Jérôme Mellon
@00013234

**Assessment of KGB's Intelligence-Gathering Successfulness
in the West During the Period of 1954 to 1991**

Essay prepared for Professor Paul Maddrell

Intelligence and the History of International Relations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

When Joseph Stalin, USSR Prime Minister since 1941, died on 5 March 1953, Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria, head of the *Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del*[1] (NKVD) since 1938, took that opportunity to launch a vast reorganisation of the Soviet security apparatus. But the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) did not agree on his plans – especially regarding the overhaul of the huge MVD[2] network in East Germany – and had him arrested on 26 June 1953 then executed. However, post-war reorganisation continued and it is in March 1954 that the *Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*[3] (MGB) was removed from the MVD and downgraded from a Ministry to a Committee, the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*[4] (KGB).

The Cold War was in its early years and although the Soviet Union got out of the Second World War weak and relatively devastated, its obsession for security and anti-capitalism led to a period of intense activity for its KGB agents. In the East was established a 'buffer zone' made of satellite states under strong Soviet influence which the KGB helped to create and maintain. And in the West, the KGB mainly sought to cultivate communist ideology and to acquire intelligence which could be useful for the Soviet Union to restore its economic strength and its overall power. Among its targets were West Germany, France, Britain and the United States, each of them being of varying level of priority during the 1954-91 period but all of them always being of major importance for the Soviet Union. This research is aimed at determining to what extent the KGB has been – or has not been – successful in its operations in these Western countries.

---

[1] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.
[2] *Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del* (Ministry of Internal Affairs).
[3] Ministry of State Security.
[4] Committee for State Security.

1.   FRANCE

The KGB was very active in France but more precisely very active in French politics. The well-established and relatively popular *Parti communiste français*[5] (PCF) provided the Soviet Union with a highly valuable access to the French political arena. The KGB, through the PCF, could therefore try to directly influence political events and leaders. At the same time, the KGB's residency in Paris engaged in many long-lasting disinformation campaigns almost all aimed at influencing French political leaders and public opinion. The PCF proved itself to be of great help in intelligence operations and mainly in the recruitment of French secret agents. It was successful in helping the KGB to penetrate the French intelligence community at least until the end of the 1960s.[6]

Apart from controlling the Communist Party, the KGB also attempted to influence the outcome of French elections. The main reason for undergoing operations during French electoral campaigns was to pursue that ultimate objective of dividing the West, which coexisted with that obsessive Soviet fear 'that a powerful Jewish lobby was at work behind the scenes, manipulating much of the political process.'[7]

Thus, the KGB was engaged in active measures during the 1974 French presidential elections to disrupt the Gaullist-led ruling coalition by sowing distrust between the Gaullists and their allies. The goal was to make people believe that Moscow was supporting Valéry Giscard

---

[5] French Communist Party.
[6] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, London, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 360. See Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, p. 369 and Thierry Wolton, *Le KGB en France*, Paris, Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986, 310 p.
[7] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 612.

d'Estaing[8] while, behind the scenes, he was a target of KGB's covert actions. In reality, Moscow – like the PCF – was in favour of François Mitterrand[9]. The KGB's operations included planting false documents reporting an American financial involvement in the campaign[10] but nevertheless, Giscard d'Estaing won the elections – with 50.81 per cent of the votes. All the efforts put in influencing the outcome might well have impressed the CPSU in Moscow but they did not have the expected influence on French voters, although the vote of the left increased. The same pattern reappeared seven years later during the 1981 presidential elections and then again, 'the Centre seriously exaggerated its ability to influence the course of events'[11] and tried to influence the outcome of the elections.[12]

Another 'victory' that the KGB claimed much of the credit for was the decision taken by French president Charles de Gaulle to withdraw from the integrated NATO[13] command in March 1966[14]. The visit of de Gaulle to the Soviet Union three months later might have led us to think that the KGB was justified in claiming credit for the 'anti-Atlanticist' move of France. In fact, the KGB had little influence in such decision. 'Ever since the United States and Britain had rejected his proposal early in the Fifth Republic to join with France in a three-power directorate at the head of NATO, de Gaulle had been increasingly inclined to distance himself form it.'[15] In 1969, the KGB helped in organizing the Gaullist-dominated *Mouvement pour l'Indépendance de l'Europe* expected to become another means to destabilize NATO.[16]

