


# Yezhov's infiltration model and the Russian Federation's seizure of Crimea

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## Abstract

The author analysed the scale of betrayal among the officers and officials of the Ukrainian state during the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014. The main research problem was an attempt to explain the anomaly in the activities of the special services in the form of recruiting 1,400 officers of the Ukrainian SBU to the Russian FSB. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon in the practice of secret services, the author used the theory of offensive intelligence and counterintelligence created and developed in the USSR from the early 1920s, as well as the findings of cognitive psychology regarding the phenomenon of projection as the main mechanism for explaining the behavior of other people. Thanks to the synthesis of psychology and the analysis of the theoretical achievements of the Soviet secret services, the author put forward a hypothesis about the mass recruitment of the SBU officers in the Crimea long before the annexation. According to the author, the main mechanisms of mass recruitment of agents in order to control the opponent's organisation were broadly understood corruption and cronyism characteristic to the post-Soviet area.

## Keywords

annexation of Crimea, FSB, SBU, corruption as a factor of betrayal, offensive counterintelligence

On 21 February 2014, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed an agreement with the opposition providing, among other things, for a return to the 2004 Constitution (which severely limited presidential powers) and the holding of early presidential elections by the end of 2014. Later the same day, Yanukovich left Kiev for Kharkiv to attend a congress of deputies of the south-eastern regions. He later maintained that there had been a failed attempt on the presidential column during this trip<sup>1</sup>.

Under pressure from a demonstration of several thousand people with armed Right Sector militias, on 22 February the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a resolution stating that, by leaving Kiev, Yanukovich had abandoned his presidential duties. A date for new elections for head of state was set for 25 May. 328 MPs voted in favour of the resolution (including MPs who had until recently been part of the government majority). On 23 February, the Verkhovna Rada entrusted Chairman Oleksandr Turchinov with presidential duties.

From the perspective of the authorities of the Russian Federation (RF), this meant an almost complete loss of the possibility to influence the political situation in Ukraine and, militarily, a significant weakening of its position in the Black Sea basin. Russia expected the termination (by the new, anti-Russian-oriented Ukrainian government) of the agreement allowing the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea<sup>2</sup>. Although it consisted at the time of some 40 ships built back in the 1970s, the fleet remained fully operational<sup>3</sup> and was in the process of intensive modernisation and expansion<sup>4</sup>. Its stationing in Sevastopol gave the Russians access

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<sup>1</sup> See: Viktor Yanukovich's interview with Nikolai Zyatkov: *Виктор Янукович: «Народ договорится, и Украина станет единой»*, "Аргументы и Факты" 2014, no. 52, online version: [https://aif.ru/euromaidan/viktor\\_yanukovich\\_eksklusivnoe\\_interview](https://aif.ru/euromaidan/viktor_yanukovich_eksklusivnoe_interview) [accessed: 6 VI 2023]. Later, the accusation that the opposition had attempted to assassinate Yanukovich was repeated by Vladimir Putin, who stressed that if it had not been for the help of the Russian secret services, Yanukovich would have been killed. See interview with Andrei Kandrashov in 2015: *Крым Путь на Родину Документальный фильм Андрея Кондрашова*, YouTube, 4 X 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGGNXIQX1-cU> [accessed: 2 III 2023].

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, Yanukovich signed the so-called Kharkiv Agreement extending the agreement governing the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea until 2042 in exchange for a reduction in the price of gas sold to Ukraine by the Russian Federation. A vote on this in the Verkhovna Rada led to a violent confrontation between representatives of the Party of Regions and the opposition. See: *Janukowycz podpisał umowę o stacjonowaniu rosyjskiej floty na Ukrainie* (Eng. Yanukovich signed agreement on stationing Russian fleet in Ukraine), Portal Spraw Zagranicznych, 29 IV 2010, <https://psz.pl/162-wschod/janukowycz-podpisał-umowe-o-stacjonowaniu-rosyjskiej-floty-na-ukrainie> [accessed: 7 VI 2023].

<sup>3</sup> This was confirmed by the effective blockade of Georgia during the 2008 war.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to modernising old ships, the plans at the time included the addition of six new submarines and six new frigates to the fleet, as well as the French Mistral-type helicopter carrier.

not only to the Black Sea but also to the Mediterranean, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean<sup>5</sup>, despite the legal restrictions imposed by the Montreux Convention<sup>6</sup>. Crimea provided the Russian Federation with the opportunity to operate in the oceans and to dominate militarily in the Black Sea theatre of war through the option of expanding anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems (especially with the increased capabilities of the S-400 launcher)<sup>7</sup>.

The abrupt change of power in Ukraine therefore meant very serious geopolitical problems for Russia, which were a significant reduction in the operational depth of its defences (the buffer of neutral states on its borders with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and the loss of its dominant position in the Black Sea basin, which greatly weakened the Russian southern flank. Russia, too weak at the time to risk open conflict, responded to this threat with hybrid action, using agent networks long built up in Ukraine<sup>8</sup> and masked kinetic force<sup>9</sup>. It annexed Crimea and embroiled Ukraine in a long-running conflict in the Donbass, effectively blocking the country's aspirations for NATO membership, and seized much of Ukraine's heavy industry and raw material resources, further exacerbating the country's difficult economic situation. The loss of Crimea (along with its almost 2 million inhabitants) and the mass emigration triggered by the eight-year conflict, which turned into a full-scale invasion in February 2022, left between 28 and 34 million people out of the 52 million Ukrainians in 1991 in the current Ukrainian territory<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 18 III 2014, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/crimeas-strategic-value-russia> [accessed: 6 VI 2023].

<sup>6</sup> *Convention concernant le régime des détroits* – agreement signed in 1936 regulating the law of the sea in the Black Sea straits. It concerns the right and rules of passage through the Black Sea straits of ships and vessels not belonging to Turkey, in whose territorial waters the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles are located.

<sup>7</sup> *Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia...*

<sup>8</sup> For more on the use of agents to achieve strategic objectives in Ukraine, see: M. Świerczek, *2014 takeover of the SBU headquarters in Lugansk as an example of the operation of the Russian special services*, "Internal Security Review" 2023, no. 28, pp. 278–312. <https://doi.org/10.4467/20801335P-BW.23.012.17662>.

<sup>9</sup> First it was the so-called green men in Crimea, and then the military groupings fighting in the Donbass against the Ukrainian army and posing as Donbass self-defence forces, despite the fact that, locked in successive encirclements, the Ukrainian troops were decimated with heavy equipment that the separatists were not allowed to have.

<sup>10</sup> O. Danylov, *As of January 1, 2023, the population of Ukraine was 28-34 million*, Mezha.Media, 7 IV 2023, <https://mezha.media/en/2023/04/07/as-of-january-1-2023-the-population-of-ukraine-was-28-34-million/> [accessed: 7 VI 2023]. Such a large margin of uncertainty is due to the fact that researchers cannot correctly assess whether emigrants will return to their country or stay permanently in their destination countries.

