

By Lana Jarsdell

The world of espionage has always been shrouded in mystery and suspicion. The world powers all have their own distinguished security agencies each with a more colourful history than the other, but none stands as notorious or infamous as the Russian Secret Services the FSB, formerly, the KGB. The KGB was an exceptional phenomenon in the 20th century; no other security services were regarded in the same manner then, as is still the case for the FSB today.

The Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii (FSB) was formally decreed in 1995 following a restructure of the KGB. The agency is responsible for the internal security of Russia. Its principle objectives are to gather intelligence on the threats to the security of the state and its armed forces, with a focus on counter-terrorism strategies, counter-espionage and organised crime. The FSB's power is firmly entrenched in the influence of the office of the President and amongst a vast network of former or current officers that have permeated all levels of Russian government and society. During the reform of the FSK, the predecessor organisation of the FSB, many former agents were forced to resign their posts and have since become prominent businessmen and politicians. They have also been able to develop powerful networks that have allowed them to gain control of many aspects of the social and political spheres in Russia. The presence of the FSB is felt everywhere throughout the country. Front Page Magazine claims that since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the influence of the FSB has increased rather than decreased, rising to 1 agent for every 297 citizens.

Whilst the collapse of the Soviet Union caused turmoil and destabilization to Russian society it also presented many possibilities for attaining wealth and power. The subsequent economic downfall and political instability meant that Russia fell into a state of criminality. These conditions made it a very dangerous yet hopeful period for the FSB. They used this time to strengthen their grip over society by forming partnerships with organised crime. This is not how one would expect a government agency to conduct itself, especially during a time of such important transition. There were few legal convictions and instead the agency itself became an essential part of the criminal world. This meant that political affairs and social policies were dictated by those who had most to gain or lose, rather than the Russian electorate.

The FSB has been implicated in politically-motivated assassinations, bombings, suspicious business activities and numerous human rights violations. Because of this, the agency has been able to amass power and influence. One of the key beneficiaries was President Putin, while others are now in command of social, economic and political policies. This has provided the agency with many opportunities to influence almost all aspects of Russian life, subsequently allowing for further extensions of its control; opportunities that the FSB fully exploit.

The FSB has been slow to cast off the shadows of its predecessor. There have been charges

that it has falsified cases against alleged dissidents and continues to exercise threats and intimidation as a method of recruiting agents. They supposedly employ large-scale surveillance and utilize a range of measures that includes deliberate misinformation through the mediums of state controlled media. The FSB also regularly pursues and harasses opposition and political dissidents.

Despite many promises of modernisation there is documented evidence of the FSB setting up false flags with the aim of realizing their own political agendas. The security services have always perceived themselves as a separate state within the state, unaccountable to no one other than those within the organisation. So what happens when someone on the inside strays from the circle of trust?

Some experts claim that one reason for the FSB's seizure of power is a lack of oversight regarding its conduct. This accounts for a number of events over the course of almost two decades that may have been prevented had the FSB faced restrictions on their actions. Throughout the troubled history of the country, Russian leaders have always been linked to the deaths of many of their enemies. Since Vladimir Putin was elected to power in 2000, the number of suspicious deaths of anti-Kremlin dissidents has risen sharply. The names of Alexander Litvinenko and Anna Politkovskaya are most easily identifiable. That said; the Kremlin has other ways of dealing with its enemies, as Mikhail Khordorkovsky and Boris Berezovsky are all too aware.

Events in Moscow in 1999 set the scene for a relative newcomer on the political stage to fight an election battle and win. Some anti-Kremlin circles believe that the bombings and subsequent Chechen war was nothing more than a plot by the FSB to ensure that Vladimir Putin won the Presidential election. They suggest that rather than Chechen rebels, the Moscow bombings and the failed attempts in Rayazan were staged by the FSB. The bombings would catapult Putin into the public conscience as a leader who was going to deal, once and for all with the terrorists on their doorstep. Many of these theories have been put forward by former FSB agents as well as independent journalists and exiled oligarchs. Alexander Litvinenko publicly blamed Putin for authorising his assassination because of his work with exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky to reveal details about corrupt FSB directors. Journalist Anna Politkovskaya was gunned down in her apartment building just before she was due to release a report that would have been the 'smoking gun' in the investigation of the Chechen war.

