

# Schisis in Putin's Russia

*Roman Bessonov explores the impact on Russia's elites of years of mental splits, which have created susceptibility to geopolitical entrapment.*

I don't feel like integrating into insanity.

—Alexander Lukashenka, President of Belarus

One of the first events after Vladimir Putin's accession to power in 2000, was very frightening for Moscow's liberal intelligentsia. The wall of the fortress-like building in Moscow's Lubyanka Square, headquarters of the Russian secret police, was decorated with a plaque in memory of long-time KGB chief **Yuri Andropov**—the only head of that Soviet intelligence agency to finish his career as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The liberal intelligentsia, bewildered, rang the alarm bell. The majority of the population slept well.

Recently, a marble plaque was installed on the wall of 31 Moika Embankment in St. Petersburg, where **Anatoli Sobchak**, the city's first democratic mayor and a fan of the Kirillovichi<sup>1</sup> heirs of the Romanov dynasty, resided "between 1990 and 1998" (the 1997-99 period of his flight to France, to avoid criminal charges, was delicately omitted). The liberal intelligentsia feels relaxed and sleeps well. The rest of the population remains bewildered.

There is really no contradiction between the two events and the two memorial plaques. Inside the intelligence community, that is understood. As for the "broad masses of the population," they are supposed to stay ignorant—their growing dissatisfaction with the leadership of Russia, and its domestic and foreign policy, notwithstanding.

In the late period of perestroika, as the reforms of the last Soviet leader, **Mikhail Gorbachov**, were called, the entire population of the U.S.S.R. was glued to their TV sets in a sort of mass obsession. They were watching the proceedings of the Congress of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, on the historic decision to annul Article Six of the U.S.S.R. Constitution, the clause that defined the CPSU as the ruling, and sole, political party in the country. Dozens of young parliamentarians launched their careers at that moment, making sure that their pictures were taken standing beside, or arm in arm with, the

famous physicist and human rights activist Academician Andrei Sakharov. They looked so natural, so sincerely committed to the cause of transforming the state, that the TV audience readily bought the fiery speeches of those people who very soon would become governors and mayors, or found new political parties, to introduce that pluralism which was supposed to be the precondition for a decisive political and, espe-



*"Who is Mr. Putin?" The question remains unanswered—perhaps even by President Putin himself. Here, Putin (left) receives German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, in St. Petersburg, in 2001. When he first came to office, Putin's agenda focussed on restricting the power of the financial oligarchy. But each of his initiatives was thwarted, and the momentum of those early weeks was lost.*

1. Descendants of the Grand Duke Kirill Romanov, senior first cousin of Tsar Nicholas II at the time of the latter's execution. Kirill married Princess Victoria Melita ("Ducky") of Britain, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, who shared with other members of her family an affection for fascist movements.



*The late St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoli Sobchak, an example of the Russian “schisis”: He launched his career as a parliamentarian by associating himself with Soviet-era dissident Academician Andrei Sakharov; has a mystical affinity for a branch of the Romanov dynasty; became famous for his anti-military rhetoric in 1990; and fled the country in 1997-99 to avoid criminal charges. He was recently honored by Putin with a plaque.*



*The late Soviet Communist Party General Secretary leader and longtime KGB chief Yuri Andropov was honored by Vladimir Putin, shortly after Putin came to power, with a plaque on the wall of the headquarters of the former KGB: a sign of the bewildering contradictions among the Russian elites today.*

cially, social revival. The Interregional Group of Deputies, grouped around the aged Academician Sakharov, included Doctor of Sciences (Law) Anatoli Sobchak, then a professor at Leningrad State University (since renamed the University of St. Petersburg).

This particular parliamentarian became famous for his emotive anti-military rhetoric during the 1990 events in Georgia (when Army units dispersed a peaceful public rally). That episode eventually resulted in the replacement of Dzhumber Patiashvili’s Georgian Communist Party clan by a different one, under then-Soviet Foreign Minister, former Georgian security chief and Communist Party First Secretary **Eduard Shevardnadze**, who returned to power in 1992, now as President of independent Georgia. In early 1991, the “Sakharovite” Sobchak and the Communist Party/police functionary Shevardnadze, along with CPSU Politburo member **Arkadi Volsky**, established the Movement for Democratic Reforms (DDR).

Sobchak also played a key role in the elections of the President of the U.S.S.R. in 1990, taking the floor right before the vote in the Supreme Soviet, to accuse Gorbachov’s only rival, Prime Minister **Nikolai Ryzhkov**, of responsibility for illegal military contracts. His speech was enthusiastically

greeted by the “democratic reformers” as a brave challenge against corrupt Party officials, although the unfortunate Ryzhkov was not a career Party functionary like Gorbachov, Shevardnadze, and Volsky.

These contradictions were overlooked by the ecstatic crowd that cheered the new idols of Democratic Russia, Sobchak’s partners in the Interregional Group. Little did they imagine, that the technique of deploying unverified, but highly discrediting information (*kompromat*, in Russian) for short-term political purposes, would become a tradition in post-Soviet Russia—a tradition initiated by a professor of law!

