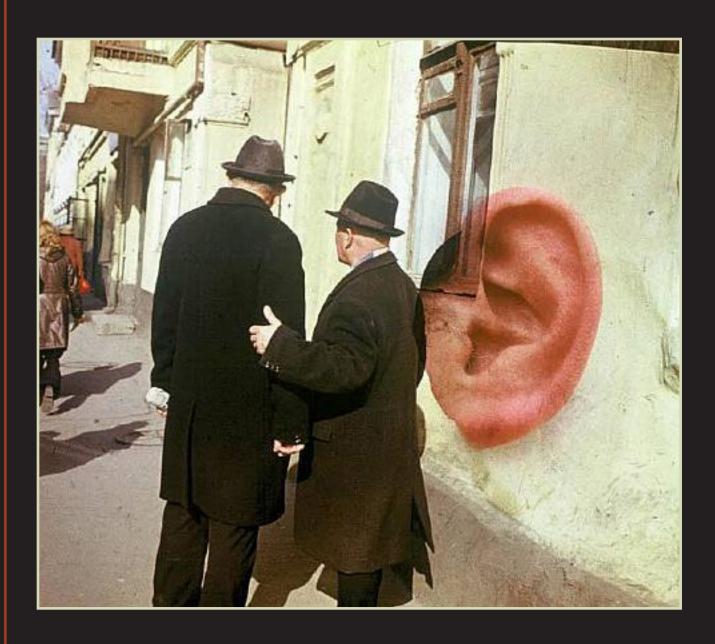# Getting to Know You
Domestic Surveillance in the Soviet Union

Amir Weiner

Getting to Know You

The Soviet Surveillance System, 1939–57

Amir Weiner and Aigi Rahi-Tamm

"Violence is the midwife of history," observed Marx and Engels. One could add that for their Bolshevik pupils, surveillance was the midwife's guiding hand. Never averse to violence, the Bolsheviks were brutes driven by an idea, and a grandiose one at that. Matched by an entrenched conspiratorial political culture, a Manichean worldview, and a pervasive sense of isolation and siege mentality from within and from without, the drive to mold a new kind of society and individuals through the institutional triad of a nonmarket economy, single-party dictatorship, and mass state terror required a vast information-gathering apparatus. Serving the two fundamental tasks of rooting out and integrating real and imagined enemies of the regime, and molding the population into a new socialist society, Soviet surveillance assumed from the outset a distinctly pervasive, interventionist, and active mode that was translated into myriad institutions, policies, and initiatives.

Students of Soviet information systems have focused on two main features—denunciations and public mood reports—and for good reason. Soviet law criminalized the failure to report "treason and counterrevolutionary crimes," and denunciation was celebrated as the ultimate civic act.[1] Whether a "weapon of the weak" used by the otherwise silenced population, a tool by the regime to check its bureaucracy, or a classic feature of the totalitarian state franchising itself to individuals via denunciations of their fellow citizens—and quite likely all three—denunciations were critical in shattering old and forming

[1] Simon Wolin and Robert M. Schlusser, eds., *The Soviet Secret Police* (New York: Praeger, 1957), 194.

new modes of socialization. Even the most astute studies of denunciations, however, profess that this was not the main source of information for the Soviet regime, if only because of their unpredictability and the fact that they were solicited by the regime at specific moments, especially during mobilization campaigns for certain policies or against targeted individuals and groups.[2]

Since the opening of the former Soviet archives, scholars have focused mainly on public opinion, deciphered from the voluminous reports on the political mood of the population gathered by the political police and submitted to party-state organizations and leaders, despite the absence of the term "popular opinion" from the Soviet political lexicon under Stalin.[3] A handful of insightful studies situate Soviet police reports within a modern pan-European ethos of socio-political engineering and the evolution of the late imperial polity. They offer fresh interpretations of the essence of the system and its values, as well as invaluable comparative angles, albeit with the price tag of universalizing distinct socialist totalitarian features.[4]

This essay tackles an additional and new set of questions that help explain the oft, although unsurprisingly, ambiguous record of Soviet surveillance on the ground, which was torn between totalitarian aspirations and institutions and the corresponding quota system, collateral damage, and constant pressure for immediate results, on the one hand, and the aspiration to professional pride and ethos of its police officers, on the other. What did the Soviets initially know about populations on which they imposed their rule? What did they want to know? How did they obtain their information and recruit informants? How successful was the surveillance enterprise according to the

[2] On denunciations as a key feature in the *initial* phase of the totalitarian revolution, see the indispensable discussion by Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 114–22. For consideration of denunciations as "weapons of the weak," see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s"; for denunciations as mainly a tool by the top leadership to rattle its bureaucracy, see Vladimir Kozlov, "Denunciation and Its Functions in Soviet Governance: A Study of Denunciations and Their Bureaucratic Handling from Soviet Police Archives, 1944–1953," both in *Accusatory Practices: Denunciations in Modern European History, 1789–1989,* ed. Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 85–120 and 121–52, respectively.

[3] For an insightful survey of these problems, see Jan Plamper, "Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion in Stalinism," in *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism,* ed. Paul Corner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64–80.

[4] Peter Holquist's pathbreaking studies of Soviet surveillance reports and their contemporary counterparts still remain an anomaly. See his *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Modern History* 69, 3 (1997): 415–50.

Soviets' own goals and evaluation? Finally, what do the surveillance methods tell us about the nature, goals, and distinct features of the regime when compared with other systems?[5]

We analyze the manner in which domestic surveillance was used in the application of key Sovietization policies and in coping with ensuing problems on the Soviet western frontier—the territories between the Baltic and Black Seas, populated by some 23 million people—from their annexation in 1939–40 to the aftermath of the eventful year of 1956. Confronted by populations that enjoyed a brief spell of sovereignty during the interwar years, were hostile to Soviet power to the point of launching mass armed resistance, and posed linguistic and religious difficulties for infiltration, the Soviets pressed on relentlessly, imposing at once the political and socio-economic order that they gradually, sometimes even imperceptibly enforced over two decades inside the pre-1939 borders. Lest anyone entertained the thought that regional features required distinct policies, it was dismissed out of hand. "We work for the entire Union. There is no such thing as Ukraine in our work," snapped Vitalii Fedorchuk, the director of the Ukrainian KGB.[6] This tight temporal and geographical framework offers a unique window into the functioning of the Soviet order as a whole, and into its surveillance system in particular.

Knowing Little, Knowing Much

The birth of the Soviet surveillance system in the western borderlands was marked by a puzzle—the fantastic disparity between the limited knowledge of the local social scene and precise information on the political–military landscape by the intelligence agencies. The gap between Soviet servicemen's and functionaries' expectations and realities on the ground left one wondering what the Soviets actually knew about the territories they had just annexed. An avalanche of servicemen's letters, diaries, and memoirs, as well as their scrutiny by the party and police organs revealed a huge cohort that knew precious little about the neighboring populations who barely two decades

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[5] Despite the passage of more than five decades and some outdated data, the Wolin and Schlusser volume cited above is still indispensable for studying the structure and functioning of the Soviet surveillance system. For a few exceptions in post-Soviet literature that address some of these issues, albeit with a different interpretation and temporal focus from that of this essay, see David Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and the special issue "La police politique en Union Soviétique, 1918–1953," *Cahiers du monde russe* 42, 2–3–4 (2001).

[6] Iakov Pogrebniak, *Ne predam zabveniiu…: Zapiski professional'nogo partiinogo rabotnika* (Kiev: Letopis'-XX, 1999), 173–74.

earlier had been part of the Russian Empire and thoroughly studied by the former regime.[7]

Did this matter? On one level, the totalitarian enterprise was not dependent on social realities but rather the opposite. If there was a gap between ideology and the social, political, and economic landscape, the latter had to adjust to the former. The more relevant questions were who knew what, what did they want to know, and how did they get their information. Here, the Soviets stood on firm ground. By their own admission, the security organs were still in a post-traumatic state when they took on the task of infiltrating the annexed populations in 1939–40. Having lost scores of seasoned agents and lacking genuine local intelligence networks, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) had to rely on young, often unqualified employees from the Soviet interior who did not command indigenous languages—some 726 new agents in western Ukraine alone—and a handful of local communists who had spent most of the past decade behind bars. Despite these challenges, information gathering marshaled on.[8]

The Third Department of the NKVD, which was in charge of gathering information on the political and social theaters prior to the invasion, exhibited an impressive command of the situation. Assisted by the Foreign Ministry and the embassy in Warsaw, which were set to the task in early spring, the security services acquired detailed knowledge of the Polish domestic scene. The 53-page report it composed prior to the invasion accurately mapped all political parties, civic associations, and military organizations across the ethnic divide in Poland, including leading personnel and membership.[9] The task of dealing with these groups was relegated to special operational groups, whose small number was telling. Their assignments ranged from taking over communications and media, establishing temporary administrations in each area occupied by the Red Army, imposing political and ideological

[7] Vladimir Zenzinov, *Vstrecha s Rossiei: Kak i chem zhivut v Sovetskom Soiuze. Pis´ma v Krasnuiu Armiiu 1939–1940* (New York: n.p., 1944), 332; Peter Gornev, "The Life of a Soviet Soldier," in *Thirteen Who Fled,* ed. Louis Fischer (New York: Harper, 1949), 37; Natsyianal´ny arkhiu Respubliki Belarus´ (NARB) f. 4, op. 21, d. 1683, ll. 50–51, 57.

[8] Viktor Chebrikov et al., eds. *Istoriia Sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (Moscow: KGB, 1977), 305–6, 308. Notably, this KGB internal textbook was prepared for the training of the agency's officers.

[9] Federal´naia sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii and Ministerstwo spraw wewnętrznych i administracji Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, *Polskie podziemie na terenach Zachoniej Ukrainy i Zachodniej Białorusi w latach 1939–1941/Pol´skoe podpol´e na territorii Zapadnoi Ukraïny i Zapadnoi Belorussii, 1939–1941 gg.* (Warsaw and Moscow: RYTM, 2001), 1:36–106; Donal O'Sullivan, "Die Sowjetisierung Osteuropas 1939–1941," *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 2, 2 (1998): 118.

control, and arresting prominent government figures and leaders of Polish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian "counterrevolutionary" parties. The dismantling of the political and civilian leadership and potential opposition groups totaled over 13 million people and was handled by five operational groups of 50–70 agents on the Ukrainian front and four groups of 40–55 agents on the Belorussian front. Each operational group was assisted by a military battalion of 300 soldiers.[10]

The NKVD struck with lightening speed. Less than four weeks into the invasion, the Belorussian NKVD had already identified no fewer than 3,535 counterrevolutionary "elements," and by late November 1939 the organization had already arrested nearly 12,000 people throughout the former eastern Polish territories.[11] When the NKVD chief in Belorussia reported the arrest of some 581 Polish officers and army reservists in early December, he emphasized that they were targeted based on compromising materials. Evidently, the system was already fully functioning.[12] By the spring of 1940, the Polish underground, the NKVD's main target, practically ceased to exist, with most of its members arrested and directed to the Soviet courts and prisons. A similar fate befell the resilient Ukrainian nationalist organizations following the arrest of over 4,400 activists.[13]

The three Baltic states were meticulously studied nine months before their annexation. The NKVD in Leningrad dispatched agents to the embassies and trade missions with detailed instructions on information-gathering methods in the political realm, the Russian émigré community, foreign intelligence activity, the region, and economic affairs. The prominence of the NKVD agents was underscored when shortly after the lead agent in Tallinn, Vladimir Botskarev, was appointed Soviet ambassador to Estonia and personally handled the formation of the new government in the summer of 1940.[14] A

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[10] Vasyl′ Danylenko and Serhii Kokin, eds., *Radians′ki orhany derzhavnoï bezpeky u 1939–chervni 1941 r: Dokumenty HDA SB Ukraïny* (Kiev: Kievo-Mohylians′ka Akademiia, 2009), 42–45.

[11] This figure included 278 Polish officers; 1,181 White Guards and Petliurite officers; 3,544 gendarmes, policemen and police agents; and 2,103 members of counterrevolutionary parties and organizations (NARB f. 4, op. 21, d. 1683, l. 139; *Pol′skoe podpol′e,* 246–53).

[12] NARB f. 4, op. 21, d. 1715, l. 127.

