



Towards an anthropology of spies and intelligence agencies

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Spies' place in the structure of power

In many ways, intelligence agencies are at the apex of the modern power structure of every nation state, and how they work has major impacts on many aspects of modern life. The history and methods of intelligence agencies therefore call out for proper anthropological or sociological analysis.

There is a vast library on the secret services of USA and Russia, UK, Israel, and other countries likewise, but little of this is much informed by the critical lens of anthropology. In this article, we shall start by surveying the field, asking how to bring it into view in a manner that is as 'objective' as possible, at the same time giving a holistic overview of a complex, fascinating and very significant subject. Throughout, we shall focus particularly on Britain or 'our side', as I find the place of intelligence agencies here the hardest to unravel; not so much because understanding one's own culture is often the hardest, but also because secrecy seems to have a special place in British culture, especially in how power is exercised. Anthony Sampson's books (versions of *The Anatomy of Britain*, 1962-2004), are helpful for understanding the UK power structure.

After this introductory section, this article will highlight some key episodes in the 2nd world war before proceeding to the cold war and 'war on terror', with particular focus on the role of intelligence agencies in relation to Middle Eastern, especially Kurdish issues.

There is an obvious tension in intelligence agencies between the claim to be producing intel that is objective and politically neutral, and a strong hidden national (and sometimes political) bias. At times this is obvious, as in the infamously false intel concerning 'weapons of mass destruction' that facilitated Tony Blair's decision for war on Iraq; and (less known but well documented) the involvement of supposedly 'apolitical' secret services in campaigns to discredit 'left-leaning' Labour leaders.

For these and related reasons, it is hard to be neutral about the role of intelligence agencies. On the one hand, their purpose is to carry out a vital function for the nation states they serve; on the other, whistleblowers and investigative journalists have exposed a long list of violence and disinformation. This article will highlight the voices of whistleblowers and dissidents at critical points, to get a sense of how much in public affairs is kept secret or distorted. In this sense, this article is an anthropological critique of intelligence agencies (IAs), asking fundamental questions about their place in society.

The role of anthropologist has some affinity with the role of spy, in terms of 'eliciting information from natives'. The often close connection between roles of spy and anthropologist is explored in colonial India by Bayly (1996). Colonial era anthropologists abetted 'structural violence' through 'scientific' but stereotyped analysis and categorisation of tribal peoples, most notoriously in the concept of 'Criminal Tribes' (Manjana et al 2022). Since the 2nd world war, many anthropologists have been employed as spies (Price 2016).

Spying was recognised as crucial in ancient times. In the Old Testament, Moses sends spies to spy out the land of Canaan before his people move into it. Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars is understood as showing an anthropological interest in 'the enemy' that was crucial to Caesar's rapid conquest of what is now France. The 'knowledge'

Caesar published about the Gauls and other peoples he conquered, like 19th-20th century colonial ethnography, is top-down and stereotyped 'conquerors' knowledge', of huge yet constantly questionable value to those of us wishing to understand the Gauls or Celts. Among ancient texts, the Arthashastra shows an Indian emphasis on spies; and advocacy of spy networks in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, written in China about 2500 years ago, had huge influence on Mao Tsetung and the CIA (Andrew 2019: 2-3).

In Britain, Tudor times were the period when a new dynasty used spies and intelligence gathering in a more organised way than ever before to clamp down on dissent. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be read as a play about the new 'surveillance state', with honey traps and assassination as well as rival 'intelligencers'. This aspect is beautifully brought out in Tom Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*. During the reign of Elizabeth I, spies were employed to counteract Catholic plots hatched by the Spanish royalty and Pope, involving Mary Queen of Scots (Alford 2013). Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, took over as spymaster to the crown from his own father and Sir Francis Walsingham, becoming Secretary of State, ensuring the accession of Mary's son James VI of Scotland as James I, and discovering Guy Fawkes' Gunpowder Plot in 1605. How much he acted as 'agent provocateur' towards these conspirators has been much debated, prefiguring modern debates about conspiracies and false flag attacks.

Historians of IAs, such as Christopher Andrew, trace their ups and downs from ancient and Renaissance times to the present. As we shall see, IAs played a crucial role in the Allied victory in the 2nd world war. Since then, their scale and influence has increased vastly; not just in their conventional role of spying or gathering 'intel', but also in influencing events and steering the media narrative, employing the black arts of psy-ops and propaganda (Todd et al 2009). Their extensive media control today evolved in relation to the CIA project of 'mind control', which many have understood in terms of extending Nazi medical experiments (Marks 1979/1991, Kinzer 2019, Gross 2019) and propaganda – 'Operation Mockingbird'. The UK secret services' 'Integrity Initiative' is a recent manifestation (Elmazi and Blumenthal 2021).

During the post 9/11 era of the 'war on terror', controlling the narrative starts with who we call terrorists. The UK Terrorism Act of 2000 (CAMPACC 2021), like anti-terrorist legislation in many countries, follows an intelligence agency definition of terror tactics that excludes government use of terror; even though much of what this discourse calls 'terrorism' can be understood as a reaction to state terror. This is the argument in Herman's book *The Real Terror Network* (1982) and in *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman and Chomsky 1998/2002). In Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and other countries, it seems painfully apparent that US-led attacks on 'terrorists' have escalated conflicts and 'terrorist attacks' exponentially. As we shall see, the 'Jewish terrorism' leading up to the formation of Israel is largely forgotten (Eveland 1980/2018, Giladi 1992/2003), and whether the Kurdish-led PKK should be counted a terrorist organisation is much debated.

Following the attacks in the USA on 11th September 2001, the US intelligence agencies were deemed to have failed (Kermack 2021). As the War On Terror was conceived and acted out through US-led attacks

on Afghanistan and Iraq, this justified the IAs playing a rapidly expanding role in surveillance as well as orchestrating operations and influencing media narratives. Expansion in surveillance of citizens is what led Edward Snowden to become a whistleblower (Snowden 2019).

If we fail to analyse the role of intelligence agencies, we therefore remain trapped in the narratives they construct, in which disinformation is entangled with truth. As we shall see, the experience of most Kurdish people in particular, among countless other communities, seems to be systematically marginalised out of mainstream media.

In terms of understanding spies' place in a social structure, this is often a marginal place in the sense that all spies become experts in secrecy and the tensions this demands. Some key spies have combined this with living very flamboyant lives indeed (e.g. Richard Sorge and Donald Maclean, Matthews 2019, Philipps 2018). Spying is structured through complex diagrams of agents and assets. Many spies lead largely conventional lives, but always coloured by stringent secrecy restrictions. Motivation varies notoriously between patriotism or ideology, money, and sometimes sex or love (Smith 2010).