## Event Number 10

Soon after the strange putsch of August 1991,<sup>2</sup> two persons from the inner circle around Academician Sakharov’s

2. On Aug. 19, 1991, a group of Soviet Communist Party, military, and intelligence officers declared themselves a State Emergency Committee (GKChP) and attempted to take power in Moscow. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov was held at a resort in the South. Boris Yeltsin, as President of Russia (within the U.S.S.R.), declared the GKChP illegitimate and rallied a crowd around the Russian Parliament building. With key military commanders supporting Yeltsin, the GKChP crumbled. At the end of that week, Ukraine declared independence. The Soviet Union officially dissolved that Autumn.

widow, Yelena Bonner, arrived at KGB headquarters, demanding files on ranking clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). But an activist in the Democratic Russia movement, which was already factionalized into groups at that time, told me that the real purpose of those persons' visit to Lubyanka was to acquire files on themselves, and their former work as agents of the organization housed there.

In the Autumn of 1991, a St. Petersburg newspaper published the transcript of a conversation between Mayor Sobchak and a KGB department head named **Anatoli Kurkov**, taped on the very day of the August putsch. The two men were discussing something they called "event number 10." No explanation followed. In early 1992, now retired KGB General Kurkov got a job as chief of security at Sobchak's favorite bank, Astrobank, the institution that initiated the creation of the St. Petersburg Free Trade Zone.

The name of General Kurkov was also mentioned by a friend of mine in Tbilisi, in the context of organizing a trip to London around that time for Shevardnadze, who had resigned as Soviet Foreign Minister, but had not yet returned to Tbilisi as President of Georgia. Sobchak, in turn, did a great favor for Shevardnadze, as head of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet "fact-finding" team, whose assembled evidence on the oppression of the 1990 rally in Tbilisi finished the political career of Patiashvili.

The founding convention of the St. Petersburg organization of **Yegor Gaidar's**<sup>3</sup> Democratic Choice Party was held in the Spring of 1994, in the office of Astrobank. At that time, the party's executive committee was headed by banker **Oleg Boiko**, most famous for a debauch he provoked at a Moscow restaurant called The White Cockroach. The security service of Boiko's National Credit Bank, too, was headed by a KGB general—**Gen. Otari Arshba**, who reportedly played a role in organizing separatist warfare in the Abkhazia province of Georgia. (Just recently, *Kommersant Daily* mentioned the name of this same Arshba, as now being engaged in the business of consolidating the stock of Iskander Makhmudov's Yevrazholding, in preparation for a move into international markets.)

Gaidar was recently elected deputy head of the European Democratic (Conservative) Union. None of his Western tutors would fault him for his cooperation with KGB generals. In the global economic arena, this is taken for granted. Nor would the foreign guests and participants in the founding assembly of the Russian Jewish Congress protest against the participation of the aged **Gen. Filipp Bobkov (ret.)**, who had been deputy chairman of the U.S.S.R. KGB in 1991, after a long career as head of the notorious Fifth Directorate, responsible for mind-control. Apparently **Vladimir Gusi-**

3. Former economics editor of the Communist Party journal *Kommunist*, Gaidar became Prime Minister in the first Russian government after dissolution of the U.S.S.R. A follower of Friedrich von Hayek's radical liberal economics, he launched so-called shock therapy with the decontrol of prices on Jan. 1, 1992.



*Mikhail Gorbachov, the Soviet Union's last President. Russians today are drawing a parallel between Putin and Gorbachov: The latter disastrously positioned himself "in between" the two artificially planted tribes of the successors to Yuri Andropov.*

**nsky**, the Russian financial magnate who today is deputy president of the World Jewish Congress, could hardly have launched his career in business without Bobkov's assistance in setting up a U.S.-Soviet joint venture called Infex (Information Export).

These are just a few examples of the close connection between Russia's "official democrats" and experienced KGB generals, who privately described their allies from the newly founded liberal parties as "trashy agents."

### **Andropov's 'Democratic Transformation'**

It was not until 1999, that one of the top figures at the KGB's London station, **Col. Mikhail Lyubimov**, wrote an article describing the entire "democratic transformation" of Russia as a sophisticated operation, masterminded personally by Yuri Andropov. According to Lyubimov's version, the ultimate goal of this operation was to provoke a profound economic and social crisis in the U.S.S.R., in order to make the population suffer, and—in a precise Dostoevskian way—to survive through suffering.

Lyubimov's family did not undergo any serious social problems after he published this revelation. His son is one of the most influential persons in the Russian mass media, and is sometimes mentioned as one of the richest people in the country.

Probably **Alexei Musakov**, a St. Petersburg analyst who



Eduard Shevardnadze (center) as Soviet Foreign Minister, with President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker III, 1989. Shevardnadze, the former Georgian security chief, returned to power in 1992 as the President of independent Georgia.

reportedly advised Mayor Sobchak before the latter's flight to France, came closer to the truth when he said that (Andropov's) KGB saw itself as the "historical alternative" to the CPSU, because the KGB was capable of taking spiritual lessons from the most intellectual of the Soviet dissidents, whom the KGB would take on as indispensable partners in decision-making.

