



# Under the Aegis of the Foreign Ministry

By Galina Sidorova

*Translated by Arch Tait*

January 2017

This article is published in English by The Henry Jackson Society by arrangement with Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. The article reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of The Henry Jackson Society or its staff.



<sup>1</sup> Over the past quarter of a century, Russian diplomacy has turned into a ‘black operation’, and the ministry itself is not fit for diplomatic purpose.

## PART ONE

Six months ago, Andrey Piontkovsky, in the course one of our conversations, came up with an unexpected hypothesis: that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had ‘spoiled’ Putin.

Russian diplomats, in the political analyst’s opinion, are behind Putin’s anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism and, accordingly, behind his current ‘aberrant course’. In support of this view, Piontkovsky recalled that immediately after September 11, Putin’s ‘KGB pragmatism’ had kicked in and he had managed to turn the situation to advantage: to justify the war in Chechnya and, more personally, to enjoy the fruits of having Russia’s ‘principal opponent’ as his dearest friend. He even managed to charm George Bush into confiding to reporters after their first meeting in Ljubljana in 2001 that he had gazed into Putin’s eyes and seen his soul.

My conversation with Piontkovsky gave me the idea of looking at the wider issue of when, at what stage in its 25-year history, the new Russia had veered off course. What role was played by its four successive foreign ministers and the 12,000 or so employees in the central administration and outposts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Who ‘spoiled’ whom? Who influenced whom? And what brought about the present situation where a country that had begun building a new way of life, in a new state, in a friendly environment of well-wishers, has succeeded a quarter of a century later in finding itself ‘ringed by enemies’?

### Molotov’s Armchair

I do not remember much of my first day within the walls of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but I arrived in the skyscraper on Smolensk Square on 23 March 1992, and departed finally in 1995. I remember more clearly the events leading up to my arrival. They developed unusually for me that winter, although entirely in keeping with the revolutionary spirit of the period. I was the political correspondent of *New Times* and a member of the pool of diplomatic correspondents around Eduard Shevardnadze during his years as minister, and was inventively and systematically ‘recruited’ to become a political adviser of the first foreign minister of the Russian Federation, Andrey Kozyrev. Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the Soviet Union and an ally of Gorbachev, was a pillar of glasnost and real transparency, despite working in such a secretive institution as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was the best journalistic source in my entire career. It was not least through his efforts that the foreign policy of a very buttoned-up state in the mid-1980s shifted towards mutual understanding and partnership with the world’s democracies. The way events were moving after the August 1991 coup opened up even more attractive prospects for a journalist, so I had not the slightest intention of being lured from my footloose profession into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

My recruiters, who included mates in Kozyrev’s entourage and former members of Shevardnadze’s secretariat, had their work cut out. The high point came when, during one of Secretary of State James Baker’s visits to Moscow, the ministers came out to meet the press. As cameras clicked,

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written for the Russian Service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty and published in two parts. The first part can be accessed at, Sidorova, G. ‘Pod krishei MIDa’, *svoboda.org*, 15 May 2016, available at: <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27734915.html>. The second part t can be accessed at, Sidorova, G. ‘Pod krishei MIDa. Okonchanie’, *svoboda.org*, 16 May 2016, available at: <http://www.svoboda.org/a/27736055.html>.

---

Kozyrev suddenly turned to me and said, quietly but distinctly, causing the whole pack of journalists to peer at me: ‘Look, do finally come and join us!’ He indicated a seat next to him and Baker. Shortly afterwards I was offered something completely outside the normal rules of state bureaucracy: to write a list of the duties I would like to perform if I agreed to become his adviser. In other words, how I saw the contribution I could make to developing a new foreign policy. This, of course, was a professional challenge I could not resist, and I did not. An alternative candidate being courted by ministry officials was Gorbachev’s speechwriter, Alexey Pushkov, deputy editor of *Moscow News*. I think that, by accepting, I played some small part in advancing his subsequent career under the Putin regime, since he would probably have been less successful if his copybook had had such a liberal blot in it.

My first impression in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came from the morning queue for its creaky lifts, which had something symbolic about them. They were apt to get stuck at the worst possible moment, regardless of whom they were elevating: rank-and-file employees rushing to a meeting with their boss, or important foreign visitors. I found no less symbolic the heavy furniture in the minister’s office on the sixth floor, lumberingly redolent of empire. I think every member of our team must at some point have advised Kozyrev to get rid of Molotov’s armchair, but in this one respect our democratic minister showed himself a true conservative.

### **Look Who’s Just Arrived!**

Andrey Kozyrev’s background was untypical for a child of fortune, which is what, for a time, he became.

After school, having no strings to pull to gain admission to a prestigious university, Kozyrev went to work at the Communard mechanical engineering factory, and for a year sweated in the workshop producing vacuum cleaners. His innate charm and energetic participation in the factory’s social life, where he particularly excelled in organizing comedy club events and skits, led senior comrades at the factory to advise him to apply for a place at the Institute of International Relations. They supplied the reference necessary to open the doors of this elite university to a young worker (who had, moreover, done very well in Spanish at school). Success in his studies and friendly contacts facilitated his entering the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Kozyrev himself relates how, after six years of grafting in very junior positions, he came to the attention of the ministry’s most senior leaders quite by chance. A colleague who was due to take notes at a meeting of the board fell sick and the task was entrusted to Kozyrev, together with a warning to keep his head down, because his rank did not entitle him to be present at such a high-powered gathering.

The young diplomat performed brilliantly, noting down and editing a speech by the aging Gromyko, who spoke without notes and at great length. Kozyrev distilled it down to three pages and his document went first to the minister, who found it entirely to his satisfaction, and on, as was traditional then, to the Politburo. That set the ball rolling, and Kozyrev was soon noticed by the new minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. He moved rapidly up the career ladder to become the youngest ever head of administration of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The element of chance not infrequently plays an important role in careers there. Take, for example, Putin’s current press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, who was sitting quietly in Turkey, also keeping his head down, when Yeltsin came on a visit and was given Peskov as an interpreter. The president recognized his quality and, in the argot of the Foreign Ministry, ‘plucked’ him out to work in his administration in Moscow.

In the mid-1980s, unlike many of his colleagues who just got on with performing their professional duties, Kozyrev began taking an interest in political developments in the Soviet Union. As he has said, he did not really believe Gorbachev would undertake radical reform of the decrepit system. The appearance of Yeltsin gave him new hope, and he then staked everything in a major gamble, deciding to move across from the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where his career was on a sharp upward curve, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR. At the time it was ensconced in a modest period house on Prospekt Mira and served as a last posting for high-ranking diplomats of pensionable age. Through Vladimir Lukin, a people's deputy Kozyrev met when the former had briefly worked in the 'main' foreign ministry of the perestroika government, Kozyrev asked to join Yeltsin. At the Supreme Soviet session, Kozyrev who, in his own words, had barely had time to have a preparatory talk with Yeltsin, was approved on the first round (unlike Shoigu, who had to reapply).

In his 'speech from the throne', the newly appointed minister laid out for the first time his approach to foreign policy, which he defended to the last and, to this day, remains true to: 'Democratic Russia should and will be a natural ally of the democratic countries of the West, just as the totalitarian Soviet Union was their natural enemy.' To such tricky questions as, 'Did the West really consider us a natural ally under Yeltsin?' his long-standing answer is, 'Were we (are we) a democratic Russia?'

