

Ukraine Geopolitics and the US-NATO Military Agenda: Tectonic Shift in Heartland Power

Part I

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Global Research, March 16, 2010
16 March 2010

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Oil and Energy](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

A decisive vote against NATO

On February 14 Ukraine's Election Commission declared Viktor Yanukovych the winner in that embattled country's Presidential runoff vote, defeating former Prime Minister and Orange Revolution instigator Yulia Tymoshenko. Contrary to the positive spin Washington is trying to put on the events, they mark the definitive death of Ukraine's much-touted "Orange Revolution."

The relevant question at this juncture is what the defeat of Ukraine's Orange Revolution signifies for the future of the Eurasian Heartland, as British geopolitician Halford Mackinder termed the region? Even more significantly, what does it imply for a two-decade long Pentagon attempt to weaken and ultimately cripple Russia as a military power in Washington's awesome and overly-ambitious agenda of Full Spectrum Dominance?

To understand the long-term significance of the Ukraine vote for the future global geopolitical balance of power we should go back to the original Orange Revolution of 2004. Viktor Yushchenko was the hand-picked candidate of Washington, and especially the neo-conservatives around the Bush Administration, in their attempt to split Ukraine from its historic and economic ties to Russia and bring the country, along with neighbor Georgia, into NATO.

Ukrainian economic and political geography

A look at the map will indicate just how strategic Ukraine is for both NATO and for Russia. Not only does the country directly border Russia to its east, but it also provides the transit route for most Russian natural gas pipelines to western Europe — some 80% of all Russian gas exports from which the country earns dollars, a vital economic lifeline for Russia.

Perhaps equally vital for Russia, in terms of her ability to maintain a credible defense against ever-growing NATO encirclement of its land area, is the Russian leasing rights to Ukraine's Black Sea port of Stevastapol, home to Russia's Black Sea Naval Fleet. The Fleet leases an additional home port in Odessa, in an agreement between Russia and Ukraine. This politically sensitive bilateral treaty for the Black Sea Fleet basing is not due to expire until 2017, if not renewed. Following the Russia-Georgia conflict in August 2008, Ukraine's President Yushchenko began making noises about prematurely terminating that treaty,

thereby depriving Moscow of its strategically most important naval base. Russian navy ships have used Sevastopol since Russia annexed the region in 1783.



The eastern part of Ukraine bordering Russia is home to more than 15 million ethnic Russians and remains literally the bread basket of eastern Europe, with some of the richest soil on earth. In 2009 Ukraine was the world's third largest grain exporter after the USA and EU, and ahead of Russia and Canada.[1] Ukraine's famous black soil, *chornozem*, is considered the most fertile in the world, and covers two-thirds of Ukraine.[2] The area around the rivers Dnieper and Dniester is the only place in the world where the width of the so-called 'sweet' black soil reaches 500 km. This soil is exceptional in providing very high quality harvests and belongs to the national wealth. Western agribusiness companies such as Monsanto, Cargill, ADM and Kraft Foods are reportedly salivating over the prospect of an end to the internal Ukrainian political stalemate in hopes of exploiting these resources. [3]

The Ukrainian Donetsk region in the eastern Donets Basin or Donbas is the political base of newly elected President Yanukovich. It is the most populous region of Ukraine and the center of its coal, steel and metallurgy industries, science centers and universities. Ukraine's Donbas contains an estimated 109 billion tons of coal as well as oil and gas.

Overall, Ukraine is one of the richest regions in all Europe for natural resources including granite, graphite, and salts. It provides a rich source for metallurgical, porcelain, chemical industries, for production of ceramics and building materials. [4]

In short, capture of the Ukraine in 2004 was a prize of strategic geopolitical importance for Washington in its bid for what the Pentagon terms 'Full Spectrum Dominance'—control of the entire planet: land, air, oceans, space and outerspace. As the British father of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder wrote in his seminal 1919 book, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*,

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:

Who rules the World-Island commands the World.[5]

For Mackinder, the Heartland integrally included Ukraine and Russia. By chopping off Ukraine from Russia in a de facto US-led coup called the Orange Revolution, Washington came a giant step nearer to a complete domination not only of Russia and the Heartland, but also of all Eurasia, including what would then become an encircled China. No wonder that the Bush-Cheney administration invested so much energy to install their man, Yushchenko, as President and de facto dictator. His task was to bring Ukraine into NATO. What he did for his countrymen was clearly of no concern to the Bush planners.