Until the political ascent of Vladimir Putin, Democratic Choice, renamed as the Union of Right Forces (SPS), described itself as the enemy of KGB and reacted nervously to any reference made to the intimate relations between its leaders and the Service. Brave colonels, who serve in hotspots like Tajikistan or Chechnya and glorify Yuri Andropov's mind and intellectual power, as well as the anti-corruption campaign he failed to complete before dying of kidney failure in 1984, react with the same defensive intonation, when faced with the historical fact that Andropov had some "court anti-communists" among his close friends and intellectual partners—such as dissident philosopher **Mikhail Gelter**<sup>4</sup> and his-

4. The teacher and the pupil of this Soviet-era historian, known as Yuri Andropov's favorite dissident, reflect certain important historical continuities. Gelter (1918-94) was a pupil and friend of Soviet political prisoner **Yevgeni Gnedin**, son of **Alexander Helphand Parvus**, the infamous Anglo-Venetian agent who bankrolled the Bolshevik Party during key phases of the Russian Revolution. One of the circle around Gelter in the 1980s, in turn, was **Gleb Pavlovsky**, who went on to style himself as Russian spin-doctor *par excellence* in the 1990s ("game technician," as he puts it) and an image-maker for the Kremlin. Pavlovsky founded the Strana.ru website and heads the so-called Effective Policy Foundation.

torian **Roy Medvedev**. This special relationship between the KGB chairman and the dissidents is likewise neglected both by nostalgic leftist historians and by the George Soros-type of school textbooks, designed for the newly independent—oh, pardon!—"emerging-market" countries.

The brave officers might be well informed, however, of the existence of yet another circle around Andropov—the one represented by **Gen-nadi Shimanov**, author of a proposal to transform the CPSU into the Orthodox Party of Russia. The scholastic debate between the followers of these two circles formed the backdrop of the perestroika-era struggle between "reformists" (then calling themselves "leftists"!) and "conservatives" (e.g., Pamyat,<sup>5</sup> which was built up on Shimanov's concept). The Pamyat organization, in turn, had in it a large quotient of former dissidents calling themselves "Orthodox," of the "blood-and-soil"

type—but whose training took place not only on Russian soil, but also in certain institutions in the West, such as the Freemasonic lodge in Beyreuth (Bavaria)—where the entrance is decorated by the portraits of David Hume and John Locke—and the Virginia-based Western Goals Institute.

In order to conceal the connections among themselves within their respective reference groups, intelligence officers and public activists (of both the leftist-liberal and Orthodox-conservative types) spent years with a split self. Such a mental split cannot fail to leave traces in each of the partners in that prolonged process of informal partnership.

To appreciate the importance of this phenomenon for the leadership of Russia, imagine two characters from Huxley's *Brave New World*, who have exclusive access to knowledge that is kept from millions of others. They can communicate and cooperate only in their small circle of Alpha people. Now, imagine that one of them is entrusted with a job, in which his responsibility is not merely to receive and channel information, not to establish direct or indirect control, not to manipulate one ignorant stooge against another—but to be able, at a crucial and sensitive period of time, in an unstable political and strategic situation, to address a great mass of people directly, and share with them not "information," but truth, belief, will, and confidence in a common future. A new function, requiring that you understand people and they understand

5. The name of this Russian chauvinist group, which developed during the 1980s with scarcely concealed patronage from Soviet intelligence circles, means "Memory."



*Former Russian Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, architect of the shock therapy “reforms” after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has his own ties to the KGB apparatus, notably through the person of banker Oleg Boiko—a fact taken for granted by Gaidar’s Western tutors.*

you, without mediation by ambitious government or selfish regional officials. A calling, which cannot rely on sophisticated manipulation behind the scenes, nor on skills in private conversation, but the ability to communicate a clear vision in clear language. These are the elements of *leadership*, which is not equivalent to mere control. To rise to the occasion, would require overcoming this split, collecting the pieces of a broken spyglass in order to achieve a vision of the inherited split, and present a clear view of the future to your people—or else, collapse.

### The Imposed Controversy

In the writings of the late **Metropolitan Ioann** of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, a liberal intellectual finds a lot of shocking definitions which should drive him crazy—primarily, the definition of Jews as the concentration of the harmful and destructive factor in Russian culture, politics, and history, as well as arguments in favor of a number of political figures of the Nazi regime, particularly of Dr. von Scheubner-Richter, a descendant of a Russian German (“Ostsee-German”) noble family. The infamous openly racist Russian National Unity Party developed in St. Petersburg directly under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Eparchy where Ioann was based. This did not a bit contradict the “democratic rule” of then-Mayor Sobchak, given his own mystical affinity for the Kirillovichi, the branch of the Russian monarchic dynasty that was recognized by the Nazis in a previous generation.

