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UKRAINE FORGES MILITARY ALLIANCE WITH MACEDONIA

By Taras Kuzio

During the tenth anniversary celebrations of Ukrainian independence in Kyiv on August 24, one guest was conspicuous--Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski. This was the first occasion that such a high-level guest had attended these annual celebrations from a country with which Ukraine had, until recently at least, little contact.

Also in attendance were the presidents of two of Ukraine's important "strategic partners"--Russia's Vladimir Putin and Poland's Alexander Kwasniewski. During the commemoration, Poland's president described his country as both Ukraine's gateway to the West and its main advocate within Western institutions and countries. Putin's reasons for attending the celebration differed from Kwasniewski's, for three reasons. First, Putin's visit reflected a new approach, which recognizes that policies towards Ukraine must differ from those used in relation to Belarus. In Kyiv President Putin accented the depth of Russian-Ukrainian cultural and historical ties as "a good foundation for relations between the two countries to achieve a new level of alliance."

The more "pragmatic" Putin now reluctantly accepts the claim made by Kuchma during the tenth anniversary that Ukraine's independence is irreversible. Similarly, Ukrainian Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh told Rossiiskaya Gazeta that "[t]here is a stronger understanding of the historic and political fact that the Russian Federation and Ukraine are independent states and relations between them must be built on the basis of parity, mutual respect and the search for optimal economic solutions." Since 2000 Ukraine's strategic foreign policy aims have been narrowed from integration into "Trans-Atlantic and European" to only "European" structures.

Second, against the backdrop of a likely large-scale second round of NATO enlargement at next year's Prague summit, Putin sees Ukraine as highly important strategically. Since Putin's accession as president, Ukraine has ceased flirting with the idea of NATO membership, as it did under former Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk, who was sacked in October 2000 under Russian pressure. Putin knows that Kuchma may thus need allies, just as he did during the "Kuchmagate" scandal of 2000-2001. The Russian president has already helped his Ukrainian counterpart by providing documents backing alleged corruption charges against Kuchma's chief opposition foe, Yulia Tymoshenko, head of the Front for National Salvation.

Third, Ukraine will hold parliamentary elections in March 2002. If the anti-Kuchma opposition win a large number of seats, it could ensure that Kuchma does not leave office in 2004 unscathed from the charges leveled against him during "Kuchmagate."

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA FORGE A COMMON POSITION ON MACEDONIA

Putin's arrival in Kyiv with Vladimir Rushailo, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, and Aleksandr Voloshin, head of the presidential administration, reflected not only Russia's renewed interest in maintaining Ukraine within its sphere of influence, but a common position with Ukraine on events in Macedonia and Kosovo. After the joint meeting in Kyiv, Russia, Ukraine and Macedonia outlined their opposition to NATO's alleged support for Albanian Muslim separatism in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Support for NATO declined in Ukraine, even in its traditionally anti-Russian Western regions, after the alliance's military operations against Serbia in April 1999. Neither Ukraine or Macedonia are intrinsically pro-Serb or anti-NATO. But, as newly independent states that emerged from the ruins of multinational states, they are sensitive about threats to their territorial integrity and thus support the territorial status quo in postcommunist Europe. At a joint Ukrainian-Macedonian press conference in Kyiv, President Kuchma said: "The entire world should proceed from the central point--the territorial integrity and independence of Macedonia--and investigate where there is terrorism, and where the protection of national interests." On a visit to Bulgaria in September, the Ukrainian and Bulgarian presidents said that Macedonia should not be divided along ethnic lines and called for the Albanian rebels' complete disarmament.

The Ukrainian and Russian take on developments in Kosovo and Macedonia corresponds to that of Slavic countries in the Balkans, which view the Albanian fighters as "terrorists." NATO, on the other hand, views them as "rebels," and NATO's

military campaign in Kosovo cause fear in Ukraine that it would set a precedent for regions like the Crimea, if the Crimean Tatars were to launch a violent separatist campaign. While the Tatars are anti-Russian and thus natural allies of Ukraine's national democrats, some Ukrainians fear the Tatars are only waiting for the time when they become a majority in Crimea to break away from Ukraine.

UKRAINE BECOMES MAIN MILITARY SUPPLIER OF WEAPONS TO MACEDONIA

Macedonian Defense Minister Vlado Buckovski visited Ukraine this past summer as part of an expansion of military cooperation between the two countries that began when the start of the Albanian insurgency in Macedonia. Ukraine is Macedonia's largest supplier of military equipment and therefore vital to the success of its campaign against Albanian separatists. Buckovski and Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk discussed several ways to expand military and technical cooperation.

First, the number of Macedonian pilots trained in Ukraine's large number of military academies will increase. Macedonia has heavily relied on its air power in its war against separatists. Ukraine is also prepared to offer training to police and special forces, which Macedonia lacks. Ukraine has well-trained special forces for domestic counterinsurgency in the Ministry of Interior (which took over the National Guard in 2000) and the Border Troops.

Second, Macedonian military equipment, such as airplanes and tanks, will be serviced in Ukraine. Ukraine has already supplied four Mi-8 helicopters to Macedonia's military from its peacekeeping mission in neighboring Kosovo. In June Ukraine also supplied SU-25 attack aircraft to Macedonia.

Involvement in peacekeeping in separatist conflicts like Kosovo and Macedonia is useful to Ukraine itself. Ukraine can offload more of the huge military arsenal it inherited as a frontline former Soviet republic. After the arrest of a Ukrainian gunrunner in Italy this past summer the Guardian newspaper reported that Ukraine had exported upwards of US\$32 billion worth of arms in the 1990s, most of it illegally. Ukraine ranks among the world's top ten arms exporters and expects to increase these sales by 8 percent this year.

Peacekeeping in the Balkans and participation in NATO Partnership for Peace exercises helps Ukraine train its own troops in case separatist unrest erupts inside Ukraine. Many of these exercises aim to deal with a local conflict requiring international assistance.

Under heavy U.S. and NATO pressure, Ukraine agreed to

"suspend" its deliveries of military weapons to Macedonia during the NATO peacekeeping operation there. Nevertheless, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Serhy Borodenko said that Kyiv would continue its "military cooperation" with Macedonia despite this temporary "suspension." The Ukrainian side has admitted that this continued "cooperation" could only be undertaken with Russian support.

In late September, Ukraine delivered thirty-one T-72 tanks to Macedonia, claiming they were being delivered under a contract signed in 1999. Ukraine did not rule out a new contract, with two sides expressing their readiness "to continue mutually advantageous Ukrainian-Macedonian cooperation in the political, economic and other areas."

CONCLUSION

Ukrainian, Macedonian and Russian national interests coincide in opposing Albanian "terrorists" and all three countries remain distrustful of NATO's actions in Kosovo and Macedonia. Ukraine has successfully used the crisis in Macedonia to become its largest supplier of military equipment. This will indirectly influence Ukraine's relations with Russia given that, in the contrast to the Yeltsin era, Ukraine and Russia are today also less opposed to cooperation in the military-industrial sphere. Valery Malev, head of the Ukrainian state arms export Ukrspetseksport, recently stated that the development of Ukrainian defense enterprises was impossible without Russian partners. Ukraine and Russia will, however, continue to differ over whether NATO and its enlargement is a threat (Russia) or beneficial (Ukraine).

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