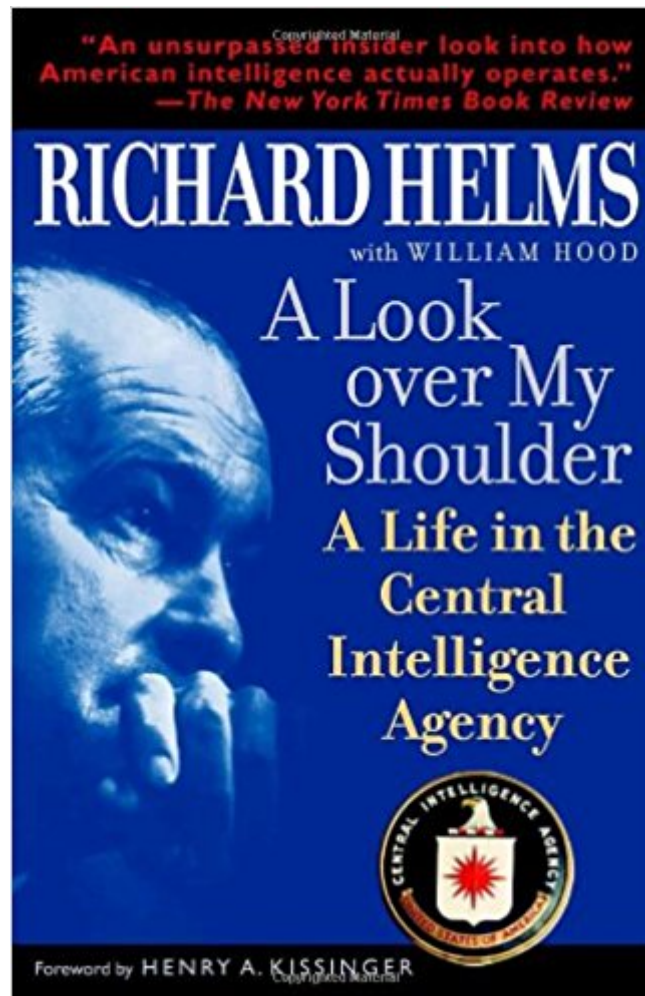




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A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life In The Central Intelligence Agency



Synopsis

A Look over My Shoulder begins with President Nixon's attempt to embroil the Central Intelligence Agency, of which Richard Helms was then the director, in the Watergate cover-up. Helms then recalls his education in Switzerland and Germany and at Williams College; his early career as a foreign correspondent in Berlin, during which he once lunched with Hitler; and his return to newspaper work in the United States. Helms served on the German desk at OSS headquarters in London; subsequently, he was assigned to Allen Dulles's Berlin office in postwar Germany. On his return to Washington, Helms assumed responsibility for the OSS carryover operations in Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe. He remained in this post until the Central Intelligence Agency was formed in 1947. At CIA, Helms served in many positions, ultimately becoming the organization's director from 1966 to 1973. He was appointed ambassador to Iran later that year and retired from government service in January 1977. It was often thought that Richard Helms, who served longer in the Central Intelligence Agency than anyone else, would never tell his story, but here it is—revealing, news-making, and with candid assessments of the controversies and triumphs of a remarkable career.

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Customer Reviews

Director of Central Intelligence from 1966 to 1973, and with an intelligence career spanning three decades, Helms offers an insider's defense-and occasionally critique-of the frequently maligned agency's performance during the turbulent 1950s, '60s and early '70s. He argues that criticisms of

