

Author's note:

Since the publication of this chapter in 1999, I have become persuaded that the spy Perseus never, in fact, existed.

CHAPTER 29

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

A famous living atomic spy of half a century ago is located and the problem arises of what to do about it. This chapter is designed to be part of the solution.

I suppose it all started with the publication, in the spring of 1994, of *Special Tasks*, the memoir of the Soviet KGB spymaster Pavel Sudoplatov; the volume, written with his son, Anatoli, and two American coauthors, Jerrold and Leona Schecter, accused the most famous atomic physicists of the period of the World War II Manhattan Project—Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard, and Niels Bohr—of having “knowingly cooperated” with Soviet espionage to help the Soviet Union (then in a wartime alliance with the United States) to enable them to make progress on an atomic bomb.

Sudoplatov, who died in September 1996, was a highly placed KGB official during the war. From 1939 to early 1942, he seems to have run a special section of the foreign intelligence division that handled “wet affairs”: murder, terrorism, sabotage. From 1942 to 1944, he headed the Fourth Directorate of the NKVD, which directed the partisan guerilla operations, including terrorism and sabotage behind German lines. He claimed that Beria made him “director of intelligence” for the Special Committee on the Atom Bomb, though others say that this committee was not formed until August 1945.⁴⁹³

In any case, only two sentences in the Sudoplatov book made the allegations against the three Americans. The charge was that

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Szilard “helped us plant moles in Tennessee, Los Alamos, and Chicago as assistants in those three labs” and that these moles “copied vital documents to which they were allowed access by Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard, who were knowingly part of the scheme.”⁴⁹⁴

None of these charges could be substantiated, and they were implausible on many grounds, including these simple facts: Oppenheimer was carefully watched, Fermi was a staunch anticommunist, and Szilard was not, as alleged, at Los Alamos. (The Bohr allegations involved a meeting that was wholly watched by Allied intelligence at Bohr’s request!) In the end, even *Time* magazine, which initially excerpted the chapter without critical comment, admitted that the critics made a “troubling case” and said the chapter had been “assailed by critics right and left, scientists and historians, American and Russian.” The new post-Cold War Soviet intelligence agency, which had full access to the files of the NKVD and the KGB, denounced the book as a “mosaic of truthful events, semi-truths and open inventions.” It said that Sudoplatov had “access to atomic problems during a relatively brief period of time, a mere 12 months from September 1945 to October 1946” and that his department “had no direct contact with the agents’ network.”

I began following this controversy very closely—after all, it involved the original atomic scientists, and FAS was the child of their sense of responsibility. And I daresay my May/June 1994 FAS *Public Interest Report*, entitled “Atomic Spies: The Implosion of the Sudoplatov Charges,” became the best summary of the controversy.

But, if those distinguished scientists were not the culprits, then who? In the week of June 20, I recalled and dug up an article from the October 4, 1992, *Washington Post* about a living American spy code-named Perseus. In the next week we unearthed, in the Library of Congress, the Soviet (English-language) journal *New Times* from which the *Post* reporter, Michael Dobbs, had gotten his information about Perseus.

On reading this article, I thought I realized who Perseus was

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

because the article quoted a paragraph that Perseus had uttered, fifty years before, to his recruiting KGB officer. And, despite the fact that this paragraph had been translated into Russian and back into English and then modified at least slightly, there was a statement and a turn of phrase that seemed to me to identify the speaker like a thumbprint.

In the *New Times* article, Perseus claimed to have been offered “material support” and said:

Oh no, for God’s sake. I’m willing to cooperate with them for a cause, not for money. I want to dedicate my life to averting the danger of a nuclear holocaust looming over mankind, because I have just realized how real the threat of such a holocaust is, and this prompted me to counter it in the ranks of the Soviet intelligence service.⁴⁹⁵

Any original atomic scientist who would say that he would “dedicate my life to averting the danger of a nuclear holocaust” would be among FAS’s original members, since FAS was set up by the original atomic scientists to do just that and was, indeed, the first organization created for this purpose. If, indeed, such a scientist were still living, then the phrase “dedicate my life” would suggest that he would be helping us still.

