

# **UKRAINE'S MILITARY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

**Marybeth Peterson Ulrich**

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## FOREWORD

America's new allies in Central and Eastern Europe have been struggling with defense reform since the end of the Cold War. Only recently, since the Orange Revolution, has Ukraine's national political and military leadership seriously engaged the process of radical and comprehensive defense reform. Dr. Marybeth Ulrich applies the various roadmaps for reform developed in the post-communist states of Central European states to the emerging Ukrainian case. She draws upon this mixed picture to suggest a framework focused on key areas in need of reform, as well as key conditions that will facilitate the achievement of reform objectives. The result is a richly developed case study revealing Ukraine's main strengths as well as obstacles limiting the improvement of its military capabilities.

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is pleased to publish this monograph, originally commissioned as a paper for the 2006 conference "The U.S. and Russia: Regional Security Issues and Interests," conducted with the University of Washington's Ellison Center for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies; the Pacific Northwest Center for Global Security; and the Institute for Global and Regional Security Studies.

  
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## SUMMARY

Ukraine's geopolitical location positioning it firmly between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to the west and Russia to the east has demanded that its foreign and security policy take into account its interests in the east and the west. The pro-reform forces in power since the Orange Revolution would like to move Ukraine squarely into the Euro-Atlantic community with only limited deference to Russia in matters where Ukrainian dependency remains unavoidable. Political forces favoring a more neutral stance between east and west or openly in favor of leaning eastward remain formidable. Russia's astute deployment of its national instruments of power in support of these forces will loom large into the indefinite future.

### **The Need for Radical Reform – Key Areas.**

Key areas in need of radical reform include the quality and degree of intragovernmental coordination and improving the expertise of civilian defense bureaucrats, along with adapting Soviet era military experts to the new security environment and democratic political system. Other areas requiring priority attention and resources are the creation of a rational defense planning system and the revamping of personnel policies in accordance with the needs of a professional and expeditionary force.

Reform may take place unevenly across the various governmental institutions depending on the level of democratization, especially with regard to transparency, accountability, and, in the case of the

security sector, the introduction of effective civilian democratic control. The Ukrainian political and military leadership has remained divided over the question of whether Ukraine should pursue a collective security approach or retain its neutral status.<sup>1</sup>

A key pillar of defense reform is the creation of a rational defense planning system. The essential ingredients of such a system include a coherent articulation of national interests within national security documents, defense programming processes that adequately match resources with requirements, and the systemic ability to choose among competing priorities using long-term planning timelines.

Ukraine embarked on independence with 0.9 million Soviet troops stationed on its territory. Significant downsizing occurred, but by 2004 the remaining force of 355,000 “matched neither the requirements of the military-political situation in the world nor the country’s economic capabilities.”<sup>2</sup> The 2004 *Strategic Defense Review* (SDR) recommended adopting a rational defense planning system linking objectives to an economic basis of reform.

Fundamental transformation of personnel systems has eluded most post-communist militaries and been a major cause of these armies’ lack of capabilities. Ukraine’s distribution of officers is cylindrical rather than pyramidal, reflecting the fact that there are still far too many senior officers in proportion to junior officers. The White Paper lays out the objective of moving toward a normal-curve distribution, while interjecting a Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps and contract professional soldiers into the mix alongside the conscript pool. Conditions attracting appropriately educated civilians to serve in the Ministry of Defense (MOD) are also lacking.<sup>3</sup>

Military education is another area in need of radical reform. The communist era system must adapt not only to the vast ideological changes that occurred within the state, but also overhaul curriculums to educate officers to perform within the post-Cold War threat environment in multinational coalition or alliance operations. Overall, the military education system is characterized by the side-by-side existence of two standards—NATO and Soviet—causing systemic tension and a continued waste of resources.

### **Achieving Radical Military Reform – Key Conditions.**

Some conditions have emerged as key factors for beginning the cycle of substantive reform, which may lead to improved capabilities through systemic and integrated change.

- Political will to undertake difficult reform and governmental commitment to dedicate a predictable level of scarce economic resources over a long period of time are the most essential factors required to facilitate the success of defense reform. The backing of key political leaders willing to appoint change agents in critical positions at the MOD and General Staff has proven to be a prerequisite to launching reform processes in the region. The Ukrainian armed forces have been on a starvation diet, recently receiving only 1.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Ukraine ranks third among NATO's 26 countries in terms of size, but 127th out of 150 countries worldwide in expenditure per serviceman.



- A country's national security documents play a crucial role in setting forth the state's strategic vision. Equally important is the quality of the strategic concepts being employed to effect change, that is, the reform plans themselves. Only reform plans that take an integrated and systemic approach have been effective in the region. Ukraine's *Defense White Paper* takes some important steps in that it lays out the essential parameters of an integrated and systemic approach to reform.
- In addition to political will at the top, strong leadership in positions of authority throughout the national security bureaucracy is necessary to move reform plans forward. Ukraine's current senior military leadership is thought to support the reform agenda and favor closer ties to NATO. Most senior commanders have pro-reform credentials, but there are still large numbers of senior leaders within the Main Defense Forces who have no or only limited exposure to Western training and operations.
- Cases that leverage external expertise have advanced more quickly in the reform process. The additional input of external leverage from NATO in the form of Alliance assessments, both before accession and after, has also been critical. In the case of Ukraine, long-term collaboration between Ukraine and NATO provided the political and military leadership with expertise essential to the development of reform concepts.

