Introduction

The U.S.’ military strategy for Ukraine is misaligned with its 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS). Among other objectives outlined in the document, the NSS states that the U.S. will deter Russia, leverage U.S. leadership to “mobilize collective action to address global risks”, and will support emerging democracies. Each of these objectives support national interests and are consistent with U.S. efforts to provide global stability. The NSS also states that the use of force “is not the principal means of U.S. engagement abroad, nor always the most effective for the challenges we face.” Despite this assertion, the U.S. has utilized the military instrument of national power in Ukraine, despite it not being the most effective strategy for the global challenges and opportunities presented as a result of the Ukraine conflict. The current military strategy of providing training and equipment to Ukrainian forces is at odds with the NSS; it will prove ineffective at accomplishing the objectives outlined in the NSS. More specifically, it will not deter Russia, fails to mobilize the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to act on matters vital to its collective security, and strengthens and legitimizes forces with anti-democratic ideals and values.

Deterring Russia

Current U.S. military strategy designed to deter Russia include funding, arming, training Ukrainian forces. This strategy runs counter-productive to the NSS designed to deter Russia. The NSS states that the military will “remain essential to deterring future acts of inter-state aggression.” As it applies to deterring Russia, however, the use of the military has an opposite effect. The U.S. expansion into Eastern Europe in recent years has escalated tension and provoked Russia to take measures against what it views as an ever-growing encroachment by western powers within its sphere of influence. Multiple examples demonstrate Russia’s predictable response to U.S. presence in the region.

In 2002, the U.S. began training and equipping Georgian forces as part of the Georgian Train and Equip Program. The U.S. presence did not deter Russia from invading Georgia and seizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008. The U.S. response to this territorial incursion by Russia into Georgia was remarkably similar to its response to the recent Russian seizure of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine. In both cases, the Presidents of the United States delivered speeches condemning Russian aggression and pledging support for the democracies of Georgia and Ukraine. Similarly to Ukraine, the U.S. provided military support to Georgia, as well. The 2009 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) pledged $50 million for Georgian security operations. Despite this, Russia has continued to act aggressively when confronted militarily.
More recently, Russia has reacted aggressively as U.S./NATO exercises have encroached close to their territorial borders and adjacent countries. During Exercise Atlantic Resolve, a 2015 NATO mission in the Baltic Sea, Russian jets overflew U.S. Navy ships. The exercise, which was designed to further interoperability between NATO partners, included portions of the exercise along the coast of Poland. The response of Russia was predictable considering Poland’s geostrategic proximity to Russia. In the Black Sea, Russia has behaved similarly. In 2015, on two separate occasions, Russian Su-24 jets have overflown U.S. warships (USS Ross and USS Cook) during routine maneuvers in the Black Sea. In May, 2016, the United States deployed and activated a ballistic missile defense system to be operated out of Develesu, Romania. Russia condemned the action and publicly stated that its existence threatened Russian security. The Russian response was predictable with past actions. In October 2016, it deployed a nuclear-capable Iskander missile system to Kaliningrad. Finally, in Syria, amidst rising tensions with the U.S. on the conduct of the conflict, Russia deployed an S-300 anti-air missile system which threatens U.S. freedom of action in the region. Perhaps the most useful example demonstrating how U.S. military action will not deter Russian aggression is the example of, surprisingly, Ukraine. The U.S. has been conducting Exercise Sea Breeze in Ukraine since 1997. This continual presence did not have a deterrent effect. Russia has a clear history of predictable behavior when confronted militarily.

While history indicates that Russia will respond with strength when confronted with strength, the current military strategy does not challenge Russia significantly enough to raise the stakes to levels in which Russia is compelled to curb their actions. This is largely due to inconsistencies between foreign policy and military strategy. In the case of Ukraine, Congress has delivered a clear message to Russia that the U.S. will limit its military commitment and avoid escalation. Its passage of the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2016 signaled a lack of U.S. resolve for the region.

