

**Remarks of Ambassador Alexander R. Vershbow
Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
*U.S.-Ukraine Security and Defense Relations***

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Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine**

Thank you very much for the invitation. It is a great honor to be here today and great to be back in Kyiv, a city I first visited when I was a high school student 40 years ago. And it is also a pleasure to visit this beautiful and historic building, which I am told was built by the famous Ukrainian architect Olexander Beretti.

I commend you for your decision to study a diplomatic career at this prestigious institution. I understand that 500 graduates have matriculated from this academy since its founding in 1995. Speaking at this institution has a personal meaning for me since before prior to assuming my current position as a Defense official at the Pentagon, I had a 32-year career in the U.S. Foreign Service and spent many years working on issues related to this part of the world. I was a witness to many historic events, including the end of the Cold War and the emergence of 15 new states from the former Soviet Union, including an independent and democratic Ukraine. I experienced the Russian reaction to the Orange Revolution while I was in Moscow as Ambassador. It was a very interesting experience. I hope that all of you will find the service of your country to be as interesting and rewarding as I did.

I have come to Kyiv this week to lead the U.S. delegation to the annual U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Defense Consultations. I've already had fruitful and candid discussions with Acting Minister of Defense, Mr. Ivashchenko, and other key members of the Ministry of Defense and I hope to meet with other Ukrainian leaders and national security experts. The Bilateral Defense Consultations are an important activity in which the U.S. Department of Defense and Ukrainian Ministry of Defense meet to discuss key issues in our bilateral defense relationship. And that is what I would like to talk to you about this afternoon – the security and defense partnership between the United States and Ukraine, which is an important component of Ukraine's efforts to become a strong, independent and secure nation and active contributor to international peace.

Let me first start by stating that the United States and Ukraine share an important and valuable strategic partnership. This is a message that Vice President Biden delivered during his visit to Kyiv in July, and it is a message that I have come to Kyiv to reaffirm. As the Vice President said, the United States will stand by Ukraine as it continues on the path to freedom, democracy and prosperity. Now these are your choices, not ours. But rest assured that we will stand with you as you make these choices and try to see them to fulfillment. Ukraine's integration into Europe and Euro-Atlantic institutions will contribute to a wider and more stable Europe.

The Vice President's visit also resulted in the establishment of the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission, which further affirms the importance of the relationship between our two great countries. The commission will be co-chaired by my colleague Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon and a Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister. They will lead discussions to deepen cooperation in the areas of security, economy, trade, energy and the rule of law. And we are hoping that the first session of the commission will take place later this fall in Washington, DC.

Another message I want to reaffirm is support of the United States for deeper engagement between Ukraine and NATO. Engagement with NATO is worthwhile in its own right to help raise the professional level of Ukraine's Armed Forces and also to address common security challenges that confront all nations. Stopping the spread of the world's most dangerous weapons, tackling terrorism and cyber-security, and expanding energy security – these are problems that concern all of us, and so we should be working together to address these kinds of threats. NATO is a cooperative security structure, a forum in which countries can address the challenges that face us all. So we support closer ties between Ukraine and NATO, and we welcome the work of the NATO-Ukraine Commission that was established 12 years ago. This year Ukraine submitted its first Annual National Program, an important document that will help the Allies to provide advice and assistance as Ukraine seeks deeper Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO's door is open to Ukraine, but NATO membership is ultimately for the Ukrainian people to decide. This is a choice for Ukraine and no one else to make, and the United States stands by the right of nations to choose their own alliances.

Ukraine is already making important contributions to NATO, and we highly value these contributions. Ukraine is an active member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and Ukrainian servicemen are participating in NATO operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo. Ukrainian ships participate in Operation Active Endeavor, which is a NATO maritime cooperation activity in the Mediterranean which monitors shipping to detect, deter and prevent terrorism. Ukraine is the only non-NATO country participating in all NATO-led operations, and this clearly demonstrates Ukraine's commitment to regional and global security.

Ukraine also participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom, which has led to the establishment of a sovereign and

democratic Iraq. In this effort, eighteen Ukrainian servicemen gave their lives and forty-four servicemen were wounded. We are sincerely grateful for the contributions and sacrifices that Ukraine has made.

