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The Security Services and the Decline of Democracy in Russia: 1996-1999

Amy Knight

*The Henry M. Jackson
School of International Studies
The University of Washington*

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The Donald W. Treadgold Papers
Jackson School of International Studies
Box 353650
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195-3650
(206) 543-4852
treadgld@u.washington.edu

About this series

The *Donald W. Treadgold Papers* publication series was created to honor a great teacher and great scholar. Donald W. Treadgold was professor of history and international studies at the University of Washington from 1949 to 1993. During that time, he wrote seven books, one of which — *Twentieth Century Russia* — went into eight editions. He was twice editor of *Slavic Review*, the organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, and received the AAASS Award for Distinguished Contributions to Slavic Studies, as well as the AAASS Award for Distinguished Service. Professor Treadgold molded several generations of Russian historians and contributed enormously to the field of Russian history. He was, in other ways as well, an inspiration to all who knew him.

The *Treadgold Papers* series was created in 1993 on the occasion of Professor Treadgold's retirement, on the initiative of Professor Daniel Waugh. Professor Treadgold passed away in December 1994. The series is dedicated to the memory of a great man, publishing papers in those areas which were close to his heart.

Sabrina P. Ramet
Editor

About the author of this issue

Amy Knight is the author of *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Allen and Unwin, 1988), *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton, 1993), *Spies Without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (Princeton, 1996), and *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* (Hill and Wang, 1999). Formerly a senior research analyst at the Library of Congress and a professional lecturer at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Dr. Knight was until recently a research associate at the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at the George Washington University. She currently resides in Ottawa, Canada.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Sabrina Ramet for inviting me to speak on the Russian security services at the Jackson School of International Studies and for her helpful comments on my talk and on this paper. The paper represents my most recent assessment of the political situation in Russia and the role of the security services there, a subject which I have followed for many years. Because of the volatile nature of Russian politics, it is difficult, if not impossible, for scholars to keep abreast of the most recent events in their writings. What I have attempted to do in this paper is to discuss developments in terms of long-term trends, rather than to report on all the changes that have occurred, with a view to offering the reader some perspectives on Russia's future.

As the year of the much-anticipated presidential elections in Russia, 1996 was marked by intense speculation in the West about Russia's political leadership, both before and after voters went to the ballot box to re-elect President Boris Yeltsin in June. Throughout this period the Russian media duly reported every detail of the corruption scandals, the dramatic confrontations between different political factions in the parliament, and the ups and downs of Yeltsin's health. To observers in the West all this excitement pointed to one thing: Russia was finally becoming a democracy. To be sure, given Russia's economic problems and its unsettled political environment, there was still a way to go. But Russians now enjoyed a free press and the ability to leave the country freely (if they could afford it), to pursue profits on the free market, and to vote in democratic elections. All this added up to the outward trappings of democracy.

As several political theorists have pointed out, however, free elections do not always produce liberal constitutional democracies, particularly when they are introduced in societies without a tradition of civic liberties and rule of law. Initially, elections in Russia brought new faces into power, suggesting that the old order was crumbling. But the new men—Yeltsin in particular—were more interested in legitimizing their claims to govern than in instituting liberal reforms. As one Russian political scientist has pointed out, the fact that Yeltsin was popularly elected, "made him confident that his authority was unlimited."¹

Instead of transferring state-owned property to private ownership by means of a regulated process that would lead to genuine market reforms, Yeltsin doled out the nation's vast economic resources to his cronies and their families, thereby creating financial oligarchs, who used their new riches to buy political influence. Instead of developing a real parliamentary government, with a system of checks and balances, Yeltsin increasingly disregarded democratic procedures and ruled by decree. As his authoritarian methods and seemingly capricious governing style led to a dramatic decline in his public support, he relied more and more on the traditional Soviet means of maintaining power — a strong police and security apparatus.

Indeed, the enthusiasm of the West over Russia's so-called democratic transition might have been less, if more attention had been paid to the growing role of the security services, the successor agencies to the KGB, in both domestic and foreign politics. Having ensured that officials loyal to him were in charge of the various internal security agencies, Yeltsin placed great reliance on them in his campaign to win

re-election in 1996. The methods employed by these agencies raised real questions about the democratic nature of the election.

Developments in the area of foreign policy were equally disquieting. At the beginning of 1996, Evgenii Primakov, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service and a former KGB official, was named Russian Foreign Minister. To be sure, few in the West were pleased about this appointment. People worried that Primakov's background in the intelligence services, an institution which had always been hostile to democratic states, might make Russia's foreign policy less flexible. But Primakov, who had been a part of Russia's foreign policy establishment for years, was a "known quantity," who, rightly or wrongly, had the reputation of being practical and businesslike. His background in the KGB soon ceased to be an issue as he acquired the statesmanlike stature of a foreign minister.

What people did not realize was the extent to which Primakov's appointment signified the resurgence of the KGB in the political life of the country and the threat that this resurgence posed to Russian democracy. It was not simply a question of one former KGB official happening to get a top government job. More significant was that Primakov could not have received this job if Russians had rejected their Soviet past and rid themselves of the vestiges of an institution that epitomized the evils of the Soviet system—the KGB. Initially it had seemed that this was their intention. The KGB, it might be recalled, was such a focal point of popular anger against the regime after the August 1991 coup attempt that crowds even toppled the statue of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, chief of the first Soviet political police, which had stood proudly in front of KGB headquarters for decades. A month later Russian President Boris Yeltsin, responding to the public mood, spoke in sweeping terms about disbanding the KGB: "Perhaps we should leave, let's say, the intelligence and counterintelligence service, as in other countries, but all the rest of the tale-telling services—surveillance, eavesdropping, informers, and so on—needs to be abolished beyond any shadow of a doubt."²

By 1996 Yeltsin's words had become an empty promise. The KGB had been divided up into five separate agencies with new names; several laws had been passed, enumerating the functions of the new agencies; and some of the former KGB personnel had retired or been dismissed. But a substantial number of officials had remained in their jobs, and, under Yeltsin's auspices, the KGB's successor agencies had resumed many of their former functions. Far from what might have been expected in 1991, the Russian security services had regained much of the power and influence which they had lost in the immediate af-

termath of the coup attempt.

There are several reasons for the failure of the new Russian government to reform the security services. First and foremost is the fact that Russia's new leaders, Yeltsin included, were former communist party apparatchiks, who had worked closely with the KGB bureaucracy for years. They were used to relying on the KGB to maintain stability in the country and to suppress public discontent with the regime. Old habits die hard; so when Yeltsin and his allies encountered opposition from other political factions and criticism from the press, they reacted by cultivating the support of the security services.

Another factor was that the new leadership made no effort to address the problem of past injustices under the Soviet regime. With the exception of former KGB Chairman Vladimir Kriuchkov and four of his deputies, who were imprisoned for a time for their part in the August 1991 coup attempt, security officials were not called to account for past actions. For several decades the KGB had deprived citizens of basic freedoms, imprisoned innocent people after mock trials, covertly murdered others, and forced millions to become spies and informers.³ Yet no one was punished for these abuses. It was difficult to reform the security police without any kind of reckoning.