[13] *Pol′skoe podpol′e,* 454; Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 319–20. The official history of the KGB in 1977 offered much more modest figures of arrests than its own reports in 1939–40—about 3,000 arrests—which it admitted did not translate into a conclusive liquidation of the nationalist underground organizations in the annexed territories (Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 322).

[14] On the embassy in Tallinn, see Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaali (ERAF) SM f. 138, n. 1, s. 57, ll. 3–9, 11–13. On the embassy in Kaunas, see Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (LYA) f. K-1, ap. 49, b. 826.

report submitted to Andrei Zhdanov on 27 September 1939 offered detailed and accurate data on the economy, national composition of the population, the armed forces, and the mobilizing capacity of Estonia and Latvia.[15] Detailed intelligence gathered on Lithuania months before its occupation led to the rapid liquidation of the Polish underground and a variety of Jewish nationalist organizations whose most intimate meetings and discussions were reproduced verbatim.[16]

How and where did they obtain their information while operating in an unequivocally hostile environment? Not surprisingly, the initial information gathering on the ground relied on and utilized social and political cleavages. Individuals and cohorts with grievances were violently unleashed against their opponents, providing the arriving authorities with a foundation on which to build. In eastern Poland, peasant committees identified and attacked Polish settlers and in the Baltic states Communists released from lengthy prison terms pledged to "decisively cleanse the state and economic apparatus of people who hamper socialist construction" and "purge the government of spies, provocateurs, and villains [and] enemies of the people."[17] By December 1940, all relevant documents on the suppression of the communist uprising in December 1924 had been excavated, and those associated with the ensuing trial were arrested. Tellingly, the NKVD investigation was led by the son of a prominent murdered communist leader, who returned to Estonia to avenge his father's death. As we will see below, the authorities were aware of the potential bias of such sources, which they excused as nothing more than the collateral damage of revolutionary justice and—more relevantly—as providing fertile ground for the recruitment of informants and solicitation of compromising material.

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[15] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial´no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 77, op. 4, d. 40, ll. 43–53.

[16] See the 27 March 1940 detailed report on the Polish underground in Lithuania, three months before the invasion, in LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 4, ll. 159–70 and *Pol´skoe podpol´e,* 654, 668, 674. On the Jewish nationalist organizations, see the report from 29 March 1940 in LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 4, ll. 179–98 and March 1941 in LYA f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 719, ll. 83–93 where the detailed information was attributed to informants planted in all segments of the community. Notably, from the moment they arrived in Lithuania after concluding the mutual assistance treaty in October 1939, Soviet representatives and the Red Army constantly pressured the Lithuanian authorities to expose and deliver Polish political activists to Soviet power. The Lithuanians, who had their own interest in reducing the Polish presence in Vilnius, complied. The result was more police files in the hands of the Soviets when they finally annexed Lithuania in June 1940. See Algimantas Kasparaičius et al., eds., *SSSR i Litva v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Sbornik dokumentov* (Vilnius: Institute of History, 2006), 422–23, 435.

[17] RGASPI f. 17, op. 22, d. 3855, ll. 230–40, 245, 247; d. 3854, ll. 35, 43–44; Alfred Senn, *Lithuania 1940: Revolution from Above* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 162–63.

Interrogations were a primary tool for obtaining information. Here, too, the gap between operational and socio-political knowledge was in full display. The NKVD officers clearly knew where to find their targets but knew abysmally little about their world, and the little they did know was filtered through Soviet ideological blinders. The interrogation of Menachem Begin, the leader of the mass Zionist Beitar movement in Poland and Czechoslovakia and the future prime minister of Israel, was a case in point. Begin's interrogators "knew for a fact" that his predecessor, Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, was a "colonel in British intelligence." They were, however, unaware that the British had banned Jabotinsky from pre-state Israel and that he was already dead. This did not deter or embarrass the interrogators in the least ("Tell me, where is Jabotinsky now? Jabotinsky is dead. Are you sure? Regrettably, yes. Well, you see, nobody sheds tears over him"). The interrogators dismissed Begin's statement that he had joined Beitar voluntarily because he liked its program and that no one recommended him. "Impossible," uttered the interrogator. "With us, when a youth wants to join the Komsomol, other members recommend him."[18]

The NKVD was interested in two key questions: the political goals of their target's activities and the scope of the network of the target's collaborators. Multiple interrogation stenograms reveal a fixation with extracting confessions of guilt for counterrevolutionary activities and retracing networks of alleged conspirators. Begin's initial interrogations focused on a detailed account of his relatives, friends, and associates in Poland and Lithuania.[19] There was, however, much more to it than the simple police method of investigating the sources and conduct of actual and potential subversions. The mechanisms of the interview shed light on the very essence of the Soviet surveillance enterprise.

The terrible thing, reflected Begin, was not the accusations themselves but the "fact that the interrogators were not lying to themselves. On the contrary, they were convinced that they had in their hands genuine proof."[20] Anxiety over the uncertainty of his fate and that of his young wife was compounded by successive late-night sessions and sleep deprivation. At least once he was forced

[18] Menachem Begin, *Beleilot levanim*, 2nd ed. with NKVD protocols (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1995), 78–80. Ironically, four years later the NKGB was finally aware of Jabotinsky's death but marked his place of death as Poland. Jabotinsky actually died and was buried in New York (LYA f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 177, l. 4).

[19] LYA f. K-1, ap. 58, b. R-12544, ll. 13–19, 26–28, 35. The fixation with opponents' networks was punctuated four years later in a union-wide NKGB report on Beitar that called on its regional branches to keep track of contacts between members of the Zionist organization in the various Soviet republics and regions (LYA f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 177, l. 2).

[20] Begin, *Beleilot levanim,* 126.

to sit for 60 hours with his knees pressed against a wall.[21] More intriguing, however, was the fact that the Soviets could have disposed of Begin without any qualms. They could have tortured him. They could have sentenced him immediately for lengthy incarceration. But they did none of the above. Moreover, none of the hundreds of inmates Begin encountered during his time in Lukiškės, the harshest regime prison in Soviet Lithuania, was beaten. Begin even insisted that the interrogators refrain from using profanities and address him with the more respectful *Vy* rather than *ty;* more important, he refused to sign a confession of guilt for having been the chairman of the Beitar organization in Poland unless the corresponding statement be changed to "I admit that I was [the chairman]."[22] His interrogators were alternately annoyed and bemused by his demands but mostly obliged, the exception being in response to his rebuttal that he was defending Jabotinsky's memory just as he would expect his interrogator to defend the honor of Lenin. Needless to say, this analogy enraged the interrogator.

The NKVD subjected Begin to nearly a two-month dialogue on topics ranging from the compatibility of religion and science, Jewish nationalism and Soviet class internationalism, to the Stalin Constitution and international norms of legality and sovereignty.[23] Begin soon realized that even the most courteous conversation was essentially an interrogation and, as he was reminded by one of the NKVDists, "with us, one pays for his thoughts, if they are counterrevolutionary, and we are aware of these thoughts." Moreover, Begin observed, "factual truth … was completely unacceptable to the NKVD officer. It was not I confronting my interrogator: it was one 'world' against another. Concepts against concepts. And between them lay an abyss. Factual truth cannot bridge it; it is cast into the abyss."[24]

Begin had no illusions that he would be offered a podium for public martyrdom. "The engineers of the soul had a clear political objective in demanding that those who were about to die cease to exist even before the merciful bullet has pierced their skulls," Begin observed. "The accused has one option: either trial with ideological annihilation, or physical destruction without trial."[25] Still, he was astounded by the lengthy sessions, which often lasted several hours. He was allowed to talk uninterrupted for 10–15 minutes and listened to his interrogator's protracted boasting about Soviet

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[21] Ibid., 41–45, 55–61.

[22] Ibid., 46, 122, 145–53.

[23] Ibid., 148–50, 121–26.

[24] Ibid., 119, 82.

[25] Ibid., 157.

achievements. At one point he wondered, "Where was the interrogation? It looked more like a debate than an interrogation. A debate between communism and Zionism, an often stormy debate between two "worlds" folded together in a small room, the night shift office of a Soviet state security officer."[26]

In the totalitarian world, the source of information itself was a valued target for social engineering.[27] Interrogations aimed at reducing their targets to a state of utter helplessness, to the point that they realized the aimlessness of their previous existence and submitted to Soviet power or even better, converted to its cause. Begin did not deny that torture, sleep deprivation, and threats to the families of the interrogated were instrumental in extracting admissions and confessions. Still, he wondered, "as a matter of fact, among those who 'confessed' on the Soviet platform of annihilation were people who had been subjected to horrifying tortures by other police organizations— and had not been broken down!"[28] The key to the riddle, Begin argued, was isolation—and not only physical isolation. Rather, it was the isolation of the regime itself that rendered worthless all struggles and sacrifices. "If the fighter [for an idea] knows that his service is annihilated, that no one will hear his words, no one will witness his stand, no one will receive his sacrifice from his hands, and no one will learn from him how to sacrifice, then the thread between him and the ideal is likely to be severed; it is then that his own recognition of his mission is completely eradicated, and his tortured soul asks: Who will know? Who will follow me? Who will come in my stead? What is the point of my suffering? What good is there in my torments?"[29]

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[26] Ibid., 84.

[27] Notably, the Gestapo also aimed at winning back political enemies, mainly Communists, as proper *Volksgenossen* (national comrades). For this purpose it used not only torture but also temporary incarceration in "educative labor camps" aimed at "bringing about a change of opinion," and a concerted effort to recruit them as informants on fellow members of the party's underground. See Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52, 54–59; and Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 177–94. Per Heinrich Müller's instruction on 12 June 1942, at least on paper, the use of "enhanced interrogation" (*Verschärfte Vernehmung*) techniques was permitted only when regular inquiries failed and could not be applied "in order to induce confession about the prisoner's own criminal acts" or against people who were "delivered temporarily by justice for the purpose of further investigation." For a unique testimony by a leading Communist who endured interrogations by both the NKVD and the Gestapo and whose life, if not freedom, was spared by the latter after renouncing her communist beliefs, see Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1949).

[28] Begin, *Beleilot levanim,* 161–62.

[29] Begin went on to speculate on the case of Bukharin, who knew that none of his countrymen would hear or read his words and would eventually be "persuaded and believe he was nothing

The annihilation of the interrogated was completed by the dogged obsession with obtaining confessions of repentance. For Begin, this was the ultimate politicization of a paternal pattern that ran through Soviet public life. The regime's absolute political and economic authority was translated into a practice by which it acted like a father who "is not content with merely punishing his son who has sinned, but demands that he admit his error, that he repent, that he beg forgiveness."[30] Hence interrogations were a venue to convey the invincibility of Soviet power. When Begin inquired how article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code (counterrevolutionary activity, treason, and diversion) could be applied to activities that were considered legal in then-sovereign Poland, his interrogator did not hesitate: "Ah, you are a strange fellow [*chudak*], Menachem Wolfovich. Article 58 applies to everyone in the world. Do you hear? *In the whole world.* The only question is when he will get to us or we to him."[31] Since arrest established guilt and not vice versa, and Soviet reach was bound by neither time nor geography, overwhelming the target to the point of helplessness was as important as extracting information.

In the meantime, the NKVD was recruiting informants from the ranks of oppositional groups with impressive speed and skill. On the very day that Soviet soldiers entered Szczebrzeszyn, the newly created Red militia had already enrolled some members of Polish patriotic organizations and local postmen, noted an astonished diarist. In a matter of weeks, one operational group in L´viv had already recruited 130 agents who were instrumental in penetrating networks of the Polish and Ukrainian undergrounds.[32] Even in the Baltic states, which generally offered less fertile ground for recruitment among dissatisfied ethnic minorities, the number of agents and informants

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but an agent of the international bourgeoisie and an enemy of the proletarian revolution. Knowing all this, he must have asked himself one night: What is the use?" His own young interrogator, Begin noted repeatedly, "believed without any doubt that Bukharin was a spy when he stood at the head of the Comintern and that Trotskii was an agent of the bourgeoisie when he was at the head of the Workers' and Peasants' Army" (ibid., 163–64).

[30] Ibid., 157. Notably, Begin's interrogation followed a trope that was perfected in the course of the interwar purge waves and was now applied to the new territories. Alexander Weissberg's classic memoir of his arrest and interrogation at the height of the terror in the late 1930s conveys almost identical patterns to those of Begin (*The Accused,* trans. Edward Fitzgerald [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951]).

