

FROM PUTIN'S RUSSIA ... WITHOUT LOVE

More and more evidence, all of which is circumstantial, however, is piling up, indicating that the President of the Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir Putin, is rather a nasty piece of work.

It is said that, when a policeman has been on the job for an extended period of time, his view of the world becomes very jaded since he has witnessed some of the most horrible excesses of man; and, he has been forced, by experience, to look with askance and suspicion on most strangers, and even close associates, on occasion.

With former, successful spies, such as is Mr Vladimir Putin, it must, likewise, be difficult for him to down the tools of his trade, from the use of poison gas, to the use of car bombs, to plain and outright murder in the name of the State.

About a fortnight ago, it was reported that the Government of Qatar had detained 2 Russian intelligence agents, who have, since, been charged with the murder of the former Chechen President, Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev.

About one month ago, Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev was blown up when he tried to start his motor car, following prayers at a Mosque in the Qatari Capital City of Doha.

Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev had been living, peacefully, in Qatar for the previous 3 years, but Moscow had long wanted him to stand trial in Russia and, to that end, official attempts had been made, presumably, on the orders of President Vladimir Putin, to have the 1996 Chechen President extradited.

Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev had been linked to the siege of a Moscow theatre in October 2002, a siege that left some 130 of the hostages dead as the result of a lethal gas that was used by the Russian Army to put a halt to the siege, instigated by hard-line Chechen freedom fighters.

The use of the lethal gas, injected into the Moscow theatre, was on the direct orders of President Vladimir Putin.

According to Moscow intelligence sources, Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev had, also, been considered a key link in the raising of funds for Chechen rebels.

It may have been completely coincidental, of course, but the assassination of Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev followed a bombing in the Moscow underground railway, which resulted in the deaths of some 41 innocent Moscovites and the wounding of another 100 civilians.

In the international intelligence game, there is a saying: If a target cannot be neutralised, one way, then, there must be another and, probably, a better way to get the job done.

For the Russian secret service, today, assassination is not always the best alternative to the neutralisation of an individual, whether or not with extreme prejudice, as the following narration will make only too clear.

But before leaving the matter of the assassination of Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev, it is worthy of note that one of the arrested Russians in Qatar, on or about February 26, 2004, was the holder of Russian diplomatic documents.

He was released, as soon as it was discovered that he could, and would, be claiming diplomatic immunity.

The other 2 Russians are, still, under detention in Qatar, awaiting trial for murder.

Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was quick to put out an announcement, via the Qatari Ambassador to Moscow, as soon as the Qatari Government announced the detention of the 3 Russians:

'These Russians citizens, one of whom has a diplomatic passport, are members of the Russian special services ... linked to the battle against international terrorism ...'.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, as it turned out, was so concerned about the Russian diplomat, then, under detention, that he sent a special envoy to Qatar in order to secure the diplomat's immediate release.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, it stood to reason, would not have embarked on this mission without the express permission/orders of President Vladimir Putin.

One has to wonder as to the reason that this seemingly small cog in the wheels of the Russian special services was (a) in Qatar at the time of the assassination of Mr Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev and (b) of such importance that he rated a special envoy, sent directly from Moscow by a high-ranking official, in order to secure his immediate release.

What intelligence does this secret service agent have that would cause such great embarrassment to the Office of the President of the Federation of Russia?

The assassination of the former President of Chechnya was the last in a long chain of events, all tenuously linked to President Vladimir Putin, over the past few years.

Mr Vladimir Putin: The Spy

Mr Vladimir Putin was born in 1952 in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad).

He studied law at Leningrad State University and, after graduation, he joined the **Komitét Gosudárstvennoï Bezopásnosti**, known, popularly, as The KGB (the intelligence and internal security agency of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR]).

For about 15 years, he worked for the KGB's offices in Dresden, East Germany (as it was, then, known), under a false name and under the guise of an Advisor to the Leningrad State University's Rector on International Cooperation.

He, also, headed the German-Soviet Friendship Society, which was known to be a cover for the recruitment of KGB agents, living in East Germany, at that time.

