

# THE MERITS AND LIMITATIONS OF MEMOIRS IN THE INTELLIGENCE FIELD: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRUTH AND DECEPTION PRESENT IN KIM PHILBY'S BOOK – "MY SILENT WAR"

Alin DREPTATE

Master degree graduate in Intelligence  
and Security Studies, Salford University, UK

*This research supports the importance of memoirs with their merits and limitations, exemplified through the writings of a British double agent, Kim Philby. Philby's book, first published over fifty years ago, is a propagandistic material, portraying favourably the Soviet intelligence services. However, the memoir also presents embarrassing truths about questionable practices and failures of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), highly likely never to be officially admitted. This article argues that memoirs are valuable and relevant as supplement of the archival evidence, pending on the ability to separate between truth and falsehood.*

*Keywords: memoirs; intelligence; espionage; deception; propaganda;*

## INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE MERITS AND LIMITATIONS OF MEMOIRS

Memoirs represent a relevant source of information, as they *"stand as historical sources both of the past they describe, and the present in which they were written"* (Haire, 2014, p. 777). A critical review of memoirs shows they present both merits and limitations, and understanding both of these aspects can enhance the quality of a piece of research, particularly when the official records are still too sensitive to be declassified. This first part of the article will first look at the merits followed by the limitations of using memoirs, and it will conclude with an assessment of the value of memoirs.

Memoirs are *"a vital way of supplementing archival evidence"* (Haire, 2014, p. 758) with their qualities *"of overcoming a shortage of contemporaneous sources"* (Ibid.) and offering *"insights into the attitudes and motivations of participants"* (Ibid.). Memoirs are important as they give *"a unique insight into the way individuals defined themselves and understood themselves"* (Popkin, 2017, p. 25). Ignorance of the cause of betrayal within a traitor's personality led to Robert Hanson being portrayed as *"a mediocre FBI agent"* (Muszynski, 2005, p. 221) and Aldrich Ames *"an under-achieving alcoholic"* (Ibid.), perspectives which were biased, superficial and one-sided. Similarly, Guy Burgess was described as a *"promiscuous man with twin vices: a bottle of gin and a book on flagellation"* (Lownie, 2015). Such shallow categorisations can be avoided by acknowledging a memoir's worth in describing *"personal and cultural aspects which are often especially well illuminated"* (Haire, 2014, p. 758), and because they cover the *"mentality and values"* (Tosh and Lang, 2006, pp. 64-65) and offer *"a fresh perspective and insight into the life of the <other>"* (Bacon, 2017, p. 389). Memoirs *"reveal one's character, basic values, and philosophy of life"* (Richman, 2006, p. 373), and therefore, their main quality is that they will offer the knowledge to understand the inherent *"self-justificatory element"* (Glynn and Booth, 1979, pp. 303-315), which is mostly absent or misjudged in official documents.

An additional merit of memoirs is that they *"are usable primary sources where the authors [write] from first-hand experience"* (Davies, 2001, p. 77), especially when *"the credibility of a source increases in direct proportion to the proximity of the source to its subject"* (Kerr, 1996, p. 566). The author's level of access allows

researchers a better perspective of the event, particularly if the author of the memoir is *“a head of station reporting his unit’s organisation”* (Davies, 2001, p.77). In this case it would make his or her statements *“the recollections of an insider’ and more reliable when compared with redacted and scarce official records”* (Tosh and Lang, 2006, pp. 64-65). Such memoirs have the advantage of illustrating *“the practicalities and intricacies of intelligence relations”* (Haire, 2001, p. 774), which otherwise would be lost, or remained buried in a classified archive. Therefore, the placement and access of a memoir’s author makes the memoir a valuable primary source of information.

