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# General Zhukov and the Cyborgs: A Clash of Civilisation within the Ukrainian Armed Forces

by Rosaria Puglisi

## ABSTRACT

The eruption of war in the Donbas has brought under everyone's eyes what has been evident to Ukrainian defence analysts for years: undertrained, underequipped and underfunded, the Ukrainian army would be hardly capable to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The uncertain conduct of operations and the tragic defeats suffered by the Ukrainian forces have highlighted a growing rift within the political and military leadership. A clash of civilisation has become evident within the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff. It is a clash between a Soviet-style resource management and operation planning, and a more open and horizontal approach. Against the background of a dramatically altered security environment, the modernisation of the Ukrainian army and the finalisation of the unfinished defence reforms are urgent, not only in order to guarantee the country's security, but also within the framework of the consolidation of democracy in post-Maidan Ukraine.

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by Rosaria Puglisi*

## Introduction

The unexpected eruption of the war in the Donbas has brought under everyone's eyes what has been evident to Ukrainian defence analysts for years: undertrained, underequipped and underfunded, the Ukrainian army would be hardly pushed to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Setting aside the uneven task of countering a hybrid war with Russia, the Ukrainian armed forces have suffered for years from what the 2012 Strategy of National Security termed "continu[ed] deterioration," a source of potential threat to the country's security.[1]

Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union a large and inefficient army, which was generally unfit to satisfy the security needs of the newly independent state. Placed on the agenda since the very early days, defence reforms have been ongoing in a partial and scattered way for many years, but have never really been concluded. From this point of view they resemble – as a Ukrainian defence analyst called them – a *dolgostroi*, or permanent building site. Though construction starts, stops, is resumed, it is never really completed, and substantial changes have been haphazard and not necessarily coherent.[2] Having lost out against the police and the Ministry of Interior in the permanent competition for the allocation of budget resources, the armed forces have seen their capability gradually decline. A source of patronage

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[1]  Philipp Fluri, Marcin Koziel and Andrii Yermolaiev (eds.), *The Security Sector Legislation of Ukraine*, Kyiv, Center for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies, 2013, p. 128, http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/The-Security-Sector-Legislation-of-Ukraine2.

[2]  Oleksiy Melnyk, *Security sector reform and democratic control over the armed forces*, Paper presented at the SIPRI conference "Promoting Ukraine's integration into European Security Cooperation", Stockholm, 21-22 June 2010, http://www.sipri.org/research/security/old-pages/euroatlantic/ukraine/papers/SIPRIUkraineMelnyk.pdf.

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and rent-seeking for top officials, the army has witnessed the proliferation of imaginative corruption schemes that have hollowed it from within and further undermined its effectiveness.

It is therefore not a surprise that, when the security situation in the Donbas started deteriorating, hostilities degenerated into an armed conflict, and the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) was launched on the Ukrainian side, the Ukrainian army was not combat-ready. The defence of the country was quickly set up thanks to volunteer battalions and the few National Guard and police special units that were somehow able to deploy. Yet, the uncertain conduct of operations and the tragic defeats suffered by the Ukrainian forces in Ilovaisk, the Donetsk Airport and Debal'tseve have sparked huge controversy in the country and highlighted a growing rift within the political and military leadership. A clash of civilisation has become evident within the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff, between a Soviet-style of resources management and operation planning, on the one hand, and a more modern, open and horizontal approach, on the other. A conflict has emerged between the old-fashioned "General Zhukovs," as a former deputy minister of Defence characterised them, and the Cyborgs, as the public ended up calling the Ukrainian defenders of the Donetsk airport.[3]

Acclaiming the heroism of the soldiers and the middle-ranking officers of both formal military structures and volunteer battalions, while castigating the incompetence and questioning the loyalty of senior military staff, has become a permanent feature in the public debate on the war. The outcome of combat operations has displayed the systemic lack of strategy, central control and coordination, weaknesses in the gathering and analysis of intelligence, poor situation awareness, and a distinct lack of leadership in the decision-making process. The effectiveness of the Ukrainian forces on the ground has been often ascribed to the skills and efforts of local commanders rather than to a well-oiled structure of command and control. Fighting with obsolete weaponry, often under-equipped and under-protected, and at times insufficiently trained, military officers have demonstrated the long-term defence shortcomings of a country that as late as 2012 had rated as "unlikely" the medium-term possibility of an armed aggression resulting in a local or regional war.[4]

Against the background of a dramatically altered security environment, the modernisation of the Ukrainian army and the finalisation of the unfinished defence reforms have become urgent. As an early draft of the National Security Strategy currently under review reveals, the Ukrainian leadership understands the need to set

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[3]  General Georgiy Kostantinovich Zhukov, Marshall of the Soviet Union, is the most decorated Soviet military officer. Talented in both operational and strategic command, he led the Red Army in the liberation of the Soviet Union during World War II. Former Deputy Minister of Defence Igor Kobanenko used Zhukov's name to epitomise an old fashion, Soviet-style attitude to leadership and command still surviving in the Ukrainian army. Author's interview, Kyiv, 4 February 2015.

[4]  Philipp Fluri, Marcin Koziel and Andrii Yermolaiev (eds.), *The Security Sector Legislation of Ukraine*, cit., p. 141.

in place a "new model of national security."[5] This should not only equip the country to handle the Russian occupation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, which are likely to draw military resources for years. A new vision of national security should also protect Ukraine against what the country has become so painfully aware of: the risks deriving from the "absence of reliable external security guarantees."[6]

While the internal debate is still open as to what model of security sector would best suit the Ukrainian case, a consensus is gradually emerging on the need to set in place a relatively small yet agile professional army that would be able to count on the support of a ready-to-deploy reserve force. The latter would give credit to and open up the army to the increasing demand for popular participation and the growing sense of collective engagement that has become the single, most important legacy of the Maidan "Revolution of Dignity."

Since the very inception of the hostilities, volunteer organisations have played a central role in the security sector, supplementing or even replacing the state in the fulfilment of functions that the latter had proven unable to perform. Volunteers have participated in organising a sudden defence through the volunteer battalions and have provided crucial logistical, procurement and medical support to the military effort. They have introduced modern and more transparent working methods that the military establishment was not accustomed to. Building also on the nationalistic tradition of the anti-Soviet partisan brigades, Ukraine has seen the emergence of a *de facto* people's army, the role and contribution of which will have to be accounted for in and factored into the defence reform process.

## 1. *Dolgostroi* – Defence reforms in independent Ukraine

Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union an army consisting of 726,000 military units stationed on the Ukrainian territory at the end of 1991 and the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world. Convinced by the security assurances against the "threat or use of force against [its] territorial integrity or political independence" provided by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation in the Budapest Memorandum, Kyiv gave up its nuclear weapons stockpile and joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1994.[7]

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[5] An English version of the *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (a draft dated January 2015), is available at http://www.niss.gov.ua/public/File/2015_table/Draft_strategy.pdf. On 6 May 2015, the National Security and Defense Council approved the document. See Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, *Press release after the meeting of the NSDC on May 6*, 6 May 2015, http://www.rnbo.gov.ua/en/news/2121.html.

