Conflict Studies Research Centre

Ukraine:
The Pursuit of Defence Reform
in an
Unfavourable Context

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Key Points

* Defence reform and Euro-Atlantic integration have been indivisible for a decade but now risk becoming decoupled.

* For the Armed Forces, NATO is the partner of choice. But most Ukrainians believe in non-alignment, and part of the opposition doubts that closer ties with NATO will promote democracy.

* Civilian democratic control is limited. The Armed Forces have kept aloof from politics, but answer primarily to the president and the opaque and politicised President's Administration.

* Defence Minister Marchuk is well-equipped to make essential reforms, but is hampered by political intrigue and distrust.

* Force reductions and professionalisation advance, but the latter needs to extend beyond salaries to training and career development.

* Dilemmas remain:
    * Despite Ukraine's part in the war on terror, it has received no clear quid pro quo from the West, and its Iraq deployment is unpopular at home
    * NATO still emphasizes 'reform', not membership
    * NATO's lack of firmness in the Tuzla dispute was deeply unsettling in Ukraine.

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Ukraine's Armed Forces are undergoing in-depth reform in a context of pervasive uncertainty. In significant measure, that uncertainty is socio-political. The Armed Forces are a core structure of a state in which power is grossly weighted towards a president who is widely distrusted by the country's citizens. Whatever reform has been achieved has depended upon the support, or at least the acquiescence of Leonid Kuchma and those who have gained his favour. The merits of what has been achieved, like so much else in Ukraine, have not been communicated to the population – which, not surprisingly, perceives that there has been little or no defence reform at all.[1] Civil society, whilst far from absent in Ukraine, is fragmented and resentful, and it has far more immediate and consuming priorities than the effectiveness and well being of the Armed Forces. In view of the fact that the President is required by the current (1996) Constitution to leave office and hold elections in autumn 2004, this is not a trivial matter. For the centre-right political opposition – which commands at least a plurality of support in society – the consuming priority is Ukraine's democratisation. In neither of the centre-right blocs are there many who have ties to the military establishment, let alone substantial sympathy for it. This, too, is not a trivial matter. Should the 'regime' survive under another name, the Armed Forces are likely to remain hostage to the intentions and whims of Kuchma's successor. Should a form of regime change take place, then the uncertainties of the Armed Forces are likely to be greater than they are now.

Yet the uncertainty is also geo-political. Defence reform has become the centrepiece – and the day to day business – of Ukraine's relationship with NATO: the one relationship between Ukraine and the West which, in the eyes of the country's authorities, has brought practical benefit to Ukraine. These authorities have used this relationship for both political and geopolitical advantage: politically, to muffle Western reactions to growing authoritarianism; geopolitically, to offset – and persuade the West that it is *determined* to offset – very powerful pressures from Russia and a powerful alternative dynamic of integration in the former USSR. But nothing is guaranteed in the NATO-Ukraine relationship. In the post-9/11 world, NATO has more pressing and more dire preoccupations than Ukraine. Whilst the mechanisms of working level cooperation between NATO and Ukraine are eminently sustainable in this new world, the political will required to move this relationship forward from 'distinctive partnership' to accession may not be forthcoming. The only fresh elements in this relationship in recent months are disturbingly asymmetrical: courageous steps by Ukraine to support Coalition activities in Iraq – activities that fall outside NATO but which are critical to its future – and renewed efforts by NATO to underscore the importance it attaches to democratisation in Ukraine. Thus, at a time when much of Ukraine's opposition perceives that NATO has underwritten an undemocratic regime, elements inside that regime perceive that it is exerting internal political pressure without offering any geopolitical compensation or reward. For at least ten years, Ukraine's 'full integration into

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Euro-Atlantic security structures' and defence reform have been indivisible pursuits. Should the two pursuits become decoupled, defence reform may lose its most powerful constituent, and reformers may find themselves marginalised by authorities who have marginalised so many others.

Civil-Military Relations

Any assessment of relations between society, political institutions and the Armed Forces is bound to be misconceived if it is not informed by a historical perspective. The Soviet Armed Forces was not only a military machine, but a social institution, which has left behind deeply entrenched attitudes about authority, society, national security and the role of the military in defending it. Its legacy is by no means entirely bad, but it is profoundly influential, and it both shapes and hinders progress.

In the USSR political control over the Armed Forces was at one and the same time pervasive, but narrowly focused. Through the Defence Council, the Chief Political Directorate of the Communist Party Central Committee and the 'special departments' of the KGB, the Soviet Politburo had mechanisms at its disposal which not only ensured the reliability of the Armed Forces, but their total obedience. Paradoxically, the very effectiveness of these mechanisms persuaded the Party leadership to entrust the Armed Forces with a dominant influence in military-technical decisions and accept its monopoly of military-technical expertise. This centralised, circular and assiduously compartmented system placed enormous power in the hands of the country's civilian leadership, but it was undemocratic and inculcated no sense of accountability to citizens or even to executive structures outside a tightly bordered and inbred network.

