

# Ames, Aldrich

Lee Lukoff and Victoria Botelho

Department of International Affairs, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A.

## Abstract

Aldrich Hazen Ames is remembered today as one of the most notable American traitors from the Cold War. After volunteering his services to the Soviets in 1985 in exchange for a cash advance of \$50,000, Ames became an indispensable asset to the KGB, capable of securing the most sensitive secrets inside the CIA. His treasonous actions led to the deaths of valuable American assets inside the Soviet Union and did permanent damage to the American intelligence community. The psychological motivations that ultimately led Ames to commit treason, specifically his familial background and personal hardships, career trajectory, and political beliefs, are examined. The remarkable spy craft of the KGB and the failure of a joint CIA-FBI counterintelligence operation explains why Ames was not apprehended for nine years.

## Keywords

Counterintelligence  
Cold War  
CIA  
Soviet Union  
Mole  
Double Agent  
Investigation  
Psychological Motivations  
Spy Craft  
Disinformation

## PART I: INTRODUCTION

At different points in his career, Ames worked as a case officer tasked with recruiting spies and co-opting enemy intelligence officials, primarily from the Soviet Union. Ames also worked as an analyst responsible for assessing Soviet foreign policy. His intricate knowledge of Soviet politics and international affairs made Ames an asset to the CIA at a time when analytical skills were in high demand at Langley. Most notably, Ames worked as a counterintelligence officer in the CIA's prestigious and powerful Directorate of Operations. It was in this position that Ames would do the most damage to the national security interests of the United States. After volunteering his services to the Soviets in 1985 in exchange for a cash advance of \$50,000, Ames became an indispensable asset to the KGB, capable of securing the most sensitive secrets inside the CIA. A traitor to his country, Ames would become the most valuable asset the Soviets handled during the Cold War.

Aldrich Ames is a complicated figure whose psychological motivations that led him to commit treason against the United States are not easily understood or explained. However, his familial background and relationships with prominent Russian figures can provide valuable insight

into the reasons for Ames's betrayal. The political and psychological dynamics employed by the Soviets that effectively kept his identity secret for nearly nine years were the hallmark of remarkable spy craft employed by his Soviet handler Victor Cherkashin and warrant further study. Ames became the most important CIA agent recruited to work for the KGB in the entire Cold War. Such a state of affairs raises important questions. What inspired Ames to commit acts of treason against the United States? What secrets did Ames reveal to the Soviets? How did the Soviets keep the identity of their most valued asset inside the CIA secret for such a long period of time? What psychological factors did the Soviets employ to sidetrack the internal watchdogs in the CIA's Office of Internal Security, whose sole responsibility was to find moles inside the CIA working for the Soviets? Most importantly, why did the CIA fail to recognize that Ames was a potential security threat when his behavior inside and outside of the office raised serious questions about his competence as an intelligence operative.

Over the course of nine years, under the watch of his KGB handlers, Aldrich Ames would reveal the identities of several dozen U.S. agents recruited by the United States to spy on the Soviets from inside the KGB and Soviet

Politburo. Ten of these agents were summarily “executed” by the Soviets for their treason (p. 109).<sup>[1]</sup> As one of Moscow’s most valued assets, Ames used his position to funnel top secret documents and CIA secrets in exchange for nearly \$2 million dollars over the course of seven years. Ames remained anonymous due to the expert spy craft of his Soviet handler Victor Cherkashin, one of the KGB’s most trusted and capable intelligence officials serving in Washington, D.C., during the 1980s. After Ames agreed to spy for the Soviets, Cherkashin monitored all of his actions both professionally and personally from 1985 until his apprehension by the FBI in 1994.

The fascinating story behind the seditious acts of treason performed by Aldrich Ames warrants further study because his case sheds light on how a rival intelligence service, in this case the KGB, was able to use the tools of intelligence to psychologically manipulate the CIA. This would subsequently force the world’s most vaunted intelligence agency to fail in its mission to protect the national security interests of the United States at the height of the Cold War. Ames was responsible for causing the United States to lose its most valuable intelligence assets inside the KGB as well as a great deal of its own national security secrets. Furthermore, studying the treason of Aldrich Ames and his acts of espionage provides one with an understanding of the psychological motivations and existential factors that can lead American intelligence professionals to violate their loyalty oaths and commit acts of high treason against a country they swore to protect and defend.

The mere fact that Ames’s spying continued for such a long period of time is a testament to the fact that the KGB employed a remarkable tradecraft in keeping his identity hidden from CIA counterintelligence watchdogs. This state of affairs goes to show that the CIA in 1985 was an agency whose corrosive bureaucratic and organizational culture failed to live up to its high standards of professionalism. The CIA failed to diagnose the threat posed by Ames early on, and the nation’s most vaunted intelligence organization fell victim to the deceptive tactics employed by the KGB.

This entry will explain how and why Ames slipped through the cracks and stayed active in the field for nearly nine years. There are three underlying reasons that explain why Aldrich Ames chose to betray the United States and spy for the Soviets:

1. Financial reasons and personal problems;
2. Disillusionment with his professional status at the CIA;
3. Political disagreements with American foreign policy in the Cold War.

