

A Polish (Military Counter-Intelligence) Joke: Boy Scouts vs. ex-GRU/KGB

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz

Have you heard the latest Polish joke, the Polish military counterintelligence joke to be exact? On March 28, 2008, Poland's leading leftist daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Electoral Gazette) claimed that six undercover Polish military intelligence officers posted their pictures from a secret mission to Afghanistan on www.nasza-klasa.pl (Our Class), Poland's equivalent of Facebook.com. The allegations were repeated in English by *Warsaw Business Journal*.¹ The officers not only jeopardized their mission but also basically undermined their entire career in counterintelligence since their faces were now splashed all over the internet. The *Electoral Gazette* sneered, along with the rest of the liberal media, that this was the fault of the previous center-right government. In particular, the newspapers scathingly criticized Antoni Macierewicz, the uncharismatic head of the Military Counterintelligence Service (*Służba Kontrwywiadu Wojskowego* -- SKW).

Between 2006 and 2007 Macierewicz presided over the vetting of military intelligence officers in Poland. He also hired a new crop of operatives. Now his left-wing detractors have charged him of seriously damaging Poland's national security by favoring untrained "kids." Macierewicz allegedly substituted sophisticated professionals with naïve "boy scouts." These charges have been making rounds for at least three years since the vetting process started. The revelations about the internet indiscretions are just the latest installment in a sustained campaign surrounding the controversy over Poland's post-Communist secret services.

No sooner the charges were made however that an alternative story surfaced, partly credited to Poland's leading neo-conservative commentator Bronisław Wildstein of the centrist daily *Rzeczpospolita* (Republic) of March 30, 2008. Young Polish counterintelligence officers were dispatched on a mission to Afghanistan. There they were attached to the Polish contingent, where the regular troops did not know either their mission or their true identities. Their (blissfully ignorant) non-CI buddies took some pictures of the outfit. The CI officers failed to weasel out of the photo opportunity. They also thought that trying to avoid group pictures with the rest of the unit would appear suspicious. To blend in, they further allowed others to take their individual pictures. Either their friends or they themselves emailed their pictures home and posted them or had them posted on the internet. Their names were appended to the posts as well as information that they served in Afghanistan in "the Polish Army."

All in all, this was pretty stupid, but it is unclear what exact procedures the CI officers failed to follow. Disappearing from a photo shoot and refusing to pose would have certainly sparked curiosity, if not right out suspicion. During downtime the troops at the base have very few activities to keep them entertained. Photographically documenting one's service is everyone's most popular pastime, some would say obsession. Posting images of oneself is downright criminal, if indeed the CI officers did it themselves. But how do we know whom the uploaded pictures depict?

With eleven million registered users (out of the total population of less than 40 million), [nasza-klasa.pl](http://www.nasza-klasa.pl) is a very popular site in Poland. It boasts half a billion uploaded pictures and images. But that begs a question: Who actually told the leftist newspaper about the pictures of CI officers posted there? Who knew their identities? After all, they did not identify themselves as serving in military counterintelligence.

The informers are former and present operatives of military intelligence, disgruntled at the purge conducted between 2006 and 2007. The internet CI picture imbroglio has all the marks of active

¹ *Warsaw Business Journal* 28 March 2008, <http://www.wbj.pl/?command=article&id=40583>.

measures.²). To appreciate the operation, we should introduce the institution and the players as described, among others, by historians Jerzy Poksiński, Leszek Pawlikowicz, and Piotr Kołakowski.

The Institution

In 1943, the Soviet military intelligence (GRU) and counterintelligence (Smersh) established their presence in “Polish” puppet Communist military units fighting on Stalin’s side during the Second World War. Since most troops were former Polish slaves of the Gulag, the Kremlin correctly viewed them as unreliable. Hence, the notorious *Informacja* (Information), soon formally dubbed The Main Directorate of Information of the Polish Army (*Zarząd Główny Informacji WP*), focused on counterintelligence. Until 1947 Soviet officers held all leadership posts. Afterwards, until 1956, they retained 50% of the top positions. In 1956 and 1957 most of them returned home to the USSR. The Main Directorate was then duly renamed Military Internal Services (*Wojskowa Służba Wewnętrzna* – WSW), fulfilling mostly counterintelligence duties but also that of the military police.

Initiated only in 1945, military intelligence operations were the domain of the 2nd Section of the General Staff (*Oddział II Sztabu Generalnego LWP*). Between 1947 and 1950, military intelligence was briefly combined with its civilian counterpart at the Ministry of Public Security (MBP). Later, it operated alone. In 1951 it changed its designation to the 2nd Directorate of the General Staff (*Zarząd II Sztabu Generalnego*). Military intelligence was also led by Soviet officers until 1956. Afterwards, native Communists enjoyed much autonomy.

