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Bolstering Societal Resilience: The Crucial Role of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces in Safeguarding the Nation

*"Si vis pacem, para bellum". (Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus's tract Dē Rē Militārī)
"We will be able to wrestle our independence for all future generations of our nation. And to guarantee it, to guarantee security for our nation we'll ensure comprehensive development of Territorial Defence Forces. When nation is armed, when our people are capable of defending themselves - that's the best foundation of national security". (President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, October 2, 2022)¹*

Introduction

In the light of the unprovoked russo-Ukrainian asymmetric war, it is of significant value to highlight the bravery and commitment of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, who protect Ukraine's borders as well as the borders of Europe, and give us an excellent opportunity to discuss such topical issues as *resilience of society to hybrid threats*; furthermore, on behalf of all Ukrainians I want to express our heartfelt thanks to all of our best Polish friends and allies of Ukraine for your constant and overall support in general and an excellent opportunity to voice our vision of the role of Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) of Ukraine in strengthening societal resilience in particular.

We want to emphasise that yet in November 2016, in the context of aggravating geopolitical situation in the Eastern Europe, related to the revolution of dignity in Ukraine, annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation and the onset of the war in Donbas, Poland was the first state to raise the issue of the necessity of the public discourse and debate concerning territorial defence. We are pleased to state that we were honoured to have contributed to the narrative and a valuable reflection on the territorial defence and the issues of security and defence at the international scientific conference "Territorial Defence and its role in the contemporary security systems", in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, as representatives from Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University ahead with Prof. Tit. Yuriy Makar². The problem under study was to enhance and level up the understanding of CMR and its efficient communication with the concerned actors, including civil society as well as military (would-be territorial defence forces reps), in the context of the start of the war of Russia against Ukraine in 2014 that had deepened the fight of ATO soldiers of Ukraine against pro-

¹ We will ensure the systematic development of the Territorial Defence Forces, as the ability of people to defend themselves is the best foundation for national security – President", <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/10/02/we-will-ensure-the-systematic-development-of-the-territorial-defence-forces-as-the-ability-of-people-to-defend-themselves-is-the-best-foundation-for-national-security-president> (accessed: 22.02.23)

² D.Malyasov, *The first Polish conference on the territorial defence forces*, Nov 24, 2016, <https://defence-blog.com/the-first-polish-conference-on-the-territorial-defence-forces/> (accessed: 22.05.22)

russian militants of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk (LPR). Speaking of the Ukraine case-study, we should mention that in order to prevent the creation of humanitarian disaster preconditions in the area of antiterrorist operation (ATO), the emergence of social tension in the rest of Ukraine and aim to form positive public opinion on the Armed Forces of Ukraine during the special period, legal regime of martial law or a state of emergency, in peacekeeping operations and security emergencies, senior military leadership had decided to implement the system of Civil-Military Cooperation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.³

It should be articulated that today's security environment is dramatically different from the one we've been engaged in for the last 33 years and *it requires new ways of thinking and new ways of acting*. By and large, it concerns a motley tapestry of immensely transformed world politics, economy and environment, communication, employment, psychological and emotional wellbeing, societal structures, safety and security and social culture and values integrated into the global landscape. "In today's security environment, countering such threats more than ever requires a full range of capabilities, military and civilian, and active interagency cooperation, as well as with the private sector. It also requires a deeper cooperation and engagement of NATO partners and other international bodies and continuously up-dated situational awareness."⁴

The Warsaw Summit in July 2016 resulted in a commitment by the NATO Heads of State and Government to strengthen Societal Resilience, which is crucial for establishing credible trust and effectively fulfilling the core tasks of the Alliance. The leaders also welcomed the Resilience Guidelines, endorsed by defence ministers in June 2016, which emphasised the importance of assessing and developing plans to ensure the continuity of government, essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, including civil society as well as military.⁵

Respectively, one of the key takeaways from February 24, 2022 (the Russian full-scale invasion) has become the significance of fostering national resilience. Central to this effort

³ V. Bohatyrets, Ya. Zoriy, *CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND TERRITORIAL DEFENCE ISSUES*, [Ante Portas – Studia nad Bezpieczeństwem 2016 | 2\(7\) Obrona Terytorialna i jej rola we współczesnych systemach bezpieczeństwa](#) 289-298, <https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmetal.element.desklight-22569539-1293-4042-9523-d6d014c4b554> (accessed: 22.06.23)

⁴ Ya. Yanakiev, P. Dimov & D. Bachvarov, *Conceptualizing the Role of Societal Resilience in Countering Hybrid Warfare*. *Information & Security: An International Journal*. 2018, 39. 77-89.10.11610/isij.3907, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327504068_Conceptualizing_the_Role_of_Societal_Resilience_in_Countering_Hybrid_Warfare, (accessed: 22.02.23)

