

President Urho Kekkonen of Finland and the KGB

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A major post-Cold War history debate in Finland has been over the role of President Urho Kekkonen and his relations with the Soviet Union, in particular with the Soviet foreign intelligence. No surprise to anybody, variance of interpretations has been wide, fuelled by scarcity of sources on the most sensitive aspects, by the unavoidable ambiguity of an issue like the intelligence, and even by political leanings.¹ As things stand now, even a preliminary assessment of available evidence – viewed from a distance – might prove useful.

The Soviet Union regularly tried to build back-channel contacts and confidential informal links with the Western powers. On the Soviet side, these contacts were usually conducted by intelligence officers, as were those to Robert Kennedy on the eve of the Cuban missile crisis,² and to Chancellor Willy Brandt during his new German *Ostpolitik*.³ By far the

1 A good introduction to Finnish studies on Kekkonen in J. Lavery, 'All of the President's Historians: The Debate over Urho Kekkonen', *Scandinavian Studies* 75 (2003: 3). See also his *The History of Finland*. Westport: Greenwood Press 2006, and the analysis of D. Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland*. Cambridge University Press 2006.

2 An account by G. Bolshakov, 'The Hot Line', in *New Times* (Moscow), 1989, nos. 4-6; C. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and American Presidency from Washington to Bush*. London: HarperCollins 1995, 278–80. The best known exception is the back channel to Kissinger, which was not conducted by an intelligence officer, but by Ambassador Dobrynin.

3 W. Keworkow, *Der geheime Kanal*. Berlin: Rowohlt 1995.

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longest relationship of this kind was established with Kekkonen, whose contacts were keenly cultivated by both sides from 1944 right up to his resignation in 1981.

On Kekkonen's relationship with the KGB there is only a thin sample of Soviet documents, complemented by memoirs, the most informative of which are by the long-time Helsinki *resident* Viktor Vladimirov, published only in Finnish.⁴ The Finnish documentation is more extensive now after President Kekkonen's diaries were published in four volumes.⁵ Kekkonen recorded his hundreds of conversations with KGB representatives; at first shyly, calling his interlocutors a "Mr. X" or a "Mr. Zh.", but then unblushingly by their real names. The diaries were not written for later publication, but for working purposes, to remember who said what and when. Thus the main defect of the entries is brevity, abridgment to barest essentials. During his numerous visits to the Soviet Union, Kekkonen did not produce any entries; he was not so stupid as to take a diary along.⁶

FINLAND AS A TARGET

According to a Soviet intelligence officer, Finland was a kind of great power as far as intelligence was concerned.⁷ Finland became a major intelligence target for the Soviets right after the Winter War (1939–40), because Stalin's decision to attack Finland as well as the one to

4 V. Vladimirov, *Näin se oli...* Helsinki: Otava 1993. Memoirs by other high KGB officers (A. Akulov, F. Karasev, E. Sinitsyn) are much more tight-lipped and their quality is lower. Only the posthumous (and confused) memoirs of Sinitsyn have also been published in Russian.

5 *Urho Kekkosen päiväkirjat*, ed. by J. Suomi, vols. 1–4. Helsinki: Otava 2001–04. The diaries cover the period from 1958 to 1981. The Finnish security police archives are a first-rate source for other politicians' contacts with the KGB. However, the security police considered it prudent not to produce written reports on the President's contacts, despite the fact that they were noticed.

6 On some short trips, there are entries, probably written after returning home.

7 This was said to the author by Albert Akulov, who was a prominent KGB political line officer in Helsinki. Of course, it is an exaggeration, but not totally baseless.

make peace had been based on fatally faulty intelligence,⁸ and he was determined never again to repeat the catastrophe. By mid-1940, the number of Soviet intelligence officers in Finland was second only to that in the United States; even Germany hosted fewer.⁹ By May 1941, NKGB resident Elisei Sinitsyn was able to procure first-rate information from government sources, including the fact of the imminent German attack and the Finnish participation in it.¹⁰

As soon as peace was again in sight, the Soviets focused on high-level political contacts. In February 1944 in Stockholm, Soviet intelligence established contact with Eero A. Wuori, the head of the Finnish trade unions, who described the basic anti-Nazi stance of Marshal Mannerheim to a charming female journalist, who happened to be working for Soviet intelligence.¹¹ After the armistice in September 1944, this effort was revived in Helsinki by Sinitsyn, who again showed up, now as a political counsellor in the Soviet Control Commission. Among the first to call was Urho Kekkonen, 44, a fast rising Agrarian politician.¹²

8 K. Rentola, "Sovjetisk etterretning og Stalins beslutning om krig og fred med Finland, 1939-1940", in *Motstrøms: Olav Riste og norsk internasjonal historieskrivning*, ed. by S. Holtmark, H. Pharo & R. Tamnes. Oslo: Cappelen 2003, 188–17. The article is based on NKVD foreign intelligence documents. For Stalin admitting the failure in the April 1940 post mortem session, see A. O. Chubaryan & H. Shukman (eds.), *Stalin and the Soviet-Finnish War 1939–1940*. London: Cass 2002, 196.

9 Introduction by O. I. Nazhestkin in *Ocherki istorii rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki*, vol. 3 (1933–1941), ed. by E. M. Primakov et al. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya 1997, 17–8, quoting a report by the head of foreign intelligence P. M. Fitin. In the US, there were 18 officers, in Finland 17, in Germany 13.

10 NKGB reports from Helsinki, 4 Jun 1941; 10 Jun 1941; 13 Jun 1941, in *Sekrety Gitlera na stole u Stalina: Razvedka i kontrrazvedka o podgotovke germanskoi aggressii protiv SSSR. Mart-ijun' 1941 g. Dokumenty iz Tsentralnogo arkhiva FSB Rossii*, ed. by V. K. Vinogradov et al. Moscow 1995, 140, 151–3, 157.

