

Intelligence, U.S. Foreign Relations, and Historical Amnesia

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*“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,”
the Queen remarked.*

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Spies, poisonings, Russian election meddling, disinformation, FBI scandals, international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, mass surveillance, cyber espionage, and data harvesting: the use and abuse of intelligence is one of the most contested and scrutinized subjects in contemporary news and current affairs. It generates almost daily news headlines across the globe. For anyone on social media, it often seems as if barely an hour passes without another spy scandal breaking. Such scandals are the subjects of many heated dinner-party conversations on university campuses.

By contrast, for a student of history who is eager to understand the similarities and differences between clandestine operations today and those in the past, there are yawning gaps in the literature and the classroom when it comes to intelligence, U.S. foreign relations, and international relations. These gaps exist even in some of the latest and most authoritative publications, as well as the history classes of major U.S. universities. Intelligence is either wholly missing from them, reduced to passing comments and historical footnotes, or, when it is addressed, taken out of context. As far as intelligence and U.S. foreign relations are concerned, we are living in the United States of Amnesia.²

The terms “signals intelligence” and “National Security Agency” (“NSA”)—the Western world’s largest and best-funded clandestine agency—do not appear in authoritative histories of U.S. foreign relations, spanning thousands of pages of scholarship.³ Consider *Diplomatic History* itself: a search on its website for “American foreign relations” produces 2,177 results, while a search for “National Security Agency” produces a meager 35. However, when “American foreign relations” is combined with “National Security Agency,” there are, bizarrely, zero results.⁴ This means that no current articles in *Diplomatic History* expressly link the NSA with American foreign relations.

Search terms are clearly imperfect, but these results do reveal a broader historical amnesia about major parts of U.S. intelligence. Anyone reading some of our most esteemed works about U.S. foreign relations is left with the mistaken impression that signals intelligence broadly, and the NSA in particular, did not play a significant role in postwar U.S. foreign policy. This means that important chapters of U.S. foreign affairs are not only incomplete but are likely distorted. No history of the Second World War would now fail to mention the role of signals intelligence in the Allied war effort and the successes of British and U.S. codebreakers in cracking Axis codes. However, key studies

of the Cold War and postwar U.S. foreign relations seem to be saying that these codebreakers abruptly ceased their work in 1945.

In reality, signals intelligence continued to play a role in U.S. foreign relations during the Cold War, just as it had done during the Second World War. Failing to incorporate signals intelligence into the history of postwar U.S. foreign relations is like playing a piano with one hand tied behind your back: you might produce a tune but never the full score.

Intelligence: Still a Missing Dimension of Major Published Works

To start, it would be useful to establish what I mean by “intelligence.” The best definition I know is that it is information acquired from secret sources against the wishes and generally without the knowledge of its originators or possessors. This information is processed by collating it with other material, then validated, analyzed, assessed, and finally disseminated to consumers.⁵ Intelligence should thus be distinguished from political or diplomatic reporting, which is not subject to validation, analysis, and assessment by a dedicated independent agency.

Intelligence is concerned with understanding the intentions and capabilities of enemies. In the spy world, professionals like to distinguish secrets (hidden but knowable information) from mysteries (hidden and unknowable information). Intelligence does not necessarily mean secret information: today there are enormous efforts to obtain “open source intelligence” from publicly available data. Likewise, simply because an assessment is stamped with the seductive words “Top Secret,” it is not necessarily more important or accurate than reports lacking those words (although there is a tendency by some policymakers to conflate “secret” and “important”). On the contrary, agencies today operate in a saturated world where consumers drink from a firehose of information. If an intelligence assessment fails to deliver something extra for a consumer—something s/he cannot read in the *New York Times*—then its value should rightly be questioned.

Traditionally, intelligence was seen as a “missing dimension” in the history of diplomacy and international relations in the twentieth century.⁶ It is not missing today to the extent it once was. Some chapters of U.S. foreign affairs are obviously impossible to discuss without including an intelligence dimension: Pearl Harbor, the CIA and MI6’s coup in Iran in 1953, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, and 9/11 are all clear examples. However, outside crisis moments like these, major parts of intelligence still tend to be missing from the historical landscape of U.S. foreign relations. The curtain is raised at specific moments; secret agencies appear during foreign emergencies like these; but thereafter they vanish, exiting stage left. This

means that their ongoing role as everyday contributors to U.S. statecraft, not just emergency actors, is omitted and thus misunderstood.

Consider the role of the President's Daily Brief (PDB) in U.S. foreign policy. One magisterial thousand-page study of U.S. foreign policy discusses the PDB only once, in relation to 9/11.⁷ However, PDBs (and their differently named successors) were given to all U.S. presidents from the 1960s onwards. Some, like Nixon, generally ignored them, while for other presidents the PDB was the first document they read each morning. The problem with addressing intelligence in isolation, at specific moments, is that there is no proper context about its use and abuse; that is revealed only by examining its broader prior and later development. To understand catastrophic failures of U.S. intelligence like Pearl Harbor or 9/11, we need to appreciate how they differ from moments when intelligence was successfully collected and successfully informed U.S. foreign policy. I am not aware of any existing published study of U.S. foreign relations that points out that on the outbreak of the First World War, the U.S. president, Woodrow Wilson, had a weaker grasp of intelligence than his eighteenth-century predecessor, George Washington. This deficiency was overlooked by Wilson's contemporaries and has been by subsequent historians. Taking a long-term perspective reveals deviations from norms.

