

The Ukrainian Elections: A Dangerous Fairy-Tale

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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The 'fairy tale' of the Ukrainian elections is designed to legitimate attempts to reorder to post-Soviet space - through the agency of NATO, the IMF/World Bank, and civil society promotion outfits like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), USAID, the Open Society Institute, etc. - in ways that serve the geostrategic and economic interests of Empire.

In late November, more than 2.5-million people in the Donetsk region marched in support of the Yanukovych campaign, with 200,000 converging on the regional capital of Donetsk. Needless to say, this display of 'people power' - which isn't funded by CIA fronts like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was completely omitted by the Western press. The regions people were simply erased from the global consciousness by a virtual 'disappearing' act that neatly compliments the physical 'disappearances' practiced by authoritarian pro-Western regimes against dissidents in a number of countries (including the dictatorships of Central Asia).

The Ukrainian crisis falls neatly into a long-standing mythology that a fraction of the left and a large majority of liberals in the West buy into each time the media decides to engage in a foreign policy morality tale. It is the same old story of the good - be it 'democracy', 'human rights' or 'self-determination' - that 'we' bring to others. In fact this mythology is the dangerous product of a deep-seated racism in Western societies that still hasn't come to terms with the legacy of colonialism, exploitation and genocide that 'we' have in reality imposed on 'them.'



Ukrainian opposition poster shows a PORA jackboot stomping on an insect representing the current government and its supporters. Such racist dehumanization of opponents is a critical precursor to conflicts and is a hallmark of fascist movements.

US-backing for opposition forces in the Ukraine - which has already been exposed in some progressive and main-stream publications (see links below) - has been well documented. What hasn't been addressed, however, is the way in which the reality of the situation on the ground has been obscured in the main-stream press in order to confirm old Cold War stereotypes and perpetuate the current mythologies of Empire globally. The 'fairy tale' of

the Ukrainian elections is designed to legitimate attempts to reorder to post-Soviet space – through the agency of NATO, the IMF/World Bank, and civil society promotion outfits like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), USAID, the Open Society Institute, etc. – in ways that serve the geostrategic and economic interests of Empire.

Thus, while opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko has been represented as a liberal reformer and his opponent Viktor Yanukovich as the incarnation of Soviet style authoritarianism, the reality is quite different. Yushchenko essentially represents the modern face of a conservative Ukrainian nationalism that has been progressively revived in the western portions of the country since the declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1990, while Yanukovich is little more than a typical post-Soviet petty-capitalist oligarch – of which there are dozens of examples of in the region (and that generally, although not in this case, enjoy the backing of Western policy makers).

In fact, the ‘reformer’ Yushchenko represents a social network that is closely tied to the interests of Western military geo-strategists, neo-liberal technocrats, Polish irredentists and Ukrainian conservative forces (including the Uniate church, which is closely aligned to the Vatican). The alliance of this constellation of forces with conservative tendencies in successive US administrations during the Cold War, and in its aftermath, is well documented. The ‘marriage’ of Yushchenko with this clique is actually literal in that his US-born wife, who is of Ukrainian decent, was a a member of the staff in the Reagan White House. The general right-wing agenda of Yushchenko’s supporter base is illustrated by the prevalence of Bibles and crosses at opposition rallies, emphasis on the desire to purify ‘Ukraine’ from ‘filth’ and ‘corruption’ and Yushchenko’s own populist-nationalist-fundamentalist posturing when he swears himself in as the President of Ukraine with one hand on the Bible or when he insists that he will crush any moves towards regional autonomy by minorities in the country. John Laughland has done a remarkable job in highlighting the far-right wing and actually anti-semitic nature of much of Our Ukraine’s constituency.

