The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Why Putin Will Inherit an Unhappy FSB in 2012

By Andrei Soldatov

October 12, 2011



Although funding for the Federal Security Service increased significantly during the 2000s, it is facing its most serious internal crisis in years. The political uncertainty of recent months has only intensified the problem, and even Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's announcement on Sept. 24 that he will run for president has not resolved the situation.

There are several aspects to the deep crisis in the FSB.

First is the conflict between senior and midlevel officers that escalated in the mid-2000s and was caused by senior officials disrupting the pay and incentive system within the ranks.

In the days of the KGB, even generals who built luxury homes for themselves in Rublyovka had to hand the keys over to the state upon their retirement. But in the mid-2000s, senior FSB officials privatized their swanky Rublyovka homes while at the peak of their careers. A level or two lower, colonels and majors were indignant, not only because their superiors were

exponentially more wealthy, but because now all the best Rublyovka real estate had been taken. That left the next generation of generals with no land on which to one day build their own private estates in one of the most prestigious areas of Moscow.

It is common practice for the FSB to place officers in large state-affiliated companies, such as Gazprom or LUKoil, to head their internal security operations. This is also a source of tension between generals and midranking officers, who receive much less money and fewer career opportunities. Generals receiving highly remunerative jobs in major companies are more easily tempted to forget the larger interests of the FSB. Instead, they focus on their "civilian" bosses in the business world, and their loyalty to the FSB gets shifted to second place. Thus, it is no wonder that FSB junior and midlevel officers are constantly bickering about corrupt generals.

In addition, FSB officers have become more vocal in protesting their small pensions and the failure of the FSB to provide retiring officers with apartments that were promised to them.

Harmony in the ranks has also been compromised by another practice — paying officers with administrative jobs many times more than officers of the same rank who work in far more difficult and demanding conditions in the field. What's more, officers working at FSB headquarters receive more than those in a regional posting, including "regional posts" that are located several kilometers away from Lubyanka.

The traditionally cold relations between the FSB and the Federal Guard Service, which provides personal security to top Kremlin officials, has been made worse by the fact that deputy Federal Guard Service chief Alexander Lashchuk was widely viewed as the unofficial director of President Dmitry Medvedev's re-election campaign.

Adding to these problems, the FSB was ordered to tighten control over the army, which may explain the reason behind the dubious criminal case against retired General Staff's intelligence directorate head and ultranationalist Vladimir Kvachkov, who was charged in January with plotting an armed rebellion to overthrow the government.

This scandal heavily damaged relations between the FSB and the General Staff's intelligence directorate, or GRU. In response, individuals close to Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov have been openly complaining about the FSB interfering in the work of the armed forces and have announced a proposal to create a military-run internal investigations agency to replace the intelligence officers who are currently carrying out these functions.

But the age problem is perhaps the most serious of the crises caused by Putin's staffing policies. Putin chose people of his own age for most of the current senior posts in the FSB. Naturally, many of those officials are nearing or have surpassed 60. Because the law stipulates a retirement age of 60 for military and other state jobs, all of these generals are in a vulnerable position. Only a presidential decree prolonging their contracts can enable them to remain at their posts.

Medvedev's inner circle seems to have been well aware of this and apparently introduced their unpopular reforms and cuts to the siloviki while the generals were in a weak position. With the guarantee of a few more years on the job, Alexander Shlyakhturov, head of the General Staff's intelligence directorate, would have docilely accepted the subordination of the special

forces to the ground forces as well as cuts to the number of brigades and to the military intelligence directorate itself.

Perhaps for this reason, rumors started in the summer of 2010 that the Kremlin was planning to retire either 12 or 16 FSB generals. And because several actually did lose their jobs — such as investigative department head Nikolai Oleshko, scientific and technical services chief Nikolai Klimashin and deputy director Vyacheslav Ushakov — the functioning of the FSB was paralyzed and the remaining generals were put in a vulnerable position.

Under such conditions and given the tensions and mistrust between senior and midlevel officers, there is very little chance that a group would appear from within the FSB capable of producing leaders or leveraging its influence prior to the elections. The age crisis has caused a paralysis of leadership, and the friction between the different generations has engendered passivity among midranking officers.

Despite all the privileges that the FSB enjoyed in the 2000s, FSB generals have not gained the same status in Russia as their counterparts in, for example, the Egyptian army. FSB generals do not control large corporations or major business interests, and they lack resources to aid and promote large groups of loyal supporters. Thus, their influence and power is limited to their closest associates.

As a result of all of these problems, the FSB has been dominated by discontent and passivity. This is the last thing the Kremlin needs if it has to rely on FSB personnel to defend and protect its interests amid a serious economic crisis or social unrest.

Andrei Soldatov is an intelligence analyst at Agentura.ru and co-author of "The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State" and "The Enduring Legacy of the KGB."

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/10/12/why-putin-will-inherit-an-unhappy-fsb-in-2012-a10124