

Origins of Intelligence Operations

Conference of the International Intelligence History Study Group

2-4 May 1997

Strausberg/Germany

Conference Report

The 3. Annual Meeting of the International Intelligence History Study Group took place in Strausberg from May 2 to 4, 1997. The topic "Origins of Intelligence Organizations" attracted more than 80 specialists from eight European nations, from Russia, Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United States. John P. Fox, Jews College, London, the keynote speaker, talked about decrypted messages by German Police and SS/SD units from the early part of the German invasion of the USSR, summer and fall 1941, that have recently become available in the United States. It is clear from these messages that the British authorities had knowledge about mass executions conducted by German units at the eastern front. Churchill, in a few contemporary remarks, revealed that he was informed about what was going on. The British authorities quite obviously decided not to publicize such information to prevent Germany from realizing that their codes were not secure. It is not clear from currently available information if American authorities were informed at the time or only in the 1980s when the papers now at the National Archives were transferred to Washington, D.C. After the Labour Party won in the last elections in Great Britain, Professor Fox was granted access to the original documents at the Public Records Office.

The main emphasis of the first part of the conference was on American intelligence organizations. Bradley F. Smith, London, presented findings of his research on the cooperation of American and Soviet intelligence organizations from 1942 to August 1945. The interchange of information was mostly on German troop movements, he discovered, and Americans even supplied data gained through ULTRA. Petra Marquardt-Bigman, German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., discussed why the scientifically based and quite successful work of the Research & Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services was supplanted by the CIA's almost exclusive consideration for espionage and covert action. J. Kenneth McDonald, former Chief Historian CIA, Washington, D.C., broadened this topic in his discussion of the influence of the Cold War on the organizational structure of the CIA. He also acknowledged that between 1949 to 1952 the main emphasis of the organization was on covert operations. Mario Del Pero, University of Milan, introduced a typology of different forms of covert operations and delineated George F. Kennan's and Paul Nitze's influence on the introduction of covert operations as a means of foreign policy. Horst Boog, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Freiburg, addressed the importance of HUMINT -- intelligence data provided through human sources -- during the early period of the Cold War. Before U-2 reconnaissance flights could provide American intelligence organizations with hard data on Soviet armaments and with information useful for choosing possible targets, German and Austrian POWs were interrogated upon their return from Soviet camps. Christian Ostermann, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., discussed scope and aims of CIA operations in the German Democratic Republic from 1949 to 1955. Using the incidents on 17. June 1953 as an example, he delineated the large spectrum of covert operations, ranging from support of opposition groups to plans

of massive psychological warfare.

The second part of the conference was devoted to papers on the creation and early development of the Soviet intelligence organization KGB. Matitahu Mayzel, Tel Aviv University, maintained that the creation of the KGB in 1953 had its origins in a severe domestic crisis that, after Stalin's death, spread to all areas of national security. For years, the KGB's work was handicapped by competition between security and intelligence agencies. Only after 1967, when Juri Andropov became head of the KGB, the organization began to function more effectively. Sergei A. Kondrachev, Moscow, a former KGB general, delineated attempts by the Soviet Union to influence the developments in post-war Germany -- through cooperation with the Western Allies and by other means -- and the establishment of a East-German state. This, Kondrachev maintained, was made difficult by a crisis within the Soviet intelligence apparatus and because of developments within the GDR that culminated in the events of 17 June 1953.

The establishment and early development of German intelligence organizations was the topic of the third part of the conference. Gerhard Weinberg, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, discussed Allied disinformation and the evaluation based on such faulty data by important Nazi officials such as Joseph Goebbels at the end of World War II. He indicated the necessity to address in our research the possibility that such patterns of erroneous evaluations were carried over to the Organisation Gehlen. James Critchfield, Williamsburg, VA, delineated the founding of the Organisation Gehlen and his attempts, as the CIA officer in charge, to influence the setup of the organization. He described the frictions between government agencies in Washington, D.C., and the various military and civil American intelligence agencies during the early years of the German Federal Republic, that only dissolved with the creation of the Bundesnachrichtendienst in 1956. Substituting for Roger Engelmann who could not attend the meeting, Monika Tanzscher, Gauck-Behörde, Berlin, gave a paper. She presented her research on the early intelligence/security organizations in the Soviet zone of occupation established within the police. She found that Saxony was the first state to establish a political police force. Gary Bruce, McGill University, Montreal, discussed the events of 17 June 1953 from the East German point of view and the impact of the uprising on the developments within the Ministerium fuer Staatssicherheit. As a result of these events, Bruce argued, the focus of the MfS shifted from observation of anti-communist groups to surveillance of the entire population. At the same time the MfS launched a public relations campaign and intensified its espionage among the Western German political class which was held responsible for the unrest.

The focus of the last part of the conference was on the establishment of intelligence organizations in other countries. David Kahn, Arlington, VA, addressed the historical development of crypto analytical know-how in Europa and in the United States until the end of World War II. France and Austria, Kahn argued, had been leading in this field and countries such as Germany could only catch up during the war. In none of the countries, he maintained, the development of crypto analysis had been a reaction to outside stimuli but rather had been based on the initiatives of individuals. Yigal Sheffy, Tel Aviv University, delineated the shift of the British military intelligence operations in the Middle East during World War I towards a modern intelligence system: To gain reliable information on Turkey, the British almost completely abandoned HUMINT in favor of communications intelligence and airplane reconnaissance. Jérôme Marchand, Centre d'Etudes Historiques de

la Défense, Paris, looked at the establishment of the British intelligence agencies from a cultural perspective. He maintained that spy thrillers were utilized to create a sense of danger and the impression that a gentleman-spy could save the nation, thus creating a legitimization for the establishment of an intelligence organization. The concluding paper was delivered by Frank M. Cain, Australian Defense Force Academy, Canberra, on Allied and Japanese intelligence organizations in the Pacific War. He paid particular attention to the successful attempts by the Americans and the British to decipher Japanese codes.

The conference has revealed how important and rewarding a transnational comparative perspective of the establishment and early development of intelligence organizations is. The incorporation of decision-making processes and domestic issues, addressed in a number of papers, proved to be a valuable addition to the traditional scope of research in the field of intelligence history. (From a German digest provided by Heike Bungert and Anke Ortlepp, Cologne.)