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Three Shields and One Sword

Soviet Border Troops, Internal Troops, Militia and the KGB in Visual Propaganda in the 1930s–1990s

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This thesis examines Soviet visual propaganda in the forms of posters, medals, and postage stamps. The specific area of interest is the portrayal of Soviet domestic security services – the KGB, the Border and Internal Troops, and the Militia. The purpose of this thesis is to form an idea of how the Soviet Union wanted to portray its security services, and in which visual ways they tried to achieve this desired result, and to add a more security services heavy perspective to an already abundant research area of Soviet propaganda.

The methods used in this thesis are semiotics, compositional interpretation, and content analysis. Through these methods, the posters, medals, and stamps can be analysed from individual aspects to larger wholes. Colours, symbols, and words are looked at in contexts of Soviet culture and communist invented tradition, and are then considered in a wider continuity of selected Soviet propaganda pieces from the 1930s to 1990s. Material for the KGB is lacking, which also gives an idea of what the Soviet Union did not want to show audiences.

The main results of this thesis are that, with the help of familiar Orthodox symbolism, the Soviet Union aimed for an uneven mixture of trustworthy safety and intimidating power, where the organs' sword and shield emblems became a lot more focused on the shield, rather than the more violent symbol. Visual propaganda tried to present the Soviet security services as benevolent forces who were there to help, serve, and protect the nation and its people, only capable of hurting external enemies. The KGB was more often left with the role of the sword, when it was not left in obscurity.

Key words: Soviet Union, propaganda, security, KGB, MVD

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1 Introduction

Visual propaganda has been considered an effective way to influence masses and drive forward different agendas. The Soviet Union was a globally prominent producer and utiliser of visual propaganda throughout its entire existence. Visual advertisements, mainly in the form of posters, rose in popularity towards the end of the 19th century.[1] Later, during and after the October Revolution in 1917, such visual media gained a new importance in revolutionary and communist ideological messaging to the wider audience at the forefront of the Bolsheviks' initial plans: workers and peasants in a nation where literacy rates were low and where traditional culture was highly visual.[2]

The Soviet Union was founded in 1922, after revolution and a civil war ended with the Bolsheviks usurping power from the Russian Tsar and defeating resistance.[3] The new system operated with a sense of terror, in large part due to the implementation of powerful domestic security services.[4] Dissent, desertion, or any other perceived betrayal of the Soviet Union would often result in violent or otherwise disproportionate retaliation from the state, often with the direct involvement of the secret police organs.[5] The history of such services predates the Soviet Union by centuries, and has still carried on after the dissolution of the Soviet system in the form of the Federal Security Service (FSB). Between the years 1565 and 1917, there were at least four imperial secret services.[6] The last one of them, *Ohrana*, persevered until the October Revolution in 1917, after which it was replaced by the Bolshevik's *Cheka* (VChK) in the same year.[7] *Cheka* started the long list of Soviet secret police organs: from 1917 to 1991, there were 11 different stages for the most infamous organ, starting with *Cheka* and ending in the Committee for State Security (KGB).[8]

The aim of my thesis is to take a look at how the Soviet Union portrayed its domestic security services in visual propaganda, and how those in control of the propaganda potentially wanted the audiences to view these services. First, I will be looking at individual aspects of the chosen propaganda pieces and connecting them to other propaganda or Soviet culture, and then I

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[1] Lafont 2007, 7–8.
[2] Bonnell 1997, 3–4.
[3] Sakwa 1999, 32, 74.
[4] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 23–39; Sakwa 1999, 199.
[5] Sakwa 1999, 180–183, 196–197; Lovell 2010, 50; Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 54.
[6] Ivan the Terrible's *Oprichnina*, Peter the Great's *Preobrazhensky* regiment, Tsar Nikolai I's Third Directorate, and *Ohrana*. Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 23–26.
[7] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 32.
[8] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 8.

will look at the bigger pictures formed by the propaganda. When discussing visual propaganda, I am mostly talking about posters due to their overrepresentation. I will also include seven medals and seven stamps. Despite its widespread nature, the KGB and its predecessors are hardly present in Soviet era visual propaganda, compared to other subjects such as leadership, the army, or the working class. Some KGB-affiliated groups also serving in domestic security – the Border Troops, Internal Troops and Militia – had more frequent appearances. There are various posters encouraging soldiers and civilians to not spill secrets that are considered propaganda for the KGB, but I have chosen not to include those, as I do not consider them to portray the organs. In addition, posters that encourage the viewer to be vigilant and pass information forward without showing the relevant organs will also not be included for the same reason.

I have chosen 24 posters that are connected to the KGB and its predecessors, the Border Troops, the Internal Troops, and the Militia. The KGB is directly referenced in zero. Its predecessors are referenced in a few, and the other organs appear quite frequently. One included poster does not directly reference these groups, but portray a specific person – Feliks Dzerzhinsky – representing them instead. Some of the included posters are not associated with the security organs, but have been included for comparison and context. The Border Troops posters I have chosen are only a fraction of the Border Troops posters out there, but they are not the sole focus of my thesis, and they overlap with Red Army propaganda. The Militia posters I have chosen are also not the only ones out there. There could be more KGB related posters that either exist now or have existed before, but they might not be available online, or they may even have been destroyed. The posters, stamps, and medals have mostly been found online through searching for each individual organ in Russian and in English, which has then led me to either auction sites or blogs, or in the best case, to online archive sites. Many of the posters do not have artists' names or years clearly enough on them, unfortunately. Some posters, mostly not related to the security organs but included for comparisons, are from a poster collection published as a book.

Posters, stamps, and medals can give information about what was deemed important enough to be made into visual propaganda. By looking at colours, symbols, words, compositions, and other aspects, they can also give information on what the makers of the media were trying to get across to the viewers about the desired, doctored reality intended by the government. Propaganda will not give a detailed look into reality, and it can not tell us how exactly the contemporary audiences actually reacted or thought. Propaganda can, however, also give

information about changes in society – unfortunately, this thesis is too short for very detailed looks at societal changes. Soviet visual propaganda has been widely utilised in a lot of research, and it has also been the main focus of research in many cases. However, research specifically focusing more on Soviet domestic security services, and especially the KGB in visual propaganda, are at least more difficult to find. This could be due to the KGB's invisibility in propaganda, as well as the other organs' more open connection to the Soviet armed forces or the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD).

Secondary sources, research literature utilised in this thesis mostly help with the history and contextualisation of the organs. Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky's book *KGB* was originally published in English in 1990. The version I am using is the Finnish translation from 1991. The book gives a thorough look into the Soviet secret police and its history. Gordievsky was an ex-KGB Colonel, who defected and became a double agent for western nations, delivering information about the KGB from the inside. Jeff Trimble's paper *Spreading the Word: The KGB's Image-Building Under Gorbachev* (1997) is especially helpful in laying out the biggest changes to have happened for the KGB in regard to propaganda and public image. There were not many significant changes in how the KGB needed to handle its public image before the Gorbachev era, when allowing freedom of speech and openness was suddenly required. Additionally, I will be heavily referencing Victoria E. Bonnell's *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (1997), where Bonnell analyses posters in the Lenin and Stalin eras, with significant emphasis on religious iconography and invented tradition.

