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1. (C) Summary. Discussions with a wide range of contacts in Crimea November 20-22 and officials in Kyiv discounted recent speculation that a return of pro-Russian separatism in Crimea, which posed a real threat to Ukrainian territorial integrity in 1994-95, could be in the cards. However, nearly all contended that pro-Russian forces in Crimea, acting with funding and direction from Moscow, have systematically attempted to increase communal tensions in Crimea in the two years since the Orange Revolution. They have done so by cynically fanning ethnic Russian chauvinism towards Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians, through manipulation of issues like the status of the Russian language, NATO, and an alleged Tatar threat to "Slavs," in a deliberate effort to destabilize Crimea, weaken Ukraine, and prevent Ukraine's movement west into institutions like NATO and the EU. While the total number of pro-Russian activists in Crimea is relatively low, the focus is on shaping public perceptions and controlling the information space, so far with success.

2. (C) Ukrainian officials acknowledge expert complaints that the overall degradation of Kyiv's ability to assert central power and authority in the past two years has provided a conducive climate for destabilizing efforts, particularly in Crimea, which several Crimean journalists referred to as Ukraine's "soft underbelly." The most publicized flashpoints in 2006 were the May-June Feodosia anti-NATO protests and July-August fights in Bakhchiserai over a market located on a Tatar cemetery, with pro-Russian groups figuring prominently in both. Yushchenko and the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) are quietly trying to lay the groundwork for a more effective assertion of central authority and countering of pro-Russian agitation in Crimea, with limited success to



date.

3. (SBU) The most active pro-Russian actors highlighted by our contacts were the Russian Society of Crimea and its affiliates, the Russian Bloc political party and the Crimean Cossack Union. The latter's informal links to local Crimean law enforcement and security service personnel were clearly evident during the anti-NATO actions in May-June in Feodosia. Recent radical youth groups like Proryv ("Breakthrough") and the Eurasian Youth Movement attract more media attention but are for now mainly small, public relations projects. Natalya Vitrenko's Bloc, the Communists, and the Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia National Front also actively pushed Russian interests, with less impact. Internecine squabbles and splits among pro-Russian groups in Crimea for Moscow's attention and money limit their effectiveness.

4. (SBU) The primary mechanisms of Russian influence appear to be: the Russian Black Sea Fleet, with its extensive intelligence and press operations; regular visits of Russian officials/agitators, many of whom, such as Duma deputy Konstantin Zatulin, are now blacklisted by the GOU as a result (ref B); biased media/PR efforts such as Modest Kolerov's New Regions/Regnum projects and Russian-owned/influenced Ukrainian media; and the Moscow-Crimea Foundation and the Moscow-Sevastopol Foundation, allowing Mayor Luzhkov, also blacklisted, to buy influence. End Summary

What's Going On in Crimea?

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5. (C) Western pundits (Anne Applebaum, Jane's Intelligence Digest, Taras Kuzio) have written with alarm in 2006 of a worsening situation in Crimea due to alleged post Orange Revolution Russian meddling. Some have raised the specter of a return to the active separatism which threatened Crimea and Ukraine's territorial integrity in 1994-95 before the threat was ended by decisive intervention by then President Kuchma and central Ukrainian authorities. Discussions with two dozen government officials, journalists, and community leaders in Crimea November 20-22 and in Kyiv indicate that fears of revived separatism are misplaced. However, all argued that interethnic tensions in Crimea had worsened considerably in the two years since the Orange Revolution, due to a deliberate Russian campaign aimed at destabilizing Crimea and, by extension, weakening Ukraine.

6. (C) Starting in January 2006, President Yushchenko dispatched his then Chief of Staff Oleh Rybachuk and Interior Minister Lutsenko to Crimea for repeated multi-day visits. He also appointed as his representative in Crimea respected

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ex-deputy Interior Minister Hennadiy Moskal, who spent years in Crimea in the late 1990s helping attack organized criminal structures. Yushchenko also convened NSDC sessions on Crimea in February and late September which led to published decrees, the first systematic attempt to address the entire range of economic, political, interethnic, cultural, and central power challenges inherent in Crimea, according to Oleksandr Lytvynenko, NSDC Department Head for Law Enforcement and Internal Affairs, including Crimea, who also acknowledged implementation was less than 20%. The ineffectiveness of central authority was clear during the height of the anti-NATO protests in Feodosia in May-June, when Rybachuk and DFM Khandohiy repeatedly made clear to us

that they had limited control over Crimean authorities.

