

Organization Attributes Sheet – Tambovskaya (AKA: Tambov Gang, AKA: Tambov Gang, AKA: Tambovskaya-Malyshevskaya)

Author: McKenzie O'Brien

Review: Phil Williams

A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- Tambovskaya was formed around 1988/1989¹ by **Vladimir Barsukov, (AKA: Vladimir Sergeevich Kumarin, AKA: “Kum”)** and **Valerii Ledovskikh**, a former sportsman.
- By 1990, the group had expanded in membership and its provision of “protection services,” covering “every possible form of commercial activity, from prostitution to the importation of computers.”²
- A 1990 police crackdown arrested 72 members of Tambovskaya, including Barsukov and Ledovskikh; Barsukov was sentenced to four years, but returned to continue to lead the criminal group.³
- The year 1993 saw some infighting within Tambovskaya, culminating in a 1994 contracted attempt on Barsukov by a rival faction within the group. Barsukov survived but lost his right arm.⁴
- Following this “internal war,” Barsukov, according to a premier scholar on Russian organized crime, “consolidated the leadership of the Tambovskaya group and began to create a new structure that would allow it to transform itself into a legitimate financial-industrial group. By the end of 1994 the group had already invested in the timber trade, computers, and entertainment facilities, and had set up a number of banks.”⁵
- In the 1990s, Tambovskaya began expanding its portfolio, moving into the energy sector by taking control of Petersburg Fuel Company (PTK). In 1994, Vladimir Putin (then deputy mayor of St. Petersburg) awarded to PTK the right be the sole supplier of gasoline to the city. Tambovskaya, given the control of gasoline to all of St. Petersburg, was thus given an incredible boost in power. In 1998-1999, Barsukov himself was the vice president of PTK.⁶
- At this point, Tambovskaya began to expand its influence further into the legitimate realm, pushing its “army of managers and officials...into business and politics.”⁷
- A second crackdown on the group came after deputy Novoselov was blown up in a car bomb in 1999. Several prominent members of Tambovskaya were either arrested or murdered.⁸ Despite this, the group continued to expand its portfolio and areas of operations.
- Barsukov was arrested in a massive law enforcement raid in 2007 and in 2009 was sentenced to 14 years in prison for fraud and legalization of property he had acquired illegally, as well as setting up a criminal group, extortion, and money laundering;⁹ he is also accused of ordering the 2006 attempt on the life of business rival Sergei Vasiliev.¹⁰ The raid in which Barsukov was apprehended is alleged to have been executed for political reasons, namely as retribution for Barsukov’s refusal to sell all of his holdings and back away from a business deal involving a friend of Putin’s.¹¹

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- **As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean:** drug trafficking, arms trafficking, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, credit card fraud,¹² and money laundering¹³
- **Globally:** drug trafficking, arms trafficking, contract killing, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, fraud (various types), auto theft and smuggling, cargo theft, money laundering,¹⁴ cyber crimes,¹⁵ and possibly antiquities smuggling¹⁶

b. *Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in*

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- **Drug Trafficking:** According to Interpol, Tambovskaya is actively trafficking drugs in Mexico.¹⁷ Furthermore, sources have indicated that Russian criminal groups are the main “masterminds” or organizers, along with Italian criminal groups, for other external actors interested in moving drugs from Latin America.¹⁸
- **Arms Trafficking:** According to Interpol, Tambovskaya is actively trafficking arms in Mexico.¹⁹

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- Estimates put the group’s peak size at 2,000 members.²⁰ Although current exact numbers are unknown to open source information, the group’s myriad activities and areas of operation would indicate that size remains significant.

b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)

- **As pertains to Central America and the Caribbean:** Mexico,²¹ Cuba;²² Latin America and the Caribbean in general.²³
- **Globally:** Russian Federation, all of Eastern and Western Europe, Balkans, Central Asia, the United States, Israel, much of China, Japan, Malaysia, and Indonesia²⁴

D. Leader Characteristics

a. Who is/are the leader(s)

- There is no information available from open sources as to who leads operations in Latin America. However, **Vladimir Barsukov, (AKA: Vladimir Sergeevich Kumarin, AKA: “Kum”)** was believed to lead the organization, along with **Valerii Ledovskikh**, until Barsukov’s arrest in 2007. It is likely that another (or others) have since filled Barsukov’s position (if he does not continue to lead from prison), but this information is unknown from the available open sources.

