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Review of "Legacy of Ashes: The History of CIA"

Tim Weiner. New York: Doubleday, 2007. 516 pages. Notes and index.

Nicholas Dujmovic

Tim Weiner's *Legacy of Ashes* is not the definitive history of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that it purports to be. Nor is it the well researched work that many reviewers say it is. It is odd, in fact, that much of the hype surrounding the book concerns its alleged mastery of available sources. Weiner and his favorable reviewers—most, like Weiner, journalists—have cited the plethora of his sources as if the fact of their variety and number by themselves make the narrative impervious to criticism.

Legacy of Ashes is not the definitive history of the CIA that it purports to be.

But the thing about scholarship is that one must use sources honestly, and one doesn't get a pass on this even if he is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the *New York Times*. Starting with a title that is based on a gross distortion of events, the book is a 600-page op-ed piece masquerading as serious history; it is the advocacy of a particularly dark point of view under the guise of scholarship. Weiner has allowed his agenda to drive his research and writing, which is, of course, exactly backwards.


History, fairly done, is all about context, motivations, and realistic expectations in addition to the accurate portrayal of events. Weiner is not honest about context, he is dismissive of motivations, his expectations for intelligence are almost cartoonish, and his book too often is factually unreliable. What could have been a serious historical critique illuminating the lessons of the past is undermined by dubious assertions, sweeping judgments based on too few examples, selective or outright misuse of citations, a drama-driven narrative, and a tendentious and nearly exclusive focus on failure that overlooks, downplays, or explains away significant successes.

The irony is that a new history of CIA is needed to fill the gap left by the now dated works of John Ranelagh (*The Agency*, 1986) and Christopher Andrew (*For the President's Eyes Only*, 1995). Having read the book, I have to conclude that this is not it; anyone who wants a balanced perspective of CIA and its history should steer well clear of *Legacy of Ashes*.

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The Deceit in the Title

The phrase "legacy of ashes" comes from a critical remark President Dwight D. Eisenhower uttered near the end of his administration when, Weiner tells us, Ike finally blew up at Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Allen Dulles and the failings of CIA generally, and more particularly at Dulles's resistance to recommendations for intelligence reform from the president's board of consultants. Here's how Weiner treats the episode, under the subhead



View the movie *Extraordinary Fidelity*, the story of CIA officers John T. Downey and Richard G. Fecteau who spent decades in a Chinese prison, in our [Video Center](#).

https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol51no3/legacy-of-ashes-the-history-of-cia.html

"An Eight-Year Defeat" (page 166).

"A great deal has been accomplished," Dulles insisted to the president at the final gatherings of Eisenhower's National Security Council. Everything is well in hand, he said. I have fixed the clandestine service. American intelligence has never been more agile and adept. Coordination and cooperation are better than they have ever been. The proposals of the president's intelligence board were preposterous, he said, they were madness, they were illegal. I am responsible under the law for intelligence coordination, he reminded the president. I cannot delegate that responsibility. Without my leadership, he said, American intelligence would be a "body floating in thin air."

At the last, Dwight Eisenhower exploded in anger and frustration. "The structure of our intelligence organization is faulty," he told Dulles. It makes no sense, it has to be reorganized, and we should have done it long ago. Nothing had changed since Pearl Harbor. "I have suffered an eight-year defeat on this," said the president of the United States. He said he would "leave a legacy of ashes" to his successor.

This incident serves as an iconic moment in the book, the cornerstone of the entire edifice, a sort of literary fractal that encapsulates in microcosm all that Weiner thinks is wrong with CIA: its unrelenting record of failures, its non-responsiveness—and even duplicity—to presidents, its cowboy-ish autonomy and resistance to accountability and oversight. *But this central episode in Weiner's book is an invented dialog, a created exchange that never happened.* An examination of the source documents shows that:

The central episode in Weiner's book is an invented dialogue, a created exchange that never happened.