In addition, I knew quite well the atomic scientists of conscience who were part of our organization. I had been, after all, their steward for almost a quarter century. I often knew their intellectual physiognomy, better than my brother’s. And the third sentence had a formulation, combined with a point of view, that was again as far as I was concerned unmistakable.

Perseus’s words were “counter it in the ranks of the Soviet intelligence service.” This was the idiom of a scientist who looked at human society in a mechanistic way, as if it were a giant gadget that cried out for appropriate manipulation. I knew only one original atomic scientist whom I could hear, in my mind’s ear, expressing himself in that way.

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

But this was not, of course, evidence. What to do?

I decided to go right to the top of the community of atomic scientists to discuss the general problem of atomic spies. Hans Bethe was a Nobel Prize winner and, as head of the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos, the right-hand man to Robert Oppenheimer. And in the scientific community he was a champion of everything FAS has stood for since 1945. Most important, he was renowned and loved for his decency and integrity. Surely he was the first with whom to discuss this problem.

I had other reasons to visit Ithaca and, in any case, had been regularly consulting with Hans, a sponsor of FAS, about the Sudoplatov case. So there was no problem in justifying a visit without describing my precise concern.

We talked for about six hours about the general situation, including the issue of Alfred Sarant, a Cornell graduate student of physics who had defected to Russia. I read Hans the Perseus “recruiting” exchange without comment. He did not volunteer that it sounded like anyone he knew. And I did not disclose my suspicions.

During a break, when Hans left the room, I had a brainstorm. Since Perseus (and all the other spies of that period) were acting on ideological grounds—and indeed, in their minds, idealistic grounds—not financial ones, why not just invite them to come clean, perhaps after getting suitable assurances from the Justice Department that they would no longer be prosecuted. And since these atomic spies—assuming they were acting out of fear of nuclear war—presumably read our newsletter and/or the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, an advertisement of this kind might be seen.

Hans agreed that this might be put in the newsletter but “not in too large type.” Although he did not say so, I felt he was not keen on having this whole issue of atomic spying raised anew—which was understandable, since this topic is an embarrassment to the scientific community (no doubt some scientists will criticize me for putting this chapter in this book).

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

Scientist X

Later, in another city, I called on the scientist whom I will call Scientist X—the man I thought was Perseus or, if Perseus was a KGB composite, then part of that composite. I did not confront X with my suspicion but simply began—in the context of my Sudoplatov investigation in the current newsletter—by sharing some of the facts I had learned about World War II espionage, including the information in the *New Times* article.

As I read and shared this information, he became visibly frightened. (My wife was with me, and her assessment, later, was that his knees were knocking. His wife told B.J. in an aside, "Nothing good will come of this [investigation]." I felt this was intended to warn me off.)

We parted as friends. And I continued talking to a number of the other original atomic scientists (when I could find them) and to a number of people who had reason to be well informed. In particular, I located a Soviet émigré, Dr. Mark Kuchment, formerly of Harvard's Russian Research Center. It was Kuchment who uncovered the fact that a defecting electrical engineer from Cornell, Alfred Sarant, a friend of the atomic spy Julius Rosenberg, had been living in the Soviet Union as Professor Filip Staros until his death in 1979.⁴⁹⁶ Asked about the *New Times* article by Chikov, Kuchment said it was either an "indiscretion" or a piece of "disinformation."

The word "indiscretion" hit me like a shock. It was, indeed, indiscreet because it reopened the question of atomic spying. What's more, the KGB had made a mistake. Despite KGB efforts to protect its source, the KGB had left in enough to identify X at least to someone, namely me. (And the notion that the article was "disinformation" seemed clearly wrong because there seemed little disinforming about it and the KGB motive of boosting its reputation seemed clear.)

The article in question—"How the Soviet Intelligence Service

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

‘Split’ the American Atom”—was, in fact, a puff piece about a couple, Morris Cohen and Lona Cohen. Its author, Colonel Vladimir Matveyevich Chikov, was a senior officer of the KGB Public Relations Centre. Its obvious purpose was to show that the KGB—not the Soviet atomic scientists—had been the ones who should get the credit for the Soviet atomic bomb.

