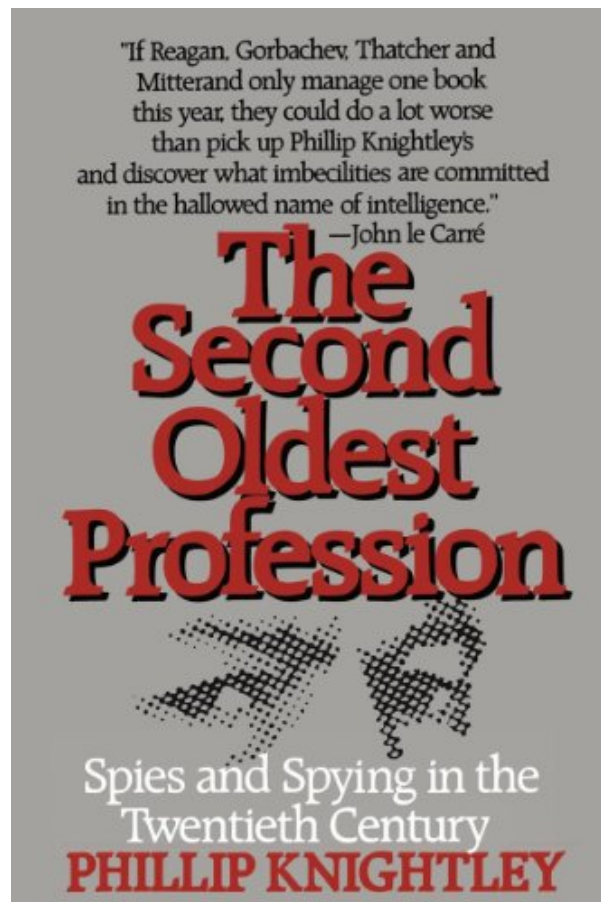


THE SECOND OLDEST PROFESSION: SPIES AND SPYING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY BY PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY



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—John le Carré

The Second Oldest Profession



Spies and Spying in the
Twentieth Century

PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY

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The first modern, permanent intelligence agency was created about 1909, and within a few years all the great powers had similar agencies. Concentrating almost entirely on Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States, Knightley asserts that these services are not worth the enormous sums they cost, that they are not effective in predicting enemy actions, and that they cause more trouble than they prevent. He uses anecdotes of failed operations and jaundiced interpretations of other episodes in an attempt to prove that intelligence services corrode a democratic society's liberty and pervert international relations. Knightley lambasts even such famous operations as ULTRA, MAGIC, and the XX Committee as overrated and mythologized. His argument might have had greater credibility if it were not so shrill and one-sided. Edwin B. Burgess, U.S. Army TRALINET Ctr., Fort Monroe, Va.
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The first full history of spies, spying, and the intelligence bureaucracy, from the author of *The Philby Conspiracy*.

In 1909, the business of spying was hoisted from the domain of a few European descendents to the highest reaches of British government with the formation of Britain's SIS. Acting in response to a totally fraudulent fear--the German spy scare that preceded World War I--the British soon had a lot of company as Germany, Russia, France, and other powers large and small joined the mad rush toward information and espionage. Not far behind came the biggest of them all, first with the OSS and then with the CIA, fueled by paranoia and by more money than any new bureaucracy had ever seen. "Bigger than State by '48," was the CIA's slogan on its founding in 1947. And it was.

Now intelligence is a very big business with a very rich history, told here with a depth and verve never before brought to the subject, by a master historian. All of the legends and their immensely readable stories and here--Sorge, Donovan, Philby, Mata Hari, Golitsyn, Angleton, Penkovsky--and behind them a large question: did any act of these spies and their masters make any difference at all in the course of history?

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The Second Oldest, and "Just as Honorable as the First!"

By F. S. L'hoir

In "The Second Oldest Profession," Phillip Knightley has penned a compelling account of the ongoing saga of the British Secret Intelligence Service, a once-'non-existent' organization that was gestated appropriately enough in the fantasies of Rudyard Kipling's Great Game and pre-World War I spy novels. These, the author notes, ignited a frenzy of hysteria against various enemies, both actual and imaginary. As SIS became a reality (and other agencies and nations joined in the intelligence rush) the fantasy became compounded--often careening out of control--due to the deception that is, necessarily, embedded in the core of espionage.

Mr. Knightley questions whether governments ought to sponsor intelligence agencies, which, he notes, tend to be costly, self-perpetuating many-headed monsters, the growth of which "always seems to be accompanied by a reduction in civil liberties" (p. 366). Thriving on "secrecy which corrodes a democratic society," the intelligence monster "juggles all our destinies in the name of protecting them" (p. 392), a proposition that seems even more cogent today than in 1986 when the book was first published.