[6] *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (draft), cit.

[7] The text of the *Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the NPT* (Budapest Memorandum) is available at http://undocs.org/A/49/765.

Engagement in a never-ending process of defence reforms started shortly after independence. The sizeable army units that Ukraine acquired with the collapse of the Soviet Union were well-trained and combat-capable at the time, but were an integral part of the Soviet Army. They were therefore not designed to constitute a separate army and to operate self-sufficiently. At the time of independence Ukraine was then faced with the double challenge of establishing its national armed forces out of the "hypertrophied troops" it had acquired, while setting in place the military and civilian institutions that would run them.[8] Lulled into a sense of security dictated by the changed geopolitical conditions in a post-Cold War world and subjected to the financial constraints imposed by recurring cycles of economic crises in the country, the army was gradually downsized, reaching 165,500 units by 2013.[9] Yet it was only partially reformed. Consensus gradually emerged within the country's political and military elite on the diminished security needs of a medium-sized power primarily interested in playing its role as contributor to international security (mainly through peacekeeping operations). At the same time, the country's defence was outsourced to the system of collective security that was also outlined in the Budapest Memorandum.

However, the lack of continued political commitment, a degree of resistance within the military institutions, the ineffectiveness of strategic planning, and the inability to harmonise existing structures and capabilities as well as available human and financial resources with a coherent assessment of the country's security needs have all led the reforms to a continued, repeated "failure."[10] Almost two decades after independence, a group of Ukrainian experts defined the ongoing process in the defence sector as "degradation" and concluded: "the armed forces and other military formations of Ukraine are presently unable to defend the nation's sovereignty in the event of a serious military threat."[11]

At the end of the 2006-2011 State Programme for the Development of the Armed Forces, the assessment was that 50 percent of the programme had remained unaccomplished and that only 26 percent of targets relative to the procurement and the modernisation of arms and military equipment had been implemented. Arms and military equipment, in particular, were deemed to have reached a "critical" level, especially in relation to high-tech weapons (aircrafts, helicopters, air defence

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[8] Anatoliy Grytsenko, *Civil-Military Relations in Ukraine: On the way from form to substance*, NATO-EAPC Fellowship Programme paper, 2000, http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/grytsenko.pdf.

[9] Figures on the size and structure of the Ukrainian Armed Forces before the war can be found in Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, *Bila knyha 2013. Zbroyni Syly Ukrayiny* [White Book 2013. The Armed Forces of Ukraine], Kyiv, 2014, p. 66, http://www.mil.gov.ua/content/files/whitebook/WB_2013.pdf.

[10] Oleksiy Melnyk, *Security sector reform and democratic control over the armed forces*, cit., p. 5.

[11] Anatoliy Grytsenko, Leonid Polyakov and Mykola Sunhurovskyi, "Military Reform in Ukraine: expert opinion poll", in *National Security & Defence*, No. 2 (2000), p. 32, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/journal_pos.php?y=2000&cat=2&pos=3.

systems and boats) and munitions (ammunitions and missiles).[12] According to earlier estimates, already in 2000 70 percent of weapons required capital repairs while between 40 and 50 percent were deemed obsolete.[13]

From the prestigious institution it had been in the Soviet times, following independence the army has been undergoing a process of gradual decay; the quality of recruits has declined. Low morale and impoverishment have characterised the life of soldiers and middle-ranking officers, while the armed forces have come to be viewed as a source of patronage and rent-seeking revenue for top officials.[14] The latter has been possible thanks to the real-estate property the army still controls, the practice of financing defence needs through special funds, and the hefty military-industrial contracts the Minister of Defence and the military leadership command.[15]

In the constant competition for the relatively limited post-Soviet budget resources, the army has also lost out to the police, a testimony of the continued power struggle between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior – and between the President, who appoints the Minister of Defence, and the Prime Minister, who appoints the Minister of Interior.[16] More broadly, the upper hand in resources allocation won by the Ministry of Interior marked, in the view of former Minister of Defence Anatolyi Grytsenko, the demise of a democratic vision of the state – in which the army is established to protect the citizens – against a police vision of the state – in which the security forces are designed to protect a self-interested, alienated political elite.[17]

During the Yanukovich presidency this inefficient and corrupt system reached its peaks of paroxysm. Patronage and personal loyalty, rather than competence and loyalty towards the Ukrainian state, became the standard criteria for the appointment of senior military officers. This led to the consolidation in leadership positions of what former Deputy Minister of Defence Leonid Polyakov called "private commercial interests."[18]

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[12] Stanislav Hurak, "Reformation of Ukraine's AF: New Ambitions or a Practical Way?," in Joseph L. Dserdzinski and Valeriya Klymenko (eds.), *Almanac on Security Governance in Ukraine 2012*, Geneva and Kyiv, DCAF and Razumkov Center, 2013, p. 64, http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Almanac-on-Security-Sector-Governance-in-Ukraine-2012.

[13] Anatoliy Grytsenko, *Civil-Military Relations in Ukraine*, cit., p. 8.

[14] In 1999, 80 percent of military officers described their families' living conditions as below average or low. Ibid.

[15] Leonid Polyakov, "Corruption Obstructs Reforms in the Ukrainian Armed Forces", in Joseph L. Dserdzinski and Valeriya Klymenko (eds.), *Almanac on Security Governance in Ukraine 2012*, cit., p. 81-92.

[16] The latter is an arrangement resulting from the power-sharing deal following the Orange Revolution in 2004.

[17] Author's interview, Kyiv, 3 February 2015.

[18] Author's interview, Kyiv, 10 February 2015.

Following the hiatus imposed by Moscow as a result of President Medvedev's accusations that under President Yushchenko Kyiv had adopted an anti-Russian line, bilateral Russian-Ukrainian military cooperation resumed with renewed enthusiasm after President Yanukovich's election. According to Ukrainian senior officials, this was a form of cooperation that went far beyond the work of the 2005 Subcommittee for Security under the Russia-Ukraine Interstate Committee. It entailed the appointment of Russian citizens to key security positions, like Minister of Defence Dmytro Salamatin and Minister of Interior Vitaly Zakharchenko, and a degree of "openness" to Russian requests on the basis of clear "political instructions." That the 2012 Security Strategy neglected to recognise war as a possible security threat, despite the "warning signals," was seen by some as a sign of the times, a "must for Yanukovich" in his strategic relations with Moscow.[19] The prevalence of external over domestic economic and security interests was reflected also in decisions on defence commissions.[20]

Plagued by years of underfunding, corruption, patronage and, ultimately, Russian infiltration, the Ukrainian security sector was not in a condition to respond promptly to the deterioration of the security situation and the outbreak of hostilities in the Donbas. According to a US scholar, the total number of usable troops and equipment in the ground forces amounted nominally to 80,000 personnel, 775 tanks, 51 helicopters, fewer than 1,000 artillery pieces and 2,280 armoured personnel carriers. In fact, due to a combination of lack of training and inadequate and poorly maintained equipment, the size of the combat-ready force was only 6,000 troops.[21] The Russian annexation of Crimea caused also a loss of combat-ready forces and of the most modern hardware, primarily in the navy, where a total of 12,000 personnel defected to the Russian side and 51 vessels were confiscated by Russia.[22]

A rapid-reaction force was organised thanks to two National Guard battalions, mainly composed of Maidan activists and the Omega police special operations unit. They were the only forces combat-ready and available to deploy at the moment. Composed primarily of volunteers and reservists, a number of territorial defence battalions (placed under the Ministry of Defence), special police battalions and reserve battalions of the National Guard (placed under the Ministry of Interior) were also established in those early days.[23] In the spring and early summer, volunteer

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[19] Ibid. For the text of the 2012 National Security Strategy, see Philipp Fluri, Marcin Koziel and Andrii Yermolaiev (eds.), *The Security Sector Legislation of Ukraine*, cit., p. 123-136.

