

The Russian Job

The rise to power of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

*“We did not reject our past. We said honestly:
The history of the Lubyanka in the twentieth century is our history...”*
~ Nikolai Platonovich Patrushev, Director of the FSB

Between August-September 1999, a series of explosions in Russia killed 293 people:

- 1 person dead from a shopping centre explosion in Moscow (31st August)
- 62 people dead from an apartment bombing in Buynaksk (4th September)
- 94 people dead from an apartment bombing in Moscow (9th September)
- 119 people dead from an apartment bombing in Moscow (13th September)
- 17 people dead from an apartment bombing in Volgodonsk (16th September)

The FSB (Federal Security Service) which, since the fall of Communism, replaced the defunct KGB (Committee for State Security) laid the blame on Chechen warlords for the blasts; namely on Ibn al-Khattab, Shamil Basayev and Achemez Gochiyayev. None of them has thus far claimed responsibility, nor has any evidence implicating them of any involvement been presented. Russian citizens even cast doubt on the accusations levelled at Chechnya, for various reasons: Not in living memory had Chechen militias pulled off such an elaborated string of bombings, causing so much carnage. A terrorist plot on such a scale would have necessitated several months of thorough planning and preparation to put through. Hence the reason why people suspected it had been carried out by professionals. More unusual was the motive, or lack of, for Chechens to attack Russia. Chechnya's territorial dispute with Russia predates the Soviet Union to 1858. After Communism fell, Chechnya was retained into the Russian Federation, because it had already been conquered by Russia before the Russian revolution of 1917 swept in countries under the red banner of the hammer and sickle. After Russia made it clear to the Chechens that its status would remain unaltered post-Soviet Union, barring hopes for compromise from the Kremlin, the First Chechen War was triggered in 1994 when tensions reached a crescendo. In spite of Russia's overwhelming military strength, it could not subdue its enemy. Russia's core consisted then of reservists that were unfit and badly trained, in comparison with Chechen troops who knew the topography well and were eager to fight for their common cause. By 1999, Chechen rebels understood that it was not in their interests to carry out any acts of terror on Russian soil as public opinion was on their side; and public opinion, both Russian and international, was far more valuable to them than two or three hundred lives abruptly cut short. It made little sense for Chechens to be behind the apartment bombings of 1999, for lack of motive.

On the 22nd of September, 1999, a bomb package was discovered inside an apartment block in the city of Ryazan when a vigilant resident, Alexei Kartofelnikov, alerted the police after noticing two suspicious men and one woman unloading three white sacks from a white car into the basement block. The car in question had a number 62 taped over the number plate so that it would pass as a local car from Ryazan, instead as one originating from the capital Moscow. The mysterious car left the scene by the time the police arrived. After the police made their way down to the basement, they discovered three large 50 kg bags and a homemade detonator programmed to go off at 05:30 am.

This timing correlates with the pattern set by the previous four bombings, which had gone off whilst people were asleep. Buynaksk was bombed at 22:00; Guryanov Street, in Moscow, mere minutes after midnight; the Kashirskoye Chaussée, also in Moscow, occurred at 05:00; the blast in Volgodonsk went off at 05:57. Ryazan was not the sole bomb attempt to have been foiled. On the 14th of September, approximately three tons of explosives were found inside a house on Borisovskiye Prudy Street, four tons were discovered in a car shelter in Kapotnya, and even more explosives were found inside a cache in the Moscow district of Lyublino. These discoveries were made possible after Achemez Shagabanovich Gochiyaev, a fugitive on the run from the Russians, alerted the relevant authorities of these depositories. Gochiyaev gave an account of events on the 24th of April, 2002 during an interview he held with Yuri Felshtinsky, co-author of *Blowing Up Russia*; a book banned in Russia for accusing the regime of acts of terror. Gochiyaev claims that he was framed by an old acquaintance; an FSB officer who had tasked him with renting basements as 'storage facilities' at four locations where bombs were later found. Gochiyaev has gone into hiding since giving that interview.

