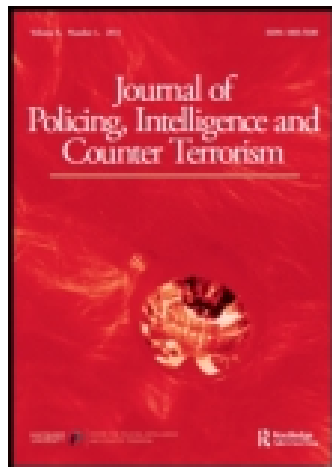


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### Book reviews

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# Book Reviews

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## Terrorism & Intelligence in Australia: A History of ASIO & National Surveillance

Frank Cain

Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing (2008).

ISBN: 9781 921 509 322

### Reviewed by Rebecca Mitchell

Frank Cain's book chronicles surveillance in Australia, from its infancy to its gradual development into the surveillance apparatus of today, primarily analysing the connection between political surveillance and Australia's political parties.

The book begins by describing the reasons behind the emergence of surveillance in Australia, largely in response to protests against conscription in WW1 and the rising level of protest by those in the Labor party. Labor Prime Minister William Hughes, who left the Labor party to become a Nationalist, showed a new interest in using surveillance against his Labor detractors once he became Prime Minister for a second time. The use of surveillance was subsequently expanded to target Australian trade unions and suspected Communists, but surprisingly not the significant numbers of German (Nazi) consular officials that resided in each of the State capitals by the late 1930s, or contemporaneous Italian fascist organisations.

The "History of ASIO" aspect of the book's title is covered well, with a detailed analysis of the specific reasons for the establishment of ASIO in 1949. After the U.S./UK code breaking Venona program, which indicated a spy ring was operating from within the Soviet Embassy in Australia, there was an American reticence and a general embargo on sharing intelligence with Australia and even Britain, for fear of a Soviet leak high within the Australian government. ASIO was established as a means of demonstrating to the Pentagon that an effective counter to Soviet espionage was in place in Australia. The extensive surveillance and intelligence gathering during WW1 and WW2 led to many of the resulting files/dossiers forming the informational basis for ASIO's high-tech database at its inception. Cain describes the one-sided intelligence-sharing arrangements that primarily benefitted the U.S. and gives in-depth coverage regarding the political machinations behind U.S., British and Australian intelligence-sharing arrangements in the 1950s.

The book then moves to a detailed account of the Petrovs' defection to Australia in 1951, leading to substantial changes in the political life of Australia and the subsequent closure of the Soviet Embassy in Canberra in 1954 (re-opened in 1959) and the Australian Embassy in Moscow. Cain argues that the Petrovs' defection

led to the beginning of a split in ALP/ASIO relations, and the beginning of ASIO's primary sense of attachment to the Liberal Party. Cain explores the historically close relationship between ASIO and the leadership of non-Labor parties of Australia.

ASIO's initial focus was to disrupt Communist activities. This role was later expanded to screening immigrants for security reasons or for war criminal activity, which helped ASIO improve its connections with other Western intelligence agencies. ASIO later monitored anti-Vietnam war protestors; however, ASIO's main focus remained on Communists.

Cain is critical of the early hiring practices of ASIO (not advertising, using ad-hoc arrangements to add staff) and contends that ASIO's early recruitment sources and "like-selecting-like" techniques resulted in a very homogeneous recruit demographic. The book focuses on ASIO's establishment as a secret agency (facilitated by the ASIO Act of 1956<sup>1</sup>), and argues that its operation was for a number of decades quite unlike other agencies, which were relatively transparent.

Cain is also critical of the 1977 Hope Royal Commission reports and their "backward-looking" vision for ASIO (for example, Hope's adoption of the ASIO officials' view that the agency must be considered superior to the normal government departments). He also describes the expansion of ASIO in the 1980s under Fraser's Liberal Party government. Cain then looks at Labor's attempts to make ASIO more accountable to Parliament and the government. The analysis of the time period after the Cold War in ASIO's history is particularly good, describing the decrease in pressing security issues facing ASIO, leading to reductions in staff and a quest for relevance in the new era.

The structure of the book is very straightforward. Topics are organised chronologically, with roughly the first half of the book covering the history of ASIO, national surveillance and an examination of the activities of the Communist Party of Australia.

The second half of the book covers the issues of intelligence agencies, terrorism and the impact of 9/11 on Australia; Australia's role in the Iraq war; catching Australia's terrorists; and lastly, the political limits of terrorism and political surveillance, including the David Hicks, Mamdouh Habib, Operation Pendennis and Dr. Mohamed Haneef cases. Cain provides an in-depth analysis of the claims made by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair of Iraq's possession of WMD to bolster support for a coalition invasion of Iraq, specifically outlining the difficulties faced by Australian (and other) intelligence agencies at the time in advising against political strategic policy.