He retired from the KGB with the rank of colonel.

In 1990, the rather colourless Vladimir Putin surfaced when he joined his old law professor, Dr Anatoly Sobchak, the then Mayor of St Petersburg.

From the Head of External Relations, Mr Vladimir Putin rose to be the Deputy Mayor of St Petersburg, the following year.

After the defeat of Mr Anatoly Sobchak as Mayor of St Petersburg in 1996, Mr Vladimir Putin moved to Moscow where, in 1998, he obtained the position of Deputy Head of Management in the Presidential Administration.

By July 1998, Mr Vladimir Putin was back to his old profession: That of a spy.

He was appointed Head of the **Federal Security Service (FSB)**, the successor to the old KGB, ousting Mr Nikolai Kovalyov in the process.

As though acting in a play, Mr Vladimir Putin made a point of indicating, openly, his support of the then President of Russia, vodka-swiggling Boris Yeltsin.

Eventually, President Boris Yeltsin appointed Mr Vladimir Putin as the Head of the Security Council, which monitors and makes recommendations for Russia's security strategy and coordinates its work with the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Federal Border Guard Service and the Federal Security Service.

During that tenure of office at the Kremlin, Mr Vladimir Putin was in constant touch with his US counterpart, Mr Samuel Berger.

These 2 arch-spies were said to have engaged in discussions as to ways and means to prevent the proliferation of arms, especially, weapons of mass destruction.

Mr Vladimir Putin is credited with the following official communiqué, sent to Mr Samuel Berger:

'Russia pays careful attention to US concerns in the area of arms and nuclear technology export controls; and, has a right to expect adequate reciprocal measures (from the US Government).'

From head spy of The Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir Putin found himself, donning the purple of Russian office, as his (now) good friend, President Boris Yeltsin, appointed him Prime Minister.

That was in August 1999.

At the time of his appointment as Prime Minister, President Boris Yeltsin made it known that Mr Vladimir Putin should be his successor to the post of President.

In a televised statement to the people of Russia, President Boris Yeltsin said:

'I am convinced that he (Prime Minister Vladimir Putin) will serve the nation well while working in this high post ... Russians will be able to appraise (Prime Minister) Putin's human and businesslike qualities ...'.

This statement surprised many people because it was made, just one year prior to the Presidential elections.

While holding the position of Prime Minister, and being part of President Boris Yeltsin's Inner Cabinet, Mr Vladimir Putin made it known, only too clearly, that he was not to be taken lightly.

He proclaimed that he would quash Islamic separatists, battling Russian forces in the Caucasus, and that he favoured, strongly, rebuilding and strengthening Russia's secret service in the model that he had been trained as a fresh graduate from Leningrad State University.

President Boris Yeltsin shocked Russia when, on December 31, 1999, he, unexpectedly, resigned as President, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was named Acting President.

By March 2000, the 47-year-old, Vladimir Putin was named President-Elect of The Federation of Russia.

Just prior to the resignation of President Boris Yeltsin, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin published, what could only be considered, his manifesto.

He said, inter alia:

'We can count on a worthy future only if we manage to naturally combine the principles of a market economy and democracy with Russia's realities ...'

'There is no point speculating whether (or not) this tradition is good or bad. It exists and remains dominant for now. This should be taken into account, especially in social policy ...'.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, also, stated that the country was not ready for classical liberalism, and that Russia may never come to resemble the United States of America.

On July 19, 2000, just 4 months after being elected President of Russia, President Vladimir Putin orchestrated a situation whereby the State Duma, the Lower House of Russia's Parliament, pushed through legislation, giving the President the right to sack elected governors and to dissolve local legislatures as he saw fit.

The Duma showed overwhelming support for the President in his demands for radicalism, radicalism that gave President Vladimir Putin almost unfettered powers in respect of the Russian regions and their governance.

By this one act, whether or not the majority of the members of Duma realised it in its entirety, it was the first step to grind away at the Duma's powers to rule the country, handing them to the President.