Russia's hybrid actions, even before they moved into the hot war phase, therefore had consequences of strategic importance for the entire Ukrainian state.

### **The annexation of Crimea and the attempted separation of Ukraine's eastern and southeastern regions as Russian special operations**

The actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine undertaken in 2014 had the character of a sequence of special operations, during which Russia pursued its geopolitical objectives. It achieved them through the annexation of Ukraine's economically and militarily most important territories<sup>11</sup>, but - until 2022 - without the need for full-scale war<sup>12</sup>. The use of the army was spotty, always masked and on a small scale. This was made possible by the paralysis of Ukraine's decision-making centres (i.e. the newly formed government and the leadership of the power ministries) after the opposition seized power in February 2014. At the same time, passivity and lack of resistance on the part of Ukrainians, as well as their collaboration with the invaders (covert or overt), occurred at almost all levels of Ukrainian statehood. An examination of the course of successive Russian operations in Ukraine indicates that these processes were strongly influenced by Russian agents<sup>13</sup>. Russian intelligence networks were built both using political clientelistic networks in state institutions (especially in the power ministries) and among the Russian-speaking population, whose defence against alleged persecution was intended to provide cover for Russian actions.

#### **Scale of infiltration**

An objective indicator of the scale of Russian infiltration of Ukrainian state institutions is the number of Ukrainian soldiers and officers of the power ministries and officials who - after the annexation of Crimea - continued to serve and work for the occupiers, refusing to leave the peninsula and return to Ukraine. The first attempt to summarise the scale of the collaboration of Ukrainian state structures in Crimea with the Russians was made by the then deputy chairman of the Medjlis of Crimean

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<sup>11</sup> As already mentioned, the attempt to take the whole of the east and south-east from Ukraine meant the threat of deindustrialisation and the cutting the country off from the ports through which grain was exported.

<sup>12</sup> It is irrational that, after two years of war, it has not been declared by any of the fighting parties.

<sup>13</sup> Cf.: M. Świerczek, *Szturm na siedzibę Służby Bezpieczeństwa Ukrainy w Ługańsku...*

Tatars<sup>14</sup> Ilmi Umerov<sup>15</sup>. In an interview given to the Ukrainian edition of the newspaper “Новое время” on 3 November 2017, he stated that 100% of Crimean militia and Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) officers, 80% of the military and 70% of prosecution staff had switched to the Russian side and continued their previous work, only that for the occupation forces<sup>16</sup>. According to Umerov, this proved that the Ukrainian state had not carried out any ideological work among the Crimean population for decades, and that the Russians had been preparing for the annexation for a very long time by expanding their agents and subjecting the population of the peninsula to intensive propaganda<sup>17</sup>. He stated that one of the elements of influencing society and state organs in Crimea was to be (in parallel with the long-standing building of pro-Russian sentiment) to portray the Tatars and their organisations as the main extremist factor and hostile to Ukrainian rule in Crimea<sup>18</sup>. This was a way of distracting the power ministries from Russian activity. Umerov pointed out that the clearest manifestation of the betrayal was that none of the 300 units of the Ukrainian army in Crimea resisted the Russian troops, who forcibly seized barracks and equipment<sup>19</sup>.

Umerov's statement caused a storm in the Ukrainian media and fuelled long observed phenomena - espionage and the politicisation of widespread allegations of treason<sup>20</sup>. Some commentators accused Umerov of deliberately inflating statistics<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Medjlis of Crimean Tatars (Къырымтатар Миллий Меджлиси) – an organisation of Crimean Tatars to represent the interests of this community in Crimea.

<sup>15</sup> Ilmi Umerov (born 1957) is a Ukrainian politician and social activist of Tatar nationality. In 2017, convicted in Crimea on charges of undermining the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, after which he was handed over by the Russian authorities to Turkey in exchange for two detained FSB agents.

<sup>16</sup> *Замглавы Меджлиса Умеров: Сотрудники СБУ и милиции в Крыму оказались предателями на 100%, военнослужащие - на 80%, прокуратура - на 70%*, New Voice, 5 XI 2017, <https://nv.ua/ukraine/politics/zamglavy-medzhlysa-umerov-sotrudniki-sbu-i-militsii-v-krymu-okazalis-predateljami-na-100-voennosluzhashchie-na-80-prokuratura-na-70-2135335.html> [accessed: 7 V 2023].

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> In order to realise the scale of the phenomenon, it is worth tracing the ДЕРЖЗРАДА on Ukrinform. It contains a very large number of entries concerning real and alleged traitors. See: ДЕРЖЗРАДА, Ukrinform, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/tag-derzrada> [accessed: 14 VI 2023]. The posts and articles on treason on the Myrotvorets portal are also a good example. See: <https://myrotvorets.news/?s=%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA> [accessed: 14 VI 2023].

<sup>21</sup> Cf.: *Официальная статистика: замглавы Меджлиса завысил количество предателей в Крыму на 10 %*, Inform Napalm, 7 XI 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/41430-ofitsialnaya-statistika-zamglavy-medzhlysa-zavysil-protsent/> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; А. Круглов, *На измене, Совершенно Секретно*, 30 X 2014, <https://www.sovsekretno.ru/articles/bezopasnost/na-izmene/> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; «Предатели на 100%»: Умеров резко высказался о спецслужбах в Крыму,

A parliamentary investigation was therefore conducted by the deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, Dmytro Tymchuk, who sent official parliamentary enquiries to the relevant ministries<sup>22</sup>. The responses containing officially confirmed data allowed to draw up a summary, including a division into individual service and armed forces<sup>23</sup>.

### Security Service of Ukraine

In all organisational units in Crimea served 1619 officers as at 1 March 2014. Of these, 1235 belonged to the officer corps. After the annexation, 217 officials, including 210 officers, left for Ukraine. The percentage of traitors was therefore 86.4% and 83% among officers<sup>24</sup>.

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OBOZ.UA, 5 XI 2017, <https://news.obozrevatel.com/society/predateli-na-100-umerov-rezko-vyiskazalsya-o-spetssluzhbah-v-kryimu.htm> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; О. Козаченко, *Умеров жалеет, что в Крыму не стали стрелять по русским*, Полит Навигатор, 3 XI 2017, <https://m.politnavigator.net/umerov-zhaleet-chno-v-krymu-ne-stali-strelyat-po-russkim.html> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; *Замглавы Меджлиса упрекнул Украину в сдаче Крыма без стрельбы*, Черноморская телерадиокомпания, 6 XI 2017, <https://blackseatv.com/in-the-spotlight/zamglavy-medzhliisa-upreknul-ukrainu-v-sdache-kryma-bez-strelby/> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; *Теперь пишут записки в Москву: озвучены масштабы предательства крымчан*, From-UA, 30 XI 2017, <https://from-ua.org/news/425623-teper-pishut-zapiski-v-moskvu-ozvucheni-masshtabi-predatelstva-krimchan.html> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; *Более 10 тысяч солдат перешли на службу России*, Безформата, <https://angarsk.bezformata.com/listnews/soldat-pereshli-na-sluzhbu-rossii/62518616/> [accessed: 7 V 2023]; *Сколько военных ВСУ и СБУ перешли на сторону России в 2014 году*, RF-SMI, 20 II 2022, <https://rf-smi.ru/ukr/71072-skolko-voennykh-vsu-i-sbu-pereshli-na-storonu-rossii-v-2014-godu.html> [accessed: 7 V 2023].

