

**Christopher Andrew, Vasili Mitrokhin.** *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB.* New York: Basic Books, 1999. xvii + 700 pp. \$32.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-00312-9.



**Reviewed by** David L. Ruffley (Department of International Programs, United States Air Force Academy)

**Published on** H-Russia (April, 2002)

## Diminishing Shadows: The Continued Unveiling of Soviet Intelligence Secrets

Diminishing Shadows: The Continued Unveiling of Soviet Intelligence Secrets

As the story of Vasili Mitrokhin's dramatic defection from the chaos of post-Soviet Russia in 1992 became known, it aroused Western expectations of a bonanza of spectacular revelations about the KGB and its predecessors. Mitrokhin's courageous compilation of secret files from the KGB's First Chief Directorate (foreign intelligence division) did indeed contain some original revelations, but in the main proved more valuable in filling in the details of cases that Western intelligence agencies had already known about or suspected for years. In the hands of veteran intelligence historian Christopher Andrew, the Mitrokhin archive as published here is a richly documented description of Soviet intelligence activity from the founding of the USSR through its demise and collapse. The book skillfully combines Mitrokhin's new material with information from earlier defector-based works as well as post-Soviet "collaborations" between the Russian intelligence services and western authors. This combination provides the clearest picture to date of Soviet intelligence activity, fleshing out many previously obscure de-

tails, confirming or contradicting many allegations and raising a few new issues of its own. Mitrokhin's data, combined with Andrew's analysis, sheds new light on Soviet intelligence activity that, while perhaps not so spectacular as some expected, is nevertheless significantly illuminating.

Andrew's opening chapter describes Mitrokhin's clandestine development of his archive and the details of Mitrokhin's exfiltration with his archive to Britain in 1992. Andrew describes Mitrokhin's motivation as stemming from his disillusionment with the Soviet system. Mitrokhin lost faith in the system gradually. The humiliation of Pasternak in 1958, crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and suppression of the dissident movement in the early 1970's were critical factors in his decision to create an archive of intelligence material that he viewed as a classified counterpart to the dissident samizdat publication *The Chronicle of Current Events*. Naturally, this background information is important, but it contains a few flaws. Andrew's comparison of Mitrokhin's early efforts to conceal his archival material (buried in a milk churn) to Solzhenitsyn's burial of his own early writing in an

empty champagne bottle (p. 11) is a bit overdramatic, if interesting nonetheless. More significantly, this introductory material fails to address the basic violation of security procedures that provided Mitrokhin the opportunity to spend so much time working with highly classified material ALONE. This is particularly striking when one considers that Mitrokhin had been transferred from operations to duty in the archives as a result of being “too outspoken for his own good” following Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in the infamous 1956 “Secret Speech” (p. 3). Much of the material in the rest of the book raises questions about the KGB’s competence in analyzing intelligence data, but this striking example of fundamental incompetence in the handling of classified material passes unnoticed. Andrew’s neglect of this point in favor of immersing Mitrokhin’s story in the ethos of de-Stalinization and the emergence of dissent is disappointing.

After this introduction, the book follows a general chronological layout. Its thirty-one chapters begin with Lenin’s establishment of the Cheka shortly after the 1917 revolution and conclude with the role of intelligence services in Boris Yeltsin’s post-Soviet regime. Within this chronological framework, Andrew further develops the data from the Cold War era in five chapters devoted to operations against the “Main Adversary” (the United States), two chapters devoted to operations against Eastern European countries before 1980, two focused on KGB actions relative to Western European communist parties, two chapters detailing operations against Soviet dissidents, four focused on specific operations in Britain (two chapters), The Federal Republic of Germany (one chapter), and France and Italy (one chapter). Additional chapters focus on SIGINT (signals intelligence), “Special Tasks” against individual opponents of the Soviet regime, and KGB operations against Soviet churches. The final chapters focus on Poland from the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in 1978 through the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and Yeltsin’s rise to the presidency of the Russian Federation.

