

Kateryna Hladka  
Veronika Myronova  
Oleg Pokalchuk  
Vasilisa Trofymovych  
Artem Shevchenko

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## FOREWORD

**I**t's been four years that Ukraine has been defending its independence with arms in hand, resisting the cunning and deceitful hybrid aggression of Russia that has annexed Crimea and occupied some of the Donbas territory violating all the norms of international law. At the cost of lives of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, we are actually defending peace and democratic values of the Western civilization, protecting them from the cynical neo-Imperial policies of our Eastern neighbor. It is a difficult and exhausting struggle of Ukraine, and Ukraine is grateful to the international community for the massive support of our country in the international arena. It's due to this unity that we are able to significantly restrain the expansionist and invasive appetites of the Russian aggressor. We are grateful to all the foreign citizens, and the members of the numerous Ukrainian Diaspora in the New and Old World in particular, who have helped and supported us in restoring our country's defense potential. Rest assured that every dollar and euro transferred to the Ukrainian volunteer organizations, every item of the military equipment, clothing and ammunition received has been sent to the frontline, to the Ukrainian army units in Donbas, and all that is real help in defending civilized democratic Europe, and the entire free Western world.

Volunteer battalions (Ukr. dobrobats). During the years of Russian aggression against this country, every Ukrainian citizen and patriot learnt the deep meaning of these words. Now journalists and writers often play with associations, reading additional meanings into the "volunteer battalions" phrase, emphasizing that the word "good" (Ukr. dobro) is actually the most crucial part of it. Probably there is truth in it... Only for the sake of the good did volunteers enroll in the volunteer Special Troops Battalions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the units we were forced to form facing the challenges of that time!

Those were the first days after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity. The annexation of the Crimea just started, and separatists began to disrupt the East of Ukraine. It was totally clear that the Ukrainian Armed Forces, almost fully destroyed by the Yankovych regime, were in very poor condition, while the internal military troops and

police were demoralized. There were only a couple of units actually capable of resisting the separatists. Something innovative and efficient had to be done.

Oleksandr Turchynov, who was acting President of Ukraine at that time, gathered then-Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Secretary of National Security and Defense Council Andriy Parubiy, acting Head of the Presidential Administration Serhiy Pashnysky and defense officials. I was also present there as a Minister of Internal Affairs.

“We are virtually unable to respond to the threats, everything is bulging at the seams,” said Turchynov opening the meeting. “Let’s form territorial defense battalions. It is crucial to drastically increase the number of battle-seasoned and efficient units. Use the reserves, call the experienced reserve officers on duty, every day counts! Arseniy,” he addressed the Prime Minister, “I know that our Treasury is almost empty, but we should somehow provide the army with everything, with money, with fuel... Think!”

“Arsen, “ he then spoke to me, “expand the special troops units, and do it quickly. Inform me of specific proposals and actions to be taken”.

The situation was developing rapidly. It that the idea of forming territorial defense battalions by way of military conscription wasn’t a good one. They were taking too much time and effort, and not operationally ready. That was the moment when we came up with the idea to new special troops units of the Ministry of fellows enrolling only volunteers such as officials, officers, and policemen in reserve, fellows from Maidan Self-Defense, and ordinary citizens patriots of Ukraine. All of them could serve, but on a voluntary basis! They are motivated, they learn fast, and they don’t give in to the challenges of the first weeks.

Hence, relevant instructions and commands have been sent on my order throughout the country. The work began, it was prompt, and often undocumented. Away with those archaic bureaucratic procedures and filters! We risked a lot, but that was the call of the times!

The first National Guard volunteer battalion was formed right on the Maidan. We erected a recruitment tent, and just two days later a new training camp started its work in Novi Petrivtsi. A lot of work was done by Andriy Parubiy and Mykola Velychkovich, as well as many other Maidan activists.

You will find a lot of facts, memories and thoughts in this book. Of course, they are still incomplete, sometimes not entirely precise. There’s still too much work and no time for a thorough analysis. or for checking details about the volunteer battalions phenomenon in Ukraine. Time will put everything into perspective. There will be research done, and monographs written, although this book is extremely important and timely today, in our hard times...

One should not idolize the fighters of volunteer battalions, they are not gods or judges, neither are they jacks of all trades, or moralizers. They are just guys and girls, who did not hide at the most important moment, despite the deadly threats, possible outcomes of the particular military operations. They stood up to defend Ukraine! All

of them deserve utter respect, those who were killed in battle, those who were wounded, and those who came back home unharmed!