## The Way Ahead.

Ukraine has made tremendous strides toward its integration into the Euro-Atlantic community of states. The overall move toward the West is unlikely to be reversed, but Ukraine is still a divided society that is not yet at the stage of political, social, and economic development where a broad and deep consensus on Euro-Atlantic integration is possible. Ukraine's main strengths lie in its capacity to develop sound reform concepts and to back them up with the strongest level of political will evident since independence. Ukraine's greatest obstacles to reform are the prospect of indefinite underfunding of reform concepts and the lack of consensus beneath the top leadership within society as a whole and the military overall with regard to the reform agenda, both at the level of defense policy and in the overall orientation toward the West.

## ENDNOTES

1. "Armed Forces, Ukraine," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Russia and the CIS*, March 24, 2005, p. 18, [www.janes.com/Search/printFriendlyview.do?docID=/content1/janesdata/sent/cissu/](http://www.janes.com/Search/printFriendlyview.do?docID=/content1/janesdata/sent/cissu/), p. 5, accessed March 3, 2006.

2. *Ukraine's Strategic Defence Bulletin until 2015 (Defence White Paper)* Kyiv: Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.



# UKRAINE'S MILITARY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

## INTRODUCTION

Ukraine's geopolitical position lies firmly between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to the west and Russia to the east, thus demanding that its foreign and security policy take into account its interests in both directions. Maintaining its independence has been a consensus foreign policy objective since 1991, but the policy courses pursued to achieve this end and to determine the proper balance between Russia and the west have been more contentious. The pro-reform forces in power since the Orange Revolution of late 2004 would like to move Ukraine squarely into the Euro-Atlantic community, with only limited deference to Russia in matters where Ukrainian dependency remains unavoidable. Political forces favoring a more neutral stance between East and West or openly in favor of leaning eastward remain formidable. Russia's astute deployment of its national instruments of power in support of these political forces will loom large into the indefinite future. Meanwhile, the legacy of the Soviet past still has a great hold on Ukraine's political institutions, society, and bureaucratic culture.

This monograph examines the course of Ukrainian defense reform against the geopolitical backdrop outlined above. The experiences of Ukraine's former Warsaw Pact allies to the west in defense reform may offer lessons that could be applied in support of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The picture remains mixed in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland as the four states follow different roadmaps for defense reform. By observing the successes and failures in these cases, we can develop a credible framework for reform in the emerging Ukrainian case.

Ukraine's prospects for achievement of radical defense reform can be measured based on its performance across the key areas identified as essential in the Central European cases and based on the presence or absence of the key conditions proven to facilitate defense reform in post-communist Europe.<sup>1</sup>

## **THE NEED FOR RADICAL REFORM – KEY AREAS**

The legacy of Ukraine's authoritarian past as a Soviet republic continues to hinder development of its national security system. The current deficiencies can be traced to incomplete adaptation of Soviet era structures, decisionmaking processes, and methods of resource allocation. Key areas in need of radical reform include the quality and degree of intragovernmental coordination and increased receptivity to newly influential civilian defense experts, along with adaptation of Soviet era military experts to the new security environment and democratic political system. Other areas requiring priority attention and resources are the creation of a rational defense planning system and the revamping of personnel policies in accordance with the needs of a professional and expeditionary force. Developing a culture of accountability that puts national interests before personal and corporate ones and mobilizes national resources toward the achievement of a shared strategic vision are key steps that must be taken before Ukraine achieves its security goals and its sought-for place in the Euro-Atlantic security system.

## **Immature Intragovernmental Decisionmaking Processes and Poor Political Guidance.**

Research across post-communist Europe indicates that comprehensive reform has not yet occurred without first reordering the domestic processes for the conduct of national security.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, progress in the security sector is necessarily tied to the overall level of democratic development and transparency achieved in the transitioning state. Reform may take place unevenly across the various governmental institutions depending on the level of democratization, especially with regard to transparency, accountability, and, in the case of the security sector, the introduction of effective civilian democratic control. In the case of Ukraine, the nonmilitary structures of the security sector lag behind the military structures in their levels of democratization, remaining essentially unreformed since the early 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The armed forces, however, have benefited from substantial external influences, political attention, and better than average Ministry of Defence (MOD) leadership from the late 1990s to the present.

The strategic vision necessary for the achievement of radical defense reform is unlikely to result absent a consensus among the key national security actors and the population at large. The challenge is to develop capacities to formulate national security policy, coordinate joint responsibility within the government for national security affairs, realistically fund national security ambitions, and ensure that the oversight of national security actors and processes occurs. The stovepipe method of managing national security (and indeed all aspects of governmental affairs) inherited from the Soviet-era bureaucratic system has slowed the process of organizational change, impeded

organizational effectiveness, undercut the development of transparent and effective interagency processes, and acted as a formidable barrier to the realization of defense reform.