In the process of lauding the Cohens—who later served Soviet intelligence in Britain as Peter and Helen Kroger—the article recounted the story of how Morris Cohen had recruited Perseus. The KGB had decided to reveal, for the first time, the highly secret recruiting conversation in a file whose notations showed, Chikov said, that it had been seen only by six persons in fifty-five years.

The KGB had obviously doctored the recruiting conversation to protect Perseus because it had an anachronistic reference—Perseus refers to the Pentagon in 1942, before it had been built!

Perseus had been asked by Cohen why he had decided to hand over secret information on the atomic bomb to another country. His response was:

I am convinced that America’s military quarters have cheated nuclear physicists into developing the atomic bomb by telling them that the bomb was intended to save mankind from the danger of Nazism which had engulfed Europe. As a matter of fact, the Pentagon [sic] is of the opinion that it will be quite some time before the Soviet Union harnesses atomic energy. This will take your country decades, it thinks, and in the meantime America will destroy socialism by means of the uranium bomb.

The KGB substituted “the Pentagon” for the *exact* reference made by Perseus lest it tip his identity by revealing his source of information. But Colonel Chikov, or whoever made this substitution for him, did not know, or had forgotten, that the Pentagon was built after the war. I felt sure that the original conversation referred not to the as yet unbuilt “Pentagon” but to “General Groves,” head of the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb.

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

Perseus does refer once, in the quoted conversation, to General Groves. When asked about the "technique of seeing each other," he says, "I am not supposed to leave Los Alamos without Groves' permission, and Groves has to report my departures to the FBI. . . . We can be seeing each other not oftener than once a year, while I am on leave."⁴⁹⁷

Did Perseus have some special relationship to General Groves that required him to report to Groves—with Groves reporting to the FBI? It began to make even more sense to me as I learned more about X and his World War II experience. At one time, he had an office next door to General Groves. And why the special arrangement with Groves regarding departures from Los Alamos? This could be explained by X's left-wing background, which would, inevitably, produce suspicions requiring a special dispensation, which would, in turn, suggest a special security arrangement. Or it could simply be because he worked, or had worked, for General Groves.

Moreover, Groves was just the kind of person whose offhand comments could easily alarm a young, very left-wing scientist into believing that America might "nuke" the Soviets. Groves had very conservative views and was very senior and hence authoritative.

Joseph Rotblat, a British atomic scientist and recent Nobel Peace Prize winner, had written that General Groves had told him the real purpose in making the bomb was to subdue the Soviets.⁴⁹⁸ Such talks might have alarmed a young scientist, who might then have concluded—now I put General Groves in place of "the Pentagon"—that "as a matter of fact, [General Groves] is of the opinion that it will be quite some time before the Soviet Union harnesses atomic energy. This will take your country decades, [he] thinks, and in the meantime America will destroy socialism by means of the uranium bomb."

Indeed, Morris Cohen's response to this observation of Perseus's was to refer to Groves as if they were talking about Groves rather than the Pentagon in the original transcript: "I agree with you that the possession of the atomic bomb will be a strong temptation for generals like Groves."⁴⁹⁹

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

Cohen and Perseus then decided that meeting only on scheduled vacations would not do. Perseus proposed that “we can meet in the small neighboring town of Albuquerque. It is a famous health resort, and you can go there under the pretense of needing medical treatment.”⁵⁰⁰

Following the thought I had in Bethe’s office, I decided to run an advertisement in the *FAS PIR* for people to come forward. But what would it say? Atomic spies were unlikely to come forward if the result were sure to be drastic and certain punishment.

For advice, I called the Justice Department and asked to talk to whoever was in charge of espionage. The head of internal security called, and we discussed the matter on July 5. Espionage, he said, “had no statute of limitations.” In fact, there was a special law that turned the crime committed by the Rosenbergs—spying for an ally, which Russia was during World War II—into a capital offense. He said, “Would you want us, the Justice Department, not to pursue murders just because the crime was over fifty years old?” We agreed that Vietnam-era draft dodgers had received an amnesty. But we recognized that amnesty for atomic spies seemed less likely.

Manhattan Project Security

On July 6 I drove sixty minutes out of town to see the man who had headed security for the Manhattan Project, Colonel John J. Lansdale. I used my newsletter on Sudoplatov, which he had read and for which he had expressed admiration, as a calling card. Lansdale, a very honorable man, had testified in support of Oppenheimer at the Oppenheimer hearings and had thereby destroyed his own career.