Crimea: built-in fertile grounds for volatility

7. (SBU) Lytvynenko explained to us the historical, ethnic, and political reasons why Crimea represented fertile ground for troublemakers. Up to 70 percent of Crimea's Slavic inhabitants arrived or were the descendants of those who came from Russia or Russian-influenced parts of eastern Ukraine from 1944, when Stalin ordered Crimea's Tatars and several other much smaller ethnic groups deported to central Asia, and 1954, when Krushchev transferred autonomous Crimea to Ukraine's administrative control. Most of the new arrivals were urban poor or had criminal backgrounds and moved into homes vacated by deportees; there was no connection or affiliation to Ukraine proper through 1991, with the possible exception of the Dynamo Kyiv soccer club. Starting in 1990, however, this unfocused "Slavic" community of relative newcomers faced an influx of a dynamic, often well-educated, politically organized community of Crimean Tatar returnees, now numbering close to 300,000, or 15 percent of Crimea's population.

8. (SBU) After Crimea's separatist threat (1994-95) and organized criminal problem (1997-98) were successfully addressed, Crimea enjoyed a period of relative calm and tacit understanding between local ethnically-Russian elites, Tatars, and Kyiv. Disenchantment in the later Kuchma years revived due to the overall economic slide in Crimea, even as some Tatars started achieving economic success. The Russia factor in the 2004 election cycle in favor of Yanukovich was felt strongly in Crimea and accelerated in early 2005 after the Orange Revolution, according to Lytvynenko and nearly everyone we talked to in Crimea, exploiting such discontent and traditional Russian stereotypes ("An uninvited guest is worse than a Tatar" goes an old proverb), as well as the overall weakening of central authority in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution.

The Black Sea Fleet: intel and press

9. (C) While there has always been overwhelmingly pro-Russian sentiment in Crimea's population, the beginning of systematic, organized efforts by pro-Russian groups backed by Russian money is a relatively new phenomenon, most Crimean observers claimed. Lytvynenko stated that the Russian BSF's sizable intel unit, part of the GRU (Russian military intelligence), was active in deliberately fostering interethnic tensions in Crimea to ensure that a state of constant simmering tension was maintained. This included money to local groups carrying out Moscow's wishes, information campaigns, and occasional logistic support, including for the May-June anti-NATO protests in Feodosia. Lytvynenko claimed that, in contrast to the GRU's active role, the FSB (external intel service) seemingly restricted its efforts in Crimea to counter-intelligence operations aimed at western actors/visitors. (Note: Yushchenko's former chief of staff Oleh Rybachuk told us in January that the FSB was very active in using/controlling NGOs in Crimea to stir up trouble (ref A), but he may have mixed up his Russian intel services).

10. (C) Lytvynenko proudly claimed authorship of paragraph 10 in Presidential decree 822/2006, dated October 9, which came out of the September 20 NSDC meeting. Paragraph 10 gave the SBU and Foreign Intel Service two months to analyze the "efficiency of intel, counter-intel, and operative measures to identify, prevent, and halt intelligence and other

subversive activities in Crimea by foreign special services, state and NGO organizations" as well as improve the SBU personnel and technical capabilities in Crimea. Lytvynenko claimed it was the first time such efforts to neutralize activities undermining Ukrainian sovereignty had been mandated in writing (the decree is on the NSDC's website, in Ukrainian only).

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11. (C) The BSF intel unit maintains a special relationship with Sevastopol's BSF-affiliated high school Number 8, the main base of activists involved in Proryv activities (see below), Radio Liberty Crimea correspondent Volodymyr Prytula told us. Sobytiya journalist Lenur Yunusov added that his sources link BSF intel personnel to the recent emergence of the Eurasian Youth Union (below) as well. The BSF's extensive media operations had been maintained since Soviet times, Myroslav Mamchak of the Ukrainian Fleet's "BRIS" Radio service told us, adding that the BSF printing house "Flag Rodina" (The Motherland's Banner) and electronic media actively churn out "information, disinformation, and counterinformation" with a strongly pro-Russian, implicitly anti-Ukrainian and anti-Tatar perspective that heavily influenced the media/information environment, especially in Sevastopol but across Crimea as a whole. Several Simferopol-based journalists reiterated Mamchak's assessment.