---

[8] Giscard d'Estaing, a neo-Gaullist, campaigned in 1974 as a *républicain indépendant* (right-wing independent republican). He was codenamed by the KGB as KROT (Mole).
[9] Mitterrand, a socialist, was representing the *gauche unie* (united left wing).
[10] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 611.
[11] *Id.*, p. 616.
[12] Mitterrand defeated Giscard d'Estaing by winning the elections of 10 May 1981 with 51.76 per cent.
[13] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a regional defence alliance created in 1949 and regrouping 19 countries.
[14] 'La France ne sera plus 'l'humble auxiliaire' de Washington' said de Gaulle when announcing his decision; Jean-François Lisée, *Dans l'oeil de l'aigle: Washington face au Québec*, Montréal, Boréal, 1990, p. 84.
[15] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 607.
[16] *Id.*, p. 608.

In France as elsewhere in the West, the Soviets were looking for 'technology'. In fact, post-war Soviet Union was deeply in need for technological development and could definitely not afford the lawful acquisition or development of that technology. The KGB therefore played a very important role in acquiring foreign technology to send it back home. In fact, half of its operations were related to science and technology (S&T) intelligence, under the responsibility of Directorate T.

It can be said, however, that the technological espionage in France really was a success by the mid-1970s, reaching its apogee in the early 1980s. KGB's successes included the infiltration of International Business Machine (IBM) and Texas Instrument. These operations as well as many others made France become 'the KGB's third most productive source of S&T, providing 8 per cent of all S&T received by the Soviet Military Industrial Commission (VPK).'[17] The intelligence that went from Paris to Moscow allowed the Soviet Union to improve the quality of Soviet transistors and to bring forward the start of mass production by one and a half years. It also provided the Soviets with crucial documentation and sometimes parts concerning computer networking systems, missile guidance systems, laser weapons, detection systems for high-speed low-flying targets, infra-red night-vision equipment for tanks, helicopters and other uses, France's Ariane rocket and its fuel, Cryogène, and French-British supersonic passenger plane Concorde.[18]

*

---

[17] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 245 and 618. The acronym 'VPK' stands for *Voyenno-promyshlennaya Kommisiya*.
[18] *Ibid.* and 618 and Jay Tuck, *High-Tech Espionage: How the KGB Smuggles NATO's Strategic Secrets to Moscow*, London, Futura, 1986, p. 168.

2.   WEST GERMANY

In the post-war era, West Germany became of great importance for Moscow mainly because of its contacts with Western powers. Military personnel[19] and advanced Western technology were just next door to the KGB's closest allies, the East German Stasi[20]. Therefore, KGB operations in West Germany have been characterized by a high-level of collaboration with the Stasi and more specifically with its foreign intelligence organization, the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*[21] (HVA). Such cooperation – that one could characterize as mainly 'one-way' – was a success for KGB agents who could obtain high-grade intelligence form the HVA.

That did not mean, however, that there was no KGB presence in West Germany. In fact, Soviet agents – as well as East German agents – could easily cross the border and infiltrate the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) dissimulated within the millions of 'refugees' who went from East to West Germany before the building of the wall in 1961.

That KGB presence in West Germany had many objectives. One of them was to intimidate West Germany and try to make it switch from its position of 'American puppet' to a Soviet ally. The intimidation campaign started around 1977 and was based on the assumption that if the Soviet Union was to invade West Germany, the Americans would not hesitate to sacrifice innocent lives by using their nuclear arsenal on West Germany. Considering the relatively small NATO ground forces and their inferiority compared to the Red Army, such a scenario was credible. The solution then proposed by the Soviets was that West Germany could withdraw from NATO and distance itself from the West while getting support from the

---

[19] 'West Berlin and West Germany [...] were the KGB's most successful recruiting grounds for disgruntled US military personnel'; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 232.
[20] Abbreviation for *Ministerium für Staatssichercheit* (MfS), the East German Ministry of State Security.
[21] Main Administration Reconnaissance.