Actually not all of those in the army of thousands of volunteers were heroes. It is true. Shakhtarsk and Tornado battalions were dissolved. Things happened. It's part of human nature, it's a human world. It's not always black and white, and it's not in only bright colors. But despite everything, I will not allow anybody to condemn out of hand the Shakhtarsk battalion I dissolved! I will remind those who don't remember, or who don't know — (and I will never forget it!) — that 17 fighters of Shakhtarsk battalion were killed during the Battle of Ilovaisk. Let us honor the fighters!

I don't like it when some noisy critics and double dealers wear the camouflage as volunteer fighters. I also don't like it when people judge all the volunteer fighters by the actions of one of them. I want more and more people to find out the truth, not myths but real facts about the heroic achievements of epy volunteer fighters. They deserve it! I hope that this book will be of some assistance in that noble work.

*Arsen Avakov,  
Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine*

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## Chapter 1

# MAIDAN SELF-DEFENSE

**T**he Maidan of 2013—2014, often called Euromaidan or Revolution of Dignity, demonstrated again and to us, Ukrainians, that we are real patriots. It showed that Ukrainians are true descendants of free and courageous Zaporozhian Cossacks, as well as joyous and cheerful Tripolitans and that they have national dignity, an unconquerable will and readiness to make sacrifices.

However, we are a friendly folk with longstanding political culture and tradition and collective statehood principles, among which self-government and communities' initiative are the most crucial. Such national mentality along with a strong commitment has enabled Ukraine to withstand numerous storms of life and social and military turmoil through centuries, to preserve their national traditions and language, to become one of the most patriotic nations in the world, and to prudently and patiently pursue their goal — that of living in a free and democratic society despite all those who oppose our national revival.

And right at this time, on the verge of the recent history, Ukrainians sacrificed their lives for the Ukrainian renaissance. That's when the adamant and enduring Maidan activists first started forming SELF-DEFENSE (samooborona) units. These units later shaped the volunteer military structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Guard facing the foreign aggressor. Here are the memories of those who were involved in organizing Maidan's Self-Defense Troops.

***Arsen, Avakov,***

***Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine:***

*Self-Defense was being formed by the campaign's headquarters. That was a clear political decision taken by the Maidan's leaders. Andriy Parubiy, who then was the Maidan's commandant and head of the Self-Defense Sotnia (an organized squadron) was charged with this task.*

*Even back then it was clear that we actually had a prototype of the new defense and security forces. The volunteers were tested with the hardest tasks. Along with Parubiy, two*

of his deputies, Andriy Levus and Mykola Velychkovich, were in charge. Sometimes I also joined them, as I knew all the guys very well. Brave and courageous they were! But they were also hard to deal with, and we had to somehow consolidate them around the right idea, protect them from destructive actions, and guide them.

Later on, when I was appointed Minister of Internal Affairs, we continued active cooperation, and they were trustworthy and easy to manage. The Maidan's defense ideology was complemented with the understanding that the Maidan's Self-Defense was the only capable power, especially during the transition period. As we were on watch back then together with the police and the Maidan's Self-Defense, we paid attention to the people's capability and discipline, observed if they were willing to embrace the notions of nation building and systematic order. As we started forming volunteer battalions, these principles were taken as a basis for this movement's philosophy.

The Annexation of Crimea started separatists' processes in Donbas gained traction, especially in Luhansk. Luhansk was the city where endless talks and negotiations were ongoing: whether to free or not to free, whether to trust or to distrust the local authorities, Security Service representatives, police. The situation there was very volatile! We were even disillusioned that we could find some sort of agreement. During the talks we came up with the idea that all those people at the Maidan, who were not protesting not against Ukraine but rather against the oligarchs, could be united into a tactical unit. The events were developing rapidly in different directions, but we kept thinking about this. I often discussed this idea with Turchynov and Pashynsky.

When the revolution started spreading throughout the country, I came up with an idea to form the first reserve battalion of the National Guard (the second one was formed later). We determined several directions for the development. We erected a tent of the National Guard mobilization center at the Maidan, which was still functioning actively at that time. The first volunteers to sign up left this tent and immediately got on buses, and headed for the training base in Novi Petrivtsi. It was one of the directions for the development.

