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Managed Competition and Fragmented Control: Inter-Institutional Relations and Russian State Governance

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Managed Competition and Fragmented Control: Inter-Institutional Relations and Russian State Governance

Photo: Kremlin

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This research examines how relations among the Russian intelligence and security institutions (RISI) have influenced state governance between 2000 and 2022. By applying a novel theoretical framework which analyzes these relations using a categorical case study approach, it demonstrates that cooperation, competition, and conflict among the RISI constitute a recurring but context-dependent feature, varying across political, economic, institutional, and foreign operational domains. These behavioral patterns shape state governance by positioning the executive as a selective arbiter, inhibiting information flows, and enabling the instrumentalization of state institutions. Within this dynamic, these relations constitute a structural component of how executive power is both managed and fragmented in the contemporary Russian state.

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AFB	Federal Security Agency
DNC	Democratic National Committee
DOI	Department of Operational Information
FAPSI	Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FNS	Federal Tax Service
FPS	Federal Border Service
FSB	Federal Security Service
FSKN	Federal Drug Control Service
FSNP	Federal Tax Police Service
FSO	Federal Protective Service
FTS	Federal Customs Service
GP	Prosecutor General's Office
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff
GUEBiPK	Main Directorate for Economic Security and Anti-Corruption
ICC	International Criminal Court
KGB	Committee for State Security
MB	Ministry of Security
MGB	Ministry of State Security
MID	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MO	Ministry of Defense
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NKGB	People's Commissariat for State Security
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
OGPU	Joint State Political Directorate
RISI	Russian Intelligence and Security Institutions
SEB	Economic Security Service
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SK	Investigative Committee (MVD)
SKR	Investigative Committee of Russia
SOKR	Organizational and Personnel Service
SVR	Foreign Intelligence Service
TsIB	Information Security Center
TsEKTU	Central Expert-Criminalistics Customs Administration
USB	Internal Security Directorate
VChK	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage

1. Introduction

What does a Russian national television channel have in common with a former prime minister and the heads of Russia's drug enforcement, intelligence, and investigative services? Over the past two decades, each has been publicly involved in disputes surrounding the relations and frictions among Russia's intelligence and security institutions (hereafter referred to as RISI). While the inner workings of this domain are typically obscured from public view, periodic and highly visible statements by these actors offer insight into their dynamics.

During investigative and judicial proceedings against NTV in 2001, the channel's general director, Evgeny Kiselyov, described the event as "a hostile takeover by the government," alleging that "it wants to nationalize the channel because it criticizes the government and asks questions."[1] A few years later, reflecting on the state's investigation into oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his associate Platon Lebedev, former prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov claimed that both arrests were politically motivated, characterizing their trial as a "judicial farce." [2] In both instances, RISI actions were framed as coordinated instruments of political control.

In the wake of a 2004 corruption investigation implicating officers of the Federal Security Service (FSB), Viktor Cherkesov, then head of the Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN), issued a stark warning: "All those who can help the drug control bodies identify and purge themselves of 'werewolves in uniform' will find in me an active and reliable ally. But anyone who attempts to turn the noble cause of fighting corruption into a murky and ambiguous squabble will face categorical resistance."[3] Notably, Cherkesov explicitly framed anti-corruption efforts as a site of inter-institutional strife.

Similar tensions surfaced in the domain of foreign intelligence. In 2010, following the arrest of ten alleged intelligence operatives in the United States, an anonymous Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) official described the episode as "a major shake-up, which will result in heads rolling and people losing their jobs," adding that the post-Soviet separation of the SVR from the Committee of State Security (KGB) was "coming under increasing criticism."[4] The same source claimed that the secretary of the Security Council and former FSB director Nikolai Patrushev actively supported reversing this separation, further adding that rumors circulated about replacing the SVR's leadership with figures more favorable to the FSB.

Disputes also emerged around institutional reform. During parliamentary hearings in 2013, Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika accused the Investigative Committee (SKR) of engaging in a "new form of harboring crimes" and called for the restoration of prosecutorial investigative powers that had been removed during earlier reforms. The SKR rejected the proposal as "sheer, utter nonsense," arguing that the reform's primary objective had been "to separate investigative and supervisory powers," and that the prosecutor general was effectively seeking to undo this separation and "return things to how they were."[5]

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[1] Gregory Feifer, "NTV's Last Stand (or How Russia Learned to Stop Worrying and Love President Putin)," *Institute of Current World Affairs*, April 2001, https://www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/GF-16.pdf.

[2] Alex Anishyuk, "Kasyanov Testifies Yukos Case Is Political," Moscow Times, May 25, 2010, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/kasyanov-testifies-yukos-case-is-political; Robert Sharlet, "Politics of the Yukos Affair," in *Private and Civil Law in the Russian Federation*, ed. William B. Simons (Brill Nijhoff, 2009), 356.

[3] "Nel′zya dopustit′, chtoby voiny prevratilis′ v torgovtsev," *Kommersant*, October 9, 2007, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/812840.

[4] Vladimir Solov′ev and Vladislav Trifonov, "Svezho predatel′stvo," *Kommersant*, November 11, 2010, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1536406.

[5] "Chaĭka nagovoril na sledstvie," *RBK*, November 19, 2013, https://www.rbc.ru/society/19/11/2013/56c027569a7947299f72d9d7.

These episodes appear to indicate that inter-institutional conflicts have been a recurring feature over the last two decades, seemingly involve a wide range of institutions, and manifest in different forms across political, economic, institutional, and foreign operational themes. The existence of such inter-institutional dynamics between the RISI is not unique to the contemporary Russian state. However, though disagreements (and even occasional controversy) were noted between Soviet security and intelligence institutions, overt conflict was largely constrained by the hierarchical, secretive nature of the state. Moreover, intelligence and security were mostly unified under a single institution, the Committee for State Security (KGB), forming a core instrument of state power and capacity embedded within a centralized system controlled by the Communist Party.[6]

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reforms of the 1990s fundamentally altered this environment. The general political, economic, and societal instability of this era was accompanied by fragmented state authority, weakened governance structures, and diffused control over intelligence and security institutions. As relative stability returned toward the latter end of the decade, the Russian state underwent a renewed process of political centralization. Under Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer who briefly headed the FSB, executive authority was further consolidated, alongside efforts to strengthen and reorganize the intelligence and security services. Putin, right before assuming the presidency, stated the following in reference to crimes committed by its Soviet predecessors: “They must not be separated from the state and turned into some kind of monster.”[7] At the same time, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of unity for state security and the centrality of RISI in achieving this.[8]

Despite executive power consolidation and early expectations that the RISI would assume a centralized character similar to that of their Soviet predecessors, the persistence of inter-institutional competition and conflict suggests that they did not evolve into a fully unified system dominated by a single central actor. Instead, political centralization has coexisted with fragmented institutional authority and recurring rivalry within the intelligence and security apparatus. This raises broader questions about the nature of state governance in Russia. If centralized executive authority operates alongside sustained competition among core coercive institutions, this suggests that governance cannot be understood solely in terms of formal hierarchy or command. Rather, inter-institutional relations themselves appear to form an important part of the context within which the Russian state is governed. This poses the following question: How have inter-institutional relations among the Russian security and intelligence services influenced state governance between 2000 and 2022?

The academic and societal relevance of this research lies in its challenge to prevailing assumptions about the cohesion, functionality, and role of the RISI within the Russian state. In public discourse, media, as well as in parts of the academic literature, these institutions are often portrayed as a unified, disciplined, and highly effective bloc, constituting a controlled instrument of state power. Societally, this perception has been reinforced by the Russian state’s own strategic messaging, which emphasizes strength, unity, and operational competence of the RISI. Such portrayals, however, run counter to the recurring disputes outlined above, and seemingly obscure the internal dynamics that shape how these institutions actually operate and interact with the state.

Academically, this research addresses a substantive and methodological gap in the literature. The existing work on the dynamics between the RISI is narrow in scope, lacks analytical clarity, and provides a limited understanding of their influence on Russian governance. By analyzing these relations across multiple categories over two decades using a novel framework, this research

[6] Mark Harrison, *Secret Leviathan: Secrecy and State Capacity under Soviet Communism*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2023), 33-64.
[7] Kevin P. Riehle, *The Russian FSB: A Concise History of the Federal Security Service* (Georgetown University Press, 2024), 18.
[8] Riehle, *The Russian FSB,* 26.

contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the RISI and their interaction with governance, as well as the functioning of the Russian state more broadly. In addition, by developing and applying a standardized, transparent analytical framework, this research not only provides a better understanding of the topic at hand, but also provides a methodological basis for future research on inter-institutional relations and their influence on other matters of state or society. Thus, the importance of this research lies in challenging the common portrayal of the RISI as a coherent and unified bloc, providing a better understanding of their influence and role on state governance, and conceiving a novel analytical framework to study these relations.

This research is structured as follows: first, the literature review situates the research within the existing academic work on the RISI, identifying prevailing discussions, gaps, and weaknesses. Second, the methodology outlines the theoretical framework, research approach, and describes data collection and analysis. Third, the conceptual and historical background necessary for the analysis is given, establishing the context within which contemporary inter-institutional relations operate. Fourth, relations between the RISI are examined to identify recurring behavioral patterns, as well as the conditions under which these different forms of interaction occur. The fifth chapter analyzes how the patterns identified translate into effects on state governance, and situates these mechanisms within a broader discussion of the role of inter-institutional relations in the functioning of the Russian state. Lastly, the conclusion synthesizes the findings of the analysis to answer the research question. It also reflects on the broader implications of the analysis, the analytical framework, as well as potential avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

The RISI and state governance have been examined from a multitude of perspectives and analytical approaches. This review summarizes and examines the literature using the following structure: First, it examines the academic research on the RISI, which centers around their structural aspects, their historical legacy and contemporary influence, the relations between the state and the RISI, the role of Putin, ending with a brief examination of the research on state governance. Third, it provides a general evaluation, highlighting gaps and weaknesses to further illustrate the importance and relevance of this research. By doing so, it argues that a structured analysis of the influence of RISI relations on state governance is missing from the current body of work.

2.1 Structuring Security and Intelligence

The Russian security apparatus forms a complex network of state structures that defy easy categorization. The literature varies significantly in how it defines and characterizes these institutions, reflecting both conceptual and practical ambiguities. Some adopt a broad definition that situates these institutions within the context of overarching power structures, encompassing all state institutions with uniformed or armed personnel.[9] Others adopt a narrower, legal-technical definition, focusing on ministries, agencies, services, and directorates directly subordinate to the president. However, as Pallin's analysis shows, this results in the inclusion of a range of institutions from the relatively obscure State Courier Service (GFS) to major entities like the Ministry of Defense (MO) and the ostensibly unrelated Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID).[10]

[9] Bettina Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures' and the Study of Civil-Military Relations," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 18, no. 4 (2005): 561.
[10] Carolina Vendil Pallin, "The Russian Power Ministries: Tool and Insurance of Power," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 1 (2007): 6-20.

Another common perspective ties the definition of Russian security and intelligence services to Soviet legacy, emphasizing the fragmentation of the KGB into multiple successor entities. These generally include the FSB, SVR, and Federal Guard Service (FSO), existing alongside institutions built on their Soviet equivalents like the MO and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD).[11] While this view captures the historical evolution of these agencies, some note that this conflates organizations with distinct roles and offers limited analytical viability. For example, Marten critiques the inclusion of the GRU, the military's intelligence directorate, noting its relatively limited connection to civilian security services.[12] Others identify the RISI on the basis of their perceived importance. Meakins, for example, simply identifies 'key' agencies and analyzes the FSB, FSO, MVD, SKR, SVR, GP, and the National Guard (*Rosgvardiya*), while also including the GRU for its role in strategic operations.[13]

The literature also highlights a lack of clarity regarding the specific roles and responsibilities of these institutions. Unlike the more distinct separations in Western contexts, Russia's security structures exhibit significant overlap and role conflation. Riehle observes that the FSB, nominally an internal security service, often undertakes foreign intelligence operations typically associated with institutions like the SVR.[14] Similarly, Soldatov and Borogan note the FSB's evolution from a counterintelligence and counterterrorism body into one that also oversees border security and suppresses political dissent.[15]

Moreover, some argue that there is a notable disparity between official mandates and practical operations. For instance, Shamiev and Renz state that the National Guard's declared responsibility focuses on ensuring state and societal security and protecting human rights and freedoms. However, these authors note that the National Guard has been deployed in Ukraine, where it performed roles more akin to those of regular military forces.[16] According to some, this operational flexibility is often dictated by political imperatives and reflects a broader structural characteristic of the RISI. Particularly, they argue that this lack of clear boundaries is not merely incidental but a deliberate feature, enabling the state to adapt and deploy these institutions to meet varying objectives without formal constraints.[17]

2.2 Historical Legacies

Within the research, many authors emphasize the enduring influence of historical legacies on contemporary RISI. Bateman argues that following the Soviet Union's collapse, the KGB's culture and identity largely persisted, shaping the ethos of its successor agencies.[18] He further contends that the FSB inherited the defining characteristics of a 'counterintelligence state,' prioritizing state preservation over public accountability.[19] Waller and Yasmann support this perspective, highlighting the continuity of the Soviet-era 'chekist' culture within the modern security apparatus. They argue that

[11] Kirill Shamiev and Bettina Renz, "The Security Services," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, 2nd ed., ed. Graeme Gill (Routledge, 2022): 228-32.
[12] Kimberly Marten, "The 'KGB State' and Russian Political and Foreign Policy Culture," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 138.
[13] Joss Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*: Factionalism Within Russia's Security Services," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 31, no. 2 (2018): 238.
[14] Riehle, *The Russian FSB,* 133–35.
[15] Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, "Russia's New Nobility: The Rise of the Security Services in Putin's Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 5 (2010): 88.
[16] Shamiev and Renz, "The Security Services," 230.
[17] Nikolay Petrov and Michael Rochlitz, "Control Over the Security Services in Periods of Political Uncertainty: A Comparative Study of Russia and China," *Russian Politics* 4, no. 4 (2019): 546–50.
[18] Aaron Bateman, "The KGB and Its Enduring Legacy," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 25.
[19] Aaron Bateman, "The Political Influence of the Russian Security Services," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 3 (2014): 382–83.

