

Kremlin Secret Service accuses British Intelligence of plotting to destabilize and divide Russia

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Global Research, October 14, 2007

[The Daily Mail](#) 10 October 2007

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

MI6 is stirring up dissent in Russia to influence upcoming elections and stop President Putin holding on to power, the Kremlin's security chief claimed yesterday.

The head of Russia's Federal Security Service - the successor of the KGB - said British spies were intent on weakening Russia and breaking up the country.

British secret agents had been doing the same since the reign of Elizabeth I, claimed Nikolai Patrushev, a close ally of Mr Putin.

In an interview with the weekly Argumenty I Fakti, Patrushev alleged that MI6 agents were "not only gathering intelligence in all areas but also trying to influence the development of the domestic political situation in our country."

"Right at the moment foreign intelligence services are making considerable efforts to get information about the forthcoming elections to the State Duma (lower house of parliament) and presidency," he said.

Last week, Mr. Putin announced he would lead the dominant United Russia party, which would give him a strong chance of becoming Prime Minister next year when the constitution requires that he step down as President after two consecutive terms.

Analysts expect him to engineer the choice of a crony as new President and retain most of the power in Russia himself.

Foreign Office sources said this week that election observers are not being given normal access to Russia ahead of the parliamentary vote in December and the presidential election in March.

Britain's ambassador to Russia, Tony Brenton, suffered months of harassment from the pro-Kremlin youth organisation, Nashi, after attending an opposition conference in 2006.

The Foreign Office sources said British-Russia relations remained at a low and were not likely to improve in the near future because of Russia's refusal to extradite Andrei Lugovoi, the businessman wanted in connection with the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in London last November.

Perhaps speaking for internal consumption, Patrushev painted a paranoid picture of Russia beset on all sides by foreign spies, eager to dig up the country's secrets and destabilise it

ahead of the elections.

British agents were the worst offenders, he said, although he offered no new evidence.

“Since the time of Elizabeth 1 the British principle has been “the end justifies the means,” he said.

“Money, corruption, blackmail, offering immunity from prosecution, these are their main methods of recruitment.”

In Cold War language, Patrushev attacked not only MI6 but also spies from Poland, the Baltic States, Georgia, Turkey and Pakistan as stooges of the CIA.

Spies were poking their noses into everything from the state of Russia’s armed forces to conditions in the Caucasus, Siberia and the Far East, he said.

“Regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union as their achievement, they are now nurturing plans to carve up Russia,” he said.

But he reserved special scorn for London, now the base of Russian exiles such as Boris Berezovsky.

“Lately, to achieve their political goals, the British have been relying on individuals accused of crimes and hiding abroad from Russian justice,” Patrushev said.

He reiterated accusations that Berezovksy and Litvinenko had tried to recruit Russian citizens to work for MI6.

He also dredged up old allegations, dating back to 2005, that British agents had placed fake rocks in Moscow parks to hide their transmitters.

And he claimed that the use of non-governmental organisations was “in the arsenal” of foreign intelligence services trying to provoke a revolution in Russia similar to the 2004 Orange Revolution in the Ukraine.

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