In addition to approaching intelligence in a chronological vacuum, many histories of U.S. foreign relations fail to provide its international and comparative context. Histories of U.S. foreign relations, which largely overlook the role played by America's largest secret agency, the NSA, often do mention the activities of America's foreign intelligence-collection agency, the CIA.⁸ They usually do so with reference to CIA "covert action" conducted in foreign countries. Inexplicably, however, these same studies habitually fail to mention parallel—and often much larger-scale—Soviet covert action, which the KGB called "active measures."

Discussing CIA covert action while failing to discuss its foreign equivalent in the Cold War, KGB active measures, produces a lopsided and misleading view of U.S. foreign affairs. It is the historical equivalent of the sound of one hand clapping.⁹ It is like writing about the history of the Second World War and discussing Allied troop deployments while omitting any mention of the Wehrmacht. SHAFR's own online guide, which offers a "near comprehensive, 2.1 million-word online annotated bibliography of historical work covering the entire span of U.S. foreign relations" since the year 1600, does contain one entry for Soviet "active measures," even though they were a significant focus of American foreign policy during the Cold War.¹⁰ It is impossible to understand CIA covert action in South American countries like Chile, for example, without understanding KGB activities there.¹¹ Given a large body of secondary literature, as well as the archival resources on Soviet and Eastern Bloc services that have opened up, there is now no excuse for historians of U.S. foreign relations not to include the KGB and its Eastern Bloc allies in research.

As anyone who even fleetingly follows current affairs today can appreciate, the KGB is a subject with a reach extending beyond the historical grave. Much of the public shock and confusion about Russian active measures directed against the United States in 2016, measures that involved meddling in the presidential election and, allegedly, gathering compromising material (*Kompromat*) on Donald Trump, may be derived from a failure to appreciate the Kremlin's longstanding efforts to conduct similar active measures during the Cold War. Moscow interfered in U.S.

presidential elections by promoting its favored candidates and undermining those hostile to the Soviet Union. For example, the Kremlin secretly offered to subsidize Hubert Humphrey's Democratic election bid in 1968, when he was running against the veteran anti-communist, Richard Nixon. Humphrey politely declined the offer.¹² The KGB also attempted unsuccessfully to meddle in Ronald Reagan's election campaigns, with Moscow—correctly—fearing him more than any other Western politician. The KGB tried to find *Kompromat* on Reagan, but when it failed to do so, it settled for spreading disinformation ("fake news," in modern parlance) about him within the United States, promoting public protests under slogans such as "Reagan means War!"—all of which, to Moscow's disappointment, had minimal impact.¹³

A greater appreciation of the long history of KGB active measures, which involved a spectrum of political warfare activities, from "influence operations" at one end to assassinations at the other, and their impact on U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, would help correct the frequently reported claim that Russian active measures today are "unprecedented." They may appear

new, but in fact, President Putin, a former KGB officer, has merely adapted older KGB active measures for the modern age, harnessing new digital cyber technologies for older Cold War ends. He has spread disinformation to undermine public confidence in Western governments, promoted conspiracy theories to make it seem that nothing can be trusted and everything is a sham, and driven wedges between members of Western strategic alliances like NATO. All these measures are straight from the KGB's Cold War playbook. A valuable and policy-relevant subject of research at present would be to study how the United States and its Western allies countered Soviet active measures in the past—or failed to do so.

The Broader Problem: The Decline of Political and Diplomatic History

As readers of these pages will doubtless appreciate, there has recently been a vigorous debate about the decline and fall of political history taught at U.S. universities.¹⁴ Subjects labeled "traditional," like the history of high politics and statecraft, biographical studies of statesmen, and diplomatic and military history have been shunted aside in research and teaching agendas at major U.S. universities, with "new" subjects taking their place. During the 2015–16 academic year, only three out of 572 history jobs advertised with the American Historical Association were for positions in diplomatic or international history, a fall from a still pathetic nine positions the year before.¹⁵

Undoubtedly, readers will immediately and correctly point out that "new" subjects, like social, cultural, and gender history, are expanding and moving traditional political history in invigorating new directions. However, arguments between these two camps, traditionalist and non-traditionalist, are really attacking straw men, and they miss a more important point: so far as I can tell, nobody is seriously contending that subjects like gender, social, cultural history should not be researched and taught. All disciplines benefit from the ways in which they are advancing and enhancing our understanding of U.S. foreign affairs and diplomacy.