Besides a detailed history of schisms and behind-the-scenes clashes in the ROC through the four centuries from Ivan III till the Soviet period, Metropolitan Ioann’s writings contain a very specific analysis of the Soviet political regime’s internal contradictions. Ioann identified, beginning in the



*Financial magnate and Putin enemy Vladimir Gusinsky is now deputy president of the World Jewish Congress. His ex-KGB associates include Gen. Filipp Bobkov (ret.), who had a long career as head of the Fifth Directorate, responsible for mind-control. The liberal intelligentsia has not trusted Putin since he jailed Gusinsky for two days—they fear that they may get the same treatment.*

1930s, a split within the Communist Party between “Westernists” (internationalists) and “continentalists” (ethnicists). Surprisingly, the person cited as an example of the second category, which is the object of the author’s sympathy, is not a CPSU official, but an intelligence operative. He is **Capt. Nikolai Khokhlov**, who was deployed in January 1954 to Frankfurt, West Germany, tasked with the physical elimination of a top figure in the anti-Soviet “continentalist” party, the Narodno-Trudovoy Soyuz (NTS, or People’s Labor Alliance), which emerged among Russian emigrés in Germany in the 1930s and closely collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

Captain Khokhlov did not accomplish his mission: Instead, he repented in public of his Soviet allegiance, and defected. As the late Metropolitan certainly knew, but did not mention (as a true ideologue, with a K.P. Pobedonostsev<sup>6</sup> type of obsession with concealing the truth from the people, for the sake of the state), Khokhlov promptly emigrated to the United States. The author was not eager to mention, and probably unhappy to know, that Khokhlov was owned, directed, and materially protected, from the time of his defection, not by “continentalists” at all, but by the Anglo-American, “Atlanticist” intelligence community.

### Long and Chronic Schism

The split in the top Soviet establishment, referred to by the deceased Metropolitan Ioann, was a real process. It had everything to do with the special relationship between the Soviet and British intelligence services, of which the famous

6. K.P. Pobedonostev (1827-1907) was Procurator of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

triple agent, **Kim Philby**, is the outstanding example.

This internal conflict developed into a chronic discussion at top levels of the Soviet establishment, and splashed out into the mass media under Gorbachov, when notorious “ideological duels” took place between magazines like the liberal-Westernist *Ogonyok* and the ultra-nationalist *Nash Sovremennik*. A major institutional vehicle for pushing this split, which fractured the ranks of the CPSU, was **Raisa Gorbachova’s** Soviet Culture Fund, which was sponsored by the late Soviet intelligence-linked British billionaire publisher, **Robert Maxwell**.

The supervisors of both tendencies, designed to confront each other and, eventually, dooming not only the CPSU, but also the Soviet Union and Mikhail Gorbachov’s own career, were pretty well aware of the game in which they were involved.

Right at the time of Khokhlov’s defection, his superior, **Gen. Pavel Sudoplatov**, was regarded within Soviet intelligence as a representative of the “internationalist” wing, as was Security Minister **Lavrenti Beria**, who, immediately after Stalin’s death, closed the investigation of the anti-Semitic so-called “doctors’ plot.”<sup>7</sup> Beria was soon arrested and executed by **Nikita Khrushchov**. Still, Khrushchov is not regarded as a “conservative” or “continentalist,” but is always characterized with sympathy by the so-called “generation of the [1950s] thaw,” the direct predecessors of the Westernist liberal intelligentsia of Gorbachov’s perestroika.

Thus, the picture of “schism” described by Metropolitan Ioann is inadequate. What he actually describes is a game in which he, too, was involved, and well-manipulated—evidently in order to split the ROC itself. Ioann’s factional heirs have joined their “conservative reformist” efforts with the core “anti-KGB” wing of the ROC, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, which was founded in exile in 1921 and based abroad throughout the 20th Century.

Russian imagemakers, boasting of their skill at treating millions of human beings as cattle, declared Niccolò Machiavelli to be their idol. Really, they are more Maxwellian than Machiavellian. The splitting of minds is still continued in the Russian establishment, through games and manipulations that prevent the country from moral and physical economic revival.

A victim of mind-splitting technology often recognizes that he has a problem, only when he finds himself amid the ruins of what was once his country, his church, his institution, or his political movement. Sometimes, unfortunately, this does not happen at all—because of a lack of the intellectual effort, needed to free oneself from an ideological trap constructed by a professional with a relevant family tradition of centuries.

“The fate of a ship is often similar to the fate of a man.”

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7. In 1953 a group of physicians, most of them Jewish, was accused of trying to poison Stalin.

This line from a song in a Soviet cartoon film about the battleship *Aurora*’s signal shot during the Bolshevik insurrection in October 1917, could apply to a church, or to an institutional network in a nation—which, due to a combination of circumstances, has acquired some of the major functions of a supreme national theological authority. Such an institutional network is the Soviet/Russian intelligence service, in which Vladimir Putin made his career.

