John Cairncross, RASCLS and a reassessment of his motives

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ABSTRACT
In 1990, John Cairncross was identified as the ‘fifth man’ of the Cambridge Ring of Five. Historians have provided various motivations for Cairncross’ decision to spy for the Soviet Union. Yet, after three decades, he remains poorly understood. Proposed espionage motives have ranged from ideological Communism, an impoverished upbringing in Lanarkshire, and proto-Popular Frontism. Generally, however, it has been assumed that the former, ideological Communism, best explain Cairncross’ actions. This article uses Cialdini’s model of psychological influence to demonstrate the significance of Cairncross’ attitude to British socio-cultural-political norms in rendering him susceptible to NKVD recruitment.

Introduction
John Cairncross, the fifth man of the Cambridge ‘Ring of Five’, was one of the most significant spies of the twentieth century. The KGB officer, Anatoliy Golitsyn, who defected to the West in 1961, referred to ‘a ring of five young men who were all known to one another and possibly University students together who had been recruited to the R.I.S. [Russian Intelligence Service] in the 1930’s’.

It became public knowledge by 1979 that four of these five were Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby and Anthony Blunt. Cairncross was suspected as a spy in 1952 and gave a partial confession in 1964, and the Security Service speculated that he was a candidate for the ‘fifth man’. His status was later confirmed, following the defection of Oleg Gordievsky in 1985. Since 1990, when Cairncross’ identity as the fifth man was made public by Christopher Andrew and Gordievsky, much ink has been spilt detailing Cairncross’ espionage activities as well as other earlier works on the wider ring.

Before that time, several spy-writers, mole-hunters and historians had identified Cairncross as a Soviet agent but assumed that he was a relatively minor figure. Andrew and Gordievsky’s revelations showed that assumption was incorrect, presenting evidence that, aside from having passed highly sensitive information from his various positions in the Foreign Office, the Treasury, Lord Hankey’s office, the Government Code and Cypher School, the Secret Intelligence Service and the Ministry of Supply, he was likely an early ‘atomic spy’.

In addition to identifying spies and detailing their exploits, much scholarship has also been invested in understanding the motivations of agents, how to handle them and how to defend against traitors. The motivations of spies have sometimes been categorised under the terms: ‘money’; ‘ideology’; ‘compromise’; and ‘ego’, collectively forming the mnemonic, MICE. In 1992, in a study on espionage motives, the US’s Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center (PERSEREC) updated MICE to include a more expansive range of reasons: money, ideology, disgruntlement/revenge, ingratiation, coercion and thrills. Disgruntlement/revenge and thrills, in this model,

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replacing ego. PERSEREC analysed 117 spies and found that espionage cases had ‘doubled from the 1950s to the 1970s and then doubled again in the 1980s’. The most common motive, accounting for 60 of the cases, was money.\(^8\)

Randy Burkett, who serves on the CIA’s history staff, has criticised MICE as a term which ‘has outlived its usefulness. Today’s recruiters of agents abroad often pursue non-state actors with complex mixtures of competing loyalties, including family, tribe, religion, ethnicity, and nationalism’. Instead, he suggests adopting the psychologist Robert Cialdini’s ‘six influence factors, reciprocation, authority, scarcity, commitment (and consistency), liking, and social proof – RASCLS’.\(^9\) Cialdini’s model is an analysis of how con-artists ensnare their victims and succeed in keeping them on the hook as their bank balances continue to empty for little reward. Burkett argues that these psychological principles can fruitfully be applied to how intelligence assets can be recruited and maintained despite considerable personal risk. Moreover, the model, when applied to historical case studies, furthers our understanding. For instance, ‘By employing RASCLS we can see that Pyotr Popov did not just spy for money but because his case officer, George Kisevalter, reminded him strongly of his older brother, who had opposed the Soviet regime’.\(^10\)

Typically, Cairncross has been ascribed motives that can be framed under the MICE model; first and foremost, that he was an ideological Communist.\(^11\) As Chapman Pincher put it, Cairncross ‘had experienced poverty and had concluded that Soviet-style communism was the only way of securing social justice’.\(^12\) Second, that he was partly driven by ego. As one of his Soviet handlers, Yuri Modin, succinctly described it, ‘John Cairncross had a sizeable chip on his shoulder’.\(^13\) Getting even with an establishment which he felt had snubbed him was, according to this view, Cairncross’ motive. For his part, Cairncross self-serving attribution of his initial motive was first to coercion. He claimed he feared denunciation to his employers because of his brief association with Communists while at Cambridge. He also contended that his main reason was ideological, though not Communism – rather, patriotism. Working with the Russians, he claimed, could allow him to ‘play a useful part in the coming struggle against German expansionism’, something no major political force in Britain was either willing or able to achieve.\(^14\) He was not a traitor, but a patriot operating in the mould of the Popular Front. In addition to claims to ideological motivations, it is not difficult to detect a considerable degree of ego in such a position: if the government would not stand up to fascism and share information with the Soviet Union, then it was left to men like Cairncross to take matters into their own hands. Cairncross has, in recent years, been the subject of two biographies, both of which situate anti-fascism as the key motivating factor in his decision to work with Soviet intelligence.\(^15\)

Of course, to accept Cairncross’ claims regards his motivations at face value would be foolish, and few, if any, historians have done so. Indeed, Christopher Andrew described Cairncross’ autobiography as ‘unreliable’ and an ‘almost textbook case of psychological denial’.\(^16\) Yet, as this article will show, the usual attribution of ideological Communism to Cairncross does not fully unravel his motives. He was a complicated man, driven by a wide range of factors. The article considers Cairncross’ motives, first by exploring his relationship with Communism, which was highly complex. Second, it will proceed to apply the RASCLS framework, to unpick Cairncross’ motives. It shows that Cairncross’ attitude to the British class system within the civil service, his rejection of what he deemed to be English establishment snobbery, rooted in his upbringing, was key to his initial recruitment. It also shows how careful management by some of his handlers maintained his usefulness as a Soviet asset.