The level of support currently committed as part of the NDAA will have little impact on deterring Russia. The NDAA authorizes $300 million as part of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. The preponderance of the funding is only authorized for defensive weapon systems. Only $50 million is authorized for “offensive-type” weapons such as mortars, crew-served weapons, and anti-armor weapon systems. Most of the money is for “command and control, small unit tactics, counter-artillery tactics, logistics, countering improvised explosive devices, battle-field first aid, post-combat treatment, and medical evaluation.” By limiting Ukraine’s offensive capability, the U.S. has demonstrated to Russia its unwillingness to escalate hostilities. This will be interpreted as a lack of resolve for Ukraine and will not deter Russia.

The NDAA is not the only way that the U.S. is demonstrating a lack of resolve for Ukraine. U.S. political leadership has also signaled that the U.S. will remain measured in its defense of Ukrainian sovereignty. In a speech at NATO headquarters in March 2014, the U.S. President Barak Obama, when addressing the crisis in Ukraine, stated, “To be honest, if we define our -- our interests narrowly, if we applied a coldhearted calculus, we might decide to look the other way. Our economy is not deeply integrated with Ukraine’s. Our
people and our homeland face no direct threat from the invasion of Crimea. Our own borders are not threatened by Russia’s annexation.\textsuperscript{13} President Obama, in admitting that Ukraine’s sovereignty is not a matter of U.S. national interest, sends clear indications across the globe of the level of support the U.S. will provide. In a separate speech, President Obama further articulated that he favored a diplomatic resolution to the Ukraine crisis when he said, in 2015, “There continues to be a better choice -- the choice of de-escalation, the choice of joining the world in a diplomatic solution to this situation, a choice in which Russia recognizes that it can be a good neighbor and trading partner with Ukraine even as Ukraine is also developing ties with Europe and other parts of the world. I’m going to continue to engage President Putin as well as President Poroshenko and our European partners in pursuit of such a diplomatic solution.”\textsuperscript{14} The message being conveyed to Russia is that our national policy for Ukraine is at odds with our military strategy and there is a limit to what the U.S. will do to protect Ukraine. Thus, the military strategy will not deter Russian aggression.

The U.S.’ contradictory national and military strategies have an effect beyond Russia and Ukraine. As the President mentions in his earlier quote, Ukraine is not a matter of U.S. national interest. It is, however, in the national interest of NATO and Europe. This mismatch in policy prevents the U.S. from improving collective security efforts in the region, which is a central theme of the NSS.

**Strengthening NATO**

The current military strategy of training and equipping Ukrainian forces will undermine the U.S. ability to influence collective security efforts in Europe. It risks sending a conflicting message to NATO that the U.S. sees Ukraine in its national interest when, in actuality, it is in NATO’s interest. The NSS states that the U.S. will use force unilaterally when its “enduring interests demand it: when our people are threatened; when our livelihoods are at stake; and when the security of our allies is in danger.”\textsuperscript{15} Further, it states that in circumstances when U.S. interests are not directly threatened, the U.S. “will seek to mobilize allies and partners to share the burden and achieve lasting outcomes.”\textsuperscript{16} By acting unilaterally (from a military standpoint), the U.S. failed to further its NSS that highlights the need for NATO to make “reforms and investments...to make sure we can work more effectively with each other.”\textsuperscript{17} As a result, the current military strategy has undermined the NSS and the result is that NATO has not advanced collective defense in Europe.

The U.S. did not leverage the conflict in Ukraine to compel NATO members to improve collective security. In February 2015, in addressing the Leangkollen Conference in Oslo, NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow stated, “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is not an isolated incident, but a game-changer in European security.”\textsuperscript{18} This acknowledgment that Russia’s actions in Ukraine were a European issue presented an opportunity for the U.S. to further collective security in Europe, which is a central theme in the NSS. The U.S., however, utilized its military strategy to undermine this opportunity, despite being contrary to the NSS. Rather than force NATO to enact measures to strengthen collective defense, the U.S. has assumed the lead role in providing military
support to Ukraine. By not doing this, the U.S. has undermined collective security efforts in
the region and enabled NATO to continue its practice of over-relying on the U.S. for security
matters that are not part of the U.S.’ “enduring interests.”

