



## Guide to Soviet and Russian Intelligence Services

Robert W. Pringle

Intelligence and security services have played a critical role in Russian domestic and foreign policy for more than a century. The tsars, general secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet leaders have viewed the services as crucial in coping with dissenters, punishing enemies at home and abroad, gathering intelligence, and serving as a signaling channel with foreign governments and terrorist organizations.

### THE TSARIST LEGACY

The Okhrana was created in 1882 after the assassination of Tsar Aleksandr II to penetrate opposition political movements at home and abroad, and conduct pogroms against the empire's Jewish minority. The Okhrana recruited hundreds of informers, penetrated revolutionary movements, including the Social Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik leader of the Russian Duma, Roman Malinovskiy, was an Okhrana agent who fooled the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin for more than a decade.

Yet, despite successes, the Okhrana was as feckless an organization as the empire it served. Many Okhrana agents continued to work as terrorists. One agent masterminded the killing of tsarist ministers, another assassinated a prime minister. Most infamously, an Okhrana agent, Father Gapon led a march on the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg in 1905 that was met with gunfire. More than 100 once loyal workers and their families died. Widely feared inside and outside Russia, the Okhrana could not prevent the collapse of the monarchy in the revolution of 1917.

### FROM THE CHEKA TO THE KGB

Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks, believed that a revolution without a firing squad was doomed to failure. He asked Polish revolutionary Feliks Dzerzhinsky to head the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (CHEKA) in 1918. The CHEKA crushed all opposition to the new regime, executing more than 143,000 men and women, intellectuals, capitalists, and priests between 1918 and 1921 (compared to less than 12,000 executions between 1881 and 1917). Dzerzhinsky grew the CHEKA into a security empire with more than 250,000 employees (Chekists) with responsibility for foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, domestic security, and border control. The CHEKA oversaw the Gulag system of forced labor camps. One of his great achievements was the creation of The Trust, a fabricated anti-Bolshevik underground used as a deception against White Russian émigrés and foreign intelligence services, which operated from 1921 until 1926.

EVOLUTION OF SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

1917	Cheka	All-Russian Extraordinary Committee to Combat Counterrevolution and Sabotage
1922	NKVD – GPU	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs – State Political Directorate
1923	OGPU	All Union State Political Directorate
1934	GUGB	Main Directorate for State Security
1941	NKGB	People's Commissariat for State Security
1946	MGB	Ministry for State Security
1953	MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
1954	KGB	Committee for State Security
1991	SVR FSB FSO	Foreign Intelligence Service Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation Federal Protective Service

Lenin's successor and disciple, Joseph Stalin, gradually

took over the security services between 1924 and 1937. Its leaders, Henry Yagoda and later Nikolai Yezhov, used the services against insurgents in Central Asia,

peasants resisting collectivization, political opponents, and ultimately some of Stalin's comrades within the Communist Party. Stalin had most of Lenin's remaining deputies executed. In mass show trials some confessed to treason and even the attempted assassination of Lenin. At the same time, the police purged the Red Army, arresting and executing over 650 general officers and more than 30,000 others. During the Yezhovshchina, the time of Yezhov, more than 1,500,000 were arrested and at least 750,000 were shot, died under interrogation, or perished in the Gulag. In late 1938, Stalin restored some order, replacing Yezhov with Lavrenty Beria, a competent and cruel Georgian Chekist. Yezhov was executed in 1940.

Both the NKVD and the GRU (the military intelligence service of the Soviet General Staff) provided foreign intelligence for the Soviet leadership. Case officers from both services, many serving under non-official cover ("illegals") ran spies in the British, French, German, American and Japanese government. Most spied for ideological reasons. Spies provided the Soviet Union with critical military, scientific, and industrial technologies and targeted enemies of the regime. In 1940, an NKVD assassin murdered Leon Trotsky, Stalin's last living rival in Mexico.

Before Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, Soviet spies penetrated both the German military and Nazi political bureaucracy. Stalin received more than 100 warnings from these agents of German plans to invade the motherland—information he largely rejected. However, following this spectacular error, Stalin became a sophisticated consumer of intelligence. Soviet spy rings such as the Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra) operating in France, Belgium, and Germany provided detailed information on German strategy and weapons. Spies in London and Washington also provided detailed information about the allies' plans.