President Vladimir Putin was holding the whip hand, permitting him, willy-nilly, the power to sack elected regional leaders if they had been found to have broken Federal laws ... in his opinion.

There were 2 powerful opponents of this legislative reform: Former Deputy Premier Boris Nemtsov; and, the multi-billionaire, businessman, Mr Boris Berezovsky.

Mr Boris Berezovsky resigned his seat in the Duma over this piece of legislation, warning that it ushered in authoritarianism for The Federation.

Mr Boris Berezovsky said, on leaving the Duma:

'I leave with a clear conscience and a heavy heart ... Thousands of people already understand that the action of the authorities (a finger, pointed, directly, at President Vladimir Putin) are dangerous to our society.'

Mr Boris Berezovsky would live to regret his statements because the arms of the Kremlin are long – and President Vladimir Putin's ire is known to be resolute and unswerving.

Mr Boris Berezovsky is, today, in exile, imposed by himself.

He fled Russia just ahead of the Russian police, slapping an arrest warrant on him.

He did not pause to learn of the charges that were being considered to be levelled against him.

He didn't have to know about the charges for he knew that he could not fight the might of President Vladimir Putin.

The Arrests

Mr Boris Berezovsky left Russia after prosecutors summoned him for questioning as a suspect in the investigation into the alleged theft of funds from the Russian, State-run airline, Aeroflot.

Although he appears to be free and, from time to time, shows up in London, England, it is said that he continuously watches his back and, to that end, he has bodyguards on the payroll.

He, clearly, fears the wrath of President Vladimir Putin, who, today, makes no bones of the fact that he would like to see Russian justice done, and seen to be done, in the case of this one-time insider in the days of President Boris Yeltsin.

On March 5, 2002, Mr Boris Berezovsky presented, what he considered, conclusive evidence that President Vladimir Putin *'definitely knew'* that the Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, had been involved in 4 bombings, which killed more than 300 people in Moscow, Volgograd and Ryazan in late 1999.

Mr Boris Berezovsky stopped just short of claiming that President Vladimir Putin ordered the bombings.

But the innuendo was only too clear.

President Vladimir Putin resigned as the Head of the Federal Security Service just before the bombings. That was in September 1999.

He resigned from the Federal Security Service in order to take up the position of Prime Minister, under President Boris Yeltsin.

A spokesman for the Federal Security Service said, about the Berezovsky allegations:

'Berezovsky's behaviour is predictable. In anticipation of charges against him, he is trying, well in advance, to present himself to the world as a victim and a fighter for political freedom in Russia.'

At the London Press Conference of Tuesday, March 5, 2002, Mr Boris Berezovsky released new evidence of the involvement of the Federal Security Service in the 1999 bombings.

It was a 10-minute part of a 52-minute documentary, using footage, shot by NTV, the private television station, owned and controlled by Mr Vladimir Gusinsky (see below).

The 10-minute clip, supposedly, focused on the foiled bombing in Ryazan on September 22, 1999.

It was said that a bomb had been discovered in the basement of a 12-storey apartment building by the local police.

Four explosive experts from Great Britain and France had examined the available evidence from the site of the bombing, as well as the film evidence, and had concluded that, in fact, the several bags of a white powder, connected to a timer and a shotgun shell detonator, was, indeed, a bomb.

The then Head of the Federal Security Service, Mr Nikolai Patrushev, dismissed the claims of Mr Boris Berezovsky.

The white powder in the bags was said to be hexogen, a very powerful explosive, long been a favourite of the Federal Security Service.

The Russian Government had blamed Chechen rebels for the bombings in Moscow, Volgodonsk and Ryazan, but Mr Boris Berezovsky tried to put a different slant on the official Russian Government account.

The Vladimir Gusinsky Arrest

The additional powers that President Vladimir Putin coveted, and obtained, followed just one month after the arrest of Mr Vladimir Gusinsky, the beneficial owner of Media-Most Group of Companies, once a powerful and independent media empire of Russia.

