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**The  
Second  
Oldest  
Profession**

**A WORLD HISTORY  
OF ESPIONAGE  
Part One**

**Professor Jeffrey Burds  
Northeastern University**

# The Second Oldest Profession

## A World History of Espionage

### Part One

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Professor Jeffrey Burds  
Northeastern University



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The Second Oldest Profession:  
A World History of Espionage  
Part One  
Professor Jeffrey Burds



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## About Your Professor

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### Jeffrey Burds

Jeffrey Burds is an associate professor of Russian and Soviet history at Northeastern University in Boston. He earned a Ph.D. with Distinction from Yale University in 1990 and has been the recipient of three distinguished teaching awards. He teaches a course on the history of espionage, on the history of the KGB, and on spying in World War II.

Professor Burds is the author of *Borderland Wars: Stalin's War against 'Fifth Columnists' on the Soviet Periphery, 1937–1953*, a study of the international history of Soviet-German-British-American espionage operations at the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. He has also published three book-length monographic studies and is coeditor or coauthor of six other books on different aspects of archival practices in the former Soviet Union. Burds has published several groundbreaking articles on the Soviet counterinsurgencies in Ukraine and the Caucasus in the 1930s and 1940s.

Professor Burds has spent more than six years doing research in archives throughout Eastern Europe over the past twenty-five years. Burds has also worked in archives in Israel, Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States, and he has consulted on espionage issues with the *Washington Post* and *ABC News*.

Further information about Professor Burds, the courses he teaches, and his scholarly writing are available at his Northeastern University homepage (<http://www.sovhistory.neu.edu>).



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## Introduction

To investigate the history of espionage is to enter into the world of the shadows. The problem for historians is that a good espionage operation leaves few traces behind. Both the agency responsible for the operation and the targeted object usually collude in keeping the secrets away from a prying public. Spies want to keep their secrets, and their targets often have something to hide. As the British chief of staff penned on a top-secret report after World War II, dated 31 July 1945: “It is imperative that the fact that such intelligence was available should NEVER be disclosed.” As we have moved toward declassification of veritable mountains of new materials since the end of the Cold War, what is most remarkable about the released archives is that national security restrictions were used far more often to conceal failed operations, incompetence, and human foibles such as greed and avarice than to preserve truly sensitive national security secrets.

Clearly, the task before us is daunting. And certainly, we will begin only to scratch the surface of an enormous set of problematica, both new and old.

I firmly believe that the history of espionage is best studied as international history: that is, scholars are called upon in the post-Cold War era to step well outside of traditional narrow national perspectives and myopias, and we are expected to draw from sources in national security archives of all players, and to critically challenge any one nation’s version of events. Decentering and internationalizing are the operative principles here. The goal is to write international history on the basis of solid social science methods drawing on a huge array of newly released sources.

Unfortunately, as soon as we exercise the practice of decentering, we find ourselves ready to dispense with much of the existing literature on the history of espionage. Once we reach World War I, the reliability of the materials and the confidence of our conclusions will decline rapidly. And therefore we must vigorously avoid viewing history as ideology, and that means reminding ourselves that the history of the shadow world is by definition a contested space.

# Lecture 1

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## A “Wilderness of Mirrors”

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Simon Singh’s *The Code Book: The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography*.

*“There is no place where espionage is not possible.”*

*~Sun Tzu*

Why a world history of espionage? Because if human history is defined in part by the movement from local and distinct to international, global, and interconnected, then espionage is an intrinsic part of this process of the history of globalization. To a large degree there was no institutional history of espionage until England emerged as the supreme and dominant world power in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. With the emergence of modern nation-states in Early Modern Europe, so too did espionage become an intrinsic part of governing.

If espionage and spying became commonplace by the seventeenth century, if the first modern spymaster was Sir Francis Walsingham under Queen Elizabeth I way back in 1572, why do we persist in seeing espionage as a modern twentieth-century phenomenon? Too often we use history as an ideological weapon. In this context, historical writing about the twentieth century has tended to lay blame on Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union as the espionage aggressor, and Western powers as innocent victims. Can any historically informed person really accept such assertions? By the twentieth century, espionage was so critical to modern systems of government that virtually everyone was spying on virtually everyone else, friends and foes alike.

And this is where we begin to run into serious trouble. As we move into the twentieth century, we move from history to contemporary history, where accepted knowledge about past events has managed to root itself in the collective memories of all sides, both East and West, North and South, Developed and Lesser Developed, Capitalist, Communist, Socialist, Fascist, and everything in between.

Any endeavor to investigate the history of espionage involves simultaneously two primary objectives. First, we must endeavor to uncover the hidden, the world of the shadows. This means trying to determine what covert operations and their supporting agencies were doing. It means making an effort to ascertain their objectives and determining their success or failure.

Now I do not have to tell you that the reason we know of espionage as the Second Oldest Profession is precisely because as soon as humans organized

themselves into communities, there was also spying. So it is not enough for us merely to uncover the evidence or coattails of espionage networks. We must also determine its significance. What impact, if any, does the world of the shadows have on Big-H History? Does our discovery of covert operations in any way alter our fundamental understanding of larger historical events and processes? Obviously, espionage agencies want us to believe it does.

Study of human history automatically requires us to remember that we are talking about human beings, and not about cardboard cutouts. The funny thing about human beings is that we do, as Milan Kundera once observed, at any moment have within ourselves a thousand different desires, motivations, and feelings. And we are never quite sure which is the important one. Human beings are characterized by antinomy—by the tendency to think or believe one thing, and to do another. In his book *The Great Game: The Myths and Reality of Espionage*, Frederick Porter Hitz wrote that “the subject of espionage is itself endlessly fascinating, because it deals with the rawest, most elemental side of human behavior.” As such, I warn you that we will find spies to be especially elusive characters, slippery and virtually impossible to define.

And if individual spies are so hard to pin down, so too can be the governments and agencies that employ them. Picking up on this very idea, British historian Richard Aldrich engaged the forces of what he called the “Invisible Hand” this way: “The story of modern secret service offers us a clear warning. Governments are not only adept at hiding substantial secrets, they are quick to offer their own carefully packaged versions of the past.”

The first chief of counterintelligence of America’s Central Intelligence Agency, James Jesus Angleton, chose a line from T.S. Eliot’s epic poem *Gerontion* to describe intelligence work as none other than a “wilderness of mirrors.”

Angleton wrote that “the ‘wilderness of mirrors’ consists of the

myriad stratagems, deceptions and all the other devices of disinformation that the Soviet Union and its coordinated intelligence services used to confuse and split the West, producing an ever-fluid landscape where fact and illusion merge.” And that is the very essence of planned chaos, which we are asked here to order and elucidate.



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## What Is Espionage?

Espionage is the secret gathering of information regarding the intentions and capabilities of other persons, groups, organizations, or states. Espionage differs from intelligence precisely in this way: intelligence is the gathering of information, either openly or secretly, or, to use espionage jargon, either overtly or covertly. Espionage, on the other hand, is always covert; it is always conducted in secret.

Therefore espionage is generally considered to be synonymous with spying.

Another synonym of espionage is clandestine operations—secret underground activity that cannot usually be traced back to its source. Anonymity and deniability are often crucial aspects of espionage work.

There are two primary categories of espionage work: HUMINT, or human intelligence—spies, agents, and the like—and SIGINT, signals intelligence, which refers to codes, ciphers, secret forms of communication, secret writing, and secret monitoring of an adversary's communications.

Now most definitions of espionage and intelligence are so broad as to allow us to define even a local town library as intelligence. But as the foremost authority on the history of Soviet espionage, Cambridge professor Christopher Andrew, has written: “Knowledge is power. Raw intelligence is not.” It is not enough to gather raw intelligence; that information must be explored, analyzed, and processed. And therefore, intrinsic to espionage is not only the covert gathering of information but also its analysis, and its presentation to military or political or economic leaders who will then adjust and adapt their own policies or tactics accordingly. The four



intrinsic steps in the gathering and utilization of espionage intelligence then are (1) raw intelligence, (2) processed intelligence, (3) analysis, and (4) policy outcomes.

Besides espionage intelligence—the secret gathering of information—espionage also includes counterintelligence, often referred to as XX, double cross, or X-2—which means protecting one’s own secrets from the prying eyes of others. And this raises the thorny issue of information control: while spying focuses on the secret collection of information about one’s adversaries, it also includes the deliberate use of disinformation—the conscious spreading of false information—to deceive one’s adversaries, enemies, or even friends about one’s own intentions and capabilities. Besides the deliberate spreading of false information to mislead others, under the rubric of espionage we can also include the use of sabotage.

### **Why Engage in Espionage?**

Specialists and military and political leaders alike are unanimous in their resounding judgments about the importance of espionage in the modern world. The mastermind of the Golden Age of Soviet illegal spy networks during the Stalin era in the 1930s, Alexander Orlov, wrote: “The importance of intelligence services in the fortune of nations cannot be overstated. . . . The existence or absence of a well-working spy network on the territory of a potential enemy may spell the difference between victory and defeat.”

Espionage intelligence has often been described as a force multiplier. Scholar Michael Handel has offered an explanation of precisely what this means in the context of military operations: “Good intelligence will act as a force multiplier by facilitating a more focused and economical use of force. On the other hand, when all other things are equal, poor intelligence acts as a force divider by wasting and eroding strength. In the long run, therefore, the side with better intelligence will not only use its power more profitably but will also more effectively conserve it.”

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What is the purpose of spying?
2. What is counterespionage, or X2?
3. Why are espionage and counterespionage often compared to a “wilderness of mirrors”?

## Suggested Reading

Singh, Simon. *The Code Book: The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography*. New York: Anchor, 2000.

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Dulles, Allen W. *The Craft of Intelligence*. New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2007 (1963).

Kahn, David. *The Codebreakers: The Comprehensive History of Secret Communication from Ancient Times to the Internet*. Rev. ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Orlov, Alexander. *Handbook of Intelligence and Guerilla Warfare*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972 (1963).

## Websites of Interest

1. The National Security Archive is an independent nongovernmental research institute and library located at the George Washington University. The Archive collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. — <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/index.html>
2. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is an independent U.S. Government agency responsible for providing national security intelligence to senior U.S. policymakers. — <http://www.cia.gov>
3. The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), often known as MI6, collects Britain’s foreign intelligence. The SIS provides Her Majesty’s Government with a global covert capability to promote and defend the national security and economic well-being of the United Kingdom. — <http://www.sis.gov.uk>
4. The International Spy Museum is the only public museum in the United States solely dedicated to espionage. — <http://www.spymuseum.org>

## Lecture 2

### Espionage Among the Ancients

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Sun Tzu's "Employing Spies," *The Art of War*, chapter 13.

For the first two thousand years of our story, almost all espionage was battlefield intelligence—about learning the disposition of enemy forces, about the lay of the land, about special weapons, and so on. Scouts were sent ahead to determine the disposition of enemy forces, their number, and their armaments. Locals were recruited to supply details about the direction in which the enemy was moving. Books, guides, and maps were considered vital intelligence for invading forces operating on foreign territories with virtually no knowledge of local conditions, languages, terrain, or special factors like wild animals and impassable jungles.

#### Espionage in the Old Testament

The oldest known reference to the use of spies appears in the Old Testament of the Judeo-Christian Bible. This is the story of "Rahab" (English pronunciation: *Raackharb*), a harlot in the town of Jericho, a Canaanite by race. According to the story, which appears in the Book of Joshua, God had ordered the commander of the Israelite armies to slaughter every living thing in the towns they captured. Presumably as a result of their sins—"their dissolute and diseased condition"—God had ordered the Israelites to burn Canaanite cities to the ground, to murder all Canaanites, and in this way to cleanse the region by fire.

According to the Book of Joshua, when the Jewish armies were encamped at Shittim, in the "Arabah," now known as the Jordan Valley, opposite Jericho, ready to cross the river, the Israelite commander Joshua, as he was making final preparations to lay siege to the city, sent out two spies to reconnoiter the military strength of Jericho.



*The Harlot of Jericho and the Two Spies*  
by James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836–1902)

The first and second oldest professions:  
The classical Old Testament story of  
Rahab in Jericho from the Book of Joshua.

The spies hid in Rakhab's house, which was built into the Jericho city wall. It was harvest time, so when soldiers of the city guard came to look for them, Rakhab hid the two Jewish spies under bundles of flax on the roof of her home. Alerted from their own sources of suspicious activity, the Canaanite soldiers demanded that Rakhab bring out the enemy spies. But Rakhab refused, and in strict adherence to local customs, the Canaanite soldiers were not allowed to enter any woman's house without first getting her permission. The Israelite spies were in this way saved.

Having escaped with their lives, the two spies promised to spare Rakhab and her family should Israelite armies succeed in taking Jericho. In order not to be murdered in the massacre that was to follow, Rakhab was instructed by the spies to mark her house by hanging a red cord out of her window.

When the city of Jericho fell to the Israelite armies, Joshua honored his spies' promise: Rakhab and her whole family were preserved, and they were allowed to live among the Jewish people.

### **Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*, 500 BCE**

One of the most widely cited sources on the incredible sophistication of ancient espionage is Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. This extraordinary work was originally written by hand in China on bamboo strips around the year 500 BCE. *The Art of War* was presented in thirteen chapters. The last chapter, "Employing Spies," is a seminal work in the world history of espionage. Sun Tzu was the first writer in history to emphasize "the necessity of avoiding all [military] engagements not based upon extensive, detailed analyses of the strategic situation, tactical options, and military capabilities."

Sun Tzu opened chapter 13 with an admission that traditional warfare was both dangerous and expensive: "Raising a host of a hundred thousand men and engaging them in war imposes heavy burdens on the people and a [considerable] drain on their resources." If the war lasts very long you run the risk, Sun Tzu added, that there "will be commotion at home and abroad, and men will drop out exhausted." There was little difference in this way between war in Sun Tzu's time and war today. Sun Tzu continued:

Thus, what enables the wise commander to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge.

For Sun Tzu, "foreknowledge" was none other than strategic intelligence. The nature of warfare in Sun Tzu's time was that two colossal armies of perhaps a hundred thousand soldiers on either side fought it out to the death. A loss meant either slaughter or enslavement. Women and children were raped, murdered, or enslaved. The loser's homeland fell prey to catastrophic destruction. There was no concept at the time of limited engagement, of limited warfare. And with so much riding on a single battle, no

leader could afford to ignore foreknowledge about the enemy's number, disposition, and intention.

How was one to gain foreknowledge? Sun Tzu was among the first to decry the widespread, traditional reliance upon spirits and prognostication as a primary means of gaining insight into enemy intentions. Instead, he vigorously insisted on confining intelligence efforts to the human realm, that is, from HUMINT, or human intelligence.

Sun Tzu identified five classes of spies:

- *Local spies* were recruits from among local noncombatants who lived inside the territories occupied by the enemy.
- *Moles* were officials within the hierarchy of the enemy's staff who could be persuaded to work covertly for your side.
- *Double agents* were spies sent by the enemy to penetrate your side, but who were persuaded—through bribery, threats, or torture—to work instead for your side against the enemy.
- *Doomed spies* were hapless individuals who were duped into believing false information about your intentions, and then betrayed to the enemy with a specific goal of leading the enemy astray.
- *Surviving spies* were what today are called “tourists”—spies sent into the enemy's territory who are expected to escape back to your side in order to report on enemy activity.

The beauty of Sun Tzu's system was that it was founded upon the principle of *compartmentalization*: None of the spies knew everything, and therefore, as Sun Tzu wrote, even if they were captured by the enemy, “none can discover the secret system.” Sun Tzu called this the “divine manipulation of the threads,” which he considered to be “the commander's most precious faculty.”

Sun Tzu was advising a military dictator, one concerned about restricting the access of his subordinates to intelligence information that might lead them either to cash in by selling their secrets to the enemy or by colluding against the commander himself. It was in this atmosphere of extreme suspicion and distrust of one's own ambitious commanders that “divine manipulation of the threads” came to be the best means by which a commander could preserve his own life. As can be seen, the intelligence apparatus in Sun Tzu's era was rather simple, with minimal separation between raw



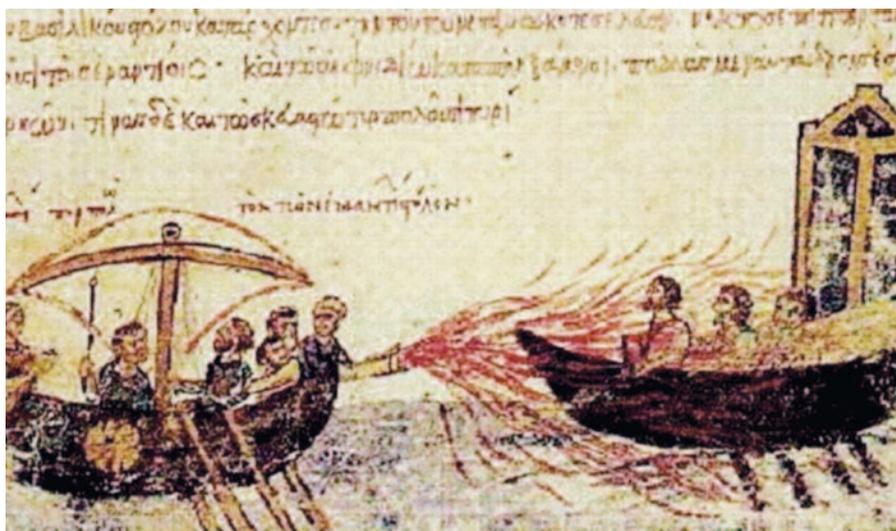
intelligence and the commander. This ultra-centralized hierarchical structure seriously limited the ability of the commander to create large, complicated covert operations. And it also rendered armies vulnerable to complete collapse in the event of the commander's capture, injury, sickness, death, or incompetence.

A second observation is that in Sun Tzu's time, and up to the modern era, spies were considered mercenaries, whores, traitors, and therefore intrinsically unreliable. This is a stark contrast to the eroticization of spies in our own age—James Bond, Mata Hari, or even Anna Chapman. Today, spies have become celebrities, whereas among the ancients few spies fared well for their troubles. Win or lose, most spies were slated for execution.

## Greek Fire

In 678 CE, the Byzantine Empire was seriously threatened by Arab attacks. Having a modern state-of-the-art naval fleet, the Arabs were threatening to attack the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. Lacking sufficient naval strength to defend against Arab threats, the Byzantines developed a new secret weapon that allowed them to drive off the Arab forces and save their empire: "Greek Fire."

According to the chronicler Theophanes, Greek Fire was invented by a Greek architect/engineer named Kallinikos, but no one today really knows how Greek Fire was made. Though historians debate the main features of Greek Fire, it is known that there were at least four principal ingredients.



A fragment from the illuminated Byzantine manuscript *Codex Skylitzes Matritensis* showing Greek Fire in use against the fleet of the rebel Thomas the Slav (ca. 760–823 CE).

Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, Vitr. 26-2, Bild-Nr. 77, f 34 v. b. (Pászthory, p. 31).

First, Greek Fire could burn in water, making it ideal for use in naval battles. The only known substances that would extinguish Greek Fire were urine, sand, or vinegar. Second, Greek Fire was a liquid and could be fired through metal nozzles from specially made Byzantine ships. Third, Greek Fire was shot through siphons or tubes resembling metal or copper fire-hoses when used in naval battles—these firing tubes were usually located at the bow or stern of the ship. And fourth, when fired from a hose, Greek Fire was accompanied with a loud noise, or discharge and smoke. Contemporaries compared the sound to loud, continuous thunder.

Some suggest components of the mixture included saltpeter (or potassium nitrate); gunpowder, which accounts for both the loud thunderous discharge as well as the great distance one could shoot Greek Fire; naptha, which was perhaps mixed with resin to thicken the liquid to render it similar in composition to modern napalm; and quicklime, which enabled Greek Fire to burn even in water.

The key piece in the entire Greek Fire system was “preheating and pressurizing the liquid below decks before discharging it from the siphon on the main deck.” Specially designed pumps based on an air-bellows system below deck drove the liquid fire through metal hoses, which were directed toward enemy targets above deck.

Historians generally agree that Greek Fire saved the Byzantine Empire by delaying the fall of Constantinople to the Arabs during two sieges in the seventh and eighth centuries. Greek Fire was the most powerful naval weapon of the era, a fact that was noted by Byzantine military and political leaders, who imposed strict prohibitions on access to the secret recipe for making and deploying Greek Fire.

The need for multiple elements allowed the Byzantines to use compartmentalization to protect their ultimate state secret. The five separate components of Greek Fire were produced independently of one another at remote sites. To guard the secret still more, the secret of the technology of Greek Fire was preserved by a small, elite group.

Compartmentalization proved to be an excellent counterintelligence tool to protect the secret of Greek Fire from Byzantium’s enemies for nearly five hundred years.

The Byzantines managed to keep the secret of Greek Fire so well protected, however, that by 1204 they had lost the secret themselves. And in 1453, Constantinople fell to the Muslim Ottoman Empire under Sultan Mehmed II.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. How did the Canaanite spy Rakhab assist the Israelite commander Joshua in the sacking of Jericho?
2. What did Sun Tzu mean by the use of “foreknowledge” and the commander’s “divine manipulation of the threads”?
3. What are the lessons of the Byzantine use of Greek Fire?

## Suggested Reading

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Warner, Michael. “The Divine Skein: Sun Tzu on Intelligence.” *Intelligence & National Security*. Vol. 21, no. 4 (August 2006): pp. 483–92.

## Websites of Interest

1. The *Livius* website provides an article entitled “Greek Spies at Sardes” extracted from *The Histories* by Herodotus. — <http://www.livius.org/he-hg/herodotus/hist02.htm>
2. A Wikipedia entry entitled “Greek Fire” features a weblink at the bottom of the page to a pdf article from the *Field Artillery Journal* by First Lieutenant Richard Groller, who was a U.S. Army military intelligence reserve officer at the Intelligence School in Fort Devens, MA, when he wrote the article in 1981. — [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_fire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_fire)

# Lecture 3

## The Roman Empire

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Rose Mary Sheldon's *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome: Trust in the Gods, but Verify*.

