

Former Intelligence Officer Responds to *The Fourth Man*

Dr. Richard Rita

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In his book, *The Fourth Man: The Hunt for a KGB Spy at the Top of the CIA and the Rise of Putin's Russia* (Hatchette Books, 2022), and in numerous subsequent media engagements, Robert Baer purports to tell the story of CIA's hunt in the mid-to-late 1990s for another highly damaging Russian mole in its ranks in the aftermath of the February 1994 arrest of Aldrich Ames. It is based primarily on a few key named sources, retired CIA and FBI counterintelligence officers who had some involvement with the investigation, as well as the usual panoply of anonymous sources and outside observers and experts cited in books of this type. Baer paints an ugly picture of an aborted investigation hamstrung by careerist senior officers and sabotaged from the inside by the very mole the investigators were looking for. He all but asserts that this mole, who has never been officially identified and caught, is none other than Paul Redmond, the CIA's legendary, decorated spy catcher and the senior CIA manager of counterintelligence during this time.

I have never talked to Baer, but I can speak with some authority about the joint CIA-FBI investigation looking for this Russian mole. In June 1995, I joined CIA's Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which was charged with working with the FBI to find a Russian penetration of CIA. I was an active participant in this espionage investigation codenamed GRAYSUIT until FBI Supervisory Special Agent Robert Hanssen was

uncovered as a Russian spy and arrested in February 2001. I served as the chief of SIU during 2008–14 and had access to all its historical and contemporary records. After I retired in 2014, I wrote for CIA a highly classified, in-house history of the SIU from its pre-Ames antecedents until Hanssen's arrest. It includes a detailed discussion of the GRAYSUIT investigation.

What I write below is from memory and is not a chapter-and-verse book review, nor is it a response to all of Baer's assertions in his many public comments about his book. I do not address events in the book completely outside my knowledge, such as the alleged unsanctioned and likely quite illegal espionage investigation conducted by some of the author's sources under the witting protection of a CIA division chief. I will point out the book's key factual errors, which render it an unreliable account of what actually happened in the GRAYSUIT investigation during the period Baer covered. I also show how these errors fatally undercut the book's sensationalist implication that Paul Redmond was probably a Russian mole, Baer's "Fourth Man."

Claim: Management Balked and SIU Sputtered, Thanks to the Mole

Baer claims that CIA senior management in the early-to-mid-1990s was reluctant to pursue the

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investigation into a reported Russian penetration of CIA more damaging than Aldrich Ames. Moreover, the author asserts that SIU was marginalized or effectively disbanded in November 1994, and that source reporting was withheld from it—both developments allegedly masterminded by Redmond trying to hamstring the investigation because he was the mole.

The Facts

CIA management was seized with finding the reported mole “more damaging than Ames” and provided resources to do so. To assert otherwise is false. Redmond was the key CIA senior working to secure those resources. When I arrived in SIU in June 1995, it was my job as a senior analyst to work with the FBI squad and CIA officers assigned to GRAYSUIT. I was part of an almost tripling of specially vetted personnel assigned to SIU—an augmentation agreed upon by senior CIA and FBI management in November 1994 to reinforce the investigation and work with new information about this penetration and on other cases. I and others had access to all espionage reporting from sources that included “Max,” Baer’s key source for the mole hunt, as well as access to FBI investigatory results. SIU was hardly marginalized, shut down, relegated to researching dusty historical files, or denied access to any contemporary reporting in November 1994.

Claim: Off-the-Books Agents Were Run by the Mole

Baer alleges that Redmond ran “back-pocket agents” in the mid-1990s, whose information was denied

to SIU or shaped by him to minimize any connection to him as the mole.

The Facts

CIA and FBI investigators, myself included, had access to all information from any source bearing on the GRAYSUIT case, including from the purported “back-pocket agents” as well as other reporting sources. I and others developed intelligence requirements for agent meetings and worked with raw reporting, not massaged information. This included being briefed on the details surrounding the collection of that reporting—something rarely allowed. We operated in a highly compartmented world where information was strictly controlled and limited to a small group of operators, analysts, and investigators. This is not back-pocket agency; this is topnotch case security against a hard target that may be secretly operating within your organization.

Redmond at the time was the CIA’s senior manager overseeing the GRAYSUIT investigation, among others. I personally briefed him and, on a regular basis, wrote highly compartmented assessments on developments in GRAYSUIT and other investigations that were circulated to Redmond and other witting CIA seniors. This included on occasion the Director of Central Intelligence. My analysis was shaped in the normal and regular analytical debates the GRAYSUIT team had about source reporting, the importance of specific lead elements, and their application to specific investigation candidates.