11 Venona decrypts, Razin to Fitin, Feb 1944. Wuori was mentioned as 'Tsilindr' in these telegrams. On the female agent 'Klara' (Gusti Stridsberg), see W. Agrell, *Venona: Spåren från ett underrättelsekrig*. Stockholm: Historiska Media 2003, 302–28.

12 In 1943–44, Kekkonen developed a contact with the American intelligence in Stockholm (Vilho Tikander of OSS), but he does not seem to have had contacts with the Soviets (or the British) before the armistice.

Since Finland avoided occupation, instead of directly imposing their will, the Soviets had to find ways of influencing those in power in Helsinki. As for the Finns, they remained in the Soviet sphere of interests, a fact acknowledged by the Western allies, and the leaders of the country had to adapt to this. As usual in rapidly changing situations, first something is done, and the theory justifying the action would be formulated only afterwards. As for the Agrarian contacts with the Soviet intelligence, Kaarlo Hillilä (Minister of the Interior, 1944 to 1945) wrote later that it was vital to prevent the strong Finnish Communist Party from having exclusive access to the Soviets. It was necessary to deal directly with the Soviets on as high a level as possible, so the Communists could not 'fake out Russian support even when that did not exist at the moment, and so obtain positions otherwise out of reach for them.'¹³

Stalin never believed what was said to him above the table; he wanted to know what the other side was really up to. The Finns adapted to this. Even old President Paasikivi understood the necessity of confidential contacts, but would not deal personally with intelligence officers, not wanting to touch 'an ugly fish', as he said.¹⁴ Instead, he relied on middlemen and messengers, various left wing social democratic politicians,¹⁵ and Kekkonen.

Kekkonen was qualified for this. In the 1920s, he had served as an officer in the Finnish security police, and then prepared his doctor of law dissertation on *agent provocateur*, a police agent inside revolutionary ranks. On his study trips to Vienna and to Berlin he discovered that the learned doctors in the security police of these countries 'did not even know as much as I know', as he complained to his wife.¹⁶ He saw Moscow for the first time as a counter intelligence officer, checking out

13 National Archives of Finland (KA), Paasikivi papers V: 35, Memorandum by Kaarlo Hillilä, 31 Oct. 1950, attached in Kekkonen to Paasikivi, 11 Dec 1950.

14 Paasikivi's diary, 15 Jun. 1946, *J.K. Paasikiven päiväkirjat 1945–1956*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Y. Blomstedt & M. Klinge. Helsinki: WSOY 1985–86.

15 The most important ones were Mauno Pekkala (prime minister, 1946–48), Reinhold Svento (2nd Foreign Minister) and Eero A. Wuori (chairman of the trade unions, then minister, in 1945 ambassador to London). In Sinitsyn's memoirs, they are mentioned under code names, and can be identified on the basis of Paasikivi's diary entries on their discussions with the Soviets.

16 Kekkonen to his wife Sylvi, 25 Jun. 1928. Kekkonen dropped this theme and wrote his dissertation on local elections law.

listening devices and security lapses in the Finnish mission. Although his second visit in 1945 was in a friendship delegation, even then the attendant Soviet lady watcher suspected that the Finnish Minister of Justice, Mr. Kekkonen, was a spy. He was so curious, always asking pertinent questions and very sensitive ones at that; at the *kolkhoz* he wanted to know which of the men had fought on the Finnish front and how many had fallen, and then he wanted to see the house of the poorest *kolkhoznik*. On top of it all, he was capable of assessing the exact amount of spectators in a football match in Moscow.¹⁷

Despite his background, Kekkonen did not immediately grasp every peculiarity of his new friends, as can be seen from the letter in which he described to his wife how Sinitsyn in June 1945 transferred him to his successor, V. F. Razin.

Elisei is leaving for good; last Friday the Finnish-Soviet Friendship Society threw a farewell dinner for him. There, he asked me to dinner on Sunday. I believed a good many people would attend, but there were only him, the newly arrived Razin, and me. When the restaurant ran short of brandy, we came to our home, where I invited [Kustaa Vilkuna], and he brought along [a female artist] and we had a cozy night. Razin speaks good German. I think that through Razin I can take care of my business.¹⁸

This was a routine transfer meeting of a Soviet intelligence contact, a pattern Kekkonen did not fully understand at that time. But the full nature of these new contacts was not easy to grasp for Razin either. A seasoned intelligence officer, he tried to run agents according to official rules, and (if we can believe Sinitsyn's memoirs) at his first meeting with Kustaa Vilkuna, he thrust him a brown envelope stuffed with money. Sinitsyn had to go to great pains to explain the 'misunderstanding' to an offended Vilkuna, who was an academic scholar and a personal intelligence hand for Kekkonen. And when Kekkonen put out serious political feelers as if joking, as he always did with the Russians ('I'll probably take over the

17 Russian Foreign Policy Archives (AVP RF), fond 012, opis 6, papka 85, delo 273, ll. 11-13v, Report by T.Yu. Solovieva, official of the Soviet society for cultural contacts (VOKS), 12 Oct. 1945. Kekkonen was a sports union leader, so the number of spectators was routine for him.

18 Kekkonen to his wife Sylvi, 19 Jun. 1945.

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Ministry of Interior in the next government'), Razin was not at all on the same wave length, but responded according to the official line only: 'The man there should enjoy the trust of the working class' etc.¹⁹

During Razin's tenure, 1945 to 1947, Moscow hoped that Finland would also follow the path to a people's democracy. Accordingly, their intelligence activities concentrated on the communist control of the security police (Valpo). When it turned out that Finland had a path of its own, the significance of confidential contacts with non-communist politicians rose again, and a pure national force like Kekkonen's party, the Agrarians, was much less suspected by the Soviets than the social democrats, who were connected to an international movement.

