

Ugadat, Ugodit, Utselet (Sniff out, Suck up, Survive) A Book Review

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*KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations
From Lenin to Gorbachev (1st Edition)*
Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky
HarperCollins Publishers
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This review follows the organizational realities and communication concepts reflected in the 1990 non-fiction book *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations From Lenin to Gorbachev*. The paper describes the decision-making process and outcomes of key episodes in Soviet foreign intelligence operations using Groupthink Theory. Agenda-Setting Process is used to explore Soviet “active measures” deployed against foreign institutions of influence and their publics, while cases of defection and betrayal by agents from both sides of the Cold War are discussed using two consistency theories – Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Theory of Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values.

Keywords: Intelligence Studies, Groupthink, Agenda Setting, Consistency Theories

The inside cover of the first edition of *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations From Lenin to Gorbachev* in 1990 begins with a line for the reader that it is the “most enthralling, the most riveting, and most thorough history ever written about Soviet intelligence and espionage and activities -- and it is all true (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990).” Released within a year before the final dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the book’s claim towards definitude is primarily based on the authority of its two authors. The first is Christopher Andrew, a Cambridge scholar then known for his 1985 book, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, who

later served as “the official historian of MI5, the British counterintelligence service branch, in 2002 (“MI5 – The Authorized Centenary History,” 2013).” The second author is Oleg Gordievsky, a former colonel in the Soviet security service, the KGB, who once headed Soviet intelligence operations in the UK. He had been a high-level spy for the British Secret Intelligence Services (also known as MI6) since 1974 before defecting to the UK in 1985.

Despite its titular usage of the post-Stalin term KGB (or *Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*, tr. “Committee for State Security”), the book is actually a comprehensive analysis of Soviet intelligence history, covering all iterations of Soviet Russia’s secret police services – from the Bolshevik-era Cheka, the Stalin-era NKVD, the OGPU, the GUGB, the wartime NKGB, the post-war MGB, the MVD, to the KGB. It was unique during its release in featuring information and insights derived not only from Andrew’s investigation of open source material from Western libraries and Russian state archives, but also from Gordievsky’s firsthand knowledge and research during his repeated forays to classified KGB records both as a KGB official and as a British double agent.

In the course of telling the history of foreign operations made by Soviet intelligence apparatuses, Andrew and Gordievsky constructed an image of Soviet espionage that revolves around two major observations. The first was that of the immensity of efforts taken by the Soviet Union to build “the largest foreign intelligence network in history (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 268).” The book provides a lucid portrait of the full array of methods employed by the Soviet Union, and its mirror organizations in allied countries such as the East German Stasi, the Cuban DGI and the Bulgarian Committee for State Security, in collecting intelligence, controlling public opinion inside and beyond its borders, influencing foreign governments and not sparingly, in the physical elimination of individuals and organizations deemed anathema to Soviet rule. The authors point out how central the Soviet intelligence services were to the Soviet Union’s transformation from a political force trying to quell “counterrevolutionary enemies” in the aftermath of the October Revolution, to the nuclear superpower that it came to be, matched only

by the United States. The KGB's legacy is virtually intertwined with that of Soviet history itself—under figures such as Felix Dzerzhinsky, Lavrenti Beria, and Yuri Andropov, generations of Soviet spies have helped cement Bolshevik rule after the October Revolution, enabled Joseph Stalin's rise and the Great Purge, facilitated the USSR's triumph against Nazi Germany and rise as a superpower after WWII, spearheaded the Red Army's takeover of Eastern Europe, and expanded Soviet influence throughout the rest of the Third World, from Cuba to Egypt, India and Vietnam at the height of the Cold War.

The authors express no surprise in the strength and breadth of the KGB's reach. The Soviets' sophisticated understanding and approach to intelligence gathering both through human (HUMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT) date back to Lenin's Cheka in 1917, while in comparison, within a few years before WWII, US military protocols still considered wiretapping, mail intervention, and even basic communication codes—now all considered as essential tools of modern spycraft - to be beneath proper conduct between states, as best explained by one contemporary American diplomat, "There is no weapon so disarming. .. as sheer honesty (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 268)."

