

Intelligence in Transition - The Case of Republic of Macedonia

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ABSTRACT

In Macedonia, intelligence gathering dates back more than 100 years. However, the modern structure and system was for almost half a century, was directed by Yugoslavia during the last fifty years. The Macedonian Intelligence Agency was officially established in 1995. Its status and function were defined by law, but there were obstructions and attempts at revision; that is, the restoration of the previous model. This caused a three-year delay in the transformation and establishment of modern Macedonian modern. Conditions have gradually changed since 1998, and the Intelligence Agency has begun to operate as a separate state institution for foreign intelligence. Preparing a case study of the development of intelligence in a post-communist state faces the challenge of representing conditions comprehensively and objectively. This challenge cannot be met fully, for the time period under analysis is still in transition, the data incomplete and fluid. Hence, the time of the adjustment of the secret services to the conditions and circumstances will differ.

Introduction or Basic Dilemmas

Preparing a case study of the development of intelligence in a post-communist state faces the challenge of representing conditions comprehensively and objectively. This challenge cannot be met fully, for the time period under analysis is still in transition, the data incomplete and fluid. Hence, the time of the adjustment of the secret services to the conditions and circumstances will differ.

The decade following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War acutely demonstrated the turbulence, shocks, and controversies within and around the intelligence services of former

communist systems. In fact, it is an impressive indicator of the “child diseases” that intelligence contracted in the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic system. The problems and dilemmas arise, basically, from two tendencies. The first and radical one, is total nihilism and anathema towards all former structures, followed by an effort to disband them using “revolutionary” methods and then forming completely new ones. The second tendency is a counter reaction to the first principle; that is, some things should probably be changed, but in the way that allows things to remain as before. However, it was immediately apparent that both approaches were in deep collision with the stated goal of bringing intelligence into conformity with the Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Thus, the decade transition of intelligence services was a critical time of profiling and adjustment, which in some post-communist countries is still in process. Proof of that are the recurring reports of diverse intelligence activities, affairs, and scandals. Because of the above, analytical “vivisection” of intelligence in transition, is analogous to an orthodox believer facing this dilemma: If he tells the absolute truth, he will be right before God, but he will make superior angry. If he beautifies the unpleasant truth, he will satisfy the vanity of his superior, but he will conceal the truth before God.

Hence, obtaining a comprehensive and objective “tell-all” of intelligence is to be hoped for, but probably would prove a mirage. Simply put, today’s facts and truths are tomorrow’s fictions and biases. Because of recidivism of prejudice and negative fixations from the former system, intelligence services find it difficult to break with the past. The abandoning of the old without a new set of values or clear rules in place leaves the role and function of intelligence activity in transition countries either adrift or in limbo.

History of Intelligence in Macedonia

Intelligence in Macedonia historically has deep roots. Although the intelligence service was formed formally and officially in 1995, its existence actually dates back more than 100 years. In 1896, the Central Committee Congress of the Secret Macedonian-Odrin Revolutionary Organization formed a secret police unit to observe the “internal and external enemy.” The intelligence service was under the jurisdiction of the “investigative division” which conducted surveillance, collection of evidence, and detection of enemies. But this was the romantic, idealistic part of the revolutionary fight of the Macedonian people at the close of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Modern intelligence in Macedonia is organically connected with the previous Yugoslav security-intelligence system. Specifically, during the Second World War, documents dealt with creating an information

network and infiltrating the most sensitive areas of the occupying forces, all within the framework of the united Yugoslav national-liberation authority.

The modern structure and function of Macedonian intelligence (for almost half a century) was determined and directed both by the State Security Service in the Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs and by the corresponding federal intelligence services of the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs. However, the ideological component was the main pillar of this powerful communist security-intelligence structure.

The monopoly for a united system of internal and foreign intelligence was founded on broad, repressive police powers with the added flavor of classical political police. The spheres of competence and powers was broad and diverse, but still the main task was to collect data and prevent individuals, groups, and organizations from undermining or destroying the constitutional socialist self-management order. Thus, the main thrust of foreign intelligence was focused on "external enemies", with a special emphasis on "adversary emigration."

All intelligence services from former Yugoslav Republics operated as an integral component of the Federal State Security Service. There was no authentic, independent intelligence service; it was part of the security system which had long had the power, authority, and prestige, and thus had established itself as the dominant security pillar in the former united federal state.