friendly Soviet Union. That very ambitious plan lost its intimidating power when the Americans succeeded in developing a very efficient, precise and powerful new weapon, the Enhanced Radiation Warhead (ERW). In the event of a Soviet invasion of West Germany, the Americans could, from a distance and using ERW, surgically strike Soviet positions. That clearly undermined the KGB's propaganda campaign in West Germany.[22]

As a matter of fact, the Soviet leadership was itself convinced that an atomic attack from the United States on the Soviet Union could happen at any time. The paranoia developed in the 1980s into operation Ryan, a large-scale operation to discover Western preparations for a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union. It became the KGB priority in West Germany, diverting its efforts from other real and more important threats or operations.[23]

During the 1980s, the main aim of the KGB was to 'exploit the opposition of the large and militant West German peace movement to the deployment of US medium-range missiles in the FRG.'[24] The West German government did oppose to the stationing of these missiles on its soil but the KGB is unlikely to have had any significant influence in that decision, although it claimed credit for it.

But the KGB was successful in its penetration operations. Indeed did it succeed in infiltrating the semi-official West German foreign intelligence agency, the Gehlen Org, led by ex-Nazi and CIA 'friend' Reinhard Gehlen[25], as well as the West Germany chancellor's office through the highly-efficient Günter Guillaume.

---

[22] John Barron, *KGB Today: The Hidden Hand*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1983, p. 267.
[23] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 596.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Celina Bledowska and Jonathan Bloch, *KGB CIA: Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Operations*, Twickenham, Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1987, p. 79.

Another priority of the KGB in its objective to gain influence and authority over West German leadership was to discredit politicians as neo-Nazis. The Soviet agents were relatively successful in doing so since many Germans in positions of power did have Nazi background or even had retained some ideological remains from Hitler's era.

The KGB has also been very successful in imitating HVA's method of employing 'Romeo spies', secret agents whose objective was to seduce target individuals – mainly female secretaries – who could then pass to the KGB classified information to which they had access. The KGB did suffer some failures using that technique but overall, the use of 'Romeo spies' was a great success both in terms of quantity of infiltrations and quality of the classified information obtained.

Finally, West Germany was an invaluable source of science and technology intelligence for the Soviet Union, only second to the United States. In fact, 10.5 per cent of all the S&T intelligence transmitted to the VPK was coming from West Germany. Targets of KGB's agents included Bayer, Siemens, Dynamit Nobel, Messerschmitt and Thyssen, all of considerable importance and showing how successful was KGB scientific and technological intelligence-gathering in the FRG.

3.   BRITAIN

Authors Andrew and Mitrokhin divide Soviet intelligence operations in Britain from the 1930s onwards in three phases: a phase of great successes between 1930 and 1950, a second phase of fewer – though still substantial – intelligence successes during the 1950s and 1960s,

and a third one of few major successes and some spectacular failures in the 1970s and 1980s.[26]

The 'golden age' of KGB's operations in Britain was mainly characterized by the ex tensive use of 'illegals[27]', but even more efficient and successful was the use of British-born agents like the famous 'Magnificent Five', a group of five Cambridge graduate students who were recruited by the KGB in the early 1930s[28].

Although the Magnificent Five proved themselves to be very successful in reaching high-level positions within the British establishment[29], one could retrospectively argue that they have been poorly-used. Cleverer use of this extraordinary resource and better understanding of the intelligence gathered by them might have led to more efficient infiltration and might have perhaps prevented Blunt and Cairncross to confess to the British Security Service (MI5) in 1964.

Two other successes, both the work of British agent George Blake, an officer of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6), are worth mentioning. First, his intelligence helped East Germany to get rid of its adversary's agent network in 1953-5, uncovering a total of almost 400 Western agents in the entire Soviet Bloc. The same Blake was also responsible for alerting the KGB, in 1954, to the Western intelligence operation Gold consisting of the construction of a secret tunnel from West to East Berlin.[30]

---

[26] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 518.
[27] Intelligence officers operating abroad under the cover of false assumed nationality.
[28] The group consisted of Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess, John Cairncross, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby. In less then ten years, all of them succeeded in penetrating either the Foreign Office or the British intelligence community, providing Moscow with high-level intelligence.
[29] Except maybe for Burgess whose behaviour might have prevented from being as successful as his four companions. See Celina Bledowska and Jonathan Bloch, *supra* note 25, p. 70.
[30] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 520.

