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SIPDISSIPDISE.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018TAGS: NATO PGOV PREL UPSUBJECT: UKRAINE: RUSSIAN ACTIONS ANSWER MEDVEDEV'S QUESTION OF "WHY DO THEY FEAR US?"

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1. (C) Summary and Comment: For many Ukrainians, Vladimir Putin's February 12 threat that membership in NATO could result in Russian missiles pointed at Ukraine answered Russian presidential candidate Dmitry Medvedev's question about Russia's neighbors posed during a January 22 campaign appearance when he asked, "Why do they fear us?" Here in Ukraine, the theme of fear and/or intimidation as a component of the bilateral Ukrainian-Russian relationship continues to surface in the press, on the streets and in many of our conversations with Ukrainian government and civil society contacts. The latest round of threats, culminating in Putin's missile threat, began as a reaction to Ukraine's decision to request a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) which triggered what many Ukrainians view as a series of Russian statements intended to intimidate Ukraine and warn off the Allies from granting Ukraine's request at the April Bucharest NATO Summit (Reftel A). The refused entry to Russia of Ukrainian political activist Serhiy Taran (Reftel B), statements by Russian NATO Ambassador Rogozin regarding the potential introduction of a visa regime for Ukrainian citizens in response to Ukrainian NATO aspirations, and even issues relating to Ukraine's gas debts to Russia are also seen as answers to Medvedev's question for many Ukrainians who view Russia's intentions with skepticism, if not outright fear.

2. (C) Comment. For some Ukrainians, primarily in the South and East, the preferred response may be to slow down Ukraine's westward movement toward NATO and Europe. The majority of Ukrainians, including a sampling of politicians from both East and West, appear to be outraged, although not surprised, by Putin's remarks. However, looking beyond the rhetoric, what is even more interesting is the measured tone of Ukraine's official responses and a continuing determination to maintain a full bilateral relationship with



its most important neighbor. Statements made by President Yushchenko at the same February 12 press conference with Putin, the willingness by both countries to remain engaged in the full range of bilateral activities -- as evidenced by the results of the February 12 Yushchenko-Putin Commission meetings, the success of the recently concluded sub-commission meetings focused on the status of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) in Crimea and demarcation of the Kerch Strait, and even Yushchenko's announcement that he will return to Moscow on February 22 to participate in an informal CIS Summit -- are all signs that the lines of communication are still open. End Summary and Comment.

Why Do They Fear Us? - Putin's Response

3. (SBU) The Ukrainian press gave a great deal of coverage to a statement made by the presumed next Russian President Dmitry Medvedev during a January 22 campaign appearance. According to the media, Medvedev while referring to Russia's neighbors asked: "Why do they fear us? The answer in my opinion is obvious -- in part it is simply not clear to them where Russia is going -- all these fears persist today, and we must continue to explain our plans openly and clearly." For many Ukrainians, the statement made by Russian President Putin on February 12 during his joint press conference with Ukrainian President Yushchenko was all the answer they needed: "It is frightful to say or even think that Russia...will direct its rockets at Ukraine. Just imagine this for a moment. This is what alarms us." The Ukrainian press reported that during a February 14 press conference, Putin made similar comments: "We will have to reposition our missiles at the objects, which, in our opinion, endanger our national security. I have to speak about this today directly and honestly, in order not to lay the blame on somebody else in the future. According to my information, the majority of Ukrainian citizens are against NATO accession; however, the leadership of Ukraine signed a paper that triggers the process. Is it a democracy? Who has asked the citizens of the country whether they want this or not? If it is done in such a secret manner, then NATO bases ... could be deployed there in an equally secret manner."

