



THE IMPACT OF THE CARAMAN NETWORK ON THE SECURITY OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

Aliases: Matei CRĂCIUN and Adrian GEORGESCU

ABSTRACT

The present article aims to investigate how the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Headquarters was penetrated by the Caraman network, a Romanian espionage network created in France in the first part of the Cold War. We will also identify NATO's organizational vulnerabilities from 1960 to 1969, which will lead to improved capabilities to anticipate and counter contemporary threats. The final part of the article includes the negative effects caused to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, presenting the major impact that an espionage network can have. Moreover, we will analyze the appropriate strategy for countering contemporary espionage actions and determine whether they can now achieve a similar scale and yield compared to the operation led by Mihai Caraman. We underscore that we distance ourselves from any possible ethical or ideological judgment of officer Mihai Caraman and his operations against NATO in the seventh decade of the last century.

Keywords: *espionage; intelligence; NATO; security; vulnerability.*

Introduction

The Caraman network was one of the most effective and mysterious espionage operations carried out and managed by the Foreign Intelligence Directorate (and its subsequent structures within the Ministry of Internal Affairs) during the Cold War (March 1947 – December 1991, in fact, from the creation of the Iron Curtain until the break-up of the Soviet Union), with the aim of gathering strategic intelligence on NATO for the Soviet Union, Romania and the other socialist states that made up the Warsaw Pact. Created and coordinated by Mihai Caraman, a young Romanian foreign intelligence officer working in Paris under diplomatic cover, the Network succeeded in stealing a very large number of classified documents from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Headquarters, both when it was located in Paris, France, and after its relocation to Belgium, in Brussels and near Mons (inaugurated on March 31, 1967, following General Charles de Gaulle's decision to withdraw France from NATO's command structures). The Romanian officer's extensive espionage operation was active between 1960 and 1969, when it was dismantled by the Western intelligence services following a complex counter-espionage operation triggered by the defector Captain Ioan Iacobescu, one of Caraman's deputies (Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

Our study analyzes the impact that the Network has had on the security of North Atlantic structures, both historically and from today's perspective. Our main goal is to provide a better understanding of how historical events can guide current security strategies and to present the organizational vulnerabilities of NATO over a span of nine years, in the period 1960-1969, which allowed Caraman's agents to carry out their intelligence gathering activities unhindered, mainly the acquisition of classified materials and documents, both military and civilian (diplomatic, economic, industrial). The secondary aim is to contribute to the intelligence literature with an objective perspective on a poorly studied subject, as well as to develop our skills and knowledge as intelligence students.

The motivation for writing this article is the professional interest in the field of security, as well as the desire to enrich the knowledge of other people eager to learn about an emblematic case that jeopardized the collective security of the Transatlantic Alliance and influenced the evolution of the two political-military blocs that confronted each other in the Cold War. We emphasize that in spite of an obvious temptation, we distance ourselves from any possible ethical or ideological

judgment of officer Mihai Caraman and his operations against NATO in the seventh decade of the last century, this not being the subject of our research.

The central objective is to assess the feasibility of replicating an espionage network similar to Mihai Caraman's in the current context. This includes analyzing potential strategies to counter contemporary intelligence-gathering actions and estimating the possibility that they could reach a scale and efficiency comparable to the Romanian officer's operation. At the same time, the article aims to assess the impact of the network on the relations between NATO and the European countries of the socialist camp, as well as on the internal dynamics of the Western Bloc.

To achieve all the objectives, we will use the case study method, which consists of an in-depth analysis of a concrete phenomenon or situation, in a historical or current context, using primary and secondary sources of data. We consider this to be the appropriate method to explore the causes and consequences of an espionage case, involving a variety of actors, interests and motivations, and to generate directions for further research.

In addition to its contribution to academic research in the field of intelligence, the paper also aims at the practical benefit, seeking to facilitate the development of improved tactical and operational thinking for intelligence analysts. The actions of Romanian foreign intelligence officer Mihai Caraman highlight the importance of knowledge of human psychology, efficient resource management, ingenuity, and perseverance in achieving objectives.

Historical Background

Knowing the context of the evolution of the international relations between East and West makes it easier to understand the Caraman Affairs. In September 1953, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev came to power in the Soviet Union. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, the new General Secretary Khrushchev condemned the purges and crimes ordered by Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, leader of the USSR from 1922-1953, the sinister Leningrad Affair, the poor preparation of the defense against the Nazi Germany's attack to invade the USSR on June 22, 1941, and also released a huge number of political prisoners. In addition, Khrushchev took steps to re-establish relations with Western left-wing Freemasonry, a collaboration that political scientists have dubbed the *Khrushchev Thaw* or the *Geneva spirit*. The objective pursued by Nikita Khrushchev through his concessions to left-wing

Freemasonry was a complex geopolitical strategy, namely the penetration of North-Atlantic military structures (Tismăneanu, 2018; Hogan, 1956; Troncotă, 2008).

