

The release of documents that had previously been classified has shed new light on the Six Day War. The records of spies and double agents, that is individuals whom the Soviet Union thought were their spies but who were actually informants for Israel, has given us new insights on past events. In particular it seems now that Soviet misinformation provided to the Egyptians was the impetus for Nasser's May 15th move into the Sinai, his insistence that the UN peacekeepers leave, and his closing the straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, the three key factors in causing the war. This is because on May 13th Sadat, Nasser's deputy at the time, was informed, falsely, that the Israelis were amassing their army on the northern border preparing to attack Syria. This helps explain why Israeli intelligence had at first placed the likelihood of war in the spring/summer of 1967 as extremely low- reasoning that the Egyptians were tied up with their war in Yemen and the Syrians with political instability at home. Then something changed- now we have evidence that this was a KGB misinformation campaign designed to weaken the US position in the Middle East, in response to its strengthened position at that time in Vietnam.

Spies play a significant role in our Torah and Haftarah portions this week, in the book of Numbers and in the book of Joshua. The spies that Moses sent were less than professional. Leaders of the community, travelling in a pack, I can't imagine

that they were that effective in reconnaissance. And we know that things didn't turn out too well – they had been asked to provide facts and instead provided analysis, reminiscent of other intelligence failures in our own time.

Joshua's spies were more effective. There were just two and they hid successfully in the city of Jericho. They brought back the necessary information without undermining the goals of the campaign.

These stories about spies reminded me of my favorite three Jewish spy stories.

The first is of a fairly well known American Jewish spy, Moe Berg. Berg played major league baseball in the 1930's for the Chicago White Sox, the Cleveland Indians, The Boston Red Sox, and the Washington Senators. He was a back up catcher and a substitute shortstop so people wonder why he was chosen for the 1934 all star team trip to Japan. Now we know that speaking Japanese and being an enthusiastic amateur photographer, he brought back film that was later used in planning the bombing raids of 1942.

Born to immigrant parents in a tenement in New York City, Berg was a Princeton and Sorbonne graduate who spoke 7 languages in addition to his career in baseball. He was drafted by the OSS, precursor to the CIA, and served in Latin

America. Most famously he made a trip to Zurich to assess Germany's nuclear capabilities, while posing as a dumb baseball player.

The most famous Israeli spy is perhaps Eli Cohen, about whom the movie "Impossible Spy" was made. Born in Syria and raised in Egypt, he helped smuggle Jews out of that country in the 1950's and was part of the Lavon affair, a scandal in Israeli politics, when a spy mission to bomb US and British targets and blame the Egyptians, went sour. He spent time in Argentina and then took on his best known mission undercover in Syria. Posing as a wealthy industrialist he moved in the highest circles, advising the Syrian military in the Golan Heights and providing the Israelis with important information in the 1960's. Unfortunately equipment brought by a new Soviet ambassador outed his radio transmissions and he was caught and hung. He was so important that Prime Minister Menachem Begin attended his son's Bar Mitzvah after his death, as an expression of appreciation from the State of Israel.

There are many other spies with dramatic stories, but let me conclude with the story of Vera Atkins, the name used by a young Rumanian Jew whose real name was Rosenberg. She was recruited by the Canadian William Stephenson, known as "agent intrepid", and the inspiration for James Bond. He introduced her to the

German ambassador and she became an important source of British information in the years leading up to World War II. During the war she was a Special Operations Executive, leading Churchill's secret army, and met with Roosevelt's envoy William Donovan, creator of the CIA. Much of what she did remains secret even today, but we do know that she was admired for her steel trap intelligence and her fierce loyalty to her agents. After the war was over she investigated her 118 missing agents, and brought their surviving killers to war crime trials. She secured a confession from Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Hess. Suggesting to him that 1.5 million people had been killed at Auschwitz. "Oh no", he said, as if offended, "It was 2,345,000". Though Atkins remained in the shadows, stories about her have come out in the autobiographies of other spies whom she recruited and trained. She lived to the age of 92, settled in a small cottage on the British coast, from which you can, on a clear day, see France, the focus of so much of her wartime efforts.

These spies and their romantic stories are from another time and place, but perhaps this year, reading the story of ancient spies, we are reminded of the power of espionage to change the course of history, in Joshua's time as well as within our own lifetimes.

