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From Underdogs to Masters of Modern Warfare

The Transformation of Ukrainian Nationalist
Movements in 2022 - 2023

Strategic Paper No. 16

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Introduction

The transformation of social movements into combat forces is not a unique historical phenomenon. This process can be illustrated by the mobilization of communists during the Spanish Civil War, involving volunteer combatants, significant fundraising, and international support. Similarly, the transformation of political radical groups into regular forces is evident in the formation of the Republican Guard post the French Revolution. Even in Ukraine, a similar transformation occurred with the development of Ukrainian military units from social groups in 2014, aligning with this phenomenon.

However, the transition in 2022 - 2023 of the Ukrainian nationalist movement into military units is distinctively characterized by its integration into a stable and legitimate state that possesses an established military infrastructure. Moreover, Ukraine did not experience the typical revolutionary conditions that often facilitate such transformations. Instead, these units have become fully integrated and stable components of the official armed forces. Interestingly, they have become a symbol of the professionalism of the Ukrainian army, participating in crucial campaigns, including the critically important defence of Mariupol early in the war. While it's inaccurate to claim these units are the best without exception, they undoubtedly represent a significant marker of trust from both society and within military reputation circles.

The attention of researchers¹ has mostly been drawn to nationalist or far right as radical movements. Yet the specific emergence of military units, also referred to as 'nationalists,' remains underexplored. Indeed, this is essentially a new phenomenon that, although it has historical continuity since the beginning of Ukraine's independence, has never manifested on the scale seen since the start of the full-scale invasion.

From a military studies perspective, nationalist units are overshadowed by the broader "hybrid regime" of the Ukrainian army's transition from 2014 to 2022. As Deborah Sanders noted, the Ukrainian army was in a unique state when the country faced a full-scale Russian invasion, enabling the use of "both sides of the coin" for two fundamentally different approaches to military formation.² However, it is currently difficult to assess the dynamism of transformations in Ukrainian military affairs after the full-scale invasion. It is entirely plausible that the integration of nationalists into regular forces could be due to reforms conducted over 8 years and is just one episode in military history.

The Ukrainian army was indeed in an unusual "hybrid" state, but the current conflict is also a rare example of how a developed and generally stable democracy, and more importantly, a developed civil society, faced a full-scale war. This compels us to pay more attention to the reactions of various

1 Ivan Gomza & Jan Zajaczkowski, "Black Sun Rising: Political Opportunity Structure Perceptions and Institutionalization of the Azov Movement in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 47, no. 5 (2019), pp. 774-800; Anton Shekhovtsov & Andreas Umland, "The Maidan and Beyond: Ukraine's Radical Right," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2014), pp. 58-63; Tamta Gelashvili, "Political opportunities and mobilization on the far-right in Ukraine," *East European Politics* (2023); Denys Brylov, Tetiana Kalenychenko & Pavlo Smytyniuk, "Ukraine's Far-Right Movements and Their Connections to the Religious World," in: Gionathan Lo Mascolo (ed.), *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks, and Denominations*, vol. 129 (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023).

2 Deborah Sanders, "Ukraine's third wave of military reform 2016–2022: Building a military able to defend Ukraine against the Russian invasion," *Defense & Security Analysis*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2023), pp. 312 - 328.



social groups within the country, especially social movements. From this position, we are interested in the transformational phenomenon of Ukrainian nationalists.

The main feature of this social movement lies in why, during total mobilization, nationalist movements were able to restore old types and increase various types of units and, unlike in 2014, officially integrate into the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It would be misleading to interpret the nationalist movement's militarization and institutionalization into military units literally.³ However, the fact remains that the role of leaders of these movements is important in forming a series of units. They initiated the creation of units within the Armed Forces, seeking ways to legalize their volunteer formations while simultaneously preserving their identity and a certain narrative continuity to their activities as political actors. In the diversity of Ukrainian civil society, nationalists have maintained visibility, even though they have become part of the regular formations of the Ukrainian army, which severely limits the possibilities for manifestation. How, in general, an oppositional and marginal movement stood out by forming large military units that partially or fully replicate the identity, brand, and style of the political movement. De facto, the nationalist movement is much more vividly represented in the war with Russia than any other representatives of Ukrainian civil society.

This work represents a continuation of research⁴ into why nationalists had no choice but to become professional soldiers. It also marks the first attempt to test theories that can explain the transformation process the movement has undergone since the start of a new phase in the Ukraine-Russia war. However, this paper offers a more detailed review of how nationalists were able to achieve such notable results on the battlefield. We employ resource mobilization theory as the primary lens for viewing the movement, while explaining their professionalism as an example of the bricolage mechanism, effectively transforming existing practices of political movements into military strength. This involves practices, training formats, ideology, and youth engagement that transformed newly formed units, affiliated, or symbolizing former Ukrainian right-wing movements, into symbols of professional military service and “masters of war.”

Historical Context

Reflecting on the evolution of Ukrainian nationalist groups into professional military units necessitates revisiting the Revolution of Dignity (2013-14) and the initial stages of the overt Ukraine-Russia conflict. Nationalist political entities had a marginal presence in Ukrainian politics. However, during Viktor Yanukovich's pro-Russian presidency, the Svoboda party's surpassing of the 5% electoral threshold to enter the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada) marked a notable electoral acknowledgment of nationalist factions.⁵ This support was pivotal for their visible role throughout the revolution.

³ Alexander Ritzmann, “The myth that far-right zealots run Ukraine is Russian propaganda,” *Euronews*, 20/6/2023, accessed 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/49raX40>

⁴ Taras Tarasiuk & Petro Burkovskiy, “From Political Outsiders to Military Stalwarts: The Evolving Face of Ukrainian Nationalism” (2023) [Unpublished paper].

⁵ Shekhovtsov & Umland.



During the Revolution of Dignity uprising from December 2013 to February 2014, nationalist movements stood out for being the best prepared to confront the Yanukovich government's attempts to suppress the protests, also signalling numerous future changes. This period marked the beginning of a new wave of nationalist movements in Ukraine, shifting the key role of the Svoboda party and giving rise to a plethora of new formations and strengthening small youth groups like Azov or Tradition and Order. Meanwhile, older organizations like UNA-UNSO, active in the early 1990s, or ultraradical groups like Tryzub, were reinvigorated. However, it would be incorrect to portray the nationalist movement as a mouthpiece for violent protests. Existing research clearly shows that nationalists only played a partial role in the protests and violent confrontations, reinforcing the argument that interpreting the nationalist or far-right movement as a key player in the radicalization of the Euromaidan is misleading.⁶

Nevertheless, nationalist organizations quickly adapted to the new challenges of post-revolutionary society – military ones. Along with other actors in the Revolution of Dignity, nationalists became a mobilization resource for defending Ukraine at the Donbas in 2014. However, their activity diminished relatively quickly with the legitimization of the new political regime in Kyiv, mainly through presidential and parliamentary elections, and later due to the Minsk agreements, which significantly reduced combat activity.⁷

At the same time, the legalization of the first volunteer and nationalist combatants began. This process mostly took place within the framework of Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) and through the subordination of new formations under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.⁸ With the decline in active combat actions, nationalist and other volunteer formations quickly dissolved into state formations, and the last of them – the Volunteer Ukrainian Corps and the Ukrainian Volunteer Army – gradually reduced their presence within the ATO/OOS, virtually nullifying it by 2019. The absolute majority ceased to be in the combat zone immediately after 2015.⁹ The focus then shifted back to political movements, prioritizing activities within civil society and the country's political life. Studies have also repeatedly shown the institutionalization of movements and their role primarily as political actors within civil society.¹⁰

However, even at the peak of combat actions and active, often successful, nationalist engagements, they barely managed to garner 1% of the electorate in the first post-revolutionary parliamentary

6 Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests: an attempt of systematic estimation," *European Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2016), pp. 453-472

7 Kostiantyn Fedorenko & Andreas Umland, "Between Frontline and Parliament: Ukrainian Political Parties and Irregular Armed Groups in 2014-2019," *Nationalities Papers* (2021), pp. 1 - 25.

8 Andreas Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the 'Azov' Battalion in 2014," in: Jeffrey Kaplan (ed.), *The 21st Century Cold War: A New World Order?* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 27.

9 Shekhovtsov & Umland.

10 Gomza & Zajaczkowski; Ivan Gomza, "Too Much Ado About Ukrainian Nationalists: the Azov Movement and the War in Ukraine," *Krytyka* (2022), accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://bit.ly/499hCAP>



elections in 2014.¹¹ Among them, there were repeated attempts at unification, conducting joint actions, united marches,¹² trying to nominate a single joint candidate for elections with the idea of creating a single political party.¹³ However, all these attempts were unsuccessful.¹⁴

The constant weakness of the potential for unification among Ukrainian nationalists is largely illustrative in understanding such a wide representation of various units and the long-running development of preparation for military confrontation. Clearly, it played a significant role in the loss of unity and competition among nationalist movements.

Bricolage as a Mechanism of Resource Transformation

In this concise overview of the history of nationalists since 2014, we highlight a key point: it is fragmented and possesses internal competition, preventing it from becoming unified. Ukrainian nationalists during this period represent a series of competing movements. This factor in the history of nationalists compels us to adopt the lens of resource mobilization theory. Within this theory, we can categorize them as a Social Movements Industry (SMI), consisting of various Social Movement Organizations (SMO).¹⁵ We believe this theory best explains the active development of nationalists into a range of professional, diverse units within the Defence Forces of Ukraine from 2022.