Ukraine's first attempts at military reform (1991-96) achieved little because they were undertaken within unreformed governmental institutions, lacked the proper legislative basis, were based on vague political objectives, and were formulated and implemented by bureaucrats with insufficient expertise to carry out the task. Because Soviet-style thinking still prevailed, these first efforts did little more than rebuild Soviet-style forces and structures aimed at meeting Soviet era threats on a smaller scale.<sup>4</sup> According to a study of Ukraine's armed forces by Oleksiy Melnyk and Leonid Polyakov, "It took years for the political and military leadership to realize that the Soviet military heritage of some 800,000 military personnel and thousands of tanks, personnel carriers, artillery pieces, and aircraft was more of a liability than an asset."<sup>5</sup>

Although Ukraine engaged NATO immediately after independence through the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1992 and was the first former Soviet republic to sign a Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework document in 1994, the Ukrainian government remained ambivalent concerning Euro-Atlantic integration until the Orange Revolution in late 2004.<sup>6</sup> Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk, appointed in June 2003, was regarded widely as a committed reformer and proponent of NATO integration, but Ukraine's aspirations for NATO and European Union (EU) membership remained simply declaratory under President Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) who was unwilling to back them up with a commitment to democratization.<sup>7</sup> This led to a degree of "Ukraine

fatigue” in the West due to the inconsistency between Ukraine’s actions and rhetoric.<sup>8</sup>

Various reform efforts in this period – the “State Program of Reformation and Development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine through 2005” (2000), “Concept for the Structure of the Armed Forces – 2010” (2001), and the “State Program of Transition of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Manning with Contracted Servicemen” (2002) – did not firmly orient Ukraine toward the West, did not focus on systemic reform, and were seriously underfunded. Even with the advent of increased political will, the capacity of the national security system to issue clear political guidance in the form of consensus-based strategic documents was still weak. As James Sherr noted, Ukrainian governance is poor because Ukrainian bureaucracy suffers from a serious lack of coordination. In Ukraine, transparency also is lacking because information is treated like a strategic commodity instead of a public good. Furthermore, resources must be devoted to creating the human resources needed for good governance in the defense sector and all other governmental sectors.<sup>9</sup>

The 2004 *Defence White Paper* was a “breakthrough document” for providing clear political guidance for defense reform.<sup>10</sup> This was the first strategic document since Ukraine’s independence that substantively assumed a future based on NATO integration. The White Paper concluded that Ukraine’s security depended on its strategy of integration into Euro-Atlantic and European security and cooperation structures, as well as future membership in both NATO and the EU.<sup>11</sup> The strategic defense review faced head-on the Soviet legacy pattern of spending the vast majority of the defense budget just to sustain personnel. In short, the comprehensive review represented a systemic,



resource-driven approach based on a reorientation of Ukraine force projection activities within the context of multinational formations and Western-led coalitions.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Kuchma cabinet neglected to fund the program adequately in its 2005 defense budget, indicating a lack of political commitment. Kuchma's team worked under the assumption that Ukraine might be able to slip into NATO without fundamentally transforming its political system and implementing difficult economic and security reforms.<sup>13</sup> Prior to the Orange Revolution, Kiev continued to receive poor marks from NATO for its failure to deliver on most governance-related reforms.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the reform-minded Defense Minister Marchuk was sacked several months prior to the December 2004 presidential elections due to suspicions that his loyalty lay with presidential aspirant Viktor Yushchenko and his opposition allies.

At the point of the Orange Revolution, then, Ukraine had rhetorically committed to the West while still courting Russia to the East. This balancing act made it impossible to issue clear political guidance committing Ukraine and its government firmly to the cause of NATO integration. The Ukrainian political and military leadership remained divided over the question of whether Ukraine should pursue a collective security approach or retain its neutral status.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Kiev's democratic shortcomings prevented the country from advancing its eligibility for NATO membership despite the depth of security cooperation with NATO and key NATO allies such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Yushchenko's ascension to power led to a more consistent pro-west and pro-reform message from the security and foreign policy team. Looking back

on the Kuchma years, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer remarked, "For several years, we found ourselves in the unusual situation of dealing with a Ukrainian leadership that sent very mixed messages with regard to NATO."<sup>16</sup> Commenting on the impact the Orange Revolution was having on the NATO-Ukraine relationship, he said, "Ukraine has clearly indicated that it wants to go along the long and winding road to membership. Given the fact that there has been a peaceful revolution, the membership standards can be much more easily fulfilled by the Yushchenko government than by the [former] Kuchma government."<sup>17</sup> Ukrainian political guidance has become less ambivalent and more clearly aimed at directing resources toward the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO lauded Ukraine's initiative to publish an annual White Book beginning in 2006 with the aim of communicating to the Ukrainian public and interested parties abroad the current state of the armed forces.<sup>18</sup> These documents have addressed the achievements and challenges related to implementing "The State Program of Development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for 2006-2011" (2006). To date these documents indicate trends toward further downsizing, continued rethinking of roles and missions, and increasing the proportion of professional contract forces.<sup>19</sup>

### **Rational Defense Planning.**

A key pillar of defense reform is the creation of a rational defense planning system. The essential ingredients of such a system include a coherent articulation of national interests expressed within national security documents, defense programming

processes that adequately match resources with requirements, and the systemic ability to choose wisely among competing priorities using long-term planning timelines. Making resource allocation decisions without effective defense planning processes necessarily leads to inefficient expenditures and makes it virtually impossible to achieve integrated defense goals over time.

