



UKRAINE: Aspirant for membership poses NATO dilemma

Friday, March 28 2008

EVENT: US President George Bush visits Ukraine for the first time on March 31-April 1.

SIGNIFICANCE: Bush is in Kiev just before the NATO summit in Bucharest, which will have to consider whether to present Ukraine and Georgia with a membership action plan (MAP), which prepares candidates for NATO membership. Divisions are likely on this issue between 'old' and 'new' Europe and the United States, with Russia vociferously opposing enlargement to CIS states.

ANALYSIS: US President George Bush pays his first visit to Ukraine next week. His predecessor in office, Bill Clinton, visited Ukraine on three occasions, in January 1994, May 1995 and June 2000. During the Clinton era, Ukraine became the third-largest recipient of US overseas aid and established a strong security relationship with the United States and NATO. Bush was to have visited Ukraine in June 2006, but his visit was cancelled after the post-election Orange coalition collapsed.

During Bush's first term in office (2001-04), two factors inhibited his visiting Ukraine:

- the 'Kuchmagate' (2000) and 'Kolchugagate' (2002) scandals; and
- enhanced US partnership with Russia following the 2001 terrorist attacks.

NATO track. Ukraine joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in January 1994 and became one of its most active members. Three years later, Ukraine and NATO signed the Charter for a Distinctive Partnership in Madrid; a year later, a NATO Information and Documentation Centre was opened in Kiev. NATO has signed a similar agreement and opened an information office with only one other country, Russia.

Ukraine officially declared its intention to seek NATO membership in July 2002. However, US-Ukrainian relations deteriorated later that year, after US tests confirmed the authenticity of a tape recording made in Leonid Kuchma's office in 2000 by rogue security guard Mykola Melnychenko, on which the president could be heard authorising the sale of Kolchuga military radars to Saddam Hussein's Iraq (see [UKRAINE/NATO: Iraq arms scandal ruptures relations - November 18, 2002](#)).

NATO's Prague summit did not seek to isolate Ukraine completely, and it created a new vehicle, the yearly action plan (AP), which in outlining annual targets for political, economic and security reforms is deliberately similar to a membership action plan (MAP) except in one respect: APs do not lead to membership. Ukraine has fulfilled five APs since 2003.

The 2002-04 Yanukovych government supported seeking an MAP by 2004 and membership by 2006. However, no MAP emerged at the June 2004 Istanbul summit. To improve relations with the United States and curry favour with the Bush administration, Ukraine dispatched the third-largest military contingent (the largest from a non-NATO member) to Iraq, where it operated under Polish command, until withdrawn in late 2005.

Following President Viktor Yushchenko's April 2005 visit to Washington, US-Ukrainian relations returned to the Clinton-era partnership. Ukraine and Georgia were invited into 'intensified dialogue on membership' in 2005-06.

Most difficult enlargement. Since the Cold War ended, there have been three rounds of enlargement, embracing:

- the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (1997-99);
- the three Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia (2002-04); and
- Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, which are expected to join in 2008-10.

Russia opposed the first and second rounds. Enlarging to Ukraine and Georgia would move NATO into the CIS, which Russia considers its sphere of influence. Russia has threatened negative consequences following such a fourth enlargement, including targeting nuclear weapons at Ukraine and using the Kosovo precedent to recognise the independence of secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia. Yushchenko has replied that Ukraine must protect its security and is a sovereign nation (see [UKRAINE/NATO: Kiev's bid to join presents dilemma - January 28, 2008](#)).

'Old Europe' has been more willing to heed Russia's concerns, whereas the United States has lobbied for NATO to show its support for two of only three democracies in the CIS (the third being neutral Moldova). NATO is divided ahead of Bucharest on enlarging to Ukraine and Georgia:

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- Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain oppose.
- Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, the United Kingdom and United States are in favour.
- Hungary, Iceland, Norway and Turkey are neutral.

German opposition. Germany is the only NATO member that has publicly aired its opposition to MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia, while others have maintained a diplomatic silence. It employs four arguments:

- **Conflicts.** Extending an MAP to Georgia would involve NATO in the 'frozen conflicts' in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- **Popular support.** NATO would prefer to have at least 50% popular support at the point of a new member joining the alliance. On the basis of current surveys, this would exclude Ukraine, where only about one-fifth support NATO membership and more than one-third oppose it. By contrast, three-quarters of those voting in a referendum in Georgia in January supported NATO membership (see [GEORGIA: Saakashvili tasks loom large post-re-election - January 8, 2008](#)). In some previous accessions to NATO, popular support was initially low and many were undecided; government information campaigns had to build up a majority in favour. However, anti-NATO feeling is very high in eastern Ukraine and Crimea; the pro-NATO elite in Kiev would have to work hard to overcome this and success is by no means assured.
- **Stepping stone to EU.** Some European NATO members have 'enlargement fatigue', as seen in the failed 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands on the EU constitution. They fear that, following in the path of the 13 post-communist states that joined the alliance in 1999 and 2004, putting Ukraine and Georgia on track to join NATO would lead to applications to join the EU.
- **Russia.** The election of a new Russian president in Dmitry Medvedev requires restraint from NATO, as it provides an opportunity to rebuild the West's relations with a 'new' Russia. Bush visits Russia after the NATO summit. Russia has established close energy relations with Germany and other EU members.

Outlook. As at the Prague summit, in Bucharest NATO will seek to paper over its divisions by adopting a compromise that neither rejects Ukrainian and Georgian aspirations altogether nor offers them MAPs now, probably deferring a decision to the 60th anniversary summit in 2009. Germany and France would back a similar compromise to that proposed to Turkey in its negotiations with the EU. Both oppose Turkish EU membership and, with Austria, seek to offer instead an 'enhanced partnership'. A NATO variant in Bucharest would be to offer Ukraine and Georgia an association that, unlike an MAP, would not necessarily open the door to membership.

However, this might sow confusion, as Ukraine has already been offered APs since 2003 -- less than an MAP, but modelled on it. Arguably, Ukraine and Georgia have made greater progress towards democracy than some Balkan states that were offered MAPs in 1999-2001, opening NATO to the charge of double standards. The dangers for NATO are that a compromise short of MAPs might undermine its longstanding open-door policy and reverse its previous refusal to allow an outside country, such as Russia, a veto on alliance policy.

CONCLUSION: NATO's possible fourth enlargement into the CIS is its most difficult since the end of the Cold War. The obvious solution is to defer offering MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia; for the time being, membership looks highly unlikely.

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