To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause

THE MANY LIVES OF THE SOVIET DISSIDENT MOVEMENT

BENJAMIN NATHANS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON & OXFORD

ersitäts- und Landesbibliothek
10. FEB. 2025
- JENA -

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eton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
Oxford OX2 6JX

s Cataloging-in-Publication Data

enjamin, author.
s of our hopeless cause : the many lives of the soviet
ient / Benjamin Nathans.
y of the Soviet dissident movement
eton : Princeton University Press, 2024. | Includes
eferences and index.
2023046852 (print) | LCCN 2023046853 (ebook) | ISBN
(hardback) | ISBN 9780691255576 (ebook)
issenters—Soviet Union—History. | Soviet Union—Politics
—1945–1991. | BISAC: HISTORY / Russia / General |
IENCE / Political Ideologies / Communism, Post-Communism &

DK277 .N38 2024 (print) | LCC DK277 (ebook) | DDC
/20240212
at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023046852
ailable at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023046853

loging-in-Publication Data is available

son, Morgan Spehar, Emma Wagh
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le Amatucci
neider (US), Kate Farquhar-Thomson (UK)
Lichty

For Nancy, Gabe, Ilana, and Dora

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

—F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, "THE CRACK-UP"

My intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of the truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity: . . . .who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power.

—MICHEL FOUCAULT, *FEARLESS SPEECH*

What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs?

—SHAKESPEARE, *CORIOLANUS*

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The Fifth Directorate

> Things were simple in Stalin's time: you walloped the intellectuals, did away with anybody who thought for himself. Now it's much harder.
>
> —KORNEI CHUKOVSKY

For Stalin's successors, the salient fact about the Cold War was that, in the places that mattered most to Moscow, it stayed cold. Despite lingering American talk of a "rollback" of Moscow's sphere of influence, by the 1960s it was becoming clear that neither NATO nor the United States was prepared to undertake a military assault against the USSR. Hitler's Operation Barbarossa, the most recent such attack, had assembled the most lethal military force in history, only to be driven back by a crushing Soviet counter-offensive. While it would take until the late 1960s for the Soviet Union to match (and then surpass) America's nuclear stockpile, even an inferior arsenal of such weapons exercised a powerful deterrent. The decision by Western powers not to deploy military force in response to Soviet suppression of protest movements in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 reinforced the impression that its enemies regarded the Soviet empire as too strong to take by force of arms.

Armed resistance to Soviet power within the USSR, too, had all but disappeared by the early 1960s. After a decade of post–World War II guerrilla activity by tens of thousands of "forest brothers" in the annexed

Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (with support from Western intelligence services), as well as by militant nationalists in western Ukraine, Soviet authorities could confidently regard their western borderlands as pacified. "The regime conveyed unequivocally," writes the historian Amir Weiner, "that resisting Soviet power by force was futile."[1]

But the Cold War was still a war and therefore, in Carl von Clausewitz's classic formulation, a continuation of politics by other means. American intelligence operatives called it "psychological warfare." The State Department preferred the more genteel "struggle for hearts and minds." Most of the relevant techniques had been developed during the two world wars with the goal of weakening morale on the enemy's home front. They included dropping propaganda leaflets from high-altitude balloons and other airborne devices as well as shortwave radio broadcasts to targeted populations behind enemy lines. As late as the 1960s, the KGB identified thousands of uncrewed devices per year sent from abroad into Soviet airspace, each bearing thousands of leaflets designed to discredit communist rule. Untold millions of Soviet citizens were listening to the Voice of America, Radio Liberty, the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Kol Yisrael, and other shortwave radio stations. Some of these tactics received covert funding from the CIA, as did a secret program that smuggled roughly ten million books and magazines to readers behind the Iron Curtain, a "Marshall Plan for the mind."[2]

Seen from Moscow, the American struggle for hearts and minds was self-evidently a class struggle organized by bourgeois imperialists to eat away at the socialist bloc. By corroding communist ideals, it aimed to achieve from within what could not be obtained by force from without: the dissolution of the Soviet system. The Soviet government at times spent more money jamming Western shortwave radio programs than it did on the USSR's own domestic and international broadcasting.[3] According to an internal KGB handbook, psychological warfare—or, as Soviet officials preferred to call it, "ideological sabotage"—consisted of "a complex of propaganda and provocation measures undertaken by capitalist states by means of the mass information media and by intelligence measures with the object of undermining the ideological foundations of the socialist social order, and undermining the moral and political unity of the peoples of the socialist countries by spreading all manner of lies and slander."[4] A pair of internal KGB reports in 1964 by counter-intelligence officers Filipp Bobkov and Vladimir Strunnikov described such tactics as having become the central modus operandi of Western anti-communism. Insofar as the USSR had successfully eliminated class antagonisms, the imperialists now lacked "a social base in which to cultivate subversive actions against our country" and therefore were increasingly relying on "the covert insinuation among Soviet people of an alien ideology in order to gradually and systematically evoke feelings of dissatisfaction with the socialist order." Western promotion of abstract art was part of this strategy, as were efforts to "artificially provoke discussions among young people of the problem of fathers and children" (as the "generation gap" was called in Russia).[5]

It was symptomatic of the West's ideological bankruptcy that, in their determination to chip away at the "moral and political unity" of the Soviet people, the imperialist powers gladly exploited *any* social tensions, whether between "the intelligentsia and the working class, workers and peasants, the city and the countryside" or by "playing on religious feelings or nationalist prejudices."[6] Precisely for this purpose, Bobkov would go on to claim, Western intelligence agencies planted the omnibus term "dissident" into global discourse, to unite disparate groups under a single label.[7] Disguising its true intent behind a screen of "apoliticism and the defense of 'spiritual values,'" psychological warfare reflected an "extreme degree of degradation, of alienation from all progressive ideas and political traditions."[8] According to Bobkov, the mask of apoliticism proved especially appealing to a portion of Soviet youth disoriented by the ideological zig-zags of Khrushchev's Thaw, many of them suffering from an "adolescent spirit of protest and romantic nihilism."[9] Unlike agents recruited in the classic manner by Western handlers working abroad, moreover, those who carried out "ideological sabotage," according to the KGB, gave the appearance of operating on their own. It was therefore difficult to prove that such informal agents of influence were linked to Western intelligence organizations.[10]

It fell to Yuri Andropov, former Soviet ambassador to Hungary, member of the Central Committee, and, as of May 1967, successor to Vladimir

Semichastnyi at the helm of the KGB, to organize the struggle against this new, more insidious variety of capitalist aggression. Within weeks of taking office, Andropov established a counter-intelligence unit within the KGB targeting the agents, unwitting or otherwise, of Western psychological warfare. Known as the Fifth Directorate, it would become the Kremlin's instrument of choice against what it regarded as the USSR's fifth column. Its mission was to gather intelligence on and neutralize the emerging dissident movement, among other targets.[11]

For Andropov, the idea of the Fifth Directorate had its roots in an episode predating the chain reaction, namely, the 1956 anti-communist uprising in Hungary. From his window in the Soviet embassy in Budapest, Ambassador Andropov had watched in horror as, in the space of a single week in October, a peaceful student protest metastasized into a mass armed insurgency that toppled the communist government and threatened to unhitch Hungary from the Soviet bloc. Despite the successful crushing of the uprising by Soviet troops, Andropov famously developed a "Hungarian complex"—a mortal fear of small, ostensibly peaceful groups sparking movements to undermine communist rule with direct (in the Hungarian case) or indirect encouragement by the West.[12]

Bobkov, a veteran of the renowned SMERSH (Death to Spies) counter-intelligence unit created by Stalin during World War II, was the man Andropov would eventually choose to head the Fifth Directorate, a post Bobkov held from 1969 to 1983.[13] Like Andropov, Bobkov believed that the failure of the Hungarian uprising had not altered the West's strategic goal of subverting Soviet power, but had instead inspired a shift toward subtler, more gradual, and thus more insidious tactics. Rather than attacking with conventional methods, "ideological sabotage" acted "like cancerous tumors, gradually and imperceptibly taking over the entire organism" from within.[14] Under Bobkov's command, the Fifth Directorate became the nerve center of what he called "political counter-intelligence," with subdivisions to monitor foreign tourists, journalists, and exchange students; Soviet university students and faculty; religious minorities, "sectarians," and "Zionists"; "nationalist and chauvinist" groups; "centers of ideological sabotage" abroad; and, by the early 1980s, hippies, punks, devotees of Hare Krishna, and other youth groups beyond the Communist

Youth League's shrinking control. Its full-time staff more than doubled during Bobkov's tenure, from 201 to 424 supervising officers overseeing some twenty-five thousand agents and informants across the USSR, including a young KGB lieutenant named Vladimir Putin, who worked in the Fifth Directorate's Leningrad branch from 1976 to 1979.[15] In addition to its central office in the KGB's headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow, each Soviet republican and regional unit of the KGB had its own local branch of the Fifth Directorate.[16] According to the intelligence historian Christopher Andrew, "More of the KGB's elite corps of illegals (deep-cover personnel posing as foreign nationals) were used to penetrate dissident movements within the Soviet bloc than were ever deployed against the United States or other Western targets during the Cold War."[17] The journalist Ernst Henri (aka Semyon Nikolaevich Rostovsky, aka Leonid Abramovich Khentov), who had sought to distract Andrei Sakharov from the chain reaction of dissent by encouraging him to write about the role of the intelligentsia in the nuclear age, was one such "foreign national."

