

KGB Special Operations and Ukrainian Identity, the 1960s-1970s¹

Olga Bertelsen
Department of Global Security and Intelligence Studies
College of Security and Intelligence
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
E-mail: bertelso@erau.edu

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Very little has been published in the West on KGB covert operations targeting Ukrainian human rights activists and intellectuals domestically, operations that transcended geographical and political borders during the Cold War. As under Stalin, during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, KGB covert action, including disinformation, forgeries, and assassinations, remained a significant part of Soviet policy, targeting Ukrainian dissidents, the leaders of anti-Soviet émigré groups, including the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and new diaspora alliances established to help their Soviet counterparts resist the regime and ultimately survive it.² From 1967 when Yuriy Andropov became Head of the KGB of the USSR, his obsession with Ukrainian nationalism and ideological subversion resulted in several resolutions that intensified the struggle with Ukrainian nationalists within Ukraine and beyond. Several operations were designed and launched against the Uniates (the Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine) who “inspired Ukrainian nationalism among its adherents,” against the Ukrainian intellectual elite who “propagandized Ukrainian culture and language,” and the Ukrainian diaspora organizations that “aligned themselves with the Jewish diaspora in the Western anti-Soviet human rights movement.”³ Those few works that briefly explore various aspects of Soviet intelligence in the Ukrainian context have been written in Ukrainian and published in Ukraine, a factor that limits discussions among broader scholarly audiences.

This paper focuses on the operation under the code name “Retribution” (or “Payback”), and its value lies in the analysis of archival material, KGB operational documents that are located in the SBU archives in Kyiv (among them fond 16, HDA SBU) and declassified CIA documents that reveal KGB concerns pertaining to Ukrainian identity and its literary and intellectual expression. These documents demonstrate with absolute clarity that the intelligence history of the Cold War has not been written yet, and the assault on Ukrainian identity and psychological warfare against its advocates domestically and abroad were among the main foci of intelligence reports on the both sides of the Iron Curtain in the 1960s and 1970s.

KGB Operation “Payback”

¹ This text is a modified version of a chapter that has been published in *Russian Active Measures: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, ed. Olga Bertelsen (ibidem-Verlag/Columbia University Press, 2021).

² Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Europe and the West: The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 466.

³ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Europe and the West*, 651–57.

During the 1960s–1970s, the Soviet government identified two major enemies in Ukraine and abroad – Ukrainian nationalists and Zionists. According to the KGB, both represented anti-communist and anti-Soviet forces.⁴ The Ukrainian and Jewish diasporas in North America supported Soviet Ukrainians and Jews who resisted cooptation by the communist regime. As a result of the Western anti-Soviet human rights movement, close links developed between these two groups. In their documents, Soviet propagandists and the KGB labeled Soviet Ukrainians as nationalists, and Soviet Jews as “stateless cosmopolits” (*otshchepentsy*), Zionists, or “agents of imperialism.” The Ukrainian and Jewish diasporas were cast as nationalists and imperialists, and these terms were used interchangeably for Soviet Ukrainians and Jews and their counterparts in the West. For decades, the Soviet secret police purged Ukrainian nationalists and separatists, and “‘Zionist subversion’ was one of the KGB’s most enduring conspiracy theories.”⁵ Regardless of their geographic location, these two groups were targeted domestically through repressions and abroad through covert operations. In the late 1960s, when the KGB realized that a Western alliance between Jewish and Ukrainian human rights activists had begun to form, two Soviet campaigns against Ukrainians and Jews overlapped and transcended national borders. Every meeting of the Ukrainian diaspora activists in North America was interpreted as plotting and scheming against the USSR, and every protest and gathering of Western Jews was suspected of being part of an international Zionist conspiracy against the Kremlin.⁶

Empirically and historically, nothing is unusual about these KGB constructs and charges of collusion between Ukrainians and Jews in Ukraine and abroad. Many Soviet Ukrainians and Jews held membership in Ukraine’s dissident movement, and the most active portions of the Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora in North America together organized rallies and protests in support of the Jewish emigration movement, Jewish *refusniks*, and Ukrainian dissidents in Ukraine.⁷ The brief period of relaxation during the Khrushchev Thaw inspired Ukraine’s citizens to fight against russification and for freedom of speech, expression, and movement, activities that challenged the very foundations of the Soviet system. Post-Stalinist state violence in Ukraine facilitated the ideological evolution of views for many people and shaped the fabric of the dissident movement that united human rights activists of various ethnicities. Inevitably, their links transcended national borders, involving the largest diaspora groups in North America, Ukrainians and Jews, sympathetic to the cause of their brethren in Ukraine and other Soviet republics.⁸

By the late 1960s, the Soviet dissident movement gained clear contours, which prompted the Soviet government to design new tactics and strategies to neutralize it. Beyond KGB clandestine counter-measures aimed at isolating human rights activists domestically and

⁴ Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, MA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; the John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 197; Taras Kuzio, “The Soviet Roots of Anti-Fascism and Anti-Semitism,” *New Eastern Europe* 6, no. XXIV (2016): 93–100.

⁵ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 222.

⁶ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 232.

⁷ The term *refusniks* refers to those Soviet Jews whose requests to emigrate and visas were denied by the Soviet authorities.

⁸ See an enlightening study on the dissident movement in Ukraine, conducted by a research group at the CIA: “Research Study: Nationalism in Soviet Ukraine,” *United States of America: Central Intelligence Agency* (Directorate of Intelligence; Office of Political Research), *CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)*, August 1975, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000981759.pdf (accessed 22 June 2020).

thwarting their links abroad, the Soviet party establishment publicly labeled the diasporas' campaign as "aggressive American imperialism and rabid Zionism."⁹ This rhetoric further encouraged the rapprochement of the Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora, inviting them to overcome individual and collective stereotypes and hostilities toward each other and invest their efforts in liberating persecuted and prosecuted human rights activists in Ukraine. Importantly, shared activities and imprisonment of Soviet Ukrainians and Jews extended the space of their interactions, fueling and amplifying the anti-Soviet human rights movement in the West.

