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Moles, Defectors, and Deceptions: James Angleton and CIA Counterintelligence

David Robarge

James Angleton, the longtime head of counterintelligence (CI) at the Central Intelligence Agency, is one of the few CIA officers known to even non-specialists of intelligence history. He shaped CIA counterintelligence for good and bad for 20 years from 1954 to 1974 – nearly half of its Cold War history. His excesses have been widely portrayed as paradigmatic of how *not* to conduct counterintelligence, yet more is known about his legend than his ideas, accomplishments, and true shortcomings. This essay will briefly survey what has been written about Angleton, what his counterintelligence world view was, how he acted on it in several prominent cases, and what his short- and long-term impact was on counterintelligence at the CIA. Angleton's legacy – real and perceived – still influences counterintelligence practices in the United States government and public perceptions of the CIA.

The Historians' Angleton

Historians and journalists have produced a workable bibliography about Angleton, although a comprehensive biography is still needed. This nonfiction corpus began appearing after Angleton's much publicized firing in 1974 generated extensive interest in the shadowy world of counterintelligence, and pro- and anti-Angleton voices made themselves heard.¹ Edward Jay Epstein, author of *Legend* and *Deception*,² became Angleton's most prolific ally in his post-dismissal, behind-the-scenes campaign for vindication. In *Legend*, Epstein first publicized the clashes inside the CIA over the bona fides of KGB defector Yuri Nosenko and drew attention to the "strategic deception" theories of Angleton and his prize source, KGB defector Anatoli Golitsyn. David C.

1 For titles and commentary on the most prominent of these works, see Cleveland Cram, *Of Moles and Molehunters: A Review of Counterintelligence Literature, 1977-92*, CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence Monograph CSI 93-002 (October 1993).

2 *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978); *Deception: The Invisible War Between the KGB and the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

Martin's *Wilderness of Mirrors*,³ now over 20 years old, remains the most balanced treatment of Angleton and CIA counterintelligence. It helped deflate the Angleton myth and established a more objective frame of reference within which to evaluate his suspicions about the Soviets. In *Cloak and Gown*,⁴ the late Yale history professor Robin Winks presented the most insightful biographical sketch of Angleton yet written, avoiding the sinister overtones and shallow psychologizing that mar other accounts.

Those are the main drawbacks of *Cold Warrior* by Tom Mangold,⁵ the most factually detailed study of Angleton so far. *Cold Warrior* is the "prosecution's brief" against him, and Mangold prepared as good a case as can be made. He concluded that counterintelligence in several Western services suffered at Angleton's hands – notably during his later career – when its practitioners most needed to exhibit intellectual honesty and operational discernment. The last major book on Angleton is *Molehunt* by David Wise, the doyen of intelligence journalists.⁶ Wise started a biography of Angleton, but when Mangold beat him to it, he salvaged his project by focusing on the search for "Sasha" – the alleged Soviet mole inside the CIA. Wise revealed details about the penetration agent, who did not damage the CIA nearly as much as Angleton feared or as the molehunt itself did (although Wise exaggerates in claiming that the search "shattered" the Agency).

The Fictional Angleton

Observers of American intelligence and the CIA have regarded Angleton as so influential that he has transcended mere history and entered the realm of historical fiction and even docudrama. However, literary license has obscured historical reality and made achieving an even-handed understanding of Angleton all the harder. Many misconceptions about him – including his alleged nickname – owe their currency to *Orchids for Mother* by Aaron Latham⁷ – an often outrageous *roman à clef* about the bureaucratic battle between counterintelligence chief "Francis Xavier Kimball" (Angleton) and Director of Central Intelligence "Ernest O'Hara" (William Colby). Two friends and admirers of Angleton, Arnaud de Borchgrave and Robert Moss, did him no

3 New York: Harper and Row, 1980.

4 *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 322-438.

5 *Cold Warrior: James Jesus Angleton: The CIA's Master Spy Hunter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

6 *Molehunt: The Secret Search for Traitors that Shattered the CIA* (New York: Random House, 1992).

7 Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.

favor with *The Spike*,⁸ a far-fetched conspiracist tale of a counterintelligence sage, dismissed from service, who uses revelations from a high-level KGB defector to save the United States from an evil Kremlin plot that employs Soviet agents infiltrated throughout the U.S. Government.

William F. Buckley's contribution to the Angleton fiction genre, *Spytime*,⁹ is far inferior to his entertaining Blackford Oakes stories. He appropriates most of Latham's motifs and perpetuates some of its misinformation. His Angleton is charmless and uninteresting; the real one was anything but. Reviewers have touted Robert Littell as "the American le Carré," but his latest effort, *The Company*,¹⁰ suggests that the United States has far to go. This bloated saga of the CIA propagates much folklore about Angleton, whose idiosyncracies therein occasionally border on the unintentionally comical, and the idea that the CI Staff chief could order the imprisonment and torture of an Agency officer suspected of being a Soviet mole is preposterous.

So far, the only cinematic portrayal of Angleton has been in *Yuri Nosenko, KGB*, a made-for-television movie shown in the United Kingdom and the United States in 1986. The well-staged film tells the Nosenko story from the viewpoint of the CIA case officer who initially ran him but, when confronted with Angleton's Golitsyn-inspired suspicions, turns on the defector and tries to "break" him. It avoids melodrama, gets most of the atmospherics and personalities right, and features remarkable look-alikes for Angleton and Richard Helms. Some historical and tradecraft errors will be apparent to more knowledgeable viewers.¹¹

Myths About Angleton

Sometimes we know more about the myths that surround a man than about the man who spawned the myths. One operations officer recalled that Angleton was "seldom seen but with an awesome reputation nurtured ... by word of mouth."¹² Among the most persistent legends about Angleton are:

8 New York: Crown Publishers, 1980.

9 *Spytime: The Undoing of James Jesus Angleton* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).

10 Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002.

11 According to *Variety*, a fictionalized Angleton will be the main character of a forthcoming movie by Universal Pictures, *The Good Shepherd*. Leonard DiCaprio will play James Wilson, an idealistic Yale graduate who joins the CIA at the dawn of the Cold War and endures forty years of professional risk and personal strife.

12 David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch* (London: Robert Hale, 1978), 189.

He was paranoid.—Only Richard Nixon is so labeled as routinely.¹³ However, no reliable professional or lay expert in psychiatry or psychology has gone on record diagnosing Angleton as clinically paranoid or psychologically unfit for duty. There are less malign explanations for his obsessive approach to whatever interested him – whether it was hunting spies or raising orchids – his intellectual rigidity, and his sometimes-aberrant behavior.

Soviet operations were shut down during the molehunt.—It has often been asserted – for example, by the three chiefs of the CIA’s Soviet Division in the 1960s, all critics of Angleton – that Angleton’s suspicion that the KGB had penetrated the CIA paralyzed US espionage efforts against the Soviet union for many years.¹⁴ Other officers with comparable access who were more sympathetic to Angleton, however, deny those claims. They point out that the large Soviet Division – with around 900 staffers, including over 600 posted overseas¹⁵ – continued to handle defectors and run new operations while its recruits were under greater CI scrutiny and some of its officers were under investigation. Other projects were terminated, but not necessarily because Angleton objected; throughout the 1960s, the Soviet espionage division dropped a number of unproductive activities as part of a change in emphases, particularly after a leadership shakeup in the late 1960s. Moreover, Angleton had no unilateral authority to veto a recruitment or defection. He could and sometimes did, however, decline to pass on potentially actionable information he had obtained if he deemed it unverifiable or counterfeit.¹⁶

13 Representative of such characterizations is this one from David Wise: “[Angleton] was ... warped, a tortured and twisted man who saw conspiracy and deception as the natural order of things. His mind ... was a hopeless bramble of false trails and switchbacks, an intricate maze to nowhere.” *Molehunt*, 295.

14 John Maury: “[w]e never had a successful Soviet operation that Angleton and his crowd didn’t cast some doubt on” (quoted in Burton Hersh, “In the Hall of Mirrors: The Cold War’s Distorted Images,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 1991, M2); Rolf Kingsley: “[w]hen I took over, the place had simply quit working ... [it] was only going through the motions” (quoted in Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 264); William Colby: “we seemed to be putting more emphasis on the KGB as CIA’s adversary than on the Soviet Union as the United States’ adversary” (*Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978], 245.)

