Policing the Russian Emigration in Paris, 1880-1914: The Twentieth Century as the Century of Political Police*

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Introduction

The growth and spread of modern political police institutions across European societies from London to St. Petersburg is one of the major cultural and political phenomena that is identified with the changing complexion of European society at the turn of the twentieth century and afterwards.¹ By the last years of the nineteenth century political policing institutions were becoming a critical element of political and social control within every modernizing state, and their steadily increasing professionalism caused them to become more and more alike—a true international brotherhood.² As Louis Lépine, the Prefect of Paris during the first years of the twentieth century remarked, “one cannot possibly conceive of a relatively well-organized society without the existence of a political police department.”³

Nowhere can this phenomenon be better seen and analysed than in the close, but covert, relationship between the political police of Europe’s most repressive

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state—Tsarist Russia—and the political police of arguably its most notable democracy—Republican France. This study of the co-operation between the Imperial Russian and the French political police in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is derived principally but not exclusively from Russian archival and secondary sources.4

The Lev Gartman Case

On 5 February 1880, an explosion rocked the Tsar’s Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. It signalled another failed attempt on the life of Alexander II. Shortly thereafter, a young terrorist named Lev Nikolaevich Gartman, who had participated in the affair, fled Russia with the agents of the Third Section (the tsarist political police prior to its reorganisation in 1883) in pursuit. They caught up with Gartman in Paris. The Paris Prefecture, without consulting its own ministry, ordered his arrest. On 16 February 1880, the Tsarist government formally requested Gartman’s extradition to Russia on political grounds, apparently expecting a rapid positive response.

As word spread of Gartman’s plight, left-wing Parisian public opinion mobilised in his defence. Gartman became a cause célèbre. Pressure began to mount on the French government on Gartman’s behalf from every quarter of left-wing European society. Even the threat made by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the failure to extradite the terrorist would be considered an unfriendly act and could lead to closer ties with Germany could not overcome the Third Republic’s

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4 The foundation for this research is the Archive of the Russian political abroad known as the Foreign Agentura. This bureau, headquartered in Paris, ultimately directed Russian political police operations throughout Europe. The Foreign Agentura archive is located at the Hoover Institution on the Stanford University campus. It contains 100,000 documents, or about one million pieces of paper, covering the years 1883 to late February 1917, when the February Revolution brought about the downfall of Tsardom. The archive is a goldmine of information dealing with the Okhrana’s contacts with other European police forces, especially its relationship with the Paris Prefecture, including official correspondence, personal letters and official memoranda. In 1918, a book by V.K. Agafonov entitled Zagranichnaia okhranka (Petrograd, 1918) based on the Agafonov’s perusal of the archive appeared. This work was an immense help in serving as a guide to this huge archive. The Hoover Institution is the repository for several other archives that contain valuable material for the study of Franco-Russian political police relations. These are listed in my book, The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad: Policing Europe in a Modernising World (Basingstoke, 2003).

Another source of invaluable information for this paper are pre-1917 Russian émigré Russian and Soviet historical journals, several dating from the early 1920s that published articles and documents dealing with one of their favourite topics: the Russian revolutionary emigration and its seemingly endless struggle with the Russian political police. This material is supported by memoirs, biographies and autobiographies of former Russian émigrés and police officials. The titles of these articles and books, beside the ones used herein and listed in the notes, can be found in the bibliography of my earlier book, The Tsarist Secret Police in Russian Society, 1880-1917 (Basingstoke, 1996).
reticence as it confronted this groundswell of opinion. The French refused Russia’s request.\(^5\)

