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Spies and Peaceniks: Czechoslovak Intelligence Attempts to Thwart NATO's Dual-Track Decision

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Introduction

The intelligence services of Central and Eastern European communist countries and their activities during the Cold War deserve further attention and research. Drawing on newly available declassified documents, this article deals with the efforts of Czechoslovak intelligence services to prevent deployments of new intermediate nuclear forces on the territory of some European North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states, planned by the NATO Dual Track Decision of December 1979. It focuses on the Intelligence Service of the General

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Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army (ZSGŠ) that served as the Czechoslovak military intelligence service between 1951 and 1992.

Unlike military counter-intelligence agencies, the ZSGŠ did not fall under the purview of the Ministry of the Interior or the secret police force (i.e. State Security or StB). Under the Chief of the General Staff, the ZSGŠ was engaged in external espionage activities that focused on collecting and processing military information, which was then passed on to the high command of both the Czechoslovak Army and the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, as well as the military secret services of their allies within the Eastern bloc. While the ZSGŠ was modelled on the Soviet Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravlenie (GRU) military intelligence service, it was also practically controlled by it. Therefore, the ZSGŠ was a branch of the security forces that attempted to maintain the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It also participated in operations against Czechoslovaks in exile who had found refuge in Western countries.

The NATO Dual-Track Decision and Czech Intelligence Attempts to Thwart It

NATO's Dual-Track Decision of 1979 was a reaction to the Soviet nuclear modernization programs and military build-up, which climaxed during the years of the so-called East-West *détente*. Regarding the intermediate land-based nuclear forces, these modernization efforts were symbolized by the intensive deployment of state-of-the-art SS-20 missiles. They carried three multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles [MIRVs] and were capable of targeting many NATO countries as well as the USSR's archenemy, the People's Republic of China. Even though NATO's response was rather reactive, the Soviet Union and its satellite states took many measures to prevent the deployment.¹ These efforts included diplomatic negotiations and direct written communication by top Soviet leaders (e.g. General Secretaries Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko) with the U.S. president, Ronald Reagan. There were also various attempts to influence public opinion in the West through coercion, propaganda, disinformation, and other methods.

The Kremlin's intentions and goals were aligned with the traditional Soviet approach towards arms control. The Soviet leadership was only willing to make symbolic and superficial concessions vis-à-vis NATO, as its goal was to preserve as many advantages on its side as possible. Thus, the main thrust of all Soviet negotiations and activities was to divide NATO, prevent the deployment of 'Euromissiles' in NATO member states, and promote the principle of 'equal security,' which differed significantly from the principle of 'strategic stability' that underpinned American and Western European approaches towards arms control.² Central to the Soviet strategy was intensive intelligence collection on NATO and its Dual-Track Decision plans. In the late 1970s, these efforts were complemented by active measures conducted by



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Soviet and 'brotherly' secret service agencies, which planned to continue as deployments began as well as afterwards.

In support of these objectives, some of the top intelligence tasks of the Czechoslovak services were to collect intelligence about U.S. nuclear and conventional weapons as well as the operational capability of other NATO members. The Federal Republic of Germany/West Germany (FRG) was perceived as a country that hosted a decisive portion of NATO's tactical and operational nuclear forces, which would be used in the first and second offensive waves of attack in the event of unrestricted nuclear war. West Germany was often blamed for preventing the reduction of nuclear weapons, seeking to increase Western nuclear arsenals, and introducing and deploying neutron weapons on its soil.³ This explains why West Germany was the primary target of Czechoslovak intelligence services.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the decline in relations between the superpowers paired with a growing concern over NATO hostility (especially the fear of a surprise nuclear attack) caused Soviet leaders to view relations with the United States as the worst they had been since the Second World War or the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁴ This international situation, along with the Eastern bloc's objective to undermine the deployment of INF, substantially increased the cooperation between communist intelligence agencies.⁵