Given the nature of questions posed by this article, little accessible archival material exists. While there are some British materials from the Foreign Office, Security Service and Cabinet Office, which documented the fallout of the Cairncross affair, understandably little of this concerns NKVD recruitment techniques, agent handling or Cairncross’ motives.\(^17\) Meanwhile, Soviet archives are currently inaccessible. As such, it has proven necessary to rely on the published surveys of those archives by Tsarev and West, autobiographical writing by Cairncross and his handler Yuri Modin. Ultimately, the
article offers not a new archival survey, but, drawing on familiar sources, shows that each of the components of the RASCLS model applies to Cairncross and offer a new light into understanding the motivations of this important spy.

**Cairncross and communism**

Hugh Trevor-Roper, who himself knew Philby – and possibly Cairncross too, all three having served in the Secret Intelligence Service – wrote in 1968, that, ‘the young intellectuals of the West, like Burgess, Maclean and Philby, dissatisfied with the social and moral “contradictions” of their society, looked East and saw an idealised Russian communism as the hope of the future’. Similarly, for Phillip Knightley, the basis for the spy ring’s turn to Communism was squarely tied up in the economic failures of the inter-war years. According to the authorised historian of the Security Service, Christopher Andrew, like the other four, Cairncross was drawn to ‘the myth-image of the world’s first worker-peasant state courageously constructing a new society for the benefit of all’. His politics as a student, Andrew suggests, were clear to all. The student periodical, *Trinity Magazine*, even saw Cairncross listed by his fellow students as ‘the fiery cross’. This was, according to Andrew, evidence of the future spy’s ‘passionate Marxism’. Andrew further contends that (still classified) Security Service files suggest that Cairncross had even been a card-carrying member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) while at Cambridge.

Yet, Cairncross’ relationship with Communism, which emerged during his Cambridge years of 1934–36, was complex. According to his biographer, Geoff Andrews, Cairncross was only briefly attracted to Communism during his final student days, had never been a full member of the CPGB, and had already given up the doctrine before his recruitment by the NKVD in 1937. Instead, Cairncross was an unenthusiastic recruit, whose espionage career was a reluctant one. Meanwhile, Andrew’s claim, that Cairncross was dubbed ‘the fiery cross’ because of his well-known public views, is speculative. Cairncross was, according to his brother, the famous economist Sir Alec Cairncross, ‘a prickly young man, who was difficult to argue with and resented things rather readily’. That temperament, combined with his surname and his red hair, may better explain the nickname.

Certainly, publicly available evidence sheds only a little further light on this matter. According to the journalists Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, he admitted that he had indeed been a Party member in his Cambridge years. This, Cairncross would deny in his autobiography. In 1952, when questioned on the matter by the Security Service interrogator, Jim Skardon, Cairncross admitted to briefly travelling in Communist circles before adopting Churchillian politics. In his statement, he wrote, ‘I came under Communist influence very gradually and ultimately attended two or three Party Member meetings, but thereafter I was repelled by the unrealistic and conspiratorial aspects of the doctrine’. Skardon was convinced that Cairncross was telling him the truth, that his association with Communism had been fleeting, others in the Security Service were less convinced. Guy Liddell, for instance, recorded in his diary that,

> A further point which is not in his favour related to an incident reported by the Watchers. He apparently deposited in a wastepaper basket in one of the Parks, a copy of the *Communist Review* of current date. This would have been understandable in the circumstances if the copy had been an old one, but it is difficult to see how a man who describes himself as having given up his Communist ideas and as having become a Churchillian, would go on wasting his time reading such turgid material as the *Communist Review*.

In addition, despite Cairncross’ efforts to present his involvement with Communism as a passing phase, years later Cairncross and his first wife, Gabrielle, were again linked to Communism. According to one observer in 1964, ‘there seemed to be’, in the mind of an acquaintance, ‘a connection of ideas between the Cairncrosses and Communism’.

Interestingly, Cairncross’ brother, Alec first learnt of the allegations of espionage in 1964. He had recently been appointed as the Chief Economic Advisor to the British government, and, as such, the Security Service wished to establish whether he had known of his brother’s activities. The security
official revealed John’s espionage. This shocked Sir Alec, who wrote in his diaries, ‘if anyone else had told me, I would not have believed it’, finding ‘it very hard to reconcile with what I knew of him’. When the first news of John’s espionage broke in the Sunday Times in 1979, the story reduced him to a state ‘of emotional tumult’ and anger; ‘what rankles as it rankled in 1964’ was that John ‘held political views even when having lived with me that he never avowed. To be so close yet so far apart seems a little obscene’. He flatly rejected the notion that his brother had ever been a Communist at Cambridge, recording ‘I am positive that he’d no Communist leanings in 1934–35 when we shared rooms’. However, Alec graduated in 1935, according to John, it was only in 1935 that his Communist sympathies blossomed.

