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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: WHO WERE THE FATHERLAND'S DEFENDERS? THE
UPA CONTROVERSY FLARES UP AGAIN AT POKROVA

Classified By: DCM Sheila Gwaltney, reason 1.4 (b,d)

1. (SBU) Summary. The Orthodox feast day of Pokrova (October 14), marked for centuries to honor defenders of the fatherland, occasioned three dueling marches in downtown Kyiv between elderly veterans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and nationalist supporters on the one hand and Communists plus a wide range of pro-Russian and pan-Slavic forces on the other. The most extreme groups, known to have Russian connections, announced beforehand they expected bloodshed and clashed with police in several early altercations, leading to dozens of temporary detentions. The same groups also tried to manipulate press coverage afterwards, including posting doctored photos on the internet. After a nasty 2005 Pokrova brawl between younger supporters of UPA and the Communists on the streets of Kyiv, however, Ukrainian authorities were ready and handled the situation much better this year -- a court ruling late October 13 prevented marches down Khreshchatyk, and thousands of police kept the three main groups far apart from each other. For his part, Yushchenko signed a decree October 14 to develop a comprehensive review of the participation of Ukrainians in World War II and other 20th century conflicts, to provide balanced information to Ukrainians, and to prepare a draft law on the social status of Ukrainian independence movement participants and to recognize organizations which fought for Ukrainian independence from the 1920s-1950s.

2. (C) Comment: The controversy surrounding recognition of the UPA's role in fighting the Nazis in World War II and for an independent Ukraine has now spilled from the annual May 8-9 "victory over fascism" commemorations into the marking of Pokrova, traditionally associated with the Cossacks but consciously used by the UPA's founders in 1942 to launch their movement. In contrast to the May events, dominated by those nostalgic for the days of the Soviet Union and Stalin,

the Pokrova marches saw the nationalist supporters on the streets of Kyiv outnumber the Communists and pro-Russian forces by a factor of at least two to one. More significant



is the fact that this overt Russian-affiliated intervention into internal Ukrainian politics, both in advocacy of a Ukrainian political force and via participation of a handful of Kremlin sponsored or tolerated fringe groups and NGOs, took place in Kyiv. Although such groups have been active in Crimea since the Orange Revolution, their appearance and willingness to rumble in Kyiv was unusual, as was their use of digitally altered photos on the internet to sway perceptions of events in Ukraine. However, the determination of Ukrainian authorities to act firmly, quickly, and properly prevented a potentially very nasty scenario from unfolding. Yushchenko's October 14 decree will keep the political controversy simmering; Communist leader Symonenko denounced it from the floor of the Rada October 17 and demanded its withdrawal. End Summary and Comment.

Marking Pokrova - with masses, marches, and court orders

3. (SBU) The Orthodox feast of Pokrova dates back to the earliest days of Kyivan Rus and was marked with particular reverence by the Cossacks, hearkening back to supposed appearances of the Virgin Mary over battlefields offering protection to the defenders of the fatherland. Numerous special masses were held across Kyiv and Ukraine October 14; the main Kyiv Patriarchate Volodymyrski Cathedral, the usual church attended by the Yushchenko family, was as packed for the mid-day service as it is for the Easter Vigil, with many post-retirement age men in uniforms associated with the Cossack movement.

4. (SBU) The Cossack "defender of the fatherland" legacy of Pokrova was used by the founders of the UPA in 1942 to launch their anti-Nazi insurgent efforts; UPA veterans and younger nationalist supporters traditionally mark Pokrova with commemorative marches. Nationalists propose to move Ukrainian Army Day from February (a legacy of the Soviet Armed Forces Day celebration) to October 14, to bring it in line with Pokrova/Cossack traditions. FM Tarasyuk, apparently in his capacity as party leader for Rukh, a nationalist party, used the occasion of Pokrova to repeat Yushchenko's calls to grant WWII veteran status to UPA fighters, an appeal supported by a wide range of Ukrainian nationalist parties.

