

It's Still Business as Usual for Spies, Even as the Eastern Bloc Rises Up

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 30 — For years, experts have dubbed Czechoslovakia's spy agency the "two Czech" service. Agents of the Office for the Protection of State Secrets got one check from Prague, the pun goes, and another from their real bosses at K.G.B. headquarters in Moscow.

The disturbing news from Eastern Europe this winter, American intelligence officials say, is that the punch line has not yet changed.

Despite a democratic revolt that has shaken Communist rule in Czechoslovakia and five other Eastern bloc states, those nations' espionage agencies have not slackened their vigorous efforts to steal Western technology and military secrets, often at Soviet direction, several officials said in interviews.

"We don't see very much indication that any of these countries are diminishing their overseas intelligence activities, with the possible exception of a somewhat greater emphasis on their

Experts say agents continue to steal Western secrets.

own interests as opposed to the broader interests of the East bloc," a State Department official said.

Infancy of Democratic Revolt

That official and others caution that the democratic revolt is still in its infancy. Eastern bloc spy agencies, they predict, will eventually warm to Western-style government and to inducements, like trade agreements, that will reduce their incentive to spy on the West.

They also agree that the radical changes in the East bloc will eventually cripple the ability of the Soviet Union's primary intelligence agency, the K.G.B., to use its old allies as surrogates in espionage battles between East and West.

"In general, what liaison there was is going to break down further; no question about it," said an Administration expert who declined to be identified.

"If I were Kryuchkov I wouldn't be a happy man right now," he said. Col. Gen. Vladimir A. Kryuchkov is the K.G.B. chief.

Yet there are few signs that such changes are occurring this winter. On the contrary, several Administration officials and private experts said, the K.G.B. appears in some cases to have stepped up its "tasking" of Eastern bloc agencies for specific missions

against Western targets.

Of the six nations swept by pressures for democratic change — Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania and East Germany — Communists allied with the Soviet Government remain in apparent control of intelligence-related agencies in all but Czechoslovakia and Rumania.

Intelligence experts also noted that there has been but a trickle of defectors from Soviet bloc spy services during the democratic upheaval, although defections usually increase in times of political uncertainty.

Although Central Intelligence Agency officials refused to be interviewed, the Director of Central Intelligence, William H. Webster, said publicly this fall that the warming of East-West relations is stirring an increase in espionage, not a decrease.

In remarks Nov. 29 to the National Press Club, Mr. Webster said it was too early to tell whether Eastern bloc nations would curb their spying on American targets.

"Let us not assume that because we are getting friendly and seeing freedom come up from the streets, that freedom has been endorsed by some of those aggressive intelligence services," he said.

Well-Founded Concern

Mr. Webster's concern is well-founded, officials say. While the public views espionage as a purely Soviet affair, some of the decade's most damaging spies were recruited and run by the K.G.B.'s East bloc allies.

East German agents managed a ring of spies from 1978 to 1988 inside one of the United States' most sensitive electronic listening posts, atop a wooded hill in West Berlin. The American inquiry into the case has produced one espionage conviction and a guilty plea and is continuing, the Federal Bureau of Investigation said Friday.

Czechoslovak and Polish agents this decade have sought Western military and technological secrets with great success, and Hungarian agents ran a spy network within United States Army installations in Europe that acquired some of NATO's most tightly held war plans.

Much, if not all of that information was sold or given to the Soviets. "Obviously, these are still countries that had their own interests, but historically the K.G.B. could get access to just about anything they wanted," said W. Douglas Gow, the F.B.I.'s new assistant director for counterintelligence.

Change Is Unlikely Soon

Mr. Gow and others say they anticipate some easing of the K.G.B.'s grip, but few expect serious change soon. For one thing, they said, the new civilian rulers in some nations — playwrights, coal miners, exiles — are probably too naive or too consumed by economic problems to worry about spying.

"We've often found that changes have taken place in the East bloc countries without any similar changes taking place in those countries' foreign-intelligence-gathering networks," said John C. Whitehead, Deputy Secretary of State in the Reagan Administration. "That's not because the new governments wanted to keep the networks in business, but simply because the new people in office didn't know what was going on in their own services."

In any case, friends of the Soviet Government appear to control most spying outright through the interior ministries, which generally manage the domestic secret police and espionage.

For example, Poland's Solidarity leadership conceded the Interior Ministry to Communists in what some American officials called a tacit agreement with Mr. Gorbachev to allow a peaceful transfer to democracy.

Intelligence in East Berlin

East Germany abolished its Ministry for State Security and its hated secret police, but re-established an intelligence service that will report to Prime Minister Hans Modrow, a Gorbachev favorite.

"No one will be so naive as to think that our country is the only one in the world that can do without intelligence service reconnaissance abroad," the East Berlin newspaper National-Zeitung said two weeks ago.

Even in Czechoslovakia, where the Interior Ministry has been moved from Communist control to a troika that includes two leaders of the opposition, American officials say they see no change so far.

Other East bloc nations are likely to feel the same need to spy on the West as long as a vestige of the cold war remains, some experts noted. Zdzislaw M. Rurarz, a former Polish diplomat who defected to the United States in 1981, noted pointedly in an interview that the United States was undoubtedly continuing to spy on the Solidarity-run Government there.

It would be foolish, he said, to expect the Poles not to reciprocate.

Two Question Marks

The two question marks are Hungary and Rumania, American officials say. In Rumania, it is unclear whether the Communist or anti-Communist factions of the ruling Council of National Salvation will gain the upper hand, but hatred of Communism runs so deep that many experts doubt that the Communists will prevail.

Hungary's intelligence directorate is Communist-run, but the state has dismantled the Communist Party bureaucracy, leaving it in civilian control. The United States has also warned Hungary that thefts of American technology will kill plans to ease curbs on the legal export of those technologies.

"The Hungarians seem further along than anybody," one official said, and have even offered to help prevent the

Communists retain control of some intelligence services.

leak of sensitive technologies to hostile countries.

In an apparent bow to American intelligence concerns, Hungary's new Government this fall deported Edward Lee Howard, a turncoat C.I.A. agent who in 1985 helped the K.G.B. destroy much of the agency's Moscow espionage network. The Hungarians have denied deporting Mr. Howard, but American officials confirmed a Los Angeles Times report of the action.

'Net Loss' for the K.G.B.

How deeply the K.G.B. will be hurt by the East bloc changes looms as the biggest unanswered question of all.

Roy Godson, head of the Washington-based National Strategy Information Center and a well-known intelligence scholar, called any democratic change "a net loss" for Soviet intelligence. But he cautioned against euphoria.

"The Soviets wouldn't have relied on just official cooperation," he said. "It would be surprising if they haven't unilaterally penetrated friendly services with their own agents, too."

And, he said, much depends on the angst of East bloc spies who labored for years against the West, only to discover that they have seen the enemy — and he is them.

"They've got to decide who they're going to throw their support to," he said. "Will they be loyal to whoever's the government? To the Communist parties? To themselves? That isn't clear yet."