### Early Intelligence Gathering Methods

Until 390 BCE, and in stark contrast to military-political administrations in China and Greece, Rome had no serious intelligence assets. Defensively, the first warning the Roman Republic had of trouble would be an enemy's arrival at the city gates. Offensively, Roman generals relied heavily on superstition—on what they called “spiritual intelligence,” which consisted of various forms of astrology and prophecy.

This lack of an early-warning system changed in 390 BCE, after Rome was attacked by the Gauls. With absolutely no advance information of their enemies' plans, Rome was saved only because some geese noticed enemy soldiers sneaking into the city, and started squawking. Following the Gaulic siege of Rome, the Romans adopted the principle, “trust in the gods but verify,” a makeshift acknowledgement that though one must heed the gods, one must also rely heavily on real human intelligence. With this in mind, the Romans began to deploy basic scouting units around their legions and territory. Another important source of intelligence information that originated around this time was the use of foreign exiles, deserters, traitors, and prisoners of war as informants.

### The Second Punic War

Hannibal was a Carthaginian statesman who led an army overland from Iberia on a march against the Italians. According to Polybius, in year 218 BCE, 90,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry, and an unknown number of war elephants attacked Rome overland from the north, taking the Romans by surprise.

Unlike the Romans, Hannibal had constructed an efficient intelligence unit within his armies. Indeed, Hannibal's entire operation against Italy was the direct result of an intelligence success on his part. After learning that some



© Frank Martini, Cartographer, Department of History, United States Military Academy

of his scouts had intercepted information that Rome planned to attack the Iberian peninsula—in modern Spain—Hannibal decided to go on the offensive and invade Italy first.

Hannibal's impressive knowledge of the terrain of battle and a regular flow of information on the political alignments of regional tribes and cities gave him a distinct advantage over Rome. Hannibal also successfully used intelligence on the inner workings of the Roman senate in preparing ambushes against overconfident, but heavily pressured, Roman generals. Roman intelligence assets during the war were subsequently adapted from Hannibal's own tactics.

### Foreign Intelligence as Rome Expands

As the Roman Republic expanded, it still lacked any centralized intelligence service. The primary foreign intelligence method used by the Roman Senate was the “embassy” system, in which the Roman Senate would send out fact-finding delegations to enemy capitals. Since these delegations were overt and already automatically suspect, their efficacy as spies is highly doubtful. More successful as spies were the *publicani*, essentially wandering tax collectors.

The most effective foreign spies were *negotiatores*, who were merchants, traders, and businessmen secretly working for the Roman government. Many *negotiatores* set up their own loose “industrial” intelligence networks to keep on top of the political and military situations of the countries where they traded. Often, the *negotiatores* would pass information on to the Roman Senate. As a result, Roman citizens trading abroad were soon automatically under suspicion by their foreign hosts.

A major downside of relying on the *negotiatores* was that the Roman Senate was vulnerable to manipulation. When the state's interest lined up with its trader-spies, the system worked well. When it did not, the state could be forced into taking action against its own interests, manipulated by spies driven by personal gain.

### Caesar in Britain

One of the most skilled military commanders in the history of Rome, Gaius Julius Caesar (100 BCE–44 BCE) was also responsible for creating his own private intelligence service. Even so, his intelligence operations were not always successful. In 55 BCE,

*The First Descent of Julius Caesar  
on the Coast of Britain*  
S. Grainger, 1808



Caesar planned an invasion of Britain. At the time Rome knew almost nothing of the island, and the only people on the continent with any real knowledge of Britain were the Gauls—the French—who were less than eager to help the Romans.

The Britons had received advance notice of the invasion from the Gauls, who were waiting in force on the shore to meet Caesar when he arrived. After a brief skirmish, they were able to block Caesar's first landing attempt. As a result, Caesar's cavalry had to return to the continent. At the same time, many of his transports were destroyed by strong winds. After fighting a few short engagements, Caesar was forced to return home. Always the skilled propagandist, Caesar played up his mission as a success, leading the Roman senate to support him in another invasion the following year.

Despite two years of invasions across the channel, Caesar failed—and he was eventually forced to sign a symbolic treaty with the tribes. Although the treaty formally required the tribes to pay tribute to Rome, in reality this was only a symbolic gesture. All in all, Caesar's intelligence during the two invasions of Britain was a resolute failure.

### Caesar and the Gauls

Compared to his forays into Britain, Caesar's intelligence operations against the Gauls were far more widespread and far more effective. In combat he became famous for using *exploratores* and *speculatores*, both of whom subsequently became integral parts of Roman intelligence throughout the empire. The *exploratores* were cavalry scouts, mostly involved in reconnaissance. In contrast, the *speculatores* worked on foot, delivering dispatches, infiltrating enemy camps, and doing reconnaissance.

Another important innovation by Caesar in the Gaulic wars was the establishment of a regular network of secret messengers.

Like all other Roman generals, Caesar relied heavily on the interrogations of prisoners of war. At the same time, Caesar frequently used deception tactics, and Caesar is also recognized for innovative counterespionage methods, most notably his notorious “Greek cipher.”



*Vercingetorix  
Throws Down His Arms  
at the Feet of Julius Caesar*  
Lionel Royer, 1899

© Clipart.com/Corbis/Museum at Le Puy-en-Velay

The counterespionage tactic that proved to be the most valuable to Caesar was his emphasis on strong security around centers of command and control. With a secure system of sentries that watched all traffic in and out of his camps, Caesar was able to cut off the flow of information to his enemies.

Finally, playing off of his skill as a propagandist, Caesar successfully carried out psychological operations (or psy-ops) on both his enemies and his own troops. These tactics reached a peak during the struggle between Caesar and Pompey for control of the Roman Republic, when Caesar routinely falsely announced victories to build up his support among the Roman population. This support became invaluable as local populations began signaling to Caesar all of Pompey's movements, giving him a great tactical advantage.

### The Augustan Reformation

After Caesar's death, and nearly a century of civil war that followed, at the Battle at Actium in 31 BCE, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus defeated the forces of Mark Antony, changed his name to Augustus, and returned to Rome to take control of the Republic, forming the *Principate*—later known as the Roman Empire. The centralized power of Augustus as the sole consul of Rome created the necessary conditions for the first centralized Roman intelligence service. Almost immediately, Augustus showed the high value he gave to intelligence assets, creating support for cartography so that campaigning Roman generals would no longer have to rely on (likely hostile) natives as guides.

The next big step was the development of the *Cursus publicus*, a state-run communications network. Amazingly, it was the first reliable communication system to unite the entire Roman empire.

Even an emperor as popular as Augustus had to rely heavily on guards and spies inside the Roman court. Although protected by the Praetorian Guard, one of the most skilled units in the Roman Empire, no amount of physical protection could stop a determined assassin, and the protection of the emperor demanded an improved domestic intelligence service.

One of the ways plots were detected was through the use of *delatores*, private informers who were rewarded for their service. The system, however, was quickly plagued by corruption. *Delatores* began to inform on others for personal benefit, either for money or as a way to get rid of a competitor.

The basis for prosecution that the *delatores* relied upon was the *Lex Julia Maiestatis*—the law against treason. The law was sufficiently vague that people could be executed both for real treason and for seemingly ridiculous reasons (for example, carrying into the bathroom a coin with Augustus's face on it). Often, such prosecutions were only used by those in power to get rid of personal enemies or competitors.

Another non-military internal security organization started by Augustus was the *vigiles*, which started out as a fire department but soon became a

police force as well. Later, when an institutional military internal security organization was set up, the *vigiles* acted closely with it as well as with the Praetorian Guard. Officers of the *vigiles* worked as plain-clothes agents and were confined solely to Rome. When in the fourth century the emperor moved to Constantinople, the Roman police moved with him and Romans were left to deal with crime and theft on their own.

### *Speculatores and Exploratores*

In the military, the Augustan reforms created two different types of intelligence units, both of which were quite similar to the roles given to them by Caesar, only more generalized throughout the Empire. The *exploratores* were cavalry scouts; the *speculatores* were couriers and clandestine agents.

No longer up to the discretion of each commander, Augustus organized formal *speculatores* units. Each legion had a ten-man *speculatores* subunit, so that intelligence became an integral part of war. Since their use was generalized, they took on responsibilities that they had not had under Caesar—especially border defense. Many of the *speculatores* also ran “independent communications networks” that kept an eye on border areas. *Speculatores* were also used internally as *agents provocateurs*.

Unlike *speculatores*, the *exploratores* were rarely clandestine. Their main responsibility was to find enemy legions and measure their strength. They were selected from among the most reliable members of cavalry troops.

### The Teutoburg Forest

Despite the many reforms in the Roman intelligence apparatus beginning with Caesar Augustus, the Roman use of espionage was limited. Probably the most famous intelligence failure in the history of the Roman Empire was the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. This failure set the northern boundary of the Roman Empire and deeply affected the future history of Europe, not only with respect to the line between Romance and Germanic languages, but also with respect to Romanic versus Teutonic influences.

View of the Monument of Hermann in Teutoburg Forest, erected on the Grotenburg hill near Detmold. The monument was dedicated in 1875 by Emperor Wilhelm I, first Kaiser of the unified German Empire.



© Clipart.com/Cornelius Museum at Le Puy-en-Velay

The battle took place in the midst of an aggressive effort to Romanize Germany beyond the Rhine. The leader of the Roman legions in the Germanic zones, Publius Quinctilius Varus, had plenty of experience in fighting insurgencies. A Romanized German, Arminius (or Hermann the Great), was assigned to Varus's staff as commander of a German regiment.

In 9 CE, as Varus marched from his vulnerable summer fort to safety at his winter one, Arminius tricked Varus into marching off course to put down an uprising, one Arminius had provoked to lure Varus into a trap. Believing that Roman hegemony in Germany was absolute, Varus proceeded recklessly. Along the way at Kalkries Hill, north of Osnabrück, German troops came out of the forest and drove the unsuspecting Romans into a swamp.

After three days of entrenched battle in the pouring rain, the Roman troops were completely defeated. Three whole legions, 30,000 troops in total, were destroyed along with their entire attached civilian population.

While expertly planned and executed, the ambush was not inevitable. Smart use of *exploratores* scouts could have prevented it, as would have better counterintelligence and installation security.

### The *Frumentarii*

The reforms of Caesar Augustus eventually paved the way for the later creation of a centralized intelligence organization throughout the Roman Empire. Starting from the first century CE, that body was the *frumentarii*. Initially set up by the Emperor Domitian as intelligence gatherers, couriers, police, and assassins, the *frumentarii's* roles and responsibilities rapidly expanded. Technically, the *frumentarii* were a part of the military, organized from within the supply section, from where they took their name from the word *frumentum*, Latin for grain. Their responsibilities in the supply section were, however, just a cover for their real duties as espionage agents.

Roman Emperors came to rely so heavily on the *frumentarii* that they gradually supplanted the functions of the *speculatores*. Emperor Hadrian had *frumentarii* inform on his friends in the court, and Emperors Commodus and Didius Julianus used *frumentarii* as assassins.

It was the *frumentarii* who were responsible for infiltrating the early Christians. When ten of fourteen districts of Rome were either destroyed or badly damaged in the Great Fire in 64 CE, Emperor Nero used evidence from the *frumentarii* to implicate Christian terrorists for the arson. Tacitus wrote that Christians confessed to the crime when induced by *frumentarii* torture.

## The *Notarii*

Unlike the *frumentarii*, who were usually in uniform, the Roman Empire also had general agents, *agentes in rebus*, a counterintelligence force who were largely civilian plain-clothes informants. They fell under the command of the Master of Office, who in effect became the Master of Roman Intelligence. Their actions were coordinated with those of other intelligence agents by the imperial privy council, or Consistory. Much more numerous, there were as many as 1,200 general agents, compared to an estimated 800 *frumentarii*.

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire during the reign of Theodosius between 279 and 295, the general agents changed their main occupation from infiltrating and persecuting Christian groups to the vigorous persecution of heretics.

Inevitably, the secret service role of the *frumentarii* became widely known and deeply resented. Seeking to curry popular support, Emperor Diocletian did away with the *frumentarii* and replaced them with the *notarii*, imperial secretaries who also served as spies. Adam Silverstein has noted that these new agents “came to be as unruly and as despised as the *frumentarii* had ever been, and many contemporary observers were unable to detect any real difference between the old and the new.”

## Conclusion

Roman covert intelligence was largely domestic and not foreign. Initially created as an early warning system to guard against enemy attacks at Roman borders in the late-third century BCE, the growth and stabilization of the Roman Empire gradually transformed Roman intelligence services into a secret police force focused on the protection of Roman emperors. As such, the system largely failed, reflected by the fact that the vast majority of Roman emperors—over 75 percent—were assassinated.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What were the main forms of Roman intelligence before the Second Punic War?
2. What was Rome's greatest intelligence failure?
3. What was the main indication of the failure of intelligence in the Roman Empire?

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<http://www.historynet.com/espionage-in-ancient-rome.htm/6>

## Lecture 4

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### Spies of the Vatican

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Eric Frattini's *The Entity: Five Centuries of Secret Vatican Espionage* and Edward N. Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*.

Early Christian underground tactics developed over three hundred years in an atmosphere inside the Roman Empire that aggressively persecuted Christian beliefs. It was not until the end of the third century CE (279–295) that the Roman emperor Theodosius embraced Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. From that time on, the same Roman secret police—the *frumentarii* and the *agentes in rebus*—moved from persecuting Christians to a vigorous support of official religion and the persecution and torture of heretics.

From the third century, the close association between the Roman Empire and Christianity meant that the seat of the Catholic Church in Rome did itself become embroiled in worldly intrigues. Once it moved from the liberation theology of an underground movement to the status of official religion, Catholicism became a powerful force in the world of espionage. And the Vatican was responsible for covert operations to sow discord among allies and enemies alike, to gather insider information from moles inside the courts of Europe and around the world, to press for Vatican interests on a wide variety of more worldly than spiritual agendas, to collect unflattering information about persons of influence, and even to perpetrate assassinations.

Inside the Roman Empire, Vatican agents became the lead investigators in heresy trials. In this way, the hunt for religious heretics applied many of the lessons of the counterintelligence operations of the Roman Empire in disclosing the presence of satanic and heretical influences inside society at large.

Rome's efforts to impose controls on all of Christendom became the crucible that led to the expansion of espionage operations.

But while historians generally agree about the papacy's reliance on espionage and covert operations to consolidate

The seal of the *biblioteca secreta* in the Vatican. The term *secretum* has been used since the fifteenth century for people or institutions close to the authorities who could be trusted in the Vatican. The Vatican's secret archives are the personal, or private, archives of the pope.



its hold on Europe and the Mediterranean during the first millennium of the history of the Catholic Church, few records of that era have survived in the Vatican archives today. And the only reliable information about the history of Vatican espionage dates from the sixteenth century and the formation of the so-called Holy Alliance as an antidote to the rise of Protestantism in Europe, and particularly as a response to the crisis in England following King Henry VIII's decision in 1533 to reject Catholicism in favor of a new Church of England.

### **Catholic Church: East versus West**

Civilization in the city of Rome was extinguished by the year 476, but scholars today recognize that the Roman Empire continued to thrive in its eastern capital of Constantinople, in what is called the Byzantine Empire. As Edward Luttwak notes, the Byzantines did not use the word "Byzantine." They called themselves Romans, and their enemies called them Romans as well.

The Byzantine Empire was formed around 400, with the capital at Constantinople—modern-day Istanbul—a city on the margins of a Muslim East and a Catholic West.

The Byzantine Empire was almost constantly at war over its thousand-year history and therefore depended on an extensive spy network to protect itself from enemies, both foreign and domestic.

In his monumental study, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, historian Edward Luttwak uncovered the extraordinary tactics of the Byzantine leadership to maintain security. "The genius of Byzantine grand strategy," Luttwak observed, "was to turn the very multiplicity of enemies to advantage, by employing diplomacy, deception, payoffs, and religious conversion to induce them to fight one another instead of fighting the empire."

Perhaps the most notable and innovative strategy of the Byzantines lay in recognizing the limits of their resources. The Byzantine strategy was therefore to play her enemies off against each other, and this required active intelligence and espionage networks—both to collect information and to sow intrigues among their enemies.

### **Crusades**

More often than not, espionage is born of fear. A critical factor of the policy of the Catholic papacy was the fear of non-believers—meaning in this context, non-Catholics—that resided at the margins of Europe, ominously poised to attack Christendom at any moment.

Pope Urban II has influenced the history of the West perhaps more than any other leader of the Catholic Church. His appeal in 1095 for a rescue of Jerusalem from Muslim invasion was based on raw intelligence of the desecration of the Holy Land by what he considered to be the Muslim infidels.

At the Council of Clermont in France on 27 November 1095, Pope Urban II declared a Catholic holy war against all Muslims, appealing to Europeans to rise up to protect the sacred relics of their faith.

Obviously, the existence of spies originating from the Vatican ipso facto indicates the existence of spies in the courts of Europe, the Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East.

In fourteenth-century Turkey, for instance, the chronicles of Saint Denis indicate that the son of the Ottoman ruler Murad I, King Bayazid, relied on spies and interpreters at his base in Adrianople to keep him well-informed about the kings and kingdoms of Christendom farther west.

Even as the Vatican was spying on others at and beyond the margins of Europe, others were in turn spying on the kings of Christendom.

Especially after the sacking of Constantinople by the Muslim armies in 1204, Vatican counterintelligence grew increasingly wary of the “Muslim hordes” poised at the margins of Europe.

### **Moscow as the Third Rome**

Within decades after the fall of Constantinople to Ottoman ruler Mehmed II on 29 May 1453, there were many in the Eastern Church who looked to Moscow to become the Third Rome. The idea became more real when the Russian monk Filofei of Pskov in 1510 sent this panegyric to the Grand Duke of Muscovy, Vasilli III: “Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. And there will be no fourth. No one shall replace your Christian Tsardom!”

Consistent with this passing of the Eastern Christian mantle to Moscow were rumors that the priceless collections of books and manuscripts in the Vatican library with the first 1,400 years of the history of the Catholic papacy in Constantinople had not actually perished in the flames of Muslim iconoclasm, but rather that the entire Byzantine library had been secretly transferred to the Moscow Kremlin for safekeeping.

In 1533, Ivan IV was the first Russian tsar, the first Russian leader to be coronated as tsar by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. Ivan IV is more popularly known by his other name, Ivan Grozny, or Ivan the Terrible.

One of the greatest examples of Vatican intrigue against Moscow would take place in the wake of Ivan the Terrible’s death at the end of March 1584.

Obsessed with recovering the lost treasures of the papacy’s Byzantine library, and also seeking to reunite the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, agents of the Vatican descended upon Moscow seeking information on the whereabouts of the missing Byzantine library.

The background for the covert operation that followed was based on the fact that Ivan the Terrible had died without a male heir. In fact, in 1581, Ivan beat his pregnant daughter-in-law for wearing immodest clothing at

the Moscow court, a beating that is believed to have caused the miscarriage of a male heir to the Russian throne. When Ivan the Terrible's son, also Ivan, challenged his father's violent abuse, the father struck him in the head with his pointed staff, killing his own son, the next in line to the Russian throne.

There was another heir to the throne, Ivan the Terrible's younger son Dmitry. But it is generally believed that this son was assassinated in 1591 in Uglich, Russia, leaving Russia without a male heir to the throne, and therefore hurling Russia into an age of political chaos and great upheaval known as the Time of Troubles.

Polish secret agents, working in concert with the Vatican, sought to exploit this chaos by insisting that the rumors of the young Dmitry's demise had been incorrect, and that the rightful heir to the Russian throne had managed to escape to safety in Poland back in 1591. According to the story, Dmitry returned to Moscow to reclaim his right to the Russian crown in July 1605. This alleged Dmitry, son of Tsar Ivan IV, appeared on the scene around 1600, when he managed to create a good impression on Patriarch Job, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church. Then Tsar Boris Godunov was so concerned about this alleged son of his predecessor that he ordered the young Dmitry arrested, and an official investigation followed. Gradually, as opposition to Boris Godunov grew, more and more powerful families in Russia began to support Dmitry's claim to the throne. On 17 April 1604, Dmitry publicly converted to Roman Catholicism, and in this way he won the commitment of the papal nuncio Claudio Rangoni to support his claims.

By June 1604, Dmitry had managed to put together an army of his own, and as the weeks and months wore on, Dmitry added the support of disaffected Cossacks and others who supported his bid to take over the throne of Russia. They captured towns as they advanced toward Moscow—Chernigov, Putivl, Sevsk, Kursk. On 13 April 1605, Boris Godunov suddenly died, and the last impediment to Dmitry's claim had been removed.

On 1 June 1605, members of the ruling families in Moscow imprisoned the new tsar, Godunov's successor—Feodor II—and then murdered him and his mother. On 20 June 1605, Dmitry entered Moscow triumphantly.

*Ivan the Terrible and His Son  
Ivan on November 16th, 1581*  
by Ilya Repin, 1885



© Clipart.com/Treykov Gallery, Moscow

And on 21 July 1605 the false Dmitry—a Polish and Vatican spy—was crowned the tsar of Russia. The Polish and Vatican intrigues had succeeded, but not for long.

Dmitry immediately set about instituting a series of policies and acts that began to alienate the Russian population. On 8 May 1606, Dmitry married a Polish Catholic noblewoman, Marina Mnischek (also popularly known in Russia as “Marinka the witch”), in Moscow. In violation of Russian tradition, Dmitry’s new wife did not convert to Russian Orthodoxy. The Russian aristocracy, led by Prince Vasili Shuisky, began to plot against Dmitry—renouncing him for Roman Catholicism, sodomy, and other heresies.

Two weeks after Dmitry’s wedding, on the morning of 17 May 1606, armed conspirators stormed the Kremlin. Terrified, Dmitry leaped from a window in a Kremlin tower, breaking his leg on impact. The broken false pretender was dragged inside the Kremlin, and Dmitry’s mother was interrogated: Was this really her son? No, she said. Her son Dmitry had died years before. An eyewitness recalled: “The conspirators now fell upon Dmitry and his body was pierced with a thousand dagger thrusts. His mangled remains were then dragged through the streets and burned.”

