

JOURNALISM IN AN AGE OF TERROR

COVERING AND UNCOVERING
THE SECRET STATE

JOHN LLOYD



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About the Book

The threat of terrorism and the increasing power of terrorist groups have prompted a rapid growth of the security services and changes in legislation permitting collection of communications data. This provides journalism with acute dilemmas. The media claims responsibility for holding power to account, yet cannot know more than superficial details about the newly empowered secret services. This book is the first to analyse, in the aftermath of the Snowden/NSA revelations, relations between two key institutions in the modern state: the intelligence services and the news media. It provides the answers to crucial questions including: how can power be held to account if one of the greatest state powers is secret? How far have the Snowden/NSA revelations damaged the activities of the secret services? And have governments lost all trust from journalists and the public?

When it comes to mapping the jagged dilemmas and relationships between the media and the secret state, nobody does it better than John Lloyd.

Peter Hennessy
Atlee Professor of Contemporary British History,
Queen Mary University of London

This is a masterpiece: an engrossing narrative, told with flair but generally with fairness, about the evolving relationship between journalism and the secret intelligence services of three countries; a dissection of the cross-cutting imperatives of journalists as they confront a new age of information technology and global terror threats; and, perhaps most intriguing of all, a sensitive analysis of the moral, legal and political conflicts arising in a democracy both protected and sometimes endangered by intelligence agencies and their doppelganger, the press. It is a timely work, absorbing, comprehensive and scrupulously argued, and we are all in John Lloyd's debt for it.

Philip Bobbitt, Herbert Wechsler Professor of Jurisprudence,
and director of the Center for National Security, at Columbia Law School

About the Author

John Lloyd is Senior Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism as well as a contributing editor at the Financial Times (FT), a columnist for Reuters.com, and for La Repubblica of Rome.

What follows is a short extract from this book.

More information can be found at: www.ibtauris.com/reuters

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Preface: Divided by a Common Commitment to Democracy

The two trades of espionage and journalism are often said to be close. Both observe behaviour, seek the substance of issues hidden or denied, and construct narratives and analyses based on their research. In fact, the two are divided by a larger issue, large not just for journalism, but for the public it aspires to serve. Journalism seeks audiences, often as wide as possible, or at least as numerous as possible within a particular niche. The secret services, however, serve a strictly limited number of ‘customers,’ always including the head of the government, together with a small selection of senior ministers and officials, and a few others in the intelligence networks.

And therein lies the basic tension between them. For, in democratic societies – three of those covered in the book which follows – the intelligence agencies’ central task is to secure the state against external or internal threats to the democratic polity. Journalism makes a similar claim: that its free activity is a necessary pillar of a democratic order.

Journalism defaults to publication; the intelligence agencies to secrecy. Both argue that these opposing methods of working are necessary in the liberal democratic state. It is in this clash of views, which can be extreme and bitter, that the relationship between the secret services and the news media resides. The relationship is a vital one. Journalism is an erratic and often overstated tool for the preservation of democracy, but an active and, at certain times, crucial one.

I have been fortunate to be able to talk, on the record, to former heads of the external intelligence services of the US, France and the UK: all are revealing about the relationships they had, and which they wish the services to have, with the news media. This is the first time they have addressed, at length, the subject of news media relations.

The work is a comparative one – in keeping both with the policy of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, and on the understanding

that these three agencies are the most important in the present confrontation with jihadist terrorism. Their policies and actions – especially those of the most powerful by far, in the US – dictate the largest part of the Western response to the terrorist organisations, led, as this is written, by the so-called Islamic State (IS).

Each of the three intelligence agencies have quite distinctive histories. They are also independent of each other, and often have quite scratchy relationships – true even between the US and UK agencies, which have been close since World War II and are the founding members of the Five Eyes group of Anglophone countries: the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. France has ever been an independently minded member of Western alliances: General de Gaulle pulled the country out of the NATO command structure (though France had been a founder member of the Alliance); in 2009, President Sarkozy rejoined, while keeping its nuclear deterrent independent. Its secret services were similarly independent, but are much closer now, in part because of the growing need to share information against a global threat aimed at Western European states – in 2015/16, particularly at France.

* * *

The immediate prompt for this book has been the mass leaks from the US National Security Agency (NSA), organised by Edward Snowden in 2013. Snowden was a former CIA employee and latterly private consultant contracted to the NSA. The subsequent publication of a selection of these files – said to number as many as 1.7 million, of which some 200,000 may have been passed to journalists – was hailed as exposing extensive deceit on the part of the US and UK governments in the concealment of their bulk collection of data from the communications of their citizens (as well as foreigners). Snowden has said he did not read them, but that ‘I’ve evaluated all of the documents that are in the archive ... I do understand what I turned over.’¹

Bulk collection, ramped up sharply on the orders of the US administration after 9/11, allowed the NSA to collect and examine the communications metadata – the details of the message, not its content – of hundreds of millions of people, both foreign and American: the latter having been explicitly protected against such surveillance before the attack. Other national listening centres, especially the UK’s Government Communications

Headquarters (GCHQ) which works closely with the NSA, have similar programmes with an equally large reach.

The revelations were said, powerfully by the journalists who most closely collaborated with Snowden on their publication, to mark a new kind of journalism. This new journalism is one where leaks from governments, corporations and institutions of all kinds, are now explicitly sought on the grounds that documents and policy memoranda allow a much deeper appreciation of the true nature and practices of major centres of power than mainstream, including investigative, journalism.

Thus Snowden, and before his actions, Julian Assange's Wikileaks, have exploded one bomb – that of their revelations. They have left others beneath both trades in the frame here – intelligence gathering and journalism. Under the first, the fear of further mass leaks and a further erosion of trust inflict perhaps more long-lasting damage than that suffered by Snowden's raids. For journalism, there is now a method of illuminating what is going on which trumps the standard process of investigative journalism – radical whistleblowing, which puts the real stuff in the hands of the public, relegating the journalists to the secondary, though vital role of curation.

What secrecy is necessary? How far can the agencies go in securing the public's trust – also necessary to their operation – without betraying their own activities? Philip Bobbitt expressed the dilemma as 'the most difficult intelligence challenge of all ... how to develop rules that will effectively empower the secret state that protects us without compromising our commitment to the rule of law.'²

For journalism, the challenge of Assange/Snowden is that of deciding what is and what is not fit to be published – one which events have always posed to editors, but now more urgently press upon them. Can an editor, unversed in what is and what is not a harmful revelation, assume the position of one deciding for the public (which in the internet age is global) what they should see – overriding the fears of agencies and governments? If news organisations now seek the real stuff of internal decisions and arguments, what new relationship does that dictate between news organisations and the state?

Governments have sought to keep secret more than just the activities of the secret services. They have wished to retain the right to have private debates about choices – private, because policies must be canvassed which may, when isolated, sound extreme, or damaging to one part of the government, or to society. Disclosure, they believe, would choke off free discussion within government and between it and the services themselves.

Governments will also wish to test if hostile states or groups can be brought into negotiations. Premature disclosure could force both sides to deny any intention to talk and diminish the chances of an end to conflict. Finally, governments will commit to actions which, if revealed before begun, could place those engaged in the actions in jeopardy. The obvious case is during conflict. Should journalists – either through investigations of their own or leaks from another – reveal these?

Such decisions are hard because, as noted above, journalism defaults – and must default – to publication. These decisions are not new; but the internet is, and sharpens these dilemmas because of the greater ease with which material is leaked, and the speed at which revelations go global. Journalism must default to publication because to do otherwise is to lose its compass. This is not to pretend that journalism, even of the most serious kind, always investigates the right issues well, always unmask the true villains and always grasps complexity. It often misses on all of these; or does not even try.

But discovering and illuminating issues which bear upon the democratic nature or lack thereof within government and the civility or lack thereof within society cannot be properly done if there is not a powerful urge to reveal. The perceived need for security, as the historian Christopher Andrew has noted, is a large part of history: it is also a large part of the present. Only when the urge to publish is confronted with good reasons for withholding publication, themselves bearing on democratic policy and civil society, can a well-founded (though not necessarily correct) decision be made on whether or not to go ahead, and quite possibly be damned.

* * *

Note: In the case of the UK, the two main agencies are officially called the Secret Intelligence Service (for external intelligence) and the Secret Service (for internal intelligence). They are also, more often, called respectively MI6 and MI5, their old names, derived from Military Intelligence (Department) 5 and 6. I have used the latter throughout, except when quoting from an interview, paper or book which uses the former.

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As the impresario Max Bialystock remarked in *The Producers*, 'Must have checkies. Can't produce plays without checkies'. Nor can you produce books. Most of the checkies for this book came from David Ure, a very good and sharp-minded friend to the Reuters Institute from its beginning in 2006.

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1

Fictions Before Facts

Discussion of the intelligence services 'is left to inquisitive journalists, disgruntled professionals and imaginative fiction writers – categories that confusingly overlap.'

(Michael Howard, Review of *Her Majesty's Secret Service*,
New York Times, 16 February 1986¹)

Journalism has not had much measure of the secret services until recently, and even now, it cannot have but a partial measure. All journalism about anything, even at its best, is a sketch of the observably and verifiably real, but in matters of security and espionage, the sketch is very sketchy indeed.

