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Official Intelligence Histories. Is there a Problem?

Ben de Jong

Over the past twenty years or so, intelligence and security services in several Western countries and in Russia as well have allowed official histories to be published.¹ Authors, in some cases in-house historians, were given access to archives of the service and allowed their use for the publication, albeit in all cases with limitations as we shall see. This article discusses official histories which have been published in several Western countries and in Russia since the 1990s.² In a slightly wider context, the article also briefly discusses other ways in which intelligence and security services sometimes practice openness towards the academic community and the public, mainly by the declassification of material from their archives. The term ‘official history’ in this article refers to a history of a service which is written with full access to the archives by an author who is a member of the service or by an independent outside historian who is not. Contrary to usual academic practice, in the case of official histories access to the archives of the service is limited to one author or group of authors, in most cases chosen by the

¹ The author is grateful to Dr. Eleni Braat, Leiden University, Dan Mulvena, Florida (USA), and Gloria Reyes, University of Cologne, Germany for their critical remarks on an earlier version of this article. Furthermore, for more background information on this topic, *Leidschrift* recommends that one should take a look at the book review on page 149 of this issue.

² The official history of the Australian Security intelligence Service (ASIO) was recently published: D. Horner, *The Spy Catchers: The Official history of ASIO 1949-1963. Volume I* (Sydney 2014). This book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. In 1998 a two-volume official history of the Norwegian security service Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste (PST) was published in Norway and a similar volume was published in Denmark on the history of the security service Politiets Efterretningstjeneste (PET). In Germany, official histories of both the foreign intelligence service Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) and the security service Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) are in preparation. Separate monographs have already been published on the history of the BND on the basis of full archive access. The German, Norwegian and Danish official histories will not be discussed here. See the review by Cees Wiebes of Horner where these other official histories are mentioned, http://www.nisa-intelligence.nl/PDF-bestanden/ReviewHorner_CWiebes_2015.pdf, accessed 10 April 2015. For the BND history project see <http://www.uhk-bnd.de/>, accessed 15 April 2015.

service, and not given to other historians. This highly problematic aspect of official histories will be discussed here as well.³

Limitations of official histories

In the preface to the recently published official history of the Australian Security Intelligence Service (ASIO), entitled *The Spy Catchers*, the author David Horner explains the limitations that apply to his book with respect to the use of archives. These limitations apply in some form to practically all other official histories as well. Intelligence and security services have a strong mission to protect the real identity of their agents and their so-called *modus operandi*. They will generally never give full access to their archives to outsiders for that reason. Only those ASIO agents are therefore mentioned in *The Spy Catchers* whose identities were already in the public domain, in most cases through a decision of their own.⁴ Officers of the service, to the extent that they are not already known to the public through earlier publications, are only mentioned in the book with their consent. David Horner, a historian at the Australian National University, had unlimited access to the non-redacted files of the Organisation, as ASIO is often called. Thus, this is a history of ASIO written by an independent outside historian, i.e. one who was not a member of the service, and it is based to a large extent, but not only, on ASIO's own records. Other academics who might be interested in the subject, however, do not have

³ Within intelligence and security services, official histories of the service or of separate branches are often written for internal use. Even within a service, these histories are often only accessible to a limited number of people and they are only declassified sporadically, if at all. An internal history of the British Security Service MI5, for instance, which covered the years 1909-1945, was declassified at the end of the twentieth century. 'Transcript of the Lecture by the Director General of the Security Service, Sir Stephen Lander, to the Public Records Office Conference "The Missing Dimension", 21 June 2001'. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/home/about-us/who-we-are/staff-and-management/director-general/speeches-by-the-director-general/director-generals-speech-to-the-pro-2001.html>, accessed 7 June 2015. See also: N. West and O. Tsarev ed., *Triplex: Secrets from the Cambridge Spies* (New Haven, CT and London 2009) 26.