Resource mobilization theory (RMT), originally formulated by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald in the 1970s, views social movements as entrepreneurs competing for limited resources.¹⁶ Through this lens, the movement uses social issues for the sole purpose of increasing its resources, by constantly relating to social crises, current issues, political agendas, etc. This corresponds to nationalist movements that continuously tried to assume the role of discourse monopoly on nationalism and its potential resource.

The distinct advantages of various organizations since 2014 have created a conditional *casus belli* for competition among movements. The opening of a window of political opportunities after the onset of the war in Donbas highlighted the main foundation of Ukrainian nationalism – the existential threat from Russia. It is important to note that the need to prepare for war with Russia unites nationalists. This discourse became a priori, deeply rooted in the history of the idea of Ukrainian ultra-right. Ultimately, this was necessary to maintain the status of military experts and the ability to appeal to the need for attention to the security and defence sector.

11 Halyna Stadnyk, "Porazka natsionalistiv zi 'Svobody,'" *Deutsche Welle*, 29/10/2014, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/42BreSn>

12 "U tsentri Kyjeva - marsh natsionalistiv," *UkrInform*, 22/2/2017, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <https://bit.ly/3SGP3E6>

13 "Pravyi sektor, 'Svoboda' i 'Natsional'nyy korpus' pidpysaly manifest pro ob'yednannya," *Radio Svoboda*, 16/3/2017, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <https://bit.ly/3waYOCN>

14 Pavlo Vuiets, "P'yatachok patriotiv. Za shcho pochubylys' ukrayins'ki natsionalisty," *Glavkom*, 3/12/2018, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <https://bit.ly/3wbYUdo>

15 John D. McCarthy & Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 82, no. 6 (1977), pp. 1219 - 1220.

16 *Ibid.* pp. 1212 - 1241.



However, it should not be forgotten that organizations within the same social industry, sharing similar goals, also shared common values and views that, in one way or another, inspired participants towards collective action and collaboration. This was most unequivocal regarding attitudes towards national security and defence issues. This allows for the assertion of another important characteristic of the nationalist movement – the presence of a network within the followers of these organizations.

Competition for participants required providing high-quality and broad-spectrum opportunities for military or paramilitary training. This competition was further intensified by other aspects of what we call “resource” – the number of supporters and members, prestige within the network, media presence, and reputation. The exclusivity of movements, preventing parallel participation in different organizations, only intensified the competition between movements. Such competitive conditions, mandatory since 2014, forced nationalists to continuously improve their own practices in preparing their members for military affairs.

This led to the development of a wide range of military, physical, and ideological training practices, becoming regular practices of the movements. These are the main elements of the transformation in 2022-23, when, despite national mobilization, Ukrainian nationalists were able not only to join the military but also to form their own units and participate in the most important military campaigns of the Ukraine-Russia war.

In contrast to 2014, the state had the capacity within its armed forces, and the number of volunteers was large – about 400,000 men voluntarily joined the ranks of the Ukrainian Defence Forces.¹⁷ The scale of the war dictated a greater need for coordinated action among units, exacerbated by limitations on military resources, such as heavy military equipment or ammunition. These elements were a privilege only of fully legal state formations. This aspect placed nationalists in new social realities, where they were forced to increase delegation of control to the state while also publicly acting as a force against Russia. This effectively removed them from the public space, limiting both their freedom of action and freedom of expression, including ideological expressions. The total mobilization of the country and reliance on support from democratic countries only intensified the conditions where even the formal statutes of the army’s apolitical nature played a crucial role. Added to this were restrictions during wartime on protests not coordinated with the authorities, not to mention the possibility of any violent acts during demonstrations. A clear example of this situation is the declaration made by fighters of the then Azov Regiment during the blockade at Azovstal in Mariupol:¹⁸

“We despise Nazism and Stalinism. Because our country has suffered the most from these totalitarian regimes and false ideology.”

¹⁷ Serhiy Rakhmanin “Putin ne spryyme bud’-yakoho variantu, krim peremozhnoho dlya sebe. Tse oznachaye, shcho viyna nadovho”, *Ukrainska Pravda*, 16/6/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/vj28p5jm>

¹⁸ “Polk ‘Azov’ poyasnyv rosiyanam, khto ye natsystamy u nynishniy viyni,” *UkrInform*, 3/3/2024, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3SGPjmy>



This put nationalists in a difficult situation, where the idea of resisting Russia gained unprecedented support, and the conditions that led to this required them to eliminate public and political activity and fully subordinate to the state within the Armed Forces. In effect, such movements practically ceased to exist, and the theses of nationalists were expressed by the majority of the population. This situation was also aptly described by a former member of UNA-UNSO, combatant of battles in Transnistria, Slavko Artemenko:¹⁹

“This war, from the perspective of Ukrainian nationalism ideology, is the last. The nation has formed, the state has formed, nationalism has played its role.”

Nationalists were not fully prepared as combat organizations, although they had paramilitary wings, mostly for youth participants (who were significantly fewer in number compared to party cells). Despite the formal affiliation of the Azov movement with the eponymous regiment, the latter was separate and did not participate in the activities of the political party in any way. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, nationalist movements weakened further, especially given to the loss of their main advantage – vivid and mass street actions. While the nationalist movement utilized the discourse of a possible “great” war with Russia, it largely did not translate into constant preparation for it, focusing on political, humanitarian, and other issues that provided more political dividends than building military capabilities (if the latter were even possible).

The primary question arises: How did political entrepreneurs in the form of movements (especially their leaders) not disappear and instead manage to mobilize and transform the movement into military units, and even make themselves a benchmark of quality for the Ukrainian army?

To characterize the elements that were effective for transforming movements into military units, we analyse practices that directly influenced their ability to form quality military connections during the full-scale invasion. For this, we look at the discourse through the lens of the bricolage mechanism. Literally, the concept means creating a work of art from available materials, whatever they may be. This mechanism has been used in economic research to explain the unique adaptability of entrepreneurs to survive in the face of institutional or external changes.

The central paradigm of our study is the application of a mechanism from economic sciences, employed within the framework of resource mobilization theory by entrepreneurs. As we have noted, RMT is actively adapted and utilized to elucidate the logic behind the activities of social movements. Similarly, we propose the use of the institutional bricolage paradigm. Our contribution to this interpretation specifically narrows down to one of the interpretations,²⁰ namely, the institutional one. This paradigm defines the application of bricolage to work around established principles, rules, and practices – or the absence thereof – to create institutional change.

¹⁹ Vsesvitnie Telebachenya Slavka, “Yakym bude shlyakh Ukrayiny vid viyny do myru? CH. 1 Rozdumy,” *YouTube*, 18/9/ 2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/48cZTY6>

²⁰ Sara Mateus & Soumodip Sarkar, “Bricolage – a systematic review, conceptualization, and research agenda,” *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* (2019).



These elements largely define the majority of the components used by nationalist movements to adapt movements into military institutions. Another important aspect is that different movements had varying degrees of institutional development – from networks of organizations that included parties, publishing houses, patronage services, and foundations to semi-formal organizations that only nominally registered as legal entities, or did not have such a status at all. “Institutional bricolage” refers to entrepreneurial actions aimed at overcoming challenges posed by formal and informal institutions seeking to achieve institutional change and value creation.²¹

Furthermore, we consider this theoretical construction of bricolage specifically as a social mechanism – a delimited class of events that changes the connections between specified sets of action elements in an identical or very similar manner across different situational variations and within certain fields of interaction among political actors.²² These principles allow for a better understanding of our interpretative framework, under which we propose to examine the process of change among nationalists.

Therefore, we suggest examining the phenomenon of bricolage as a social mechanism within the toolkit of nationalists for transforming mobilized resources under drastically changed conditions.

Indeed, the mechanism is often used to explain the adaptation of entrepreneurs in the event of sudden external changes in operating conditions. Clearly, nationalists faced a similar phenomenon with the full-scale Russian invasion, the abrupt change mentioned earlier. This connotation with the economic mechanism, where an entrepreneur adapts to realities and “makes something out of nothing,” seems entirely adaptive for understanding the logic of nationalist transformation, primarily because in both dimensions the unchanging goal is resource accumulation and increase, with the difference that resources in this case have various characteristics. We propose to consider nationalist units because of a bricolage of elements from their activity as a political movement. This includes ideological training, tactical training, formation of personnel reserves, and youth training and development with parallel support infrastructure. This can also be interpreted within the framework of another adaptation of the mechanism. Huang et al. adopt “institutional bricolage” across three dimensions²³ – material, organizational, and discursive – for the purpose of gaining an advantage over competitors. We consider here material resources to encompass human, financial, and technical support, while organizational resources include practices, training, and combat experience. The discursive sphere, evidently, comprises the ideological and educational activities of the movements. Additionally, there is a combination of horizontal connections in the nationalist social sector. These elements allowed the movement to rapidly adapt from fighting in the political arena to being present in a massive military machine of resistance against Russia, without dissolving during nationwide mobilization.

21 Andrew Mzembe et al., “Institutional Bricolage as an Antecedent of Social Value Creation in a Developing Country’s Tourism and Hospitality Industry,” *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2019), pp. 997 - 1008.

22 Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow & Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 24.

23 Xiang Huang et al., “Integration of Bricolage and Institutional Entrepreneurship for Internet Finance: Alibaba’s Yu’e Bao,” *Journal of Global Information Management*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2019), pp. 1 - 23.