Combating those construed as internal ideological opponents, of course, was hardly a new activity for the Soviet security apparatus. Within the NKVD, the KGB's predecessor under Stalin, the Secret Political Division (SPO) had performed analogous work during the Great Terror. What was new in the Fifth Directorate was the targeted, evidence-based nature of its operations and their coordination with broader government policies. Whatever one might say about the Fifth Directorate's efforts to crush the dissident movement, it was hardly a rogue operation. Andropov became a candidate member of the Politburo in 1967, the same year he took over as head of the KGB, and a full member in 1973. In Leonid Brezhnev he found a boss whose highest goal was to safeguard the USSR's hard-won social stability, economic prosperity, and international prestige, and who by nature was a seeker of consensus. Brezhnev's main concern vis-à-vis dissidents was that they not disrupt détente with the West or compromise the Soviet Union's image abroad. Like many Soviet citizens, he seems to have been genuinely perplexed by the dissident phenomenon: How, given all its historic achievements, could Soviet society produce such antagonists from within its ranks? Whatever the explanation, both Brezhnev and Andropov preferred

to handle troublemakers with as little noise as possible, so as not to arouse attention. Brezhnev left the details to Andropov.[18]

The KGB had plenty of experience combating monarchists, religious believers, fascists, black-marketeers, neo-Leninists, and nationalists, including those prepared to use force. What it had not previously encountered were devout constitutionalists.[19]

The Soviet dissident movement was made possible by the post-Stalinist retreat from state-sponsored terror in favor of more predictable governance. That retreat had saved the Communist Party from cannibalizing itself and helped usher in an era of unprecedented social stability. Its impact on the KGB's ability to suppress dissent, however, was decidedly mixed. On the one hand, virtually every dissident trial produced the juridical outcome desired by the state, that is, conviction of the accused. The Kremlin could point to violations of known laws, adequate defense counsel for the accused, and nearly all the visible trappings of a bona fide legal system. On the other hand, dissident trials typically failed to produce the political effect desired by the state, namely, the discrediting of the dissident movement. Defendants' refusal to plead guilty, much less confess, spoiled the intended pedagogical impact of most trials.[20] They turned the accused—in the eyes of a significant minority within the Soviet Union and the overwhelming majority of observers abroad—into heroes. "How much longer," wondered Central Committee member Anatoly Chernyaev, "will we keep shitting in our own pockets?"[21]

The defense strategy pioneered by Dina Kaminskaya in the 1967 trial of Vladimir Bukovsky—acknowledging her client's behavior as described in the indictment but insisting it did not violate Soviet laws—was becoming the new norm in dissident trials. The attorney Boris Zolotukhin was expelled from the Party for adopting this approach in his 1968 defense of Alexander Ginzburg. In a 1970 memorandum to the Central Committee, Andropov cited the "incorrect behavior" of several lawyers who in recent trials "took the path of denying that a crime had been committed." "This group of attorneys," Andropov warned, "is now taking on practically all analogous cases that arise in various regions of the country. Often they act in direct collusion with anti-social elements, briefing them about the materials of the preliminary investigation and jointly developing a strategy for defendants and witnesses during the investigation and trial."[22] The Central Committee got the message: three weeks later, Kaminskaya, Sofia Kallistratova, and two other attorneys were barred from participating in trials involving Article 190. The Moscow Procuracy, Judiciary, and Bar Association, along with the KGB, were instructed to "improve the coordination of their activities when organizing and carrying out public-political trials of great significance" and to "increase attorneys' personal responsibility when appearing in court."[23] In practice, coordination meant barring any defense attorney deemed "unreliable" from handling political cases and forbidding lawyers registered in Moscow from participating in trials in other cities—while the KGB had a free hand in deciding where any given trial should take place.[24]

For the KGB, defense attorneys' strategy of denying *corpus delicti* was one facet of a larger problem: the dissident movement's claim that its existence and its activities were consistent with Soviet law and in fact protected by the Soviet Constitution. The most elaborate argument along these lines, as we saw in chapter 13, came from Valery Chalidze's Human Rights Committee. But Andropov's predecessor, Semichastnyi, had already sensed the danger in Alexander Volpin's transparency meeting on December 5, 1965. "On a formal level," he noted, "these actions do not constitute a crime, but if we do not resolutely stop these antics, a situation may arise when it will become necessary to resort to criminal prosecution, which is hardly justified."[25] Within days of establishing the Fifth Directorate, in a speech to graduates of the KGB's training academy, Andropov warned that "enemies" were seeking "to undermine Soviet society using means and methods which at first glance do not appear to match what we understand as hostile activity." Their goal, he said, was "to stop short of violating statutes of the criminal code, to stop short of violating our Soviet laws, to act within their framework, and nonetheless to act in a hostile manner."[26] This was precisely what Andropov saw happening during the "Trial of the Four" in 1968. Supporters of the defendants, he wrote to the Central Committee, "are trying to

legalize in our country the conduct of their anti-Soviet work, to achieve impunity for their hostile actions."[27] The specter of a legal opposition arose repeatedly, eventually finding its way into the KGB's classified history of itself, which served as a textbook for new officers. "Characteristic of the tactics of anti-Soviet elements," the textbook stated with remarkable frankness, is the "conduct of hostile activity at 'the brink of legality,' so that, without formally violating Soviet laws, they could commit hostile acts against the USSR under the guise of 'friendly criticism of socialism,' 'perfecting its democracy,' 'extending freedom,' and so on."[28]

Putting dissidents on trial who had not formally violated Soviet laws did not advance the KGB's image of having ascended from the dungeons of Stalinist terror into a worthy professionalism. More to the point, trials—which because of the requirements of "socialist legality" required considerable time and effort to prepare—often did greater reputational damage to the Soviet state, inside and outside the country, than the alleged anti-Soviet activity of the accused, much of which remained unknown until its authors were arrested and displayed in the defendants' dock. For the KGB, this was a source of considerable frustration. Stalin's show trials, with their perfunctory attention to matters of evidence and judicial procedure, had been a resounding pedagogical success. By the 1960s, trials of dissidents that appeared to operate within the bounds of due process were being received by a substantial portion of the intelligentsia—not to mention public opinion in the West—with skepticism or worse.

Andropov did not have the luxury of simply ignoring people like Andrei Amalrik or Natalya Gorbanevskaya. One of the peculiarities of the Soviet system, and more generally of authoritarian governments that claim comprehensive control over public life, is that whatever behaviors go unpunished are assumed to have the leadership's tacit approval. Neutrality is not considered part of the state's repertoire. Hence the concern often expressed in official Soviet circles that failure to suppress dissent could confuse, anger, or embolden ordinary Soviet people, leaving them in a state of ideological disorientation. Protest by dissidents, Andropov informed the Central Committee, "arouses in the absolute majority a feeling of outrage, but in certain circles of the intelligentsia and among young people, it sometimes inspires sentiments such as this: 'Act boldly, openly, attract foreign journalists, obtain support in the bourgeois press, and nobody will dare touch you.'"[29] It was imperative for the KGB to disprove such claims.

When it came to battling dissidents, the KGB had its own version of network theory. Instead of identifying strong ties and weak ties, it searched for leaders whose influence radiated outward, structuring groups under their alleged control. Dissidents may have imagined themselves as a conductorless orchestra, but the KGB's instinct—likely conditioned by the pervasiveness of patron-client relationships in the Soviet system—was to hunt for conductors. When the KGB pictured the dissemination of the samizdat journal *Kolokol* (Bell), for example, it deployed a hub-and-spoke model (figure 14.1). According to this model, the most efficient way to disrupt distribution was to remove the hubs—in this case, Valery Ronkin (the large circle pictured center-left) and Sergei Khakhayev (the large circle pictured center-right). For a time, the Fifth Directorate attempted to suppress all samizdat in this manner, which, given its radically decentralized means of reproduction, ended up resembling a gigantic game of whack-a-mole. "A lot of literature, leaflets, and letters are being disseminated, on the political and national rights of man, freedom of expression, of the press, democracy and other questions," complained the Kyiv-based Politburo member Petro Shelest in his diary. "But our security agencies can't find the 'root' from which all this comes. Moscow is scrambling too, and is unable to do anything to put an end to this phenomenon."[30]

Samizdat was irrepressible because there was no root "from which all this comes." There were thousands of roots. Every copy of every samizdat text had the capacity to spawn thousands more (or millions, if one counted dissemination via the Voices). No text could count as definitively suppressed so long as a single copy remained at large. In contrast to the Internet, there were no central platforms or servers from which the dissemination of texts could be blocked. Every typewriter was a virtual private network. Whereas the *Kolokol* network, as pictured by the KGB, encompassed twenty-eight people in roughly four different locations,

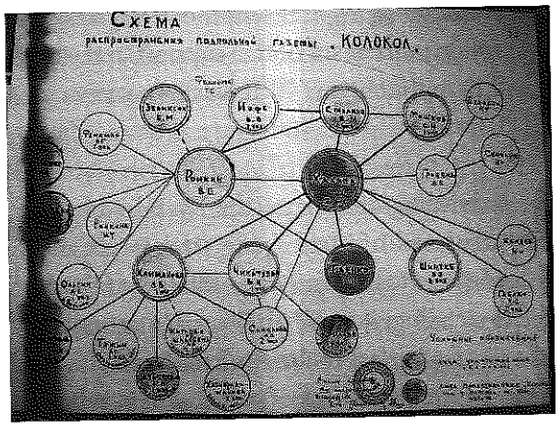


FIGURE 14.1. KGB diagram of distribution networks of the underground Leningrad newspaper the *Bell*, ca. 1962

the *Chronicle of Current Events* involved hundreds of contributors and distributors and thousands of readers in cities and towns across the USSR's eleven time zones.[31] As part of an ongoing investigation known as Case 24, the Fifth Directorate spent years hunting for the hubs, that is, the *Chronicle*'s compilers and editors. Dozens of apartments were searched and hundreds of suspects were brought in for interrogation. So extensive were the networks uncovered in Case 24 that rumors began to circulate that the KGB itself had sponsored the *Chronicle* precisely in order to flush out dissidents and their supporters.[32] The *Chronicle* reported as many of the searches and interrogations as it could, in its usual dispassionate style.[33]

Frustrated by the unintended fallout from political trials and the Sisyphean labor of attempting to disrupt the dissemination of samizdat, the Fifth Directorate turned to other methods. Available data for individual years are spotty, making it difficult to pinpoint the timing of the shift. In the Russian Republic, between 1966 and 1980, the number of convictions for anti-Soviet activity under Article 190 declined by roughly a third, while the number of convictions under Article 70 dropped by nearly two-thirds. There is no evidence that the volume of

Table 1: Convictions under Articles 70 and 190 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, 1966–1980

	Total number of people convicted	
Years	Article 70	Article 190
1966–70	295	384
1971–75	276	527
1976–80	112	285

Sources: Kozlov and Mironenko, *Kramola*, 36; Petrov, "Podrazdeleniia KGB," 166.