The peer-approved stance of a journalist is that of an outsider, with no potentially corrupting links to the subjects covered: it encourages a necessary scepticism, though it also denies useful knowledge of the real experience of and the pressures on the subjects, whether they are a government, the military, a bureaucracy, a political party or a family. Sidney Blumenthal left the coveted post of political editor of the *New Yorker* to become an aide to Bill Clinton and later wrote that 'the decisive moment had arrived when I became a whole-hearted participant. Being on the outside in whatever capacity was never the same as being in.'² People who have 'been in' can provide a rich resource for journalists when they write their memoirs or speak of their experiences; they can also be helpful contacts when they are in.

But 'being in', or even 'being close', is impossible in the coverage of the secret services, since they must themselves keep the core of their activities, the business end of espionage and counter-espionage, secret. This is especially so before and during operations, but also after, since they all believe that knowledge of the individuals and tradecraft used in operations, even of many years past, will be useful to the enemy and potentially deadly to friends.

The relationship between hacks and spooks has been fraught, fevered and often mythical: it may be that it cannot fundamentally change (see an attempt to argue it can change, at least a little, in my Conclusion). The CIA's 'secrecy would always conflict with the openness of American democracy', writes one of the agency's severest journalist-critics, and quotes Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State (1949–53), as saying of the fledgling service that he had warned the President (Truman) that, as set up, 'neither he nor the National Security Council nor anyone else would be in a position to know what it was doing or to control it'.³ Secrecy in such a critically important part of the state's activities – one which, in the twenty-first century, has grown immensely from an already impressive size, especially in the great powers of the US, China and Russia, but also in the agencies of Europe – necessarily conflicts with democratic practice anywhere, and most of all with the most insistent claim of journalism to hold power to account.

The services have existed in organised and semi-acknowledged form since the late nineteenth century; though spying and spymasters were common enough in most states and cultures from medieval times. In Britain, writers/journalists were early hired as spies – a tradition which lasted deep into the twentieth century. The dramatist Christopher Marlowe is thought likely to have been a spy in Elizabethan times, working for Sir Francis Walsingham, known later as Elizabeth's spymaster.⁴ Daniel Defoe was employed to spy on the anti-unionist forces in Scotland before the successful vote on Union in 1707 – a job made easier by the author's Presbyterianism, and perhaps, from the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, by his imagination.

Espionage was early entwined with fiction, a constant and continuing adjunct to the craft. The coupling has a sinister side, evident in the instant effectiveness and enduring popularity among anti-Semites of 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', a document used by one of the earliest and most numerous organised secret police forces, the Tsarist Okhrana, which took up the fiction which created 'the Elders' as the all-powerful executive committee of worldwide Jewry, administering the conspiracy in pursuit of global domination. The Protocols is the product of a mind creative enough to envisage a world of conspiracy and control, subtle enough to make it seem real and menacing. A fiction, it moved real events – as many spy fictions have.

In the first decades of organised espionage, the conflict between journalism and the services was minor, at times apparently non-existent.

The services were, self-evidently, a patriotic endeavour in and before World War I and II, when in both the UK and France spying was mainly directed against Germany. The ‘coverage’ was thus mythic rather than factual – since facts, anyway scarce, were potentially treacherous, the stuff which foreign agents were hired to discover. Propaganda, getting into its twentieth-century stride as the services became state-sponsored organisations, convinced the peoples of authoritarian states of the goodness of the security services: both the Soviet Cheka (later NKVD, then KGB) and the Nazi Sicherheitsdienst (SD, a section of the SS) were projected as the best men of the nation, ruthless to enemies and protective of the people.

Both tyrannies decreed a hyper patriotism from which it was unwise, at times fatal, to dissent. It called forth in patriots of all stripes a pride in the use of brutal force against enemies, and in ensuring the disciplining of society. In Vladimir Nabokov’s story ‘Conversation Piece 1945’,⁵ a former White Guard colonel, an exile in the US, anti-communist and Christian, says that, in spite of his views, he puts Stalin on a par with Ivan the Terrible (tsar 1547–84) and Peter the Great (tsar 1682–1721) as a mighty leader – ‘today, in every word that comes out of Russia, I feel the power, I feel the splendour of Old Mother Russia. She is again a country of soldiers, of religion and true Slavs.’

Patriotism and belief in the goodness of one’s nation was, in much less terrifying circumstances, a general sentiment in the few semi-democracies of Europe, and in North America. Military power and its projection were seen both officially and – broadly – popularly as a test of national valour. These qualities have a real and often solid base both in public and private actions; but their maintenance and support by the public depend much more on the charge of emotion than on dispassionate and neutral analysis – an approach reserved for the elite, who required it to make informed decisions.

Thus the journalism on security issues was – up to and even beyond World War II – scanty and, where it existed, depended on officially approved briefings, and on gossip. The latter was especially the case in the UK, where newspaper writing on intelligence issues was greatly influenced by the first spy fiction, often written by men who had themselves been, or still were, journalists. The tropes of these fictions entered the bloodstreams of subsequent novelists and of journalists – who depended and in some cases still depend on the support of fiction rather than research, an approach which coexists with (though sometimes trickles into) the harder edged journalism of the last half century.

The importance of fiction in the coverage of intelligence – especially in the first decades of state-organised espionage agencies when dispassionate news coverage was hard to find, officially disapproved and seen as potentially treacherous by many journalists themselves – is large. Almost all journalism operates in areas which are subject to stereotyping and mythicisation, these often created by journalism itself. Politics, foreign affairs, defence, health, the economy and many other beats are encrusted with preconceived notions of their importance, their power within societies, the activities of elites within their spheres, the trust or lack of it which citizens give them. But the business of intelligence is a special case even within areas so imaginatively perceived – since the espionage and counter-espionage trade remains in the shadows; the other beats have been, over the past century and more, the subject of much more journalistic light, much of it well focused.

The power of the early fiction, especially in the UK, was great – and it remains powerful, though the messages are less monolithically admiring. Fleming’s James Bond is without challenge in the global gallery of fictional spies, substantially because of the many successful (and some unsuccessful) film adaptations; and British secret service officers will at times admit to enjoying basking in the glow he sheds, even while dismissing his antics as ridiculous. From the US, Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan and Robert Ludlum’s Jason Bourne have both powered best-sellers and successful films. John Le Carré’s George Smiley (in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, 1974, and again in 2011; *Smiley’s People*, 1979), and his later novels as *The Constant Gardener* (2001), *Our Kind of Traitor* (2010), *A Delicate Truth* (2013) and *The Night Manager* (2013), are increasingly concerned with the corruption and oppression of US, and to a lesser extent British, politics, and of corporate power. The force of their narratives both played to and helped create the default position of cynicism and suspicion among publics throughout the democratic world of the leaders they elect, the corporations which supply them and the secret services which claim to keep them secure. In the conjuring of phantasmagorical worlds where no one is what they seem, Le Carré has no peer in spy fiction – though he is resented by many of his ex-colleagues and their successors in the intelligence world for misrepresenting work they see as straightforwardly necessary and patriotic.

* * *

Among the first in a subsequently crowded field of espionage novels are Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901), set in India and using the background of

the 'Great Game' of Russian and British imperial contest for control over Central Asia; Colonel F. N. Maude's *The Sack of London in the Great French War of 1901*, foreseeing a French invasion of Britain backed by the Russians (the French general staff had studied the possibility in 1900); and Erskine Childers's 1903 novel *The Riddle of the Sands*. *Kim*, the greater fiction, is exotic and imperial in its concerns: Childers dealt with what for the British was a more potent and much closer threat. The novel, written in Childers's imperialist phase (he later fought as an ardent Irish Republican and died in Ireland, executed by the pro-Treaty side of the Irish civil war), is a derring-do fiction in which two young English gentlemen, one a young diplomat, while on a sailing trip round the Frisian Islands off the German coast discover preparations for landing a German army in the UK. Childers described it as 'a story with a purpose' which was 'written with a patriot's natural sense of duty'.⁶ It was essentially a long and fictionalised editorial, aimed at changing the establishment view by alarming the populace. Its effect was satisfyingly large, prompting a strengthening of UK naval defences. It underscored another potent theme, in politics and journalism as well as fiction: that of a warning against governmental and military insouciance in the face of a future enemy's steady preparation for war.

Britain, motherland of a huge empire, published the largest range of spy fiction before the 1950s (when the US took over). France, also the centre of a large empire, had a less developed tradition, though Gaston Leroux, best known for his 1910 novel *The Phantom of the Opera* and for the 1907 *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (the first mystery of a murder in a room locked from the inside, with no other means of entrance or exit), dipped into the theme with novels featuring the amateur detective Rouletabille – like the author, a newspaper reporter – notably in the 1917 book, *Rouletabille chez Krupp*. The novel has Rouletabille, a reporter on the Parisian daily *L'Époque*, serving as a corporal at the front, recalled to his paper by the editor, who then takes him to a meeting at the Ministry of the Interior. There he hears that a scientist, Fulber, has invented a rocket with the power of an atomic bomb, and has taken it to the British, who had constructed the rocket, tested it, then had the plans, design, Fulber and his assistant all captured from them by German spies while they toasted the success in champagne. The news is brought by a high British official, Cromer – who emphasises that the Germans now have the power to destroy Paris or London in one blow. Only one with the street cunning and fluent German of the reporter Rouletabille can intervene to stop a horror and certain defeat.