<sup>22</sup> A scan of the response from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. See: *Сколько военных из Крыма предали Украину: шокирующие цифры*, Паноптикон, 7 XI 2017, <https://panoptikon.org/ukraine/98813-skolko-voennykh-iz-kryma-predali-ukrainu-shokirujushhie-cifry.html> [accessed: 4 VI 2023].

<sup>23</sup> Data quoted from: Д. Тымчук, *Сколько крымских силовиков стали предателями Украины*, UA Info, 6 XI 2017, <https://uainfo.org/blognews/1509980385-skolko-ukrainskiy-silovikov-v-krymu-stali-predatelyami.html> [accessed: 4 VI 2023]; *Тымчук назвал число предателей среди украинских силовиков в Крыму после аннексии*, РБК-Україна, 6 XI 2017, <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/tymchuk-nazval-chislo-predateley-sredi-ukrainskih-1509976026.html> [accessed: 4 VI 2023]; *Нардеп Тымчук назвал число изменивших присяге крымских силовиков*, Black Sea News, 6 XI 2017, <https://www.blackseanews.net/read/136189> [accessed: 5 VI 2023].

<sup>24</sup> The calculations summarising the results of the deputy enquiries come from the official page of D. Tymchuk's Facebook page. See: <https://www.facebook.com/dmitry.tymchuk/posts/1366726656789319> [accessed: 9 VI 2023].

### Armed Forces of Ukraine

As of 1 March 2014, there were 13,468 soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) stationing in Crimea, including 4,737 officers. After the Russian takeover of Crimea, 3991 servicemen, including 1,649 officers, left the peninsula. The percentage of traitors in the AFU was thus 70.4%, and 65% among officers<sup>25</sup>.

### Ministry of the Interior

There is no data on the number of Ukrainian militiamen in Crimea. Only information on internal troops under the responsibility of the Ukrainian Ministry of Interior and Border Guard is available.

As of 1 March 2014, there were 2489 internal army soldiers in Crimea. 1398 returned to Ukraine. Thus, there were 44% traitors in the ranks of the internal troops. This low percentage was due to the fact that in the units stationed in Crimea there were 1265 basic military service soldiers from Ukraine proper who had returned home in full force. Among the officer cadre of the internal troops, usually from Crimea and living there, by contrast, the percentage of traitors was 86%<sup>26</sup>.

As of 1 March 2014, there were 1869 Border Guard officers in Crimea, including 448 officers. 479, including 226 officers, returned to the country. The percentage of traitors was therefore 74% and 50% among officers<sup>27</sup>.

The figures included in the above statistics may in fact be higher, as some officers may have returned to Ukraine to leave the service and retire, and then returned home to Crimea to take up service with the Russians, while retaining Ukrainian pension benefits.

### Attempts to explain the scale of the betrayal

In the Ukrainian media discussing such a large scale betrayal, attempts were made to rationally explain why the mass betrayal of Ukrainian soldiers and officers occurred. The hypotheses put forward included several factors that could have been relevant.

- Firstly, those who stayed in Crimea had families, homes and property there. Leaving the occupied peninsula meant losing everything. The weakened

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Ukrainian state did not provide material security for people who remained faithful to their oath when they left Crimea<sup>28</sup>.

- Secondly, according to the 2001 census, of the 2.4 million inhabitants of Crimea, 60.40% were ethnic Russians, 24.01% were of Ukrainian nationality and 10.11% were Tatars<sup>29</sup>. There is a lack of information on actual linguistic and cultural affiliation, i.e. data on how many of the Crimean Ukrainians and Tatars were Russian-speaking. It can be assumed that the ethnic structure of the Ukrainian services and military may have corresponded to these percentages, at least in terms of professional cadres, probably recruited mainly from peninsula residents looking for work close to home. Crimean Russians - loyal to their country of origin - may have rejected Ukrainian statehood, which was alien to them. A higher percentage of traitors than the statistics for the main nationalities would indicate may have been the result of, for example, a reluctance to accept Tatars (considered a subversive element) into service<sup>30</sup>, so the choice to stay in service may have been derived from nationality. The ethnic factor may have played a major role due to Russian propaganda scaring the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine with the threat of ethnic cleansing by Right Sector activists<sup>31</sup>.
- Thirdly, Russia in Crimea was not a foreign state. The Russian Black Sea Fleet worked closely with the AFU. Officers of these formations were friends, met, and were linked by comradeship and family ties. Thus, they were able to prioritise informal (i.e. family-friendship) relationships when making decisions. Eastern European societies - in contrast to the West -

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Про кількість та склад населення України за підсумками Всеукраїнського перепису населення 2001 року, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071124125111/http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/> [accessed: 12 VI 2023].

<sup>30</sup> This would change the nationality structure in Crimea's power ministries, as the proportion of Russians and Russified Ukrainians would be higher than in the population as a whole.

<sup>31</sup> Cf.: *Корсуньская трагедия - боевики Майдана пытаются крымчан, поджог автобусов*, 20.02.2014, YouTube, 20 II 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2TGeF-xbTc&list=PLeuqEf-NtM8zleTyjJ-n8DXE2Uz9OHm2Ty> [accessed: 23 II 2023]; *Документальный фильм «Корсуньский погром»*, YouTube, 30 VII 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FfPTBQ4l38> [accessed: 22 II 2023]; *«Корсуньский погром»: зверства сторонников майдана*, YouTube, 21 VI 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlF\\_AdGbJfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlF_AdGbJfE) [accessed: 22 II 2023]; *Корсуньская трагедия Убивали только за то, что они из Крыма 2014 весна*, YouTube, 27 V 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqUcM5YBWFw> [accessed: 23 II 2023].



have a so-called communal character, i.e. they value loyalty to family members and friends more highly than to the state<sup>32</sup>.

- Fourthly, the Crimean population was under the constant influence of the Russian mass media and generally supported the pro-Russian Party of Regions. Both Russia and Party of Regions activists intensively promoted the narrative that the opposition's seizure of power in Kiev was a forceful coup financed by the West. With this perception of these political events, the choice of Russia (to which the ousted Yanukovich had fled) could have been seen as the only option to fight the 'putschists' in a situation where the 'legitimate' president had obtained refuge in the Russian Federation.

