

Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf—June 2020

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Current Topics

The Hacker and the State: Cyber Attacks and the New Normal of Geopolitics, by Ben Buchanan (Harvard University Press, 2020) 412, endnotes, index.

Anyone who has suffered identity theft or encountered a “zoom bomb” while participating in a web-based discussion, has experienced hacking at the personal level. In *The Hacker and the State* Georgetown University School of Foreign Service professor Ben Buchanan argues, with good reason, that hacks are also “a persistent part of geopolitical competition. They happen every day. . . . This is a new form of statecraft.” But he is quick to point out that while hacking is a suitable tool for shaping elements of statecraft, it is in most cases “ill-suited for signaling a state’s position and intentions.” (3) Examples of the latter include military mobilization, Russian May Day parades, sanctions, and summit talks.

The Hacker and the State maintains that the shaping elements of cyber statecraft are mostly clandestine. Thus, government hackers “wiretap, alter, sabotage, disrupt, attack, manipulate, interfere, expose, steal and destabilize.” (7) The book provides instances of these techniques from several nations, including China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and the Five Eyes countries. Two sabotage digital worms, Stuxnet and Wiper are attributed to the United States and Israel. The former attacked Iranian centrifuges and the later wiped Iranian oil production computers clean. (142–44) Besides China’s well documented thefts of intellectual property, Buchanan describes North Korea’s attacks on South Korea’s critical infrastructure in 2011 and Sony Pictures in 2014, (169–70) among other examples.

Not all hackers have been positively identified, however. The most prominent example is The Shadow Brokers. Somehow they acquired what were said to be NSA’s most powerful hacking tools and offered them for sale online, complete with user guides. No body bought. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to enrich their coffers, The Shadow Brokers gave the powerful tools away for free. (250) Some were quickly used against computer systems in the United States. Although Buchanan does not identify

the targets or the damage, he raises important questions: Who was responsible, why did they go public, and what are the implications of such power.

The short answer to the “who” is we don’t know for sure, at least publicly, though Russian involvement is suspected. (256) As to the “why they went public” when they could have raised havoc with NSA with little fear of being caught, there is no definite answer. Buchanan speculates that a warning signal was being sent, but if so, to what purpose?

The most detailed example of the havoc that can be produced by hacking is found in the story of Russia’s attack on Ukraine which achieved its goal of “pervasive damage.” Dubbed “NotPetya,” it damaged “everyone doing business in Ukraine and everyone paying taxes to the government.” Then it spread all over the world damaging corporations like FedEx and Merck chemical among others. “NotPetya ranks as the costliest and possibly the most important cyber attack in history. It caused more than \$10 billion in quantifiable damage.” (289) Hopefully, writes Buchanan, it served as a wake-up call to install updates promptly.

The Hacker and the State covers several decades of cyber hacking operations. Based largely on secondary sources, it is perhaps a second draft of hacking history, but it nevertheless offers some valuable insights on the state of the hacking art, a practice, Buchanan suggests, that most policymakers do not understand. And he observes, “the harm that hackers can do is expanding faster than the deterrence or defenses against them.” (313) As a remedy he recommends a strategy of aggressive “persistent engagement” because “hacking makes a difference in geopolitics.

It is a sobering account that highlights the need for the Cyber Command and the potential vulnerabilities of the national intelligence agencies.

The Russians Among Us: Sleeper Cells, Ghost Stories, and the Hunt for Putin's Spies, by Gordon Corera (William Morrow, 2020) 428, endnotes, photos, index

When Alexander Kouzminov, a former member of the SVR illegals Directorate S, wrote in 2005 that “The Western world can’t bring itself to believe to what extent it is transparent and vulnerable to Russian illegal intelligence,” (7) he received little attention in the media. But the FBI, CIA, MI6, and of course, the SVR knew he was spot on. In *The Russians Among Us*, BBC security correspondent Gordon Corera, tells their story.

As Corera explains it, the FBI, following routine monitoring procedures for Russian intelligence officers assigned to the United States, was able to recruit a source in 1999 who was serving in Directorate S. Gradually during the next 10 years, he revealed at least 10 Russian illegals living in the United States under false identities. The Bureau put them under surveillance and thus was born operation Ghost Stories. The CIA was involved when targets traveled overseas and when operations in Moscow concerning SVR officers became an issue. MI6 joined the program when some of the illegals became British citizens before coming to the United States.

