

KGB Files May Fill Holes in History, But With What?

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Scholars Prepare to Evaluate
Volumes of State Secrets
With Glee and Suspicion

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Deep within the bowels of the Lubyanka, the KGB's once-dreaded Moscow headquarters, may lurk written records on whether Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused killer of John Kennedy, was acting on the Kremlin's orders. Stanislav Levchenko, a KGB defector, says he learned from a colleague 15 years ago of a secret file showing that the Soviet espionage service recruited Oswald when he lived in the Soviet Union.

But if such a file is turned up, what then? "Suppose you see the Lee Harvey Oswald file," says Walter Pforzheimer, who was the CIA's legislative counsel for 30 years. "How will you know you've seen all of it? How do you know some of it wasn't being made up while you were waiting for it?"

Rarely has an event promised greater potential for historical revisionism than the opening of the KGB's files. And rarely has so important an archive been assembled by an entity so devoted to disinformation. For scholars, gleaning the truth from the Kremlin files—deciding just what was a Communist plot and what was not—may be like trying to construct a biography of a pathological liar by reading his mail.

Already, historians, policy analysts and

conspiracy theorists are drawing up wish lists for the missing pieces of the mosaic of 20th century history. What, if anything, did Alger Hiss tell the Soviets? Were there high-level American spies who were never caught? What happened to Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who disappeared after saving thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II? Were the Soviets funding antiwar activists in the U.S. during the Vietnam era? Were any senior Western politicians ever on the Kremlin's payroll?

It remains to be seen just how much archival material the new leaders of the KGB are prepared to make available. Unlike in East Germany, where reunification spelled the end of the State Security Ministry and spilled its secrets, in the Soviet Union the KGB is continuing its work. Vadim Bakatin, the KGB's new chairman, has promised to investigate the agency's possible role in some of this century's darkest moments, including the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. But he and his deputies insist that they won't reveal any information that could compromise Soviet agents still alive and working.

Nikolai Stolyarov, the new KGB deputy head, said last week that he opposed disclosing all the secrets even of Stalin's Gulag prison-camp system. "If we open all the archives, that will affect not just the relatives of the victims, but the relatives of those who perpetrated the crimes," he said. "That could destabilize society."

There is also the chance that many files will be destroyed, and the problem of trusting what comes out: The KGB, after all, had a department devoted exclusively to pumping out disinformation. Lawrence Martin-Bittman, a former Czech intelligence operative who now lives in Boston, notes that the KGB in 1968 orchestrated the publication of a bogus book called "Who's Who in the CIA" designed to tar as CIA agents a number of American judges, diplomats and politicians who had outspoken anti-Soviet views.

"There is always the possibility that documents are forged, or intentionally ed-

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