The Soviet human rights movement involved activists of various ethnicities. Although the grievances of each ethnic community had their distinct character, all members of this movement advocated the rule of law, free speech, the freedom of movement and emigration, and the right for their culture to exist and develop. Within this movement that by the early 1970s had become a pan-Soviet phenomenon, there were Ukrainians who protested against russification, persecution, and imprisonment of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, and Jews, *refusenik* groups, and individuals who advocated the rights of Soviet Jewry to develop their culture or to emigrate to Israel. Both groups relied on internal and external resources for support, including diaspora organizations and Western governments, although various Soviet Jewish groups took advantage of the support of "'external' rather than 'internal' resources."¹⁰

The Soviet regime managed to keep the diaspora in the dark for quite some time about arrests of Soviet human rights activists, intellectuals, and dissidents. The KGB operation under the code name "Blok" and arrests of the opposition were camouflaged by false accusations that portrayed these people as criminals or psychiatrically ill individuals.¹¹ Despite the fact that by 1963 in the United States, there were approximately 300 Ukrainian periodicals that enlightened their readers about the situation in Ukraine,¹² the first wave of Soviet repressions launched in 1964–1965 against the Ukrainian and Jewish intelligentsia received little international attention. Western outlets, such as *Voice of America*, *Radio Liberty*, *Vatican Radio*, and the *BBC*, began to cover the abuse of dissidents in the Soviet Union, including Ukraine, only in the late 1960s, although some degree of popular awareness of violations of human rights in the USSR can be traced to the beginning of the 1960s.¹³ The informational breakthrough occurred during the second part of the 1960s when *samizdat* penetrated the Iron Curtain, and the United Nations and UNESCO were bombarded with letters of complaint authored by Ukrainian and Jewish émigrés and organizations.¹⁴

⁹ See Petro Shelest's speech (party chief in Ukraine) in *Radianska Ukraina*, 1 April 1971. Also quoted in Kenneth C. Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era: Myth, Symbols and Ideology in Soviet Nationalities Policy* (The Hague, Boston, and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publisher, 1980), 203.

¹⁰ On the phenomenon of *refuseniks*, see Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin, "The Refusenik Community in Moscow: Social Networks and Models of Identification," *East European Jewish Affairs* 41, nos. 1–2 (2011): 78.

¹¹ Olga Bertelsen, "Rethinking Psychiatric Terror against Nationalists in Ukraine," *Kyiv-Mohyla Arts and Humanities*, no. 1 (2014): 27–76.

¹² Y. S. Bukhtoiarova, "Obraz UPA u svitskii presi ukrainskoi diaspori SShA (1950-1980-ti rr.)," *Ukrainskyi katolytskyi universytet*, 2014, <http://journalism.ucu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Buhtoiarova1.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2020).

¹³ Olena Zashko, "Pidtrymka uviaznenykh dysydyntiv diasporoiu SShA (za materialamy vydan 'Ameryka' ta 'Svoboda'" (M.A. dissertation), *Ukrainskyi katolytskyi universytet*, 2017, <http://kzref.org:81/poyasnyvalena-zapiska-do-magistersekoyi-roboti-osvitneo-kvali.html> (accessed 22 June 2020), 48–49; Christina Isajiw, *Negotiating Human Rights: In Defence of Dissidents during the Soviet Era* (Edmonton and Toronto: CIUS, 2014), xxiii.

¹⁴ On *samizdat* (self-publishing) see Heorhii Kasianov, *Nezhodni: Ukrainska intelihentsiia v rusi oporu 1960–80-kh rokiv* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1995).

As a response to the imprisonment of human rights activists, many associations and defense committees were formed in Canada and the U.S. They sprang from the political activism of the Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora who organized solidarity hunger strikes, appealing to the local press and elected officials for their help. In 1966, a charity movement on behalf of Soviet prisoners and their families emerged. Human rights activists donated money, clothes, and food and by 1972, many unofficial charity funds were established for Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish political prisoners.¹⁵

These committees also organized rallies and protests in support of political prisoners, and their participants were people of various ethnicities, including Ukrainians and Jews.¹⁶ For instance, in November 1974, a diverse group of 80 people rallied at Burr Hall (Harvard University) to protest the fourteen-year incarceration of the Ukrainian dissident and historian Valentyn Moroz. He was arrested by the authorities twice, in 1965 and 1970, for “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda,” and the day of the rally was the 148th day of Moroz’s voluntary hunger strike in the Vladimir Prison outside Moscow. The rally was organized by the Harvard chapter of the Committee for the Defense of Soviet Political Prisoners, and speakers at the rally urged supporters to appeal to the U.S. Congress to obtain its support for Moroz.¹⁷ Some committees were named after dissidents and victims of Soviet terror. For instance, the Department of the Union of Ukrainian Women in America was named for Alla Horska, a Ukrainian artist and dissident who in 1970 was violently murdered, likely by the KGB, for her dissident activities. By the late 1970s, many grassroots groups founded in the middle of the 1970s were transformed into fully functioning associations, such as “Americans in Defense of Human Rights in Ukraine” led by Ihor Olshaniivskyi. Its chapters were established in many Canadian and American cities.

The base for support of human rights activities in the West was substantial. Individual and collective memories and experiences of displacement and terror to which people were subjected in the Soviet Union inspired their political activism. The third wave of forced migration from Ukraine occurred during WWII, when approximately 4.2 million people were transported to Western Europe. At the end of the war the majority of the survivors returned to Ukraine. Yet approximately 310,000 remained in Western Europe, 240,000 of whom later migrated to the U.S. and Canada, 35–40,000 – to Argentina and Brazil, and 30,000 – to Australia. In the 1970s–1980s, 30,000 Ukrainians found themselves in Canada, and 100,000 – in the United States. Well-educated people, they occupied the leading positions in various diaspora organizations, and significantly advanced their infrastructure, moving the center of the Ukrainian diaspora activities from Europe to North America.¹⁸ Between 1970 and 1980, approximately 250,000 Soviet citizens emigrated on Israeli visas.¹⁹ Many of those Soviet nationally conscious emigrants joined the anti-Soviet human rights movement.