### **Making History as Part of the Job**

I never cease to be amazed by how routine historical events sometimes look when refracted through the actions of particular individuals and, perhaps precisely because of that, appear even more momentous. Probably one of the most dramatic moments in the last twenty-five years of the history of the MFA's skyscraper was the night following the signing of the Byelovezha Accord on 8 December 1991.

The man who found himself at the epicentre was Kozyrev's deputy, Georgiy Kunadze. The minister had left him in charge while he was away with Yeltsin in Byelovezhskaya Pushcha. Kunadze was instructed to obtain from Yeltsin's office the original of the newly signed decree on transference of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the jurisdiction of the RSFSR and take it to Shevardnadze, hand him the document and react in accordance with circumstances until the management got back from Byelovezha. Kunadze collected the document, not without some bureaucratic shilly-shallying, and went to Smolensk Square on what was unquestionably a historic, and psychologically very trying, mission.

'I phoned Shevardnadze and said, "Eduard Amvrosievich, I have some important business. I would like to come and see you," Kunadze recalls. Shevardnadze replied, "What if I am busy?" I said, "In that case I will come and sit in your waiting room until you are free. Until night, if need be." "Fine. In that case, come." We arrived and went up in the lift, nervously joking about being the takedown squad. We were all sitting there in the waiting room, very worked up, looking at the floor. I wanted to relieve the tension and indicated a wooden plaque on the aide's table which read, "Diplomacy - the ability to tell a person to go to hell in such a way that he actually looks forward to the trip." I said, "I am confiscating that. It is now the property of Russia." And I did.

'The door opened, Shevardnadze came out and invited us to his office. I went in and said, "Eduard Amvrosievich," (I had had great respect for him ever since he came to Japan in 1986 and made a huge impression at the embassy, where I was working) "I very much regret that I have this mission, but I am instructed to inform you that there has been a change of government and the

USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now under the management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.” He replied, “Fine.” Then he paused, and continued, “All the same, why has he done this to me?” He meant Yeltsin. I said, “I can’t answer that question,” and he said, “I wasn’t asking you.” Then he said, “But now I will ask you, as I’m leaving immediately ...” I told him no one was rushing him. He repeated, “I’m leaving immediately, and down there journalists are waiting. What shall I tell them? What do you think?” I said, “I have no right to give you advice. You are older than me, more experienced, cleverer, but in your place I would say that circumstances are such that I am leaving my post, but as a great patriot of our country and someone who has done so much for it, I am willing to work and cooperate fully with President Yeltsin and the new government of Russia to uphold the principles of a democratic foreign policy.” He listened and said, “I cannot say that.” He went out and I was left in the office. In what capacity, I had absolutely no idea.

‘I could see I would not be getting back that night, and to my shame did not even know how to use the telephone to call home. There was a whole collection of them. One was red and under a perspex dome, while the others were conventional white phones on the government network. There were some other buttons, which I tried pressing. A white-faced person came rushing in from the waiting room and asked, “What’s happened?” I said, “You tell me.” He explained that pressing that button made no sound in the office, but set off an alarm in the waiting room. I told him I just wanted to phone home. He showed me how, and said, “Well, you’ll know how to use the government phones. The only thing I would ask is that you don’t touch the red telephone.” I asked, “What’s that for?” “That,” he said, “is for use in the event of nuclear war.”’

### **However, the night was just beginning.**

‘At about two in the morning,’ Kunadze continues, ‘someone very agitated looked in from the waiting room and said the British Foreign Secretary wanted to talk to Kozyrev. Kozyrev was in Byelovezhskaya Pushcha. He was asking, “Who is deputizing for Kozyrev?” Would I take the call? I did.’

What was it that Douglas Hurd, at that time Her Majesty’s foreign secretary, wanted so urgently to convey to the new government? One simple but vital matter: Russia must, without delay, declare itself the legal continuation of the Soviet Union.

‘It seemed to us then that everything would somehow take care of itself,’ Kunadze goes on. ‘The USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs now had a different government sitting in it. He explained to me that all the republics of the USSR were successor states of the Soviet Union, but only one republic could become the legal continuation. It was this legal continuation state that would inherit all things Soviet: Soviet commitments, Soviet rights, Soviet embassies. I said, “Good. Thank you. I’ll pass that on.” But he impressed on me, “Don’t put it off until morning. This is very urgent, and very important.” I hung up and thought, “I bet they’ve remembered what happened in 1917, when the slate was wiped clean, we stopped owing anybody anything and all debts were forgiven!” I was impressed, though, by how seriously they took this. While we were all scratching our heads, they were already thinking about the future. I called Kozyrev and reported the situation, and he passed it on to Yeltsin. To cut a long story short, that day Russia declared itself the legal continuation of the USSR and everyone heaved a sigh of relief. Russia assumed all the obligations of the USSR, and retained its place on the UN Security Council.’

## The Witch Hunt Has Been Cancelled

The switchover in embassies proceeded differently, but no less dramatically.

Andrey Kolosovsky, another of Kozyrev's deputies and, on the eve of the MFA revolution, head of the RSFSR section of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, said that the Russian interests section already acted autonomously. It had its own staffing establishment, its own employees, and its own foreign contacts. Relations were terrible at the top, but on the lower floors a sense of professional solidarity came to the rescue, although there could be major differences in political views. The culmination came on 25 December 1991. The embassy had to lower the flag of one country that evening, and in the morning raise that of a different one. Ambassador Komplektov was sent back to Moscow. A man of completely Soviet views, everything happening was extremely unwelcome to him. 'But the way he delivered the embassy to me,' Kolosovsky recalls, 'was very calm and professional. The state might have changed, but we should just get on with working on its behalf.'

Inevitably, there was endless intrigue. The new, Russian, Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not being built on a tabula rasa. The reality was that people woke up one fine day not just under a different government, but living in a different country, and had either to do the job of ensuring the best possible external conditions for the new state to develop in, or leave. Just to make everything more difficult, the economy was in ruins and the USSR's international economic ties collapsed overnight. A significant proportion of ambassadors and consuls general were Communist Party officials from the union republics. They were not, of course, really working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were not professional diplomats. They were being recalled, but where were they to go? It was also far from clear what was to be done with ambassadors who were professionals, but had actively spoken out against Yeltsin. It helped that, after the coup in August 1991, there had been a steady stream of defectors from the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Russian one. Many older staff members muttered that they were 'deserters from the Soviet army.'

Kolosovsky thinks it was very much to the credit of the staff who moved with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs into the former USSR ministry that efforts to conduct a witch hunt into who had behaved how during the coup were immediately frozen, which made it possible to maintain continuity and ensured a more positive attitude towards the new management during that first phase.

In Kunadze's opinion, a great many MFA staff in the early 1990s, young and not-so-young, did not view what was happening as revolutionary. 'Okay,' they thought, 'change of government, new instructions. Let's get on with it.' Then, when the government began reverting to old ways, they easily trickled back 'from one set of beliefs to the other.' He feels the MFA was conservative from the outset, because what the diplomats were defending was not ideology but a system in which they could feel elite. There was no need to be an Einstein: the main thing was to get yourself made an attaché. Subconsciously they were protecting their privileged position and that, of course, impacted on the overall situation in the country. That was still the staffing situation at the ministry in 1991.