- Dulles made his remarks ("body floating in thin air") at a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) on 12 January 1961, and he was speaking against a Defense Department proposal to separate the position of DCI from the management of CIA.
- Eisenhower's supposed retort ("eight-year defeat...legacy of ashes") occurred a week earlier, at the 5 January NSC meeting, and had nothing to do with CIA. Eisenhower was expressing frustration at what he considered his major failing regarding intelligence—his inability to reform and streamline *military* intelligence.
- Far from criticizing Dulles and CIA, Eisenhower at both meetings affirmed the Agency's central role in the collection and correlation of strategic intelligence while criticizing the redundancy and expense of having four separate military intelligence agencies.
- The words "preposterous" and "madness" are nowhere to be found in the record of Dulles's remarks on proposals to reform intelligence. ¹

Here is the critical paragraph from the minutes of the 5 January meeting.

The President then remarked that soon after Pearl Harbor, he was engaged in an operation which required him to have certain information which he was unable to obtain from the Navy, i.e., the strength the Navy had left in the Pacific. The President also noted that the U.S. fought the first year of the war in Europe entirely on the basis of British intelligence. Subsequently, each Military Service developed its own intelligence organization. He thought the situation made little sense in managerial terms. He had suffered an eight-year defeat on this question but would leave a legacy of ashes for his successor.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist has distorted what was said, why it was said, when it was said, and the circumstances under which it was said—all to support his thesis that CIA has been a continuous failure from 1947 up to the present. Weiner's use of the plural "final gatherings" in the excerpt from his account suggests he knows what he is doing.

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The Preface as Fractal

The book's preface, an "Author's Note," is another literary fractal that in four-and-a-half pages reveals all the problems of interpretation, evidence, and scholarship that follow throughout the entire book. ² Weiner is on thin ice from the opening lines: "the most powerful country in the history of Western civilization has failed to create a first-rate spy service." Yet at no point in the 671 pages of narrative and notes does Weiner offer a basis for his standards—other than suggesting that mistakes just shouldn't be made—or explain what his "first rate" intelligence service might look like.

The intelligence services that are often judged to be superior to CIA—the Israeli Mossad, the Cuban DGI, the East German Stasi, and even the British SIS—are far more limited in focus and scope. CIA from the beginning was charged with worldwide coverage in all intelligence areas, something no other service, except perhaps the Soviet KGB, was required to do. If making no mistakes is Weiner's only standard, he has adopted an unrealistic one—a Platonic

ideal for intelligence—that CIA, dealing with the world as it is, could only have failed to meet.

CIA's central "crime," as Weiner puts it in the opening pages, is its consistent failure to inform presidents, which he equates with predicting the future. This is a rather sophomoric view of what intelligence can reasonably be expected to do. Throughout the book Weiner repeats the mantra that the Agency was created "to prevent another Pearl Harbor." True enough, but if CIA had existed in the fall of 1941, it would have been telling policymakers of Japanese capabilities, analyzing Tokyo's intentions, drawing attention to the vulnerabilities of our Pacific bases, including Pearl Harbor, and by November estimating that war was imminent—not going for a prediction that at 0755 on 7 December, the Japanese would strike (though, of course, credible intelligence of that sort would have been welcome).

There is a difference between warning of the day and time of the next attack and providing analysis that helps presidents and other policymakers understand circumstances and act to affect outcomes.

There is a difference between warning of the day and time of the next attack and providing analysis that helps presidents and other policymakers understand circumstances and act to affect outcomes, an aspect of the process Weiner—who has written about US intelligence activities and organizations for some time—somehow seems not to have learned.

There are other lapses. Weiner's opening note asserts that, in CIA's history, US presidents ordered the Agency to undertake covert action when CIA could not provide knowledge of adversaries; that CIA lied to presidents to conceal its failures and preserve its standing in Washington; that CIA analysts "learned to march in lockstep" to conform to what the president wanted to hear; that all of the Agency's Soviet assets were executed; and that the "Islamic warriors" CIA supported in Afghanistan later turned on the United States. Overall, in his view, the few successes have been "fleeting," while the many failures are "long-lasting." Heady stuff, these assertions—but every one of them is wrong (some are not even consistent with each other), and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

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Failures R Us

Moving into the book itself, the reader finds a ceaseless drumbeat of failure. The main theme of *Legacy of Ashes* is that the CIA has been a consistent and essentially inexcusable failure since the beginning, over the decades, and up to the present moment.