In terms of the power these agencies wield, analysing them is an apex example of 'studying up' (Nader 1969, Tuhiwai Smith 1999/2012). So if we combine this with 'reverse anthropology' by putting the critical focus on how power is exercised in our own society, this will help the collective effort of decolonising anthropology. How can we reach objective understanding about other cultures, without analysing the power structures that define our own lives?

The essence of modern power structures emerges particularly clearly in what is imposed over indigenous peoples (IPs). Among those IPs whom intelligence agencies have used and then 'betrayed', a particularly poignant case is that of the Hmong people in Laos, recruited in large numbers by the CIA and US military during the Vietnam war, with a few thousand airlifted to the USA afterwards, but most abandoned to severe reprisals by a communist government who saw them as traitors (Hamilton-Merritt 1993/1998).

Every generation of anthropologists has attempted further levels of decolonising our own roles. As we turn to analysing the role of intelligence agencies in the overall power structures imposed over us, we shouldn't be afraid to analyse upwards. Perhaps we even have a duty to encourage similar self-awareness about their role among intelligence agents.

Formal and non-formal structures

Every country's intelligence agencies seem to go through deep divisions at times, which reflect personal, political, institutional, ideological or policy rivalries. Distinguishing formal or overt from non-formal structures is therefore a starting point for analysing IAs' social structures. My first book was an exercise in reverse anthropology, studying the power structure imposed over a tribal people in India through analysing the roles of administrators, missionaries and anthropologists, during and after colonial rule. Distinguishing the administrators' formal from their non-formal structure was a starting point. Coming to IAs, their power is covert by definition, so their most violent actions, such as assassinations and political interference abroad, rarely form part of their official narrative. For example, if the CIA has sometimes collaborated with the mafia, this will hardly form part of its overt or formal structure, even though CIA practice has often involved 'wet assignments' (as assassinations are termed) much more than MI6, whose methods appear more indirect (Jacobsen 2019). Either way, covert structures are an essential aspect of how IAs work.

One aspect of the non-formal structure is the pattern of 'revolving doors'. It is interesting how many senior intelligence officials have become heads of state, from Bush senior, head of the CIA 1976-7, and Putin in the KGB/FSB 1975-1991, to several key Israeli heads of state (see below), and many examples in Britain, where No. 10's close

relationship with the secret services has been extensively documented (Cormac and Aldrich 2016).

The three best known British IAs are MI5 (Military Intelligence, Service 5), MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS, focused on foreign affairs) and GCHQ (Govt Communications HQ), which grew out of the codebreaking outfit at Bletchley Park during the 2nd world war. MI5 and MI6 are well known through many histories, as well as spy novels and films. Le Carré's novels and James Bond films give conventionalised images of MI6 that are both cynical and glamorous, emphasising the danger and violence. MI6 essentially started in 1909, its SIS designation defined in 1920, but its existence not officially admitted until 1994 (Jones 2014), while the super-secret designation of SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) at GCHQ has been surrounded by far greater secrecy still (Aldrich 2010, MacAskill et al 2013).

During the 2nd world war, Special Operations Executive (SOE) was formed (1940) to carry out 'covert action' and 'set Europe ablaze'. It employed about 13,000 men and women, and merged with SIS at the end of the war. The SAS (Special Air Service) and SBS (Special Boat Service) were also formed for 'special ops' during the war and disbanded after, though the SAS was revived in the 1960s. SOE, SAS and SBS were under military command rather than the Foreign Office (Cormac 2018: 1-13). 'Spy' is a vague word, and often refers to special agents devoted to sabotage and insurrection, such as British agents in France in WW2, and 'special forces' since.

Obviously, MI6 and GCHQ are instruments of the British government's foreign policy. Mark Curtis' books are excellent for understanding highly manipulative covert roles they have played in Iran, the Malaya war, Aden/Yemen, attempts to destabilise Egypt and assassinate Nasser during the Suez crisis, and supporting the US-orchestrated overthrow of Sukarno in Indonesia in 1965 and the Vietnam war (Curtis 2003, 2004, 2010) - 'the secret pursuit of Britain's foreign policy' (Cormac 2018). Official histories give important detail, but omit or distort much, as in the official history of MI6 (Jeffery 2010), which conveniently stops before the agency's controversial role in ousting Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mosaddeq in 1952-4 by supporting Muslim extremists to bring in the Shah dynasty (Kinzer 2006, 2008).

Other British intelligence units have been equally secretive, such as 'spy cops' (Woodman 2018, Lewis and Evans 2020), who infiltrated environmental and anti-war movements by forming sexual relationships and steering movements as agents provocateurs towards extreme actions to discredit them; and the Information Research Department (IRD), a Foreign Office propaganda unit (1948-1977). Eric Blair (George Orwell) wrote a list of 'crypto-communists' for the IRD just after its formation (Open Culture 2015) - no small matter when one understands the momentous, hidden role this organisation played ousting Mossadeq in Iran and Sukarno in Indonesia (Lashmer and Oliver 1998, Bevins 2021). In the latter, the IRD's black propaganda and lists of communists supplied to Suharto's forces led to the slaughter of tens of thousands of Indonesians (Lashmer, Gilby and Oliver 2021). In Northern Ireland, the IRD's dangerous psy-ops role (1975-7) was exposed by one of its key agents, Colin Wallace, 'the man who knew too much'. Each of these operations, among many more in other countries, witnessed a wide range of extreme activities, including violent use of agents provocateurs to escalate unrest. Recent British government initiatives aimed at 'countering fake news' seem to replicate these campaigns, amplifying them through surveillance technology (Conversation 2018).

The FBI and CIA are better known, through very different imagery, for the role they have played in internal and external US affairs. The CIA, formed in 1947 to replace the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, that was formed and played a key role in the 2nd world war) is known to have aided and abetted at least 70 regime changes in different countries since the 2nd world war (O'Rourke 2018). The FBI and CIA figure prominently in histories of the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, journalist Dorothy Kilgallen and others associated with the Kennedy murders. Among other US

spy agencies, DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), formed under Eisenhower in 1958 for military intelligence, is particularly influential and secretive (Jacobsen 2015).

The separation between MI5-MI6 and GCHQ is mirrored in the USA in the separation in internal-external affairs and SIGINT between the FBI-CIA and NSA (National Security Agency, Bamford 2008). Like GCHQ, the NSA retained its secrecy until recently, and only became widely known to the public through a leak at the end of 2005 about its surveillance program (CNN 2005). Vastly expanded after 9/11, public knowledge was much amplified by Snowden's escape to Russia in 2013, after revealing the extent of electronic surveillance on Americans and foreigners alike; also by comparable agencies in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand - 'the Five Eyes'.

