Book World

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'Our Side Good'

THE CHAMPAGNE SPY: Israel's Master Spy Tells His Story. By Wolfgang Lotz.

(St. Martin's. 240 pp. $6.95)

Reviewed by Miles Copeland.

The reviewer, the author of "The Game of Nations," is a corporate consultant on security matters in the Mideast.

For forming judgments of persons uncovered as spies, I recommend the Copeland Rule: "Our side good; other side bad." By application of this simple vernier even the subtlest and most stubborn cases yield to moral analysis.

Take, for example, the case of "Kim" Philby, the British intelligence officer who turned out to be a Soviet spy. He was "vain, cruel, contemptuous to the point of being psychopathic," to borrow the words of a former friend. And the case of "Mickey" Goleniewski, the Polish intelligence officer who turned out to be an American spy. He "put loyalty to principle above all other loyalties," and, "at great personal sacrifice and risk he served those whom he believed to be most capable of fighting what was evil in his country." (The first quote is from a review of Philby's autobiography by Cyril Connolly which appeared in 1968 in The Sunday Times of London; the second two quotes are from an editorial appearing in the same paper six years earlier.)

This is not to say that we admit to having spies in foreign countries. We occasionally catch Soviet 'spies' in our own country, and we deal with them in a manner befitting persons so traitorous and low. In retaliation, the Soviets trump up evidence on innocent people in their country and charge them with spying for the CIA. The same happens in the Arab-Israeli cold war. The Arabs send spies into Israel, and they are

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promptly caught by the Israeli security service, acknowledged to be one of the most efficient in the world. In retaliation, one or another of the Arab governments trumps up charges on an equivalent number of "Israeli spies"; they are omitted when the spy-catching is the other way around.

To be truly useful, the Copeland Rule must be applied with particular vigor when our side produces literature which throws doubt on its innocence. (When I say "our side" I include the Israelis, because of general adherence in our country to quite a different Rule: "Israel good; Arabs bad.") Whenever an Arab government trumps up charges against "Israeli agents" some authoritative voice is likely to undermine our righteous fury by suggesting that the Israelis have one of the finest intelligence services in the world, or by revealing that they have information which could only have come from espionage sources. Indeed, during one of the kangaroo court trials of "Israel spies" held by the Iraqis, the Israelis unblushingly used information coming from their real spies in Iraq to prove to the world that those on trial were innocent. And after protesting for years the innocence of persons hanged or in jail for spying against the Syrian and Egyptian governments, the Israelis now allow the publication of books which show that their intelligence service has had some of the most effective spies of modern history at work in those two countries. But such contradictions only increase the usefulness of the Copeland Rule.

To understand this admittedly subtle point, one must understand that most modern intelligence services have all but abandoned the use of their own nationals as espionage agents. For example, if the CIA wishes to penetrate the Soviet government it must employ agents with access to it—Soviet citizens, in other words, with whatever it takes to get the ppr late Soviet security

clearances. And the same goes, the other way around, for KGB if it wishes to penetrate the United States government. Thus, with modern security controls being what they are, an espionage agent is by definition a traitor to his country. And if he is to be an effective espionage agent, he must also betray his friends and associates.

But this is not necessarily the case with Israeli agents. Like services of the great powers, Israeli Intelligence recruits most of its espionage agents in Arab countries from among citizens in good standing of those countries. These are Bad by Arab standards, and Good by Israeli standards. It also has made extensive use of agents who are Israeli citizens, but who have what it takes to build new identities, supported by proper documentation, and to introduce themselves into the mainstreams of Arab society. To these, obviously, the Rule does not apply—or, it would be more accurate to say, they are "exceptions which prove the Rule." To anyone who tries to be objective as he views world events, the Rule is a reminder to avoid postures of pious indignation when the other side does to us precisely what we would do to it.

By studying the cases of Israeli agents who are Israeli citizens, and who therefore owe no loyalty to the countries they spy upon, we may get away from the grosser aspects of betrayal altogether, and concern ourselves with its finer points. Is it true, as the CIA's Kilbourne Johnston used to say, that "to be a good agent either for our side or the other a man has to be a mean, treacherous s.o.b.'? To get at the answer it is helpful to have a look at those spies, a small minority in the world of espionage and counterespionage, to whom the question of national loyalty does not apply.

Such a case is that of Major Ze'ev Gur-Arieh, better known as "Wolfgang Lotz," whose autobiographical account of spying in Egypt, "The Champagne Spy," has just been published. Gur-Arieh—or Lotz—was born in Germany of a Gentile father and Jewish mother, but he emigrated to Palestine as a child and grew up within the Jewish community. By the time he was employed by Israeli Intelligence, shortly after the Anglo-French-Israeli campaign against Egypt in 1956, he was as Israeli as any Egyptian is Egyptian. Except for his language skills (Hebrew, Arabic, English and German) and Teutonic appearance, sending him to spy on Egypt was the equivalent of the CIA sending an untraveled American Army officer to penetrate the Kremlin.

But he did it. And "The Chapagne Spy," written with that kind of ingenuous frankness found only in persons so amoral as to be oblivious of how others judge them, tells us what sort of person he had to be to do it. It convinces us that no other sort of person could have done it, and that, therefore, his attitudes must be entirely typical of the old-time non-treasonous spies of history whom we have regarded as heroes. "The Champagne Spy" is compulsively readable in any case, if only because it is an interesting story simply told; but with these special insights it becomes a case history classic.

I am reminded of a key test question in the final oral examination for admission to the CIA's predecessor organization, the Office of Strategic Services. It was, "Do you want to fight the Nazis because you hate them?" If you gave the proper answer, "No, I want to fight them because they're on the other side," the examiner clapped you on the back and said, "Correct! Welcome aboard.' A candidate who gave the right answer, and who subsequently rose to be one of the most effective officers in OSS and is now a senior official of CIA, asked, "What would your reaction be if I admitted that I would have answered the opposite had I figured that it was the one you wanted?" "Even better!" was the reply. When I first heard this story I didn't get the point. I do now.