The level of commitment that NATO members have toward collective defense
reflects an over-reliance on a handful of countries. NATO countries are expected to spend 2
percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense spending. Of the 28 countries
that comprise NATO, only five will meet their cooperative security defense spending
requirements: U.S. (3.61), Greece (2.38), United Kingdom (2.21), Estonia (2.16), and Poland
(2.00). An equal number of countries spend below 1% of their GDP. For 2016, European
countries (as part of NATO), will spend 1.46% of their GDP. In 2014, after the
commencement of hostilities in Ukraine, NATO members convened in Wales and signed the
Wales Summit Declaration. In that document, NATO members pledged an increase in
defense spending to reach the 2% figure. The following year, only 1/3 of those countries
that signed the Declaration saw increases in defense spending. Secretary General
Stoltenberg, in addressing this decrease in spending, said in 2015, “NATO is the strongest
military alliance in history. Yet, we cannot take our security for granted. Since 1990, there
has been a steady fall in European defense spending. And last year, there was a further
decline of about 3%. So the fact is that our security challenges are increasing, but our
defense spending is decreasing. This is simply not sustainable.” President Obama, a year
later at the NATO summit in Poland, also weighed in on the lack of progress made by NATO
saying, “But for those of you doing the math, that means that the majority of allies are still
not hitting that 2 percent mark -- an obligation we agreed to in Wales. So we had a very
candid conversation about this. There’s a recognition that given the range of threats that
we face and the capabilities that we need, everybody has got to step up and everybody has
got to do better.”

While NATO members have not spent on their defense equipment, it appears that
there is an overreliance on NATO exercises, which are largely funded by the U.S.’ European
Reassurance Initiative. In 2015, for example, NATO conducted nearly 300 exercises, with
100 of these exercises being conducted in Eastern Europe. Overall, the United States
contributes approximately 70% of the NATO requirement. While there is an aspirational
goal for collective security, it largely being provided by a single country. While NATO has
consistently underspent on its collective security, Russia has dramatically increased its
defense expenditures.

Following the invasion of Georgia in 2008, Russia embarked on a military
modernization program. The result of this has seen dramatic improvements across its
military capability. Recent events in Syria have highlighted the increase in Russian
readiness. For example, their successful launching of cruise missiles from warships
demonstrated a level of sophistication not seen previously. In addition, Russia has also
stated that it will add three additional divisions in order to counter NATO aggression along
its borders. Finally, its utilization of hybrid warfare in Ukraine represents an emerging
military strategy requiring study and analysis. These examples demonstrate a concerted
Russian effort to improve its military at a time when NATO is decreasing theirs.
The U.S.’ military strategy in Ukraine has undermined its ability to leverage Russian aggression to strengthen NATO’s collective defense, which is a central theme in the NSS. As a result, the U.S. has assumed lead responsibility for providing military assistance to Ukrainian forces. The decision to train and equip Ukrainian forces exposes a further mismatch between the military strategy and the NSS because the forces receiving the training and equipment represent a threat to the very democracies that the NSS states the U.S. will support.

Promoting Democracies

The United States has long had a history of promoting democratic governments across the globe and it is part of its NSS. The NSS states that the U.S. will “concentrate attention and resources to help countries consolidate their gains and move toward more democratic and representative systems of governance.” During the Arab Spring, both the President and Secretary of State publicly voiced their support for the rise of democracies in the Middle East. In supporting Ukrainian sovereignty, the U.S. has continued this foreign policy. In July 2016, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry commented, “So long as Ukraine’s democratic forces stay united and continue to make progress towards the goals that the people of Ukraine have expressed, I can assure you, on behalf of President Obama and the American people, the United States will stand with Ukraine.” While this has remained a consistent principle in U.S. foreign policy, its military strategy in Ukraine is in conflict with it because the paramilitary forces that will be trained and equipped represent a threat to democracy.