⁴ Michael Bialoguski, for instance, the ASIO agent who played a crucial role in the Petrov defection, published his own memoirs very soon after it all happened. M. Bialoguski, *The Petrov Story* (Melbourne 1955).

access to the records used by the author. Indeed, the many notes in *The Spy Catchers* which refer to the archive of the service simply say ‘ASIO files’ without a file number, because the ASIO filing system still remains classified. Strictly speaking, this is, of course, a highly undesirable situation from an academic point of view but one has simply to put up with this, or so it seems, if official histories are to be written. With some modifications which will be discussed, the other official histories that are mentioned in this article have been written in a similar way, i.e. the files of the particular service were made accessible to one historian or group of historians but remain closed to all others.

Official histories of the Dutch security service

Possibly the first official history which was written in a Western country on this condition is the one on the Dutch service Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (Domestic Security Service, Dutch acronym BVD) by Dick Engelen, a former officer of the service.⁵ It was published in 1995, quite some years before the British services MI5 and MI6 published their official histories, in 2009 and 2010 respectively. A follow-up volume was published by the same author in 2007.⁶ Engelen’s two books were the first in the Netherlands based on the BVD archives, to which as a historian writing at the behest of the then Minister of Internal Affairs he had unlimited access. His books revealed many details of the history of the service, which so far had not been known to historians and the wider public. These related, for instance, to the far-reaching penetration of the Dutch Communist Party (Dutch acronym CPN) by the BVD and the close cooperation of the Dutch service with the Americans, the CIA in particular. To give just one example of this cooperation: at the beginning of the 1960s the BVD had installed microphones made available by the CIA in the newly

⁵ The BVD existed by that name from 1949 to 2002. From 2002 its successor organization is the Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst [General Intelligence and Security Service, Dutch acronym AIVD].

⁶ D. Engelen, *Geschiedenis van de Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst* [History of the Domestic Security Service] (’s-Gravenhage 1995). Engelen also wrote a follow-up volume: D. Engelen, *Frontdienst. De BVD in de Koude Oorlog* [Front Service. The BVD in the Cold War] (Amsterdam 2007). Both volumes basically cover the Cold War period.

established communist Chinese representation in The Hague. The BVD carried out the eavesdropping operation but shared its intelligence product with the CIA. Another revelation from the book is that the CIA in the early Cold War period paid part of the budget of the BVD, a practice which only came to an end at the beginning of the 1960s. Engelen's first book was his Ph.D. dissertation, which was supervised by a commission of expert academics from the Netherlands who, within the framework of the project, were also given unlimited access to the BVD archives. The same access was given to the members of the commission which supervised his second book. In contrast to the *The Spy Catchers* volume, both of Engelen's works give the exact numbers of the files he refers to in the notes, with the explicit aim to make it possible for other researchers to apply for a copy of a file through the Dutch version of the Freedom of Information Act.⁷

The two volumes by Engelen are very important contributions to the historiography of Dutch intelligence. One important objection, however, is that in a 'normal' academic discipline, several books could be written on the basis of the same archive material, posing different questions and treating separate aspects of the history of the service. This is obviously not possible the way official histories are written, since only one author or a group of authors has access to the material. A recent work by a Dutch intelligence historian, who wrote a book which was originally not meant for publication, offers a good example of what can happen if another historian makes use of the same archives. Eleni Braat, who was until recently employed by the BVD's successor, the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, as an in-house historian, wrote a social history of the BVD, for which she interviewed former members of the service and used material from the archives as well.⁸ Once the book was finished the AIVD decided it should be an internal publication, but a scanned copy of it found its way to a website in the Netherlands fairly soon, where it is now accessible for those

⁷ In the case of Engelen's second book, it has also been possible for readers to receive a cd-rom with digital copies of all the files the author makes a reference to in the notes. The files are made available by the successor organization of the BVD, the AIVD, in heavily redacted form, however.

