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Physicists & Engineers in the Spy Business—What Does the Record Say About National Reconnaissance?

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Readers of John LeCarre novels most likely have heard about “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy.” Is there another story, “Engineer, Mathematician, Physicist, Spy?” There may very well be when you consider that a physicist was part of the October 1962 intelligence find of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, or when you consider that another student of physics made critical contributions to the U.S. intelligence that debunked the 1960s myth of an American-Soviet “missile gap.” The record suggests the fictions that LeCarre, Ian Fleming, Tom Clancy, and other authors invented have their counterparts in the real world of physics, engineering, and foreign intelligence activities. In fact, I would argue that without the contributions of physicists and engineers to the intelligence discipline of national reconnaissance, the world might not have acquired the intelligence necessary to bring the Cold War to an end, and terrorists might now have an unending advantage as we start our journey through the 21st century.