Interestingly, Israel and pro-Israeli activists in the US administration – who denounce any criticism of Israel as anti-semitic – are turning a blind eye to the involvement of outright anti-Semites in the Yushchenko alliance. Yuliya Tymoshenko – the powerful gas baroness linked to Yushchenko – recently even ran an Op-Ed piece in Haaretz urging Israel’s support for ‘democratic’ forces in the Ukraine. Thus even in Israel silence has been nearly complete on the oppositions’ patchy track record with respect to Ukrainian anti-Semitism (thereby continuing a long-standing tradition among Israeli policy-makers in which the imperatives of Realpolitik often trump the myth asserting that the Zionist project is an antidote to anti-Semitism). This also isn’t the first time that pro-Israeli figures in the US administration have turned a blind eye to allies in other parts of the world that openly professed anti-Semitic views. The pattern has already been well established throughout eastern Europe, the Balkans, in South America and among the former-apartheid regime in South Africa (going so far as lending US support to the regime of Croatia’s late president Franjo Tudjman, who was known for openly engaging in Holocaust denial in his book *The Wastelands of History* and reviving the projects and insignia of the fascist Ustasha regime from World War II).

The Yushchenko alliance in Ukraine, as Laughland and others have demonstrated, draws support from Rukh party activists, those of the Ukrainian National Defense Organization (UNSO), and the followers of Eduard Kovalenko. All of these forces reclaim the collaborationist past of Ukrainian fascists and SS soldiers who served in the Nazi-backed Galician Brigade during WWII and were implicated in mass-killings like those at Babi Yar. The

Rukh Youth movement has agitated actively for the banning of the Ukrainian Communist Party – which is one of the largest Parliamentary forces in the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) – and has sought to impose a virulent right-wing agenda in Ukraine. Many followers of these movements have been found in the ranks of the NED funded Ukrainian ‘youth movement’ PORA that replicates the experience of OTPOR in Serbia and KMARA in Georgia (among others). This has been the general trend in Slovakia, Serbia, Belarus, and Georgia as well, where far-right wing and neo-Nazi youth formations were heavily implicated in the ‘pro-democracy student movements’ that our press continues to glorify (movements that enjoy a level of funding and official support that eclipses anything student activists here in North America could possibly imagine).

In fact, the principle dynamic that Yushchenko represents is that he favors the 100% incorporation of Ukraine into the Western military and strategic security apparatus that dominates Europe and 100% loyalty to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank (which he displayed while in charge of implementing the shock therapy that decimated living standards throughout country). This loyalty translates into the desire to see the complete eradication from Ukrainian soil of any tendencies and forces that favor a rapprochement with Russia, including restrictions on Russian language use, the Ukrainization of Russian names, the vilification of the Soviet past in its entirety, the substitution of Russia’s Black Sea fleet with a NATO force, and the construction of pipeline projects for Central Asian natural gas and oil that will by-pass Russia entirely.

Yushchenko, is also allied to former Defense Minister Yevyten Marchuk who was the architect of Ukraine’s involvement in the Iraq war and who was dismissed by Leonid Kuchma (the incumbent president) in September. Marchuk has since openly gone over to the side of the opposition, issuing a televised call to military units to refuse service and come on the side of the opposition in the aftermath of the elections. The dismissal of Marchuk may have been the straw that broke the proverbial ‘camel’s back’ in the relationship between US policy makers and the current Ukrainian administration since Kuchma’s initial ascension to the Ukrainian presidency in 1994.

US policy in the region was complicit in electoral fraud during the Clinton years, including turning a blind eye to the use of state media and police to secure Kuchma’s reelection in 1999 when the main challenger at the time was the head of the Ukrainian Communist Party Petro Symonenko (who campaigned on an openly anti-IMF and anti-NATO agenda). At the time Kuchma enjoyed full Western support, and serious election irregularities were simply ignored. Like many Western backed autocrats, after stealing elections in 1994 and 1999 Kuchma seems to have forgotten the hand that feeds him and got ahead of himself. In 2001 Kuchma signed an agreement to provide weapons to the Macedonian government – which was fighting a US-backed insurgency in the western portions of that country – and participated in the Parliament’s dismissal of then Prime Minister Yushchenko.

Since then the West has mobilized tremendous resources behind the Yushchenko-Tymoshenko-Moroz alignment in Ukrainian politics to dislodge Kuchma’s clan of oligarchs and impose a more pliant regime on the country. The fact that the 2004 presidential elections were much cleaner than the 1994 and 1999 presidential elections – see the British Helsinki Human Rights Group (BHRG) reports included below – is only secondary to the imperative that while the West “respects Ukraine’s right to choose its leaders, the direction of reforms must be preserved” (a formula for Ukrainian democracy which was defined by IMF managing director Horst Kohler during Yushchenko’s dismissal by the

Ukrainian parliament in the spring of 2001).

