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Weekly Intelligence Notes Short-form Book Review (April 2025)

Chinese Espionage, Operations, and Tactics, Second Edition

by Nicholas Eftimiades
Vitruvium Press
05 January 2025

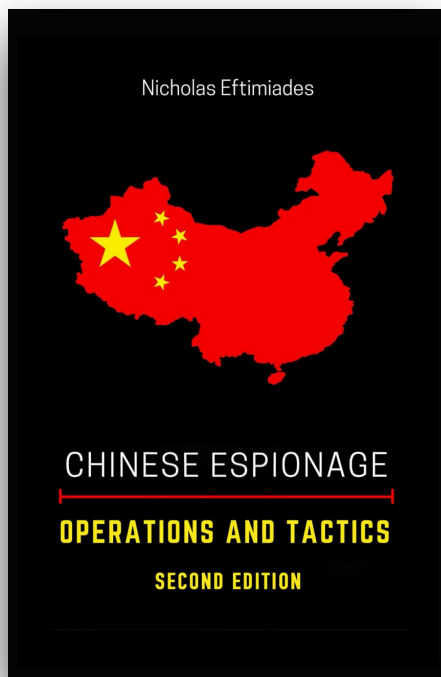
Review by **Randal Phillips***
Former CIA East Asia Division Chief
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Nicholas Eftimiades has once again provided a thoroughly researched and comprehensively detailed roadmap of China's intelligence apparatus. This not only builds upon and updates his seminal 1994 book *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, it provides the reader with a detailed understanding of China's "whole-of-society" espionage activities that dwarf the approach of any other nation.

Eftimiades painstakingly provides the reader with factual details derived from analyzing over 850 known espionage cases of how that "whole-of-society" approach works in practice today.

He starts with an overview of the legal framework that has been put in place in the Xi Jinping era that explicitly mandates that any Chinese organization, business or individual must cooperate with China's security and intelligence apparatus, if requested. He then layers upon this how multi-faceted the number of players are in China conducting espionage, including state-owned and private business entities, the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department, research and academic organizations, individuals sensing a business opportunity off of stolen intellectual property, and of course, China's formal intelligence agencies.

Perhaps most interesting from my perspective, given a career at CIA working on China issues, is the analysis provided on China's intelligence objectives. A perennial question was always to identify how the Chinese leadership decided upon its clandestine collection priorities, and how this was communicated up and down the chain of command to its bevy of collectors, particularly the Ministry of State Security



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and the PLA's Joint Intelligence Bureau. Eftimiades quite effectively details how this process is tied to China's domestic and global security and economic development requirements, particularly that laid out very transparently in the "Made in China 2025" policy blueprint seeking a dominant position for China in 10 critical industries. Whereas in days past it could be said that Chinese espionage efforts were in many ways quite scattershot in function, almost in a "target of opportunity" fashion, it is clear that today China has a more streamlined and focused set of collection priorities against which they unleash their vast resources.

Perhaps no less compelling from my perspective is Eftimiades' superb use of the 850 plus espionage cases to explain how significantly China's espionage players have altered their tradecraft and taken on a truly global collection effort. Particularly in the Xi Jinping era, the various espionage arms – particularly the MSS – have been both incentivized and browbeat into being more aggressive in their pursuit of their requirements. This includes more daring targeting of individuals in operating environments around the world, and greater confidence in using bountiful social media approaches and financial incentives of various forms. This can be seen as part and parcel of Xi's pursuit of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and an element of a more confident China on the world stage.

It's hard to truly wrap one's arms around the global impact of China's espionage activities, both in terms of the economic impact well into the trillions of dollars lost, but also in the enormous scope of China's campaign that dwarfs the capabilities and resources of target nations to combat these efforts. Eftimiades provides a great service to all readers, whether those in government or in the private sector in the crosshairs of this battle, to truly begin to understand what is happening here. I would say that this book provides in a concise 180 pages a tremendously useful description of the challenge, and an opportunity to understand what will be required to mount an effective defense.

Randal Phillips is Founder and President of HFBB Associates, a bespoke strategic geopolitical and financial risk consultancy on China and Asia issues. Randy previously spent 28 years with the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Operations, serving a number of tours abroad in Asia, including most recently as COS Beijing. He also served as Chief of China Operations and Acting Chief of East Asia Division in CIA HQS.

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