

Belarus: Stronghold against the West

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On August 20, 2004, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) had this to say about Belorussian President Alexander Lukashenko:

President Lukashenko has manipulated the constitution to solidify his control. He has ordered the disappearances of opposition activists and journalists. He runs Belarus as if it were the Soviet Union, instilling a climate of fear, repression, and arbitrary rule. Under Mr. Lukashenko's leadership, the government has routinely harassed, arrested and physically attacked democracy advocates—individuals guilty of nothing more than speaking out against the dictatorship into which their government has descended. As just one example, Mikhail Marinich, who served as Belarus's ambassador to Latvia, returned to his country with a desire to run for president. For his role in the opposition, on April 26 of this year he was thrown in KGB detention. He remains there today. (Quoted from McCain's official website at www.McCain.senate.gov, as of 2005).

Any aspect of this nonsense could easily have been taken from Republican rhetoric aimed at Serbia, Somalia, Iran, Syria or Iraq. But it is precisely this that is cause for concern, given the fact that the American establishment uses this sort of rhetoric to justify either military adventurism or the continuation of CIA operations in the country in question. The rhetoric has little relation to facts, or, at the very least, refuses to place the facts within their proper context, a context that usually has something to do with American capitalist designs on the region.

Recently, the U.S. Congress voted unanimously to impose sanctions on Belarus. The passage of the Democracy in Belarus Act permits the CIA to subvert the present government. Pravda reported:

According to the *Kommersant*, [McCain] is one of the politicians who initiated the draft project about democracy in Belarus. The document has been recently submitted to the House of Representatives and to the U.S. Senate. According to the document, the American government is to assign considerable funds to the Belarus opposition [This is now no longer a secret, though it was denied just a few years ago.—MRJ]. Certain Belorussian officials will not be allowed to enter the U.S.A.; the strategic export and state investments to Belarus will be banned. The document also stipulates [that] there will be efforts taken to cut the financial help to Belarus on the part of international financial institutes. In addition, Belarus will have to expose the export of weapons to terrorist-supporting states and publish the data about the property of Lukashenko and the people from his team.

Could one imagine the fallout if George W. Bush was to be forced to reveal his own

personal finances such as his interests in the Carlyle Group? The Carlyle cult had as one of its major investors the family of Osama bin Laden.

For example, in Serbia, the identical rhetoric was used by Sen. McCain and others to demonize Slobodan Milosevic. The purpose was not to further the abstract concept of “democracy,” but rather to secure the country for oil pipelines coming in from the Caspian Sea. Similarly, the demand for the independence of Kosovo has only one concern, to establish a pro-American government in that Serbian province to assist American mining interests to exploit the immense mineral wealth under Kosovo’s surface. The list could continue, but it must be understood that abstractions such as “democracy,” or “freedom” are cynical masks for American power, serving at the behest of organized capital.

Regardless, nationalism is the enemy of the American empire, simply for the reason that it prevents American corporations from penetrating and exploiting new markets and native raw materials. Specifically, Belarus is a medium-sized country with substantial natural resources with the additional benefit of having an educated and skilled workforce. Moreover, Lukashenko’s desire to build a union of states with Russia and some Central Asian republics is, of course, a desire to build a counterweight to American imperial designs on every corner of the globe. In other words, a new Cold War is building, one pitting nationalism against Anglo-American economic and ideological imperialism.

Alexander Lukashenko is a threat not only because Belarus has a formidable military, left over from the post-Soviet troop withdrawals from eastern Europe, but because his policies, which contradict the standard ideology of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at every point, have been successful far beyond most developing countries. Whether it be Malaysia or Belarus, kicking out the World Bank or the IMF is a sure-fire policy for economic growth and stabilization. On this front, the achievements of Lukashenko’s presidency are extraordinary. It must be understood then, that the driving out of the IMF and World Bank is one of the main reasons Lukashenko is considered “repressive.” The lack of WB or IMF oversight is another way of saying that the U.S. was kicked out of Belarus. These international agencies are controlled by the major donor countries, which are, exclusively, wealthy capitalist ones. Therefore, Lukashenko and his allies ended their control over the Belorussian economy.