Although the hypotheses presented are important in trying to explain the events described, they do not in any way explain the admission of 86.4% of Crimean SBU officers to the FSB. The militia, border guards, prosecutor's office or civil administration are non-political organs of the state (at least in theory), even purely technical and necessary for the administration of an area inhabited by a population<sup>33</sup>. This may result in their officers seeing the service as a profession and the state merely as an employer. This may encourage collaboration with the occupying power, especially if it forms the occupying administration on the basis of its own legal system<sup>34</sup>. The occupying forces may in turn use already existing institutions (with their personnel) with knowledge and experience in the area, treating them pragmatically as a necessary part of the administration, regardless of nationality.

Special services (all over the world) use very restrictive recruitment methods. They seek to identify as much as possible about the candidate's past and way of life (in order to eliminate the possibility of blackmail), as well as his or her possible links with groups potentially dangerous to the service. The most important thing is to establish whether the candidate is in contact with a foreign special service and whether there are indications of a real risk that such relations could be established in the future. In other words, the sine qua non conditions for admission to work in the special services are the candidate's lack of so-called counterintelligence risk and his or her loyalty to his or her own state. Consequently, even in peacetime and towards one's own

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<sup>32</sup> On the differences between community and associative societies, see: F. Tönnies, *Wspólnota i stowarzyszenie* (Eng. Community and association), Warszawa 1988.

<sup>33</sup> An example drawn from history is the establishment of police units by the Germans in the General Government (Polnische Polizei im Generalgouvernement), which were armed and financed by Polish local governments. See in more detail: A. Hempel, *Policja granatowa w okupacyjnym systemie administracyjnym Generalnego Gubernatorstwa: 1939-1945* (Eng. Blue Police in the occupation administrative system of the General Government: 1939-1945), Warszawa 1987.

<sup>34</sup> This was the argument used by the so-called 'blue policemen' to defend themselves after the war. They pointed to their "service" role towards Polish society, which they protected from criminals.

citizens, extensive vetting procedures are applied. Under quasi-war conditions and with regard to citizens of a foreign state, the rigour of counter-intelligence checks should be much greater. Especially if the candidates have already once betrayed their service and their own state and broken the oath of allegiance taken by officers of the power ministries.

How, then, did the Russians accept 1,400 Crimean SBU officers into FSB service without vetting? This meant, after all, that they would have access to the FSB's IT systems, official and state secrets and the possibility of promotion in the hierarchy (not only in the Crimean units, but also in the headquarters). Such conduct is contrary to the elementary principles of the work of the special services. Looking for an explanation, one could assume that such a decision was taken by the Russians due to their inability to create security structures because of the lack of their own cadres. However, the FSB is estimated to have between 200,000<sup>35</sup> and 350,000<sup>36</sup> officers, of which around 100,000-120,000 serve in the Border Guard<sup>37</sup>. Thus, the internal service alone accounts for between 80,000 and 230,000 officers. With such a staff resource, the secondment of around 2,000 personnel to Crimea should not pose a problem<sup>38</sup>.

## Research hypothesis

The most plausible explanation for this phenomenon is the assumption that the Russians, when accepting former SBU officers, did not need to check their loyalty, as the Crimean SBU cadres had been in contact with the Russian special services for a long time. If this cooperation had been long and repeatedly positively verified, there was no need for additional confirmation of the new officers' loyalty. Russian agents in the SBU were simply taken over en masse by the FSB.

Such reasoning has the methodological weakness that no intelligence service in the world would recruit almost the entire personnel pool of an adversary to cooperate. This would be counter-productive, as new sources would provide the same information and receive remuneration for it, while generating the need to expand its own intelligence structures due to the handling of numerous agents. The aim, therefore, is to recruit only those ranked high enough in the adversary's structure

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<sup>35</sup> Численность ФСБ, <https://fsb.dossier.center/number/> [accessed: 12 VI 2023].

<sup>36</sup> B. Renz, *The Russian Force Structures*, "Russian Analytical Digest" 2007, no. 17, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Численность ФСБ...

<sup>38</sup> The one thousand four hundred officers of the Crimean SBU who took up service in Russian structures accounted for between 0.4 and 0.7% of the number of total posts in the FSB.

to be able to obtain information gathered from those at lower levels of the service hierarchy.

In attempting to explain the atypical *modus operandi* of the Russian services with regard to the Crimean SBU, reference can be made to the results of analyses that point to an important difference between the paradigm of operation of the Western and Russian secret services consisting in the different objectives and methods of the latter. These methods are referred to as offensiveness (Russian: наступательность)<sup>39</sup>.

### Offensive counterintelligence

It should be emphasised that the Soviet-Russian concept of counterintelligence differs radically from that of the West. According to the assumptions of the first concept, counterintelligence is not about passively protecting sensitive information from the actions of the enemy's intelligence services, but about actively controlling the enemy's intelligence and counterintelligence by placing its own agents ('moles') in these structures and planting double agents. However, the Russian concept of active counterintelligence does not stop there. Among the methods of operational counterintelligence work described by Russian authors dealing with the activities of the Soviet secret services<sup>40</sup> the term *разложение противника* always appears. Despite the frequent use of this term in the works of Russian historians, its definition is lacking, while at the same time such a *modus operandi* is treated as an obvious attribute of the Chekist operational workshop. Translating the term into Polish, one should speak of disorganisation, decomposition or systemic destabilisation of a hostile organisation. Sometimes this term is used in its developed form – *разложение на корню*, which should be understood as a complete, systemic paralysis

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<sup>39</sup> “Наступательность – образ действий контрразведки обеспечивающий активность и инициативу, достижение максимальных успехов в борьбе с противником. Н. – представляет собой организационно-технический принцип, которым стремятся руководствоваться разведывательные и контр разведывательные органы в своей деятельности. В соответствии с ним сторона действующая наступательно, достигает при прочих равных условиях наилучших результатов” (Offensiveness is the counterintelligence *modus operandi* of seizing activity and initiative to achieve maximum success against the enemy. Offensiveness - represents the organisational and technical principle that intelligence and counterintelligence agencies try to follow in their operations. According to it, the best results are achieved by the side that plays offensively). See: *Контрразведывательный словарь*, Москва 1972, p. 171. Translations in the article are from the author (editor's note).

<sup>40</sup> In the context of agent infiltration, control over channels of communication.

of the enemy's military-intelligence organisation, making any effective offensive-defensive action impossible<sup>41</sup>.

This approach to the work of the Soviet-Russian secret services stems from the theoretical assumptions formulated in the early 1920s by Aleksandr Kuk, deputy head of the agent department of the USSR's military intelligence service Razvyudpr. The main one stated that: *Secret intelligence has acquired an active character. This feature of clandestine intelligence, as bearing on terrorism, disorganisation of state life and the military system of the opposing side, turns out to be extremely important and shows intelligence in a completely different light from before the world war*<sup>42</sup>. According to this premise, intelligence ceased to consist merely of collecting military or political information about the opponent, but became a multi-faceted activity aimed at disorganising the opponent's state apparatus as fully as possible. In other words, the described *разложение противника* was a practical application of Kuk's theoretical considerations, which postulated active paralysis of the opponent's state structures instead of passive collection of information about it.