Furthermore, memoirs may present a different perspective on the official version of the facts, which would be omitted or underrated according to the official policy of the government. When it comes to sensitive topics, the trend of authorities is to present the *“politically correct”* version of the facts, avoiding to present debatable information from human rights or moral perspective. Hughes et al. (2008) highlight the fact that *“official records, like all other records, are written for a purpose (and declassified or withheld for a purpose)”* (p. 14). This makes records of activities *“against allies [...] more likely to be destroyed after use, weeded later or at least withheld from declassification for extraordinary lengths of time”* (Alexander, 1998, p. 2). Churchill’s memoirs were vetted *“usually twice or three times”* (Reynolds, 2005, p. 211) to excise *“Churchill’s ruder remarks about men such as Eisenhower, Tito and de Gaulle who had become significant [post-war] leaders”* (Ibid.). Hughes and Scott also remark that *“while the CIA has adopted a relatively liberal declassification policy in the United States, the archives of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) remain effectively closed to researchers”* (Hughes et al., 2008, p. 5). Considering that this assertion remains true, memoirs are one of the few sources that can shed some light on these well-preserved secrets.

Memoirs become most valuable when studied in *“a triangulation triad”* form, along with *“primary sources (interviews, published first-hand accounts; and documentary sources – published or archival)”*. (Davies, 2001, p. 78). Such a comprehensive approach is highly recommended when the topic involves analysis of an intelligence matter between contradictory and competing accounts, as seen for example in two historically rival nations, such as the UK and France. Haire (2014) warns that *“it would be unwise to attempt to write about the Anglo-French intelligence relationship without examining some of the available memoir material in conjunction with archival evidence”* (Haire, 2014, p. 760), especially when a *“memoir perhaps yields the best account of an event that can be traced”* (Ibid.). Corroborating sources becomes significant when it comes to forgotten history where *“the personal narratives of those who have been involved in intelligence can and must be explored”* (Haire, 2014, p. 763), as they offer *“emotional and personal*

*side of important relationships"* (Ibid., p. 760). Consequently, regardless of the time passed between the event and the writing of the memoir, the latter, by comparison with other sources of information, becomes *"a published artefact [which] is less volatile over time than memory, and hence possibly marginally more reliable"* (Davies, 2001, p. 77).

The memoirs have also shortcomings, as they can *"be deemed too unreliable for exclusive use"* (Hair, 2014, p. 776), when there is no primary or documentary sources to support them. When used as singular sources they serve *"as a record of events"*, [which] *"are often inaccurate and selective to the point of distortion"* (Tosh and Lang, 2006, pp. 64-65). The inaccuracy encompasses the *"subjective"*, with the recall of facts based on an *"arbitrary timeframe of the individual life and the perspective of the individual"* (Hair, 2014, p. 761). Memories suffer changes due to the *"choices which memories to include and how to portray them"*, and present a retrospective view of what seemed important combined with an emotional *"remodelling"* (Bacon, 2017, p. 389). Memoirs have similar flaws to autobiographies and *"are heavily dependent on the autobiographer's very ability to remember"* (Summa-Knoop, 2017, p. 3). Considering that *"not all alterations and not all distortions qualify as lies"*, the information can poorly mirror the reality, with the same event being recalled differently by multiple individuals (Bacon, 2017, p. 389). The intentional alteration of memories take place because memoirs involve *"personal narratives"* (Hynes, 1999, pp. 205-220), which suggests that those who write them are *"makers"* (Ibid.). The memoir's faithfulness to the truth suffers because of the individuals' intentions *"to exonerate themselves, elevate their positions, or to applaud or condemn the institutions they examined"* (Haire, 2014, p. 763). The latter case was seen in Compton Mackenzie's *Water on the Brain*, where *"he wickedly mocked SIS and its management"* (West, 2004, p. 278). Additionally, the exposure to external factors (such as manipulation of data to serve the targeted audiences) supports the claim that the *"production of a memoir or autobiography is arguably as social an activity as conversation"* (Haire, 2014, p. 763). With such limitations, it is difficult to evaluate and differentiate to what extent the intentional or unintentional distortion took place and how it manipulated the truth described in a memoir.