[31] Begin, *Beleilot levanim,* 123. Italics in the original.

[32] Zygmunt Klukowski, *Diary from the Years of Occupation, 1939–1944,* trans. George Klukowski (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 32; Ihor Il´iushyn, "Operatyvno-chekists´ki hrupy NKVS v zakhidnykh oblastiakh Ukraïny v veresni–zhovtni 1939 roky (za materialamy Derzhavnoho arkhivu sluzhby bezpeky Ukraïny)," in *1939 rik v istorychnii doli Ukraïny i Ukraïntsiv,* ed. K .K. Kondratiuk et al. (L´viv: LNU imeni Ivana Franka, 2001),181–82.

grew exponentially. Initially relying on imported personnel from Moscow and the handful of Lithuanian Communists emerging from the underground and prisons, by the eve of the German invasion the NKVD–NKGB (People's Commissariat of State Security) already counted 5,044 employees, of whom 4,340 were locals.[33]

How did they recruit informants? Usually the NKVD went directly to the core of the targeted groups, blackmailing individuals who were made an offer they could not refuse: maintaining their freedom (or life) in exchange for information. In western Ukraine, former members of the disbanded Communist Party of Western Ukraine who sought reinstatement in the party following the establishment of Soviet power were offered first to inform on their comrades as a way to demonstrate their loyalty.[34] In western Belorussia the Forestry Administration, which was suspected of being a cover for training guerrillas in the event of war, was penetrated through informants who came forward immediately upon the Soviet arrival, leaving one to wonder whether class and ethnic resentments or some kind of coercion compelled these men to betray their comrades.[35] In Lithuania, the interrogation of a peasant who was caught trying to cross the border to the German side in October 1940 yielded a network of illegal cross-border correspondence, involving several priests, a tightly closed group that proved a formidable challenge to the NKVD for years to come. Instead of the expected prison term or exile, the detainees were released and recruited as agents with specific instructions to continue their activities and expose other culprits.[36]

The bulk of information, however, was gathered through the less exciting venues of the emerging totalitarian state institutions that now monopolized political and economic life. As the sole employer and registrar, the Soviet state gathered vast information rather easily. In the former eastern Poland, the cataloging of the population via passportization was a top priority for the NKVD. The goal of passportizing the entire adult population—each individual over 16 years old had to present birth, housing, and work certificates, a military card, and two photos in order to obtain a passport—was pursued with impressive speed. One could be excused for confusing the NKVD in western

[33] Liudas Truska, Arvydas Anušauskas, and Inga Petravičiūtė, *Sovietinis Saugumas Lietuvoje 1940–1953 metais: MVD–MGB organizacinė struktūra, personalas ir veikla* (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventoju genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 1999), 92.

[34] Danylo Shumuk, *Life Sentence: Memoirs of a Ukrainian Political Prisoner* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1984), 37.

[35] NARB f. 4, op. 21, d. 1683, l. 27.

[36] LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 1, ll. 6–9. For somewhat similar cases in former eastern Poland, see Gross, *Revolution from Abroad,* 149.

Ukraine and Belorussia with a photo agency, given its constant requests for more photo paper and equipment. Failing to register for a passport with the local militia was ruled a criminal offense. As a result, between January and early March 1940, 1,758,000 people (out of an estimated 4 million) in the cities and district centers of western Ukraine were issued passports. Tellingly, the NKVD already credited passportization with the creation of a pool of nearly 15,000 people with compromising material, a figure that more than doubled a month later.[37]

Local archives emerged as a key tool in the information-gathering enterprise. Here, too, the Soviets brought along two decades of expertise in utilizing largely professional archives for their social and political engineering drive. Inside the pre-1939 borders, archives had long been employed to support the task of cleansing society of "alien elements." As early as April 1918, a special committee in the Petrograd Archive of History and Revolution was charged with the compilation of compromising materials, a task that constantly expanded as the regime consolidated its grip on the country and launched a crash course in building socialism. Twenty years later, at the height of the terror, the NKVD claimed jurisdiction over the archival system, which it then used extensively in carrying out mass repressions, and on 21 September 1939, with the USSR's westward expansion underway, it introduced the Soviet index-card recording of "politically tainted people." Each card consisted of personal, professional, and political data as well as compromising information and its sources. All those recorded were entered into reference lists in triplicate and immediately forwarded to the NKVD for operational use, its Soviet archives, and the director of the organization's archives. The archives were obliged to respond within 24 to 48 hours to inquiries fielded by the police and the Party.[38]

Needless to say, the mayhem brought on by the occupations did not bode well for smooth implementation. In late 1939, an official at the Archival Department of the NKVD in L´viv reported to Moscow that many critically important archives were destroyed and almost all archives were damaged in one way or another. But the official did not blame the former Polish authorities who, he said, destroyed very little. Rather, it was the Red Army that did most of the damage. Quartered troops destroyed the archives of anti-Soviet movements and liquidated the archives of the command of the district Polish

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[37] Derzhavnyi arkhiv Ministerstva vnutrishnikh sprav Ukraïny (DAMVSU) f. 3, op. 1, spr. 6, ark. 4–6, 12–15, 23–26, 45–48.

[38] V. E. Korneev and O. N. Kopylova, "Arkhivy na sluzhbe totalitarnogo gosudarstva (1918–nachalo 1940-kh gg.)" *Otechestvennye arkhivy,* no. 3 (1992): 13–20; Kopylova, "V poiskakh 'spetskartotetki GAU NKVD SSSR'" *Otechestvennye arkhivy,* no. 1 (2000): 33–34.

army and the garrison, as well as those of the Strelets association and those of the newspapers *Dilo* and *Bat'kivshchyna*. The paper carnage continued despite protests to the top military command and party bosses in the city. These pleas fell on deaf ears, however, as neither seemed to consider the archives an issue of vital importance. The situation was made worse by the fact that the highly qualified archival staff was almost entirely Polish and affiliated with nationalist and former government parties. Some were even army officers. Interestingly, the archival official objected to the recommendation of the NKVD top command in western Ukraine to dismiss them, given that there were no available replacements. Until he received qualified personnel who had a command of Polish, he opted to continue and employ them under NKVD control.[39] Yet regardless of these and other obstacles, the enterprise rolled on relentlessly. Between May and October 1940, the archives yielded some 28,607 "politically tainted" people, including 18,476 former policemen and gendarmes and 3,521 members of counterrevolutionary parties.[40]

On 4 September 1940, the new Council of the Soviet Estonian People's Commissariat declared all documentary archival materials to be state property. All institutions and organizations, both active and defunct, had to surrender archival materials of "public value" to the State Central Archives. A large portion of the material was immediately transferred to the Secret Department of the State Central Archives in Tallinn, which promptly launched the search for compromising data under tight supervision of new arrivals from the Soviet core.[41]

If this was not exactly the way local professional archivists viewed their tasks, it did not matter. They were forced to adjust to the new order. When the director of the Estonian Central State Archives expressed his amazement at the subordination of the archives to the NKVD, he was bluntly notified that the prevalent view in the world that archives were research institutions should be quickly forgotten; perhaps it was so in the capitalist world, but "in the Soviet state, the main task of the archives is to expose class enemies and destroy them."[42] In case the message was lost on anyone, it was hammered

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[39] Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 5325, op. 10, d. 533, ll. 2–6, esp. 3–5.

[40] Ibid., l. 160; *Pol'skoe podpol'e,* 654; Gross, *Revolution from Abroad,* 148.

[41] For a thorough description of the Sovietization of the Estonian archival system, see Priit Pirsko, "Eesti arhiivinduse sovetiseerimine 1940–1941," in *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940–1953: Sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontektstis*, ed. Tõnu Tannberg (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007), 106–52.

[42] Gottlieb Ney, "Teadlasest tshekistiks," in *Eesti riik ja rahvas II maailmasõjas* (Stockholm: Kirjastus EMP, 1956), 3:154.

home in official communications to his successor, Bernhard Veimar, a stellar Communist and brother of the chairman of the Estonian Council of Commissariats. Frustrated by the slow processing of material deemed relevant for operational use, the Deputy Director of the Soviet NKVD Archival Administration reminded Veimar that he was personally responsible for taking all measures to process archival documents on schedule, "because when archival documents are used in good time, we are able sooner to expose enemies of the people through the operational department of the NKVD of the ESSR.… Working through confidential archival documents is the main battle duty."[43]

Two special decrees on 23 November 1940 and 27 March 1941 ordered the NKVD archival departments in the annexed territories to compile registers of "counterrevolutionary elements." These registers were based on material found in the archives of tsarist Russia and interwar independent states in line with the above-mentioned Soviet decree from 21 September 1939 which initiated the index-card system.[44]

The search for politically tainted and counterrevolutionary elements was launched at a fierce pace, targeting members of the political and regular police forces, army officers, nationalist parties, state officials, and court officers of the now defunct states. Throughout the spring of 1941, the Estonian and Soviet NKVD bombarded the archives of the tiny republic with about a 100 daily inquiries about politically alien people, creating an inevitable backlog of 1,400 unanswered inquiries.[45]

The Soviet drive was not without its ironies, albeit bitter ones. One key constituency targeted by the NKVD were the *Vapses,* members of the "Veterans' League of the War of Independence," the radical-right movement and main opposition force in the Republic of Estonia in the 1930s.[46] As such, the *Vapses* were a key target of the Estonian interwar political police, making

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[43] Eesti Riigiarhiiv (ERA) f. R-1490, n. 1, s. 2, l. 17 (4 December 1940). In a laconic response that can be interpreted as either matter-of-fact or defiant, Veimar wrote that the system was new to the local archives and at the moment was still being studied. He was confident, however, that once the archives' inquiries regarding more guidance were answered, they would catch up by the following year (GARF f. 5325, op. 10, d. 535, l. 44 [27 December 1940]).

[44] Korneev and Kopylova, "Arkhivy na sluzhbe totalitarnogo gosudarstva," 21.

[45] ERA f. R-1490, n. 1s, s. 2, l. 67.

[46] The Central Federation of the War of Independence Veterans' League was set up to look after the well-being of veterans of the War of Independence. Increasingly interfering in everyday politics, the movement soon became a considerable political force. In the fall of 1933, the league endorsed a referendum that called for radical constitutional changes and won overwhelming approval. To prevent the league from taking power in the coming elections, the presidential candidates Konstantin Päts and Johannes Laidoner launched a military coup d'état on 12 March 1934 and imposed a state of national emergency for six months. The league

up a sizable part of its archives, now at the NKVD's disposal.[47] Like all other associations and individuals, whether on the right or the left of the political spectrum, being in opposition to the deposed interwar regime did not buy the *Vapses* a reprieve. On the eve of the war, the archives of the dismantled states helped register some 49,360 members of political parties and the political and regular police in the western Belorussian provinces.[48] In Estonia alone, the archives registered nearly 38,000 people as "politically tainted."[49] Simply put, 2 percent of the Estonian population was recorded within five months.

In their search for political enemies the archivist-policemen displayed impressive research skills that would have made even professional academics proud. When compiling prosecution files against former members of the political police, researchers combed the annual reports of the Ministry of Finance, looking for payments made for undercover operations, which were then produced as material evidence in establishing guilt.[50] With the entire archival apparatus of former independents states at its disposal, the regime acquired almost limitless venues for restructuring the social and political landscape.

The same applied to the economic sphere, where the state's monopoly over the labor force was used to solicit political information. Three weeks into the invasion, the Belorussian NKVD had already cited informants in the Shpira factory in Belastok, who reported on fellow workers spreading anti-Soviet rumors.[51] Mass enrollment and elections in the trade unions were viewed as a golden opportunity to expose a variety of enemies. In mid-December 1939, the secretary of the Belastok oblast committee (obkom) proudly informed his superiors in Minsk and Moscow that in the course of mass gatherings before and during registration in the unions, workers exposed the identity of agents of the Polish political police and members of hostile classes.[52] The 1,100 workers at Ammunition Factory no. 508 in Lithuania were subjected to surveillance from the get-go. Although the Lithuanian Central Committee complained bitterly about the low level of party work and agitation in the factory and ordered the replacement of the director, with the help of two Russian functionaries brought from other Soviet republics, he

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was banned, and its followers were discharged from the state bureaucracies and placed under surveillance by the political police.