We assert that these practices enabled the movement to survive, simultaneously de facto ceasing to be a movement by integrating into the Armed Forces of Ukraine. We propose viewing nationalists primarily as entrepreneurs who marketed the discourse of military glory, who had to use existing practices on 24/02/2022 to transform from social movements into regular military units within the Ukrainian Defence Forces. This theory serves as a prism for us to examine, yet it still provides an answer to how nationalists were able to form professional regular military units.

This article aims to uncover the practices of the nationalist movement that, through the movement's development, allowed them to become professional military units and even expand them into brigade units. This prism also indirectly adds understanding to why the political heirs of the 2014 - 15 volunteer forces' glory did not stop at integration within volunteer formations, such as Territorial Defence volunteer battalions, but went on to integrate into the Special Operations Forces, the Main Directorate of Intelligence, form mechanized brigades of the Ground Forces, and so on.

Cases: Major Nationalist Movements and Their Subdivisions

In 2014, after Russia started hybrid invasion of Ukraine, nationalist movements began establishing volunteer paramilitary units. They demonstrated readiness to fight Russian troops in eastern Ukraine amid an institutional crunch and widespread corruption in the law enforcement agencies and the regular army.

Four main large nationalist movements play a role in the current war with Russia: Azov Battalion, DUK-PS (the former paramilitary wing of the political party and movement "Right Sector"), the party and movement All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda" (which also includes the youth wing "Sokil"), Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People's Self-Defence (UNA-UNSO). The prominent role is also played by Yevhen Karas, the leader of the "Society of the Future" party, the "Bratstvo" movement, as well as "Tradition and Order," which, shortly before the start of hostilities, became the Conservative Party.

Regional organizations such as HONOR in Kyiv, Fraikor in Kharkiv, and National Alliance in the Volyn region also had significant influence. Additionally, numerous small organizations were affiliated with nationwide movements or operating autonomously but still part of a network in one way or another. Overall, we can say that the concept of the "Ukrainian nationalist movement" is a classic example of Social Movement Industry.

The Azov movement was formally founded in May 2014 as a volunteer separate police unit under the Ministry of Interior. Between 2014-2021, the Azov movement developed into a broad network of political and civil organizations founded by veterans of the Ukrainian-Russian war. In addition, some members of the Azov movement continued professional military service in a separate regiment, "Azov" of the National Guard of Ukraine.

Bratstvo is a neoconservative group founded by charismatic leader Dmytro Korchynskyy in 1998. In 2014 Bratstvo fought along Azov and participated in establishing paramedic units within volunteer



military formations. In February 2015, it established a separate “Christian volunteer battalion of Saint Mary” in the Ministry of Internal Affairs structure.

The Volunteer Ukrainian Corps – Right Sector (Dobrovolchyy Ukrainskyi Korpus – Pravyi Sektor, DUK-PS) was founded in 2014, serving as a collective platform for various smaller and lesser-known nationalist movements, including “Tryzub” named after Stepan Bandera, UNA-UNSO, Karpatska Sich and football ultras from cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Donetsk. Initially, its purpose was to defend Maidan protesters from the riot police. With the onset of the Russian invasion, it evolved into DUK-PS, comprising several volunteer military units. In 2021, Dmytro Kotsiubaylo, leading the first separate assault company of DUK-PS, “Da Vinci Wolves,” was honored with Ukraine’s highest national award, the “Hero of Ukraine.” By 2022, the entirety of the HONOR movement, under the leadership of Sergiy Filimonov, had merged with the Kotsiubaylo unit. In March 2022, DUK-PS integrated into the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) as a distinct unit.²⁴ By the end of November 2022, those battalions established a new formation within the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the 67th Mechanized Brigade.²⁵ DUK-PS formalized its status as an official brigade of the Armed Forces only in the autumn of 2022, adopting its own internal disciplinary code.

Svoboda, founded in 1991, is the oldest nationalist political party in Ukraine. In 2014, Svoboda adopted a decision that all party members must join the ranks of the Armed Forces or work as civic volunteers to support the Ukrainian army. In 2014, it formed two volunteer units, battalion “Sich” subordinate to the Ministry of Interior and company “Karpatska Sich” within the UAF 93rd mechanized brigade. In 2015, Svoboda founded NGO “Svoboda Legion,” which united the party’s war veterans.

UNA-UNSO (*Ukrainska Natsionalna Asambleia – Ukrainska Narodna Samooborona*) is the oldest Ukrainian paramilitary organization founded in 1991. Its members took part in conflicts against Russia in Georgia (1993) and Ichkeria (1994-1995). In 2014, UNA-UNSO founded a volunteer battalion, which was later transformed into the 131st separate reconnaissance battalion of GUR²⁶.

Additionally, several small military groups form around leaders such as Bohdan Khodakovsky (leader of the Conservative Party, which formed the “Revanshe” unit), Dmytro Yarosh (former leader of the Right Sector party and DUK, after the split his formation is called the Ukrainian Volunteer Army – UDA), Yevhen Karas’ movement (his unit is named “C14”), and Fraikor (a unit bearing the same name), regional organization Karpatska Sich (Zakarpattia region, led by Taras Deiak). All these movements and groups gained battlefield experience in engagements with the Russian army, including Special Forces and Wagner mercenaries, in the East of Ukraine in 2014 - 2015.

Since then, they purposefully built their networks of ex-combatants and veterans, learned war lessons, carried out paramilitary drills and ideological training, or even pursued professional military

²⁴ Nestor Dym, “‘Viyna dobrobativ zakinchylas’: DUK ‘Pravyi sektor’ stave chastynoyu ZSU,” *Novynarnia*, 16/4/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3uD1GI1>

²⁵ Nestor Dym, “DUK ‘Pravyi sektor’ stav 67-yu mekhanizovanoyu bryhadoyu ZSU,” *Novynarnia*, 12/12/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3HRKiCz>

²⁶ *Valorous pages of Intelligence*, accessed on 20/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/42yAZRj>



careers. As a result, on the eve of 24 February 2022, they communicated effectively on a horizontal level and carried out internal preventive mobilization.

Bricolage Tools: Discipline, Education, Training, and More Training

1. Ideological training

The ideological training plays a leading role.²⁷ The archetype of the warrior has become a model for activists' development. However, through a blend of discipline, education, military experience, and relentless training, these groups have crafted a narrative that transcends mere physical readiness, embedding a deeper, ideological preparedness in their ranks.²⁸ Yet the essence of this preparation lies in its ability to forge a moral and psychological "armour" among its members.

Central to this is the belief in the existential nature of their struggle against Russia, a battle that goes back not years but centuries. This conviction is nurtured through historical lectures,²⁹ conferences,³⁰ and various events designed not just to educate but to create a wider movement members support, laying the groundwork for potential mobilization.

At the forefront of this narrative, the Azov movement has masterfully utilized information campaigns³¹ as a tool to bolster its ranks. Even as the full-scale Russian invasion loomed in February 2022, ideological training persisted. The Azov movement and organizations like Centuria continued their efforts.³² Additionally, events were designed to draw in civilian supporters and build a potential base for mobilization. Peripheral to Azov organizations, such as the Plomin publishing house, contributing to the cause through the translation and selling of philosophical literature aimed at sustaining the ideological fervour.³³ Through a series of engaging videos titled the "Recruit" series,

27 Dobrovoltzi, "Ukrayins'ka dobrovol'cha armiya s'ohodni zalyshylysa yedynym chysel'nym dobrovol'chym formuvannyam na peredoviy," *nachshtabu UDA Serhiy Il'nyts'kyi*, 30/9/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://rebrand.ly/hjq9siu>

28 "2-y Pikhotnyy Batal'yon Polku 'Azov'," *Ukrainian Military Pages*, 6/4/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3UCylrQ>. see also: "Boyets' 'Azovu' Nataliya Kotskovych: 'YA pryikhala v 'Azov' ne rozvazhatys', ne cholovika sobi shukaty, a voyuvaty. Ztsipyla zuby i dovodyla tse svoeyu povedinkoyu'," *Kurs*, 13/1/2015, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/4buzx6K>

29 Natsional'nyy Korpus, "Zaprosuyemo na vidkrytu lektsiyu do richnytsi utvorennia OUN," *Telegram*, 31/1/2022 at 14:27, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/nationalcorps/10697>

30 Plomin, "Onlain-prezentatsiya al'manakhu 'Traditsiya i tradytsionalizm'," *Telegram*, 13/1/2021 at 15:53, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/plomin/2199>

31 AZOV 4308, "Z'hidno/vidpovidno #1| Pro fizo na BKBP: vpravy, pravyla vykonannya, normatyvy," *YouTube*, 10/2/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4k5aef3>; AZOV 4308, 'Rekrut. Chastyna 1'," *YouTube*, 25/12/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/wpy5ejc8>

32 Centuria, "Khto ne znae svoho mynuloho - vtratyť svoe maibutnie," *Telegram*, 5/4/2023 at 19:59, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/centuriaua/1518>

33 Plomin, "Knyha Stepana Protsiuka 'Infektsiia' perezhyla vzhe piat'e perevydannia," *Telegram*, 17/3/2023 at 13:50, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/plomin/3359>



aimed at the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade,³⁴ they've managed not just to inform about the standards of the brigade but to inspire, significantly enhancing their recruitment efforts.³⁵