THE NATURE OF THE BACK CHANNEL

Some characteristics of this relationship became evident early on.

First, the backdoor channel was useful in vital issues, as the Mutual Assistance Treaty of 1948. Before and during the negotiations, Kekkonen was in touch with Mikhail Kotov and others, explaining the utter limit the Finns could accept, and painting in dark colours the threat of anti-Soviet forces coming into power in Helsinki if these reasonable needs would not be met by the Soviets. This and the information obtained from other sources (in particular, the Finnish generals' opinion that in a possible world war Finland would need to take the Soviet side²⁰) made it possible for Stalin to accept a lesser treaty than the Hungarian and Rumanian ones he first set as models. From the Finnish point of view, the most important feature of the channel was where it led to: right to the top in the Kremlin, and with reasonable speed. This function was underlined by the fact that

19 Paasikivi's diary, 14 Feb. 1947.

20 The information on generals' opinions was delivered by the Minister of Interior Yrjö Leino (a communist) or by Finland's ambassador to Moscow, Cay Sundström. Kekkonen was careful not to divulge military secrets. In 1954, when the KGB needed to know what the Finns would do in case of a Soviet attack on northern Norway in a major war, Kekkonen did not say anything himself, but his close female friend said to the KGB that Finland would not put up any resistance in such case. AVP RF, fond 0135, opis 38 (papka 204), d. 6, pp. 177-8, Memo of a conversation between Anne-Marie Snellman and Yu. V. Bakey, on 6 and 7 May 1954.

discussions between state leaders were usually interpreted by the KGB Helsinki resident and not by professional interpreters.

The 1948 pattern was to repeat itself in every major treaty concerning the position of Finland. In particular, when Finland negotiated its Western economic integration treaties, first with the EFTA and later with the EEC, the Soviet 'yes' was obtained through patient background discussions with the KGB representatives. In issues like these, the KGB tended to ignore other Soviet interests not vital from their particular point of view, so that an ambassador complained in his memoirs how the foreign ministry often prepared complicated negotiation strategies only to find out that the Finns had already agreed the main issue secretly through the KGB, thereby getting benefits they would never have been able to pull from diplomatic or foreign trade bureaucracies.²¹

Second, the back channel tended to reduce communist influence in Finnish political life. The Communist Party, with a fifth of the popular vote, was a formidable force, and one of Kekkonen's main preoccupations in his dealings with the Soviets was to use the contact to domesticate the communists.²² In 1954, for instance, the Soviets compelled Finnish communists to drop their resistance to military appropriations in the Finnish budget.²³

Third, it is not simple to establish, which side dominated. The Soviet Union was a superpower, Finland a small neighbour, and the KGB officers were trained to see their contacts as agents and as objects or instruments in their operations. But there was more to it than that. In 1944, Kekkonen and Vilkuna were in their mid-40s, 10 to 15 years older than Sinitsyn and Kotov, and with experience in counter-intelligence, government, and academic life. Finland was their home turf and the contact language was Finnish. According to Sinitsyn's memoirs, his meetings with Vilkuna always commenced with alternating *Kalevala* verses: the folklore professor tortured a Smolensk country boy. Every

21 J. Derjabin, *Omalla nimellä*. Helsinki: Otava 1997.

22 This was noted and complained by the Foreign Ministry in Moscow: 'Kekkonen often uses his contacts with Soviet representatives for various political manoeuvres.' AVP RF, f. 0135, op. 38 (papka 204), d. 8, pp. 16-27, 'K obstanovke v Finlyandii', 24 Jun. 1954, a memo prepared by A. Aleksandrov and I. Marchuk, signed by section chief G. F. Pushkin.

23 Details in K. Rentola, *Niin kylmää että polttaa: Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kremlin 1947-1958*. Helsinki: Otava 1997.

issue at hand always received full attention from the Finns, who knew all details, but the Soviet leaders in Moscow could devote only a fraction of their attention to Finland, and they mainly wanted to hear that everything was proceeding as it should. In case of conflicts, the KGB in Helsinki sometimes had incentives to smooth out *chukhna* peculiarities²⁴, because in case of escalation, they would have to answer to embarrassing questions about their earlier reports. Of course, there were limits to this. With time passing and experience accumulating, the roles were reversed, not with Kekkonen so much as with the next generation, such as when Kotov in the 1970s dealt with ambitious politicians thirty years his junior, like Paavo Väyrynen.

Finally, the perennial question: what is in it for me? In addition to high-level issues, the KGB always tried to collect small commissions, their pounds of flesh, loose change, as it was described by Kissinger. Even from Khomeini in 1979, the Moscow headquarters wanted something specific, a gesture.²⁵ An introduction, a juicy piece of news, prevention of something to be published (or leak of another item), and most desired of all, a person wanted by Soviet security.²⁶ In April 1950, when Kekkonen was appointed prime minister for the first time, his government decided to hand over two Estonian anti-Soviet guerrillas, who eight months earlier had succeeded in escaping to Finland. One was actually delivered.²⁷ Probably with this in mind, the following summer Kekkonen told the Agrarian party congress: 'I am affected neither by

24 'Chukhna' is a pejorative Russian word for a Finn, in particular in the St. Petersburg area. Mikoyan had a fine collection of chukhna jokes he said he first heard from Sergei Kirov.