Each of these motives explains an important aspect of the psychological mindset Ames possessed when he chose to walk into the Soviet embassy with a packet full of some of the most sensitive intelligence secrets in the CIA. Understanding Ames’s psychological predispositions will not only provide clarity to understanding why he chose

to commit treason, but also explain how he was able to keep his spying a secret for such a long period of time. The psychological conditions that inspired Ames to commit treason developed over the course of his career and were not motivated by an ideological predisposition towards communism, but rather his familial dynamic and the personal relationships he built with Soviet figures. In fact, Ames was a loyal liberal Democrat and participated in partisan political activism throughout his adult life. Over the course of 32 years, Aldrich Ames would transform from a loyal American civil servant into a mole, doing the dirty work of the KGB deep inside the bureaucracy of the CIA.

## PART II: PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS FOR COMMITTING ESPIONAGE

Ames’s psychological motivations for committing treason against the United States began in his childhood and early contact with the CIA. As a young child, Ames was known for creating stories and various identities. His classmates and teachers noted early on that Ames had a knack for lying, leading him to declare his intentions for becoming a spy. Ames’s father, Carleton Ames, was offered a job at the CIA in 1952 after gaining notice for his thesis on Burmese politics. Carleton Ames was given a position in Burma under the guise of an academic. The family resided there for two years before moving to Washington, D.C. After Aldrich Ames became aware of his father’s job status, he started a job in the CIA’s records department. After high school graduation, young Ames spent two years in Chicago pursuing a career in theater. He failed in his efforts. Financially unstable, he was forced home by his father. With the help of his father, Ames was placed in the CIA’s Directorate of Plans, giving him the opportunity to graduate from George Washington University and complete CIA training. This background is crucial to understanding Ames’s motivations. He was placed into the CIA bureaucracy early in life with the motivation to live up to his father’s expectations. In fact, many parallels can be drawn between he and his father. It is surprising that the CIA failed to notice such behavior patterns at the beginning of Ames’s career. Following Carleton’s post in Burma, he received such a poor performance review that he was placed on a six-month probation. He spent the rest of his career at a desk job and became disappointed with his performance. His own father was a very successful and respected man. Carleton’s drinking increased and developed into alcoholism. When analyzing Ames’s career path, it is apparent that both Carleton and Aldrich Ames had a tense dynamic with their fathers. Each man wished to make something of himself and reach high success in his respective field (pp. 32–41).<sup>[2]</sup> A sense of entitlement gave both men the inability to come to terms with his failures, propelling each towards alcoholism.

Aldrich Ames was a professional spy and was keenly aware that careless behavior could blow his cover and land him in prison for the rest of his life. His path towards treason began when he established a professional relationship with a Soviet embassy official named Sergei Chuvakhin. He told the CIA that Chuvakhin was a potential target for recruitment. This gave him cover with the CIA to establish a relationship. The two talked politics and established a rapport. Chuvakhin believed Ames (under an assumed alias) was an academic interested in foreign policy. Ames knew Chuvakhin, an official at the Soviet embassy, had direct contact with Stanislav Andrevich Androsov. Androsov was the resident KGB chief at the Soviet embassy in Washington. To secure the trust of the KGB, Ames had to establish a connection with Androsov in order to cement his reliability as a business source to do business with. This was not an easy thing to do. Many volunteer spies, or walk-ins, were really dangles with the sole purpose of tricking a rival intelligence group into revealing sensitive information. Intelligence services use dangles to “identify hostile intelligence personnel and gain insights into the intelligence requirements or methods of a hostile service.” (p. 99).<sup>[3]</sup> To prove his worth as a double agent, Ames knew that he had to convince the Soviets that he was a credible person who could be trusted to work for the KGB inside the CIA.

To prove himself reliable and worth spending the time and resources to handle, Ames had to prove that he could be trusted by the Soviets and that the intelligence he could provide them with would coincide with their political interests. If the KGB agreed to work with, and subsequently handle, every walk-in that entered the front door of the Soviet embassy, they would waste an awful lot of resources and time. In addition to wasting precious financial resources, diversionary tactics (such as sending dangles) are but one tool the KGB and CIA used throughout the Cold War to mislead and prevent the adversarial intelligence organization from functioning effectively. More time spent handling dangles meant that either American or Soviet intelligence agents would be spending less time in the field-recruiting spies, blackmailing potential sources, cultivating ongoing relationships, collecting new intelligence, analyzing existing raw intelligence, and performing regular internal sweeps for moles. These diversionary methods also stopped the other side from identifying new ventures which could have yielded additional intelligence. Successful deception can be the death knell for any intelligence service and can cause grave damage to a country’s national security. The Soviets executed a textbook deception strategy that kept Ames’s true identity as a KGB mole hidden.

