



2015 LEADERSHIP IN ACTION AWARD

Presented by the Partnership for Public Service and the Leadership Alumni Board

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Finalist: Department of State

Yaropolk Kulchyckyj, Deputy Director, State Department's Ukraine-Russia Coordination Team, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs

Achievement: Provided vital and timely information to U.S. leaders about unfolding developments in the war between Ukraine and separatists backed by Russia, which has killed more than 6,000 people and displaced two million others.

When Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed in Ukraine on July 14, 2014, killing 298 civilians, the cause of the disaster was not immediately clear.

But moments after the crash, Yaropolk Kulchyckyj, deputy director of the newly created State Department's Ukraine-Russia Coordination Team, captured social media posts from separatists bragging about shooting down the plane. Although the separatists quickly removed the posts after realizing they had hit a civilian airliner instead of a Ukrainian military plane, Kulchyckyj had already alerted State Department officials and staff at the National Security Council, allowing them to plan an appropriate and timely response.

This was just one of numerous developments during the Ukrainian crisis—a war now in its second year between Ukraine and combined Russian-separatist forces—where Kulchyckyj has used his knowledge of the Ukrainian language and culture as well as his information technology skills and quick judgment to provide vital and timely information to U.S. leaders at the highest levels. The war so far has resulted in more than 6,000 deaths, some 800,000 refugees and an estimated 1.2 million displaced people inside Ukraine.

“Yaro’s role has been absolutely indispensable in helping State respond successfully to this tragic crisis,” said Eric Rubin, deputy assistant secretary for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. “He has led a number of teams to prepare briefing materials that helped policymakers make decisions to address this conflict. And he has helped refute an avalanche of misinformation from the Russians.”

Rubin said that without Kulchyckyj’s efforts, “We would not have been able to identify, combat and diminish Russian aggression in Ukraine.”

Kulchyckyj helped develop the processes, systems and operating procedures for the new office. On a typical day, he and his team monitor blogs, social media posts, chat rooms, newspapers, and radio and television broadcasts to keep abreast of breaking developments and provide information requested by the White House and other top officials. His team also created a scorecard that monitors Russian compliance with the Minsk peace plan and provided information to support U.S. sanctions against Russia in 2014.

“Yaro has presented complicated developments in easy-to-understand formats for dozens of interagency meetings,” said Cari Enav, director of the Ukraine-Russia coordination team.

“He has drafted accompanying narratives to explain the strategic, geographic, economic and military significance of each event, and he personally updated military maps reflecting Russian incursions that ensured we had reliable information to share throughout the government,” Enav added.

Kulchyckyj, a civil service officer and an *Excellence in Government* Senior Fellow, said his goal for the past year has been to break through all the “misinformation and propaganda” and “provide accurate information so the principal decision-makers can make the best possible decisions.”

“As a Ukrainian-American, I have a commitment to public service and a passion for informing people of what’s actually going on,” said Kulchyckyj. “You have people who are dying, who have lost everything, who are being displaced. There’s nothing worse than war and most people really don’t really understand why it’s happening and how this can be happening in the 21st century.”

For Kulchyckyj, this assignment is the perfect return to his roots and passion. He holds a master’s degree in international public policy from Johns Hopkins and completed a Fulbright research scholarship on the making of Ukraine’s national identity and foreign policy towards Russia. He spent most of the 1990s as a USAID democracy officer in Ukraine. Since 2003, he has been working on strategic planning at the State Department and in 2014, was recruited for the Ukraine-Russia coordination team.

Kulchyckyj’s assignment has been extended for one more year, where he will continue to evaluate and monitor developments in this fragile and complicated crisis.