25 V. Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB: Myth and Reality*. London: André Deutsch 1990, 271.

26 'Whatever is given to the KGB must be done secretly, deeply, and with very strong precautions', explained 'General Marov' to writer Norman Mailer; see his *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery*. New York: Random House 1995, 405.

27 This man, Artur Lööke, was condemned to death in Tallinn, as can be seen in the Estonian KGB archives. The other one, Herman Treial, was too sick to transfer; an unsuccessful escape attempt made him an international celebrity and drew e.g. Eleanor Roosevelt's appeal, but soon after he died in a Helsinki hospital. The documents in the case file (12 L Treial & Lööke) in the Foreign Ministry Archives and personal file no. 11461 in the Security Police Archives.

hate nor by love, when what is at stake is political action for the best of the country.²⁸ In February 1956, five days before the electoral council was to vote on the next President of the Republic, the Kekkonen camp and the KGB busy making deals, an illegal Soviet intelligence officer who had sat in a Finnish prison almost two years was suddenly pardoned and ejected over the eastern border.²⁹ Of course, there is no conclusive proof of a connection between this pardon and the presidential deals.

Kekkonen's special slice was career promotion. The main prize was reaped in the 1956 presidential elections. To stop any anti-Soviet candidate, the Soviets first wanted President J. K. Paasikivi to continue, despite his advanced age (85 years); this was the official Soviet line as late as five days before the crucial electors' meeting.³⁰ Then, however, Kekkonen and Vilkuna sold their KGB contacts (Kotov and Vladimirov) the idea that Kekkonen could also obtain a majority if the communists were given detailed orders on how to use their votes and if some additional measures were taken. Khrushchev, who liked risky ventures, gave his nod on a dramatic day, when he delivered his secret speech to the 20th CPSU Congress. So, the Soviets abandoned Paasikivi, the communists were given orders (the party leaders needed to be shown the actual Moscow cipher telegram to turn their heads), and Kekkonen was elected by the closest margin possible.³¹ Had it failed, the two KGB officers would

28 That remained his credo: 'I do not feel any feelings in this office.' Kekkonen's diary 19 Dec 1963.

29 His name was K. A. F. Holmström, by birth a Swede; he had been watching northern Norwegian defence facilities. The pardon was signed by the Police Superintendent (an Agrarian close to Kekkonen) during a leave of the social democratic Minister of Interior. The decision came as a surprise to the security police, who were planning to let the man slip into Sweden. Documents in his personal file no. 11524, Archives of the Security Police of Finland.

30 A memorandum for the Moscow top leadership on the presidential elections in Finland, 10 Feb. 1956, by Ivan Tugarinov, deputy chief, KI pri MID, AVP RF, f. 0135, op. 40, papka 215, d. 34, ll. 6-13. The 'small KI', a rump from the intelligence conglomerate KI, remained in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an analytical centre. See V. Zubok, 'Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The "Small" Committee of Information, 1952-53', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 19 (1995: 3).

31 A synthesis by T. Polvinen in his *J.K. Paasikivi: Valtiomiehen elämäntyö 5, 1948-1956*. Helsinki: WSOY 2003.

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have found themselves far away, but as winners they were fast on their way towards the rank of general. In 1957, at 41, Kotov was promoted to deputy chief of foreign intelligence in charge of western Europe.³²

PRESIDENT AND REZIDENT

A contradictory situation developed after 1956. On one hand, Kekkonen was a pro-Soviet politician with close contacts to the KGB, and these were continued. In 1958, he recorded eleven private discussions with the KGB rezident, and in addition there were phone calls, meetings with others present, and the rezident's private meetings with Kekkonen's closest allies. On the other hand, he was now the head of a state which had agencies that practised counter intelligence operations against the very same KGB. Tracking a high KGB officer, Finnish security police officials sometimes saw that the Finn the *chekist* was going to meet was the President of the Republic himself.³³

The KGB tried to find ways to use this to their advantage. Immediately after the 1956 elections, Vilkuna travelled to Moscow to meet a senior Soviet foreign intelligence official. 'The guy' wanted something in return for KGB support: the Finnish Ministry of Interior should be taken over by the Agrarian party, 'to secure the security police and its surroundings keep appropriately to the right line instead of the present bias. Otherwise not possible to sleep in peace. [This is] no interference in Finnish internal affairs, but the actions of the other side [the West] must also be under decent control.'³⁴

'The guy' asked for a lot. Kekkonen was able to deliver only after the further shock of the 'Night frost' crisis of 1958.³⁵ After that, the

32 Reports signed by him in the appendix in *Ocherki istorii rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki, vol. 5, 1945–1965*. Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya 2003, 690–97.

33 To avoid attention, Kekkonen sometimes met the KGB resident in the house of his son or elsewhere.

34 Kekkonen Archives, 1/25, Vilkuna to Kekkonen, 25 Feb. 1956. 'The guy' was higher than the KGB men in Finland, possibly A. M. Sakharovski, who was responsible for Scandinavia and was promoted foreign intelligence chief in May 1956.

35 Preparing for that crisis, the KGB (Vladimirov) made a harsh attack against

Ministry of the Interior was headed by Agrarians for eight years³⁶, and the security police controlled by the president. But this did not mean cessation of Finnish counter-intelligence activities. The change consisted of the fact that from that point on, everything was done quietly, in the dark. Emphasis was put on preventive action; espionage cases³⁷ were usually not brought to court, double agents were no longer used to trap or provoke the KGB,³⁸ no KGB diplomat was declared *persona non grata*. Many were quietly asked to leave, sometimes by the president himself, when he was seeing his good friend, the local KGB chief. When the president met the resident, between smiles and assertions of trust, crude raw truths were said, as if joking, and somewhere in the shadows their subordinates quietly clashed, and both knew that this was the case. The most famous *non grata* case was that of a high-level political line officer, Albert Akulov, who was asked to leave in 1973, when he not only tried to recruit Finns, but also spied on the Japanese embassy. Reportedly, Kekkonen said that this man would not be seen in Finland as long as he was the President of the Republic. The Soviets took this literally.

