

Washington's interest in Ukraine: Democracy or Energy Geopolitics?

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The current battle over the election for President to succeed the pro-Moscow Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine is more complex than the general Western media accounts suggest. Both Putin and Bush are engaged in highest stakes geopolitical power plays. Both sides in Ukraine have evidently engaged in widespread vote fraud. Western media chooses to report only one side, however. Case in point: the British human rights group, Helsinki Watch Group, reports it found more vote irregularities on the side of the opposition Yushchenko than from the pro-Moscow Viktor Yanukovych. Yet media reports as if fraud were only from the side of the pro-Moscow candidate. The Kuchma regime is anti-democratic and no model for human rights, one factor which feeds an opposition movement. Yet the deeper issue is Eurasian geopolitical control, an issue little understood in the West.

The Ukraine elections are not about Western-sanctioned democratic voting, as some magic formula to open the door to free market reform and prosperity for Ukrainians. It's mainly about who influences the largest neighbor of Russia, Washington or Moscow. A dangerous power play by Washington is involved, to put it mildly.

A look at the geo-strategic background makes things clearer. Ukraine is historically tied to Russia, geographically and culturally. It is Slavic, and home of the first Russian state, Kiev Rus. Its 52 million people are the second largest population in eastern Europe, and it is regarded as the strategic buffer between Russia and a string of new US NATO bases from Poland to Bulgaria to Kosovo, all of which have carefully been built up since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most important, Ukraine is the transit land for most major Russian Siberian gas pipelines to Germany and the rest of Europe.

Yushchenko favors EU membership and NATO membership for Ukraine. Not surprising, he is backed, and strongly, by Washington. Zbigniew Brzezinski has been directly involved on behalf of the Bush Administration in grooming Yushchenko for his new role.

As far back as November 2001 Yushchenko was reportedly wined and dined in Washington by the Bush Administration, paid for by the US Congress-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Martin Foulner in the *Glasgow Herald* of November 26 reported the details of the meeting. The NED, it's worth noting, was set up during the Reagan Administration by the US Congress, to 'privatize' certain CIA operations, and allow Washington to claim clean hands in various foreign meddling. Ukraine is part of a wider US pattern of active 'regime change' in eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Brzezinski is directly involved in Ukraine events, and has openly condemned the initial November election results along with Henry Kissinger and Colin Powell. Brzezinski's entire

career has been geared to dismantle Russian power in Eurasia since the time he was Jimmy Carter's National Security Council chief. If Brzezinski succeeds in getting his hand-picked man in power in Kiev, that will be a major step in the direction of US domination of all Eurasia. That, of course, is the aim, as Brzezinski makes explicit in his writings.

It is useful to quote Brzezinski directly from his now infamous 1997 book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*:

"Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire..."

"...if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia."

Brzezinski then adds the following: "The states deserving America's strongest geopolitical support are Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine, all three being geopolitically pivotal. Indeed, Kiev's role reinforces the argument that Ukraine is the critical state, insofar as Russia's own future evolution is concerned."

There is a distinct pattern of US covert actions in changing regimes in Eastern Europe, in which Ukraine fits the pattern. The Belgrade vote in 2000 to topple Milosevic, was organized and run by US Ambassador, Richard Miles. This has been well documented by Balkan sources and others. Significantly, the same Miles was then sent to Georgia, where he engineered the toppling of Shevardnadze in favor of the US-groomed Mikhail Saakashvili last year, another pro-NATO man on Moscow's fringe. James Baker III played a key role as well, as some noted at the time.

Now Miles is reportedly involved in Kiev, with the US Ambassador there, John Herbst, former Ambassador in Uzbekistan. Curious coincidence? The Ukraine 'democratic youth' organization, Pora ('high time') is a slick, USA-created entity. It is modeled on the Belgrade youth group, Otpor, which Miles also set up with help of the NED and Soros' Open Society, US AID and similar friends. Pora was given a brand image for selling to the Western media, a slick logo of a black-white clenched fist. It even got a nifty name, the 'chestnut revolution,' as in 'chestnuts roasting on an open fire...'

Before he came to power, Saakashvili was brought by Miles to Belgrade to study the model there. In the Ukraine, according to British media and other accounts, George Soros' Open Society, the US government's 'private' National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the Carnegie Endowment, along with State Department USAID, were all involved in fostering Ukraine regime change. Little wonder Moscow is a bit concerned with Washington actions in Ukraine.

A key part of the media game has been the claim that Yushchenko won according to 'exit polls.' What is not said is that the people doing these 'exit polls' as voters left voting places, were US-trained and paid by an entity known as Freedom House, a neo-conservative operation in Washington. Freedom House trained some 1,000 poll observers, who loudly declared an 11 point lead for Yushchenko. Those claims triggered the mass marches

claiming fraud. The current head of the Freedom House is former CIA director and outspoken neo-conservative, Admiral James Woolsey, who calls the Bush Administration War on Terror, "World War IV." On the Freedom House board sits none other than Zbigniew Brzezinski. This would hardly seem to be an impartial human rights organization.