Visual interpretations are very subjective and dependant on culture, and so it can be hard to find clear answers for how colours, icons, or other aspects should be interpreted. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th Edition, 2016) by Gillian Rose does not offer final answers to what different things mean, but what it does offer, is a guide on what to focus on and how to look at visual works. The book also talks about different methods. I will be using content analysis as a base for categorising different groups, themes, and imageries.[9] Another relevant term for this paper is Rose's term "compositional interpretation", which relies on contextual information regarding the area of interest.[10] It does not necessarily make clear, explained interpretations or observations of the visual material,

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[9] Rose 2016, 93.
[10] Rose 2016, 56–57.

but looks at the composition, content, colour, and spatial organisation of the material.[11] Compositional interpretation is mostly subconscious, and therefore will not be actively referenced much in the thesis. An especially important method to this paper is semiology, which looks at different aspects of visual materials and gives them meaning, such as colours or items having a specific meaning.[12] I will be using the two latter methods to look at the images as a whole in the context of Soviet propaganda, as well as to pick out specific icons or symbols. To help provide necessary context to utilise these methods, I will use Bonnell's previously mentioned book, and Galina V. Paramei's *Singing the Russian Blues: An Argument for Culturally Basic Color Terms* in the publication *Cross-Cultural Research*, Volume 39 Issue 1 (2005). I will also be making comparisons to and referencing other themes in Soviet propaganda. Comparing to and referencing other Soviet propaganda is necessary in this paper to provide context and to also work around the lack of available material.

[11] Rose 2016, 62–72.
[12] Rose 2016, 106–145.

2 Symbols, Themes, and Imagery

This chapter looks at individual aspects of posters, stamps, and medals for all included organs. Different reoccurring aspects will be handled mostly separately from one another: 2.1 goes over colours, 2.2 addresses symbols and words, and 2.3 looks at people and perspectives. Some reoccurring objects are handled as symbols rather than as real items.

The KGB and its predecessors all continued the tradition of constant monitoring and powerful terror. Still, they did have some minor differences, usually regarding reputation, structure, or dynamics between other Soviet organs. The KGB was formed in 1954 to replace its Stalin era predecessor MGB, who was publicly painted as violent and out of control.[13] Border and Internal Troops are often considered to be part of the KGB's directorates, even if they were officially parts of the Soviet armed forces and took orders from the MVD. [14] The Border Troops ensured the safety and counterintelligence of the Soviet Union's borders, and the Internal Troops likely performed crowd control and strategic guarding.[15] All of these tasks are ones that would fall in line with the KGB's directorates and purposes. Additionally, the KGB had its own main directorate at least for the Border Troops.[16] It is also important to note that the KGB's predecessors were, at times, part of the MVD, until 1954 when the KGB was made separate for good. It can be said that the Border and Internal Troops were at the very least affiliated with the KGB, though this connection rarely seems to come up in visual propaganda.

2.1 Colours

Throughout her book, Victoria E. Bonnell explains the connection between Soviet era propaganda posters and Russian Orthodox art and traditions. Bonnell brings up an important term for Soviet propaganda: invented tradition. Invented tradition seeks to teach values and norms through repetition and an implied continuity with the past. The Bolsheviks started establishing new social belonging, norms, and hierarchy through repetitive, consistent propaganda.[17] This propaganda borrowed heavily from Russian Orthodox iconography, something that most would have already been familiar with. The aspects of Soviet propaganda brought up in this chapter all follow the rules of repetition and continuity at least to some degree, in an attempt

[13] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 8, 150–151.
[14] Ex. Curtis 1998, 555–558, 568.
[15] Curtis 1998, 558.
[16] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 357.
[17] Bonnell 1997, 1–3.

to establish the Soviet domestic security services as a normal part of society with a clear place within the hierarchy of the system.

The colours used in Soviet propaganda typically followed religious iconography. Bonnell presents red as a holy colour used to identify the sacred in orthodox art, and later in Soviet propaganda to depict heroes of communism, such as Lenin. [18] The colour red is present in most visual propaganda depicting Soviet domestic security services, sometimes used as the main colour, and other times coming through in smaller details. Artist Mikhail M. Solovyov's poster of Feliks Dzerzhinsky with a Border Guard and an Internal Guard from 1983 has a red block of colour framing a simplified, white Dzerzhinsky as its background.[19] A stamp for the KGB from 1967 is almost entirely blue, with red as an accent colour for the star and banner of the KGB emblem.[20] Red was also the colour of revolution.[21] In Soviet imagery the colour red may even have shaped to eventually represent the USSR itself, along with communism.

To accompany the colour of good, Bonnell presents the colour of evil in religious iconography. Black was used to depict the devil and those associated with the devil, and from there it was adopted into Soviet propaganda to depict class enemies.[22] A poster by a collective of three artists from 1941 shows a red Red Army soldier pointing his rifle at Hitler, who is drawn in black.[23] This extends to posters for the security services: a 1932 poster depicts the KGB's class enemies in black and dark or desaturated colours, and another poster likely from the 1920s or 30s shows the KGB as a red pike fighting against three black capitalist fish.[24] There is also an observable trend of general atmospheres in the posters. The colours are light and warm for the Soviet side, which is a far cry from the cold, grey, and dark depictions of enemies often seen in anti-capitalist or anti-nazi posters.[25] Therefore, the assumption here is that warmer and lighter colours were linked to good.

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[18] Bonnell 1997, 13, 32, 146.
[19] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard*.
[20] Soviet Union 1967, *VChK-KGB 50 Years Commemorative Stamp*.
[21] Bonnell 1997, 13.
[22] Bonnell 1997, 32.
[23] Kukryniksy (Kupriianov, Krylov & Sokolov) 1941, *We Will Mercilessly Crush and Destroy the Enemy*.
[24] Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution*; Rie. Mina. n.d., *That's Why There's a Pike in the Sea, So That This Carp Doesn't Multiply*.
[25] Unknown, n.d., *Excellent Militia Worker – Support of the Higher Up in Solving Service and Operative Tasks*; Vera Sergeevna Korableva 1930, *Comrade, Come Join Us at the Collective Farm!* ; Viktor Deni 1930, *The GPU Strikes a Counterrevolutionary Pest*; Kukryniksy (Kupriianov, Krylov & Sokolov) 1941, *We Will Mercilessly Crush and Destroy the Enemy.*