The positive side of this inheritance is that Ukraine does not possess an army of intriguers, and its military leadership has kept aloof from political struggle. The negative side is that the vacuum ceded by the Party leadership has been filled by the President. According to Leonid Polyakov of the Ukrainian Centre of Economic and Political Studies (aka Razumkov Centre), the President has issued over 300 decrees on military matters. According to the Constitution, adopted on 28 June 1996, he has every right to do so. The President is Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and other military formations; he directs national security and defence policy, appoints senior military commanders, establishes, reorganises and disbands executive structures and declares war, states of emergency and military mobilisation. Because he cannot possibly attend to all of these tasks himself, the Western observer would naturally assume that they fall within the day-to-day provenance of the Cabinet of Ministers and government, which is at least partially accountable to the parliament. At least one recent development – the establishment of a State Commission on Defence Issues in the Cabinet of Ministers – offers some hope of movement in this direction. But to date, many of the core tasks related to defence are still entrusted to the President's Administration, which employs approximately 600 people. Apart from the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), the President's Administration is not mentioned in the Constitution and is not accountable to anyone apart from the President himself. According to Article 107 of the Constitution, the NSDC is chaired by the President and 'coordinates and controls the activity of bodies of executive power in the sphere of national security and defence'. At times, it has had an impressive staff, and two of its three Secretaries have often exerted a strong, beneficial and widely respected influence.

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But their ability to do so depends entirely upon their relationship with the President.

In this *schéma,* the *Verkhovna Rada* (parliament) has a decidedly subsidiary role. According to Article 85 of the Constitution, the *Rada* has the authority to approve the state budget (including defence budget), but in the real world this is very different from the ability to scrutinise expenditure. Until recently, the budget presented had only nine categories (though a measure of progress since serious reform began is that it now has 30). Under the same article (paragraph 22), it also has the power to 'confirm' the numerical strength of 'the Armed Forces, the Security Service of Ukraine and other military formations', though in practice the numerical strengths and even the budgets of many of these other force structures are secret. The *Rada* also has the power to enact laws, and in the defence and security sphere it has enacted several highly detailed ones. Yet the influence of these laws on the actual programmes that define defence policy is limited, and the *Rada*'s input into these programmes (which have binding force but do not have the status of 'laws') has been virtually nil. The Programme of Armed Forces Reform and Development 2001-5 has been published – which is an immense step forward – but it was approved by the President, not the Parliament. Finally, the *Rada* has a Standing Commission on Security and Defence, but unlike committees of the US Congress and the House of Commons Defence Committee, the Commission does not have a standing corps of expert advisers. Whereas some members of the Commission are active, well-informed individuals who take their responsibilities seriously, this is not true of everyone, and it could not be said that the Commission has emerged as an effective focal point of opposition to the status quo. In sum, whatever the formal powers of the *Rada*, it has limited capacity. In contrast, the British Parliament and the House of Commons Defence Committee have relatively few powers in the defence sphere but a considerable influence thanks to a far greater contrast: the presence in the United Kingdom of an independent and critical mass media, a large, confident and active community of experts and an organised and articulate opposition which is able to draw upon these resources.

On the margins, the weakness of civilian democratic control in Ukraine is reinforced by a linguistic confusion, which Ukraine's NATO partners have unwittingly abetted. In the Ukrainian and Russian languages, the dictionary definition of the term 'control' (translated as *kontrol'*) is 'checking' or 'verifying', which in political-administrative terms connotes 'oversight' at most. Only when Ukrainians are exposed to Western practice do they grasp that our concept intrudes into other domains: *upravlinya* (direction), *zaviduvannya* (management), *keryivinstvo* (administration), *naglyad* (supervision), as well as *kontrol'*.

Until recently, this state of affairs suited the Armed Forces perfectly. For the majority of its commanders, and those of other force structures, civilian democratic control means control by an elected president, and that is exactly what Ukraine has. Yet thanks to the dynamics of defence reform – and, alongside it, cooperation with NATO – a growing number have come to appreciate that in a democracy (however limited) with a market economy (however distorted), defence policy will suffer if it is not the outcome of broad deliberation between executive and elected institutions: institutions that will be called upon to finance it and justify it. For the same reason, a growing number of people now understand that those who work in these institutions had better be knowledgeable than not.

Possibly, the most outstanding and influential example of this is Ukraine's current (and sixth) Minister of Defence, Yevhen Marchuk. Unlike all but one of his

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predecessors, Marchuk is not a military man, although he has long held the pro forma rank of Army General of the Security Services. Alongside his experience in the SBU, which he headed from November 1991 to July 1994, he has very broad interagency experience and was both a Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister of Ukraine. Marchuk also understands the two strategic sectors of Ukraine's national economy, energy and defence industry, and he understands the inner workings of the trans-national networks that dominate both. For this reason, he is well equipped to deal with the commercial networks and 'parasitical structures' that have grown up inside and in association with the defence establishment. For the same reason, he is able to talk to the heads of civilian ministries with authority and at least on equal terms. On one key issue, force reductions, he has already moved with despatch (albeit to the trepidation of much of the military establishment). He has also, in line with Euro-Atlantic practice, established a Department of Strategic Planning inside the MOD, headed by an astute and competent civilian, Andrey Semenchenko. This breadth of approach and inter-agency experience is something that a military minister, particularly a Soviet trained military minister, lacks. Yet it also reinforces other factors that remind the Armed Forces that he is not 'one of us': a vulnerability that political opponents (and hostile economic interests) can exploit.

