

## Russian Subversion in the Crimea

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On 11 October, President Viktor Yushchenko ordered the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) to upgrade its operational activities in the Crimea. The SBU was given two months to, 'look into the efficiency of intelligence, counterintelligence and operative measures in order to identify, prevent and halt intelligence, subversive and other illegal activities in the Crimea by foreign secret services and NGOs'.

The SBU was also ordered to develop a plan of action to, 'neutralise' activities in the Crimea, 'which harm Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, pose security threats and incite ethnic, racial and religious tension'.

Russia's subversive tactics in supporting separatism among ethnic Russians in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine are long standing. Kiev's ability to launch counter-measures are hampered by two factors, as clearly noticeable during the well-organised anti-US and anti-NATO demonstrations in the Crimea.

There is a lack of political will by Yushchenko and within the presidential secretariat and the National Security and Defense Council (NRBO) to tackle the separatist threat. These two institutions are the president's two remaining levers of influence following this year's constitutional reforms that transferred much of presidential powers to parliament.

Second, there are divided loyalties between Kiev and Moscow within the SBU and Interior Ministry (MVS). In 1994-1995 President Leonid Kuchma successfully used non-violent tactics implemented by the SBU and the NRBO to marginalise Crimea's separatist voices. Following a decade of rampant corruption under Kuchma, including the SBU's involvement in arms trafficking and repression of the opposition reminiscent of the Soviet KGB, the SBU's competence is now in doubt. In the Crimea and eastern Ukraine, regions loyal to pro-Russian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions, the local SBU branches remain highly sceptical of Yushchenko. Further, the Crimean parliament, dominated by the Party of Regions, has often disregarded Yushchenko's directives.

Under Kuchma a number of officials from Russia were declared persona non grata for short periods in retaliation for inciting separatism in Ukraine. Under Yushchenko, Kiev's official policy has hardened, especially following the June protests in the Crimea where Russian politicians gave inflammatory speeches.

After Yushchenko's inauguration in January 2005 former senior Kuchma-era officials sought refuge in the Crimea. In March 2006, the Party of Regions and its three extreme left allies - the Communist Party, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Union party - swept elections to the Ukrainian and the Crimean parliaments, gaining over 70 per cent of the vote in the Crimea. Many of the former Kuchma figures re-entered the political stage on the back of the election wins of Party of Regions.

These three political constituencies have allied with Russian intelligence (FSB) and the Black Sea Fleet's intelligence (GRU) and military officers to incite anti-US and anti-NATO demonstrations, pickets and rallies in the Crimea. These reached a crescendo in June and led to the first ever cancellation of joint military exercises with the US and with other NATO countries through its Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme. These exercises had been regularly held in the Crimea and in military bases in western Ukraine since 1997.

Russia has supplied intelligence on the location and plans for military exercises and has given personnel to increase attendance at the rallies and demonstrations. During the June rallies many of the leading organisers were spouses of serving Russian Black Sea Fleet officers.

Russia is also involved in attempts to incite inter-ethnic strife in the Crimea by fomenting clashes between Tatars and Russian-speaking Slavs. The presidential secretariat has told JID of its fears that Russia is attempting to 'Abkhasize' the Crimea by repeating its successful tactics in Georgia's two frozen conflicts, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The presidential secretariat has told JID that it has reports from loyal SBU officers who have reported financial support being given to ethnic Russian nationalist NGOs in the Crimea. Logistical support is given to these groups by the Black Sea Fleet and by nationalist youth groups from Russia who are dedicated to the Kremlin, such as Nashi, a pro-Vladimir Putin NGO that has been involved in racist and anti-Georgian violence in Russia.

Russia's strategy is two fold. First, to foment instability in the Crimea to halt Ukraine's drive to join NATO. The anti-NATO and anti-US rallies in June in the Crimea have reinforced the concerns of those NATO members that deem Kiev's membership aspiration in the organisation as impracticable in the near future.

Second, Moscow seem to want to make use of increased political volatility in the Crimea as a way to pressure Kiev to seek its assistance which would enhance its leverage over its weaker and anxious neighbour. In late October, President Putin offered to provide assistance to Ukraine if Slav-Tatar tension increased in the Crimea. Such protection would be reminiscent of similar tactics in Georgia's two separatist enclaves where Russia first incited inter-ethnic tension and then offered 'CIS' (in reality Russian) 'peacekeeping troops' who have frozen the conflict in Moscow's favour. As Putin said, 'Russia cannot be indifferent to what happens in Ukraine and the Crimea'.

Related to this question, is Russia's tactics of organising a lobby within the Crimea and Ukrainian government to support its calls to extend the twenty year lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. The lease was negotiated in 1997 as part of a package of documents that obtained Russian recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and is set to expire in 2017.

Ukraine's constitution bans foreign bases but made a 'temporary' exception with the Black Sea Fleet. The Anti-Crisis coalition, uniting the Party of Regions, Socialists and Communists, has 240 deputies and is therefore unable to change these constitutional provisions, which would require 300 votes. Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko, a Yushchenko loyalist, has rejected extending the 20 year lease and turned down offers of security assistance from Russia. Prime Minister Yanukovich has supported negotiations to extend the Russian base agreement beyond 2017.