The book's second main premise was the authors' shared conclusion regarding the "recurrent obsession of the KGB with imaginary conspiracies, as well as with real opponents (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p.2)." A major theme in the book is how in the authors' view, Soviet bureaucracy compromised the overall potency of its vast intelligence resource – unmatched by any other world power in several key moments throughout the 20th century - due to doctrinaire dogma and personal paranoia of its leaders and top agents.

The legacy of Soviet foreign intelligence - with its successes and ultimately systemic frailties – invites academic interpretations of its organizational and communication dynamics, especially in such a secretive and rule-bound context. In this review, episodes in Soviet intelligence planning and execution are explained using Groupthink Theory, while the Agenda Setting Process is used to shed light on Soviet

engineering of public opinion. Two consistency theories – Cognitive-Dissonance Theory and the Theory of Attitude, Beliefs, and Values are also referred to in examining the decisions made both by those who spied for, or who defected out of, the Soviet Union.

Groupthink in Soviet Espionage

An integral aspect of the book's critique of Soviet intelligence is that despite having an espionage system that is arguably the most powerful throughout modern history at its command, the rationale and decisions of Soviet leadership have not made their intelligence operations immune to failures and errors. In this regard, recurrent fiascos of Soviet intelligence prove to be a quintessential demonstration of concepts under the Groupthink Theory by Irving Janis. The phenomenon of groupthink is defined "as the deterioration of mental efficiency, reality-testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 296)." Ironically, Janis started the study of groupthink during the Cold War by reviewing American foreign policy blunders.

The authors' perspectives are easily seen in the special criticism reserved by the book of Stalin-era blunders and disasters – from the Great Purge which produced about a million Soviet victims, to the tragic beginnings of the Great Patriotic War – or the Soviet term for the Eastern Front of WWII. The authors blamed "the sheer perversity of Joseph Stalin's role as his own chief intelligence analyst, and the fearful sycophancy of Soviet bureaucrats encapsulated in the formula *ugadat, ugodit, utselet* – or sniff out, suck up, survive (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 268)."

The Stalinist gaffes in the book are perfect examples of the negative outcomes of groupthink. Two salient outcomes of groupthink are immediately noticeable in these accounts: one was their "failure to seek expert opinion, and the feeling of being threatened by outsiders" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 298) and their "tendency to concentrate on the information that supports the favored plan" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 298). Both were seen in the cases of Soviet spymasters Richard Sorge and Leopold Trepper, who sent separate well-informed warnings on the

upcoming German military offensive on Russian soil in 1941, only to be disastrously ignored by the Soviet high command. Stalin himself, who held anti-Semitic views, believed that Hitler's Nazi Germany genuinely wanted an alliance with the Soviets, and dismissed Sorge and his top-level revelations as that of a "shit who set himself up with brothels in Japan" (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 264).

The stark contrast between Soviet reception to Sorge and Trepper's warnings and to that of intelligence sourced from the Cambridge Five, a spy ring composed of Cambridge alumni who infiltrated the wartime British security services, reveals just how effective intelligence work can be when groupthink does not largely derail critical phases of data collection and analysis. Together, Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross mounted one of most effective intelligence coups ever sprung by a state on another in modern times, by passing on a wealth of high-grade British and Allied intelligence to the USSR throughout WWII and the onset of the 1950's. The Cambridge Five's work against the British was never hampered by ideological blinders in the way the usefulness of Trepper and Sorge's works against Germany were stunted by Stalin's initial proclivity to the Nazis. Thus unlike Sorge (who was arrested and executed in Japan shortly after Stalin reversed his views on Sorge's intelligence feeds) the Soviets were able to better take advantage of the Cambridge Five's information, ranging from vital updates on the advancement of the US-UK nuclear program, access to the prized Ultra ciphers (decrypts of the German Enigma transmissions), to revelations of deadly worth for Soviet counterintelligence - such as the name of British agents tasked to spy on the Soviet Union and its neighbors.