Yushchenko almost succeeded but for the ill-conceived adventure of Georgia's hand-picked Rose Revolution President, Mikhail Saakashvili in August 2008, sending troops to reclaim the secessionist region of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for Georgia just weeks before NATO ministers would vote on Ukrainian and Georgian NATO membership. The swift Russian military response in stopping the Georgian attack and routing Saakashvili's rag-tag forces also stopped dead any chance that Germany or other NATO countries would OK NATO membership, and with it the pledge to come to the defense of either Georgia or Ukraine in a war against Russia. [6]

Significance of the Orange Revolution

The "revolution" that swept Viktor Yushchenko into power on a wave of US dollars and support from US-backed NGO's, was initially conceived at the Washington-financed RAND corporation. RAND had studied the swarming pattern of bees and similar phenomena, and applied these to modern mobile communication, text messaging and civil protest as tactics for regime change and covert warfare. [7]

As I describe in some detail in my book, *Full Spectrum Dominance: Totalitarian Democracy in the New World Order*, the transformation of Ukraine from independent former Russian republic to a pro-NATO US satellite was accomplished by the so-called 'Orange Revolution' in 2004. It was overseen by John Herbst, appointed US Ambassador to Ukraine in May 2003, just months before the events were set off. As the US State Department euphemistically described his activities:

During his tenure, he worked to enhance US-Ukrainian relations and to help ensure the conduct of a fair Ukrainian presidential election. In Kiev, he witnessed the Orange Revolution. Prior to that, Ambassador John Herbst was the US Ambassador to Uzbekistan,

where he played a critical role in the establishment of an American base to help conduct Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.[8]

The man Washington decided to back in its orchestrated regime change in Ukraine was Viktor Yushchenko, a fifty-year old former Governor of Ukraine's Central Bank who had been the point man in Ukraine for the savage IMF "shock therapy" deindustrialization of the country during the 1990's. Yushchenko's IMF program had devastating consequences for his countrymen. Under his 1994 IMF program, Ukraine was forced to abandon exchange controls and let the currency fall. He oversaw the currency demands as head of the central bank, which within days saw the price of bread increase by 300%, electricity prices by 600%, public transportation by 900%. By 1998 Ukrainian real wages had fallen by 75% compared with 1991 when the country declared independence. He was clearly Washington's man for what they wanted to do in Ukraine. [9]

Yushchenko's wife Kateryna, an American citizen born in Chicago, had been an official in both the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, and in the US State Department. She had come to Ukraine as a representative of the US-Ukraine Foundation whose Board of Directors included Grover Norquist, one of the most influential conservative Republicans in Washington. Norquist had been called 'the managing director of the hard-core right, and was a key political figure behind the consolidation of right-wing organizations in support of the George W. Bush Presidency. [10]

The central focus of Yushchenko's slick campaign for President was to advocate membership for Ukraine in NATO and the European Union. His campaign used huge quantities of orange colored banners, flags, posters, balloons and other props, leading the media inevitably to dub it the 'Orange Revolution.' Washington funded 'pro-democracy' youth groups to play a particularly significant role organizing huge street demonstrations that helped him win the re-run of a disputed election.

In Ukraine the pro-Yushchenko movement worked under the slogan *Pora* ('It's Time') and they brought in people who had helped organize the 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia: Chair of Georgia's Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, Givi Targamadze; former member of the Georgian Liberty Institute; and Georgia's youth group, Kmara. The Ukrainian opposition leaders consulted the Georgians on techniques of non-violent struggle. Georgian rock bands Zumba, Soft Eject and Green Room, which had supported the 'Rose Revolution,' now organized a solidarity concert in Kiev to support Yushchenko's 2004 campaign.[11]

A Washington-based PR firm called Rock Creek Creative also played a significant role in branding the Orange Revolution by developing a pro-Yushchenko website around the orange logo and its carefully-staged color theme. [12]

When Yushchenko lost the 2004 election to Viktor Yanukovich, several elements worked in concert to create an aura of fraud around the results, and to mobilize popular support for a new run-off. Using the *Pora* and other youth groups, especially election monitors, in coordination with key western media such as CNN and BBC, a second election was organized that allowed Yushchenko to squeak out a narrow margin of victory in January 2005 and declare himself President. The US State Department reportedly spent some \$20 million to secure a US-friendly outcome in the Ukraine Presidency. [13]

The same US Government-backed NGOs that had been in Georgia produced the results in

Ukraine: the George Soros' Open Society Institute, Freedom House (whose head at the time was former CIA Director James Woolsey), the National Endowment for Democracy and its subsidiaries, the National Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute. According to Ukrainian reports, the US-based NGOs, along with the conservative US-Ukraine Foundation, were active across Ukraine, feeding the protest movement of Pora and Znayu, and training the crucial poll watchers.[14]

President Viktor Yushchenko, Washington's man in Kiev, moved immediately to disrupt economic links to Russia, including shutting off Russian natural gas into western Europe via Ukrainian transit pipelines. This move was used by Washington to try to convince EU countries, especially Germany, that Russia was an "unreliable partner." Some 80% of Russia's gas was exported via Ukrainian pipelines that had been built during the Soviet Union era when the two countries were one economic and political entity.[15] Yushchenko also worked closely with US-backed President Mikhail Saakashvili, Washington's man in neighboring Georgia.