Shortly after the Dual-Track Decision was announced by NATO, Czechoslovak intelligence attempted to strain relations between the United States and its NATO allies. The scope and nature of its activities focused on the planned deployments of U.S. INF forces in Western Europe. They also launched a set of actions aimed at influencing Western public opinion and political circles.⁶ These core activities aimed at discrediting the 'militaristic' policies of the United States and NATO were characterized as a frenzied arms buildup.⁷

There were separate, interconnected operations directed towards achieving the same primary goal, that is, preventing intermediate nuclear forces deployments in West Germany and the entirety of Western Europe. Aside from anti-missile endeavors and attempting to stir up opposition to the deployments, the aim of Czechoslovak intelligence was to discredit the political right wing of the FRG and reveal the hegemonic tendencies of West Germany (primarily in relation to France). Many activities were organized to promote and support peace movements that protested nuclear missiles. They sought information concerning West German organizations and people who were actively opposing the planned deployments. One of their ideas was to use peace movements to declare recreational areas in the FRG nuclear-weapons-free zones. There were also other proposals to obtain and exchange information on Pershing II missiles and even considerations to incite protests, such as marches and roadblocks.⁸

In late June 1982, at a meeting held in Prague, Soviet colleagues were informed about the results of operations that had been carried out in West Germany and Austria during the first half of



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the year. The focus of the discussions, however, was to support peace movements in order to block the deployment of U.S. missiles and hinder the on-going process of European integration.⁹ As the final document concludes: “Our Soviet friends agreed with the use of so-called ‘greens’ as the correct direction for the active fight against missile deployment and further arms race issues.”¹⁰ They also recommended engaging with peace organizations in the neighboring countries of NATO member states and the United States.¹¹

Czechoslovak intelligence tried its best to influence Western European public opinion through actions that targeted issues beyond the planned missile deployments. There were stations actively engaged in this pursuit in Brussels, London, Paris, Vienna, Nicosia, and even Caracas. Altogether, Czechoslovak spies in these countries were responsible for 14 texts and pamphlets that criticized the deployment of U.S. INF in Western Europe. The report’s authors stated that while all these actions had not terminated NATO’s plan, they had, at least, helped to engage the Western public, which would make the implementation of the policy more difficult.¹²

Since 1981, Czechoslovak intelligence had begun developing a series of actions in Western Europe helping to direct various initiatives against the planned missile deployments in order to stop them or at least slow them down.¹³ For example, the Czechoslovak *rezidentura* (i.e. resident spies) in Brussels influenced many organizations (e.g. the Walloon Socialist Party, Belgian trade unions, and the Belgian Union for the Preservation of Peace and Independent Front) to reject the planned missile deployments in Belgium. Another tool of Czechoslovak intelligence was to organize protest petitions. The *rezidentura* in Brussels, for example, managed to gather 30,000 signatures in Ghent and 25,000 in Lutych. These petitions were sent to the Belgian Foreign Ministry, the Communist Party of Belgium, the Belgian Union for the Preservation of Peace, and the Belgian All Union League.¹⁴

To encourage the country’s growing protest movement, other measures were taken to influence Belgian parliamentarians. Later, there were some interviews with political figures that were made public. The *rezidentura* also claimed to have influenced a former French Vice Admiral, Antoine Sanguinetti, to hold a press conference against the INF deployments. Sanguinetti had previously called for Europe’s disengagement from NATO, which, from his perspective, only served U.S. interests.¹⁵

The Czech *rezidentura* in Brussels also initiated a meeting between several figures including the Spanish Ambassador to Belgium and the Belgian Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens. In this meeting, the Spanish diplomat warned Belgian politicians about the dangers that the deployments posed to *détente*. The Belgian government was advised to postpone its decision and look for negotiation opportunities with the East, especially concerning military *détente*. According to the report, these measures caused the Belgian government to delay the final decision regarding deployment.¹⁶



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The Prague Peace Congress

From 21–26 June 1983, a peace congress entitled “For Peace and Life, Against Atomic Death” was held in Prague, and it was one of the final attempts to turn the tide against the INF deployments. To host this event, Czechoslovak citizens had to contribute 65 million Czechoslovak Crowns, mostly through forced direct donations.