Two honourable men of distinction, Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinsky, have both paid a heavy price for publishing their book. *Blowing Up Russia* is an exposé of incriminating material, so damaging to Russia's reputation and international standing that its distribution was immediately curtailed by the FSB, citing as cause for the ban 'unauthorized publications of sensitive state secrets' and 'threats to national security'. Alexander Litvinenko was a former KGB/FSB officer, turned defector after refusing on principles of conscience an assignment to assassinate the tycoon Boris Berezovsky. He fled Moscow for London where he was granted asylum and got recruited into MI6. On 1 November, 2006, Litvinenko was poisoned after ingesting a deadly substance of polonium-210 in a cup of tea. He paid the ultimate price three weeks later, dying on a hospital bed. His slaying came off the back of Anna Politkovskaya's assassination just weeks before—a former journalist for *Novaya Gazeta* (one of Russia's few remaining independent publications)—in a killing spree that was seemingly a concerted effort to stifle undesired criticism and suppress the flow of information. Extrajudicial killings of this nature are reminiscent of the bygone era of the former Soviet Union's KGB. In a show of defiance, Russia continues to flout British requests to extradite Litvinenko's alleged killer, former KGB officer Andrei Lugovoy, despite robust diplomatic efforts. Yuri Felshtinsky is a Russian/American historian living in the United States. Since the publication of *Blowing Up Russia*, he has been unable to travel to Russia. Investigator Mikhail Trepashkin said in 2007 that, according to his FSB sources: "...everyone who was involved in the publication of the book *Blowing Up Russia* will be killed." Exiled tycoon Boris Berezovsky, who sponsored the book, was found dead in his home, aged just 67, on the 23rd of March, 2013. A post-mortem examination found the probability likely that Berezovsky was hanged. Felshtinsky suggested that he had been murdered.

On 13 September, 1999, just hours after the second explosion in Moscow, the speaker of the Federal Assembly of Russia (Duma), Gennadiy Seleznyov, announced: "*I have just received a report. According to information from Rostov-on-Don, an apartment building in the city of Volgodonsk was blown up last night.*" However, the bombing in Volgodonsk took place three days later, on the 16th of September. Three years later, in March 2002, Seleznyov said in an interview that he had been referring to an unrelated hand grenade-based explosion thrown in Volgodonsk, which neither killed anyone nor destroyed any buildings. It remains unclear why Seleznyov took centre stage to report such an insignificant incident to the State Duma given the seriousness of the situation.

Death of a Dissident, published in 2007, is a book co-authored by Alexander Goldfarb and Marina Litvinenko (Alexander Litvinenko's widow). The book goes on to recount an investigation into this incident conducted on behalf of the Berezovsky group:

“There was one new item: a video and a transcript, which he [Litvinenko] brought with him from Spain, depicting an old episode...The material came from Yuli Rybakov, the Duma deputy from St. Petersburg...He had retrieved something from the official Duma record: a remark by the speaker, Gennadiy Seleznyov... on the morning of September 13, 1999...According to the transcript, Seleznyov interrupted the proceedings with a surprising announcement...”
~ Alexander Goldfarb

Alexander Goldfarb [asking Litvinenko]: “What do you make of this?”

“Well, to me it appears that someone mixed up the order of the blast, the usual Kontora [FSB] mess-up. Moscow-2 [Kashirskoye Chaussée] was on the 13th and Volgodonsk on the 16th, but, they got it the other way around.”
~ Alexander Litvinenko

Alexander Litvinenko [telling Goldfarb]: “I need to talk to Mikhail Trepashkin...”

Two weeks later, Litvinenko updated Goldfarb on his discussions with Trepashkin:

“The man who gave Seleznyov the note about Volgodonsk was FSB.”
~ Alexander Litvinenko

The commission of Sergei Kovalyov tasked Mikhail Trepashkin with investigating the apartment bombings. He found that the basement of one of the bombed buildings was rented by Vladimir Romanovich, an FSB officer. Trepashkin was unable to bring the evidence to court because he was arrested and imprisoned in Nizhny Tagil under the charge of disclosing state secrets, just a few days short of making his findings public.

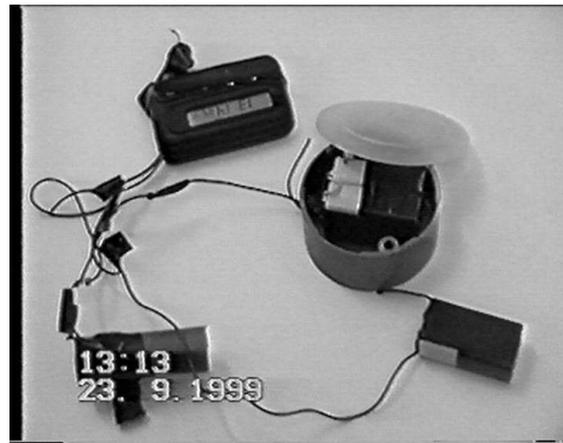
From Alexei Kartoffelnikov's testimony could the Ryazan bomb plot be uncovered:

“I drove straight past them, but I went back to look at the rear number plate too, and, sure enough, it was the same; a piece of paper with 62 on it taped over the end of the registration number. It made me suspicious. So, when I got home, I called the police.”
~ Alexei Kartoffelnikov

Bomb disposal expert Yuri Tkachenko, the head of the local bomb squad in Ryazan, disconnected the detonator and the timer, and tested the three sacks of white substance with a MO-2 gas analyser. The device he used detected traces of RDX (hexogen), the military explosive used in all of the previous apartment bombings. Tkachenko said in 1999 that the explosives and the bundle, a timer, a power source and a detonator, were genuine military equipment and obviously prepared by a professional. Tkachenko also said that the gas analyser that tested the vapours coming from the sacks unmistakably indicated the presence of RDX trace. So too did he say that it was out of the question that the analyser he used could have malfunctioned, as the gas analyser was of world-class quality, cost \$20,000 and was maintained by a specialist who worked according to a strict schedule, frequently verifying the analyser and making prophylactic checks.