Another disadvantage is that memoirs are an account of the author's life and less a *"historical truth"* (Haire, 2014, p. 763), which may describe events in a *"revealing and provocative style"* (Defty, 1995, p. 184). Exaggeration is used as an attempt to maintain the interest of the reader, while concealing or compensating for areas when the historical perspective of an account is filled *"with such vagueness that it is impossible to verify"* (Haire, 2014, p. 772) or to provide details. The *"varying degrees of self-censorship"* (Defty, 1995, p. 184) create difficulties for the historian

in *“the extraction of facts from sensationalism”* (Ibid.), which led for example the British intelligence community to be known in its early days *“in the form of memoirs, fictionalised memoirs and classic spy fiction”* (West, 2004, p. 276). Such limitations led Defty to state that *“the British intelligence memoir, like all memoirs, must be read with some care”* (Defty, 1995, p. 184). The degree of sensationalism and oversimplification can make memoirs a source of disinformation, contributing to either *“intelligence literature lies”*, or at least to increased difficulty in determining the accuracy of the intelligence-related work (West, 2004, p. 279). Sensationalised or oversimplified memoirs are seen in democratic states, where the stories *“are decidedly patchy and at times quite vague”* (Defty, 1995, p. 186), but also in autocratic states. In the latter, the authors *“typically have an agenda of disinformation or self-aggrandizement”* (Muszynski, 2005, p. 220) or write *“to berate the services for their actions both during and since their employment”* (Defty, 1995, p. 184). As a result, memoirs can suffer in accuracy due to author’s attempt to make the book more commercial or to gratify the service or the state he or she serves.

In conclusion, the use of memoirs must be done with caution and careful handling can offer benefits and enhance the quality of research. When it comes to intelligence, every piece of information is valuable, regardless of whether it is true or not, because in the first case it augments the current historical facts, while in the second one, it demonstrates the intention of deceiving. Most successful deceptions are not fully-fledged falsehood, but a combination of truth and lies which allows, under a rigours screening, a separation between the two. Memoirs, despite their drawbacks in being subjective and malleable under their writer’s pen, supplement the archival evidence, can offer first-hand information, and when used in corroboration with other materials can exceed the value of official records.

### **A DEFECTOR’S MEMOIR: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRUTH AND DECEPTION PRESENT IN KIM PHILBY’S BOOK – “MY SILENT WAR”**

Kim Philby’s memoir is a controversial source of information about the British and American intelligence services’ activities during the Second World War and the Cold War, and it fuses elements of truth with disinformation and propaganda. This part of the article will first analyse the information assessed as true, followed by an inquiry into the deceptive messages present in Philby’s book, in both cases cross-checking his memoir with archival evidence and secondary sources. The study will attempt to assess the veracity of Philby’s accounts of several cases presented in his memoir, and whether it can be used as a reliable source to augment the existing information on intelligence-related activities during the Second World War and the Cold War.

The memoir truthfully highlights the difficulties of cooperation between Britain's Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS/MI6) *“due to basic differences of opinion about the line of jurisdictional demarcation between the two organisations”* (Philby, 2018, p. 43) and *“personal factors”* (Ibid.). Both MI5 and Section V of MI6 had overlapping responsibilities in counter-espionage, and despite the fact that the first organisation was focused on *“foreign territory”*, while the second was supposed to concentrate on British territory, conflicts between the two still emerged (Harrison, 1995, p. 522). Regardless of Philby's personal agenda to *“attempt to vilify MI5”*, he correctly observed the strains between the two services, and his assessment is supported by other accounts (Harrison, 1995, p. 514). The two services *“quarrelled over the control of agents”* (Harrison, 1995, p. 522), and the Security Service *“found SIS neither helpful nor efficient”* (Ibid.). When it came to countering espionage, MI5 was *“unsatisfied”* (Harrison, 1995, p. 523) and *“found the SIS performance of its Counter-Espionage duties inadequate”* (Ibid.). The complaints came also because SIS delayed *“in reporting the facts”* following the Ultra intercepts about two major operations, Garbo and Tricycle (Harrison, 1995, p. 523). These corroborated testimonies support the assessment that Philby's memoir presents truths that are valuable in establishing historical facts and which are sometimes concealed or distorted even by official documents.

