

Ostrovsky, Victor, and Claire Hoy. *By Way of Deception*. New York: St. Martin's, 1990.

The game of truth is a recent innovation in two-person game theory.¹ In this game, the first player is asked to choose between two strategies: tell the truth or lie. The other player, the receiver of the message, also has two strategies: accept the information as the truth or reject it because he believes it is a lie. Of course, the receiver may possibly reject the truth and accept lies. In this type of game players with incomplete information cannot be sure what are the intentions of the other side. This uncertainty exists even when players are presented with evidence that the information is really an accurate description of reality.

Victor Ostrovsky's *By Way of Deception* is a good illustration of the game of truth played between him and his Canadian co-author Claire Hoy on the one hand, and the general and/or professional public on the other. They tell the readers the "inside" story of the Mossad, ("the institute" in Hebrew) Israel's intelligence organization, and ask them to believe it. "The Mossad — believe it or not — has just 30 to 35 case officers, or *Katsas*, operating in the world at any one time." (p. xi) Is this possible? Can all those covert Israeli operations performed over the years, stretching four continents, about which we have read and in which the Mossad was presumably involved have been carried through by such an extraordinarily low number? The answer provided by the authors is affirmative. Israel, they explain, relies "on the worldwide Jewish community outside Israel." Believe it or not — every Jew is a potential spy. I don't.

The book consists of three parts. In part I, "Cadet," Ostrovsky describes in great detail the way in which he was recruited to the Mossad and how he was trained. In the second part, "Inside and Out," he continues to describe mostly his own personal and direct involvement with and observations on the covert activities of the Mossad. The third part, "By way of deception" is a presentation of some incidents in which he was not directly or indirectly involved. The structure chosen for the presentation of his story is a clever one. It is guided by a confidence building technique. If you believe the information presented in the first parts you will, most likely, continue to believe the information presented in the third, even though the author has just a minimal basis to make a claim of knowledge over the incidents he describes.

To play the game of truth, however, from the reader's point of view, i.e., to find out whether or not Ostrovsky's account of the Mossad is an accurate one, several strategies are available. Three such strategies, denial and examination of the internal and the external validity of the information, are presented below.

DENIAL

One common and effective strategy used in the game of truth is that of denial. The second player (the reader), in order to protect himself against false

information, may decide to treat the source (i.e. the authors) as one that always produces lies. It makes no difference to the reader if some of the information is accurate; because the transmitter cannot be trusted everything he transmits is to be considered false or at least guided by false intentions. Israeli governments have used this strategy against Yassir Arafat, the chairman of the PLO. The operative assumption of the government is that the PLO's real intention is to destroy the state of Israel and her people. Hence, from the Israeli's point of view, it makes no difference what Arafat says — it should not be regarded sincerely.

The Mossad, and for that matter other intelligence organizations, also tend to automatically deny all public information concerning their operations. Their denial is either passive (i.e. make no reference to the information) or active. The Ostrovsky book is no exception. But the author, presumably anticipating such a response, cleverly employed a preemptive strike: he decided to include in his book the names of real, active operators of the Mossad. It adds to the book an important measure of authenticity. While the list of names is not always accurate, it is, nonetheless, potentially damaging and risks the lives of his former friends. To minimize potential damage the Israeli government uncharacteristically chose to react against the author through the courts in the USA and Canada in an attempt to stop publication. These appeals, of course, were counter effective and public interest in the book increased. The attention the book received can be compared to that attained through the Iranian attempt to ban Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and, to a lesser degree, the attempt against Philip Agee's *Inside the CIA*. In the first move of the game Ostrovsky won decisively.

The Israeli reaction cannot be considered as confirmation of the validity of the information presented in the book. It may indicate, however, that some policymakers in Jerusalem often think with their hearts, rather than with their heads.

