

Who Is Making Foreign Policy?

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Undermined politically and with its powers diffused, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Andrei Kozyrev has been eclipsed by the former KGB First Directorate of Yevgeniy Primakov.

President Boris Yel'tsin, who built his power base on the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the military, and the secret services in late 1991, is almost completely at the mercy of them today. While he limited the former KGB's potential to act against him personally by dividing it into separate organizations, he enhanced their power as independent institutions by dismissing his democratic allies' demands that they be purged and reformed, and by providing them with material means to sustain themselves free of institutional checks and balances.

Even before the Soviet collapse, Kozyrev warned about the events now unfolding.¹ In July 1992, he argued that the country could not build democracy at home while using force in the "near abroad" or against ethnic separatist enclaves within the Russian Federation.

Decisionmaking

Kozyrev's policies of cooperation with the West fell into disfavor and hostility overnight among the revanchist forces with whom Yel'tsin had surrounded himself almost immediately after the Soviet collapse. On creating the presidential Security Council in 1992 to examine foreign and domestic policies, Yel'tsin appointed nationalist and communist individuals—sharing a common chauvinist and imperial vision—to the most prominent posts, a move that reformist State Councillor Sergei Shakhrai warned would usurp the president's powers in a "collective leadership."² Soon afterward, while Yel'tsin was attending a G-7 summit in Munich, the Security Council voted to recommend that Kozyrev and First Deputy Minister Fedor Shelov-Kovdayev be removed.³

The Security Council became the leading vehicle by which national-communists, the military-industrial complex, the fuel and energy complex, the bureaucracy, the armed forces, and the secret services would use Yel'tsin to protect their own interests while they marginalized reformers. The president expressed little interest in security policy, and delegated authority in this area to others, particularly the "power ministries" of Defense, Internal Affairs, and the organs of the former KGB.⁴

Meanwhile, the authority of the Foreign Ministry declined. After ousting State Secretary Gennadiy Burbulis and

Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar in late 1992, Yel'tsin signed a decree to form an "Interdepartmental Foreign Policy Commission" within the Security Council to coordinate foreign policy decisionmaking over Kozyrev's head, naming revanchist council secretary Yuri Skokov as chairman.⁵ It was in this context that Kozyrev gave his imperialistic, anti-Western Stockholm speech that so shocked the world. Though he quickly assured his audience that his words constituted only a warning, he soon adopted the imperialistic mantle for himself.

A year later, in anticipation of the new constitution that vastly expanded presidential powers, the Security Council grew in size and influence.

Strengths of SVR vs. Foreign Ministry

As Kozyrev and the Foreign Ministry faded, the External Intelligence Service (*Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki*, SVR) under Yevgeniy Primakov saw its star rise. Primakov, a former member of Gorbachev's security council and the last head of the USSR KGB First Chief Directorate who directed its name change to SVR, is the highest-level holdover from the Soviet government. He and the SVR possess substantial strengths that Kozyrev and the Foreign Ministry lack in the present power game.

Part of the old power structure. As the former KGB First Chief Directorate, the SVR is a fundamental part of the old power structure. It has been neither purged nor reformed.

The intelligence service's quick acceptance of Primakov as an "outsider" is due not only to his own professionalism and

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political affinities, but because he was not as much of an outsider as his image suggested.

Noted for his expertise in Arab and Islamic affairs as a journalist and "academician," Primakov worked covertly for the KGB as early as 1957 under the cryptonym "Maxim."⁶ He has long identified himself with radical elements in the Middle East and southwestern Asia that are a favorite of today's Russian imperialists. His personal relationship and powers of persuasion with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein date to the late 1960s, when, during the Soviet-sponsored terrorist campaign against Turkey, he secured Baghdad's support for the Marxist-Leninist Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK).⁷

As a correspondant for *Pravda* during the Brezhnev regime's "Zionism is racism" campaign, Primakov wrote unstintingly in support of Palestinian terrorist groups during their most atrocious campaigns against Israeli civilians. He penned the communist party's most authoritative ideological justification for the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, and later made uncompromising endorsements of the military occupation.⁸ He disdained the Iran-Iraq war because it "divert[ed] the forces of Iraq and Iran from the struggle against [US] imperialism."⁹ In the early Gorbachev period he urged that the Palestine Liberation Organization remain hostile to the West as part of its "anti-imperialist nature."¹⁰ Primakov's prescriptions for cooperating with the West against international terrorism fell short of supporting sanctions against Soviet client-states like Libya; instead he supported the continued supply of weapons to the Qaddafi regime without conditions.¹¹ In 1990 and early 1991, Primakov led the Soviet initiative to prevent the US-led Desert Shield/Desert Storm coalition from driving the Iraqi military out of Kuwait.¹²

