

## THE EVOLUTION OF INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES AFTER WORLD WAR II: A TESTIMONY TO PERPETUAL CHANGE

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**Abstract:** World War II, with all its consequences, played a pivotal role in establishing the organizational, personnel, methodological, and professional-value foundations upon which, despite a broad spectrum of mutual differences and specificities, contemporary intelligence and security services around the world continue to operate. Wise and responsible state leadership, primarily through assessing the scope and limitations of intelligence and counterintelligence operations as crucial instruments in warfare, drew essential lessons from the period following 1945 and embarked on the creation of services capable of making the expected contributions in the decades that followed. Such an approach significantly influenced the ultimate outcome of the Cold War, which was succeeded by new recompositions within the entire intelligence community and individual agencies. This paper aims to examine and elucidate the stages in the evolution of intelligence and security services over the past eighty years, tracing their development up to their present-day configurations.

**Keywords:** World War II, intelligence and security services, Cold War, international terrorism, Russo-Ukrainian conflict

The history of intelligence and security services demonstrates that major and transformative events in the development or decline of our civilization have exerted a profound and far-reaching influence on the evolution and structuring of these highly specialized state institutions, often shrouded in

secrecy and prejudice, which should, whenever possible, be dispelled through scientific methods. Undoubtedly, “the two world wars left an indelible mark on the further development of intelligence work” (Parezanović, Željki, Stajić, 2024, p. 45), with World War II and its repercussions playing a pivotal role in shaping the organizational, personnel, methodological, and value-based foundations upon which modern intelligence services operate across various regions of the world, despite their considerable differences and distinct characteristics.

In a broader sense, this process began even before World War II, as “during the era of imperialism and the heightened militarization of developed capitalist states, intelligence services underwent further refinement, with their tasks correspondingly expanding. In particular, states with totalitarian regimes (Japan, Germany, and Fascist Italy), developed their intelligence structures to the maximum extent in line with their expansionist ambitions. Their doctrine of intelligence activity, known as „total espionage“, remains unparalleled in modern society for its comprehensiveness and ruthlessness in applying the principle that „the end justifies the means“. These countries established powerful and multifaceted organizations tasked with complex missions and granted extensive authority. The operational experiences of these regimes practically laid the foundation for the functioning of contemporary intelligence services, particularly those of major powers with imperialist and hegemonic aspirations” (Stajić, 2021, p. 233).

Perhaps the most illustrative example of how the events during and immediately following World War II influenced intelligence and security services, as well as intelligence activities more broadly activities that long predate the institutionalization of modern intelligence agencies, is the establishment of what remains the world’s most formidable intelligence structure: the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This process was formalized through the passage of the National Security Act of 1947 (<https://www.cia.gov/legacy/cia-history/>). Decision-makers in the United States, after evaluating the operations of the CIA’s predecessors, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), particularly regarding their effectiveness in organizing and coordinating intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination (including intelligence-sharing with allies and strategic deception against adversaries), recognized significant weaknesses but also pragmatically acknowledged the advantages and opportunities that a modern, well-structured intelligence agency could provide. The key element of this new agency, as emphasized in its name,

was its centralization. This proved to be a strategic decision of paramount importance, positioning the United States, its political leadership, and its entire intelligence-security apparatus for the Cold War era, a period of intense geopolitical confrontation in which the U.S. faced a formidable adversary: the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had already organized its intelligence apparatus, most famously known as the KGB (Committee for State Security), into a centralized structure well before the CIA's official establishment.

Other nations, including socialist Yugoslavia, were also compelled to align their intelligence services with the post-war global intelligence landscape. Yugoslavia's intelligence service underwent multiple structural and organizational transformations, ultimately evolving into Serbia's present-day Security Information Agency (BIA), whose historical roots can be traced back to the Confidential Police Affairs Department, established in 1899 within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia. This adaptation process is aptly described by British intelligence historian Keith Jeffery as an "adjustment to peace" (Jeffery, 2016, p. 577). Essentially, for many intelligence services worldwide, this transition marked a sharp shift from wartime operations to peacetime functions, though it quickly became evident that this new operational mode was, in fact, defined by the Cold War's strategic framework. This necessitated not only organizational and logistical modifications but, more importantly, ideological, doctrinal, and strategic adaptations. Additionally, the post-war period was characterized by the emergence of new states, such as Israel, which necessitated the establishment of new intelligence structures. In Israel's case, this resulted in the creation of the national intelligence agency known as the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations, far better known as the Mossad. Over the following eight decades, Mossad would distinguish itself as one of the most effective and renowned intelligence organizations, playing a pivotal role in what is loosely termed the international intelligence community.