the glorification of the KGB's historical role sustains an institutional identity deeply rooted in Soviet practices.[20]

Others broaden this historical comparison, tracing modern Russian security practices to pre-Soviet, Tsarist-era institutions and notions of state security. Riehle notes that the current operational principles of the FSB reflect a return to the Tsarist tradition of serving the ruling elite and maintaining state unity. This perspective, Riehle argues, is reinforced by an ideological narrative that portrays Russia as perpetually under threat, embedding a 'siege mentality' within the operational culture of these services.[21]

Conversely, some scholars highlight the significant transformations that have occurred within Russian security institutions. Taylor notes that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fragmentation of its security structures disrupted the centralized grip these agencies once held.[22] Shamiev and Renz further argue that the post-Soviet period brought about adaptations to new political and technological realities. They emphasize that reforms expanded the remit of agencies like the FSB to include modern domains such as cybersecurity and counterterrorism, reflecting their ability to evolve beyond Soviet-era roles.[23]

Additionally, Meakins critiques the tendency to draw direct comparisons between modern institutions and their 'Stalinist' predecessors. He argues that today's RISI represent a distinct, more anarchic system characterized by inter-institutional rivalries and fragmented operations. This view challenges the perception of continuity, suggesting that contemporary practices, while influenced by historical legacies, are also shaped by the unique dynamics of post-Soviet governance.[24]

2.3 *Siloviki,* the State and the Security Services

Much of the literature emphasizes the critical role of the *siloviki* (men of force) in Russian governance. One perspective highlights the power wielded by this group of individuals with a security, intelligence, or military background, particularly their penetration into politics, business, and the state apparatus. Kryshtanovskaya and White coined the term 'militocracy' to describe this phenomenon, using quantitative analysis to illustrate that the *siloviki* occupy influential positions across multiple sectors.[25] Similarly, Illarionov argues that elites from the security services have achieved a form of state capture, consolidating control over key levers of power in Russian society.[26]

While many scholars agree that the *siloviki's* worldview is characterized by suspicion of the West and a preference for centralized authority, there is significant debate regarding their cohesiveness and influence. Smith acknowledges their deep political and economic influence but argues that the *siloviki* are far from a monolithic group. Instead, they represent a collection of elites with diverse interests and loyalties.[27] Meakins reinforces this view, emphasizing the intense factionalism and competition among groups, driven by struggles over resources and personal rivalries. This disunity undermines the notion of a cohesive *siloviki* bloc and complicates their role and position in governance.[28]

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[20] Michael J. Waller and Victor J. Yasmann, "Russia's Great Criminal Revolution: The Role of the Security Services," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 11, no. 4 (1995): 280–82.
[21] Riehle, *The Russian FSB,* 27.
[22] Brian D. Taylor, "The Russian *Siloviki* & Political Change," *Daedalus* 146, no. 2 (2017): 54.
[23] Shamiev and Renz, "The Security Services," 227-30.
[24] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*," 236.
[25] Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2003): 290.
[26] Andrei Illarionov, "Reading Russia: The *Siloviki* in Charge," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 2 (2009): 70–72.
[27] Mark Smith, "The Politics of Security," in *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*, 1st ed., ed. Mark Galeotti (Routledge, 2010), 29–49.
[28] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*," 257.

Taylor provides another view to this, suggesting that the *siloviki*'s role is primarily reactive rather than proactive. According to Taylor, they function as guardians of the status quo, reinforcing the existing regime rather than initiating significant political or structural change. This perspective challenges views that portray the *siloviki* as independent or transformative actors within the Russian political system.[29] Alternatively, Østbø offers a more dynamic interpretation, proposing the concept of a 'hybrid intelligence state.' In this model, RISI are not merely tools of the Kremlin but co-creators of state policies and structures. Østbø highlights the ongoing interaction between politics and these institutions, which mutually reinforce each other to create new governance structures.[30] This perspective moves beyond the idea of the RISI capturing politics, instead emphasizing a complex and evolving relationship that blurs traditional boundaries between these domains.

Some argue that while the RISI have been instrumental in shaping authoritarian policies, they are not the sole drivers of this trend. Shamiev and Renz contend that the dominance of these agencies reflects the Kremlin's prioritization of security over democratic development. This is evident in their involvement in both foreign interventions and domestic repression, demonstrating their utility in consolidating state power and suppressing dissent.[31]

In this regard, Smith emphasizes the role of Russia's highly centralized presidentialist system in shaping security policies. He notes that security decisions are predominantly made by a small circle of elites, adhering to a 'command-and-control' governance model. Accordingly, this centralization serves a dual purpose: addressing external threats while reinforcing domestic stability. Smith's analysis shows how the institutional structure of the Russian state enhances the influence of security institutions within the broader authoritarian framework.[32]

The centrality of the RISI in maintaining Russia's authoritarian regime is also recognized by other research. Petrov and Rochlitz highlight the critical role of these institutions in ensuring regime stability, particularly during periods of political or economic turbulence. They point to the institutions' effectiveness in suppressing public protests and centralizing control over internal security by eliminating rivals.[33] In addition, Soldatov and Borogan further emphasize the role of the RISI in surveillance and targeted repression, particularly against NGOs and journalists. They note the importance of this targeted approach in ensuring that opposition voices are marginalized.[34]

Within the literature on their relations, Putin's management of the security apparatus is another significant theme. Bateman emphasizes Putin's reliance on the *siloviki* to consolidate his authority, describing how their loyalty forms an important support base to his power.[35] Similarly, Rochlitz underscores that while Putin maintains control over the *siloviki*, this reliance has notable costs. In particular, increased corruption, the erosion of the rule of law, and the system's dependence on informal networks and patronage are identified as significant barriers to meaningful reform and long-term stability. Rochlitz further argues that Putin deliberately fosters rivalry among these factions to prevent them from accumulating disproportionate power.[36] Reddaway further elaborates on this approach, noting that it enables him to maintain dominance over powerful factions originating within the RISI. By preventing any single group or faction from consolidating sufficient influence to challenge his authority, this strategy secures Putin's position and power in the Russian political

[29] Taylor, "The Russian *Siloviki*," 55–56.
[30] Jardar Østbø, "The Russian Hybrid Intelligence State: Reconceptualizing the Politicization of Intelligence and the 'Intelligencization' of Politics," *Intelligence and National Security* 39, no. 6 (2024): 971–75.
[31] Shamiev and Renz, "The Security Services," 233-34.
[32] Smith, "The Politics of Security," 48–55.
[33] Petrov and Rochlitz, "Control Over the Security Services," 548–49.
[34] Soldatov and Borogan, "Russia's New Nobility," 81.
[35] Bateman, "The Political Influence of the Russian Security Services," 394–96.
[36] Petrov and Rochlitz, "Control Over the Security Services," 546–47.

system.[37] Together, these analyses illustrate how managing these elites constitutes an important aspect of executive power.

2.4 Corruption: Origins and Consequences

Many authors agree corruption is a pervasive element within the RISI. Galeotti documents extensive involvement in illicit activities, emphasizing how the intertwining of organized crime with the state security apparatus has eroded the integrity of institutions such as the police, military, and intelligence agencies.[38] Waller and Yasmann similarly describe the institutionalization of corruption, highlighting how security services often partner with or protect organized crime groups. They note how high-ranking officials are frequently implicated as both enforcers of state authority and participants in criminal enterprises, blurring the lines between governance and criminality.[39]

Several authors argue that this systemic corruption undermines institutional effectiveness and public trust. Galeotti contends that while Russian agencies exhibit tactical capacity, their strategic planning suffers due to inefficiencies, in part stemming from entrenched criminal networks and corrupt practices.[40] Meakins reinforces this view, pointing to how corruption-driven rivalries between agencies exacerbate inefficiencies and weaken coordination.[41] Others contend that selective anti-corruption measures, often weaponized to target political rivals, further undermine institutional stability by addressing symptoms rather than the systemic roots of corruption.[42]

Discussions around corruption exist and views generally differ in origins and broader impact. Galeotti's earlier research attributes much of the corruption to the lawlessness that emerged in the post-Soviet transition, when weak governance structures allowed security services to exploit their positions for personal and institutional gain.[43] Østbø offers a contrasting perspective, arguing that corruption is a natural consequence of the 'hybrid intelligence model' in which personal and institutional self-interest are prioritized over national interests and operational efficacy. This system, Østbø asserts, fosters a culture where corruption becomes an inherent part of the operations of the RISI.[44] Another view is posited by Riehle who argues that the absence of ideological restraint within modern Russian security services has enabled corruption to proliferate, as individuals prioritize personal enrichment over adherence to ethical or institutional principles.[45]

2.5 State Governance

State governance in Russia has also been examined from various perspectives. A substantial strand of the literature evaluates Russian governance through the lens of 'good' and 'bad' governance, often evaluating state performance against liberal-democratic or rule of law standards, highlighting deficits in accountability, transparency, and institutional effectiveness.[46] Closely related work focuses on the sources and mechanisms of governance, with some emphasizing the enduring impact of historical legacies on the contemporary Russian state.[47] Other research has explained governance by

[37] Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Domestic Security Wars* (Springer, 2018), 35–37.
[38] Mark Galeotti, "The Criminalisation of Russian State Security," *Global Crime* 7, nos. 3–4 (2006): 473–75.
[39] Waller and Yasmann, "Russia's Great Criminal Revolution," 280–82.
[40] Mark Galeotti, *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia* (Routledge, 2010), 243–245.
[41] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*," 238–240.
[42] Pallin, "The Russian Power Ministries," 24.
[43] Mark Galeotti, "The Criminalisation of Russian State Security," 473–75.
[44] Østbø, "The Russian Hybrid Intelligence State," 971–74.
[45] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 66.
[46] Vladimir Gel'man and Margarita Zavadskaya, "Exploring Varieties of Governance in Russia: In Search of Theoretical Frameworks," *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, no. 6 (2021): 971–88.
[47] Eugene Huskey, "Legacies and Departures in the Russian State Executive," in *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

the consolidation of authoritarian rule under Vladimir Putin and the predatory behavior of political and economic elites, arguing that the emergence of 'crony capitalism' has been a defining feature of the modern Russian state.[48] Besides this, ethnographic and sociological studies have examined more intangible factors, by for example analyzing how informal rules, practices, and networks shape governance. [49] Lastly, comparative scholarship situates Russia within broader Eurasian patterns of rule, most notably through analyses of patronal politics and hierarchical 'power pyramids.' [50]

2.6 General Evaluation

While the existing literature provides valuable insights, it also exhibits several notable gaps and limitations that constrain a systematic understanding of inter-institutional relations and their broader implications for the Russian state.

First, much of the literature is focused on the FSB. Though understandable given its prominence, it has come at the expense of attention to other institutions such as the SVR, MVD, or SKR, despite these also being important actors in the realm of security and intelligence. Second, while interactions between the RISI are acknowledged in the literature, they are typically discussed in a disparate or symptomatic manner. Rather than being treated as an object of study in their own right, these relations are usually subordinated to other questions regarding the Russian state, such as corruption or factionalism. Consequently, the conditions under which different forms of interaction occur, as well as their effect on state governance as an independent factor are insufficiently interrogated. Consequently, there is no dedicated body of work that systematically examines how relations among the RISI influence governance practices. Where this relationship is addressed, it is often framed in stylized or dichotomous terms, portraying executive control as either absolute, fragmented, or inverted, with these institutions exercising dominance over political leadership. Such approaches overlook the variation and coexistence of multiple modes of interaction.

Other limitations pertain to the methodological approaches employed. Existing research on inter-institutional relations in the Putin era has largely focused on specific instances or limited timeframes, and studies that track interactions over longer periods remain scarce. This makes it difficult to distinguish persistent, structural dynamics from more short-term or isolated developments. In addition, the existing research lacks a clearly defined analytical framework for identifying and comparing inter-institutional relations; it is often unclear how cases are selected and how data are operationalized and scrutinized. Specifically, much research relies heavily on speculative or difficult-to-trace sources, with the 'anonymous official' pulling a lot of analytical weight.

This research seeks to address these issues by systematically examining relations among the RISI over a longer period using a descriptive, transparent analytical framework. In addition, by drawing on a broad set of publicly observable cases, it also contributes to the literature by shifting the analytical focus from individual institutions to their relations and by linking these explicitly to questions of state governance. By connecting RISI relations to more general forms of state governance, this research provides a novel, more nuanced understanding of an important aspect of the Russian state, as well as providing a framework for future analysis.

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[48] Anders Åslund, *Russia's Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy* (Yale University Press, 2019).

[49] Alena V. Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise?: Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[50] Henry Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Given the lack of suitable theoretical frameworks in the literature, this research develops its own approach to analyzing inter-institutional relations. The overarching goal is to identify behavioral patterns and the conditions under which different types of interaction occur. Accordingly, the framework is designed to meet three requirements: it is descriptive in nature and avoids speculation, it allows cases to be grouped into distinct categories and interaction types, and it produces distillable analytical elements that can be applied in the final chapter.

Based on these considerations, the research develops the following framework: each case is first presented through a chronological description to provide the basis for analysis. This is followed by an analysis containing several aspects. First, the initiator of the case as well as other institutions involved are identified. Second, the directionality of interaction is assessed, examining whether action occurred upward (toward higher authorities), downward (from the executive to institutions), or horizontally (between institutions). Third, each case is assigned a primary analytical category: political/power, economic/material, institutional/organizational, or foreign operations. Where overlap is present, one or more secondary categories are also assigned. Fourth, the type of interaction is identified as cooperation, competition, or conflict. Here, cooperation refers to coordinated action toward a shared objective, competition is understood as contention over resources, authority, or jurisdiction, and conflict pertains to overt attempts to obstruct, undermine, or neutralize other institutions through investigative, coercive, or reputational means. Following the case analyses, each subsection concludes with a categorical analysis that interprets patterns within the category and across the dataset as a whole, providing the distillable analytical factors used in the final chapter.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The methodological approach and data utilized by this research differs per chapter. The fourth relies on a mix of primary and secondary sources, with the conceptual discussion, historical development, and institutional composition derived primarily from academic literature. These were supplemented with a range of primary sources relating to institutional mandates, policy, and reform. The final chapter draws primarily on academic literature on state governance to establish its conceptual foundation. While the argumentation in this chapter relies largely on the findings of Chapter 5 and their interpretation, it also incorporates relevant primary and secondary sources where necessary to substantiate specific claims.