[20] Author's interview, Kyiv, 10 February 2015.

[21] Dmitry Gorenburg, "Ukrainian Military Capabilities", in *Russian Military Reform* blog, 22 December 2014, http://wp.me/pBeNm-q8.

[22] "Poroshenko says Ukraine should rebuild its navy", in *UNIAN*, 10 April 2015, http://www.unian.info/society/1066082.

[23] "S nachalo ATO Natsgvardiya ne byla gotova k boyam, k pervye dni rabotal tolko Spertsnaz - Poltorak" [The National Guard was not combat-ready at the beginning of the ATO. In the first days only the special forces worked - Poltorak], in *Censor.net*, 21 October 2014, hhttp://censor.net.ua/n308023; "Paruby: Srochno komplektuem novy batalyony Natsgvardii i vydvigaemsiya na peredovuyu" [Poruby: We will quickly set up the National Guard battalions and we'll then move forward], in *Censor.net*, 18 April 2014, http://censor.net.ua/n281820.

battalions took the first blunt of a war, initially shaped as an anti-terroristic operation, that the Ukrainian security was unprepared to sustain. Under-equipped and light-armed, volunteers held the front, thus giving the Ukrainian authorities the time to regroup and organise a defence.[24]

## 2. Fighting in the Donbas

### 2.1 Ilovaisk

Fought from early August to early September 2014, the battle for Ilovaisk proved to be a watershed in the war in the Donbas. Not only did Ukrainian forces report for the first time the massive presence of Russian soldiers fighting on the side of the separatists, but there was also large scale shelling on their positions from behind the border with Russia. Furthermore, from an operational point of view, the battle dramatically highlighted the weaknesses of the Ukrainian forces. It marked clearly, for the first time in the military campaign, the contrast between what the public came to characterise as the courage and the sense of duty of the soldiers, the officers and the generals who had kept their positions in the battlefield until the end, and the lack of competence and responsibility of top officials engaged at the decision-making and military management level in the capital.[25]

According to the then-Minister of Defence Valeriy Heletey, 107 soldiers were killed in action during the battle. According to the General Prosecutor the casualties were 241. According to journalistic estimates, no less than 500 Ukrainian troops were either killed or went missing in action.[26] More than 600 were captured. The losses of hardware were also substantial.[27] In parliamentary hearings following the gradual encirclement of the Ukrainian forces, the protracted siege and the massacre occurred while the Ukrainians were evacuating along a so-called humanitarian corridor offered by Russian President Putin, representatives of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence admitted that "leakages of information," "shortages of reserves to conduct the rescue operation and the lack of secure communication" were behind the defeat. Yet, a large part of responsibility could be attributed, in the words of Deputy Minister Rusnak, to "the independence of volunteer battalions

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[24] For more on the volunteer battalions see Rosaria Puglisi, "Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 15|08 (March 2015), http://www.iai.it/en/node/3820.

[25] Yurii Butusov, "Ilovaysk. Rokovie resheniya" [Ilovainsk, the rock decisions], in *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 10 October 2014, http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/ilovaysk-rokovye-resheniya-_.html.

[26] Yurii Butusov, "Zabyl rasskazats" [I forgot to tell], in *Facebook*, 6 April 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/960162470690716.

[27] At least 7 tanks, 22 BMPs, 6 MT-LB light armoured multipurpose tracked tractors, 3 BTRs, 7 anti-tank cannons Rapira, 7 grenade-launchers, and no less than 120 transport vehicles were lost in the battle. See Yurii Butusov, "Ilovaysk. Rokovie resheniya" [Ilovainsk, the rock decisions], cit.

and the lack of exact coordination with the military."[28]

While both the inquiry of the temporary parliamentary committee set up to look into the events and the criminal investigation opened by the General Prosecutor's Office have yet to make their conclusions public, two alternative narratives to the story told by the military leadership in Kyiv emerged.[29] Repeated warnings from the ground on the growing presence of Russian troops and their artillery shelling were apparently ignored by the General Staff until the troops, caught between two fires, found themselves unable to establish a defence line or attack groups.[30]

In addition to regular Ukrainian troops, a number of volunteer battalions were also present in Ilovaisk. Following the battle, commander of the Dnipro battalion Yurii Bereza blamed the military leadership for their deliberate failure to rescue volunteers trapped in the humanitarian corridor and called for Ilovaisk to become a permanent memorial to the volunteers, a "bed of honour," while the government was accused of having betrayed the volunteers.[31] "All the battalions brought to Ilovaisk think the government betrayed us to destroy the volunteer battalions. The government fears us and wants to control us," a volunteer was quoted as saying to journalists.[32]

## 2.2 The Donetsk Airport

When, after a 242-day siege, the Ukrainian forces lost control of the Donetsk airport, headlines in Kyiv referred to the defeat as "our Stalingrad." "The defence of the Donetsk airport has become the brightest page of Ukraine's contemporary military history," a Ukrainian journalist wrote.[33] Located only 10 km away from the city of Donetsk, the airport was prized for its strategic proximity to the separatists' stronghold. It had been reconstructed as a symbol of modernity on the occasion

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[28] Denis Rafalskiy, "Neuverennost' voennykh vynuzhdaet politikov govorit o mire" [The military's lack of self-assurance forces the politicians to talk peace], in *Kapital*, No. 313 (5 September 2014), http://www.capital.ua/ru/publication/28654-. For an overview of English-language media articles on the battle see Catherine A. Fizpatrick, "The Battle of Ilovaisk: A Turning Point in Russia's War on Ukraine," in *The Interpreter*, 15 September 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/?p=18946.

[29] For a humanitarian account of the battle and its aftermath see "Geroy-medik, spasavshiy lyudey pod-Ilovayskom: "Ya, skolko vlezlo, zobral ranenykh. Bez i na kapote, i na stekle" [A doctor, a hero who saved people in Ilovaisk: I collected as many injured as they fit, on the hood, on the window], in *Censor.net*, 5 September 2014, http://censor.net.ua/n301301.

[30] Yurii Butusov, "Ilovaysk. Rokovie resheniya" [Ilovainsk, the rock decisions], cit.