Aside from red and black, at least one other colour is significant too. The KGB used blue in its emblem from 1954 to 1991, its medals[26], and uniforms. In Russian culture and language, there are two different classifications for blue: *goluboj* and *sinij*. The blue used in imagery for the KGB is more in line with *sinij*. *Sinij* in religious iconographic context was often used in the Virgin Mary's clothing to signify suffering and grief.[27] It could also have its roots in one of the Imperial Russian secret police, Tsar Nikolai I's Third Directorate, whose gendarmerie had blue greatcoats.[28] A significant symbol of the Third Directorate was also allegedly connected to grief. Tsar Nikolai I allegedly gave the Third Directorate a handkerchief and said: "The more tears that you wipe with this handkerchief, the more faithfully you will have served my intentions."[29]

Blue could also signify protection and safety, as the Virgin Mary was often depicted as protecting others under her blue cloak.[30] The use of blue was most common for the KGB, but the colour was sometimes also present in the other groups. Occasionally the Border Troops were depicted with a blue band in their uniform caps, but their official and more recognisable colour was green.[31] The Border Troops were very recognisably and publicly the protectors of the Soviet Union's borders, and therefore cloaked the nation and its people in their safety. The Internal Troops and the Militia, however, used red.[32] Of particular interest in this theory for blue are the emblems and medals using blue shields. The blue in the KGB's emblem in 1954-1991 was specifically in the shield part of the emblem.[33] There are also several medals for the other groups that have blue shields.[34] In either case, blue in Soviet domestic security services propaganda could be linked to religious iconography, as well as invented tradition. Especially with red and black coming to Soviet visuals from religious iconography, it is reasonable to claim that blue would be the same. Though, *sinij* was also commonly used in expensive, festive clothing in the 11th to 13th centuries, and it therefore signified higher social code.[35]

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[26] 60th Anniversary of the KGB Medal 1977. The writer's own collection.
[27] Paramei 2005, 31.
[28] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 24.
[29] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 24.
[30] Francisco de Zurbaran 1600s, *Virgen de las Cuevas*; Lippo Memmi 1350s, *Madonna of the Recommended*.
[31] The band of the uniform cap is blue, but the shoulder boards and other coloured parts of the uniform are green. Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard*.
[32] Coloured parts of the uniform are depicted as red. Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, Militia are the Servants of the People; Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard*.
[33] 60th Anniversary of the KGB Medal 1977. The writer's own collection.
[34] Ex. Badge for Distinction in Service of the Internal Troops of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1st Class, replica.
[35] Paramei 2005, 30–31.

2.2 Emblems, symbols, and words

Other aspects of Soviet visual propaganda depicting domestic security services leave affiliations with the KGB quite vague. Since the founding of the Cheka, all succeeding KGB organs would use the sword and the shield in their imagery, at least until 1985. In 1985 only the shield remained in some presentations, as the sword – a violent symbol – was not doing any favours to the public's perception of the KGB.[36] The sword and the shield were also the emblem for the MVD and therefore present in propaganda for the Border and Internal Troops. The Militia also operated under the MVD, and used the shield as part of its visuals. After 1954[37] the KGB is more often connected to its emblem with a blue shield and grey sword, while the MVD affiliated groups were usually more likely to be represented with a sword and shield that did not include blue, and were different in shape.[38]

In their book, Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky explain the sword and the shield's semiology as follows: the shield represented protecting the revolution, and the sword striking down the enemies.[39] This explanation is specifically given in the context of the KGB, but it can be assumed that the semiology would have been the same across all of these groups, as they all at least officially focused on safety and protection. Later, after the revolutions, perhaps the shield's imagery widened to also represent protecting the nation and the people. It can be said that both the sword and the shield were meant to represent safety, specifically from any enemies. The sword was still more violent – a reminder of the true nature of those such as the KGB – and tended to be the more ignored part of the pair, just as the KGB was more ignored in visual propaganda than the others.

There were other reoccurring symbols, too. Especially posters depicting the Border Troops would often include rifles. One poster shows a border guard using the butt of a rifle to push enemies away from the border, but most instances are of a border guard simply holding the weapon.[40] They usually do not hold the rifles in a way that necessarily reads as dangerous. In

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[36] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 32.
[37] Before 1954, when the KGB was separated from the MVD for good, the KGB's different predecessors were at times parts of or connected to the MVD's different iterations. Especially before 1954, it is reasonable to assume the KGB would have used imagery connected to the MVD. VchK-GPU medal 1922-1932. tk_54435. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti; NKVD medal 1941. tk_54437. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti.
[38] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard*; NKVD medal 1941. tk_54437. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti.
[39] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 32.
[40] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1960, *We Don't Let Them Pass!* ; Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1951, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards!* ; Aleksey Kokorekin 1953, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards*!

most instances, they grasp the rifle with both hands in a relaxed hold, and position it almost protectively across their chests. The rifle is not a representation of the sword that strikes, but of the shield that protects. It also adds a militaristic edge, and so do medals and other similar additions. Militarism and the military were held in high regard in the Soviet Union, even just judging by the enormous amount of military, war, and Soviet armed forces themed propaganda.[41]

More general symbols for the entirety of the Soviet Union and the Soviet system also made appearances in propaganda for the security services. The State Emblem of the Soviet Union, the red star, the hammer and sickle, or even the silhouette of the Soviet Union potentially worked towards creating trust. They can be thought to have familiarised the organs to the Soviet people through known symbols held in high regard in a patriotic, communist society. They also connected the organs to the reality and wider context of the Soviet Union, cementing them as just another part of life, instead of something to be wary of. The red star also further connected the Border and Internal Troops to the Soviet armed forces. The attempted familiarity may tie into invented tradition.

In her dissertation, Reeta Kangas studies the use of animal symbolism in Soviet *Pravda* political cartoons. Kangas brings up the portrayal of fish in one of Kukryniksy's political cartoons, identifying it with the passiveness of the fish in Slavic folklore and the relationship between humans and fish.[42] However, there is at least one Russian fairy tale where a fish is an active, powerful entity: Pushkin's *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish* from 1835.[43] One poster openly portraying the GPU presents the organ as a red pike.[44] The fish in the fairy tale is likely not a pike, but it is a fish that helps people and punishes acts like greed.[45] In the poster there are three black carps meant to represent anti-communists. The three carps are more reminiscent of Kangas' passive fish. Additionally, the pike is a predator, and the carp is not.

Posters and other visual media are not just visual. Just as there were reoccurring visual aspects, there were reoccurring words and themes. One KGB medal, which is most likely a

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[41] Ex. Gustav Gustavovich Klutsis 1935, *Long Live the Worker-Peasant Red Army – The Loyal Guard of the Soviet Borders!* ; Leonid Fedorovich Golovanov 1946, *Glory to the Red Army!*
[42] Kangas 2017, 263–264.
[43] Средне-Уральское книжное издательство 1979, 55–66.
[44] Rie. Mina. n.d., *That's Why There's a Pike in the Sea, So That This Carp Doesn't Multiply*.
[45] It is never specified as anything other than a golden fish, and the 1979 illustrations by artist S. Kovalyev seem to have modelled the fish after something closer to a goldfish. Средне-Уральское книжное издательство 1979, 55–66.

souvenir[46] uses the term *sotrudnik*. *Sotrudnik* is a word used to refer to workers, but often with a more prestigious tone than its synonym *rabotnik*, which refers more so to labourers.[47] Referring to KGB personnel as *sotrudniki* can connect them to the workers, but can also separate them as a higher class, especially when paired with the distinct, expensive blue that stands out from the red masses. Separation from the masses is created again with the earlier pike poster, whose text underlines the special purpose of the KGB: "That's why there's a pike (the KGB) in the sea, so that this carp (the anti-communist) doesn't multiply".[48] This phrase also connects the KGB to the sword even more deeply.