Still, can anyone reasonably contend that diplomatic and military history, which address major subjects such as statecraft and war, should not be taught by university history departments? Unfortunately, whichever way one looks at it, subjects like diplomatic and military history

have been sidelined or eliminated altogether at the history departments of leading U.S. research universities. There are inevitably contrary examples, but these subjects are trending into oblivion at major institutions in this country. Take Princeton University, for example. With a more than 60 faculty in the History Department on a tenure track or with tenure, not a single one does U.S. diplomatic history or the United States and the world.¹⁶

At the same time, overall undergraduate enrolment in history majors at U.S. universities is in decline—in free fall, in fact.¹⁷ Since 2008, the number of students majoring in history at U.S. universities has dropped 30 percent, falling more than any other humanities subject.¹⁸ Some have suggested that the cause of our fall off a cliff is the 2008 financial crisis, after which students began to vote with their feet, choosing STEM majors, which have “safer” employment prospects. However, the awkward reality is that history’s collapse started long before the financial crisis.

The unpalatable truth for our profession is that history seems to be dying at U.S. universities—committing slow-motion suicide, as two commentators recently put it—because history departments are failing to provide courses that students see as relevant and appealing: those about diplomacy, war, and peace.¹⁹ Notably, when universities have offered history courses on subjects like grand strategy and warfare, they have proved popular. History departments should also recognize that other university departments, like government, international relations, and political science, are only too happy to offer courses on subjects like statecraft and warfare. There is a serious risk that, if history departments continue to fail to offer relevant courses, they will, amid a large marketplace for university majors, steadily work themselves out of a job. It thus seems to me that the real debate that university history departments need to be having is not whether any one field should be pursued at the expense of another, which is really a false dichotomy; instead, it should be how to pursue *both* “traditional” and “new” areas of historical research—not “either/or,” but “both/and.”

Intelligence history is a striking example of how traditional subjects like diplomatic and military history need to be reinvigorated. The recent declassification of voluminous intelligence records from the United States and its key Cold War allies, like Britain, as well as the opening of the secret archives of former Soviet-Eastern Bloc countries, enhances and in some cases changes our understanding of hitherto established chapters of U.S. foreign relations, diplomacy, and warfare.

Intelligence History: State of the Field

Theoretically, the recent explosion of trans-national history should have led to a similar boom in the way intelligence history is studied and promoted. However, it has not. There is a puzzle at the heart of this state of affairs. I am not qualified to comment on the psychology of why many historians ignore intelligence—some who are vocal about intelligence matters today fail to incorporate them into their own scholarship—but I will offer some speculation, falling happily short of psychoanalysis.

Traditionally, historians may have shied away from incorporating covert agencies into their work because they viewed them as frivolous subjects, more suitable to the pages of an Ian Fleming novel than serious scholarship. This is fair enough. James Bond has done serious damage to the study of intelligence history. In many ways, the aim of those of us working in the field is to rescue it from 007.

Second, historians could legitimately claim in decades past to have been frustrated by a lack of archival intelligence material.²⁰ This was fair enough. Previously there were striking gaps in publicly available sources such as archives

and the memoirs of statesmen—gaps that arose either through imposed or self-imposed censorship. For example, in the 1,500 pages of his memoirs about his time in the White House, Henry Kissinger did not mention the NSA once; he justified the omission with the quip that the NSA stood for “No Such Agency.”²¹ However, the NSA is certainly no longer the non-existent agency it once was. (In fact, even in the face of silence about the subject in memoirs, some pathbreaking scholars showed that significant archival material was available in the public domain about the NSA’s activities and its historical impact on U.S. foreign relations, if one was prepared to look for it.)²² Recently declassified records now unsurprisingly show that, contrary to the impression he left in his memoirs, the NSA in fact provided Kissinger with the intercepted secret communications of foreign powers.²³

There has never been a better time to study intelligence history. It is a rapidly developing subject of research, essentially a subfield of diplomatic and military history, which can boast of a large body of specialized scholarship, with dedicated, peer-reviewed journals publishing widely about intelligence and U.S. foreign relations.²⁴ Scholars are taking the subject in new directions, exploring topics like the CIA’s role in America’s cultural Cold War, for example.²⁵

Anyone who decides to study the subject now faces the happy problem of having so many declassified U.S. intelligence records available that it is difficult to know where to start. The National Archives at College Park, as well as presidential libraries, contain valuable intelligence records revealing the impact, or lack thereof, of clandestine agencies on policymaking by different U.S. administrations. The CIA has recently placed its entire declassified record system, CREST, containing 12 million pages, online, so scholars no longer even need to travel to College Park and use the awkward dedicated computer terminal there, as used to be the case. The FBI has put 6,700 of its historical documents online, and the NSA has undertaken similar efforts. Even selected portions of the CIA’s most sensitive document, the PDB, have been declassified.²⁶ Likewise, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series includes intelligence material, so readers can begin to study its use and abuse in U.S. foreign affairs.

