

END NOTE

**BELARUS BECOMES A MAJOR CONDUIT FOR ARMS TRANSFER TO IRAQ
AND OTHER ROGUE STATES**

By Taras Kuzio

Belarus has become a major source of domestically produced arms and a conduit for arms produced by other CIS states to Iraq. The country is led by Europe's last dictator, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who disbanded and replaced the democratically elected parliament and was re-elected in what the OSCE termed fraudulent elections in September 2001.

Lukashenka is, together with Armenia, Russia's major ally in the CIS. His virulent anti-Westernism was useful to President Boris Yeltsin in his failed attempt to halt the enlargement of NATO in the second half of the 1990s. Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, has accepted NATO enlargement as a *fait d'accompli* and established a strategic, "antiterrorist" partnership with the U.S. Putin has therefore less need for Lukashenka, who has become increasingly marginalized.

Belarus is a black hole in the CIS. Lukashenka's command economic policies have proved unable to generate any sustained economic recovery of the kind now experienced by neighboring Ukraine and Russia. Belarus also has the largest inflation rate in the CIS.

Domestic arms exports and acting as a conduit for illegal arms transfers from other CIS states whose corrupt ruling elites wish to distance themselves from such practices has become a major money-making operation for Lukashenka's cash strapped Belarus. The free-trade regime operating between Belarus and Russia assists in this operation, as does the fact that Belarus inherited a large military industrial complex from the former USSR. Some Belarusian tank repair plants only stay afloat by refurbishing Soviet-era tanks sent to former Soviet client states. Like other front line, first-echelon Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, Belarus inherited large stockpiles of weapons which are surplus to its needs. Belarus has 1,700 T-72 tanks (NATO member Poland, with four times the population, has only 900).

Between 1996-2000 Belarus ranked 10th in major arms exports in the world, according to SIPRI, which is only just above Ukraine, at 7th, with a five times larger population. Most of these exports are not undertaken transparently and the proceeds end up within the presidential administration as slush funds for elections or to fund his growing apparatus of internal security forces used to keep his regime in power.

In addition, Lukashenka has no interest in ensuring good diplomatic relations with NATO, the U.S. or the OSCE. Belarusian relations with the West are poor and because

Lukashenka expresses no interest in Euro-Atlantic integration, unlike Ukraine, Lukashenka is uninterested in maintaining good relations with the EU, Council of Europe, or NATO. The EU was evicted from Minsk some years ago but eventually returned. The OSCE has been accused of being a nest of "spies" and also has been made persona non grata.

It is therefore very difficult for the West to exert pressure on Lukashenka. Threats of diplomatic isolation or sanctions against Belarus hold little weight because Lukashenka is content with his isolation. The only manner in which pressure can be brought to bear is through Russia, although the West is unwilling to push too hard in order not to jeopardize its partnership with Russia.

Lukashenka has cultivated a long-term relationship with Iraq. In early October a Belarusian and CIS 150-man delegation headed by Nikolau Evan visited Iraq. The visit followed a July Iraqi delegation which visited Belarus. Evan described the visit as an example of deep-rooted relations between Iraq and Belarus and denounced U.S. plans to attack Iraq. An example of Belarus acting as a pro-Iraqi conduit in the CIS could be seen by the inclusion in the Belarusian delegation of Russian and Ukrainian parliamentarians and political party leaders. Following the visit on 22 October, Lukashenka instructed presidential administration head Mikalay Ivanchanka to expand ties with Iraq.

Even before the recent scandal surrounding the sale by Ukraine of "Kolchuga" radars to Iraq, Belarus had become a major supplier of advanced military equipment to the

countries in the Middle East and elsewhere. Belarusian weapons have ended up in Tajikistan, some of which were resold to warring clans in Afghanistan. Other destinations included Angola, Algeria, and even Sudan, where T-55 tanks and Mi-24 Hind helicopters were exported. In the first half of 2001 over \$500 million in weapons were exported to Arab, Palestinian, and Albanian extremist groups, according to U.S. and Israeli intelligence sources.

The most disturbing supplies have gone to Iraq. Former Belarusian Defense Minister Pavel Kozlauski admitted that Belarus has no moral principles when exporting arms. This places it in the same league as Ukraine. What is different is that Ukraine's leadership undertakes this for corrupt reasons whereas Lukashenka has an ideological commitment to rogue, anti-Western states such as Iraq (as well as Iran, Libya, Syria, and North Korea). Lukashenka congratulated Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein on the 100 percent support he received in his 15 October referendum.

Reports about Belarusian arms exports to Iraq first surfaced in February, only a month before similar reports were released about Ukraine. A U.S. congressional visit to Belarus attempted to obtain assurances that arms transfers would be transparent, "to ensure that weapons sold are not delivered or diverted to terrorist groups." In February, the U.S. claimed it had hard evidence of Belarus breaching arms sanctions to Iraq, including supplying S-300 missiles, and threatened sanctions. Twenty Iraqi air defense officers are undergoing a two-year training course on the S-300 missile at the Belarusian Military Academy at a monthly cost of \$2,500 per officer. Belarus has assisted Iraq in rebuilding

and modernizing its air defense capability by supplying it with SA-3 anti-aircraft missile components and technicians.

Arms exports from Belarus and other CIS states follow a pattern common to arms exports from other countries in the post-communist world whereby arms legally sold end up in countries barred by the UN from receiving them. intended for the designated end user. This has been the case with Yugoslav arms "exported" to Nigeria but ending up in Liberia, which subject to UN sanctions.

Transparency is highly unlikely in Belarus or other CIS states such as Ukraine and Russia because of a Soviet legacy of secrecy that still permeates their governments. Transparency would also increase public accountability and reduce possibilities for corruption. The budget law in Belarus never includes a revenue item pertaining to arms sales. An Israeli expert on arms proliferation concluded that Belarus is one of the most secretive in its arms exports "and probably one of the most irresponsible countries." Other CIS states are little different.

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