



## THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE'S INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE SERVICES – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS –

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*The Russian Empire was based, since the early years of the nineteenth century, mainly on military force, in the composition of which an important role was played by the accumulation of information on opponents and the fight against foreign espionage inside the country. Despite the central role attributed to these secret services, the Russian Empire did not have a specialized body in the field of military espionage. In this context, based on a vast and new Russian historiographical material, accumulated as a result of research by the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, the author presents, by the method of analysis of historical documents, a perspective of the genesis, activity and results obtained by the Russian intelligence and counter-espionage services of the tsarist period.*

*Keywords: counterintelligence; secret services; Russian Empire; intelligence; amateurism;*



### INTRODUCTION

The Russian Empire, like its predecessor, the Russian Tsardom, was a state characterised by the desire for territorial growth and expansion due to wars. The army's central role within the state structures was understandable, resulting in Russia becoming a truly militarised country.

It is surprising that this militarised country did not have a service that could gather information, which is necessary for developing a strategic vision on foreign policy objectives and planning military campaigns aimed at achieving the proposed objectives.

### EXPOSITION

In Russia, the responsibility of collecting military information was on a case-by-case basis assigned to various state structures, most often those responsible for foreign policy, from the Ambassador's Office and the Foreign Office, during the medieval period, to the College and Foreign Ministry during the modern period. The armed forces's ability to obtain information was limited, due to rudimentary and unprofessional procedures. The military activities in intelligence gathering and combating foreign intelligence began when Peter the Great established the regular army. Such missions, from a formal point of view, were attributed to the service quartermaster general, established in 1711. This body represented the prototype of the military staff, which was active only in times of war and military actions. The General Staff was established in 1763 and the service-quartermaster general was added, but paradoxically, it did not accomplish reconnaissance and counterintelligence missions. This situation was kept until 1796, when Emperor Paul I (1754-1801) abolished the General Staff.

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During that period, the Russian secret services had mediocre results, mainly due to the lack of a specialised body, the overlapping of intelligence activities with counterintelligence activities, the absence of specialists trained in this field, resulting in amateurism in actions, and a series of dangerous accomplishments (Алексеев, 1998, p. 31). The inefficiency of these services contributed to the unhindered activity of a Prussian spy named Captain Lamerti in the Russian army during the Seven Years War (1756-1762). Lamerti reported to his superiors about the actual state of the Russian army, particularly the Moldovan Hussar Regiment. He managed to attract the Sergeant Major of that regiment, Keller, into his network. Keller was assigned to Field Marshal Apraxin and, while performing his personal services besides the Field Marshal, he systematically infiltrated the enemy and provided valuable information. He even succeeded in fleeing to the Prussians at the end (Leșcu, 2005, p. 77).

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The first body specialised in collecting military information was established on 28 August 1810, when, following the decision of the Minister of War, Infantry General Michael Barclay de Tolly, “The expedition of secret affairs to the Ministry of War” was created, headed by Colonel Alexei Voeikov (Алексеев, 2010, p. 16). On 27 January 1812, “The expedition” was transformed into the “Special Chancellery of the Minister of War”, with the mission of gathering, analysing and generalising military intelligence from abroad, attributions remained unchanged throughout the entire period of the Napoleonic wars (Ib., p. 17). After five years of activity, the existence of a body specialised in intelligence was considered useless, the Russians

returning in 1815 to the old and cumbersome system of collecting information. Most of the information collection in the military field was under the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry, through the diplomatic missions of Russia abroad, in which General Staff officers were sporadically being included. By 1825, Russia had 24 general consulates all over the world, including one in Moldova and one in Wallachia, which shows the strategic importance of these countries to ruling parties in St. Petersburg (Ib., p. 126).

At the Ministry of War, the 1<sup>st</sup> Section of the Quartermaster General's Service of the Great General Staff (Ib., p. 92) was in charge of the military intelligence, which periodically sent so-called scientific expeditions abroad, consisting exclusively of officers (Ib., p. 95), such as the one in 1834, sent to Moldova and Wallachia under the leadership of the Colonel of the General Staff, Carl Emanuel Victor von Ruge. As a result of this expedition, a detailed military description of both countries was compiled, with maps and drawings, without the right to be edited and put on sale (Ib., p. 112).

All the findings refer only to strategic military intelligence, there was no existing structural framework for tactical intelligence. Tactical reconnaissance was carried out, by commanders of various ranks, from the division down, at their own initiative, with questionable results and successes. It is also worth mentioning that the army and the state lacked an adequate counterintelligence service, resulting in local police being assigned duties on a case-by-case basis.