The Svoboda party, too, played its part in this. They registered a think tank called “Ukrainian strategic research studies” in 2015 mostly by younger group of movement, academics, and influential activists of the party. Organizing³⁶ historical lectures³⁷ through its “Bandera readings” not only educated civilians but also involved active combatants on the frontline and brought in speakers with warfare experience.³⁸ The head of the centre serves in the Svoboda battalion of the armed forces³⁹ but participates remotely, or even physically to some extent, in the centre's public events across the country. Mostly, these events are related to discussions on Ukrainian nationalism, the possibilities of countering Russia (including the disintegration of Russia as an entity),⁴⁰ or various initiatives to increase prestige among university students in Ukraine.⁴¹

Another example is DUK-PS, which, despite becoming an official brigade of the Armed Forces in 2022, has long embraced a strict internal disciplinary code, setting a standard for commitment and order within its ranks.⁴²

The Bratstvo battalion,⁴³ as one of the most religious examples, forms moral strength in spirituality sessions, with weekly prayers. Sometimes it is led by the movement's leader, Dmytro Korchytsky.⁴⁴

Through these concerted efforts, the nationalist battalions within the Ukrainian Defence Forces have evolved into entities that are not just physically formidable but ideologically unbreakable. The

34 3-tya okrema shturmova bryhada, “Kynu hranatu – perevirymo, chyyakisni u vas okopy: trenuvannya rekrutiv SSO AZOV,” *YouTube*, 19/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/w6njp5cf>

35 AZOV 4308, “Rekrut. Chastyna 2,” *YouTube*, 8/1/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yh77st6x>; AZOV 4308, “Rekrut. Chastyna 2,” *YouTube*, 25/1/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/35vy7h4k>; 3-tya okrema shturmova bryhada, “168 hodyn vyprobuvan': pershy tyzhden' KMB v SSO AZOV. Znayomstvo,” *YouTube*, 19/6/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/49u5n7xe>

36 Extract from: *Unified Register of Organizations*, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/44s7akjz>

37 “U Rivnomu vidbulasya ekspertna dyskusiya pro rosiyu v ramkakh prezentatsiyi Banderivs'kykh chytan’,” *Ukrainian Studies Of Strategic Disquisitions*, 26/4/2024, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mtyuxcnx>

38 Banderivs'ki chytannya, “X Banderivs'ki chytannya: usi dopovidi, dyskusiyi, vystupy, vital'ni slova / 10 lyutoho 2023 roku,” *YouTube*, 13/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4ha2j9zw>

39 “Dyrekto NATS “USSD” Yuriy Syrotyuk voyuvatyme v lavakh Zbroynykh Syl Ukrayiny” *Ukrainian Studies of Strategic Disquisitions*, 26/4/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mtyuxcnx>

40 “Kruhlyy stil “Ponevoleni narody rosiyi ta sabotazh mobilizatsiyi,” *Ukrainian Studies of Strategic Disquisitions*, 12/6/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/35566jn2>

41 “U Luts'ku vidbulasya dyskusiya pro rozpad rosiys'koy imperiyi v ramkakh prezentatsiyi Banderivs'kykh chytan’,” *Ukrainian Studies Of Strategic Disquisitions*, 16/11/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4spfxp5>

42 Pravyi Sector, “Polozhennya pro vydy porushen' dystsypliny i zlochyniv u pidrozdilakh DUK PS v zoni boyovykh diy,” 1/8/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4suf9asp>

43 Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Rankova molytva BRATSTVA,” *YouTube*, 17/3/2022, accessed on 28/05/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/ypeuzj2m>

44 Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Propovid' na Chystyy chetver,” *YouTube*, 21/4/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bddxhxsj>. Also available at: t.me/korchytskyi, *Telegram*, 25/10/2022, 21:01, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/29e3kj3e>

journey from recruitment to the battlefield is paved with lessons that extend beyond tactics and armaments, instilling a sense of duty, history, and unwavering resolve in the face of adversity.⁴⁵

Maintaining ideological practices during active combat operations is undoubtedly a positive factor for motivation. In fact, most of these activities primarily relate to historical events, especially from the 17th-18th and 20th centuries, which are currently key both in terms of constructing Ukrainian identity and in connection with global confrontations, often with catastrophic consequences, with state formations around Moscow.

This historical perspective allows participants to compare themselves with legendary military formations in Ukrainian history, such as the Sich Riflemen of the Ukrainian People's Republic, students who defended Kyiv from Soviet forces in 1918, or the Cossacks, the most legendary figures in Ukrainian military history. Often, such events are associated with or accompanied by various disciplinary trainings or comprehensive activities involving preparation, education, and training. Nationalists were able to transform this infrastructure through two key aspects: moral-psychological support through ideological and educational activities, and the tools of indoctrinating additional elements of discipline among their members.

2. Tactical training

Nationalist groups often conduct additional training of the personnel. Their networks facilitated quick search for exceptional military instructors. The selection of instructors is careful and demanding.⁴⁶ The tactical medicine training is top-rated and conducted by the "Hospitaliers" unit of the UDA. The DUK-PS and STG Karpatska Sich⁴⁷ cooperate with the "Hospitaliers" too.⁴⁸

Most units and movements provide instructions on how to use weapons⁴⁹ or how to improve them.⁵⁰ The movements frequently carried out firearm training activities simulating field conditions. Karpatska Sich (Deiak), Azov Civil Corps and Centuria (both Azov movement) conducted such training events and camps. UNSO has its training area⁵¹ for periodic boot camps.⁵² Members of the Revansh

45 "Yevhen Chepelyans'kyy: 'Viyna Vlitku 2014 Bula Skhozha Na Makhnovshchynu,'" *Ukrinform*, 15/3/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/49ycqXf>; "Vasyl' Yutovets': 'Z Dobrovol'tsyamy Ne Vyyde Obkhodytys' Po-Khams'ky,'" *Ukrinform*, 14/3/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3SxuGJe>; "Boyets' 'Azovu' Serhiy: Navit' Stavshy Rehulyarnym, Dobrobat Zalyshayet'sya Dobrobatom,'" *Ukrinform*, 18/3/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/49fnicQ>; "Denys Novikov: YA Khotiv u 'Chorni Cholovichky'. Potrapyv - u Batal'yon 'Donbas,'" *Ukrinform*, 16/3/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3SQyQNO>;

46 5 Channel, "Vybukhny z seredynty!": yak trenuyut' AZOV. Instruktory Istok i Tserber | Khto z Miroshnychenko?," *YouTube*, 21/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/39pvh9ac>

47 Karpatska Sich, "Hospitaliers and Karpatska Sich together since 2014," *Telegram*, 8/12/2022, 18:53, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/karpatsich/1331>

48 Karpatska Sich "Hospital'yery ta Karpat-s'ka Sich razom z 2014 roku," *Instagram*, 8/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/53tjtrzu>

49 Karpatska Sich, "Stinger. Instruksiya vid ODCH Karpats'ka Sich," *YouTube*, 21/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/544azw3r>

50 Khloptsi z lisu, "Obvis dlya boyovykh zadach | Tyuninh AK," *YouTube*, 29/1/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3rp57fbp>; 3-tya okrema shturmova bryhada, "Aphreyd stvola: yak azovtsi modernizuyut' svoyu zbroyu," *YouTube*, 10/1/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yyp8p86ch>

51 Ukrayins'ka natsionalistychna samooborona, "Polihon UNSO 2019," *YouTube*, 9/6/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yfhhbncy>

52 Ukrayins'ka natsionalistychna samooborona, "UNSO L'viv 2015 UNSO Lviv," *YouTube*, 17/2/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2ka3u44t>



battalion have been conducting field and boot camps since 2016 as representatives of the Tradition and Order movement.⁵³

Incorporating NATO guidelines and standards for personnel preparation, combat readiness, and unit hierarchy structuring has been a fundamental aspect of these units' operational procedures. Since 2015, the Azov movement has continuously highlighted the superior quality of its personnel training, showcasing greater professionalism and announcing the establishment of a selection and training centre according to NATO standards.⁵⁴ From the beginning, they actively asserted that NATO standards had been long utilized within the unit. This adherence to NATO instructions and standards for preparing personnel, combat training, and forming the unit hierarchy eventually became a significant prestige factor for both the movement and the unit itself, which was also leveraged to mobilize activists and volunteers after 2022. The extraordinarily successful defence of Mariupol,⁵⁵ led by the Azov regiment commander Denys Prokopenko, further attested to the unit's reputation for professionalism and quality training – a perception that extended to other military units founded by veterans of the regiment and participants in the Azov movement. This was again evidenced by successful combat operations around Bakhmut by the 3rd SAB under Andriy Biletsky.⁵⁶

The selection and training of those mobilized for the Azov SAB took place in the training area for at least three months.⁵⁷ The former Azov Regiment conducted firearm training, boot camp, and preparatory assault courses akin to the well-known Q-course for Special Operations Forces.⁵⁸ In both Azov brigades, “trial recruit weeks” are conducted, which allow potential new recruits to understand the conditions and workload and decide whether to continue joining the unit.⁵⁹ As mentioned earlier, an important aspect is that this training process is well publicized, making it useful for recruiting campaigns. All these events are actively covered, including on the movement's Telegram channels and YouTube.