I asked whether there were ever any attempts to vet staff for their politics. 'Absolutely none,' Kunadze continued. 'Now, with hindsight, you do wonder whether it might have been wise to be more selective, especially in respect of those who were working in the Foreign Ministry by virtue of their Party record, but efforts were made to find a satisfactory niche for them too.'

Kozyrev himself believes that while he was foreign minister the institution was not particularly polarized by ideology. He estimates that about 15 per cent of the MFA staff fully supported him,

the same proportion were 'ideological enemies', while the remaining 70 per cent were purely technocratic professionals.

Needless to say, the general economic situation had an impact. Salaries in the ministry were low. In the past it had been felt that diplomats had nothing to complain about, since they could rectify their material situation during assignments abroad. With the move to a convertible ruble, however, both the dollar and the ruble were valued against the 'common denominator of capitalism' and this changed things markedly. The salary of, for example, the Russian ambassador to New Zealand was \$ 700 a month. Embassy staff took to working on the side for commercial organizations of their host countries, which was prohibited but generally accepted. High-ranking diplomats in the central administration had to survive on the earnings of wives working in the private sector.

I remember, when I returned to Moscow one time from a ministerial visit, bumping into a counsellor colleague in the corridor on the sixth floor who eagerly tried to persuade me to invest in the Vlastilina (pyramid) scheme before it was too late. He added that half the ministry were in the queue for a cut-price Volga, and some had already even received their promised car. Vlastilina came to its predestined sad end in 1994, and its founder, Valentina Solovieva, was sentenced to seven years in prison, so it is not difficult to guess what became of the 'capital' of luckless ambassadors who fell for the modest charm of the mistress of one of the earliest pyramid scams.

Many of the younger ministry staff decamped elsewhere at that time for financial reasons.

### **'Agree the Matter with President Bush'**

What influence did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR enjoy in the early 1990s? Kunadze has no doubt that, compared with when Shevardnadze was in charge, it declined. That was due in part to the drawback of aging, which in our personal lives occurs faster than we would wish but, in the case of the ministry, did not have time to happen at all. Kozyrev was 38. A young minister, young deputies, young staff, with the task of directing older, even elderly, people. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was required to do just one thing: help the Russian Federation to survive.

In my opinion, it did so. Thanks to Kozyrev's policy and his ability to get round Yeltsin, the diplomacy of the early 1990s laid the foundations for stable internal development of the nation and the relative prosperity of the early and mid-2000s, which the current regime is so quick now to claim credit for. So, there can be differing opinions about the extent of its influence.

There were, of course, occasions when youthfulness really was a drawback, not least when there was a need to counteract the sometimes grotesque incompetence of Yeltsin's retinue. He brought to power with him apparatchiks from the back benches who replaced Gorbachev's officials in the top posts. Indeed, Yeltsin himself could sometimes leave the ministry staff floundering. On one of his resolutions to the ministry he wrote, 'Kindly agree this matter', going on to indicate with whom: the prime minister (of Russia) and the president (Bush of the United States).

Another tragi-comic resolution came from the pen of the then Deputy Prime Minister, Georgiy Khizhi. He had oversight of the military-industrial complex, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations. He was sent a note, 'On opportunities for a breakthrough into the Malaysian market for military aircraft sales', which explained that, while we were well positioned, our competitors the Americans also made good aircraft. In response, the deputy prime minister instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to 'Kindly agree with the Americans that they

concede the Malaysian market to us, and consider which market we can concede to them.’ Kunadze in this connection recalls an earlier tussle with Prime Minister Silaev: ‘I went to answer his questions before negotiations with a Japanese delegation. Silaev asked, “What do I have to talk to them about?” I advised, “We should thank them.” He asked, “What do we have to thank them for?” I said, “These loans are very important to us: they are long-term and low-interest.” He said, “They’re charging us interest? They’re pawnbrokers! They’re making money out of us. You don’t say thank you to usurers!” I tried to hold the fort. “Well, but with the situation we are in, it is unlikely we will ever be able to repay it. So we do nevertheless need to thank them, in my opinion.” Silaev: “You don’t know anything, do you?!”’

That was the level of their understanding of foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was sometimes literally banging its head against a brick wall.

### **A New (Three-)Letter Word**

It is amazing to see how neatly the government incompetence of that time dovetails with today’s official primitive narrative of what was done in the early 1990s in terms of innovation and consolidating the achievements of perestroika. The main assessment is, “They gave everything away! They betrayed everything!” What, exactly, was given away or betrayed nobody, however, seems able to say.

So let me list what we did not give away. We confirmed Russia’s status as the successor state and legal continuation of the USSR, and held on to Russia’s seat as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. We gave away no territory whatsoever. There was talk about expanding NATO back in the days of the Soviet Union, and the first wave of expansion began in 1999.

It is possible to argue endlessly about disarmament, but to agree parity (in START-2) was a considerable achievement in our economically parlous condition. We withdrew nuclear weapons from Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and the missiles stationed in Kazakhstan and Ukraine included Satans, the SS-18s with their multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle payloads. Of which there were hundreds. Russia was prepared to accept the Satans and to bring all the Soviet nuclear stockpiles under its control. The Belarusians quickly expressed a desire to become a neutral state, but the Kazakhs and Ukrainians haggled furiously. With Ukraine, moreover, we divided up the Black Sea Fleet. The United States actively helped the Russian side and behaved very correctly. For them, the appearance on the planet overnight of three new states bristling with modern nuclear weapons was, as one of Baker’s assistants told me at the time, their worst nightmare. As a result, we were able to reach full agreement with Nazarbayev in the course of 1992. The definitive document was signed with Ukraine only in 1994 in Moscow by Yeltsin, Kuchma and Clinton.

In general, negotiations with former colleagues from the USSR, transformed at Byelovezha into the Commonwealth of Independent States, were far from easy. There were times when we all felt decidedly uncomfortable, sitting on opposite sides of the table confronting those alongside whom we had been working only yesterday in the same department, in the same embassy, on the same problems. We knew each other inside out, but here we were, defending divergent interests. It was essential to observe protocol meticulously, because any violation aroused suspicion of disrespect, and caused resentment.



I had a sense of complete parallel reality in Tbilisi when we were received by Shevardnadze as the new leader of Georgia. The principal assistants flanking him were two of my best friends from the era of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had followed their boss to Tbilisi.

I always thought the attempt to play at the CIS, pretending that some things were still the same between us although others were now different, merely confused the situation. Setting up all these CIS departments and ministries seemed only to underline how strangely wrought was this link Moscow was using to pretend it exercised special influence in the region, and which the former republics used opportunistically to ask for money or otherwise blackmail the former 'centre'. And all this charade was to prevent us having to forge a new, separate relationship with each state which respected its individuality. Until they had all established their own independent identities it would be impossible for them to come together satisfactorily. My revolutionary idea of not creating a separate CIS department in the ministry but grouping the new states on a geographical basis into appropriate territorial departments was met by my seniors with, to put it mildly, bafflement.

