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Book Reviews

Soybel, Phyllis L.

A Necessary Relationship: The Development of Anglo-American Cooperation in Naval Intelligence.

Westport, CT & London: Praeger, 2005. xvi, 172pp.

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As the title of this book suggests, the central contention of Phyllis Soybel's work is that the naval intelligence relationship was one brought about by necessity rather than any amorphous notions of 'special' or sentimental links between London and Washington. In her words, it was a 'marriage of convenience' (p.87) and the wedding day was 7 December 1941. The key sub-themes of this study are therefore continuing mutual distrust, the dominance of respective national self-interests, and the vital influence of personal relations between key naval personnel in nurturing Anglo-American ties. This approach to the study of relations between Britain and America is convincing and echoes other studies of the period, more recently Nelson MacPherson's *American Intelligence in Wartime London*.[\[i\]](#)

Soybel's work also contains many revealing insights. She details effectively British beliefs that they were far ahead of the Americans in the intelligence field at the start of World War Two and fears that close co-operation with the US would compromise their security. In relation to this Soybel argues that American intelligence capability in decryption and intelligence gathering did not receive due credit from the British at the time, nor has it from scholars since (pp.152-3). And the importance of exchanges between members of the two intelligence establishments is made very clear. In particular she highlights the rapport between the head of the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre, Commander Roger Winn, and his US counterpart, Commander Kenneth Knowles, (especially on pp.104-7) as co-ordinators of Anglo-American anti-submarine warfare strategy.

The best chapter (simply titled 'Problems, 1941-1945') is very impressive because it develops new perspectives on how the Anglo-American 'alliance' dealt with the twin challenges of German code-breaking successes and British attempts to forge intelligence links with the Soviets. The latter in particular had important implications for British-American relations in the emerging Cold War and I would have appreciated the author taking a slightly longer-term perspective to explain this further.

Indeed, similar criticisms can be levelled at other areas of the book, specifically how Soybel's findings help us to understand the Anglo-American alliance more broadly. In short, she occasionally seems to get bogged down in personal relations and details of security designations on documents (pp.142-8), fascinating though these often are, rather than what they tell us about

the dynamics of the relationship. The brief introduction could therefore have engaged more fully with the existing literature on Anglo-American intelligence relations in order to signpost more clearly the debates with which she engages. Moreover, there could have been a more thorough examination of the inter-war period, perhaps through the insertion of a linking chapter between Chapter 1 (on the First World War) and Chapter 2 (on the 1936-1939 period) in order to explain more fully how the 'marriage' came about.

There are a few minor mistakes in the text, the most notable of which are two references to Alan Harris Bath's key text *Tracking the Axis Enemy* (pp.xii-xiii) both of which get his name wrong.

[ii] I also found the bibliography to be a little problematic. Books and monographs are dealt with reasonably comprehensively, but, by my count, there are a mere 13 journal articles cited yet three references to the author's own unpublished conference papers.

Yet overall, this is an interesting, albeit brief, book that aids our understanding of some specific areas of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation, and points the way to potential avenues of further research. Perhaps this was the author's intention and perhaps she intends to follow some of these avenues

[i] Nelson MacPherson, *American Intelligence in War-Time London: The Story of the OSS* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2003).

[ii] Alan Harris Bath, *Tracking the Axis Enemy: The Triumph of Anglo-American Naval Intelligence* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998).