The Azov movement units are unquestionably the leaders in implementing protocols used by NATO countries.⁶⁰ For instance, the requirements of the TCCC AC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care for All Combatants) protocol were successfully implemented in Azov as early as 2017,⁶¹ while the first

53 “«Lehiony Poryadku»: V Ukrayini z'yavylasya Chervova Paramilitarna Orhanizatsiya,” *Kontrakty*, 17/4/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mrywj8da>

54 “Polk ‘Azov’ vprovadzhuje novi standarty pidhotovky biytsiv ATO,” *TSN*, 8/3/2015, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4vhcyw38>

55 Denys Hubashov, “Vohon' i stal'. Khronolohiya viyny v Mariupoli” *Texty*, 13/5/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdh87ev3>

56 Sevhiil` Musaeva, “Andriy Bilets'kyy: Rosiyany sterly svoiy kadrovi chastyny v Ukrayini v nul',” *Ukrainska Pravda*, 17/10/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/ytkarmua>

57 Y. K., soldier of of the 3rd Assault Brigade since 2022, personal interview, Kyiv, 4/10/2022.

58 AZOV, ‘Recrut 2.0’, *YouTube*, 31/8/2021, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3pz8c8y6>

59 “Testovyy Tyzhden' Shturmovyka,” *3rd Assault Brigade official website*, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/5n8euupe>

60 “Dev'yat' rokov u borot'bi za Ukrainu: dobrovol'chiy polk “Azov” vidznachaye richnycyu stvorenniya,” *Espresso*, 5/5/2023, accessed on 28/05/2023, at: <http://bit.ly/3HQ09I7>

61 “Viys'kova Shkola imeni Yevhena Konoval'tsya,” *Azov*, accessed on 28/5/2023 at: <http://tinyurl.com/3wuf5ykk>



sergeant school graduation took place in 2016.⁶² Throughout the development of Azov unit structures, new courses were included, such as the Azov regiment CQB (Close Quarters Battle)⁶³ training also used in 3rd SAB.⁶⁴

The Azov movement was indeed at the forefront in terms of training, and the number of veterans within the movement allowed these standards to be transferred to new units that were formed after 2022. It's important to understand that while similar aspects of training have been characteristic of various groups in the military since 2014, it was the Azov regiment at that time that introduced them as internal standards, effectively implementing institutional changes in the organization of fighter training. For example, the reform of military medicine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine according to NATO standards only took place in 2018-2020,⁶⁵ before this a significant portion of the practices were a restoration of older Soviet elements,⁶⁶ due to the unreformed state of the military medical service as a whole. The reform of the sergeant corps in the Armed Forces of Ukraine was finally completed during the full-scale war – in April 2022.⁶⁷

Since 2015, the Azov Movement has offered an intensive training regimen through its sergeant school, renamed in 2016 after Yevhen Konoval'tsya. ⁶⁸ This program aimed to develop proficient sergeants through rigorous physical and theoretical training, merging general military instruction – such as drill exercises,⁶⁹ firearms proficiency, ⁷⁰ physical conditioning, ⁷¹ military tactics,⁷² communication skills, and engineering. But the main focus is the leadership development curriculum.⁷³ Participants engaged in unit management procedures (TLP), combat task analysis, METT-TC factors consideration, OCOKA analysis, and operations planning at the squad/platoon level.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Azov initiated

62 “Viys'kova shkola «Azov» imeni Yevhena Konoval'tsya pryynyala biytsiv do lav II serzhant-s'koho kursu”, *Ukrainian Military Pages*, 7/2/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mu4b8rr2>

63 Polk AZOV, “Taktychni pryntsyipy CQB v budivli,” *YouTube*, 26/7/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yy5jrtrt>

64 3-tya okrema shturmova bryhada, “Blyzhniy biy v obmezhenomu prostori: trenuvannya SSO AZOV,” *YouTube*, 26/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4k89fz7>

65 “V ZSU formuyut' Komanduvannya Medychnykh syl,” *Militarny*, 12/2/2019, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/msfmx87y>

66 “U ZSU sformovano yedyny orhan upravlinnya medychnym zabezpechennyam,” *Ukrainian Military Pages*, 6/1/2018, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/c8j4mm5x>

67 Bohdan Solovyov “Vazhlyvyi komponent armiyi: yak reformuvavsyia instytut serzhantiv ZSU», *apostrophe.ua*, 23/10/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/495I8Lq>

68 Mil'tarnyy, “Interv'yu z Nachal'nykom Viys'kovoyi Shkoly Komandyriv Imeni Polkovnyka Yevhena Konoval'tsya druhom Kirtom,” 26/1/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3HViKMy>

69 “Shchodennik ukrayins'koho serzhanta | Vypusk 3-y | Stroyova / Ukrainian sergeant Blog|3rd Edition|Marching,” *RECONQUISTA Ukrayina*, 19/7/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3SS8Am7>

70 “Shchodennik ukrayins'koho serzhanta | Vypusk 5-y | Robota na polihoni / Ukrainian sergeant Blog,” *RECONQUISTA Ukrayina*, 18/8/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3HVuWwG>

71 “Shchodennik ukrayins'koho serzhanta | Vypusk 4-y | Fizychna pidhotovka / Ukrainian sergeant Blog,” *RECONQUISTA Ukrayina*, 9/8/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/4bxY1Mj>

72 “Shchodennik ukrayins'koho serzhanta | Vypusk 7-y | Taktychna pidhotovka,” *RECONQUISTA Ukrayina*, 19/9/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/42xRehA>

73 “Shchodennik ukrayins'koho serzhanta | Vypusk 6-y | Vid Ofitser's'kykh do Serzhants'kykh kursiv,” *RECONQUISTA Ukrayina*, 31/8/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3SSd8J6>

74 AZOV, “Dnyamy vidbuvsyia vypusk serzhants'koyi shkoly bryhady 'Azov,’” *Telegram*, 10/4/2023 at 17:19, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2pbznky5>



the Mykola Sciborsky School for the specialized training of military psychologists⁷⁵ within the regiment and organized leadership courses like the “School of Axion and Homa.”⁷⁶ Notably, many of the current commanders and higher-ranking officers of the 12th Assault Brigade Azov and the 3rd Assault Brigade were formerly low-ranking commanders and sergeants in the Azov Regiment, showcasing the effectiveness and impact of their training programs.

The Volunteer Ukrainian Corps “Right Sector” (DUK-PS) and the Ukrainian Volunteer Army, led by Dmytro Yarosh, have built a robust training and preparation infrastructure since 2015.⁷⁷ Their training programs have covered a wide range of military skills, including combat coordination, usage of anti-tank missile systems,⁷⁸ handling automatic weapons and armoured vehicles (notably Infantry Fighting Vehicles), mortar operation,⁷⁹ sniper training, assault tactics, and strategic positioning.⁸⁰ Following the disbandment of the Right Sector, the Ukrainian Volunteer Army under Dmyko Yarosh continued this tradition, establishing similar training facilities.⁸¹ The movement’s leader has reported that, since 2017,⁸² thousands of volunteers have undergone training at these bases, predominantly through an infantry training program known as the “Infantry School.”⁸³

The practice of military training by the Ukrainian National Self-Defence Organization, Ukrainian National Army (UNA-UNSO) dates back to at least 1995.⁸⁴ Military training programs were conducted for its members after the organization’s revival in 2014 - 2015.⁸⁵ Joint military training exercises were also conducted in collaboration with various nationalist organizations, including joint sessions with the Karpatska Sich of Taras Deiak representatives in Lviv Oblast.⁸⁶ The training curriculum encompassed firearm proficiency.⁸⁷ and combat coordination.⁸⁸

Before reestablishing the “Revansh” group, formerly known as the political party and movement “Tradition and Order,” training sessions were organized for interested participants.⁸⁹ Additionally,

75 Kravchenko Mykola, “Khorunzha shkola imeni pidpolkovnyka Mykoly Stsyborskoho,” *Censor*, 15/6/2021, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3w9OrPJ>

76 Natsional'nyy Korpus, “‘Shkola Aks’ona i Khomy’ - natsionalisty na varti,” *YouTube*, 27/4/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/we8jzvv3>

77 Sector Pravdy, “Trenuvannya biytsiv DUK,” *YouTube*, 10/7/2015, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4pshcudu>

78 Sector Pravdy, “Trenuvannya iz PTRK ta SPG na bazi DUK,” *YouTube*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/5d44atxa>

79 Sector Pravdy, “Trenuvannya biytsiv DUK.”

80 Olha Kirilenko & Nazariy Mazilyuk, “Ne mozhu pity smuzi, znayuchy, shcho Ukrayina stikaye krov'yu. Yak biytsi 'Pravoho sektoru' opanovuyut' amerykans'ku zbroyu,” *Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 1/6/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mw9kjjnx>

81 Gazeta.ua, “Dmytro Yarosh pokazav trenuva'nu bazu Ukrayins'koyi dobrovol'choyi armiyi,” *YouTube*, 21/4/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4mr94stp>

82 “Yarosh vidkryv navchal'nyy tsentr Ukrayins'koyi dobrovol'choyi armiyi,” *Ukrinform*, 6/2/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/48dwA7N>

83 Navchal'nyy Tsentri UDA, “Shkola pikhoti NTs UDA. Vyshkil 2. Den 1.,” *YouTube*, 11/4/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdsnyeeep>

84 UNSO, “Reportazh pro vyshkil UNSO 1995 r.,” *YouTube*, 29/10/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/5axbjuex>

85 UNSO, “Masshtabni viys'kovi treniny na Vinnychchyni,” *YouTube*, 10/6/2015, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/5nvn4fk2>

86 “Viys'kovyy vyshkil Karpats'koyi Sichi v Ivano-Frankivsku,” *Deyak Taras*, 6/2/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3bm3keky>

87 Zvedenny pidrozdil UNSO, “Cherhovyy zymovyy vyshkil UNSO 2020 roku,” *YouTube*, 21/10/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3u6zcahz>

88 Zvedenny pidrozdil UNSO, “Polihon UNSO 2019,” *YouTube*, 21/10/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc3auukj>

89 YB, member of Tradition and Order since 2018, Personal interview, Kyiv, 7/7/2019.



recruited individuals participated in the combat operations in the East of Ukraine as volunteers.⁹⁰ Until 2022, only one publicly known militarized training event was conducted by the organization within the framework of the announced “Legions of Order” led by Bogdan Khodakovskyy.⁹¹ Following the start of the full-scale Russian invasion and the resurgence of the “Revansh” tactical group as a combat volunteer unit after the defence of Kyiv,⁹² the group conducted military training exercises in the spring and summer of 2022.⁹³ In 2023, they announced their affiliation to the GUR.⁹⁴

The Bratstvo battalion has been conducting⁹⁵ combat training for organization members continuously since 2015 (as “Saint Maria” battalion).⁹⁶ It ensured that all battalion members had a high level of preparedness for combat situations and effective performance in the field. Since 2023, the Brotherhood battalion has also established its own training infrastructure for special forces. Training sessions are systematically conducted for both the unit’s personnel and among volunteers and recruits. At a minimum, the base includes firearms training, mining, drone operator training, and other tactical elements of preparation.⁹⁷

In sum, comprehensive training programs allowed not only replenishment of the units participating in combat actions but also integration of the combat experience gained conventional and special operations implemented in Donbas. Thus, allowed to preserve and pass valuable knowledge and skills to the new volunteers and upgrade units’ battle effectiveness.

