

## **Espionage Makes a Big Comeback**

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### ABSTRACT

In the space of a few weeks, an attempt in Great Britain to eliminate a Russian GRU traitor who had defected to the West, reports of former French foreign intelligence agents spying for China, and the comic real-life episode of the faked assassination of a Russian journalist who had fled to Kiev, staged by Ukrainian secret services, have brought memories of twentieth-century spy stories back into our minds.

**Keywords:** Spy, Espionage, Le Carre, GRU, Five Eyes

## **El espionaje tiene un gran regreso**

### RESUMEN

En el espacio de unas pocas semanas, un intento en Gran Bretaña de eliminar a un traidor ruso de GRU que había desertado a Occidente, informes de ex agentes de inteligencia extranjeros franceses espionando para China y el cómico episodio de la vida real del asesinato falso de un periodista ruso que había huido a Kiev, organizado por servicios secretos ucranianos, nos ha traído a la memoria recuerdos de historias de espías del siglo veinte.

## **间谍活动大回归**

### 摘要

英国企图消灭一名曾投敌西方阵营的俄罗斯格鲁乌叛国者，前法国外交情报官员为中国效力的报道，以及由乌克兰国家安全局对逃往基辅的俄罗斯记者安排的假刺杀情节，上述事

件仅在几周内，便将有关二十世纪的间谍故事回忆带到眼前。

关键词：间谍，间谍活动，勒卡雷，格鲁乌，五眼联盟

**T**he adventures of James Bond and those written by John Le Carré have recently made a triumphant return to our screens in real life.

In the space of a few weeks, an attempt in Great Britain to eliminate a Russian GRU traitor who had defected to the West, reports of former French foreign intelligence agents spying for China, and the comic real-life episode of the faked assassination of a Russian journalist who had fled to Kiev, staged by Ukrainian secret services, have brought memories of twentieth-century spy stories back into our minds.

Since the Snowden affair, the public has gradually gained the impression that cyber-breaches have supplanted the previous generation of espionage and that the outdated techniques used by Le Carré's Smiley have been filed away in the post-war nostalgia archive.

It was thought that war could be waged remotely by videogame controller and we found that it still led to the same cortege of mutilated corpses and barbaric destruction of cities and civilizations. This belief also applied to what was, in German, previously called "the profession of the nobles."

Of course, everyone remembers that there used to be spies and people who were spied upon. Could it be that states only have old enemies, adversaries and rivals who could become enemies once more? General de Gaulle summarized this perspective very astutely when he said: "States do not have friends, only interests."

If we look at the matter more closely and extricate ourselves from the stereotypical emotions of continuous alternative disinformation, we can identify some fundamental points:

- All the major powers eliminate their spies. Generally they do this from a legal perspective, and occasionally in a more definitive way. According to the top historians in the field, France has never shied away from doing this. Recently, a former president, who should not have said what a book revealed, told journalists he had given instructions for the targeted killing of jihadists (a revelation that is more complicated to justify in a country that has fortunately removed the death penalty). Great Britain, the United States, Russia, China .... The Soviet Union even introduced a specialist service (SMERSH) in 1943 whose primary activity was to eliminate traitors, deserters, spies and, above

all, political opponents of Stalin. All states, or almost all, can take drastic and definitive measures, especially when a traitor flees his or her country ...

- All the major powers engage in espionage, whether proactively, as a precaution, or “just in case.” Even close allies like the United States and Israel have experienced a major crisis with the Pollard affair, which drew large-scale media coverage and is not such an isolated case as may have been believed. The Snowden revelations showed the capacity of the United States to take action, particularly but not exclusively in economic and industrial terms, and not just against France, the ugly duckling of the Atlantic Alliance, but also by targeting its close friends. This includes fellow members of the “Five Eyes” alliance (Australia, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand), which has shared intelligence tools since 1941.
- As for the farce in Ukraine, it would be no more than a comical footnote if the operation had not, at the same time as saving a potential target, cast permanent doubt on all operations that might occur. This “fake” attack has provided the conditions of justification for all alternative realities in the future, and is more than could have been hoped for by those who may have had an interest in eliminating the journalist. But journalists *are* dying, not only those on assignment in combat zones, but also those who are being targeted directly and personally. More than 1,000 have died over the last fifteen years according to Reporters Without Borders. This has happened in the East, in South America, in Africa, in Asia—and also in the heart of Europe, recently in Malta and Slovakia.

Intelligence is built around a number of crafts (gathering, analysis, intervention) and a number of cultures (espionage, counter-espionage, anti-terrorism). While wars between states have for a long time primarily been waged based on traditional frameworks, asymmetric wars, guerilla activities and infra-state terrorism have brought about fundamental change.

The revolution in terrorism that ISIS has succeeded in establishing has disrupted the usual rules: the range of terrorist profiles is now so diverse that typical profiles no longer exist, operating procedures are now so varied that there are no longer any signature methods, and the mechanisms for making demands are now so opportunistic that it is hard to know what to believe any more.

Accelerating its return to analysis, anti-terrorism has incorporated key methods that are now making it possible to rebalance operations, particularly at the French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSE). However, the emergence of complex and multiple forms of terrorism that are hybrid and evolving has not replaced traditional problems. It has only added new tasks and risks to those already in existence.

Something that deserves attention is the recent media coverage of files dating back several decades, following the decision taken by the head of the DGSE in April 2017 to judicialize internal mechanisms. This is due less to the decision being a move that allows these mechanisms to catch up with common law, and more down to the fact that this information was leaked just before Macron's visit to China. Was it a personal message to the head of the armed forces to show more prudence in anti-terrorist security cooperation? Could it have been a diplomatic message aimed at China? Or was it a message reminding the government of its responsibility not to neglect the implications of counter-espionage? We will need to wait for a few months or maybe even years to get to the root of the matter and its sudden raised profile.

Three cultures. Three crafts. Civil and military services, at home and abroad, that are better coordinated and better suited to sharing what needs to be brought together without putting sources in danger: this is the balance of development that it befits the state to implement. After this crucial rebalancing, it will be necessary to find ways of developing preventative and proactive tools. Consequently, France's Intelligence Academy—which is judiciously placed under the authority of the National Centre for Counter Terrorism and its academic partners—will need to be given the means to become a true school of intelligence capable of dealing with identified and existing threats.