¹⁵ For a discussion about the charity movement, see Barbara Walker, “Pollution and Purification in the Moscow Human Rights Networks of the 1960s and 1970s,” *Slavic Review* 68, no. 2 (2009): 376–95.

¹⁶ Zashko, “Pidtrymka uviaznenykh dysydyntiv,” 32.

¹⁷ Monique L. Burns, “Committee Rallies to Support Soviet Dissident Writer Moroz,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 26 November 1974, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1974/11/26/committee-rallies-to-support-soviet-dissident/> (accessed 22 June 2020).

¹⁸ Bukhtoiarova, “Obraz UPA.”

¹⁹ By 1980, however, the Soviet government placed restrictions on Jewish emigration, and in 1981 approximately 40,000 Jews were denied visas. Volodymyr Kubijovyc, ed., “Jews,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 390.

Jewish-Ukrainian cooperation in North America was built on extant personal and institutional connections established during the post-war decades in the United States and Canada. For instance, in the early 1950s, a commission of Jewish-Ukrainian affairs was formed at the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Science in New York, and the Association to Perpetuate the Memory of Ukrainian Jews and the Support Committee for Ukrainian Jews were founded in New York under the leadership of Mendel Osherovych, a Jewish writer, translator, historian, and the author of the three-volume publication *Jews in Ukraine* (1961).²⁰ Personal links and friendships among Ukrainian and Jewish families, members of these associations, survived through generations, serving as a social bond for their political activities in the 1970s. The Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, especially those who were leaders of various Ukrainian diaspora organizations and communities, took an active part in the human rights movement, protesting against the incarceration of intellectuals in Ukraine under Shelest and Brezhnev.²¹ The diaspora tried to influence societal and political developments in Ukraine through several channels – economic, informational, and cultural. However, because the USSR and its authoritarian governing and policymaking was less susceptible to diasporic influence than that of more democratic regimes, the Ukrainian diaspora sought support from other ethnic interest groups, including the Jewish diaspora community, and relied on its financial resources locally to promote the anti-Soviet human rights grassroots movement, exerting direct and indirect influence through donations to various civil society projects and lobbying state officials.²²

The Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora encouraged and supported students' human rights initiatives, from rallies to street protests in front of Soviet embassies. Those students who struggled for Soviet Jewry's rights engendered local "action" committees in half a dozen cities in the United States. These activities served as the foundation for establishing an umbrella organization in 1970 – the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ). In the 1970s, the Union functioned as the principal grassroots organization that facilitated the effectiveness of the Soviet Jewry Movement. The Union offered moral and financial support for the movement, and its objectives included assistance to Soviet political prisoners and working toward their eventual release from Soviet labor camps and emigration from the USSR. Many other ethnic grassroots groups and NGOs participated in the activities of the UCSJ. They shared general strategies and methods of influence on the Soviet government in human rights matters. Individual contacts among the members of the UCSJ and organizations, such as the Human Rights Commission (HRC) of the World Congress of Free Ukrainians (WCFU), were preserved until the very collapse of the Soviet Union, strengthening Western commitment to human rights that led to revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century.²³

Samizdat and communication among imprisoned Ukrainian and Jewish dissidents extended a space for a dialogue between the two ethnic diaspora groups. Importantly, for the first time since the attempts at a Ukrainian-Jewish dialogue that were curtailed by the Bolsheviks in

²⁰ Volodymyr Kubijovyc, "Jews;" Vasyl Markus and Dariia Markus, eds., "Osherovych Mendel," in *Entsyklopediia Ukrainskoi diaspori: Spolucheni Shtaty Ameryky*, vol. 1, kn. 2 (New York and Chicago: Naukove Товариство im. Shevchenka v Amerytsi, 2012), 222. On Osherowitch's experiences in Soviet Russia, see Mendel Osherowitch, *How People Live in Soviet Russia: Impressions From a Journey*, ed. Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, trans. Sharon Power (Kingston, Canada: Kashtan Press, 2020).

²¹ On various groups of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, see Denis Horelov, "Vplyv orhanizatsii ukrainskoi diaspori na rozvytok ukrainskoho suspilstva v Ukraini," *Stratehichni priorytety*, no. 3 (20) (2011): 34.

²² On how diasporas operate, see Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (2003): 449–79.

²³ Isajiw, *Negotiating Human Rights*, 294–95, 320–22.

the post-revolutionary decade,²⁴ this space became truly transnational, inviting the Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora communities to participate in the movement against injustice and terror in the Soviet Union. Individuals such as Yosyp Zisels (b. 1946), Nadiia Svitlychna (1936-2006), Ivan Svitlychnyi (1929-1992), Semen Gluzman (b. 1946), Vasyl Stus (1938-1985), Arie Vudka (b. 1947), and Yevhen Sverstiuk (1927-2014) created a new intellectual, cultural, and humane context for Ukrainian and Jewish émigrés, in which the sense of Ukraine, liberated from Moscow’s ideological constraints and subversion, cultivated notions such as freedom, mutual respect, and compassion.