Notes: This trend may apply to other Soviet republics. According to Ludmilla Alexeyeva, Ukraine was the "testing ground" of new methods, which were then "extended to other republics." Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 55. See also Bellezza, *The Shore of Expectations*, 217–312. For Lithuania, see Oleszczuk, *Political Justice in the USSR* (96–100), which notes that in the 1970s and 1980s the KGB was particularly reluctant to put Roman Catholic priests on trial because of the attendant negative publicity.

activity deemed "anti-Soviet" actually decreased during these years; what changed was the way the KGB responded to it. The Fifth Directorate increasingly deployed a trio of stealthier tactics designed to disarm dissidents with minimal fuss and publicity. Those tactics were "prophylactic measures," involuntary emigration, and forced confinement in psychiatric prisons and hospitals.

None of the stealth tactics was new. Some originated in the 1950s, part of the reforms that followed Stalin's death; others traced their roots back to the nineteenth century. But they all had one thing in common: in contrast to criminal trials, they allowed the KGB to operate entirely outside the bounds of the justice system. In this sense, the bravura courtroom performances by dissident defendants that helped propel the chain reaction, as well as the public protests that drew so much attention to dissident trials, proved Pyrrhic victories. Volpin's ultimate goal, after all, was to nudge the USSR toward the rule of law. In the short run, the transparency promoted by the dissident movement was moving the Soviet state not to abide by its own laws and judicial procedures, but to work around them.

The Russian word *profilaktika*, like the English "prophylaxis," derives from Greek and means "to guard against in advance." Its most common

use is in the field of medicine, where it refers to techniques for preventing disease or infection. In the KGB lexicon, it signified a range of methods for preventing crimes before they happened. Formally inaugurated by Khrushchev in 1959, *profilaktika* was meant to reduce the mass incarceration that had characterized the Stalin era. By addressing minor transgressions, especially by young people, the KGB sought to nip deviant behavior in the bud, setting errant Soviet citizens on the path to productive and patriotic lives. Soviet leaders were also keen to inoculate "politically immature" individuals against contamination by Western influences, to which the USSR was increasingly exposed as it emerged from decades of isolation.[34]

The KGB's medicine took many forms. The most common was a "conversation" between a KGB officer and his wayward subject, either alone or in the presence of parents, teachers, neighbors, or work colleagues. Conversations were not interrogations; their primary purpose was not to extract information for an ongoing investigation but rather to chastise, to warn, as well as to instruct and encourage. As one official put it, "We lay out their mistaken views and point out the harm they can bring to the Soviet state. . . . [We demonstrate] the great concern that the Communist Party and the Soviet government show for the welfare of the Soviet person and for his moral and spiritual level."[35]

That, more or less, was the experience of the twenty-one-year-old Vera Lashkova when she was first "invited" to the Lubyanka for a conversation. While her parents were away in Smolensk, she had used their Moscow apartment to host a revolving cohort of poets and *samizdatchiki*, sometimes up to a hundred, passing around a bottle of wine and reciting someone's verses. Among her guests, it seems, was an informant who heard tell of a plan to distribute anti-Stalinist leaflets in Red Square. Lashkova soon found herself seated in the office of KGB officer Ivan Abramov as he addressed her in what she described as "a very fatherly way." "He didn't try to bend or break me," she recalled, "or to find out who said what. They already knew enough." Instead, to her amazement, Abramov—who would later succeed Bobkov as head of the Fifth Directorate—proceeded to ask about her family, and about whether anyone had been repressed under Stalin (one of her grandfathers had



FIGURE 14.2. Vera Lashkova

been). Lashkova was accustomed to thinking of herself and her friends as "us" and the KGB as "them." She was not inclined to respond to overtures from "them." But her parents had raised her to be polite: "It was difficult for me to maintain a stance of 'I don't know you, I won't talk to you.'" At one point in their conversation, Abramov turned to her and said, "Vera, you're very young, you're talented, you need to study. Think about what you've gotten yourself into." Gently putting his hand on her shoulder, he declared, "No, Vera, we will not give you up to the enemy!"[36]

She forced herself not to burst out laughing. The phrase "No, Vera, we will not give you up to the enemy!" stuck in her memory, an unintended piece of comic theater and a reminder of the chasm separating her and her friends from the KGB. The next time Lashkova appeared at the Lubyanka, it was after being arrested, along with Alexander Ginzburg, Yuri Galanskov, and Aleksei Dobrovolsky. A year later, in the

"Trial of the Four," she was convicted of helping to disseminate anti-Soviet slander via samizdat.[37]

Abramov's quasi-paternal concern for Lashkova's future was not necessarily typical of prophylactic conversations, especially when the subjects were male. More often than not, those conversations included threats of arrest, expulsion from school or university, or the loss of a job. Sometimes they involved pressure to become an informant.[38] Whatever their tone, such encounters were becoming the KGB's preferred mode of interacting with actual and potential dissidents. In the early 1960s, for every individual arrested for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, approximately five were subject to prophylaxis. In 1967, when the Fifth Directorate started systematically gathering country-wide data on the KGB's prophylactic work, that ratio began to skew dramatically. Over the next seven years (1967–74), for every individual arrested for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, ninety-six were subject to prophylaxis, producing an annual average of more than eleven thousand "conversations." Out of a total of 121,406 "conversations" conducted by the KGB during that period apropos all types of potentially criminal activity, 81,365 (two-thirds) had to do with suspected anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.[39] As the historian Nikita Petrov notes, "prophylaxis was the basic working method" of the Fifth Directorate.[40]

We do not know what effects the tens of thousands of encounters with the KGB had, apart from the fact that the vast majority of those summoned were not subsequently arrested or prosecuted. It is impossible to distinguish the impact of "conversations" from that of harsher prophylactic methods such as termination of employment, expulsion from school, denial of university scholarships, blacklisting from publication, and various forms of harassment of spouses and children—none of which appear in the statistics assembled by the KGB. The campaign against the roughly one thousand signers of open letters in 1968 and 1969, however, suggests the powerful deterrence such punitive measures could produce.

All this punishing, it should be emphasized, took place outside any judicial framework. While the KGB was legally obliged to get permission from the Procuracy (at the union or republican level) before arresting someone, no such permission was required for prophylactic measures. Ex post facto notification sufficed.[41] The Fifth Directorate was thus empowered to decide by itself who was likely to commit a crime, who should be summoned for a "conversation," and, if necessary, whose education or career should be derailed. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet formalized this power in 1972 via an unpublished administrative decree granting certain directorates within the KGB (including the Fifth Directorate) the authority to require subjects of prophylaxis to sign a document confirming that they had been warned about the impermissibility of their anti-Soviet behavior. In the event of a future arrest, the signed document could be used against the defendant in court.[42]

The Fifth Directorate was now effectively in the business of punishing a range of activities that it recognized were not forbidden by Soviet law. According to Vasily Mitrokhin, a KGB archivist who defected to Great Britain in 1992 with voluminous notes on internal KGB documents, those activities included

> listening to, recording, or recounting the content of foreign radio broadcasts; expressing negative views of Soviet reality and governing institutions; praising the Western way of life; assessing the Soviet way of life in a demagogic or unprincipled manner; posing provocative questions; telling political jokes; showing excessive interest in classified library and archival materials; collecting documents and statistical data or results of sociological research concerning negative phenomena in Soviet society; collecting biographical information about people who had been unjustly repressed in the past; gathering signatures for appeals, letters, and complaints; organizing gatherings in which negative aspects of literature, art, and the domestic and foreign policies of the Communist Party were discussed; contact with foreigners and the acquisition of books and articles from them; acquisition of polygraphic or photocopying devices; expressing approval of the policies of states hostile to the USSR; condemnation of communists, representatives of authority, or leaders of local organs.[43]

In neither their severity nor their extent nor their capriciousness did the extra-judicial activities of the KGB come close to the wanton

violence of the NKVD under Stalin. People no longer returned from interrogations with their fingernails gone. Suspects did not disappear for unknown or invented reasons, never to be seen again. Nonetheless, across the lifespan of the Fifth Directorate (1967–89), prophylactic activity intruded on and in some cases disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens. Overall, KGB threats and warnings seem to have produced the desired deterrent effect.

