Spies Without Cloaks:

The KGB's Successors

Amy Knight

Princeton University Press

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,
Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Knight, Amy 1946–
Spies without cloaks : The KGB's successors / Amy Knight.
p. cm.
Includes index.
eISBN 1-4008-0450-7
1. Secret service—Russia (Federation)
2. Russia (Federation). Ministerstvo bezopasnosti.
I. Title.
HV8227.2.A3K59 1996
363.2′83′0947—dc20 95-26281

This book has been composed in Sabon

To all those in Russia who have courageously fought to reform the KGB and its successors

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I BEGAN working on this book in September 1992 as a fellow at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. My ten months there were invaluable, and I want to express my gratitude to Blair Ruble, Charles Blitzer, and the entire staff at the Kennan Institute and the Wilson Center for their help.

I am also indebted to the International Research and Exchanges Board, which awarded me a short-term travel grant to conduct interviews in Moscow, and to the Smith-Richardson Foundation, which provided me with a grant to finish up the writing of this book.

This book would not have been possible with the support and advice of numerous colleagues. I owe much to Robert Sharlet for his encouragement of the project from the beginning and for reading the manuscript before publication, and to Eugene Huskey, who also read and commented on the manuscript. I also want to thank Thane Gustafson, Bruce Parrott, Barbara Chotiner, Yevgenia Albats, and Rod Barker for their support, as well as the staff at the Library of Congress, and my agent, Gail Ross.

Special thanks go to Werner Hahn and Jim Nichol, who have been willing to take time out from their busy schedules to give me the benefit of their expert knowledge of Russian politics, and to my friend Peter Reddaway, whose ideas and writings on Russia are always an inspiration.

Thanks are also due to two excellent research assistants, Joe Proctor and Steve Guenther, and to Florence Rotz, of the Department of Russian Area and East European Studies at Johns Hopkins, SAIS.

I am grateful to my former editor at Princeton, Lauren Osborne, for encouraging the book project and for reading and commenting on the manuscript, as well as to my present editor, Brigitta van Rheinberg, and my manuscript editor, Alice Calaprice, for seeing this book through to publication efficiently and thoroughly. Thanks are also due to Alan Greenberg, who prepared the index.

My final debt of gratitude is to my husband, Malcolm, who read the manuscript and provided invaluable insights and commentary, and to my daughters, Molly, Diana, and Alexandra, who put up with my long hours graciously and patiently.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(see Introduction for further explanations)

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EEC	European Economic Community (European Union)
FAPSI	Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information
FCD	First Chief Directorate (KGB)
FIS	Foreign Intelligence Service
FSB	Federal Security Service
FSK	Federal Counterintelligence Service
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate (under Ministry of Defense)
GUO	Main Guard Directorate
KGB	Committee for State Security
MB	Ministry of Security
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (USSR)
SBP	Presidential Security Service
SBU	Ukrainian Security Service
SCSE	State Committee on the State of Emergency

SPIES WITHOUT CLOAKS

INTRODUCTION

> Spies, you are lights in state, but of base stuffe,
> ho, when you have burnt your selves down to the snuffe,
> Stinke, and are throwne away. End faire enough.
> *(Ben Jonson)*

THIS BOOK tells the story of what happened to the world's most powerful security and intelligence apparatus, known until late 1991 as the KGB, when the totalitarian Soviet empire that supported it collapsed. How does such an organization survive in a world where the rules of the game have changed dramatically? Why, for that matter, does it survive at all, given that the cold war has ended and Russia has embarked on a path of political and economic transformation? Does the KGB's successor organization still represent a threat to Western interests and an enemy to the development of democracy within the former Soviet Union?

This account is part of the larger story of the post-Soviet political system in transition, and, although the book deals with one element of that system, its ultimate aim is to provide a deeper understanding of domestic and foreign politics in the former Soviet Union. The focus of the book is on the Russian Federation, which emerged as an independent state when the Soviet Union was dissolved in December 1991. But the story of what happened to the KGB also involves the other former Soviet republics, whose security services were part of the KGB and are still closely connected with Moscow.

The former Soviet Union has been in the throes of economic and political upheaval since 1987, when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated his program of *perestroika*. Western observers have followed these events closely, because the outcome will affect the entire world for a long time to come. Yet in many respects the Russian political process remains a puzzle. Despite—or perhaps because of—the overwhelming amount of information on day-to-day developments in Russia, Western experts and policymakers have often been caught off guard by important political events there, such as the August 1991 coup attempt, Yeltsin's violent confrontation with the parliamentary opposition in the autumn of 1993, and the December 1994 invasion of Chechnia. The significance of such events for Russia's long-term political development is not always clear.