Cain also examines the special legislation passed in 1999 under the Liberal Howard government, broadening ASIO's collection powers and giving it a new lease on life. The terrorist attacks of 2001 in the U.S. led to much greater ASIO funding and staff numbers. The November 2001 re-election of Prime Minister John Howard enabled a greater expansion of ASIO powers in 2003. Cain contends that during the Howard government, ASIO and other agencies became increasingly politicised.

1 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 31 October, 1956, pp. 2015, 2033.

*Terrorism & Intelligence in Australia: A History of ASIO and National Surveillance* provides a unique historical overview of one area of Australia's security and intelligence apparatus, encompassing the politics that are inevitably associated with the policies of any given administration. Cain provides the reader with a comprehensive history of ASIO and the use of surveillance within Australia, either as a political tool or, more recently, in the efforts to counter terrorism. Cain's book is thoroughly researched and well referenced, providing a full index for easy review of key areas. The book is suitable as an effective resource for students of intelligence or terrorism studies, as well as those newly entering the intelligence, counter terrorism, policing or policy areas. Frank Cain makes no pretense of neutrality in his political leanings and makes his views abundantly clear throughout the book. However, the book serves as a timely and relevant analysis of surveillance in Australia and its use by ASIO and other national security agencies.

## Climate Wars

Gwynne Dyer

Melbourne: Scribe Publications (2008).

ISBN (13): 9781921372223

### Reviewed by Clive Williams

Gwynne Dyer is a Canadian journalist based in London. He has been on the fringes of the military as a member of the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve and the British and American naval reserves. He has a PhD in War History from the University of London, and was employed as a senior lecturer in War Studies at RMA Sandhurst during the years 1973-77.

His first venture into journalism was in 1973 when he started writing articles for London newspapers on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1977 he took up journalism full-time and abandoned his academic career. Today he is a prolific writer, with fortnightly columns published by about 175 newspapers in more than 45 countries. He has produced eight books, with a book a year since 2003.

My only contact with Gwynne Dyer was when he was brought to Australia to be a keynote speaker at the ASIAL Security 2008 conference in Sydney in August 2008. His conference presentation, made without notes, was rambling and he seemed to lose his flow on several occasions. As soon as he had finished his presentation he disappeared, apparently to do media interviews, and was not seen again at the conference. This was a pity because no one had an opportunity to challenge his assertions.

Dyer's articles regularly appear in Australia's Fairfax newspapers and I note that this year the articles have been promoting *Climate Wars*. (When you write

an opinion piece you do not get to choose the heading, but you do at least get to describe yourself at the end of the article. Dyer has been using the opportunity this year to promote *Climate Wars*.) While Dyer seems to have a flair for promotion and a talent for getting people offside, his articles and books are usually carefully researched, well analysed and well written. (Nearly 200 articles are available at his website [www.gwynnedyer.net](http://www.gwynnedyer.net).)

*Climate Wars* looks at a future that has been radically affected by greenhouse gas emissions, climate change and rising temperatures. The growing shortage of water in some of the world's biggest watersheds is a major focus of the author's attention. Dyer goes well beyond current intelligence projections to provide plausible scenarios of political instability and chaos that are intended to scare us into committing ourselves to do something about saving our planet.

Dyer claims that his scenarios, which include extreme heat waves in Europe, massive population migrations, eco-terrorists attacking nuclear power stations, and a redrawing of the post-Cold War network of alliances, are credible consequences of climate change. He observes that scientists are already discussing them between themselves. "When you talk to the scientists they're in a state of submerged panic" Dyer claims.

Dyer says he finally became attentive when he discovered that defence officials were taking climate change seriously in the context of future demands on defence resources. (Although the word 'climate' did not feature once in Australia's *A Defence Update 2007*, largely because of Prime Minister Howard's scepticism, it did feature prominently in Prime Minister Rudd's 4 December 2008 inaugural *National Security Statement*.) Dyer notes:

"About two years ago I realised the military were getting serious about it ... They were starting to see this as their next mission – to deal with the political upheavals that will come of climate change. Now they've bought into the scenarios that climate change is coming and it's going to be bad. The Middle East and the war on terror won't last forever and they're asking themselves, how can we keep these big budgets up?"

The book contains lots of information, sometimes repeated, and seems to reflect the way Dyer does his presentations – somewhat rambling and disorganised, but with a lot of original thought. The book is not easy to read but is one of those books you need to absorb if you are involved in long term risk management and strategic planning. As with the economic crisis, those who are well prepared will improve their situation relative to those who are not.

Dyer spent months travelling around the world interviewing climate scientists, defence officials and senior political advisers before he wrote the book. As a result of his travels, he is concerned that there is simply not the political will to make the kind of sacrifices that would be enough to make a significant difference to the rate of global warming.

This will be even more the case now as politicians wrestle with the more immediate problems presented by the global financial crisis and mounting unemployment. As always, the politicians' focus is on the next election - and not the next generation.

The Rudd government seems to be gearing itself up to prepare for the longer-term military consequences of climate change, but seems unwilling to confront the serious contributory short-term issues - like Australia's coal exports. I fear that baby boomers like me and Dyer will have to rely on our children to save the planet.