
I. Today in History

BOOK REVIEW

What Is True Strategic Intelligence? The Case of the American Revolution

by Dean Andromidas

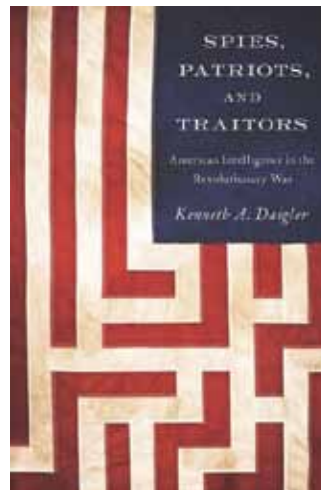
Spies, Patriots, and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War

Kenneth A. Daigler

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Paperback, 336 pages, \$23.50

Aug. 25—Although on the bookshelves for nearly four years, the book under review comes at a very timely point in our history. The unprecedented political compromising of U.S. intelligence institutions over recent years has reached the point that the leadership of those institutions now stands accused of running nothing less than a coup against the sitting president, going beyond even the “military industrial complex” about which President Dwight Eisenhower so earnestly warned the citizens of this country. The rubber-stamp approval, by this same leadership, of the claim that Russia influenced the outcome of an American presidential election would make even warmonger Paul Nitze cringe with embarrassment.

Therefore, for the sake of the country, and especially for the thousands of professional intelligence and security officers who have dedicated their lives, often at great personal risk to their very lives, a reform is needed that looks towards redefining—or perhaps better said, reasserting—the mission of the intelligence community for the future security of this nation. When one speaks of “security,” it is rightly not only about the danger of terrorism and aggression, but also about the opportunities that could benefit the nation. Indeed, while the mission of the intelligence community is to provide timely intelligence and analysis to the Presidential institutions to safeguard the nation, it also needs—and perhaps even



more importantly—to provide competent intelligence and analysis in the tradition of Sherman Kent’s 1949 book, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*. In the latter case, such an important development as the Belt and Road Initiative of China demands competent analysis, to present its great potential for the United States—rather than the inept pres-

entation of it as a geopolitical threat.

A Needed Forward Looking Reform

The formulation of a forward-looking reform always requires reexamination and an assessment of the past, to discover the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the principles, of past performance. The examination of the intelligence activities of the American Revolution is the obvious beginning. Therefore, *Spies, Patriots, and Traitors* serves as a very good beginning for this task. Moreover its author, Kenneth Daigler, brings to the task more than three decades of experience as a retired officer of the Central Intelligence Agency. He examines the topic, not only as an historian, but as a professionally trained intelligence officer who can identify and assess American capabilities and the competence of American tradecraft.

Indeed, Daigler draws a parallel between the Sons of Liberty and the leaders of the fight for American in-

dependence, and the United Front of the Bolsheviks:

A united front organization is a principal tool for political and social organization. The term first came into use after the Bolshevik Revolution, but the general principles behind it are much older. It espouses a broad and somewhat general objective to a large number of groups and individuals willing to claim some connection to it. But its leadership usually has a more specific set of objectives ... often more radical than the general membership realizes. Within this context, it can also be an effective operational tool for political action, one of the intelligence disciplines of covert action in the intelligence discipline. The Sons of Liberty's objective was to create a mass movement that first opposed specific British policies and then promoted political independence. While current national security emphasis on counter terrorism focuses on the paramilitary aspect of covert action, the other two basic elements—propaganda and political action—have a long tradition of use within the American intelligence community.

Daigler shows that American revolutionary “covert action” could at time be as ruthless as that of the Bolsheviks.

Daigler identifies the founders of American intelligence as George Washington, John Jay, and Benjamin Franklin, who are also three of the principal founders of our republic and framers of our constitution. Washington is identified as the founder of foreign intelligence, John Jay, counterintelligence and Benjamin Franklin, covert action.



Massachusetts Historical Society

Broadside, calling for “Sons of Liberty” members to gather, Dec. 17, 1765.

George Washington

The most effective handling of the subject is his discussion of Washington as a practitioner and consumer of intelligence. Indeed Washington demonstrated a genius without which the United States might never have come into being.