France, led since January 1959 by General Charles de Gaulle, has become an undesirable ally of NATO, even an irritating one (Banu, 2019). Reorienting their approach in European integration, the French president and Khrushchev entailed considerable transformations in the political configuration of the era. Through this policy, the French president may have sought to pay a policy to the United States in response to the humiliation suffered during the Suez Canal Crisis of October-November 1956 (Troncotă, 2008).

Additionally, the history of the Cold War is peppered with unknown and unseen episodes of intense confrontation on the *invisible front*. Maintaining a *bearable temperature* during this period depended on the efforts of many people on both sides of the Iron Curtain who permanently risked their lives to gather crucial information needed to prevent surprise attacks and a major new conflict in Europe, a new human hecatomb like World War II (Banu, 2022).

The Romanian state, inevitably regimented on one side of the Cold War since 1948, developed its own intelligence services and engaged in a major confrontation. As a member of the Warsaw Pact, the representatives of the regime in power in Romania concentrated their espionage efforts on Western countries, especially NATO member states. This game of intelligence and geopolitical influence persisted until the collapse of the Soviet Union (in December 1991), which marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new world order (Banu, 2022).

The Caraman Affair

Mihai Caraman was born in Oancea commune, Covurlui county (now Galați county) on November 11, 1928, exactly a decade after the end of the First World War. He obtained his baccalaureate diploma in the summer of 1947, and in March 1950 he graduated from the Officers' School of the Ministry of the Interior in Măgurele, receiving the rank of lieutenant (Banu, 2022).

A few weeks before his thirtieth birthday, Mihai Caraman was sent on a mission to Paris, under the cover of first secretary and commercial counselor of the Romanian Economic Agency in Paris, with the main objective of collecting classified information from NATO Headquarters. He was joined by other foreign intelligence officers such as Mihail Simula, Secretary II at UNESCO; Ioan (Jacob) Iacobescu, Secretary III at UNESCO; Mihail

Georgescu, Secretary II at the Embassy; Gheorghe Ionescu, Secretary II at the Embassy; Eugen Vișan, Secretary II at the Embassy; Pavel Cișmaru, Secretary I at the Embassy; Constantin Mirea, Secretary II at the Embassy; Ion Păduraru, Secretary II at UNESCO; Marin Negrea, Secretary II at the Embassy; Mihail Ilie, First Counselor at the Embassy (HAI România! Youtube channel, 2021). The Romanian officer saw this very difficult mission as a unique chance to prove his operational capabilities (Banu, 2022; Troncotă, 2008). One of his colleagues considered him to be a very demanding man, even saying with admiration that "You don't call a whaler if you want to catch bleaks" (Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

To establish his first contacts, Mihai Caraman analyzed the diplomatic and business circles of the French capital. The first person he was in contact with was Minister Counselor Roberto Cordero d'Aubuisson from the Embassy of El Salvador. From talking to him, he realized that he is left-leaning and an advocate of peacekeeping between the two antagonistic military blocs in confrontation. By fructifying the relationship with the Latin American dignitary, Caraman learned about a NATO Secretariat official, Robert Van de Wielhe, who was the key to the whole operation (Racoviceanu, 2019; Banu, 2022).

After a whole process of documentation on his personality, a first contact was made during a reception at the Paris City Hall in January 1960, where Mihai Caraman introduced himself as a Romanian diplomat, according to the deposition of NATO official Van de Wielhe, given to his investigators over the years. Van de Wielhe's father happened to have been doing business in Romania before the Second World War, so they also had a common topic of conversation, leading to the two exchanging business cards at the end of the conversation (Banu, 2022; Racoviceanu, 2019). There followed nights out at fancy restaurants, during which the Romanian realized the future French agent's sexual orientation, as he was gay. In order to recruit him officially, the Romanian suggests a gay approach, which he later used to coerce him into providing information. From that moment, Caraman had Van de Wielhe under his control, who would willingly provide him with a first document concerning a NATO Research Center in Italy (Banu, 2019).

