

State Security, Information, and Repression

A Comparison of Communist Bulgaria
and Ba'athist Iraq

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The centrality of a strong state security apparatus to the maintenance of authoritarian rule has been highlighted in classic studies of single-party regimes as well as in more recent research on authoritarian resilience in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.¹ The general insight is that the state security system helps preserve authoritarian regimes by the threat or use of repression. Although this is doubtless true, existing studies have not usually examined some fundamental questions related to the operation of state security in single-party autocracies. In particular, we focus here on two related issues. First, how do state security agencies collect information? Second, how is this information used?

The answer to the first question reveals the importance of the recruitment of informants in the state security networks, a topic that has not received theoretical attention in the existing political science literature. With regard to the second question, we demonstrate how information affects decisions about the deployment of repression. We argue that single-party autocracies continuously extract information by recruiting ordinary citizens to participate (voluntarily or involuntarily) as informants in the state security networks and use the information gathered to mete out repression. Our major counterintuitive claim is that totalistic repression exists in information-poor environments. Therefore, as the quality of information increases, repression becomes more selective and targeted. Our focus on information gathering

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1951); and Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). For more recent research, see Yevgenia Albats, *State within a State: The KGB and Its Hold on Russia—Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994); and Eva Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 139–157.

by state security allows us to shed new light on repression in single-party autocracies.

This article compares the operation of state security organs in two single-party autocracies: pre-1989 Bulgaria (an Eastern European Communist regime) and Iraq under the Ba'ath Party (1968–2003). Technically, neither Bulgaria nor Iraq was a single-party system. In Bulgaria, a quarter of the seats in the legislature and several ministerial posts were always reserved for the Bulgarian Agricultural National Union (BANU). However, there was never doubt that BANU functioned as a loyal ally of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP). The same is true for Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where non-Communist parties existed, but served as loyal adjuncts of the Communist party. In China, which is indisputably a single-party state, eight political parties besides the Communist Party currently exist. In Iraq, the Communist Party was allowed to coexist with the Ba'ath, at least for parts of the post-1968 period. However, the Ba'ath had total control of the political system. Thus, for all practical purposes, Bulgaria and Iraq were single-party systems.

We classify Bulgaria and Iraq as non-electoral single-party autocracies, following Tullock's classic definition, which subsumes a wide spectrum of modern non-democratic regimes, ranging from absolute monarchies and totalitarian regimes to less extreme forms of authoritarianism.² Because this category is very broad, we further classify these two regimes as Stalinist. For Bulgaria, we use this term for the period until 1956. After 1956, Bulgaria, much like other East European regimes, underwent de-Stalinization and entered a post-Stalinist stage of regime development characterized by a decline in repression. In Iraq, the system remained Stalinist until the U.S. invasion in 2003. We make a distinction between Stalinism as a regime of control with particular security practices that could be adapted and borrowed by other authoritarian one-party states and Stalinism as a descriptor of a political system. Thus, Bulgaria had a Stalinist political system until 1956, whereas Iraq adopted Stalinist security practices.

Our argument is counterintuitive in two ways. First, although the operation of state security forces in East European states is commonly understood to have remained static under Communism, we argue that in Bulgaria the State Security (*Durzhavna sigurnost*, or DS) apparatus underwent a transformative change as the regime exited from Stalinism: massive repression was gradually replaced by surveillance and targeted repression. What made this possible was a conscious effort by the DS to collect more fine-grained information. With such information, repression could be more precise and more

2. Gordon Tullock, *Autocracy* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 1987).

efficacious, yet also more selective. Second, for the case of Iraq, we argue that although variations existed during the 35-year period, repression overall remained consistently high and totalistic until the end of Ba'th rule. The regime was mostly stable in spite of some assassination attempts and failed coups d'état during the party's 35-year rule, and, had it not been for the U.S. invasion, Ba'th rule probably would have continued well beyond 2003.

We base these claims on unprecedented access to archival sources from the two countries. Previous research on the Bulgarian DS has typically relied on a single collection of documents at the Central State Archive, which consists of BKP Politburo decisions regarding the organization of state security.³ These documents reveal how the BKP Politburo wanted to organize the DS, but they do not help us understand how the state security apparatus actually functioned. To get at this question, we need to analyze other documents. For Bulgaria, we rely in particular on materials gathered at the BKP archives and the Bulgarian DS archives.⁴ These materials include reports on the functional organization and staffing levels of the DS, the methods for recruitment of informants, the methods for collecting information, and the use of information to guide decisions about the targeting of repression. Because these materials are both voluminous (we consulted more than a thousand files) and detailed (some are longer than a hundred pages), the Bulgarian documents allow us to reconstruct the actual operation of the DS and to theorize the important shift in information-gathering that occurred when Bulgaria exited Stalinism.

The research for the Iraqi part of this article relies primarily on the massive archive of government documents captured by the United States after the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. The records of the Ba'th Party, the intelligence and security services—mainly the Special Security Organization (SSO)—the presidential *diwan* (the presidential headquarters), and the Ministry of Information, as well as the audiotapes of meetings of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), provide unparalleled insights into the ideology and structure of Saddam Hussein's regime. The files of the Ba'th Regional Command are the most illuminating, as they contain copies of the correspondence of the different arms of the regime and enable us to connect the lines between these organizations. Most of the Iraqi archives are housed at Stanford

3. These records are stored in Tsentralen Durzhaven Arkhiv (TsDA) Fond (F.) 1B, Opis (Op.) 64. For an example of a study written on the basis of these documents, see Momchil Metodiev, *Mashina za legitimnost: Roliat na Durzhavna sigurnost v komunisticheskata durzhava* [A machine for legitimacy: The function of state security in the Communist state] (Sofia: Ciela, 2008).

4. The Bulgarian Communist Party archives are housed at the Central State Archive (TsDA). The DS archives are housed at the Arkhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vutreshnite Raboti (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or AMVR) and at the Committee for Releasing Documents and for Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens with State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army (AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA, usually referred to as COMDOS).

University's Hoover Institution Archive, and audiotapes and other documents can be found at the National Defense University in Washington, DC. These materials give scholars a unique opportunity to construct how the security services of a modern Arab dictatorship functioned based on its own archives rather than secondary sources. These fascinating Bulgarian and Iraqi records illustrate in minute detail how the different arms of the state operated and how the intelligence and security services gathered information, recruited informants, and carried out their surveillance of society.

Why have we chosen to conduct a paired comparison of Bulgaria under Communism and Iraq under the Ba'ath? We are interested in exploring the mechanisms of rule in single-party autocracies. In particular, we argue that because the bulk of the recent political science literature on authoritarian rule has focused on electoral autocracies, the sources of regime resilience in non-electoral single-party autocracies (countries in which elections serve only a ceremonial purpose rather than providing opportunities for meaningful contestation) are poorly understood.⁵ The universe of non-electoral single-party autocracies consists of the Communist regimes (ten countries that were Communist until their collapse in 1989–1991 and another five countries that are still ruled by Communist parties: China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba) and roughly fifteen non-Communist single-party regimes scattered around the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (prominent examples include Syria under the Ba'ath, Eritrea since 1993, and Taiwan during the first two decades of Kuomintang rule, 1947–1970).

Only exceedingly rarely do studies of autocratic resilience compare a Communist and a non-Communist single-party regime.⁶ We argue that this comparison is useful because it reveals some striking institutional similarities between those two subtypes of non-electoral single-party autocracies. Most important among these similarities are the dominant role of the party and the

5. Examples of the the recent literature on authoritarian rule include Barbara Geddes, "Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game-Theoretic Argument" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, 2–5 September 1999); Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Benjamin Smith, "Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule," *World Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (April 2005), pp. 421–451; Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kenneth F. Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

6. One exception is Bruce J. Dickson, *Democratization in China and Taiwan: The Adaptability of Leninist Parties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

non-electoral institutions that were created to enable the party to maintain its rule. We compare these two regimes at a time when they were most similar; namely, when they were both regimes of a Stalinist type. For Bulgaria, this period spanned the years from 1944 to 1962. The period until 1956 is a textbook case of Stalinism, with power gradually being concentrated in the hands of the top leader and repression being used on a massive scale. From 1956 to 1962, Bulgaria underwent a process of initial de-Stalinization. During this transitional period, repression continued to be used frequently (though less often than prior to 1956), and the labor camps continued to operate. After 1962, Bulgaria entered the period of mature post-Stalinism, when leadership was collective, levels of repression were low, citizens gradually started to enjoy more rights and freedoms, and the regime engaged in more extensive redistribution.⁷ For Iraq, the entire period during which the Ba'ath party was in power can be characterized as Stalinist.⁸

Our paired comparison of Bulgaria and Iraq is nested within the larger sample of non-electoral single-party autocracies. Bulgaria is a case from the group of Communist single-party autocracies, whereas Iraq is a non-Communist single-party regime.⁹ Sidney Tarrow has argued that paired comparison allows scholars to correct generalizations based on single cases, to assess the influence of institutions, and to generate hypotheses about causal relations between variables. These are important steps in theory development.¹⁰ Our primary focus in this article is the day-to-day operation of state security in single-party regimes, with particular attention paid to the strategies that state security organs use to recruit informants, the information provided by the informants, and the use of this information to wield repression. We identify differences in the operation of state security (movement from massive repression to surveillance and targeted repression in Bulgaria and continuous, unrelenting repression in Iraq) that do have relevance for understanding the eventual fragility of the Bulgarian regime and regime durability in Iraq.