If Ames only proved capable of providing the KGB with inconsequential intelligence, they would not have devoted the time and financial resources needed to cultivate and manage a nine-year relationship. In the latter portion of the Cold War, the cash-strapped Soviet Union was

teetering on the brink of economic collapse. Their once prosperous centrally planned economy was crumbling from within. The Soviet military was caught in a quagmire in Afghanistan, and Moscow found itself flailing to stay afloat in the waters of a newly emerging globalized economy. In addition to their lack of financial resources, the KGB had serious bureaucratic inefficiencies that impeded its ability to function effectively. Richard Betts describes such bureaucratic inefficiencies as “*innocent enemies of intelligence*” (p. 9).<sup>[4]</sup> The KGB’s decision to trust Ames would prove to be financially worthwhile when he revealed the identities and actions of CIA moles within the KGB and left Soviet decision makers shocked at the breadth and extent of CIA infiltration.

Like their Soviet counterparts, the CIA also had its own innocent enemies of intelligence. The CIA’s Inspector General’s Report on the Aldrich Ames case revealed that “individual and managerial accountability” (or lack thereof) was at the root cause of the failure of the CIA to notice the dangers that Aldrich Ames posed to the national security interests of the United States (p. 2).<sup>[5]</sup> The report delved into the corrosive workplace culture at the CIA. Bureaucratic managers in the CIA had created a hostile atmosphere that spawned the conditions that led Ames to commit treason. Career promotions and workplace responsibilities were key variables that cannot be ignored when assessing the conditions that led Ames to commit treason. Certain posts that are considered to be less prestigious oftentimes receive the least attention and are typically made up of employees whose career prospects and potential are known, both by the organization and by the individual, as being of the least consequence to the agency and its mission. An ambitious employee pigeonholed into a backwater agency and denied promotion to more desirable postings may typically feel (as Ames did) personally slighted.

Aldrich Ames’s career at the CIA was mired by clashes with senior management and feelings of being slighted by his superiors. During his posting in Ankara, Ames received a promotion to GS-11 and two consecutive yearly fitness reports where he was ranked as “strong” and “proficient” in his daily tasks and professional responsibilities as a member of the clandestine service (p. 2).<sup>[6]</sup> In his third year in Ankara, Ames was placed under the management of Deputy Chief of Station Dewey Clarridge. Clarridge saw Ames as an individual unfit to serve in the clandestine service. Clarridge was unhappy with the number of agents Ames was recruiting and his unseemly behavior, performing acts of incompetence that compromised sensitive operations (such as getting in a “drunk-driving accident” and participating in a “shouting match with a Cuban diplomat at a reception”) (p. 103).<sup>[2]</sup> For this behavior, Ames was severely reprimanded and fell out of favor with Clarridge, who gave Ames poor performance ratings due to his alcoholism and inability to effectively recruit assets. Ames viewed Clarridge as a blowhard who neglected to

see the successes he made in his first two years on the job in Ankara and in his subsequent posting in Mexico. In his last fitness report in Ankara, Clarridge advised CIA staff to relegate Ames to a future in the CIA as an analyst where he would never again be placed in a position in the clandestine service where he had to deal with actors in the outside world. Ames was “deeply bothered” by the “Satisfactory” grade in his final fitness report in Ankara and considered leaving the CIA altogether (p. 9).<sup>[7]</sup>

Ames’s personal life complicated matters further. Even after the biggest accomplishment of his career (handling Arkady Shevchenko), Ames was forced to turn down overseas assignments in the clandestine service due to his wife’s insistence that he stay in the United States. This perturbed Ames, as it not only strained his marriage but also stymied his career prospects. Ames decided to serve a brief post in Mexico, where he met Maria del Rosario Cases, who worked at the Colombian embassy. He attempted to recruit her in the hopes that she would pass along information regarding Soviet diplomats. Ultimately, they fell in love and became engaged. Ames moved back to the United States with Rosario and filed for divorce from his wife. The divorce and settlement conditions placed a heavy financial burden on Ames for years to come. This debt would later propel Ames toward the Soviets as the monetary compensation for spying looked more and more attractive. His post in Mexico marks a significant shift in Ames’s attitude towards the CIA, and pushed him towards a more sympathetic stance regarding the Soviet Union. According to Ames’s coworkers and close friends, Ames often spoke about the CIA’s wrongdoings. He believed that the Soviets were unjustly portrayed by the CIA and US media (pp. 38–43).

<sup>[8]</sup> Following his post in Mexico, Ames applied for a job as a Deputy Chief of Station in Latin America. He was ultimately turned down due to his “poor job performance” (p. 137).<sup>[9]</sup> Perceived slights and his belief that his work was under-appreciated by his managers was at the heart of creating the psychological conditions that made Ames feel entitled to engaging in acts of treason.

### The Impact of Ames’s Treason on the KGB

The mere fact that Aldrich Ames was able to reveal the identity of over a dozen spies within the KGB was but one sign that the KGB had organizational weaknesses that the CIA was able to exploit. The revelation that Aldrich Ames and the CIA had recruited so many spies in sensitive positions within the Soviet intelligence services showed how inefficient the KGB’s counterintelligence operations truly were. Upon receiving intelligence from Ames, the Soviets swiftly and decisively fixed this problem by purging its ranks of traitors. When these double agents were caught by the KGB, the CIA waged a disinformation campaign to obscure the true number of

spies betrayed by Ames in order to protect its legitimacy as an institution in the United States. Congress was to believe that the organization was not lazy and incompetent in its work. Though such disinformation may have quelled concern in Washington temporarily, the full damage would become apparent in the years to come. The damage caused by Ames was revealed to investigators in the CIA and officials on the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee.