15 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 249.

16 Most prominent among those squelched sources – and the only two regularly cited in published accounts – were NICK NACK, a GRU officer who reported to the CIA and FBI in the early 1960s and in 1972, and KITTYHAWK, a KGB walk-in who in 1966 seemed to corroborate Golitsyn’s leads about the mole in the Agency. NICK NACK provided 20 “serials” that, when acted upon after Angleton left, helped uncover GRU espionage in France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Angleton

DCIs gave him a “no-knock” privilege.— The notion that Angleton could enter the Director of Central Intelligence’s office any time unannounced is a corridor legend. Of course senior Agency managers regularly drop by each other’s offices without an appointment, and Allen Dulles, one of Angleton’s closest associates, encouraged much informal communication. It stretches the point, however, to turn that into an entitlement to barge into the DCI’s inner sanctum without notice. In addition, John McCone, under whom Angleton worked for over three years, was a strict chain-of-command, by-the-calendar executive who did not tolerate such intrusions.

He ordered Nosenko’s incarceration.—Yuri Nosenko, the KGB counterintelligence officer who defected to the United States in February 1964 and was subjected to hostile interrogation for nearly four years, was the responsibility of the Soviet Division, not Angleton’s CI Staff. Senior executives of that division, who along with Angleton suspected Nosenko was a plant, recommended that the Russian be placed in increasingly harsh solitary confinement to force him to confess. The Office of Security took charge of the Spartan physical conditions under which Nosenko was kept. Had the case been his, Angleton would not have “sweated” the alleged provocateur. Instead, he would have tried to play Nosenko back against the Soviets, or at least would have let him go to find out whom he contacted in the United States. That said, Angleton did not object to Nosenko’s treatment, and once the defector’s confinement began, Angleton advised the Soviet Division about the interrogations (he did not question Nosenko directly).¹⁷

He was nicknamed “Mother.”— No Agency officer this writer has consulted who knew Angleton or worked with others who did can recall anyone ever calling him that.¹⁸ Angleton’s other supposed monikers – including “Virginia Slim,” “Skinny Jim,” “the Gray Ghost,” “the Black Knight,” “the Orchid Man,” “the Fisherman,” and “Scarecrow” – were uttered (if at all) only in men’s room and corridor chit-chats or were attached to him in later years by imaginative interviewees.

thought KITTYHAWK was a provocateur whose reporting about the mole – by then already identified – was a giveaway to establish his credentials. Notwithstanding Angleton’s reservations, the CIA and the FBI used KITTYHAWK in a complicated playback scheme that went badly awry (the Shadrin case). Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, 191-92; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 340-44, 409-10; Wise, *Molehunt*, 195-97.

17 Samuel Halpern and Hayden Peake, “Did Angleton Jail Nosenko?,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 3 (Winter 1989): 451-64.

18 The idea first appeared in 1973 in articles by former CIA operator Miles Copeland, and Aaron Latham borrowed and popularized it.

Facts About Angleton

The real Angleton is captivating enough without all the apocrypha that has been attached to him.

He had a brilliant intellect and unparalleled knowledge of Soviet operations.—A coworker of Angleton's once remarked that "Jim had the ability to raise an operational discussion not only to a higher level but to another dimension," and even Angleton's detractors recognize that "no one could compete with him as an expert on [the KGB's worldwide covert political role]."¹⁹ Angleton's knowledge of Soviet secret operations was encyclopedic, and he was renowned for his esoteric, often seemingly impenetrable, oral exegeses on Moscow's clandestine activities.

He had unorthodox work habits and behaviors.—Here the caricature of Angleton most closely approaches reality. He was tall, thin, and stooped; had a gaunt and pale face distinguished by a chisel nose and a wide mouth; wore oversized, heavy-framed glasses, black suits, homburgs, and floppy overcoats; and drove an old black Mercedes Benz sedan.²⁰ He arrived at the CI Staff's suite late in the morning and left late in the evening. His curtain-shrouded office was dimly lit, hazy with cigarette smoke, and full of scattered files and papers. His lunch "hour" often lasted well into the afternoon, spent at restaurants mainly in Washington with liaison partners, operational contacts, and professional colleagues. His capacity for food (despite his wraith-like appearance) and liquor was remarkable, and toward the end of his career he probably was an alcoholic. His dinners, often eaten late into the evening, were commonly work-related. He was an insomniac who passed what was left of his time in an odd assortment of hobbies: raising orchids, crafting items from gold, leather, and semiprecious gems, fly fishing, poker playing, reading poetry, and watching movies (he liked Westerns and Italian films).

He was secretive and suspicious.—Angleton enveloped himself and his staff in an aura of mystery, hinting at knowledge of dark secrets and hidden intrigues too sensitive to share. He often sat silent through operational meetings and shared his information selectively with only a chosen few whom he had

19 Richard Helms with William Hood, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Random House, 2003), 276; [John Hart,] "The Monster Plot," June 1978, 178, in Yuri Nosenko FBI Freedom of Information Act File No. 65-68530, section 6.

20 Former operations officer David Atlee Phillips offered this evocative memory of Angleton: "I watched Angleton as he shuffled down the hall, six feet tall, his shoulders stooped as if supporting an enormous incubus of secrets ... extremely thin, he was once described as 'a man who looks like his ectoplasm has run out.'" *The Night Watch*, 239.

indoctrinated personally. He took standard compartmentation practices to an extreme, using safes and vaults to hide hundreds of linear feet of files and papers that he never integrated into the regular operations records system.²¹ He was reclusive; some of his employees recall never meeting him personally even after several years. He often bypassed Agency channels, cultivating private relationships with sources and foreign services independent of the area divisions.

He was fervently anti-communist and pro-Israel.—Angleton believed that Moscow controlled the international communist movement, which, despite later evidence to the contrary, to him was monolithic and bent on world domination by any means. Angleton handled the Israeli operations account within the CI Staff without involvement by the Agency's Near East Division. Angleton knew some of the new state of Israel's leaders from World War II as members of the Zionist underground in Italy, started the sensitive liaison relationship in 1952, and held onto it until 1974. It afforded him important counterintelligence information about possible Soviet plants among Russian Jewish émigrés to Israel, and also his first big intelligence coup – a copy of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 denouncing Stalin, which the Israelis obtained from Polish contacts.²²

He never used his middle name "Jesus."—An Anglophile who attended an English private school and Yale, Angleton felt somewhat ashamed by that prominent reminder of his half-Mexican parentage. When he filled out a U.S. government personnel form in 1949, he left out his middle name,²³ and he always signed documents only with "James Angleton" (in a crabbed, slightly shaky script that would fascinate graphologists).

He was not a Soviet case officer.—Notwithstanding Angleton's profound knowledge of Soviet intelligence affairs, he never handled a Soviet agent until Anatoli Golitsyn beginning in 1963. His CI Staff, which at one time had a few hundred employees, was surprisingly thin on Soviet field expertise and had few

21 David H. Blee (Chief, Counterintelligence Staff) memorandum to Chief, Information Management Staff, "CI Staff Record Study," 29 November 1976, declassified in 2000, copy in author's possession.

22 Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 422-23. The Israeli government acknowledged its special tie to Angleton by dedicating two monuments to him: one on a battlefield near Jerusalem and the other near the King David Hotel in the city center. Andy Court, "Spy Chiefs Honour a CIA Friend," *Jerusalem Post*, 5 December 1987.

23 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 46. If Angleton had used his middle name, he would have pronounced it in its Spanish form "hay-soos," not "gee-zuss," as nearly everyone else does when saying it.

Russian linguists (Angleton was not one). These weaknesses, combined with the CIA's continual paucity of good Soviet sources during the early Cold War, left Angleton and his shop vulnerable to the manipulations of a useful but self-promoting and manipulative defector such as Golitsyn.

A Career in Counterintelligence, 1943-1974

Angleton was professionally born into counterintelligence and stayed in that enterprise his entire career, including during the several years at the end of and just after World War II when he also managed espionage and covert action operations.