⁸ E. Braat, *Van oude jongens, de dingen die voorbijgaan... Een sociale geschiedenis van de Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst 1945-1998* [Old boys and the days that were ... A social history of the Domestic Security Service 1945-1998] (n.p. 2012).

interested.⁹ It is interesting to see how Eleni Braat, partly on the basis of the same material to which Dick Engelen had access, wrote a completely different book which tried to answer its own set of questions. She poses questions such as: ‘How did the members of the service deal with the pressure of excessive secrecy they were asked to practice, not only towards the outside world but also in many cases towards close family members and their own colleagues?’ And: ‘What was the part played by the early post-WW II generation of officers in the service, many of whom had taken part in resistance activities against the German occupation during the war? What was the role of women in the service like?’ Asking different sets of questions to the same material is, of course, what normally happens if you give different historians access to the same material. By limiting access to the archives in the way it is usually done when official intelligence histories are written, the work of other historians – except the ‘chosen ones’ – is in practice made impossible; the history of a particular service is only limited to one version, which is strictly speaking highly undesirable. Free access to sources for a variety of historians, as is normal practice, generates different interpretations and tends to stimulate discussion and debate whereas limiting access tends to do the opposite.

Official histories in Britain

In 2009 the ‘authorised history’ of MI5, as the British Security Service is often called, was published as *Defence of the Realm*, written by the well-known intelligence historian Christopher Andrew.¹⁰ It came out almost simultaneously with the official history of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, commonly known as MI6) on the occasion of the centenary of the two services which were both founded in 1909. One of the many positive aspects of the book on MI5 is the fact that it covers the whole period of the existence of the service from its founding in 1909 up to the present time. Understandably, the material that was left out of the book for national security reasons tends to grow in volume the closer one gets to the present day, as the Director General of MI5, Jonathan Evans, remarks in his foreword. Evans makes clear the reasoning of the service behind the

⁹ To be found at <http://www.inlichtingendiensten.nl/literatuur/oudejongens.pdf>, accessed 19 March 2015.

¹⁰ C. Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London 2010).

decision to commission a book like this from an independent scholar. He emphasizes the importance of being ‘as open and transparent as possible, within the constraints of what the law allows, because that openness, by supporting public confidence in us, helps us do our job of protecting national security.’ In a similar vein, the service wanted an independent scholar like Andrew to reach his own conclusions in the book.¹¹ Indeed, there is no lack of independent judgments. One chapter discusses the hunt for the Cambridge Five, arguably the best-known and most successful Soviet spy ring in the West in the 1930s and 1940s, by the Security Service and hints at critical mistakes that were made in that regard by MI5.¹² Another chapter with the subtitle ‘Paranoid Tendencies’ has some very harsh words about the attempts from within the service in the 1960s to prove that its Director General Roger Hollis and in an earlier stage of the investigation, his deputy, were Soviet agents.¹³ In his discussion of the post-Cold War period, Andrew gives some interesting numbers, based on material from Security Service archives, about the relative efforts devoted to counterespionage, countersubversion and counterterrorism in later years. In early 1974, 52 per cent of the resources of MI5 were spent on counterespionage and 28 per cent on countersubversion. The attention given to counterterrorism, in spite of the Irish Republican Army problem, was in other words relatively small. After 9/11 in the US, the relative share

¹¹ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, xvi-xvii. This is what ‘authorised’ apparently means, as the Director General of MI5 says in the foreword: it was written by an independent historian who came to his own judgements and conclusions, not by a member of the service. In that sense David Horner’s *The Spy Catchers* is also ‘authorised’, of course, even though it is labelled an ‘official history’. This article does not make a distinction between an ‘official’ and an ‘authorised’ history in this way.

¹² Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, 420-441. The Cambridge Five, among them Kim Philby (1912-1988), Guy Burgess (1911-1963) and John Cairncross (1913-1995) were students at Cambridge in the 1930s or had recently graduated when they were recruited by the KGB’s predecessor, the NKVD. They were all to hold important positions within British government departments in the 1940s from which they betrayed many secrets to the Russians.

