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Review: Piotr Ogrodowczyk, *Służby specjalne w systemach totalitarnych* [Special Services in Totalitarian Systems], Toruń 2025, 546 pp. [Adam Marszałek Publishing]

In 2025, the book market saw the publication of Piotr Ogrodowczyk's monograph *Special Services in Totalitarian Systems*. The book fits within the growing body of works related to the increasingly popular intelligence studies field in Poland. Like any publication, it requires not only editorial reviews but also a post-publication assessment that highlights its strengths and weaknesses.

Piotr Ogrodowczyk, as stated in the biographical note on the book cover, is a graduate of the Academy of Humanities and Economics in Łódź. He is described as an enthusiast deeply exploring the history of totalitarian systems and the secret services that formed their foundation [quote from the cover]. His main interests, as noted, focus on Russian security services, from the Oprichnina to contemporary times. He also runs the video blog *Polityka dla Opornych*. According to the authors of the note, he is able to present difficult issues in an accessible manner.

The reviewer attempted to obtain additional information about P. Ogrodowczyk but was unable to find details regarding the title of his doctoral dissertation written under the academic supervision of Marek J. Malinowski, nor the date and place of its defense (I checked, just in case, on the websites www.ck.gov.pl and the "List of Advancement Proceedings – RAD-on: REPORTS, ANALYSES, DATA"). On the Nauka Polska portal, in the list of doctoral candidates supervised by Professor M. J. Malinowski, there is no doctoral dissertation by P. Ogrodowczyk. Likewise, after checking the profiles of Professors Bogdan Chrzanowski and Andrzej Gąsiorowski – listed as reviewers of the book based on the dissertation (presumably the dissertation's reviewers) – no information concerning P. Ogrodowczyk was found.

I therefore turned to LinkedIn and managed to clarify some details about the author. He obtained his master's degree (2012) in political science within the field of public administration, and his bachelor's degree in European studies. He has an interesting professional résumé and has worked in many occupations,

including serving for seven years as an assistant to MP (now senator) Artur Dunin. He previously published academic articles, among others in *Civitas Hominibus* no. 13/2018 and *Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* no. 1/2013 vol. 4. These articles were based on the content of his doctoral dissertation in preparation.

The bibliography of the monograph under review is relatively extensive and comprises 354 items. The alphabetically arranged list of sources includes archival documents, printed documents, legal acts of various categories, studies, and scholarly articles, including those published on various online platforms. A weakness of the bibliography is the lack of hierarchical organization in accordance with established scholarly standards – such as classification into source editions, memoirs, press materials, or studies. Such structuring would have enabled the reader to more easily assess the scholarly and informational value of the sources used.

An analysis of the Russian-language works cited by the author reveals a fundamental weakness. These studies are several or even dozens of years old e.g., К. Дегтярев, *Смерш*, Москва 2008; А. Полянский, *Ежов (История «железного» сталинского наркома)*, Москва 2001; А. Колпакиди, *Империя ГРУ. Очерки истории российской военной разведки*, т. 1, Москва 1999). Furthermore, they constitute only a small fraction of the more than 350 referenced items. Referring to journalistic, popular works by Leonid Mleczin, such as *Ojcowie terroru. D Dzierżyński, Mienżyński, Jagoda*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2003, is at the very least questionable due to the lack of a solid source base in these works.

The bibliography also lacks significant collections of printed documents that should have been used, such as: *Ф.Э. Дзержинский председатель ВЧК–ОГПУ 1917-1926. Документы* (сост. А.А. Плеханов, А.М. Плеханов), Москва 2007; *Лубянка. Органы ВЧК-ОГПУ-НКВД-НКГБ-МГБ-МВД-КГБ. Справочник. Документы* (сост. А.И. Кокурин, Н.В. Петров), Москва 2003; or *В.Ч.К. Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем. Главные документы*, lacking place and year of publication. This document album was published jointly by the "Komsomolskaya Pravda" publishing house and the Public Council at the FSB of Russia.