In comparison with the American establishment’s hatchet job on Belarus, the reality is that in the first half of 2004, the Belorussian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew 10.3 percent. Industrial production rose 14.4 percent as agricultural production rose 5.7 percent (and this, with about one-third of Belorussian farmland still poisoned from Chernobyl). Consumer goods production increased by 14.2 percent while the volume of investment in fixed capital grew 21.7 percent. Most significantly, the real income of the population (adjusted to the consumer price indices) grew 12.5 percent.

While just a few years ago Belarus’s trade was predominately with Russia, today, Lukashenko’s economic strategy has paid off, for trade with Russia only amounts to 45 percent or so, the remainder going to the Far East or the European Union. Significantly, Belorussian trade with the United States increased 75 percent, year on year, with 2003. Though this is now ended with official U.S. sanctions on Belarus.

As if this is not enough, according to the official report by the World Bank (of all people), in their World Development Report 2005, the volume of direct foreign investment in the Belorussian economy made up \$247 million in 2002. The per capita amount of investments in Belarus was \$25, whereas in Russia it was \$21 and in Ukraine \$14.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2004, published on July 15, 2004,

Belarus has the lowest among Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries total debt service as a percent of GDP at 1.4 percent. Belarus has a higher literacy rate than the United States at 99.7 percent. Belarus surpasses all post-Soviet countries, as well as such European countries as Latvia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands in public expenditure on education, which amounts to 6 percent of GDP. Belarus is the first among CIS countries on such socially meaningful indices as health expenditure per capita, which amounts to \$464, which leads to Belarus having the lowest among post-Soviet countries under-five mortality rate. Belarus leads among CIS countries and some European countries (Lithuania and Poland) by the amount of telephone mainlines (299 per 1,000 people), and has twice as many Internet users compared with Russia, and four times more than Ukraine (these figures are all taken from information compiled by the Belorussian Embassy in America from third party sources). It might be added that it is not Lukashenko who wishes to censor the Internet, but the Anti-Defamation League in the United States.

This is the reason why Lukashenko is so popular in Belarus and his party wins parliamentary elections. Lukashenko need not “repress dissent,” for the dissent is weak and led, as in Georgia or Yugoslavia, by the CIA.

Significantly, the appointment of Michael Kozak as ambassador to Belarus, was the beginning of U.S. intelligence and George Soros’ plans to overthrow Lukashenko. Kozak was instrumental in funneling millions of dollars into the Belorussian opposition. Open Society Institute operatives (this institute is founded and controlled by Soros) were training opposition candidates and activists. George Gedda, a writer for the Associated Press, wrote candidly:

A year ago, the United States helped Milosevic’s opposition with some success and is trying to do the same for Lukashenko’s opponents. The U.S. administration is spending about \$9 million on get-out-the-vote activities and on support for non-governmental organizations, including independent labor unions that are active in the run-up to the elections. The European Union, Belgium, Sweden, Britain and France are similarly engaged. All refrain from activities that support a particular candidate.

Similarly, Alice Lagnato, writing for *The Times* in 2001, said, “In an unusual admission, Michael Kozak . . . said in a letter to a British newspaper that America’s “objective and to some degree methodology are the same” in Belarus as in Nicaragua, where the U.S. [government] backed the Contras against the left-wing Sandinista government in a war that claimed at least 30,000 lives. Mr. Kozak was not available for comment. . . .”

Further, Lagnato writes,

A spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Minsk told *The Times* that the embassy helped to fund 300 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including non-state media, but did not fund political parties, since that is banned by law. He admitted that some of the NGOs were linked to those who were “seeking political change.”

Now, concerning the “repression of democracy” prattle uttered by McCain, there are almost 600 initiative groups collecting signatures for candidates to the Belorussian House of Representatives. The parliamentary elections were scheduled for October 17 of 2004. Initiative

groups can be derived from party agitation as well as from individuals. The Belorussian Helsinki Committee (BHC) has made independent verification of the fairness of the petitions.

