

END NOTE

'PRO-UKRAINIAN' OR 'PRO-KUCHMA?' UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CRISIS

By Taras Kuzio

With more than two years of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma's second term remaining, it is becoming increasingly clear that his continued presence in office is negatively affecting Ukrainian foreign policy. Although Kuchma is fond of stating that Ukraine's foreign policy is neither "pro-Western" nor "pro-Russian" but "pro-Ukrainian," it is in reality more "pro-Kuchma," in that it almost exclusively serves to further the interests of the executive and its oligarch allies.

Ukraine's international image began to worsen almost immediately after Kuchma's re-election in November 1999, and this process accelerated with the revelations of presidential wrongdoings that became public during the "Kuchmagate" scandal in the winter of 2000-01. Nobody within the Ukrainian elite denies the authenticity of the tapes made in Kuchma's office by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko; Kuchma merely argues that they were doctored as a "provocation" against him. The authenticity of the tapes was obviously not questioned by oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk, head of the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine-united (SDPU-o), who reportedly offered \$3 million to Melnychenko for them at the end of last year -- an offer Melnychenko turned down.

The latest scandal to affect Kuchma and thereby Ukraine's foreign policy is the allegation that in contravention of a UN Security Council embargo, advanced weaponry (a "Kolchuga" air-defense system) was sold to Iraq after it was demonstrated at the SOFEX-2000 arms exhibition in Jordan in April 2000.

Melnychenko testified to a federal grand jury in San Francisco in mid-April that a conversation on the tapes between Kuchma and Ukrspetseksport chief Valeriy Malev in July 2000 about the delivery of a "Kolchuga" system to Iraq is genuine. This portion of the tapes has also been authenticated by forensic experts used by the FBI.

Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh and the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry have strenuously denied the new allegations, while Kuchma has characteristically dismissed them as "dog shit." Nevertheless, the head of counterintelligence within the Security Service of Ukraine, Serhiy Makarenko, has admitted that Malev lobbied for the sales to Iraq. Kuchma knew the scandal was about to explode, and therefore there are suspicions about Malev's death in a car accident on 6 April, days before the scandal became public. Yuriy Ryabkin, director of the Donetsk-based Topaz plant where "Kolchugas" are manufactured, has also confirmed that a conversation between Kuchma

and Malev did indeed take place on this question, but denies that a "Kolchuga" system was delivered to Iraq.

Even before this latest scandal Kuchma was already persona non grata in the West; his most recent foreign visit, to Germany in January 2001, had been planned before the eruption of "Kuchmagate." Prior to the Iraqi arms scandal, the U.S. had laid down the condition that the murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze must be resolved before any visit to Washington can take place. Last week, FBI agents who had attempted to assist Ukraine's incompetent 17-month investigation of Gongadze's death left the country without accomplishing anything after they were denied access to any evidence.

U.S. military intelligence has confirmed that a "Kolchuga" system is in Iraq, and if U.S. investigations confirm that the supplier was indeed Ukraine the consequences will worsen Ukraine's semi-isolation. In its just published annual report, the Kyiv-based Center for Peace, Conversion, and Foreign Policy of Ukraine (CPCFPU) concluded that relations in 2001 between Ukraine and the U.S. were in "crisis," saying, "Tension and stiffness were present in all political and diplomatic contacts." Last year marked the first year of Kuchma's terms in office in which no U.S.-Ukrainian summits took place, as even prior to the latest scandal there was no enthusiasm in Washington for a Ukrainian presidential visit.

The latest scandal is negatively affecting Ukraine's foreign policy in two other ways, despite the evident isolation from reality of the Ukrainian executive. In January 2002, Volodymyr Lytvyn, head of the presidential administration and the pro-Kuchma For a United Ukraine election bloc, argued that, "We don't need to return to Europe. We are in Europe. We don't need to seek the West's approval. We are an inseparable part of it." Ukrainian ambassadors to Western countries have also argued along similar lines that the results of last month's parliamentary election showed that Ukrainians voted for the "European choice."

Such statements by Ukraine's executive incorrectly assume that, like the reformist and pro-Western Our Ukraine, the pro-Kuchma For a United Ukraine (ZYU) is seen as "pro-European," which has not been the case since the late 1990s and certainly not since "Kuchmagate." The CPCFPU defines the foreign policy of ZYU and its oligarchic allies as "moderate pro-Russian isolationism," and argues that of the three main election groups (ZYU, Our Ukraine, and the Communists), only Our Ukraine supports Ukraine's integration into European and trans-Atlantic structures.

Although the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the U.S. State Department described the 31 March elections as an important step, they also complained about serious violations that were committed by the executive on behalf of the ZYU. And the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution on 26 April that concluded that "all of the actions of the authorities -- the use of administrative pressure, controlling who had access to the media, the use of compromising materials -- were undertaken in order that democratic elections would not take place in Ukraine." As the CPCFPU noted, the main obstacle to Ukraine's integration into "Europe" is the existence of a regime "that does not comply with the European

model of political order and European values." Ukraine's elites have still not understood that to be accepted into "Europe" requires the pursuit of European policies at home and abiding by international treaties abroad.

If evidence is uncovered regarding Ukraine's supply of arms to Iraq, Ukraine will not be invited to the NATO summit in Prague in November. Five to seven Central/Eastern European states are expected to be invited to join NATO this year and a new NATO-Russia Council will be created. Ukraine's position on NATO expansion or membership is unclear because of its ambivalent "multivector" foreign policy and the ongoing ramifications of the "Kuchmagate" crisis. Consequently, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council chief Yevhen Marchuk warned last week in the newspaper "Den" that there is a real danger that Ukraine will be "sidelined from the major Euro-strategic processes."

Ukraine's foreign policy was already ambivalent prior to the late 1990s. This ambivalence has worsened since "Kuchmagate," the unwillingness to resolve the Gongadze case, blatant abuse by the ZYU of "administrative resources" during and after the elections, and now the Iraqi arms scandal. Ambivalence has become a crisis of Ukraine's foreign policy because that policy is pro-Kuchma, rather than pro-Ukrainian.

Dr. Taras Kuzio is a research associate at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.