The NSA was founded under Truman and remained extremely secretive, though even larger than the CIA. As Aldrich's book on GCHQ emphasizes, Bletchley Park's decoding of the enigma code was glamorised after the war; but its transformation from 'Govt Code & Cypher School' to GCHQ at a base in Cheltenham in 1946 was long kept shrouded in secrecy, as were the decipherment techniques which gave Churchill his Ultra-secret (i.e. above top-secret) intel reports; until the importance of Cyprus as a sigint base was outed through the 'ABC trial' of two journalists and a corporal in sigint, who exposed GCHQ surveillance in the 1970s. Long before this, GCHQ had allowed the NSA/CIA to use its 'listening bases', from Cyprus to Diego Garcia.

On many of these topics, an overall history is Christopher Andrew's *The secret world: a history of intelligence* (2018), though its approach is rather 'flat'. Andrew wrote books on the British IAs (1984-7), several on the KGB (1990s-2000s), including some co-authored with Soviet defectors Gordievsky and Mitrokhin, on the CIA (1997), and also the authorised history of MI5 (2009). He is said to have been the main MI5 recruiter at Cambridge, which raises questions over his impartiality.

The relationship between US and UK intel agencies is interesting. The CIA is hardly shy about letting the world know its role in effecting regime changes etc, in relation to a far more secretive British role. On whistleblowers, the first chapter in Greenberg (2012) compares Dan Ellsberg bringing out the Pentagon Papers in 1969 with Bradley (Chelsea) Manning bringing out the torture/assassination of innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2006.

Philip Agee was a key early CIA whistleblower (1975, 1978, 1987). Kiriakou (2009.2012), Lindauer (2010) and Gary Webb (Devereux 2014) followed this tradition in revealing some less savoury CIA exploits. FBI whistleblowers on events surrounding 9/11 include Coleen Rowley and Sibel Edmonds (2012). Both agencies at times have worked very closely with the mafia and other gangsters, for example in attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro in Cuba, and FBI agents who colluded closely with gang leaders (Lehr and O'Neill 2012).

The CIA's close links with US arms companies emerges clearly in the history of 'Operation Cyclone', in which the CIA funded Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) to support Osama Bin Laden among others with a view to bringing down the USSR through a proxy war in Afghanistan, even though research by certain CIA analysts showed that half the funds were going to develop Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, even adapting planes being bought from the US to carry nuclear missiles. Far from heeding this research, these CIA analysts' concerns and careers were blocked to facilitate this arms sale (Levy and Clark 2007). In the interests of UK's arms sales, Tony Blair infamously curtailed a serious fraud office investigation into corruption at the heart of UK's economy, and intel agencies' infiltrated the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (Thomas 2007).

CIA infiltration of left movements, student unions and academia has come under the spotlight recently (Paget 2015). Cambridge Analytica is relevant in understanding recent trends in IAs operating in a way that bridges government and private enterprise, orchestrating elections of polarising leaders in many countries.

Disinformation that won the 2nd world war

Britons grow up on heroic tales of brave and brilliant British spies and spy agencies fighting the Nazis, from SIS decoding Ultra/Enigma to SAS liaison with the French Resistance, and master deceptions such as 'the man who never was'. Ben Macintyre outlines this well in his books on Operations Zigzag, Mincemeat and Double Cross (2007, 2010, 2012).

Operation Mincemeat involved dropping the corpse of a Welsh 'tramp' dressed as a special forces messenger into the sea just off the coast of Spain with vital letters for British commanders in Gibraltar and North Africa outlining fabricated plans for invading Sardinia and southern France, with Sicily to be attacked only as a decoy, when the real plan actually was to invade Sicily. This succeeded well: Hitler believed the deception and moved key forces out of Sicily.

Meanwhile, all Nazi spies in Britain had been either shot or turned into double agents, their identities maintained for running hundreds of nonexistent assets, from Welsh miners to workers in munitions factories, whose reports were dutifully sent to German spymasters, producing a mountain of false intel. Some members of the Abwehr were courageously anti-Hitler, and were executed horribly after the attempt on Hitler's life, so may have been willing dupes.

During the 2nd world war, the effectiveness of British intelligence agencies was extraordinary, both in deciphering enemy codes and in disseminating elaborate disinformation. The contrast between British and German spy operations was dramatic. The British, with crucial Polish help (War history online 2016) had deciphered the 'enigma' code and read most German coded messages on a daily basis throughout the war. They maintained an extensive network of spies in continental Europe, while all of Germany's spies in Britain had been captured (MacIntyre 2012). Messages from dozens of non-existent UK-based spies radioed to German intelligence were all fictitious constructs, carefully maintained through Bletchley Park's mass employment of several thousand workers deciphering foreign codes and constructing disinformation. All these workers had signed the Official Secrets Act. Demobbed at the end of the war they were threatened that 'careless talk costs lives', forbidden to tell even their families about their secret wartime work. Britain had won the war in large part thanks to the brilliance of its intelligence network; but the extent of this expertise in decipherment and disinformation was not to be known too widely. Only since historians of espionage have researched declassified archives from the 1970s has this history become known.

Sicily was overwhelmed fairly fast in July 1943, thanks to Operation Mincemeat. As the Allies fought northwards, they captured Italy and then Germany, area by area. What remains little known is that they did this partly through secretly enlisting the help of key mafiosi, fascists and Nazis (Talbot 2015). As one strand in this secret network, Lucky Luciano, 'father' of the mafia in New York, was freed from jail (where he had been since 1932) through Operation Underworld (Dezenhall 2013), giving OSS an introduction to Don Calo - Calogero Vizzini, Capo di tutti capi of the Sicilian mafia (Tagliabue 1994), who had also been recommended by Monsignor Giovanni Montini in the Vatican, who later became Pope Paul VI (Williams 2018). Don Calo appears to have given indispensable help to the allied invasion after US tanks made straight through German defences for his home. He was made honorary colonel in the US army, and Mayor of Villalba. Many mafiosi jailed under Mussolini were released to help occupy Sicily, and this collaboration with the Allies seems to have re-established mafia power as never before. Evidently they were considered a necessary tool by Americans and Britons determined to prevent communists coming to power, and many leftwingers were assassinated under Don Calo's regime in Sicily.

Transition into Cold War

In this way, the Cold War pattern emerged before the 2nd world war ended, and the infamous spy intrigues flourished in occupied Berlin before the wall went up. Fascinating spy thrillers focusing on the early cold war years extended Britain's celebration of wartime spies. Those by ex-spies David Cornwell (Le Carré) and Ian Fleming, in The spy who came in from the Cold and the James Bond series are among the most celebrated. One vital aspect they failed to highlight, for obvious reasons, was Operation Gladio, the 'stay behind armies'.