The final result of the 2010 Ukrainian elections was an overwhelming rejection by voters of Yushchenko, the "hero" of the Orange Revolution, who received barely 5% of the vote. After five years of economic and political chaos, Ukrainians clearly want some kind of stability. Opinion polls in Ukraine show a majority opposed to joining NATO.

Western media depictions of incoming Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich as some kind of Moscow puppet, however, appear wide of the mark; his major industrial backers want harmonious economic relations with the European Union as well as with Russia.

Yanukovich announced that his first official trip abroad will not be to Moscow but rather to Brussels to meet with leading EU officials. After that, he will immediately fly to Moscow, where President Medvedev has signalled anticipation of improved cooperation by re-instating Russia's Ambassador to Kiev after months of political tensions between Yushchenko and Moscow had put the appointment on hold.

Most significantly, however, and contrary to his predecessor's relentless attempts to pull Ukraine into NATO on Washington's urgings, Yanukovich announced he would not meet with NATO officials in Brussels. In interviews with Ukrainian media, Yanukovich has clearly stated that he will not try to bring Ukraine into either the EU or, most importantly for Moscow, into NATO.

Yanukovich has pledged to focus instead on Ukraine's economic crisis and political corruption. Regarding Moscow, he has added that he will welcome Russia into a consortium that would jointly operate Ukraine's natural gas pipeline network, restoring influence that Yushchenko and his highly ambitious Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko tried to cancel. Another important signal not welcomed in NATO circles was his announcement that he would extend Russia's strategically vital lease on the naval base at the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol due to expire in 2017. [16]

Russia's new Geopolitical Calculus

It's clear that Yanukovich's bitter election opponent, Orange Revolution veteran and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, has bitterly opposed Yanukovich's policy, at the very least because she is fighting for her political ambitions and is known to be a sore loser. After

her challenge to the February election results failed in Ukrainian courts, she announced she would use her parliamentary coalition to block Yanukovich. Under normal procedures, she should have resigned as Prime Minister after the Yanukovich victory (by a margin of one million votes) was certified, as President-elect Yanukovich asked on February 10. She refused. She was supported as the preferred Presidential candidate by Germany's Angela Merkel and other EU leaders. [17]

The Yanukovich victory was backed by some of the country's most powerful business oligarchs including Ukraine's richest man, steel and football billionaire, Rinat Akhmetov. Like Yanukovich, he comes from the east steel region of Ukraine. Also backing Yanukovich was Dmitry Firtash, a gas trading billionaire, who owns Rosukrenergo jointly with Gazprom of Russia, and whose trading business was cut last year by Prime Minister Tymoshenko.

The Ukrainian Parliament delivered a vote of no confidence on March 3 against the sitting government of Prime Minister Tymoshenko, by a majority of 243 out of 450. This was the death knell for Tymoshenko's faction of the 2004 Orange Revolution and it opens up the possibility of finally breaking a political stalemate among Ukraine's political factions that has existed since shortly after the 2004 Orange Revolution. The ball is now clearly in Yanukovich's court. [18]

In the late 1990's before she co-led the Orange Revolution, Yulia Tymoshenko was president of Ukraine's United Energy Systems, a privately-owned importer of Russian natural gas into Ukraine. She was accused by Moscow of illegally reselling enormous quantities of stolen Russian gas and avoiding tax on the sales during the late 1990s, whence she got the nickname in Ukraine as "gas princess."

She was also accused of having given her political patron, former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, kickbacks in exchange for her company's stranglehold on the country's gas supplies.[19] Lazarenko was sentenced to prison in California for extortion, money laundering, fraud and conspiracy and was accused of murder in the Ukraine. [20]

Assuming that Yanukovich is now able to proceed with stabilizing the country along the neutral lines noted following the defeat of the Tymoshenko government, Moscow gains a major shift in the political tectonic plates that comprise the Eurasian Heartland, even with a strictly neutral Ukraine.

First, the strategic military encirclement of Russia — via NATO's attempted recruitment of Ukraine and Georgia — is now clearly blocked and off the table. Russia's access to the Black Sea via Ukraine's Crimea appears assured as well.

In effect, the neutralization of Ukraine knocks a huge hole in Washington's strategy of total encirclement of Russia. It breaks a geographic crescent of NATO or prospective NATO states stretching from Poland to Ukraine to Georgia on the periphery of Russia and her closely allied Belarus. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko successfully resisted a similar Ukraine-style Rose Revolution, warding off strong US State Department funding of anti-Lukashenko NGO's in the country. Belarus remains a centrally planned economy to a large extent, to the irritation of the free market Western governments, especially Washington. Belarus is economically tied to Russia, which accounts for half of its trade and it has no plans to enter NATO or the EU.[21]

This altered geopolitical configuration in central Eurasia after the defeat of the Orange

Revolution gives a strong boost now to Russia's long-term energy strategy—a strategy that we might call Russia's North-South-East-West Strategy.

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Notes

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