

Atlantic Council.- 23.12.2021

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Is Ukraine's reformed military ready to repel a new Russian invasion?

Чи готова реформована армія України відбити нове вторгнення Росії?

Сьогодні Україна стикається зі значно більшою загрозою, ніж будь-коли з моменту здобуття незалежності. Колишній міністр оборони України А. Загороднюк в статті вважає, що з ряду причин ЗСУ не мають всіх можливостей, необхідних для стримування російської агресії. Процес реформ почався з найгіршої з можливих вихідних умов, за дуже обмеженого фінансування та практично без будь-якого досвіду та знань НАТО.

Незважаючи на визнання того, що багато питань залишаються невирішеними, все ж таки було досягнуто великого прогресу.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/is-ukraines-reformed-military-ready-to-repel-a-new-russian-invasion/>

The looming threat of a full-scale Russian invasion poses a wide range of questions for the Ukrainian military. Currently, most US experts are confident that the threat is very real and should be taken seriously. Are the Ukrainian Armed Forces capable of inflicting prohibitive costs on a Russian invasion force?

The authors of this report believe that Ukraine's defense forces can cause significant damage. In collaboration with reservists, civil society, and volunteers, they can make any attempted invasion a miserable experience for Russia. We recognize that it is also vital for international audiences to understand this.

Ukraine-based analysts owe US readers a better assessment of Ukraine's defense sector reform progress since the watershed of the country's 2014 Euromaidan Revolution. Indeed, there is currently very little available on this topic in the information space.

Considering the recent appointment of a promising new Minister of Defense, new armed forces command, and new defence reform roadmaps (a new edition of the strategic defense bulletin has been approved just two months ago), now is a good time to assess the current position.

Also, we could not help but notice that the most visible English language report about Ukraine's reform progress currently available is Glen Grant's work "Seven years of deadlock" published in June 2021. Unfortunately, we believe this assessment provides an inaccurate view of the current state of affairs and can create a flawed understanding of the results of post-2014 reforms, including the impact of US military assistance.

Any assessment of Ukraine's defense reforms should be done with reference to key documents including the Strategic Defense Bulletin, the NATO-Ukraine Annual National Program, the Planning and Review Process (PARP) PGs Package, and the Development Program of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Defense Forces). These guidelines have been developed by the Ukrainian authorities, often with input from international advisors. This was not the case in Mr. Grant's assessment.

A number of factors have slowed reforms. The starting position for Ukraine was extremely unfavorable. The onset of war in 2014 exposed Ukraine as completely unprepared. The Armed Forces of Ukraine

(AFU) were not manned, equipped, or trained to meet Russian aggression. Ukraine was neither psychologically nor legally prepared for hybrid war. Its logistic stockpiles were, with the exception of weapons and ammunition mostly from the Soviet period, non-existent. At the beginning of the war, there was virtually no budget. The command and control system was not suited to combat activities.

The defense budget allocation for more than 250,000 personnel is and will objectively remain a problematic issue in the coming years. The spending per service person (full-time equivalent) is one of the lowest in Europe. Ukraine's defense budget is one of the highest in terms of percentage of GDP (around three percent) even for NATO member states. However, the UAF started the war with a huge "backlog" after years of neglect and downsizing with most equipment obsolete. The relatively low salaries of military personnel compared to the risks and burdens of combat operations greatly influenced retention perspectives.

Even though the military has been prioritized for the last seven years, it has been impossible to overcome decades of neglect. The UAF therefore still has several enduring strategic vulnerabilities. Funding is limited due to the general economic conditions of the country. Ukraine has been forced to down-prioritize many important acquisitions, not for lack of will, but due to a desperate lack of funding.

Ukraine started to reform its armed forces during the active phase of the war, which naturally distracted the attention, resources, and time of commanders and political leaders. Most reform decisions and actions were taken prudently and cautiously.

Military doctrines are greatly challenged by new wars. Most armies have been in constant transformation for decades and their systems, doctrines, and approaches have not always worked well in new operational environments. Ukraine is not an exception to this rule.