The Russian new Minister of Internal Affairs, Mikhail Loris-Melikov, realized that the dynamics of formal diplomatic relations in such matters would necessarily involve public opinion, which was bound to interfere with the pursuit of the Russian émigrés in France. After he completely reorganised the Russian political police system in 1883 under the gifted and ruthless V.K. Plehve,\(^6\) the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs began to expand and reshape police operations designed to harass and undermine the émigrés. Melikov and Plehve thought this could best be accomplished through a clandestine relationship between the Russian and French police. The Russians established the Foreign Agentura of the \textit{Okhrana} also in 1883 as part of the tsarist political reform. The Paris Office (as the Foreign Agentura was popularly known) would maintain a continuous and intimate informal contact with the French political police force, carrying out the assault on the émigrés by both legitimate and nefarious means until 1917.\(^7\)

\textbf{The Russian and French Political Police}

From 1880 onwards, the French and the Russian forces of order strove to reorganise and professionalise their political police institutions. During the first part of this era, the Paris Office and the police of the Paris Prefecture came under the tutelage of two of the most notorious political policemen of the late nineteenth century whose combined techniques and attitudes, no matter how distasteful, would become an integral part of modern policing methods. These men were A.C. Puibaraud and Peter Ivanovich Rachkovskii.

The political police of the Paris Prefecture performed three principal tasks: they collected intelligence on individuals and groups that the Ministry of the Interior believed threatened the stability of the Republic; they served as the technical advisors to the Ministry, suggesting strategies and tactics devised to anticipate and neutralise confrontations before they arose; and ultimately, if worst came to worst, they fulfilled the Ministry’s orders in the field.\(^8\) However, their initial lack of professionalism created an odd situation. The men who directed political police operations were members of the administrative elite with a tradition of service. They were generalists with little police training, even if they were capable of collecting, collating and analysing information.\(^9\) How would they cope with the demands placed upon them by the post-1880 world, which presented France with all sorts of new policing problems, especially in the two decades preceding the First World War?

\(^5\) Michael B. Millard, “Russian Revolutionary Emigration Terrorism and the ‘Political Struggle’” (PhD. Diss., University of Rochester, 1973), 87-89.
\(^6\) Fredric S. Zuckerman, \textit{The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad: Policing Europe in a Modernising World} (Basingstoke, 2003), 80.
\(^7\) Ibid., 50.
During the first 20 years or so of the Third Republic’s life, its political police stagnated. In 1892, the Minister of the Interior turned over the reins of the Paris Prefecture to Louis Lépine, one of France’s brightest prefects. Lépine became renowned as an imaginative police reformer. More than any other policeman of his age he recognised that ultimately a police force can only be effective if the population it serves respects it.¹⁰

With Paris seemingly under siege from both a crime wave and Anarchist terrorism, Lépine recruited better people, improved training and public relations, declaring “that order, security, these things are the missions of the police.”¹¹ The minister of the interior paired the prefect with the talented but sinister A.C. Puibaraud, a long-serving official in the Ministry, to supervise the Prefecture’s political police operation.

Puibaraud served as Directeur-Général des Recherches between 1894 and 1903; his specific brief was to wipe out terrorism. The Directeur employed dozens of informers and secret agents. In fact, in the zealous pursuit of their job, Puibaraud’s agents intruded into the lives of the innocent as well as the guilty; rumors had it that Puibaraud was not above acts of provocation.¹² Under Puibaraud’s leadership, his police developed a close working relationship with the Russian police in Paris, a relationship made easier by the signing of the Franco-Russian Alliance in 1894. The Prefecture established close surveillance over the Russian revolutionary émigrés and looked the other way as French agents of the Russian police harassed members of the emigration, even allowing them to body-search émigrés in public.