⁵ *Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016*, Press Release (2016) 100, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm. (accessed 14. 05.23)

has been the establishment of Territorial Defence Forces, serving as a primary component of the nation's military-civilian response. Simultaneously, the volunteer movement has played a crucial role in bolstering the Armed Forces by contributing various essential resources such as vehicles, weapons, generators, medical supplies etc. The population's active and enthusiastic willingness to support the defence sector underscores the people's integral role in safeguarding the nation.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the valiant struggle manifested by the Ukrainian territorial defence units prompted decision-makers in various countries to rethink the structure of their armed forces. This reconsideration naturally involves the anticipation of bolstering the operational capabilities of the armed forces swiftly, but it also faces the challenge of financial constraints. Importantly, one of the fore-fronters of such an innovative approach were Polish decision-makers and strategic military leaders, who back in 2016, encountered this very challenge while developing the Territorial Defence Forces, a new military entity that significantly bolstered the nation's defensive readiness.⁶

It is for this reason that we return to the problem of the significance of Territorial Defence Forces of Ukraine in their 'out-of-the-box' approach to defend and protect their terrain as well as bolster the nations' resilience. The purpose of the article thus is to conceptualise the pivotal role of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) in enhancing societal resilience within the country. Amidst historical conflicts and ongoing security threats, the TDF has emerged as a vital component of Ukraine's defence strategy. This article delves into the structure and functions of territorial defence forces, emphasising their contributions to local security, rapid response, crisis management, national unity, and community resilience.

Data and Methods

The present study has been developed in two stages and makes use of qualitative methods. The first phase of the research was based on the study of bibliographic materials and sources of secondary data (official studies, evaluation reports, program documents and websites), which provided a framework for discussing the role of territorial defence forces of Ukraine in bolstering societal resilience. The second stage uses the case study approach, the focus being mainly on the structure and functions of territorial defence forces, emphasising their contributions to local security, rapid response, crisis management, national unity, and

⁶ M. Klisz, *The Polish Territorial Defence Forces (POL TDF) - A significant component in national resilience and resistance*, The Kingston Consortium on International Security, Canada, 2023, <https://www.thekcis.org/publications/insights/insight-28> (accessed: 22.06. 23)

community resilience. We are aware that during the research stages we have not exhausted the multitude of existing sources on the problem under study. Thus, the purpose of the article is to find out on the basis of theoretical and empirical research, the specifics of resiliency, its manifestation and development in persons who stay in the territory of Ukraine and are experiencing events caused by a full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation.

Ukraine's Resilience Formula

“For every Ukrainian man, every Ukrainian woman. Pride for us. We have become one big army. We have become a team where someone finds, someone packs, someone brings, but everyone donates. I am grateful to our people, grateful to our multi-million army of volunteers and citizens who do care, who can collect and get everything necessary. We have become one. Our journalists and media are a united front fighting against lies and panic. We have become one family. There are no more strangers among us. Ukrainians today are all fellows. Ukrainians have sheltered Ukrainians, opened their homes and hearts to those who were forced to flee the war. We withstand all threats, shelling, cluster bombs, cruise missiles, kamikaze drones, blackouts, and cold. We are stronger than that. *It was a year of resilience. A year of care. A year of bravery. A year of pain. A year of hope. A year of endurance. A year of unity.*”⁷

The novelty of our paper lies in its focus on the considerable impact of TDF on the Ukrainians' becoming stress resistant and resilient to hybrid threats; physically and emotionally survive to live and work, hope, plan their future and strongly believe in Ukraine's victory and completely defeating the axis of evil.

Noteworthy, the hybrid threat is a complex phenomenon that arises from the convergence and interconnectedness of various elements, creating a multifaceted and multidimensional peril. Within this context, hybrid conflict and hybrid warfare emerge as specific categories, wherein a state employs hybrid tactics to achieve its strategic objectives. As a result, fostering societal resilience has become a crucial strategic objective for Ukraine. By enhancing pre-crisis resilience to effectively address hybrid security challenges, we bolster our capacity to withstand, recover from, and attribute responsibility to an aggressor. Building up societal resilience equips us with the ability to confront and counter the multifarious aspects of hybrid threats, thereby safeguarding our nation's security and stability.