Formation of the personnel reserves

Since 2014, nationalist volunteer military units, namely the Right Sector Volunteer Corps (DUK PS) and the Ukrainian Volunteer Army (UDA), have developed programs for training of the high readiness reserves. By 2018, DUK PS had at least 23 reserve companies,⁹⁸ which also were the centres for mobilizing more members. Prior to the Russian invasion in 2021, the UDA had reserve battalions deployed.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “«Lehiony Poryadku»: V Ukrayini z’yavylasya Cherhova Paramilitarna Orhanizatsiya,” *Kontrakty*, 17/4/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mrywj8da>

⁹² “Revansh: Tactychna Hrupa (t.me/revanche_tactical), “Polum’ya viyny til’ky rozgorayet’sya!” *Telegram*, 27/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4whbvcae>

⁹³ Revansh: Tactychna Hrupa, “Trenuvannya ta samovdoskonalennya - shlyakh do Peremohy dlya kozhnogo voyna,” *Telegram*, 14/4/2023 at 09:06, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4rbces94>

⁹⁴ *Revansh official website*, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/v8d7w3n4>

⁹⁵ Batal’yon BRATSTVO, “Nabir do batal’yonu BRATSTVO tryvaye!” *YouTube*, 21/4/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4dz8j8bw>

⁹⁶ Batal’yon Svyata Mariya, “Pidhotovka biytsiv,” *YouTube*, 30/7/2015, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4h4dbe24>

⁹⁷ Dmytro Korchynskyy “Korchyns’kyy na trenuvanni batal’yonu BRATSTVO! Vse shcho varto znaty dobrovol’tsyu pered vstupom do ZSU!”, *YouTube*, 27/5/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2y892er6>

⁹⁸ “Rezervni sotni DUK PS,” *Pravyy Sektor*, 20/6/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/53vv2svc>

⁹⁹ Suspilne Odesa, “Na viyni z 2014: yak zhyve odeskyy shtab Ukrainy’s’koyi dobrovol’choyi armiyi,” *YouTube*, 7/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2tjc5a2z>



To maintain their reserves, the nationalist movements cultivated an active sports lifestyle. Azov's local cells held sports competitions in boxing and knife fighting.¹⁰⁰ Frequent military and sports events were held in the military units. Sokil, whose members actively participate in the Svoboda and Karpatska Sich (STG) battalions, organized similar events.¹⁰¹

Next, the nationalist organizations conducted pre-medical training courses for civilians,¹⁰² as well as courses and lectures on the history of combat actions in 2014-15, history of Ukrainian-Russian wars and the study of modern war history.¹⁰³

On the eve of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, military courses for the civilians became primary educational and training focus of the nationalist units.¹⁰⁴ Around 10,000 residents participated in the Azov program for the civilian defence. It was incredibly successful in Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Mariupol.¹⁰⁵ The training involved tactical medicine, first aid, and combat training. The Right Sector held similar training sessions,¹⁰⁶ VMO Sokil with the participation of veterans from the VO SVOBODA party, and so on.¹⁰⁷

Personnel reserves of the UDA/DUK PS structures were equipped, trained, and combat units without putting additional burden on the training centres of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Moreover, they avoided complex bureaucracy and red tape of the Ministry of Defence and, likely, remained under radar of the Russian intelligence. This was made possible first and foremost thanks to the volunteer principles of funding the movement, it's quite significant popularity in 2014, which had the opportunity to become an "umbrella" for most ultranationalist organizations in Ukraine. During this period, it included fighters and members of UNA-UNSO, representatives of Tryzub (like Ihor Mosiychuk),¹⁰⁸ future leaders of the Azov movement,¹⁰⁹ and even representatives of liberal activists, such as Serhiy Sternenko.¹¹⁰ This all allowed for the mobilization of resources for their own training centres, their system of preparation, which also laid the decentralized foundation for the training of the movement's combatants.

¹⁰⁰ Centuria, *Telegram*, 1/1/2023 at 20:51, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/36pbshrs>

¹⁰¹ SOKIL, "Vstupay v Sokil!", *YouTube*, 28/4/2016, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yzvdk4sd>

¹⁰² National Corps, "Tyzhnevyy dayzhest novyn vid Natsional'noho Korpusu," *Telegram*, 7/2/2022 at 12:25, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3k5um7ye>

¹⁰³ National Corps, "Tyzhnevyy dayzhest novyn vid Natsional'noho Korpusu," *Telegram*, 21/2/2022 at 15:52, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/7a3uwesu>

¹⁰⁴ Centuria, "Uvaha! Formuyemo boyovyy pidrozdil," *YouTube*, 10/2/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/y2knkf6u>

¹⁰⁵ A. B., commander of the 3rd Assault Brigade since 2023, personal interview, Kyiv, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Pravy Sektor, "Tsiy nedili z 12:00 do 16:00 chleny NVR 'Pravy sektor' provedut vidkrytyy povtorny vyshkil dlya usikh okhochykh u Kyievi," *Telegram*, 19/2/2022, at 14:20, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3jzu9jcn>

¹⁰⁷ Sokil Info, "ZNOVU STRIL'BY," *Telegram*, 1/2/2022 at 10:24, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3aed88h9>

¹⁰⁸ "«Pravy sektor», «Svoboda» i «Natsional'nyy korpus» pidpysaly manifest pro ob'yednannya zusyl," *Radio Svoboda*, 16/3/2017, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <http://tinyurl.com/rhyxee6y>

¹⁰⁹ "Yarosh sformuvav hrupu «Pravy sektor»-Skhid," *ZiK*, 12/3/2014, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/42BqVHb>

¹¹⁰ Denys Priadko, "7 rokov borot'by i 7 rokov v'yaznytsi: shcho vidomo pro aktyvista Serhiya Sternenka," *UNIAn*, 24/2/2021, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3OHUcdF>



Units of the Azov movement also played role of gathering points for the hidden reserves,¹¹¹ early mobilization of the territorial defence units.¹¹² This practical and volunteer preparation for potential conflict situations appeared to be a vital component of the nationalists' strategy.

The results of working with civilians were impressive. After the beginning of the Russian invasion, 80% of Azov movement members, primarily veterans, joined the UAF, NGU, and TDF units. Immediately, many Azov veterans with combat experience and advanced training became field commanders and officers¹¹³. In particular, the founder of what was then the battalion, Andriy Biletsky, currently commands the 3rd SAB.¹¹⁴ Bohdan Krotevych, the chief of staff of the 12th Separate Brigade, was a volunteer of the Azov battalion in 2014.¹¹⁵ Maksym Zhorin went from being a volunteer of the battalion in 2014 to the commander of the regiment in 2016. In 2017, he handed over this position to another former battalion volunteer – Denys Prokopenko, who, after returning from captivity, took charge of the 12th Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine.¹¹⁶

These military units consisted of individuals from different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds, a testament to the diverse nature of the movement. There were nine such “Azov” military units within the ranks of the regular defence forces, four units under SOF Command of the UAF, two Special Operations units under GUR Command, a Special Operations Unit of the State Border Guard Service, a separate battalion of TDF from Dnipro.