These interactions and human rights movements in the USSR and the West provoked serious concerns among Soviet party leaders. They took urgent measures to prevent the spread of “Ukrainian nationalism” and “global Zionism,” and to conceal the truth about state violence, targeting dissidents and nationalists throughout the Soviet Union.²⁵ Most importantly, Western alliances that supported Ukraine’s dissidents were to be compromised and broken. Thus, the KGB designed a covert operation code named “Vozmezdiie” (Retribution or Payback). Conceived at the height of the Cold War in the late 1960s, it was designed to perpetuate the image of Ukrainians as Nazi collaborators in the West and to discredit Ukrainians in the eyes of the Western Jewish community and vice versa. It was calculated that these tactics would impede and potentially nullify the Western anti-Soviet human rights movement. Sadly, the sophistication of the Soviet propaganda machine and KGB active measures undermined the shared activities of Western human rights activists, exacerbating the anemic bonds and mutual grievances among the Ukrainian and Jewish diasporas.

The discovery of a very important document among other KGB operational materials preserved in the former KGB archive in Kyiv invites us to consider it in the context of other archival documents located in the former party archive in Kyiv, Ukraine, and to revisit the Demjanjuk case, a tremendous KGB counterintelligence success and part of the operation “Payback.” Its code name is telling, accurately highlighting its essential goal and tasks. Among other tactics that will be discussed below, the Demjanjuk affair neatly dovetails with the objectives of the operation launched to break the coalition of Ukrainian and Jewish émigrés by perpetuating the image of Ukrainians as organic antisemites and war criminals. Yet the desire for revenge and retaliation against former OUN members (the American citizen John Demjanjuk was one of them), who fought against Soviet communists for decades, seems to have prevailed. The language of KGB reports to the Central Committee is quite instructive, revealing the hostile attitudes of the KGB leadership toward former OUN members and Western OUN members. Nearly every report emanating from the KGB headquarters in the 1960s and 1970s closely discussed their activities. This fixation on Ukrainian nationalists inspired the KGB to move against the logic of the Cold War at its height and to express eagerness to work with American officials, providing evidence of Ukrainian immigrants’ real or alleged war crimes. Interestingly enough, juxtaposed with declassified CIA documents on covert operations code named “Aerodynamic” and later “Prolog,” KGB reports on “Payback” equip us with a nuanced understanding of factors that shaped the vectors of this operation domestically and abroad, which

²⁴ On the Jewish-Ukrainian dialogue in the twentieth century’s second decade, see Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Myroslav Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature: Representation and Identity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 92–106.

²⁵ Anatoliy Kruglashov, “Chernivtsi: A City with a Mysterious Flavor of Tolerance,” *Eurolimes*, no.19 (2015): 151–52.

ultimately disrupted the relationships between the two largest diasporas in the U.S., Jews and Ukrainians.²⁶

According to Ukraine's KGB, the overall guidance for "Payback" was implemented by the central KGB office in Moscow, and this operation included several strategic directions: 1) gathering intelligence (*razrabotka*) about OUN members who had functioned in the Soviet Union and Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis and who managed to escape from the Soviet "sword" to the West; 2) identifying OUN members who became active in the anti-communist human rights movement in the West and channeling evidence (or forgeries) of their collaboration with the Nazis to Western governments;²⁷ 3) publishing and distributing in the United States and Canada two editions of the book by the American communist of Ukrainian origin Michael Hanusiak entitled *Lest We Forget* (Chtoby my ne zabyli) which included a list of OUN members, alleged Nazi collaborators;²⁸ 4) creating three counterpropaganda films and sharing them with 17 anti-fascist organizations in the West; 5) publishing articles in American mass media about mass demonstrations in Ukraine demanding the extradition of Nazi collaborators to the USSR where they would be brought to justice; 6) publishing articles in pro-Soviet Western Ukrainian newspapers, such as *News from Ukraine*, in which Ukrainian émigrés would be portrayed as Nazi collaborators; 6) sending petitions of the same content written by Soviet citizens and addressed to the American government.²⁹ The primary goal was to smear and discredit Ukrainian nationalists in the eyes of the western Jewish community to break their alliance, and to establish a stable association between Ukrainians and their "intrinsic antisemitism."

The details of the thirty-five-year legal battle of John Demjanjuk, a retired Ukrainian-born autoworker from Cleveland who allegedly exterminated thousands of Jews while working at the Nazi concentration camp near Treblinka, Poland, are offered in numerous publications.³⁰ The Demjanjuk affair was part of the KGB operation "Payback," and its history should be traced to the events that occurred in the mid-seventies in the Soviet Union, rather than in the United States, when Elizabeth Holtzman, the originator of the Holtzman Amendment, had gone to the Soviet Union to discuss two basic issues:³¹ first, how to make Soviet Jews' immigration to the United States freer, and second, to initiate collaboration with the KGB on bringing accused war criminals, former Soviet citizens, to justice. In 1977, she secured passage of a law, known as the Holtzman Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act. This amendment provided additional grounds for deportation of individuals who collaborated with the Nazi government, and limited their ability to obtain exclusion and deportation relief. Congress added an appendage, establishing the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) under the umbrella of the Department of

²⁶ On "Prolog" see Taras Kuzio, "U.S. Support for Ukraine's Liberation during the Cold War: A Study of Prolog Research and Publishing Corporation," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012): 51–64.

²⁷ HDA SBU, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 67827, ark. 208. For instance, the KGB gathered information about Petro (Pavlo) Rudenko, a Ukrainian who resided in Australia, for the purpose of "potentially compromising him" in the eyes of the international community as a Nazi collaborator.

²⁸ Michael Hanusiak, *Lest We Forget*, 1st ed. (New York: The Ukrainian-American League, 1973).

²⁹ HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, spr. 1230, ark. 169.

³⁰ For the most recent publication, see Olga Bertelsen, "Ukrainian and Jewish Émigrés as Targets of KGB Active Measures in the 1970s," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 26 May 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1750093>, 1–26.

³¹ For an enlightening study focusing on the Holtzman Amendment, see Daniel E. Ross, "Wafen SS: Friend or Foe? The 1978 Holtzman Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act," *Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College*, 9 May 1989 (unclassified), available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a209531.pdf> (accessed 21 March 2020). See also Nigel Jackson, "John Demjanjuk: The Man More Sinned Against," *Inconvenient History* 4, no. 2 (2012), *Codoh*, 1 July 2012, <https://codoh.com/library/document/3177/?lang=en> (accessed 23 June 2020).