The angry crowd displayed Dmitry’s corpse for tens of thousands of viewers. Soon after, the conspirators burned Dmitry’s body and fired his ashes from a cannon on Red Square back toward Poland as a signal to all Catholics and Poles that this was the fate of Catholic spies inside Russia.



*Last Minutes of False Dmitry*  
by Karl Venig, 1879

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. Why do we know so little about papal intrigues and spying before 1521?
2. What innovative strategies did the Byzantines introduce to the history of spying?
3. What was Poland's role in the False Dmitry episodes in seventeenth-century Russia?

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2. The *Medieval Crusades* website provides a short article on the siege of Antioch involving spies of crusader Marcus Bohemond. — <http://www.medievalcrusades.com/antioch.htm>

## Lecture 5

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### Espionage in the Time of the Religious Wars

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Stephen Budiansky's *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage*.

#### Sir Francis Walsingham

“The Father of Modern Intelligence”  
Sir Francis Walsingham is the man most credited with opening the doors to new ways of gaining covert information as a matter of national security. In his life and service (from 1559 to his death in 1590) to Queen Elizabeth I, Walsingham uncovered three major plots to assassinate the Queen and to restore a Catholic monarchy in England. He also helped to save the monarchy from Spanish invasion. His successor, Sir Robert Cecil—the son of Walsingham's mentor—discovered and quashed the Gunpowder Plot in November 1605, a Catholic conspiracy that aimed to assassinate the entire government of England—the king, his successors, and members of Parliament—by detonating fifty kegs of gunpowder under Parliament.



*Sir Francis Walsingham*  
(1532–1590)

“The Father of Modern Intelligence”  
by John De Critz the Elder (died 1647)

#### Elizabeth I (1533–1603)

With Queen Mary's death in 1557, the succession question once again was raised in England. Elizabeth's sister Mary I had reversed Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy and therefore she had not only restored Catholicism in England, but this act also had the effect of rendering Elizabeth an illegitimate birth. She therefore could not be a legitimate heir to the throne. The Catholics insisted that Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry had been legal, and that Elizabeth was therefore the illegitimate daughter of Henry's VIII's mistress, Anne Boleyn.

In Catholic views, Mary Queen of Scots, the daughter of Mary Tudor, was the sole remaining legitimate heir to the English throne.

Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558. Instead of taking rash action that could lead to civil war, or a dispute with Catholic Spain, Elizabeth chose to wait for Parliament to make a decision regarding the proper line of succession. In 1559 the English Parliament voted overwhelmingly to restore the

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Act of Supremacy, and Parliament also thereby recognized the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth as head of the Church of England. The Parliament also reinstated several religious acts introduced by Henry VIII and Edward VI, so that by 1559 Protestantism again became the official religion in England.

Pope Pius IV became increasingly alarmed and wrote Elizabeth several times, entreating her to return to Catholicism. When she refused, Pius IV announced publicly that “indulgence and pardon would be granted to anyone who might attack Elizabeth.”

In 1570, Pope Pius V opted to win back England through any means necessary and published his *Regnans in Excelsis*, which vilified “Elizabeth, the pretended Queen of England and the servant of crime.” After years of secret negotiations, the *Regnans in Excelsis* excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I and forced her subjects to choose between loyalty to Elizabeth or devotion to their Catholic faith.

### The Ridolfi Plot

Roberto Ridolfi was an Italian banker who handled financial affairs of London merchants. He aroused suspicion when he began delivering huge sums of money to the Bishop of Ross, an informant of Mary’s, and a member of the Catholic underground inside England. To question him Elizabeth’s chief adviser, Sir William Cecil, called upon one of his protégés, Francis Walsingham. Ridolfi easily explained away his connection to the money, dismissing this suspicious activity as simply part of his job.

The matter ended there. Under Cecil’s influence, and with an eye toward establishing an English intelligence operation inside Catholic Europe, in 1570, Queen Elizabeth appointed Walsingham as her ambassador to France. In the spring of 1571, a foreigner attracted the attention of customs officials and was arrested. That man was Charles Baillie, a servant of the Bishop of Ross. Among the documents he was carrying were a book and a packet of letters written in code. The letters were switched before Cecil was able to read them; however, Baillie revealed under duress that the letters were from Ridolfi, and they detailed his recent meetings with the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands. A plan was being hatched to overthrow Elizabeth by a Spanish invasion and replace her with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots.

#### Royal Rivals

A portrait of Elizabeth I (the “Darnley Portrait,”) ca. 1575, and Mary, Queen of Scots, painted while in captivity, ca. 1575.



It was Walsingham who obtained the necessary clues to discovering the letters' intended recipients. His information also led to a large stockpile of gold that was being moved north, presumably to finance the entire operation.

This astounding plot opened Walsingham's eyes to the serious dangers to the English Crown. The Ridolfi connection all but proved that the entire operation had the support of Pope Pius V and convinced Walsingham that "Mary was the enemy, pure and simple, the focus of all that threatened Elizabeth and her realm; sooner or later she would have to be dealt with, as would the power of Catholic France and Spain." But how could he persuade Elizabeth I to act against Mary?

### **Secretary Walsingham**

In December 1573, Sir Francis Walsingham officially took on the position of Secretary Walsingham, after his mentor William Cecil had become Treasurer. In this post, Walsingham would distinguish himself as a brilliant spymaster, ready and willing to use virtually any tactics to collect information by virtually any means.

Walsingham kept a series of notebooks that detailed every minute detail of the intelligence he had collected. Walsingham also employed a network of "suppliers," both official and unofficial spies. His official suppliers were typically men stationed at points of entry into the country. His unofficial suppliers were more a network of informants positioned around the world.

In addition, Walsingham employed men of more unsavory backgrounds for shady tasks.

### **The Throckmorton Plot**

In the summer of 1583, Walsingham gained an incredibly useful informant—the French ambassador's secretary. With his help, Walsingham acquired several cartons' worth of letters between the French ambassador, Mauvissiere, and Mary, Queen of Scots. Among these letters was one addressed to Mary from the mysterious "Sieur de la Tour," who turned out to be Francis Throckmorton, one of Mary's couriers.

In response, Walsingham sent several of his men to search Throckmorton's house and to arrest him. Throckmorton was caught red-handed while encoding a letter for Mary, and a search of his house turned up other useful documents that proved conclusively yet another Catholic plot to murder the Queen of England. With this information, Walsingham authorized the use of torture in interrogation to gain any crucial information Throckmorton might be withholding.

Throckmorton did eventually confess that Mary's allies in France had hired him to inspect possible areas for an invasion of five thousand men, to be led by the Duke of Guise. He also admitted that the Spanish ambassador Mendoza was involved in the scheme and that he planned to commit twenty thousand Spanish troops to the cause. The three most important officials

in Elizabeth's government—Walsingham, Cecil (Lord Burghely), and Leicester—confronted Mendoza with the evidence of his intrigue, and they gave him just fifteen days to leave the country.

The issue with the French ambassador was handled more discreetly. Lists of charges were drawn up, but ultimately the entire matter was dropped. Walsingham concluded that rather than risk an open break with France, that the mere presentation of evidence would force Mauvissiere to cease his correspondence with Mary altogether.

Francis Throckmorton was hanged in 1584.

### **The Babington Plot**

The third major Catholic conspiracy to overthrow Elizabeth's rule with the aim of placing Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne was the Babington Plot, named for one of the chief conspirators, Sir Anthony Babington (1561–1586), a young Catholic nobleman. Walsingham was aware that Mary's supporters would find a way to contact her. Seeking to implicate Mary, Walsingham devised a scheme to intercept letters to and from Mary: a local businessman delivered beer barrels to Pault, one of Mary's supporters, who stuffed them with outgoing mail from Mary. From there the businessman would deliver the letters to Gifford, whom Mary assumed was loyal to her, but who was actually working for Walsingham. Gifford was to pass the letters on to another conspirator, Thomas Phelippes, who would decipher and return them to Gifford. Gifford would then deliver these deciphered letters to the French embassy.

The extent of control and surveillance that Walsingham achieved over Mary's agents in what would come to be known as the Babington Plot was remarkable and completely unprecedented. He had learned his lessons from the previous plots and now wanted to eliminate the rival queen.

Walsingham relied heavily on Gilbert Gifford, who had been a member of a formerly wealthy Catholic family in England. He had credibility with the mostly Catholic plotters, and he had also done a stint in prison under the order of Walsingham to gain even greater credibility. When Mary sent for the opinion of Thomas Morgan, a prominent Catholic imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris, Morgan gave his word that Gifford was an honorable man and a good Catholic.

In a meeting with Mary, Gifford proposed that he personally carry the letters from Chartley Hall to London, where they could be carried by the French ambassador to Paris and beyond. To get his hands on the messages away from the suspicious eyes of her captor, Sir Amias Paulet, Gifford proposed bribing the town brewer, an "honest man" who allegedly supported their cause. At the brewer's, Gifford would roll the letters, place them into watertight cylinders, and drop them through the bunghole into barrels of ale intended for Chartley Hall.

When she wished to write back, Mary's replies were dropped back into the empty barrels, which were then recycled back to the brewer's, where Gifford could bring them along to London.

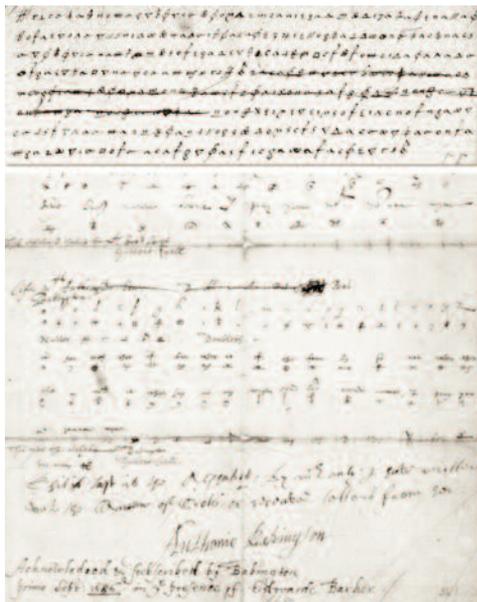
Little did Mary know, Gifford's true plan included rushing the letters to Sir Thomas Phelippes, a friend of Walsingham who specialized in breaking codes. Within a few days, Phelippes could copy, decode, and reseal the letters so that no one would suspect they had been tampered with.

Gifford then took the letters with all possible speed to Ambassador Mauvissiere at the French embassy in London. Thanks to the code-breaker's considerable skill, the letters arrived on time without arousing any suspicion. It was through this intricate deception that Walsingham managed to gather all the evidence he needed to prove a massive Catholic plot implicating Mary, the French, the Spanish, and the Vatican.

In Robert Poley's home (Poley was one of Walsingham's agents), the French ambassador and Babington were carefully watched. At Poley's, as well as at several taverns throughout southeastern England, a plot was slowly formulated. The enthusiastic English Jesuit priest, John Ballard, prodded the cautious group along with "promises" of Spanish support. Double agent Charles Paget and Thomas Morgan sent their own words of encouragement from Paris. Babington became the hub of the network and regularly wrote to Mary about the plan they were putting together.

Babington wrote of how he planned to lead ten noblemen and a hundred others to "undertake the delivery of your royal person from the hands of your enemies" and "for the dispatch of the usurper [Elizabeth], from the obedience of whom we are by excommunication [*Regnans in Excelsis*—Pius V] of her made free, there be six noble gentlemen all my private friends who for the zeal they bear to the Catholic cause and your Majesty's service will undertake the tragical execution."

Against the advice of her secretaries, Mary replied to this letter with her approval on 17 July 1586. Her enthusiastic response was long and detailed, restating



Thomas Phelippes's forged cipher postscript letter to Mary, Queen of Scots, from Anthony Babington.

the necessity of a foreign invasion coordinated with her escape and requesting details regarding the conspiracy's leadership, which ports were to be invaded, and so on. Though the reply letter does not give direct assent to the assassination of Elizabeth, it does make clear that "it would be a mistake to try and free her before Elizabeth had been taken care of." When Phelippes sent the deciphered letter on to Walsingham, he scratched a picture of a gallows into the wax seal. Phelippes himself pushed for the immediate arrest of Mary and the conspirators, but Walsingham still had to learn the names of the "six noble gentlemen" who were to carry out the assassination. Walsingham and Phelippes therefore agreed to add a postscript of their own onto Mary's letter, using the same cipher to request from Babington the names of her supporters. Though Babington received the letter on the 29th of July, he did not reply.

Walsingham personally issued the warrant for the arrest of Ballard. Fearing that Babington might be pressed to flight, Walsingham told Phelippes to make a move on Babington's arrest on August 4, advising that it would be "better to lack the answer [to the postscript], than to lack the man." Babington himself witnessed the arrest of Ballard from the window of Poley's house on 4 August. He, along with several followers, fled to St. John's Wood, a patch of thick forest where they were found in very bad condition. Among Babington's possessions was found a recent portrait that included the six would-be assassins. They were brought to London, put on trial, and on 20 September 1586, they were drawn and quartered in St. Gile's Field while Robert Savage and several of his men were hanged.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. In what way did King Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church in 1533 set the foundation for the creation of the English Secret Service?
2. Who was Sir Francis Walsingham?
3. What were the three Catholic plots to murder Elizabeth I and put Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne?

## Suggested Reading

Budiansky, Stephen. *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage*. New York: Plume, 2006.

## Other Books of Interest

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Hutchinson, Robert. *Elizabeth's Spymaster: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War That Saved England*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007.

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Harbison, E. Harris. "French Intrigue at the Court of Queen Mary." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 45, no. 3 (April 1940): 533–51.

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Robinson, A.M.F. "Queen Elizabeth and the Valois Princes." *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 2, no. 5 (January 1887): 40–77.

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## Website of Interest

The *BBC History* website features an article from February 2011 by Alexandra Briscoe entitled "Elizabeth's Spy Network." —  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/spying\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/spying_01.shtml)

## Lecture 6

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### The Gunpowder Plot, 1605

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Alice Hogge's *God's Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth's Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot*.

#### The Trial and Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots

Queen Elizabeth I was understandably reluctant to place a fellow monarch and family member on trial. Executing her cousin went against her beliefs about rule by divine right, and Elizabeth rightly feared that the trial might ultimately undermine her own authority. Sir Francis Walsingham was convinced, however, that until Mary was tried and executed, her mere existence would encourage Catholic conspirators throughout Europe. Driven by security of the English queen, Walsingham spared no expense from his personal fortune to push the matter forward, and in late September 1586, he persuaded the queen to appoint a special jury of forty-two peers, judges, and the Privy Council to conduct a trial of Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was brought to the trial on 25 September at Fotheringhay Castle.

When asked of her connections with Ballard and Babington, Mary denied everything. When her ciphered letters were read and her own secretaries testified against her, she accused Walsingham of fabricating the letters to bring about her ruin. Walsingham stood up and defended his public honor, saying, "I have done nothing unbecoming an honest man, neither in my public condition and quality have I done anything unworthy of my place." Mary accepted Walsingham's reply and took back her accusation. Several scholars have identified this as the moment when Mary appeared to resign herself to her inevitable execution. On 25 October 1586, the jury reached a verdict in Westminster: Mary was convicted of "compassing, practicing, and imagining of her Majesty's [Queen Elizabeth's] death."

Queen Elizabeth was hesitant to sign Mary's death warrant. For more than three months, Elizabeth swayed between execution or mercy. Finally, on 1 February 1587, Elizabeth signed Mary's death warrant. Before the Queen could change her mind, her Privy Council took action and carried out the execution by beheading Mary on 8 February 1587. When the announcement of Mary's execution was released, church bells rang and, according to numerous reports, there was considerable celebration in streets throughout England.

#### The Jesuits and the English Mission

Historian Eric Frattini discovered in Vatican archives "The Entity," an ultra-secret Vatican espionage unit that has been active for at least five-hundred years. Originally named the Holy Alliance, the espionage branch of the

Vatican can be traced back to the papacy of Pope Pius V, who created the organization in 1566, specifically to depose Elizabeth I and bring England and Scotland back to Catholicism.

From its inception, the Holy Alliance was closely associated with the Society of Jesus—the Jesuit order of Catholic priests—founded by Ignatius Loyola and six of his followers on 15 August 1534. It was not until 1540 that the new religious order—one that would become the symbol of Catholic conspiracy and intrigue in Europe—would gain official recognition from the Vatican. This new religious order was to perform missionary work wherever the pope felt it was most needed. These Jesuit missionaries would be seen, as historian Jonathan Wright has written, as a “direct response to the incursions of Luther and Calvin—created to win back the souls snatched in Europe and to locate new souls in Asia, Africa, and the Americas to balance the spiritual books.”

In the religious upheavals that had struck England since 1533, large settlements of refugee Catholics had become hotbeds of Catholic intrigue against Queen Elizabeth all over Europe. It was from this pool of English Catholic refugees that the Vatican drew its fanatical secret agents. As seen, these Catholic conspirators were driven by the dream of replacing Queen Elizabeth with Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.

The English Mission was coordinated with covert efforts by Pope Gregory XIII to finance a Catholic mission to Ireland to assist the Irish rebellion against Elizabeth. This put the English authorities on high alert when it came to catching priests, and it also ensured brutal treatment of the priests they found. It was with this realization that Jesuit priests to the “English Mission,” Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons, wrote out a declaration (the “Decem Rationes”) of their intentions in the event that they were captured by the English authorities. Campion wrote unequivocally: “Be it known to you that we have made a league—all Jesuits in the world, whose succession and multitude must overreach all the practices of England—cheerfully to carry the cross you shall lay upon us, and never to despair your recovery, while we have a man left to enjoy your Tyburn.”<sup>†</sup> For Walsingham and the English government, this was a direct challenge to national security and the queen.

### **The Spanish Armada**

At the time of Mary’s execution, England was in the middle of a full-fledged war with Spain in the Netherlands. By 1588, the Spanish king Philip II was gathering an armada of ships for an invasion of England. Spain had allied itself with Portugal, Italy, and the Netherlands, combining

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<sup>†</sup> The Tyburn was a village in Middlesex and is now a part of London City. The name was almost universally used in literature to refer to the notorious and uniquely designed gallows, used for centuries as the primary location of the execution of criminals.

to create a powerful fleet of one hundred thirty ships. The English, by comparison, had only twenty-three warships, eighteen smaller sailing ships, and a military force of untrained soldiers.

Using espionage and with more than a small amount of luck, the English managed to transform inevitable defeat into victory. How? Walsingham spy networks intercepted a letter that provided many of the details of the planned invasion of England. Immediately, preparations began to protect the coasts that the Spanish were most likely to attack. On 28 May 1588, the armada left Lisbon destined for Plymouth. On 19 July, the Spanish fleet was spotted off the coast of England. Elizabeth had sent her own fleet of nearly fifty ships under the command of Lord Charles Howard and Sir Francis Drake to intercept them. Although the English were outnumbered, they had the advantage of possessing smaller, more maneuverable ships especially suitable for use along the treacherous English coast.

The English attacked on 29 July in what became known as the Battle of Gravelines. They began by sending eight burning ships full of explosives straight at the Spanish Armada, which scattered in panic. The English warships then pursued the scattered remnants in a divide-and-conquer strategy. The day after this battle the Spanish sailed away from the English coast, closely pursued by the English. During their retreat, the Spanish Armada was caught in a hurricane, and several ships, along with over five thousand men, were lost at sea. The engagement proved an astounding English victory.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was to be the last major intelligence contribution of Sir Francis Walsingham. Upon his death in 1590, Walsingham was replaced by Sir Robert Cecil. It was Cecil who would manage to uncover and block the last major Catholic plot against the English Crown.

### **The Gunpowder Plot**

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 took place two years after Elizabeth I had died and James I of Scotland had become king. Curiously, James was the son of Mary Stuart, who had been executed in 1587 for plotting the assassination of Queen Elizabeth. James was himself a Protestant, but Catholics in England were hopeful that because James was the son of a Catholic and was married to one, that persecution would be substantially curbed. The realization that James would not restore a policy of toleration persuaded the Catholic underground to take radical action against the English Crown.

The Gunpowder Plot was a plan set forth by English Catholics to blow up the houses of the English Parliament and assassinate King James I. It has often been assumed that Guy Fawkes was the main conspirator in the plot, but the leader of the conspiracy was actually Robert Catesby. Catesby already had a fairly long record of conspiratorial work, and he had been imprisoned several times because of his adherence to Catholicism.

It was on Sunday, 20 May 1604, that five men—Robert Catesby, Tom Winter, Jack Wright, Thomas Percy, and Guy Fawkes—met at a London inn, the Duke and Drake. Although there would eventually be thirteen plotters, these five were the chief instigators of the Catholic conspiracy to murder King James. It was here that Catesby presented a plan “to blow up the Parliament House with gunpowder.”

The group’s membership grew from the five initial members to seven by December of 1604. By March, three more plotters had been added to the conspirator ranks. Of these, John Grant proved to be most useful to the group. His home provided a strategic gateway for the plotters, because it was located about halfway between the two key towns of the plotters, Warwick and Stratford.

The aim of the conspirators was not simply to blow up the houses of Parliament, but to do so while Parliament was in session, in the presence of the new king, and (with any luck) his two male heirs as well.

The plotters hoped to murder King James and his two sons to push the succession to James’s daughter Elizabeth, who was third in line to the throne. Elizabeth was only nine years old, but she was the preferred candidate for a puppet monarch. The princess would be kidnapped and converted to Catholicism, and the pro-Catholic Earl of Northumberland would protect the throne and Catholic interests until Elizabeth came of age.

By October 1605 Catesby had drawn the last five men into the scheme. On the day of the explosion, Guy Fawkes was expected to light the fuse in the hidden cellar under Parliament and then make his way to a boat waiting for him on the Thames River. As soon as it was confirmed that the explosion had succeeded in killing the entire English government, Princess Elizabeth would be kidnapped, and Spain would be informed of the conspirators’ intentions.