Their units often coordinated their actions better in the battlefield or front positions, knowing they could rely on each other, which on many occasions became critical in stopping and defeating columns of the Russian army and special forces. Examples of this include memories of the battles in the north of Kyiv region, and Chernihiv region in April 2022 – thus, the Brotherhood, Special Operations Forces Azov, and Tradition and Order groups were actively involved in the fights for Lukianivka,¹¹⁷ and in pursuing the retreat of the Russian army from near Brovary. Another well-known example is the participation in the battles near Barvinkove by the Carpathian Sich, which responded to the call of the 93rd Separate Mechanized Brigade, to which other volunteer nationalist units later also joined.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the opportunity to form new units as part of the integration into the Armed Forces of Ukraine allowed for their formation for the most critical directions – during the counteroffensive in Kherson region,¹¹⁹ or the example of counteroffensive operations around Bakhmut by the newly formed Azov brigade.¹²⁰

111 Andriy Biletsky, “Viyna, yaku tak dovho ‘ne bachyly’ monovladtsi ta svit, pereyshla u naygaryachishu stadiyu,” *Telegram*, 24/2/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/285apbk5>

112 National Corps Kyiv, “Uvaha! Formuyet’sya boyovyy pidrozdil,” *Telegram*, 24/2/2022 at 10:41, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/244wb3u4>

113 “Commanders,” *3rd Assault Brigade official website*, accessed on 28/05/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mucchwaw>

114 Ibid.

115 Oleksiy Yarmolenko, “V MVS rozpovily detali pro «Hvardiyu nastupu» ta nazvy novykh shturmovykh bryhad. Polk «Azov» tezh rozshyryat’ do bryhady” *Babel*, 3/2/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/49wITMe>

116 Anna Pavlyk, “Denys Prokopenko, z pozyvnyym ‘Redis’,” *Hromadske*, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycxz7sdc>

117 STALKERUA, «Nayuspishnishi operatsiyi, — tse ti de bula vzayemodiya ZSU/TRO/Dobrobativ,” *Telegram*, 2/2/2023 11:31 a.m, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <http://tinyurl.com/4n6ryy9y>

118 Yurii Butusov, “Fermopily Oleha Kutsyna,” *Istorycha Pravda*, 13/10/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/327mty8k>

119 Revansh: Tactical Group, “Viyna — yednist’ frontu y tylu.” *Telegram*, 19/4/2022 at 10:47, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/49td49ru>

120 “Yak 3-tya shturmova rozpochala kontrnastup na Bakhmuti,” *Ukrainian Military Pages*, 24/6/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/52punfj8>



Youth Training and Development

The nationalist groups in Ukraine have an original approach toward the youth engagement and preparation. Their collaboration with the civilian social movements, which serve as parallel support centres and potential mobilization resources, plays a significant role in this process. An integral component of this collaboration is focusing on patriotic and sports education for teenagers and young adults. Unlike the rest, they had the opportunity to incorporate modern combat history more actively into training courses, provide lectures from combat participants,¹²¹ and use veterans to provide field training.¹²² This also played a strong moral role, as the movements presented themselves not only as activists but as direct participants in combat operations defending the country. They cannot be called recruiters, however, participation in such units and movements elicited more trust in the command, which already had successful experience in combat operations.

As noted earlier, the nationalist groups have access to veterans of military operations and active-duty soldiers, allowing them to conduct lectures and classes on the history of the 2014 - 2015 military operations. The main reason is simple – most of the leaders and many of activists were a combatants in Donbas in 2014 - 2015. They also offer training in the basics of military affairs, which typically involves analysing firearms and movement in pairs, among other things. However, even more, crucial are the patriotic sports schools and competitions, like outdoor games – “Terranova hra.” The main goal of these competitions between two teams in the wild is to capture the other team’s flag. These games engaged youth in long-term camps focused on developing combat strategies, studying and organizing fights, as well as survival in field conditions – from organizing basic living conditions to identifying edible plants and knowing how to filter water in the wilderness.¹²³ Such games are conducted over several days, where participants form unique units, obey commanders who plan tactics and strategies of “fights” – group combat where the objective is to remove a band from the arm of an opponent team member, symbolizing the “life” of the participant. Such games are systematically organized, including the “Zvytiaha” games, organized by the regional organization National Alliance, and the “Hurby of Antonivtsi,” organized by the Youth National Congress, among others.¹²⁴

These games serve as the initial stage for selection and encourage participation in more complex games like the “Lehioner”,¹²⁵ which essentially mirrors the military boot camps. The Azov movement also actively opens free gyms¹²⁶ in various cities of Ukraine and provided tournaments like boxing¹²⁷ or MMA.¹²⁸

121 Centuria, “Desyatnyk - tse skriplyayucha lanka Orhanizatsiyi,” *Telegram*, 3/2/2024 at 12:03, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc4cs9fd>

122 Oleh Kindratsky, “U Kalushi vidbulys’ viys’kovi navchannya dlya molodi,” *Informator* 17/9/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <http://tinyurl.com/2hmsprej>

123 “Hra ta pravyla”, *Zvytiaha*, accessed on 8/2/2024 at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdf6bc5z>; “Terenovi lhry l vpravy kurenia,” *Posibnyk Plastovoho Yunatstva*, 24/7/2013, accessed on 8/2/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/gjAL8>

124 Fuk Rostyslav, “Na Ternopil’shchyni provodyat’ terenovu hru ‘Gurby-Antonivtsi,’” *Suspilne*, 7/5/2021, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/364re5ew>

125 KVVVT Lehion, “Legion 21 vyshkil,” *YouTube*, 21/8/2020, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2p5shkrw>

126 National Corps, “Natsional’nyy Korpus vidkryvaye u Kyievi suchasnyy sportzal dlya vsikh bazhayuchykh. Doluchaytesya!,” *YouTube*, 25/4/2017, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4ryc8fmy>; “Sotsial’nyy sportzal vidkryto za pidtrymky Bilets’koho v Kyievi. FOToreportazh,” *Censor*, 15/12/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/498Zcj0>; “Natsional’nyy korpus Sumy vidkryv sportyvnyy zal,” *Sumski debaty*, 20/6/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycxtutmu>

127 National Corps, “U Kharkovi vidbudetsya turnir z boksu na chest’ Volodymyra ‘Chempiyona’ Radionova,” *Telegram*, 12/2/2020, at 12:25, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc4zfa4z>

128 National Corps, “Yak provesti ostannu subotu lita: 29 serpnya u Kyievi vidbudetsya ‘Fabryka 5.5.14,’” *Telegram*, 28/8/2020 at 13:23, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/me2c4f9z>



This infrastructure serves as an alternative to the military-patriotic education pursued as a state policy by many countries worldwide. Independent nationalist and patriotic movements developed their own infrastructure for youth in response to the low quality of the pre-conscription training system for military personnel inherited from the Soviet times.

Sometimes, the nationalist organizations succeeded in attracting public funding to support their engagement with the youth. For instance, children's training camps "Syla i Chest" (Strength and Honor) were conducted with the support of the Ukrainian government.¹²⁹ Antonivtsi Hurbas and Zvitjaga were also supported at different times by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine.¹³⁰ The field game "Sokil" was conducted with the support of the regional department for national-patriotic education in the Cherkasy region.¹³¹ Similarly, the Lviv Regional State Administration supported such a youth game.¹³² In 2021, the "Yastrub" game was held with the support of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine.¹³³ Furthermore, since 2014, similar field games attracted the veterans of the Ukraine-Russia war from the 72nd Separate Mechanized Brigade.¹³⁴

These gatherings, events, and camps promoted a culture of healthy lifestyle and introduced alternative, more appealing, and exciting approaches to military training. This was particularly important given the poor quality of the youth's introduction to military affairs in the secondary schools and higher educational institutions.

Establishment of Parallel Support Infrastructure and Interaction with Civil Society

An essential aspect of the unique quality of training in the nationalist units is transformation of civilian and political structures into de facto back support for the units.

Civilian activities were focused exclusively on fundraising and charity to support the combat units. Among the transformed organizations, notable examples include the Azov movement, which formed the patronage service "Angels of Azov",¹³⁵ "Support Azov,"¹³⁶ and the newly created "Azov One"¹³⁷ to

¹²⁹ "Zustrich z predstavnykamy «Sich: Syla i Chest» - terenova hra v Kholodnomu Yaru - Cherkaska obl," *Facebook*, 21/9/2018, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/nxpwmkfp>

¹³⁰ "Shcho robyty, yakscho ne vystachaie adrenalinu v krovii? Yikhaty na Zvityahu!", "Viddil natsional'no-patriotychnoho vykhovannia Minmolodspor," *Facebook*, 27/4/2021, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/49rB1wL>; "Zvityaha. Orhanizator," accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/53f7p2vu>

¹³¹ Pres-sluzhba Cherkaskoyi oblasnoyi derzhavnoyi administratsiyi, "Na Cherkashchyni rozpochavsya oblasnyy etap Vseukrayinskoyi viyskovo-patriotychnoyi hry 'Sokil' ('Dzhura)," 2/6/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3UAKP81>

¹³² Lvivska oblasna derzhavna administratsiya, Departament komunikatsiy ta vnurishnoyi polityky, Pres-sluzhba ODA, "Oblasna terenova hra 'Lohenda UPA' vpyate zbere shkoliariv Lvivshchyny," 26/09/2018, accessed on 28/05/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc7x22xd>

¹³³ "Zvit pro vykonannya rozporjadzhennya Kabinetu Ministriv Ukrayiny vid 18 zhovtnya 2017 roku № 743," *The Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine*, 9/10/2019, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3UzWFPK>

¹³⁴ "Terenova hra 'Hertz' imeni 72-oyi bryhady," *Facebook*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2canhdc2>

¹³⁵ Yangoly Azovu, "Blahodiyenny Fond patronatnoyi sluzhby polku," *Azov*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7emus62>

¹³⁶ *Support Azov*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2w8nts28>

¹³⁷ Azov One, "Komandyry 'Azovu' stvoryuyut hromadsku orhanizatsiyu Azov One," *YouTube*, 23/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdz55ube>



support the assault brigade as part of the National Guard. Although other nationalist organizations did not establish separate endowments or foundations, they carried out their main media activities to attract voluntary private donations to cover the needs of their combat operations.