[31] "Dlya dobrovolcheskikh batal'onov Ilovaysk dolzhen byl stat' bratskoi mogiloi - Kombat Dnipra 1" [For the volunteer battalions Ilovaisk should become a bed of honour - Dnipro 1 Commander], in *Censor.net*, 3 September 2014, (video) http://censor.net.ua/n301075. On the ambush in the humanitarian corridor see "Aftermath of Ambush on Ukrainian Forces: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 75)", in *Vice News*, 7 September 2014, (video) https://news.vice.com/video/aftermath-of-ambush-on-ukrainian-forces-russian-roulette-dispatch-75.

[32] Alec Luhn, "Anatomy of a Bloodbath", in *Foreign Policy*, 6 September 2014, http://atfp.co/1cSrfI2.

[33] Anastasia Beryoza, "Nash Stalingrad" [Our Stalingrad], in *Novoe Vremya*, 23 January 2015, http://nvua.net/project/nash-stalingrad.html.

of the Euro 2012 football cup at a cost of 750 million dollars, but, after months of intense fighting, it had turned into rubble. In the Ukrainians' collective imagination the defence of the airport had, nonetheless, acquired a symbolic value; it had come to epitomize their heroic resilience in the face of an uneven war. Ukrainian regular and volunteer troops who had repelled almost every attack until mid-January 2015 were characterised as Cyborgs, "indestructible half men, half machine."[34] Cyborg soldiers became household names.[35]

On 11 January, Russian and separatist forces attacked the airport with rockets and shells followed by infantry assaults. By 14 January part of the new terminal was captured. After intense fighting, the battle was lost in the days between 16 and 22 January.[36] By then, no more than 100-120 Ukrainian soldiers were left in the airport, where the skeleton of the structure, the only part still standing, and the open spaces in between limited greatly the possibility to establish viable defence positions.

While the country mourned the nearly 400 Ukrainian troops killed in the siege of the airport and dealt with the psychological aftermath of what the defeat meant in the general economy of the war, military analysts tried to pin down the reasons for the event and to apportion responsibility. Chief of the General Staff General Muzhenko had personally taken over the command of the Donetsk airport operations since mid-January, while the staff of the operative command "South," who had been in charge throughout the period April-December 2014, had also been gradually removed. The replacement of an experienced staff with an "improvised structure" had led, in defence commentator Yurii Butusov's opinion, to a large number of tactical errors.[37]

## 2.3 Debal'tseve

The largest highway and railways hub in Eastern Ukraine, located at the intersection of road-links between Luhansk and Donetsk, Debal'tseve had acquired strategic importance as a potential bridgehead for the Ukrainians to launch an attack

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[34] Oksana Grytsenko, "'Cyborgs' pledge to defend ruined Donetsk airport," in *Kyiv Post*, 10 October 2014, http://www.kyivpost.com/content/kyiv-post-plus/cyborgs-pledge-to-defend-ruined-donetsk-airport-367553.html.

[35] See, for example, the interview with Pravy Sektor volunteer Andriy Sharaskin, "Ukraine Today Exclusive interview: Ukrainian 'cyborg' soldier on the defence of Donetsk airport", in *Ukraine Today*, 23 October 2014, (video) http://uatoday.tv/geopolitics/exclusive-interview-ukrainian-cyborg-talks-about-defending-airport-375512.html.

[36] "Donetskiy aeroport ne sdan. Pod nashim kontrolem pomesheniya kotorye prigodny k oborone, - kombat 'Pravago sektora' 'Cherniy'" [Donetsk airport has not fallen. We have in our control areas important for the defence, Pravy Sektor Commander 'Cherny'], in *Censor.net*, 23 January 2015, (video) http://censor.net.ua/n321187.

[37] Yurii Butusov, "Rukovostvo Operatsii Vooruzhennykh sil Ukrainy po oborone Donetskogo aeroporta..." [The leadership of the Ukrainian armed forces' operations for the Donetsk Airport defence...], in *Facebook*, 21 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/917413391632291.

aimed at cutting communication lines between the two self-proclaimed people's republics. The area had been occupied by separatist forces in May 2014 and won back by Ukrainian troops in mid-July. Upon international insistence, however, hostilities were suspended following the downing of the Malaysian Boeing MH17 in order to allow recovery operations.[38]

In January 2015, the separatists started closing in on the Ukrainian troops from both the Donetsk and the Luhansk side, aiming at regaining control over a pocket of territory that they considered their own. Ukrainian forces found themselves increasingly isolated and on 11 February, the encirclement, the "kettle," was allegedly completed. Despite OSCE protestations that the Minsk II package of measures signed on 12 February was not "a shopping list" from which combatants could pick and choose, shelling against Ukrainian positions continued unremittingly past the ceasefire deadline.[39] Following two days of heavy fighting that took place, according to a statement of the EU VP/HR Federica Mogherini, in "clear violation" of the Minsk II agreement,[40] the Ukrainian withdrawal from the town of Debal'tseve started on 18 February.

President Poroshenko's description of the withdrawal as taking place "in a planned and organised way," his denial of a separatist encirclement, and the General Staff's insistence that "the best possible time" had been chosen and that the operation had been studiously planned were all later contradicted by volunteer battalion commanders on the ground.[41] Apparently, neither the General Staff nor the sector command had been aware of the evacuation plan, which had instead been put together hastily and spontaneously by a group of "enterprising officers" when it became clear to them that the troops in Debal'tseve would be "betrayed" and the chances for them to get out of the "kettle" alive were becoming increasingly slim.[42] At the end of the operation, on the basis of preliminary media estimates, a total of 159 soldiers were reportedly dead, 118 were captured and 36 were missing in action.[43]

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[38] For an overview on the build-up ad the follow up of the battle, see Ilya Vasyunin, "The Retreat from Debaltseve", in *openDemocracy*, 3 March 2015, https://www.opendemocracy.net/node/90995.

[39] Andrew E. Kramer and David M. Herszenhorn, "Retreating Soldiers Bring Echoes of War's Chaos to a Ukrainian Town", in *The New York Times*, 19 February 2015, http://nyti.ms/17YLRM6.

[40] European External Action Service, *Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the violation of the ceasefire in Debaltseve*, Brussels, 18 February 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150218_01_en.htm.

[41] "Vykhod iz Debal'tsevo byl sverkhoslozhnoi operatsiei - zamrukovoditelya ATO" [The withdrawal from Debal'tseve was an extremely difficult operation - deputy ATO commander], in *Ukrainska Pravda*, 22 February 2015, http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/02/22/7059403.

[42] "'Debal'tseskii platsdarm gotovoli k sdache. Shaby u nas zhili otdel'no, - voiska otdel'no' - Komandir 25ogo batal'yona 'Kyivskaya Rus' Andreiy (Vysota)" ['In the Debal'tsevo bridgehead they were preparing to surrender. Commanders were living on one side, the troops on the other' - Commander of the 25th battalion 'Kyiv Rus' Andrey (Height)], in *Censor.net*, 22 February 2015, http://censor.net.ua/n325755.

[43] "Poteri Ukrainskikh boinov v bitve na Debal'tseskoi duge 24 Yanvarya-18 Fevralya 2015" [The Ukrainian army's losses in the battle for the Debal'tseve curve 24 January-18 February 2015], in *Censor.net*, 20 February 2015, http://censor.net.ua/n325541.