From a psychological perspective, the term ‘*resilience*’ encompasses the process and outcome of effectively adapting to challenging life experiences.⁸ Within the realm of foreign and security policy, this concept has become integral to a comprehensive approach aimed at bolstering national security. It involves the seamless coordination and immediate collaboration among the state, military, and civil society as a unified entity in times of crisis. This collective effort enables the ability to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, drawing inspiration

⁷ Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy “*February. The year of invincibility*”, 24.02.23, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-lyutij-81213> (accessed 05.03.23)

⁸ K. Hurley, *What is Resilience? Your Guide to Facing Life's Challenges, Adversities, and Crises*, Everyday Health, 14 July, 2022, <https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/resilience/> (accessed 17.05.23)

from the Latin term “resilio.”⁹ As has been previously reported in the literature, the concept of social resilience encompasses various perspectives, each offering a unique understanding of its nature.

These perspectives are as follows: *psychological resilience perspective*: psychological resilience is defined as an individual’s capacity to effectively adjust and cope with life’s challenges, particularly when faced with social disadvantages or highly adverse conditions resulting from hybrid warfare. It involves the ability to maintain a positive outlook, adapt to difficult circumstances, and navigate through hardships without succumbing to their negative impacts; *community resilience perspective*: community resilience refers to a community’s ability to foresee potential risks, minimise their effects, and swiftly rebound from disruptive changes. A resilient community exhibits survival instincts, adaptability, evolution, and growth in the face of turbulent circumstances. Such communities not only take measures to prevent or mitigate loss of life, property, and environmental damage but also possess the capability to expedite citizens’ return to work, reopen businesses, and reinstate essential services, facilitating a full and timely economic recovery. Thus, social resilience, when viewed from these different angles, encompasses the individual’s psychological capacity to cope with adverse conditions and the community’s collective ability to anticipate, limit, and recover from the impacts of challenging situations, fostering a stronger and more adaptable society¹⁰.

It should be articulated that the issue of fostering resilience has received considerable critical attention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and it has assigned national governments the responsibility of developing resilience. Consequently, it becomes crucial to assess the role of resilience in Ukraine’s recent strategic documents and how well it aligns with NATO’s priorities. The 2020 National Security Strategy of Ukraine advocates the establishment of a national resilience system to ensure society and the state are highly prepared to tackle various threats. This involves such activities as risk assessment, prompt identification of threats and vulnerabilities, effective strategic planning, crisis management, and the incorporation of NATO-recommended crisis response protocols. Moreover, it emphasises the necessity for coordination and cooperation among security and defence sectors, state agencies, territorial communities, businesses, civil society, and the public to prevent and address emergencies (Article 47). Likewise, the 2021 Foreign Policy Strategy of

⁹ A. Bulakh, *Defining Ukraine’s National Resilience in Light of Non-linear Threats: Where to Start?* Commentary, 22 December, 2016, <https://icds.ee/en/defining-ukraines-national-resilience-in-light-of-non-linear-threats-where-to-start/> (accessed 17.05.23).

¹⁰ John T. Cacioppo, Harry T. Reis, and Alex J. Zautra, Social Resilience. *The Value of Social Fitness with an Application to the Military*, American Psychological Association 66, no. 1 (January 2011): 43–51, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021419>.

Ukraine also highlights the significance of resilience. It outlines the 17 principles of resilience, defining it as the state and society's capacity to effectively counter any threats, including military aggression, economic pressure, political destabilisation, cyberattacks, disinformation, and other challenges. It stresses the need for adaptability to changing security environments, supporting sustainable operations, and swift recovery from crises.¹¹ In comparison to the National Security Strategy, this definition is more comprehensive, aligning better with international practices, and offering prospects for collaborative efforts with partners. Additionally, Article 58 underlines the importance of enhancing Ukraine's cooperation with the EU, NATO, and their member-states to enhance defence capabilities and *national resilience*.¹² The significance of Ukraine's resilience, often overlooked in the Western perspective, offers an explanation for its success in containing and repelling Russia's military aggression subsequent to the large-scale invasion in February 2022. While there has been considerable emphasis on Russia's own military deficiencies, such as intelligence failures, inadequate leadership, corruption, and demotivated soldiers equipped with subpar gear, as well as Western military assistance to Ukraine, the importance of Ukraine's resilience should not be underestimated. This resilience is not a mere coincidence but can largely be attributed to deliberate reforms and transformative changes implemented over the past eight years.¹³

In this article, we wish to contribute to the debate about the structure and functions of territorial defence forces (TDF), emphasising their contributions to local security, rapid response, crisis management, national unity, and community resilience. By actively engaging citizens in defence efforts and providing comprehensive training and support, the TDF strengthens the bond between the state and its people, fostering a shared responsibility for national security. In the context of the aforesaid it is of particular value to highlight the pivotal role of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) in enhancing societal resilience within the country. Amidst historical conflicts and ongoing security threats, the TDF has emerged as a vital component of Ukraine's defence strategy.