As other commentators have pointed out, the whole program is identical to the project of Western intervention in Serbia, Georgia, Belarus, Slovakia, and was also attempted two years ago in Moldova (where raging right-wing anti-semites and fascist apologists were also used, although this time they weren't minor coalition partners but key figures in the opposition protests against the Communist government).

The point is not about the promotion of democracy in the former Soviet bloc, but identifying which leader will best represent US strategic and economic interests in the region and offering their regime full ideological support. Thus while the political class in most former Soviet states is generally pliant to the dictates of NATO on the strategic front, the IMF/World Bank on the economic front, and USAID, the Open Society Institute, the NED and other 'civil society' promotion agencies at the societal level, the 'problem' remains that many of these governments also acknowledge Russia as an important strategic, political, economic and cultural partner with which there is a shared past, and an affinity that sometimes includes linguistic, religious and cultural ties as well.

What distinguishes the Clinton and Bush administration approaches to the region is that while both sought to ensure the hegemony of local elites that were primarily sensitive to Western strategic and military considerations, while both favored the expansion of NATO and the redefinition of its role regardless of legitimate Russian concerns, and while both favored further capital interpenetration of the Ukrainian economy and its 'globalization' through IMF backed 'shock therapy', the Clinton administration was willing to tolerate some links to Russia as well (including the shady activities of some local oligarchs that blocked up full Western capital interpenetration). On the other hand the Bush team seems to be narrowly committed to a very anti-Russian agenda in the region that is a hang-over from the Cold War. Essentially, this translates into a policy that demands 100% loyalty to Washington's geo-strategic vision for the region and zero-tolerance for any cooperation between Russian peoples and their one time co-nationals (even if such cooperation doesn't necessarily threaten Western interests).

The blind hatred of Russia among some neo-conservatives even includes open support for Chechen separatists among the same US intellectual class that was critical in defining the terms of Washington's global War on Terror. As an example of this, one only needs to look to 'The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya' whose website can be found at:

<http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/index.htm> .

You can read about the committees activities here:

<http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/about.htm>

and also peruse its membership list here:

http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/about_members.htm .

Notables include Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Perle, Richard Pipes, Morton Abramowitz, Caspar Weinberger and a ton of other names I'm sure American readers who've been following US foreign policy over the years will recognize. The existence of this Committee

illustrates that the current expansionist militarism in Washington has little to do with a 'clash of civilizations' but more precisely involves an attempt to impose an ideological vision of a free market global order regardless of the consequences. This is essentially Naomi Klein's 'Year Zero' analysis for Iraq applied to the former Soviet bloc countries since the fall of communism in the early 1990s.

Therefore the crisis in Ukraine has little to do with 'democracy' but needs to be viewed instead as an intensely geopolitical event. The sentiment in much of the former Soviet east, and in those portions of the Ukraine that voted for Yanukovich, is that US policy makers are seeking to continue the Cold War conservative project of seeking to impose the dominion of a morally superior 'civilization' over the peoples of the 'Asiatic' east. Thus the terms of the current struggle in the Ukraine are framed by the Western press in the same polarized language that characterized the Cold War and that currently defines the War on Terrorism. Recent articles in the Russian media, including RIA Novosti and Pravda, have castigated the West for reviving such polarized concepts of regional politics and imposing a false and racialized choice on Ukrainians between a 'democratic' West and an 'authoritarian' East, instead of offering a solution in which all interests and stakeholders are acknowledged and given a say.

Two days ago more than 2.5-million people throughout the Donetsk region of the Ukraine marched in support of the Yanukovich campaign, with 200,000 converging on Lenin Square in the regional capital of Donetsk (most of these people are miners and their families that fear the region will be neglected under Yushenko). Needless to say, this display of 'people power' - which isn't funded by CIA fronts like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), or sketchy philanthropic outfits like George Soros' Open Society Institute - was completely omitted by the Western press. The regions people were simply erased from the global consciousness by a virtual 'disappearing' act that neatly compliments the physical 'disappearances' practiced by authoritarian pro-Western regimes against dissidents in a number of countries (including the dictatorships of Central Asia).