As survival was the top priority, the preference was given to commanders who were available at the time, while assuming they could effectively develop and use limited capabilities during the war. The majority did not know NATO standards and were not prepared for rapid change.

For many, it was a dilemma to drop the existing standard operating procedures and change them to something new. In general, personnel doctrine was based on post-Soviet standards. English language proficiency was low, as was the understanding of NATO principles and concepts.

We acknowledge the significant role that corruption has played in the actions of many defense officials, especially during the first years of the war. This factor significantly limited momentum for change and positive transformation outcomes. The issue is still relevant, although the influence of corruption has declined due to reforms and the active role of government, civil society, the public sector, and agents of change within the armed forces.

Equipment coming from foreign military assistance covers some of the tactical gaps of the armed forces. For a long time, such assistance did not include lethal weapons to Ukraine, which is currently in the eighth year of war. Only the United States and Lithuania have provided such support.

In line with the above-mentioned budget constraints, Ukraine's ability to domestically produce inexpensive military equipment is critical. Existing production capacity has been negatively impacted by the institutional weaknesses of the government-owned defense industry and outdated defense procurement system. Part of Ukraine's defense industry capacity was lost during 2014-2015 as more

than 20 defense industry companies, including ammunition factories, were based in occupied parts of Ukraine.

At the same time, Ukraine has achieved a lot. We believe that detailed assessment requires a separate report, but some accomplishments are worth mentioning specifically.

Most importantly, Ukraine has built and engaged capabilities which have been able to stop the Russian advance on the ground. The original Russian ambition at the beginning of the campaign in 2014 was much greater than the occupation of parts of the Donbas region. Stabilizing and maintaining the line of contact became possible due to the efforts of the UAF. Ukraine managed to build fortifications on the line of contact, which now represent over 400 kilometers of complex engineering structures in various terrains. A strong second line of defense has also been built.

Thus far, Russia has failed to achieve its goal by military invasion in the east of Ukraine of splitting Ukrainian society and reversing the nation's democratic European choice. On the contrary, we can argue that armed aggression has strengthened civil society in Ukraine and made it more resilient.

Civil society has realized its responsibility for national security, with private citizens and businesses donating substantial funds to the Ukrainian army. Civil volunteers and activists have helped on many important issues. Society respects and supports the army. According to opinion polls since 2014, the Armed Forces consistently enjoy the highest levels of trust in society among all state institutions.

The combat capabilities, readiness, and practical skills of Ukraine's Armed Forces, Special Operations Forces, and National Guard have reached much higher levels compared to 2014. Ukraine has gained invaluable experience of war, given the duration and multidimensional nature of the ongoing conflict. This experience is studied and analyzed by military and civilian experts who regularly come to Ukraine. The multinational training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the framework of military assistance is recognized by partner countries as a mutually beneficial exchange of experience.

Ukraine's path towards NATO membership is imprinted in the Constitution of Ukraine and underlying policies. The country's pro-NATO course is supported by a majority of Ukrainians.

The transition to NATO standards has been carried out with the participation of NATO advisers helping to integrate the security and defense sector into the Euro-Atlantic community. Ukrainian personnel are constantly undergoing special training activities based on NATO approaches and practices.

Ukraine's defense management system has incorporated new approaches, including capability-based planning. The command and control system of the UAF has been transformed in accordance with the principles and logic of NATO J (L/M/N/A)-structures to the level of brigades, unified ranks, and basic job descriptions. Extended programs of bilateral and multilateral cooperation are being implemented, including the training of servicemen of combat units (about 10,000 people per year), as well as the development of institutional and combat capabilities.

Ukraine's defense planning system meets the key requirements of the NATO planning process, including the logic of building and developing capabilities on all basic components (DOTMLPF-I) taking into account capability life cycle considerations.

The defense policy and strategic planning departments of the Ministry of Defense and the UAF have since 2019 implemented NATO approaches in new cycles of defense planning and defense reviews. Key strategic documents for the development of defense forces (Military Security Strategy and Strategic Defense Bulletin) have been developed based on the results of the Defense Review 2019. Implementation documents on the development, generation, and employment of the armed forces are being produced within this framework.