Posters for the Militia and the Border and Internal Troops would underline aspects of servitude, protection. and heroism. One Militia poster directly states that "Militia are the servants of the people".[49] A poster of the Border and Internal Troops refers to them as "heroes of the sword and shield".[50] Many posters for the KGB and those affiliated will highlight protecting the revolution and its achievements, such as the 1932 poster by Viktor Deni, celebrating "15 years of guarding the achievements of the October Revolution".[51] However, while all groups seem to be connected through words of heroism and protection, the KGB is usually not mentioned alongside the three others. The closest that at least posters come to this connection in naming organs, is a 1941 poster honouring the Border Troops of the NKVD.[52] The NKVD can be considered a predecessor for both the MVD and the KGB, however, it is difficult to say whether the poster was made during or before the KGB was brought back into the NKVD that year.[53]

2.3 People and perspective

One reoccurring person in propaganda for all organs handled in this thesis is the founder of Cheka, Feliks Dzerzhinsky. Alongside Lenin, Dzerzhinsky was elevated into an immortal

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[46] The list of KGB related items given by the Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti marks this badge as most likely being a souvenir. KGB Badge 1954-1991. tk_54439. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti.
[47] ru.wiktionary.org Сотрудник and Работник.
[48] Rie. Mina. n.d., *That's Why There's a Pike in the Sea, So That This Carp Doesn't Multiply*.
[49] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, *Militia are the Servants of the People*.
[50] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard*.
[51] Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution*.
[52] Unknown 1941, *XXth Anniversary of the Frontier Troops of the NKVD of the USSR*.
[53] In 1941, from February to July, the KGB was the NKGB, a separate organ from the NKVD, which would later become the MVD. In July the NKGB was fused back into the NKVD, under the abbreviation GUGB. The poster from 1941 has a winter scene, so it could be assumed that it was made when the NKVD was not associated with the KGB. This would also fall more in line with the general lack of the KGB being connected to the other organs. However, without knowing the full context and time of year, it cannot be said for certain. Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 8.

saint of the proletariat revolution. After his death in 1926, a glass case like that of Lenin's was set up in the KGB's building, with Dzerzhinsky's uniform as well as casts of his face and hands, furthering his immortality.[54] Later, as Stalin centred himself, this glass case was removed. [55] However, Dzerzhinsky as a whole would not die, as he is still present in propaganda later on. With him having a cult of personality like Lenin or Stalin, he is significant part of the visual propaganda he appears in. In fact, he becomes an icon instead of a person.

Bonnell talks about the iconisation of Lenin in visual propaganda: just like religious icons or heroes from Russian *byliny*[56], Lenin was generally depicted in the same outfit and in the same poses.[57] This is true for imagery of Dzerzhinsky as well, both in posters and in stamps. Three posters use the exact same image of Dzerzhinsky in varying styles.[58] In this depiction, he always faces the same direction in the same perspective – three-quarters, common in religious art of saints and icons.[59] Another way to elevate both Lenin and Dzerzhinsky to icons and saints was being drawn in a distorted perspective as larger-than-life (large compared to their surroundings), also typical for religious icons.[60] In one of the three aforementioned posters, Dzerzhinsky is drastically larger than those around him.[61]

The most common depiction of Dzerzhinsky is clad in an overcoat uniform, complete with a cap and a medal.[62] Border guards, internal guards and Militia officers always appear in their respective, militaristic uniforms too.[63] As the KGB's officers do not make appearances in visual propaganda, the KGB is largely excluded from the uniform visuals. Dzerzhinsky can be considered an exception, as he was the founder of Cheka, and therefore also the founder of the KGB. However, especially later pieces of propaganda mostly choose to connect him to the MVD[64], and the connection to the KGB, the violent sword, wanes even further. Almost all instances of uniformed officers in visual propaganda are male. Women would occasionally

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[54] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 33; Bonnell 1997, 149.
[55] Portraits of Dzerzhinsky were switched out for smaller ones, and eventually his glass case was removed. Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 33.
[56] Russian oral epic poems.
[57] Bonnell 1997, 147.
[58] Unknown n.d., *Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky 1877-1926 – Be Vigilant and Alert!* ; Yuri Valentinovich Tsarev 1984, *Dzerzhinsky with Militia Officers*; Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard.*
[59] Bonnell 1997, 33.
[60] Bonnell 1997, 145.
[61] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard.*
[62] Unknown n.d., *Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky 1877-1926 – Be Vigilant and Alert!*
[63] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, *Militia are the Servants of the People;* Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard.*
[64] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard;* Yuri Valentinovich Tsarev 1984, *Dzerzhinsky with Militia Officers.*

appear in visual propaganda for the Militia, but usually not in the role of the officers. They often take a passive role being protected or helped.[65] This coincides with the woman worker mostly being depicted as the helper, subordinate to the dominant male worker counterpart.[66]

Workers – especially labourers – were central to Soviet propaganda up until the 1930s, when depictions of work started giving way to workers posing triumphantly, where men looked young and handsome, and where industrial workers started to be sidelined by the leadership and officials.[67] Especially this post-1930s image of the Soviet man permeates art of the armed security troops and Militia officers. They're strong, young men, drawn to be visually appealing, and posing with similar triumph to the workers with their heads held high.[68] Some posters also use the direct gaze, common in religious icons and in Soviet armed forces posters.[69] Many posters, however, depict the Border Troops looking somewhere out of frame. They often have intense expressions.[70] The posing of Militia members differs greatly from static and triumphant sometimes, with more actions, movement, and even facing away from the camera entirely. The Militia are usually not larger-than-life, but interact with others and their surroundings in a non-distorted perspective. The Militia are usually shown in normal streets and offices, engaging in their jobs.[71] In many ways, they're depicted much closer to the average worker than the KGB or the armed troops.