As they say in the world of intelligence, an agent can be persuaded to do a lot if he is inoculated with the belief that he is serving a just cause. The dignitary responded in the affirmative to the Romanian's request to provide him with more important documents, believing that in this way he was preventing a conflict between the blocs on either side of the Iron Curtain. The most important document obtained was a NATO master plan, which

included the entire armed forces by category, with the capabilities of each member state and their strategies for the next five years. The relationship was further cultivated and a very large number of documents, hundreds of pages, including some classified *COSMIC TOP SECRET*, were obtained. All these materials and documents were sent to the central office in Bucharest, and finally to the KGB, in accordance with official protocols between the Bucharest and Moscow governments (Accoce & Pouget, 1999; Banu, 2019).

In this context, it is worth noting a key vulnerability within NATO - the high officials were not controlled when leaving NATO Headquarters, as this was interpreted as offensive behavior and considered an insult, so Van de Wielhe could, without any hindrance, remove classified material from the building (and then re-enter the circuit) at any time, using only a common briefcase (Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

The relationship between the two of them began to regress due to some accidental events from both sides. The first was generated by the NATO official, who left the locker's door open, this way generating suspicions and security checks. The second one was provoked by the Bucharest Headquarters, which ordered Caraman to give the agent a Soviet-made camera, in order to photocopy documents faster. The Frenchman felt guilty and confessed to the Romanian that he did not want to be a spy, that everything he offered him was out of friendship. Subsequently, Robert van de Wielhe resigns in September 1961, but the Romanian officer manages to obtain one last piece of information from his former agent, namely a notebook of all his acquaintances employed in the North Atlantic Alliance structures (TVR, 2021; Banu, 2019).

By tenaciously analyzing this list of various categories of NATO officials (the information is also corroborated with other telephone directories from the NATO High Command), over the next seven years, approximately twelve thousand NATO documents were supplied to the East - all with the help of a single person working as documentalist in the translation office. In the fall of 1962, Francis André Élie Roussilhe became Tudor's agent. Before contacting him, Mihai Caraman intensively studied his habits, his background, his personality and his residence in order to choose the right way to approach him. After this process, he learnt that the Frenchman was well known among the Alliance officials because he sold *foie gras*. On the pretext that he was a member of the Greek delegation and wanted to buy the famous delicacy, the Romanian officer appeared one evening at Francis Roussilhe's door. He agreed to sell him the product and invited him to the NATO Headquarters the next day. In order to conclude the transaction and not to arouse suspicion, Caraman waited for Roussilhe in the

main hall of the building (where he could enter without being legitimized), offered him the money in exchange for the *foie gras* and left. Thus, the relationship created was developed with professionalism and care by the Romanian, the orders of *foie gras* increased, and so did the sums handed over. In this context, their friendship was established, the officer revealed his true identity to him and, from this moment on, we can say that the Caraman Affair also began for Roussilhe (C. M., 2020; Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

Another high-profile agent was a Turk, Imre Nahit, who held an important position in the economic department of the North Atlantic Alliance, him being the third person in hierarchy. He had access to all economic contracts and accounting documents. He had been recruited by other Romanian foreign officers from the spy residence in Ankara while he was in Türkiye. After the agent's secondment to the NATO Headquarters in Paris, he was handed over to Mihai Caraman, who managed him with great skill, until September 1968, when he was arrested (Banu, 2019).

The Romanian spy network always had a subterfuge when it came to attracting their agents. In this context, it is interesting to note Pierre Rocheron's case, for whom the head of the Paris office put a lot of effort, because he considered that he had potential. The Frenchman had graduated from the National School of Administrative Studies and in June 1963 he was sent as Second Secretary at the French Embassy in Washington. In the United States capital, officer Victor Dorobanțu had already been waiting for him for a month. The Romanian intelligence officer easily penetrated his inner circle, found out about his precarious financial situation and the fact that he was in love with a Black woman, Eva, whom he had impregnated. At that time, it was inappropriate for a high-ranking French official to have such connections, so Dorobanțu helped his *friend* with a free abortion for Eva, in Mexico. This surgical intervention represented the right premise that allowed Rocheron's manipulation (Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

So far, we only mentioned male identities, but that does not mean that the cell formed in the *city of lights* was devoid of women. In 1964, Miss Sylvie Borel was 27 years old and was working in the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Up to that age, she had been deprived of any romantic affairs and Caraman knew how to take advantage of this. Sylvie provided documents regarding oil resources, France's economic problems in the West and Franco-Soviet economic relations. For a better outline of the Caraman Affair, there are other important agents to be mentioned such as Antoinette X, the Austrian citizen Klaus Edelmann, the French colonel Charles de Jurque De La Salle (Accoce & Pouget, 1999).