Why does Washington care so much about vote integrity next door to Russia? Is Ukraine democracy more important than Azeri or Uzbek 'democracy'? There something else going on than what appears to be a vote count. We have to ask why it is that the Bush Administration suddenly is so keen on the sanctity of the democrat vote process as to risk an open break with Moscow at this time.

Eurasian oil geopolitics

US policy, as Brzezinski openly stated in *The Grand Chessboard*, is to Balkanize Eurasia, and ensure that no possible stable economic or political region between Russia, the EU and China emerges in the future, that might challenge US global hegemony. This is the core idea of the September 2002 Bush Doctrine of 'pre-emptive wars.'

In taking control of Ukraine, Washington would take a giant step to encircle Russia for the future. Russian moves to use its vast energy reserves to play for room in rebuilding its political role would be over. Chinese efforts to link with Russia to secure some independence from US energy control would also be over. Iran's attempts to secure support from Russia against the Washington pressure would also end. Iran's ability to enter into energy agreements with China would also likely end. Cuba and Venezuela would also likely fall prey to a pro-Washington regime change soon after.

Washington policy is to directly control the oil and gas flows from the Caspian including Turkmenistan, and to counter Russian regional influence from Georgia to Ukraine to Azerbaijan and Iran. The background issue is Washington's unspoken recognition of the looming exhaustion of the world's major sources of cheap high-quality oil, the problem of global oil depletion, or as the late American geologist, M. King Hubbard termed it, of peak oil.

Over the coming 5-10 years the world economy faces a major new series of energy shocks as older fields from the North Sea to Alaska to Libya and even major fields in Saudi Arabia such as the giant Ghawar field, peak and begin to decline. Many large fields already have peaked such as the North Sea, perhaps one reason for the British interest in Iraq. And no new fields of a North Sea size have been found to replace them.

It was clearly no accident of politics that former Halliburton chief, Dick Cheney, became Vice President, with quasi-presidential powers, in the current Washington Administration. Nor that his first job was to oversee the Energy Task Force.

Back in late 1999, as CEO of Halliburton, Cheney delivered a speech to the London Institute of Petroleum. Halliburton, of course, is the world's leading oilfield services and construction group. Cheney presumably had a pretty good picture of where there was oil in the world.

In his speech, Cheney presented the picture of world oil supply and demand to fellow oil industry people. "By some estimates," he stated, "there will be an average of two percent annual growth in global oil demand over the years ahead, along with, conservatively, a

three percent natural decline in production from existing reserves.” Cheney added an alarming note: “That means *by 2010 we will need on the order of an additional fifty million barrels a day.*” This is equivalent to more than six Saudi Arabia’s of today’s size.

He cited China and East Asia as fast-growth regions, and noted that the oilfields of the Middle East were, along with the Caspian Sea the major untapped oil prospects.

Oil pipeline politics are also directly involved in the fight for control of Ukraine. In July 2004 the Ukraine Parliament voted to open an unused oil pipeline to transport oil from Russian Urals fields to the port of Odessa. The Bush Administration vehemently protested this would make Ukraine more dependent on Moscow.

The 674-kilometer oil pipeline, completed by the Ukraine government in 2001, between Odessa on the Black Sea and Brody in Western Ukraine, can carry up to 240,000 barrels a day of oil. In April 2004, the Ukraine government agreed to extend Brody to the Polish Port of Gdansk, a move hailed in Washington and Brussels. It would carry Caspian oil to the EU, independent of Russia. That is, were Ukraine to become dominated by a pro-EU pro-NATO regime in the November vote.

The stakes were big. George Bush Sr. made a quiet trip to Kiev in May to meet both candidates according to the British *New Statesman* of December 6. Former US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright flew in to Kiev as well.

Last July, the Kuchma government suddenly reversed itself and voted to reverse the oil flows in Brody-Odessa, in order to allow it to transport Russian crude to the Black Sea.

Commenting on the significance of that move, Ilan Berman of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington remarked at the time, “Kremlin officials understand full well that Odessa-Brody has the potential to deal a fatal blow to Russia’s current near monopoly on Caspian energy.” Berman then added a telling note, “Worse still, from Russia’s perspective, the resulting European and US economic attention would all but cement Kiev’s Westward trajectory.” The pipeline to Poland, a 3-year project, would make Poland a major new hub for non-Russian, non-OPEC oil as well, Berman notes.

The decision to reverse the pipeline last July would greatly weaken that Westward shift of Ukraine. The next government will have to tackle the issue. Ukraine is a strategic battleground in this geopolitical tug-of-war between Washington and Moscow. Ukrainian pipeline routes account for 75% of EU oil imports from Russia and Central Asia, and 34% of its natural gas import. In the near future, EU energy imports via Ukraine are set to expand significantly with the opening of huge oil and gas fields in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Ukraine is a key piece on Brzezinski’s Eurasian chessboard, to put it mildly, as well as Putin’s.

William Engdahl is author of the book, ‘A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order,’ recently released by Pluto Press Ltd, London.

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