Ukraine embarked on independence with 900 thousand Soviet troops stationed on its territory. Significant downsizing of this force occurred, but by 2004 the reduced number of 355 thousand still “matched neither the requirements of the military-political situation in the world nor the country’s economic capabilities.”<sup>20</sup> This bloated Soviet force commanded 85 percent of the defense budget simply to pay personnel costs. Only 3 percent was spent on procurement, less than 2 percent on research and development, and less than 1 percent on training.<sup>21</sup>

Lacking both the expertise to prepare and defend a budget and a defense planning system with the processes and transparency needed to ensure rational defense budget development and implementation, Ukraine experienced severe yearly mismatches between its minimal defense needs and actual budget allocations for defense purposes.<sup>22</sup> This situation led to a steady deterioration of military capabilities. Ukraine’s 2004 *Defence White Paper* summed it up:

Severe underfunding of military demands, slow reform process, rapid physical and moral degradation of armament and equipment, [and] insufficient level of personnel training prove the existence of [a] gap between the requirements and capabilities of the Armed Forces to provide Ukraine with reliable defence.<sup>23</sup>

A key precursor document, the *Strategic Defense Review* (SDR), was initiated in 2003 and completed the following year. The substance of the SDR will be discussed in greater depth later in this monograph. One of the 2004 *Defence White Paper's* most salient recommendations was to adopt a rational defense planning system linking objectives to an economic basis of reform. The *Defence White Paper's* authors explained that, absent an effective defense planning system, it would be impossible to efficiently optimize resources to meet defense needs. Indeed, they warned that perpetuating planning errors would lead to the breakdown of reform plans, thus discrediting the very concept of defense planning itself.<sup>24</sup> Getting such a system on-line remains crucial to Ukrainian reform. Planners are having to assume that savings garnered through the introduction of rational planning processes will underwrite reform since a significant increase in the defense budget is not politically or economically feasible.

### **Personnel Management Reform.**

Fundamental transformation of personnel systems has eluded most post-communist militaries and has been a major cause of the lack of capabilities on the part of their armies. Top-heavy rank structures consume defense budgets and prohibit the development of more rational structures that match needed skill sets and experience levels to the appropriate positions across the force. Colonels and lieutenant colonels still outnumber captains and lieutenants across the region by a hefty margin. All reform efforts aim to “right-size” the force by reducing the proportion of senior grade officers and increasing that of junior officers and NCOs. The

establishment of centralized personnel management systems that are capable of accessing, promoting, and releasing personnel on the basis of merit also is needed. Indeed, one of the challenges of piecemeal reform has been undertaking personnel reductions without the benefit of such a system.

Ukraine's distribution of officers is cylindrical rather than the customary pyramidal, indicating that there are still far too many senior officers in proportion to junior officers. In 2004, the ratio between officers and the overall strength of the armed forces was 1:2.6, close to one officer for every three enlisted members, which is approximately twice the rate of militaries of advanced democracies.<sup>25</sup> The White Paper laid out the objective of moving toward a pyramid-shaped distribution while interjecting an NCO Corps and contract professional soldiers into the mix alongside the conscript pool. The 2006 White Book reports that specific steps are being taken to correct this imbalance such as reducing the intake of officer candidates by 28 percent.<sup>26</sup>

Professionalization, however, is much more complex than replacing conscripts with paid soldiers. It also requires a reconceptualization of officer and NCO roles as currently practiced in the Ukrainian armed forces, along with conversion of present grade structures to accommodate junior, mid-level, and senior NCO positions.

Personnel management reform also includes issues related to the pay structure and assignment of soldiers. Some of the key hurdles of military reform in the region are the norms that governed these practices through the communist era. Soldiers were paid by position instead of rank, and officers did not regularly rotate to new geographic locations. Service on the General Staff was considered prestigious duty and paid more. It was not the norm to cycle General

Staff members from the capital to units in the field in a continuing rotation that assured an officer corps of broad experience and geographical exposure. Coordinating policies related to the compensation and benefits of soldiers with policies for reassignment and promotion entails a comprehensive overhaul of the outdated legislation now in place and present legacy management concepts.

The MOD readily admits that the Ukrainian personnel management system has yet to establish the legal basis for laying out a career path for professional soldiers. The assignment and promotion system does not select personnel based on specific requirements or the attainment of particular professional skills. Conditions attracting appropriately educated civilians to serve in the MOD also are lacking.<sup>27</sup> The MOD leadership has stated that implementing such a personnel management system is integral to reform efforts, and the 2006 White Book reports some gains in this area including a summary of draft legislation.<sup>28</sup> But actual achievement of such a system depends on overcoming formidable cultural resistance to the initiatives within the institution.<sup>29</sup> For the time being, the Ukrainian personnel management system will remain a mix between the Soviet legacy and first tentative steps to move toward western standards.

*Professionalization.* Recognizing that low pay and poor garrison facilities and accommodations will deter high-quality recruits from enlisting, the MOD has placed a high priority on modernizing selected facilities and raising the pay of contract soldiers so that it outpaces comparable civilian opportunities.<sup>30</sup> The MOD plan also features a two-tiered, mission-oriented structure for the armed forces that distinguishes between Joint Rapid Reaction Forces (JRRF) and Main Defense

Forces (MDF). This approach focuses on building three professional brigades (one army, one navy, and one air force), with training and personnel initiatives and increases in funding being directed to the first-tier forces. Contract soldiers, sailors, and airmen will man the professional brigades and constitute the forces that deploy in multinational formations for peacekeeping and other alliance or coalition contingencies.

The MDF will continue to make up the bulk of the forces and have a mix of contract and conscript personnel. Their mission will remain territorial defense. However, unless steps are taken to change current conscription policy under which 91 percent of the relevant manpower pool is exempt from military service, this majority element of the armed forces will continue to be of poor quality. Only 32.7 percent of the conscripts have finished secondary school, which makes them poor prospects for the advanced technical training necessary to serve in first-tier units.<sup>31</sup>

### **Leader Development and Military Education.**

Military education is another area in need of radical reform. In the communist era, military education was technically oriented and focused on the development of military specialists. The legacy communist era system must not only adapt to the vast ideological changes that have occurred within the state, but also overhaul curriculums to educate officers to perform in the post-Cold War threat environment in multinational coalition or alliance operations. Interoperability in officer development is an important ingredient for the success of these common endeavors.