The most practically influential authors in their time are not always those best remembered. The hugely prolific French/British author William Le Queux was probably the master in the early years, writing more simply and graphically than the author of *The Riddle of the Sands*, playing on the common fears of Germany, his status such that he could fairly claim to be an influence on the government's creation of the first secret services. Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), creator of the *Daily Mail*, had commissioned Le Queux to write a serial for one of his magazines on a French invasion in 1893, three years before founding the *Mail*. He was commissioned again by the *Mail* to write, in 1906, *The Invasion of 1910*, an attack this time by the Germans, strongly influenced by the views of Field Marshal Earl Roberts, who had tried and failed to convince the government to institute national service. The novel greatly increased the paper's circulation, and it was changed at Harmsworth's instructions to include a number of larger towns in the narrative, where the sales of the *Mail* were higher than in the villages in the original.

Le Queux occupies some 20 pages in Christopher Andrew's *Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1985). That book is subtitled 'The Making of the British Intelligence Community': Andrew underscores the central role of fiction in that construction, as Le Queux, enormously prolific, built up the fears of the (real) growing hostility of Germany, and the increasing conviction, including within the government, that Britain was infested with highly trained German spies. His and other authors' books were written in a documentary style, deliberately blurring fact and fiction, the writers claiming they had done extensive research.

The more surprising element of their work was the high level of alarm these apparently trashy novels excited. Viscount Haldane, the Secretary of State for War (1905–12), educated in the universities of Edinburgh and Gottingen with a first-class degree in philosophy, was so moved by the spy fever the novels fed that he created a high-level subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence which he chaired, and which included the Home Secretary, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Major (later General) James Edmonds, head of the Military Operations Directorate, told the committee that the rapid rise in reported cases of German espionage had happened 'only since certain newspapers have directed attention to the subject' – the veracity of the newspaper reports being implicitly accepted. Andrews writes that Edmonds, who believed that the German network was so extensive that 'a German general landing a force

in East Anglia would know more about the country than any British General' was wholly ignorant of the facts – which were that the German network was small, poorly paid, part-time and had largely been closed down by the time the war began.⁷

John Buchan, a Presbyterian minister's son born in Perth, was an editor of the *Spectator* in his early thirties, and a *Times* correspondent in France during the 1914–18 war. These spells alternated with longer periods as a political aide (in South Africa) and as Director of Propaganda in the latter part of World War I. In later life, he rose to become Governor General of Canada from 1935 until his death in 1940.

Buchan's fiction was popular throughout his life, particularly his (shortest) novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) in which he introduces Richard Hannay, a Scots-born mining engineer returning to London from South Africa, who, in the course of the novel, manages to foil a German plot with the aid of a senior intelligence officer, Sir Walter Bullivant. These two are together again in *Greenmantle* (1916) where they once more foil a potentially fatal German plot. *Greenmantle*, out a year earlier than *Rouletabille chez Krupp*, Leroux's tense but less jingoistic thriller (not yet translated into English), uses the same narrative lines: like *Rouletabille*, Hannay – a major, not a corporal – is taken away from the front; like *Rouletabille*, he is given a task in which he is likely to fail, and to die failing; like *Rouletabille*, the stakes are the highest.

In *Greenmantle*, Bullivant tells Hannay that he may be sending him to his death. *Rouletabille*'s editor also warns that the stakes are as high as saving Paris, and that his death is likely. Leroux's means by which the Germans will succeed in conquering France and Britain is a huge rocket; in Buchan's novel a Muslim prophet will rouse the tribes of the Middle East to support the German war effort and sweep the British forces before them.

Both authors prefigure, remarkably well, real events and developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Leroux's device is even a Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) type of ballistic missile, in which smaller warheads are encased in one vast rocket, the real MIRV only being developed in the 1960s. Buchan's prophet out of the east evokes al Qaeda's bin Laden or IS's al Baghdadi. The strongest and most influential of the themes present in the work of both the French and British thriller writers is that only

one man, at times with a few trusted companions, can save the country, or even the world, from a barbarian invasion. James Bond and Jack Ryan were born then.

The uncontroversial shuffling between political service, government propaganda work, novel writing and journalism illuminates a central point in early writing on espionage: the ‘natural sense of duty’ which Childers invoked as an explanation for his novel writing covered, before the 1950s, journalism as well as all other fields. The security officials were defenders of the nation, sacralised by the danger of the craft and the constant need for dissimulation at the expense of their own private lives. The most a spy-thriller author would permit himself was some well-bred irony, tending towards the *de haut en bas*: as did W. Somerset Maugham, an acerbically elegant writer of novels, plays and short stories, who in his 1928 novel *Ashenden; or The British Agent* wrote loosely linked stories which had as eponymous hero a British dramatist recruited by MI6 and sent to Geneva. Ashenden, who though properly patriotic and prepared to take up the challenge of espionage work without any apparent hesitation, still retained a certain authorial reserve: as presumably Maugham himself did, when working for MI6 in 1916–17 in Switzerland and Russia. As he put it in the foreword ‘In 1917 I went to Russia. I was sent to prevent the Bolshevik Revolution and to keep Russia in the war. The reader will know that my efforts did not meet with success.’⁸ In the novel, Ashenden meets a colonel at a party, and is asked for ‘a chat’ the next day. Turning up at a shabby house, he is asked by the Colonel – apparently the head of the secret service – to join the agency, encouraging him with the thought that his experiences will make good copy on the page or the stage. The interview ends with a fine piece of stiff-upper-lippery:

Colonel: There’s just one thing I think you ought to know before you take on this job. And don’t forget it. If you do well you’ll get no thanks and if you get into trouble you’ll get no help. Does that suit you?

Ashenden: Perfectly.

*Colonel: Then I’ll wish you a good afternoon.*⁹

The other spy writer of note – now largely neglected – was Alexander Wilson, a restless and daring man who was an accredited MI6 officer during World War II but had begun to write successful and well regarded spy novels – such as *The Mystery of Tunnel 51* and *The Devil’s Cocktail* – in the 1920s, and may have been a undercover agent for many years. The writer Tim Crook,

who wrote his biography,¹⁰ said of him in an interview that the hero of the novels, Sir Leonard Wallace, bore ‘an uncanny resemblance to the first head of MI6, Sir Mansfield Smith Cumming,’ known as ‘C.’ When Crook researched his past, he was not allowed to see files on him in MI6 but was allowed to speak to agency officers, with whom, said Crook,

*I always stressed the negative – that Wilson was a fantasist, his books luckily perceptive rather than the work of an insider and his post-war decline his own fault. But when I spoke to my sources, the positive was strongly pointed out – that Wilson might well have been doing a great job for his country, an unsung hero in contrast to others from the era, like Anthony Blunt or Guy Burgess.*¹¹

Was this the MI6 man claiming a hero to set against the embarrassing traitors whom they had clasped for so long to their unsuspecting bosom? Or was Wilson simply a clever and lucky fantasist? The fictional and the real are again intertwined, with the agencies deliberately encouraging a romantic mist to settle permanently about their activities.

The exception – the only one I know of – was the writer Sir Compton Mackenzie, best known for his comic novel *Whisky Galore* (1947). He had been an MI6 officer in World War I, engaged in counter-intelligence during the Gallipoli campaign and later founding the Aegean Intelligence Service. In retaliation for the suppression of his memoirs (not published until 2011), Mackenzie wrote a satire, *Water on the Brain* (1933), an account of the Directorate of Extraordinary Intelligence, MQ 99(E), run by a man named N. The organisation’s headquarters, Pomona Lodge in north London, became a lunatic asylum, ‘for the servants of bureaucracy who have been driven mad in the service of their country.’¹²

As with world domination, Britain ceded its pre-eminence in spy writing after World War II to the US. Pre-war, there was little American spy writing of any consequence, either in journalism or in fiction – for though there were spies, there were no agencies. The one book of any note which concerned itself with spying was not a novel (though a 1935 film, *Rendezvous*, was based on it), but a memoir by Herbert Yardley, an expert code breaker. In the 1920s, he headed MI-8 or the Cipher Bureau, which came to be called the Black Chamber: a forerunner of the National Security Agency (NSA) in intercepting communications and reading, in its case, the content rather than the ‘metadata.’ It was closed in 1929 when

Henry Stimson, the Secretary of State, judged that ‘gentlemen do not read each others’ letters.’¹³ Like Mackenzie a few years later, Yardley reacted by writing an account of the Bureau, *The American Black Chamber*, which was popular at home and abroad – especially in its Japanese translation, since Japan’s coded messages were a prime target of the bureau. Yardley was accused, it seems rightly, with prompting several states to change their codes and revealing sources and methods. He was not, however, prosecuted.

