

Peacetime Intelligence Has Failed

By Phillip Knightley

THE COLD WAR is over. Is intelligence still needed? And if it is, where and how? Congress has set up a committee to answer these and other questions.

The secret agents, the code breakers, the evaluators insist that intelligence is still essential. And the old spies are not easily surrendering their myths. The KGB defector Oleg Gordievsky, who now advises Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), recently reviewed the memoirs of his old boss, Gen. Oleg Kalugin, in a British magazine. Gordievsky wrote of Kalugin's appointment as head of the KGB's foreign counterintelligence and how he "turned his talent and energy towards the destruction of the fabric of American society."

The idea that any KGB general, no matter how brilliant, could sit at his desk in the Lubyanka and by playing intelligence games destroy the fabric of American society is ludicrous. Yet it is typical of the legends that many spies and spymasters seem determined to perpetuate. Fortunately, others have decided to be frank.

Yuri Modin, the KGB officer who controlled the notorious Cambridge ring — Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross — has revealed that when he was working as a desk officer in the KGB during World War II, he seldom had time to read all the reports that agents sent him. When he consulted his senior officer about this he was told to plunge his hand into the pile on his desk, hope that he hit gold, and mark the rest. "To be read later."

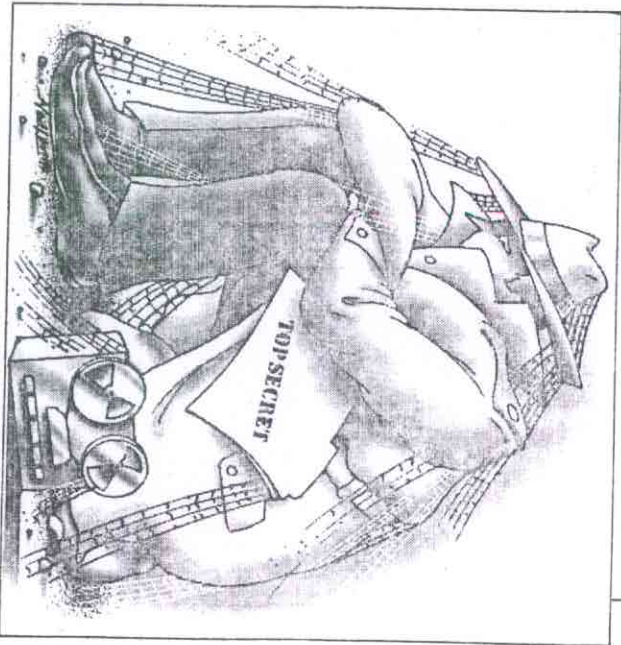
A new Russian biography of Philby reveals that the KGB never really trusted the Cambridge Ring anyway — because it was too good to be true. Moscow Center refused to believe that the five men could have legitimate access to such top-secret in-

formation. Philby was especially suspect. How could a man with a known Communist past become an officer in the Secret Intelligence Service? The center concluded that all five must really be British intelligence officers trying to penetrate the KGB. So, at a time when the Germans were at the gates of Moscow, the center concentrated on trying to trap the Cambridge Five into admitting this.

I believe, therefore, that Philby's most valuable role for the KGB actually came after he fled to Moscow. There he was — a constant, living reminder to SIS and the CIA that none of their officers was to be trusted, and a stimulus to the paranoia of such American counterintelligence officers as James Jesus Angleton, whose hunt for the American Philby tore apart the Central Intelligence Agency.

Angleton was, of course, too early. The American Philby turned up later — Al-drich H. Ames — and the report by Senate Select Committee on Intelligence about the Ames case makes it clear the CIA was every bit as inept as the KGB. So it came about that the agency's failure to accept that Ames, a drunken and bumbling spy, had been handing over bundles of CIA documents to the Soviet embassy in Washington, led to the loss of "virtually all the CIA's intelligence assets targeted at the Soviet Union." By 1987, a senior officer reported, it did not have a Soviet case producing worthwhile intelligence.

Yet, despite this, the United States won the cold war. Kalugin's grandiose plans for the KGB to destroy the fabric of American society came to nothing. The CIA, tripped by Ames' treachery, was equally unsuccessful in its operations against the Soviet Union. The conclusion is inescapable: Intelligence played little or no role in the outcome of the cold war. Economic strength, technological ability, political institutions, geography and population were far more important factors.



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At a recent conference on intelligence, I challenged a panel that included the former head of the KGB, Leonid Shebarshin; the former chief of KGB counterintelligence, Sergei Kondrashov; the former head of East German intelligence, Markus Wolf; and the former head of West German intelligence, Herbert Hallenbreich, to name a single important historical event in peacetime in which intelligence had played a decisive role. They could not do so. I believe history will show that peacetime intelligence agencies have been an expensive waste — and that for 50 years we have all been victims of a vast international confidence trick to deceive us about their necessity and value.

Phillip Knightley is the author of "The Secret and Oldest Profession," a critique of intelligence, and of a study of Kim Philby.