Leonid Polyakov, now the Deputy Defense Minister, noted in a paper published months before the

Orange Revolution that “while some initial steps have been made . . . for the most part there has been no systemic review of curricula and training at military education institutions.”<sup>32</sup> Since then, analysts have noted that some progress has been made in the areas of joint service training programs and in initiating programs to train NCOs.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the National Defense Academy has established Multinational Staff Officers’ courses as well as Euro-Atlantic orientations.<sup>34</sup> English language courses for junior and mid-ranking officers have also been instituted.<sup>35</sup> Overall, however, the military education system is characterized by the concurrent presence of two standards—NATO and Soviet—causing systemic tension and a continued waste of resources. Rationalization of this system, a crucial catalyst for defense reform, has not yet matured.

One significant bright spot, however, was the decree of the new defense minister to recognize the diplomas Ukrainian servicemen earned abroad in such places as Britain, Canada, and the United States.<sup>36</sup> As is the custom in some post-communist militaries, these courses were not previously recognized. As a result, graduates had to repeat the courses at the appropriate level Ukrainian military school. The present MOD leadership is personally interviewing returning students from abroad in order to recommend their appropriate placement in the forces so as to leverage their education and experience.<sup>37</sup>

## **ACHIEVING RADICAL MILITARY REFORM— KEY CONDITIONS**

Defense reform in Europe’s post-communist states has been characterized by pockets of progress occurring side by side with legacy backwaters protected



by reactionary bureaucrats resistant to change and other niches actually regressing due to continued underfunding and lack of strategic vision. Poor policy decisions, especially in the form of costly acquisitions, have also set back reform programs. In the first decade after the collapse of communism, very few reform initiatives in the key areas treated here actually resulted in improved military capabilities. But since 2001, with the advent of initiatives to conceive integrated reform measures and to enact them, greater differentiation among the cases is increasingly becoming evident.

Field work in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland since 2001 has identified a set of key conditions that enable military institutions to break the cycle of ineffective reform. These conditions have emerged as key factors for beginning the cycle of substantive reform, which may lead to improved capabilities through systemic and integrated change. The more advanced Central European militaries are ahead of Ukraine in their reform accomplishments. Variations among the cases can be explained by the extent to which the key catalyst areas discussed in this monograph have been addressed. Variations are further explained by the extent to which the key conditions discussed in the next section of the monograph are present. Comparing these conditions with those present in the Ukrainian case will provide further insight on Ukraine's progress vis-à-vis its former Warsaw Pact allies to the West, all now potential NATO allies.

### **Political Will and Sustained Economic Resources.**

Political will to undertake difficult reform and governmental commitment to obligate a predictable level of scarce economic resources over a long period

of time are the most essential factors for the success of defense reform. The backing of key political leaders willing to appoint change agents in critical positions at the MOD and on the General Staff has proven to be a prerequisite to launching reform processes in the region.

Reform is also more likely to succeed if political commitments to defense funding hold firm. The best efforts feature at least mid-range defense planning, which assume steady percentages of gross domestic product (GDP) earmarked for defense. The failure to adhere to the planning assumptions may deal a significant blow to the implementation of integrated reform concepts. Sustaining political will across administrations and across budgets is another key ingredient for success.

The Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) decided on May 23, 2002, to seek future NATO membership. President Leonid Kuchma followed up the NSDC move with a presidential decree. Observers describe the marked policy shift as an effort to assert Ukraine's independence by building ties to the West in the face of Russia's aggressive policies toward Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> These proclaimed goals, however, were viewed by the West as declaratory rather than substantive, because the expressed commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration was not backed up by real movement forward on the democratization front or in the realm of defense reform.<sup>39</sup>

The Orange Revolution erased such ambivalence, as President Yushchenko clearly affirmed Ukraine's intent to join the alliance at the February 2005 NATO summit.<sup>40</sup> Yushchenko's defense and foreign ministers have been steadfast in arguing that Ukraine's NATO goal is "irreversible."<sup>41</sup> Although Yushchenko's Our

Ukraine party suffered a disappointing setback in the March 26, 2006, parliamentary elections, the majority of Ukrainians still supported politicians and parties with overtly Western and pro-reform policies. As long as a generally pro-Western coalition is in office, the Euro-Atlantic orientation is unlikely to change.