Several of Puibaraud’s colleagues in the Paris Prefecture, including Lépine, found his methods distasteful. They argued that the persecution of such groups only served to nourish subversion,¹³ but at least initially, nothing came of their revulsion. At a more senior level, a French government that still feared the influence of its left-wing press, and politicians restrained the French political police and limited how far it would go in support of the Russians in matters of arresting and deporting even the most hated and feared of the Russian revolutionaries in their midst.¹⁴ Nonetheless, like so many of his colleagues in other countries, Puibaraud behaved as a law unto himself, and he spread his tentacles much further than French legislation permitted.¹⁵

Eventually Puibaraud’s excesses infuriated the Prefect, but he was powerless and perhaps unwilling to curb Puibaraud’s tactics until the threat of terrorism had passed. During the first years of the twentieth century, as Anarchism in France altered its strategy by more or less abandoning terrorism and becoming increasingly involved in working class organizations, Lépine finally saw his chance to get rid of Puibaraud.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.
The Prefect of Paris now believed he could safely dispense with Puibaraud’s services. Puibaraud was dismissed.16

One person, however, who certainly appreciated Puibaraud was the equally gifted although even more venal P.I. Rachkovskii, the Chief of the Foreign Agentura between 1884 and 1902. Rachkovskii had inherited a tiny operation. He began, therefore, by enlarging his bureau in Paris by hiring former French detectives who had retired. Promotions in European police forces came slowly, and frustrated detectives and supervisory personnel could choose to retire at a still relatively young age and earn extra income above their meagre pensions by working for the Russian police.17

The Foreign Agentura used these detectives to establish a formal detective agency within the Paris Office. Rachkovskii established a small chancery staffed by bureaucrats selected to manage and rationalise the burgeoning paper flow. The Russian Department of Police informed its officials in Paris that its most secret and valuable function involved collecting intelligence on subversive activities directed at the personages and institutions of the Tsarist government.18

Of course it did not hurt that the former head of the French secret police in the immediate post-Second Empire era had joined the Foreign Agentura upon his retirement from French service.19 The French police, especially those of the Prefect of Paris, became the most co-operative of Rachkovskii’s international allies. As Franco-Russian relations improved in the 1890s, the French harassed the émigrés with ever increasing vigor, going so far as to ransack their apartments.20

This did not mean, however, that the French government—as opposed to its police—was prepared to do Tsardom’s bidding when it came to dealing with émigrés. Officially, the French government told the Russians that it would only take action against the émigrés if they broke French laws.

To better understand the nature of Russian dissent, the French Foreign Ministry in 1885 ordered its embassy in St. Petersburg to prepare an aide memoire analysing the nature of the burgeoning Russian revolutionary movement. The author of the report believed that the Russian revolutionary movement did not present a danger to either France or Russia, for that matter.21 As a result, although Rachkovskii had developed a rapport with the French police, he did not do so with the French government as a whole. This situation placed the Foreign Agentura and especially the Paris Prefecture in a precarious position.

Rachkovskii carefully thought through a strategy that he hoped would overcome this problem. The foundation of his plan relied on the one hand on a

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16 Ibid., 68-69.
18 Zuckerman, The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad, 84.
19 Ibid., Chapter 5: The head of the secret police within the Paris Prefecture to whom I am referring was Raoul Rigaul. Galtier-Bossièr, Mysteries of the French Secret Police, 236-7.
21 Millard, “Russian Revolutionary Emigration,” 117.
successful propaganda campaign that painted the émigrés in the darkest colours possible as a threat to the stability of Europe, and, on the other hand, on acts of provocation designed to reinforce this view. Here are a few examples of Rachkovskii’s tactics. In 1887, as if to directly contradict the aide-memoire (of which he supposedly knew nothing) of a year or so before, Rachkovskii wrote a letter to Fragnan, the Prefect of Paris, in which he argued that the Russian exiles—all of whom were revolutionaries on the run—were exceptionally dangerous. Rachkovskii implied throughout his letter that these vermin did not display any sort of human dignity or morality. Whether Fragnan swallowed Rachkovskii’s line is unknown; indeed, Rachkovskii may have been preaching to the converted. Actually, the letter was not intended for the Paris Prefect at all. Undoubtedly the Chief of the Paris Office hoped that Fragnan would have passed the correspondence on to his more recalcitrant superiors within the French government.