Complementing Bonnell's exploration of the colours red and black, she also notes the common saints versus the devil ideal in religious art being transformed into the Soviet heroes versus enemy ideal. [72] This ideal can be seen across visual propaganda for domestic security services. While the officers are depicted as strong, handsome, young men, the enemies are twisted into ugly, angry, old caricatures that usually fall in line with Soviet caricatures of fascists and capitalists no matter who the enemy is supposed to be.[73] The enemies vary between

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[65] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, *Militia are the Servants of the People;* Yuri Nikolayevich Chudov 1956, *Fight Against Hooliganism!*
[66] Bonnell 1997, 67.
[67] Bonnell 1997, 42–44.
[68] Unknown n.d., *50 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster*; Unknown n.d., *45 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster*; Unknown, n.d., *Excellent Militia Worker – Support of the Higher Up in Solving Service and Operative Tasks.*
[69] Bonnell 1997, 33.
[70] Aleksey Kokorekin 1953, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards*!
[71] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, *Militia are the Servants of the People*; Unknown n.d., *Militia Officers Notice Hooliganism in the Street*.
[72] Bonnell 1997, 7.
[73] Viktor Deni & Nikolay Dolgorukov 1939, *Long Live the NKVD*; Rie. Mina. n.d., *That's Why There's a Pike in the Sea, So That This Carp Doesn't Multiply*; Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution*; Unknown n.d., *Militia Officers Notice Hooliganism in the Street*; Kukryniksy (Kupriianov, Krylov & Sokolov) 1941, *We Will Mercilessly Crush and Destroy the Enemy.*

groups: for the Militia the enemies are often alcoholics, hooligans, and other everyday violators, as opposed to the KGB's more devious, grandiose enemies, such as conspirators, provocateurs, spies, and counterrevolutionaries.[74] The heroes and enemies are set up against one other, with the hero always coming out on top as the larger, brighter figure.

The Militia officers and border guards usually do not seem to strike the enemies violently, but are there to stop them from advancing or hurting Soviet citizens. In one poster, a Militia officer stops a hooligan from hitting a woman, and in a previously mentioned scene a border guard pushes enemies away from the border with the butt of a rifle.[75] In both instances, the action is defensive, not offensive; they are shielding the Soviet Union and its people. Two posters depicting the KGB's predecessors show the names of the organs turning into a red lightning or arrow striking into the enemy.[76] As such, the KGB is depicted as striking into or through the enemy – once again, they are the sword.

[74] Yuri Nikolayevich Chudov 1956, *Fight Against Hooliganism!* ; Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution.*
[75] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1960, *We Don't Let Them Pass!*
[76] Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution;* Viktor Deni 1930, *The GPU Strikes a Counterrevolutionary Pest.*

3 Domestic Security Services in Visual Propaganda

This chapter will dive deeper into the picture that was being conveyed to the viewers with what was shown and what was left out. In addition to symbols or words, things like compositional decisions and colour choices can give an idea of what viewers were meant to see and think. 3.1 will look at the trustworthy image of the security personnel, 3.2 will show them in a powerful light, and 3.3 will focus on the hidden sword behind the shields. 3.1 and 3.2 will focus more on the idea of the shield and protection, while 3.3 will centre around the sword and its enemies. Soviet propaganda did not experience many significant changes between the 1930s and 1980s, so chronology is not considered important for this thesis. The 1980s and 1990s turned the Soviet system on its head, however, and then even the security services needed to pivot in what they wanted to show to the people.

While the KGB was largely in charge of, or at least had great influence over propaganda in the Soviet Union, out of the KGB and its predecessors only some are ever referenced in posters: Cheka, the GPU, and the OGPU. At least as far as this thesis goes, after the 1930s posters largely ignore the state security organ. This could have been due to Stalin's era permanently staining the organ's reputation. The Border and Internal Troops and the Militia appear a lot more frequently, to where I had to select only small portions of their posters to look at for this thesis. The KGB does show up in some media, with an uptick especially towards the 1990s. The appearances of the KGB and its predecessors used in this thesis are likely not the only ones in existence, however. Additionally, the Soviet Union would routinely destroy propaganda posters that were oftentimes only in use for a short time.[77] It is possible that there have been more posters for the KGB, but those hypothetical posters may not have survived until present day, or they might not have been archived accessibly. Even still, the lack of the KGB's appearances or the potential destruction of the KGB's appearances is notable.

3.1 A Friendly Face You Can Trust

A friendly face the viewer could feel safe with and place their trust in was imperative. In one poster, two Militia officers are pictured shaking hands and smiling widely.[78] Another Militia poster shows a woman worker being served by a Militia officer, both of them smiling and engaged with one another in relaxed poses. The latter poster includes the following text: "Militia

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[77] Lafont 2007, 11.
[78] Unknown, n.d., *Excellent Militia Worker – Support of the Higher Up in Solving Service and Operative Tasks.*

are servants of the people". It even has a poster behind the Militia officer, reading "Be sensitive to the complaints and statements of workers!".[79] The latter is an instruction for the Militia officers, but it is most likely directed at workers too, as the drawn poster is in the middle of the image, with the officer and worker on either side guiding the viewer's eye to it with the directions of their own gazes. It is telling workers that the Militia are here to help them, and encourages the viewer to tell things to the Militia. The text about Militia being servants of the people could be making the viewer feel as if the Militia are less powerful than they are, under the servitude of the working class. Both of the mentioned posters are in well-lit, warm colours. An additional poster for the Militia shows the Militia noticing a group of hooligans in the distance, shrouded in shadow and drawn in dark colours, while the Militia in light.[80]

For the Border Troops and Internal Troops, the expressions are often stern and vigilant, their postures stricter than the Militia. Still, in many posters, they are bathed in warmer tones in well-lit environments. Two posters, both reading "Glory to the Soviet border guards!", each have a border guard standing with a rifle held close to their body like a shield, yet relaxed as if the danger they are looking out for is not there.[81] The lack of enemy presence is likely meant to create a feeling of safety, just as much as the presence of the protector. Matching the shielding nature of the Border and Internal Troops, the Militia has a poster where an officer stops a man from hurting a woman. The officer is holding the man's hand, effectively shielding the woman from his violent attack.[82] A threatening presence creates tension in a dynamic, active composition, but the Militia officer – the metaphorical shield, fittingly dressed in *sinij* – makes this tension dissipate, saving the victim from harm. The inclusion of women as those being helped or protected by the officers of these organs potentially increases the intended feeling of safety. A group usually seen as more vulnerable is portrayed as being safest when around uniformed officers, threatened by the enemies but never by the much stronger hero who easily overpowers the attacker. The officers never seem to cause any actual harm to the enemies in addition to never hurting their own or the more vulnerable, merely acting as shields.

In all of the above examples, everything from colours to atmosphere and composition are meant to lead the viewer into thinking positively of the organs and those who work for them.

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[79] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1953, *Militia are the Servants of the People.*
[80] Unknown n.d., *Militia Officers Notice Hooliganism in the Street.*
[81] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1951, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards!* ; Aleksey Kokorekin 1953, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards!*
[82] Yuri Nikolayevich Chudov 1956, *Fight Against Hooliganism!*

Friendly, warm, and relaxed interactions create a positive connection between the viewer and the Militia showcased in the propaganda; vigilant, powerful Border and Internal Troops make the viewer feel as though they are being protected from external dangers. They are all shown as reliable, diligently handling their respective duties. They look capable, at times even stern, but never ugly. The uniformed men are all drawn in a way that is pleasant and even conventionally attractive – one might even compare them to saints above humanity, unaffected by age, danger, or the evil that they are portrayed as defending against.

