

IN OTHER WORDS

[REVIEWS OF THE WORLD'S MOST NOTEWORTHY BOOKS]

Ukraine's Warrior Princess

By Taras Kuzio

Nevyipolnennyi Zakaz
(Unfulfilled Orders)

By P. Loza

95 pages, Kiev: Taki Spravi, 2002
(in Russian)

Fighting a brace of corrupt and cynical strongmen, Yulia Tymoshenko is the most glittering figure in Ukraine's struggle for democracy. Her biographer compares her to Lady Diana, dubbing her "Ukraine's very own Princess." Others, paying tribute to her maverick traits, brand her an "Iron Princess" or a "Joan of Arc." Already, at age 42, she has started two factories, two political parties, and one national platform rallying for reform. She offers beauty tips in the international fashion magazine *Harper and Queens* (her secret for blemish-free skin: soap and boiling water). And she would very much like to become the next president of Ukraine.

Tymoshenko has her work cut out for her. Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has been trapped in a sputtering process of reform, with three main oligarchic clans fighting for control over the economy, the political

system, and the judiciary. President Leonid Kuchma, continually finding himself in the midst of scandal—as when a cassette tape implicated him in the gruesome murder of investigative journalist Heorhiy Gongadze in 2000—has relied on the three clans for political support. With one out of four Ukrainians living below the poverty line, widespread public discontent could fuel the makings of a belated Ukrainian Velvet Revolution. Eight out of 10 Ukrainians want Kuchma to step down before the end of his term, but only 1 out of 10 is ready to expedite his departure by protesting openly—and under risk—in the street. Unlike in other former communist countries, such as neighboring Poland, a grassroots opposition movement has yet to spring up in Ukraine.

Last year, Tymoshenko led her self-named, antioligarch party, the "Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc," into Parliament with 7 percent of the popular vote, a notable success in an election that Western observers declared not fully free and fair. In the run-up to these elections, the publishing house Taki Spravi (So It Goes) released 900,000 copies of Tymoshenko's biography, *Nevyipolnennyi Zakaz* (Unfulfilled Orders). As is so often the case with Ukrainian texts, the book is poorly struc-

tured by the standards of Western readers. (P. Loza, the author, is a pseudonym for the popular screenwriter Yuriy Rohoza who works in Ukrainian television.) But nobody in the West would have difficulty recognizing the true nature of this biography: It is the literary equivalent of a campaign video. Banned by the government from making television appearances, Tymoshenko relied on this romanticized account of her life to burnish her credentials as a humble populist—a difficult task for one of the wealthiest, most glamorous women in Ukraine—and to defend her good name. After publication of the book, Kuchma sought revenge against his prodigious challenger. Tax authorities raided Taki Spravi's offices more than 30 times between March and November 2002, often using armed police, seizing office equipment, while reportedly focusing on documents related to *Unfulfilled Orders*. Faced with financial losses and negative publicity, the publishing house's boss had to lay off 279 of his 304 employees.

The biography recounts, Cinderella-style, how Tymoshenko was raised in an underprivileged, working-class household. Until she was 30 years old, she and her husband and daughter lived in relative poverty, a narrative underscored by photographs showing Tymoshenko

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doing housework (Ukraine is still a long way from achieving gender equality). In 1990, Tymoshenko, a trained economist, decided to go into business, and she recalls proudly how she started up two of the first private factories in Ukraine and how she plowed profits back into these businesses. As her business empire grew, she says she was inevitably drawn

Tymoshenko as his deputy prime minister in charge of energy, Yushchenko reportedly replied, “you need a crook to catch a crook.” Only Tymoshenko knew the complicated and highly corrupt energy sector. Her relentless reforms returned more than \$3 billion to the state coffers, a sum previously siphoned off annually by the oligarchs. Because she had done

garchs who made a fortune speculating on energy. With unintended irony, she once told an interviewer that, in Ukraine, “any person who has worked a single day in business can be put in jail.”

Such glib comments have not increased her political capital. In recent polls, she trails well behind other presidential candidates for the



into the political world, evolving from neutrality to radical opposition to the Kuchma government, from oligarch to dissident oligarch.

From 1995 to 1997, she headed the gas-trading company United Energy Systems, worth \$1 billion; critics say the company grew fat from illegitimate government contracts awarded by former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko (now on trial in the United States for money laundering). In 2000, she joined the government of then-Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, the only reform cabinet Ukraine has had since 1991. When asked why he had chosen

her work too well, Kuchma fired her in 2001. Since then, the government has repeatedly attempted to imprison her and her husband on accusations of corruption.

