

SBU Challenges the FSB in Crimea

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 134

July 14, 2009 12:52 PM Age: 2 hrs

Category: Eurasia Daily Monitor, Home Page, Ukraine, Foreign Policy, Military/Security, Domestic/Social

By: Taras Kuzio

The Russian missile cruiser Moskva seen anchored in the Black Sea port of Sevastopol, Ukraine.

In line with implementing stricter security policies in Sevastopol and the Crimea, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) is adopting tougher policies towards Russian intelligence activities in the peninsula. These follow the August 2008 decrees restricting the movement of Russian Black Sea Fleet vessels in and out of Sevastopol without Ukrainian consent. The SBU has officially given its Russian equivalent, the Federal Security Service (FSB), until December 13 to remove itself from Ukraine. SBU chairman Valentyn Nalyvaychenko warned that if the FSB has not left by that date, "then they would bear criminal responsibility. The criminal code contains an article on 'espionage'" (www.pravda.com.ua, June 28).

The FSB officers also operate in counter-intelligence matters. Russia utilizes its domestic intelligence agency, (the FSB) in its dealings with the CIS, because it is regarded as the "near abroad" (the SVR is used in the "far abroad"). Russian policy would be the equivalent of the FBI rather than the CIA operating in Central and Latin America.

Nalyvaychenko explained that he had consulted the Ukrainian foreign ministry before advising Moscow of the cancellation of the protocol permitting the FSB to operate in Sevastopol. Nineteen FSB officers currently operate in Sevastopol. Russian intelligence has always been thought to support separatist, anti-NATO and anti-American groups and parties, even providing Black Sea Fleet personnel who wear civilian clothes to participate in protests. Nalyvaychenko revealed that one factor behind the decision to terminate the right of the FSB to maintain its presence in Sevastopol was that they did not restrict themselves to the naval base. "Foreign special services operate in the city of Sevastopol. And this is against Ukrainian law," he said (www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian, June 18).

One member of the Ukrainian parliamentary committee on national security and defense, Oleksandr Skybinetsky, said that most Ukrainian experts in security affairs are concerned that Russian intelligence orchestrates various groups and protest movements that are hostile to Ukrainian sovereignty. The SBU has instituted criminal charges against separatists and brought in political leaders for interrogation. The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party faction in the Sevastopol city council, Yevhen Dubovyk, was recently questioned after he threatened radical steps to unite Sevastopol and the Crimea with Russia (Ukrayinsky Tyzhden, June 12).

A second factor of concern to the SBU is the possible recruitment of Ukrainian citizens who comprise the majority of the 20,000 workforce in the fleet and military-industrial enterprises that provide services to it. Financial inducements are hard to resist when pay in the fleet and its ancillary industries is twice that in other Russian naval units and many times higher than the average pay in Ukraine.

Why the FSB needs to be involved in the security of the Black Sea Fleet is puzzling, since this would more normally be the task of military intelligence. Ukrainian military intelligence operates in Sevastopol and it is assumed by Kyiv that Russian military intelligence maintains a presence within the fleet.

The ostensible reason the Black Sea Fleet claims it needs Russian intelligence units is to safeguard the security of the fleet on foreign territory. The question is against whom? The SBU has offered to provide full security for the fleet. Nalyvaychenko revealed that the SBU had established a new "powerful counter-intelligence unit in Simferopol, Sevastopol and other cities of the Crimea." This unit would be ideally suited to protect the fleet, he added (Nezavisimoy Gazete, June 15). As soon as this unit was established, Nalyvaychenko advised his Russian counterparts that the FSB was no longer required in the Crimea.

The SBU could deal with law and order and terrorist issues. "We do not need assistance or the physical presence of foreign secret services," Nalyvychenko said (Nezavisimoy Gazete, June 15). The Russian reaction was predictably negative and similar to Yushchenko's August 2008 decrees. The Russian foreign ministry reiterated that the FSB was in Ukraine based on earlier agreements in relation to the fleet. They could only be removed through mutual agreement (www.pravda.com.ua, June 18).

Anatoliy Tsyganok, the head of the Russian Center for Military Forecasting, believes that the FSB will ignore the Ukrainian demand (www.pravda.com.ua, June 17). Kiril Frolov, a representative of the Institute for the CIS, warned of an "asymmetrical response" from Russia for this "unfriendly Ukrainian act against the Russian state" (www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian, June 18). It remains unclear how Russia can retaliate, since Ukraine has no military base on its territory and the SBU only has a minimal presence in its diplomatic representations within Russia.

The old and technologically obsolete vessels in the fleet are not a threat to the four NATO member countries in the Black Sea. The only occasion they have been used is in the August 2008 invasion of non-NATO member Georgia. NATO has long known everything it needed to know about the Fleet. In December 1991, this author faxed to Ukrainian members of parliament, after they had held a successful referendum on independence, xeroxes of the pages pertaining to the Black Sea Fleet in the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Military Balance. Open source IISS publications were purchased by the Soviet Embassy who then classified them as "confidential" and they were subsequently placed in the restricted areas ("spetsfond") of Soviet libraries.

Sevastopol was neglected by Kyiv since independence. The city has few memorials dedicated to Ukrainian history, but is full of Russian and Soviet symbols tying the twice "hero city" to Russia. The city's youth is "educated exclusively on Russian history, Russian patriotism and loyalty to Russian statehood." The fleet plays an important role in this process, which transcends its military function, "especially in the areas of education, propaganda, information and culture" (Ukrayinsky Tyzhden, June 12).

On June 12 Ukrayinsky Tyzhden asked: "What about official Kyiv?" "Well, it (official Kyiv) undertakes a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine." Russian policies towards Sevastopol are conducted within the context of "great power politics." Ukrainian policies in contrast are "the private affair of individual patriotically inclined persons who have become accustomed to disinterest from official Kyiv" (Ukrayinsky Tyzhden, June 12).