To go along with a saintlike nature, the overabundance of the holy colour red was likely meant to increase trust. Solovyov's 1983 poster of Dzerzhinsky's iconic face completely submerged in red behind a border guard and an internal guard is mostly red. Aside from the block of red colour, it has red text and a red MVD emblem. The text by Nikolai Entelis calls the guards heroes of the sword and shield. In the same poster, Dzerzhinsky is referred to as a "legendary chekist, faithful friend or Ilyich (Lenin)", and the heroes are praised to live forever.[83] The guards and organs are raised to stand alongside immortal communist saints Lenin and Dzerzhinsky, cementing them as reliable, safe, trustworthy heroes who exist to protect the nation and its people.

Furthermore, these posters sometimes show the viewer exactly what is being protected, aside from just the specific groups of vulnerable people falling victim to attackers. The posters remind the viewer that these heroes are specifically protecting the Soviet Union, by including Soviet imagery like the silhouette of the nation or a red star, positive connection driven forward by communist nationalism.[84] The KGB used the familiar red star, too. It is on the front of the KGB emblem, and therefore also on the front of any medals or stamps for the KGB.[85] While the KGB did not technically receive a face outside of Dzerzhinsky, at least at first, they were cemented as parts of communist canon by bathing them in Soviet imagery, and, through repetition as part of invented tradition, they were meant to be familiar and safe to the viewer.

The blue present in various medals for all groups is likely meant to symbolise protection, to make the viewer subconsciously think of the Virgin Mary keeping people safe with her blue cloak. Seeing a blue shield on the coat of a uniformed officer might have been intended to

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[83] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1983, *Dzerzhinsky With a Border Guard and an Internal Guard.*

[84] Unknown n.d., *Border Guard, a Young Man and a Young Pioneer Standing in Front of USSR Map Silhouette and the Soviet State Emblem*; Unknown n.d., *Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky 1877-1926 – Be Vigilant and Alert!*

[85] 60th Anniversary of the KGB Medal 1977. The writer's own collection; KGB Badge 1954-1991. tk_54439. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti; Soviet Union 1967, *VChK-KGB 50 Years Commemorative Stamp*.

spread a feeling of trust and safety, and to make it so that people would not connect them to attacks or danger. Another possibility, blue standing for grief and suffering as per Andrew and Gordievsky's Third Directorate story[86] and Galina V. Paramei's presented information about sinij[87], may seem counterintuitive when compared to other aspects potentially aiming to create a trustworthy façade. However, connecting the KGB to a sense of grief for their actions could make it seem like they are only engaging in terror for the greater good of the people, and potentially humanises them as feeling guilty for their actions. With these medals of blue shields, the words such as *sotrudnik* could have intended to make the organs feel even safer to the working class, reassuring them that the protector is not too far above, with not quite enough authority to hurt them without reason.

3.2 Power and Hierarchy

The ascension to communist sainthood in visual propaganda would have most likely also increased ones perceived power. Especially with someone like Lenin being portrayed in similar manner to these organs' officers, drawn as a towering figure in red, it can be assumed that they were meant to be viewed with a similar hierarchy to Lenin.[88] By repeating certain patterns in posters, it was made clear to the viewer where the organs' officers were supposed to place – above them.

In many posters, the way Dzerzhinsky and the armed troops are posed can elicit a feeling of power and superiority. Their heads are held high, shoulders are squared, and there is often an angle where the viewer is positioned slightly below the subjects. There is sometimes a barrier between the Border Troops and the viewer, oftentimes the rifle held in a shielding manner.[89] This not only shows off that they have military power that they use for protection, but it can also create a further physical separation between the worker or peasant civilians viewing the poster and the more powerful officer. The uniforms and medals signify status, especially in a society so militaristically inclined to the point where the leaders would parade themselves as war heroes and award themselves medals.[90] This would also work for the real-life medals, not

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[86] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 24.
[87] Paramei 2005, 31.
[88] Viktor Semenovich Ivanov 1967, *Lenin Lived, Lenin Lives, and Lenin Will Go on Living!* ; Nikolai Semenovich Babin 1976, *The Party is the Mind, Honor, and Conscience of Our Era!*
[89] Mikhail Mikhailovich Solovyov 1951, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards!* ; Aleksey Kokorekin 1953, *Glory to the Soviet Border Guards!* ; Unknown n.d., *50 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster*; Unknown n.d., *45 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster.*
[90] Lovell 2010, 7–9.

just for ones seen in posters. Because they were groups whose members would get medals even just for being part of these groups, there must have been some power in the groups' position.

Larger-than-life, distorted perspective almost builds on this "looking up from below" status in favour of the organs' officers. The general compositions of many posters may help set the organs and officers above the viewer. A poster celebrating 50 years of the Border Troops positions the angle subtly below the border guard, so the viewer is looking up at him slightly.[91] This composition creates a physical hierarchy, where the organ is physically above others. Another poster celebrating 45 years of the Border Troops centres the guard in the middle of the image, and makes him the focal point of the propaganda with framing and values. He stands out from the lighter background by being in full colour, and a border marker and text create a frame around him. He is the largest, most important part of the image.[92] And, as always, with repetition the organs and their workers were imprinted into the viewers' minds as having more power than the viewer, which would also potentially lend them the authority needed to not only act as the shield, but also as the sword. This technically counteracts the point in 3.1 about words like *sotrudnik* trying to create equality to reassure no harm would be caused, but the important distinction is "without reason". In reality, the KGB and others did not need actual reasons to go after someone, but for propaganda, it was important to claim that they were of no danger to the viewer, unless the viewer did something to make them dangerous.

The lack of women in active roles in these depictions can also be linked to a need to show power. Women were mostly there to support their male counterparts, and were often seen as weaker, second-class employees, who were there to symbolise the power of the other party.[93] Leaving women out of visual propaganda and focusing on men for the security services may have helped to create an image of superiority and power in a hierarchical society, where women were seen as below men. Where women are drawn, they are drawn being helped by the superior, uniformed male officer, potentially creating a contrast where the officer's power and authority is being bolstered by the presence of someone who needs them.

[91] Unknown n.d., *50 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster.*
[92] Unknown n.d., *45 Years Commemorative Border Troops Poster.*
[93] Lovell 2010, 129; Bonnell 1997, 8–9, 67.