¹¹ President of Ukraine, *On the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 20 August 2021 "On the Implementation of the National Resilience System"*: Decree of the President of Ukraine of 27.09.2021 No. 479/2021. Legislation of Ukraine: official portal. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/479/2021#Text> (accessed 14.05.23)

¹² *Enhancing Resilience through Civil Preparedness, NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience and Associated Resilience Guidelines*, Notice, North Atlantic Council, Civil Emergency Planning Committee, September 7, 2016.

¹³ J. Hedenskog, *Explaining Ukrainian Resilience, SCEEUS Report Series on Ukrainian Domestic Affairs*, No. 2, 2023, <https://sceeus.se/en/publication/s/explaining-ukrainian-resilience/> (accessed 17.05.23)

TDF Establishment: Europe and Ukraine's Experience

Throughout the early 21st century, various conflicts and warfare wreaked devastating losses on both human and natural resources worldwide. As a result, national defence encompasses the safeguarding of humanity as an integral aspect of national security. Furthermore, the unprovoked russo-Ukrainian war inflicted atrocities and widespread destruction that can be characterized as acts of genocide and ecocide, causing immense loss of life and irreversible damage to the environment. Confronting these threats necessitates the establishment of a well-functioning system of state and common defence that involves both military and civilian forces. The synergy between national security and defence forces is crucial for ensuring lasting state safekeeping in the modern world. This cooperation is facilitated through a military defence system that comprises mobile operational forces, territorial defence, civil defence, and national defence. Noteworthy, in countries with relatively long traditions concerning such troops, they now constitute an important link in the state's defence system, counting close to the regular operational forces. Their purpose, and thus the goals and tasks set for them, depend on the specific needs related to the security of a given state, and are adequate in addressing the occurrence of possible threats¹⁴. Simultaneously, Territorial Defence Forces serve as a means to bridge the gap between a society and the Armed Forces by establishing a locally-based military unit. The TDF recruits, respectively, reside in the specific region, thereby strengthening their commitment to fulfilling responsibilities associated with safeguarding the local community. The realms of civil and military defence intersect at different states of national defence readiness, namely peace, crisis, and war. The effectiveness of national defence relies on the interplay between these two domains.

The current study considers various steps towards a more profound understanding of multi-vectoring and multifunctioning of TDF resistance operations in general as well as their preparation and organisation in peacetime prior to a war. The Russian assault on Ukraine in February 2022 altered this situation and reintroduced to Europe the reality of a conventional conflict accompanied by resistance to an occupying power. This latter effort is currently only visible through open-source reports that get filtered through the front lines of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

When developing novel concepts of territorial defence, it is essential for us to take into account the practices and military theories of other countries, in particular, drawn from

¹⁴ K. Goniewicz, M. Goniewicz, & F. Burkle, *The Territorial Defence Force in Disaster Response in Poland: Civil-Military Collaboration during a State of Emergency*. (2019). Sustainability. 11. 10.3390/su11020487.

Lithuania's national experience. The practical value of this approach is evident, as Lithuania has repeatedly considered, carefully planned, and applied these concepts in practice in early 20th century. Jokubauskas's comprehensive review concluded that in planning Lithuania's defence, a synergy between the efforts of the civil authorities, regular forces, militarised formations and civilians at all levels and striving for the territorial decentralisation of planning activities and military operations was clearly seen and traced. The researcher disclosed the inevitability of various outcomes in employing partisan (guerrilla) tactics. On the one hand, it can be a spontaneous movement of the local population, resistance, or self-organisation-based resistance against a more powerful aggressor. On the other hand, it can be even an expedient activity (raids, airborne landing) of regular military forces units in the enemy's rear by employing partisan tactics. "Partisan movements and their activities can emerge both momentarily and can be planned at the national level, organised, and supported. Historical experience suggests that there is always a risk that part of the Lithuanian population will be prone to actively collaborate (especially those who are detached and feel disappointed), while some will try to remain only passive observers. In the 21st century, and especially in recent years, Lithuania has highlighted an increase in the citizens' motivation to oppose external aggression, but unlike the situation in the interwar period, less attention is being paid to the formation of competences: when, where, what and how to act to make resistance yield the desired results. Several important aspects can be taken into account: a) a guarantee of loyalty and support of civil authority and local people, as well as their involvement in the resistance".¹⁵