Yet whatever lessons are learned in the defence sector, they will have only a limited impact on Ukraine's democracy and security unless they extend to the security sector. But for historical, political and institutional reasons, the learning curve is proving to be even less smooth there than it has been in the A rmed Forces. Again, the historical factors are highly relevant. Following the sanguinary, formative period of the Soviet state, the Soviet Armed Forces lost most of their internal functions. These were for the most part entrusted to substantial, highly militarised formations of the security services (the *VeCheka* and its successors) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The practice extended to guarding borders, whose first line of defence became the KGB subordinated State Border Troops, which by the 1980s had evolved into a heavily militarised force of at least 200,000.[2] This separation of the Armed Forces from the unpalatable and deeply politicised tasks of suppressing internal conflict and confronting their own citizens became part of its ethos, and it has contributed to the respect with which they were held by much of society. This tradition continues to be observed in Ukraine, and its positive effects continue to be felt. In Ukraine, only 11.9 per cent of the population express trust in the *militsia* (civil police), 11.8 per cent trust the courts and (before the tape scandals damaged their reputation further) 20.2 per cent in the Security Services (SBU). Yet 55 per cent have either 'complete trust' in the Armed Forces or are 'inclined to trust' them.

Yet this strict distinction between external and internal functions has a number of negative sides. For one thing, it reflects the inbred Leninist instinct of divide and rule and the fear of what might occur if the Armed Forces had a monopoly of force. This instinct and practice continue to flourish in post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine. Indeed, in both countries the proliferation of force structures has continued since the Soviet collapse, and it is even given legitimacy by Ukraine's Constitution which (Article 17) speaks of 'other military formations' alongside the Armed Forces – and maintains the Soviet distinction between the term 'military' (which can apply to any subordination) and the term 'Armed Forces' (often capitalised - *Zbroynyi Syly*) which can only be used to apply to armed services subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. Therefore, schemes of civilian democratic control confined to the Armed Forces will be dangerously incomplete and will do very little to diminish the gap between state and society.

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All of this needs to be borne in mind by Westerners who expect the *army* in Ukraine to be remodelled into an institution capable of addressing soft security challenges. To some extent, it must be, it can be – and to some extent, as we note below, that is what is taking place. Yet in the Ukrainian system, most of this burden is meant to fall upon other shoulders, and in principle there is nothing wrong with this, so long as those who perform these functions are well trained, well controlled and have no confusion about what state, what people and what scheme of values they are protecting. Ukrainian military professionals believe it is their primary task to provide armed defence of the country against external opponents. Although the focus today has shifted from general war to local and limited conflicts, the view that interstate wars have become a thing of the past and that current and future security threats will be transnational, internal or 'soft' would be disputed with conviction even by many of the most reformist Ukrainian military officers, all of whom could cite conflicts in the former Soviet Union, the Balkans and Iraq in support of their views. The fact that a strong element of corporate interest is present in these perspectives does not detract from their force or the conviction with which they are held.

Defence Reform

In Ukraine progress in civil-military relations has lagged well behind progress in defence reform. This is a telling contrast with recent members of NATO, most of whom were relatively swift in democratising the defence sphere, but often lacklustre and amateurish in addressing the conceptual, material and operational dimensions of defence reform.[3] Although Ukraine has significant accomplishments to its credit in this area, here too, progress needs to be measured against a Soviet rather than a NATO template.

Progress has come in two waves: post-independence, when it was most dramatic, and since December 1999, when it has been more methodical. In the post-independence period, the fact that troops of the Soviet Armed Forces, MVD Internal Troops and KGB numbering 1.4 million men were substantially reduced and thoroughly resubordinated – all of this without conflict and upheaval – was a contribution to European security second only to the country's unilateral nuclear disarmament. But it was an early and finite contribution, not an ongoing and dynamic one. Fortunately, two subsequent contributions have provided such a dynamic.

One of these has been the NATO-Ukraine relationship, which we survey in part two. The second dynamic was that launched by Ukraine's adoption of a radical, but coherent set of first principles about the country's security interests, its likely security threats and the type of military formations required to maintain security. Ukraine's first National Security Concept (1997) drafted by the analytical staff of the National Security and Defence Council under the stewardship of its Secretary, Volodymyr Horbulin, was a model statement of first principles. It assaulted the general war ethos by stipulating that in conditions where both state and society were weak, the prime security challenge would be to forestall and resolve local crises, emergencies and conflicts and prevent them from being exploited by actors (internal and foreign) with ulterior political ends. Proceeding from this analysis, the Concept identified 'the strengthening of civil society' as the first of nine security challenges for Ukraine.

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However, it has taken a considerable period of time to translate these concepts into practical programmes. In the first official stage of armed forces development (1991-96), Ukraine established the legislative basis, as well as the institutional and command structures for independent armed forces. It repatriated over 12,000 officers and warrant officers who refused to take an oath of allegiance to Ukraine (and absorbed 33,000 military servicemen from other parts of the USSR). It demobilised over 300,000 servicemen. It also disarmed the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, removing the last nuclear warhead from its territory by 1 June 1996. Yet at the start of the second stage (1996-2000), Ukraine's armed forces still were a bloated, grossly underfinanced establishment of 400,000, lacking an authoritative, coherent and realistic scheme of transformation and development. During this second stage (in 1997), Ukraine also adopted a State Programme of Armed Forces Development to 2005. This programme had its merits, but it did nothing to assault the general war ethos, which pervaded the military establishment and did not show much recognition of the country's severe economic constraints.