The traitors uncovered by Ames raised alarm bells in the Soviet Politburo as soon as their identities were revealed. Almost as soon as the intelligence from Ames was gleaned and proven to be accurate by KGB officials in Washington, Soviet political leaders summarily executed 10 spies implicated in the intelligence dump by Ames. Known as the “Big Dump,” more spies were killed in this one action than at any time in the history of the Cold War. It was at this moment in time, as the CIA saw almost every one of its agents executed all at once, that the hunt for Ames began in earnest. Such behavior, in such a short period of time, led CIA analysts to believe that the KGB was made privy to intelligence from a single source within the CIA. He was the person with access to the case files of double agents working inside the KGB for the CIA. The Soviets knew the CIA would soon begin an extensive mole hunt to find Aldrich Ames. In retrospect, the former KGB officials later admitted that the hastily performed executions were perhaps “the biggest political mistake” Moscow made in the Ames case (p. 142).<sup>[10]</sup> If the Soviets moved slower and more strategically in their shakedown, or if they had chosen to employ the double agents as triple agents, it may have been possible that we might have never known the identity of Aldrich Ames today.

The Soviets had no idea that Aldrich Ames would turn out to be perhaps the most important source the KGB ever recruited in the American intelligence community when he arrived at the Soviet embassy. If a walk-in turns into a trusted partner and a valuable source capable of providing a steady stream of accurate and sensitive information on a regular basis, an intelligence service has, for all intents and purposes, won the lottery. This was the case for the KGB. In an interview with Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), after his arrest, Ames revealed his initial intelligence dump had provided the Soviets with “virtually all of our (CIA) intelligence officer cases, GRU officers, KGB officers around the world” (p. 90).<sup>[7]</sup> This shocked the KGB. Never before had the KGB secured such rich, accurate, and sensitive intelligence from a single source whose recruitment to the KGB was self-induced. The intelligence provided by Ames to the KGB was priceless. His impact on the CIA was severely damaging. Scholars, such as Arthur Hulnick, noted the long-lasting impact the treason of Aldrich Ames had on the American intelligence community:

But the Ames case has caused a different kind of damage that may be longer lasting and more insidious. Ames may, in fact, have gone a long way toward damaging the very fabric of the intelligence community.

—(p. 150)<sup>[9]</sup>

Altogether, Aldrich Ames was a godsend to the KGB. The money, manpower, and time that would have to have been spent uncovering the moles Ames ultimately revealed would have effectively tied the hands of KGB and limited its ability to function effectively. Such a situation would have put the KGB at an even greater operational disadvantage due to their finances. An extensive mole hunt to find the double agents Ames compromised would have impaired the KGB's efforts to gather intelligence and employ the tools of spy craft to deter the CIA from its organizational prerogatives. The Soviets were intimately aware of the damage a rogue mole hunt could do to an intelligence organization. A little more than a decade earlier, the CIA's Chief of Counterintelligence James J. Angleton waged an unrelenting internal campaign to rid the CIA of alleged Soviet moles believed to be operating inside the corridors of Langley. The bitter experience of the Angleton Affair led the next Director of Central Intelligence William Colby to spend fewer resources on counterintelligence and to shift agency emphasis elsewhere. According to Loch K. Johnson, this policy made the CIA "more vulnerable to infiltration" and created an opening for the Soviets to hide Ames from CIA counterintelligence officers (p. 353).<sup>[10]</sup>

The KGB spared itself a costly counterintelligence operation by paying off Aldrich Ames and using his knowledge to shed light on the enemies within their ranks. It was later revealed that the Russians had spent "approximately \$2.5 million dollars" to cultivate and maintain the relationship with Aldrich Ames for nine years (p. 2).<sup>[11]</sup> When Ames provided his first intelligence dump to the Soviets, the KGB was shocked when it found out that some of its most sensitive positions were occupied by American spies. Ames identified some targets that were of little consequence to the overall security of Soviet intelligence operations as many of these were actually "loyal KGB double agents" deceiving the Americans (p. 206).<sup>[12]</sup> Ames also revealed valuable information about the inner-workings of the CIA, American weapons systems, American military strategy, and CIA intelligence collection efforts targeting Soviet assets overseas.