It will probably take a substantial interlude, providing the benefit of historical perspective, to understand fully this period of breathtaking

change in Russia. Nonetheless, we can learn a great deal about the broader political process and the future of reform in Russia by looking specifically at the fate of the KGB, which always played a key role in Soviet politics. The power and influence of its successor organization serves as a gauge against which to measure the progress of political reform in Russia. Also, the influence of the Russian security services in the other former Soviet republics that now form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) tells us much about the political evolution of the former Soviet Union as a whole.

The development of the Russian security services after the fall of the Soviet Union reflects all the contradictions and discontinuities that have characterized Russia's political development under Boris Yeltsin. On the one hand, the reforms that began under Gorbachev and were continued by Yeltsin have had a significant impact on the security services, depriving them of potent weapons. As a result of *glasnost*, for example, the security police can no longer enforce silence through censorship. The abuses and offenses of the security police are openly criticized in the press. Gone are the days when bothersome dissidents could be dealt with easily by whisking them off to labor camps or psychiatric hospitals without answering to a court or a judge. And the security services do not have the unlimited resources that were at their disposal during the Soviet era. They too have to worry about their budgets. With the West no longer an evil enemy, Russia's spies and agents abroad have had to change their ways. Murder, support of terrorism, and kidnapping are no longer in the arsenal of weapons to be used freely against foreign governments.

Nonetheless, it is wrong to depict the KGB's successor organization as an impotent, shattered bureaucracy that poses no threat to Russia's democratic reform or to Western governments. Along with the difficulties created by the political and economic changes in the former Soviet Union, new advantages and opportunities have arisen for security professionals. The political climate itself has worked in favor of a strong security service. Ever since the August 1991 coup attempt, which set the stage for the collapse of the Soviet Union, a crisis atmosphere has prevailed in Russia. The economy has been weak and unstable, crime has reached epidemic proportions, ethnic conflicts and separatist movements have seriously threatened the viability of the Russian state, and the political leadership has been embroiled in internal struggles. Such an environment of instability and lawlessness makes people yearn for the rigid law and order of the past.

The Yeltsin government, for all its avowed democratic ideals, has been reluctant to rein in the police and intelligence apparatus. Indeed, like Gorbachev before him, Yeltsin chose to co-opt the support of the security services rather than to confront them. He could not risk alienating this

key source of support against challenges to him and his government. He has depended on the security organs for reliable information—a crucial function for monitoring what is going on in the periphery and among political opponents. And the special security troops, well trained and more reliable than the regular army, have been valuable assets in the face of violence and unrest. Another important consideration for Yeltsin has been that the security services have extensive files on all members of the political leadership. Judging from the compromising materials that were released about Gorbachev, their files could be highly damaging to Yeltsin, a stalwart communist bureaucrat until 1987.

As a result of Yeltsin's policies, Russia's new security services inherited the bulk of the staff and resources of the former KGB, and they continued to enjoy unrivaled political influence. For many Russian democrats, particularly those who have been involved in the human rights movement, Yeltsin's reluctance to reform the security services has been a great disappointment. As a Moscow journalist bemoaned, "Why did the president go only halfway, outlawing the CPSU, but not touching the no less dangerous monster, the KGB?"[1]

The KGB's Legacy

It is no simple matter to reform a security service that for decades had been so powerful and pervasive. The KGB had been a key component of the Soviet state since it was established by Khrushchev in 1954 to replace the Stalinist security services. Having acquired vast monetary and technical resources, an active personnel that numbered at least 420,000 (not to mention the large network of informers and persons with loose connections to the KGB), and huge archival files with the most sensitive political information, the KGB represented a state within a state.[2] As a former KGB general, Valentin Korolev, observed: "During the years of stagnation [the Brezhnev era] the KGB grew to proportions that nobody but a Chekist [the traditional name for a KGB employee] could imagine. Several years ago whole new departments were created by subdividing departments in the central KGB apparatus."[3]

Thanks to the policy of openness initiated by Gorbachev[3] and continued by Yeltsin, former KGB and party officials have provided accounts of their careers during the Soviet period, and some archival sources on the activities of the KGB and the party leadership have become available. As a result, we know a lot more about the KGB than we did when it was still in existence. But the new information does not change the general perception of this institution as a powerful bulwark of the Soviet regime.

The KGB was a rigidly hierarchical structure, led by a chairman (the most infamous of which was Vladimir Kriuchkov, who was implicated in the aborted August 1991 coup attempt) and several deputies. The various KGB directorates had responsibilities ranging from suppressing political dissent to guarding borders to conducting propaganda campaigns abroad. Unlike the United States government, which has two separate agencies, the FBI and the CIA, for domestic counterintelligence and foreign intelligence, the Soviet system combined these functions within the KGB. This practice reflected the ideological underpinnings of the regime, which blurred the distinction between the enemy abroad and political threats at home on the grounds that the latter were always foreign inspired.

