



Empire of Secrets

Calder Walton

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'Empire of Secrets' offers a compelling new chapter in the history of Britain's last days of empire, as well as adding to our understanding of the Cold War and the history of international relations since 1945.

Empire of Secrets Details

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From Reader Review Empire of Secrets for online ebook

Vikas Datta says

Quite comprehensive account of the last gasps of the British Empire and how it maintained its influence (or tried to) after relinquishing power...

D?c??r says

A very good history book about British Intelligence services.

Hank Waggy says

Empire of Secrets plows through virgin territory, summarizing previously undisclosed intelligence files related to Britain's retreat from empire. Starting at the conclusion of World War II and covering the independence of Israel, Malaysia, Ghana, Kenya, Cyprus and Yemen, Calder Walton documents the recurring problems faced by Britain's intelligence agencies through the 1950s and 1960s. First, Britain routinely under-resourced intelligence efforts in its colonies and thus failed to provide decision makers (whether in London or the colonial administration) with the current state of affairs. Secondly, Walton illustrates Britain's inability to apply the lessons of one colonial emergency to the next; each colonial administration seemingly discovered through trial and error the same techniques for responding to nationalist crises. A worthwhile read for those interested in colonial history or those interested in intelligence policy.

Owen says

A good book, which definitely could be used as an introduction to Christopher Andrew's official history of MI5, as Walton's narrative can at times focus heavily on MI5 and cover the same ground in more detail. However this is not a major issue, as the author explains the MI5 files are some of the few archives that have been released to the public. This book certainly provides more context to the retreat from empire and should definitely be on the shelves of those interested in the end of empire.

Sean Vangordon says

I was really excited to pick this book up, and I found the experience underwhelming. Overall, it is interesting material, but it isn't presented in a compelling way. I found myself dreading picking the book back up to read it. Unimpressed.

Donald Luther says

When I was in graduate school, I was lucky enough to be there when F. W. Winterbotham published 'The Ultra Secret.' My director and I had a number discussions about this book, he brought in Ronald Lewin to give a symposium on the revelations that were coming thick and fast, and what all this meant for World War II history. Everything related to the European war would have to be rewritten.

While not quite up to that scale, Walton's book portends that a lot of the history of Britain's loss of empire is going to have to be looked at again. The records of Britain's intelligence agencies (GCHQ, MI5, and SIS/MI6) coming available will provide much new material to be chewed over, discussed, and evaluated. Though Walton himself warns, in his conclusion, that the basic lines of historiography will likely remain unchanged, this new material will probably have effects similar to the Ultra revelations. (The assessment of the abilities of both Allied and German commanders have all changed markedly since the Ultra materials have come available.)

This volume takes the story up to the mid-1960s. The period since then awaits the release of the intelligence documents. And even the period covered in this book has some gaps, which Walton notes in his narrative. Every chapter--and portion of a chapter--in this book awaits further development and new documentation: a new monograph or somebody's dissertation.

I remember that Winterbotham had some errors in that first book (most famously, perhaps, on the bombing of Coventry). The same may prove the case here. And Walton, for all his discussion of the causes for the failures of intelligence, never once mentions racism, an area that must also be examined in future treatments of the sunset of the British Empire.

I would have liked to have given 'Empire of Secrets' five stars. I think it is an important book that breaks new ground and uncovers a treasure trove of materials for future scholars to dig through. But, for all its worth, I can't describe Walton's book as having a 'riveting' style.

Conor says

A very interesting look at the role of Britain's secret services in the withdrawal from Empire. Covering all the major regions of the empire over the course of the Cold War, as Great Britain was forced through a combination of factors to decrease their presence in territories across the globe, Walton explores the parallels between each case. He highlights the ways in which the Service continually failed to learn from previous mistakes, and was forced to learn the same lessons again and again across the Empire.

He is also not afraid to highlight the atrocities committed by the exiting British forces, and the subsequent attempts to brush these under the carpet. In addition, he notes that there is still a large volume of files to be released and investigated, which may well lead to further revelations of the same nature.

Although the pattern of each withdrawal does begin to follow a similar pattern, this is very interesting as an overview of both the operation of the Secret Service in overseas territories, and of the behaviour of the British in their withdrawal from same.

Stephen says

interesting book looking at intelligence services of Britain and its empire from WW1 to the withdrawal of Britain from rhodesia and the failings in the cold war era

William says

Good book, although it does trot over the entire Middle East in around a hundred pages or so, when more detail would have been appreciated. It's probably because of the paucity of released documents though.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS

Reviewed by The Guardian (31 Jan 2013)

Yokosuka14 says

Good book, within its limitations. Should have been subtitled, "The role of MI5 in British Decolonization," as there was little Cold War info beyond fears that nationalist leaders were Communist sympathizers. The book is also limited by the available sources, which the author frequently notes. Sometimes the author uses the limited available info in interesting ways, other times, he makes an analytic leap too far (The British warned the French in 1956 that their codes were insecure, therefore the NSA and KGB must have penetrated the French code.)
