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DETAILS EMERGE OF SECOND RUSSIAN PLOT TO ASSASSINATE YUSHCHENKO

By Taras Kuzio

As Viktor Yushchenko prepares for his inauguration as Ukraine's third president, he knows that Ukraine-Russia relations will be one of the most difficult issues he faces. The Economist (December 29) advised Yushchenko, "to kiss and make up with Russia and Vladimir Putin, who backed Mr. Yanukovych and has thus been humiliated by his defeat." Such reconciliation will be far easier said than done. Russia is reportedly behind two attempts on Yushchenko's life, one through poisoning and a second with a bomb. Yushchenko alluded to the latter plot when he said, "Those who wanted to blow myself up did not undertake it, because they came too close and could have blown themselves up" (Ukrayinska pravda, December 16).

While details of the poisoning are better known, evidence of the bomb threat has only just come to light in a documentary on Channel Five, a Ukrainian television station sympathetic to Yushchenko. Details aired in the weekly "Zakryta Zona" (Closed Zone) documentary, under the suitable title "Terrorists" (5tv.com.ua/pr_archiv/136/0/265/).

During last year's election campaign a still-unexplained bomb detonated in Kyiv, killing one person and injuring dozens more. The Kuchma government blamed the Ukrainian People's Party (UNP), a member of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc, for the attack. Explosives were also planted during searches of the offices of opposition youth groups. The Security Service (SBU) and Interior Ministry (MVS) have now admitted that charges of "terrorism" against the UNP and youth groups were false (Ukrayinska pravda, December 16; razom.org.ua, December 23).

According to Channel Five, the real terrorists were the authorities, conspiring with the Russian security services (FSB). It would be naive to believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin was unaware of the plot. An illicitly transcribed telephone conversation, cited at length in the "Zakryta Zona" documentary, between a Ukrainian informant and an FSB officer showed how the Russian authorities were fully aware of the dirty tricks being used by Russian political advisors working for Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych. The "advisors," such as Gleb Pavlovsky and Marat Gelman, worked with Yanukovych's shadow campaign headquarters, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Andriy Kluyev. Presidential administration head and Social Democratic United Party (SDPUo) leader Viktor Medvedchuk served as Gelman and Pavlovsky's principal contact. The taped conversation reveals that Gelman and Pavlovsky considered assassination to be a legitimate campaign strategy. The FSB officer on the tape specifically discusses the poisoning of Yushchenko.

The bomb attempt may have been conceived after the poison failed to kill Yushchenko before election day. Plans for the bomb attack were discovered when a spetsnaz unit of the State Defense Service (DSO) was sent to investigate a burglar alarm. The alarm went off near one of the three offices used by the Yushchenko campaign. The DSO noticed a car with Russian license plates and asked the two occupants for their documents. After a check of their Russian and Ukrainian passports revealed them to be false, a search of the car's trunk found three kilos of plastic explosives, enough to destroy everything within a 500-meter radius.

Both passengers were arrested and a subsequent investigation unmasked them as Mikhail M. Shugay and Marat B. Moskvitin, Russian citizens from the Moscow region. Their only contact in Moscow had been a certain "Surguchov" who had hired them in September for the bombing operation against Yushchenko and his ally, Yulia Tymoshenko. The terrorists were to receive \$50,000 after the bomb plot was completed. After smuggling the explosives through the Russian-Ukrainian border, both FSB operatives set up a safe house in the village of Dudarkiv, 15 kilometers from Kyiv. A search of these premises found pistols, radio equipment, and bomb-making instructions.

The plot thickens with additional taped telephone conversations played in the "Zakryta Zona" documentary. These conversations were made by the SBU during the elections and handed over to Yushchenko after round two. Kluyev is heard discussing with unknown individuals the whereabouts of Yushchenko's office and where the leadership of the Yushchenko camp meets. The documentary's producers believe that Kluyev sought this intelligence to pass on to the Russian assassination team, so that bombs could be placed to murder not only Yushchenko, but also other members of his team, such as Tymoshenko.

Increasing evidence points to Russian involvement in Yushchenko's poisoning. In December Yushchenko's doctors in Vienna concluded that he had, in fact, been poisoned by TCDD, the most toxic form of dioxin. His dioxin level was 6,000 times higher than normal and the second highest recorded in history. Alexander V. Litvinenko, who served in the KGB and the FSB before defecting to the United Kingdom, has revealed that the FSB has a secret laboratory in Moscow that specializes in poisons. A former dissident scientist now living in the United States, Vil S. Mirzayanov, reported that this institute studied dioxins while developing defoliants for the military. (TCDD was a component of Agent Orange.) SBU defector Valeriy Krawchenko also pointed to this FSB laboratory as the likely source of the dioxin that poisoned Yushchenko (New York Times, December 15).

Yushchenko has alleged that the poisoning took place during a September 5, 2004, dinner at the home of then-deputy SBU chairman Volodymyr Satsyuk, a member of the SDPUo. This again reveals the involvement of Medvedchuk and Russian political advisors working for Yanukovych. Not surprisingly,

Satsyuk and Kluyev have hurriedly abandoned their government positions to return to parliament, where they enjoy immunity.

Russia's involvement in two terrorist attacks in Ukraine, a poisoning and bombing, make a mockery of Putin's alleged commitment to work alongside the United States in the international war on terrorism.