

The KGB Is Back in Business

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

MOSCOW—To the horror and dismay of many of his democratic supporters, President Boris Yeltsin has given the former KGB virtually free rein in post-Soviet Russia. The 1991 breakup of the hated and feared apparatus, founded in 1918 as the *Cheka*, is being reversed. The KGB's renamed massive internal security machine, the Ministry of Security, is reabsorbing other ex-KGB units while its chief, General Viktor Barannikov, consolidates his power.

In May, the 100,000-strong border troops, including customs, was retaken by decree. On Wednesday, the independent Parliamentary Guard, created to ensure against attack on the Russian White House, was abolished by presidential decree and replaced with the former Ninth Directorate of the KGB. The codes and ciphers unit may be next. Internal informant files remain intact, ready to be used again at any time. The *chekist* cult mentality that permeated the KGB was never erased—the KGB is back.

Gen. Barannikov is a career police officer who served as minister of internal affairs for both Russia and the Soviet Union. In December 1991 he was named by President Yeltsin (in a decree Gen. Barannikov wrote himself) to become leader of the internal security of the former KGB. After being thwarted in an attempt to merge the former KGB with the uniformed police from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Gen. Barannikov went about a de-

facto merger by stuffing the Ministry of Security with top MVD officers, some of them cronies alleged to have been involved in mass corruption.

This was an insult to the cult of *chekism*, which inculcated its officers with self-importance—especially over the lowly MVD. Critics call this merger *Barannizatsiya*, or “Barannikovization” of state security, a play on the word *baran* or male sheep, a symbol of stupidity.

Morale in state security today is low as a result, a mixed blessing of sorts, as the once proud *chekists* are in disarray. Yet this is not without its costs. The bureaucracy best positioned to combat rising trafficking in drugs, weapons and nuclear material is the demoralized Ministry of Security rank and file. Many of the service's best and brightest have left for the private sector. Deadwood from the old regime predominates.

Barannizatsiya is making it even worse. Gen. Barannikov has yet to answer allegations of abuses he committed against independence movements when he was Deputy Interior Minister of Azerbaijan. Known perpetrators of monstrous crimes have risen to positions of power: Earlier this month, reformist Deputy Security Minister Sergei Stepashin was sacked and replaced by Colonel Viktor Cheraskov, a KGB careerist who worked his way up in the 1970s as a zealous interrogator of dissidents in the notorious KGB Fifth Directorate—the political police of Brezhnev's U.S.S.R.

Even Gen. Barannikov's public relations spinmasters are not reformist. Deputy

Press Secretary Gurov, for one, reportedly said that tanks should have been used against the unarmed crowds who protected the Russian parliament building during the August 1991 coup attempt. Indeed, *Barannizatsiya* is starting to dispense with the fiction of reform. The security service's once-hyped openness is disappearing; Russian journalists complain of reduced access to even the most routine information.

Moreover, the legal framework of censorship remains. Foreigners traveling to Russia must certify on the new Commonwealth of Independent States customs declaration, “I must submit for inspection printed matter, manuscripts, films, sound recordings.” In effect, a visiting businessman must waive his right to keep proprietary information confidential, and is bound by law to hand it over to state security if so instructed.

The Ministry of Security and the External Intelligence Service—like their KGB predecessors—continue to wage internal propaganda campaigns to manipulate public opinion inside Russia and to present the “special services” in the most glowing of terms. Meanwhile, critics are feeling the KGB's heavy hand once again. Last week, the avant garde Moscow News was raided by state security agents, who searched editorial offices for the sources of a stunning story accusing the Yeltsin government of violating the spirit of its agreements with the West by developing a new generation of ultratoxic chemical weapons.

Even former KGB officers who wish to

go public with firsthand knowledge about Soviet-held American and European prisoners of war must remain silent, bound by law not to reveal their “state secrets” even though the state they served no longer exists.

When it comes to the former KGB, there is little to distinguish the Russian state from the U.S.S.R. The Ministry of Security headquarters at Lubyanka square in Moscow is still festooned with stone reliefs of the KGB emblem. Busts of Lenin and his secret police founder, Felix Dzerzhinsky, still adorn the interior, as do polished brass communist symbols and memorials to slain KGB officers set in marble and granite.

Only a black stone stump on the traffic island in front of the yellow brick building indicates that anything has changed. The stump was once the pedestal for a towering statue of Dzerzhinsky that was torn down in the post-putsch euphoria of a year ago. Atop it today is perched a large wooden cross, replaced by a group of Cossack nationalists.

The cross, symbolic of the triumph of good over evil, is also a sign of a dawning grassroots commitment to challenge the state instruments of repression and the twisted cult of *chekism*. The challenge is not coming from the Russian parliament, whose hard-line leaders have little sympathy for true democratic change. To the contrary, the parliament has passed a number of laws designed to control the state security apparatus that were written and approved by the apparatus itself.

Russian reformers disillusioned with the *Barannizatsiya* process seek strong security services that will protect their country from crime, violence and threats to its democratic process—internal or external. Last week a conference was held at Moscow State University between Russian and American experts to develop a pool of information and expertise for promoting civil control over the Russian Security Services. But while Russians look to the West for ideas, the solutions will have to be their own. In their view, the struggle is not Russians against the West, but democrats against anti-democrats.

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