Angleton's Curriculum Vita

- Office of Strategic Services (OSS), X-2 Italian desk in London, 1943-44; X-2 detachment in Italy, 1944-45
- Strategic Services Unit and Central Intelligence Group, Italy, 1945-47
- CIA, Office of Special Operations, 1947-52
- Directorate of Plans, Special Projects Staff, 1952-54
- Chief, Counterintelligence Staff, 1954-74

OSS's Formative Influence on Angleton

The impact that working in the Office of Strategic Service's counterintelligence branch, X-2, had on Angleton can hardly be overemphasized. X-2 was the only OSS component cleared to receive raw ULTRA material, which Angleton called "the superior source" that provided the foundation for OSS's counterintelligence operations.²⁴ Because ULTRA was so sensitive, X-2 from its inception had a culture of intense security and secrecy. It had its own overseas stations separate from regular OSS bases, a dedicated communications channel, and independent liaison relationships with British intelligence. X-2 could veto without explanation operations that OSS espionage and covert action elements proposed. These characteristics of X-2 instilled in Angleton his

²⁴ Timothy J. Naftali, "ARTIFICE: James Angleton and X-2 Operations in Italy," in *The Secrets War: The Office of Strategic Services in World War II*, ed. George C. Chalou (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), 222.

sometimes-exaggerated need-to-know psychology. In addition, while in London, Angleton became privy to the Double Cross and FORTITUDE deceptions that were preparing the way for the cross-channel invasion. This knowledge was a major reason for his belief in Soviet “strategic deception” (see below).

Aptly codenamed ARTIFICE, Angleton ran penetration and double agent operations in Italy, initially from London and later in country. He was an innovative, activist field operative and rose from his initial position as head of X-2’s unit in Rome to, at war’s end, chief of all X-2 activities in Italy. He cultivated contacts with Italian intelligence – whom Allied services had previously shunned as former enemies – reported on political machinations in Rome and the Vatican, and devised ways to make ULTRA information usable by U.S. Army counterintelligence officers who were not cleared to see the raw intercepts.

After the OSS was disbanded in October 1945, Angleton stayed in uniform in Italy to run operations for the OSS’s caretaker successors. One of his key jobs after transitioning into the CIA’s espionage and counterintelligence component was liaison with Western services. Because the new Agency relied so heavily on its intelligence partners, the young Angleton (barely thirty) already was at the heart of its business. A few years later, he became the CIA’s first counterintelligence chief.

Angleton’s CIA Patrons

One of the principal reasons why Angleton survived the controversies he generated for so long was that until the very end of his career he enjoyed support and protection from the Directors of Central Intelligence under whom he worked. Angleton spent nearly three fourths of his service as CI Staff chief under two DCIs, Allen Dulles and Richard Helms. They served longer than any others – nearly nine and seven years, respectively – and were powerful and highly regarded inside the Agency. Both knew and respected Angleton from their OSS days, thought him the officer best equipped to fathom the arcane world of double agents and disinformation, and largely shielded him from recrimination. Both believed counterintelligence was vital to effective espionage and covert action. In late 1954, Dulles made it a priority by centralizing it in the new Counterintelligence Staff. He and Angleton became good friends and often drove home from work together.

Helms was not personally as close to Angleton but professionally was of the same mind toward him and counterintelligence as was Dulles. In his recently published memoir, Helms approvingly quoted an observation he heard early in his career from an X-2 veteran – “no intelligence service can for very long be any better than its counterintelligence component” – and he said that his

greatest fear as DCI was that the KGB had penetrated the CIA.²⁵ Although he acknowledged that Angleton “went overboard from time to time,”²⁶ with few exceptions he let Angleton have his way. Lastly, John McCone – the DCI during the early 1960s, a pivotal time in Angleton’s career – was not knowledgeable of counterintelligence and deferred to him and Helms, at the time the director of operations and Angleton’s boss. He could hardly have asked for more congenial superiors during the most important periods of his career.

Angleton’s Counterintelligence Credo

Angleton has been quoted as saying, “if you control counterintelligence, you control the intelligence service.”²⁷ His philosophy of this often-misunderstood discipline comprised three fundamental tenets:

The Soviets will exploit Western vulnerabilities to penetration.—The distinctive characteristics of liberal democracies – openness, individualism, privacy, suspicion of authority and secrecy – leave them susceptible to counterintelligence attack. Recruits to intelligence services are inadequately screened, employees are insufficiently scrutinized, information is shared too widely within secret agencies and discussed too broadly on the outside, and hostile services have too many avenues of access to intelligence personnel and facilities. The Soviets will take advantage of these conditions to run penetration and deception operations against Western services for the long-range purpose of beguiling Western governments about Soviet capabilities and intentions.

Espionage and covert action operations cannot work without strong counterintelligence support.—Many operators often do not accept this truism because they see counterintelligence as a hindrance to recruiting and running sources. As they cast their nets for new agents, spyhandlers are willing to risk pulling in a few bad ones, relying on their own abilities at “asset validation” without having Headquarters counterspies second-guess them. The reluctance to accept guidance from CI professionals is more acute in the field, where officers are particularly independent-minded, and was most intense in the Soviet Division, where Angleton believed the mole had burrowed. This institutional resentment partly explains the charge that Angleton paralyzed Soviet operations during the molehunt.

Counterintelligence operations and analysis must be centralized.—Angleton believed that counterintelligence could not reliably be dispersed throughout the

25 Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder*, 154; Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 52.

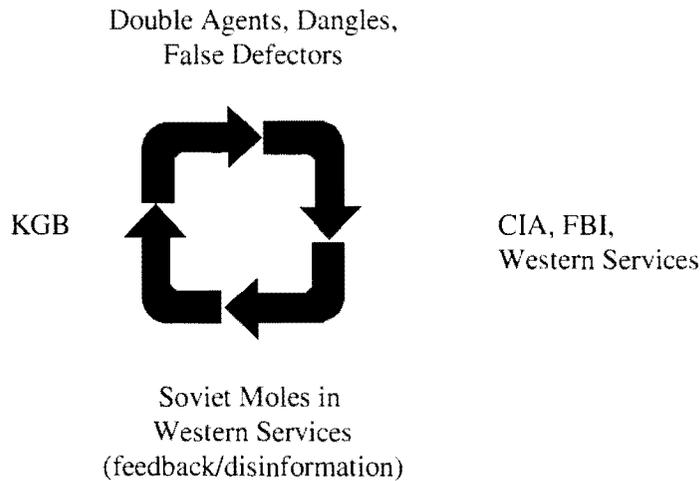
26 Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder*, 277.

27 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 47.

area divisions but needed to be consolidated in a separate component, staffed by full-time, experienced CI officers, and with access to the DCI. Only such an entity would have the bureaucratic clout to ensure that counterintelligence received the attention it deserved, attracted the quality of personnel needed to carry out its complex work, and was not hindered by competition and lack of communication among division-level CI units.

Soviet Strategic Deception: Theory and Reality

The “wilderness of mirrors,” an expression that Angleton borrowed from the poet T.S. Eliot, has become a cliché for counterintelligence generally and Angleton’s idiosyncratic view of Soviet operations specifically. To Angleton, the “wilderness” was the “myriad of stratagems, deceptions, artifices, and all the other devices of disinformation which the Soviet Bloc and its coordinated intelligence services use to confuse and split the West ... producing an ever-fluid landscape where fact and illusion merge.” The following diagram depicts how Angleton saw the Soviets practicing “strategic deception,” which was his catch phrase for the Soviet counterintelligence threat:



By penetrating the CIA and other Western services, the Soviets could do far more than just spy on them. The moles would serve a second role as agents of influence, sowing deceptions that would enable Moscow to manipulate those services and, by extension, their governments. Fake defectors would peddle phony intelligence, support each other’s bona fides, backstop operations the West was running unaware they were bad, and send its spyhunters down false trails. Meanwhile, the moles inside would report back on how the bogus

information was being received in the targeted services. Moscow Center would then fine tune the message and continue the cycle. The principal agency for carrying out this alleged conspiracy was a KGB disinformation department created in the late 1950s that first came to the CIA's attention in 1961 in a defector debriefing that Golitsyn confirmed and elaborated upon.²⁸