“The illegals’ mission was to subvert America from within, infiltrating deep into its society and in doing so identifying and helping recruit people who could aid Moscow.” (66) Drawing on sources in Russia, England, and the United States, Corera establishes that Ghost Stories involved two generations of illegals, both of whom took their work seriously. *The Russians Among Us* discusses the officers in both categories to varying degrees as well as those who supported them.

The older, or traditional, generation is typified by Donald Heathfield (Andrey Bezrukov) and his wife, Ann Foley (Elena Vavilova). After finishing their SVR training they went to Canada, where they had two children while establishing cover. Ann joined a Catholic church, took computer courses and worked as an accountant. Donald ran “Diapers Direct,” a home diaper delivery business and attended York University. After nearly 10 years, including a detour in France, they moved to Boston—in their target country—where Donald attended Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. (66) Corera describes how they got their fictitious names, their professional and family lives in America, their contacts with their SVR handlers, and the FBI’s counterintelligence (CI) that documented

their behavior without alerting them they were under suspicion.

Richard Murphy is another example of the traditional approach. It is also another good example of FBI CI diligence. Posing as an American with a Russian accent, he fooled everybody but his faculty adviser at the New School in New York City. That adviser happened to be Nikita Khrushchev’s great-grand daughter. She couldn’t understand how an Irishman with a Russian accent couldn’t speak Russian, but she took no action. No matter, in the end, Corera reveals how Murphy gave up his position of principal operator to his wife and how the Bureau acquired the keys to his covert communication system with the SVR and learned of his illegal status.

The second generation of illegals, the so-called “true name illegals,” are personified by Anna Chapman (Ana Kuschenko). (134) Such spies operated under different rules because security checks were tightened after 9/11. In addition, finding and using names of the dead in the era of easily searched digital databases and the use of biometrics in identity checks had increased the risks of using such false identities. Then too, true name illegals were cheaper to field and to maintain. In Chapman’s case, her business acumen combined with her seductive skills applied with sound tradecraft made her a potentially valuable officer. But her arrest came before she had time to prove herself.

The decision to arrest the illegals when they did, balanced several operational and political issues. Operationally, the SVR source wanted to defect and at least two illegals were planning a family trip to Russia. If the defection occurred while the illegals were gone, they would never be caught. On the political side, Russian president Medvedev was visiting Washington and the Obama administration did not want to embarrass him. Corera explains how CIA director Leon Panetta ‘coordinated’ with the SVR chief to arrange a spy swap that exchanged ten Russian illegals and four Russian prisoners—two former KGB officers, one GRU officer, and a Russian scientist. The latter was not a former agent but was included because he was wrongly convicted.

In explaining why they were selected for the swap, Corera summarizes the background and current status of each one. Thus, the comments on Sergei Skripal,

the former GRU officer and MI6 agent, includes his subsequent poisoning and that event is contrasted with the Litvinenko poisoning in London in 2006. Corera sees causal links to the Russian FSB and thus to Putin's involvement.

As for the former KGB officers, Gennady Vasilenko and Alexander Zaporozhsky, both ran afoul of Alexander Zhomov an experienced FSB officer. Corera explains why CIA gave him the code name PROLOGUE when he became a player in their search for Aldrich Ames. Zhomov was also linked to the Robert Hanssen case when he arrested and tortured Gennady Vasilenko on suspicion of revealing the source that exposed Hanssen. And it was Zhomov, the CIA worried, who might detect the FBI source before he could defect.

The closing chapters of *The Russians Among Us* deal with the aftermath of Ghost Stories. In the United States and Britain, Corera suggests, there is increased concern with terrorism and cyber warfare. In Russia he reemphasizes the shift to true name illegals citing the Maria Butina case but doesn't neglect cyber operations. Likewise, traditional illegals have not been forgotten, as Putin made clear at a "gala to celebrate ninety-five years of illegals . . . [and] directorate S a legendary unit." Corera concludes "there is no reason to think that Moscow Center will give up on illegals that they have run for a century. At least while Vladimir Putin is in power." (397)

The Russians Among Us is a fine espionage story and a cautionary tale that demands our attention.