Kekkonen knew which agency his Soviet friends served; he *wanted* the guys sitting as close to the Devil's right hand as possible. But he was kept in the dark about the full extent of the activities of his friends. He did not ask, not liking being lied to.³⁹ His best contact Mikhail Kotov, who

the Finnish security police, wanting Kekkonen take action to set a limit to their activities. Kekkonen Archives, Karjalainen file, Ahti Karjalainen to Kekkonen, 13 Jun. and 24 Jun. 1958.

36 In 1966, when the Agrarians finally had to give the Ministry of Interior to the Social Democrats, police issues were transferred to the minister of defence, who was an Agrarian.

37 In some trials since 1953, even Russian intelligence officers caught on illegal reconnaissance missions in Finland had been condemned to prison.

38 In 1958, the Finnish security police was, after four years of action, preparing to reap the benefits of a complicated double agent operation, which was planned to lead into expulsions of first-rate KGB diplomats (e.g. Zhenikhov and Vladimirov). The plan was quietly dropped. Supo Archives, personal file no. 11572; the file on Soviet espionage, no. XXIII E 1 – 26.

39 Immediately after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Kekkonen was most upset and offended by the fact that the Soviets had blatantly lied to an old customer like himself right to his face. Kekkonen's diary, 22 and 23 Aug. 1968.

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used to show up in Helsinki to explain some unexcepted turns of events,⁴⁰ was not available after the occupation of Czechoslovakia. He was busy in Prague as the chief KGB foreign intelligence representative there. Back in Helsinki in 1971, he did not mention this *komandirovka* to Kekkonen. Nor did V. M. Vladimirov say, showing up again in 1970, where had he been meanwhile. This British style gentleman had been the head of the KGB department responsible for sabotage, assassinations and the like. Probably he told Kekkonen as much as he wrote in his memoirs: in the meantime, he had been involved in ‘some issues in Soviet-Chinese and Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.’

Most of the prominent Helsinki KGB hands worked almost their whole career in Finnish affairs. Many were involved with Finland for more than thirty years. The language effectively chained an officer to Helsinki. Foreign intelligence insiders believed that members of their ‘Finnish mafia’ looked like Finns, dressed like Finns, behaved like Finns. They were reticent, phlegmatic, and slow, liked the sauna, skiing, hard drinking and even weather ‘almost as their own.’⁴¹ On some occasions it is plausible that KGB officers could see where the situation would lead to sooner and better than their superiors in the Kremlin. When Finland’s free trade agreement with the EEC was negotiated, Kotov said to Kekkonen that he ‘disagrees with the Soviet leadership’ and thinks that the official (strictly negative) Soviet line was faulty. He said he believed that in the end Moscow would allow the Finns to sign up with Brussels.⁴²

WESTERN ATTITUDES

Western intelligence knew about the close relations between Kekkonen and the KGB. The most critical moment came after 15 December 1961, when KGB major Anatoli Golitsyn (in Finland Klimov) defected from Helsinki to the CIA. The Soviets told Kekkonen that Golitsyn was ‘a very

40 E.g. the defection of Golitsyn, the assassination of Kennedy, the dismissal of Khrushchev, the foreign political turn of the SDP right wing leader Leskinen.

41 As described by Gordievsky in O. Gordievsky and I. Rogatchi, *Sokea peili: Ihmisiä vallan ja vakoilun puristuksessa*. Helsinki: WSOY 1997, 166.

42 Kekkonen’s diary, 3 Jan. 1973.

low-level official and knew almost nothing',⁴³ having served in Helsinki only for a short period and against the main enemy, not in Finnish affairs. But it turned out that he had picked up more than gossip about KGB political operations. He told the Americans about the prevalence of the political field in the Helsinki KGB operations, and gave several names and code names for Soviet 'agents of influence' in Finnish political life, and even a list of restaurants used for meetings.⁴⁴

Americans discussed the revelations with Kekkonen himself. The president 'received the information calmly, and with keen interest, and did not contest it'. He 'also mentioned that some people, because of the positions held by them, were required to be in regular contacts with the Soviets and might give an impression they were being used.' Thanking the Americans for the information, the president said that he would now be able to warn the next prime minister to be careful when appointing new Cabinet ministers.⁴⁵

Despite this last rather comical remark and his outward calm, Kekkonen was nervous. As a cautionary measure, for two years he did not meet directly with the new KGB resident, Yuri Voronin.⁴⁶ It seems,

43 Kekkonen's diary, 13 Jul. 1963. The information had been given at some point earlier, but Kekkonen recalled it here in connection with the West German Felfe case.

44 According to the list received by Finnish military intelligence, Eero A. Wuori was 'Moses', the splinter social democratic leader Aarre Simonen was 'Sika' (Swine), but Kustaa Vilkuna was under a neutral name 'Ville'. P. Salminen, *Puolueettomuuden nimeen*. Helsinki: Suomen mies 1995, 146, 189. In the Supo Archives, file amp XV U 1 b, there is a list of 28 KGB and GRU officers, written down by and by the Finnish security police chief Armas Alhava, no title, no signature, no date, but late 1962.

45 A memo from the US Government to the Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander, given on 20 Jan 1962, published as an appendix in J. Widén, *Notkrisen och dess efterspel: USA:s relationer med Sverige under en av kalla krigets höjdpunkter, oktober 1961-mars 1962*. Stockholm: Forskningsprogrammet Sverige under kalla kriget 2004.