The KGB's tentacles extended far and wide. There were large KGB branches in the non-Russian republics, which duplicated its functions at the Moscow center, and KGB offices in every district, region, and city. Its empire also spread over Eastern Europe, where secret police organizations set up by the Soviets after World War II enforced Moscow's domination and carried out operations on the KGB's behalf.

KGB officials, who bore military ranks, were recruited from the "best and the brightest" and had long been accustomed to the privileges granted to the most elite elements of Soviet society. They were also used to operating without regard to the law, answering only to the Communist Party leadership. Recent sources have revealed, for example, that the KGB channeled money abroad—to be stored in secret accounts—for party bosses. And it was common practice for KGB intelligence officers in foreign countries to purchase "gifts" with state money to bring back to their superiors in the KGB and the party.

The KGB's primary internal functions were spying on the Soviet citizenry—by means of a vast surveillance apparatus—to ensure its loyalty to the regime, and suppressing any expressions of political opposition. It served as the eyes and ears of the party leadership, purveying information to the Politburo on all aspects of Soviet society. So effective was the KGB at keeping a lid on dissent that it did not resort to the widespread terror used by the Stalinist political police. It was often enough just to call an outspoken citizen to KGB offices for a warning "chat."

In some cases the KGB used such chats to persuade people to become informers. Like other secret police agencies, the KGB relied heavily on an extensive network of collaborators, who spied on colleagues and neighbors and then reported periodically to KGB case officers. Because KGB files are still closed, it is not known how pervasive the informant network was. But unofficial reports leave little doubt that, as in Eastern Europe, agents and informers were ubiquitous in the Soviet Union. In some sense, the entire society—with the exception of a small minority of dissidents—col-

laborated with the KGB by adhering to the rules of a police state in order to avoid trouble.

With all its access to information, the KGB stayed on top of events and was therefore able to adopt better than other Soviet institutions to changing circumstances. This flexibility enabled the KGB to weather the dramatic changes that Gorbachev's policy of perestroika wrought and to retain its substantial influence on politics up until the time of the coup attempt. Even before perestroika the KGB leadership had recognized the need to revamp the KGB's image in keeping with the times and had tried to avoid strong-arm tactics that gave it a bad name. During the late 1970s and 1980s the KGB had moved from coercion to manipulation, emphasizing propaganda and political education over arrests and public trials of dissidents. The KGB also tried to soften its image—and that of the Soviet leadership—abroad by means of sophisticated public relations campaigns.

Toward the end of the Soviet period the KGB had evolved into an institution that appeared to be markedly different from the security services of earlier days—not necessarily more benign, but more complex. It was harder to single out KGB officers than it had been earlier, except that they were more sophisticated and worldly-wise than the average Soviet citizen. They professed democratic values, endorsed economic reform, and complained openly about various shortcomings in the Soviet system. They began speaking about the West in friendly terms. KGB officials went into politics, running for elections to the local and central parliaments, and they became involved in joint ventures. They voiced support for perestroika until it went too far for them to tolerate.

The failed August 1991 coup attempt, which the KGB helped to orchestrate in order to put a brake on reforms, demonstrated the superficiality of the KGB's new image and the hypocrisy of its efforts to portray itself as a progressive institution. Those who had been willing to believe that the KGB was proreform felt betrayed and joined the chorus of demands that it be dissolved once and for all. The KGB was disbanded, but, much to the chagrin of the democrats, it was reconstituted under another name.

After the KGB

The years 1991–1995 have seen the demise of several important Russian politicians, including Gorbachev. Structures like the Communist Party and the Soviet Union have crumbled. Even the Russian Army is in disarray, demoralized by budget cuts, corruption, and the loss of its traditional strategic mission. The security services, on the other hand, have

survived because this has been a time of political struggle and civil disorder, when Russian leaders have depended more than ever on their ability to employ secret police methods. In every political crisis that has occurred in Russia since perestroika began, the security services have played decisive roles.

Herein lies the paradox of Russia's transition toward democracy. Significant economic reforms have been introduced, the media have been unshackled, political parties have formed, and people are experiencing a freedom of movement and expression that was unknown in the Soviet days. Yet the security services continue to play a larger than life role in the political system, just as they did in the past. Can the Russian government free itself from its reliance on these institutions without creating a vacuum of power that could lead to political chaos? Can Russian leaders preserve order and stability without reneging completely on their commitment to protect individual rights? These are some of the questions that this book attempts to answer.