No explanation was given as to how any Chechen terrorists could have got their hands on RDX explosives. RDX is produced in one plant in Russia, in the Perm Oblast; and the party responsible for securing that plant is the central FSB. Doubts of involvement were fuelled from the onset. During the first few days into the Ryazan affair, the FSB altered its official position. According to its first account, issued 22 September, 1999, a terrorist attack had been foiled. However, according to the second account, exercises designed to check the readiness of the agencies of law enforcement were taking place, the detonator was a mock object, and, the three sacks contained just innocuous sugar.

At a press conference on the occasion of the Federal Security Service Employee Day in December 2001, Tkachenko said, likely under duress, that the gas analyser had not been used. He added that the detonator was a hunting cartridge, and that it would not be able to detonate any known explosives. The Russian Deputy Prosecutor declared in 2002 that a comprehensive testing of the samples showed no traces of any explosives, and that the three sacks contained just sugar.



The scenario panned out as follows: Operation Intercept was launched by the Ryazan police following Alexei Kartofelnikov's testimony. The mission was to search for the suspect white car, two men, and, one woman thought implicated. When the routes out of Ryazan were already closed off, the operational divisions of the Ryazan UVD and UFSB attempted to determine the precise location of the terrorists they were seeking. One lucky break came their way: Nadezhda Yukhanova, an employee of Electrosvyaz (the telephone service), intercepted a suspicious call. The recording went as follows: *"Leave one at a time, there are patrols everywhere."* Yukhanova quickly reported the suspicious call to the Ryazan UFSB, which was able to monitor and trace the call. The operatives were hopeful of this lead. But, when the bugging technology identified the source wherefrom the call emanated, it registered as a phone number pertaining to one of the Lubyanka offices of the FSB in Moscow! Acting on instructions received, one of the three terrorists left for Moscow in their car on the 23rd of September, abandoned the car in the area of Kolomna and carried on to Moscow unhindered. Thereafter, just twenty-four hours later, an empty car was found by the police on the Moscow-Ryazan highway close to Kolomna, about halfway to Moscow. It was the same white car with the papered-over license plates. The car turned out to be registered as missing with the police. In other words, the terrorists had carried out their operation in a stolen car—a typical modus operandi. Whenceforth, two more were left as one had slipped through the net. The wanted two who fit the profile were eventually caught and arrested under Operation Intercept. The Ryazan UFSB and local authorities knew nothing of the sort, nor did they have any advanced knowledge of any planned 'exercises'. When word got out to Moscow about the remaining two terrorists kept under arrest, the central FSB in Moscow issued an order to release them immediately. It transpired that the detainees both produced FSB identification. A fiasco unfolded. The Ryazan UFSB now realized that the people of Ryazan had been set up, and that the Public Prosecutor's Office, the press, and, the public may accuse the Ryazan UFSB of having planted the explosives. They were left shaken by the treachery shown by their FSB colleagues in Moscow.

The Ryazan UFSB decided on an alibi, and callously made the announcement that the Ryazan operation had been planned in Moscow. Things got even messier. On the 24th of September, two government ministers speaking half an hour apart in the same place made two contradictory statements. Vladimir Rushailo, the Minister of Interior, stated that a terrorist attack in Ryazan had been thwarted. Nikolai Patrushev, the Director of the FSB, contradicted his colleague in stating that what took place in Ryazan had been an exercise, and that the three sacks in question contained sugar, not explosives. The bags that the FSB claimed to contain sugar were confiscated. Then, it was announced that the bags were undergoing further analysis. And then, the bags were blown up in a safe zone. Later then, Novaya Gazeta circulated the news in the Russian press, leaving people to scratch their heads in bewilderment at why the FSB even bothered to try to blow up bags which were passed as sugar. The FSB announced that the bags failed to detonate. The test was carried out behind closed doors, which only the FSB witnessed.