Below are some of the archival sources that I have found valuable in writing a book about U.S. and British intelligence during the Cold War:

For U.S. intelligence:

- CIA²⁷
- FBI²⁸
- NSA²⁹
- “U.S. Declassified Documents Online”³⁰
- National Security Archive³¹
- Holdings at presidential libraries, papers of U.S. intelligence officers held at the Library of Congress and at various university libraries

For British intelligence:

- MI5 and GCHQ records and those of Britain’s high-level intelligence assessment body, the Joint Intelligence Committee, now at the UK National Archives³²

For Soviet/ Eastern Bloc intelligence services:

- The “Mitrokhin Archive,” material compiled by a senior KGB foreign intelligence archivist, Vasili Mitrokhin, and smuggled to Britain, parts of which are now publicly available in Cambridge, UK³³
- National Security Archive³⁴
- East German (Stasi) records,³⁵ Bulgarian (DS) records,³⁶ Czech (StB) records,³⁷ and Lithuanian (KGB) records³⁸

For further information on the opening of Eastern Bloc records and on doing research in them, and for a look into the ways in which Soviet Bloc services influenced U.S. foreign relations, I would recommend a recent publication by Philip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva.³⁹

Despite an avalanche of source material that has come crashing into archives, some of which now appears in published document collections, history departments of major U.S. universities have failed to promote intelligence history as a subject in its own right. I am not aware of a single lectureship in a history department of a U.S. research university specializing in intelligence history. Those U.S.-based scholars who study intelligence, under the rubric of “intelligence studies,” tend to be trained as political scientists,⁴⁰ or, if they are historians, tend to be housed in political science/ international relations departments, public policy schools, or specialized military schools. The U.S. historians Tim Naftali, Nick Cullather, Kathryn Olmstead, and Hugh Wilford are exceptions to this rule. In fact, there seem to be more British-based historians specializing in intelligence and U.S. foreign policy than U.S.-based historians—leading one well-placed commentator to remark that the subject is facing a British invasion.⁴¹

U.S. history departments are missing a significant opportunity here. The course I helped to teach and develop on intelligence history at Cambridge University, “The Secret World: The Rise of Governments and Intelligence Communities,” was persistently one of the most popular undergraduate courses offered in history at Cambridge University and produced a number of pioneering undergraduate and graduate research dissertations.

Opportunities for Original Research: U.S. Signals Intelligence

The issues raised above are not intended as criticism, but to highlight gaps in existing scholarship—gaps that provide opportunities for new research and forward momentum. My central contention can be summarized succinctly. It would be misleading to suggest that intelligence was pivotal in U.S. foreign affairs. In reality, U.S. statesmen used intelligence as just part of their decision-making; rarely, if ever, in history has it been decisive by itself in statecraft or warfare. But at the same time, ignoring the role of intelligence in U.S. foreign policy would be equally misleading. It was, and is, a normal function of government. Below are two examples that reveal episodes of historical significance about intelligence and U.S. foreign affairs that also inform today’s national security affairs. To understand their depths, we have to go some way down into the weeds.

Biographies of President Truman, and some studies of U.S. foreign relations, note that immediately after the Second World War, in September 1945, he shut down America’s wartime foreign intelligence service, the OSS. Few of those studies, however, note that in the exact same month, Truman authorized an unprecedented peacetime signals intelligence-sharing agreement between the United States and Britain known as the “UKUSA” agreement.⁴² Historians have known about the existence of UKUSA for decades, but the text of the agreement establishing it was only declassified in 2010.⁴³ We can now see that UKUSA was in fact not one but a series of agreements. The first, signed in October 1945, extended a previous wartime SIGINT agreement established between Britain and the United States to peacetime.

UKUSA became the most significant secret arrangement

in history. Its terms were unprecedented for the peacetime sharing of secrets between two countries; it provided that Britain and America would collaborate freely on all aspects of foreign SIGINT collection, dividing resources and responsibility between them, with “unrestricted” exchange of SIGINT product. Through UKUSA, the United States and Britain would share more secret material in the postwar years than any other two governments. As the Cold War set in after UKUSA was signed, the new U.S. SIGINT agency, the NSA, and its British counterpart, GCHQ, worked so closely that for practical purposes they were two sides of the same collection machine. Staff were located at each other’s headquarters and eventually shared transatlantic computer networks.

To understand U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War, it is thus necessary to incorporate not only the NSA, but GCHQ. UKUSA’s now-declassified text also dispels a conspiracy theory that the NSA used GCHQ to “spy” on U.S. citizens, circumventing legal restriction placed on it, but not the

British: the agreement only relates to foreign communications, with U.S. and British communications expressly exempt. Under UKUSA’s terms, it was thus expressly prohibited for the United States or Britain to collaborate to collect each other’s communications. Furthermore, Britain and the United States could not establish SIGINT sharing agreements with

third parties without notifying each other. As the Cold War chill descended, UKUSA was expanded to include British commonwealth countries Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, forming what became known as the Five Eyes Agreement, which is still in existence today. Five Eyes entailed the vast global pooling of SIGINT resources during the Cold War.