The Soviet sources tend to confirm the picture that Cairncross had briefly been a ‘not very active member of the Communist Party’ at Cambridge but was increasingly committed to the Communist cause. According to Modin, Cairncross’ final handler, before his recruitment Cairncross ‘was already a convinced Communist’ but was uninterested in joining the Party. Further, ‘The result was that Cairncross had little difficulty in obeying [James] Klugman’s [sic] order to break with Marxist theory’. Burgess, when talent scouting Cairncross, claimed that his potential recruit had told him that, ‘It is true, I have abandoned this now (i.e., active membership), but in a theoretical and spiritual sense I shall always remain on the side of the party’. Similarly, Maclean reported, Cairncross had been a party member and ‘he has retained Marxist principles in his subconscious’. In this sense, Cairncross’ relationship was not dissimilar to that of Blunt, who described himself as only ‘a paper Marxist’ before his recruitment by Soviet intelligence. As Miranda Carter has noted, ‘He was far from an obvious choice. He was not a committed Communist’. Indeed, he only elected to accept Burgess’ advances following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Also like Blunt, Cairncross was motivated more by anti-fascism than a desire to spread Soviet Marxism. However, perhaps the most significant factor was another of Burgess’ observations, that Cairncross thought he could ‘achieve a great deal in bourgeois society’. The failure to do so was a significant driver of Cairncross’ decision to spy for the Soviet Union.

Reciprocation

It was the failure to find this acceptance – or reciprocation in the RASCLS model – first at Cambridge and then at the Foreign Office, which proved a critical tipping point for Cairncross. Burkett notes that, in terms of CIA’s recruitment of agents, the efforts of a recruiter in ingratiating themselves with their target is vital, noting ‘One of the easiest ways for a case officer to initiate and develop a relationship with a potential agent is to fill some small need the agent has revealed’. This, for Burkett, was in the form of small gestures, perhaps a gift or favour. In the case of Cairncross, his recruiter and handler, Arnold Deutsch, was able to swiftly identify that his prospective agent was deeply dissatisfied with his lot at the Foreign Office, where he did not feel he was being taken seriously or treated with respect. Deutsch could to ingratiate himself with Cairncross by providing such recognition and, importantly, that he was part of something. Where the Foreign Office did not accept Cairncross, the NKVD did. As Deutsch wrote, ‘[Cairncross] was very glad he could make contact with us and not feel himself cut off from the party.’

To fully recognise this point, it is necessary to understand Cairncross’ early life and upbringing. He was born in 1913 in the small South Lanarkshire mining community of Lesmahagow, his father an ironmonger and his mother a former schoolteacher. The last of eight children, Cairncross initially attended his local school before attending, on a scholarship, the prestigious Hamilton Academy. A bright boy, at the age of seventeen, he went up to the University of Glasgow in 1930 where he remained for two years. He then spent a further two years at the Sorbonne, Paris, before completing his degree in 1936 following a further two years of study at Trinity College, Cambridge. His early life was one of lower-middle-class frugality, a desire for socio-economic improvement facilitated by his
academic excellence. The pinnacle of his climb up the social ladder was his recruitment into the Foreign Office in 1937. Yet this success did not generate the reception he felt his academic and intellectual achievements warranted.

Deutsch was very interested in the psychology of his targets for recruitment. His decisions regarding Cairncross were based on a detailed profile of Cairncross by Guy Burgess which, as noted above, carefully considered the Scotsman's personality and opinions, both political and personal. According to Burgess, Cairncross ‘belonged to that category of petit-bourgeois who is intoxicated with his own success, with the fact that he could raise himself to the level of the British ruling class and has the possibility of enjoying the luxury and delights of bourgeois life’. Moreover, he had worked ‘for six years without any holiday or leisure time’ to fulfil that ambition by ‘get[t]ing into the Foreign Office at any price’. The issue, then, was not some ideological question, but Cairncross’ infatuation with social status.

Rather than finding a receptive Foreign Office, which Cairncross had entered having achieved the top score that year in the civil service exams, he instead found an environment in which his lower-middle-class, Scottish background stood against him. He described the Foreign Office as a ‘prestigious, if alien, world’ in which ‘difference in background was to constitute an insuperable barrier’. Indeed, the otherwise friendly Personnel Officer who inducted Cairncross even went as far as to point out ‘We don’t say Sir’, clearly of the assumption that the lowly, Scottish recruit would be used to such vocal acts of social deference. Of course, Cairncross, wilful and argumentative, did not help his position by quarrelling with colleagues many years and ranks his superior, including Sir Robert Craigie, the Under-Secretary and soon to be British Ambassador to Japan. Cairncross was ‘rebuked’ by a superior for his ‘arrogance’ for that ‘terrible bloomer’.

For his part, Modin, years later was surprised that Cairncross was ever accepted into a branch of the civil service where he would have been deemed ‘boorish, ill-dressed, arrogant, and scornful of either diplomatic or social niceties’. A department where ‘Social background, good manners and good connections counted as much and probably more’ than intellect. That Cairncross left a bad impression among colleagues was in no doubt. John Colville, for instance, who had lunched with Cairncross, described ‘a very intelligent, though sometimes incoherent, bore’. Cairncross’ bosses in the Foreign Office also found fault with their ‘unsatisfactory probationer’, complaining that he lacked ‘sound judgment or ability to conform to office routine’. Looking back on the episode, Sir Alec Cairncross concluded that his brother was ‘a prickly young man, who was difficult to argue with and resented things rather easily’ and that he ‘did not take to the Foreign Office, nor the Foreign Office to him’. As Donald Maclean wrote, at least according to Modin, Cairncross felt isolated at the Foreign Office, that he ‘wasn’t a very engaging sort of chap; he never seemed to talk to anybody at the FO’.