46 In Kekkonen's diaries, no private meetings with Voronin are recorded, except one, on 5 Apr. 1964. Of course, there could have been meetings not recorded by him, but this seems improbable, because he eagerly recorded (and directed) meetings with Voronin by others close to him, as Ahti Karjalainen or Arvo Korsimo (19 Jan. 1963, 19 Mar. 1963, 8 Nov. 1963 and several others). During this period, Kotov frequently visited Helsinki to consult Kekkonen in case of important

however, that the main Western conclusion drawn from Golitsyn's revelations was that the West must take a more positive and constructive attitude to Kekkonen to avoid pushing him completely to the Soviet side. The Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander was urged by the US to pay more attention (in a positive sense) to Kekkonen. This he did.

In August 1963, Rex Bosley of the British intelligence showed up in Helsinki to talk with Kekkonen about the revelations. He said that on Golitsyn's list of top Finns 'in Soviet service' were the two leaders of the splinter social democratic party (Emil Skog and Aarre Simonen), the commander of the Helsinki City Police (Erik Gabrielsson), and last but not least, Urho Kekkonen himself. 'Was there really "in Soviet service"?' Kekkonen asked. 'That's what he said', Bosley responded, but then explained that the West considered the president as a mysterious political figure, close to Khrushchev, but not 'in service'. Kekkonen was relieved. In his diary he pondered the proper way to get it known in Moscow that he was considered mysterious, 'even suspected' by the West. This information 'would strengthen my position in the Soviet Union.'⁴⁷

Here, Kekkonen reaped the fruit of sharing of his assessments of Soviet leaders with Western intelligence circles. His most important Western contact was Reginald 'Rex' Bosley, whom he for an unknown reason called 'Art Dealer' (Taulukauppia).⁴⁸ Bosley, who had served in Finland in the 1940s, showed up in 1957 to say that there was a group in the British government willing to keep up unofficial contacts with the Finnish president.⁴⁹ By the mid-60s, Bosley had visited Kekkonen

developments. Voronin's predecessor V. V. Zhenikhov, whom Kekkonen met frequently, lost his job because of the defection of his subordinate.

⁴⁷ Kekkonen's diary, 29 Aug. 1963. Bosley also told about the case of Penkovsky, 'the biggest spy that can be imagined'. Due to him, the West saw that the Soviet Union is not as strong as it was trying to make others believe. The damage he did to the Soviets was irreparable. Years later, Bosley said that Golitsyn had claimed that Kekkonen was 'a spy hired by them', but the SIS had rejected the accusation 'by saying that UKK [Kekkonen] is their spy.' Kekkonen's diary, 5 Nov. 1975.

⁴⁸ Information about the nickname given to the author by Gen. Urpo Levo, who was the president's aide-de-camp and organized many of his clandestine meetings.

⁴⁹ J. Suomi, *Kriisien aika: Urho Kekkonen 1956–1962*. Helsinki: Otava 1992, 108.

more than 20 times.⁵⁰ In the US archives there is a memo on a frank and detailed discussion between Kekkonen and ‘a British friend’ at the height of the Note Crisis in 1961.⁵¹

If we can infer from topics discussed, the Swedish industrialist Marcus Wallenberg might have served as Kekkonen’s intelligence channel to some circles in the West.⁵²

THE BREZHNEV PERIOD

Three weeks after Khrushchev’s fall, the new Soviet leadership restored the direct KGB contact with Kekkonen. The new resident in Helsinki, V. S. Stepanov, was of Karelian (or Finnish) origin and had a perfect command of language. Immediately on arrival he wanted to meet in the presidential sauna, to declare that he, unlike the ambassador, had direct contact with Brezhnev. ‘Has he?’ Kekkonen pondered, and had his close ally ask Albert Akulov of the KGB political line if this was really the case. Envious of his new boss, Akulov declared that it was *he* who had the direct link to Brezhnev and *not* Stepanov, ‘at least not yet’.⁵³ This incident shows a new feature: the Soviets, including KGB officers, slandered each other and even criticized their top leaders. Early on, after the Cuban missile crisis, Kotov had said that ‘some people in the USSR, he among them, had considered Khrushchev’s policy towards the US too soft. But the decision had to be made quickly and the other line would probably have led to the occupation of Cuba [by the US].’⁵⁴ When Brezhnev came

50 Kekkonen’s diary, 9 Jul. 1965. On this visit, Bosley said that Shelepin would take over the Soviet leadership.

51 National Archives (US), Record Group 84, Box 7, folder 320, Finland-USSR 1959–1961, Memo on a discussion between Kekkonen and a friend on 6 Nov. 1961, 8 Nov. 1961, published by J. Aunesluoma in Finnish in *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, vol. 100 (2002: 2). Nothing has so far turned up in the British archives.

52 When the KGB Helsinki resident gave Kekkonen a rather extensive account of Soviet leaders’ thinking on the war in Vietnam, the next day Kekkonen told Wallenberg about it. Kekkonen’s diary, 27 and 28 Mar. 1965.

53 Kekkonen’s diary, 7 and 10 Nov. 1964.

54 Kekkonen’s diary, 9 Jan. 1963.

to power, the KGB channel produced a frank assessment about the new leader: 'That's a stupid guy.'⁵⁵ Kekkonen probably agreed.⁵⁶

Through the new *resident*, Kekkonen first tried to promote ideas developed during the Khrushchev era, such as the exchange of Finnish recognition of the German Democratic Republic for the return of the city of Vyborg (in Finnish, Viipuri) with surroundings, lost in the Second World War.⁵⁷ Initially, the KGB man was eager, but the new ideological climate in Moscow did not turn out to be favourable. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Kekkonen dropped the idea.