The depth of pro-NATO support required to sustain backing for the completion of costly and painful reforms, however, is still lacking. In the run-up to the March elections, parliament rebelled by voting down a bill that would have granted permission for foreign troops to enter the country for training exercises. The measure failed 226 to 215, reflecting the split in society over this issue.<sup>42</sup>

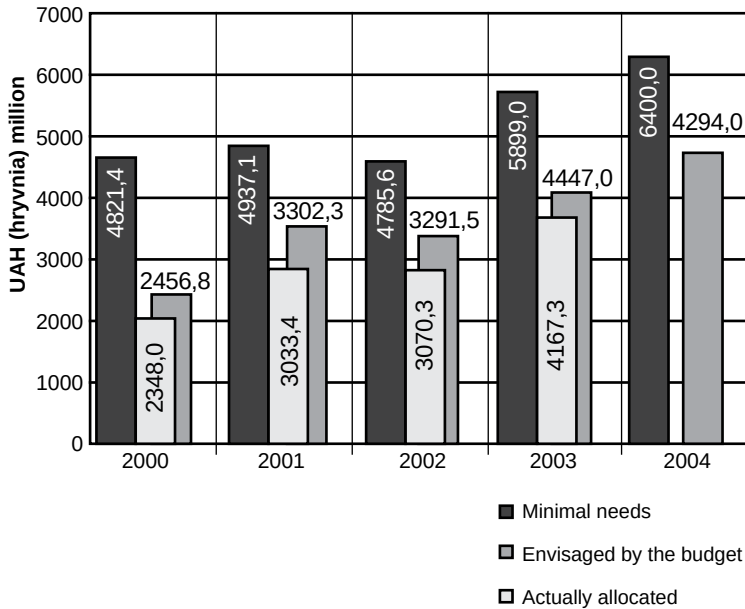
Only 30 percent of Ukrainians are in favor of NATO membership, a number that NATO will certainly want to approach the 50 percent mark before it would approve an actual Membership Action Plan (MAP) for membership for Ukraine.<sup>43</sup> Ukrainian Defense Minister Anatoliy Gritsenko attributes the low polling numbers to a “lack of knowledge”<sup>44</sup> about what alliance membership means. Russia, meanwhile, has capitalized on the poor polling data to support its efforts to keep Ukrainians from orienting westward. Chief of Russia’s General Staff General Yuri Baluyevsky crowed to *ITAR-TASS*, “[Seventy] percent of Ukraine’s population is against the idea of the country’s membership of NATO.”<sup>45</sup> He went on to add that NATO would be departing from its own membership criteria if it considered admitting such a candidate. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian MOD and foreign ministry continue to support the NATO education campaign through regular visits to regional towns and cities and the launching of a new publication focusing on Euro-Atlantic issues called *The Atlantic Panorama* to inform

the army and public on developments in Euro-Atlantic integration.<sup>46</sup>

As late as 2002, receiving only 1.3 percent of GDP, the armed forces were subsisting figuratively on a starvation diet. One strategic research group characterized the armed forces then as a “semi-privatized, corporatized entity, forced to raise almost 100 million dollars a year from ‘private economic activity’ – supplying business with labour,” resulting in “scandals over the sale of equipment and fuel, and the de facto secondment of military personnel as private security forces.”<sup>47</sup> In 2004, the year the *Defence White Paper* was published outlining Ukraine’s plan to reform its armed forces according to NATO standards, Ukraine ranked third among NATO’s 26 countries in terms of size, but 127th out of 150 countries worldwide in terms of expenditures per serviceman. Ukraine allotted the equivalent of 16 Euros per inhabitant for defense, while the United States spent 1,190; France, 453; and Italy, 235.<sup>48</sup>

The 2005 budget contained a significant increase for defense spending. The military budget rose by 22 percent (up to 2.41 percent of GDP) and included, for the first time, spending for military reform initiatives and new armaments. Yushchenko’s claim at the end of 2005 that the Ukrainian armed forces will actually receive the entire amount which they were supposed to be allocated is also significant. From 2000 to 2004, underfunding occurred at levels ranging from 35 up to 60 percent. Figure 1, taken from the 2004 *Defence White Paper*, depicts these funding levels.<sup>49</sup> The recent White Books report that the chronic problem of financing persists. In 2005 and 2006 the JRRF received only 54-56 percent of their planned funding.<sup>50</sup>

Although the right areas are being targeted to receive increased funding, e.g., safety, housing



**Figure 1. Ministry of Defence Funding Levels.**

construction, pay, and some new armaments, the overall budget is still insufficient to make significant gains in modernization, training, and other reform-related programs.

### **The Quality of Reform Concepts.**

A country's national security documents play a crucial role in setting forth the state's strategic vision. Equally important is the quality of the strategic concepts being employed to effect change, that is, the reform plans themselves. My research on the various practices of states in Central Europe points to the conclusion that only reform plans that take an integrated and systemic approach will be effective. Ukraine's 2004 *Defence White Paper*, as seen in the following excerpt, takes some important steps in

that it lays out at least the essential parameters of an integrated and systemic approach to reform:

The principal objective of the modernization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is the creation, on the basis of the 21st century challenges, of the armed forces which will successfully fulfill their incumbent tasks, effectively function in a democratic society, correspond to the economic potential of the state to support them, adapt for changes of forms and ways of warfare and be completely interoperable within NATO Forces.<sup>51</sup>

Earlier in 2004, Leonid Polyakov, while still working for the Razumkov Centre, had summed up Ukraine's effort to date as focusing on quantitative reductions instead of systemic transformation:

Current plans are still unrealistic. Technological advance means that the cost of military equipment for a given sized force doubles in price every 7-10 years, while the early stages of personnel reductions and all stages of professionalisation require considerable additional financial resources. Such factors have been ignored for many years in allocating funds to the national defence budget. As a result, even under the most optimistic scenario of economic development, Ukraine will not be able to afford 240,000 servicemen (as stipulated in the "Concept for the Armed Forces—2010") or even 180,000-200,000 (according to the latest declarations of the Defence Ministry) if it also wishes to meet its goals for maintaining a high level of combat readiness and developing professional Armed Forces.<sup>52</sup>

Ukraine's military reform concepts have now evolved, however, to the point where the key areas of reform have been identified. Top national goals include:

- Defense planning review;
- Defense planning procedures;

- Defense budget;
- Resource management;
- Defense reform and forces review management;
- Personnel management; and,
- Training and education.<sup>53</sup>

These broad goal categories track closely with the key areas of reform identified earlier in this monograph that emerged from my own cross-national research. This implies that Ukrainian strategists have some familiarity with regional efforts and have adopted much of the reform framework that NATO experts have offered in the close consultations that have taken place in recent years. Indeed, the 2004 *Defence White Paper* built on the framework earlier developed in the two principal policy blueprints, both cited above: “The List of the National Goals of Military Reform in Ukraine” and “State Program of Armed Forces Transition towards Manning on a Contract Basis.” Each was developed in coordination with NATO planners.