On the subject of Russian methods of disorganising the enemy - despite the lack of detailed descriptions in Russian literature - one can deduce from the 'interpretation' contained in a circular sent out on 11 August 1937 by the head of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR (Народный комиссариат внутренних дел СССР, NKVD) Nikolai Yezhov<sup>43</sup>. The letter was a de facto death sentence for Polish communists working in the party-state apparatus of the USSR<sup>44</sup>, accused of belonging to an intelligence network called the Polish Military Organisation (PMO). Characterising the (alleged) activities of the PMO to harm the interests of the USSR, Yezhov listed the following manifestations of activity:

- infiltration of the Soviet administration, political apparatus, economy, army (mainly middle and senior cadres), NKVD, party apparatus and Comintern;

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth adding that 'dismantling' the enemy's organisation - as a connotation-neutral term - was a name reserved for offensive actions of the Soviet secret services. The same action of foreign services directed against the USSR was referred to by the pejoratively characterised word вредительство (pestering).

<sup>42</sup> A.I. Kuk, *Kanwa wywiadu agenturalnego* (Eng. The canvass of agent intelligence), Warszawa 1994, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov (born 1895, executed 1940) - Soviet party and state activist, People's Commissar of State Security from 1936 to 1938, responsible for the implementation of Stalinist terror during the so-called Great Purge (named after him "Yezhovshchyna").

<sup>44</sup> *Оперативный приказ Народного комиссара внутренних дел Союза ССР Николая Ежова № 00485. 11 августа 1937 г. о польской национальной операции*, <https://operacja-polska.pl/nkr/o-operacji-polskiej-nkw/dokumenty/966,00485-11-1937.html> [accessed: 22 X 2019].

- locating agents in key positions in intelligence and counterintelligence (civilian and military) to paralyse the activities of bodies able to detect mass infiltration;
- organisation by Polish intelligence of systematic recruitment work using high positions in the USSR state apparatus, with the aim of weakening the USSR's defence capabilities in every possible field.

It is clear from the contents of Yezhov's letter that the tactic of dismantling the Soviet apparatus was to consist of three successive stages:

- 1) point infiltration of key places in the apparatus of the Soviet republic (these were mainly leadership positions in the secret services, the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, administration, party and economy<sup>45</sup>);
- 2) support for further, almost massive infiltration at lower organisational levels by 'moles' positioned in sensitive locations<sup>46</sup>;
- 3) creation of an extensive agent network entangling the economy and the political-military superstructure of the state, the members of which - by means of actions difficult to prove due to the use of camouflage - tried to harm the Soviet state by all means<sup>47</sup>. These activities consisted of corrupting and

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<sup>45</sup> Cf.: "(...) уже определилось, что антисоветской работой организации были охвачены – система НКВД, РККА, Разведупр РККА, аппарат Коминтерна – прежде всего польская секция ИККИ, наркоминдел, оборонная промышленность, транспорт – преимущественно стратегические дороги западного театра войны, сельское хозяйство" (Eng. ...it has already been established that the anti-Soviet work of this organisation included - the NKVD system, the Red Army, the Intelligence Department of the Red Army, the Comintern apparatus - above all the Polish section of the Comintern Executive Committee, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, the defence industry, transport - mainly strategic roads of the western theatre of warfare, agriculture). Quoted from: *Закрытое письмо...*

<sup>46</sup> Cf.: "Массовая фашистско-националистическая работа среди польского населения СССР в целях подготовки базы и местных кадров для диверсионно-шпионских и повстанческих действий" (Eng. Mass fascist-nationalist work among the Polish population in the USSR to prepare a base and local personnel for sabotage, espionage and insurgent activities). Quoted from: *Закрытое письмо...*

<sup>47</sup> Cf.: "Глубокое внедрение участников организации в компартию Польши, полный захват в свои руки руководящих органов партии и польской секции ИККИ, провокаторская работа по разложению и деморализации партии, срыв единого и народного фронта в Польше, использование партийных каналов для внедрения шпионов и диверсантов в СССР, работа, направленная к превращению компартии в придаток пилсудчины с целью использования ее влияния для антисоветских действий во время военного нападения Польши на СССР" (Eng. Deep penetration of members of the organisation into the Polish Communist Party, complete takeover of the party's leadership organs and the Polish section of the Comintern Executive Committee, provocative work for the decomposition and demoralisation of the party, breakdown of the united and popular front in Poland, use of party channels to introduce spies and saboteurs into the USSR, work to transform the Polish Communist Party into an appendage of Piłsudism in order

demoralising Soviet officials, promoting harmful solutions in industry and agriculture, leading to the dissipation and waste of budget resources, lobbying for ineffective or countereffective methods of operation of the secret services, administration and army (at both tactical and strategic levels<sup>48</sup>).

In historiography, Yezhov's circular was treated either as a manifestation of the widespread psychosis prevailing in the Soviet power apparatus, or as evidence of the cynicism of its author, who wanted to secure his career by means of mass executions of his more capable colleagues and thanks to recognition from Stalin, who was supposedly suffering from advanced paranoia. Sometimes a thesis was put forward about the alleged anti-Polonism of the Soviet authorities, which was said to be a legacy of tsarist times.

In the process of explanation, it is necessary to reach - without entering into considerations of Stalin's unproven (due to lack of diagnosis during his lifetime) madness and assuming that the sheer number of Poles occupying leadership positions in the USSR<sup>49</sup> falsifies the theories of Soviet anti-Polonism - to the carefully documented

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to use its influence for anti-Soviet activities during the Polish military attack on the USSR). Quoted from: *Закрытое письмо...*

<sup>48</sup> Cf.: “Полный захват и парализация всей нашей разведывательной работы против Польши и систематическое использование проникновения членов организации в ВЧК–ОГПУ–НКВД и Разведупр РККА для активной антисоветской работы. Основной причиной безнаказанной антисоветской деятельности организации в течение почти 20 лет является то обстоятельство, что почти с самого момента возникновения на важнейших участках противопольской работы сидели проникшие в ВЧК крупные польские шпионы (...)” (Eng. The complete seizure and paralysis of all our intelligence work against Poland and the systematic infiltration of the Cheka-OG-PU-NKVD and the Intelligence Board of the RKKA with the help of members of the organisation for active anti-Soviet work. The main reason for the unpunished anti-Soviet activity of this organisation for almost 20 years is the fact that, almost from the very beginning of its existence, significant Polish spies who had infiltrated the Cheka were active in the most important areas of anti-Polish work). Quoted from: *Закрытое письмо...*

<sup>49</sup> A minimum of 17% of the leadership apparatus (middle and senior levels) of the NKVD consisted of ethnic Poles. In reality, the Polish element in the NKVD was much more numerous, as there were a large number of people working in the Soviet state apparatus who came from Polishised Jewish, Belarusian-Lithuanian or Ukrainian families. In their personal questionnaires, however, to emphasise proletarian roots, they would enter their ethnic origin, remaining silent about their links with the Polish language and culture. The Soviets were aware of this. In the NKVD reports on the Polish ‘operation’, they scrupulously reported that 20,311 Poles and - as part of this operation - more than 17,000 representatives of other nations (mainly Belarusians and Jews) had been arrested. If these proportions were to be translated into the percentage of Poles in the NKVD leadership given above, it could mean that almost a third of the leadership apparatus of this institution had ties to the Polish language and culture. Quoted from: А. Зданович, *Польский крест советской контрразведки. Польская линия в работе ЧК-НКВД. 1918-1938*, Москва 2017, pp. 169–170, 311–312.

findings of cognitive psychology, within which the phenomenon of projection has been described as a possible explanation for the action against the PMO.