the CIA are misdirected because the agency made no policy and had no agenda of its own-it merely did the president's bidding. Helms doesn't sensationalize. Instead, he describes how the CIA successfully influenced geopolitical developments in ways that benefited the U.S. The strength of the book is in the breadth of history it encompasses. Helms's career spanned WWII, the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S role in the ouster of Chile's President Allende, Vietnam, numerous Middle East meltdowns and much of the Cold War. Along the way he battled with the Pentagon about the relative troop strength of the Vietcong and with the Department of Defense over the nuclear capability of the USSR. Helms's impressions of the men of his times, from Hitler to Reagan, makes for sometimes surprising reading. For example, President Johnson is sympathetically treated, while Sen. Frank Church, who headed Senate hearings into the CIA, is depicted as an ambitious political opportunist. Although it is only by implication, Helms raises provocative questions about the proper scope of congressional oversight of the CIA that are especially relevant in the post-September 11 world. Photos not seen by PW.Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Helms was director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1966 to 1973. "This is a memoir I never expected to write," he says in the preface to the memoir we're glad he did write, for in looking over his 30 years in the intelligence field, he presents a book as compelling as a good thriller. (Perhaps a lot of credit for the fluidity of the prose should go to his coauthor, but, ultimately, that's an unimportant issue.) In terms of a profession, Helms was involved first in journalism--in Germany during the Third Reich--but during the war and postwar years, circumstances drew him into intelligence gathering. He was high in the CIA during such bruising times for this country as the Vietnam War and Watergate; his character insights into Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon are gut-real. Helms has a point of view, of course; readers would be naive to think otherwise. For instance, he insists that when it comes to the government's need to gather intelligence, "Americans will never believe that secrecy is essential." We learn spy talk here--such as what "counterintelligence" is and does. Particularly in the post-September 11 climate, inside information on the CIA is bound to generate considerable reader interest. Brad HooperCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Helms seems to be very detailed in his history of CIA from WW2, Truman administration thru Nixon/Ford administrations. Of course, as most reviewers note, how much is believable depends on

readers preconceived opinions. Some of the book drags because he describes so many different personalities in the CIA and the world that he had to deal with, along with so much red tape. This book has SO much more information that was ignored by Allen Dulles' book (published in the mid '60's). I like how he didn't shy away from explaining U2 flights as much as he could, addressing Cuba/Castro interactions, Vietnam, and JFK assassination. One of the reasons I find that Helms is believable is that he admits that Vietnam history was unknown or ignored by everybody, Vietnam was not like Korea-they had been fighting for independence for 2000 years. Hindsight told him that Vietnam would NEVER have surrendered. I do find his support for J. Edgar Hoover disturbing, even maintaining that Hoover wasn't homosexual (homosexuality was Hoover's least important flaw). In Helms' defense, he probably didn't have to deal with Hoover much since CIA is responsible for everything outside of FBI's jurisdiction. I believe his main purpose in writing this book is to absolutely stress how the CIA is a tool of the administration; President and at least some in Congress are aware and dictate everything that CIA attempts to do. There has been too much discussion on how the CIA does everything secretly on their own without any rules - he's trying to set the record straight in that the Agency has always followed the orders of the current administration. I think that he is convincing with his details, some failures and some successes during his tenure. Others will have other opinions on this book- such is the case with an organization that has to protect this country from enemies that don't worry about 'transparency'. Too many people here don't want secrets kept from public, I say that that is the very definition of insanity, treating our patriots that risk their lives worse than the enemies that want to destroy this country.

I enjoyed this read from a man who admitted he never thought he'd write a memoir. Helms was a gentleman spy, a man who never violated the code, even getting himself charged with perjury for not revealing certain things during the Congressional hearings of the 1970s. Helms speaks knowledgeably and practically about the capabilities and limitations of intelligence and the fact that the intelligence picture is seldom clear. He does not go deeply into detail into incidents that have been covered in depth elsewhere nor does he go any further than information that is already in the public domain. Helms was always opposed to covert operations, he felt they were noisy, messy and full of risk for indeterminate gain. He always felt the agency should have stuck to its original charter to gather intelligence and function as a think tank for policy makers. Thus it was ironic that he came up through the agency during the heyday of cowboy covert operations. The book is most useful for its insights into the realities of intelligence operations as well as the insights into politicians and policymakers during the Cold War and Vietnam War.

The book is splendidly written -- very accessible, very good flow. Well-crafted all-around. It's a highly interesting account of not only an interesting career but it's a good chronology of the early days of OSS through the establishment of the CIA. This isn't a handbook on operational or analytic techniques, but it is a wonderful memoir giving in-depth glimpse into major operations and important personalities of the intelligence agency through Helms' long career. Relationships are a big theme, and Helms does not shy away from dispensing professional advice for would-be DCIs. Greatly enjoyable.

I was looking for more from the later years like LBJ and the Kennedy era, did not give much of an insight into Watergate and I didn't believe his view. I got the impression that he took most of the juicy bits to his grave. I quite enjoyed his early CIA years in post war Germany which was interesting. It's a book that should be read but he knew too much to talk about it in a book.

I'm fully satisfied.

I think this guy was the "real deal". The connections between politics and getting the job done are well covered.

Insightful and well-written; however, the truth that he saw may not be the truth that others saw.

a great book on the history of the CIA and the US foreign policies of the last few years. a great book i highly recommend .

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