INTERNAL VALIDITY

Another way to play the game of truth is to examine each bit of information for its own value. This is common practice among intelligence practitioners. Operating under the assumption that the enemy would try to conceal its true intentions by supplying a considerable amount of false data, the professionals attempt to separate the noise from the real voice. This is never an easy task. The examination of the data is carried through by different methods. Among them is the test of internal validity. The data should be consistent and should be presented sequentially in logical order.

Here again, Ostrovsky does not fail in his task. His book is structured in such a way as to increase confidence in his credibility. First he tells us of his rookie days: a rookie who, perhaps does not know much but who is smart and creative, learns quickly, keeps his ears open, and takes notes. He is then moved to the field, still as a student, but now trusted with responsibilities. He makes professional judgments that seem to the reader to be reasonable. He

presents himself as one who is guided by respectable moral values always in tune with the goals of his country, to whom he is strongly attached. "My ideas were relatively liberal, so from that point on, I was in a constant conflict between my beliefs and my loyalties." (pp.51-52) Loyalties that is, to an organization and to superiors who chose to direct their energies toward collective sex (pp. 110-14), rather than toward fighting the enemies of the state. He makes suggestions, but no one listens. He is then sent to his first mission outside the country, takes some initiatives, and receives the pink slip. His desire to save the country from the Mossad, an organization that, according to Ostrovsky, keeps "officials deliberately misinformed," and that justifies "violence and inhumanity through deceit," (p. 336) and so on, prompts him to write this book.

The evaluator cannot forget that Ostrovsky was merely a low-ranking, inexperienced intelligence officer with only one very simple mission to his record. Insightful as he may be, he was never in a position wherein the policy of the organization would be revealed to him. The picture he draws is often an interesting composition of myth and reality. Indeed, when he departs from describing his own experiences and moves on to other Mossad adventures he rapidly moves into the realm of myth and speculation. His comments on Amiram Nir (pp. 326-31) are a case in point. Nir, who was involved in the Iran-Contra scandal, was scheduled to testify in the 1989 trial of Oliver North. He was killed, however, in a plane crash just outside of Mexico City in 1988. According to Ostrovsky, "it's highly likely that Peres returned the thanks, [to the Reagan administration] at least in part, by arranging for Nir's convenient "death" to avoid his testifying in public. It is difficult to be certain . . . [but] it is unlikely that Nir is dead . . . We may never know for sure." (pp. 330-31). So Nir may or may not be among us with a reconstructed face and a new identity. Robert Ludlum would perhaps love to write this story. It goes well with market interests in the post-Iranganate era.

"Victor" writes Claire Hoy, "possesses a photographic memory for charts, plans, and other visual data so crucial to the successful operation of intelligence." (p. xii) Victor's memory, however, fails a basic high school-level test on Israeli politics. In 1985-86 Shimon Peres was Israel's prime minister and Amiram Nir was his Advisor on Terrorism. Since 1987 Peres was in no political position to arrange such a fantastic scheme without the consent of his two principle political opponents — Itzhak Rabin (Minister of Defence until 1990) and Itzhak Shamir (the Prime Minister).

The most credible and hence interesting part of the book is the first one in which Ostrovsky tells the story of his recruitment and training. It raises an important question: what type of people should intelligence organizations employ in their service? Issar Harel, the first Director of the Mossad, provides an answer: "Servicemen should be people with the highest moral standards and impeccable personal background, . . . balanced and law abiding citizens, who came to serve guided by a sense of mission."² Ostrovsky is perhaps right in claiming that the Mossad has strayed; the departure from the roles established by Harel is also manifested in his own recruitment.

EXTERNAL VALIDITY

The scientific strategy demands that facts be reproduced to enable the verification or falsification of the hypothetical claims. This means that data and its sources should be made available to readers in such a way as to be independent of the amount of trust the reader places in the transmitter of the information. It makes no difference that he was an “insider,” and that his motivation in presenting his case is honorable.