No objective observer of Agency history can fail to note that CIA in its history has failed—sometimes miserably—in what it set out to do or was ordered to do. As a CIA historian, I've been accused of dwelling too much, in fact, on the failures, a few of which are real doozies. Most of us in the profession take these cases very much to heart, endeavoring to learn as much from them as we can so we can do better.

It is a task that requires constant attention. Among difficult human endeavors the profession of intelligence is an activity that seems by its very nature to have a higher probability of failure. Everything intelligence is called upon to do is inherently, inescapably difficult: to reveal what is hidden, most often deliberately by people who mean us harm; to ascertain trends and look into the future; to push the bounds of science and technology to collect what otherwise would be uncollectible and therefore unknowable; to test the limits of human ingenuity and courage in old-fashioned spying and counterespionage; and to estimate what it all means. These are not trifling challenges.

Consider further that these difficult tasks are being attempted by mortal men and women, all of whom by virtue of the human condition are fallible and imperfect: not a superhero among them, outside of the imaginations of novelists and screenwriters. The logic is inexorable: if the tasks are very hard, and the human raw material is flawed, inevitably there will be failure.

This suggests that a fair treatment of intelligence and a realistic assessment of its history, if not tending toward a sense of forgiveness, would at least attempt to understand the very human context of what must be a record that will include failures. This context is especially necessary in appraising the early years of CIA, when enormous challenges were faced by a new generation for whom intelligence was something learned through often-bitter experience.

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Success versus Failure? Success IS Failure

Weiner's central theme of unrelenting failure does an injustice to the truth, not least because the existence of real Agency achievements cannot be denied.

A fair treatment of intelligence and a realistic assessment of its history would at least attempt to understand the very human context of what must be a record that will include failures.

Moreover, Weiner's secondary theme, that Agency leaders learned to lie to portray CIA's failures as successes, is inaccurate and requires one to believe US presidents are dolts.

Allen Dulles freely admitted to President Eisenhower that CIA had no sources in the Kremlin, that its Soviet estimates relied more on speculation and "the logic of the situation" than on hard evidence, and that the Agency could not reliably warn of a sudden Soviet attack (pages 73–75). This was not a unique occasion of truthfulness, and it does not sound like an Agency trying to hide its shortcomings.

Weiner even manages to portray genuine CIA successes as failures. For example, in 1948 CIA accurately assessed the chance for war with the Soviets as nil; according to Weiner, that was a failure because "no one listened"—likewise with accurate Agency predictions of genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

He portrays the development of the U-2 spyplane—a stunning technological achievement—as a failure because, he says, CIA should have had better human sources inside the USSR. If we had only developed "a bigger picture of life inside the Soviet Union" that revealed the Russians "were unable to produce the necessities of life" (page 114), we would not have had to create the unprecedented capability to take pictures of Soviet military power from 70,000 feet. Never mind that the Soviets had built and would continue to build a formidable and genuinely threatening military machine for decades to come.

Oddly, in the video trailer for the book on his publisher's Web site, Weiner contradicts himself about the utility of the reconnaissance efforts. He describes as a success the development of spy satellites, and the analysis from satellite imagery, that, in his words, "helped keep the Cold War cold." This is significant. If CIA had had no other success in its history, the Agency deserves more credit than Weiner allows for keeping the Cold War from becoming a hot war, presumably a nuclear war. In the book, Weiner gives the Agency no credit on this point.

Other successes Weiner obscures or otherwise marginalizes. For example, discussing the successful covert support of democracy in Italy in 1948, Weiner belittles the prospects of a communist takeover and then implies that CIA's achievement had little real effect other than to encourage more such operations. The Berlin Tunnel operation gets short shrift, and the story of CIA's first major Soviet spy, Pyotr Popov, is buried in a footnote. Weiner ascribes the Agency's spot-on call regarding the 1967 Mideast war wholly to liaison service information rather than to the rigorous analytic work that was behind the judgment. ³

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Dramatic Assertions, Cheap Shots

Throughout his book, Weiner has a distressing tendency to make compelling, usually damning statements about CIA—its leaders, operations, and programs—and about US presidents that are untrue. Many of these assertions he even undermines in his subsequent narrative.