b. Leadership timeline

- **Vladimir Barsukov, (AKA: Vladimir Sergeevich Kumarin, AKA: “Kum”)** is/was the founding leader of the group.
- **Valerii Ledovskikh** was also a founding leader and was head of the group’s “enforcement branch.”²⁵
- **Gennadiy Petrov** is reported to have been a prominent member of Tambovskaya, the leader of the group’s operations in Spain, after it settled there in 1996.²⁶ Petrov is now incarcerated in Spain, apprehended in 2008 in Spain’s “Operation Troika.”²⁷
- **Aleksandr Malyshev** is the founding leader of Malyshevskaya, which some denote as a part of Tambovskaya; he is currently held in Spain, along with Petrov.²⁸

c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)

- **Diffuse** – While there is a degree of decisions made at the “core” of the group, in general, decisions tend to be spread among various levels of authority and various cells and nodes of the network.²⁹

E. Organizational Structure

a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)

- **Structured, but flexible, cellular network** – There is a degree of hierarchy in that some decisions appear to be made by certain key authorities within the group, but Tambovskaya as a whole functions generally as a flexible network, with members/components allocated to diffuse areas and tasks that will make the group both more effective in its endeavors, but also safer from law enforcement. Moreover, the group’s structure also employs cells, especially with regard to contingents operating farther from the former Soviet Union. These cells, while loosely affiliated

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

with the core, generally make their own decisions and operate autonomously.³⁰

b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?

- Information not found.

c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

- **Decentralized** - Reports from Interpol and other law enforcement agencies indicate that Russian criminal organizations are operating in Mexico through multiple small cells.³¹

F. Resources

a. Financial

- **Significant financial resources.** It is possible that Tambovskaya has at its disposal the equivalent of billions of U.S. dollars. It has been reported that, in 2009, Barsukov had to his own name between \$850 million and \$1 billion USD.³² A Bulgarian newspaper has alleged that Russian businesswoman Elisabeth Elena von Messing and her colleague Dmitry Abramkin laundered in 2008 perhaps as much as GBP895 million through her company, Optima, which is registered in Sofia; this money was allegedly some of Tambovskaya's proceeds from drug trafficking, prostitution, and protection rackets.³³ The group also has access to revenue generated from legitimate businesses ventures in which it has representatives – in industries such as: the fuel and energy complex, the food industry, machine-building, the credit and finance sphere and the trade in real estate.³⁴

b. Human

- **Significant human resources.** Tambovskaya is a large group involved in numerous illicit activities. The group, therefore, has members of various specializations to increase success in its ventures. For instance, the group is known to use professional managers and accountants.³⁵

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- In order to maintain low profiles in Mexico, Russian criminal groups are known to operate out of resorts [or hotels or houses] owned by their Mexican business partners."³⁶

ii. Key routes

- Information not found.

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Information not found.

ii. Sea

- According to a Balkan crime expert, Russians, for whom Serbian and Montenegrin criminal groups reportedly work beneath in Latin American drug trafficking, utilize "oceangoing vessels" in a "big system" to smuggle cocaine.³⁷

iii. Air

- Information not found.

iv. Intermodal container

- Information not found.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- No information on use of corruption in Central America and the Caribbean, but Tambovskaya and Russian groups are known to make extensive use of corruption in Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

the former Soviet Union, Central Asia, and elsewhere.

b. Concealment

- Information not found.

c. Deception

- In order to maintain low profiles in Mexico, Russian groups often operate out of resorts [or hotels or houses] owned by their Mexican business partners.³⁸