According to some Ukrainian military analysts, the instructions from Kyiv to "hold on whatever the price" were more political than strategic in nature. Most likely aimed at exercising political leverage in the negotiations for the Minsk II agreement, the Ukrainian plan did not take into account what appeared to be the overwhelming advantage of the Russian-backed forces on the ground and ignored the clear risks that the "kettle" would result in yet another massacre of Ukrainian soldiers.[44] The separatist side could count on a high concentration of artillery and sophisticated military equipment.[45] As during the protracted siege of the Donetsk airport, the "Ukrainian army's passivity" and lack of initiative in launching a counterattack on Russian and separatist forces in places where they were lowering their defences were seen as the main weakness in Kyiv's strategy and, ultimately, the cause of these defeats.[46]

## 3. A clash of civilisation

"Saur Mohila, Ilovaisk, the Donetsk Airport, Debal'tseve. This is not evidence of the Russian superiority, but of the large-scale heroism of the people's army and of the outrageous incompetence, not to say more, of the highest army leadership," commented Semen Semenchenko, opinionated commander of the volunteer battalion Donbas on his Facebook page in the aftermath of the withdrawal from Debal'tseve.[47]

Like the battle of Ilovaisk and the Donetsk airport siege, Debal'tseve also took place almost live on TV and had a huge emotional impact on the general public in Ukraine. People protested and picketed the Ministry of Defence calling for the President and the military authorities to send in reinforcements for the troops or

[44] "Debal'tsevo: o chem molchat voennye" [Debal'tseve: what the military do not say], in *Info Resist*, 8 March 2015, http://inforesist.org/?p=286448. In the aftermath of the evacuation, Ukrianian volunteers accused the Chief of the General Staff Muzhenko of being the only one opposed to the withdrawal of the Ukrainian troops, when the General Staff had expressed itself in favour of the operation. "'Otvod Voysk iz Debal'tsevo blokiroval nachal'nik Genshtaba Viktor Muzhenko' - volontery Georgiy Tuka i Vitaliy Deynera obvinili Genshtab v nekompetentnosti" ['The Chief of the General Staff Viktor Muzhenko blocked the withdrawal of the troops from Debal'tseve' - The volunteers Georgiy Tuka and Vitaliy Deynera accuse the General Staff of incompetence], in *Censor.net*, 19 February 2015, http://censor.net.ua/n325296.

[45] Ukrainians reported that, among other pieces of artillery, the separatists were equipped with Russian T72BM tanks and sophisticated instruments that allowed them to target and fire to a distance of up to 3km, against the 1.5km maximum firing range allowed to the Ukrainian T64 tanks. They could also count on interception systems through which they would identify Ukrainian soldiers' private mobile numbers and use their location to increase the accuracy of their artillery firing. "Debal'tsevo: o chem molchat voennye" [Debal'tseve: what the military do not say], cit.

[46] Oleg Sukhov and Olena Goncharova, "After Debaltseve defeat, what next? Debaltseve retreat exposes weaknesses in nation's strategy, military strength", in *Kyiv Post*, 20 February 2015, http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/after-debaltseve-defeat-what-next-debaltseve-retreat-exposes-weaknesses-in-nations-strategy-military-strength-381314.html.

[47] Semen Semenchenko, "Po sostoyanyu na seichas'..." [Given the current situation...], in *Facebook*, 18 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/dostali.hvatit/posts/904190079615767.

to organise rescue operations. Ordinary fighters and commanders of volunteer battalions alike produced daily social media reports on the unfolding of events on the ground. They mercilessly criticised the shortcomings of military decisions. In the general lack of communication between the Kyiv command and the front or even between different units in the field, it happened that commanders would learn about their troops' conditions from their Facebook updates.[48]

Reports from the front often told a story of insufficient reserves to allow regular troops rotation or to step in in support of units under attack. They highlighted the overwhelming hardware superiority of Russian-supported separatists fighting against the technically imaginative efforts of the Ukrainian side.[49] They spoke of Ukrainian personnel not always trained to operate artillery systems. More than six months into the military campaign, Ukrainian soldiers kept complaining about the bad quality of the provisions they received, the scarce financial support and the poor healthcare assistance offered to the injured. They reminded everybody that the bulk of the military units' equipment was still provided by volunteer organisations thanks to ordinary people and businesses' donations.[50]

Even more worryingly, however, in pointing their finger against the incompetence of the General Staff and the top military leadership in the Ministry of Defence, soldiers and officers on the ground signalled that the already fragile relationship of trust between the top and the bottom of the armed forces was close to breaking point. According to a military officer, the army was in a "pre-revolutionary mood," at a point when the troops, having gained direct fighting experience, would refuse to take orders from a leadership they neither trusted nor respected.[51] In a letter addressed to the President, army officers who had fought in Debal'tseve asked for Chief of the General Staff Viktor Muzhenko's dismissal for his passivity and incompetence.[52] Relaying comments from within the military institutions, defence

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[48] Yurii Beryukov, "Segodnya utrom neskolko boitsov…" [This morning some fighters…], in *Facebook*, 20 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/yuri.biriukov/posts/1550445968557548.

[49] A commander mentioned, for example, enemy drones flying all night over the Ukrainian positions in Debal'tseve. These were devices that could fly higher and over a wider range of territory than the homemade ones produced and manned by the Ukrainian volunteers. Andrei Misenyuk, "Boets 128-i brigady rasskazal, chto nuzhno bylo delats' esli ukrainskaya armiya deistvitel'no sobiralas uderzhats' Debal'tsevo" [A fighter of the 128 brigade told us what should have been done if the Ukrainian army really wanted to keep Debal'tseve], in *Informatsionnoe Soprotivlenie*, 2 March 2015, http://sprotyv.info/ru/node/13857. On Ukrainian volunteer-produced drones see "Flying Drones with the Dnipro Battalion: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 93)", in *Vice News*, 15 February 2015, (video) https://news.vice.com/video/flying-drones-with-the-dnipro-battalion-russian-roulette-dispatch-93.

[50] "Soldat VSU Andrey Grachev: Pani President…" [Soldier of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Andrei Grachev: Mr President…], in *Censor.net*, 6 March 2015, (video) http://censor.net.ua/n327448.

[51] Viktor Pokusa, "Pis'mo s fronta" [Letter from the front], in *Den'*, No. 42 (11 March 2015), http://www.day.kiev.ua/ru/node/468197.

[52] "Offitsery VSU trebuyut otstavki nachal'nika Genshtaba Muzhenko za porazhenie v Debal'tsevo" [Officers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces ask for the dismissal of the Chief of the General Staff Muzhenko as a result of the defeat in Debal'tseve], in *Censor.net*, 12 March 2015, http://censor.net.ua/n328152.

analysts defined Muzhenko as a "petty tyrant," unaware of the real situation on the ground and unable to listen to the advice of his staff.[53] In obvious contrast with the General Staff, commanders of a number of volunteer battalions signed a memorandum for the establishment of a volunteers' coordination command, a "shadow General Staff," as it was branded in the press, which was allegedly intended to harmonise volunteers' efforts both in the battlefield and in support of the military operations.[54]

Ilovaisk, the Donetsk airport and Debal'tseve triggered a debate that not only reminded the Ukrainian public of the historic weaknesses of the armed forces, but also pointed to the deepening fault lines within the army's leadership. By highlighting the inadequacy of what an army officer called "peace-time [military] careerists," the fighting had brought to a point of non-return a pre-existing clash between a layer of Soviet-trained high officials, the General Zhukov-types, and a younger generation of military officers, the Cyborg-types.[55] While the former had climbed to the heights of their military career thanks to patronage networks and had their leadership skills tested exclusively along the insidious corridors of the military institutions, the latter, both army professionals and volunteers, had acquired warring competences in the battlefields in the Donbas.