Following the “collapse” of Communism, a deceptively major reorganization took place in 1990. According to Andrzej Grajewski,³ the main architects of democratic Poland’s secret service were General Edmund Buła, the last head of the Military Internal Services (WSW), and General Czesław Kiszczak, the previous commander of the WSW and the last Communist minister of internal affairs (secret and uniformed police supervisor). Thus, the “new” intelligence agencies had an unpalatable totalitarian imprint. The Military Information Service (WSW) shed its military police section, which became a separate entity – the Military Gendarmerie (*Żandarmeria Wojskowa*). The 2nd Directorate was combined with the bulk of the WSW to form the Military Information Services (*Wojskowe Służby Informacyjne* – WSI). Military counterintelligence and intelligence became a single institution. Symbolically, the last act of General Buła was to turn over the agency’s files to the Soviets. Meanwhile, the civilian Communist Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa* – SB) was renamed as the Office for the Protection of the State (*Urząd Ochrony Państwa* – UOP). It underwent a *pro forma* vetting and continued to employ about 80% of its old personnel. However, the Military Information Services retained 100% of its Communist-era officers. It escaped all scrutiny and all efforts at reform between 1991 and 2006 (<http://raport.gov.pl/>).⁴

The Professionals

According to the foremost specialist on Poland’s secret services Sławomir Cenckiewicz, the WSI operated autonomously within the Polish state.⁵ Cenckiewicz also points out that the WSI

² “Operacja kombinacyjna Nasza Klasa,” <http://cogito62.salon24.pl/68179,index.html>.

³ Andrzej Grajewski, “Poland: Continuity and Change,” *Demokratyzatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Volume 12, Number 3 (Summer 2004): 451 – 463.

⁴ For a brief history of the civilian branch see Andrzej Paczkowski, “Civilian Intelligence in Communist Poland, 1945-1989): An Attempt at General Outline,” *Intermarium: On-Line Journal of East Central European Center, SIPA, Columbia University*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007) at <http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/ece/research/intermarium/vol10no1/Civilian%20Intelligence%20in%20Communist%20Poland,%201945-1989.pdf>.

⁵ Teofil Lachowicz, an account of the meeting with Dr. Sławomir Cenckiewicz on the “Likwidacja Wojskowych Służb Informacyjnych, jako przezwyciężanie postkomunizmu w Polsce,” (The liquidation of the Military Information Services as overcoming of post-Communism in Poland) New York, The House of the Polish Veteran, 7 February 2007, <http://www.pava-swap.org/wydarzenia6.htm>.

remained a firmly post-Communist and post-Soviet institution. Many of the officers active in the 1990s were relatives, often sons, of their Stalinist predecessors. Four out of six of WSI heads had received training in the Soviet Union. They were among about 3,000 Polish high ranking officers still active, after 1989, "in leadership posts" who had attended the courses, including, for example, such high profile military men as General Andrzej "Tyszkiewicz," erstwhile commander of the Polish contingent in Iraq. By the way, the General bears a historic Polish aristocratic name but a personal inquiry with the American branch of the family now residing in California has failed to confirm that the officer is related at all. "Some of them were recruited as paid Russian agents," according to Cenckiewicz.

Given its pedigree and personnel, it is little wonder that, in essence, like its civilian counterpart, the WSI simply continued its old activities under the new circumstances of a parliamentary democracy. It is unclear whether anti-Western spy missions persisted. However, it is obvious that so-called "economic operations" proceeded apace. WSI sleepers took over properties belonging to Polish émigré organizations in the United States. They simply pretended to be staunch anti-Communists, insinuated themselves into Polonian institutions, and pledged to continue the good work of the now rapidly aging and dying Polish-American victims of totalitarianisms as was the case in northern California. Unit "Y" (*oddział „Y”*) of the WSI, for example, specialized in creating false identities in Western countries to acquire inheritance of heirless former Polish citizens. This scam also targeted Jewish Holocaust survivors, in Canada for instance. In the 1980s, over 10,000 private estates were thus successfully claimed. The statistics for the 1990s are not available. The "Y" unit also raided Poland's hard currency reserves, in particular the Fund to Service Foreign Debt (FOZZ), and invested surreptitiously in Western markets under a false flag. In early 1990s, one of the WSI agents promised his handlers to provide "half a billion dollars annual return" from the FOZZ scheme alone.