Rachkovskii developed larger and more sophisticated projects: Rachkovskii argued that the destabilising effects of mass democracy and social and economic modernity so despised by the Old Order was the fault of the Jews. In 1892 in a book entitled Anarchie et Nihilisme written over a pseudonym, but with Rachkovskii’s touch visible throughout, the writer presents his reader with a thoroughly modern form of anti-Semitism. Rachkovskii obviously enjoyed writing slanderous articles and pamphlets. In one pamphlet, “Nigilist voobshche,” (“Nihilists in General”), he wrote that Nihilists were “individuals with a strange walk and [for] the most part of the Jewish type … dirty ragged… drawing attention to themselves by sharp gestures. Their entire conduct is diffident partly [for the benefit of] the passerby… .” Rachkovskii’s despicable stereotypes had a great appeal in the thickening nationalist and xenophobic atmosphere so apparent in French society in the late 1880s. The most famous of Rachkovskii’s schemes designed to provoke the French government into taking action against the Russian émigrés in Paris was known as the “Landezen Affair.” Rachkovskii used Abram Landezen, a trusted agent, to infiltrate émigré (Populist/terrorist) ranks. Landezen then initiated a scheme to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. Landezen recruited a few would-be terrorists for the scheme and offered to fund the entire venture as well. Rachkovskii waited until the plotters were well advanced before informing the Russian Ambassador. The Russian Ambassador, unaware of the true situation, immediately contacted the French Minister of the Interior and managed to convince him that a plot was going ahead to assassinate the Tsar and to take vigorous action to prevent the regicide. On the morning 28 May 1890, the Prefect of Paris ordered the arrest of nine so-called nihilists. The arrests involved massive sweeps into the homes of both Polish and Russian émigrés, including that of Peter Lavrov, the most prestigious émigré living in Paris. The French authorities soon freed several of those arrested, while they detained others, eventually convicting two of the detainees.

The French police raids on émigré flats turned up a substantial pile of documents, especially correspondence between the émigrés themselves and comrades

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22 Rachkovskii to Fragnan 1888, FAAr [Foreign Agentura Archive, Hoover Institution], [Box] 4, [Index Number] IIa, [Folder] 3.
within the Russian Empire. Rachkovskii desperately wanted to be given the opportunity to study the documents. In particular, he wanted to gain access to the material taken from Peter Lavrov, who conducted a voluminous correspondence with dissidents in Russia. This was a ticklish matter. The French government told Rachkovskii that it would allow him to study those documents related to terrorism—a European-wide policy—but it would not permit him to review seized documents the contents of which dealt with other matters.

Lavrov, whose papers were of paramount importance to Rachkovskii and would give the Russian political police information that would lead to arrests within the Empire, was not a terrorist. In fact it was well known that he abhorred acts of terror. Therefore the negotiations held between Rachkovskii and the French Foreign Ministry over access to Lavrov’s papers are quite revealing.

Russian Minister of Internal Affairs Durnovo wrote Rachkovskii that he should make it clear to the French that St. Petersburg would regard a positive response to Rachkovskii’s request in a favourable light, while the failure of the French to co-operate in this matter might damage the relationship between the two countries.26 Rachkovskii told the French:

That which remains to be done [turning over the documents to Rachkovskii] is, in my opinion, nothing but a trifle for the French government but as you know often in this world it is the smallest things that produce the greatest effects.27

Rachkovskii’s referring to the “smallest thing” having a great effect placed the matter of a Franco-Russian alliance squarely on the table. The French understood that the act of supplying information to the tsarist government could lead to the arrest of possibly hundreds of radicals within Russia and enrage the French Left, thus having domestic repercussions of considerable proportions.

