



CANADA, UKRAINE and NUCLEAR WEAPONS: THE WAY FORWARD

by
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In the upcoming federal election, domestic rather than international security issues are likely to dominate the political discourse, even though events in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Cambodia and elsewhere figure in the headlines daily.

One critical issue is of particular interest both to the Canadian government and to one of the largest and politically powerful groups in Canada -- Canadians of Ukrainian descent. This issue is whether Ukraine will allow the removal of former Soviet strategic nuclear weapons stationed on its territory to Russia for destruction: 176 intercontinental ballistic missiles carrying a total of 1,240 nuclear warheads, and 42 long-range bombers with 592 cruise missiles each with one nuclear warhead; or whether Ukraine will declare itself to be a nuclear-weapon state with the world's third largest nuclear arsenal?

Ukrainian-Canadians generally endorse Ukraine's nuclear aspirations, as part of supporting Ukraine's independence and its position vis-a-vis Russia on control over the Black Sea fleet, Crimea and the port of Sevastopol, as well as on other issues. Canada, the first country to recognize Ukraine's independence, predicated its recognition on Ukraine's compliance with two existing nuclear arms control agreements.

While Ukraine has entered into legally binding international commitments to renounce nuclear weapons, President

Kravchuk and Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko have faced increasing opposition in parliament, the Rada, to give up the weapons. Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma and Defence Minister Col.Gen. Konstantin Morozov, in addition to the Foreign Affairs Committee and other deputies, have been arguing that in order for Ukraine to defend itself against Russia and to be taken seriously in the world, Ukraine should declare itself a nuclear power and temporarily retain some of the former Soviet nuclear weapons stationed on its territory. Further, there are worrisome reports that Ukraine has expropriated the nuclear weapons, and is working on developing enabling codes so that it could launch the missiles.

Western attention, including Canada's, has focused disproportionately on assistance to Russia for nuclear safety and dismantling. Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine -- states with former Soviet nuclear weapons -- also require Western assistance to deal with their Soviet nuclear legacies.

Revanchist elements in the Russian Parliament, including President Yeltsin himself, on occasion, have needlessly provoked fears in Kyiv by challenging the legality of the Russian-Ukrainian border, the status of Crimea and Sevastopol, and disputed other issues. Given the centuries-old history of Ukraine of foreign occupation, mainly Russian, it is understandable that the newly independent Ukrainian state is nervous about Russia's attitudes toward its sovereignty and independence. Probably, due to a lack of experience in dealing with nuclear-weapon issues combined with a persistent fear of Russia, many in Ukraine, and many Ukrainian-Canadians, feel that the best way to safeguard Ukraine's sovereignty is to rely on nuclear arms for protection. Such thinking is not entirely unreasonable in the current context.

Consequently, Ukraine has advanced several conditions that must be met before it will agree to consider START ratification. These are: 1) financial assistance for dealing with nuclear weapons; 2) security guarantees from nuclear-weapon states; and 3) resolution of disputes with Russia over borders,

disposition of military assets, share of the Soviet debt, and energy supplies.

Ukraine is demanding up to \$2.8 billion in financial assistance to defray dismantlement costs, while the US has offered \$175 million dollars to be provided after START ratification and NPT accession. Recently the US proposed removal of the warheads from the missiles, and to store them in Ukraine under international monitoring. Ukraine has been given security assurances by all five nuclear-weapon powers, to the effect that Ukraine will not be subjected to nuclear threats or attack if it joins the NPT. However, Kyiv is still demanding additional security guarantees from the West in relation to disputes with Russia. Kyiv and Moscow continue to bicker over the division of the Black Sea Fleet and the port of Sevastopol, Ukraine's share of the \$11.9 billion from the sale of highly enriched uranium, and on several economic and energy issues.

The stark reality is that the nuclear missiles in Ukraine are declining assets, soon becoming a major liability. The 130 SS-19 missiles are liquid-fuelled. Liquid rocket propellant needs to be chemically stabilized periodically. Similarly, nuclear warheads require constant monitoring and technical attention, to ensure the integrity of all built-in safety devices. With Ukraine extending "administrative control" over the nuclear weapons and because of the on-going dispute, Russia has not serviced the missiles and the warheads for over a year. Thus, as Foreign Minister Zlenko told the Rada last month: "these missiles are now already posing a real ecological threat to Ukraine." Recent reports suggest that given the environmental danger, of its 130 SS-19 missiles, Ukraine has begun to disarm one regiment of 10 SS-19 missiles, with another 10 to be disarmed next month, and that the US has agreed to provide financial support for this purpose. However, the 46 modern SS-24 missiles will not be deactivated.

Under the terms of the 1990 Treaty on Reducing Conventional Forces in