The spy network created with intense work by the undercover officer Mihai Caraman was dismantled in July 1969, but not because of him. The defector was a captain by the name of Ioan Iacobescu, him being the deputy of the network. As he feared that he would be recalled to Bucharest, he requested political asylum at the British Embassy in France for him and his family. It is believed that Iacobescu was initially taken to Scotland (other sources claim that he was taken directly to the United States) where his interrogation began. In order to provide a good enough reason for him to be taken quickly to the United States, he confessed everything he knew about the activities of his colleagues in Paris - about the agents of the Caraman Network. In a short period of time, all the agents were arrested and tried and the Romanian officers involved were discreetly recalled to Bucharest, none of whom being declared *persona non grata* by the French authorities (Ierunca, 1986). Even more, the diplomat Mihai Caraman organized a farewell cocktail party on August 14, 1969, sending invitations to all the personalities he had had the opportunity to meet and with whom he had collaborated during the ten years he had worked on the banks of the Seine - diplomats, high ranking officials, businessman and French industrialists (Banu, 2019).

However, some scholars in the field believe that the disintegration of the Caraman Network began in Berlin in October 1967, with the betrayal of a KGB officer who had negotiated with CIA agents to take refuge in the United States in exchange for an impressive amount of information about sources that the Eastern intelligence services had gathered in some Western states (Banu, 2019).

Despite the distancing from the USSR - which President Nicolae Ceaușescu claimed during his speeches - The Foreign Intelligence Directorate was *subordinated* to the KGB, an aspect deliberately emphasized by the defector Iacobescu. Therefore, all documents collected regarding NATO and France were a priority for Moscow (Ierunca, 1986).

Vulnerabilities Imply Consequences

The lack of an effective counterintelligence system, which would ensure the protection of secret documents within NATO structures, as well as the counterintelligence training of the officials, allowed the network led by the Romanian Mihai Caraman to achieve a spectacular penetration. At that time, Romania and obviously, the Soviet Union, had knowledge about NATO's organization, logistics,

communication systems and their training. As a result, in the event of an alleged military conflict between the two antagonistic blocs, the Warsaw Pact countries had an undeniable strategic superiority, having detailed knowledge of their adversary's capabilities. For the time being, it is impossible to quantify the costs incurred in rethinking and reconceptualizing NATO strategies as the result of the theft of the Alliance's operational documents by agents of the Intelligence Network that Caraman created in 1960 and coordinated with mastery until the summer of 1969 (Rusu, 2022).

Instead, it was through the information obtained by the spies of communist Romania - *Moscow's Trojan horse* - that the strategy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization became fully known. Realizing that this military alliance was a defensive one, the fears of the leaders of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe of a surprise attack against their countries were significantly diminished. As a consequence, the political leaders of the Eastern Bloc approached the arms limitation talks with increased confidence, building collective security mechanisms that facilitated finding ways for bilateral cooperation (Rusu, 2022).

The Actual NATO Security

From a security perspective, NATO has implemented numerous measures to protect its personnel and classified information, making the penetration of the Alliance structures an extremely difficult target for any hostile entity. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization binds all member states together in a strong and cohesive alliance.

The evolution of cooperation within the organization has greatly enhanced security, both at the micro and macro levels. In certain specific international contexts, NATO member states share intelligence information, strengthening their ability to prevent and counter threats more effectively. NATO communications are encrypted to prevent interception. Technological advances have played an important role in ensuring preventive measures against contemporary risks.

Access to NATO classified information is granted on the basis of a security clearance and requires compliance with the need-to-know principle (no person is entitled by rank, position or security clearance alone to have unrestricted access to certain NATO classified information). The level of access provided by the certificate shall be similar to the classification level of the information used for the performance of the duties (ORNISS, 2022).

Individuals who work on a NATO classified contract need to have a security clearance. The objective of this extensive process is to reduce the risks of unauthorized theft or disclosure of information and material. The main criteria for assessing an individual's suitability for security clearance are character traits that may raise the security risks. The views and the conduct of the life partner may also be relevant and should be taken into account. Once the security clearance expires, the same rigorous vetting process starts again. This process can also be initiated when there are indications of the manifestation of risk factors or at the request of NATO representatives (ORNISS, 2022).