Finally, the new Russian Federation had no tradition of legality upon which to build. Centuries of autocratic rule had deprived Russian people of any notion of the rule of law. As one scholar observed, "the beginnings of a civil society, that is, the government's commitment to the safeguarding of individual or corporate rights of person and property, were discernible only in the second half of the nineteenth century."⁴ The development of a civil society was cut short by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent imposition of the Soviet system of justice. This system had some of the outward trappings of a democratic legal structure — judges, courts, prosecutors and even lawyers. But in reality it operated according to the dictates of the party and the police, who called all the shots and determined the fate of those who found themselves in the criminal justice process. The idea that individuals had rights under the law simply did not exist during the Soviet period. In order for a true reform of the security police to take place, there had to be an effective legal infrastructure with judges, courts, and lawyers who actually operated according to laws. There had to be a way to make the security police accountable for their actions, just as they are in other countries. Although efforts were made to build such an infrastructure, it could not be done overnight.

As time went by and the economic situation declined, people

seemed to forget about the lofty democratic goals to which they had aspired in 1991. Disenchantment with the Yeltsin leadership and cynicism about the future set in. Economic woes became the primary concern. Few people had the energy or optimism to demand change. Thus, when Primakov's appointment was announced in early 1996, it barely raised an eyebrow among Russians. It was as if the inevitable had happened. Everyone knew that the KGB had never disappeared; so why be surprised that someone like Primakov would take over Russia's foreign policy?

Primakov's appointment was part of a more general trend which was taking Russia away from the democratic path upon which it had embarked. The war in Chechnya which had begun in December 1994 and resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians was already an indication of the Russian government's disregard for human rights. Yeltsin and his colleagues defended the invasion of Chechnya as an effort to keep the Russian Federation together by preventing Chechnya from asserting its independence, but most people viewed it as blatant aggression on Russia's part.⁵ Although the Russian army withdrew from Chechnya in 1996, the democratic rights that Russian people had gained after the Soviet Union collapsed continued to erode.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the growing influence of the Russian security services in Russia and explain how this trend has contributed to the decline of democracy. First, I discuss the role of security services in democratic societies and how their governments reconcile the need to ensure security without trampling on the rights of citizens. I then describe the different security agencies that emerged from the KGB and explain what role they play in Russian government and politics. Next, I consider the effects on democracy: the interference by the security services in the political process; their connections with organized crime; their attempts to curtail freedom of the press; their abuse of human rights in trials of critics; their imposition of a regime of secrecy and their efforts to curb archival access; the disproportionate influence that the Foreign Intelligence Service has had on Russian foreign policy; and finally the often arbitrary and lawless behavior of the security agencies in Russia's regional territories. In order to better explain these developments, I discuss them in the context of more general changes which have occurred in Russian politics from 1996 onwards.

I begin with the year 1996 because it marked the beginning of a new, regressive period in Russian politics. It is also a convenient starting point because it takes up the narrative of developments (with a few months' interval) where my book *Spies Without Cloaks: The KGB's*

Successors left off. I should say that, in giving my prognosis for the future of Russian democracy at the end of that book, I was not as pessimistic as I might have been, given what has happened in the past three years.

Security and Democracy

All states need agencies that ensure domestic security and protect them from foreign encroachments on their integrity, including espionage. Security agencies perform many functions that are essential to the well being of states and are considered to be completely legitimate. These include: gathering intelligence about the hostile intentions of foreign powers, protecting the state's secrets, preventing attempts at inciting internal unrest or possible terrorist attacks on the state, and collecting information to enable the government to make informed policy decisions in both the domestic and international arenas. Fighting organized crime is another function which a security service might legitimately perform in a democratic state.⁶ The challenge for democratic states is to maintain effective security and intelligence bodies without infringing on the democratic process and on the rights of their citizens. As Sir Karl Popper once wrote, "We must go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we may have to plan as well as we can for both security *and* freedom."⁷

The development of technology, which has offered security and law enforcement agencies an increasing array of sophisticated electronic tools for the purpose of covert surveillance, has posed a particular challenge for democracies. The issue of wiretapping is a case in point. Courts in the United States, citing the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, repeatedly struck down cases where authorities used wiretapping as evidence in domestic criminal investigations. In 1968 the US Congress passed a law making exceptions to the ban on wiretaps, but it allowed wiretaps only in exceptional cases where warrants were obtained. The requirements for surveillance involving national security are less stringent, but also guard against abuse of government power by means of a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which rules on requests for secret surveillance. Through congressional acts and judicial decisions a balance has been achieved in the United States between the protection of individual privacy and the needs of security.⁸

Democratic governments have adopted a number of safeguards to keep their security and intelligence services in check. The most

important of these is an effective system of independent oversight to ensure that their operations are in conformity with the law and with the state's policy objectives. In countries like the United States and Great Britain, both the executive and legislative branches of government carry out oversight. Although the US model is hardly perfect, its congressional system gives select committees the power to request testimony and documentation from the FBI and the CIA, as well as from the National Security Agency. The committees approve appointments of agency directors and, most importantly, determine their budgets. As demonstrated by the issue of wiretaps, judicial oversight, carried out by an independent court that reviews the legality of actions by security agencies, is another key element in a democratic system of oversight.⁹

In most western democracies, the security services are excluded from participation in the electoral process. Although their employees of course have the right to vote, they are not allowed to work on political campaigns, and their agencies are prohibited from supporting candidates by means of public statements or campaign contributions. The reason for this is fairly obvious: the security and intelligence agencies have formidable powers of law enforcement and information-gathering which might unduly influence the political process.¹⁰ Finally, a free and independent press serves as another guarantee that the security agencies will not commit illegalities or abuses their powers. If the press is able to investigate and publicize abuses, this serves as a strong deterrent. Recall, for example, that it was in response to highly critical press accounts of illicit CIA domestic intelligence operations, that the Church and Pike Committees were established in the Senate and House to investigate the CIA in 1975.¹¹

Given that Russia only began making a transition toward democracy in 1991, after almost 75 years of political dictatorship and centuries of autocratic rule, it would be unreasonable to expect that its new government would institute all these safeguards overnight. Even in western democracies the system of oversight and control evolved gradually, often in response to abuses which were brought to the attention of the public. Nonetheless, it useful to have some criteria upon which to measure Russia's situation and to determine the extent to which it goes against democratic norms.

Russia's political development is inextricably linked to its security and law enforcement system, just as with all states. Speaking about regular police organizations, one British scholar observed: "The practice of policing provides citizens with one of their most immediate and tangible experiences of the state. To measure the extent to which

a state works for, and on behalf of, its citizens, look to its police and what they are up to."¹² The same could be said of Russia, where the actions of police and security agencies are a direct reflection of the existing political order. One cannot speak about democracy in Russia without a close look at the security agencies that arose from the KGB.

