

BOOK REVIEW

The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands

Statiev, Alexander. *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2013. Paperback: 386 pages. ISBN-10: 1107616476; ISBN-13: 978-1107616479.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

There is much newly available literature concerning the resistance to Soviet reabsorption of the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) back into the Soviet Union after World War II. They (the "Forest Brothers" group and others) fought guerrilla wars against the Soviet occupation until well into the 1950s and then transitioned into a nonviolent underground to continue their struggle when it was obvious that no Western support was coming to their aid. This series of unconventional wars has produced several books by guerrilla fighters, some of which have been reviewed in this journal.^{1,2} Much has been made of this style of warfare as being a possible response to current Russian "hybrid warfare" pressure on Eastern NATO countries.³

However, what of the other side of this fight, the Soviet Counterinsurgency side? Few write about guerrilla war and even fewer seem to write about counterinsurgency. The Soviet Union's annexation of Western borderlands at the end of World War II sparked fierce insurgencies in both Western Ukraine and the Baltic states. The author draws extensively on newly opened Russian archival sources to provide a detailed account of Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine. No previous study in English has addressed this topic as well. He has obviously done a large amount of research, especially on numbers of insurgents, counterinsurgents, and casualty figures. The book has numerous tables and figures to include death rates of guerrillas. Because of the nontransparency of Soviet history, this violent pacification of Soviet borderlands occurring at the end of World War II has not been well documented until now. This is the first comprehensive study of Soviet counterinsurgency that ties together the security tools and populist policies, including religion, intended to attract and/or subdue the local populations.

Soviet counterinsurgency efforts are explored in detail from origin, to composition, to conduct as well as delineating the techniques employed by KGB Special Forces. Some parallels to the American Phoenix Project (targeted assassination and black operations) in the Vietnam conflict are evident. The

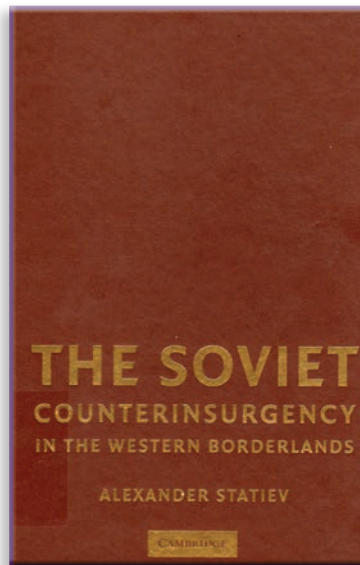
author connects the history of pre-Soviet and early Soviet-era rebellions with the often Nazi-collaborating background of the postwar guerillas and their leaders. Russian is criticizing a current film on the Forest Brothers made by NATO⁴ with a countering Russian news video report entitled "NATO promotes armed resistance."⁵ At the time, the West vainly sought to turn these insurgencies into early "contra-style" forces but gave no outside (CIA) support to the logistics of these revolts behind the "iron curtain" which sentenced them to certain defeat. Afterward, the insurgents turned to nonviolent mass action and political deal making, not insurgent armies.

This book is an excellent introduction to the soviet policy for dealing with partisans, guerillas, and banditry with draconian methods of counterinsurgency, pacification, and gulag exile. As a byproduct, it gives a detailed look at Nazi antipartisan operations and doctrine employed in the borderlands during World War II. Particularly good is Chapter 9, on police tactics, which focuses on the tactics, techniques, and procedures used, to include Soviet use of pseudo-operations and units to penetrate, isolate, and eliminate the partisan and guerrilla human and physical infrastructure. Overall, this book has every-

thing you might want to know about the way the Soviets, or the Russians, do, or did, counterinsurgency warfare.

References

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