The case of Colonel Ivan Liprandi is an example to the inefficiency of the Russian army's intelligence service at the tactical level (the operative level, at that time, did not even exist). Prior to the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, in 1827, General Pavel Kiseleff, the Chief of Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, appointed Colonel Ivan Liprandi to investigate the national and Turkish military forces in Moldova. Arriving in Iași, he formed a network of spies composed of Phanariots and Bulgarians. However, his activity raised suspicion and he was



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expelled from the country by ruler Ioan Sandu Sturdza. Following the Russian army's arrival in Iasi, Liprandi arrested Sturdza and sent him to Basarabia as revenge for his earlier expulsion (Leșcu, 2005, p. 187).

The Crimean War (1853-1856) demonstrated the collapse not only of the Russian secret services, but also of the entire military system. The new stage in the history of the Russian secret services began with the military reforms of 1860-1870. After a century of experiments in this field, the importance of having a specialised secret service, independent of other state structures and institutions, was understood. Thus, from 1863, the General Staff became the main body within the Ministry of War responsible for military intelligence, devastating, from this point of view, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs!

The information and intelligence service was structured on three levels – strategic, operational and tactical. Two sections of the General Staff were responsible for the strategic level, namely the 3<sup>rd</sup> section (Military Sciences) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Asian) section (Алексеев, 1998, p. 60), and since 1903, in the 7<sup>th</sup> section, the Directorate of the Quartermaster General (Ib., p. 85). The strategic information collection was handled by the Russian military attachés, officially accredited to the Russian embassies in the world, all being officers with academic studies, representatives of the General Staff corps. Military operational intelligence was assigned to the staffs of Military Regions, where intelligence (research) sections were established, within the Directorate of the Quartermaster General.

At the tactical level, military information collection was handled by all those with an interest and possibility to recruit secret agents – the gendarmes, the border guards, and the police, except for the army. The lack of a centralised system for gathering information at the tactical level hampered the activity of the intelligence services at the operative level, which were permanently lacking data. Thus, in the period 1903-1904, in the absence of its own network of agents, the General Staff of the Odessa Military Region sent to the Ministry of War

only one piece of information about the Romanian fortifications in Tulcea, one collected by the border guards, who were subordinated to the Ministry of Finance (Ib., p. 100).

If, in terms of military intelligence, things were somewhat clear, the situation was completely different in the field of counterintelligence. Until 1911, the Russian Empire did not have a special service, specifically focused on combating intelligence and counter-intelligence activities. Several ministries and departments of the state were active in this field – the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, the State Police, the Independent Corps of Gendarmes, the Independent Corps of Border Guards (Кирмель, 2006, p. 50), commanders of military units and local authorities. Of course, the efficiency of such a system was below the level of real needs, and innocent people were caught and arrested instead of spies. Thus, on 17 August 1829, the commander of a Russian detachment in Giurgiu, Major A. Lashkarev, arrested Moldovans Nicolai Matei, Mihai Patraș, Stoian Mitul, accused of espionage for the benefit of the Turks. They were handcuffed and sent to Basarabia without any concrete evidence (ANRM, file 229, p. 2). After a year of imprisonment in the prison of Hotin, it was only after the governor of Basarabia, A. Sorokunski, was involved in their favour, starting an investigation that proved their innocence, in 1830, that they were released and returned home in Moldova (Ib., p. 19). A similar case occurred in January 1854, when Ismail resident Ivan Vasiliev was charged with spying for the Turks without presenting any sustainable evidence (ANRM, C. 6, list 3, f. 689, p. 1).

After years of endless inter-ministry and interdepartmental consultations, on 8 June 1911, the “Regulations for the operation of counterintelligence sections” were adopted. Based on this document, a special body was established within the army, responsible for counterintelligence activities. According to it, counter-intelligence sections were established within the staffs of the Military Regions, subordinated to the service of the quartermaster general, mandatorily



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headed by an officer of the Independent Corps of Gendarmes. Thus, within the Military Regions there were two special bodies, an intelligence one, led by a General Staff officer, and a counterintelligence one, under the command of the Independent Gendarmes Corps officer, who worked separately, independently, unrelated to each other (Кирмель, 2006, p. 50). It is evident that the Regulations implemented had some drawbacks. They restricted the scope of responsibilities at the operational and tactical levels, as there was no central authority to coordinate the counterintelligence activities across all military regions. The counterintelligence sections were subordinated to two different authorities, which made their work more complicated. This system remained in operation until the October 1917 coup.

## CONCLUSIONS

When analysing the work of Russian intelligence and counterintelligence services, it becomes apparent that, throughout the existence of the Russian Empire, a unique system of secret services in the military field was not developed. These services were characterised by a lack of centralisation, coordination, and an amorphous organisational state. Their actions were amateurish, leading to poor efficiency in practical work and sporadic achievement of objectives.

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