¹³ One of the main protagonists in this hotly debated issue within MI5 was Peter Wright. For his views see P. Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (New York, NY 1987). The Hollis case is a controversial issue even to this day. See, for instance, C. Pincher, *Treachery. Betrayals, Blunders and Cover-ups: Six Decades of Espionage Against America and Great Britain* (New York, NY 2009).

of counterespionage went down sharply in the work of MI5 as opposed to counterterrorism. Drawing upon one of the Annual Reports of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament, the author writes that 'by 2008-2009 three-quarters of the Security Service's resources were devoted to countering Islamist terrorism.'¹⁴ In contrast, the Dutch service AIVD does not release information about the relative share of counterespionage and counterterrorism in its operations.¹⁵

If one reads the official history of MI6 written by Keith Jeffery, which came out a year after Andrew's history of MI5, it comes as a disappointment, mainly because of the relatively short period that is covered, 1909-1949. In this case there is also an independent historian who received unrestricted access to the archives, but the arguments the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service offers in the preface for the limited period covered in the book cannot be called persuasive. Most important among those is his view that 'full details of our history after 1949 are still too sensitive to be placed in the public domain.'¹⁶ Apart from this rather vague argument, the reasons for the limited time period chosen are not entirely clear. There is at any rate no intention to bring out another volume later to cover the period after 1949. One cannot escape the impression that an important reason for choosing 1949 as the endpoint has to do with the fact that probably the two most disastrous cases of treason in the history of MI6, the ones regarding Kim Philby and George Blake, are largely left out by the choice of this time frame.¹⁷ There is some discussion of Philby, necessarily so since he entered MI6 in 1940, but in this way the period in which he possibly did the most damage (1949-51), remains conveniently untouched. This was the period during which he was the MI6 liaison in Washington D.C. and was therefore in a position to betray many US intelligence secrets to the Russians as well. In the caption to one of the pictures in the book, Philby is called 'SIS's worst traitor' with good reason. Blake entered the service in 1944 and is mentioned in passing at the end of the book in just

¹⁴ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, 616, 835.

¹⁵ Neither do Dick Engelen's two books mentioned earlier, since they do not discuss the post-Cold War period.

¹⁶ K. Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London 2010) vii.

¹⁷ Philby made it to Moscow from Lebanon in 1963 and Blake (1922-) confessed to spying for the KGB in 1961 and was sentenced by a British court to 42 years in prison. He subsequently escaped to the USSR in 1966.

one paragraph. Apparently there was much about Blake's background which MI6 failed to discover before he entered the service, the influence exerted upon him by an older cousin by the name of Henri Curiel, a co-founder of the Egyptian Communist Party, among other things. We know this from Christopher Andrew's *Defence of the Realm*, however, not from the official MI6 history.¹⁸ Alone for the reason of the restricted period covered, therefore, the MI6 volume is a bit of a disappointment.¹⁹

Official history the Russian way

In Russia a six-volume series of Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence was published from 1999 to 2006 in Moscow which is of particular interest here.²⁰ The series was written by a group of authors who were all employed by the present Russian intelligence service, the Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki (Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR).²¹ It is clear from the way the series is set up that the authors place the SVR squarely in the tradition and footsteps of the KGB and its predecessor organisations from the Soviet period. The sixth volume, for instance, covers the period 1966-2005, which is, to phrase it in Stalinist terms, 'no coincidence'.²² The series

¹⁸ Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, 488.

¹⁹ The Dutch official histories discussed here cover a much larger period as will the official history of ASIO, which will consist of three volumes, with 1989 as the final year covered. Horner, *The Spy Catchers*, xvii.

²⁰ *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Vneshney Razvedki* [Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence] (Moscow 1999-2006), six volumes. The volumes were written and edited by a group of authors which varied in composition over the years. Prominent among them were E.M. Primakov (1929-2015), director of the SVR in 1991-1996, and V.A. Kirpichenko (1921-2005) a long-time officer of the KGB and the SVR who rose to the rank of lieutenant general.