Operation Gladio was a secret, virulently anti-communist organisation, named after an ancient Roman sword. In Operation Sunrise (Halbrook 2006), Allen Dulles, as Swiss Director of OSS (Talbot 2015), and James Angleton, in charge of OSS in Italy, made clandestine deals with key fascist and Nazi commanders, including Prince Junio Valerio Borghese, a top fascist naval commander, Karl Wolff, an SS General who had been posted to collaborate with Mussolini after months in charge of concentration camp transports, and Reinhard Gehlen, Lt-General in charge of intelligence on Germany's Eastern front. Each of these was helped by OSS agents to avoid prosecution for war crimes, enlisting them in the fight against communism.

Gehlen, working closely with the CIA, brought about 350 spies who had worked in Nazi intelligence into a spy network overseen by the OSS/CIA named the Gehlen organization, and oversaw its transformation into the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND, West German foreign intel service) in 1956 (Gehlen 1972). Similarly, Paul Dickopf, who headed Germany's Federal Police for six years before heading Interpol (1968-71) was only found to have been a senior Nazi in the SS who switched to working for OSS before the end of the war, after his death in 1973. This link between the CIA and ex-Nazis involved employing war criminals by hiding their past identities (Timeline 2021), orchestrating anti-communist operations of extreme violence for decades to come, including Operation Condor in Latin America (Dinges 2004), and terrorist attacks attributed to the Red Brigades in Italy such as the kidnap and murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978 (Forte 2019).

Gladio was first discovered by Italian magistrate Felice Casson in 1972, investigating the Peleano bombing, initially blamed on leftists. Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti admitted Gladio's existence in Parliament in October 1990; and Judge Guido Salvini, heading an inquiry, found evidence of CIA and NATO involvement including training by the British SAS, fomenting a 'strategy of tension'. P26, a similar organisation in Switzerland, was also revealed in 1990; with similar evidence from other countries, including Turkey, as we shall see.

The close relationship between the CIA and mafia has persisted, and paying for Gladio involved raising money for black ops through the drugs trade, with mafia help transporting heroin to New York (Williams 2018), in a pattern replicated in SE Asia during the Vietnam War (McCoy 1972/2003, Chouvy 2011), whose notorious Phoenix Program of assassinations was funded through the CIA effectively taking over the drugs trade (Clair and Cockburn 2017). Under cover of Reagan's 'War on Drugs', the CIA similarly funded the contra guerrillas in Nicaragua by taking control of the drugs trade they were supposedly suppressing (Ruppert 2004, Devereux 2014).

The US military also took an estimated 1,600 Nazi arms scientists to the USA, employing them with minimal questions about their past, to start the arms race against the USSR (which also took some). This was Operation Paperclip.

While Britain's brilliant spy networks had fooled the Nazis and won the war, they were brilliantly penetrated by spies working for Stalin's USSR, during and after the war, especially the 'Cambridge Five'. The first two discovered managed to defect and escape to Moscow – Donald Maclean (Philipps 2019) and Guy Burgess. The 'third man', Kim Philby (1968) managed to hang on and defect much later. Maclean, like Philby, was a top member of MI6, and had long stayed

'above suspicion', bringing out vital information for Stalin. The other two weren't discovered till later, and after debriefing they were allowed to remain free, to save MI6 and the ruling elite they were part of from crippling embarrassment. John Cairncross' confession in the USA in 1964 led to uncovering Sir Anthony Blunt. Cairncross was allowed to live in Britain unmolested until his death in 1995 aged 82. Blunt had been a personal friend of the Queen, and was also allowed to remain free, though Mrs Thatcher outed him and got him stripped of his 'Sir'.

George Blake joined this list of embarrassing double agents, reporting crucial intel to the KGB during 1956-1961. From a more working class background than the Cambridge Five, he was sentenced to years in prison in Wormwood Scrubs as an example – which failed spectacularly when he escaped and got to the USSR in 1966. He had headed SIS/MI6 in the British embassy in Seoul. Captured during the Korean war, he said he defected to the Soviet side out of horror at the indiscriminate allied bombing of Korea (Kuper 2021).

After the 1950s, the British turned the tables on the Soviets, and there was constant secret spy-warfare, involving hundreds of individuals – some stories and deaths known, others not. For example, Oleg Gordievsky was 'turned' by Danish intelligence in partnership with MI6 in 1974, and worked as its double agent when promoted as Resident in the Soviet embassy in London (1982-5), where he supervised all Soviet spies in the UK. Recalled to Moscow and in danger – as Stalin's spy agencies in the USSR tortured and executed such people – he was exfiltrated by the British, and survived to write books on the KGB (Gordievsky 2015). The cold war history of double/triple agents is fascinating though brutal, and well worth anthropological analysis.

Vignettes into the complex cold war history of spy defections and double agents emerge in books about the directors of US Central Intelligence (1973-6) William Colby (Woods 2013), and of MI6 (1973-8) Maurice Oldfield (by his nephew Martin Pearce, 2016). Colby's CIA service spanned OSS in Italy to Operation Phoenix in Vietnam. Aldrich and Cormac (2016) give a detailed account of UK's intel agencies' relations with every British PM, from Herbert Asquith to David Cameron (1908-2016).

Of course Le Carré's novels, while revealing the heartless cynicism of MI6, show the Soviets in a much worse light. He and Fleming (like Graham Greene, Somerset Maugham and others) were spies, so their works both reflect real power relations in the agencies, but also contain distortions, to avoid giving anything vital away that could endanger 'national security'. This reveals an interesting connection between novel/thriller-writing and spies, and the two main spy-creators of 'the man who never was' also wrote spy thrillers (MacIntyre 2010).

Cold war 'smoke and mirrors' - 'cloak and dagger stuff' - reached a climax with publication of Spycatcher by Peter Wright (1987), which the UK govt tried to ban, but which was published in the USA and Australia. Although its main thesis was discredited (that Roger Hollis, head of MI5 was a Soviet mole), it reveals much about how MI5 worked, while again carefully avoiding 'giving too much away'.

From 1948, Sidney Gottlieb working with Allen Dulles at the CIA started projects Bluebird and Artichoke, which became MKUltra in 1953 - a vast programme of psychological experiments on human guinea pigs with 149 sub-projects (Melton and Wallace 2010: 13), which continued until the Church Committee judged it illegal in 1975 and it was officially closed down. Gottlieb drew on sadistic Nazi and Japanese research on prisoners, and MKUltra had far-reaching effects on thousands of individuals as well as future patterns of mind control and propaganda. Media penetration was considered the CIA's 'crown jewels', and purposefully underplayed in the Church Committee report. Bernstein (1977) estimated that the CIA counted at least 400 journalists as 'assets', and worked closely with at least 25 key news outlets. Frank Wisner, as CIA Deputy Director in charge of 'black ops', spoke of media influence as his 'mighty wurlitzer'. Since then, media control by IAs has become ever more extensive and normalised (Wilford 2008).

