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To cite this article: Jerry D. Ennis (2007) What *Did* Angleton Say About Golitsyn?, *Intelligence and National Security*, 22:6, 905-909, DOI: 10.1080/02684520701770667

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520701770667

Published online: 06 Jun 2008.
What Did Angleton Say About Golitsyn?

JERRY D. ENNIS

In an earlier issue of this journal I examined statements attributed to James J. Angleton, then Chief of the CIA Counterintelligence Staff, that Anatoli Mikhailovich Golitsyn had worked secretly for the CIA for many years prior to defecting in Helsinki in December 1961. Further research shows that Angleton had made similar remarks on a number of occasions, but intended something other than the usual meaning of the phrase ‘worked for’.

My earlier article addressed information in the literature that Anatoli Mikhailovich Golitsyn had worked secretly for the CIA for many years prior to defecting in 1961. The reported source for the statements was James J. Angleton, then chief of the CIA Counterintelligence Staff.1 I chose to address the claim because, as one former CIA officer put it, ‘the literature on Golitsyn . . . has been contaminated to the point that the truth is hard to find’.2 If this bit of information about Golitsyn was incorrect, I believed it was important to clarify the record for other students of intelligence. I am revisiting the matter because my conclusion as to what Mr. Angleton said about Golitsyn and why he said it was incorrect.

Information from a number of former CIA officers who had been deeply involved with James J. Angleton and the Golitsyn case over the years established that Golitsyn had not been recruited by or otherwise secretly provided intelligence information to the CIA prior to defecting. The question then remaining was, why would Angleton have said such a thing?

Finding a conclusive answer to that question was more difficult. Neither Thomas Powers nor Loch K. Johnson, authors who had reported that Golitsyn had worked for the CIA, had detailed notes of their conversations with Angleton, which took place in the mid-1970s, and each felt his recollections of Angleton’s remarks might have been mistaken – but they were not.3 There was no obvious reason for Angleton to try to mislead Powers, but in 1975–76, Professor Johnson was on the staff of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities...
(the Church committee) and Angleton had made no secret of his low opinion of that body’s work.

Walter Elder, a former executive assistant to Director of Central Intelligence John McCone and CIA liaison officer to Congress, recalled a late-night visit from Angleton in August 1975. Angleton had been before the committee that day and wanted to tell Elder about a ‘diabolical plot’. Angleton told Elder, ‘The Church committee has opened up the CIA to a frontal assault by the KGB’, and, ‘The committee is serving as an unwitting instrument of the KGB’. In June 1976, Angleton told an interviewer from the Lewiston, Idaho newspaper that Senator Frank Church was conducting ‘a type of McCarthyite hearing in which the denigration of the intelligence community was its goal’. Professor Johnson heard similar comments during some of his meetings with Angleton. During a February 1976 lunch meeting, Johnson wrote that Angleton ‘became highly agitated as he discussed the congressional inquiries, comparing them to the pillaging of intelligence services that had been overrun and occupied by a foreign power. “Only we have been occupied by the Congress,” he said, “with our files rifled, our officials humiliated, and our agents exposed”’. One source speculated that Angleton might have said almost anything to a representative of the Church committee just to muddy the waters. After all, Angleton had previously told Johnson that ‘the task of the counterintelligence officer was to construct a “wilderness of mirrors” in which the opponent would be forever lost and confused’. Johnson later wrote

In 1975, the chief enemy of the CIA was – in the eyes of many CIA officers, including Angleton – the United States Congress. I wondered if Angleton’s ploy was to lead the Church committee into his ‘wilderness’, where everything revealed reflected something concealed, and the maddening multiplicity of images spun dizzily in the mind.

Perhaps. But comments made to a member of the committee’s staff at public lunches at the Army–Navy Club seem an unlikely way to try to lead the committee (or Johnson) into the wilderness.

Some additional support for the ‘muddy the waters’ and ‘wilderness of mirrors’ theories can be found in an article by Seymour Hersh concerning Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in which he denounced Stalin. Angleton, Hersh wrote:

has repeatedly told friends, and some reporters, that his office began planning a major disinformation operation even while the Eisenhower
Administration was still debating whether to make the speech available to the press.

‘What Jim did’, one of his friends told me, ‘was to doctor the speech with some pejorative stuff and leak it to the neutrals, the Indians among them. They all swallowed it. There were some nasty things about the heads of 15 or 20 governments that were written by Jim and attributed to Khrushchev.’ The resulting furor, his friend said, was ‘a tremendous coup for Jim. It completely disrupted Communist efforts all over the world.’

The fact, however, is that the Angleton plan was killed by higher officials before it could be put into operation. When one newspaper editor reproached Angleton recently for continuing to tell the story to reporters, Angleton replied, ‘Why not tell it? It muddies the waters, doesn’t it?’

Finding no better explanation, I concluded that Angleton may have believed that ‘muddying the waters’ was justification enough for his comments that Golitsyn had worked secretly for the CIA for years. However, further research has caused me to change my conclusion.

When we say ‘X worked for Y’, we generally mean that an employee–employer relationship existed and that both parties were aware that this relationship existed. However, it can also mean ‘X worked on behalf of Y’, without necessarily having an employee–employer relationship. And that is the meaning Angleton intended.

In an Executive Session of the Church committee on 19 June 1975, Angleton testified that Golitsyn ‘had decided to defect many years prior to December of 1961, if the opportunity ever arrived. And therefore he used those many years breaking down the compartmentalization of the KGB in order to acquire the kind of information which would be more valuable to the U.S. and to our allies’. In a 1978 deposition to the John F. Kennedy Subcommittee of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Angleton removed all doubt about Golitsyn’s status vis-à-vis the CIA. Angleton testified, ‘But because Golitzen [sic] had made up his mind to defect many years before he actually arrived, he was actually without our knowing an agent in place’.

The third, and most explicit, statement comes from an undated document (probably from 1963) marked ‘COPY (from SIG files), SUBJECT: GOLITSYN Biographical Highlights’. This record provides further information on Angleton’s views, since the SIG (Special Investigations Group) was a unit within Angleton’s Counterintelligence Staff. The document notes:
Subject is the first major KGB defector since 1954 with extensive and intensive knowledge of the KGB. Not only does he have a rich 16-year career as a counterintelligence operations officer, but it is important that seven of these years were spent in formal counterintelligence training, including the four-year advanced counterintelligence-internal security course at the KGB’s Juridical Institute. The latter course was taken after Subject’s 1955 decision to fight against the system. Thus Subject might be characterized from 1955 as almost a self-run penetration agent within the KGB, who made it a point to read, observe, and overhear information for purposes of future utilization against the KGB and the Soviet communist dictatorship system.\textsuperscript{12}

In other words, what Angleton intended to convey was that Golitsyn, having decided in 1955 to defect if the opportunity presented itself, had worked to acquire information with the intent to furnish it to the CIA at some future date – but without the CIA’s knowledge, control or direction – for many years prior to December 1961. This additional information shows that Angleton was neither trying to muddy the waters nor to lead anyone into the wilderness of mirrors by his statements – at least not in this case.

NOTES


3 Thomas Powers, e-mail to author, 29 June 2004; Loch Johnson, e-mail to author, 30 August 2004; Editor’s Note to Ennis, ‘Anatoli Golitsyn: Long-time CIA Agent?’ (note 1) p.41.


5 Jay Shelledy, ‘Former Top Spymaster has Bitter Words for Harshest Critic of the Cloak and Dagger’, \textit{Lewiston Morning Tribune}, 6 June 1976, p.5A.


7 Ibid., pp.82–83.


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