The fifth chapter contains the most substantive original research and therefore requires more detailed explanation. The research process began with an overarching goal of identifying discernible patterns of inter-institutional interaction (cooperation, competition, or conflict) across the political/power, economic/material, institutional/organizational, and foreign operational categories. To this end, all publicly observable cases of inter-institutional relations in the Putin era (2000–2022) were collected. This period was selected because it represents a relatively stable phase in modern Russian history, particularly with regard to state governance. In particular, the 1990s were considered too chaotic to draw causal connections between these relations and state governance, while the post-2022 period following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine also introduced additional dynamics that would complicate the analysis.

The cases presented in this chapter were drawn from a broad range of primary sources. The research relied primarily on Russian-language media, including those more favorable of the state (e.g.

TASS, Rossiyskaya Gazeta), relatively neutral business-oriented publications (*Kommersant, RBK*), and oppositional outlets (*Novaya Gazeta, Meduza*). These sources contained interviews with current and former officials, reporting on events such as arrests and investigations, as well as more substantive analyses of inter-institutional relations. Two sources were particularly instructive for the initial identification of these cases: Agentura.ru, a specialized website on the RISI run by investigative journalists Andrey Soldatov and Irina Borogan, as well as the Dossier Center, a dissident investigative organization financed by exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. In addition, Western media reporting, as well as official sources such as court documents and media releases by intelligence and security services were analyzed.

This process produced a large number of potential cases, which were then narrowed down using three selection criteria: first, each case had to involve two or more state institutions whose primary mandate relates to intelligence, security, or the investigation and oversight of these bodies, as reflected in both formal mandates and observed behavior. This broad approach is justified by the significant overlap and unclear boundaries between RISI mandates, as observed in the literature review. Second, cases had to involve high-level RISI participation, on the grounds that such cases are more likely to have implications for state governance. For instance, in the economic/material category, a 2000–2006 case was identified which involved real estate fraud by an ex-FSB lieutenant colonel, an ex-MVD operative, a senior police officer, and a senior prosecutor-investigator, who systematically murdered eight individuals to facilitate property seizures.[51] While this case involved multiple RISI, it was excluded because it was relatively low-profile, revealed little about broader inter-institutional dynamics, and likely had limited impact on state governance. Third, cases had to allow for the corroboration of at least key events (such as arrests or formal investigations) using primary sources. This excluded a number of potentially relevant but poorly documented cases, but it also strengthened the overall credibility of the research. Using these criteria, the eleven cases included in the fifth chapter are those that remained after this culling process.

Though the research aimed to be as comprehensive as possible, it is prone to several limitations. First, it is limited by the veracity of sources. Broadly speaking, the Russian media landscape is divided into outlets with unquestionable support of the state and those vehemently against it, which raises concerns about objectivity. In addition, the individuals involved may not tell the truth as they have a personal or institutional interest in skewing narratives. To mitigate these issues, claims were corroborated across multiple sources to the largest extent possible and supplemented with academic literature where necessary. Though avoiding speculation entirely is not feasible, the theoretical framework also addresses this by sticking to more descriptive factors.

Another limitation pertains to the inherent opacity and secrecy of the subject. Matters of intelligence and security are intentionally obscured from public view, which means that the dataset is not wholly exhaustive, and consequently only includes cases that made it into media reporting. Besides being prone to sensitization, these more overt displays are by nature more dramatic, and potentially overlook the more routine, yet consequential aspects of inter-institutional relations. This limitation, in addition to the other issues outlined above, can be partially mitigated through heightened scrutiny of the data and caution when drawing inferences and causal connections to state governance. Nonetheless, the cases examined in the next chapter provide a sufficient and reliable dataset for the broader analysis.

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[51] Anastasiia Zagoruiko, "Banda Prevrashchala Liudei v Nedvizhimost′," *Novaya Gazeta*, September 2014, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2006/09/14/27912-banda-prevraschala-lyudey-v-nedvizhimost.

4. Intelligence and Security: Concepts, History, and Composition

This chapter provides an overview of the conceptual foundations, historical development, and institutional composition of the RISI. It begins by discussing the differing understandings of intelligence and security in Western and Russian traditions. The chapter then provides a brief overview of the historical evolution of the RISI from the late imperial period through the Soviet era. The next section describes the post-Soviet reforms of the 1990s and the composition of these institutions at the onset of Vladimir Putin's presidency. By doing so, this chapter establishes the conceptual and historical context necessary for the analysis undertaken in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Intelligence and Security vs. *Razvedka* and *Bezopasnost'*

In Western academic and doctrinal traditions, intelligence and security are typically conceptualized as distinct, yet closely related terms. Intelligence is generally understood as a form of knowledge production and from a nation-state perspective, refers to covert activity conducted by state actors aimed at understanding, anticipating, or influencing foreign entities.[52] This is primarily achieved through the systematic collection and analysis of information in order to support decision-making and reduce uncertainty. As such, intelligence is commonly associated with a cognitive, preventive, and outward-looking function.[53]

Security, by contrast, is broader in scope and has been the subject of extensive conceptual debate. In its most conventional understanding, it is treated as a public good and as a legal and physical condition, encompassing a set of protective or coercive measures designed to safeguard the state, society, and constitutional order from perceived threats.[54] Though intelligence is often instructive to security, the two are nevertheless viewed as performing distinct roles: intelligence is typically framed as anticipatory and informational, whereas security is conceived as practical, enforcement-oriented, and more inward-looking.

This conceptual distinction is reflected in the organization of many Western security and intelligence institutions. Most European states tend to separate these two into distinct state bodies with differing legal mandates.[55] However, this distinction is not always clear: for example, the United Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), also supports the prevention and detection of serious crime. [56] In addition, many domestic security and law enforcement bodies in the United States possess both the remit and resources to collect intelligence on foreign threats, while elements of the intelligence community have frequently conducted domestic operations.[57] Despite this, however, the underlying conceptual understanding still is that intelligence and security are separable, even where practice might ostensibly blur the boundary between them.

In the Russian conceptual tradition, intelligence and security are not treated as clearly distinguishable, but are instead understood as intertwined components. Intelligence (*razvedka*) derives from the verb *razvedyvat'*, meaning to reconnoiter, explore, or find out. From this perspective, it is defined as the systematic and purposeful activity of the state aimed at obtaining, processing, and

[52] Michael Warner, "Wanted: A Definition of 'Intelligence,'" in *Secret Intelligence* (Routledge, 2009), 10.
[53] Matthew Crosston, "Bringing Non-Western Cultures and Conditions into Comparative Intelligence Perspectives: India, Russia, and China," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 29, no. 1 (2016): 112.
[54] David A. Baldwin, "The Concept of Security," *Review of International Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): 8–11.
[55] Piotr Burczaniuk, ed., *Legal Aspects of the European Intelligence Services' Activities* (Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, 2022).
[56] Security Service Act 1989, accessed January 26, 2026, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/5/contents.
[57] "Members of the IC," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, accessed January 26, 2026, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/what-we-do/members-of-the-ic; Loch K. Johnson, *America's Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 12–24.

exploiting information about both external and internal entities to support political, military, and strategic decision-making.[58] Importantly, intelligence is conceptualized as an activity linked to broader military and state interests rather than to foreign intelligence alone. As such, intelligence is not limited to the collection and analysis of information, but also encompasses the execution of policy in the operational sense. [59] Consequently, intelligence in the Russian understanding is both cognitive and practical in nature.

Security, or *bezopasnost'*, literally translated means the absence of danger. From the perspective of the state, it is defined as a condition of protection (*sostoyanie zashchishchennosti*) of the individual, society, and the state from internal and external threats.[60] In Russian security thinking, *bezopasnost'* is not conceived as a static condition, but as the result of continuous and proactive state activity. It is explicitly state-centric, prioritizes the stability of political order and authority, and rejects a strict separation between internal and external domains.[61]

This conceptual difference is also reflected in the terminology used to describe the collection of Russian state entities responsible for intelligence and security. In common parlance, these terms vary, sometimes referred to as the 'special services' (*spetssluzhby*), 'power ministries' (*silovye ministerstva*) more broadly, or focus on the individuals: men of force (*siloviki),* or their Soviet origins and legacy (*Chekisti*).[62] Instead of denoting differentiated functional roles, these terms indicate a shared association with state power, coercive authority, and regime protection, as well as a certain historical connotation. This ambiguity, along with the integration and overlap of *razvedka* and *bezopasnost*' are not merely linguistic and semantic, but have also been reflected in the historical development of the RISI.

4.2 Historical Development of RISI

Throughout modern history, a strong and centralized intelligence and security apparatus has constituted an important position within the governance and statehood of Russia. Across different state structures, these institutions have played a key role in state preservation and protection.

In the late imperial period, the Russian state relied on a combination of police, gendarmerie, and specialized security bodies to manage both internal dissent and external threats. In response to an increase in revolutionary activity and the perceived ineffectiveness of existing political policing arrangements, a centralized Department of State Police was established within the Ministry of the Interior. This included the creation of so-called 'security sections' (*okhrannye otdeleniia*), commonly referred to as the *Okhrana*, which functioned as the state's principal political police and was primarily tasked with counterrevolutionary operations.[63] Relations between different actors within the imperial security apparatus, particularly between the gendarmerie and the Department of State Police, were marked by bureaucratic rivalry and confusion regarding overlapping responsibilities, which reportedly impeded police efforts in the final years of the Tsarist state.[64]

The Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing political and societal upheaval resulted in the dissolution of Tsarist institutions of state security. In December 1917, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (*VChK*, a.k.a. *Cheka*) was established as

[58] Østbø, "The Russian Hybrid Intelligence State," 965.
[59] Yaacov Falkov, "Intelligence-Exalting Strategic Cultures: A Case Study of the Russian Approach," *Intelligence and National Security* 37, no. 1 (2022): 94.
[60] Gudrun Persson, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, FOI-R--3734--SE, ed. Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Pallin (Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2013), 72–73.
[61] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 22-27.
[62] Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Services* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 1–3, https://ecfr.eu/publication/putins_hydra_inside_russias_intelligence_services/.
[63] Amy W. Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Routledge, 1990), 19.
[64] Knight, *The KGB,* 20-23.

an emergency organ tasked with preserving state power during a period of extreme instability. From its inception, the *Cheka* combined intelligence, security, and coercive functions, reflecting the new state's emphasis on centralized control and political survival. In 1918, the Soviet military was assigned its own intelligence body (*razvedpur*), later known as the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).[65] Formally operating in the interests of high command, the GRU's remit was both domestic and foreign, and included technological, political, and economic matters.

As state power was consolidated during the 1920s, the intelligence and security apparatus expanded in scope and authority. Concerns among segments of Soviet leadership regarding the centralization and concentration of power of the *Cheka* prompted a series of reorganizations aimed at curtailing its influence, which ultimately resulted in its transformation into the Joint Political Directorate (OGPU).[66]

In the 1930s under Stalin, intelligence and security functions were again centralized within the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The NKVD constituted a powerful instrument of state power and came to exercise near-monopolistic control over state security and intelligence. In the early 1940s, however, several reforms split up the NKVD's (military) intelligence functions into different institutions, including the newly established People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). Following the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet and Russian name for the Second World War), the Soviet commissariats were reorganized into ministries: the NKVD became the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), while the NKGB was renamed the Ministry of State Security (MGB).[67]

Following Stalin's death, efforts were made to reform and partially rehabilitate the security apparatus. In 1954, the Committee for State Security (KGB) was established as the Soviet Union's principal intelligence and security organization.[68] Despite initial efforts aimed at stemming its influence, power, and repressive nature, the KGB's functional scope expanded beyond internal security, to counterintelligence, border protection, political policing, foreign intelligence collection, and the implementation of Soviet foreign policy objectives.[69] Its key and underlying purpose was much like its predecessors: the protection of the political system against subversion and perceived threats to state stability, or essentially preventing the collapse of the Soviet Union from within.

The Soviet security and intelligence apparatus was not entirely monolithic. Reportedly, the KGB consistently faced internal divisions within the organization. [70] Moreover, despite the KGB's dominant position and attempts at encroachment and increased oversight of the GRU, the GRU was able to retain its independence.[71] Other elements of the security apparatus also competed. For example, the MVD reportedly had a longstanding controversy with the Procuracy over jurisdictional authority.[72] Overall, however, the KGB was the dominant institution in both intelligence and security, primarily designed to protect a highly centralized government through whatever means necessary. Though formally subordinated to the Communist Party, lines between the two were at times blurry as it wielded considerable influence over the state.[73]

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[65] Viktor Suvorov, *Soviet Military Intelligence* (Grafton Books, 1986), 51.
[66] Knight, *The KGB*, 32–36.
[67] Knight, *The KGB*, 40-46.
[68] Bateman, "The KGB," 35–37.
[69] Knight, *The KGB*, 17.
[70] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*," 237; Soldatov and Borogan, "Russia's New Nobility," 11.
[71] Suvorov, *Soviet Military Intelligence*, 66-72.
[72] Knight, *The KGB*, 69.
[73] Bateman, "The KGB," 24; Evgeniia Albats, *The State Within a State: The KGB and Its Hold on Russia--Past, Present, and Future*, trans. Fitzpatrick (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 90.

4.3 The 1990s: Reforms, Reorganization, Reconstitution

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 initiated a period of extensive reorganization of its intelligence and security apparatus. The failed coup attempt in August 1991, in which elements of the KGB were implicated, provided an important impetus for reform. Subsequently, a special commission concluded that the KGB had become excessively centralized, exercised pervasive influence across Soviet society without a clear legal foundation, and had evolved into an independent political force.[74] In subsequent years, several efforts were undertaken to restructure the security and intelligence apparatus.