Not until the adoption of the State Programme of Armed Forces Reform and Development 2001-5 were steps taken to give these principles definite content. Imprecise and unrealistic as some of the Programme's aims and targets have been, they have been steadily revised under pressure of expert criticism and unforgiving economic reality. Between 2000 and 2002, the State Programme was supplemented by others, notably the Concept of the Armed Forces 2010 and the State Programme of Armed Forces Transition Towards Manning on a Contract Basis, designed to transform the 288,600 mixed conscript-volunteer force (as of 1 January 2003) into a much smaller all-volunteer force by 2015.[4]

In operational terms, the Programme mandated the establishment of a structure of command, operations and logistics that was truly joint and based upon the three Operational Commands (OC) (Northern, Western and Southern) originally established in 1998.[5] Over the five year period, they were to be transformed into structures capable of mobilising, commanding and supporting 'multi-component' forces in the tasks of responding to peacetime emergency, as well as preventing, containing and 'neutralising' armed conflict. In structural terms, the Plan called for a reorganisation of the Armed Forces into three components: Forward Defence Forces (comprising Strategic Conventional Deterrent Forces, Rapid Reaction Forces and Covering Forces), Main Defence Forces and Strategic Reserve Forces. As in the UK, this joint approach has not been intended to eliminate separate armed services (Ground Forces, Air Defence Forces, Air Forces and Navy) but to provide a radically different approach to conducting operations. Although the Soviet Armed Forces, too, had a combined arms structure, it only came into play above the tactical level. In Ukraine the combined arms focus now extends to sub-tactical and low intensity activity. This shift in emphasis is now reflected in training and education. Above officer commissioning level, education is now joint service and also includes non-MOD force structures.

Whilst very positive above this programme, NATO members of the Joint Working Group on Defence Reform (JWGDR) were sceptical about whether a number of its goals could be achieved within current institutional and resource constraints. For example, the General Staff and subordinate to them, the OC Commander, will have authority to command components of other force structures (eg Interior Troops and Emergency Situation Troops) outside peacetime MOD formations. But what mechanisms are being provided to create a common operational culture and a common basis of training in peacetime? Apart from points of scepticism, there were

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also serious points of criticism, not least with regard to the extremely modest force reductions mandated: from 310,000 servicemen and 90,000 civilians in January 2001 to 295,000 servicemen and 80,000 civilians in 2005. For all the merits in the Programme, it therefore did little to persuade the wider NATO community that reform would bring resources and capabilities into balance.

Today, this would be a less justified conclusion to draw. Under Army General Volodymyr Shkidchenko (who replaced Army General Oleksandr Kuzmuk on 24 October 2001) several of NATO's concerns were quietly addressed. Shkidchenko's successor, Yevhen Marchuk (who replaced him on 25 July 2003) has gone further and with greater boldness. Despite its focus on local war and low-intensity conflict, the State Programme envisaged equipment holdings vastly disproportionate to these requirements: 3,276 tanks, 4,203 AFV, 3,684 artillery pieces and 406 fixed-wing combat aircraft. In January 2002, Shkidchenko revised these figures downward by more than 30 per cent (to a maximum of 2,000 tanks, 3,500 AFV, 2,000 artillery pieces and 300 combat aircraft). To be fair to Shkidchenko as well as his predecessor, Kuzmuk, these totals reflected an estimate of how much could be sold on the international market, and both ministers envisaged further reductions over time. Shkidchenko also put in place a well planned scheme of base closures. A total of 43 military bases were closed in 2001. This expanded to 69 in 2002, and (as of October 2003), the total was projected to rise to 120.[6]

Building on Shkidchenko's plans, Marchuk authorised an establishment of 160,000 servicemen (and 40,000 civilians) in the Armed Forces by the end of 2005 (since amended to end 2006 - a reduction of 175,000 from the figures presented in the State Programme). As Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, Marchuk was also able to secure presidential and parliamentary backing for a substantial increase in the defence budget: from 3,541.2 mn *hryven* (UAH) (approximately $680 mn) in 2001, to UAH 4,282.7 mn (approximately $823 mn). Ukraine's harshest knowledgeable critic of its defence reform, Anatoliy Grytsenko (now President of the Razumkov Centre), concluded in 1999 that Ukraine's Armed Forces should not fall below 150,000 troops and that defence spending would need to rise to 2.5 per cent of GDP. Although defence spending is still no more than 1.8 per cent of GDP, projected totals will now fall very close to Grytsenko's minimum figure. In several spheres, training and combat readiness have also improved substantially. In 2003, Air Force pilots in the Rapid Reaction Forces flew an average of 90-100 hours per year (some four times greater than the average figure for the Air Forces in 1999), and graduates of the military aviation institute flew 130 hours.[7] But in the longer term Marchuk's two greatest accomplishments are likely to stem from his assault upon 'parasitical [commercial] structures' in the military establishment – a risky and possibly perilous task – and the Defence Review, set in motion by Presidential Decree No 565 in July 2003.