Aside from protection, the meaning of blue or *sinij* could link the security services to a higher social standing, something above the working class, if going by the more luxurious historical use of dark blue explained by Paramei.[94] And, with all things considered, officers of the KGB and other such organs were above workers and peasants: they were part of the intelligentsia – some even beyond, in the elite – esteemed *sotrudniki* of the organ.[95] In a 1967 stamp of the KGB emblem, the background of the stamp is blue, and so is the sword and shield emblem of the KGB, large and in the centre of the image. It is drowned in a royal colour, to make this power obvious at first glance. The star, including the hammer and sickle inside it, as well as the banner reading "VChK-KGB" are red.[96] A previously mentioned KGB souvenir badge reading "KGB SSSR" uses blue, true to the KGB's emblem. A badge celebrating the 60th anniversary of the KGB is also true to the emblem and uses a blue shield.[97] The sword and the shield needed widely accepted and easily, immediately recognised authority, so borrowing a familiar colour once meant for those above others could have been effective in setting the hierarchy out in public, with something worn on ones person for others to see.

Having badges and stamps to celebrate the anniversaries of an organ, like the KGB, can also make the organ seem more important and powerful. Looking at other celebratory or commemorative medals and stamps, they would centre around themes, things, or events that were important in some way: the Great Patriotic War and the Soviet Union were very popular themes, as well as scientific or agricultural feats made in the Soviet Union.[98] These were all things that the people were meant to be proud of, so by that logic, it can be claimed that celebrating the KGB or Border Troops' anniversaries was meant to make the people feel proud to have them. The pride would have in turn bolstered their importance in hierarchy within the system. The sword and shield were something to celebrate, instead of just normal people.

3.3 The Sword in the Shadow of the Shields

Throughout this thesis, the three more visible security services have stood out as representing the shield more so than the sword. In addition to offering protection, the shield can conceal,

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[94] Paramei 2005, 30–31.
[95] Lovell 2010, 109–121.
[96] Soviet Union 1967, *VChK-KGB 50 Years Commemorative Stamp*.
[97] KGB Badge 1954-1991. tk_54439. Museum of Finnish-Russian Relations Nootti; 60th Anniversary of the KGB Medal 1977. The writer's own collection.
[98] Ex. Medal For the Victory Over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945 1945. The writer's own collection. Pin celebrating 60 years of the Soviet Union 1982. The writer's own collection; Soviet Union 1961, *Forward to Victory of Communism – XXII Congress of the Communist Party Stamp, showcasing farm equipment at work.* The Writer's own collection.

and conceal it did. The KGB was likely involved with all three of the other groups: the Border and Internal Troops and the Militia all worked within the KGB's areas of expertise, and with the KGB having had its hands in every nook and cranny of Soviet society and systems, it is also reasonable to assume that the KGB would receive information through these organs. Behind the shields was the sword, the KGB, that visual propaganda did not usually reveal.

It would be a lie to claim that the NKVD or MVD was never connected to the sword. One poster includes the text "Long live the NKVD. The untiring guardian of the revolution, the unsheathed sword of the proletariat!", and pictures a hand using a sword adorned with the NKVD's emblem to cut off a black, inhuman hand with a fascist symbol.[99] Of note is that this poster, which strays from the other examples found for this thesis, was made in 1939. In 1939, World War II was creating tension and affecting Soviet propaganda, but also during that time the KGB was part of the NKVD.[100] The more violent, sword-including poster was made specifically at a time when the NKVD was directly affiliated with the KGB.

Other posters showing danger posed to enemies were also made around the 1930s. A previously mentioned poster has the KGB – GPU at the time – portrayed as a pike. The pike is a predatory fish, large in size, and dangerous to its prey. The text in the poster implies the red GPU pike will cut down the spread or population of the smaller, black anti-communist carp, going as far as to imply that to be the pike's purpose.[101] Reeta Kangas presents the idea that the predatory animal has a more significant and fixed symbolic function in Soviet propaganda than other wild animals, and that they are meant to pose a threat to humans. However, Kangas presents such predatory animals as wolves and crocodiles – the pike, in comparison, is hardly a threat to humans.[102] Perhaps it is closer to the golden fish of Pushkin's story[103], helpful to the people by granting their wish of safety, and taking that safety away from those who do something wrong. Still, the pike is a predator with a fixed symbolism of danger to its enemies, serving the same purpose as the sword in the NKVD's 1939 poster.

One of the posters depicting the KGB as a red arrow or lightning was published in 1932, celebrating "VChK-OGPU – 15 years of guarding the conquests of October". The enemies are labelled as, for example: terror, provocation, conspiracies, espionage, and speculations. The

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[99] Viktor Deni & Nikolay Dolgorukov 1939, *Long Live the NKVD.*
[100] Andrew & Gordievski 1991, 8.
[101] Rie. Mina. n.d., *That's Why There's a Pike in the Sea, So That This Carp Doesn't Multiply*.
[102] Kangas 2017, 137–139.
[103] Средне-Уральское книжное издательство 1979, 55–66.

enemies are drawn in cold, dull hues, against a black background. This contrasts with the light background for the red text. The biggest one of them, fat and wearing a monocle and top hat, is a common visual shorthand for the capitalist in Soviet media. He is holding a bag of money with the text "to the counterrevolutionary" in a clawed hand. The enemies are small, angry, and old.[104] The KGB is the holy lightning or sword that strikes down the enemies. It is not represented through people; it is not given a face. It remains anonymous, but protects the Soviet Union. In comparison to the dehumanised but very human and mortal enemy, it is the very image of something far above man, undying and unknown.

A significant amount of Soviet propaganda relied on the binary opposites, "they" and "us", utilising animalisation, vilification, and general othering.[105] Using familiar semiotics from Orthodox art in Soviet propaganda helped further this image of an external group, an inherent evil entirely separate from the good Soviets. The same enemy image would be repeated throughout visual propaganda, usually settling into the image of someone western, capitalist, and fascist. This outsider would technically repeat in threats that were more so internal, potentially making the internal threat seem driven by the external one. In the poster where a Militia officer stops a man from hurting a woman, the aggressor's face is reminiscent of the faces on external anti-communists.[106] The internal enemies are also often shrouded in darkness, connecting them even further to the "other".[107] The border guards looking somewhere off-screen, not at the viewer, could imply that the enemy is elsewhere. Just as the Militia or the Border Troops, the KGB was never meant to be portrayed as capable of hurting the Soviet Union's own, good citizens. Even the pike is not a predator for humans, but for fish – the outsiders. The viewer is possibly meant to feel safe with the KGB and other organs, as if they will only fight against an external threat, while also subtly letting the viewer know what will happen if they join the external enemy. The propaganda of the organs is meant to be dissuading, not just praising.