5. (SBU) In 2005, the first post-Orange Revolution Pokrova, authorities were caught off guard by street brawls between young supporters of UPA on the one hand and communist-affiliated marchers on the other. After UPA veterans and Ukrainian nationalists initially received a permit for a Pokrova 2006 march on Kreshchatyk, Kyiv's main avenue traditionally used for military marches, both the

KYIV 00004021 002 OF 003

Communists and Pro-Russian Progressive Socialist leader Natalya Vitrenko announced countermarches aimed at preventing UPA/nationalists from marching down Khreshchatyk, in a replay of the May controversies over the status of the UPA and its claim to have defended the idea of an independent Ukraine by fighting the Nazis. (Note: while the UPA did fight the Germans, many historians argue that its main opponent was the Polish Home Army and Polish citizens in western Ukraine, who were massacred by the tens of thousands; there were also concerns about anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions. The UPA later fought the advancing Soviet Red Army, conducting guerrilla operations and assassinations of Soviet officials into the early 1950s, when resistance finally petered out, assisted by the deportation of 500,000 western Ukrainians to Siberia.)

6. (SBU) Fearing more violence this year, Kyiv courts late on October 13 banned all Pokrova marches on Khreshchatyk. Interior Ministry officials negotiated through the night with various factions on revised zones of allowed movement, The Government then deployed thousands of riot police and plain-clothes policemen early October 14 to prevent the main three groups from coming into contact with each other and to restrict the flow of non-marchers onto Khreshchatyk.

A Hodge-Podge of Nationalist and pro-Soviet/Russian forces

7. (SBU) A total of at least 2000 Ukrainian nationalists (some estimates ranged between 3000-5000) rallied at various staging points in central Kyiv before convening in their revised authorized zone around Mikhailovsky and Sofiiivsky Square. Led by no more than a dozen UPA veterans, they laid flowers at the holodomor (1932-33 great famine) monument before rallying around the statue of 17th century Ukrainian leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky. In addition to hundreds of blue and yellow Ukrainian flag and the red and black flag associated with Ukrainian nationalists, there were also the specific red and black flags of Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian National Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO) and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN), the blue flags of the Svoboda party and the yellow flags of Tryzub (Trident), another group claiming to be followers of Stepan Bandera.

8. (SBU) Between 300-500 Communist party and affiliated supporters gathered on the edges of the Maidan (which itself was ringed by police) and the nearby Khreshchatyk sidewalks, listening to Soviet-era music. Around noon Communist speakers made their way to the podium to denounce the UPA as fascist collaborators, denigrated Yushchenko for supporting UPA rights, and called for his impeachment. Groups that affiliated themselves with the Communist march from the Pechersk Lavra Monastery (controlled by the Moscow Patriarchate) included: the "Rus" Union (whose flags dominated); the Union of Orthodox Citizens (led by Valeriy Kurov); "United Motherland"; The "Orthodox Brotherhood"; the Russian Bloc party; and the Crimean branch of "Proryv" (Breakthrough), a radical "NGO" registered in Tiraspol, Transnistria, Moldova which attempted a symbolic "severing" of Crimea from Ukraine last January by digging a trench across the main road out of Crimea in front of Russian TV cameras.

Vitrenko, Russian-sponsored troublemakers, the Crimea card

9. (SBU) The trouble-makers spoiling for a fight were associated with Natalya Vitrenko, whose party had issued a statement saying they were ready for bloodshed. True to their promise, they sparked at least three early morning clashes with riot police. At 1100, we saw riot police patting down a row of youth up against the wall; the camouflage-clad protesters had shaved heads, red bandannas over their faces, and waved the flag of the (Russian) National Bolshevik front (a black hammer and sickle in a white circle on a red field, evocative of the Nazi flag). A plainclothes policeman told us later that Vitrenko's supporters had been armed in their clashes. Interior Minister Lutsenko in his news conference from Lviv later in the day stated that Progressive Socialist activists had tried to use tear gas against the police. Police detained 65 protesters, nearly all from Vitrenko Progressive Socialist Party and the Eurasian Youth Union (EYU), releasing them after writing up protocols of violations.