Justice with an annual budget of \$3 million. Its task included identifying Nazis and deporting or extraditing them to the USSR or Israel.³² The same year, Michael Hanusiak, an editor of the pro-Soviet Western Ukrainian newspaper *News from Ukraine* (which was a KGB front) and head of the American Communist Party, had traveled to the Soviet Union and, collaborating with the KGB, obtained a list of suspects which he brought to the United States upon his return. One of the names on that list was Ivan Demjanjuk.³³ Why?

According to Demjanjuk's son-in-law Edward Nishnic, Demjanjuk was a member of the OUN.³⁴ Moreover, as mentioned earlier, for a brief period of time Demjanjuk was also part of the Vlasov Army, a collaborationist formation that fought against the Soviets under German command, which made him doubly guilty in the eyes of the Soviets.³⁵ In addition, the KGB learned from Demjanjuk's mother that he was still alive residing in the United States. The discovered KGB documents fully confirm a supposition of Demjanjuk's Israeli lawyer Yoram Sheftel about Demjanjuk's innocence and the Soviets' motivations for targeting Demjanjuk. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, through intuition, logic, and evidence, Sheftel insisted that the Soviet objective was to cause a rift between the Jewish and the Ukrainian diasporas, and to eliminate the old enemies of the Soviet state.³⁶ People like Michael Hanusiak and the leaders of the Jewish organizations in the West were used as tools of manipulation that would help the KGB to "nip the Jewish-Ukrainian 'conspiracy' in the bud."³⁷

In his book *John Demjanjuk: The Real Story*, Jim McDonald shared with his readers an interesting piece of information that has not been mentioned in any other narratives that portrayed Demjanjuk as evil lying under oath. McDonald has detailed a story told by Attorney O'Connor who frequently visited the Demjanjuk family in Cleveland:

Vera's first visit to Ukraine [Demjanjuk's wife] was to John's mother who was shocked to discover that her son was still alive, as she had been collecting a mother's veteran pension for all these years. After Vera left, the delighted old lady went to the KGB and joyously told them, "You don't have to pay me a pension anymore; my boy is alive and living in Cleveland, Ohio." On hearing this incredible admission, the KGB immediately invaded her house and confiscated all photographs and documents pertaining to John. The machinery of a police state began to operate.³⁸

In September 1977, *News from Ukraine* published an article which triggered Demjanjuk's saga. The article labeled him a "traitor to the Motherland" because he surrendered to the Germans instead of killing himself. In swift manner, the OSI "transmogrified" Demjanjuk from a traitor, in Soviet terms, into a notoriously cruel Nazi guard known as "Ivan the Terrible,"

³² Jim McDonald, *John Demjanjuk: The Real Story* (Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1990), 13.

³³ Jackson, "John Demjanjuk." *News from Ukraine* was an English-language Communist newspaper located in New York City.

³⁴ Correspondence with Edward Nishnic, 22 April 2019, FB. For more on Demjanjuk's biography, see Hans Peter Rullmann, *Der Fall Demjanjuk. Unschuldiger oder Massenmörder?* (Viöl: Verlag für ganzheitliche Forschung und Kultur, 1987).

³⁵ On the Vlasov Army, see Kirill Aleksandrov, *Russkii soldaty Vermakhta: Geroi ili predateli: Sbornik statei i materialov*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Yauza, 2005).

³⁶ Interviews with Yoram Sheftel, *Youtube*, 30 November 30 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxIoGqfXGyI>, and *Youtube*, November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G72ecY5hjxs> (accessed 24 June 2020).

³⁷ Yoram Sheftel, *Defending 'Ivan the Terrible.' The Conspiracy to Convict John Demjanjuk* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1996), pp. ix, x.

³⁸ McDonald, *John Demjanjuk*, 14.

operating gas chambers in Treblinka and exterminating thousands of Jews.³⁹ The OSI director Allan Ryan insisted that Demjanjuk was to be prosecuted as Ivan the Terrible despite the fact that one of the OSI prosecutors at the time, George Parker, warned his colleagues against it for ethical reasons, because the evidence was contradictory, placing Demjanjuk in two different places at the same time – Treblinka and Sobibor.⁴⁰ Yet, according to Parker’s testimony, the OSI, being pressed by a former member of Congress Joshua Eilberg (1921–2004) of Pennsylvania, dismissed Parker’s reservations. Eilberg had written to Griffin Bell, the Attorney-General at the time, stating that the Department of Justice “could not afford to lose” this case. Demjanjuk was to represent the evil symbol of the Holocaust at a show trial.⁴¹ Demjanjuk’s defense attorneys lost the case: he was stripped of his American citizenship and in February 1986 extradited to Israel to stand trial as a Nazi war criminal.

An Israeli court determined that Demjanjuk had participated in war crimes and sentenced him to death. However, five years later, the Israeli Supreme Court acquitted him after it heard evidence indicating that he was a victim of mistaken identity. He returned to the United States to be sued again by the OSI, this time accused of being an SS guard at several concentration camps. Once again, he was stripped of his American citizenship, and in May 2009 he was deported to Germany to stand trial in Munich at the age of 89. Demjanjuk passed away at the age of 91 at a nursing home in Bad Feilnbach, Germany on 17 March 2012. On 12 May 2011, he was convicted as an accessory to the murder of 27,900 Jews and sentenced to five years in prison. Yet his conviction was invalidated because the German Appellate Court had no opportunity to try an appeal or to make any decision before Demjanjuk’s death. According to German law, Demjanjuk remains legally innocent.