Inside the opening Soviet political structures, Primakov defended the institutional interests of the KGB. As chairman of one of the two chambers of the USSR Supreme Soviet, he fought democrats allied with Andrei Sakharov who demanded a parliamentary committee with strict oversight of the state security organs. Co-opting the reformers' rhetoric, Primakov announced the creation of such a committee, but revealed that it would be packed with representatives of the military, military-industrial complex, and KGB. He refused to answer deputies' questions, and used parliamentary maneuvers to silence debate.¹³ Primakov has shown no sign of repentance.

SVR answers directly to Yel'tsin. The SVR is the primary supplier of foreign intelligence to the Foreign Ministry and other bureaucracies, the Security Council, and

the president. Unlike the Foreign Ministry, the SVR is not a part of the government, but answers directly to Yel'tsin, usually by means of the Security Council. It not only utilizes the Foreign Ministry as cover for espionage abroad, but also is said to maintain the KGB network of informants within the diplomatic service who operate less as foreign counter-intelligence agents and more as political informants.¹⁴

The 1993 constitution leaves the Federation Council with no effective oversight authority of the SVR. Nor is there political pressure to impose checks and balances on the agency; to the contrary, revelation of the Aldrich Ames espionage case of successful penetration of the CIA has heightened the SVR's domestic credibility and prestige across the Russian political spectrum.¹⁵

SVR's economic role aids revanchist military and industrial sectors, and nomenklatura capitalists. The SVR performs important services to anti-reform and imperialist elements, bolstering their economic and thus their political power. With few exceptions, Russia cannot compete effectively in traditional Western markets, and seeks to preserve the old markets of the Soviet empire. The SVR plays no small role in this area, and is actively working to assist Russian business and industry to save old markets and to influence other countries' financial and aid policies. SVR spokesman Yuri Kobaladze stated that economic intelligence is a priority area for the espionage service, noting that whereas "before we were interested in what was going on in foreign Ministries of Defense, now we are concentrating on Ministries of Finance."¹⁶

Russian foreign policy has become more responsive to the military-industrial complex (VPK) and the fuel and energy complex (TEK). Much of the VPK's interest lies in the old Soviet arms markets of the Middle East, an area where Primakov is one of Russia's leading undisputed and best-connected experts. Though some Russian firms have broken into Western markets, one observer noted, "In circles close to the Russian VPK, there began to be a stronger conviction that 'an old friend is better than two new ones,' and that this might be the proper time to return to trade with the traditional partners, which in this region are Syria and Iraq."¹⁷

In addition to modernizing its own infrastructure with Western corporate partners and government aid and credits, the TEK is intensely interested in cutting into the territory of Western oil companies, particularly British and American, that have built independent relationships with Azerbaijan and Central Asian republics where Moscow is trying to

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reimpose its own presence. The Russian-backed ouster of pro-Western Azerbaijani President Abulfaz Elchibey and his replacement with former Azerbaijan SSR KGB chief Geidar Aliev in 1993 was a covert operation that attempted not only to reimpose political hegemony, but also to re-insert the TEK into Azerbaijan's rich petroleum deposits. The pro-Turkish Elchibey government, which resisted joining the CIS, had concluded lucrative deals with British Petroleum and American firms to develop oil fields off the Caspian coast, freezing Russia out of the picture. As soon as Aliev was installed, Azerbaijan joined the CIS, reneged on its oil deals and renegotiated them, pointedly inviting Russia's Lukoil state firm as a new joint partner with the Turkish, British, Norwegian, and American concerns. The 30-year, \$34 billion deal was signed in September 1994. Even though Lukoil had a 10 percent interest, the Russian Foreign Ministry objected to the agreement, citing ecological concerns. Soon, however, the ministry took a nationalist line, challenging the contract because "the Caspian Sea and its resources are the object of joint use of all coastal states," implying that Azerbaijan's coastal resources are partly owned by Moscow.¹⁸

SVR controls billions of party dollars illegally banked offshore. One of the SVR's unseen powers is its control of the records of tens of billions of dollars of CPSU funds illegally banked offshore. This heavily guarded informantion affords the SVR formidable leverage with the rest of the system. A Russian Supreme Soviet commission led by democratic deputy Lev Ponomarev revealed in early 1992 that as the communist party's hold on power dissolved, the Central Committee instructed KGB First Chief Directorate officers to design a system by which billions of dollars could be laundered and stored abroad under the control of party officials.¹⁹ Originally estimated at between \$15 and \$50 billion, the fortune included 60 metric tons of gold and eight metric tons of platinum.²⁰ Later estimates were much higher.