Britain and America’s transatlantic secret arrangement during the Cold War influenced U.S. foreign and domestic policies. A series of Soviet communications broken by U.S. and British cryptanalysts, later codenamed VENONA and shared through UKUSA, provided Washington and London with probably the greatest source of information about Soviet espionage in the early Cold War. VENONA was the postwar successor to Britain and America’s wartime SIGINT efforts against the Axis Powers at places like Bletchley Park, discussed in many history books. VENONA revealed that approximately two hundred U.S. citizens had worked as Soviet agents during the war and in some cases after it and that Soviet agents had penetrated every major branch of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s wartime administration.

Among those agents were Alger Hiss (codenamed “ALES” in VENONA) at the State Department, Larry Duggan (codenamed “FRANK”) at the State Department, and Harry Dexter White at the Treasury (“JURIST”). In 1944, FDR’s then vice-president, Henry Wallace, had selected Harry Dexter White and Larry Duggan to be his secretary of state and secretary of the Treasury, respectively, in the event of FDR’s death, which at the time seemed likely. If FDR had died then, and Wallace had become president, Soviet agents Duggan and White would have occupied two of the highest offices of the land.⁴⁴ VENONA shows that the FBI was correct at the time to have suspicions about Wallace’s affiliations with Russia. It also shows that present-day allegations about the FBI investigating whether Trump is a Russian asset are not unprecedented: now is not the first time the FBI has had concerns about Russia and incumbents inside the White House.

VENONA revealed Soviet intelligence had penetrated the top-secret Allied atomic bomb program in New Mexico, the “MANHATTAN” project, with agents literally sending plans for the world’s first nuclear bomb to the Kremlin.

Authorities on both sides of the Atlantic used VENONA in lockstep to identify and prosecute a series of "atom spies," including Klaus Fuchs (codenamed "CHARLES") and Julius Rosenberg ("LIBERAL"), though neither they nor the press reporting their stories at the time knew it was SIGINT that revealed their guilt. VENONA also revealed the most able and damaging group of foreign agents ever recruited by Soviet intelligence: the five "Cambridge spies." The VENONA decrypts present remarkable opportunities for original research, as some Soviet agents, listed only under their codenames, still have not been publicly identified.⁴⁵

Britain and America's SIGINT cooperation through UKUSA produced more than counterespionage investigations: it influenced U.S. foreign policy. As Britain withdrew from its global empire in the postwar years, it became apparent that far-flung outposts of the British empire, like Cyprus and Hong Kong, were valuable Cold War real estate, essential bases for British and U.S. SIGINT collection on the Soviet Union. In fact, as I have shown elsewhere, recently declassified records reveal that SIGINT collection was so important for U.S. national security that in some cases Washington guided London in its exit from empire.⁴⁶ In Cyprus, the United States helped to bankroll Britain's continued presence in military compounds after independence, effectively turning British "sovereign bases" there, where British flags continued to fly, into vast GCHQ and NSA SIGINT collection sites, with radar and antennae pointed at the Soviet Union.

This information confirms an older thesis put forward by two influential historians, Ronald Robinson and Wm. Roger Louis, about the imperialism of decolonization: during the Cold War the United States picked up responsibilities in Britain's former colonial empire.⁴⁷ In some cases, like that discussed below, the Cold War drove the United States to be a stronger advocate of British colonial rule than the British government was.

U.S. Covert Action: Meddling in Foreign Elections

The United States has a long history of meddling in foreign elections. One of the first covert actions conducted by the CIA after its establishment in 1947 was to interfere in democratic elections in Italy in 1948, with the aim of preventing the Communists from winning. Facing Soviet active measures to influence the election there, the CIA deployed a range of dirty tricks learned from its wartime predecessor, the OSS. These included black propaganda against Communist candidates and the secret use of \$10 million of captured Axis loot to fund, literally with bags of cash, anti-communist candidates.⁴⁸ The CIA and president Truman got the result they wanted: the Communists failed to win a majority. It is unclear whether the CIA's covert activities were decisive, but as far as Truman was concerned, the CIA played an important role. He sent his Director of Central Intelligence, Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, his personal congratulations.⁴⁹

The CIA continued to meddle in the domestic affairs of foreign countries during the Cold War. Well-known examples of such interference are Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and Chile in the 1970s. Less well known is the CIA's covert action in British Guiana, on the Atlantic/ Caribbean coast of South America. The source of London and Washington's concern there was its Marxist leader, Cheddi Jagan, and his Marxist American wife, Janet. Under Jagan, British Guiana became the first British imperial territory with a Marxist prime minister.