[47] GARF f. 5325, op. 2, d. 467, l. 2.

[48] Korneev and Kopylova, "Arkhivy na sluzhbe totalitarnogo gosudarstva," 22.

[49] ERA f. R-1490, n. 1s, s. 1, l. 13.

[50] Ibid., s. 2, l. 3.

[51] NARB f. 4, op. 21, d. 1683, l. 34.

[52] Ibid., d. 1605, ll. 32–33.

displayed a rather commanding knowledge of the political mood and past of the management and workers. Thus the secretary was not only informed that the director, a former officer in the Lithuanian army, had studied in a military academy in France, but also the amount of monthly stipend he received while he was there, the political views of the director's wife, the number of foreign languages mastered by another manager who also had an international driving license, and so on. The new director was also appointed head of the party organization in the factory, formalizing the role of the workplace as employer, political-ideological guardian, and information collector.[53]

On the military front, the dual-command system imposed on the vanquished armed forces of the former Baltic states was used to obtain information on alleged opponents of the regime among the uniformed men. Political instructors—some 306 of all ranks—were introduced to the Lithuanian army once it was reincarnated as the People's Army. Modeled after their Red Army counterparts, the *politruks* were immediately assigned with the task of identifying "unreliable elements" in the ranks. They were soon supplemented by special intelligence officers in charge of obtaining similar data. The gathering of information was unabashedly framed by preconceived ideological biases, as the chief intelligence officer of the Tenth Riflemen Corps made clear in his report on 15 September 1940. The unsatisfactory political situation among the troops and the local population would not improve and the rear would remain insecure, he concluded, as long as the socio-economic restructuring was incomplete. In the meantime, large segments of the troops, mainly Lithuanian nationals of the wrong social origin and political-religious views, were held under suspicion.[54] Tellingly, at a time when the dual command was abolished in the rest of the Red Army following the Winter War fiasco, it was reinforced in the newly annexed territories once the already defunct Baltic armies were liquidated and fully integrated into the Red Army in the fall of 1940. Numerically reduced and reorganized, these forces were immediately subjected to close surveillance.[55]

Obtaining information was complicated because of the language barrier, since the NKVD Special Department and the political instructors sent from Russia had not mastered Lithuanian. The authorities had no qualms about making temporary compromises and allowed the recruitment of instructors of the right social and political background from the disbanded People's

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[53] LYA f. 1771, ap. 190, b. 1, ll. 112–15.

[54] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (RGVA) f. 892, op. 3, d. 21, l. 255.

[55] For the Lithuanian Politburo's deliberations and decree on the issue, see LYA f. 1771, ap. 190, b. 1, ll. 25–27. For surveillance reports on the political views and activities of servicemen, see LYA f. K-1, ap. 19, b. 1, ll. 1, 7–9, 10–31, 32–38, 39–42, 75–80, 87–90.

Army, while also mobilizing indigenous party and Komsomol members for these positions. Headed by a Lithuanian national and veteran of the Soviet security forces, the NKVD Special Department grew exponentially. Within two months, it employed no less than 387 servicemen, including 68 military officers.[56]

Again, blackmail was the recruiters' method of choice. In one such case, a rank-and-file soldier turned NKVD agent in the 262nd Regiment obtained a written pledge from a drunken major to inform on his peer officers' political views and sentiments. When the officer, once sober, refused to keep his promise, he was threatened with arrest and deportation to Siberia. Fully aware that large portions of the information provided by informants was often of little value, especially that from and about officers, the Special Department and the republic's NKVD widely censored servicemen's private correspondence, which yielded information ranging from a plea to a brother to hold on to his religious faith, pledges to sustain national identity, and expressions of frustration with the silence imposed on the spread of political terror and the decline in the quality of life to characterizations of Russian commanders as "rabid dogs."[57] Between 15 January and 5 May 1941, some 3,551 letters from servicemen to their relatives and acquaintances were confiscated and used in investigations of politically suspicious personnel. In addition, the oath of allegiance to the Red Army was used to mark those who refused to swear or were suspected of such refusal. Based on this information, the men of the 29th Corps were catalogued by "degrees of contamination."[58] As elsewhere in the Soviet polity, the gathering and analysis of information worked both ways. It was used to identify real and imagined opponents of the regime and simultaneously catalogued constituencies on terms familiar to the authorities, ordaining them with political identities, making them legible and workable. Information not only reflected realities. It also created them.

Here, again, the comparison with the NKVD's Nazi counterpart is telling. Many of these servicemen would soon fall into German captivity.

[56] Algirdas Jakubčionis, Stasys Knezys, and Arūnas Streikus, *Okupacija ir aneksija: Pirmoji sovietinė okupacija (1940–1941)* (Vilnius: Margi Raštai, 2006), 534–35, 537–38; LYA f. 1771, ap. 190, b. 1, l. 26.

[57] LYA f. K-1, ap. 19, b. 1, ll. 39–42. These censored letters are reproduced in *Okupacija ir aneksija,* 343–46.

[58] Some 2,600 officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers were classified as suspicious, mostly members of prewar organizations now categorized as counterrevolutionary. Over 500 were classified as potentially dangerous, including those whose families suffered in the course of Sovietization policies. Somewhat more than 100 servicemen, although not a single officer, were listed as supporters of Soviet power (*Okupacija ir aneksija*, 536, 538–39; LYA f. K-1, ap. 19, b. 1, ll. 75–80).

Most were released from the prisoner of war (POW) camps throughout the summer and fall of 1941, and in an ironic twist of fate, many were recruited as guards in POW camps for Soviet soldiers. Having objectified the foreign recruits a priori as racial entities, few in the German military and civilian administration cared about the easterners' thoughts and views or were willing to try to convert them to the Nazi cause the way they did with Aryan political enemies. No one entertained the idea of integrating them as equals into the Nazi world.[59]

The Soviets' pervasiveness and efficiency overwhelmed their opponents. Surrounded by comrades-turned-Soviet-informants, Leopold Okulicki, the despairing leader of the battered Polish underground, Związek walki zbrojnej (Union of Armed Struggle), concluded in January 1941: "The work methods of the NKVD, which controls every aspect of life and penetrates everywhere, demoralized the weak people. There are thousands of agents everywhere.… In comparison with the methods of the NKVD, the Gestapo looks like kids' stuff."[60] Ironically, it would be the Nazis who would put this system to the test.

Back to Square One, and Not Missing a Beat

Within a month of the German invasion, the Soviet surveillance system in the western frontier was practically wiped out. Nearly two years of building human and institutional infrastructure were erased over night. Regional NKVD branches reported the loss of nearly 80 percent of their agents and informants, who were either drafted into the Red Army or killed by local anti-Soviet forces, and the consequent failure to obtain any valuable information on these organizations. The destruction of personnel was exacerbated by losses of a large part of the archives and registries that were not evacuated in

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[59] On German policy toward Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Baltic POWs in contrast to Russian and Jewish POWS, see Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 90, 92, 106–13; and Christoph Dieckmann, "The Murder of Soviet Prisoners of War in Lithuania," in *Karo belaisvių ir civilių gyventojų žudynės Lietuvoje, 1941–1944,* ed. Dieckmann, Vytautas Toleikis, and Rimantas Zizas (Vilnius: Margi Raštai, 2005), 244–47.

[60] *Pol'skoe podpol'e,* 462, 474. Okulicki's predecessor, General Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski, was arrested in March 1940. Okulicki was arrested in January 1941 and released after the Sikorski–Maiskii agreement later that year. He served as the last commander of *Armia krajowa* before he was arrested again and moved to Moscow, where he was tried and executed in 1946. Reporting the liquidation of a Polish underground cell in Lithuania in May 1941, the NKGB attributed its success to the penetration of the cell by Soviet agents (LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 5, ll. 137–42). Testimonies of Polish refugees conveyed a similar impression (Gross, *Revolution from Abroad,* 148).

time.[61] The system, however, did not miss a beat. On the contrary, the war and its immediate aftermath saw the expansion of information gathering, the scope of which could only be imagined before the war. How did they do it?

Archivists took the lead in solidifying and expanding wartime information gathering. German-occupied Estonia was a case in point. The entire Special Department of the national archives of the young Soviet republic, including the 200,000 index cards of the interwar Estonian political police, was evacuated in 1941 to Kirov, where a small team of specialists worked around the clock to systemize the material and expand it by 53,000 additional cards. In the fall of 1944, some 160,000 biographical cards of Estonians who had served in German military formations, compiled by the Germans and left in Estonia, were added for operational use by the returning Soviet regime. The number of categories in the Soviet card index was also growing fast, expanding from the 27 categories in 1939 to include wartime additions of members of anti-Soviet nationalist organizations, diplomatic representatives of the interwar sovereign governments, and people who had fled the country following the Soviet annexation.[62]

The "business as usual" mode was emphasized by the ongoing verification of the political reliability of tens of thousands of evacuees who were drafted into NKVD-led labor battalions and national armed groups, as well as ordinary evacuees. In 1943, for example, the Party requested inquiries on 458 people, which yielded compromising data on 146 individuals, including members of interwar parties and associations and volunteers in the Finnish army during the Winter War.[63]

Evacuation allowed the archivists to dig deeper into the political past of people in the occupied republics. With the fate of the war still in doubt, and much like the modus operandi of the late 1930s, researchers turned their attention to people and events that took place during the Russian Civil War. The archival departments of Ukraine, Estonia, and Latvia were instructed to quickly process data about the staffs and activities of the bourgeois

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[61] Unsurprisingly, NKVD surveys of popular moods during this period relied heavily on opened letters by citizens and servicemen. See *Belarus´ v pervye mesiatsy Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (22 iiunia–avgust 1941 g.): Dokumenty i materialy* (Minsk: NARB, 2006), 131, 139, 145, 168, 212–32.

[62] For a list of wartime categories, see ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 34, ll. 94–94a. For 1952, see ERAF SM f. 131, n. 1, s. 248, ll. 1–3.

[63] On ethnic Germans and Estonians in labor battalions, see Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War* (Novato: Presidio, 1998), 39–40; and Urmas Usai, *Eestlased tööpataljonides 1941–1942: Mälestusi ja dokumente* (Tallinn: Olion, 1993), 1:11–14. For the 1943 verification, see ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 34, ll. 51–54 and s. 37, l. 35.

governments of these countries during the Civil War. Accordingly, the name lists kept growing.[64]

With the return to the occupied territories in sight as the USSR turned the tide against Germany, the archivists were busy feeding information to the operational groups then in formation—the core units in charge of reestablishing Soviet power in the recovered territories—as well as verifying the political credentials and past of members of these groups.[65] Similar to the eve of the annexations in 1939–40, all heads of local archives were required in February 1943 to assist the security services in composing "orientation surveys" that mapped out non-Soviet political and social institutions, their structure, composition, activities, networking, and contacts with foreign governments and organizations.[66] The archival department also combed through newspapers that had been published in German-occupied Estonia, which it obtained with the help of the political departments of the Leningrad Front and the Estonian Riflemen's Corps. This source alone yielded 2,280 alleged collaborators from all walks of life. In July 1944, the assembled data were introduced to the would-be chiefs of county departments of the NKVD–NKGB, who then drew up lists of suspects in the respective counties. Concrete guidelines for the use of German material were issued six months later during a union-wide conference of archival and departmental directors.[67] This was just a first attempt to use German data. The massive archives the Germans left behind were promptly employed for the study of wartime institutions and personnel, especially the study of local armed auxiliary forces. The quest continued well into the postwar years. In March 1949, the materials of the German Wartime Resettlement Committee were discovered and a list was drawn up of people who had wanted to evacuate to Sweden. The same applied to other cleansing campaigns, where the card index was used, for example, to verify the wartime record and political, social, and ideological credentials of schoolteachers, whose detailed questionnaires were subjected to repeated verifications. Thirty-six categories of "political taint," comprising 45,376 individuals, were registered in 1945, followed by 39,468 persons in 40 categories a year later.[68]

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[64] ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 34, ll. 33–34.

[65] Tsentral´nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads´kykh ob˝iednan Ukraïny (TsDAHOU) f. 1, op. 6, spr. 698, ark. 1–3; ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 33, ll. 33–34; *Eestimaa Kommunistliku Partei Keskkomitee organisatsiooniline struktuur 1940–1991,* ed. E. Tarvel (Tallinn: Kistler-Ritso Eesti Sihtasutus, 2002), 182–83.