Severe groupthink, however was not a monopoly of the Stalin era. In the later decades of Soviet rule, Operation RYAN was launched due to conspiracist fears by the Soviet Politburo of an imaginary NATO nuclear first strike plan, fanned by what was perceived as bellicose statements from the Republican US President Ronald Reagan. The result was a continent-spanning campaign which became "the largest Soviet intelligence operation in history (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p.2)." When RYAN yielded zero results, the Soviet leadership and compliant

KGB leaders insisted upon their pre-made conclusions and continued the campaign, much to the disaffection of many agents on the ground, such as Gordievsky himself. The operation ended only upon the death of former KGB Chairman and RYAN's main proponent, Yuri Andropov. The massive loss of resources and morale to the KGB in RYAN's aftermath could have been avoided, had one of the steps to avoid groupthink been followed - that is, "to spend a sizeable bloc of time surveying all warning signals from rivals, and constructing alternative scenarios of the rival's intentions" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 298).

Agenda Setting Process and Soviet "Active Measures"

While the Soviets were not the first to direct propaganda against their strategic enemies, Soviet intelligence services were among the most effective and influential practitioners of this form of political warfare. The book's illustration of how Soviet "active measures" (non-euphemistically translated by the authors as influence operations) were waged on targeted foreign media systems describes phenomena that fit the Agenda Setting Process first coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972.

The agenda setting process is "an ongoing competition between issue proponents to gain the attention of the media professionals, the public, and the policy elite" (Dearing and Rogers, 1996, p.1). The term implies that the modern process of public influence is based "not in requiring 'what citizens think' but rather, in setting an agenda for 'what citizens think about'" (Jones and Holmes, 2011, p.167). This competitive environ also assures the emergence of issue proponents, or "those who advocate for attention to be given to an issue, and help determine the position of an issue on an agenda, sometimes at the cost of other issues" (Dearing and Rogers, 1996, p.3).

As presented in the book, setting public agenda favorable to Soviet interests in foreign societies translated into exerting control towards the relevant issue proponents - which range from the manipulation of independent media agencies and supposedly non-aligned organizations, to active subversion of the information apparatuses of enemy states.

Of note is the early appreciation by the Soviet Union towards the use of “front organizations” – and on the fact that fielding Soviet agenda through neutral and non-state sources is effective in gathering the attention of foreign, if not hostile, audiences. KGB-backed front groups like the International Workers Aid in 1921 and the World Peace Council in 1950, to name two from the score of Soviet fronts groups listed by Andrew and Gordievsky, brought international agenda such as anticommunism and nuclear disarmament on settings of public opinion extremely favorable to the USSR.

Similar infiltration of influential foreign information ministries led to these institutions unwittingly providing legitimacy to the setting of pro-Soviet agenda to their domestic audiences. This was exemplified in the book by the pernicious success of well-placed agents in UK’s wartime information ministry like BBC producer and Foreign Office employee Guy Burgess in subverting supposedly anti-communist propaganda campaigns into stoking positive British public opinion towards the Soviet state during WWII.

Interestingly, Soviet miscalculations on several of its active measure campaigns delineate how media agenda is not the sole or exclusive element of the agenda –setting process. Rather, it exists with the elements of “public agenda and policy agenda” (Dearing and Rogers, 1996, p.5). A KGB active measures campaign in 1969 using co-opted journalists in the Western press hinted a Soviet pre-emptive nuclear strike against China, intended as a form of political pressure to keep Maoist China in check. While the ruse initially carried the desired effect to Chinese morale, it later disastrously contributed to the Sino-Soviet Split of the 1970’s, and helped convince Chinese foreign policy planners “to enter talks with the United States and a Sino-American rapprochement” (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 494).

Consistency Theory 1: Cognitive Dissonance Theory on Defection

A prominent aspect of this book is the humanization of spies and defectors from both sides of the Cold War – lengthy explanations for the actions of those who decided to switch loyalties are judiciously provided. Though it can be said that switching sides is an institutional

hallmark of the intelligence trade itself, consistency theories can deconstruct the whole phenomenon of turncoatism as an introspective one that it is rooted to internal decision-making processes aimed at maintaining “self-maintenance and balance” (Littlejohn, 1992, p.150).