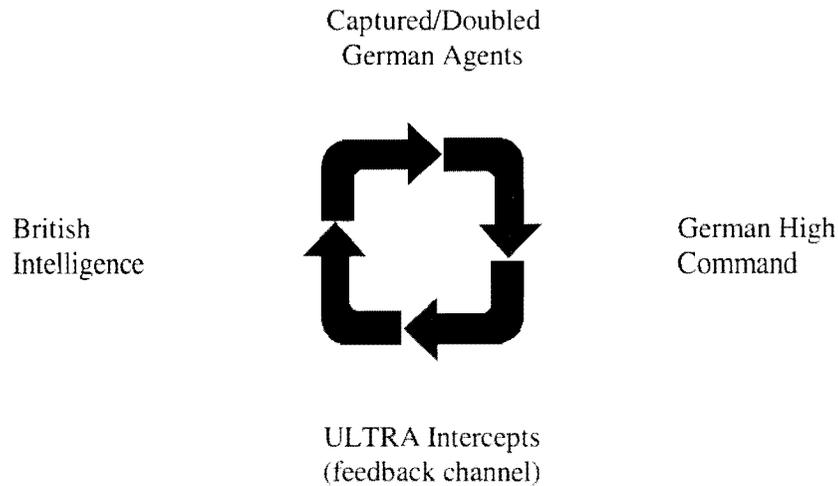
What was the strategic purpose of this elaborate subterfuge? To gull the West into complacency; to trick Western governments into believing that the Soviet Union was weaker and more benign than it really was, and that international Communism was a fractured movement and not a monolith. Angleton's detractors dubbed this theory "the Monster Plot" and accused him of willfully ignoring reality, notably Yugoslav leader Josef Tito's break with Moscow and the Sino-Soviet split. Although early opinion inside the Agency and the U.S. Government was sharply divided over how to interpret signs of Russian-Chinese estrangement,²⁹ by the mid-1960s only a few holdouts – Angleton among them – still denied or downplayed extensive evidence that the split was deep and would last.

Angleton was an intellectual and a theoretician, but he also had a strong sense of history, as any good counterintelligence officer should. Contrary to the misconception that Angleton's counterintelligence world was largely based on delusion, he had a substantial empirical base on which to ground his "wilderness of mirrors" idea:

The Normandy invasion.—From his vantage point in X-2, Angleton saw first-hand how a strategic deception worked. The process used in the Double Cross and FORTITUDE operations followed his model almost precisely.

28 "The Monster Plot," 114-16. CIA first heard about the KGB disinformation unit from Polish intelligence officer Michal Goleniewski – a walk-in source of the CIA's beginning in 1959 – who had dealt with the KGB on *dezinformatsiya* matters since 1953. Although he was not the first Agency asset to refer to the practice of disinformation, Goleniewski was the first to emphasize the role that Soviet counterintelligence officers played in disseminating it.

29 CIA analysts first began describing differences between Moscow and Beijing in the early 1950s and were more forward leaning than many counterparts in the U.S. Intelligence Community and the CIA's operations directorate. These skeptics believed that the early evidence of a split was too sketchy, too inferential, and too contrary to other signs of continued cooperation. They also believed that one of the major irritants in bilateral relations, animosity between Khrushchev and Mao, was eliminated with the Soviet leader's ouster in 1964, and that afterward mutual interest would bring the communist powers back together. Harold P. Ford, "Calling the Sino-Soviet Split," *Studies in Intelligence*, Winter 1998-1999, 57-72.



The controlling organization – British intelligence – played back captured German agents against the *Wehrmacht* to disinform it about Allied invasion plans. The ULTRA intercepts, rather than a mole, provided the feedback channel that told British intelligence that the German High Command believed the false information the double agents were being forced to send.

Soviet deception operations.—Turning to the current enemy, Angleton knew that the Soviets had badly tricked Western services twice in sophisticated, very similar “false flag” operations run thirty years apart: the Trust³⁰ and WiN.³¹ A

30 Successive Soviet intelligence services ran the Trust from 1921 to 1927 against White Russian émigré groups abroad. The program used a bogus anti-Bolshevik organization (the Monarchist Association of Central Russia) to penetrate, control, and disrupt the intelligence and political activities of more than one million expatriate dissidents, principally in Germany, France, and Poland. The Trust also hoodwinked the intelligence services of Great Britain, France, Poland, the Baltic states, and Finland into financially supporting it, fed them disinformation, and fooled them into disclosing their White Russian and other anti-Soviet contacts.

31 In the early 1950s, the Soviets used a formerly authentic dissident group in Poland – Wolność i Niepodległość (“Freedom and Independence” and known by its acronym WiN) – that had been penetrated by the Polish security service to monitor Western intelligence personnel, plans, and activities. Western intelligence services thought that in 1947 the Soviets had eliminated resistance groups operating inside Poland. A Polish agent dispatched to London claimed that WiN – formerly a remnant of the Polish Home Army – had survived, however, and soon the CIA and MI-6 were airdropping money, ordnance, and radios to supposed WiN elements all over Poland.

strong believer in the importance of history as a counterintelligence tool,³² Angleton used the Trust as a case study from which CI Staff members could learn about Soviet deception methods. Moscow's disclosure of the WiN operation in 1951 embarrassed Washington and London, and gave impetus within the CIA to develop a stronger counterintelligence capability. The CI Staff came into existence barely a year later.

Real spies.—Angleton's measure of the intelligence threat Moscow posed to the West also derived from his knowledge of extensive Soviet espionage operations in Europe and America before and during World War II, and in the early years of the Cold War.

The *Rote Kapelle* ("Red Orchestra") – the highly effective Soviet military intelligence network that spied on Germany during World War II – was Angleton's main case study for teaching his staffers about Soviet espionage operations.³³ The *Rote Kapelle* comprised an extensive array of cells in Germany, conquered France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland that penetrated key military and political offices in Nazi Germany.

Angleton used the *Rote Kapelle* as a framework for understanding what he learned from the VENONA material. He was among the first, and very few, CIA officers to be read into that highly compartmented SIGINT operation against Soviet intelligence organizations in the United States. From VENONA, he found out that the Soviets had placed over 200 agents and sources inside the U.S. Government, the Manhattan Project, defense industries, and the media.

The KGB also penetrated many early CIA clandestine operations launched against the Soviet Bloc – for example, the REDSOX program and the "regime change" program in Albania. The Soviets knew that the CIA looked for potential agents in displaced persons camps and émigré communities, so it dispatched bogus refugees to be "recruited" or enlisted the émigrés' services first. KGB mole Harold "Kim" Philby – MI-6's liaison in Washington – revealed to Moscow many intelligence projects that the CIA was running in tandem with the British.

Lastly, the "Years of the Spies" from 1959 to 1963 – one of the bleakest periods in Cold War counterintelligence history – showed to Angleton that the Soviets had badly penetrated several Western services and gained crucial

32 Angleton's first venture into writing intelligence history came after World War II, when he prepared detailed studies of German intelligence units for use in interrogations or possible war crimes trials.

33 One of them has been published as *The Rote Kapelle: The CIA's History of Soviet Intelligence and Espionage Networks in Western Europe, 1936-1945* (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1979).

knowledge of their HUMINT and SIGINT capabilities. For several years, one intelligence disaster compounded another:

- 1959 Pyotr Popov (CIA source in GRU) arrested
- 1960 Martin and Mitchell (NSA officers) defect to USSR
- 1961 George Blake (KGB mole in MI-6) arrested
Portland Ring in United Kingdom rolled up
- 1962 Heinz Felfe (KGB mole in BND) arrested
Oleg Penkovsky (CIA source in GRU) arrested
- 1963 Philby (MI-6) and Hamilton (NSA) defect to USSR
Jack Dunlap (GRU source in NSA) commits suicide before arrest
Stig Wennerstrom (GRU spy in Swedish military) arrested
Profumo Affair (involving GRU “honey trap”) in UK disclosed

Why worry about a mole in the CIA? As of the early 1960s Angleton did not know for sure that the Soviets currently had penetrated the CIA, but to him the absence of evidence was not evidence of absence. If the Soviets had placed agents inside most other Western services, why not in the CIA also? The fact that the Soviets in the 1950s had “turned” the Agency’s first operative in Moscow³⁴ heightened Angleton’s fear that the KGB probably had put someone else inside the CIA at some point. Secondly, Angleton had become ever more aware throughout the 1950s that he had unwittingly divulged secrets to his friend “Kim” Philby, especially during long, alcohol-laced meals. If Philby had deceived Angleton – the most perceptive counterintelligence officer at the CIA – far less discerning minds could be tricked all the easier. Finally, without high-level assets and sensitive SIGINT inside Russia, the CIA could not find out if it had been penetrated or not. Angleton believed the Agency should err on the side of security by presuming penetration and trying to prove it had not occurred. Present lack of proof proved nothing.