Differentiating between the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces, which have an expeditionary role, and Main Defense Forces, which have a homeland defense role, is an attempt to funnel scarce resources to the units that will deploy abroad. The growing competence of these externally focused units has been widely recognized. The drawback of this approach is that the MDF units are kept at low operational levels, with poorly maintained or nonfunctional equipment and manned by few professionals. Additionally, within the MDF, most battalion and company-sized units follow the same training and organizational procedures as they did in the Soviet era. This mix of leading edge reforming

units and lagging legacy units is an obstacle to reform because it allows major swaths of the armed forces to continue operating totally immune to the main reform principles.

Finally, it is important to note that although the reform documents identify the key areas for reform, these documents were created without the benefit of a national security strategy that would lay out the underlying strategic vision of the political leadership and the state's plan for leveraging all its instruments of power to achieve its political objectives. President Yushchenko called for the preparation of such an overarching strategic document in early 2006. The *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* was finally published in February 2007. It is a sweeping view of Ukraine's security interests calling for further reform of institutions essential to effective governance and economic development.<sup>54</sup>

### **Strong Leadership Atop the Bureaucracy.**

In addition to political will at the top, strong leadership in positions of authority throughout the national security bureaucracy is necessary to move reform plans forward. Strong leadership is requisite in the post-communist strategic bureaucratic culture where proactive, forward-leaning managers are scarce. Bureaucrats may be more accustomed to reacting to direct and explicit orders from superiors. In such an environment, the opportunities to resist and impede change are limitless and can be overcome only by strong personalities demanding compliance.

From 1991 to 1996, Ukraine had three Ministers of Defense and four Chiefs of General Staff, making it difficult to develop a consistent and forceful approach to reform.<sup>55</sup> Kuchma's main contribution to defense



reform was the appointment of Yevhen Marchuk to be Ukraine's sixth minister of defense on June 20, 2003. A former intelligence chief and Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, Marchuk was competent in national security affairs and respected in both the East and the West. A pragmatic centrist, his aim was to balance Russian influence with integration in NATO. During his tenure, Marchuk secured more funding for defense, began restructuring away from the Soviet model, and oversaw a comprehensive Strategic Defense Review which became the basis for the 2004 *White Paper*.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike his predecessors, Marchuk had the broad interagency experience, political skills, and executive ability to implement radical change.<sup>57</sup> He also was instrumental in securing governmental approval for the deployment of 1,600 Ukrainian peacekeepers to Iraq, which ranked as the fourth largest coalition contribution and ensured a strong strategic partnership with the United States. However, once President Kuchma understood that a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) would not be forthcoming in the short term without significant progress in the development of Ukraine's democratic institutions, Marchuk was sacked in favor of a more loyal political ally who could be depended upon to maintain Kuchma's oligarchic system.<sup>58</sup> While Marchuk got the MOD on track with the introduction of key reform concepts, no similarly reform-minded leaders were in place atop other elements of the national security bureaucracy, and the President did not fully back the MOD reform team's efforts.

Yushchenko's victory resulted in the installation of a team of reform-minded leaders throughout the national security bureaucracy. Razumkov Centre founders Anatoliy Gritsenko and Leonid Polyakov

assumed the key positions of Defense Minister and First Deputy Minister, respectively. This team was able to build on Marchuk's plans to reduce the force and benefited from Marchuk's efforts to bring more civilian experts to the MOD and his support for training Ukrainian officers at western staff colleges.<sup>59</sup> Gritsenko is a graduate of the U.S. Air War College, while Polyakov graduated from the U.S. Army War College. Their American war college educations, and their subsequent experience staffing Ukraine's leading think tank for national security issues, have provided Gritsenko and Polyakov with a genuine capacity for serious and relevant analytical planning.

Ukraine's current senior military leadership is thought to support the reform agenda and to favor closer ties to NATO. Most senior commanders, especially those associated with the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces, have pro-reform credentials. However, because of the present two-tier structure of the Ukrainian armed forces, large numbers of senior leaders within the MDF still have little or no exposure to western training and operations.

### **External Pressure and Advice.**

Comparative research indicates that where external expertise is brought to bear, advances in the reform process occur far more quickly. The additional input of external leverage from NATO in the form of alliance assessments, both before accession and after, has also been critically important. In the case of Ukraine, long-term collaboration between Ukraine and NATO provided the political and military leadership with expertise essential to the development of reform concepts.

