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**The Role of the USSR Security Services in the Creation and Maintenance of the
Satellite Regimes of the Post-World War Two Soviet Bloc**

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INTRODUCTION

The present research is aimed at examining to what extent the USSR owed to its security services the creation and maintenance of the satellite regimes of the post-World War Two Soviet Bloc. The security services concerned by this question consist of the Red Army and of the Soviet secret police. The latter changed name several times, being called the *Narodnyi Kommissariat Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*¹ (NKGB) from 1943 to 1946, the *Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*² (MGB) from 1946 to 1953, the *Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del*³ (MVD) from 1953 to 1954, and the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*⁴ (KGB) from 1954 to 1991. For reasons of convenience, the term KGB will be used indifferently of the period to describe the Soviet secret police.

1. EASTERN EUROPE AT THE END OF THE WAR

As the Second World War was coming to an end, the Red Army, one of the most powerful instruments of Soviet power, was in the process of liberating almost the entire Eastern Europe from Nazi Germany. It did succeed in doing so but such a task was only the prelude to an even greater one, namely the creation of what was going to be known as the Soviet Bloc, a group of states first under the influence of communism and later under the control of Moscow. These countries of Eastern Europe, before 1945, showed some similarities among them, like strong parliamentary traditions as well as a certain number of individual rights and freedoms⁵. But overall, they had not much in common with Russia or with one another.

¹ Security and Intelligence Service, within the *Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del* (NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) from 1941 to 1943.

² Ministry of State Security.

³ Ministry of Internal Affairs.

⁴ Committee for State Security.

⁵ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1990, p. 5.

Therefore, what Joseph Stalin⁶ faced in 1945 was not, as one might have been led to think, a group of states that has been following a parallel development to the one of Russia. In fact, Eastern Europe countries and Russia ‘used to be (and still are) strange bedfellows indeed’⁷. But despite that fact, the Red Army could carry on an unparalleled expansion of Soviet power and influence, mainly because of the lack of countervailing power, through a region it had just freed from Nazi occupation. In fact, Western countries would have had great difficulty in trying to export their influence in an area with such a Soviet ‘presence’.

With the information available today, we can reject the proposition suggesting that the creation of the Soviet Bloc was the first step of a broader plan to conquer the entire continent or even the world. Post-World War Two Soviet Union was weak and more devastated than what the average Westerner could perceive. But Stalin did feel the need to establish that ‘buffer zone’, made of satellite states under strong Soviet influence, between the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist West.

2. CREATION OF THE SOVIET BLOC

The post-World War Two Soviet Bloc was made of eight Eastern Europe satellite states on Russian western borders, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia⁸. At a political level, immediately after the liberation of these countries from Nazi occupation, ‘[c]oalition governments with significant numbers of non-Communist ministers, but with the newly founded security services and the other main levers of powers in Communist hands, were established’⁹. They were then to be

⁶ Secretary General of the USSR Communist Party (1922 to 1953) and USSR Prime Minister (1941 to 1953).

⁷ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 5.

⁸ Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were placed under Soviet control in the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1940 and so were already part of the Soviet Union when the creation of the Soviet Bloc started. See Juris Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 5.

⁹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, London, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 322. See also Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 160.

replaced, sometimes with crude violence involving the Red Army, by puppet governments taking their orders directly from Moscow.

The Red Army and the Soviet secret services played a crucial role in the creation of that bloc of states. They could assure uniformity, discipline and order within the satellite states with a great level of efficiency, mainly using the same weapons they used back in Russia, namely intimidation and violent coercion. We can identify two principal steps in the creation of the Soviet bloc: satellization then Sovietization¹⁰.

The first step, satellization, was aimed at ensuring the Eastern Europe countries' loyalty to the Soviet Union. The most efficient way to do so was by using the intimidating Red Army. Already in place in almost all the satellite countries following the end of World War Two, the Red Army proved itself to be the key instrument in the creation of the Soviet Bloc.

The second step in the creation of the Soviet Bloc consisted in duplicating the Soviet model into the domestic system of each and every state of the Bloc in order to turn them into 'replicas' of the Soviet Union. The objective was that '[e]ach People's Democracies [has] a 'little Stalin' at its head' ¹¹.

