

A Mind War: Intelligence, Secret Services and Strategic Knowledge in the 21st Century

George Cristian Maior, ed. Bucharest, Romania: RAO Publishing House, 2010. 485 pp, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Larry L. Watts

Reviewer's Note: I had the advantage of both the original Romanian version—to which the bibliographic information above refers—and a merely satisfactory, unofficial English translation encumbered by too many unnecessary definite articles, odd translation choices, and confusing run-on sentences that severely compromise intended meaning and damage overall intelligibility. An official, more rigorous, translation would redress most of these problems and make the work accessible to English-language readers.

Twenty-two years after their chaotic revolution, Romanians who count themselves as representatives of civil society and the fourth estate are still more likely than not to describe Romania's intelligence services and the intelligence task itself in terms suggesting illegitimacy and abuse. With retrospective tunnel-vision, they commonly evoke only that part of the former security intelligence apparatus (the Securitate in Romanian parlance) implicated in political policing and the most egregious forms of human rights violations as characteristic of the intelligence profession and those who serve within it. Except for the services of defunct states—East Germany in particular—this phenomenon and its persistence is unique in the former Soviet Bloc. And its political impact has been appreciable, as quite a few of the journalists and civil society representatives noted above have themselves gone on to become heads of publicly funded institutions, members of government, presidential advisers, and even directors of intelligence.

George Cristian Maior, the editor of *A Mind War: Intelligence, Secret Services and Strategic Knowledge in the 21st Century* and current director of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI)—Romania's domestic

security intelligence agency—explicitly seeks to introduce greater sophistication into the Romanian public discussion of intelligence, especially regarding post-communist and post-9/11 developments and debates over intelligence transformation. *A Mind War* reflects Maior's now five-year-long campaign to advance his service's already impressive outreach and education roles.

An important element of subtext is the fact that Director Maior's unprecedented 2007 appointment from a major opposition party was partly driven by the repeatedly expressed fears of civil society that presidential administrations and ruling parties regularly employed intelligence services for partisan political purposes. Indeed, while none of the authors dwells on it, the issue of politicization arises in several of their presentations. Fortunately, Maior is also one of a handful of defense and security intellectuals actually qualified for such a position, having served as deputy defense minister in charge of Euro-Atlantic integration and reform during Romania's NATO accession. He is also an experienced diplomat and former charge d'affaires in Ireland.

The immediate aims of Maior's work are to define strategic knowledge and the purposes of intelligence in democratic society, and to identify and explicate intelligence actors, processes, and products; the necessary or desirable structure of intelligence in the current security environment; and the nature of 21st century intelligence transformation—especially regarding professional management. Maior's target audience is broad, including political elites, journalists, and academic analysts involved in the public debate, as well as professors, researchers, and stu-

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dents who seek to understand these issues or whose work would be better informed through their understanding.

For the most part, Maior and his contributors succeed in laying out the principal contours of the debate and providing a road map of accessible online sources for those interested in its specific elements. Particularly impressive are the contributions of the SRI intelligence professionals in this volume. There is Maior himself on the nature of strategic knowledge and intelligence transformation in the 21st century; Mihaila Matei on intelligence transformation and management processes; Florian Coldea on counterespionage; Ionel Nițu on early warning and avoiding surprise; Nicolae Iancu on cybersecurity; and Valentin Filip on parliamentary relations and control. These presentations, along with intelligence scholar Florina Cristiana Matei's contribution on intelligence effectiveness under democracy, form a coherent whole, consistent both in their use of terminology and authorities, and in their recapitulation of debates and issues.

There are, however, large differences in the acquaintance of other contributors with the current debates and their theoretical unpinning, which sometimes strikes jarring and incongruous notes. This is particularly the case of Stejărel Olaru's contribution on the transfer of former Securitate archives. This example, nonetheless serves to demonstrate in striking fashion the aforementioned biases of civil society representatives (e.g., the casting of "civil society" as an unmitigated good, when leading representatives involved in the archive transfer had been "persons of interest" for Romania's anti-KGB unit prior to 1990 and were exposed for concealing their intelligence links afterward). Also out of place, in my opinion, are the media-oriented study of Vasile Sebastian Dăncu and the contribution on open source intelligence by Gabriel Sebe, whose focus, terminology, and evaluation criteria are markedly different from those of the intelligence professionals. While the cognitive and perceptual aspects of the intelligence mission are indeed fascinating and important, introducing general and official audiences to the topic would be better served with a less esoteric approach.

While working well as introduction to the central themes, debates and developments of contemporary intelligence transformations, the volume works significantly less well as a historical overview of the Roma-

nian experience, albeit with exceptions. For example, two of the four contributions to the third section ("Intelligence Services and Democracy: The Romanian Experience") give virtually no specific information about Romania whatsoever. Of the remaining two, one by Remus Ioan Ștefureac presents a comparative analysis of US and Romanian access to information regimes. The other, that of Olaru, focuses on the transfer of communist-era security and intelligence archives during the postcommunist transition. It may well be that the difficulty of interpreting the intelligence role of the Securitate in the communist dictatorship, the nature of the 1989 revolution and the postcommunist transition and the role of the security intelligence service within it still necessitates a separate treatment, at least until interpretational benchmarks can be persuasively documented and commonly agreed. Given that these topics are still objects of highly polemical and often politicized debate, this will take some time.

In fact, the best coverage of the Romanian experience is not in this section at all. It is at the end of the second section on "Intelligence Services and Security Challenges in the 21st Century," namely, Sergiu Medar's "Romanian Intelligence Services in the 21st Century." Although not very strong on overall theory, Medar's is the best among the professional intelligence contributions on specific developments and implementation within the sphere of Romanian intelligence. Unfortunately, Medar's chapter is largely limited to the transformation of military intelligence, which he headed during 1999–2005, and there is no correspondingly detailed approach to Romania's foreign or domestic services. The informative contribution by another security professional with firsthand experience, former Defense Minister Ioan Mircea Pașcu, on Romania's failure to exploit strategic opportunities since 1989 also would be better situated in the section on the "Romanian Experience," although perhaps pitched more broadly as an essay on recurrent strategic challenges and vulnerabilities.

Along with these organizational quibbles, I found the tendency of contributors to note specific Romanian examples in passing, with no explanation or citation, particularly annoying and problematic. Whenever public controversy exists over the meaning and interpretation of specific cases, including at least some of these examples, further explanation and/or citation of authority is mandatory.

That said, this effort is by far the most sophisticated and comprehensive approach thus far to the intelligence challenges of the 21st century to appear in Romania to date. It provides a firm grounding in the evolution and elements of intelligence transformation and the new frontiers of the debate and promises future work that will inform participants in Romania's debate over intelligence and provide texts for future intelligence professionals and scholars as well. For

non-Romanians, the book is useful as a reflection of thinking in Romanian intelligence regarding the transformations now underway and as an indicator of concerns, old and new, that preoccupy their professionals. It is also of interest for those looking comparatively at intelligence reforms and preoccupations in the post-communist space.

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