In an attempt to maximize this opportunity, Czechoslovak intelligence, as the organizer of this enormous operation, gathered 3,625 participants from 132 countries. On 21 June 1983, they staged a huge peace demonstration consisting of 200,000 people in Prague’s Old Town Square, including protesters from the Greenham Common Royal Air Force (RAF) base. The Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, sent the participants a special greeting. Organizers also gathered 120 church officials, spiritual leaders, and theologians to attend the Peace Congress in conjunction with Operation PAGODA, which targeted the Vatican and other religious groups to discredit Pope John Paul II and limit his authority. They also wanted to split the views within the Roman Catholic Church and offer support to “more progressive” factions.¹⁷ This was nothing new, however, as a continual effort was being made to influence “the Vatican – for humanistic reasons – to take a stance against the rockets”.¹⁸ The Czechoslovak side expressed pride that it cooperated with its Soviet counterparts to plan and execute several actions that were related to the Prague Peace Congress.¹⁹

However, when the Charter 77 dissident group expressed interest in participating, the event in Prague backfired.²⁰ The authorities ignored the request, and the StB intensified the persecution of Charter 77 signatories. Then, the request to participate in the assembly was officially denied.²¹ Charter 77 addressed the assembly in a statement.²² After learning of the situation, some delegates publicly read the message in the sessions, and others (including the Greenham Common activists) even met with Charter 77 representatives. However, the secret police disbanded the meeting by force and even attacked the foreign reporters.²³

Activities and Measures After the Deployment

The communist intelligence services recognized their limited influence over NATO’s decisions and those of other member states. However, they were aware they had some influence over the peace movements, so they tended to overestimate the impact of the anti-missile movement.²⁴ At the beginning of the planned deployment, Czechoslovak intelligence needed to reflect these realities and make the necessary adjustments to its activities, but one goal remained unchanged: to follow the Euromissile issue and monitor the on-going deployment of U.S.-made intermediate-range missiles. This was the most important task for Czechoslovak intelligence, the KGB, and the East German Stasi.²⁵



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The newest task was to obtain the transportation schedules of the Pershing IIs and GLCMs to Europe, which included monitoring the transportation, the number of systems involved in the process, delivery times, the military units that would pick up the deliveries, and the locations of deployment. Czechoslovak intelligence also focused on the withdrawal of old Pershing IA weapon systems, the locations of their storage, and the future utilization of them at their launch sites. Information was also sought on the areas of deployment of the GLCMs in United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands, including the overall situation, the organization of the sites, numbers of people, and both the units and battalions of the BGM-109G (GLCM) and Pershing II.

Learning from History

In September 1984 at a meeting in Prague, Czechoslovak and Soviet intelligence admitted to having problems regarding the evaluation of their operations. According to a document, the main criterion for evaluating their active measures was how much damage it caused the enemy. The measurable outcomes of each action, therefore, had to be compared to the overall goals. Another criterion was to analyze the relevance of an action to Soviet foreign policy, especially concerning whether individual measures appropriately supported the most important foreign policy goals. Each active measure was to be evaluated individually. Since there were vast differences between individual measures, it was difficult to apply the same criteria to each one and make quantitative assessments. These evaluations focused on objectives: achievement; relevance and importance in the frame of foreign policy; complexity; financial resources that needed to be invested; and reactions.²⁶ A lack of response complicated planning and the evaluation of some operations, especially in the United States.²⁷

Paradoxically, efforts by ZSGŠ to derail NATO's missile deployments further complicated the crisis, which was only resolved after the deployments had occurred through the diplomatic negotiations that led to the INF Treaty. Although these developments took place more than 30 years ago, there are still important lessons to take away from these events, since similar operations might be planned and carried out by intelligence services both in the present and in the future. The warnings should be taken seriously, and we should learn not only from this particular episode, but from the post-Cold War era, too.