Historical

Kim Philby and James Angleton: Friends and Enemies in the Cold War, by Michael Holzman (Chelmsford Press, 2019) 464, end of chapter notes, bibliography, appendix, index.

Independent scholar Michael Holzman has written two other books on Cambridge students recruited by Soviet intelligence in the 1930s and one on the late James Angleton, a career CIA counterintelligence officer.^a And while each one has included Kim Philby to some degree, this is the first time he is a principal character.

At the outset, Holzman notes that the usual questions raised about Philby are those about the cause he served: "How could this intelligent, civilized, charming man devote his life to the Moloch of Stalinist Russia?" As to Angleton, the question most often raised is, according to Holzman: How could such an intelligent charming man "destroy so many careers?" And indeed, these are the issues that have plagued many of the authors who have written about these men. But Holzman then adds a surprising comment: "Those are the wrong questions." (18) He never explains why, but he supplies a hint when he states that their "biographical narratives . . . were for the most part created and kept in place by their enemies." (12) Surely Yale historian Robin Winks, Oxford historian Hugh Trevor Roper, Harvard historian Timothy Naftali, author Graham Greene, former CIA officer William Hood,

and current CIA historian David Robarge would challenge Holzman's assessment, and readers should do so as well.

Perhaps a more germane question about this book is whether it contains anything new about two intelligence officers about whom so much has already been published? With one exception, the answer is no. Even Holzman's methodology supports that conclusion. He sums up his approach as follows: "We must now gather the used bricks of discredited historical narratives, chip off the mortar of earlier interpretations, and attempt to assemble what remains in ways less predetermined by conflicting ideologies of the time." (11) The use of "discredited historical narratives" in any way is not desirable and a review of the secondary sources cited makes clear that is what he has attempted. The exception is in the appendix, "Philby's Articles in *The Observer* and *The Economist*," where Holzman provides lengthy comments on Philby's writings from Beirut in the years before his defection. Although the articles have been alluded to, extracts and commentary about them have seldom appeared in print since they originally appeared.

a. Michael Holzman, *James Jesus Angleton: The CIA and the Craft of CounterIntelligence*; Guy Burgess: *Revolutionary in an Old School Tie*; Donald and Melinda Maclean: *Idealism and Espionage*;

In the unsuccessful hunt for new material, a number of errors were discovered. Some examples follow. The first is the statement that Angleton and Philby “were friends for six years.” (12) Their service records suggest otherwise. Angleton was in London, assigned to X-2 (OSS counterintelligence) at the Ryder Street building, where Philby worked, for just under 14 months during WWII. Philby was assigned to Washington, DC, where Angleton was working, from the fall of 1949 to May 1951, or about 19 months. While Philby visited Angleton once while the latter was in Italy, the time they could have had regular contact was much less than six years.^a A second error, linked to the first, occurs on page 16 where Holzman writes that in London Angleton “was tutored and for a time in effect supervised . . . by Philby. (16) A related comment that Philby, “having taught the art of counterintelligence to Angleton,” appears on page 382. No evidence has ever been produced that this protégé relationship existed, and Holzman does not source either comment. One of Angleton’s colleagues in London at the time, William Hood, stated their contact was occasional due to the seniority gap between the two.^b Holzman adds

“that it has been said by a recent observer that Philby was Angleton’s ‘uncle’ in counterintelligence matters”; but he doesn’t source that comment either. Then on page 270, Holzman writes that former Soviet agent Michael Straight was Philby’s “old Cambridge friend.” Straight always denied ever meeting Philby, and he entered Cambridge University more than a year after Philby left. Holzman does not produce a source that contradicts Straight.

On the matter of Philby’s students, the Michael Leonidovich Bogdanov mentioned in endnote 25, page 357, is not the Michael Bogdanov, KGB, that was a Philby student. Holzman does cite a source for this claim, but his source doesn’t mention the same Bogdanov that Holzman does. And finally, Angleton was not “chief of the counterintelligence staff until 1973” (359); he stayed until December 1974.

