

# Newly released KGB files tell of disinformation that missed mark

## Accounts of JFK, King propaganda show Soviets didn't understand U.S.

By James Risen  
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Oswald Kennedy

WASHINGTON — A new book based on long-secret KGB files makes a number of shocking Cold War-era claims — that the Soviet agency fabricated evidence and worked to spread rumors that the CIA assassinated John F. Kennedy and that J. Edgar Hoover was gay.

The claims are made in a book based on KGB archives brought to the West by a defector.

According to the files turned over by a former KGB archivist to British intelligence and detailed in a new book, Moscow's Cold War spy service took several steps designed to link the CIA to the Kennedy assassination.

These steps included forging a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald to a CIA officer, E. Howard Hunt, asking for information "before any steps are taken by me or anyone else," according to the new book, "The Sword and the Shield," written by Christopher Andrew and the former KGB officer, Vasily Mi-

trokhin. The book is to be published by Basic Books later this month.

The Oswald letter was supposedly written about two weeks before Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, but was actually created by the KGB in the mid-1970s, after Hunt's name had surfaced in the Watergate investigation, according to KGB files copied by Mitrokhin while he served as a KGB archivist.

The letter looked so real that it even fooled Oswald's widow, according to a BBC report that was to be rebroadcast on Sunday by CBS' "60 Minutes."

It was then passed anonymously to three conspiracy buffs and entered circulation in the United States when it was picked up by one writer of self-published assassination books, the authors report.

### KGB letter declared a forgery

The letter led to a brief flurry of

interest when a Dallas newspaper reported that a handwriting expert declared it to be genuine, but a congressional panel that re-investigated the Kennedy assassination in the late 1970s later concluded that the letter was probably a forgery.

The KGB's clumsy propaganda campaign never had much of an impact on the debate over the Kennedy assassination in the United States. But the archives spirited out of Russia by Mitrokhin appear to support the longstanding assertions by CIA officials that the KGB conducted disinformation campaigns designed to raise dark suspicions about the U.S. government and prominent American leaders-around the world.

The book also suggests that those efforts were amateurish and often silly. In August 1967, for instance, the KGB authorized a plan to discredit the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. by planting articles in the African press portraying him as an "Uncle Tom" who was secretly being paid by the government so that he would make sure the civil rights movement would not threaten President Lyndon B. Johnson.

### Fumbled effort

The KGB was apparently frustrated that a moderate like King had emerged as the most influential voice in the civil rights movement, but Moscow's conical propaganda revealed the KGB's lack of understanding of American politics and society. The KGB's propaganda campaign had even less impact than the FBI's equally fumbling efforts to smear King.

"News that the KGB was attempting to plant false stories in the African press portraying Dr. King as an 'Uncle Tom,' at the very time when Dr. King was harshly

attacking Johnson's conduct of the Vietnam War indicates that American police agencies were not the only Keystone Kops active in the 1960s," said David J. Garrow, a historian at Emory University and the author of "The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr."

KGB agents reportedly also mailed forged letters to major U.S. newspapers to support rumors that Hoover, then the FBI director, was gay.

Mitrokhin was a KGB archivist in charge of managing many of the spy service's secret files until he retired in 1984. When he arrived in Britain in 1992 and sought out British intelligence, he brought with him a huge cache of notes that he said he had taken based on those files, and turned them over.

The Mitrokhin files, which the British considered reliable enough to share with the CIA and FBI, have offered Western intelligence and law enforcement officials a treasure trove of historical information about KGB operations around the world.

And while the archives quoted in the book contain only limited information about Soviet espionage cases, the archives have already helped identify some spies. In the United States, for instance, the book reveals that the Mitrokhin files helped lead the FBI to Robert Lipka, a former code-clerk at the National Security Agency, who worked as a Soviet mole in the 1960s. Lipka was arrested in 1996 and pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit espionage.

#### **CIA turned defector away**

Mitrokhin first attempted to defect to the United States, but was received a lukewarm reception from a CIA officer when he approached the agency in a Baltic country soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Officials say that the CIA's Soviet/East European Division had decided that the KGB was no longer a threat and had instituted a controversial new policy that led CIA officers in the field to turn

away many defectors. Paul Redmond, who was then the CIA's deputy chief of counterintelligence, said in an interview that he sought to take over the Mitrokhin case after other officials had failed to show interest, but by then Mitrokhin had turned to the British.

Redmond now argues that the CIA's diffident handling of Mitrokhin's efforts underscored a larger problem, which was that the CIA decided "naively" after the collapse of the Soviet Union to scale back its espionage operations against Moscow.

The CIA apparently did miss a good bet with Mitrokhin, since his archives seem to reveal a wide array of intriguing insights into KGB operations against the West. Among other things, according to the book, the files show that the KGB planted secret caches of weapons in Europe and probably in North America as well, apparently for use in the event of war.

They also appear to show that the KGB sought to blackmail German Chancellor Willy Brandt in the 1960s by alleging that he had spied for Moscow during World War II.

## **CORRECTIONS**

*The Examiner corrects errors. Please notify the editor: P.O. Box 7260, San Francisco 94120.*

An article Sept. 5, 1999, had an incorrect headline for a new real estate book, "Steiners Complete How To Move Handbook, Second Edition," by Clyde and Shari Steiner.