The Defence Review, due for completion in July 2004, has subjected the entire organisation of defence to painstaking and remarkably transparent review, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and experts in NATO, with whom all relevant data has been shared. Whilst not designed to overturn existing plans, it will certainly refine them and define the basis upon which they can be elaborated and implemented. For example, the State Programme called for 12 out of 13 divisions of the Ground Forces to be transformed into brigades. But without a rigorous assessment of inventories, infrastructure, personnel and costs, there is no definite way of knowing whether this scheme is the right one, let alone what its precise costs and collateral effects will be. The Review will revise plans and create a sound basis for further revision. In the view of NATO experts participating in the

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process, it will meet the standards of informativeness, transparency and realism found in the defence reviews of NATO member states.

The Review will also strengthen realism regarding professionalisation, a subject that generates mixed feelings in Ukraine and confusion in the West. Given the historical and economic factors that bedevil professionalisation in the post-Soviet context, the emphasis placed upon it in Ukraine is noteworthy. Although elements in the military establishment have, with reluctance, accepted this policy, formalised by the State Programme of Armed Forces Transition Towards Manning on a Contract Basis (2001), there has been no resistance to it. The number of professional ('contract') servicemen has risen steadily from 29,446 in January 1999 to 42,300 in October 2003, which represents 26 per cent of non-commissioned ranks. The aspiration (plan) is for this total to reach 50,000 by January 2005 and 70,000 by 2010, perhaps as much as 72 per cent of other ranks.

The reluctance that still exists in some quarters is, once again, the product of the Soviet legacy. The Soviet Armed Forces were a conscript force not only in fact but in ethos. To the Soviet officer, conscription is what gave substance to the principle of 'unity of Party, army and people'. For many senior Ukrainian officers, conscription is still seen as an institution tying the Armed Forces to ordinary people and making citizenship a meaningful term. Like their equivalents in the Russian Federation, many instinctively equate professionals with mercenaries and believe that there is something deeply immoral in 'hiring' soldiers to defend the security of their own country.

Today this perspective is not shared by most junior officers, who have learnt that conscription detracts from their own professionalism. First, they can see that in Ukraine as in Russia, the best and the brightest have the connections to evade military service. (According to one 2000 report, 'some 90 per cent of conscripts are either released from duty or enjoy postponement rights'.)[8] Second, the low quality of the conscript cohort that actually serves obliges many junior officers to perform tasks that in the British and American armies are performed by NCOs. To be sure, a long-term, technically skilled professional NCO corps on NATO lines, which is slowly coming into being in Ukraine, will gradually alleviate this burden, but the poor quality of conscripts pulls the whole system down. Society, too, does not share the views held by traditionalists. In a January 2002 poll, 33 per cent of respondents identified the professional soldier as a 'staunch defender of the native land and true patriot', 21.5 per cent identified him as 'a fighter who is able to perform the most complex tasks', 12.5 per cent described him as 'the present-day serviceman, but better maintained', and only 11.8 per cent equated him with 'a mercenary fighting for money'. In the same January 2002 UCEPS poll, respondents placed 'military policy' as the country's eighth national priority (2.4 per cent), well behind the first priority, 'economic policy' (32.9 per cent).[9] Both Ukraine's policy and its implementation demonstrate that the traditional view has not been upheld.

This is less remarkable than the fact that resources are being found for professionalisation and its corollary, force reductions. The budgeted costs for conscription are extremely low. In 2001 the budgetary cost of the conscript cohort was $6.5 million, roughly one-and-one-half per cent of the defence budget. Hidden costs (subsidies on food, housing and other support) drive these costs up considerably, but they are still low. As opposed to the conscript wage of $50 per annum, the salaries of *kontraktniki* (contract soldiers) are $50 per month. Reductions are also expensive, because if they are undertaken properly, they require base closures, and if they are undertaken legally, they demand the

retraining and resettling of officers, who can only be dismissed if they have civilian employment. Whilst the base closures are underway, resettlement is an enormous institutional and financial burden. Hence, there is the worrying possibility that the officer corps (already considerably disproportionate to the size of other ranks by NATO standards) will become a still larger proportion of the army as reductions are carried out. The equally worrying possibility is that professionalisation will not extend far beyond professionally attractive wages, whereas the real challenge is to provide an infrastructure for the continuous and progressive training regime and superior services enjoyed by NATO professionals, who have the skills and long-term motivation required by a technologically advanced force.

Even in summer 2003, the dynamics of modernisation, stagnation and decay were precariously balanced in Ukraine's Armed Forces. Today they are balanced rather more favourably and less dangerously. In 2002 Major General Valeriy Muntiyan, Assistant to the Defence Minister for Budget and Financial-Economic Activity, could state that without a radical revision of financial support, 'the Armed Forces have no more than five years until self-ruination'. Muntiyan's warning is certainly reinforced, and most dramatically, by the explosion of 900 wagonloads of munitions in Zaporozhzhiya region on 6 May 2004, which killed five citizens and forced the evacuation of 10,000. Ukraine possesses 184 storage sites prone to similar risks. Serious as these risks are there is nothing in the political or geopolitical context which provides a guarantee that the fundamental ills of the military system will be cured.