Kim Philby and James Angleton reviews previous opinions, many questionable; is poorly sourced; and contains too many errors.

Mapping The Great Game; Explorers, Spies and Maps in Nineteenth-Century Asia, by Riaz Dean (Casemate, 2019) 293, footnotes, bibliography, photos, maps, glossary, index.

In 1840, British army captain Arthur Conolly wrote to his colleague Major Henry Rawlinson, a newly appointed political/intelligence officer in India, that “You’ve a great game, a noble game, before you.” Years later after Conolly had lost his head in Bokhara trying, unsuccessfully to save another colleague from the same fate, Rudyard Kipling popularized the phrase in his novel *Kim* applying it to the “strategic rivalry between Russian and Britain” for territory in Asia. The Russians referred to the situation as the “tournament of shadows.” (3) And though some scholars take issue with that account of the term’s origins,^c that is the context used in *Mapping The Great Game*.

The book is presented in four parts. Part one describes the early efforts of the British East India Company to determine whether Russia intended to invade India, and if it

did what route would it take. As Lord Ellenborough, president of the Board of Control for India put it, “We ought to have *Information*. [emphasis in the original] The first, second, and third thing a government ought to always have is *Information*.” (35) In short before the question of a Russian approach could be answered, they needed maps. Author Riaz Dean discusses the work of various British officers dispatched to acquire the geographical knowledge needed before Britain invaded Afghanistan and launched that failed war.

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, as the events described in part one were taking place, two civilian explorers, William Lambton and George Everest, were conducting the Great Trigonometric Survey (GTS) of India. Dean tells their story in part two, explaining that while conducting their mapping survey “They were

a. Robin Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in America’s Secret War* (London: Collins, 1987) p. 348; Tim Naftali, “ARIFICE: James Angleton and X-2 Operations in Italy,” in George C. Chalou (ed.), *The Secrets War: The Office of Strategic Services in World War II* (Washington, DC: NARA, 1992), pp. 218-9.

b. Phone conversation with William Hood and the author, May 9, 2004, 1030hrs.

c. See: Malcolm Yapp, “The Legend of the Great Game”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 2001, III, 179-98.

expected to gather intelligence about the people they encountered and the rulers . . . noting important commercial and military details.” (70) But Dean concentrates on the mapping, which consumed the entire careers of the two men, without explaining why they did nothing to satisfy Ellenborough’s need for maps and information.

Part three follows chronologically and focuses on the British use of local inhabitants who could cross borders with impunity. Called pundits (local explorers) they also secretly gathered “information about foreign lands [and] in the eyes of . . . neighboring governments they were spies.” They were very successful in accomplishing

both missions in countries like Tibet, China, and Russia, though the Russians suspected they had dual missions. (144)

The final part of *Mapping The Great Game* covers Russia’s territorial acquisitions in the Turkestan region and the successful British attempts to secure its northern borders after the Second Afghan War. While Dean’s emphasis is on mapping, he leaves the reader with a good appreciation of how intelligence was collected and integrated in the days before formal military intelligence units or civilian organizations.

The Zinoviev Letter: The Conspiracy That Never Dies, by Gill Bennett (Oxford University Press, 2018) 340, end-notes, bibliography, photos, index.

On October 9, 1924, the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS/MI6) received a cable from its station in Riga, Latvia, containing an English translation of a letter to the Central Committee of the British Communist Party (CPGB) from Grigori Zinoviev, the head of the Bolshevik Communist International (COMINTERN). It was accepted as genuine by important British players, who viewed it as a blatant inducement to revolution, military mutiny, and an exhortation to pressure Parliament to ratify an Anglo-Soviet trade treaty. When leaked to the press days before a general election, the government’s Tory opponents used it to show, among other things, that Labour “was in thrall to the ‘Reds’ in Moscow.” (4) Labour blamed ‘the Zinoviev Letter’ for their loss, setting a precedent that still resonates today. As recently as 2017, when then-Prime Minister Theresa May made accusations of foreign interference in a British election, it drew comparisons with the Zinoviev Letter incident.