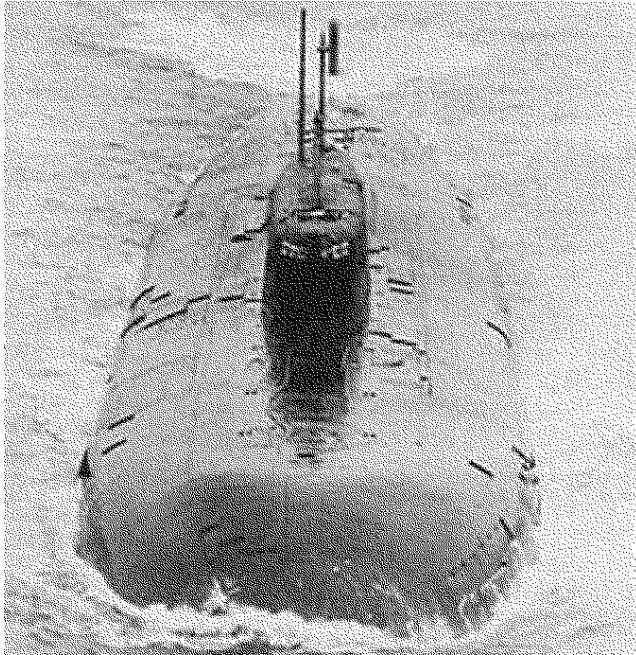
## The Sunken Ship

**Vladimir Putin’s** ascent to power was followed by the emergence of a new kind of TV ideologue, violently anti-American, violently anti-Communist, ostentatiously patriotic, but using a curious would-be positive model for Russia: Chile under the rule of Juan Augusto Pinochet. Typical of these new gurus are the “talking heads” of ORT’s Odnako program, **Mikhail Leontyev** and **Maxim Sokolov**. In 2000, Leontyev’s personal website had a record number of visits, demonstrating that his rhetoric, irrational though it might be, had struck a chord within the population, which was exhausted from the constant humiliation of Russia’s statehood during Boris Yeltsin’s rule and glad to find a firm patriotic alternative to the disgustingly anti-military and pro-Western NTV.

To understand Leontyev’s popularity, it is essential to be aware of the importance of the military tradition throughout the history of the Russian Empire, since the crisis and military defeat of the Tatar-Mongol occupation in the 14th Century. The drafting of peasants into military service for terms of 14 years or even longer, the education of young members of the nobility at higher military schools, but also a close relationship between anti-military thinking and movements for the protection of civil rights, are all deeply embedded in the national psychology. Leontyev’s furious anti-Western rhetoric is perceived by the population in the spirit of a famous maxim, formulated by Tsar Alexandr III: Russia has no allies, except its Army and its Navy. This revival of military thinking in the early period of Vladimir Putin’s rule, closely related to his pursuit of a new campaign against the guerrillas in breakaway Chechnya, laid the cornerstone of Putin’s popularity. It created a sort of myth, which, apparently unbeknownst to Putin himself, restricted his maneuvering room. The steeper the ascent, the more unexpected would be the first slip from the heights.

It happened in August 2000, only three months after Putin’s inauguration, when exercises of the Navy’s Northern Fleet, organized at an unusually high level of mobilization, ended in the horrible catastrophe of the sinking of the *Kursk* submarine.

The catastrophe happened to coincide with the height of the struggle of Putin’s political team against its ideological enemies from Vladimir Gusinsky’s Media Most. It also interrupted a decisive summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was supposed to resolve the problem of



*A Russian submarine of the same class as the Kursk, which sank in the Barents Sea on Aug. 12, 2000, killing all on board. The reasons for the tragedy were never satisfactorily explained. Politically, it was a destabilizing blow to newly inaugurated President Putin, coming at the height of a struggle with his ideological enemies.*

the Caspian Sea basin.

I wonder what went on in the mind and soul of the ambitious young leader when, instead of a scheduled meeting in Sochi with the President of Tajikistan, he had to cancel all his meetings and fly to Severomorsk. What was his own first interpretation of the tragedy? A conspiracy against himself? Personal misfortune? Or, worse, a kind of retribution, addressed not to him alone, but to the whole community of ex-intelligence men, in league with their own “trashy agents” for the sake of political survival—with those who had provided political cover for the real actors, who stripped the Navy, destroying, in particular, most of the military capacity of the Baltic Fleet in Kaliningrad and Kronstadt, with a definite contribution from his own former fellow servicemen?

Mikhail Gorbachov’s will was broken under similar circumstances. The disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant was followed by a campaign in the mass media, which he could have stopped but did not. And then came a narrow escape from a global strategic catastrophe, resulting from the collision of a Soviet and a U.S. submarine. The parallel of Putin with Gorbachov, with his disastrous self-positioning “in between” the two artificially planted tribes of Andropov’s successors, figures more and more often in Russian analytical writings.

### **The Last Resort?**

For any political figure, the greatest domestic danger is represented by those who once fanatically believed in this figure and the forces he represents, but have become disillusioned.

sioned.