Russia's Security Agencies

As mentioned, one of the first decisions made by Yeltsin regarding the security services was to divide the KGB into separate agencies, a seemingly positive step from the democratic point of view, since it dispersed the KGB's substantial powers. Russia's main domestic security agency evolved from the KGB's Second Chief Directorate (counterintelligence), Third Chief Directorate (military counter-intelligence), Fourth Directorate (transport security), the Directorate for Protecting the Constitution (suppression of political and nationalist dissent), Sixth Directorate (economic crime and corruption) and Seventh Directorate (surveillance and wiretapping). After undergoing several reorganizations and name changes, this agency became the Federal Security Service (*Federal'naia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti*) in mid-1995. The lengthy statute establishing the Federal Security Service outlined a broad range of functions, which included traditional counterintelligence, protection of strategic (primarily nuclear) facilities, combating economic crime, and counter-terrorism.

Rather surprisingly, the Federal Security Service was also authorized to carry out intelligence operations both within Russia and abroad. This presumably was to enable its operatives to gather intelligence in the former republics of the Soviet Union, now part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In the Soviet period a key function of the KGB's domestic branch was to monitor events in the non-Russian republics and to suppress any manifestations of nationalism or ethnic unrest. The Federal Security Service's intelligence operations in the Commonwealth of Independent States, where they still maintain a network of former KGB operatives, represent a modified version of what the KGB used to do.

Although the statute gave the parliament and the judiciary vague powers of oversight, it stated clearly that the president "directs the activity" of the Federal Security Service. As it has turned out, neither the parliament nor the courts have exercised any control whatsoever over the service. The executive branch has had the ultimate control in determining the service's personnel, material resources, functions, and

prerogatives. All the parliament can do is summon security leaders for questioning and discuss the budget of the Federal Security Service.¹³

The Federal Security Service is a formidable organization in terms of both size and prerogatives. In addition to a staff of 120,000 to 130,000, it has special anti-terrorist forces, the so-called Alpha unit, comprised of highly trained crack troops for deployment in emergencies. (It was the Alpha group which stormed the White House in October 1993, during Yeltsin's confrontation with the parliament.) More recently the service acquired the federal border troops, numbering some 180,000 men. Established as a separate agency in 1992, they were placed under the service's jurisdiction in early 1998, as part of what some observers consider a trend towards consolidating the security agencies. Following the announcement about the incorporation of the border troops into the Federal Security Service, there was press speculation that other security agencies would also be merged with the service, but that has not yet happened.¹⁴

The Federal Security Service is the country's main investigative agency for serious crimes, such as espionage, terrorism, drug-trafficking and large-scale economic crimes. According to the procedural laws, investigators have the right in certain cases to install wiretaps, carry out searches without warrants, and hold suspects in prison for up to a week before charging them.¹⁵ Given the extent to which Russia's politicians and government leaders have been implicated in corruption, the Federal Security Service's investigative powers are a formidable political weapon.

Another key security agency deals with physical protection. In the Soviet period the KGB's ninth directorate was in the front-line when it came to ensuring the physical safety of the leadership and preventing violent attacks against government and party installations. Under Yeltsin this directorate became the Main Guard Directorate (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Okhrany*), which included a separate Presidential Security Service for guarding Yeltsin. In the years leading up to the June 1996 presidential elections, this guard agency increased its staff from 8,000 to 20,000 employees and took on many functions that were not immediately related to the physical security of the leadership. New laws authorized the agency, for example, to carry out investigative work, including covert surveillance, secret bugging, and wiretapping.

In early 1992 Yeltsin had appointed two reliable KGB old-timers, Mikhail Barsukov and Aleksandr Korzhakov, to run the Guard Directorate and the Presidential Security Service respectively. In his memoirs, published in 1997, Korzhakov relates how Yeltsin told him

after the bloody confrontation with the parliament in October 1993: "I trust no one but you, Aleksandr Vasilevich. I want you to create a tiny KGB. My personal mini-KGB."¹⁶ In 1995, when Barsukov was appointed chief of the Federal Security Service, his deputy, Iurii Krapivin, took over the guard directorate, which was renamed the Federal Protection Service (*Federal'naia Sluzhba Okhrany*) in mid-1996. This agency, and the Presidential Security Service subordinate to it are under the direct control of the Russian president. The president determines the budgets and personnel, as well as the general guidelines for their operations. The protective services have no accountability whatsoever to the parliament, the courts, or even the prime minister's government.¹⁷

A less visible, but no less powerful body is the Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information (*Federal'noe Aгенство Pravitel'stvennoi Sviaza i Informatsii*), which emerged from the KGB's Eighth and Sixteenth Directorates. This agency handles electronic intelligence, cryptography, and the interception of foreign communications. Headquartered in Moscow, FAPSI has research institutes, a special training academy, and its own special troops, numbering around 50,000 men. This powerful and highly secretive body, headed until recently by the former chief of the KGB's Eighth Directorate, Aleksandr Starovoitov, also is authorized to regulate commercial and financial communications, which means that it can monitor banks and private commercial enterprises.¹⁸

Finally, the KGB's First Chief Directorate, for foreign intelligence, became the Foreign Intelligence Service, headed from 1991 to 1996 by Evgenii Primakov. This service, like its predecessor organization, was tasked with political, economic, and scientific intelligence-gathering abroad. By all accounts the new Foreign Intelligence Service retained the personnel, organization, and methods of its KGB predecessor. Of course, as was the case with other government agencies, it incurred budget cuts and a reduction in staff when the Soviet Union was disbanded. Also, the end of the Cold War left the Foreign Intelligence Service without its ideological mission of spreading communism abroad and defeating capitalism, leading to a decline in morale and an exodus of intelligence officers to the private sector. But, as events would show, Russia still had ambitious foreign policy goals and thus still needed a powerful spy network.¹⁹

Much of the spying was directed at NATO countries. Between 1991 and 1993 intelligence collection efforts in the United States and Germany reportedly rose by 12 per cent. In early 1996, Great Britain's parliamentary Security Services Committee released a study claim-

ing that Great Britain and the United States had underestimated the need for aggressively counting the resurgence in foreign intelligence gathering by the Russians. The focus of the Russians was less on political secrets than on scientific and technological intelligence.²⁰

It should also be mentioned that under Primakov's leadership the intelligence service assumed a visible and influential role in policy-making. Whereas the KGB never issued public statements on policy, Primakov's service came forth with independent statements on issues such as NATO expansion, the reintegration of the states of the former Soviet Union, and nuclear proliferation. In democratic countries, intelligence services are prohibited from making policy recommendations because this might give them an incentive to manipulate intelligence collection in a way that would support their policy views. Policy is supposed to be made by elected officials who are accountable to the public, rather than by the agency which provides them with information. In Russia, where the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service reports directly to the President and has no accountability to parliament, such policy making is even more problematic from the point of view of democracy. When Primakov moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early 1996, his first deputy and a career KGB intelligence officer, Colonel General Viacheslav Trubnikov, replaced him as head of the Foreign Intelligence Service. Trubnikov, a close associate of Primakov's for years, could be counted upon to continue with Primakov's policies, which by all accounts, he has done.²¹