The extent to which Jagan's Marxism bled into communism became a matter of intense debate in London and Washington, as Britain looked to withdraw from British Guiana and grant it independence in the 1950s. British intelligence informed colonial policymakers in London that it had no evidence that Jagan was a fellow-

travelling Communist. In fact, MI5's intensive surveillance of the British Communist Party in London, which Jagan communicated with and visited, showed that he was, as one MI5 report put it, little more than a fairly pink "London School of Economics Marxist."⁵⁰

Non-alarmist assessments like these fell on deaf ears in London and Washington. Churchill, who became prime minister in 1953, saw the specter of communism looming large in British Guiana. When Jagan won an election victory there in May 1953, Churchill told the colonial secretary that the British "ought surely to get American support in doing all that we can to break the Communist teeth in British Guiana." He then added sarcastically, "Perhaps they would even send Senator McCarthy down there."⁵¹ Churchill resorted to extraordinary measures to remove Jagan from power. After the premier had been in office just over a hundred days, Churchill suspended the constitution in British Guiana, claiming that Jagan was undermining the constitution and furthering communism. Jagan was ousted from power.

To London and Washington's consternation, Jagan's Progressive People's Party (PPP) continued to win elections in British Guiana, even after London redrew voting districts to make it more difficult. The PPP won elections in 1957 and again in October 1961, at which point Jagan became prime minister. Soon after his election victory, Jagan visited President Kennedy in the Oval Office. Photos show an amicable meeting between the two leaders. Afterward Kennedy said that, although Jagan was a Marxist, the "United States doesn't object, because that choice was made by an honest election, which he won."⁵²

In private, Kennedy said the opposite. Following the humiliating failure to overthrow Fidel Castro in Cuba six months earlier in the CIA-backed landing at the Bay of Pigs, JFK was determined to prevent another Castro-type leader in America's backyard. He wanted what he called "a good result" in British Guiana. The Kennedy administration pressured London to delay its transfer of power in British Guiana until an alternative to Jagan could be found, even suggesting the British could reimpose direct rule. The British responded that it was impossible to bring back colonialism. But the Kennedy White House persisted.

In February 1962, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk sent a message to the British foreign secretary, Lord Home. "I must tell you that I have now reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan," he wrote. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told Home that Rusk's letter was "pure Machiavellianism," exposing a "degree of cynicism" that he found surprising, considering that the secretary of state was "not an Irishman, nor a politician, nor a millionaire." Home shot back a terse letter to Rusk. "You say that it is not possible for you to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan and that 'Jagan should not be allowed to accede to power again.' How would you suggest that this can be done in a democracy? And even if a device could be found, it would almost certainly be transparent."⁵³

The British and Americans held a series of high-level meetings about how to steal elections in British Guiana. At some meetings, the British poked fun at their American counterparts by getting them to say how important British colonial rule was. At one point, the colonial secretary told the U.S. ambassador in London, "If you Americans like British Guiana so much, why don't you take it over?"⁵⁴ In March 1962, JFK's special adviser, Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, noted that British Guiana, a colony of just 600,000 people, was consuming more man-hours per-capita in Washington and London than any other issue. Jagan, he added, would doubtless be pleased to know this.⁵⁵ In March 1962, a U.S. economic adviser in British Guiana poignantly asked the White House whether the United States could legitimately maintain that it respected the freedom of the

ballot and a choice made in a democratic election, even if it was not the choice America would make, and then coerce a people to choose a government that Washington wanted.⁵⁶

In August 1962, JFK authorized a \$2 million CIA covert action to do just that: drive Jagan from power before British Guiana reached independence.⁵⁷ British Guiana thus became the only British territory where a U.S. agency, not one of Britain's own services, became the dominant intelligence force. JFK ordered that the CIA's plans for British Guiana were not to be put on paper for the White House, only discussed in person; information would be available to the State Department on a strict need-to-know basis. Records at the JFK Presidential Library suggest that funds were pushed through Congress under the pretext of conducting economic feasibility studies for British Guiana.⁵⁸

In October 1962, the colonial secretary, Duncan Sandys, agreed that the CIA should approach Jagan's main political opponent, Forbes Burnham, whom Washington regarded as suitably pro-Western. The CIA provided funding for the British Guiana Trade Union Council, which in April 1963 launched a crippling ten-week-long general strike—at that point the longest general strike in any country in history. In December 1963, CIA covert action in British Guiana got the result that Washington wanted: Jagan's PPP lost the election, and Forbes Burnham came to power as head of a coalition government. Burnham led Guyana (as British Guiana was renamed) to independence in 1966.