Mr Vladimir Gusinsky, under the pretext of being a witness for the Chief State Prosecutor's Office in respect of the operations of companies, belonging to his Media-Most holding group, the offices of which had been raided by a special unit of the secret service on May 11, 2000 – just 2 months after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was named Acting President of Russia – was promptly charged, after a lengthy session, during which he was questioned about his alleged involvement in certain business deals, and, then, imprisoned in Butyrka Prison.

Butyrka Prison is under the direct control of the Chief Prosecutor's Office.

Mr Vladimir Gusinsky was arrested on suspicion of having committed a crime, pursuant to Section 179 of the Russian Criminal Code.

Specifically, it was alleged that Mr Vladimir Gusinsky, along with others, played a large role in the theft of \$US10 million of Russian State money in a privatisation arrangement with regard to Russian Video where \$US10 million had been *'removed ... without returning it.'*

Mr Vladimir Gusinsky is a very wealthy man, even by today's standards, and people found it difficult to believe that this multi-millionaire, in any currency in the world, would, with others, stoop to steal just \$US10 million – especially in Russia, which is very unforgiving for crimes against the State.

At the time of the arrest of this former important business tycoon, President Vladimir Putin was on a trip to Spain.

When asked whether or not the arrest of Mr Vladimir Gusinsky was politically motivated, President Putin said:

'I don't see a political aspect in that ... as for criminal, I don't know, yet.'

President Vladimir Putin referred to the arrest of Mr Vladimir Gusinsky as being a *'questionable gift ... Gusinsky is a very talented person ...'*

He, then, went on to state:

'He succeeded in gaining control of an enterprise worth about \$US1.30 billion – and has hardly paid any of it back.'

But Media-Most had been a stentorian critic of the Kremlin – and of President Vladimir Putin.

Media-Most was the owner of Russia's only independent, national television channel: NTV.

Mr Vladimir Gusinsky was incarcerated and was not offered the opportunity of bailment.

But, due to public pressure, he was, quite unexpectedly, released from Butyrka Prison on June 16, 2000.

He had spent one month and 4 days in the notorious Butyrka Prison.

As more and more evidence came to light, it appeared that that which was to be the charges against Mr Vladimir Gusinsky was the alleged embezzlement of \$US10 million, being the actual market value of the shares of Russian Video and the pittance that the Media-Most group paid for them.

Although Mr Vladimir Gusinsky had promised not to leave Russia while the charges were being drafted, he, nevertheless managed to leave the country, probably using his Israeli passport – he holds dual nationality.

After his departure from Russia, the Russian, State-controlled gas company, Gazprom, took control of NTV.

The rationale for the seizure of NTV was based on statements from Gazprom that NTV owed the company hundreds of millions of US dollars.

NTV had been launched in 1992 by Mr Vladimir Gusinsky after the collapse of the old USSR: It was Russia's first, private television station.

Along with the loss of Russia's only independent television station, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky lost several radio stations, Segodnia, a popular newspaper, and Itogi, a news magazine.

In August, last year, he was arrested in Athens Airport on an international arrest warrant.

Mr Vladimir Gusinsky had just returned from a trip from Tel Aviv, Israel, at that time.

The Interpol Warrant alleged, this time, that the amount of money that Mr Vladimir Gusinsky had, allegedly, swindled out of the Russian State was \$US250 million. He was, also, accused of money laundering and fraudulent privatisation.

Prior to this event, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky had been arrested in Spain, also on an international Arrest Warrant, but the Spanish Court determined to reject the Russian extradition request.

Arguing that Russia was corrupt and that judges are appointed, meaning that they failed to be impartial and objective, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky was released on a 100,000-euro bond, but was barred from leaving the country, pending the outcome of his Extradition Hearing.

By this time, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky had attained the status of being an international symbol of Press freedom.

The Mikhail Khodorkovsky Affair

In October last year, Mr Mikhail Khodorkovsky was arrested in spectacular fashion: He was boarding his private jet when Russian police surrounded the aeroplane and took him into custody.