When Donbas got on fire, it was totally clear that we had to rely on the civil forces as a key factor to be trusted. I held negotiations with many governors, heads of administrations, including Kolomoyskyi, who enthusiastically supported the idea of forming volunteer battalions. That was when Dnipro-1 battalion was formed.

The situation in Donbas was escalating. We understood that it was time to form a new military unit of the National Guard. Almost the entire Security Service, same as the police, was discredited and demoralized with the events at the Maidan. A new philosophy for security and defense structures was required, as well as new functions and new administration. So we created a new administration system and a new paradigm of functioning in the National Guard.

We quickly prepared an appropriate draft law, and together with Turchynov and Poltorak defended it in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament). Thus, a new National Guard was legitimately born, and it consisted mostly of the former internal military and security forces, but volunteers from the first and second reserve battalions already started joining it.

**Serhiy Pashynsky,**  
**provisional head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine,**  
**March — June 10 2014:**

*I always spoke in support of dynamic actions at the Maidan. It couldn't be any different. It's important to understand: as of January 22, when Oleksandr Turchynov was appointed Head of the Verkhovna Rada, there were no power structures at all, had totally fallen apart centralized bodies, others were even power vertical as it is. The Security Service fhad totally fallen apart half of fled, hiding in their homes. The Ministry of Internal Affairs had disappeared as well, scattered in different directions! When the first signs of possible pogroms appeared on February 23, we had to replace all Kyiv law enforcement bodies with two hundred people from the Maidan's Self-Defense. The guys understood very well that protection of the state was at stake.*

*Kyiv was the most important place back then. The FSB people escalated the situation by setting the Maidan afire. It was dangerous though to attack the Verkhovna Rada as it was the only legitimate government authority in the country at that time, and they understood it very well in Russia. Ukraine at that time could be compared a crab without a shell, if it's possible to say so, anyone could easily destroy it by merely striking it. Nevertheless, at the Maidan, we all knew how to keep to the established order. The Maidan was, in fact, a massive structure (nearly 120 thousand meals were to be cooked every day!). People, who came to the Maidan to protest, were the needed point of consolidating all possible efforts and strivings. We called it Kulchitsky Battalion later.*

*This was just the beginning. Volunteers started to enroll as governmental agents right on the first day after Yanukovych had fled the country. The events in Crimea were developing simultaneously, and we understood, that we simply could not rely on the existing power structures. First of all, they virtually didn't exist anymore, and secondly, they were absolutely demotivated as almost all bodies of the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in repressions against the Maidan activists and protesters all over the country, and they were well aware that they would be held accountable for that.*

*We didn't want the chaos of 1917—1918 to return. It was clear once this red line was crossed, there will be no way of getting our country, our state, back. Maybe that was the reason why we somehow lost the pace, but created what we had to create. A volunteer battalion armed with Kalashnikov rifles countered the first strike of the Russian Federation in the East of Ukraine. Only later did we set the wheels of the rusty mechanism of the Ukraine's Armed Forces (AFU) in motion.*

*Just fancy all that was happening amid the Crimean events. When I hear someone saying today that we should have sent the elite troops to Crimea and got everyone arrested, I can't help laughing elite troops? Those that stormed the Trade Union House in Kyiv?! Surely, there were exceptions, funny situations occurred. Everybody was seeking publicity and trying to hype themselves back then. Once, a famous politician, surrounded by his aides, came up to me and started yelling: I've got 500 well-trained people, give*

*them weapons, and they will go to defend our Homeland! I thought to myself then: who knows, maybe they really found 500 people somewhere and mobilized them. I called to the General Staff and told them I had five hundred volunteers. Come and look at them, I told them, and if there are really people over there, give them weapons. Two hours later the commander of Kulchytsky Battalion called and told me that there were 500 inexperienced people who were not trained, but who desperately wanted to be given weapons and to join the training. No comments... I told that famous politician to just leave because they can beat you!*

*But there were also pleasant exceptions. For example, the Aidar Battalion. There was this actual administration situation. I had to cut off the northern part of Luhansk region with the pro-Ukrainian cities and towns where separatism was on minimal levels. We had to organize some kind of troops there. The territorial defense battalions of the AFU became this force. We found 50 our activists on site, and sent 100 people from the Self-Defense. And those 150 people became the core of the Aidar Battalion. You can check it in the history: we cut off the northern part of Luhansk region immediately. I marked the places for roadblocks on the map, as well as the points where separatists and their roadblocks were located (they appeared three days later). This picture was actually considered a demarcation line.*