### The Spies Ames Betrayed

The specific number of agents betrayed by Ames will never be known. This was largely due in part to the fact that the CIA engaged in an extensive propaganda campaign to deceive the world (and the Soviets) of the true extent of their losses. Not every mole identified by Ames

was killed, but many of them were tortured in an effort to force them to implicate themselves and any further information or knowledge they may have possessed. Oleg Gordievsky, a British spy working in London as the KGB resident, was recalled to Russia and tortured in an effort to force him to admit to betraying his country. Gordievsky's life was ultimately saved when MI6 helped him defect to Great Britain in the aftermath of his interrogation (p. 122).<sup>[6]</sup> Some of the agents revealed by Ames were lucky and were simply recalled to Moscow and later pardoned after the Cold War ended. Others spies were not as lucky. For traitors such as Vladimir Potashov, it meant over "a decade of torture and manual labor" in a Soviet Gulag (p. 2).<sup>[12]</sup> For "10 spies", among them, Valery F. Martynov (KGB lieutenant colonel), Adolf Tockachev (Soviet defense researcher), and Sergei Motorin (KGB major in Washington), this meant "death" (pp. 330–331).<sup>[6]</sup>

The hastily arranged executions and torturing sessions were proof that superiors in the politburo could not quite come to terms with the fact that some of their highest ranking and most trusted leaders would betray their country and spy for the Americans. The highest echelons of the KGB and Soviet military services were made up of the elites of Russian society. These officials were seen by their overlords in the politburo as the least likely to commit treason. This perception was largely due in part to their families' high standing in Soviet society and investment in the long-term future of the Soviet Union as a global power. It was surprising to Soviet leaders that someone like Dmitri Polyakov would betray his fellow comrades. Polyakov was the highest-ranking Soviet official uncovered by Ames. He was referred to by the CIA as Agent TOPHAT. Polyakov was a general in Soviet military intelligence and had provided the CIA with intelligence on "Soviet weapons systems, nuclear strategy, and details on the Soviet's active chemical and biological weapons program" (p. 3).<sup>[12]</sup> Polyakov was safely hidden for almost two decades during the Cold War before he retired and went home back to Russia in 1980. After Ames leaked his name to the Soviets, he was executed shortly thereafter. The fact that such a high-ranking Soviet general could spend almost his entire career spying for the Americans, without the Soviets being aware of his loyalty, showed that despite all of their operational strengths as an intelligence service, the KGB had its weaknesses that the CIA could exploit. In the case of the Soviets, internal counterintelligence was one of their biggest organizational weaknesses. The day Aldrich Ames offered his services to the KGB, the KGB's biggest counterintelligence threats were effectively neutralized.

### PART III: THE MOLE HUNT—THE CIA & FBI INVESTIGATIONS

The KGB found itself in a tenuous position when it could not block the CIA from learning the fact that 10 of their

most valuable assets had been killed. By hastily executing the American spies, the KGB inhibited its ability to prevent the CIA from carrying out a sweeping counterintelligence investigation. This made it even harder for the KGB to carry out a successful denial and deception campaign that would prevent the CIA from uncovering Ames's identity. Godson and Wirtz describe the two-pronged strategy intelligence agencies used to stymie their adversary's counterintelligence capabilities:

Denial refers to the attempt to block information which could be used by an opponent to learn some truth. Deception, by contrast, refers to a nation's effort to cause an adversary to believe something that's not true.

—(p. 425)<sup>[13]</sup>

Nonetheless, the KGB went into overdrive in their efforts to employ a denial and deception campaign that would effectively keep the CIA from identifying Ames as the mole within their ranks. Benjamin B. Fischer, writing in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, noted the extent of the KGB's plan to keep the identity of Aldrich Ames safely hidden from the Americans:

The KGB had launched a major deception effort to divert, mislead, and confuse the CIA mole hunters, sending them off on rabbit paths that pointed in all different directions except the right one.

—(p. 269).<sup>[14]</sup>

Understanding how the Soviets conducted their campaign to protect Ames sheds light on the tradecraft the KGB employed to sidetrack CIA mole hunters during the nine years Ames remained at large.

## KGB Spy Craft

Upon realizing that Aldrich Ames was not a dangle or low-level agent of little value, the KGB found itself in possession of a valuable asset worth protecting, pleasing, and controlling in order to serve their own interests. After agreeing to spy for the Soviets, Aldrich Ames was placed in the hands of his Soviet handler, Victor Cherkashin. The KGB had a clear interest in establishing a strong relationship with Ames in order to keep him in place at the CIA (and safely anonymous). Practically speaking, this meant keeping Ames happy by providing him with enough cash to feed his lust for money. It also meant monitoring his every move, coaching him through polygraph tests, and scheduling discreet meetings to transmit intelligence documents to KGB officials. Such meetings had to be done outside the purview of American intelligence agents monitoring the Soviets in Washington and keeping tabs on

Ames as part of his ongoing work at the CIA. The KGB monitored Ames's bank accounts, travel, professional contacts, personal relationships, and most importantly, his possession of documents that detailed the CIA's interactions with the Soviet personnel they had recruited to spy on their behalf. Ames and his Soviet handlers communicated with each other by means of conducting personal meetings in areas they knew FBI or CIA operatives could not be present or penetrate (safe sites). Document exchanges were performed under the cloak of secrecy in predetermined areas where American personnel would never be able to intercept the messages (dead drops). Such covert actions were absolutely essential for the relationship to continue and for Ames to remain safely anonymous from American authorities.

