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At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA

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Tenet, George. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. 549pp. \$30

George Tenet's tenure as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was marked throughout by controversy, so it is no surprise that his memoirs face more of the same. Partisans will never be satisfied; policy and national security insiders, regardless of their depth on the inside, will find areas with which to disagree; historians will decry the lack of citations; and individuals who helped to create some of that history will be glad for that lack.

Yet for readers not looking for confirmation of their prejudices, *At the Center of the Storm* will provide an engrossing narrative of a critical time in U.S. history. This much cannot be contested: George Tenet was a key player during a period that reshaped this nation. Was he the best possible choice? Some will argue that he was not, while others who look back at the history of the CIA during the 1980s and 1990s will be grateful for his tenure.

At the Center of the Storm is above all a story of love and passion, for Tenet is not a cold chronicler who hides his emotions behind a detached, simple narrative of events. As Virgil writes, "I sing of arms and the man," so does Tenet. Just as his love for his country and for his family shines throughout this work, so does his love for the CIA and its officers. This book reads as a first-person history should. It is engrossing and fascinating, with the personal view of "this is what we were trying to do."

Tenet's strengths were as a leader and visionary, strengths that civilian agencies, unlike the military, rarely have the pleasure to experience. Tenet took over the agency during a time of demoralization and became its greatest champion, cheerleader, and advocate. If he was not as successful within the larger intelligence community, it was not for lack of effort.

Tenet's appointment showed both the advantages and disadvantages of having an intelligence outsider at the helm of the CIA. As an outsider, he was willing to challenge the old ways of doing things that any bureaucracy develops over time. Changing from a Cold War world to a multipolar world required a new perspective to meet new threats and challenges. But outsiders cannot always recognize the nuances of the intelligence craft (whether operational or analytic) and risk losing the balance necessary for producing good intelligence. The reader can decide where events like the now-infamous "slam-dunk" incident belong.

Decades from now, historians likely with no better knowledge than we have will write an objective account of DCI George Tenet. If there is a degree of justice in the world, Tenet will be rightfully acknowledged as one of the greatest DCIs in history. If these historians are faithful to their craft, however, they will also point out that George Tenet, like all great men, had an element of hubris that in the end tarnished his record.

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