Although we do not claim that changes in repression are the only independent variable that affects the dependent variable of regime resilience, we present some hypotheses about how the reorientation of state security toward

7. For definitions of regime types, see Martin K. Dimitrov, ed., *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Communist Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 1.

8. Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. chs. 6–7.

9. Evan S. Lieberman, "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (2005), pp. 435–452.

10. Sidney Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (February 2010), pp. 230–259.

selective repression gradually weakens the coercive capacity of single-party authoritarian regimes and thus increases the likelihood of their demise when they face a crisis. Future studies can test the theoretical argument about the role of institutions (specifically, state security agencies) that is developed from this paired comparison of Bulgaria and Iraq by expanding the size of the sample of regimes analyzed.

The article is organized as follows. The first section provides a discussion of information-gathering in single-party autocracies and specifies our theoretical contribution. We then turn to a case study of the operation of state security in Bulgaria. This portion of the article analyzes the methods used by the Bulgarian state security apparatus to recruit citizens to serve as informants and discusses why the use of targeted repression made it increasingly more difficult for the state security to defuse mass discontent prior to the collapse of the Communist regime. Section III focuses on the contrasting case of Iraq. The state security apparatus in Iraq was much more successful in continuing to use massive repression than the Bulgarian regime. Section IV summarizes the similarities and differences between Bulgaria and Iraq and provides some general reflections on the role of state security in maintaining single-party authoritarian regimes.

Information and Repression in Single-Party Autocracies

Our discussion of the role of information in single-party autocracies begins with the uncontroversial assumption that these regimes maintain themselves in power through a combination of repression and concessions.¹¹ However, rather than being constant, the amount of repression and concessions may fluctuate as authoritarian regimes undergo various changes. We want to establish a simple but important point: These regimes go through stages in their development.¹² Scholars of Communist regimes have made a distinction between a Stalinist and a post-Stalinist regime.¹³ Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes differ in terms of the foundations of their power. In the former, pa-

11. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

12. Barbara Geddes, "Stages of Development in Authoritarian Regimes," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, Marc Morjé Howard, and Rudra Sil, eds., *World Order after Leninism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), pp. 149–170.

13. Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970); and Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970).

tronage is distributed to a small group (typically members of the elite), and repression is employed widely.¹⁴ In the latter, the use of repression declines, and wider segments of the population derive various material benefits from the regime. Take the Soviet Union as an example. Less than a decade after the death of Iosif Stalin, the Gulag was closed down, and although repression did not disappear, its use was carefully targeted. The annual reports of the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) from the 1960s reveal that the overall volume of repression was low and that those who were repressed were primarily members of ethnic minorities (including Jews, but also Ukrainians, Belarusians, Balts, Georgians, and Armenians), rather than ethnic Russians.¹⁵ Once repression declined, the source of regime resilience was a social contract, under which citizens would exchange political quiescence for universal employment, stable pay, and the provision of consumer goods.¹⁶ This system has been variously described as late socialism, goulash Communism, and post-Stalinism.¹⁷ It was stable as long as the regime was able to use limited repression strategically and to muster enough resources to satisfy the material demands of the population.¹⁸

The transition from Stalinism to post-Stalinism in Bulgaria had two kinds of effects on the state security system. One concerned the incentives for informants to join the ranks of state security. Under a Stalinist system, infor-

14. S. S. Mironenko and N. Werth, eds., *Istoriya stalinskogo Gulaga: Konets 1920-kh–Pervaiya polovina 1950-kh godov* [The history of Stalin's gulag: Late 1920s–early 1950s] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004–2005); A. I. Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Gulag (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerrei) 1917–1960* [Gulag 1917–1960] (Moscow: Materik, 2000); and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

15. Memorandum from Yuri Andropov to Leonid Brezhnev, May 1968, in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), F. 89, Op. 51, Delo (D.) 3. On this, see also Yurii F. Lukin, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaya aktivnost' i protest v istorii sovetskogo obshchestva* [Social-political activity and protest in the history of Soviet society] (Arkhangelsk: Arkhangel'skii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut, 1991) and A. B. Bezborodov, M. M. Meier, and E. I. Pivovar, *Materialy po istorii dissidentskogo i pravozashchitnogo dvizheniya v SSSR 50-kh–80-kh godov* [Materials on the history of the dissident and human-rights movement in the USSR in the 1950s–1980s] (Moscow: Istoriko-arkhivnyi institut RGGU, 1994).

16. Alex Pravda, "East-West Interdependence and the Social Compact in Eastern Europe," in Morris Bornstein, Zvi Gitelman, and William Zimmerman, eds., *East-West Relations and the Future of Eastern Europe: Politics and Economics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 162–187; Linda J. Cook, *The Soviet Social Contract and Why It Failed: Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

17. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

18. Egor Gaidar, *Gibel' imperii: Uroki dlya sovremennoi Rossii* [Collapse of an empire: Lessons for contemporary Russia], 2nd ed. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007); Stephen Kotkin and Jan T. Gross, *The Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009); and Mark Kramer, "The Demise of the Soviet Bloc," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 788–855.

mants joined as a result of ideological conviction or, more typically, because of intimidation, although some were attracted by material considerations. In a post-Stalinist system, informants were recruited more on the basis of material interest than of intimidation. This change in incentives improved the ability of the regime to maintain a network of informants who were more likely to supply accurate information. In contrast to Iraq, where there was a constant obsession with recruiting more informants, post-Stalinist Bulgaria even engaged in the highly unusual step of pruning its informant network in order to increase the quality of the information gathered through it. The Bulgarian state security apparatus used this information to mete out targeted repression. The handling of political dissent through the use of targeted repression rather than mass terror was the second development. It meant that the preferred method of operation was the “prophylaxis” of dissidents. Prophylaxis entailed the intimidation of dissidents prior to their engaging in acts that would be classified as political crimes; state security could thus defuse dissent, rather than allowing dissidents to coalesce and form opposition groups. Counter-intuitively, the reorientation of state security to targeted repression meant that it could deal with isolated cases of discontent but not with widespread discontent, which required a reversion to indiscriminate mass repression. When such discontent emerged in the second half of the 1980s, state security registered it but could not counteract it.

But not all single-party autocracies move beyond the Stalinist stage. In Iraq, which never formally established a political system of a Stalinist type (there was no central planning, the private sector was allowed to grow in spite of so-called socialism, and ideology never played a dominating role as in Communist countries), the recognizably Stalinist governance practices of physical intimidation, including torture, continued to be used throughout the Ba‘th regime (Iraq also adopted a Stalinist-type cult of personality and used political commissars in the army). The Ba‘th was determined to ensure its longevity by creating a single-party system and setting up security organizations to prevent any opposition from ousting it. Sure enough, the Ba‘th stayed in power for 35 years (in part because of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980–1988, the invasion of Kuwait in 1991, and numerous military conflicts with the Kurdish population) and collapsed only as a result of the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Unlike East Germany or Hungary, the regime did not enjoy a “safety blanket” from a superpower that would intervene to crush any opposition. Thus the Iraqi establishment had to rely on itself to ensure coup-proofing and to recruit a large number of informants. In contrast to Communist countries, repression did not decline with the maturity of the regime. The Ba‘th’s durability stemmed from its dual policy: instilling fear on one hand and, on the

other hand, maintaining an extensive system of rewards and incentives for party members and supporters of the regime. Iraq, by all measures, remained a Stalinist system and never moved to a post-Stalinist stage.

