

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 edited."
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ited to lead researchers astray," says historian Michael R. Beschloss, author of "The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev." "It's happened before, even in this country. For instance, FBI researchers went through (former Treasury Secretary) Henry Morgenthau's diaries taking out all negative references to Hoover and putting in positive ones." The Federal Bureau of Investigation declines to comment on this charge.

Still, veteran KGB watchers expect the truth to emerge in a variety of ways, through officially released files, through unofficial leaks, and from disaffected former secret policemen. One scholar contacted for this article said he had fresh documents sitting on his table as he talked, but was unable to discuss them.

What's more, says a former U.S. intelligence official, a whole new generation of Soviet defectors will be expected to ante up far more than in the past. "The answers we're going to get will be brought out by individuals who have realized you can't claim political asylum any more, but if you bring over a fat enough file you can make a deal," says Donald Jameson, a retired Central Intelligence Agency officer. "It's the last valuable capital they have."

Soviet scholars say that for now, their best hopes may lie in resolving mysteries that are relatively far removed from contemporary sensitivities. The files of the KGB and its predecessor organizations may help historians clarify Lenin's role in the killing of Czar Nicholas II's family in 1918, and may even shed light on the decades-old mystery of whether one of the czar's children, Anastasia, actually survived the incident.

Mysteries of War

Documents from the Lubyanka could provide much new insight into World War II. They could clarify whether the Soviets, who stunned the world in 1939 by siding with Germany, were about to administer another shock to the Allies in 1943 by concluding an armistice with the Nazis and closing down the Eastern front. These documents could disclose whether Soviet espionage provided the Red Army with Hitler's plan for the battle of Kursk in 1943—the biggest tank battle ever and, in the estimation of historian A.J.P. Taylor, "the decisive battle of the war."

KGB documents may explain why Stalin's armies waited outside Warsaw and let the Germans slaughter the beleaguered Polish "Home Army." They may reveal whether the head of the Gestapo at the end of the war became a Soviet agent and disappeared into the Eastern Bloc, as historians suspect. And because it was the Red Army that liberated the Auschwitz concentration camp, Holocaust scholars believe that the Kremlin files may turn up more information on the Germans' wartime effort to eliminate the Jews.

Researchers believe the Kremlin files

might also hold some insights into how Communists raised money in Hollywood in the '30s and '40s, including some new information on the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, an organization of actors and writers with a substantial Communist presence.

In those files may also lurk the death of some fine reputations. The paper trail could lead, for example, to the identity of the fabled Fifth Man, a high-ranking and traitorous British official during the Cold War—and even to a Sixth Man or a Seventh. Or it could confirm the possibility—"mouth-watering," in the words of Yale diplomatic historian Gaddis Smith—that there was a major mole on the U.S. side. "We're into Le Carre stuff," says Mr. Smith, "but it could be real."

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But researchers, who for decades have been working amid the curved mirrors of cold-war diplomatic studies, may in many instances be stepping not into the clean air of scholarship but into another hall of mirrors.

The case of the Raoul Wallenberg files underscores this difficulty. Last week the KGB provided new documents on the Wallenberg case, but Swedish experts complained that those files still don't solve the mystery of Wallenberg's disappearance after he was arrested by the Soviets in 1945. "The idea that the KGB doesn't know the story is ludicrous," says Christopher Andrew, a Cambridge University historian specializing in Soviet intelligence matters. The KGB later promised to let its agents participate in a joint Swedish-Soviet investigation.

Despite all the pitfalls and false leads, gaps in the history of the Soviet Union almost certainly will be filled. Historians expect the files to contain final proof that Stalin in fact engineered the 1934 murder of Sergei Kirov, who headed up the Leningrad party organization and was one of Stalin's few plausible rivals. Stalin, who made a show of rushing to Leningrad to interrogate Kirov's assassin, used the incident as a pretext to begin the purges that resulted in the death or imprisonment of millions of Soviet citizens.

Historians say the files also may shed some light on a major U.S. operation in the 1950s to recruit Eastern European exiles and then parachute them back into their homelands as latent U.S. intelligence agents. This underground-in-waiting program was compromised and many of the people involved in it perished. "There's almost no doubt there was a leak," says Mr. Smith, the Yale historian. "The question is: Where was the leak?"

The Kennedy Question

The KGB files also may reinvigorate the conspiracy theories about Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination. Oswald defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 but returned to the U.S. less than three years later. Only two months after President Kennedy's death, Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko, a top KGB official, defected to the

West and eagerly told his CIA debriefers that Oswald had never been recruited or approached by the KGB. (The subsequent internal battle at the CIA over the authenticity of Mr. Nosenko's tale bitterly divided the agency, wrecked the careers of several officers, and cast doubt on the bona fides of several subsequent defectors.) But Mr. Levchenko, another KGB defector, insists that in 1975, during what he calls "some KGB chitchat" in Moscow, a colleague told him that the Soviets actively tried to recruit Oswald and gathered extensive information on him.

The files—or the testimony of a new generation of defectors—may also resolve the question of Soviet involvement in the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Allen Weinstein, president of the Center for Democracy, a private non-profit group with ties to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, recently has been given the Bulgarian government's files on the shooting of the pope.

Harvey Klehr, an Emory University political scientist who studies American radicalism, already is "salivating" over the possibility of getting one of the treasures of the Kremlin: Minutes of meetings of the Communist Party U.S.A., which were routinely sent to Moscow. "In three or four years," says Mr. Klehr, "it may be easier to get this sort of information out of the Russians than out of the FBI."

Japanese Machine Orders Drop

TOKYO—Japanese machinery makers said new orders dropped 16.4% in July, to 1.517 trillion yen (\$11.27 billion), from July 1990, the Economic Planning Agency said.

In seasonally adjusted terms, July machinery orders rose 2% from the previous month to 1.737 trillion yen.

Although the year-to-year comparison shows a drop that reflects a very high year-earlier level, "we view machinery orders as remaining at a high level as a trend," an agency official said. The official added that orders from the auto and machinery industries seem to have been picking up from the slowdown seen some months ago.