As argued in the previous paragraph, during the Second World War cooperation between British intelligence services was poor, and this was partly attributed to the SIS leadership. Philby's memoir brought into debate the low-level of professionalism of SIS leaders, such as the SIS chief, Major General Sir Stewart Menzies and Felix Cowgill, Section V's chief, together with other SIS personnel. Menzies' intellect *“was unimpressive”*, having the knowledge only of a *“fairly cloistered son of the upper levels of the British Establishment”* (Philby, 2018, p. 109) and, according to Philby, his counterintelligence training was reduced to *“schoolboyish-bar, beards and blondes”* (Ibid.) attitudes. Other authors corroborate this description, with Menzies labelled as *“not suitable as a Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service”* (Harrison, 1995, p. 515) and *“not a very strong man and not a very intelligent one”* (Howarth, 1986, p. 115) who *“drew his personal advisers from a painfully limited social circle”* (Trevor-Roper, 1968, p. 72). This assessment is augmented by Christopher Andrew's remark that the MI6 leadership during wartime *“was not of the calibre of some of the senior professionals in MI5 and GC & CS”* (Andrew, 1985, p. 462). Similarly, Section V chief Felix Cowgill's *“intellectual endowment was slender”* (Philby, 2018, p. 55) and his professional skills were *“inhibited by lack of imagination, inattention to detail and sheer ignorance of the world we were fighting in”* (Ibid.), combined with a tendency for *“self-destruction”* (Ibid., p. 97). Cowgill was also accused of having *“stood by his own staff far beyond the call of loyalty, retaining*

many long after their idleness or incompetence had been proved" (Philby, 2018, p. 46). Despite the tribute from Robert Cecil that "*Section V had rapidly expanded and continued to do so under Cowgill's direction*" (Cecil, 1994, p. 765), Ben Macintyre confirms in his book Philby's perspective on Cowgill's lack of professionalism, and characterises him as "*rigid, combative, paranoid and quite dim*" (Macintyre, 2014, p. 27). When evaluating the quality of other SIS personnel, the latter showed little professionalism: "*He (Philby) is plum right about Vivian and Dansey. Vivian was a nice wet man with no guts...Dansey was a snobbish, arrogant, incompetent shit and I've never met anyone who disputed it*" (Harrison, 1995, p. 516). Harrison also supports the evaluation that the "*SIS grass-roots personnel were of mixed quality*" (p. 516) and he quotes Lord Dacre's description of SIS as "*by and large pretty stupid and some of them very stupid*" (Ibid.). All these testimonies support the argument that despite some of Philby's biases towards certain powerful figures within MI5, which led him to spread false information about them, his account of the SIS leadership is truthful, and explains some of the MI6 failures which have been attributed to poor leadership.

Throughout the memoir, Philby illustrates SIS's value between 1940 and 1946 by labelling it as "*of mythical prestige*" (Philby, 2018, p. 22) with "*little substance*" (Ibid.), and stating that "*if the British genius leans towards improvisation, then SIS is a true reflection of it*" (Ibid., p. 41). The memoir correctly underlines the limited success and professionalism of Section D within SIS, starting with its staffing organigram "*if it had one*" (Philby, 2018, p. 12), and stressing the "*disparity between ends and means*" (Ibid.) and their "*slender resources*" (Ibid.). Philby ridiculed his colleagues at Section D who intended to destroy the Iron Gates of the Danube, as, in his opinion, they equated this operation with "*destroying the pintle of a lock-gate in the Regent's canal*" (Philby, 2018, p. 12), and which eventually resulted in causing the British government "some embarrassment" (Ibid.). Harrison confirms Section D's inefficiency during the Second World War with two other failed sabotage attempts, one "*to block the Danube by blowing up a cliff*", and a second to disrupt Swedish iron ore production, the latter resulting in one SIS officer being arrested and another one fleeing (Harrison, 1995, p. 514). The performance of SIS's human intelligence collection was similar to that of Section D. Philby mentioned the complaints of "*three service Directors of Intelligence (DI)*" (Philby, 2018, p. 110), members of the Joint Intelligence Committee, because "*secret intelligence obtained by SIS was inadequate*" (Ibid.) and he confirmed the three DIs had "*some substance in their allegations*" (Ibid.). Other assessments of SIS's wartime activities avowed that SIS "*agent information produced nothing of value throughout the war*" (Harrison, 1995, p. 517) and their information was "*routinely disbelieved by intelligence staffs*" (Ibid.). In other situations when it was acted upon it, it resulted

in "disasters" (Ibid.). The SIS analysis department also failed to predict the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the invasion of Holland. The effect of those failures was that in 1940 SIS had reduced capabilities, and this resulted in the arrest of the SIS Vienna station chief, "*the collapse of the SIS network in Czechoslovakia*" (Ibid., p. 518) and the closure of "*the SIS stations in Oslo, Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, Brussels and The Hague*" (Ibid.). All these elements support the assessment that Philby's memoir does provide pieces of information which can reliably be corroborated with other primary and secondary sources. Such corroboration provides a more accurate picture of the reality during wartime, despite the general reservations associated with using memoirs as a valid source of information.