The CIA has been relatively open about its role in assisting often extremely violent removals of elected leftwing governments in at least 70 countries since WW2. The best known CIA regime changes, some involving or instigated by MI6, include:

- Malaysia 1948-54, by Britain, delaying Independence in a way that prevented takeover by communists.
- Iran 1952-4, masterminded by MI6 in the interests of the Anglo-British oil company (precursor of BP), which brought in vital revenue (Kinzer 2008). The CIA were brought in under British pressure and played a crucial role in effecting the coup.
- Guatemala (1954) is vital for showing the key use made of Edward Bernays, 'Father of PR', Freud's nephew, who popularised his uncle's work, but was arguably a lot more influential, using Freudian psychology in PR, not just for advertising, but in politics, and as a standard set of techniques by intel agencies from this time. This US-led regime change ousted the socialist elected leader Arbenz Guzman with extreme violence, falsely depicting him as a hardcore communist, in the interests of US United Fruit Company, which Bernays worked for. Bernays and the CIA portrayed the installed leader Carlos Castillo Armas as 'good' even as he institutionalised systematic oppression that would persist for decades (Schelisnger and Kinzer 2005).
- MI6 attempted to assassinate Nasser in Egypt in the 1950s, as the CIA tried to assassinate Castro in the 1960s – regime changes that failed.
- Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana and other former British colonies had their Independence delayed through often very violent campaigns full of IA tricks, including destabilisation over bauxite politics and violent suppression of the Mau Mau movement. The indigenous population of Diego Garcia was removed in 1968, their existence denied.
- In Congo, Britain colluded in the killing of Lumumba (1960-61), inaugurating Mobutu's reign of terror – a pattern of extreme violence in African countries (also especially Ghana) exposed in Susan Williams' *White Malice* (2021).
- In 1967, Britain supported the newly independent Nigerian govt in its violent Biafran war.
- Indonesia 1965 (Bevins 2020), Chile 1973, Argentina 1976... This list represents the briefest selection of the conspiracies hatched by US and UK intelligence agencies that have toppled governments considered uncongenial to 'our interests' (Curtis 2003-2010, Kinzer 2006). It is fascinating how techniques of mass deception and propaganda, used so effectively during the 2nd world war, were steered post-war towards undermining socialism in Europe and worldwide during the Cold War.

Funding Bin Laden and other jihadists in Afghanistan played a key role in undermining the USSR and the transition into the 'War on Terror'. There is much evidence that essentially the same tactics are still being used, with far more elaborate propaganda campaigns. As we shall see, this seems especially evident in the case of Turkish orchestrated attacks on the Kurds and Syria.

If the CIA is relatively open about its role in effecting regime changes, Israel has been even more open about numerous targeted assassinations abroad, seen as necessary to protect the country's security. Israeli intelligence agents or 'operators' are widely regarded as national heroes. The Israeli case is significant for its influence over US, UK and other countries' foreign policy, not least through arms sales and counterinsurgency training for many national security forces. These make Mossad and the other Israeli 'special op' agencies a key model (Bar-Zohar and Mishal 2016, Bergman 2008 and 2018).

It is interesting how many Israeli Prime Ministers were previously senior intelligence or special force commanders:

- Ben Gurion (1st PM 1948-54 and 1955-63, Israel's 'founding father') led Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, uniting the secret Jewish militias into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and presiding over the formation of Mossad and Shin Bet ('Unseen Shield' – equivalents of MI6 and MI5 respectively).
- Yitzhak Rabin (PM 1974-77 and 1992-5) served in the Palmach (elite fighting force of the Haganah) before 1948, the IDF 1948-67, and was the general credited with winning the Six Day War.
- Menachem Begin (6th PM 1977-83) headed Irgun, that broke with Haganah and led the 'terrorist' revolt against the British from 1944. He formed the Likud party, became deeply depressed after the Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon, when he was misled by Ariel Sharon (defence minister) that Israeli forces would enter 'only 40km into Lebanon'.
- Yitzhak Shamir (PM 1983-4 and 1986-92) was a key member of Lehi, 'the Stern gang', that broke with Irgun to continue anti-British terrorist activities during the war, and then of Mossad (1955-65).
- Shimon Peres (PM 1984-6, 1995-6, 2007-14) held several diplomatic and military positions during and directly after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. His first high-level government position was as Deputy Director-General of Defense in 1952 which he attained at the age of 28, and Director-General 1953-59.
- Benjamin Netanyahu (PM 1996-99, 2009-2022) became a team leader in the elite Sayeret Matkal special forces unit, and took part in many missions, including Operations Inferno and Gift (1968), and was wounded in Operation Isotope (1972). His elder brother Yoni (Yonatan) commanded Sayeret Matkal during Operation Entebbe, rescuing 102 out of 106 hostages held at Entebbe Airport in Uganda in 1976, at the cost of his own life.
- Ehud Barak (10th PM 1999-2001) was a Rav Aluf (Lieutenant general) in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), one of the most highly decorated soldiers in Israel's history, joining in 1959 and serving 35 years, including as a commando in Sayeret Matkal, leading several highly acclaimed operations, including Sabena Flight 571 at Lod Airport in 1972; the covert 1973 Israeli raid on Lebanon in Beirut, in which he was disguised as a woman to kill members of the Palestine Liberation Organization; a key architect of Operation Entebbe; also of Operation Bayonet, which led to the dismantling of Palestinian terrorist cell Black September. Barak also masterminded the Tunis Raid on 16 April 1988, in which PLO leader Abu Jihad was killed.
- Ariel Sharon (11th PM 2001-6) was a key military leader from 1948. He founded and commanded Unit 101 as a special ops unit within the IDF under Ben Gurion in 1953. As Minister of Defense, he directed the 1982 Lebanon War. An official enquiry found that he bore 'personal responsibility' for the Sabra and Shatila massacres as 'the butcher of Beirut'.

A key moment was when 3 whistleblowers within Shin Bet spoke out and insisted on justice after Avraham Shalom had lied to conceal the extrajudicial killing of two Palestinians who had hijacked a bus. As a Shin Bet member said during the Inquiry Commission: 'The supreme rule after a failed op is the removal of the fingerprints of the State of Israel. Not telling the truth is an integral part of removing the problem.' Sharon was understood to have lied to conceal systematic torture and extrajudicial killings of 80 Palestinian suspects, using a list of victims to blackmail ex-Prime-Ministers (Bergman 2018: 287).