Daigler ably documents Washington's ability to organize intelligence gathering networks, at both the tactical and strategic levels, even penetrating the British high command in New York to a degree that should amaze the reader, given his other responsibilities for organizing, directing, and supplying the continental army under extraordinarily challenging conditions, to the say the least.

More important, the author details how Washington was able to use that intelligence. Two operations stand out. First, Washington's famous Christmas Eve crossing of the Delaware to steal a victory over the Hessian mercenary forces, which not only gave a much needed boost to American morale, but was also a serious defeat of the British forces, which electrified public opinion on the other battlefield, Europe, especially in France, Germany, Russia, and of course in Britain itself.

The second demonstration of Washington's genius that is well documented in the book before us, is the grand deception operation leading to the defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Many revolutionary war histories give a cursory ac-

count of the operation, but Daigler details the intelligence gathering and the deception that led to the victory. The operation was a masterpiece of intelligence and deception, and it was Washington's genius that made it possible.



Engraving by the Illman Brothers

Commander-in-Chief George Washington leads the Continentals to victory against Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, Dec. 26, 1776.



Detail from painting by Gilbert Stuart
President George Washington, March 20, 1797, 16 days after the end of his second term.



Painting by John Trumbull

British lord, Lt.-Gen. Cornwallis surrenders to the Continental Army led by General Washington and French troops led by Rochambeau, after the Battle of Yorktown, Oct. 19, 1781.

count of how Washington deceived General Clinton, Britain's commander-in-chief of its forces in America, into believing he was preparing against a combined American and French attack on New York. The deception was so complete that the British commander refused to send reinforcements to Cornwallis in Yorktown. Daigler has carefully and thoroughly detailed how Washington orchestrated this multi-leveled deception including setting up dummy supply depots and troop movements, and planting disinformation directly with Clinton himself through American penetration of his headquarters with double agents. It is a story well worth reading.

John Jay as Counterintelligence Officer

Not so well known is the role of John Jay as the revolution's counterintelligence officer. In today's world, in which counterintelligence—in the name of fighting terrorism—is seen as crossing the line of individuals' constitutionally guaranteed civil rights, Daigler's review of the way John Jay handled British-



Painting by John Trumbull

John Jay, around 1793.

orchestrated conspiracies using colonists loyal to the British Crown is very timely. He relates how Jay, through his chairmanship of the Committee and the "First Commission for detecting conspiracies" was able to penetrate loyalist bands, particularly in the Hudson River Valley, with his agents.

As Daigler correctly points out, in a revolution, especially where principle is at issue, the line between friend and foe often falls across personal friendship. Such a case is that of Jay and his personal friend who, when he refused to take an oath of allegiance, was forced to withdraw behind British lines. Jay wrote to him, "Your judgment, and consequently, your

Conscience, differed from mine on a very important Question. But though as an independent American, I consider all who were not for us, and You among the Rest, as against us, yet be assured that John Jay did not cease to be a friend to Peter Van Schaack."

It is a chapter one wishes were longer.

Franklin and True Strategic Intelligence

The weakest section of the book is on Benjamin Franklin, whom Daigler identifies as the progenitor of covert action. This included organizing the purchase of weapons and ammunition, and the recruitment of European professional military officers. It also included the naval operations of John Paul Jones. Jones deployed privateers to seize British merchant ships and sold the prize ships to pay for military equipment. Covert naval operations included a plan for the invasion of England by joint action of John Paul Jones and the Marquis de Lafayette. Although the invasion was never carried out, a bold raid on the small English port of White-

haven by John Paul Jones, while of little material effect, was nonetheless a masterpiece of psychological warfare.

The author faults Franklin for counterintelligence and security failures, pointing to the fact that one of his own commissioners in Paris was in the pay of the British. He quotes Franklin himself saying he saw no point to hunting spies within his circle as he had nothing to hide. Daigler dismisses Franklin's attitude as "ingenuous."

Here it is not Franklin who is "ingenuous" but the author, because he fails to see that Franklin is operating on an entirely higher plane than the author appears to understand. While the choice of Arthur Lee, a paid British agent, and Silas Deane, a man who had a hard time separating duty from business, were poor choices, Franklin clearly understood the hopelessness of keeping secrets in countries and societies like France, Britain, and other European monarchies. He, without doubt, could easily imagine that anything he told his French allies would be reported to the British ambassador in Paris within hours.

