

A Survey of Developments in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine by the  
Regional Specialists of RFE/RL's Newslines Team

UKRAINE

- \* IN WAKE OF KUCHMA SNUB, WHITHER RELATIONS WITH NATO?
- \* OR WAS THIS JUST A PERSONAL REBUFF?

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Taras Kuzio

Ukrainian

President Leonid Kuchma will not be invited to the NATO summit in Prague on 21-22 November. This is a major personal rebuff to Kuchma, who has been the most active CIS leader in cooperating with NATO since Ukraine joined the Partnership for Peace in 1995. Instead, NATO plans to send only a lower-level invitation to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko to participate in the summit. Kuchma's hopes of arranging an informal meeting with U.S. President George W. Bush on the sidelines of the NATO summit have been rejected by Washington.

The rebuff is a direct response to the claims made public by the United States in late September that Kuchma had personally authorized at a July 2000 meeting with Valeriy Malev, the head of the state arms-export agency Ukrspetseksport, to sell four Kolchuga radar systems to Iraq for \$100 million each.

The revelations were first made public by former presidential bodyguard Mykola Melnychenko in March. Melnychenko defected to the United States in April 2001 after publicly releasing tape recordings made illicitly in Kuchma's office between 1999 and 2000. The Kuchma-Malev meeting is found on one portion of these tapes that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation authenticated this past summer. (Malev died in a suspicious car accident in April just as the Kolchuga scandal first unfurled.)

Initially, Ukraine denied outright that the July 2000 meeting had taken place. After the United States authenticated the tape, however, Ukraine switched its official position, saying the meeting had indeed taken place (implying that Kuchma had in fact authorized the sale) but denied that the sale had actually gone ahead.

A team of U.S. and British experts visited Ukraine in October to investigate whether all of the Kolchugas built by the Topaz plant in Donetsk could be accounted for. A U.S. official told AP last week that their visit proved inconclusive. The official added, however,

that the U.S. administration has deemed that the taped Kuchma-Malev conversation is proof enough. The source also said the U.S. administration has tentatively decided to reduce its assistance to Ukraine further, in addition to a \$54 million cut announced in September.

The rebuff to Kuchma may also dash Ukraine's hopes that the summit would lead to the signing of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) between NATO and Ukraine. The conditions set out by a MAP have to be fulfilled before a country is invited to join the alliance. Ukraine first announced its intention to apply for NATO membership in May, and then officially announced this during NATO Secretary-General Lord George Robertson's visit to Ukraine in July.

The Ukrainian armed forces have developed extensive ties with NATO since high-level cooperation began in the mid 1990s, which has helped prepare them for military reform and has reoriented them westward. Nevertheless, they remain vastly underfunded. Ukraine's expenditure of \$590 million on the military is abysmal and would require a six or sevenfold increase. Hungary, with armed forces one-seventh as large as Ukraine's, spends twice as much on its military (\$1.091 billion), while Poland, with a population only slightly less than Ukraine's, spends \$3.58 billion.

NATO also remains concerned about the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) and the bloated Interior Ministry (MVS), which has more men under arms than the military and has large numbers of paramilitary units. Both the SBU and MVS have been largely untouched by NATO's cooperation with Ukraine, and they are still oriented toward cooperation with Russia and within the Commonwealth of Independent States. In postcommunist states, it has been the security services and interior ministries, not the military, that have been mainly involved in human rights abuses. In Ukraine, this has included allegations of organizing eight suspicious car accidents involving officials and opposition leaders and illegal political surveillance of parliamentary deputies and the opposition.

NATO also remains concerned that Soviet-era ties between CIS intelligence services could compromise shared intelligence between Ukraine and NATO. The SBU and the MVS have also been implicated in high-level corruption, including the illegal sale of weapons abroad. Former SBU Chairman Leonid Derkach, whom the parliament forced to resign in February 2001, allegedly assisted in the illegal sale of Kolchugas to Iraq in 2000, which has now brought Ukraine's relations with NATO and the United States to the crisis point.

Since the "Kuchmagate" scandal began in November 2000, Kuchma has been semi-isolated and has not been invited by any Western government on an official visit. (His only visits to the West have been to annual conferences of organizations or international forums.) With the refusal to invite Kuchma to the NATO summit, even this avenue for traveling to the West has been closed off.

Four further problems are likely to beset Kuchma. First, the United States is expanding sanctions it first launched in late September against Ukraine. A bipartisan U.S. Helsinki Commission letter to President Bush accuses Kuchma of committing a "hostile and reckless act" that should lead to the United States' examining of other illegal activities by Kuchma, including money laundering. The

Financial Action Task Force is also instituting sanctions against Ukraine for its unwillingness to halt money-laundering operations.

Second, a court case was opened in early October in the European Court of Human Rights by the wife of murdered opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze.

Third, Melnychenko is planning to release even more incriminating material from the tapes.

Fourth, the trial of former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko is due to start in California. Lazarenko, who was stripped of his deputy's immunity but was suspiciously allowed to leave Ukraine, after which he sought asylum in the United States, is accused of money laundering. The trial is likely to reveal further unpleasant information about corruption in Ukraine.

President Kuchma has two years remaining before stepping down, unless he is forced to resign early. As Ukraine's foreign policy stagnates as the president is isolated around the world, Ukraine will be marginalized as NATO and the European Union enlarge to incorporate as many as seven and 10 countries, respectively.