The emphasis on deception and disinformation by Israeli secret services is also brought out in Palestinian histories (Kimmerling and Migdal 1994/2003, Pappé 2006, Khalidi 2010) and an intrinsic part of the proliferation of such patterns worldwide. Many aspects of Israel's history remain hidden or little known, including Mossad terror campaigns targeting Jews in Iraq and Egypt during 1950-54, aimed at accelerating Jewish emigration to Israel, and propaganda that concealed the violence of the Nakba (Giladi 2003).

Narrative control in the War on Terror

Control of the media narrative by the FBI and CIA was already evident under J. Edgar Hoover, first Director of the FBI (1935-1972). When J.F. Kennedy was assassinated, and the Warren Commission advocated the 'lone gunman' theory, those around Hoover and President Johnson put great energy into dismissing 'conspiracy theories' that – far more than the idea they promoted of a Soviet or Cuban conspiracy – have consistently focused on conspiracy between FBI and/or CIA officials working with mafiosi (Summers 1980/2013, Smith 2013, Shaw 2020).

Collating all the evidence, conspiracy actually seems the essence of how intelligence agencies have operated at crucial points, especially obvious in regime changes. 'Conspiracy theories', as a term used to undermine critique, was first propagated through these agencies' influence over hundreds of prominent journalists and media consortia, essentially to discredit those alleging FBI/CIA involvement in the conspiracies that gave rise to these killings. Details are disputed (e.g. in Wikipedia), but what is not in question is that the 1967 CIA cable that first used the term recommends counteracting conspiracy theories through 'propaganda assets' in the media.

The start of black ops on a massive scale in the Vietnam war is covered (from very different perspectives!) in the books on Colby (Woods 2013) and the drugs trade (McCoy 1972/2003, Chouvy 2011); and in how consent was 'manufactured' through media manipulation (Herman and Chomsky 1998/2002). The extension of black ops or covert operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries, including how these were concealed from Congress through funding by drugs, is analysed in books by journalists documenting the war on terror under the Bush administrations (Risen 2006, Scahill 2007, Hastings 2008, Mazetti 2013), continuing under Obama. On Guantanamo, one of the most revealing books is Hickman's *Murder at Camp Delta* (2015), which documents systematic torture at a 'black site' in a secluded area in Guantanamo, and the death of three prisoners there.

All these books reveal patterns far beyond what is usually understood as 'spying', including use of torture (McCoy 2006), covert operations, disinformation and media control. Like the expertise in code-breaking and sowing disinformation, British and American expertise in covert operations 'behind enemy lines' during the 2nd world war, through the SAS, SIS, OSS and other services, has multiplied in the decades since. John Kiriakou's book *The Reluctant Spy: My secret life in the CIA's War on Terror* (2009/2012) is the work of a CIA whistleblower who masterminded the abduction in Pakistan of Osama bin Laden's close ally Abu Zubaydah in 2002. Kiriakou was led to believe Zubaydah had been waterboarded only once after this capture. After discovering this had happened over 80 times, he came out and testified that this amounted to torture in 2007, and pleaded guilty to passing classified information to a journalist about the case, serving 30 months in jail during 2013-15.

Craig Murray was Britain's ambassador to Uzbekistan at the time of Blair's declaration of war on Iraq in 2003. He was outspoken about appalling human rights abuses in Uzbekistan, including false flag attacks, and outraged at US and UK silence about this systematic abuse, obviously because Uzbekistan was a key US/UK ally in the war on Afghanistan; and about complicity in secret renditions. His book about this (Murray 2007), also describes the violent disinformation the Foreign Office spread to try and discredit him, under evident instruction from PM Tony Blair and Foreign Secretary Jack Straw (2001-6).

The Guardian newspaper in Britain was considered relatively independent, which is why it was selected by Julian Assange and Edward Snowden as an outlet for the classified material they were revealing. The Guardian reportedly ignored 'DA notices', sent by the Defence & Security Media Advisory (DSMA) Committee. These are supposedly 'voluntary' directives sent to media outlets 'to prevent inadvertent public disclosure of information that would compromise UK military & defence operations'. PM David Cameron issued a 'veiled

threat', saying he didn't want to issue more DA notices; but on 20 July 2013, GCHQ sent a team who forced the Guardian to destroy hard drives containing the Wikileaks material. Alan Rushbridger, the Guardian's editor-in-chief (1995-2015), called this destruction a 'symbolic act', and brought out several more articles following a supposedly independent line. But after Catherine Viner succeeded him in 2015, the Guardian was given the first ever interviews by an acting head, first of MI5 (Andrew Parker, November 2016) and then of MI6 (Alex Younger, March 2017). The latter came out just as the High Court was reviewing its earlier decision not to prosecute MI6's 2004 acting head, Sir Mark Allen, over complicity in the rendition of Abdel Hakim Belhaj, an opponent of Gaddafi, to Libya in 2004, where he was tortured. Keir Starmer was the Director of Crown Prosecutions who presided over this decision not to prosecute MI6 officials over secret renditions (Kennard and Curtis 2019). So from revealing 'wrongdoing' by UK's security agencies, the Guardian shifted its position drastically, receiving their special favour.

What motivated Snowden (2019) was the realisation that the NSA was engaging in mass surveillance in the USA, and that Britain's spy agencies were doing the same thing. By 2018 it was apparent that British courts could fine them for this, but not stop them doing it (Corfield 2018).

Alongside this surveillance, the disinformation: *Propaganda Blitz: How the Corporate Media Distort Reality* (Edwards and Cromwell 2018) shows a pattern of systematic disinformation, with reference to the BBC and Guardian in particular (since these are often perceived as 'impartial' and 'leftwing' respectively), following the lines dictated by the IAs through DA notices and unstated consensus on key subjects, systematically distorting them. Topics covered in this book include Syria, Libya, Yemen, Israel and Palestine, Julian Assange, Scottish Independence, and Jeremy Corbyn.

Media manipulation is nowhere more apparent than in Kurdish regions. CIA and MI6 have a long history in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (the four main countries comprising 'Kurdistan'), since these countries were created by dividing the Ottoman empire after the 1st world war, and more intensively since the 2nd. The role of CIA has been very complex in relation to the Kurds, including supporting north Iraq's breakaway from the Iraqi government in 2002-3 in advance of destroying Saddam Hussein's Iraq (Andrew et al 2021); and supporting the Rojava fighters intermittently, through the Syrian Democratic Forces (New York Times 2017). It seems highly significant that Wikipedia carries an informative article about a 'Timber Sycamore' CIA program of arming the Syrian rebels via Jordan, while keeping to the line on White Helmets that all criticism is 'conspiracy theory'. Serious researchers are well aware of extreme corruption and misinformation in Wikipedia articles on sensitive topics, including narrative control by the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

Turkey, Syria, Kurdistan

The term 'Kurdistan' was used freely, including by Atatürk, until he banned it during the extensive Kurdish rebellion of 1925. This was partly instigated by the dividing up of Kurdistan between Turkey and Iran-Iraq-Syria by the Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne. Part of the world's 'forgotten history' is how Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji set up the Kingdom of Kurdistan (1921-25) in Sulaymaniyah (north Iraq), after being appointed Governor of the Protectorate of South Kurdistan under the British Mandate of Mesopotamia; and how Barzanji's rebellion was brought to an end partly through bombing by the RAF.