Since military control of the countries was not sufficient to assure complete order and stability, the KGB was given an important role in the extension of Soviet control to Eastern Europe societies. The crucial role played by the KGB was to establish a series of Soviet-controlled, one-party states along the Soviet Union's western borders. One of the KGB's strategies was to infiltrate national secret services, with or without their collaboration. One example is the case of Romania where the *Siguranța*¹² and the SSI¹³ were infiltrated

¹⁰ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 9.

¹¹ François Fejtö, *A History of the People's Democracies: Eastern Europe since Stalin*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 341.

¹² *Diracțiunea Poliției de Siguranță*, the Directorate of Security Police.

respectively by the NKVD and the national 'Patriotic Guards'¹⁴. The KGB could then gain control of the security services already in place¹⁵, usually appointing its most brutal agents at the head of these services, and benefit from these services' networks to impose Soviet power.

In its methods, the KGB did not have to innovate and could go on continuing what it used to do in Russia, that is to arrest people perceived as opponents to the regime and send them to the camps or execute them. It even set up a number of stage-managed trials on charge of sabotage and espionage. But since the Soviet Union wanted to be seen by the West as respecting democratic values in its expansion in Eastern Europe, it had to avoid, as much as possible, the open use of force. The KGB therefore prioritized the use of intimidation, ubiquitous surveillance and, when important purges were needed, fabrication of evidence of revolutionary movements to set up show trials and have opponents to the regime sent to camps or executed.

3. MAINTENANCE OF THE SOVIET BLOC

Stalin was somehow preoccupied, in the early times of the creation of the Soviet Bloc, that populations within the satellite states would not embrace communism as quickly and as completely as he would have wanted them to. He therefore ordered communist parties to preoccupy themselves with local political and economical issues more than with international revolutionary ambitions. However, putting such emphasis on national issues will prove to have the perverse effect of threatening uniformity within the Soviet Bloc and of contributing to the emergence of divergent individual interests.

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¹³ *Serviciul Special de Informații*, the Special Information Service.

¹⁴ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, London, Hurst & Company, 1995, p. 14.

¹⁵ Except in Yugoslavia and in Albania.

The KGB and its national detachments in Eastern Europe proved themselves to be the key instrument in the maintenance of order in the Soviet Bloc. ‘Their functions were various: [...] they sliced away all potential enemies of Moscow within the East’s lingering independent political parties; they neutralized ‘class enemies’ within the new society which they helped to create; they policed the new concentration camps in which such ‘parasites’ and ‘wreckers’ were housed; they foiled the attempts of the Western powers to subvert the Red order by espionage and propaganda; and they kept watch over the newly-inflated communist parties of the Soviet Bloc’¹⁶. Also, KGB omnipresence offered a guarantee for the preservation of Soviet control in the event of the collapse of the local communist parties and, serving as the ‘shield of the revolution’, the KGB defended the satellite states of the Soviet Bloc against all forms of subversion.

The armed forces - whether they were the Red Army troops or the Soviet-controlled national armies - also played an important role in the maintenance of the Soviet Bloc, mainly in the control of large-scale riots. For example, on 17 June 1953, when workers demonstrated throughout the towns and cities of East Germany¹⁷, ‘the *Volkspolizei* [civil police] proved wholly ineffective in containing the unarmed rioters, while committed party members disappeared from view. Had the Red Army not made its inevitable appearance, the East German party-state would have collapsed’¹⁸.

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¹⁶ Richard J. Popplewell, “The KGB and the Control of the Soviet Bloc: The Case of East Germany”, in Martin S. Alexander (ed.), *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions From 1914 to the Cold War*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, p. 255.

¹⁷ Called, in German, *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* and, in English, the German Democratic Republic or GDR.

¹⁸ Richard J. Popplewell, “The KGB and the Control of the Soviet Bloc: The Case of East Germany”, *supra* note 16, p. 264.

3.1 Purges against 'domesticism'

The separation of Yugoslavia from the Soviet Bloc in 1948-49 sent a message to Stalin saying that overcentralised power and excessive Soviet interference could contribute to the emergence of strong opposition. The heavy-handed Red Army and KGB surely played their role efficiently in firmly establishing the Soviet influence in Eastern Europe but the satellite states, especially Yugoslavia, nourished the idea of an opposition movement against the oppressive Soviet Union.