²¹ The SVR is the successor organisation of the intelligence branch of the KGB, The First Chief Directorate (FCD). It was established in 1991.

²² The process of putting the SVR and other Russian intelligence and security services in the footsteps of the KGB already started under president Yeltsin when in 1995, for instance, he proclaimed December 20 as the 'Day of the worker of the organs of state security of the Russian Federation'. See *Sobranije Zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Collection of Laws of the Russian Federation], no. 52, 25 December 1995, no. 5135. This process was then carried further under President Putin. December 20, 1917 was the date the first Soviet security service was founded

mostly consists of short historical profiles of important officers or agents from the history of the Soviet intelligence service and it definitely adds important new information. There is, for instance, an interesting chapter on a former high-ranking Nazi SA officer by the name of Walter Stennes about whose involvement with Soviet intelligence very little was known until recently. After a falling out with Hitler and Goebbels in 1930-1931 Stennes left Germany in 1933 to become a military adviser to the Chinese nationalist leader Chang Kai-shek in China, where he stayed until 1949 and where he was recruited by the Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, Russian acronym NKVD), one of the predecessors of the KGB in the Stalin era.²³ Among other things, he gave information to the Soviet leadership about the threat of a Nazi attack against the USSR which materialised in June 1941. As in practically all other cases which involved warnings against the German attack, this one was also ignored by Stalin.

Sometimes the Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence offer important little details which add to the story of agents that are already known. John Cairncross, one of the Cambridge Five, writes in his autobiography, for instance, that he was never a member of the Communist Party, whereas this is contradicted in the Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence.²⁴ In this instance the Russian authors' collective is

under Lenin, followed on December 20, 1920 by the foreign intelligence department of that service. December 20 was for that reason a day of celebration in the former KGB, as it is again these days for the Russian services.

²³ E.M. Primakov a.o. ed., *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Vneshney Razvedki, tom 3, 1933-1941 gody* [volume 3, the years 1933-1941] (Moscow 1997) 386-394. The case of Walter Stennes (1895-1989) is briefly mentioned in Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*. (London 2000) 124. Mitrokhin was a KGB archivist with the First Chief Directorate who escaped to the West in the beginning of the 1990s with a huge volume of material from the KGB archives which he had copied illegally at great personal risk. The two volumes written on the basis of his material by Andrew and Mitrokhin offer the most extensive overview of KGB intelligence operations all over the world. These are Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* and Idem, *The Mitrokhin Archive II: The KGB and the World* (London 2006).

²⁴ J. Cairncross, *The Enigma Spy: The Story of the Man Who Changed the Course of World War Two* (London 1997) 42; V.I. Trubnikov a.o. ed., *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Vneshney Razvedki, Tom 4, 1941-1945 gody* [volume 4, the years 1941-1945] (Moscow 1999) 180.

probably right. In other instances, it seems they simply leave out information which in their view does not reflect well on the KGB or its predecessors and its personnel. One example may suffice here. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin in their seminal work on KGB foreign operations discuss the activities of the NKVD in Spain during the Civil War in the second half of the 1930s, when the USSR supported the Republican side in the conflict. They mention an NKVD officer by the name of S.A. Vaupshasov, a leading expert in assassinations, who played an important part in constructing and guarding a crematorium in Spain at the time, where the bodies of victims of the NKVD were disposed of without leaving a trace. According to Andrew and Mitrokhin, many of the victims were first lured to the building and then killed on the spot. Earlier in his career, in 1929 in the Soviet Union, Vaupshasov had been sentenced to death for murdering a colleague. The sentence had, however, been commuted to ten years imprisonment and he had been released prematurely. Remarkably, these rather striking episodes from Vaupshasov's career are nowhere to be found in the profile written about him by the SVR authors' collective.²⁵

