

The KGB is Returning

by Michael Curtis



Things have come to a pretty pass and we don't know where we're at concerning Russia and its President Vladimir Putin. But we can't call the whole thing off. We can legitimately differ on whether Putin is a "killer" or not, or the father of his nation, or the noble knight saving Russia. Few however will dispute the conviction that there is no moral equivalence between the Russian and American political and social systems.

Understanding of the Russian system becomes more imperative with the announcement of the creation of the MGB (Ministry of State Security), combining a number of existing bodies, which is to be operative before the Russian presidential election of 2018. It is ominous for two reasons: one is that with its seeping powers, it will resemble the former KGB; the other is that the MGB was the name of the infamous Stalinist organisation for eight years, 1946-53.

The current differences between President Donald Trump and members of the U.S. Senate over policy toward contemporary Russia exist at almost the 100th birthday of one of history's most important train rides. In April 1917, Vladimir Lenin accompanied by more than 30 companions was allowed to ride from Zurich, where they were in exile, to the Finland Station in Petrograd. Germany allowed the train to go through its country because its leaders believed, correctly, that Lenin's presence in Russia would lead to political instability, and to Russia pulling out of World War I so that Germany would no longer have to fight on an Eastern front.

The train ride did lead to the end of the Czarist regime, to the dictatorship of the Communist party, to a totalitarian regime, the Soviet Union. and indirectly to the growth of Nazism as the supposed herald of anti-communism. It is unlikely that the Bolshevik Revolution would have succeeded without Lenin who articulated the promise of peace, bread, and land, and channeled anti-war feelings and the end of the war with Germany. At the Finland Station, Lenin declared "long live the world wide Socialist Revolution."

Petrograd itself became Leningrad which it remained until 1991 when it became St. Petersburg. Though Lenin occupied power for a short time, his rule led to deaths of millions. The uprising in March 1921 against the Bolsheviks by the sailors and workers at the Naval fortress at Kronstadt was crushed with several thousand killed.

Stalin was not on the train to the Finland Station, though after he came to power hundreds of photos were doctored to make him appear besides Lenin. There is abundant documentation of the crimes, euphemized as "mistakes," committed by the Stalinist regime. More information on them comes out all the time. A recent one is by Andrei Zhuko who worked for years in the archives of the NKVD Soviet secret police. In the great terror of 1937-38, about 1.5 million people were arrested and 700,000 killed. Zhuko examined the records of 40,000 senior

officials in the NKVD, and a data base was released of his findings by the Memorial organization which documents crimes during Stalin's rule.

Memorial lists 3.3 million names of victims.: in all about 12 million were victims, internally deported or sentenced for political reasons. Of the 40,000 NKVD on Zhukov's list, about 10 % were executed or imprisoned.

Vladimir Putin is not a Stalinist, but he refuses to admit the criminality of the Soviet state. To understand the present Russian system it is helpful to trace the heritage and activities of existing Russian institutions, especially the FSB , the elite police force and spy agency, that is more than merely a security service, and has immense power, including counter intelligence.

It stemmed from the Cheka set up by Lenin, soon after the Revolution. Under its leader, Felix Dzerzhinsky, it collected and disseminated foreign intelligence. The Cheka then became the OGPU in 1923, the NKVD in 1934, notorious for the purges under Stalin of millions during the 1930s, which was followed by the KGB in 1954. The KGB was dissolved into separate bodies in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They included the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service), FAPSI (Communications and Information), GUSP (Special Programs), and FPS (Federal Border Service), and the main one FSK which was renamed the FSB (Federal Security Service), a shift from counterintelligence to security.

Some KGB personnel became business men. one is Alexander Lebedev, now owner of two London newspapers, the *Evening Standard* and the *Independent*. The most important ex KBG is Vladimir Putin, who joined in 1975, worked in Leningrad, and as an agent in Communist East Germany in the 1980s. It was Colonel Putin who burned KBG files when the Berlin wall fell on November 9, 1989.

Putin headed FSB for a year before becoming prime minister. He was the third ex-KGB to become prime minister. Under his rule as PM and then as president, FSB became more important. Noticeably, ex-KGB officials entered and controlled government bodies or business organizations, many engaging in corrupt activity. For US politicians the real question is whether all elements of the Russian system are still controlled by ex-KGB.

Politically, FSB has its own special institute, IKSI (Institute of Cryptography and Protection of Information). The large staff works on code breaking and now on information security and computer systems.

FSB does not deal with foreign spies. this is done by the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service). The SVR that employed about 13,000, has been headed by individuals close to the Kremlin. Two were prime ministers: Mikhail Fradkov, 2004-7, once rumored as a possible successor to Putin, and Yevgeny Primakov, 1989-9.

According to the report by a British committee headed by former High Court Judge Robert Owen, almost certainly it was Putin who approved the killing by an SVR agent who poisoned Alexander Litvinenko ex-FSB and KBG operative in London in November 2006, while other agents attacked the Greenpeace ship, Arctic Sunrise, in international waters in September 2013, arresting and detaining the crew.

There are rival organs and power struggles, one is the Investigative Committee headed by Alexander Bastrykin, classmate of Putin, to look into high level political murders, the Federal Protection Service, the FSB (Federal Security Service, and the National Guard, personal security agency of the president.

Putin favors the "Petersburg family," his former ex-KGB colleagues and former Petersburg officials who are influential

in military, security, and law enforcement issues. It is an informal group sometimes known as the siloviki.

Putin, gathering power and exerting personal authority, has said there is no such thing as a former KGB man. No longer abiding by a system of divide and rule, Putin has been consolidating power, reshuffling personnel, trying to root out corruption, trying to decrease costs of the different organizations, as well as to get unity.

To that end Putin put under his personal control the National Guard. Most important, he is setting up the MGB, Ministry of State Security, uniting FSB with the foreign intelligence service, and employing 250,000 people. It is ominous that the name is that of Stalin's secret police for almost eight years in 1946-1953. Even more disturbing is that it is a recreation of the KGB.

President Trump, beware and be prepared.