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THESIS

**FROM TRUST TO TREACHERY: UNRAVELING
SOVIET INTELLIGENCE TACTICS
IN THE 1920S AND 1930S**

by

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**FROM TRUST TO TREACHERY: UNRAVELING SOVIET INTELLIGENCE
TACTICS IN THE 1920S AND 1930S**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines why the Soviet Union's intelligence services, in its efforts to neutralize the White Russian movement, chose strategic deception as its primary tactic in the 1920s and political violence in the 1930s. The research effort uses variables common to criminal investigations (victim, means, motive, and opportunity) as a framework to evaluate the decisions made by Soviet intelligence and political leaders in their respective decades. The thesis uses Soviet intelligence operations drawn from each decade as case studies to further refine the comparison.

The exercise yields two conclusions. First, the steady consolidation of White Russian leadership after the Russian Civil War was a significant factor in the Soviet choice of political violence in the 1930s. Second, the increase in Soviet intelligence capacity for foreign operations was another significant factor in the move toward political violence. In contrast, Soviet motivations in attacking the White Russians, and the opportunity to do so, did not change significantly from the 1920s to 1930s, and thus did not impact Soviet decision-making. The research result is a refined understanding of how Soviet intelligence adapted to different foreign threats in the interwar period, and the refinement of a research tool to apply to Soviet and Russian intelligence operations up to the present, and those of services trained by the Soviets.

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GLOSSARY

<i>aktivnoe meropriatia</i>	Political manipulation and propaganda, literally “active measures”
<i>Cheka (Vserossiiskaya chrevzuychanaia komissiiya po bor’be s kontrarevoliutsiei i sabotazhem)</i>	Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, the Bolshevik’s first intelligence service established in December 1917
Chekist	A member of the Cheka
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
Comintern	Communist International
<i>FSB (Federalnaya sluzhba bezopasnosti)</i>	Federal Security Service, successor to domestic and counterintelligence elements of KGB
<i>FSR (Fond spaseniia rodiny)</i>	Fund for the Salvation of the Motherland, money raised by the ROVS for sabotage operations inside the Soviet Union
<i>GPU (Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie)</i>	State Political Directorate, successor organization of the Cheka, established in 1922
<i>GUGB (Glavnoe upravlenie gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti)</i>	Chief Directorate of State Security, a division of the NKVD formed in 1934 to combat counter-revolutionary groups and foreign espionage
Illegal (<i>nelegal</i>)	An intelligence officer posted to a foreign country without diplomatic cover or immunity, sometimes using a false identity from a benign third country

INO (<i>Inostrannyi otel</i>)	Foreign Intelligence Directorate of the OGPU
KGB (<i>Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopastnosti</i>)	Committee for State Security
<i>maskirovka</i>	strategic deception
<i>mokroye delo</i>	executions and assassination, literally “wet work”
MOTsR (<i>Monarkhicheskoye ob’yedineniye tsentral’noy rossii</i>)	Monarchist Association of Central Russia
NEP (<i>Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika</i>)	New Economic Policy
NKVD (<i>Narodniy kommissariat vnutrennikh del</i>)	People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs
Non-predeterminist	White Russian political position that refused to support the automatic return to autocracy, instead insisting on a national assembly to decide the form of government in post-Bolshevik Russia
Okhrana	The Russian tsar’s secret police
OGPU (<i>Obyedinennoye gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravleniye</i>)	Unified State Police Directorate
ROVS (<i>Russkii obhsche-voinskiy soiuz</i>)	Russian All-Military Union
VMS (<i>Vyshshii morarkhicheskii soiuz</i>)	Supreme Monarchist Union

EVOLUTION OF SOVIET INTELLIGENCE SERVICES, 1917–1941¹

December 1917	Cheka
February 1922	Incorporated into the NKVD as the GPU
July 1923	OGPU formed
July 1934	OGPU incorporated into the NKVD as the GUGB
February 1941	GUGB elements incorporated into the NKGB

¹ Robert W. Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 353, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=4086019>.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis uses a simplified version of the Library of Congress system to transliterate Russian words and names. It makes exceptions for well-known transliterations of names that are widely recognized with an alternative spelling, such as Dzerzhinsky.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In late 1920, the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow should have been celebrating the end of the Russian Civil War. The Red Army had systematically defeated their monarchist enemies and wrenched authority from the remnants of the Provisional Government that had been established in 1917 after the Tsar's abdication. Most Russians believed the Bolsheviks were firmly in control.

Instead, the leaders in Moscow turned their attention to threats from abroad, both from the Western powers intent on isolating the Bolshevik regime and the monarchists committed to bringing back the tsar. The latter group, known as the White Russians, were plotting to renew the fight as soon as their forces recovered from the hasty evacuation of Crimea one month before. These foreign enemies called for a new strategy, one based on subterfuge and long-distance manipulation rather than forced marches and military might.

What followed was a multifaceted and long-running strategic deception campaign, perhaps one of the greatest intelligence operations of its kind. Rather than worrying that the White Russians and their foreign patrons might build a genuine internal opposition movement, the Soviets decided to invent one. From 1921 to 1927, the exiles were confident that a sizable network inside Russia was on the verge of replacing the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, the exiles sent money, volunteers, and weapons in support, all in the hope of a triumphant return to their homeland. These hopes were dashed in 1927 when a disgruntled Chekist (a term for Soviet intelligence personnel) defected to Finland and revealed that the entire pro-monarchist network was a fabrication known as Operation Trust. The White Russians learned that six years of faith in an anti-Bolshevik counter-revolution was based on lies concocted by the Soviets themselves. As one émigré newspaper bluntly stated, “the knife of the Russian chekist has already been driven into the spine of the emigration.”¹

Ten years later, the leader of the White Russian community, General Evgenii Miller, disappeared from the streets of Paris. As the surviving member of a shrinking cadre

¹ Paul F. Robinson, *The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920-1941* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 141.

of monarchists trying to keep their movement alive, Miller's goal was to weaken the Soviet regime in Moscow and bring his people back to their homeland. His disappearance shook the White Russian community and exposed how Soviet spies systematically penetrated the movement. Years later, the Soviets admitted to abducting Miller and later executing him in a Moscow prison.

Soviet fears of a White Russian émigré movement intent on overthrowing the Bolsheviks drove both operations. Intelligence historians rate Operation Trust as one of the greatest strategic deception operations of all time. Miller's disappearance exemplifies the paralyzing effects of political violence, as his kidnapping hobbled the White Russians and finished them as a political force in the run-up to the Second World War. Both operations epitomize Soviet intelligence tactics in their respective decades. What remains undetermined, however, is why the Soviet intelligence leadership opted for political violence in the 1930s after the success of strategic deception in the 1920s. This thesis attempts to answer that question by comparing the circumstances driving both decisions.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Recent articles on Russia's war in Ukraine note that while the Kremlin's military forces underperform, its security services have done well in hunting partisans and muzzling others opposed to the invasion.² This development surprises no one familiar with the reach and capabilities of the Russian intelligence services, institutions that have survived in one form or another since the nineteenth century. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, the Tsar's secret police, the Okhrana, monitored and harassed domestic and foreign opponents of the monarchy.³ Vladimir Lenin established his All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, abbreviated as VChK and known as the Cheka, mere weeks after the October 1917 coup that brought the Bolsheviks to power. This new security service was instrumental in

² Jack Watling, Oleksandr Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, "Preliminary Lessons from Russia's Unconventional Operations During the Russo-Ukrainian War, February 2022–February 2023," Special Report (Royal United Services Institute, March 29, 2023), <https://www.rusi.org><https://www.rusi.org>.

³ Rita T. Kronenbitter, "Paris Okhrana 1885-1905," in *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police*, ed. Benjamin B. Fischer, Studies in Intelligence Anthology (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1997), 19–30.

winning the Russian Civil War, gaining a reputation for brutality and control in the process.⁴ The reorganized services that followed the Cheka directed Joseph Stalin's Great Purge in the late 1930s (with many of its personnel later becoming victims themselves), ran labor camps in Siberia, and aided in the transformation of Soviet society following the Second World War.⁵ The Cheka's legacy survives today in Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).

Over the years, Soviet methods of thwarting its enemies changed. In the 1920s, the Soviet relied on "active measures" (*aktivnoe meropriatia* in Russian) to discredit opposition groups using disinformation, political propaganda, and crises created from within.⁶ One example was planting evidence of foreign government support, thus calling into question an opposition group's true allegiance—to Russia or to the foreign power. A decade later, the preferred method was political violence (kidnapping and assassination) to neutralize foreign dissidents, known as "wet work" (*mokroye delo*) for the blood spilled during successful operations.⁷ Both methods were part of the Soviet playbook until 1991, and they may remain useful tools to advance Russian foreign objectives today. What is unclear is why, in a narrow span of time, Moscow changed tactics while fighting the same foreign foe. As this thesis will show, the switch was not an evolution, but a deliberate choice driven by variables that changed between the two decades. When faced with those circumstances, Soviet leaders had several options available to undermine foreign enemies of the Soviet state.⁸ This thesis questions what drove the Soviet intelligence choice of deception in the 1920s and violence in the 1930s against the White Russians and offers an

⁴ E. H. Carr, "The Origin and Status of the Cheka," *Soviet Studies* 10, no. 1 (1958): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/149095>.

⁵ Alexandra Lauren Sukalo, "The Soviet Political Police: Establishment, Training, and Operations in the Soviet Republics, 1918-1953," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., California, Stanford University, 2021), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2734696723/abstract/E19DBCF2D7BF4480PQ/1>.

⁶ Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence*, 14.

⁷ Pringle, 198.

⁸ Christopher M. Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1990), 387; "Litvinenko's Murder Was 'Probably' Approved by Putin," *The Economist*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2016/01/21/litvinenkos-murder-was-probably-approved-by-putin>.

assessment framework that may generate insights into the operational decision-making of Soviet intelligence in other eras.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Current literature on the development and deployment of Soviet intelligence active measures and political violence focuses mainly on specific events, isolated operations, or recent high-profile incidents and their political repercussions. Intelligence historians devote less attention to the variables that drove Soviet leadership to choose one tactic over another when faced with a persistent threat. Whereas academic articles and books by historians focused on the Soviet Union seek to explain the structure, organization, personal politics, and practices of the Soviet and Russian security services, the study of operational choices has not benefitted from the same level of attention.

This thesis contributes to the study of Soviet intelligence by focusing on the deliberate decisions made to neutralize an opposition group that threatened the early Bolshevik regime. All the practices used with success by Russian intelligence remain part of the services' repertoire today, albeit in advanced forms. Gaining a better understanding of why early Soviet intelligence chose one tactic over another when faced with an existential foreign threat might offer insight into the thinking of today's Russian leaders and the tools they use to pursue enemies of the state. Additionally, the same framework might apply to intelligence services trained by the Soviets and Russians in Eastern and Central Europe and beyond, and thus contribute to our understanding of the decision-making processes of a wide array of intelligence services.

The shadow war that is today's security and intelligence environment hails from the deception and covert violence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Applying the research design of this thesis to other timelines may help identify how intelligence services learn to use different tactics against their foes. At the foundation of this evaluation, however, is the choice of case studies backed by sufficient historical evidence. Operation Trust and the kidnapping of General Miller both merit further research due to the importance these events played in the Soviet struggle against the White Russians.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis compares two discrete intelligence operations against the White Russians to determine the variables that influenced Soviet leadership's choice of tactics. By applying the same decision framework to each operation, this paper aims to identify the variable or variables that explain the decision to pursue political violence in the 1930s after the successful use of strategic deception in the 1920s against the same target.

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis is based on the comparison of two Soviet intelligence operations against the leadership of the White Russian émigré movement. Using a framework of four decision variables consistently applied to both case studies, this effort will identify which variables changed over time and the significance of those differences in terms of the Soviet decision to shift tactics. As both intelligence operations were effectively crimes against the White Russians, this thesis structures its analysis on the traditional criminal investigation variables of victim, means, motive, and opportunity. This thesis argues that a systematic comparison of these four decision variables over two separate case studies reveals changes in some of the variables. In turn, those changes explain the shift in Soviet tactics between the 1920s and 1930s.

First, this project will describe the general state of the White Russian community and its leadership (i.e., the “victim”) in the early 1920s and the mid-1930s, the two periods in which the Soviets were choosing strategies to use. A major change in the White Russian community's leadership, ideological position, or broader unity could help explain the Soviet shift in tactics.

Second, this thesis will focus on Soviet means to execute complex intelligence operations. Means, or capabilities, include skills and experience in clandestine activities, along with the personnel, financial, and other resources necessary for success. Fundamental to the comparison of the two operations will be the gap between the Soviets' domestic and foreign capabilities, and whether that gap played a role in the service's calculus on tactics.

Third, a comparison of the motives of Soviet leadership will aid in discerning whether changes in those motives had any influence on the choice of tactics against the White Russians. Soviet fear of White Russian military activities, backed by the Western powers, drove many of the regime's actions. Changes in Soviet leadership and motivations may have affected the decision over tactics.

Fourth, this thesis will review the Soviets' access to their targets (the "opportunity") and their ability to manipulate the White Russians. Without an opportunity to act against a potential victim, even overwhelming means and strong motives fall short. Significant changes in Soviet access to White Russian leadership might explain the shift in tactics between the decades.

The selection of this period in the history of Soviet intelligence enables a discrete comparison of operations against the White Russians. The Bolsheviks came to power through a coup in October 1917, and after a brief time to recover from the shock, opposition groups organized and fought back. Lenin and Trotsky began to identify their enemies, both internal and external, and use that identification to unify their followers and excuse the use of terror against their fellow Russians. This early tradition of leveraging "enemies," whether real or imaginary, to maintain control and focus attention became the foundation of the modern Soviet police state. The use of violence, rare after the Russian Civil War, then emerged in the 1930s as a fundamental tool for dealing with internal dissidents. This thesis argues that those early decisions on how to pursue one external dissident group shaped the Soviet state's approach to dealing with all threats.

In addition to defining the variables and timeframe for the comparative study, the selection of cases is an important element of this investigation. The two operations chosen—the strategic deception known as Operation Trust and the political violence of the abduction and execution of General Evgenii Miller—each offer a robust example of Soviet tactics used against the White Russians in the 1920s and 1930s. If strategic deception was just one of several tools used in the 1920s or political violence part of an array of options in the 1930s, the selection of these cases would be artificial. In fact, a review of the Bolshevik-White Russian conflict outside of Russia will show that while Lenin considered multiple tactics in 1921, the only option pursued with vigor was strategic deception. By the

1930s, the strategy favored violent action against select White Russian targets, demonstrating that political violence became the leading option pursued by Soviet intelligence. By this reasoning, narrowing the study to two specific operations against the same target helps limit the variables that may have driven the decision process.

The first case is known in the intelligence history community as Operation Trust, the premier example of a strategic deception campaign run against an external opposition group. While there were similar efforts aimed at Ukrainian nationalists and non-Bolshevik socialists, the deception operation against the leadership of the White Russian community in Europe and its Western patrons sets the standard in terms of the longevity, overall effectiveness, and Soviet energy devoted to maintaining the operation. Allegedly, a display on Operation Trust was the centerpiece of the Chekists' Study Room at KGB Headquarters in Moscow in the 1950s, making it available to Soviet students of deception as a template for future operations.⁹

The second case study, chosen to exemplify the use of political violence against Soviet enemies in the 1930s, is the kidnapping and eventual execution of General Evgenii Miller, the leader of the White Russian military from 1930 to 1937. The operation against Miller is not unique as Soviet assassins were active in this period, but it does exemplify the role of all four decision variables in deriving success.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of intelligence is a unique field in that its primary sources suffer all the traditional limitations of the researcher and archive survivorship biases, along with the significant possibility that accessible material contains deliberate disinformation. For example, there are competing explanations for the end of Operation Trust. The first explanation is the 1927 defection of one of its architects who subsequently exposed the operation. A second explanation holds that the defection was in fact a ruse to add credibility to his story and heighten the impact of the original deception operation. Suspicions of ulterior motives and hidden agendas are common in this field of study, complicating

⁹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 384.

research and posing a challenge to any analysis. Fortunately, many of these false trails are not essential to the primary research question but the potential of disinformation must be acknowledged.

Additionally, primary sources, such as those contained in the Russian national archives, are limited or blocked due to the sensitivity of the material and no tradition of mandatory declassification. Furthermore, foreigners' access to these documents is nearly impossible due to the current political climate. The material for this thesis draws on a range of primary sources, such as autobiographies, internal reports, and literature, to construct a narrative of the 1920s and 1930s, while remaining fully aware of the possibility of intentional lies and limited archive access. The good news, however, is that several bodies of literature exist at the institutional, personal, and intelligence operations history levels to build a narrative of this period in Soviet and White Russian history.

1. Institutional and Intelligence History

Soviet intelligence has a long and storied history that benefits from extensive (and widely available) research in the West. The core texts on the history of Soviet intelligence are compiled by Christopher Andrew with the help of defectors Vasili Mitrokhin and Oleg Gordievsky, respectively.¹⁰ Mitrokhin's contribution were the boxes of notes he collected over years of access to the KGB archives, while Gordievsky had firsthand knowledge of KGB operations. These surveys of Soviet intelligence help place Operation Trust and the political violence of the 1930s into the context of the security services growing role in preserving the Soviet state by neutralizing "foreign enemies." Andrew's more comprehensive history of intelligence helps compare the development of Soviet intelligence with that of the Okhrana, the Russian tsar's secret police.¹¹

¹⁰ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, Paperback ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*.

¹¹ Christopher Andrew, *Secret World: A History of Intelligence* (Yale University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5cg9n4>.

Alongside these comprehensive studies are two works with extended descriptions of the Cheka and the early years of Soviet security and intelligence.¹² Lennard Gerson and George Leggett both highlight the importance of Operation Trust to the reputation of the Cheka and its impact on the White Russian community. Less attention is spent on the abductions of Generals Aleksandr Kutepov and Miller, but these operations are addressed in other sources described below. Additionally, it is important to note that Gerson and Leggett's works were published well before the opening of Soviet archives in the 1990s and thus neither writer could check their research against historical KGB files.

To gain a sense for the ferocity of the Cheka in the early 1920s, several works from that era capture the flood of rumors, anecdotes, insider information, and official Bolshevik reports on Cheka activities. The first is a 1922 book titled *Che-Ka*, published by the Socialists-Revolutionaries Party (SR), non-Marxist socialists that dominated Russia's political left before the rise of the Bolsheviks.¹³ *Che-Ka* offers a dramatic (and likely exaggerated) snapshot of the situation inside Russia in the early 1920s, and the SR used it to discredit the Bolsheviks. More accessible for a Western audience is *The Red Terror in Russia*, a 1925 history based on former tsarist administrator Sergey Melgounov's firsthand experiences and his interpretations of material drawn from *Che-Ka*.¹⁴

2. Memoirs and Biographies

Another important source of information on the policies, politics, and personalities of the battle between Soviet intelligence and the White Russians are the autobiographies and biographies of former spies, generals, and other key figures on both sides. Many of these were intelligence operatives that chose to defect to the West rather than return to Moscow during the purges of the late 1930s. This thesis will rely on three to give context to the choice of tactics used against the White Russians and other external enemies. In

¹² Lennard D. Gerson, *The Secret Police in Lenin's Russia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976); George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹³ *ЧЕ-КА - материалы по деятельности чрезвычайных комиссий [Che-Ka - Materials on the activities of emergency commissions]* (Berlin: Central Bureau of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1922), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001744951>. Electronic translation provided by Yandex Translate.

