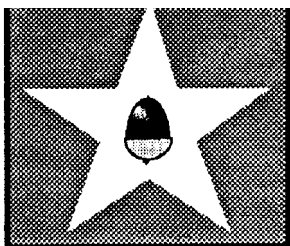


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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A Political Minuet in Kiev

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While welcome, the appointment of Yevhen Marchuk as Ukrainian Defence Minister is unlikely to result in major initiatives in military reform. President Kuchma is seeking a protective strategy for when he leaves office in 2004.

On 20 June 2003, the Ukrainian defence minister, General Volodymyr Shkidchenko resigned. The Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), Yevhen Marchuk, was quickly appointed to replace him. This development was welcomed by some foreign observers who believe, rightly, that Ukrainian defence reform has stalled. Whether Shkidchenko is to blame for the slow pace of change in the Ukrainian Armed Forces is an open question, although the very low level of defence expenditure in Ukraine and the lack of sustained attention to the armed forces by the highest political authorities would probably have undermined even the most dedicated reformist. In any event, and as one Ukrainian opposition daily reported, "restrained applause greeted the arrival of the new defence minister".¹ Marchuk's broad experience in government alongside his advocacy of defence reform suggests to some that change is in the wind. This view was reinforced by the knowledge that he is also well-known as an advocate of the Euro-Atlantic option for Ukraine and was a strong proponent of closer relations with NATO, leading to his country's acceptance of the 2002 NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. Such sentiments are, however, almost certainly misplaced and, as the months pass, the change of leadership in Ukraine's Defence Ministry will be shown to have had very little to do with defence reform.

General Shkidchenko's Exit

Shkidchenko's resignation followed two months of turmoil in the senior ranks of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) that began with a surprise visit in late April by Kuchma to naval facilities in the Crimea. Prior to meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in Yalta for a scheduled bilateral summit, Kuchma unexpectedly changed his itinerary and inspected Ukrainian military assets in Balaklava Bay. The facilities visited included four army units, the naval base, a submarine repair plant, and the naval vessel *Novy Buh*.² Referring to his inspection tour as a trip through the "backdoor of the military", Kuchma claimed to have been surprised at the poor state of the naval units he saw, and blamed the condition on mismanagement and malfeasance by senior naval commanders. At the conclusion of the visit, Kuchma issued a decree relieving the commander of the Ukrainian Navy, Admiral Mikhail Yezhel. "Most of the state property in the units has been stolen," Kuchma charged, "and the conditions in which people are serving are horrible."³ He claimed to be particularly incensed at what he saw as misleading reports about the navy's capability:

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The peak was reached in November 2002, when former Commander-in-Chief Yezhel reported that almost 95% of the ships and units on stand-by alert were assessed as ready to fulfil their combat duties. Most likely, even the former Soviet navy did not have such achievements in the best times.⁴

Later, in Kiev, Kuchma urged the Prosecutor-General's office to examine the misuse of funds and military property by the Navy, and in late May a case was opened against Yezhel on charges of abuse of office and criminal negligence.⁵ In the weeks that followed the firing of his naval commander, Kuchma re-directed his criticism toward the defence minister, whom he accused of failing to initiate reforms to modernize the UAF.⁶ At a special 20 June session of the NSDC on reform of the armed forces, which included a debriefing on Kuchma's Crimean tour, Shkidchenko submitted his resignation.