If one wants to discover who was responsible for something in the world of politics, one must look to the party who most stood to benefit. In the case of the Chechen war, it is improbable that the terrorists did not anticipate Russia's military response, which supports the claim that the FSB may have been involved from the start. The Chechen rebels would not want to see their towns destroyed, villages burned down and the blood of their people resting on their conscience. Terrorism is propaganda by deed, and by denying responsibility; the Chechens destroyed whatever publicity they may have hoped to achieve by carrying out an attack. The theory is also supported by the fact that in the past, Chechen rebels have been very vocal about their involvement in previous attacks, so to deny involvement was rather uncharacteristic. Despite the presence of a large Chechen population within Moscow conducting an operation over 1000 miles away would be an unrealistic possibility for small rebel groups. A more

realistic option would be an attack on the military bases that had been secretly assembled on the Russian Chechen border.

During his time in office, President Putin looked for backing from the armed forces and security services, especially the FSB. In a country where nepotism has historically been the favoured way of developing one's career, this was to be expected, owing to his history with the service. He knew how it operated and had close associations with those in charge. Enhancing their personal wealth and power was a way of repaying their loyalty.

The FSB's is also heavily involved within the 'high' politics of security and counter terrorism. There are many instances of associations with oligarchs and foreign terrorists that highlight how far removed much of their work is from everyday life. That said the FSB understands that if they are to maximise their control over Russia they must regulate every medium of freethinking and repress anyone pursuing an agenda that falls out of line with the current government's accepted wisdoms. As a result, the FSB is seen to uphold old KGB habits of state control and keenly monitors the progress of Russia's ethnic and religious movements as well as the traditional socio economic spheres.

It is true that all aspects of social and political life in Russia are to some degree dominated by the FSB. The security services pay close attention to religious life in Russia for good reason. History has shown that control of the Church equals control of the state, so if they are able to attain influence over the church they will have access to a much larger pool of resources at their disposal, in the form of the congregations.

During Soviet times, many of today's Orthodox priests in Russia were active KGB agents. This historical relationship means that the Orthodox Church is sometimes referred to as another division of the security services. However this association guarantees that the Russian Orthodox Church has a certain degree of freedom compared to other faiths. Religions that are new to Russia such as Scientology or Mormon can expect to be under constant surveillance.

In 1993, the constitution was changed to formally declare the Federation as a secular state. This meant that, legally, all religious associations were to be separated from the government, and viewed as equal in the eyes of the law. Nevertheless, this change cemented the status the Orthodox Church as number one, securing its place at the top of the hierarchy. The declaration of secularism still saw the implementation of a variety of limitations specifically designed to make it more difficult for the religions that do not have an established history in the country to operate within the country.

The Russian Orthodox Church is publicly depending more on the FSB in its attempt to secure its prime position, and to justify its assertions that the other churches and religions present a threat not only to the Church, but also to the cultural and social security of the state. In doing this, the Orthodox Church have been keen to follow through with FSB suggestions to provide the security services with information on these religious institutions.

It is difficult to assess whether the past will have lasting impressions on the future of the FSB and for the development of Russian Society. What is certain is that if the current status quo

remains it is unfeasible to describe Russia as a democratic country in the same way we speak of other Western democracies. Due to the invasive manner in which the FSB conducts its operations, the human rights and civil liberties of both Russians and foreigners are deemed to be at risk. Even being a part of the organisation does not assure one's own security, for it is easy to fall foul of the institution. The FSB and its other affiliated security services are subordinate to no particular institution or law. This means its power and influence in the country is unrivalled and their aspirations continue to grow ever more elaborate.