The next section to analyse is Philby's inside information about the internal struggles within SIS, which clarifies some of the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of Felix Cowgill as a potential Section IX chief. In this case, Philby arranged for the removal of Cowgill "*with surgical detachment, and no remorse*" (Macintyre, 2014, p. 91) by exploiting his role as "*an antagonist in inter-office strife*" with MI5 (Philby, 2018, p. 98). Philby's master plan included "*no overt measures*" (Philby, 2018, p. 94) against Cowgill, with "*every move in the campaign (...) [coming] from someone else*" (Ibid.) and using allies found "*in the ranks of Cowgill's enemies*" (Ibid.). Describing the steps Philby used to achieve his goal shows that memoirs provide valuable pieces of information to complement the facts already known, in this case, the appointments to MI6 lead positions. Additionally, the internal SIS conflicts and the lack of released archival documents in regard to this matter make Philby's confession a relevant contextual document which permits the identification of the security system's vulnerability in the form of informal networking and lobbying to appoint MI6 sections' leaders.

In addition to inside information about the SIS, Philby's memoir provides information about other British intelligence services' activities. One such activity was the opening of the diplomatic bags of allied nations during the war, a highly questionable activity and one unlikely to ever be admitted by government officials. Philby mentions that "*the bags of neutral states and of minor allies, such as the Poles and the Czechs, were fair game*" (Philby, 2018, p. 51) and the diplomatic correspondence of others "*was regularly subjected to scrutiny*" (Ibid., p. 53). Philby described the procedure in detail and gave the example of one case when "*the red seals in a Polish bag turned purple under treatment, and nothing could be done to restore them*" (Philby, 2018, p. 53). The opening of diplomatic bags of allied nations which transited British territory is surprising in the case of Poles, especially when British intelligence worked in close cooperation with them and were dependent on the Poles' "*extensive network of informers in Europe*" (Harrison,

1995, p. 519). However, considering the clandestine opening of diplomatic bags a regular non-technical information collection tactic performed by every intelligence service which had the capability and the will to assume the risk, it is highly likely that Philby is telling the truth about the matter (Herman, 1996, p. 79). Despite Philby's questionable motives for reporting this practice, the opening of diplomatic bags confirms other available information on the customary practices of intelligence services in times of conflict, subsequently making the memoir a corroborative source on questionable wartime practices.

When discussing several MI6 operations, the memoir provides context to some of them, and an example is seen in the case of the Russian vice-consul in Turkey, Konstantin Volkov. After realising the value of the information that Volkov was willing to offer, Philby realised that his friends, Guy Burgess and Donald Mclean, and even he, were at risk of being exposed as Soviet informers (FCO 158/57, 1952, p. 140). Volkov allegedly knew the identities of *“three Soviet agents working in Britain. Two of them were in the Foreign Office; one was head of counter-espionage organisation in London”* (Philby, 2018, p. 119), details which matched three members of the Cambridge Five spy ring (FCO 158/57, 1952, p. 251). Philby admitted in his memoir that his delayed arrival in Turkey to debrief Volkov would work in his favour and acted accordingly by arriving as late as possible. When he was challenged about why he arrived nearly three weeks later in Turkey after Volkov first contacted British representatives, he replied that any change in his schedule *“would have interfered with leave arrangements”* (Macintyre, 2014, p. 101). John Leigh Reed corroborates Philby's late arrival by considering his delay at that time as *“just irresponsible and incompetent”*, facts which eventually led to Volkov and his wife being taken back to Russia and highly likely executed (Ibid.). Despite the fact that the context of this case is described only vaguely, at least Philby brings a perspective which is missing from released official archives.