In December 1991, the KGB was formally dissolved and divided into several successor agencies, each inheriting specific components of its predecessor's responsibilities. Shortly before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Federal Security Agency (AFB) was created, and most former KGB functions were merged with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to form a centralized 'superministry' responsible for state security. This arrangement proved short-lived, as it was deemed unconstitutional, and a series of further reforms redistributed intelligence and security functions across multiple institutions.[75] In 1992, a presidential decree established the Ministry of Security (MB), which in 1993 was reorganized into the Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK), which in 1995 was again restructured and renamed the Federal Security Service (FSB). These reforms were characterized by political conflict, but also a need to maintain strong institutions amid the broader instability of this era.[76]

Despite frequent renaming and formal restructuring, by the late 1990s the FSB had regained most of the KGB's former roles, responsibilities, and personnel. Notable exceptions included foreign intelligence, which was assigned to the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), inheriting the functions of the KGB's First Chief Directorate. However, the FSB inherited many foreign intelligence operations and analysis functions as well, primarily in post-Soviet countries.[77]

Besides this, executive protection was transferred from the Ninth Chief Directorate to what later became the Federal Protection Service (FSO). [78] Signals intelligence and cryptography, previously handled by the Eighth and Sixteenth Chief Directorates, were reassigned to the Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), while the KGB's Main Directorate for Border Troops was reorganized into the Federal Border Service (FPS). The only component to be fully dissolved was the Fifth Chief Directorate, responsible for ideological counterintelligence, although this function was subsequently reintroduced within the FSB in 1998.[79]

Alongside the reconstituted FSB, several other state bodies with intelligence and security responsibilities operated within Russia at the time Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in 2000. These included the GRU, which continued to function as Russia's military intelligence service, retaining its subordination to the Ministry of Defense and its core responsibilities in military intelligence and strategic operations. The MVD maintained responsibility for internal order and law enforcement, encompassing policing, criminal investigations, and public order. Oversight of legality in investigations and prosecutions was vested in the Prosecutor General's Office (GP). Many other institutions were also active in this domain, owing to the fragmentation of the RISI in this era. Notable

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[74] Dossier Center, *Lubyanka Federation: How the FSB Determines the Politics and Economics of Russia* (Atlantic Council, 2020), 5, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/lubyanka-federation/.
[75] "Bez nazvaniia," *Kommersant*, November 7, 2011, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1802254.
[76] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 9-11.
[77] Riehle, *The Russian FSB,* 47.
[78] Irina Borogan et al., "Nereformiruemaia bezopasnost′," *Agentura.ru*, February 15, 2022, https://agentura.ru/investigations/nereformiruemaja-bezopasnost/.
[79] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 12-20.

examples include the Federal Tax Police Service (FSNP) as well as the State Customs Committee (later Federal Customs Service, or FTS).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter outlined the conceptual foundations and historical development of the RISI, situating them within the intertwined traditions of *razvedka* and *bezopasnost'*. Rather than being separate, intelligence and security have historically operated as mutually reinforcing components of state power, with overlapping mandates and institutional continuity across imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. While the reforms of the 1990s introduced formal decentralization and legal restructuring, these changes did not fundamentally alter the centrality of the RISI and its function in preserving state power. Instead, these reforms fragmented their institutional composition, as seen in overlapping responsibilities and bureaucratic ambiguity more broadly at the onset of Putin's presidency. By providing this contextual foundation, the chapter establishes a basis for understanding inter-institutional relations during the Putin era, which are examined in the following chapter.

5. Inter-Institutional Relations

This chapter examines inter-institutional relations among the RISI between 2000 and 2022 through a series of structured case studies. These cases are organized into four analytical categories: political/power, economic/material, institutional/organizational, and foreign operations. The chapter is structured accordingly, with each category containing chronologically ordered cases that trace patterns of interaction, directionality, and outcomes, along with a categorical analysis. By identifying inter-institutional behavioral dynamics and the conditions under which these occur, this chapter lays the groundwork for the analysis in the subsequent chapter.

5.1 Political/Power

Case 1: The NTV Takeover

In May 2000, the FSB and FSNP raided the broadcaster NTV and its parent holding company Media-Most.[80] According to the FSB, these actions were part of a broader investigation into the company's finances, later changing the allegations to illegal wiretapping. Notably, NTV was not simply a large broadcaster, but a very influential, ostensibly Kremlin-independent platform which aired sustained critical coverage of Russian politics. Its owner, Vladimir Gusinsky, was an oligarch who amassed his wealth during the privatization era of the 1990s. Despite his close connections to the political elite, he had maintained its news medium's openly critical (if somewhat skewed) editorial line during the late Yeltsin period and remained willing to scrutinize the new administration, including topics which others considered taboo, such as the war in Chechnya and high-level corruption.[81] One of the network's most popular shows *Kukly*, in which a set of puppets mocked high-level political figures, reportedly caused particular irritation in the political elite. Accordingly, this made NTV a target for the new administration.[82]

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[80] Yevgeny Kiselyov, "The Seizure of NTV 10 Years On," *Moscow Times*, April 19, 2011, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/19/the-seizure-of-ntv-10-years-on-a6453; Celestine Bohlen, "Russian Security Agencies Raid Media Empire's Offices," *New York Times*, May 12, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/12/world/russian-security-agencies-raid-media-empire-s-offices.html.
[81] Laura Belin, "The Rise and Fall of Russia's NTV," *Stanford Journal of International Law* 38, no. 1 (2002): 32–35.
[82] Cécile Vaissié, "They Made Putinism: Alfred Koch, the Man of Privatizations and NTV," *Desk Russie*, July 17, 2023, https://desk-russie.info/2023/07/17/they-made-putinism-alfred-koch.html.

In the subsequent two years, different state actors worked in parallel to take over the network. The GP moved against Gusinsky in June 2000, and he was arrested on allegations tied to the acquisition of state property (reported as a roughly $10 million privatization-related claim), then released as pressure over Media-Most's ownership and debt structure continued. In particular, state-controlled energy giant Gazprom and creditor pressed its debt claims against Media-Most. By doing so, it enabled the financial backdrop to subsequent coercive negotiations and ownership contestation.[83] The same year, prosecutorial and investigative pressure continued through actions by the FSB and GP, while courts adjudicated contested shareholdings in ways that strengthened Gazprom-Media's position. In November 2000, an international arrest warrant was issued against Gusinsky. He was arrested by Spanish police but not extradited, eventually fleeing to Israel. Two months later, the Tax Ministry demanded complete liquidation of Media-Most and NTV. FSB and FSNP raids continued, leading to the shutdown of NTV operations.[84] Thus, financial leverage, prosecutorial and judicial pressure, and coercive measures jointly created the conditions under which control over NTV was transferred, completing the takeover in April 2001. Subsequently, Gazprom-Media enacted significant restructuring, changing management, and got rid of critical staff and programs.[85]

Analysis

Formally, the FSB and the FSNP initiated this case, subsequently cooperating with the GP and the FSNP. Informally, however, the timing, background, and actions surrounding the NTV case strongly suggest that directionality came from the president's office. As such, this is best categorized as a case of downward/hierarchical political cooperation, with the involvement of Gazprom adding an economic element. Though formally not a RISI actor, its actions were closely aligned with state interests and functioned as a quasi-state instrument within the broader process.

Case 2: The Yukos Affair

With most of its assets acquired from the Russian state during the 1990s in the controversial 'loans for shares' privatization program, the Yukos oil company had become one of Russia's largest and most valuable energy producers. Its CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, had become increasingly influential and politically active. Such actions included aggressive lobbying in Russia's lower house of parliament (*Duma*), hinting at running in the 2008 presidential elections, and perhaps most importantly openly criticizing corruption within Putin's government.[86] Subsequently, in early 2003, the GP opened a criminal investigation into alleged large-scale tax evasion committed by subsidiaries of the oil company. Shortly after these initial investigative actions, the MVD and specialist units of the FSB joined the inquiry and began seizing documents and examining company records.[87]

In July 2003, MVD officers, with operational support from the FSB, arrested Platon Lebedev, a close associate of Khodorkovsky, on charges of fraud relating to a mid-1990s privatization dispute. In addition, many other senior Yukos executives were questioned by Russian prosecutors.[88] On 25 October 2003, FSB officers detained Khodorkovsky at Novosibirsk airport, after which investigative teams from the GP, MVD, FSB, and the FSNP carried out coordinated searches at Yukos offices

[83] Sophie Lambroschini and Floriana Fossato, "Analysis -- Gusinsky's Arrest Has Several Goals," Archive, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 6, 2000, https://www.rferl.org/a/1094153.html.
[84] Vaissié, "They Made Putinism."
[85] "Gazprom Completes NTV Takeover," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, March 12, 2001, https://cpj.org/2001/03/gazprom-completes-ntv-takeover/.
[86] Sharlet, "Politics of the Yukos Affair," 351–53.
[87] "Kak presledovali Platona Lebedeva," *Kommersant*, September 8, 2012, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1998159.
[88] R. G. Gidadhubli, "Yukos Affair: Putin Attacks Russia's Oil Barons," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 47 (2003): 4949–52.

throughout the country.[89] The following year, the focus of state action expanded from criminal prosecution to tax and administrative sanctions. In particular, the Tax Ministry issued a series of retroactive tax claims against Yukos for the years 2000–2003, which froze the company's accounts and left it unable to meet its financial obligations.[90]

In December 2004, the company's main production subsidiary, Yuganskneftegaz, was auctioned by the Federal Property Fund to cover the outstanding tax debt. The winning bidder, a little-known firm named Baikal Finance Group, subsequently transferred Yukos' assets to the state-owned oil company Rosneft. In 2005, the Meshchansky District Court of Moscow found Khodorkovsky and Lebedev guilty of fraud and tax evasion, sentencing them to lengthy prison terms. [91] By the end of 2006, Yukos had been declared bankrupt, and its remaining assets were distributed among state-controlled companies. In addition, a variety of other state institutions worked against Yukos: notable examples include the Ministry of Agriculture investigating 'unsupervised mating of rabbits' at a Yukos-affiliated farm, the Justice Ministry attempting to disbar the defendants' attorneys, and the immigration service expelling a foreign lawyer.[92] Additional charges against the two followed in a second trial in 2009–2010, during which former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov testified that the motivation behind the case was principally political.[93] Despite alleged investigative misconduct, the RISI involved did not face charges or other discernible consequences.[94]

Analysis

The Yukos affair falls primarily within the political category, with an additional economic component due to the financial and administrative measures imposed on the company. Formally, the investigation was initiated by the GP, subsequently involving the MVD, FSB, and Tax Ministry. However, it is more reasonable to assume directionality came from the president's office. As the actors involved did not necessarily work together out of shared interest but by direction from above, this interaction was hierarchical/command-based cooperation. In doing so, they carried out their tasks in a complementary manner, from a legal inquiry initiated by the prosecutor toward a wider, multi-agency process in which several state actors aligned their efforts.

Categorical Analysis: Political/Power

In the political/power category, inter-institutional relations are characterized by hierarchical cooperation rather than competition or conflict. When politically salient objectives are clearly defined, the RISI align their actions in a complementary manner, with directionality originating from the executive. Cooperation in this context appears to serve as enforced unity rather than convergent institutional interests, in which rivalry is suspended and parallel institutional action is structured to achieve executive objectives. Outcomes are typically stable and in favor of participating institutions, as involvement in such cases does not generate lasting negative consequences even when legal or procedural concerns are present. As a result, the political/power domain represents a category in which executive authority is most clearly translated into coordinated institutional behavior, reinforcing hierarchy while temporarily suppressing fragmentation.

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[89] Seth Mydans and Erin Arvedlund, "Police in Russia Seize Oil Tycoon," *New York Times,* October 26, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/world/police-in-russia-seize-oil-tycoon.html.
[90] "Delo IUKOSa. Dos′e," *TASS*, December 19, 2013, https://tass.ru/info/542234.
[91] "Chto nuzhno znat′ o dele IUKOSa protiv Rossii," *Kommersant*, April 4, 2016, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2968395.
[92] Sharlet, "Politics of the Yukos Affair," 354–56.
[93] Anishyuk, "Kasyanov Testifies Yukos Case Is Political."
[94] Yekaterina Kravtsova, "Court Finds Violations in Khodorkovsky Case," *Moscow Times*, July 26, 2013, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/court-finds-violations-in-khodorkovsky-case.

5.2 Economic/Material

Case 3: The Three Whales Investigation

In 2001, the Federal Customs Service (FTS, then State Customs Committee) opened an investigation into the Moscow furniture chain *Tri Kita* (Three Whales) and associated firms, alleging it had imported goods from China using falsified invoices to avoid customs duties. Shortly thereafter, the MVD's Investigative Committee (SK) took over the case, as it suspected the possible involvement of FTS officials.[95] Just a month and a half later, GP took control of the investigation but after reportedly losing part of the documents in the transfer, it closed the case and instead filed abuse of office charges against MVD investigator Pavel Zaitsev and two high-ranking FTS officials. In 2002, GP resumed the case, reportedly after Putin took a personal interest in resolving the conflict between FTS and GP. As a result, Zaitsev and the two-high ranking FTS officials were acquitted, though Zaitsev's was later overturned by the Supreme Court.[96]

In 2003, the newly created Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) initiated its own investigation into the case. Headed by Viktor Cherkesov, the FSKN received access to materials from prior customs investigations. As his personnel reviewed these documents, they encountered obstacles that were later attributed to interventions by individuals connected to the FSB.[97] In particular, the owner of Tri Kita's parent company, Yevgeniy Zaostrovstev, was a retired KGB general and father of the then-deputy director of the FSB, Yuriy Zaostrovstev.[98] Consequently, earlier investigative steps had been hindered after the FSB's Internal Security Directorate (USB) became aware of the inquiry.[99]

In parallel, a change of Prosecutor General in June 2006 brought changes to this case. Subsequently, five people involved in the affair were arrested, including the owner of *Tri Kita*, Sergey Zuev. Moreover, 19 high-level officials were dismissed, such as the head of the FTS Alexander Zherikhov and his deputies, three FSB generals among whom Zaostrovstev as well as several MVD and GP employees.[100] Moreover, Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov resigned ahead of schedule, with his post being taken by the then Minister of Justice Yuri Chaika.[101] According to Sergey Novoselov, who previously served as Deputy Head of the MVD's SK, the affair reflected a clash of bureaucratic interests between the SK and the FTS on one side, and the GP together with the FSB on the other.[102]

This conflict escalated in 2007 after FSKN head Cherkesov gave an interview in the newspaper *Kommersant*. In this, he explicitly condemned the conflict and commercialization of the security services, directly appealing to Putin to restore unity between the RISI. He also implicitly accused high-ranking FSB officials of profiting from illicit schemes.[103] In subsequent public comments, Putin gave a displeased response to this interview, stating that disputes between the security services should be handled internally, and signaled his support for the FSB's actions.[104]

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[95] Aleksei Sokovnin, "'Tri kita' nastai͡vaiut na obvinenii," *Kommersant*, July 7, 2009, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1251196.
[96] Elena Kiseleva et al., "Kit i Mech," *Kommersant*, September 14, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20171019041217/https:/www.kommersant.ru/doc/704751.
[97] Roman Shleinov, "Kak kitov prevratili v mysheĭ," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 7, 2008, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2008/07/07/37384-kak-kitov-prevratili-v-myshey.
[98] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 148.
[99] "Delo Trekh Kitov," Dossier Center, February 10, 2020, https://fsb.dossier.center/delo-treh-kitov/.
[100] Kiseleva et al., "Kit i Mech."
[101] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 149
[102] "Siloviki Ne Smogli Zamiat′ Delo 'Trekh Kitov,'" *Rusbase*, December 26, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20201127034148/https://rb.ru/article/siloviki-ne-smogli-zamyat-delo-treh-kitov/5009397.html.
[103] *Kommersant*, "Nel′zya dopustit′, chtoby voiny prevratilis′ v torgovtsev."
[104] Andrei Kolesnikov, "Prezident ne sognul svoiu 'liniiu,'" *Kommersant*, October 19, 2007, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/816507.

