

Blunders of the Intelligence Service during the Cold War

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Abstract

December 20, 1917 was the official day of establishment of the Soviet Intelligence Service and now it is celebrated by the Russian Federation. Since that day the Intelligence Service has done its best to get information about its political opponent, the West. They have had advantages due to efficient operations of the intelligence service, through many secret operations implemented, as well as diplomatic intrigues and conspiracy. As a rule, such activities were planned in details by the special secret services and their staff were trained especially in order to get the basic trust of the opposite parties and to work “in a hidden” way.

The Intelligence Service has changed history and contributed a lot to it, but we have found out about it, only many years later as the information about such operations used to be kept in the secret archives of different military organizations. They are now accessible to media and society since they have lost their importance.

The paper discusses the activities of the Soviet Intelligence Service during the Cold War and, in particular, the mistakes and cases conducted by the intelligence service; which changed the history for the better and which for the worst. At an initial stage we will try to discuss briefly the period we refer in the article and review the key functions of the intelligence service during the Cold War.

Introduction

The Cold War was a geopolitical, ideological and economic struggle between the two super-powers of the World, the United States and the Soviet Union. It started after completion of the World War II and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Cold War was characterized by non-stop competition between two former allies during the World War II. The conflict was full of intelligence agents and intrigues in the world's greatest states. The war, spanned from the nuclear vessels swimming in the depths of the ocean and reached the satellites flying in the space. Confrontation between communists and capitalists, in the culture or politics, sport or cinema, art or armament was just as wide-spread and unprecedented in human history.

Informing has been the most important activity of any epoch or age for identification of the rival's plan. Though, as mentioned above, such confrontation and opposition were unprecedented in history, and the role of the intelligence became the most important for the state. According to W. Churchill, there was "an iron curtain" between two poles, therefore the governments needed real information about opponent's territorial and economic interests. In addition, they were seeking information about the gaps of other countries, the vulnerability and weaknesses which can be used for achievement of their own goals. Accordingly, structures were built for providing information and these structures were established by the special service. The intelligence service was the one of these special services (Andrew and Gordievsky, 1990).

Intelligence operations are an international political field of state operations, concerning collection of the information about the capacities and intentions of the acting states. It is impossible to get the required information by means of official diplomatic ways and the intelligence service tries to get it through secret methods. The goal of the intelligence service is to collect, analyse and evaluate the data, while the content, accuracy and earliness can influence or make easier the decision-making process of the state agencies. Counterintelligence is connected to the intelligence service as well and it considers hindering the acquisition of information by another party (Barrass 2009). Soviet KGB, which conducted intelligence activities during the Cold War was established in 1917 based on Cheka which was established to conduct surveillance and destruction of counter-revolutionaries and the organizers of sabotage, under the guise of getting rid of „State enemies“. Cheka consisted of 250,000 members who killed more than 140,000 people based on political and ideological reasons. Later on, new functions were added to the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) established by Stalin, they had their informants in all the fields, including in Red Army and state structures. It was the trial to establish mass control and struggle against "the public enemies". The GRU was the first Soviet organization, which implemented secret missions abroad (e.g. murder of Trotsky). It was the organization which brought a great success to the Soviet intelligence. They had agents in the Foreign Ministry of Germany, as well as about 300 agents in the US state structures and 5 agents in the nuclear weapon production program. The agents were in Great Britain, from where about 20,000 secret documents were set in Moscow in 1941-1945. Kim Philby was a good example of it (Andrew and Gordievsky, 1990).

Since Khrushchev criticized cult of Stalin in 1954 and separated the KGB as a separate structure, the organization became the "Arm and Shield" of the Communist Party. They started massive blackmailing,

pursuing certain groups due to antipathy to the regime. The KGB became the most powerful intelligence organization in the world, though regardless of their popularity and power, the organization had serious problems, which became more obvious over the deterioration of the economic situation in the Soviet Union.