Putin’s original popular support was centered in the generation of Russians between the ages of 30 and 40, who grew up at a time when the CPSU was already well discredited, whereas the KGB not only was not discredited, but was recognized, often subconsciously, as an alternative to the Party apparatus. Behind these expectations was usually an assumption that the once glorious intelligence community possessed some kind of extensive strategy, subsuming its huge quantity of specific knowledge, which would protect the country against foreign challenges and the population against corrupt officials and oligarchs at the federal, regional, and district levels.

Belief in miracles like that has been very characteristic and very fatal for whole generations of Russians, but it corresponded perfectly to the self-conception of the intelligence community, which really did spend a decade waiting for a political opportunity. In the ten years of post-Soviet history, intelligence veterans have published millions of copies of memoirs and books of fiction, of which some tried to justify the Soviet special services, as such, but many more glorified and exaggerated their own personal morale, capabilities, and merits. Many of Putin’s political supporters, especially among the youth, were brought up on this genre.

### **Failed Initiatives**

Readers of this kind of fiction, however, scarcely imagined the extent of the changes inside the intelligence community. Moreover, Putin’s team, picked mostly from among this very community, encountered difficulties with their own fellow service veterans, as soon as they tried to implement their original agenda.

This initial agenda was largely focussed on restricting the power of the financial oligarchy by a number of radical measures, which were supposed to reverse capital flight and repatriate previously exported funds, as well as eliminate the main “flowerbeds” of traditional corruption, such as the customs agencies and operations involving foreign debts. The very first attempt at an operation against smuggling, however, uncovered the involvement of interests directly related to a deputy director of the Federal Security Service (FSB, successor to the KGB). Shortly thereafter, it emerged that recent cheerful reports about the successful construction of a new port in Leningrad Province were an obvious case of mere window-dressing—and the perpetrator, again, was a top intelligence official. Finally, the attempt to clean out the giant state-owned company Gazprom, by replacing the previous management with one of Putin’s men from St. Petersburg, brought an economic result quite opposite to his expectations.

The declared intention to reconsolidate three of the former KGB’s directorates into a unified police and intelligence investigative service, under the auspices of the Security Council, confronted violent bureaucratic resistance, was postponed and revised several times, and eventually failed. The heavily



funded Center for Strategic Research did not produce any research. The Center for Strategic Development developed a few anti-NATO writings, for which there was no demand on account of “tactical reasons.” A lavishly advertised initiative called the Civic Forum, which was billed as an intellectual “kitchen” for political brainstorming and practical decision-making, turned out to be nothing but a blab shop, and eventually “self-dissolved” out of impotence. The hierarchy of Special Presidential Representatives to seven new Federal districts, which was designed to control the provincial Governors, factionalized internally. The State Council, another special body composed of the same Governors, was convened—but, again, the result of its activity hardly justified the organizing and financial expense.

The person with whom millions of Russians had linked a renewed hope for revival, the “last hope” for many of them, may have not have identified the first and key mistake he made, but he clearly understood that the initiative was being lost, and that he could rely on none of these domestic partners when it came to any serious issue. In a certain way, he needed a Big Brother—not just for the country, but for himself, to feel more psychologically secure.

### Last Resort—Britain

The President’s arrival in Britain in December 2001, with his wife and—very unusual—his two daughters; his private talks with Tony Blair and the latter’s whole family; the sudden revelation of the existence of a Russian-British bilateral “anti-terrorist commission,” hastily established on Sept. 11; speak to the notorious question (it became famous at a Davos World Economic Forum press conference): “Who is Mr. Putin?” It is another matter, whether or not the subject of that notorious question has answered it for himself.

The most striking alogism in the writings of the late Metropolitan Ioann, is his essential hatred for Tsar Peter I, counterposed to sincere adoration for Tsar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible)—despite the all too obvious political, cultural, and territorial deterioration of Russia during the final years of Ivan IV’s rule. The clinically paranoid Tsar, having killed his son and heir who had come to him with a proposal for a vitally necessary military move, was hiding in the town of Vologda and writing letters to the British Queen, asking her for asylum in connection with an imagined conspiracy that obsessed him.

This seemingly contradictory historical phenomenon of a “continentalist” becoming irrationally devoted to the “Island Empire” of Great Britain, and destroying his own country in the process, would be seen again. It was evident in the sophisticated and profoundly misanthropic psychology of Yuri Andropov. It was continued in Politburo member **Alexander N. Yakovlev**, the so-called “architect of perestroika.” It was reiterated in the generation of Andropov’s grandsons, who put forward Putin as the best choice of a successor for **Boris Yeltsin**. This last choice of heir (Yeltsin had anointed and dumped several “successors” before), though it was re-



*Russian President Boris Yeltsin (right) and British Prime Minister John Major, in 1993. “For the Romanov dynasty, for the Politburo, for the present Russian establishment, misty Albion remains ‘the last resort’ in case of big problems. Especially when these problems emerge from the personal psychology of a Russian sovereign.”*

lated to the need for decisive action in the war in Chechnya (1999), seemed rather more essentially to have been influenced from outside Russia. The prehistory of Yeltsin’s decision may be traced to 1992, when, in a state of psychological panic right after the defeat of the senior George Bush in the U.S. Presidential elections, Yeltsin raced to London and signed a “historic agreement such as had not been signed in three centuries”—historic, but not made public!

