

The ether war: hostile intelligence activities directed against Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and the émigré community in Munich during the Cold War

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This article traces hostile intelligence service activity, ranging from espionage to murder, from the Warsaw Pact countries directed against exiles working for the American sponsored radio stations Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in Munich, Germany, 1950–89.

Keywords: Radio Free Europe; Radio Liberty; RFE/RL; Cold War; CIA; Markov; Carlos the Jackal; KGB

Introduction

For over 40 years, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) were two American-sponsored radio stations in Munich, Germany, that broadcast to countries behind the Iron Curtain. Thousands of persons worked for these radio stations at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. These stations were two critical elements of the CIA's early clandestine activities directed against the communist regimes. Yet, for years their existence remained covered in a Cold War shroud of mystery and intrigue.

This article begins with a short, three-part historical overview of the development of RFE and RL and then examines the hostile intelligence activities of four Warsaw Pact countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia.

Creation of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty¹

Early corporate and government records no longer exist and many persons who were responsible for the development of 'the radios' (the informal collective label for RFE and RL) have long since died, leaving at best fragmentary documentation. Most archives of both American and Eastern intelligence services remain even today classified, rendering them basically inaccessible to the public and researchers.²

Although we recently have seen remarkable research by highly motivated individuals and organisations such as The Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw (IPN), and the Czech Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism (UDV) most East European intelligence files remain closed or were destroyed in the immediate post-November 1989 events, as I will discuss below. That being said, the main outlines of the development of the radios can be traced from open sources and selected files released in the US government's recent declassification program as well as some files

of the former Warsaw Pact intelligence services. The Soviet Union's intelligence archives remain almost entirely draped in secrecy.³

The idea of the international radio stations RFE and RL first arose in 1947–48. This was the time of the completion of Soviet domination of East Europe, the Berlin airlift, the Marshall Plan, and the Iron Curtain. Eastern, Central, and Western Europe were physically divided by barbed wire, armed patrols, land mines and guard towers. In Warsaw Pact countries, the Communist monopoly and censorship of media was absolute. The free flow of information was cut off, not only from the outside, but also internally.

The origins of both RFE and RL can be traced to 17 December 1947, when the United States National Security Council issued NSC 4-A, which directed the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to 'initiate and conduct covert psychological operations . . . designed to counteract Soviet and Soviet-inspired activities which constitute a threat to world peace . . .'.⁴ One aim of the psychological war effort was to create surrogate radio stations (home service) that would broadcast to countries under the Soviet control.

By August 1948, the CIA had acquired in Europe a radio transmitter, a printing plant, and began assembling a fleet of weather balloons to carry and drop off propaganda leaflets and other materials over the Iron Curtain. In 1949, the CIA created The National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE), 'in which the émigrés from the satellite nations could find employment that would utilize their skills and, at the same time, document for the world at large the actions of the satellite governments and Soviet Russia'.⁵

On 4 July 1950, RFE transmitted its first 30-minute program to Czechoslovakia. Broadcasts to Romania followed on 14 July to Poland and Hungary on 4 August and to Bulgaria on 11 August. The first broadcasts were prepared in New York and air transported to Germany, but soon the entire broadcast operation was moved to Munich, Germany. The NCFE then established a Crusade for Freedom, with former General Lucius Clay, famous for his role in the Berlin Airlift 1948–1949, as its chairman. Allen Dulles, who later became Director of the CIA, was also one of the incorporating officers.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower passionately called for an American 'Crusade for Freedom' in a nationwide radio broadcast on Labor Day 1950. He asked for financial support and for Americans to sign a 'Freedom Scroll' with a 'Declaration of Freedom'. He also announced that General Clay would direct the Crusade For Freedom.⁶ Over 16 million Americans signed the 'Freedom Scrolls' on a publicity trip to over 20 US cities and contributed \$1,317,000 to the expansion of RFE. A 'Freedom Bell' was forged in England, transported to Berlin, and officially dedicated at the City Hall before hundreds of thousands of Berliners on 24 October 1950. RFE used four notes of the bell as a station-break with the words: 'That was the Freedom Bell to remind you that you are listening to Radio Free Europe.' The Freedom scrolls are enshrined in the Freedom Bell tower vault at the base of the belfry and are visible to visitors today.

From October 1951 to November 1956, the skies of Central Europe were filled with more than 350,000 balloons carrying over 300,000,000 leaflets, posters, books, and other printed matter. The balloon launchings, with coordinated programming operations that followed, were called 'PROSPERO, VETO, FOCUS', and 'SPOTLIGHT'. The Free Europe Press (FEP) constructed three major launching sites in Germany to launch the balloons in round-the-clock operations in good weather. (More below on SPOTLIGHT).

Radio Liberty

The beginning of RL contrasted dramatically with RFE, as the CIA had difficulties getting the various Soviet émigré groups in Germany to agree on how to start up a radio station. The American Committee for Freedom of the Peoples of the USSR was founded in January 1951, also under CIA sponsorship and policy guidance. Its purpose was to use emigration forces against Soviet Union. The American Committee did not attempt to raise funds publicly, which would have assisted in providing plausible cover for its activities. The American Committee assumed that former Soviet nationals speaking in the name of a united emigration would conduct the most effective propaganda against the Soviet regime. Because of this assumption, The American Committee spent a great deal of time and effort in attempting to unify the various political groups.