Initially, the intelligence service was the strength of the Soviet Union more so than of the USA, as the Soviet Union and earlier the Tsarist Russia, was more experienced than the USA. In particular, the first Soviet State Security Service was established in December, 1917 by the decree of Lenin. While the Strategic Service Department was created based on the decision of the President Franklin Roosevelt with a key aim to conduct intelligence and sabotaging actions of the enemy (the reason for this decision, according to many historians and researchers, was the attack of Japanese aviation on Pearl Harbor in 1941 despite the fact that the US government had sufficient information on it, it was not possible to process and analyse it in a timely manner). After World War II, in September 1947, the Strategic Service Department was replaced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). As you can see, during the Cold War, US intelligence service was newer compared to the Soviet version, still it is noteworthy, that the CIA was still able to oppose KGB quite effectively (Cherkashin 2005).

Specifically, the newly established US intelligence service was supported by the British intelligence service. Due to them, the world avoided another war, which could have followed the Cuba crisis. Oleg Penkovsky provided them the information regarding to placement of missiles on Cuba, who worked for the British intelligence service and the US regularly used to know Soviet plans in advance due to him and his support over a long period of time. Due to Penkovsky the US took relevant measures and avoided the greatest threat to peace between the superpowers.

As for the Soviet Union, the intelligence service was the highest priority field of the state structure. The Soviet Union had important reasons for this emphasis on intelligence, with the fact that the Soviet intelligence obtained the information about the production of the US and British nuclear weapon and, later, the Soviet agents working in America; obtained the detailed information regarding the plans of production nuclear energy rockets and missiles. After this, the Soviet Union tested the first nuclear missile, only four years after the USA. Accordingly, we can freely say that this was the greatest success of the Soviet intelligence service. Without important information obtained by the intelligence service, it was not possible to identify when they were able to produce nuclear weapons and successful confrontation with the US. The Soviet Intelligence had weaknesses as well; of course, mistakes together with success and positive sides (Haslam, 2016).

It is well-known that Soviet intelligence has about one century history, and was more or less successful, though many people do not know what is the reason for its successful or unsuccessful work. Since Tsarist Russia the Russian intelligence committed lots of mistakes. The World crisis before World War II, in 1929-1939 did not refer to the Russian economy. Socialism became very attractive in the West. Therefore, the Russians recruited British and American agents without any pressure. This period can be called the "Golden Age" of the Soviet Intelligence, though it was very short. After starting the Cold War, all the mistakes of the Russian Intelligence became more important which were not so obvious before. In addition, there were real threats faced by the state (Gaddis, 1982).

The dictatorial governance of Stalin, the repressions and killing of military people, politicians and scientists based on personal reasons slowed progress and delayed results. It is known that everything was

developing much earlier in the West rather than in the Soviet Union, mainly because of education and experience. The Soviet Union was not quite distinguished by great human resource in the field of technology and engineering. Considering the fact that one of the main cryptographers was killed due to Stalin's personal reasons, this is the reason why the Soviet Union had such a big failure in this field, and this reflected on inefficiency of the intelligence service. Due to uncontrolled corruption the intelligence service often provided incorrect or exaggerated information to the government. Otherwise, they would lose the job or that minimal salary they had. Ideology, it was the only factor for which the dual agents worked for the Soviet Union, though quite soon, socialism lost the popularity in the West. Above mentioned and many other factors became the condition for ineffective intelligence and counterintelligence, which will be discussed in details and with argumentations below.

Main Mistakes and Arguments

Russian proverb- „Fear has big eyes“ describes the Russia of the Cold War period best. In general, Russians always had and have the fear of conspiracy and this is the key to the strategy of Soviet intelligence, when the rival and exaggerated threat are imagined threats to the State. It was the great weakness of the Soviet Union not only during the Cold War, but it always existed in Russian government and society. It achieved its highest peak during the Cold War, as Stalin paranoia that Europe was planning to attack continued for years. The state leading power always expected external threat, and this was the “Russian Paranoia”. To make this more clear, several terms need to be defined. “Paranoia”—Psychical disorder during which stupid, illogical ideas and illusions are developed without mental disorder and hallucination. In most cases, the illusions of greatness are revealed. During this paranoia there was panic meaning irrational and non-controlled actions of the people, confusion, a sense of threat which puts people under real or imaginary threat”. Scientists consider that panic, as a rule, blocks the capacity of a person to evaluate situations rationally. When talking about the Soviet Union of the Cold War period, we should know the meaning of paranoia and panics and consider these terms as the reason why the government felt threatened by the West and therefore committed such extraordinary things.