Instead of revising his policies and strategies, Stalin decided to reaffirm his power using his security services even more extensively. Therefore, as the process of Sovietization accelerated at the end of 1947, the power of the KGB within the Soviet Bloc increased. In the aftermath of the Yugoslav revolution, purges were conducted to fight that 'domesticism'¹⁹ Stalin was so afraid of. Communists were jailed and killed by the KGB in order to reaffirm Stalin's supremacy over the region and if 'earlier an average citizen had been harassed and punished for being against the regime, he could now be tortured even for having shown insufficient support for the regime.'²⁰ Earlier, tens of thousands of innocent people charged of fascist or anti-democratic behaviour 'disappeared' while later, as Stalin increased the level of intimidation, even more people disappeared but without being charged at all.

The bloody purges spread down to the lowest ranks of society. And although motives of the purges are still not certain, one could suggest that Stalin wanted to suppress any other emergence of 'domesticism' and discourage any future threats to his authority from the satellite leaders, especially after Yugoslavia's defection from the Soviet orbit in 1948-49. Just like a repetition on a smaller scale of the purges that took place in the Soviet Union in the

¹⁹ A term used to describe the tendency to look inward and give domestic issues rather than international communism top consideration (see Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 15).

²⁰ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 19.

1930s, the purges of Communists and other citizens in Eastern Europe considerably increased the power of the secret police, turning it into a semi-autonomous entity.

3.2 Suppression of dissidence

The KGB was also very efficient in providing intelligence by using illegals disguised as Westerners. These agents were part of KGB chairman Yuri Andropov's strategy during the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the 1968 Czechoslovakian uprising. Andropov also contributed to the preparation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia²¹ by identifying reliable members of the national Communist Party who would be suitable to form the new government following the invasion²² and by 'fabricating evidence of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy by Czechoslovak 'rightists' and Western intelligence services'²³.

The secret police was also very useful in restoring Soviet-controlled governments after disturbing uprisings such as those of Budapest, Hungary, in 1956 and of Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1968. In both cases, 'the KGB and its Hungarian and Czechoslovak allies [restored] one-party states [...] with remarkable speed and success'²⁴.

4. SOME INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

This section is aimed at presenting domestic particularities in some of the Soviet Bloc countries related to the role played by the Red Army and the KGB in the adhesion of these

²¹ The decision to invade Czechoslovakia was taken on 18 August 1968 and on 26 August, the Czechoslovak delegation signed a secret protocol accepting a 'temporary' occupation by forces of the Warsaw Pact (see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, *supra* note 9, p. 336.).

²² Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, *supra* note 9, p. 329.

²³ *Id.*, p. 333.

²⁴ *Id.*, p. 726.

states to the Bloc as well as their maintenance in the Soviet group of satellites. This section is not an extensive analysis of each of these countries' situation but rather gives examples of the Soviet actions at a state level.

4.1 Czechoslovakia

The inclusion of Czechoslovakia in the Soviet Bloc after the Second World War was characterized by the fact that Stalin was uncertain about what would be the reaction of the West to his seizure of the power in that country. Consequently, he ordered the communists to proceed more gradually. The Red Army and the KGB were in the country and they did undertake the process of satellization and of Sovietization, but the pace was different. The same uncertainty in Western intentions and reactions characterized the situation in Hungary and Stalin therefore gave similar instructions to Hungarian communists²⁵.

The KGB deployed illegals in Czechoslovakia like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but gave them two specific objectives: 'to penetrate the allegedly counter-revolutionary groups springing up during the Prague Spring [of 1968] in order to report on their subversive intentions; and to implement a series of active measures designed to discredit them'²⁶. The Czechoslovak police also played a role in the maintenance of Czechoslovakia in the group of satellite states by intimidating any opposition group with the threat of retaliation from its close ally in the country, the Red Army. Therefore, and since Western countries recognition of the Soviet zone of influence in Eastern Europe made them unlikely to intervene²⁷, the population showed signs of resignation and order could be maintained with relative efficiency.

²⁵ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 14.

²⁶ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, *supra* note 9, p. 330.

²⁷ François Fejtö, *A History of the People's Democracies: Eastern Europe since Stalin*, *supra* note 11, p. 479.