International & Transnational Influences

Ukrainians are very conscious of the fact that the country's strategic orientation has rarely depended upon its wishes. The political, military and security establishments of Ukraine proceed from the assumption that the country's geopolitical vulnerabilities will, over the long-term, act as a powerful constraint on 'the art of the possible'. As already noted, Ukraine is in a vulnerable geographical position between the Black Sea and seven neighbours. It is also a rear area of the Caucasus and the Balkans, and it has been subject to external pressure in both the Balkan and Chechen conflicts.[10] Moreover, its most influential and closest neighbour in terms of cultural affinity, the Russian Federation, is reconciled to Ukraine's independence *de jure* more than it is *de facto*. Until 2003, the Russian Federation officially refused to accept that the border between the two states should be demarcated; many of its official representatives speak of Ukraine as an 'ally' (thus refusing to recognise the country's non-aligned status), and Russian ministers have on several occasions referred to Ukraine's neighbour, Moldova, as a state bordering Russia. All of this, combined with a number of Russian actions (eg the use of Crimean bases to train troops for combat duty in Chechnya) creates the impression that respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, endlessly reiterated *pro forma*, does not fully conform to real Russian thinking and practice. More fundamentally, the Russian authorities see no contradiction between independence and 'integration'. The Treaty on the Single Economic Space, which President Kuchma signed (over the public objections of two of his own ministers and a number of senior officials) in response to Russian pressure and perceived EU coolness, establishes a series of undertakings contrary to Ukraine's long-standing official goal of joining the European Union, and the EU has stated as much itself. The basing of the Black Sea Fleet, as well as its air, intelligence and naval infantry components in Crimea (until at least 2017) adds to other concerns that Ukraine could be involuntarily drawn into conflict with third parties.

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A clear majority of Ukrainian citizens believes that non-alignment is indispensable to good relations with neighbours, as well as political stability. Within the political establishment, an influential number of avowed 'centrists' have gone two steps further: favouring a large measure of economic integration with CIS countries and security integration with the West. Since Leonid Kuchma was elected President in July 1994, Ukraine has therefore pursued a 'multi-vector policy', with shifting degrees of emphasis accorded to each vector in response to internal and international circumstances. In this context, the NATO-Ukraine relationship – put on a solid footing when Ukraine joined Partnership for Peace (PfP) in February 1994 and enhanced by the signing of a Charter on a NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership in July 1997 – has had a unique importance.[11] Despite the Russian factor, the relationship has continued to be firmly supported by President Kuchma who, like most centrists and much of the left, does not wish to see the de facto primary vector, Russia, become the sole vector influencing Ukraine's choices and development.

Despite growing Russian influence and the deep controversy aroused by NATO's intervention in Kosovo, the relationship has taken on a more intense and practical form since President Kuchma decreed the start of the latest defence reforms in December 1999. If prior to 1999, it was first and foremost a political relationship, cemented by a web of military-to-military contacts, it is now at least as much a military-technical relationship. Whilst today perhaps even more than a few years ago, NATO is seen as an essential counterweight to Russia, today there are far fewer hopes that NATO can serve as Ukraine's primary vehicle for 'entering Europe', as the role and requirements of the EU are well understood, even if they are understood in sullen and resentful terms. Whatever the NATO-Ukraine relationship brings in geopolitical terms, its day to day business, in the words of former Minister of Defence, Army General Oleksandr Kuzmuk, is 'supporting defence reform in the country'.[12]

Although a majority of influential players see Russia as the prime partner in defence industrial collaboration – and here perhaps more by necessity than by choice – no one of significance in Ukraine's military establishment believes that Russia should be the partner of choice in carrying out defence reform.[13] First, in all the areas where progress is sought – low-intensity operations, joint operations, professionalisation, planning and budgetary transparency, civil-military collaboration – NATO is seen as the repository of experience and expertise. In contrast, Russia's inconsistent and internally contested reforms offer a poor model, and the performance of Russian combat forces in Chechnya does not lend itself to imitation. Second, Russia's aims are mistrusted and its methods regarded with suspicion. As noted by three specialists in *Zerkalo Nedeli*:

> An indicative example [of the wrong] approach is provided by the Agreement between Ukraine and Russian concerning the conditions regulating the basing of the Russian Federation Black Sea Fleet on Ukraine's territory. Up to now, neither the Ukrainian public nor the parliamentarians of Ukraine have seen the full text and conditions of this extremely important document for Ukraine and its future.[14]

A different but complementary point is made by Leonid Polyakov, Director of Military Programmes of the Razumkov Centre:

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> So far, Russian officials, unlike NATO's, have never voiced their concern about the weakness of Ukraine's defence or the slow pace of its military reform. One might infer that Ukraine's problems in building its Armed Forces are simply more acceptable to Moscow than Ukraine's success in that area.[15]

In contrast, it is obvious that NATO seeks to develop Ukraine's institutional capacity, rather than undermine it, and it is also obvious that NATO is less keen on integration than Ukraine is itself.

NATO's role is institutionalised by several mechanisms unique to the NATO-Ukraine relationship. The principal mechanism, the NATO-Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform, was established under the Distinctive Partnership, but energised by the State Programme. Within this framework, cooperation has now moved beyond the formal exchange of ideas to a scheduled process of audit and consultation. In 2001 Ukraine became a fully active participant in NATO's Planning and Review Process (PARP): a PfP programme requiring each participating country at regular intervals to supply NATO with a detailed inventory of its military assets and, jointly with NATO, identify real costs, as well as capabilities in short supply or surplus to needs. Several additional mechanisms (eg, the NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv) have also been devised to facilitate cooperation.