Following this, one of Cherkesov's closest associates, FSKN General Alexander Bulbov, was arrested by the FSB and charged with abuse of office and illegal wiretapping.[105] In addition, Cherkesov was removed from his post and reassigned to a marginal federal agency and fired two years later, effectively ending his challenge to FSB authority. Despite the dismissal of numerous high-ranking figures across all RISI involved, none within the FSB were prosecuted.[106]

Analysis

The Three Whales case illustrates how an economic investigation evolved into a prolonged inter-institutional conflict with political aspects. Though formally initiated by the FTS, actions quickly occurred between camps within the MVD and FSKN against the GP and FSB; interactions shifted from an upward process into direct, multi-actor horizontal conflict. The outcome for the actors involved differed. The FSB ostensibly faced little consequences as no one was prosecuted for the affair. Instead, it strengthened its position among the other RISI by taking control of the investigation and forcing the MVD out. The FSKN, however, was neutralized: its leadership was removed and the institution's challenge to the FSB effectively ended. For the FTS and MVD, its senior officials were dismissed, and their role in the case diminished. Though personnel changes at the GP did change its position briefly, it ultimately aligned with the FSB.

Case 4: The Customs Service Conflict

From 2006, the FTS functioned as a separate government agency reporting to the Prime Minister, having been previously subordinated to Ministry of Economic Development. [107] Reportedly, it had been involved in confrontations with other RISI, with the FSB in particular wanting to effect leadership change in the FTS after its involvement in the Three Wales case.[108] The appointment of Andrei Belyaninov in 2005 as the new head of the FTS was supposed to reconcile these feuds, as he reportedly enjoyed good relations with FSB leadership. Despite his appointment, the FTS repeatedly clashed with the SKR and the FSB's Sixth Service.

The FSB Sixth Service's Organizational and Personnel Service (SOKR), besides its namesake employee-management tasks, is also responsible for seconding personnel to different ministries, departments, and even private companies. Based on the KGB's 'Sixth Department,' (*shestoi otdel*) these officers are sent on temporary assignments openly, but they can also infiltrate by obfuscating their affiliation with the FSB in order to observe, report and influence other organizations.[109] Reportedly, the FSB general embedded in the FTS, Igor Zavrazhnyi, claimed that the FSB's Economic Security Service (SEB) was repeatedly obstructed in its corruption investigations. In 2008, Zavrazhnyi initiated investigative action into a 10-million-dollar embezzlement scheme surrounding FTS procurement. Subsequently, Belyaninov responded by passing information to the FSB that Zavrazhnyi's subordinates were involved in smuggling consumer goods.[110] In 2009, Putin publicly

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[105] Steven Eke, "Russia Holds Anti-Drugs Official," *BBC*, October 3, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7026523.stm; "Sud Ostavil Generala FSKN A. Bul′bova Pod Strazhei," *RBK*, October 31, 2007, https://www.rbc.ru/society/31/10/2007/5703c9a39a79470eaf767a05.

[106] Mariia Tsvetkova et al., "Viktor Cherkesov lishilsia gosudarstvennoi dolzhnosti iz-za stat′i," *Vedomosti*, June 15, 2010, https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2010/06/15/viktor-cherkesov-lishilsya-gosudarstvennoj-dolzhnosti-iz-za-stati; "U Narkokontrolia bol′she net 'spetsifiki' v otnosheniiakh s FSB," *Kommersant*, November 11, 2008, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1081665.

[107] Andrei Sukhotin, "Slivanie i pogloshchenie. FTS perekhodit pod polnyi kontrol′ Lubianki. Novomu glave vedomstva peredan «rasstrel′nyi spisok» iz 11 familiĭ," *Novaya Gazeta*, August 21, 2016, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/08/21/69620-slivanie-i-pogloschenie.

[108] Nikolai Sergeev et al., "Tamozhniu pred″iavili k dosmotru," *Kommersant*, July 27, 2016, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3048276.

[109] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 57.

[110] Andrei Sukhotin, "Slivanie i pogloshchenie."

complained about the lack of consequences, stating that such cases should result in jail time.[111] Following this, Zavrazhnyi was recalled from the FTS by FSB director Alexander Bortnikov, and the apparatus of seconded FSB employees in the FTS formally ceased to exist.

In early 2013, the FSB and the SKR conducted searches and interrogations at the headquarters of the FTS. Accordingly, a group of operatives from the SKR, accompanied by FSB personnel, entered the restricted premises of the FTS central offices. The FTS stated that no official authorization for these actions had been shown to its leadership and characterized the raid as procedurally improper. According to the FSB, the searches were linked to a criminal case against Vladimir Makarenko, head of the forensic department of the Central Expert-Criminalistics Customs Administration (TsEKTU), who was suspected of attempted fraud. Given the relatively minor scale of the allegation, the large, coordinated presence of both agencies at FTS headquarters was notable. This episode was not isolated. Similar actions by the FSB and SKR against the FTS had taken place in the years prior, such as the investigation into the illegal issuance of so-called 'all-access passes' allowing drivers to bypass traffic police inspections; the FTS again claimed that investigators had acted without proper documentation.[112]

In 2015, after prior discussions of uniting 'profitable' power structures, Putin instructed the government to consolidate the state's fiscal powers under the Federal Tax Service (FNS). Informally, this was also meant to strengthen the FSB's efforts against wide-scale smuggling and corruption within the FTS, which was facilitated the following year after the FTS was subordinated to the Ministry of Finance by presidential decree.[113] Subsequently, FSB and SKR operatives conducted raids on FTS offices as well as on Belyaninov's home on high-level smuggling and corruption allegations, purportedly without a court order.[114] Belyaninov resigned shortly hereafter, reportedly instructed to do so by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. After his resignation, the FSB instructed the new head of the FTS, Vladimir Bulavin, to enact sweeping personnel changes, as well as the transfer of many important positions and capacities to the FSB.[115]

Analysis

The primary category of this case is economic/material, as it centers on allegations of corruption and smuggling within the FTS. A secondary institutional/organizational category is also present due to the restructuring of state fiscal authority and the subsequent withdrawal of FTS powers. The initiative originated with the FSB and SKR, who directed their actions against the leadership and autonomy of the FTS. As such, this interaction was horizontal cooperation between the FSB and SKR conflicting with the FTS, later reinforced through backing from higher up.

Case 5: The Master Bank Affair

Illegal banking operations constituted an important domain of inter-institutional conflict between the MVD and the FSB. The two institutions had clashed in 2007 after the MVD arrested Yevgeniy Dvoskin, who reportedly facilitated the FSB's money laundering activities.[116] This conflict intensified a few years later over a similar case surrounding Master Bank. Founded in the early 1990s and operating with a substantial retail network, this bank repeatedly saw allegations for being

[111] Sergoism Krava, *Vladimir Putin: Gde Posadki?*, 2016, 0:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcgCUckb6wM.
[112] "FTS Protiv FSB i SK. Siloviki Opiatʹ Razbirai͡utsia Drug s Drugom," *Republic*, June 4, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20250604041636/https://republic.ru/posts/33442.
[113] Andrei Sukhotin, "Slivanie i pogloshchenie."
[114] Sergeev et al., "Tamozhniu predʺiavili k dosmotru."
[115] "Russia's Customs Chief Resigns Amid Smuggling Investigation," *Moscow Times*, July 28, 2016, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/07/28/russias-customs-chief-resigns-amid-smuggling-investigation-a54766.
[116] Leonid Nikitinskii, "Who Is Mister Dvoskin?," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 21, 2011, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2011/07/21/44537-who-is-mister-dvoskin.

involved in so-called *obnalichka* (cash-out) schemes: a form of tax evasion and money laundering whereby a company pays for services that only exist on paper by transferring funds to a 'dirty' bank. After charging a transaction fee, the bank subsequently returns the funds to the company in 'clean' cash, free of tax.[117]

In 2011, FSB officers conducted operational checks into the bank's activities, focusing on suspected violations of anti-money-laundering regulations. Reportedly, these initial inquiries came from the FSB's Second Service and its regional departments, which monitored transactions associated with large-scale cash withdrawals suspected to be related to the funding of terrorist groups. However, former employees claim the investigation stemmed from internal conflicts among RISI interest groups rather than stated concerns over security threats. Notably, Igor Putin, a former security-service officer and cousin of the president, served on the bank's board from 2010 to 2013.[118] In addition, Alexey Patrushev, the nephew of the then FSB director Nikolai Patrushev, became an adviser to the chairman of the board of Master Bank in 2007.[119]

As a result of these connections, the FSB's initial investigation was quickly halted. Shortly hereafter, however, the MVD's Main Directorate for Economic Security and Anti-Corruption (GUEBiPK) opened its own inquiries into Master Bank. Investigators reviewed bank accounts, corporate intermediaries, and the role of so-called 'technical firms' used in cash-out schemes. [120] Consequently, in November 2013, GUEBPiK, together with Russia's Central Bank, effectively halted Master Bank's operations after revoking its license and raiding its offices.[121] Reportedly, GUEBiPK head Denis Sugrobov and his deputy Boris Kolesnikov advised MVD leadership to investigate high-level FSB involvement in the case.[122] Around the same period, Directorate M of the FSB's Internal Security Directorate (USB), responsible for counterintelligence operations in Russia's law enforcement agencies, opened a case against Sugrobov and Kolesnikov on charges of entrapment and abuse of office. [123] Shortly thereafter, FSB officers raided the premises of GUEBiPK, after which Sugrobov was dismissed from his position and arrested. The SKR, aided by the GP, charged both men with entrapment, racketeering, and corruption. Kolesnikov was charged specifically with attempting to entrap an FSB officer for extortion, following a sting operation coordinated by its Economic Security Service (SEB).[124] Following the arrests, GUEBiPK's head was replaced by an FSB official and its inquiries into the FSB were halted.[125] Sugrobov was convicted to 22 years in prison in 2017, and Kolesnikov later died in SKR custody, reportedly after falling from a balcony.[126] No senior FSB officials were prosecuted in connection with the case.

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[117] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*," 2018, 244.
[118] Joshua Yaffa, "The Double Sting," *New Yorker*, July 20, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/27/the-double-sting.
[119] "Master-Bank pod prikrytiem FSB," *BFM*, November 25, 2013, https://www.bfm.ru/news/237580
[120] Andrei Sukhotin, "Nuzhnye bankomaty zari͡azhali piatitysiachnymi kupiurami, za vecher iz nikh vynimali do 1 mlrd rublei.," *Novaya Gazeta*, November 20, 2016, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/11/20/70607-po-odnomu-milliardu-v-den.
[121] "Russian Cbank Withdraws Licence of Mid-Sized Master Bank," Markets, *Reuters*, November 20, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/russian-cbank-withdraws-licence-of-mid-sized-master-bank-idUSL5N0J519V/.
[122] "Delo Sugrobova," Dossier Center, accessed January 26, 2026, https://fsb.dossier.center/sugrobov/.
[123] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 55.
[124] Mark Galeotti, "A 'Spook War' May Be Brewing," News, *Moscow Times*, June 17, 2014, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/17/a-spook-war-may-be-brewing-a36478.
[125] Andrei Sukhotin, "Spetsoperatsiia «Buria v mundirakh»," *Novaya Gazeta*, March 24, 2017, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/03/24/71885-spetsoperatsiya-burya-v-mundirah?print=true.
[126] "Russia's Former Anticorruption Police Chief Sentenced To 22 Years For Corruption," Russia, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 27, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-anticorruption-police-chief-jailed/28455482.html.

Analysis

The Master Bank affair is a direct conflict, belonging primarily to the economic/material category. Formally, the FSB was the first to conduct operational checks into the bank's activities in 2011, but these inquiries stalled and did not result in sustained enforcement. The case escalated only after the MVD's GUEBiPK initiated its own investigation and began looking into potential FSB-linked protection networks, thereby acting as the actual initiator to the horizontal conflict. The FSB responded through its USB, opening criminal cases against GUEBiPK leadership and mobilizing the SKR and GP to formalize charges, which ultimately neutralized the MVD.

Categorical Analysis: Economic/Material

In the economic/material category, inter-institutional relations are predominantly characterized by sustained competition and overt conflict. Unlike politically salient cases, interaction in this domain is largely horizontal and driven by contention over resources, jurisdiction, and access to rent-seeking opportunities. These conflicts typically originate at the institutional or sub-institutional level rather than from executive direction, and tend to escalate when investigative or enforcement actions threaten the interests, protection networks, or institutional standing of other RISI. Here, challengers are neutralized through disciplinary, investigative, or reputational means. Outcomes are frequently asymmetrical, favoring institutions with superior coercive capacity or proximity to the executive. Executive intervention, when it occurs, is primarily aimed at restoring hierarchy and stability rather than resolving underlying issues.