The book begins with an account of the August 1991 coup attempt. Although others have described this event in detail, I offer my own interpretation of the developments that led to the coup and the role that the KGB played because it is essential for understanding the subsequent evolution of the security services and of the political system in general. Although the initial, widely accepted version of this event—that a small group of KGB-led culprits attempted to seize power from Gorbachev and failed because of the courageous resistance of democrats—has been discredited by subsequent evidence, a cover-up of sorts has persisted. As I argue here, the failure of Russian society to come to terms with what really happened in August 1991 has impeded the process of political reform.

The collapse of the coup had an immediate impact on the KGB, which was soon dismantled and replaced by several different agencies performing the same functions. In chapter 2 I describe the new security structure as it evolved under Yeltsin and the various laws that Yeltsin introduced to buttress the powers of this apparatus.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide details on the role of the security services in the power struggles and political crises that occurred during the first two and a half years after the coup. I give particular attention to the actions of the counterintelligence apparatus in the fight against official corruption, which ended up involving some of Yeltsin's closest associates. Chapter 4 continues the saga of the struggle against official crime, describing the new powers that were granted to the security police to deal with this problem and the creation, at the end of 1993, of the Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK). Its establishment coincided with a new emphasis on

fighting nuclear smuggling and on suppressing ethnic separatism, particularly as it related to the recalcitrant republic of Chechnia.

In chapter 5 I turn to the Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS), successor to the former First Chief Directorate of the KGB. What are the goals and purposes of Russia's foreign intelligence apparatus now that the cold war is over? Spying against the West is still an important priority, as the case of Aldrich Ames demonstrates. But the FIS directs much of its effort at the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The FIS has played a crucial foreign policy role in the Russian Federation, which has not abandoned its goal of preserving its great power status. In contrast to the KGB's First Chief Directorate, the FIS has moved beyond intelligence gathering and other foreign operations to the actual formulation of policy for the Yeltsin administration.

Chapter 6 describes the situation along Russia's borders and the role of the Border Guard Service, formerly part of the KGB, in protecting Russia's security interests. This is followed by a discussion of the security services of the other CIS countries and the efforts of the Russian Federation to integrate the operations of these services with those of Russia. As I argue, the success of Russia's efforts raises the possibility of a partial reconstitution of the KGB's empire.

I then consider, in chapter 7, the important question of human rights in Russia and the other CIS states. Do the security services still violate these rights? What laws have been established to protect individuals from police persecution? In several of the CIS countries the governments have been slow to institute legal restrictions on the security police, largely because their political leaders are members of the old guard, which had close ties with the KGB. Indeed, Gaidar Aliev, the leader of Azerbaidzhan, headed the republican KGB there for years. And Evhen Marchuk, the new prime minister of Ukraine, was a career KGB official.

Closely tied to the human rights issue is the question of coming to terms with the past, which is still buried in the archives, especially those of the KGB. The archives, discussed in chapter 8, are central to the process of reform in Russia. Without dealing directly with its history of police repression, Russian society cannot expect to solve its political problems today. The KGB archives have been the subject of intense debate because they contain files that are highly sensitive politically, particularly those that pertain to the abuse of human rights by former KGB officers and to the use of informers. In addition, the foreign intelligence archives hold the answers to key issues of cold war history. Although the KGB archives were supposed to be handed over to the state archive committee and thus be screened for the possible declassification of some documents, this has not happened. Instead they have remained in the custody of the secu-

rity services, whose staffers have profited from the sale of secret documents to the West.

In chapter 9 I provide an overview of political events involving Russia's security services since the beginning of 1995, when authoritarian tendencies in the government came to the fore. In 1995, four years after the August coup attempt, we can finally discern long-term political trends that transcend the personalities of leaders like Yeltsin, who may well not survive in office after the 1996 presidential elections.

In the concluding afterword, I attempt to shed light on the future by looking briefly at what happened to the security services in eastern Europe, where people have for the most part faced up to their past legacies of secret police repression and grappled with questions of guilt and responsibility. Is Russia's situation so different that it can never go the way of some states in eastern Europe and peacefully rid itself of this last vestige of totalitarianism, the all-powerful secret police? Or will it eventually follow in the path of these countries that were once part of the Soviet empire? Russia's future as a democracy depends heavily on the answer to this question. And we in the West have a tremendous stake in the success of Russia's transition to a democratic state. But this transition may not occur quickly and easily, no matter what the outcome of the next parliamentary and presidential elections. Russia's security services, revamped yet still powerful, serve as a reminder that Russia's future political course is highly uncertain.

The dizzying succession of name changes and reorganizations of the security services under Yeltsin have posed a challenge in the writing of this book. I did not want to solve the problem, as other writers have done, by simply referring to the new security services as the KGB. That would not only be inaccurate, but it would also give the false impression of continuity of purpose on the part of the Russian government. I have chosen instead to use the correct terminology for the new agencies, but, in order to avoid inundating the reader with unfamiliar names, I often use the generic term "security services." Table two in chapter 1 should help if there is any confusion.

