

NGOs a Cover for Spying in Russia

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FSB Chief: NGOs a Cover for Spying

By Simon Saradzhyan and Carl Schreck
Staff Writers

U.S., British and other foreign nongovernmental organizations are providing cover for professional spies in Russia, while Western organizations are bankrolling plans to stage peaceful revolutions in Belarus and other former Soviet republics bordering Russia, Federal Security Service director Nikolai Patrushev told the State Duma on Thursday.

Patrushev said the FSB has monitored and exposed intelligence gathering activities carried out by the U.S. Peace Corps, the British-based Merlin medical relief charity, Kuwait's Society of Social Reforms and the Saudi Red Crescent Society.

He said foreign secret services rely on NGOs to collect information and promote the interests of their countries.

"The imperfectness of the legislation and lack of efficient mechanisms for state oversight creates a fertile ground for conducting intelligence operations under the guise of charity and other activities," Patrushev said in televised remarks.

He said a bill to regulate the activities of foreign NGOs will be submitted "soon" to the Duma. He said the bill would change registration procedures for foreign NGOs, but did not elaborate.

The unusually harsh rhetoric caps a year of growing concern among NGOs about a government crackdown on their activities. The worries were sparked by President Vladimir Putin in his state of the nation address last May when he questioned whether NGOs were really pursuing their stated missions and sharply accused them of advancing their sponsors' interests.

A U.S. Embassy official, speaking on behalf of the government-funded Peace Corps, dismissed Patrushev's claims as "completely baseless."

"We deny them utterly," the official said.

The Peace Corps began sending volunteers to Russia in 1992, but the program was abruptly canceled in 2003 after Russian authorities refused to issue visas to volunteers, saying Russia was as developed as West European countries and those countries did not receive

Peace Corps volunteers.

Patrushev, however, offered a new explanation in December for why the Peace Corps had been shut out, hinting that its volunteers in Russia had been surreptitiously gathering intelligence. The program's leadership denied the accusation at the time.

In the Duma, Patrushev also said the FSB has uncovered a "regime change" plan for Belarus that involves Western organizations and the Ukrainian activists who played a key role in that country's Orange Revolution last year.

He said directors of the U.S. International Republican Institute's CIS offices recently met in Bratislava, Slovakia, to discuss ways of supporting the Belarussian opposition. "At the meeting, they discussed the possibility of continuing orange revolutions" in former Soviet republics, Patrushev said. He said the directors decided to allocate \$5 million for projects to support the opposition and to study the feasibility of recruiting Ukrainians to train the opposition.

Lisa Gates, a spokeswoman for the International Republican Institute's headquarters in Washington, did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

Patrushev said the threat of uprisings looms in other former Soviet republics as well, and that representatives of the secret services of those republics met in April to discuss it. While he did not say what countries apart from Belarus might see uprisings like those in Ukraine, in Georgia in 2003 and in Kyrgyzstan this year, he said those three uprisings show that "certain forces in the West are trying to weaken Russia's influence" with its neighbors. He would not identify the Western countries.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who addressed the Duma after Patrushev, used more diplomatic language to express Kremlin concerns about the West's growing influence in the former Soviet Union. While conceding that influence from "third countries" was growing, Lavrov insisted that "we are not putting a claim on monopolizing [the influence] in this region, but we won't tolerate any one else having a monopoly either."

Calls to the Saudi Red Crescent office in Riyadh went unanswered Thursday evening, and Marie-Francoise Borel, spokeswoman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, declined to comment when reached by telephone in Geneva.

Merlin representatives in London could not be reached for comment.

Social Reform Society officials in Kuwait City also could not be reached for comment. The organization's Moscow branch was registered in 1993 as a charity organization aimed at Russian-Kuwaiti cooperation. In February 2003, however, it was included on a government list of 15 international terrorist groups accused of presenting a national threat, and its operations were subsequently banned from Russian soil.