There was another, even more telling contrast between secret police practices of the Stalin and post-Stalin eras. NKVD interrogators of the 1930s and 1940s were interested not only in what a suspect had done and with whom, but why, based on what class origins and driven by what beliefs. Bolshevik zeal demanded a thorough mining of the inner lives of individual suspects. Motives could not be established without scrutinizing biographies. Depth probes were pivotal for the quintessential Bolshevik ritual of unmasking. Only after rendering their enemies transparent could the NKVD's "metaphysical police" (as the émigré novelist Vladimir Nabokov called them) consider the possibility of their redemption via conversion to the revolutionary cause.[44] "Our investigation has an educational role," an interrogator told Gleb Bonch-Osmolovsky, arrested in Leningrad in 1933 on charges of counter-revolutionary activity. "We will find out who you really are." Only by confessing in full "will you free yourself psychologically from the various impediments to the unremitting revolutionary self-criticism you need." After deciding that he had "no right to distrust the investigator," Bonch-Osmolovsky dutifully poured out his innermost doubts and hopes. He emerged from the encounter convinced that "the whole thing was an exercise in evaluating me, not an inquiry into a crime. At no point during the investigation were concrete crimes ever attributed to me."[45]

KGB officials in the 1960s and 1970s, by contrast, displayed a remarkable lack of interest in the inner lives of their dissident interlocutors.[46] For the most part born after the revolution and formed by Soviet institutions, dissidents had grown up in a country that had eliminated internal class enemies and, as of 1936, claimed to have built socialism. Under the post-Stalin dispensation, KGB interrogators no longer grilled

suspects on their social origins, nor did prosecutors. Internal Soviet government memoranda also stopped mentioning class background—as if class had simply evaporated as a way of accounting for deviant or anti-social behavior. Nor were KGB interrogators in the habit of asking about political beliefs or worldviews or the content of samizdat materials confiscated in apartment searches. Stalin's interrogators had constantly demanded to know suspects' views on this or that topic, and how they arrived at such views, in the hope of unmasking counter-revolutionary or bourgeois forms of consciousness. They were known to repeat their questions over and over, for hours on end, until they got the answer they wanted.[47] Brezhnev's interrogators did not pose such questions—not because they would have violated new standards of professionalism, but because they simply weren't interested. When Semyon Gluzman, a dissident psychiatrist arrested in Kyiv in 1972, was told by his interrogator, "You still have time: recant, give us the information we want, and you won't get ten years," he was stunned. "Do you actually think," Gluzman asked, "that arresting people and investigating them are enough to change their beliefs?" "Who cares about your beliefs?" the interrogator shot back. "That's not what this case is about."[48]

Lack of curiosity about political views and inner lives increasingly characterized not just the way Bobkov's agents in the Fifth Directorate talked to dissidents, but the way the regime talked to itself about dissidents. By the 1960s, a series of administrative orders prohibited reproducing anti-Soviet statements in legal documents. At most, officials might reference them in the subjunctive, as, for example, "The person under investigation spoke as if there were no democracy in the USSR." At a time when foreign observers were busily cataloguing the political views of Soviet dissidents, deciding who qualified as a liberal, a social democrat, a monarchist, a nationalist, and so on, the Soviet government, including the Fifth Directorate, typically limited its in-house characterizations to such nondescript categories as "anti-Soviet," "politically immature," "politically harmful," or "reformist." The historian Vladimir Kozlov has interpreted this practice as reflecting a ritualized taboo, according to which dissident critiques were unrepeatable heresy.[49] The prosecutor and judge in the trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli

Daniel had indeed described the defendants' works as "blasphemy." Censorship within the state and Party bureaucracy certainly demanded the excision of vitriolic or obscene comments about specific Soviet leaders (in this regard there was nothing unusual about Soviet bureaucratic practices), of which there was no shortage among the thousands of homemade leaflets and defaced election ballots discovered by the KGB. Lack of engagement with the content of samizdat texts and the inner lives of their arrested authors and readers, however, suggests something else: the KGB's own ideological apathy.

Memoirs of former KGB officials, including Bobkov—all published after the collapse of the Soviet Union—are full of contradictions on this point. As part of the widespread veneration of Andropov, they highlight the KGB's professionalism, including its ability to see beyond the blinders of Marxism-Leninism.[50] Much of this, of course, stems from a retrospective desire not to appear as having been naive enforcers of a now discredited ideology. But it also reveals the decidedly un-Bolshevik assumption that ideological fervor was no longer a necessary component of, and perhaps even a hindrance to, professional intelligence work. In any case, the notion of transcending ideology in the name of sober professionalism offers a clue as to why the KGB demonstrated so little interest in dissidents' ideas.

At the same time, KGB memoirists insist—again, in hindsight—that ideological commitment constituted the "core" of the Soviet system.[51] Two decades after the Soviet collapse, Bobkov posed what he called "the main question, the painful question that tortures me: Why did the nation that defeated fascism and liberated not only itself but a whole series of European countries from German occupiers—why did this nation lose the Cold War?" His answer: the decline of ideological fervor or, as he rephrased it, perhaps in sync with the rekindled romance between church and state in the Putin era, the decline of "faith" in the Soviet system.[52]

Additional factors may have contributed to the KGB's relative indifference to the beliefs and biographies of Soviet dissidents (even as, following Anna Akhmatova's observation, the KGB unwittingly helped remake those biographies). In public as well as in private, Soviet officials

took for granted that dissent was inspired, directed, and financed by the West as part of its psychological warfare against the socialist bloc. "Intelligence agencies in the countries of our main enemy," Bobkov wrote in a confidential 1972 memorandum, "are making efforts to consolidate anti-Soviet elements within our country and to set in motion their subversive activities. The leading role in inspiring these activities continues to be played by the 'Radio Liberty Committee,' which carries out orders from the CIA."[53] Radio Liberty—originally named Radio Liberation, until the U.S. government decided in 1959 that liberalization was a more realistic goal vis-à-vis the USSR—was indeed covertly financed and directed by the CIA, a fact that became public in 1967 thanks to an exposé in the San Francisco–based magazine *Ramparts*. But Bobkov didn't need *Ramparts* to reveal the CIA's involvement. From 1966 to 1985, the KGB had a mole inside Radio Liberty's headquarters in Munich, the ostensible defector Oleg Tumanov. Radio Liberty's mission, according to Tumanov's messages, was "to foment mistrust in the policy of the Soviet government, stimulate doubts in the Soviet state system, undermine belief in communist ideals, and enable the formation in our country of a so-called democratic movement."[54] All of the basic dissident activities, Bobkov maintained, were "methods of underground organization promoted by the enemy," from the "illegal preparation and dissemination of various kinds of hostile materials intended to ideologically manipulate [Soviet] citizens" (that is, samizdat) to the "establishment of organizational ties with foreign anti-Soviet centers" (that is, Western human rights NGOs).[55] Andropov went further: not just Western intelligence services and NGOs but journalists and diplomats were all part of a master plan to foster dissent in the USSR. In a speech titled "Communist Conviction Is the Great Strength of the Builders of the New World," published on the front page of *Pravda*, he warned that "'dissidence' has become a distinct profession that is generously paid in hard currency and other handouts, which in essence hardly differs from the way the imperialist special services pay off their agents."[56]

If dissidents were mercenaries employed by the USSR's enemies, then KGB interrogators had little reason to probe their beliefs. Neither, for that matter, did prosecutors, insofar as the post-Stalin reforms of Soviet law

de-emphasized defendants' criminal intent and focused instead on their impact on a vaguely defined "public order."[57] Dissidents' beliefs, including what Semichastnyi, Andropov's predecessor as head of the KGB, called their insidious "apoliticism," mattered only in a negative sense, as spoilers of the ubiquitous claims of Soviet society's "moral and political unity." From the bottom to the top of the system, Soviet officials went to considerable lengths to promote the façade of unanimity and therefore to pathologize dissent. During their Tenth Party Congress, in 1921, the Bolsheviks formally banned factions within the Party—a ban that was never lifted. Open dissent inside the Party was henceforth understood as "objectively" serving the interests of domestic and foreign enemies.[58] Soviet elections, as we have seen, presented voters with a single candidate for each office and thus became mass rituals of acclamation rather than acts of choosing among different legitimate options. At the pinnacle of power, the Politburo developed a simple procedure to promote the appearance of unity: after discussing and voting on a given issue, members would vote a second time, only now everyone would endorse the majority position, so that a unanimous result could be recorded.

