

UKRAINE MOVES CLOSER TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

By **Taras Kuzio**

At the April 20-21 summit of NATO foreign ministers in Vilnius, Ukraine was invited to begin an Intensified Dialogue on Membership. The Intensified Dialogue is commonly viewed as the precursor to being invited to enter the Membership Action Plan (MAP) process, a stage that is assumed to eventually lead to membership. Currently Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia have MAPs.

NATO introduced MAPs in 1999 at its 50th anniversary summit, when Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic joined in the first wave of NATO enlargement. NATO describes the purpose of MAPs as "the submission by aspiring members of individual annual national programs on their preparations for possible future membership, covering political, economic, defense, resource, security, and legal aspects..." (nato.int).

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer views Ukraine's move to Intensified Dialogue status as not necessarily leading to "any eventual alliance decision" on Ukraine's NATO membership. At the same time, "Ukraine has clearly indicated that it wants to go along the long and winding road to membership" (Financial Times, April 20). "Given the fact that there has been a peaceful revolution, the membership standards can be much more easily fulfilled by the Yushchenko government than by the former Kuchma government," he added.

Intensified Dialogue, rather than a MAP, suits President Viktor Yushchenko for now, because he does not want NATO to become an issue in the March 2006 parliamentary elections. Therefore, moving to a MAP after next year's elections, when the Yushchenko camp hopes to win a parliamentary majority, is a sound strategy.

President George W. Bush raised the issue of Intensified Dialogue during his early April summit with Yushchenko. There has been a general Western consensus that, following Yushchenko's election, Ukraine should be "rewarded" through market economic status and WTO and NATO membership. According to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, "If states fulfill the criteria, then NATO fulfills its promise to offer membership" (Financial Times, April 22).

Ukraine began working towards this goal in January 1994, when it became the first CIS state to join NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). Since then Ukraine has participated in both PfP programs and related bilateral security programs with the United States and Great Britain. In July 2002 Ukraine declared its intention to seek NATO membership. In subsequent years there have been annual NATO-Ukraine Action Plans that include military, political, and economic goals. But, this was the maximum interaction that NATO would offer Ukraine under President Leonid Kuchma.

Relations with the United States deteriorated in October 2001, when Kuchma deceived Rice, then U.S. National Security Adviser, over the sale of weapons to Macedonia. Her resulting negative view of Kuchma influenced U.S. policy toward Ukraine for the rest of Kuchma's presidency.

The following year, Washington revealed that Kuchma had authorized the sale of Kolchuga radars to Iraq in July 2000. The Kolchuga scandal led NATO to advise Kuchma to not attend NATO's November 2002 Prague summit.

Times have changed, however. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk believes that Ukraine could meet the criteria for NATO membership by 2008, one year earlier than Defense Minister Anatoly Grytsenko had predicted. "One cannot stop the movement of Ukraine," Tarasyuk optimistically predicted (Financial Times, April 22). Furthermore, according to Tarasyuk, Intensified Dialogue is "the movement to format a plan to achieve future NATO membership" (Ukrayinska pravda, April 22).

Ukraine would, according to one State Department official, have to demonstrate civilian control of the military, democratic progress, and an effective military that is no longer top heavy with generals (New York Times, April 22). During the Vilnius summit, NATO and Ukraine issued a document entitled "Enhancing NATO-Ukraine Cooperation." The program includes sections devoted to strengthening democratic institutions, renewing political dialogue, reinvigorating cooperation in military and security-sector reform, and dealing with the socio-economic aspects of defense reform.

A final section dealt with enhancing and targeting public diplomacy. A crucial element of this is "to address negative public perceptions of NATO in all regions of Ukraine" (nato.int). This area of work will be crucial following the Soviet-style anti-American propaganda campaign that took place during the 2004 elections.

Support for NATO membership in Ukraine stood at one-third of the population throughout the 1990s. This figure resembles that found in Hungary before its public-awareness campaign to join NATO, which increased support to 70%. Following last year's anti-American barrage, public support for NATO membership in Ukraine plummeted to 15%.

Russia has opposed NATO enlargement at every turn and yet has been unable to halt two separate rounds. In round three, Russia is unlikely to oppose membership for Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia. But, Ukraine (and possibly Georgia) would be viewed very differently, despite Kyiv's desperate attempts to portray its Euro-Atlantic tilt as not being "anti-Russian."

Officially Russia states that each country has a sovereign right to choose its desired integration partners. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who some Russian analysts believe is being groomed as a successor to Vladimir Putin when he leaves office in 2008, told the Vilnius NATO summit, "It would be the choice of Ukraine to choose its partners and it is the sovereign question of Ukraine."

In reality, Russia would find it difficult to digest Ukrainian NATO membership, particularly as it would spell the end of the CIS. During a call-in show on Ekho Moskvyy radio, Russian listeners told Rice that the United States and NATO were attempting to surround Russia. Rice replied that Russians seemed stuck in a "19th century view of the world" (New York Times, April 22).