

The Problems of Perestroika: The KGB and Mikhail Gorbachev's Reforms

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In May 1990, a new journal appeared on Soviet newsstands. But *Sbornik KGB SSSR* was not one of the countless new unofficial publications asking difficult questions about life in the Soviet Union as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika reforms.¹ It was an official product of the Soviet Union's Committee on State Security (KGB). Produced to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II, the journal's inaugural public issue was devoted to the role of intelligence in the conflict—a topic chosen to generate as sympathetic an audience as possible. Demand for the 138,000 copies printed was astronomical, in spite of the dear price of 2 Rubles.²

One of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*'s new readers was so taken aback by what she saw in its pages that she applauded the “savvy entrepreneur” who published it in a letter to the editor of *Argumenty i fakty*, assuming that someone had stolen top-secret KGB documents and was now selling them to a clamoring public. In fact, *Argumenty i fakty* confirmed with the KGB: the documents were all genuine and willingly declassified—and their own publication had been outsold by the KGB's by a factor of three that month.³

The disbelief of the letter's author, I. Ermolaeva of Krasnodarskii krai, is easy to appreciate. For her whole life, the KGB's officers and agents (official and unofficial employees, respectively) had been active in, but also aloof from, everyday life in the Soviet Union. Its Sixth Directorate infiltrated transportation networks and other enterprises to root out saboteurs and enforce labor discipline. The Second Chief Directorate stood watch against western spies—a category in which those who opposed the Kremlin's rule often found themselves (though really, they were the concern of the Fifth Chief

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1. William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York, 2017), 338–41.

2. Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukraïny (HDASBU), fond (f.) 13, opis' (op.) 1, sprava (spr.) 844, arkush (ark.) 70–73 (Skomorokhov, “‘Prem'era' gazety,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

3. “Vopros–otvet,” *Argumenty i fakty* 21 (May 26, 1990): 8.

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Directorate, responsible for political control). It was the Ninth Directorate who drove the ZIL limousines that sped through the streets of Soviet cities with their precious cargo of top Party officials; and it was the Seventh Directorate listening in on the telephone lines strung overhead. The KGB Border Troops Directorate greeted returning citizens and others arriving from abroad, as well as stopping those without permission from leaving. The best-known First Chief Directorate, tasked with espionage overseas—which itself often served domestic priorities, such as surveilling émigrés—may have been only a comparatively small part of the KGB’s overall efforts, but it looms largest in the public’s imagination. Meanwhile, it was the Analytical Directorate that made sense of all this information for the Soviet leadership, interpreting the vast quantity of information the KGB accrued about the situation at home and abroad.⁴ So omnipresent was the KGB, Evgeniia Al’bats argued, that it comprised a “state within a state” in the Soviet Union.⁵

Scholars have made great strides in illuminating “ordinary lives” within the Soviet state.⁶ Now, when it comes to the KGB state-within-a-state, similar studies are possible thanks to *Sbornik KGB SSSR*—not the version that appeared on Soviet newsstands in May 1990, but the top-secret, internal version in print since 1959.⁷ When Nikita Khrushchev installed Aleksandr Shelepin as KGB Chairman in 1958 as part of his de-Stalinization campaign, the trained historian worked to raise the prestige of the KGB, but also to make it more efficient. *Sbornik KGB SSSR* was a means of laying down the Party line.⁸ Its editorial board of senior KGB officers gathered and disseminated the experiences of their subordinates throughout the Soviet Union, including operational best-practices, speeches by leadership, accounts of KGB exploits by the journal’s special correspondents, and even letters to the editor.

In 1987, the journal’s editors at the Feliks Dzerzhinskii Higher School of the KGB responded to the new reforms in the Soviet Union announced that year by introducing a new section, “Perestroika: Quest, Experience, and Problems.” In subsequent issues, officers detailed their professional experiences with a changing Soviet Union because of perestroika and glasnost with a frankness not before seen in *Sbornik KGB SSSR*’s pages. These accounts show that the KGB—at least its rank and file—were positive participants in, and not just obstacles to, the process of reform. As the pace of Gorbachev’s reforms shifted from quite moderate to much more radical (especially beginning in 1988), the KGB, like the rest of the state apparatus, struggled to keep up. At the same time, however, perestroika and glasnost shifted from being the new dogma,

4. Viktor Chebrikov, ed., *Istoriia Sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti* (Moscow 1977).

5. Evgeniia Al’bats, *Mina zamedlennogo deistviia: Politicheskii portret KGB* (Moscow, 1992), 26.

6. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999).

7. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 705, ark. 4 (“Ot redakologii,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 1 [1959]). In the archives of the Security Service of Ukraine in Kyiv, copies of each issue can be found in Fond 13, “Collection of Printed Materials of the USSR KGB.” In the Lithuanian Special Archives in Vilnius, a selection of issues, mostly from later years, is also fully accessible to researchers, with some issues digitized: www.kgbdocuments.eu/kgb-journals-and-books/.

8. Leonid Mlechin, *Shelepin* (Moscow, 2009), 136–66.

shibboleths that KGB officers writing in an official publication were obliged to use, to a real challenge with which these officers grappled.⁹ A sense of loss of control jumps off the pages of *Sbornik KGB SSSR* as officers lacked the vocabulary to make sense of phenomena taking place across the Soviet Union, such as industrial action and interethnic violence, nor were they equipped to adjust to a new reality in which these problems were now omnipresent. *Sbornik KGB SSSR* presents a contemporaneous account of an organization having an identity crisis in the midst of concurrent social, political, and economic crises.

Most depictions of the KGB's role in the late Soviet period cast its officers as either the masterminds or nemeses of Gorbachev's reforms.¹⁰ Accounts by Christopher Andrew and Vasily Mitrokhin, Raymond Garthoff, Baruch Hazan, Mark Kramer, and Amy Knight all focus on KGB leaders' hostility towards liberalization and particularly on the participation of Chairman Vladimir Kriuchkov in the attempted ouster of Gorbachev in August 1991.¹¹ Others, such as Evgeniia Al' bats, and Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievskii actually credit the KGB with having devised and stage-managed Gorbachev's reforms.¹² But the KGB was more than just its leaders, and it was certainly more than just a conservative opposition bloc, as David Remnick's account of the collapse of the Soviet Union hints. Remnick highlights, for example, the gap between middle- and even upper-level KGB officers and the "muddled dinosaurs," as they described their leaders, at the top.¹³ *Sbornik KGB SSSR* shows just how wide that gap was between the rank-and-file and the leadership in Moscow, and between the status quo to which KGB officers had become accustomed and the reality in which they found themselves during the late 1980s.

Articles by KGB officers in the field speak to a host of issues that pervade Soviet history and historiography; the study of intelligence offering, in this and so many other cases, unique insight into a wide range of areas of historical inquiry. Soviet citizens in the era seized new freedoms and demanded

9. Taubman, *Gorbachev*, 337–38.

10. Much of that literature focuses on its foreign operations, in large part because the most significant documentary revelations from defectors such as Oleg Gordievskii and Vasily Mitrokhin have focused on the activities of the First Chief Directorate, tasked with espionage overseas: Jonathan Haslam, *Near and Distant Neighbors: A New History of Soviet Intelligence* (New York, 2015), xvi–xvii. Haslam, for example, makes no mention of the reforms taking place within the Soviet Union, let alone the KGB's role therein.

11. Christopher Andrew and Vasily Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York, 2001), 393–94; Raymond Garthoff, "The KGB Reports to Gorbachev," *Intelligence and National Security* 11, no. 2 (April 1996): 224–44; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War* (Washington, DC, 2015), 84, 91–92; Baruch A. Hazan, *Gorbachev and his Enemies: The Struggle for Perestroika* (Boulder, 1990), 149–51, 157–63; Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 51, 60, 90, 92; Amy W. Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Boston, 1988), 96–104; Amy W. Knight, "The KGB, Perestroika, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 67–93.

12. Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London, 1990), 509–10; Al' bats, *Mina zamedlennogo deistviia*, 174–75.

