

Terrorism and Human Intelligence: The Soviet Experience

OLEG KALUGIN

Professor

Center for Counterintelligence and Security Studies

AT NO TIME IN THE history of mankind has intelligence played as crucial a role as it does today. The immediate response to the painful shock of 11 September was the introduction and enforcement of tough security measures—from the intense scrutiny of all foreign visitors and physical searches of airports, to the erection of fences and concrete roadblocks around historic monuments, government offices, and military installations. Subsequent administrative shakeups were accompanied by military actions in Afghanistan and later, the invasion of Iraq. Few would doubt that the United State's initial reaction was an indispensable and justifiable act of self-defense. But do these measures reduce the danger of terrorism and protect against further brutal assaults on the country? Do these demonstrations of superior military might strike at the causes and roots of terrorism? Can military action result in democratic change and strengthen the rule of law? A myriad of problems have to be grappled with and resolved before we feel confident that we can effectively address the difficult threat that terrorism poses.

Today, the most immediate problem is the need to readdress the effectiveness of our intelligence services, and ensure their readiness to protect the free world from mortal surprises in an age of nuclear proliferation and international terrorism. Napoleon is said to have noted that, "one spy in the right place is worth twenty thousand men in the field," and this adage is more true today than it was two hundred years ago. Despite the technological prowess, signal and imagery collection capabilities of the United States, there is no substitute for human penetration, and the latter has been woefully neglected over the past decade.

Spies do not spring up by a wave of the hand inside an adversary's backyard. They need to be carefully selected, meticulously vetted, trained, patiently nurtured, and pre-

OLEG KALUGIN is a retired Major General of the Soviet KGB. A former Fulbright Scholar, he is the author of *The First Chief Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*. He is currently a Professor at the Center for Counterintelligence and Security Studies.

Copyright © 2004 by the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*

pared for risky assignments. They are of course, not the end in and of themselves, but should instead form a key part of a larger strengthened system of intelligence. We need to employ far more forceful tactics, with special operations featured as the preferred method of handling concerns. Intelligence collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination

Intelligence collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination should serve as a prelude to vigorous intervention into international events fraught with dangers of new terrorist attacks.

should serve as a prelude to vigorous intervention into international events fraught with dangers of new terrorist attacks.

Time-tested covert actions to influence political, economic, or military con-

ditions abroad should become the core of the intelligence community's response to Muslim extremists wherever they may be. These actions include subversion, sabotage, operational deception, disinformation, and massive sophisticated propaganda efforts to confuse and manipulate the targeted contingents. No country nurturing or harboring terrorists should be exempted from special operations going beyond diplomatic demarches and economic sanctions. Toward this end, human penetration—the recruitment of agents within or the infiltration of agents into the vital structures of institutions, groupings and cells of potential adversaries—must be at the center of all intelligence efforts.

SOVIET INTELLIGENCE EXPERIENCES

A brief retrospective view of some past practices by the Russian and Soviet intelligence organizations may serve as an illustration to the above. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian imperial Police (Okhrana) faced growing terrorist threats from Russian revolutionaries, particularly those who lived in exile in Europe. Some of Okhrana special penetration agents went to Switzerland and France and successfully infiltrated conspiratorial émigré groups and located clandestine print shops and weapons stores.

In several instances the agents operated as provocateurs. In France, for example, an agent proposed a plan to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. The scheme envisaged the construction of bombs in Paris. Subsequently, a workshop was rented, bombs were manufactured, and several conspirators were trained to go to Russia as an advance team, each receiving written instructions on his personal role in the assassination. When everything was ready, the Okhrana informed the French authorities, and twenty people were arrested. The court trial and the inevitable publicity routed Russian terrorist organizations in France, seriously undermined the reputation of Russian political forma-

tions abroad, and led to closer cooperation between France and Russia in the security and military field.¹ In 1923, to create chaos and facilitate revolutionary change in Poland, Soviet intelligence carried out a number of terrorist acts against Polish political organizations and their publications, both left and right. The most notable event was the bombing of the Warsaw Citadel, in which hundreds of people were killed and injured. With similar intentions, Soviet intelligence agents attempted to assassinate Bulgarian ruler A. Tsankov in 1925. During the service at the Sophia Cathedral attended by Tsankov and his cabinet, an explosive device was detonated, killing a hundred and fifty people.²

None of those brutal crimes achieved their desired goals, but they inspired the next generation of Soviet security and intelligence servicemen to plot and carry out more sophisticated special operations on a grander scale. For instance, in the years following World War II, Soviet security organs conducted a major campaign in Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to wipe out the so called "bourgeois-nationalist underground" of national liberation movements. The range of operations was wide indeed; Russian intelligence, with the help of undercover agents, penetrated the centers of the movement and captured and killed its activists. They subsequently surveyed and bombed the movement's secret hideouts and supply points, and intercepted channels of communication and supplies. These agencies also sent security agents abroad, disguised as fleeing Soviet citizens. They went on to capture or recruit members of the nationalist movement and their emissaries' couriers. These latter operations were supported by propaganda appeals from the Soviet government urging the nationalists to voluntarily turn themselves into the authorities with guarantees for their freedom.