**Valentyn Nalyvaichenko ,  
MP of Ukraine of the VII calling,  
Head of the Security Service of Ukraine  
February 24 2014 — June 18, 2015:**

*The most striking and, honestly, the most pleasant impression since the very first days of the Maidan, since the beginning of students' protests was that those were absolutely non-political actions. We, men of the Udar Parliament faction, didn't sleep, and used to come to these rallies and guard them. Each of us knew that we were responsible for the lives of those young people. To what extent we were helpful is not for us to judge. Despite the weather, the demonstrators would sing the Ukrainian national anthem at regular intervals all day long. It was especially impressive at night. Besides, we were pleased to see young people doing that.*

*Another impression was the inhumane beating of the youth near the Independence Monument. That was the time when we took the plunge. We organised a night watch, and supplied the Maidan with everything from firewood to security services. I was personally responsible for that. At that stage, the Maidan was ready to fight. There were two things that impressed me most. One was the ability of young people to organise Maidan Self-Defense units intended to keep people safe there, and they were ready to go all the way. I was among them during all the night clashes with the riot police. Usually, we, MPs, came forth to stand in the front lines, although it did not stop the Berkut... Behind us there would stand either the Afghan Sotnia, or the guys from Maidan Self-Defense units led by Andriy Levus and Dmytro Yarosh. I must say that, first of all, we were afraid of*



nothing, and, secondly, we went all the way even against bullets and water cannons. Even the wounded guys helped us. Having received the first aid from Maidan's medical women, the wounded would stand up, put their helmet on, hit it with a baton, and run back into the battle. "What are you doing?!" we asked. "There are my brothers over there..."

Another striking memory was the feeling of support that will probably stay with me forever. Arsen Avakov was the Maidan's Commandant at its last, the hardest stage. He was there every night. I knew that even at three or four o'clock on the morrow I could come to him to discuss some issues. Neither of us was trying to deliver speeches from the stage. Especially by day. And we were right. Because only young people who fought at the Maidan had and still have this right. Of course, at night, when it was extremely hard and people needed support, well, then we took on our political role and gave speeches, encouraged them on the stage. It was true that many people usually left the Maidan late at night.

After the victory of the Revolution of Dignity, the Parliament appointed me Head of the Security Service of Ukraine, and Viche (Maidan People's Council) approved it. I entered the empty building of the Security Service whose snipers fought against us on at the Maidan, and real patriots Dmytro Yarosh and Andriy Levus entered together with me. They were the first to start reviving the national security system. And under really difficult conditions. Who could be sent to the frontlines? There was no one, everybody had fled. Who would ensure security? After the Revolution of Dignity all the law enforcement bodies fell apart in Ukraine! There was literally no one to even ensure civil order by safety on the streets. Not to mention the safety of the diplomatic missions and diplomats! And there was also the Verkhovna Rada and other government bodies that had to be rebuilt from scratch... And let me remind those people trying to promote themselves and saying something could have been done had hundreds of people shot and kidnapped back then that nothing could have been done! Yanukovich not only shot and kidnapped hundreds of people, he was preparing (and got prepared!) to surrender the country, some of its territories such as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and some parts of Donbas region to the Russian Federation.

If you have never been at the Maidan at night, you will never understand this drama... Well, perhaps you shouldn't understand it... But it was at night when it was really scary, when Arsen Avakov and Andriy Levus saw the real bloodshed, and could grasp the situation. And in daylight, the sun was shining, and political rallies were held.

It was extremely hard to restore the functioning of the Security Service in Ukraine, believe me. When I left my position in June 2015, I declassified information about all the investigations initiated and opened after my appointment on February 24, 2014. I handed this information to journalists. The most important fact arising from these data was that Yanukovich and Yakymenko (who is a traitor, a deserter, the former Head of the SBU) formed the Security Service staff in all regions of Ukraine (first of all in Donetsk and Luhansk regions as well as in Crimea) exclusively from the anti-Ukrainian representatives of Donetsk or Luhansk regions. We call them separatists today. And this sort of people represented the top-down governance up to the regional level. They were busy selecting people carefully and appointing them every day. But there is more to come! All the anti-

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