The heroes of the British spy novels, *Kim* apart, were one-dimensional characters, as were the villains: they were the more widely popular and powerful for being so. They were written in the late heroic period of the British Empire, when the establishment, Liberal and Conservative, was largely united in support of the empire, differing only on the nature of their rule over it. The later fiction, especially after World War II, could not credibly deploy ‘clean-limbed’ establishment products as heroes. At one, unique extreme, the hero was an ironic super-cool superman, James Bond; the mainstream became the despairing patriots of Len Deighton, and above all of John Le Carré – products of a failing post imperial state, dominated by venal politicians, corporate sharks and temporising officials, with a few decent people, like the MI5 agent Leonard Burr in *The Night Manager* (a woman, Angela Burr, in the TV dramatisation of 2016). As the popular novelists wrote within the imperial consensus, so did most journalists, since that was what their proprietors, editors and publics demanded.

* * *

World War II caused a rapid expansion – or creation – of intelligence services. In the UK, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) – ‘Churchill’s Secret Army’ – was created, largely charged with behind-the-lines subversion and thus mainly worked in collaboration with resistance movements. It also had an intelligence function, which meant it clashed inevitably with MI6 – a clash never toxic, and settled by what Keith Jeffery, the official historian of MI6, called ‘a typically effortless assumption of bureaucratic superiority ... able deftly to outmanoeuvre attempts by less practiced Whitehall warriors to change (downgrade) the status’ of MI6.¹⁴ The SOE was a genuinely dashing organisation, perilous for its agents and allies, often very effective: it had great coverage in films after the war, and two of its agents – the head of the French Section, Maurice Buckmaster

and his aide, the Jewish-Romanian-born Vera Atkins, may be models for Ian Fleming's Bond and Miss Moneybags. Novels – such as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity Rainbow*, Ken Follet's *Jackdaw*, Elizabeth Wein's *Code Name Verity*, Sebastian Faulks's *Charlotte Gray* and Mal Peet's *Tamar*, mostly written many decades after the fact – all use the SOE to different degrees; the journalist Sarah Helm wrote a biography of Vera Atkins, *Vera Atkins and the Lost Heroes of the SOE*, in 2005.

Journalism in Britain in the post-war period had added, to the already-established rumbustiousness of its political reporting and commentary, increasing doses of scandal and sex, stimulated by the well-grounded belief on the part of the popular press proprietors and their editors that these would assist circulation. In the early 1960s, as media criticism and mockery of 'the Establishment'¹⁵ mounted, a series of spy scandals gave the newspapers, and even the still-staid BBC and the brasher ITV, huge amounts of copy. They included the ring of spies under the direction of Gordon Lonsdale (real name Konon Molody, a KGB agent posing as a Canadian businessman) who smuggled out details of UK nuclear submarine design and weaponry; the arrest (1961) and then the escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison (1966) of George Blake, an MI6 officer, enrolled in the KGB while a prisoner in North Korea, whose revelations of a tunnel built by the British agency under the Berlin Wall within which they tapped phone lines had, together with other leaked details, caused the arrest and execution of up to 40 operatives in the Soviet bloc; and John Vassall, blackmailed by the KGB (who had photographs of his homosexual activities) into espionage, and who sent a range of classified documents, again mainly concerned with naval technology.

The crowning scandal was the Profumo affair, the bit-by-bit revelation that John Profumo, Defence Minister in the second Conservative government of Harold Macmillan (1959–63) had had an affair with Christine Keeler, a model. She also had as a lover Yevgeny Ivanov, a Soviet diplomat in London, an agent of the military intelligence agency, the GRU. The story was brought to a climax in 1963 by the persistent questioning by the leader of the Labour opposition, Harold Wilson. Profumo, who had denied the rumours in the House of Commons, was forced to recant his denial, resigned and spent the rest of his long life doing charity work in London's East End.

These stories were both made for the popular press – dominant then as now – and were in part made by them. The main actors, especially Keeler and her friend and housemate Mandy Rice-Davies, were paid large

sums by newspapers for their ‘confessions’ and ‘memoirs.’ In his book on the period, Richard Davenport-Hines writes that ‘the Profumo affair was made in Fleet Street ... incited, publicised and exploited by journalists.’¹⁶ This is vivid, but misleading: the main incitement, and the one the government had to take seriously, was done by the relatively young Harold Wilson, using information supplied by George Wigg, a party colleague with links to the intelligence services.

The popular press was hot on the heels of, or at times led, every rumour and allegation; at the time, it accounted for some 90 per cent of the public’s news reading. This was a time when popular papers like the *News of the World*, the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, were each selling over 4 and even 5 million copies, and the BBC and the more demotic ITV (launched in 1955) were increasing their grip on the free time of the population. Davenport-Hines writes that

*the Profumo affair roused a Fleet Street frenzy of ferocity. It managed to glorify what was shabby and had an enduring influence on investigative journalism ... the gutter press, with its entertaining scrapes and vicarious punishments, provided a histrionic morality for its readers and frontier markers for society. Its contents were a map of moral landscaping, showing the contours of normality, the roads to right and wrong, the boundaries that must not be crossed.*¹⁷

It was an age where members of the elite in journalism both bemoaned the decline of manners and morals, and when asked by the popular press which they derided, provided mordant and well-rewarded commentaries on their own class, which had seen itself as initiator and guardian of these manners and morals. Malcolm Muggeridge, who when Rector of Edinburgh University (1966–8), inveighed against the students’ ‘pot pills and promiscuity’, wrote that ‘the Upper Classes have always been given to lying, fornication, corrupt practices and, doubtless as a result of the public school system, sodomy.’¹⁸ Sodomy – homosexuality – was regarded by the popular press as a disgusting ‘perversion’, and was used as a major reason why the Cambridge spy ring – Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean (who was bisexual), later Anthony Blunt – were traitors.

Though the national newspaper reporters were both connoisseurs and shapers of scandals, there was little attempt at forensic investigative journalism, whether on the secret services or any other aspect of British, or foreign, life. In the case of the security services, this was because they

were officially chimeras of the press's and public's imagination, and the political and civil service classes had never heard of them. Reviewing, in the *New York Times*, a 1986 book, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, by the Cambridge historian and expert on the secret services Christopher Andrew, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford Sir Michael Howard wrote that

*so far as official Government policy is concerned, the British security and intelligence services, M.I.5 and M.I.6, do not exist. Intelligence is brought by the storks, and enemy agents are found under gooseberry bushes. Government records bearing on intelligence activities are either industriously "weeded" or kept indefinitely closed. Members of Parliament who ask questions are listened to in icy silence and choked off with the most abrupt and inexplicit of replies. Serious historians, deprived of documentation, tend to accept the situation and do not ask questions to which they know they cannot provide the answers.*¹⁹

Journalists were also in the dark – or where not, could not publish much of what they had learned, or suspected. As Davenport-Hines has shown in his *An English Affair*, journalists revelled in the clouds of obscurity round the services, which both excused and increased the sensationalist myths, intertwined with truths, which they printed.²⁰ The other advantage was that, since they did not exist, they would not sue.

In the 1960s, the journalism trade was colonised by a post-war generation of graduates, many from Oxford and Cambridge, who saw themselves as at least the social and intellectual equals of the political and administrative classes, unlike the previous generations of British reporters who – a US colleague, quoted by Davenport-Hines, wrote in 1965 with the condescension which Americans tend to ascribe to the British – had 'provincial accents and tea-boy educations; many of them held the old spit-and-polish, school-of-hard-knocks, learn-the-hard-way-on-the-stone and other equally soporific philosophies for journalistic success'.²¹ This new breed was influential in developing the first organised efforts at investigative journalism in the *Sunday Times*, from the 1960s onwards, especially under the editorship of Harold Evans, but continuing after he had gone.

These included investigations into Kim Philby's activities (1967), Israel's possession of nuclear weapons (1986), a serialisation of *Spycatcher*, a book (banned in the UK) by the former agent Peter Wright alleging penetration of MI5; the allegations that Michael Foot, former leader of

the Labour Party, was a KGB ‘agent of influence’ (Foot won large damages for this, when it was judged false) – and, in the early 2000s, the revelations of the renditions of suspected jihadists for interrogation and likely torture by Stephen Grey at Insight and others.

The man who, from the 1950s, did most to reveal something of their workings, was not from the elite, but proved adept at moving in elite circles. His father, formerly a major in the Indian army, kept a pub in Northumberland, and his mother had been an actor. He was not easily categorised as either a gentleman commentator or a workaday hack. He credited his upbringing above the pub for his ability to speak to all ranks, and to get them to talk – one of the greatest gifts a reporter can possess.

Chapman Pincher was educated in a grammar school and took a science degree at London’s Kings College, taught physics, joined the army’s technical branch during the war and was hired after it, and became Science and Defence Correspondent for the *Daily Express*. The newspaper is now a reactionary shadow of its former self: in the years he worked for it – from 1946 to 1979 when he retired to concentrate on book writing, still on the same beat but with the title of Assistant Editor – it remained a popular if slowly declining title, commanded despotically by its proprietor Lord Beaverbrook (1879–1964), slipping below 4 million daily sales in 1967 and below 3 million a few years before Pincher left.