The reader will also note that in some cases I use abbreviations from the English translation of the organization's name rather than the Russian. This is because some of the names in Russian are so unfamiliar that the reader might have trouble remembering what the abbreviation stands for. Thus, I use FIS for the Foreign Intelligence Service rather than the Russian "SVR" (Sluzhba Vneshnei Razvedki). But at the same time I use "MB" (Ministerstvo Bezopasnosti), rather than "MS" for Ministry of Security, just as the term "KGB" (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) was always used, instead of CSS, for Committee of State Security.

For sources of information I have relied extensively on the Russian media. Glasnost has given rise to a flourishing Russian press, which not only reports the day-to-day details of politics, but also offers lively and perceptive analyses and in-depth investigative reporting. I have also made broad use of interviews conducted in Moscow in 1994–1995, memoirs of Russian politicians and former KGB officials, and Western books, periodicals, and newspapers.

Chapter One

THE KGB AND THE MYTH OF THE AUGUST COUP

> Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.
> *(Karl Marx)*

RUSSIA HAS always been prone to historical myths. Take, for example, the widely held nineteenth-century belief that the peasants were the true bearers of socialism, or the portrayal of Lenin as a deity and the Communist Party as infallible. Or consider the most outlandish myth of all, that of the "great leader" Joseph Stalin. In some cases it has taken a long time to dispel the myths. Official acknowledgment of the true extent of Stalin's crimes and public criticism of Lenin, for example, did not occur until the late 1980s. By contrast, the myth of the failed August 1991 coup attempt, presented as a victory of the democratic will of the Russian people, took only a few years to fall flat.

The aborted coup was a last-ditch effort by Gorbachev's hard-line subordinates to stem the tide of reform in the country, which they saw as a threat to political stability and to their own interests as party and state leaders. In particular, they wanted to prevent the imminent signing of the so-called Union Treaty, which would have significantly reduced the powers of the central Soviet government vis-à-vis the republics. On the morning of 19 August 1991, KGB Chief Vladimir Kriuchkov and seven other conservative members of the government, including Defense Minister Dmitrii Iazov and Minister of Interior Boris Pugo, announced that Gorbachev, who was vacationing in the Crimea, had fallen ill. Because of his incapacitation, they said, they had formed an eight-man State Committee on the State of Emergency (SCSE), headed by Vice-President Gennadii Ianaev, to rule the country.[1] Their attempt to enforce a state of emergency and impose martial law was a resounding failure, and within seventy-two hours most of them had been arrested.[2] The coup affair, which riveted the world for several days, had an important impact on subsequent developments, giving impetus to the breakup of the Soviet Union and laying much of the groundwork for the evolution of the KGB's successor agen-

cies. But, viewed from the hindsight of several years, the August 1991 events appear much different from what they seemed at the time.

Part of the appeal of the coup story was that it featured what appeared to be clear-cut forces of good and evil, battling it out.[3] It also had a happy ending—or so it seemed—with the hero, Boris Yeltsin, standing victorious on top of a tank, and the villains, the KGB-led conspirators who had tried to seize power, being marched off to jail. But the dividing line between good and evil, reformers and hard-liners, victors and vanquished that seemed so clear in August 1991 has since become blurred.

By August 1994 all but one of the fourteen accused coup plotters had been granted amnesty, and two of those amnestied, Vasilii Starodubtsev and Anatolii Lukianov, had been elected members of the Russian parliament. The remaining defendant, Army General Valentin Varennikov, had rejected the amnesty and insisted on his day in court. After a highly publicized trial, he was acquitted of all charges. Meanwhile Yeltsin's allies in August 1991, Aleksandr Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov, who helped him defend the Russian White House, had become his bitterest enemies, even ending up in prison for a short time after their confrontation with Yeltsin in October 1993. As for the KGB, which was blamed for masterminding the coup plot, it survived the upheaval and was still in business, albeit under another name.

One hundred and fifty volumes of investigation and inquiry records, days of court testimony, and numerous eyewitness accounts in the press led many to the inevitable conclusion that things were not what they had seemed to be in August 1991. Not only had the accusations of treason against the fourteen men been effectively refuted; Gorbachev's claims that he was an innocent victim of the coup had lost all credibility; and even Yeltsin's role as the courageous defender of the White House during the August crisis appeared dubious.