Phillip Knightley's books are eminently readable, and "The Second Oldest Profession" is no exception. The book, which serves as a reader's guide to British intelligence agencies (e.g., SIS, MI5, SOE) with stopovers at the Abwehr, the KGB, and the CIA, is fascinating, both to the reader approaching the topic for the first time and to the "addict," who cannot get enough of the subject. With considerable wit (e.g., "KGB: Dzerzhinsky's Pride, Stalin's Prejudice"), Mr. Knightley rounds up the usual suspects--a cast of "thousands" whose names have become household words (at least, in some households). In relating the notable triumphs and even more notable disasters of the intelligence world, Phillip Knightley never fails to inform and to whet the interests of his readers.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Two Stars

By Don Pellicano

Could not get into this.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Outdated Shrill Mythbusting

By A. Ross

I picked this book up thinking it was a general history of modern espionage, based on the subtitle "Spies and Spying in the Twentieth Century." However, the subtitle of the original British edition is much a more accurate description of what lies within: "The Spy as Bureaucrat, Patriot, Fantasist and Whore." Knightley is not a historian, but an investigative journalist, and as such, he's much more interested in destroying myths

than anything else. Published some twenty years ago, in the midst of the Cold War, the book is a rather shrill critique of national intelligence agencies. Read today, the original edition (apparently an updated edition was published several years ago), suffers from being somewhat outdated, rather under researched, and presuming a great deal of reader knowledge. It's not a particularly good book for anyone who hasn't already read a few general histories of intelligence, as it presupposes a fair amount of familiarity with various "famous" espionage incidents: the "Lucy" spy ring, ULTRA intercepts, and especially the whole Philby, Burgess, et al debacle within the British services. Readers (such as myself), without a solid grounding in this history will have little basis of comparison when Knightley starts pounding away at accepted wisdom.

In terms of being outdated, so much has happened in the world since the original publication (such as the collapse of the USSR, the opening of KGB and Stasi archives, Aldrich Ames, etc.) that it's hard not to read it today without wondering what new information is out there on all the topics he speculates so freely on. And make no mistake, Knightley does engage in a great deal of speculation in the book, and it's hard to know what to make of his repeated dangling of "doesn't it seem more likely that..." before various elaborate explanations of why the accepted interpretation of something is wrong. And yet, even when he's completely categorical about something, one is forced to take it with a grain of salt. In the one area he mentions that I do know a little about, he's quite wrong. Early on, Knightley characterizes German saboteurs operating in the U.S. before the U.S. entered World War I, as "German-Americans frequently acting on their own initiative." In fact, there is ample documentation before world courts that there was an official German sabotage effort directed at U.S. arms factories and transportation facilities organized and directed by German government officials working out of the German embassy in Washington, D.C. Some of the operatives were German-American, but many were not -- and it was very organized (albeit, not as capably as one might expect) and not on anyone's "own initiative." This example also illustrates Knightley's lack of depth and bread in terms of research. As a journalist, he seems more comfortable quoting from personal interviews and drawing upon the work of other researchers than he is digging through dusty archives to gather supporting material.

These critiques are somewhat wistful on my part, because I actually am quite sympathetic to the jaundiced eye Knightley takes toward the intelligence agencies. The basic gist of the book is that throughout history, intelligence agencies have wielded power and influence completely disproportionate to their actual value while costing far far too much for what they accomplish. He focuses primarily on the establishment and rapid ballooning of British, American, and Soviet national intelligence services over the previous century, and sets out to demolish any romantic notions of the modern spy. The story starts by attempting to explain how the creation of the first modern intelligence agency in Britain was the result of some well orchestrated fear mongering by a popular writer, and some fine bureaucratic wrangling by one man. He sees much the same situation in the U.S., and lays the origin for the KGB at Britain's doorstep, theorizing that it emerged in reaction to (very real) British attempts to thwart the Bolshevik revolution (Let's just say that you'll never watch "Reilly: Ace of Spies" the same way again.)

Bureaucracy figures large in his tale, as he sees an inverse relationship between the size of the espionage bureaucracy and budget, and actual effectiveness. Some of his examples from World War II of bureaucracy's ineptness as dealing with routing accurate information to those who can act on it, as well as dealing with internal dissent, read almost word for word as if they applied to the "war on terror" and buildup to the invasion of Iraq. Of course, bureaucracies exist to perpetuate themselves, and Knightley argues that no one does it better than spies. They have the ultimate advantages of hazy mission and mandate, "black" budgets, easily evaded oversight, and no practical method of assessing effectiveness, ergo, no accountability. And as he points out time and again, spy agencies have the penultimate fallback of being able to declare that their successes can never be revealed... because they're secret...top secret. By the end of his shrill (and again, one wishes for a more reasoned tone throughout) exploration and litany of espionage debacles, it's hard not find oneself mulling over the prospect of what the practical difference would be to national security (not to

mention civil liberties) if the budgets of spy agencies were simply cut in half. Of course, the CIA would at least be able to augment its funds by reentering the drug trade so capably engaged in during the Vietnam War and in Central America in the '80s (subjects Knightley does not touch upon).

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