Meanwhile, at home, the WSI placed its agents in strategic posts to influence the democratic process. Staffers were recruited at the parliament and regular intelligence officers dispatched to work undercover. The WSI hoped to influence the legislative process by blackmailing deputies who had been Communist secret police informers in the past and who failed to confess about their sordid history subsequently. Similar measures were allegedly applied to courts and universities. Former and current secret service employees routinely testified at trials of alleged agents and testified under oath to having had falsified agent reports, thus exonerating the guilty. Such testimonies of course ignored the awesome stringency of Communist own counterintelligence measures which made filing false reports neigh impossible between 1944 and 1989.

However, it was the media that was the most favorite target of the secret services after 1989. Journalists were recruited as agents. More precisely, these were often the cases of re-recruitment through blackmail. Many journalists, some estimates running as high as 50%, had been Communist secret police stool pigeons, and the WSI retained copies of their personal files. Should one be surprised then that Poland's mainstream media spent much of the 1990s discrediting the idea of the *lustracja*, vetting of the agents, and of the secret service reform?

Further, the Military Information Services attached itself to the state archives. Its primary objective was to prevent freedom of research. Both scholars and journalists were routinely denied access to documents. When, in 1998, the parliament established the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), despite hysterical opposition of the post-Communists and their liberal allies, the WSI and its civilian counterpart did everything they could to exclude certain documents, implicating them and their agents, from general circulation.⁶ Thus, the so-called "closed collection" was created under the supervision of the secret services. Aside from a minority of classified files truly crucial to the national security of free Poland, the collection included mostly the gory accounts of the totalitarian terror from the 1940s on. From behind the scenes, the WSI

⁶ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Wyzwania po Zagładzie," *Rzeczpospolita*, Plus-Minus, 4-5 April 2008, at <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/116405.html>.

was a major force stonewalling Poland's push for *Vergangenheitueberweltigung* (overcoming the past). It insidiously stifled research and free discussion of controversial issues from Poland's recent past.

The involvement of the Military Information Services in the nation's economy has recently also come to light. It placed its operatives on the boards of directors of various state-owned companies, in particular in the energy sector. Further, one can only peruse the registers of bad debtors to discover that WSI officers chaired various private firms which subsequently went bankrupt. A number of such businesses were established with money from the operational fund of the Military Information Services. It is unclear, however, whether these economic shenanigans reflect poor camouflage strategies or what Andrzej Zybertowicz and Maria Łoś called "privatizing the police state."⁷ If the investments were legitimate undercover operations, why would the real names of the officers be available from public bankruptcy records? Perhaps the much touted professionalism of the WSI left much to be desired.

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish official operations of the WSI from its extracurricular endeavors. For example, in the late 1990s WSI officers were implicated in illegal arms deals with the post-Soviet mafia and post-KGB. The scheme was uncovered by the Estonian authorities but not before some Polish arms had been shipped to Sudan, most likely earmarked for al Qaeda. The implicated officers endeavored, of course, to explain this away as an undercover operation gone awry. In another strange instance of moonlighting, a WSI soldier conducted active measures operation against another WSI officer. Both had "retired" from active service and each started a competing university. To undercut the competition, they employed electronic surveillance and disinformation techniques against each other. These "professionals" and their wild run between 1989 and 2006 have been perhaps best depicted in a literary form in novelist Włodzimierz Kuligowski's *Third Eye*.

In any event, in fifteen years of its "democratic" existence the WSI neglected sorely its counterintelligence arm. For instance, it failed to catch a single Russian spy. Was it because, as at least one source has informed us, there was a GRU cell operating openly within the WSI until August 2006? Yet, the slightly reformed civilian services located three Russian moles in the Polish army in the 1990s. Meanwhile, the longest serving (2001-2005) chief of the Military Information Services General Marek Dukaczewski terminated the only active counterintelligence operation targeting post-Soviet assets in Poland. Operation "Star" (*operacja Gwiazda*) identified and interrogated Polish military officers who had received training in the Soviet Union. Soon after, the centrist weekly *Wprost* (Straight Forward) revealed that Dukaczewski was an alumnus of a GRU course in the Soviet Union. He completed it in August 1989. The General himself was a target of the "Star." Dukaczewski has also been frequently quoted on the pages of the leftist *Electoral Gazette*, including, most recently, in the internet photo scandal. Not surprisingly, the erstwhile head of the Military Information Services has been quite resentful of the center-right government that ruled Poland until the end of 2007, in general, and of the "amateurs" and "boy scouts" who took over the nation's military special services.