Ukraine has been granted the status of NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner due, in part, to evidence of the progress it has made. This status provides multiple new practical opportunities in addition to the existing support of the NATO-Ukraine Comprehensive Assistance Package. The NATO Summit in 2021 reaffirmed the strategic agreement of all NATO countries that Ukraine will become a full member.

There are a number of positive trends evident in the new generation of Ukrainian commanding officers. Many commanders are relatively young people. Many (including the Commander-in-Chief of the UAF) are military professionals who built their careers in independent Ukraine not during Soviet times and have practical combat experience. This establishes a new generation of Ukrainian leaders with a distinct national identity, vision, approaches, and values.

Ukraine shows considerable progress in the area of civilian democratic control. The role of parliament as a democratic oversight institution over the armed forces has significantly increased. The Law on National Security adopted in 2018 defined and increased the role of the civilian Ministry of Defense and the Cabinet of Ministers while strengthening the government's control over the defense forces.

We can argue that the current level of public oversight of the military, while not perfect, is unprecedented for Ukraine. The system of civilian democratic control is moving closer to approaching the full spectrum of Euro-Atlantic standards, as currently developed amendments to a number of laws should resolve existing inconsistencies and formalize a stable and effective control and oversight system.

However, unless proposed changes to the law on national security are adopted, the civilian control system is still not going to meet NATO standards. It retains an ambiguous division of functionality and reporting between the Ministry of Defense and military command, which has led to conflict between the previous Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief. Their replacement restored the balance but has not resolved institutional gaps.

The place and role of the NCO corps have been revised for the new armed forces. A new concept of NCO development is being implemented, with the full review of NCO roles, responsibilities, and career development. New doctrinal documents were introduced in line with NATO approaches and practices.

Equipment and armament have been significantly renewed. This process mostly concerned the armament of Ukrainian Land Forces and was justified by the nature of ongoing warfare and limited financial resources. Attention has now finally extended to the development of other critical combat capabilities, particularly for the Ukrainian Navy.

A new law on defense procurement was adopted in 2020 as part of procurement reform. It aims to bring procurement in line with Western practices and to eliminate corruption. Half of procurement has been transferred to the public category and subjected to bids in transparent open tenders. Additionally, half of military equipment is procured from private-sector manufacturers of goods and providers of services.

The largest state-owned defense industry corporation, Ukroboronprom, has finally begun restructuring and moving towards a conventional Western corporate governance model based on modern principles and business practices. This is currently at the very early stage, but the process has received support at the highest levels of government.

In recent years, the transformation of the logistics and public procurement system has addressed issues with material, food, and medical supplies. Although this process is not fully completed, shortages present in the first years of war are long gone.

The new Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021) was developed to include the maximum involvement of Ukrainian citizens in national defense. As part of the implementation of strategy provisions, parliament adopted a new law “On the Fundamentals of National Resistance”. This should lay the foundation for a comprehensive defense doctrine and upcoming reform of territorial defense.

There are a number of key shortcomings and gaps in defense reform and the development of defense forces.

There are gaps in key operational and combat capabilities, namely Navy, Air Defense, and Tactical Aviation. The Navy's capabilities are growing, but in contradiction with the priorities set out in the strategic documents based on the results of the last Defense Review (2019) and the Navy Development Strategy 2035, developed with the participation of representatives of NATO member states.

Capstone and keystone doctrinal documents (operational concepts) are being adapted to NATO principles and standards at a rather slow pace. The amendments to the Statutes of the Armed Forces did not manage to bring them much closer to the norms and practices of NATO member armed forces. This requires further expert discussions and rethinking of the content of most of the provisions.

Replacement of armament and equipment with new models is still insufficient and requires significant budget expenditures and profound changes in business practices. Maintaining a large amount of obsolete equipment and infrastructure takes away a significant chunk of the budget and does not allow for the proper investment of resources in modern systems and platforms.