13. David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 1994), 463, 475–77, 482–83.

accountability, even as many feared that a new round of repression might be in store in the future, with them as targets.¹⁴ Civil-society organizations emerged.¹⁵ An environmental lobby coalesced.¹⁶ Nationality rivaled class as an organizing principle.¹⁷ Challenges also came from within the state apparatus: corruption and a black market that was the KGB's obligation to suppress but on which countless Soviet citizens depended for subsistence.¹⁸ All of these shaped Soviet history and are omnipresent in the pages of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*.

The journal also challenges conventional narratives about the role and capacity of the Soviet state and its chief coercive institution, the KGB, during a time of social and political upheaval.¹⁹ In Vladimir Lenin's memorable formulation, "a standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power."²⁰ Intelligence services such as the KGB played a key role in the Soviet Union, and continue to do so in Russia today.²¹ Spying abroad was far less important than the KGB's domestic remit: preserving the rule of the Communist Party.²² Its tools spanned the military, economic, and ideological elements of state capacity; not only implementing decisions to mete out carrots, sticks, and propaganda, but also shaping them in the first place as the key source of

14. Tyler C. Kirk, "Memory of Vorkuta: A Gulag Returnee's Attempts at Autobiography and Art," *Kritika* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 97–126; Kathleen E. Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca, 1996); Amir Weiner, "The Empire Pays a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 2 (June 2006): 333–76.

15. Nanci Adler, *Victims of Soviet Terror: The Story of the Memorial Movement* (Westport, CT, 1993); Vadim Volkov, "Obshchestvennost': Russia's Lost Concept of Civil Society," in Norbert Götz and Jörg Hackmann, eds., *Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region* (Aldershot, Eng., 2003), 63–74.

16. Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley, 1999).

17. Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of Nations* (Ithaca, 2005); Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca, 2019); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993).

18. William A. Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom: Combatting Corruption in the Political Elite, 1965–1990* (Aromok, NY, 1993); Gregory Grossman, "The 'Second Economy' of the USSR," *Problems of Communism* 26, no. 5 (September/October 1977): 25–40; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton, 2004).

19. Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge, Eng., 2016); Milan W. Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, Eng., 2012); Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (Cambridge, Eng., 2011).

20. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Leninskaia biblioteka, Vol. 5: Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1943), 14.

21. Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West* (New York, 2020); Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York, 2014); Kimberly Marten, "The 'KGB State' and Russian Political and Foreign Policy Culture," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30, no. 2 (April 2017): 131–51; Michael Rochlitz, "The Return of the Siloviki: An Introduction," *Russian Politics* 4, no. 4 (November 2019): 493–98; Brian D. Taylor, "The Russian Siloviki and Political Change," *Daedalus* 146, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 53–63.

22. N.V. Petrov, "Spetsial'nye struktury KGB po bor'be s inakomysliem v SSSR, 1954–1989 gg.," in V.K. Bylinin, ed., *Trudy Obshchestva izucheniia istorii otechestvennykh spetssluzhb* (Moscow, 2007), 306–17.

information for policy-makers.²³ The KGB is commonly portrayed as a tool of governance, but *Sbornik KGB SSSR* highlights in equal measure the roles the KGB played in governance itself.²⁴

The journal illustrates the extent to which the Soviet state was no longer a unitary actor during the Gorbachev years—from the perspective of the KGB, a coercive organ charged with keeping it so. While many have investigated the role and agency of institutions in authoritarian states, that work has tended to focus on those of at least a superficially quasi-democratic nature.²⁵ Though the institution in which they served was nothing of the sort, KGB officers during the late Soviet period did tend to be politico-ideological pragmatists.²⁶ Thus, *Sbornik KGB SSSR* shows not only how the Kremlin managed those whom Charles Tilly terms its “specialists in violence,” but also what happened when it no longer could or would.²⁷ KGB officers told their leaders and colleagues how governance was breaking down. When smugglers violated laws and borders, they found themselves without even working vehicles to give chase. Faced with industrial action, they lacked a vocabulary to make sense of strikes, let alone address their demands. And witnessing unfathomable ethnic violence, they were reduced to mere bystanders. The organ charged with “direct political protection” of the Party proved less and less capable of rebuffing the myriad new challenges to its authority.²⁸

Such a source is, of course, not without its challenges. How much is exaggeration of problems faced (and therefore additional resources required) or success in overcoming them? When the authors come from a profession in which lying is a skill to be honed, not a defect to be weeded out, these issues are all the more glaring. Consistency across accounts of similar phenomena in different places, often involving admissions against interest, is one reassurance. Another is the venue: an in-house, highly classified outlet. But the challenge is surmountable; this unique source—like all others—requires rigorous interrogation.

Despite its minimal use in studies of Soviet history since being introduced to a wider audience by Victor Yasmann and Vladislav Zubok in 1998, *Sbornik KGB SSSR* has much to offer.²⁹ It makes it possible to glimpse the everyday

23. Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Origin, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology* 25, no. 2 (November 1984): 193.

24. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds., *Accusatory Practices: Denunciations in Modern European History, 1789–1989* (Chicago, 1997), 85–120; Amir Weiner and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, “Getting to Know You: The Soviet Surveillance System, 1939–57,” *Kritika* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 5–45.

25. David Art, “What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After 10 Years?” *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 3 (April 2012): 351–73.

26. Nikolai Leonov, *Likholet’e* (Moscow, 1995), 136.

27. Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), 34–41.

28. Chebrikov, *Istoriia Sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*, 3.

29. Victor J. Yasmann, “The KGB Documents and the Soviet Collapse: A Preliminary Report,” at www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/1998-813-15-Yasman.pdf (accessed November 10, 2021); Victor J. Yasmann and Vladislav Zubok, “The KGB Documents and the Soviet Collapse: Part 2,” at www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/1998-813-15-2-Yasman.pdf (accessed November 10, 2021). For a recent exception, which uses the journal to identify pro-reform

lives of the denizens of the KGB state-within-a-state, essential to understanding the power dynamics of late-Soviet society.³⁰ Rank-and-file members living through the disintegration of the Soviet Union reported on it in real time, with articles addressing four principal thematic issue-areas, on which the ensuing sections focus: (1) in-house perestroika, making the KGB itself more efficient and economical; (2) implementing the tenets of perestroika in the Soviet economy; (3) confronting the new challenges to central control—including the KGB's—borne of glasnost; and (4) engaging with, as opposed to suppressing, civil society. Examining the role of the KGB in the final years of the Soviet Union offers not only new insights into its role in the Soviet Union, but a unique window into the decline of state capacity and the collapse of the Soviet state itself.

Perestroika for Chekists

Gorbachev had harsh words for the period of “stagnation” which preceded his tenure as General Secretary.³¹ Following his example, many in the KGB decried the formalism of the past and an over-reliance on quantitative measures of work which led to “superficial conclusions” and an inadequate understanding of the real situation throughout the country.³² Instead, they argued, in a new political climate the task of the KGB must be to develop autonomy, initiative, creativity, and efficiency within its ranks.³³ “The Chekist profession is not a craft,” one officer summed up, “but an art.”³⁴ Authors wrote of their—and the whole organization's, they insisted—commitment to the cause of perestroika and determination to fight for the realization of this new, revolutionary process underway in the Soviet Union; and they condemned “those who, fearing the ‘winds of change,’ are waiting for something else, looking backwards.”³⁵

A first, critical step to that end would be to restore an appropriate sense of—and respect for—“socialist legality.”³⁶ Every KGB officer would need to “respect the Soviet people, their constitutional rights, and legitimate

tendencies within the KGB, see: Arto Luukkanen, *Suomi hajoavan imperiumin sylissä* (Helsinki, 2019).

30. Lynne Viola, “The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1–23; Lynne Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial: Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine* (Oxford, 2018).

31. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 2008), 3:286–92.

32. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 13–14 (“Ne ublekat ‘siasifrovymi pokazatel’ iami,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

33. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 842, ark. 42–46 (Tikhonov, “Tvoricheskii potentsial operrabotnika,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 142 [1990]).

34. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 842, ark. 50–51 (Abakumov and Ioganson, “Molodye opravdvaiut doverie,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 142 [1990]).

35. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 823, ark. 43–44 (“Nauchno-prakticheskaia konferentsiia Komitete gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 122 [1988]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 838, ark. 31–41 (Skomorkhov, “Vmesto vizitnoi kartochki,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 137 [1989]).

36. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 9–13 (“Meniat’ stil’ raboty,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

interests.”³⁷ Unsurprisingly, KGB leaders in Erevan, for example, concluded that they themselves had committed no major violations of socialist legality, even if many of their subordinates demonstrated “basic legal illiteracy” and they saw fit to dismiss eighteen of them.³⁸ Socialist legality was not new to the KGB, nor were violations thereof. In the aftermath of the Great Terror, for example, accusations of violations of socialist legality led thousands of perpetrators in the ranks of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), the KGB’s predecessor, to meet the same fates as their victims in a “purge of the purgers” beginning in late 1938.³⁹ Decades later, Khrushchev’s secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 laid the blame for these violations of socialist legality at Stalin’s feet, and the term “socialist legality” would be a hallmark of the internal reforms under his leadership.⁴⁰

Implementing perestroika would also call for a rejuvenation of the KGB’s workforce and an overhaul of management style.⁴¹ To that end, the KGB turned to familiar methods: scapegoating the few non-Russians in its ranks and organizing retreats for senior leadership. The head of the KGB for the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region surrounded himself with “toadies and sycophants,” one highly stereotype-driven example claimed, and was dismissed.⁴² Soon after the January 1987 Plenum at which Gorbachev unveiled his reforms, the KGB convened a month-long course for senior leaders at the Feliks Dzerzhinskii Higher School of the KGB with an emphasis on “deepening legal knowledge and strict observance of socialist legality.”⁴³ Nikolai Ermakov, Deputy Head of the Second Chief Directorate with responsibility for personnel, wrote of the need to avoid “parallelism and duplication,” making the KGB more efficient. When leaders could not do their jobs “to modern standards,” he insisted, they should be removed, allowing younger officers to rise through the ranks.⁴⁴ But while these younger recruits were less burdened by “theoretical baggage,” they also had a troublesome tendency not to accept at face value what they were told by their superiors.⁴⁵

Two years after Gorbachev introduced his reforms, Vitalii Ponomarev, who oversaw personnel issues for the whole KGB, applauded *Sbornik KGB*

37. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 833, ark. 54–59 (Abdrakhmanov and Matvienko, “Razobrat’sia v cheloveke,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 133 [1989]).

38. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 9–13 (“Meniat’ stil’ raboty,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

39. Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial*, 4.

40. Nikita S. Khrushchev, “O kul’te lichnosti i ego posledstviia kh,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 3 (1989), 128–70; Marc Elie, “Khrushchev’s Gulag: The Soviet Penitentiary System After Stalin’s Death, 1953–1964,” in Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, 2013), 109–42.

41. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 826, ark. 23–30 (Ramenskii and Grachev, “Vzgliad na perestroiku,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 125 [1988]).

42. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 3–9 (Petkel’, “Kak my realizuem trebovaniia partii,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

43. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 14–15 (“Ucheba rukovodiashchikh kadrov,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

44. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 825, ark. 38–45 (Ermakov, “Perestraivaem rabotu s rukovodiashchimi kadrami i rezervom vydvizheniia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 124 [1988]).

45. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 826, ark. 37–42 (Trusov, “Legko li byt’ molodym?,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 125 [1988]).

SSSR's readers for embracing the necessity of "revolutionary transformations" in Soviet society and within the KGB itself. Everyone, he declared, would need to adapt their work to the new realities of the Soviet Union: "the revolutionary principles of perestroika—more glasnost, more democracy, and more socialism." Whether they liked it or not—and Ponomarev knew full well that many did not—new problems required "new political thinking."⁴⁶

Perestroika was not only a policy shift, but an "intellectual breakthrough in the life of [Soviet] society." Naturally, these changes attracted attention worldwide, and with that interest came more and more foreign correspondents in Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union—who, thanks to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, had even more rights, and knew it. Of late, they were becoming "friendlier [and] more objective" and the KGB could no longer continue to treat them all as enemies. "Indeed, if one takes a sober look at it," one officer conceded, "it turns out Soviet journalists abroad are . . . focused on the search for social sore-points in the societies in which they work." This did not mean a free pass for western journalists, but methods did change. In the face of foreign-press criticism of ethnic relations in the Soviet Union and the mistreatment of non-Russians, for example, the KGB produced a film about the high quality of life enjoyed by Volga Germans living in the Kazakh SSR (without explaining how they came to find themselves on the steppe in the first place, as victims of mass deportations). For the most intransigent of journalists, the weapon of the future would be to draw up massive income tax bills using little-known provisions of the Soviet tax code, not the usual physical harassment.⁴⁷

A newly expanded role for the press in the Soviet Union could be a powerful tool for the KGB in a new era of openness. It created new avenues for intelligence-gathering: work to gauge the public mood that once required informants and wiretapping could now be done at much lower cost using public-opinion surveys with reasonable expectations of honesty on the part of respondents.⁴⁸ And the press could shape public behavior if the KGB could place the right articles in the right outlets. "On the Question of Eternal Truths" in *Sovietskii tanker*, for example, shamed the navigator of the ship Volgoneft-136 for smuggling pornography and shoplifting in Stockholm, while a series of exposés served to drive shopkeeper Alinus Zaid, a Polish Jew, out of business for engaging in currency speculation and smuggling—malfeasance commonly stereotyped as being typical of Jews in the Soviet Union.⁴⁹

In keeping with the new thinking of the era, preemption came to supplant punishment: "any case when the Chekists fail to prevent a person's first step along the criminal path is a real professional failure." In order to save

46. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 3–14 ("Perestroika v rabote s kadrami: Na poprosi redaktsii Sbornika otvechaet zamestitel' Predsedatel'ia KGB SSSR V. A. Ponomarev," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

47. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 826, ark. 23–30 (Ramenskii and Grachev, "Vzgliad na perestroiku," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 125 [1988]).

48. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 848, ark. 35–38 (Viatkin, "Glasnost'—instrument deistvia," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 149 [1990]).

49. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 25–30 (Legan, "Iz opyta obshchaia profilakticheskoi raboty," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

a promising young science student, for example, who had turned his attention to reselling foreign audio-visual equipment, Leningrad's KGB turned, of all places, to the arch-capitalist Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: citing it explicitly, they posited that because the young man might be doing wrong but could not likely be persuaded of the fact, they should try to find the hidden reason for his confounding choice. Armed with this wisdom from the United States, they coaxed an admission, "I'm scum, a speculator, and a bastard."⁵⁰

The biggest issue for the KGB was the use of Soviet citizens to inform on other Soviet citizens, and the legality of recruiting such agents to assist their work. *Sbornik KGB SSSR* published dozens of highly technical articles about the various types of agents who could be recruited, with what purpose, and the legality of the full range of such arrangements. Over time, the rules became increasingly restrictive until, in December 1989, word came down that KGB officers would only be allowed to use agents they recruited within the Soviet Union to gain information about someone arrested for a crime or to conduct a background check on someone who had applied for work in the KGB. This represented a massive reduction in officers' abilities to gather information, and the editorial board's mailbag reflected it: letters of concern from KGB officers denouncing the leadership's decision flooded in from posts across the Soviet Union. The basic message was the same: the KGB without its agents penetrating every aspect of Soviet life, without a monopoly on information and privileged access thereto, was no KGB at all.⁵¹

Implementing perestroika and glasnost not only required looking forward, it also called for KGB officers to look back. The decisions of the January 1987 Plenum, one author wrote from the Tajik SSR, "compelled us to return to the analysis of past mistakes." Those guilty of "gross violations of discipline" were let go in order to get out from under the "heavy burden of past mistakes," a history rife with violations of "socialist legality."⁵² This reckoning would not only be on the KGB's terms: citizens now had a right to redress for unlawful persecution in the past.⁵³ With every day, more and more people across the Soviet Union demanded the rehabilitation of Stalin's victims, even if KGB leadership bemoaned the proliferation of "distorted ideas about the attitude of the Chekists to the tragic events of the personality cult period." By 1989 and 1990, the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR received thousands of demands to see the records of criminal proceedings and repayment for confiscated property (triple the 1988 figure). Some wrote individually, others collectively through the newly established Memorial, a civil society organization dedicated to exposing the truth about Soviet repression. In Murmansk, the KGB worked to

50. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 835, ark. 12–21 (Skomorokhov, "Velenie vremeni," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 134 [1989]).

51. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 841, ark. 58–59 ("Voprosy, trebiushche raz'iasneniia," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 140–141 [1990]).

52. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 3–9 (Petkel', "Kak my realizuem trebovaniia partii," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

53. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 56–61 (Iuzepchuk, "Vozmeshchenie usherba, prichinennogo neobosnovannym privilecheniem k otvetstvennosti," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

get its agents into positions of authority within the local Memorial chapter.⁵⁴ In Ukraine, the KGB and Memorial cooperated to identify some twenty mass graves and turn them into proper cemeteries.⁵⁵ Perm's KGB officers even took up a collection at work to erect a memorial to those repressed by their predecessors.⁵⁶ One demand remained a bridge too far, however: access to the KGB archives.⁵⁷

In, ironically, their final issue, *Sbornik KGB SSSR*'s editors cast their lot with those who wanted even more reform—and from below—in the KGB, promising that going forward they would provide a venue for free expression to all Chekists in response to a reader's letter calling for the creation of something akin to a KGB ombudsperson.⁵⁸ By then, they were too late.

Perestroika by Chekists

In Rostov, the local KGB's leadership came to a realization: they were working too hard. They had active operations throughout the city's economy, a huge drain on resources, but had not thought about, for example, whether the American spies those officers were meant to be rooting out actually existed in the first place. After reflection, over half of these activities were abandoned.⁵⁹ An audit in Samara found the same: of investigations into "treason against the motherland," 85 percent were abandoned due to lack of evidence.⁶⁰ Perestroika was introducing so many new demands that the intelligence wheat needed to be separated from the chaff.⁶¹

The process of major economic reform in the Soviet Union was an opportunity for many. In Leningrad, the rush of foreign firms to cash in on the opening Soviet economy brought with it a treasure-trove of new technology to steal, saving millions of rubles and accelerating the Intensification 90 economic plan for the oblast, which centered on automation, computerizing management and production.⁶² This influx of cash caused an uptick in bribery, including at the highest levels of the KGB in nearby Gatchina, whose leaders

54. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 32–34 (Veselov, "Put' k vzaimoponimaniuu—cherez 'kruglyi stol,'" *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 136 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 57–62 (Gorbatiuk, Drozov, and Shapovalov, "O rabote chekistov s pis'mami i obrashcheniiami grazhdan," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146–147 [1990]).

55. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 57–62 (Gorbatiuk, Drozov, and Shapovalov, "O rabote chekistov)."

56. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 848, ark. 35–38 (Viatkin, "Glasnost'—instrument deistvia," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 149 [1990]).

57. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 32–34 (Veselov, "Put' k vzaimoponimaniuu).

58. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 859, ark. 52 ("Iz redaktsionnoi pochty," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 160 [1991]).

59. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 28–33 (Voronov and Tumpel', "Zashchishchaem ob'ekty ekonomiki," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

60. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 854, ark. 40–45 (Aldashev, "O metodike operativnoi proverki," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 154 [1991]).

61. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 28–33 (Voronov and Tumpel', "Zashchishchaem ob'ekty).

62. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 820, ark. 9–14 (Sibarov, "Chekiskoe sodeistvie realizatsii programmy 'Intensifikatsiia-90,'" *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 119 [1987]); Blair A. Ruble, *Leningrad: Shaping A Soviet City* (Berkeley, 1990), 132–38.

were cashing in until they were fired.⁶³ Joint ventures between western and Soviet firms introduced other challenges as well. Many of the earliest and most enthusiastic participants from abroad were in fact Soviet émigrés. While their capital was welcome, the KGB feared that they would also bring with them dangerous nationalist and capitalist ideas.⁶⁴ In Minsk, for example, the number of foreign visitors for business purposes had increased from 376 in 1986 to 2887 by 1988, bringing with them forty-eight useful technologies for the KGB to steal.⁶⁵ Increasingly, the KGB came to see “obtaining” advanced technology as the key to solving “the social and economic problems afflicting [Soviet] society.”⁶⁶

Economically, the KGB’s responsibility also included making the Soviet Union attractive to foreign investors. The first order of business was infrastructure. Pervasive maintenance issues caused over 400 emergency incidents in 1987 and 1988 alone: 140 train crashes (of which twenty-five were passenger trains), ten shipwrecks, thirty plane crashes, and significant number of explosions, fires, and other incidents killing over 500.⁶⁷ In the shadow of the April 1986 disaster at the Chornobyl’ Nuclear Power Station north of Kyiv, Ukraine, monitoring other nuclear power plants for safety was an especially critical task lest foreign investment be scared off by another catastrophe.⁶⁸

These were all economic tasks within the KGB’s usual remit, albeit on a different scale, but perestroika and glasnost ushered in a new challenge to which Chekists were not accustomed: industrial action, especially strikes. Initially, these could be written off. When, for example, workers at the Noril’sk mines went on strike in 1989 for twelve days over issues including salary and living conditions, KGB officers chalked the action up to the fact that 70 percent of the workforce over the past five to ten years had come from the western parts of the country and brought with them with “selfish” desires like the “maximization of earnings,” bringing down the morale of the collective and leading to “demagoguery”; similar, but of course not linked, to the ongoing strikes in the Donbas and Vorkuta. This perception of the strike as more motivated by economic desires (greed, to be precise) than politics created an opportunity in the KGB’s eyes to “search for compromise solutions.” Highly critical of local officials for deluding themselves into thinking the situation would just resolve itself, the KGB also discovered that their idea of the strike as apolitical was itself a delusion after setting up a crisis cell in Noril’sk and learning that the striking miners’ grievances included complaints about the

63. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 820, ark. 14–17 (Safonov, “K chemu privodit beskontrol’nost’,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 119 [1987]).

64. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 13–15 (Sarkisian, “Podstraivaiutsia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

65. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 842, ark. 34–38 (Kovalenko and Peresiatnik, “Sredi inostrannykh spetsialistov,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 142 [1990]).

66. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 852, ark. 14–17 (Sham, Chogovadze, and Klimov, “KGB SSSR—ekonomike strany,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR*, no. 152 [1991]).

67. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 19–23 (Markevich and Panchenko, “Chrezvychainym proisshestviyam—nadezhnyi zaslon,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

68. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 9–13 (“Meniat’ stil’ raboty,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

conduct of Soviet foreign policy, especially the ongoing war in Afghanistan, the domestic political system, and rampant corruption.⁶⁹

1989 saw strikes across the Soviet Union. Workers in the Voroshilovgrad (present-day Luhans'k, Ukraine) coal mines issued demands “of a socio-economic nature, which in some cases took the form of ultimatums,” and ultimately seventy-three of ninety-three mines in the region went on strike—some 90,000 workers. The KGB set about having its agents elected to strike committees, and at the Krasnodonskoe, Stakhanovskii, and Sverdlovsk mines they managed to attain positions of significant responsibility, directing the committees towards what they deemed constructive negotiations and away from efforts by outside interlopers, mostly democratization activists, to give the strikes “a political character.”⁷⁰ This failed: the miners unionized and became a powerful political force, first for even more perestroika and glasnost, and then demanding Gorbachev's resignation and an end to communism. But across the Soviet Union, introducing agents into the leadership of troublesome groups became a common practice in order to “influence their development.”⁷¹

Elsewhere, overt politics were the order of the day. At the Podmoskovnaia mine in Tula oblast, for instance, workers made demands “of an economic and social nature” and declared a hunger strike, leading to an onslaught of messages of solidarity from across the Soviet Union. Local attempts to resolve the issue only drove the number of hunger-strikers from eight to fifty-seven.⁷² Gradually, the KGB came to appreciate explicitly that the line between economic and political issues was permeable, to say the least. The summer 1989 strikes in Kemerovo oblast, for example, cited the fact that theirs was the fifth-most important region in the Russian SSR for industrial production, but forty-second in housing, sixty-sixth in medical access, and seventieth in quality of schools. Many lived in unsafe conditions due to industrial pollution, and thus life expectancy was markedly lower than the Soviet average; improved sanitary conditions for workers topped the list of the strikers' demands, along with higher pay and more vacation time. The KGB immediately established contact with the strike committee and helped its agents to join and rise within it, especially to rebuff the overtures of liberal political parties. That proved straightforward: the miners made it clear they had little time for activists from Moscow, and those who purported to speak for them were spurned—once, to the great satisfaction of the local KGB, live in front of US news cameras.⁷³

The Kemerovo oblast strikers' demands presaged a new issue the KGB would have to grapple with: the environment. The Arkhangel'sk KGB paid

69. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 835, ark. 6–11 (Shenin, “ChP za poliarnym krugom,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 134 [1989]).

70. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 838, ark. 25–30 (Shama, “Chto pokazala zabastovka shakhterov,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 137 [1989]).

71. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 854, ark. 36–39 (Podeliakin and Sukhanov, “Taktika prostaia—v rady mitinguiushchikh!” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 154 [1991]).

72. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 840, ark. 31–32 (Sorokin, “Konflikt lokalizovan sovmetstnymi usiliiami,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 139 [1989]).

73. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 842, ark. 38–42 (Mekshun and Savin, “Na shakhterskikh perekrestkakh,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 142 [1990]).

particular attention to sentiment in indigenous communities ravaged by the toxic effects of Soviet nuclear testing on the Novaia Zemlia archipelago.⁷⁴ Salavat, in the Republic of Bashkortostan, was once the emblem of Soviet technological progress due to its numerous chemical plants. Propagandists had once plastered the city with posters declaring, “The twentieth century is the century of chemistry!” Now, the KGB there focused on the “victims of chemistry” poisoned by contaminated drinking water in a city where life expectancy was under fifty years and infant mortality was skyrocketing, inserting agents in plants to ensure safety regulations were upheld without potentially lethal corner-cutting.⁷⁵

“Green” issues gradually took on a sinister aspect in the eyes of the KGB.⁷⁶ The United States, one popular line of argument held, was using ecological concerns to suppress the economic potential of the Soviet Union. Organizers of symposia on climate change, the effects of pollution, and even birds of prey were all found by the KGB to have suspicious (even if decades-old, many from WWII) connections to western intelligence. New efforts to bring the Soviet Union into international research projects on the environment were viewed with suspicion, as Trojan horses to give US intelligence access to sensitive economic data. And ecological groups were seen as convenient dupes for western intelligence services to pursue their own nefarious campaigns to undermine the Kremlin.⁷⁷ The Volgograd KGB worked to infiltrate the environmentalist movement both to “protect [it] from anti-socialist elements” and to identify any extremists within. This prevented, for example, those who had been exposed to unsafe levels of chemical pollution from coordinating with other “socially disadvantaged” groups across the Soviet Union, as well as their “Western ‘friends’” from providing environmental monitoring equipment—or receiving soil, air, and water samples from the Soviet Union for analysis.⁷⁸

New Thinking, New Challenges

Environmental activism was just one of the many forces unleashed by glasnost that the KGB would have to grapple with. The most pressing was not new, but reached a fever pitch during the late 1980s: nationalism. According to KGB authors, the only nationalism that existed in the Soviet Union was non-Russian.⁷⁹ Ideas like the “revival of Russia” were not the problem, and were even celebrated in *Sbornik KGB SSSR*’s pages. Rather, it was non-Russians’

74. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 849, ark. 50–51 (Andreev, “Nash deputat,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 150 [1990]).

75. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 28–32 (Ustiakin, “Professional’naia aksioma,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146–147 [1990]).

76. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 853, ark. 1 (The March 1991 issue featured, for the first time, a section titled “Ecology and Security”: *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 153 [1991]).

77. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 853, ark. 32–35 (Leshin and Bakatin, “Pytaiutsia pomiat’ ‘zelenoe’ dvizhenie,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 153 [1991]).

78. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 853, ark. 35–38 (Torgashov and Stolbin, “‘Ekologiiia’ otkazyvaetsia ot ekstremizma,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 153 [1991]).

79. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 848, ark. 35–38 (Viatkin, “Glasnost’—instrument deistvia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 149 [1990]).

aspirations that posed a threat.⁸⁰ In the KGB of the late 1980s, Russians and Ukrainians predominated; even if a representative of the local nationality headed the KGB in a given SSR, the deputy would invariably be Russian—and report back regularly to the Lubyanka.⁸¹

Early suggestions that this issue could flare up as a result of perestroika and glasnost came from the Baltics, where one KGB officer warned that many resented Moscow's control as a result of the “allegedly forcible Sovietization” of the 1940s.⁸² In Bauska, Latvia, the five-man KGB office vowed to work together not as five fingers, but one clenched fist to smash the opponents of the Soviet Union. They exercised that power, for example, by making sure that the coffin of a young Latvian killed when he was run over by a Soviet Army convoy while riding his bicycle would not have the flag of “bourgeois Latvia” draped over it by staging a KGB show of force at his funeral—all, of course, in the context of “expanding democracy.”⁸³

Often, that power was needed to make up for the Party's shortcomings. In Sakhalin, the KGB launched Operation Groundswell to counter Japanese claims to the island. A key component of this was improving the standard of living of the Korean minority there, including facilitating meetings with relatives living in both North and South Korea, resuming the teaching of Korean in schools, and introducing courses on Korean history at the university level.⁸⁴ In a similar vein, the Arkhangelsk KGB focused on improving the quality of life of the indigenous peoples of Russia's far north.⁸⁵ But elsewhere, measures designed to placate ethnic minorities brought with them new concerns. In Turkmenistan, for example, non-Russian locals conscripted into the Soviet Army demanded to only perform their service on their territory, not elsewhere in the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ And in Perm', KGB officers were wary of the reestablishment of mosques and increased surveillance of the local Muslim Tatar population.⁸⁷

Ukraine was a hotbed of nationalism. KGB officers decried the local activists and foreign elements (especially in Canada and the United States) working together to create an anti-Soviet underground, to whitewash the crimes of “the Nazis and their [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist] minions,” and to build support for Ukrainian independence. They denounced this as

80. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 849, ark. 50–51 (Andreev, “Nash deputat,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 150 [1990]).

81. Amy W. Knight, “Internal Security,” in Raymond E. Zickel, ed., *Soviet Union: A Country Study*, (Washington, DC, 1991), 770.

82. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 825, ark. 32–38 (Zukul, “Natselennost' uprezhdaiushchikh deistvii,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 124 [1988]).

83. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 824, ark. 13–22 (Skomorokhov and Sarana “Chekistskie budni,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 123 [1988]).

84. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 840, ark. 10–15 (“Chto pokazala proverka,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 139 [1989]).

85. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 849, ark. 50–51 (Andreev, “Nash deputat,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 150 [1990]).

86. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 848, ark. 38–43 (Dolzhenkov, “Turkmenskii fenomen,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 149 [1990]).

87. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 848, ark. 35–38 (Viatkin, “Glasnost'—instrument deistvia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 149 [1990]).