Regardless of the accuracy of the president's criticism of problems in the UAF, the resignation of Shkidchenko nonetheless came as a surprise to many observers of Ukrainian politics. The defence minister was well-regarded both at home and abroad, and was viewed as a consummate professional officer who was confronted by almost insurmountable problems. Moreover, it was generally assumed that his predecessor, General Oleksander Kuzmuk, who is related by marriage to Kuchma, continued to exercise considerable influence in the Defence Ministry, thereby undercutting Shkidchenko's authority.⁷ Given the Byzantine nature of the Kuchma regime, questions immediately arose as to whether the resignation was part of a much larger political game. As the widely respected Ukrainian journalist Yulia Mostovaya recently noted, "[w]hat the ex-Minister of Defense Volodymyr Shkidchenko was imputed to (*sic*) – the army's poor combat readiness, economic and social troubles – must have been just a cloak to disguise the real reasons for sacking him."⁸ Leonid Polyakov, a senior analyst at the Ukrainian Centre for Political and Economic Studies, opined similarly:

General Shkidchenko stood out by his professionalism and decency. Therefore, I think that the main reason for the change is political. I'm not sure about the exact reason for the change, but it seemed inevitable it would happen sooner or later because it was difficult for a military personage like Shkidchenko to remain in the political role as minister of defence. He tried to avoid politics, but the defence minister is a political role and sooner or later he was going to be sacrificed.⁹

Indeed, the reasons given for Shkidchenko's resignation are not entirely convincing, for the problems currently facing the UAF are not new. They have persisted for the past decade and are well known to both Ukrainian and international observers.¹⁰ And this is not the first time that Kuchma has intervened in the defence reform debate. In late 1999 and early 2000, he voiced many of the same views he raised this year, issued a number of decrees and then returned to other issues.¹¹ Moreover, failure to advance reform has not been a factor in replacing previous ministers, most likely because defence reform has generally been of little interest to Ukraine's highest political leaders. Kuzmuk, for example, was kept in harness for several years despite very ineffective (perhaps purposely so)¹² efforts at implementing reform. He resigned only after a series of scandals involving the UAF, particularly the October 2001 downing of the Russian Air Sibir passenger jet during an air defence exercise and his own misrepresentation to parliament (*Rada*) of what happened. Marchuk has frequently been tasked by Kuchma to put out fires caused by UAF scandals, ranging from missiles fired at civilian apartment complexes in the

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late 1990s, the Air Sibir incident, and last summer's air crash at Lviv. As a result of this background, Kuchma's surprise at what he discovered in Crimea, including Yezhel's misrepresentation of the Navy's capability, seems, therefore, somewhat disingenuous.¹³

Moreover, Yezhel's dismissal was clearly not the trigger for the re-examination of Ukraine's defence reform agenda. Media and other reporting indicate that Kuchma had already issued an order to the Ministry of Defence in late March 2003 to revisit the defence reform programme originally adopted in 1997. The presidential order called for a reduction of the UAF to 150,000 personnel from the current force level of about 350,000. It was accompanied by a document prepared by Mykola Bilokin, a general officer attached to the Presidential Administration, that ordered an increase in the number of civilians in the Defence Ministry and a "serious reduction" in the number of senior officers and generals.¹⁴ According to Borys Andresiuk, the *Rada's* Chairman of the Committee for National Security and Defence, a meeting of the Collegium of the Ministry of Defence agreed that the orders required revisions to the current reform programme, "The State Programme of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Reform and Development Until 2005".¹⁵ In early April, defence reform received an added boost when the Cabinet of Ministers approved a draft of a new Military Doctrine that had been submitted by the NSDC, but apparently with considerable input from the Defence Ministry. Under study for years, the new doctrine is designed to replace one prepared in 1993, and takes account of the changed international situation. It also responds to a demand by NATO and Washington that a more up-to-date statement of military policy be prepared. In a mid-May interview, Shkidchenko noted that "[t]he new draft military doctrine is in line with the goals of military reform in Ukraine and the spirit of the Prague summit. Its provisions are reflected in the Defence Ministry's proposals on defence review."¹⁶

