



Anti-Americanism obstructs critical analysis

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Adam Swain's op-ed (Kyiv Post, May 20, "Ukraine is no Arab police state") is par for the course. Swain has always disliked the 2004 Orange Revolution and taken the position of its opponents, whether in the British or Kyiv media.

What is surprising is two factors.

The first is his inability to be critical of anything "his" side undertakes – unlike those of us on the "orange" side, who were quite happy to criticise ex-President Viktor Yushchenko and ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. I agree with Swain that Tymoshenko's references to the Arab world are, of course, misplaced. Just as Ukraine is not Russia, as ex-President Leonid Kuchma famously wrote, so too Ukraine is not Egypt.

What is all the more difficult to comprehend is how a British scholar can so readily brush aside political persecution in a country like Ukraine. Here are close to 30 politically motivated cases and jailings in Ukraine today meaning this not a "Kuchma-light" administration, as he describes it (where the only political prisoners were nationalists charged with the March 2001 riots) but "Kuchma-heavy."

Today's political prisoners include nine leaders of the anti-tax code protests, 14 or more nationalists involved in beheading the Josef Stalin monument and an untold number of former members of the Tymoshenko government. Photographs of former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko show him to be in poor health after a long hunger strike.

Perhaps Swain needs to look at them from a different angle (if humanitarian is insufficient). Swain writes that Ukraine "is a young democracy with relatively well-run elections which are the most competitive in the whole of the Commonwealth of Independent States."

If true, then future elections will eventually lead to the opposition winning power and if this were permitted to happen, the authorities would have only themselves to blame for opening up a Pandora's box. After all, if Kuchma and Tymoshenko can be criminally charged, then why not an ex-President Viktor Yanukovich and an ex-Prime Minister Mykola Azarov? If ex-Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko can be charged, then even more so could an ex-Security Service of Ukraine chief Valeriy Khoroshkovsky. Ukraine's corrupt courts can be manipulated by whoever is in power.

A second factor which is difficult to comprehend to comprehend is how anti-Americanism can so badly throw off a scholar's arguments. Swain, for example, claims: "The West was so desperate for Tymoshenko to win the presidential election last year that it was always likely that Yanukovich's victory would be greeted by a splurge of anti-Ukrainian articles in the press."

The history books will eventually show that the West was neutral in the 2010 elections and did not have a favorite candidate, unlike in 2004. The U.S. rushed to congratulate Yanukovich on his election victory before the Central Election Commission announced the official results.

Ukraine fatigue that emerged in 2008-2009 turned Western governments against Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. U.S. Embassy cables leaked by WikiLeaks clearly show the US had no love for Tymoshenko by the 2010 elections.

Yanukovich was also given a long honeymoon by the West that believed he was a different man to the candidate in 2004. This honeymoon lasted until last fall, when three developments ended it: (1) the declining state of media freedom, (2) the manner in which the constitution was changed (a policy that Yanukovich never included in his election program) and (3) the conduct of local elections did not meet democratic standards.

Swain refuses to accept the reality that the U.S. and Europe gave Yanukovich a major honeymoon opportunity to prove he was committed to democratic values. Instead Swain trumpets the views commonly heard from the conspiracy-minded Yanukovich administration that the intention of Western criticism "is to discredit Yanukovich, his business supporters and his electorate."

History books will again show that Yanukovich has only himself to blame for growing Western criticism – including from the International Monetary Fund and Western business experts who argue that economic reforms have stalled since November and corruption has ballooned.

Swain crowns his anti-American conspiracy theorizing by writing as if the George W. Bush administration had never been replaced by Barack Obama three years ago. He wrote: "Yet paradoxically, the West dare not 'lose; Ukraine to the Russian orbit" and "Western pressure on Yanukovich may even grow in the coming months as the geopolitical tug of war with Russia unfolds but the west will not disengage for fear of losing what grip it does have over the country."

As I have written in the Kyiv Post ("[Ukraine is no longer a US strategic priority](#)," May 6), the Obama administration has disengaged from Eurasia and is no longer pursuing democracy promotion as aggressively as did George W. Bush or NATO enlargement in post-Soviet states. At the same time, the European Union does not have the capabilities or vision to replace the U.S. in Eurasia as a competitor with Russia.

In conclusion, I would give three recommendations for Swain. First, try and be as critical towards the Yanukovich administration as scholars like myself were towards the "orange" administration of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko.

Second, attempt to write analyses without being blinded by old-fashioned and out-dated anti-Americanism or through recourse to Soviet conspiracies.

Third, try to understand that President Obama is not President Bush.

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