

## Ukraine Beefs Up Its Military Defenses with an Eye on Russia

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 5 Issue: 232

December 5, 2008

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Since the Russian invasion of Georgia in August, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has stressed the need to review defense priorities, with reference to the budgetary allocations to the military (The Times, August 23). The president warned that he would refuse to sign the state budget for 2009 unless it increased the military budget for 2008.

The Yushchenko's demand for higher outlays comes at a bad time, as Ukraine's 2009 budget will be severely constrained by parliament's anti-crisis package adopted in October as a precondition for a \$16.4 billion IMF standby loan. The president is unwarranted in blaming the Yulia Tymoshenko government for the state of the military, inasmuch as it was starved of funds by all the previous 13 governments.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov announced plans to increase Ukraine's military presence in the Crimea and to deploy new units on Ukraine's border with Russia. Asked if he feared that the Crimea would become a "second South Ossetia," Yekhanurov replied that "Military provocation will not take place. There are certain tendencies there, but we have sufficient forces to localize a threat" (Tyzhden, November 7-13). Unlike South Ossetia, the Crimea has never been a frozen conflict zone outside of Ukraine's central control.

Yekhanurov pointed out that the Crimea was different from South Ossetia because Ukraine had well equipped security forces based on the peninsula that included marines, the best trained units in the armed forces, as well as air force and anti-aircraft missile complexes (AMC). In the aftermath of the invasion of Georgia, these units would be strengthened and prioritized, Yekhanurov said.

The Pivdenmash company (Yuzhmash) in Dnipropetrovsk, one of the largest military industrial complexes in the former USSR, is developing a new AMC, the

advantage of which is that it can be used to provide support to both aviation troops and to infantry and naval forces. The new AMC, expected to enter production in 2010, will be used in ground to air, ground to ground, and ship to ship anti-aircraft units and is undergoing tests at Ukraine's only test site near Feodosiya, Crimea.

Yekhanurov announced plans to deploy new units to the Ukraine's long land border with Russia. In the Soviet period, eastern Ukraine had no military district; Ukraine's two military districts were western and southern. A Northern Operational Command (NOC), headquartered in Chernihiv on the Russian border, was created in the mid 1990s to cover Ukraine's northern and eastern regions bordering Russia.

The 8th Army Corps forms the basis of NOC, which includes one airmobile, one artillery, and three mechanized brigades as well as the Army Aviation Regiment. The Army Aviation (air defense) Regiment was deployed in eastern Ukraine last year and provides a defense umbrella over economically important Donbas. Next year further Ukrainian military units will be deployed on Ukraine's land border with Russia (Delo, November 26).

Following the collapse of the USSR, the Crimea quickly came under Ukrainian central control, the exception being the Black Sea Fleet, which remained contested until the May 1997 agreement with Russia. The Southern Operational Command (SOC), headquartered in Odessa, is based on the former Soviet Southern Military District, excluding Moldova.

Ukraine has large armed forces structures in the Crimea, which falls under the SOC, as the region was heavily militarized in the USSR. The 6th Army Corps is central to the SOC, which includes one airborne, one airmobile, one armored, one artillery, and three mechanized brigades ([www.sentinel.janes.com](http://www.sentinel.janes.com)).

In addition, Ukraine has other security forces in the Crimea: naval (seamen, marines, and special forces), border troops, and Interior Ministry (MVS) Special Forces. The Crimea Tactical Group in Belbek is based around the 204th Fighter Aviation Brigade operating MiG-29s for air defense and attack.

Elite National Guard units were stationed in the Crimea from 1991 to 1999. After President Leonid Kuchma abolished the guard and transferred these units to the MVS in 2000 they were the best trained MVS Special Forces.

During the Orange Revolution, at a time when the majority of the MVS had defected to Yushchenko, the Crimean MVS Special Forces remained loyal to the end to Kuchma. Dispatched to Kyiv to guard the presidential administration, Crimean MVS Special Forces, such as BARS, were mistakenly reported as “Russian spetsnaz.”

Russia’s reaction to Ukraine’s proposed re-deployment was entirely negative, describing it as a “provocation.” Nikolai Tulayev, a member of the State Duma’s Committee on Defense and Security, ridiculed the idea that Ukraine’s armed forces would become a threat to Russia. “From the military point of view, the Ukrainian armed forces do not constitute a threat to anybody,” Tulayev scoffed (UNIAN, November 29).

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin rejected the idea of a Russian threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity (Germany’s ARD television channel, August 30). Following Russia’s invasion of Georgia, no Ukrainian president or government could ignore continued provocations in the Crimea by Russian nationalists, the distribution of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens, and threats not to remove the Black Sea Fleet in 2017. Two Russian Crimean leaders were arrested last week and charged with threatening Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

Putin told the April NATO summit that Ukraine was an artificial state that could disintegrate if the country joined NATO. These views are commonplace across Russia’s political spectrum, from the Communists, through Unified Russia’s “pragmatists,” to the pro-Putin nationalist camp. Russia’s NATO representative Dimitri Rogozin warned the BBC on December 1 that Ukraine would disintegrate if it joined NATO.

Regime loyalist and nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the deputy chairman of the State Duma and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, said that two-thirds of Ukraine was in reality “Russian territory.” If Ukraine wanted to remain independent, Zhirinovsky advised, it could only remain so in a third of the territory that it currently occupied, with the other two thirds reverting to Russia (www.pravda.com.ua, December 1). These views are echoed by Moscow Mayor and senior Unified Russia member Yury Luzhkov, who raised territorial demands on Sevastopol during his visit to the Crimean peninsula in May.

Ukraine's deployment of additional units to the Crimea and its land border with Russia reflects Ukraine's perceived security threats following Russia's invasion of Georgia. In Ukraine's eyes the threat is real, albeit unrecognized by Brussels.