However, as so often appears to be the case with U.S. covert action, short-term "success" was replaced by longer-term failures, determined by unintended consequences known as "blowback" within intelligence agencies. Washington's man, Burnham, ruled Guyana incompetently and corruptly, wrecking the Guyanese economy. Ironically, by the 1970s, he had proclaimed that Guyana was "on the road to socialism," and he formed friendly ties with the Soviet Bloc. It is impossible to know the extent to which Jagan would have aligned with the Soviet Bloc if he, not Burnham, had led Guyana to independence.⁵⁹

Conclusion: An Agenda for Applied History, or Historical Sensibility

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961, President Kennedy asked his special counsel, Theodore Sorensen, "How could I have been so stupid, to let them go ahead?"⁶⁰ We can now see that a reason for his miscalculation, or "stupidity," was wishful thinking about the situation inherited from his presidential predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower. He believed that covert action could achieve the removal of Castro, when in reality that could be achieved only by overt military action—to which Kennedy would never have consented. Kennedy's miscalculation was also derived from understandable ignorance about U.S. peacetime intelligence. The history books he read, first at university and then while president, gave little guidance about what a covert agency could reasonably be expected to achieve. In particular, he failed to grasp the gulf between the CIA's directorate of plans (operations), which exaggerated its ability to conduct successful covert action to remove Castro in Cuba, and the CIA's directorate of intelligence, which provided sober assessments.

In the 1990s, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government published a twenty-page condensed history of "The CIA to 1961."⁶¹ Anyone who reads those twenty pages will know more about the CIA than Kennedy did when he became president. It would be tempting to suppose that the level of historical knowledge among U.S. policymakers about U.S. intelligence has improved since Kennedy's time—or since the 1990s. However, there are good grounds for believing it has not. A senior U.S. official who worked on national security matters in President Obama's White House, with history and politics degrees from some of the

best universities in the world, told me that when he took his job all he knew about intelligence was from James Bond and Jason Bourne films.⁶² Though anecdotal, his comments are symptomatic of a larger problem. Yawning gaps in the historical literature about intelligence, which I have illustrated in the paragraphs above, have contributed to public policy misunderstandings about the nature, role, capabilities, successes, and failures of U.S. intelligence.

Intelligence is a significant, but often neglected, subject in the history of U.S. foreign relations. Correcting historical amnesia about it has historical merit and also provides opportunities to influence public policy through "Applied History," or what another commentator has called "Historical Sensibility": lessons learned from precedents, drawing analogies with the past, and warning of false analogies.⁶³ To paraphrase Winston Churchill, in order to understand the present, let alone predict the future, we first need to look back to the past—and the further back we look the better.

Christopher Andrew and I have recently launched a landmark new project in intelligence history that follows Churchill's suggestion: *The Cambridge History of Espionage and Intelligence*, to be published in three volumes by Cambridge University Press. It will study the use and abuse of intelligence in statecraft and war from the ancient world to the present day. With approximately ninety chapters by leading scholars, it will be the most authoritative collection ever assembled on intelligence history and will also set new research agendas. However, given the voluminous publicly available archival material now available, scholars of U.S. foreign relations have no excuse to wait for our publication, in five years' time, to incorporate intelligence into their work. In fact, historians of U.S. foreign affairs now have a stark choice: either to include intelligence in their scholarship or explain why they have chosen not to do so. The latter is not a tenable position.

Notes:

1. I would like to thank Ben Edgar, a Master in Public Policy student at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, for assisting me with some of the research for this article.
2. Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, "Why the U.S. President Needs a Council of Historians," *The Atlantic* (Sept. 2016).
3. See, for example, Warren I. Cohen, *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol 4: *Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present* (Cambridge, UK, 2013), which does not mention signals intelligence or the NSA; the same terms are omitted from Melvyn Leffler's otherwise excellent new book, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security 1920–2015* (Princeton, NJ, 2018).
4. Search conducted by author on January 21, 2019.
5. "The Nature and Use of Intelligence," in Lord Butler, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London, 2004), 7–16.
6. Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, UK, 1984).
7. George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower. U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford, UK, 2008), 941–2.
8. See, for example, Cohen, *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*.
9. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: the KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (London, 2005), xxv.
10. Search by the author conducted on Nov. 13, 2018. The CIA publicly testified before Congress in 1961 about the nature and threat of Soviet active measures. See *Communist Forgeries: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws*, Eighty-Seventh Congress, first session, on June 2, 1961 (Washington DC, 1961). In September 1961, *Communist Forgeries* became the first Senate hearing ever translated into three foreign languages (Spanish, French, and Italian). Ronald Reagan later established an "Active Measures Working Group" that was responsible for reports like Department of State, *Soviet*

"Active Measures": *Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations*, (Washington DC, 1981); and Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda* (Washington DC, 1987).

11. Kristian Gustafson and Christopher Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand: Soviet and Cuban Intelligence in Allende's Chile," *Intelligence and National Security* 33 (2018): 407–21.

12. Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, 1995), 176.

13. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 1999; published in the United States as *The Sword and the Shield*, 1999), 315–17.

14. Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, "Why Did We Stop Teaching Political History?" *New York Times*, Aug. 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/opinion/why-did-we-stop-teaching-political-history.html?_r=0.

15. Robert B. Townsend and Emily Swafford, "Conflicting Signals in the Academic Job Market," *Perspectives on History* (Jan. 9, 2017), <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2017/conflicting-signals-in-the-academic-job-market-for-history>.