Claim: Only One Person Fit the Lead Very Well and Was Protected by the Russians

Baer asserts Redmond was singularly positioned to fit the investigative lead elements and the Russians went to great efforts, including perhaps sacrificing assets, to protect him as their source.

The Facts

The investigation’s candidate matrix comprised dozens of CIA officers, and that list regularly changed because of new information, investigation results, or revised analytical conclusions. This was an iterative process conducted by several FBI and SIU officers like myself in ad hoc discussions, scheduled reviews, and off-site meetings. Redmond was indeed a primary matrix candidate as a result of his access to compromised cases and his connections to other lead elements. But so were other senior- and mid-level CIA Russia operations and counterintelligence officers, some of whom would fit as well or better than Redmond in the rankings as we worked through the information. This phenomenon was true for most of our espionage investigations.

What distinguished Redmond and other senior matrix candidates from the beginning, however, was the fact that they had access to ongoing Russia source reporting across the board and knowledge of a host of sensitive CIA cases and operations directed at the Russia target (and others). Contrary to Baer’s claim, people working Russia operations and counterintelligence were not blind to developments in and about Russia. Quite the opposite. As a rule, we regarded the successful running and importance of these foreign intelligence

and counterintelligence assets, cases, and operations as a critical exculpatory factor in investigations.

Most critically for GRAYSUIT, Redmond knew the identity of all the sources helping us with that investigation. One can go through all the wilderness-of-mirrors explanations as to why Redmond, if he were the mole, would not compromise these sources to the Russians to save his skin, but experience shows that penetration agents go to extraordinary lengths to neutralize such dire threats to their security. Ames and Hanssen certainly did so. Perhaps the most well-known historical case of how far a threatened penetration will go is Kim Philby's betrayal of Konstantin Volkov.^a

So how does Baer explain how important cases survived if Redmond was reporting to Moscow? You can, as Baer does, conduct all the convoluted analysis you want in trying to explain why the Russians would compromise an active, important CIA penetration agent like Jim Nicholson to protect Redmond or any asset, but the reality is that they don't. You can try to explain away, as the author does, the Russians' willingness to let secrets hemorrhage, but not the secrets that were actually hemorrhaging if Redmond compromised our knowledge about them to the Russians.

Finally, you can try to find a psychological reason for Redmond's or any agent's unwillingness to compromise CIA or FBI sources and programs for fear he would be on an investigation short list. Indeed, that sometimes happens. Inevitably, though, a spy's reasons

for spying—money, self-esteem, ideology, revenge—win out and the spy gives up the crown jewels of their access and knowledge. In short, spies spy and work to remove obstacles and threats to their spying. As part of our normal analytic process, we considered all the above possibilities; we didn't simply disregard them out of hand. In my experience, it turns out that Occam's Razor is a valuable approach, even in counterintelligence.

Claim: The Mole Manuevered the Removal of Those Closing in on Him

Baer asserts that the SIU's first chief, Laine Bannerman, was cashiered and two other SIU officers were purged from the unit in a defensive move allegedly engineered by Redmond shortly after, in November 1994, they provided senior CIA and FBI counterintelligence officers including Redmond, a profile of the mole they knew pointed directly at him and would be seen as such by the others being briefed.

The Facts

Let's set aside the incredulity of professional mole-hunters knowingly alerting the person they believed was the mole that he had been uncovered. Let's also let pass the stunner that senior FBI and CIA counterintelligence officers would not follow up on a briefing that all but identified that mole literally sitting in their midst.

Bannerman never fully accepted that the rules for mole hunts had changed after Ames. Both CIA and FBI had been severely criticized by

Congress for not working together to find the cause of the disastrous Russian agent losses in the 1980s until 1991 (when Redmond revived the moribund CIA investigation and convinced FBI to join the effort). Presidential Decision Directive 24 in May 1994 reiterated that the FBI was the lead agency for espionage investigations and mandated that a senior FBI officer head the Counterespionage Group (CEG).

Bannerman and the other officers did not leave SIU until fall 1995, almost a year after this alleged briefing and after SIU was expanded and given more resources. Bannerman was replaced as chief because of a well-documented dispute with her immediate supervisors, Ed Curran (from FBI) and Cindy Webb (CIA), the chief and deputy chief of CEG, respectively, over the handling of source reporting and SIU's role in FBI espionage investigations. CEG was the element in the Counterintelligence Center charged with identifying foreign penetrations of the US government and its allies.

