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**Simo Mikkonen.** "Exploiting the Exiles: Soviet Émigrés in U.S. Cold War Strategy." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:2 (Spring 2012): 98-127. DOI: 10.1162/JCWS\_a\_00222.

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Reviewed by **Hugh Wilford**, California State University, Long Beach

Recent years have seen a veritable flood of books about Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), the Cold War broadcasting operations funded for roughly the first two decades of their existence, via the Free Europe Committee (FEC) and American Committee for Liberation (AMCOMLIB), by the CIA. Many of these works have been written by former employees of the two stations and, while containing much valuable material, have tended, not surprisingly, toward the celebratory, often arguing, whether explicitly or implicitly, that RFE and RL broadcasts behind the Iron Curtain made a decisive contribution to western victory in the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Associated with this literary outpouring is a huge interest among government officials and policy-oriented think-tanks in the lessons that might be learned for our own age from this earlier venture in ideological warfare, especially with regard to the West's confrontation with radical Islamism. There is a major project underway to preserve and catalog RFE/RL's broadcast archives and corporate records at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and an apparent responsiveness on the part of the CIA to Freedom of Information Act requests for Agency records relating to the subject. In spring of 2012, the Cold War International History Project based at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars released an e-dossier consisting mainly of CIA documents made available to former RFE director A. Ross Johnson in the course of his research for a book about the two stations.<sup>2</sup> This is a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> A. Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2010); e-Dossier No. 32, "Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty," CWIHP, Wilson Center, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-32-radio-free-europe-and-radio-liberty>.

remarkable collection, perhaps unrivaled as a body of primary sources documenting the relationship between the CIA and an Agency ‘front’ operation (I say this as the author of a study of CIA Cold War front organizations and many relatively fruitless FOIA requests for the relevant Agency records).

With all this rather rose-tinted interest in the CIA’s Cold War broadcast operations, it is a little refreshing to come across an article concerned with another, and less successful, aspect of RL’s parent organization, AMCOMLIB: its efforts to organize Soviet exiles into a unified force capable of waging political warfare against the Soviet Union. Simo Mikkonen begins by briefly examining U.S. officials’ first experience with communist-bloc émigrés in the late 1940s, the Free Europe Committee’s initial efforts to organize Eastern European as opposed to Soviet exiles, then the shift to a focus on the latter before shifting his attention to the effort to organize the Soviet émigrés themselves – ironically prompted in part by communist attacks on Russian defectors such as Viktor Kravchenko – that culminated in the launch of AMCOMLIB in 1951. Next, he anatomizes the émigré Russian population on which AMCOMLIB sought to draw, noting its internal divisions between first-wave, pre-Soviet and Soviet-era cohorts, and the welter of associated intra-mural political disputes between groups such as the leftist anti-Bolsheviks in New York, the Mensheviks, and the *Narodno-Trudovoi Soyuz* NTS, conservative Great Russians based in West Germany. The following sections narrate the attempts by AMCOMLIB officials during the early 1950s to bring together the several Russian groups, then representatives of the minority Soviet nationalities at a series of conferences in various German towns. This effort, Mikkonen explains, was bedeviled from the outset by conflict between the Russian and non-Russian delegations over such issues as the independence of the individual minority nations after the hoped-for dissolution of the Soviet empire, and tensions arising from the Great Russians’ assumption that they were the natural leaders of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. The Americans attempted to impose some order on this chaotic scene by tactically granting and withholding funding, and making basically incompatible promises to different groups, before eventually despairing of the possibility of creating a unified émigré front and deciding instead to work with the exiles on an individual basis and to concentrate on the launch of an anti-Soviet broadcast operation – Radio Liberation (later Radio Liberty). As Mikkonen concludes, the U.S. Cold War strategy of exploiting the émigrés had been undone by their fractiousness and the resulting inability of U.S. officials ever fully to control them.

Mikkonen’s account has a number of fine qualities, including the clarity of its exposition of the complex organizational maneuverings of the Soviet exiles, and quite a lot of new detail about the individual groups involved and the negotiations between U.S. officials and them, much of it mined from an extremely revealing June 1956 report on AMCOMLIB’s operations discovered among the Arch Puddington Papers at the Hoover Institution.

(Incidentally, in his 2009 monograph *Political Warfare against the Kremlin*, Lowell H. Schwartz identifies the author of this document as CIA officer William Cates.)<sup>3</sup>

Beyond this welcome attention to the motives and actions of the exiles themselves, the article tends to confirm rather than challenge the main findings of earlier studies of U.S. front émigré operations, which placed similar emphasis on the problems and contradictions of American attempts to unify the emigration, and the ungovernability of the exiles.<sup>4</sup> A major dimension of AMCOMLIB's program that was recently revealed in Ian Johnson's *A Mosque in Munich*, involving CIA efforts specifically to organize refugee Turkic Muslims as an anti-Soviet force, and the Nazi antecedents of this effort, is regrettably not covered here.<sup>5</sup> And the portrayal of the relationship between the exiles and the American officials who sought to mobilize them would have been greatly enriched by the slew of declassified U.S. government documents made available to A. Ross Johnson and published by the Wilson Center, including as they do previously unseen memoranda by the likes of Frank Wisner and Tom Braden, the CIA officers who oversaw the Agency's émigré program, or QKACTIVE as it was codenamed (among the revelations in the Johnson documents is the fact that the CIA effectively sacked AMCOMLIB president Admiral Leslie Stevens in 1954 due to his refusal to surrender the original vision of a united emigration).<sup>6</sup>

Still, it would seem uncharitable to reproach Mikkonen for having failed to incorporate in his article documents that have only just been made generally available to researchers in a somewhat unusual manner. Indeed, it might be more fitting to sympathize with a clearly able historian working in a field in which vital primary sources are made available to some and withheld from others. Ongoing issues relating to selectivity in the declassification of CIA records and the granting of institutional support to researchers working in the area raise discomfiting questions about the possibility of ever arriving at a truly complete and objective understanding of the secret history of the Cold War.

**Hugh Wilford** is the author of *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (1995), *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (2003), *The U.S.*

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<sup>3</sup> Lowell H. Schwartz, *Political Warfare against the Kremlin: U.S. and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 248, fn. 8.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Eric Thomas Chester, *Covert Network: Progressives, the International Rescue Committee, and the CIA* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), chap. 5; Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 127-35; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), chap. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> A. Ross Johnson, 33.

*Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State-Private Network* (2006, co-edited with Helen Laville,) and *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (2008). His latest book, about the CIA and the Middle East during the early years of the Cold War, will be published by Basic Books in Fall 2013.

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