Not surprisingly, public opinion about the coup had also changed. Polled on the three-year anniversary of the coup attempt, only a small proportion of Muscovites expressed a favorable opinion of its outcome.[4] Less than a quarter of those polled viewed the changes that had taken place since the coup in positive terms, and close to one-third said they would like to return to the pre-1991 state of affairs. Almost 50 percent said that their opinion of the August 1991 events had changed over the past three years.[5]

In fact, many Russians sympathized with the plotters all along, because they approved of their motivation, that of preventing the Soviet Union from unraveling. After the initial euphoria over the defeat of the coup had died down and people began to face the realities of a disbanded Soviet empire, disenchantment set in. Within a couple of years the Yeltsin administration itself was pushing, with considerable success, for a "reinte-

gration" of the former Soviet republics (with the exception of the three Baltic states).

As it turned out, the crisis of August 1991 did not represent the revolutionary turning point that it was portrayed to be. A decisive break with the Soviet system of the past did not occur when the coup attempt collapsed. The system had begun to unravel well before and, as the postcoup events have shown, it has yet to be completely destroyed. What, then, was the significance of the August coup attempt? In order to answer this question, we must look at the role of a key player in the plot, the KGB, and examine its complex relationship with the political leadership both before and after August 1991.

Gorbachev and the KGB

The KGB presented Soviet President Gorbachev with one of his biggest political challenges when he embarked on his program of political and economic reform in 1987. However democratic his intentions, Gorbachev knew that he could not risk confronting the KGB head-on. So he maintained a tight balancing act during the period from 1987 to mid-1991, an act which often resulted in contradictory policies. On the one hand, he introduced glasnost, a policy of unprecedented freedom of expression in the Soviet Union; he initiated semi-democratic electoral procedures for the parliament; he allowed for the emergence of a de facto multiparty system; and he embarked on a dramatic new foreign policy, which involved a complete reassessment of Russia's relations with the West and Eastern Europe. Gorbachev's "new thinking" put an end to the militant anti-Westernism that had justified a continuous military buildup for forty years. And it set the stage for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

These reformist policies were highly threatening to the KGB, which had relied on strict censorship, a closed political system, an extensive spy network in Eastern Europe, and a virulently anti-Western foreign policy to maintain its power and influence. But Gorbachev offset these changes by other measures, which reinforced a strong KGB. He appointed Vladimir Kriuchkov, a long-time KGB professional, to head the KGB in September 1988 and made him a leading adviser; he did not fire members of the KGB's old guard from the organization's leadership or subject the KGB to legal controls; and he authorized the KGB, along with the regular police and the army, to use brute force in combatting nationalist unrest in places like Georgia, where Russian troops killed twenty-nine civilians in the infamous "Tbilisi massacre" of April 1989.[6]

Gorbachev's ambivalence toward the KGB was a reflection of two un-

derlying problems. First, the reform of the socialist system that Gorbachev started with perestroika had quickly escalated beyond his control. The system was being undermined rather than reformed. Second, Gorbachev was not strong enough politically to rein in the KGB even if he had wanted to. By late 1990 he had suffered a serious decline in popularity and in political authority. Growing ethnic unrest, a deepening economic crisis, demands for independence from the Baltic states, and opposition from within his own leadership were eroding his powers. He could not run the risk of antagonizing the KGB by giving in to democratic calls for a reform of that organization because he needed its coercive forces as a bulwark for his rule. This was a problem that Gorbachev's successor, Boris Yeltsin, was also to encounter.

As for the KGB leadership, publicly Kriuchkov and his deputies declared themselves strong supporters of Gorbachev's reforms. Kriuchkov, who had worked under Iurii Andropov as head of the KGB's First Chief Directorate (foreign espionage), came across as smooth and sophisticated in his initial media interviews as the new KGB chief, supporting the need for a complete restructuring of Soviet foreign policy. He also welcomed the creation of a parliamentary committee to oversee the KGB and stressed the importance of rehabilitating the victims of Stalin's purges. On the basis of his public statements (Kriuchkov gave no fewer than eighteen press interviews during the first two years of his tenure as KGB chief) and his association with the "liberal" Andropov, some Western analysts even assumed that Kriuchkov's appointment was a positive sign for perestroika.[7]

Try as they did to promote a new image for the KGB and to convince the world that their organization was drastically reforming itself, KGB officials had trouble containing their anxiety about perestroika, especially by mid-1990. They had good reason to be nervous. After all, their counterparts in eastern Europe, where communism had already collapsed, had lost their jobs overnight, and some were even facing criminal prosecution. In the non-Russian republics, nationalist groups, who saw the KGB as the ultimate symbol of Russian domination, were threatening it with force, in some cases even storming their buildings. There was also the growing phenomenon of "whistle-blowing" by disaffected KGB staffers. As a result of glasnost, these critics became increasingly vocal, revealing to the press shocking stories of the KGB's arrogant disregard for legality. This public scrutiny was unbearable for such a secretive organization.[8]

