

# Bulgarian Scientific and Technical Intelligence in Japan during the Cold War

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## *Abstract*

Since Bulgaria-Japan relations have already been researched by Bulgarian scholar Evgeny Kandilarov, this study aims to approach very specific aspect of the interaction between the two states during the Cold War. Based on Bulgarian declassified documents of socialist secret services it attempts to supplement the Cold War studies and knowledge about Bulgaria-Japan relations as a part of Japan's relations with the Soviet Union and East European countries. It provides analysis regarding aims, methodology, expansion, cooperation, and results of the Bulgarian scientific and technological intelligence in Japan. This study proposes that since Western democracies restricted access of the socialist countries to high technologies by COCOM and since Japan achieved unimaginable economic and technological growth in the end of 1960s, KGB and all Eastern European secret services estimated Japan as destination with significant opportunities for scientific and technological intelligence. Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov was one of the greatest admirers of Japanese economic model. Therefore, this secret activity became a priority for Bulgarian residence in Japan. Scientific and technological intelligence was not only a countermeasure in view of COCOM restrictions but transformed into a crucial element of socialist strategy for modernization. Japan was not the only capitalist country – object of industrial espionage, but it took key place for completing important tasks in the field of electronics, robotics, chemical industry, equipment etc. This knowledge was more or less implemented in industry and contributed to the Bulgarian economic and technological modernization.

**Keywords:** scientific and technological intelligence, Bulgaria-Japan relations, Japan-Eastern Europe interaction, Japan-USSR interaction.

## 1. Introduction

Regardless of geographical distance, Bulgaria and Japan have long history of interaction (Kandilarov, 2009).<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War both countries underwent significant political transformations. Japan democratizes, while the Soviet state model was introduced in Bulgaria. The East-West confrontation at the beginning of the Cold War divided even more Sofia and Tokyo and hindered bilateral communication. Japan and Bulgaria were loyal partners of the United States in Asia and of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe accordingly. Nevertheless, bipolar

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural, economic, and personal contacts between Bulgaria and Japan were registered at the end of XIX and the beginning of the XX century, but official diplomatic relations were established whit the organization of Japanese legation in Sofia in 1939 and Bulgarian legation in Tokyo in 1942.

relations were not constantly tense. Thus, global thaw during 1950s provided opportunity for Bulgaria and Japan to reestablish their official diplomatic relations in 1959.<sup>2</sup>

Prime sources regarding Bulgaria-Japan contacts can be found in various Bulgarian archives like the Diplomatic Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central State Archives. Many of those have already been used by the Bulgarian scholar Evgeny Kandilarov in his studies on Bulgarian-Japanese relations (Kandilarov, 2009, 2016, 2019). Therefore, current study focuses on very concrete and specific aspect of the Bulgarian-Japanese Cold War interaction. Based on declassified documents of socialist secret services it attempts to supplement the Cold War studies and knowledge about Bulgaria-Japan relations as a part of Japan's relations with the Soviet Union and East European socialist countries. In People's Republic of Bulgaria several structures within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of People's Defense were in charge of intelligence activities. The First Main Directorate of the Committee of State Security was responsible for foreign intelligence, but 7<sup>th</sup> Department for scientific and technical intelligence. Intelligence service of the General Staff of the Bulgarian National Army was responsible for military intelligence. Their work was assisted by many other ministries and state structures (Stanchev, Nikolov & Baev, 2017: 143-234, Baev, 2019, Metodiev, 2008). Documents of the Bulgarian secret services were arranged and publicly available due to efforts of the Committee for disclosing the documents and announcing affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security and intelligence services of the Bulgarian National Army (CDDAABCSSISBNA)<sup>3</sup>. This study implemented data from two documental collections – “State Security and intelligence service of the General Staff of the Bulgarian National Army in Asia (1944-1991)” and “State Security and scientific-technological intelligence.”