In Turkey, a network of clandestine organisations was set up soon after the end of the 2nd world war through close collaboration with the CIA as well as NATO, which seem to have kept in close contact with Turkish security, paramilitary and intelligence forces ever since. The original purpose of this collaboration was to prevent communists coming to power in Turkey, and the CIA and NATO played crucial, covert roles in the 1971 and 1980 coups in Turkey (Kinzer 2002).

In Iran, Britain's MI6 is understood as the main instigator of the subversion leading to the overthrow of Mossadeq's socialist government in Iran in 1952-4, largely through agent provocateurs and aid to hardline Islamic opponents of Mossadeq (Kinzer 2008). Similar aid to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during this period was aimed at removing Nasser from power, with MI6 plotting his assassination. The Shah dynasty, reinstated in Iran in 1953, lasted until the Islamic revolution of 1979, and here too, despite appearances, MI6 played a hidden role in aiding Khomeini's passage to power, passing on names of Tudeh party members (communists) to the new Iranian authorities, who killed over 1000 (Klarenburg 2019).

A much-contested aspect of Turkey's covert paramilitary organisations goes back to Gladio (Edmonds 2013), whose existence in Turkey was admitted by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in 1973 (the same time as in Italy), in the form of 'Counter-Guerrilla', after people who had been tortured in Ziverbey villa (where leftwingers were interrogated after the 1971 coup) revealed that their interrogators had said they were members of this organisation. Ecevit alleged Counter-Guerrilla involvement in the Taksim square massacre of 1977; and covert state-orchestrated violence is evident in countless bombings and atrocities in the country since then, especially after the war with the PKK started in 1984, and often involving false flag attacks by the Grey Wolves terrorist outfit – and not just in Turkey.

As Sibel Edmonds points out (2013), the terrorist career of Abdullah Çatlı (1956-1996) raises many questions. A leader of the Grey Wolves in the 1970s, and a contract killer for MIT (especially of leftists and Kurds associated with the PKK), he was also reportedly linked with the attempted assassination of the Pope in 1981; yet was granted UK citizenship (for no easily intelligible reason), and a US green card, making Chicago his base, despite being on Interpol's top 10 most wanted list. Arrested in France in 1984 and jailed in Switzerland for heroin dealing, he escaped from the Swiss jail in a helicopter apparently supplied by NATO and co-ordinated by the Grey Wolves in 1990, and was involved in the failed (possibly on purpose) assassination attempt of Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev in 1995 – which caused Azerbaijan to switch from the Russian to the US/NATO sphere of influence - before being killed in the Susurluk car crash in November 1996. This road accident caused an uproar in Turkey and beyond, as the other people in the car included a senior policeman, a leader of the Kurdish village guards (an anti-PKK state organisation) and MP Sedat Bucak (the only occupant to survive). Çatlı murdered literally hundreds of people, and the Susurluk scandal proved state collaboration with terrorism, murder and drugs dealing. His green light for worldwide travel (reportedly Çatlı had diplomatic-style passports from several countries in several names) indicates the NATO connection with Gladio, since many Grey Wolves reportedly received training from NATO forces in Belgium, UK and other countries.

By contrast, Abdullah Öcalan, a key founder of the PKK, was captured in 1999 by the combined forces of many countries' intelligence agencies. In 1998, from his base in north Syria, he was asked to leave by the Syrian Government, which was under pressure from Turkey, threatening to stop the flow of water in the Tigris river after building the Ataturk dam. He travelled to Russia, Italy and Greece, none of whose governments allowed him to stay. Offered asylum in South Africa by Nelson Mandela, he was flown instead from Greece to Kenya, and essentially captured from the Greek embassy in Nairobi through the combined forces of the CIA and MIT, and flown to Turkey with Israeli help, where he was condemned to death. This sentence was soon commuted to life imprisonment on Imrali island in the Sea of Marmora. Peace in Kurdistan and the Free Öcalan campaign have sent peace delegations to Turkey over several years. Öcalan's books, written in jail and translated into Spanish, English and other languages, have had a major impact in terms of rethinking democracy to place central focus on women's rights, and questioning capitalism and the nation state through 'democratic confederalism'.

Collaboration between Turkey's MIT and ISIS has been well-documented, along with NATO allies' toleration of this. The MIT

has played a many-sided role in anti-Kurdish operations, from assassinating three Kurdish women activists in Paris in January 2013 to present plans for more incursions into Rojava. The same is true, for example, of Turkish attacks on the PKK. The listing of PKK as a 'terrorist' organisation (by most but not all governments) acts as an insuperable obstacle to peace, and masks continuous state terror by Turkish security forces, in Syria/Rojava and Iraq, as well as in Turkey, where independent journalists have been jailed on fabricated charges.

For example, Selahattin Demirtaş, like many others in Turkey, blamed the MIT for the series of bombings during mid-2015 in Diyarbakır (5 June), and Süruç (20 July), where over 30 young volunteers were killed who were about to cross the border into Rojava, bringing aid to Kobane, then under attack by ISIS, as well as in Ankara (10 October) where over 120 peace demonstrators were killed (Hurriyet 2015, Hafıza Merkezi 2015).

Among the world's worst unresolved military conflicts, we witness almost unbearable warfare over large areas of Kurdistan. In Turkey, a situation of huge repression (UK Home Office Report of Fact-Finding Mission 2019), with hundreds of HDP (People's Democratic Party) members in jail, despite electoral gains; somewhat similar repression in Iran, with frequent jailings and armed conflict (Glynn 2020); and in Kurdish areas in northern Syria and Iraq, huge violence from Turkish invasion and occupation. 'Ethnic cleansing' here has involved settling jihadist fighters affiliated with ISIS and similar extremist organisations in areas where Kurdish communities have been violently displaced. How have Turkish forces been allowed to get away with this? Why has there been so little protest by foreign governments? Why so little media coverage, considering the gravity of attack on civilians and civil society (Sweeney 2021)? And what has been the role of intelligence agencies (Andrew et al 2021), both in specific operations, and in this marginalisation from world coverage?