For the Soviet Union the intelligence service was the most prioritized field and they invested lots of money and human resource to struggle against their ideological enemy. While in the West, unlike the Soviet Union, the intelligence service was not the priority of the foreign policy. The staff of the KGB and the GRU knew about this xenophobia which existed in the Soviet Union and used it for their benefit. There was high demand of the Soviet leaders (including Yuri Andropov) to reveal bad intentions of the enemy. As a result spies lost the motivation and in most cases they simply “meet” the expectations of party leaders. Sometimes, they even invented non-existent threat or exaggerated the available one. In some cases, if they did not provide information regularly, they could be even punished and lose their job. Based on the above mentioned facts, the government was not always fully trusting their intelligence agents. Accordingly, they used to make important decisions during the direct meetings with the Western leaders, without the input of their intelligence advisors (Gaddis, 1982).

The Soviet political system was totally hierarchical. Only a few state officials together with Stalin had access to state secret materials, and important decisions were made only after analysis by several high-ranking officials. The problem continued also in the Cold War period. The system was more open in the

USA and accordingly more people were involved in the decoding and analysing the information. The small-sized groups at KGB were not able to process the huge information, which caused unreasoned threat and misunderstanding. In addition, the information was analysed from the perspective of the political framework of the Soviet Union with the goal to destroy the country's and ideology's enemies (Gaddis, 1982).

The second important mistake of the Soviet Intelligence Service was co-existence of GRU and KGB. GRU activities directly referred to the intelligence service, while the KGB was a multifunctional organization, with the main direction, counterintelligence. However, due to lack of human resources, the KGB was often involved in intelligence. Of course, when two competing organizations conducted spying in one and the same region, it caused their inefficiency. The important thing is that GRU officers did not subordinate to the Ministry of Defence, but to the head of the General Staff. The General Staff analysed the information collected by the GRU, and transferred it to the Ministry of Defence and politburo. Frequently, the information had been corrupted and incorrect, as the military officials were interested in increasing the military budget. For this reason, they exaggerated the information about external threats. Of course, the KGB activities balanced the fake information, though it was not enough (Haslam, 2016).

It should be noted, that the Soviet Counterintelligence Service always worked worse; than the Intelligence Service. This led to the fact, that part of the young people, who understand that the West gave a great perspective of studying and working, went to KGB schools, in order to have the chance to be employed and study foreign languages abroad. In the history of intelligence the most well-known case is „Cambridge Five“ who were recruited by the Russians in 1930-1949, though they worked during the Cold War as well. They were motivated by ideology, as this time coincided to the World Crisis and people started to dislike capitalism and see more positives in communism. Another good example is Robert Hanssen. The precise reason of his recruitment is not known. Though it is likely that he was a romantic, he loved his job very much and used to get pleasure from it. As for counterintelligence, it worked comparatively badly, and this is proven by the fact that the US and British agents used to get information relatively easily and without effort in Russia, as all the resources of USSR were concentrated on surveillance abroad. One of the most important cases of counterintelligence failure was special operation „Operation Gold“, which started in spring of 1955 and worked for a year. It was British and the American joint project, according to which a tunnel was dug till the territory of Soviet-occupied Berlin, in order to listen and decode the activities of the main office of Russian military unit (Haslam, 2016).

There are two reasons for the weakness of the counterintelligence work. The first one is that the focus of state was made on the external threat, therefore, the most resources of the intelligence service were concentrated abroad. The second reason is the practice of the Russians, namely, that every agent sent for surveillance abroad, was pursued by the counterintelligence agent for an immediate response in case of recruitment of an intelligence service agent. It directly reduced the number of the counterintelligence success, which was not big.

The Soviet Union had limited human resources in the Intelligence Service. The surveillance schools were not well developed in the country. Russians did not know foreign languages, it was hard to pronounce and spell English due to the specifics of the Russian alphabet. This was why it was difficult to integrate in the society and work freely. In addition, the Soviet Union was quite behind in terms of technology and couldn't compete with the US in this regard. The closed condition of the Soviet Union did not give it the possibility

to develop. What was not popular in the US any more, became popular in the USSR. The US was much advanced compared to the Soviet Union. Especially it was obvious during the Cold War and it was clearly felt in the Intelligence Service as well (Andrew 2019).

