

# **A Comment on 'A Note on KGB Style'**

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*Letter to the Editor*

The central thesis of this essay is intriguing. It is true that major intelligence services, and especially those engaged in collecting foreign intelligence abroad, develop distinctive styles and that the style of each has a deep influence upon its personnel and its capabilities.

The writer's assessment of the style of the Soviet State Security Service, the KGB, gains clarity, however, at the expense of omitting certain complicating but essential facts. The essay has a monodimensional quality because the Second Chief Directorate (SCD), the KGB's domestic security and counterintelligence component, has been ignored. The style of the Second Chief Directorate is important, of course, because it is actually the primordial element of the service. Furthermore, the style of the SCD is more ruthless and cynical than are any of the qualities that this article attributes to the service as a whole. This fact results largely from the coercive, underhanded, and repugnant methods that the SCD has used in the past and that it keeps on using. Despite a strong effort in recent years to polish the image of the KGB at home, so that Soviet citizens will see its officers as their stalwart defenders, the continuing persecution of intellectuals and dissidents, the persistent use of sexual entrapment against foreigners, and the arbitrary use of duress have not been wholly concealed. Many Soviet citizens continue to hate and fear the KGB. The CPUSSR and the KGB can argue until they are blue in the face that there is no morality but Communist morality, but the reaction of Russians approached by the KGB often ranges from evasiveness to revulsion. Even the Soviet man has a non-Marxian conscience. KGB

officers know how they are seen; and though the cynical may take pleasure in their power over others, the less corrupted are disturbed. Most defectors from KGB ranks have expressed distaste if not disgust.

The author of "A Note on KGB Style" considers that although that style "... is in many ways admirably suited to running operations, it appears to have limitations in the way it makes use of the product of its operations and in evaluating whether the operations are really worthwhile." He considers the younger officers "... less dedicated to fulfilling the obligations of the Party and the State." The record, however, suggests that KGB officers are loyal and dedicated, that they show genuine analytic skill in evaluating their operations, that they have scored major successes, that they use both agents of influence and disinformation (to cite only two strata) with subtlety that the present generation of Sovietologists, diplomats and political leaders just refuse to face up to. The simple word "Kombinazia," for example, has no real analogue in the English "Combination." Our appreciation of its significance to understanding large-scale Soviet and Bloc deception is primitive and inadequate. It goes without saying that we need more information about the KGB. Presumably we always shall. But it is dangerous to suggest, on the basis of our inadequate and superficial information, that the service is anything less than hard-driving and by its own standards, successful.

Both the communications and filing systems are described as somewhat primitive. Whether or not volume of traffic is a good indicator for the effectiveness of the commo system used by the KGB, which makes widespread use of TDY trips and oral messages, their methods of storing and retrieving information have been much affected by modern equipment. Like other Bloc services, the KGB has reportedly invested heavily in computers.

In his discussion of KGB training the author says, "In the course of their education the students learn two or three foreign languages well. ..." The *well* is relative, of course. Even so, it is unusual for anyone past childhood to learn another language well, especially one written in a different alphabet. When Soviet intelligence defectors are debriefed about the skills of former colleagues, they usually describe them as knowing no foreign language well or knowing one. The officer who knows two or three well seems to be an exception.

The strength of the KGB and its special character or style result from several characteristics, but one of these is more important than the rest.

It is the fact, which the author of this essay has noted at its conclusion, that this service is part of Soviet society as a whole and shares the quality of that society. Its compartmentation and vertical structure are characteristic of the government that it serves. Its subtlety and ruthlessness, its contempt for the rights of individuals, are among the sources of its effectiveness. No counterintelligence service in a non-communist country can match the advantages which the KGB exploits as the henchman of a dictatorial state. In no other service, therefore, are the employees at all levels subjected to the same corruption of the human spirit. It is basically this fact which has created and maintains the style of the KGB.

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## Footnotes

\* *Studies*, Vol. 15, no. 1, Winter 1971, p. 115.

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