Since the 23 May 2002 declaration (defining NATO membership as the 'ultimate' goal of Euro-Atlantic integration), the relationship has taken an additional step forward. This declaration represented a radical change of policy, for up to that point policy had been predicated on non-alignment and, hence, a firm (but not always clear) distinction between 'integration' with NATO and membership of it. Because of its 'long-term' focus, the NSDC's declaration was not accompanied by an official Ukrainian application to join NATO. Because the declaration emerged at a time when President Kuchma's relations with most NATO governments had reached an impasse – and because NATO makes decisions by consensus – NATO did not issue Ukraine with an invitation to submit a Membership Action Plan. Yet both sides grasped that the moment had to be captured and exploited. The NATO-Ukraine Action Plan was the result.

As an officially Ukrainian document, drawn up in consultation with NATO and approved by the NATO Council in Prague (22 November 2002), the Action Plan represents the definitive statement by both parties about what Ukraine must do to achieve its goal of 'full Euro-Atlantic integration'. It is an ambitious document with a clear message: it is the country, not the army that joins NATO, and the state of the country will be the principal benchmark that NATO will use to assess Ukraine's progress. This should be sobering and possibly unwelcome news to those tempted to use cooperation (eg, the dispatch of the 1,600 strong Ukrainian military contingent to Iraq) as a substitute for in-depth internal change. Valued as this cooperation is, here, too, the message is clear: in itself, political-military cooperation will merely prolong the status quo, under which the 9 July 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, rather than membership, 'remains the basic foundation of the NATO-Ukraine relationship'. However the political dimension of the Action Plan might be interpreted by President Kuchma and his key allies, the military dimension is being addressed with due seriousness, as are the mechanisms set out for NATO consultation and review, notably Annual Target Plans, designed to establish a scheduled and measurable sequence for the Action Plan's implementation.

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In today's post-9/11 world, three politico-military dilemmas are felt acutely inside Ukraine. First, the focus of the United States and other key NATO players on the 'war on terror', the war in Iraq – and the buffeting that trans-Atlantic relations have suffered as a result of the two – almost guarantees that Ukraine will occupy a diminished role in their scale of priorities. But by how much? There is surely no comfort to be derived from the possibility that one of the corollaries of the war on terror – greater interest in energy partnership with Russia – might diminish the inclination of the West to challenge Russia's increasingly assertive claim that the CIS is its 'zone of special interests'. In response to these anxieties, the natural impulse is to demonstrate Ukraine's usefulness both in the war on terror and the war in Iraq, as demonstrated by the decision to deploy the Coalition's fourth largest military contingent to that country.

This gives rise to the second dilemma. The Iraq deployment is highly unpopular in Ukraine. Until 9/11 Ukraine faced no significant threat from terrorism. Indeed, the relative absence of such a threat – which has plagued Russia since the start of the second Chechen war at least – has reinforced wishes to live in a 'normal' country and neither return to Russia's fold nor share its burdens. Yet a growing number of people are now asking whether Ukraine's complicity in US policy is exposing the country to the very threats that it has long avoided. Thus, many radical democrats (eg, Yulia Tymoshenko) can agree with Communists that Ukraine's love affair with NATO is unrequited, that it has put lives on the line for interests that are not its own, and that Ukraine has received nothing tangible in return.

This dilemma has an affinity with a third. NATO is a collective defence organisation. Ukraine has based its policy and planning on the assumption that it might – and most probably will – be obliged to defend itself. National armed forces 'closely resembling Euro-Atlantic standards and practice' were already a stated aim of the State Programme 2001-5, yet these forces were designed to act independently and, if necessary, alone. Even before the adoption of this programme, Ukraine made a noteworthy if finite contribution to collective defence by assigning contingents of forces to NATO-led peace support operations – indeed by 2003 over 20,000 Ukrainian servicemen had served in peace support operations under the aegis of NATO or the UN. Yet this did not diminish the emphasis on self-reliance. To what extent should this orientation change in the absence of hard assurances that the Action Plan will be followed by Membership Action Plan and, in the foreseeable future, membership? Will even membership provide a substitute for national defence? The fact that NATO sees little contradiction between national defence and collective defence may assuage anxieties, but will not quell them.

The third dilemma stems from the fact that Ukraine's defence programmes were drawn up in the pre-9/11 world and prior to the latest, more ambitious phase of Russian policy. In October 2003, the Russian Federation set out unilaterally to resolve a long-standing border dispute in the Sea of Azov by constructing a causeway under the protection of Ministry of Emergency Situation troops in the Kerch Strait – without, incidentally, incurring any public reproach on the part of NATO.[16] This action, and the lack of a NATO response, has had a deeply unsettling effect in Ukraine. Since 2000, the justification put forward by Ukraine's MOD for force reductions has been twofold: economy and the nature of the threat. Is it now necessary to revise these assumptions?[17]

The calm and considered answer should be no – and for two reasons. First, it is wrong to equate economy with impoverishment and force reductions with a less

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capable force (as many Ukrainians military officers still do). Both NATO and at least two Ukrainian Ministers of Defence have regarded modernisation, quality and force reductions as a seamless whole. What would rescue a force of 288,000 other than an economic miracle in the country?

Moreover, in what way does the Tuzla crisis refute long-standing threat perceptions? From at least 1997, these threat perceptions have emphasised the 'combination of factors' linking Ukraine's internal weaknesses and its vulnerable geopolitical position. Although total war has been removed from the official lexicon, official thinking has not minimised the likelihood of local war, let alone the potential for relatively small conflicts to escalate in intensity and in geographical scale. As Marchuk's predecessor, Army General Volodymyr Shkidchenko stated in 2002: 'the probability of a large-scale and prolonged war is low. Ukraine has no enemies to wage a total war, and ... one should not expect the appearance of such enemies in future'.

