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The Committee for State Security (KGB), the primary state security organization of the Soviet Union, was formally disbanded more than thirty years ago, but a large number of its operations in the West remains unknown. Sergei I. Zhuk’s most recent book, *KGB Operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991*, offers persuasive new evidence that there are still important secrets in the KGB files.

Zhuk is a professor of history at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. He immigrated from Ukraine in 1997 and has published several acclaimed books on the social and cultural history of Soviet-American relations, including *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (2010), *Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and American Studies in the USSR: People’s Diplomacy in the Cold War* (2017), and *Soviet Americana: The Cultural History of Russian and Ukrainian Americanists* (2018). His newest book is his first direct foray into the field of intelligence history. It is a pioneering work in many respects.

While working on his book, Zhuk obtained unprecedented access to files held by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the main national security agency of Ukraine. In addition to the documents of the Secretariat of the GPU-KGB of Ukraine (Fond 16), which contain top secret correspondence between the KGB and Ukrainian Communist leadership, Zhuk also accessed the documents of the Second Chief Directorate (SCD) of the Ukrainian KGB responsible for domestic and foreign counterintelligence (Fond 1). Zhuk is one of the first (if not the first) scholar given open access to Fond 1’s vast collection of counterintelligence files produced by the Soviet Ukrainian KGB.

Relying on these KGB files and supplementing them when appropriate with documents from a number of other Ukrainian archives and interviews with several retired KGB officers, Zhuk presents an account of KGB activities in the United States and Canada that in its depth and scope sur-
passes all that has been known about them previously. For example, Zhuk documents the history of KGB covert interference in US and Canadian political life that covers both sides of the mainstream spectrum, the liberal and the conservative, with ample financial support for the marginals as well, from the radical leftists to the neo-fascists. His account makes it clear that KGB officers and agents in the United States and Canada worked with any and all individuals who, in their opinion, could, wittingly or unwittingly, advance the KGB’s main missions: first, to undermine, subvert, and sabotage the smooth functioning of US and Canadian democratic systems, the “main enemy,” and, second, to promote a favorable, positive view of the Soviet Union.

Zhuk reveals that, according to annual Ukrainian KGB reports, the number of agents sent to the US and Canada every year in the 1960s and 1970s exceeded a couple hundred. In 1969, for example, “the Ukrainian KGB sent 23 agents to various international organizations located in the USA; 200 KGB agents traveled to the USA as research specialists, collecting intelligence information there; 40 KGB operatives worked abroad for hiring [recruiting] foreigners as the future KGB agents; 3 KGB agents had already been ‘implemented [planted] in the US intelligence’; 2 were ‘implemented [planted] in the Zionist and clerical groups’ in the USA and Israel; 292 KGB agents were engaged in counterintelligence operations against the Ukrainian nationalist centers in the USA and Canada” (p. 123). The shock potential of this claim is compounded by the fact that Ukraine was only one of fifteen Soviet republics, most of which also had their own agents in the West.[1]

While it is possible that the Ukrainian KGB had inflated the number of their agents to try to impress the Ukrainian Communist leadership, this number, reflecting the reach and sophistication of KGB operations, even if partially accurate, is staggering. And it is even more staggering to realize that a significant number of these agents remained undiscovered, their treasonous activities having gone unpunished by law enforcement.

In addition to reporting statistical information from KGB reports, Zhuk also describes a number of compelling espionage and counterespionage case histories. He chronicles both the successes and failures of the Ukrainian KGB in trying to infiltrate the émigré organizations of those they referred to as Ukrainian and Jewish nationalists. Some of the stories Zhuk tells—for example, the account of the convoluted and ill-fated spy activities of Valentina Safianova, who, suspected by her KGB handlers of being a double agent, was pushed into killing herself—read like the scripts of Hollywood spy thrillers. Others, such as US-born Janet Bekker, codenamed Maiskaia, seemed to have better luck. Having immigrated to Ukraine with her Ukrainian-born mother as a child in the 1930s, Bekker was recruited by the KGB in the 1950s and worked as their agent for decades targeting the Jewish community in Ukraine as well as US diplomats and tourists.

Zhuk zeroes in on KGB surveillance and counterintelligence activities against US diplomats and tourists in several sections of the book. He notes that the KGB considered all visitors from the United States and Canada as potentially working for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and treated them accordingly. They were followed each step of the way. They were secretly photographed and their rooms were wiretapped. The only people they were allowed contact with were trusted KGB agents. Zhuk cites KGB documents that claim that the KGB penetrated the premises of the US Consulate in Kyiv numerous times during its years of operation from 1974 to 1980. After describing some of the “raids” in detail, he comes to a disconcerting conclusion that “the US Consulate’s papers retrieved by the KGB became the major KGB source of the important information not only for the anti-American operations and monitoring of the US diplomats and other American officials, who visited Soviet Ukraine, but also for vari-
ous active measures against various anti-Soviet dissidents” (p. 184).

Another setting for the leakage of US secrets and know-how to the KGB were, according to Zhuk, US technological and industrial exhibitions organized in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities from the early 1960s until the demise of the Soviet Union, sixteen in total. Zhuk describes how Soviet science and technology received tremendous boosts from the technologies stolen from the West. He quotes one of his retired KGB officer interviewees as stating that “between 1965 and 1987, almost 90% of all technological innovations in all research institutes and the factories of the ‘military-industrial complex’ of Soviet Ukraine were based on the stolen information from the capitalist countries by the specially trained KGB agents. And at least 80% of all those ‘secret samples’ of important technological ‘inventions’ came from the United States of America” (p. 152). This statement should provide serious food for thought to US counterintelligence officials considering that it sounds similar to what has been alleged about the activities of the agents of the Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS) in the United States in more recent times. It almost seems as if no counterintelligence lessons have been learned from KGB operations.

Zhuk concludes his book with a section on Ukrainian KGB efforts to contain and counteract the influence of US popular culture (music, films, books, etc.) on the attitudes and behaviors of Soviet young people. This section builds on Zhuk’s earlier work, especially his book on Soviet youth culture of his native Dniepropetrovsk (Dnipro), Rock and Roll in the Rocket City, and adds new information and insights by referring to the previously inaccessible reports on KGB interventions in the Ukrainian cultural sphere. With an obvious gusto of somebody who was on the opposite and ultimately winning side, Zhuk describes how the KGB tried and failed to “protect” the young people of Soviet Ukraine from what they called in their reports “the poison of Western, especially American, mass culture” (p. 193).

No book is ideal, and notwithstanding its pioneering archival work and its memorable and impactful stories, Zhuk’s book, unfortunately, also has some weaknesses. The writing style leaves much to be desired. Some parts of the book, apparently originally written in Russian, were clumsily translated into English, perhaps using Google Translate. A Routledge editor should have done a better job in correcting the narrative’s grammar and making the narrative more readable. There is also an ambiguity in the title. As the reader is aware by now, Zhuk’s book is more than just about “KGB operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991” and the title should have reflected that. Additionally, there was no KGB in 1953; it was founded in 1954. Lastly, the book would have greatly benefited from an explanation of the structure of the Ukrainian KGB and a more extensive focus on the biographies of its ranking officers.

Note
and that the KGB stations abroad, also known as the *rezidenturas*, received and used 25,645 intelligence documents. He also stated that 31 KGB agents were “dangled to foreign intelligence agencies, 12 of whom attracted attention” and that 7 agents have been infiltrated into the leadership ranks of anti-Soviet organizations abroad (p. 716).

My translation.

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