



# The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service

*Gordon Corera*

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## **The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service** Gordon Corera

The British Secret Service has been cloaked in secrecy and shrouded in myth since it was created a hundred years ago. Our understanding of what it is to be a spy has been largely defined by the fictional worlds of James Bond and John le Carre. THE ART OF BETRAYAL provides a unique and unprecedented insight into this secret world and the reality that lies behind the fiction. It tells the story of how the secret service has changed since the end of World War II and by focusing on the people and the relationships that lie at the heart of espionage, revealing the danger, the drama, the intrigue, the moral ambiguities and the occasional comedy that comes with working for British intelligence. From the defining period of the early Cold War through to the modern day, MI6 has undergone a dramatic transformation from a gung-ho, amateurish organisation to its modern, no less controversial, incarnation. Gordon Corera reveals the triumphs and disasters along the way. The grand dramas of the Cold War and after - the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 11 September 2001 attacks and the Iraq war - are the backdrop for the human stories of the individual spies whose stories form the centrepiece of the narrative. But some of the individuals featured here, in turn, helped shape the course of those events. Corera draws on the first-hand accounts of those who have spied, lied and in some cases nearly died in service of the state. They range from the spymasters to the agents they ran to their sworn enemies. Many of these accounts are based on exclusive interviews and access. From Afghanistan to the Congo, from Moscow to the back streets of London, these are the voices of those who have worked on the front line of Britain's secret wars. And the truth is often more remarkable than the fiction.

## **The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service Details**

Date : Published August 11th 2011 by Weidenfeld and Nicolson (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780297860990

Author : Gordon Corera

Format : Hardcover 480 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Spy Thriller, Espionage, Politics

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## **From Reader Review The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service for online ebook**

### **Peg says**

Fascinating story about the British spy agencies, MI 5 and MI 6, with insights into the US CIA. This is the stuff that spy novels attempt to bring to life. In fact some of the novelists actually were involved in these secret spy agencies. Doesn't do a lot to encourage one to think that these services are always right in their info and assessments. In fact they are frequently way off. Nonetheless this is a very interesting book.

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### **Katharine Holden says**

The exciting title appears to belong to some other book. This book was rambling, disjointed, and not very interesting.

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### **Patty says**

Very interesting history of the spy game in the U.K. (And by extension the US) after WWII. Well written, sometime complex especially in the sections of Afghanistan but the story of the WMD and the push to war with Iraq were fascinating and very telling. I learned a lot that I had not known.

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### **Michele Weiner says**

I have often noticed that the Brits and the Yanks are twins separated at birth. We have Reagan, they have Thatcher. We have Clinton, they have Blair. Then we have Bush and they have Blair. (Did Tony change his stripes, or did he just express his feminine side with Bill and his alpha male with George W?) Now we have Obama and they have Gordon somebody. Culturally, we share a lot. I personally can't stomach Dr. Who, though I have tried, but I love Downton Abbey and I first became hooked on House of Cards and State of Play on British TV. So why was I surprised when the story of MI6 turns out to be totally symmetrical with the history of the CIA? This book focuses on post WWII, when the British were coming to terms with the fact that beating the Germans broke their empire. They had no money left, and had to make do while their brothers-in-arms at the Agency spent money like water. They are symbiotic, two halves of a whole. Whatever went wrong at the CIA also went wrong at MI6, only with a British public school accent instead of Skull Bones. This was a readable book and I'm glad I did read it. The stories of the Russian defectors were fascinating, and there were a couple of real idjits that I enjoyed meeting. I guess I'd give it a 3.5 or 3.75. Better than average.

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### **James says**

This was a fairly good book

I had no idea the Brits were so involved in the question of WMD in Iraq

The US media prefers to call George Jr a liar.

He may have been an idiot, but I don't think he lied

p382

"the absence of evidence is not absence of evidence"  
footnote 96 from press briefing Feb 2002

That doesn't make sense

I think I remember it as:

"the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence"

Proves once again that now days, publishers don't edit books  
and even the writer seems not to have read the first draft  
a second time.

Just send first draft to printer and start selling as fast as possible

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### **Vikas Datta says**

An exciting account of over a half-century of British clandestine operations including coups like Penskovsky and Gordievsky, debacles like Philby, Blake and Vasall and of course, Iraq and the rest of the life of spycraft in the country... a riveting narrative of the Congo tragedy, the Afghan jihad, of how came about the wholly unnecessary Second Iraq War whose blowback is still being faced.... The strength of this book lies in showing how an unholy closeness to the ruling class and a desire to find information - which did not exist - to bolster a predetermined case led to Iraq as well as other ways in which a secret service seeks to make itself indispensable and the internal debate of what its aim is and how it should accomplish it...

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### **JMR says**

I am by no means a fan of spies, but I loved this book. Something about the writing made me see the entire world of espionage with new eyes.

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### **Wesley Gerrard says**

They say that truth is often stranger than fiction and this book that I have given a 5 star rating reads very fluently and tells the real story of British secret service agents as they engage in the art of espionage across the globe. True heroes and heroines emerge as you quickly flutter through the pages. From SIS's early war

history through to the heavy espionage focus against the Soviets during the Cold War through to the closer to present military escapades in Afghanistan and Iraq, spies are always at the centre of international events, the front line defences of any country and they are especially important to Britain with the remnants of its empire. The shocks of betrayal are often harsh and blunders in espionage can prove very costly. Although the reality is often different to the popular perception of James Bond, some of the adventures and intrigue of the real espionage world are profound tales that push the human spirit to its limits. I think that the most fascinating tale of the book, one which has haunted the halls of Whitehall and Washington to this day, is that of the Soviet super-spy Kim Philby, of the Cambridge Five. Philby rose to the highest echelons of the secret service on both sides of the Atlantic at the height of the Cold War, all the time working discreetly for the Soviet Union, attracted ideologically by Communism. His deceit actively cost the lives of many and severely disrupted many critical operations. The book details not just Philby but also the defectors coming in the other direction and there are some great depictions of the tasks performed by MI6 and MI5 operatives who had to handle these defectors and also run foreign agents behind the lines. The book leaves a hunger for further research and I shall be looking carefully at the fictitious works of Graham Greene and John Le Carré, both of whose real lives feature in this book as they were both at one time secret agents. The book to me tailed off a bit after the excitement of the Cold War and the last chapter on the political blunderings of the failed Iraq War intelligence was a trifle mundane yet overall the book lived up to all expectations and was laid out very well with a very flowing narrative.