There were two major difficulties in the way of accomplishing this aim. One was the extreme hostility existing between Great Russian groups and those composed of the various non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union. The other difficulty was the basic political differences between Marxist and non-Marxist elements in the emigration, regardless of nationality. On 7 July 1951, the Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the Soviet Union was founded in Munich to utilise the knowledge and research skills of the émigrés (the author was one of the last graduate students there when it closed in 1972).

'Radio Liberation from Bolshevism' first broadcast on 1 March 1953 to the Soviet armed forces in Germany and Austria; however, within 10 minutes, the Soviet Union started jamming Radio Liberation broadcasts. Programs which broadcasted in Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek, Tatar-Bashkir, Armenian, Azeri, Georgian and other languages of the Caucasus and Central Asia were also introduced.

In 1958 Radio Liberation issued a revised policy manual, pointing its staff toward promoting 'liberalisation' rather than 'liberation'. The station was renamed Radio Liberty in 1959.

CIA funding revealed

A major turning point in RFE/RL's history occurred in 1967 when *Ramparts* magazine publicly revealed the RFE-CIA connection. President Lyndon Johnson appointed a Presidential Commission to look into RFE funding among other CIA covert-action programs.

When the US Congress decided that CIA funds would no longer finance RFE and RL after 30 June 1971, possible future sources of funding were debated.

On 19 August 1972, President Richard Nixon appointed a commission under the direction of Milton Eisenhower to study the future of international radio broadcasting. In 1973, the Eisenhower Commission published its report as 'The Right to Know'. Subsequent Congressional legislation consolidated RFE and RL into one new hybrid organisation: a private non-profit corporation but still funded by Congress. Consolidation of the two radio stations took place in 1975-76 as a new corporation: RFE/RL, Inc.

On 4 July 1994, the 44th anniversary of RFE broadcasting, President Bill Clinton formally accepted an offer from President Havel and the Czech Government to relocate all of RFE/RL from Munich to Prague. The first broadcast from RFE/RL's new headquarters in the former Czechoslovakian Federal Parliament building took place on 10 March 1995. RFE/R today continues to function in Prague but with emphasis on broadcasting to Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan and former Soviet Republics in Central Asia.

The ether war: hostile intelligence reaction to RFE/RL

Famed Cold War novelist John Le Carré best captured the émigré community and intelligence activity in Munich, when he wrote in his novel *The Secret Pilgrim*:

For anybody who has lived in Hamburg, Munich is not Germany at all. It is another country. I never felt the remotest connection between the two cities, but when it came to spying, Munich like Hamburg was one of the unsung capitals of Europe. Even Berlin ran a poor second when it came to the size and visibility of Munich's invisible community . . . And now and then frightful scandals broke, usually when one or other of this company of clowns literally forgot which side he was working for, or made a tearful confession in his cups, or shot his mistress or his boyfriend or himself, or popped up drunk on the other side of the Curtain to declare his loyalty to whomever he had not been loyal to far. I never in my life knew such an intelligence bordello.

Munich, Germany is where the Cold War was in reality a 'Hot War'. The émigré staff at both RFE and RL faced intimidation, threats of murder and kidnapping, some of which actually were carried out. Intelligence agents penetrated the stations, and some employees became intelligence collaborators. Some specific cases are detailed below.

All of the intelligence services of the Warsaw Pact operated against RFE and RL. Sometimes this was centrally coordinated activity and sometimes the countries ran their own operations. Actions (in this case, hostile actions) did speak louder than words in the battle of ideas fought by East and West. Due to constraints of length, I will present only a few cases to illustrate the hostile actions, which East European intelligence services mounted against RFE/RL and its staff.

Bulgarian Intelligence Service: murder of Georgi Markov⁷

On 11 September 1978, Bulgarian émigré writer and broadcast journalist Georgi Markov died in London at age 49. His murder by a killer armed with a so-called 'poisoned umbrella' remains one of the Cold War's greatest unsolved mysteries. Markov had been a prolific and successful literary figure in Bulgaria before he defected to the West in 1969, unable to further endure what he called a 'sense of the unbearable'. He later explained in one RFE broadcast, 'I tried to compromise as much as I could and it was eventually too much. And the whole atmosphere was in deep disagreement with myself'.

As a defector, he was branded a 'traitor' by the Bulgarian media. Five years later, Bulgarian authorities tried him in absentia, sentenced Markov to six-and-half-years imprisonment, and ordered the confiscation of all his personal property. His books, which had once been bestsellers, were banned and his plays were not performed. Markov wrote more than 130 primetime Sunday evening programs for RFE, largely consisting of his memoirs, in a series called, 'In Absentia, Reports about Bulgaria'. Not only were these memoirs informative about cultural life in Bulgaria, but also they revealed the otherwise hidden life of Communist Party leaders, especially Todor Zhivkov.