5.3 Institutional/Organizational

Case 6: The Investigative Committee Independence

In January 2011, a presidential decree made the Investigative Committee (SKR) an independent institution, having previously been subordinated to the Prosecutor General's Office (GP). This separation of the SKR from the GP placed it in direct competition not only with its former overseer, but also with other RISI traditionally active in sensitive, high-level investigations. [127] Along with an increased budget and personnel increase, in part effected by transferring a substantial amount of MVD and FSKN investigators to the SKR, this organizational change granted the Committee broad powers to investigate high-level crimes, including judges, parliamentarians, the military, and other RISI bodies such as the FSB.[128] Alexander Bastrykin, who had headed the Committee since its creation in 2007, reportedly wished to unify Russia's investigative capacities into one cohesive unit under his command, signaling an intent to expand the SKR.[129]

Following this, Bastrykin quickly initiated actions against several other RISI, with the SKR and GP seeing open confrontation as both sought to control the initiation, suspension, and oversight of criminal cases. In particular, the SKR initiated criminal cases against several prosecutors for allegedly covering up an illegal gambling business, including high-ranking first deputy prosecutor of the Moscow region, Alexander Ignatenko. The SKR accused Ignatenko of abuse of office and corruption, but the decision to initiate criminal proceedings against him was closed by the GP on the same day.

[127] "Rossiia stal′naia: istoriia Sledstvennogo komiteta," *Meduza*, July 26, 2016, https://meduza.io/feature/2016/07/26/rossiya-stalnaya-kratkaya-istoriya-sledstvennogo-komiteta.
[128] Nikolai Sergeev and Oleg Rubnikovich, "Aleksandra Bastrykina odnogo ne ostavi͡at," *Kommersant*, September 9, 2012, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2015576.
[129] Polina Nikol′skaia et al., "Dopros na samom vysokom urovne," *Gazeta.Ru*, March 31, 2011, https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/03/31/3571393.shtml.

By the time Ignatenko was put on the federal wanted list, he had already left the country.[130] Tensions ensued and later that year, an intervention by then-president Dmitri Medvedev was required to stabilize the situation.[131]

In October 2014, a presidential bill allowed SKR to open criminal cases for tax-related crimes without prior consultation of the Tax Service (FNS).[132] According to some, Bastrykin had persuaded Putin to do so in order to gain powers more useful for extorting other RISI actors than for actual policing.[133] However, following comments by GP head Yuri Chaika on the SKR's lack of oversight, another presidential bill two months later would subordinate the SKR to the GP again, restoring the supervision it previously had.[134]

Analysis

This case is primarily institutional/organizational in nature and centers on competition over investigative authority and oversight. The SKR acted as the initiator, as it sought to expand its autonomy and consolidate investigative power at the expense of the GP. Directionality can best be characterized as upward expansion, as the SKR attempted to change established institutional hierarchies for its own benefit. This process was characterized by direct conflict and manifested itself through the use of institutional capacities and public disputes, whereby the outcome was asymmetrical: while the SKR initially gained expanded authority, the GP ultimately reasserted the GP's supervisory role over the SKR, in part by influencing the executive.

Case 7: The Investigative Committee Expansion

In parallel to its conflict with the GP, the SKR also expanded its involvement into other politically significant areas. This included high-profile cases such as the investigation into Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov on corruption-related allegations, which contributed to his eventual resignation in 2013.[135] The SKR also became increasingly active in cases involving political opposition, most notably in the aftermath of the Bolotnaya Square protests, as well as in investigations connected to the armed conflict in Ukraine.

By doing so, the SKR involved itself in cases that traditionally fell under the remit of the FSB, such as espionage and terrorism cases. Though the two had reportedly been on good terms in the years prior and cooperated against the MVD and FSKN, the SKR's increased involvement in matters of state security would see it clash with the FSB.[136] Reports indicated increased surveillance of SKR officials by Directorate M of the FSB's Internal Security Directorate (USB), which SKR leadership interpreted as direct interference in ongoing investigations.[137]

The conflict culminated in 2016, when the FSB conducted searches of SKR premises and detained two senior SKR officials on corruption charges related to their alleged ties to organized crime. Central to these accusations were links to Zakhary Kalashov, known as *Shakro Molodoy*, a prominent figure in Russia's criminal underworld, who was accused of exerting influence over senior

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[130] *Meduza*, "Rossiia stal'naia."
[131] Nikol′skaia et al., "Dopros na samom vysokom urovne."
https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/03/31/3571393.shtml?utmauth=false.
[132] Sergei Nikitenko, "Luchshe Zaplatit′," *Rossiĭskaia Gazeta*, January 20, 2015, https://rg.ru/2015/01/20/dela.html.
[133] Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra*, 6.
[134] *RBK*, "Chaĭka nagovoril na sledstvie."
[135] Brian Whitmore, "Surkov's Last Stand," The Power Vertical, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 14:42:03Z, https://www.rferl.org/a/surkovs-last-stand/24987291.html.
[136] Tat͡iana Stanovaia͡, "Konflikt Silovikov: Novyi Vitok," Kompromat.Ru, October 8, 2007, https:/www.compromat.ru/page_21579.htm.
[137] *Meduza*, "Rossiia stal′naia."

SKR officials in exchange for protection and favorable treatment in criminal proceedings.[138] Following this, the FSB excluded the SKR from any internal investigations, and the GP charged those involved with corruption.[139] Responding publicly to the arrests, Bastrykin stated that the SKR required "cleaning," though his attempt to contain the damage proved ineffective.[140] Shortly thereafter, Putin dismissed two top-ranking SKR generals implicated in the affair and Bastrykin submitted his letter of resignation following this, though he ultimately remained in office.[141]

Analysis

This case is primarily institutional/organizational as it revolved around mandate, jurisdiction, and institutional hierarchy. The SKR acted as the initiator by expanding its activity into domains that the FSB perceived as falling under its remit. Directionality was initially horizontal, but shifted into a downward corrective response once the FSB, supported by the president, mobilized its capacities in the direct conflict. The outcome was asymmetrical: the FSB strengthened its position, while that of the SKR was curtailed through disciplinary action and reputational damage.

Categorical Analysis: Institutional/Organizational

The cases in the institutional/organizational category indicate that public displays of inter-institutional relations here are rare but marked by conflict. An important feature is that drivers of these conflicts frequently originate in individuals or groups within the RISI itself, whose actions tend to reflect ambition and self-preservation rather than necessarily aligning with overarching presidential interests. As such, while rivalry is to a degree institutionalized within the RISI, individual behavior, interests, and relationships are also significant factors, whereby alliances do occur, but are temporary and indicate lack of coherence. Besides this, upward expansion is usually followed by downward correction when such expansion threatens established (formal or informal) boundaries. Though self-initiated institutional expansion can occur, it is ultimately limited when lacking sustained backing or approval from higher up. In addition, rather than resolving competition, reforms seem to redistribute the lines along which it is conducted, reinforcing asymmetries.

5.4 Foreign Operations

Case 8: The Lubyanskaya Pravda Leaks

In June 2010, a website containing FSB leaks appeared online. Hosted on the domain lubyanskayapravda.com, (the truth on Lubyanka, the name of the FSB headquarters building) and purportedly created by disgruntled FSB employees, the site hosted a sizeable amount of sensitive and classified documents. Most of these appeared to originate from the FSB's Fifth Service Operational Information Department (DOI) and were signed by the department's head, Sergei Beseda,

[138] "Russia's Federal Agents Raid Russia's Federal Investigators," *Meduza*, July 19, 2016, https://meduza.io/en/feature/2016/07/19/russia-s-federal-agents-raid-russia-s-federal-investigators.
[139] "Arestovany vysokopostavlennye chinovniki SK. Chto dal′she?," *Meduza*, July 20, 2016, https://meduza.io/feature/2016/07/20/arestovany-vysokopostavlennye-chinovniki-sk-chto-dalshe.
[140] Natalia Kozlova, "Dobro Na Posadku," *Rossiĭskaia Gazeta*, July 24, 2016, https://rg.ru/2016/07/24/bastrykin-ochishchenie-riadov-sk-i-drugih-vedomstv-prodolzhitsia.html.
[141] "Head of Russia's Investigative Committee Bastrykin Resigns," News, *Moscow Times*, September 26, 2016, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/09/26/head-of-russias-investigative-committee-bastrykin-resigns-a55490.

and addressed directly to Putin.[142] Established in 2000, the DOI was given the mandate and means to conduct operations in post-Soviet states, or what it calls the 'near abroad.'[143]

Among the files was a forged report aimed to undermine the relationship between Turkmenistan and Ukraine. This report suggested that Ukrainian security services had funded political opposition in Turkmenistan, which reportedly was aimed to undermine a gas deal between the two countries. This information was leaked to Ukrainian media outlets which subsequently published the story, after which the SVR depicted these documents as authentic in its reporting to the executive. Reportedly, Beseda bragged that his department had 'duped' the SVR.[144] A week after its launch, the website was taken down, and no other discernible actions between the RISI followed.[145]

Analysis

The Lubyanskaya Pravda case falls under the foreign operations category, with an additional institutional/organizational aspect. The initiative originated within the FSB's DOI and affected the SVR, though the apparent lack of intent is a notable element in the case's directionality. Though the FSB's actions did affect the SVR, it appears more of a side effect rather than a targeted effort. However, Beseda purported response does indicate some opportunism for reputation management in this regard. As such, this can be characterized as was horizontal competition, as the FSB pursued its objectives without coordination and at the expense of another institution operating in the same domain.

Case 9: The Illegals

In 2010, the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested ten individuals alleged to be Russian intelligence operatives. According to subsequent press releases and court documents, these so-called 'illegals' were in fact planted by the SVR and had spent a significant amount of time establishing their cover identities as ordinary American citizens, in an apparent attempt to gather intelligence by forming relations with US government officials and other influential figures in policy-making circles.[146] The FBI claimed it had uncovered the group by mid-2006, penetrated the group's communications, and had conducted extensive and prolonged surveillance operations. Moreover, the FBI also noted that despite the great number of resources invested, the SVR operatives were ultimately unsuccessful at gaining valuable intelligence, noting their poor tradecraft and overall inefficiency.

When news broke, Russian media outlets reported that an SVR Colonel by the name of Shcherbakov had defected to the Americans and provided them with comprising information. According to unnamed FSB sources, Shcherbakov had been part of the SVR's 'S' department, overseeing the illegals program in the United States. However, many others, including the SVR, claimed that Shcherbakov was fictitious and called the allegations improbable and dubious.[147] State

[142] Andrei Soldatov, "Neizvestnaia razvedka," Agentura.ru, January 17, 2022, https://agentura.ru/investigations/neizvestnaja-razvedka/.
[143] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 47.
[144] "Departament operativnoi informatsii (DOI)," Agentura.ru, 2022, https://agentura.ru/profile/federalnaja-sluzhba-bezopasnosti-rossii-fsb/departament-operativnoj-informacii-doi/.
[145] No detailed primary documentation of the website exists. Internet Archive (Wayback Machine) captures confirm its brief existence and general timeline reported elsewhere, but display only a blank 'under construction' page, consistent with the site being taken offline within a week of launch.
[146] "Operation Ghost Stories: Inside the Russian Spy Case," Federal Bureau of Investigation, October 31, 2011, https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/operation-ghost-stories-inside-the-russian-spy-case.
[147] "V SVR dokazyvai͡ut, chto istoriia s predatelem Shcherbakovym, sdavshim russkikh shpionov, vymyshlennaia," *NEWSru.com*, November 12, 2010, https://www.newsru.com/russia/12nov2010/scherbakov.html; Oleg Fochkin, "Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki predata͡telia ne sdaet," *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, November 11, 2010, https://www.mk.ru/politics/2010/11/11/543476-sluzhba-vneshney-razvedki-predatelya-ne-sdaet.html; Pavel Felʹgengauer,

press would later claim that Colonel Alexander Poteyev was the actual defector.[148] Regardless, both President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin alluded that a high-level defector within the SVR caused the arrests.[149] At the same time, the FSB launched an investigation into the SVR. [150] Despite hints that the SVR would be restructured and transfer its capacities to the FSB, ultimately no publicly discernible changes were made and the SVR only suffered reputational damage.

In the following years, more cases of illegals were uncovered. In 2013, a married couple that had been living in Germany for over two decades was arrested on treason charges.[151] According to Dutch prosecutors, the two had been passing information to the SVR.[152] Two years later, the FBI reported that it uncovered three more SVR operatives: two of which were working under diplomatic immunity, but one individual was a banker working under deep cover.[153]

Subsequent cases indicate that Russian military intelligence (GRU) has also employed this method. In 2018 for example, Italian authorities and investigative journalists exposed Maria Adela, a well-connected Naples socialite who abruptly left Italy after years of cultivating ties with NATO officers. Subsequent investigative reporting linked her to the GRU.[154] Similarly, in 2022, Dutch authorities reported that they had prevented Sergey Cherkesov from entering the country. Operating under a fabricated Brazilian identity which he had cultivated for years, Cherkesov was uncovered while attempting to start an internship at the International Criminal Court (ICC).[155] The same year, Swedish authorities arrested Sergey Skvortsov, another deep-cover operative who had allegedly been supplying the GRU with embargoed technology since 2013.[156]

Analysis

The case of Russian illegals is best categorized as belonging to foreign operations. Formally, the initiative lies with the SVR, as its mandate makes it responsible for managing illegals and foreign intelligence operations. The more recent cases of GRU illegals are notable and could be indicative of lack of communication and coordination between RISI, but could also be interpreted as a lack of faith in the SVR's capacities following the exposure of their operatives in the years prior. Notably, the FSB only became involved after inserting itself into the investigation into internal failures and suspected defectors within the SVR. Directionality was predominantly horizontal, both abroad and within the RISI, as they overlapped and competed without visible coordination.

"Chekisty Protiv Shpionov," *Novaya Gazeta*, November 15, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20110717010755/https:/novayagazeta.ru/data/2010/128/00.html.

[148] Vladimir Shishlin, *Polkovnik Poteev Vmesto Polkovnika Shcherbakova*, November 15, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20101117080340/https://www.interfax.ru/politics/txt.asp?id=165046.