Kunadze for his part describes being recalled by Primakov in 1997 from Seoul, then listed as an ambassador extraordinary with oversight of the CIS. He wrote a note, essentially arguing that the attempt to create a reduced copy of the USSR was futile: Russia had neither the strength, capability or moral authority to order the former republics of the USSR about. The only way to exercise political power in the CIS was to help these republics to become genuinely democratic and independent. Not to try to pressure them into it, but to support them; while at the same time maintaining good, principled relations with the West, based on shared common values. Then these republics would be our friends. Realizing that his note was never going to be forwarded to the person it was principally intended for, Kunadze resigned from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### *C'est la Guerre*

My main shock in the early 1990s was discovering how easy it is to start a war. This dismaying insight was only reinforced as we rushed across the globe like a bunch of firefighters, trying to put out fires which were sometimes dangerously close to Russia: Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia.

Kozyrev seemed obsessed with Yugoslavia. He was greatly concerned that a similar scenario could be played out in Russia. That was why he went in so persistently and purposefully for his curious battlefield diplomacy which, it seemed to me, entirely suited those in charge of the Ministry of Defence at the time, who were in no hurry to get to the front line themselves.

I remember we had barely arrived in Tajikistan to visit the Russian guards on the border with Afghanistan when Kozyrev chanced to hear a report on the radio. Something was brewing in Transnistria, where Ruskoy was inciting the hungry Twelfth Army to move on Kishinev. Kozyrev immediately contacted Yeltsin. Receiving the nod, we went to Kishinev, and from there by helicopter to Tiraspol. As later became evident, the minister had secured the President's agreement on what mattered most: that the army should not under any circumstances intervene. The most it could be allowed to do was separate the conflicting sides and give help to refugees. There was to be no attack on Kishinev.

We arrived in the Moldovan capital. Kozyrev met President Snegur, who agreed to help to cool passions, and we went on to Tiraspol. There I first saw Kozyrev in action: not just in negotiations or some choreographed meeting, but facing a crowd who had not yet cooled down after Ruskoy's

incendiary speechifying. Incandescent women who had lost all hope of a decent life for their families and their men in the army were demanding the return of the Soviet Union and the bringing to justice of the traitors in Moscow. Now here was some 'boy in pink pants', as Rutskoy had referred to the ministers in Arkady Gaidar's government in his rant the day before. The bodyguards warned that they were powerless in such a situation and said we should fly out. Kozyrev went straight into the crowd without really knowing, as he later admitted, what he was going to say to them, and got up on a makeshift platform. They were all shrieking but he somehow managed to catch their attention and said, 'You know, women, you are in the majority here. Raise your hands all those of you who want right now to send your children into a war, a civil war!'

They quietened down, flustered. They had not been expecting to hear the question put like that. Then, very opportunely, one of the women with a stentorian voice, said, 'Come on, it's right what he says. Think about it, girls, what are we all yelling about? Is that what we want, a war?'

### **Masters of Improvization**

In my opinion, one of Kozyrev's great strengths, which many experts, even among those sympathetic to him, consider a weakness, was precisely his involvement in home affairs. It enabled him to fight for his approach to foreign policy, which he did more or less successfully.

It is impossible to consider diplomacy in the early 1990s outside the context of developments inside Russia: the attempted anti-Yeltsin coup in 1993, the routing of the rebellious Supreme Soviet, the constant tug of war between the supporters of democracy. It was easy to succumb to the logic of that struggle: I have only to remember our feeling on board the ministerial jet as we were preparing to land in the government zone of Vnukovo Airport, on the morning after the shelling of the mutinous Supreme Soviet on 4 October 1993. We had been recalled from the annual session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Messages from the minister's secretariat were doing little to clarify the situation and we had to rely on CNN, which was transmitting a fairly dreadful picture of what was going on in Moscow. We had no idea who would be meeting us when we landed - Rutskoy's rebels or Yeltsin's security people.

Professional diplomats still consider Kozyrev's 'Stockholm *démarche*' an unforgivable piece of mischief-making, but it was to prove prophetic. To this day, I am suspected of having put my boss up to it, but what actually happened was this: on our way to Stockholm for the December 1992 Ministerial Council meeting of the Conference (from 1995, Organization) for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Kozyrev sequestered himself in the ministerial compartment of the plane and, without telling anyone, drafted a spoof text with which to begin his speech. He then planned that there would be a forty-minute period during which other members of the Council would speak, and then he would continue his speech, explaining the first part. In that first part were a number of suggestions which few people today would consider startling. These were, that Russia and NATO had no interests in common. It was not that we considered NATO members our enemies, but we had no use for them, or, indeed, the West as a whole. As regards the countries of the former socialist camp, and particularly the Commonwealth of Independent States, that was our sphere of influence and we would be grateful if the CSCE would stop sticking its nose in there. Kozyrev had lifted these postulates from the programme of Civic Union, a political grouping very mild by today's standards.

I still cannot forgive him his hoax. All the journalists and members of official delegations in the corridors, including Russia, seemed to come rushing to me. The minister himself was still in the hall, where the official speeches were continuing. I stood there completely frantic, without a clue as

to what had happened or how I was supposed to get us out of this. The only thing I could do was promise that I would immediately try to discover what was going on in Moscow. What was going on in Moscow was a congress at which Gaidar was removed as prime minister, but apparently my consternation was all part of Kozyrev's plan and intended to enhance its effect.

Forty minutes later, the Russian foreign minister was again given the floor. He said afterwards he had obtained the chairman's agreement to this departure from protocol. Kozyrev explained that what he had read out earlier were changes in foreign policy proposed by the opposition, who were in a great hurry to come to power.

Actually, the audacious 'démarche' that so stupefied certain immaculately groomed European diplomats unaccustomed to high jinks was aimed less at gaining the attention of the Western public than of Kozyrev's most important listener and viewer, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin had immediately to respond to journalists who wanted to know whether the change of course Kozyrev had referred to was in fact occurring in Moscow. In reply, the president called his foreign minister a panic-monger and assured them that 'nothing of the sort is happening: the policy remains what it was and, although Gaidar has been removed, economic policy will not change either.'

I imagine that at that moment Yeltsin was furious with Kozyrev, but he soon calmed down, and before long his minister's prophecy was beginning to come true.

Yeltsin was himself a past master of shock tactics, and not above taking his own Ministry of Foreign Affairs by surprise. One of his most unexpected diplomatic impromptus was a bright idea that came to him in Poland, also in 1993. After going for a walk with President Wałęsa, Yeltsin announced that Russia did not see NATO's eastward expansion as a threat, and signed a joint declaration, accepting that Poland had a sovereign right to ensure its own security. If she preferred to join NATO, that was not contrary to Russia's interests.

## The End of the Game

In Kolosovsky's view, the biggest diplomatic mistake was a failure, right at the outset, to agree the rules of the game with the West. Kunadze sees the root of the problem as the failure to articulate and adopt as an official doctrine of our foreign policy the view that Russia had won the Cold War, which had been lost by the Soviet Union, Soviet ideology and politics. Russia, by abandoning the Soviet legacy, finding the strength to overcome it and make its choice in favour of joining the civilized world, democracy and progress, was just as much a winner of the Cold War as anybody else. It was a victory for both sides.