In the case of Volkov's *“disappearance”*, Philby concealed information and forwarded the hypothesis that because of the *“nearly three weeks”* (Philby, 2018, p. 127) between first approach and his attempt to contact him, *“the Russians had ample chances of getting on to him”* (Ibid.). Philby did not officially acknowledge he was the one who had sentenced Volkov to death and presented his theory that Volkov and his *“insistence on bag communications had brought about his downfall”* (Philby, 2018, p. 119). Moreover, despite the fact that it was known that Volkov *“was forcibly abducted from Istanbul a few days before Philby arrived [in Turkey]”* (Cecil, 1994, p. 766), the idea that the Russians were tipped off had *“no solid evidence to support it”* (Philby, 2018, p. 128). Philby acknowledged his role in this affair only later, when, following a meeting in Moscow with Phillip Knightley, he was quoted as considering Volkov's case *“a nasty piece of work”* (Knightley, 1988,

p. 138), and saying that the Russian *"deserved what he got"* (Ibid.). In this case, while official records show Philby's travel itinerary to Turkey and the outcome in regard to this case, Philby's memoir exposes some of the deception he used. Philby omits relevant pieces of information about the case and attempts to present the reader a hypothesis which absolves him of any guilt, tactics consistent with Soviet's disinformation strategy to deny the crimes and to blame the victim for the negative outcome.

Notwithstanding the depictions of certain true facts, Philby's memoir is likewise a work of propaganda and a disinformation instrument sanctioned and promoted by the KGB. Kim used his *"duplicity and charm"* (Philby, 2018, p. xv) in the *"pursuit of his long vendetta against the West in general and, in particular, against the British and American intelligence communities"* (Cecil, 1994, p. 764). Kim's deceptions in his memoir started with claims of not *"incurring the charge of wanting to muddy waters"* (Philby, 2018, p. xxvi) and trying *"simply to correct certain inaccuracies and errors of interpretation"* (Ibid.). His mastery in deception is present from the early pages of his book, when he caveats his thoughts against any criticism by claiming that *"this book is not a history or a treatise or a polemic. It is a personal record"* (Philby, 2018, p. xxx). He continues by stating his duty to answer questions *"even if the answer takes the form of gross over-simplification"* (Philby, 2018, p. xxxi). However, his intellect *"as sharp as a cut-throat razor"* (Ibid. p. ix) *"succeeded in poisoning the well"* (Cecil, 1994, 765) by convincing Graham Greene, who, in line with his dubious motivation, labelled the book a *"honest"* account, with no propagandistic messages and a *"dignified statement of his [Philby's] beliefs"* (Philby, 2018, p. xvii). In obvious contradiction to this, Philby's memoir is *"a brilliant piece of propaganda"* (Harrison, 1995, p. 514), *"an expression of his <cover personality>"* (Cecil, 1994, p. 764), and there are at least *"14 cases where Philby lied, distorted the facts, or omitted major episodes"* (Harrison, 1995, p. 515). Overall, the deception and propaganda in his book, in the form of outright lies, mixed truth and fabrications, or withheld information, is destined to protect the image of the service he always worked for, the KGB.

In line with his deception, Philby portrays himself as more than a traitor and eulogizes his recruitment and his communist allegiance in opposition to his presumed natural loyalty to the UK and the SIS. Despite the fact that the Russians considered him *"agent Tom"* until his death, following *"his easy escape from Beirut [which] invited suspicion he was still working for the British government"* (Cecil, 1994, p. 765), *"in early manhood"* (Coffey, 2015, p. 43) he called himself *"an accredited member of the Soviet intelligence service"* (Philby, 2018, p. xxviii). Also, after the Spanish civil war, he valued himself *"as a fully-fledged officer of the Soviet service"* (Philby, 2018, p. xxx). He justified his KGB recruitment

by stating that *“one does not look twice at an offer of enrolment in an elite force”* (Philby, 2018, p. xxxii). Such a force had only been in existence for 16 years by 1934 (the year of Philby’s recruitment), and it was part of a system where ideology was more important than professionalism, as demonstrated by Joseph Stalin’s purges, making it unlikely that the force was *“elite”*. Also, Philby’s ideological perspective was aligned with Communist messaging against Nazism, but he totally disregarded inconvenient truths, such as the fact *“that until Hitler invaded USSR on 22 June 1941 Communist parties not only refused to oppose him, but on orders from Moscow actively co-operated with him”* (Cecil, 1994, p. 765). Furthermore, his positions within the SIS were nothing more than *“cover jobs”* (Philby, 2018, p. xxix) to better serve the Soviet Union, which was *“the inner fortress of the world movement”* (Ibid.). In Philby’s faulty belief, if it was not for *“the Soviet Union and the Communist idea, the Old World, if not the whole world, would now be ruled by Hitler and Hirohito”* (Philby, 2018, p. xxxii). These assertions make it clear without a doubt that Philby’s memoir is more than a personal account and contains a political and ideological message, and not surprisingly his message does not reflect reality.

