

Panorama

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J Phillip Knightley

MS. ANGELA ROBINSON: With recent events surrounding IranScam it's becoming evident that intelligence gathering organizations are becoming more powerful than ever. International stakes are getting higher, tensions are nearing fevered pitch. There's never been more money poured into spying.

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Joining us now on Panorama to give an insight into this world of international espionage we welcome Mr. Phillip Knightley and his book on the subject entitled The Second Oldest Profession. Very interesting book, Mr. Knightley.

MR. PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY: Thank you, thank you.

MS. ROBINSON: We welcome you to the show.

My question is, and let's go back a little bit before we talk about some specifics, if you can find out all of this information, under cover, resources, names,

places and things, that means possibly anybody that puts a lot of time and concentration into it can do that also?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Yes, of course. I mean --

MS. ROBINSON: That means other countries can very easily find out what we were doing?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Absolutely. Absolutely. You see, one of the interesting things about the CIA is that it's a secret intelligence organization run within a democratic country. Now that's almost a contradiction in terms. In other words, it is impossible because of the way the United States runs to keep everything secret and all you have to do is use the Freedom of Information Act, look for publications of Congressional hearings, monitor certain publications and then, of course, the CIA, it's in the phone book. You know where it is, you can ring them up. You can ask to speak to their press officer. You can find out who the previous officers were who have now retired. They all live around here, in Virginia, Washington itself. Ring them up, go down and see them, have a chat with them. They love to tell you their stories.

MS. ROBINSON: So what we've been thinking is such a deep dark secret is not that much of a secret after all?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Not in the United States because it is elsewhere.

MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: In Britain, for example, Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service, the James Bond organization, now that is so secret that it doesn't even exist. There is not a word about it in any British telephone directory. There's nothing about it in the list of government organizations. If you want to join it, you have to wait until they approach you. You know, we'll ring you, don't you ring us. And if you do happen to learn about and then publish something about

it, you can go to jail for seven years even though you may not have realized that what you were revealing was a so-called official secret.

MS. ROBINSON: That's interesting. How much money is dumped into this spying network organization, so to speak.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Oh, enormous. I mean it's a really 20th Century growth industry.

MS. ROBINSON: That we really don't know about, that, you know, the American people have absolutely no idea whatsoever?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I don't think even the American government knows how much money it spends on its secret world, and I don't think they know how many people they employ because you run into difficulties of definition. Everybody knows -- well, the CIA naturally knows how many employees its got. But a lot of work is subcontracted and nobody knows how many sub employees. Say, if you're a CIA officer stationed abroad you may have a little network of agents and you pay them money. Now in a way, they're really working for the CIA. And if you add them all up it comes to three or four times the actual established number that people know about.

If you want some figures on it, I mean the world intelligence organization, the whole community, consists of about 1.25 million people --

MS. ROBINSON: You're kidding.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: -- and they spend something like \$25 billion a year.

MS. ROBINSON: You're kidding?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: No, I'm not kidding. That's the way it goes.

MS. ROBINSON: I believe you, yes. That's incredible.

You know, when you talk about not really knowing the American people, perhaps, the government takes us back to when the Iranscam, so to speak --

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Sure.

MS. ROBINSON: -- broke and we are under the impression, at least the information we've gotten, a lot of people didn't know what was going on or somebody knows and somebody's just not talking. A lot of people aren't talking.

This raises another question: Who in the world is running the show? Who is charge, and I don't mean Secretary so-and-so.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Right.

MS. ROBINSON: Mr. So-and-so with this title, uh uh. Who is really running the show?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Who is really running it? Well, I raised the question in the book whether the CIA runs the President or the President runs the CIA. It's not quite as bad as that, but certainly because it's a secret world, because there is no established reporting procedures, it's very likely that a small group of CIA offices, or in Britain a small group of SIS officers, or in Russia a small group of KGB officers can actually run their own operations doing things on behalf of their country without the country's leaders knowing about.

MS. ROBINSON: So it's very impossible, if I'm hearing you correctly, Mr. Knightley, for someone like an Oliver North, perhaps, and his --

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Yes, without -- you said don't mention any names. But okay --

MS. ROBINSON: Well, you know it's all over everywhere. We've been talking about and trying our best to figure out what's going on here with this Iranscam.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: All I can tell you is it's quite possible that Oliver North was running a little operation on his own and --

MS. ROBINSON: And the President, CIA, the Secretary of State may not have known?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: May not have known about it. May not.

MS. ROBINSON: May not.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I don't know. I mean it may all emerge, but it is theoretically possible.

MS. ROBINSON: And this has happened a lot? I mean - -

MR. KNIGHTLEY: It happens all the time.

MS. ROBINSON: Operations like this have been happening over the course of the years and nothing has leaked, so to speak, like this came out to the press?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Let me give you an example. Don't imagine that the United States is alone in this. Let me give you an example of what happened in Britain not so long ago. A group of decent intelligence officers in British intelligence got worried that the Prime Minister, the then serving Prime Minister of Britain, was a bit too friendly with the Russians and he had too many Russian contacts. They bugged his telephone. They bugged the telephone of the Attorney General. And they did this without the knowledge of their own boss. So here you have an example of the power of this organization. This is only emerging now. Nobody in Britain knew about this, not the Prime Minister -- well, the Attorney General began to get a little suspicious when he heard all sorts of pops on his telephone. And if he wanted to talk to say a very high other government official, he used to have to go out in his car and go for a drive around the park to be certain that he wasn't being overheard and bugged by his intelligence agency.

MS. ROBINSON: See, that is incredible. And see -- and that happens, that exists?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: That happens.

MS. ROBINSON: Who is the type of person that wants to get into this spying? Describe -- I mean I think there would be a lot of danger, a lot of risk in certain areas, and if someone is off doing their own little escapades and whatnot and the head of the organization doesn't know what's going on, that's a lot of danger to an individual.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Sure. The danger of actual death has now been removed because it got counter productive. I mean we knocked off them and their agents, they knocked off ours and it was no longer a feasible financial thing for one thing. You know, you put a lot of money into training an officer and the other side killed him. And they puts lot of money into training a man, and we have to kill him. So there's a sort of truce at the moment between the major intelligence agencies. We don't kill each other. But you may very well end up in jail for a long period of time.

MS. ROBINSON: And a lot of times we don't know about it?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: No, a lot of times you don't know about it and you may not be swapped. They have exchange of spies every now and then, run by, incidentally, the exchange is run by a lawyer in Berlin who specializes in spy swaps. Marvelous business.

MS. ROBINSON: This is incredible.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Now, you may end up in jail for a long time but if you do, you're warned before you go abroad on that mission that if it goes wrong, we're going to wash our hands of you. So you're on your own. So there is that risk. So what sort of people want to do it? Soldier priests. Some people are patriotic they think they're doing what they should for their country. Others do it for money. It's an interesting career,

good career structure, government post, bureaucratic jobs. But also I think it does tend to attract people who are a little bit anti-social who --

MS. ROBINSON: And they want to get in and explore that?

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Yes, and they like it. Yes. Because it's basically exploiting other human beings.

MS. ROBINSON: Right.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Manipulating them, dragging information from them and in the end often portraying them. And I think it needs a very strange sort of person who wants to do that.

MS. ROBINSON: Phillip Knightley, thank you very much for --the book is intriguing.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Good.

MS. ROBINSON: It really is.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I'm glad you like it.

MS. ROBINSON: The Second Oldest Profession spying and spies of the 20th Century. We thank you for joining us on Panorama.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I enjoyed it. Thank you.