"Cossacks," Russian Community of Crimea, Russian Bloc  
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12. (C) Both GOU and journalist contacts consistently identified the Crimean Cossack Union (Krymskiy Kozachiy Soyuz - KKS), led by Crimean Rada MP Yuri Cherkashyn, as the single most dangerous and active pro-Russian actor in Crimea, in conjunction with two affiliated organizations. The overall umbrella group with the most overt contacts with Moscow was the Russian Community of Crimea (known by its Russian acronym ROK - Russkaya Obshchyna Kryma), led by Serhiy Tsekov. ROK in turn is closely affiliated with the Russian Bloc political party led by Oleh Rodyvilov. Prytula likened the intertwined relationship to that of Sinn Fein and the IRA. Yunusov said that ROK leaders openly admitted to him that they received money from Moscow.

13. (C) The paramilitary KKS, which wears the Russian flag on its uniforms, had a network of several thousand members located in every district in Ukraine, well-equipped with communications equipment and weapons thanks to related security provider businesses that it established in the 1990s, when criminal gangs operated more openly, according to various journalists. More significantly, many KKS members were local police and Security Service (SBU) officers, making it much more difficult for central authorities to rely on prompt or reliable action when the Cossacks were involved, such as during the Feodosia and Bakhchiserai events, the November 4 "Russkiy March," or less publicized illegal business takeovers (so-called "raiderstvo"). Lytvynenko noted that the KKS also maintained relations with Kuban and Don Cossack groups in Russia. At least the latter two drew on genuine Cossack traditions; Cossacks historically had no presence in Crimea, "except as prisoners of the Crimean Tatar khanate," one journalist joked. As a result, the KKS was a completely artificial construct, primed to promote anti-Tatar sentiments in law enforcement structures and local Russian communities.

14. (SBU) Mustafa Jemilev, the long-time Crimean Tatar

community leader (head of the Mejlis informal national assembly, as well as a Rada MP as part of the Our Ukraine bloc), highlighted the double standards maintained by the police and SBU, combined with the role Russian Bloc leader Rodyvilov had played in sparking the Bakhchiserai incidents August 12. The anti-Tatar attacks came a day after newly named PM Yanukovych had visited Crimea and endorsed court decisions moving an open air market illegally located on an old Tatar cemetery. Jemilev complained that although Tatars took extensive video of the incident clearly showing nearly 500 outsiders connected with the Russian Bloc, ROK, and the Cossacks, many from Sevastopol, initiating the altercation, the SBU and the police took no action, claiming they could not identify those involved. Jemilev characterized the Russian Bloc as the main anti-Tatar force in Crimea currently.

15. (SBU) The Russian Bloc's political influence grew considerably in early 2006 thanks to Party of Regions' decision to contest Crimean elections jointly with it under the "For Yanukovych" banner; no observers gave the Russian Bloc any chance of making it over the threshold alone. ROK leader Tsekov now serves as the Crimean Rada's First Deputy Speaker, and 10-15 of the 44 MPs in the "For Yanukovych" faction (out of 100 total in the Crimean Rada) come from the Russian Bloc. Thanks to the alliance, Russian Bloc's Aleksandr Chernomorov also made it in the national Rada in Regions' faction.

Zatulin - chief political meddler  
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16. (SBU) The Russian politician universally deemed the biggest meddler in Crimean affairs is Duma MP and head of the

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CIS Institute Konstantin Zatulin. Sobytiya's Yunusov claimed that, in addition to political and business interests in Sevastopol, Zatulin had personally brokered the electoral alliance between Russian Bloc and Regions' Crimean branch, even negotiating party list placement for favored Russian Bloc members. Zatulin and his Institute deputy Kirill Frolov were also seen as the primary Moscow links to the radical youth group Proryv. Zatulin encouraged the Feodosia protests in person and was blacklisted as a result (ref B), though the SBU allowed him to visit Kyiv Dec 4-6 as part of an interparliamentary exchange.

The PR projects: Modest Kolerov, Proryv, EYU  
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17. (C) Kremlin spinmeister Modest Kolerov, brought in by the Kremlin in March 2005 after the Orange Revolution to manage a counter-campaign aimed at Russians in the "near abroad," has focused on Crimea as part of his "CIS-II" project also involving Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, stated Lytvynenko. He claimed there had also been unsuccessful efforts to involve Crimean Rada Speaker Anatoliy Grytsenko (Regions) in the meetings with the "presidents" of the separatist regions. Kolerov uses his Regnum and Novy Region news agencies to promote biased and misleading "news," influencing Crimea's information space (note: the Novy Region website lists its Crimean affiliate along with those in Russian provinces and separatist "republics," apart from the Ukraine affiliates). Ukrainian outlets often re-ran Novy Region "manufactured" material without fact checking, perpetuating a circle of myths according to Maidan-Krym's Aleksandr Pylypenko.