An insult, of which Pincher was apparently proud, illuminates something of his method, and of the way in which the security world was represented by its most assiduous chronicler. The insult came from the left intellectual E. P. Thompson, who wrote in the *New Statesman* in 1978 that Pincher was ‘a kind of official urinal’ in which top people in the security and defence establishments ‘could stand patiently leaking’.²² Thompson had earlier written that British spies lived as if characters in a Buchan novel: an out-of-date assessment of those who, in the main, spent their lives sifting dubious data on the Soviet Union and attempting to keep up a network of agents living always on the brink of discovery.

Yet there was something in the leaking comment. Pincher’s gift for making himself agreeable and interested allowed him to appeal to both establishment figures and the readership of the *Daily Express*. With a Beaverbrook-approved expense account from the paper which allowed him to host lunches for his contacts at the Ecu de France²³ and other costly St James’ restaurants, he spent much of his time and his employer’s money on highly placed officials, and reaped large stories from the men so irrigated.

E. P. Thompson's contempt also overlooked a large fact, central to journalism's practice. Until the internet age of journalism and even in it, details, plans, policies and debates hidden within government and state institutions were accessible largely and often only through politicians, officials and advisers, in post or recently moved or retired. They might respond to the flattery of an expensive lunch with a journalist they knew or knew of, who had some working knowledge as well as an intense professional interest in the subject with which they dealt day after day – that interest being an even more effective form of flattery. His King's College science degree and his work, both in the army and in civilian life, as a munitions expert and instructor gave Pincher a basic understanding of the technical details of the issues with which he dealt, unlike most journalists who either had no university training, nor had read classics or the arts.

Pincher wished to be 'used' – at least by some of his informants, who shared his strong anti-communism and his belief in the porousness of the intelligence services to subversion. Being 'used', for him, was taking part in a joint endeavor to secure Britain, a task more important than any demands – not then very strong – that journalism be independent of political power. When, in an interview given when the former *Express* man was 97 and 'still working every day', the journalist Ian Jack asked him if he felt used, he responded 'Absolutely! But my motto was, if the story is new, and particularly if it's exclusive, I'm open for use any day.' Noting that government expenditure on defence after the war had increased because of the state's investment in nuclear weaponry, Pincher said that 'the taxpaying public had to understand why. Governments realised I was a good medium for getting that across'.²⁴

He had developed a nose for those who would yield secrets – either because they thought the secrecy excessive, or because they wished to impress a journalist with their knowledge or access, or because they wished to boost their own professional and departmental interest and/or damage that of others, or because they had received the nod from superiors to insert, non-attributably, some facts into the public arena, or because of simple gratitude, even friendship. Every reporter trawling for stories through the maze of state and corporate interests must take advantage of these motives for leaking; that some of the leaks to Pincher embarrassed governments is attested by the irritation of prime ministers and permanent secretaries when the stories were published. Like reporters everywhere, then as now, he sniffed out and played on divisions among ministries, ministers and officials.

One controversial scoop with contemporary resonance was published in the *Express* edition of 21 February 1967. In a front-page story, Pincher wrote of 'a Big Brother intrusion into privacy which ranks with telephone tapping and the opening of letters'. The substance was that all overseas cables were daily collected from the office of the company Commercial Cables and Western Union, taken to the Ministry of Defence for checking then returned after a two-day delay. Pincher, who had the story as an exclusive, checked it was fit to be published with Colonel 'Sammy' Lohan, secretary of the D-notice committee, a mechanism through which journalists could check on the sensitivity of stories with a representative of the state, invariably a high-ranking former military figure.

The conversation, in the traditional expensive restaurant, produced a misunderstanding. Pincher claimed that Lohan had said there was no problem, Lohan said he had not given permission to publish. The case was then given 'legs' by the refusal on the part of Harold Wilson, then prime minister, to let the issue drop. He appointed a committee of privy councillors to examine the issue, which sided with Pincher. Ignoring that judgment, Wilson had a White Paper published on D-notices. In the debate on the paper, he directly blamed Lohan for his 'over-close association' with journalists. He was roasted by the opposition and in the press, alienated many in his cabinet – a triumph for Pincher and the press.²⁵ Wilson was probably at least partly right.

The larger issue is not that reporters should not seek leaks, whether given on moral grounds or prompted by the last glass from a bottle of expensive wine; they must. It is that they are rarely the whole story. Journalists in search of a narrative, or conducting an investigation, use these confidences as parts in a jigsaw which, when completed, yields a picture coherent in its own terms. Pincher was not an investigative reporter as it is now defined (though he was later to claim he was): for much of his career Britain had no such explicit sub-category of the journalists' trade.

He needed scoops, because the *Express* needed them and he became its premier supplier. He told Ian Jack that among his most pleasant memories was 'coming out of l'Ecu after a nice lunch, walking back to Fleet Street in the sunshine and feeling great, knowing that I'd got two bloody big scoops that nobody could touch and they were bound to lead the paper. Oh, it was wonderful, quite wonderful.'²⁶ Few reporters of any experience haven't had that feeling when being first, or going deepest, or revealing most, whether or not after a nice lunch.

Pincher got scoops day by day – in one early success, he secured through the kind act of a friend a report on US nuclear weaponry not then published in either the UK or the US, and led the paper with excerpts from it for seven days. But he had a long-term and quite serious ideological mission too, which produced both scoops and long narratives and which he turned into books written after his Fleet Street career ended. Strongly anti-communist, he became an expert in treachery within the secret services: he focused, it seems wrongly, on Roger Hollis, whose career in and leadership of MI5 he believed concealed a loyalty to Moscow, and a servicing of its intelligence needs. His 2011 book, *Treachery, Betrayals, Blunders and Cover-Ups: Six Decades of Espionage* – was an extended enquiry into Hollis's alleged treason, strongly dependent on the bitter testimony of Peter Wright.

Wright was a former senior MI5 officer (and like Pincher, a scientist by education) who had chaired a committee while in MI5 investigating possible treachery – a job which drew him to the conclusion that Hollis, the chief, was the main 'mole'. Wright's 1987 book, *Spycatcher*, in which the charge was laid out, was banned in the UK but published in Australia, and became – because of the ban – an international best-seller, selling 2 million copies and making Wright a millionaire. The ban prompted a 1991 judgment from the European Court of Human Rights condemning the UK government for breaching the Convention on Human Rights by censoring its own press.

Pincher's book was an updating of Wright's, with further evidence: but both men were disappointed in not having their view confirmed officially. Wright's co-author on *Spycatcher* was Paul Greengrass, then a director on the Granada TV investigative documentary series *World in Action*, and later director of two of the films in the 'Bourne' series, *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007). The second of these featured a *Guardian* journalist who gets part of the web of stories surrounding the CIA fugitive Jason Bourne and is murdered by a CIA-appointed assassin – an example of the still-potent mutual flows between fact, fiction and paranoia in the representation of the intelligence services.

Pincher's approach to journalism was conventional, if much more active and shrewd than most of his fellows: his success was unusual, and long-lasting, driven by his own desire to 'lead the paper', his assiduous cultivation of contacts and useful friendships and his strong work ethic. That approach was designed to accord with what had emerged, post-war, as the way in which the secret services bypassed their non-existence²⁷ to

leak material sanctioned by their leaderships and by ministers, and material not sanctioned but usually useful at some level of the agencies. Pincher was more successful than most in this era because of his, and his newspaper's, strong anti-communism – naturally popular with officials whose existence depended on the view that the Soviet Union was the main threat to British security. But he also was personally able – in part because he was personable – to negotiate the shoals and currents of British officialdom, and to seek out those who would best serve his purpose as much as he served theirs.

Pincher's frank patriotism had been unexceptional when he began in journalism, and was in tune with his newspaper; by the time he retired from regular newspaper work, it was going out of fashion, replaced with a sceptical approach which shaded, in many cases, into an aggressive suspicion of authority. He was able to get the scoops he did – some were no more than what the services and the government wished to see published, but some exposed internal struggles and divisions which were certainly not welcome – because he was assiduous in discovering those who had, or took, a licence to leak. He was also an enthusiastic actor in the dramas he described: his anti-communism grew as his fame did and he learned more of the Soviet system.

The books he wrote, mostly after he had ceased daily reporting, were both well documented and pugnacious: in the introduction to a 1985 book, he wrote that 'to the Western mind, peace is the absence of war and a state of friendliness to other countries. To those few in the Kremlin and to the millions never given any option but to agree with them, peace means what Lenin proclaimed – that there can be no peace until there is Communist world control, and the struggle for that control must be ceaseless.'²⁸ Pincher's reporting was properly concerned with Soviet infiltration and subversion, but the hard reporting was mainly directed to the naming of Soviet moles within the services, with polemical writing aimed against those who were blind to the threat he believed they posed. Far from full and balanced, Pincher's assiduous work was still often the best available in the journalism of the time.

* * *

Spying in France is a venerable trade. Julius Caesar writes of his use of it in his Gallic Wars; the kings and princes of the medieval courts kept spies about them (or abroad). It was in the Middle Ages when tactics still used

were developed – the interception of communications, codes, disinformation, the use of merchants and other travelling folk as spies and messengers. The French were the first to create a Ministry of War, in 1567 under Charles IX; and in 1589, under Henry IV, a Foreign Ministry – two centuries before the US and the UK. The conclusion of the Treaty of Westphalia gave international agreement to the sovereignty of the nation state, and therefore a multiplicity of possible enemies – thus prompting a further development in espionage organisation; the French king Louis XV created a network of agents across Europe.²⁹

In the nineteenth century, the French military, one of the largest and most splendid armies in the world, created a series of institutions, some of which bordered on security – such as the statistics section in the 1820s and the department of fortifications in the late 1830s. A department dedicated to intelligence had to wait till the 1880s and it was in that department that an ‘affaire’, one of the most important in the modern history of the country, developed.