He confirmed that General Groves thought it would take the Russians a long time to build the atomic bomb because “we didn’t think the Soviets had the industrial capacity”—this supported my supposition that General Groves was “the Pentagon” in Perseus’s conversa-

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

tion. He remembered X as having been in the Communist Party and said, "Didn't we ease him off the project?" But he wasn't sure.

In fact, it was Lansdale, trained as a lawyer and put in charge of security by General Groves, who "cleared" Oppenheimer. He interrogated Oppenheimer and his wife twice. She, especially, was one of the security community's concerns. But she said, "This is Oppie's big chance, and we're not going to screw it up." He had been persuaded that the Oppenheimers were sincere and had acquiesced in Oppenheimer's being chosen as director.^[501]

In those days, as the atomic scientist Robert Serber explained to me later in New York, people were hired first and cleared later—there was, after all, a war on. People who had Communist backgrounds were not necessarily let go. They were, instead, given special scrutiny. (This seemed to me to support the speculation that Perseus's recruiting conversation referred to a special security arrangement.) For example, David Hawkins, a close assistant to Oppenheimer, had been in the Communist Party, and he had been permitted to continue.

I realized also, from later reading, that X also had been a member of the Communist Party and had made no secret of it in earlier times. This could explain why, if X were Perseus, he expressed the concern for socialism by saying that "America will destroy socialism by means of the uranium bomb." Or perhaps X, like Perseus, was just trying to prevent nuclear war.

On July 7, in the early morning hours, I began examining the Sudoplatov book to see if anything in it might bear on this matter. According to Sudoplatov, the material that reached the spy-ring leader, Anatoli Yatskov, came from "Fuchs and one of the Los Alamos moles" and was carried by couriers, "one of whom was Lona Cohen."⁵⁰²

Since Harry Gold was the courier for the atomic spy Klaus Fuchs, Lona Cohen was not helping Fuchs but presumably was the courier for Perseus—as would be natural if Perseus had been recruited by her husband. These circumstances also indicate that Lona explained her trips by saying that she was going to a TB san-

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

itarium, a tack that is consistent with the suggestion by Perseus that Albuquerque be justified as a site for health cures.⁵⁰³

Advice from a Unique Source: William E. Colby

On that same morning, from 8:30 A.M. to 11:00 A.M., I met with William Colby in his downstairs parlor. I felt things had reached the point where I needed real legal advice and in particular the advice of a lawyer on matters concerning espionage. Who could do this better than my good friend, the lawyer and ex-CIA chief? I told him that I had something so serious to discuss that I wondered if I could retain him as a lawyer and get the benefits of attorney-client privilege.

Since we were friends, I knew better than to offer more than a token and offered him a hundred-dollar bill. He agreed and took the bill. (Some weeks later, he commented wryly on how hard it was to register a “bill” as opposed to a check with his firm.)

As I began to describe the situation, he said, “Don’t tell me the name of the person.” Otherwise, he listened to a pretty full account. His conclusion was that under American law I had no obligation to come forward. What I had was not “evidence” in strict legal terms, and even knowledge of a crime does not require persons to come forward. But if asked by suitable law enforcement to tell what I knew, I would, of course, have to comply fully and truthfully.⁵⁰⁴

Bill wondered whether I should forget about it. Wouldn’t the disclosure and resultant flap wreck my career? He was beginning to give me the kind of avuncular advice that good lawyers give clients. But I interrupted. I said that it was not something that I could, in good conscience, leave alone. The truth should come out, and some way should be found to achieve it. (His reaction to this was that, if I wanted, I could just discuss this in private with a reporter. [Later, reading his autobiography, I learned that he had lived through a quite similar situation as director of the CIA on learning of inap-

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

propriate behavior there. His reactions had been quite similar to mine; in order to get the truth out, he had taken measures that required his former superior, Richard Helms, to face charges.])