Deutsch was informed by Maclean that, after his recruitment into Soviet intelligence, Cairncross thought ‘himself more clever and better than all the others’. Deutsch concluded that Cairncross feelings of ‘opposition towards his environment’ placed him ‘outside the ranks of his environment’. After his first meeting with Cairncross, he wrote that his recruit was very dissatisfied with his work. Hatred for his social environment which have behaved very untactfully towards him. He drew the following conclusions for himself: they won't keep him for long and that soon he will have to start looking for another profession. He was very happy that we had established contact with him and was ready to start working for us at once.

Modin took a similar view, writing that ‘To be perfectly frank, I think his collaboration with the NKVD was prompted by the boundless hatred their mockery provoked in him. John Cairncross had a sizeable chip on his shoulder, as the English would say’. In short, the Foreign Office, with its atmosphere which Cairncross perceived as elitist, did not provide or reciprocate, to lower-middle-class son of a shopkeeper, the respect to that Cairncross felt he was due. That refusal of social acceptance, not ideology, was the catalyst that turned Cairncross from an anti-fascist Communist sympathiser into a Soviet agent.
Authority

‘Authority’, in Cialdini’s original model, was illustrated by an experiment carried out in the 1970s. Participants in the experiment were willing to deliver electric shocks of up to 450 volts to other participants. Not, it transpires, because they wished to do so, but because, as slaves to their deference to authority, they were commanded to. Most people, it transpires, will submit to perceived authority – this was a fact that spymasters had long been aware of. As Burkett notes, William Donovan’s training manual for the OSS, instructed would-be recruiters thus: ‘From the first give an impression that we are part of a powerful and well organized body – prestige counts heavily.’ It further added that ‘Agents require firm handling’ and that ‘Every agent wishes to feel, even though he has not met him, that he has a “CHIEF” . . . . If he has this it does not matter how far the agent may be removed from the fountain of authority, the deputy symbolizes the chief’. A sense of authority, power and prestige was key in influencing potential agents. Yet also, perhaps more importantly, it was necessary to maintain control of the agent. As Donovan went on to add, ‘Prestige counts very heavily in any secret society, an agent is not going to risk his neck for an organization in which he has not the fullest confidence’.

It is plain that Deutsch and the NKVD operated along similar lines and were keen to provide an aura of power. Come the revolution, Cairncross would be offered a senior position within the new Soviet British civil service. The implication was clear, that it was in Deutsch’s gift, and by extension that of the NKVD, to orchestrate such a promotion. In addition, Cairncross claimed to be being subtly threatened. He had, after all, been approached by a sinister, dangerous and powerful organisation, with the ability to expose him as having associated with Communists at Cambridge, which given his lowly background, would likely spell career ruination. He wrote of his awareness of ‘the cold-blooded tactical deception of the KGB . . . the KGB’s reputation for ruthlessness . . . their treatment of statesmen such as Nikolai Bukharin and the cream of the Red Army’. His ‘first reaction was to fold-up inside . . . hot-headed anger gradually gave way to fatalistic calm and my survival instincts emerged’. He had little option but to go along with the NKVD. Thus, in addition to the carrot of potential promotion was the stick of potential exposure.

Of course, this might well be better read as a self-serving narrative of a highly dubious nature. After all, Cairncross was unconvincingly keen in his autobiography to dispel the notion that he had acted out of a desire to aid the Communist cause or to harm the British establishment. By contrast, Deutsch recorded in a missive to Moscow that Cairncross ‘at once expressed his readiness to work for us and his attitude to our work is extremely serious’. Nevertheless, Cairncross’ retrospective analysis of his initial meeting with Deutsch does suggest that he understood full well that he was dealing with a powerful organisation. Meanwhile, Deutsch soon reported to Moscow that, ‘He trusts us absolutely and we carry great authority with him’.

Scarcity

If Communist sympathies and a failure to find acceptance in the Foreign Office led Cairncross into the arms of the Soviet Union, so too did the threat of Fascism and, in particular, Nazism. Certainly, Cairncross had several direct experiences with both far right-wing politics, and its victims, thanks to study in France, and holidays in Austria and Germany.

In 1932, then a student at the University of Glasgow, Cairncross opted to spend a year, which he later extended to two years, studying in Paris at the Sorbonne. Prior to arriving in Paris, he took a bicycling holiday to Vienna, where

the economic crisis had hit the Austrian people very hard. the country was suffering from violent hostility between the Social Democrats and the governing party of Christian Democrats . . . the large Jewish community would offer a natural target for the Nazis who were becoming more and more powerful.
Once in Paris, he was soon to discover that many of his peers were part of Action Française, ‘a reactionary monarchist movement which I found anachronistic’ and ‘anticlerical and authoritarian’. In his second year in Paris, his classmates by then included German Jewish refugees who had fled Nazi Germany. One such student, François Bondy, who later found fame as a journalist, was to provide Cairncross with a ‘fairly clear picture of what was going on in Germany’.59

During the vacation period of 1934, Cairncross travelled to Germany to observe matters for himself and saw, ‘with alarm, Hitler’s rise to power and the impact of his totalitarian imprint on the country’. This ranged from the increased anti-Semitism and militarism of the people he encountered, one stating that ‘Poland is making things difficult for us. There must be conscription. Yes, Germany must be armed’. The same individual expounded on ‘the evils of the Jews. They are atheist, immoral, dishonest in business and anti-national. The Jews must go’. Meanwhile, the economic problems Germany had faced since 1929, as well as the stigma of defeat in the First World War, loomed large in Cairncross’ analysis of what had occurred in Germany. Cairncross’ disgust was recorded in his diary, and described ‘Hitlerism’, as ‘distinctly reactionary and militaristic, though it has no real programme’.60 It was there, on those trips to Paris and Germany, that the true evidence of fascism and its dangers became obvious to Cairncross. The only political force capable of warding off fascism and Nazism was Communism and the Soviet Union.