This is the more remarkable since the authenticity of the letter has never been established after “early enquiries were contradictory and inconclusive.” The CPGB denied receiving it, Zinoviev denied writing it, no original in Russian has ever been found, and there is evidence to support the view that it was a forgery. Nevertheless, the controversy surrounding the letter surfaced “in successive general elections, in the context of atomic espionage,

the treachery of the Cambridge spies . . . and even the Falklands War.” (5) British historian Gill Bennett examines these issues in *The Zinoviev Letter*.

Bennett was not the first to try and sort out the letter’s provenance. In fact, this is her second attempt. Her first^a was the consequence of parliamentary questions arising from the publication of a book by Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels*,^b that contained a chapter on the Letter based in part on KGB files. Bennett was then chief historian of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and she was tasked to examine all the Zinoviev Letter files and make a definitive report. Her research showed that some 30 years before, Millicent Bagot, the MI5 Soviet specialist—and model for John le Carré’s Connie Sachs—had conducted a similar review. Then, in addition to numerous media accounts, Bennett found a weakly sourced book entitled *The Zinoviev Letter*^c that claimed Sidney Reilly—the “Ace of Spies”—convinced MI6 that the letter was genuine.

In *The Zinoviev Letter: The Conspiracy that Never Dies*, Bennett analyzes the “theories and allegations” associated with each of these sources and others recently published, for example, Keith Jeffery’s *MI6*.^d (225) In particular she goes over the arguments for forgery in great depth, noting that though Zinoviev denied writing it, “he said he

a. Gill Bennett, *History Notes, ‘A most extraordinary and mysterious business’: The Zinoviev Letter of 1924* (FCO, 1999).

b. Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels: The British Secrets at the Heart of the KGB Archives* (HarperCollins, 1999).

c. Lewis Chester, Stephen Fay and Hugo Young, *The Zinoviev Letter: A Political Intrigue* (Lippincott, 1968).

d. Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909–1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

would in principle have signed a draft of those terms if presented to him.” (229) In general, she presents a much broader and explicit picture of how the letter has affected past events and suggests that, as a conspiracy theory, it is unlikely to expire.

Gill Bennett is left with a historian’s frustration for not finding a smoking gun. But she has given the reader a most comprehensive scholarly and valuable treatment of the subject to date.

Memoir

The Unexpected Spy: From the CIA to the FBI, My Secret Life Taking Down Some of the World’s Most Notorious Terrorists, by Tracy Walder with Jessica Anya Blau (St. Martin’s Press, 2020) 249, no index.

Tracy Walder gave her resumé to the CIA recruiter at a University of Southern California job fair in 1998. It was almost a whimsical act, certainly it wasn’t planned. She was 20 years old. In 2000 she entered on duty and for nearly four years worked hard as an intelligence officer in the United States and overseas. In 2004 she left CIA and joined the FBI, where she remained for less than two years before leaving to teach high school. She is currently on the board of Girl Security, a nonprofit company that “explores girls’ understanding . . . of U.S. National Security.”^a

Now Tracy Walder has written her memoir, *The Unexpected Spy*, in which she makes “every effort to be accurate and true in my recounting” with some caveats. With a few exceptions, she has changed the names and personal details of all FBI agents and CIA officers mentioned as well as other people she has encountered. Similarly, she has removed the names of most cities and countries visited and made the nature of her work “deliberately vague.” (xi) With all those constraints, can her story be of some interest, even benefit, to readers?

Indeed it can if you are looking for insights into a career such as hers. Each chapter is a glimpse of some part of her life though, not in chronological order. She begins with the story of her interrogation of a terrorist, who after “hours of seemingly casual conversation . . . gave me exactly the information that I had come for. And another pod of terrorists were [sic] stopped before they could kill.” (14)

This is followed by a chapter on her early life in California where she was born in 1978. After overcoming hypotonia—poor muscle tone—she went on to grade school, endured bullying from her female classmates

only to be selected as a “Homecoming princess.” Perhaps because her father was a university professor, she was always more interested in social issues and international affairs. And when she was accepted at USC she joined the Delta Gamma sorority, majored in history, and in her junior year gave her resumé to the CIA recruiter.

