

---

## **A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal. By Ben Macintyre, NY: Crown, 2014**

Robert Smith  
*American Public University System*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>  
pp. 117-118

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Smith, Robert. "A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal. By Ben Macintyre, NY: Crown, 2014." *Journal of Strategic Security* 8, no. 4 (2015) : 117-118.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.8.4.1495>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol8/iss4/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

***A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal.* By Ben Macintyre, NY: Crown, 2014. ISBN 978-0804136631. Photographs. Notes. Index. Pp Xii, 384. \$18.00.**

*A Spy Among Friends* by Ben Macintyre is the story of one of the 20th century's most notorious spies: Kim Philby. Many today think of the Cold War only as post World War II. The actuality is the Cold War truly extended from the time the Bolsheviks seized and consolidated power until the final whimper of the Soviet Union on December 25th, 1991. By the middle of the 1930s, the Soviets were deeply infiltrating western institutions, particularly the leading British universities. In this period they recruited many young leftist leaning individuals. The most noted groups of Soviet agents were the Cambridge Five, to which Philby belonged, and the American Rosenberg's who passed American atomic secrets to the Soviets. So why this book when this story has been told more than enough times?

What sets this book apart from the others is in part it revolves around the friendship of Philby and Nicholas Elliott, one of Britain's top spies. This theme is critical to the book, as Elliott is hoodwinked time and time again by Philby. When this theme is intertwined among what one can only see as class or tribal loyalties Elliott's blindness becomes perhaps somewhat easier to comprehend. Elliott and others in MI6 had opportunities to nail Philby time and time again, as well as the others. But the test of class and blood was simply too much to overcome the suspicions that one of their own "club" could betray their upbringing, much less the British Empire. Elliott was simply blinded. Lesser figures than Philby spent years in prison for doing less, but as Elliott remarked off-handedly about one of those, ". . . well he wasn't top league was he?" (293), all but excusing Philby because he did more and was of the right class.

Instead time and time again we return back to the thesis that perhaps during the war, Philby out of exuberance for their gallant Russian ally, lost his proverbial way. Perhaps he had fed them some intelligence. Perhaps he fed them a lot of intelligence, but the self-serving justification for all who knew Philby was this was all for a higher good. What we seem to have at times is the story of deep friendship that almost reads like a love story. Sure, the line was Philby drank a lot. He womanized with a rapacious appetite. He was often off color for a man of his stature and position, but then this seemed to have fit many in the British espionage community. Lest we lose focus, Philby was responsible for the death of many colleagues and western field operatives. It never seemed to enter his conscience that his intelligence leaks were dooming individuals.

What comes across from Macintyre is not only his utter disdain of Philby, but the entire elitism of the gentleman's club that ran the British establishment. Family and breeding would allow for a multitude of sins, missteps, and questionable associations to be swept under the rug because one simply was born to the right family. Macintyre has trouble with Elliott's tale that Philby's sanction would be ruthless to him, cutting him off from civilized society. The

idea of killing him, much less his flight to Moscow never entered Elliott's mind during his professional course of action development. However, Macintyre seems to feel the betrayal ate at Elliott. Elliott's last effort to strike back at Philby may have led to Philby's downfall in the Soviet Union had MI6 approved it. Elliott wanted to have Philby awarded the order of St. Michael and St. George, the 6th most prestigious award in the British honors system with a note to say that ". . . "I can now reveal that Philby was one of the bravest men I have ever known" (292).

If you are a lover of the spy genre in fiction, this is a must read. If you want a model of institutional blindness and the old school network, there are few equals to this work. The master of the spy novel, John Le Carre, added a pithy but quite good afterword. For those unaware of LeCarre's background he worked for a period in MI6 and knew of Elliott, a remote deity in British espionage. LeCarre's *Tinker Soldier Sailor Spy* actually is more believable than Macintyre's book, for the core of this book, the rampant institutional failure makes it such an important read.

*Robert Smith, American Public University System*