In the section addressing Soviet special services (or, more precisely, state security organs), the author failed to use works by the most distinguished Russian experts in the field, such as Александр Плеханов, Владимир Хаустов, Олег Хлобустов, Александр Зданович, Олег Мозохин, Владлен Измозик, and Андрей Плеханов. Among Polish scholars, the omission of Leszek Pawlikowicz, a leading expert on the KGB, is particularly noticeable.

When we look at the literature used by the author to present the German security apparatus of the Third Reich and the GDR, the absence of German authors is striking. It is surprising that the memoirs of Reinhard Gehlen were not used, nor the study on the Stasi by Jens Gieseke, published in Poland, as well as works by other authors such as David Kahn. I do, however, appreciate the use of studies by Professor Karol Grünberg, perhaps the most eminent Polish expert on Hitler's biography and the security system of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, the bibliography lacks publications that would broaden the reader's knowledge, such as the works of Leszek Gondek, Henryk Ćwięk, or Roman Kilarski, which would enrich the general understanding of Hitler's intelligence services.

The literature used to present the problematics of the special services of the People's Republic of Poland also shows significant gaps. In my view, the author should have included, among others, the works of Sylwia Galij-Skarbińska, Arkadiusz Nyzio, Filip Musiał, Sławomir Cenckiewicz, or Witold Bagieński.

The reviewer does not deny the author's efforts in conducting source research; however, it is his duty to point out the authors or bibliographic works whose inclusion, in his view, would have enriched the substantive dimension of this interesting monograph. In the bibliography, the author should also indicate the source from which a given document was obtained – for example, see p. 526: *Dyrektywa GUKR Smiersz nr 38288 z 16 lipca 1943 roku – „Instrukcja organizowania i prowadzenia gier radiowych z wrogiem*", or p. 538: *Rozkaz MON nr 051* No. 051 of 4 April 1979. More such examples could be cited.

There are also other entries that are not entirely precise. On pp. 536-537 there is an entry suggesting that the author consulted Russian archives but did not mention this in the introduction:*Протокол заседания СНК от 7 декабря 1917, пункт 9: доклад Дзержинского об организации и составе комиссии по борьбе с саботажем. Государственный архив Российской Федерации, ф. Р-130, оп. 23, д. 2, л. 159, 161-162.*

Meanwhile, on pp. 533-534 we find the following entry: *Некрасов Василий Федорович, Вклад внутренних сил в дело победы советского народа в Великой Отечественной войне, «Военно-исторический журнал», nr 9/1985, Министерство обороны Российской Федерации (Минобороны России), Москва 1985.*

Yet, in 1985, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation did not exist. Despite these remarks – both those articulated here and others not presented – the literature query conducted by Piotr Ogrodowczyk can generally be assessed positively. It undoubtedly provided a sufficient foundation for writing the monograph. Its greatest shortcoming is the lack of hierarchical differentiation of sources

and the absence of the most recent studies, as well as the failure to use works by researchers mentioned by the reviewer.

The monograph under review is divided into seven chapters and includes an Introduction, Conclusion, List of Abbreviations, and Bibliography. Unfortunately, from an editorial standpoint, it is poorly structured. The length of the individual chapters ranges from 19 to 136 pages, which is unacceptable. This discrepancy is not justified by the subject matter of the respective chapters. Why does the author devote 113 pages to the twelve-year period of the functioning of the Third Reich's security organs, while allocating only 19 pages to the forty-year history of the GDR's special services? Insufficient sources, perhaps? The Soviet state security organs are described over 136 pages, while the Polish ones occupy 104 pages. The author had incomparable access to Polish sources (particularly archival ones), as well as to numerous studies, books, and scholarly articles.

These examples point to gaps in the author's scholarly methodology. They also make it more difficult for the reader to fully grasp the content of the book. For instance, the author writes that the book was based on an analysis of available documents and sources – as if documents were not themselves sources, and indeed the most valuable ones, being primary. Having read the monograph, I can state that P. Ogrodowczyk synthesized the information he gathered in order to present it to the reader. Moreover, he employed the problem-oriented method, especially in the first three chapters, and the chronological-problem method in the remaining parts of the book. He also used biographical approaches to introduce figures he considered important for the functioning and analysis of the special services discussed.