A contemporary woodcut of the main participants in the Gunpowder Plot, 1605.

## Henry Garnet

A native Englishman, Henry Garnet became a Jesuit in 1575 and supervised the Jesuit mission for eighteen years with conspicuous success. Garnet happened to be in London in June 1605 when he was approached by Robert Catesby, an acquaintance, who asked the Jesuit “in case it were lawful to kill a person or persons, it were necessary to regard the innocents which were present lest they should perish?” Garnet later claimed that he had not known at that point of the plot. However, he must have known something, as he wrote a letter to the English Privy Council warning of an imminent Catholic terrorist act against the government.



Fr. Henry Garnet  
(1555–1606)

How the Gunpowder Plot was uncovered remains shrouded in mystery. The official English government’s account asserted that Garnet’s letter was received by spymaster Sir Robert Cecil, who chose to wait to take action until James I saw the letter. Once James had read the letter, Cecil had the chambers beneath Parliament searched twice. On the second raid on 5 November 1605, Guy Fawkes was discovered beneath the House of Parliament guarding fifty kegs of gunpowder.

Over the next two days of interrogations, Fawkes alleged that he was John Johnson, a servant to Thomas Percy. Once the rest of the conspirators learned that Fawkes had been caught they began to flee London. On 6 November 1605, while Fawkes was still imprisoned in the Tower of London, James I ordered him to undergo torture until he disclosed every detail of the plot. Fawkes managed to resist, and it was not until 8 November that he unveiled anything of great importance. After confessing his true identity, Fawkes went on to admit that five unnamed men were also involved in the plot. He also had confessed that “Gerard, the Jesuit” had performed the sacrament after the group had sworn an oath of secrecy. Although Fawkes had sworn that the Jesuit had not been aware of the plot, he did say that the group had used Henry Garnet’s quarters to meet.

English authorities began a mad search for the two Jesuit priests, John Gerard and Henry Garnet. The government could not have failed to recognize how convenient it would be to implicate the Jesuits as the chief instigators in a “Vatican-inspired” Gunpowder Plot. In the course of tracking the actual plotters, four, including Catesby, were killed resisting arrest. All of

the remaining plotters were eventually captured and questioned vigorously about Gerard and Garnet, but none would speak against them.

By January 1606, James I had decided that enough evidence existed to officially list Gerard, Garnet, and a third Jesuit, “Father Greenway” (Oswald Tesimond), as coconspirators. In late January, Nicholas Owen was added to the list, and several days later Garnet and a fellow priest, Father Edward Oldcorne, surrendered.

On 7 January the trial for the eight remaining plotters began. The only ones left were Guy Fawkes, John Grant, Ambrose Rookwood, Everard Digby, Thomas and Robert Winter, Robert Keyes, and Thomas Bates. They were charged with treason, and seven of the men pleaded not guilty, while only Digby admitted his guilt. During the trial Gerard and Garnet were named as the principal instigators. Garnet had, in fact, been arrested on the morning of the last day of the trial, although the news of his arrest did not reach London for quite some time. The verdict was predictable: all eight of the surviving conspirators were found guilty of high treason, and all eight were publicly executed on 30 and 31 January 1606.

After the capture of Garnet and Owen, both prisoners were brought to the Tower of London for interrogation. Owen was the first to be tortured, on 19 February. By 2 March, Owen was dead from the use of excessive force. Following Owen’s death, Garnet readily admitted his part in the Gunpowder Plot. At his trial, Garnet was found guilty of treason and subsequently hanged on 30 April. The last of the conspirators, Father John Gerard, managed to escape England and lived out the rest of his life performing Jesuit work in Europe.

Each year since that failed assassination plot, England has celebrated the Gunpowder Plot as Guy Fawkes Day on 5 November, with bonfires, massive fireworks displays, and the ubiquitous image of Guy Fawkes masks.



A typical plastic Guy Fawkes mask worn by participants at celebrations on November 5 each year.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. Why did Queen Elizabeth I order the execution of her cousin Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots?
2. What were the chief aims of the Gunpowder Plot of November 1605?
3. Why was it so important for King James I to implicate Jesuits and the Vatican for instigating the Gunpowder Plot?

## Suggested Reading

Hogge, Alice. *God's Secret Agents: Queen Elizabeth's Forbidden Priests and the Hatching of the Gunpowder Plot*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.

## Other Books of Interest

Fraser, Antonia. *Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot*. New York: Anchor, 1997.

Marshall, Alan. *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660–1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 (1994).

## Articles of Interest

Wormald, Jenny. "Gunpowder, Treason, and Scots." *The Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 24, no. 2 (April 1985).

## Websites of Interest

1. The *Gunpowder Plot Society* website provides a history of the plot, character profiles, articles, and other information. —  
<http://www.gunpowder-plot.org/index.asp>
2. The *Guardian* website features an interactive experience about the Gunpowder Plot. —  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,5860,1605605,00.html>
3. David Cornfield's website provides a reprint of a 1606 London newspaper article detailing the execution of Guy Fawkes. —  
<http://www.exmsft.com/~davidco/History/fawkes1.htm>

# Lecture 7

## The Age of Discovery

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Peter Earle's *The Pirate Wars* and Charles C. Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*.

The discovery of America in 1492 transformed the struggle for hegemony among rival European states into a truly global struggle. And as the old institutions of state control of Europe were extended and transformed into the New World, so too was the competition for the vital resources and seemingly limitless wealth of the Americas.

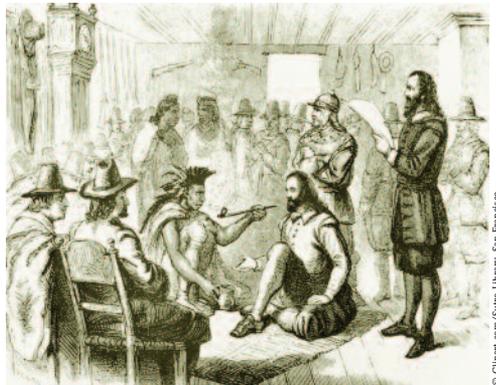
### Native American Intelligence and European Settlers in New England

In 2006, writer Charles C. Mann published his monumental book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. Curiously, Mann managed to turn one of the most universally loved stories of the contact between Europeans and Native Americans into an intriguing espionage tale.

Most know the story of the fateful meeting of 22 March 1621 of the Native Americans with Myles Standish and the Puritan community at Plymouth Colony, and the foundations of the holiday Americans know as Thanksgiving. In Charles Mann's adroit handling, when Chief Massasoit first met the Pilgrims he was actually trying to co-opt the European newcomers in a clever scheme to save his tribe.

In those early days, the settlement at Plymouth Colony had come under constant conflict with the local Native Americans—so that by mid-February 1621 the able-bodied men of Plymouth Colony had organized themselves into a militia, with Myles Standish as the commanding officer and John Carver as their new governor. By the end of February, five cannons had been removed from their ship and positioned on Fort Hill to defend the community from Indian raids on their stores.

The brutal winter of 1620–21 decimated the Plymouth community. Of the one hundred two Pilgrims who had arrived in November 1620, only fifty-seven managed to survive that first winter.



Massasoit and John Carver smoking a peace pipe at Plymouth colony, 1621.

© Clipart.com/Quiro Library, San Francisco

Those desperate conditions essentially forced the Europeans to seek some sort of rapprochement with the Native American communities of the region. The opportunity for partnership came in the form of overtures from Massasoit, the chief of the Wampanoag, a dominant confederation of tribes that controlled most of what is now southeastern Massachusetts.

As Mann explained: “Massasoit was an adroit politician, but the dilemma he faced would have tested Machiavelli. About five years before, most of his subjects had fallen before a terrible calamity. Whole villages had been depopulated—killed off by infectious diseases brought from Europe into the North American continent by these same settlers. It was all Massasoit could do to hold together the remnants of his people. Adding to his problems, the disaster had not touched the Wampanoag’s longtime enemies, the Narragansett alliance to the west. Soon, Massasoit feared, the Narragansett might take advantage of the Wampanoag’s weakness and overrun them.

Far from being a passive recipient of European expansion, Massasoit was a brilliant negotiator who agreed to cede some 12,000 acres of depopulated land and resources in exchange for an exclusive alliance that would, he hoped, preserve the Wampanoag for generations to come.

The principal obstacle standing between Massasoit and his goals was language. Massasoit initially turned to Samoset, sachem or chief of an allied Indian group to the north. Samoset spoke a little English but lacked the linguistic ability to negotiate such a complex agreement. Soon, Massasoit became dependent on Tisquantum, who was more commonly known as Squanto, a distrusted enemy captive Massasoit had brought along as a backup interpreter. Tisquantum spoke local Native American dialects along with fluent English, but he was not an ideal choice for so important a negotiation, because his interests did not align with the long-term interests of either Massasoit or the Wampanoag.

At Massasoit’s behest, Tisquantum showed the colonists how to plant corn and survive the harsh conditions on the edge of the North American wilderness. In exchange? Through Tisquantum, Massasoit managed to negotiate an exclusive defense pact with the Plymouth colony. All future European trade would be channeled through the Wampanoag, and, moreover, the Europeans and the Wampanoag were each bound to assist the other to defend against threats posed by other Native American communities.

Deeply cognizant of his own special position, Tisquantum decided to reconstitute his own community by playing the English against the Wampanoag. In this is a valuable lesson about spies: their agendas are rarely consistent with our own, and rare is the field agent who is a mere executor of the commander’s will.

Eventually, Massasoit found out about Tisquantum’s deceit and immediately demanded Squanto’s return for execution. But the English colonists refused—a fact that provoked considerable unease and a cooling of relations.

The alliance with the English served Massasoit and the seriously depleted Wampanoag Indians well. In the winter of 1623, when he became gravely ill, Massasoit was nursed back to health by the English settlers. In 1632, threatened by the alliance between the Wampanoag and the English settlers, the Narragansett tribes launched an attack against Massasoit's base in the village of Sowams near Narragansett Bay, but that attack was beaten back with help from the English and their European armaments.

In the next decade, tens of thousands of Europeans came to Massachusetts. Massasoit shepherded his people through the wave of settlement, and the pact he signed with Plymouth colony lasted more than fifty years, until after Massasoit's death around 1661. Only in 1675 did one of Massasoit's sons, angered by the colonists' increasingly discriminatory and restrictive laws, launch what was perhaps an inevitable attack. Metacomet ("King Philip," as he was known to the colonists) and Native Americans from dozens of groups joined in. Brutal and devastating, King Philip's War tore through New England, but the Europeans eventually won.

Historians attribute the English victory in part to native unwillingness to match the European tactic of massacring whole villages. Another reason was manpower—by then the colonists outnumbered the natives.

The Native American communities proved their ability to adapt European technology and methods to their needs, but they had no defense against European infectious diseases, which over the course of a century wiped out 90 percent of the indigenous population.

### **Pirates as Non-State Agents**

Historians generally agree that Spain was the preeminent European military and naval power at the beginning of the sixteenth century. A century later, however, England had emerged as the predominant naval and colonial power.

The reigning economic system in Europe at that time was known as mercantilism—according to Webster's Dictionary, "a system of political and economic policy, evolving with the modern national state and seeking to secure a nation's political and economic supremacy in its rivalry with other states. According to this system, money was regarded as a store of wealth, and the goal of a state was the accumulation of precious metals."

The rise of mercantilism preceded the discovery of America and corresponded to the formation of modern European nation-states, but Columbus's voyage to the New World in 1492 powerfully added to the impetus for global trade and the accumulation of national wealth. Further complicating relations in the New World was Vatican policy. In 1493, the year after Columbus discovered America, Pope Alexander VI divided the New World into two continent-size territories: North America for Catholic Portugal; Central and South America for Catholic Spain. The Spanish Armada then

dominated the seas, so that there was no room for any other country to have pretensions on the lands and wealth of the western hemisphere.

The infusion of wealth into Spanish and Portuguese coffers from the New World threatened to upset the balance of power in Europe. This was all the more true because the Reformation had divided Europe along bitter religious and ideological boundaries. Such bitter rivalries led to state-sponsored piracy in which European governments—largely Protestant ones—authorized privateers to attack enemy shipping for the sake of the Crown, but also for the right to keep part of the booty for themselves.

During the next two centuries, Protestant states like England and the Netherlands (as well as Catholic France, who resented Spanish preeminence and intrigues) would try to gain a foothold in the West Indies to share in the vast wealth found there. These nations employed every possible means to obtain their objectives, especially in the form of officially sanctioned wars during which the privateering commission (*letter of marque*) allowed privately owned ships to attack enemy vessels or, in peacetime, the letter of reprisal that could be used to attack ships of a former enemy to recover commercial losses incurred in earlier wars.

Often missed among adventurous stories of pirates is that most were Protestants sponsored by governments in England or the Netherlands against Spanish or Portuguese Catholic shipping. By the time of Captain Kidd at the end of the seventeenth century, there were three main rivals for domination of the seas: Catholic Spain, Catholic France, and Protestant England, with the Dutch Netherlands playing a smaller Protestant role.

What was the precise relationship between pirates and their governments? Historian John Weston explained it best: “Why did the English authorities seem to encourage the activities of the buccaneers? The answer lies in the fact that people in power in London knew that Britain’s future prosperity rested on her ability to expand trading markets. . . . England had no colonies where slaves toiled in gold mines and knew that only the outposts of the enfeebled Spanish empire prevented British merchants from exploiting new opportunities for



*Sir Francis Drake*

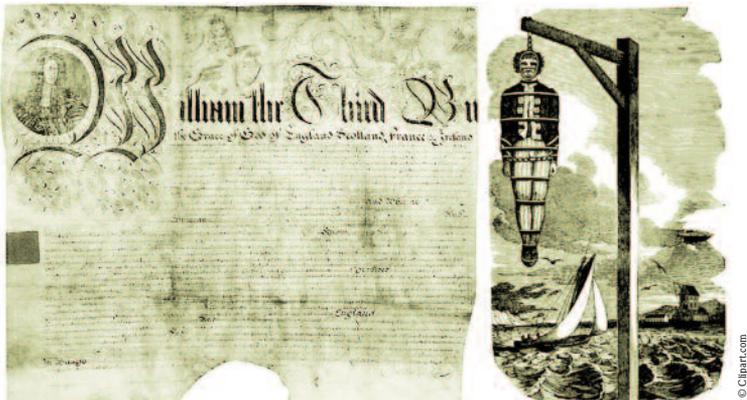
by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, ca. 1690

On his third voyage to the French West Indies, 1572–73, Drake returned to England with some 20,000 pounds of gold and silver, most of it plundered from Spanish colonies in the New World.

trade.” Simply put, England understood that the Spanish empire was too large to defend effectively. And English privateers were therefore encouraged to seize every opportunity to harass Spanish shipping and to attack and pillage Spanish outposts.

To combat the constant danger to vital shipping, in the 1560s the Spanish adopted a convoy system. A treasure fleet or *flota* would sail annually from Seville (and later from Cádiz) in Spain, carrying passengers, troops, and European manufactured goods to the Spanish colonies of the New World. This cargo, though profitable, was really just a form of ballast for the fleet, whose true purpose was to transport the year’s haul in silver to Europe. This made the returning Spanish treasure fleet a tempting target, although pirates were more likely to shadow the fleet to attack stragglers than to try to seize the well-guarded main vessels.

The golden age of buccaneering began to decline after 1680 when an increasingly hostile legal and political environment developed as the European countries found that the privateering wolves unleashed among the Spanish sheep did not always distinguish between Spanish and English, French or Dutch sheep. What had been a cost-effective mechanism for challenging the Spanish commercially and politically in the Americas had become a threat to their own commercial and political interests in the area. After 1680, with the passage of anti-piracy laws in Jamaica, a pirate could be executed simply for being a pirate. The English Act of Piracy of 1699 also allowed colonial courts to try sea-robbers rather than sending them to England. Pirate Captain William Kidd was executed in 1701 as a result of this change in the political climate. Even though efforts at pirate repression



A portion of William Kidd’s “Letter of Marque and Reprisal” from King William III (left). The Letter of Marque was a government licence authorizing a private vessel to attack and capture enemy vessels, and bring them before admiralty courts for condemnation and sale. Cruising for prizes with a Letter of Marque was considered an honorable calling combining patriotism and profit. Confusion over whether or not Kidd had been authorized as a privateer culminated in his hanging in a gibbet over the Thames (right).

began in the 1680s, it was not until 1716 that a genuine campaign began to stamp out piracy in the Caribbean. As historian Peter Earle noted, between 1716 and 1726 alone, English authorities hanged at least four hundred pirates. These extermination efforts were largely successful, and, after 1730, even though piracy continued, it never enjoyed the freedom it had experienced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The substantial decline in transatlantic shipping rates between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflected largely the decline in piracy and the reduction in both risk and security outlays to protect transatlantic shipping lanes.

## Conclusion

Historians unanimously agree that piracy was not a very effective way to redirect Spanish wealth from the New World. With a few notable exceptions, Dutch and English buccaneering and attempts to seize territories in the Caribbean were largely defeated by Spain's rebuilt navy and her improved intelligence networks. Over the course of one hundred fifty years, some 90 percent of the Spanish treasure ships managed to fulfill their mission to deliver precious metals and other valuable commodities from the Americas to Spain.

But all his success at repelling Protestant piracy came at a price for Spanish King Philip II. By 1596, Spain was basically bankrupt. The Spanish, despite being the wealthiest nation in Europe at the time, simply could not afford a sufficient military presence to control such a vast area of ocean, or enforce their exclusionary, mercantilist trading laws.

The influx of gold and silver created a price revolution in Spain, rapidly inflating the costs of all goods. At the same time, Spain failed to advance in other key ways. Meanwhile, to compete with Spain and Catholic Europe, England and the Netherlands led the Industrial Revolution and attained through increased industrial output and productivity what the Spanish and Portuguese had obtained in precious metals and trade. A century later, as the Spanish dominion over the Americas declined, so too did the rate of return from investments in precious metals as the mines simply ran dry. The result? By the end of the seventeenth century, England and Europe began to emerge as dominant global powers.

The lesson learned from the perspective of the history of espionage? Sometimes it is less important to succeed in stealing the wealth away from your enemies than it is to drive up the costs of their national defense. In the twentieth century, the impact of exorbitant costs of empire can be observed in the relative decline of England and France following World War II, in the Soviet Union by the 1980s, and—many argue—in the United States today. When the costs of security outstrip the national wealth that must sustain it, then decline becomes inevitable.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. In what ways did Chief Massasoit advance the interests of the Wampanoag tribes in his negotiations with the Puritan community at Plymouth Rock?
2. How was the Catholic-Protestant rivalry affected by the settlement of the New World?
3. In what ways did state-sponsored piracy promote the advancement of England over Spain?

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## Lecture 8

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### Spies in the American Revolution: Domestic Operations

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Alexander Rose's *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring*.

#### General Washington's Conundrum and America's First Spy Ring

In lower Manhattan in late August 1776, General George Washington wrestled with the most important decision of his career as a revolutionary. He knew that retreat from General William Howe's advancing troops and the steadily encroaching British fleet was inevitable; the only question that remained was whether to abandon New York City intact. Once the vital port was lost, he could not retake it without a superior navy—one that the fledgling patriots could never muster. Military theory therefore dictated that he burn New York City to the ground, forcing the enemy to spend the coming winter among ashes rather than by comfortable firesides.

Washington, however, was torn by ambition. If he destroyed the livelihoods of those whom he was ostensibly liberating, he would have little hope of a political career after the war. In the end, Washington deferred to the delegates of the First Continental Congress, who predictably rallied to their constituents' defense. Washington received their orders on 3 September 1776: New York must be left standing. The commander-in-chief of British forces General William Howe, in turn, took the prize and unknowingly set the stage for the most mythologized (and forgotten) espionage operation in American history.

Despite the legends about Washington as an infallible leader, he actually began commissioning spies—the most necessary of all the assets at any general's disposal—quite reluctantly. Espionage, he had noted on the outskirts of Boston a year earlier, was a dastardly enterprise almost entirely without place in a war between civilized men.

The key change of heart for Washington came after his retreat north of what is now 172nd Street in Manhattan, atop Harlem Heights (now called Morningside Heights). With his adversary securely bivouacked just miles to the south, Washington could no longer rely upon conventional methods of reconnaissance to provide actionable intelligence. His best recourse was to turn to lowly spies or risk being outmaneuvered.

But the veteran military commander knew little of the spy trade. Washington nevertheless realized that he needed a disguised observer who could document the enemy's movements from relative safety. Enter Captain Nathan Hale, intensely patriotic, fervently religious, and a member of

Thomas Knowlton's famous Rangers, a handpicked squad of frontier marksmen. Washington could not have asked for a better man—or so he thought.

The two immediately set to work outlining a mission. Hale would infiltrate enemy lines by sea through a supposedly unguarded “back door.” Instead of landing directly onto occupied territory, he would come ashore on Long Island by way of Norwalk, Connecticut, crossing the Long Island Sound under cover of darkness. From there, Hale would make his way westward toward the Royal Army's forts at Brooklyn, traveling in the guise of a Loyalist schoolteacher. Along the way, he would record his observations of baggage trains and transport ships, carefully noting anything that remotely revealed Howe's intentions. Once finished, he would make his way back to Washington's headquarters. Hale was under orders never to set foot in Manhattan. It was simply too risky. His mission, therefore, was not a radical departure from conventional reconnaissance.

Unfortunately, the supposedly inconspicuous “back door” through which Hale entered British-occupied territory was in fact very well guarded. As Hale disembarked from the armed sloop the *Schuyler* during the early hours of 16 September 1776, he unknowingly entered the territory of a veteran British spy hunter, Major Robert Rogers.