Another important aspect of the strategy is cooperation with allied forces that encompass military policy documents and also reflected in frequent military reforms in Slovenia that pertained to either certain segments of armed forces or to the whole military. As Slovenia deepened its engagement with NATO and faced evolving security challenges in its immediate environment, the prospect of implementing numerous reforms in the Army and defence sector became apparent. The structure of the Territorial Defence of the Republic of Slovenia, which reverted to its original name despite attempts to rename it as the Slovenian Army, remained unchanged due to a lack of amendments to the Defence Act for a

¹⁵ Jokubauskas, Vytautas. (2018). Territorial Defence and Partisan Resistance (Lithuania's Experience). Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review. 16. 331-371. 10.2478/lasr-2018-0012. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330317388_Territorial_Defence_and_Partisan_Resistance_Lithuania's_Experience/citation/download (accessed 14. 05.23)

considerable period.¹⁶ Under the embargo and with limited financial resources, the Slovenian army remained primarily territorial, and continued to develop branches and services it was lacking; i.e., artillery, armoured units, the air force. So-called seven-month training actually lasted only six months during military service and was of a dual nature, taking place at both training centres and the other in peace-time units of the Territorial Defence. The army was professionally reinforced by the Territorial Defence that successfully recruited almost every officer who responded to the appeal of the Presidium of the Republic of Slovenia and joined the Territorial Defence before the deadline of July 1, 1991. Importantly, the army, having won the 1991 war, enjoyed a high level of public trust, with state authorities further deliberately developing its positive public image. Citizens saw the armed forces of their country as an important and non-problematic part of the state structure and expressed a higher-than-average level of trust in it.¹⁷

Seminal contribution has been made by Marek Bodziany that demonstrates that this formation has to be ready to achieve its tasks both during a military conflict (war) and in coping with non-military contingencies. “The ‘Territorials’ are soldiers prepared to perform varied tasks utilizing their knowledge of the local terrain, with aid of the local authorities and communities. In giving the TDF their final form, a number of analyses as well as scientifically-based forecasting must be made. Conclusive decisions can only be taken bearing in mind that conditions and potential working environments will be undergoing constant changes¹⁸. Markedly, decisions and actions taken by the Ministry of Defence of Poland led to the creation of Territorial Defence Forces, as the fifth, independent branch of the Armed Forces.

The existing literature on TDF efficacy and effectiveness is extensive and focuses particularly on the fact that by actively engaging citizens in defence efforts and providing comprehensive training and support, the TDF strengthens the bond between the state and its people, fostering a shared responsibility for national security.

Regrettably, Ukraine has failed to timely respond and boast its experience in the organisation of the territorial defence due to several reasons. It should be articulated that

¹⁶ D. Guštin, *Defence of the Republic of Slovenia 1991–2004: from Individual to Collective Defence*. Prispjevki za Novejšo Zgodovino. 2016, 56: 86-100. 10.51663/pnz.56.3.06. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317759958_Defence_of_the_Republic_of_Slovenia_1991-2004_from_Individual_to_Collective_Defence (accessed 14. 05.23)

¹⁷ T. Repnik, *Odnos civilne družbe do Slovenske vojske v obdobju 1991–2006*. Diplomsko delo, Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2006. Slovenska vojska12, No. 1, 1. Prvih sto prostovoljcev.

¹⁸ M. Bodziany, *Territorial Defence Forces – Determinants and Challenges*. Kwartalnik Bellona. 696. 82-91, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338637411_Territorial_Defence_Forces_-_Determinants_and_Challenges (accessed 25.08.22)

Ukraine, located in the heart of Europe, has been facing significant challenges since 1991 when it gained its sovereignty, due to ongoing territorial disputes and external aggression. In the face of such threats, the role of territorial defence forces has emerged as a vital component of bolstering societal resilience. In this respect, to understand the significance of territorial defence forces in Ukraine, it is crucial to consider its historical context.

Ukraine has a long-standing history of external pressures, including invasion and occupation. These experiences have shaped Ukraine's approach to national defence, emphasising the need for a strong and capable defence force that includes territorial defence units. To track the history of establishing TDF, in 1999, the then President Leonid Kuchma issued a decree that established the Territorial Defence Forces. However, when the TDF system was developed in 2000, it essentially replicated the basic structure preserving the 'mindset' of the post-soviet internal defence system without any significant improvements. Subsequently, the Territorial Defence Forces underwent multiple rounds of reforms, yet the fundamental objective remained unchanged: to uphold domestic stability.¹⁹ Yet, on March 11, 2020 the the-then Minister of Defence of Ukraine Andrii Taran stated, "To ensure high defence capability of the country, we need to create a comprehensive and far-reaching territorial defence system. Of course, this is not just a task for the Ministry of Defence or the General Staff. It is one of the priorities for the entire national security system"²⁰. It is imperative to highlight the fact that the Territorial Defence Forces as a military reserve force took its origin as the informal volunteer battalions formed in response to Russia's covert invasion of parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014. The matters of security and defence are under the purview of the state, and Ukraine's local governments were prepared to play a role in the multi-level system of national resilience. This was possible due to their increased local budgets and demonstrated capacity for cooperation with the state and civil society on both vertical and horizontal levels. In accordance with the 2021 law on national resilience, local governments were assigned the responsibility of overseeing territorial defence (terytorialna oborona). While the armed forces focus on safeguarding the state's territorial integrity, territorial defence units ensure security at the regional and municipal levels. They are tasked with patrolling the streets and protecting social infrastructure and communal facilities. The president, as the leader of national resilience and the supreme commander-in-chief of the