4. (C) Although used to hearing statements like this from their Russian neighbors, many Ukrainians appeared to be surprised by Putin's overtly threatening statements. President Yushchenko, responding directly to Putin's comments at the same press conference, stressed that Ukraine's interest in obtaining a MAP and eventually joining NATO was not intended to be a move against Moscow, and offered to consult with Russia on the process ahead. Yushchenko has even gone so far as to emphasize publicly that Ukraine is not

planning to host NATO bases, regardless of its relationship with the Alliance, citing constitutional provisions that bar such foreign bases on Ukrainian territory. During a February 13 meeting with the Ambassador, several prominent Rada members, from both the government and opposition, appeared angry about the statements. Regions' deputy Taras Chornovil said "all of Putin's statements leave a bad taste in one's mouth," while his fellow Regions deputy Leonid Kozhara, a former diplomat, noted his concern that "Putin's statements go against the spirit of various bilateral state agreements, specifically Articles 4-6 of the 1997 Friendship Treaty."

Russia Pushing Against Ukraine on MAP

5. (C) Russia's opposition to Ukraine's request for a NATO MAP has been building since the letter was first made public

on January 15. During a February 4-5 visit to Kyiv, Robert Wexler, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Europe, heard about how Russia was affecting Ukraine's request for a MAP request. Former Foreign Minister Tarasyuk (OU-PSD) said that the Ukrainian opposition was influenced by Russia, who does not want Ukraine in NATO. He urged the U.S. to provide the same support on MAP as it did in the summer of 2006, "do not let Russia be the beneficiary of this ploy." He argued that since the U.S. supported MAP two years ago, to not do so now would be perceived as a victory for the "undemocratic forces" opposed to Ukraine,s EuroAtlantic integration. Russia wants, if not to dominate Ukraine completely, then to prevent any action that would finalize Ukraine,s independence. According to Tarasyuk, NATO membership would end any doubts and discussion of Ukraine,s future, which is why Russia opposes it. Tarasyuk believed that Russia would continue its militant rhetoric as long as the MAP debate continued, but once a decision was taken, it would die down, just as it did in 1999 when the Baltic States joined NATO.

6. (C) BYuT's Oleh Bilorus, Chairman of the Rada's Foreign Affairs Committee, said that Russia had issued the same "agitprop" when it first came out that Ukraine might join the WTO, now the same rhetoric was focused on NATO, and next would be the EU. He believed the key date was 2017 when the Black Sea Fleet would leave Ukraine. Any postponement of the MAP question beyond Bucharest would lead to "a slow death" and Ukraine could find itself in the Tashkent Treaty in two years. This is the "last battle for Ukraine." According to Bilorus, some European countries still viewed Ukraine through a Russian prism. He underlined that there remained 6600 km of undemarcated border with Russia, which meant that Russia had still not acknowledged Ukraine,s sovereignty. He concluded that Ukraine needed a system of security and that a negative decision at Bucharest would be a victory for Russia.

7. (C) Former Defense Minister Hrytsenko, now Chairman of the Rada's National Security and Defense Committee, said that if Ukraine does not get MAP, there will be "a big celebration in Moscow, the Russians will believe that they stopped it." He also noted that failure on MAP would impede Ukraine,s ability to help Georgia and Azerbaijan withstand Russian pressure. Russia has threatened to cut military-industrial ties if Ukraine goes toward NATO, but "they,re already cutting those ties anyway." They can cause problems in the energy sphere, but the impact will be limited by the European market and Ukraine,s inevitable move to market prices. He underlined that there was no threat of military force. He concluded that "Russia will always be next door to Ukraine - that problem will never go away, so it can,t be the deciding factor or the reason to postpone."