10. (C) Speaking on a bullhorn in front of Bessarabsky Market (the opposite end of Khreshchatyk from the Maidan), a Russian who did not identify himself before speaking but who could have been Rodina leader Dmitry Rogozin extolled the eternal union of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Slavic brothers and urged everyone to vote for Natalya Vitrenko in

KYIV 00004021 003 OF 003

the next elections (note: the speaker said that he had come from Moscow for only one day. Rogozin appeared the night before on ICTV's "Svoboda Slova" (Freedom of Speech) talk show to defend his views that the breakup of the Soviet Union was a mistake. When asked later October 14 by Fifth Channel reporters whether he had participated in Vitrenko's protests that morning, Rogozin declined to comment rather than denying he had been involved. The EYU website showed a picture of its Moscow leader Vladimir Nikitin fighting with police, but that makes it unlikely Nikitin would have been free to make comments later).

11. (SBU) For her part, Vitrenko, focusing primarily on Crimea-related issues, incited racial hatred of Crimean Tatars on behalf of the Slavic inhabitants of Crimea, warned of the NATO threat to Crimea as indicated by this spring's Feodosia events around the Sea Breeze exercise, denounced NATO, UPA "Banderivtsi," and fascists together in one breath and "American lackeys" Yushchenko and Yanukovych in another, and gave thanks that Russian President Putin and the Duma were defending true Slavic interests. There were dozens of people who had traveled from Crimea for the march, carrying an assortment of hand-lettered signs referring to Sevastopol and other Crimea-related issues. In addition to the Progressive Socialist flags, those marching with Vitrenko waved the Russian tricolor, the National Bolshevik Front standard, and dozens of Eurasian Movement flags, both the yellow/black of the Eurasian Youth Union (EYU) and the Green/white of the "International Eurasian Movement."

12. (SBU) Note: the websites of the EYU and certain Russian news agencies (Novy Region, Rosbalt) devoted heavy coverage to the October 14 Kyiv events, claiming that Ukrainian authorities used armed force to prevent an anti-fascist rally and tortured EYU detainees and, in the case of Novy Region (which has a Crimean branch), digitally manipulating at least one photo from the barricades to claim Ukrainian authorities had used excessive force regardless of the age and gender of protesters. While Proryv marched with the Communists October 14, they are usually at the vanguard of radical action. On October 9, Nadiya Polyakova, Proryv coordinator in Simferopol, Crimea, told a press conference that branches in Crimea, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia had formed the Proryv International Youth Front to provide mutual assistance and support an agreement signed by the "presidents" of the unrecognized "republics."

Yushchenko makes another run at righting history

13. (SBU) For his part, Yushchenko signed a Presidential Decree October 14 on the "all-sided study and objective coverage of the Ukrainian Independence Movement and facilitation of the national reconciliation process." The decree tasks the Cabinet of Ministers and the Academy of Sciences to develop a comprehensive review of the participation of Ukrainians in World War II and other 20th century conflicts, to provide balanced information to Ukrainian society, and to prepare a draft law on the social status of Ukrainian independence movement participants from

the 1920s-1950s and on recognizing organizations which fought for Ukrainian independence from the 1920s-1950s. Yushchenko's initial efforts in May 2005 to foster a reconciliation between UPA vets and Red Army/Red Partisan vets in time for the 60th anniversary of V-E day failed in the face of sustained opposition, particularly from communists and Red Army veterans. His decree expands the historical framework of review considerably (covering both the 1920s and 1930s); with Communist leader Symonenko's October 17 salvo likely only the beginning, the historical controversy over UPA and other Ukrainians who struggled against Soviet rule in the name of an independent Ukraine will continue to simmer.

14. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Taylor

Website pages