After describing the CIA application experience, with emphasis on the polygraph, Walder covers her early assignments at Headquarters, assignment that were influenced by 9/11. And she challenges the 9/11 Commission conclusion suggesting that the “snafu between the CIA and the FBI might be where the blame lies.” (44) It was during that time, while on shift work, that she met President G. W. Bush, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Vice President Richard Cheney and DCI George Tenet when they stopped by her section early in the search for Usama bin Laden, then in the mountains of Tora Bora. “It was clear to me,” she writes, “and to everyone else. . . that an aerial bombing would be the best way to flush al-Qaeda out of the caves.” (62) She was disappointed when it wasn’t done.

Some four months after 9/11, Walder was accepted as a “staff operations officer in the Weapons of Mass Destruction office of the Counterterrorism Center.” (67) After more training, Walder went on assignments in the Middle East and Africa, then after the March 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid, for which she felt some responsibility, (187) she decided to apply to the FBI, ostensibly to limit her overseas travel, though one wonders if that can be the entire story. Perhaps the details were obliterated in one of the many portions of the text blacked out by the classification reviewers.

a. <https://www.girlsecurity.org/new-page>.

Walder's time in the FBI wasn't quite what she had hoped. She was harassed during boot camp—they didn't believe she had been in the CIA—and her subsequent assignment to Los Angeles was not in the counterintelligence field as she had hoped. She quit the FBI after 15 months and, still in her twenties, went to graduate school, married, and started a family. For a while she taught a high

school girls class in spycraft whose aim was encourage them to enter government service.

The Unexpected Spy concludes with an unconvincing explanation of why Walder didn't pursue her career in government—as if she herself is not sure why. (234–35) In any event, her memoir is atypical and hardly looks like a roadmap to a career in intelligence.

Intelligence Abroad

ASSASSINS: The KGB's Poison Factory 10 Years On, by Boris Volodarsky (Frontline Books, 2019) 322, footnotes, bibliography, appendices, photos, index.

In the preface to this follow-on to his first book on the KGB's "Poison Factory,"^a author Boris Volodarsky provides superfluous autobiographical detail—as he did in his first book—before finally revealing himself as a former Soviet special operations officer and . . . a British intelligence historian and academic." (2) *ASSASSINS* goes on to update the reader on cases covered in the first volume, while adding a number of new operations.

The updated cases include the poisoning of Nikolai Khokhlov, who survived, and Alexander Litvinenko who did not; the assassination attempt on Lenin; the assassination of Trotsky; and the story of Soviet assassin Bogdan Stashinsky. New cases include the loss of the "96 people on board Polish Air Force One," Natalia Estemirova in Chechnya, Alexander Perepilichny, and Boris Berezovsky in England, Boris Nemtsov in Moscow, and Pavel Sheremet in Kiev, to name a few. Two attempted assassinations are also discussed. The best known is Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England. (2–3) Lesser known, but of at least equal importance, is the attempt on the life of Oleg Gordievsky, of which more below.

To understand the players involved, Volodarsky provides a review of the current Russian intelligence services. He begins with the well known SVR, the FSB, and "the genuinely elite foreign intelligence agency . . . the GRU." (4) Then there is the Federal Protection Service, "a euphemism for bodyguarding the high and mighty," and finally the less well known "very special agency," the Presidential Security Service (SPB), headed by Victor

Zolotov, president Putin's personal bodyguard, "that can operate anywhere in the world." (6)

Returning to the attempt on Gordievsky's life, Volodarsky candidly acknowledges that Gordievsky accused him of the deed, (202) though he was never charged. No explanation is given in the narrative and in several places Volodarsky is complimentary of Gordievsky and his service to MI6. On the other hand, without providing substantiation, he challenges Gordievsky's account of his escape from the Soviet Union. And that fact raises two other issues worth mentioning about *ASSASSINS*. The first is the weak documentation. With the exception of a few footnotes, this is a 'trust me' account. The second issue is more subtle; Volodarsky insinuates himself into nearly every case mentioned—including the Ghost Stories operation that had nothing to do with assassination—implying his firsthand word is enough. But for academics, scholars, and just the curious, it is not.

Volodarsky concludes that "assassinations have been an integral part of Soviet foreign policy from Lenin to Putin." (240) And he makes it clear that he thinks Putin will implement that policy on former colleagues and intelligence officers who challenge him. But since Volodarsky has himself accused Putin, he leaves the reader wondering how he has escaped Putin's wrath.