For the Romanov dynasty, for the Politburo, for the present Russian establishment, misty Albion remains “the last resort” in case of big problems. Especially when these problems emerge from the personal psychology of a Russian sovereign.

### ‘In Between’

Perhaps the first surprise for the President’s closest allies was his reluctance to join the attempts by China and some in Europe, to prevent the new Bush Administration’s pursuit of a Nuclear Missile Defense program. This was Putin’s first move toward partnership with Bush in a passive role—toward unconditional support for the so-called “anti-terrorist” campaign in Afghanistan, hospitable reception of U.S. troops in Central Asia and Georgia, and, finally, a special oil relationship, proposed to the United States as an alternative to Mid-east oil.

If such a policy line had been chosen from the outset, at the peak of the President’s popularity, and introduced as a true revolution in foreign policy, the consequences might



have been less painful than they turned out to be. Yes, Putin would have acquired deadly enemies, but he wouldn't have lost the number of supporters he is losing today.

One phrase, pronounced by the President quite recently, has to have struck the readers of KGB memoirs most painfully. After his May-June series of diplomatic meetings in St. Petersburg, Putin said aloud and in public, definitely for an international audience, that Russia "does not lay claim to any special path." So much for the mystical aura around the name "Putin," which denotes "*put*"—way, *Weg*, path, road, direction, impetus, solution, salvation.

He was perceived as saying, "No, I am not going to lead you anywhere. You stay where you are. In between."

Those who have been patiently waiting for him at last to declare his agenda, inherited from his ancestors, teachers, and superiors in the service, hear nothing except liberal phraseology *à la* Gaidar, and see nothing but a number of "survivalist"—at best—policy maneuvers, one concession after another, crowned with the commemoration of Anatoli Sobchak noted at the outset. The liberal intelligentsia, meanwhile, which might have rejoiced at Russia's long-awaited pact with the idealized West, is unable to sincerely appreciate these same moves by Putin. It has not trusted him since the moment Vladimir Gusinsky was packed off to jail for two days, because "this might happen to any of us."

As a result, any new move by Putin is perceived with suspicion. The conservatives are sure that the deal with the United States will undermine Russia's relations with the Islamic world. The liberals are not opposed to more security from terrorists, and a segment of them agrees that Chechen gangsters should be crushed, but they are not so sure that today's repressive measures will not affect them tomorrow.

So, the head of the state finds himself just somewhere in between, as a fissure in the ground spectacularly expands under his feet. Is it so easy to realize that this split has originated inside himself, as a result of his particular experience of the "schisis" of practice and views, reason and calculations, ambitions and superstitions?

## Split Institutions

Putin's most devoted colleagues demonstrate a kind of split within themselves. The most obvious example is **Dmitri Kozak**, deputy chief of the Kremlin Staff, responsible for the reform of law. On the one hand, he is known as a ruthless promoter of financial and legislative centralization, to achieve an abrupt restriction of the power of "regional barons." But this very person, at the same time, also promotes changes in legislation, to deprive the prosecution of its supervisory duties and convey them to the courts. Ostensibly, this innovation pursues anti-corruption goals, but it is well known that, at the local and regional levels, judges are far more corrupt than prosecutors. Yet, the deputy chief of staff explains that his motive is devotion to human rights! He may, indeed, be quite sincere. Strict control combined with "human rights" (under-



*Vladimir Putin (right) with U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in 2001. Putin is widely perceived in Russia as refusing to give direction to the nation. As a result, any new move by him—such as his efforts to align with the United States under its current policies—is perceived with suspicion from all ideological camps.*

stood abstractly) may be viewed by Putin's fanatics as the real essence of the ideology their new power is making historic efforts to bring about.

Terms like "historic," "extraordinary," "unprecedented," and "unique" are common among the President's loyal men, those who style themselves as "longtime colleagues" or "supporters" of Vladimir Putin. The founding assembly of **Sergei Mironov's** Party of Life was billed by the organizers as an "unprecedented" and "unique event in the history of mankind"! This "unique" entity aspires to the status of "the real Presidential party." Meanwhile, Yedinstvo, the party that won the 1999 State Duma [lower House of Parliament] elections under Putin's portrait, has merged with its worst enemy, Moscow Mayor **Yuri Luzhkov's** Otechestvo, and is wondering: Are we now considered "unreal"? Or—unreliable? Or—not populist enough? Or—what?

