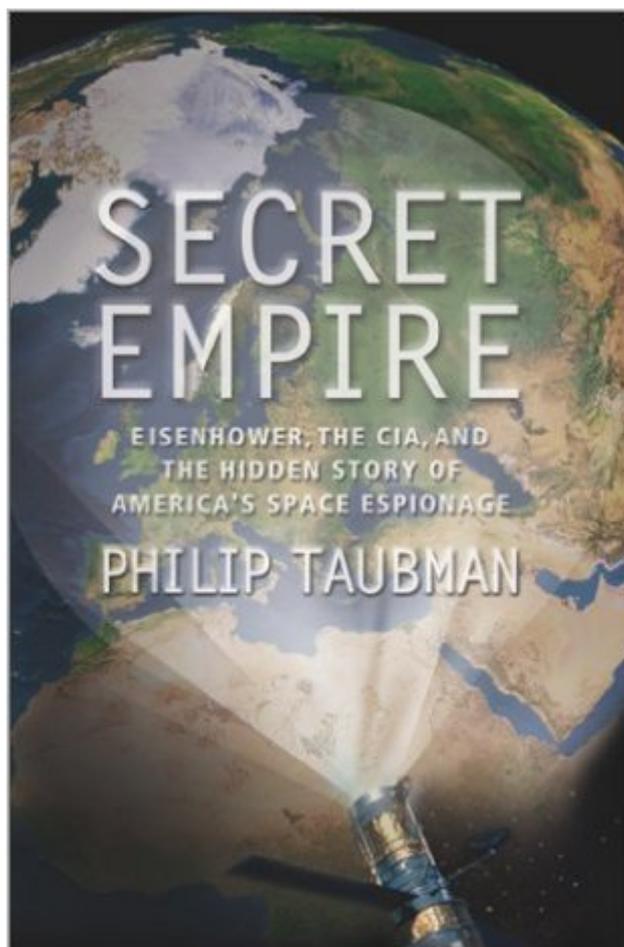


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Secret Empire: Eisenhower, The CIA, And The Hidden Story Of America's Space Espionage



Synopsis

During the early and most dangerous years of the cold war, a handful of Americans, led by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, revolutionized spying and warfare. In great secrecy and beyond the prying eyes of Congress and the press, they built exotic new machines that opened up the Soviet Union to surveillance and protected the United States from surprise nuclear attack. "Secret Empire" is the dramatic story of these men and their inventions, told in full for the first time. In a brief period of explosive, top-secret innovation during the 1950s, a small group of scientists, engineers, businessmen, and government officials rewrote the book on airplane design and led the nation into outer space. In an effort no less audacious than the creation of the atomic bomb, they designed, built, and operated the U-2 and supersonic SR-71 spy planes and Corona, the first reconnaissance satellites -- machines that could collect more information about the Soviet Union's weapons in a day than an army of spies could assemble in a decade. Their remarkable inventions and daring missions made possible arms control agreements with Moscow that helped keep the peace during the cold war, as well as the space-based reconnaissance, mapping, communications, and targeting systems used by America's armed forces in the Gulf War and most recently in Afghanistan. These hugely expensive machines also led to the neglect of more traditional means of intelligence gathering through human spies. Veteran "New York Times" reporter and editor Philip Taubman interviewed dozens of participants and mined thousands of previously classified documents to tell this hidden, far-reaching story. He reconstructs the crucial meetings, conversations, and decisions that inspired and guided the development of the spy plane and satellite projects during one of the most perilous periods in our history, a time when, as Eisenhower said, the world seemed to be "racing toward catastrophe." Taubman follows this dramatic story from the White House to the CIA, from the Pentagon to Lockheed's Skunk Works in Burbank, from the secret U-2 test base in Nevada to the secret satellite assembly center in Palo Alto and other locations here and abroad. He reveals new information about the origins and evolution of the projects and how close they came to failing technically or falling victim to bureaucratic inertia and Washington's turf wars. The incredibly sophisticated spies in the skies were remarkably successful in proving that the missile gap was a myth in protecting us from surprise Soviet attack. But in some ways, the failure to detect the planning for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, can also be attributed to these powerful machines as the government became increasingly dependent on spy satellites to the neglect of human agents and informants. Now, as we wage a new and more vicious war against terrorism, we will need both machines in space and spies on the ground to fight back.