Another way to foster an imagined communist unity was to excise from the Soviet ecumene anyone who publicly dissented. Punishment by exile was a common practice of modern European empires, whether British convicts sent by the tens of thousands to colonies in America and Australia or Russian peasants and political prisoners banished by the hundreds of thousands to Siberia.[59] In the twentieth century, the Soviet Union became an outlier in this regard, retaining the practice of internal exile (usually to Siberia or Central Asia) at a time when most other states abandoned it. In the post-Stalin era, hundreds of Soviet citizens were punished this way, including Joseph Brodsky, Andrei Amalrik, Larisa Bogoraz, Pavel Litvinov, Nadezhda Yemelkina, Andrei Sakharov, Vladimir Bukovsky, and Yuri Orlov, to name just a few. Such cases were typically the result of judicial sentences, often generating negative international publicity for the Soviet government.[60]

After prophylaxis, the second most common extra-judicial punishment practiced by the KGB consisted of a specific form of exile: involuntary

emigration from the Soviet Union accompanied by loss of citizenship and a de facto ban on returning. It might seem odd to use emigration as punishment, given the significant number of Soviet citizens, especially Jews, who actively sought to leave the USSR starting in the late 1960s. By 1985, over a quarter million would succeed in doing so, thanks in part to foreign incentives dangled before the Kremlin—American grain, technology, financial credits, and arms-control agreements.[61] Over one hundred known dissidents were pressured to leave the USSR during the same period, including a significant fraction of the roughly one thousand "signers" in 1968–69, but mere drops in the river of eagerly departing Soviet Jews.[62] That, in a way, was the point: to get rid of dissidents with as little notice as possible. No arrests, no trials, no protests—just a "conversation" in which the Fifth Directorate presented the subject with the options of emigration or prison. Whether or not they were Jewish, dissidents who "chose" emigration received a visa to Israel, which helped reinforce popular stereotypes that people who agitated for rights must be Jews. Inside the dissident milieu, offers of exit visas from the Fifth Directorate sometimes proved toxic, fueling speculation that certain individuals had cut a deal with the KGB in order to escape from the USSR, thereby abandoning the cause of civil and human rights. Indeed, there were increasing suspicions that certain people were taking up that cause, as the art historian Igor Golomshtok put it, "in order to accumulate political capital prior to their departure abroad."[63] In the West, meanwhile, the distinction between "dissidents" and "refuseniks" (Soviet Jews who had applied and been refused permission to emigrate) was frequently lost. That could only have pleased the KGB.

The third method of extra-judicial punishment involved the confinement of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals and prisons. One might think of this as the Fifth Directorate's version of psychological warfare, only in this version the weapons of choice were not ideas transmitted via smuggled texts and shortwave radio broadcasts, but tranquilizers and anti-psychotic drugs. The goal was no longer to change minds but to disable them.

As the cases of Volpin and others illustrated, in the late Stalin era, questionable diagnoses of mental illness occasionally served as a merciful alternative to prison, the Gulag, or conscription in the Soviet Army. To be sure, confinement in a psychiatric ward with people suffering genuine mental illness, including some convicted of violent crimes, could prove a harrowing experience, as could the abiding stigma of having been labeled "schizophrenic," "paranoid," or "delusional." Prior to the 1960s, however, such confinement rarely involved the application of mind-numbing drugs, and at least in Volpin's case, the periods of confinement were comparatively brief: a year in 1949–50 (for "anti-Soviet" poems), three weeks in 1957 (for discouraging a French visitor to the World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow from applying for Soviet citizenship), a year in 1959–60 (for failure to inform on an acquaintance who had allegedly engaged in currency speculation), and four months in 1962–63 (following the publication in New York of *A Leaf of Spring*).[64] Prison and labor camp sentences for "anti-Soviet" activity, by contrast, typically ranged between three and seven years. There too, one's fellow inmates might include violent criminals.

The length of psychiatric internments was not set by judicial sentence. Court-mandated confinement to a psychiatric institution typically involved a closed-door trial *in absentia*, with the defendant declared guilty but not responsible for his or her actions (*nevmeniaemyi*, or "non-imputable") due to insanity. In many cases, however—including three of the four aforementioned instances involving Volpin—there was neither a trial nor a formal finding of guilt and therefore no court mandate. Under the Soviet system, medical personnel and prison administrators could initiate a psychiatric examination and, having found a suspect to be non-imputable, could confine him or her without any involvement by lawyers or judges.[65] Such administratively mandated (as opposed to court-mandated) confinement effectively placed the suspect at the whim of individual psychiatrists, who in turn were subject to influence by, and were sometimes employees of, the Fifth Directorate.[66] As usual, a Soviet *anekdot* summed up the situation:

> How has socialist legality changed since Stalin's death?
>
> They've stopped executing people before their sentences are announced. Now they put them in psychiatric hospitals before the investigation begins.[67]

Like coerced emigration, psychiatric internment gave the KGB multiple advantages over its targets. Officials could avoid the nuisance and publicity of criminal trials, confining suspects indefinitely without the right of appeal. Just as emigration inevitably reinforced the suspicion that all dissidents were Jews, psychiatric confinement nourished the widespread intuition that there was something unhinged about people who dared openly to disagree with the Communist Party. "In truth," Bukovsky conceded, "one has to be decidedly 'different' to become a dissenter in the USSR."[68]

For the period between 1960 and 1991, 674 cases of involuntary psychiatric confinement of individuals alleged to have committed various anti-Soviet acts have been documented.[69] The majority were administratively mandated; that is, they bypassed any opportunity to legally challenge the finding of non-imputability. Cases occurred in over one hundred Soviet cities and towns, the majority (60 percent) somewhere other than Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv. Over 90 percent of those confined were men. As the graph in figure 14.3 suggests, recourse to psychiatric internment of dissidents rose sharply in the late 1960s, following the chain reaction of arrests, trials, and public protests. In response to these developments, Andropov secured approval from the Politburo in 1970 for a significant expansion of the network of psychiatric hospitals and prisons, apparently anticipating more frequent KGB recourse to this method of punishment.[70]

In the overwhelming majority of cases, dissidents subjected to psychiatric incarceration were diagnosed as schizophrenic. Schizophrenia, literally "split mind," has been used to describe a wide range of symptoms involving the uncoupling of reliable (or "normal") associations among thought, emotion, perception, and behavior. For most of its history, the term has been dogged by extreme imprecision. Even today, there is no

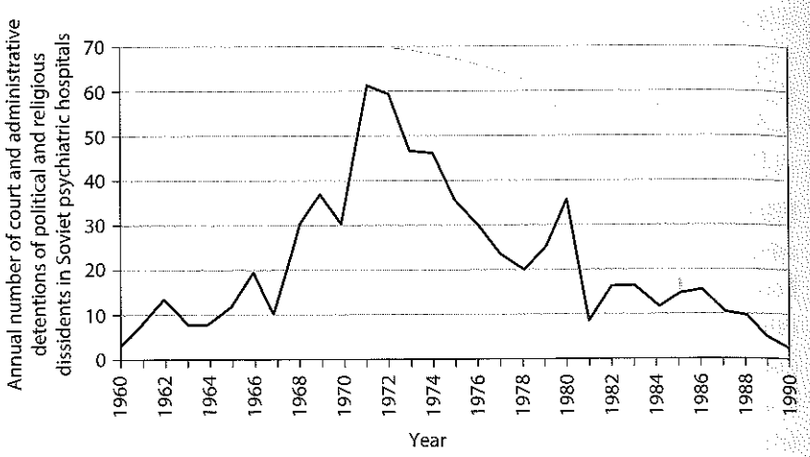


FIGURE 14.3. Involuntary detention of dissidents in Soviet psychiatric hospitals, 1960 to 1990

objective diagnostic test to confirm its presence. Soviet psychiatrists in the post-Stalin era, led by Andrei Snezhnevsky, director (1962–87) of the Institute of Psychiatry of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences, developed a particularly elastic understanding of the concept, including a variant called "slow progressive" or "sluggish" schizophrenia in which the characteristic symptoms of being unable to distinguish reality from unreality (delusions, hallucinations, and other psychoses) were allegedly hidden, latent, or otherwise imperceptible.[71] "The absence of symptoms of an illness cannot prove the absence of the illness itself," insisted a psychiatrist at Moscow's Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry, having examined twenty-year-old Olga Yofe following her arrest on charges of disseminating anti-Soviet materials.[72] Like the doctrine of socialist realism, the official aesthetic of Soviet literature and the arts, the concept of "slow progressive schizophrenia" was supposed to capture the reality of patients' mental lives not merely as they appear at the moment, but more deeply, in light of their future developmental trajectory.

Apart from the plight of Soviet Jews seeking to emigrate, no aspect of human rights in the USSR evoked more visceral outrage in the West than the use of involuntary psychiatric incarceration against "other-thinkers."[73] Part of that outrage was fueled by the Western vision of the

Cold War as a battle between freedom and totalitarianism, with dissidents subjected to straitjackets and mind-numbing drugs as the ultimate expression of "total" power over individual human beings. Another part drew on the specific Western backlash against psychiatry per se, beginning in the 1960s and inspired by figures ranging from the psychiatrist Thomas Szasz to the novelist Ken Kesey, the sociologist Erving Goffman, and the philosopher Michel Foucault. From different vantage points, they portrayed the psychiatric profession as a particularly insidious form of social control that used the idea of mental illness as a weapon against individuals who refused to conform to certain social norms.[74] In the Soviet Union there was no such backlash, neither within nor outside the psychiatric profession. What was distinctive about the Soviet setting, in this as in so many other arenas, was the overwhelming presence of the state. In nearly every case in which a dissident was diagnosed with mental illness, it was the state that initially identified the alleged symptoms, rather than family members or others close to the individual concerned, as is normally the case. Indeed, family members usually insisted that their incarcerated relative was mentally healthy.[75]

Soviet psychiatry mirrored Soviet jurisprudence. Just as defendants in courtroom trials bore the burden of proving their innocence, so arrested dissidents bore the burden of proving their mental health when examined by psychiatrists. For their part, Soviet psychiatrists resembled judges and lawyers in their lack of professional autonomy from the state, including the KGB. Like the handful of defense attorneys who dared to argue that their dissident clients had not broken any Soviet law, psychiatrists who questioned diagnoses of dissidents as mentally ill faced disbarment from their profession or worse, with little or no protest by colleagues.