Referring back to the shortcomings in the source inquiry, it must be emphasized that the author is aware of the issue of source reliability in relation to the chosen topic. Since he writes from a historical perspective and deals with services that have not existed for several decades, the possibility of obtaining reliable sources is relatively high.

The subject matter addressed in the reviewed book has been explored by many authors. In addition to those used by the author and those listed above by the reviewer, many more could be mentioned. Not all works are available in Polish, but both Polish and international literature in the field of intelligence studies is relatively extensive. I will list some of the authors whose works were not used by the author, but which, in the reviewer's opinion, would have been valuable for raising the scholarly level of the book. Among these authors are: Marek Berliński, Marek Słoń, Stanisław Wójcik, Robert Zulczyk, Władysław Bułhak, Jan Bury, Patryk

Dobrzycki, Justyna Doroszczyk, Roger Faligot, Rémi Kauffer, Andrzej Grajewski, Mariusz Antoni Kamiński, Monika Komaniecka-Łyp, Bogusław Pacek, John Barron, Milt Bearden, James Risen, Tennent H. Bagley, John Dziak, Edward Jay Epstein, Amy Knight, Александр Шевякин, Сергей Воронцов, Василий Христофоров, Олег Хлобустов, Евгений Бочков, Сергей Мироненко, Алексей Степанов, Сергей Веригин, and many others.

I would also recommend conducting a query of publications from the journals *За и против* and *Разведчик*, as well as articles published in the conference volumes of the *Общество изучения истории отечественных спецслужб* (Society for the Study of the History of Domestic Special Services).

The first chapter, *State Security in a Comprehensive Approach: Internal and External Aspects and Contemporary Threats* (34 pages), is divided into six subsections devoted to: the definition of security, state (national) security, state security management, internal security, information security, and security strategy.

The second part, *The Charisma of Power: The Evolution of the Concept and Its Significance for Leadership* (20 pages), contains three subsections addressing the understanding of charisma, the charisma of power in totalitarian and democratic systems (ideology), and the element of state governance constituted by special services.

The third chapter, titled *The Division and Scope of Activity of Special Services: A Historical and Definitional Perspective* (46 pages), is composed of as many as eleven sections. They address the following issues: the history of intelligence and information activities, the definition of intelligence, the acquisition and methods of operation of spies, disinformation, active measures, open-source intelligence, agents of influence, illegals, technical methods of intelligence collection, counterintelligence activities, and military intelligence and counterintelligence.

The fourth chapter is titled *The Special Services of Russia and the USSR – From Revolution to Totalitarianism* (136 pages). It is divided into four subsections, three of which contain further titled parts. The first subsection is dedicated to Joseph Stalin and the tools of his dictatorship. The second describes "faces behind the curtain," presenting the biographies of the following heads of the Soviet and Russian special services: Feliks Dzerzhinsky, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, Genrikh Yagoda, Nikolai Yezhov, and Lavrentiy Beria. The third subsection discusses the structure and specializations, that is, the types of Russian and Soviet special services: the Cheka (VChK), the Unified State Political Administration (OGPU) and its direct predecessor GPU, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the Committee of Information, and the Committee for State Security under the Council

of Ministers. The fourth and final subsection is devoted to the strength and role of military special services in Soviet military doctrine and the actions of the Red Army, including the Registration Directorate, the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and the military counterintelligence service SMERSH.

The fifth chapter, *Ruthless Instruments of Power: Special Services in the Third Reich* (113 pages), consists of three subsections, two of which are divided into smaller parts. The first subsection introduces Adolf Hitler and the security apparatus, its ideological foundations, and oversight by the Führer. The second subsection presents the profiles of the heads of the services: Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, and Wilhelm Canaris. The final subsection presents the structure and organization of German services, which the author divides into: the NSDAP Defensive Squadrons, the Reich Main Security Office, the Security Service of the Reichsführer SS, the Secret State Police, the Armed SS Units, special SS operational groups, and the Abwehr.