The evolutionary trajectory of intelligence and security services in the decades following World War II, viewed from a global perspective, was largely characterized by continuity, with expected exceptions and regional peculiarities. Rather than abrupt disruptions, the process unfolded in accordance with the logic of evolving security threats, shifts in international relations, and advances in modern technologies, which have always played a crucial role in the enhancement of intelligence systems. The first significant "seismic shift" in this regard occurred in the final phase and aftermath of the Cold War, marked by German reunification and the dissolution of the

Soviet Union (and, from a regional perspective, the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). These geopolitical transformations led to a substantial reassessment of intelligence priorities, operational methods, and strategic objectives, as well as corresponding organizational and personnel changes. As in previous periods of transition, the primary objective of intelligence and security services was to adapt to the new geopolitical landscape and security environment at global, regional, and national levels.

The next major milestone with far-reaching consequences for the global intelligence and security community, arguably the most significant since World War II, was the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. From that moment onward, counterterrorism, particularly the fight against jihadist terrorism, became the paramount priority for the majority of intelligence services. Some agencies, such as Russia's, had already shifted their focus in response to domestic security dynamics, specifically the brutal wave of Islamist terrorism that engulfed the Russian Federation, culminating in the First and Second Chechen Wars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Željki, 2018, p. 19).

This redefinition of priorities had profound and lasting consequences, permanently altering the configuration of numerous national intelligence agencies and the broader intelligence community. Agencies that had previously lacked dedicated counterterrorism units established specialized divisions focused exclusively on combating international terrorism and its local networks. In agencies that had already possessed such capacities, substantial human and material resources were redirected to counterterrorism efforts. Highly experienced professionals, particularly field operatives and analysts who had spent years working on intelligence and counterintelligence operations, rapidly transitioned to this emerging and increasingly critical area of intelligence work.

Certainly, the most profound and far-reaching transformation resulting from the shift in focus toward combating international terrorism has been the unprecedented expansion of cooperation among intelligence and security services. This development has led to an openness toward foreign counterpart institutions to an extent that would have been unimaginable only a few decades earlier. Recognizing the undeniable reality that Islamist terrorism knows no borders, possesses an almost global reach, and has the capability to rapidly generate real and immediate security threats at diverse locations worldwide through the cooperation and coordinated actions of groups and individuals of different nationalities and citizenships but united

by the same ideological convictions (Živaljević, 2022), intelligence and security services had to adjust their response to reflect this reality, adopting an inherently international character. Consequently, a continuous series of joint activities ensued, most frequently in a bilateral format but also through various multilateral bodies established to enhance the effectiveness of countering the common threat.

As the human inclination toward expansion in all fields and the broadening of the context in which one lives and operates is an intrinsic trait, the sustained engagement of intelligence services in counterterrorism cooperation soon led to the emergence of new topics of mutual interest. Over time, alongside counterterrorism efforts, two other areas gained prominence on the list of priorities for intelligence agencies, both in terms of their significance and the frequency and depth of international cooperation: the fight against transnational organized crime (primarily drug trafficking) and illegal migration. This focus was further reinforced by their functional interconnection with terrorism.

Beyond these evolutionary developments in intelligence and security services, the first two decades of the 21st century saw new issues rising to prominence due to broad modernization trends, technological advancements, socio-political shifts, economic fluctuations, and security dynamics. The repositioning of traditional and the emergence of new global economic actors, fluctuations in world markets, varying degrees of economic crises, disruptions in supply chains, and similar factors led to an increased focus on economic and energy security. This became even more relevant from 2019 onwards with the outbreak and escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic when concerns related to biological, environmental, and medical security began to be treated as indispensable components of national security. Consequently, intelligence and security agencies responsible for safeguarding national security were either motivated or compelled to acquire new expertise in these areas, leading to organizational and personnel restructuring.

Near the end of their nearly eighty-year-long developmental trajectory, one that effectively began toward the conclusion of World War II and its aftermath, modern intelligence and security services encountered yet another extraordinary challenge of immense scale, so complex, intense, and deep-rooted that even the involved and opposing actors cannot agree on its name. For some, it is a "special military operation", for others, the "Russia-Ukraine conflict," and for yet another group, a "war", one that, due to its characteristics, aligns closely with definitions of a "third world war". Initiated

in 2022, this conflict rapidly began exerting a profound influence on relations between intelligence services of different nations, as well as on their strategic priorities and daily operations. While it is already evident that the repercussions of these events will leave a lasting imprint on the work of intelligence agencies and serve as a foundation for new evolutionary processes in the future, it is currently impossible to predict with precision their trajectory, pace, or direction. However, even at this stage, this ongoing transformation serves as further proof of the initial premise: that the fundamental characteristic of modern intelligence-security systems is their constant and uninterrupted adaptation to socio-political and security realities.

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