The schisis has gone out of control even in the most controlled fragment of the system of artificial pluralism. In 1999, the Union of Right Forces (SPS) enjoyed a relative (8%) electoral success, by expressing support for Putin. Today, this party's executive chairman, **Boris Nemtsov**, openly expresses not merely non-confidence, but open contempt for Putin, while SPS leading light **Anatoli Chubais** does not

rule in the party organization of his and Putin's native city, St. Petersburg.

A year ago, Russia had one—at least one visible—"party of power," namely Yedinstvo. Now there are five, including the merger of Yedinstvo-Otechestvo (drifting from "rightist" to "centrist"), plus: the People's Party, the Party of Life, the Soyuz (Alliance) Party, and the Eurasia Party. The youth organization of Yedinstvo, once launched triumphantly as "Putin's Komsomol," has been practically ousted by "Walking Together," which was established directly under the auspices of the Kremlin Staff and has already earned the nickname "Sucking Together," for exceptional servility to the President and any move he makes—servility based, unfortunately, upon plentiful financial support.

The sense of a kingdom without a sovereign, a house without a master, is rising also at the level of the regions. Long-standing criticism of Primorsky Territory **Gov. Yevgeni Nazdratenko**, levelled by the corporate empire of Chubais' United Energy Systems, ended in his administrative replacement, which appeared to illustrate the Kremlin's increased power under Putin. Within several months, however, the local population rejected the President's protégé, and the Kremlin had to swallow the insult.

Each regional election is a splitting headache for the Kremlin—literally splitting, as rival teams, operating in the provinces and striking deals with various economic-financial clans, are linked with particular top officials, each with his own plan for increasing his influence, as well as financial power. The sudden death of Krasnoyarsk **Gov. Alexander Lebed** has opened the prospect of a ruthless clash among financial groups, representing the interests of leading Moscow-based oligarchs, in partnership with Kremlin Staff people. Unlike Primorsky Territory, where the choice was clear, with only two real contenders (one of them a mentally unstable personality), in the Siberian heartland and strategic area of Krasnoyarsk, the outcome is wide open. It is most remarkable that in this case, none of the contenders relies on the President's backing. It has become unprofitable, unfavorable, and unnecessary to refer to the will of the President—whose authority, a year and a half ago, seemed to be unshakable.

### Putin's Most Serious Electoral Problems

Ironically, the place where Putin will face the most serious electoral problems in 2004 may turn out to be his native St. Petersburg. This city expected too much from the team it delegated to Moscow, hoping at least to achieve necessary financial support for upgrading the city's infrastructure, which, during Sobchak's rule, either deteriorated or became obsolete; for example, the disgrace of the St. Petersburg international airport, which looks like a pig sty on a second-rate Soviet collective farm. But the heavily advertised federal program for celebrating the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg in 2003 has stumbled against the prevalent lack of managerial

skills, a vacuum that is quickly filled by private interests eager to "utilize" the federal expenses. For nearly half a year, construction of a beltway around St. Petersburg has been stalled, because **German Gref's** Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, despite Gref's St. Petersburg origin, promoted Moscow construction companies against their local rivals. In the St. Petersburg corporate establishment, the reluctance of the President to intervene was interpreted as evidence of a newly formed relationship between the "St. Petersburg team" and powerful Moscow-based private interests. This disappointment is likely to increase by 2003-04, when the next elections will test the clout of the ex-St. Petersburgers, not necessarily with support from today's St. Petersburgers.

Did he anticipate this threat, during the dedication of Sobchak's memorial plaque, when he explained with a strange tone of self-justification, that his former boss, faced with a new political and—especially—economic reality, had had to make decisions in a law-and-order vacuum, when "it was not clear what to do at all"? Is he going to justify himself in the same way?

While the establishment is in disarray, the legendary "St. Petersburg team" fractured into 7—or is it already 11?—clans and groupings, each with its own narrow grasping interest; while real economic power has been taken over by top figures of the government and the Kremlin Staff, combined with shadowy figures from the unshaken hierarchy of professional crime; while Russia's political influence is barely tangible even in nearby Ukraine; while the KGB-trained Defense Minister is obsessed with how to replace the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, but appears unable to do it; while the top ten of the business community are entrusting themselves to the British lords they invite onto their boards of directors, correctly guessing that the President cannot and will not protect them from Transparency International, the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), and so forth; while the British are able and eager to let Russian businessmen operate in the FATF-free territory of Gibraltar—the conditions for falling into a big geopolitical trap are perfect.

Moreover, the object of manipulation steps right into it, to the extent that he is looking not for practical advice, but for a mystical solution. It is quite a natural development: from KGBism as an alternative to Communism, to the supervision of tribes instead of the development of deserts. Why engineer the turning of Siberia's great rivers, when it is more convenient to turn minds? And, apparently, more secure?

A sweet trap, isn't it? And how immensely difficult it will be, for the leader himself and the whole country with him, to get out of it! Probably harder than escaping from any START III arms agreement, or any International Monetary Fund or World Trade Organization. Because the most dangerous destruction is one that originates in the brain, according to Mikhail Bulgakov, the favorite author of Soviet intelligence.