Not surprisingly, she rejects charges that her stewardship of United Energy Systems was in any way corrupt. But her denials seem implausible. In the Commonwealth of Independent States, all who were involved in business affairs in the 1990s either had to infringe upon or bend the rules. Tymoshenko was likely no exception. The best that can be said of her past misdeeds is that her guilt is shared by Kuchma and most oli-

2004 election, including her former political mentor and leading opposition figure, Yushchenko, whom she belittles in her biography as “tragic” and a “soft politician.” Ukraine’s reformers would best serve their cause if they stepped aside and threw their support behind Yushchenko. The odds of that seem slim, however, given the competing egos and agendas of the opposition leaders. Yushchenko could strike a deal and align himself with Tymoshenko, offering her the position of prime minister if he wins. That strategy, however, would alienate the oligarchs, who could deliver important

ILLUSTRATION BY JANE STERRETT FOR FP

votes. Yushchenko's best bet might be to keep Tymoshenko at a distance, maintain his moderate stance, and hope that the pro-presidential camp will disintegrate as the elections approach.

Such divisions are already apparent. Kuchma has yet to find a successor who would be acceptable to all the clans, be willing to grant him immunity from future prosecutions, and still stand a

chance of winning the election. The success of the democratic opposition in Ukraine's presidential elections ultimately may depend less on unrest from below than unrest from the top. **FP**

Au Revoir to American Empire

By Vladislav L. Inozemtsev and Ekaterina Kuznetsova

Après l'Empire: Essai sur la décomposition du système américain (After the Empire: An Essay on the Breakdown of the American System)

By Emmanuel Todd

240 pages, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2002 (in French)

The preeminence of the United States seems even more uncontested today than it was 50, 20, or even 5 years ago. Yet the foundations of this preeminence have changed. In previous decades, it was the country's economic might that insured political domination. Today, a globally accepted belief in U.S. military hegemony secures the United States' domestic economy. But the nation's military and economic might are more myth than reality. In fact, the United States' weaknesses in these areas will cause the country's downfall. So argues Emmanuel Todd, a

French historian and sociologist in *Après l'Empire: Essai sur la décomposition du système américain* (After the Empire: An Essay on the Breakdown of the American System), which for 27 weeks was among the bestsellers compiled by the French newspaper *l'Express* and in November is due to be released in English.

This attack would be easy to dismiss as anti-American or typically French were it not coming from Todd, a respected researcher at the French National Institute for Demographic Studies with a track record of uncannily accurate European political predictions. In 1976, while still in his 20s, Todd predicted nearly to the year the fall of the Soviet empire in a book called *The Final Fall: An Essay on the Decomposition of the Soviet Sphere*.

Now Todd has set his sights on those who see the United States as the world's stabilizing force. For the past 50 years, periods of stability were rare. Destabilizing forces were needless to invent: communism in the 1950s and 1960s, Third World liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and antiwar protesters in the 1970s. But these forces faded

into history after 1989. As Todd puts it, after the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War, no conflict loomed large enough to justify U.S. interference on a global scale.

Then came the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, perpetrated in Todd's words by "gangs of crazy but genius terrorists originat[ing] from . . . Saudi Arabia." According to Todd, these attacks "let America become the leader of a world crusade, justify its pointed and artificial interventions like those in the Philippines or Yemen, install its military bases in Uzbekistan as well as in Afghanistan, and penetrate even deeper into Georgia to the borders of Chechnya." Thus, the myth of global terrorism became the bedrock of a U.S. strategy, aimed at "staying, at least symbolically, in the center of the world, which is about to discover that it can survive without America." Todd calls it *micromilitarisme théâtral* (theatrical micromilitarism), a doctrine that follows three principles: Choose weak enemies, avoid final solutions to conflicts, and demonstrate U.S. supe-

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riority in the everlasting arms race.

But if a nation is willing to become so indispensable to the world, isn't that nation in desperate need of the world? In exchange for its stabilizing efforts, the United States imposes an economic yoke on the entire planet—what Todd calls *servitude volontaire* (voluntary servitude). U.S. citizens annually consume \$450 billion more in goods and services than they produce domestically. U.S. businesses absorb \$865 billion a year in foreign investment, and the U.S. government feels free to borrow as much as it sees fit. For Todd, the United States has become “a kind of black hole, absorbing goods and capital but incapable of providing, in return, equivalent goods.” Thus, “America cannot do without the world” and “has objectively become a predator.” This attitude, hardly to be found among Europeans even 15 years ago, now dominates intellectual reflections throughout the Old World.