It did not seem to matter that psychiatric explanations for dissenting behavior, which invoked dysfunctional families of origin, personality disorders, and biological illnesses of the mind, diverged markedly from that of the Fifth Directorate, which emphasized the malicious influence of the West's "psychological warfare" on "politically immature" Soviet citizens. The two approaches found common ground in diagnostic phrases that appear repeatedly in psychiatric reports on arrested nonconformists: "paranoid reformist delusional ideas," "over-estimation of

his own personality," "poor adaptation to the social environment." As Andrei Snezhnevsky's *Handbook of Psychiatry* put it, "Affective tension and delusional interpretation by the patient of words and actions of individuals around him may, during his struggle for his 'rights,' become the cause of socially dangerous acts."[76] One could hardly sum up more concisely the pathologizing of dissent by the Soviet psychiatric establishment.

The Fifth Directorate had at its disposal a varied tool kit with which to manage dissidents and potential dissidents. Arrests and trials continued, but with declining frequency. Bobkov and other officials increasingly relied on extra-judicial methods of prophylaxis, forced emigration, and psychiatric confinement—the first ensnaring hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens over the lifespan of the dissident movement, the second and third applied far more selectively against hundreds. The hybrid approach was both flexible and unpredictable—perhaps by design. Even today, with access to a significant if still limited store of internal KGB documents, it is difficult to discern a pattern or logic governing the choice of one or another method. Individual cases, however, offer glimpses of the KGB's modus operandi and of how Soviet leaders at the highest levels participated in deciding dissidents' fates.

The poet Natalya Gorbanevskaya was one of many signers of protest letters during the chain reaction who faced extra-judicial retaliation by the Fifth Directorate. In February 1968, during a brief pregnancy-related hospitalization, she was forcibly transferred from a maternity clinic to a psychiatric hospital, where she was diagnosed with "slow progressive" schizophrenia.[77] If this episode was intended to frighten her away from further activism, it had the opposite effect. After her release, Gorbanevskaya produced a caustic samizdat essay titled "Free Medical Care," recounting her experience of involuntary psychiatric confinement. In April, she organized the first issue of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, followed by more protest letters and culminating with the August 25 demonstration on Red Square.

Two weeks later Gorbanevskaya was required to undergo a new psychiatric evaluation, which now revealed "deep psychopathy: the possibility of slow progressive schizophrenia is not excluded." Placed under her

mother's guardianship, she remained on probation, subject to immediate confinement in a mental institution whenever the authorities deemed it necessary. This too failed to deter her: a samizdat transcript of the trial of her fellow Red Square demonstrators appeared under Gorbanevskaya's name in 1969, and in the spring of that year she became a founding member of the Initiative Group for the Defense of Civil Rights. By December, Bobkov and Andropov had had enough: Gorbanevskaya was arrested and charged with slandering the Soviet system under Article 190 and once again subject to psychiatric examination, which now firmly concluded that she was "suffering from a chronic mental illness in the form of schizophrenia." Among the evidence cited was Gorbanevskaya's statement, regarding her protests, that she "acted thus so as not to be ashamed in the future before her children." "She does not renounce her actions," the report added, and "thinks she has done nothing illegal."[78]

Gorbanevskaya was tried *in absentia* on July 7, 1970. All but one of her friends who attempted to enter the courtroom were refused admission; Volpin and others watched through an open window, to the great annoyance of the presiding judge. Valery Chalidze, the sole friend who managed to gain entrance, produced a samizdat transcript which showed that Gorbanevskaya's lawyer, Sofia Kallistratova, had pulled no punches. The psychiatric report, Kallistratova pointed out to the judge, listed "not a single symptom of disordered mental activity," even as the indictment failed to show that Gorbanevskaya's actions had violated Soviet laws. To no avail: pronounced guilty but not responsible for her actions, Gorbanevskaya was sentenced to indefinite confinement in a mental hospital.[79]

Every day, she was forced to take haloperidol, an anti-psychotic drug used to treat schizophrenia and other disorders. Her hands soon began to tremble uncontrollably, she found it impossible to read or write coherently, and she slept poorly. When she complained, the attending psychiatrist doubled the dose. Another psychiatrist told her that the natural punishment for anti-Soviet writers was to execute them. After two years of confinement, Gorbanevskaya agreed to state, orally but not in writing, that she had committed criminal acts while suffering from mental illness and that she would not repeat them after her release. That was sufficient for the KGB, which by then was keen to put an end to the

negative publicity her case and several others had elicited in the West. "If you are let out," warned the psychiatrist Daniil Lunts, a KGB employee who led the diagnostic division of the Serbsky Institute, "your friends will quickly drag you back into your previous activity even though you promise now that you will not resume it. It would be better to change your circle of friends."[80]

Released in February 1972, Gorbanevskaya did not change her circle of friends. But she kept her dissident activities out of view, declining to sign protest letters or attend demonstrations. Instead, she wrote anonymous pieces for the *Chronicle of Current Events* and distributed funds collected for the families of political prisoners. Once again she was placed on probation, subject to constant surveillance and periodic psychiatric examinations, under threat of reconfinement at any moment. Finding this arrangement intolerable, in December 1975 Gorbanevskaya accepted the KGB's proposal that she leave the Soviet Union with her two young sons.[81]

Andropov calculated that it was more "expedient," as he put it in reports to the Central Committee, to arrange for certain dissidents to emigrate rather than trying to silence them via intimidation, imprisonment, or internal exile. That calculus was influenced by the intensity of public criticism from abroad, including by communist parties in Western Europe, against the Soviet practice of punitive psychiatry. Archival sources leave no doubt that Soviet leaders were acutely sensitive to such criticism, which was often triggered by dissidents' transmission to the West of information about specific cases. When it came to Bukovsky, both transmission and criticism took an especially spectacular form: an interview filmed in Moscow by CBS journalist William Cole and broadcast on *60 Minutes*.[82] In calm, lucid responses, Bukovsky recounted the horrors of his own multiple periods of confinement in psychiatric hospitals, among other things for helping Volpin organize the first transparency meeting in December 1965.

Within weeks of the broadcast of the interview, Soviet authorities ordered Cole to leave the Soviet Union—one of roughly twenty Western correspondents expelled in the early 1970s "for activities incompatible with the status of a foreign journalist," which in many cases



FIGURE 14.4. Natalya Gorbanevskaya with fellow dissident Venyamin Yofe, shortly before her emigration in 1975

meant excessive contacts with dissidents.[83] Bukovsky, who by age thirty-five had spent a dozen years in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and labor camps, was deported in 1976 in exchange for the general secretary of the Communist Party of Chile, Luis Corvalán, who was imprisoned without trial under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Corvalán received a warm welcome in the Kremlin, Bukovsky in the White House. In response to the Soviet press describing Bukovsky as a "hooligan," Vadim Deloné, one of the participants in the August 1968 demonstration on Red Square, circulated the following ditty:

> They exchanged a hooligan
> For Luis Corvalán.
> Where can we find a whore,
> To trade Brezhnev for?![84]

Deloné too was now an expatriate, having accepted an offer to leave the Soviet Union together with his wife, Irina Belogorodskaya in 1975.

On May 29, 1970, the well-regarded geneticist Zhores Medvedev (named after the French socialist Jean Jaurès), twin brother of Roy (named after the Indian socialist Manabendra Roy), was seized from his apartment in Obninsk, outside Moscow, and incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital. No charges were filed against him; there was no arrest and no trial. The KGB was punishing Medvedev for his publication abroad of a critical history of Soviet genetics (*The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko*, 1969) and for more recent samizdat works on the legal right to privacy of correspondence and international scientific cooperation.[85] By his own account, Medvedev accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet state while disagreeing with some of its policies. He had never written or signed statements addressed to the Soviet leadership.[86] "This can happen tomorrow to any of us," Alexander Solzhenitsyn warned in an open letter titled "This Is How We Live." He then touched the third rail, likening Brezhnev's Soviet Union to Hitler's Germany: "The incarceration of free-thinkers in insane asylums is *spiritual murder*, a variation on the *gas chamber*, and even more cruel: the torments of those put to death in this way are more evil and last longer. Like the gas chambers, these crimes will *never* be forgotten, and *all* those who take part in them will be condemned in perpetuity, during their lives and after their deaths. Even in lawlessness, even in evil deeds one must remember the boundary beyond which a man becomes a cannibal!"[87] For the intelligentsia, Solzhenitsyn later wrote, punitive psychiatry was "more dangerous and more a matter of principle" than the invasion of Czechoslovakia—it was "a noose around our own throats."[88]

Thanks to letters of protest from prominent Soviet scientists and cultural figures, as well as pressure from scientists abroad, Zhores Medvedev was released after three weeks in psychiatric confinement. In January 1973, the KGB allowed him to travel to London, together with his wife and the younger of two sons, to take up a one-year research fellowship in genetics. "Don't build up any illusions," Solzhenitsyn told him on the eve of his departure. "They're not going to let you back in."[89] Several months later the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet stripped him of his Soviet citizenship.

As for Solzhenitsyn, his one-man war against the Soviet system was approaching its climax. Unpublishable at home, his novels *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle* had appeared abroad to critical acclaim, emboldening their author to openly call for an end to censorship of literary works in the USSR. The Union of Soviet Writers responded by expelling Solzhenitsyn from its ranks. In 1970, in what felt to many like one of the Cold War's more rarefied proxy wars, the Swedish Academy awarded Solzhenitsyn the Nobel Prize in Literature. He declined to attend the ceremony in Stockholm for fear that the Kremlin would bar his return.