There are approximately fifty paramilitary battalions currently engaged in some level of conflict with Russian separatists. When hostilities began in April 2014, the Ukrainian military was woefully unprepared to confront the Russian separatists. This gave rise to the emergence of paramilitary organizations. While these organizations were vital to the immediate defense of eastern Ukraine, their continued existence has allowed them to metastasize into an existential threat to a post-conflict Ukraine because they are not united in their support for the existing government. Although they have been subsumed by the Ukrainian military, this is in name only; they continue to operate as independent units. Their ideologies, perpetrated atrocities, and unpredictability are diametrically opposed to U.S. values.

Paramilitary forces have differing ideologies. The common trends in ideologies are “pro-Ukraine/anti-Putin”, “anti-Semitic”, and “pro-oligarch”. Many are simply “anti-Russia.” More disturbingly, however, is that these organizations frequently adopt an ultra-nationalist set of ideals that borders on fascism and anti-Semitism. One of the most prominent paramilitary groups is the Azov Battalion, who originated from a nationalist social group that espoused white supremacy, racial purity, and an authoritarian and centralized form of government. (This particular paramilitary battalion has caused considerable concern within the U.S. Congress. House Resolution 2685, as part of the NDAA, was unanimously passed that would “limit arms, training, and other assistance to the neo-Nazi Ukrainian militia, the Azov Battalion.” This resolution was not, however, included in the final bill.)
The final common ideology found in paramilitary battalions is the “pro-oligarch” ideology. These battalions were recruited and formed by rich oligarchs throughout Ukraine in order to preserve their lucrative illegal activities during the crisis. Their battlefield behavior reflects their dangerous ideologies.

Paramilitary forces have conducted battlefield atrocities that are not only inconsistent with U.S.’ ideals, but are also in violation of international treaties. Both Amnesty International and the Office of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights have substantiated considerable abuses by the paramilitary battalions, which include war crimes. The results of the investigations indicate that the paramilitary battalions choose to ignore the rule of law and that some battalions “have been involved in widespread abuses, including abductions, unlawful detention, ill-treatment, theft, extortion, and possible executions.” Furthermore, the lack of oversight by the Ukrainian military has created an environment where the various paramilitary battalions are allowed to create their own laws of war. Interviews with paramilitary battlefield commanders indicate an ambivalent attitude for human rights. For example, when confronted with accusations that his battalion was committing war crimes, the battalion commander for Aidar battalion responded, “It’s not Europe. It’s a bit different... There is a war here. The law has changed, procedures have been simplified... If I choose to, I can have you arrested right now, put a bag over your head and lock you up in a cellar for 30 days on suspicion of aiding separatists.” The battalion commander for Tornado battalion, when asked a related question, responded similarly. The paramilitary battalions operating in Ukraine lack the discipline characterized by professional warfighting organizations.