¹⁹ M. Butchenko. *Ukraine's Territorial Defence on a War Footing* // <https://icds.ee/en/ukraines-territorial-defence-on-a-war-footing/> (accessed 12.05.23)

²⁰ A. Taran, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/speeches/2020/03/11/to-ensure-high-defense-capability-of-the-country-we-need-to-create-comprehensive-and-far-reaching-territorial-defense-system%E2%80%9D-andrii-taran> (accessed 12.05.23)

Armed Forces of Ukraine, holds the primary decision-making authority. The president collaborates with the minister of defence and military commanders to carry out these duties. During times of martial law, the heads of regional and sub-regional state administrations are appointed as heads of corresponding military administrations, making them responsible for territorial defence. The structure of territorial defence aligns with Ukraine's administrative-territorial divisions. Each region (oblast) and Kyiv hosts a territorial defence brigade, while each subregion (rayon) hosts a battalion. The military command, including brigade and battalion commanders, is responsible for achieving military objectives, including training and the provision of weapons. The core of the territorial defence units consists of soldiers from the Armed Forces of Ukraine, although civilians also have the option to sign contracts and join these units.²¹

When it came to keeping a city functional during wartime, the territorial defence forces so far had an exceptional record. Furthermore, only in January 2022, when Russian troops and equipment amassing along the Ukrainian borders, was the reformed Territorial Defence Force officially incorporated into the structure of Ukraine's Armed Forces. President Zelenskyi ensured the systematic development of the Territorial Defence Forces, as the ability of people to defend themselves is the best foundation for national security. The Head of State articulated that the Territorial Defence Forces demonstrate the nationwide character of the Ukrainian resistance in the war for the independence of our country. These forces are the light infantry of the Ukrainian army, sometimes supported by the armoured vehicles and heavy artillery of other brigades but without any of their own. Importantly, the revamped Territorial Defence Forces of Ukraine, as a separate branch of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, function in accordance with the law "On fundamentals of national resistance" enacted in July 2021.

Theoretically, this law envisioned that the TDF might be engaged in both specific rear area protection functions and 'timely response [actions] while taking measures to defend territories and populace at certain locations', which allows for quite a broad interpretation. The TDF military component consists of TDF Command, regional headquarters and brigades/battalions for each region/district.

In practice, the implementation of the law's provisions related to the TDF coincided with the last stages of Russian strategic deployment in January-February 2022. In this short time, it was possible to nominally establish command nuclei for brigades and battalions in

²¹ V. Romanova, *Ukraine's resilience to Russia's military invasion in the context of the decentralisation reform*, 10.13140/RG.2.2.32756.83840, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360447277_Ukraine's_resilience_to_Russia's_military_invasion_in_the_context_of_the_decentralisation_reform (accessed 21.04.23)

border regions, regional headquarters and a central TDF Command. Other organisational issues were addressed in January–February 2022, including the establishment of a command-and-control vertical, acquisition of bases, and establishment of armouries.

On 24 February 2022, the TDF was in the process of completing the first stage of organisational developments: creating a professional peacetime nucleus. Noteworthy, even the professional peacetime nucleus of the TDF was not provided with the proper amount of communications equipment, means of individual protection or automobiles. This is why the TDF was still in the process of attaining initial combat readiness status for wartime.

As it was above-mentioned, a brigade of the TDF was created in each oblast, and a battalion, respectively, in each district. After the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, people of different ages, genders, experiences and professions put aside their affairs and courageously stood up for the defence of Ukraine. During the first month of the full-scale war, more than 110,000 patriots joined the Territorial defence of Ukraine, including the best representatives of our Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University brave warriors of Light – students and professors, former cadets of the University Military Training Department. In general, the first TDF units were able to join the resistance in 3-4 hours after the beginning of all-out war. It should be articulated, the deployment of the TDF in the first month of unprovoked Russian aggression enabled mass national resistance and inflicted maximum losses of men/equipment on the enemy and increased their resilience.

