

Spying on Science: Western Intelligence in Divided Germany, 1945-1961

Review Number:

649

Publish date:

Monday, 31 March, 2008

Author:

Paul Maddrell

ISBN:

9780199267507

Date of Publication:

2006

Price:

£68.00

Pages:

304pp.

Publisher:

Oxford University Press

Place of Publication:

Oxford

Reviewer:

Pauline Elkes

In *Spying on Science*, Paul Maddrell has provided an excellent account of the early and very difficult period of the Cold War, when tensions between East and West had emerged and relations between the 'big three' (the USSR, the USA and Britain) were deteriorating rapidly, finally reaching the critical point signified by the Berlin blockade. The focus on Germany reminds us of the geopolitical importance of that country, and also the 'problem' it became during the 20th century following its defeat in the First World War, the rise of Nazism and the Second World War. The perennial question of 'what to do with Germany' emerged again as the Grand Alliance began to disintegrate. In contrast with 1918, the world of 1945 was a much more complex place and Europe was no longer a key player in the game of international politics. The atomic bomb had been used against Japan to end the war, and international relations entered a bi-polar phase with America and Russia positioned as the two serious contenders for world power.

Maddrell's painstaking and methodical research, undertaken in German archives and in interviews with people involved in intelligence and propaganda during the early Cold War, clearly illustrates for us both the very real threat of conflict with Russia felt by Washington and London as the alliance began to break up, and also the strategies they evolved and implemented to deal with this. It is a new area of research, and an immensely interesting one that has largely been overlooked in the historiography of the Cold War. It is also an important addition to our knowledge of that period, and increases our understanding of the tensions between East and West, the rapid escalation of the Cold War in terms of the arms race, biological and chemical warfare, and more specifically, the rapid recognition in the West of the potential of intelligence and propaganda as weapons in a 'Cold War' situation when a 'hot' war was to be avoided at all costs.

Drawing heavily on records of the former East German Ministry of State Security and the National Archive in London (formerly the PRO, Kew), Maddrell provides an incredibly detailed account of the acquisition of intelligence on the current and future Soviet weaponry by western - chiefly British - intelligence agencies in Germany during the period between the end of the Second World War and the building of the Berlin Wall. This, according to Maddrell, was when the fear of actual war was at its greatest. Intelligence on the capability of the USSR, therefore, was a crucial component as an adjunct to traditional methods of warfare as it would provide the West with the ability to stay ahead in the arms race.

In 1945, the importance of intelligence (particularly human intelligence) supplemented by a diet of espionage and subversion could not be over-estimated. Whitehall was ahead of the game in its recognition of this scenario and in its evolution and implementation of a strategy to counter the Soviet threat. Scientific intelligence would provide information about Soviet intentions and capability in the field of biological and scientific warfare, their military and technological development and, crucially, their acquisition and planned expansion in the field of atomic and thermonuclear weapons. Much of this information would come from human intelligence through the public space of a divided Germany, which offered a unique window of opportunity for the transfer of people, information and intelligence.

Maddrell points out that the British were leaders in the collection of scientific intelligence during this time, a period which he suggests saw the 'greatest revolution in military technology in history', with both the USA and the USSR developing atomic and thermonuclear weapons, guided missiles and long-range bombers to carry them to their destination. By 1961 both countries had intercontinental ballistic missiles with which each could do devastating damage. One of the strengths of this book is the very clear and real sense of the rapid and revolutionary ways in which the arms race was emerging at this time, and the threats posed by scientific and biological warfare as well as the atomic bomb, which had been used by the USA with devastating effect on the people of Japan. Atomic bombs also delivered a message of sinister clarity to the USSR in political propaganda in August 1945.

This transformation of weaponry and the huge commitment of resources required to achieve it led to the formation in advanced countries of military industrial-academic complexes. The key concerns to defence planners are here identified as atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons, guided missiles and electronics. Intelligence of the development of these technologies in the USSR was pursued for it was logical that no possible aggressor could make preparations without noticeable indications. Good intelligence would provide information and, it was hoped, give decision-makers the rudimentary ability to predict future Soviet behaviour. This is classic intelligence theory put into practice - and a reading and application of Michael Handel's 'politicisation of intelligence' theory would be an interesting exercise, particularly in locating the weaknesses or misunderstandings of analysis and decision-making at the time. [\(1\)](#)

American and British policy towards the USSR was a dual track one of 'exploitation and denial'. Exploitation took the form of information, skills, expertise and intelligence gained from key scientists and academics involved in the development of Soviet weaponry and technology who through inducements to leave the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) defected to the West. Their defection provided a wealth of material, much of it mundane and some of it important. All of this intelligence was carefully gathered and fed back to the centre through the Scientific and Technical Intelligence Branch (STIB) of the

Intelligence Division, a small specialist team of interrogators who were employed to question defectors, refugees and ex-prisoners of war (POW) in order to extract scientific and technical information which might be useful to the West. This was part of the strategy which aimed to force the USSR to abandon satellites gained during the latter years of the Second World War. Defection was seen to have a powerful psychological impact and was, therefore, a key element in the West's psychological warfare strategy. It denied key resources to the Communist regime, made useful people available to the West and was exploited in propaganda as a means of counteracting the idea that Communism was a 'better' social system. This, it was believed, would push the East onto the political defensive. Finally, it caused resentment to grow behind the Iron Curtain while discrediting their politicians and military commanders. Defection was seen as a powerful instrument as it put the Soviets under as much strain as possible. The USSR's condemnation of efforts to encourage defection appeared to confirm to the West that the strategy, which increased its own power at the cost of the communists, was one worth pursuing.