On a slightly different note, it is worth looking at the personality of Guy Burgess, another of the Cambridge Five, as presented in the SVR series. It is widely known about Burgess from Western publications that he was a flamboyant personality with a rather unusual lifestyle, a consumer of large quantities of alcohol, like most of the Cambridge Five, and a very active homosexual. Burgess also had a very shrewd intellect. It would be difficult if not impossible to imagine a book or an article published about him in the West these days in which these character traits including his sexual inclinations would not be mentioned. Indeed, during a trip to Gibraltar and Tangier in 1949, the way Andrew describes it in the official history of MI5, Burgess failed to pay some of his bills, he publicly identified MI5 and MI6 officers and was heard drunkenly singing in local bars, 'Little boys are cheap today, cheaper than yesterday.'²⁶ The Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence in one of its volumes has a profile of Burgess in which he is characterised as:

an unusual and contradictory personality. In combination with his extraordinary natural talents, his sharp analytical mind and his broad and

²⁵ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 97; V.I. Trubnikov a.o. ed., *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Vneshney Razvedki, Tom 4, 1941-1945 gody*, 88-95.

²⁶ Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, 422. Burgess fled to Moscow in 1951.

many-sided education, every now and then he surprised his acquaintances by his extravagant behaviour. Burgess distanced himself from the 'bourgeois world view' and made this known openly and in the unbalanced manner which was typical for his character. He showed it by his 'scandalous' behaviour and his bohemian life style. He intentionally dressed in a shabby manner, he drank a lot and was aggressive in disputes with his opponents.²⁷

Amazingly, there is no explicit mention here or elsewhere in the Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence of Burgess' homosexuality. This is in spite of the fact, mentioned in the profile, that Burgess' NKVD code name in the 1930s was *Mädchen*, 'girl' in German, which is a clear allusion to his sexual orientation on the part of the Austrian NKVD officer who recruited him in 1934, the legendary Arnold Deutsch.²⁸ Burgess' homosexuality is not mentioned in the short profile of him on the SVR website either.²⁹ He is labelled there as a 'Soviet *razvedchik*', i.e. a Soviet intelligence officer or a staff member of the Soviet service, and not as an 'agent', as he should be.³⁰ This was probably done because of the negative

²⁷ E.M. Primakov a.o. ed., *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Vneshney Razvedki, Tom 3, 1933-1941 gody*, 50. Yuri Modin, who was in the late 1940s the case officer of several of the Cambridge Five in London, mentions Burgess' homosexuality in his memoirs. These would otherwise be barely credible, of course, for Western readers. See Y. Modin, *My Five Cambridge Friends* (London 1994). See also A.I. Kolpakidi and D.P. Prokhorov, *Vneshnaya razvedka Rossii* [Russia's foreign intelligence service] (St. Petersburg and Moscow 2001) 419-420, for another case in which the homosexuality of an agent recruited by the KGB is not mentioned. This is the case of John Vassall, who was recruited by the KGB in Moscow in 1955 by a homosexual 'honey trap', i.e. he was seduced by a male KGB agent and subsequently blackmailed. See Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 523 for the real story of the Vassall recruitment.

²⁸ For the recruitment of Burgess by Deutsch (1904-1942) see Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 79-80.

²⁹ See <http://svr.gov.ru/history/ber.htm>, accessed 19 March 2015.

³⁰ The defector Vasili Mitrokhin in his *KGB Lexicon* defines a *razvedchik* as a 'staff member of an intelligence agency, engaged in organizing and conducting intelligence activities.' V. Mitrokhin ed., *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook* (London and Portland, OR 2002) 344. An official KGB dictionary from the 1970s gives the same definition. *Vysshaya Krasnoznamenayaya Shkola Komiteta Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR imeni F.E. Dzerzhinskogo, Kontrrazvedyatelnyy slovar'* [Red Banner Higher School of the Committee of State

connotations associated with the term ‘agent’ in present-day Russia.³¹ The lack of reference to the homosexuality of such a well-known Soviet agent like Guy Burgess has undoubtedly partly to do with the strong prejudice against homosexuals in today’s Russian society, which is also evident in the blatantly homophobic legislation that was recently adopted under President Vladimir Putin.³² It seems that in the case of the *Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence* there is clearly a tendency to leave out information which is deemed embarrassing for the present Russian service, even if there is no valid operational reason to do so, like protecting the identities of agents. It does not seem far-fetched to conclude that *The Mitrokhin Archive*, as the KGB’s ‘unofficial history’, offers a much more complete version of its history.