“profiteering off the processes of glasnost and democratization” in the Soviet Union. But efforts to curtail Ukrainians’ activities were frustrated by the fact that much of the leadership of Ukrainian nationalist organizations lived abroad and nationalist elements in the Soviet Union were coordinating and sharing their experience evading surveillance through the newly constituted Committee of National Democratic Movements.⁸⁸

The Kyiv KGB reported staggering numbers: as a result of Gorbachev’s reforms, some 47,000 organizations sprung up in Ukraine, many led by “convicted nationalists” and anti-Soviet in character. With foreign financial assistance and support from religious organizations, these groups could send activists throughout the SSR and stage thousands of rallies, hiding behind claims that their motives were to improve the quality of life in Ukraine, as opposed to fascist sympathies. The KGB’s main focus was on exposing links between nationalists in Ukraine and “Banderite centers” abroad, a reference to Stepan Bandera, the WWII-era leader of the Ukrainian nationalists with connections to Nazism. These efforts led to seventy-four arrests, but even more valuable were the tough questions journalists posed about foreign influence to nationalist leaders as a result.⁸⁹

In April 1990, *Sbornik KGB SSSR* sent one of its special correspondents (himself a KGB officer) on a tour of Ukraine to see how glasnost was affecting it and the entire Soviet “multinational state.” Much had changed. Whereas in 1944, advancing Soviet troops had hoisted the red banner over L’viv, now all he saw were the yellow and blue flags of Ukraine. “The coat of arms and the flag are symbols of the state, symbols of power,” the correspondent found himself thinking. “What does the replacement. . .of these emblems mean?” Throughout his travels across Ukraine, he found his answer. In the newly elected L’viv City Council, only thirty-three of the 150 deputies were communist—a surprisingly good outcome, according to the head of the L’viv KGB, given the depth of anti-Soviet sentiment. Rumor had it the citizens wanted to tear down the statue of Lenin and replace it with one of Bandera. Russians, meanwhile, were beginning to fear for their safety.⁹⁰

More and more demonstrations did turn violent all across the Soviet Union, such that many of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*’s correspondents found themselves working the massacre beat, beginning with the April 9, 1989, killing of twenty-one (and injuring of hundreds more) by the Soviet military in Tbilisi, in the Georgian SSR, following the “irresponsible actions of extremist and nationalist groups” and, admittedly, some miscalculations in efforts to disperse them. In Tbilisi’s KGB offices a week later, “it seemed as if even the air was saturated with bad news” as 1,439 people were interrogated over the ten-day curfew period that followed the killings. Clearly, the forces of nationalism

88. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 15–20 (Pavlenko and Shevchuk, “Pri aktivnom uchastii mass,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 835, ark. 31–34 (Samoilenko and Litvin, “Ukrainskie natsionalisty meniaiat taktiku,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 134 [1989]).

89. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 840, ark. 16–23 (Podgainyi and Zolototrubov, “Priobretaem opyt,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 139 [1989]).

90. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 35–44 (Zdanovich, “V interesakh liudei vsekh natsional’nostei,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

posed an even greater threat than had been previously appreciated.⁹¹ After the June 4, 1989, massacre at Fergana, in the eastern Uzbek SSR, another correspondent reported the feeling of the local KGB. "I never considered myself a sensitive person, but what happened . . . shocked me," he recounted. "The power of the crowd, uncontrollable, implacable, ready to turn on anyone who stood up to them." Only KGB officers who spoke Uzbek could get through to the mob, but it was too little, too late; somewhere in the archives of the KGB, a videotape of the entire violent episode is preserved.⁹² In Dushanbe in February 1990, what began as an attack on the local Party headquarters devolved into a riot focused on attacking women dressed in "European clothes," and ultimately engulfed the entire Tajik SSR capital. In the span of a few days, 219 properties were ransacked, 103 vehicles were destroyed, twenty-three people died, and a further 395 civilians and 170 police and military personnel were seriously injured.⁹³ Clearly, the "healthy forces in society" needed all the help they could get.⁹⁴

Vying with nationalism for a monopoly on KGB officers' time in the new Soviet Union were organized and violent crime.⁹⁵ Extortion became a major issue: 25,000 Rubles from the priests of the Ascension Cathedral in Elets or else a bomb would detonate; 60,000 Rubles from the management of the Cherepovets Metallurgical Plant, or the machinery would be fouled; and 1,500 Rubles per child in a string of kidnappings in Kirovgrad.⁹⁶ Often using accomplices on the inside, criminals armed themselves.⁹⁷ Explosives, too, went missing, and the KGB was always on the lookout for a bomb smuggled into a crowded public place.⁹⁸ One officer even went so far as to endorse relaxing firearms laws for self-defense, so ubiquitous was violent crime.⁹⁹

Hijackings and hostage-takings also increased in frequency.¹⁰⁰ In Cheliabinsk, a group of prisoners overpowered their guards and took six

91. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 832, ark. 33–40 (Zdanovich, "Trevozhnye dni i nochi Tbilisi," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 132 [1989]).

92. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 25–32 (Dolzhikov, "Etogo nel'zia bol'she dopustit'," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 136 [1989]).

93. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 44–50 (Przhezdomskii, "Otriady samooborony daiut otpor ekstremistam," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

94. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 23–30 ("Po rezul'tatam proverki," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

95. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 831, ark. 6–8 ("Osnovnoe sredstvo resheniia chakistskikh zadach," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 130 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 850, ark. 19–22 (Butorin and Kotov, "Tol'ko sovместnymi usiliiami," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 158–159 [1991]).

96. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 5–10 ("Pervye operatsii chekistov v voine, ob'iavennoi prestupnosti," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 136 [1989]).

97. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 838, ark. 41–45 (Fedoseev, "Promakh 'snaiperov,'" *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 137 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 23–27 (Grechishkin, "Prestuplenie predotvrashcheno," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

98. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 825, ark. 45–51 (Dobrovolskii and Artamonov, "Aktual'nye voprosi deiatel'nosti dezhurnykh sluzhnb organov gosbezopasnosti," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 124 [1988]).

99. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 859, ark. 60–61 (Fedotov, "Zakonodateliu sdelovalo by. . .," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 160 [1991]).

100. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 832, ark. 48–53 (Izmodenov and Davydov, "Pobytko uguna samoleta predotvrashchena," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 132 [1989]).

other inmates and their visiting family members hostage, demanding weapons, cars to escape, and an extravagant quantity of vodka.¹⁰¹ One would-be hijacker planned to kidnap a group of Young Pioneers in the Far East and to demand money, weapons, and a plane to fly to Moscow, where they would be joined by some accomplices and then fly on to the west. Instead of landing in Moscow, he planned to parachute out of the plane en route (with what equipment remained unclear) and escape the Soviet Union on foot, but he was apprehended before he could carry out his plans—those he tried to recruit as accomplices were understandably reticent.¹⁰² According to Viktor Karpukhin, commander of the KGB's Alpha Group, the Soviet Union's premiere counter-terrorist unit, hostage-takings, hijackings, and the like would only increase in frequency.¹⁰³

Fighting organized crime proved easier said than done due to “the merging of administrative and other state bodies with criminal elements.”¹⁰⁴ In Dnipropetrovs'k (present-day Dnipro, Ukraine), for example, the local branch of the Promstroibank of the Soviet Union demanded bribes in exchange for the loans for capital improvements which were their enterprise's *raison d'être*.¹⁰⁵ Tax evasion, especially amongst those in management with financial-over-sight roles, was rampant.¹⁰⁶ In Murmansk, oil stockpiled for the ships of the Northern Fleet based there was shipped abroad as industrial waste on manifests and sold for profit.¹⁰⁷ In Riga, one cooperative sold 206 tons of nickel and titanium to foreign buyers at domestic, not global, market prices. In Turkestan, another sold high-alloy steel abroad for (significantly lower) cast-iron prices. Such “metallurgical mafiosi” were costing the state billions in lost export revenues.¹⁰⁸

The Soviet Union enjoyed, according to KGB experts, the twentieth-most developed shadow economy in the world, accounting for roughly 10 percent of all economic activity. This black market was nothing new, but it was virtually impossible to shut down: its foundation was the completely normal, but unmet, needs of the Soviet people, and leading figures in the shadow economy were also leading figures in the regular economy and, all too often, Soviet

101. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 841, ark. 29–33 (Lobanov, “Na razmyshlenie daiu,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 140–141 [1990]).

102. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 842, ark. 28–34 (Bykov, Tumanov, and Trusov, “Ne dali ostupit'sia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 142 [1990]).

103. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 833, ark. 59–63 (“Minuta na obezvrezhivanie prestupnikov,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 133 [1989]).

104. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 840, ark. 10–15 (“Chto pokazala proverka,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 139 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 52–57 (Legan and Martirosov, “Obsuzhdeny problemy bor'by s organizovannoi prestupnost'iu,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 850, ark. 19–22 (Butorin and Kotov, “Tol'ko sovместnymi usiliiami,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 158–159 [1991]).

105. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 57–58 (Savchuk, “Arestovan vziatochnik iz Promstroibanka,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

106. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 850, ark. 19–22 (Butorin and Kotov, “Tol'ko sovместnymi usiliiami,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 158–159 [1991]).

107. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 33–37 (Zdanovich, “Novyi faktor,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146–147 [1990]).

108. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 851, ark. 57–64 (Ustiakin, “Gangstery-metallisty,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 151 [1991]).

politics.¹⁰⁹ It also crossed jurisdictional lines, meaning that much criminal activity went unnoticed or was inadequately investigated, as different KGB offices protected their turf, and other law-enforcement agencies protected theirs against KGB encroachment.¹¹⁰

Sbornik KGB SSSR's correspondents noted with dismay that the KGB was not adequately equipped for the fight against organized crime. "The need to combat [it] is obvious. However, legislators are in no hurry to codify a legal framework... .Meanwhile, the monster is becoming impudent, attacking the political and economic system of our state, and encroaching on the personal, labor, and property rights of citizens."¹¹¹ In the summer of 1991, the head of KGB's organized-crime task force, Dmitrii Lukin, bemoaned the fact that it was still not a priority in Moscow. Whereas criminals in the US contented themselves with vice, he had to contend with "a shadow economy based on a deficit of everything."¹¹²

The KGB was not immune to this dearth of goods. In Uzhgorod, for example, officers made do with vehicles and even weapons seized from smugglers, as the office had none of its own. And in Donetsk, KGB officers had to use their personal cars for work as the lone official vehicle was always broken down. Many from the KGB's ranks ended up leaving law enforcement for the criminal underworld, or to become private bodyguards protecting their employers from it. This, the *Sbornik KGB SSSR* correspondents made clear, was unacceptable: "the stakes in the fight against organized crime are too high—the Soviet state itself."¹¹³

"Militant Islam," growing in influence on the Soviet Union's borders with Iranian support, constituted another new threat.¹¹⁴ In the Tajik SSR, KGB officers warned that US and Pakistani intelligence services were building a local Islamist underground "in their struggle to create an Islamic state." Those organizations also smuggled weapons and drugs (along with militants) into the Soviet Union from across the border in Afghanistan to fill their coffers. In fact, the end of Soviet military operations in Afghanistan in February 1989 was a setback to the KGB's counter-smuggling efforts according to many, as they could no longer gather intelligence on the Afghan side of the border with ease.¹¹⁵

Other elements of the international situation also boded ill. As Gorbachev signed arms control treaties, the inspection regimes that came into force brought US spies into the heart of the Soviet Union's most sensitive military

109. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 43–51 ("Tenevaia ekonomika: Ee struktura i masshaby," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146–147 [1990]).

110. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 850, ark. 9–18 (Borisov, "Organizovannaia prestupnost' kak ob'ekt deiatel'nosti KGB," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 158–159 [1991]).

111. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 19–28 (Bul'din, Veselov, and Gurskii, "Pereval," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146–147 [1990]).

112. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 857, ark. 3–12 (Kucherov, "Bor'ba idet beskompromissnaia," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 157 [1991]).

113. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 19–28 (Bul'din, Veselov, and Gurskii, "Pereval").

114. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 3–9 (Petkel', "Kak my realizuem trebovaniia partii," *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 117 [1987]).

115. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 841, ark. 20–28 (Bul'din and Zaleskii, "Gonets 'dzhikhada,'" *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 140–141 [1990]).

installations and sent Soviet officials with heads full of state secrets into the clutches of US intelligence overseas: US officials conducted 237 inspections at 118 sites, while the Soviets only conducted sixty-nine at thirty-one installations. US inspectors never discussed anything important in their accommodations or during the inspections, obliging the KGB to extensively (and expensively) bug nearby walking and jogging trails, sports fields, and shops to pick up gossip.¹¹⁶ To the KGB, the entire US inspection regime was a massive intelligence-gathering effort, a point they had made consistently since the beginning of arms-control negotiations and verification regimes decades earlier.¹¹⁷

Going to the People

The KGB had a problem: their new job was to help strengthen democratic principles in Soviet society, but they had no idea what that meant in practice.¹¹⁸ “Yes, the time has come for such a thing,” one Sakhalin-based KGB officer concluded, “Chekists must go to the people!”¹¹⁹

Liberated to do so openly by glasnost, Soviet citizens formed discussion clubs and other informal associations to debate the issues of the day—and, by the late 1980s, there were many. At first only observing these gatherings, in which the past trespasses of the KGB were a hot topic, the KGB of Omsk oblast concluded that joining them would offer a valuable platform to tell their side of the story directly, unmediated by local Party officials. The Omsk State University discussion club was an especially hostile body, where professors lambasted the Kremlin to a receptive audience and students began to “use the concepts of perestroika for their own purposes” to demand new freedoms, including to criticize the KGB. The KGB took matters into its own hands and sent a delegation to the discussion group. Six officers usually responsible for surveilling the politically unreliable, many of them alumni of the university themselves, came prepared to give verbal answers to a dozen written questions submitted in advance. What they found was something else entirely: their “opponents” were well prepared to embarrass them, as they found themselves sat in the middle of a hostile room—“we were surrounded, as it were”—fielding questions from all angles imbued with “more emotions than reason” for three long hours. After the formal meeting ended, however, something changed and “a completely different conversation began—calm and friendly, with levity and joking.” The KGB would need to learn how to debate,

116. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 10–16 (Epifantsev and Shironin, “Novyi faktor operativnoi obstanovki,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 136 [1989]).

117. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 9–13 (Laptev and Andreev, “Vokrug inspektorov iz SShA,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

118. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 20–21 (“Voroshilovgradskie chekisty ukrepliaut sviazi s trudiashchimisia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

119. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 6–9 (Dolzhikov, “Vremia podoshlo takoe—v narod idti chekistam,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]). The reference to the “going to the people” movement of late nineteenth century Russia, which saw members of the intelligentsia go out among the peasantry hoping to inspire them to revolution, cannot have been lost on readers.

it became clear, and after the meeting, the six officers who had attended the Omsk State University gathering began posing the questions they had fielded to others, who took turns in the hot seat being grilled by their comrades. None distinguished themselves in these trainings, and that would not do. What the Soviet people wanted most was “open and frank discussion,” unlike the scripted question-and-answer sessions of the past. If the KGB did not dive in, the conversation would be dominated by anti-Soviet “demagogues.”¹²⁰

In Gor’kii (Nizhnii Novgorod today), the local KGB hand-selected agents to send to discussion groups for their skills in debate to dispel rumors about the KGB, make the case for its positive role in society, and also to ask hard questions of the liberals who dominated such gatherings, with a particular focus on their alleged links with the west. The KGB filmed these meetings, sometimes reviewing the tape to identify errors on the part of officers who participated, such as missed opportunities to discredit the opposition or flubbed answers to unexpected questions, and sometimes disseminating the film when it cast the KGB in a favorable light.¹²¹ In Arkhangel’sk oblast as well, discussion clubs were the best means of understanding the changes underway in society available to the KGB, and of perhaps influencing their course. In advance of a meeting at the Arkhangel’sk Pedagogical Institute (now the Mikhail Lomonosov Pomorskii State University), they received eighty questions in advance for the KGB delegation to answer. For three hours, they reported back, “questions literally rained down.” When KGB officers expressed their own opinions, as opposed to reciting dogma, however, they seemed to sway the crowd.¹²²

Other avenues also existed for outreach. In Ukraine, retired officers volunteered to share their stories with the public to counter the KGB’s pernicious image.¹²³ In Dagestan, the head of the local KGB appeared on the television show “S vami vstrechaetsia,” in preparation for which the KGB set up a veritable war room to take the pulse of the public. Topping the list of public concerns: that glasnost and perestroika were all a ruse to smoke out regime opponents for another round of repression on the scale of the 1930s.¹²⁴ In Perm’, the KGB used factories like the Sverdlov engine plant as settings for encounters with the public, an established practice, for example holding a conference on the book *Perm’ Chekists*, with its “heroic-patriotic themes,” including resistance by Perm’-based KGB officers to 1930s and 1940s repression as well as the work

120. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 826, ark. 42–46 (Lobanov, “Posleslovie k dialogu,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 125 [1988]).

121. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 16–19 (Krylov and Sintsov, “Nuzhny nastypatel’ nye deistviia,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]); HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 854, ark. 36–39 (Podeliakin and Sukhanov, “Taktika prostaia—v rady mitinguiushchikh!,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 154 [1991]).

122. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 22–25 (Shipovskii, “Byt’ v gushche sobytii,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

123. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 846, ark. 57–62 (Gorbatiuk, Drozov, and Shapovalov, “O rabote chekistov”).

124. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 36–39 (Trusov, “V priamom efire,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

done by the KGB in recent years to rehabilitate those repressed in the past.¹²⁵ Such encounters spread across the Soviet Union and took on wholly new characteristics. In Tashkent, 140 young people came to a meeting demanding an end to the use of informers for KGB work, as it was “incompatible with socialist relations.”¹²⁶ In Sakhalin, a series of meetings—many broadcast live on radio and television—brought 2,000 people face to face with the KGB, who fielded some 400 questions about how it supported perestroika and glasnost. Openness about both the present and the past was now “a mandatory part of the activities of the KGB.”¹²⁷ In Ukraine, in fact, the KGB made debate and round-table-participation part of their training regimen, complete with role-players and scenarios designed to familiarize officers with “the democratic form of discussion.”¹²⁸

By June 1988, Gorbachev had persuaded his colleagues to introduce political competition into the Soviet system, and in early 1989 the 2,500 deputies were elected.¹²⁹ “The Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union brought our country into a qualitatively new orbit of democracy and glasnost, aroused in every Soviet person a sense of personal responsibility and interest in a large-scale renewal of the political, moral and socio-economic life of society,” one KGB-officer author celebrated—and some of those participants were themselves his colleagues from the security services.¹³⁰ Many were the usual suspects when it came to high office in the Soviet Union, the KGB Chairmen of many SSRs as well as the heads of the KGB Border Guards Political Department and of the KGB’s Dynamo sports club. The outlier was Captain Sergei Beliaev, assistant to the head of the Political Department of the Blagoveshchensk Detachment of Border Guards in the Far East. He won his seat at just twenty-two years of age as a Komsomol-backed candidate.¹³¹ Beliaev, in the estimate of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*’s first-ever (and last) election commentator, understood the need to forge a connection with the electorate. He held some fifty meetings with voters from Kamchatka to Crimea and gave interviews to a wide range of media outlets. And the KGB was not above helping its candidates, using surveillance and information on popular moods amongst the electorate, for example, to steer them away from discussing sensitive issues such as the effect of the Chornobyl’ disaster in Belarus, organized crime in Turkmenistan, and religion in Azerbaijan. For some, however, a KGB affiliation was a liability, such as the head of the Estonian SSR’s KGB, whose nomination was greeted with a bevy of newspaper stories alleging that

125. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 830, ark. 40–41 (Shatalin and Konoplev, “V gostiakh u motorostroitelei,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 129 [1989]).

126. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 837, ark. 39–40 (Sidak, “Kruglyi stol’ v Tashkente,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 136 [1989]).

127. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 839, ark. 6–9 (Dolzhikov, “Vremia podoshlo takoe—v narod idti chekistam,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 138 [1989]).

128. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 847, ark. 39–40 (Drobakh, Podobnyi, and Nuriakhmetov, “Proveli delovuiu igru,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 148 [1990]).

129. Vadim Medvedev, *V kommande Gorbacheva*, (Moscow, 1994), 75.

130. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 835, ark. 12–21 (Skomorokhov, “Velenie vremeni,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 134 [1989]).

131. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 832, ark. 5–9 (“Chekisty—Narodnye deputaty SSSR,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 131 [1989]).

the military was being coerced into voting for him and that he had a different platform for Russian- and Estonian-speaking voters. He lost to an Estonian nationalist.¹³²

In the pages of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*, as debates raged over whether officers should be allowed to belong to political parties, KGB officers made clear that they opposed reforms that would change its character as the “sword and shield” of one specific party: the Communist Party. After all, one author summed up, “the requirement for [it] to be engaged primarily in ensuring not the security of the state, society, its constitutional system, sovereignty, and economic and defense potential. . . is analogous to a demand to transform the KGB into a charitable organization.”¹³³ That he saw all of the above as synonymous with protecting the Party is telling of just how profoundly some in the KGB failed to understand the whole point of democratization, even as they actively participated in that same process.

Openness might not have come naturally to the KGB, but gradually it became a fact of life in the Soviet Union, whether they liked it or not. In the Lubianka, KGB leaders celebrated the success of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*'s public issue to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of WWII.¹³⁴ But this success also signified why the journal had, in other ways, become irrelevant: the KGB's access to privileged information was eroded by glasnost, and to the extent that information was one of the KGB's power sources in the Soviet Union, that signaled an existential crisis. Glasnost had destroyed its information monopoly.

In the pages of the official, classified version of *Sbornik KGB SSSR*, the KGB disseminated information throughout the Soviet Union from leaders and officers in the field. As everyday life in the Soviet Union changed during the late 1980s, so too did the everyday lives of those KGB officers. As Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost reforms accelerated, KGB officers found themselves positive participants in the transformational process—not, as they are so often depicted, trying to stymie the changes afoot in the Soviet Union but trying (with varying degrees of success) to implement them. These rank-and-file officers used *Sbornik KGB SSSR* to speak out about the issues that mattered to and challenged them in their unique line of work. Though they took their superiors to task for failing to appreciate the gravity of new threats, such as terrorism and organized crime, and even for the lack of resources Moscow provided them to do their jobs, some limits clearly remained. No mention, for example, was made of the August 1991 coup and the role of the KGB in attempting to unseat Gorbachev in the two issues following the attempt.¹³⁵

132. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 832, ark. 10–14 (“Pervyi opyt predvybornoi bor'by,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 131 [1989]).

133. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 855, ark. 34–40 (Komkov, “Zakonproekt ob organakh gosbezopastnosti: ‘Za’ i ‘protiv,’” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 155 [1991]).

134. HDASBU, f. 13, op. 1, spr. 844, ark. 70–73 (Skomorokhov, “‘Prem'era' gazety,” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 144 [1990]).

135. HDASBU, f. 15, op. 1, spr. 850, ark. 80 (These issues went to press on September 4 and October 31, while the coup's key leaders had all been arrested by August 22: *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 158–159 [1991]); HDASBU, f. 15, op. 1, spr. 859, ark. 64 (*Sbornik KGB SSSR* 160 [1991]).

As a source, *Sbornik KGB SSSR* is a window into the world of the Soviet Union's key coercive organ. It paints only a partial picture of the Gorbachev era and the process of the Soviet Union's disintegration, to be sure. But the issues on which KGB officers chose to focus when they put pen to paper—nationalism, environmentalism, organized crime, corruption and inefficiency, and economic turmoil—all played their part in bringing down the Soviet flag one final time from over the Kremlin on the night of December 25, 1991.