

KGB Operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991

Sergei I. ZHUK

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Professor Zhuk's "KGB Operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991" focuses on the post-Stalin Cold War period, when Soviet Ukraine was gradually opened to American and Canadian visitors and combines counter-intelligence documents in the 1st (and 16th) fund of Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) archive with the Committee for State Security's (KGB) official correspondence and reports to the political leadership of Soviet Ukraine. The first and most important historical source of the book which follows a chronological and thematic sequence reflecting the story of special KGB operations is the reports of various KGB agents who participated in KGB counterintelligence operations. The second group of "unexpected" sources, as the author calls it, consists of interviews with retired KGB officials in Kyiv and Dnipro. In the first part of the book (pp. 1-94), it is emphasized that the most important target of the KGB in the geopolitical conflict was Ukrainian nationalism, which was linked to and financed by Americans, and from 1953 to 1991, almost 50% of all criminal cases were devoted to this "dangerous" issue of Ukrainian nationalism. The author states that the second target of Ukrainian KGB was Jewish nationalism, while the third target was religious sects and the fourth target was American espionage. The most interesting narrative of the first part is the "Yankees case" involving Valentina Fedorovna Safianova¹ and seven so-called nationalist Jews. Professor Zhuk, who mentioned in his work that the KGB adopted an anti-Semitic approach despite the Soviet Union's (USSR) official distancing from anti-Semitism, states that the KGB used Ukrainians and Russians for the needs of Soviet intelligence. The Ukrainian diaspora in America in the 1960s became the "useful means" of the Soviet KGB

¹ She was born into the family of a Russian-German descent in Kyiv in 1915. She was recruited as a secret Soviet police agent in 1945. In May 1953, KGB investigators suspected Safianova of being a German agent (during the Second World War) and filed a criminal case against Safianova (pp. 27-29).

and one demonstrative example used by the author, Zhuk, is Peter Krawchuk² who visited Soviet Ukraine as a member of Canadian Ukrainian Communist Delegations almost every year starting from 1947. Zhuk wrote regarding Peter Krawchuk that “Their material well-being, even their Canadian businesses depended on those relations (p. 66)”.

In the second part of the book (pp. 95-192), Professor Zhuk states that after Stalin’s death, KGB tried to take less active measures against the United States (US) officials who were visiting the Soviet Union, while KGB officers continued to spy on all US official visitors in Soviet Ukraine. Zhuk focuses on the official visit of Marshall McDuffie,³ who after visiting food stores in Kyiv city center, which resulted in a “shocking revelation”, witnessed long lines of people waiting for butter and milk near these stores; recounted in detail in the stories of US Embassy second secretary Harry George Barnes, Jr.,⁴ Adolf Werner⁵ and Dutch tourists Ewert Reidon and Lou de Yaher.⁶ Especially the photos of Adolf Werner’s espionage equipment reinforce the narration of the book. In the same part of the book, the author also mentioned KGB operations against American exhibitions in Soviet Ukraine and stated that according to KGB data, 16 of the 52 official members of the exhibition team had either overt or covert connections with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or other US forms of intelligence; as a state security body, the KGB took part not only in the protection of Soviet state leaders, but also in the protection of top American guests who were invited to visit the Soviet Union. The third part of the book (pp. 193-240) investigates the active measures and special operations of the KGB against the Soviet youth’s Americanization/Westernization. The author emphasizes how the Ukrainian KGB carried out special operations against the effects of capitalist America on young Ukrainians, and -interestingly- how students gradually distanced themselves from their apolitical and cynical character and communist ideology. In addition to these, the third part mentions that through Rock’n roll, disco and foreign movies, new and very attractive forms of “Americanized” popular culture from jeans to tape recorders came into Soviet Ukraine. Another interesting point of the third part is the young Ukrainian imitators of Italian Neo-Fascists and American religious missionaries who visited Soviet Ukraine.

2 Peter Krawchuk’s (1911-1997) for Soviet Americans (specialists in American history, politics, economy and culture), Krawchuk became “*the direct bridge*” between Ukraine and “*the attractive and forbidden capitalist America*” (p. 50).

3 She was the chief of the Soviet Ukraine mission of the US State Department. Her 1953 Kiev visit was closely followed by KGB. During the time he stayed in Ukraine, the KGB “*characterized her to be a progressive American*” (p. 97).

4 Second Secretary at the US Embassy and professional intelligence officer. He was placed under KGB surveillance in October 1958 due to his meetings with Viktor Petrovich Gontar, director of the Kiev Opera and Ballet Theatre. However, a thorough KGB investigation did not find any evidence of Barnes’ espionage and Gontar’s cooperation with US intelligence (pp. 103-104).

5 Adolf Werner and his wife Hermine Werner. West German tourist couple. They visited USSR in August 1961. They took pictures of military objects in the forbidden harbour of Sevastopol. They were arrested after being discovered by the KGB. Soviet court sentenced Adolf Werner to 15 years and his wife Hermine to 7 years in prison (pp. 11-117).

6 Dutch tourists Ewert Reidon and Lou de Yaher tried to enter secret military sites in Yalta. They took pictures of Soviet radar equipment and other strategic and military objects. They were arrested in Yalta on August 22, 1961. During their interrogation, they confessed to working for NATO and US intelligence (p. 106).

As a result, the work -despite its uneven aspects- is a ground-breaking book in terms of historiography; it is a basic reading, as well as a strong and carefully thought out book. There has never been a book written on this topic before. Contrary to Routledge's assessment in the introduction of the book, the work does not appeal to general readers. I agree with Professor Benjamin Tromly on this.⁷ The book is an ideal example of meticulous archival research that avoids speculation. The experiences of KGB officers may be of interest to general readers; however, overall the book is addressed to academics and researchers. Although there is some repetition, the work will be of interest to anyone seeking to understand the complex relations of the KGB. In fact, it won't be wrong to say that it is one of the few books that will remain valid in the coming years. Especially finding so many KGB officers and persuading them to be interviewed is truly an admirable effort. However, I still have doubts about the historical source value of the interviews. Some of the interviews date back to 2004. This means one of two things: Either Professor Zhuk started this work years ago, or he is using his old notes. In any case, I keep my distance to the interviews of 2019 -since it is a little further away from the dissolution of the Soviet Union- because memories can move away from reality and change over the years. Besides, Soviet political atmosphere of the period is remembered with hesitation today even by Soviet retirees. Professor Zhuk would be the one to understand this best because in 1987 when he wrote his doctoral thesis, almost every doctoral thesis written in the Soviet Sciences Academy was dedicated to Marx and Lenin. Today these dedications are called the obligation of individuals in the face of the authoritarian Moscow administration and are ignored. Apart from this, the book is the main source on KGB and its operations in Ukraine and will continue to inform and inspire readers thanks to the many photos and maps it presents.

⁷ Professor of History at the University of Puget Sound, Professor Benjamin Tromly said the following about the book: "Zhuk's timely book uses rigorous archival research to analyze KGB activities, avoiding the sensationalism and speculation usually associated with study of these topics. Beyond being fascinating reading, the book uses KGB operations in Ukraine as a fascinating lens for examining Soviet interactions with American society and with Ukrainian national identity."