By late May, therefore, the process of re-examining Ukrainian defence reform appears to have been well underway. Indeed, press reports indicate that Shkidchenko had prepared some ideas for "structural and qualitative change in the armed forces". Although Kuchma had envisaged a reduction of the UAF to 150,000 in two to three years, the Defence Minister told the State Commission for the Reform and Development of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in late May that such a timetable was impossible. Volodymyr Horbulin, the deputy chairman of the Commission, apparently shared this view, and assessed the Defence Ministry's own plan as "close to be (sic) realistic".¹⁷ Indeed, Horbulin, a close advisor of Kuchma, had argued similarly in early April: "...I would not claim that an easy solution is to release this number of servicemen within the next two to three years. I would not claim that a reform like this will bring the expected results any time soon."¹⁸

Despite this apparent harmony of views among civilian defence specialists and senior military commanders, Shkidchenko's tenure as Defence Minister came to an abrupt end on 20 June 2003. Kuchma appears to have used the disagreement over the pace of reform, that everyone else regarded as unrealistic, as the means to remove Shkidchenko. Although few onlookers accepted that the outgoing minister was responsible for the state of affairs in the UAF, a positive policy spin was immediately created to explain the personnel transition. According to a report in *Den (The Day)*, a Kiev-based daily that Marchuk purportedly controls, "the appointment of Yevhen Marchuk as defence minister shows the president's determination to streamline and speed up reforms in the armed forces".¹⁹ Such comments were found elsewhere as well. *Defence Express News*, a Kiev-based internet publication, noted that "[o]ne can anticipate Marchuk putting forward

certain initiatives related to tougher approaches to optimization of the armed forces size and structure".²⁰ Given Marchuk's record, such comments might not seem entirely unwarranted. As former president Leonid Kravchuk noted, Marchuk has extensive knowledge of the military "from the inside".²¹ To give added heart to those who believed that positive change was soon coming, at the time of his appointment Kuchma listed three tasks that he wanted the new minister to undertake: to establish a civilian defence ministry;²² to separate the General Staff from the Defence Ministry and delineate the responsibilities of each body;²³ and, to adopt modern methods of management in the UAF.²⁴ Ukraine needs, Kuchma noted, "much smaller, modern, well-equipped and well-trained forces with high combat readiness".²⁵ The identification of these objectives – goals that Kuchma had never shown any sustained interest in supporting before his visit to Crimea – fit well with the demands made by proponents of reform, in Ukraine, at NATO, and in the US. (Interestingly, President Vladimir Putin used very similar wording when discussing Russian military reform during a press conference in Moscow six days earlier.)²⁶ On 4 July, Kuchma issued a decree mandating a defence review to be completed in Summer 2004 "with the purpose of implementing the state policy of Euro-Atlantic integration, improving the national system of defence planning, specifying the tasks, structure and strength of the armed forces and other military formation".²⁷

Yevhen Marchuk's Arrival at the Defence Ministry

Yevhen Marchuk is one of Ukraine's most skillful politicians and, as a former head of the KGB in Ukraine and its successor, the SBU (*Sluzhva Bezpeki Ukraina*), as well as a former prime minister (1995-1996), is purportedly skilled in the collection and deployment of information. His appointment as NSDC chairman in 1999 came as a surprise, as he had campaigned earlier that year against Kuchma for the presidency: and, prior to the second round of balloting from which he had been excluded, warned Ukrainians that it would be a disaster if the president were to be re-elected. Unlike other Ukrainian leaders, Marchuk has no independent political organization of his own, has limited voter appeal, and is tainted by accusations of shady business dealings, including the illegal sale of armaments.²⁸ He has influence but, unlike other Ukrainian political figures, no real authority. He has been linked to the current head of the Presidential Administration, Viktor Medvedchuk, although it is unclear how close that relationship actually is. His experience in both the KGB and SBU, as well as his interest in defence and security issues, have marked him as a knowledgeable public spokesman for Kuchma on such issues. However, his influence as NSDC chairman was quite limited, especially when set against the role played by his predecessor Volodymyr Horbulin. And, whereas it has been suggested that Horbulin was dismissed because the president feared he was gaining too much influence,²⁹ there is no indication that Marchuk was viewed similarly.