In one of the greatest successes in history, the NKGB and GRU stole critical information about the first atom bomb, accelerating the Soviets nuclear capabilities by years. Soviet spies in London, Washington, Los Alamos, and Oak Ridge provided details about many aspects of the bomb. According to declassified U.S. intelligence reports, the Soviets had six agents in Los Alamos—only three of whom were ever identified.

By the end of World War II, Stalin had more than 600 agents in the United States, London and Ottawa. They had penetrated the White House, State and War Departments, and both the British and American intelligence services. (By contrast the West had no agents inside the Soviet Union.) Yet, much of this apparatus

disintegrated when a key agent confessed to the FBI and a GRU code clerk defected in Canada. Western counterintelligence got better. By the late 1940s the United States has decrypted and analyzed more than 2,400 coded NKGB messages (codenamed VENONA), leading to the arrest of spies such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

In his last years Stalin was increasingly paranoid. By early 1953, there were more than 5,000,000 people in the gulag or internal exile. In 1950, several of the Party's young stars were purged, and in 1952-53, Stalin turned against the country's Jews. The "Doctors' Plot" was concocted by the MVD to implicate thousands of leading Jews as Anglo-American spies. Stalin's death on March 1, 1953, saved many of these people.

Stalin's successors faced a vexing question, how to disengage from the Stalinist system without losing power. They agreed that Beria had to go. He was arrested in July 1953 and shot with some of his closest associates five months later. Nikita Khrushchev, the new General Secretary of the Communist Party, attempted to cut the Gordian knot. More than a million were released from the camps and exile; Stalin's crimes were denounced; and the security police were renamed the KGB (Committee of State Security) and placed under Party control.

---

## THE KGB AND THE LAST YEARS OF THE SOVIET UNION

---

The KGB evolved into an extensive intelligence community, which incorporated the functions of the American CIA, FBI, NSA, and U.S. military intelligence. By 1989, the KGB was the largest intelligence/security service in the world with a staff of more than 480,000. This included approximately 250,000 Border Guards, which had armor fighting vehicles and helicopters. The other important components of the KGB were:

**The First Chief Directorate**, responsible for foreign intelligence.

**The Second Chief Directorate**, responsible for internal security and counterintelligence.

**The Fifth Directorate**, responsible for surveillance of churches and dissidents.

**The Eighth and Sixteenth Chief Directorates**, responsible for communications security and codebreaking.

During the last decades of the Soviet Union, the KGB became infamous for spying on foreign govern-

ments, stealing Western technology, propaganda operations (“active measures”), and the suppression of dissent. While the KGB recruited sources in the 1930s and 1940s based on ideological sympathies, following World War II, recruits were well paid for their treachery. For example:

- John Walker, a U.S. Navy petty officer, provided the Soviets the keys to decrypt U.S. military codes over more than 10 years. He was paid over one million dollars.
- Aldrich Ames, a CIA officer, who betrayed a number of American agents within the KGB (10 of whom were executed), was paid more than two million dollars. Like Walker, he is serving a life-term in federal prison.
- Agents within the West German government and security services allowed Moscow to track NATO war plans.

The Communist Party expected the KGB to destroy political dissent. During the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of dissident Protestant, Catholic and Russian Orthodox believers were arrested, as well as nationalists from the Ukraine and Central Asia. Famous dissidents harassed by the KGB were the writers Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov. Solzhenitsyn was exiled from the USSR, and returned more than two decades later. Sakharov spent more than five years in internal exile. The persecution of these two, and their supporters, seriously damaged the Soviet Union’s international reputation. While an organized opposition never emerged in the USSR, KGB actions actually hurt the regime far more than any opposition was capable of.

Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev tried to curb the KGB in the last years of Soviet power. Key elements of the KGB turned against Gorbachev and took part in the failed August 1991 putsch that marked the end of the Soviet Union. The KGB proved that – like the Okhrana – an omnipotent and all-seeing intelligence service could not save an inefficient and corrupt regime.

---

## POST SOVIET SERVICES AND THE FUTURE

---

The post-communist Russian government broke the KGB into several services. The most important were the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia (SVR) and the Federal Security Service (FSB), the former internal components of the service. Former President Vladimir Putin served in the KGB’s foreign intelligence

arm and remains a proud veteran of it.

