

CIA debates Brits' Cold War perfidy

by Jeffrey Steinberg

A Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored forum, convened to assess a newly released volume of early Cold War national security documents, erupted into a surprisingly candid discussion of the perfidious role of Great Britain in manipulating the start of the Cold War. The impromptu discussion took place during a day-long symposium, "Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years," which took place on Oct. 24, in the auditorium on the CIA's Langley, Virginia campus. Approximately 400 retired CIA officers, academics, and researchers attended the event, which was the sixth in a series of such public conferences sponsored by the Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence.

The event featured a number of prominent speakers, who were critical players in the formative years of the CIA, including George Kennan, Robert Bowie, and Paul Nitze. William Hyland, who served in the CIA for many years before becoming head of State Department intelligence, and later, edited the New York Council on Foreign Relations' journal, *Foreign Affairs*, was also a featured speaker.

Philby, Maclean, and Burgess

The conference was organized around three panels, dealing with the Soviet threat in eastern Europe, western Europe, and East Asia during 1946-50. The panelists were asked to review 200 newly declassified Central Intelligence Group (CIG) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates and daily briefings, prepared during the Truman administration, to assess the effectiveness of the nascent postwar civilian intelligence service, in forecasting such monumental events as the Soviet takeover of countries in eastern Europe, the advent of the thermonuclear stalemate, the North Korean invasion of the South, the Chinese Communist takeover of the mainland, the Mao-Stalin relationship, and the Soviet efforts to install communist governments in several crucial western European countries.

Throughout the symposium, and particularly during the discussion of early-Cold-War efforts by the United States to roll back Soviet advances in eastern Europe, the audience was reminded that a trio of high-ranking British intelligence officers, posted in Washington, D.C., had betrayed America's most ambitious secret operations to Moscow. H.R. "Kim" Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald Maclean had served

in key liaison posts to the Central Intelligence Group and its successor, the CIA. All three were Soviet spies, penetrated deep into the British security elite. Or were they?

No one at the symposium, neither the panelists, nor the members of the audience who had brief opportunities to make comments or ask questions at the close of each panel, went so far as to directly accuse any of the three men of acting on behalf of British geopolitical interests, when they betrayed American secret operations. However, at the close of the second panel, on the early Cold War years in western Europe, Dr. Charles G. Cogan, the former head of the CIA's Near East Division of the Directorate of Operations, now a professor at the Harvard University Center for International Affairs, raised the question of whether the British had intentionally manipulated the United States into the Cold War against Stalin, at a point when the United States was still in a position to forge some kind of postwar partnership with Moscow.

Dr. Lloyd Gardner, a history professor at Rutgers University, one of the panelists, acknowledged that a whole school of historiography exists, that argues that there was a real possibility of World War III breaking out, shortly after the end of the World War II, *between the United States and Great Britain*, over the issue of Britain's commitment to reestablish its pre-war colonial empire.

Dr. James Hershberg, former head of the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution, pointed out that there were extensive discussions between Stalin and several of his top foreign policy aides, over the issue of how the Soviet Union might exploit the "inter-imperialist" rivalry between the United States and Britain. One recently obtained Soviet diplomatic communiqué to Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and Stalin argued that a war between the United States and Britain was "inevitable."

Another questioner from the floor added that even President Truman was completely taken by surprise by Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri, which was aimed at manipulating the United States into a conflict with Stalin, one that even Truman was not then committed to. Professor Gardner cited a book-length study of the Churchill intervention, that made the strong case that Britain had manipulated the United States into the Cold War.

The speakers who argued that Britain's perfidy against U.S. strategic interests had shaped the early moments of the Cold War and locked the United States into a still-avoidable break with Russia, were by no means in the majority at the symposium. However, the surfacing of the debate over the rarely challenged Cold War mythology, and the sanctity of the Anglo-American special relationship, inside the headquarters of America's postwar intelligence community, is a sign of mental health at a moment when the warfare between Washington and London has returned to center stage in the post-Cold War strategic drama.