¹⁴ Sergey Petrovich Melgounov, *The Red Terror in Russia*, trans. C. J. Hogarth (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1925), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015069769530>.

addition, they help make clear the evolution of the Cheka and its successors the foundational importance of identifying an enemy to justify the brutality of the police state.

The first is Walter Krivitsky's 1939 recounting of his operational activities in Europe. Krivitsky, born Samuel Ginsberg in 1899, was a Soviet intelligence officer operating as a businessman, known in intelligence circles as an "illegal" (as opposed to an accredited "legal" diplomat in a Soviet Embassy).¹⁵ Ordered to return to Russia, Krivitsky defected in 1937 and authored a book that revealed much about Stalin's operations in Europe.¹⁶ He earned kudos from the Western press for his testimony before the U.S. Congress and his prediction of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact before it was announced. Krivitsky died in Washington in 1941 of suicide, though many speculated at the time that the Soviets assassinated him.¹⁷

Another defector who had first- and second-hand knowledge of Soviet operations against the White Russians was known as Alexander Orlov, born Aleksandr Felbin in 1899.¹⁸ Orlov's two books offer detailed accounts of the deception operations used to lure back former SR terrorist Boris Savinkov and British agent Sydney Reilly, both of whom wished to overthrow the Bolsheviks in the 1920s.¹⁹

The work of a third former intelligence officer, Pavel Sudoplatov, offers a unique perspective and possible biases. Sudoplatov, a former NKVD and KGB officer instrumental in Soviet assassination operations in the 1940s and beyond, is an interesting source for this thesis.²⁰ The publication of *Special Tasks* caused an uproar in 1995, largely because Sudoplatov relied on his own experiences and newly released archives to

¹⁵ Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence*, 169.

¹⁶ Walter G. Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service: An Expose of Russia's Secret Policies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

¹⁷ Frederick C. Giffin, "The Death of Walter Krivitsky," *Social Science* 54, no. 3 (1979): 139–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41886413>.

¹⁸ Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence*, 222.

¹⁹ Alexander Orlov, *The March of Time: Reminiscences* (London: St Ermin's, 2004); Alexander Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1953).

²⁰ Pavel Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness, a Soviet Spymaster*, Updated ed (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

document many of the Soviets' executive activities. Sudoplatov's book, however, cannot be taken at face value because he remained in Russia after serving a fifteen-year prison term after the death of Stalin. It seems unlikely that the KGB did not have some influence over how Sudoplatov wrote his memoir.

All four works, despite their limitations, offer insights into the inner workings of Soviet intelligence. This thesis will leverage those insights to identify the variables that drive the choice of tactics to use against an external enemy.

A fourth writer offers the White Russian perspective during and immediately after Operation Trust. In 1925, Operation Trust operatives "smuggled" monarchist and staunch Russian nationalist Vasili Shulgin into Russia and allowed him to experience first-hand the Bolshevik's progress in developing the new Soviet Union. After the trip, Shulgin wrote *Tri stolitsy* (*Three Capitals*) to inform the world of Soviet progress and to advocate against Western interference. Just after the Soviets published Shulgin's initial draft (without his permission), he learned that Operation Trust was a Soviet intelligence operation and everyone he had met was a Cheka role player. His follow-on article, titled *How I Was Hoodwinked by the Bolsheviks*, captured the shock and disappointment of the White Russian community.²¹

For a more objective view of some of the figures in this thesis, three articles on General Miller, Shulgin, and Reilly provide additional background. Vladislav Goldin and John Long's study of Miller, including his last correspondence with his NKVD jailors, offers important insights into their objectives in kidnapping Miller and Miller's attempts to save his own life.²² Giovanni Savino's article on Shulgin details his role in the White

²¹ Vasili Shulgin, *Tri stolitsy [Three capitals]* (Berlin: Zinaburg and Co., 1927), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007043088>; Vasily "Basil" Shulgin, "How I Was Hoodwinked by the Bolsheviks," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 6, no. 18 (1928): 505–19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202205>.

²² Vladislav I. Goldin and John W. Long, "Resistance and Retribution: The Life and Fate of General E.K. Miller," *Revolutionary Russia* 12, no. 2 (December 1, 1999): 19–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546549908575708>.

Russian movement and the fallout when *Three Capitals* was revealed as deception.²³ Lastly, Richard Spence offers insights into the relationship between Reilly and Savinkov, and Reilly's final days through his own notes saved in the KGB archives since 1926.²⁴

Lastly, a detailed description of the events before and after the abduction of General Miller comes in the biography of Nadezdha Plevitskaia by Pamela Jordan.²⁵ Plevitskaia was married to General Nikolai Skoblin, Miller's deputy, and both were Soviet spies directed to undermine the White Russian movement. After Miller's disappearance, Skoblin fled France, leaving Plevitskaia to stand trial for her role in the incident. She was found guilty and died in a French prison in 1940. The story of Plevitskaia, Skoblin, and Miller was immortalized in Vladimir Nabokov's 1943 short story *The Assistant Producer*.²⁶

3. Tactics and Operations

Understanding the variables that drove Soviet leadership's choice of tactics in the 1920s and 1930s requires an in-depth assessment of the chosen case studies and their respective circumstances. This thesis draws on a range of professional, academic, and popular sources to assess the tactics of strategic deception and political violence. Following that, the thesis will explore several histories of each operation.

For a "professional" analysis of Soviet intelligence's use of deception and violence, this thesis will rely on studies prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its experts. The first is a declassified 1964 study describing the targets, tactics, and foreign

²³ Giovanni Savino, "Vasily Shulgin (1878–1976): The Grandfather of Russian Nationalism," *Transnational History of the Far Right* (Washington, DC: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, November 2020), <https://www.illiberalism.org/vasily-shulgin-the-grandfather-of-russian-nationalism/>.

²⁴ Richard B. Spence, "The Terrorist and the Master Spy: The Political 'Partnership' of Boris Savinkov and Sidney Reilly, 1918–1925," *Revolutionary Russia* 4, no. 1 (1991): 111–31; Richard B. Spence, "Sidney Reilly's Lubianka 'Diary' 30 October–4 November 1925," *Revolutionary Russia* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 1995): 179–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546549508575638>.

²⁵ Pamela A. Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy: The Life and Exile of Nadezhda Plevitskaya* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

²⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, "The Assistant Producer," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1943, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1943/05/the-assistant-producer/656407/>.

installations developed to enable kidnapping and assassination operations.²⁷ For our purposes, the focus on the KGB's ability to use political violence in ways attributable (or not) to the Soviet Union will help us assess the limitations of the Cheka in the 1920s. The second source, an article on counterintelligence and self-deception, is written by Tennant Bagley, a former CIA counterintelligence officer.²⁸ Bagley describes several deception operations against the SR Party, the Bolsheviks, and Leon Trotsky that proved successful. Bagley speaks to the requirement for a believing victim for deception to succeed, a consideration that the Cheka must have debated when developing Operation Trust.

The academic and historical communities have devoted some attention to Soviet intelligence tactics in different eras and against different enemies. Thomas Rid's *Active Measures* describes the practices of several nations, with a useful focus on Soviet and Russian techniques.²⁹ Sanshiro Hosaka's article titled *Repeating History* aptly captures the long-term viability of both tactics while Marek Świerczek demonstrates how Operation Trust provides a playbook for future deception operations.³⁰ For historical examples of early disinformation operations against foreign foes, John Long and Richard Debo both document the sensational Lockhart Plot, an early Bolshevik use of *agent provocateurs* to disrupt a British plot to overthrow Lenin.³¹ All of these articles treat their respective incidents in isolation, aptly showing that early successes can be replicated years later. But

²⁷ "Soviet Use of Assassination and Kidnapping," *Studies in Intelligence* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1975), <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-19-no-3/soviet-use-of-assassination-and-kidnapping/>.

²⁸ Tennent H. Bagley, "Bane of Counterintelligence: Our Penchant for Self-Deception," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 1993): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850609308435198>.

²⁹ Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*, First edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

³⁰ Sanshiro Hosaka, "Repeating History: Soviet Offensive Counterintelligence Active Measures," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 35, no. 3 (July 3, 2022): 429–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1822100>; Marek Świerczek, "The 'Matryoshka System', or the Perfect Disinformation," *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 10, no. 19 (2018): 416–30, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-00142b49-d209-47a2-bca5-cd3f4375d15a>.

³¹ John W. Long, "Plot and Counter-plot in Revolutionary Russia: Chronicling the Bruce Lockhart Conspiracy, 1918," *Intelligence and National Security* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 122–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529508432289>; Richard K. Debo, "Lockhart Plot or Dzerzhinskii Plot?," *The Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 3 (September 1971): 413–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1878562>.

there the contribution to this thesis ends, as the literature does not address why Soviet leaders chose one tactic over another as the years passed. To clarify the difference between strategic deception on the intelligence rather than military front, this thesis takes into account Mikhail Tsypkin's detailed explanation of Soviet military deception to avoid conflating the two similar, but distinct, forms of misdirection.³²

Operation Trust, due to its reputation as the premier deception operation executed by Soviet intelligence, benefits from some professional scrutiny. These works suffer from a lack of academic rigor, however, possibly due to the niche subject and the scarcity of primary sources. An uncredited analyst at the CIA drafted an unclassified white paper on Operation Trust in 1969, since released through a Freedom of Information Act request in 2013.³³ The historical overview includes an extensive list of personalities linked to the operation and a useful review of other histories of Operation Trust.

In 1950, former Polish intelligence officer Ryszard Wraga published a history of Operation Trust in *Vosrozhdenia*, a Russian émigré newspaper, which was later translated by the CIA and declassified in 2002.³⁴ Wraga ran the Russia desk for Polish intelligence in the 1930s and was well versed in the operation. Though similar in scope to the CIA's white paper, Wraga's history described the steps taken by Polish intelligence to objectively vet Operation Trust personnel and their information. Natalie Grant, a former U.S. Department of State officer and expert on Soviet deception, published several articles on Operation Trust and related operations.³⁵ Her interest in Operation Trust began in the Baltics when she served at the American Legation in Riga in the late 1920s (alongside George Kennan), offering a front-row seat to the fallout of the operation's exposure. A

³² Mikhail Tsypkin, "Glasnost and Secrecy in the Soviet Military" (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, December 1990), 45–51, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/28736>.

³³ CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, "The Trust," Unpublished white paper (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, March 1969), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90g01353r001700020002-4>.

³⁴ Ryszard Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," *Vosrozhdenia* 7 (February 1950), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-03362a002200040004-7>.

³⁵ Natalie Grant, "The Trust," *American Intelligence Journal* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 11–15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44319063>; Natalie Grant, "Deception on a Grand Scale," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 1, no. 4 (1986): 51–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850608608435036>.

third writer with professional interest in Operation Trust and related Soviet deception was Vladimir Burtsev, an active investigator who warned about Operation Trust before its exposure and later tracked down evidence in both the Kutepov and Miller abductions.³⁶

For a more entertaining, albeit biased, version of the Operation Trust story, Moscow published *Mertvaya zyb'* (*The Swell of the Sea*) in 1967 by Lev Nikulin.³⁷ Nikulin's dramatic retelling reads like a movie script with heroic efforts by the Bolsheviks to thwart counter-revolutionary plots. Nikulin went on to write the screenplay for *Operatsiya Trest* (*Operation Trust*), a Soviet mini-series in 1968.³⁸ Though unsubtle in their portrayal of Soviet operatives and their monarchist foes, both works capture the importance of Operation Trust in Soviet intelligence history.

Though the abduction of General Miller caused a media stir in Paris, stand-alone treatments of the event are few. One exception is the history of the disappearances of Miller in 1937 and his predecessor Kutepov in 1930 written by Marina Grey, herself the daughter of White Army General Anton Denikin.³⁹ Grey's book includes research from French police files and evidence used in Plevitskaiia's trial, a valuable source for assessing the competence and scope of the Soviet operation to abduct Miller.

4. The White Russians

A comparative case study of these two operations requires an understanding of their target, the White Russians. The White Russians were exiles committed to restoring the monarchy or letting the Russian people choose rather than accept the Bolshevik takeover. Hundreds of thousands of White Russians fled after October 1917, with the remnants of

³⁶ Vladimir Burtsev, "Police Provocation in Russia," *The Slavonic Review* 6, no. 17 (1927): 247–67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202167>.

³⁷ Lev Nikulin, *Mertvaya zyb'* [*The swell of the sea*] (Moscow: Voennoye Izdatelstvo, 1967), https://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:JPRSX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=144DB4448F3640F9&svc_dat=HistArchive:jprsd&req_dat=0D0CB5FC0F5C3AD5.

³⁸ *Operatsiya Trest* [*Operation Trust*], History (Mosfilm, 1968).

³⁹ Marina Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit: l'enlèvement des généraux Koutiéпов (1930) et Miller (1937)* [*The general dies at midnight: The kidnappings of generals Kutepov (1930) and Miller (1937)*] (Plon, 1981).

the Russian Imperial Army and associated volunteer forces finally evacuating from Crimea in late 1920.

As a sizable movement spread across Western Europe and supported by several countries opposed to the Bolsheviks, the White Russians played a role in interwar European politics. Robert Johnston's *New Mecca, New Babylon* strives to describe the sizable Russian exile community in Paris and its challenges in providing for itself and other exiles in Western Europe.⁴⁰ As we will see, the White Army was the first to maintain some order within the broader White Russian community and eventually took over the movement's political leadership. Paul Robinson's comprehensive history, *The White Russian Army in Exile*, follows the evolution of the force from a sizable apolitical army to a smaller, more aggressive yet fractured entity by the mid-1930s.⁴¹ Robinson's research also helps explain how the broader White Russian community was vulnerable to deception in the 1920s.

Some first-hand accounts of the time will help contextualize changes within the White Russian community. Petr Wrangel's memoir *Always with Honor* recounts the defeat of the White Army by the Reds and the disappointment of exile.⁴² As leader of the White Army, Wrangel left his mark on its policies well after his death in 1928. Dmitry Lehovitch's biography of Wrangel contemporary Denikin gives us an assessment of the White Russian community from an outsider view since Denikin refused to participate in the community's political struggles.⁴³ Lehovitch uses Denikin's personal papers to add detail to the aftermath of Operation Trust and the disappearance of Miller ten years later. By offering the White Russian perspective, both sources help us better understand the Soviets' target.

Finally, to appreciate the Soviet investment in neutralizing the White Russian movement, this project's case studies need to assess Moscow's thinking on the threat posed

⁴⁰ Robert H. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon: Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

⁴¹ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*.

⁴² Petr Wrangel, *Always with Honor*, trans. Sophie Goulston, First paperback (Orlando, 2023).

⁴³ Dmitry V. Lehovitch, *White Against Red: The Life of General Anton Denikin*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1974).

by its foreign opposition, i.e., the Soviets' motive. The evolution of White Russian thinking, especially the erosion of the Army's apolitical position, may play an influential role in the Soviet decision to act. Robinson's monograph on the code of the White Army officers establishes a baseline for the community's ideology.⁴⁴ That baseline shifted in the 1930s, with open debates on the White Russian community's stance on defending or attacking their Russian homeland. As the exile community moved further to the right politically, support for Nazi Germany caused a schism.

The ideological debates among the White Russians are well documented in articles by Peter Kenez, Nicolas Lebourg, and Oleg Beyda and Igor Petrov. Kenez analyzes the positions of White Army leadership during the Civil War, showing how their policies varied widely and adapted to the needs for men, materiel, and popular support.⁴⁵ Lebourg focuses on the interwar period and the divide over support for Hitler's anti-communist rhetoric and the threat of a fascist attack on their homeland.⁴⁶ Beyda and Petrov trace the growth of the Russian right in Germany, a political shift that may have alarmed the Soviets.⁴⁷ All four writers help contextualize the intelligence collected by the Soviets on the plans and intentions of White Russian leaders throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Armed with a robust background on the Soviet intelligence services and their tactics, we are well positioned to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the decision to use strategic deception in the 1920s against the White Russians. Though a fascinating story

⁴⁴ Paul F. Robinson, "'Always with Honour': The Code of the White Russian Officers," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 41, no. 2 (1999): 121–41, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40870058>.

⁴⁵ Peter Kenez, "The Ideology of the White Movement," *Soviet Studies* 32, no. 1 (1980): 58–83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/150391>.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Lebourg, "White Émigrés and International Anti-Communism in France (1918–1939)," IERES Occasional Papers (Washington, D.C: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, December 8, 2020), <https://www.illiberalism.org/white-emigres-and-international-anti-communism-in-france/>.

⁴⁷ Oleg Beyda and Igor Petrov, "Stakeholders, Hangers-On, and Copycats: The Russian Right in Berlin in 1933," Illiberalism Studies Program Working Paper (Washington, DC: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, April 6, 2021), <https://www.illiberalism.org/stakeholders-hangers-copycats-russian-berlin-1933/>; Oleg Beyda, "Iron Cross of Wrangel's Army: White Russian Émigrés and the German-Soviet War, 1941–1945" (Thesis, Sydney, University of New South Wales Sydney, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/3718>.

in its own right, the history of Operation Trust may also reveal the variables that led Dzerzhinsky to choose deception over violence.

III. CASE STUDY ONE: OPERATION TRUST 1921–1927

This first case study will focus on the circumstances facing Feliks Dzerzhinsky and the Cheka in the early 1920s in hopes of identifying the variables that contributed to the decision to attempt the strategic deception campaign called “Operation Trust.”⁴⁸ The four circumstances (or decision variables) were the dispersion of the White Russian leadership, the Cheka’s available means to maintain a long-term operation, the Kremlin’s motives for such an operation, and the opportunity to execute it against a wary opposition. This chapter identifies the diffused nature of the White Russian community and the Cheka’s domestic capabilities for disinformation (backed by an experienced, domestic workforce) as the driving variables in the Kremlin’s decision to pursue a strategic deception campaign.

A. BACKGROUND ON OPERATION TRUST

Vladimir Lenin and the surviving leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution faced many challenges as the Russian Civil War wound down in 1920. Soviet Russia’s economy was in ruins, Lenin’s government enjoyed limited popular support, and only Imperial Germany and the Baltic states recognized the Bolshevik regime.⁴⁹ Additionally, the regime faced an external threat in the form of pro-monarchist Russian émigrés who fled after the Revolution and Civil War. These “White Russians” (as opposed to the Bolshevik “Reds”) wanted to roll back the Revolution.⁵⁰ Lenin turned to Dzerzhinsky, chief of the Cheka (the first Bolshevik security service), for a plan to neutralize the White Russian threat.⁵¹ In December 1920, Dzerzhinsky offered Lenin four options: (1) take hostages in Soviet

⁴⁸ As noted in Chapter II, several intelligence historians, amateur researchers, and actual participants have written histories of Operation Trust. Some versions claim to be based on first-hand access to the 37-volume file used by the NKVD to train its officers in the 1930s. There are considerable discrepancies among these histories (a common problem in field of intelligence history), yet the underlying strategy and key events are well-established and useful in comparing the deception operation to the political violence used in the 1930s.

⁴⁹ “The Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk,” World War I Document Archive, March 3, 1918, https://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Peace_Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk.

⁵⁰ While the Bolsheviks used the term “White Russian” for all Russian émigrés, this thesis will use the term to describe only those veterans of the Imperial Russian Army and émigrés that supported a return to the monarchy or, at a minimum, a formal assembly to decide the future government of Russia.