Security and Intelligence System in Republic of Macedonia

The modern history of the autochthonous Macedonian intelligence is an integral part of the short history of independent and sovereign Macedonia. With the implosion of the former, structural changes in the former one-party totalitarian security-intelligence sphere were mandated. The first was to differentiate between intelligence and counterintelligence; that is, to set up spheres of competence, and to induce cooperation between civil and military services. This first step guaranteed that there would be no arbitrary or vague interpretations of the jurisdictions of the civil and military services in the conduct of domestic and foreign intelligence.

The lack of understanding between the two services and their reluctance to merge overlapping functions prolonged the reforms of Macedonia's security and intelligence system. Five years later, following the declaration of independence and autonomy of our state, a Law established the Intelligence Agency as the sole and special body of state administration for conducting foreign intelligence. The Law was a logical epilogue to the reorganization of the Interior Ministry. The State Security Service was divided into the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate and remained within

the Ministry; the Intelligence Agency was designated a special state institution. The status thus defined differentiated between counterintelligence and foreign intelligence and set out their spheres of competence.

Unfortunately, the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate (to which the Defense Ministry Counterintelligence and Intelligence Sector belonged) continued to raise objections and obstructions even after the status and functions of the Intelligence Agency had been legally defined. The players of this often public dispute argued to continue the status quo, each protecting its old positions and concerns. One, that “the Defense Ministry had no intention of leaving military strategic intelligence to the Intelligence Agency”; the other, that “the Intelligence Agency should be placed under the Interior Ministry and should operate as an organizational unit within the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate.” These arguments and accompanying actions were unsuccessful; they were transparent attempts to restore the organization of the security and intelligence structures which had been part of the former system.

The doubtful reasoning and spurious effort in support of the status quo (i.e., for “cementing” the former State Security Service) was a paradigm of the “mental code” of the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate; they simply did not want (or failed to understand) that internal and foreign intelligence are different entities and thus must not be confused. They were convinced that both components (counterintelligence and intelligence) could operate jointly.

The Security and Intelligence Sector at the Defense Ministry also ignored the fact that intelligence gathering today is an exclusively civil function, relatively detached from the executive power, especially from the police and military structures. In fact, the current Defense Law only determines internal security in defense. The military units collect data and information via operational and tactical reconnaissance conducted in the unit’s zone of responsibility and through military attaches.

The reasons for this division of tasks between strategic and tactical military intelligence are to avoid duplicating or overlapping the agents’ networks and to avoid or eliminate unnecessary expenditures, tasks and activities. Also, military-defense structures are usually regarded as a narrow framework for conducting strategic intelligence, which has a higher significance for a state.

Towards Modeling of a Modern Intelligence Service

However, unlike democratic states which are pragmatic and rational when modeling stable, efficient intelligence services, post-communist countries (many still “fluid”) have to overcome the left-over doctrines and dogma from the former system; i.e., party

influence, political narrow-mindedness, and revenge. Following the old model of an intelligence service generates instability and criminalization in the countries in transition.

The practical experience of the German BND after World War II illustrates the importance of intelligence when national interests are concerned. Germany's top priority was to safeguard the state and its national interests. Because of his expansive professional experience (which was crucial to preserving, developing, and maintaining tradition), former Nazi General Reinhard Gehlen was given the job of forming a new German intelligence service. The main objective of the German nation was to suppress political foment and political paranoia, which unavoidably lead to loss of confidence, increased opposition, destruction of the service, and, eventually, loss of illusions and the desire to create democratic institutions.

However, this view of a modern intelligence service was not favored by other countries in transition, including the Republic of Macedonia. Fortunately, the attempts to restore the old, worn-out model were unsuccessful. However, the young, undeveloped democracy of the Republic of Macedonia still faces latent, chronic temptations and challenges to the establishment of an efficient, professional, and expert intelligence model.

Vestiges of these misunderstandings affected the Intelligence Agency's ability to function and carry on its work. Because of the lack of office space, materials, financial aid, and manpower, two years passed at "idle speed." The Intelligence Agency only began to function in the second half of 1997. The working staff consisted of employees from the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense. However, it was immediately apparent that among them were those no or negative professional references, poor work records, and ones who were (deliberately) put on the "transfer list". Problems soon surfaced in adapting these personnel to the new intelligence service. They found it difficult to abandon ingrained police standards, rules of work, and behavior, and to adopt a different methodological approach regarding operational and analytical intelligence work.