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Information not found.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- **Mexican criminal organizations (highly cooperative)** – According to Stratfor sources, “Links between Russian organized criminal groups and one or more of the principal Mexican criminal organizations have allowed the Russians to obtain and transport illicit narcotics at a low cost and under relatively secure circumstances for shipment to Europe and Russia.”³⁹
- **Colombian criminal organizations (cooperative)** – cooperation in drug trafficking⁴⁰
- **Italian criminal organizations (particularly La Cosa Nostra and the Camorra)** – degrees of cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or counterfeiting. With regard to the Camorra, The two groups appear to be cooperating in such ventures as gambling, prostitution, fraud and extortion.⁴¹
- **Japanese Yakuza** – some cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or counterfeiting⁴²
- **Chinese Triads** – cooperation in drug trafficking, money laundering and/or counterfeiting⁴³
- **Turkish criminal organizations** – cooperation in drug trafficking⁴⁴
- **Balkan criminal organizations (including the Saric Group)** – According to Balkan sources, might be the actual “masterminds” or organizers of cocaine smuggling from Latin America, dealing with Balkan and other external criminal groups wishing to smuggle cocaine from the region.⁴⁵
- **Russian Business Network (RBN)** – Tambovskaya has been connected to the Russian Business Network, a premier cybercrime entity. Allegedly, in the late 1990s or early 2000s, RBN, as it was growing in power, proficiency, and profit, either merged with Tambovskaya or came under this group’s protection.⁴⁶

b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement, political parties and other state entities, etc.

- **Russian political and security structures (at all levels)** – One of the most significant sources of power for Russian organized crime is its connections within the government. There is no clear distinction in Russia between criminal enterprises and the government. In point of fact, criminal organizations and their leadership often have direct ties to oligarchs and others in positions of power.⁴⁷

c. *Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.*

- There is no indication in open sources of past or present dealings and/or relationships with any known terrorist groups.

I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)

- It is significant to note that Russian criminal organizations such as Tambovskaya do not always have ethnic orientations, unlike some other criminal groups from the former Soviet Union.

J. Technical Sophistication

- **In general, assessed as technically sophisticated.** It is unknown from open sources the degree

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

of technical sophistication the Tambovskaya is utilizing in terms of its operations in Central America and the Caribbean. However, it is known that the group utilizes excellent information technology (IT) resources and personnel of the highest technical sophistication to aid in traditional operations, but also, increasingly, to engage in manipulation and exploitation of cyberspace and information within the cyber realm. For instance, the group has been connected to the Russian Business Network, arguably the premier cybercrime entity.⁴⁸

K. **Penchant for Innovation**

- **Assessed as highly innovative.** This judgment is based upon the notion that Russian criminal organizations, including the Tambovskaya, have grown in terms of the number of illicit – and licit – activities they have engaged in over the past two decades, despite increased attention from various government, law enforcement, and academic entities. Moreover, Russian criminal organizations have expanded into the cyber realm, using cyberspace to facilitate where possible even traditional illicit ventures.

L. **Activities in United States**

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- May include human trafficking/prostitution.

b. *Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities*

- *Human Trafficking/Prostitution:* The Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition (BSCC) has noted that criminal gangs from Russia have been discovered attempting to traffic victims across the U.S.-Mexico border.⁴⁹ They have succeeded in some cases: Using Mexico as a transit point, Russian groups have moved East European/Russian victims to New York.⁵⁰

c. Linkages with US groups

i. Market/transaction links

- Information not found.

ii. Stable supplier

- Information not found.

iii. Franchise arrangement

- Information not found.

iv. HQ and Branch office

- Within the United States, Russian groups are known to operate extensively in New York, particularly in Brighton Beach and Brooklyn, and in the “tri-state” area in general (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York).⁵¹

M. **Evaluations**

a. Strengths

- **Financial Resources** – Extensive financial resources, generated from numerous illicit and legitimate sources, bring the group enormous financial power.
- **International criminal and political connections** – The group has strong cooperative ties to Mexican and Colombian criminal organizations, among others, enhancing its power and capabilities in the region. A presence in numerous countries, in addition to ties to many criminal organizations across the world, gives the group a degree of global power and capabilities. Connections to federal and local Russian government officials and the security apparatus also give the group vast additional resources as well as protection.
- **Operational security (OPSEC) and denial, deception, and evasion measures** – Russian criminal groups, including Tambovskaya, are exceptional at evading detection by hostile and inquisitive entities, likely through a combination of good operational security and measures taken to deny information, to deceive, and to evade such Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

	authorities.
b.	Weaknesses and vulnerabilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of operations, while a strength in many respects, also give the group a vulnerability in that it adds to the burden of OPSEC. • The sentencing of founding leader Barsukov, along with the apprehension of Petrov and Malyshev in Spain, could be a psychological blow to Tambovskaya and/or a disruption to the organization's operations that perhaps can be further exploited by authorities.
c.	Additional insights
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative to other large and powerful transnational criminal organizations, it is extremely difficult to find information, even dated, about this Russian group and others. This problem is exacerbated the farther one moves from the former Soviet Union, where investigators and journalists are more familiar with Russian organized crime.
Other Notes	
	•

¹ Volkov, Vadim. *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (New York: Cornell University, 2002), 109.