A prominent early example, in which Weiner sets the stage for his view that CIA overstepped its boundaries from the beginning, is the first sentence of chapter 1: "All Harry Truman wanted was a newspaper." Weiner then repeats the myth, long discounted, that President Truman wanted his intelligence service just to produce a daily report. A few pages later, however, Weiner tells how Truman gave the first director of central intelligence a black hat, a cloak, and a wooden dagger—which make for a pointless joke if all Truman wanted was a classified version of the *New York Times*.

In fact, Truman signed NSC directives assigning the responsibility for covert action to CIA, a duty CIA officials had misgivings about at the time. Weiner goes on to mention that, by the way, there were 81 covert actions approved by the NSC and carried out by CIA during Truman's term, including significant paramilitary operations in the Korean War.

Weiner is forced by his own premise to then assert the incredible: that Harry Truman didn't know what was going on in his own administration regarding Cold War covert activities. To accept that, you need an imagination like Oliver Stone's to believe that Truman's secretaries of state and defense, his military commanders, his advisers Clark Clifford and former DCI Sidney Souers, his own secretary, plus George Kennan at the State Department, as well as Directors Vandenberg, Hillenkoetter and Smith—all conspired to keep this form of warfare a secret from the president.

Yet publicly available documents, which Weiner seems to be unaware of or ignores, make an overwhelming case that President Truman was informed frequently of NSC and other policy discussions on covert operations and CIA's role in them. In Michael Warner, ed., *CIA Cold War Records: The CIA Under Harry Truman* (CIA History Staff, 1994) is a memo from the DCI dated 23 April 1952 to the NSC about CIA activities. It includes (pages 459–60) a discussion of "cold war covert activities, including guerrilla warfare." The document is marked "Included in the President's Book."

Weiner might also have read Hayden Peake, "Harry S. Truman on CIA Covert Activities," in

Studies in Intelligence 25, No. 1 (1981). Peake demonstrates that, Truman's stated opposition to Eisenhower- and Kennedy-era covert operations notwithstanding, CIA officials of the late 1940s and early 1950s considered Truman to have been intimately involved in the development of CIA's covert mission.

Weiner might also have examined more closely the holdings of the Truman Library, where he would have been able to see a progress report sent by DCI Souers to the president in June 1946 on "planning for psychological warfare" on the part of the Central Intelligence Group; ⁴ he might also have taken note of the NSC memorandums for the president summarizing NSC discussions of 20 May and 3 June 1948 concerning psychological and political warfare, also in the Truman Library, President's Secretary's files. ⁵

He misses other important evidence of Truman's knowledge of such activity, such as the Acting DCI's 16 January 1951 report to the NSC on "Responsibilities of CIA (OPC) with Respect to Guerrilla Warfare." ⁶ Weiner does cite the 23 October 1951 NSC report on "Scope and Pace of Covert Operations," but he misses the significance of this document's presence in the files of Truman's secretary—unless Weiner is implying that she was in on the aforementioned conspiracy to keep him in the dark.

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A Circle of Incompetents?

Weiner's portrayal of CIA leaders, especially in the Agency's first decades, drips with hostility—something that even favorable reviewers have criticized. ⁷ His prose forces one to conclude that the Agency was led by incompetent louts ignorant of the world and duplicitous with higher authority.

Weiner's portrayal of CIA leaders, especially in the Agency's first decades, drips with hostility—something that even favorable reviewers have criticized.

Frank Wisner, a passionate and driven man who led covert operations for many years, comes in for especially rough treatment. Weiner portrays him as absolutely autonomous, out of control, accountable to no one: "He alone would decide whether his secret missions conformed to American foreign policy" (page 32). But even Weiner's animosity can't get in the way of unavoidable facts—*on the very next page*, one reads that Wisner created stay-behind agent networks in Europe on the orders of Secretary of Defense Forrestal. Reading on, one finds that both State and Defense were pressing Wisner to expand covert action programs in 1951, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered him to undertake covert operations against the USSR, and that all such operations were authorized by George Kennan at State.

Weiner says Wisner successfully resisted orders from DCI Smith to shut down any covert program, no matter how ineffectual, yet in reality Wisner complied with orders to end the heavily invested "Third Force" program in 1953. Wisner is lambasted for doing too much—except during the 1953 East German riots, when Weiner chastizes him for doing nothing.