Turning to our defense partnership, the United States and Ukraine enjoy a very robust defense and military-to-military cooperation. We are assisting in the transformation of the Ukrainian military into a modern, professional and NATO-interoperable force, a military that can protect your homeland and contribute to international operations. Military forces that are composed of volunteers instead of conscript soldiers represent the very best ideals of a democratic society. It's the concept of the citizen-soldier. We are also assisting in the establishment of a professional noncommissioned officer corps, which is necessary for the development of a truly professional army.

To be a little more specific about some of our ongoing efforts, we are assisting with the development of defense planning documents, which can help to assign priorities in the face of limited resources so that goals and objectives can be met; we are helping to establish a better training management system so that military tasks can be performed and measured against set standards; and we are providing equipment to help your military conduct better training. So, we think that our defense cooperation activities thus far have been a real success story. And this can be seen by the relationships that have been forged between our military personnel and in the capabilities that we have worked on and developed together. We look forward to keeping these efforts in successful and upward trajectory.

An important way the United States demonstrates its commitment to Ukraine is through security cooperation activities. Under the International Military Education and Training program, or IMET, Ukrainian officers study in U.S. military academies and schools. American officers also come to Ukraine to take part in education, training and exercises. And these kinds of exchanges are an important form of military engagement, and we would like to examine possibilities for developing expanded opportunities in this field. Since the IMET program was established with Ukraine in 1992, 903 Ukrainian students have attended training, including four Ukrainian general officers who graduated from IMET programs such as the U.S. Army War College. This year we have authorized 1.77 million dollars for Ukraine in support of the IMET program. And there are currently 53 Ukrainian students attending 33 various military schools.

Another important activity is Foreign Military Financing, which provides U.S. funding to help develop interoperability, to support defense reform and to increase the training capacity of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Through the current fiscal year, Ukraine has purchased 85 million dollars worth of defense articles and services using U.S. grant money. And for 2009, Ukraine was authorized a budget of seven million dollars under this important program.

So, we have a very good record of cooperation and we are looking for ways to better engage and better cooperate, so against that background we were a little disappointed by some setbacks that we experienced this year. We recognize that Ukraine, like many other countries including the United States, has faced a difficult set of challenges. Perhaps more than many other countries, Ukraine was particularly hard hit by the global financial crisis, and sufficient funding for the armed forces has become an issue, a very sensitive issue. The approach of presidential elections in January adds another element of uncertainty. So this setback is understandable but causes concern nonetheless. And of particular note, the Verkhovna Rada's inability to approve the foreign exercises legislation caused us to cancel the Sea Breeze and the Rapid Trident exercises. This was very unfortunate because military exercises are an important way to facilitate military-to-military engagement, and they provide an opportunity for the Ukrainian military to perform tasks that can establish and measure interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces.

We recognize that in democratic societies the military exists under civilian control. So any questions about defense cooperation must lie first and foremost with the political leadership, with both the government and the parliament. This is a reality, and it is a reality of your country's democratic evolution. So, one of my purposes this week is to speak very candidly about the need to stay on track with your defense reform efforts, even in hard times. That is a message that I delivered in my meeting with Acting Minister of Defense Ivashchenko, and it is a message for political leaders as well. So I certainly recognize and commend the progress that has been made in specific areas, such as the establishment of a Joint Operations Command and the start of work to establish a Special Operations Command, other efforts appear to be lagging. It's often a question of resources and a question that is best addressed to political leaders. So, I hope that Ukraine's political leadership will make the right choices so that your armed forces will be adequately supported, and so the important work in military transformation can continue.

While I have been frank in describing to you some of the challenges we faced this year, let me clearly state that challenges exist in any partnership, and the partnership between the United States and Ukraine is no different. Friends should have open and constructive discussions. And let me also be clear in reaffirming the support of the United States for Ukraine. We support Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will stand by you on the path you have chosen toward democracy, and we will support your efforts toward European-Atlantic integration. Cooperation in security and defense matters is a highlight of our strategic partnership, and I look forward to seeing that partnership succeed and grow in the strongest possible way.

So I thank you very much for your attention. I'm now ready to survive all your questions.