



Ukrainian Security Policy and the Threat from the East: Key Findings from Kyiv

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From June 4, 2014 to June 8, 2014 The Jamestown Foundation led a ten-person delegation to Kyiv, Ukraine, to meet with senior government security officials in the interim Ukrainian government. Headed by Jamestown's board chairman, Willem de Vogel, delegation members met with a number of senior ranking policymakers, including Andriy Parubiy, Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council; Ihor Kabanenko, Deputy Minister of Defense; the newly elected Kyiv Mayor, Vitaliy Klychko (Klitschko); and Mustafa Dzhemiliev (Jemilev), the leader of the Crimean Tatars; as well as other Ukrainian officials.

During the four-day visit, the delegation also met with the U. S. Ambassador to Ukraine, G. Pyatt, and representatives of the US-defense attaches working in Ukraine to learn more about the status of US military assistance to Ukraine and American perspectives on the newly elected government. According to Ambassador Pyatt, the newly elected government is one of the strongest and most capable governments to take power in the 20 year history of Ukraine, since the country gained independence in 1991. As the Ambassador remarked during our meeting, Ukraine is a wonderfully rich country that has had the unfortunate experience of being terribly governed. So the new Poroshenko government certainly promises to be one the most capable governments to direct Ukraine at a critical time in its history.

One of the key objectives of our visit was to obtain insight into the array of security challenges facing Ukrainian policymakers in their struggle to subdue the Russian-backed separatist rebellion in eastern Ukraine. Some of the key insights from our visit regarding these security challenges are the following:

1. The Ukrainian military and security policymaking elite remain in a state of psychological shock due to Russian actions taken with the annexation of Crimea and the Russian-led war in eastern Ukraine. The historical notion of close Russia-Ukraine relations and the concept of Russia acting as a big elder brother to Ukraine have been shattered. Ukrainian policymakers stated repeatedly that Moscow's actions have guaranteed that future generations of Ukrainians will harbor strong anti-Russian feelings because of Putin's actions. Increasingly, the Ukrainian

elite is grasping this development of Ukraine as a nation and the support for the nation state has been Putin's greatest gift to Ukraine as a result of this crisis.

2. Ukrainian security and defense policies and much of the poor military performance in eastern Ukraine can be traced to the organizational structure and make up of the military forces and the various command relationships between the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ukrainian military units serving in the East. I can cite several examples here that illustrate my point. The first and foremost example are the border guards who until recently were a separate branch of the Ukrainian military and have now been subordinated back under the arm of the Ministry of Defense. Miscommunication and poor coordination with the Ministry of Defense and the regular army have been a huge factor in Ukraine's inability to protect its border. Key aspects of the Ukrainian constitution that prohibit actions of the Ukrainian military inside the territory of Ukraine have also plagued the defense forces. Last and not least has been the uncertainty of an interim government and the ability to take orders from officials who were at best an interim government — and one whose civilian officials lacked military experience. Now with a newly elected government in charge of the military, the Ukrainian MOD has shown a new assertiveness in carrying out orders because the air of uncertainty has been eliminated. In short, no one wants to lose their job because of inactivity in the East due to the fear that the officials giving the orders will not be there tomorrow. I remain hopeful that much of the disorganization and confused nature of Ukrainian military actions in the East will come to an end, and the Ukrainian military will operate more effectively. Indeed, the recapture of Mariupol last week is an encouraging sign that the military is regaining the upper hand against Russian backed rebels in eastern Ukraine.

3. Deficiencies in certain types of military equipment: lack of night vision goggles, reconnaissance drones and certain classifications of category 6 body armor are the key pressing requirements that Ukrainian forces need which are critically important to Ukrainian efforts to regain control over the approximately 180-kilometers of its 2000-kilometer land border with Russia that it does not have control over.

