

Why Mutual Reduction in Intelligence Activity Is a Bad Idea

by J. Michael Waller, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow, American Foreign Policy Council

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Mutual reduction in intelligence activity between the United States and the Russian Federation may seem like a good idea on the surface, but on closer consideration it is fraught with dangers.

Let me begin by saying that every country, if it is to remain sovereign and safeguard its people's interests, must have a strong intelligence and counterintelligence service. It is vital not only to the Russian Federation but to the world as a whole that Russia have strong and capable special services.

The question, however, is the nature of those special services and the level of civil controls over them. This point underscores the danger of flirting with the idea of mutual reductions in activities, because the natures of the Russian and American secret services are not mutual at all. They are diametrically different, and as such, they cannot be treated in the same manner. It should be noted that the idea for mutual intelligence reductions was first surfaced by the KGB under Viktor

Chebrikov and Vladimir Kryuchkov, as part of a propaganda effort to win Western acceptance of the chekist apparatus into the family of normal intelligence services of democratic societies.

To appreciate the diametrical differences between the chekists and the Western services, one may contrast the beginnings of the Russian Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK) and the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the corresponding External Intelligence Service (SVR) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Today's Russian special services find their roots in the Cheka, which exterminated hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens during Lenin's rule alone, and which under other names carried out the mass murder campaigns of the Communist Party under Stalin. President Yeltsin himself recognized this in his decree of last December which abolished the Ministry of Security. The Cheka's foreign intelligence branch, founded in 1920 to expand Communist power around the world, is the basis of today's SVR--the celebration of the SVR's 73rd anniversary last December is a case in point.

Contrast these with the American services. Because police power rests in the hands of the towns and states, the U.S. had no federal law enforcement service until inter-state crime became a problem in the early 1920s. The FBI was founded specifically to fight the mafia, and soon took on a counterintelligence function to defend American democracy against the Cheka and its Communist Party USA instrument, and later against the espionage of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. It never had the capability to repress the population.

The United States did not have a functioning peacetime foreign intelligence service until 1949, when the Central Intelligence Agency was formally created, based on a law passed two years previously. Consider the circumstances at the time. The CPSU had a network of Communist Parties in almost every country of the world, whose main goals were to conduct espionage and ultimately seize power. Stalin had conquered Central and Eastern Europe and refused to withdraw or permit democratic elections. He sponsored a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and similar power grabs elsewhere. In 1949 alone, Stalinism spread to China with the Communist revolution of Mao Tse-tung, and the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb. Imagine how the West viewed that madman Stalin with an atomic bomb! Communism had to be contained. In this context the CIA was founded.

Another extremely important difference in the natures of the Russian and Western special services is the type of individuals who lead them. President Yeltsin's decree of last 21 December which abolished the Ministry of Security began with the sentence, "The system of bodies of the VChK-OGPU-NKVD-MGB-KGB-MB has

proved unreformable. The attempts at reorganization that have been made in recent years is basically superficial and cosmetic."¹ That single statement unraveled all of General Aleksei Kandaurov's hard work as Ministry of Security public relations spokesman in trying to convince us that the ministry was something new.

But how different is the character of the Federal Counter-intelligence Service (FSK), whose first chief, Nikolai Golushko, made a 30-year career in the Fifth Main Administration? What reformers did Sergei Stepashin appoint as his deputies when he became chief? Look at them: Valeriy Timofeyev, former KGB chief of Gorky where Sakharov was exiled; Aleksandr Strelkov, who until 1992 was head of the department responsible for the Gulag system; and Igor Mezhakov, previously of the KGB Fifth Main Administration who is now in charge of cadres. (It is worth noting that in describing the FSK deputy chiefs in an interview with Natalya Gevorkyan of *Moscow News*, Stepashin avoided talking about the backgrounds of Strelkov and Mezhakov.)

What sort of democratic counterintelligence service would have Sakharov's captor and the gulag master in its leadership, with a former hunter of dissidents responsible for recruiting new officers? What kind of democratic counterintelligence service would, instead of engaging in honest debate with critics who demanded civil controls, publicly denounce them as "terrorists" and "enemies" instead?

Leaders of foreign intelligence are no better, though they are much more skillful at the public relations game. As a *Pravda* correspondent in the Middle East, Yevgeniy Primakov reportedly was a courier for KGB money to be delivered to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fatah, at a time both groups were murdering tourists and blowing up buses full of schoolchildren. Later, as a servant of Leonid Brezhnev, he became well-known as a major architect of the CPSU's policy toward the Middle East, building up the terrorist regimes of Hafez al-Assad in Syria, Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. He shamelessly and publicly gave the Party's ideological rationale for invading Afghanistan. He and his current deputy Vyacheslav Trubnikov were found to have been behind the murderous provocations and repressions in the Caucasus in the perestroika years.²

And who advises Mr. Primakov today? The chief of his advisory council is Lt. Gen. Vadim Kirpichenko, who began his chekist career as a servant of Stalin and who, under Kryuchkov, headed the notorious

1. ITAR-TASS world service in Russian, 1704 GMT, 21 December 1993, trans. in FBIS-SOV-93-244, 22 December 1993, p. 35.

2. See J. Michael Waller, *Secret Empire: The KGB In Russia Today* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 69-70, 133-135.

Illegals Directorate, whose sub-unit, Department 8, was responsible for training terrorists and conducting political assassinations abroad.

Have these spymasters renounced their terrible careers in the service of Communism? Have they really embraced democratic principles? General Trubnikov answered the question last year: "We are not the kind to forget where we come from, and we never intend to repudiate our past."

Threats to democracy?

As an American citizen, I would like nothing more than a bilateral agreement that would get the chekists out of my country. However, even if such a mutual agreement worked, it would be counterproductive to Russian democracy. U.S. intelligence has warned Russian leaders of threats by their own secret services. Curiously, even several chekists have acknowledged this to be the case. Consider the following points:

- In June 1991, the CIA informed U.S. Secretary of State James Baker that the KGB was plotting a putsch against Mikhail Gorbachev. During a meeting in Berlin, Baker warned Soviet Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh who informed Gorbachev, but the Soviet leader, to his peril, ignored the warning. Significantly, Bessmertnykh said that Gorbachev could not be warned by means of the "hotline" between U.S. and Soviet leaders, because in his words, "the hotline provides protection against foreign intelligence, but not our own."³

- That same month, President Bush warned Gorbachev personally in a telephone call that a coup attempt was underway. Gorbachev dismissed the warning, telling Bush not to "worry" and adding that "Everything's okay."⁴

- When the putsch occurred in August, President George Bush reportedly ordered American intelligence officers in Moscow who were intercepting Soviet military communications, to tell President Yeltsin that the army was not responding to calls by Defense Minister Yazov and KGB Chairman Kryuchkov. According to a recent report in the *Washington Post*, President Bush also ordered a U.S. communications specialist to enter the Russian Supreme Soviet building "with communications gear and assigned to help Yeltsin and his followers

3. Eleanor Randolph, "Soviet: Baker Warned of Coup," *Washington Post*, 6 November 1991, citing Galina Sidorova's interview with Bessmertnykh in *Novoye Vremya*, November 1991.

4. Eleanor Randolph, "Gorbachev Says Bush Warned Him of Coup," *Washington Post*, 11 November 1991, pp. A1, A25, citing Gorbachev's remarks at the press conference announcing his new book, *The August Coup: The Truth and the Lessons*. In the same press conference, Gorbachev acknowledged Bessmertnykh's revelation that he had been warned by Baker.

make their own secure telephone calls to the various military commanders." The report said that President Yeltsin was confident he could put down the putsch in large part because he was kept informed of Soviet troop mobilizations thanks to U.S. spy satellites, electronic intelligence intercepts, and Soviet military officers working for the CIA.⁵