The case of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island in 1894 for an act of treachery – passing confidential information on French artillery to Germany – he did not commit, as a consequence of widespread anti-Semitism, stands at the head of the development of the French secret services and is still a potent memory in French political life. The case was a test for the French press of the time (1880/1890s): one which, by contemporary standards, it failed. Though diverse and lively, the newspapers were also tied closely to particular commercial and political interests, and made little discrimination between advertisements and editorials: indeed, the latter were often a platform for the former, as well as shills for a particular political or commercial venture. They were also, according to the German spy chief Wilhelm Stieber, ‘incorrigibly talkative’,³⁰ and aided his espionage activities greatly. (Guy de Maupassant’s *Bel Ami* (1885) is a fine satire on the press of the time, as the hero, Georges Duroy, rises in society through an adroit mixture of seduction and journalism.)

In his account of the Dreyfus Affair, the novelist and historian Piers Paul Read lays stress on the sharp and animus-filled divisions in France’s Third Republic – especially the anti-clericalism espoused by the republican radicals, who won the election of 1876 and embarked on a resolute programme of de-Catholicising national institutions and the power of Catholics within the state structures. Read writes that ‘Catholics from families who had traditionally served in the French administration were now debarred. The higher strata of

the old bourgeoisie were excluded from power in this generation, as far as it was Catholic or royalist, and on the whole it was both. The gap they left was filled with Protestants, and to a lesser degree by Jews.³¹

'L'affaire' resounded round the world: within France, it touched on every nerve of political and social life, setting Catholic against Protestant against Jew, class against class, in a state where defeat by Germany and suppression of the Paris commune's revolt against the new national government, which had signed the armistice with Germany in February 1871, had left little space for more than formal reconciliation. Dreyfus, whose Jewishness made him a prime suspect when leakages of vital information to the military attaché in the German embassy were discovered, was rapidly tried, found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment in the most degrading circumstances on a former leper colony named Devil's Island, one of the Salvation Islands group off the French colony of Guiana, which was used as a gulag. Popular hostility was evident and large; his family and friends and a few others convinced of or suspecting his innocence were regarded as traitors. Only when a new chief of the Deuxième Bureau's Statistical Section, Colonel Georges Picquart, took over in 1895 was there an officer conscientious enough to question and then to dismiss the flimsy evidence which had convicted Dreyfus.

The long route to release and a (limited) rehabilitation continued to divide and shock many in the country – especially the revelations that the highest officers in the army had refused to believe plain new evidence, or had been party to fabrications of the old. Dreyfus emerged, at least to liberal opinion, as an enlightenment and secular hero, not just in France but more widely. The affair itself showed divisions within the military, between it and the government, between liberals and the left who belatedly took Dreyfus's side; and conservatives who continued to regard him as in some way guilty. Of the several individuals who led the campaign against his imprisonment, the one best remembered is Emile Zola, France's most popular novelist of the time, whose impassioned article 'J'accuse'³² was published in 1899 in a newspaper founded only in 1897, by George Clemenceau – the journalist who later became, twice (1906–9, 1917–20), Prime Minister of France. Among the targets were two of the many papers which printed lies about Dreyfus – *L'Éclair* and *L'Écho de Paris* – both of which were willing collaborators in 'an abominable campaign' run by the war department to 'mislead (public) opinion and cover up their own faults.'³³ In his naming of the guilty men at the top of the army and politics, Zola courted danger and was tried for criminal libel later the same year,

and convicted – escaping from France to the UK to avoid jail, returning the following year to accept a pardon, for which he had to admit guilt. He was later completely vindicated. Both for its urgent spelling out of the truth and for the courage of the writer, it has remained a prime example of journalism engaged for justice.

With this massive political, religious and emotional freight, the divisions of the Dreyfus Affair come right up to recent times. In 1985, President Francois Mitterrand proposed to have a statue of Dreyfus erected in the Ecole Militaire – an offer refused, on the grounds that ‘it was perceived as a reminder of division and humiliation.’³⁴ Only in 1995 did the French Army make an official declaration of the officer’s innocence, through the Director of its Historical Section. The fact that the nascent intelligence service was deeply involved – first in faking forgeries which sealed Dreyfus’s fate, then in an attempt by Picquart to set the record straight which was sabotaged by his colleagues and stamped on by the hierarchy – left a deep unease.

Philippe Hayez, a security scholar, previously a deputy director of the Direction Général de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE, the External Intelligence Agency), writes (with Jean-Claude Cousseran) that

*Admiral Pierre Lacoste, the DGSE’s director general from 1982–85 (together with foreign experts) were supporting the thesis of a ‘French disease’ in intelligence. In their view, the French ‘Intelligence culture’ had been suffering, since the affaire Dreyfus, from a paradoxical history of politicisation and distance between the political authorities and the services. Intelligence policy was obviously too sensitive to be accounted for and managed as a public policy, and thus better left untouched.*³⁵

Where the ‘Anglo-Saxons’ see in the genesis of their secret services square-jawed patriots and doughty and decent men and women opposed to tyranny everywhere, the French see a much more complex picture, retrospectively shameful and presently politically manipulated.

Nigel Inkster, a former high official in MI6, now a senior analyst at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, says that ‘the reason that the British are by and large supportive of the secret services is that they have no experience of being repressed or treated badly by them. You cannot say the same about the Germans, for obvious reasons: and in France, the shadow of Dreyfus is a long one – and there is really little effective oversight even now, while the press has been very complaisant’

(see Conclusion). Inkster concedes that the services are now in better shape and that the press is more inquiring.

The US historian of the French Secret Services, Douglas Porch, writes that

*the Dreyfus affair had revealed an emerging character, one might even say a 'culture', of French intelligence which would become increasingly defined in the 20th century ... [it] would be poor civil - intelligence relations. Of what use was intelligence ... in the hands of men whose preconceptions or prejudices predisposed them to distort, ignore or misuse information?*²⁶

This distrust is not unique: indeed, it is common, if usually in milder forms than occurred in France. The US administration of George W. Bush, especially the Vice President Dick Cheney, believed the CIA to be insufficiently engaged in finding evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and created a parallel service more amenable to the belief. Harold Wilson, UK Labour Prime Minister in the 1960s and 1970s, believed that MI5 officers were plotting against him – a suspicion which had some foundation, though the more lurid charges were dismissed by the historian of secret services Christopher Andrew. However, Andrew's *Defence of the Realm* (2009) says that he was alone among post-war prime ministers to have had a file kept on him, by a service concerned that his pre-office contacts with East European officials in pursuit of business interests cast suspicion on him.

In France, however, both the distrust and the politicisation of the services have been a more constant element in the relationship. Eric Denécé, head of the Centre for Intelligence Research, writes (with Gerald Arboit) that 'since the Dreyfus affair, our intelligence services have been the victims of distrust from politicians' and claims that 'the common characteristic of the heads of the intelligence services and of the security of France from the time of their nomination is to be incompetent in concrete issues but to be obedient to the orders of the executive power'.³⁷

The defeat and subsequent occupation in 1940 splintered the French political class among the collaborationist Vichy government, the Gaullist Free French in exile and the Communist-dominated resistance in the later years of the war. These marked the post-war efforts to build security services with pervasive feuds and (often well-founded) suspicions of Communist leaking to the Soviet Union, especially when the Party had

ministers in the government and members high in the civil and military service in the years immediately after the war.

Thus while the Anglo-Saxon agencies could bask in their part in winning World War II – an effort heroic in many theatres, though at first fairly chaotic, especially on the inexperienced US side – the French agencies were caught in a series of political cul-de-sacs. The French Communist Party, which had played the leading role in resistance to the Nazi occupation once the Wehrmacht had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, achieved a vote in the first post-war general election of over 28 per cent. The result ensured its participation in the post-war coalition governments – until it was expelled in 1947, as anxieties mounted on the Party's loyalty and as the US insisted on its expulsion as a condition for the receipt of Marshall Aid. The Party retained up to 30 per cent of the popular vote, and mobilised much of the industrial working class – whose militancy it was its main concern to increase after expulsion from government, and with the encouragement of Moscow.