In retrospect, the KGB's plan to protect Ames from being outed worked quite effectively despite the fact that the process began sooner than initially expected by Ames's KGB handlers in Washington. For nine years, the KGB was able to protect Ames from arrest by artfully employing an array of diversionary tactics it used throughout the Cold War. Such a feat was particularly impressive considering the fact that on multiple occasions throughout his nine-year handling by the Soviets, Ames's own self-induced actions (which the KGB could not control completely) made his arrest all the more likely. Ames acted impulsively on multiple occasions that raised suspicions. Once attached to Soviet purse strings, he spent excessive amounts of money on expensive cars, clothes, and jewelry. According to a joint OIG/FBI investigation into his finances (conducted after his arrest), Aldrich Ames "purchased a \$540,000 house in cash in 1989 with his only source of income being a government salary of \$40,000–\$50,000 per year." (p. 5).<sup>[15]</sup> He also had a penchant for making large cash transactions upward of \$10,000 on numerous occasions despite the fact that the CIA monitored the financial transactions of its employees as part of its security protocols. Ames openly flaunted his newfound wealth at CIA headquarters. He developed an alibi to mislead his coworkers into thinking he had legally amassed great wealth. The alibi Ames used stated that his wife Rosario had inherited great wealth from her rich and politically connected Colombian father.

Ames's freewheeling spending habits were noticed by security officials at the CIA. A background investigation and subsequent polygraph were performed on Ames in 1990 to gain further information on his reactions to questions that may imply he was involved in illegal activity. To stop Ames from failing his polygraph, the KGB coached him through the process. This effort was to deter the mole hunt from narrowing its focus on Ames. Victor Cherkashin helped coach Ames through the process by creating "psychological conditions" that allowed Ames to answer his polygraph questions "honestly" (pp. 188–189).<sup>[16]</sup> He rehearsed meetings and staged questions that he knew would be asked to an intelligence officer under the same

conditions. These tactics were effective . Ames passed his polygraph examination and avoided further detection for another four years.

The KGB also systematically planted double agents inside the CIA to protect Ames. These individuals were successful in prolonging the mole hunt while causing the CIA to expend millions of dollars in financial resources and added manpower to conduct investigations that would bear no fruit or substantial links to the true sources of their leaks. One of the most notable cases of KGB spy craft was the double defection of Vitaly Yurchenko. Vitaly Yurchenko was a KGB officer whose management responsibilities included overseeing KGB activities in North America. Yurchenko defected to the United States in an effort to re-establish a romantic relationship with a Russian woman with whom he had a previous romantic relationship. When Yurchenko walked into the hands of the Americans, his defection was heralded in the American media as a major propaganda coup. Yurchenko revealed to his American debriefing officer (who ironically was Aldrich Ames) that Edward Lee Howard (a U.S. Marine who ultimately defected to Russia after being named by Yurchenko) was the source of the intelligence leaks that had led to the capture and subsequent execution of “10 American spies working inside the KGB” (p. 134).<sup>[6]</sup> For the Americans, this made sense as Howard had possession of intelligence documents that had led to the murder of some of the agents Ames revealed. After realizing that the Americans were taking advantage of his defection for political purposes, Yurchenko used the event as a pretext to re-defect back to the Soviet Union.

Over the years, questions have lingered regarding whether or not Yurchenko was a dupe all along, who pre-planned his actions in Moscow. Yurchenko actually revealed real intelligence to the Americans about KGB intelligence sources. He legitimately betrayed Edward Lee Howard and corroborated his story from the Soviet perspective as well as providing the Americans with intelligence about Soviet weapons programs and KGB communication techniques. Yurchenko only defected back to the Soviet Union after he believed that his life was being used as a propaganda coup for CIA bureaucrats eager to claim a political victory against the Soviets at a time when the Iran-Contra Affair was destroying the agency’s reputation in the United States. Though some of the details behind the Yurchenko Affair are still unresolved today, Soviet sources confirm that Yurchenko’s treason was based on personal reasons. Soviet sources believe that Yurchenko had never truly felt any fealty towards the United States:

The twists in Yurchenko’s story further illustrate the nature of treason—that it’s most often committed to solve immediate personal problems and is rarely prompted by ideology. Yurchenko never threw away his Communist Party membership card.

—(p. 175)<sup>[1]</sup>

The Soviets were “managing Yurchenko all along” and using him as a “decoy” to divert American attention away from Ames and towards Edward Lee Howard as the real source of the intelligence leak (p. 291).<sup>[14]</sup> Regardless of whether or not Yurchenko was put up to the task by the KGB, his actions had the same effect. Keeping Yurchenko in place for an extended period of time tricked the Americans into thinking that the source of the intelligence leak had been Edward Lee Howard. Since Ames was handling Yurchenko, he was able to ensure that Yurchenko would not threaten his own safety and that the KGB would be aware of all his dealings in the United States. By welcoming him back to Moscow with a hero’s welcome, the KGB was able to use his defection back to Moscow as a propaganda coup, arguing that the Americans had lied all along about his change of heart. The smoke and mirrors employed through the employment of false double agents like Yurchenko worked for the KGB. This act did significant damage to the American intelligence community at one of the most intense periods of the Cold War.