4.2 Hungary

The communists could have seized full power in Hungary as soon as the war was over but Stalin had decided not to immediately abolish the coalition government then in place. By supporting the Hungarian multiparty government until mid-1947, the Soviet Union avoided shocking Western sensitivities by a too rapid takeover. But the Red Army was present in Hungary and it was only a matter of receiving instructions from Moscow before it gradually started the satellization process²⁸.

That first step as well as the Sovietization of the country took place perhaps at a slower speed than elsewhere in Eastern Europe - except than in Czechoslovakia where the situation was somehow similar - but they were successful and lead to the integration of Hungary into the system of the satellite countries.

KGB illegals were sent to Hungary in 1971 just like they were sent in other Eastern Europe countries. However, these agents on Progress operations²⁹ were primarily in Hungary 'to investigate the extent of Zionist influence. They were instructed to report on attitudes to Israel and its trade and economic relations with Hungary, 'the links of Hungarian organizations and individuals with Zionist circles' and the situation in the Writers' Union and other 'creative unions' (where Jewish influence was also believed to be strong).' ³⁰.

4.3 Poland

Poland was undoubtedly of primary importance to the Soviet Union, mainly because of its strategic position in Eastern Europe. Stalin saw as a necessity to establish Soviet rule in

²⁸ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, supra note 5, p. 11.

²⁹ Deployment of illegals disguised as Westerners.

³⁰ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, supra note 9, p. 355.

Poland in order to claim his supremacy over the entire region. Consequently, the Red Army entered Poland and wiped out the existing political and military authorities. The Committee of National Liberation was then established under strict Soviet control and the political reins of the country were then in Stalin's hands³¹. It is true to say that, in a free election, the Polish Peasantry Party led by the popular Stanislaw Mikolajczyk would have won a sweeping victory, even getting support from Communists³². But as of 1945, the country was in Communist hands and the Red Army as well as the KGB were on the field making sure that Poland would stay under Soviet control. In front of these two intimidating instruments of power, and without support from the West, Mikolajczyk's popularity had clearly no political significance.

4.4 Romania

A coalition government was also put in place in Romania, in August 1944. But a few months later, in February 1945, Moscow presented the king with an ultimatum, to which the king complied by appointing Petru Groza as premier of the country³³. The king knew very well that the Red Army was ready - and able - to annex Romania by force: he only had to decide whether or not he wanted to resist before seeing his country fall in Soviets' hands.

The Red Army played its role of ensuring Communist control over the country by taking 'initiatives through the political structure, the trade unions and the educational system which were designed to reduce Romania to subservience to the Soviet Union'³⁴. By breaking the internal existing structures of Romanian society, the Soviet armed forces were preparing the ground for satellization and Sovietization. By installing a climate of fear, police coercion,

³¹ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 9.

³² *Id.*, p. 12.

³³ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 12.

³⁴ Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, *supra* note 14, p. 4.

intrusion and intimidation in Romanians' everyday lives, the KGB was assuring discipline and order throughout the country.

In 1964, the KGB counsellors within the Romanian security and intelligence police were withdrawn from Bucharest. The Romanian services became the first of a Warsaw Pact country to rid itself of its Soviet counsellors, and the DGIE³⁵ became the only foreign intelligence agency among the satellite states to enjoy this privilege down to the collapse of Communism in 1989. This did not mean, of course, that it ceased to collaborate with the KGB.³⁶

The KGB continued to closely monitor the policies of Ceaușescu and it is alleged that Moscow had prepared a contingency plan for the removal of Ceaușescu should he become a threat to Soviet security³⁷. That plan even included the identification of potential Soviet allies who would take the reins of the government after the coup.

In Romania too did the KGB send illegals in Western disguise in 1971. There, the objectives were again of a more specific nature: the KGB agents were to 'collect intelligence on Romanian relations with the United States and China; Romanian claims on Soviet territory in Bessarabia³⁸ and north Bukovina; the political and economic basis of opposition to the Soviet Union; the position of German and Hungarian minorities; the Ceaușescu cult; and the state of the Romanian Communist Party'³⁹.

³⁵ *Directia Generală de Informații Externe*, the Romanian Foreign Intelligence.

³⁶ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, *supra* note 14, p. 54.

³⁷ The plan for such a *putsch* was code-named *Dnestr* and, according to Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa, was set in motion in August 1969 after Ceaușescu had sent an invitation to President Nixon to visit Bucharest. But in fact, Ceaușescu was overthrown and eventually died in December 1989. See Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, *supra* note 14, p. 89.

