SPECIAL ISSUE
SOVIET ESPIONAGE IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE STALIN ERA

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Abstracts

Alexander Vassiliev’s Notebooks and the Documentation of Soviet Intelligence Activities in the United States during the Stalin Era
John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr

Alexander Vassiliev’s notebooks with 1,115 pages of handwritten transcriptions, excerpts, and summaries from Soviet Committee on State Security (KGB) archival files provide the most-detailed documentation available of Soviet espionage in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. This article discusses the provenance of the notebooks and how they fit with previously available Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files, KGB cables decrypted by the Venona project, Communist International records, court proceedings, and congressional investigations. As an example of the richness of the material, the essay reviews the notebooks’ documentation of Soviet spy William Weisband’s success in alerting the Soviet Union to the U.S. decryption project that tracked Soviet military logistic communications, allowing the USSR to implement a more secure encryption system and blinding the United States to preparations for the invasion of South Korea in 1950.

In Re Alger Hiss: A Final Verdict from the Archives of the KGB
Eduard Mark

The notes and transcriptions that Alexander Vassiliev made during several years of work in the archive of the former KGB resolve many of the early Cold War’s espionage cases. Hitherto unexploited materials in the collection relate directly to the case of the diplomat Alger Hiss. They conclusively show that Hiss was, as Whittaker Chambers charged more than six decades ago, an agent of Soviet military intelligence (GRU) in the 1930s. With other evidence, Vassiliev’s notebooks also establish with high probability that Hiss was the Soviet agent “Ales” mentioned in a much-disputed Venona cable. This article provides a systematic review of the evidence on the case.

Target Enormoz: Soviet Nuclear Espionage on the West Coast of the United States, 1942–1950
Gregg Herken

Alexander Vassiliev’s notebooks fill in long-standing gaps in historians’ understanding of Soviet nuclear espionage in the western United States during the Second World War and Cold War. Scholars are, in effect, finally able to see some of the most notorious spy cases in modern history from the Soviet side.
The notebooks exonerate some individuals who were accused of spying—and whose careers were ruined as a result—while confirming the guilt of others. These revelations include an arguably definitive answer to a question that has been the centerpiece of Cold War controversy for more than half a century: whether the renowned American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer was, as alleged at the time, “an agent of the Soviet Union.” The new evidence indicates that he was not a spy.

The Rosenberg Ring Revealed: Industrial-Scale Conventional and Nuclear Espionage
Steven T. Usdin

New evidence from the KGB’s archives reveals that Julius Rosenberg’s espionage ring was larger and caused more damage to U.S. security than has been previously understood. Rosenberg’s prosecution centered on his recruitment of David Greenglass to spy on the Manhattan Project. Notes smuggled out of Moscow by Alexander Vassiliev show that Rosenberg also recruited Russell McNutt as a nuclear spy. The Rosenberg ring’s primary contribution to the USSR, however, was a wealth of detailed information about non-nuclear weapons systems that were critical elements of the early Cold War Soviet arsenal.

I. F. Stone: Encounters with Soviet Intelligence
Max Holland

I. F. Stone has never loomed larger as a role model for American journalists than he does now. Yet since his death in 1989, persistent allegations have surfaced about associations he may have had with Soviet intelligence. The Vassiliev notebooks shed important new light on this question, although definitive answers remain elusive. The notebooks show that Stone did actively cooperate with Soviet intelligence in the mid-to-late 1930s. They leave unclear whether he also maintained a furtive relationship in the 1950s. Evidence suggests that Stone’s only active period of cooperation was in the 1930s.

What the Spiders Did: U.S. and Soviet Counterintelligence before the Cold War
John F. Fox, Jr.

Counterintelligence history has too often relied on a “wilderness of mirrors” trope, which suggests that the discipline is driven by personalities and self-delusion. Using the newly available Vassiliev notebooks and other sources, this article takes a closer look at the historical evolution of U.S. and Soviet
counterintelligence as they developed and changed tactics in response to a changing world and the evolving actions of their opponents. Although blind at times to one another, they moved—especially on the American side—toward greater clarity of the opponent and a more complex approach to counterintelligence, driven by real-world experience and a growing knowledge of the threat posed by the other side.
Editor’s Note

This special issue on Soviet espionage in the United States during the Stalin era has been in the works for some time. In early 2006, John Earl Haynes, an eminent historian of American Communism and Soviet espionage whom I had known since the mid-1990s, called me to let me know that in late 2005 he and Harvey Klehr, another distinguished historian and frequent coauthor with Haynes, had met in London with the former Soviet foreign intelligence officer Alexander Vassiliev, who had agreed to make available to them the 1,115 pages of notes and transcribed documents he had compiled in the early 1990s when working in the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) archive. As soon as I heard about this, I was eager to see the materials myself, especially when Haynes mentioned that the notebooks apparently contained many transcriptions and other information that was even more interesting and important than that included in Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 1999). Haynes was interested in having me review the notebooks and in meeting with him, Klehr, Vassiliev, and a few others to discuss the possibility of translating the notebooks, making them fully available to everyone in three versions (the original handwritten notes, a typescript in Russian, and an English translation), and producing a book and articles based on them.