Moreover, as it is well known, any attack against one NATO member-state is considered an attack against all NATO members - against the entire Alliance - thus creating a deterrent against acts of hostility. The expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - from its 12 founding members to 32 countries in Europe and North America - provides a strong disincentive to military espionage by adversaries. The exposure of such illegal actions against any of NATO's structures would inevitably damage the image of the aggressor on the international stage, with long-term losses, impossible to quantify at present. As a result, on the *invisible front*, some *apparent victories* can have the *flavor of defeat*. This makes NATO a difficult organization for any enemy to penetrate. Nevertheless, its members must remain vigilant and its safeguards must constantly evolve to protect the Alliance's values and promote its interests.

The Possibility of Replicating the Espionage Case Today

Notwithstanding the evolution of NATO security and the management of classified information, the risk of penetration by adversary entities seems to be omnipresent. Technological development has revolutionized modern espionage. These changes enhance, in a seemingly paradoxical way, the role of the human factor in intelligence gathering. The evolution of technology is like a double-edged sword, with both sides benefiting from its advantages. Artificial intelligence has the capacity to search and analyze large amounts of open source data. However, the truly valuable information lies in the well-kept and hidden secrets, beyond the understanding of algorithms that only a human being can discover, decipher and capitalize on (AP & Euronews, 2023).

In an organization where people work, there will undoubtedly be mistakes. Intelligence is no exception. It is not always possible to predict the future or to detect the person who betrays by providing valuable information to adversaries. Throughout history, social evolution has led

to changes in thinking and behavior, resulting in diverse cultural landscapes. The methods of coercion applied by the spy network led by Mihai Caraman will not have the same results today. It is certain, however, that as people develop, they have complex feelings and emotions, the manifestation of which can radically influence the way they act. As long as a spy can use these specifically human weaknesses to his advantage, he can penetrate even the most hermetic environments. Subsequently, he becomes a ventriloquist who influences actions and decisions in favor of the actor (state or non-state) for whom he spies. Another important factor is the fact that, in the right context and at the right time, money is a sufficiently satisfying motivation to induce a person to undertake a certain activity (even an illegal one).

In conclusion, a replication of the successful penetration of the Caraman Network is still possible today in any seemingly hermetic environment. Obviously, the circumstances of conducting such an operation and the potential outcomes must be rigorously analyzed in advance. Targets may have good counterintelligence preparedness, and this can be a hindrance to achieving their goals. In addition, weaknesses in human nature are present on both sides, and people are susceptible to influence. As a consequence, this game becomes unpredictable, complicated and professionalism, intelligence and ingenuity will determine the winner.

The Smart Approach

At present, an exhaustive analysis of the possible courses of action in the event of an espionage network being uncovered is impossible. Given the counterespionage service's intentions, the methods to counter action or neutralize the negative effects are varied. The unmasking itself seems to be rather inefficient due to the fact that it leads to a subsequent consumption of significant resources. After the network's destruction and applying the right measures, the hostile entity can bring new people in, who would create a new structure that would need to be countered and annihilated, too. Otherwise, if the aggressor's image is intended to be affected on the global political arena, this way of counteraction can be efficient.

Another way of neutralizing the negative effects of an espionage case is by intoxicating the opponent. Following the certification of the clues regarding the network's hostile actions, its members would be deliberately delivered false information. The invisible battlefield is fluctuating, the defensive situation thus turning into an offensive one, without the enemy realizing the change. The informational volume can be gradually increased in order to determine the opponent to invest more of its resources, finally reaching a point that is totally lacking in concreteness.

Conclusions

The Caraman Network constitutes not only a remarkable moment in the history of espionage, but also a comprehensive phenomenon that has significantly influenced the geopolitical and geostrategic landscape of the Cold War. Operating between 1960-1969, this group of spies, managed by the native Mihai Caraman succeeded in collecting a significant amount of classified information from NATO's general Headquarters, affecting the collective security of the Alliance and changing the dynamics of the relations between the blocks on either side of the Iron Curtain.

The analysis conducted has shown that NATO's organizational vulnerabilities during that time were ingeniously exploited by officers of the Romanian external intelligence agencies, under diplomatic cover. This exposure of the North Atlantic system's weaknesses

underlines the importance of continuous adaptation and the need to constantly improve the counter espionage strategies in the face of threats to national and international security.

The results have shown us that the replication of such an operation in the contemporary era is attainable, which changes the game into an unpredictable, complicated one. The lessons learned from Mihai Caraman's actions bring to the forefront the importance of deeper understanding of human psychology in the intelligence field, efficient resource management and perseverance in the face of challenges. These facets are not only relevant in the historical context of the Cold War, but also through contemporary threats, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach in managing security and counterespionage. Therefore, the Caraman Network remains a complex and relevant case study, offering perspectives on both the past and the future of Euro-Atlantic space security.

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