Disinformation by IAs seems nowhere clearer than on the vexed issue of the Syrian White Helmets, which takes us to the heart of the propaganda war on Syria. In December 2017 the Guardian published a defence against many critics of the organisation (Solon 2017). This was immediately attacked for numerous factual errors by Eva Bartlett, Tim Hayward and several others, but the Guardian would publish no replies at all. The White Helmets' funders include the British, US and other governments, and the pattern of entities involved in funding makes clear its links with vested interests that are trying to bring down the Syrian government (Politically Incorrect News 2019). The foreign-funded Free Syrian Army dissolved fast into the various jihadist groups (Hersch 2014) fighting not only the Syrian government but also the Rojava Kurdish-led administration. Many reports by 2015 were showing that Turkish intelligence (primarily MIT) was funding Islamic State and other jihadist groups, just as it is blamed for many 'false flag attacks' within Turkey (Reuters 2015, Başaran 2017).

Tim Anderson (2016) makes a convincing case that the 'Arab Spring' rebellion in Syria was orchestrated from 2011 by foreign agents provocateurs, involving the CIA and other countries' intelligence agencies. In particular, all the intelligence that Assad's government has used chemical weapons appears to have been concocted through the White Helmets and associated outlets (Connelly 2018). In other words, the Syrian war is exceptionally dirty in this far-reaching use of propaganda by intelligence agencies, in collusion with White Helmets; while well-documented use of chemical weapons by the Turkish military against Kurds in northern Iraq have been ignored by mainstream media (Sweeney 2021). Despite repeated calls to investigate this systematic use of chemical weapons by Turkish forces (Roustopoulos 2021), there is no mainstream media coverage, in extraordinary contrast to alleged chemical weapons attacks by Syrian forces.

Many news reports have outlined the role of MI5 and MI6 in allowing jihadists to go and fight in Libya and Syria, including the father of the Manchester bomber, while getting Britons who fought with Kurds against jihadists jailed. Investigation shows that the BBC has invested

heavily in promoting the White Helmets, in collusion with British secret services, in line with the pattern of propaganda apparent in the Integrity Initiative (Klarenburg 2021, Elmazi and Blumenthal 2018). A key role of Israeli intelligence is implied in news reports that wounded Al Nusrah or ISIS fighters have been treated in Israel, which has supplied arms to the jihadists to undermine the Syrian government.

The PKK, though still counted as 'terrorists', were credited with saving the Yazidis in the Sinjar mountains when ISIS attacked them so brutally in 2014 and the Iraqi Peshmarga failed to protect them. Turkey's attack on thousands of Kurdish civilians and the PKK in the Qandil and Zagros mountains of north Iraq, which started in 2007 and escalated hugely from 2019, has met with near-silence in mainstream media, in contrast with periods of constant, one-sided reports on Syrian government forces attacking civilians in East Ghouta and Idlib.

Over 40,000 ISIS fighters with their wives and children remain stranded in prison camps in Rojava, that foreign governments take no responsibility for (Human Rights Watch 2021). From this perspective, don't the intelligence agencies of the UK, US, among other countries, bear a large part of responsibility for Syria's refugee crisis? How intelligent, overall, are the policies these agencies have been pursuing?

Unravelling conspiracies

When Turkish forces have supported jihadists so openly, with so little criticism from their NATO allies, it is hard not to see a conspiracy of intelligence agencies in allowing this rise of ISIS, following the history of black operations back to Gladio and the overthrow of Mossadeq (Edmonds 2013).

Colin Wallace left the IRD when he was ordered to become involved in MI5's secret campaign to smear Harold Wilson as a KGB agent while he was Labour Prime Minister. The role of intelligence agencies in discrediting Jeremy Corbyn, making him 'unelectable' as a perceived 'national security liability' seems equally apparent (Curtis 2020). Corbyn made frequent astute comments about the invasion of Kurdish areas when other world leaders and media were silent (Sykes 2019), just as he highlighted the Palestinian situation.

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff 2019) illustrates the way intelligence agency thinking has permeated many aspects of daily life. The ruthless manufacture of disinformation by US corporations is laid bare in John Perkins. Confessions of an Economic Hit Man, promoting false economic forecasts that tempted 'developing countries' into committing themselves to destructive projects through unrepayable debt (Perkins 2004/2018). Similarly, we have seen how closely the CIA co-ordinated to serve the interests of US arms companies, and Chris Hedges asks how far arms companies have driven the expansion of NATO and fuel the war in Ukraine (Hedges 2022). Certainly, the CIA used Ukrainian war criminals, protecting them from prosecution and giving them false identities to promote anti-Russian insurgency from the 1940s to 2022.

Whistleblowers started to be targeted more assiduously under Obama and since. Soon after his appointment as CIA Director (2017-18), Mike Pompeo made a tirade against 'the Philip Agees of this world' and targeted Julian Assange. CIA operations against Assange have included plans to assassinate him (Blumenthal 2020, McEvoy 2021). This leads to vital questions: should journalists toe the lines dictated by intelligence agencies? Was Wikileaks performing a vital service in bringing out truth in an age of disinformation? Or was Assange a traitor as Pompeo and many think in the USA?

In conclusion, an anthropology of intelligence agencies needs to elucidate many recurring patterns, starting perhaps with the consistent move from collecting 'intel' to giving out disinformation – clear since Bernays' involvement in the 1954 Guatemala regime change, and his aim of 'engineering consent' or propaganda.

Another pattern is the use of indigenous peoples in proxy wars, from Hmong in the Vietnam war, to 'off-on' CIA support for Kurds in Iraq,

Syria and Iran. From the perspective of Indigenous Peoples, despite token acknowledgement that they are generally among those living most sustainably, it is clear that there has been no concerted effort to end countless conflicts over extraction of resources on indigenous lands. Nor has there been any attempt to confront the fuelling of armed conflicts by the arms trade, or the systematic corruption in this trade (Feinstein 2011). The arms and mining industries are among the world's most polluting, yet neither received proper coverage in Cop26, presided over by the UK government in Glasgow in November 2021 (Lakhani 2021).

A fundamental question involves the term 'intelligence'. 'Intel' as facts or 'data' is often biased, 'dumbed-down', and geared towards control. If one role of IAs is to 'gather intel', another involves putting out certain interpretations or narratives through the media. This puts a spotlight on the word 'intelligence': how intelligent are the policies promoted by these agencies? Is their main role collecting intel, or is it often to promote dubious, violent policies, especially in terms of foreign policy, that may be in their own country's interest (or the interest of a national elite), but are often harmful for most people in countries interfered with, in terms of promoting polarisation and conflict? In this sense, could it be that intelligence agencies disseminate ways of thinking that are – at least in the long term planning for our collective future – basically extremely unintelligent?

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