18. (SBU) Kolerov's Regnum helped launch Moscow's "Evropa" publishing house in May 2005 with the stated intent of influencing opinion makers in Russia and the CIS, according to website mission statements. One of Evropa's 2006 publications, available in Moscow and Kyiv bookstores and, for a time, at the Ukrainian Rada (where we bought it), is: "Operation Anti-NATO: the Feodosia Model." The book trumpets the success of the Feodosia protests as a model for pro-Russian communities to emulate. It highlights the role of the Russian Bloc and the Crimean Cossacks in launching the protests, along with the later participation of Proryv, Vitrenko's Bloc, and Party of Regions, with glossy pictures of the latter three groups and quotes from all five, plus Kirill Frolov

19. (SBU) Proryv, a radical pro-Russian youth group first registered in Tiraspol (Transnistria), came to Ukraine's attention January 19 when its Crimea branch dug a trench along the Yalta-Moscow highway at the neck of the Crimean peninsula and symbolically created a mock border post between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine, inviting Russian but not Ukrainian TV stations to cover the action. Proryv's former Crimean director Dobychin was expelled in June and blacklisted by the SBU after active participation in the Feodosia protests (ref B).

20. (SBU) High media "brand" profile aside, Proryv was described by most contacts as currently consisting of no more than several dozen mostly school-age activists tied to the Russian BSF. Prytula noted that Proryv had been much more active prior to the March elections; Russia Duma MP Zatulin and his associate Frolov had been Dobychin/Crimea's main interlocutors during frequent visits to Sevastopol, with Frolov the seeming main ideologue. Since then, however, all three had been blacklisted; the SBU had taken active steps against Proryv, and it appeared Proryv's money and activities had dried up, leaving the "brand" and public relations potential to be tapped in the future. (note: Echoing Kolerov's efforts to tie Crimea to Russian- affiliated separatist zones, the current Proryv Crimea coordinator Natalya Polyakova held a press conference October 9 to announce the formation of an "International Front Proryv" uniting the efforts of branches in Crimea, Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia).

21. (SBU) As Proryv's profile dipped in late 2006, that of the Eurasian Youth Union (EYU) project affiliated with Alexander Dugin has risen, Yunusov told us. He noted that EYU was particularly active in Bakhchiserai, led by Konstantin Knyryk and his son (note: when we visited Bakhchiserai November 22, we saw EYU graffiti on walls near large apartment blocks on the outskirts of town). EYU also turned out for the Pokrova marches October 14 in Kyiv and in Crimea (ref C), as well as the "Russkiy March" November 4.

Moscow and Mayor Luzhkov - buying influence/real estate  
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22. (SBU) The Moscow-Crimea Foundation and Moscow-Sevastopol Foundation, the latter run out of a self-styled "Embassy of Moscow" in Sevastopol, gave Mayor Luzhkov vehicles to buy influence and real estate, even though he personally is on Ukraine's black list, noted several Crimean journalists. The Foundations provide money to the ROK for allegedly cultural projects and purchase large amounts of Russian textbooks, donating them to Crimean schools as a way of influencing what

the next generation of Crimeans learn. They also purchase land to build apartment blocks, particularly in Sevastopol, and sanatoria throughout Crimea. Luzhkov recently appointed an energetic, young former assistant in September to head the Moscow-Crimea Foundation with the aim of increasing activity and cooperation, noted Yunusov. Sevastopol city council members travel monthly to Moscow, Tymofiy Nikitiuk, head of Sevastopol's Committee of Voters of Ukraine, told us, ensuring positive decisions on land allocation for the Moscow Foundation.