In drawing such assumptions, Cairncross was hardly alone. The impact of the rise of fascism on the other members of the Ring of Five, and indeed the left in general, was considerable leading to calls for a united, or popular front against fascism.61 In 1934, Blunt increasingly conscious of the dangers posed by Nazism, became ‘dimly aware that my own position wasn’t quite satisfactory’. He had been studying in Italy and Germany and upon his return to Cambridge was shocked to discover that many if not most of his erstwhile friends, not least Kim Philby, Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess, were increasingly drawn to, or had become, Communists.62 The Communist students, chief among them James Klugmann, drew upon the grave international situation to attract students repelled by fascism to the Communist cause. Klugmann, unlike some of his peers, had a knack for the art of persuasion and, according to Burgess’ biographer Andrew Lownie, ‘made communism appear attractive and simple, a combination of the best of Christianity and liberal politics’. Furthermore, Lownie observed that this new approach, with anti-fascism at its core, ‘chimed’ with the emergent Communist position of uniting the broader left in a ‘Popular Front’ against the Nazi threat.63

During the first half of the 1930s, the Comintern had been advocating the development of militant rank and file movements. Yet the rise of the Third Reich, which posed a direct and existential threat to the Soviet Union, led to a shift in strategy as Moscow demanded a united front against fascism.64 As Georgi Dimitrov summarised at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, opposition to fascism, the ‘paramount immediate problem of the international proletarian movement’, required, ‘establishing unity of action of all sections of the working class in the struggle against fascism’.65 If defeating fascism required working with reformists and anti-fascist elements of the bourgeoisie, then so be it. This shift was significant, as regards the Ring of Five. It meant that the likes of Blunt and Cairncross, though sympathetic to Communism, but far from ideologically pure, could find in the Soviet Union an outlet to fight fascism.

According to Burkett, ‘Scarcity is a recurrent element of a successful recruitment. Recruitment pitches should make clear to potential agents that they are being presented with fleeting opportunities to act on statements they have made concerning their beliefs, goals, or ideals’.66 Certainly, in the context of the turbulent international situation in the 1930s, Soviet illegals, like Deutsch, were in a position to offer an opportunity for young, leftwing intellectuals, like the members of the Cambridge Five, a limited-time offer, to do their bit to support the Soviet Union and defeat the fascist threat. Unlike the British and French empires, which showed little sign of standing up to the threat of fascism, the Soviet Union was the only power on earth with the ideological and moral conviction to stare down the fascist strongmen.
Commitment and consistency

According to Cialdini's model, commitment and consistency are key features of influence. 'Inconsistency', he wrote, is commonly thought to be an undesirable personality trait. . . . On the other side, a high degree of consistency is normally associated with personal and intellectual strength. It is at the heart of logic, rationality, stability, and honesty.67

For Soviet recruiters in the 1930s, this was a key tool with at least some of their agents. The student politics of the 1930s, which emphasised anti-Fascism and the moral bankruptcy of Western Democratic governments, which first attracted young men like Cairncross to Communist circles in the first place, could be easily weaponised in this regard. If young men like Cairncross opposed fascism and believed that civilisation itself was under threat, then to remain consistent they needed to side with the one power, the Soviet Union, taking a stand against the fascist aggressors. Once in the clutches of the NKVD, having already supplied documents, the same arguments to consistency could be applied when doubts emerged or the Soviet Union radically shifted policy – such as the signing of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact in 1939.

The result on the Soviet networks in Britain was profound, as much of its success in recruiting agents had been built on opposition to Fascism and Nazism. Burgess' close friend and staunch anti-Nazi, who had himself briefly dabbled with the NKVD, Gorony w Rees, was disgusted and severed his involvement with Soviet intelligence entirely.68 This was not the case for the Cambridge Five though the pact hit the group like an earthquake. At the time, Burgess and Blunt were holidaying together in France. They raced back to London to meet with Maclean and Philby. So hasty was their return, Burgess was forced to leave his car at Calais. After several hours of argument, the conclusion of the group was, according to Modin, that 'the pact was no more than an episode in the march of world revolution; that in the circumstances it might easily be justified; and that in any event, it did not constitute sufficient pretext for a break with the Soviet Union'. Their 'battle against Fascism' would, he concluded, 'continue'.69 Clearly then, they, unlike Rees, were able to convince themselves, as a group, to remain consistent with their anti-Fascism and thus their connection with Soviet intelligence, even when faced with the evident contradiction that the Soviet Union was no-longer opposing Nazi Germany.

The same was also true of Cairncross, who, rather than view the non-aggression pact as an indelible black mark against the Soviet Union, instead considered it, at least according to his posthumously published autobiography, the result of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. As Geoff Andrews notes, in this instance, Cairncross' argued that his lack of dogmatic ideological commitment and non-party member status assisted his ability to remain aligned to a position he convinced himself was consistent. He contended to have told his handler, Gorsky, that under the existing conditions, that he would not pass on documents and did not do so again until late 1940.70 However, such claims from Cairncross are difficult to square with Tsarev and West's findings in the Soviet archives, which show that at 'the end of 1939 he supplied two War Office directories'.71

These spies' own sense of consistency and commitment, be it to Communism, anti-Fascism and also in Cairncross' case, to a dislike for the British establishment and its policy of appeasement, allowed them to perform elaborate mental contortions chronicled in their own writings.72 They would continue to stay true to their cause, even when the Soviet Union committed atrocities or conducted the rapid shift in policy, from anti-Fascism to a Devil's bargain with Nazi Germany, ostensibly made a mockery of their ideals.