ASSASSINS makes a powerful case for the long-term history and continued survival of assassination as state policy in Russia.

a. Boris Volodarsky, *KGB's Poison Factory: From Lenin to Litvinenko* (New York: Zenith Press, 2009). See Hayden Peake review in "Intelligence Officers Bookshelf" in *Studies in Intelligence* 54, No. 2 (June 2010).

The State of Secrecy: Spies and the Media in Britain, by Richard Norton-Taylor (I. B. Tauris, 2020) 331, endnotes, index.

Memoirs are distinguished from autobiographies by specific focus on a topic, and that is what journalist Richard Norton-Taylor offers in *The State of Secrecy*. For most of his 50-year career he battled secrecy in various forms, including digressions into playwriting, as he attempted to “expose wrongdoing by agents of the state, and the growing power of security and intelligence agencies.” (xii)

He had an early brush with intelligence after graduating from Oxford with a third-class degree in history, when MI6 interviewed him. It is not clear whether he was offered a position, only that he did not pursue a career as an intelligence officer. But he hints at continuing contacts in succeeding years, as he “followed the secret world in a constant game of cat and mouse.” (xix) He describes many of them, while noting one former senior intelligence officer called him a “long term thorn in the side of the intelligence establishment.” He immediately adds, “I hope this book explains why.” (xix) In a sense his book does just that but perhaps not entirely in the favorable light he tries to create.

It is true he has had some fascinating assignments, for example his six weeks covering the Peter Wright trial in Australia, where Sir Robert Armstrong denied he lied by insisting he “was being economical with the truth.” (100) A real “gotcha moment.”

But most of the book taunts the intelligence establishment, its history, its current policies and secrecy, about which Norton-Taylor is bluntly forthright. For example: the government mandarins “can subvert their elected bosses . . . by deciding what to pass on to ministers and what to withhold;” (93) secrecy is imposed to cover up wrongdoing and prevent embarrassment; (128) official secrecy covers up what the government is up to now.” (141) And then there is the preferential access to material given certain authors, while it is denied to others and the many spy case files more than 30 years old are still withheld. (149)

And, without any experience of spying, Norton-Taylor devotes a chapter to critiquing spies and spy cases, for

example the handling of the Cambridge Five. While arguing they were protected by class—except for Cairncross—and adding that Philby’s father “had been “a senior intelligence officer” (194)—he never was—his key point is that the associated secrecy undermined national security, though he offers few specifics.

The class factor also features in his account of the other spy cases he discusses. This includes George Blake, the Jewish immigrant MI6 officer and later Soviet agent, whom he interviewed in Moscow after Blake escaped Wormwoods Scrubs prison. The Michael Bettaney case—a former MI5 officer who tried to sell material to the KGB—and the Geoffrey Prime case—a former GCHQ officer working with the KGB—are explained by “the neglect of senior managers in the security and intelligence agencies protected by a wall of secrecy.” Just how that occurred is not explained.

The State of Secrecy is also rather bitter about the Official Secrets Act of 1989, which “like its predecessors, is a political weapon designed to frighten officials and journalists.” (127) And these attitudes are not new, writes Norton-Taylor, they date to the year 1250. (117) To make his point, he includes a chapter on ‘Spies: The Uses and Abuses,’ in which he summarizes the history of the principal intelligence agencies before concluding that “Far from needing the protection of an ever higher wall of secrecy, they should be subjected to more rigorous independent scrutiny, including by journalists.” (172) He returns to this point when discussing his role in publicizing the CIA rendition program and writes, “Scandals, wrongdoing and unlawful activities have been exposed not by Parliament but by a few whistle-blowers and journalists. (218, 235)

While Norton-Taylor’s litany of problems include some truths, only one solution to the problems of secrecy emerges from the pages of *The State of Secrecy*: give journalists unrestricted access to all information and let them make the decisions about what, if any, secrets should be kept. A conclusion better imagined than experienced.



Hayden Peake has served in the CIA’s Directorates of Operations and Science and Technology. He has been compiling and writing reviews for the “Intelligence Officer’s Bookshelf” since December 2002.