## 2. Aims and methodology of the Bulgarian scientific and technological intelligence in Japan

Sofia considered the opening of an embassy in Tokyo in 1960 as a good opportunity to extend intelligence activity in the Far East. Thus, almost immediately, efforts were made to lay the foundations of the Bulgarian residency in Japan. Under the cover of first secretary in the embassy a person with good professional knowledge and experience was sent. Colonel Tocho Kiryakov with pseudonym “Aleksandrov” spoke English fluently and before he came to Japan he worked in Israel and Turkey. Bulgarian officer was influential figure since he took the position of Deputy Chief of the 1<sup>st</sup> Main Directorate of the Committee of State Security. Initially his mission was limited. He was supposed to organize the Bulgarian residency, to establish contacts with his Soviet colleagues and with Japanese politicians, diplomats, journalists, academics, to get to know Japanese and the United States secret services and explore the opportunities for work in Japan. It seems that Soviet secret services had already made some contacts in Japan, because Bulgarian agent should contact them as well (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 157, p. 55). Initially, the Bulgarian residence was given tasks only related with acquiring information for diplomatic and security initiatives, plans, capabilities, alliances of capitalist countries and discovering how the West could be discredited and divided (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 196, pp. 191-192). More or less, he succeeded in these tasks as he established good connections with Japanese journalists, politicians, academics, and diplomats and acquired some information about Japan's political, socio-economic development, Japanese Self Defense Forces, US-Japanese foreign policy and security strategy in Asia, US-Japanese Chinese relations etc. Bulgarian resident worked closely

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<sup>2</sup> Normalization of relations between Japan and the USSR during 1955-1956 allowed Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe to follow Moscow's example.

<sup>3</sup> More information about the CDDAABCSSISBNA see at <https://www.comdos.bg/p/language/en/> [Accessed October 13, 2023].

with Soviet agents and in practice much in their favor. I believe much of the political and military information was more valuable for Moscow than for Sofia. For example, it is worth to note that during the Cold War Bulgaria did not have military attaché in Tokyo in comparison with Beijing and Pyongyang, where military attaches were in charge of military intelligence. In Tokyo a resident in the embassy was in charge of political and military intelligence until the end of the Cold war. In addition, various materials about Japanese political, socio-economic and security development were collected, as well as data regarding regional developments in North and South East Asia as a whole (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016: 1149-1384). Yet, much of the acquired information was not secret, but was provided by public sources. Besides, not every material was recognized as “valuable”. According to the prime sources, information that was actually used varied between 30% and 50%. In this spirit were the recommendations from Sofia for collection of “more valuable” (secret) information, establishment of “more valuable” contacts, and improvement of training for the Bulgarian agents (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document N<sup>o</sup> 167, pp. 78-79, Document N<sup>o</sup> 204, pp. 8-10, Document N<sup>o</sup> 208, pp. 34-37, Document N<sup>o</sup> 213, pp. 1-2).

Almost a decade since the beginning of Bulgarian intelligence activity in Japan, Sofia and Moscow estimated Japan as perspective destination for scientific and technical intelligence. For example, according to the documents Soviet Committee of State Security (KGB) believed that “Japan provides colossal opportunities for scientific and technical intelligence activities” because “Japan recently has developed own army and military industry, especially rocket and shipbuilding,” “was well developed in chemical, electronic and transport industries” and “has joint ventures with Americans.” It was interesting detail that KGB estimated Japanese engineers and experts as worst paid in comparison with other capitalist countries and could be recruited “on a material base”. They also believed that Japanese counter intelligence was basically focused on embassies and to the great extent ignored trade offices (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 227, pp. 5-6, Document N<sup>o</sup> 229, p. 218).

Thus, since Western countries restricted import of high technology in socialist world through Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) and since Japan at the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s achieved spectacular economic and technical growth scientific and technical intelligence became a priority for Bulgarian secret services. Bulgarian Communist leader Todor Zhivkov was so significantly impressed by Japanese miracle during his visit of EXPRO 70 in Osaka that he strived to implement some elements of Japanese economic model in Bulgaria transforming it into “Japan on the Balkans” (Kandilarov, 2009). He even recognized “catastrophic falling out of socialist countries” for which was been criticized by Brezhnev. Zhivkov’s self-initiative continued during the 1980s to such extent that he again attracted criticism from Gorbachev for trying to transform Bulgaria into “mini-Japan” (Baev, 2010: 366). This shows strong political will for modernization. Therefore, tasks put to the scientific and technical intelligence were directed by communist political leadership and corresponded to the Five-year economic plans for development. A special structure for scientific and technical intelligence was established in 1964 – 7<sup>th</sup> Department in 1<sup>st</sup> Main Directorate of State Security, consisting of two main directions – European and non-European capitalist countries. Japan was positioned in the latter along with the US, Canada, the UK, and Israel (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 70, pp. 4-5, Document N<sup>o</sup> 58, p. 25, Document N<sup>o</sup> 59, p. 20, p. 42).