⁵¹ Gerson, *The Secret Police in Lenin’s Russia*, 234; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, xv.

Russia to dissuade attacks from foreign elements, (2) liquidate key White Russian figures living abroad, (3) use *agent provocateurs* to identify and wrap-up domestic groups of White Russians, or (4) fabricate a domestic pro-monarchist group to attract and isolate external support.⁵²

Though their discussion is lost to history, the events that followed shows that Lenin chose Dzerzhinsky's fourth option—fabricating a pro-monarchist organization—as the first thrust against the White Russians. The Cheka invented a counter-revolutionary group, the “Monarchist Association for Central Russia” (MOTsR), to be the focus of domestic and foreign-based anti-Bolshevik groups with the goal of first controlling their efforts and then neutralizing them.⁵³

The first step was to “introduce” the MOTsR to the anti-Bolsheviks through an intermediary. In late 1921, Chekist Aleksandr Yakushev travelled to Western Europe under the auspices of Lenin's New Economic Policy as a lumber salesman.⁵⁴ Yakushev stopped in Tallinn to visit an old friend (and known pro-monarchist sympathizer) Yuriy Artamonov.⁵⁵ Over dinner, Yakushev revealed that a small but well-placed network of monarchists (the MOTsR) survived the Russian Civil War. Not only was the network gaining strength, the MOTsR controlled a small Moscow-based bank and used its legal activities to disguise the underground movement's fundraising and to explain Yakushev's

⁵² Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 93–94. The historical record is unclear whether Dzerzhinsky meant the options to be independent or complementary lines of effort.

⁵³ Wraga, “The ‘Trust’ - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation,” 7. There is some debate among Trust historians whether the MOTsR existed as a true group before being coopted by the Cheka or it was a complete fabrication of the Cheka. Advocates of the “cooption” theory argue that Yakushev represented a true pro-monarchist group when meeting Artamonov, but the Cheka learned of the meeting through other sources. Yakushev was arrested and convinced to turn against his compatriots, thus exposing the fledgling monarchist movement to penetration by the Cheka. Given the leading role Yakushev would continue to play in promoting the MOTsR in Western Europe, it seems unlikely that the Cheka would use a turncoat for such an important role in the conspiracy.

⁵⁴ Grant, “Deception on a Grand Scale,” 54.

⁵⁵ Grant, “The Trust,” 12.

travel to and from the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Yakushev did warn, however, that any overt assistance to the MOTsR or foreign intervention on the White Russians' behalf would increase Russian popular support for the Bolsheviks.⁵⁷ Artamonov accepted his friend's story and quickly relayed it to the British Embassy in Estonia and, more importantly, White Russian leadership based in Warsaw.⁵⁸

Over the next year, Yakushev and other Cheka agents posing as MOTsR conspirators met with leading Russian émigrés and their patrons in Warsaw, Paris, and Berlin.⁵⁹ The deception operation's initial stage culminated in November 1922 with a meeting between Yakushev and key advisors for White Russian military commander Petr Wrangel, the last leader of the Russian Imperial Army during the Civil War and a leading candidate for leadership of the émigré community.⁶⁰ With some reservations, Wrangel's advisors chose to forge an alliance with the MOTsR network and agreed to provide some financial assistance. Soon afterwards, MOTsR role players offered to "smuggle" White Russian volunteers into Russia to verify MOTsR membership, access, and need for money.⁶¹ Those who returned glowingly reported a steady decline in the Bolshevik's revolutionary fervor and advances in MOTsR preparations to take over when the revolution finally collapsed. In reality, every person the White Russian émigrés met were Cheka role players except for the few surviving anti-Bolsheviks in Russia who were exposed to the

⁵⁶ "The Trust," 7. The MOTsR allegedly used the Moscow Municipal Credit Association to hide its activities. Such credit unions and banks, known as "trusts" (*trest* in Russian), emerged quickly under the New Economic Policy (1922-28) to finance international trade and economic reconstruction after the Russian Civil War. In a nod to the bank cover story, the Cheka role players and White Russians used "The Trust" as a codename for the MOTsR movement. The Cheka named the entire deception campaign "Operation Trust". For consistency and clarity, this thesis will use the terms "Operation Trust" and "Trust" to describe the Cheka/OGPU strategic deception campaign and use "MOTsR" when discussing the false monarchist group and the Cheka role-players posing as monarchists.

⁵⁷ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 9. Yakushev claimed the Russian people would unite against any foreign invader, even if it meant backing the current regime.

⁵⁸ Grant, "The Trust," 12.

⁵⁹ Grant, "Deception on a Grand Scale," 59.

⁶⁰ "The Trust," 12.

⁶¹ Shulgin, "How I Was Hoodwinked by the Bolsheviks," 507.

Cheka when they were contacted by their exiled friends.⁶² According to Alexander Orlov, a Chekist who served in the 1920s and 1930s, approximately fifteen percent of those smuggled in were arrested, with the rest allowed to gather fabricated “intelligence” and then return to Western Europe.⁶³ With these visits, the Cheka reinforced White Russian confidence in the existence of the MOTsR.

The next phase of Operation Trust built on Yakushev’s initial warning against foreign interference. A key disinformation theme for Operation Trust was that Lenin was slowly moving away from “militant communism” and toward a more open society with the New Economic Policy.⁶⁴ The Cheka assessed that news of “normalization” would reinforce overt messaging of a standdown on exporting global revolution, helping the Soviets regain some standing with the other European nations. At the time, the Soviet Union was desperate for trade, outside investment, and industrial imports to recover from the devastation of the Russian Civil War. Operation Trust served to delay foreign interference while the Bolsheviks consolidated power, with many Allied capitals inching their way toward diplomatic recognition of, and trade agreements with, the Soviets. As disinformation about the Soviet Union flowed from the MOTsR to the Allied capitals, those nations gave up on developing their own sources in Moscow and elsewhere.⁶⁵ With no contrary information being collected, the steady flow of reports reinforcing the Soviets’ preferred narrative helped convince Western (and some White Russian) leaders that the Soviet regime was moving away from the “militant communism” of the Civil War and becoming less confrontational within the international community.⁶⁶

⁶² Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 136–37. The Cheka orchestrated similar deception campaigns against Boris Savinkov’s anti-Bolshevik movement based on Warsaw, and the Ukrainian nationalists.

⁶³ Orlov, *March of Time*, 153. The Cheka probably assessed that a higher success rate in crossing the border would raise the suspicions of anyone familiar with Soviet frontier security.

⁶⁴ Wraga, “The ‘Trust’ - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation,” 18.

⁶⁵ Orlov, *March of Time*, 139.

⁶⁶ Bernard Pares, “Light on Conditions in Russia,” *The Slavonic Review* 6, no. 16 (1927): 216, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202152>.

Barring the warning against outside interference that limited White Russian infiltrations and sabotage activities, the reports coming from Soviet Russia via the MOTsR were highly encouraging to the émigrés—the Bolshevik regime was failing, and the Russian people were preparing for a successor government. Many émigrés became convinced that a counter-revolution was inevitable and that their exile would soon be over. The White Russians were split, however, between those calling for moderation in engaging with the Soviets and those advocating an aggressive approach of terrorist attacks and insurgency operations.⁶⁷ The steady flow of good news coming from the MOTsR helped swing the debate toward patience and away from asking the Western European powers for another round of interventions.

The fundamental goal of Operation Trust was to contain efforts to overthrow the Bolsheviks by the White Russians and their European patrons.⁶⁸ This was accomplished by first convincing influential White Russians that the MOTsR was legitimate using known intermediaries and well-orchestrated visits into the Soviet Union. The second phase focused on providing compelling disinformation that kept the White Russians and their foreign patrons from interfering in the Bolsheviks consolidation of power.⁶⁹ The resulting scheme lasted for six years and funneled millions into the Cheka's coffers.

Despite the Cheka's efforts to forestall outside interference, two individuals—each with ties to the White Russian community or the Western European powers supporting the anti-Bolshevik émigrés—chose to continue their fight against the Soviet regime. To contain the efforts of both figures, the Cheka's successor organization, the OGPU, used deception to lure them back to the Soviet Union for elimination.⁷⁰

The first was Boris Savinkov, a former Socialists-Revolutionaries Party (SR) firebrand and terrorist responsible for assassination attempts against the Romanovs in

⁶⁷ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 184.

⁶⁸ Grant, "The Trust," 11.

⁶⁹ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 9.

⁷⁰ The OGPU was formed in July 1923 as the successor to the Cheka (1917-1922) and the GPU (1922-1923).

1904.⁷¹ Though Savinkov hated the monarchists as much as he hated the Bolsheviks, he had close ties with the same European powers that supported the White Russians, and he fought against the Bolsheviks in the Civil War.⁷² The Soviet deception campaign against Savinkov was called “Operation Syndicate” (*sindikát* in Russian, another generic term for the new financial firms emerging from the New Economic Policy).⁷³

According to Orlov, the OGPU used the Operation Trust playbook against Savinkov, aiming to penetrate his existing network and then to lure him back to the Soviet Union for elimination.⁷⁴ In the first phase, the OGPU recruited members of Savinkov’s courier network to insert messages that linked events inside the country to supposed operatives working on his behalf.⁷⁵ These reports bolstered Savinkov’s confidence in his (false) domestic supporters. His representatives, smuggled into the Soviet Union in the same manner used by Operation Trust, came back with convincing reports of stored weapons, effortless travel across Russia and Ukraine, and even successful contact with one of Savinkov’s closest friends (at the time an OGPU prisoner held in a hospital and medicated to limit his ability to warn Savinkov of the conspiracy).⁷⁶ The Kremlin leveraged Savinkov’s reputed connections inside the Soviet Union to funnel OGPU disinformation to his Western patrons, drawing collection resources away from alternative contacts and tightening the OGPU’s control over Savinkov himself.⁷⁷

After the OGPU learned all there was to know about Savinkov’s network and activities, they began the second phase of Operation Syndicate—luring him back to the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ The OGPU used penetrations of Savinkov’s courier network to insert false reports of a split among his “allies” inside the Soviet Union. One message drafted by a

⁷¹ “The Trust,” 16.

⁷² CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, 17–18.

⁷³ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 33.

⁷⁴ Orlov, *March of Time*, 99–111.

⁷⁵ Orlov, 93.

⁷⁶ Orlov, 107–8.

⁷⁷ Orlov, 97.

⁷⁸ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 33.

talented OGPU operative flattered Savinkov by saying, “only your presence and personal appeal could make them close ranks.”⁷⁹ Savinkov agreed to return, and after his supposed allies smuggled him across the Soviet border in August 1924, the OGPU immediately arrested him.⁸⁰ The subsequent show trial and Savinkov’s recantation of anti-Bolshevik terror represented such a dramatic reversal for his movement that some speculated Savinkov had turned years before his arrest.⁸¹ A few months later, Savinkov allegedly threw himself from an unguarded prison window and died from his injuries, according to Soviet claims at the time.⁸²

A second anti-Bolshevik who refused to wait for the “inevitable” fall of Lenin’s regime was former British intelligence agent Sidney Reilly. Again, Orlov’s writings form the basis for understanding the role of Operation Trust in silencing the spy. Reilly played a leading role in early Allied efforts to roll back the Bolshevik Revolution and he actively supported White Russian efforts to destabilize the Soviet regime in the 1920s.⁸³ Despite the public capture and trial of his brother-in-arms Savinkov, Reilly believed that overthrowing the Bolsheviks was still possible.

At the behest of Western industrialists hoping to recover property in the Soviet Union and Wrangel’s military organization, the Russian All-Military Union (*Russkii obshche-voinskiii soiuz* or ROVS), Reilly travelled to Finland in September 1925 to meet with MOTsR representatives.⁸⁴ Reilly spoke with several MOTsR role players, including Edward Opperput, a key MOTsR representative to the Western powers (and the Chekist

⁷⁹ Orlov, *March of Time*, 102.

⁸⁰ Elias Tobenkin, “Boris Savinkov,” *Current History (New York)* 21, no. 3 (December 1, 1924): 395, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1310913263/citation/EAA47FCAB82541E7PQ/1>.

⁸¹ Richard B. Spence, “The ‘Savinkov Affair’ Reconsidered,” *East European Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 38–39, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1297277157/citation/5E2F29C9921C4FA0PQ/1>.

⁸² Orlov, *March of Time*, 121. It seems more likely that the Soviets saw no value in keeping Savinkov alive.

⁸³ John W. Long, “Searching for Sidney Reilly: The Lockhart Plot in Revolutionary Russia, 1918,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 7 (1995): 1233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139508412316>.

⁸⁴ “The Trust,” 26–27.

charged with making the first contact with Savinkov in 1921).⁸⁵ According to Orlov, the role players used two ploys to convince Reilly to make a short trip into the Soviet Union. The first was a fake note from the British Secret Intelligence Service in London stating that the monarchists were sending representatives to meet Reilly. The second was a doctored news clipping backing an unnamed MOTsR member's claim of close access to Lenin's inner circle.⁸⁶

After crossing the border and meeting up with Yakushev, the MOTsR shuttled Reilly to Leningrad and then to Moscow to discuss fundraising options for the monarchist movement. The discussions and his safe travel seemed to convince Reilly of the MOTsR's potential to undermine the Soviets, and he prepared to return home. However, in a reversal to Dzerzhinsky's plan to let Reilly cement the MOTsR's reputation in Western Europe, Stalin ordered Reilly's arrest.⁸⁷ The historical record is incomplete on Stalin's rationale for the arrest, but it is possible that Stalin was growing suspicious of Dzerzhinsky's widespread "alternative Russian government" even if it was wholly controlled by the OGPU. No matter his reasoning, Stalin's decision posed an immediate challenge for the OGPU to explain Reilly's fate. A show trial like Savinkov's would expose the MOTsR as a provocation, so the Soviet press released reports of a shootout on the border and the death of a "British national" to cover Reilly's disappearance.⁸⁸ The expectation of a British outcry may have deterred the Soviets from revealing Reilly's capture, especially as they were rebuilding diplomatic and trade relations with London.

The OGPU's elimination of Savinkov and Reilly neutralized two threats to Operation Trust while preserving its broader goals of delaying White Russian terrorist activity and foreign interventions. Despite the OGPU's efforts, however, doubts among the

⁸⁵ Spence, "Sidney Reilly's Lubianka 'Diary' 30 October-4 November 1925," 189 fn 38.

⁸⁶ Orlov, *March of Time*, 144–45. The alleged SIS note was handwritten by an unnamed British official recruited by the OGPU. The note claimed that ongoing negotiations over war debts had given the SIS insights into anti-Bolshevik groups in the Soviet Union, including the representative meeting Reilly. The fake newspaper paper showed Reilly's contact standing next to Lenin, bolstering the role player's claim that he was well-connected to the Soviet regime.

⁸⁷ Orlov, 149.

⁸⁸ CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, "The Trust," 28.

White Russians and foreign powers were accumulating.⁸⁹ The disappearance of Reilly when the MOTsR guaranteed his safety was a blow to the group's reputation. At the same time, MOTsR's alleged access to Soviet secrets failed a test by Polish intelligence (described in Section E below). If the future of Operation Trust had relied solely on the gullibility of the West, it may have run into the 1930s. Instead, the actions of one disillusioned Chekist brought it down.

In April 1927, Oppenput, by then a veteran of Operations Trust and Syndicate, defected to Finland and exposed the MOTsR as a Soviet fabrication.⁹⁰ In a series of meetings with Finnish intelligence and ROVS leadership, Oppenput revealed the extent of Operation Trust, the efforts to disrupt monarchist infiltrations into the Soviet Union, and the flow of disinformation to the West.⁹¹ Oppenput shared the same accusations with the émigré newspapers in Helsinki and Riga, ensuring that the White Russian community and their patrons learned the truth. In addition to naming key OGPU figures running Operation Trust, he detailed the purpose of the MOTsR story (i.e., "legend") and the true destination of the funds sent by the West:

The main purpose of this legend was to mislead foreign headquarters, engage in the struggle against foreign espionage, and direct the activities of anti-Soviet organizations abroad into a desired channel for the GPU.

Thanks to these legends, significant sums of money allocated by [Western] headquarters for intelligence work ended up in the GPU. This not only allowed the KRO/OGPU to exist on an economic basis but also allocated some funds to the disinformation bureau of the Intelligence Directorate, which fabricated military, political, and economic intelligence materials transmitted to foreign headquarters.⁹²

⁸⁹ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 18.

⁹⁰ CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, "The Trust," 37.

⁹¹ Orlov, *March of Time*, 157–58.

⁹² "GPU Agent Oppenput-Staunitz Makes Revelations," *Сегодня (Sevodnia)*, May 17, 1927, 109 edition, 2, <http://periodika.lv/periodika2-viewer/?lang=fr#panel:pp|issue:582980|article:DIVL89>. Translated electronically by the author using Google Translate. Oppenput used the acronyms GPU and KRO/OGPU to describe the entire service and its counterintelligence bureau, respectively.

One can only imagine the reaction in London or Paris upon learning that hard currency sent to support the MOTsR instead funded the OGPU's counterintelligence and disinformation bureaus.

The OGPU refused to walk away from years of hard work. They responded with press placements of their own to discredit Oppenput. They also sent notes to the ROVS from the MOTsR, claiming that Oppenput was working for the Bolsheviks in a last-ditch effort to preserve their failing regime.⁹³ Despite the OGPU's efforts to resuscitate Operation Trust, most White Russians accepted Oppenput's story and admitted publicly and privately that the Soviets had thoroughly penetrated their movement.⁹⁴ Oppenput's exposure of Operation Trust led to the wholesale demoralization of the White Russian community, an impact that outlasted the short-term delay in Western power interference.⁹⁵

To assess why the Soviets abandoned strategic deception and turned to political violence in the 1930s, it is important to understand the basis for Lenin and Dzerzhinsky's decision process in the 1920s. The following sections evaluate four variables that influenced their decision, starting with an evaluation of the White Russian community at the time.

B. THE "VICTIM" – WHITE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP

An assessment of the White Russian émigré community in the 1920s explains the Cheka choice of strategic deception as their primary tactic. Faced with an array of White Russian political, religious, and military figures, each with some claim of legitimacy and support, the Cheka probably realized that they did not have the capabilities to neutralize each one. The Cheka may have been concerned that premature political violence against any White Russian figure could give the émigrés a martyr to galvanize the movement. This section will show that the diffusion of the White Russian émigré community drove the Cheka to pursue strategic deception instead.

⁹³ Świerczek, "The "Matryoshka System", or the Perfect Disinformation," 422.

⁹⁴ Grant, "Deception on a Grand Scale," 73.

⁹⁵ Grant, "The Trust," 73.

At the end of the Russian Civil War, the situation facing all Russian émigrés was a bleak one. An estimated eight hundred and fifty thousand Russians fled their homeland or were displaced by the First World and Russian Civil Wars, and roughly one in eight were former or active members of the Imperial Russian Army or All Volunteer Army.⁹⁶ Many expected a short time in exile, as they presumed (without justification) that the Bolshevik regime would soon collapse under the weight of its poor decisions and popular pressure inside Russia.⁹⁷ In the meantime, the émigrés found homes and jobs throughout Western Europe while working to maintain their traditions as Russians away from home.