Liking

If the failure of the Foreign Office to provide a suitably warm reception to Cairncross, his desire to defeat Fascism, and acceptance of the authority (and power) of the Soviet Intelligence services, led him into the arms of the NKVD, the personability of his handlers helped to keep him in their service.
Where his Foreign Office superiors appear to have treated Cairncross poorly, Deutsch handled Cairncross with respect and small yet important kindnesses. For example, when they first met, the pair rode in a taxi, ‘this was an event for him – it was the first time in his life that he had ridden in a taxi’. Deutsch also rapidly recognised Cairncross’ love of knowledge and desire to better understand Communist theory,

Every time I met him, he brought with him a list of the most varied questions and explained that he was asking them not because he doubted the justice of our cause but because certain things were not clear to him.

Like Maclean before him, Cairncross was gradually encouraged to provide more and more intelligence, including documents. As Deutsch explained, he was particularly concerned by the well-being of his agents. Ultimately, unlike his Foreign Office colleagues, Deutsch appeared to genuinely like Cairncross, describing him as ‘very modest and kind’ and ‘a lively and warm-hearted person’.73

Significantly, Deutsch was also to offer, as Cairncross confirmed, sums of money, particularly when Cairncross was a junior civil servant on a modest income, which he accepted ‘when there was a real emergency’. However, this was not to render Cairncross financially dependent on Soviet financial assistance, as he recalled ‘they never used the financial weapon against me’.74 Instead, the money appears to have been small gifts used to buy reciprocation and trust, which had the desired effect. For instance, he was gifted £250 as a reward for his ‘long and useful’ service. A grateful Cairncross wrote a note in reply stating, ‘I am delighted that our friends should have thought my services worthy of recognition and am proud to have contributed something to the victories which have almost cleared the Soviet soil of the invaders’. He further promised ‘redoubled efforts in the future’.75 In another example of a similar gift, the NKVD, decided to buy Cairncross a car. This was designed to facilitate meetings with his handler, Modin, but as Cairncross struggled to operate the vehicle, he instead sold it.76 According to Modin, he was also awarded the Order of the Red Banner.77

The warm relationship also resonated with Cairncross and he described Deutsch as having a ‘pleasant and polished personality’. By contrast, he wrote that his next controller, Anatoli Gorsky, an ideological purist, ‘immediately regarded me as an unbeliever’ and that ‘the change significantly affected my relationship with the KGB’.78 According to Modin, when Gorsky was replaced by Boris Krötenschild, who treated Cairncross ‘with simple warmth and humility’, ‘twice as much intelligence’ was produced.79 Modin was also careful to stroke Cairncross’ ego, recalling;

My own relationship with Cairncross remained excellent, because I took care to conduct it on a friendly basis of mutual confidence. I reminded him often that I was very young, that he could teach me a lot and that I admired the quality of his work.80

He also recalled that ‘The crucial thing was to formulate my comments in such a way that my agent believed the initiative had come not from me but from himself’.81 Plainly, for a man like Cairncross, who had through his superior attitude, succeeded in alienating his Foreign Office colleagues and harboured resentment that he was undervalued, Modin’s self-deprecating and deferential attitude was an effective one.

‘Liking’ – the establishment of a positive and rewarding bond – was essential in maintaining a successful relationship between handlers and agents. It also increased the quality and volume of the material they supplied. Deutsch and, later other controllers, provided both gifts and recognition, to which Cairncross responded with both trust and documents. This, of course, relates directly back to the question of reciprocity. Where the British class system, which disadvantaged those from humbler backgrounds, both in terms of economic and social status, alienated Cairncross, his successful Soviet handlers were keen to ensure he felt liked and valued.
Social proof

Social proof, perhaps better thought of as a form of herd mentality, holds that otherwise hesitant individuals will gain confidence in certain behaviours if they see others doing likewise. Thus, if an agent handler can point to others who have conducted similar activities, they can assuage the doubts their asset may harbour, that the task before them is, for example, relatively safe or that it is less morally dubious. According to Burkett, ‘the ultimate social proof is the presence of the case officer, and implicitly the organization behind the case officer, who provide constant reminders that an agent is doing the right thing’.\textsuperscript{82}

In terms of providing evidence of other assets actions from within the ring, there was little Cairncross’ handlers could offer. Where the other four members were known to each other, as friends but also as spies, Cairncross’ role within the Ring of Five was peripheral. There is little evidence that he was aware that the other members of the ring were themselves working with the NKVD, even though he had known them all either professionally or socially. Blunt, he knew from his time at university; Burgess he met socially; Maclean he met in 1936 as a Foreign Office colleague; and Philby he met only in 1943 when both worked for the Secret Intelligence Service. Indeed, Cairncross leaked material to the Soviet Union authored by Philby. This he would have realised was redundant, had he been aware of Philby’s status as a fellow Soviet asset.\textsuperscript{83}

Cairncross’ handlers could not point to specific examples from other members of the ring to bolster his commitment or to calm his nerves. The latter issue, Cairncross’ willingness to take risks on behalf of the Soviet Union, was a constant problem. Initially, he elected not to provide documents to Deutsch, fearing that his lack of experience would result in his exposure. Deutsch, however, ‘managed by working on him to put this right and he started to provide documents’.\textsuperscript{84} This fear was maintained throughout his Soviet espionage career and Modin, his final handler, recalled that Cairncross was a particularly nervous spy, writing that he ‘agonized about getting caught and talked about it whenever we met’.\textsuperscript{85} Modin noted that, hitherto, Cairncross’ previous handler, Ivan Milovzorov, had largely disregarded elementary tradecraft, and that he, Modin, was keen to correct this for both his and Cairncross’ security.