Many have written about the Demjanjuk affair, but only a few have examined its origin, and the KGB’s and OSI’s role in it. Demjanjuk’s Trawniki ID card was a KGB forgery. The OSI’s motivations for concealing the evidence that would have helped Demjanjuk’s defense still await close scrutiny. The role of American intelligence agencies that were aware of the fraudulent nature of the main evidence in the case, Demjanjuk’s Trawniki ID card, is not completely clear. While Demjanjuk was still alive, the United States Court of Appeals ruled that his prosecution was a fraud and that federal prosecutors acted with an absolute disregard for the truth.⁴² Withholding the documents that confirmed that Demjanjuk was a victim of mistaken identity, evidence that the OSI possessed since the late 1970s, and heavily relying on the KGB forgery, the OSI compromised its reputation at a very early stage. Yet some still publish books that avoid thorough analyses of the OSI’s wrongdoings in this case, portraying Demjanjuk as a war criminal without any credible evidence.⁴³ Importantly, these narratives are void of any

³⁹ McDonald, *John Demjanjuk*, 15.

⁴⁰ Eric Lichtblau, *The Nazi Next Door: How America Became a Safe Haven for Hitler’s Men* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 203.

⁴¹ Quoted in Nigel Jackson, “John Demjanjuk.” Joshua Eilberg was a Jewish American politician and member of the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1978, Eilberg was investigated for money he received pertaining to a federal grant to Hahnemann University Hospital. He lost his re-election in 1978, and three months later pled guilty to charges of conflict of interest. He was sentenced to five years probation and a \$10,000 fine. See “Joshua Eilberg,” *Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of Aice*, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joshua-eilberg> (accessed 23 June 2020).

⁴² Nigel Jackson, “John Demjanjuk.”

⁴³ Lawrence Douglas, *The Right Wrong Man: John Demjanjuk and the Last Great Nazi War Crimes Trial* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

attempts at answering the question about the Soviets' reasons behind framing Demjanjuk as a Nazi accomplice.

KGB archival documents help establish a logical connection among the most crucial developments during the Cold War – the agreement about cooperation between American and Soviet officials in the Nazi hunt, the Western anti-Soviet human rights movement, political instability in the USSR, and the KGB's desire to “pay back” former OUN members fighting the Soviet regime. Former members of the OUN who managed to survive Soviet and Nazi regimes by escaping to the West were especially vulnerable. In the KGB's view, the dissident and human rights movement in the Soviet Union were provoked and supported by the Ukrainian diaspora, “Ukrainian nationalists” who petitioned the United Nations and American Congress, demanding relief for Soviet political prisoners. According to the KGB, they became quite visible and active in North America, creating unions, associations, and groups that continued to fight the Soviets and protest against a new wave of repressions of intellectuals in Ukraine.⁴⁴ To neutralize their activities in North America, the KGB designed several special operations that targeted the “reactionary political circles and Western secret services.” In their reports to the Central Party Committee, the KGB leadership informed their party bosses that in their anti-Soviet operations of ideological subversion, Western intelligence services used the “gang leaders’ [*glavari*] of Western OUNs” and Ukrainian nationalists of “all shades.” The KGB covert operations, including “Payback” would kill two birds with one stone – eliminate the long-lasting enemies of the Soviet regime, former members of the OUN who could be easily framed as Nazi collaborators, and use the powerful Jewish circles who would complete this task for the Soviets. As a result, cooperation between Ukrainian and Jewish communities and their shared human rights activities would be curtailed.

The birth of two Demjanjuks (Ivan Mykolaiovych and Ivan Andriiovych) in the same village of Dubovi Makharyntsi (Vinnytsia oblast) eased the KGB's task. In 1971, after learning from a relative that the KGB visited his home looking for him, Ivan Andriiovych, an apparently real Trawniki man whose name can be found in the death camp's documents, committed suicide.⁴⁵ When the KGB decided to forge the Trawniki card that allegedly belonged to Ivan Mykolaiovych Demjanjuk, a U.S. citizen residing in Cleveland, the KGB paid another visit to Ivan Andriiovych's home in Dubovi Makharyntsi to make sure that no written documents or photos were left behind. Having no valid documents that would prove Ivan Mykolaiovych Demjanjuk's crimes against humanity and his collaboration with the Nazis, the KGB doctored Ivan Andriiovych Demjanjuk's authentic Trawniki ID card by replacing his original photo with Ivan Mykolaiovych Demjanjuk's photo extracted from his mother's home, an occurrence that has been established beyond a reasonable doubt by numerous probes, including those implemented by the head of the Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany (*BKA*) Dr. Louis Ferdinand Werner, German document expert Dieter Lehner, and the German Jewish independent

⁴⁴ According to a participant of the Committee in Defense of Political Prisoners and Amnesty International (private correspondence on 31 May 2020), the OUN(B) in North America was a highly infiltrated organization and was, to a significant degree, manipulated by KGB operatives. Its authoritarian structure and ideology prevented the OUN from becoming part of the mainstream human rights movement in the West. According to this person, “human rights for the OUN(B) was a tactical concession to the contemporary moment.” The KGB hardly ascertained the diaspora dynamics and affiliations. Ukrainians were gathered under the umbrella term “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists,” and Jews were labeled “Zionists” or “imperialists.”

⁴⁵ Natalia A. Fedushchak, “Case of Mistaken Identity?” *Kyiv Post*, 2 June 2011, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/case-of-mistaken-identity-105923.html> (accessed 24 June 2020).

news magazines *SemitTimes* and *Der Spiegel*.⁴⁶ The KGB, however, could not anticipate such tremendous success of the operation. Without the OSI's assistance, persistence, and the lies of its officials, "Payback" would have likely had its limitations.

The original of this forgery is located in one of the archives in the Russian Federation. In Israel, when it became clear that the story about Demjanjuk of Treblinka was not valid, the prosecution replaced it with the story about Demjanjuk of Sobibor who participated in mass killings of Jews as an SS guard. Had Ivan Mykolaiovych Demjanjuk received his initial training in Trawniki and been a guard at Sobibor, he must have had a *Personalbogen* on file there, a document that included, among other things, a thumb print. Yet, this document had never been produced by the KGB. Doctoring this document was impossible for a simple reason: just anyone's thumb print would unequivocally reveal the forgery.