³⁸ The Bessarabia is the name given to the region in eastern Europe bounded by the Prut River on the west, the Dniester River on the north and east, the Black Sea on the southeast, and the Chilia arm of the Danube River delta on the south.

³⁹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, *supra* note 9, p. 352.

4.5 Yugoslavia

As stated earlier, the Red Army proceeded to the liberation of virtually all the Eastern Europe countries from Nazi occupation. Yugoslavia was the exception. Indeed, Marshal Tito's forces had liberated their country by themselves, preventing the Red Army from imposing the same level of presence and intimidation than in the other satellite states. It also prevented the KGB from gaining the same access to the political structures and to the security services than the one it could enjoy in other Eastern Europe countries.

Since Moscow was obsessed by uniformity within the group of satellite states and that even slightly varying interpretations of Marxist dogma were simply unacceptable, it knew that Yugoslavia would, sooner or later, be excluded from the Soviet Bloc. Yugoslavia, like China, without having to suffer the presence of the Red Army on its own soil, could challenge Soviet authority⁴⁰. Therefore, Romania remained strong in front of Soviet occupation and Moscow failed to undermine the Tito regime from within, and in 1948-49, Yugoslavia left the Soviet Bloc⁴¹. But even in the absence of the KGB, a secret police was growing within the state structure. It was revealed to Tito, in 1966, that his allegedly loyal companion Alexander Rankovic had set up a secret police that gradually became 'a state above the State, a clandestine government entirely independent of Tito, the Central Committee, and Parliament. He had established control over the whole of society [...]'⁴².

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⁴⁰ Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, *supra* note 9, p. 165.

⁴¹ Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition*, *supra* note 5, p. 16.

⁴² François Fejtö, *A History of the People's Democracies: Eastern Europe since Stalin*, *supra* note 11, p. 203.

5. END OF THE COLD WAR

Mikhaïl Sergueïevitch Gorbachev⁴³ became the Secretary General of the USSR Communist Party in 1985 and USSR President in 1988. At the beginning of 1988, Gorbachev established a new doctrine ‘according to which the satellite states were allowed to ‘do it their way’ and choose their own policies’⁴⁴. In other words, along with his team of advisors, Gorbachev had decided to allow the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc⁴⁵. ‘The dissidents, in particular in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, were courageous people [...] but they could not have successfully resisted tanks. In any case, their movement was not new; what was new was the unwillingness of the Soviet tanks to move’⁴⁶.

Were then made possible the revolutions of Eastern Europe which eventually destroyed the Soviet Bloc in 1989. These revolutions took various forms. In Poland and Hungary, the parties in place were voted out of office. In Czechoslovakia and East Germany, revolutions took place but without significant violence. In Romania, force had to be used to overthrow Ceaușescu who actually died in the December 1989 revolution. This was the end of the Soviet satellite regimes and the end of the cold war, which was a ‘necessary price to pay for Western credits and access to technology - that is, for joining the modern economic community’⁴⁷. Obviously, such withdrawal of the Soviets from Eastern Europe had a considerable impact on the Red Army which passed from the status of a powerful and intimidating army into the one of a passive bystander. Indeed, the new Gorbachev doctrine tremendously decreased the power of the Red Army which could only look at the collapsing Soviet Bloc without intervening.

⁴³ Secretary General of the USSR Communist Party from 1985 to 1991 and USSR President from 1988 to 1991.

⁴⁴ Richard J. Popplewell, ‘The KGB and the Control of the Soviet Bloc: The Case of East Germany’, *supra* note 16, p. 278.

⁴⁵ For his work in putting an end to the cold war and allowing the Soviet satellite states to leave the Bloc, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in October 1990.

⁴⁶ Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, *supra* note 9, p. 261.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, p. 262.

CONCLUSION

The question asked in the introduction can undoubtedly be answered by saying that the Red Army and the KGB made a significant contribution in the creation of the Soviet Bloc and towards its stability. The omnipresence of the intimidating Soviet armed forces and the links established by the experienced KGB with national security services contributed to the maintenance of the Soviet Bloc as a whole. To the greatest extent did the USSR owe to its security services the creation and maintenance of the satellite regimes of the post-World War Two Soviet Bloc.

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