Markov's listening audience was estimated to be 30% of the Bulgarian adult population, even though Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian language broadcasts were heavily jammed. A collection of these programs was translated into English and published posthumously as *The Truth That Killed*. In another RFE program, Markov compared living in Bulgaria to living under a lid:

Every word spoken under this lid constantly changes its meaning. Lies and truths swap their values with the frequency of an alternating current. We have statesmen who have no state . . . politicians who have no policies . . . shops in which nothing is sold, writers who do not write, elections in which there is no choice . . .'

In 1977, Markov learned that his father was dying of cancer, and he asked for permission either to return to Bulgaria, or have his father visit him in the West. The regime denied both requests; his father died in June 1978. The tone of Markov's programs on Radio Free Europe changed, notably in a biting satirical series of programs broadcast from November 1977 to January 1978, called 'Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov'. Markov persistently bore witness to, and criticised, the Bulgarian government's lies and corruption. In 1978, at least three attempts to kill him were made. The first was in Munich in the spring, when Markov was visiting friends and colleagues at RFE. An agent failed in an attempt to put a toxin in Markov's drink at a dinner party held in his honour. The second attempt failed on the Italian island of Sardinia, where Markov was enjoying a summer vacation with his family. Farce turned to tragedy with the final and successful attempt in London, on President Zhivkov's 67th birthday, 7 September 1978.

Markov had parked his car below Waterloo Bridge and climbed the stairs to a bus stop. As he neared the waiting queue, he experienced a sudden stinging pain in the back of his right thigh. He turned and saw a man bending to pick up a dropped umbrella. Later that evening, Markov developed a high fever and was taken to a hospital, where he was treated for an undetermined form of blood poisoning. He went into shock, and after three days of agony, he died. In January 1979, after months of investigation, research and experimentation, a coroner's court in London ruled that Markov had been unlawfully killed by the use of 450 micrograms of a lethal biotoxin ricin implanted in a sophisticated minute pellet implanted in Markov's leg. The case lay dormant until after the collapse of Communism in Bulgaria in 1989, when Bulgarian and British investigators re-opened it. Their efforts were hampered, however, by a lack of lack of coordination, documentary evidence and witnesses.

Georgi Markov was posthumously honoured in Sofia on 28 December 2000, when President Stoyanov presented Mrs Annabel Markov with Bulgaria's highest honour: The Order of Stara Planina. The Order's citation spoke of Markov's 'remarkable contribution to Bulgarian literature and of his opposition to the Communist authorities'. But, President Stoyanov did not admit that Bulgarian agents killed Markov. On 12 April 2002, the Supreme Court in Sofia sentenced former Interior Minister General Atanas Semerdjiev to four and a half years and former head of 'secret police' archives General Nanka Serkedjieva to two years for destroying 140,000 intelligence files in 1990, some of which related to Markov.

In effect, the case of 'Who Killed Georgi Markov?' was finally closed without an official attribution of guilt. Georgi Markov was a victim of ultimate censorship: state sponsored assassination. Sadly, he has become a historical footnote, but his death proved how far a totalitarian regime would go to protect itself from the truth. Today, one can read on his gravestone, in a small churchyard in Whitchurch, Dorset, England that he died in the 'cause of freedom'.

Romanian Intelligence Service

From the mid 1970s to his overthrow and execution in December 1989, Romanian Dictator Nicolae Ceausescu waged a vengeful war against the RFE/RL. His regime fought with intimidation, threats, and physical attack; the radios countered with the 'truth' in the programs broadcast to Romania. The Romanian intelligence services responded vigorously:

- In May 1981, German police arrested a female Romanian ‘spy’ in the RFE headquarters building in Munich.
- Book bombs hidden in the memoirs of former Soviet leader Khrushchev were sent to three prominent émigrés associated with RFE. One injured a freelancer and a policeman in Paris.
- Four Romanian diplomats were expelled from Germany in 1984, for plotting to bomb RFE, identified by code name ‘Cobra’.
- In 1982, Colonel ‘Z’, a Romanian agent sent to Paris to kill a prominent RFE/RL freelancer, instead confessed to French authorities and became a double agent for French Intelligence.

Code name Iago: the murder attempt on Emil Georgescu

The name Emil Georgescu is practically unknown in the West, apart from a few Romanian émigrés who remember him from his broadcasts over RFE/RL. Yet, with his listening audience he was one of the most popular broadcasters for the RFE/RL Romanian Service. His daily program, ‘Domestic Bloc’, a mixture of news and satire, was very highly rated with Romanian listeners, according to audience surveys. His commentaries were especially biting in his personal criticism of Communist Party leader Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, both of whom ruled Romania with an iron fist. In the halls of RFE/RL, one heard the apocryphal story about Georgescu’s popularity:

One Romanian asks, ‘What time is it?’

The other Romanian doesn’t look at his watch, he looks out the window and says, ‘It must be 11 o’clock.

Everyone’s shutters are closed. Emil has started his daily commentary.’