### **The Hunt for Ames in the Intelligence Community**

The defection of Vitaly Yurchenko made counterintelligence a higher priority for the CIA and the FBI. In September 1987, the FBI created a task force to find the leaks revealed by Ames. The FBI could not successfully use the task force if the CIA did not provide it with definitive proof that the mole was emanating from a specific source within the confines of the CIA. As a result of this state of affairs, the FBI task force did not identify Ames:

During this period (between September 1987 and 1991) the FBI investigated other unrelated espionage cases and made attempts to obtain intelligence from the 1985–86 compromises. However, the FBI did not pursue any analytical or investigative effort focused specifically on determining the cause of both the FBI’s and CIA’s 1985–86 losses.

—(p. 6)<sup>[16]</sup>

Ames was able to stay anonymous due in part to the failure of a joint CIA-FBI counterintelligence task force. This occurred because of a major bureaucratic rivalry between the two agencies. Since the CIA had no power to arrest American citizens and the FBI could not carry out counterintelligence investigations on employees at the CIA, it was only natural that a coordinated effort to find and capture Ames could not occur until existing bureaucratic obstacles were reconciled. In the summer of 1991, the two rival agencies joined forces and coordinated for the first time in an effort to “find the source” of the intelligence leaks performed by the mystery mole (p. 47).<sup>[7]</sup>

By 1991, technology had improved and the CIA was able to monitor its employees and document their professional activities electronically. Information such as an intelligence officer's finances, professional contacts, time sheets, performance reports, overseas postings, and access to classified information was able to be produced instantaneously under a new software package developed for the CIA's Counter-espionage Group led by Jeanne Vertefeuille. A careful winnowing process overseen by Vertefeuille, a career bureaucrat who had spent her entire career in the Counter-espionage Group, found that Aldrich Ames was "one of a handful of employees who had access to the intelligence that was ultimately leaked to the Soviets in 1985" (p. 138).<sup>[17]</sup> Shortly thereafter, the FBI was given access to the information and allowed to investigate Ames in the United States. A daring break-in of his home by FBI operatives revealed evidence that implicated Ames as being guilty of espionage. Cryptic documents were found in his trash. The hard drive of his computer was found to contain detailed correspondence between Ames and his KGB handlers. On February 21, 1994, Ames was arrested "just a day before he was to leave to Moscow" to share even more CIA secrets with his Soviet handlers (p. 1).<sup>[18]</sup> After his arrest, the American intelligence community was shocked that a mole had successfully evaded CIA watchdogs for nearly nine years. He had done more damage to American national security than perhaps any other person in American history. After the initial shock subsided and an investigation commenced, Ames revealed the psychological motivations that inspired him to switch loyalties and join forces with the Soviets. Years later, his post-arrest statements would be documented and used as inspiration for the television series, *The Assets*, which aired on ABC in 2014.

#### PART IV: CONCLUSION

A need for money, a series of professional slights, and personal grievances with American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union explain why Ames chose to commit treason against the United States. Each of these motivations was compounded by his many personal shortcomings which grew worse over the course of his career at the CIA. Ames's disposition towards alcoholism and egotism was formed at a young age. The CIA failed to notice the red flag similarities between Ames and his father. Ames was an individual whose personal failings as a husband caused him to fall into the abyss of debt. To get out of this debt, Ames resorted to the only thing he had of value (intelligence documents) to alleviate his financial troubles. After securing \$50,000 in cash from the Soviets for his initial intelligence dump, Ames became attached to Soviet money. He was able to live a life of luxury from this relationship. Ames lived the high life and did so in a manner that blew the cover the Soviets worked so Ames lived an opulent lifestyle that exposed the cover the Soviets worked

so hard to provide him. Buying a \$540,000 house in cash, on a \$40,000 salary, driving a Jaguar, and wearing fancy jewelry and expensive clothes alerted at Langley. These factors played a major role in commencing the investigation that ultimately led to his subsequent arrest.

Though money was a primary motivating factor that led Ames to commit treason, he showed no remorse afterward for his actions. Ames felt disrespected by the CIA. Throughout his career, Ames saw himself as someone of great importance in the CIA. He was the operative who handled the most important KGB defector in the entire Cold War (Arkady Shevchenko). He was fluent in Russian and was an expert on Soviet politics. He had spent time overseas in numerous parts of the world recruiting agents for the CIA. Unfortunately for Ames, his coworkers did not always see him as being such an important piece of the CIA community. His boss Dewey Clarridge tried to demote him and pigeonhole him into unimportant jobs where his presence would not harm the operational interests of the CIA abroad. Ames had made serious mistakes throughout his career that led his supervisors to question his competency as an employee. He drank heavily, lost sensitive documents on numerous occasions, and conducted himself in an inappropriate manner in many of his professional contacts with foreign intelligence operatives.

Ames did not betray the United States for ideological reasons or any personal fealty towards the Soviet Union. He was, however, highly critical of American foreign policy in the Cold War. Ames revealed that he did not see the Russians as the threat that most Americans and their elected officials did:

I also had come to believe that the CIA was morally corrupt. No, my feelings were more intense than this. I had come to believe that it was a dangerous institution. The CIA is all about maintaining and expanding American imperial power, which I had come to think, was wrong. We have no right to behave as if somehow should find an interest in every culture and then pursue our interests in those cultures.