While the paramilitary battalions’ ideology and battlefield atrocities are abhorrent, it is their unpredictability that poses the most concern for a post-conflict Ukraine. As stated previously, their ideologies are not tied to the existing government. Currently, they share a common enemy with the Ukrainian government: Russia. Because the paramilitary battalions are “pro-Ukraine” and not “pro-government”, it is uncertain how they will act once the conflict has concluded. As a result, the oversight and control that Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has been able to have on these forces has been tenuous. Initially, these paramilitary battalions operated independent of state security forces, however government efforts have attempted to rein in these paramilitary organizations by having them register with the Interior Ministry and be subjugated to state security force oversight (Nov, 2014). All but one battalion complied—the Right Sector battalion. The Right Sector resisted the move and the Ukrainian government cracked-down on the Right Sector, resulting in direct confrontation between the two forces. In a compromising move, the Ukrainian government named Dmytro Yarosh, a popular and outspoken ultranationalist leader of the Right Sector battalion, a “military advisor” in the Ukrainian military in order to bring the Right Sector battalion under the control of the Interior Ministry. This move clearly demonstrates the threat the government perceives from paramilitary forces. Furthermore, the Ukrainian government must be concerned with the paramilitary forces’ role in the peace process. Given their ultra-nationalist ideology, they will be satisfied with only one result: reunification of Ukraine and expulsion of Russian forces. While they may currently state that they are subordinated to the government, it is highly likely there will be
a clash of ideologies if their objectives are not met. The result of this likely will lead to a destabilized country with a questionable democratic future for Ukraine. Providing military support to forces such as these as part of our military strategy is in direct conflict with the national policy of promoting democracy around the globe.

Counterargument
While the military strategy conflicts with the NSS, it can be argued that the current military strategy is consistent with similar strategies employed previously. Two examples demonstrate similar approaches. In Afghanistan and Libya, the U.S. actively supported foreign forces because it believed that the forces funded and equipped shared the U.S.' long-term strategic objectives, that the U.S. was supporting forces closely aligned with U.S. national values, and that the conflict would remain limited in scope and duration. While this is a valid and accurate counterargument, it fails to account for the failings that resulted from such a strategy.

In each of these examples, the U.S. believed that the forces it supported shared similar strategic objectives. Following the Soviet invasion in 1979, the U.S. aligned itself with the mujahedeen in Afghanistan and provided training and equipment that sustained their resistance against the Soviets. While the mujahedeen aligned with our objective of expelling the Soviets, their post-conflict actions were not in line with U.S. strategic objectives. Growing into the Taliban, they gained continued support and eventually seized control of the government, installing a pro-Islamic and oppressive form of government. In Libya, the U.S. aligned itself rebel forces committed to the ouster of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The rebel forces, however, did not share the U.S. larger objective of establishing a liberal democracy post-Gaddafi. Each case highlights the danger associated with supporting foreign forces assumed to align with strategic objectives. Ukraine faces similar challenges. The current administration is fragile and it is uncertain if it can remain effective. The emergence of paramilitary forces, their inclusion in the Ukrainian military, and their rise in popularity and public support indicates that they will be a powerful actor in a post-conflict political environment.

Each example also demonstrates the U.S.' willingness to support foreign forces it believes represents similar values. In Afghanistan, the U.S. failed to understand the mujahedeen and its core values, which were fundamentally opposed to U.S.-espoused liberalism. The result was the birth of the Taliban and then al Qaeda. The same was also true when the U.S. supported foreign forces during the Arab Spring based on a belief that any group advocating for democracy share U.S. values. This assumption is furthered in 2011 by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who commented, when discussing the Arab Spring, “Democracies make for stronger and stable partners.” This insistence that all of these groups advocating for democratic forms of government reflected U.S. values proved inaccurate. In Libya, the forces that were backed by the U.S. were not moderates, but opportunists. As a result, Libya has remained in an on-going civil war. These strategies of providing direct support to foreign forces proved dangerous and unsuccessful. Ukraine has similarities with each of the examples listed. While espousing democracy, it has been
marked by corruption and abuse. If Russian separatists are expelled and territorial sovereignty is restored, the U.S. will likely not see a democracy in the form it expected because the very forces who receive the training and equipment will attempt to influence the post-conflict government. Their fascist and anti-Semitic ideologies will starkly contrast with what the U.S. envisioned for a “stronger and stable” partner.