Defense procurement, despite the newly adopted law, is stagnating in the implementation of new rules and practices. There are some alarming signs of reform setbacks, while the content of the state defense order (defense equipment procurement plan) remains unreasonably classified.

Much-sought reform of housing for servicemen as part of the social package has not taken place, despite promises and expectations. Despite partial rent compensation implemented in recent years, the housing issue remains a major demotivating factor for servicemen and their families.

A large part of military infrastructure does not meet the basic needs of personnel and military organizations and units. At the same time, the Ministry of Defense manages a high number of underutilized assets including tens of enterprises and hundreds of thousands of hectares of land.

Corruption still significantly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of processes and decisions in the defense sector. Key areas prone to corruption risks include career and job appointments, housing distribution, land asset management, management of defense companies, fuel procurement, procurement of goods and services and employment abroad in peacekeeping units.

So far, Ukraine hasn't managed to establish the domestic manufacturing of ammunition.

Information Systems (Logistical, Medical, Defense Resource Management, and C4ISR) either have not yet been deployed or are still far from achieving their full operational capabilities and interoperability.

We need to acknowledge that, based on the experience of past NATO enlargement processes, it takes generations to change institutional culture and mindset. This process, however, starts in the military education system. Reform is not irreversible until NATO doctrine, tactics, procedures, principles, and values have been introduced into the military education system. Education programs should be improved, approaches to teaching and knowledge evaluation need radical modernization, along with implementation of critical thinking and other approaches.

English language proficiency of the majority of officers and sergeants is below the minimum required to work with documents and to interact with respective NATO units.

The transformation of organizational culture is a complicated issue. This is hindered by resistance to change mostly among the older generation of officers and civil servants. Personnel policy does not consider modern requirements for personnel management and is not fully incorporated into the capability-based defense planning process. The Military Personnel Policy of the Ministry of Defense is inadequate.

Internal culture depends on the personalities of the commanding officers along with their talents and shortcomings. This is frequently cited as the number one reason for personnel quitting the military.

The conscription process is an anachronism of the old days. The conscription system must be immediately transformed into a more efficient and modernized process of preparing a military-trained reserve.

Gender equality issues have just started to be addressed more systemically and still require fundamental changes to improve gender equality in the armed forces, including career-building and education opportunities.

We would like to address the most important points of Mr. Grant's report in order to create a more balanced overview for readers who are not well acquainted with the development and recent transformation of the UAF.

For a number of reasons, the UAF does not have all the capabilities required to deter Russian aggression. Ukraine was in no way prepared for the start of Russian aggression in 2014. The reform process began from the worst possible baseline with very limited funding and with hardly any NATO experience and knowledge at hand.

Despite this, while still acknowledging that many issues remain unresolved, great progress has been made. We have, however, not found any recognition of the achievements of the armed forces or analysis of any positive trends of Ukraine's defense reform in Mr. Grant's recent article.

Although the article identifies many problems and challenges, we also found a number of factual and logical errors. Below are the top 10 false or inaccurate statements.

Legacy of Post-Communist and Post-Soviet Ideology

The dominance of Soviet ideology, values, and culture in the defense forces is one of the key narratives in the article. The article is loaded with words like "Soviet", "communist" and "red commander", which appear dozens of times. The author claims that "it is important to keep in mind that the Ukrainian military, from the political leadership down to the basic soldier, functions as one of the last vestiges of the Communist and Soviet system."

We find this premise to be flawed. Ukrainian officers share the same military culture as their peers in NATO and are a result of their upbringing, education, and experience. The USSR collapsed 30 years ago. The share of people who consider it good that the USSR fell apart has risen from 36% in 2010 to 61% in 2021, with a fall from 46% to 32% in people who feel nostalgic towards the USSR. The older generation is, by default, more nostalgic than those born after Ukraine gained independence. After 30 years of independence, only a minority of officers were educated in the USSR, while all have served in an independent Ukraine for the majority of their service.