In this article, we argue that despite these differences between Bulgaria and Iraq (one moved to a post-Stalinist stage of development, whereas the other did not), important structural similarities between the two countries justify our comparison. One concerns the role of the party in the two countries. Single-party regimes functioned quite similarly in the otherwise very different regional contexts of Eastern Europe and Iraq. Thus, Iraq was a mono-organizational system much like the Soviet Union. In both settings, despite a nominal commitment to democratic centralism, the system operated in a centralized, top-down fashion in which lower levels had to implement goals formulated at the apex of the pyramid.¹⁹ The BKP and the Iraqi Ba'ath party penetrated and dominated all social spheres, from religion to education to social organizations for women and youth.

Although the party's role in ensuring the loyalty of the population is worthy of deeper study, in this article we focus on a second avenue through which single-party regimes maintain their rule: the use of repression by the secret police. State security was organized and operated in largely similar ways in Bulgaria and Iraq, relying on informants to collect information. What differed were the strategies for selection, the type of information that was collected, and the use of that information. In Bulgaria, informants were carefully selected and rewarded for gathering fine-grained information. In Iraq, recruitment was less discriminating, resulting in less granular information. The use of the information gathered through these informant networks also differed. In Iraq, the regime was much more willing to use this information to mete out massive repression against opponents. In contrast, the Bulgarian regime became less repressive over time as it transitioned away from Stalinism. These similarities and differences and their implications for authoritarian durability are explored in the following two sections.

Our research contributes to two expanding lines of inquiry in political science and history. The first concerns the change in repression over the lifespan of authoritarian regimes. Our argument is consonant with seminal studies on the decline of repression in post-Stalinist regimes, as well as with recent analyses of the reorientation of the Stasi in the GDR from massive repression to surveillance after 1953.²⁰ Our findings parallel those of Stathis Kalyvas and

19. T. H. Rigby, "Stalinism and the Mono-Organizational Society," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999), pp. 53–76.

20. Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970); and Gary Bruce, "The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East

Jason Lyall, who make similar points about repression and the penetration of society by informants: when penetration increases, repression during civil wars and counterinsurgencies becomes targeted and selective.²¹ Our contribution through this paired comparison of Bulgaria and Iraq is to identify a mechanism that links these two literatures: we argue that the availability of more fine-grained information can explain both the decline of repression in post-Stalinist societies and the decline in the use of violence in communities that are penetrated by informants.

State Security in Communist Bulgaria, 1944–1962

During the first two decades after the BKP came to power, the Bulgarian regime most closely resembled classic Stalinism, with the system being entirely Stalinist until 1956 before going through a period of initial de-Stalinization in 1956–1962. From 1944 to 1962, the BKP used the repressive DS apparatus to accomplish two goals. The first was to eliminate the leaders of the organized opposition. The second was to counteract sporadic expressions of political dissent by individuals and small groups of citizens. The first goal was accomplished by 1948 through ruthless repression. Although the second goal was pursued in parallel with the first, it required a much longer time frame because of the technical difficulty of building an informant network capable of monitoring multiple segments of the population. Nevertheless, by the early 1960s, the BKP made a determination that the DS had lowered dissent to a level at which it could be managed without the use of mass repression. The last remaining labor camp was closed in 1962, thus marking Bulgaria's definitive transition to a post-Stalinist system, one in which surveillance became the dominant mode of dealing with political dissent. Iraq did not experience such changes in the operation of state security over time.

State security cannot deploy targeted repression without a network of informants. Although the Bulgarian DS had a substantial corps of full-time officers, one conclusion that emerges from research with the extensive Bulgarian archival materials is that the primary function of these full-time officers was the recruitment of informants and the processing of the reports they provided, rather than the collection of raw information. The important role of

Germany: Stasi Operations and Threat Perceptions, 1945–1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 3–31.

21. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Jason Lyall, "Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 104, No.1 (February 2010), pp. 1–20.

informants raises the questions of how they were selected and rewarded, what information they supplied, and how this information was used in targeting repression. The first two decades of Communist rule in Bulgaria provide us with an opportunity to address these questions by tracking changes in the size and composition of the informant network as state security pursued the twin goals of eliminating organized opposition and managing dissent.

In Bulgaria, which remained a constitutional monarchy until 1946, the ascent to power of the BKP was made possible by a coup that took place on 9 September 1944. Although the BKP was part of the coalition government that seized power through the coup, it did not possess numerical superiority in the cabinet. However, it controlled the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the Directorate of State Security was located within the Ministry of Internal Affairs). These two ministries allowed the BKP to consolidate power by eliminating three sources of existing or potential organized opposition to its rule. The first was the political, economic, and intellectual elite of the ancien régime: the council of regents (its members ruled on behalf of the king, who was born in 1937), cabinet ministers and deputies in the National Assembly, members of the military high command, and key industrialists and intellectuals who were accused of being Nazi collaborators. Barbaric repression was used, including the execution of as many as 30,000 people in late 1944 and the first several months of 1945 that resulted in the physical elimination of the old elite.²² The second potential challenger to the party was the army officer corps. Various organized groups of officers opposed to Communist rule emerged (e.g., Iron Fist, King Krum) or were consolidated (the Legionnaires). These were eliminated by the execution of their leaders and the mass discharge of officers loyal to these groups. The third threat to the BKP came from the opposition parties (which remained legal in Bulgaria until 1947) and from its coalition partners (which formed the Fatherland Front, a party coalition that ruled the country after the 1944 coup). The opposition parties were destroyed by physically eliminating their leaders, whereas the coalition partners of the BKP were forced either to join the Communists or to remain in the Fatherland Front, which was transformed into a toothless mass organization in 1948.

Informants played an important role in facilitating the destruction of organized opposition. The archival evidence indicates that because members

22. Dinyu Sharlanov, *Tiraniyata: Zhertvi i palachi* [Tyranny: Victims and Executioners] (Sofia: Strelets, 1997), p. 10. Others provide lower estimates. See, for example, Iskra Baeva and Evgeniya Kalinova, *Bulgarskite prekhodi: 1944–1999* [Bulgarian Transitions, 1944–1999] (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006); and Lyubomir Ognyanov, *Politicheskata sistema v Bulgariya: 1949–1956* [The Political System in Bulgaria, 1949–1956] (Sofia: Standart, 2008).

of the old elite had high visibility, informants were not always needed to identify “enemies of the people.” Nevertheless, denunciations played a role in at least some cases of repression, for example when a high-ranking police officer was denounced for being critical of a senior Ministry of Internal Affairs official.²³ But informants were essential for evaluating the loyalty of the officer corps. Such assessments were made by the Intelligence Department of the General Staff. Although prior to 1946 the defense minister was not a Communist (Damyán Velchev was a member of the opposition party Zveno), the head of the Intelligence Department, General Petar Vranchev, was a BKP member. Vranchev established a network of informants who gathered information on the political orientation of officers, on their participation in anti-Communist officer associations, and on coup plotting.²⁴ Informants were also essential for tracking the leaders of opposition parties. As early as September 1946 the DS boasted that it had penetrated the leadership of both the opposition parties and the coalition partners of the BKP in the Fatherland Front.²⁵ Multiple narrative reports of the daily activities and public pronouncements of all key political leaders have survived in the archives, revealing the extent to which all parties were infiltrated by DS informants.²⁶ The state security apparatus was essential for managing organized threats to Communist rule.

The management of dissent required systematic surveillance of a wide spectrum of groups: the clergy and churchgoers, intellectuals and students, ethnic minorities, sympathizers of the old regime and of the formerly existing opposition parties, peasants who opposed land collectivization, and fringe po-

23. “Report to the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs,” 5 December 1944, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, Arkhivna edinitsa (A. e.) 42, L. 23.

24. “Report from State Security in Plovdiv to State Security in Sofia,” 8 June 1945, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 159, L. 71; and “Report to the Minister of the Interior,” 4 August 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 295, Ll. 1–4.

25. “Report to the Director of the People’s Militia from the Head of the State Security Department,” 7 September 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 219, Ll. 1–7.