Corruption and Politics

The volatile political climate in which Yeltsin soon found himself after 1991 gave him a strong incentive to turn to the security agencies for support. From the beginning he made efforts to ensure the loyalty of the domestic security services, whose troops and impressive investigative authority were powerful political weapons. In the period from 1991 to 1996, Yeltsin made several changes in the leadership of the security services to make sure that his orders would always be followed. The loyalty of the security bodies became especially important during the presidential election campaign in 1996. Both Federal Security Service chief Barsukov and presidential security chief Korzhakov were on Yeltsin's re-election committee, and they played a key role in his winning the presidency, using their arsenal of listening and monitoring devices, their investigatory powers and their access to secret files on Russian politicians. But they were not rewarded for their ef-

forts. In fact, Yeltsin dismissed both of them just days after he had won the first round of elections on 16 June. The pretext was the arrest by Korzhakov's service of two campaign aides who were allegedly carrying large sums of money out of the Kremlin. Apparently the aides were connected with the newly appointed presidential chief of staff, Anatolii Chubais, who did not see eye-to-eye with Yeltsin's security chiefs and was looking for an excuse to get rid of them. It is unclear why Yeltsin did not stand behind Korzhakov and Barsukov, given the strong personal loyalty to him which they had demonstrated, but it is possible that Yeltsin's deteriorating health prevented him from withstanding pressure from Chubais.²²

Whatever the case, Yeltsin moved quickly to fill the vacancies, promoting the immediate deputies of Barsukov and Korzhakov: Nikolai Kovalev, who had worked in the KGB's notorious directorate for fighting dissidents in the seventies and eighties, became chief of the Federal Security Service; and Anatolii Kuznetsov, a veteran of the KGB's Guard Directorate, took over as head of the Presidential Security Service, with Krapivin remaining as chief of the Federal Protection Service. As before, Yeltsin was relying on seasoned security officials with solid KGB credentials to fill these key security posts. He made a point of assuring them that he would continue giving their agencies his strong support. Addressing Federal Security Service leaders at their headquarters not long after his re-election in July 1996, Yeltsin stressed the important role their agency had to play in ensuring security. He talked of the threats that Russia faced from spies and terrorists and urged security officials to take the "harshest of measures" to stop them.²³

Neither Kovalev nor Krapivin meddled in politics to the extent that Korzhakov and Barsukov did. But this did not make their agencies any less essential for Yeltsin. As the Russian parliament became increasingly more hostile toward Yeltsin, the fact that he controlled these powerful security bodies gave him the necessary strength to assert his authority, even as his health so visibly declined. In November 1996 Yeltsin underwent a multiple bypass heart operation, which left him incapacitated for months. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and his first deputy Anatolii Chubais were running the country. Both men were tainted with involvement in corruption scandals, which grew to such proportions that they lost political credibility in the eyes of the public. They were by no means exceptions. The Russian "oligarchs" around Yeltsin were all corrupt, and their links with mafia groups were becoming stronger. Observing Russia in 1998, the British journalist Anatol Lieven wrote: "A situation has been created akin to that

of Pakistan and other countries where official corruption is so pervasive that for an official not to steal and take bribes is pointless and irrational—like chastity at the Court of Naples.”²⁴

So-called power elite crime has inflicted serious economic damage on Russia and has also caused considerable dysfunction in the governing branches of the state. Instead of focusing on the business of running the country, top officials are preoccupied with covering up their corrupt activities and defending themselves against accusations raised by political opponents and publicized in the media. Corruption at the top levels of the state has also led to cynicism and apathy toward the government on the part of the citizenry. In the words of a Russian legal expert, power elite crime “undermines the foundations of the people’s legal consciousness, their belief in justice and the inevitability of being held accountable for breaking the law, and the principle of equality before the law.”²⁵

The Federal Security Service has refrained from criminal investigations within the oligarchy, even though one of its main jobs is to fight economic crime. In fact, the service has its own corruption problems, which then Federal Security Service chief Kovalev admitted in 1996, saying that some of his officers were highly bribable and that he hoped that the service would be able to “cleanse itself.”²⁶ Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the Federal Security Service has become less corrupt since then. On the contrary, its employees, lured by profits, have reportedly moved into the criminal underworld in droves. A 1997 study by the Center For Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. confirmed that the epidemic of crime in Russia had penetrated the Federal Security Service, whose staff was easy prey for the mafia.²⁷

It is of course difficult to estimate how extensive corruption actually is within this agency, but the stories that abound in the media about its illegal activities create the impression that it is fairly widespread. It is not confined to the Federal Security Service. In 1996 Valerii Monastyrstskii, chief of the Financial-Economic Administration of the Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information, was arrested for embezzlement of billions of rubles worth of state funds. The director of this agency, Aleksandr Starovoitov, was later implicated in the scandal by one of his deputies, Aleksandr Orlov. Orlov was quoted in a Russian newspaper as saying: “Could it be that General Starovoitov is charmed? The accusations, one-tenth of which would be enough to get any other minister fired in disgrace, bounce off him like peas off an armored vest. We hear that the President likes him a lot. Maybe for his help during the elections.”²⁸ (The

communications agency developed the automated system that counted the votes.) It was not until well after the scandal had broken, in December 1998, that Starovoitov finally was dismissed, to be replaced by a subordinate, Vladislav Shirstiuk.²⁹

Indeed Yeltsin has consistently ignored the accusations of corruption against his subordinates in the security organs, just as he has ignored corruption charges against others in his government. During his long convalescence from heart surgery, Yeltsin appointed Boris Berezovskii, a billionaire who had financed much of his re-election campaign, as a deputy to the Security Council. Amazingly, Berezovskii, who had close ties with the mafia and whose business deals were highly suspect, had the job of overseeing the security services on Yeltsin's behalf. Not surprisingly, despite a promise by security chief Kovalev that his agency would fight crime with a "sword of vengeance," the rule of corrupt elites has continued, stifling democracy and economic development. Yet Yeltsin has had nothing but praise for his security agencies. Speaking in December 1997 in honor of the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the secret police, the Cheka, in 1917, Yeltsin was upbeat about the accomplishments of the security services under his leadership: "The principles of democracy and the work of the security bodies do not clash in this country. True patriots of their cause are now working in our secret services."³⁰

Instead of making some effort to reform the security services and make them accountable for their dismal record in fighting crime, Yeltsin took a hands-off approach and left them to their own devices. Moreover, as he became increasingly incapacitated because of illness, he brought several security professionals into his government, thereby strengthening the ties between the security agencies and his administration. Vladimir Putin, who began his career in KGB counterintelligence and later worked for the mayor of St. Petersburg, became head of Yeltsin's Main Control Directorate (for administering Russia's regional governments) in 1997. Later, in September 1998, Yeltsin fired Federal Security Service Chief Kovalev and appointed Putin in his place. That same month, Yeltsin appointed as his chief of staff Nikolai Bordyuzha, formerly chief of the border guard and the veteran of many years' service in the KGB's military counterintelligence branch. Reportedly Bordyuzha's appointment was strongly supported by Primakov because they shared the same views on the necessity for a strong central government.³¹ Yeltsin also brought in two other KGB veterans, Viktor Zorin and Vladimir Makarov to serve in the Presidential Administration. Zorin had most recently directed the Federal Security Service's anti-terrorism department.