In November 2002, the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan was adopted. The focus of the plan was fundamental reform of the entire security sector and strengthening the rule of law and democracy. Consequently, as we have seen, the Kuchma government did not make much headway in its implementation.<sup>60</sup> The action plan is implemented through detailed annual Target Plans. Under Defense Minister Marchuk's leadership, Ukraine scored some early high marks in the defense reform area, but received poor evaluations on the broader governance-related issues.<sup>61</sup> NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer remarked at a joint press conference with Kuchma at the 2004 Istanbul Summit, "We made it very clear the success of integration requires more than defense reform [, it also requires] a strong commitment to the highest values of NATO."<sup>62</sup> NATO responded to the positive political development of the Orange Revolution with the offer to launch an "Intensified Dialogue" with Ukraine aimed at focusing on five areas essential to continued progress in defense reform and to the consolidation of democracy.<sup>63</sup> The Intensified Dialogue falls short of a MAP, which implies that an offer of accession will be forthcoming upon completion. Until public and political support solidifies in favor of NATO accession and strides in good governance are more evident, the NATO-Ukraine relationship will likely plateau at this level for the time being.

Outside advisers, often made available as a result of specific bilateral agreements, have also played a critical role in defense reform. Such consultants have been able to contribute expertise that native members of the defense communities simply did not have, such as the drafting of foundational documents and amelioratory analysis of processes. In late 2004, the United Kingdom seconded a British Defense Ministry

civilian adviser, David Jones, to the Ukrainian MOD for a 2-year term to assist with the implementation of the 2004 *Defence White Paper*.<sup>64</sup> Ukrainian sources report that Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states actively participated in Ukraine's Strategic Defense Review.<sup>65</sup> Lithuania has provided experts to help Ukraine draft the first annual plan for MAP implementation and lobbied NATO to implement a MAP with Ukraine.<sup>66</sup> Lithuania and numerous other western countries have sponsored the education of Ukrainian officers at their military educational institutions. Poland is another strong advocate of Ukrainian accession to NATO. The United States has a robust security cooperation program with Ukraine featuring joint exercises, training, and education. Substantial foreign aid aimed at consolidating democracy is provided as well.<sup>67</sup> The United States is a strong proponent of eventual Ukrainian accession to NATO.

Participation with western armed forces in numerous operations and exercises is another valuable experience. Ukrainian units have deployed to the Balkans, contributed Antonov transport aircraft to NATO forces in Afghanistan, and contributed 1,650 soldiers to the Polish-led multinational force in southern Iraq.<sup>68</sup> More than 2,700 soldiers were participating in operations abroad prior to the pull-out of the Ukrainian contingent from Iraq at the end of 2005.

The role of Russia is an external factor absent in the other post-communist cases of Central Europe, but is highly important in Ukraine. Russia is adamantly opposed to Ukraine cementing its orientation to the West with NATO membership. Russia has not hesitated to use its power in a heavy-handed way, most recently by cutting off Ukraine's natural gas supply and demanding substantial increases in payments for Russian energy. Bilateral military ties continue,

although at reduced levels. Russia's Black Sea fleet is based in the Crimea on Ukrainian territory.<sup>69</sup> Soviet era procedures, equipment, and thinking are still prevalent throughout the armed forces. Russia will continue to use whatever leverage is available to counter Ukraine's march toward the West. Each step toward further integration with the West will have serious consequences for Ukraine's relationship with Russia.

## **THE WAY AHEAD**

Ukraine has made impressive strides toward its integration into the Euro-Atlantic community of states. Recent elections indicate that the overall move toward the West is unlikely to be reversed. The results also reveal, however, a divided society that is not yet at the stage of political, social, and economic development where a broad and deep consensus on Euro-Atlantic integration is possible. A pro-reform, pro-Western government can continue to make progress on overall governance issues, while the reform-minded leadership in the MOD and General Staff may be able to make headway on defense reform. However, democratic consolidation and its manifestation in transformed military institutions will not occur until the Ukrainian society is more unified toward this end.

Ukraine's main strengths lie in its capacity to develop sound reform concepts and to back them up with the strongest level of political will evident since independence. Ukraine's greatest obstacles to reform are the prospect of chronic underfunding of reform concepts and the lack of consensus beneath the top leadership and within society as a whole, and also within segments of the military itself, for the reform agenda – both at the level of defense policy and in the

overall orientation toward the West. Real movement on reform depends on an awakening of public consciousness that the Euro-Atlantic community and the NATO alliance system offer the best solution for meeting Ukraine's security needs. Admission to the Euro-Atlantic community also depends on the consolidation of democracy that will come only with the maturation of democratic institutions.

Until these elements come together, personal and corporate interests will continue to outweigh national interests, civilian control will remain incomplete, transparency will be limited, nepotism and corruption will hold sway, and a culture of accountability will elude the majority who seek it. Ukraine is likely to remain frozen "between East and West" for the indefinite future. However, many elements are in place to move Ukraine's political system, society, and security sector more firmly into the Western camp. As one scholar of Soviet era armed forces remarked recently, "The greatest achievement of the Cold War was the export of NATO's military model."<sup>70</sup> Military reform, when it occurs in Europe, is squarely along the lines of the NATO paradigm. This reality will necessarily influence Russia once its political and military leaders emerge from their post-Soviet era of reform intransigence. What remains to be seen is the final balance that will result as Ukraine's democratic institutions mature, its military evolves on the path of NATO integration, and its society's hybrid identity emerges with aspects of both the East and the West. The cumulative effect of the post-Soviet movement toward the NATO model in the management, training, and equipping of armed forces is an ongoing phenomenon worthy of continued observation, study, and, where feasible, gentle nudges from the West.

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