The next chapter, *The Repressive Apparatus in East Germany – An Analysis of the Ministry for State Security (STASI) 1950-1989* (19 pages), is divided into two parts: the first devoted to Erich Mielke and his role in the construction of the Ministry for State Security; the second addressing the organizational structures and operational divisions of the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*.

The seventh and final chapter, *The Shadow of Communism – The Evolution of Special Services in the People's Republic of Poland* (104 pages), is divided into three subsections, each further divided into smaller parts. The first subsection contains biographical notes on Bolesław Bierut, Władysław Gomułka, Stanisław Radkiewicz, and Czesław Kiszczak, presenting these politicians as the foundations of the system of repression and control in Poland. The second subsection is devoted to the organizational structure and evolution of the special services of the PRL and is divided into parts concerning the Department of Public Security, the Ministry of Public Security, the Committee for Public Security, and the Security Service. The final subsection presents the history, structure, and tasks of military special services, including the Internal Security Corps, the Main Directorate of Information of the Polish Army, the Military Internal Service, and the Internal Security Corps and Border Protection Troops.

The monograph opens with the Introduction and closes with Conclusion. The Introduction is conventional: it discusses, among other things, the contents of the monograph, provides a relatively general assessment of the sources, and addresses the issue of the biographies of J. Stalin, A. Hitler, and F. Dzerzhinsky, along with the sources used in presenting these figures. It ends with relatively extensive acknowledgements for assistance in writing the doctoral dissertation and in publishing this book. The Conclusion, in the reviewer's assessment, does

not particularly engage with the content of the book, does not identify topics that could not be addressed in the monograph, nor does it propose research areas related to the scope indicated in the title of the reviewed work. Instead, it consists of fairly loose reflections by the author on totalitarianisms and the threats present in the "information era," as well as on the new tools that special services possess or may possess. These services, in the author's view, form the foundation of every totalitarian system. The text is supplemented by a list of abbreviations, which, in the reviewer's opinion, could have been somewhat shorter. Many acronyms are widely known. Here are some examples: PZPR, LWP, AK, AL, GL, CIA, FBI, IPN, KGB, KPZR, MBP, MO, NATO, NKWD, NRD, NSDAP, ONZ, PRL.

In his friendly critique of the publication, the reviewer focuses on chapters four through seven, i.e., those presenting the special services of Russia and the USSR, Nazi Germany, the GDR, and the Polish People's Republic. From the first three chapters, which together comprise 100 pages, the author should have created a single chapter, limiting the discussion of security—described by him as "comprehensive"—and instead presenting the political and party systems of the states whose special service systems he examines. As a political scientist, the author should understand the role of the political and party system in authoritarian (totalitarian) states. The charisma of leaders, on which he elaborates at length, would have had little significance without a developed bureaucratic apparatus and ruling parties with a mass character (millions of members). On charisma alone, totalitarian (autocratic) systems could not have been built.

Moreover, each of the states described featured a different party system. In the USSR and Nazi Germany, these were single-party systems. In the Polish People's Republic, a hegemonic-party system functioned, supported by other parties (PZPR, ZSL, SD). Without going into detail, in the GDR, apart from the SED (Socialist Unity Party), four other parties (CDU, LDPD, DBD, and NDPD) also existed, whose representatives were part of the state authorities. Like ZSL and SD in Poland, these parties were dominated by the hegemonic party. The nature of the political system influenced the entire exercise of power, including its crucial component – the special services, that is, the state security apparatus analyzed by the author.

The lack of an analysis of the political-party system and its complex and diverse relations with the special services – changing over successive stages of the functioning of the respective political regimes – is undoubtedly a significant impoverishment of the topic undertaken. The author should be familiar with and understand the functioning of political and party systems, as well as their role and tasks in governing the state.