Rogers briefly spotted the *Schuyler* (along with her escort *Montgomery*) while aboard one of the raiders he had contracted, the *Halifax*, but he was unable to catch her. He immediately suspected a rebel covert operation was afoot. An informant confirmed Rogers's suspicions the following day, reporting that he had seen the elusive vessel briefly in port. Two men had gone ashore, this man said, a civilian and a soldier, but only the latter had returned. The battle-hardened veteran instantly understood that the rebels had inserted a spy. Figuring that the intruder would head west along the coast toward Brooklyn, the most valuable and most obvious target, he and several men immediately set off after him.

Rogers caught up with Hale just a few days later and carefully watched the odd traveler from a distance. Realizing that he would need a full confession to condemn him, Rogers waited for the perfect opportunity, approaching Hale at a tavern. There he convinced Hale that he too was a patriot sympathizer. Hale, relaxed from drink and overjoyed at having found a sympathetic friend, disclosed his mission. Rogers arrested him on the spot and immediately brought

A statue of Nathan Hale outside CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. The statue shows Hale's hands bound behind his back and his feet bound at the ankles just before he was hanged. There is a replica of the same statue on Old Campus at Yale University near Hale's dormitory room.



Hale before his superior officer. General Howe condemned America's first spy to be hanged for espionage on 22 September, less than a week after Washington had abandoned lower Manhattan.

America's entire first spy mission was a tragicomic failure. George Washington would not forget this lesson while maintaining an extensive, immensely successful, and now all-but-forgotten spy network during the remaining years of the war: the notorious Culper Ring.

## The Culper Ring

It is one of history's greatest ironies that on 29 October 1777 Washington appointed Major Benjamin Tallmadge to succeed his superior, General Charles Scott, in leading his burgeoning espionage service. Tallmadge had been Hale's best friend at Yale, and his new position provided him with the perfect opportunity to avenge his fallen companion. In October 1777, Washington needed spies in New York even more desperately than he had the previous year. Luckily, fate had provided him with the means of achieving his goal only two months earlier: Lieutenant Caleb Brewster, Tallmadge's old friend. Brewster, a whaleboat man, had secured regular access to British-controlled ports on northern Long Island and had taken it upon himself to inform Washington.

Tallmadge promised success by using his friend as one member of a fixed group of informants, whom he would recruit using his local contacts. And he delivered, developing a productive network that was sophisticated even by modern standards. Its name, the Culper Ring, came from the alias Washington and Tallmadge chose to disguise the identity of their first agent, Abraham Woodhull. The name they chose for him was Samuel Culper, later Samuel Culper Senior. Robert Townsend joined the group nearly two years later and was dubbed Samuel Culper Junior.

Along with Brewster, Woodhull, and Townsend, there were two other so-called Culpers: Austin Roe, who served as principal courier, and James Rivington, Townsend's business partner. The latter, commissioned as the King's Printer in 1777, was on the surface the most ardent of loyalists. Indeed, historians have long debated whether this Gazetteer of London high society was a patriot spy at all. Evidence, however, confirms that he was. A gambler and risk taker, Rivington had by 1779 already fallen into bankruptcy at least once. He had opened his coffee house that year with funding from Townsend as a means of gleaning information for his papers, but to no avail. With income from England cut off and bankruptcy again looming, he realized, to paraphrase Catherine Crary, that his establishment was as equally suited for espionage as it was for publishing papers. He began selling secrets to his patriot bankroller as payback against an England that he believed had abandoned him. And in so doing Rivington became the linchpin of the Culper Ring. One of the first secrets he passed on to Washington was arguably the most important: the code signals used by the British fleet.

Rivington notwithstanding, all of the Culpers had grown up together in Setauket, and each trusted the other because of this common background. That trust—rare in such enterprises—greatly contributed to their success and longevity as spies. Equally important, however, was the fact that, like Hale before them, the Culpers spied out of patriotism, rather than for either fame or wealth.

In his patriotic Culpers, Washington had informants far superior to those of his enemy, whose spies were mostly deserters and defectors embittered by either loss or jealousy, bought and paid for with no concerns above self-preservation. The most notable example, of course, was Benedict Arnold.

Once in place, the Culper Ring operated this way: Townsend gathered intelligence in New York (primarily from Rivington), carefully recording it in easily concealable letters. (Though risky, Washington shrewdly demanded written reports to verbal ones.) He then passed his reports along to Austin Roe, whom he met at a predetermined time and place. Roe then carried the messages on horseback to Woodhull in Setauket. There Roe would either give the message to Woodhull personally, or for safety's sake, utilize the “dead drop” method—leaving the coded message in an inconspicuous container in



**The Culper Ring: Transport Logistics**

Unable to proceed directly to Washington's headquarters in New Jersey, rebel spies communicated through a circuitous route from Manhattan to Setauket, Long Island, then by ship across Long Island Sound, and again on horseback through southern Connecticut and to New Jersey from the north, a route that generally took seven days to complete.

one of his fields for Woodhull to retrieve later. Woodhull collected this intelligence along with whatever he managed to gather and record on his own, arranging for Brewster to land outside of town, where he would pick up the message and row it across the Long Island Sound to Tallmadge in southern Connecticut. Tallmadge then processed the information, relaying it to Washington at his headquarters in New Jersey via one of his loyal dragoons, who would usually travel on horseback. In all, the entire circuit could be traveled in seven days.

Because the intelligence traveled by a circuitous route, Tallmadge introduced measures to protect his spies' identities in the event the message was intercepted by the British. He devised a code system entirely from scratch based on alternating alphabets that, when used in tandem with a revolutionary new type of invisible ink, which he dubbed his "sympathetic stain," rendered messages impervious to the usual methods of detection.

The greatest coup for the Culper Ring came in the summer of 1780. In early July, Washington received word that the long-awaited French naval squadron of General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vigner, the Count of Rochambeau, was finally nearing Newport, Rhode Island. Rochambeau's ships carried valuable arms and supplies for the American war effort. Washington, however, was unaware that General Sir Henry Clinton—Howe's successor—had received the same information through their own turncoat spy: the American Revolution's most notorious traitor, Benedict Arnold.

Townsend, however, managed to warn Washington in time. His message, written hastily in invisible ink, passed through the network rapidly—from Roe to Woodhull to Brewster. When Brewster reached southern Connecticut on 21 July 1780, however, he could not locate his handler. Knowing the urgency of the situation, he ordered a dragoon to carry the message to Washington as fast as possible. Once this courier arrived, however, he could not find Washington. Desperate, the dragoon left the intelligence with Alexander Hamilton, who took quick action. Hamilton saved the day by writing letters to both Rochambeau and the Marquis de Lafayette, who was en route to Newport to rendezvous with his countryman.

Thanks to Arnold, Clinton had known about Rochambeau's imminent arrival since 12 June—over a month before his rebel counterpart—and had, of course, planned an ambush. Arnold, earlier praised (and now forgotten) as the hero of the Battle of Saratoga, had become disenchanted with the rebel cause after being repeatedly passed over for promotion. (His marriage to the beautiful Peggy Shippen, the daughter of a Loyalist judge, on 8 April 1779, no doubt influenced his decision to defect.) Fate, however, intervened, nullifying the tremendous impact he might have had on the war's outcome. A combination of unfavorable weather and a lack of supplies forced Clinton to call off what would have doubtlessly been a devastating attack. Regardless, the fact remains that the Culpers promptly informed Washington's command of a most serious crisis in time to take preventive

measures, allowing the patriots to stay one step ahead of the British. In all, the incident represented a huge advance in what only four years earlier had been the most elementary of espionage services.

Less than three months after the Culper Ring's most outstanding success, the American forces avenged the death of Nathan Hale. On 2 October 1780, British Major John André—the head of Clinton's intelligence service—was executed as a spy against the Continental Army. Three mercenaries had caught him quite accidentally traveling in plain clothes along the Hudson River, while he was traveling back to Clinton after meeting with his top defector, Benedict Arnold. These soldiers for hire had found the damning evidence in, of all places, André's boots. These documents consisted of plans of West Point, drawn up by Arnold himself. Arnold managed to escape to the British lines after hearing of John



The capture of British Major John André as depicted in an 1845 lithograph.

André's capture. Despite considerable self-doubt, Washington sentenced John André to hang for espionage against the Revolutionary Army, largely in retribution for Howe's execution of Nathan Hale.

### British Intelligence in the Revolutionary War

The British did not adapt their use of intelligence as quickly as the Americans did, sticking mostly to traditional military reconnaissance. The British military was more acquainted with old-world norms: black chambers that censored the mail, embassies abroad that provided intelligence, and court intrigue. Also, the military superiority of the British—and yes, a distinct degree of hubris—probably led the British to view espionage as unnecessary, since British superiority and sheer brute force would eventually win out.

### Conclusion

The contrast between espionage and its uses by the rebels in the American Revolution and their British counterparts are an object lesson in spycraft. The Culper Ring reflects Washington's incredibly sophisticated use of spies: the ring relied on local spies who were familiar with their terrain and well-known by their communities. They therefore went completely undetected throughout their service inside enemy territory. The Culpers demonstrated incredibly sophisticated spycraft: they operated within compartmentalized networks; they cross-checked and verified all intelligence and they created multiple networks of local spies and couriers; they utilized a simple but effective code.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. Who was America's first spy?
2. What were the key factors behind the enormous success of the Culper Ring?
3. What were the main shortcomings of British intelligence in the American Revolution?

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2. The Library of Congress features "George Washington Papers," a collection of approximately sixty-five thousand documents written by or to George Washington, including materials on his use of spies. — <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml>

## Lecture 9

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### Spies in the American Revolution: Foreign Operations

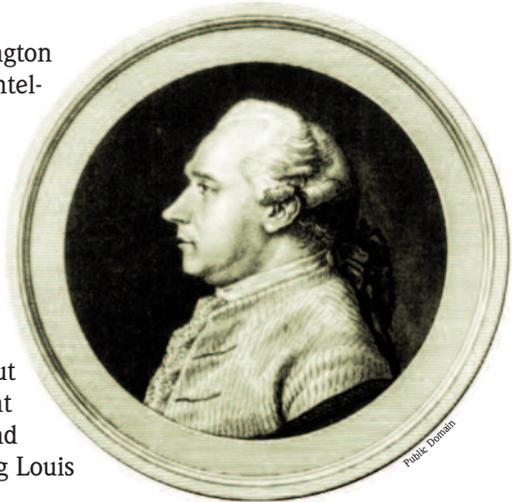
The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Thomas J. Schaeper's *Edward Bancroft: Scientist, Author, Spy* and Harlow Giles Unger's *The French War Against America: How a Trusted Ally Betrayed Washington and the Founding Fathers*.

#### Silas Deane

Two years before George Washington reaped the fruits of a successful intelligence apparatus in the Culper Ring, he enjoyed the benefits of an undeclared alliance with France that Congress had speedily arranged through a secret agent: tents, clothing, arms, munitions, and other accoutrements of war were channeled to the rebel army from France. But unlike the loyal Culpers, the agent responsible, Silas Deane, spied and double-dealed in the court of King Louis XVI for his own personal gain.

The talented son of a Connecticut blacksmith, the avaricious Deane, America's first diplomat, had appeared well-suited for the post when the Committee of Secret Correspondence appointed him on 2 March 1776, at age forty. He had by that time graduated from Yale (the class of 1758), taught school, gained admittance to the Connecticut bar (in 1761), married into wealth twice (1763 and 1767), entered into trade through the management of his first father-in-law's estate, entered local politics like so many merchants infuriated with the Townshend Acts, and impressed influential patriots, including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, with his eloquent activism.

In reality, however, Silas Deane was hardly the type of man to be entrusted with so important a charge: he was opportunistic and hell-bent on amassing a fortune. Throughout his brief tenure as America's first foreign spy, Deane exploited his position by embezzling the funds entrusted to him and speculating on the matériel placed in his care.



Silas Deane  
(1739–1789)

Deane's mission was, to quote historian Julian Boyd, "one of the easiest . . . any foreign envoy ever faced." The man he was to persuade, Charles Gravier, the Count of Vergennes, was already a convert, having grown embittered at Great Britain for having thwarted French colonial ambitions during the recent Seven Years War. All Deane had to do was remain alert and patient, waiting for the moment Vergennes could sign a formal treaty while shipping the supplies he covertly made available in the interim. The sly Deane, however, chose to occupy himself with nefarious intrigues instead. Nevertheless, the eight cargoes he dispatched, worth some six million *livres* in total, reached America in pristine condition and timely fashion—just before Benedict Arnold's pivotal battle at Saratoga in autumn 1777.

Deane did his utmost to ensure the safe passage of French supplies since he had personally invested so much in them. He commissioned privateers, manipulated the value of the prizes they captured, and worked to convince Whitehall that the revolution in the colonies would ultimately fail so that the risks of his speculations would diminish and the value of his goods increase. These underhanded tactics worked well. Silas Deane completed his mission successfully, largely because he had substantial help. His equally selfish business partner and mentor was ironically his former student at Yale, the mysterious Edward Bancroft.

The future spies' time together had been brief, however. Deane had left to pursue law, and Bancroft was apprenticed to a physician in Connecticut shortly thereafter.

In 1763, three years after having been indentured, the energetic Bancroft fled after hearing that unflattering rumors of his prodigal misconduct had been spread throughout the town. He ran as far as he could to escape the shame—to Barbados—likely using his master's property to pay his way and vowing never to return. Finding prospects of earning a living on the tiny island slim, Bancroft set his sights on nearby British Guiana (now Guyana) and sailed for Georgetown, the colony's largest port, situated at the mouth of the Demerara River. There he fared better. Only three days after his arrival in September 1763, Bancroft found employment as personal surgeon to a wealthy British landowner.

Bancroft returned to New England in 1766 and, according to John Adams, apologized to his former master and "honorably" repaid him in full. The following year, he ventured to England to study medicine at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London. There Bancroft capitalized on his tenure in South



Edward Bancroft  
(1744–1821)

America, publishing a book based on his keen observations and analyses. Naturally, he concentrated on the use of dyes and poisons. Bancroft would later demonstrate just how well he had perfected these techniques by secretly poisoning his partner Silas Deane with laudanum in 1789. His crime would go undiscovered for more than a century.

Bancroft, the former student, and the former schoolmaster Silas Deane met again in July 1776, a conspiratorial union created by Benjamin Franklin. Bancroft left their meeting with a note from Deane to Garnier, the French *chargé d'affaires* in London. Deane was also instructed to get in touch with Arthur Lee, with Benjamin Franklin his other counterpart sent by the Revolutionary Congress to represent American interests in France. Deane dutifully wrote to Garnier but excluded Lee so that his plots might be kept secret from Congress. Bancroft thus became Deane's sole courier and only confidant, and he immediately capitalized on the opportunities.

Once in London, Bancroft contacted his former employer, Paul Wentworth, who had by then become the principal spy of William Eden, the British Undersecretary of State, in hopes of earning a baronetcy from Parliament. Bancroft offered his services to Wentworth, who then saw to it that the information his latest acquisition knew about the American reached David Murray, Lord Stormont, who represented George III in France. Though the channel was by no means direct, Stormont knew the specifics of Deane's activities long before his bosses in the Revolutionary Congress. Ironically, Deane never figured out that his partner Edward Bancroft was a British double agent.

By mid-August, Whitehall knew that Deane had already purchased 15,000 stands of arms and sent them to a warehouse in Nantes; that Vergennes had met with Deane secretly and pledged his support; that Deane had then requested "arms and Cloathing for 25,000 Men, together with 200 light Brass field Cannon"; that Vergennes, in turn, had delivered the guns, showing Deane how to remove all incriminating French markings embossed on them, and directed him to Le Ray de Chaumont, a well-connected merchant, to acquire the clothing; and that the Minister "had recommended [arms dealer Pierre-Augustin] Caron de Beaumarchais to Deane and had promised to support his credit for three million *livres* worth of supplies"—all thanks to Bancroft.

Eden ensured that Bancroft was compensated for his services. In December, the British double agent was promised a life pension of £200, which was later increased to £500 at his request. He was well worth the cost, it seemed, as he saw to it that Wentworth and Stormont were kept informed of the development of Vergennes's alliance. Bancroft and Stormont even developed a system using a stain similar to Washington's Culper Ring. Every Tuesday night before nine thirty he was to leave his intelligence "in a sealed bottle . . . in a hole at the foot of a tree on the south terrace of the

Tuileries” in Paris. The information, disguised as a private letter on the “subject of gallantry” and signed Dr. B. Edwards, was contained in a hidden message written in the secret ink between the lines. Any communication to Bancroft was left under a nearby box tree at the same time. Curiously, Bancroft’s revelations as a double agent working for the British were quite limited: for instance, he never disclosed the information that his British handlers would need to block colonial efforts to obtain desperately needed weapons and other war matériel. Less patriot than businessman, Bancroft always remained steadfastly loyal to his own enterprises.

The Second Continental Congress ratified Vergennes’s Treaty of Alliance on 4 May 1778, bringing an end to one of the easiest missions in the annals of diplomatic history. Deane was recalled shortly thereafter, ostensibly to be debriefed but actually to be interrogated. The ensuing debates left the merchant from Connecticut publicly disgraced, and he returned to Europe in 1780 to continue his intrigues with Bancroft.

After a brief period in Ghent, Deane spent the remainder of his life in England. Illness and depression haunted him throughout his final years. He died aboard the *Boston Packet* on 23 September 1789, at a time when it appeared that his reputation in the newly independent United States might be restored. Deane, with redemption at his fingertips, decided to end his own life by taking a lethal dose of laudanum . . . or so wrote Bancroft shortly after his former schoolmaster’s mysterious death. In hindsight it seems that Bancroft was the culprit responsible. Bancroft was likely overcome by a fear that Deane might unknowingly betray him. Ever the pragmatist, Bancroft therefore took the necessary measures to protect himself. Like Nathan Hale before him, America’s first foreign spy Silas Deane died a victim of those better skilled at espionage than he.

### **The Geopolitics of the American Revolution**

Why did the French king Louis XVI support the American Revolution against the British empire? Put simply: the French goal in providing substantial assistance to the rebels against British control was all about extending French control in the New World.

Having recently suffered yet another defeat at the hands of the British, the French developed a plan to recoup some of their losses. The plan called for promoting and capitalizing on unrest between Britain and the American colonies, with the hope of provoking a revolution and weakening both enough that the new American states could not resist French incursions. To that end, French Foreign Minister Duc de Choiseul began to send agents to the American colonies to test the waters of revolution.

With this in mind, the French entered into a secret treaty with Spain, agreeing to prolong the war as much as possible. The Spanish, fearing for their colonies bordering the American colonies, shared the French interest

in seeing a weakened post-Revolutionary American state. Make no mistake: the colonial government was keenly aware about French interests in the region, but they had little choice but to accept a growing French role in the American Revolution, especially after the British navy disrupted Revolutionary coastal activities.

The French saw a protracted revolutionary war to be in their best interests because it would weaken both Britain and the colonies and ensure greater dependence on French support. The French, therefore, formally entered the war on the Colonial side, promising naval support to sweep the British ships from American coasts.

To no one's surprise, this elevated the conflict. The French began to send even more assistance to the colonies and engage the British navy all across the Atlantic. As French support grew, the colonies found themselves relying heavily on their newfound "allies."

As the months wore on, the Revolutionary War continued to weaken both Britain and the American colonies. Toward this end, the French began to impose their dominance over the fledgling American government, pushing them to renounce their claims to the vital Mississippi River areas and restoring French power in the New World. As the fighting continued, the American government found itself in a desperate situation. In accordance with Choiseul's original plan, the Revolutionary leadership were forced to cede control of their own foreign policy to the French, who stood ominously in the wings to seize outright what had been British territory just a few years before.

Just as it appeared that the French would succeed in gaining hegemony over the original thirteen colonies, Revolutionary generals won a string of large battles against the British. Due to heavy losses sustained in both battles, in 1782 the British Parliament voted to end the fighting and open direct peace talks with the American government, who had been forced to cede foreign policy (and therefore rights to negotiate in peace talks) to the French government. Recognizing an imminent threat to their sovereignty, the new American government chose to conduct their peace negotiations with the British in secret, operating behind the backs of their closest allies so that they could end the war as soon as possible on their own terms.

As a result of these negotiations, in spring 1782, the British withdrew their forces from the American colonies to reinforce the Caribbean and Canada from imminent French attacks. As part of their fleet sailed toward the Caribbean in the Battle of the Saintes (April 1782) the British navy surprised and destroyed a massive French fleet stationed off of Guadeloupe, effectively crippling the French Navy in the New World and creating a stalemate of the great European powers in their competition for control of the western hemisphere.

The American Revolutionary War ended just seven years before the French Revolution began on 14 July 1789. As a result of the catastrophe at Guadeloupe, the French suddenly found themselves severely weakened on the international stage. The British had likewise overstretched themselves in their efforts to suppress the American Revolution, and they saw their troop levels in the New World dangerously depleted. With the heavy expenses of war and the loss of revenues flowing from the American colonies, the British economy faltered.

In fact, the sole victor of the American Revolution was the Americans, who not only won their independence, but who also received vast tracts of land to their west and a better political and military position relative to the world's two superpowers, who had until then dominated in the western hemisphere. The events surrounding the French War against America highlight a calculated attempt by the French to use agents in America to draw the colonies into the French sphere of influence, buttressing the French position against their European rivals. And the French plan not only failed, but seriously weakened the French and the British just a few years before the total collapse of the French monarchy in July 1789.



*The Battle of the Saintes, 12 April 1782: Surrender of the Ville de Paris*  
by Thomas Whitcombe, 1783

The action near Guadeloupe in the Caribbean shows British captain Samuel Hood's HMS *Barfleur*, center, attacking the French flagship *Ville de Paris*, commanded by François Joseph Paul de Grasse, at the right.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What was the relationship between Silas Deane and Edward Bancroft?
2. Who killed Silas Deane, and why?
3. Evaluate the position of the French toward the American Revolution.

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2. The *National Counterintelligence Center* website, edited by Frank J. Rafalko, features a four-chapter account of Dr. Edward Bancroft's activities while in Europe. — <http://www.fas.org/irp/ops/ci/docs/ci1/ch1c.htm>

## Lecture 10

### Spies and the French Revolution

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Elizabeth Sparrow's *Secret Service: British Agents in France, 1792–1815*.

