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# Ukraine: Look into arms exports

**By Taras Kuzio**

**TORONTO** - Just a few years ago, Ukraine was the apple of the West's eye. Nestled in the strategic heart of Central Europe, the former Soviet republic had transferred its nuclear weapons to Russia, started economic reforms, and signed a defense charter with NATO.

Now Ukrainian elites stand accused by Italian authorities of involvement in illegal arms-trafficking. The Italians claim weapons were sent in the mid-1990s to the Taliban via Pakistan, and that shipments continue to other conflict zones around the world.

High-level Ukrainian officials, if not directly dealing arms, are reportedly either smoothing the path for sales or at least looking the other way.

Since independence in 1992, the Ukrainian government has conducted no trials and only one investigation into a range of alleged misdeeds by Ukrainian elites. In the West, Ukrainians have stood trial for such crimes as money-laundering.

Just last month, Ukraine ratified the European Convention on Combating Terrorism and yet remains unwilling to investigate fresh, serious allegations made by Italy and Russia about illegal Ukrainian arms exports.

What can the United States do? Last week, the deputy US secretary of State for global affairs, Paula Dobriansky, visited Kiev and repeated the rhetoric about a US-Ukraine strategic partnership.

This partnership has become less useful to the United States since relations with Russia warmed. Nevertheless, Washington still holds out hope that Ukraine will reinvigorate its reform process and maintain its support for NATO enlargement.

Ms. Dobriansky also warned that if Ukraine failed to hold free and fair parliamentary elections on March 31, the country's integration into Europe would be seriously harmed.

Last month, the US imposed trade sanctions in response to Ukraine's unwillingness to deal with CD piracy, slow economic reform, and high levels of official corruption. The US has conditioned its aid to Ukraine this year on a faster pace of reform and progress into the investigation of a prominent opposition journalist's murder in 2000.

But Ukraine must do more to encourage Washington to drop trade sanctions.

Ukraine has conducted only one official investigation into its illicit arms trade, a parliamentary commission in 1998. The inquiry found that Ukraine's 1992 military stocks were worth \$89 billion and that over the next six years, \$32 billion worth were stolen and resold abroad. But the investigation led to no charges, and the issue was swept under the carpet.

Some of the funds from the arms sales have returned to Ukraine and other former Soviet states from offshore zones such as Cyprus and Liechtenstein for use in insider privatizations of national industries. Other funds have remained deposited in safe offshore zones around the world.

After Sept. 11, Ukraine signed on as part of the global alliance against terror. But until the nation seriously investigates arms sales to the Taliban and other rogue regimes, such a sign of unity rings hollow.

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