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RUSSIAN AND GERMAN AGENT INTELLIGENCE BEFORE AND DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR (1914–1918): AN ANALYSIS BASED ON K. K. ZVONAREV

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Annotation

This text examines the activities of Russian imperial agent intelligence in the period leading up to the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905. It focuses on the intelligence systems operated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police Department), and the Ministry of the Imperial Court. The document describes how "black cabinets" were used to intercept diplomatic correspondence, how foreign ciphers and codes were acquired, and how ambassadors, consuls, and personal adjutants were employed in gathering secret political, diplomatic, and military information.

Keywords: agent intelligence, black cabinet, diplomatic correspondence, ciphers and codes, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police Department, court intelligence, military counterintelligence, Russo–Japanese War, intelligence networks, secret agents, diplomatic couriers, Wilhelm II, economic intelligence.

Different government agencies' agent intelligence Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Paid agents – Ambassadors and consuls – Distribution of agent materials – Diplomatic couriers – The case of Count Ignatyev – "Black cabinets" – The activities of the Russian "black cabinet" – Purchasing ciphers and codes – Diplomatic conversations. Ministry of Internal Affairs. Police Department – Interest in revolutionary organizations – Cooperation with the police of bourgeois states – Military counterintelligence – Expenditures of the Police Department. Ministry of the Court. Court agents – System of work – Rewards not with money but with gifts and orders – Personal adjutants of the tsars – Their duties and appointments determined by Wilhelm II. Ministry of Finance, Trade and Industry – Issues of interest to them – Methods of obtaining information.

Although the main purpose of this work is to examine the agent intelligence directed by the military department, for a more complete understanding we will briefly mention other ministries that also conducted their own independent intelligence activities. In Tsarist Russia there was almost no ministry that did not engage in foreign agent intelligence or counterintelligence in one form or another. Even within the military ministry, despite the existence of a special intelligence body in the General Staff, several main departments conducted their own independent agent intelligence on narrowly specialized issues.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained its own paid secret agent network abroad and spent considerable sums on it. The task of this network was to obtain secret diplomatic and political information. At the center this work was directed by the Political Affairs Department of the ministry, while abroad it was carried out by ambassadors and consuls. They employed paid

secret agents to collect the necessary confidential information and documents. The collected information was organized by countries and issues and then published in the form of special confidential bulletins, which were distributed to central government offices and Russian diplomatic missions abroad. Each piece of information in these bulletins was accompanied by an indication of its official source, that is, the embassy or consulate from which it was obtained. Often the bulletins included decrypted telegrams from ambassadors and consuls without any changes. Sometimes such "strictly confidential" bulletins were sent to foreign addresses by ordinary mail, marked "strictly confidential – to be delivered personally" and sealed with wax. Naturally, the "black cabinets" of foreign states could easily examine the contents of these secret packages. Diplomatic couriers were used only in the most important cases, but even they were not immune to the possibility of revealing secret documents in exchange for bribes. The former tsarist censor S. Mayskiy described how poor the situation was in this regard with the following example: "…There is a well-known story about Count N. P. Ignatyev. While serving as ambassador in Turkey, he sent his reports in simple cheap envelopes, sometimes even keeping them among herring and soap, and had his servant write the address…" He did not address the letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to whom it was intended, but instead sent it to the name of the minister's porter or stoker at a private address. Such precautions, it seems, really protected his correspondence from being opened and inspected. According to the legend, Ignatyev resorted to such measures because, while serving earlier as a Russian military attaché in London, he once received a letter from St. Petersburg that bore the impressions of several postal stamps all on one side of the sheet inside, even though the stamps on the envelope itself had been placed on different sides. This clearly proved that his correspondence had been opened and examined in London or elsewhere in the British Isles. When Ignatyev reproached the British foreign minister for this, the latter gave his "word of honor" that there was no "black cabinet" in England. Yet, when confronted with the evidence of the stamps, he laughed and said: "So what did you expect me to say? Do you really think we are not interested in knowing what your minister writes to you and what you report to him about us?" At the same time, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself extracted many valuable materials from the correspondence of foreign ambassadors with their governments by means of the "black cabinet" subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Mayskiy explained how this operation was carried out:

"This diplomatic correspondence was received in St. Petersburg and sent abroad in special mail bags. It was usually encrypted with codes and sealed with one or several official seals. However, these precautions did not save it from inspection, because

1. the letters entered the black cabinet in their mail bags in full;
2. the secret section possessed perfect metal copies of the seals of all foreign embassies, consulates, missions, and even the seals of ministers and chancellors;
3. the ciphers of all countries were also available, so the correspondence could be read freely;
4. even the most secret dispatches, carried by special couriers in locked leather portfolios, were opened for money, photographed, and resealed without a trace."

Mayskiy further emphasized that almost all diplomatic couriers, attendants, and even the personal servants of ambassadors were bribed. They supplied the black cabinet not only with letters and telegrams, but sometimes even with cipher keys and codes. Many ambassadors trusted

their servants excessively and, as a result, suffered from their betrayal. Once, when the ambassador of a major power was replaced, the new ambassador was expected to arrive with an entirely new staff. The former ambassador did not trust his old servants, yet in a letter to his successor he strongly recommended one, in his words, “irreplaceable” person — namely his coachman-lackey. It was precisely this man who, for a small monthly payment, had been delivering from the embassy whatever information was desired. Ciphers and codes were obtained not only through embassy employees but were also purchased in Paris and Brussels, where certain individuals openly traded in foreign codes and encryption systems. The long quotation above confirms that the Tsarist Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted an active intelligence service not only abroad but also within Russia itself, using “black cabinets” and a special network of agents. Abroad, the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs relied not only on secret agents but also on meetings and conversations with various officials and public figures. For example, according to A. A. Polovtsev, before the war of 1904–1905 the Russian ambassador in Japan, Izvolsky, told him that he had informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Japan’s military preparations using information he had received mainly from the military agents of foreign powers, especially France. In addition, no other government agency could send its agents abroad or provide them with proper cover without the consent and assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although the ministry was not always willing to provide such help, under the existing rules it had the right, in return, to familiarize itself with the intelligence materials obtained by the agents of other departments. For this reason, in terms of access to information, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a more advantageous position than the other ministries.

Ministry of Internal Affairs — Police Department

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, more precisely its Police Department, also maintained its own independent agent network abroad. The main task of this network was to monitor Russian revolutionary organizations and individual revolutionaries operating in foreign countries. The countries where Russian political émigrés most often sought refuge were filled with agents of the Police Department. These agents worked almost openly and were well known to the local authorities. The Police Department proposed to conclude official agreements with certain foreign governments for a joint struggle against revolutionary movements, but Germany did not support these initiatives. Nevertheless, the Russian police entered into secret arrangements with the German police and received their assistance in pursuing Russian political émigrés. This cooperation was exposed during a Social Democratic inquiry in the German Reichstag on January 19, 1904. Until 1911, the Police Department also handled military counterintelligence, although this sphere was poorly developed. The main emphasis was placed on bribing employees of foreign embassies. The results of this military counterintelligence activity were so weak and expensive that, after long disputes, the General Staff took control of military counterintelligence in 1911. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, as mentioned above, also controlled the “black cabinet,” which was located in the main post office. A. V. Bogdanovich gives the following example to illustrate how the Police Department spent the funds allocated for its extensive intelligence activities:

“Galkin said that Durnovo of the police, over a period of five years, sent his mistresses to Paris as secret police agents, provided them with 5,000 rubles for travel expenses, and then, doubting their loyalty, dispatched real detectives after them.

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