Key aims of scientific and technological intelligence were defined as acquiring secret information and items of the most contemporary scientific achievements for military or civil purposes. Priority was given to fields like electronics, electronic computing and radio communication equipment, means of automation and automated control systems, chemical and petrochemical industry, microbiology and medicine, military and operational equipment (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 70, pp. 3-4, Document N<sup>o</sup> 236, pp. 32-23). Since Japan was seen as one of the most developed capitalist countries, Bulgarian scientific and technological intelligence in Japan focused its activity on making contacts and collecting materials in

electronics, chemical industry, mechanical engineering and military equipment (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 196, pp. 198-199, CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 54).

Main objects of penetration were “developed capitalist countries”, especially their scientific and research institutes, laboratories, manufactures, state institutions, formulating scientific policy, regional and international economic associations, scientific and research centers, companies having connections with the United States, NATO, and the People’s Republic of China (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 236, pp. 32-34, Document № 243, pp. 39-44). It was not unexpected that most often Bulgarian trade offices and embassies were used for covering intelligence activity. In addition, Bulgarian secret services usually took advantage of bilateral cultural, scientific, and technological agreement and received assistance from Bulgarian citizens on long-term specializations or short-term internships. Initially bilateral joint ventures were used for cover as well. However, it was not recommended by the secret services because agents were too engaged with their official duties (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 55, pp. 16-18). Until 1974 the Bulgarian residence in Japan had already used 20 contacts, 12 of them working at places “with concentrated valuable information for military and political intelligence” (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 167, pp. 78-79). Bulgarian prime sources show also that the Bulgarian residence in Japan succeeded in creating “confidential connections” with Japanese companies like Fuji, Sato, Sumitomo, Taizo etc. (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 196, p. 194).

### 3. Expansion, improvement and cooperation

Bulgarian scientific and technological intelligence expanded gradually. During the Cold War several times services were restructured as a result of more complicated activities, the increasing number of agents, assistants, objects for penetration and requirement for an effective coordination. Intelligence apparatus and activity in Japan were expanded and improved as well. During the second half of the 1960 new operatives with pseudonyms “Kostov,” “Zlatarev” and “Penev” were sent to Tokyo. They were tasked with acquiring information and recruiting associates (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 196, p. 194, CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 54). Training of agents became a priority. Around 60% of Bulgarian agents graduated intelligence schools in the Soviet Union and other 40% special courses in Bulgaria. However, scientific and technological intelligence required additional knowledge and skills, especially activity in Japan (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 70, pp. 3-4, Document № 54). Japan was perceived as one of the most difficult destinations to work in due to the language barrier and cultural differences. It was pointed that 80% of scientific and technological documentation was in Japanese language. Thus, intelligence activity in Japan required not only specific education in fields like electronics or chemistry, but also good knowledge of Japanese language. Therefore, Bulgarian secret services started to send agents and associates to study as students or specialists in Japanese universities and companies (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 159, pp. 17-18).

Scientific and technical intelligence became a priority for the Soviet Union and socialist countries in Eastern Europe as a whole. It was evident by close cooperation and coordination between them. Bulgarian secret services signed the so-called perspective plans for cooperation with KGB which defined common aims and work for a period of several years. In addition, they held regular meetings for information and experience exchange, coordination of joint operations and discussion of a more concrete and short-term tasks (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2016, Document № 232, p. 8, Document № 234, p. 108, CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 233, p. 14, Document № 234, p. 108, Document № 237, pp. 15-26, Document № 243, pp. 30-47, Document № 245, p. 210). Most wanted information from Moscow was military and

technological and sometimes KGB received data from Bulgarian secret services classified as “extremely valuable” (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 237, pp. 15-26).