Therefore, the question that immediately arises is why Kuchma moved Marchuk from his position as the head of the NSDC to the Defence Ministry. It is possible, however improbable, that Kuchma's decision to replace Shkidchenko was indeed a reaction to what the president perceived as too slow defence reform. Despite years of apathy, Kuchma and his closest advisors, including Marchuk, now know that integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures requires the UAF to be modernized – a task that includes substantive restructuring and reform. Kuchma's gate-crashing at the Prague Summit (November 2002), his humiliating reception there by the assembly of Western leaders, and the adoption of the highly intrusive NATO-Ukraine Action Plan would seem to attest to the significance he attaches to

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the NATO-Ukraine relationship. Following the Kolchuga scandal of late 2002, in which Kuchma was accused of being complicit in the illegal transfer of stealth-detecting radar equipment to Iraq, assuaging Western criticism must be a priority if Ukrainian foreign policy is to continue to balance between Russia and NATO. The commitment of 1,800 UAF servicemen to the occupation force in Iraq, despite opposition to the war by Kiev, and thereby putting some distance between it and Moscow, is one approach. Supporting the US postwar effort in Iraq will reduce the criticism directed at Ukraine for its lacklustre defence reform to date and, Kuchma might be hoping, on other issues related to civil society. Branding Shkidchenko as a scapegoat, and replacing him with Marchuk, who is well-respected within NATO for his reformist views, would also seem to advance this agenda.

There is further evidence that lends itself to this interpretation. According to the Kiev weekly *Zerkalo Nedeli*, Kuchma agreed to Marchuk's demands to be able to purge the senior officer corps, to re-subordinate military intelligence to the Defence Minister from the head of the SBU to whom it now reports, and to change the structure of the Defence Ministry.³⁰ The new law, passed by the *Rada* in mid-June but approved by Kuchma only on 10 July, which grants the Defence Minister wider authority for foreign defence cooperation, will further allow Marchuk to draw upon his favourable international ratings.³¹

All of this is, however, largely cost free for Kuchma and does not necessarily represent anything more than a continuation of the same type of rhetorical commitment to defence reform that his critics have repeatedly charged. His humiliation at the Prague Summit went largely unnoticed by the Ukrainian population, a great majority of which does not favour closer ties with the Atlantic Alliance. The acceptance of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan will, like most other such agreements, only be successful in areas not requiring politically contentious decisions. Marchuk's conditions will generate counter-pressures from vested interests in the Defence Ministry that the president may not wish to engage. (And, even if these conditions are not even partly implemented, they represent a face-saving device for both Marchuk and Kuchma, both of whom can point to them as examples of what needs to be done.) Lastly, the real decisions on reform and restructuring of the UAF will only be necessary after the defence review is completed in summer 2004 when the attention of the political class will be focused on the presidential election in the following November.

So, it would seem unlikely that heightened presidential interest in defence reform is the cause for the change of leadership at the Defence Ministry. A second, more plausible explanation for Marchuk's appointment is that it meets the president's domestic political needs. If such is the case, the real reason lies elsewhere, most likely in the effect created by Marchuk's departure. There is no shortage of scenarios, many of which seek to bridge the divide between defence restructuring and more suspect motives. For example, one Ukrainian journalist strongly opposed to the government has argued that the president's appointment of Marchuk is not principally about restructuring the UAF at all. Instead, he argues it is really only designed to use a reduction in the armed forces to free up "a huge volume of capital which can be spent on buying votes of deputies of the *Verkhovna Rada*".³² The section below will focus on an alternative explanation.

Regardless of the rationale, by assigning him to the Defence Ministry and charging him with a mandate to advance defence reform, Kuchma has given Marchuk a very difficult task at which he is unlikely to make much progress. The constraints, both bureaucratic and financial, that operated on Shkidchenko will almost certainly

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persist until well after the next presidential election. They will be lifted only if the current regime is replaced. Marchuk will, however, have to make the best of his new appointment if he wishes to remain close to the circle of power in Kiev.