It was a cultural as well as a generational clash as far as resources management and operation planning was concerned: quantity vs. quality, administrative command vs. motivation and technology, a vertical vs. a horizontal style of leadership.[56] Engulfed in red tape and bureaucracy, the General Zhukov-types would try to manage the troops as during peace-time, through written orders and instruction.

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[53] Yurii Butusov, "Vchera na zasedanie komiteta po oborone Verkhovnoi Rady..." [Yesterday at the meeting of the Verkhovna Rada Defence Commiittee...], in *Facebook*, 5 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/924816730891957.

[54] Semen Semenchenko, "Chast' dobrovolcheskikh batal'onov, volonterskikh organisatsii sozdali koordinatsionniy shtab dobrovolcheskogo dvizheniya" [A part of volunteer battalions and volunteer organisations have established a coordination command of the volunteer movement], in *Facebook*, 19 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/dostali.hvatit/posts/904726896228752. The move sparked enormous controversy and renewed accusations that the volunteer sector was ultimately a subversive force, a danger for the stability of the country. Roman Romanyuk, "Parallel'naya voennaya real'nost'. Kto i dlya chego sozdaet al'ternativnyi Genshtab" [A parallel military reality. Who and why is setting up an alternative General Staff], in *Ukrainska Pravda*, 19 February 2015, http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2015/02/19/7059155. Other volunteer battalions commanders took distance from the move. See Yra Bereza, "Vid imeni pol'kiDnipro1 ofitsiyno zayavlayu" [On behalf of the battalion Dnipro 1 I officially declare], in *Facebook*, 19 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/yra.bereza/posts/757022887727371; Viktor Tregubov, "Semenchenko yavno pereotsenil svoyu populyarnost" [Semenchenko clearly overestimated his popularity], in *Facebook*, 19 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/victor.tregubov.5/posts/888143337872535. Dmitro Yarosh and Semen Semenchenko, who had promoted the initiative, were ultimately forced to clarify their intentions and reiterated their loyalty towards the legitimate Ukrainian institutions, including the General Staff. See Semen Semenchenko, "Zakonchilsya napryazhennyy den" [A hard-work day has ended], in *Facebook*, 19 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/dostali.hvatit/posts/904998909534884.

[55] Viktor Pokusa, "Pis'mo s fronta" [Letter from the front], cit.

[56] Former Deputy Minister of Defence Igor Kobanenko, author's interview, Kyiv, 4 February 2015.

Lacking the basic principles of operation planning and managing, deliberately ignoring the conditions of the troops on the ground, limiting to the very minimum their visits to the front, unable to organise a rational system of intelligence collection and analysis, mistrusting the officers they were supposed to lead, the General Zhukovs had retained and amplified the "feudal-bureaucratic structure" that characterised the Ministry of Defence in pre-war times.[57]

Writing in 2012, an external observer had identified the persisting prevalence of a Soviet model of leadership as one of the main factors hampering the development of the Ukrainian army. The "Soviet leadership style is an over-centralisation of decision-making authority that carries with it a lack of subordinate empowerment. Younger leaders do not have the chance to make many decisions, which stunts their development as leaders." The consequence, the external observer had concluded, was that both initiative and creativity in leaders was lacking, while a distinctive passivity was leaving untapped human potential.[58] Against the overwhelming prevalence of a Soviet style of leadership, the few hundred officials who had been trained in Western military academies or had taken part in multinational NATO, EU or UN operations had remained, by and large, excluded from leadership positions inside the Ministry and the General Staff.[59]

Within this turbulent framework, volunteer battalions represented an even more incongruous presence. A mixed bag of eloquent populists, romantic visionaries, cunning adventurers and committed patriots, volunteers brought to the frontlines the Jacobin attitudes of the Maidan "Revolution of Dignity" and the urgency for change. They tended to challenge authorities, to defy hierarchies and to question orders. They introduced into the organisation of the war business and procurement practices that were foreign to the traditionally bureaucratic military world. Accused by many in the military establishment of being "ATO tourists," and shunned for stealing the limelight thanks to their overwhelming social media activism while the bulk of military operations was in fact conducted by regular troops, volunteer battalions were also looked at with mistrust within the political circles in Kyiv. Feared for their occasional proximity to oligarchic interests and their recurring threats to overturn the tables to stage a third Maidan that would do away with all

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[57] For a more detailed list of recriminations see: Viktor Pokusa, "Pis'mo s fronta" [Letter from the front], cit; Yurii Kasyanov, "Esli by ya byl nachal'nikom Genshtaba..." [If I were the Chief of the General Staff...], in *Facebook*, 8 March 2015, https://www.facebook.com/brtcomua/posts/849995355061120; Yurii Butusov, "Obshalsya s inostrannym voennym spetsialistom v Ukraine.." [I spoke with a foreign military expert in Ukraine...], in *Facebook*, 21 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/917287654978198.

[58] D. Lee Gabel, "Hope in Hidden Potential: The Human Factor in Reforming the Armed Forces in Ukraine", in Joseph L. Dserdzinski and Valeriya Klymenko (eds.), A*lmanac on Security Governance in Ukraine 2012*, cit., p. 71-80 at p. 76.

[59] Former Deputy Minister of Defence Igor Kobanenko, author's interview, Kyiv 4 February 2015. According to the 2011 White Book of the armed forces of Ukraine, as of the end of 2011, 468 Ukrainian servicemen participated in 9 multinational operations. *White Book 2011. Armed Forces of Ukraine*, Kyiv, 2012, p. 63, http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lang=en&id=167335.

unreformed political structures, volunteers were often viewed more as a domestic source of instability rather than a useful element of potential change within the framework of the country's security system.[60]

Incompetence and treachery were charges often voiced against both the military and the political leadership, who were blamed for their internecine power-struggles while the country was ablaze. Observers reported of a General Staff and a Ministry of Defence often oblivious of each other's decisions and even lacking effective channels of communication. Rumours circulated of generals not particularly disloyal towards independent Ukraine's institutions, but so scared and incapable of making decisions that they would spend their days locked in their ministerial offices. In addition to "serious mistakes in the military strategy," former Minister of Defence and candidate in the May 2014 presidential elections Anatoliy Grytsenko went as far as identifying a train of "criminal mistakes and delays" in the country's political decision-making process that had undermined Ukraine's defence efforts.[61]

Although some of these arguments were undoubtedly part of the persistent political confrontation between rival political forces and the vehemence used to express them at times risked undermining the credibility of the institutions and the political establishment at large, they nonetheless highlighted the urgency of military reforms that would address and resolve the existing contradictions. The ongoing military campaign was no longer an excuse to further postpone reforms, many agreed. Reforms had to be conducted despite the fighting, as a precondition for the war to be finally won.[62] "The authorities simply do not understand what is going on at the front," pointed out a defence analyst, "and if we do not get it into their heads that the army needs a reorganisation and changes, changes will not take place. [...] We have now an army that knows how to fight, but we need to set up an army that knows how to win."[63]

## 4. Modernising the Army

Along with the urgency of the continuing military operations in the Donbas, reforming and modernising the Ukrainian armed forces is an absolute priority, a *conditio sine qua non* not only to guarantee the country's security, but also to restore the citizens' shattered trust in their institutions following the tragic post-Maidan events.[64] An efficiently-managed, fully-accountable, democratically-

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[60] Sergey Rakhmanin, "Tretiya mirovaya igra" [Third world game], in *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 7 November 2014, http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/tretya-mirovaya-igra-_.html.