Let's take Russia as an example – it has never ceased to perceive the West as its main target, adversary, or even enemy.²⁸ It has been trying to carry out various active measures and influence operations for strategic and political gains, whenever it sees a good opportunity. Its intention to thwart possible allied cooperation, for instance, in the case of U.S. – Czech cooperation on missile defense in the previous decade serves as a clear case in point.²⁹ And so does its current attempt to undermine the cohesion of western societies and alliances by



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spreading disinformation concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰ NATO itself became the target of such activities in January 2020 when Lithuania faced a cyber attack spreading disinformation that a U.S. soldier deployed there was infected with the coronavirus, and that the planned “Defender 2020” military exercise had a mission to spread the virus further.³¹ It would be therefore rather naïve to think that the intelligence services of our adversaries do – and will – stand by idly.

1. For more on the INF deployments and related talks, see, for example: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985); Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1994); Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1994); Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 1969–87: The Problem of the SS-20* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989); see also Alexei G. Arbatov, *Lethal Frontiers: A Soviet View of Nuclear Strategy, Weapons, and Negotiations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1988). And see also the Decree of 15 April 1980, available at <http://bukovsky-archives.net/pdfs/peace/ct206a80.pdf>. This decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is regarding additional measures to activate the public against NATO’s decision to produce and deploy new American missiles in Western Europe.
2. Aleksandr’ G. Savel’yev and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 55, 57, 62, 123; see also Aleksandr’ G. Savel’yev, “Russian Defense and Arms Control Policy and its Prospects after the Presidential Elections,” UNISCI Discussion Papers, no. 17 (. Savel’yev, “Russian Defense and Arms Control Policy and its Prospects after the Presidential Elections (May 2008), available at <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-72512/UNISCI%20DP%2017%20-%20Savel'yev.pdf>.
3. Koncepcie práce rezidentury HVOZD, čj. 00134007/ZPS-12, 19 November 1979. ZSGŠ collection, rezidentura HVOZD, Box 59, 134007 a, Archiv bezpečnostních složek, Prague (henceforth cited as ABS).
4. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrochin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 1999), 255; Marcus Wolf, *Man without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 222; Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster: My Thirty-two Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2009), 353; Oleg Gordievsky, *Next Stop Execution* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1995), 244, 271–3; Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 271; see also Stephen J. Cimbala, “Year of Maximum Danger? The 1983 War Scare and US-Soviet Deterrence,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* vol. 13, no. 2 (2000): 1–24; David Arbel and Ran Edelist, *Western Intelligence and the Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1980–1990: Ten Years that did not Shake the World* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Pavel Žáček, “Vznik operace RJAN: Pohled zevnitř. Z dokumentů o Hlavní správě rozvědky KGB SSSR, 1982–1984,” *Securitas Imperii* 22, no. 1 (2013): 174–206; Karel Pacner, *Československo ve zvláštních službách. Pohledy do*