KGB efforts to influence Finnish political life were facilitated by the fact that, hoping for entrance into the government, traditional anti-Soviet parties were changing their line and beginning to strive for Soviet contacts, the Social Democrats from the mid-60s and then also the Conservatives. Kekkonen thus lost the argument that if the Russians did not deal with him, worse forces would take over in Finland. On the other hand, Soviet positions were weakened by electoral losses suffered by the traditional customer parties, the Agrarians and the Communists, and by currents inside these two parties which favoured distancing themselves from the Soviets. On the surface, all relevant forces took their oaths of loyalty to friendship and the 'Paasikivi-Kekkonen line', but deeper and hidden forces were fiercely competing with each other, and on both sides.

Around 1970, the Soviets were even afraid of 'losing' Finland. A silent crisis developed, when the CPSU International Department – backed by Suslov and, to an extent, Brezhnev – were trying to introduce a more distinct left-wing domination in Finnish political life after Kekkonen, who was believed to be retiring. Deputy head of the international department,

55 Kekkonen's diary, 17 Oct. 1964. Which one of the Soviets said this is not written down. The entry was written on the basis of the discussions Kekkonen's close ally Korsimo had in Moscow with the former Helsinki resident Zhenikhov about the reasons for Khrushchev's dismissal.

56 When British Prime Minister Harold Wilson suggested that Brezhnev would do as a secretary general for the Transport Workers' Union, whereas Kosygin could be an excellent chairman for the Imperial Chemical Industries, Kekkonen agreed, but did not offer further criticism of Brezhnev. Instead, he gave his thoughts on how this kind of a man had been able to come to power. The National Archives (UK), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 33/724, Record of conversation between Wilson and Kekkonen, 17 Jul. 1969.

57 Kekkonen's diary 19 Oct. and 16 Nov. 1965.

Aleksei Belyakov, was appointed ambassador to promote these ideas. The KGB, however, wanted to continue business as usual with Kekkonen and after him with his more docile pupil, Ahti Karjalainen.⁵⁸ Kekkonen and the KGB prevailed, the ambassador was pulled out after seven months in office.

During this crisis Kekkonen showed an additional feature in his dealings. Aware of the fact that the KGB would not trust his word only, Kekkonen wrote memorandums about what the president was believed to be thinking, and these were then given to the KGB by his personal intelligence chief, Professor Kustaa Vilkuna, who was a long-time regular agent in the KGB books.⁵⁹ So, the KGB obtained both the president's direct views and secret agent information about these, both of which had been carefully prepared by Kekkonen himself. In the agent reports, the Soviets were sometimes criticized rather sharply for their insufficient support for the president in his difficult task. The president was described to be very depressed because of the Soviets having let him down, 'completely alone (...) without the slightest help from any of yours.'⁶⁰ The brightest KGB chiefs in Helsinki possibly guessed that also this agent information originated from Kekkonen, but they could not afford to destroy a pattern certainly appreciated by the Centre. Of course, the KGB probably had also real (but weaker) agent sources around Kekkonen.

KGB purists accused the Helsinki political line of becoming a branch of diplomacy. Where were actual agents, meeting in secret, taking orders, doing as they were told to and getting paid for it?⁶¹ The Helsinki hands responded by inflating numbers and by recording contacts as agents,⁶² and

58 A detailed description and assessment of this crisis in K. Rentola, *Vallankumouksen aave: Vasemmisto, Kekkonen ja Beljakov 1970*. Helsinki: Otava 2005, part of which published as 'Der Vorschlag einer europäischen Konferenz für Sicherheit und die stille Krise zwischen Finnland und der Sowjetunion', in *Neutralität – Chance oder Chimäre? Konzepte des dritten Weges für Deutschland und die Welt 1945–1990*, Hrsg. D. Geppert u. U. Wengst. München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte 2005, 177–202

59 This kind of ploy is mentioned in Kekkonen's diary on 7 Dec. 1970.

60 Kekkonen Archives, Yearbook for 1971, P.M. on 1 Apr. 1971, no signature, Kekkonen's note: 'Vilkuna to Vladimirov'.

61 O. Kalugin, *Proshchai, Lubyanka!* Moskva: Olimp 1995, 225.

62 According to Gordievsky (1997, 124–6) the KGB political line in Helsinki in the 1970s had 33 actual agents, 33 confidential contacts, and 25 targets under

by trying to prove that operative conditions in Finland were extremely complicated and very difficult.⁶³ Operatives with experience of big powers ridiculed this: how come a tiny security police with a hundred officers could create difficult conditions? But the Helsinki hands did not bow down. On the contrary, V. M. Vladimirov proved 'scientifically' in his dissertation in the KGB Academy that in specific (and difficult) operative conditions it was necessary to shift emphasis from traditional agent operations to modern contact network, through which all necessary information could be obtained.⁶⁴

By the 1970s, the Brezhnev stagnation began to take its toll on KGB operations in Finland. Discipline was slackening, there were instances of corruption and various side efforts. In 1973, the former KGB resident to Helsinki, V. S. Stepanov, asked Kekkonen to propose to Brezhnev and Podgornyi that he, Stepanov, be appointed as Soviet ambassador to Helsinki.⁶⁵ After some hesitation, Kekkonen agreed, fearing that the arrogant Karelian might get his appointment even *without* his support. Kekkonen might have been tempted to play various Soviet interests and bureaucracies against each other in order to gain more latitude; he was aware of intense rivalry between Soviet actors, but that was a dangerous game and uncertainties were huge. In any case, Stepanov was appointed, but forced to resign from the KGB.⁶⁶ In Helsinki, his arrival made a mess of the KGB high level network and in particular of relations with Kekkonen. As ambassador and 'Vice President of Finland', as he liked to present himself, Stepanov was in charge of official relations, but he also

development. The total figure corresponds with the records of the Finnish security police, where the KGB political line officers in Helsinki in 1970 had 101 recorded contacts persons who were met more or less regularly. However, it seems absurd that 33 of these could have been agents in any meaningful sense.