The KGB's control over propaganda was vast: they had their own manuals for controlling every step of the way, and in general the production of propaganda was largely under the direct supervision of governing organs.[108] Before the 1980s and Gorbachev, the KGB operated largely with terror and secrecy, perfectly content with Soviet citizens actively wanting to keep

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[104] Viktor Deni 1932, *VChK-OGPU 15 Years of Guarding the Achievements of the October Revolution.*
[105] Bonnell 1997, 187–264.
[106] Yuri Nikolayevich Chudov 1956, *Fight Against Hooliganism!*
[107] Unknown n.d., *Militia Officers Notice Hooliganism in the Street.*
[108] Horbyk, Prymachenko & Orlova 2023, 72–79; Bonnell 1997, 6.

them out of sight and mind.[109] The shields could be the public face of protection, and the sword could operate behind them in the shadows. After Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and started implementing changes that gave more freedom for expressing opinions, the KGB had to adapt to a new need for PR after about six decades of enjoying hiding in plain sight.[110] They were not new to this, however; they were already experienced in PR due to their extensive work in other countries.[111] Their new approach to media and publicity included curated appearances and publishing material related to the KGB.[112]

In non-visual forms of media and propaganda, the KGB did admit to past wrongdoings in the USSR as part of its attempts to moderate its reputation.[113] However, in visual propaganda such as emblems and stamps, it seems they were brushing away implications that they operated in any significant way within the USSR. In 1990 the Soviet Union would produce a series of five postage stamps of portraits, all openly showing off the KGB's illegals – spies who worked as double agents to the KGB in different countries.[114] They removed the sword from their emblem to erase violent imagery, and showed off only those agents – who were all dead by 1990 – who worked against outside forces, outside the Soviet Union's borders. While admitting to Stalin era terrors, the KGB would bring focus to its significance in countering plots by external enemies.[115] Printing these agents on stamps was perhaps an attempt to create heroes of the KGB and make the KGB seem better, to bolster its own importance in the nation's safety, perhaps change the narrative to one where the KGB was once again only a threat to the external enemy, never mind the purges. Paired with this was an attempt to soften the KGB's public image with the 1990 Miss KGB winner.[116] While photographs are not a part of this thesis, giving the KGB the face of a beautiful woman in an attempt to increase likeability does fit with the theme of trying to cover the sword with something more pleasant.

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[109] Trimble 1997, 3.
[110] Trimble 1997, 1–5.
[111] Trimble 1997, 8.
[112] Trimble 1997, 5–7.
[113] Trimble 1997, 5.
[114] Trimble 1997, 7; Soviet Union 1990, *Soviet Spy Stamp Collection.*
[115] Trimble 1997, 4.
[116] Trimble 1997, 10.

4 Conclusion

The visual propaganda that the Soviet Union produced for the KGB, the Border and Internal Troops, and the Militia would repeat several previously familiar symbols, colours, and words in an attempt to create a clear image of new norms and hierarchy through invented tradition. New propaganda borrowed directly from Orthodox art, reusing colours and conventions to replace old icons with the security organs. Red made Dzerzhinsky and the armed guards into saints; lighting, smiles, and a helping hand turned the Militia into angels; the colour blue replaced the Virgin Mary with the KGB. Their places in Soviet hierarchy were set with words like hero and sacred, and with distorted perspective the make the viewer feel smaller and lower in comparison. Soviet visual propaganda also wanted to make them seem safe and trustworthy, as if they would only ever harm the external enemy, never the Soviet citizen. Those organs, who were openly showcased to the public in visual propaganda, were given the shield of the binary. They got to be the peaceful, trustworthy, safe, and protective defenders of the Soviet Union. The three shields hid behind them the KGB, who was assigned the role of the sword – violent, unfit to be shown to the public, and kept separate from the others. Even the founder of Cheka and therefore the KGB, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, was separated from the KGB in visual propaganda and connected more strongly to the others. His image was kept clean, and the organs associated with him could benefit from his status as an immortal legend of the revolution. Still, where the KGB was shown, it was shown as dangerous yet benevolent, given a calculated image of the protector who grieved for the pain it had to cause for the greater good.

Timelines were glossed over previously, as there were not many significant changes between the 1930s and 1980s. However, the KGB's predecessors showing up during the 1930s and then mostly disappearing until the Gorbachev era could be significant. It could mark a more drastic change in the population's view of the KGB, perhaps as a result of Stalin's purges or the violence of the Stalin era in general. There is also the fact that, up until 1954, the KGB would occasionally be fused into the MVD. A lot of the posters more clearly connected to the KGB or the sword imagery were made at times where the KGB was not independent or where a change was close to happening. The 1932 "VChK-OGPU. 15 years of guarding the achievements of the October Revolution" poster by Viktor Deni came out only 2 years before the independent OGPU became obsolete, replaced by the NKVD's GUGB Directorate in 1934. The KGB's public appearances also grew towards its eventual reform and disappearance.

Especially posters would also aim to create an image of the enemy, not just the sword and shield. Soviet propaganda needed the outsider, the "they" of the binary, so that the image of the hero would be more obvious. The inclusion of the enemy told the viewer three things: the security organs were heroes keeping the viewer safe from enemies, the enemies were mainly outside forces and always anti-capitalists, and the viewer would be safe from the security organs as long as they did not fall to the side of the external enemy. Even when the drawn enemy was internal, such as a violent hooligan on the streets, they were still drawn in much of the same way as the external enemy, as if the internal enemy was also only infected by external forces. If the viewer, as a Soviet citizen, could not be viewed as part of this inherently bad outside force, then they would have no reason to fear the security organs.

The success of propaganda efforts, if their goal was to create an image centred around both power and trust, was probably minimal, though perhaps not entirely in vain. An opinion poll in December of 1989 or January of 1990 showed that, out of those questioned, 38% expressed confidence in the KGB.[117] In March of 1990, this number had dropped down to 32%.[118] However, compared to the Red Army's 35% and the Communist Party's 16%, it was not necessarily that bad of a result for the KGB.[119] In 1991 – after the coup against Gorbachev, in which the KGB was involved – only 8% expressed trust in the KGB, 39% expressed distrust, and 25% refused to answer, possibly due to fears of the KGB lashing out.[120] The KGB and other organs had taken significant hits to their public images domestically. However, around the same time and also in the past, the western media and western leaders had been much more receptive to the KGB's PR stunts.[121] Stamps and envelopes especially were pieces of propaganda that could easily make their way into other countries, even without grand efforts from the KGB. Especially seeing as the 1990 Soviet Spy stamps were of agents who mainly operated against external enemies, it could possibly be seen as a propaganda attempt towards the west.

The KGB never disappeared, as it simply reshaped itself into the current FSB of the Russian Federation. The KGB carried its predecessors with it, perhaps as part of invented tradition, and in large part these notions of still carrying predecessors alongside oneself and invented traditions do continue with present day Russia and the FSB. The propaganda produced now

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[117] Trimble 1997, 10.
[118] Trimble 1997, 10.
[119] Trimble 1997, 10.
[120] Trimble 1997, 11.
[121] Trimble 1997, 8 and 11.

borrows major themes from Soviet era propaganda, and stamps produced after the dissolution of the Soviet Union openly present the USSR as the predecessor to Russia, and the KGB as the predecessor to the FSB. Looking at Soviet era propaganda can help with understanding current propaganda produced in Russia, and can even help understand current situations with or reception of present-day security services. There are also other forms of propaganda not touched on in this thesis, such as television shows or books, that could give an even deeper look into how the Soviet Union – and possibly present-day Russia – wanted to present its security services to both domestic and external audiences.

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