4. American and western policymakers do not yet fully comprehend the long-term implications and repercussions for post-Soviet space caused by the Russia-Ukraine crisis. A case in point is that Ukraine is talking about creating a Mannerheim line along its border with Russia that could result in a long fortified border with Russia similar to that of East and West Germany during the Cold War. Ukraine with its population of 46 million is in my opinion too big to be Finlandized. US and western policymakers and Kremlinologists need to understand that Ukraine is not Georgia, which has a population of 3 million. Ukraine and its 20 million strong diaspora represent a vast reservoir of manpower and resources that over time will help Ukraine hold its own against Russia. Moreover, taking issue further with the idea of Finlandizing Ukraine is that Kyiv can, if it chooses, opt for a nuclear option. Finland never had a nuclear option available but Ukraine did at one time and got rid of this option at the urging of the United States. Resentment is strong among some in the Ukrainian elite, that the United States continued indifference to the commitments it pledged to Ukrainian security in the Budapest Memorandum may have

a debilitating effect on Ukraine as it debates a future security and defense posture against the Russian threat. As one Ukrainian official reminded our group, the Budapest Memorandum was all about getting rid of strategic nuclear weapons and said nothing about tactical nuclear weapons. I am not arguing that Ukrainian officials are saying they will go nuclear, but they want to remind those in the West that they have this option available if the western powers remain indifferent to the Ukrainian desire to defend itself against Russia.

5. Western policymakers need to understand that Ukraine is facing a new form of warfare being waged by Russia in eastern Ukraine that many in Kyiv are referring to as “hybrid warfare.” This new form of warfare is symbolized by the deployment of Russian volunteers — like the notorious Colonel Igor Strelkov — who are using various forms of irregular warfare that were first tested by Russian advisers in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and updated and applied in Chechnya in the mid-1990s and then refined recently in Syria. The components of this new type of warfare are nothing like we in the West have ever seen before. It has been refined over time by Russian specialists like Strelkov in a series of conflicts, both outside and inside of post-Soviet space. Basically, in each of the regions where Col. Strelkov has served. Today eastern Ukraine is a testing ground for this type of hybrid warfare and the first country to be exposed to this new type of irregular warfare being waged by one state — in this case Russia, against another country — Ukraine. NATO officials in Kyiv argue that hybrid warfare is a test for NATO, whereby little green men arrive overnight in a Russian-populated enclave and declare a secessionist republic that results in a clash with host country forces. The aim of this type of warfare is very simple — it is to blur or simply obscure the distinction between warfare between nation states and that of Russian-backed separatists that neutralize the ability of outside powers to intervene. The situation in eastern Ukraine is not about Ukraine, but is all about NATO. As I noted, eastern Ukraine is a testing ground and the real challenge will be if it appears Russia enclaves in NATO member states like Estonia (such as Narva) or Latvia, which have Russian minorities. Make no mistake, Putin’s longer term goal is to break Article V of NATO and prevent NATO from acting in a unified manner. As we heard during our visit to Kyiv, Ukraine is a special testing ground for this type of warfare and it will not be the last case for its application by Moscow in post-Soviet space. Wherever there is a Russian minority residing hybrid warfare will be a special weapon available to Kremlin policymakers and it is vital that western and NATO experts begin to study and understand the challenges that hybrid warfare poses. I would like to note that hybrid warfare has many components, and it is not just irregular warfare waged by Russian special operations forces with a friendly local population. It also involves the use of information warfare. As Ambassador Pyatt noted during our visit to Ukraine — “Moscow has mastered the use of information warfare, to the point that it has weaponized the use of information.” Indeed, if you go back and review the use of the term of hybrid warfare you will see that the concept was first introduced in the United States by General James Mattis in the USNI Proceedings of 2004. In that article, which obviously has been studied and further refined by Russian experts like Colonel Strelkov, one can see that hybrid warfare has many components, and that information warfare is just one of them.

In conclusion, what happens in the security situation in eastern Ukraine and the military lessons we learn from Ukraine's battle with Russian-state supported terrorism is as important to European security as the 1939 Spanish Civil War was to European security before the Second World War. By no means am I arguing that the war in eastern Ukraine is a civil war, but it is a new type of warfare and we need to learn how to combat it because it will be repeated again by Russia in Post-Soviet space and NATO's immediate border in the Baltics. This in my opinion is one of the most valuable lessons Jamestown learned from our recent visit to Ukraine.