

Answer to Question

Question: The second phase of the presidential elections was held in Ukraine on 2nd February, 2010. In the first phase of the polls, Victor Yusichenko, who had come to power in the wake of the 'Orange Revolution', bagged merely 5% of the votes and in the second phase, he was unable to compete. While Yanukovych and Tymoshenko won 35% and 25% of the votes in the first phase and entered the second round. Indeed Victor Yanukovych who is pro-Russia and has served earlier as Prime Minister and also as President in 2004 polled 48% of the votes in the second round against his rival Tymoshenko who bagged 46% of votes, and thus he has again become the president of the republic. Does this mean the end of the era of the 'Orange Revolution' and return of Ukraine in the Russian lobby? How will the US-Russian rivalry affect Ukraine in the coming era?

Answer:

1. As is known that the 'Orange Revolution' was ushered after the 2004 elections which led to the downfall of Yanukovych from power and shaped the pro-West alliance of Yushichenko and Yulia Tymoshenko which resulted in increased tension Russia and the West represented by the US and Europe and both the parties organized campaigns against each other. However Yusichenko further heightened the tension during his rule between Ukraine and Russia through his attempts to bring Ukraine into the NATO fold, his statements regarding expulsion of the Russian Black Sea fleet from the Crimean peninsula as well as his attempts to forge strong ties with Saakashvili of Georgia and his pursuing a policy of eternal conflict with Russia in every field...especially in the energy and security matters. Thus Yusichenko was not able to realize widespread popular support especially with regard to his national programme which he himself described as programme of conflict with Russia.

As against this, Russia used the Compressed Natural Gas card to project Yusichenko as an unwanted person in front of his people. Russia threatened Ukraine with cutting off gas supplies or increase in the gas prices during the last two years and especially during the severe winter months. And thus the threatened people of Ukraine realized that pro-Western stance is not the solution....

On the other hand, as a result of the International Economic Crisis, Ukraine was plunged into continuous political and economic instability wherein parliamentary elections were held twice and five governments were changed...All these factors prepared grounds against Yusichenko in the presidential elections and resulted in the victory of pro-Russian Yanukovych.

2. Ukraine, which has an area of 603.700 Sq. Kms and a population of 48 million, occupies a strategic position on the Black Sea and has energy routes passing through it, especially the natural gas pipelines. In addition to it, it is strategically positioned to link Europe with Asia and thus it can influence the global situation

as well as the regional balance. Therefore, both Russia, the US as well as Europe Union countries ascribe a place of importance to Ukraine.

3. **As for Ukraine's Strategic Importance to Russia** is concerned; Russia attached great importance to it because a vast majority of the eastern Ukraine are Catholics and speak Russian language. Apart from it, the Russian Black Sea fleet is stationed in Ukraine under an agreement which is valid until 2017 C.E.

After the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine in 2004, relations with Russia worsened due to Ukraine's attempts to enter the European Union and also because of Ukraine stand on the Russian Black Sea fleet anchored in Sevastopol as well as their differences on the natural gas.

Therefore Russia made huge efforts to create an atmosphere against the rule Yusichenko especially in the eastern regions of Ukraine and other pro-Russian regions of Ukraine...Thus it was successful in bringing a pro-Russian government in the elections in Ukraine. Russia heaved a sigh of relief and as soon as Yanukovych ascended to power, he signed a number of agreements with Moscow in the energy sector and consolidated economic cooperation between them proceeded to develop relations in the fields of journalism, publishing and education language and culture. Yasuchenko indicated to the possibility of reaching a new agreement on the issue of the Russian Black Sea fleet in exchange for reduction in the natural gas prices. He said, as reported by the website (www.haberrus.com) on 6th March, 2010, saying: "The problem concerning the issue of Russian Black Sea fleet can be solved in such a way so as to safeguard the interests of both Russia and Ukraine." On the other hand, Ukraine strategically situated on the Black Sea through which also pass energy routes and links Europe with Asia is eternally the cynosure of Russian eyes.

4. **As for Ukraine's Strategic Importance to the United States**; it is vitally important for the US which is attempting to encircle the Russian influence region. Therefore America's loss of influence in Ukraine would mean strengthening of Russian influence in the Black Sea and Eastern Europe. However, we have seen how the US did all that it could do during the 'Orange Revolution' which brought Yushenko to power and during that period Ukraine became the main strategic partner of the United States which provided it with economic assistance to the extent that it became the third largest recipient of US aid after (Israel) and Egypt on the list of US aid recipient states. This was meant to sever Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia... However, in the wake of the economic crisis, the US especially because it is caught in the Iraq and Afghanistan quagmire, could not focus enough attention to the opportunities that lay in Ukraine, and this helped Russia to easily exert its influence to destabilise the 'Orange Revolution'.
5. **As for Ukraine's Strategic Importance to the European Union**, it sees Ukraine as the dividing line between Russia and the eastern Europe through which Europe's 80% of natural gases flow from Russia which represents some 25% of Europe's gas consumption, and therefore the EU attaches significant importance to Ukraine. After the inclusion of Poland into the EU and Bulgaria & Romania became eligible for EU membership, Ukraine has become EU's very important

neighbour. The EU on one hand, views Ukraine as the bridge between Russia and Europe, and on the other hand considers it as the buffer region between itself and Russia.

6. Thus Ukraine's importance to these countries made them take keen interest in the recent elections there...however an observer of the election process can notice that Yanukovych achieved his success by a margin of merely 3% of votes, and this reflects that the political atmosphere has not changed much from earlier times. Therefore, despite pro-West Victor Yushenko's defeat as the president of the republic and coming to power of pro-Russia Yasuchenko as President, it is rather too early to say that the era of the 'Orange Revolution' has come to an end and that Ukraine has come full circle into the Russian stronghold. This is because Yasuchenko has won by a very slender margin which means that the pro-West popular base still has its pockets of strength intact in Ukraine. This also implies that the Russian-US rivalry in Ukraine will continue.
7. Indeed, Yanukovych realises this well and this is why despite his pro-Russian stance, he first visited Brussels instead of Moscow in an attempt to gain Europe's attention and reduce the focus from his Russian loyalty, especially because his margin of victory was so narrow. This is also because Yanukovych does not want to retrace his earlier path which he followed after the 2004 elections when the people came out on the streets and dethroned him from power. Therefore it is expected of him to follow an approach that is apparently balanced between Russia and the West and cover his policies in such a way so as not to provoke either the US or the EU. However, he will pursue policies inclined towards Russia. Sergey Taran of the International Institute for Democracy pointed this out in a statement in Kiev which was reported by the BBC's Turkey website on 8th February, 2010, he said: "The broad outline of Yanukovych's rule are clear, he will improve Ukraine's relations with the Kremlin, dispel notions regarding Ukraine's membership of the NATO alliance and will work to extend the agreement regarding the stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet present in the Crimean peninsula which is about to expire in 2017."

The West no doubt is aware of Yanukovych's Russian loyalties and realises that pursuing confrontational approach with him will not be feasible. Instead it will pursue a policy that is apparently closer but covertly adopting such an approach that places obstacles in his path. This is why the US 'congratulated' him on his victory just like the European Union did...

Despite all this, the conflict between the West, especially the US and Russia regarding Ukraine will not cease because Ukraine occupies such importance. The base of all the parties in Ukraine is substantial and the victory margin in the election was so meager at just 3%, which means that both the parties have effective strengths in Ukraine.

4th Rabee ul Awwal, 1431 A.H

20th March, 2010 C.E