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SECRETS OF STATE:

Intelligence Activities and American History

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The secrets are buried in Suitland, Maryland, in twenty underground vaults owned by the United States government. Each vault is one acre in size, about three- to four-hundred-feet deep, fifty- to seventy-feet tall, filled floor to ceiling with classified documents that were put there shortly after World War II. Do you remember the last scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*? Suitland is like that, only less organized. The people who created the arcane filing systems and index cards have long since retired from government service. To compound the confusion, each vault is owned by a different agency, and each denies access to the others.

The vaults are connected by a long underground corridor; security areas are blocked off by computer-controlled gates. The infrequent visitor inserts a special card in the slot and then approaches heavy steel vault doors with combination locks. Inside the vaults, notebooks and legal pads are carefully checked to ensure that unauthorized material is not withdrawn. A long time ago, while the vaults were being built, a few snakes crawled inside and nested among the dry, dusty alcoves. The vault custodians swear that a few still lie hidden in the shadows.

Like the snakes, there are some creatures of American diplomacy that do not like the light of day. Doctors are said to bury their mistakes; bureaucrats classify their errors and inter them at Suitland. In the last forty years, I am perhaps the only person ever granted full security access to the American security archives. My Top Secret clearance from the Justice Department had to be upgraded several levels just to get in. Among the esoteric codewords added to my file was a "COSMIC" clearance from NATO, and a "Q" clearance from the Atomic Energy Commission. Some of the secrets I had come to read were buried in the vault where nuclear warfare documents are kept.

It was a unique opportunity to sample the underhistory of America. For two years, I reviewed intelligence files from 1945 to the present on a specific topic: utilization of Nazi war criminals as secret agents in the cold war against communism. When time

permitted, I engaged in a casual scrutiny of classified operations in other areas. My Eagle Scout attitudes on American policy were shattered. There is a level of information that does not reach the public, sometimes not even presidents and the Congress. It may not be hyperbole to suggest that one third of modern American history is classified.

To be fair, ninety per cent of the men and women in our intelligence services are good and decent folk, mindful of the Constitution and respectful of our system of government. The hideous atrocities in Russia during the Stalinist era, still largely undocumented in the West, convinced me that United States intelligence services are indispensable to our national defense, indeed that a good secret service is our best chance for peace. It was a tiny proportion of American intelligence activities that terrified me. There were records of cold warriors who convinced themselves that it would be in the national interest to lie to the president, to disobey Congress, to commit mutiny. They even lied to the other American intelligence agencies with disastrous consequences.

I do not claim to be an intelligence expert, I am an attorney. But I did have a rare opportunity to perform a sort of consumer's shopping comparison among the products of our intelligence community. My opinion is this: our intelligence bureaucracies make the post office look efficient. According to a 1948 Top Secret report from the State Department, there were twenty-two different American intelligence organizations interviewing refugees in occupied Germany after World War II. All competed for the same agents, the same resources, and in some instances, spent as much time spying on each other as they did on the Russians.

To help sort out the chaos, the British Secret Service loaned us one of their top officers from 1949 to 1951. His name was Sir Harold Adrian Russell ("Kim") Philby. Kim Philby was the highest ranking communist spy ever to penetrate the British Government. Kim Philby's job was to help the amateurish Americans coordinate their infant intelligence community. He was the genius behind relocating Nazis to

America. He ensured that only those Nazi groups that were riddled with Soviet spies came to our shores. With Philby's help, our cold war operations degenerated to the level of a comic opera, where innocent spies bumbled across the stage of world events, ignorant of the fact that Moscow was calling the tune and carefully orchestrating the grand finale.

Next to the loss of the secret of the atom bomb, the loss of our cold war espionage system behind the iron curtain was probably America's greatest intelligence disaster. Philby's Nazi networks sold us out. To paraphrase Churchill, hiring Nazis was worse than immoral; it was a mistake. For forty years, the only part of the program that worked was the coverup. Too many senior politicians would be embarrassed, not to mention our diplomats and intelligence chiefs.

When I asked permission to write a history of the secret Nazi programs, the CIA and the Army were delighted (off the record, of course). They had been blamed for years by the popular media for a host of illegal programs that were actually run by the State Department. The bitter truth is that the CIA controls less than ten per cent of the intelligence budget, and is regarded as far too "liberal" to be trusted with some illegal operations, especially ones that Congress has explicitly prohibited. Perhaps because of the interecine warfare still rampant in Washington, my manuscript emerged from the censorship committees largely intact and caused a minor uproar when it was released on "60 Minutes" in 1982.

The House Judiciary Committee demanded a full investigation. The General Accounting Office was ordered to conduct a complete audit of Nazi-intelligence recruitment. That report is due back to Congress in the summer of 1985. Several Congressmen are planning to hold hearings sometime in the fall. Don't hold your breath. I am still uncertain whether the system will work.

You see, there is far more buried in the files than the mere recruitment of Nazis. I took a peek at some of our modern operations when I was down in the vaults. There are no wolves in the underground forest today, but there are some rogue elephants. There

are still a few misguided individuals who run secret programs at their own instigation, the best and brightest of today's generation repeating the errors of Alan Dulles. Congress is less than enthusiastic about poking about in these secret places, and well they might be. Congress has a few scandals of its own buried in Suitland. Nothing earth-shaking mind you; a few senators and congressmen on Hitler's payroll, a few folders of Swiss bank records, that sort of thing. Most of our congressman are surprisingly decent and reasonably competent. But it only takes a few who know where the bodies are buried to steer the unwilling away from the unmentionable.

George Orwell once told the story of a French intelligence officer who sanitized his own file to conceal his shift of opinion after the Hitler-Stalin pact. Orwell wrote "the most powerful form of lie is the omission, and it is the duty of the historian to make sure that those lies do not creep into the history books."

Eventually, the files at Suitland will make their way into the history books. After forty years, low-level files are released to the National Archives.

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