In April 2006, Haynes and Klehr convened a workshop in Washington, DC, with a small group of experts on Soviet intelligence and espionage and the former Soviet archives. At that meeting, I pored over all of the notebooks and quickly realized their immense value for scholars. I spent many hours over the next couple of days going through the hundreds and hundreds of densely handwritten pages of transcriptions and notes. The more I read, the more convinced I was that this was an invaluable resource for all those interested in the Cold War, Soviet espionage, and Soviet foreign policy. Because Vassiliev’s knowledge of the subject was quite limited when he started his research in the SVR archive, he erred on the side of writing down too much rather than too little. For those who now use his notebooks, this is a huge benefit because it gives a much better sense of the context of particular documents. Also, as I was going through the notebooks I was pleased to see how many documents were complete or nearly complete transcriptions rather than just brief excerpts. Vassiliev deserves great credit for having sedulously noted the archival location and page numbers of all the documents he transcribed (in full or in part). I know from my own experience in the archives that it is often tempting to cut corners in jotting down all the archival information, and I was therefore relieved to see that Vassiliev did not cut corners. The information was all there.

Equally important, the workshop gave me an opportunity to question Vassiliev at
length. Not having met him before, I was a bit apprehensive beforehand. I am always wary of former Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) officers, even those who broke with the Soviet regime. But I found Vassiliev refreshingly open, engaging, and candid. I asked a few "trick" questions early on to see whether he might try to dissemble, but he was always scrupulous about saying what he knew and acknowledging what he did not know. Any concerns I might have had prior to the workshop were put at ease. Also, Vassiliev explained to me precisely where the notebooks had been from 1995 to 2002 and how they were transferred to him in the United Kingdom from Russia. He later wrote up this account, and it is published as a long introductory essay, "How I Came to Write My Notebooks, Discover Alger Hiss, and Lose to His Lawyer," in the important new book by John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev, Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Readers who want to know more about the provenance of the notebooks should read Vassiliev's essay as well as the opening article by John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr in this special issue of the Journal of Cold War Studies. We coordinated the timing of the special issue to coincide with the publication of Spies.

The Vassiliev notebooks will be a great boon for researchers specializing in Soviet espionage and foreign intelligence during the early Cold War. Our understanding of key aspects of the Cold War has been altered over the past fifteen years by the partial opening of some former Soviet archives, by the transcriptions of documents made available by Vasilii Mitrokhin (a former archivist in the KGB foreign intelligence archive), and by the U.S. National Security Agency's decision in the mid-1990s to declassify and release the Venona documents (translations of some 3,000 partly or wholly decrypted communications between Soviet intelligence organs in Moscow and Soviet intelligence stations in the United States and numerous other countries, primarily during World War II). Nonetheless, the sources available up to now on Soviet intelligence have had notable limitations. The SVR and military intelligence (GRU) archives in Russia have never been accessible, and the director of the SVR archive, Vasilii Khristoforov, has repeatedly vowed that his archive and the GRU archive "will never [nikogda] be opened." A small number of documents have occasionally been released from the SVR archive and have been published individually or in official anthologies, but these sporadic releases obviously are no substitute for access to broader collections of documents. Similarly, although a few former Soviet foreign intelligence officers like Sergei Kondrashev (who, unlike Alexander Vassiliev, remained a loyal supporter of the former Soviet intelligence organs), have been given access to selected documents from the SVR archive, non-KGB researchers have received no access at all.

Vasilii Mitrokhin's transcriptions of some KGB foreign intelligence documents, which he ferreted out of Russia in 1992 and turned over to the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), have been extremely enlightening, but unfortunately the SIS chose not to make them fully available. Christopher Andrew, a leading expert on intelligence, was given selective translations of the Mitrokhin transcripts, and these enabled him (with Mitrokhin as coauthor) to produce two books about KGB foreign intelligence activities, The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB (New York: Basic Books, 1999) and The World Was Going Our
Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World (New York: Basic Books, 2005). The books are of great value, but unfortunately the SIS did not make the full collection of transcriptions available to other scholars, especially those who (unlike Andrew) know Russian. Shortly before Mitrokhin died in 2004, he published an important translation of a lengthy document, KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer’s Handbook (London: Frank Cass, 2002), and he made the original Russian transcription and other important items from his collection available by transferring copies to the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. The CWIHP has posted these materials on its website (http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.browse&sort=Collection&item=The%20Mitrokhin%20Archive), mostly in the original Russian typescript, though some have been translated as well. The rest of the Mitrokhin collection, however, remains in the possession of the SIS and is unavailable to researchers. (Among the items not yet available are ones I particularly want to see dealing with the Polish crisis of 1980–1981.) Moreover, the coverage of the Mitrokhin transcriptions is somewhat spotty; some topics are covered in depth, whereas other topics (including the subject of this special issue of the JCWS) are covered very little or not at all.