By now, the KGB was aware of a monumental history of the Gulag that Solzhenitsyn had been composing—and hiding—since shortly after his return to Moscow from internal exile in the mid-1950s. Determined to prevent its publication and if necessary to silence Solzhenitsyn himself, the Soviet leadership, including the KGB, began to weigh its options. A smear campaign in the Soviet press following the Nobel announcement included comparisons of Solzhenitsyn to Valery Tarsis and Anatoly Kuznetsov, writers who had been allowed to leave the USSR and then stripped of their citizenship, effectively barring their return, as well as to Bukovsky and Amalrik, well-known dissidents sentenced to psychiatric prison and labor camp—implying that these were the options Solzhenitsyn himself now faced.[90]

At the latest by March 1972, Andropov together with the Soviet procurator-general, Roman Rudenko, had drawn up plans for Solzhenitsyn to be expelled from the USSR. Citing a litany of anti-Soviet works, they highlighted a passage from Solzhenitsyn's unpublished verse play *Feast of Victors* in which a character proclaims: "The USSR! It's a dense forest after all! A dense forest! No laws! Just power—to seize people and torture them according to the constitution—or without it." Their recommendation to seize and expel Solzhenitsyn via administrative fiat, rather than putting him on trial under formal charges, only confirmed the passage they quoted. To be sure, expulsion was not without its costs. In Andropov and Rudenko's view, it would inevitably "be used by our enemies to stimulate anti-Soviet activities." But more important was the advantage that "in Soviet peoples' eyes, Solzhenitsyn would thereby cease to be an ambiguous figure, because the Soviet state's attitude toward him will have been clearly established."[91] Apparently, one could not count on a courtroom trial to produce that effect.

The dissident problem—or, as Brezhnev put it after reading Andropov and Rudenko's recommendation, "the question why these kinds of sores keep forming on the generally healthy organism of our society and why they are eating away at this healthy organism"—was taking up more and more of the Party leadership's attention. Brezhnev seems to have been genuinely perplexed, perhaps because his sense of the sources of dissent was vague and cliché-ridden. "It's a result of our shortcomings," he announced at a Politburo meeting on March 30, 1972, "of the fact that we let down our guard and in certain arenas we stopped conducting a genuine Bolshevik struggle against this phenomenon." The problem, he said, had to be understood as "a form of class struggle, on an international scale as well as inside our country, thanks to the influence exercised on a certain backward portion of people."[92]

What would a genuine Bolshevik struggle against dissidents look like? There were still some Old Bolsheviks around, people who had joined the Party before the revolution and who were intimately familiar with the old ways of dealing with troublemakers. One of them was Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin's long-serving foreign minister. Now in his eighties and comfortably retired, Molotov expressed his views in conversations with various acolytes. Letting disaffected Jews leave the Soviet Union, for example, was fine, according to Molotov: "To hell with them, if they don't want to stay. They have their own homeland. But to allow a Russian to leave—that in my view is a sign of weakness." The bottom line, for Molotov, was that "politics decides." "It would be easy to kill Solzhenitsyn," he added. "But I think it would be better to put him in prison." Sakharov, on the other hand, "must be reckoned with. It seems, however, that he will not come to his senses, neither he nor his friends, acquaintances, those in the circle around him. To a certain extent one has to work on people, on their milieu. It's not always so easy. Even if you crush that swarm all at once," he concluded, "your troubles will not end. One has to keep fighting it."[93]

In Brezhnev's Politburo, the debate about what to do with dissidents similarly oscillated between imprisonment and various forms of exile, whether within the Soviet Union or beyond its borders. Political—including reputational—consequences, or what Andropov called

"expediency," remained the decisive factor. Only rarely did issues of legality enter the conversation. In contrast to Molotov, Brezhnev's colleagues gave relatively little weight to the nationality of individual dissidents, despite their sensitivity to the threat of nationalism within the multinational Soviet state. Available transcripts of Politburo discussions about dissidents do not mention potential assassinations, though that technique evidently remained in the KGB's repertoire.

Debates over what to do with dissidents were becoming more frequent. In the early 1970s, Sakharov alone was discussed by the Politburo, the apex of power in the Soviet system, on average once per month.[94] "We need to draw very serious conclusions," intoned Viktor Grishin, head of the Communist Party's Moscow City Committee, "and take practical measures." Sakharov, Petr Yakir, and Solzhenitsyn needed to be removed from Moscow, but how and where to? "Maybe there needs to be a conversation with Sakharov, I don't know, but we have to somehow put an end to this business, because he's gathering people around him. Although the group is not large, it's harmful." Mikhail Suslov, the Politburo's longest-serving member, agreed: "Sometimes in life, a thousand people can put up a building but all it takes is one person to destroy it."[95]

At a Politburo meeting on March 30, 1972, Suslov and Mikhail Solomentsev, chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Soviet Republic, blamed Khrushchev. The Party's ideological work was supposed "to inculcate the entire people with the spirit of intolerance" toward dissidents, but Khrushchev had sown confusion in this regard. "He's the one who cleared a path for Yakir, associated with him, encouraged him. He cleared a path for Solzhenitsyn too, and elevated him, that bastard. And look what came of Khrushchev's loose comment about how there are no longer any political enemies here."[96] The latter charge referred, slightly inaccurately, to Khrushchev's declaration at the Twenty-First Party Congress in 1959, following the liquidation of Stalin's personality cult, that there were no longer political *prisoners* in the Soviet Union.[97] Khrushchev's claim, added Suslov, that "there are no political opponents or political enemies" in the Soviet Union had "harmed the people." It was dangerous to pretend that the USSR's internal enemies

had been vanquished. The Soviet leadership needed to call things by their name, to declare Solzhenitsyn and Yakir enemies of the people, and expel them from the USSR.[98]

At this point Brezhnev felt the need to chime in. "Actually, as comrade Andropov mentioned, we don't have a law for punishing political jabbering." How could that be, wondered Boris Ponomarev, head of the international division of the Central Committee. How could the Soviet Union, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding in 1922, its global authority steadily advancing, and having helped liberate over seventy countries from colonialism—how could such a country "be unable to deal with some Solzhenitsyn, some Yakir, and Sakharov"? There was emphatic agreement that something needed to be done, but no consensus on what, when, or how. Finally Alexei Kosygin proposed a solution:

KOSYGIN: Let comrade Andropov resolve the question of what to do with these people in accordance with those laws that we have. We in turn will monitor how he resolves this question. If he resolves it incorrectly, then we'll correct him.

ANDROPOV: That's precisely why I'm consulting with the Politburo.

BREZHNEV: Judging by the previous comments of our comrades, one thing is clear—that we are unified in our principled assessment of the question. Therefore, perhaps we should end our discussion here, unless a comrade objects. Does any comrade insist on speaking further?

VOICES: We are completely "for," and we can end the discussion here.

BREZHNEV: As for Yakir and Solzhenitsyn, I agree with the comrades' opinions. We must absolutely remove them from Moscow.[99]

Everyone was unified and nothing was decided, except that the KGB should handle the problem.

The Politburo revisited the Solzhenitsyn case again and again. A turning point came in September 1973, when the KGB interrogated the elderly

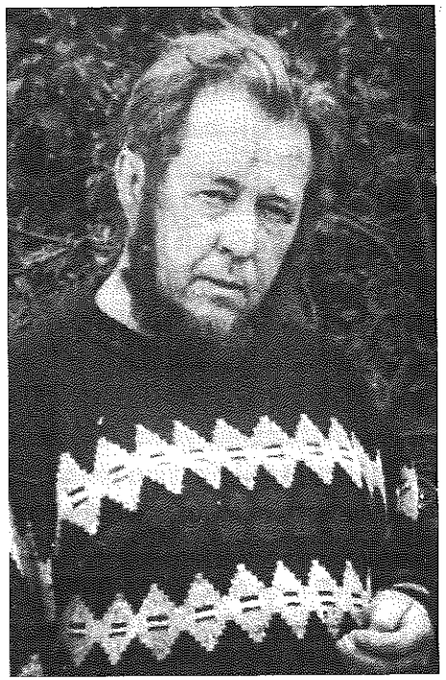


FIGURE 14.5. Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Elizaveta Voronyanskaya, one of Solzhenitsyn's trusted typists, and coerced her into revealing the hiding place of one of the three extant typescripts of the still unpublished *Gulag Archipelago* (a copy that, ironically, Solzhenitsyn had implored her to burn). Shortly thereafter she hanged herself in her apartment in Leningrad. Having waited six years since completing the manuscript, Solzhenitsyn decided the time had come to unleash his grand indictment of the Soviet system. A Russian edition of *Gulag* was published in Paris that December. Soon the Voices began broadcasting excerpts to Soviet listeners.[100]

At a Politburo meeting on January 7, 1974, the familiar alternatives were debated yet again: put Solzhenitsyn on trial or expel him from the USSR? Once more, the decisive factor was politics, or, as Nikolai Podgorny, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, put it, "Let's look at what will be more advantageous for us: a trial or expulsion.