Another criticism of Kozyrev was that he failed to get on the right side of Russia's foreign policy elite and that, although he did periodically convene councils of experts, he did not really listen to the views of all the sundry foreign policy specialists. Kozyrev's hard-hitting rhetoric raised hackles in 'elite' circles.

In my view, that position was rather forced upon him. He was having to conduct Russia's foreign policy, seeking to ensure a favourable environment abroad, even as an implacable political struggle was going on inside the country. To make matters even more difficult, that elite, so cosseted by the West which it was shortly to abuse from pillar to post, was simply unprepared for the kind of radical changes Kozyrev was proposing.

Bile was accumulating on both sides: the liberals were disappointed that the West was not more accommodating, that it was not listening to Russia; the conservatives, who really just wanted to turn back the clock, were becoming increasingly exasperated about the West taking advantage of what they saw as Russia's weakness.

Ominous changes were already taking place within the the walls of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the 'late Kozyrev period.' I had a physical sensation of storm clouds gathering. The fresh new shoots were being sucked back down into the mire by the old bureaucracy, which was intent on suffocating everything. This tied in only too organically with what was going on in national politics.

For me, the turning point came on 31 December 1994, with night vision shots of the destruction in Grozny, which was being flattened by Russian armour. The First Chechen War. I argued about it with Kozyrev. He was trying to persuade me that it was necessary in order to avert the disintegration of Russia and spread of extremism and violence to other regions. (In the early 1990s the word 'terrorism' was not yet common currency.) He simply could not convince me, however, that waging war against your own citizens in their own country was conscionable, and I suspected that in reality it was himself rather than me he was trying to convince. The start of the First Chechen War was the beginning of the end of democracy in Russia, and hence of the new Russian diplomacy and all that we fought for so hard and tenaciously. For me it brought the realization that I could not continue to work for this government, distributing to my foreign counterparts regular official justifications of what was being done in the Caucasus, and remain true to myself. That is my own little story, but in the bigger story, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was already changing. From mid-1995, Kozyrev was readying himself to resign. He decided to stand for election to the State Duma in a single-mandate constituency in Murmansk, and in the autumn went to see Yeltsin. The law required him to stand down during the election campaign but Yeltsin asked him to think it over and not take a final decision until after 17 December, the day of the elections. Kozyrev was elected to the State Duma, and in January 1996 left the skyscraper on Smolensk Square for the last time. It seemed to me that, as a people's deputy, he was shunning the limelight, and I suspect there was a gentleman's agreement with the Kremlin that he would not speak out on foreign policy issues.

His stint as a deputy ended in 2001, and with it his political career. The former minister became a businessman, although it cannot be said he was particularly successful. He began living the life of an ordinary citizen but, if truth be told, as he himself admits, missed the work he loved. There is no place in his own country nowadays for his intelligence, knowledge, and unique experience. The so-called elite immediately ostracized Kozyrev and even twenty years later still gleefully revile him. Since 2012 he has been leading a quiet life, like an old age pensioner, in Miami. He gives consultations, lectures, and writes books. He is reluctant to talk about what is going on in Russia today. It looks too much like the destruction of his life's work.

PART TWO

Already when Andrey Kozyrev was minister, the Foreign Ministry looked askance at the ‘specialist departments’ of the Presidential Administration, which, incidentally, were largely staffed by former Foreign Ministry officials. In the early 1990s, nevertheless, development of foreign policy for consideration by the president was basically the preserve of the Foreign Ministry, even if every Tom, Dick and Harry tried to put a stick in the spokes.

When Yevgeny Primakov became foreign minister in January 1996, he was able to pull the foreign policy blanket further over to his side of the bed, not least because he was bringing part of the blanket with him from his former job as head of SVR, the Foreign Intelligence Service and, more generally, from the state security agencies with which he had long been firmly associated. He was, moreover, one of the most knowledgeable experts on the Middle East, and the final first deputy chairman of the KGB of the USSR.

Primakov’s appointment was enthusiastically received at the Foreign Ministry by the old guard, who saw him as a conservative leader with traditional values, and a big hitter who would strengthen the Ministry’s position in the Kremlin hierarchy. The Middle East specialists, one of the most politically conservative sections of the Ministry, were jubilant. The ‘Asianists’ also pricked up their ears when the new minister immediately made clear his intention of paying close attention to the Asia desks, to China and India. There were, however, some who had reservations about Primakov, uncertain of what the new broom might sweep away, given his recent and, as many believed, underlying career affiliation. The new deputy establishment minister, brought with him by Primakov from his former job, was immediately nicknamed Canaris, and openly feared. The attitude towards the diplomats of their ‘neighbours’, the security agencies, had been one of suspicion and distrust since Soviet times. These were people who had been living abroad, for heaven’s sake, consorting with who knows whom. The diplomats felt they had constantly to prove their continuing loyalty.

When I shared this observation with Georgiy Kunadze, he agreed, but drew my attention to a kind of patriotism peculiar to the Foreign Ministry. ‘In earlier times, people would actually say, “It’s time I had another foreign posting to boost my patriotism.” Living here, whether in Soviet times or today, you constantly come up against ‘specific features’ of our society – in the street, in a store, when you’re travelling – and you have largely to agree with the bad things people say about Russia. When you’re abroad, everything changes. If you hear people slagging your country off, you automatically start defending it. As Pushkin wrote, “Of course I despise my homeland, from top to bottom, but it annoys me if a foreigner shares my feeling.” People develop a defensive reaction, and bring it back home with them. After another two or three years, they are sent off again, before they have had too much time to get mired in life here.’

To my question of whether, from the latter half of the 1990s, the state security agencies and the importing of staff from ‘there’ influenced what and how things were done at the Foreign Ministry, Kunadze replied that their arrival was a sign of the times. ‘That trend, fully established only under Putin, is much more obvious in the embassies than in the central administration. In the Foreign Ministry building on Smolensk Square, even though certain individuals from the security agencies get appointed to top positions, the everyday, operational level is staffed by professional Foreign Ministry officials who have worked there all their lives. The embassies are a closed little world and everyone, even the children, knows who has what kind of job: this one is a spy, that one works in counterintelligence (so you have to be on your best behaviour with him). It is in the embassies that

those people are again feeling the wind in their sails, to an even greater extent than in the Soviet period. I think it has put its stamp on the way the embassies are functioning.’

Their influence was, nevertheless, also increasing at Smolensk Square. Primakov’s friend and successor as Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, General Vyacheslav Trubnikov, was the next swallow to home in. He entered the Foreign Ministry, along the already established track, as First Deputy Minister for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, with the rank of federal minister. In 2004, after the opposition of the Indians to having a spy chief as head of Russia’s diplomatic mission was overcome, he went as ambassador to New Delhi and served there until 2009. His principal success was seen as restoring the Indian arms market to the bosom of the Russian defence industry, and his principal means of doing that, according to people in the know, was a suitcase he brought from Moscow containing compromising material on uncooperative Indian leaders.