For post-communist countries in transition, paramount was the necessity to depoliticize or, better, remove the party influence on security services. In principle, this view was ideal; however, in reality its implementation was impossible; for such an undertaking in a period of transition is a long-term process, its results uncertain.

Party influence in the old system dominated all spheres; anything could be politicized; debates were endless. Intelligence services were not exempt, being the "driving force of the only party." However, the imperative to change the system demanded quick liberation from the virus of party influence and an adjustment of

the professional rules regulating every day operational and analytical work. But events proved that these rules were not only ambiguous, unclear, and confusing, but also contradictory.

In countries in transition, negating party influence and de-professionalizing the security and intelligence services remain a priority; however, recidivism of the one-party system is a survival technique of the ruling party. Instead of recruiting public officials who will work in the interest of the state, regardless of the political party in power, untrained personnel are recruited who are sympathetic to and promote the development schemes of the ruling party. However, in practice, party soldiers sooner or later become the gravediggers of the party and the national interest as well. For it is absurd and tragic when marginal, inexperienced figures, who also lack professional credence, become *modus vivendi* and creators of intelligence.

The past decade of transition showed that party soldiers are used to support and solidify the power structure. However, at the same time, the "power" was not only ungrateful but quick to sacrifice its soldiers, all with the end of remaining in power. This attitude corroborates the conclusion of Zbigniew Brzezinski that the "journey" away from communism will probably last for as long as its "stay" in it. So the period of transition for post-communist countries (optimistically forecast to end in ten years) proved an illusion. It is now clear that it will be indefinitely longer.

Some problems in implementing reform programs were caused by the lack of full cooperation between the President of the Republic and the Government. Because of different political options, the cooperation between the two holders of the executive power (the President, who was from the ranks of the former government, and the new Government, formed after the parliamentary elections in 1998) was fragmentary at best. Thus the unbalanced competence in the sphere of intelligence between the Government and the President of the Republic had a negative influence on the functioning and establishment of the Agency; namely, pursuant to the law, the Government has the authority to authorize and adopt the acts for the organization of the work and systematization of jobs, and to determine the means and methods of work; it also determines the budget for the Intelligence Agency. The President of the Republic has the authority only to appoint and/or discharge the Director of the Agency. Thus, although the law provides that the Director answers to the Government, in practice that liability was not always operable. As a result, following the resignation of the Director in 1999, the President unilaterally appointed an acting Director of the Intelligence Agency, who was discharged a year later by the newly elected President of the Republic.

Since a Law on the System of National Security has not as yet been passed, there is no precise demarcation of the spheres of competence of the segments of the security and intelligence system. Instead, the bases for the organization, operation, and spheres of competence and cooperation are regulated by special laws relating to the services and fields for home and foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence. Thus, for instance, in the current Law on the Intelligence Agency, this obligation is regulated by a general provision which is not applicable to other security structures. The absence of a legal regulation for the national security system is relevant, for it has been demonstrated that in regular or emergency situations, special laws cannot standardize forms and obligations for mutual communication and exchange of information.

Causally connected with the above is the presence of a body with executive power to coordinate the tasks and activities of the security-intelligence structures. This would enhance forecasting, which is invaluable if the political leadership is to make suitable decisions.

However, the negative experiences regarding the status and functions of intelligence are now old news. It is a fact that conditions are changing significantly in all respects. The objective obstacles of space, material, and work conditions have been removed. A basic organizational structure now overlooks the selection of staff and the establishment of partnerships relations with a number of foreign intelligence services. Its result is a small, but modern, efficient, and professional intelligence service. In fact, the organization, development, and function of intelligence services in transition countries is a continuing process, requiring constant review.

The turbulence and ferment that racked intelligence services in former communist countries produced a crisis of identity. This was reflected in an erosion of the established service, caused by the vacuum created after the break with the former ideology, and the difficulty of implementing a new system of values. These concerns impeded the efforts for fast and efficient reform of post-communist intelligence services.

In this interregnum, the media's role is to report accurately and thoroughly affairs, scandals, and piquances connected with intelligence activity. Their obligation to report the facts that they uncover is a given. In most cases, however, the media do not stop with just printing the facts. They may start with them, but they immediately go on to make inferences and judgments based on them; the result is an opinion piece expressing the biases and politics of the newspaper's publisher.