Indeed, when he was well handled and could be encouraged by his controllers, Cairncross was willing to take significant risks. He boasted in his memoirs to smuggling raw decrypts destined for destruction from Bletchley Park during a nearly year-long stint working there between August 1942 and early June 1943.\textsuperscript{86} In 1950, while at the Treasury, he supplied Modin with materials gathered from examining documents from the desk and safe of his colleague, George Oram, who worked on materials on military research and development as well as Atomic energy.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, he and Modin even planned to steal the documents, have them photographed overnight and return them in the morning. This was deemed too risky by the Centre and, besides, Cairncross was suddenly transferred.\textsuperscript{88} Yet, clearly, with encouragement, an otherwise nervous spy was willing to take significant personal risk. This stood in sharp contrast to when he was poorly handled or his controllers were largely absent. To return to Burkett’s statement, the ‘presence’ of quality handlers and ‘implicitly the organization behind the case officer, who provide constant reminders that an agent is doing the right thing’, were vital in gathering high volumes of quality material from Cairncross.

Conclusion

In applying the RASCLS model, a different vision of Cairncross emerges. Rather than being largely driven by Communist ideology or even anti-Fascism, a more complex vision emerges. Instead, through this prism, his dissatisfaction with an English social system from which he felt excluded once he reached the Foreign Office, becomes more significant. This should not, however, lead historians to conclude that Communism was unimportant. On balance, the evidence, particularly that presented by Tsarev and West from the Soviet archives, strongly suggests that Cairncross was
a convinced, if unorthodox, Communist by the time he graduated from Cambridge in 1936. Yet his Communism, as much as anything else was a product of the same dissatisfaction with the class-riddled British establishment which he believed belittled his efforts and presented barriers to the recognition of his intellect and abilities. This brewing resentment was only magnified once he reached the Foreign Office, where his lower-middle-class, Scottish background, combined with his contrarian, ‘prickly’ personality, saw his otherwise promising career stall almost immediately.

Nor should his anti-Fascist views, which were also of the utmost significance to his turn towards Communism at Cambridge, be dismissed. Both of Cairncross’ biographers highlight the central significance of his first-hand exposure to the far right, as a key moment in his political development. Rather, these three issues, Cairncross’ resentment regarding the socio-economic class system in Britain which he believed held him back, the international situation following the rise of the Third Reich, and his growing attachment to Communism, all contributed to a situation in 1937 where he was open to recruitment by the NKVD.

The RASCLS model also fruitfully shows how the NKVD were able, through sophisticated management, to retain his services as a source. Where his peers at Cambridge and the Foreign Office failed to accept Cairncross as truly part of their establishment, Deutsch, Gosky, Modin and other handlers went to great pains to gain Cairncross’ trust and liking. As Burkett noted of reciprocation, handlers gain trust by identifying and being able to ‘fill some small need the agent has revealed’. In Cairncross’ case, that was the kind of deference and respect he felt he lacked in his normal, professional and social life. Yet, despite these small kindnesses, complete with occasional gifts and rewards, Deutsch, and more importantly the organisation he represented, was, according to Cairncross, a potentially menacing one which was able to instil its authority over its agents. Importantly, the NKVD was also able to directly appeal to Cairncross’ anti-fascist sentiments, depicting the Soviet Union as the only moral actor on the international stage willing to stand up to Hitler. When, in 1939, that position came crashing down with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the NKVD was fortunate indeed that Cairncross, as well as the other members of the Ring, remained consistent with their espionage commitments, rather than walking away – as Goronwy Rees did. Finally, as a form of social proof, when Cairncross’ morale was low or his fears had become acute, his handlers like Modin and Deutsch were able, through their reassurances, to assure his fears. It is important to note, that when Cairncross was poorly handled, as he was by Milovzorov and Gorsky, the quantity of intelligence he provided diminished.

Of course, no model or mnemonic device can present an entirely satisfactory window into, or capture the full complexity of, human behaviour – particularly that of spies – yet RASCLS is instructive when applied to Cairncross. Where Burkett presented Cialdini’s RASCLS model as a tool for intelligence practitioners to replace MICE, it is hoped that the application of the model to an historical case study demonstrates its utility to historians and intelligence scholars.