26. These are periodic (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly) reports on the activities of leading opposition figures. The reports include statements these individuals made. Daily reports also contain a detailed breakdown of their daily activities. See “Report No. 32 to the State Security Department of the Directorate of the People’s Militia,” 17 January 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 286, Ll. 23–24; “Report to the Head of State Security in Sofia,” 29 January 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 159, L. 6; “Report No. 98 to the State Security Department of the Directorate of the People’s Militia,” 2 April 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 264; “Denunciation from ‘G. P.’ Concerning the Situation in BANU Nikola Petkov,” 14 October 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 355, Ll. 4–5; “Statements by Nikola Petkov on Domestic and International Political Issues,” August 1946–May 1947, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 228, Ll. 4–6; and “Special Information No. 223 Concerning Conversations of M. Genovski and K. Lulchev,” 1 January 1948, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 1, A. e. 728, Ll. 1–3.

litical groups like the anarchists. To accomplish this, the DS needed an informant network that was both large in size and high in quality.

The size of the DS informant network grew from less than 1,000 in 1945 to as many as 55,000 by 1953.²⁷ This extraordinary rate of growth meant that some groups were thoroughly penetrated. Extensive informant networks existed within the Orthodox Church, as well as within the smaller Protestant and Catholic communities. The DS used the information from these networks to remove Exarch Stefan, the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and to organize a series of trials against Protestant and Catholic priests.²⁸ Such measures underscored the BKP's determination to weaken the major organized religions in Bulgaria. However, other groups were poorly penetrated. An important example is the ethnoreligious minorities of Bulgarian *pomaks* (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims) and the Bulgarian Turks (Turkish-speaking Muslims). Initially, the BKP did not include them on the list of groups with hostile attitudes toward the regime. But by the late 1940s, the party realized that the meager available information on the political attitudes of these minorities indicated that they did not support the regime. Turks openly opposed land collectivization, whereas *pomaks* were likely to participate in small resistance groups of so-called *goryani* (mountain people).²⁹ Given the durability of resistance among the Bulgarian Turks in particular to BKP policies, the DS took active steps to recruit more informants from among this minority, focusing on religious and community leaders.³⁰ The continuous growth of the in-

27. On 1945, see "Brief Report of Department A Concerning the Period from 9 September 1945 to 9 September 1946," 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 32, Ll. 1–8. On 1953, see Document No. 44 (TsDA, F. 1b, Op. 64, A. e. 185), in Veselin Angelov, ed., *Strogo sekretno: Dokumenti za deinostta na Durzhavna sigurnost (1944–1989)* [Top secret: Documents on the activities of State Security, 1944–1989] (Sofia: Simolini, 2007), p. 235.

28. See Documents No. 17, 19–20, 27, 50–52, 62–71, and 73, in Angelov, ed., *Strogo sekretno*. See also Momchil Metodiev, *Mezhdú vyanata i kompromisa: Bulgarskata pravoslavna tsurkva i komunisticheskata durzhava, 1944–1989* [Between faith and compromise: The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Communist state, 1944–1989] (Sofia: Ciela, 2010), esp. ch. 2; Daniela Kalkandzhieva, *Bulgarskata pravoslavna tsurkva i durzhavata, 1944–1953* [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the state, 1944–1953] (Sofia: Albatros, 1997); and Daniela Kalkandzhieva, *Bulgarskata pravoslavna tsurkva i "naradnata demokratiya," 1944–1953* [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and "people's democracy," 1944–1953] (Silistra, Bulgaria: Demos, 2002).

29. On the Turks, see Document No. 33, in Angelov, ed., *Strogo sekretno*. On the *pomaks*, see Documents No. 188–201, in Nedyalka Grozeva et al., eds., *Goryanite: Sbornik dokumenti, 1944–1949, Tom I* [Collection of documents on *goryani*, 1944–1949, volume one] (Sofia: Central State Archives, 2001), pp. 651–680.

30. "Top Secret Report on the Activities of the First Department of State Security in 1950," 11 January 1951, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 616, esp. Ll. 5, 10; and "Top Secret Report on the State of Agent-Operative Activities in the First Department," 12 March 1951, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 795, esp. Ll. 2–3. The DS's specific plans for penetrating minorities, dated 20 August 1952, can be found in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 970, Ll. 5–7.

formant network reflects the determination of state security to penetrate all social groups opposed to the regime: peasants who resisted land collectivization, intellectuals, and those sympathetic to the ancien régime.³¹

Yet, size did not equal quality. The high proportion of BKP members in the informant network diminished its effectiveness. Unless these individuals kept their party membership secret (a difficult thing to do), they appeared suspect to the groups on which they were supposed to spy and therefore provided information that had limited utility. To correct this problem, state security issued guidelines that prohibited the recruitment of party members to serve as agents (*agenti*) and informants (*informatori*), the categories of state security associates that received the most sensitive information-collection tasks (agents were given a greater degree of responsibility than informants, although in practice the distinction between the two was not clearly drawn; for simplicity, this article uses “informant” to refer to both categories unless further distinctions between the two subtypes are necessary).³²

Quality was also negatively affected by the method of recruiting informants. The archival records reveal that citizens were recruited through two main channels: blackmail and voluntary cooperation (the technical term for the latter was “recruitment on an ideological basis”). Informing in exchange for regular payments was rarely used when recruiting informants during the first two decades of Communist rule.³³ However, the absence of monetary inducements does not mean that those who informed had no incentives to do so. Those who volunteered entered a privileged circle of citizens with access to better jobs, better housing, and better services than those available to ordinary Bulgarians. In a planned economy, such non-monetary benefits acquired high importance. But these incentives were not provided to informants who were recruited through blackmail. Consequently, they supplied information reluctantly.³⁴ A concern that too many informants were recruited through blackmail was expressed as early as 1946; for example, one state security report stated that “we need to learn how to recruit through more flexible methods . . . open blackmail is naturally not always an effective method.”³⁵ Neverthe-

31. “Top Secret Report on the State of Agent-Operative Activities of the First Department,” 12 March 1951, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F 13, Op. 1, A. e. 795, L. 1–15.

32. “Memorandum,” 8 December 1953, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F 1, Op. 11, A. e. 11, Ll. 11–27. Communist Party members were allowed to serve as residents (*rezidenti*), a position equivalent to a manager of a group of agents and informants.

33. The use of regular payments is first mentioned in a 20 June 1962 recruitment instruction, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F 1, Op. 11, A. e. 49, L. 66.

34. “Top Secret Order of the Minister of the Interior Concerning Work with Agents and Measures for its Improvement,” 13 January 1957, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F 1, Op. 11, A. e. 31, Ll. 16–17.

35. “Report on the Organization and Activities of the State Security Department,” 7 September 1946, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F 1, Op. 1, A. e. 219, L. 2.

less, an assessment of the informant network in 1950 indicated that 54 percent of its members were still being recruited through blackmail.³⁶ Efforts to increase voluntary cooperation continued throughout the 1950s. Most effective in this regard were instructions to use blackmail only in exceptional cases.³⁷

The low quality of the informant network had a direct impact on the way in which dissent was handled. State security reports indicate that, when information was of insufficient quality, mass repression was used. Although this approach was favored in the 1940s, by the early 1950s there was a growing awareness that, in handling dissent, mass repressive measures were not as effective as targeted repression. The logic was simple: Mass repression was conducted without sufficient information, which meant that many of those who were arrested would eventually have to be released because of lack of evidence of a crime.³⁸ Mass repression also affected the wrong group of citizens. Workers, who occupied a privileged ideological space, would be targeted as “enemies of the people,” thus undermining the fragile social and ideological basis of the dictatorship.³⁹ The archival documents from Bulgaria reveal that as early as 1952, the DS already realized that resorting to mass arrests underscored the weakness of its informant network.⁴⁰ Thus, DS officials interpreted a decline in arrests as directly related to an improvement in the quality of the informant network. As one top-secret report notes, “Because of improvements in agent-operative and investigative work, unnecessary arrests have been greatly reduced.”⁴¹ The relationship between information quality and the incidence of repression is a major discovery that emerges from the Bulgarian archives and helps us to understand the subsequent changes that took place not only in Bulgaria but in all post-Stalinist regimes in which repression declined in favor of surveillance.⁴²

In an attempt to increase the quality of the information collected, in November 1953 the BKP Politburo took the unusual step of issuing an order to State Security to reduce the size of the informant network by one third and to stop the “harmful practice of indiscriminate recruitment of infor-

36. “Top Secret Report on the Activities of the First Department of State Security in 1950,” 11 January 1951, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 616, L. 13.