The French decided on a middle course. They would review the seized material before handing a selection of the documents over to the Russian police. The Russians combined this new material with intelligence gathered earlier. It led to a substantial number of arrests and fifty-nine convictions.28

The outcome of the “Landezen Affair” made the French government more sensitive to the potential danger presented by Russian revolutionary émigrés living in their midst. Certainly, the international situation played a role in the French decision to co-operate on a governmental level with the tsarist political police and after the conclusion of the Franco-Russian Alliance a stable Russia was clearly in France’s interest. But the changed domestic situation in France, particularly between 1892 and 1910, also played a role. The combination of terrorism, labour and peasant unrest, the rise of both right-wing and especially left-wing extremism, and a government marked by steadily revolving cabinets contributed to a sense of political and social fragility that made the French government more reliant on its own political police, more likely to follow the police’s advice and, at the same time, made it more sympathetic to the plight of the Russian government.29

26 Quoted in Millard, “Russian Revolutionary Emigration,” 143.
27 Ibid., 144.
28 Ibid., 149.
29 Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, trans. J. R. Foster (Cambridge, 1984), 144-145, 223, 246, 249-250,
As for Rachkovskii, he harassed the émigrés, transforming their already difficult lives in Paris into veritable nightmares of intrigue and suspicion. As we have seen, he manufactured propaganda campaigns and provocations that successfully turned French public opinion against the émigrés and his agents successfully infiltrated the revolutionary movement with highly skilled undercover operatives who disrupted the émigrés’ lives still further, all with the acquiescence of the Parisian authorities.

Rachkovskii understood that once the revolutionary émigrés realized they were no longer safe from the reach of the tsarist secret police, even within the borders of arguably one of the most democratic nations in Europe, the great strain under which the émigrés already lived would overwhelm many of them and drive them into silence, if not back into the tsarist camp itself.30

The Post-Rachkovskii Era and More Co-operation

In 1908, the Chief of the Paris Office, A.M. Harting, made a significant appointment when he employed Marcel Bittard-Monin. Bittard-Monin had just retired from the post of Director of Police Operations for the Paris Prefecture. He assumed a similar post as Director of Detective Operations for the Foreign Agentura with about twenty detectives under his control.31 This eased the way for a personal agreement between the Chief of the Paris Office and the Prefect of Paris in which the Prefect agreed to form a special detachment of agents who would maintain surveillance over so-called terrorists and would inform the Foreign Agentura about the results of its observations. The agreement had the approval of the French government, which claimed that it wished to ensure the tsar’s safety during his proposed trip to France in 191032—a rather weak excuse given that the trip was more than a year in the future.

Franco-Russian police co-operation of this sort was becoming easier all the time. The professionalization, that is, the standardization of training and outlook among political police cadres across Europe, accounts for this fact. Political policemen no matter their nationality belonged to the same club, they spoke (and still speak) the same language and shared the same professional values. For the government, however, things were not so simple. Government officials at the highest levels are generalists and politicians. What these share in common is a national political culture, which superseded the new political police sub-culture of the forces of order. Of course, these national cultures differ from country to country—from democracy to democracy, from autocracy to autocracy. The French and Russians could only consistently work together at a level where vital common interests overrode their political cultural differences.

30 For the case of Lev Tikhomirov, his mental breakdown and his return to the tsarist camp as an extreme right-wing propagandist for the monarchy see S.M. Taratuta, S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskiy revoliutsioner pisatel’ (Moscow, 1973), 383; Leonid Menshchikov, Russki politicheskii sysk za granitsei (Paris, 1914), 151.
31 Spisok sluzhashchikh v Zagranichnoi Agenture Departamenta Politsii udostoennik v 1909 gody nagrazhdeniiu Vysochaishimi podarkami i ordenami za uchastie v okhrane Gosudarstva Imperatora vo vermia prebivania Ego Velichestva v Shvetsii, Germanii,Fransii,Anglii, Itali, FAAr, 12, IIIc, 1; Bittard-Monin’s agent list for 1910, FAAr, 98,Xe, 57d.
32 V.K. Agafonov, Zagranichnaia okhranka (Petrograd, 1918), 98-99.
Nevertheless, when the French and Russian police worked together, their joint activities had to be kept secret from those who considered themselves the keepers of their political culture: politicians and newspapers, for example. Otherwise, scandal, which would deeply embarrass all concerned, would inevitably erupt.