Notes

1. The National Archives [TNA], FCO 158/129, Director general of the Security Service [Sir Roger Hollis] to Bernard Burrows, 18 February 1964.
2. TNA, FCO 158/129, Director general of the Security Service to Bernard Burrows, 18 February 1964. For autobiographical works on the Cambridge ring see: Philby, My Silent War; Maclean, ‘Foreword’, British Foreign Policy; British Library, Add MS 88902/2, Anthony Blunt: Memoir (revised draft), (1983); Cairncross, Enigma Spy.
3. Andrew and Gordievsky, KGB: Costello and Tsarev, Deadly Illusions; Modin, Five Cambridge Friends; Borovik, Philby Files; West and Tsarev, Crown Jewels; Andrew and Mitrokhin, Mitrokhin Archive; Andrew, Defence of the Realm; Davenport-Hines, Enemies Within. Notable biographies and tests on the five include: Boyle, Climate of Treason; Purvis and Huillbert, Spy Who Knew Everyone; Lowrie, Stalin’s Englishman; Knightley, Philby; Netwon, Cambridge Spies; Carter, Anthony Blunt; Milne, Kim Philby.
4. Examples include Leitch and Penrose, ‘I was a spy for Soviets’; Pincher, Their Trade is Treachery; Pincher, Too Secret Too Long.
5. Andrew and Gordievsky, KGB, p. 253.
6. Taylor and Snow ‘Cold war spies’, pp. 101–125; Ehrman, ‘Counterintelligence?’, Studies in Intelligence, pp. 5–20; Varouhakis, ‘Approach for Counterintelligence’, International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence, pp. 494–509; Charters, ‘Have a Go’, Intelligence and National Security; Cunliffe, ‘Hard target espionage’, Intelligence and National Security, early online. In addition, there are also numerous memoirs and autobiographies by Soviet intelligence officers: Myagkov, Inside the KGB; Levchenko, On the Wrong Side; Sudoplatov, Special Tasks; Modin, Five Cambridge Friends; Cherkashin and Feifer, Spy Handler; Bagley, Spymaster.

7. Levchenko, On the Wrong Side, p. 117.

8. Wood, ‘Americans Who Spied Against Their Country Since World War II’, PERS-TR-92-005, Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center, May 1992, http://www.all.net/books/iw/www.dss.mil/www.dss.mil/training/tr92005.pdf [Accessed: 20 June 2021], pp. iii–iv; 8. Similarly, Taylor and Snow, and Herbig and Wiskoff also found, in similar studies, that money had, over time, become the largest motive for espionage. Taylor and Snow ‘Cold war spies’, pp. 101–125; Katherine L. Herbig and Martin F. Wiskoff, ‘Espionage Against the United States by American Citizens 1947–2001’, Technical Report 02–05, Defense Personnel Security Research Center, July 2002, https://fas.org/sgp/library/spies.pdf [Accessed: 20 June 2021], pp. xi–xii.

9. Burkett, ‘Rethinking an Old Approach’, Studies in Intelligence, p. 7; Cialdini, Influence.

10. Burkett, ‘Rethinking an Old Approach’, p. 17.

Taylor & Snow ‘Cold war spies’, p. 105.

12. Pincher, Their Trade is Treachery, p.154.

13. Modin, Five Cambridge Friends, p. 107.

14. Cairncross, Enigma Spy, pp. 62–65.

15. One such historian is the author: Smith, Last Cambridge Spy. See also: Andrews, Agent Molière.

16. Andrew, ‘Cambridge Spies: the ‘Magnificent Five’, p. 226, note 39.

17. TNA, FCO 158/129; KV 2/4108; KV 4/471, CAB 301/270; HO 532/4.

18. Trevor-Roper, ‘The Philiby Affair’, pp. 7; 25.

19. Knightley, Second Oldest Profession, p. 182.

20. Andrew, ‘Cambridge Spies: the “Magnificent Five”,’ pp. 209–210.

21. Cambridge University Library, Special Collections, Trinity College Magazine, ‘Who’s Who’, Easter Term, 1936.

22. Andrew, ‘Cambridge Spies: the ‘Magnificent Five’, p. 216.

23. Andrew, Defence of the Realm, p. 428.

24. Andrews, Agent Molière, pp. 61–65; Andrews, Shadow Man, p. 1.

25. Cairncross, Living with the Century, p. 300. On Cairncross’ hair colour, to which he attributed his ‘prickly’ character, see: Cairncross, Enigma Spy, p. 21.

26. Penrose and Freeman, Conspiracy of Silence, p. 369.

27. Cairncross, Enigma Spy, p. 46.

28. TNA, KV 2/4108, Interview with John Cairncross, 31 March 1952.

29. TNA, KV 2/4108, STATEMENT of John CAIRNCROSS, Principal H. M. Treasury’, 2 April 1952.

30. TNA, KV 4/474, Diary of Guy Liddell Deputy Director General of the Security Service, 1952, 3 April 1952, p. 64.

31. TNA, FCO 158/129, A. F. Maddocks, QF2/343 Arthur Propper, 26 August 1964.

32. Cairncross, Living with the Century, p. 303.

33. University of Glasgow Archive, DC106 Additions, 83/8/23, Handwritten Diaries of Sir Alexander Cairncross, 22 December 1979.

34. See note 27., p. 43.

35. West and Tsarev, Crown Jewels, pp. 210–211.

36. See note 13., p. 107.

37. West and Tsarev, Crown Jewels, pp. 204–205.

38. Carter, Anthony Blunt, pp. 162–164.

39. See note 37.205.

40. Burkett, ‘Rethinking an Old Approach’, p. 14.

41. West and Tsarev, Crown Jewels, p. 208.

42. For full details of Cairncross’ upbringing and education, see Smith, Last Cambridge Spy, pp. 20–49; Andrews, Agent Molière, pp. 7–66.

43. See note 41., p. 205.

44. See note 27., p. 49.

45. Ibid, p. 51.

46. Ibid, p. 52.

47. See note 13., p. 107.

48. Colville, Fringes of Power, p. 30.

49. TNA, FCO 158/129, Edward Youde, Mr John Cairncross: Case History Derived From Head of Security Department File QPF 2/343 (H) [Draft], 28 December 1979; TNA, FCO 158/129, J.E.D. Street to Sir Bernard Burrows, 19 February 1964.

50. Cairncross, Living With the Century, pp. 300–301.
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