The military strategy in these examples also demonstrates the U.S. desire to limit its involvement in similar conflicts in scope and duration. In Afghanistan, moderate support began with weapons and funding. What initially started as $30 million in 1980 grew to $630 million in 1987. Further, the support for the mujahedeen directly led to Operation Enduring Freedom, which remains on-going. It is too early to tell how Libya will conclude, however there is no end in sight. Whereas the U.S. viewed support to rebel forces in Libya as limited in scope and duration, incomplete policies left the region without strong central governments to prevent the growth of the Islamic State (IS). As a result, the U.S. will remain engaged against IS. Whether or not the U.S. can support Ukrainian forces in a limited manner and achieve intended results is unknown, however the question must be asked if the U.S. is willing to commit to supporting Ukrainian forces and receive similar results as it has in Afghanistan and Libya.

Conclusion

An analysis of the Ukrainian case study reveals that the U.S. military strategy for Ukraine is inconsistent with its NSS. The military strategy being employed will fail to deter Russia, prevents the U.S. from improving collective security efforts in Europe, and supports fascist and anti-Semitic paramilitary forces that will threaten the democratic future of Ukraine. Examples of similar strategies employed in previous conflicts demonstrate the complexities and challenges associated with such a strategy. In order to prevent similar results, the U.S. must alter its military strategy.

Recommendations

There must be a complete overhaul of U.S. military strategy in Ukraine in order to align it with the NSS. An indirect military strategy to accomplish national objectives not only in Ukraine, but in the region, is more appropriate than the strategy currently employed. Specifically, the U.S. should cease the training and equipping of Ukrainian forces who threaten the current government, continue to weaken Russia economically to limit its ability for defense expenditures, and leverage the Ukrainian conflict to compel NATO to improve its collective defenses.

Training and equipping Ukrainian forces represents a threat to a post-conflict democratic form of government and counter to the NSS. In order to align U.S. military strategy in Ukraine with its national strategy, it should cease training and equipping Ukrainian forces, many of whom possess paramilitary ideologies counter to Ukrainian and U.S. national interests. Their ideology, battlefield atrocities, and unpredictability indicate they are not a force to be developed, but to be eliminated. Although the U.S. has repeatedly pledged support for emerging democracies, the paramilitary forces in Ukraine are not freedom fighters determined to create a country in the mold of the U.S.; they are
fascists who, if rise to power, will create instability in the region. Training and equipping these types of forces will likely lead to long-term complications and further destabilization of the region. Their loyalties are not to the government, but to the unification of Ukraine. Paramilitary forces in Ukraine have openly confronted the Poroshenko government, and it is likely that this sort of behavior will continue post-hostilities. They will remain a major actor in the future of Ukraine if the U.S. continues to legitimize them by training and equipping them. In addition to ceasing the training and equipping of Ukrainian forces, the U.S. should also continue to leverage other instruments of national power to degrade Russia’s ability to conduct future aggression in Europe.

The U.S. must also leverage other instruments of national power in order to weaken Russia militarily and deter future aggression. Following the annexation of Crimea, the European Union and the U.S. enacted economic sanctions against Russia. The impacts of these sanctions have had considerable impacts on the Russian economy and have led to a drop in the value of the Ruble, inflation, and recession. These trends are expected to continue and it is likely the Russian economy will face recession. The continuation of these sanctions will limit military expenditures and decrease the likelihood of future Russian aggression. This strategy will likely lead to the defeat of Eastern Ukraine, however. From a military standpoint, this should not be of concern. Since Ukraine is not an ally and President Obama has clearly indicated they are not in U.S. national interest, the U.S. should leverage Russian success in Ukraine to persuade NATO members to improve collective security.

The U.S. must also engage NATO members to increase collective security in Europe, even if it means failure in Ukraine. The U.S. must use Russian aggression in Ukraine to signal the need for a robust collective security effort in Europe. To date, few countries have fulfilled their obligation to spend 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense spending, however many have made improvements. In 2016, 14 NATO members increased their defense spending relative to GDP. The U.S. must continue to engage NATO members to make progress toward the shared responsibility of collective defense. At the same time, it must accept risk in its own contributions to NATO in an effort to signal its resolve toward shared responsibility.

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3 Ibid.


11 Ibid.

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38 Ibid.


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