In 1993, Ukraine's security services (the SBU) received materials from the independent German Jewish magazine *SemitTimes* that informed the Ukrainian government that: 1) Lehner's research and Dr. Werner's statement proved Ivan Mykolaiovych Demjanjuk's Trawniki ID card to be a "deliberate forgery;"⁴⁷ 2) there was no convincing evidence whatsoever that would place Demjanjuk in Sobibor and link him to any potential war crimes; and, 3) Demjanjuk passed away in Germany as a legally innocent man.⁴⁸ The German Jews reached out to the SBU to confirm that the Demjanjuk case was manufactured in Moscow, something that many understood but could not prove.

Importantly, beyond the KGB, high-ranking Soviet Ukrainian officials contributed greatly to the operation "Payback," from the Central Committee of Ukraine's Communist Party (TsK KPU) to most important Soviet institutions, such as Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ukraine's Academy of Sciences. For instance, in July 1976, following Moscow's orders, two members of the TsK KPU Anatolii Merkulov, the head of the Department of Foreign Relations, and Yurii Yelchenko, the head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, informed Valentyn Malanchuk, Ukraine's key ideologue, that they might employ several measures to neutralize the activities of the Ukrainian diaspora nationalists who seemed to coordinate their efforts with the Western Jewish diaspora. Merkulov and Yelchenko suggested that in order to break this union, the TsK should engage historians from the Institute of History of Ukraine's Academy of Sciences. Scholars would provide the Western and Soviet Jewish community with documents that would compromise Ukrainian nationalists in their eyes. Evidence of Ukrainians' violence against Soviet Jews during World War Two that "exceeded that of the Nazi" would serve this purpose. "Documents, images, and other factual materials would be especially valuable to uncover the hypocrisy of Ukrainian immigrants who yesterday were killing the Jews and today are involved in ingratiating behavior with Zionists," Merkulov and Yelchenko posited.⁴⁹ As in the Demjanjuk affair, historical facts and authentic materials mixed with forgeries created by the KGB constituted the evidential base for these measures.

⁴⁶ HDA SBU, f. 68, op. 1, spr. 3, tom 1, ark. 1–18 zv.; HDA SBU, f. 68, op. 1, spr. 3, tom 2, ark. 1–19. For a detailed analysis of the Soviet forgery, see "John Demjanjuk: Mistrial of the Century," *Will and Lily Zuzak (Lubomyr Prytulak)*, 2020, <https://willzuzak.ca/lp/demlinks.html> (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁴⁷ HDA SBU, f. 68, op. 1, spr. 3, tom 2, ark. 14; see also Jerome A. Brentar, "My Campaign for Justice for John Demjanjuk," *The Journal of Historical Review* 13, no. 6 (1993): 2–8; also available at http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v13/v13n6p-2_Brentar.html (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁴⁸ HDA SBU, f. 68, op. 1, spr. 3, tom 2, ark. 19; see also Marek Bem, *Sobibor Extermination Camp: 1942–1943*, trans. Tomasz Karpiński and Natalia Sarzyńska-Wójtowicz (Amsterdam: Stichting Sobibor, 2015), 320–21.

⁴⁹ TsDAHOU, f. 1, op.25, spr.1362, ark. 1, 2, 8.

Similar countermeasures were designed by Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Minister Heorhii Shevel who devised a comprehensive plan to restrain the activities of "nationalists" abroad.⁵⁰ Shevel's propositions transformed Soviet diplomats into intelligence officers who gathered information, recruited young Ukrainian emigres, and fed disinformation to the Ukrainian and Jewish communities in North America.⁵¹

Epilogue

Several decades ago, the director of Radio Liberty in Ukraine Roman Kupchinsky (1944–2010) argued that the Russian disinformation campaign in the 1960s-1970s was organized by the highest echelons of power in the USSR as a response to rapprochement between the Ukrainian and Jewish diasporas and the state of Israel for the purpose of defending the human rights of Soviet dissidents. Indeed, for the Soviets, the consolidation of Western forces that helped release Soviet dissidents and expose human rights abuses and state violence in the Soviet Union meant a blow against the myth about the USSR as the most humane world system.⁵² The archival documents discovered in the former party archive in Kyiv (Ukraine) and recently declassified KGB and CIA documents confirm Kupchinsky's argument and fully expose the plans of Soviet authorities to disrupt these unifying activities.⁵³ This secret operation, it was thought, would distract the attention of the world community from the human rights issue in the USSR, and would disrupt the concerted effort of various ethnic communities abroad aimed at mobilizing a wider international community to help Soviet dissidents. At the very least, the operation would obscure Soviet nationalities policies that denied Ukrainians and Jews their right to develop their languages and cultures.

In October 1985, in its report to Ukraine's communist boss Volodymyr Shcherbytskyi, the KGB head Stepan Mukha assessed the effectiveness of this operation. He claimed that the active measures conducted within the framework of "Payback" were quite successful, suggesting that the operation to a large extent shaped the OSI's activities and public opinion in the United States, which were "expedient to us [the USSR; the KGB]."⁵⁴ Observing the achievements of "Payback," the KGB made a decision to employ similar operational tactics in Canada. The KGB encouraged the influential Canadian newspaper *Toronto Star* to publish articles about the crimes of the SS-Halychyna, and distributed a book in Canada entitled *We Accuse* (My obviniaiem)

⁵⁰ TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 25, spr. 1891, ark. 55; Bertelsen, "Political Affinities."

⁵¹ TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 25, spr. 1891, ark. 69-71; Bertelsen, "Political Affinities."