Benjamin Franklin's Strategic Superiority

In reality it was Franklin himself who was the founder of American intelligence, who understood true "Strategic Intelligence," which must be understood as going beyond the disposition and intentions of enemy forces and delve much deeper into the societies and very minds of both adversaries and allies alike.

It is a peculiar book. Daigler, as a retired CIA officer, examines revolutionary war intelligence with the skills he learned in his professional career, and therein lies a fundamental failing in this otherwise informative



John Paul Jones

history. However it is not his personal failing, but instead the failing of our intelligence services introduced during the Vietnam War.

This is seen very clearly in the nomenclature used throughout the book. Here the American Revolution becomes a rebellion for independence. This is a totally false understanding of the revolution and represents an intelligence failure of the highest order. There is nothing really "revolutionary" in a fight for independence. The American Civil War saw the southern states fighting for "independence" in

order to perpetuate slavery, in effect renouncing the founding principles of our republic.

Our revolution was not a fight for "independence from the motherland" because of "taxation without representation." It was a fight for the creation of humanity's first republic, dedicated to the principle that "all men are created equal" and share the inalienable right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," where each individual's creative potential may best be realized. It was a fight of ideas. These were not conceptions restricted to the colonies, but were fundamental ideas that were sweeping through political, intellectual, and artistic currents throughout western civilization of the time. Therefore the American Revolution was the vanguard and front line of that struggle of ideas and the principles that set man above the beast.

The Enemy

The enemy was not the people of Great Britain or of Hessen, Germany, but the system of oligarchy premised on the proposition of "life, liberty and property," where property could include human beings then known as "subjects," or an overlordship, known as imperialism, over entire nations.



Benjamin Franklin



Franklin is received at the French Court, 1778.

While Washington led the fight across the battlefields of the territory of the united colonies, Franklin waged it in the heart of the beast and on both fronts. Franklin and Washington's most powerful weapons were ideas. Nowhere is this more evident than the struggle waged by Franklin. Revisionist history might tell us that Franklin deployed to Paris on the premise that the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" and saw his mission as persuading the French government, a monarchy as oligarchical as that of the British Crown, to support the American revolution through skillful manipulation, in order to acquire the rifles and cannons, and ultimately a powerful military ally, which would enable the defeat of the British on the field of battle. If he had accepted those limitations, Franklin would have failed miserably.

Franklin was the leading intellect of his era; a fact appreciated by all the leading statesmen, intellectuals, and scientists throughout all of Europe, including Great Britain itself of the time. Moreover, many of these men and women not only shared his political views but were active within the highest political circles, including the royal courts of their countries. This was particularly the case in France, Prussia, and Russia, in which efforts were being made to reform these monarchies. While these monarchies would render support to the American cause against Britain, they also knew they were playing with fire, a fact of

which Franklin was very much aware. Once America gained independence, they knew no king would be invited, or imposed, to rule over the American people, and a state would be erected diametrically opposed to the concept of monarchy, or more specifically, oligarchy.

Daigler has an interesting insight, stating, "Perhaps the greatest irony in the intelligence history of the war is that while British intelligence activities were highly successful in collecting information regarding American-French plans and intentions in both a timely and comprehensive manner, British failure to use this information effectively in its

policy formation and implementation negated most of its value."

This is one of the most important insights the author expresses in the entire book, but that same author does not elaborate on the observation, which should, in fact, serve as the beginning of an intelligence investigation.

Franklin, without doubt, knew that those in power in Britain would fail to make effective use of their intelligence in their policy formation, and that knowledge was a true piece of "strategic intelligence" for Franklin and the American cause.

Franklin knew that despite sympathy for the American cause within important circles in Britain, those in power were fully committed to an imperialist policy that left no room for compromise. The colonists, even if they were the "children" of the "mother country," could not be treated better than the Indians, Malays, or Africans suffering under the oppression of the East India Company.

While Washington can be correctly identified as founding the first military intelligence organization and being America's first practitioner of military intelligence, the true founder of American intelligence is Franklin himself. While there are many biographies and histories of Franklin's role in the revolution, the book written from an intelligence point of view has yet to be written.