When I arrived in SIU in June 1995, Bannerman was locked in a struggle with the leadership over unilaterally holding back CIA information from FBI, which FBI thought relevant to its investigations, and refusing to accept FBI's primacy over SIU in CIA-FBI espionage investigations. In late summer, at Bannerman's request, she and other SIU officers, myself included, met with the chief of the CIC and our CEG supervisors. Bannerman had requested the meeting to complain about the FBI's handling of CIA source information (which she

a. An NKVD agent, Volkov was a would-be defector who could have revealed Philby's spying for Moscow. After Volkov approached the British embassy in Istanbul in August 1945, Philby betrayed him. Volkov was detained and returned to the USSR, where he presumably was executed.

strongly thought threatened source security), FBI's treatment of SIU, and her immediate supervisors' unwillingness to do anything about these issues. She asked the chief of CIC to resubordinate SIU directly under his control.

Not long after the meeting, she received her answer—she was replaced as SIU chief. As a result, the two putatively purged officers, who strongly supported her views, decided to leave as well. The departure of all three had everything to do with policy disagreements and bureaucratic relationships, and nothing to do with a mole's machinations at self-protection. It was open, I saw it, and it's in the official record.

After Bannerman's removal, a new chief was assigned and, over the next few years under her management, SIU worked on a number of Russian penetration cases, achieving notable success in uncovering as Russian spies CIA officer Harold "Jim" Nicholson and GRAYSUIT subject Hanssen.

Conclusion

Lastly, I'd like to address the term "Fourth Man." At no time prior to Hanssen's arrest in February 2001 was the FBI or SIU looking for a Fourth Man. It was looking for the GRAYSUIT subject based on lead information provided by Max and others, going back to 1993. From late 1996 to late 2000, the GRAYSUIT team believed CIA officer Brian Kelley was that subject. The team was horribly wrong. Later information added to the GRAYSUIT lead

matrix conclusively showed that the Russian mole CIA and FBI had been looking for in CIA since 1993 was, in fact, Hanssen. There is absolutely no doubt on this score.

"Fourth Man" was an unofficial term used by some counterintelligence officers in the post-Hanssen-arrest period who believed there were several compromises and other counterintelligence discrepancies that could not be explained by Edward Lee Howard, Ames, and Hanssen. Indeed, after successful espionage investigations and the debrief of a turncoat, there are almost always lead items that are still unexplained. Those unexplained lead items sometimes become the basis of a follow-on investigation. This occurred after the GRAYSUIT case in 2001.

By the mid-2000s, however, SIU had concluded that there was no Fourth Man hiding in the leftovers of GRAYSUIT, having found solid answers to non-Hanssen-related leads, some mentioned by Baer, and having not received any further source reporting deemed reliable on the matter. This did not mean there were (then or subsequently) no other Russian penetrations of the CIA. As Redmond himself reminded those of us working in the counterespionage field, it is "an actuarial certainty" that foreign intelligence agencies have penetrated CIA.

When I was chief of SIU, the unit continued to work diligently on Russian espionage cases with the FBI, however tenuous or strong the

leads were. A Fourth Man investigation was not among them. I am very skeptical, therefore, about Baer's assertions in the book and in interviews that the FBI has had an active investigation on a Fourth Man since the mid-2000s.

Of course, I cannot say what espionage investigations are, or may have been, under way involving SIU, let alone the FBI, since my retirement in 2014. (I subsequently worked off and on as a contractor in SIU until 2021.) I am dismayed, however, over Baer's statements after his book's publication that FBI supports the publication because it may shake loose a person in Moscow willing to sell what he knows about a Fourth Man. This, to me, suggests a foundering investigation, if one exists. Moreover, from a counterintelligence viewpoint, Baer's book may be more likely to shake loose a dangle or double agent controlled by Moscow and peddling disinformation.

Given the book's key factual errors, repeated and enhanced by the author in subsequent public comments, I consider *The Fourth Man* a fictionalized account of actual events—Baer himself calls it a "thriller"—peddling a sensationalist and slyly presented accusation aimed at a CIA counterintelligence legend. It is neither a reliable account of one of the greatest mole hunts in modern US counterintelligence history nor does it provide its readers with an accurate picture of modern counterespionage investigations and operations.



The reviewer: Dr. Richard Rita is a retired CIA counterintelligence officer.