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UNDER KUCHMA, UKRAINE SENT MISSILES TO IRAN AND CHINA

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Since President Viktor Yushchenko was inaugurated on January 23, Ukraine's Interior Ministry (MVS), Security Service (SBU), and Prosecutor-General's office have made daily revelations about massive, high-level corruption under former president Leonid Kuchma. One new scandal is that Kyiv sent 12 long-range surface-to-air missiles to Iran and six to China in 1999 and 2000 (*Financial Times*, March 17). These revelations come on top of previous accusations that Kuchma authorized the sale of Kolchuga radars to Iraq in July 2000.

The concurrent transfers to Iran, China, and Iraq confirm a three-fold suspicion long held by Western governments.

First, the weapons transfers took place while Leonid Derkach was chairman of the SBU (1997-2001). Derkach has been implicated in numerous illegal arms transfers while head of the SBU. The Secretary of the National Defense Council from 1999-2003, Yevhen Marchuk, publicly accused Derkach of being involved with arms traffickers on trial in Italy.

Second, the highest levels of the Kuchma regime were involved in the deception. While Kuchma was authorizing and undoubtedly taking a cut from the \$113 million proceeds, he was re-elected on a pro-Euro-Atlantic integration platform in 1999 and sought to prove this orientation by making Yushchenko prime minister.

Third, illegal arms transfers were part of the high-level involvement in numerous corrupt activities. Kuchma's abuse of office was the factor that prompted security guard Mykola Melnychenko to secretly tape 700 hours of conversations in Kuchma's office.

Ukraine faced a political crisis after a portion of the tapes was first publicly revealed in November 2000. But despite the political crisis, abuse of high office continued. An attempt to sell 14 additional missiles as late as 2004 was only blocked because the SBU had a different chairman, Ihor Smeshko.

Hryhoriy Omelchenko, deputy head of the parliamentary committee on organized crime and corruption, first made public the Iran and China allegations last month. A former

SBU officer, V.V. Yevdokimov, has been charged with involvement in the missile sales. Yevdokimov headed the state-owned UkrAviaZakaz airfreight company.

The Prosecutor-General's office has now confirmed that a criminal investigation is underway (*Financial Times*, March 17). Consequently, Prosecutor-General Sviatyslav Piskun has characterized the transfers as "contraband," not "exports" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 18).

Piskun faces the uncomfortable allegation that he did nothing to investigate the illegal transfer of this "contraband" while he was prosecutor-general in 2002-2003. Omelchenko has revealed that his parliamentary committee informed the SBU, Prosecutor-General's Office and Kuchma about these transfers in 1999-2002. Omelchenko received standard noncommittal replies that "your information has not been confirmed" (Interfax-Ukraine, March 18). Omelchenko claimed that Piskun is not genuinely interested in investigating the issue and his only aim is to continue to remain in his post. "Piskun is guided by principles of double standards, double morals, and political opportunism," Omelchenko charged (Interfax-Ukraine, March 18).

The head of the parliamentary committee on organized crime and corruption, Volodymyr Stretovych, explained this discrepancy by the fact that the Kuchma regime "did not provide opportunities for the prosecutor to investigate the affair" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 18). Similar accusations were made over the inability of the authorities under Kuchma to resolve the murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze.

The missiles in question were part of the 1,000 missiles Ukraine inherited from the USSR and falsely recorded as having been destroyed in the 1990s. The Defense Ministry has rushed to deny any involvement, an unbelievable claim as it never bothered to inventory what it actually inherited from the former USSR (UNIAN, March 18). When Marchuk was defense minister, he complained that much of what Ukraine had inherited from the USSR had gone missing due to the lack of an inventory.

These long-range missiles, the KH-55 (AS-15 Kent in NATO's classification) and KH-55SM (AS-15B), are capable of delivering a 200-kilotonne nuclear warhead, although Ukraine did not supply any nuclear material. Both missiles have a 2,400-3,000 kilometer range and are launched by Tupolev bombers.

Thus missiles based in Iran are capable of hitting Israel, while those based in China have the capability to hit Japan.

Russia's involvement in the arms transfers to Iran and China is also under scrutiny. The Russian secret services were allegedly involved, and Omelchenko has implicated two Russian arms traders (known only as "O" and "Ch"). Interpol arrested Russian citizen "O" in the Czech Republic last year and is still considering whether to extradite him to Ukraine.

Melnychenko provided the FBI with a recorded conversation in which a voice resembling Derkach's is heard saying that the transfer of the missiles to Iran was undertaken with the assistance of Russian security services.

Omelchenko also accused Valeriy Shmarov, former head of Ukraine's state-owned arms trader, Ukrspetseksport, and former deputy SBU chairman Petro Shatkivskyi of complicity in the Iran and China deals. Shmarov has denied any involvement, as he only headed Ukrspetseksport from 2002 after Valeriy Malyev died in a suspicious car accident just as the Kolchuga scandal was unfolding (Interfax-Ukraine, March 19). Ukrspetseksport has always been closely linked to the SBU, and Malyev was aware of the illegal transfers.

Missiles sent to Iran and China are not the only items that have gone missing. The Defense Ministry has admitted that a Strela-3M portable launcher and two missiles have disappeared from the navy in the Crimea (Interfax, February 24). These launchers are ideal for terrorists, as they can be held by one person and can hit airborne targets within a range of 4.5 kilometers at a maximum altitude of 30 kilometers.

The United States has welcomed the transparency of the Ukrainian investigation and has expressed a desire to work with Ukraine in preventing future proliferation. U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli has noted that the new atmosphere in U.S.-Ukrainian relations will facilitate cooperation in investigating how these transfers to Iran and China took place and why (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 20).