While most Russian émigrés identified as anti-Bolshevik, not all were monarchists. The same political divisions that fueled the February Revolution separated the émigrés into conservative and progressive camps. Both agreed the Bolsheviks had to go, but the former advocated for a return of the tsars while the latter called for a national assembly to determine Russia's next form of government.⁹⁸

Many influential figures settled around Paris, including Imperial Army Generals Aleksandr Kutepov, Evgenii Miller, and Anton Denikin, and Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich Romanov, establishing the city as a destination for the Russian diaspora.⁹⁹ As noted by one historian, the mix of political, military, and intellectual figures in Paris left the Russian population "ripe for intrigue and conspiracy."¹⁰⁰

If the Cheka assigned an operative to study the White Russian émigré community, he would quickly realize that political and religious positions divided the monarchists. The strict monarchists had two aspirants for the throne. Grand Dukes Nikolai Nikolaevich in Paris and Kirill Vladimirovich in Bavaria both had legitimate claims, though Kirill's was

⁹⁶ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 16.

⁹⁷ Katherine Foshko, "The Paul Doumer Assassination and the Russian Diaspora in Interwar France," *French History* 23, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 390–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crp054>.

⁹⁸ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 23–27.

⁹⁹ Robert H. Johnston, "The Great Patriotic War and the Russian Exiles in France," *The Russian Review* 35, no. 3 (1976): 303–4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/128406>.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 17.

the stronger of the two.¹⁰¹ After the unpopular Kirill attempted to name himself Emperor of Russia, the émigrés turned away from him and asked Nikolai to lead instead. In November 1924, Nikolai accepted the role of Supreme Commander, with General Petr Nikolaevich Baron Wrangel (known to the Bolsheviks as the “Black Baron”) as the monarch’s military leader.¹⁰² The apparent resolution to the political crisis was short-lived, however, when Nikolai failed to unite the émigré groups in a congress in 1926.¹⁰³

Equally confusing were the lines of authority for members of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad. As the Bolsheviks arrested or deported Orthodox leaders, the Patriarch in Moscow made temporary provisions for the religious leadership of the émigré orthodox community.¹⁰⁴ Self-appointed Metropolitan Antonii, based in Yugoslavia, openly called for the restoration of the monarchy in 1921 and thus alienated many progressive White Russians.¹⁰⁵ In response, the Soviet-imprisoned Patriarch Tikhon appointed another leader, Metropolitan Evlogii, to take over the Church in Western Europe.¹⁰⁶ Antonii’s followers resisted and the Russian Orthodox Church abroad split into factions, one more liberal under Evlogii and the other more conservative under Antonii.¹⁰⁷ The division in the church mirrored a wider gap among the White Russian community between the strict monarchists and the “non-predeterminists,” those who felt all Russians (not just its émigrés) should decide on their form of government through a freely elected assembly.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Lebourg, “White Émigrés and International Anti-Communism in France (1918–1939),” 5. A third claimant, Grand Duke Dmitrii Pavlovich, instead chose the life of a playboy, married an American heiress, and moved to Florida in 1926. (Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 114)

¹⁰² Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 124.

¹⁰³ Robinson, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 114–15.

¹⁰⁵ Pospelovsky, 1:117.

¹⁰⁶ Pospelovsky, 1:118.

¹⁰⁷ Oxana Antic, “The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad,” in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet, Christianity under Stress 1 (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1988), 138.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 5.

Lastly, the power struggles within the White Russian community extended to the military. Though General Wrangel was recognized by at least one Allied Power (France) as the *de facto* head of state of the Provisional Government, no other power made the same determination and even France would not allow Wrangel to sell Russian state property to fund his evacuation and resettlement efforts.¹⁰⁹ The few remaining ambassadors from the short-lived Provisional Government era owed Wrangel no allegiance and refused to fund him despite their sizable local accounts.¹¹⁰ To maintain the readiness of and provide support for the thousands of veterans of the First World War and Russian Civil War scattered across Western Europe, Wrangel formed the ROVS in 1924 and based it in Paris.¹¹¹ The new organization brought under one command a range of veterans' groups and military support organizations. The ROVS also helped the military remain separate from the growing political monarchist groups. For his part, Wrangel tried to keep the military out of émigré politics and even ordered its personnel to refrain from joining political movements or even voicing an opinion on the future form of government in post-Bolshevik Russia.¹¹²

Facing divisions among the political, religious, and military components of the White Russian community, any Chekist tasked with identifying the true threats might never reach a conclusion. Reinforced by geographic separation (some European nations limited the number and employment of emigrants), the White Russians had no obvious leader. The Cheka, when considering how to best tackle the threat posed by the White Russians, must have realized that the diffused nature of the movement would limit the usefulness of political violence. Deciding whom to target would have been difficult, and violence might have given the émigrés a martyr around which to rally. One history of Operation Trust claimed the White Russians had no cohesive government, stating “a controlling upper-strata simply did not exist.”¹¹³ Coincidentally, not long after Operation Trust's exposure

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, 51–52.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, 51.

¹¹¹ Robinson, 97.

¹¹² Robinson, 98–99.

¹¹³ “The Trust,” 11.

in 1927, the White Russian leadership began to consolidate by attrition. The death of Wrangel in 1928 and of Nikolai in 1929 (both of natural causes) left Kutepov as the leading figure in both the Imperial Russian Army (as head of the ROVS) and the Grand Duke Nikolai's political movement, setting the stage for more direct action (on both sides) in the 1930s.¹¹⁴

C. “MEANS” – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES IN THE 1920S

When developing a strategy to neutralize the White Russians, Dzerzhinsky faced practical constraints. Foreign intelligence collection against the Soviets' foes was limited and thus any assessment of the regime's danger from the White Russians would be incomplete. Not to say the Cheka did not hope to build a foreign presence. Their efforts would need to wait for improved diplomatic relations with the other European powers before it could place spies in Soviet embassies.¹¹⁵ Based on Soviet relations with the wider diplomatic community immediately after the Revolution, normalized relations were going to take time.¹¹⁶ Domestically, however, the Cheka had just helped win the Russian Civil War and it was playing a leading role in consolidating control within Soviet Russia. The potential for manipulating the White Russians rested at home rather than in foreign capitals, so Dzerzhinsky developed a plan to bring the émigrés to him. His strategy relied on two strengths of the Cheka in late 1920. The first was experience in creating and disseminating disinformation, the second was a skilled workforce dedicated to preserving the Soviet regime.

The Bolsheviks knew the power of disinformation because the tsar's own security police, the Okhrana, used it as a weapon against them prior to the February Revolution.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 143.

¹¹⁵ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 28.

¹¹⁶ Russian S.F.S.R, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, Report Submitted by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets (Nov. 1918 to Dec. 1919)* (London: British Socialist Party, 1919), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100881829>.

¹¹⁷ Rita T. Kronenbitter, “The Illustrious Career of Arkadiy Harting,” in *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police*, ed. Benjamin B. Fischer, Studies in Intelligence Anthology (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1997), 5–7, <https://www.cia.gov/static/Illustrious-Career-Arkadiy-Harting.pdf>.

For example, in 1886 the Okhrana destroyed the Geneva printing office of the People's Will, a serious blow to the anti-monarchist, socialist organization. The damage to the tsar's opponents was serious, but the Okhrana's use of disinformation had a multiplier effect. Immediately after the blast, the Okhrana sponsored the printing of pamphlets that falsely blamed the Marxists for the attack, adding fire to the feud between the two groups.¹¹⁸ History can thank the Okhrana's pursuit of the Bolsheviks for the group's conspiratorial ways and famous aliases Lenin and Stalin (Vladimir Ulyanov and Joseph Dzhugashvili, respectively).¹¹⁹ In hunting the tsar's opponents and causing friction among them, the Okhrana created opportunities for further disruption while wasting the resources of its adversaries. Having been the victims of the Okhrana's tricks themselves, the Bolsheviks knew both the dangers and benefits of disinformation and provocations to disrupt a foe. Turning the monarchists' tricks against them likely had a perverse appeal to the Chekists.

Not long after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, the Politburo directed that disinformation play a major—if not leading role—in Soviet foreign activities.¹²⁰ While the Cheka had few options to tackle the White Russian threat, it could mislead its enemy and patrons with false information about political and military conditions inside Soviet Russia. Paramount to every deception campaign's success was the flow of consistent disinformation, meaning the lies from MOTsR messages, reports from ROVS operatives smuggled in and out, and press articles, had to be coordinated and self-reinforcing. This task fell to the Disinformation Bureau, with the marching orders of maintaining the key messages of patience in the MOTsR's ability to fight the Bolsheviks without foreign interference.¹²¹

Despite the costs of maintaining a consistent narrative, disinformation offered another advantage to Moscow—it was inexpensive. Aside from the low costs of manning

¹¹⁸ Andrew, *Secret World*, 428.

¹¹⁹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 27.

¹²⁰ David R. Shearer and V. N. Khaustov, *Stalin and the Lubianka: A Documentary History of the Political Police and Security Organs in the Soviet Union, 1922-1953*, *Annals of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 44.

¹²¹ "The Trust," 14.

the Disinformation Bureau and dissemination through media placements, publications, or couriers, disinformation was far less expensive than maintaining a stable of foreign influence agents or recruiting Western writers to skew public opinion. Given the Soviet economy's poor state after the Civil War and the cost of heavy equipment imports taking up all the available hard currency, disinformation offered a cost-effective option for the Cheka to advance Lenin's agenda.

The second resource that the Cheka brought to Operation Trust was a hardened workforce of Russian Civil War veterans, many who had first-hand experience in using terror and propaganda to defeat the White Russians. By the end of the war, the Cheka was two hundred sixty thousand strong, mostly focused on internal security tasks such as guarding essential railways and border crossings.¹²² Those tasks, however, left plenty of men (and a few women) available for the more creative tasks of developing and executing deception campaigns against the SR, the Ukrainians, and the White Russians. MOTsR role players sent to Western Europe carefully rehearsed their false histories, known as "legends," with their Cheka colleagues, sometimes even with Dzerzhinsky himself.¹²³

An incident in the latter years of Operation Trust exemplifies the power of disinformation, combined with the OGPU's manpower resources, in manipulating influential White Russians. Vasili Shulgin was a Russian nationalist and monarchist who served in the Duma prior to the February 1917 Revolution.¹²⁴ During the Russian Civil War, he moved to Kyiv and helped run the "Azbuka," a small pro-monarchist intelligence ring intent on preserving the Russian empire at the expense of Ukrainian nationalism.¹²⁵ After the Civil War, Shulgin made his way to Yugoslavia and remained active in émigré affairs.¹²⁶

¹²² Leggett, *The Cheka*, 233.

¹²³ Orlov, *March of Time*, 138.

¹²⁴ Savino, "Vasily Shulgin (1878–1976)," 7.

¹²⁵ Savino, 11.

¹²⁶ Savino, 14.

In 1923, MOTsR representatives offered several influential White Russians an opportunity to return to the Soviet Union.¹²⁷ After learning that his son (missing since the Civil War) might be alive, Shulgin accepted the MOTsR's offer in 1925. MOTsR operatives smuggled him across the border and Shulgin spent several weeks travelling around Ukraine and Russia, escorted at all times by OGPU officers posing as MOTsR members.¹²⁸ When efforts to locate Shulgin's son were unsuccessful, he decided to return home. But before he departed, Shulgin's contact repeated the warning against outside interference that might disrupt the MOTsR's preparations.¹²⁹ In an excerpt from *Three Capitals (Tri stolitsy)*, the book Shulgin wrote after his return to Yugoslavia, he recalled the words of an unidentified MOTsR leader during a clandestine meeting in a train sleeping car:

The important thing is to be ready for some moment that is 'suitable and favourable.' But even if such a moment shall come, and the preparation has not yet been sufficient, it would be criminal to make a try with inadequate means.

Every day we, as a people, as a nation, as a State, are recovering from the terrible blows which Socialism has dealt us. And that is why we can wait quietly for that hour which is inevitable.

And now, as to Communism. There the matter's quite plain; that's played out. There is no Communism any longer. There is a stupid chattering of people who are ashamed to own that they have failed all round, have made fools of themselves.¹³⁰

Fearing that the details of his journey might expose his contacts to the OGPU, Shulgin sent the first draft to Moscow through MOTsR channels for their review. The OGPU not only proposed Shulgin's book, the first draft was personally edited by its deputy chief, Artur Artuzov.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Savino, 13–14.

¹²⁸ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 17.

¹²⁹ Wraga, 17.

¹³⁰ Vasily "Basil" Shulgin, "The Sleeping Car," trans. B. P., *The Slavonic Review* 5, no. 15 (1927): 471–72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202103>.

¹³¹ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 17.

Without asking Shulgin, the Soviets published *Three Capitals* in Berlin in early 1927, and it received widespread acclaim and criticism.¹³² From the Soviet point of view, the mission to deceive Shulgin was a tremendous success. Famed British historian Bernard Pares, in a review of *Three Capitals* shortly after the Soviets published it, argued that Shulgin shed light on the moderation of policies in the Soviet Union, drawing a line between the growing openness of Soviet society to outside investigation and the period of “militant communism” of 1918–21.¹³³ Pares even highlighted Shulgin’s meeting in the sleeping car, lauding the underground movement’s “general good sense and restraint of the programme imparted to Shulgin. As was to be expected, opponents of Communism who have remained in Russia have learned very much more than their fellow-thinkers abroad.”¹³⁴ The OGPU must have been thrilled by Pares’ endorsement of their warning against foreign intervention. At extraordinary cost, the OGPU smuggled Shulgin across the border (twice), escorted him across Russia and Ukraine, exposed him selectively to improved living standards, and convinced him to author a book. Only after Oppenheimer compromised Operation Trust in mid-1927 did Shulgin realize his role in the deception. In an article published later that year titled *How I Was Hoodwinked by the Bolsheviks*, Shulgin explained (without irony) the lengths he took to obfuscate his travel details in *Three Capitals* in an effort to protect his MOTsR contacts.¹³⁵ Shulgin admitted that he had been duped, and through *Hoodwinked* he owed “a certain moral duty towards the readers of my book” as it was “right for them to see the dark side of the picture too.”¹³⁶

The operation against Shulgin highlights the means available to the OGPU against the White Russians. The first was disinformation, carefully written and integrated such that it reinforced existing information coming from inside the Soviet Union and supported the Soviets’ goals of preventing Western interference. The second was manpower, drawing on

¹³² Shulgin, *Tri stolitsy [Three capitals]*; Wraga, “The ‘Trust’ - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation,” 17.

¹³³ Pares, “Light on Conditions in Russia,” 216.

¹³⁴ Pares, 221.

¹³⁵ Shulgin, “How I Was Hoodwinked by the Bolsheviks,” 509–10. While admitting his mistake in trusting the MOTsR story, Shulgin hinted that he was always suspicious of the network.

¹³⁶ Shulgin, 505.

the large ranks of Cheka officers who fought in the Civil War. Lacking a wider foreign intelligence network, the Soviets developed a strategy that played to their strengths.

D. “MOTIVE” – SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE RUSSIAN THREAT

What role did perception of the White Russian threat play in the Soviets’ decision to pursue strategic deception in one decade and political violence in the next? If the Kremlin’s perception of the threat evolved over time, that change might explain the shift in tactics. Immediately after the Russian Civil War, the danger posed by a large yet now more distant White Russian movement loomed large in Lenin’s mind, as seen with his early charge to Dzerzhinsky to continue combatting the group. Based on the constant fear of a conservative counter-revolution backed by the Western powers, the Soviets remained focused on the White Russian threat throughout the 1920s.¹³⁷

Lenin never lost sight of the threat of a White Russian invasion. “A beaten army learns much” was Lenin’s warning to those who believed the withdrawal from Crimea meant the Black Baron was no longer a threat.¹³⁸ While Wrangel dismissed terrorist activity in Russia as “pinpricks,” Kutepov and others focused their meagre resources on underground methods such as conspiracy, subversion, terrorism, and sabotage aimed at hindering Bolshevik efforts to consolidate control inside Russia.¹³⁹ Grand Duke Nikolai agreed with the strategy and appointed Kutepov to lead those operations.¹⁴⁰

The existence of these underground operations was no secret. Rather, they served as the public rallying cry for the Fund for the Salvation of the Motherland (*Fond spaseniia rodiny* or FSR), a vehicle to raise money specifically for ROVS operations inside Soviet Russia.¹⁴¹ Though minor in comparison to the damage and destruction of the Russian Civil

¹³⁷ Grant, “The Trust,” 11.

¹³⁸ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 31.

¹³⁹ “The Trust,” 9–10; Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 134–35.

¹⁴¹ Robinson, 134–35.

War, the White Russians hoped the small attacks would highlight deficiencies in Bolshevik control over their homeland.

Equally concerning to the Soviets was the hostility of the Allied Powers toward Russia's new rulers. Still smarting from the Bolshevik's decision to withdraw from the fight against Germany in the First World War and the repudiation of tsarist and Provisional Government war debts, the Allies demonstrated their anti-Bolshevik position with the interventions in northern and eastern Russia in 1918.¹⁴² The Cheka assessed the Western powers would use the ROVS as proxies to infiltrate Russia going forward.¹⁴³ If the Western powers could be convinced that the Soviet Union was moderating at its own pace, they might choose to wait rather than force a crisis.

Fundamental to the deception operation was ensuring that no contradictory narratives escaped to the West, according to Ryszard Wraga's 1950 study of Operation Trust.¹⁴⁴ For the Soviets, this meant controlling all Western European and ROVS intelligence collection in Russia. In 1925, the OGPU learned that Kutepov was receiving financial help from an unknown benefactor and that he was building an independent branch to root out Soviet spies within the ROVS.¹⁴⁵ The possibility of an outside source of information was a grave risk to the deception operation. To limit the collection of contradictory information, MOTsR operatives suggested that Moscow-based Western diplomatic personnel might expedite the transport of letters by meeting the MOTsR there and including the dispatches in diplomatic pouches.¹⁴⁶ If the Western intelligence services had alternative sources of information in Russia, those true agents would have met the same diplomats meeting OGPU officers disguised as MOTsR members. The OGPU could have exposed the true agents by simply following the Western diplomats to their next meeting.

¹⁴² Howard Fuller, "Great Britain and Russia's Civil War: 'The Necessity for a Definite and Coherent Policy,'" *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 553–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2019.1683976>.

¹⁴³ Orlov, *March of Time*, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 11–12.

¹⁴⁵ "The Trust," 24.

¹⁴⁶ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 11.

One option to limit Western interference in Soviet affairs was to complicate cooperation among those same services.¹⁴⁷ The OGPU sent slightly different narratives to each nation, in hopes that disagreements would lead to a breakdown in cooperation.¹⁴⁸ One can imagine that the Poles might learn of anti-Bolshevik protests in the Red Army whereas the British would receive reports on the debate over tsarist debt repayment. All the disinformation pointed in the same directions of internal normalization and the weakening of communism but differed enough to cause confusion among the powers and to encourage some states to hoard information for their own advantage.¹⁴⁹

Since the threat posed by the White Russians depended on their ability to gain active support from the Western powers, Dzerzhinsky designed Operation Trust to prevent that cooperation. This objective remained consistent throughout the operation, which may have aided both senior planners and tactical role players in making decisions that promoted that core objective.

E. “OPPORTUNITY” – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE ACCESS TO WHITE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP

The last variable driving Soviet intelligence operations against the White Russians was “opportunity,” or access to their target. In the 1920s, the Cheka needed to interact directly with White Russian leadership to build confidence in the MOTsR network. In the 1930s, when the tactic shifted to political violence, the NKVD needed access to individual targets in locations without effective security or public scrutiny.¹⁵⁰ If White Russian leaders remained skeptical enough to deny meetings with MOTsR representatives or cautious enough a decade later to remain safely behind guarded walls, the Soviets would have failed. Instead, the Soviets generated opportunities through careful planning and taking advantage of weaknesses among the White Russian leadership.