Even the most conservative sum would have been enough to finance reforms without dependency on the West. The Ponomarev Commission sought the money to support a social safety net to alleviate financial dislocations during the transition from totalitarianism. The planned humanitarian effort would have had distinct political advantages as well, by allowing Yel'tsin and his then-reformist government to push through radical changes while meeting the people's basic needs—and undermining the communist, nationalist, and imperialist opposition that has thrived because of mass economic hardship and anxiety about the future.

Primakov repeatedly refused to cooperate with the parliamentary investigation. Commission members felt they

knew where much of the money was, but they lacked the specific account numbers that were in the possession of the Ministry of Finance and elsewhere in the bureaucracy, and had insufficient resources to launch a full investigation. The state Procuracy appealed to Yel'tsin for funds, and the commission appealed to the Supreme Soviet, while recommending to Yel'tsin that he instruct the SVR to cooperate fully.²¹

Yel'tsin asked foreign countries to help Russia recover the money and treasure, hiring the American firm Kroll and Associates to follow the paper trail, but he failed to instruct Primakov to cooperate. The SVR chief also is reported to have rebuffed "numerous requests" from the Russian Procurator General with this excuse: "We have no right to expose our agents' network."²²

Effectively blocking the probe, Primakov then successfully pressured Supreme Soviet Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov to terminate the Ponomarev Commission.²³ The money never has been recovered.

SVR leadership in tune with Chechnya-like operations. Whereas Kozyrev until recently opposed the use of force in the "near abroad," SVR leaders are likely to enjoy the confidence of revanchists because of their own key involvement in violent operations in the Caucasus region to preserve the USSR. In one documented instance, Primakov was behind a murderous campaign in January 1990 to keep President Elchibey and his Popular Front from gaining power. An investigation by the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet found that Primakov was the "main organizer and inspiration" of the operation, in which 130 civilians were killed and 700 wounded. Head of the Azerbaijan KGB at the time was Lt. Gen. Vyacheslav Trubinkov, now SVR First Deputy Director.²⁴

Primakov and the Near Abroad

Kozyrev's recent nationalist rhetoric has won him few friends in the policy-making apparatus. On "near abroad" questions, Primakov appears to be overshadowing him. In September 1994, shortly before the Federal Counterintelligence Service (*Federalnaya sluzha kontrrazvedki*, FSK) stepped up covert operations to provoke fighting in Chechnya, Primakov issued a major address from the Foreign Ministry Press Center that put the world on notice that Moscow's redomination of former Soviet territory was inevitable. He announced that Russia would consolidate its control over the Commonwealth of Independent States regardless of the West's response. He titled his speech, "Russia-CIS: Does the West's Position Need Modification?" In his words, "it is *hopeless* to resist the centripetal tendencies within the CIS," and "*counter-*

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productive at the same time."²⁵ (Emphasis Primakov's.)

The SVR chief also upstaged Yel'tsin, who was to travel to the United States within days for a summit with President Bill Clinton and to address the United Nations. The timing was reminiscent of when the presidential Security Council called for Kozyrev's removal while Yel'tsin was at the G-7 summit.

Primakov's speech was particularly significant because the FSK, not SVR, retains primary responsibility for intelligence gathering and operations in CIS countries. (The SVR is responsible for the three Baltic States, and has mutual foreign intelligence cooperation agreements with 9 of the other 11 CIS states, with only Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan not having signed as of October 1994.)²⁶ Thus the head of the intelligence service who is not a part of the government was making a government policy statement about a function out of his jurisdiction from a forum that was not his, to a primarily foreign audience—a very unusual circumstance.