### The mechanism of projection as a hypothesis explaining the actions of the NKVD

In psychology, projection is understood as a defence mechanism of personality consisting in attributing one's own motivations, views, traits and behaviours to others. The common occurrence of the phenomenon of projection results from the fact that the projecting individual usually has access only to his or her own thoughts, feelings and behaviours<sup>50</sup>, with the help of which he or she explains other people's behaviours<sup>51</sup> (since in the process of understanding others, one cannot refer to emotions, beliefs and knowledge that one does not have<sup>52</sup>).

If one accepts that the Soviet services infiltrated foreign services en masse and paralysed their activities with the help of agents, then – in line with the availability heuristic<sup>53</sup> – NKVD officers were convinced that enemy intelligence was doing the same to them. The NKVD leadership, by dismantling the Western apparatuses of power with the help of 'moles', agents of influence and double agents, believed that it was the victim of symmetrical actions on the part of its opponents, carried out by similar methods and on a similar scale.

### Yezhov's infiltration model as an explanation for mass betrayals in the Crimean SBU

If, on the basis of the above considerations, it is assumed that the Soviet services and then their continuators in the Russian Federation used the methods revealed by

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<sup>50</sup> An attempt to avoid projection as a factor falsifying cognition in the social sciences is the rigorous application of methodology and the researcher's multiple cognitive perspectives. However, accessibility heuristics remain a major source of cognitive error. Cf.: D. Kahneman, P. Slovic, A. Tversky, *Judgment under uncertainty: heuristics and biases*, New York 1982.

<sup>51</sup> Cf.: T. Koberzycki, *Filozofia osobowości* (Eng. Philosophy of personality), Warszawa 2001, p. 153. See in more detail: A. Freud, *Das Ich und die Abwehrmechanismen*, Wien 1936; O.F. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, London 1990; K. König, *Abwehrmechanismen*, Göttingen-Zürich 2007; S. Mentzos, *Interpersonale und institutionalisierte Abwehr*, Frankfurt am Main 1994.

<sup>52</sup> This phenomenon is also known to so-called naïve psychology, e.g. as the belief that thieves believe that everyone steals.

<sup>53</sup> Habitual recourse to one's own experiences, emotions and beliefs.

Yezhov, the massive scale of betrayal in the Ukrainian state apparatus and the FSB's seamless absorption of the cadres of the Crimean secret services become understandable. Since the aim of the Russian services - according to the methodology described earlier - is not to obtain information, but to take control of the institutions of a hostile state in order to paralyse their activities through a network of agents penetrating almost all organisational levels, the mass scale of recruitment becomes logical.

The main infiltration mechanism, as described by Yezhov, was cronyism. Using corrupt mechanisms, agents could be introduced to lower levels with the help of 'moles' who had previously been placed high in the hierarchy. Established agents had to surround themselves with further agents or people who were fully controlled and lacked initiative in order to protect themselves from unmasking by subordinates and colleagues. Thus, agentisation and complicity (if only in passive form) descended to lower and lower levels of the organisation under attack.

The well-known phenomenon of mass administrative cliques in the post-Soviet area, accompanied by the passivity of those who do not belong to them but are fully loyal to them out of fear or self-interest, explains the effectiveness of the method outlined by Yezhov. It also explains the admission of almost 1500 former SBU officers to the FSB without vetting them. If one assumes that there were agent networks in the Crimean SBU reaching from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, and that each level protected its own security by introducing new agents and by intimidating and making dependent employees formally uncooperative with the Russians, then the Russian takeover of an entire team, fully agent-controlled, did not involve a high degree of counterintelligence risk.

From this, it follows that the agentic model of capturing an adversary's institutions involves two key elements:

- 1) creation, through cronyism mechanisms, of branched agent networks composed mainly of management staff at all levels,
- 2) clientelistic dependence of rank-and-file employees on infiltrated cadres in order to gain full control over their actions and bind them to the established system.

The mechanism of dependency of subordinates by corrupt supervisory personnel is also common in the post-Soviet reality<sup>54</sup>. It consists of:

- negative selection of managed staff, removing from the team all independently thinking and autonomous employees who are not willing to accept implicit hierarchies and clientelistic dependencies;

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<sup>54</sup> For more on the mechanisms of staff dependence on informal relationships in the secret services, see: Г.С. Водолеев, С.Ф. Сидоренко, *Спецслужбы и спецслужбы*, Москва 2009.



- undermining subordinates' confidence in official regulations by developing unofficial, extra-legal networks of relationships and dependencies that fully regulate relations within the institution and replace the legal basis of its functioning;
- total paralysis of objective personnel policy, with the result that promotion depends solely on superiors and not on individual skills or work performance;
- corruption, which - through the complicity of subordinates - binds them to an unofficial structure both because they want to share in the profits and because they fear the legal consequences if they are exposed<sup>55</sup>.

The last factor is the most important, as corruption (broadly understood as the use of a public function to pursue one's own interests) is a *sine qua non* for all other elements. Observations on the mechanisms operating in Ukrainian state structures during the recent conflict with the Russian Federation confirm the existence of a correlation between betrayal (i.e. entering into cooperation with Russian services) and prior corruption<sup>56</sup>.

## Corruption in the Crimean SBU

According to a study by Transparency International Ukraine (Трансперенсі Інтернешнл Україна, TIU), in 2022 Ukraine ranked 116th on the corruption scale out of 180 countries in the world<sup>57</sup>. In Europe, it was the most corrupt country. At the same time, it is worth noting that the results of the TIU study do not fully reflect

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<sup>55</sup> Failing to report corruption is already a criminal offence, so passivity arising from powerlessness in the face of the system becomes an effective binding element to the informal, agent-created system.