[66] ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 34, ll. 41–41a.

[67] ERAF SM f. 17/1, n. 1, s. 7, ll. 38–38a; GARF f. 5325, op. 10, d. 1697, l. 11.

[68] ERA f. R-2338, n. 1, s. 59, ll. 47, 78, 71.

If these measures seemed overwhelming, this was certainly not the view from Moscow. Pressure to expand the information gathering was constant and relentless. In December 1948, the minister for state security of the Estonian Republic was reprimanded for sloppy recording of the "nationalist element." As Moscow saw it, the existing records failed to reflect the actual situation, resulting in inadequate measures in the fight against the nationalist underground and its supporters. Hence a complementary card index was created, drawing data from official bulletins of Soviet and party organs, citizens' communications, confiscated documents of nationalist activists, and confessions of detainees. Similarly, it was decreed that suspects' relatives had to be registered as well, resulting in the by then already established pattern of mass deportations in which actual anti-Soviet activists were a minority among their relatives and supporters, who accompanied them to the special settlements.[69]

The importance attached to information gathering was underscored in the course of postwar civil war in the western borderlands. Captured armed guerrillas who otherwise would have been shot on the spot were often offered the opportunity to "atone for their crimes against the motherland" by returning to the guerrillas as Soviet informants. Just in case, they signed a statement that should they stray again, their families would pay for their recidivism with exile.[70] Nikita Khrushchev, who presided over the struggle against Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas, repeatedly emphasized that surveillance and meticulous registration of the population were the key to success. "We have to think carefully about each district, mobilize forces and improve surveillance so we can catch the bandits and clear the way," Khrushchev told party and security officials in western Ukraine. Seasoned police and party personnel should repeatedly go to the village and verify suspect lists, he said, and went on to remind his audience that "initially, the OUN [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists] operated legally under the Germans. We should find the lists they were using. That's why we have the Cheka.... I suggest that we draw information lists on the gangs in the districts, villages, and regions. These lists should indicate not only the number of bandits but also name the gangs' commanders."[71]

[69]   ERAF SM f. 131, n. 1, s. 151, ll. 38–39. For the composition of one wave of deportations in March 1949 by gender, age, family relations, and contacts with those arrested, see Aigi Rahi, *1949. aasta märtsiküüditamine Tartu linnas ja maakonnas* (Tartu: Kleio, 1998), 65–70.

[70]   TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 23, spr. 3286, ark. 57–59.

[71]   N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Nikita Khrushchev: Dva tsveta vremeni. Dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda,* 2 vols. (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2009), 1:109, 114, 125.

In gathering this precious information, no means were considered too extreme. Penetrating the ranks of the nationalist undergrounds was a formidable task given their cohesion, brutality, organizational structure, and methods—which often mirrored those of the NKVD—and a supportive rural population that alerted them in advance to the approach of strangers to the villages. Hence relatives of known guerillas and adolescent children were considered particularly valuable sources.[72] If Khrushchev was right to remind his subordinates that in the village everybody knows everything about everyone ("It is inconceivable that a peasant does not know the bandits in his midst. If a goose is missing, a peasant knows who stole it, whether it was Ivan or Petro who did it, just as he knows who steals his apples or honey. They know each other and they will tell you"),[73] then children were fountains of knowledge on the identity and whereabouts of the guerrillas.

As always, ethnonational strife offered the NKVD an opportunity to get a foot in the door. Poles, in particular, figured highly in assisting the NKVD, the more so in ethnically mixed communities and after the eruption of exterminatory campaigns pursued by the communities' underground forces. Difficulties only piled up in the wake of the mass departure of Poles to newly established Poland in 1944–47, which wiped out valuable networks. Tellingly, the authorities pursued the surveillance of the Polish evacuees all the way to Poland. Nor did they have problems in recruiting Polish agents, residents (veteran agents directing a group of informants), and informants. In June 1946, more than 60 percent of the 550 agents in the Ministry of State Security (MGB) Second Department who were engaged in surveillance of the Polish community in Vilnius were recent recruits.[74]

Equal Opportunity Recruitment

Was there a prototype of an informant during this era? The surveillance organs' own data imply that aside from a common pattern of a compromised

[72] Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 472; Jeffrey Burds, "Agentura: Soviet Informants' Networks and the Ukrainian Underground in Galicia, 1944–1948," *East European Politics and Society* 11, 1 (1997): 115; Pearu Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud Eesti vastupanuliikumisega: Banditismivaste võitluse osakond aastatel 1944–1947* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2007), 45.

[73] Tomilina, *Nikita Khrushchev,* 1:86.

[74] For reports on reactions of Polish citizens in western Ukraine to the announcement of the population exchange in the fall of 1944, see TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 23, spr. 892, ark. 156–65. On the number, composition, and activities of the Polish sector in the Lithuanian MGB, see LYA, f. K-1, ap. 2, b. 3, ll. 63–87. For a personal account of a young Pole who was recruited by the NKVD, including a description of his training as an informant, see Waldemar Lotnik with Julian Preece, *Nine Lives: Ethnic Conflict in the Polish–Ukrainian Borderlands* (London: Serif, 1999), 132–57. On the impact of the mass departure of Poles on the surveillance system in western Ukraine, see Burds, "Agentura," 116–19.

socio-political past used for blackmailing during the recruitment of individual informants, surveillance truly was an equal opportunity system. In its report on intelligence-operational work in January and March 1949, the Second Department of the Lithuanian MGB counted 463 agents and 2,208 informants, of whom 16 agents and 49 informants were new recruits. Some were recruited based on their useful contacts. Agent "Maksim," a prominent 56-year-old Jewish gynecologist whose list of friends and patients included former members of the Lithuanian interwar social and economic elite who were now identified as agents of foreign intelligence services, was recruited for these very reasons. Agent "Bal´chunas," a 57-year-old Lithuanian peasant who had served in the interwar Lithuanian and wartime German police forces, was recruited because of the information he could provide on individuals who were in contact with the U.S. embassy in Moscow and others who resided outside the Soviet Union. Agent "Algis," a 24-year-old worker, was trained by the German police in Dresden during the war and took part in battles against the Red Army before he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. Such a record earned people a 25-year sentence, but the familiarity of "Algis" with scores of people with similar backgrounds was more important to the MGB.

Maria Poškus lived up to her code name "Tsiganka" (Gypsy). Having moved to Germany during the war, where she married a Lithuanian who had served in the Wehrmacht, Poškus moved between Hamburg and England before she returned to Lithuania. She kept corresponding with her husband, who stayed in the British occupation zone in Germany, and was contemplating reuniting with him when she was recruited on account of her alleged useful contacts with the British intelligence. Agent "Tamara" was born in Philadelphia in 1925. After her father's death in 1934, the family returned to Lithuania. By 1949, "Tamara" was still in limbo, possessing neither Soviet nor U.S. citizenship despite qualifying for both. She did manage, however, to enroll in the anti-Soviet underground. Arrested in early 1949, she was not sentenced but rather was recruited as an agent on account of her past romantic relations with a leader of a nationalist guerrilla force, familiarity with other leaders of the underground, and potential intelligence regarding the U.S. embassy in Moscow.[75] While the Soviets may be faulted for coming up short in building a genuinely egalitarian society, at least on one front the regime constructed and nurtured an unmistakable socialist trait: every citizen—regardless of political past, ethnicity, religion, age, or gender—was an eligible informant.[76]

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[75] LYA f. K-1, ap. 2, b. 12, ll. 2–8, 11–13, 83–86.

[76] Unsurprisingly, this pattern was identical to the East German Stasi. See Barbara Miller, *The Stasi Files Unveiled: Guilt and Compliance in a Unified Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004), 35–85.

How were such individuals managed? One telling case was the infiltration into various Zionist organizations whose campaign for out-migration of Jews to pre-state Israel elevated them to the status of "fascist collaborationist tools of American imperialist, terrorist organizations." In the course of investigating Zionist activities in March 1947, the Second Department of the Lithuanian MGB recruited Bentsion Aronas, a 32-year-old engineer with solid Zionist credentials. Aronas soon emerged as a model agent. The department's profile of Aronas referred to him as a disciplined agent who tended to take the initiative with wide contacts and respect among fellow Zionists. Aronas solidified his standing in the MGB by offering information that led to the arrest and sentencing of several other activists in Lithuania and Belorussia and helped recruit the secretary of Drew Middleton, the *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow. His impeccable record led the MGB to appoint Aronas the chief agent of a decoy underground group whose task was to attract immigration activists in Lithuania, Poland, and Germany. The same people that Aronas recruited were instructed to keep an eye on him, making the organization look like a tangled web of compromised characters informing simultaneously on their brethren and on one another. Recruitment was done by straightforward blackmail.

Semen Gordon, the other key figure in the fake cell, was recruited on the basis of his criminal conviction in 1944. Fluent in several languages and in contact with family members in pre-state Israel and Norway, Gordon was sent on a five-month stint in West Germany under the guise of a German repatriate, a cruel irony for Jew at the time, with instructions to track down immigration activists and routes. To protect Gordon from unwarranted Western temptations and guarantee his return to the motherland, the MGB kept his family in the Soviet Union. Gordon's instructions included ways to conduct himself if interviewed by Western intelligence services and the specific information he should convey on the economic and political situation in Soviet Lithuania.[77] Whatever the successes of the operation intelligence-wise, it was also a brutal demonstration of the efficacy of the surveillance system in tearing apart the social fabric, setting members of certain communities against one another, and cultivating suspicion and intimidation across the board.

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[77] On the NKGB typologies of Jewish organizations and recommended methods for recruiting informants, see LYA f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 177, l. 2; and LYA f. V-15, ap. 7, b. 542, ll. 1–8. The case of the decoy cell is in LYA f. K-1, ap. 2, b. 9, ll. 2–19, 25–42, 53–54, 61–88, 94–98, 103–6, 114–15, 118–19, 135–36, 143–45.

Triumph and Weakness

The postwar quest for justice and revenge added new channels of gathering information. The imperatives of compiling propaganda material for use in the international arena, acquiring knowledge about its society's conduct in war, and constructing official mythologies of the unprecedented cataclysm propelled the regime to create multiple investigative commissions that brought on board hundreds of thousands of new informants whose own agenda overlapped with the regime's, even if partially and temporarily. The best known of these commissions was the "Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and Their Accomplices, and of the Damages They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises, and Institutions in the USSR." Established in November 1942, the commission employed about 32,000 public representatives in charge of ascertaining the facts of Nazi crimes. More than 7 million citizens collected and prepared documents and, in turn, produced more than 54,000 statements and 250,000 protocols of witness interrogations and declarations, as well as approximately 4 million documents on damage caused by the Nazis. In the Latvian Republic, some 53,578 people took part in the commission's work, of which 25,335 were paid employees and the rest volunteers or members of the Party and the Komsomol. In the western Ukrainian region of Volyn´ alone, evidence was gathered by more than 6,000 people, not counting the investigators and technical workers. Significantly, the 1,329 departmental commissions in the region included 891 rural soviets, traditionally a challenging site for Soviet power.[78]

The security services' control over the information gathered by the commission was established early on by specific decrees. On the ground, scores of local commissions in the localities that consisted of local party and state bosses, Red Army officers, and selected representatives of the public (journalists, artists, doctors, and members of the local clergy) were guided and controlled by NKVD–KGB branches. Whatever the deficiencies embedded in the way the commission gathered its information—mainly a witch-hunt atmosphere and personal vendettas—they were outweighed by the immediacy

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[78] Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika* 6, 4 (2005): 801; Juliette Denis, "La Commission républicaine extraordinaire en Lettonie (1944–1945): Support de la refondation du régime soviétique," in *Vremia "veselogo soldata": Tsennosti poslevoennogo obshchestva i ikh osmyslenie v sovremennoi Rossii* (Perm´: Astaf´evskie chteniia, 2008), 215; Marian R. Sanders, "Extraordinary Crimes in Ukraine: An Examination of Evidence Collection by the Extraordinary State Commission of the U.S.S.R., 1943–1946" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1995), 84; GARF f. 7021, op. 55, d. 364, ll. 7–8.

of the investigations that were launched upon regaining territory and the utter seriousness with which the commission members approached their task.[79]

The assembled information was put to immediate use as waves of arrests swept the recovered territories and war crime trials dominated the local landscape for years to come.[80] In the Ukrainian Republic alone, between 1943 and 1957 some 93,690 people were arrested and charged with collaboration with the Germans. Fifty-eight percent of the nearly 82,000 arrested in 1946–52 came from the western provinces.[81] When it came to information gathering, even the calamity of the war presented an opening rather than a setback.