For more than 150 years, the French Revolution was largely seen not as a democratic act against a corrupt monarchy, but rather as a violent and riotous uprising of the dark, uncultured masses manipulated by French noblemen who sought to use revolution for their own personal gains.

The image of well-dressed men handing out coins to push the crowd to revolutionary acts is one haunted by the notion of the *agent provocateur* (“inciting agent”—a person employed by the police or other entity to act undercover to entice or provoke another person to commit an illegal act).

According to this scenario, leading noblemen inside France were covertly working with British secret agents as *agents provocateurs* to provoke instability and revolution inside France, and to topple the French crown.

Certainly this assessment was grounded in the traditional elite notion that revolution demanded of the revolutionary a certain cultural grounding, that one could not act in a revolutionary way without proper education and breeding. Hence, the traditional French concept of the *jacquerie* was used to describe peasant action—as in a peasant revolt, an explosive reaction against some grievance or another.

This notion of a vast, seething, dark, and violent mass ready to follow the orders of aristocratically controlled *agents provocateurs* is one that haunted French history for generations. It was not until after World War II that the New Social History was born in France, and French historians began to study the French revolutionary crowd as a force unto itself.

Against this backdrop there appeared in 1954 an article prepared by Alfred Cobban, one of the greatest historians of France who ever lived. Cobban's article

#### *Sans-culotte*

by Louis-Léopold Boilly, ca. 1790s

During the French Revolution, working-class revolutionaries were known as the “sans-culottes”—literally, “without culottes”—a name derived from their rejection of apparel associated with the aristocratic elite.



was entitled, “British Secret Service in France, 1784–1792.” Cobban took on the core issue: Did the British Secret Service cause the French Revolution? “There was a general belief in France in 1789, among both royalists who supported the Bourbon monarchy and revolutionaries who opposed it, that the British Government was spending money on a large scale for the purpose of stirring up revolution.” Cobban shows convincingly that many French observers had come to the conclusion that the British were directly responsible for many of the disruptions in France in 1789. “Undoubtedly, . . . money had been used widely among the soldiers and the people, from whatever source it had come.” Rumors abounded of British spies pouring all over France, of the dispatch of weapons, muskets, and gunpowder to support the rebellion, and of ample supplies of British funds to foment revolutionary agitation among the people. There were rumors of foreign armies being raised to invade France from abroad. Conspiracy was the suspicion of the era. The British response at the time was, as Cobban noted, one of “indignant repudiation.”

By and large, Cobban supported these denials of British culpability, and as evidence he drew from British governmental expenditures on the foreign secret service in the years before the French Revolution: “The figures for foreign secret service are thus compatible only with activity on a small scale.”

Cobban spent the last years of his life trying to get to the bottom of the relationship between the French Revolution and the British Secret Service, and he died never knowing the real answer.

Curiously, the British kept the key intelligence files of the French Revolutionary era secret for more than two centuries and only released the files for research in the 1990s. As meticulous as Cobban had been, he made the hasty generalization that the absence of specific documents automatically should lead us to conclude that such documents had never existed at all.

And so we are faced with this key question: Did the French Revolution, the toppling of the French throne of Louis XVI, the beheading of the king and his queen Marie Antoinette along with thousands of other French noblemen and women, the whole violent and chaotic upheaval that was the French Revolution—was all of this the result of a British secret intelligence operation to use revolutionary ideology to destabilize their chief rival, the French?



*Les deux ne font qu'un* (the two are one)

A British anti-French satirical print lampooning King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette as a double-headed beast, 1791.

If it was, then it may well indeed be the greatest case of blowback in the long history of espionage, and if so, what lesson should be learned? Be careful what you wish for, because sometimes your actions may bring unexpected results.

Just think about the implications: On the shattered foundations of the Bourbon dynasty grew Robespierre and the Terror, and after him? Napoleon, whose rise did more to threaten British interests than any other world leader until Adolph Hitler in World War II.

### **Aftermath: Reactions to the French Revolution as a National Security Crisis**

Elizabeth Sparrow's *Secret Service: British Agents in France, 1792–1815* examines how Great Britain began to understand the importance of information on internal and external movements of both enemies and friends.

In direct response to the tumultuous upheavals of the French Revolution, the English Parliament passed the first national security legislation in 1792 that would eventually create MI5 and MI6, two of the most powerful and sophisticated espionage agencies in the world.

MI5 would be charged with internal security, and MI6 would become England's foreign intelligence service, the service of Ian Fleming's fictional character James Bond.

When William Huskisson became Acting Superintendent of Aliens he began to work with the *Comité Français*, the French Government in Exile, to set up royalist agents in France. His labors were so ineffectual that he was replaced by William Wickham shortly after Louis XVI was sent to the guillotine on 21 January 1793. Britain requested that Wickham establish an agent in France to provide information and to guide the formation of the new government there. Wickham chose a Swiss asset from Geneva, known as Gaston. Gaston reported back on the formation of the French Directorate and the radical shift toward terror and violence, but he was unable to influence its formation, nor to bring Anglophiles to leadership roles.

Later that same year a memoir was circulated throughout Europe that demanded a royalist resurgence, the restoration in France of the Bourbon dynasty. It was believed to have originated somewhere in Switzerland. Britain

William Wickham  
(1761–1840)

Wickham was Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs and British spymaster during the French Revolution.



© Hampshire Record Office, British National Archives

was interested in supporting a royalist coup to restore the Bourbons to power, so Wickham traveled personally to Switzerland to investigate. Unable to discover the origins of the mysterious memoir, Wickham instead took over as British ambassador to Switzerland, and in this position he began to create the first of several international networks for espionage activity targeting France, a group known as the Swiss Agency.

By July 1795 the Swiss Agency was up and running, encompassing a web of agents surrounding and within France and providing lines of communication from Paris to royalists throughout Europe. Two agents of the Swiss Agency were Joseph Gaillard and Louis Bayard (the notorious Scarlet Pimpernel), Frenchmen who proved to be extremely effective spies for Britain. To succeed, these men relied on false identities and multiple aliases. Wickham developed plans to restore France to a royalist government with the Bourbon Prince de Condé as its monarch.

The success of the Swiss Agency inspired Wickham to create a similar network in Paris, mainly to facilitate easier and speedier communications with royalists inside France. Out of this work he created the Paris Agency.

French agents gave Wickham accurate intelligence about developments inside the revolutionary government, and they provided direct links to a large royalist army in the Vendée. The Paris Agency agents also managed to influence elections with propaganda and to suborn commanders of troops in the Paris area. Wickham, meanwhile, provided substantial British support with information and money for the royalist army. By 1795, it seems, the British had become the greatest supporters of the restoration of the Bourbon throne in France.

British efforts brought about an organized royalist rebellion on 5 October 1795, when 30,000 troops that had never seen battle were led by General Denican to the Tuileries, where they were repelled by a single round of grapeshot from a republican cannon. Louis had not even had the chance to cross the Rhine before the restorationist army had been dispersed. And by June of 1796 Britain had given up all hope of reestablishing an absolute monarchy in France. Wickham therefore shifted his emphasis toward utilizing his webs of agents to attempt to create a constitutional monarchy in France.



*Un Petit Souper* 20 September 1792  
by James Gillray

The original is a hand-colored etching that scathingly depicts the French Revolution as a bacchanalia of human cannibalism. The British Secret Service worked diligently for the restoration of the same Bourbon dynasty that had been their main enemy before 1789.

Nearly a year later, in 1797, top republican leaders contacted Wickham that they were willing to give up their positions in exchange for huge sums of money and a guarantee that they would not be charged with regicide. Wickham was unable to unite the royalists to secure the funds or the pardons, and this entire plan came to nothing. But it did show the increasingly cynical Wickham that Louis XVIII and the Bourbons were more interested in letting the republican Directorate remain in power as a weak apparatus that they believed could be overthrown than they were in establishing a constitutional monarchy (like the one in England) that would be permanent. Louis XVIII, it seems, had not given up on his dream of restoring an absolute monarchy in France.

Wickham's agents at his Paris Agency began to act without his approval in feeble attempts to organize royalists and recruit more agents. As a result of the increasing distance between Wickham and Paris, a French spy, the Prince de Carency, was able to infiltrate the Paris Agency and gain access to information passing through it and communicate most of the details back to the Directorate. By the end of 1797, the Paris Agency was no longer a viable source for information.

The British gave up hope that their royalist allies among the Bourbons would ever initiate their own coup, and so Wickham began by 1797 to organize his own coup from London. For this Wickham needed as much detailed information about the Directorate as he could get from his Paris Agency. Soon after Wickham dispatched Lord Malmesbury along with his secretary James Tyrell Ross and mission secretary James Talbot on a mission to Paris. When Malmesbury arrived, he was immediately accused of being sent to Paris solely to spy, and the French infiltrated one of their agents into Malmesbury's household. Malmesbury's operation was another in a long series of dismal failures on behalf of the British Secret Service, and he was soon ordered to return promptly to London.

Because of these repeated blunders the British began to consider supporting the ascendancy of Napoleon Bonaparte to the throne as an alternative to the ineffectual Bourbon dynasty. Initially, the British Secret Service gave substantial monetary assistance to support Napoleon's rise, but after a short time the British refused to grant him direct support, and Bonaparte consequently decided to make a direct move against British spy networks in Paris. On 18 Fructidor 1797 (4 September 1797) Napoleon's police captured the Comte d'Antraigues, and his briefcase was confiscated and searched. The case was found to contain a damning transcript of a conversation between royalist minister Pichegru and Louis XVIII plotting to overthrow the French Directorate.

Napoleon used these documents to implicate so-called royalist plots inside the Directorate. Secretly encouraging royalist ministers to assassinate the leaders who opposed them on 1 September, Napoleon then arrested some

forty French ministers for supposed royalist sympathies. Martial law was declared, and Napoleon used fears of foreign intervention and rumors of royalist plots to consolidate his grip on Paris. Inevitably, the British-supported Paris Agency was completely annihilated, and Wickham was forced to rebuild his networks from scratch, this time with the aim to bring down his nemesis Napoleon Bonaparte.

## **Conclusion**

The modern British Secret Service was born in the wake of the French Revolution to protect Britain from the effects of revolutionary violence infiltrating Britain. There is strong evidence to support the conclusion that the British Secret Service worked to destabilize the French monarchy in the days leading up to the French Revolution. But immediately after the French monarchy had fallen, the British reorganized their national security apparatus in a mad rush to block the infectious spread of the epidemic of revolution from France to Britain and other parts of Europe. Ironically, soon after the Revolution the British Secret Service had become the greatest defender of the restoration of the French monarchy. When that strategy had failed, they chose to support the political ambitions of a brilliant young French officer, Napoleon Bonaparte. This policy also backfired. By 1798, the worst nightmares of the British Secret Service had become real: in place of an ineffectual King Louis XVI, the British found themselves doing all they could to destabilize Napoleon's rule.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. Did the British Secret Service cause the French Revolution?
2. What were the contributions of William Wickham to British spying in the age of the French Revolution?
3. Why did the British Secret Service covertly support the rise of Napoleon between 1795 and 1798?

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Durey, Michael. *William Wickham, Master Spy: The Secret War against the French Revolution*. London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2009.

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## Websites of Interest

The *Project Gutenberg* website provides all three volumes of Hippolyte Taine’s *The French Revolution* in several formats. —

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2578>

# Lecture 11

## Spies in the Age of Napoleon

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Urban's *The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes*.

Two of the many secret operations by the British Secret Service demonstrate the pivotal role of espionage and covert operations during the Napoleonic Era.

### The Assassination of Paul I, Tsar of Russia

Paul I was the son of Tsar Peter III, and grandson of Peter the Great. His mother was Catherine the Great, who in 1762 cooperated in the murder of her own husband, Peter III. Catherine saw too much of her husband in her son, and therefore hoped to bypass his reign altogether by passing on the mantle of tsarist power to her grandson, Alexander I. While Catherine had had almost no hand in her son Paul I's education, she had personally managed the education of her grandson, sparing no expense to bring the greatest minds of the day—including several French philosophes—to tutor the heir to the throne of Russia in the most progressive ideas of the era.

In contrast, Paul I was neither smart nor educated. Taking the throne after his mother's death in 1796, Paul I was not especially adept at maintaining alliances abroad or at home. He distrusted the British, but he was charmed by Napoleon's strength and military brilliance. Paul I therefore pushed for the end of the British-Russian coalition in 1800, even as he sought closer ties to Napoleon Bonaparte's France. General Korsakoff's failure at the Battle of Zurich, and Suvorov's retreat from Switzerland, had soured Paul against the Austrians and led him to appreciate the potential benefits of an alliance with France. Paul admired Napoleon and believed that a Franco-Russian alliance would be far more advantageous than an alliance with any other European power. Anglophile representatives in St. Petersburg resisted the sovereign's new orientation. Among other things, Paul I intended to revive the League of Armed Neutrality



Russian Emperor Paul I  
(1754–1801)

Portrait by Stepan Shchukin, ca. 1790s.

between the Baltic powers—an effort that would have neutralized the effect of a boycott of Napoleon imposed by the British navy. Moreover, Sweden, Denmark, and Prussia had already agreed to block British access to the Baltic. Any British ships found in Russian ports were to be impounded. These policies cut the British Navy off from necessary supplies of Russian timber, tar, flax, and hemp, and seriously threatened the British war efforts against Napoleon.

On 4 October 1800, William Drummond, chargé d'affaires in Copenhagen, received news that Paul had ordered preparations for a land invasion of India. The denial of important Royal Navy supplies and a possible Russian invasion of India forced the British to take a resolute stance against Paul, and newly released files from the British Secret Service show that the British had a direct hand in the murder of Tsar Paul I in March 1801.

In Europe, a group of leading diplomats and generals from the continent linked with British diplomats and the exiled King Louis XVIII's *Agence de l'Extérieur*—an informal foreign affairs group of the heir to the French throne—rallied against the Russian tsar. They operated in “quasi-diplomatic groups,” which they called Committees, with secret correspondences and couriers. In a sense they were structured as a normal diplomatic service.

In January 1801, Paul turned his back on the Bourbons, and, on 15 January, Louis XVIII was forced to leave not only his castle at Grodno, but Russia entirely. He was promised that his allowance of 200,000 rubles would continue, but there was a secret order not to pay him. On January 22, Louis XVIII set out with no clear destination and no reliable source of funds. His correspondents were to write to Anne Louis Henri de La Fare, the former bishop of Nancy in exile in Vienna, who was to be joined by the Marquis de Bonnay.

### **Gustav Armfelt—Documenting the Assassination**

Paul's assassination has been recorded in two extraordinary contemporary accounts. The most well-known was recorded by Comte de Langeron, but perhaps more important is a little known account written by Baron Gustav Armfelt for Gustav IV of Sweden, entitled *Relation des evenemens [sic] qui out rapport á la mort de Paul Ier Empereur de Toutes les Russies (Summary of the events leading to the death of Paul I, Emperor of Russia)*.

Armfelt's account of the assassination begins in the planning stages in Courland, a part of Lithuania controlled by Russia on the partition of Poland. On 15 November 1799, Paul had become sufficiently suspicious of Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin (who had been one of his mother's trusted advisors) to relieve him of his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs and to banish him to his estate in Moscow.

By March 1800, Paul had stopped cooperating with the Allies altogether, and his assassination became increasingly inevitable.

After Napoleon was victorious at the Battle of Marengo (14 June 1800), Paul decided to support France fully, further inciting resistance against him. General Count Peter Pahlen remained the sole member of the original conspiracy who was still in St. Petersburg, simply because he continued to serve as the city's Governor and Minister of Secret Police. All but Panin regrouped in Lithuania, at the castle of Bialystock near the Russian border.

The planning was long-winded, unpleasant, and difficult to wrap up. They finally agreed that both grand dukes would have to be persuaded that their father the emperor was unfit to rule and needed to be arrested and removed from power. His removal would be attributed to madness, and Alexander would be named regent in his father's stead.

If the plot was to be effective, it would need successful propaganda to deceive those still loyal to Paul I. The plotters would also have to operate in complete secrecy. At the same time, they needed to turn opinion against Paul by inflating preexisting perceptions of his violent personality. This was accomplished by misinformation designed to make the tsar suspicious of his sons as traitors. If Paul were persuaded that his sons were plotting a coup against him, then he might be persuaded to consider imprisoning them—which would no doubt increase support for the plot as other officials grew increasingly concerned that they might share the same fate.

Next, the tsar had to be convinced to recall to St. Petersburg those whom he had banished into exile. Paul I's *valet de chambre*, Kutaisoff, was a Turkish slave given as a personal servant to Paul when he was a child. Paul firmly trusted him and was almost entirely reliant on him. Kutaisoff, it turned out, was not above bribery, and he had regularly received large sums of British Secret Service funds from Sir Charles Whitworth throughout Paul's reign. Kutaisoff was London's man closest to Paul I.

On 1 November 1800, Count Peter Pahlen persuaded Paul to pardon senior officers in exile. Pahlen himself wrote the edicts for their return to St. Petersburg. Upon their return, they fawned over the tsar to create an air of tranquility at the court.

In his account, Armfelt plays down the role of Royal French planners while emphasizing the leading role of the English Secret Service. By mid-March 1801, all the preparations were made, and all the players were in place. Prince Platon Zoubov had charge of the actual coup, while Pahlen was assigned the task of managing the troops "destined to preserve tranquility and public safety" to ensure a peaceful succession.

In the last moments before the coup, Paul was tipped off by an anonymous letter. The next day he confronted his sons and forced them to swear that they did not intend to take his life. They were able to do so honestly, for they had only agreed to force his abdication. Paul likewise confronted Pahlen, who laughed off his sovereign's accusations. By then Pahlen had

complete control of the military guards, the police, and the civil administration of St. Petersburg.

On the final day of his life, Paul seemed to be aware of the attack planned for that evening. Armfelt describes how Zouboff, leader of the twenty-seven conspirators, entered the tsar's private apartments. Earlier that evening, they had been admitted into the cellars of the tsar's palace to await the right moment to strike. The attack took place, as planned, at 1:30 a.m. on 24 March 1801.

Next to Paul's bedroom, Pahlen had stationed over one hundred guards—not to protect the tsar from assassination, but to restrain the empress if she made any attempt to stop the conspirators. No one at the Russian court intervened to save Emperor Paul.

Pahlen had no hand in what took place in the tsar's chamber. The tsar was skilled in swordplay, and Armfelt claimed that Paul overcame Platon Zouboff's initial attack. Paul I nearly managed to kill Zouboff with his sword, until Nicolas Zouboff knocked Paul's sword away. Platon Zouboff, drunk and angry from his humiliation, took the tsar's own sash and strangled Paul, whispering the words: "Commend yourself to God and go there." The assassins then stomped on the corpse of the murdered tsar to ensure that he was, in fact, dead.

The next morning, the news of the conspiracy's success reached Stedingk, who was the first diplomat to learn of the events. Stedingk in turn wrote to the Swedish king two days later, on March 26. He wrote that the news of Paul I's death created a "barely decent" public jubilation.

For his service in the murder, Platon Zouboff was restored to the emperor's council. Pahlen retained all of his positions and the command of St. Petersburg, while temporarily gaining control of Foreign Affairs as well, until Nikita Panin returned from Moscow. Panin arrived in St. Petersburg on 27 or 28 March and reestablished a friendly relationship with Alexander, Paul's son and the heir to the throne.

Throughout the entire plot to assassinate Paul I, the British fleet had remained anchored in the Baltic Sea, just off St. Petersburg. At the beginning of 1801, Britain's principal advantage over France was its naval superiority. The Royal Navy searched neutral ships trading with French ports, seizing their cargoes if they were destined for France. As seen, Paul had broken with the British regarding Russian cooperation in imposing a boycott of Napoleon and had reestablished a League of Armed Neutrality to enforce free trade with France. The British viewed the League to be in the French interest and a serious threat to their own.

Paul I's assassination and the immediate removal of Russia from the League of Armed Neutrality was a clear signal to the British that it was safe to attack the Danish port at Copenhagen.

Sir Hyde Parker and his deputy, Vice Admiral Nelson, held the British fleet, waiting off the northern Danish coast for the signal that Paul was dead. As soon as that news was received on 2 April 1801, the British fleet attacked Copenhagen. Within days, the League of Armed Neutrality was dead, and Baltic waters once again were closed to trade with the French.

With the succession passed to Paul's son, the twenty-three-year-old Alexander I, Russia was firmly on the side of the British in the war against Napoleon. Later events would prove the pivotal role played by the British Secret Service in the assassination of Paul. Alexander I emerged as the leader of the Russian forces that ultimately liberated France from Napoleon. On 31 March 1814, Tsar Alexander I led the Coalition Army of Russia, Austria, and Prussia in a triumphant march into Paris, and forced Napoleon to abdicate just a few days later.

### George Scovell: An Unsung Hero of the Napoleonic Wars

Cryptology is a study and art that has been around for thousands of years. Classic cryptology is using ciphers written by hand on paper. Ancient civilizations had been using simple ciphers to convey sensitive information since the early years of writing. The Romans and Greeks made use of ciphers in conveying military information about troop movements and strengths. Today, while the art of cryptology has become infinitely more complex, and ciphers are now created on computers rather than by hand, the ability to send a secret message containing sensitive information remains at least as important as it was thousands of years ago.

The Napoleonic Wars lasted from 1805 to 1815. As ciphers began to be used more and more in French communications, there was one man who helped immensely to exploit ciphers to military advantage against the French. George Scovell was born in 1774, and, while working as an assistant to Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, Scovell found his niche as a code-breaker and contributed enormously to the British victory against Napoleon.

Mark Urban's book, *The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes*, begins at the battle of Corunna in 1809, painting a dreary picture of the British campaign on the Iberian Peninsula. With Scovell's help with embarkment logistics, the British succeeded in retreating back to Britain, but they had suffered a demoralizing defeat. Under the command of a new general, Arthur Wellesley,



Sir George Scovell  
(1774–1861)

Portrait by William Salter, ca. 1850s.