That said, the idea that Angleton spent his career on an Ahab-like quest for moles is incorrect. He did not question the bona fides of the Agency’s earlier Soviet sources like Pyotr Popov, or allege that defectors enticed through the Iron Curtain under the REDCAP program or who fled after Stalin’s death were dispatched to deceive the CIA. Nor did Angleton, as has often been claimed, doubt all along that Oleg Penkovsky was genuine; according to the head of the Soviet Division in mid-1962, he said that “this was undoubtedly the most

34 Wise, *Molehunt*, 45-47; Richard Harris Smith, “The First Moscow Station: An Espionage Footnote to Cold War History,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 3 (Winter 1989): 340-43.

important case that we [have] had for years.”³⁵ Angleton’s fixation on the mole started around 1960, after Popov’s then-unexplained compromise; the KGB’s apparent redoubling of a key CIA source on its operations (Goleniewski); and the Soviets’ evident awareness of an extremely close-hold operation by the West Germans to “pitch” a Polish intelligence officer in Switzerland.³⁶

Dueling Defectors

No event influenced Angleton’s career and shaped perceptions of him more than the defections of KGB officers Anatoli Golitsyn and Yuri Nosenko in 1961 and 1964, respectively. Their stories have been thoroughly recounted elsewhere, but a bit of background is needed to make sense of Angleton’s attitude toward either turncoat.

Golitsyn, a mid-ranking KGB espionage officer, defected at a fortuitous time for the CIA, still reeling from the Bay of Pigs disaster. He was the first KGB staffer to change sides since 1954 and initially provided a trove of useful intelligence, but then began making sensational allegations about Soviet moles and deceptions that caused years of disarray in several Western services. His CIA and FBI handlers put up with his arrogance and irascibility because after Popov’s compromise and Goleniewski’s loss of access, the CIA had no well-placed current sources on Soviet intelligence activities, and its best stock of information on the KGB was at least seven years old.³⁷ Golitsyn’s reporting, extensive in its own right, soared in value in the absence of other comparable HUMINT.

35 Jerrold L. Schechter and Peter S. Deriabin, *The Spy Who Saved the World: How a Soviet Colonel Changed the Course of the Cold War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 204. Like others at the CIA, Angleton started to have doubts about Penkovsky after the U.S. Government learned the Russian had been arrested in September 1962. The CIA looked into the possibility that Penkovsky had been a controlled disinformation agent before and during the Cuban missile crisis. The idea was soon discounted, but Angleton – by then influenced by Golitsyn’s ideas – wrongly held on to that theory and added the twist that a Soviet mole inside the U.S. or British governments had compromised Penkovsky. *Ibid.*, 189, 194, 391-94.

36 Only a tiny handful of CIA officers knew about the West German plan. When Goleniewski reported that the KGB also was aware, to Angleton it was a clear sign that a source inside the CIA or the BND was responsible. Because it was never determined that either of the known Soviet spies inside the German service (Heinz Felfe and Hans Klemens) was to blame, Angleton had to accept the possibility that the mole was in the Agency. Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, 105-6; Thomas Powers, “Spook of Spooks,” *New York Review of Books*, 17 August 1989, 41.

37 From Peter Deriabin, who had defected in 1954. Penkovsky was still in place, but he was in the GRU and reported mostly on Soviet strategic and military subjects.

By early 1963, however, officers in the Soviet Division concluded that Golitsyn had nothing else to offer beyond his “analysis” of intelligence that U.S. and foreign services gave him. There was little resistance at Langley when Golitsyn accepted an invitation from Britain’s MI-5 to help it hunt Soviet agents in London. Angleton wanted Golitsyn back, however, and may have contrived (through a press leak in a British tabloid) to force him out of England. After Golitsyn returned to America in August 1963, Angleton – who had scrutinized his debriefings from the first – took over his case from the Soviet Division. Golitsyn was Angleton’s first “agent” and shared his baroque view of Moscow’s methods and intentions. With his reservoir of current information having run dry, however, Golitsyn began telling grandiose tales about Soviet strategic deception and making outlandish charges that prominent Americans and Britons were Kremlin spies.

Nosenko was the Agency’s first source on the structure and personnel of the KGB’s counterintelligence directorate who had actually worked in it. He first contacted the CIA in Geneva in June 1962 and was persuaded to work as an in-place asset. He next approached the CIA in January 1964 and, unlike before, said he wanted to defect. Between those encounters, serious doubts had arisen within the Soviet Division and the CI Staff about his bona fides, and extensive questioning following his defection seemed to support those suspicions. Nosenko created many problems for himself by repeatedly lying about his background and embellishing his information. Many of his leads seemed to be “giveaways” – information that the KGB no longer valued or that it judged had already been compromised – or were too vague to be acted upon.³⁸

Nosenko’s most startling disclosure – and the one that caused him (and the U.S. Government) the most grief – was that he had been the “case officer” of Lee Harvey Oswald, who had defected to the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1962 before returning to the United States to kill President John F. Kennedy. The information Nosenko provided about the Soviets’ reaction to and treatment of Oswald did not add up,³⁹ and his surprise decision to defect only three months

38 An FBI tally of the leads Nosenko provided in his early debriefings showed that out of 157 cases (63 concerning American citizens and 94 involving foreigners), 104 (52 in each category) were already known or suspected, unproductive or not yet active, lacked access to classified information, or could not be investigated because Nosenko’s knowledge was vague or ambiguous. Nosenko FBI FOIA File No. 65-68350, section 5.

39 Nosenko’s contention that Soviet intelligence had had no operational interest in Oswald seemed implausible, considering that the American had been stationed at an airbase in Japan involved in U-2 missions. Oswald’s comfortable living conditions in Minsk, his marriage to the niece of a Soviet army intelligence officer,

after the assassination with the news that Oswald was not a KGB hit man seemed contrived.

Perhaps the most important factor in what Angleton and like-minded Agency officers thought about Nosenko was Golitsyn's claim that Moscow would send provocateurs to discredit him and divert attention from the search for moles inside the CIA. Nosenko's reappearance with some information that contradicted Golitsyn turned an unusually snarled defector case into a counterintelligence contretemps with international import. With the United States still suffering from a national trauma and the Warren Commission inquiry into the assassination underway, the Agency had to determine whether the KGB had dispatched a false defector to hide the fact that Oswald was a Soviet-sponsored killer. "That made the Nosenko case so extraordinary and so different from all the others," Richard Helms said. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have done all the things we ended up doing."⁴⁰

What the Agency did was to confine Nosenko to a safe house and a detention cell for three and a half years under very austere conditions and subject him to hostile interrogation. There were serious flaws in the Soviet Division's handling of Nosenko – the interrogations and polygraphs of Nosenko were egregiously administered (though "drug free") – and with its and Angleton's evaluation of his bona fides, beginning with their prejudgment that he was a controlled contact. Among the most basic fallacies were these:

Deception was presumed, not proven. Because the Soviets had a reason to deceive and a record of penetration and deception, disinformation was inferred from any indication that it *might* be occurring through Nosenko. His small lies, exaggerations, and inconsistencies – typical of most defectors – were all interpreted as *big* lies and part of the deception plot.

Golitsyn was the only litmus test. Any variation from his information or interpretation – which were not always reliable or accurate, and sometimes were ludicrous – was deemed deception. The same applied to any sources that corroborated Nosenko (such as the FBI's cherished source at the United

and the circumstances of his return to the United States could be interpreted as suggesting that he had some tie to the KGB. None of Nosenko's information about Oswald and the KGB could be confirmed independently; nor would Nosenko, a counterintelligence officer, necessarily be able to say without reservation whether the KGB's foreign intelligence component had or had not recruited a particular individual. Nosenko's knowledge of Oswald is well summarized in Gerald Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (New York: Random House, 1993), 46-56.

40 Quoted in Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 151-52.

Nations, codenamed FEDORA): other indications notwithstanding, they had to be part of the plot, also.⁴¹

Additionally, Angleton blundered in letting Golitsyn review Nosenko's information. Having defectors evaluate later sources' authenticity was an old practice, but Golitsyn, for reasons of self-protection, had every interest in undermining Nosenko's credibility and of course concluded that Nosenko was a provocateur.