Weiner asserts that Agency officers consistently misunderstood the world and communicated that misunderstanding to US presidents, who then reacted by ordering the CIA to conduct covert actions in order to change the world to their liking. This thesis is unsupportable from the historical record. Other commentators (Walter Laqueur, Angelo Codevilla, e.g.) have noted that one problem with covert action in the Agency's history is that it was not sufficiently informed by the Agency's analysis. For example, the analysts were completely cut out of deliberations before the Bay of Pigs, and they could have told the operators that there was no potential for an anti-Castro uprising that the operation was intended to foment.

One of Weiner's most unfair assertions is that CIA analysts "learned to march in lockstep" to conform to how the president saw the world (page xv). That judgment would come as a surprise to several generations of analysts in the Directorate of Intelligence, especially those who delivered unexpected or unwelcome assessments to various administrations on China, Soviet strategic intentions and capabilities, Vietnam, the Balkans, and more recently on terrorism and Iraq.

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ISO Context

Weiner's predilection for the knockout punch or the cheap shot might make for successful tabloid journalism, but it is unsatisfactory as history because it neglects essential context that would provide real understanding of complex situations. For example, he dismisses the first DCI to lead CIA, Roscoe Hillenkoetter. Labelling him as an ineffectual leader, Weiner gives him no credit for trying, as a lowly rear admiral in Washington, to lead this new venture called Central Intelligence. In an apparent rush to condemn Agency covert action, Weiner curiously fails to give Hillenkoetter credit for trying to keep the Agency out of it.

Similarly, Weiner focuses solely on CIA's problems with the Gehlen group, the former military officers of Nazi Germany who served as the basis for West German intelligence, and he omits

mention of its valuable intelligence on the USSR, which "outweighed these problems during the hottest years of the Cold War," in the words of a declassified CIA historical assessment. [8](#)

Weiner also repeats the canard that CIA missed the decline of the USSR, something that was obvious to everyone in the world but the Agency. He ignores several important sources that have refuted this claim: the work of Bruce Berkowitz, Douglas MacEachin, Robert Gates, and the Case Program of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. CIA analysts warned of the USSR's socio-economic troubles from the late 1970s on.

A particularly telling cheap shot is Weiner's dismissal of Ronald Reagan as someone who came to the presidency knowing "little more about the CIA than what he had learned at the movies" (page 375). This is a wrong-headed view of a president who in 1975 had served on the Rockefeller Commission investigating intelligence activities and who had drafted for his own delivery, from 1975 to 1978, radio addresses on national security matters that included cogent discussions about CIA and intelligence issues. In addition, a large number of Reagan's letters and essays has emerged that dispel Weiner's notion. [9](#)

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Sourcing Sins of Omission and Commission

Weiner, like a prosecutor in a trial, pulls from his source material only that which supports his perspective.

Just as he fails to provide context or alternative plausible explanations, Weiner, like a prosecutor in a trial, pulls from his source material only that which supports his perspective. Concerning CIA analysis of the Soviet Union, he quotes the former director of national estimates at CIA, Abbot Smith, on page 154:

We had constructed for ourselves a picture of the USSR, and whatever happened had to be made to fit into that picture. Intelligence estimators can hardly commit a more abominable sin.

Clearly Smith's idea of an "abominable sin" doesn't apply to this journalist-turned-historian, who doesn't mention that in the very next paragraph of the document from which he drew the above quote is the following:

Abbott balanced his critique by noting that many of the main points of political analysis of the USSR had turned out to be valid: emphasis on the continuing strength of party rule, the importance of heavy industry and the military, and the emergence of problems with Communist China. [10](#)

That last point is especially important, for CIA analysis on the Sino-Soviet relationship was far ahead of the rest of Washington's and must be counted a success.

Another example: Weiner's treatment of CIA during the Korean War (chapter 6) is entirely one-sided, again supported by selective quotation of sources. His account of error and botched CIA operations relies on the work of Michael Haas, a former Air Force contract historian who had access to CIA internal histories on the Korean War. [11](#) To be sure, those internal histories speak of many failed operations, especially after 1952, but Weiner fails to report that Haas also wrote of "noteworthy" HUMINT successes early in the war—one of which contributed to the successful Inchon landing—as well as collection operations that yielded intelligence on the enemy's order of battle and critical targeting information that resulted in the destruction of a North Korean Communist Party facility.