¹⁴⁷ Wraga, 23.

¹⁴⁸ Wraga, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Wraga, 23.

¹⁵⁰ The NKVD took over the roles of the OGPU in 1934.

For Operation Trust to have any chance of success, the Cheka needed to convince White Russian leaders to meet with their MOTsR role players. Messages relayed by intermediaries would be insufficient to forestall terrorist attacks and Western intervention. Fortunately for the Cheka, opportunity emerged not from their expert work, but the vulnerabilities of the White Russians and Western services themselves. The White Russians wanted to believe that popular support remained for their return.¹⁵¹ The Allied powers were equally eager for information from inside Russia, along with the possibility of debt repayment and commercial concessions. Seemingly on cue, the MOTsR emerged to offer both.

Key to the success of any strategic deception operation is the receptiveness of the intended audience.¹⁵² A skeptical audience looks for inconsistencies and offers counterarguments, while a sympathetic one dismisses absent details and accepts new information at face value. Fortunately for the Cheka, for every skeptical White Russian leader there was another that believed in the MOTsR. Wrangel and Denikin, both veterans of the Civil War, dismissed news of the MOTsR when it contacted pro-monarchists in the Baltics. Despite their suspicions, however, neither advocated against further meetings.¹⁵³ Contrastingly, General Kutepov and Grand Duke Nikolai found Yakushev very convincing when they met him in Paris in August 1923.¹⁵⁴

Kutepov's enthusiasm was vital to the success of the deception operation because Grand Duke Nikolai had charged Kutepov with leading ROVS subversive activities in Russia.¹⁵⁵ If Operation Trust could convince Kutepov to restrain the "activist" elements of the ROVS (or at least rely on the MOTsR to manage those efforts), half of the operation's goals would be met. Kutepov played his part, first by sending ROVS volunteers to confirm the MOTsR's claims (with OGPU assistance throughout) and eventually sending Maria

¹⁵¹ Grant, "The Trust," 11.

¹⁵² J. Bowyer Bell, "Toward a Theory of Deception," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 16, no. 2 (2003): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850600390198742>.

¹⁵³ Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 9–10.

¹⁵⁴ "The Trust," 14.

¹⁵⁵ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 134–35.

Shultz, his own niece, to coordinate operations with the MOTsR inside the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁶ Kutepov never questioned his judgment on operations against the Soviets or his evaluation of individual operatives. Even after the exposure of Operation Trust by Oppenput in 1927, Kutepov claimed to Denikin that the ROVS could continue to operate independent of the MOTsR and that he could always spot *agent provocateurs*.¹⁵⁷ This overconfidence probably contributed to Kutepov's own demise in 1930.

One might excuse the White Russian military leadership for its naïve approach to identifying the Soviets' deception. Kutepov and the others were battlefield veterans, not spies or hardened revolutionaries. Alternatively, the Western powers that allowed themselves to be deceived by Operation Trust had no such excuses.

Western intelligence was desperate for news from inside Russia. They occasionally paid Savinkov for the reports he provided, but they needed more and better information about the political and military plans of Soviet leadership.¹⁵⁸ The MOTsR filled those requirements with such volume that several embassies in the Baltic nations added special sections to translate and encrypt the flow of information from the MOTsR.¹⁵⁹

Similarly, free-lance spy Sydney Reilly needed an assessment of affairs inside the Soviet Union. His independent plan to foment a counter-revolution depended on private Western financial support (no government backed him), and they required proof of an existing anti-Bolshevik group.¹⁶⁰ Reilly needed the pro-monarchist network to exist and, perhaps, he allowed himself to be convinced. His final notes do not reveal whether he was shocked or only disappointed when arrested.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, the urgent need for

¹⁵⁶ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 27. There is much debate among historians of Operation Trust over Shultz's true allegiance. Grant claims that the OGPU recruited Shultz, while Wraga argues she remained committed to the ROVS cause. Further complicating the story is Shultz's affair with Oppenput that led to his defection in 1927. What is certain is Kutepov's faith in her loyalty to the monarchist cause.

¹⁵⁷ Lehovich, *White Against Red*, 432.

¹⁵⁸ Grant, "The Trust," 11.

¹⁵⁹ Orlov, *March of Time*, 139; Natalie Grant, "The Russian Section, A Window on the Soviet Union," *Diplomatic History* 2, no. 1 (1978): 107–15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24909947>.

¹⁶⁰ Orlov, *March of Time*, 142.

¹⁶¹ Spence, "Sidney Reilly's Lubianka 'Diary' 30 October-4 November 1925."

information from inside Soviet Russia combined with few reliable sources led Western intelligence and independent adventurers to rely on the MOTsR windfall without questioning their good fortune.

Not every intelligence service was convinced, however. Along with Russian Generals Wrangel and Denikin, Polish Minister of War Marshall Józef Piłsudski was equally skeptical and had the means to test the MOTsR. Piłsudski tasked his MOTsR contact to steal Soviet Army mobilization plans, a specific request but an easy one for a network claiming access to the Soviet bureaucracy. After some delay, MOTsR couriers delivered the plans to Warsaw. Unbeknownst to the OGPU in Moscow, Piłsudski possessed detailed railroad capacity data from a separate source.¹⁶² After comparing the two reports (and presumably being convinced of the integrity of his other source), Piłsudski declared the MOTsR-produced plans to be fabrications and that Polish intelligence would stop relying on the MOTsR.¹⁶³ It is important to note that Piłsudski's test depended on an alternative source of information inside Soviet Russia. By relying solely on the MOTsR for their insights, the other Western services could not use the same vetting technique.

In retrospect, the White Russian leaders and Western intelligence services that believed in the MOTsR were victims of poor analysis and optimistic interpretations of events. Bad luck rather than conspiracy explained Savinkov's capture, according to those faithful to the MOTsR narrative, while Reilly's disappearance was similarly dismissed. By presenting a coordinated message that reinforced itself, the Soviets took advantage of the West's desire for information and hope for normalized relations with Moscow. As the CIA's unpublished history of the operation concludes, "the Trust operation succeeded not because of its inherent merits, but rather because of the inherent weakness of elements it was targeted against."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 20.

¹⁶³ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 103–4.

¹⁶⁴ "The Trust," 41.

F. CONCLUSION

Dzerzhinsky's motive in designing Operation Trust was to protect the nascent Soviet regime from a widespread yet incohesive White Russian movement backed by several of the Western European powers. While the options of political violence and small-scale provocations were considered, Lenin chose deception instead as the alternatives offered little chance of success. Political violence exceeded the Cheka's capabilities in the early 1920s, and the multitude of influential White Russian figures made choosing a target nearly impossible. *Agent provocateurs* could be used to disrupt identified cells of White Russian hatching specific schemes, but first the Cheka needed to learn more about the White Russian groups and their plans. Lenin and Dzerzhinsky probably realized a deception campaign played to the Cheka's domestic strengths and the White Russians' desperation to return.

Of course, the Cheka could not know where the deception operation might gain traction and where it might meet resistance. For that, the Cheka depended on the White Russians and their ability to convince themselves that hope remained. When the MOTsR turned to dust following the exposure of Operation Trust, the hopes of the White Russian émigrés were blown away by the same, cold wind. More importantly to the Kremlin, Operation Trust allowed the Soviet regime to consolidate its power undisturbed by outside interference, laying the foundation for Stalin's fierce control in the 1930s.

Over the next decade, the struggle between the Soviets and the White Russians saw shifts in the circumstances of victim, means, motive, and opportunity. Despite the overwhelming success of Operation Trust in delaying Western interference and disrupting ROVS terrorist attacks, changing circumstances drove the NKVD to reconsider its strategy for neutralizing the White Russians. The abduction and execution of General Evgenii Miller is a robust example of the political violence that Dzerzhinsky opted to forego in 1921 but emerged as a practical option in the 1930s. As our attention turns to how Miller became a target for the Soviets, applying again the framework of victim, means, motive, and opportunity may reveal the answer to why he became one.

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IV. CASE STUDY TWO: THE ABDUCTION AND EXECUTION OF GENERAL MILLER

With the exposure of the MOTsR as a provocation, the White Russian community realized that it was vulnerable to the Soviet security services. Accusations of more Soviet spies among the émigrés were widespread, fueled by paranoia, and the overall morale of the community deteriorated. Yet the movement's leaders did not give up on their goal to destabilize the Soviets. General Aleksandr Kutepov, deputy commander of the Russian All-Military Union (ROVS) renewed the organization's efforts to infiltrate the Soviet Union and conduct small-scale terrorist attacks that would highlight the Kremlin's fragile hold on the country.¹⁶⁵ The White Russian threat had not been dealt a fatal blow by Operation Trust and Moscow needed a new strategy for the 1930s. Rather than attempt a follow-on deception operation that might tear the ROVS apart from the inside, the OGPU (and later the NKVD) opted for a more aggressive and targeted campaign of political violence.¹⁶⁶

The covert abduction and execution of ROVS leader General Evgenii Miller in 1937 was the culmination of NKVD efforts to neutralize the ROVS as a movement. Equally impactful as Operation Trust a decade before, the abduction of Miller led many in the White Russian community to wonder if any attempt to overthrow the Soviets was worth pursuing. That both operations met Soviet objectives is clear, yet the decision to shift from deception to violence merits more analysis. By comparing the White Russian community in the 1920s to the same community a decade later, along with changes in Soviet means, motives, and opportunities in that same period, this chapter will identify the key changes that led to the shift in tactics.

¹⁶⁵ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ The OGPU was reincorporated into the NKVD in July 1934.

A. BACKGROUND ON GENERAL MILLER

To appreciate the importance of Miller to the White Russian community, one must know how he came to be its military and political leader in Western Europe. Vladislav Goldin and John Long wrote extensively on Miller's life, and their access to KGB archives led to unique insights into the motivations for abduction and his execution.¹⁶⁷ Their research helps explain why the Soviets opted to eliminate Miller in their fight against the larger White Russian movement.

Miller was born in 1867 into a noble family of German-Baltic extraction with a tradition of Russian military service. Miller excelled in cavalry training and when commissioned in 1886 at age nineteen, found himself in the tsar's Life-Guard Hussar Regiment. Three years later he attended the Imperial General Staff College and graduated top of his class in 1892. Miller's superiors in the Imperial Army recognized him as a high achiever and assigned him accordingly.

After ten years of international duties, Miller returned to St. Petersburg in 1909 to the role of Over-Quartermaster of the Chief Administration of the General Staff. Starting with this headquarters assignment, Miller demonstrated a knack for administering complex organizations. As a field leader, however, Miller earned a reputation for fair but strict discipline, a style that did not agree with efforts at military democratization under the Provisional Government. Equally telling was his limited success in the battlefield during the last months of Russian participation in the First World War and against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War.

Miller's field career ended with the decision to evacuate himself and staff from the Northern theater to Norway in early 1920, leading to the capture of over 50,000 members of the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army (many of whom were veterans of the Imperial Army). Miller forever regretted that decision and sought to atone for it by devoting himself to supporting Russian Imperial Army troops that managed to escape to Western Europe and Asia.¹⁶⁸ Miller became chief of staff for General Petr Wrangel in 1922 and helped

¹⁶⁷ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 20–21.

¹⁶⁸ Goldin and Long, 25.

execute Wrangel's reforms that led to the creation of the ROVS and its consolidation in Paris in 1924.¹⁶⁹ After Wrangel's death in 1928, Miller was promoted to deputy head of the ROVS under General Kutepov.¹⁷⁰ When Kutepov disappeared from the streets of Paris in 1930, Miller first demurred and then accepted the position as head of the ROVS.¹⁷¹ He ran the organization for another seven years.

In contrast to the White Russian émigré community of the 1920s and its plethora of leaders and pretenders, Miller stood as the primary political and military leader of the community in the 1930s. He maintained the ROVS position as the leading support organization for Russian Imperial Army veterans (despite limited resources) while pursuing a limited fight against the Soviets in multiple arenas.¹⁷² Through Miller's hard work, the monarchist threat to the Soviets' legitimacy carried on years after the end of the Civil War.

B. SUMMARY OF THE OPERATION TO ABDUCT MILLER

September 22nd, 1937, should have been a normal day for Miller and the small ROVS staff based in Paris. Meetings with individual Russian Imperial Army veterans in need of help, mixed with ceremonial events to commemorate fallen friends and historical battles, were at the core of Miller's daily duties. On that Wednesday, however, Miller expected to gather with two representatives of the German military in a meeting brokered by his deputy, General Nikolai Skoblin.¹⁷³ Unbeknownst to Miller, Skoblin and Skoblin's wife, Nadezhda Plevitskaia, had been on the OGPU payroll since 1930.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps due to concerns about the meeting itself or the loyalty of Skoblin, Miller left a sealed note with ROVS vice president General Pavel Kussonsky, to be opened if Miller did not return.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 26.

¹⁷¹ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 146.

¹⁷² Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 171.

¹⁷³ Grey, 127.

¹⁷⁴ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 116.

¹⁷⁵ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 127.

Later testimony showed that this request was not customary for Miller, who often took public transportation to meetings and even refused a security detail.¹⁷⁶ Whatever led Miller to leave the note, it proved to be an important development in the story of the ROVS.

The details of Miller's kidnapping come from NKVD officer Alexander Orlov who served in Spain during the operation and was in regular contact with Special Tasks personnel in that period.¹⁷⁷ After leaving his office, Miller met with Skoblin who drove them to a building in the 16th arrondissement in western Paris. Skoblin ushered Miller into the building and stood aside as three NKVD operatives wrestled down his superior officer and injected him with a sedative. Less than twenty minutes later, Miller was placed in a crate and loaded onto a Soviet Embassy truck. The truck drove to the northern port Le Havre where sailors carried the crate containing Miller on to the Soviet cargo ship *S/S Maria Ulyanova*, which quickly departed for Leningrad.¹⁷⁸ From Miller's departure from ROVS headquarters at 12:15 pm, the operation took approximately four hours.

It was many hours later that Kussonsky, alerted to the fact that Miller never arrived at a Russian Civil War commemorative event and was not at home, remembered Miller's odd note.¹⁷⁹ The prosecution of Skoblin's wife Nadezhda used the note in her trial, and it remained archived until unearthed by amateur historian Marina Grey. The note, a simple precaution by Miller, thwarted months of NKVD planning and the extensive resources invested to maintain some Soviet deniability for Miller's disappearance. The note read:

I have an appointment at 12:30 pm with General Skoblin on the corner of Jasmin and Raffet Streets, and he is to go with me to an appointment with a German officer, Strohman, a military attaché in the Baltics, and with Werner, who is assistant here at the Embassy. Both speak good Russian. The meeting was arranged on Skoblin's initiative. Maybe it's an ambush, in which case I leave this note.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 157.

¹⁷⁷ Orlov, *March of Time*, 195–98.

¹⁷⁸ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 28.

¹⁷⁹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 164.

¹⁸⁰ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 127. Grey's book includes an image of Miller handwritten note in Russian and provides a translation in French. Translation into English completed by Google Translate and the author.

Faced with hostile questions about his whereabouts that afternoon and the disappearance of Miller, Skoblin feigned that he was confused and then escaped while his ROVS colleagues were gathering notes to visit the police.¹⁸¹

While the investigation began in earnest in Paris, Miller was on his way to a prison cell in Moscow. As a precaution, the *S/S Maria Ulyanova* steamed around Denmark to avoid German inspection at the Kiel Canal and arrived in Leningrad on September 29th.¹⁸² Miller's presence in Moscow soon posed a bit of a dilemma for NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov. As the NKVD kidnapped rather than assassinated Miller, one can conclude that Miller's survival served some purpose for Yezhov.

Unlike the public confession of Boris Savinkov in 1924, a show trial featuring Miller was not an option.¹⁸³ The Soviets denied their involvement in Miller's disappearance for fear of a negative public reaction in Western Europe and the impact of a scandal on the security agreement signed with France in 1935.¹⁸⁴ Just as one goal of Operation Trust was to moderate Western European attitudes toward the Soviets in the 1920s, the disappearance of Miller could not derail Soviet efforts to build a coalition to deter a German attack on the Soviet homeland. A show trial would reveal the Soviets' role in Miller's kidnapping and enrage the French public.

Instead, the NKVD hoped to justify the risky operation by gathering new information from Miller on ROVS activities aimed at Joseph Stalin and the Soviets. This was a common investigative technique as NKVD interrogators forced prisoners to betray their compatriots in return for leniency. Savinkov reportedly revealed his entire network before his trial and afterwards to a fellow prisoner who in fact was an NKVD officer.¹⁸⁵ In this objective, the NKVD failed because their intelligence collection on ROVS activities was comprehensive before Miller's abduction. Miller offered no information that was not

¹⁸¹ Orlov, *March of Time*, 201.

¹⁸² Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 160.

¹⁸³ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 29.

¹⁸⁴ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 154.

¹⁸⁵ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 34.

already in the reports from Skoblin and the other NKVD spies surrounding the ROVS.¹⁸⁶ The improved capabilities of the NKVD that enabled the risky abduction operation (described later in the section on Soviet intelligence “means”), led to such effective intelligence coverage that Miller’s interrogation had little value in terms of understanding the ROVS.¹⁸⁷

Again, the record relies on Goldin and Long and their access to the Soviet intelligence archives to learn of Miller’s final months.¹⁸⁸ At one point in his confinement, Miller offered to help mediate a reconciliation between the Soviets and the White Russians, in hopes that an agreement would allow the White Russians to return to Russia. The NKVD could have leveraged Miller’s offer to lure back other ROVS leaders (as was done during Operation Trust). Instead, the Kremlin ignored Miller’s offer, possibly because going public would mean acknowledging the Soviet role in his disappearance (and Miller did not know the Soviets denied involvement).¹⁸⁹ Another explanation was the level of paranoia within the NKVD brought by the Stalinist purges of the time. In 1937–38, Moscow recalled NKVD officers posted abroad in substantial numbers due to suspicions about their international contacts (the core of their jobs, one must remember). Many were sentenced to prison or executed.¹⁹⁰ Any NKVD officer supporting Miller’s proposal risked being accused of counter-revolutionary leanings. Such was the state of paranoia within the Soviet state that even reasonable ideas were viewed as destabilizing and their proponents considered suspect. Miller remained in prison for nearly nineteen months, fighting depression and health issues (he was seventy-one) and fraught with concern for his wife, until Yezhov’s replacement Lavrenti Beria ordered Miller’s execution in May 1939. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia finally acknowledged the NKVD’s role

¹⁸⁶ Goldin and Long, “Resistance and Retribution,” 34.

¹⁸⁷ Andrew, *Secret World*, 594.

¹⁸⁸ Goldin and Long, “Resistance and Retribution,” 29–33.

¹⁸⁹ Goldin and Long, 28.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 81.

in Miller's kidnapping and death in the 1990s in an official history of Soviet intelligence.¹⁹¹

In the end, the Miller operation led to limited intelligence gains for the Soviets, but it did have a major impact on the remnants of the White Russian community in exile. The exposure of Skoblin as a suspected Soviet spy and the elimination of the last of the politically active Imperial Russian Army generals resulted in widespread disillusionment.¹⁹² Some White Russian groups continued to support German aggression toward the Soviets.¹⁹³ Others simply gave up on returning to their Russian homeland.¹⁹⁴ From a historical perspective, however, the question remains: why did NKVD leadership chose political violence over the other tactics available (especially the successful tool of deception) to neutralize the White Russian movement? The following sections will show that changes in aspects of the battle between the White Russians and the Soviets drove the shift in Soviet tactics.