Western counterintelligence services indicate that the level of Russian spying has returned to the levels seen during the Cold War. Since 2006 Russian-British relations have been hurt seriously by the poisoning in London of Alexandr Litvinenko, a former KGB/FSB defector. The suspected assassin is a member of Russia’s Federal Protective Service (FSO).

Russian intelligence has an older pedigree than that of the United States or the United Kingdom. America’s first civilian intelligence service, the Central Intelligence Agency, was only formed in 1947. The British internal and external services date from the first decade of the twentieth century. Neither the British or American services have been as well supported politically as the Okhrana or the KGB.

---

## Readings For Instructors

---

The following are recommended readings for instructors on Soviet and Russian Intelligence Services

A good account of Soviet repression is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1991, London, Penguin Books. His three-volume history of the forced labor camp system, *Gulag Archipelago*, 1973, New York, Harper Row, has been condensed in later printings into one book.

For more advanced students, Anne Applebaum, *GULAG: A History*, 2003, New York, Doubleday, is highly recommended. The website [www.memoria.ru](http://www.memoria.ru) has English and Russian language section about the years of Stalinist repression.

Two good accounts of KGB foreign operations are Victor Cherkashin, *Spy Handler: Memoirs of a KGB Officer*, 2005, New York, Basic Books, and Oleg Kalugin, *Spy Master: My Thirty-two Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*, 2009, New York, Basic Books (originally published in 1994 with the title, *The First Directorate*, by St. Martin’s Press).

An account of the Walker spy case from the perspective of the FBI is by Robert W. Hunter, *Spy Hunter: Inside the FBI Investigation into the Walker Espionage Case*, 1999, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press.

Again for strong and interested students a good read is Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin’s *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, 1999, New York, Perseus Books.

For CIA operations against the KGB, a good book is Robert Wallace and H. Keith Melton’s *Spy Craft: The*

Secret History of the CIA's Spysytechs from Communism to Al-Qaeda, 2005, New York, Basic Books. 🐦

Robert W. Pringle received a Ph.D. in Russian history from the University of Virginia. After service as an Army intelligence officer in Vietnam, he was a Foreign Service Officer from 1974 to 1983 in southern Africa and Moscow. He joined the CIA in 1983 as an intelligence analyst and manager. Following his retirement, he taught at the University of Kentucky, Georgetown College (KY), and Virginia Military Institute. He is the author of *The Historical Dictionary of the Russian Intelligence* and several articles.

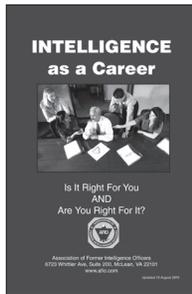
**“Life belongs to the living,  
and he who lives  
must be prepared  
for changes.”**

— Goethe

**“The first panacea  
for a mismanaged nation  
is inflation of the currency;  
the second is war.**

**Both bring  
a temporary prosperity;  
both bring  
a permanent ruin.  
But both  
are the refuge  
of political  
and economic  
opportunists.”**

— Ernest Hemingway



### “Intelligence as a Career” Booklet

Newly Updated and Available Online

One of the primary missions of AFIO is to help educate the American public about the role that Intelligence plays in safeguarding America’s security. But the Intelligence Community can be bewildering to many who have not actually worked for one of the 16 agencies that comprise it. The proliferation of threats over recent years, and the expansion of our government’s efforts to meet these threats, have made it more difficult for many who may wish to join this effort to know how and where they can help.

To address this, AFIO has published a booklet, entitled *Intelligence as a Career: Is It Right For You and Are You Right For It?* Aimed at high-school and college students who might be considering a career in the intelligence or security fields, the booklet discusses the broad differences between analysts and collectors, and how these differences vary throughout the IC. It answers questions about prerequisites and the optimum skill mix for candidates; it compares the pros and cons of private industry versus government occupations; and it contains some frequently asked questions about careers in intelligence.

The booklet lists all 16 members of the IC, with a short description of each one and an overview of the application process. It lists websites for each. Finally, it contains an updated section on institutions that offer courses in intelligence and security, starting with the DNI’s Centers of Academic Excellence.

The booklet is available free online as an easily downloaded PDF or as a webpage. Both digital versions are located at [www.afio.com](http://www.afio.com) — at the top of the main webpage, or click on Careers. It is also available in hard copy. For university professors teaching in this field, it is available in quantity at no charge. Send requests to [aep@afio.com](mailto:aep@afio.com).