By this time I knew well why the statute of limitations for most crimes existed (memories fade, evidence is lost, witnesses die). And it was pretty clear that the Justice Department, even if reminded of this problem and informed of everything I knew, was not likely to be able to persuade a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that someone had been a spy half a century ago—especially if the punishment was likely to be severe. Accordingly, it was not likely to indict X or anyone else. So the urgency and purpose of telling the authorities was undermined by this reflection; moreover, I was interested in truth, not punishment. (Later, on July 15, Colonel Lansdale volunteered that the administration would never pursue a case like this at this late date, confirming my view.)

Continuing with the *PIR*

The next day the July/August *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* had an interesting article by an *Izvestia* correspondent, Sergei Leskov, who reported on the reaction of younger KGB officials to Sudoplatov's disclosure. They denied the truth of Sudoplatov's accusations against the big “four” atomic scientists but said that aside from Fuchs, they had gotten help from six other such agents in America and four in Britain.

As this record shows, I was already keeping daily notes of what was transpiring, with a few key things deleted in case the whole thing was lost or read by someone else without permission. And the log shows that, on Monday morning, I had an idea.

The Justice Department was not strong enough, politically, to recommend amnesty for truth. Even the president was not. But a committee of Congress could, and might, give immunity in return for the full and complete truth. And if the Justice Department were

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

asked by the congressional committee whether it objected, the Justice Department would not object because it would have so little chance of a successful prosecution.^[505] Moreover, the executive branch had some interest in the truth; after all, the intelligence community always wants to know what really happened in past events of this kind. (A few weeks later it even occurred to me that the committee would have, or could have, as its purpose, clearing the Sudoplatov four—Oppenheimer, Fermi, Szilard, and Bohr—by hearing the truth from a real spy!)

Colby thought this idea was interesting and less academic than my first thought of just asking people to come forward. Most important, he felt it would not do the world an injustice if such a scientist got immunity to tell his story. I immediately began delicate discussions with a high-ranking officer of the Senate who understood the immunity statute, in an effort to learn how the system really worked. Another lawyer I respected with very relevant congressional experience thought the idea was “brilliant,” so I began considering it further and pondering various subcommittees.

On July 13 I returned to visit X for about three hours and discussed many relevant things about his past experience in World War II. I mentioned the immunity possibility in the context of my expressed interest in getting the truth out about Perseus. He actually tried to argue against my suggestion of advertising for Perseus to come forward. It was, I think, clear what I wanted. And his wife was very clearly refusing to let us converse alone.

At one point, I told an anecdote of two friends in China awaiting the final capture of Beijing by the armies of Mao Zedong. One friend, a Communist, knows full well what will happen to the other, a non-Communist, when Beijing becomes “red.” The Communist knows his friend is a person of integrity and that he cannot be persuaded to pretend to be a Communist by outright appeals to self-interest. But he wants him to come in out of the cold. Accordingly, he engages in a dialogue, over a number of visits, urging his friend to consider the benefits of ideological conversion and trying to help him change his spots.

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

X thought this amusing. I considered it pretty relevant—a kind of political mirror image of our situation and an example of two friends discussing something without admitting to each other what that something was.

I also explained how someone (e.g., a lawyer or a reporter) could defend Perseus—if he existed—who seemed, after all, trying to prevent nuclear war by jump-starting a balance of terror. Even Bertrand Russell, an arch pacifist, once toyed with the idea of preventive war to prevent the Russians from getting so strong with nuclear weapons that the inevitable war would destroy mankind. X thought this view too intellectual.

Finally, I asked if I could talk to him alone. At this point his wife began carrying on, crying and pointing at him in a clear indication that he was “the one” we were discussing—but without an admission. He said nothing. She suggested I reach a “tacit agreement” with him, saying, “He is good at tacit agreements.” It was all too obvious.

And I remembered that, when the first Dobbs article in *The Washington Post* appeared, I had called X to discuss it. She had gotten on the phone, an unusual occurrence, and started answering for him how, she thought, the whole thing could be explained. She was then, as now, afraid that a direct question would be put and that he, a scientist, would not know how to handle it.

I left with nothing being said and, no doubt, they both hoped that a tacit agreement had been reached. But I was still thinking about what to do.