Armed with weapons and willpower, the soldiers of the Territorial defence forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces defended Kyiv and Kharkiv, liberated Sumy and Kherson, other cities and villages. Today, units of the Territorial defence forces are liberating the captured territories, accordingly, enhancing societal resilience amidst the war in Ukraine.

It is worth mentioning that since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Territorial Defence Forces proved to have played a critical role in thwarting Russian plans. To the point, the territorial Defence are not the only units to have stepped up to the task of fighting in the toughest battles of the war. Ukraine's Border Guard Service, National Guard, and police formations have all taken part in the battles in Donbas, with the border guards in particular playing a key role in Ukraine's defence of Soledar and Bakhmut in Donetsk Oblast. Furthermore, it is arguably those of the Territorial Defence Forces that have undergone the most dramatic metamorphosis. Since the days of sneaker-wearing green militia, Territorial Defence soldiers are now serving as a key component of Ukraine's defence against Russia's war, often performing some of the most unenviable tasks in their role as light infantry, holding the first line of defence against constant Russian bombardment and assaults.

TDF members, thus, taking up arms to not only defend Ukraine itself, but defending their own homes from immediate Russian attack, fighting and dying in the last ditch for Freedom and Independence. enjoyed a high level of public trust. Warfighting under such conditions proved to be a challenge for the TDF, though. There were some cases, when TDF formations had to abandon their positions, unable to withstand Russian artillery advances – although withstanding these tactics proved to be a problem for more heavy Ukrainian formations too. At the same time, TDF forces aided in relieving more heavy formations by performing heavy fighting in priority areas. Moreover, the TDF assumed the main responsibility for border protection after Russian forces left Northern Ukraine in early April 2022 and were expelled from the Kharkiv region in September 2022.

Two thirds of the 120 arrests of sabotage and reconnaissance groups in Kyiv were carried out by about 10 000 fighters with the assistance of territorial defence forces that, eventually, testified to the invaluable contribution of territorial defence units in maintaining public order in urban areas and conducting patrols, both in Kyiv and other cities. A specific schedule has been designed for territorial defence patrols, where assigned units range from keeping their checkpoint duty, foot patrolling with the police in city blocks, and designated rest periods.²²

Approximately 10,000 fighters, supported by territorial defence forces, have played a significant role in apprehending around two-thirds of the 120 sabotage and reconnaissance groups in Kyiv. TDF members' deep awareness of the area and strong bonds within the local community have been instrumental in achieving this. Additionally, enforcing public order is another crucial responsibility of the territorial defence forces. Despite being a large metropolitan city like Kyiv, only a few instances of crime have been reported. Thus, the territorial defence forces have demonstrated an exceptional track record in ensuring the functionality and security of the city during times of war.

Through their presence within communities, territorial defence forces instil a sense of reassurance and trust, enhancing the morale and confidence of the civilian population. Moreover, TDF units serve as a rapid response force, equipped to address emerging threats and crises promptly. The collaboration between territorial defence forces and local law enforcement agencies enables effective coordination in maintaining public order and

²² M. Bielieskov, *Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces: The War So Far and Future Prospects*, 11.05. 2023, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraines-territorial-defence-forces-war-so-far-and-future-prospects> (accessed 12.06.23)

combating crime. By building resilience at the community level through preparedness initiatives, the TDF empowers civilians with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond effectively to hybrid threats and various challenges. The massive and all-encompassing nature of the national resistance, which will be guaranteed among other things by TDF preservation, can actually reduce enemy advances only to key roads. This will make enemy's logistics and support vulnerable and paralyse its ability to advance deep into the country's territories, minimise its inroads and create a basis for disrupting the enemy's TDF role in Ukraine's Armed Forces prospective model aggressive intentions. De facto, it can be assumed that the effective system of national resistance of Ukraine can become one of the main factors of non-nuclear deterrence of the enemy, along with the development of the Ukrainian own missile program.²³

To finalise, the emphasis on the role of territorial defence forces in bolstering societal resilience acknowledges their significance beyond traditional defence strategies, further deliberately developing its positive public image. It recognizes their potential to contribute to the overall well-being and preparedness of a nation. By investing in the capacities and resources of TD forces, societies can enhance their ability to adapt, withstand, and recover from various challenges, ensuring a more resilient and secure future. Another promising finding in terms of TDF's future effective reforming was that members of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces attend tactical, combat and first aid training courses during russia's military invasion launched on Ukraine.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, it should be articulated that in the context of unprovoked russo-Ukrainian asymmetric war, Territorial Defence Forces proved to have played a vital role in bolstering societal resilience by safeguarding the security and stability of a nation. Consequently, Ukraine's TDF's top priority is to protect the territorial integrity of our country, defend its borders, and ensure the safety of Ukraine's citizens. The current reality provided solid evidence that TDF's role extends beyond traditional military operations, since they actively contribute to the resilience of our society in various ways. From the outcomes, it is clear that with the onset of the unprovoked russo-Ukrainian war, there is growing

