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Herald Tribune

As KGB Dissolves, Spies May Work for Republics

By Joseph Fitchett

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The KGB's liquidation appears to have begun in earnest.

More top officials were dismissed Thursday - only hours after the KGB received orders to dissolve its command council, transfer its crack military units to the army and disband its networks of informers in the armed services.

Saying that the KGB "must be done away with," its new boss, Vadim V. Bakatin, pledged to separate its foreign espionage and domestic police into separate agencies, each under political supervision - a structure similar to that in most Western democracies and possibly modeled on the roles of the CIA and FBI in the United States.

Determined to smash the powers that made the KGB and its predecessors the main instrument of Soviet rule by terror, Mr. Bakatin promised a complete overhaul of the security apparatus and its elimination from certain domestic activities, notably the media and the arts.

Already one of the main targets of the official inquiry into the abortive coup, the KGB - initials of the body known as the Committee for State Security - seems to stand little chance of escaping with only a purge at the top that would leave a new leadership in a position to rebuild a secret police power base.

Until this week, the 700,000-strong KGB was an unequaled intelligence empire, handling international spying, internal security, border controls and other special functions, including special services for the Communist elite.

Like some episodes in the agency's past, the KGB's future is stirring up fierce debate, offering some broad certainties but few specifics.

With so much disintegrating around it, "the nature of the KGB or its successors will be subordinate to what becomes of what was the Soviet state," said Adam Ulam, director of the Harvard University Center for Russian Studies. If the old Soviet political system perishes, he said, the KGB problem "solves itself."

Other officials and experts said that some trends were already becoming clear, including:

The splitting of the KGB's near-monopoly on the secrets that constituted much of the ability to wield power in the Soviet system.

The emergence of a "Russian KGB" nominally affiliated with the central agency but that in fact has been operating for several months, including during the coup, in support of the elected president of Russia, Boris N. Yeltsin.

The likelihood that, even if no central intelligence organization survives, undercover police work and political infiltration will be continued by the republics, and Soviet or Russian spying will continue against the West, primarily for economic intelligence.

A major uncertainty concerns relations between the KGB and its main Soviet rival, the GRU, the military intelligence agency, which handles intelligence-gathering satellites and also has several thousand officers spying in foreign countries. Often used by the Kremlin to offset KGB power, the GRU now faces all the uncertainties engulfing the armed forces.

Also unclear is whether KGB secrets will be disclosed to the West. As the security services were attacked in East European countries that had been Soviet satellites, the KGB retrieved many of the spies and secrets from the services formed by Moscow's emissaries.

With the Communist spies' last bastion under assault, Western officials hope that some files will be shared, notably those concerning terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons.

Less urgent but still fascinating, officials say, is reliable information about Soviet involvement, if any, in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II.

For intelligence professionals, the most teasing question of all is whether defectors from the KGB were genuine or Soviet double-agents dispatched by Moscow to mislead the West.

The grimmest body of facts, the KGB's domestic record of torture and using millions of Soviets to spy on each other, will not be made public, Mr. Bakatin said, because disclosure would "split society and bring fear of revenge to every family" throughout the Soviet Union.

Formal restructuring of the KGB may await the report on last week's coup, due by late October. But Mr. Bakatin, who was confirmed Thursday by the Soviet legislature as the

agency's post coup chairman, already says that the KGB has been divested of its 230,000 border guards, together with some elite commando units and some secret laboratories - all re-assigned to other services.

By dividing foreign and domestic spying, Mr. Bakatin will split the core of the KGB's hold on information. Ironically, this special access to facts about the West and about real conditions inside the Soviet Union - denied even to Soviet politicians - seems to have induced many KGB officers to support the early policies of Mr. Gorbachev.

Further decapitating the post coup KGB, Mr. Gorbachev dismissed its first deputy director, General Geny Ageyev, and its personnel director, General Vitali Ponomaryov. The personnel department, with its records of agents, was handed over to an outsider, General Nikolai Stolyarov, an air force commander who resisted the hard-line coup.

Some KGB operatives are unlikely to be out of a job for long, if at all. Western officials said that they expected foreign espionage to continue, combining the resources of the KGB and the GRU. Several European officials said they relished the foreseeable scramble in Soviet embassies, which provides diplomatic cover for officers from both services.

The officials added that Mr. Yeltsin, in pressing for the demolition of the central KGB, may count on recruiting many of the best operatives for his own intelligence services.

Part of Mr. Yeltsin's conquest of power in Russia apparently involved a subtle struggle for the loyalty of KGB agents sent to infiltrate his movement by Moscow.

In the showdown last week, one of Mr. Yeltsin's key assets in successfully facing down the coup plotters turned out to be his much better intelligence about the real balance of power.

"The Soviet Union has a tradition of good spies working for bad leaders," a Western official said. The spying will continue, he said, but in a very different guise if it is serving more enlightened, more democratic government.