C. THE “VICTIM” – WHITE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP

In comparison to the White Russian leadership cadre of the 1920s, the political and military movement of the 1930s was more centralized. The ROVS consolidated control over its finances and personnel such that it had the potential to cause trouble for the Soviets. Unfortunately for the ROVS, consolidation assisted the NKVD's efforts to identify specific individuals who they could recruit, encircle, or eliminate to neutralize the ROVS. If the Cheka had attempted a similar approach in the 1920s, it would have failed because the service did not have the capabilities to cover the dozens of military, political, and religious figures vying for influence over the White Russian émigré community.

As discussed in Chapter III, the White Russian community emerged from the Russian Civil War as a disorganized and dislocated movement. Multiple political circles

¹⁹¹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 159. Citing Primakov et al., *Ocherki istorii rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki*, vol. 3, 118.

¹⁹² Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 211.

¹⁹³ Robinson, 219.

¹⁹⁴ Robinson, 213.

emerged, based in various Western European capitals, aiming to represent the estimated eight hundred fifty thousand exiles stretched across Europe and Asia.¹⁹⁵ The first military reform took place in 1924 when General Wrangel created the ROVS to maintain order and mutual support within the Imperial Russian Army veteran cadre.¹⁹⁶ Wrangel served as the military leader under Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, who eventually agreed to act as the political leader of the White Russian community.¹⁹⁷ The deaths of Wrangel in 1928 and Grand Duke Nikolai in 1929 left General Kutepov as the leading figure in both the Imperial Russian Army and the Grand Duke's political movement.¹⁹⁸ Few doubted that Kutepov was the nominal leader of the White Russian exile movement as he refocused efforts on the fight against the Soviets. By becoming the singular focus of the White Russian community, however, Kutepov took on a degree of personal risk.

In January 1930, Kutepov disappeared from the streets of Paris. The immediate investigation unearthed thousands of leads, some of which pointed to Soviet involvement.¹⁹⁹ The public outcry was severe. Diplomats in the Soviet Embassy, fearing a crisis in French-Soviet relations, prepared to be called back to Moscow.²⁰⁰ Soviet defectors claimed that Kutepov died from a heart attack brought on by the stress of his kidnapping or the chloroform used when he was seized.²⁰¹ In 1965, the Soviets admitted that the OGPU was responsible for Kutepov's abduction.²⁰² While successful in eliminating a leader in the White Russian community, the 1930 abduction of Kutepov failed to accomplish the twin goals of interrogating him for additional information followed by the public disgrace of a show trial. One might conclude that the operation failed because

¹⁹⁵ Robinson, 16.

¹⁹⁶ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 26.

¹⁹⁷ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 125–26.

¹⁹⁸ Robinson, 143.

¹⁹⁹ Orlov, *March of Time*, 165.

²⁰⁰ Orlov, 167.

²⁰¹ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 116–17.

²⁰² Grey, 111.

the OGPU had insufficient experience in covertly tracking and abducting a target, especially one in poor health after years in the trenches.

Kutepov's disappearance in January 1930 led to the elevation of Miller from ROVS deputy to its head.²⁰³ An able administrator, Miller maintained ROVS support for its members and operations meant to disrupt the Soviet regime.²⁰⁴ His efforts to sponsor ROVS military training, a full decade after the Civil War and despite Soviet complaints to the nations hosting the White Russians, were well publicized.²⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the ROVS frequently ran up against French restrictions on émigré groups and their military activities. Miller was forced to hide any infiltration operations into the Soviet Union to give his French allies some plausible deniability.²⁰⁶ Thus ROVS efforts to destabilize the Soviets deteriorated after Kutepov's disappearance. Miller instead focused the organization's meager income on supporting its members.

Not everyone within the ROVS was happy with the shift away from attacks on the Soviet Union. By 1934, a spirited debate emerged between the "activists" who supported more aggressive terrorist attacks inside the Soviet Union, and the "moderates" who wished to focus limited resources on maintaining the White Russian community until the group could gain Western support for regime change.²⁰⁷ Some émigrés pointed to Kutepov's disappearance as proof that his activism was viewed as a threat to the Soviets.²⁰⁸ Additionally, Miller faced questions about his abilities as a fundraiser and was asked to either improve or resign.²⁰⁹ Ultimately, Miller was able to survive the challenge by ordering operations that appeased his activist critics but remained clandestine enough that the French authorities could claim ignorance if exposed.²¹⁰ Multiple attempts were made

²⁰³ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 146.

²⁰⁴ Orlov, *March of Time*, 191.

²⁰⁵ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 153.

²⁰⁶ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 110.

²⁰⁷ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 184.

²⁰⁸ Robinson, 146.

²⁰⁹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 137.

²¹⁰ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 190.

to infiltrate operatives into the Soviet Union, usually from Finland. Soviet border guards caught many of them, largely due to Skoblin's role in planning the operations, and by 1936, the Finns refused to help because they suspected a Soviet penetration within the ROVS.²¹¹ Even if successful, ROVS attacks inside the Soviet Union were not going to start a counter-revolution. Despite the long odds and lack of success, however, ROVS leadership felt it necessary to continue trying. Without efforts to overthrow the Bolsheviks and return to their homeland, the ROVS had no purpose beyond supporting the surviving veterans of the Imperial Army.

In the decade and a half after the White Russians made their way to Western Europe, their political and military leadership steadily coalesced around the ROVS in Paris while the wider community searched for a unifying identity. This clarity in leadership, however, did not translate into more effective activity against the Soviets. Even Imperial Russian Army veterans believed that the constant policy debates within the ROVS were sapping its strength. General Anton Denikin, himself a veteran of the Civil War, wrote in 1931 that the ROVS "no longer shows any signs of life other than continuous internal intrigues."²¹² It is difficult to say whether this internal dissent was a natural characteristic of the White Russian émigré community or the successful outcome of Operation Trust.

What consolidation of the leadership of the White Russian community did accomplish was to make it far simpler for the NKVD to decide which figures to recruit, undermine, or liquidate. Put plainly, the number of targets had fallen, and it was easier to determine the relative importance of the remainder. Miller was identified as the most important White Russian leader and thus became Stalin's primary target.

²¹¹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 128, 143.

²¹² Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 170.

D. “MEANS” – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES IN THE 1930S

A number of foreign assassinations and abductions in the 1930s and 1940s are attributed to the Soviets.²¹³ The most memorable was the assassination by ice axe of Leon Trotsky in Mexico in August 1940.²¹⁴ Stalin’s pursuit of Trotsky is legendary, but that specific example of political violence offers few insights into the capabilities brought to bear against a large movement such as the White Russian target over time. The successful abduction of General Miller in 1937 highlights the additional capabilities the Soviets developed after their initial foray into Western Europe in the 1920s. First, this section will review the expansion of NKVD capabilities, then the resources devoted to political violence. Following that, the focus turns to the specific means used in the operation to abduct Miller.

1. The Growing Capacity for Intelligence Collection

If the Cheka of the 1920s had focused on gathering intelligence about the White Russian community in Western Europe, it would have spent years before making any progress. The service’s focus was internal, especially toward the end of the Russian Civil War. Lenin and his circle knew the importance of understanding the Bolshevik’s position in world affairs, but the immediate threats of the Russian Civil War and Allied intervention precluded investment in foreign capabilities.²¹⁵

By the mid-1930s, however, the NKVD overcame the collection deficit. A Politburo decision in 1930 tasked OGPU’s Foreign Intelligence Directorate (INO) with increasing its network of spies, with the specific purposes of learning about Western European foreign policy with regard to the Soviet Union, stealing military and industrial technology, and the “destruction of traitors, deserters, and leaders of White Guard terrorist

²¹³ Peter Deriabin, “Murder International, Inc.; Murder and Kidnapping as an Instrument of Soviet Policy: Testimony before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary,” 89th Congress (1965) (statement of Peter S. Deriabin, former Russian NKVD officer), March 26, 1965, v–vi, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009990176>.

²¹⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 88.

²¹⁵ Andrew and Mitrokhin, 28.

organizations.”²¹⁶ Tellingly, the White Russians were the only group mentioned by name in the decision memorandum. A related push for additional “illegals” (spies posing as businessmen or housewives as opposed to INO officers working inside “legal” Soviet Embassies) was implemented as well.²¹⁷ Prior to the diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union and the establishment of Soviet embassies in Western Europe in the mid-1920s, Soviet intelligence collection was mostly conducted by illegals.²¹⁸

The result of Moscow’s investment in foreign intelligence was the largest spy network in Europe by the mid-1930s.²¹⁹ It had cracked Great Britain’s diplomatic cyphers, the codes used to encrypt important messages sent via telegram, and recruited spies in senior positions in London and other levels in Paris and Berlin.²²⁰ In fact, the network was large enough that the conviction of twenty-three Soviet agents in France did not severely degrade Soviet intelligence collection there.²²¹ At the same time, Western intelligence services were still smarting after Operation Trust. The NKVD was therefore far better placed to collect foreign intelligence in the 1930s than the Cheka of the early 1920s. Parallel to this expansion in coverage was the added commitment to active measures, specifically political violence. Without the expansion of these capabilities in the 1930s, plans for the abduction of Miller might have stalled.

2. The Growing Capacity for Political Violence

Equally important to the successful abduction of Miller were the NKVD’s capabilities to conduct covert operations involving political violence. The Cheka certainly had experience with political violence inside the Soviet Union (hostage-taking being a well-used technique against the White Russians during the Civil War), but their foreign means were years from effectiveness.

²¹⁶ Shearer and Khaustov, *Stalin and the Lubianka*, 82–83.

²¹⁷ Jordan, *Stalin’s Singing Spy*, 112.

²¹⁸ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 42.

²¹⁹ Andrew, *Secret World*, 593.

²²⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 53–54.

²²¹ Jordan, *Stalin’s Singing Spy*, 134.

Despite their limitations, the Soviet services were not starting without a strategy to build the capability for violence. Well before Sarajevo, assassination was a tool for those engaging in political activism. The period between 1880 and 1914 saw a number of attacks against European leaders in what historian Christopher Andrew calls the “Golden Age of Assassination.”²²² The Socialists-Revolutionaries Party (SR) and its Combat Organization, including Savinkov (the target of Operation Syndicate described in Chapter III), successfully terrorized the Russian monarchy for years.²²³ The outbreak of the First World War and subsequent bloodletting seemed to limit assassination as a tactic in the early 1920s, but by 1926, the Soviets saw a place for political violence.

One of the Soviets motivations for neutralizing the White Russians was the persistent fear the Allied Powers would resort to direct intervention against the Bolsheviks. More broadly, Moscow assessed that Great Britain conspired against the Soviet Union on all fronts, and that both powers would be embroiled in a second World War before long.²²⁴ In 1926, the OGPU created the Bureau of Special Tasks to serve as a parallel foreign intelligence service in times of war when sabotage and deeply embedded illegals would be called upon.²²⁵ By the early 1930s, the Soviets were investing heavily in the bureau’s “mobile groups” meant to conduct assassination and kidnapping operations in the West.²²⁶ In 1938, Special Tasks was the largest foreign section in the NKVD (with over 200 officers) and only Stalin or the Politburo authorized its operations.²²⁷ To allow the Kremlin the option to deny involvement, non-Soviet citizens made up the mobile groups and conducted many Special Tasks operations.²²⁸

²²² Andrew, *Secret World*, 425.

²²³ Andrew, 437.

²²⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 55.

²²⁵ Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*, xxx.

²²⁶ Orlov, *Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes*, 223.

²²⁷ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 76, 679 fn 2; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 41.

²²⁸ Orlov, *March of Time*, 193.

Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War was an example of the reach of the Bureau of Special Tasks. Ostensibly there to help fight fascism, the NKVD was more focused on eliminating pro-Trotsky cadres than actively supporting the Republicans. As former NKVD officer Pavel Sudoplatov put it, the Spanish Civil War included a “separate war among Communists.”²²⁹ First tasked with destabilizing the Trotskyites, Stalin ordered Special Tasks in spring 1937 to focus on “liquidation” instead.²³⁰ The result was the arrest and execution of hundreds of Republicans and their allies in Spain at the cost of chaos and poor morale as the Nationalists advanced across the peninsula.²³¹

The development of a largely independent operation within NKVD’s Foreign Department speaks to the importance Stalin and the Politburo placed on active measures outside more routine intelligence collection. The foundation established for the pursuit and elimination of the Trotskyites and other threats to Stalin’s regime was put to excellent use against the White Russians in 1937.

3. Miller in the Crosshairs

In the mid-1930s, the NKVD had extensive intelligence about the White Russian community (and the ROVS in particular) and a refined capacity to conduct covert acts of violence against foreign enemies. The operation to abduct Miller depended on both. The idea to kidnap Miller probably came from NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov, who reportedly saw the boost that his predecessor Genrikh Yagoda enjoyed after the disappearance of General Kutepov in 1930 and decided that a successful kidnapping and interrogation would impress Stalin.²³² The challenge, however, was the need for absolute secrecy due to the political sensitivities of using violence inside France. A 1935 security pact between France and the Soviet Union precluded any activity attributable to the Embassy. Many remembered the furor after Kutepov disappeared, when protestors surrounded the Soviet

²²⁹ Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*, 30.

²³⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 73.

²³¹ Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin’s Agent: The Life and Death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 239–79, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=1876214>.

²³² Orlov, *March of Time*, 192.

Embassy as officials inside burned sensitive correspondence and prepared to evacuate.²³³ Therefore, the operation required extensive resources to be successful and not attributable to the Soviet Union.

Many of the details of the Miller operation come from former NKVD officers that claimed firsthand knowledge. They all agree that at least eight NKVD officers and agents participated directly in the abduction, spanning an array of skillsets, covers, and vulnerability to French arrest.²³⁴ On hand were drivers from the Embassy, a doctor brought in to administer a sedative, and even two officers expected to play the role of German officers to lure Miller into an empty apartment building.²³⁵ Despite the large number of players, the team was dedicated to their mission and there was probably no risk of betrayal due to high performance expectations in Moscow. In addition to personnel, the abduction relied on the availability of a discreet apartment in suburban Paris and rapid transport to the coast and beyond. The operation used an Embassy truck to move the sedated Miller (in a crate) to the French coast and a cargo ship on standby in Le Havre to transport him to Leningrad.²³⁶ As mentioned earlier, the *S/S Maria Ulyanova* steamed around the Kiel Canal to avoid German inspection and the crew was prepared to kill Miller and dump his body if the ship was boarded by French authorities.²³⁷ This advance planning demonstrated the NKVD's care in avoiding a scandal, all negated by Miller's note before his abduction.

Beyond the tactical resources necessary, the NKVD devoted its attention to managing public reaction and possible diplomatic difficulties. Within days of Miller's disappearance, Soviet disinformation shifted the blame to the fascists. Rumors quickly spread that Miller was meeting regularly with Nazi secret police, the Gestapo, while the

²³³ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 154; Orlov, *March of Time*, 167.

²³⁴ Orlov, *March of Time*; Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*; Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*; Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*.

²³⁵ Orlov, *March of Time*, 195; Geoffrey Bailey, *The Conspirators* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 228.

²³⁶ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 190.

²³⁷ Orlov, *March of Time*, 198.

Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published reports from Spain linking Miller with the Germans and Italians fighting for the Nationalists.²³⁸ Soon the immediate outcry aimed at the Soviet Embassy passed. Skoblin's disappearance, after having been accused by his ROVS colleagues, remains a mystery. One theory is that he fled to the nearby apartment of NKVD spy Sergei Tretyakov who eavesdropped on Miller for years, while another claims Skoblin hid in the Soviet Embassy.²³⁹ A third claims he was flown to Spain on a charter flight.²⁴⁰ Sudoplatov, after orchestrating the assassination of a Ukrainian nationalist in 1938, was smuggled to Spain and it seems very possible that the escape route could have existed in time for Skoblin's escape.²⁴¹ The fact that Skoblin was able to escape France despite a fierce manhunt demonstrates the NKVD's extensive network.

The resources used by the NKVD to successfully and covertly abduct Miller ranged from trained personnel on the street to pre-scheduled press placements that tried to confuse investigators and the public. NKVD Special Tasks learned the lessons from the botched Kutepov operation in 1930, choosing a quiet building in the suburbs instead of a public street in central Paris, bringing in a medical professional to ensure Miller survived the sedative, and placing an NKVD spy close enough to Miller to ensure he arrived on time and unaware. From the Cheka's small foundation of international capability in 1921, the Soviets built an extensive collection and action network capable of gathering information on the regime's enemies and making them disappear when ordered by the Kremlin.

E. "MOTIVE" – SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE RUSSIAN THREAT

There was little change in the Soviet appreciation of the threat posed by the White Russians from the 1920s to the 1930s. The White Russians persisted in infiltrating operatives into the Soviet Union to conduct acts of sabotage, instigate counter-

²³⁸ Hugo Dewar, *Assassins at Large: Being a Fully Documented and Hitherto Unpublished Account of the Executions Outside Russia Ordered by the GPU* (London and New York: Wingate, 1951), 9–10, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dewar/assassins/index.htm>.
www.marxists.org/archive/dewar/assassins/ch01.htm.

²³⁹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 170; Orlov, *March of Time*, 208.

²⁴⁰ Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*, 37.

²⁴¹ Sudoplatov et al., 33.

revolutionary movements, and expose the fragility of Soviet control. And while those actions were unlikely to disturb the Soviets in real terms, they did alarm the security services. Thus, a full decade after the Russian Civil War, Stalin maintained his belief that the “White Guard” still posed a threat.²⁴² In the mid-1930s, his fear of a conservative counter-revolution was reinforced by the growing links between some White Russians and the fascist movement in Western Europe.²⁴³

Faced with a persistent challenge to their control, the Soviet strategy remained consistent from the early 1920s to the late 1930s: protect against émigré efforts to destabilize the Soviet regime and work to undermine Western support for the White Russians.²⁴⁴ However, Stalin’s decision to escalate from subversion to political violence seems unnecessary given the limited White Russian threat as assessed by the NKVD. At the heart of Stalin’s decision is the question of whether the perceived threat posed by the White Russians had changed since the Russian Civil War.

1. White Russian Threat as Myth or Reality

The White Russian’s existential threat to the Soviet regime probably peaked during the Russian Civil War, with the White’s evacuation in late 1920 and loss of Western support setting the stage for decline and isolation.²⁴⁵ Despite Kutepov and Miller’s efforts to maintain a steady flow of attacks on the Soviet Union, most of these costly efforts failed due to warnings from Skoblin and other OGPU and NKVD spies.²⁴⁶ The ROVS attempts at counter-Soviet propaganda were limited, and Miller resorted to lobbying Western European governments to boycott Soviet goods in an effort to reduce Moscow’s hard currency income.²⁴⁷ By the mid-1930s, contributions to the Fund for the Salvation of the

²⁴² “White Guard was the catch-all term for White Russian émigrés, their leadership, and its capacity for terrorism.

²⁴³ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 151.

²⁴⁴ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 148.

²⁴⁵ Anatol Shmelev, “Gallipoli to Golgotha: Remembering the Internment of the Russian White Army at Gallipoli, 1920–3,” in *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*, ed. Jenny Macleod (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 195, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582798_12.

²⁴⁶ Jordan, *Stalin’s Singing Spy*, 128.

²⁴⁷ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 170.