Scovell returned to the Iberian Peninsula in May 1809 serving as an aide. Realizing the need for a central intelligence system, Wellesley promoted Scovell to the post of head of communication and intelligence.

In 1811, a new scheme of encrypted French messages began to appear on the peninsula. Frederic Marmont, the commander of the Army of Portugal, had created a small cipher of around 150 characters that was called the “Army of Portugal” cipher. Each of the characters stood for either letters or keywords, such as people or places. While the 150-character cipher was not the most secure code ever created, it did help to increase the security of communications between various parts of the French military on the Iberian Peninsula.

Scovell, as the chief of communications for the British military, was brought in to help solve these encrypted messages. While Scovell had no prior experience in code breaking, in 1811 he had managed to find a hand-written copy of a book called *Cryptographia, or the Art of Decyphering* by David Arnold Conradus. This book highlighted specific rules to breaking a cipher:

Proposition 1: The art of decyphering is the explanation of secret characters by certain rules.

Proposition 2: Every language has, besides the form of characters, something peculiar in the place, order, continuation, frequency, and numbers of the letters.

Rule 1: In decyphering regard is to be had to the place, order, combination, frequency, and number of letters.

Rule 2: In decyphering nothing is to be left to conjecture, where the art shews the way of proceeding with certainty.

Proposition 3: In writing of any length, the same letters recur several times.

Rule 3: Writings of any length are most easy to decypher from the frequent recurrence and combination of the same letters.

Remarkably, applying these simple rules, Scovell managed to break the Army of Portugal cipher over the course of a few weeks. Armed with this knowledge of French intentions and dispositions, the British were able to decrypt many sensitive French communications.

Because of the growing unreliability of the Army of Portugal cipher, Joseph Bonaparte, the brother of Napoleon, demanded a new, stronger cipher. This request gave rise to the Great Paris Cipher, and in the last days of 1811, the new cipher tables were distributed to the senior leadership of the French political and military administration. This new cipher consisted of 1,750 symbols, which alone rendered the new code far more secure. Rather than

using symbols for just letters and words, this new cipher also used symbols for sounds, syllables, and parts of words, which increased the flexibility of the code and added precision and speed.

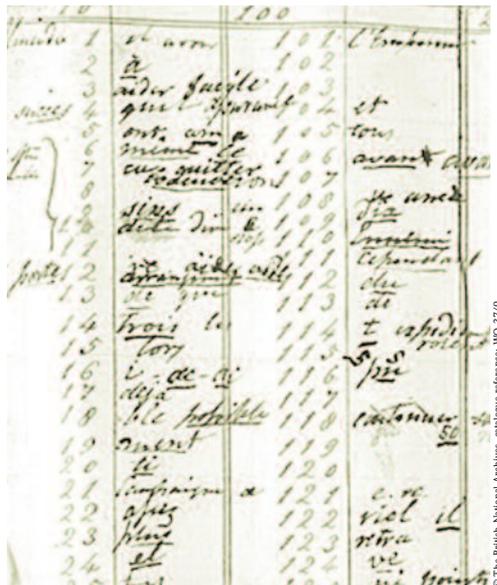
Because of the increased difficulty of this code, it took Scovell several months (instead of weeks) to break the Great Paris Cipher.

Between the introduction of the Great Paris Cipher and its being broken in mid 1812, the British military continued its campaign in the Iberian Peninsula, with much of its information being gathered from intercepted transmissions still being sent in the Army of Portugal cipher. In spite of their basic knowledge of enemy movements, the British could not be sure of the true intentions of the French military without knowledge of the contents of highly encrypted transmissions between Paris and Spain.

With the Great Paris Cipher broken in July 1812, it was just a matter of time before Wellesley was able to discover vulnerabilities in French defenses. After a long period of cat and mouse between the French and British armies, Wellesley received word that the French army could not expect reinforcements any time soon. With this information, the British army launched a successful attack on the French at Salamanca. After suffering heavy casualties, the French were forced to retreat and cede Madrid to the British troops—a concession that dealt a permanent death blow to Joseph Bonaparte and the government he had worked so hard to create in Spain.

Throughout 1812, Wellesley continued to exploit Scovell's growing skills in breaking the Great Paris Cipher, even as Napoleon proved too arrogant or naïve to change his codes—that is, until the disaster at the Battle of Vitoria. While retreating from Vitoria, Joseph Bonaparte was forced to leave behind his carriage containing many valuable goods, including his personal deciphering tables for the Great Paris Cipher. Keenly aware that their codes had been compromised, the French abruptly changed their cipher tables in favor of a new grand cipher. While the British no longer enjoyed a clear knowledge of French war plans, they nonetheless continued to bear down on the French military, leading to the fateful battle of Waterloo, where Napoleon surrendered, bringing an end to the Napoleonic wars.

A detail of the Great Paris Cipher of 1812.



# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. Why did the British Secret Service assassinate Paul I, Tsar of Russia, in March 1801?
2. What are the simple rules of codebreaking as revealed by Conradus?
3. What particular expertise and background did George Scovell have that enabled him to break Napoleon's codes?

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Sparrow, Elizabeth. *Secret Service: British Agents in France, 1792–1815*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1999.

## Websites of Interest

1. The *Alexander Palace Time Machine* website provides a biography on Tsar Paul I entitled "The Mad Tsar?" —  
<http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/Paul.html>
2. The British National Archives features information on General George Scovell and his contribution to code decyphering. —  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/spies/ciphers/scovell/default.htm>

## Lecture 12

### The American Civil War: Foreign Operations

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is David Hepburn Milton's *Lincoln's Spymaster: Thomas Haines Dudley and the Liverpool Network*.

Entering the American Civil War, neither the Union nor the Confederacy had any organized military or civilian intelligence department. While the Confederacy had the General Intelligence Office, its work was largely limited to gathering information regarding the sick and wounded. And while the North inherited the U.S. Treasury Department's Secret Service, this agency was restricted to investigating counterfeiters and protecting the president.

As a result, spying in the American Civil War was initially dominated by volunteers, men and women motivated out of passionate ideological commitment or, more often, those seeking fame, fortune, or adventure.

#### Henry Shelton Sanford and Federal Surveillance Abroad, 1861–1865

In early December 1861, the London *Chronicle* broke the story that American spies were monitoring British maritime activities and shipments being processed at all major British seaports. It was only the latest article confirming Union espionage in Great Britain. Two months earlier, two newspaper stories told of Federal agents operating in Liverpool, opening and inspecting shipments while posing as passengers on steamers.

These activities represented Union covert operations to quash the Confederacy's efforts to secure munitions and vital resources at European ports during the American Civil War. Henry Sanford, the United States' minister to Belgium, also served as the head of the North's secret services in Europe. Unlike the North, which had the ability to produce war materials in its own factories, the South was vitally dependent on European imports to fight its war. In order to starve the South of these desperately needed war materials, it was Sanford's mission to penetrate British textile mills, factories, shipbuilding facilities, ports, post, telegraph offices, and other governmental agencies. He urged



Henry Shelton Sanford  
(1823–1891)

Sanford was the United States' Minister to Belgium and head of the Union's Secret Service in Europe during the Civil War.

Lincoln's Secretary of State William Seward to supply him with agents in Paris and London, as well as funds, to "aid in routing up this nest of secessionists." These agents were to follow Confederate purchasers at all times so there would be no doubt regarding Southern activities.

By the end of June 1861, Sanford had established a network in London that ran through U.S. consul Freeman Morse and Ignatius Pollaky's private detective force. Encouraged by Northern overseers, in 1862, Pollaky, a veteran of London's Metropolitan Police, created his own private detective agency—Pollaky's Private Inquiry Office—which Morse initially hired to set up a nationwide clandestine surveillance system regarding Confederate activities inside Great Britain. So long as he was well-paid, Pollaky and his men would prove invaluable to Northern efforts to undermine the Confederacy. Pollaky and his men created a surveillance system that would—as Pollaky wrote to Morse—"leave no room for further improvement" in monitoring Confederate agents. Within just three months, Pollaky had boasted in a report that he had established a surveillance system "whole & everywhere" throughout Great Britain. Of special interest was James Bulloch, who was sent abroad to purchase ships and war supplies for the Southern states. Bulloch's reputation preceded him—Seward had warned all ministers and consuls in Britain of his impending visit to England. Pollaky's method was to exploit his contacts from his service on the London police force and to suborn British police and government agents with extra compensation he paid for information and services.

After his arrival on 4 June 1861, Sanford's agents constantly monitored Bulloch's movements and activities. By the end of July, Sanford informed Seward that he had doubled the amount of surveillance dedicated to Bulloch.

It was Pollaky, however, who ran most of the day-to-day surveillance operations in Britain. Pollaky assigned agents to monitor warehouses and ports in London and Liverpool. From there, shipments could be tracked to individual ships as agents carefully examined shipping labels and boxes for distinguishing characteristics. He paid postmen an extra £1 a week to provide details on the origins of letters mailed to known Confederates and their dates of delivery. When multiple letters came from a single seaport town, an agent would be assigned to locate a ship departing for the Confederacy.

On 24 September 1861, Pollaky proposed an expansion of surveillance. He suggested the utilization of officials employed in dock and steamship companies to receive schedules of ships bound for the Confederacy. Clerks were bribed to gain copies of Confederate business transactions. When his agents uncovered Confederate message-bearers en route to America, Northern agents endeavored to travel on the same ship in order to intercept the message, or to follow it to its destination. Pollaky initiated the use of lawyers to delay the departure of shipments through British courts. Such delays afforded Northern agents the opportunity to sabotage ships laden

with Southern goods: at a cost of about £5,000, the loaded ships could simply be sunk. At any rate, it was important that ships leaving port be reported with enough information that they might be placed on a “black list” and possibly intercepted. Pollaky also proposed stowing Federal agents on supply ships and bribing ships’ crews to help take over the ship. Once overrun, the ship could be intentionally scuttled, or sailed into a Northern port. As historian Harriet Chappell Owsley has noted, however, such sabotage efforts often failed.

The pinnacle of Pollaky’s success came with the discovery of the *Fingal* loading at Greenock, Scotland. The *Fingal* was a fast steamer, purchased by Bulloch for the South in September 1861 and loaded with guns, munitions, clothing materials, and medical supplies to aid the Confederacy. The ship was discovered by Northern agent Ed Brennan, who managed to confirm the cargo when he recognized the markings of Isaac Campbell & Co. For several days, he reported the ship’s hourly loading progress to Pollaky, who in turn reported to Sanford.

The *Fingal* finally left port on 9 October, but Brennan did not see Bulloch on board. To escape detection, Bulloch had clandestinely traveled down the coast to Holyhead, where he boarded the *Fingal* on 15 October. Unaware of his departure, Pollaky’s men continued to report on the activities of “B & Company” up to Bulloch’s return to Britain in March 1862.

Despite the success of Pollaky’s men, within just a few months his entire operation had been disbanded because of redundancy. U.S. consul Morse and U.S. ambassador to England Francis Adams had already paid £270 for the same *Fingal* information from their own sources. The appearance of reports about Sanford’s operations in England in the British press had led Seward to appoint an alternative network: Sanford remained as intelligence chief on the continent, but Francis Adams took over operations inside England.

After Pollaky’s demise, the man in charge of stopping the burgeoning Southern fleet in Britain was Thomas Haines Dudley, American Consul at Liverpool during the Civil War. Dudley arrived in Britain on 19 November 1861 and would play an essential role that would directly affect the outcome of the Civil War.

Dudley improved upon Sanford’s system by utilizing a vast number of Northern sympathizers—including many shipyard workers involved with building the Confederate ships—as well as an expert private detective, and his own two eyes; Dudley often walked around the shipyards in disguise, questioning the workers himself, or he



Thomas Haines Dudley  
(1819–1893)

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spied on ships with binoculars. As a rule, Dudley kept extensive records of all the information he received from his various spies. It was Dudley's treasure trove of collected intelligence that would be used to support U.S. claims for reparations from Britain following the Civil War's end.

At the outbreak of the American Civil War, the British government had reinstated its Foreign Enlistment Act, a law originally passed in 1819 prohibiting British subjects "from enlistment in foreign armies or service" and from "fitting out or equipping" vessels in the British dominion for war purposes without government approval.

Dudley's main strategy was to use the Foreign Enlistment Act in British courts as a means by which to prevent the British outfitting of a Confederate navy. Twice in spring and summer 1862—in the case of the warship *Oreto*, and the *290* (later, the *Alabama*)—Dudley had relied on his covert networks to collect evidence to present as affidavits to use British law to impede the sale of warships to the Confederacy as a direct violation of the Neutrality Act. It was determined that the *290* was in fact in violation of the Foreign Enlistment Act—but the ship had by then already sailed, and so it could not be detained. After the escape of this second Confederate ship, the British government had to consider that their policy was possibly too much in favor of the South, so much so that the North might take aggressive action against the "neutral" country.

By the beginning of 1863, British public opinion had begun to sway in favor of the North, largely as a result of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. This plus Northern diplomatic pressure seems to have moved the British to honor their commitment not to build any more warships for the Confederate navy. After the escape of the *Alabama*, Secretary of State William Seward warned that the British government's policy could lead to war with the United States if they did not start seizing ships clearly intended for the Confederacy.

The *Alexandra* was the third major ship against which Dudley took action. He had been gathering evidence against it since the fall of 1862, and by the time he passed his findings on to the Collector of Customs in March 1863, Dudley knew that Bulloch had the contract for the *Alexandra*'s construction, and he could trace its ownership back to Fraser, Trenholm & Co., the secret owners of many of the British-built Confederate ships. Just as with the previous ships, Dudley's evidence was passed around various departments of the British government. This time, however, it was concluded that Dudley was correct about the *Alexandra*, and the ship was seized on 5 April 1863. This was an incredible victory for the North, and a similar strategy of combining espionage to collect information for use in the British courts was utilized to halt the sale of two additional ironclad ships to the Confederacy, the Laird Rams.

After Pollaky's dismissal in January 1862, Sanford was ordered by Seward to focus his attention toward thwarting Confederates on the Continent. In

Paris, Seward worked closely with a New York newspaperman and consul, John Bigelow. Seward also relied heavily on wealthy New York businessman and socialite, Nelson Beckwith. Together the three men ran Northern surveillance operations in Europe for two and a half years.

Sanford relied on more extensive networks as well. Shortly after his arrival in Belgium in April 1861, Sanford established reliable communications with Northern agents in various coastal ports that Confederates were likely to use to ship goods to the American South. Sanford instructed his agents to keep a close watch on all shipments of weapons and war materials. He also employed special agents to keep him informed of Southern arms orders. He further took the initiative to inspect a Prussian factory that had filled a Confederate arms order months earlier.

Sanford was all the more delighted when he realized he could outbid Confederate agents to block or seriously delay their shipments. Even when supplies were deemed too shoddy and expensive to be worth outbidding Confederate buyers, Sanford nonetheless insisted on their purchase. And in one case, when one of his agents insubordinately refused to buy what the agent considered to be worthless junk bound for the South, Sanford instructed his network of agents to watch for the shipment and to make every effort to stop it. If they could not, they were to give immediate notification so that the ship might be intercepted before reaching the South.

To Sanford, the European press was also valuable in undercutting Southern aid from Europe. Sanford reasoned that if European public opinion could be turned against the Confederacy, then supplies and financial support would likewise run dry. In the winter of 1861–62, Sanford sought to encourage a pro-Union media initiative through the purchase and strategic dissemination of subscriptions of the London *News* and *American*—decidedly pro-North papers. He also paid the editor of the *Independent Belge* 6,000 francs to publish regular articles that supported the Northern cause. In August 1862, Sanford paid 1,000 francs to *Opinion Nationale* in Paris for the editor's agreement to help the Northern cause—by launching a media attack on the American South, alleging that not states' rights but slavery was the primary cause for the Southern secession. The editor was paid 500 francs each month until the end of the war to ensure the steady publication of pro-North, anti-South news.

While Sanford was distressed by British attacks against his networks in October 1862, by this time he lacked the funds to do anything more about it. By July 1863 he had spent \$15,000 of his own money to sustain his European operations, and his persistence would pay off with what would become the greatest intelligence victory of the American Civil War.

In July 1863, Beckwith informed Sanford of a Southern intention to move its shipbuilding operations from England to Continental Europe. Beckwith believed that the South intended to purchase an entire fleet of French iron-clad warships. In response, Sanford quickly traveled to Paris to investigate

these reports, and he informed Seward that a thorough investigation and more funds were necessary. A month later, Bigelow was increasingly concerned about Bulloch's efforts to build a Confederate naval fleet, but he still lacked sufficient evidence to make a move. After numerous conferences and correspondence, Sanford alerted Northern agents in Nantes, Havre, and Bordeaux.

On 9 September 1863, a clerk from Voruz and Company in Bordeaux provided Sanford's operation with precisely the evidence they needed to scuttle Bulloch's plan. The clerk offered Bigelow indisputable evidence of Confederate ironclad construction. For 15,000 francs, the clerk sold twenty-one original documents to Northern agents. After reviewing the documents, Bigelow concluded that no further effort or expense would be necessary. He had obtained explicit agreements for ironclad construction for the Confederacy.

Emperor Napoleon III had actually solicited the Confederacy's business through John Slidell, the Confederate Commissioner. Keenly aware that Napoleon III could be put in a rather precarious position, Secretary of State William Seward sent emissaries to the French leader, who threatened to release the embarrassing contracts to the media. Anxious to avoid public embarrassment for his blatant violation of French neutrality in the American Civil War, Napoleon III rescinded the contracts. As a result, the Confederacy was deprived of a technologically advanced fleet of warships.

Most historians agree that this operation was the turning point in the American Civil War. Without its own fleet of warships, the Confederacy was at the mercy of the Northern blockade of the Southern coast. Similarly, Northern coastal shipping remained largely invulnerable to Southern attack.

### **North American Operations**

The Confederacy also conducted foreign spy operations inside North America. Mainly, these were covert operations to support secessionist movements inside Northern states. To head up this operation, Confederacy President Jefferson Davis personally appointed a former Secretary of the Interior, Jacob Thompson, to run the entire operation from a secret headquarters in Toronto.

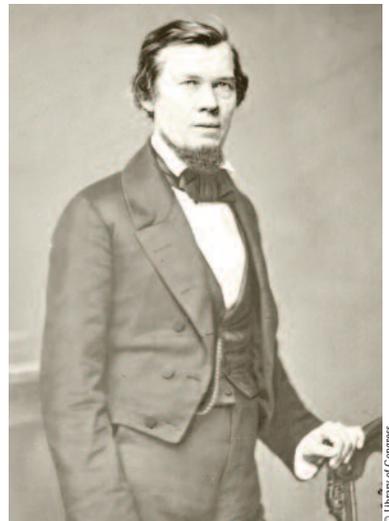
Confederate covert operations in Toronto were heavily infiltrated by Union secret agents, and as unlikely as the entire Toronto operation may seem now, it was a serious affair. In all, Thompson spent over \$600,000 dollars (some estimates exceed one million dollars) trying to persuade the Sons of Liberty to help support various militias to press for secession. Thompson is best known for his Northwest Conspiracy, when in 1864 he commissioned a small guerrilla unit to cross over into Ohio to stir up the Copperhead Militia, allegedly ready to rebel with its several hundred thousand members, into a secessionist movement to form a new Northwestern

Confederacy. The leadership of the Copperhead group persuaded Thompson that they were ready to act—all they needed was cash for guns and ammunition.

Thompson devoted most of his energy in summer and autumn 1864 toward supporting the secessionist groups—who turned out to have greatly exaggerated their numbers. Here again, Northern spies had infiltrated the militias—so that their leaders were tracked and arrested.

By autumn 1864, the northwest secessionist movement was all but dead, so that Thompson moved on to try to provoke a war between the North and Canada (still then a British colony) by staging cross-border attacks of Confederate soldiers on Northern targets. In mid September 1864, a Confederate unit managed to seize a Lake Erie passenger steamer *Philo Parsons*. They traveled to the Bass Islands, and there they seized a second steamer, the *Island Queen*. On 19 September 1864, the Confederate unit intended to attack the Northern warship the USS *Michigan*, then anchored at Sandusky, and then to level several Great Lakes cities with bombardment. Expecting the *Michigan* to be empty, it was, in fact, loaded with Union soldiers waiting to set a trap. Realizing they had been duped, the attack force sailed back into Canada, scuttled the *Philo Parsons*, and disappeared. Later, it was revealed that Thompson's agent in Sandusky, Thomas Cole, had been arrested earlier in the day, foiling the entire operation. Cole had been arrested on the basis of information provided by a Union spy working inside a Confederate refugee community in Windsor, Ontario.

With this failure, officers close to Thompson in Toronto began to desert to the Union, taking with them details about Thompson's safe houses, a secret weapons factory, and operations that led to the demise of the entire operation.



Jacob Thompson  
(1810–1885)

Confederate agent in Canada, Thompson's efforts to attack Northern cities were expensive and, in the end, a failure.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What sort of spy network did Thomas Haines Dudley create in Great Britain to monitor the operations of Confederate agent James Bulloch?
2. How did Henry Shelton Sanford manage to block the Confederacy's purchase of a fleet of French-made ironclad warships in 1863?
3. Briefly describe Confederate spymaster Jacob Thompson's operations in Toronto.

## Suggested Reading

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## Websites of Interest

1. The Sanford Historical Society provides links to research information about Henry Shelton Sanford. — <http://sanfordhistory.tripod.com/id19.html>
2. The *University of Mississippi Libraries Archives and Special Collections* website features correspondence and other information on Jacob Thompson available in their William and Marjorie Lewis Memorial Collection. The "historical note" on this website provides details of Thompson's life. — [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general\\_library/archives/finding\\_aids/MUM00266.html](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/archives/finding_aids/MUM00266.html)

## Lecture 13

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### The American Civil War: Domestic Operations

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Ann Blackman's *Wild Rose: The True Story of a Civil War Spy* and Elizabeth R. Varon's *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, a Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy*.