The significance of his appointment should not be exaggerated. Even if Marchuk is able to implement some aspects of the reform agenda, such as introducing an effective civilian staff into the Defence Ministry – which in itself would be a considerable accomplishment – his chances of increasing his political weight are minimal. Such successes are nevertheless somewhat unlikely. A lack of a political organization linked directly to him means that he will be unable to influence parliamentary discussion of defence policy beyond the force of his own personality. He will likely be ineffective during the next year in wrenching the substantial increases in spending from the *Rada* that everyone recognises are necessary for the achievement of Ukraine's defence reform programme. While the West greets Marchuk's appointment as the harbinger of change in a moribund Defence Ministry, it is important to recognize that he has been removed from the centre of gravity in Ukraine's political sphere. In other words, the former NSDC chairman has been politically sidelined.

Opening a Vacancy in the NSDC

Established by the Constitution, the NSDC is "the co-ordinating body ... on issues of national security and defence".³³ Its broad mandate is perhaps the asset of greatest worth to the president, and over the years its role has been largely determined by what Kuchma wants it to do. As Yulia Mostovoya has written, "the Council serves as props to reach Kuchma's decisions. Within the available competence, the duties of the NSDC Secretary could be performed by any tractable politician."³⁴ Under Horbulin, for example, the NSDC was the central agency for strategic thinking in the Ukrainian government, with input into all types of policy. Under Marchuk, it has generally played a less prominent role, focusing on relations with NATO and defence reform issues. In recent months, however, the firing of senior Ukrainian officials has been undertaken by the NSDC, suggesting that Kuchma intends it to play a more prominent role in controlling the government.

Given the central role played by the NSDC, and its growing prominence, for some Ukrainian political leaders Marchuk's appointment as Defence Minister has been assessed as a demotion. "This is his honourable dismissal from the post," Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz stated, "which has to do with politics and which is meant to vacate the post for another contender."³⁵ Yulia Tymoshenko, whose opposition to Kuchma's regime is ferocious, views the situation similarly. She has argued that the president is using Marchuk to assuage Western criticism of Ukraine's defence reform efforts.³⁶ Some of this might very well be true, as Marchuk's dismissal cannot be due to him posing any threat to Kuchma or his incompetence – far from it. Unlike Horbulin, whom Kuchma dismissed as Chairman of the NSDC when he appeared to be gaining too much influence, Marchuk's tenure was notable for both its public expressions of loyalty to the president and its professionalism. It is important to note, however, that simply dismissing Marchuk from government was never really an option. By all accounts, he retains the support of Viktor Medvedchuk, and he has far too much information on the shady dealings of the regime for Kuchma to risk his angry reaction. (Lyndon Johnson's metaphor of the value of keeping the camel inside the tent would seem to be apposite here.) Furthermore, Marchuk's dismissal would have signalled lack of interest at the highest level in issues, such as defence reform and Euro-Atlantic

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integration, that the West and especially the US view as important. So, if Kuchma wanted a new NSDC chairman, a new senior-level position in government had to be found for Marchuk. In this regard, Kuchma's tour of Crimea was fortuitous and his criticism of Shkidchenko represented an effort to free up the post of Defence Minister.