This style, deliberate or not, often leaks security-intelligence knowledge and data. This style and manner derived mainly from

the confused atmosphere during the transition, but more probably from political manipulation. There are two explanations. On one hand, the former, highly bureaucratized intelligence structures erected a "bronze gate" to shield their activities. On the other, the democratic public and media favored and fostered maximum transparency. The first tendency is rigid and seclusive. The latter is extremely liberal and open. The latter approach, however, overlooks the fact that absolute transparency is counterproductive; in addition, it questions the possibility and even the need for intelligence services.

Politicians who mistrust intelligence officers discreetly continue to make them instruments of everyday political and - sometimes narrower - party objectives. Intelligence officers, in turn, "read" the politicians' minds and then provide "adapted" knowledge that satisfies their wishes and expectations. This symbiosis is the product of the vanity and frustration of the new "democratic," transitional politicians, and the moral and mental gymnastics of the intelligence officers.

Black and White Views

Another important issue is whether officials from the former State Security Service should remain in the new intelligence structures. This question was posed by the political paranoia that arose after the destruction of the communist system. Two attitudinal responses (black and white) emerged. One was that the secret services generally represented the classical mafia organization, based on violence and total citizen control. In truth, these accusations can be somewhat substantiated. However, to the mafia's benefit, its main function was to protect national interests from external threats and negative influences.

The second response merges with the first; it then proceeds from the prejudice that in post-communist intelligence structures (after ten years of transition), conservative, like-minded persons, and desperadoes who oppose reforms are one of the factors generating organized crime. Time has shown both the black and white view are an unconvincing alibi meant to mask the incapability of the new authorities in post-communist countries.

After the break with the old ideology, post-communist countries began letting go their personnel who were the most loyal and professional and who had survived the security barricades. However, post-communist countries soon realized that greater damage was caused by the dissatisfied and rejected intelligence officers released from their ranks than by their opponents. Because of this, and to avoid compromising and depleting the services, "consolidation" rejected the philosophy of a two-sided, strict division of intelligence activities. The new approach to intel-

ligence activities would afford equal treatment of both potential enemies, allies, and partners.

One reason for this change in attitude was the unprecedented harassment of former intelligence officers after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some officers, to make a living, established contacts with representatives of foreign intelligence structures and released concrete intelligence data, names of agents, networks, etc. Some of the dismissed turned to private entrepreneurship and established consulting offices, detective and security agencies, and became consultants in the media and other legal businesses, in which their professionalism and expertise were welcomed. They knew the processes for quickly gathering and organizing data, and possessed the analytical skills needed to evaluate and forecast.

A third group was involved in organized crime; they affiliated with mafia structures and had the status of so-called "outside associates"; or they entered a close circle of politicians and became their instruments.

These ex-officers had the expansive knowledge, experience, and connections, but they were not in a position to exploit it. In some terrorist actions, in addition to the terrorists, the mafia recruited former intelligence officers; they became "hit men," professional executors, murderers for hire.

Thus was created a shadow intelligence structure, a parallel form of influence in politics and the economy. A new, powerful network of business advisors was created from the ranks of former intelligence officers. But only the "firm" was changed – from the Government to their own firm, an established company, or a criminal organization.

Initiative for Balkan Intelligence Conference

The many obstacles faced by the post-Communist intelligence services leave the false impression that their aims were ambiguous and their competence suspect. But if one considers the fact that their security-intelligence segments have always been slow to alter or change old habits and adjust to new forms of technology. Historical examples are illustrative enough; and transition is just the latest proof for this conclusion.

One asks the question now: what are the future expectations? The most serious question faced is how to complete the transformation? The answer will probably come from the collective thinking and imagination of those deciding the function and role of intelligence in the new democratic and legal milieu. In this context, intelligence in the Republic of Macedonia functions as part of the Balkan and European market of information. The initiative now is to establish a Balkan Intelligence Conference as a forum of civilian intelligence services from central and eastern European

countries. Members would exchange intelligence information and views and cooperate bi- and multi-laterally.

Finally, one must concede that intelligence in transition involves slow, carefully planned and monitored change to achieve the "new reality." I am convinced that intelligence and political astuteness will prevail.