The second phase of the KGB's operations in Britain, in the 1950s and the 1960s, was characterized by fewer intelligence successes. Many of them involved compromising foreign diplomats and Western politicians by using female or male – heterosexual or homosexual – 'Romeo spies', photographing their sexual liaisons and then blackmailing them in order to have them 'cooperate' with the KGB. John Vassall, a clerk for the British naval attaché at the British embassy in Moscow, Tom Driberg, a Labour Member of Parliament and journalist, and Edward Crankshaw, a journalist considered as Britain's most authoritative commentator on Soviet affairs, have all been targets of such blackmailing, as well as staff of many foreign embassies in Moscow.[31]

But by the 1960s, the success of KGB's operations in Britain declined. Moscow seemed desperately in need of new recruits of the kind of Philby. And it had to suffer a painful blow when Oleg Lyalin defected in 1971, causing the expulsion of 105 KGB and GRU[32] agents out of Britain. The British intelligence services saw their counter-intelligence workload diminish and the KGB lost crucial means of access to high-grade intelligence.[33] Thereinafter, the residency operated under tighter surveillance form outside but also under more security constraints from the inside. And the attempt from Moscow to use Philby, back in the Soviet Union since 1963, to discredit British intelligence lamentably failed and caused more diplomatic tensions than it did any good.

It is at the end of the 1970s that the London's residency obtained great successes in scientific and technological intelligence, particularly in the defence field. Around that time, Britain was the fourth most important source of S&T intelligence for the KGB, after the United States.

---

[31] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 522.
[32] *Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye*, Soviet Military Intelligence. For a brief description of the GRU and its relations with the KGB, see Marko Milivojević, "The GRU", *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 1, no. 2, May 1986, p. 281-285.
[33] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 543.

Indeed, during the 1980s, the KGB in London put more emphasis on scientific and technological intelligence since its activities of infiltration, propaganda and other active measures have met with limited success. And the number of defections during the 1980s and the 1990s added to an already not shining picture of the KGB's operations in Britain. During these two decades, despite the relative success of Directorate T in acquiring S&T intelligence, the British counter-intelligence service clearly had the advantage over the Soviets.

4.   UNITED STATES

It is no surprise that the United States, the 'main adversary', became during the Cold War the primary target of the KGB, mainly in the objective of discrediting the capitalist and imperialist Western leader. The main attention was on the United States also because Moscow firmly believed that all the other intelligence and security services, including the British, were completely under American control.[34]

After 1945, the Soviet leadership believed that an atomic offensive from the United States could happen at any time. That unjustified fear led to great efforts in acquiring – mainly using S&T intelligence – nuclear capability. In 1949, four years after the first test of the American atomic bomb, the Soviets had their own bomb – an exact replica of the American one.

During the Cold War, the KGB invested a tremendous amount of efforts and resource in its operations in the United States which resulted in great successes. However, it is difficult to assess whether, in proportion to the efforts invested, the KGB was more successful in the United States than elsewhere in the West.

---

[34] Vladimir Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB: Myth and Reality*, London, André Deutsch, 1990, p. 52.

The KGB was successful both in infiltrating the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and in monitoring the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). One of the most famous KGB agents within the CIA – the first agent of major importance – was Aldrich Ames who 'walked in' the Soviet embassy in Washington to offer his services to the KGB in April 1985.[35] The high-level intelligence provided by Ames and the monitoring of FBI's operations, which was responsible for counter-intelligence within the United States, contributed to the successfulness of KGB's operations in that country.