The influence of the KGB old guard became even stronger with the appointment of former KGB spymaster Evgenii Primakov as Russian prime minister in August 1998. Primakov soon assumed many presidential powers as Yeltsin lay on his sick bed. Primakov appointed a former subordinate at the intelligence service, Iurii Zubakov, as the chief of staff of his cabinet. Zubakov had a long career with the KGB, working in military counterintelligence in the Soviet period. Another former intelligence official, Robert Markarian, became head of Primakov's secretariat. Thus by the end of 1998, a coterie of former KGB officials was running much of the government.

Later, as signs of conflict between Yeltsin and Primakov emerged, Yeltsin made further changes in his administration, changes that ensured the domination of Yeltsin loyalists. In mid-March 1999, Yeltsin dismissed Bordyuzha as his chief of staff (apparently because he was too close to Primakov and his chief of staff Zubakov) and replaced him with a former subordinate of Berezovskii, Alexander Voloshin. Yeltsin then made two other key appointments: Vladimir Putin, chief of the Federal Security Service, became head of Yeltsin's Security Council, while holding on to his other job; and Sergei Stepashin, Minister of Internal Affairs, was given the simultaneous position of first deputy prime minister. A former chief of the Federal Security Service, Stepashin had masterminded the invasion of Chechnya in December 1994 and had a reputation for hard-line solutions to political problems. Having supported Yeltsin in October 1993 when he used troops to storm the parliament, Stepashin could be counted on to back Yeltsin with his Ministry of Internal Affairs troops in the event of a crisis. In addition, because Putin and Stepashin controlled the agencies which investigated corruption, they were in a position to protect Yeltsin cronies like Berezovskii, who had been charged with economic crimes by the Russian prosecutor-general, Iurii Skuratov. In fact, this is exactly what has happened. Neither Stepashin nor Putin arrested Berezovskii, although Skuratov had issued a warrant for his arrest in April 1999. None of this boded well for Primakov, whom, as an opponent of Berezovskii, Yeltsin clearly wanted to fire.³²

Facing an impending vote on impeachment by the Russian Parliament in mid-May 1999, Yeltsin took a bold step. Over the vehement objections of parliamentary deputies, he fired Primakov and appointed Stepashin in his place. Yeltsin then let it be known that if the parliament voted for his impeachment this would amount to a declaration of war against the Kremlin, thus hinting strongly that troops would be called out. His gambit worked: the parliament backed down and did not vote for his impeachment. Moreover, the deputies approved

Stepashin's nomination as prime minister on the first vote.

Whether or not the special troops of the Ministry of Interior and the Federal Security Service would follow the orders of their superiors in the event of a confrontation with the parliament is an open question. If Yeltsin decided on a show of force, his first act would be to declare a state of emergency, which is basically a declaration of martial law. Although Yeltsin might call on two airborne divisions of the regular military for support, as he did in October 1993, he would probably rely mainly on the special troops of the Ministry of the Interior, numbering several thousand, and the security service's elite Alpha unit, numbering around 300. Although these troops are considered more reliable than the army troops, it by no means certain that they would agree to employ force. They were slow to move in 1993—Alpha leaders demanded written orders before they finally agreed to storm the parliament building—and today they would be defending a president who is far more unpopular than he was in 1993. Nonetheless, the fact that Yeltsin was able to cow the Duma with threats of force suggests that Duma deputies did not think they could count on a mutiny if troops were asked to use coercion.³³

Attacks on Civil Rights

The rampant corruption in Russia has hampered the democratic process in Russia by depriving ordinary people of the economic opportunities that would be available to them in a properly regulated free market economy. While the oligarchs and mafia leaders have amassed billions of rubles in secret bank accounts abroad, the Russian people have experienced a steady deterioration in their standard of living. The collapse of the ruble and the government default on its foreign debt in August of 1998—the result of government failure to collect taxes, arrears on wages and pensions, and the widespread corruption—have brought the economy to a near halt. According to a recent statistic, over thirty per cent of the Russian population is living below the poverty line.³⁴ The economic crisis has become so severe that even robber barons like Berezovskii have suffered huge financial losses.

The spread of corruption and the mafia's domination of businesses have also led to a marked rise in violence. Contract killings (the going rate for which is said to be \$2,000) and kidnappings of businessmen and bankers have become an everyday occurrence in Russia, and the perpetrators are rarely caught. Even more disturbing have been the

numerous murders of journalists and politicians, which also remain unsolved. According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation, at least nine journalists were murdered in the first eight months of 1998 alone. Several of them were apparently killed because they had been investigating corruption in the government. The most notorious case was that of Larisa Iudina, editor of an opposition newspaper in the Russian republic of Kalmykia. She was stabbed to death on 7 June 1998 on her way to receive documents incriminating Kalmyk President Kirsan Iliumzhinov in the embezzlement of state funds. Beatings and threats against family members of journalists are also commonplace.³⁵

Six members of the Russian parliament have been murdered since 1993. None of the murders has been solved. In November 1998, Russian parliamentarian Galina Starovoitova, who was known for her outspoken defense of human rights and interethnic cooperation, was shot to death in the stairwell of her St. Petersburg apartment building by two attackers using sophisticated machine guns. A former close associate of human rights activist Andrei Sakharov, Starovoitova had reportedly requested a Kremlin meeting on the growing dangers of political extremism just hours before her murder. The Federal Security Service, along with the police from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, assumed charge of the investigation because the crime involved the killing of an elected official. Security chief Vladimir Putin expressed outrage over the murder and vowed that his agency would find the assassins, but, as the Russian media predicted, after several months the Federal Security Service has failed to come up with a suspect. Typically, the Kremlin used the murder as a pretext for introducing tough new anti-crime measures, which gave the security police significant new powers. (The usually reserved Primakov even announced: "we will physically eliminate all criminals.") But the new measures did nothing to further the investigation of the Starovoitova case.³⁶

Starovoitova, who had been a victim of KGB persecution in the Soviet period, was no friend of the security services, which may explain why they had little motivation to get to the bottom of her murder. Some observers have even suggested that employees or former employees of the Federal Security Service had a hand in the crime. In order to ascertain that Starovoitova would be flying up to St. Petersburg from Moscow at that time wiretapping and covert surveillance would have been necessary, and the murder weapons were of the type used mainly by the special services.³⁷ The security services have been linked to contract killings on other occasions. In October 1994 investigative journalist Dmitrii Kholodov, who was probing corruption in the Ministry of Defense, was killed when he picked up a satchel left

for him by a source working in counterintelligence; the satchel had been booby-trapped.³⁸ Shortly before the Starovoitova murder, a group of Federal Security Service employees claimed publicly that their agency was being used to "settle accounts with undesirable persons, to carry out private political and criminal orders for a fee, and sometimes simply as an instrument to earn money." They went on to assert that one of them had been ordered by a Federal Security Service official to kill business tycoon Boris Berezovskii.³⁹

Whatever the case, the murders of journalists and politicians who criticize the regime and investigate corruption have created an atmosphere of lawlessness and fear that threatens the democratic process in Russia. It is all very well to have an independent press and an elected parliament, but if journalists and parliamentary deputies face a possible death penalty for expressing themselves freely, these institutions lose their effectiveness. The security services are not only failing to protect Russian society from this lawlessness; they themselves may be involved in the violence.