But he preceded this statement by noting that 'transient, limited, possibly very fierce local interstate conflicts' remained possible. As long ago as 1997, the General Staff determined that the role of Armed Forces in this schéma would be to 'set up a zone which would make it possible to direct or influence the processes occurring outside it': a formula certainly applying to 'processes' in a neighbouring country. How is this schéma in any way irrelevant to the Tuzla crisis? It would seem to be tailor made for it.

Ukraine is accustomed to complexity, and these are complex dilemmas. But that is not to say they will be resolved to Ukraine's advantage, or even NATO's, if they are not treated with respect and understanding by Ukraine's partners.

ENDNOTES

[1]   According to a poll of the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, 40.4 per cent described information about defence reform as 'insufficient', 39.6 per cent believed that 'we are actually barred from trustworthy information', and only 4.4 per cent believed that a 'planned process of reform' was taking place. Andriy Bychenko, 'Ukrainian Citizens about their Army', National Security and Defence, (Kyiv), 1 (2002), 40.
[2]   Even the most knowledgeable sources disagree over the numbers involved, see Gordon Bennet, 'The Federal Border Guard Service', CSRC, C107, March 2002, p13.
[3]   See for example, James Sherr, 'NATO's New Members: A Lesson for Ukraine? The Example of Hungary', CSRC, G86, September 2000.
[4]   The total number including civilian personnel stood at 382,200 in January 2003, down from 405,200 in January 2002 and 415,800 in January 2001.
[5]   Unlike the Military District in the USSR, which was a territorial-administrative formation without command responsibilities, the Operational Command is 'a permanent operational and strategic formation assigned operational and mobilisation missions ... responsible to defend territory and provide logistic and other support to forces in its sector regardless of their subordination' – and do so not only in war but 'conflicts of various intensity'.
[6]   Ukraine's MOD defines a base as 'a military object (unit, centre, etc) with supporting infrastructure'. It would appear that here, as in general Ukrainian and Russian usage, the term 'object' (ob"ekt) corresponds to the English language term 'facility'.
[7]   Yevhen Marchuk interview with BBC World Service Ukrainian Section, 9 December 2003, 'Challenges and Answers: Why Ukraine Needs Military Reform'.
[8]   National Security and Defence, No 1 (2000), 10-12.
[9]   Mykola Sungurovskiy, 'Military Reform: Progress Against a Background of Stagnation', *op cit*, 59.

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[10]   Russia's dispatch of a 'humanitarian' convoy to Yugoslavia (halted on the Hungary-Ukraine border) in April 1999, its redeployment of the intelligence ship *Liman* (and initial preparation to redeploy other vessels) from Sevastopol to the Adriatic and its plans to transit Ukraine with Airborne Troop reinforcements after the 'brilliant dash to Pristina' in June 1999 provoked anxiety and, in some quarters, alarm. For a more comprehensive discussion, see James Sherr & Steven Main, Russian and Ukrainian Perceptions of Events in Yugoslavia, CSRC, F64, May 1999, pp2, 17-24.

[11]   More than 500 bilateral activities are scheduled between NATO Allies and Ukraine in 2001, as well as 250 multilateral activities with NATO.

[12]   Statement to the NATO-Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform, October 2000.

[13]   The number of Ukraine-Russia activities has gradually risen every year from 28 in 1998 to 52 in 2000. But this puts it on a par with Poland and at about 60 per cent of the Ukraine-UK level.

[14]   Eduard Lisitsyn, Rustem Dzanguzhin, Aleksandr Goncharenko, 'Civilian Control and the System of National Security of Ukraine' [*Grazhdanskiy kontrol' i sistema natsional'noy bezopasnosti ukrainiy*], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, No 35 (410), 14-21 September 2002.

[15]   Leonid Polyakov, National Security and Defence, No 12, 2000, p15.

[16]   At the height of this crisis, Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov spoke of the necessity to remove (*ubrat*) Ukraine's border troops and the Chief of the President's Administration went so far as to state that if Ukraine resisted, Russia should 'drop a bomb'.

[17]   At least one respected commentator has called for a reconsideration of the fundamentals of defence policy and seriously to 'contemplate forceful resistance to a state whose military potential significantly exceeds that of Ukraine'. Valentyn Badrak, 'The Right to Use Force' [*Pravo na silu*], *Zerkalo Nedeli* [Mirror of the Week], 10 November 2003.

A version of this article will appear in a special edition of *European Security*, forthcoming.

Want to Know More …?

See: James Sherr, "*Another Ukrainian Minister of Defence*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, G98, July 2003, http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc

James Sherr, "*New Documents on Ukraine's Security Policy: A Sound Basis for Action?*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, G121, June 2003, http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc

Ben Lombardi, "*A political Minuet in Kiev*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, G123, July 2003, http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc

James Sherr, "*Strengthening 'Soft Security': What Is To Be Done?*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, M31, June 2003, http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc

James Sherr, "*Transforming the Security Sector in Ukraine: What are the Constraints? What is Possible?*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, 04/07, April 2004, http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc