

The Secret History of the KGB

Insight reveals shocking details of the inner workings of Moscow's spy services as reported in a top-secret internal KGB history. Here are official admissions that confirm the warnings of Cold War anticommunists.

By J. Michael Waller

Last Dec. 20, the annual State Security Workers Day in Russia, internal security chief Vladimir Putin — now prime minister — gave a nationally televised address celebrating the 82nd anniversary of the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police that preceded the KGB. He warned that Western intelligence services had intensified their activity against Russia, declared that his job was to “prevent foreign services’ subversive acts” and praised modern “Chekists” as the heirs to a great legacy. Then he hosted a gala at the Lubyanka, the Moscow headquarters of the former KGB, paying homage to Cheka founder Feliks Dzerzhinsky.

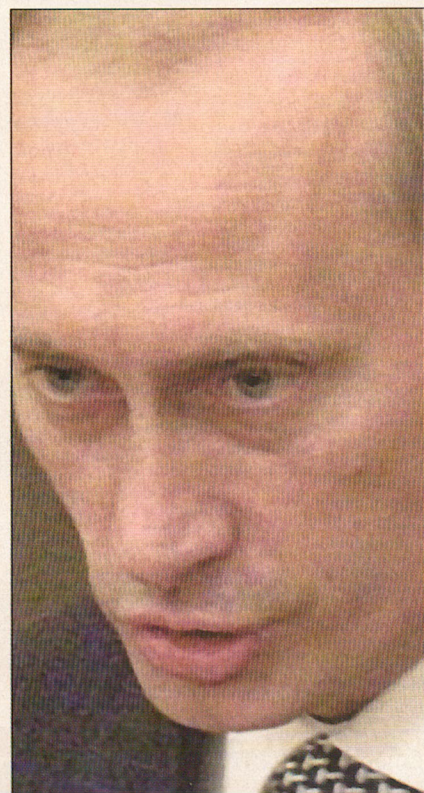
Putin’s salute to the Cheka legacy was a carefully crafted image-builder, casting the security and intelligence services in heroic, larger-than-life terms. But in the context of how the secret police and its political godfa-

thers long had viewed the agency, it was more of the same. The KGB spent many decades refining its craft and authority.

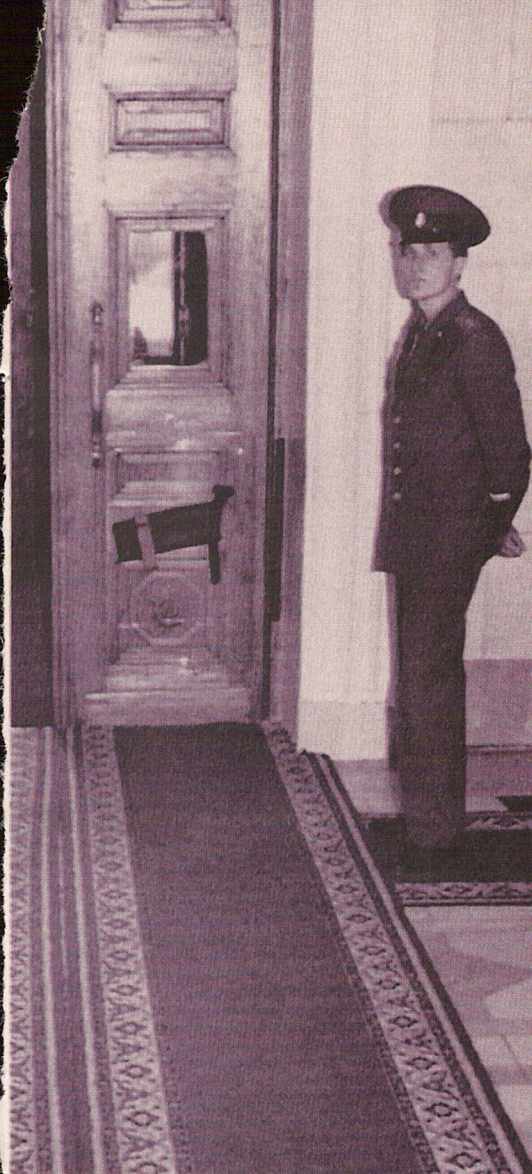
Now, for the first time in print, **Insight** can reveal details of the inner workings of Moscow’s intelligence services that not even the ebullient Putin is likely to acknowledge. These revelations come from a top-secret, serial-numbered copy of the KGB’s internal history of itself obtained by this magazine.

This secret document was produced by the KGB for its own internal use. It is an eye-opening and riveting account that confirms much of what Western intelligence long has suspected about the KGB and how it has built the Chekist cult in the minds of every officer in a corps feared and hated worldwide.

Dating to the late Soviet period when KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov was putting his personal stamp on the



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organization, the secret history was produced for the F.E. Dzerzhinsky Red Banner KGB Higher School to train officers and instruct KGB operational units.

Officially called the *History of Soviet State Security Organs*, the internal document was produced in time for the Cheka's 60th anniversary in 1977. One of its major themes was that the modern state-security apparatus was the lineal descendant of the Bolshevik Cheka and that the ruthless Cheka embodied the highest ideals and aspirations of the modern state-security officer. Former Russian security and intelligence officers tell *Insight* that new recruits continue to undergo training that emphasizes that spirit.

The official objective was "to educate KGB cadres in revolutionary, combat and Chekist traditions, in a spirit of limitless devotion to matters of the Communist Party of the socialist Motherland, in abiding faith in the creativity of communism, and love for the difficult but noble and honorable Chekist profession." This sort of rhetoric is familiar to those who have fought and studied the KGB, but the text is sensational because it confirms and bolsters the harshest critics of Moscow's secret police — from Robert Conquest to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. For top Russian leaders such as Putin who view the Cheka as the spirit of their devotion to terror, the secret history of the KGB remains relevant to the continuing controversy about political and economic reform in Russia. And it should remind the West to remain wary.

Insight's copy of the secret textbook was acquired from a KGB office in a former Soviet republic, and this is the first time its contents have been made public outside of KGB circles. Though littered with Marxist-Leninist jargon, the volume is methodical and legalistic in revealing the many structural and functional changes Moscow's secret police have undergone since 1917. Parts are shocking in their cold description of the methods and psychology of an organization that by comparison makes the Nazi Gestapo seem clumsy.

Summary executions. "Liquidation" of entire classes of people. Mass deportations. Concentration camps. According to the KGB secret history, these were innovations not of Heinrich

Himmler's SS during Hitler's regime but of Dzerzhinsky and his Cheka early in the Soviet regime. ("For the purposes of general supervision and repression the Gestapo modeled itself closely on the Soviet secret police," historian Edward Crankshaw observed in his 1956 study of the Nazi terror organization. Himmler, according to Crankshaw, "had at his command an extremely able police officer, Heinrich Müller... a close and devoted student of Soviet methods. Müller was impressed by the efficiency of the internal spy system which had been perfected by the Soviet government, the effect of which, ideally, was to isolate the individual by making it impossible for anybody to trust anybody else. He set to work to reproduce this system in Germany by more economical means.")

What strikes the reader is not just the KGB's acknowledgment and pride that the Cheka invented the modern concentration camp or liquidated millions of Soviet citizens simply because of their social or economic status, but how cavalierly and casually — usually in passing and never with criticism — the KGB treated the subject in its training manual.

The secret 400-page official history also should put an end to academic debate about whether the Soviet secret services set up the political police systems in communist regimes around the world (the secret report says it all started with the Mongolian People's Republic in the 1920s), creating the internal-security organs exploiting the international brigades in 1930s Spain and aiding "national liberation movements" in the Third World. The KGB takes credit, again in passing, for all of them.

The history fails to recognize that the Russian people and others under Soviet control might have viewed the Bolsheviks as oppressors — emphasizing throughout the text that opposition to the regime was the result of foreign plots. "The governments of the imperialist states — England, France and the USA — and their intelligence services were the guiding force in the organization of subversive activity against the Soviet state" in its early years, according to the secret history. Never mind that the United States had no meaningful foreign intelligence service in the early Soviet period.

Even so, the historical record of the former Soviet Union is placed in clearer context. What triggered the formation of the secret police, the document says, was not an armed insurrection or series of terrorist attacks

Old and new: *The shrine for KGB chairman Yuri Andropov, top, is preserved from its glory days; KGB veteran turned prime minister Putin, far left; and KGB headquarters, left.*

against Bolshevik rule but a nonviolent strike by government workers. The Cheka's founding decree was a direct response to what the history calls "counterrevolutionary speeches" by "upper-level bureaucrats." Thus, on Dec. 20, 1917, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, known by its Russian initials VChK, or Cheka, was created by decree and given its first task: "pursuit and liquidation" of the opposition.

"The struggle with these elements," according to a Communist Party Central Committee diktat quoted in the secret history, "must be conducted most decisively, energetically and mercilessly, stopping at nothing. Judicial institutions of the Soviet republic cannot remedy this problem. The necessity of a special organ of merciless execution has been recognized by our entire party, from top to bottom. Our party has entrusted this task to the VChK."

By 1918, the Cheka's full name was expanded along with its functions; it now was known as the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Struggle Against Counter-Revolution, Speculation, and Crimes in the Government Bureaucracy. This process continued through a series of name changes.

Even after 60 years, the successor KGB was fixated on the need to murder citizens who led nonviolent resistance to the Bolshevik successor regimes and to infiltrate and disrupt every possible avenue of non-Bolshevik expression. This was necessary, according to the history, "to defend the Soviet state from attacks of the internal and external counterrevolutions."

The Cheka had opponents "shot at the scene of their crimes." Its methods, according to one of its early communiqués, called for "merciless destruction" of the government's critics and foes. The secret police quickly spread through Russia's regions, then within the rail- and water-transport systems and inside the Red Army itself. The KGB text decries attempts by the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, a minority party in the early Soviet government, to limit the Cheka's powers, have it operate through decentralized structures and subordinate itself to civil control. Soon afterward, according to the history, the entire Cheka was purged of non-Communists, and criticisms of Cheka excesses, even if true,

were banned from the party-controlled press.

The secret history cites a September 1918 decree calling mass terror "a direct necessity." Bolshevik party leaders granted the Cheka emergency powers to isolate entire classes of people, called "class enemies," and round them up in "concentration camps." The book makes casual reference to the systematic campaign to steal pri-



Early victims: *The Cheka dispatched its enemies with a bullet to the skull.*

vate property under the guise of fighting "speculation" and recounts an example of two brothers who had hidden stock certificates and a supply of textiles. They and their stockbroker "were shot on 31 May 1918."

The narrative constitutes the KGB's admission that excesses were not aberrations of the Stalin period as commonly portrayed but were calculated, systematic campaigns of mass terror and extermination ordered by Lenin himself and sanctioned by the entire Communist Party leadership. It repeatedly and without a hint of criticism uses terms such as "liquidation" of opponents and "merciless" campaigns against them.

Even the Stalin era is whitewashed

— the sole exception being the crippling effects his paranoia had on the state-security machinery itself. The foreword calls the Stalin years "the period of peaceful socialist construction"; the chapter covering the time of the Great Purge (the term is not used) is the "Victory of Socialism." With a reorganization in 1934, the security apparatus was reoriented toward fighting "external enemies," and it created

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a special section to deport individuals, force them into internal exile where they could be isolated and watched or send them to "corrective labor camps" — the KGB's euphemism for the old Soviet acronym GULAG made famous by Solzhenitsyn.

The history portrays the Chekists as heroes fighting Nazi subversion inside the Soviet Union, with plenty of examples of breaking up Nazi spy rings and sabotage networks inside German companies (some with familiar names such as Siemens and Rheinmetall) working with the Soviet defense industry. It manages to avoid noting that the Soviets and the Nazis secretly were collaborating on joint military projects at the time.

The secret history is especially useful for its postmortem on the scope of damage Stalin inflicted even on the sophisticated political-police machinery honed by Dzerzhinsky. Stalin's series of secret-police chiefs Genrikh Yagoda, Nikolai Yezhov and Lavrenty Beria, according to the history, were "criminals" who "inflicted irreparable harm on Chekist cadres," destroying a generation of highly trained officers who emerged from the conspiratorial world of the Bolshevik underground and wreaking wholesale destruction of carefully built internal-informant networks.

How the KGB emerged after the

late 1950s is recounted in great detail, as the services were completely revamped and given their now-familiar name. The undercover-agent apparatus was improved to make it "smaller in size but higher in quality." Planning for the running of agents, and the methods of running them at home and abroad were improved. We learn the KGB's version of the 1961 discovery and arrest of Col. Oleg Penkovskiy, a GRU, or military-intelligence, officer who defected to the West while in place and was one of the United States' most important spies abroad. Penkovskiy, according to the history, aroused suspicion during a KGB operation against a Canadian trade adviser and during overt monitoring of the wife of an intelligence officer at the British Embassy in Moscow. The KGB secretly arrested him in 1962 and he later was shot.

The history admits that the Chekists made mistakes, but apart from the discussion of the Stalin period does not state what those mistakes were. It calls on KGB officers to learn from their mistakes yet gives no examples of how this was done in the past.

A notable feature of the secret document is its paranoid tone. The entire document portrays the KGB as fending off endless enemies, Russian and foreign. Eight of the 12 chapters begin with an introduction about "subversive activity of external and internal coun-

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terrevolutions" or of foreign-intelligence organizations as the main justifications of the Chekists' actions. Interestingly, the chapters covering the Nazi-Soviet alliance of 1939 to June 1941, and the Soviet wartime secret services of 1941-45, do not term Nazi operations "subversive."

The KGB does express alarm about the Communist Chinese secret ser-

vices and those of Japan and Israel as well as of "international Zionist centers." But during the entire six-and-one-half decades surveyed, the main "subversive" forces — a term Putin used in his Chekist Day TV address — are the British and the Americans.

U.S. technological innovations and dominance in outer space with orbiting reconnaissance satellites "fundamentally influenced the strategy and tactics of subversive activity against the Soviet Union and the other countries of the socialist camp," according to the secret history. U.S. dominance in space, the KGB maintained, allowed the United States to assert itself more strongly against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The KGB also noted how, starting in the 1960s, the United States integrated its "ideological diversions against the socialist countries" and received unprecedented access to Soviet strategic military develop-

mented KGB plans abroad was the Peace Corps, created in 1961, which the history sees as having undermined Soviet planning to promote communist or otherwise anti-Western movements and regimes in the Third World by engaging in "active propagandistic activity among the developing nations in the interests of imperialism."

The KGB document also complains about Radio Liberty and the U.S. Information Agency as having "developed special programs and tactical precepts of subversive acts against the U.S.S.R." These acts encouraged internal dissidents within the Soviet Union, prompting the KGB to take a more sophisticated approach to dealing with dissent both at home and abroad.

By the mid-1960s, "there were substantial shortcomings in the activity of state-security organs for combating enemy ideological diversions," but "active measures for exposing and disrupting anti-Soviet acts, for undercover-agent penetration into enemy intelligence organs and propaganda centers, into anti-Soviet foreign organizations that were planning and carrying out acts of psychological warfare, were not sufficiently conducted."

Shortly before the secret KGB history was commissioned, Andropov created the Fifth Directorate within the KGB to deal with political and religious "subversion." This was the unit that operated the political-informant networks, psychiatric prisons and the rest of the dissident-hunting machine. The founder, Filipp Bobkov, a KGB general, was a member of the editorial board that produced the history. After creation of the Fifth Directorate, the fight against anti-Soviet activity was much improved, according to the document.

The Chekist organs, in the KGB's eyes, were created to defend "the gains of socialism against encroachments by external and internal enemies." But to what end? As the gains of socialism collapsed with the Soviet Union, Bobkov and his dissident-hunters became guardians of oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky's MOST Group, the banking, construction and media empire. In the words of Prime Minister Putin, the Chekists' purpose today is, among other things, "to ensure Russia's economic security" — as neat a euphemism for their own exploitation as one could imagine.

Truly worthy of the KGB. ●



Nazi camp: Hitler refined the Cheka's concentration-camp idea.

ments. Increased U.S. reliance on technology for intelligence collection, as opposed to old-fashioned human intelligence with agent networks, presented a huge dilemma for the KGB.

Another U.S. innovation that frus-

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