Mr Mikhail Khodorkovsky is the President of YukosSibneft, the fourth-largest oil producer in the world.

This oil baron has been accused of tax evasion, fraud and theft.

Mr Mikhail Khodorkovsky is a multi-billionaire in any currency in the world.

He is known to be a critic of President Vladimir Putin and has been financing campaigns, aimed at ending the reign of the President.

He, also, has interests in the Russian media.

Then, on Tuesday, February 24, 2004, President Vladimir Putin dismissed his entire Government in a surprise live television broadcast.

President Vladimir Putin is expected to win, hands down, the March 14 Presidential Election.

Quoting the Russian Constitution, President Vladimir Putin said he had the power to ask for the Government's resignation.

It is of interest to many observers of modern Russian politics that, following the arrest of the former, leading media-owning businessman, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky, other members of the Russian Fourth Estate, when threatened, or think that they may be targeted by the Russian Government, tend to go into self-imposed exile.

Certainly, Mr Vladimir Gusinsky has vanished from the scene; and, one supposes that Mr Mikhail Khodorkovsky will go the same route, unless, of course, he is not jailed for life and/or, suddenly, has a heart attack.

Sycophants: Come Do Your Duty !

Just last week, President Vladimir Putin announced that Mr Mikhail Fradkov was to be the next Prime Minister.

Mr Mikhail Fradkov, as with President Vladimir Putin, had been with the Federal Security Service in days of yore.

Mr Mikhail Fradkov had been Russia's envoy to the European Union (EU) and, prior to that appointment, he was the Head of Moscow's Tax Police.

Without question, Mr Mikhail Fradkov had been of great assistance to the President in the investigations of Mr Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Mr Vladimir Gusinsky, just to name 2, multi-billionaires, who had been dislodged from positions of financial power in the Capital City of Russia.

The one, single and indisputable aspect of this appointment was that President Vladimir Putin was putting in his Number Two Man, one who would not rock the Putin *'boat'*, regardless of any storms on the horizon.

In a televised speech, President Vladimir Putin said that his choice of a Prime Minister was predicated by his wish for honesty in Government and, since Mr Mikhail Fradkov had been, in the past, closely associated with security and law enforcement, he would be a *'good, strong administrator'*.

There was no mention of Mr Mikhail Fradkov's ability as a politician or a leader of men.

No mention, also, has ever been made as to the reason that Mr Mikhail Fradkov's predecessor, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, got the sack, just prior to the elections of March 14.

President Vladimir Putin's sycophants in the Duma praised the appointment of Mr Mikhail Fradkov, although few people in Russian politics even knew of the existence of this 53-year-old, career civil servant.

It is said that, if one digs deep enough into the affairs of any and all very successful businessman, there one will find acts, which have been contrary to the law.

And, today, in the Kremlin, the Number Two man, Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, formerly only a policeman of sorts, sits with a great deal of power, which, clearly, he will wield – with the blessings of his boss: President Vladimir Putin, the spy who came out of the cold to sit on the hottest seat in the country.

Within days of his appointment, Prime Minister-designate Mikhail Fradkov made an official announcement, stating that he intended to drive toward more economic reform for Russia.

He, also, said that he would restructure the civil service by reducing the size of the Cabinet and reducing the number of Deputy Prime Ministers and other Ministers and officials.

He said that this action would make it easier for Government to make decisions and be able to implement, with alacrity, its policies.

It, also, means, of course, that President Vladimir Putin can be assured that, when he makes a determination, his will be done – via the Office of the Prime Minister.

On the day of Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov's first official speech with regard to his plan for the future, President Vladimir Putin made another appointment, that of Mr Alexander Bortnikov.

Mr Alexander Bortnikov is, today, Deputy Director, FSB Headquarters.

Lest subscribers have forgotten, FSB stands for The Federal Security Service, the successor to the old KGB, where Colonel Vladimir Putin spent for the first part of his Russian Government career, learning the art of spying and, naturally, killing.

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