[T]here was no arbitrariness during the registration of the initiative groups in precinct election commissions. The problems that appeared during the registration of some initiative groups. . . . were handled after consultations with the Central Election Commission on Elections and Holding of Republican Referendums. According to BHC observers [that is, the Helsinki Group], the submission of the lists of members of the initiative groups and the registration of the groups by precinct election commissions was held, in general, without violations.

The fractured and weak opposition, however, was caught adding names to their list who had not consented to be included, who had not reached the legal age of 18, and some were not even Belorussian citizens. This is the level of desperation to which the Belorussian “opposition” has descended.

Of course, McCain’s deliberately crafted lies are not the first attempt to slander the Belorussian state. The U.S. Department of Justice has also weighed in, some time ago, on the lack of arbitrarily defined human rights in Belarus. Now, it would be boring and pedantic to list all the ways that the American federal state apparatus does precisely what McCain purports Belorussian politicians do. I need not go through the minutia of the Patriot Act or dredge up old files on Waco. This sort of thing is well known to many. But the arrogant and imperial claims of the American Department of Justice were answered with a stinging rebuttal that was repressed by the American controlled press. Here are a few excerpts:

Fundamental citizens’ rights in social and cultural area, above all, the right to work, are guaranteed in Belarus. Thus, the Labor Code stipulates employees’ fundamental rights, including the right to choose profession, activity and work in accordance with one’s vocation, abilities and education. Employees enjoy the right to the protection of their economic rights and interests, including the right to be united in trade unions, the rights to weekly rest, vacation, social insurance, and pensions, as well as guarantees for the cases of professional illness, labor injury, disablement and loss of a job. The right to education is guaranteed by “the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Education,” envisaging free comprehensive secondary and vocational education and, on competition basis, free special secondary and higher education. The decree of the head of state establishes the right to receive beneficial credit to pay for the first higher education received in state-run higher education establishments on payment basis. . . .

There are 18 political parties acting in our republic. Like in any other democratic society some of them are in opposition to the authorities but they are not hindered in criticizing authorities, they are granted the right to present their programs in newspapers including in those run by state. In accordance with the existing legislation only the Supreme Court has the authority to liquidate a party. So far such cases have not occurred. Though I will make no secret of the fact that certain parties and their leaders sometimes violate the law. In the meantime our nation has the same approach to all parties: the law. Thus in 2002 the Ministry of Justice issued the notice of warning for the Social- Democratic Party of Civil Accord, the

United Civil Party, the Belorussian Patriotic Party, the Party of “Belorussian Democratic Gramada” the Communist Party and others.

The Republic of Belarus has surpassed the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, Romania, Brazil, Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Georgia, China, Moldova, Azerbaijan and many other nations. In the section of the countries with the average level of the development of human potential Belarus was ranked third. After all in the number of medical doctors per 100,000 people we surpass Sweden, Belgium, Japan, Switzerland, France, Great Britain and the United States. Expenditures for health care in percentage to GDP in our country are higher than in Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. As you know, more than 30,000 children die daily of diseases amenable to preventive measures. In the meantime in the number of immunized one-year-old children Belarus is ranked higher than many developed countries including the United States. [This is an unofficial translation.—MRJ.]

The president of Belarus does not have the extensive powers of the American president. One need remember that a declared war has not occurred since World War II, and American interference in the affairs of other nations spans nearly 110 countries where the U.S. government maintains military bases. The undeclared war in Iraq, where lies, myths and distortions are used by the executive to force the country into war surpass anything the Belorussian president could dream of doing. The advanced welfare state of Belarus might be odious to some, but it should be kept in mind that Belarus was heading down the same path as Russia. In her case, a handful of Jewish oligarchs stole nearly the entirety of the Russian GDP for themselves, thereby plunging Russia into dire poverty, out of which, only under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, is she slowly emerging.

Steve Gowans, a scholar and activist from Canada, wrote an exhaustive study on the last presidential election in Belarus and, importantly, the reactions of the United States. His analysis reveals that Michael Kozak had advised Semyon Domash to leave the presidential race, thereby uniting the opposition around another candidate, Vladimir Goncharyk, who, incidentally, polled no more than 10 percent at any time in the election season. The State Department is doing similar things in Georgia and Serbia.

