



# Investigating The Russian Mafia

*Joseph D. Serio*

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In the 1990s, the so-called Russian mafia dominated newspaper headlines, political analysis, and academic articles around the world. It was the new scourge, a threat so massive that it was believed to hold the Russian economy hostage. Former FBI Director Louis Freeh announced that the Russian mafia was a significant threat to the national security of the United States.

Before the end of the decade, Director Freeh reversed himself, saying that in reality the magnitude of the danger from the Russian mafia had been overestimated. Heading into the new millennium, the international hue and cry about gangsters from the former Soviet Union subsided dramatically, particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11. Al-Qaeda shifted the spotlight from organized crime to terrorism and U.S. homeland security. Has the Russian mafia been eradicated or has it simply fallen below the radar?

Countless books and articles have reported on the Russian mafia in breathless terms bordering on hysteria. Casting a broad net, Serio brings a different, more analytical approach to his exploration of the subject. In *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, Part I begins by asking a series of basic questions: What did the Soviets understand 'mafia' to mean? Was this a Russian phenomenon or more broadly-based, multi-ethnic groups? How did the media influence the perception of the Russian mafia? What does a close examination of the official statistics reveal about the nature of crime groups in the former Soviet Union?

In Part II, Serio discusses an overview of attitudes and practices of the criminal world, business, and policing, among others, in Russian history. He demonstrates that many of the forces at work in the 1990s did not originate in the Communist era or arise because of the collapse of the USSR. Part III presents a discussion of the crime groups that developed in the post-Soviet era, the challenges that faced the business world, and the law enforcement response.

This book is not simply a discussion of the Russian mafia. It is an exercise in critical thinking about one of the major developments in international crime over the past two decades. Readers will be challenged to examine information being presented by the media and government authorities, to put the current news stories in a broader historical and cultural context, and learn to ask questions and arrive at their own conclusions. *Investigating the Russian Mafia* is ideal for students, law enforcement, practitioners, and business people operating in the former Soviet Union, as well as the general reader.

Serio brings a unique perspective to his subject matter. He lived in the former Soviet Union for seven years, witnessing the country and culture from a variety of angles. In the Soviet era he was a tourist and student in Moscow. He also served in a unique internship in the Organized Crime Control Department of the Soviet police prior to the collapse of the USSR. In the 1990s, he worked as a media consultant to The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, BBC, the Chicago Tribune, and others. Serio became a security consultant to the global corporate investigation and business intelligence firm, Kroll Associates, and later served as director of Kroll's Moscow office overseeing investigations across the former Soviet Union.

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