Underdevelopment in the field of technology conditioned that the US produced such processors which could decode any code and symbol. Meanwhile the Soviet Union did not have any processor and did not pay attention to cryptography as it could not use it effectively and was depended only on human resources. Before Cold War period, Gleb Bock was involved in the cryptography and Stalin had a prejudicial attitude towards him. During the Great Repressions Bock was killed by Stalin's order. After that, Soviet cryptography had a great failure, after which it was not able to develop as much as it was in the West. Actually, this mistake was not made during the Cold War, but the mistake of Stalin's politics brought the result during the Cold War, when the West was much ahead in cryptography, while the technologies were not relied on the Soviet Union, as only agents were trusted. The attitude towards cryptography was changed when in West decrypted Enigma. After this, government's scepticism to the codes changed. But the Soviet Union had the great failure in this field and it was almost impossible to have a success (Haslam, 2016).

During the last two decades the Soviet Union had the same problem with KGB, as it was in the Soviet government, with inefficient bureaucracy, corruption, total control, lack of personal freedom. During the Cold War, especially after the 60s, the Soviet market economy was transformed into crime. During the last period, it totally became the case, when everybody tried to grasp everything what was accessible for them, otherwise, it will be done by others. The Soviet agents seeing it understood that the only solution for them was working for the West.

As it was known during the Cold War, there were three main reasons for working in the Intelligence Service: 1. the ideology and political point of view, 2. good compensation 3. blackmailing. It is not doubtful, that the ideology was the strongest part of the Soviet Union during recruiting the western agents. Though, the myth that the socialism was better than capitalism; ended after personal visits of agents to the Soviet Union showed the reality. The ideology was not enough for Soviet spies who knew what the USSR was inside and how the system was "spoiled". Cherkashin writes in his book that soviet spies were paid several hundred dollars per month and that was very little, therefore, the US had a very strong tool for recruiting soviet agents and this tool was money. Some of them really lived in the ultimate poverty and it is hard to maintain patriotism and not betray your country, when the state did not care about you at all. In such condition, everybody was seeking for the better life and most of them found it in the West. The best example was Valerie Martinov, who was a colonel of the KBG. The US Intelligence Service was able to recruit him for two reasons, the first reason was that the Soviet Union deceived him, as the attitude and state ideology were not similar. The second reason was the salary, which was 200 dollars per month; very little of that time. His initial motivation was not money, he worked in the KGB for ideology and career, though later on, he was not able to support his family. Accordingly, the ideology moved back. Basically, he betrayed his state for surviving his family (Feifer and Cherkashin, 2004).

Penkovsky and Gordievsky Cases:

The following example is one of the most important failures of Soviet intelligence, which is probably not only of, but the most important cases of Soviet Intelligence Service failure during the Cold War. This is the case of legendary Penkovsky and Gordievsky.

Oleg Penkovsky was one of the high ranking officials of Russian Military Intelligence Service. He was the personal friend of GRU head and Marshall Sergei Varentsov and his frequent visitor in informal conditions. Having such high level linkages, Penkovsky regularly provided US and Great Britain with very important information regarding to Soviet arming or the military and political elite members and their plans. He provided information for over a year.

This information played a great role during the Caribbean Crisis, which became as one of the greatest failures of Soviet Intelligence Service. The data provided by Penkovsky supported the USA to find rocket equipment in Cuba from the photos taken from the air.

As mentioned there are three main reasons for espionage, why people go to the opponents' party. The first one is an ideology, the second is blackmailing and the third is money. These reasons can be all together or act separately as well. Of these material benefit and threatening are short-term influences and the trust between the agent and its supervisor is less, as a rule. In the intelligence service, the ideal case are an ideological sympathies of the agent, when the agent becomes more dependent on its "mentor" and therefore "the agent is controlled".