The French secret services, drawn in large numbers from the espionage network created by Charles de Gaulle while in wartime exile in London, was strongly anti-communist and regarded as the enemy within by Party members. The contrast with the UK's much more moderate left was stark: there, the post-war Labour government quickly dropped its suspicions of the secret services, especially through the agency of Ernest Bevin, post-war Foreign Secretary. Douglas Dodds-Parker, a former member of the wartime secret services, recalled that, through MI6, Bevin had 'become aware for the first time of what the USSR were doing to undermine and destroy, if possible, freedom in the still-free world ... from [the SIS] he learned the full facts of the activities of the USSR in fomenting subversion, sabotage and strikes'.³⁸

The withdrawing tide from imperial possession gave a louder roar in France than in Britain, both the withdrawal from Vietnam and Algeria. The intelligence services were caught up in allegations of brutal torture, especially in Algeria – where its officers ended up on both sides of the murderous argument between the 'pied noirs', or white settlers in Algeria. From 1 November 1954, when plastic explosives in Algiers and other Algerian cities announced the start of the Algerian insurrection (to the shock of Francois Mitterrand, then Interior Minister in Prime Minister Guy Mollet's socialist government, who blamed the secret services for giving him no warning), to the concession of independence in 1962, the French secret services were deeply involved in the Algerian war.

Together with the army, they used the most brutal methods, imported from the defeat in Vietnam, against the indigenous population. The cell structure adopted by the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale made gathering intelligence difficult and the resort to torture and indiscriminate murder of groups of Algerians in reprisal for FLN assassinations, though the methods did provide some information, still ensured much more hatred.

Douglas Porch writes that

much intelligence activity actually served to weaken France's argument – directed particularly at allies and the United Nations – that she was dealing with a civil war, an internal French matter of no concern to the outside world. This was no mere diplomatic subterfuge. It was an ethnocentric vision which shaped and guided French policy and one to which the French intelligence community subscribed wholeheartedly.³⁹

The services did little better on the French mainland: according to Alastair Horne, the internal security service, then called the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST), showed 'extraordinary incompetence' in allowing a network of funding, hiding terrorists and transporting French deserters out of Algeria, run by a Marxist professor, Jeb Jenson, to exist for three years.⁴⁰

Both the military and the secret services were at least sceptical about and often directly hostile to the governments of the Fourth Republic, as short-lived prime ministers succeeded each other after a few months throughout the 1950s. De Gaulle, assuming the presidency in 1959, was left with intelligence services divided within themselves, and hostile to a government which could not trust them. Horne writes that the bitterness of the struggle, and the influx of millions of Algerians fleeing the Algerian civil war in the 1990s, had left unresolved enmities – as between the Algerian 'harkis', those loyal to France in the 1950s, whose families came to France on liberation, and the newcomers – 'in lieu of the decisive post colonial divorce that was envisaged in 1962, a messy relationship continues, with each country deeply and unpredictably involved in each others' histories. All of this is grist to the mill of Al Qaeda – and Le Pen.⁴¹

As we will see in Chapter 5, the French news media have become much more alert to issues of human rights, accountability and corruption than was the case in the 1950s and 1960s – when the strong political divisions among the papers, and the state control of much of broadcasting, worked against long-form and neutral investigation – a form of journalism

then thought to be, and still in some quarters considered, an American style. The more enquiring approach has been encouraged in the 2010s by Wikileaks disclosures, and most of all by the revelations of Edward Snowden's leaked NSA documents – which included the fact that the personal phone of President François Hollande had been bugged by the CIA.

* * *

US reporting during World War II was, like the British but with a greater propensity to reveal, relatively accurate within limits. Defeats were reported as defeats, and eye-witness accounts of war horrors were, in most cases, published. Unlike the British, the American system of censorship was voluntary: though in neither case were the activities of the intelligence services – MI6 and the SOE in the UK, and in the US, the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS), similar to the SOE – given any more than brief or accidental mention. President Roosevelt, citing a 1938 law, issued an executive order in May 1940 (before the US joined the war) which imposed presidential control over the classification of press communications: he was determined, however, to avoid the severe espionage laws exercised by President Wilson in World War I, and set two criteria only: that the stories must be accurate and must not aid the enemy.

The media relations programme was headed by Byron Price, the executive news editor of Associated Press: he determined that censorship should be voluntary, and issued a code, revised throughout the war. Robert Hanyok, a historian working for the NSA, writes that

Price put the onus for censorship directly on the journalists. His methods were to nudge and talk them into compliance under his motto: 'Least said, soonest mended.' The civilian censors had no authority to excise material prior to publication or punish violators, although they could publish the names of those who stepped over the bounds ... this kept the Censorship Office out of numerous controversies. A case in point was the famous episode in which Gen. George Patton slapped a soldier suffering from battle fatigue. Newsmen filed requests to print the story; Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, gave his approval.⁴²

As a generalisation, US reporting was more demotic than the British, reflecting both the culture of the journalists and that of the US military.

The major reservation was that the US military was segregated: black officers and soldiers did not relax, eat or bunk with their white comrades, though they did fight with them. In June 1944, a black NCO, Corporal Rupert Trimmingham, wrote a letter to *Yank*, the army's weekly, which described how, when travelling with others in his unit through a town in Louisiana, they saw German POWs being fed, under guard, in a restaurant, which they were barred from entering. He continued:

*Here is the question each Negro soldier is asking. What is the Negro soldier fighting for? On whose team are we playing? ... Are [the German POWs] not sworn enemies of our country? Are they not taught to hate and destroy all Democratic governments? Are we not American soldiers, sworn to fight and die if need be for this country? Then why are they treated better than we are? Why does the government allow such things to go on? Some of the boys are saying you will not print this letter. I'm saying that you will.*⁴³

US journalists reported on the military colour bar and much else which would have been uncomfortable to many of their readers. The hero among them was Ernie Pyle, a reporter for the Scripps Howard newspaper chain, who covered the war in Europe, then transferred to the Pacific war where, with the war nearly over, he was killed in a roadside ambush. His Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism, factual, vividly descriptive and empathetic, became a model for later reporters. In a preface to a collection of pieces by reporters on the war, Stephen Ambrose compares the literary style of Ernest Hemingway's war reporting with Pyle's direct style:

*[Hemingway's] dispatches to Colliers were about what he saw and did. 'Never can I describe to you the emotions I felt', he opened his August 1944 from liberated Paris, before going on to three columns about how he felt ... everybody already knew that Hemingway was brave, foolish and sentimental. What they wanted to know was what the GIs were doing. That was what Pyle wrote about, as did the majority of his fellow reporters.*⁴⁴

The direct, factually-based reportage became the approved default style of US journalism. While the war raged, the Hutchins Commission, formed on the suggestion of and funded by Henry Luce, the publisher of the mass circulation *Time* and *Life* magazines, began deliberating the place

and responsibilities of the press in a democracy, reporting in 1947.⁴⁵ The Commission, nearly all scholars with no journalists or women among them, proposed a ‘social responsibility’ model (this at a time when the press was under criticism for monopolistic practices and commercial bias) – under which the press first recognised that it had large power over the population’s minds, and should use that power responsibly. In a crucial passage, the Commission wrote that

*With the means of self-destruction that are now at their disposal, men must live, if they are to live at all, by self-restraint, moderation, and mutual understanding. They get their picture of one another through the press. The press can be inflammatory, sensational, and irresponsible. If it is, it and its freedom will go down in the universal catastrophe. On the other hand, the press can do its duty by the new world that is struggling to be born. It can help create a world community by giving men everywhere knowledge of the world and of one another, by promoting comprehension and appreciation of the goals of a free society that shall embrace all men.*⁴⁶

The recommendations of the Commission, coming as they did soon after a hugely destructive war and the explosion of two nuclear bombs in Japan, were influential with the generation of journalists who had fought in or reported on the war. Some of these – Pyle, Hemingway, Martha Gelhorn and the broadcasters Edward Murrow and William Shirer – had become famous through it and role models after it.

The central duty – as laid out by the Hutchins Commission – was to give ‘a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning.’⁴⁷ The scholars who made up the committee put as the prime requirement

*that the media should be accurate. They should not lie. Here the first link in the chain of responsibility is the reporter at the source of the news. He must be careful and competent. He must estimate correctly which sources are most authoritative. He must prefer firsthand observation to hearsay. He must know what questions to ask, what things to observe, and which items to report. His employer has the duty of training him to do his work as it ought to be done.*⁴⁸

Post-war journalism, in the large city papers (frequently family-owned) and the newspaper chains, as well on the rapidly growing national

broadcasters (especially CBS), took on board the ethical journalistic principles laid down by Hutchins: these were complemented by an increasing sense of journalism's power to ferret out information, resting on the protection of the Constitution's First Amendment – that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.'⁴⁹ The avowed aim became to describe the politics, society, growth, economic structure and foreign policies of America – a large and exciting task. It was one in which the new generation of journalists – inspired by the social and ethical dimension of their trade and less under the thumb of powerful and ruthless mass-circulation press owners than their colleagues in the UK, or in the US in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century high watermark of power of the press proprietors – could insist on standards of accuracy, fullness and balance in a way in which the British raucous, often abusive, tabloids bought by the majority did not.

The Americans also had a model similar to the latter: the 'muckrakers', the group of highly talented and motivated reporters such as Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker, who worked for *McClure's Weekly* at the beginning of the twentieth century. They saw their task – encouraged and feted by the then president, Theodore Roosevelt – to expose the underbelly of US society and economy, acting as a kind of journalistic research bureau for a reformist administration. The power of the press thus relied only partly on circulation and giving the people what they wanted: it also contained an overtly responsible stance, giving the people what the journalists believed they needed. This approach was aided by the fact that the newspapers were city-based, needing to appeal to a community with diverse views rather than concentrating on one slice of a large national pie.