Book Information

Hardcover: 464 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; First Edition edition (March 4, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684856999

ISBN-13: 978-0684856995

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.4 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (25 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #796,653 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #196 in [Books > History > Military](#)

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Customer Reviews

For academic historians of the Cold War, journalists are unwelcome but inevitable competitors. Journalists tend to write better than academics, and they certainly have better ties to the publishing world, but they often lack either historical training or deep knowledge of a specific topic. Admittedly, a good popular historical account of a subject can both add to the record and increase public interest in it. One person who did it in the mid-1980s was William Burrows, a former New York Times reporter who wrote one of the early books on satellite reconnaissance, *Deep Black*, and substantially advanced our understanding of this secretive world. Philip Taubman is currently the Washington bureau chief for the New York Times and has written a new popular history of the early years of strategic reconnaissance called *Secret Empire*. The book largely focuses on the people who built the U-2 spy plane and the CORONA reconnaissance satellite. It is a readable book and Taubman certainly did a lot of research. But unlike *Deep Black*, or many other books before it, *Secret Empire* breaks absolutely no new ground and primarily repeats information that appeared in several books in the late 1990s. Most notably, several chapters in *Secret Empire* are simply retreads of information in Jeffrey Richelson's 2001 book *The Wizards of Langley*. Richelson's book did well and received wide exposure, but *Secret Empire* has the force of the Simon & Schuster advertising machine behind it. After recounting the development of the U-2 spyplane, which has already been extensively covered in greater detail by author Chris Pocock, *Secret Empire* focuses upon the development of the CORONA reconnaissance satellite (spy satellite names were usually printed in capital letters).

The book *Secret Empire: Eisenhower, the CIA, and the Hidden Story of America's Space Espionage* by Philip Taubman could be likened to a triptych of America's first steps into the dark world of space through the murky processes of Cold War intelligence operations and military competitiveness. The first third looks at the period of time immediately following World War II, when the Cold War had not yet become a matter of settled doctrine, nor had the Soviet Union been identified as the key adversary. The second portion looks at the time of the spy planes, before satellite technology was available but when surveillance from the air was considered vital for national security. The final third continues the tale into space and, to a certain extent, into the post-Cold War era. This is a sweeping history. The intelligence operations that had been started during World War II were new to the United States in many respects; continuing this process on a global scale during peacetime and in civilian as well as military hands was also a new aspect. The British, with their worldwide empire, had been the masters of international intelligence, but had neither the resources nor the technology to even attempt to continue this role. The early days of intelligence gathering across the Soviet Union - the largest nation on earth geographically, and one very remote from most Western national borders - were fraught with danger. Taubman's narrative begins with one such dangerous mission - the flight of Hal Austin over the northern edge of the Soviet Union, trying to get updated intelligence information while flying a souped-up but admittedly conventional aircraft.

I saw Philip Taubman on a news show shilling for this book and immediately ordered it. How could I resist? In 1973 and 1974 fresh out of college my first "real" job was as an Intelligence Operations Specialist at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Armed with all kinds of fancy clearances, I sifted through reams of roll paper teletypes from the CIA and DIA to create a daily briefing for Fred Ikle (then head of ACDA) John Lehman (Deputy) and the Assistant Directors (like Amron Katz - a character in this book). The intelligence was actually incredibly boring and banal. Ikle used to complain that the morning briefing was pathetic next to the news from the Washington Post and NY Times. It might have been banal but it was all very "important" and secretive with silly code names for special clearances. The mere existence of satellites was called the "fact of" and was classified Top Secret. They had regular meetings for about five years before they decided to downgrade it to Confidential, and it took another ten years to declassify it. The National Intelligence Estimates (which Taubman mentions but doesn't explain) were ridiculously out of sync with the "raw" intelligence we got every day. The "raw" intelligence pretty clearly showed - if you actually paid attention to it - that the allegedly awesome Soviet military was pretty close to pathetic. There are

several very exciting stories to be told in all this. A lot of it about political bumbling, military agendas that needed to aggrandize the struggling Soviet Union, a giant man-boy dominated environment with no place for women and a big penchant for expensive toys. This book does fill in a few gaps in the espionage story that I didn't know, and it does a pretty good job of giving credit to the leadership role of Eisenhower.

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