MFA: Russia is Not an Easy Partner

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8. (C) Although considered by many to be the leading Russia critic at the MFA, since his appointment, FM Ohryzko has consistently stated that maintaining a positive relationship with Russia is a key priority for Ukrainian foreign policy. In his public statements he has underlined that the relationship must be based on Russian acceptance of Ukrainian sovereignty and not on the "big-brother, little-brother" structure of the past. On February 5 Ohryzko again stated that "our relations with Russia should be constructive and mutually beneficial - this is our goal." Ohryzko has combined his positive statements with direct, forceful engagement with Moscow, for example announcing his intention to proceed with end-phase withdrawal negotiations in 2008 on the Black Sea Fleet (withdrawal is set for 2017). On MAP Ohryzko has maintained that Ukraine needed to move ahead

irrespective of the Kremlin's reactions, most recently telling Congressman Robert Wexler during a February 5 meeting that "there is never a good time for MAP as far as Russia is

concerned." In other meetings, most recently with the visiting Finnish Foreign Minister, we understand that Ohryzko has been careful not to bash the Russians or Russian positions, arguing that Ukraine has no choice but to have a good relationship with its largest neighbor.

9. (C) Our discussions with contacts in the NATO, IO, and other MFA Directorates also show an acceptance of the need to handle the Russia relationship and factor Russian reactions into their approach -- combined with frustration that Moscow is so intertwined in their daily work. Acting MFA NATO Director General Vadym Prystaiko, in response to the Medvedev quote, noted that "Russia will continue to push as many buttons as it can reach to stop us from achieving MAP, including domestic threats like increasing gas prices and imposing a visa regime." He continued that "it isn't that we don't understand their position, it's just that we won't change our aspirations to suit their policy objectives." Prystaiko also drew parallels with the experience of the Baltic nations, who he believes benefited from NATO membership by clarifying their bilateral relations with Russia -- following statements from Moscow that Prystaiko noted were carbon copies of those currently being made by the Kremlin vis-a-vis Ukrainian NATO aspirations.

Other Reasons for Ukraine's Fear

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10. (C) Moscow's apparent decision to again use a blacklist to keep some Ukrainians out of Russia has also worried people here. A number of journalists and political NGO contacts have reacted strongly to Serhiy Taran's detention and entry refusal in St. Petersburg (reftel B). In his comments to the press, Taran claimed that his name was just one of many on a list that included other Ukrainian politicians and activists, triggering stories that Russia was reinstating a travel black-list for Ukrainians. Oleksandr Omelchuk, a journalist and former TV anchor, and currently chief-of-staff for Presidential advisor Oleh Rybachuk, said that the message was clear to him -- Moscow was sending another message that the NATO MAP request would negatively affect Ukrainian-Russian relations across the full range of activities.

11. (C) Oksana Hryhorhyeva, President of the Atlantic Council's Youth Center, noted that her efforts to educate Ukraine's youth on the benefits/responsibilities of NATO membership tried to deemphasize the role of Russia in the process. She indicated that allowing the issue to be presented as a NATO-Ukraine-Russia triangle took the focus away from the central issue -- that Ukrainians needed to decide themselves on their future security relationships and structures irrespective of the position of any other country, whether Russia or the US. She believes that the next generation of Ukrainian leaders has to have an "objective" relationship with Moscow, based on neither antagonism nor intimidation.

12. (C) Serhiy Sobolyev, a BYuT MP from Zaporizhzhya, told the Ambassador that the argument that economic ties to Russia were too important to jeopardize was not playing out. He alleged that Russia had cut off all the contracts with Motor Sich, the major airplane engine manufacturer based in Zaporizhzhya, leaving his home town with nothing. That was why all the other major enterprises in his home oblast were oriented toward Europe now. In Soboloyev's view, NATO did not mean you have to hate Russia, you can have ties with both.

13. (C) Even Russia's diplomatic representatives don't seem to understand that the aggressive statements made by their government often backfire with their Ukrainian counterparts. Russia's long-time Ambassador to Kyiv and now dean of the diplomatic corps, former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, has long been known for his unapologetic and forceful statements warning Ukrainian leaders about the consequences of their decisions on energy, NATO and other issues. In a chat with the DCM that covered Ukraine's Holodomor recognition efforts and other policy disputes, Chernomyrdin's number two angrily concluded that "Ukrainians just don't like us," showing just how out of touch with public opinion the Russians can be.

14. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kyiv](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kyiv).  
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Website pages 