As David Wise pointed out years ago, there were several permutations to the question of Nosenko's bona fides, some of which neither Angleton nor any senior Agency officer evidently considered.⁴² First, Nosenko could have been a false defector carrying a false story about Oswald and the KGB. This was Angleton's view and the conventional wisdom at the CIA until the late 1960s. Second, Nosenko might have been a real defector who made up a story about Oswald to make himself seem a "bigger catch." Third, Nosenko could have been a genuine defector with accurate information about the Soviets' non-role in the Kennedy assassination. The FBI initially believed that in 1964, and the CIA (but not Angleton) concluded a few years later that Nosenko's information about Oswald was accurate. Lastly, Nosenko might have been a KGB agent dispatched to the United States to tell the truth that the Soviets had nothing to do with Oswald or the assassination. Moscow miscalculated, however, in thinking that the U.S. Government would find that story more believable if it came through clandestine channels from a "defector" with an attractive résumé.

Angleton's *idée fixe* prevented him from thinking this creatively. People possessing only a zero-sum mentality waged the duel over Golitsyn and Nosenko: both defectors could not be bona fide. KGB records, however, show that both were, and that they damaged Soviet operations so severely that the KGB slated them for assassination.⁴³

41 CIA officer Richards J. Heuer, Jr., incisively examines the flaws in the analysis of Nosenko's case in "Nosenko: Five Paths to Judgment," in *Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal, 1955-1992*, ed. H. Bradford Westerfield (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 379-414.

42 "Epstein's Thesis Hints of KGB Entanglements," *Washington Star*, 23 April 1978, G5.

43 Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 184-86, 367-68. Nosenko was later vindicated (at least partly) after the Deputy DCI, to whom DCI Helms had delegated the case, assigned it to the Office of Security. Using an analytical methodology that tended to explain away Nosenko's inconsistencies and inaccuracies – the converse of the approach that Angleton and the Soviet Division had taken – the Office of Security concluded that Nosenko's detractors had

The Molehunt

Angleton's notorious "search for Sasha" combined methodological and psychological elements that proved incompatible and destructive. First was the fundamental dilemma in counterintelligence of proving the negative: just because a mole has not been found does not mean one is not there. Added to that insoluble quandary were Angleton's obsessive personality, intense animosity toward the Soviet Union, and feeling of betrayal by Philby.⁴⁴ Given that the KGB had the means, motive, and opportunity to run a strategic deception using penetration agents and disinformers, Angleton – once Golitsyn provided him the leads he needed – would not be deterred from finding one of them inside the CIA.

The molehunt has been described thoroughly by Wise and Mangold and will not be rehashed here. Some points need to be made or underscored, however. The molehunt gained momentum from mid-1963 to late 1964 for what in retrospect seem justifiable reasons. First, during that period Philby defected and at least five cases of Soviet espionage by U.S. military personnel and a defense contractor had resulted in arrests or were under investigation.⁴⁵ Second, and the most unexplored or underemphasized factor, was the possible connection between the Kennedy assassination, Nosenko's defection, and the mole.

The argument linking them went like this: Soviet complicity in killing Kennedy could not yet be ruled out because Nosenko's information that Oswald was not a KGB agent had not been verified. If the Kremlin had gone so far as to murder an American president, it almost certainly would attempt to manipulate the investigation of the crime to conceal KGB involvement. To do so, the Soviets would use the same asset inside CIA who was part of the strategic deception program Golitsyn had described. In this role, the mole

not proven their argument: "it is not considered that based on all available information a conclusion that Nosenko is or is not a bona fide defector can be incontrovertibly substantiated at this time." [Bruce Solie.] "Yuri Ivanovich NOSENKO," 19 June 1967, declassified 1994, in John F. Kennedy Assassination Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, record number 104-10150-10026. Nosenko was then released under supervision, resettled, compensated, and hired as a contractor lecturing CIA officers on counterintelligence.

44 Angleton's reaction to Philby's perfidy was so severe that he burned the memoranda describing his three dozen meetings with his erstwhile friend and confidante. Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 67-68.

45 Lawrence P. Jepson II, *The Espionage Threat*, Defense Intelligence Agency publication no. DOS-2400-219-88, September 1988, 41-42; Stan A. Taylor and Daniel Snow, "Cold War Spies: Why They Spied and How They Got Caught," *Intelligence and National Security* 12 (April 1997), appendix.

would support the credibility of a false defector sent to report that Oswald had no tie to the KGB. Nosenko suddenly appeared, with an unverifiable legend covering the years when Oswald was in the Soviet Union supposedly having no contact with the KGB. As Golitsyn had warned, some of Nosenko's information contradicted his own – including that about a mole in the CIA. The all-too-convenient timing of Nosenko's reappearance confirmed Angleton's suspicion that Moscow had penetrated the Agency, and gave all the more incentive to act on Golitsyn's leads about the mole's identity.

Angleton should not, however, have let Golitsyn see operational and personnel files to help with the hunt. That was contamination, not corroboration, and it played into Golitsyn's hands: he would claim that he had almost uncovered the mole, but if he could just see a few more files, he could be sure. Despite the bad methodology, a mole was found, and he fit Golitsyn's profile, but he was never apprehended.⁴⁶ Because he was not as senior or as damaging as Angleton and Golitsyn had thought and was no longer working for the CIA, the search continued for the "primary mole" still inside Langley. Along the way, forty Agency officers were put on the suspect list and fourteen were thoroughly investigated. Although innocent, they had their careers damaged by the "security stigma." Suspects in CI cases never are really exonerated; the best they can usually hope for is what is known in British courts as a Scotch verdict – "not proven guilty."

Messy Cases

Similar or worse things happened in counterintelligence investigations in other countries that Angleton, armed with Golitsyn's information, instigated or

46 According to Golitsyn, the mole used the codename "Sasha," was of Slavic origin, had a surname beginning with "K" and ending in "ski" or "sky," had been recruited around 1950, and was stationed in Germany for several years. The CIA determined that "Sasha" was a Russian émigré named Aleksandr Kopatzky. An ex-Nazi spy who worked for the OSS, Kopatzky became a Soviet agent in 1949 and was "recruited" by the CIA two years later. He served as a contract employee supporting operations in West Germany during the 1950s. Through his involvement in Agency attempts to recruit Soviets and encourage defections, he was well positioned to compromise operations, disclose agent identities and tradecraft secrets, and facilitate KGB dangles. He fell under suspicion by the end of the decade (before Golitsyn's defection) after an unusually high percentage of his cases went bad, and the CIA dismissed him in 1961. After he was identified, the FBI investigated him off and on until he died in 1982. Wise, *Molehunt*, chaps. 13 and 19; David E. Murphy, "Sasha Who?," *Intelligence and National Security* 8 (January 1993): 102-7; idem, "The Hunt for 'Sasha' Is Over," *CIRA Newsletter* 25 (Fall 2000): 11-15; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 148-49, 176-78.

encouraged. The cases all demonstrate the reality that counterintelligence cases are rarely neat. Those in the United Kingdom and France are well known and will not be reexamined here. What is striking is the variance in Golitsyn's accuracy in the two instances: he wildly overstated in the first, and he was too restrained in the second; KGB documents show that the "Sapphire" ring in France was more extensive than he ever claimed, but his charges could not be proven at the time.⁴⁷

In Norway and Canada, there were parallels to what Angleton and Golitsyn contended about Soviet penetrations of the CIA. Moles were found, but they were not the people initially suspected and investigated based on leads that Angleton provided. In Norway, Ingeborg Lygren, a secretary to the director of Norwegian military intelligence, was arrested and jailed for three months before being released for lack of prosecutable evidence. Her name arose when Golitsyn was reviewing the personnel file (he got it from Angleton) of a CIA mole suspect, Soviet Division officer Richard Kovich. Early in his career, Kovich served in Norway, where he recruited Lygren. To Angleton, a suspected mole's recruit had to be tainted, and through liaison contacts, he set the investigation of Lygren in motion. Then in 1976, Oleg Gordievsky, Britain's prime agent inside the KGB, reported that the Soviets had an agent in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – a secretary with a background resembling Lygren's. The Norwegians arrested her, but just before she was to be interrogated, she died from a heart condition.⁴⁸

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police was another beneficiary of sorts of information from Angleton and Golitsyn. During the 1950s and '60s, several operations the Canadians ran against the Soviets went bad, and a CI Staffer told the RCMP that he suspected James Bennett, the Mounties' top counter-intelligence case officer, was the cause. Angleton accepted the hypothesis and got the Mounties to let Golitsyn read some of their files. Golitsyn also pointed to Bennett, who though innocent was hounded out of the service in 1972. Thirteen years later, the RCMP finally identified the probable mole, a sergeant named Gilles Brunet. In a remarkable coincidence with what happened in Norway, Brunet died of a heart ailment just before the RCMP was about to interrogate him.⁴⁹

47 Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 460-66.