<sup>56</sup> Cf.: *Генерал-колекціонер СБУ Свиридонов друг Куницьина*, ОРД, 20 XII 2009, <https://ord-ua.com/2009/12/29/general-kolleksioner-sbu-sviridonov-drug-kunitsyina/> [accessed: 15 VI 2022]; W. Samar, *Russian «moles» in the State Security Service of Ukraine: what is missing in the Kulinich-Sivkovich' case?*, Center of Journalistic Investigations, 26 IV 2023, <https://investigator.org.ua/investigations/253973/> [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; *Генерал Кривонос: про зраду в 2014-му, Порошенка, Зеленського, «клоунів» у РНБО і силові звільнення Донбасу*, Радіо Свобода, 19 I 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rnbo-kryvonos-donbass-zrada-peremoga/30384758.html> [accessed: 15 VI 2023]; *Корупція та зрада - це неприпустимі речі. І у професійному, і в людському плані. Це не можна пробачати*, - Ігор Клименко, 7 II 2023, <https://mvs.gov.ua/uk/news/korupciia-ta-zrada-ce-nepriustimi-reci-i-u-profesiinomu-i-v-liudskomu-plani-ce-ne-mozna-probacati-igor-kli-menko> [accessed: 15 VI 2023]. See in more detail: А. Савченко, *Антиукраїнець: або Воля до боротьби, поразки чи зради*, Київ 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Transparency International Ukraine, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/ukraine> [accessed: 16 VI 2023].

the scale of the phenomenon, as many types of corruption (e.g. cronyism, favouritism or nepotism) are not perceived as such in Ukraine. They are treated as socially obvious phenomena<sup>58</sup>. One can therefore risk the hypothesis that the above surveys only show the scale of bribery and not corruption as a complex phenomenon.

Since its creation, on the basis of the republican Committee for State Security (Комитет государственной безопасности, KGB), the Security Service of Ukraine has been an institution with a predisposition to dysfunction<sup>59</sup>. On the one hand, it was subjected to politicisation (understood as the active support of political clans), and on the other, to the constant pressure of oligarchic capitalism, which drew the best officers to work in the private sector and with their help corrupted the entire structure. Crimea was remote from the Kiev headquarters and had a special status, while offering ample opportunities to join in the widespread looting of state assets<sup>60</sup>, which encouraged corruption to flourish.

Only the period from 2000 onwards, when the anomie of the 1990s caused by the collapse of the USSR was slowly beginning to end, will be included in the analysis. During this period (i.e. from 2000 to 2014), the Crimean SBU was headed successively by Gen. Alexander Sviridonov, Gen. Vladimir Pshenichnyy, Gen. Alexander Yakimenko, Gen. Vladimir Totskiy and Gen. Gennady Kolachev. During the 14 years of their rule, there were many scandals related to the sale of SBU property for bribes<sup>61</sup>, the expansion of corrupt relations with local business, organised crime, administration, as well as the so-called *kryshevaniye*<sup>62</sup> of profitable companies, the plundering of archaeological sites<sup>63</sup> and the running of security companies in collaboration

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<sup>58</sup> The Ukrainians surveyed referred to corruption being treated as a bribe. The actual level of corruption is therefore significantly higher.

<sup>59</sup> The Security Service of Ukraine, due to the mass exodus of capable officers, consisted almost exclusively of people unable to find their way in the market reality and a handful of officers who were only a few years short of retirement. Low salaries and conditions resulting from the wild capitalism of the 1990s led to high levels of corruption. Cf.: *Генерал-коллекционер СБУ Свиридонов...*

<sup>60</sup> At the time of its separation from the USSR, Ukraine had the informal status of the world's tenth economy, with both fertile black soil and heavy industry. Three decades later it was the poorest country in Europe. See: *Map of sovereign states in Europe by projected 2023 GDP (PPP) per capita based on international dollars*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_sovereign\\_states\\_in\\_Europe\\_by\\_GDP\\_per\\_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states_in_Europe_by_GDP_per_capita) [accessed: 12 III 2024].

<sup>61</sup> Including not only the polyclinic and nursery buildings, but also the contact flats used for operational work. From: *Генерал-коллекционер СБУ Свиридонов...*

<sup>62</sup> *Kryshevaniye* (Russian: крышевание) – protection in a broad sense, offered to companies in exchange for a bribe or share of the profits.

<sup>63</sup> In Crimea, so-called black archaeology has become a profitable business. The SBU leadership initially contented itself with stealing some of the seized artefacts and then moved on to illegal excavations with the help of soldiers from the ALFA unit. From: *Генерал-коллекционер СБУ Свиридонов...*

with bandits and the International Bodyguard Association, whose interests in the post-Soviet area were represented by former KGB colonel Josif Linder. The staffing of the Crimean SBU was subjected to constant negative selection, as not only the unruly but also competent officers who would be able to understand the nature of the illegal corruption schemes being set up were forced to leave<sup>64</sup>. Only officers who were passive and to some extent entangled in the illegal interests of the management were tried to be kept in the service.

There were reports in the press not only of widespread corruption and links (taken for granted<sup>65</sup>) of the Crimean SBU with the Russian services<sup>66</sup>, but also of the strong influence of the Turkish secret services on the Crimean SBU to corrupt it through the leadership of the Tatarstan Medjlis<sup>67</sup>. There is a lack of information to resolve whether this was the result of multilateral sell-outs by Ukrainian officers to maximise profits, or whether the Russian special services used agents in the SBU to play operational games with Turkish intelligence.

Even a superficial review of media reports from the period in question indicates the complete anomie of the Crimean SBU<sup>68</sup>, resulting from the intertwining of corrupt influences, infiltration by foreign special services, contact with organised crime and local political-economic networks. Thus, there was every indication that the cadres of the Crimean SBU, demoralised by corruption, subject to adverse selection and arbitrary superiors, should be fully controlled by the agent network created by the FSB.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> All those heading the Crimean SBU had either been in the KGB or the Soviet army in the past. Consequently, contacts with colleagues from their former service (especially when they served in the Black Sea Fleet) were not questioned by anyone.

<sup>66</sup> W. Samar, *Russian «moles»...*

<sup>67</sup> Cf.: *Закрытый доклад СБУ: на турецкие деньги «меджлис» вел разведку для Анкары*, EADaily, 7 IV 2016, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2016/04/07/zakrytyy-doklad-sbu-na-tureckie-dengi-medzhilis-vel-razvedku-dlya-ankary> [accessed: 16 VI 2023].

<sup>68</sup> Cf.: *Коррупция - СТОП! Прокуратура признала действия СБУ не соответствующими законодательству*, LB.ua, 23 V 2011, [https://lb.ua/news/2011/05/23/97705\\_korruptsiya\\_stop\\_prokuratura\\_priz.html](https://lb.ua/news/2011/05/23/97705_korruptsiya_stop_prokuratura_priz.html) [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; М. Галеотти, «Сейлем» и «Баишаки». Крым и криминал до и после российской аннексии, Крым.Реалии, 27 X 2014, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/26658454.html> [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; *Агрессивный крымский боевик Самвел оказался спецгентом Кремля и мог работать в СБУ*, ТСН, 20 V 2014, <https://tsn.ua/ru/politika/agresivnyy-krymskiy-boevik-samvel-okazalsya-specagentom-kremlya-i-mog-rabotat-v-sbu-366551.html> [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; *Новые русские бандиты: кто контролирует Крым*, Украина Кримінальна, 24 III 2014, <https://cripo.com.ua/investigations/?p=172293/> [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; *Милиция и СБУ закупили машин на 30 миллионов*, bigmir.net, 15 XII 2010, <https://auto.bigmir.net/autonews/autoworld/5217854-miliciya-i-sbu-zakupili-masin-na-30-millionov> [accessed: 16 VI 2023]; *Агенты национальной опасности*, dsnews.ua, 28 X 2013, <https://www.dsnews.ua/economics/agency-natsionalnoy-opasnosti-28102013090200> [accessed: 16 VI 2023].