- Some Russian officials have specifically asked for help from U.S. intelligence for defense of civil institutions from the chekist machine. For example, when Sergei Stepashin visited Washington in October 1991 in his capacity as chairman of the Supreme Soviet Committee on Defense and Security, he is reported to have asked Secretary of State Baker for CIA help in developing ways to exert civil controls over the chekists, according to the *Washington Post*.⁶

Another important role of Western intelligence is the need to inform decision-makers about the potential for greater instability in the Russian Federation. Without such information, the United States cannot adjust its policies in anticipation of inevitable problems, or to help Russian leaders avoid impending instability. A case in point is a recent press report that U.S. military electronic intelligence has discovered what appears to have been massive corruption of the democratic process in the December 1993 elections. These findings are consistent with a determination of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation that as many as 9.2 million votes in the constitutional referendum were fraudulent. The U.S. data was provided in top-secret briefings to senior American policy makers early in May and leaked to the press.⁷ This information is extremely important to know in advance, because the U.S. must be prepared for dealing with a Russian government plunged into a severe constitutional crisis.

Interestingly, an official spokesman for the chekists would agree with me on this point. SVR Public Relations Chief Yuri Kobaladze once called CIA intelligence activity in Moscow a "stabilizing factor." He made the statement on the "International Panorama" television program on 15 December 1991, while Russia was in political turmoil. Kobaladze is quoted as saying:

American intelligence is interested in the processes which are taking place in our country. They really should know, in order to predict correctly, in

5. Walter Pincus, "Bush Aided Yeltsin in '91 Coup, New Report Says," *Washington Post*, 15 May 1994, p. A24.

6. George Lardner, Jr., and Gary Lee, "Russian Security Group Meets with U.S. Intelligence to Seek Cooperation," *Washington Post*, 14 October 1991, p. A4.

7. Bill Gertz, "U.S. Detected Russian Vote Fraud," *Washington Times*, 19 May 1994.

order to give a correct evaluation and to forecast to its leadership, so that the leadership makes less mistakes. There is a kind of stabilizing factor in this. We should follow these processes.⁸

These examples show that U.S. intelligence is not aimed at undermining Russia, but to the contrary: It is doing what it can to keep not only American officials aware, but to keep Russia's democratically elected leaders informed of internal threats. Russian government and military officials repeatedly state that the main threat to the country is internal. Here, then, is the convergence of interests. The conflict is not between Americans and Russians, but between those committed to democracy and those who are not. If democratic citizens of our two countries can conduct friendly relations with one another, there is no reason why our countries' secret services cannot--if they, too, share similar democratic values. Unfortunately, they do not.

Conclusion

In summary, there are four main reasons why mutual reduction of intelligence activities would be folly in this time of uncertainty and instability:

- The natures of the un-reformed special services of Russia and the CIS, versus those of the Western democracies, are antithetical. Western services are products of democratic societies.
- Western intelligence services, especially those of the United States, are under strict civil control and oversight. The fact that it was the CIA that collected the information which warned the Presidents of the USSR and the Russian Federation against the intrigues of their own special services underscores the problem.
- Western intelligence activity has had a stabilizing effect in supporting Russian democracy, as even top chekists have acknowledged. Russian intelligence activity has had no such effect in the West.
- Agreements concerning intelligence activity even among friendly countries are inherently impossible to verify. Given the cheating by the Soviet and Russian governments on current arms control agreements (especially concerning biological and chemical weapons), it is senseless to try to make new agreements that cannot be verified.

Ironically, because any attempt to violate a treaty would be done in secret, one of the most important means of treaty verification for any

8. Yuri Kobaladze, interview with Aleksandr Drozdov, "International Panorama," Central Television First Program Network, 1540 GMT, 15 December 1991, trans. in FBIS-SOV-91-247, 24 December 1991, p. 23.

country is espionage. Thus Russia and the United States would have to increase spying on one another in order to verify that they have reduced spying on one another. This seems to invalidate the idea of mutual reductions.