The Romanian government responded with an operation intended to silence Georgescu, garnished with the onerous code-name ‘Iago’. On 28 July 1991, shortly before 8 a.m., Georgescu left his apartment to go to work. He walked down a flight of stairs to the garage entrance. A man stood at the bottom of the stairs. He asked Georgescu in French if he were Emil Georgescu. Georgescu started to yell for help; the man attacked with a knife and stabbed him. Georgescu tried to defend himself with an attaché case, but the man continued his attack. Georgescu, who was about five feet five inches, was no match for the attacker, who was well over six feet tall. Georgescu was stabbed about 27 times. At one point, Georgescu managed to ask why, and the attacker answered, ‘So you will never write again’.

Georgescu’s wife heard his screams, left the apartment, and ran down the stairs calling out for help. The attacker escaped to a waiting car. Mrs Georgescu followed the man and saw the car and part of the licence plate. Neighbours called for police and medical assistance, which quickly arrived. Mrs Georgescu gave the police a description of the car and licence plate number and two men were quickly arrested. They were tried, found guilty of the attack, and sentenced to prison terms, thereby putting an end to Romania’s ‘Iago’ operations.

The Ether (Etural) program⁸

The Ether (Eturul) Program was a comprehensive attempt to counteract the influence of the radios, carried out jointly by Romania's domestic and foreign intelligence services. One document that surfaced after the collapse of Communism in Romania was a May 1985 report published in newspapers that went into full details of this cooperation, which documented Ether's 'success' as follows:

- Identification of the contact means and ways of the foreign radios and prevention of information data reaching them: to this effect, we acted to develop the information potential, which led to an increase of 21%. At the same time, better instructions were secured and, as a consequence, the transmission abroad of over 3000 materials, data and information, meant for the reactionary radio-stations were traced and stopped . . .
- The enforcement of more efficient information control on people maintaining or intending to establish links with foreign radios: more attention was also focused on identifying and neutralising hostile activities by people listening and spreading news, of harmful contents, broadcast by foreign radios, to this effect, over 30 groupings, in their initial phase of existence, were dispersed among young people and, in a wider field, over 1200 people were officially warned. In most cases these measures were efficient, and those involved gave up their hostile intentions and preoccupation.

On 30 November 2001, at a ceremony in Bucharest honouring 50 years of RFE/RL broadcasts, then Romanian President Ion Iliescu decorated RFE/RL President Thomas Dine and five veteran journalists of the Romanian Service. Iliescu said the ceremony represented:

A sincere, though perhaps belated acknowledgment of the fact that Romania's history in the years of the totalitarian regime cannot be written without emphasising the role played by the station on our lives under the conditions then prevailing.

He added that RFE/RL had been Romania's 'window to the normal world outside', and a source of 'adequate and pluralist information'. President Iliescu also recalled the 'darker side' of Romania and RFE/RL's history: the legacy of Ether. His examples included events such as the 21 February 1981 terrorist bomb attack on RFE/RL in Munich, the physical attacks on other Romanian journalists working for RFE/RL, and the controversial circumstances surrounding the deaths of three directors of RFE/RL's Romanian Service.

Iliescu said the authorities were fully collaborating with 'competent international forums' to fully explain the circumstances of those incidents. One such admission was in regards to the terrorist bomb attack on RFE's headquarters in Munich.

Definitive investigations into these and other Romanian intelligence operations are continually complicated by the systematic destruction of documentation during the final years of the Communist regime. For instance, former RFE/RL Romanian Service Director, Nestor Ratesh, has literally spent years searching for and reviewing the Romanian Intelligence Service files on RFE. At a major conference held at the Hoover Institute in California in October 2004, he said:

What I was allowed so far to research totals 112 thick volumes, roughly 35,000 pages, much of it incredible dirt, evil, and nonsense. There are both in the archives of the foreign intelligence service (SIE) and in that of the domestic security service (SRI) an undetermined number of files that are still considered classified. In addition, the released files had been carefully sanitised and many of the most revealing documents are missing.

Ironically, one of Nestor Ratesh's own predecessors, Vlad Georgescu, died in circumstances that are still open to discussion (as alluded to by former President Iliescu above). Nestor discovered that the Securitate files on Vlad Georgescu are in five volumes and total about 1600 pages. Nevertheless, almost 300 pages are missing, including the most important: the last year of Vlad Georgescu's life and death in Munich.

Terrorist bombing of RFE/RL

Various intelligence services proposed plans to bomb the headquarters of RFE/RL in Munich, but there was only one physical attack: the bombing of 21 February 1981. This was one of the most politically sensitive, yet little-known operations of 'Carlos the Jackal': this was his only American target. Carlos called his operations 'Tango', and therefore, this was his 'Munich Tango'.⁹

In Munich, German terrorist Johannes Weinrich, known as 'Steve', directed the 'Munich Tango'. Bruno Breguet, known as 'Luca', from the Swiss terrorist organisation 'Prima Linea', detonated a 15-kilogram bomb in the RFE/RL complex. Breguet reportedly used Romanian-supplied plastic explosives, Netropinta, and a radio transmitter and receiver to detonate the explosives. The concussion caused extensive damage and terror in the neighbourhood. Windows were shattered more than one hundred yards from RFE/RL headquarters, and the sound of the bomb blast was heard throughout Munich. Two persons in the neighbourhood and four RFE/RL employees were seriously injured. Damage to the building exceeded one million dollars.

