

The Looking-Glass Spies

THE KGB: The Eyes of Russia. By Harry Rositzke. Doubleday. 295 pp. \$14.95

By DAVID WISE

“THE CLANDESTINE mentality,” former CIA station chief Harry Rositzke notes, “is rooted in a conspiratorial view of the world . . . someone out there is plotting against me Since the world is a threatening place, only secret counter-action can guarantee survival.”

Rositzke is writing about the KGB, the Soviet secret service, but whether unconsciously or not, his words could also provide the rationale for the CIA's own covert operations around the globe. It is, in fact, precisely the rationale behind the move to “unleash” the CIA under President Reagan and to increase its covert activities (although not, to be sure, under the direction of Max Hugel).

To some extent, the KGB and the CIA are reflections of each other. The mirror image shimmers throughout *The KGB: The Eyes of Russia*. For example, the KGB has an “Executive Action” department in charge of assassinations. When the CIA set up its assassination unit in 1961, it was called—“Executive Action.” That same year, the CIA moved from Washington across the Potomac to Langley, Virginia. Later, the KGB moved the headquarters of its First Chief Directorate, which handles all foreign operations, from the Soviet capital to a new building near the Moscow beltway. A picture of the

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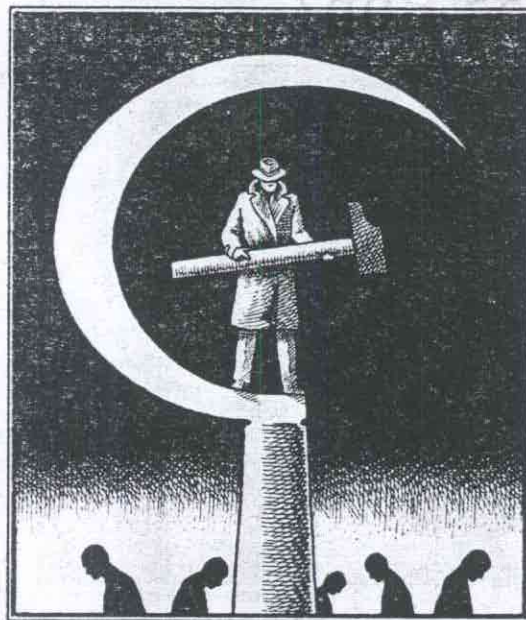


Illustration by Jean-Francois Allaux for *The Washington Post*

building appears in John Barron's book, *KGB*, (1974) and as the caption notes, the building's architecture uncannily resembles that of the CIA.

There are differences, of course. The KGB is clearly the instrument of a totalitarian (not merely authoritarian) government, and is used only for espionage and covert action but for internal control of the Soviet people. The CIA serves a democratic society, even if it periodically forgets that.

There are differences in “tradecraft” as well, many of them lovingly detailed by Rositzke. The KGB, for example, places much greater emphasis than any western service on getting their spies to steal documents. A CIA man, by contrast, prefers to deal with written or oral agent reports. KGB officers meet their contacts in open spaces, the suburbs or the countryside—where they can

spot countersurveillance—rather than indoors. The KGB has better language skills than the CIA. And Rositzke says the KGB's assassins (unlike CIA's) have not gone after political leaders of other countries and have not targeted *anyone* abroad since 1962.

Yet, it is the similarities between the clandestine agencies of the two superpowers that stand out more than the differences. As Rositzke points out, they spend a great deal of time trying to recruit each other. (The KGB's going price for an attempted recruitment of a CIA agent, according to Rositzke, is in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars. Inflation is everywhere.)

Rositzke knows a good deal about the KGB's agents because he has operated against them. He is a veteran

CIA man, now retired, who ran penetration operations against the Soviets from Munich during the height of the Cold War, when Germany was the center of espionage activity. Rositzke's job was to send agents into the Soviet Union by parachute. From 1957 to 1962, he was chief of station in New Delhi, where he lunched once a month with one of his opposite numbers, the resident of the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence arm. In the late 1960s, he was chief of the “U.S. station,” which had the task of recruiting Soviet diplomats in Washington and New York.