63 Estonian State Archives (ERAF) library, KGB collection, Memo by Capt. A.P. Akulov, 'Agenturno-operativnoe obstanovki v Finlyandii: Obshchii obzor' (KGB copy, secret, no. 55), 1968.

64 Kalugin (1995, 225) says that Vladimirov's conclusion was strongly supported by Kryuchkov, new head of foreign intelligence from 1971.

65 V. Stepanov to Kekkonen, dated 20.9. but should be 20.11.1973, published in *Kirjeitä myllärille 1956–1981*, ed. by P. Lähteenkorva & J. Pekkarinen. Helsinki: Otava 2000, 369.

66 Kalugin, *Proshchai, Lubyanka!*, 224. The English translation does not include passages on Kekkonen.

wanted to control his old area of confidential contacts, despite the fact that the KGB was represented by a very senior officer, Mikhail Kotov. 'Kotov mildly criticized Stepanov', Kekkonen noted.⁶⁷ The two Soviets 'seem to be on bad terms. K. of course is jealous of S.'⁶⁸

After Kotov, the Helsinki residency was taken over for two years by a son-in-law to somebody high up, a completely incapable know-nothing, not even able to speak Finnish, Swedish or German, the three languages Kekkonen knew. The president did not even get his name right. 'Kotov's successor', he noted in his diaries.

CONCLUSIONS

Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn.

First, the information currents. By 1970, there could not be any significant political secrets in Finland for the Soviets. Discussing the fate of the presidency and the successor problem with Kotov, Kekkonen noted that the KGB resident 'knew everything, even things I did not know.'⁶⁹ In political terms, Finland was transparent to the Soviets and their network enabled them to influence matters heavily. Kekkonen for his part received every kind of Moscow rumour and unique information on Soviet leaders, their way of thinking, even hidden motives,⁷⁰ and their pecking order, although even he was often surprised and disappointed by their actions.

Second, it is possible that Soviet intelligence operations in other areas, such as traditional military intelligence, were a bit neglected in Finland.

67 Kekkonen's diary, 15 Jul. 1975.

68 Kekkonen's diary, 25 Nov. 1975.

69 Kekkonen's diary, 23 Oct. 1972. Earlier, Kotov had a more traditional boast that 'we know better than you, what the people of Finland are thinking and talking about in railway carriages, restaurants, officers' clubs....' Kekkonen's diary, 25 Nov. 1963.

70 On the Soviet leaders' concerns inside the Socialist camp, Stepanov said that the situation in Poland was becoming better and Gomulka's position was strengthening, whereas in Czechoslovakia the new leadership was losing control. 'In both countries, the Zionists are guilty.' Kekkonen's diary, 6 Apr. 1968.

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Not that there was much to hide, but this was quite a difficult terrain to penetrate into, as were some other ‘hard’ branches of the Finnish state.

Third, for political reasons and to boost their network, the KGB regularly helped Kekkonen and Finnish industries to get huge profitable deals, which they in purely economic terms would probably not have got. What was even more important, through his contacts Kekkonen was able to obtain Soviet approval for Finnish participation in Western economic integration. Thus, KGB contacts strengthened capitalism in Finland.

CODA

Kekkonen was as skillful an operator as anybody connected with the KGB, but his last days in office were unavoidably melancholic. In June 1981, Brezhnev informed the CPSU politburo that because of his worsening health, Kekkonen is thinking of withdrawing from office rather soon. (In fact, he had two months to go.) As for the successor, he no longer repeated his earlier negative views of his former protégé Ahti Karjalainen, but the latter had meanwhile acquired a notorious reputation, drinking too much and getting involved in scandalous situations. Kekkonen had said to the KGB resident – now again a competent officer, V. M. Vladimirov – that his most suitable successor would be Jaakko Pajula, director of the National Pension Fund.

This was an ‘utterly unexpected turn’ for the KGB. Pajula was not generally known, and lacked a strong political base. The KGB was astray, in this decisive moment they could not offer any advice at all to the Kremlin, nor were they able to assess how the situation would develop in the nearest future.⁷¹

Kekkonen did not record anything of this in his diary; possibly he did not remember the details afterwards. It is difficult to believe that such a renowned tactician could produce such a silly and unrealistic idea. As loyal supporters of Kekkonen, Pajula and his friend Olavi J. Mattila (whose name was mentioned in an earlier KGB-inspired successor plan) had been promoted to high positions in state-controlled parts of economic life, but they did not carry any political weight of their own.

⁷¹ Russian State Archives for Contemporary History (RGANI), f. 89, per. 42, d. 44, str. 5, Zasedaniya politburo TsK KPSS, Rabochaya zapis’, 18 Jun 1981.

President Urho Kekkonen of Finland and the KGB

In the last instance, both Kekkonen himself and the KGB lost control of the most important lever of Finnish-Soviet relations, that of the Finnish presidency. The limits of the KGB influence were shown by the fact that Kekkonen's successor, social democrat Mauno Koivisto, was elected without clear Soviet support, even against their wishes.⁷²

⁷² Koivisto preserved the KGB contact inherited from Kekkonen and took care of many vital issues through that channel. Only at the collapse of the Soviet Union, he informed the last KGB resident Feliks Karasev that this system was now over and henceforth issues between the states would proceed through regular diplomatic channels.