[61] Author's interview, Kyiv, 3 February 2015.

[62] Author's interview, Kyiv. 7 February 2015.

[63] Yurii Butusov, "Blestyashaya stat'ya Sergeiy Rakhmanin o voine" [A splendid article by Sergey Rakhmanin on the war], in *Facebook*, 24 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/934644523242511.

[64] Interestingly, according to a survey conducted in December 2014, Ukrainians place the army fourth in their list of most trusted institutions, after the volunteer sector, the volunteer battalions

minded and democratically-controlled army is an important element in the complex institutional landscape of a functional, democratic state. Although they are the object of great criticism mainly from Russia, military training and tactical exercises offered by the United Kingdom and the United States in the spring of 2015 must be viewed as a way to support Ukraine's state-building (or state re-building) efforts.[65]

A number of US former diplomats and policy-makers have called for the provision of lethal weapons to Ukraine as a partial fulfilment of Washington and London's obligations to guarantee the country's sovereignty under the Budapest Memorandum.[66] Bipartisan appeals have been launched in both the Senate and the House of Representatives for President Obama to authorise the provisions of weapons to Ukraine.[67] Yet medical, logistics, infantry and intelligence training, as offered by UK personnel, as well as tactical and first aid training, as offered by US troops, seem to be a more long-lasting contribution towards the rebuilding of the security sector "from scratch," as mentioned by President Poroshenko at the inception ceremony of the US training on 19 April.[68] The signing of a memorandum with NATO on "cooperation in the matters of consultations, management, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance" announced by Prime Minister Yatsenyuk in early April must also be read in this light.[69]

Although defence reforms have been on everyone's mind for months, expert consultations are still ongoing and a coherent plan as to how to conduct them has not been made public yet. Doubts also remain about the full commitment of the military establishment towards substantial transformations. In an April 2014 statement, the Ministry of Defence announced plans to "radically change the philosophy of military management" in order to create a more effective system that would avoid functional duplications within the military structures and embrace

and the Church and before the President (6th) and the police (12th). "Pesnya o Rodine. Slova narodnyye - Narod i vlast" [The song of the Motherland. The words of the people - People and the power], in *Zerkalo Nedeli*, December 2014, http://opros2014.zn.ua/authority.

[65] For more details on the training see: "UK service personnel 'to help train Ukraine forces'", in *BBC News*, 25 February 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-31623438; "Britain begins training Ukrainian soldiers", in *BBC News*, 19 March 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31959634; "Ukrainian Army Rebuilds, with Allies' Help", in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 24 April 2015, (video) http://www.rferl.org/media/video/26976053.html; "Why are the American Troops in Ukraine?: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 108)", in *Vice News*, (video) https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-dispatch-108.

[66] Ivo Daalder et al., *Preserving Ukraine's Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do*, Washington, Atlantic Council, February 2015, http://brook.gs/1Ew86AT.

[67] Kristina Wong, "Lawmakers to Obama: Arm Ukraine Now", in *The Hill*, 5 February 2015, http://thehill.com/node/231874.

[68] Associated Press, "US, Ukraine start military training", in *U.S. News*, 20 April 2015, http://t.usnews.com/Z8rr4x.

[69] "Ukraine to sign cooperation memorandum with NATO," in *Ukraine Today*, 8 April 2015, http://www.uatoday.tv/politics/ukraine-to-sign-cooperation-memorandum-with-nato-420322.html.

international standards and practices.[70]

In January 2015, the Ministry declared that it would reduce Ministry and General Staff's personnel while promoting experienced officers to higher positions of responsibility.[71] On 21 January, the Parliament approved a new law on the Armed Forces, which raised the number of servicemen up to a maximum of 250,000 units[72] (from the 165,500, including 120,900 soldiers, in service in 2013[73]) including the reserves recalled as part of the three waves of mobilisation stipulated by the President for the year 2015. Abolished at the end of 2013, conscription had already been reinstated in spring 2014. As a result of the ongoing military operations, the 2015 state budget allocations for security and defence have been increased to over UAH 80 billion (5 billion dollars), roughly equivalent to 5 percent of the GDP, from previous allocations of around 1 percent of the GDP.[74]

With the exception of the amendments to the state budget, these measures, scattered and piecemeal, have been generally judged to be cosmetic rather than substantial. Their real impact has so far not been confirmed by facts on the ground. "A new form is not a reform," a military commentator has laconically concluded.[75] What soldiers in the field and military experts alike have been calling for is a process of sweeping transformations based on a coherent "doctrine for the development of the armed forces" that would embrace issues such as the effective use of resources, the combat-readiness of troops and the establishment of deployable reserves, the professionalisation of the army, and the adoption of NATO standards and international military procedures.[76]

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[70] "Minoborony planiruet v korne izmenits' 'filozofiyu voennogo upravleniya'" [The Ministry of Defence is planning to rafically change 'the philosophy of military management'], in *Censor.net*, 30 April 2014, http://censor.net.ua/n283350.

[71] Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, *Report on the results of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, January 19*, 20 January 2015, http://www.mil.gov.ua/en/speeches/2015/01/20/report-on-the-results-of-the-ministry-of-defense-of-ukraine-january-19.

[72] "Kabmin khochet uvelichits chislennost' VSU do chetverti milliona chelovek" [The Cabinet of Ministers want to increase the number of armed forces of Ukraine to a quarter million individuals], in *UNIAN*, 21 January 2015, http://www.unian.net/politics/1034388.

[73] Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, *Bila knyha 2013. Zbroyni Syly Ukrayiny* [White Book 2013. The Armed Forces of Ukraine], cit., p. 66.

[74] Of this amount, UAH 40.2 billion, including 5.2 billion for armament development, was allocated to the Ministry of Defence, 0.8 billion to military intelligence, over 15.9 billion to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including 7.1 billion for the National Guard. Razumkov Center, *Ukraine 2014-2015: Overcoming Challenges (Assessments)*, Kyiv, 20 February 2015, p. 43, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/news.php?news_id=586.

[75] Yurii Kasyanov, "Novaya forma - eto ne reforma" [A new form is not a reform], in *Facebook*, 6 April 2015, https://www.facebook.com/brtcomua/posts/864288763631779.