At the root of the argument is, therefore, an assessment that the need to ensure that the NSDC chairman is a loyalist will be increasingly important to Kuchma over the next few months. Most Ukrainians who think about such matters regard his presidency as nine years (so far) of lost opportunity and are almost certainly awaiting his departure from office in late 2004. Damaged by the Gongadze scandal and revelations on the Melnychenko tapes, he has limited public support and is discredited internationally. He only preserves his political independence by balancing various forces in Ukraine against one another, supporting one group before abandoning it for another. The current government of Viktor Yanukovych, which represents the ascendancy of a "business grouping" known as the Donetsk clan, balances Viktor Medvedchuk, one of Ukraine's wealthiest men and most ambitious political figures.³⁷ Indeed, on the same day that Medvedchuk was named Head of the Presidential Administration, Kuchma appointed Serhiy Liovochkin, who is closely linked to the Donetsk clan, as his first personal assistant.³⁸ Given Kuchma's known dislike of the Donetsk group, his appointment of Yanukovych in late 2002 might very well have been done also to prevent a rumoured political alliance between it, the opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko and the *Nasha Ukraina* organization.³⁹ (Yushchenko's popularity has long marked him as the strongest likely candidate in the 2004 election.) In addition to weakening the *Nasha Ukraina* leader, Kuchma wants to avoid becoming little more than a prisoner of whatever grouping gains ascendancy should he fail to maintain a balance of forces within his government. Such a situation would leave him extremely vulnerable to the machinations of a wide range of political enemies. In this type of environment, despite his professionalism and competence, Marchuk, identified with the powerful Medvedchuk and lacking his own political organization, was not much of an asset to Kuchma.

While this balancing act has been a political necessity for some time, it will become even more important if, as is expected, revelations damaging to the president and his supporters should emerge from the trial of former premier Pavlo Lazarenko on money laundering charges. Lazarenko has been held in custody in California, and US officials have only recently concluded their investigation, a process that included a number of depositions from witnesses in Ukraine.⁴⁰ Charged with laundering up to US\$114 million, Lazarenko was head of a large energy consortium in Ukraine before being appointed by Kuchma to lead the Ukrainian government from 1996 to 1997. There are very strong indications that Kuchma was either wilfully blind or complicit in Lazarenko's criminal activities – behaviour that might extend far beyond money laundering.⁴¹ It is generally believed that Lazarenko's trial, which is due to begin in August, will further damage the Ukrainian president's credibility at home and abroad. Indeed, on one of the illicit tape recordings made by his former security guard, Melnychenko, Kuchma is informed by then Prosecutor-General Potebenko that Lazarenko's extradition to Ukraine would not be in their interests.⁴² Extensive efforts have been made by the Presidential Administration to pressure domestic media to restrict coverage of the Lazarenko case. Given the damage that is likely to ensue once the trial begins and evidence is presented, Kuchma will want to have his strongest supporters in positions of power, including that of NSDC chairman. Marchuk was not one of these loyalists, and his

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appointment as Defence Minister might well have been made with a view to dampening US criticism that could arise from the Lazarenko case.

Even more important, however, is Kuchma's own future after the expiry of his term in November 2004. Since the election of the current parliament in April 2002 Leonid Kuchma has been searching for a means of obtaining guarantees that will allow him to leave office without being pursued by his political enemies. Having led a regime where corruption and broad criminal activity have always been rampant, he is very concerned about the many political "skeletons in the closet" that have accumulated over his ten years in office. And, while opposition leaders differ as to how to deal with him – Yushchenko probably willing to make a deal and Tymoshenko wanting to send him to a jail cell – Kuchma cannot afford to rely on the hope of striking some agreement after the presidential election when he no longer has the power to influence events. Moreover, the oligarchs and business clans know that Kuchma's power has declined significantly since the Gongadze scandal first broke, and that their own ill-gotten gains might not be secure after he leaves the political stage. Kuchma has to be concerned that as they too look for protection, including possible deals with opposition leaders, his own interests and those of his family might be sacrificed.⁴³

Therefore, like former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, Kuchma is attempting to influence the person who will next be elected president in order to extract guarantees against prosecution. Efforts to implement constitutional reform that might prolong his term of office – either through changing the election schedule or permitting a third term – have been roundly rejected by the opposition in Kiev⁴⁴ and by the international community, particularly the United States. Failing success in these efforts, which are by no means dead at the time of writing, Kuchma will need to prepare a loyal team that can influence the 2004 presidential election.