The one Korean War internal history that has been released (and available to Weiner) speaks of many successful missions into North Korean territory, mostly to gather intelligence but also to destroy infrastructure and to kill enemy combatants. [12](#) All this is absent from Weiner's retelling.

Oddly, Weiner goes on at some length concerning what CIA's internal histories say about the Korean War, and throughout the book he frequently cites declassified Agency histories. So it is amusing to read that "CIA's covert operators never wrote 'lessons-learned' studies." What does he think those internal histories were for? While it is debatable whether needed lessons were really learned, these things were written by the Directorate of Operations for the Directorate of Operations and invariably included conclusions intended to improve operations in the future—sometimes explicitly called "lessons."

With respect to analysis during the Korean War, Weiner is not completely up front either. He meticulously documents CIA's inaccurate assessments of China's intent to enter the war in force—based on the Agency's flawed premise that Moscow was really behind events on the peninsula—but he ignores the same sources regarding the Agency's frequent and consistent warnings that Chinese deployments gave Beijing the capability of entering the war. [13](#) CIA warned

There is sloppy scholarship in the recounting of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which in Weiner's hands becomes a tragicomedy.

President Truman on 1 September 1950—six weeks before Chinese troops crossed the Yalu into North Korea—that

Chinese Communist propaganda has portrayed the US as an aggressor.... Thus, the stage has been set for some form of Chinese Communist intervention or participation in the Korean War.... In any case, some form of armed assistance to the North Koreans appears imminent.

On 30 September, CIA told Truman that most information pointed against a Chinese decision "to intervene openly in Korea," although the Agency also presented contrary reports—including intelligence from Indian diplomats in Beijing that the Chinese leadership had swung toward intervention. As Weiner notes, CIA in mid-October told Truman there were "no convincing indications" of a Chinese intention "to resort to full-scale intervention."

What Weiner omits is that this report, "Threat of Full Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea," begins with the Agency's assessment that Chinese ground forces "are capable of intervening effectively" in the conflict; that the report discusses the factors arguing for a Chinese intervention, as well as the factors militating against it, concluding that continued covert aid was most likely; and that the last paragraph of the report repeats that "full-scale Chinese Communist intervention in Korea must be regarded as a continuing possibility" though it was assessed as "not probable in 1950."

There is sloppy scholarship at the very least in the recounting of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which in Weiner's hands becomes a tragicomedy, with Frank Wisner ordering Radio Free Europe (RFE) to incite violence against the communist regime and against invading Soviet troops—only to see the uprising crushed. One of Weiner's major sources for his assertion of CIA's culpability is an RFE New York memo, allegedly the result of Wisner's "exhortations" to violence, telling the radio's Hungarian staff in Munich that "All restraints have gone off. No holds barred." It's a significant problem for Weiner's thesis that Wisner in 1956 actually had no direct involvement in RFE and that the memo was produced after the uprising was effectively over and dealt with rhetoric, not violence.

Weiner also points to an RFE broadcast that predicted the United States would come to the aid of Hungarian freedom fighters, without acknowledging that the broadcaster was doing a press review *after* the Soviet invasion and was quoting—by name—a London *Observer* editorial, and that even so this was a violation of RFE policy, or that this was the sole example of an implicit hint of assistance in two weeks of continuous broadcasting to Hungary. The idea that RFE was fomenting violence at the behest of Frank Wisner is not supported either by Weiner's sources or by other sources he failed to cite. ¹⁴

On CIA's analysis of Soviet missile development, Weiner writes, "In 1960, the agency projected [that] the Soviets would have five hundred ICBMS ready to strike by 1961" (page 158), but Moscow in 1961 only had four. This item is often mentioned in reviews of *Legacy of Ashes* as an example of the Agency's total incompetence. How could we get it so wrong, especially after years of U-2 coverage?

The problem is that Weiner got the year wrong: it was in 1957, three years earlier—not long after the shock of the first Soviet ICBM test and then Sputnik, when Soviet leaders had boasted of turning out rockets "like sausages," and while the U-2 program was in its early stages—that CIA and the Intelligence Community (not just CIA) projected 500 Soviet ICBMs in 1961, *four years into the future*.

