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Cable title: **UKRAINE: DEFENSE MINISTER ON NATO, JOB SECURITY**

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2016

TAGS: MARR PGOV PINR NATO

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: DEFENSE MINISTER ON NATO, JOB SECURITY

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Defense Minister On: NATO...

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1. (C) During a March 22 meeting with Ambassador, Defense Minister Anatoly Hrytsenko said that he was in the process of reorganizing his general staff to meet the NATO "J-System" requirement. He added that he hoped a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for UKRAINE could be approved at the next NATO defense ministers' meeting; UKRAINE would be ready to move forward on the MAP in the fall.

2. (C) In response to Ambassador's observation that much depended on the upcoming parliamentary and local elections and the coalition government that followed, Hrytsenko argued that the new government would be supportive of UKRAINE's NATO aspirations -- even if it was an Our UKRAINE and Party of Regions coalition. Hrytsenko asserted that "Regions does not care" about foreign policy issues; Hrytsenko dismissed Regions' anti-NATO rhetoric as being solely for "domestic consumption prior to the elections." When Ambassador noted that Regions' leader Yanukovych in private had expressed interest in cooperation with NATO but not NATO membership, Hrytsenko reiterated that "Regions does not care about foreign policy."

...And Job Security

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3. (C) Hrytsenko related that he had spoken last week with Regions' financial patron, oligarch Rinat Akhmetov. He had briefed the Donetsk clan godfather on NATO, seeking Akhmetov's support for Rada approval of a joint UKRAINE-NATO training exercise (refTel). According to Hrytsenko, Akhmetov said that Regions MPs would vote to approve the exercise after the elections -- not before. The oligarch also allegedly told Hrytsenko that he was doing a good job as defense minister, a view Akhmetov claimed was shared by "others" in Regions. Hrytsenko said the conversation with Akhmetov suggested that he might stay on as defense minister in an Our UKRAINE-Regions coalition government, continuing to direct the military/defense component of UKRAINE's



Euro-Atlantic integration.

Comment

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4. (C) The anti-NATO public position of Regions is an election device, but not only that. As Ambassador told Hrytsenko, Yanukovich has said privately that he does not see UKRAINE seriously seeking NATO membership. If Regions would be willing to permit Hrytsenko to stay on as defense minister in a coalition government, it would be a clear sign of Regions not wanting to dramatically alter a major aspect of UKRAINE's foreign policy course.  
Herbst

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