The mass deportations from the western borderlands in the spring and summer of 1949, when over 125,000 people in the Baltic and the Moldavian republics were apprehended and exiled, were both a crowning achievement and public display of the system's chronic problem. After a decade of relying almost solely on personnel imported from the Russian core and enduring violations of secrecy that often resulted in targets slipping out of its grip, Soviet surveillance had finally reversed these patterns. Attempts to indigenize the informant pool gathered momentum in the course of the struggle against nationalist guerillas. In mid-1945, the NKVD already registered over 11,000 local agents and informants in western Ukraine. In Lithuania, it managed to increase the share of Lithuanians in its ranks from 25.3 percent in 1945 to 41.1 percent in 1947. Numerous files on the liquidation of anti-Soviet partisans indicated the indispensable role of informants in the localities, where command of the indigenous language was a prerequisite. This headway, however, carried the steep price of having to rely on numerous unverified, unqualified, and unreliable informants of dual loyalty, who were recruited in haste under wartime and civil war circumstances and constituted an estimated 60 percent of the surveillance apparatus in 1946.[82]

[79] Sorokina, "People and Procedures," 813, 823–24, 825 n. 88; Sanders, "Extraordinary Crimes in Ukraine," 77. For typical compositions of these commissions in the town of Iv´e in the Molodechno region of Belarus, see GARF f. 7021, op. 89, d. 2; on Virumaa in Estonia, see GARF f. 7021, op. 97, d. 15, l. 19; and on Horodok in the L´viv region, see Derzhavnyi arkhiv L´vivs´koi oblasti (DALO) f. 3, op. 1, spr. 279, ark. 1.

[80] Nathalie Moine, "La commission d'enquête soviétique sur les crimes de guerre Nazis: Entre reconquête du territoire, écriture du récit de la guerre et usages justiciers," *Le mouvement social* 1, 2 (2008): 105–7.

[81] Tanja Penter, "Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material," *Slavic Review* 64, 4 (2005): 783 n. 2 and 789 n. 15.

[82] Burds, "Agentura," 120; Truska, *Sovietinis Saugumas Lietuvoje,* 102, 108; For one of many detailed reports by informants that led to the arrest of nationalist guerrillas here in the Lithuanian county of Siauliai in November 1947, see LYA f. K-1, ap. 45, b. 1492, ll. 9–9a; and Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 459–60.

In 1949, Soviet doggedness finally bore fruit. In the three Baltic republics, locals accounted for over 60 percent (46,791 of 76,212) of the forces employed to carry out the deportations of their brethren.[83] Moreover, the absolute majority of people on the deportation lists were apprehended, which underlined the ability both to obtain accurate information and to avoid leaks, in sharp contrast to the 1941 deportations.[84] There were inevitable leaks: poor Estonian peasants assembled to list a priori kulaks informed the latter when they were slated for deportation; Latvian peasants sold their property once troops began assembling so as to avoid being classified as kulaks or simply left the villages; and in Moldavia, the June deportations were preceded by a wave of rumors.[85] Despite such incidents and cases of loading the trains with exempted categories of families of army servicemen, kolkhoz members, sick older people, and newborn babies, the absolute majority of marked people were located and deported, a remarkable feat given that the operation lasted for a full four days amid a suspicious and panic-stricken population.[86] Once again, myriad registers produced by various Soviet institutions, from local card indexes to records of military tribunals and taxation records, were put to devastating use in identifying and selecting candidates for deportation. The passport system contributed its share by filling in the gaps. Ironically, three years earlier, the MGB–MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) objected to the request by the Latvian and Estonian party-state leaders to issue passports to the entire population, including rural inhabitants. The latter prevailed, arguing that aside from passports' security benefits in the countryside and

[83] Heinrich Strods and Matthew Kott, "The File on Operation 'Priboi': A Re-Assessment of the Mass Deportations of 1949," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, 1 (2002): 24–26. For the recollections of an Estonian Komsomol member of the mobilization of youth to help in the implementation of the March 1949 deportations, see Rutt Hinrikus, ed., *Eesti Rahva Elulood* (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2000), 2:50–62.

[84] For the NKGB addressing the problem of missing individuals in the course of the June 1941 deportations from Lithuania, see LYA f. V-135, ap. 7, b. 8, ll. 48–49. In the Estonian county of Viljandi, only 494 out of 573 who were marked for deportation were apprehended, because of a shortage in operational personnel and flawed information and preparation. See Toomas Hiio et al., eds., *Estonia, 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity* (Tallinn: Estonian Foundation for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, 2006), 373.

[85] ERAF f. 1175, n. 4, s. 1; Elmars Pelkaus, ed., *Policy of Occupation Powers in Latvia, 1939–1991: A Collection of Documents* (Riga: Nordic, 1999), 301; Valeriu Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940–1950-e gg.* (Moscow: Terra, 1994), 402–3.

[86] In one of the last deportations of 15,537 alleged kulaks on 2 October 1951, the Lithuanian MGB recorded 31 individuals who escaped and 164 who were not at home when the families were rounded up (LYA f. V-135, ap. 7, b. 328, ll. 144, 286–87). On the inclusion of sick elderly people and newborn babies, see a report from the Estonian district of Viljandi in ERAF SM f. 17/1, n. 1, s. 140, ll. 96–97.

their utility in fighting crime, local constituencies had traditionally viewed the passport as a "fundamental document for ascertaining their citizenship." In the spring of 1949, these symbols of citizenship were used by the MVD to locate scores of individuals who escaped the initial wave of arrests under the pretense of routine verification of internal passports.[87] Evidently proud of their performance, the MGB and MVD decorated dozens of employees with military awards for distinguishing themselves in conducting the deportations.[88]

This said, the entire operation exposed the tension between the professional accuracy to which they aspired and the modus operandi of indiscriminate targeting. Thousands of marked people evaded deportation at the time, requiring additional mop-up operations. But the MGB did not blink. Forced to execute the deportation on short notice and fulfill a preset quota, it worked with constantly changing lists of deportees. The primary goal of fulfilling the quotas was achieved by creating a reserve pool of thousands of potential deportees. The authorities ended up deporting 30,629 families and 90,844 individuals instead of the originally designated 29,000 families consisting of 87,000 individuals.[89] With such methods, failure to fulfill a quota was practically impossible.

As the Stalin era was coming to a close, the surveillance system looked as omnipotent and omnipresent as ever, and the security services seemed appropriately self-assured. Armed resistance was defeated; and its leaders, surrounded by Soviet informants, were hunted one by one. "You will not leave this prison. That means that you will not leave as the person that came here, your views and attitudes intact," the MVD chief in L´viv told the wife of the captured nationalist leader Vasyl´ Halasa during an interrogation in July 1953. "Your only chance for survival is to be reborn, become different people. Of course, you would need to make amends to the government, exculpate your actions and the damage you have done." Which they did. Halasa's wife was allowed to leave Ukraine—without her children and family, who were still in exile—and with the hope that this was enough to turn her into an informant on émigré nationalist groups. The reeducation and conversion of archenemies to informants included tours in industrial

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[87] Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 479; ERAF SM f. 17/1, n. 1, s. 139, l. 250; Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml´, 1940–1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 188–90; Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism,* 427–29.

[88] GARF f. 9479, op. 1, d. 475, ll. 166–69. On 25–26 August 1949, *Pravda* published lists of 83 decorated policemen.

[89] ERAF SM f. 17/1, n. 1, s. 1, ll. 155–59; GARF f. 9479, op. 1, d. 475, l. 114; ERAF SM f. 17/2, n. 1, s. 306, l. 6; GARF f. 9479, op. 1, d. 475, l. 198; Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy,* 485–86.

complexes and cities celebrating 1 May and the tercentennial of the Treaty of Pereiaslav that brought left-bank Ukraine into the tsarist domain. A broken man, Halasa renounced his nationalist past. His confession, along with those of other captured underground leaders was published, and eventually he was pardoned and allowed to resume his education and professional career.[90]

By late 1951, the 2.6 million citizens of the Lithuanian Republic were blanketed by an army of nearly 28,000 MGB agents, residents, and informants, a force the size of a little over 1 percent of the population, not even including the MVD employees. The magnitude of these figures is even more remarkable when compared with other systems famous for pervasiveness and infiltration of their societies. At its numerical high point in 1989, the East German Stasi, the epitome of ubiquitous agency, consisted of 91,000 full-time staff and 174,000 informants who monitored 16.7 million citizens—that is, about 1.5 percent of the population. When the territorial size and population distribution are taken into account, the omnipresence of the political police in the Soviet western frontier looks even more formidable.[91] But it also embodied some of the fundamental weaknesses that plagued the Stalinist polity and had to be addressed even before the leader's death.

The Small Issue of Reliability

How reliable was the information gathered by the Soviet security organs? This question plagues all state security services regardless of time and place, but as often is the case, the Soviets were somewhat distinct. The Soviet security agencies were aware of the imprecise nature of their information gathering—not least because of the language barrier in the non-Slavic republics, where agents' lack of command of the indigenous languages made the infiltration of key cohorts rather difficult.[92]

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[90] Maria Savchyn Pyskir, *Thousands of Roads: A Memoir of a Young Woman's Life in the Ukrainian Underground during and after World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 112–19, 127, 181–84, 212–15, 219–30; citation on 191.

[91] LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 144, l. 11. Figures on the Stasi are from Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit: Richtlinien und Durchführungsbestimmungen* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1996), 59; Jens Gieseke, *Der Mielke-Konzern: Die Geschichte der Stasi, 1945–1990* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006), 72.

[92] By the fall of 1956, the KGB acknowledged that barely 53% of its agents in Lithuania had mastered Lithuanian and severely restricted the surveillance of priests and former nationalists who were released from the Gulag (LYA f. 1771, ap. 190, b. 11, ll. 37, 40–41, 44–47). Interestingly, the East German Stasi, too, estimated that in some districts barely 25% of the information supplied by informants was of operational value (Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality* [London: Pearson, 2003], 103).

The unreliability of a large portion of the gathered information was augmented by the questionable reliability of those who solicited and processed it. By the late Stalinist era, this turned into a thorny issue and triggered a drive for improved professional standards. Following union-wide MGB decrees on 10 January and 10 April 1952, regional branches of the organization were subjected to drastic cuts in personnel and recruitment procedures were thoroughly reorganized. The key categories of "agent" and "informant" were replaced by "agent" and "special agent," respectively, and could be recruited only by heads of departments. Rank-and-file operatives who had hitherto played a major role in recruitment were limited to the preparation of material on the new recruits.[93]

Within two months, the Lithuanian branch was reduced by 65.6 percent, from 27,711 agents, informants, and residents to 9,517 people. The agency's own analysis pointed to serious deficiencies. Some 1,054 agents and informants were dismissed on grounds of double-dealing, misinformation, and violation of secrecy. The rest simply appeared to be useless and redundant. Like so many other Soviet institutions, the security forces were plagued by the urge to keep up appearances and fulfill quotas. Some agents were employed regardless of having been exposed by fellow kolkhozniks who complained that "[the agents] did not fulfill their work norms because they were busy with secret cooperation with the MGB organs." Others who were unqualified or had criminal records were kept in the surveillance network since "there was no surveillance in the kolkhoz where they worked and they are needed in any case." Scores of informants who at least on paper looked like promising prospects for valuable information on the old intelligentsia and national minorities were kept on the rosters despite offering no information and avoiding meetings with their handlers over several years. In some cases, they refused flat out to work for the organization or threatened suicide if they were not left alone. Hence, for example, after four futile years the MGB had to release the private physician of Antanas Smetona, the interwar Lithuanian president, who was also a driving force behind the French-Lithuanian Society. The person, identified as informant "Iusupov" flatly refused to offer any information from the moment of his recruitment in 1948.