In November 1998, chief military prosecutor Dan Voinea said that a current bank account belonging to 'Carlos the Jackal' had been discovered in Romania. Voinea added that the terrorist's record was under investigation for 'crimes against humanity' and 'crimes against peace', which carry a life sentence. He added that among Carlos's communist era contacts in Romania were former Securitate chief General Iulian Vlad, former chief of Romania's foreign intelligence service General Nicolae Plesita, as well as former Interior Minister Tudor Postelnicu. Voinea said that Carlos had been given one million dollars to bomb RFE/RL.

On 16 June 2005, Romanian military prosecutors indicted former Securitate General Nicolae Plesita for 'acts of terrorism against peace and humanity, committed on the territories of France and Germany'.

RFE's Operation Spotlight

From October 1951 to November 1956, the skies of Central Europe were filled with more than 350,000 balloons carrying over 300,000,000 leaflets, posters, books, and other printed materials that were sent over the Iron Curtain to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.¹⁰

In December 1953, Josef Swiatlo, a colonel in the Polish secret police, 'defected' in Berlin. Whether or not he was a double agent already under control of the CIA or was a genuine defector is a matter of historical debate. For example, according to one report, Swiatlo had been sent to the West with the purpose of killing Mrs Wanda Bronksa, a former Communist Party member and effective RFE Polish Service broadcaster.

Swiatlo made his first public statement in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in carefully controlled testimony before a Congressional Committee on 21 and 22 October 1954. His testimony was tape-recorded, and then RFE broadcast his testimony in programs lasting until 31 December. He was a constant figure on RFE's Polish Service broadcasts, featured

on over 100 taped programs and almost 150 news items. His name translates as ‘light’, and since listening to RFE was considered a crime, listeners would obliquely refer to his programs by asking ‘Will there be any light at your house tonight?’

Based on experiences in the previous balloon programs, and to continue with the propaganda barrage, on 12 February 1955, The Free Europe Press (FEP) started lofting copies – again, by balloon – of a 40-page compilation of his testimony, ‘The Inside Story of the Bezpieka (Security Apparatus) and the Party’, to Poland. This balloon program was called ‘Operation Spotlight’ and by the end of March had inserted almost 232,000 copies into Poland. FEP’s purpose was ‘to weaken the Communist control apparatus, and through, detailed exposure of Communist techniques, to enable the Polish people better to defend themselves against the Communists . . .’¹¹

Polish intelligence service activities: redefectors

Attempts to subvert RFE personnel apparently produced some noteworthy successes, including, for example, three Polish Intelligence collaborators who separately returned to Poland:

- Andrzej Czechowicz left Poland in 1963. Shortly after finishing his studies at the Faculty of History at the University of Warsaw, he entered the Polish Intelligence Service, and travelled to the West as an officer of that service. His mission was to ‘disembowel’ centres of anti-Polish subversion, especially RFE. He worked between 1965 and 1971 at the Radio as an evaluator. After his return to Poland he held a few press conferences on the case dealing with the financing of the Radio and the contacts between the CIA and RFE. He also took home quantities of original documents which proved this secret contact and which were published after his return to Poland in the Polish and other East European press.
- After leaving Poland in 1968, Mieczyslaw Lach worked at the Audience and Public Opinion Research Department of RFE. He returned to Poland in 1974 with dozens of documents, photos and audiotapes, used in unmasking the so-called information net of the radio.
- Andrzej Smolinski defected from Poland in August 1965. He and his wife were employed at RFE starting in 1966. In 1974 he resigned from his post as senior evaluator in the research and analysis department, returned to Poland, and shared his knowledge of the radio with Polish authorities.

Smolinski and Lach were not only used in internal Poland propaganda programs but also by the Soviet media in 1975, for example. A March 1975 article in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* contained a review of a Polish television program featuring Smolinski. He was introduced with a provocative rhetorical flourish: ‘A former employee of this subversive center (RFE) exposes the criminal activity of the radio station and tears the masks from the faces of its present leaders – Gestapo agents, provocateurs, and spies.’

Lach would later resurface in 1983 when a book ‘I Trust You Killroy’ was published in Poland. This book consisted of photographs of RFE Polish Service staffers and photocopies of RFE documents, many of which had first appeared on Polish television in 1975. Similar to Smolinski, Lach was also quoted extensively in the Soviet media concerning RFE’s broadcasts during the tense political days in the early 1980s.¹²

Polish intelligence activity in the 1980s

In order to appreciate what RFE staff members and their families went through in the Cold War, I have selected a few prime examples of the (sometimes heavy-handed) recruiting tactics employed by Polish Intelligence Service in the 1980s. In these synopsised report excerpts, actual names have been removed and replaced with 'Polish Service staffer':