It is no surprise, then, that Russian diplomacy was beginning increasingly to display the features of a black operation. In September 2001, less than two weeks after the terrorist attack in New York, Anatoly Safonov, formerly first deputy director of the FSB, became first deputy foreign minister. The old hands in the Foreign Ministry saw him as nothing less than a spy for Putin. In 2004 Putin created a special new position for Mr Safonov, who had fallen victim to the millstones of administrative reform: he became the president’s special representative for international cooperation in the war on terror and transnational organized crime.

In March 2015, General Oleg Syromolotov, a hero of the Sochi Olympics, was parachuted in as Lavrov’s deputy in charge of counter-terrorism. Syromolotov had been responsible for security at the event, and before that had for many years been head of the FSB’s counterintelligence service. Lavrov, according to informed sources, was presented with a *fait accompli* when one fine day he found he now had yet another (ninth) deputy.

The fingerprints of the Foreign Ministry’s neighbours are evident across many of its activities. Evacuation of the Russian embassy in Iraq in March 2003, in the middle of a war, very nearly ended in tragedy. The convoy of civilian vehicles, with Ambassador Vladimir Titorenko at its head, was caught in crossfire. According to one account, it was evacuating not only the embassy staff but also Saddam Hussein’s archive. History has not revealed quite how competently this secret mission was planned by the agencies involved, or whether exposing civilian lives to such risk was justifiable.

Titorenko was back in the limelight after becoming ambassador to a more peaceful country in the Middle East, Qatar. Returning from a trip to Jordan, he was unexpectedly stopped by customs at Doha airport, who attempted to inspect the contents of the diplomatic bag he brought with him. Given that the instruction to the customs officers to violate the norms of diplomatic immunity came from their prime minister, the information regarding contraband must have originated with a reliable source. The ambassador held on firmly to the diplomatic bag and refused to allow it to be inspected. There was a major punch-up, leading to a diplomatic incident and a downgrading of the level of diplomatic relations between the two countries for years. Titorenko was later given medical treatment in Moscow and quietly relinquished his post in Qatar. History has yet to reveal whether the bag the ambassador so fiercely defended contained matters of purely personal interest (which he has categorically denied in a letter to Radio Liberty – RL) or state secrets.

## The World Owes Mike Jackson a Vote of Thanks

Primakov's very public U-turn over the Atlantic when, on his way to America, he was read a message from the US vice-president, Al Gore, informing him that Yugoslavia was being bombed, took place on 24 March 1999. At this time he was the prime minister, not the foreign minister, which is an important detail. The Foreign Ministry already had a new minister, Igor Ivanov, formerly the deputy of Andrey Kozyrev. Ivanov had taken up the post in September 1998, and made great efforts to prevent the U-turn rupturing the Ministry's contact with the US and Western Europe, and consequently being excluded from the Yugoslav settlement.

Although he severely criticized the US-NATO military operation in Yugoslavia, Ivanov, while he was foreign minister, moved Russia in the direction of cooperation with the West and, in particular, with Europe.

In October 2003, during the Rose Revolution in Georgia, Igor Ivanov mediated between President Eduard Shevardnadze (Ivanov had been his aide and head of his secretariat in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the Georgian opposition. According to eyewitnesses, the Russian minister literally led Saakashvili by the hand to talks with Shevardnadze, after which Shevardnadze announced his resignation.

Another event of global importance took place on Ivanov's watch: the war in Iraq. The minister condemned the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 by an international coalition led by the US. He emphasized that it had not been sanctioned by a UN Security Council resolution. Pro-European to the marrow of his bones, he was one of the instigators of an anti-American coalition on Iraq which, as a result of his strenuous efforts, included France and Germany in addition to Russia.

While Ivanov was in charge, and had Primakov smiling down on him and giving all-round support, the Foreign Ministry seemed to be in favour at the top, and central to the formation of foreign policy. When Primakov was removed, however, the relevant departments within the Presidential Administration, the military, the state security agencies and conservatives within the Foreign Ministry all started getting in on the act. Ivanov found himself opposing a group of high-ranking diplomats and military figures who favoured taking a tough line with the West and insisted on the need to 'close' Russia politically and economically. Among the isolationists were Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, the head of international military cooperation at the Ministry of Defence, and, it is rumoured, Ivanov's own deputy, Alexander Avdeyev.

How this internal struggle played out and became evident to the outside world is to be seen in events centred on Priština, the capital of Kosovo.

For its sheer irresponsibility, the 1999 drop of Russian paratroopers into Priština bears comparison with the current bombing of Syria, whose possible consequences, as is already clear, have not been thought through. Back in 1999, the fired-up Russian peacekeepers were under orders to secretly occupy the key Slatina airport. The ambitious goal was to give Russia the edge in regulation of the Kosovo situation and, for a start, responsibility for their own sector, on the model of post-war Germany. The surprise move was a success. A British armoured column, as the NATO command of the peacekeeping contingent had already notified Moscow, had also been ordered to take the ill-starred airport. It was met at the gates by 'polite' Russian troops, with grenade launchers at the ready. A clash with NATO troops, and a third world war, was averted by the cool thinking of British general, Mike Jackson.

General Jackson reported the situation and, hearing the irate voice of his commanding officer on the telephone demanding that the airport should be taken at all costs, replied that he had no intention of starting a third world war. In Moscow, meanwhile, events were unfolding no less dramatically. Some of the documents relating to this remain classified. The idea seems to have been the brainchild of hard-line Leonid Ivashov, who is said to have browbeaten weak-willed Defence Minister, Igor Sergeyev. Ivashov himself has given credence to this view, although he claimed to have discussed the move 'in general terms' with Russia's political leaders. The only certainty is that there was no written order to embark on this lunatic operation.

On that memorable day, Deputy US Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, no sooner having taken off from the Russian capital after routine talks, was instructed to turn the aircraft about and establish at first hand what was going on. He turned out not, in fact, to be the first hand because, as Talbott writes in his book, when he entered the office of the Russian foreign minister, he heard him talking on the phone to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, telling her he had just phoned the Russian defence minister and no parachute assault on Priština was taking place. When Talbott and Ivanov then drove to Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev, they were assured, if rather hesitantly, that Russian paratroops had not crossed the border.

At just the wrong moment, however, General Mazurkevich entered the room and whispered in Sergeyev's ear. (As later transpired, he was telling him that CNN was reporting live from Priština.) Thereupon, Talbott tells us, Foreign Minister Ivanov took him into the next room with the words, 'I regret to inform you that a column of Russian troops has inadvertently crossed the border and entered Kosovo. They have been ordered to leave the province within two hours. The Minister of Defence and I regret this development.'

The end result was that the Russian paratroopers were surrounded by the British, who went on to feed and supply them with water, not for a few hours but for several months. Russia had problems providing them with food while the negotiations over what they were to do dragged on. Russia did not, in the end, get its own sector and its peacekeepers were accommodated in the French and German zones. In April 2003, Anatoly Kvashnin, the Chief of General Headquarters, announced at a press conference, 'We no longer have strategic interests in the Balkans, and by withdrawing the peacekeepers we shall save \$25 million a year.'