Having served in the front lines of the Cold War, as it were, Rositzke ought to be able to reveal the secrets of the KGB, but of course he cannot. As he freely admits, much of the good stuff remains locked up in the KGB's vaults in Moscow. How many Soviet “illegals” (agents operating without diplomatic cover) are there in the

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United States? How many Soviet "moles," if any, inside the CIA? We can only guess.

Nor is the CIA—which leaks information about the KGB when it suits its purpose—likely to reveal very much of the really significant knowledge it possesses about Soviet intelligence. As a former operative, Rositzke was obliged to clear his book with the agency, lest he suffer Snapp-like penalties and be forced to turn over his royalties to the government. Rositzke did submit his manuscript to the CIA, although that fact appears nowhere in the preface or the contents of his book. Both the author and Doubleday would have been more forthcoming to have shared this information with the reader. (Doubleday is not unworldly or naive about such matters; it published *The Penkovskiy Papers* for the CIA in 1965.) Rositzke has said subsequently that the CIA made only three changes in his book, all dealing with references to non-Soviet foreign intelligence agencies.

The KGB: The Eyes of Russia offers little that has not appeared before in other books on Soviet espionage, including accounts by Soviet defectors, and in congressional hearings. Nor is Rositzke's book meant as entertainment; those looking for summer hammock reading or suspense will have to look elsewhere, or go to the latest James Bond movie. At the same time, the book is neither substantial enough nor long enough to qualify as a comprehensive, academic study of Soviet intelligence. There are no chapter notes or bibliography.

On the other hand, Rositzke has produced a serviceable primer on the KGB, useful for anyone who is interested in the operations of the Soviet spy service, but whose interest does not extend to plowing through a lot of individual books on the subject. For such a reader, Rositzke has pulled enough material together to give at least a good general portrait of the KGB.

And Rositzke manages to avoid a good deal (although not all) of the customary bombast, red-baiting, and ideological point-scoring that characterize most other works about the KGB. A former assistant professor of English, he writes, for the most part, with a cool, reasonably detached tone, one professional sizing up another.

And he offers some interesting opinions: that Lee Harvey Oswald was not a KGB agent (the Russians would have used a professional); that Yuri Nosenko, the controversial Soviet defector, was probably real and not a KGB "plant"—an argument that still rages inside the CIA and was the subject of David C. Martin's recent book, *Wilderness of Mirrors*; that the KGB does not direct international terrorism; and that the primary concern of both KGB and CIA officers is to protect not their own identities but the identities of their agents. (Congress, please note.)

But there is an subtle problem facing anyone who writes about the KGB, from which Rositzke does not escape. If the KGB's agents are 10 feet tall, each a Superman II, then we in the Free World must indeed be ever vigilant against their nefarious plots. The jacket of Rositzke's book trumpets: "The secret operation of *the world's best intelligence organization.*" (Italics added.)

Is this just publisher jacket hype we are dealing with here, or does Rositzke *really* mean the Soviets are better than the CIA? Aren't our guys just as good? (In fairness to Rositzke, in the book itself he says the KGB provides "the best professional training of any intelligence service in the world," but he does not go as far as the jacket line.) On the other hand, Rositzke also tells us that often the KGB are bumbler. But if so, we needn't worry much about them.

And therein lies the catch-22. Only by painting the Soviets as superspies can we really get folks exercised about KGB "agents of influence" in the media and the government, about sinister KGB "disinformation" that is brainwashing our unsuspecting citizenry, and all the rest of the piddling package of paranoia being peddled to the public, as our old friend Spiro Agnew might have put it. But to the extent that the power of the KGB is magnified, the worth of the CIA is downgraded. It is a trap from which there is no exit.

Rositzke does have one cheerful note about the KGB. Soviet espionage "reduces apprehension in Moscow." The Russians know so much about NATO plans from their spying that they don't worry.

As Rositzke has learned, and shares with us, "A spy is, like any man, unique and complicated." And spies must sometimes wonder if it is all worth it. When Rositzke was parachuting agents into the Soviet Union out of Munich in the 1950s, most of them were caught. But one, he assures us, did eventually become a Soviet official, a successful mole. Where? In the Moscow sanitation department. □