FSB officials have previously asserted that foreign NGOs collect sensitive information on Russia and are used as a cover by career spies. However, Thursday was the first time that Patrushev publicly pointed the finger at educational exchange programs as a means to advance foreign interests.

Patrushev's assessment of Western activities was echoed by a nationwide poll released by

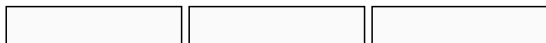
the state-controlled VTsIOM polling agency earlier Thursday. The poll of 1,600 people in early April found that “every second Russian” is very suspicious about U.S. and EU activities in the former Soviet Union.

Nikolai Petrov, a political analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said Patrushev’s worries were “natural for the leader of a secret service.” What is alarming, however, is that the political leadership has begun to share his fears, he said, referring to Putin’s criticism of NGOs in his state of the nation speech last year.

Petrov also said he believed Patrushev overestimated the role that Western organizations are playing in former Soviet republics. “If it indeed takes only \$5 million to overthrow a regime, that means public discontent is so overwhelming that the regime is already hanging on by a hair.”

Meanwhile, Patrushev said Thursday that the FSB staged a successful operation that captured key members of a terrorist group responsible for at least nine attacks, including a series of explosions in Voronezh in 2004 and this year and suicide bombings outside Moscow’s Rizhskaya metro station and on a train heading to the Avtozavodskaya metro station last year. Some 70 people died in the two bombings.

Patrushev said FSB officers have detained three people suspected of organizing the attacks. He identified them by their last names, Khubiyev, Panarin and Shavorin. Another suspected member of the group was arrested in Voronezh.



FSB BELIEVES FOREIGN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS PREPARE NEW “VELVET REVOLUTIONS”

12/05/2005 20:06

MOSCOW, May 12 (**RIA Novosti**) – The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has information on preparation of new velvet revolutions on the post-Soviet space by a number of foreign non-governmental organizations. “Foreign special services are proactively using non-traditional methods. They promote their interests using educational programs of various non-governmental organizations and collect information, particularly, on the post-Soviet space,” FSB director Nikolai Patrushev told the Russian State Duma deputies.

According to him, the Russian special services know that a western non-governmental organization allocated about \$5 million to finance a velvet revolution in Belarus.

“Moreover, oppositionists who made the orange revolution in Ukraine can be involved in the training of Belarussian oppositionists,” Patrushev added.

Among these non-governmental organizations are the US Peace Corps, the Red Crescent from Saudi Arabia, some Kuwaiti organizations and others, he said.

In his words, heads of the CIS special services are aware of the dangerous situation. They held a session in April to discuss the threat of further revolutions in the post-Soviet states.

A bill regulating activities and registration of foreign non-governmental organizations on Russian territory will be submitted to the State Duma in the near future, Nikolai Patrushev said.

Fri 13 May 2005 **4:49am** (UK)

Russia Accuses West of Spying Fomenting Unrest

“PA”

Russia’s security chief accused US and other foreign intelligence services of using non-governmental organisations to spy on Russia and foment political upheaval in former Soviet republics, and warned that Moscow’s “opponents” were bent on weakening the country.

The bellicose remarks yesterday by an ally of President Vladimir Putin reflect concerns in the Kremlin as it grapples with waning regional clout after the ascent of pro-Western governments on its borders, and fears of outside meddling in Russia itself amid US warnings against backsliding on democracy.

“Along with classic forms of influence on political and economic processes, foreign intelligence agencies are ever more actively using non-traditional methods,” including working through “various non-governmental organisations,” Federal Security Service chief Nikolai Patrushev told lawmakers.

He said the groups included the Peace Corps – which pulled out of Russia in 2003 amid FSB spying allegations – as well as the British medical charity Merlin, the “Saudi Red Crescent” and a Kuwaiti group he called the Society of Social Reforms.