The MGB concluded that the purge marked a significant improvement in its work. Having been saddled with too many agents and informants and

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[93] Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 460–61. Notably, the police agencies pursued these reforms simultaneously to its (futile) flirtation with reforms of the Gulag as a whole, turning it into an economically more effective enterprise. See Aleksei Tikhonov, "The End of the Gulag," in *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag,* ed. Paul Gregory (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), 67–73.

little time, if any, to work with them, the overworked local leaders produced no results at all. The reduced numbers allowed the leaders finally to cultivate quality work and personnel.[94] But as often happened with Soviet stabs at reform, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater. Pressed to reduce their personnel by two-thirds in three months, the surveillance agencies ended up losing a significant number of qualified agents without sufficient time to develop new viable criteria for recruitment, thus countering the benefits of eliminating redundancy and, by their own admission, having a negative impact on surveillance as a whole.[95]

The Soviets' own assessment of the reliability of most of the information on alleged enemies during the Stalin era was clear. The application of "special measures" may have yielded numerous confessions and convictions but not necessarily accurate information. The committees created in April 1956 to review all cases in the special settlements did their best to move away from the hitherto prevailing imposition of undifferentiated categories and charges and reduce the number of political inmates to those "with Soviet blood on their hands."[96] On average, one of the amnestied inmates recalled, 20 out of every 25 inmates from each group reviewed were released, some had their sentences reduced by half, and a rare few sentences were left unchanged. Moreover, he was asked to write a detailed report on the false accusations that landed him in the camps.[97] Another inmate, a former candidate for party membership and collective-farm chairman, who under constant beating confessed to false charges and incriminated a multitude of other fellow Communists as members of the Ukrainian nationalist underground, was released and his sentence of 25 years at forced labor terminated based on the abusive interrogation methods.[98]

The problems compounded in the wake of Stalin's death. As was true for the rest of the Soviet enterprise, Stalin's death was a watershed in the

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[94] LYA f. K-1, ap. 10, b. 144, ll. 11–19, 21–25.

[95] Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 461.

[96] In February 1956, the Central Committee and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet ordered the creation of 65 review committees with a mandate to issue immediate releases, rehabilitation, and reduced sentences. The committees were ordered to take into consideration the activities of convicts prior to arrest, social position, party membership, role in the Great Patriotic War and the partisan movement, attitude toward work in the camps, and the social danger posed by past crimes. The committees were also asked to report to the corresponding party organs the names of those guilty of fabricating cases and violators of socialist legality inside the camps. Detailed instructions on the composition and mandate of the committees are in TsDAHOU 1/24/4306/211–19. For a firsthand account by the chair of one such committee, see Petro Shelest, "*Spravzhnii sud istorii shche poperedu,"* ed. Iurii Shapoval (Kiev: Geneza, 2003), 111–13**.**

[97] Shumuk, *Life Sentence,* 279, 282–85.

[98] TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 4306, ark. 166–75.

life of the surveillance system. The ideological bleeding triggered by the denunciation of the leader's cult, the renunciation of mass terror, and the gradual opening to the outside world translated almost immediately into new targets, new obstacles, and new methods of obtaining and using information. Relating the lessons of the era to its young apprentices, KGB directors sounded almost nostalgic for an earlier, simpler age, when borders were controllable and the enemy recognizable and straightforward in its tactics and ideology. Although the new circumstances by no means implied "unnecessary liberalism and compromise with the criminal element," as the Fourth Department of the Estonian KGB emphasized in its 1956 annual report, they did underline the need for better documentation and greater care in formulating cases and, equally important, focusing only on hostile individuals and not their families. The era of collateral damage was over, at least formally.[99]

Closely associated with and reliant on the now-renounced mass terror, the importance of surveillance increased with the colossal effort to sustain the two remaining institutional pillars of the totalitarian system: an economic order based on a nonmarket, command economy and a political order based on single-party dictatorship.[100] The reforms launched by Stalin's successors created a world that was much more complex than the one they had hitherto inhabited. Adjustment was turbulent, and the security organs were often caught asleep at the wheel and trapped in their own mythologies and institutional anxieties. When news on the workers' uprising in East Berlin on 17 June 1953 reached the western frontier, the surveillance reports recorded a utopian harmony of a public that was unanimous in its condemnation of the "fascist hirelings bribed with American dollars who not only wished to derail peaceful construction in the GDR [German Democratic Republic] but also came out against all those who want to toil peacefully," to cite one of many identical reactions.[101] Given the fractured societies in the region and the deep-seated hostility to Soviet power that was often highlighted in reports until then, one could not avoid the impression that the turmoil and fear that engulfed the security organs throughout the last years of Stalin's

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[99] Chebrikov, *Istoriia,* 494–96, 511, 522–31, 544–45; ERAF SM f. 131, n. 347, s. 1, ll. 30, 45, 55.

[100] KGB reports on the job performance of its various departments at the time underlined the importance of *agentura* and prophylaxis rather than punitive measures. See ERAF SM f. 131, n. 347, s. 1, ll. 30, 34, 41, 43, 47, 49.

[101] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) f. 5, op. 30, d. 5, l. 95. For reports on the public reaction in other western Ukrainian regions, see TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 2998, ark. 11–15, 18–20; spr. 2737, ark. 63–64. For reactions recorded in Estonia, see ERAF f. 1, n. 194, s. 1, ll. 1–3.

rule, combined with the decisive defeat of the armed guerrillas, produced a surrealistic rosy picture of the popular mood in the region.

Hence, when a rare alignment of succession struggle and institutional rivalries inadvertently turned a public debate over the role of the Communist Party in managing the economy into a threat to the political and territorial integrity of the Soviet Union, the surveillance agencies were able only to analyze ex post facto rather than anticipating the crisis. Throughout the spring and summer of 1953, the western republics were seized by unprecedented excitement when locals from Estonia to Moldavia interpreted the simultaneous initiatives to reorganize the administrative division of the republics, to accelerate the indigenization of local cadres, and to reach out to prominent figures of "bourgeois-nationalist" background as inseparable and decisive steps in the dissolution of the union. The regime confronted the popular identification of (Russian) ethnicity and (communist) political affiliation and the conflation of reforms with total collapse. Multiple reports recorded indigenous populations publicly talking about secession from the Soviet Union, de-Russification of the Baltic republics and western Ukraine, and abolition of the single-party dictatorship and the collective farms, and demanding the restoration of indigenous languages as the lingua franca in state institutions.[102] Scores of local party members and members of the Soviet intelligentsia were identified as instigators of the unrest, forcing the leader of the Lithuanian Communist Party, which emerged as an especially troublesome case, to offer an unusual public assurance that the "Communists of Lithuania will remain loyal to the Central Committee of our party."[103]

The difficulty of extracting information from and about politically restless cohorts was underscored again barely three years later with waves of amnesties underway. The KGB and MVD were on the mark in warning the authorities about the dangers of allowing released nationalist guerrillas and activists back to the borderlands. Yet their repeated warnings went unheeded, resulting temporarily in a near paralysis of public life, especially in the countryside, when the unrest in Poland and Hungary in 1956 spilled over into the western

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[102] On the unrest in the western frontier in the spring and summer of 1953, see Amir Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (2008): 213–22. On plans to reach out to "former people," see Tonu Tannberg, "Novyi kurs L. Berii po podavleniiu dvizheniia soprotivleniia v Baltii i v zapadnoi Ukraine vesnoi 1953 goda," in his *Politika Moskvy v respublikakh Baltii v poslevoennye gody, 1944–1956* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2008), 78–106; and Dmitrii Vedeneev and Iurii Shapoval, "Byl li Lavrentii Beriia ukrainskim natsionalistom," *Zerkalo nedeli*, 13 July 2001.

[103] *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953: Stenogramma iiul´skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999), 91, 148–53.

regions and forced the authorities to impose a stricter passport regime in trouble spots and to relocate a large number of returnees for work in the USSR's eastern provinces. Frustrated, the KGB sharply rebuked the party for "counterproductive and inadequate" cuts of personnel in the western provinces that only exacerbated the crisis.[104]

The KGB's own record in 1956 was, however, far from impressive. The unrest that followed the eruptions in Poland and Hungary exposed a crucial failure in digesting and processing information. Despite having identified Baltic students as a potential problem already in the spring of 1956, it was students who initiated and led mass, well-organized anti-Soviet demonstrations. Komsomol, party, and police surveys portrayed a cohort that by and large was isolated from Soviet life (some of whose members could not even name the first secretary of the Communist Party), deeply anti-Russian, avid followers of foreign radio broadcasts, and inspired by past sovereignty and the present-day West.[105] Despite the intensified monitoring of institutions that would shortly turn into major trouble spots, the KGB seemed to miss them. Five months before the eruptions, the agency curtailed initiatives by regional officers to recruit agents among rank-and-file students in certain academies and ruled out the need to establish *agentura* in all educational institutions.[106] Come fall, Estonian students challenged a pillar of the totalitarian order when they invited peers in other institutions to form an independent union, established regular contact with Finnish students, demanded the exclusion of Russian language and Marxism from the school curriculum, expressed vocal support for the Hungarian rebels, and vowed to follow their example should similar circumstances arise.[107] Workers' participation in the demonstrations was an especially sore point. Heavy industry figured prominently among the KGB's surveillance priorities. Throughout 1955, the 14 KGB agents recruited from more than 2,500 employees in a large plant for the repair and modernization

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[104] On the KGB warnings in Lithuania, see LYA f. 1771, ap. 190, b. 11, ll. 24–25, 41; in western Ukraine, TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 4297, ark. 4, 8–9, and *Litopys UPA: Nova seriia,* 7 (Kyiv and Toronto, 2001–3): 536–44; in western Belarus, NARB f. 4, op. 62, d. 427, ll. 255–59, 265–66; in Moldova, GARF f. 9479, op. 1, d. 925, ll. 53–53 ob., and Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy,* 721–23, 726–29, 736–38. On the unrest that nationalist returnees caused in the borderlands, see Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit," *Journal of Modern History* 78, 2 (2006): 347–56. On the imposition of a stricter passport regime in L´viv in the fall of 1956, see DAMVSU Kiev f. 3, op. 1, spr. 184, ark. 15–18, 46. On redirection of returnees to work in eastern regions, see TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, spr. 4297, ark. 32–41. For the KGB criticism of the cuts in personnel and the ensuing complications, see TsDAHOU 1/24/4297/44, 46–48.

[105] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 46, d. 192, ll. 6–8, 10, 19–20, 179; LYA f. 4421, ap. 12, b. 57, ll. 27a–42.

[106] ERAF SM f. 131, n. 347, s. 1, l. 45.

[107] ERAF f. 1, n. 211, s. 5, ll. 108–11; RGASPI f. M-1, op. 46, d. 192, ll. 147–49.

of battleships (only one seemed to have been blackmailed into informing based on objectionable social origin, and none of the rest was motivated by material concerns) offered detailed information on the job performance, private lives, and political past of their fellow workers.[108] In fall 1956, one could ask: what good did all this information yield?

The KGB estimated that a crowd of 30,000–40,000 people gathered at the old Rasos historical cemetery in Kaunas on the night of 2 November 1956. The All Souls' Day tradition of lighting candles quickly turned into mass political demonstrations and violent clashes with the police, with support for Hungary and calls for an independent Lithuania, free of Russians. The urgent KGB investigation came up with the embarrassing discovery that most of the ringleaders of the mass disturbances were student members of the Komsomol, including many of working-class origins.[109] Caught off-guard, the KGB offered a succinct ex post facto analysis of a variety of causes for the eruptions, yet no one tried to explain how students were allowed to agitate uninterrupted and to interact freely with foreign students. The poor state of surveillance was underlined by alarmed ethnic Russians in Kaunas, who appealed directly to Moscow, citing their lack of confidence in the local party and KGB, which they accused of misleading Moscow and intentionally downplaying the political significance of the riots.[110] By all accounts, this was a low moment in the illustrious life of Soviet surveillance. Still, how did it come to this?

Explaining Methods, Measuring Success

Why did the Soviets tolerate inaccurate information despite being aware of the problem? While such a dilema cannot be explained by a monocasual factor, one systemic feature emerged above all. Under Stalin, carpet bombing reigned over precision hits, and for good reason. Information gathering was shaped by an overarching principle that guided the entire system: working toward the *Vozhd'* (Leader). Much like their Nazi counterparts, Soviet practices were driven by an intentional lack of institutional integrity that allowed for interference at will by the supreme leadership. Encouraged and intimidated by a leader known for his uninhibited brutality, informed by a militant ideology, and operating in uncertainty and within a warlike ethos, anxious agencies and individuals did their best to outdo one another in an attempt to anticipate the will of the supreme leader or to please him, further

[108] ERAF SM f. 131, n. 1, s. 352, ll. 1–13.