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## **Daniel says**

Corera is the BBC's Security Correspondent and is therefore well placed to bring this unofficial history of Mi6 to life with a speedy narrative flare.

The book is mainly focussed on the post-WWII era and is split into chapters of geographic and thematic significance for the service - the intrigue of post-war Vienna, Kim Philby & the 'Gang of 5', Daphne Park battling Communism and colonial decline in the Congo, double-agents and counter-intelligence in Moscow & Washington, honey traps in London, the Russian defector Gordievsky, the proxy war in 80s Afghanistan, the emergence of the service into public view in the post-Cold War era and the modern service fighting terrorism and making mistakes in the lead-up to the Iraq war.

Corera also weaves into the structure a lot of reference to spy novel authors throughout the ages, showing that sometimes life imitates arts, more than we might think.

I really enjoyed it. It's a great primer for anyone interested in one of the world's finest intelligence organisations and it rips along at an enjoyable pace providing an alternative angle on some of the 20th Century's biggest moments.

The only criticism I have, and it's an understandable one, is that at times I wondered how sanitised some of the source material and accounts were, given the need for secrets to be maintained. But other than that, I thought it was great and would recommend it to spook fanboys and those with a passing interest alike.

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## **Daniel Farabaugh says**

This book suffered from a split focus. While it claimed to be a history of the British secret service, it by necessity focused on the CIA as well. This make a more difficult narrative and, even though some sections were good, bogged the overall book down.

## Linda says

This book fed my fascination with MI-5 and MI-6, and I enjoyed the interweaving of LeCarre, Fleming and Greene with the reality of the spy world.

Quotes:

"Iraq was the lowest moment for MI6 since the betrayal of Kim Philby. Its intelligence turned out to be wrong and the aftermath of the war a disaster. The myth came ceasing against reality as MI6's intelligence, on which a case for war was built, was shown to be dud."

"A divide had emerged in the culture of MI6, just as it had among their American counterparts, between those who wanted action and those who wanted intelligence."

"The change in spy fiction--from the hung-ho imperial fiction of the early century to the more interior literature of traitors--mirrored Britain's changing position in the world and its perception of itself."

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## Tawney says

A very interesting survey of British Intelligence - primarily MI6 - from the end of WWII up to the WMD fiasco leading to the invasion of Iraq. In Corera's view the intelligence community evolved over time from an elite club of men with cowboy tendencies and too much trust in their own to another arm of government bureaucracy. The book describes plenty of intrigue, plenty of mistakes and quite an assortment of characters - traitors, defectors, double agents, the dull, the cunning and the fascinating (Daphne Park, has no one made a movie about this woman?) The book is well researched and gives plenty of insight into a very old profession.

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## Gheri Sackler says

very informative

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## Joe says

This was very enjoyable to read and I learned a lot of new things. The book rattles along and charts the period from the end of the second world war through to the present. Stuffed full of interesting anecdotes about people and an organisation that is by turns impressive and then absurd.

I hadn't realised, for instance, the extent of British involvement in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. Apparently the CIA weren't allowed to send personnel in, but the book strongly implies MI6 were very busy on sabotage missions and organising assassinations. Also of interest is the level of what looks to be mental illness amongst double agents though there is the question of whether one is mentally ill to begin with, or whether the activity drives you over the edge. Perhaps a bit of both. The agents' handlers would often face a hard time looking after their charges. Oleg Penkovsky was given US and UK army officers uniforms to wear, clearly in order for him to feel important, when he was debriefed. (UK complained the US had given him one

with medals which looked better than the one they were offering).

I also realised for the first time quite how important Oleg Gordievsky had been, not because he gave info on numbers of tanks and planes etc, but because he could tell the West what the Soviet leadership's views were. In the early 1980s they really did come close to believing that NATO was going to launch a pre-emptive strike. Once that was understood Thatcher and Reagan pulled back on the rhetoric.

Perhaps the KGB should have just upped their surveillance on anyone called Oleg.

Obviously it is difficult with a book like this to know precisely how accurate some of the detail is and I'm sure a lot of it will be modified over time as more information comes out.

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## **Gram says**

The problem with real spy stories is that spies tell so many lies, you end up wondering what's true and what's not. The first half of this book covers mostly the 1950's and 1960's, during which time there was the major disaster of Kim Philby's defection to the USSR and the realisation that he had betrayed Britain for decades. This led to decades of investigations of possible double agents with the British intelligence services - mostly carried out by the spies on their very own colleagues. The dread hand of the CIA's James Jesus Angleton reached across the Atlantic to further complicate matters - Angleton being the main paranoiac in the CIA & the man who believed there were Soviet moles throughout the CIA, FBI, MI5, MI6 and in almost every secret service in the world. "Paranoia rules" should be motto of secret services everywhere. The 2nd half of the book concentrates on Afghanistan & Iraq and how intelligence from both these countries was misused by politicians and the secret services. It closes out with what is almost an apology for the lies told by US and UK politicians about the mythical Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq.

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