The errors of fact in *Legacy of Ashes* are numerous and of the kind that a half-way diligent graduate student would spot.

Weiner failed both to correctly read his secondary source and to check primary sources. ¹⁵ If he had been more careful, he would have found that a National Intelligence Estimate in 1960 told the president that the Soviets at that time probably had 10 operational ICBMs and would have 50, at most 200, the following year. In other words, the US Intelligence Community, still animated by worst case analysis as the prudent course, nevertheless used information from CIA's U-2 program to scale back significantly its earlier estimate, and CIA's CORONA satellite program and its intelligence from Oleg Penkovskiy would soon improve that score. This should be considered a success, but Weiner uses it as an occasion to ridicule the Agency.

Enumerating cases of Weiner's selectivity would take another 600 pages, but I will close with the especially egregious incomplete explanation of events surrounding the famous "sixteen words" President Bush used in the 2003 State of the Union address about Saddam Hussein's alleged efforts to purchase uranium in Africa. Weiner, claiming that Bush was making "CIA's case," omits mention of the attribution of the information to British intelligence. Moreover, George Tenet's recent memoir makes it clear that the Agency had removed the assertion from previous speeches and simply had failed to do so for the State of the Union. CIA, in fact, did not support that statement.

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Weiner gets better during the period when he started

Getting Simple Facts Wrong

covering intelligence as a reporter.

The errors of fact in *Legacy of Ashes* are numerous and of the kind that a half-way diligent graduate student would spot. Following is a short list:

- OSS was not "barred from seeing the most important intercepted communications" during World War II (page 5); few in any organization could view ULTRA intercepts, but within OSS the X-2 counterintelligence branch had access.
- The distinction between the espionage and covert action missions did not emerge in the postwar period (page 11) but years earlier was already part of the organizing principle of OSS; the Secret Intelligence branch handled what would later be called HUMINT, and various other branches were responsible for paramilitary and other covert activity.
- The 1949 CIA Act did not provide the Agency with the legal authority to conduct covert action (page 40)—that legislation concerned DCI authorities regarding personnel, secrecy, and unvouchered funds (which certainly helped operations remain covert); the Agency construed its covert action authority from admittedly vague language in the 1947 National Security Act and from Executive Orders.
- Weiner obviously read (and quotes from) my *Studies in Intelligence* article on the ill-fated flight of Jack Downey and Dick Fecteau in 1952, yet he misrepresented a flight to pick up documents as a mission to "rescue" agents who had radioed for help (page 60).
- The reference to a "CIA colonel" (page 88) is odd; the KGB had colonels, but CIA never had military ranks—though it has employed military officers.
- Weiner also errs when he says that the current director, Michael Hayden (page 510), is the first active-duty military officer to lead the Agency since the early 1950s—that was Admiral Stansfield Turner (1977).
- Weiner says that the 1950s-era program to encourage Soviet walk-ins outside the USSR, REDCAP, was not effective and had no significant successes by 1956 (page 124). He forgets the two Peters, Pyotr Deriabin and Pyotr Popov, both of whom were immensely important assets.
- The idea that the "Islamic warriors" CIA supported in Afghanistan would later turn on the United States (page xv) fails to make the basic distinction between the Afghan mujahedin, whom the Agency supported, and Arabs who went to Afghanistan in the 1980s—whom CIA did not support.
- John McCone was never a deputy secretary of defense (page 180) and did not, as DCI, begin mass firings (page 188).

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So What's Right About Legacy of Ashes?

For all of its profound flaws bits of *Legacy of Ashes* are not bad (though Weiner has not earned the trust of the careful scholar regarding his sources, so best to check).

Weiner accurately chronicles much of the chaos of the early days of CIA espionage and covert action, particularly when the Office of Strategic Operations and Office of Policy Coordination were separate entities with separate stations in the field and competing programs (page 33).