Here again, Ostrovsky is at an advantage. He knows that the readers know that no one inside the Israeli intelligence community will come forward to support his claims. Sensitive to the need to supply external sources of support for his case he presents in the appendices of the book some documentation. In one chart (p. 339) for example, he presents the “Official Flow of Intelligence,” which is not very different from the one I presented myself elsewhere two years earlier.³

Such evidence is, however, insufficient, especially when no one claims that Ostrovsky was not a member of the Mossad. One can therefore evaluate and compare his account of events in which the Mossad was involved with other accounts of similar activities presented by other writers. In this comparison Ostrovsky lags far behind the credible description presented in Raviv and Melman’s, *Every Spy a Prince*,⁴ a book which appeared more or less at the same time. In that book the authors are careful to present their sources and sufficient evidence to increase their credibility. Their book approaches, at least in spirit, the requirements of science, i.e. a careful examination of events. Likewise, Harel’s book and Argaman’s *It Was Top Secret*,⁵ are insider-accounts that could be validated by cross-examination with other sources. Ostrovsky’s book, on the other hand, in some parts of it, comes closer to the realm of fiction. It is interesting but not reliable.

His motivation is a different matter. It presumably affects the choice he makes in presenting matters. The story of the Mossad’s behavior during the American involvement in Lebanon is most revealing. (pp. 311-26) Ostrovsky claims that the Mossad knew the exact time chosen by the Shi’ite Moslems to send the suicidal truck which caused the death of 241 US Marines, but decided not to inform the Americans. By implication, the Mossad is therefore responsible. He does not inform the readers, perhaps because he does not know, what are the SOP’s (standard operating procedures) between the Israelis and the Americans. He constructed a message in which the reader has no choice but to conclude that the people of the Mossad are evil. They — the Israelis — “were happy,” because they “showed them” i.e., the Americans. (p. 326) He cites people even though the incident occurred a year before he was recruited. In writing this he presumably expected that once the American policy makers and public learned the “real story,” they would take measures to punish Israel.

Ostrovsky’s mode of thinking is perhaps a product of intelligence naivete, which characterized the Mossad activities during the fifties but has long since disappeared. In one notable incident, “the Lavon Affair,” the

Israelis failed in their attempt to damage Egyptian-American relations.⁶ They too assumed then that incidents of this kind affect real or perceived national interests. The people in the community responsible for the affair had to pay the price. Ostrovsky, on the other hand, became a rich man.

By Way of Deception is an interesting book written well by a clever man. It should not, however, be treated as an accurate case-study of the Israeli Mossad.

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Endnotes

1. See, Steven Brams, *Superpower's Games: Applying Game Theory to Superpower Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 119-26.
2. Issar Harel, *Security and Democracy* (Tel Aviv: Edanim, 1989), p. 165.
3. Gideon Doron, "Israeli Intelligence: Tactics, Strategy and Prediction," *International Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 2, no. 3 (Fall, 1988), pp. 305-19.
4. Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy and Prince* (Boston: Hampton and Mifflin, 1990).
5. Josef Argaman, *It Was Top Secret* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 1991).
6. See, Gideon Doron and Shapira Boaz, "Accountability and Secret Operations in Israel," *International Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 4, no. 3 (Fall 1990), pp. 371-82.

Blake, George. *No Other Choice. An Autobiography*. London: Cape, 1990.

Kuzichkin, Vladimir. *Inside the KGB. Myth and Reality*. London: Deutsch, 1990.

Intelligence defectors are now publishing their autobiographies with almost the same regularity as sportsmen and politicians, and the contents have a similar predictability. Yet they remain compulsive reading. The spy and the defector are archetypal twentieth-century figures; the Cold War was buttressed on both sides by images, real and imagined, of espionage and the enemy within. What was it that made people work for the other side? What explains the fascination of clandestinity and the revulsion felt for traitors? What was the real importance of human sources, among all the technical wizardry? No one really knows the answers; and we search this literature for clues.

These two books are good examples of the genre. Blake's career as a member of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), KGB agent, and es-