

FINNISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICE: AN OVERVIEW

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Intelligence organizations can be considered a necessary part of the state. They operate in symbiosis with governments and have to adapt to current political situations, budgets and other changing elements. Finnish intelligence services can be traced to the First World War, when the Finnish activists, who were working against Russia, established an intelligence bureau in Stockholm, Sweden. The Russian gendarme administration observed activist and other separatist movements. The period under Russian rule, the independence of Finland in 1917 and especially the Civil War in 1918 had impact on Finnish intelligence.

When building the Finnish intelligence organizations the model was taken from Germany. At first the military and civil intelligence were under the Finnish General Staff, but in 1919 the Finnish intelligence organization was divided. The Finnish military intelligence was still under the General Staff and a new intelligence organization, the Detective Central Police (Etsivä keskuspoliisi), under the Ministry of Interior, take control over the civil intelligence.

Main targets of Finnish intelligence were Finnish communists who were planning a coup d'état and the Soviet Union, which was the main foreign threat to Finland. In 1920s and 1930s intelligence and espionage activity on the eastern border of Finland was busy. At the end of 1930s the political atmosphere in Europe was very tense and as the Second World War broke out, the situation in Finland became unsecure. The Soviet Union attacked Finland in November 1939. During the Winter War 1939–1940 the Finnish SIGINT was effective and useful in the main battles. During the Interim Peace Finnish intelligence stayed on higher gear than before the Winter War. Recon patrols were sent over the Finnish-Russian border and co-operation with the Germans was more intense. When the Continuation War began in June 1941 the Finnish intelligence was better prepared.

At the end of the Continuation War the famous Finnish intelligence operation Stella Polaris began. In the operation many intelligence officers and SIGINT equipment were transferred to Sweden. Finland prepared

possible guerrilla warfare in Finland. If the Soviet Union conquered Finland domestic communist and their possible coup d'état were a threat. The years 1944–1948 are therefore known as the Years of Peril. Not at least because Finnish communists took control over the Finnish State Police (Valtiollinen poliisi, successor of the Detective Central Police), which became the so-called Red State Police. It concentrated its work on the political right.

The political situation was stabilized at the end of the 1940's. In 1949 a new Security Police (Suojelupoliisi, SUPO) replaced the Red State Police. In the 1950's Finnish intelligence organizations, the Finnish Military Intelligence and SUPO, were building their basic infrastructure. In 1950 the Finnish SIGINT began its work after operation Stella Polaris. The knowledge of signal intelligence was not lost, although during Stella Polaris the major part of the material had been destroyed or transferred. In 1960 the Finnish SIGINT organization (Viestikoelaitos) was established.¹ Finland's geopolitical situation made it possible to use technical equipment and surveillance towards east.

During the Cold War Finland was a neutral country, where both main belligerents of the Cold War, the Russian and the Western intelligence organizations, operated.² The Finnish intelligence organizations operated on that premise. As a small country Finland used its resources wisely. It used normal intelligence methods as OSINT, but also co-operated with the Scandinavian countries, the USA, Great Britain and other western countries. Finland, which main focus was on the Soviet Union, got useful equipment and knowhow from the West.³ Finland's geographical situation was useful and it was used in different operations.

For political reasons only few spy cases came to the public in Finland. It has been said that the Security Police was the president's police, especially during the presidency of Urho Kekkonen, and it was the president who decided which cases would be investigated and prosecuted. The role of the Security Police changed after the end of the Cold War.⁴ At the beginning of 1990's espionage in Finland declined, obviously because of the decline of the Soviet Union. Although the previous main enemy, the Soviet Union, did not exist any more the Security Policy was needed, because there were new threats to be considered.⁵ The rise of espionage activity in Finland in the middle of the 1990's was considered to be a result of the Finnish membership of the European Union in 1995.⁶ More than ten years later, the leading newspaper Helsingin

¹ Suominen, Pertti, *Armeijan silmänä ja korvana. Tiedustelupäällikkö Raimo Heiskanen*, Helsinki 2012, p.183–184.

² Simola, Matti & Salovaara, Jukka (ed.), *Turvallisuuspoliisi 75 vuotta*, Helsinki 1994, p. 2. Foreword of Eero Kekomäki. Eero Kekomäki has described the period of the Cold War as, to Finland, “a practical question of surviving”.

³ Suominen, 2012, p. 174–204.

⁴ Koivisto, Mauno, *Kaksi kautta II. Historian tekijät*, Helsinki 1995, p. 477–481.

⁵ Helsingin Sanomat 1.10.1996. Virka vaihtuu – mieli muuttuu; Laqueur, Walter, *The Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, New Brunswick 2005, p. xvi. Walter Laqueur has pointed out the same phenomena: “[...] there is the danger for forgetting that the breakdown of the Soviet empire in 1990-91 is not the end of the history. The communist regimes in Eastern Europe might be replaced [...]”. Laqueur is correct that new threats always occur and this justifies the existence of intelligence organizations.

⁶ Helsingin Sanomat 1.10.1996. Virka vaihtuu – mieli muuttuu.

Sanomat estimated that during the 21st century intelligence activity has grown again and is on the same level as during the Cold War.⁷

It has been estimated that the capability of Finnish intelligence organizations has been very good. Edward Lucas has written: “Finland is even lower-profile [than Sweden]. It has a domestic security agency (SUPO), which is part of the police, and a military intelligence agency. Any capability for foreign human intelligence is admirably hidden.”⁸ *The Finnish intelligence organizations have responded to development and changing of time.* In the 1990’s and the 2000’s co-operation between different countries has been more active than before despite problems between them.⁹ With the collapse of the bipolar world the old confrontation has disappeared and new foes are not as apparent as earlier. Therefore the significance of geopolitics and the methods of intelligence are to be re-considered.

Finland has considered foreign examples in re-organizing its intelligence. The Finnish Security Police changed its name to the Finnish Security Intelligence Service in 2010, which has been one sign of changing atmosphere. New kind of Finnish intelligence organizations has been debated in media. New kinds of threats are taken more seriously. Lessons of new kinds of cyber warfare or intelligence have been learned, not at least because it has been discovered that the Finnish Foreign Ministry has been a target of foreign cyber intelligence for several years. At present both the Finnish Security Intelligence Police and the Finnish Defence Forces want new authorizations in order to respond better to the demands of today.¹⁰

⁷ Helsingin Sanomat 25.4.2007.

⁸ Lucas, Edward, *Deception. Spies, Lies and How Russia Dupes the West*, London 2012, p. 333.

⁹ Helsingin Sanomat 19.7.2013, Suomenkin tiedustelu mullistuu.

¹⁰ Helsingin Sanomat 15.2.2014, Armeija valmistautuu verkkotiedusteluun.