

**RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES RESORT TO INTER-ETHNIC VIOLENCE TO BLOCK YUSHCHENKO**

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

A November 2003 document prepared by Russian "political technologists" working for Viktor Medvedchuk, head of the Presidential Administration, has been leaked to Ukrayinska Pravda (June 25). The report outlines how President Leonid Kuchma could win a third term by discrediting his main opponent as a "nationalist" and an inciter of inter-ethnic conflict. Interestingly, one month after the strategy was produced, the Constitutional Court ruled that Kuchma could stand for a third term, arguing that his first term (1994-99) did not count because it began before the 1996 constitution.

The third-term strategy was prepared six months before pro-presidential forces tapped Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich as their candidate in April 2004. This decision came one week after parliament voted against constitutional changes that would have transferred some executive powers to the prime minister.

The opposition has repeatedly warned that the authorities may attempt to incite conflict in two ways. In November 2003 "Our Ukraine" deputy Mykola Tomenko publicly discussed temnyky (secret instructions from the Presidential Administration) that outlined plans for inciting instability and then imposing a state of emergency (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 7, 2003). Plans to incite Western versus Eastern Ukraine were widely discussed by opposition circles in November 2003, the same month the strategy was prepared (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 3, 12, 24, 2003). Another secret plan for a state of emergency, this one put forward by Medvedchuk's Social Democrats (SDPUo), was leaked to a Luhansk newspaper and then discussed in Ukrayina Moloda (November 6, 2003).

The first plan would be a state of emergency leading to an indefinite postponement of the elections. Such a scenario would be a desperate measure taken because Yushchenko was leading in the polls and likely to win elections and thereby inherit Kuchma's powers (as constitutional changes had failed). The crisis during the April Mukachiv mayoral elections (the authorities used skinheads to intimidate and incite violence, committed election fraud, destroyed voter slips, and encouraged Interior Ministry personnel to turn a blind eye on such violations) provides a glimpse of possible actions.

The second plan would be to depict Yushchenko as somebody who would lead to instability if he were elected. Kuchma (or another centrist, such as Prime Minister Yanukovych) would then be proposed as a source of "stability." Better the status quo than instability. This scenario was tested in October 2003 when Yushchenko held a congress in Donetsk. The city was plastered with billboards depicting him giving a Nazi salute. Yushchenko was also shown on television accompanied by anti-terrorist "Alpha" forces from the Security Service (SBU) during organized anti-Yushchenko demonstrations. The message sent to Ukrainian voters was that Donetsk did not like Yushchenko and to be wary of him as he creates instability.

The November 2003 strategy says openly, "Our aim is to destabilize the situation in the regions (through political intrigues, not by harming the economy), to drag Yushchenko into these processes, and through the media severely point out that responsibility for dealing with this situation rests upon the Cabinet of Ministers and parliament" (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 25).

The document outlines how conflict would be provoked between Tatars and Russian or Ukrainian groups in the Crimea. "Pro-Russian" forces would complain that Ukraine is unable to defend the interests of Slavs in the Crimea and would seek the intervention of Russia. In March inter-ethnic conflict in the Crimea was deliberately provoked during a visit by philanthropist George Soros (Itar-Tass, March 26). The opposition leaked details to Ukrayinska Pravda (March 26 and May 17) of government plans to declare a state of emergency in the Crimea following ethnic conflict. Media sources controlled by Medvedchuk gave the Crimean conflict extensive airtime and depicted Soros as attempting to repeat the 2003 Georgian revolution in Ukraine. Serhiy Markov, director of the Moscow-based Institute of Political Research and also a close ally of Putin, accused Crimean Tatars -- who usually vote for Yushchenko's Our Ukraine -- of training to storm official buildings on election night (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 28).

Two other proposals laid out in the strategy for inciting discord in Polish-Ukrainian relations. Possible approaches would be to escalate the dispute over cemeteries of soldiers in Lviv or fan Ukrainian-Russian religious conflicts. In the latter case, the aim would be identify Yushchenko as being completely aligned with the "anti-Russian" Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarch.

Yushchenko asked the SBU to halt such "inter-ethnic provocations" intended to discredit the opposition (Ukrayinska Pravda, May 27). Oleksandr Zinchenko, the head of Yushchenko's

election campaign, warned that more "provocations" could be undertaken against Yushchenko. These "provocations," according to Zinchenko, who was formerly deputy head of the SDPUo, are being planned in the Presidential Administration (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 26).

As with the Russian Liberal Democratic Party, the Ukrainian authorities control four extreme nationalist groups: the Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA), the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (ONU), the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in Ukraine (OUNvU), Rukh for Unity (RukhZ), and Bratstvo (Brotherhood). Nationalist groups, such as KUN (Congress Ukrainian Nationalists) in Our Ukraine and another wing of UNA, which adds the abbreviation UNSO (Ukrainian Peoples Self-Defense Forces) in the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc, are bona fide members of the opposition.

The four pro-Kuchma nationalist groups (UNA, OUNvU, RukhZ, Bratstvo) are believed to be funded by either the SDPUo or the Presidential Administration. They certainly have close ties to the president's allies. Dmytro Korchynsky, head of Bratstvo, is a commentator on Medvedchuk's 1+1 television channel. Andriy Chornovil, head of OUNvU, is a member of the SDPUo Social Justice faction in the Lviv oblast council, and the Lviv faction is headed by Serhiy Medvedchuk, Viktor's brother.

In March 2001 "Tryzub" paramilitaries from RukhZ were used to provoke violent clashes in Kyiv. The blame for the violence was placed upon members of the opposition UNA-UNSO (Tymoshenko bloc) who were arrested and imprisoned.

In the March 2002 elections pro-presidential nationalist groups backed Kuchma's For a United Ukraine bloc. OUNvU was one of the first parties to announce its support for Prime Minister Yanukovich's presidential bid (Ukrayinska Pravda, December 9, 2003).

Only one of the four nationalist groups controlled by the authorities -- UNA -- has declared its support for Yushchenko. Our Ukraine immediately denounced UNA's support as aimed at discrediting Yushchenko. Three hundred UNA members wearing SS-style black uniforms and carrying flags with SS-style inscriptions, accompanied by anti-semitic speeches, announced their support for the "right-wing presidential candidate Yushchenko" at a Kyiv demonstration. Three television channels controlled by Medvedchuk repeatedly aired the demonstration, highlighting UNA as Yushchenko supporters (UT-1, 1+1, Inter, June 26).

The Kuchma camp's resort to these tactics is a sign of desperation. They are dangerous and could easily backfire. The involvement of Russian "political technologists" close to Putin is another cause for concern.