During the run up to the election, Radio Free Europe broadcasts, part of the Central Intelligence Agency, were doubled, all critical of Lukashenko. Today, George Soros controls RFA directly. Certainly, this is not the stuff of a police state. Gowan’s paper also reveals that the head of NATO’s Allied Command General Joseph Ralston addressed a press conference in Belarus that was critical of Lukashenko.

Once the embassy under Kozak admitted that it was funding NGOs against Lukashenko, Rep. Chris Smith, from New Jersey (R), condemned Lukashenko’s response, which was to legally limit the amount of foreign funds available to domestic NGOs. Smith mentions the restrictions, but seems wholly ignorant of Kozak’s admissions. Regardless, McCain, Kozak, Smith and others are, at best, intellectually dishonest, or at worst, imperialist puppets with an agenda to cut down any state that does not work in the interests of the American oligarchy. This is the politics of empire.

On the Political Views of Lukashenko (2004)

Elected president of the former Soviet republic in July of 1994, Lukashenko has become

a powerful beacon for anti-globalist fighters for almost 10 years. He is probably best known for his unceremonious expulsion of all World Bank and IMF representatives from his country early in his tenure. In 1995, Lukashenko began a privatization program, but, when it became clear that well connected oligarchs were to take the lion's share, thus plunging the country into poverty, the president recanted and placed much of the economy under state control. The result of his policies is a substantial rise in national GDP, and, according to the United Nations, Belarus has the strongest economy among the former Soviet republics. Unemployment is about 2.5% (with about 3% of jobs presently vacant), and she is ready to sign a free trade agreement with Russia, which ensures Belarus cheap energy.

In the first half of 1996, the first year affected by the anti-IMF policies, GDP skyrocketed a breathtaking 11%. More recently, the first half of this year saw Belarus' GDP grow a strong 5.3%. The economics ministry forecasts that GDP growth next year will be about 7%, with about a 14% return on industrial investment.

GDP growth in Belarus since the IMF has been kicked out has been, on average, between 6% and 4% yearly, which is a rather strong showing. Wages have consistently risen, as has the basic economic standard of living. Crime is substantially lower than in the other post-Soviet economies. Unlike Russia or Ukraine, Belarus does not have any public sector wage arrears, and public sector monthly salaries rose by nearly 50% from 1998-2000.

Unfortunately, a large trade deficit and problems with inflation have assisted in dampening the achievements of Lukashenko's nationalist system. However, the recent increases in the trade deficit can be the responsibility of a weakening global economy. Nevertheless, Lukashenko has signed a "common economic space" deal with Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Russia, beginning an attempt to create an "alternative EU." The fact that Belarus is attempting to reemerge with Russia is a major threat to western interests. His popularity rating remains roughly between 55 and 60%. By way of contrast, former President Boris Yeltsin of Russia never cracked double digits.

But, because Belarus has refused to be a part of the New World Order, this potent economy is called by the CIA, The New York Times and countless pundits, at the "verge of collapse." Lukashenko is nothing if not popular. The last parliamentary elections in 2000 showed Lukashenko's party to have gathered a majority of the votes. The international observers from the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) reported that there were no irregularities with the election, but, due to CIA pressure, called the election "undemocratic." The U.S. State Department did the same. By way of contrast, the severely flawed reign of Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze received the highest praises from the "international community." The St. Petersburg based Orthodox anti-Globalist Resource Center had this to say about the Georgian election:

Georgians of this observer's acquaintance now living in St. Petersburg because "life in Georgia is impossible," as they put it, assert that Shevardnadze is universally hated and could never win in honest voting, yet he "won" an amazing 80% "victory" in the last elections. And this all happened in the presence of western observers, who declared the elections to be in accordance with all democratic norms. Even the fact that Shevardnadze's main opponent mysteriously withdrew his candidacy just days before the elections (clearly under pressure from Shevardnadze himself) did not trouble western observers. Shevardnadze, a former Gorbachev ally and one of the main architects of "perestroika," has loyally

followed the IMF's orders for the economic colonization of his country and promises to bring Georgia into NATO, so it's clear that any elections won by Shevardnadze will be recognized as "democratic." (cf. oga.ru for more information)

Even more serious is the fact that Lukashenko has challenged the eastward expansion of NATO. Recently, Lukashenko said that the expansion of NATO into Poland is an "act of war" against the Belorussian state. Belarus is in possession of most Soviet hardware from the former Warsaw Pact bases (pulled back into Belarus but not withdrawn into Russia proper), and this has one of the more formidable militaries in central or eastern Europe.