We will now turn to the chapter devoted to the special services of Soviet Russia and the USSR. The reviewer does not comment on the biographies of the selected heads of these services. However, since the author traces the history of the Soviet special services up to the early 1980s and discusses their operations, for example in Afghanistan, it is unclear why he does not present the biographies of at least two important heads of the KGB: Ivan Serov (whom he mentions several times) and Yuri Andropov, who held the position of chief of the most important Soviet special service for the longest period.[1] In describing KGB operations, the author most often refers uncritically to the book by Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky as his source. An example of their inaccuracies is the claim that Ivan Serov became an alcoholic and, after a heavy drinking binge, shot himself in the head in a side street near the Arbat.[2]

Similarly, in presenting the history of Soviet military intelligence, the author relies on the works of Viktor Suvorov (a defector, like Gordievsky) and Aleksandr Kolpakidi, while his discussion of wartime counterintelligence (SMERSH) depends solely on a relatively recent work by Vadim J. Birstein from 2017 – not, as stated in the bibliography (p. 522), by Vincent. Without denying the author's narrative skill, it must be noted that P. Ogrodowczyk uses facts rather loosely. For instance, on p. 236 he writes that the personnel of the KGB numbered about 400,000 officers, plus an additional 220,000 soldiers of the Border Troops. This information is inaccurate, since around 1991 the total number of officers and soldiers was approximately 480,000, including about 220,000 in the Border Troops and roughly 90,000 employees of the republican KGB branches. The author should have confronted his sources using, for example, the unused studies of Oleg Mozokhin or, regarding the size of the First Chief Directorate of the KGB, the relatively precise (and well-documented) data provided by Leszek Pawlikowicz.

I also do not understand what decisions Leonid Shebarshin could have made and implemented as the head of the KGB, since he held this position in an acting capacity for only one day (22 August 1991). The decisions the author attributes to him (such as providing reliable information) could have been made when he was deputy chairman of the KGB and head of the First Chief Directorate, from

[1] On the side, I leave out the figure of general Peter Ivashutin, who led the Soviet military intelligence for a quarter of a century. In addition, J. Andropov assumed full Power in the USSSR (General Secretary of the CPSU and Chairman of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR).

[2] The English version was released in 1990. Since then, 35 years have passed until the publication of P. Ogrodowczyk's book, and our knowledge of the functioning of Soviet intelligence services has expanded dramatically, including through published collections of documents and studies by authors such as Александр Север, Владимир Лота, Клим Дегтярев. This also applies to the sources used to present the history of military intelligence and SMERSH. Indeed, I. Sierov died in July 1990.

February 1989 to 21 August 1991. When presenting the issue of the Committee of Information, the author oversimplifies its four-year history and does not even mention the so-called "small Committee of Information," chaired by Andrei Gromyko, from which the powerful KGB Directorate "A" dealing with disinformation emerged.

To write, for example, that the execution squad for Mikhail Tukhachevsky and other high-ranking officers was led by Ivan Serov is to repeat nonsense, probably after Robert Conquest. Tukhachevsky was executed in June 1937, while Serov[3] began his service in the security organs only in February (or January) 1939, as part of external recruitment ordered by Lavrentiy Beria. Among the several thousand people recruited from the ranks of the VKP(b) and Komsomol were several hundred graduates of military academies who were assigned to the NKVD by order. This is how Serov entered the organs. Likewise, during the period of activity described in Afghanistan, the KGB under the Council of Ministers of the USSR no longer existed; instead, the Committee for State Security of the USSR existed – a fact ignored by many authors, although it is important because it marked an elevation in the status of the institution.[4]

Chapters five and six are devoted to the special services operating in Germany. Chapter six presents, unfortunately in a telegraphic manner, the history of the security organs of the German Democratic Republic. The central figure used to illustrate the East German security apparatus is Erich Mielke, the long-time Minister for State Security. This short chapter is among the parts of P. Ogrodowczyk's publication that disappoint. It is impossible to present in a dozen pages more than forty years of the functioning of the security organs of the eastern occupation zone and later the GDR. The main source used is Heribert Schwan's book *Erich Mielke – Life in the Service of the Stasi* (Polish edition, 2001). Without even addressing the omission of Jens Gieseke's major monograph, the author could have based his work on Gieseke's extensive study included in the collective volume *Czekiści. Organy bezpieczeństwa w europejskich krajach bloku sowieckiego 1944 – 1989* (eds. K. Persak, Ł. Kamiński), Warszawa 2010, pp. 325-391, which also includes a list of German-language literature on the topic. As earlier, there is a casual approach to factual accuracy (p. 381, note 3). Mielke was a graduate of the International Lenin School of the Comintern, not of the Lenin Military-Political Academy in Leningrad, as is incorrectly attributed to him.