37. “Top Secret Order of the Minister of the Interior Concerning Work with Agents and Measures for its Improvement,” 20 June 1962, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 11, A. e. 49, L. 66.

38. Document No. 44 (8 November 1953; TsDA, F. 1b, Op. 64, A. e. 185), in Angelov, ed., *Strogo sekretno*, pp. 229–238.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236.

40. Document No. 42, in Angelov, ed., *Strogo sekretno*, p. 222.

41. Document No. 44, p. 235.

42. On this process in the German Democratic Republic, see Bruce, “The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East Germany,” pp. 3–31.

mants.”⁴³ This decision was made in light of a report to the Politburo by the minister of internal affairs, who stated that indiscriminate recruitment had lowered the overall quality and effectiveness of the informant network, which had to be reduced by 30 percent.⁴⁴ Following the Politburo decision, all informants were evaluated, and those whose work was deemed unsatisfactory were excluded from the ranks over the next year.⁴⁵ The cleanup was so extensive that in some areas of Bulgaria up to half of the existing informants were excluded. No similar decision on drastic reductions of the informant network in order to improve its quality was ever taken in Iraq under the Ba’th.

By the start of the 1960s, three factors had converged, enabling a transition from mass repression to surveillance and targeted repression in Bulgaria. The first was that the size of the “enemy contingent” was becoming known. Although the process of cataloging different groups of enemies started as early as 1947, it could not be completed until two other factors were in place: technical sophistication and a high-quality informant network.⁴⁶ In the 1950s, the DS acquired access to state-of-the-art surveillance technology that was used for telephone tapping, audio surveillance, and even video surveillance.⁴⁷ These technologies were added to the more traditional methods of human surveillance and mail control, thus producing considerable information about enemy activities.⁴⁸ However, the main improvement that enabled the transition to surveillance was the enhanced quality of the informant network, which allowed the DS to keep abreast of the regime’s political enemies.

Harsh repression gradually declined in the second half of the 1950s. One statistic is revealing about the magnitude of the change. A total of 23,531 individuals were sent to labor camps from 1944 to 1962, but the vast majority were interned in 1944–1956. Only 3,352 citizens were sent to the camps in

43. “Politburo Decision on the Activities and Tasks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Organs of State Security,” 21 November 1953, in TsDA, F. 1B, Op. 64, A. e. 185, L. 9.

44. “Politburo Decision on the Activities and Tasks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of State Security,” 8 November 1953, in TsDA, F. 1B, Op. 64, A. e. 185.

45. “Annual Report on the Work of State Security in 1954,” 30 March 1955, in AMVR, F. 1, Op. 5, A. e. 40.

46. “Top Secret Report on the State of Agent-Operative Activities of the First Department,” 12 March 1951, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 13, Op. 1, A. e. 795, L. 1.

47. On telephone tapping and audio surveillance, see “Memorandum of the First Department,” 7 February 1955, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 11, A. e. 22, Ll. 383–393. On video surveillance, see “Memorandum of the First Department,” 26 May 1962, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 11, A. e. 48, Ll. 224–239.

48. On these methods, see “Top Secret Order of the Minister of the Interior Concerning the External Monitoring of Persons of Interest to State Security,” 6 May 1957, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 11, A. e. 31, Ll. 274–295; and “Top Secret Order of the Minister of the Interior Concerning the Deployment of Measure No. 9,” 19 February 1957, in AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA-M, F. 1, Op. 11, A. e. 31, Ll. 165–173.

1956–1962.⁴⁹ Although mass arrests were still conducted (e.g., the action against hooliganism in 1958), the DS was reorienting itself toward surveillance and selective repression.⁵⁰ By 1962, only a single internment camp remained (in Lovech), and the BKP Politburo decided to close it after determining that repression there was unnecessarily harsh.⁵¹ The closure of the camp marked Bulgaria's transition to a mature post-Stalinist stage of political development in which repression was used sparingly even as the state security apparatus continued expanding in size and actively monitoring the population.

In the mature post-Stalinist system, massive arrests and imprisonment were used infrequently. This applied to the punishments imposed on both party members and non-members. BKP members were, of course, less likely to be punished. From 1960 to 1989, only 824 BKP members were punished for anti-state activities in Bulgaria as a result of investigations conducted by the Sixth Department of the DS's Sixth Directorate (until 1967, this entity was known as the Third Directorate). However, of these, only 50 were sentenced to prison terms and only 73 were interned. Most received internal party or administrative punishments (a warning, fine, or demotion).⁵² Non-party members were more likely to receive punishments. Nevertheless, such punishments were selectively administered. Thus, a top-secret report of the activity of the DS Sixth Directorate indicates that in 1972–1975, the directorate investigated 4,000 cases of enemy activity (the bulk of these concerned attempts to flee the country). However, the investigations resulted in the sentencing of only 76 people, the internment of another 57 people, and the entry of 274 people into the “operational reporting” system (individuals whose names were in the system had to be watched for future, potentially more serious, violations; some of them would also eventually be forced to cooperate with the authorities and would become informants of the secret police).⁵³ This is hardly the level of repression one would expect if Bulgaria had remained a Stalinist system.

By the 1970s most individuals engaging in anti-regime activity received

49. Penka Stoianova and Emil Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa: Vudvoryavaniya, trudova mobilizatsiya, izselvaniya v Bulgariya sled 1944 g.* [Politically dangerous persons: Internment, labor mobilization, and forced resettlement in Bulgaria after 1944] (Sofia: St. Kliment Okhridski University Press, 1991), p. 101.

50. The BKP Politburo decision of 21 January 1958 authorizing the DS to conduct arrests of “hooligans” is reprinted in Stoianova and Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa*, p. 155.

51. The BKP Politburo decision of 5 April 1962 is reprinted in Stoianova and Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa*, pp. 169–177.

52. Dimitur Ivanov, *Shesti otdel* [Sixth department] (Sofia: Trud, 2004), pp. 282–284.

53. Report Regarding the Work of the Sixth Directorate and the Assessments and Instructions Given by the Leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (1975), p. 8, in AMVR, F. 22, Op. 1, A. e. 22.

warnings and reprimands rather than prison sentences. This is consistent with the information-gathering function of the secret police, which was interested mostly in anticipating, preventing, and, above all, monitoring activity rather than in heavy-handed repression. Instead of repression, prophylaxis was used for most forms of dissent. Ideologically unsound elements were subjected to an escalating series of warnings and threats, which were aimed at dissuading them from engaging in “subversive” activities. On this dimension, the operation of the Bulgarian DS was similar to the operation of the Soviet KGB under Leonid Brezhnev, when prophylaxis rather than heavy-handed repression and imprisonment became the dominant form of dealing with dissent.⁵⁴ In Bulgaria, as in the Soviet Union and the GDR, the network of full-time state security employees and part-time informants was expanding, yet levels of repression were declining.⁵⁵ With access to higher-quality information, the regime did not have to use massive repression: targeted, strategically deployed, and infrequent repression was used to ensure regime survival.

Although targeted repression may have been adequate for dealing with discontent in times of political stability, it was incapable of neutralizing dissent in times of crisis when the size of the opposition rapidly expanded. The clearest example can be seen in the activity of Bulgarian state security in 1989, the year when Communist rule collapsed in Bulgaria.⁵⁶ On the one hand, available archival materials reveal that opposition groups were still thoroughly infiltrated by DS informants.⁵⁷ Therefore, the regime had at its disposal detailed information about the rapidly increasing dissent in Bulgarian society. On the other hand, because of both external circumstances (the Helsinki process and Soviet perestroika) and domestic trends (a growing human rights consciousness), the regime did not use heavy-handed tactics against the opposition. Some dissidents were arrested or detained for a brief while, but the number of dissident organizations nevertheless kept increasing, and their membership expanded throughout 1989.⁵⁸ Toleration of these dissident organizations, as well as the inability of the DS to suppress discontent among the Turkish minority, revealed the growing weakness of the repressive apparatus.

54. See, for example, “O nekotorykh itogakh predupreditel’no-profilakticheskoi raboty organov gosbezopasnosti,” 31 October 1975, in Volkogonov Papers (Cold War Studies, Harvard University), Box 28.

55. On the Soviet Union, see Martin K. Dimitrov, “Tracking Public Opinion under Authoritarianism: The Case of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev,” *Russian History*, forthcoming.

56. On this, also see *Durzhavna sigurnost i krayat na totalitarizma: Dokumentaleni sbornik* [State security and the end of Communism: A documentary collection] (Sofia: KRDOBGRSRSBNA, 2011).