Meanwhile, the Federal Security Service has cracked down harshly on religious freedom, devoting considerable time and effort to persecuting believers of all persuasions. A new law "On Religious Associations and Freedom of Conscience," signed into effect by Yeltsin in September 1997, has provided the legal basis for such persecution. The law actually countermands the 1993 Constitution by depriving religious organizations of basic rights if they were not officially registered as religious institutions in the Soviet period. Shortly after the law was passed security and militia forces assaulted the complex of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the city of Noginsk near Moscow, beating and arresting close to a hundred worshipers. Similar instances were reported elsewhere in Russia. A year later Primakov, at the time Foreign Minister, issued a secret instruction requiring all foreign clergy and their families to leave Russia every three months for the purpose of obtaining new visas at Russian embassies abroad. This crackdown on religion, carried out in large part by the security agencies, caused the Moscow Helsinki Group to express its grave concern to the Russian government "over the erosion of religious liberties in Russia."⁴⁰

Environmentalists are another category of targets for the Federal Security Services. Two recent criminal cases against environmental whistleblowers have drawn widespread attention both in Russia and the West. These cases illustrate the Soviet-style modus operandi of the Federal Security Service, which has blatantly disregarded the civil rights of the defendants and flouted the criminal procedural laws. In 1996 the service arrested Aleksandr Nikitin, a retired navy captain

who had worked in the navy's nuclear safety division. Nikitin was helping a Norwegian environmental group, Bellona, with a report on the dangers of nuclear contamination caused by the Russian Northern Fleet. He was accused by the Federal Security Service of passing top-secret information on the nuclear submarine fleet to the Norwegians and charged with treason in the form of espionage (article 64 of the Russian Criminal Code).⁴¹

According to the charges, the exact contents of which are unknown because the Federal Security Service labeled them secret, Nikitin gave evidence to Bellona that caused damage to the defense interests of Russia, but the Federal Security Service did not specify what parts of the Bellona report actually contained state secrets. Bellona employees and Nikitin claim that all the information in the report had come from publicly available sources and that the Russian nuclear submarine fleet had been described in greater detail in numerous publications. The difference from the other publications was that Bellona's intention was to research and publicize the dangers of nuclear contamination in order to prevent an ecological disaster in the future.⁴² (The Norwegians had a particular reason for concern about a Russian cover-up of ecological information: in 1985 authorities in Moscow persistently denied that a disaster had occurred at Chernobyl while radioactive fallout was covering Scandinavia.)

In complete violation of the law, the Federal Security Service denied Nikitin the lawyer of his choice—on the grounds that the lawyer had to have a top-secret security clearance—and did not formally charge him for over six months. The service kept requesting continuances of Nikitin's detention from the prosecutor's office until Nikitin's lawyer finally received permission to represent him and requested bail. Ten months after his arrest, after the case aroused an outcry from human rights groups, Nikitin was finally released on bail.⁴³ But his case has dragged on ever since. In early February 1999, the case finally went to the Russian Supreme Court after appeals from Nikitin's lawyers, who were hoping their client would finally be acquitted. But, clearly succumbing to pressure from the Federal Security Service, the court refused to dismiss the treason charges, instead sending the case back to the St. Petersburg branch of the Federal Security Service for further investigation.

Human rights activists and international law experts responded to the ruling by expressing dismay about the growing influence of the Federal Security Service over the Russian legal system. "We are concerned that Russia is returning to Soviet days," was how a member of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee put it.⁴⁴ It is probably no coinci-

dence that the recently appointed first deputy chief of the Federal Security Service in Moscow, Viktor Cherkesov, initiated the Nikitin case when he was chief of its St. Petersburg branch. Cherkesov's notorious reputation as a ruthless persecutor of dissidents in the seventies and eighties is well known, but that did not prevent the Yeltsin administration from promoting him to Moscow.⁴⁵

More recently, Grigorii Pasko, a navy captain and a reporter for a navy newspaper was arrested in Vladivostok in November 1997 and accused of selling classified documents to a Japanese television station. Pasko had first incurred the wrath of the Federal Security Service in 1993, when he shot video footage of the Russian navy dumping nuclear waste into the Sea of Japan. When it was shown on television in Japan, it caused a furor, embarrassing the Russians. The documents which led to Pasko's arrest and indictment on charges of military espionage reportedly provide further evidence that the Russian Pacific Fleet is dumping dangerous amounts of radioactive materials into the sea. Pasko's trial, in a military court closed to the public, has been dragged out by postponements. Unlike Nikitin, Pasko was not granted bail, so he has languished in prison for well over a year, with his health deteriorating from the harsh prison conditions. Pasko has insisted that the documents found on him by the Federal Security Service were not classified and that in passing on evidence of nuclear dumping into the sea, he was only doing his duty as a reporter.⁴⁶

Why would the Kremlin allow the Federal Security Service to continue with these cases, despite the universal condemnation of them by human rights activists? Officials in the Yeltsin administration probably do not want to alienate the Russian military establishment by allowing their haphazard nuclear practices to be exposed by whistleblowers. With the political situation so unstable and their own fates uncertain, the military is a constituency which could be crucial in any future power struggle. Also, there is presumably a lot of public support for a hard-line, Soviet-style policy when it comes to dealing with people who collude with foreigners in exposing Russia's shortcomings, especially in the military, which still is a source of national pride. Finally, the publicity surrounding these cases serves as a warning to other journalists and environmentalists not to delve into sensitive topics like nuclear safety.

Return of a Secrecy Regime?

As these cases show, secrecy laws can be a powerful political weapon, even in today's Russia. In the Soviet period, secrecy was the glue which held the system together, enabling its officials to get away with all sorts of malfeasance, and the authorities continued after 1991 to revert to secrecy sanctions when potentially damaging revelations threatened them. Control of information, enforced by the Federal Security Service, is still seen as a key element of political control. In contrast to most democratic societies, where the free flow of information is seen as an essential prerequisite for good government and only information which is strictly related to national security is classified as secret, the Russian government has, through its secrecy laws, restricted public access to a broad range of information.

These restrictions relate to both current and historical information. In the initial period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the doors of the archives were opening up and the Russian press was granted unprecedented freedom, it appeared as though the regime of secrecy had ended. Up through 1993, access to the archives was liberalized, and large numbers of historical documents were declassified. Collections in the archives of the former KGB (both intelligence and counterintelligence), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense remained closed to researchers, but large numbers of documents in the archives of the former Communist Party, especially those that pre-dated 1952, were made available. More recently, however, the atmosphere of openness in the archives has reversed itself. The declassification process has been slowed down by complicated and laborious bureaucratic regulations, and officers from the security services were making their presence known in the archives. As *The New York Times* observed:

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Communist Party in 1991, the prevailing mood in Russia was to distance the new system from the old. It was then that the archives were opened, and that many of the most revealing documents emerged. But the initial euphoria soon waned under economic and political turmoil, while Russia's foreign policy recovered from the early infatuation with the West.⁴⁷

There were several factors involved in the tightening up of access to archives. Money was one consideration. Those in charge of archi-

val collections often considered them their personal property and wanted to sell them to foreigners for a profit rather than to release them for public access.⁴⁸ Also, especially with the archives of the former KGB, there was a strong incentive to keep the past hidden. Most of the KGB old guard was still around, and its members naturally did not want their sinister deeds during the Soviet period to come to light. By guarding the secrets of the past, they could ward off public scrutiny of their actions in the present.