48 Wise, *Molehunt*, 162-66, 250-52; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, chap. 10; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 566-67.

49 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, chap. 19; Wise, *Molehunt*, 112-14; John Sawatsky, *Men in the Shadows: The RCMP Security Service* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), chap. 16.

Most observers of CIA counterintelligence say the case of Yuri Loginov shows Angleton at his self-deluded worst.⁵⁰ Loginov, a KGB illegal working in South Africa, allegedly was “thrown back” to the Soviets to certain death in a convoluted scenario arranged by Angleton, who believed he was “dirty” because Richard Kovich had recruited him. An Agency review in 1979 determined that Loginov was genuine and his information valid. However, Gordievsky, who defected to the West in 1985, has said that Loginov was still alive then, and that the Soviets did not believe he had ever worked for the CIA but discharged him because his cover was blown.⁵¹ There is a third possibility: Loginov was at first a genuine CIA source that the KGB uncovered and then doubled against the Agency. Angleton found out and “burned” him. Until the full record is known, this theory is as plausible as the others; as for now, even Mangold concedes that “there is more evidence to suggest [Loginov] is alive than dead.”⁵²

Angleton’s End

Starting in 1973, Angleton lost his Seventh Floor patrons and found himself in a weaker bureaucratic position than ever before. In February of that year, James Schlesinger, a hardheaded academic outsider who favored technical collection and was totally unimpressed with the clandestine culture, replaced Helms. Schlesinger respected Angleton’s experience but found that “listening to him was like looking at an Impressionist painting. Jim’s mind was devious and allusive, and his conclusions were woven in a quite flimsy manner ... it was always smoke, hints, and bizarre allegations.”⁵³ Because he drastically cut the operations directorate elsewhere, Schlesinger opted only to pare some of Angleton’s authority and did not dismiss him.

Schlesinger stayed at Langley only five months. His replacement was William Colby, a long-time adversary of Angleton’s who resented the CI chief for several reasons. While both were in Italy in the late 1940s, Angleton spurned the notion that dealing with the so-called moderate left would check communist inroads in the country, and he took offense that Colby, who subscribed to the idea, was using his agents for covert action work.⁵⁴ In Vietnam in the 1960s, where Colby ran espionage and covert action programs,

50 It is the opening “grabber” in the television version of Mangold’s book, *Spyhunter*, shown in the United States by the Public Broadcasting Service in 1991.

51 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, chap. 14; Wise, *Molehunt*, 170-72, 214-18.

52 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 435 n. 4.

53 Quoted in Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 308.

54 John Prados, *Lost Crusader: The Secret Wars of CIA Director William Colby* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56-59.

Angleton tried to get approval to establish special counterintelligence units modeled on X-2 elements deployed in Europe (such as his in Italy). Despite evidence that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong had pervasively penetrated South Vietnamese intelligence, Colby fought off Angleton's plan.⁵⁵

Colby also questioned Angleton's vaunted expertise at counterintelligence. When he was appointed to head the Soviet Division in the late 1960s, Colby received Angleton's famous "briefing" about KGB operations. After listening to Angleton's theories and looking at his charts and diagrams, Colby left not only unpersuaded of the immediate threat but also doubting the effectiveness of the CI Staff. "As far as I was concerned," Colby said later, "the role of the Counterintelligence Staff was basically to secure penetrations into the Russian intelligence services and to debrief defectors.... As far as this business of *finding* Soviet penetrations within the CIA ... we have the whole Office of Security to protect us."⁵⁶

Then there was Angleton's apparent questioning of Colby's loyalty. Angleton learned that France's counterintelligence service had caught a French doctor passing information to the GRU. When the physician lived in Saigon, he had been a social acquaintance of Colby's while the latter was posted there. Colby did not file required reports about their contacts and became the subject of an investigation by Angleton's staff while he was Executive Director – the CIA's chief day-to-day administrator – in 1972-73. Colby told Angleton's men that he barely remembered the doctor and had not bothered to report their innocuous dealings. The investigators never established that the physician had been a Soviet agent while in Saigon and closed the inquiry. Still, Colby had a file in Angleton's office, which must have rankled him greatly.⁵⁷

By 1973, the political ground had shifted under the Agency because of Vietnam, Watergate, and the military coup in Chile. The Democrat-controlled Congress was asserting itself against a weakened Republican president, and the CIA became a convenient target in the partisan dispute over foreign policy. Colby and Angleton – already personally and professionally estranged – fell out completely over their fundamentally differing views of accountability and secrecy in that tempestuous environment. Colby believed that the rule of law applied to all parts of the U.S. Government and that counterintelligence must be fully answerable to the DCI and coordinate its activities with the area divisions. Angleton's "supersecretive style of operation had," Colby contended, "at least in recent years, become incompatible with the one I believed essential." Angleton, in contrast, believed just as ardently that the CIA must remain

55 Prados, *Lost Crusader*, 160-61; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 310-11.

56 Prados, *Lost Crusader*, 193; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 313.

57 Prados, *Lost Crusader*, 246-47.

largely autonomous within the U.S. Government and independent of congressional oversight, and that counterintelligence was so vital to the Agency's mission that it must remain much like a separate fiefdom. He would later tell a Senate committee that "it is inconceivable that a secret intelligence arm of the government has to comply with all the overt orders of the government."⁵⁸

Upon taking over as DCI, Colby decided not to dismiss Angleton right away because he "feared that Angleton's professional integrity and personal intensity might have led him to take dire measures." (What Colby meant is unclear: an appeal to the President? A public dispute? Suicide?) Epiphanies about the CI Staff finally resolved Colby to get rid of Angleton. He learned that Angleton had told a French intelligence official that the head CIA officer in France in the late 1960s possibly was a Soviet spy; and one of Angleton's officers – using the same logic that had discredited several victims of the molehunt – recently concluded that Angleton himself was a Soviet agent.⁵⁹

Angleton's thirty-year intelligence career came to an sudden end because of public disclosures of two dubious domestic operations that his CI Staff had been conducting: intercepting mail sent between the United States and the Soviet Union (codenamed HTLINGUAL) and spying on American antiwar protestors (MHCHAOS).⁶⁰ Seymour Hersh of the *New York Times* exposed those projects in a front-page article in late December 1974. Headlined "Huge CIA Operation Reported In U.S. Against Antiwar Forces, Other Dissidents In Nixon Years," the piece set off a firestorm of criticism of the CIA. Colby, who had already decided to fire Angleton, knew Hersh was writing the story and met with him a few days before to set the record straight. By announcing Angleton's

58 Colby, *Honorable Men*, 334; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 351.

59 Colby, *Honorable Men*, 364-65; Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, 212-13; Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 299-302.

60 The CI Staff's involvement in HTLINGUAL ran from 1955 to 1974; similar projects of shorter duration also intercepted mail between the United States and Communist China and Cuba. By indexing all the mail and reading some of it, Angleton hoped to learn about possible Soviet espionage contacts in America and Soviet tradecraft and mail handling procedures. HTLINGUAL never produced much of value, and reservations about it were voiced within the CIA, but Angleton persisted with it. MHCHAOS found no insidious contacts between American radicals and hostile foreign governments. U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities [hereafter, Church Committee], *Final Report ... Book III, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976) 561-636, 681-721; Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States [hereafter, Rockefeller Commission], *Report to the President* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1975), 101-15, 130-50.

dismissal the day after the article ran, Colby left the impression that he had leaked information to Hersh to create a flap that would justify firing Angleton.

