

## **EURASIA DAILY MONITOR**

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### **DID UKRAINE'S SECURITY SERVICE REALLY PREVENT BLOODSHED DURING THE ORANGE REVOLUTION?**

**By Taras Kuzio**

On January 17, the New York Times published a sensational expose alleging that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) had been key to preventing bloodshed during the Orange Revolution. The article was translated for Ukrayinska pravda the same day and has unleashed a debate as to whether the allegations are true or an attempt at whitewashing the SBU in time for Viktor Yushchenko's presidency.

The issue of whether bloodshed was contemplated is crucial to understanding the success of the Orange Revolution. In both the Serbian (November 2000) and Georgian (October-November 2003) democratic revolutions the security forces either stayed neutral or defected to the opposition. In October Russian political technologist Marat Gelman, who worked on Viktor Yanukovich's campaign, ruled out a Georgian scenario in Ukraine, predicting that the security forces would stay loyal to the authorities (Ukrayinska pravda, October 29, 2004). This prediction was wrong, and Eurasia Daily Monitor (December 1) was the first to identify the growing defection of security forces as likely to lead to a victory for the Orange Revolution.

A majority of the SBU did prefer Yushchenko to his main opponent, Viktor Yanukovich. For example, some 80% of officers enrolled in the SBU Academy in Kyiv voted for Yushchenko (Zerkalo nedeli, November 20-26, 2004). Throughout the election campaign the Yushchenko camp had excellent contacts with the SBU, which gave them (and Eurasia Daily Monitor) internal documents from the Yanukovich camp. But, this was also true of the Interior Ministry, whose personnel kept relaying to the Yushchenko camp their opposition to using force against protestors.

Elements of the SBU taped Yanukovich's "shadow campaign" headquarters and the audiotapes were given over to the Yushchenko camp immediately after round two. On November 25 the SBU issued a statement affirming their opposition to the official results that had declared a Yanukovich victory and stating their readiness to defend the protestors.

Nevertheless, four factors work against the New York Times expose's ability to improve the image of SBU chief Ihor Smeshko. Already allegations have been raised that the article was merely a public relations exercise for Smeshko (oligarch.net, January 20).

First, outgoing president Leonid Kuchma is also claiming credit for not ordering a violent crackdown. Kuchma "guaranteed" that there would be no violent crackdown "under any circumstances" (UNIAN, November 11, 2004).

Former deputy presidential administration head Vasyl Baziv revealed that it was actually Yanukovych and presidential administration head Viktor Medvedchuk who lobbied for a violent crackdown. The duo are undoubtedly the same officials who attempted to move Interior Troops to Kyiv.

Besides Yanukovych and Medvedchuk, then-Prosecutor-General Hennadiy Vasilyev issued a statement on November 22, one day after round two, calling upon the authorities and the SBU to "firmly put an end to lawlessness." Three days later he ordered a criminal case to be launched against Yushchenko and his ally, Yulia Tymoshenko for their "seizure of power." The order was never issued, because Deputy Prosecutor General Mykola Holomsha refused to implement it and was removed on November 29.

After he resigned on December 8, Vasilyev was interviewed and continued to refuse to describe the protests as a "revolution," instead calling them "complete bedlam" (*Donetskiye novosti*, January 10). Like his close ally Yanukovych, Vasilyev believes that Yushchenko seized power in a coup d'etat and that the authorities should have resisted the protests in the first week of the Orange Revolution.

Are Kuchma and Smeshko really though, the "good guys" and Yanukovych, Medvedchuk, and Vasilyev the "bad guys"? The Ukrainian authorities completely under-estimated the number of protestors in the crucial first days after round two when they could have ostensibly blocked the movement of protestors traveling to Kyiv.

Last summer Kuchma cynically recalled how the opposition had threatened him with 200,000 protestors during the Kuchmagate protests in 2000-2003 but had never mustered more than 20,000-50,000 (*Den*, July 20, 2004). Consequently the SBU never expected more than 15,000-20,000 protestors to hit Kyiv's streets after elections fraud. The Ukrainian authorities also repeatedly stated that Ukraine was not the same as Georgia and that no revolution would take place in Ukraine.

It would have been one thing to put down 20,000-50,000 protestors and another 500,000 to a million. The first could have been done without bloodshed through the use of truncheons, water cannons, and tear gas but the second could not have. By November 28 the authorities not only faced larger protests than they had expected but also could not count wholeheartedly on the loyalty of the security forces. Unlike the smaller protests, this crowd could not be put down without bloodshed.

Ukraine's most important Western military district (with its headquarters in Yushchenko's Lviv stronghold) defected to Yushchenko early on, as did much of the Interior Ministry. Sending 10,000 Internal Troops against the protestors would have been too few to deal with such large crowds, and they

would have been met by overwhelming resistance from pro-Yushchenko protestors and security forces.

Perhaps then the commander of Ukraine's Internal Troops, Lt-Gen. Serhiy Popkov, is being truthful when he says the movement of Internal Troops on November 28 was merely an "exercise" (Segodnya, December 16). Not surprisingly, speaking in defense of Smeshko, Vitaly Romanchenko, head of the SBU's military counterintelligence, confirmed the New York Times report that this was not a drill but a move on Kyiv (Segodnya, January 18).

But beyond civil war, the New York Times notes, a violent crackdown could also have led to a 1989 Romanian-style revolution in which the country's leader is executed.

Second, the expose raises suspicions that Smeshko is seeking to distance himself from his former deputy chairman, Oleksandr Satsyuk. Yushchenko believes he was poisoned during a dinner at Satsyuk's home; Smeshko also attended that fateful dinner. Satsyuk resigned from the SBU and has returned to parliament, where he enjoys immunity.

Third, under Smeshko the SBU began to return to KGB-style tactics against the opposition. Instructions were sent to SBU officers stationed in Ukrainian embassies to place opposition members and even parliamentary deputies under surveillance if they visited abroad.

Long-time SBU officer Oleksandr Tsvil defected in early 2004 to protest these orders, which he believed to be illegal. Tsvil returned to Ukraine during the elections and released his memoirs, *In the Center of the Cassette Scandal*. Parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn also complained that he and his family were placed under SBU surveillance through verbal orders issued by Deputy Chairman Satsyuk (Silski visti, October 8, 2004).

Fourth, Tsvil had worked alongside presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko whose illicit tape recordings had led to the Kuchmagate scandal in November 2000. Melnychenko, who is planning to follow Tsvil's example and return to Ukraine, claims that he was advised four times officially (presumably by the FBI) that his life was in danger. Melnychenko claimed that these threats "came directly from SBU head Smeshko" (Ukrayinska pravda, January 18).

The New York Times expose brings together many different strands concerning the attitudes of the security forces to the Orange Revolution. But it fails to make a convincing case that Smeshko saved Ukraine from bloodshed. The credit for this should go to Yushchenko and Ukraine's Orange Revolution protestors who practiced non-violence.