[76] See, for example, Yurii Butusov, "Kakim stredstvami pobedits' na Donbasse" [Through which means to win in the Donbas], in *Facebook*, 20 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/916547995052164; "Vo Spisochnom sostave Vooruzhennykh sil Ukrainy…" [In the personnel lists of the armed forces of Ukraine], in *Facebook*, 24 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/918852804821683; "Uvazhaemyi David Braun…" [Dear David Braun…], in *Facebook*, 4 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/924340004272963.

By looking organically at the reform of the security and defence sector as part of the establishment of a "new model of national security," the National Security Strategy of Ukraine, currently under revision, is supposedly moving in that direction. According to an early draft that circulated in January, in addition to the security and defence sector, a "new security culture" would address also the decentralisation of state functions and budget resources, the protection of citizens' rights, freedoms and legal interests, and the adoption and implementation of an anti-corruption policy. As far as the army is specifically concerned, however, the draft strategy promises "a new quality level – efficient, mobile, and armed with modern weapons and military equipment, capable of defending the State."[77]

While discussions on a grand strategy are still ongoing and experts dispute whether a Swiss rather than an Israeli army model, or an Estonian rather than a Swedish, would best suit post-Maidan Ukraine's security needs, the Ukrainian authorities need to resolutely address the growing rift within the armed forces. Confidence-building efforts should be aimed at rekindling a relation of trust between the top leadership in Kyiv and the troops on the frontline and at appeasing the "pre-revolutionary mood" denounced by military officers after Debal'tseve. As a priority, they should tackle three main broad areas.

Firstly, rules need to be set for the transparent and merit-based appointment of the military leadership. This concerns also the definition of a policy on the lustration of army officers. A draft law on the issue was presented and discussed in parliament in late January.[78] Facing a lack of experienced officers, also due to the restrictions imposed by the law on lustrations, the parliament has been repeatedly called to vote on *ad hoc* exceptions that would allow generals to resume their positions and join their troops on the battlefield.[79]

At the same time, however, efforts need to be made to introduce a substantial degree of accountability within the officers' corps. Criminal investigations and parliamentary inquiries into the military defeats in Ilovaisk, the Donetsk airport and Debal'tseve must be concluded, facts need to be ascertained and those deemed responsible disciplined. A climate of uncertainty on personnel policy has the potential to further widen the mistrust within the armed forces at a time when the country needs it the least.

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[77] *National Security Strategy of Ukraine* (draft), cit.

[78] Yurii Butusov, "Pros'ba k deputatam Verkhovnoi Rady" [A request to members of the Supreme Council], in *Facebook*, 26 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/919950908045206.

[79] Yurii Butusov, "Komu nravitsya..." [Who likes...], in *Facebook*, 11 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/927905497249747; "Status obnovlyaetsya on..." [Status update on...], in *Facebook*, 4 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/924804097559887.

Secondly, a decision needs to be made in favour of the establishment of a professional army. Although many in Ukraine believe that in the Donbas the country is fighting for its independence and the number of volunteers in the first months of war has been significant, it is also true that further waves of mobilisation have proved extremely controversial and potentially divisive.[80] President Poroshenko has himself admitted that 30 percent of conscripts deserted in the early days of the war.[81] As a defence expert put it, it is not important to have a large army, but an army that is well trained and effective; Ukraine does not need an army where half of the troops are qualified for nothing else besides manning check-points, but an army where each individual is a motivated professional.[82]

Finally, a proper role needs to be defined for civil society and the volunteers within the wider framework of the defence and security sector. This concerns both the volunteer battalions involved in military operations at the front and the volunteer groups engaged in support activities. Volunteers have so far provided an important contribution to the military effort and, if properly selected, trained and integrated into the system, have the potential to bring a new perspective, modern tools and, generally, a more democratic approach to defence issues. Although extremely controversial due to his nationalist positions, the appointment of *Pravy Sektor* leader Dmytro Yarosh to an advisory role to the chief of the General Staff[83] must be viewed as an attempt to bridge the gap between the formal military structures and the volunteer battalions. The decision has been saluted in these terms by many in the volunteer sector.[84] It goes without saying, however, that volunteer battalions need to accept becoming an organic part of the armed forces, subject to the same chain of command, respectful of the same rules of the game. Speculations on their split loyalty and their connections with oligarchic interests undermine the authority and the respect that the volunteer sector at large has deservedly earned in these months of war.

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[80] See for example, Alec Luhn, "The Draft Dodgers of Ukraine", in *Foreign Policy*, 18 February 2015, http://t.co/De6kSainSj.

[81] "President Poroshenko reveals 30% of Ukrainian conscripts deserted in early day of conflict," in *Ukraine Today*, 22 March 2015, (video) http://uatoday.tv/politics/president-poroshenko-reveals-30-of-ukrainian-conscripts-deserted-in-early-days-of-conflict-416833.html.

[82] Yurii Butusov, "Kakim stredstvami pobedits' na Donbasse" [Through which means to win in the Donbas], in *Facebook*, 20 January 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/916547995052164.

[83] David Stern, "Ukraine crisis: Tension over rise of nationalist Yarosh", in *BBC News*, 8 April 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32216738.

[84] Yurii Butusov, "O naznachenie Dmytro Yarosh v Genshtab" [On Dmytro Yarosh's appointment to the General Staff], in *Facebook*, 5 April 2015, https://www.facebook.com/butusov.yuriy/posts/959500297423600.

## Conclusions

Post-independence Ukrainian armed forces had not been set up to engage in a fully-fledged war on their territory. In the post-Cold War international arena, the outbreak of full-scale hostilities had not been considered as a realistic option – this also by virtue of the international guarantees the country had received through the signing of the Budapest Memorandum. Plagued by years of underfunding, corruption, patronage and, ultimately, Russian infiltration, the Ukrainian security sector has proved unable to respond promptly to the deterioration of the security situation in the east. The beginning of the war and the tangible inadequacy of the army have been both a surprise and a shock for most Ukrainians.

By tragic trial and error, months of fighting have brought together an army that comes from different strands of society: professional soldiers, mobilised reservists and volunteers alike. Leadership skills of the top military echelons have been dramatically brought to the test, revealing a substantial gap between a peacetime-trained and a battlefield-tested officers' corps. While all agree in Kyiv on the urgent need for sweeping defence reforms to equip the country with forces able to protect its people and territory, the debate on the scale and shape of these reforms is still ongoing.

With a number of significant exceptions, the Minsk II ceasefire has been holding through the winter. With the beginning of the spring, however, many expect major hostilities to break out again. Although seemingly the easiest solution to strengthen Ukraine's military capabilities, the international provision of lethal weapons might only serve the end of further escalating the conflict. The friends of Ukraine should rather help and support the country in its re-building efforts in the defence sector.

Defence reforms aimed at establishing a modern and professional army are not only pressing in the case of a very likely resumption of hostilities in the Donbas, but have a long-term significance within the framework of the consolidation of democracy in post-Maidan Ukraine. The establishment of an efficiently-managed, fully-accountable, democratically-minded and democratically-controlled army is, indeed, a centrepiece in the complex institutional landscape of a functional, democratic state.

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