57. Stefan Doinov, ed., *Shesto upravlenie sreshtu neformalnite organizatsii v Bulgariya 1988–1989* [The Sixth Directorate against informal organizations in Bulgaria, 1988–1989] (Sofia: Fondatsiya “Dr. Zheliu Zhelev,” 1999).

58. Ivanov, *Shesti otdel*, pp. 98–141.

When an ecological protest was organized in late October 1989, the participants were forcefully dispersed, but nobody was arrested (though some of the protesters were briefly detained).⁵⁹ When a repeat ecological protest with 4,000 participants took place on 3 November 1989, the authorities did not even attempt to disperse it. The Communist regime collapsed a week later, on 10 November 1989. A toleration of protests like the ones that occurred in 1989 would have been inconceivable during the Stalinist period until 1956 and during the period of initial de-Stalinization from 1956 to 1962, when similar expressions of dissent would have been met with ruthless repression.

State Security in Iraq under the Ba‘th

The survival of the Ba‘th Party and its leadership can be largely attributed to the party’s ability to expand and control the security apparatus. This system was established long before 1968, but Saddam Hussein perfected its working arrangements and used it in ways previously unknown in the history of Iraq. The security agencies were designed to overlap and were structured so as to ensure that no one agency would become strong enough to threaten the regime. During the years 1968–2003, four main agencies operated in Iraq; their importance varied during different periods of the regime, but from the early 1980s until the 2003 invasion, the SSO was the dominant agency.⁶⁰ The SSO was created in 1979 after Saddam Hussein assumed the presidency but became the most powerful agency after the first Gulf War and the uprising in the south. Saddam Hussein’s second son, Qusay, headed the SSO from the early 1990s until 2003. In addition, the party had its own security apparatus and was copied on many of the intelligence reports. Each intelligence agency, as well as the party apparatus had its own informants. The regime was determined from its early days not to allow any opposition to become a major threat. Saddam Hussein, who was in charge of the security services, and the Ba‘th Party had learned from the events of 1963 the perils of allowing an opposition to form.⁶¹ Hence, the regimes’ enemies, real and fictitious were not tolerated. In early 1969 the regime initiated the infamous trials of so-called

59. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

60. In addition to the SSO, the other main agencies were General Security, which dealt with internal affairs; General Military Intelligence, which was responsible for collecting intelligence on the military capabilities of countries bordering Iraq, as well as the Kurds in the north; and Iraqi Intelligence Services, which kept tabs on Iraqis abroad and on foreign intelligence services (in the 1990s, the agency was involved in illegal procurement for the military industry).

61. See, for example Hizb al-Ba‘th al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki, *Lamahat min nidhal al-Ba‘th 1947–1977* [Glimpses from the Ba‘th’s struggle, 1947–1977], 4th ed. (Baghdad: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1986), pp. 87–111.

spies that culminated in the public hangings of fourteen people, including nine Jews. The level of repression during the 35-year period of Ba'ath rule varied but not significantly. The enemies changed, but the overall strategy of uprooting any opposition remained constant. The system of informants and repression did not change dramatically before or after 1991. This can be clearly seen in the documents of the General Security concerning its operations in northern Iraq in the 1970s and 1980s. Given the constancy of repression, the Ba'ath regime focus on obtaining significant amounts of information on every aspect of its enemies without much regard to the quality of the information. Although the regime targeted different enemies during different periods, the files show that most of the information was short on specifics and hence repression was less discriminate.

The regime saw many enemies inside and outside Iraq. One of the Ba'ath Party documents identifies at least eight opposition movements inside the country: the Communist Party, the two Kurdish parties (the Kurdish Democratic Party, or KDP, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or PUK), the Da'wa Party, the Muslim Brothers, any movement that had "a religious cover," groups that had split from the Ba'ath Party, and any movement that pretended to be "nationalistic."⁶² Thus, the regime needed to gather enormous amounts of information about the country's citizens. Much like the Soviet system, it used censuses, detailed questionnaires, and a wide range of personal files to amass details about almost every individual in Iraq.⁶³ Printed forms were the essential method for documenting, administering, and controlling the Iraqi population during the decades of Ba'ath rule. These forms were created for every possible occasion. Together they meant a streamlined and relatively efficient system for monitoring citizens. Thus, in order to penetrate, monitor, and control society, the Ba'ath regime used every possible source of information to achieve its target, and all government offices were supposed to assist the security services in gathering information about the population or citizens living abroad.⁶⁴

62. Party Secretariat, "Statistics of Opposing Political Moments," 16 January 1990, in Ba'ath Regional Command Collection (*BRCC*), 003-3-7 (187). This form was part of the annual review of party members.

63. For a discussion of collecting information in the Soviet system, see Peter Holquist, "State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism," in David L. Hoffman, ed., *Stalinism: The Essential Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 129–156. On using censuses to gain information about families under surveillance, see *BRCC*, 004-4-3. Each employee in the public sector had a file containing all personal details, and the security organizations used these files widely. See, for example, the file of an official in the Iraqi Railways that contains hundreds of pages of information about his family, education, and employment, *BRCC*, 005-1-6 (001–220) and 005-4-5.

64. Cabinet Secretariat to Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, "Students Studying Abroad," 19 November 1998, in *BRCC*, 021-2-7 (583). This memorandum, concerning the intelligence services' efforts to rely on Iraqis studying abroad, was copied to all heads of intelligence services.

Iraq was no different from other tyrannical regimes in its reliance on informants and collaborators to ensure the loyalty of the populace. The terms *mu'tamin* (trusted) or *muta'awan* (collaborator) were given to people providing information to the authorities. The latter were sometimes also called "friends." Most informants were paid, but some supplied information on a quid pro quo basis. Usually, an officer from *al-amm* (General Security) would collate information from his informants and send two copies of his report to headquarters for review.⁶⁵ Before being enrolled, each informant would have to sign a *ta'hd khatti* (written commitment), which stated, inter alia, that the applicant must guard the principles of the Ba'th Party; commit to keep secret anything he or she would see, hear, or read; never expose his or her identity as an informant; and provide any information gathered or heard that might affect security.⁶⁶ Once an informant had been hired, his or her officer filed a weekly evaluation containing seven items: the number of reports presented about rumors; reports about specific information; the number of "friends" acquired during the week; initiatives taken by the informant; comments by his or her direct officer and the security officer of the district; and his or her overall evaluation.⁶⁷ The chain of command was clear: the security officer sent his report to the General Security branch in his province with a copy to the local branch of the party. Depending on how valuable the information was, the General Security and party branches would then send their reports to the headquarters in Baghdad and in certain cases to the presidential offices for review. In northern Iraq, because of the military activities in which the regime was engaged, numerous reports found their way to the military intelligence and presidential offices to coordinate military and security actions against Kurdish rebels.

No statistics are available on the number of informants and collaborators. We do know, however, that they were not all hapless, illiterate, or coerced into providing information.⁶⁸ A review of dozens of informants' files shows that they came from a broad range of socioeconomic strata and educational backgrounds. Some were driven to inform in return for an approval or a license; in one instance, a teacher agreed to become an informant in order to receive a license to open a bookshop; in another, a technical school graduate sought an approval to buy a photocopying machine so he could provide copying services

65. Arbil *amm* to *al-amm* Directors of Governorate "Activities," 6 March 1988, in *North Iraq Dataset* (NIDS), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) 005, Box 019 (70067).

66. See, for example, *ta'hd khatti*, signed by an informant in northern Iraq, in NIDS, PUK 003, Box 0008, (10042); and by an informant in Baghdad, in BRCC, 007-3-5 (004).

67. "Weekly Evaluation Form," 1 February 1986, in NIDS, PUK 002, Box 004 (310002–310004).

68. See Isam al-Khafaji, "State Terror and the Degradation of Politics in Iraq," *Middle East Report*, No. 176 (May–June 1992), p. 16.

to commercial offices. The informants were drawn from all religions and nationalities (the majority in the north were Kurds), and some belonged to opposition political movements and became informants under coercion or in response to persuasion.⁶⁹ In some cases, a threat was made during the forceful interrogations that took place after someone was caught. In other cases, the prospective collaborator's close relatives were threatened.⁷⁰ One father broke down during his interrogation and provided information about his two sons who had absconded from their military service and four relatives who were with the KDP.⁷¹ In some instances, families were pressured to ask their relatives to return to Iraq or surrender themselves to the authorities.⁷² In regimes such as Iraq under the Ba'ath Party, denouncing a relative or a spouse was sometimes the only course of action for somebody who wanted to survive once in the hands of the security forces.