Although KGB officials fought back by creating a public relations center (which even sponsored a beauty contest with the winner crowned "Miss KGB"), their ultimate response was frustration and alarm. In March 1990, a group of KGB staffers at the headquarters in Moscow appealed to the USSR Supreme Soviet (the parliament), urging deputies to

stop the growing crime and instability in the country by adopting laws to strengthen the KGB's power. Kriuchkov and his deputies began complaining loudly about nationalist aspirations among non-Russians in the Soviet Union, as well as about the dangers of a free market economy. In a speech at the Twenty-eighth CPSU Congress in July 1990, Kriuchkov warned that it would be "a ruinous mistake to throw the country into the arms of the elemental forces of the market."[9]

Gorbachev answered the KGB's appeals by expanding police powers to ensure public order and to combat economic crime and ethnic unrest. He also increased his own authority by persuading the Congress of People's Deputies to pass a new "Law on a State of Emergency" in March 1990. The law established a constitutional basis for the president of the USSR to invoke extraordinary centralized powers. Later Gorbachev gave his outspoken support to a new "Law on the KGB," which was ratified by the Supreme Soviet in May 1991 and gave the KGB sweeping new powers.[10] The warnings of dire consequences from ethnic unrest and the decline of law and order had clearly struck a cord in Gorbachev and his advisers. They could not afford to take these dangers lightly.

The Conservatives Coalesce

Behind the scenes, KGB and military leaders began, in the autumn of 1990, to make contingency plans for the imposition of martial law by means of declaring a state of emergency.[11] They put their plans to the test in Lithuania in January 1991, when Soviet security and military troops marched into Vilnius and attacked the television station. Contrary to the impression he gave publicly, Gorbachev was not an innocent bystander in these events. The commander of the Russian Airborne Forces stated unequivocally in a later interview that Gorbachev personally ordered all the various "crackdowns" implemented by the KGB and military and was lying when he denied knowledge of them.[12] Indeed, documents from the KGB archives show that Gorbachev was fully aware of the KGB's plans for imposing a state of emergency and weighed this option on numerous occasions. The Communist Party's Politburo seriously considered evoking emergency measures in March 1991, when thousands of Muscovites took to the streets to voice their support for Boris Yeltsin.[13]

Other archival documents—unearthed by the parliamentary commission to investigate the August coup—also showed that Gorbachev frequently enlisted the KGB to carry out "undemocratic" operations such as secret surveillance and wiretapping of his political opponents (in some cases even his colleagues). Gorbachev not only read the KGB's reports, he made handwritten remarks in the margins.[14] Gorbachev's defenders later

argued that he did all this because he was being misinformed by the KGB. According to them, the KGB deluged Gorbachev with exaggerated reports that created a false impression of the political situation. The reports persuaded Gorbachev that things had deteriorated to such an extent and his own position was so precarious that these extra-legal measures, including a state of emergency, could not be avoided.[15]

It is doubtful that Gorbachev was so naive that he believed everything the KGB told him, but that is beside the point, because the KGB's assessments were probably not far off the mark. By the spring of 1991, Gorbachev was losing ground so quickly that a siege mentality on his part would have been entirely understandable. Yeltsin, who had been elected president of the Russian republic in June and thereby had gained legitimate political authority, was pressuring Gorbachev to relinquish much of his power base. Not only did Yeltsin call for an end to the Communist Party's leading role in politics, he also demanded unprecedented independence for the republics of the USSR. Under pressure from Yeltsin, Gorbachev had agreed in late April 1991 to transfer certain functions of the central government to the republics, thus surrendering substantial powers. But this was not enough. Russia and other republics began demanding nothing less than a new federal structure.

While negotiations with republican and regional leaders continued throughout the summer, without resolution, Gorbachev began meeting secretly with Yeltsin and Kazakh party leader Nursultan Nazarbaev to hammer out details of an agreement. It was formalized on 23 July at Novo-Ogarevo as the so-called Union Treaty, which was set for signing on 20 August 1991. The treaty relegated Gorbachev and all members of the central government to secondary political roles, a prospect Gorbachev can hardly have relished.[16] He thus had good reason to avoid signing it. As for his immediate subordinates, Gorbachev's chief of staff, Valerii Boldin, recalls: "They were convinced that such an outcome would cause economic and financial bankruptcy, and wreck the armed forces and all other economic and political structures, while decimating our common culture and aggravating ethnic tensions."[17]

The Attempt to Take Power

The initial version of the August 1991 crisis, generally accepted in Russia and in the West, was straightforward: the KGB leadership had been planning to oust Gorbachev for several months and was carefully preparing for the big moment. Kriuchkov and his colleagues believed that Gorbachev had gone too far in changing the system and thus wanted him out. They staged a preemptive coup d'état, surprising Gorbachev completely

by placing him under house arrest at Foros, his vacation villa in the Crimea, on 18 August. Their attempt to seize power was a failure because of the courageous resistance of Yeltsin and his followers.[18]