The Venona collection has been a goldmine of information about Soviet espionage and intelligence-gathering, but these documents, too, have distinct limitations—the brevity of the messages, the ambiguous content of some of the messages, the difficulty of identifying codenames, and so forth. Moreover, only the translations of the decrypted Venona messages were released, not the original Russian text. Although the Russian text of one message (Cable No. 1822 from 30 March 1945) was made available in October 2005, this remains the only exception. In any case, even if all the Russian texts were released, the decrypted Venona messages represent only a tiny fraction (barely 1 percent) of the hundreds of thousands of messages the Soviet intelligence organs exchanged with their overseas stations in the late 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the Soviet intelligence traffic could not be decrypted. Thus, even if the decrypted messages were longer and all the codenames were identifiable, we would still be seeing only a minuscule portion of the communications pertaining to Soviet intelligence and espionage.

Fortunately, the notes and transcriptions in Alexander Vassiliev’s eight notebooks not only add a great deal to the Mitrokhin and Venona materials but are also available in full to everyone. Although it would be ideal if ordinary researchers could go to the SVR archive in Yasenevo and be given access to the same files that Vassiliev saw, the likelihood of that is essentially zero. Consequently, for the indefinite future, the Vassiliev notebooks themselves are a crucial substitute. The notebooks, of course, must be used with caution for all the reasons discussed by Haynes and Klehr in their opening article of this special issue of the JCWS as well as in their book Spies. But there is no doubt that scholars far and wide will be sifting through the notebooks for many years to come. The disputes that have long raged about Soviet espionage during the Stalin era, the identities of certain spies, and the role of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) are likely (one hopes) to diminish in the face of the new evidence.

Among other things, the Vassiliev notebooks, like the Venona collection and
documents from the former Communist International (Comintern) archive in Moscow, indicate that Soviet espionage in the United States during the Stalin era was more aggressive and more extensive than had been publicly known before the mid-1990s. The revelations from the Vassiliev notebooks, as well as from other sources that have been released since the early 1990s, suggest that U.S. government officials in the 1940s who were genuinely concerned about Communist subversion and espionage had ample grounds for their concern. The disclosures do not vindicate the allegations made by vicious, self-promoting demagogues like Senator Joseph McCarthy, but they do bear out the worries that many executive branch officials and members of Congress expressed at the time. The documents show that Soviet penetration of the Manhattan Project (the secret wartime project to build nuclear weapons) and of upper levels of the U.S. government and intelligence agencies was a real threat and that measures to combat it were warranted. This does not mean that every step taken in the late 1940s and early 1950s was justified (some were clearly unconstitutional and were struck down by the Supreme Court), but the U.S. government would have been irresponsible if it had not responded vigorously after learning about the scale and aggressiveness of Soviet espionage in the United States and the role of the CPUSA in facilitating that espionage.

The Vassiliev notebooks also contain intriguing revelations about other aspects of Soviet foreign policy. Several collections of declassified documents from former Soviet Communist Party archives and from the Russian Foreign Ministry archive have been published in recent years on Iosif Stalin’s policy vis-à-vis Europe and Japan in the 1930s, as World War II was approaching. Similarly, the former KGB archive put out a very useful collection in the mid-1990s—V. K. Vinogradov et al., eds., Sekrety Gitlera na stole u Stalina: Razvedka i kontrrazvedka o podgotovke germanskoi agressii protiv SSSR, mart-iyunya 1941 g.: Dokumenty iz Tsentral’nogo arkhiva FSB Rossii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ob’edineniya Mosgorakhiv, 1995)—featuring many of the intelligence reports that were sent to Stalin and other senior officials in the lead-up to the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. (This collection revealed, as many other declassified documents and memoirs have, that Stalin was receiving highly accurate intelligence about what the Germans were up to, yet he chose to disregard or downplay it.) What was missing from all these collections, however, was an exceptionally interesting document transcribed by Vassiliev. This document, from 1935, shows that the Soviet foreign intelligence service was reporting to Stalin that the United States was conniving with Japan to prepare an attack on the Soviet Union. This assertion bears no relationship to what U.S. intentions actually were at the time, but the fact that such documents were being sent to political leaders helps us understand why Stalin a few years later was so anxious to sign a non-aggression pact with Japan and thereby avoid having to fight a two-front war. Seeing these sorts of intelligence documents and correlating them with other documents (from the Russian Foreign Ministry archive, etc.) enables researchers to discern Stalin’s calculations with greater certainty.

Similarly, some of the documents Vassiliev transcribed pertaining to the Soviet foreign intelligence service’s assessments of the differences between Presidents Harry
Truman and Franklin Roosevelt, the differences between Truman and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the relative influence of some of Roosevelt’s and Truman’s advisers, and other such matters shed a good deal of light on how and why Stalin and his senior aides, despite their initial hopes for postwar cooperation with the United States, soon embraced a much more hostile stance. These materials and others in the Vassiliev notebooks will enrich all future studies of U.S.-Soviet relations during the war and in the early Cold War years.