On July 14 an informed source told me that X had been petrified by Groves and used to shake in his shoes while Groves chewed people out. On July 16 Herbert F. York told me that Groves was “apocalyptic and anti-Soviet”; the historian Stanley Goldberg said that Groves was, indeed, very apocalyptic. Had he ever said that we should “nuke them,” the earlier the better? Goldberg said, “Yes.” This was reason enough to persuade a young idealistic left-wing scientist assisting Groves to believe that the way to “counter”

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

nuclear war would be “in the ranks of the Soviet intelligence service,” as Perseus, in the recruiting conversation, had explained of his motives.

A Gentle Appeal to Reason

On July 18, two days later, I sent a two-page memo, “Atomic Spying: Getting at the Truth,” to X providing my “mechanism and a theory” at which Perseus “if he exists, could come forward voluntarily, with dignity, and with immunity, to help defend the reputation of Oppenheimer.”⁵⁰⁶

My letters to X—drafted on the assumption that they would be read by others at some possibly random time continued to avoid any charge. But the letter noted that the Perseus account in *New Times* “reflects a person trying to respond to the many concerns about strategic imbalance and preventive war from persons like Szilard and John von Neumann.” And I observed that General Groves wrote in his memoir, *Now It Can Be Told*, “Not until each of the great powers had produced a full atomic arsenal would the threat of one-sided atomic war pass.” So even General Groves, it could be argued, believed that a balance of terror was necessary to prevent “one-sided” nuclear war! The letter offered to help find a lawyer “if through you, or others, the Federation could locate a Perseus” who would come forward.

I was increasingly aware, by this time, that all the left-wingers who had helped the Soviets with atomic espionage during the war seemed to have had similar motivations. The book on the Rosenberg case by Louis Nizer shows the Rosenbergs trying to persuade Ruth Greenglass to acquiesce in spying. Julius Rosenberg said, “You see, Ruth, if all nations had the information, then one nation couldn’t use the bomb as a threat against another.” Ethel Rosenberg said, “David [Greenglass] has a chance to prevent a third world war. He can help create a balance of power to preserve peace; I think he

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

will want to do this. Why don't you tell him about it and let him decide?"⁵⁰⁷

And later Greenglass decided that, indeed, "if the two great powers had the atomic bomb, they would offset each other. Perhaps this was the best road to peace." He agreed to provide information. In sum, in those days, when I was under ten years of age, the pro-Soviet left, more sympathetic to the USSR than others, and more suspicious of what U.S. "ruling circles" would do with an atomic bomb advantage, must often have felt that the road to peace was a balance of terror.

Others took the view that Fuchs described in his confession, when he said that "the Western Allies deliberately allowed Russia and Germany to fight each other to the death." The far left had its own view of things. And, indeed, there was support for this. Even then-senator Harry Truman had said, two days after Germany attacked Russia, "If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible."

On July 19, I began thinking of a second newsletter, a sequel to the issue on Sudoplatov's memoir. And this turned into the July/August 1994 *PIR*, entitled "Conscience, Arrogation and the Atomic Scientist."

By this time, I thought I understood the meaning of the word "cheated" in Perseus's recruiting conversation, where he says, "America's military quarters have cheated nuclear physicists into developing the atomic bomb by telling them that the bomb was intended to save mankind from the danger of Nazism."

It meant that Perseus had figured out, in advance of the other scientists, that the Germans were not about to get the bomb. He knew something that was, in general, kept from Los Alamos lest the scientists stop work—that U.S. intelligence increasingly knew the Germans were not getting the bomb. And he knew it, if Perseus was X, because it was X's job for General Groves, to figure this out. X was engaged in "positive" intelligence (i.e., efforts to determine whether the Germans were getting the bomb). There was, after all,

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

a gap of almost two years between those who were persuaded early, and those convinced late, about the German failure to build the bomb.^[508]

The mobilization of scientists to work on the atomic bomb depended importantly on the threat that Hitler might get the bomb first. Without this threat, scientists would have been much less willing to work on a weapon of mass destruction. Since Los Alamos only started in March 1943, the British might have squelched the whole project, had they an interest in doing so, by insisting, in the summer of 1943, that there would be no German bomb. But they had no interest in insisting.