² *Ibid.*, 109.

³ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹ "Petersburg Court Upholds Verdict In Hostile Takeovers Case," Moscow *ITAR-TASS*, March 31, 2010, OSC: CEP20100331950027.

¹⁰ "Arrested St. Petersburg Crime Boss Vladimir Barsukov-Kumarin Profiled," Moscow *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, September 3, 2007, OSC: CEP20070903019002.

¹¹ Franchetti, Mark. "Russia's 'Al Capone' sneers at his trial," *The Times* (London), May 31, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6395870.ece>.

¹² La Jeunesse, William and Maxim Lott. "The Myth of 90 Percent: Only a Small Fraction of Guns in Mexico Come From U.S.," *Fox News*, April 2, 2009.; and Burton, Fred and Dan Burges. "Russian Organized Crime," *Stratfor*, November 14, 2007.

¹³ Galeotti, Mark. "Organized Crime Gangs Pose Threat to Cuban Development," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 2006.

¹⁴ Burton and Burges.

¹⁵ Menn, Joseph. *Fatal System Error: The Hunt for the New Crime Lords Who Are Bringing Down the Internet* (New York: PublicAffaris, 2010), 203.

¹⁶ "Arrested St. Petersburg Crime Boss Vladimir Barsukov-Kumarin Profiled," OSC: CEP20070903019002.

¹⁷ La Jeunesse and Lott.

¹⁸ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," Podgorica *Analitika*, November 18, 2010, OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," Podgorica *Revija D Online*, February 16-23, 2011, OSC: EUP20110225023001.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Franchetti.

²¹ "Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America," OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and "Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling," OSC: EUP20110225023001.

-
- ²² Galeotti.
- ²³ Burton and Burges.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Volkov, 10.
- ²⁶ “Suspected boss of Russian mafia group freed on bail in Spain,” Madrid *EFE*, January 27, 2010, OSC: EUP20100128950013.
- ²⁷ “Spanish Security Reports Expose Russian General's Mafia Connections,” Madrid *ABC.es*, November 10, 2009, OSC: EUP20100208210006.
- ²⁸ “Russian mafia chiefs held in Spain form higher mob leadership – daily,” BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, July 8, 2008.
- ²⁹ Burton and Burges.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Burton and Burges.
- ³² “Russian paper reviews career of jailed leader of St Petersburg's Tambov gang,” BBC Worldwide Monitoring, *LexisNexis Academic*, December 4, 2009.
- ³³ Ronay, Gabriel. “A tale of Russian mafia, a Bulgarian businesswoman and 1bn,” *The Sunday Herald*, February 22, 2009.
- ³⁴ “Background to Arrest of Petersburg Crime Boss Kumarin,” St. Petersburg *Fontanka.ru*, August, 24, 2007, OSC: CEP20070824318004.
- ³⁵ Volkov, 114.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ “Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America,” OSC: EUP20101129023003.
- ³⁸ Burton and Burges.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ “Crime Expert Nicovic Claims Russian Mafia Runs Drug Smuggling from South America,” OSC: EUP20101129023003.; and “Drug Boss Saric's Associate Joksovic Discloses Information on Cocaine Smuggling,” OSC: EUP20110225023001.
- ⁴⁶ Menn, 203.
- ⁴⁷ Burton and Burges.
- ⁴⁸ Menn, 203.
- ⁴⁹ Seelke, Clare Ribando. “Trafficking in Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Congressional Research Service*, December 9, 2010.
- ⁵⁰ Lin Goh, Janice Phaik. “Deterritorialized Women in the Global City: An Analysis of Sex Trafficking in Dubai, Tokyo and New York,” *Intersections*, Spring 2009.
- ⁵¹ Finckenauer and Waring.