Many observers of Ukrainian affairs are watching current events as the prelude to the installation of a reformist presidency, most likely that of Viktor Yushchenko, after November 2004. Given the uncertainties of Ukrainian politics and the stakes involved for those in the governing regime, such an outcome is far from certain. The movement of Marchuk to the Defence Ministry in order to strengthen the president's inner circle is yet another indication that Kuchma is preparing to wage a serious campaign to ensure that he (or, more correctly, his candidate) does not lose the 2004 election. If it is true, as Taras Kuzio has written, that the "ruling elite are close to panic" as the Kuchma regime's remaining days are drawn down, the need to find guarantees to protect the president and his closest supporters is more important than ever. This might also be more difficult as Medvedchuk's heavy handedness has alienated many members of the *Rada*, including those who might be inclined to support the president.⁴⁵ This is rather ironic as Medvedchuk was originally appointed to help the president fashion a working majority in parliament.⁴⁶ A chairman of the NSDC whose loyalty to Kuchma is unquestioned could therefore prove to be an extremely useful ally in deploying "administrative resources" in support of his chosen successor. Indeed, competition between the Donetsk Group and Medvedchuk, which is now barely contained, as well as the latter's own political ambitions, will leave the NSDC chairman as one of the few senior positions through which Kuchma will be able to exercise influence on the election process, from start to finish.

Conclusion

Yevhen Marchuk will be the second civilian to be a Ukrainian minister of defence. The first, Valerii Shmarov in 1995, was completely unsuccessful in bridging the natural tensions between civilian and military authority. Marchuk's experience as head of the SBU and the accompanying rank of general should smooth the transition somewhat as he takes up his new post. In any event, his duties will be onerous and the likelihood of success very slim given resource constraints and the few qualified civilian staff he can draw upon to counter powerful military vested interests. But, as this paper has argued, Marchuk's appointment was never really about defence reform – although some very limited progress which is likely to be cosmetic might very well occur. The reason for this is relatively straightforward. For the next 17 months, the Ukrainian political scene will be dominated by the run-up to the presidential election. Kuchma will have little inclination to expend the amount of scarce political capital necessary to modernize the Ukrainian Armed Forces. To keep Marchuk on side, and to placate critics in Western governments, some limited reforms might be supported, but they will be only gestures by a president desperately looking to his own future. Lacking political authority and popular support of his own, Marchuk is too weak to capitalise on the president's political vulnerability to advance a substantive reform agenda beyond the demands he made at the time of his appointment. He will, however, need to display competence as Defence Minister in order to impress the new political leadership after Kuchma leaves office.

As this report is being written, Kuchma has yet to select a new chairman of the NSDC to replace Yevhen Marchuk. The importance which he attaches to this position, and which led him to re-shuffle some senior positions in the Ukrainian government, means that he will take great care in finding a replacement. Several names have already been mentioned in the Ukrainian press, including Volodymyr Horbulin, former premier Anatoli Kinakh, and Lieutenant-General Ihor Smeshko, a former head of military intelligence and currently the first deputy secretary of the NSDC. Any of these three would be viable choices. Horbulin's experience and broad knowledge of both the government and politics (he was Kuchma's campaign manager in the 1999 election) would be a formidable asset. He is, therefore, the strongest candidate. Kinakh is known for his loyalty to the president and the organization he once led, the Ukrainian League of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, was originally founded by Kuchma. However, during his tenure as premier he allowed Medvedchuk's influence to grow, and agreed that all government business was to be cleared through Medvedchuk's office. (Yanukovych, by comparison, secured Kuchma's support in curtailing that procedure.) Smeshko's name has often been associated in the Ukrainian press with illegal business dealings,⁴⁷ leaving him vulnerable to manipulation by the president, but he is also a long-time associate of Marchuk. Some have even suggested that Medvedchuk himself might be named to head the NSDC, although this seems unlikely.

