BOOK REVIEW

Who Watches the Watchmen? The Conflict between National Security and Freedom of the Press, by Gary Ross

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From the earliest days of the United States, tension has existed between intelligence and democracy. Intelligence can seem an anathema, particularly within a society that values the First Amendment and freedom of the press. Recent years have proven just how difficult it can be to protect intelligence within increasingly open information environments. As recently as several decades ago, open source intelligence provided little benefit to decision makers. Today, however, the field has shifted, and virtually anyone can collect meaningful intelligence, which teems in abundance through the Internet and social media.

Gary Ross's *Who Watches the Watchmen? The Conflict between National Security and Freedom of the Press* is a timely book that discusses the inherent conflict between intelligence's need for secrecy and the media's desire to report stories, often at the expense of classified information. The book takes great care to explain the rationale for intelligence leaks, both from the perspective of government employees who become informants and from the journalists who use the information.

Ross provides a wonderful summary regarding the history of important leaks. The book opens with a discussion about WikiLeaks's 2010 Internet dump of U.S. military and State Department intelligence. He discusses past governmental reports regarding leaks, beginning with the Coolidge Report in 1956. Many, if not most, of the reports concluded that the government could do very little to prevent leaks; policymakers found that prosecution and potential jail time offered little disincentive for would-be leakers.

To counter the threat of leaks, Ross examines the Rational Choice Theory, which argues that people will make choices according to perceived risks and benefits. For someone to leak information, benefits must outweigh the risks. Ross analyzes journalists' motivations and

justifications for leaking, including wanting to expose injustice or simply airing frustration at perceived "overclassification" of information by the government. In recent years, intelligence leaks have led journalists to win the coveted Pulitzer Prize; winners include James Risen and Eric Lichtblau, who exposed the National Security Agency (NSA) Terrorist Surveillance Program, and Dana Priest, who exposed CIA overseas detention facilities. Ross builds upon journalism professor Elie Abel's previous findings by arguing that those within the intelligence community who are most likely to leak information include high-level policymakers (particularly those in Congress) and senior-level intelligence officers with decision-making ability. Such authority figures simply have the greatest access to information worth knowing.

After considering possible motivations and justifications for leaks, Ross examines the damage associated with the spillage of information. Leaks often reveal sources and methods in a way that compromises ongoing missions. They also strain the United States' international alliances and exact enormous financial costs on intelligence agencies. He provides a survey of historical examples to demonstrate the high cost of such leaks, demonstrating how even a small leak can have vast and lethal repercussions for those within the intelligence community.

The author concludes by looking at a case study involving Ivy Bells, a military and NSA mission to detect and decrypt Soviet messages from underwater ocean cables. Despite discovering the mission in the 1980s, journalist Bob Woodward and the *Washington Post* engaged in numerous back-and-forth conversations with intelligence officials to ensure that any published information would not harm national security. Eventually, NSA employee Ronald Pelton was arrested and charged with espionage for providing information about the program to the Soviet Union. Following his arrest, the *Washington Post* continued to advocate for a green light to publish the story. When NBC broke the story, the *Post* finally published its own version of the leak. Ross examines the story to demonstrate the extent to which the newspaper's motivations for publishing conflicted with the intelligence community's desire to keep any information related to the mission, and to Pelton's arrest, a secret. When the *Post* finally published its story, it argued that its editors had worked extensively with government officials to remove any classified information unknown to the Soviet Union.

Ross concludes his monograph by suggesting that any hope of preventing intelligence leaks begins with a change in attitudes by

the media. Journalists need to understand the gravity of their actions, and the intelligence community must prioritize its continued outreach to the press. In an effort to keep the press involved, Ross surmises that intelligence officials might be able to squelch harmful leaks. Although the topic of leaks can evince a mountain of bias and emotion from those involved in either side of the leak, Ross does a fine job of remaining objective and thorough throughout the book. He effectively assesses all involved actors' motivations and skillfully explains the process of leaks without demonizing any of them.

While Ross's book has many merits, it also has several weaknesses. Ross relies too strongly on historical examples to guide his analysis for future action while not fully taking into account the fact that journalism itself has vastly changed and continues to change. Although he discusses WikiLeaks, his solution fails to address bloggers and sources such as Julian Assange, who do not fit the profile of traditional media. People in the general public possess the ability to reveal important information via their social media accounts, blogs, or YouTube. Ross proposes that intelligence agencies should work closely with the press to prevent future leaks, but he fails to consider how intelligence agencies should conduct outreach to nonjournalists who exercise an increasing amount of influence. Ross offers no solutions for dealing with Assange protégés. He seems to believe that intelligence agencies can expect to keep an open dialogue with reporters who will warn them of impending stories and let them proofread out potential damage; his solution is unrealistic, given the timbre of today's journalism where virtually anyone can break a story. Ross also fails to address dilemmas associated with working with international journalists who may be unable to perceive any risks associated with publication. Assange did not have a sense of patriotism toward the United States and believed it was his duty to publish the WikiLeaks.

Ross's analysis is complicated by his failure to read the WikiLeaks reports. He relies extensively on news reports about the incident, but he does not cite to the primary sources. Such an omission is likely not Ross's fault, as the U.S. intelligence community has barred anyone with a security clearance from viewing the leaks. Although this reviewer is not aware of whether or not Ross possesses a security clearance, his review of the actual WikiLeaks would not have been appropriate for the National Intelligence University Press. Nevertheless, such an omission weakens Ross's analysis, as

he cannot assess the damage done by the leaks or assess the veracity of Assange's stated motivations.

In providing his solution regarding future leaks, Ross fails to answer why the threat of prosecution is ineffective, and in omitting such analysis, he fails to consider whether prosecution might be deemed a more effective deterrent under different circumstances. Why do government workers and journalists risk their careers and their future freedom to disclose leaks? Ross never provides a solid answer, nor does he consider that the threat of prosecution may discourage a great deal of intelligence employees who never leak information in the first place. Understanding that most leaks come from the top or from policymakers presents a new dilemma—such authority figures' actions indicate a sense of being above the law, of feeling that their own opinions should dictate what happens or what is exposed. Perhaps future actions should be targeted against members of Congress to stress the severity of leaking to journalists.

Finally, Ross's book has a stylistic weakness; namely, that it repeats pockets of information several times, particularly in reference to WikiLeaks. The book chapters, adapted from his master's thesis at the National Intelligence University, read at times like individual papers that the author failed to synchronize.

Despite its flaws, Ross's book would be a valuable addition to an undergraduate or graduate course on intelligence studies in which the professor wishes to discuss intelligence leaks. Ross's book largely covers new territory, as few books have moved beyond historically assessing the value of leaks to assessing possible solutions. Though Ross fails to provide a workable solution, he provides a good summary of the issues. His work is the first statement in what will hopefully emerge as a robust discussion regarding effective measures to deal with future leaks, particularly in the ever-changing landscape of journalism.

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