I actually agree with Weiner that at some point, though I am not certain where that point is, the dispatch of ethnic agent teams into denied areas was unconscionable, based on the fact—observable to CIA at the time—that so few (about 25 percent) were ever heard from again. At the same time, no one put a gun to the heads of these ethnic agents; they were nationalists, willing to risk their lives (many fought, unheralded, for years as guerillas against the Soviets in their homeland without US help), and we were willing to take the chance that sending them might yield good intelligence or otherwise harm our adversaries. In the high pressure of the early Cold War—when everyone was concerned about communist expansion and no one knew how the struggle would come out—these operations, ill-advised though they may have been, were far more understandable, if not forgivable, than Weiner allows.

Weiner gets better during the period when he started covering intelligence as a reporter (Part Six). His recounting of events in the 1990s—the change in CIA's relationship with the military as a result of the Gulf War, the effect of the "peace dividend" on Agency resources, and the debacle of the Clinton administration's attitudes toward intelligence—seem accurate and useful summaries.

But these few plusses do not overcome the essential fact that *Legacy of Ashes* is a narrowly-focused and biased account. In his preface, Weiner claims to believe that the intelligence profession is critical to national security, but he is likely to have done

My hunch is that Weiner's work will soon be replaced by that of a historian who has seriously attempted to get at

considerable damage, as the people who take up the profession will, I fear, have to deal with his inaccuracies and skewed perspectives for years to come.

more of the "whole truth" of intelligence, rather than some carefully selected bits intended to highlight an interpretation.

As to the gap that we in CIA's History Staff hoped to see filled, my hunch, and hope, is that Weiner's work will soon be replaced by that of a historian who has seriously attempted to get at more of the "whole truth" of intelligence, rather than carefully selected bits intended to highlight an interpretation. Then we will have a history that we can learn from to improve and advance the important work of our nation's security. 16

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Footnotes

[1] Memoranda of Discussions at the 473rd Meeting (5 January 1961) and the 474th Meeting (12 January 1961) of the National Security Council; documents 80 and 84, in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963: Volume XXV (2001). See also document 79, a record of 3 January meeting of Eisenhower, National Security Advisor Gordon Gray, and General Andrew Goodpastor.

[2] Weiner, xiv–xvii.

[3] See David Robarge, "Getting it Right: CIA Analysis of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War," *Studies in Intelligence* 49, No. 1 (2005).

[4] "Progress Report" memo of 7 June 1948, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Clark Clifford, available through the Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS).

[5] These are reprinted as documents 277 and 283 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment* (1996).

[6] Truman Library, President's Secretary's files and available through DDRS.

[7] See, for example, David Wise's review in the *Washington Post*, 22 July 2007.

[8] Kevin Ruffner, ed., *Forging an Intelligence Partnership: CIA and the Origins of the BND, 1945–49* (CIA History Staff, 1999; redacted and released, 2002), xxix.

[9] On Reagan's views of CIA and intelligence, see Kiron Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan, In His Own Hand* (New York: Touchstone, 2002), 121–28.

[10] Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, eds., *Watching the Bear: Essays on CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union*, 70.

[11] Michael E. Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow: UN Special Operations During the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 172–205.

[12] CIA in Korea, 1946–1965; released portions concern only the Korean War period.

[13] At the Truman Library, and available through DDRS, are CIA reports "Situation Summary 1 Sep 50," "Interim Situation Summary 30 September 1950," and "Threat of Full Communist Intervention in Korea," 12 October 1950. All these reports were declassified during 1977–79.

[14] Weiner cites, for example, Arch Puddington's *definitive Broadcasting Freedom* (University Press of Kentucky, 2000) but unaccountably seems unaware, or chose not to use, A. Ross Johnson's paper, available on the Woodrow Wilson Center's Web site, "Setting the Record Straight: The Role of Radio Free Europe in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," December 2006.

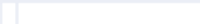
[15] Weiner relied on Raymond Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Intentions and Capabilities," in *Watching the Bear*, 135–86. The actual estimates have long been available for serious researchers in Donald Steury, ed., *Intentions and Capabilities: Estimates on Soviet Strategic Forces, 1950–1983* (Washington, DC: CIA History Staff, 1996).

[16] In his acknowledgments, Weiner offered a "tip of the hat to the men and women of the history staff" in the cause of openness. An examination of his notes, however, suggest that he made relatively little use of the fruits of such labors, which seldom produce the biting lines and colorful turns of phrase found in interviews and oral histories, which he most relies on.

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