Nor did Groves want to hear any good news of this kind. In 1943, when Michael Perrin, the chief scientific adviser on nuclear matters for British intelligence, took General Groves aside and told him what the British thought, Groves said, "Well, you may be right, but I don't believe you."⁵⁰⁹ Instead, General Groves, eager to keep his bomb program on track, took the line that until we "took into custody a number of the senior German scientists, we faced the definite possibility that Germany would produce a number of weapons before we could."⁵¹⁰ This condition meant waiting until the end of the war! And it gave credence to Perseus's reference to American physicists being "cheated" by exaggerated fears of a German bomb.^[511]

On August 10, with the newsletter in page proofs, I consulted with a lawyer, now dead, recommended by Colby: it was Mitch Rogovin.^[512] He agreed that atomic-scientist spies had a zero chance of being convicted at this stage.

With the newsletter in hand, on August 15 I went to Ithaca and, to my satisfaction, Hans Bethe liked it as did our then FAS secretary Ann Druyan and her husband, the late Carl Sagan. But I told them both that I would not answer direct questions about Perseus. And when Carl persisted, nevertheless, over lunch, in asking whether there was any evidence that Perseus existed that did not originate in Russia, I, forced to say something, misled him by saying, "You can take

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

that line if you want." I did not want to discuss, at that time, the personal evidence that arose in tacitly confronting Scientist X.

(By July 11, 1996, with the release of the VENONA code-breaking material, we see that there was a Soviet spy nicknamed "Pers" who is still unidentified and appears to be Perseus. The National Security Agency refers to "the . . . still unidentified PERS.")⁵¹³

On September 1, X called in response to a letter of August 24 in which I invited him to meet with "FAS's lawyer for Sudoplatov-related affairs" as a way of "orienting him" on such things as "the work you performed for General Groves and your experience during the war." He said he appreciated my letters and agreed to meet, only to call back a bit later to say that his wife objected and that he would respond later.

Nevertheless, the meeting was arranged on September 21 and X arrived. X briefed Rogovin and clearly liked him—and this bonding was the purpose of the meeting as far as I was concerned. Afterward, in the fifteen minutes between Rogovin's departure and X's, X addressed the question of hearings by scientists defending Oppenheimer. Couldn't scientists testify in defense of him and then, if senators accused one of them of being a spy, one could ask then for immunity with which to continue? (This seemed to me, then, to be impractical, since immunity requires a vote of the committee and, later, at least thirty days of waiting. But privately I took it as possibly meaning that he had no strong objection to coming forward if it were forced upon him.)

I decided to assemble the circumstantial evidence against X in an open letter that might get him to come forward. This letter of September 22 was not immediately answered. On October 19, 1994, I received a letter dated October 17 in which X completely denied any legal exposure and said he would expect FAS to defend him if, indeed, he were attacked. I felt my efforts had come to an end and was not sure what to do. But I had not given up.

Accordingly, when, in 1996, I decided to write this memoir, I decided to include a chapter on atomic spying and to reveal what I

Unfinished Business: Atomic Espionage in World War II

knew with a view, on publication, to continuing working, in this new atmosphere of interest generated by the book, on the effort to get out the truth.⁵¹⁴

Of course, the failure of Perseus to come forward has made more complicated the effort to dismiss entirely the charges of Sudoplatov. And it has cast something of a pall over other atomic scientists. For example, Joseph Rotblat, who had the courage to quit the Los Alamos project when the war in Europe was over, was quizzed by *The New York Times* as to whether he was the missing spy. I believe things would become somewhat clearer if X were persuaded to testify, but, no doubt, this would require immunity.

In any case, my speculation to X that the public would understand his position, were it described, was, I felt, borne out in the subsequent release in 1977 of the book *Bombshell* about a similar spy named Ted Hall.⁵¹⁵

I believe that truth heals all. As Mahatma Gandhi once put it in a postcard to a friend of his, "For me, the whole of philosophy is summed up in truth at any cost." And in this case, what cost is there to the truth? Since X's admissions will be valuable to history and cannot be secured without immunity, and since X cannot now be convicted, why not give him immunity and ascertain, among other things, his motives and whatever else he knows? Accordingly, this is the goal toward which he should work and toward which I intend to work on publication of this book.^[516]