²³ M. Bielieskov, A. Muraveinyk, *Policy Brief: Generalization and Assessment of Territorial Defense Forces Application Experience in 2022, In the Course of Repelling of Russian Aggression against Ukraine along with TDF Role in Future Structure of Ukrainian Defense Forces*, NGO "COME BACK ALIVE!" Kyiv, 2023, <https://savelife.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Generalization-and-assessment-of-Territorial-Defense-Forces-application-experience-in-2022.pdf> (accessed 20.06.23)

awareness that TDF has to implement a number of structural reforms of its military and the defence system in general.

Embracing and highlighting the pivotal role of territorial defence forces is crucial for Ukraine's ongoing efforts to bolster societal resilience in the face of Russia's aggression and internal uncertainties. No matter what's happening around us and, in the world at large, there is no more urgent and noble cause than defeating the ruscism. The battle that will determine the future of the world is happening here and now in Ukraine. It is through our combined resolve and unwavering determination that we will overcome the formidable adversary who has spent decades preparing for war against the nations advocating freedom, and quoting a TDF volunteer, we would express the desire of the entire nation – *our dream is that Ukrainians are no longer scared of anybody and everyone would admire and look up to Ukrainians.*

Therefore, this research builds on existing knowledge on the formation of Ukraine's gut-wrenching experience in establishing a territorial defence system and employing various strategies to counter hybrid warfare can serve as a valuable example for other countries and alliances like NATO. By learning from Ukraine's military blunders and achievements and effectively employing these tools, nations can enhance their own defence capabilities and avoid similar pitfalls in the future. Despite Russia's full-scale invasion causing catastrophic shock, Ukrainians have exhibited remarkable resilience. Moreover, Ukraine's new developed brand gained its symbolic colours of victory and such values as bravery, resilience and resistance. Despite the challenges, the country has managed to avoid becoming a defeated state. The state continues to carry out its duties in the territories under its control, even amidst the ongoing asymmetric war. Ukraine's heroic resistance against Russia has proven to be a significant setback for those who underestimated its determination and strength. Many observers, including admirers of great powers, anticipated that Ukraine would succumb to the invasion within a few days. However, the country's unwavering spirit and resilience have defied such expectations, inspiring hope and admiration for its courageous stand in the face of aggression.

It could finally be concluded that the lessons learned from the previous historic conflicts and wars, as well as ways forward for practitioners and academics may constitute the object of future studies, and further investigations on this important topic of TDF and national defence in strengthening the Ukrainians' resilience are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Abstract

It should be articulated that in the context of unprovoked russo-Ukrainian asymmetric war, Territorial Defence Forces proved to have played a vital role in bolstering societal resilience by safeguarding the security and stability of a nation. Consequently, Ukraine's TDF's top priority is to protect the territorial integrity of our country, defend its borders, and ensure the safety of Ukraine's citizens. The current reality provided solid evidence that TDF's role extends beyond traditional military operations, since they actively contribute to the resilience of our society in various ways.

The authors' focus revolves around the pivotal role of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) in enhancing societal resilience within the country. Amidst historical conflicts and ongoing security threats, the TDF has emerged as a vital component of Ukraine's defence strategy. The present study has been developed in two stages and makes use of qualitative methods. This article delves into the structure and functions of territorial defence forces, emphasising their contributions to local security, rapid response, crisis management, national unity, and community resilience. By actively engaging citizens in defence efforts and providing comprehensive training and support, the TDF strengthens the bond between the state and its people, fostering a shared responsibility for national security.

Through their presence within communities, territorial defence forces instil a sense of reassurance and resilience, enhancing the morale and confidence of the civilian population. Moreover, TDF units serve as a rapid response force, equipped to address emerging threats and crises promptly. The collaboration between territorial defence forces and local law enforcement agencies enables effective coordination in maintaining public order and combating crime. By building resilience at the community level through preparedness initiatives, the TDF empowers civilians with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond effectively to hybrid threats and various challenges.

Embracing and highlighting the pivotal role of territorial defence forces is crucial for Ukraine's ongoing efforts to bolster societal resilience in the face of Russia's aggression and internal uncertainties.

Keywords: hybrid threats, local security, national unity, societal resilience, Territorial Defence Forces, Ukraine, unprovoked russo-Ukrainian war.

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