The former party apparatchiks who were running the country went along with the imposition of secrecy. They too had much to hide. The situation in Russia was very different from that in the Eastern European countries, where new governments responded to public pressure and opened up at least some of the files. In Poland, for example, the government just recently passed a law requiring top civil servants to reveal past ties with the secret police.⁴⁹ The Russian ruling elite, by contrast, was able to prevent this from happening, mainly by tightening up secrecy regulations. Yeltsin issued the first law on state secrets in 1993, a law that was harshly criticized by human rights activists because the categories of secret information were so broad and punishment for revealing any such information was imprisonment for up to five years. The next year Yeltsin issued a directive, authorizing the heads of thirty-eight ministries and departments to decide what materials should be classified. Once materials were classified as secret, it was the responsibility of the Federal Security Service to safeguard them. This meant that security officers, in order to ensure that ministries were following the required security procedures, were drawn back into government institutions. Even more disturbing, since many privatized enterprises still had access to materials that were considered secret, the Federal Security Service could enter their domain as well.⁵⁰

Tightening up the regime of secrecy even more, the Yeltsin Administration came out with additional laws. In March 1995, a lengthy statute elaborated the procedure for de-classifying documents, carried out by a so-called Interagency Commission for the Protection of State Secrets, whose members were mainly from the security agencies. The complicated review process meant that the process of de-classification of archival documents would be dragged out further. In December 1995, a presidential edict approved a list of the categories of information classified as secret. The list was so comprehensive that it raised doubts about further declassification efforts.⁵¹

In early 1998, a new law replaced this list with an even more comprehensive "list of information to be categorized as a state secret."⁵² With the concept of what information is secret so broad, it is easy for

the Federal Security Service to claim that just about any troublesome journalist or political activist is violating secrecy laws, or even, as in the cases of Nikitin and Pasko, committing treason. Although such cases are still rare, the possibility for more widespread abuse is there. A growing atmosphere of spy mania in the government makes this possibility even greater. The Federal Security Service now has a special hotline to receive citizens' reports about suspected spies and appears to be trying to stir up public fears about spies by means of a propaganda campaign. In February 1999, for example, the Federal Security Service's chief of military counterintelligence, Boris Pratskevich, claimed in a rare interview that the West is intensifying efforts to steal Russian military secrets by recruiting hundreds of new agents in Russia.⁵³

Apparently the heightened concern about foreign spies is the pretext for a new regulation that is about to be introduced in the name of protecting internal security. This regulation, which is due to be approved by the Ministry of Justice, would allow the Federal Security Service to monitor all e-mail messages and web sites sent or received on the Internet in Russia. It must be said that the US government monitors international e-mail traffic through the National Security Agency. But, given the security services' history of abuse of their powers and of violating individual rights, this new regulation is a cause for concern on the part of democrats. Observers point out that, while the stated purpose of the new regulation is to curb crime and corruption, the Federal Security Service could well target its monitoring on politicians, social activists and journalists and use the information to pressure them.⁵⁴

The regulation would reportedly require the Internet providers themselves to bear the costs of installing the surveillance hardware that the Federal Security Service needs to monitor the Internet. Because the providers would have to pass these costs on to the consumer, the result would be that the number of Internet users would decline, thus making the Federal Security Service's job of monitoring Internet communication easier. As one Russian newspaper assessed the situation: "At a time when nearly every country in the world is making great strides toward embracing the Internet as the greatest tool in the history of civilization for the exchange of information and ideas, Russia is retreating back toward its dark, despotic past."⁵⁵

A Chill in Relations with the West

As some experts predicted, Primakov's move from the Foreign Intelligence Service to the post of Russian Foreign Minister in early 1996 led to a more confrontational foreign policy on Russia's part. Although the change has been subtle, the past three years have witnessed a growing chill in Russia's attitude toward the United States and other western democracies. Almost immediately after Primakov became foreign minister there was more aggressive talk about espionage. Indeed, speaking in February 1996, Yeltsin ordered the intelligence services to step up their economic spying in order to close Russia's technology gap with the West. By all accounts they did increase spying. According to some reports, Russia has concentrated not only on western civilian technologies, but also on sophisticated military equipment and on NATO military capabilities.⁵⁶ In late 1998 a western diplomat was quoted as saying: "The surge in Russian espionage is astonishing. It's like the good old days of the KGB."⁵⁷

At the same time, the Russians have accused the West of stepping up its espionage against them. In early 1998 Yeltsin praised the accomplishments of the Federal Security Service for exposing almost thirty foreign agents during the previous year.⁵⁸ A year later, in early 1999, a deputy director of the Federal Security Service told the press that his agency had tracked several hundred persons suspected of spying in Russia and had prevented nineteen espionage attempts, one of which could have cost Russian security \$140 million dollars.⁵⁹

Anti-American statements on the part of Yeltsin and his colleagues were accompanied by moves to build stronger contacts in Asia, by making overtures to countries like China and India. The purpose of the strategy was apparently to counter the threat to Russia posed by NATO expansion and to establish Russia as a power equal to the United States in Asia. By 1997 Russian and Chinese leaders were talking about a "strategic" relationship, which included Russian sales of advanced weapon technologies to China. Russia was also presenting itself as a friend of the Arab cause in the Middle East, as evidenced by its rapprochement with Iran and its attempt to lift UN sanctions against Iraq. Much of this new anti-Westernism was the direct handiwork of Primakov, who as the Kremlin's Middle Eastern expert in the 1970s and 1980s was a strong advocate of providing arms sales and intelligence support to authoritarian regimes like Libya, Iran, and Syria.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, Russia's hardening attitude toward the West was not attributable to Primakov alone. His appointment as foreign minister, made by Yeltsin, was a reflection of deeper changes which were oc-

curing in Russia. Communist and right wing groups had gained a strong influence in the parliament and they needed to be appeased. The deteriorating economy made many Russians resent westerners and feel that they were losing ground to them. Russians increasingly began to resent organizations like the International Monetary Fund, which imposed what many viewed as draconian conditions on their loans to Russia. The idea that the United States and its allies bore the blame for Russia's situation because they were interfering with Russia's internal situation, to the point of actively subverting the country's development, was appealing. Also, of course, stories of foreign spies in Russia and of alleged Russian traitors like Nikitin and Pasko diverted attention from the economic miseries and the growing political chaos in the country.

Primakov's accession to the job of prime minister in August 1998 and Yeltsin's almost total abnegation of the presidency since then served to accelerate the growing split with the West and the consequent clamp down on freedoms at home. Primakov's refusal to support US efforts to deny Saddam Hussein weapons of mass destruction and his exploitation of anti-American sentiments in the Middle East are examples of how he has challenged America's leading role in global security. His reluctance to comply with International Monetary Fund conditions on restructuring the economy and his failure to deal with Russia's mounting foreign debt soured relations with foreign investors and erected further barriers to improved relations with the West.