- November 1985: Polish Service staffer has reported a recent visit from his parents who live in Poland. Prior to their departure they were approached by the Polish Intelligence Service (PIS) to make contact with him for the PIS. His sister was first given a travel passport, but this was taken away from her as she apparently refused to cooperate with the authorities.
- August 1986: Polish Service staffer reported a visit of his parents. His father told him during the last days of the visit that he brought a message from the Polish authorities wherein the staffer was advised that he could travel to any place in the world, including a return trip to Poland, and he could think it over and meet the father and 'a friend' in Vienna to discuss more details. The staffer refused to go along with the idea of a meeting in Vienna.
- September 1986: Two employees of the Polish Service reported separate recent incidents of Polish Intelligence Service interest in RFE/RL. Of extreme interest is the attached report from one Polish Service staffer, which cites not only the attempted recruitment, but also the information from the father-in-law showing that the PIS knew about her prior visit to London.
- January 1987: Polish Service staffer reported that he received a letter from a friend who was allowed to travel to Vienna. This friend wrote that the staffer's sister wanted him to pass on the information that she was called in to the Polish counterintelligence service concerning her request for a passport and permission to visit the West. She was told that she could have the passport, she would receive a substantial amount of money, and if she wanted, she could get a job at RFE/RL, apparently indicating that they have someone at RFE/RL who could assist her in getting a position at RFE/RL. All she had to do was tell the staffer after she arrived here that all was forgiven and he could return to Poland and suffer no consequences as things are changing for the better in Poland. She refused. The man then said she could think it over and if she didn't want to do it, it was okay because they would find another person to bring the message.
- June 1987: Polish Service staffer reported that he travelled to Vienna and met his brother who travelled from Poland. He had reported the meeting prior to his departure. The brother is a CP (Communist Party) member. The brother made a very low-keyed approach, indicating that the staffer could return to Poland if he wanted and go back to his 'old job' with no problems. The staffer reported that he declined the offer and there was no further discussion.
- November 1987: Polish Service staffer reported that she received a telephone call from her sister-in-law asking that the employee meet her brother in Vienna, at the request of the Interior Ministry.
- May 1988: Polish Service staffer's 22-year-old daughter recently arrived from Poland. Shortly before she was allowed to leave Poland, she was called into the Interior Ministry and met with an officer, who said that he would like to meet with the staffer in either Austria, Greece, Yugoslavia, or anywhere in the world (except West Germany).

Czechoslovak intelligence services

The Czechoslovak intelligence services were decades long active against RFE with classical agent infiltration and espionage, plans for an indiscriminate mass poisoning of the staff, bomb attempts and plots, and other hostile activities. Josef Frolik, a former intelligence officer, once testified in the United States:

Although the RFE has always been deeply penetrated by the Czechoslovak Intelligence agent network and networks from other intelligence services of the communist bloc, [the RFE] constantly evokes fits of anger among the leading representatives of communist regimes. Their responses often took the form of operations initiatives garnished with 'code names' reminiscent of the spy genre.

Of the many operations undertaken by the Czechoslovak intelligence service, the three following examples are reasonably representative.¹³

Code name PLEY

In November 1976, RFE/RL Czechoslovak Service employee Pavel Minarik returned to Prague. It was then revealed by Prague Radio that he was 'an intelligence officer who had waged a seven-year spy operation inside the Radios'. Soviet and East European media gave extensive coverage to revelations which included attacks against both radios, the naming of individual employees, alleged CIA connections, etc. One of his code names was 'Pley'.

Code name WAVES

In the 1980s, one file on 'RFE' had the codename 'WAVES' in the Second Administration of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior. RFE was considered as a main office for CIA espionage and was treated accordingly. The activity of this operation concentrated on the mail: all letters addressed to RFE were collected and photocopied. The contents were evaluated before they were sent.

The staff member of the Second Administration of the Ministry of the Interior knew the names and sections of the radio's Czechoslovakia Service from the RFE telephone directory. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Second Administration twice received a photocopy of the RFE Telephone Book from the Hungarian Intelligence Service. The leading officers of the Ministry of the Interior tried to influence public opinion against RFE by asserting that RFE was a spy centre of the CIA and that RFE employed former war criminals. Reportedly, these files were destroyed in 1989.

Code name ALPHA

Another Czechoslovak Intelligence codeword for RFE as a 'Spy Centre of the CIA' was 'Alpha'. Alpha files dealing with employees of the Czechoslovak Service of RFE/RL were divided into five categories:

- Object Files: employees not of interest to the State Security.
- Thematic Files: 'persons' of interest because of outside activities (e.g. émigré activities).
- Type Files: 'background files' with details of employees such as date and place of birth, personality traits (alcohol, money, gambling and other problems), jobs at RFE/RL, political attitudes, contacts with foreign 'special services'.

- Agent Files.
- Special Files: Names of persons known to have contacts with Western intelligence agencies and drug dealers. These names also were forwarded to Moscow.

In December 2006, the Czech Interior Ministry released a 200-page Czech language study entitled ‘Target ALFA’ Czechoslovak Security Services Against Radio Free Europe’. There is a three-page English language summary with this conclusion:

The primary message of the submitted publication is the ascertained fact that Czechoslovak communist regime, in spite of making an enormous effort and using a variety of (quite dubious) tools, failed to reach any considerable or permanent success in its fight against Radio Free Europe.¹⁴

Conclusion: RFE/RL’s effectiveness

Why would all Eastern Bloc intelligence services be so aggressively active against RFE/RL? One answer lies in how effective RFE/RL’s broadcasts were in peeling away the artichoke layers of lies and internal propaganda by the various Communist regimes to suppress their peoples. This can be best understood in the words and actions of some prominent political figures, one of whom (then-Foreign Minister of Estonia, Lennart Meri) ultimately nominated RFE/RL for the Nobel Peace Prize on 29 January 1991.