This policy of exploitation through defection provided the West with the opportunity to practice the second strand of their policy: 'denial'. As well as providing the West with information from individuals, defections from the East also deprived the Soviets of expertise, skills and knowledge. Therefore, the denial of scientists, technicians, biological chemists and other individuals important to the Soviet war-making apparatus was achieved by encouraging them to migrate to become spies for the West, or to move to America or Britain to provide intelligence of the Soviet infrastructure and its development. Measures were also put in place to stop workers from going over to the GDR to work. In addition, the denial of war-making resources was achieved through their inclusion in an embargo of strategic goods crucial to scientific and biological development adopted throughout all the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries and others under the leadership of America.

The ideal place for these activities was in four-zoned Berlin, where the ingredients necessary for 'exploitation and denial' operations could be found. Because of the ease of travel across the city (the borders were not secure) any East German could easily make a trip to the West and back. West Berlin offered a crucial gap in the Iron Curtain which provided large-scale espionage opportunities to the West. In addition, Soviet imperialism created opportunities for the West because its use of German scientific workers, POWs and material resources in post-war weapons development and military reconstruction made Germans potential informants.

This strategy brought some rewards: the West gained information from Soviet POWs of the location of some 100 chemical factories and 80 other installations, which according to Maddrell had 'long-term significance'. One of these was the Shikani, a gas factory in the Volga, which was the Soviet principal chemical weapons testing range. Another such installation was the Central Military Chemical Range, identified in 1987 in a landmark admission by the USSR that they did hold chemical weapons.

The book outlines for us the establishment and evolution of the different agencies and organisations that would put this preferred policy into practice. It also establishes that while Britain was an early Cold War warrior full collaboration with America in both policy and method was vital for its defence. Military collaboration required intelligence collaboration. An additional strength of this book is the detail given in the description of the relationship between the Joint Scientific Intelligence Committee, the Joint Technical Intelligence Committee, MI6 and the CIA.

Maddrell also gives information about counter-intelligence operations, including those concerning the atomic bomb, where the Soviet defector Gouzenko confirmed the penetration of Los Alamos and thus the Manhattan Project. In fact the decryption of cables sent from Soviet offices in America to Moscow by the Venona project revealed that the atomic and nuclear programme had been 'deeply penetrated'. He gives details of Klaus Fuchs's counter-intelligence operations and his confession, which also identified other spies at Los Alamos, among them the Briton Donald Maclean.

Maddrell's research shows that the USA widened its embargo on the Soviets to include non-war related goods, for he argues that until the 1970s the USA was keen to wage economic warfare on the USSR in any

way that would weaken the Eastern Bloc's economies and deny them hard currency. In fact he argues that from 1946 where the USA led, others followed. For example, the USA applied pressure through the Marshall Plan, which it used as a 'lever', while also imposing its embargo on members of the Organisation for European Economic Community. It seems that 'co-operation with the willing was supplemented by prescription for the unwilling'.

Maddrell successfully paints a picture of American fears of the Soviets, which were intense in the early Cold War years, and highlights their foreign policy objective of undermining the USSR's control in the Eastern Bloc countries and forcing the Kremlin to give-up in East Germany. Encouraging skilled people to flee would damage the GDR and make it unviable; consequently, in this critical intelligence operation the Americans, British and Germans would work together closely.

The American-British collaboration is highlighted throughout this work, and Maddrell believes that American policy was formulated by the 'brilliant George Kennan'. He was the author of the critical Cold War intelligence telegram Article NSC68, which aimed to reduce Soviet power without resorting to war thereby forcing the USSR to abandon aggression and subversion. Thus the policy of containment and rollback emerged as a direct result of intelligence and the growing perception of the threat of the Soviets as the decade came to a close. But Maddrell points out that the Soviet states were not weak - the communists were ruthlessly brutal, and American and British subversion attempts were consistently defeated by their formidable opponents in the Soviet security services. By the mid 1950s this aggressive containment became 'competitive co-existence'. The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 showed how little subversion could achieve as long as the communists were willing to act ruthlessly to retain their rule.

This book has much to offer to scholars of the Cold War and those involved in intelligence studies. With an easily accessible, contextual analysis of the complexity of intelligence and propaganda as instruments of the West in its determination to challenge the threat of the Soviet Union, it provides stimulating reading and adds to our knowledge of this often overlooked area of historical enquiry.

Notes

1. M. Handel, 'The Politics of Intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 2 (1987), 5-46. [Back to \(1\)](#)

Other reviews:

muse

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tech/summary/v049/49.2.richelson.html> [2]

oxford journals

<http://ehr.oxfordjournals.org/content/CXXIII/500/262.full> [3]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/649>

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/3623>

[2] <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tech/summary/v049/49.2.richelson.html>

[3] <http://ehr.oxfordjournals.org/content/CXXIII/500/262.full?etoc>