In the 1990s the Russian government and its foreign intelligence service SVR took the decision to make some files available to selected Western authors for books intended for publication in the West. Apparently in the final years of the Soviet Union there was an awareness on the part of the KGB leadership that the image of the service needed improvement and that this could be done by releasing files about celebrated cases from the past, among them the Cambridge Five. This resulted in a number of books, which were in some cases co-written by a Western author and a former KGB officer.³³ Among those books, both *Deadly Illusions* and *The Crown*

Security of the Council of Ministers named after F.E. Dzerzhinsky. Counterintelligence dictionary] (Moscow 1972) 269. To be found at http://www.genocid.lt/KGB/ci_dictionary.pdf, accessed 29 April 2015.

³¹ The current Russian practice of labelling NGO’s ‘foreign agents’ comes to mind. See, for instance, Human Rights Watch ed., ‘Russia: Government against Rights Groups’, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/13/russia-government-against-rights-groups>, accessed 20 March 2015.

³² See, for instance, M. Gevisser, ‘Life under Russia’s “Gay Propaganda” Ban’, *The New York Times*, 27 December 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/28/opinion/life-under-russias-gay-propaganda-ban.html?_r=0, accessed 19 March 2015.

³³ For the intention of the KGB leadership to improve the image of their organisation and a short discussion of some of the publications that were the result of this, see Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 26-27. Among the books that added important new details to the story of the Cambridge Five were J. Costello and O. Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (London 1993) and N. West and O. Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels: The British Secrets at the Heart of the KGB Archives* (London 1998). Oleg Tsarev was a former KGB officer. A major work on Philby was also written

Jewels discuss Burgess' homosexuality and its central place in his character. It is only in a publication like *Essays on the History of Russian Foreign Intelligence*, aimed primarily at a Russian public, that such things apparently cannot be said. It seems likely that in the publications co-written by the former KGB officer Oleg Tsarev and Western authors information that reflects badly on Soviet intelligence is sometimes simply left out, since the selection of the material used was done by the SVR.³⁴

Declassification of archives

Apart from commissioning the writing of official histories there is another way, of course, by which an intelligence or security service can show openness and transparency concerning its own past, namely by declassifying its records. Declassification will never be total, because services for one thing want to protect the identities of agents that have not become known so far. They also prefer not to be completely open about their modus operandi, but as a result of declassification any interested historian can work with at least some of the archive material. The record of intelligence and security services in Western countries in this respect tends to differ considerably, not only by country, but even services of one and the same country deal with this issue not always in the same way. The approaches by the two main British services, MI5 and MI6, for instance, stand in stark contrast. MI5 is a service which releases documents from its archives on a regular basis and does so without a legal obligation to do so. The declassification of MI5 records has, for instance, led to a substantial number of publications on the famous Double-Cross System, of World War II fame.³⁵ MI6, on the other hand, has made it its explicit policy not to release

by a Russian journalist who had done extensive interviews with Philby in Moscow and received material from the KGB archive. G. Borovik, *The Philby Files: The Secret Life of the Master Spy – KGB Archives Revealed* (London 1994).

³⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 27.