Primakov argued strongly in favor of "centripetal forces" to integrate the members of the CIS as an economic, technological, security, and military federation under central Russian domination. Administration would be from Moscow and not CIS headquarters in Mensk.²⁷

In strong terms, he stated that continued independence of CIS members would result in retarded economic development, increased nationalism and Islamic extremism, stronger antidemocratic trends, more widespread human rights violations, more volatile destabilization, more refugees, greater military spending, and an overall "threat to the world community's security."²⁸

Far from repudiating Primakov, Yel'tsin reiterated the themes in his United Nations address, repeatedly referring to "the former Union's space" as if he were speaking of a geopolitical resurrection of the USSR.²⁹

Conclusion

The SVR is part of the Russian control structure. Unhindered by checks and balances, free of reformers sympathetic to liberalism or the West and practically unchanged from when it was a component of the KGB, it enjoys acceptance among the power ministries that dominate Moscow's decisionmaking today. Whereas the Foreign Ministry plays only a miniscule role on matters of foreign trade, the SVR provides vital economic support for the main revanchist constituencies of the military-industrial complex, and the energy and fuel complex. It appears now that the Foreign Ministry's purpose is merely to carry out policies set from above, and provide the revanchists with a friendly face to the West.

¹ Herman Pirchner, President, American Foreign Policy Council, hosted private discussions for Kozyrev with US senators and policy figures in Washington, DC, in May 1991, and relates Kozyrev's warning at the time.

² Alexander Rahr, "Yel'tsin Courts Industrial Lobby in Order to Reduce Threat from the Right," *RFL/RL Post-Soviet/East European Report*, vol. 9, no. 28, 1 July 1992, p. 1.

³ Kozyrev and his first deputy remained constant Security Council targets. See Suzanne Crow, "Russia Prepares to Take a Hard Line on 'Near Abroad,'" *RFL/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 32, 14 August 1992, pp. 21-24.

⁴ Security Council Secretary (and former CIS Marshal) Yevgeniy Shaposhnikov interview, *Megapolis-Ekspress*, 28 July 1993, cited in *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 144, 30 July 1993, p. 1.

⁵ Edict No. 1571 of the Russian Federation President, "On the Formation of the Interdepartmental Foreign Policy Commission of the Russian Federation Security Council," 16 December 1992, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 18 December 1992, first edition, p. 1, trans. FBIS-SOV-92-247, 23 December 1992, pp. 19-20. For a discussion of the Foreign Policy Commission, see Suzanne Crow, "Processes and Policies," *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 20, 14 May 1993, pp. 47-52. Skokov was fired in early 1993 not for his policies, but for increasing identification with Supreme Soviet Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov. He was replaced by Marshal Shaposhnikov, who resigned and was succeeded by Oleg Lobov.

⁶ Oleg Kalugin, cited by Yevgenia Albats, "KGB-MSB-MBVD: Substantive Changes?" *Moscow News in English*, 13 January 1992, p. 5.

⁷ Azer Mursaliyev, "Commentary: Meridional Answer to a Longitudinal Challenge," *Moskovskiy Novosti* in Russian, no. 18, 1-8 May 1994, p. A4, trans. in FBIS-USR-94-057, 2 June 1994, pp. 66-67. For reference to Soviet support for terrorism in Turkey, see Paul B. Henze, "Organized Crime and Drug Linkages," in Uri Ra'anan, et. al., eds., *Hydra of Carnage: International Linkages of Terrorism* (Lexington Books, 1986), pp. 171-184.

⁸ Avigdor Haselkorn and Christopher Coker, "The Spies Who Stayed in the Cold," *European Security Analyst*, no. 20 (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies) August 1992, p. 2. Also see Yevgeniy Primakov, "Studio Nine" program, Moscow Television discussion on the situation in Asia, 1540 GMT, 27 December 1980, trans. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (BBCSWB), 31 July 1981, p. SU/6628/C/1.

⁹ Primakov, "Studio Nine" program, Moscow Television discussion of Middle East issues for the Soviet Far East, 0815 GMT, 25 July 1981, trans. BBCSWB, 31 July 1981, p. SU/6789/C/1.

¹⁰ Radio Moscow in Arabic, 1600 GMT, 5 July 1985, trans. BBCSWB, 12 July 1985, p. SU/8001/A4/1.

¹¹ Gary Lee, "Afghanistan Pullout Predicted; Soviet Official Assesses Peace Talks," *Washington Post*, 26 December 1986, p. A25.

¹² Albats, "KGB-MSB-MBVD," *op. cit.*

¹³ Transcript of USSR Supreme Soviet proceedings, in "The New Supreme Soviet Meets—IV," *Izvestiya*, 12 June 1989, pp. 2-3, trans.