The incredulous timing of the 'exercise' declaration by the FSB points to the missing bullet fired by the smoking gun. Before the Ryazan UFSB located the hideouts of the two remaining terrorist operatives on the FSB payroll, the Russian top brass extolled its citizenry and security personnel for collectively taking steps in preventing further loss of life. The Prime Minister at the time, and, former Director of the FSB, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, confirmed that a terrorist attack had been thwarted in Ryazan:

“As for the events in Ryazan, I don’t think there was any kind of failure involved. If the sacks, which proved to contain explosives, were noticed, that means that there is a positive side to it; if only in the fact that the public is reacting correctly to the events taking place in our country today...I’d like to take advantage of your question in order to thank the public of our country for this.”

~ Vladimir Putin

Moments after the Ryazan UFSB caught up with the two terrorists and arrested them (thereby implicating the FSB of involvement in the bomb attempt), faced with its back against the wall, the FSB changed its position. Unbeknown to the local Ryazan UFSB, the FSB declared that the whole saga was nothing more than an exercise. To distance itself from the actions of the centralised FSB in Moscow, the Ryazan UFSB published a unique statement disclaiming any knowledge thereto:

“...it has been made known that an imitation detonator, discovered on the 22nd of September, was part of a joint operation. This announcement came as a surprise to us. It came out just as our agents had identified the place where the bombers were living in Ryazan and were preparing to arrest them.”

~ Ryazan UFSB

Yuri Felshtinsky is convinced that this statement points directly at FSB involvement:

“It was precisely at this moment that Patrushev replaced the real attack version with the exercise version...”

~ Yuri Felshtinsky

Vladimir Putin gave the appearance of being left in the dark when it came to what the FSB was up to. This argument carries little weight since Patrushev retained his job as FSB Director. He was neither dismissed from the Lubyanka, nor was he admonished.

In all probability, Putin knew exactly what was being planned; and even more sinister, he may have been behind these false flag attacks. The apartment bombings served as a convenient pretext for war, which would prove instrumental in elevating Putin and his entourage to the Russian presidency. Earlier precedents have been set wherein we find Russian citizens perishing needlessly at the hands of their leaders for the advancement of political agenda. Black October was one such notorious precedent when, during the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis, a political stand-off between the Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament was resolved by using military force, which culminated in hundreds of people losing their lives after they were fired upon by tank shells and sniper fire on orders issued by Yeltsin to attack the Parliament building.

On 23 September, 1999, the war in Chechnya intensified, with aerial bombardment on Grozny. Speaking the following day in Astana, Kazakhstan, Putin told the press, in a somewhat cavalier fashion, that the air attacks were being directed at terrorist bases:

“Air strikes were taking place exclusively against the guerrillas’ bases, and this will continue wherever the terrorists may be located... We are going to pursue the terrorists everywhere. If they are in the airport, we will pursue them in the airport; and if, pardon my language, we catch them in the toilet, then, we will waste them in the outhouse. ... The issue has been resolved once and for all.”

~ Vladimir Putin

On 1 October, 1999, Russian ground troops entered Chechnya. Public opinion viewed such action favourably, which was reflected in Putin’s popularity in the opinion polls. His figures rose from a mere 3% to 15% for his ostensible tough stance on terrorism. By the turn of the new millennium, Yeltsin’s tenure as President of Russia was up. He resigned from office on 31 December, 1999, two years shy of exhausting his term, to pave the way for his Prime Minister and chosen successor by default, Vladimir Putin. Yeltsin’s resignation as President was brought forth due to ill health. The infirmity of the ailing statesman manifested itself so dire that, during the latter part of his rule, his powers were surreptitiously concentrated into the hands of a close knit group, dubbed ‘the family’ by the Kremlin press pool, whose members consisted of Boris Yeltsin’s daughter, Tatiana, her husband in waiting, Valentin Yumashev, and, oligarchs such as Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich. This elite group sought out a successor to Yeltsin who they could entrust with protecting their interests. They chose Putin for the loyalty that he displayed when he was in charge of the FSB. More to the point, Yeltsin was linked to a bribe scandal on money laundering charges involving Swiss banks and a firm called Mabetex to restore the Kremlin Palace back to its former glory. A chunk of the funding for the restoration came from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Suspicions arose that the costs were inflated just so contracts could be signed several times in excess of the worth to pocket the difference. Whilst Putin was FSB Director, he undertook procedures to curb access to incriminating documents, and hampered the Swiss prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, and her Russian counterpart, Yuri Skuratov, during their investigative work. Putin was rewarded for services rendered by being appointed Prime Minister of Russia, replacing Sergei Stepashin on 9 August, 1999, and, barely four months into this position, assumed high office as the Acting President of Russia. In one of his first acts in office, Putin repaid the favour, signing a presidential decree guaranteeing his predecessor Yeltsin and his family immunity from legal prosecution. On 26 March, 2000, Putin won the presidential election outright in the first round with a 53% score, defeating Yevgeny Primakov, his closest rival. The Russian job was his.