It did not take long for this portrayal of the coup to lose credence in Russia. As unanswered questions and contradictory stories piled up, many Russians began to scoff at the idea that Gorbachev was an innocent victim of the coup plotters and assumed instead that he was deeply implicated. How, they asked, could Gorbachev have been betrayed by men he knew so well? KGB chief Kriuchkov was a trusted colleague. He was at Gorbachev's side on his first visit to the United States in late 1988 and was a key member of his brain trust. Gorbachev had known Anatolii Lukianov, who supported the SCSE after it was formed, since their law school days at Moscow University. Even the pathetic Gennadii Ianaev, sneered at by the media for his drunkenness and ineptitude, enjoyed Gorbachev's unwavering confidence. When parliamentary deputies objected to Ianaev's candidacy for Soviet vice-president in late 1990 on the grounds that he opposed reform, Gorbachev pushed them into accepting him, insisting: "I want to have a person whom I trust completely at my side during this most difficult turning point in life."[19]

That Gorbachev, an astute politician, could have so grossly miscalculated the intentions of his colleagues is puzzling, to say the least, particularly since he was warned repeatedly by various sources that the hardliners wanted a "crackdown." The telephone logs reveal that he spoke at great length with Kriuchkov and other members of the future SCSE the morning of his alleged house arrest.[20] Yet, like a sitting duck, he remained down at Foros. Did he really miscalculate? Or was he well aware of their plans?

The evidence suggests that Gorbachev was not an innocent victim of the coup plotters, but rather backed the idea of introducing a state of emergency in the country all along. Gavril Popov, the former Moscow mayor who warned the American ambassador, Jack Matlock, of a plan to introduce emergency powers in June 1991, said later that he was convinced that Gorbachev was encouraging the hard-line members of his government to push for these measures in order to offset Yeltsin's growing political strength. Only after Matlock misinterpreted Popov's warning and told Gorbachev instead of Yeltsin about the proposed crackdown did Gorbachev drop the idea of declaring a state of emergency in June.[21] Two months later, faced with the imminent signing of the Union Treaty, Gorbachev's colleagues again set plans in motion for a state of emergency, which would put the signing of the treaty on hold. Gorbachev, they say, was fully aware of their moves. "The organizers of this action notified the president beforehand," Lukianov later stated. "And he did not take a single step to prevent it."[22]

The accused coup plotters all insisted that Gorbachev gave them the go-ahead to make preparations and then, instead of coming up to Moscow to take charge, he suddenly backed off, feigning illness and leaving his comrades "holding the bag." (The illness, incidentally, was later revealed as a back problem. One of Gorbachev's physicians reported later that he flew down to Foros on 18 August, the day Gorbachev was reportedly placed under house arrest, and injected Gorbachev with strong pain medications that actually put him to sleep for a while.)[23] This was typical Gorbachevian strategy, which he had employed in earlier situations when it was politically necessary to take coercive measures but he did not want to take responsibility. Although Gorbachev was running the government at the time of the Tbilisi massacre in May 1989 and during the bloody events in the Baltic states in early 1991, he was able to escape blame by claiming ignorance. Indeed, Gorbachev gained a great deal of political mileage from portraying himself as being continually pressured and even deceived by his conservative subordinates. This enabled him to preserve his democratic image with the West while at the same time keeping a lid on reform.

As former prime minister and one of the defendants Valentin Pavlov put it: "Gorbachev decided to play a game that he could not lose. If he stayed there [in his vacation home in the Crimea] and the state of emergency worked, he would come to Moscow later, having recovered from his illness and taken charge. If it didn't work, he could come and arrest everyone, and once again as president he would take charge. In each case he would show the people that his hands were squeaky clean."[24] When four emissaries (Boldin, Varennikov, Oleg Baklanov, first deputy chairman of the Defense Council, and Oleg Shenin, a Central Committee secretary) arrived at Foros on 18 August, expecting to discuss with Gorbachev the arrangements for the state of emergency, they found to their chagrin that his attitude had suddenly changed. He spoke to them sharply and refused to condone publicly the emergency regime, telling them ambiguously to do what they wanted to do.[25]

Questions about Gorbachev's Captivity

The claim that there was a KGB-led plot to seize power from the president hinges on Gorbachev's story that he was held in complete isolation at Foros. If he had really been opposed to the introduction of a state of emergency, then presumably he would have tried to convey his views to the outside world if he had been able to. Communications from Foros were allegedly cut off on 18 August, before the arrival at 4:50 of the four emissaries, accompanied by Iurii Plekhanov, chief of the KGB's Guard