[149] "Medvedev otvetil na razoblachenie predatelia, sdavshego desiatku russkikh shpionov v SShA," *NEWSru.com*, November 12, 2010, https://www.newsru.com/russia/12nov2010/medvedev.html.

[150] Solov′ev and Trifonov, "Svezho predatel′stvo."

[151] Gareth Jones, "Germany Tries Couple Accused of Spying for Russia," *Reuters*, January 15, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/world/germany-tries-couple-accused-of-spying-for-russia-idUSBRE90E0Y9/.

[152] ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2013:BZ8217, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2013:BZ8217 (Rechtbank Den Haag April 23, 2013), https://deeplink.rechtspraak.nl/uitspraak?id=ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2013:BZ8217.

[153] Māris Goldmanis, "The Russian Spy Ring of 2010, The Use of Ciphers and Radio Messages," Numbers Station Research and Information, January 30, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20150216004006/http:/www.numbers-stations.com/russian-spy-ring.

[154] Christo Grozev, "Socialite, Widow, Jeweller, Spy: How a GRU Agent Charmed Her Way Into NATO Circles in Italy," *Bellingcat*, August 25, 2022, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/08/25/socialite-widow-jeweller-spy-how-a-gru-agent-charmed-her-way-into-nato-circles-in-italy/.

[155] "AIVD Disrupts Activities of Russian Intelligence Officer Targeting the International Criminal Court," AIVD, June 16, 2022, https://english.aivd.nl/latest/news/2022/06/16/aivd-disrupts-activities-of-russian-intelligence-officer-targeting-the-international-criminal-court.

[156] "A Russian-Born Swede Accused of Spying for Moscow Is Released Ahead of the Verdict in His Trial," *AP News*, October 9, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/sweden-russia-spying-sergey-skvortsov-verdict-gru-c18874ded04c026a2835b687405c0188.

Case 10: Involvement in Ukraine

Following the Euromaidan protests, the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovych, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it became apparent that multiple RISI had simultaneously operated in Ukraine. The SVR had long been active in the country for long-term political intelligence, which included maintaining ties with the Yanukovych administration as well as overall political monitoring. Following Yanukovych's removal, Putin reportedly blamed intelligence failures on the SVR, with their inability to predict political change as a particular point of contention.[157] Subsequently, several senior officials within the SVR were dismissed. [158]

The FSB operated in parallel but reportedly managed to avoid the same scrutiny. Though a internal security service by name, it conducted operations in Ukraine on the basis of its expanded mandate in the 'near abroad,' relying heavily on human intelligence assets in the government and armed forces.[159] According to Ukraine's Internal Security Service (SBU), the FSB had recruited assets for military-operational purposes as early as 2011.[160] However, the FSB had also been active in political affairs: DOI head Sergey Beseda visited Kyiv ten days before Yanukovych fled Ukraine in an attempt to meet the ousted president.[161]

The GRU had also been embedded in Ukraine's military and security structures, particularly in Crimea, where Russia's Black Sea Fleet is stationed. It mostly focused on gathering technical intelligence related to military actions in Ukraine, by for example hacking a mobile application the Ukrainian military used for artillery strikes.[162] However, the GRU did not confine its activities purely to the military domain; it was also reportedly involved in a poisoning attempt targeting a Bulgarian arms manufacturer supplying weapons to Ukraine, as well as in the sabotage of two arms depots in the Czech Republic.[163] In contrast to the SVR, the perceived operational success of the GRU increased its standing, which subsequently gained resources and increased its operations abroad.[164]

Analysis

This case falls primarily within the foreign operations category, with additional political/power and institutional/organizational dimensions. Multiple RISI (SVR, FSB, and GRU) were simultaneously active in Ukraine, pursuing broader strategic objectives without coordination. This interaction is therefore best characterized as horizontal, uncoordinated competition with asymmetrical outcomes: the SVR suffered reputational damage and personnel losses following the events, whereas the FSB avoided scrutiny and maintained its role. The GRU benefited in its part from perceived operational success by gaining additional resources.

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157 Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Services* (2016), 4.
158 Kevin Riehle, "The Ukraine War and the Shift in Russian Intelligence Priorities," *Intelligence and National Security* 39, no. 3 (2024): 460–62.
159 Riehle, "The Ukraine War," 460-462
160 Denis Karlovskii, "SBU zaderzhala predatelia, korrektirovavshego ogon′ voisk RF po aeroportu Lutska," *Ukrainskaia pravda*, March 4, 2022, https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/04/7328219/.
161 "FSB RF: otvetstvennyi sotrudnik vedomstva nakhodilsia v Kieve 20–21 fevralia," *Interfax.ru*, April 5, 2014, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/369704; Andrei Soldatov, "The True Role of the FSB in the Ukrainian Crisis," *Moscow Times*, April 15, 2014, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/the-true-role-of-the-fsb-in-the-ukrainian-crisis.
162 Crowdstrike Global Intelligence Team, *Use of Fancy Bear Android Malware in Tracking of Ukrainian Field Artillery Units* (Crowdstrike, 2017), https://www.crowdstrike.com/wp-content/brochures/FancyBearTracksUkrainianArtillery.pdf.
163 Bellingcat Investigation Team, "How GRU Sabotage and Assassination Operations in Czechia and Bulgaria Sought to Undermine Ukraine," *Bellingcat*, April 26, 2021, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/europe/2021/04/26/how-gru-sabotage-and-assassination-operations-in-czechia-and-bulgaria-sought-to-undermine-ukraine/.
164 Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Services*, 4.

Case 11: The DNC Hacks

In 2015–2016, two separate RISI conducted parallel intrusions into the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) networks. The SVR first gained access to DNC data in 2015, reportedly using low-visibility intrusion methods to sustain the long-term information gathering.[165] In spring 2016, a GRU-associated hacking group conducted its own attack, launching a spear-phishing campaign that compromised senior DNC campaign staff accounts, seizing a large number of sensitive documents in the process. Accordingly, the SVR and GRU used distinct but uncoordinated ways of gaining access.[166] In addition, the manner in which the obtained material was leaked also appeared uncoordinated. After gathering the data, the GRU disseminated sensitive information through social media and the online DC Leaks platform, whereas the SVR did not release any material.[167]

In 2016, US intelligence and cybersecurity investigators attributed the attack to the SVR and GRU, with additional suspected FSB involvement. They specifically noted that the duplication of these efforts and the differing operational conduct aided in identifying the perpetrators.[168] Later that year, the FSB's USB launched a probe into its Information Security Center (TsIB). TsIB's official task is to protect Russia's internet, but it also monitors information aimed at Russian citizens, collects foreign intelligence, and is in charge of information sharing on cyber-related issues.[169] According to the investigation, the deputy head of TsIB, Sergei Mikhailov, together with Ruslan Stoyanov, lead incident investigator at Russian anti-virus company Kaspersky labs, the two allegedly had passed information to Western intelligence services which rumored to have helped in attributing the DNC intrusions. [170] Subsequently, both were convicted of treason and sentenced to prison. Stoyanov claimed that this was unrelated to the DNC hacks, instead framing events as retribution for an earlier case which threatened business interests of well-connected economic and political elites.[171]

Analysis

This case was primarily rooted in foreign operations, as the SVR and GRU both undertook subversive operations against a foreign state's electoral process. Directionality is difficult to establish; ostensibly the SVR, FSB, and GRU acted on their established remit and mandates, but it is also possible that they were given specific orders. Some argued that Putin instructed the RISI to conduct these operations as a retaliatory measure against what he perceived as foreign meddling in its domestic electoral process.[172] The fact that they operated independently toward a similar objective without confronting or cooperating with each other is indicative of parallel, uncoordinated competition. The subsequent internal investigation by the FSB illustrates how events were potentially utilized as retributive opportunism.

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[165] Editorial Team, "CrowdStrike's Work with the Democratic National Committee: Setting the Record Straight," *Crowdstrike Blog*, June 5, 2020, https://www.crowdstrike.com/en-us/blog/bears-midst-intrusion-democratic-national-committee/.

[166] Cosimo Melella et al., "Disjointed Cyber Warfare: Internal Conflicts Among Russian Intelligence Agencies," *Applied Cybersecurity & Internet Governance* 3, no. 2 (2024): 65–70.

[167] David V. Gioe, "Cyber Operations and Useful Fools: The Approach of Russian Hybrid Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 7 (2018): 968.

[168] Editorial Team, "CrowdStrike's Work."

[169] Riehle, *The Russian FSB*, 34.

[170] Andrew Osborn and Maxim Rodionov, "Russia Jails Ex-FSB Agent, Cyber Expert for Passing Secrets to U.S.," *Reuters*, February 26, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/world/russia-jails-ex-fsb-agent-cyber-expert-for-passing-secrets-to-us-idUSKCN1QF1RK/; Mariia Kolomychenko, "U kiberbezopasnosti meniaetsia kurator," *Kommersant*, January 13, 2017, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3189312.

[171] Andrew Kramer, "Was Russia Treason Trial About U.S. Election Meddling or a Convict's Revenge?," *New York Times*, March 18, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20190318085121/https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/world/europe/russian-election-interference-trial.html.

[172] "Is Hacking Hillary Clinton Russian Payback for the 'Freedom to Connect'?," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 3, 2016, https://www.cfr.org/articles/hacking-hillary-clinton-russian-payback-freedom-connect.

Categorical Analysis: Foreign Operations

In foreign operations, RISI behavior is characterized by parallel rather than coordinated action. Here, institutions frequently operate simultaneously and independently, with limited evidence of active coordination. Accountability and institutional standing are selective and performance-driven, preferring perceived effectiveness over cooperation, which incentivizes increased (and at times unnecessary) operational risk in competition with other RISI. At the same time, this category exposes the limits of centralized control: while broad strategic objectives are set by the executive, implementation is fragmented and duplicated. Although such redundancy can be functional when objectives align, it also encourages opportunism and the utilization of such events for ulterior motives. Consequently, foreign operations represent a domain in which inter-institutional competition is not suppressed but effectively externalized abroad.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter examined inter-institutional relations among the RISI between 2000 and 2022 through a structured analysis of publicly observable cases. Organized into four analytical categories, the analysis identified recurring patterns in how cooperation, competition, and conflict manifest across different contexts. The political/power category is characterized by hierarchical cooperation: when politically salient objectives are involved, RISI align their actions in a complementary manner, with directionality originating from the executive rather than from the institutions themselves. Here, rivalry is largely absent, and institutional dynamics are more disciplined and coordinated.

By contrast, the economic/material category constitutes the primary domain of overt inter-institutional conflict. These cases revolve around financial interests and access to resources, with interaction being predominantly horizontal and adversarial, and outcomes frequently asymmetrical, favoring dominant institutions. In addition, the institutional/organizational category also highlights recurring conflict and competition over mandates, jurisdiction, and authority, typically driven by attempts at institutional expansion. Though such efforts can produce temporary gains, they often provoke corrective responses that reassert established boundaries, while also showing that RISI alliances remain situational and short-lived. Lastly, foreign operations are marked by parallel and largely uncoordinated action. Here, multiple RISI operate simultaneously in overlapping domains, pursuing similar objectives without coordination, with competition expressed through duplication of effort and reputational management.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that relations among the RISI vary structurally by context: cooperation prevails where overarching political objectives dominate, conflict centers on economic and institutional interests, and competition in foreign operations takes the form of parallel, uncoordinated action. These patterns provide the foundation for the following chapter’s analysis of their influence on state governance.

6. Relations and the Russian State

Building on the categories and behavioral patterns examined previously, this chapter analyzes how these patterns translate into effects or mechanisms of influence on state governance. This chapter is structured as follows: first, state governance is defined in order to establish the analytical aspects. Second, the ways inter-institutional relations influence state governance are examined. Lastly, a broader explanatory discussion of the role of RISI relations with regard to the state is given to provide a better understanding of their functioning and role for the executive.

6.1 Defining State Governance

Francis Fukuyama has defined state governance as *"the government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless as to whether that government is democratic or not."*[173] This definition has the advantage of being both succinct and not contingent on regime type. Though it is an instructive starting point, this definition is insufficient for the purposes of this research. Particularly, by analytically separating governance from state capacity (the state's coercive and infrastructural ability to carry out specific policies) and state autonomy (the extent to which the state apparatus can formulate and implement policy independently of political influence), it does not account for how these elements are intertwined in practice in states where intelligence and security institutions play a central role.[174] In addition, this definition limits itself to the state's ability to do something and not how it conceives of this in the first place. Moreover, for this analysis it is too succinct, as it does not specify what or who the government is. Thus, it is necessary to formulate a new definition.

For the purposes of this chapter, any operational definition of state governance must meet several conditions. First, it must move beyond normative frameworks such as those centered on good/bad governance or accountability/legitimacy, as these are not relevant to this analysis. Second, it must also be empirically observable, allowing governance to be examined as a set of practices or outcomes in which inter-institutional relations have been influential. Third, the definition must account for the historically central role of the RISI, as outlined in Chapter 4, as well as other factors specific to the Russian state in the Putin era.

Accordingly, state governance can be better understood through a behavioral lens, one that necessarily incorporates elements of state capacity and autonomy as they are manifested in executive authority vis-à-vis state institutions, and how (strategic) objectives are conceived, achieved, implemented, and enforced. As such, this research defines state governance as the way in which the executive exercises power, conceives and makes decisions, as well as its implementation and enforcement by state institutions. This includes, among others, information flows, institutional control and coordination, as well as the design and effectiveness of policies and laws. Having established this, it is now possible to examine the influence of RISI relations on state governance along two themes of analysis: Executive power and decision-making, as well as implementation and enforcement (of policy and laws).

6.2 Relations and Influence on State Governance

Executive Power and Decision-Making

Inter-institutional relations among the RISI exert a direct influence on executive power and decision-making in various ways. Though the president formally occupies a dominant position, control over the RISI is neither continuous nor wholly absolute. In politically sensitive cases, this control is more implied than enforced, as evidenced by institutional cooperation within this category. In other categories where intervention is apparent, different patterns indicate that the executive also actively intervenes in these relations. It does so by using disciplinary measures against individual institutions or officials whose behavior is deemed too disruptive or politically costly. Public manifestations of conflict are a recurring driver of intervention from above (see economic/material cases), though other, less publicly aired cases (institutional/organizational) suggest that an exact threshold for intervention remains unclear. This recurring executive intervention in RISI disputes

[173] Francis Fukuyama, "What Is Governance?," *Governance* 26, no. 3 (2013): 350.
[174] Gel'man, "Exploring Varieties of Governance in Russia," 971–972.

partly reinforces the centrality and authority of the executive, positioning it as the final arbiter. At the same time, the inconsistent, selective, and largely reactive nature of intervention indicates certain limits to routine institutional control from above.