Motherland, which financed sabotage in the Soviet Union, dropped due to a lack of success and the impact of the Depression on émigré workers.²⁴⁸ In effect, the lack of ROVS success in destabilizing the Soviets meant that it had ceased to be even a small threat at the time Miller's abduction was in the planning stages.

The diminished ROVS threat was known not only to Miller and his colleagues, but to the NKVD themselves. By the mid-1930s, the NKVD had significant collection capabilities around Miller and his leadership team. Skoblin served as the Kremlin's primary source of information on the planning of attacks in Russia, and helped stoke the discontent within the ROVS that weakened Miller's reputation.²⁴⁹ In addition, former White Russian official (and NKVD spy) Tretyakov owned the building housing the ROVS headquarters, enabling the NKVD to install microphones in Miller's office as early as 1933.²⁵⁰ Tretyakov's transcripts of Miller's meetings were passed to the Soviet Embassy in Paris for secure shipment to Moscow.²⁵¹ Lastly, the NKVD handled Mireille Abbiate, the Miller's neighbor. Over the course of several years, Abbiate systematically installed microphones in his home and stole documents when the family was away.²⁵²

The NKVD's coverage of Miller and the ROVS meant the Soviet leadership should have determined the ROVS posed no threat to the regime and instead was only an irritant. Despite these excellent sources and wider penetration of lower-level White Russian operations, Stalin chose to believe that the White Russians remained a significant enemy of the Soviet state. Contributing to the confusion was the fact that the INO did not have an analytical section to help Stalin.²⁵³ One can presume that either Stalin was incapable of correctly interpreting the NKVD reports handed to him or he deliberately chose to keep the "White Guard" threat alive for political purposes.²⁵⁴ The interrogations of Miller in 1937

²⁴⁸ Robinson, 188.

²⁴⁹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 137.

²⁵⁰ Jordan, 133.

²⁵¹ Goldin and Long, "Resistance and Retribution," 38 fn 40.

²⁵² Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 75.

²⁵³ Andrew, *Secret World*, 594.

²⁵⁴ Andrew, 593.

and 1938 confirmed that the ROVS posed no threat to the stability of the Soviet regime or Stalin's control of it. While the Soviets' fear of the White Russians remained consistent, the actual danger posed by the White Russian diminished over time.

2. The White Russians and Fascism

Forever linked to the Soviet concern over the White Russians was the support the monarchists garnered from the Allied Powers during the Russian Civil War. While that overt support faded in the interwar period, the growing bond between some members of the White Russian community and anti-communist fascists concerned the Kremlin. This new threat was not imagined (unlike others in the conspiracy-minded NKVD). Not only did some White Russians favor Nazi efforts to round up the German Communist Party, Miller was forced to authorize volunteers to fight with the Nationalists against the Communists in Spain.²⁵⁵ In 1937, he ordered the study of fascism as a nationalist ideology in opposition to the Soviets' internationalist one.²⁵⁶ Some Russians may have been drawn to the conservative and militaristic posture of the fascists, but even more supported the fascist position against communism.²⁵⁷ One émigré paper claimed that only Germany and Italy had successfully fought off communism.²⁵⁸ In more practical terms, White Russians believed a Nazi attack on the Soviet Union might help dislodge Stalin.²⁵⁹

The Kremlin knew of the developing Russian émigré support for the Nazis in Germany and Nationalists in Spain, and eventually Stalin decided that eliminating Miller would disrupt alleged ROVS plans to collaborate with the Germans.²⁶⁰ Stalin ignored the sizable White Russian "defencist" movement that argued for the protection of Russian territory against all invaders (as opposed to the "defeatist" camp who welcomed an

²⁵⁵ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 130, 144.

²⁵⁶ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 176.

²⁵⁷ Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon*, 152.

²⁵⁸ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 176.

²⁵⁹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 151.

²⁶⁰ Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*, 37.

invasion of the Soviet Union to dislodge the communists).²⁶¹ His focus seemed to be on the potential value of White Russian assistance to the Germans during the inevitable invasion of the Soviet Union. As mentioned earlier, Stalin chose to ignore reports that the ROVS posed no direct threat. But he seemed to see the potential for the diminished ROVS to aid his more immediate enemy, Adolf Hitler, and thus chose to escalate the fight against Miller.

Additionally, eliminating Miller might increase the break between the old guard of Civil War veterans and the new generation that lacked experience with Bolshevik brutality. If the young White Russians could be separated from those supporting an outdated monarchy, they might be convinced to join local communist movements.²⁶² One can see how Stalin, already predisposed to believe in a conservative conspiracy set against his regime, would view White Russian support for fascism as reason to act aggressively.

3. Miller and the Great Purge

This thesis would be incomplete if the NKVD's choice to use political violence was not put into context of the Great Purges unfolding inside the Soviet Union. Faced with the damage to the Soviet economy from Stalin's ill-conceived collectivization policy, the regime needed scapegoats. Ideologically, it was unacceptable to blame Stalin, so instead the NKVD accused domestic undesirables and foreign enemies (real and invented) as "wreckers."²⁶³ The NKVD leadership explicitly linked rural unrest to the existence of former White Russians still living in the Soviet Union and warned of "Kulak-White Guardist groupings" hiding within the state government.²⁶⁴ Thus any protests against Soviet planning were blamed on external actors rather than admitting that popular support

²⁶¹ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 214. Robinson notes that a similar debate took place among the White Russians in 1931 when Japan threatened to create a buffer state in the Soviet Far East. During the Russian Civil War, the Allied intervention carved out territory to allow anti-Bolshevik forces to regroup (215-6).

²⁶² Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon*, 144.

²⁶³ Andrew, *Secret World*, 598.

²⁶⁴ David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953*, Yale-Hoover Series on Stalin, Stalinism, and the Cold War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 302, 325. The "kulaks" were Russian peasants wealthy enough to own their farmland and to hire workers.

was low among Soviet citizens. Similarly, Stalin and the NKVD saw the hidden hand of Trotsky in every opposition movement (despite the contrary political and ideological views of those movements). For example, much was made of the coincidence that both the ROVS and Trotsky's son Lev Sedov were based in Paris.²⁶⁵ Stalin probably found it useful to use the White Russians as scapegoats for any unfortunate event that would otherwise reflect poorly on his own leadership of the nation.²⁶⁶

Moving beyond the general scope and illogic of the Great Purges, a third theory exists for Stalin's decision to eliminate Miller. Some historians argue that Skoblin, with Miller's knowledge, passed to ROVS contacts in the German military the rumor that Red Army Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky was planning a coup to overthrow Stalin.²⁶⁷ The Germans fabricated a dossier with evidence of the Marshal's contact with the German military and exposed the file to a known NKVD agent.²⁶⁸ Once the file reached Stalin, he called for the investigation that led to the show trial and execution of Tukhachevsky.²⁶⁹ If the affair had ended there, Skoblin and Miller would have eliminated a leading figure in the Red Army.

Skoblin's role as an NKVD agent, however, supports the claim that he accused Tukhachevsky per Stalin's orders.²⁷⁰ As with other Soviet leaders that Stalin distrusted and eventually eliminated, Tukhachevsky was a popular figure in the Red Army and with Soviet citizens. Because Miller knew the coup accusation was false, he might have revealed Stalin's scheme to eliminate an immensely popular Red Army leader.²⁷¹ Faced with the

²⁶⁵ Andrew, *Secret World*, 598.

²⁶⁶ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 142.

²⁶⁷ Paul W. Blackstock, "The Tukhachevsky Affair," *The Russian Review* 28, no. 2 (1969): 186, <https://doi.org/10.2307/127506>.

²⁶⁸ Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 239.

²⁶⁹ Bailey, *Conspirators*, 212.

²⁷⁰ Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 239.

²⁷¹ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 146–47.

potential for Miller to discredit Stalin's purge in Moscow, Stalin ordered Miller's elimination, or so the theory claims.²⁷²

While the topic merits further research, especially within the Russian intelligence archives, the theory contains a few inconsistencies. First, eliminating Miller would leave Skoblin alive with the knowledge that Stalin had betrayed his own top general. It seems unlikely that Skoblin's elevated ROVS position and value to the NKVD would be sufficient to keep him alive. Second, the abduction of Miller was discussed well before the Tukhachevsky trial in June 1937, and it would have made more sense to eliminate Miller in advance rather than let him expose the façade during or just after the trial.²⁷³ Third, if Miller was aware of Stalin's ruse and was capable of exposing that information, why would Stalin approve a plan for Miller's kidnapping rather than a simple assassination? With two days of transit time and months of interrogation, Miller might have revealed the truth of Tukhachevsky's alleged coup plans. If Stalin was really concerned about what Miller knew, he should have ordered Miller's death instead. It seems far more plausible that the decision to abduct Miller was the culmination of a long-term effort to disrupt the White Russian movement rather than a cover-up for a Stalinist conspiracy.

F. "OPPORTUNITY" – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE ACCESS TO GENERAL MILLER

The last contributing variable in the NKVD decision to use political violence over other tactics was their access to Miller, the "opportunity" in criminal investigative terms. The NKVD had improved their means and maintained the motivation to eliminate the White Russians, but those were necessary yet insufficient elements in a plot to abduct Miller from Paris. Special Tasks needed access to their target, and with a street abduction likely to repeat the furor of 1930, the team required an insider to lure out Miller. Unlike the 1920s operations against White Russian leaders, however, the NKVD had penetrated

²⁷² Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, 240.

²⁷³ Krivitsky, 213. Krivitsky claims he received the initial request to furnish two officers that could pose as the Germans Strohman and Messner in December 1936, six months before the trial and nine months before Miller's abduction.

the ROVS inner circle by the mid-1930s. Luring Miller out was as simple as providing a few role players and preparing Skoblin with a well-rehearsed story.

The OGPU recruited Skoblin in 1930, along with his wife Plevitskaia, to report on ROVS plans and intentions against the Soviets.²⁷⁴ Within two years, Skoblin was described by OGPU leadership in Moscow as one of the service's best agents inside the White Russian community.²⁷⁵ Even after suspicions were raised by another Imperial Army veteran and a contentious yet inconclusive honor board, Skoblin remained a key lieutenant for Miller and the primary officer planning infiltration operations from Finland.²⁷⁶ Skoblin reported on Miller's movements, success and failures in fundraising, and helped stoke the internal debate between the "activists" and "moderates" described earlier.²⁷⁷ The shift from information provider to accomplice to murder led to Skoblin driving Miller to a Paris suburb and the waiting Special Tasks team on September 22nd.

Equally important in providing regular updates on Miller's movements were Tretyakov and Abbiate. Tretyakov's microphones in the offices of the ROVS probably captured Miller's discussions with his private secretary, meetings with other White Russian leaders, and even Skoblin's proposal to meet with two German military officers.²⁷⁸ Abbiate served the same function near Miller's home, possibly collecting details on his travel plans and evening activities.²⁷⁹ All three were likely to have produced sufficient information to plan another streetside operation akin to Kutepov's abduction in 1930. Fearing witnesses, however, the Special Tasks team needed to get Miller out of sight before sedating him.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 116.

²⁷⁵ Jordan, 127.

²⁷⁶ Jordan, 137.

²⁷⁷ Jordan, 137.

²⁷⁸ Jordan, 133.

²⁷⁹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 75.

²⁸⁰ Orlov, *March of Time*, 193.

To conduct a sophisticated operation such as the covert abduction of a popular figure in Paris, the Soviets needed to know Miller's whereabouts, patterns, and security precautions. This type of information could not come from any random source within the ROVS or even surveillance in Paris that risked detection. Instead, the NKVD needed sources close enough to Miller to influence his behavior in addition to reporting on his policies. Skoblin's unique placement inside the ROVS gave the NKVD the opportunity to draw Miller out to a quiet suburb of Paris and, ultimately, his death in Moscow a year later.

G. CONCLUSION

From the 1920s to the 1930s, the decision variables that drove Soviet intelligence operations against the White Russians changed in important ways. Leadership of the White Russian community coalesced around a single figure responsible for the movement's political and military activities. At the same time, Soviet intelligence capabilities in Europe expanded dramatically, leading to better collection and more options for advancing Stalin's foreign, domestic, and personal agendas. Stalin's motivation to neutralize the White Russians remained consistent with Lenin's as the Kremlin was always aware of the theoretical threat posed by an alternative to communist governance. And lastly, access to the White Russian target became easier as its list of leaders consolidated from eight to one in a decade's time.

Up to this point, this thesis's objective has been to use a consistent framework to compare both operations to identify which variables changed over time and which did not. To validate this approach, however, the framework must explain how those changes influenced the Soviet decision on tactics as correlation offers little explanatory value. The next chapter attempts to explain the impact of each variable, whether dynamic or static, on the Soviet decision to pursue deception, violence, or some other course of action against the White Russians.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE

In late 1920, Cheka founder and leader Feliks Dzerzhinsky developed four options to pursue the White Russians after they evacuated from Crimea:

1. Take hostages in the Soviet Union to dissuade attacks from foreign elements,
2. Liquidate key White Russian figures living abroad,
3. Use *agent provocateurs* to identify and eliminate domestic supporters of the White Russians, or
4. Fabricate a domestic pro-monarchist group to attract and isolate external support.²⁸¹

Dzerzhinsky died of natural causes in 1926, but if he had survived into the 1930s, one can imagine him offering the same options to Stalin.²⁸² Chapter III's case study describes how Lenin chose strategic deception while Chapter IV's case study covers Stalin's choice of political violence. Both tactics ultimately damaged the White Russian movement and prevented them from destabilizing the regime in Moscow. Yet the two options, exemplified by Operation Trust and the abduction of General Evgenii Miller, represent starkly different approaches to the same problem. The former was a complicated and long-running campaign of disinformation and deceit that may have extended into the 1930s if not for the defection of Edward Opperput. The latter was a cold and calculated act of political violence against a relatively harmless yet symbolically important leader of the White Russian community.

This chapter compares the circumstances prior to these two events in search of the major variables that influenced Soviet leadership's decision to change tactics in a short period. To facilitate the comparison, the chapter breaks the circumstances into four decision variables: the cohesion of the White Russian community, the capabilities of Soviet

²⁸¹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 93–94.

²⁸² Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence*, 90.

intelligence, the motivations of Soviet leadership, and the opportunities for the Soviets to execute their plans. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates that it was the consolidation of White Russian leadership plus the increase in Soviet capabilities in Western Europe that drove the change in Soviet tactics.

A. FROM CONTAINMENT TO ACTION

In the 1920s, the Cheka faced a nebulous threat without the tools necessary to properly evaluate it. Dzerzhinsky and his Chekists were certainly aware that the White Russians wanted to overthrow the Bolsheviks, having just fought the Civil War against an array of monarchists, socialists, anarchists, and nationalists.²⁸³ However, as the White Russians escaped from Crimea in November 1920, they also moved beyond the domestic reach of the Cheka. Any Chekists tracking the movements and plans of the Black Baron probably stayed behind as the last White Russians boarded ships bound for Gallipoli, and thus the Soviets lost their intelligence collection on the group and its leaders.

The White Russians' retreat was simultaneously a great success for the Red Army and a new challenge for the Cheka. The Army defeated the immediate military threat, but the possibility of attacks from abroad remained. This meant that Dzerzhinsky found himself responsible for preventing those attacks with little information on which element of the White Russian community might strike first. Until the Cheka could develop a network to collect more information about the widely dispersed and incohesive White Russian community in Western Europe, Dzerzhinsky needed to focus on understanding rather than attacking. This objective could be described as containment, an effort to encircle the White Russians to probe for vulnerabilities before going on the offensive.

The decision to proceed with what became Operation Trust reflected the Soviets' assessment that a deception campaign, with few pre-determined targets, offered the best chance of identifying which elements of the White Russian community posed a legitimate

²⁸³ For additional reading on the Russian Civil War, this author recommends *Red Victory* by W. Bruce Lincoln (Simon and Schuster, 1989) and *The White Armies of Russia* by George Stewart (Russell and Russell, 1970). For the monarchist perspective, there is Anton Denikin's *The White Army* (Academic International Press, 1973), and for the American view *The Decision to Intervene* by George F. Kennan (Princeton University Press, 1958).

threat to the regime.²⁸⁴ As the Cheka made progress in collecting more information about the White Russians and understanding who had the ear of the Allied powers, the operation naturally focused on the movement's more threatening elements. By the end of Operation Trust, the OGPU could identify monarchist sympathizers inside the Soviet Union, disrupt attacks planned by foreign elements, and objectively assess which foreign powers were likely to provide material support for the White Russians.²⁸⁵ In less than six years of work against the White Russian exiled in Western Europe, the Cheka had transitioned from an organization barely able to send a handful of operatives abroad to one comfortable in its abilities to manipulate their foes. The execution of Operation Trust put the Soviets in an excellent position to consider the next phase of the mission to neutralize the White Russians.

Based on the hard work of their predecessors, the OGPU and NKVD of the 1930s were far ahead of 1921 Dzerzhinsky when it came to understanding the White Russian threat. The steady consolidation in the White Russians' leadership cadre aided the OGPU by reducing the number of separate elements requiring penetration. By the time of General Miller's abduction in 1937, the Soviets had near-complete information on ROVS infiltration operations (through Nikolai Skoblin's reporting) and ROVS relations with its patron foreign powers (through audio surveillance of Miller's office and Skoblin).²⁸⁶ Having addressed the two intelligence requirements that challenged the Cheka in 1920, the NKVD was well-positioned to move forward in identifying the White Russian leaders they could recruit or compromise, and which ones they would need to eliminate to neutralize the entire movement. Coupled with the capabilities that emerged after sizable investments in the Bureau of Special Tasks, the NKVD could not only prepare a list of targets, but it could also kidnap or execute those individuals as soon as Stalin approved the order.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ It is important to remember that when Lenin tasked Dzerzhinsky for an anti-monarchist strategy, the White Russians were still in the process of finding Western European hosts for its refugees, and the formation of the ROVS was three years away.

²⁸⁵ "The Trust," 40.

²⁸⁶ Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy*, 127, 133.

²⁸⁷ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, 41.

B. THE “VICTIM” – WHITE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP

Changes in White Russian leadership between the two decades played a major role in the Soviet decision to choose political violence over deception in the 1930s. The divided nature of the White Russian community and its leadership in 1920 was extraordinary. Of the estimated eight hundred fifty thousand White Russian emigrants in Western Europe and the Far East, many fled their homelands at different times depending on the circumstances. Some departed after the Tsar abdicated in February 1917—others left after the Bolsheviks took over in October 1917. The trickle turned into a flood during the Russian Civil War.²⁸⁸ The resulting waves of émigrés made homes where they could while negotiating with their host nations over legal rights and employment opportunities. Though separated by national borders, economic status, political leanings, religious schisms, and wartime experience, the White Russians were unified by their intent to continue the fight against the Bolsheviks.²⁸⁹

Faced with a scattered enemy, the Chekists were limited in the tactics it could use against the White Russians. Three of the options developed by Dzerzhinsky were too impractical or impossible to execute. Any domestic family members of the White Russians had already fled to safer shores, so taking hostages as a deterrent would be impossible. The Cheka had no means to attack the White Russian leadership in Western Europe, and if they did, the multitude of targets would dilute the impact of any single assassination while possibly providing a martyr around whom the monarchists might rally. *Agent provocateurs* offered small-scale successes against known enemies, but they were useless without information on a target group. The diffused nature of the White Russian community and its leadership acted as an effective defense against three of Dzerzhinsky’s four proposals, forcing the Cheka to consider a strategic deception campaign as their primary tactic in the 1920s.