Not surprisingly, the war in Kosovo, which began in March 1999, added fuel to the flames of anti-Westernism in Russia. It was not so much traditional Russian allegiance to the Serbs, but rather resentment at NATO's interference in a country belonging to Russia's sphere of influence, which caused outrage among politicians, journalists, and average Russians. They ignored Milošević's policy of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and focused instead on the damage and loss of life caused by NATO's air campaign. As former Russian Prime Minister Andrei Kozyrev put it;

Russia's strong official condemnation of NATO's action against Yugoslavia as 'flagrant aggression' and its early threats to take military countermeasures have dramatically revealed the anti-American, anti-Western sentiments prevailing in Russian foreign policy. The Russian government explains the need to meet NATO with an iron fist not by reference to the idea of Slavic

brotherhood, but in terms of opposition to the American policy of 'world domination.'⁶¹

For all the belligerent talk, the Yeltsin Administration clearly has not been willing to break its ties with the West over Yugoslavia. There is too much at stake in terms of economic aid that Russia desperately needs. Yeltsin's sudden dismissal of Prime Minister Primakov in mid-May 1999 raised Western hopes that Russia would follow through in brokering a peace with Milošević. But the new prime minister, Sergei Stepashin, whose entire career has been spent in the police and security apparatus, may do little better than Primakov in furthering the process. Stepashin, who is best known for his leading role in the bloody Russian war against Chechnia, has in the past advocated an iron fist against ethnic separatists and thus it is unlikely that he has any sympathy for the Kosovars.⁶²

Russia Fragmenting?

The growing assertiveness of Russia's regional governments in response to a failing leadership in Moscow and the tendency for local regional bosses to disregard Moscow's orders has become a real cause for concern in the Kremlin. Trends toward separatism have emerged in certain key regions such as Western and Eastern Siberia, the Urals and the Far East, where political leaders—dubbed “naughty little tsars” by *The Economist* magazine—have challenged Moscow's authority by refusing to pay taxes and taking control of local resources.⁶³ The Primakov government responded to the signs of separatism by admitting that it is a serious problem and pledging to take strong measures to stop the trend. In January of this year Primakov vowed that Moscow “will not allow Russia to be lost” and promised to work together with regions “to stifle, liquidate, and root out separatist tendencies.” Exactly how Primakov planned to combat separatism is unclear. A proposal he made to have governors appointed by Moscow rather than elected met with vocal opposition.⁶⁴

The new prime minister, Sergei Stepashin, has little experience in economic matters or in negotiations with the West, but his past work in the government, first as head of the Russian security services and later as Minister of Internal Affairs, suggests that he will place a new emphasis on reining in Russia's recalcitrant regions. In public comments made after he joined Yeltsin's cabinet as first deputy prime minister in late April, Stepashin indicated that one of his main tasks was

to fight crime. The focus, he said, would be on lawlessness in the outlying regions of Russia. According to Stepashin, Yeltsin was "particularly concerned with the upcoming elections and specifically with ways to prevent criminals getting into power."⁶⁵

Stepashin might advocate using the threat of force to back up Moscow, but this approach has serious problems. In the words of one expert, "the Center does not enjoy the monopoly over the legitimate institutions of coercion it once did, nor does it necessarily reliably control those nominally subordinate to the Center."⁶⁶ The military is demoralized and weak, with many of its units having been unpaid for months. The regular police, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, are corrupt, inefficient and unreliable. As for the Federal Security Service, its officers are better trained and more efficient than the regular policemen, but they may not be willing to oppose the local powers on behalf of the center. Some regional authorities have tried to exert control over their security and law enforcement agencies, forming their own security councils with representatives from these agencies as members. The fact that Moscow is often unable to pay salaries of security and police personnel in the regions makes it more difficult to assert federal authority.⁶⁷

Although this situation may prevent the Federal Security Service from using force in the regions, it is not necessarily a "plus" for liberal democracy. Local authorities often have free rein in imposing law and order in the regions, which can mean egregious human rights violations. Security police frequently harass religious groups, and more than twenty regional governments have passed laws restricting the activities of religious minorities. Whereas the mainstream press in Moscow and other large cities publish relatively freely, journalists in the provinces are often threatened, arrested, beaten, and even murdered (as in the case of Larisa Iudina) when they criticize the local authorities. According to the 1999 Human Rights Watch Report,

Russia's provinces continued to devolve into fiefdoms that engage in civil and political rights violations with impunity from Moscow. In an apparent exchange for support of its policies or promises not to seek secession, the central government turned a blind eye to corruption by regional leaders, and refused to react to blatant human rights violations in the regions. Chief among these were harassment of ethnic minorities and violations of press freedom, freedom of conscience, and electoral rights.⁶⁸

Even if Moscow was able to curb human rights abuses in Russia's eighty-nine regions, it would not be a high priority. Moscow is more concerned with imposing political and economic control than with establishing democracy in the regions. Whatever the scenario in center-periphery relations, the future does not bode well for western-style liberal democracy in Russia. This should come as no surprise to long-time observers of the Russian scene. The collapse of the traditional Soviet order could hardly lead to a democracy and an efficient free-market system when the old communist elite was allowed to run the country by relying on the agencies which emerged from the old KGB. The growing influence of the security services at the national and regional levels has been both a symptom and a cause of the deterioration of civil and economic rights in Russia and the decline of the democratic process.

It might even be argued that Russia is worse off in terms of its democratic development than it was in the late Gorbachev era, when elements of western liberal democracy—freedom of the press, freedom of movement and popular elections—first began to take hold. At that time, elections were freer and more expressive of the people's will, and there was a real popular momentum behind the movement for political reform. Significantly, the security apparatus, the KGB, was confronted with widespread public criticism and demands that its powers be curtailed. But the Gorbachev era led only to the destruction of the communist structure, not to the establishment of a viable system of government characterized by liberal democracy. As political scientist Alexander Lukin observed: "The elections do not create a new, effective system of government based on law and separation of powers, but are used by various clans in their struggle for power and even by criminal groups to evade justice."⁶⁹

Given Russia's communist legacy, there was probably little that the West could have done differently in its policy toward Russia that would have changed this situation. But the reluctance of the West, and the Clinton Administration in particular, to acknowledge the realities of Russia's failed reform and the depth of its current crisis could have serious long-term consequences, especially given Russia's arsenal of nuclear warheads and its expressed goal of maintaining its status as a superpower. It is time to recognize that, at least for the next few years, there is little hope for more progress toward democracy in Russia. As Anatol Lieven expressed it:

Unfortunately it now seems that the decline of the state has gone so far that little repair may be possible, certainly not from a regime so closely tied to the magnates. Western demands for further 'reform' miss the point. Anything now done in Russia will be not so much reform or anti-reform as desperate crisis management in extremely adverse circumstances.⁷⁰

It will take a complete change of guard in the Kremlin and a new generation of political leaders unschooled by the communist party and the KGB before Russia can return to the process of reform.

Notes

¹ Alexander Lukin, "Electoral Democracy or Electoral Clanism? Russian Democratization and Theories of Transition," in *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 93-110 (p. 99).

² As quoted in Amy Knight, *Spies Without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 36.

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