When it comes to information flow, having access to a broad variety of sources can, in principle, constitute an asset for executive decision-making. However, as the different categories (in particular foreign operations) demonstrate, competition for institutional standing and resources among the RISI also creates strong incentives for agencies to emphasize their own relevance. In an environment where there are few incentives to report the absence of threats or to downplay risks, institutions are instead evaluated and rewarded for perceived activity. This encourages agencies to 'outperform' one another in the production of security-relevant intelligence and operations, rather than to coordinate assessments or moderate threat perceptions. Aside from the patterns in the foreign operations category, this is also supported by an account of a former KGB agent. Accordingly, the FSB reported it had uncovered 397 agents in 2017, while between the 1970s and 1980s, the KGB only recruited 15, or about 3 per year. [175] Uncovered does not equal recruited, but it does point to some discrepancy in this regard. A similar dynamic can be observed in the intensified campaign against 'extremism' from 2018 onwards. In response to political pressure to crack down on treason and internal enemies, RISI have shown to fabricate or embellish cases.[176] As a result, this competitive environment distorts executive decisions and contributes to a cumulative worldview in which the state is perceived as being under constant threat. Warranted or not, this does shift executive attention towards these domains instead of others. Notably, this mechanism is self-serving to the RISI as a whole, as it reinforces the executive's perception that it needs a strong, expansive security and intelligence apparatus, thus allocating more resources and power towards these institutions. This is supported by their consistent budget increases, even during times of austerity.[177]

In this competitive environment in which information is an instrument of institutional power, decision-making and control are also inhibited. Fabricated or exaggerated reports are transmitted both horizontally to other institutions and upward to the executive as credible, intentionally left out when such reports are politically inconvenient or not shared due to detrimental potential to reputation. Instead, institutions are incentivized to retain privileged information to advance their own interests (e.g. *kompromat*), and information that does reach the president is highly filtered and compartmentalized between institutions, and subject to skepticism and distrust.

Another influential mechanism relates to perception. In particular, the persistence of competition and conflict among these institutions, particularly along economic/material and institutional/organizational patterns, creates a perception that these institutions are unable to perform or govern themselves without direction from above. As others have pointed out, corruption (real or suspected) also contributes to this issue. [178] This pattern contributes to the executive's inclination to rely on top-down control effected through extensive, continuous regulation and the creation of powerful oversight institutions.

Implementation and Enforcement

Inter-institutional relations among the RISI also exert a direct influence on the implementation of policy and the enforcement of laws through several ways. Reforms and changes appear to be subject to distortion, frequently not meeting their intended objectives. As seen in the

[175] Sofia Adamova, "Putin's KGB Classmate: 'Russian Secret Service Is Busy Not with Intelligence, but with Backing Child Prostitution and Drug Trafficking,'" *The Insider*, April 6, 2018, https://theins.ru/en/politics/98147.
[176] Anton Muratov, "How a Teenage Girl's Chat Group Became an FSB Snare," News, *The Moscow Times*, August 15, 2018, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/08/15/a-russian-teenagers-chat-group-became-fsb-snare-a62529.
[177] Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Services*, 6.
[178] Gel'man and Zavadskaya, "Exploring Varieties of Governance," 978.

patterns of the institutional/organizational category, instead of resolving or clarifying jurisdictional boundaries, these frequently function as opportunities for upward expansion by individual institutions or actors. As these cases illustrate, reform efforts often reinforce existing asymmetrical relations or established hierarchies within the RISI, with the FSB being a particularly powerful (and preferred) actor. Such expansion is conditional on backing from the executive, and when this backing weakens or is absent, efforts to expand are typically reversed through corrective intervention by other institutions or the executive itself. Moreover, these patterns also illustrate that the RISI are highly dependent on personal interests and individuals, as visible in the expansion efforts in the institutional/organizational category. As a result, the implementation of reforms and enforcement priorities can shift rapidly and often reflect changes in institutional positioning or personal preferences, rather than overarching policy direction.

At the operational level, overlapping or concurrent activities are common. As is discernible in the foreign operations category, multiple institutions pursue similar investigations or operate in the same functional domains. Though this duplication of efforts certainly implies inefficiency, at the same time, this also provides a degree of redundancy that the executive appears willing to tolerate, as it provides alternative sources to pursue its interests.

The recurring conflict and competition also show that enforcement practices are frequently selective, reactive, and institutionally targeted. As seen in various categories, investigative and coercive powers are applied strategically, ranging from pursuing political opponents to rival institutions as well as protecting economic interests. Consequently, this instrumentalization of the RISI leads to many of their capacities being utilized to advance informal interests, rather than being focused on their underlying mandates.

Related to this point, the recurring attempts by the RISI to encroach upon one another causes them to frequently subordinate formal tasks to institutional self-preservation. Corrective action is often directed at rival institutions rather than at addressing the underlying criminal activity that initially prompted enforcement. This also entails an opportunity cost: though the RISI have access to considerable resources, these are finite. As the patterns identified in the institutional/organizational and economic/material categories demonstrate, institutions devote substantial time and resources to self-preservation, bureaucratic expansion, institutional insulation, and the surveillance of other bodies or cases that may enhance their standing and reputation. Ostensibly, managing relations and reputation thus appears to carry greater perceived costs and benefits than the effective fulfillment of formal mandates.

Overall, these findings indicate that inter-institutional relations between the RISI influence state governance by how executive authority is exercised, how decisions are made, and how policy and law are implemented in practice. It does so by positioning the executive as a selective arbiter, inhibiting information flows, and the conditional implementation and selective instrumentalization of institutions. The next section discusses some potential explanations of these relations by positioning them within a broader context of the Russian state.

6.3 Perspectives on RISI Relations and the State

The patterns identified suggest that relations among the RISI do not only influence specific aspects of governance, but also reflect broader characteristics of how the Russian state functions. In this sense, these relations can be seen as both an outcome of deliberate governance choices but also as the result of structural constraints inherent in the organization of the state itself. As such, two explanatory perspectives are potentially instructive: managed competition as an intentional feature of governance, and fragmentation as an unintended consequence of institutional and executive limitations.

From the first perspective, inter-institutional conflict and competition appear to be tolerated and, to a large degree, instrumentalized by the executive. Here, rivalry among the RISI is not eliminated, but selectively managed. As long as this does not threaten executive reputation, state stability, or core political interests, it is allowed to persist, provided that institutions cooperate when politically significant objectives are at stake. In this sense, managing rivalry between these institutions functions as a stabilizing mechanism: by preventing any institution from gaining too much power, competition reduces the risk of state capture from within the RISI. This interpretation is supported when reviewing the historical role of the RISI vis-à-vis the state outlined in Chapter 4. Though the FSB has inherited much of the KGB at the hands of the executive, and is consequently the dominant and favored institution, it is not as powerful as its predecessor once was. It is possible that the executive has learned from this. Indeed, this is supported by the notion that the National Guard (*Rosgvardiya*) was created to actively oppose expansion efforts and defend the executive from threats emanating from the existing RISI.[179]

On the other hand, these inter-institutional relations also reflect the ad hoc and fragmented nature of governance in the Russian state. From this second perspective, conflict and competition are not always the consequence of deliberate design, but rather emerge from the dispersed, disorganized, and at times, personalized character of institutional power. Though the executive has periodically expressed dissatisfaction and may indeed want to change the state of these relations, its capacity to do so may in fact be limited. Within this fragmented system, institutions and individuals retain significant agency, allowing them to pursue their own economic, political or institutional interests even in the absence of explicit authorization from the executive.

Taken together, it is likely that a combination of these two perspectives provides an explanation for the somewhat ambiguous role of RISI relations in state governance. They are neither fully controlled nor autonomous, neither purely functional nor dysfunctional. Instead, governance results from the interaction between executive management and institutional fragmentation. The result is a system in which competition and conflict are both a tool of control as well as a source of disorder, simultaneously contributing to state stability while constraining the coherence and control of state power.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined how inter-institutional relations among the RISI shape state governance by influencing executive authority, decision-making processes, and the implementation and enforcement of policy and laws. The analysis has approached state governance as a set of practices and outcomes emerging from the interaction between the executive and the RISI, operating within a system that is both centralized and fragmented. The findings demonstrate that RISI relations are not secondary to governance, but rather constitute a core mechanism through which power is exercised and managed within the Russian state.

While the executive formally occupies a dominant position, its control over the RISI is uneven and more sporadic in nature. Selective intervention in inter-institutional reinforces presidential authority, but it also suggests a limit to routine institutional control, as conflict and competition remain a recurring feature. This, in turn, distorts information flows, as it shapes executive decision-making by incentivizing the inflation of threats, selective reporting, and compartmentalization of information. As a result, governance is informed less by coordinated, reality-based assessment and

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[179] Meakins, "Squabbling *Siloviki*" 239; Mark Galeotti, “The Silovik-Industrial Complex: Russia’s National Guard as Coercive, Political, Economic and Cultural Force,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 29, no. 1 (2021): 4–6.

more by filtered and embellished perceptions of risk, reinforcing a securitized worldview that serves institutional interests.

At the level of implementation and enforcement, these relations further contribute to governance outcomes that are conditional, selective, and instrumentalized. Reforms are often utilized for institutional expansion, while enforcement capacities are applied strategically in pursuit of political, economic, or institutional interests or advantages. Besides this, the recurring institutional overlap results in both redundancy and inefficiency, but also provides the executive with alternative instruments of control, suggesting that disorder is not merely tolerated but can be functional as well.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that Russian state governance emerges from the interaction between managed competition and structural fragmentation. Here, inter-institutional relations function simultaneously as tools of executive control and as constraints on coherent, controlled governance, whereby inter-institutional competition is a form of managed, or at the very least tolerated form of independent institutional decision-making, which challenges the somewhat unitary view of the Russian government.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to examine how inter-institutional relations among the Russian intelligence and security institutions (RISI) influence state governance in the period between 2000 and 2022. To do so, the research was structured around three analytical sections.

The first section (Chapter 4) established the conceptual and historical context under which contemporary inter-institutional relations operate. By outlining the integrated understanding of *razvedka* and *bezopasnost'* and tracing the development of the RISI from the imperial and Soviet periods through the post-Soviet reforms of the 1990s, the chapter demonstrated that overlapping mandates, institutional ambiguity, and rivalry are not aberrations but persistent structural features. The fragmented composition of the RISI at the onset of Vladimir Putin's presidency largely reflected this legacy and provided the institutional foundation for subsequent analysis.

The second section (Chapter 5) examined how these relations manifest in practice. Through a structured analysis of cases across political/power, economic/material, institutional/organizational, and foreign operational categories, it identified recurring behavioral patterns: cooperation occurs mainly in politically salient cases, conflict predominates where economic or institutional interests are at stake, and parallel, uncoordinated action is characteristic of foreign operations. Alliances between different institutions occur, but are often temporary.

The third chapter analyzed how these patterns translate into mechanisms of influence and effects shaping state governance. By conceptualizing governance as a set of practices and outcomes revolving around executive power and decision-making, and the implementation of policy and laws, the chapter demonstrated that inter-institutional relations are directly and indirectly influential in the following ways: First, inter-institutional relations affect the exercise of executive power. Although the RISI are formally subordinated to the president, competition and conflict among them persist and require periodic intervention from above. Executive control is therefore selective rather than continuous, with governance relying on sporadic arbitration rather than routine hierarchical coordination. Second, these relations influence decision-making by shaping information flows. Competitive pressures incentivize agencies to emphasize threats and institutional relevance, resulting in fragmented and selectively filtered reporting. This process reinforces a securitized decision-making environment not necessarily based on reality, but often informed by competing institutional perspectives. Third, inter-institutional relations affect implementation and enforcement. Investigative and coercive capacities are applied selectively and instrumentally, often in ways that advance

institutional positioning and come at an opportunity cost for underlying policy or enforcement objectives. At the same time, overlapping RISI functions do imply inefficiency, but also have a functional component in their redundancy. In addition, reforms and reorganizations tend to redistribute competition instead of resolving it, reinforcing existing hierarchies within the RISI.

More broadly speaking, the findings of this research also suggest that inter-institutional relations among the RISI are both a product of governance and a mechanism through which governance is exercised. More specifically, competition and conflict are not eliminated, but rather managed and tolerated so long as they do not threaten overall political stability and serve executive interests when necessary. This is consistent with historical patterns of attempting to curb the political power of RISI institutions. As such, rivalry functions as a tool of control, preventing any single institution from accumulating excessive power while reinforcing the president's role as final arbiter. At the same time, these relations also reflect structural constraints inherent in the organization of the Russian state. Overlapping mandates, weak institutional boundaries, and personalized authority limit the executive's capacity for more coherent control, allowing institutions and individuals to pursue their own interests. As such, these relations emerge not only from deliberate design but also from fragmentation and institutional differences. Governance in this context is thus shaped by the interaction between managed competition and structural limitation to executive power, producing a system that is simultaneously marked by control and disorder.

The analytical framework utilized lends itself to comparative application beyond the Russian case. Future research could apply it to other post-Soviet or authoritarian states with similarly fragmented security sectors to assess whether comparable patterns of managed competition and institutional rivalry emerge, or whether the dynamics observed here are idiosyncratic to Russia's historical and political context. In addition, the framework can also be applied beyond governance, by for example ascertaining the influence of inter-institutional relations on the economy, society, or other ostensibly related topics.

Further research could also examine how periods of political instability affect inter-institutional relations. Russian history suggests that moments of domestic crisis often trigger cycles of fragmentation, followed by recentralization within the intelligence and security apparatus. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the prospect of a post-Putin political order raise questions about whether future reforms may alter these dynamics or reproduce familiar patterns. Researching such transitions may provide insight into the conditions under which meaningful, lasting change in intelligence and security governance becomes possible.

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