[3] Similarly, P. Ivashutin and General Vitaly Pavlov, who was the KGB representative in Poland for ten years, began their careers in the security services. Pavlov differed from Sierov and Ivashutin in that he was a student at a civilian university.

[4] This was related to the adoption of the new USSR constitution in 1977.

The earlier and more extensive chapter is devoted to the special services of Nazi Germany. In the reviewer's opinion, the author unnecessarily became entangled in describing the armed SS units (Waffen-SS) and the SS operational groups, while devoting too little space to the Abwehr, a service that deserved a broader treatment due to its importance for the expansionist policy of the Third Reich and its military successes. Furthermore, the author should have chosen a different set of service chiefs or supplemented it with figures such as Heinrich Müller, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, and Walter Schellenberg. The use of literature in this chapter can, however, be positively assessed – it is relatively diverse compared to the earlier chapters.

The final chapter of the monograph is devoted to the special services of the Polish People's Republic. This topic may be relatively familiar to readers due to the abundance of published studies, documents, and public discussions. A drawback is the omission of Agnieszka Grabowska-Siwiec's monograph *Kontrwywiad a władza, Od Departamentu II MSW do Zarządu Kontrwywiadu UOP*, Warszawa 2024. The content of the chapter does not introduce any new or noteworthy findings regarding the transformation and functioning of the PRL's special services. As noted earlier, the selection of personnel is not entirely accurate. In the reviewer's view, between Władysław Radkiewicz and Czesław Kiszczak, two individuals should have been characterized – Mieczysław Moczar and Mirosław Milewski – whose influence on the nature and functioning of the special services was significant. A flaw of the chapter is its very brief and superficial presentation of military special services, beginning with the Main Directorate of Information, through the Military Internal Service (WSW), and the omission of military intelligence. Also unnecessary, in the reviewer's view, is the presentation of the Internal Security Corps (KBW) and its tasks. The KBW was not a special service; it formed part of the broader category of public security organs.

The author did not make the effort to present lesser-known espionage and counterintelligence operations of the Security Service to the reader. I have in mind, for example, the infiltration of diplomatic facilities by counterintelligence officers, intelligence operations directed against the Vatican, or the illegal intelligence of the PRL. Instead, he repeats descriptions of operations or spy scandals from many earlier publications.

The classical principle of writing a review requires the presentation of conclusions and research postulates for the future. In addition to the conclusions already included in the present text of the review, and assuming that the author may wish to publish this work again, I propose the following changes:

1. Editorial refinement of the book's structure (including a more proportional arrangement of its parts).
2. Rewriting the first three chapters and supplementing them with a chapter devoted to the political and party systems in the respective states, as well as to the role of the ruling party and its bureaucratic apparatus in shaping the relations with, and importance of, the special services referred to in the title.
3. A thorough authorial revision of the study with regard to the facts cited, combined with proper source criticism.
4. Supplementing the literature and refining its editorial form. The same should be done with the footnotes. The bibliography should include all sources cited in the notes (at present, for example, the work of Krzysztof Surdyk is missing; see p. 94).
5. Adding an index of names.
6. Conducting an in-depth editorial review of the revised version of the monograph.
7. Attempting to prepare an appendix in the form of organizational charts of the structures of the services discussed.

The monograph by Piotr Ogrodowczyk under review, as stated at the beginning, fits within the growing series of publications by Polish authors in the field of intelligence studies. According to the reviewer's knowledge, it is the first academic Polish work attempting to present the role of special services in totalitarian systems in this manner, analysing and depicting them across several selected states, thereby enabling readers to compare them. Despite the shortcomings highlighted in the review, as well as those not mentioned, I consider the book worthy of reading. However, both readers with broader knowledge of the subject and beginners should approach the text with distance and critical caution, especially in places where they may sense that the author becomes more of a popularizer of knowledge than a detached scholar adhering to the principle of scientific objectivity.