Sofia has similar (yet not so close) contacts with all East European secret services. Most effective were said to be those with East Germany and Czechoslovakia (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 98, pp. 40-47, Document N<sup>o</sup> 70, p. 14, Document N<sup>o</sup> 217, pp. 39-41). All member-states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance had specific responsibilities to exploit concrete scientific and industrial issues. Documents evidenced that during the 1970s KGB prompted East European secret services to acquire not only military, but civil technologies as well. In addition, serious efforts were made for improvement of coordination, information exchange and implementation of acquired data in socialist economies (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 220, pp. 41-45, Document N<sup>o</sup> 216, pp. 1-3, Document N<sup>o</sup> 218, pp. 119-126). All East European secret services estimated the importance of Japan for scientific and technological intelligence but admitted the difficulties of their work there due to the language barrier and the small number of agents (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 222, pp. 110-111, Document N<sup>o</sup> 251, p. 27, Document N<sup>o</sup> 269, p. 49, Document N<sup>o</sup> 278, p. 130, Document N<sup>o</sup> 290, p. 12).

Nevertheless, collective efforts gave some results not only in quantity, but in quality of acquired data. For example, in 1966 materials received from the intelligence were 47, but in 1971 – 930. In the beginning of 1970s, the total number of materials was 2760 consisting of 232,599 pages and over 2000 samples of equipment. Besides, documents labeled as “extremely valuable” in 1967 were only 3, but in 1971 they were 104 (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 70, pp. 11-12). It is interesting to note that the information flow was not one-way from Sofia to Moscow. Bulgarian secret services reported that cooperation with their Soviet colleagues was beneficial for the “national economy and science” as well (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 246, pp. 163-180, Document N<sup>o</sup> 231, pp. 179-182). In reference to Japan prime sources mention that Bulgarian secret services acquired information about dosing device, manufactured in Japanese company and two-beam spectrometer for the analysis of radio transmissions (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 247, pp. 204-206). Despite the relative success there were still some issues. Intelligence services were often criticized for unsatisfactory results, especially in the field of military technology, for not completing the assign tasks, for not maintaining enough or “valuable” connections (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 237, p. 28).

#### 4. Results

In the beginning of 1980s Bulgarian political leadership headed by Todor Zhivkov estimated that scientific and technological intelligence achieved “very good results”. Management of the secret services also pointed that “achievements of the scientific and technological intelligence were recognized in the country” and “it was now unthinkable to work and think without it” (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 98, pp. 43-44). Indeed, Bulgarian scientific and technical intelligence in Japan achieved some positive results. Over time the total number of collected materials has increased, and much more of it was appreciated as “valuable” or “especially valuable”. Political and intelligence leadership emphasized the significant importance of scientific and technological intelligence for the development of Bulgarian economy, industry, and science. It contributed to the realization of national programs and five-year economic plans. It was believed that intelligence activity was one of the main reasons for Bulgaria’s leading position in electronics and electronic computing within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Intelligence information was applied in other spheres as well. These were biology, medicine, engineering, robotics, energetics, agriculture, and defense (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document N<sup>o</sup> 98, pp. 43-44).

Nevertheless, now we can conclude that intelligence activity was only partially successful. There were various problems as well. For example, documents clearly show unsatisfactory results in acquiring military information. Much of the collected information was not valuable as it was public. Secret services themselves complained of a waste of time and a lack of various and valuable contacts, objects for penetration that were not of interest and not providing opportunities for intelligence. Thus, often acquired information did not correspond entirely with the initial tasks (CDDAABCSSISBNA, 2013, Document № 70, pp. 8-16). Many organizational, operational and coordination problems arose as well. Sometimes secret services were faced with more ambitious tasks than were realistic for them to complete. Global tensions complicated their situation as most of the time they had to work in a hostile environment and were obstructed by local counterintelligence. Thus, détente in the Cold War when cultural and economic interactions intensified was probably the most beneficial decade for Bulgarian scientific and technological intelligence in Japan.

## 5. Conclusion

Normalization of Japan's relations with socialist countries activated their intelligence activity on Japanese territory. Initially Bulgarian secret services lack special policy toward Japan, but mostly gathered military and political information in favor of KGB. Military information was vital for the Soviet Union, but in time scientific and technical intelligence took a significant place. For Bulgarian secret services it became a priority direction as well. Japan was estimated by the Soviet Union and all East European countries as destination provided significant opportunities. Therefore, intelligence activity has expanded and complicated. More and better trained agents and associates were sent to Tokyo. Cooperation between the Soviet Union and all East European countries was activated for regular communication, better coordination and exchange of information, collective tasks, and joint operations.