Miscellaneous pro-Russian actors  
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23. (C) Presidential representative in Crimea Hennadiy Moskal suggested to us that "Mother Russia" had been behind the active participation of the Russian Bloc and Natalya Vitrenko's Progressive Socialists in the Feodosia protests. He predicted that the Russian Bloc's support would fall over time, but that Vitrenko, Crimea's Communists, led by ex-Crimean premier Leonid Hrach, who had organized a non-binding anti-NATO referendum in Crimea for December 16, and the smaller "Soyuz" (Union) party, "all bought" by Moscow, were ready to continue to agitate active pro-Russian lines. Yunusov claimed that Hrach and Zatulin had previously worked closely together but experienced a falling out over money, with Zatulin redirecting his support to ROK and the Russian Bloc, and Hrach organizing the anti-NATO referendum as a way of showing he could deliver as a friend of Moscow and was still deserving of financial support.

24. (SBU) Ukrainian media controlled by Russians or those sympathetic to Russia reinforce the biases via their coverage. Inter, Ukraine's top rated TV channel, has been controlled by the Russian Yevraz Holding group since the summer of 2005. Inter's long-time Crimea lead correspondent Yuri Pershykov has long pushed a strongly anti-Tatar perspective in his reporting and took active part attacking Tatars in the Bakhchiserai August riots, according to Crimean Tatar community activist Nodir Bekir and Yunusov. Bekir, who tracks hate speech, notes that in September the Crimean state TV channel broadcast racial hatred comments by Andriy Kuryaev of the Moscow Russian Orthodox Academy, in which Kuryaev urged Slavs in Crimea to "knock out Tatars' teeth" to teach them a lesson. Media Krym's Shchekun concurred that Crimean TV regularly purveyed pro-Russian propaganda on various regional issues, including misleading "documentaries" on Chechnya whose anti-Islamic slant could affect perceptions of Crimean Tatars locally. Yunusov added that the "Krymskaya Pravda" newspaper, circulation 50,000, promotes a strongly anti-Ukrainian, anti-Tatar, pro-Russian line targeted primarily at Crimea's large pensioner community, which remains "Soviet" in outlook.

25. (SBU) Some pro-Russian groups in Crimea act independently. On the one side, there are activists like Serhiy Shuvainikov of the Congress of Russian Communities in Crimea, who told us that he focused on improving the rights of ethnic Russians (ruski) in Crimea, rather than promoting a pro-Russian (rossiski) political agenda or supporting Putin's recent call for ethnic Russians to relocate to Russia. Prytula passed us an unsigned copy of an analysis, which Shuvainikov apparently provided to the SBU, of various Russian groups in Crimea; the report split them into those controlled by Moscow and those interested in an independent local agenda. As word of the analysis leaked, the ROK and the Russian Bloc denounced Shuvainikov, who did not disavow authorship to us. On the other side, the small National Front Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia, which advocates reunification with Russia, believes that the Kremlin has not been aggressive enough in Crimea.

26. (SBU) There is frequent quarreling and splintering among the pro-Russian groups, which often compete with each other for Moscow's attention and money, according to all Crimean observers, including pro-Russian group leaders. Most are unable to generate more than a few hundred attendees for any particular event (even the Feodosia protesters usually numbered no more than 100-300 at any time). However, sympathetic media carefully chooses camera angles and boosts reported numbers by a factor of ten, with the intent of influencing perceptions and controlling the information space in Crimea and beyond, meeting with seeming success.

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What is to be done?

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27. (C) Lytvynenko suggested the three main steps Kyiv needed to take to address the Crimean situation effectively: establish an effective land registry; use the SBU to more aggressively counter intel activities (and rotate out SBU personnel too closely affiliated with the Cossacks and Russia); and improve presidential outreach to the Crimean Tatar community. Then Interior Minister Lutsenko, in a November 17 discussion with Ambassador, reaffirmed the SBU's lead role, stressed the limited utility of law enforcement action against Proryv-style mischief, and focused on a wider cultural challenge. Ukraine had done nearly nothing to create a positive Ukrainian alternative to the Russian propaganda machine of the Black Sea Fleet and pro-Russian media. Nearly all the journalists we talked to in Crimea heartily agreed, adding the education system as another tool, with the need to expand Ukrainian language opportunities (there is still only one magnet Ukrainian language high school, and only three overall, in Crimea). Lytvynenko noted that the internet-based Maidan-Krym and Media-Krym projects were a modest start in the right direction, particularly with the younger generation of Crimeans, in the information space battle, but the challenge remained enormous.

28. (U) Note: Septel will address the purely local issues which dominate the Crimean scene: land allocation, and a decline in governance amidst the weakening of central power and the return of many former "bandits" into local government after the March elections.

29. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev).  
Gwaltney

Website pages