Ever since the *Times* story, Angleton has been wrongly blamed for MHCHAOS, which got much of the attention in the subsequent scandal over CIA improprieties. In 1967, President Johnson ordered the Agency to determine if American antiwar protesters and political dissidents in the late 1960s were receiving foreign support. Helms created a task force (the Special Operations Group) and placed it inside the CI Staff for security reasons, but the unit's chief reported directly to the DCI, and its workspace was separate from the CI Staff's. Angleton knew about MHCHAOS but did not request, devise, or run it. The program eventually violated the CIA's charter prohibitions on domestic activities, but those transgressions were not Angleton's responsibility.

After his forced retirement, Angleton launched a counterattack against the Agency he believed had betrayed him and the new CI Staff that he feared was undoing his life's work. He fed information to writers and journalists, playing them off against one another, running them like the sources he no longer had. He used the Security and Intelligence Fund, an organization he had initially helped establish in part to defend U.S. security and intelligence officers in legal trouble, as a forum for publicizing his views about Soviet "active measures." Until 1982 he worked at the American Security Council, a conservative defense lobby group that, like him, opposed rapprochement with the Soviet Union. For a time he was a minor media cult figure; to keep up with what appeared in print about himself, he subscribed to a press clipping service. "If John le Carré and Graham Greene had collaborated on a superspy," wrote *Newsweek*, "the result might have been James Jesus Angleton."⁶¹

A Balance Sheet

Overall, from the mid-1950s to *circa* 1963, Angleton and the CI Staff provided a useful voice of caution within an Agency seized with the urgent requirement to pierce the Iron Curtain and ascertain Soviet strategic intentions and capabilities. From *circa* 1963 to the early 1970s, Angleton and his lieutenants, distracted by increasingly unsubstantiable theories of "strategic deception," embarked on counterproductive, and in some cases harmful, efforts to find moles here and abroad and to prove Moscow's malevolent designs. Angleton did well during the first half of his career, but "[i]n the end," former Deputy Director for Intelligence Ray Cline observed, he "was so obsessive that he became less effective, and ultimately did damage to the Agency."⁶²

61 Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, 216.

62 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, 159.

A fair assessment of Angleton's career might note the following on the "credit" side:

- While he was running CIA counterintelligence, there were no known Soviet penetrations of the CIA besides "Sasha."
- Information from, or assistance by, him and his CI Staff helped uncover, or prepared the way for later discovery of, significant Soviet espionage operations in several Western countries.
- He maintained good relations with the FBI at the working level, helping mitigate longstanding interagency hostility fostered mostly by J. Edgar Hoover.
- He contributed to the establishment of counterintelligence as a separate discipline.

On the "debit" side of the ledger would fall the following:

- By fixing on the Soviets, he largely ignored the threat that the Chinese, Czechs, East Germans, and Cubans posed. During his tenure, they either had agents in the CIA or doubled all the spies the Agency thought it was running against them.
- His operational staff was so deeply involved with defensive CI (molehunting) that it did not run enough offensive (counterespionage) operations.
- He became far too dependent on Golitsyn and consequently mishandled some cases – either by wrongly accusing suspected enemy agents based on scant evidence, or by suppressing information he believed was sham because it contradicted his special source.
- He became too isolated later in his career, insisting on maintaining his autonomy beyond the time it was useful and defensible. By the mid- to late 1960s, his security-consciousness had become self-consuming, and the culture of compartmentation he had fostered was stultifying.

As a manager of programs and personnel, and as an advocate for counterintelligence awareness in the Agency, he was woefully inadequate. He did not delegate enough, his recordkeeping was chaotic, he had no rapport with his subordinates, he did not encourage them to think beyond his paradigms, and his insistence on monopolizing counterintelligence prevented a proper awareness of it from being encouraged inside the CIA through training programs.

Since Angleton

As the U.S. Senate's Church Committee stated in its 1976 report, "December 1974 marked the end of an era in CIA counterintelligence."⁶³ Under Colby, the CI Staff's personnel and budget were slashed, much of its responsibility was dispersed into the area divisions, and Angleton's job would be filled with rotational appointments not to exceed four years (his first successor left after just two). New officers on the staff generally had less counterintelligence experience than those who worked there before. Several official post-mortems on Angleton's tenure and on specific cases handled under him were exceptionally critical, and soon an anti-Angleton orthodoxy emerged.⁶⁴

Did the CIA overreact to Angleton's excesses by diminishing the importance of counterintelligence and security? Is it accurate, as Angleton's FBI ally Sam Papich has asserted, that "counterintelligence has never been reconstructed" since Angleton's empire was dismantled?⁶⁵ The Agency ran more counterespionage operations against countries besides the Soviet Union, but the CI Staff was not where up-and-coming officers wanted to work, and enforcement of security rules waned. Five current or former CIA employees began spying against the United States in the decade after Angleton's departure and the change in counterintelligence philosophy.⁶⁶ Then came the so-called "Year of the Spy" in 1985, in which security lapses across the Intelligence Community prompted two congressional investigations that reached these damning conclusions about the state of post-Angleton counterintelligence: "despite verbal acknowledgment that some espionage losses have been truly devastating and have negated enormous defense investments, top managers remain unwilling to budget relatively modest sums for improved counterintelligence and security measures that would help protect much larger investments;" the U.S. Government's counterintelligence had "basic flaws" and was "poorly organized, staffed, trained, and equipped to deal with continuing counterintelligence challenges."⁶⁷ In response to the "Year of the Spy," the CIA created the Counterintelligence Center (CIC) to draw together and give prominence to CI operations and analysis. To some Agency veterans, the move sounded familiar.

63 Church Committee, *Final Report ... Book I*, 171.

64 Mangold, *Cold Warrior*, chap. 22, and Wise, *Molehunt*, chap. 17.

65 Quoted in Wise, *Molehunt*, 297.

66 Security Research Center, Defense Security Service, *Recent Espionage Cases, 1975-1999* (September 1999). The officers were David Barnett, Edward Lee Howard, William Kampiles, Edwin Moore, and Sharon Scranage.

67 U.S. House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Oversight and Evaluation, *U.S. Counterintelligence and Security Concerns: A Status Report, Personnel and Information Security* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), 19; *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 20 August 1988, 2345.

In the late 1980s, the CIA's slowness to accept the fact that one of its own – Aldrich Ames – had gone bad was attributable in part to its leaders' reluctance to be cast as Angletonian inquisitors. According to the Agency's Inspector General, "[t]he deficiencies [in the Ames investigation] reflect a CIA CI function that has not recovered its legitimacy since the excesses of James Angleton ... to some extent, the 'Angleton Syndrome' has become a canard that is used to downplay the role of CI in the Agency."⁶⁸ After Ames was finally caught in early 1994, DCI James Woolsey told Agency employees that there would be no "witch hunt" to find out what went wrong; "We all at the CIA want to continue to serve in today's Virginia, not in seventeenth-century Salem."⁶⁹

American counterintelligence still, however, has not righted the balance between the undue suspicion of the Angleton era and the laxity that followed it. The Agency's first response to Ames's arrest was heavy-handed over-reliance on polygraphs that left many Agency officers languishing in a security limbo, and the FBI's horrendous handling of the Robert Hanssen case – especially the vehemence with which it pursued an innocent CIA officer based on the flimsiest of coincidences – was reminiscent of Angleton at his worst.⁷⁰ Richard Helms once said that the Nosenko case "hung over the CIA like an incubus."⁷¹ The same could well be said of James Angleton, even three decades after he left the counterintelligence wilderness.

The content of this article has been reviewed by the CIA's Publications Review Board. The views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the CIA.

68 "Unclassified Abstract of the CIA Inspector General's Report on the Aldrich H. Ames Case," September 1994, 4, copy in author's possession.

69 Quoted in Abram N. Shulsky and Gary J. Schmitt, "The Future of Intelligence," *The National Interest*, 38 (Winter 1994-95), 73.

70 Kevin Whitelaw and David E. Kaplan, "To Tell the Truth," *U.S. News and World Report*, 11 June 2001, 18ff.; Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *A Review of the FBI's Performance in Deterring, Detecting, and Investigating the Espionage Activities of Robert Philip Hanssen*, 14 August 2003, accessed on the Department of Justice website at <http://www.doj.gov/oig/product.htm>.

71 Quoted in Epstein, *Deception*, 45.