There is, nonetheless, a broad pool of people on whom Kuchma can draw, including the oblast governors, all of whom he has appointed, and other less notable members of his inner circle. In any event, the process of selecting Marchuk's successor might take some weeks. Simply put, the position is far too valuable an asset to the president as he prepares for his departure from office, to make an error. Vulnerable, both because of the scandals and corruption with which his administration is identified, and also because he is a lame duck, Kuchma cannot afford to be sloppy. He has already indicated that he is not in a hurry to fill this post,⁴⁸ suggesting that he is probably somewhat uncomfortable with the most

prominent names already mentioned. Regardless of who is eventually appointed, Kuchma's choice will be informed by who best can fulfil the president's tactical political needs in the months culminating in the 2004 presidential election.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Zakhid ne pomietib zamenih Shkidchenka na Marchuka", *Ukraynska Pravda*, 26 June 2003.

² "Ukrainian President Dismisses Navy Commander", *Interfax-Ukraine*, 28 April 2003.

³ "Ukraine's navy ex-commander faces charges of abuse of office", *FBIS-SOV-2003-0521*, 22 May 2003.

⁴ Serhiy Solodky, "Personnel Surgery", *The Day (Kiev)*, 24 June 2003.

⁵ "New Commander to Ukrainian Navy Appointed", *Moscow-Interfax*, 21 May 2003.

⁶ Askold Krushelnycky, "Can Ukraine's New Defense Minister Jump-Start Military Reform?", *RFE/RL Newslines*, 7 July 2003.

⁷ Private interview, Kiev, April 2002.

⁸ Yulia Mostovaya, "Brave Man, Afraid of Everything", *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 28 June-4 July 2003.

⁹ Askold Krushelnycky, "Marchuk Becomes Defense Minister", *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 July 2003.

¹⁰ For example, see this author's article, "The Ukrainian Armed Forces and Defence Reform" in *Slavic Military Studies* (September 2001), Vol 14, No 3, pp31-68.

¹¹ Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament Studies (CACDS), "Which Path the Army is Going to Take [*sic*]", Kiev, March 2000. (www.niss.gov.ua/cacds/rese/0217d.html).

¹² Such an assumption is not far-fetched. For many people, Kuzmuk's tenure as Defence Minister seemed to have been oriented around the goal of making certain that the UAF did not create any problems for Kuchma. The defence reform agenda was, therefore, largely rhetorical and lacked the public demands or political pressure by the Defence Minister for the *Rada* to provide the necessary funds. Volodymyr Horbulin, a senior advisor to Leonid Kuchma and former head of the National Security and Defence Council, has stated that "In my opinion, the former Defence Minister did all he could to slow down the reform, arguing that the Ministry needed more documentation utilizing a large timeframe". See Horbulin's comments in Yulia Mostovaya, "An Awaited Resolution", *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 29 March-4 April 2003. Given Kuzmuk's close relationship with Leonid Kuchma, this is a remarkable statement.

¹³ There are very strong suspicions that the firing of Admiral Yezhel was due to his criticism of the Russian Black Sea Fleet presence in Sevastopol: or that Yezhel opposed the demilitarization of Balaclava Bay, which would create highly lucrative investment opportunities for those who have special access to the privatization process in Ukraine, and that Kuchma has since decreed. Neither charge has been proven, although reportedly Yezhel's relations with the commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Vice Admiral Vladimir Masorin, had deteriorated significantly, and would likely have come up for discussion when Putin met Kuchma later that month. See Roman Woronowycz, "Controversy continues over dismissal of commander of Ukraine's Naval Forces", *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 8 June 2003; "Kuchma Demands Balaclava Bay in Sevastopol Be Demilitarised", *Interfax-Ukraine*, 5 June 2003.

¹⁴ Yulia Mostovaya, "Brave Man, Afraid of Everything", *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 28 June-4 July 2003.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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¹⁷ "Ukraine backtracks on timeframe for army cuts - defence minister", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 May 2003.

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