## Summary

The starting point of the considerations undertaken was the question of the possible reasons for the incredibly high percentage of Ukrainian state functionaries who switched to the side of the Russians in 2014. The main research problem was - contrary to the rules regulating the functioning of special services - the admission of 1,400 officers of the Crimean SBU to the Russian FSB. After all, no service would accept into its ranks hundreds of service officers of an enemy state (in addition, in a state of undeclared war with it), especially since they had broken the oath of allegiance they had taken at their previous location. All available procedures for checking the loyalty of so-called walk-ins (i.e. people spontaneously offering their services to the special services) should be applied to SBU officers declaring their willingness to work for the FSB<sup>69</sup>. The author considered that the only logically acceptable explanation for this phenomenon was that the Russians de facto did not accept neophytes of the Russkii mir into their service, but instead enlisted agents who had previously - by acting for Russia - fully proven their loyalty. Since the hypothetical mass enlistment was at odds with the economics of intelligence operations, the author drew, in the process of explanation, on the Soviet theorist's concept of active intelligence from the 1920s and - using the achievements of cognitive psychology - reconstructed the Soviet method of mass infiltration of an opponent's institution in order to paralyse its offensive and defensive actions early on and any attempt to improve and reform the agent-infested organisation.

From the analyses carried out, the explanation for the phenomenon indicated is most likely the massive infiltration of Ukrainian services in Crimea by the FSB. The author assumed that - in line with the described methodology of Soviet infiltration - the main mechanisms underlying such an attack were the widespread cronyism, nepotism and immanent corruption prevailing in the infested service. Indeed, by exploiting these pathologies, it is relatively easy to build vertical agent networks and at the same time (as a result of complicity in corruption and the removal of independently thinking individuals) to make the non-recruited part of the cadre dependent. All these factors occurred in great intensity in the Crimean SBU, which made it easy for the Russians to take control of this institution long before the annexation of the peninsula.

It can be presumed that the FSB's group takeover of Crimean SBU officers was carried out for propaganda purposes, since - from the point of view of operational logic - it would have been more advantageous for Russia to transfer agents

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<sup>69</sup> See in more detail: I.A. Serov, *Work with Walk-ins*, "Studies in Intelligence" 1962, vol. 8, no. 1; F. Begoum, *You and Your Walk-In*, "Studies in Intelligence" 1962, vol. 6, no. 1.

from the Crimean SBU to the Kiev headquarters or regional SBU units, especially from areas adjacent to the kinetic action zone in the Donbass. Probably the fear of criminal trials against Ukrainian state functionaries working in Crimea, who could be accused, if not of treason, then of failing to fulfil their duties, also played a role. It was therefore preferable to leave the agents on the peninsula to use them for propaganda operations, while at the same time transferring to Ukraine the right agents positioned among the soldiers, officers and officials who were returning to their homeland in the halo of Ukrainian patriots<sup>70</sup>.

If the hypothesis posed in the article is true, it must be assumed that the Crimean operation was a de facto special services operation, with only a subsidiary role for the armed forces. The kinetic action in the form of the intervention of the Russian army (first masked, then overt) could only have been the final chord of a multi-year process of mass infiltration and disintegration of the opponent's civil-military institutions. Taking into account the statistics quoted at the beginning of the article demonstrating the scale of the betrayal, one can risk the hypothesis that the army was used only to mask the real, hidden mechanism of the annexation. For Russia - relying on massively infiltrated Ukrainian state structures - could have staged the 'spontaneous' secession of Crimea in a situation of a forcible seizure of power by the opposition in Kiev. It would have been sufficient to carry out a *staging*<sup>71</sup> using mass protests, the local administration joining them and the Crimean parliament declaring secession. Thanks to Tymchuk's findings, it is known that all power institutions in Crimea were fully controlled by Russian agents. There was therefore no real force that could have stopped the 'people's referendum' if it had been carried out by a fully agent-controlled local parliament. The use of armed formations of the Russian Federation was even an obstacle to the legitimacy of the annexation, giving the West a pretext to declare the referendum invalid.

The most significant conclusion to be drawn from the above analysis is the finding that the Russians succeeded in seizing Crimea not through military intervention, but through systemic infiltration and agentic dismantling of the opponent's institutions. This tactic of aggression as an extension of policy is a development of the assumptions of Soviet theorists from the period of major disinformation operations and ancient Chinese military thought, indicating the possibility of achieving

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<sup>70</sup> An identical method of operation was used by the Soviet GPU during major disinformation operations carried out in the 1920s and 1930s. See in more detail: M. Świerczek, *Jak Sowietci przetrwali dzięki oszustwu. Sowietcka deceptja strategiczna* (Eng. How the Soviets survived by deception. Soviet strategic deception), Warszawa 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Staging (Russian: инсценировка) – a game for the needs of foreign services conducted by agents and cadres of their own service.

strategic victory without military action, only by means of systemic corruption and recruitment of officers and officials of the enemy state<sup>72</sup>.

The research problems arising from the above analysis can be put in the form of two questions: 1) why did the Russians - after the annexation of Crimea and the partial separation of the Donbass from Ukraine - decide to launch a full-scale military operation in 2022? and 2) what made their actions this time met with strong resistance from the Ukrainian state?

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<sup>72</sup> Cf.: "Among the class of officials, there are always corrupt people whose office has tainted their character, and others who have experienced injustice and been wronged. There are multitudes of sycophants and servants who covet wealth. Those who remain too long in their comfortable positions, and those who have not, in their mind, occupied the office that suits them, and those whose only desire is to make good use of time and circumstances to fulfil their selfish aims, as well as those who are double-minded, fickle, ephemeral, and those who are still waiting for their opportunity. You can be sure that all of these people can be secretly recruited for service against their state, providing them with a decent salary in gold and silk. Then you can rely on viable informants from their country or attempts to thwart plans turned against you. They are also free to create conflict between the ruler and his advisers so that they do not act in concert". S. Tzu, *Sztuka wojny* (Eng. Art of War) elaborated by J. Paterczyk, p. 80, [https://www.academia.edu/41929781/Sun\\_Tzu\\_SZTUKA\\_WOJNY\\_czyli\\_TRZYNA%C5%9ACIE\\_ROZDZIA%C5%81%C3%93W](https://www.academia.edu/41929781/Sun_Tzu_SZTUKA_WOJNY_czyli_TRZYNA%C5%9ACIE_ROZDZIA%C5%81%C3%93W) [accessed: 21 VI 2023].

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