The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Member of Kremlin Guard Flees Russia, Details Putin's Secret Life

April 04, 2023



Vladimir Putin with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and security guards. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS / kremlin.ru**

An officer responsible for providing encrypted communications to President Vladimir Putin said he has fled Russia over the war in Ukraine and disclosed details about the Russian leader in an interview with the Dossier Center investigative website Tuesday.

Gleb Karakulov had served as an engineer in the Federal Guard Service (FSO) presidential communications unit and accompanied Putin on more than 180 trips over the past 13 years. The unit ensures that Putin and his prime minister are provided with 24/7 encrypted communications.

Karakulov told the Dossier Center he managed to flee with his family to Turkey while accompanying Putin on a visit to Kazakhstan for a summit in mid-October 2022.

Knowing that his defection violated Russian law, Karakulov said: "It would have been an even bigger crime if I had stayed in my job."

“I consider this man [Putin] a war criminal,” Karakulov told the Dossier Center, which is funded by exiled former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Karakulov is the highest-ranking member of Russia’s special services known to have defected in the country’s modern history, the Dossier Center said.

Over the course of an hour-long interview, he shared details about Putin’s habits, family and health.

Karakulov said Putin still does not use smartphones or the internet and demands that Russian state-run television be available on his foreign trips.

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He added that Putin remains paranoid about getting infected with Covid-19 three years into the pandemic and forces every employee to quarantine for two weeks before they can be in the same room with him.

“He’s been living in an information cocoon for the past couple of years,” Karakulov told the Dossier Center. “He’s pathologically afraid for his life.”

“He has shut himself off from the world with all kinds of barriers: the quarantine, the information vacuum. His take on reality has become distorted.”

Still, Karakulov denied speculation that the 70-year-old leader was suffering from an undisclosed illness: “He’s in better health than many other people his age.”

The FSO engineer corroborated some of the past high-profile investigative reports into Putin’s personal life and wealth.

Karakulov said Putin’s family, which the Russian president has never publicly identified, was an “open secret” that had been discussed among fellow FSO officers. He recalled colleagues mentioning Putin staying in his residences with his rumored daughters or partners.

Karakulov said he had confirmed with a colleague the existence of Putin’s opulent palace on the Black Sea after it was detailed in a high-profile investigation by jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's team.

Karakulov also confirmed reports that Putin has identical offices in several residences. He shared an anecdote of witnessing Putin at his office in Sochi while a television report said he was holding a meeting at his residence outside Moscow, hundreds of kilometers to the north.

The Dossier Center said it had recorded the interview with Karakulov sometime in late 2022 and published it Tuesday after ensuring that he and his family had left Turkey and were in a safe location.

Karakulov said his reservations toward Russia's leadership first appeared with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and his work organizing expensive trips for Putin and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

These reservations reached a tipping point the day Russian troops invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, then after Putin declared a mobilization of reservists on Sept. 21.

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