²⁸⁸ James E. Hassell, “Russian Refugees in France and the United States between the World Wars,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 81, no. 7 (1991): 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1006535>.

²⁸⁹ Tatiana Schaufuss, “The White Russian Refugees,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (May 1939): 50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1021884>.

The consolidation of 1930s White Russian military and political authority in the ROVS increased the organization's potential for effectiveness yet left its leaders vulnerable to political violence. After years of failed attempts to unify those who fled Bolshevik rule, the émigré community finally saw General Miller as their leader, albeit with limits on their support as described in Chapter IV.²⁹⁰ However, the consolidation of power resolved one of the two fundamental obstacles to Dzerzhinsky's second option: political violence abroad. In 1920, there were too many chiefs within the White Russian tribe. By the mid-1930s, only General Miller remained for the NKVD to evaluate as a viable target.

At the same time, the NKVD's collection investment on the White Russians was paying dividends, resulting in volumes of intelligence about ROVS activities and relations with other nations.²⁹¹ Not only could the NKVD identify Miller as the leading target for political violence, but the NKVD could also assure Stalin that no other White Russian leader could replace Miller. Miller's ROVS deputy Skoblin and the group's landlord Sergei Tretyakov were positioned to identify all ROVS activities against the Soviet Union. The NKVD's conclusion was that Miller was the only leader worth targeting, and if they eliminated Miller, they might destroy the ROVS.

The transition from strategic deception to political violence demonstrates how Soviet intelligence adapted to changing circumstances in the 1920s and 1930s. Initially faced with a nebulous threat, the Cheka deployed a deception strategy that contained the White Russians by encouraging them to delay counter-revolutionary activities. As White Russian leadership consolidated around Generals Alexander Kutepov and then Evgenii Miller, the Soviet strategy shifted from containment to liquidation. This process illustrates that the Soviet intelligence services were flexible enough to change tactics and develop new ones against a long-term adversary.

²⁹⁰ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 146.

²⁹¹ Andrew, *Secret World*, 593.

C. “MEANS” – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES

Improvements in Soviet intelligence capabilities in Western Europe also played a major role in the NKVD’s decision to choose political violence over deception in the 1930s. At the end of the Russian Civil War, the Cheka’s reach was limited to the domestic arena. The service had vast reserves in manpower to devote to hostage taking, provocation operations, or strategic deception inside Russia.²⁹² The first two options were impractical because all the White Russian hostages had fled to Western Europe, and infiltrating opposition groups required detailed information on their networks that the Cheka did not yet have. Strategic deception, on the other hand, required only trustworthy and capable operatives willing to play the role of monarchists and experience in crafting disinformation. The Cheka had both. Cheka operatives had posed as criminals and counter-revolutionaries during the Civil War, deceiving their enemies in order to break up the opposition networks.²⁹³ With these resources available, the Cheka quickly established the foundation for the false monarchist movement known as the Monarchist Association of Central Russia or MOTsR.

In comparison, the botched abduction of General Kutepov in 1930 demonstrated that attempting a complex operation without first developing the necessary capabilities could have serious repercussions. The decision to target Kutepov was the correct one, based on his leadership of the wider White Russian community, but the operation itself was a failure. In 1930, the OGPU lacked the foreign resources and experience to covertly abduct a public figure. The lack of OGPU experience was illustrated by the choice of a street in downtown Paris as the location to snatch Kutepov despite the risk of witnesses who quickly offered their sensational stories to the French press.²⁹⁴ Moreover, the team did not have the medical experience to properly use chloroform to subdue Kutepov, and instead, they killed him.²⁹⁵ Overall, the lack of skills in Special Tasks led to the operation’s failure.

²⁹² Leggett, *The Cheka*, 233.

²⁹³ Gerson, *The Secret Police in Lenin’s Russia*, 167–69.

²⁹⁴ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 53, 57.

²⁹⁵ Grey, 99.

Unfortunately for Miller, the Soviets learned from their mistakes. While the Soviets and White Russians covertly battled through the 1920s and 1930s, those decades witnessed an explosion in the range and capabilities of the broader Soviet intelligence and security services. The Soviet collection network became the biggest in Europe, and the resources invested in the Bureau of Special Tasks starting in 1926 gave the Soviets an independent arm to exercise violence and other aggressive tactics.²⁹⁶ For the White Russian movement, the Soviet advances translated into a grave threat to its exiled leaders. Not only could the NKVD confidently contain the ROVS and its activities, but the service could also execute plans to eliminate individual leaders with minimal risk of blowback on Soviet foreign relations. Even though the Kremlin in 1926 conceived of the Bureau of Special Tasks as a future wartime capability, its record in the 1930s shows that once created, Soviet leadership could not resist using the Bureau's skills to protect the regime.²⁹⁷

The Cheka's strengths of domestic manpower and disinformation skills contributed heavily to the 1920 decision to fabricate a pro-monarchist organization. Any alternative strategy dependent on an international network would have failed in the short-term or taken years to reach maturity. Fifteen years later, however, the NKVD had developed vast domestic and foreign capabilities for both collection and violence. The expansion in means, driven partly in response to all foreign threats, gave the Soviets more viable options against their White Russian foes.

D. "MOTIVE" – SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE RUSSIAN THREAT

Changes in Soviet perceptions of the threat posed by the White Russians did not play a significant role in the Soviet decision to change tactics in the 1930s, as the perceived threat was consistent throughout. From the last days of the Russian Civil War to the opening salvos of the Second World War, Soviet leadership worried that the White Russians might return with the backing of Western European powers in a repeat of the

²⁹⁶ Sudoplatov et al., *Special Tasks*, xxx.

²⁹⁷ Sudoplatov et al., 47–49.

interventions during the Russian Civil War.²⁹⁸ If the White Russians could convince France, Great Britain, or Poland to support their attack on the Bolsheviks, defending against the return of the Black Baron would be costly for the Soviets. The opportunity to divert Western European interests in intervention should have favored strategic deception when the Cheka considered alternatives. As described in Chapter III, the steady flow of coordinated MOTsR disinformation led the Western powers to opt for economic restrictions rather than military intervention, giving the Soviets years to consolidate their power in the 1920s.

By the 1930s, the reputation of the White Russians and the ROVS amongst Western governments had eroded. The embarrassing exposure of ROVS reliance on Operation Trust hurt the movement's efforts to develop allies in Western Europe. Adding to their woes was the Great Depression, which led to further restrictions on the employment available to the White Russian exiles.²⁹⁹ With fewer sources of income and fewer Allied patrons, the threat of foreign intervention on behalf of the White Russians was slipping.

Countering that trend, however, were the growing links between some White Russian groups and Europe's fascists. The White Russians found ready allies in the fight against communism with the rise of fascism. Instead of working to limit the growth of domestic socialist and communist activists as many Western nations attempted, the fascists actively hunted communist sympathizers and used anti-communism as the basis for diplomatic agreements. For example, the first formal agreement between Nazi Germany and Japan was the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact, making clear both nations' position on Soviet efforts to export the revolution.³⁰⁰ Going a step further, Hitler openly proclaimed his goal of invading the Soviet Union and eliminating the Slavic people living there, so

²⁹⁸ Orlov, *March of Time*, 136; Wraga, "The 'Trust' - The History of a Soviet Provocation Operation," 23.

²⁹⁹ Hassell, "Russian Refugees in France and the United States between the World Wars," 20.

³⁰⁰ Florentino Rodao, "Japan and the Axis, 1937-8: Recognition of the Franco Regime and Manchukuo," *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 3 (2009): 433, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40543042>.

joining forces with the White Russians might help him defeat the Red Army.³⁰¹ For the first time since 1920, some White Russians were aligning themselves with a foreign power that posed a legitimate military threat to Moscow.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the actual impact of the addition of the White Russian support to Nazi plans to conquer the Soviet Union would have been minimal. The White Russian contribution could not have been more than a few remaining contacts and their dream of a Russian nationalist uprising. Whether the threat was real or not, Stalin devoted NKVD energy to neutralizing the leader of the White Russians using the same approach he devoted to other opposition leaders.³⁰²

Ultimately, the motivation to neutralize the White Russians remained consistent over time, though the links between the exiles and fascists likely contributed to the timing of Soviet efforts. Since Miller was not an ardent advocate for a Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, a broader concern over fascist support for the White Russian cause does not explain the decision to abduct him specifically. Thus, motivation does not seem a likely driver in the change in Soviet tactics.

E. “OPPORTUNITY” – SOVIET INTELLIGENCE ACCESS TO WHITE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP

Changes in Soviet intelligence access to the White Russian leadership did not play a major role in the decision to choose political violence over strategic deception in the 1930s. The Cheka seemed confident in their ability to manipulate émigré leaders in the 1920s, just as the NKVD was ready to do so in the 1930s. Without a significant change in Soviet access to their target, this factor did not influence the decision to change tactics.

In the early 1920s, the Cheka had limited access to the White Russian leaders who fled abroad during and after the Civil War.³⁰³ Instead, the Cheka planned to exploit an

³⁰¹ David C. Gompert, Hans Binnendijk, and Bonny Lin, “Hitler’s Decision to Invade the USSR, 1941,” in *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars*, What America and China Can Learn (RAND Corporation, 2014), 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1287m9t.14>.

³⁰² Charles Sumner, “Stalin the Assassin,” *Workers’ International News*, January 1, 1938, Vol. 1 No. 1 edition, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/win/v1n01-jan-1938-WIN-rz-.pdf>.

³⁰³ Leggett, *The Cheka*, 288–89.

array of known pro-monarchist sympathizers in neighboring countries, such as the MOTsR's initial contact in Tallinn. These contacts, in turn, offered introductions to influential figures within the White Russian movement. Once in contact with any White Russian leader, the Cheka's effort to gain a following was facilitated by the divisions among the White Russians. For every Anton Denikin or Petr Wrangel who dismissed the MOTsR as a provocation, there was a Kutepov or Vasily Shulgin who wanted to believe in the underground monarchist movement. The result was a lively debate within the various White Russian camps that created tensions among them.³⁰⁴

In addition to the White Russians' vulnerability to deception was the Cheka's success in selling the MOTsR narrative to anyone with influence over émigré policy. Before Grand Duke Nikolai and General Kutepov advocated for the MOTsR network, a Cheka role player had to peddle his story and convincingly answer probing questions about his personal ideology, the MOTsR network, and the situation inside the Soviet Union to convince them of his trustworthiness. Chekists such as Aleksandr Yakushev and Edward Opperput were instrumental in reinforcing the reliance of the ROVS and its Western patrons on the MOTsR. Their efforts created opportunities for the Cheka to lure in Reilly and Shulgin and to hold off Western intervention.

In the mid-1930s, the NKVD had more options to manipulate the White Russian movement. NKVD penetrations of the ROVS were nearly comprehensive, and, if that were the only requirement, the Soviets could have replicated Operation Trust. Preventing a repeat, however, was the singular nature of Miller's role as a political and military leader of the White Russian movement. A Soviet opportunity existed, but it provided no advantage over a skeptical Miller unlikely to fall for another deception campaign.

Instead, the close coverage of Miller created a different opportunity for the NKVD, one missing in the earlier attempt to kidnap Kutepov—influence over Miller's movements. Skoblin's ability to convince Miller of an important meeting on September 22nd, 1937, was instrumental to the covert abduction plan. Rather than the street-side seizing of Kutepov, witnessed by several and quickly sensationalized in the press, Miller would

³⁰⁴ Robinson, *White Russian Army in Exile*, 138.

simply step away from the office and never come back.³⁰⁵ If not for Miller's note to General Pavel Kussonsky, the Soviets could have maintained a degree of plausible deniability. Skoblin's ability to manipulate Miller provided significant opportunity to the Special Tasks personnel who planned the operation.

In comparing the Soviets' opportunity to manipulate their targets in both operations, differences exist but they had little impact on the operations' success. The Cheka started with limited immediate access to their targets, yet their plan mitigated the issue by identifying channels to quickly put MOTsR role players in the same room with White Russian leaders. Considering the travel limitations to and from the Soviet Union, the twelve months between the first meeting in Tallinn and subsequent discussions with Wrangel's advisors (including Shulgin) was inconsequential.³⁰⁶ The Cheka must have been pleased with the reception they were getting in Western Europe in such a short time. The NKVD of the 1930s started out with the same level of access that the Cheka developed in the first two years of Operation Trust. A cursory assessment of the Soviet ability to manipulate the White Russians seems to indicate that the NKVD had an advantage over their Cheka predecessors. However, the rapid progress by the Cheka in gaining the émigrés' confidence by 1922 illustrates that the initial lack of access was a minor obstacle. While further research might reveal concerns among the Cheka in the early stages of the operation, available evidence demonstrates that differences in opportunity did not contribute to the change in overall tactics from strategic deception to political violence.

F. CONCLUSION

Of the four variables that contributed to the NKVD's decision to pursue political violence, the consolidation of White Russian leadership and the increase in Soviet intelligence capabilities abroad offer the most explanatory power. Chapter III established the baseline of a diffused White Russian community and a Cheka with limited capabilities abroad. In contrast, Chapter IV describes a consolidated White Russian leadership facing a highly capable NKVD. This thesis argues that neither difference can, in isolation, explain

³⁰⁵ Grey, *Le général meurt à minuit*, 53.

³⁰⁶ "The Trust," 3, 12.

the shift in tactics. Instead, it is the combination of changes in both variables that drove the decision to pursue a different strategy in the 1930s.

Two counterfactuals help support this assertion. The first posits political violence by the highly capable Soviets (as in the 1930s) against the dispersed White Russian leadership circle of the early 1920s. The second imagines a 1920 Soviet attempt to deceive a unified White Russian leadership (as was the case in the 1930s).

If the White Russian community had not consolidated around the ROVS in the 1930s, the NKVD might have tried to use its advanced capabilities to assassinate or kidnap every White Russian leader. Fear of widespread diplomatic furor and public outrage if several White Russian figures began disappearing should have held the NKVD back. The planning devoted to a covert operation against Miller (with some degree of deniability for the Soviet Embassy) shows the NKVD's cautious approach. One can imagine the resources required to replicate the same clandestine act a dozen times or more. Moreover, if the NKVD chose to start eliminating White Russian leaders, the rest would quickly increase their security measures and call upon their Western European patrons for protection. Even with its widespread capabilities in 1930s Europe, the NKVD could only act against a few targets with any confidence of limited blowback.

Conversely, if White Russian leadership consolidated around Miller yet the NKVD did not expand its foreign capabilities, a second deception campaign would have faced an obstacle that Operation Trust did not—a sole decision maker at the top. The operation would hinge on a single opportunity to convince Miller, with no guarantee of success. At least the Cheka could hope for one advocate among the émigrés, given multiple chances to find one. In the case of selling Miller a new counter-revolutionary group, failure meant the loss of a serious investment of NKVD resources in stories and role players. Failure also meant displeasing Stalin. The history of the NKVD identifies few leaders that would have accepted those odds.

These examples illustrate the importance of changes in both variables (White Russian consolidation and increased Soviet capabilities) to explain the Soviet decision to switch tactics. Unfortunately for Miller, the hard work to unify the White Russian

community came at the price of his vulnerability to political violence. In both decades, the Soviets chose the right tactics to meet the circumstances of the times and to do damage to their White Russian foes.

The framework of victim, means, motive, and opportunity, when used to compare intelligence operations against similar targets or in similar timeframes, may have application beyond the study of Soviet operations against the White Russians in the 1920s and 1930s. As the next chapter explains, gaining a sense for how the Soviets made operational decisions may aid the study of other eras or intelligence services trained by the Soviets or Russians.

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VI. CONCLUSIONS

Operation Trust in the 1920s and the abduction and execution of General Evgenii Miller in 1937 exemplify Soviet tactics against the White Russians in their respective decades. Both operations were designed to take advantage of the Soviets' strengths and the White Russian's vulnerabilities. Changes in both naturally affected the Soviets' choice of tactics, as the circumstances that supported the choice of strategic deception in the 1920s were not the same circumstances facing Moscow in the 1930s.

Of the four variables that most influenced the Soviet choice of tactics, two explain the switch to political violence in the 1930s. The first was the steady consolidation in the leadership among the White Russians. In the early 1920s, the divided White Russian community in Western Europe had nearly a dozen political, religious, and military figures from which to choose a leader. Some of those divisions healed over time through negotiation, while others faded as some White Russian leaders died before returning to their homeland. By the mid-1930s, a few individuals emerged to lead the émigrés, with General Miller holding both political and military authority.

The second factor that drove the Soviet change in tactics was their intelligence operational capabilities abroad. At the same time the White Russians were consolidating their leadership, the Soviets were pouring resources into intelligence collection and clandestine operations in Western Europe. By 1935, the Soviets had extensive collection on the White Russians and other threats to the Soviet regime, backed by a skilled operational cadre prepared to kidnap or assassinate opposition figures.

These two developments intersected in the operation to kidnap General Miller. By uniting around one White Russian leader, circumstances made him a valuable target for the Soviets. In expanding their reach and experience in political violence, the Soviets now had the means to reach into a foreign capital and bring back their prize.

History shows that strategic deception and political violence continued to play a major role in Soviet intelligence operations after 1937. The assassination of Leo Trotsky in Mexico City in 1940 is perhaps the most famous, but countless other Russian opposition

leaders and defectors died or disappeared under mysterious circumstances.³⁰⁷ After the Second World War, the Soviets used strategic deception in Operation WiN, an attempt to neutralize Polish nationalists in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with results that were startlingly similar to Operation Trust decades earlier.³⁰⁸

Even today, the tactics considered in 1921 are options to advance Russian objectives today. Political violence is a valid concern for defectors, opposition leaders, and journalists critical of the Putin regime, as demonstrated by the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 or Alexei Navalny in 2020.³⁰⁹ *Agent provocateurs*, described as “little green men,” played a role in the run-up to the first Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014.³¹⁰ And while not as dramatic as White Russian hostages during the Russian Civil War, family members of today’s exiled opposition leaders often face retaliatory harassment.³¹¹ Without dates and names, this summary of action against Moscow’s foes could apply as easily to 2023 as to 1923. In each of these cases, the application of the victim-means-motive-opportunity framework might reveal key factors that drove Soviet or Russian decision-making. Understanding why and how Russian intelligence might approach a target could aid in efforts to detect and disrupt such actions. The Soviet history of deception and violence—and by extension the Russian likelihood of using those same tools in a modern way—should be a warning to policymakers and opposition groups.

³⁰⁷ Dewar, *Assassins at Large*.

³⁰⁸ Bruce Hoffman and Christian F. Ostermann, eds., “Panel III: The Long View,” in *Moles, Defectors, and Deceptions: James Angleton and His Influence on US Counterintelligence* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014), 95.

³⁰⁹ “Litvinenko’s Murder Was ‘Probably’ Approved by Putin”; “Germany Says That Alexei Navalny Was Poisoned with Novichok,” *The Economist*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/09/02/germany-says-that-alexei-navalny-was-poisoned-with-novichok>.

³¹⁰ “‘Little Green Men’: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013-2014,” *Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies Studies* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2015), 45–46, <https://www.soc.mil/ARIS/books/arisbooks.html>.

³¹¹ Leyla Latypova, “Russia Targets Activists’ Families as Efforts to Muzzle Dissent Spread,” *The Moscow Times*, August 11, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/08/11/russia-targets-activists-families-as-efforts-to-muzzle-dissent-spread-a82113>.

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