While Igor Ivanov was foreign minister, an event occurred which could have been, but was not, a turning point. On September 11, 2001, President Putin undertook what Kunadze considers one of the most powerful acts in his political career: he ordered Russia's strategic forces not to be placed on high alert when the US did so. 'He was also the first to call Bush and offer him total support. It was the perfect moment for someone to say to him, "Your historic act on September 11 will go down in history, and now we should build on it." Instead, we backed off. If that momentum had not been lost, our goose would still be laying golden eggs,' Kunadze concludes.

Igor Ivanov continued as foreign minister until February 2004. One account suggests that people in the Presidential Administration began undermining him, suspecting him of surrendering Adjara to the Georgians in exchange for Abkhazia. He was suspected of being altogether too helpful to the Georgians. By one of the ironies of history, the Russian Foreign Ministry had deep Georgian roots, which had been there since the multinational Soviet era. Eduard Shevardnadze was the Soviet foreign minister during Perestroika; Yevgeny Primakov had spent his entire childhood with relatives in Tbilisi; Igor Ivanov had Georgian blood through his mother.



Towards the end of Ivanov's time in post, there was unpleasantness of another kind: the murder in Doha of the former vice-president of Chechnya, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev. For this two members of the Russian embassy staff were given life sentences by the Qatari authorities. They were arrested in the immediate aftermath of the assassination on 13 February 2004, and Ivanov was obliged to admit publicly that the suspects were members of the Russian state security agencies. He also found himself having to deal with the consequences of the affair when, as secretary of Russia's Security Council, it was his task to extract those two citizens from Doha to serve the remainder of their sentences in Russia.

Ivanov's ill-wishers had their way, but that was not the end of him. Putin sent him (Ivanov had been made a Hero of Russia by a secret decree of President Yeltsin in 1999) not into retirement but into honourable exile at Russia's Security Council. He later quietly became a businessman, is a professor at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Relations, and president of the Russian Council on International Affairs [established in 2011 by Dmitry Medvedev during his presidency – RFE/RL].

### **Following in the Footsteps of von Ribbentrop**

Igor Ivanov relinquished the post of foreign minister on 9 March 2004 to another of Andrey Kozyrev's former deputies – Sergey Lavrov.

Of the first four Russian foreign ministers, I would categorize the first two as strategists – each in their era and in their own way, of course – and the two who followed as technocrats or, as people said in the old days, 'competent professionals'.

In order to understand what it means to be a competent professional under an authoritarian regime, we need only look, read and listen to Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov: 'the most popular leader in the world is Vladimir Putin,' (from a speech at the youth forum, *The Territory of Meanings on the Klyazma*, in August 2015). 'Today, the field of foreign policy interests is closely tied up with the struggle of ideas. It involves, in part, the choosing, or imposition of a choice, of a model of development, of values. The age of domination by the West – economic, financial and political – is over. The West is trying to maintain its dominance in artificial ways, including exerting pressure on other countries, using sanctions, and even military force in violation of international law, in violation of the United Nations' Charter.' 'We (Russia – RL) will do what we think needs to be done.'

In the early 1990s, I naturally often bumped into Sergey Lavrov, and my relations with him were very cordial: he was an open, cheerful, informal, clever, professional person. Shortly after his new appointment, we would meet at events of one kind and another and exchange a few telegraphic words. He looked like someone who was doing well but was conflicted. One time he even complained that very little depended on him. He gave a shrug which seemed to say, 'You can imagine ...'. At that time I could, but not any longer.

Evidently Lavrov's inner struggle came to an end somewhere around 2008, after the war with Georgia, when he had to make his mind up one way or the other. There had been the career diplomat who replaced Kozyrev as head of the Board of International Organizations of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR, Kozyrev's deputy from 1992, Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations in 1994-2004, an avid footballer and rafter, author of the words of the Institute of Foreign Affairs' anthem, of skits and humorous verses for guitar accompaniment; and now there is the winner of the Russian Writers Union's 'Imperial Culture' award, full Cavalier of the Order of

Merit of the Fatherland, and recipient of several medals from the Russian Orthodox Church. Sergey Lavrov has made his choice.

With the arrival of Lavrov, the influence of the Foreign Ministry initially increased. This was largely due to the fact that Putin was still more focused on, and more successful in, foreign policy than domestic politics, or economics with its baffling trends and alarming statistics. He very much coveted a place in the global limelight, and longed to look once more into the eyes of George W. Bush or, failing that, at least of Angela Merkel. As someone who had risen from obscurity, this mattered to him. And who better to help him than Lavrov, who at that time was much more a man of the world than a mere official in his bureaucracy?

At first Lavrov's Foreign Ministry was lucky with the situation in Ukraine. The Orange Revolution came about in December 2004. Since it bubbled up under the beady eyes of the spin doctors of the Kremlin's imitation of a provincial Party committee (from the late 1990s the Presidential Administration firmly took over the functions formerly exercised by the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU), the Foreign Ministry found itself conveniently sidelined, and did not take the rap.

As relations with Georgia first deteriorated and then ended in war, to be followed by Putin's Munich speech, the Foreign Ministry started turning into an obedient executive. Relentlessly, there followed Crimea, Donbass, Syria ...

'I don't suppose the Foreign Ministry was consulted after that about what to do next,' Kunadze says with some certainty. 'Or, if it was, it would only have replied, "We are in full agreement; everything is being done entirely correctly."' At the top level, everyone is afraid of saying something the boss might not like. That is the Soviet system, the Stalinist system, and it is doomed. Vladimir Vladimirovich considers himself an expert on foreign policy and, since he is the big boss, he is automatically the top expert. He is at sea when it comes to the economy, so possibly in that area he listens to Kudrin. In foreign policy, though, he is God Almighty.'

Kunadze recalls, not without sadness, 'a cheery, sociable man with progressive views.' He goes on, 'The more I look at the current shambles, the more I see an analogy with the Foreign Ministry of Nazi Germany. In many respects, Sergey Lavrov is following in the footsteps of Joachim von Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop started out as a very progressive individual; when he was German Ambassador to London he was very popular. Beautifully brought up, subtle, tactful ... There was little of that left in the Ribbentrop who was hanged. Under Ribbentrop's leadership, the German Foreign Ministry very rapidly turned into a hyper-reactionary enclave, far more reactionary than the top echelons of the military, in which many people were opposed to what Germany was doing under Hitler.'

All this shambles, as Kunadze calls it, which massively worsened after the annexation of Crimea, affected not only the top floors, but also the lower storeys of the Ministry of Diplomacy.

Kunadze told me he always gave his students one very important piece of advice: it is a constant problem for someone working in the Foreign Ministry that, if he is expert, he will have his own views about what should be done and how. These will not always lie easily with the instructions given to him. The higher you rise through the ranks of the Foreign Ministry, the more difficult the choice becomes, because you understand more, and know more, and more depends on you personally. In matters of tactics and nuance, you have to obey the instructions; you have to push

any personal disagreement right out of sight, because there is such a matter as discipline. If, however, you find yourself disagreeing with something on fundamental matters of principle, your only option is to resign. Otherwise, you will either go out of your mind or make a complete dog's breakfast of everything. 'What I find most deplorable,' Kunadze says, 'is that when Crimea was annexed, nobody resigned. They all stayed on at their desks.'