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Yel'tsin's Chechnya

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perspective is not meant to excuse the Russian leader of his transgressions or to say they should be treated lightly. Rather, it is intended to encourage a bit more skepticism in Western expectations of Yel'tsin, of his ability to bring reform forward, and most importantly, of his readiness to act as a good partner in the Western club.

Postscript

It is, in a way, disappointing to many who have followed Russian interventions in the affairs of its neighbors for the past few years, and who have tried to convince policy makers of the need to react and impose a clear cost, to see the rapid and plentiful attention given to the Chechnya invasion in the West. When Russia initiated or exacerbated conflicts in non-Russian territories—Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Nagorno-Karabakh—its interventions did not attract much notice in Western capitals, much less in the Western media. Now, in a situation in which Russia can claim a ready excuse (ostensibly keeping internal order and maintaining the country's territorial integrity), challenges from Europe and gradually from the United States for a halt to the violence are made on somewhat weaker ground.

The West's preference to condone Russian misbehavior

early in the "Near Abroad" produced an incentive for additional misconduct of the type evident in Moscow in October 1993 and in Chechnya today. Advisers close to Yel'tsin openly admit that the West's silence undermined the positions of liberals and eliminated their braking influence on such types of behavior. (The best example is the reincarnation of Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev as a traditionalist and now, unsurprisingly, an ardent defender of the Chechnya invasion.) Sources close to Yel'tsin and Kozyrev say that both are stunned by the Western reaction to the invasion. They had been taught to expect silence, if not support.

¹ Examples include his sudden decision to enter into a new arms control agreement with the United States in early 1993 and his decision to recognize Macedonia during a state visit to Bulgaria in mid-1993.

² Interview with Alexei Pushkov, Deputy Editor-In-Chief of *Moscow News*, on 11 January 1995, in Brussels.

³ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1995.

⁴ Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for US Policy toward Russia* (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, January 1994).

⁵ *Op. cit.* interview with Alexei Pushkov.

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Current Digest of the Soviet Press, vol. 41, no. 33, 13 September 1989, p. 20.

¹⁴ Author's confidential interviews with Russian foreign ministry officials and an active duty SVR officer, 1992-1994.

¹⁵ Author's interviews with Russian journalists and members of the State Duma and Federation Council, July, August, and September 1994.

¹⁶ Victor Yasmann, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 166, 1 September 1994, p. 2.

¹⁷ Mursaliyev, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Vladimir Socor, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 186, 29 September 1994, p. 3.

¹⁹ S. Sokolov and S. Pluzhnikov, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 22 January 1992, trans. in *Soviet Press Digest*. Said Ponomarev Commission investigator A. P. Surkov; "True, the data from the interview about Primakov's service misled us all, that, let's say, the information in *Komsomol'skaya pravda* and all is quite true." Surkov testimony in "Hearings of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet Commission Concerning the Events Associated with the Attempted Coup d'etat of 19-21 August 1991" (hereafter referenced as *Ponomarev Commission Hearings*), 10 February 1992, English text, p. 167.

²⁰ Surkov, *ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

²¹ Yevgeniy K. Lisov, Deputy Procurator General of the RSFSR, testimony, *Ponomarev Commission Hearings*, 10 February 1992, p. 151. L.A. Ponomarev and A. P. Surkov, "Conclusion per the results of the open parliamentary hearings 'About the Illegal Financial Activity of the CPSU,'" 8 February 1992, *ibid.*, p. 9.

²² Sokolov and Pluzhnikov, *op. cit.*

²³ Lev Ponomarev and Gleb Yakunin, news conference and interview with author, 27 March 1992.

²⁴ Victor Yasmann, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 12, 20 January 1992, p. 3; and "Vesti" broadcast, Moscow Television Network, 1900 GMT, 22 July 1992, trans. FBIS-SOV-92-143, 24 July 1992, p. 68.

²⁵ Yevgeniy Primakov, "Russia-CIS: Does the West's Position Need Modification," transcript of statement, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 22 September 1994, pp. 1, 6, trans. FBIS-SOV-94-185, 23 September 1994, pp. 1-7.

²⁶ Vladimir Socor, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 203, 25 October 1994, p. 3.

²⁷ Vladimir Socor, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 172, 9 September 1994, p. 3.

²⁸ Primakov, "Russia-CIS," *op. cit.*

²⁹ Vladimir Socor, *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 184, 27 September 1994, p. 1.