The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance could account for the considerable number of Soviet intelligence officials who defected into Western states, mostly into the US and the UK. Two premises govern the theory -- that dissonance produces tension reduced only by change, and that the individuals will attempt “to reduce dissonance or avoid dissonance-producing information” (Littlejohn, 1992, p.150). Both premises are best reified by Gordievsky’s own experience during his “increasing alienation from both the KGB and the Soviet system” (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p.3) due to his belief that the “Communist one-state party leads inexorably to intolerance, inhumanity and the destruction of individual liberties” (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p.3) – a dissonance which he addressed by starting collaboration with members of British intelligence in 1974.

Following this theory would also demonstrate how “dissonance is apt to result from forced compliance or being induced to say or do something contrary to one’s values” (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 151). This is best encapsulated by the book with the remarkable case of the first Soviet defection to the West during the Cold War- that of Nikolai Khokhlov, a KGB assassin who turned himself to the American CIA in 1954 after refusing to murder a Ukrainian émigré leader out of moral repugnance. If the book is to be believed, personal disenchantment, spurred by deeply-held operational and ideological misgivings, was the primary impetus for the defection of many Russian spies, rather than active persuasion or beguilement from Western agencies.

Consistency Theory 2: Attitude Beliefs and Values Theory on the Formation of Clandestine Principles

The book’s particular focus on the “Cambridge Five” – a ring of five brilliant and well-to-do British students who later in life became top-level spies for the KGB during the course of their public service careers-reveals a collective set of actions that could be optimally viewed under

Rokeach's Attitudes, Beliefs and Values Theory. Rokeach argued that every individual has "a highly-organized belief-attitude- value system, with well-established, relatively unchangeable beliefs that literally form the core view of the self and the world" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 152).

The existence of an entrenched core belief system means that changes to the more central beliefs lead to "profound impacts about how one would think about many things" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 152). These concepts were shown in the collective conversion of the Cambridge spies from scions of either conservative or apolitical British families to radical adherents of Marxism. The book highlights how all the Cambridge Five long felt alienation from their posh "bourgeoisie" lives, the societal suppression of their homosexuality, and their disgust at the looming threat of European fascism. The common solidification of these beliefs eventually led them into the Marxist underground, and eventually as agents of the Soviet state.

An important component of this theory, "the self-concept," is a fitting description of how even with their ardent belief in the Communist cause, Soviet spies have been able to perform and integrate themselves in social contexts that were antithetical or adversarial to their deeply-held principles. Self -concept is explained as "the guiding goal of one's belief system, whose purpose is to maintain and enhance the sentiment of self-regard" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 153). The book observed the approach of the successful Soviet atomic spy Klaus Fusch, who stole American and British nuclear secrets for the Soviet nuclear program, to his double life: "I used my Marxist philosophy to establish in my mind two separate compartments... to be completely independent of the surrounding forces of society... a controlled schizophrenia" (Andrew & Gordievsky, 1990, p. 379).

It is quite axiomatic in intelligence studies that the lines between fact and fiction are insuperably blurred. However, in the case of *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations From Lenin to Gorbachev*, the persuasive wealth of information presented by Andrews and Gordievsky could at the very least, help shed light on the organizational realities that defined the intelligence arm of one of modern history's most potent

political forces. The book proves to be effective in forcing the reader to consider the ramifications of explicit and implicit organized social control, and the workings of internalized resistance, all inside a centralized authoritarian organization where critical checks and balances were abrogated in lieu of ideological abstractions. For communication scholars or students, it could be also then argued that the book is successful in showing that issues infrequently touched upon in the mainstream dimension of communication studies such as intelligence operations and political warfare are, upon closer scrutiny and interest, fertile grounds for further academic inquiry.

The results of such inquiries might be more relevant and contemporary than people might accept - it would be foolish to assume that the phenomena described in this book ended with the fall of the USSR. The Russian Federation's current president, Vladimir Putin, is an ex-KGB officer and is surrounded by *siloviki* – or politicians who are ex-members of Soviet-era security services. A Russian spy ring had been uncovered by the FBI in the US as late as 2010; Western whistleblowers and anti-surveillance activists such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden are denouncing Western policies while under the watch of agents linked to the KGB's successor, the FSB; and allegations of involvement by Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine abound. If these are any indication, it is quite clear that the Soviet Union's clandestine legacy lives on.

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