The Ministry of Defense has historically never made well-argued policy and still does not. Although the government can be criticized for the slow and inefficient implementation of policy, Ukraine cannot be blamed for the lack of a state defense policy, especially at the strategic level. There is a streamlined architecture of strategic documents developed with the support of NATO advisers, publicly available and implemented or in the process of implementation, including the presidential National Security Strategy and the MoD's policy documents, the Military Security Strategy 2021, and the Strategic Defense Bulletin. In general, despite some shortcomings and delays, the overall quality of defense policy in Ukraine has improved dramatically over the past seven years.

The statement that "the Ukrainian defense system has not reformed" is essentially inaccurate since reform is not a state of affairs but a strategic process with milestones and interim results. Defense officials have never claimed the completion of defense reform but outlined its results which correlate with political and defense planning cycles. This continuous transformation process moves ahead and correlates with current and projected changes in the security environment.

The article features factual mistakes regarding policy and strategic decisions. One error is the claim that the Joint Operational Command was disbanded during Yanukovich's time and has never been since reestablished. In reality, it was indeed closed during Yanukovich's time as part of the campaign to destabilize the armed forces, but was reestablished in 2015 as the Joint Operational HQ. Furthermore, after delineation of force generation and force employment was completed in 2020, the Joint Forces Command reached almost its full operation capability, compatible with NATO structures and approaches.

The Russian operation effectively ended with two savage defeats of Ukrainian forces at Ilovaik in August 2014 and again at Debaltseve in January 2015.

The author's claim that Russian aggression resulted in two Ukrainian defeats at Debaltseve and Ilovaik demonstrates an inaccurate strategic perspective of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Firstly, the war is still in the active phase. Secondly, neither Debaltseve nor Ilovaik were the ultimate goals of Russian aggression.

Russia's goal in 2014-2015 was not to occupy parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, but a greater geopolitical seizure of Ukrainian lands. The Russian goal was to destroy Ukraine as a single unitary state, and this plan has so far failed. The combined efforts of the Ukrainian military, citizen support, and

international pressure succeeded in stopping Russia in 2014-2015. Currently, Ukraine continues to counter hybrid aggression in all domains of national security.

United States assistance to Ukraine of more than \$2 billion since the start of Russian aggression has not had any noticeable, let alone quantifiable, return on investment

The allegedly failed policy of receiving and managing foreign military aid, primarily from the United States, is one of the key narratives of the article. We dispute this assessment.

Although, in our opinion, the planning and application of foreign aid can be improved, it has already had a significant effect on the capabilities of the Ukrainian military. It has significantly improved the tactical and operational training of combat units. In addition, it has contributed to the development of new capabilities. There are outstanding examples of the use of foreign military assistance, such as the development of Ukraine's Special Operations Forces and the creation of a modern International Security and Peacekeeping Center. In both cases, success was defined by a comprehensive approach to developing specific capabilities, clear and measurable objectives, and close partnership with NATO member states.

Ukraine conducts a series of regular military exercises with allies on its territory. It provides advanced training for personnel. The positive impact of this can be seen in the historical certification of a non-NATO Ukrainian unit to join the NATO Rapid Response Force in 2019.

Foreign military experts involved in cooperation programs also emphasize that Western forces consistently learn from Ukrainian experience of modern warfare.

Planning and evaluation of foreign military assistance is carried out jointly within the framework of the Multinational Joint Committee (MJC), a body that has been planning military assistance from allied countries since 2014. It is currently composed of eight countries. Members, together with Ukrainian counterparts, plan and evaluate foreign military aid.

Certain change is, of course, happening. Some of this is because of war and the natural passage of time, but much is because of the energy and huge resources poured in by US and NATO allies. The author appears unaware of progress made by the Ukrainian military. For instance, he writes, "Ukraine has made virtually no more changes than would have occurred naturally by evolution over time or in reaction to Russian attacks." At the same time, whatever positive results were achieved are attributed to partner support. We already mentioned Ukraine's achievements in reform, but would also like to clarify our position on foreign support. With huge respect to Ukraine's partners and great gratitude for their support which is one of the key factors driving reform, Ukraine's resilience is first and foremost an achievement due to domestic effort. Foreign defense assistance is about 5% of the annual defense budget. During the most active phase of the war in 2014-2015, Ukraine's personnel losses were staggering. Logistics was in disarray and equipment was mostly obsolete and broken. The amount of foreign aid was minimal. Ukraine has always ultimately relied on its own resources and capabilities.