Within this organization, Andrew uses Mitrokhin’s data to emphasize five main themes. The first is the general notion that intelligence, and Signals Intelligence in particular, played a critical role in the history of the twentieth century that historians have traditionally overlooked. Andrew’s other four themes are more specific to the role of intelligence in Soviet and Russian history. Andrew notes that intelligence activity played a fundamental role in the establishment and maintenance of the post-WWII Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe, includ-

ing the restoration of one-party states in Hungary after 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The second “domestic” theme emphasizes that intelligence operations were “strikingly successful” in sustaining the one-party system for seventy-four years, a testimony to the KGB’s effectiveness against “ideological subversion” (p. 558). This positive view of Soviet intelligence operations, however, is tempered by the third theme. Andrew concedes that, while the KGB and its predecessors excelled at intelligence collection, they performed miserably in terms of analysis of political intelligence, largely due to the strictures of the Soviet system that discouraged independent initiative and analysis. The final theme emphasizes that a critical exception to this general rule was Soviet use of intelligence material regarding science and technology. The application of scientific and technological data pilfered from the West made remarkable contributions to the development of Soviet military and space technology. An American military estimate calculated that by 1970, fully 70 percent of Soviet weaponry was based on stolen US technology (p. 557). None of these themes are new to students of intelligence history or the history of the USSR. What are new, and the major contributions of this book, are the details Mitrokhin’s archive provides in “fleshing out” and supporting these themes.

In writing *The Sword and the Shield*, Andrew targeted both students of Soviet intelligence organizations and informed members of the general public. Much of the publicity surrounding the book’s publication focused on attracting the attention of the general reader. Even the titular emphasis on the “Secret History of the KGB” targeted the general public. Andrew’s own foreword emphasizes his desire to ensure that the insights provided by Mitrokhin’s archive “achieve[s] the level of public awareness and recognition that it deserves” (p.xx). Given this orientation toward the general reading public, provision of basic background information and the portrayal of Mitrokhin a heroic light, such as the juxtaposition of Mitrokhin and Solzhenitsyn in the introduction makes good sense. But the book seems more appropriate to Andrew’s other audience, the specialists in intelligence history in general and Soviet intelligence in particular. Andrew’s concluding commentary on “academic historians’” limited recognition of the role played by intelligence operations clearly demonstrates his desire to reach this specialized audience (pp. 544-545). Indeed, the meticulous attention to the minute details of intelligence operations (code names for every operation and agent, etc) make this work extremely valuable as a reference book for in-depth study of the subject. Simultaneously,

those same details can make a cover-to-cover reading tedious for the casual reader.

Vasili Mitrokhin copied by hand highly classified documents from the archives of the KGB's First Chief Directorate (Per'voe Glavnoe Upravlenie), the directorate responsible for foreign intelligence. Prior to his defection, he succeeded in re-typing and organizing some of the files and writing his own commentary and analysis. But most of the files remained in raw handwritten form. The somewhat random nature of the collected files is actually one of the archive's strengths. Unlike a number of recent works in which Russian authorities granted Western authors "selective" access to intelligence archives, Mitrokhin's collection is unfiltered, or at least, filtered with a different or less biased selectivity. As Andrew points out, given the Russian penchant for destroying archival files that could embarrass certain authorities (especially in regard to activities against Soviet-era dissidents), Mitrokhin's files may be the only surviving copies of some documents (p, 22). Of course, that same "random" aspect of the Mitrokhin archive can be seen as a weakness as well. At this point, the accuracy of Mitrokhin's copied files cannot, in many cases, be confirmed. Nevertheless, Andrew does an exceptional job of integrating information from the Mitrokhin archive into the known history of Soviet intelligence.

The masterful documentation and cross-referencing of Mitrokhin's files with previously published material demonstrates Andrew's mastery of the subject. The book includes nearly three thousand footnotes (2853 to be precise), forty-seven percent of which (1346) are direct citations from Mitrokhin's files. Andrew convincingly marshals the materials to highlight the KGB's susceptibility

to "conspiracy theories" as a fundamental weakness in its use of political intelligence. This susceptibility, combined with unrealistically high expectations for the success of illegal operations in Western nations made the KGB much less effective in the political arena than it might otherwise have been during the Cold War. Andrew shows that both problems stemmed from the 1930's and 1940's, when Stalin's paranoia created a legacy of conspiracy theory that infected his intelligence services. Neither his successors, nor their agencies ever escaped this infection. Likewise, the extraordinary success of Soviet penetration of the highest levels of the British and American governments during World War II condemned the Cold War Soviet intelligence services to false expectations and high levels of frustration. These flaws represent the most insightful aspects of Andrew's analysis, and he uses Mitrokhin's materials to provide rock-solid support of these positions.

*The Sword and the Shield* provides a hitherto unprecedented level of detail in "fleshing out" the history of Soviet intelligence operations. It will not cause any massive revision of previously posed hypotheses about the KGB. But this valuable work will, nonetheless, serve as an absolutely essential resource for future serious investigations of the subject.

Copyright 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-russia>

**Citation:** David L. Ruffley. Review of Andrew, Christopher; Mitrokhin, Vasili, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*. H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. April, 2002.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6190>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).