16. The author would like to thank Stephen Kotkin for discussing this.

17. Niall Ferguson, "The Decline and Fall of History," remarks accepting the Philip Merrill Award from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni for outstanding contributions to liberal arts education (Washington DC, Oct. 28, 2016).

18. Emma Pettit, "Why Are Students Ditching the History Major?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Are-Students-Ditching-the/245163>.

19. Hal Brands and Francis J. Gavin, "The Historical Profession Is Committing Slow-Motion Suicide," "War on the Rocks," (Dec. 10, 2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/the-historical-profession-is-committing-slow-motion-suicide/>.

20. My comments here are influenced by John Lewis Gaddis, "Intelligence, Espionage and Cold War Origins," *Diplomatic History* 13:2 (April 1989): 191–212; and the response by D. Cameron Watt, "Intelligence and the Historian: A Comment on John Gaddis's 'Intelligence, Espionage and Cold War Origins,'" *Diplomatic History* 14:2 (April 1990): 199–204.

21. Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (New York, 1979).

22. James Bamford, *The Puzzle Palace: Inside the National Security Agency* (Boston, 1982); David Kahn, *The Codebreakers — the Story of Secret Writing* (London, 1967).

23. See the NSA's recently declassified tranche of records, "Declassified Records Related to the Vietnam Paris Peace Talks 1972–1973," <https://www.nsa.gov/News-Features/Declassified-Documents/Vietnam-Paris-Peace-Talks/>.

24. *Intelligence and National Security* is the leading journal publication in the field.

25. See Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS, 2006); and Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

26. "CIA releases roughly 2,500 Declassified President's Daily Briefs," <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/press-releases-statements/2016-press-releases-statements/cia-releases-roughly-2-500-declassified-president2019s-daily-briefs.html>.

27. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/crest-25-year-program-archive>.

28. <https://vault.fbi.gov>.

29. <https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/>.

30. <http://eresources.loc.gov/record=e1000193-S9>.

31. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu>.

32. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>. MI5 records are found under catalog reference "KV," JIC records under "CAB," and GCHQ records under "HW."

33. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/mitrokhins-kgb-archive-opens-to-public>.

34. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu>.

35. <https://www.bstu.de/en/>.

36. <https://www.comdos.bg>.

37. <https://www.abscr.cz/en/how-to-request-archival-materials/>.

38. <https://www.hoover.org/library-archives/collections/lietu-vos-ssr-valstybes-saugumo-komitetas-selected-records>.

39. Philip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva, *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War* (London, 2018).

40. These include scholars like Richard Betts, Robert Jervis, Loch Johnson, Gregory Treverton, and Amy Zegart.

41. Richard H. Immerman, "Intelligence Studies: the British Invasion," *History* 100, vol. 340 (April 2015).

42. See Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency* (New York, 1995), 161.

43. Government Communications Headquarters, HW 80/1 to 80/11 inclusive, The National Archives of the UK [TNA]; see also <https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/ukusa/>.

44. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin Archive*, 144.

45. <https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/>.

46. Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (New York, 2013), ch. 4.

47. Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22 (1994): 462–511.

48. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 171–72; Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, repr. ed. (New York, 2008), 30.

49. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 172.

50. Records of the Security Service, "Dr Cheddi Berret Jagan/Janet Rosalie Jagan," KV 2/3604, TNA. See also Memo from U.S. Ambassador in London (Bruce), Feb. 27, 1962, box WH 27, file 2, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA [hereafter cited as Schlesinger Papers].

51. Prime Minister's Office, PREM 11/827 Churchill to Lyttelton (2 May 1953), TNA.

52. Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 221.

53. Prime Minister's Office, Rusk to Home (19 Feb. 1962) and Home to Rusk (26 Feb 1962), PREM 11/3666, TNA.

54. Memo from President's Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to Kennedy (March 8, 1962) attaching Memo for US Ambassador in UK (Bruce) (Feb. 27, 1962), box WH 27, file 2, Schlesinger Papers.

55. "Schlesinger memo for President" (March 8, 1962), box WH 27, file 3, s.36f, Schlesinger Papers.

56. Harry Hoffman Economic Development Mission to British Guiana to Ralph Dungan, White House (June 1, 1962), box WH 27, file 3, s.24, Schlesinger Papers.

57. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, vol. XXXII, *Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana*, eds. Daniel Lawler and Carolyn Yee (Washington DC, 2005), editorial note; Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 689–90.

58. Schlesinger memo for president, box WH 27, file 3, s.13 (Sept. 15, 1962), Schlesinger Papers.

59. Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2009), 480. This author was a principal researcher for that book.

60. Cited in Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, 257.

61. Harvard Kennedy School of Government Case Program, "The CIA to 1961" (1983), available at <https://case.hks.harvard.edu/cia-to-1961/>.

62. Private conversation.

63. Francis Gavin, *Thinking Historically: A Guide for Strategy and Statecraft War on the Rocks* (Nov. 17, 2016), <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/thinking-historically-a-guide-for-strategy-and-statecraft/>.