³⁵ The Double-Cross System was used by British government agencies, MI5 in particular, to send misleading information to the German High Command through an elaborate system of double agents. In particular, it was used to deceive the Germans about the location of the Allied landings in France in June 1944. Among the books recently written on the Double-Cross System and its agents are B. Macintyre, *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* (London 2012); N. West

material from its archives into the public domain, with the argument that its sources (i.e. agents) need to be protected.³⁶ So whatever has been written in the West about the cases of notorious MI6 traitors like Philby and Blake, has been written without any access to MI6 archives at all. In the United States no official histories have been written on the three main services, CIA, FBI and NSA, but they have declassified many documents over the years, especially since the end of the Cold War, even though this doesn't seem to be a systematic process in the way MI5 releases documents on a regular basis. What often happens is that a selection of documents having to do with a particular case or issue is declassified in bulk.³⁷ Within the CIA, the Center for the Study of Intelligence has as its mission the study of intelligence past and present. It has many publications on its website, some of them written by members of the CIA history staff; declassified articles from the CIA in-house journal *Studies in Intelligence* are also made available there.³⁸ The importance of this material provides ample compensation for

and M. Roberts, *Snow: The Double Life of a World War II Spy* (London 2011); R. Miller, *Codename Tricycle: The True Story of the Second World War's Most Extraordinary Double Agent* (London 2005).

³⁶ As the British intelligence historian Nigel West put it in an email to this author on 30 March 2015: 'MI5 is the exception because it voluntarily sends declassified files to Kew [the National Archives]. It is not required to do so as it is exempt from the Public Records Act. It is also exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. SIS [MI6] never knowingly declassifies anything voluntarily.' In 2014, for instance, MI5 released 110 records to the National Archives which was the 30th time it did so. The total number of released records at that moment stood at 5138. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/security-service-release-feb-2014-introduction.htm>, accessed on 30 March 2015. For MI6's stance on not releasing any material to the National Archives see <https://www.sis.gov.uk/our-history/archive.html>, accessed 1 April 2015.

³⁷ For the FBI see, for instance, http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2007/january/records_011007, accessed 1 April 2015. The NSA decided in early 2015 to declassify 52,000 pages related to the career of William Friedman (1891-1969), the founding father of U.S. code-breaking. <http://www.matthewaid.com/post/114495645076/nsa-begins-releasing-52-000-pages-of-documents>, accessed 1 April 2015. For the CIA, see for instance <http://www.foia.cia.gov/>, accessed 1 April 2015.

³⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence>, accessed 13 May 2015. For declassified articles from *Studies in Intelligence* see <http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/declassified-articles-studies-intelligence-ic%E2%80%99s-journal-intelligence-professional>, accessed 1 April 2015.

the fact that there is no CIA official history. In the Netherlands, the process of declassifying material from the archives of the two main services, the Defense Intelligence and Security Service (Militaire Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, MIVD) and its civilian counterpart the AIVD, is still in its infancy.³⁹ Declassification, in other words, seems at first sight in many countries, also in the West, a rather haphazard process, if it exists at all.

Conclusion

The record with respect to official histories in countries where they have been published is uneven, to say the least. Not only does the question of lack of access by other historians than the selected few prove an intractable problem, but in some cases even in Western countries services cannot always be counted on to allow selected historians to discuss embarrassing episodes from their history as the example of MI6 and the choice of the years covered in its official history shows. In the case of the Russian official history series it would seem that it is also less than forthcoming about disclosing information which is for some reason considered embarrassing to the SVR and its predecessors. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that more official histories will be published, especially in Western countries where this has not happened so far. Slowly and gradually, especially since the 1990s, there seems to be a growing awareness at least in the West, that the history of an intelligence and security service is not to be regarded as the eternal property of one particular government organisation, but should be shared, to the extent possible, with a wider public, historians and non-historians alike.

³⁹ <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/waardering-selectie/selectielijsten-ter-inzage>, accessed 1 April 2015. There is a website in the Netherlands which has many documents that were released from the AIVD archives on the basis of the Dutch version of the Freedom of Information Act.

See <http://www.stichtingargus.nl/bvd/index.htm>, accessed 1 April 2015. The release of these documents does not take place on the basis of a regular declassification process and for the applicant who seeks their release it is a very time-consuming and cumbersome process.