The lessons of the war have provided Ukraine with tragic but unique experience that shapes current military policy and doctrines. Therefore, it is impossible to talk about this without considering the practical actions already taken by the leadership of the armed forces to institutionalize hard-earned experience.

The Illusion of Defense Reform and Reaching NATO Standards

We strongly disagree with this thesis and also with the author's statements that "the hardest thing for outside observers to accept is that much of what they read and hear is an illusion created by the government and defense staffs, designed to convince their own countrymen, NATO allies, and probably even Russia that reform is underway and that the armed forces are powerful and strong."

There are a substantial number of officers and observers from NATO countries and NATO HQ who have been assessing Ukraine's efforts. Ukraine's standpoint in this regard is complex and has its own advantages and disadvantages. Partners are well-aware of the situation and have enough professional experience to objectively and consistently assess Ukraine's progress.

The author also argued that President Zelenskyy, on April 6, 2021, exposed his lack of confidence in his own forces when talking to the NATO Secretary General by stating that Ukraine is "fully dedicated to reforms, but cannot stop Russia just by reforming. NATO is the only way to stop the war." We would argue that on the contrary, this demonstrates a strategic understanding the author himself does not possess.

US Congress should not grant money for defense if that money is not properly focused
We strongly disagree that this statement applies to Ukraine. Mr. Grant argues that "The United States "Gold Standard" assistance of more than \$2 billion to Ukraine since the Russian war started has not had any noticeable, let alone quantifiable, return on investment" and makes a huge effort to explain why the US Congress should not grant money for Ukraine's defense. His exact wording is "Congress should not grant money to defense if that money is not properly focused" while simultaneously arguing that the US support system (1) "is simply not designed to deal with this complexity at any single level" and (2) "has not dug deep enough or spent enough time trying to understand the beast" (which we assume is Ukraine). There (3) "appears to be no coherence to US support", (4) "no senior officer is focused solely on helping Ukraine reform", (5) "the US commander of European Command is too busy", (6) "his staff is too far geographically removed to be actively engaged" and (7) the US defense attache team "to a large extent formally controlled by the Ukrainians and are kept far away from the parts of the system the General Staff and Ministry of Defense do not want them to see."

Mr. Grant's assessment of the US structure, as well as its insight and experience, is no better or no worse than his understanding of Ukraine and the UAF. We have already explained why his claim of no reform is wrong, and why his statement that the reform process lacks political direction is false, and why his assessment that the "continued selection of senior officers who are opposed to NATO and wishing to maintain the Soviet legacy" is without value, and why the "illusion of Defense Reform and Reaching NATO Standards" is not an illusion (but rather a lack of insight).

Make no mistake, there remains a lot to be done. Ukraine is today facing a bigger threat by far than at any given time since it gained independence. Ukraine will remain vulnerable until outstanding reforms have been implemented and critical vulnerabilities have been closed. Reform is therefore a prerequisite for Ukraine's sovereignty and independence. The will to reform is, therefore, not in question, but abilities must be demonstrated.

The Ukrainian military, from the political leadership down to the basic soldier, functions as one of the last vestiges of the Communist and Soviet system. It is not representative of the vast body of Ukrainian society but rather should be seen as a historic anomaly in a country that is slowly modernizing. Isolation of the military from society and subordination of the armed forces inclusively and directly to the president has been a true state of affairs in Ukraine until 2014. Currently, the situation is radically different as younger commanders of the new generation have been appointed to lead the armed forces.