In fact, this is the standard treatment that our press reserves for democratic forces and tendencies that express preferences contradicting those of the ruling elites in the West. Thus the demonstrations of the Haitian poor demanding that the democratically elected Aristide government be returned, or the struggle of democratic forces in the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi demanding that the popular will be respected are routinely ignored. The model is repeated in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Morocco, the Gulf States, Colombia etc. where the opposition forces calling for democratic change don't have the luxury of staging rock concerts in public squares but can instead often be found languishing in resistance units somewhere in tropical jungles or forced into urban clandestine activity (in the best of cases), if they aren't actually being tortured and massacred in ways gleaned from US or NATO training manuals (including boiling dissidents alive as has been known to happen under the orders of President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan or the killing of peasants with chainsaws as is often done by Colombia's brutal paramilitary forces).

Of course the 'fairy-tale' reality being presented to us by the press about the situation in the Ukraine is old, but I'm surprised how each time a fraction of the left and a large majority of liberals buy into the time-worn fairytales of 'democracy' that 'we' bring to others. I can only conclude that this is the product of a deep-seated racism in Western societies that still hasn't come to terms with the legacy of genocide and colonialism that 'we' have in reality imposed on 'them.' The notion that 'our' contribution to 'them' has always been benevolent

is the worst form of holocaust denial, and ensures 'our' continued perpetuation of human rights abuses in discursive constructs like 'the East' (let alone here at home, where the rights of indigenous people are still ignored completely).

Ukraine was not only the victim of Stalinist state planning in the 1930s, Nazi depredations in the 1940s, but is also currently suffering from neo-liberal technocracy in the 1990s (as have all the peoples of Eastern Europe). In fact it could be argued that more people died prematurely as a result of neo-liberal structural adjustment in the former Soviet bloc in the last 15 years than were killed in the Stalinist famines of the 1930s. On a global scale the impact of neo-liberalism – where 30,000 children die from preventable causes each day – is devastating. It is high-time that 'we' take ownership of 'our' own crimes and authoritarian legacies before lecturing others on theirs. In the case of the Ukraine this means exposing the tremendous double-standards and distortions of reality that have become routine in the reporting of the corporate media. Anything short of that is complicity in the continued perpetuation of the anti-democratic logics of neo-liberalism on a global scale.

FURTHER READING

Ukraine's Election Crisis (Lee Sustar - Socialist Worker, December 2)
<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=90&ItemID=6778>

Truth and Consequence in Ukraine (Katrine Vanden Heuvel - The Nation, November 29)
<http://www.thenation.com/edcut/index.mhtml?bid=7>

How the US and Britain are Intervening In Ukraine's Elections (John Laughland - The Spectator, November 28)
<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=74&ItemID=6746>

IMF Sponsored "Democracy" in The Ukraine (Michel Chossudovsky - Global Research, November 28)
<http://globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO411D.html>

The Revolution Televised (John Laughland - The Guardian, November 27)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,5072956-103677,00.html>

Ukraine's postmodern coup d'etat (Johanthan Steele - The Guardian, November 26)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/ukraine/story/0,15569,1360297,00.html>

US campaign behind the turmoil in Kiev (Ian Traynor - The Guardian, November 26)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/ukraine/story/0,15569,1360236,00.html>

Ukrainian Crisis and Revival of Cold War Stereotypes (Vladimir Simonov - RIA Novosti, November 25)
http://en.rian.ru/rian/index.cfm?prd_id=3D160&msg_id=3D5131402&startrow=3D31=&date=3D2004-11-25&do_alert=3D0

I would also recommend that readers examine the following human-rights monitoring groups that follow the situation in the former Communist countries of eastern Europe very closely:

British Helsinki Human Rights Group - <http://www.bhhrg.org/>

OSCE Watch - <http://www.oscewatch.org>

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