[109] LYA f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 509, ll. 176–203, 242–51; b. 510, ll. 330–34.

[110] "Sotsial´no-politicheskaia obstanovka v Pribaltike v 50-e gody," *Voennye arkhivy Rossii,* no. 1 (1993): 250.

radicalizing conduct on the ground.[111] More concretely, this modus operandi led to constant exaggeration by the reporting agencies. Guessing the will of the boss was never an easy task, especially because Stalin kept sending mixed messages and making U-turns in policies. After encouraging the brutalization of the Polish population during the first nine months of the annexation, on 3 July 1940 Stalin abruptly ordered the L´viv party bosses to stop harassing the Poles and focus on developing brotherly relations between Poles and Ukrainians. Addressing the issue of peasants seeking departure to Romania, Stalin wrote to Khrushchev on 2 April 1941 that "of course, shooting people is permissible, but shooting is not our main work method."[112] But if the 1930s had taught people anything, it had taught them that it was better to err on the side of zeal and excess than on the side of compassion and precision. Always uncertain, Stalin's lieutenants opted for zeal.

Time and again, the result was conscious and deliberate collective targeting that placed terrorization of potential targets above studying them and paralyzing the entire suspicious environment rather than focusing on specific individuals. During the initial phase of the invasion of eastern Poland, Khrushchev did not hesitate to publicly assault a group of NKVD generals as invisible scum and scoundrels who wrote nonsensical reports and sat and chatted in the rear instead of carrying out executions. Ironically, one of the NKVD generals countered that they did shoot a number of people but would not do it without proper procedure.[113] Panteleimon Ponomarenko, the first secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party, showed more concern for precision when he declared that "we will not object to the peasants giving it to them [the settlers] on the snout. It is arbitrariness that we will not tolerate.… Watch out that some Polish poor peasant [*bedniak-poliak*] is not classified as a settler and ends up starving."[114]

But both Khrushchev and Ponomarenko ignored concerns over arbitrary identification of alleged enemies on the grounds that this was an integral component of revolutionary justice and savage class war.[115] These patterns

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[111] On the lethal triad of all-powerful personal rule, lack of institutional integrity, and radicalizing impetus in both systems, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 3rd ed. (New York: Harvest, 1967), 389–437; and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936–1945: Nemesis* (New York: Norton, 2000), esp. chaps. 6 and 8.

[112] RGASPI f. 17, op. 167, d. 59, l. 26; d. 60, l. 2.

[113] *Radians´ki orhany derzhavnoï bezpeky u 1939–chervni1941 r.*, 196–97.

[114] NARB f. 4, op. 21, d. 1764, ll. 15–16; d. 1521, l. 207; d. 1683, l. 19.

[115] Aleksander Wat, *My Century,* ed. and trans. Richard Lourie (New York: Norton, 1990), 105–6; Tobias Privitelli, "Irredentism, Expansion, and the Liberation of the European Proletariat: Stalin's Considerations on How to Bring Communism to the Western Neighbors of the Soviet Union, 1920–1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bern, Switzerland, 2008), 332.

were institutionalized in the postwar era. Throughout the first half of 1945, the NKVD plenipotentiaries at the front—some of whom presided over the 1940–41 cleansing operation in eastern Poland and the Baltic states—were engaged in a private competition as to who would carry out and report to Moscow the largest number of arrests and executions.[116] With Stalin breathing down his neck during the postwar collectivization and anti-nationalist campaigns ("I warn you that if you persist in taking such an unstate-like and un-Bolshevik path in the future, this business may end badly"),[117] Khrushchev bluntly altered lower estimates of anti-Soviet guerrillas fatalities to significantly larger numbers, publicly lamented the "liberalism displayed by the NKVD and NKGB in 1941," and the current "nonsensical, very, very low number of [rebel] families deported," exhorted his subordinates to "conduct deportation to Siberia in daylight," and instructed them to "arrest even the least important ones. Some must be tried, others can be hanged, the rest deported. For one of ours, we will take a hundred of them," and "You haven't used enough violence! When you seize a village where they killed two women, you must destroy the entire village."[118] Collateral ruled the day.

In all likelihood, this was not a modus operandi that would entice mimicking by other intelligence services. It would be a mistake, however, to evaluate the surveillance system on a professional basis alone. True, opting for collective targeting ran counter to the professional ethos to which the security services aspired, and it further embittered large segments of society and violated the official stand of individually based justice following the "Great Break." But in the Stalinist pressure cooker and quota system, indiscriminate targeting was not simply the only method of choice. It was also highly effective in subjugating a restless society—a dividend that outweighed all other deficiencies. Imprecision was a reflection of both the system and its ever-suspicious leader, who blocked all attempts at reform and an affordable price tag. Shifting course to a more accurate gathering of information and individual targeting was conditioned both by the death of the dictator and by successors with a different regard for their society.

Conclusion

The fall of 1956 may have marked a low point for the security services, but the KGB did not betray a sense of despair or resignation. Nor did it resort to its old methods. With the help of Komsomol activists, interrogations, and

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[116] Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi predsedatel´ KGB: Ivan Serov* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 39–40.

[117] RGASPI f. 17, op. 167, d. 72, l. 126.

[118] Tomilina, *Nikita Khrushchev*, 1:86–87, 90, 118; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: Norton, 2003), 195–96.

intelligence, its investigators reconstructed the events and quickly apprehended the leading instigators of the riots. The agency chose not to prosecute several students who had been caught a few days earlier writing pro-Hungarian graffiti and limited itself to "prophylactic" measures since the students were of "our social origins"—that is, workers. Instead, it recommended that they be expelled from the university and drafted into the army as a deterrence to other potential offenders. The response to the mass outbreaks three days later was equally restrained. Except for four individuals who were arrested and sentenced, the rest of the 85 detainees were questioned, warned, and released.[119] Restraint spelled confidence, and for a reason. By that time, the KGB was already in full transition to a new era.

With a new leadership that displayed confidence in local cadres and the population, as well as in the ability of the system to absorb shocks—the very features absent from Stalin's world—reforms were underway. Further compilation and use of the special card index was ruled unnecessary, and sometime later it was stored in a remote location in Siberia.[120] The security forces moved to enforce widespread communal policing on the restless western frontier via public trials, street patrols, and an active constituency of war veterans that yielded more information on its population than ever before. With the armed opposition crushed, the embryonic dissident movement offered nothing the security services could not handle. This, however, was only half of the story. With mass terror out, the regime faced two major challenges of its own making. Mass terror was the only viable tool to keep in check the growing and unbridgeable gap between the utopian claims and the dreary reality of socialism in power. The question now arose: how long could the Stalinist formula of vast operational knowledge and little social understanding be sustained, especially with incomprehensible and restless youth, a rising middle class, and increasing exposure to a wealthier outside world via tourism, radio and television broadcasts, and cultural exchanges— in short, the very things that the Soviet Union struggled to either fathom or contain.

A final word concerns the relations between the Soviet surveillance system and the Soviet enterprise as a whole, a perspective that highlights that system's relatively impressive record in infiltrating alien constituencies, especially when compared with the intelligence services of other polities. Imposing their rule on foreign populations, European empires, such as the British and the French, developed vast systems of study and control with

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[119] LYA f. K-1, ap. 3, b. 509, ll. 178, 245.

[120] Kopylova, "V poiskakh 'spetskartotetki GAU NKVD SSSR,'" 31– 37.

large numbers of local informants. Yet, in the absence of a universalist ethos, none sought the integration of either informants or the surveilled population as citizens. Hampered by ignorance of indigenous societies and often unable to penetrate their information systems, the security agencies strictly observed and institutionalized a colonial hierarchy between rulers and "deceitful natives" on racial and often-overlapping class lines. This hierarchy, in turn, limited the formation of a common agenda between regime and population and between agents and local informants.[121] Similar obstacles hindered the Nazi continental empire when it engaged with the same populations discussed in this essay, which it approached with a contrasting package to that of the Soviets: an outdated operational intelligence, on the one hand, and a formidable arsenal of social-cultural knowledge, on the other. Subjecting these societies to their racial ethos, the Nazis maintained a rigid hierarchy that a priori excluded locals, collaborators included, from integration into the empire's socio-political fabric.[122] Reflecting on both systems, a young Frenchman who witnessed the Soviet operations in person in Estonia, offered an apt observation. "[The SS] would not have done as well," wrote Jean Cathala. "What fascism lacked was … a structured power in which civil society, the political regime, the economy and repression completely overlap and, especially, the anchoring in one state of the mentalities and customs that had been emerging from the beginning of time. National Socialism was incapable of filling that hiatus except with atrocities."[123]

Modern nation-states that have coped with similar situations seem to offer a more apt comparison to the Soviet imperial nation-state hybrid. The tale of the Israeli security services and the Arab minority in Israel

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[121] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[122] On Nazi studies in the 1930s of societies they would later occupy, see Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastward: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On Nazi ethnographers' encounters with the Soviet population, see Eric J. Schmultz and Samuel D. Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of George Leibrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy," in *German Scholarship and Ethnic Cleansing, 1919–1945,* ed. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 51–85. It is important to note that when the entire number of Soviet informants is taken into account—including party, Komsomol, and trade union members, street patrol forces, and those involved in the constant mobilization campaigns—it more than matches the estimated 5–10% of voluntary informants in Nazi Germany. On the Nazi estimate, see Gieseke, *Mielke-Konzern,* 118. For an informed challenge to the overemphasis of denunciations as the primary tool in Nazi Germany, see Johnson, *Nazi Terror.*

[123] Jean Cathala, *Sans fleur ni fusil* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), 97.

bears striking resemblance to the Soviet case but also highlights the latter's distinctiveness. Much like the societies studied in this article, newly independent Israel gained control over a national-religious entity hostile to its very existence and then moved to integrate it as citizens while subjecting it to nearly two decades of military rule and pervasive surveillance. Informants multiplied in every sphere of public life, drawn to the security services by ruthless blackmail and intimidation, the realization of Israel's permanence and power, attraction to the state's modern and democratic features, and rewards—such as preferential treatment in leasing land, family unification, payments, freedom of movement, the right to carry arms, the blind eye turned on smuggling activities, and career promotion. The results have been impressive, if ambiguous: the Arab minority has been thoroughly infiltrated and neutralized but only within certain limits. Inhibited by legal-democratic structures and beliefs that countered its inherent aggressiveness, as well as the state's opting for ethno-religious over universalist national identity, the Israeli surveillance system often failed to penetrate at the family level and reap the benefits of a supranational community. In a word, it lacked the two key features that made the Soviet system so powerful.[124]

Indeed, the magnitude of Soviet violence often obscured its ambitious revolutionary dimensions, which, in turn, bred distinct socialist patterns of surveillance. Much like their counterparts within the pre-1939 borders, the populations of the western frontier realized early on that the Soviets sought to reach everyone and everywhere and pursued the total submission and transformation of anyone they laid their hands on, informants included. Surveillance was often the initial encounter with Soviet power and its bureaucratic machinery, introducing new constituencies to the rules of the Soviet game, teaching them who and what was legitimate and who and what was not.[125] The homogenizing drives, shaped by a universalist ethos and conspiratorial political culture, overwhelmed their various constituencies, conveyed the aura of inevitability and permanence, and institutionalized ever-expanding social infiltration, equal-opportunity recruitment of informants, and the gathering of vast information for use in restructuring society and

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[124] Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[125] See Nick Baron's insightful observations, "Remaking Soviet Society: The Filtration of Returnees from Nazi Germany, 1944–49," in *Warlands: Population Resettlements and State Reconstruction in the Soviet–East European Borderlands, 1945–50,* ed. Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 89–116.

uprooting real and imagined enemies. In short, it was a totalitarian enterprise, and surveillance was its guiding hand.

Dept. of History
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-2024 USA
weiner@stanford.edu

Dept. of Philosophy
Institute of History and Archeology
University of Tartu
Lossi 3, 50090 Tartu, Estonia
aigi.rahi-tamm@ut.ee