

The KGB Lingers Unreformed

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

Russian President Boris Yeltsin gave himself the perfect opportunity to do away with the former KGB when he recently sacked Security Minister Viktor Barannikov. If there was ever a time since the 1991 coup attempt to strike at the heart of the all-powerful secret police, it is now.

But the populist Russian leader has recently squandered a series of chances to challenge and eliminate his government's most noxious Soviet-era elements. In so doing, he has alienated his reformist friends and rewarded his hard-line enemies. Among Mr. Yeltsin's most destructive missteps was his decision to preserve most of the old KGB and his failure to dissolve the Soviet-designed "parliament" which has had him on the defensive. He has backed away from free-market economic reforms and responded weakly to the disastrous declaration that rubles printed before 1993 would no longer be honored as currency.

To win back some of the support of his countrymen and put the country's reforms back on track, President Yeltsin should take two bold steps. First, he must nullify—not water down—the decision made in his absence to gut the ruble, thereby rescuing the thousands of private businesses on the verge of ruin and salvaging the savings of millions of impoverished Russians. While it may be considered too late for this first step, the second is long overdue. Mr. Yeltsin must instruct his new security minister to conduct a wholesale purge of the secret police bureaucracy and do away with the legacy of the KGB once and for all.

The KGB Beast

The Ministry of Security is an immensely powerful institution. It retains most of the KGB's internal structures and functions, including counterintelligence, border guards, military and police counterintelligence, physical security of subways, highways, railroads and the Aerofloat airline fleet; economic and industrial security, counter-organized crime and counter-narcotics, security of bunkers and certain government buildings, analysis, military construction, technical laboratories, surveillance, mail interception, wiretapping, archives, investigations and training. A ministry spokesman has acknowledged that it also contains the "Administration for Combating Terrorism"—the new name for the former KGB Fifth Chief Directorate that was responsible for political repression.

While it is no longer an instrument of the Communist Party, the Ministry of Security is structured and staffed as though it still is. Two years after the coup attempt, the state security headquarters at Lubyanka Square in Moscow continue to sport the outward symbolism of the dreaded KGB, with its sword-and-shield crest still bearing the hammer-and-sickle.

Those images, visible to any tourist who walks the perimeter of the complex, indicate the primitive mindset of those inside. According to KGB veterans I interviewed, training of new recruits is almost no different than it was in the past, the only exception worthy of note being an end to instruction in Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The KGB's cult-like devotion to Feliks Dzerzhinskiy, the mass-murdering founder

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of Lenin's Cheka secret police, is still inculcated among state security personnel, who continue proudly to call themselves "chekists." Dzerzhinskiy statues and memorabilia adorn ministry facilities like religious icons. One Russian parliamentary leader, Nikolai Ryabov, who interviewed a number of KGB officers after the coup attempt observed, "Meetings and conversations with KGB leaders of various ranks clearly highlight one detail. They have no understanding in their minds that they are serving the constitution or the law, they have no reverence for the rule of law and citizens' rights. They unquestioningly and consistently fulfilled only the orders of their superiors; this for them was the main value, even though there may have been declarations of the 'we serve the people and the motherland' type."

The old KGB informant networks—the massive files on innocent citizens, the scores of thousands of secret policemen who remain on duty in every Russian village, the persecutors of Andrei Sakharov and countless others—all remain in place. They serve no purpose if Russia is to become a real

democracy. Now is the time for President Yeltsin to sweep them all away.

There is no reason why legitimate security functions such as counterintelligence, criminal investigations, and the like, cannot be parceled out to other institutions such as the armed forces and the *militiya* uniformed police, or established as independent agencies. While none of those institutions could be considered reformed, the breakup of the Ministry of Security would at least dilute the potential for abuse over the time it would take to create and staff new institutions compatible with democracy. Moreover, some of the ministry's departments have no legitimate function at all, and should be abolished altogether. Their records should be turned over to an independent commission for preservation and judicious release, much like the successful Gauck Commission has done with the Stasi archives of the former East Germany.

Opportunity for Change

Recent experience has shown that mere replacement of the power-hungry General Barannikov, who managed to reverse some of the modest reforms carried out after the 1991 coup attempt, will not solve the problem. When Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Mr. Yeltsin named the reformist Communist Party functionary Vadim Bakatin to head the KGB immediately after the putsch, Mr. Bakatin lacked a trusted staff on whom he could rely to take control of the organization. He also believed, wrongly as events proved, that the KGB could be reformed from within.

Mr. Bakatin later lamented, "one of my main errors was that I came into the KGB without my own staff and without a large group of like-minded people devoted to the matter. I overestimated my own powers. Without my own staff to turn over this bulky and cumbersome thing called the KGB, it proved to be almost impossible."

Unless President Yeltsin directs his new security chief to bring in his own team and conduct a thorough, top-to-bottom purge of the bloated, corrupt and out-of-control chekist bureaucracy, old KGB insiders will quickly isolate him and turn him into a mere figurehead. Their powers safely preserved, they will then use that figurehead to show the world, one more time, how the secret police have "reformed."

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