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## AFIO Exclusive Book Review (June 2024)

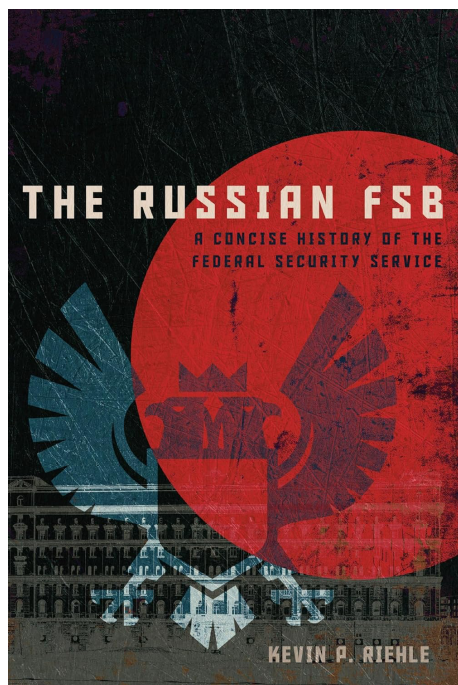
### *The Russian FSB: A Concise History of the Federal Security Service*

by Kevin P. Riehle  
Georgetown University Press  
March 2024

Review by former  
CIA Deputy Chief of Russia Operations  
**John Sipher\***

**K**evin Riehle's new book "The Russian FSB" is a valuable primer on the organization central to Vladimir Putin's control of the Kremlin, and key to understanding both Russian and Soviet history.

The Russian secret police are the one constant that defines Russian history from the Tsars to the Soviets and today. They are a state-within-a-state, and as long as they maintain their power, Russia is unlikely to develop as a responsible member of the international community. Putin's Russia relies on several intelligence and security organs to include a civilian and military foreign intelligence service. However, the most powerful organization supporting Putin's political power is the Russian domestic security service, the FSB. The FSB is inheritor of the feared KGB, and the Kremlin's machine for repression. It has its tentacles embedded in every aspect of Russian society. Riehle's book is a much-needed English language overview of the FSB's history and its role in Putin's Russia.



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Today's FSB is a direct descendent of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Tsarist secret police and terrorist organs rebuilt by Lenin and Stalin. Like its predecessors, the FSB's primary role is to keep the leadership in power at all costs – regime security vice national security. Today's FSB manufactures and maintains a culture of fear to convince the population that they are constantly under siege from foreign spies and saboteurs. The political siege narrative justifies a massive

police state to stifle potential dissent, repress civil society and protect the leadership. They use pervasive surveillance, threats, arrests and even assassination to keep the populace from threatening Putin's power. In turn, the culture of fear insures the primacy of the state security

organs. Only the powerful security services can keep Russia safe in a dangerous world with enemies everywhere.

Before becoming President in 1999, former KGB officer Vladimir Putin served as the Head of the FSB. While there, he used the power of the secret police to destroy then-President Boris Yeltsin's enemies and manufacture threats to justify crackdowns on ethnic groups inside Russia. While many institutions experienced reform after the fall of the Soviet Union, the FSB maintained its size, structure, power and influence from its KGB days. Subsequent leaders saw the secret police as a handy means to destroy their enemies, and the FSB has become a veritable state-within-a-state, accountable to only one man.

Riehl's book will be useful to journalists, academics and national security professionals as the primary primer on the history, structure, organization and leadership of Russia's most important institution.

**\*John Sipher**, a CIA Distinguished Career Medal recipient and former Deputy Chief of CIA's Russia Operations, was involved in the effort to neutralize FBI mole Robert Hanssen and—earlier in his career—served as an operations officer in Moscow. He currently serves as a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and is co-founder of **Spycraft Entertainment**, a global production company run by former US and UK senior intelligence officers and an experienced producer that connects the worlds of Hollywood and intelligence. Mr. Sipher's articles on foreign policy and intelligence matters have been published in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Washington Post, Politico, Foreign Affairs, Time, and Newsweek, among others. He appears on the PBS NewsHour, CNN, NPR, MSNBC, BBC and speaks to corporate, academic and governmental groups. He can be heard on major podcast platforms exploring conspiracy theories as host and producer of **Mission Implausible**.