Turning the attention to particular incidents, the memoir omits the details of events in which Philby was involved, mostly in cases that were morally questionable or challenged the infallible communist ideology. During his assignment in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, despite Philby’s declared mission *“to get first-hand information on all aspects of the Fascist war effort”* (Philby, 2018, p. 3), he omits to mention that his presence there *“was to organise the murder of General Franco”* (FCO/27, 1952, p. 251). A similar example is seen when Philby talks about *“General Krivitsky, the Red Army intelligence officer who defected to the West in 1937, only to kill himself a few years later in the United States – a disillusioned man”* (Philby, 2018, p. 105). Philby outright disregards any chance of him having been murdered by NKVD, *“although evidence suggests an operation by Soviet <hitmen>”* (Cecil, 1994, p. 766). These examples show that in cases when Philby was involved in questionable operations, such as facilitating assassinations, or when it exposed the true oppressive trait of communism, the memoir does not mention the actual details of the episode.

Other examples of actions omitted from the memoir include Philby’s providing Russian intelligence with the names of people opposed to the Soviet agenda who would become leaders within their countries (back then under Soviet influence). These people opposed the USSR’s plans to *“take-over of the countries concerned, regardless of the wishes of the inhabitants”* (Cecil, 1994, p. 766). Philby omits to mention in his memoir that he *“shared with the Soviets the names of leading Catholics in Germany who could play a role in government after the war. The Kremlin had many of them killed or imprisoned”* (Coffey, 2015, pp. 42-43). Also, Philby’s

role in crushing the insurgency in Albania is not mentioned, and according to him *“the operation was quietly dropped without having made any noticeable dent on the regime in Tirana”* (Philby, 2018, p. 156) because British and American governments’ *“squib proved so damp”* (Ibid.). However, in reality the Albanian operation (mostly between 1949-1951) failed so categorically because Philby *“gave away plans of the United States and Britain to infiltrate insurgents into Albania, thus ensuring these raiding parties were all rolled up”* (Coffey, 2015, pp. 42-43). Therefore, the facts which would have shown the imposition of Communism in certain countries as the result of the USSR’s intervention and not as the will of the people were removed from the memoir, and the US and the UK were blamed for their *“imperialistic”* ambitions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Philby’s memoir combines true and distorted facts to give his book more credit, either to promote it as a historical document or for it to serve as a propaganda tool for those who might want to adhere to the communist ideology or to betray their countries. The memoir starts as a confession where Philby justifies the path he chose and offers valuable insight into why he became a source of information for Russian intelligence. When he discusses the circumstances of his work in the SIS, his relationship with MI5 or the cooperation with the US intelligence community, Philby’s memoir mixes truth and false statements. Philby wrote his memoir in this way highly likely following a NKVD editing process or as the consequence of his grudges towards certain individuals, in either situation promoting false information. His memoir becomes more untrustworthy when he reaches morally challenging circumstances in regard to how some of his actions will be perceived by the public, or to actions which could compromise the image of Communist ideology. On these occasions, his memoir omits details, alters parts of the information presented or simply falsifies the facts. In these instances, establishing the truth becomes a matter of prediction, following the lack of a *“standard against which Philby’s narrative could be judged”*, and with a degree of certainty based on accounts of other actors present during that time (Cecil, 1994, p. 767). Reasons such as *“the enforced silence of the intelligence community”* (Ibid.) or the fact that *“successive governments refused to provide authentic accounts”* (Ibid.) only manage to augment Philby’s side of the story, and 52 years later facts and questions remain debated and unanswered. Despite all these drawbacks, Philby’s memoir, used with caution, increases the amount of information available and has triggered responses from other intelligence professionals, aspects which have enriched the intelligence community’s knowledge about intelligence during and after the Second World War.

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