Many service people have joined from civilian life. Civil society maintains awareness of aspects of the military's well-being through a large network of volunteers and watchdogs. The army and society are now unprecedentedly connected, even in comparison with many Western countries. Never in Ukrainian history have the armed forces been as transparent as today.

The author of the article explains his statement of “The Mirage of Civilian Control” with the following arguments: 1) lack of integration of the Reforms Project Office in the MoD and its closure in 2020; 2) disbandment of the MoD Public Council; 3) replacement of Captain (Navy) A. Ryzhenko; 4) influence of the oligarchs; and 5) alleged subordination of the civilian MoD to the military leadership, namely to the Commander-in-Chief. In fact, all of these statements are false.

The Reforms Project Office (RPO) was disbanded, which we consider a mistake by the MoD. At the same time, over the past seven years, the RPO has been integrated into every part of defense reform and has been located within the main MoD premises. The Reforms Project Office was an official advisory body, subordinated directly to the Minister of Defense. Thus, its status as an independent organization allowed it to avoid much bureaucracy and act as a component of civilian democratic oversight.

The MoD Public Council has not been disbanded and still holds sessions.

With all due respect to Captain Ryzhenko (who is coincidentally a fellow at our think tank), he held a military rank and position and has nothing to do with the civilian democratic control status in the military.

Oligarchic influence over the military is significantly less than in other areas of Ukrainian society. There is a lack of evidence proving direct or indirect influence in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Actual civilian control lies in the ability of civil society to establish effective oversight over the military. Traditional means are parliament, the civilian cabinet (including the Ministry of Defense) with firm control over the military establishment and non-governmental oversight via a free press and NGOs. All of these elements are substantially progressing in Ukraine.

Exactly how many senior appointments inside the defense system are still of the “Russian World” (Russkiy Mir) is hard to judge, but there are a few who are notable for talking a great game with NATO allies while afterward ensuring that no reform of significance ever takes place. Russia's influence on the Defense Ministry was strong in 2010-2013, due to the systematic activities of Russian representatives under President Yanukovich. In the first years of the war in 2014, military counterintelligence regularly identified agents of Russian influence in the UAF and Ministry of Defense. Some of this information was made publicly available to the media and some is known only to insiders. We assume that the risk of the presence of staffers recruited by Russia still exists but is much lower, as the personnel of the Ministry of Defense and the armed forces have been significantly changed over the past seven years. Allegations of possible influence and allusions to “some people” sabotaging reform or NATO integration efforts is purely speculative.

Inability or unwillingness of officers to challenge a system marked by outdated or detrimental laws, rules, and regulations, since breaking these ensures punishment and career failure

We could not find anything useful in this statement other than the intention of the author to add more negativity to the article. In our opinion, any military is very resistant to change by the nature of “closed systems” and human behavior. Such changes often proceed at the slowest pace. But we certainly do not want to have a country where the military defies laws, rules, and regulations.

The organizational culture of the UAF is based on discipline, respect, and strict adherence to laws and regulations, which, we should point out, are gradually being updated. This process is ongoing, and we expect that the implementation of new rules will continue.

In any case, Western observers note that there are significant changes for the better in many commands and units, especially compared to 2014. Changes in personnel, the opportunity to observe in practice the organizational culture of the armed forces of partner countries, and the above-mentioned change of statutes, should lead to a radical change in organizational culture. That is to say, we are in the process of change. A good public example of such changes was the rescue operation of the civilian population in Afghanistan by the Ukrainian military. The value of human life for the military was higher than their own security.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces today are going through significant struggles, fighting on the Eastern Front, restoring Ukraine's presence in the Black Sea, developing capabilities, assisting partner countries in military operations, and transforming itself from within.

We require and expect much from the UAF in terms of consistent and effective transformation. At the same time, we clearly understand that they deserve our respect, which should be expressed in an objective assessment of their achievements and further support for their development and transformation. A strong Ukrainian Armed Forces is a safeguard against the major war that is emerging on Europe's eastern borders. Therefore, the support of our partners is not an issue of compassion, but a matter of being able to gain time to strengthen their own defenses.

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