The KGB is believed to have used the racial tension to weaken internal cohesion within the United States. There have indeed been some violent racial clashes in the United States, especially shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King[36] on 4 April 1968, but it is unlikely that the KGB had a significant influence on the demonstrations and racial hostilities.[37]

But overall, the greatest success of the KGB in the United States has been its scientific and technological intelligence-gathering. Ten years behind other major countries in terms of industrial and economical development, the Soviet Union was facing an extraordinary challenge calling for extraordinary action. The KGB therefore became the tool of such action and successfully penetrated the American industry, both on US soil and abroad, to provide the Soviet Union with intelligence susceptible to help it boosts its economy. In 1980, after the President Richard Nixon years of détente and before the tougher era of President Ronald Reagan, 61.5 per cent of the S&T that was received by the VPK was coming from American sources. One of the most important successes in KGB's infiltration was its operations to

---

[35] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 287.
[36] Civil rights leader Martin Luther King has been a target of the FBI for his continuous criticism of the federal bureau and also a target of the Soviets since the KGB was interested in King as a left-wing charismatic and popular figure.
[37] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 308.

penetrate IBM[38]. That success, combined with other operations in the United States and abroad, and with the use of signals intelligence to intercept communications from scientific or technological installations, made the S&T operations of the KGB its greatest achievement in the United States.

KGB's active measures in the United States were second in importance and were generally less successful than expected. For example, Soviet's attempts to influence the outcome of elections or to blackmail politicians did not seem to have had the expected impact. In fact, active measures were often more effective outside the United States where, for example, France, Denmark and India were more receptive to anti-Reagan propaganda.[39] Also, operations to influence public opinion did not play any major role since the KGB was often trying to influence the public in a direction it was already going to take. It is therefore sometimes difficult to determine if the public opinion during a certain period has been influenced by KGB's operations and if yes, to what extent. One example is the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963 after which the KGB presented to the American people a conspiracy theory involving right-wing leaders and the intelligence community. That theory was more popular than the results of the Warren Commission[40] but one could argue that the KGB simply supported a theory that many Americans had already adopted and therefore played a minor role in the shaping of the public opinion on the plot behind Kennedy's assassination. [41]

*

---

[38] In the United States but also in London, Paris, Geneva, Vienna and Bonn.
[39] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 316.
[40] The Warren Commission has been a commission appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate Kennedy's assassination. Its report was published in September 1964.
[41] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *supra* note 6, p. 299.

CONCLUSION

The KGB placed a great importance on foreign intelligence-gathering because of the Soviet fear of the West and its ideological war against capitalism. And in that battle, the KGB could benefit from the democratic systems and the freedom of expression. Such freedom allowed Soviet intelligence agents to gather tremendous amount of information in open sources, simultaneously decreasing the need to undertake plenty of covert and risky operations.

This essay tried to draw a general picture of the KGB's foreign intelligence-gathering in four Western countries and assess whether it has been successful or not. In France, political operations were clearly less successful than technological intelligence-gathering. In West Germany, the KGB was not successful in its actions to undermine West German alliance with the West but was more efficient in the use of its 'Romeo spies' and in S&T intelligence-gathering. In the case of Britain, KGB's successes were remarkable in the infiltration of the British political and intelligence communities but suffered from painful blows caused by defections in the 1980s and the 1990s. Finally, operations in the United States were, for the KGB, the greatest success in scientific and technological intelligence-gathering but it could be said that it failed to have any significant influence on American public opinion or to have any major impact on American internal cohesion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, 704 p.

Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, London, Penguin Books, 2000, 996 p.

John Barron, *KGB Today: The Hidden Hand*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1983, 491 p.

Celina Bledowska and Jonathan Bloch, *KGB CIA: Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Operations*, Twickenham, Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1987, 192 p.

Vladimir Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB: Myth and Reality*, London, André Deutsch, 1990, 406 p.

Jean-François Lisée, *Dans l'oeil de l'aigle: Washington face au Québec* , Montréal, Boréal, 1990, 577 p.

Marko Milivojević, "The GRU", *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 1, no. 2, May 1986, p. 281-285.

Jay Tuck, *High-Tech Espionage: How the KGB Smuggles NATO's Strategic Secrets to Moscow*, London, Futura, 1986, 211 p.

Thierry Wolton, *Le KGB en France*, Paris, Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986, 310 p.[42]

Also were used my personal notes taken during classes of Intelligence and the History of International Relations taught by Professor Paul Maddrell at the University of Salford, 2001. That source has not been footnoted.

---

[42] Readers could be justified to question the apparent similarities between the approximately fifteen cases used in Thierry Wolton's book and those analysed in Pierre Faillant de Villemarest, *L' espionnage soviétique en France, 1944-1969*, Paris, Nouvelles éditions latines, 1969, 316 p.