Some informants supplied information out of a conviction that the regime's policies were correct and should be supported. In one instance, a housewife who finished primary school was willing not only to inform but to donate gold to the war effort against Iran. She volunteered information because she believed the PUK's policies were detrimental to the interests of the region.⁷³ Some informants volunteered information out of a grudge against a friend or a neighbor or to settle a score, which is akin to practices in other authoritarian regimes. One anonymous citizen sent a letter to *al-Thawrah* (the party's official newspaper), which in turn forwarded the letter to the SSO. It contained information about the connection of an employee in the presidential palace to the Da'wa Party. In response, the SSO, after investigating the matter, placed the employee under permanent surveillance.⁷⁴

69. For example, one informant was put to work within the Communist Party in Halabja in 1986. See *NIDS*, PUK 038, Box 229 (320003–320008). An informant who was in the PUK and “returned to the national front” was debriefed and sent back to report on his cell. See PUK 017, Box 069 (340013–340016).

70. One informant was asked to write a report on the KDP and its connections with the Communist Party in the region. In addition, he was told to bring in any pamphlets or brochures that either party distributed. See *NIDS*, PUK 008, Box 031 (41003–410020). The *al-amm* report does not specify how the family was influenced (410024–410025).

71. *Amn* Arbil to Headquarters, 8 October 1985, in *NIDS*, PUK 008, Box 031 (410028).

72. In one case, the father of a Kurd from Suleimaniyya was forced to contact his son in Holland to seek his return. See Director of *amm* Suleimaniyya, “Information,” 2 October 1988, in *NIDS*, PUK 045, Box 283 (30058).

73. Letter from B. to *amm* Suleimaniyya, 19 January 1988, in *NIDS*, PUK 038, Box 227. There are numerous files on informants in *NIDS* and some in *BRCC*.

74. SSO Directorate, “Information,” 9 October 1989, *BRCC*, 003-4-4 (009–011). Other repressive authoritarian regimes used similar tactics. See, for example, Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–89* (London: Hurst, 2006), pp. 392–395. Intriguingly, Saddam Hussein opined that the “best source of accurate information” was his regular meetings

The Ba'ath regime, realizing the importance of informants as a source of information, took steps to protect its agents around the country. A law promulgated in July 1979, called Protecting *al-mu'taminin* in Defending the Revolution, defined *al-mu'tamin* as any individual working with or without pay for any of the security agencies. The law outlined the benefits an informant could receive, including pension rights and compensation for disability or death in the course of action. Such benefits were conditional on the individual being deemed valuable by the security organization responsible for him or her. The law created three payment levels for informants, which were decided by the director of the security agency.⁷⁵ Thus, in addition to gaining protection and such ancillary benefits as licenses or approvals for requests, informants were rewarded financially. Some informants who were caught by "the enemies of the revolution" were rewarded on their release, or their families received a special payment if they were killed.⁷⁶

With the passage of time, the number of informants increased. In the 1990s, after the First Gulf War, the ability to plant informants in the north was reduced and the regime put more emphasis on southern Iraq and religious activities. The severe sanctions imposed on Iraq after 1991 played into the hands of the regime, as the economy deteriorated dramatically, thus making large numbers of middle-class citizens vulnerable and willing to provide information to the regime. The vast majority of informants were paid monthly wages, which were correlated to the value of their input. The *North Iraq Dataset (NIDS)* documents in particular contain dozens of files pertaining to the monthly payment of informants and their acknowledgments of receipt. Most of the receipts do not have the full name of the *mu'tamin*, and in many cases an alias was used in the correspondence between the different *amn* directories.⁷⁷ The *al-amn* officer in charge of payments for informants also distributed the salaries of the village *mukhtars* (mayors) in the region, illustrat-

with the Iraqi people, which took place on an almost daily basis. See U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "Saddam Hussein talks to the FBI," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 279, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm>. Twenty interviews and five casual conversations were conducted with "Detainee No. 1" during 2004, after his capture by American forces. The interrogation of Saddam Hussein was conducted by an Arabic-speaking FBI agent, George Piro, who managed to establish a rapport with Saddam Hussein. The former head of state even wrote Piro a poem thanking him and comparing him to a son. See Casual Conversation, 10 May 2004 in *ibid*.

75. *Al-Waqa'i' al-'Iraqiya* [Iraqi Official Gazette], No. 2720 (9 July 1979), pp. 785–788.

76. SSO Directorate to Presidential *diwan*, "Citizen R.," 1 December 1995, in *BRCC*, B 001-2-1 (174). The memorandum indicates that a Kurdish woman who was very helpful to the SSO was arrested by Kurdish forces and tortured. Hence, the SSO recommended that she be given a new apartment in which to live.

77. See, for example, *NIDS*, KDP 013, Box 2143; and *NIDS*, PUK 044, Box 279.

ing the extent to which the security forces permeated every aspect of life in Iraq.⁷⁸

Reports by informants encompassed all the enemies of the state, including the Kurdish movements and opposition parties.⁷⁹ Sometimes when political activists were arrested but refused to acknowledge their “crimes,” the state security organs would try to force them into confessing by confronting them with the informants who had reported on them.⁸⁰ Because the regime was fundamentally wary of religious tendencies, any individual or group who subscribed to a religious ideology or held strong Islamic beliefs was also placed under surveillance. Informants reported on men who frequented mosques and distributed religious books or pamphlets, and the details of Friday sermons were sent by informants to their security officers.⁸¹

Dealing with deserters from the army and military service, whose numbers increased dramatically throughout the war with Iran and later in the 1990s, was another major area in which the role of informants was significant—for example, in supplying information to the authorities about deserters’ whereabouts, a task made easier because the informants were living in the same localities as the deserters.⁸² Denigrating military service also met with a harsh reaction. In one meeting of a group of women, a participant who said that “anyone serving the military is a loser,” was immediately reported by another participant.⁸³ Similarly, demeaning or swearing at the president or his family was immediately reported by informants.⁸⁴

The economy was another fertile area for informants, who were supposed to report on black market activities or related topics such as counterfeit currency. In one example of how informants worked, a taxi driver in Baghdad managed to get his passenger to discuss economic affairs and found out that

78. *Amn* Arbil to All Directorates, “Salaries for *mukhtar*in and *mu’tamin*in,” 26 September 1989, in *NIDS*, PUK 008, Box 031 (1260033). According to one list, 22 mayors were on the payroll of *al-amm* (1260018–1260019).

79. See, for example, a report about a senior member of the Communist Party sent by the informant to *amm* Sarjanar in northern Iraq, 16 November 1990, in *NIDS*, PUK 030, Box 149 (750005–750007); and a report on the activities of members of the Da’wa Party in Basra, 12 November 1986, in *BRCC*, 003-2-7 (019–022).

80. Salah al-Hadidi, *Qabdh al-Huda: Hussein Jalugan Tarikh wa Ribla* [The hand of the guidance: Hussein Jalugan history and a journey], 2nd ed. (Karbala, Iraq: al-Hadidi Center for Studies and Research, 2009), pp. 124–125.

81. See, for example, Party Secretariat to Intelligence Service, “Information,” 11 October 1992, in *BRCC*, 005-1-2 (192) and (307).

82. Branch of Khalid bin al-Walid, Baghdad, “Death Incident of a Deserter,” 6 September 1992, in *BRCC*, 033-1-6 (047).

83. Al-Karrada Section, “Report,” 30 August 1992, in *BRCC*, 005-1-2 (313–314).

84. Branch of Khalid bin al-Walid, Baghdad, “Death Incident of a Deserter,” 6 September 1992, in *BRCC*, 033-1-6 (047).

he was involved in dealing in forged currency.⁸⁵ Any manipulation of fruit and vegetable prices was also recorded by informants and sent to the officers in charge of economic affairs.⁸⁶ Saddam Hussein believed that informants should be everywhere; for example, when a citizen wrote to a newspaper complaining about the increased number of stolen cars, the leader was baffled that the regime did not have enough agents among car dealers who would report on stolen cars.⁸⁷

Informants were also given the task of reporting on rumors, as these were an important source of information for the Ba'ath about people's feelings on current issues.⁸⁸ Like other authoritarian regimes, the Ba'ath collected information about public opinion through eavesdropping and surveillance, whether on the streets or in offices and shops.⁸⁹ The Iraqi authorities paid attention to these rumors, as did the Soviet regime under Stalin. After all, rumors are prevalent in times of crisis, and the regime wanted to know whether they originated from resistance groups and, if so, how to control the damage and trace the source.⁹⁰ Thus an informant's skill in reporting about rumors was essential to his or her evaluation and resulting wage. For each rumor, the informant had to file a form stating details about the rumor, such as the location and milieu of its dissemination and the date it began to be spread. The officer in charge would then "analyze" the rumor and recommend how to deal with it.⁹¹ Informants were rarely asked to spread rumors on behalf of the regime, as this lay more within the realm of party affiliates who could be relied on to execute such a mission properly.