—(p. 146)<sup>[19]</sup>

As someone privy to the most sensitive intelligence on the Soviet Union, Ames knew the true motivations of the Soviets and felt they were blown way out of proportion for political expediency in the United States. The negative view Ames had towards the CIA may have been a side effect of the slights to his professional honor that took place throughout his career in the agency. The fact that Aldrich Ames was clearly a disillusioned individual with personal grievances with the CIA provides us with a good understanding as to why he had no remorse for betraying the United States.

The failure to find Aldrich Ames until nine years after his initial treason will go down in history as one of the

biggest American intelligence blunders of the Cold War. Ames remained elusive to CIA and FBI mole hunters largely due in part to the exceptional tools of spy craft employed by the KGB and the brilliance of his Soviet handler Victor Cherkashin. The KGB's methods of deception fooled the vaunted CIA—an organization with far greater manpower and financial resources. The tactics the KGB employed were nothing short of brilliant. Ames was, in many ways, the perfect spy for the KGB. He had access to the most sensitive information in the CIA and possessed the knowledge the Soviets had always dreamed of obtaining (the names of double agents within the Soviet intelligence services). Ames was bought off for a small sum of money in comparison with the value of the intelligence he gave to the Soviets. His subsequent arrest occurred because of had no remorse for betraying the United States. The unique circumstances of the Ames case show how truly complex and nuanced is the art of espionage. Dire consequences can result from sloppy counterintelligence trade craft. The American intelligence community would benefit from analyzing the mistakes of CIA personnel that served during Ames's tenure at Langley.

## REFERENCES

1. Cherkashin, V.; Feifer, G. *Spy Handler: Memoir of a KGB Officer: The True Story of the Man Who Recruited Robert Hanssen and Aldrich Ames*; Basic Books: New York, 2005.
2. Earley, P. *Confessions of a Spy: The Real Story of Aldrich Ames*; G.P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1997.
3. Lowenthal, M.M. *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 4th Ed.; CQ Press: Washington, DC, 2009.
4. Betts, R.K. *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and, Power in American National Security*; Columbia University Press: New York, 2007.
5. *The Aldrich Ames Case: An Assessment of CIA'S Role in Identifying Ames as an Intelligence Penetration of the Agency*. Unclassified Abstract of the CIA Inspector General's Report on the Aldrich H. Ames Case, Washington, DC, 1994.
6. Wise, D. *Nightmover: How Aldrich Ames Sold the CIA to the KGB for \$4.6 Million*, 1st Ed.; HarperCollins: New York, 1995.
7. Report for the Staff on the Select Committee on Intelligence an Assessment of the Aldrich H. Ames Espionage Case and Its Implications for U.S. Intelligence. United States Senate. One Hundred Third Congress: Second Session; U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1994.
8. Stephenson, K.; Breckenridge, J. *Ames, Aldrich Hazen. Taylor & Francis Encyclopedia of U.S. Intelligence*; Taylor & Francis Group: New York, 2015.
9. Hulnick, A. The Ames case: HOW could it happen? *Int. J. Intell. Counterintell.* **1995**, 8 (2), 133–154.
10. Johnson, L.K. *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*; Routledge: London and New York, 2009.
11. Johnston, D. How the F.B.I. Finally Caught Aldrich Ames. *New York Times*, posted January 27, 1995.
12. Wise, D. Victims of Aldrich Ames. *Time Mag.* **1995**, 145 (21), 56.
13. Godson, R.; Wirtz, J. Strategic denial and deception. *Trends Organ. Crime* **2000**, 1 (6), 5–16.
14. Fischer, B.B. Spy dust and ghost surveillance: How the KGB spooked the CIA and hid Aldrich Ames in plain Sight. *Int. J. Intell. Counterintell.* **2011**, 2 (24), 268–306.
15. Office of Inspector General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. *A Review of the FBI's Performance in Uncovering the Espionage Activities of Aldrich Hazen Ames*, Washington, DC, 1997.
16. Bromwich R. *A Review of the FBI's Performance in Uncovering the Espionage Activities of Aldrich Hazen Ames*; Department of Justice: Washington, DC, 1997.
17. Grimes, S.; Vertefeuille, J. *Circle of Treason: A CIA Account of Traitor Aldrich Ames and the Men he Betrayed*; Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, MD, 2012.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, J. *Sell Out, Aldrich Ames and the Corruption of the CIA*; Penguin Books: New York, 1995.
- Carr, C. Aldrich Ames and the conduct of American intelligence. *World Policy J.* **1994**, 3 (11), 19.
- Kahn, D. An historical theory of intelligence. *Intell. Nat. Secur.* **2001**, 16 (3), 79–92.
- Unclassified Abstract of the CIA Inspector General's Report on the Aldrich H. Ames Case. *The Aldrich Ames Case: An Assessment of CIA'S Role in Identifying Ames as an Intelligence Penetration of the Agency*, Washington, DC, 1994.
- Wiener, T.; Johnston, D.; Lewis, N.A. *Betrayal: The Story of Aldrich Ames, an American Spy*; Random House: New York, 1995.
- Wippl, J. The CIA and Tolkachev Vs. the KGB/SVR and Ames: A comparison. *Int. J. Intell. Counterintell.* **2010**, 4 (23), 636–646.