I consider our laws humane and at the same time merciless with regard to enemies. We should try Solzhenitsyn according to our Soviet law in our Soviet court and force him to serve his sentence in the Soviet Union." That would put the USSR in a favorable light, for as he noted, "In China they publicly execute people; in Chile the fascist regime tortures people and shoots them." Andropov reiterated his preference for expelling Solzhenitsyn from the Soviet Union with or without his cooperation. "Back in the day they expelled Trotsky," he reminded his colleagues, "without asking for his agreement." Ivan Kapitonov, another Politburo member, took Podgorny's side. "I would like to judge the situation as follows: if we expel Solzhenitsyn from the USSR, what are we demonstrating—our strength or our weakness? I don't think we would be demonstrating our strength." Kosygin took a similar approach: "What will cause the least damage?" Expelling Solzhenitsyn was likely to stir up a fuss in the West. By contrast, "We have nothing to fear from applying the severity of Soviet jurisprudence to Solzhenitsyn. Look at England: they execute hundreds of people. Or Chile—the same thing. We should put Solzhenitsyn on trial and tell everyone about him. We can send him to Verkhoyansk to serve his sentence. None of the foreign correspondents will go there. It's very cold."[101]

Above all, it was the anticipated Western response that shaped the Politburo's calculus. The USSR was deeply invested in the success of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was approaching final agreement on what would come to be known as the Helsinki Accords, ratifying the borders set by Stalin in Eastern Europe after World War II. As for the domestic Soviet audience, according to Kapitonov, "we need to begin work on unmasking Solzhenitsyn, and then whatever steps we take will be understood by our people." Podgorny concurred: "The people will support any action we take." Brezhnev summed up what was now the majority position:

> I think the best method is to act in accordance with our Soviet laws. The investigation must be conducted openly. We should demonstrate to the people Solzhenitsyn's hostile anti-Soviet activity, his desecration of our Soviet system, his blackening of the memory of our great leader, the founder of our party and state V. I. Lenin, his desecration of the memory of the victims of the Great Patriotic War, his justification of counter-revolutionaries, his direct violation of our laws. He must be tried on the basis of our laws. There was a time when we were not afraid to act against the counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia. We were not afraid to let [Stalin's daughter Svetlana] Alliluyeva out of the country. We survived all that. I think we'll survive this too.[102]

The stenogram indicates that "everyone" responded with "Correct. Agreed." Brezhnev's assertion that the USSR had survived the very public defection of Stalin's daughter to the United States (via India) as well as the embarrassment of having invaded its own socialist ally was of course correct. The salient point, however, is that he assumed the trial of Solzhenitsyn would produce an analogous effect.

There was no trial. Instead, the KGB orchestrated a propaganda campaign in the Soviet mass media, branding Solzhenitsyn a renegade, traitor, Judas, blasphemer, and counter-revolutionary. He was pilloried as an ally of both Mao Zedong and the Pentagon.[103] There was no "open investigation" and the government did not "try him according to our Soviet law in our Soviet court and force him to serve his sentence in the Soviet Union." On February 7, 1974, Andropov wrote a personal note to Brezhnev (rather than to the Politburo as a whole) informing him that "the Solzhenitsyn question has now moved beyond being a criminal matter and is becoming a significant problem with a certain political character." That, as previous Politburo discussions made clear, is what it had always been. Was Andropov, who had consistently favored expulsion over a trial, manipulating Brezhnev into overruling the Politburo, or did he genuinely perceive a shift in the political calculus? Citing surveillance information from the Fifth Directorate, he informed Brezhnev that while the overwhelming majority of Soviet people "correctly evaluated the criticism of Solzhenitsyn" (that is, were persuaded by the official propaganda campaign), within that majority many wanted to know "why the authorities do not take measures" against him. Certain members of the "creative intelligentsia," moreover, along with some students and workers, were expressing sympathy for Solzhenitsyn's arguments.

The crucial arena, according to Andropov—Hungarian complex intact—was no longer foreign but domestic. "Despite all our desire to avoid damage in international affairs," he argued, "it is simply not possible to put off the resolution of the Solzhenitsyn question. Further delay could trigger consequences inside the country that would be extremely undesirable for us. Unfortunately, we have no other way out, insofar as Solzhenitsyn's unpunished behavior is already costing us far more inside the country than what we will be required to pay in the international arena."[104]

It is not clear what led Andropov to identify such a critical threat lurking within Soviet society scarcely four weeks after the Politburo had confidently agreed that "the people will support any action we take." Whether or not he was performing an end-run around his fellow Politburo members, Andropov appears to have been driven by one central concern: putting Solzhenitsyn on trial would court disaster. It wasn't just that the author of *The Gulag Archipelago* was sure to be a maximally defiant defendant or that his global fame guaranteed wall-to-wall coverage in the international press. The charges against Solzhenitsyn—"slander against the Soviet order, the Communist Party and its internal and external policies," "desecration of the sacred memory of V. I. Lenin and other Party leaders"—would inevitably draw more attention to his historical indictment of communism. Moreover, the only actual law Solzhenitsyn was directly accused of violating (in the Soviet procurator's preliminary list of charges), was the Universal Copyright Convention, ostensibly for the manner in which his works were published abroad.[105]

On February 11, Solzhenitsyn received a summons to appear at the procurator's office. Rather than signing to acknowledge receipt, he attached a typed statement:

> Under the conditions of unrelieved, pervasive lawlessness that has reigned for many years in our country . . . , I refuse to acknowledge the legality of your summons and will not appear for interrogation by any agency of the state. Before requiring citizens to answer to the law, learn to fulfill it yourselves. Liberate the innocent prisoners. Punish those guilty of mass exterminations and false denunciations. Punish the administrators and the special units that carried out genocide (the deportation of *entire peoples*). *Today*, deprive local and departmental satraps of their unlimited power over citizens, their arbitrary use of courts and psychiatrists. Satisfy the *millions* of lawful but suppressed complaints.[106]

On the following day, eight officers showed up and took Solzhenitsyn to Lefortovo Prison, where officials informed him that he was being charged with treason under Article 64 of the Criminal Code—a charge that had not appeared in the procurator's brief four weeks earlier. Was the KGB bluffing? Solzhenitsyn never found out. Twenty-four hours later, he was placed on an Aeroflot flight bound for West Germany.[107]

Whether the expulsion of Solzhenitsyn was a symptom of weakness (Soviet leaders feared the power of a lone writer, even one whose works were barred from publication in the USSR) or of strength (Soviet leaders could seize and immediately deport anyone, whenever they pleased), the fact that he was never put on trial betrayed a lack of confidence in the Soviet judicial system. Mikhail Malyarov, the first deputy procurator-general, had once asked Sakharov, "Who gave you the right to doubt our system of justice?"[108] Evidently, the KGB's doubts were even deeper than Sakharov's.

We should not be surprised, of course, that political factors shaped the Kremlin's approach to the phenomenon of dissent, including its legal dimensions. The Soviet government was hardly unique in this respect. What is noteworthy is the ease with which legal considerations were brushed aside as well as the absence of pushback by Politburo members who had favored putting Solzhenitsyn on trial, when faced with Andropov's sudden reversal of that plan. The decision not to bring Solzhenitsyn to justice was emblematic of a larger retreat from "socialist legality" as a tool of governance in favor of a repertoire of informal, extra-judicial techniques that sought either to preempt dissident activity (via prophylaxis) or to extrude dissidents from Soviet society (via forced emigration or the use of psychiatric confinement). Couched in

the language of progressive social and medical science, prophylaxis and punitive psychiatry allegedly helped their subjects by stopping criminal activity before it happened or diagnosing and treating incipient mental illness. In reality, they opened the door for the KGB to operate almost entirely outside any legal constraints.

By creating the Fifth Directorate, Andropov signaled an awareness of a qualitatively new challenge to the USSR, one that rejected armed force and underground conspiracy in favor of deploying Soviet and international law. The sheer scope of the response to the dissident movement—the thousands of phones tapped, apartments searched, suspects tailed, prophylactic conversations held, prisoners interrogated—indicates the heightened level of concern. The goal was now to remove dissidents from Soviet society rather than attempting to transform them into upstanding "Soviet people." That, in fact, was the puzzle: by anyone's definition, they already *were* Soviet people. Brezhnev was by no means alone in his struggle to understand where dissidents came from. As one of the letters from ordinary citizens published by the Soviet mass media put it, responding to the official campaign against Sakharov and other dissenters, "We cannot understand how someone who has been raised under Soviet rule, whose education and professional status were provided for by the toil of common laborers, can so unscrupulously libel our way of life."[109] For the post-Stalinist security services, giving up mass terror as an instrument of social control seems to have gone hand in hand with diminishing interest in finding answers to such questions, a loss of desire to understand how and when certain Soviet citizens had gone wrong. It is as if the much-discussed apathy of postwar Soviet youth found a counterpart in the KGB itself, in the form of declining ideological élan—couched, to be sure, in the language of professionalism. Extra-judicial methods were regarded by their practitioners as "sophisticated" and "ingenious," if only by contrast with Stalin's indiscriminate terrorism.[110] Caught up in the global Cold War, the KGB fell back on a stock answer to the question of how to account for Soviet dissidents: knowingly or not, they were agents of hostile foreign powers, tools and instruments rather than home-grown, self-propelled entities.

That assumption helps account for a second noteworthy aspect of the Soviet government's handling of the dissident movement, namely, the extent to which it was tethered to the USSR's relations with the West. Internal Politburo discussions make clear that Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders were acutely sensitive to Western criticism of the USSR's internal affairs, including violations of international human rights norms, about which the dissident movement seemed to generate an endless supply of damaging evidence. The Fifth Directorate's shift toward stealthier, extra-judicial tactics against dissidents was driven to a considerable degree by the negative publicity that political trials stirred up in Western media. So were decisions about how to manage individual cases: there was less need to stand on ceremony with dissidents unknown to the outside world. To be sure, Soviet leaders often dismissed Western criticism as "noise," fake indignation designed to serve the purposes of psychological warfare. The frequency with which they cited such criticism, however, and the effort they expended in combating it suggest that it found a significant place in their political calculus. The rise of East-West détente only exacerbated these issues insofar as greater openness and interaction raised Western expectations that the Soviet regime would relax its rule at home as well. The Kremlin, by contrast, harbored no such expectations.