A spokeswoman for Merlin, speaking on condition of anonymity from its London office, said it “categorically denies any allegations that it has been involved in espionage operations or activities.” She said Merlin had worked in Russia since 1996, fighting tuberculosis.

Patrushev reiterated claims by Russian officials who have accused the US and other Western nations of using government-funded organisations to aid opposition forces that have brought down governments in other ex-Soviet republics in the past two years.

He spoke just two days after US President George Bush visited Georgia, site of the November 2003 “Rose Revolution” that started a wave of uprisings against entrenched leaders in ex-Soviet republics. An uprising followed in Ukraine, then in Kyrgyzstan.

US officials say the programs of American groups whose activities include providing election training, underwriting exit polls and supporting independent media are not interference, but acknowledge that some of the money has helped opposition groups.

Patrushev suggested Russia believes the next Western target is Moscow ally Belarus, where US officials have not masked their disgust at authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Bush has called Belarus the last dictatorship in Europe, and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said it was time for a change in the country, which holds a presidential election next year.

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Russian official: U.S. using non-governmental groups to spy

Friday, May 13, 2005

By Steve Gutterman, The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia's security chief yesterday accused U.S. and other foreign intelligence services of using non-governmental organizations that promote democracy to spy on Russia and bring about political upheaval in former Soviet republics.

The remarks by an ally of President Vladimir Putin reflect concern in the Kremlin over its waning regional clout following the ascent of pro-Western governments on its borders.

"Along with classic forms of influence on political and economic processes, foreign intelligence agencies are ever more actively using nontraditional methods," including working through "various non-governmental organizations," Federal Security Service chief Nikolai Patrushev told lawmakers.

"Under cover of implementing humanitarian and educational programs in Russian regions, they lobby the interests of the states in question and gather classified information on a broad spectrum of issues," he said.

Patrushev reiterated claims by Russian officials who have accused the United States and other Western nations of using government-funded groups to aid opposition forces that have brought down governments in former Soviet republics in the past two years.

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, that Patrushev accused of involvement in espionage — including the Peace Corps — denied the allegations. And White House press secretary Scott McClellan said he was not aware of the accusations by Russia's security chief. "I have not seen those comments," he said, "and I have no idea what he is referring to."

Just this week, President Bush visited Georgia, site of the 2003 Rose Revolution — first of the uprisings against entrenched leaders in ex-Soviet republics that later spread to Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. On Monday, Bush stood beside Putin in Red Square for a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany.

"Our opponents are steadily and persistently trying to weaken Russian influence in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the international arena as a whole," Patrushev said. "The latest events in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan unambiguously confirm this."

With Bush joining domestic critics who question Putin's tightened control over electoral processes in Russia and pointedly advocating democracy in visits to Russia's neighbors, the Kremlin is sensitive about foreign influence as elections approach in 2007 and 2008.

Russian politicians have claimed that U.S. government money, funneled through NGOs that promote democracy, was a major force behind the protests that swept Western-leaning opposition leaders to power in Georgia and Ukraine, and was also a factor in Kyrgyzstan.

U.S. officials say the programs of U.S. groups — whose activities include providing election training, underwriting exit polls and supporting independent media — are not interference, but acknowledge that some of the money has helped opposition groups.

Patrushev suggested that Russia believes that the next Western target is Moscow ally

Belarus, where U.S. officials have not masked their disgust at authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko. Bush has called Belarus the last dictatorship in Europe, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said it was time for a change in the country, where a presidential election is to be held next year.

Patrushev said the International Republican Institute, a group that promotes democracy and gets most of its money from the U.S. government, held a meeting in Slovakia last month during which "the possibility of continuing 'velvet revolutions' on the post-Soviet space was discussed." He also claimed that \$5 million was earmarked for IRI funding of opposition groups in Belarus this year.

IRI spokeswoman Lisa Gates said in Washington that the organization spends about \$500,000 annually on programs in Belarus, and none of it goes to political parties.

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