The Scouts

On June 9, 2006, the Polish parliament voted to dissolve the Military Information Services. It was to be split into two separate entities: the Military Intelligence Services (*Służba Wywiadu Wojskowego* – SWW)⁸ and the Military Counterintelligence Services (*Służba Kontrwywiadu Wojskowego* – SKW).⁹ Two oversight committees were set up: one to liquidate WSI assets and the other to vet its officers. The former was headed by Dr. Sławomir Cenckiewicz. Raised by a single mother, Cenckiewicz, as a teenager in the 1980s, was active in the anti-Communist high

⁷ Andrzej Zybertowicz and Maria Łoś, *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

⁸ <http://www.sww.wp.mil.pl/pl/index.html>.

⁹ <http://skw.gov.pl>.

school underground Federation of Fighting Youth (*Federacja Młodzieży Walczącej* -- FMW). Later, as a young historian, he worked hard to research and publish on Poland's totalitarian past, most recently with the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Already as an adult, Cenckiewicz learned to his horror that both his grandfather and his father were veterans of the Communist secret police. That only made him redouble his efforts to provide transparency and openness in Poland's public life.

The vetting committee was chaired by Antoni Macierewicz. His father, a professor of chemistry, was a fighter in the anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet underground. Refusing to snitch on his confederates and fearing torture, the professor committed suicide when taken into custody by the Communist secret police in 1949. Antoni Macierewicz joined the anti-Communist opposition as a boy scout in the late 1950s. He was one of the principal leaders of the student revolt in 1968. Next, in 1976, Macierewicz launched the dissident Committee to Defend Workers (*Komitet Obrony Robotników* -- KOR). Further, he was a prominent "Solidarity" activist both during its legal interlude and in the underground. Macierewicz was arrested numerous times between 1968 and 1989. Afterwards he was elected as a parliamentary deputy, and served briefly as a high ranking government official both in defense and security. Most notably, in 1992, the politician presided over an aborted effort to vet Communist agents in parliament and government bureaucracy. After the WSI was abolished in 2006, Macierewicz vetted its members and, eventually, took over as the first commander of the Military Counterintelligence Services.

The task was daunting: There were about 2,300 soldiers of the WSI to vet. Most of them wanted to continue with the SWW and SKW. Most of them qualified. As of this writing, there are perhaps 800 more left to be vetted. New people were needed to staff the services as well. The liquidation committee consisted of 15 officers of the WSI and 9 outsiders. The latter included Dr. Filip Musiał, a historian, and Piotr Woyciechowski, a legal expert. Like Cenckiewicz, Musiał, Woyciechowski, and other young scholars are quite familiar with the Communist terror apparatus. They have studied it thoroughly since 1989. Some even experienced the secret police first hand as budding dissidents. And they are completely dedicated to the cause of freedom.

The lesson was not lost on Macierewicz and other reformers. For Macierewicz it was just a matter of tradition to hire idealists and, yes, scouts. To be more precise, a few were former scouts, mostly from the dissident-originating Union of Scouting of the Commonwealth (*Związek Harcerstwa Rzeczypospolitej* -- ZHR). Thus, a fair number of new recruits are young historians and archivists, in particular from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. They are the only ones, beside the Communists, who know the secret police documents and who professionally studied the structures of secret services.

Naturally, for pragmatic reasons some short cuts were taken. The newbies are not seasoned veterans. Some are not very well trained. What is better: To hire and groom an idealistic, if untrained, former girl scout patriot or to retain a post-Communist nihilist with unsavory connections to the mafia, party kleptocrats, and, quite possibly, Russia's secret services? On-the-job training has had to suffice also because Poland's allies, the United States in particular, have been none too eager to become involved directly with the reforms.

Despite all these obvious problems, the heart was in the right place and, given time, job experience and practical training would have quickly augmented archival and scholarly knowledge.¹⁰ However, in November 2007 the ruling center-right Law and Justice Party (PiS) lost a parliamentary election. The liberal Civic Platform (PO) emerged as the winner. The PO decided partly to reverse the course and, at least to a certain extent, it also reverted to the post-Communist model as far as the leadership of the secret services. The new government fired some of the "scouts" and re-hired more than a few "professionals."

¹⁰ <http://urbanowicz.jerzy.salon24.pl/69550,index.html>.

The liberal media went bananas with joy. And the unrelenting campaign against the “scouts” has continued apace. The funniest thing is, however, according to a source in Poland, that the internet star counterintelligence officers in Afghanistan were not “scouts” but, rather, former WSI & Military Gendarmerie soldiers, who were positively vetted by Antoni Macierewicz. I am sure he will be more stringent next time.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz
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www.iwp.edu