This combination of political omnipresence, military aggressiveness, and economic vulnerability predestines the United States to failure. So, Todd asks, how can the world manage a superpower that is economically dependent and politically useless? Two of his prescriptions for taming the United States' imperial ambitions make this book indispensable for U.S. policymakers.

Todd argues that Europe's budding economic superiority and common cultural and social values, which are gradually becoming more distinct, make the continent the only natural political contender to the United States. Europe's economic power can and should be translated into political and military influence sufficient to contain the United States and to reestablish

global political equilibrium. In the sphere of politics, Todd believes this balancing act can be achieved by creating a framework within which all East European countries—including Turkey—discontinue political alignment with the United States in favor of the greater benefits that would result

If a nation is willing to become so indispensable to the world, isn't that nation in desperate need of the world?

from closer economic ties with Europe's core. In the military domain, Todd explores the possibility of creating a nightmare alliance for the United States “between Russia, a major nuclear superpower, and Europe and Japan, the two dominant economic powers.” Today, such a development can hardly be imagined, but for Todd everything is possible in this unpredictable world.

Todd's eagerness to see a common European political and military identity is understandable. But the political strategy he proposes to put at the core of Europe's identity is surprising. Todd wants Europe to abstain from any overt action in the world, while allowing the U.S. economy to deteriorate and the U.S. military to overextend itself. Drawing on highly optimistic estimations of developments in the Third World, Todd argues that if developing countries are left in peace (particularly in the Muslim world), they will be overcome by “spreading literacy and falling fertility rates” and ultimately by the “universalization of democracy.”

Much of what Todd predicts in his book has already come true. A scenario he sets out for Franco-

German rapprochement—one year before the war in Iraq—is quite similar to the framework officially announced in Paris eight months later. The war left trans-Atlantic relations lying in rubble. But there is a duality in Todd's perceptions. At the same time that Todd calls upon Europe to step

up as the only group of nations capable of counterbalancing the United States, he praises Europe's geopolitical restraint. The United States can hardly pacify the simmering conflicts on the outskirts of the Western world unilaterally, but neither can a Europe that stands still. The United States' economic soundness may be a myth, as Todd asserts. But it seems premature to speak of the decomposition of the entire American system. The U.S. economy remains stable and competitive despite military overextension and foreign dependence. Still, by neglecting its European allies, the United States is pushing Europe toward greater strategic union, a union that Russia, with its vast natural resources and historical inclination to universalism, may yet join.

The shape and character of U.S. hegemony will adapt as the globe's political and economic environment changes. The adjustment to a unipolar world has been painful. Unfortunately, Todd's book provides no practical recipe for restoring balance-of-power politics. Thus no appropriate solution seems apparent. But readers should at least be grateful to the author for trying. **FP**

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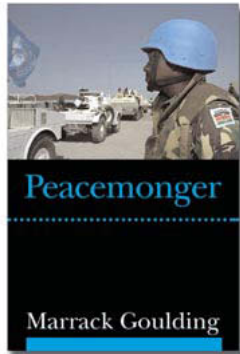
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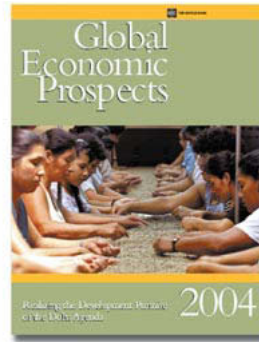


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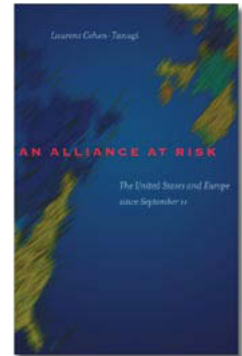


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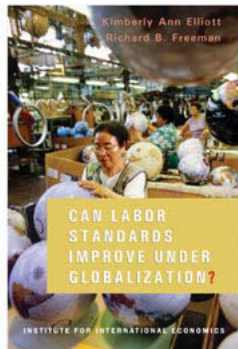
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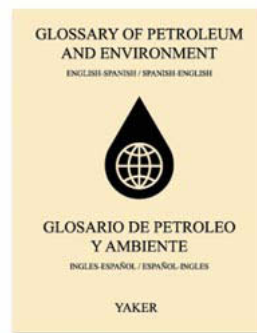


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