Penkovsky liked that he was perceived as special and they were right. It was symbolic that the CIA called him a code name "Hero". He appealed the Americans based on his desire to support them in struggling against communists. Initially, he was not considered as a serious "gain" but since he attracted the attention of British Intelligence Service, the Americans became interested as well. He was neither afraid nor desired to get money. He got money, several thousand rubles only once, which he returned back later. Accordingly, he was a reliable, important "gain" and "controlled agent" for the USA as well.

Penkovsky "failed" in 1962 and according to a popular version, he was punished by the Soviet Government by death. Though there is another less reliable version, that he was exchanged for other Soviet agents, I do not believe the evidence supports that theory. As a person who provided information about the highest level of state security and at the same time knew the ways of working the intelligence system well, it would have been very dangerous and his exchange to the rival even for the maintenance of life or certain level of freedom would have been a high risk and the Soviet intelligence and the Political Bureau would not have paid such a big price. There is the opinion that Penkovsky was not only a dual, but triple agent, it was not possible also, though I think, that Caribbean Crisis was so humiliating for the Soviet Union that his reputation failed and the USSR could not allow it (Andrew and Gordievsky, 1990; Gordievsky, 1995).

And finally, the example of Penkovsky demonstrates once again the importance of intelligence, when collection of the effective information could move a country's strategic position from a worse to better position and increase the chances of victory significantly (Gordievsky, 1995).

One of the most interesting examples of a Soviet intelligence great blunder is the history of KGB Colonel dual agent, Oleg Gordievsky. He is recognized as the most prominent betrayer of the Soviet Union. Gordievsky finished the International Relations faculty of Moscow State Institute. He attracted the attention of higher officials, because everyone characterized him as a very responsible and attentive person. After graduation, he started working for the KGB, and such service enabled him to live abroad, which was Gordievsky's main goal.

He worked for British Intelligence Service from 1974 to 1985. As he mentions he started working for Great Britain based on his own desire and will, and he did not consider himself as a betrayer. Gordievsky noted that he would like to be finished with the totalitarian regime. The state system as well as inadequate behaviour of the government was unacceptable for him. He would like to improve everything. Based on Gorbachev's order he was appointed as KGB colonel and had access to all the secret documents. During 10 years Gordievsky transferred lots of documents to the British Intelligence Service and ensured the failure of Soviet Intelligence Service. Also in interviews he often mentioned the role of Robert Hanssen, who was a dual agent and used to work for USSR Intelligence Service. "Hansen was able to have about 50% of the documents sent and returned to KGB", Gordievsky noted. Without Hanssen the documents transferred by me were so important that the Soviet Intelligence Service maybe, would stop its existence. Due to a former colonel of KGB 70 diplomats/agents were expelled from Great Britain. He not only used to transfer the important documents to Britain but also named all Soviet spies working under the cover of the diplomatic corps or consulate.

Oleg Gordievsky's contribution to British state security was so important that he was recognized by the Awards of St. George and St. Michael in 2007. The awarding ceremony took place in Buckingham Palace. The award was transferred personally to the colonel by Elisabeth II.

Conclusion:

This paper reviews the operations of Soviet Intelligence Service during the Cold War. The history of almost a hundred years highlights the importance of Soviet ideology for recruiting spies. The negative sides of the dictatorial governance were also described as clearly reflected in all the fields of the state, especially in the economics and intelligence services.

We discussed the main literature covering the Soviet Intelligence Service operations. Some of them describe the works of dual agents and vividly demonstrate the internal situation of the Soviet life. After review of the articles and a book, we can say that our assumption about key problems of the intelligence services was true. In particular, the closedness of the Soviet Union caused prevention in development in many fields, including intelligence service and brought it to a critical condition. Different forms of Russian paranoia caused dissemination of fake information and brought the government to incorrect decision for both internal and foreign politics. The dictatorship of one person destroyed many professionals of different fields and it meant that the West was much ahead in development and this was felt in every sector of the intelligence service. Due to corruptive and closed economics only a few high ranking officials were highly compensated. Other ordinary workers such as spies used to work on poor salaries and it

became the reason for failure of the Soviet Intelligence Service. This was the main reason for many mistakes made by Russian Intelligence and for current conditions.

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