He has further said that, "If the USA takes a decision to place its forces closer to the border between Poland and Belarus, our country will be forced to respond adequately to this. . . . If the situation develops in a way that is unfavorable for us, we will not only monitor these troops' deployments—they will also be aimed at." Given the fact that Russian and Belorussian troops routinely perform joint exercises and train together, this is slowly becoming serious business. Lukashenko has also proposed a joint Russian-Belorussian military force to be deployed on the Polish border.

Lukashenko has, throughout the Gulf War, sent military supplies to Syria, Cuba and Iraq up until the shooting. Many anti-Zionist fighters in the Mideast are using Belorussian made equipment, leading Israel to pressure to U.S., as well as Russia, to rein in the "rogue nation." Though Belarus has only 70,000 infantry that is combat ready, military analysis say that Lukashenko can call up 500,000 reservists rather quickly. Belarus also has roughly 5,000 tanks and a small but elite air force of about 350 combat aircraft. Militarily, Belarus is anything but a third world country. The CIA nervously says on its website that Belarus has a militarily-fit male population of 2 million. As of today, Russia and Belarus operate joint air defense systems.

The so called opposition to Lukashenko is extremely small. Recently, before an anti-presidential demonstration in Minsk, the opposition leaders predicted a "massive turnout of 20,000." Just shy of 1,000 showed up, waving anti-Lukashenko placards, conveniently, in English.

Both the Soros Foundation, as well as the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, are almost completely funding the "opposition." Lukashenko's bases of popularity are the poor, rural workers and the elderly. All of them would have been completely left out in the cold had the Belorussian government gave in to IMF and State Department pressure to implement "shock treatment" for the economy in the mid-90s.

Previously to Lukashenko's election, nearly \$15 billion has left the country under its previous pro-western leadership. Lukashenko passed a series of laws that stemmed this tide, thus angering western banking interests. On September 9th of 2001, 75% of Belorussian voters sent Lukashenko back to the presidential chair for another term. The New York Times of August 18th admitted CIA support for the Belorussian opposition.

The former head of the West German Secret Service Hans Georger-Wieck went to Minsk and was said to have "kept several hundred colleagues busy with one central task—support of the so-called democratic forces in the opposition and the regime." (*Junge Welt*, Sept. 11, 2001). Wieck himself had reported to the Belgian paper *La Libre Belgique* (Aug. 31) that the OSCE succeeded in organizing the splintered opposition to Lukashenko into one single voting bloc.

Ultimately, Alexander Lukashenko has proven that non-liberal systems were the way to

go for the post-Soviet world. In the early 1990s, this writer said as much, and suffered professionally because of it. South Korea had also shown how non-liberal systems can produce tremendous economic growth without some of the more radical inequalities presently plaguing the west. However, the system cannot merely be illiberal. There seems to be a few important factors that need to be in place.

First, there needs to be a strong sense of social unity and homogeneity. Deeply divided states cannot be expected to function much at all, let alone in times of crisis. Second, the leadership needs to be legitimate in some fashion, whether through bureaucratic competence or charismatic authority (or both). Third, there needs to be an outside threat such as North Korea in the case of Seoul or the liberalization that almost destroyed Russia for Minsk. Fourth, the state needs to be stronger than the elites, or any combination of elites against the state. Fifth, an agenda needs to be in place that is firm enough to be stronger than mere opportunism but flexible enough to change when contradictory evidence arises.

Sixth, there needs to be a long period of social peace. Seventh, the government needs to be able to answer its critics on their own ground. It cannot simply command. Eighth, there must be a strong social base: the older generation, the military, peasants, the lower middle class and some of the professions, for example, should be mobilized against any attempt of the elite to divide them. In brief, a strong state with a long-term mentality, fundamentally able to match social expectations without buckling to foreign pressure is required for small states like Belarus to be prosperous on their own terms.