⁵² Roman Kupchinsky, "Nazi War Criminals: The Role of Soviet Disinformation," in *Ukraine During World War II: History and its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1986), 143; Myron Kuropas, "Ukrainian Americans and the Search for War Criminals," in *Ukraine During World War II: History and its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk (Edmonton: CIUS, 1986), 151; Vic Satzewich, *The Ukrainian Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 174.

⁵³ Ruffner, "From the End of the Cold War to the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act." See also an analysis of KGB objectives and practices in the 1970s-1980s by Herbert Romerstein, a former staff member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the U.S. House of Representatives and chief of the Office to Counter Soviet Disinformation and Active Measures at the United States Information Agency, "Divide and Conquer: The KGB Disinformation Campaign against Ukrainians and Jews," *Ukrainian Quarterly*, Fall 2004, available at *The Institute of World Politics*, https://www.iwp.edu/news_publications/detail/divide-and-conquer-the-kgb-disinformation-campaign-against-ukrainians-and-jews, accessed 7 May 2019; and Olga Bertelsen, "Political Affinities and Maneuvering of Soviet Political Elites: Heorhii Shevel and Ukraine's Ministry of Strange Affairs in the 1970s," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 47, no. 3 (2019): 394–411.

⁵⁴ HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, spr. 1230, ark. 169.

about how the Nazis used this Ukrainian formation (SS-Halychyna). In addition, the KGB sent materials about 59 collaborators and their war crimes to the Canadian authorities. “Public opinion that we shaped was quite convenient for us. It forced the Canadian government to establish a commission in February 1985 that began to gather information about war criminals and Nazi collaborators,” Mukha posited. He also informed Shcherbytskyi that these measures pushed Western OUN members to spend substantial funds to defend themselves and to prove that they were innocent. Mukha was convinced that these active measures not only distracted the “nationalists” from their anti-Soviet activities, but also left little soft money to continue their anti-Soviet propaganda. The concluding remarks of this report assured the party that the success of “Payback” dictated its reconceptualization and continuation, and that counterintelligence channels established by the KGB would facilitate the distribution of additional materials that would further compromise OUN leaders in the United States and Canada. It was decided that special attention would be paid to the distribution of films and books produced under the supervision of the KGB.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that information about Nazi collaborators and the lists of Ukrainians who participated in the Holocaust offered by the KGB to American and Canadian authorities included both those individuals who committed crimes against humanity and those who did not. Former OUN members, however, inevitably found their way into these lists. During and after the war, the KGB actively searched for true Nazi collaborators, located them, and brought them to justice. From a moral point of view, this was a noble goal and retribution for terrible atrocities. Among those people were, for instance, Ignat Danilchenko and Ivan Ivchenko, whose criminal files are available for scrutiny in the former KGB archives in Ukraine.⁵⁶ Yet punishment of war criminals, returnees to the Soviet Union, was not part of operation “Payback.” Rather it was designed as a covert operation, targeting former OUN members, “Ukrainian nationalists,” and anti-Soviet human rights activists.

Ultimately, the honorable goal of bringing war criminals to justice was overshadowed by other KGB considerations—to settle old scores with OUN and the Vlasov Army members, to take revenge on those Western activists who tried to destroy the USSR’s reputation and ruin the Soviet narrative of a just society with victorious communist achievements, and to break the alliance between the Western Jewish and Ukrainian communities. Demjanjuk’s enduring legal battles in the United States, Israel, and Germany divided Ukrainians and Jews and exacerbated their hostilities toward one another, signaling a triumph for the KGB.⁵⁷ Moreover, Demjanjuk’s sensational show trials reaffirmed the image of Ukrainians as antisemites, inviting the majority of Western commentators to offer their readers a truncated story of Demjanjuk’s odyssey, in which the results of his lawyers’ appeals in Germany and the forensic probes of the validity of the Trawniki ID card were thoroughly omitted. Jim McDonald’s account about how the OSI tried to obstruct justice and to prevent Demjanjuk’s defense from inviting witnesses to take part in the “mistrial of the century” was also forced into oblivion.

⁵⁵ HDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, spr. 1230, ark. 170.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Ignat Danilchenko’s criminal file in HDA SBU, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 67827; and Ivan Ivchenko’s criminal file in Kharkiv SBU archive, spr. 21728, vol. 1–2.

⁵⁷ Satzewich, *The Ukrainian Diaspora*, 173–74. For more details about the dialogue between American officials and the Ukrainian diaspora who were concerned about Soviet forgeries in Demjanjuk’s case, see Myron B. Kuropas, “Fighting Moscow From Afar: Ukrainian Americans and the Evil Empire,” in *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 60–61; Kuropas, *Ukrainian-American Citadel*, 567–74, 624–27. For more details about the Demjanjuk affair, see Sheftel, *The Demjanjuk Affair*.

For Moscow and the Soviet secret police, Ukrainian identity, Ukrainian culture, and Ukrainian language had always been associated with a threat to the Soviet regime and its stability and domination in Ukraine. These attitudes survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, and contemporary Europe-oriented Ukraine and its sovereignty, weakening Putin's effort to regain Russia's imperial status daily, is again under Moscow's attack and pressure. Interestingly, most recent publications about the covert operation "Payback" and the Demjanjuk affair that offer narratives that contradict Soviet versions have provoked anxiety in Moscow and in the West among Russian agents of influence, and this fact alone suggests that the war of narratives continues and the openness of the Ukrainian archives, especially the former KGB archives, further undermines the legitimacy and the vitality of the authoritarian regime in Russia. Tragically, Russian covert action and operation "Payback" achieved a great deal, provoking hostilities between the Jewish and Ukrainian diasporas, and there is a significant group of contemporary Western scholars who still subscribe to Soviet narratives.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Efraim Zuroff & Per Anders Rudling, "Response to Olga Bertelsen's Article," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 34, no. 2 (2021): 293–297; and Olga Bertelsen, "Author Response," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 34, no. 2 (2021): 298–299.