In systems such as the Ba'ath in Iraq, almost every citizen was forced to be a watchdog and informant for the regime because not reporting a "suspicious" act, even one committed by a family member, was itself a crime. In one interesting story from the files, a loyal employee of the SSO who had participated

85. Security Officer to *al-ann*, "Information," 2 September 1992, in *BRCC*, 005-1-2 (309–310).

86. Party Secretariat to General Headquarters of *al-ann*, "Information," 22 September 1992, in *BRCC*, 005-1-2 (281).

87. Presidential Secretary to Ministry of Internal Affairs and Party Secretariat, 23 August 1998, in *BRCC*, 021-2-7 (617–618). This complaint shows how the regime took seriously letters to the newspapers. Saddam Hussein's interference in the matter is a classic example of his micromanagement style.

88. For an interesting discourse on rumor as a source of information, see Pierre Darle, *Saddam Hussein maître des mots: Du langage de la tyrannie à la tyrannie du langage* [Saddam Hussein the master of words: From the language of tyranny to the tyranny of language] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), pp. 135–143.

89. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 164.

90. For the importance of rumors during the Stalin era, see Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin 1939–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

91. See a 1993 file containing many rumors, forms for those rumors, and comments by security officers, in *BRCC*, 005-3-3.

in its so-called secret missions, including missions in his own neighborhood, reported to his superiors that his brother, who had been sent to England to study aeronautical engineering, had not returned to the country in spite of having completed his studies. The brother had married an English woman and had fathered two children with her. The employee was put under surveillance, but no signs of disloyalty were uncovered. The matter was raised to the highest level, and President Saddam Hussein decided that the employee, despite his unblemished record of loyalty and service to the party and the SSO, would be transferred outside the SSO and be monitored by the security agencies. The employee, also under pressure from the SSO, wrote to his brother, urging him to return to Iraq to serve his country, but the brother refused.⁹² This story shows us two things: how members of families were forced to inform on and denounce one another to protect themselves; and the level of the regime's paranoia about anything foreign that might "contaminate" even loyal officers of the regime.

The regime, and in particular its leader, Saddam Hussein, had clear ideas about security and intelligence gathering: "The security man must have knowledge of his environment . . . and he must gather all details, large and small about his surroundings."⁹³ "Understanding how opposition parties and movements inside and outside the country are structured" and "how these movements recruited and how they transferred information to their followers" was essential to the success of the security personnel.⁹⁴

So much information, from diverse sources, flowed into the security organizations that in many cases they admitted they were arresting and interrogating the wrong people. In one memorandum the director of *al-amn* urged security officers to be more thorough in their investigations before rushing to arrest innocent citizens.⁹⁵ The massive and indiscriminate arrests that took place in Iraq throughout the 1980s and 1990s were an important feature of repression under Saddam Hussein. Hostile activities in northern Iraq by the Kurds occupied the energy and resources of the security forces, particularly during the 1980s. The *NIDS* documents contain hundreds of files portraying in graphic terms how the information was used by the regime: suspects were followed, arrested, investigated, sent to prison, or even executed as a result of

92. Director of SSO to the President, "M.A.," 22 January 1990, in *BRCC*, B 001-4-4 (072-076).

93. From the "Security Commandments of the President Leader (May God Protect Him)," compiled 21 July 1994, in *BRCC*, B 002-3-6 (057-059).

94. See Draft memorandum, n.d., in *NIDS*, PUK 007, Box 025 (120002-120009). This draft of a memorandum was written on the stationery of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in northern Iraq, without the name of the author or the recipient. The document is also undated, although the file in which it was found is dated 1988.

95. Director of *amn* Arbil to All Security Officers, "Guidelines," 2 January 1983, in *NIDS*, PUK 011, Box 046 (550028).

information received about them.⁹⁶ There is no doubt that informants played an important role in facilitating the control of Iraqi society. Their contributions to the capture of many deserters from the army are clearly in evidence in the documents, and they were an important ingredient in making the security organizations in Iraq “as much a state of mind as the instrument of state terror,” similar to the Romanian *Securitate* under Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Soviet state security apparatus under Stalin.⁹⁷ Our point is not that the regime’s durability depended solely on the informants, but that the regime managed to create different layers of control, including the security services, informant networks, a cult of personality around Saddam Hussein, and, not least, an extensive system of rewards for its supporters. The informants enabled the security services to deploy repression effectively and thus prolong the durability of the regime.

Conclusion

In looking at Communist Bulgaria and Iraq under the Ba’th Party, we found that although they shared many common characteristics they diverged in the last stages of their rule. Institutionally, they shared the salient features of a single party and a security apparatus that bolstered one-party rule. For both systems, gathering information played a critical role in ensuring regime stability and durability, and in both countries informants were key players in the process of penetrating and controlling society. Fear and violence were additional essential elements that sustained these regimes, but in Iraq the level of violence against the population did not recede, unlike in post-Stalinist Bulgaria, where state security adopted targeted repression as its *modus operandi* by the early 1960s. In Bulgaria, the gradual availability of more fine-grained information led to a reorientation from indiscriminate repression to selective repression. The Bulgarian regime eventually collapsed, whereas the Ba’th was dislodged from power only through a foreign invasion. This divergence in outcome is a result of exogenous and endogenous factors. International pressure in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s on countries such as Bulgaria to protect human rights and to open their societies changed the basic structure of the regimes in Eastern Europe. Violence and repression gradually decreased. Opposition movements and civil societies emerged, making demands on the regime for the protection of human and minority rights that culminated with the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

96. See, for example, *NIDS*, PUK 006, Boxes 021–022; and *NIDS*, PUK 001, Box 001.

97. Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, p. 393.

Thus the contrast between the two countries derives from the fact that new concepts of civil rights were developing in Bulgaria, whereas in Iraq the wars and sanctions following the invasion of Kuwait made the country more resistant to pressure from the outside, and any foreign influence continued to be seen, in the mode of a Stalinist regime, as dangerous and undesirable. Internally, as a result of those exogenous dynamics, Bulgarians became less afraid and more willing to push the boundaries of freedom. Because Bulgarian leaders also had to contend with a restive ethnic minority, they found themselves unable to use massive repression in a way that would preserve the system. Having moved toward selective repression, the DS could not deal with widespread discontent.

In Iraq, by contrast, extreme coercion persisted because the country underwent endless turmoil, and the Ba'ath leaders were determined to weed out any opposition that could be seen as threatening. The Iraqi security apparatus retained its ability to mete out repression in an effective manner, thus enabling the regime to preserve its tight control of society. Throughout the 1990s and until the invasion of 2003, the Ba'ath Party sustained its dual policy of instilling fear while broadening recruitment through rewards and incentives. Saddam Hussein's regime even managed to expand recruitment to the Ba'ath Party, and by taking advantage of the international sanctions it established large networks of support through economic incentives. Indeed, it is doubtful that the regime would have collapsed on its own if the invasion had not taken place. By 2003, the Iraqi regime was secure in its ability to control any serious opposition, and the economic climate had improved in spite of the punitive sanctions.

A key question raised by this article is whether Iraq would have followed the footsteps of Bulgaria had it not entered those wars and endured their harsh results. Could Iraq have become more open and susceptible to outside influence? Might repression have receded in the same manner it did in Bulgaria and other Communist countries in Europe after 1956? The case of other autocratic regimes in the Arab world, such as Syria and Libya, which did not withstand the horrors of war that Iraq experienced, suggests the answer is far from clear. In the Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, the exogenous factors were and are relatively weak in comparison to the international pressure exerted on the Communist countries during the Cold War.

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