The adoption of high journalistic standards coupled with the strong growth of profitability in media corporations dictated a proprietorial and editorial agreement on the need for freedom from any kind of state control, and a determination to publish at all costs, even if the material published was inconvenient to the powers that be. Investigative reporting was enshrined as the apex of the profession, ritually awarded the highest honours. It is an attitude which has been emulated elsewhere, and which is now, in the twenty-first century, seen as the highest form of journalism. This meant that, much earlier than in other journalistic cultures and even

now more comprehensively and deeply, American journalists tried to get to grips with the 'secret state' – in the belief that nothing should in principle be kept from the people, especially when undertaken by their elected representatives.

An example illuminates the principle.⁵⁰ In 1961 in the early months of the John F. Kennedy presidency, a 'top secret' invasion of Cuba was planned, where the one-party rule of Fidel Castro was seen by US intelligence as leaning heavily towards the Soviet Union. The previous administration of Dwight Eisenhower had agreed with the CIA that the agency should organise an invasion force composed of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, with their mission to overthrow his government. Some 1,400 paramilitaries were trained in Mexico and then moved to Guatemala prior to an invasion which went ahead, after raids by USAF bombers on Cuban airfields, on 16 April. The project, initially successful, failed; the Castro-led counter-attack stopped the invasion in its tracks, took much of the force captive and paraded them in public.

The US press naturally covered the humiliating end to the invasion in detail: but, the intention to invade was reported even before it happened. These articles were not officially suppressed. But nor were they simply allowed to be published without interventions at the highest level aimed at stopping, or diluting, their publication, many of which were successful.

The first tip which dropped the issue into the news arena came from an academic, Ronald Hilton, director of Stanford University's Institute of Hispanic American and Luso-Brazilian Studies, who in November 1960 wrote in his *Hispanic American Report* newsletter that the Guatemalan base in which the invasion was being prepared was 'common knowledge' in the country. Carey McWilliams, the editor of *The Nation* weekly was told of the report by a Stanford colleague of Hilton's, the Marxist economist Paul Baran: McWilliams wrote an editorial – it appeared on 19 November 1960 – on the issue, sending out the proofs before publication to over 70 news organisations so that it might be more widely publicised. McWilliams made it clear in the editorial that he had 'no first-hand knowledge of the facts' – but added that 'if the reports as heard by Dr Hilton are true, then public pressure should be brought to bear upon the Administration to abandon this dangerous and hare-brained project.'⁵¹

After initial scepticism, newspapers began to research the facts behind *The Nation* editorial: some stories appeared which, tentatively, confirmed the original tip, especially in the Latin American press and in the *Miami Herald*, whose city contained the majority of the Cuban exiles.

President John Kennedy, and the CIA director Allen Dulles, were disturbed by the reports, and managed to persuade some papers and magazines to stop running them. The authors of the account of the coverage of the invasion in the *Columbia University Forum* write that

Mr [Arthur] Schlesinger [a close Kennedy aide and a historian of the administration] reports in his 'A Thousand Days' that in March 1961 the New Republic set aside a detailed expose of invasion preparations in Miami at the request of the White House. Of the magazine's acceptance that the piece be dropped, Mr Schlesinger comments that it was 'a patriotic act that left me feeling a bit uncomfortable'.⁵²

The Associated Press (AP), the national wire service which all news outlets took, did not deploy any of its hundreds of reporters on the story – because it, too, was asked not to, and agreed. The managing editor of AP, Alan J. Gould, reflected on the occasion obliquely in his retirement address, saying that ‘I think the people in Government should have learned a lesson for all time on the handling of the Cuban affair. Occasionally we have withheld stories for a time in the national interest. When the President of the United States calls you in and says this is a matter of vital security, you accept the injunction.’⁵³

The *New York Times* was slow to follow up on the story, either because its editors did not wholly believe it or because they did but thought it should not be published. It did, however, put some of the facts of preparation into print before the invasion. The paper’s Latin American correspondent, Tad Szulc, had referred to the story in January 1961 – as did the *Los Angeles Times*, but with little detail. At Easter, visiting friends in Miami, Szulc picked up rumours that some of the invading force had been trained in that city and gathered enough of the facts to write a story on 7 April headlined ‘Anti-Castro Units Trained to Fight at Florida Bases.’⁵⁴ The story had revealed that the project was under the aegis of the CIA and that the probable date for it was 18 April – but both of these details were cut out by the editor, Turner Cartledge – reportedly in deference to a call from Kennedy, a decision which caused a furious row around the news desk.

In a meeting with news executives after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy scolded the *Times* for publishing the stories it did: when told that these had appeared in other papers before the *Times*’ stories, Kennedy replied ‘It was not news until it appeared in the *Times*’.⁵⁵ A year later, Kennedy reversed his view, telling the publisher, Orvil Dryfoos,

that he wished the *Times* had published much more, to save him and the US from the catastrophic invasion. In May, a month after the invasion, the *Times* editorialised:

*the Cuban tragedy has raised a domestic question that is likely to come up again and again until it is solved. The cause may be something that is happening in Laos (or Vietnam?), in Central Africa or in Latin America, but the question remains the same: is a democratic government in an open society such as ours ever justified in deceiving its own people? A democracy – our democracy – cannot be lied to ... The basic principle involved is that of confidence.*⁵⁶

The ‘domestic question’ has not been solved: the leaks of the first two decades of the 2000s have made the question – ‘is a democratic government in an open society ... ever justified in deceiving its own people?’ – much more acute. In fact, American and other news media in democratic states did suppress much material during, and bearing on, the Cold War, and after.

* * *

From the early 1950s to the late 1980s, security services East and West were configured for and absorbed in the Cold War, in which they were the most active state players. Once the suspicious West had been convinced it was over, and both the turn to democracy by, and the ruinous state of, Russia had lulled them into believing that the state was no longer a threat, the intelligence services everywhere suffered from the cuts which the peace dividend brought. They feared that they would be seen by their political masters, and by the public, as unfit for any further purpose.

*A huge intelligence gathering machine had been built – men clamped with headphones in the far-flung corners of the planet, satellites scouring from space, dishes on earth picking up signals – all to try to provide a few precious moments of warning. ‘We lived on their networks’, was how one former British analyst described the way in which the US and the UK enmeshed themselves inside Soviet communications. But with the end of the Cold War, this vast bureaucracy seemed redundant.*⁵⁷

The decade of the 1990s was a perilous one for the agencies; their budgets were cut by up to one-third, and the Russian and other linguists pensioned off. They were saved from redundancy by the salience of

another zone of danger – proving to be, over the next decades, one much more unstable than that of the Cold War. As the end of the Cold War had not yet been officially stamped, in August 1990, Iraq invaded the neighbouring and tiny state of Kuwait – an attack for which GCHQ, with a small team in Kuwait, was able to give advance warning. Though the Iraqis were routed by a largely American force later that year, the Middle East and North Africa from then on grew steadily into the major preoccupation of Western intelligence. The next year, a vicious civil war broke out in Algeria as the regime fought to prevent the jihadist Islamic Salvation Front from enjoying the fruits of an election which it had won. In the same year the break-up of Yugoslavia sparked off wars on several fronts, into which the West – with reluctance – was finally dragged. These were hot, not cold, wars, and at that point did not seem to have, for the West, the existential stakes of the nuclear standoff. But they underscored the need for continuing flows of intelligence.

The Cold War was a single focus: the post-Cold War threats included continuing attention to terrorism, such as the IRA; an increased interest in organised crime, itself growing; and North African terrorism, especially in France. At the same time, scholars recognised that the weapons and technologies developed in the late twentieth century were two-edged – both protective and a threat. The former journalist and academic Peter Hennessy quotes several authorities in this context,⁵⁸ who saw that, as Sir Michael Howard put it, the triumph of liberal capitalism was ‘regarded with smouldering resentment’ in areas of social upheaval caused by the collapse of the bipolar world, a resentment which would ‘find expression not in traditional inter-state conflict but in horrific acts of terrorism directed against the most secure and prosperous regions of the developed world’;⁵⁹ while the Czech-born philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner, deeply knowledgeable about the societies of both Eastern Europe and the Middle East, wrote that millennial terrorist groups would strive for ever more destructive weapons, and use them against the Western targets and that ‘the present [i.e. early 1990s] increase in international terrorism offers a small but frightening foretaste, as yet on a moderate scale, of such a situation.’⁶⁰ The legal scholar and former US presidential aide Philip Bobbitt used his book *Terror and Consent* (Allen Lane, 2008) to make a sustained argument that WMD will become increasingly easily available, and that both these weapons and communications technologies used by secret services are also mastered and used by terrorist networks, to be turned against the democratic states which are the main object of their attacks.

The agencies, which had been able to assume substantial agreement on their mission and expense when deployed against an obvious enemy like the Soviet bloc, now had to pay more attention to securing public support, and thus reached out more to the news media in the hope of impressing them with the enduring need for their existence. It was in the 1990s that the British and the French services, traditionally limiting their contacts to a handful of trusted media, began to enlarge the tent containing those granted some insight into their work – naturally, that which underscored their efficiency and indispensability.

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