The Soviet state security service went even further. It created false undercover agent terrorist groups from their own trusted agents, and captured or re-recruited nationalists. These units started to operate alongside the real combatants, and would soon receive weapons and ammunition from abroad, and even more importantly, recognition among the local populace. The false terrorist groups established contacts with active terrorist bands, joined them when necessary, and later, when the conditions were right, captured band members alive, or if they offered resistance, killed them on the spot.³

APPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE

However unpalatable and even repulsive the Soviet experience may be, it must not be forgotten or ignored, and there are valuable lessons to be learnt. While the United States has historically had greater experience combating traditional state actors, the Soviet Union has

applied its resources to use in against more abstract and non-traditional actors. The in-depth penetration of Soviet intelligence into anti-communist cells serves as an important example for U.S. intelligence forces. Today's transnational terrorist networks, while very different, require similar techniques of penetration and destabilization.

Like the Soviets, we should make efforts to plan and implement, when necessary, comprehensive scenarios that can win a war without major battles. As a possible scenario for Iraq (alas, too late!) where the allied intelligence services could have played a decisive role, the following program might have been implemented to achieve two objectives: Firstly, to prepare grounds for the downfall of the regime without resorting to an all-out war, or secondly, to facilitate early victory in case the war becomes inevitable

The main thrust of the program would have been a destabilization of the internal situation in the country. The active measures would include the bringing together all patriotic, anti-HusseinIraqis living abroad by setting up "The Coalition of Free Iraq." This could be followed by the announcement of the formation of a provisional government-in-exile, which publicly and loudly declares its intention of taking over Iraq in the near future, and boasts of its clandestine cells already operating inside the country. Powerful radio and television broadcasts could simultaneously be beamed at Iraq from neighboring countries that are friendly to the United States, like Turkey or Kuwait. These radio stations would also be described as operating inside the Iraqi territory and representing the provisional government. The massive radio and television anti-Saddam propaganda ought to be accompanied by frequent and regular leaflet drops throughout the country. All government controlled or pro-Saddam television and radio stations should be jammed and bombed, and pro-Saddam internet websites be blocked.

As a part of the opposition offensive, acts of sabotage against the regime targeting government offices, the media, and power and communication lines would further the destabilizing effect. These acts should be accompanied by the organization of guerilla warfare spreading across the country and demoralizing the central government and its supporters. One million dollars and asylum in the United States could be offered to each senior official of the Iraqi government if they choose to defect or join the provisional government. Effective economic and humanitarian aid must be given to liberated areas of Iraq. Lastly, back channel overtures should be made to Iran to work together to create peace and stability in the region.

These suggestions may be branded as immoral and an invitation to lawlessness, however, democracies perish when they refuse to resist and adjust to the cruel realities of life. While it is too late for the United States to follow this course of action in Iraq, it and Western Europe would be well advised to prioritize aggressive human intelligence in other aspects of the war against terror.

A collaborative approach is also necessary. Only a short while ago, most Europeans

believed that the U.S. blew the international implications of 9/11 out of proportion. The recent deadly attack by Islamic terrorists in Spain and threats of more to come elsewhere is bound to change the attitudes of European governments and the public at large. But the direction of that change appears to be uncertain. Proposals to create some sort of European antiterrorist intelligence program may in fact hurt the prospects of closer cooperation between U.S. national intelligence and European security agencies in both their efforts to stamp out terrorism. If Europe distances itself from U.S. security efforts by

pursuing independent unilateral initiatives, it will be a folly of historic dimensions. Europe has always benefited by standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States.

Somewhat close, yet apart from Europe stands Russia. Her present leadership has inherited a heavy load of old habits and suspicions in regard to the United States, and her current leader, even if relatively young, still bears the scars of the Cold War mentality. After his fantastically smooth reelection he may well try to reassert Russia's claims to world leadership. His previous pledge to join forces with the United States in combating international terrorism was obviously motivated by his desire to legitimize the war in Chechnya. As of late, Russian intelligence seems to have received new instructions. The assassination of former Chechen President Yandarbiev in Katar by Russian agents indicates a revival of the old Soviet practices when "enemies of the people" were executed irrespective of location, legal norms, and international obligations.

During the Cold War, the world was constrained by a fear of mutual annihilation and marked by intense involvement from opposing intelligence services. Today, the civilized world is involved in a real war, in which no country is immune to terrorist hate and violence, and every country must deal with terrorists who vie for the dubious honor of killing others and themselves. These grim realities must motivate nations to unite and mobilize their resources to meet the challenge and defeat the forces of destruction and death. But without a reliable and aggressive intelligence service working hand in hand with its allies, our civilization may suffer immense and unsustainable losses. We cannot afford to be caught napping again. ❧

Without a reliable, aggressive, and effective intelligence service working hand in hand with its allies, our civilization may suffer immense and unsustainable losses.

NOTES

1. Ben B. Fischer, "Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police," *Center for the Study of Intelligence* (Central Intelligence Agency, 1997): 36-38.

2. *The Empire of GRU* (Moscow: Olma Press, 2000), 131-133, 125-126.

3. With skillful application of measures compromising the leaders of nationalist formations, the false groups succeeded in turning the band members against each other, separating the leaders from the rank and file members. In the course of these operations the Soviet chekists killed on the territory of Ukraine twenty-five thousand members of the nationalist movement, and fifteen thousand were arrested. In the most active period of antiterrorist warfare, state security officials from the Soviet Ukraine captured 131,000 weapons, more than a hundred printing presses, and three hundred radio transmitters. *History of Soviet State Security Organs* (Moscow: Higher School of the KGB, 1977), 336-338, 400-405.

Copyright of Brown Journal of World Affairs is the property of Brown University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.