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- historie československých výzvědných služeb 1914–1989*, vol. 4. 1961–1989 (Prague: Themis, 2002), 551; Bernd Schaefer, Nate Jones, and Benjamin B. Fischer, “Forecasting Nuclear War: Stasi/KGB Intelligence Cooperation under Project RYaN,” Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, available at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/forecasting-nuclear-war#_ftn7. In 1983, the Kremlin initiated a KGB and GRU operation called RYAN (Raketno Yadernoe Napadenie), which focused on gathering global intelligence to find information about a U.S. pre-emptive nuclear attack against the USSR. This involved efforts by all of the communist states’ intelligence services. From archival materials, see Dodatek k čj. A-00746/36-81, 9 September 1981, svazek 81282/108, ABS.
5. Pete Earley, *Comrade J: The Untold Secrets of Russia’s Master Spy in America after the End of the Cold War* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 2007), 169–70.
 6. Příloha k čj. A-00 507/36-82, 20 May 1982, svazek 81282/114, ABS.
 7. Podkladové materiály k přípravě jednání náčelníků rozvědek ZSS v SSSR. Příloha k čj. A-00137/36-82, 16 February 1982, svazek 81 282/114, ABS.
 8. Příloha k čj. A-00 507/36-82, 20 May 1982, svazek 812 82/114, ABS.
 9. Dodatek k čj. A-00746/36-81, 9 September 1981, svazek 812 82/108, ABS. This was a report about a meeting of Czechoslovak intelligence officers with their KGB counterparts’ documents. Vladimir Kryuchkov, Deputy Chairman of the KGB, vented his frustration that 20% of the West German population actively opposed the planned missile deployments.
 10. Operace AKTÉR. Příloha č. 4 k čj. A-00 687/36-82, svazek 812 82/114, ABS.
 11. Ibid.
 12. Podkladové materiály pro jednání náčelníků rozvědek – předložení. 16 February 1982, svazek 812 82/108, ABS; Podkladové materiály k přípravě jednání náčelníků rozvědek ZSS v SSSR – zajištění. 28 January 1982, svazek 812 82/114, ABS. The content and focus of some active measures in Latin America were consulted with Cuban intelligence.
 13. Podkladové materiály k přípravě jednání náčelníků rozvědek ZSS v SSSR. Příloha k čj. A-00 137/36-82, 16 February 1982, svazek 81 282/114, ABS; Připomínky odboru 36 ke kapitole ‘Aktivní opatření návrhu závěrečného dokumentu pro moskevská jednání v květnu 12 March 1982, svazek 81 282/114, ABS.
 14. Příloha k čj. A-00 358/36-81, 13 May 1981, svazek 81 282/108, ABS.
 15. “Former French Admiral Advocates Europe’s Disengagement from NATO,” *Executive Intelligence Review* vol. 4, no. 3 (1977), available at http://www.larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1977/eirv04n03-19770118/eirv04n03-19770118_041-former_french_admiral_sanguinett.pdf. From archival materials, see Příloha k čj. A-00 358/36-81, 13 May 1981, svazek 81 282/108, ABS; see also Diana Johnstone, “An Interview with Admiral Sanguinetti: A Veteran of the French High Command Speaks Out on U.S. Policy,” *In These Times* (1980), available at <http://www.unz.org/Pub/InTheseTimes-1980jan30-00010>.
 16. Příloha k čj. A-00 358/36-81, 13 May 1981, svazek 81 282/108, ABS.
 17. Spolupráce s rozvědkou SSSR v operaci PAGODA. Příloha č. 8 k čj. A-00 403/36-83, svazek 812 82/114, ABS.
 18. Operace PAGODA. Příloha č. 8 k čj. A-00 669/36-81, svazek 812 82/114, ABS.



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21. Ibid., 520–1.
22. Ibid., 523–6.
23. Ibid., 526–8.
24. Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 68.
25. Stručné vyhodnocení spolupráce, výsledky, splněné a nesplněné úkoly. Příloha k čj. A-00 296/36-83, 18 March 1983, svazek 812 82/114, ABS; Wolf, *Man without a Face*, 222.
26. Problematika hodnocení aktivních opatření. Příloha k čj. A-O 423/36-84, 29 September 1984, svazek 812 82/114, ABS.
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28. Pete Earley, *Comrade J: The Untold Secrets of Russia's Master Spy in America after the End of the Cold War* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 2007), 8, 130, 192-195.
29. Michaela Dodge, "Russia's Influence operations in the Czech Republic during the radar debate," *Comparative Strategy* vol. 39, no. 1 (2020): 162-170.
30. Jennifer Rankin, "Russian media 'spreading Covid19 disinformation'," *The Guardian* (on-line), 18 March 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/18/russian-media-spreading-covid-19-disinformation>.
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