Today everything is only getting worse. Kunadze firmly believes that, if the policy in the early 1990s of integration into the Western community, which Yeltsin more or less followed, had continued for another ten years, there would have been an environment favourable to the emergence of a new generation of people. 'That trend, however, was interrupted, and then destroyed when Russia entered a period which, in the German context, was described as the Weimar syndrome. When people saw some improvement in their lives, when they no longer had to go to bed worrying about how they would earn money the next day, that was when they started thinking about how they had been mistreated, insulted and humiliated. That has been exactly replicated in Russia.'

'That is when sentiments, which were evidently dormant in the Foreign Ministry and whose carriers were people who had worked there in the Soviet era, revived. A lot of trash floated up to the surface, including members of a generation which grew up in the early stage of Russia's "getting up off its knees." These are the heirs of the tradition of the old Foreign Ministry and the old Soviet system, only in an updated and more thuggish form. Their language is intemperate: it is, after all, easier to snarl than to talk.'

'I'm afraid that if this continues much longer everything will go belly up and we will have to start all over again. This time, however, we will have to purge the Foreign Ministry, like many other agencies of the state, from the roots up. One can only hope that there is a certain percentage of decent, honest people who, as in the Soviet period, are just keeping their heads down.'

Today the Foreign Ministry's officials, like, officials at all levels in all the other ministries, prefer to keep their heads down. Not least because their current standard of living bears no comparison with the level it was at two decades ago. Despite the crisis, the average salary in the central administration of the Foreign Ministry, according to the March statistics from Rosstat, has increased in the last twelve months by 29.9% and stands at 148,000 rubles a month. It is still lagging behind the government administration where, even taking account of a certain reduction of salaries there, the average is 232,000 rubles, In the Presidential Administration the figure is 217,000.

I surmise that, to some extent, this reflects the strengthening of Lavrov's position within the Putin elite. On the one hand, he has never really been a part of that: everyone knows the names of Putin's inner circle. On the other, he has in the last couple of years evidently moved closer to it. Sergey Ivanov, the head of the Presidential Administration, in his famous May 2015 interview with *Russia Today*, in response to a new wave of reports of Putin's involvement with corruption, unexpectedly referred to his namesake in a new context: 'There are many people close to Putin, for example, my good friend Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu, FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov, the current Presidential National Security Adviser, Nikolai Patrushev. I can vouch for all of them.'

This curious endorsement does, admittedly, sound two-edged: like a reminder that, from time to time, most often shortly before the next shake-up in the ranks of the government, ripples from the Great Kremlin Corruption do sometimes reach as far as the Foreign Ministry. Anonymous letters may be made public about machinations in high diplomatic circles involving apartments and plots

---

of land; or an Audit Commission report is suddenly published (in summer 2015) suggesting that not all the funds allocated to support our compatriots in Ukraine reached their intended destination. Or there may be a publication about the American Endeavor Group, famous for defending the interests of Oleg Deripaska in the United States; and now also because in 2012 it acted as ‘adviser on political and legal issues to Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov,’ as stated in the firm’s report. Of course, the occasional revelation of this sort could be coming from Lavrov’s own ‘neighbours’, as a reminder that ‘Big Brother is watching you.’

### **Where Were You and the Foreign Ministry You Headed When We Needed You?**

Observing the actions of the minister and his team from the sidelines, you have a sense that in recent years Russian diplomacy has been dumbed down and in general become more thuggish.

‘I am reluctant to admit it,’ Andrey Kolosovsky says, ‘but, compared with the 1990s, the professionalism of Russian diplomacy has declined. We have virtually no means of communication through channels at different levels with the Americans, even in comparison with the Soviet period.’

But then, why would anyone need them? If you believe Russia is surrounded by enemies, why pussyfoot with them?

Russian diplomacy in recent decades has been guilty of shock tactics. Every Russian foreign minister has distinguished himself in this practice, from Kozyrev with his Stockholm speech to Primakov with his mid-Atlantic U-turn (although by then he was prime minister). New times evidently call for new levels of provocative behaviour, so Lavrov startles his audiences with the linguistic refinements of the gutter diplomacy in vogue with the current regime.

He seems unconsciously to be imitating the unique style of Putin, although such manners, an alloy of insolence and brutality, do seem to come easily to him. Kunadze laughs: ‘Yes, “Who are you to fucking lecture me?”’ (when talking on the phone to British Foreign Secretary David Miliband – RL). No diplomat uses that sort of language, but Lavrov did and, coming from him, it sounded completely natural. So even his manner suits Putin. Such extravagances are intended not only to impress foreigners, but to impress ‘Hissel’, and Hissel likes it. The main thing is never to outdo the Head of State, who jealously guards his brand of brutal populism. But Lavrov is an experienced diplomat.’

Somewhat insolent offensiveness, propaganda and public relations exercises are all that remains in the once varied armoury of experienced Russian diplomats.

‘When the time comes to pick up the pieces,’ Kunadze says, ‘the Foreign Ministry will have a lot to answer for. Sooner or later, the cycle of paranoia will end and it will be time to look for someone to blame. By his heroic efforts, Vladimir Vladimirovich has earned himself the right to be responsible for everything, and he himself will have no one on whom to dump the blame. But after that there will be those who will ask, “What about you, Mr Lavrov? Why did you remain silent? With all your experience, could you not have told the president that Russia is incapable of competing on an equal footing with the rest of the world? Could you not have told him that the balance of power we are talking about is a fiction because, apart from the balance of strategic weapons, which nobody can upset and which nobody has even accurately calculated, there can never be any real balance. We are a weak country. Why did you not tell the president that? Why on earth did you not resign? Remember, Talleyrand resigned when he disagreed with Napoleon,

but what did you do?” Of course, if all this drags on for a very long time, it may simply be the case that, given his age, Lavrov will not live to see that day,’ Kunadze concludes.

I cannot look into the soul of Sergey Lavrov in the way President George W. Bush once looked into the soul of Putin. Frankly, that is a relief, because I would not want to see what I suspect is lurking there. People change. Circumstances change them, but only if they are prepared to allow themselves to be changed.

The fact that today the Foreign Ministry is not fit for purpose and its role has been reduced to providing PR for the slurry cooked up in the Presidential Administration or born in Putin’s kitchen cabinet, or in the depths of his security agencies or in his own head; the fact that the Foreign Ministry’s involvement in the development of the politics of hostility, wars and absurdity is purely executive, does not relieve it of responsibility for the outcome. The question, ‘Where were you and the Foreign Ministry you headed when we needed you?’ addressed to the current Russian foreign minister, will sooner or later have to be answered.

## About the Author

Galina Sidorova is a journalist. In 1992-5 she was political adviser to the first foreign minister of the Russian Federation, Andrey Kozyrev.



## About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free - working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



## About the Russia Studies Centre

The Russia Studies Centre is a research and advocacy unit operating within The Henry Jackson Society dedicated to analysing contemporary political developments and promoting human rights and political liberty in the Russian Federation.



## About Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

RFE/RL's mission is to promote democratic values and institutions by reporting the news in countries where a free press is banned by the government or not fully established. Our journalists provide what many people cannot get locally: uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate.



The Henry Jackson Society  
Millbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP  
Tel: 020 7340 4520

[www.henryjacksonsociety.org](http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org)  
Charity Registration No. 1140489