Bulgaria was part of these collective efforts. Nevertheless, documents clearly show that Bulgarian communist leadership had personal interest in Japanese economic model. Japan was one of many capitalist countries but received special attention as a destination for scientific and technical intelligence activity, especially in the field of electronics, robotics, chemical industry, equipment etc. It was not only a countermeasure in view of COCOM restrictions but transformed into a crucial element of socialist strategy for modernization.

However, not every task was completed entirely. Provided information was often not enough, not secret, not valuable, and not implemented in industry. Thus, results were partially successful. Nevertheless, it was enough to contribute significantly to the Bulgarian economic modernization. This fact per se put doubts regarding the capabilities of socialist countries to fully modernize on their own. The necessity to steal knowledge from the developed capitalist countries as they were called probably shows that real modernization and progress without freedom, initiative and competition are difficult to achieve.

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- Document № 237 - Informatsiya odnosno organizatsiyata na rabotata po liniya na nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane v svetlinata na sporazumenieto za vzaimodeistvie s Parvo Glavno Upravlenie na Komiteta za darzhavna bezopasnost po pridobivane na voenno-tehnicheska informatsiya [Information regarding organization of activity for scientific and technical intelligence in the light of agreement for cooperation with the 1<sup>st</sup> Main Directorate of the Committee of State Security (KGB) for acquiring military and technical information]. Sofia, April 2, 1976, pp. 15-26.
- Document № 243 - Perspektiven plan za vzaimodeistvieto mezhdu vanshnite razuznavaniya na Ministerstvo na vatreshnite raboti na Narodna Republika Balgaria i Komiteta za darzhavna bezopasnost na SSSR za perioda 1981-1985 g. [Perspective plan for cooperation between intelligence services of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Committee of State Security (KGB) of the USSR for period 1981-1985]. Sofia, September 18, 1981, pp. 30-47.
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Document № 246 - Spravka otnosno poluchena nauchno-tehnicheska informatsiya ot Upravlenie Nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane pri Komiteta za darzhavna bezopasnost na SSSR prez 8 petiletka [Reference regarding received scientific and technical information from the Department of Scientific and Technical Intelligence of the Committee of State Security of the USSR during 8<sup>th</sup> Five-year plan], no place, no date, pp. 163-180.

Document № 247 - Spravka otnosno predostavena nauchno-tehnicheska informatsiya, tehnologichna informatsiya, embargovo oborudvane, obraztsi i drugi na Upravlenie "T" pri Komiteta za darzhavna bezopasnost i Glavno inzhenerno upravlenie pri GKIS na SSSR ot Upravlenie "Nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane pri Parvo Glavno Upravlenie na Darzhavna sigurnost na Narodna Republika Balgaria prez 8 petiletka [Reference regarding delivered scientific and technical information, embargo equipment, examples and other equipment to the Department "T" of the Committee of State Security and Main Engineer Department of GKIS of the USSR from Department "Scientific and Technical Intelligence" in the 1<sup>st</sup> Main Directorate of the People's Republic of Bulgaria during the 8<sup>th</sup> Five-year plan], no place, no date, pp. 181-207.

Document № 251 - Protokol otnosno provedeni razgovori po liniya na nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane s nemskite drugari [Protocol regarding conducted conversations in scientific and technical intelligence with German comrades]. Sofia, June 10, 1975, pp. 25-29.

Document № 269 - Spravka otnosno provedenoto rabotno saveshtanie za obmyana na opit po liniya na nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane s drugarite ot Chehoslovashkata Sotsialisticheska Republika [Reference regarding conducted working consultation for exchange of experience in scientific and technical intelligence with comrades from the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia]. Sofia, November 10, 1977, pp. 39-53.

Document № 278 - Dokladna zapiska otnosno provedenite konsultatsii po liniya na nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane s predstaviteli na nauchno-tehnicheskoto razuznavane na Ungarskata Narodna Republika i Polskata Narodna Republika [Report regarding conducted consultations in scientific and technical intelligence with representatives of scientific and technical intelligence of the Hungarian People's Republic and the Polish People's Republic]. Sofia, December 10, 1968, pp. 125-133.

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