By the dawn of the American Civil War, the practice of wartime espionage in the field no longer carried with it the stigma of the previous century. Military leaders of both the Confederate and Union armies eagerly recruited and employed spies from the start of the Civil War. They also employed the latest technologies: photography, telegraph, and air balloons for reconnaissance.

Nevertheless, it was principally upon human intelligence that they relied. And the overwhelming majority of these spies, Northern or Southern, at least initially, were untrained amateurs.

Informants, though generally novices to the trade, were mostly passionate volunteers who exploited their unique positions out of a sense of duty and moral obligation. Several were professionals, however, detectives turned agents who spied to earn a living. The best spies on both sides were women, people who as a matter of convention were disregarded by men both in and outside of power as creatures of an intrinsically fairer but weaker sex.

Similarly, among the best spies for the Union were current and former African-American slaves. Their status as “sub-humans” on a par little different from herd animals in the Southern states gave them an advantage of near invisibility.

#### Rose O’Neal Greenhow

Immediately after Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard captured Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on 14 April 1861, Washington, D.C., became a den of spies. With full-scale civil war inevitable, Confederate sympathizers in the Federal capital began passing information to the new leader and hero of the Southern cause. Colonel Thomas Jordan, the quartermaster of General George Winfield Scott, passed along actionable intelligence critical to the defense of Beauregard’s fledgling army. Despite the looming conflict, Jordan shrewdly decided to keep his post while fellow secessionists resigned theirs. In doing so he became one of the Confederacy’s first—if not *the* first—stay-behind agents. Over the course of a month, Jordan secretly relayed Scott’s plans for a blockade of the Confederacy and established a sophisticated network of informants. Only then did he defect—leaving behind a spy ring with secure lines of communication. The ring’s leader was Jordan’s best informant and former lover: Rose O’Neal Greenhow.

At the time, Rose was perhaps the most popular woman in the capital, beautiful, rich, and outspokenly pro-Confederate. A wealthy widow by 1860, Rose O'Neal Greenhow knew nearly every influential politician and diplomat in Washington, D.C. Her own influence stemmed almost entirely from her relationship with President James Buchanan, whom she befriended in 1852 and for whom she had campaigned vigorously.

By most accounts, Greenhow was the most effective wartime spy in 1861 on either side. Rose exploited the prejudices of her day, playing upon the presumption that as a member of the “weaker sex” she was physically and intellectually incapable of carrying out such important work. By April 1861, Rose had established her own network as well as an elaborate system of relay by courier. After she met with influential friends or informants, she would hide an encoded message outside her home and signal one of Jordan’s waiting messengers by using a series of candles in her windows. The messenger would retrieve her report and transport it across enemy lines to General Beauregard. The cipher she used was Jordan’s brainchild. “One letter or number or symbol stood for a different letter or number or symbol for a word, such as ‘Lincoln,’ ‘infantry,’ or ‘Penn Avenue.’” It was rudimentary, far more so than the one created by Benjamin Tallmadge for George Washington, but it was effective.

In mid-July, Rose passed along intelligence regarding the intent of General Erwin McDowell, successor to the aged Winfield Scott, to launch a direct attack on Richmond, the Confederate capital. In doing so, she made her greatest contribution to the Confederate war effort.

The messenger that Greenhow dispatched on 16 July was a well-known Washington socialite, Bettie Duvall. Duvall, driving a cart and disguised as a simple farm girl, carried the message across the heavily guarded Chain Bridge. Once in Virginia, Duvall changed into more becoming riding garb, borrowed a horse, and rode off to Fairfax County Courthouse, where she passed her charge to former South Carolina Congressman turned Confederate General Milledge Luke Bonham—another of Rose’s acquaintances and one of Beauregard’s adjutants. Bonham then delivered the intelligence to his superior, who quickly deployed his



A coded message written by Rose O'Neal Greenhow (left) and a photograph of Greenhow with her youngest daughter “Little Rosie” while the Confederate spy was incarcerated in the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C., 1862.

Coded message: © National Archives/Photograph: © Library of Congress

men to strategic positions along Bull Run Creek. Jordan, in turn, sent a courier back to his secret agent requesting more details. Rose delivered in spades, obtaining a copy of McDowell's orders and relaying the number of troops at his command as well as the route he planned to follow. This included plans to cut the railroad at Winchester, specifically the Manassas Gap Railroad. Thanks to this information, Confederate forces were able to save precious rolling stock by moving it to Manassas Junction. They also wired for reinforcements, and eventually they completely routed the Grand Army of the North. The first battle of the American Civil War was in this way won largely because of the services of the Wild Rose spy network.

After Bull Run, Rose began focusing her efforts on interviewing captured Confederate soldiers imprisoned in Washington, D.C. Under the cover of humanitarian aid, Greenhow fed Confederate prisoners and dressed their wounds, while talking strategy with them. Since they had passed through Federal lines on their way to prison, these captured soldiers were excellent sources of intelligence.

Greenhow's success, however, ultimately became her undoing. After the disastrous rout of the Union Army at Bull Run, the suspicious Assistant Secretary of War Thomas Scott assigned Allan Pinkerton, whose name has since become synonymous with undercover detective work and the American Secret Service, to investigate her. Pinkerton quickly caught the Southern belle in the act, watching closely with an aide as she played host to a Union provost marshal.

In June 1862, Greenhow was exchanged for Union prisoners. Unable to continue spying in America, Rose was sent by Beauregard to Europe to see if she could prove equally useful to the Confederate cause there. Although she captivated many with her charm, Greenhow was ultimately unable to help garner support from either French or British government officials. She drowned while attempting to return to the Confederacy from Europe in October 1864.

### **Elizabeth Van Lew**

Greenhow's counterpart on the Northern side, Elizabeth Van Lew, enjoyed much more success, eventually becoming the greatest spy of the entire war. Van Lew lived in Virginia throughout the conflict, employing an array of strategies to glean valuable information about the Confederate army.

Elizabeth Van Lew was born in Richmond in 1818. Educated in Philadelphia, Van Lew developed an early passion for the abolitionist movement. She returned to her native Richmond in the late 1830s a fine prospect for marriage. But though Elizabeth indulged in the well-established courtship rituals for marriageable women of her class, she was never married. Instead, Van Lew dedicated her life to charitable work. And it was this activity that became her cover for espionage service for the North during the American Civil War.

Elizabeth began working for the Union independently by aiding Northern prisoners of war incarcerated in and around Richmond. Not surprisingly, few Richmonders appreciated her benevolence toward the enemy—and Van Lew was labeled a madwoman whose service to the prisoners was deemed to be socially inappropriate, but not treasonous.

Visiting prison camps with her elderly mother under the guise of aides in order to talk with ill-treated Northern prisoners desperate for food, water, and medical care, Van Lew began to collect raw intelligence she deemed useful to the Northern cause. After each trip, she carefully ciphered this information and sent it north via five separate courier networks, often tearing the message and sending the information in five pieces through each of five courier routes.

To stave off suspicion, early in the war Van Lew shifted her own personal attention to wounded Confederate soldiers convalescing in Richmond hospitals. Even so, she simultaneously “stepped up her own work on behalf of Union prisoners” by enlisting the services of her “slaves”—mostly her former slaves, educated black men and women who, as all evidence suggests, were secretly freed years earlier. At the start of the Civil War there were some four million enslaved blacks in the American South. As historian Mary Stark noted, “Just as slaves provided the labor vital to sustaining the Confederate war effort, they simultaneously formed an unseen and voiceless potential enemy.”

Van Lew primarily targeted captured Union enlisted men who, unlike officers and civilian captives, were locked inside prison camps, but largely ignored by their captors. Van Lew also managed to infiltrate educated blacks as slaves and servants into the homes of influential Southern families. By the end of the war, Van Lew was operating an African-American network of some forty slaves and former slaves.

Van Lew and her network are credited with several key intelligence coups, in particular the coordination of a prisoner revolt with the attack on Richmond by General George Meade in February 1864, where the Union managed to rescue thousands of Union prisoners.

One such recruit, Mary Elizabeth Bowser (who may have been Van Lew’s own African-American half-sister, the



Elizabeth Van Lew  
(1818–1900)

Van Lew created an elaborate spy ring in Richmond that provided intelligence that directly aided the Union victory.

daughter of a slave owned by Van Lew's father), found employment as the servant to Varina Davis, the wife of the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis. Everything she learned—state secrets of the highest value—“was dutifully reported to Miss Van Lew, who passed the information on to the Union.” Bowser's “Black Dispatches” played a critical role in the Northern victory.

As historian Alan Axelrod has observed: “escaped slaves or even freed blacks, who sought asylum in the North were a fertile source of behind-the-lines intelligence.” As one slave-spy recalled: “We handle everything they wears and hands them everything they eat and drink. Ain't nobody can get closer to a white person than a colored person.” In this way, Southern racism blinded white Southerners to a critical strategic vulnerability that would be repeatedly and effectively exploited by the North throughout the American Civil War. And yet it has taken nearly one hundred fifty years for scholars to rediscover the courageous risks and critical contributions of Southern blacks who, as P.K. Rose noted, “Like [all] successful spies throughout history . . . did their jobs quietly and effectively—and then faded away.”

## Conclusion

The greatest lessons from the American Civil War for the history of espionage come not in spycraft, but in the brilliant use of cultural myopias against one's enemies. Southern women spies like Rose O'Neale Greenhow and Belle Boyd thrived on the North's failure to understand that women posed a serious strategic threat to national security. Similarly, Elizabeth Van Lew, Mary Elizabeth Bowser, and Harriet Tubman showed how gender and race could be played against the South for tremendous strategic advantage.



Mary Elizabeth Bowser  
(ca. 1840–date of death unknown)

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What contributions did Rose O'Neal Greenhow make to the Confederate cause?
2. What were the unique characteristics that accounted for the enormous success of Elizabeth Van Lew's spy ring in Richmond?
3. In what ways did Northern spies exploit Southern racial prejudices to their advantage when organizing spy rings?

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## Websites of Interest

1. The *National Archives* website features over a hundred digital copies of original communications in the Rose O'Neal Greenhow papers. — <http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/topics/civil-war/greenhow.html>
2. The *CIA* website features an article on "Intelligence in the Civil War: Conspiracy in Canada." — <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/additional-publications/civil-war/p37.htm>

## Lecture 14

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### The Great Game: The Russian-British Confrontation in Central Asia

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Peter Hopkirk's *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*.

#### Expansion of the Russian Empire

In the history of the world, no country has grown faster and longer than the Russian Empire. Between 1581 and 1899, Russia's Asian territories expanded at an average rate of 20,643 square miles each year. An empire that in 1584 was roughly twice the size of Mexico—1,530,000 square miles—had by 1899 grown almost six times, to 8,660,282 square miles, extending through thirteen time zones: from Poland in the west to the Sea of Japan in the east, from the Arctic Circle in the north to the Black Sea in the south.

The vast majority of this expansion occurred in Asia, where Russia's domains by the end of the nineteenth century were roughly three times the size of her European territories. The largest expansion came in the period from 1796 to 1914.

The Russian Empire grew by taking advantage of the decay of the vast Ottoman Empire, which at one time had extended from China to modern Turkey. The empire grew from the center outward by a process of accretion. Scholar Taras Hunczak has noted that for most of this period there was no real design for the Russian expansion. Rather, Russian outposts of a rapidly expanding territory became vulnerable to smaller, weaker, insecure neighbors, which led to armed struggles and a long succession of Russian victories.

Historians have generally referred to this era as the age of colonial expansion, and the era was marked largely by the extension of European control to colonies in all corners of the world. Another name for this phenomenon is Imperialism, and with the rise of Imperialism came further impetus for globalization, and with it, espionage.

#### The Great Game

Although covert intrigues and the competition for colonies was a worldwide phenomenon, nowhere was this rivalry more heated than in the British-Russian struggle for control of Central Asia. Historians have come to refer to this period as the "Great Game" or the "Tournament of Shadows": the strategic rivalry between Russia and Great Britain for supremacy in Central Asia that some have also called the "first Cold War" between East and West.

The period of the Great Game lasted nearly a century, from the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1813, which marked a period of good relations after the

defeat of Napoleon, to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, when both nations began to recognize that it would be better to reconcile their differences and join together to confront a new threat marked by the ascendancy of Germany as a world power.

## The Geopolitics of the Great Game

The catalyst for the Great Game was growing British uneasiness about Russian expansion across Central Asia eastward toward the Pacific Ocean, and southward through the Caucasus mountains toward Persia and the Middle East. By the early 1800s, the British controlled most of South Asia, with an established colonial regime in India, and a protracted military campaign in Afghanistan to the north. The British also claimed hegemony in Persia (now Iran) and large parts of the Middle East. Intrigues abounded. Among the Russians, officials worried not only about Pan-Islamic spies and missionaries from Istanbul. They saw British secret agents at every turn. Local Muslims were also suspected of spying for the Afghans and Chinese. In the early twentieth century, German reconnaissance teams were not far behind. Russia's defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1905 seemed to embolden all of Asia as well as the European powers who would challenge the tsarist position there.

## British-Russian Rivalry in Afghanistan

From the British perspective, the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia posed a direct threat to British interests in India, the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire. Over the course of the nineteenth century as Russia benefitted from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and her troops subdued one khanate after another, the British became increasingly concerned that the Russians intended to use Afghanistan as a base to support an anti-British insurgency inside India.

To preempt Russian advances in the region, in 1838 the British

British Prime Minister William Gladstone is portrayed dancing to the tune of a Russian bear in this political cartoon made during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, 1878 to 1880.



launched the First Anglo-Afghan War, where they tried to establish a pro-British regime under Shuja Shah. This effort failed as soon as British troops withdrew. By 1842, angry Muslim mobs were attacking the British on the streets of Kabul, and in the face of increasingly violent attacks, the British garrison was forced to withdraw altogether. The Afghan army relentlessly pursued the fleeing British Army, and all but one of the British forces, Dr. William Brydon, were killed during the flight back toward India.

The British humiliation in Afghanistan temporarily ended British ambitions in the region, and it corresponded with comparable setbacks elsewhere in Central Asia. But following a failed rebellion against British control inside India in 1857, the British worked covertly to maintain a weak and ineffectual state in Afghanistan as a strategy to preclude her territories from being used as a staging point for anti-British operations.

While the British met with mixed results in their efforts to subdue Afghanistan, the Russians continued to advance steadily eastward and southward toward Afghanistan, and by 1865, Tashkent had been formally annexed into the Russian empire. Three years later Samarkand fell to Russian forces, who were under the command of the notorious “White Pasha” or as the Turkmen called him, the *goz zanli*, or “Bloody Eyes”—the brilliant and brutal Russian General Mikhail Skobelev. Samarkand became part of the Russian Empire three years later, and the independence of Bukhara was largely taken away in a peace treaty that same year. As a result, Russian control extended as far north as the northern bank of the Amu Darya river, which gave the Russians a straight run into northern Afghanistan. Deeply concerned by the rapidity of Russian advances, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli proposed in a letter to Queen Victoria “to clear Central Asia of Muscovites and drive them into the Caspian [Sea].” He then introduced the Royal Titles Act, which added to Victoria’s titles that of Empress of India, putting her at the same level as the Russian Emperor.



Mikhail Skobelev  
(1843–1882)

After the Great Eastern Crisis broke out and the Russians sent a diplomatic mission to Kabul in 1878, Britain demanded that the ruler of Afghanistan (Emir Sher Ali) likewise accept a British diplomatic mission. The British mission was turned back, a major insult, and in retaliation a force of 40,000 men was sent across the border, launching the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

The war’s conclusion left a British-controlled puppet, Abdur Rahman Khan, on the Afghan throne, and he agreed to let the British maintain Afghanistan’s foreign policy while he consolidated his position on the throne. With British support, Khan managed to suppress internal rebellions with ruthless efficiency and brought much of the country under central control.

Russian expansion brought about another crisis—the Panjdeh Incident—when the tsarist army seized the oasis of Merv in 1884, at the crossroads to Herat, and a gateway to an invasion of Afghanistan. The Russians claimed all of the former ruler’s territory and fought with Afghan troops over the oasis of Panjdeh. On the brink of war between the two great powers, the British decided to accept the Russian possession of territory north of the Amu Darya as a *fait accomplis*.

### Anglo-Russian Alliance

In the run-up to World War I, both England and Russia grew concerned about the escalation of German activity in the Middle East, notably the German project for the Baghdad Railway, which would open up Mesopotamia and Persia to German trade and technology. Ministers Alexander Izvolsky and Edward Grey agreed to resolve their long-standing conflicts in Asia to make an effective joint stand against the German advance into the region. The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 brought a close to the classic period of the Great Game.

And yet, British fears of Russian designs on their South Asian empire lasted well into the twentieth century. For instance, in June 1919, an experienced officer of the British SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) warned of “the expected REVOLT of ISLAM which . . . is still being indefatigably prepared by the united efforts of the enemies of GREAT BRITAIN in order to disturb British rule in INDIA and the EAST generally, and thereby eventually, it is hoped, bring about a downfall of the British Moslem Empire . . . This union is principally GERMANY’s work,” but still there is “LENIN’S HAND IN THE GAME.”

### Spies for the English East India Company

Most British spies in Asia operated under commercial cover. There was, for example, the notorious Arthur Conolly, who traveled on foot and on horseback from Moscow to Bombay, often in disguise, usually as a Persian merchant, “Khan Ally.” His task? To survey the routes of a hostile Russian military campaign. Conolly and another British secret agent, Charles Stoddart, were executed in June 1842 by the Emir of Bukhara, Nasrullah Khan, on charges of spying for the British Empire. His real crime? Conolly had been working to unite rival chiefs into a joint British-supported struggle against growing Russian influence in the region.

Many British secret agents in Asia worked undercover as scientific explorers. Colin Mackenzie, for instance, the British agent who



Arthur Conolly, ca. 1840  
(1807–1842)

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mapped India, formally held the title of Surveyor General of India, and he produced many of the first accurate maps of South Asia. He was also a renowned collector of Asian art and artifacts, as well as a respected Orientalist.

There was also James Lewis, who deserted from the British army, changed his name to Charles Masson, and passed himself off as an American. An East India Company soldier and explorer, Masson was the first European to discover the ruins of Harappa near Sahiwal in Punjab, Pakistan.

During the first Anglo-Afghan War, 1839–1842, Alexander “Bukhara” Burnes was London’s man in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. Posing as an American engineer, Burnes scouted East Asia for possible commercial and strategic potential, focusing on areas not yet under direct British control. Burnes spied his way as far as Kabul, collecting ancient coins while tracing the route of Alexander the Great to India. He was nicknamed “Bukhara” Burnes for his role in establishing contact with and exploring Bukhara, a future outpost of the Russian empire. He was assassinated in Kabul in 1841, hacked to death by a violent mob angry at the British intervention in Afghanistan.

The Russian explorer-spies were no less creative than the British. In 1858, Count Nikolai Ignatiev was sent into the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara on a top-secret mission to negotiate a Russian treaty of friendship with the Emir of Bukhara, the same Emir Nasrullah Khan who had executed British secret agents John Conolly and Charles Stoddart. British intelligence had instigated a plot, persuading the Khan of Khiva to block the Russian initiative by taking Ignatiev hostage. Instead, the wily Ignatiev managed to escape back to Moscow, treaty in hand.

Most famous of all Russian secret agents in Central Asia was Nikolai Przhevalsky (1839–1888), a Russian geographer of Polish origin who became a renowned explorer of Central and Eastern Asia. Although he never reached his final goal, Lhasa, in Tibet, Przhevalsky traveled through regions unknown to the West, such as northern Tibet, modern Qinghai, and Dzungaria.



Colin Mackenzie (1754–1821)  
*in Afghan Dress*  
by James Sant



Alexander “Bukhara” Burnes  
(1805–1841)

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## British Perceptions

Viewed from British India, the Russian advance into Asia was ascribed to a strategic master plan. The British certainly had serious cause for concern.

The Russians stirred up insurgencies inside regions of interest to the British to justify Russian intervention. In the 1870s, the British resident or spymaster in Hyderabad, India, wrote that a recent insurgency showed “that not more fiercely does the tiger hunger for its prey than does the Mussulman fanatic throughout India thirst for the blood of the white infidel.” And yet as much as Muslims resented white rule, they could not be relied upon to defend British India. Viceroy, Lord Lytton, explained the precarious British position in 1876:

The plain truth lies in a nutshell. If 30,000 Russians crossed the frontier tomorrow, and attacked us in the Punjab, we could probably rely on our Mahomedan population to support us against them. But, if three Turks from Constantinople landed in Bombay with a message from the Sultan Commanding the Faithful in this country to declare a jihad against the British Government, our most loyal Mahomedans would obey the order.

Understanding this basic reality, the Russians generally avoided direct, large-scale Russian-British military confrontations in favor of stirring up trouble among secessionist locals. The Russians often utilized Muslim nationalism as a strategic weapon against the British throughout Central Asia.

Even as the Russians and Germans stirred the pot of Islamic nationalism against British rule in the Middle East, Near East, and Central and South Asia, the Russians became renowned for their repressive counterinsurgency policies in zones under their own control. Russia’s conquest of Central Asia and Persia, for instance, was marked by brutality against insurgent populations and their communities.

Using modern European military methods of highly disciplined, well-armed soldiers, the Russians in the “Wild East” often faced opponents far superior in number, but poorly equipped and poorly trained. Standard counterinsurgency policy then would have been considered genocide in a military tribunal today.

For instance, in 1877, Russian General Skobelev so brutally suppressed a Kazakh uprising in Alma Ata that he remarked that it would be a century before the locals would again rise up against Moscow authority. When asked to explain the brutal violence of his forces, Skobelev quipped: “I hold it as a principle that the duration of the peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict upon the enemy.” Such was Russian counterinsurgency policy in Central Asia, a lasting legacy that would be continued by the Soviet regime in the next century.

# FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

## Questions

1. What was the “Great Game”?
2. How did Russian territorial expansion affect the pace and intensity of the Great Game?
3. What were the principal strategies for the Russian eastern expansion into Central Asia?

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