The collapse of Communism and the Soviet Union was hastened in August 1991, when government officials illegally attempted to oust Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. President Gorbachev publicly recognised the role played by RL in informing the Soviet people. He said he relied on its broadcasts for news while held under house arrest in his Black Sea vacation dacha during the attempted coup. After this unsuccessful coup attempt, Russia’s first President Boris Yeltsin enthusiastically (but somewhat inaccurately) stated:

During the three to four days of this takeover, Radio Liberty was one of the very few channels through which it was possible to send information to the whole world and, most important, to the whole of Russia, because now almost every family in Russia listens to Radio Liberty – and that was very important.¹⁵

A few weeks later Yeltsin signed a Presidential Decree giving RFE/RL special status, which allowed it for the first time in its history to officially operate a news bureau in Moscow. Ten years later, Russian President Putin repealed this decree in October 2002, but RFE/RL continues to operate in Russia at the time of this writing.

On 20 March 1993, former Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev was an invited guest at RFE/RL’s 40th anniversary celebration in Moscow of the first Radio Liberty broadcast. Gorbachev told the assembled audience of diplomats and journalists, ‘In the dark years of Communist rule before my own perestroika [reconstruction] reform program began, Radio Liberty told the truth’. He added, ‘I hope to be present at the 50th anniversary of Radio Liberty.’ Referring directly to RFE’s Polish language broadcasts, then US President George Bush sent a message to the RFE/RL in May 1992 stating, in part:

During the most difficult days of the Cold War, including martial law in Poland and throughout the gallant Solidarity movement, RFE was a singular voice of hope for Poles – and others in Central and Eastern Europe – who sought information from and communication with the West. For four decades, RFE has been resolute in its service, unwavering in its loyalty to democratic values, and steadfast in its promise to be the voice of truth. Now RFE, together with all Americans and Poles, can rejoice that Poland is once again part of free Europe.

After RFE/RL moved from Munich to Prague in 1995 for budgetary reasons, President Vaclav Havel officially welcomed RFE/RL at the station's inauguration on 8 September 1995, when he said, 'I am not sure that I would not have been in prison for another couple of years were it not for a certain amount of publicity that I had because of these radio stations'.

On 28 February 1997, a month after taking office, newly elected Bulgarian President Petr Stoyanov visited RFE/RL's new headquarters. He praised the radios' role in the Cold War: 'We still remember sometimes how, through the interference on the short-wave range, we searched for the radio station we needed, the radio station to give us courage to go through the hardships of everyday life under Communism, Radio Free Europe.'

On 11 March 1997, Romania's President Emil Constantinescu visited RFE/RL in Prague and eloquently remarked to over 200 staff members, journalists, and the diplomatic community:

Communism could not exist, but by lies and lack of information. Communism could be torn apart, not by power of arms, but by power of words and especially of real beliefs. That is why Radio Free Europe has been much more important than the armies, the rockets, the most sophisticated equipment. The rockets that have destroyed Communism have been launched from RFE, and this was America's most important investment against the Cold War.

However, the simplest, and arguably most powerful, testimonial tribute paid to the radios was not offered in the form of a strident assertion, but a metaphorically poetic question. When he was asked about the importance of RFE, Lech Walesa, Poland's first democratically elected president, answered: 'Would there be an earth without the sun?'

Notes

1. This article is adapted from the author's longer paper, 'Attacks from the East Against RFE/RL', presented at the 5th Annual Meeting of the International Intelligence History Study Group, 18–20 June 1999, Tutzing, Germany.
2. A detailed review can be found in the author's 'The Intelligence Underpinnings of American Covert Radio Broadcasting in Germany during the Cold War', *The Journal of Intelligence History* 1 (2) (Winter 2001). An excellent source for declassified CIA and State Department documents can be found in 'Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment', Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950 US Department of State, 1996, <http://www.state.gov/www/about-state/history/intel/index.html>, or in hard copy available through the US Government Printing Office, ISBN 0-16-045208-2, GPO Stock # 044-000-02413-6. Another prime source is the volume from the Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA History Staff, Michael Warner, ed., *CIA Cold War Records: The CIA under Harry Truman* (Washington, DC: CIA, 1994). A superb historical overview of RFE/RL, including photographs, is Cissie Dore Hill, 'Voices of Hope: The Story of RFE and RL', *Hoover Digest*, No. 4 (2001), www.hooverdigest.org/014/dorehill.html. This article was published for the exhibition of the same name, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 24 April–28 December 2001. Many documents on RFE's history also can be found at the Open Society Archives, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute (RFE/RL RI), 1949–1994. The records consist primarily of clippings, abstracts of media reports, and monitoring of television and radio broadcasts, with a total of 17,938 archival boxes, 2322 linear meters, <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/db/fa/300.htm>.
3. For more information on how the former Warsaw Pact countries are reviewing Cold War files and releasing files, the reader should refer to The Czech Office for the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism at: <http://www.mvcr.cz/policie/udv/english/cinnost.html>. The Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (IPN) is http://www.ipn.gov.pl/index_eng.html. In Romania, the National Council for Researching the Secret Police 'Securitate' Archives (CNSAS) is <http://www.cnsas.ro/main.html>. Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security are found at:

- http://www.abtl.hu/index_e_start.html. Reports and documentation of The Nation's Memory Institute Slovak Republic (UPN) can be found at: <http://www.upn.gov.sk/?lang=en>.
4. A photocopy of this directive can be found in Warner, *CIA Cold War Records*, 'Psychological Operations, NSC 4-A', 175–177. Also, see Document 253, 'Memorandum from the Executive Secretary (Souers) to the Members of the National Security Council'. NSC 4-A Washington, 9 December 1947, in 'Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment', Department of State, Washington, DC: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/index.html.
 5. The Report of The President's Committee (Jackson Committee) on International Information Activities, 30 June 1953, printed in *Foreign Relations II (1952–1954)*, International Information Activities, US Department of State, 1831.
 6. The full text of the Eisenhower speech can be found on the Internet at the Eisenhower Memorial Commission web page: <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/speeches/19500904%20Crusade%20for%20Freedom%20Denver%20Colorado.html>
 7. For more details, see the author's article: 'The Killing of a Dissident – Twenty-five Years On: Bulgaria: The Murder of Georgi Markov', <http://www.indexonline.org/en/news/articles/2003/3/the-killing-of-a-dissident-twenty-five-years.html>. Also, see RFE/RL's Special Report, '25 Years Later: The Assassination of Georgi Markov', <http://www.rferl.org/specials/markov/default.asp>.
 8. The information in this section is based, in part, on research by Nestor Ratesh, former RFE/RL Romanian Broadcast Service Director, has been given access by the Romanian Government to review declassified intelligence files. He presented some of his findings entitled 'Radio Free Europe's Impact in Romania During the Cold War', at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact, Stanford California, 11–13 October 2004, in which the author participated as a Commentator on RFE's Impact in East Europe.
 9. More details can be found in the author's RFE/RL Special Report: 'The 1981 Bombing of RFE/RL', <http://www.rferl.org/specials/rferl/bombing81.asp>. An excellent source for the hostile Romanian Service Intelligence activities against RFE's Romania Broadcast Service is a paper presented by former Broadcast Service Director Nestor Ratesh at the Conference on Cold War Broadcasting, Hoover Institute, Stanford, California, 15 October 2004.
 10. Operation SPOTLIGHT: Regime, Press and Radio, Western Press and Radio and Internal Reactions, 12 February–13 March 1955, Free Europe Committee, New York, March 1955, Free Europe Press both of which can be found in the RFE/RL archives at the Hoover Institute, Stanford University, California. More details on these operations, including photocopies of some propaganda leaflets are found in the author's article: 'Balloons Over East Europe: The Cold War Leaflet Campaign of Radio Free Europe', Psywar Society, <http://www.btinternet.com/~rrnotes/psywarsoc/leaf/rfe.htm>.
 11. Full details of the Swiatlo case are in L. W. Gluchowski, 'The Defection of Jozef Swialto and the Search for Jewish Scapegoats in the Polish United Workers' Party, 1953–1954', *Intermarium*, Columbia University electronic journal of modern East Central European postwar history, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sipa/REGIONAL/ECE/intermar.html>. And, the inside story of the Bezpieka and the Party: Jozef Swiatlo Reveals the Secrets of the Party, the Regime, and the Security Services, March 1955, Free Europe Committee files.
 12. One such example where Lach was used in Soviet propaganda campaigns against RFE/RL can be found at: <http://foia.state.gov/documents/foia/docs/71dd.pdf>.
 13. Information on Czech and Slovak Intelligence Services operations came to the author's attention after the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia when the new Czech Interior Ministry made some file information available.
 14. Priokop Tomek, 'Target ALFA', Czechoslovak Security Services against Radio Free Europe, Czech Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism (UDV), Prague, 2006. This report includes photographs of the former spy Pavel Minarik, Agent Pley, that accompanied his bombing plans mentioned in the article above. At the time of this writing the author has not had the opportunity to read an English language translation of the full report. That is for future scholars studying the Cold War.
 15. Full text translation of Yeltsin's comments: 'During the 3–4 days of this takeover, Radio Liberty was one of the very few channels through which it was possible to send information to the whole world and, most important, to the whole of Russia, because now almost every family in Russia listens to Radio Liberty – and that was very important. I think that by virtue of its work and its objectivity, Radio Liberty deserves that [the Russian Government] establish direct contact and invite the management of Radio Liberty to visit us. Of course, I cannot speak on behalf of the

Soviet Union, but I can speak on behalf of Russia and say that we must accredit you', Radio Liberty Interview, Country and the World, 23 August 1991.

Notes on contributor

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