For instance, in the summer of 1909, the story of Franco-Russian political police co-operation finally surfaced and created an immediate scandal. The Chamber of Deputies ordered foreign police forces from French soil, citing the Foreign Agentura in particular. Premier Clemenceau, probably thinking of the Franco-Russian Alliance, rescinded that order immediately, instructing the Paris Prefecture and the Sûreté Générale to renew their connection with the Foreign Agentura at once. Shortly thereafter Clemenceau’s successor Aristide Briand told the Russian Ambassador that he would follow his predecessor’s lead and not act against the Paris Office. Briand, however, had one crucial stipulation: in order to avoid the possibility of a deepening scandal in the future, the Russian police in France must reduce the number of agents working for it and more narrowly define its duties.

The Paris Office found itself in a dilemma. Briand’s order would curtail the size of its intelligence-gathering operations on the one hand and limit its psychological impact on the emigration on the other. While this is not the place to discuss the complicated and effective solution the Paris Office developed to resolve its problem, it is enough to say that the French political police was aware of the solution, but its superiors in the French government were kept completely in the dark. Indeed no politician, newspaper person or member of the general public was any the wiser!

The Russian police continued to operate more or less freely in France until the February Revolution of 1917 when it was disbanded.

**Conclusion**

This paper makes two major points. First, in the opinion of some scholars “a government is recognised as being authoritarian if its police are repressive, democratic if its police are restrained.” This observation reads well but only serves to obfuscate the complexity of police development in modernizing states that gave birth to and encouraged the growth of modern political policing institutions on the one

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33 The relationship between the Prefecture of Paris and the Foreign Agentura was probably much closer than either Clemenceau or Briand suspected. In exceptional cases, when the Foreign Agentura of the Russian police found itself short staffed it would request that an appropriate number of detectives be seconded to it by the Prefect of Paris in order to complete the task at hand. The Prefect complied. Director of the Foreign Agentura Krassil’nikov to the Department of Police 11/24 June 1910 cited in: Zagranichnaia Agentura Departamenta Politii’ (Zapiski S. Svatikov i dokumenty Zagranichniia Agentura) Glavnoe Arkhivnoe Upravlenie NKVD SSSR (Moscow, 1941), 119.

34 Dispatch No. 404, Paris 6/19 August 1909, FAAr, 4, IIa, 1.

35 Dispatch No. 1360, (Krassil’nikov to Beletskii), Paris, 23 August/5 September 1913, FAAr, 8, IIb, 5; Zuckerman. The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad, 183-186.

36 Quoted in Jonathan Daly, Autocracy under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia 1860-1905 (Dekalb, IL, 1998), 1.
hand and created an operational and professional bond amongst Europe’s political policemen on the other.\footnote{Johnson, “The Okhrana Abroad,” 81.}

Second, co-operation at governmental level was based more on the circumstances of the geopolitical situation than any other factor. Most current criminologists, such as Frances Heidensohn, emphasize the major hindrance to international police co-operation is culture which so deeply colors the interpretation of language, political and social attitudes and the nature of the legal and justice systems.\footnote{Michael Levi, “Developments in business crime control in Europe,” in \textit{Crime in Europe}, eds. Frances Heidensohn and Martin Farrell (London, 1991), 175.} To this we should add the most deeply embedded obstacle of all: self-interest.

Barton Ingraham remarked that the French political police, no matter how arbitrary and abusive of the law, were ultimately contained by its judiciary system operating under the sway of liberalism.\footnote{Calhoun, “The Politics of Internal Order,” 24.} In fact from about 1890 to the outbreak of the Great War the Okhrana almost never encountered a refusal to collaborate from the political police of the Paris Prefecture (or from any European State).\footnote{Johnson, “The Okhrana Abroad,” 45.}