For instance, Yevhen Karas created a foundation named “Protection of the Future” adjacent to his political party, which also aids in supplying servicemen.¹³⁸ The Azov veterans’ division from the Volyn region, who formed the special forces unit “Lyubart,” also created a namesake fund.¹³⁹ The National Alliance, one of the largest regional nationalist organizations in the Rivne and Volyn regions, also co-founded the Volyn Foundation, a charitable fund for the military.¹⁴⁰

Fundraising efforts are actively managed by almost all Telegram channels officially linked to volunteer squads, alongside established charitable organizations. This fundraising mainly targets the community of nationalists and their supporters, distinct from the methods used by other funds and influencers. Additionally, these channels host live streams¹⁴¹ where unit combatants share stories and engage with viewers in a format akin to a comedy show, answering life questions and generally collecting funds to meet the needs of the unit.

The diverse and numerous information channels, such as Telegram¹⁴² and YouTube channels for Bratstvo,¹⁴³ or Facebook pages¹⁴⁴ more favoured by Svoboda¹⁴⁵ or UNSO networks,¹⁴⁶ enable volunteer battalions to recruit individuals, secure additional funding, and more. Initially designed for activist activities, the fundraising system was completely restructured to collect resources for combat units’ requirements.

Moreover, these resources help maintain independent logistical support. Hence, it is evident that nationalist units possess an extra means of support for meeting their needs and procurement, including paying for the rehabilitation of wounded members and supporting the families of the deceased.

Nationalist formations also boast significant experience in various military service aspects, leveraging this to promote the units and produce educational content for active military personnel.

¹³⁸ “Pro fond ‘Zakhyst Maibutnoho’. Zakhyst Maibutnoho, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mr3tpr8w>

¹³⁹ Rayon Lutsk, “Dia spetspryznachentsiv ‘Liubarta’ vidkryly zbir na bezpilotnyk Punisher,” 5/10/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/42yfMHe>

¹⁴⁰ Volynska Fundatsiya, “Pro orhanizatsiyu,” accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/muw868sn>

¹⁴¹ 3-ya okrema shturmova bryhada, “Dvizh roku: novi tekhnolohiyi v 3 OSHBr, mobilizatsiya zhinok ta yak ukhlyantu staty voyinom,” *YouTube*, 31/12/2023, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/btjdubp6>

¹⁴² KhronikiRidika, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: https://t.me/hroniki_ridika; UDAROV, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://t.me/kristianudarov>; Khimikdavid, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://t.me/khimikdavid4308>; Zhorin z Azovu, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://t.me/MaksymZhorin>; Chyli i Ko Kharkiv, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: https://t.me/chilli_1654; Andriy Biletsky, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://t.me/BiletskyAndriy>; KHODAKOVSKY, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://t.me/BKKhodakovsky>

¹⁴³ Batalion Bratstvo, *YouTube*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/22p2yw7w>

¹⁴⁴ “Ukrayinska Natsionalna Asambleya - Ukrayinska Natsionalistychna Samooborona,” *Facebook*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/5x9d57nv>

¹⁴⁵ There are more than sixty-five different Facebook pages of the Svoboda movement. Mostly there are pages of regional units of movement. A few examples of them are given below: “BO ‘Свобода,’” *Facebook*, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/7y5pn5v2>; “BO ‘Свобода’ Волинь,” *Facebook*, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/уцкбкдн5>; “BO ‘Свобода’ Кременеччина,” *Facebook*, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/47гс3nhz>; “Одеська обласна організація ВО Свобода,” *Facebook*, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/uv7u28n6>

¹⁴⁶ There are more than 20 Facebook pages on UNSO in Facebook.



They create instructional videos¹⁴⁷ covering the usage and maintenance of different weapon types, customization¹⁴⁸ of combat gear, and more.¹⁴⁹ This extensive media engagement necessitates considerable unit activity coverage, video editing, and the participation of numerous professionals in advertising, marketing, crowdfunding, and related fields.

The technical developments of combat equipment by the representatives of the Azov movement are particularly noteworthy. In particular, the development of a FAV (fast attack vehicle) was presented in 2016,¹⁵⁰ whose characteristics, according to engineers, surpassed the indicators of the legendary American Humvee.¹⁵¹ A heavy infantry fighting vehicle based on the T-72 chassis¹⁵² was also tested, and there were announcements about the engineering development of the 3rd generation tank “T-rex”.¹⁵³ However, only some development models were announced.¹⁵⁴ The crew capsule stands out as the most groundbreaking design feature of the T-Rex. Following the tank’s modular design philosophy, this distinctive compartment remains separate and well-isolated from the weapons and ammunition section. The concept of an unmanned turret is currently one of the most cutting-edge solutions. Besides the T-Rex, it is only implemented in the Abrams-X and T-14 “Armata” tanks.

The “Arey” group is currently developing heavy and light armoured personnel carriers,¹⁵⁵ like the modern Bradley systems, but only one created prototype is known.

Interaction with the Regular Ukrainian Armed Forces

1. Combination of horizontal and cell organization

Before Russian full-scale invasion most volunteer battalions view the ability to enter freely and exit units as one of their key advantages.¹⁵⁶ Prior to their integration into the ranks of the Armed Forces, this approach helped to maintain the moral spirit of the unit members.¹⁵⁷ Certainly, such

147 Karpatska Sich, “NLAW Instruksiyi,” *YouTube*, 18/3/2022, accessed on 8/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4at42saa>

148 3-ya okrema shturmova bryhada, *YouTube*, accessed on 10/1/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mr3d5zpe>

149 3-ya okrema shturmova bryhada, “Boiove sporjadzhennia shturmovykiv: haïd vid kombata 3 OSHBr,” *YouTube*, 1/3/2023, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://bit.ly/3w7H0s9>

150 “Spetsialisty polku ‘Azov’ stvorily universalnu boyovu mashinu (foto),” *Promyslovyy Portal*, 27/9/2018, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://bit.ly/49bm0zm>

151 “Novoe ukrainske baggi protiv Hummer – test-draiv v Natshvardii (video),” *Autocentre*, 12/12/2018, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://bit.ly/49kT8V4>

152 “Inzhenerna hrupa ‘Arey’ prodovzhuye rozrobku vazhkoyi BMP ‘Vavilon!’,” *Promyslovyy Portal*, 20/2/2021, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://bit.ly/42BuRrt>

153 “T-REX TANK,” *Arey Engineer group*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mt62rsak>

154 “Ukrayinskyi tank T-Rex: Azov rozrobvyv khyzhaka na papëri (FOTO),” *Texty*, 22/4/2016, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <https://bit.ly/3SRFBYJ>

155 “HEAVY APC DON,” *Arey Engineer group*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3jn48sx3>. See also: “HYBRID PLATFORM RYSAK,” *Arey Engineer group*, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2w2h2p47>. See also: “ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER DANA,” *Arey Engineer group*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4x7n5yps>

156 Dmytro Sincenko, “Na front bez povistky. Chomu na dev’iatomu rotsi viyny vse shche isnuyut dobrobaty,” *Tyzhden*, 10/8/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3UALfqh>

157 Ibid.



an opportunity did not pertain to the direct involvement of participants in combat actions, but it could be planned more freely than in regular military units, where the regulation of leaves and redeployments is much stricter and more bureaucratized. It also demonstrates a degree of mobility and allows for a more efficient rotation of fighters.¹⁵⁸ It enables quicker retreat when necessary due to movement or a service member's health condition.

For instance, the UDA exited the combat zones in 2018, while the DUK began reducing its presence in Eastern Ukraine in 2016, transferring most of their battalions to the reserves,¹⁵⁹ leaving only two assault battalions within the conflict areas in Donbas.¹⁶⁰ This level of mobility creates an ongoing demand for the new volunteer mobilization while enabling timely demobilization of personnel who can no longer participate in the combat operations.

With the commencement of the transformation into legal units, capacity for informal procedures diminished, while the need for operational command staffs dealing with legal and other bureaucratic issues increased. Despite these formalizations, many units continue to cultivate a "volunteer spirit," encouraging voluntary enlistment, with recruitment campaigns often emphasizing the volunteer nature of their forces. This ethos also affects internal relations, with commanders showing greater leniency in granting leave and being more responsive to issues of rotation, fatigue, etc. Nonetheless, these advantages are relative, given the high intensity of combat operations and constraints due to legal status and subordination to central command.

The possibility of participating in combat operations without the commitment to stay for the entire duration of the conflict is considered a significant benefit of volunteer associations. For instance, participants of the HONOR movement¹⁶¹ and the Troop Organization "Azov-Dnipro" formed separate units¹⁶² in the ranks of the 67th Brigade, which was formed by the DUK-PS movement. The same brigade included separate battalions composed of the football ultras from Kherson and Mykolaiv.¹⁶³ Members of Centuria also serve together as part of the 3rd Assault Brigade.¹⁶⁴ Similar practices exist in UNA-UNSO, where the regional origin is also considered when forming units, tiny groups.¹⁶⁵

Often, demobilized members of the nationalist organizations undertook roles that involve media and public relations, fundraising, war event coverage, recruitment, and training recruits. However, this only applies to people who do not serve in the Ukrainian Armed Forces but are registered as volunteers or members of volunteer territorial defence units.

158 Ibid.

159 "Rezervni sotni DUK PS," *Pravyi Sektor*, 20/6/2017, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/53vv2svc>

160 Ibid.

161 Honor, "Vchora vidbulosya proshchannya biytiv zahonu iz zahyblim pobratymom, voyinom - Vitaliyem 'Vitakhoyu' Styboyu," *Telegram*, 28/8/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/GonorKyiv/770>

162 "U Dnipri mozhna zapysatys' do 3-oji shturmovoji bryhady: de ta yaki vymohy," *DP Informator*, 21/4/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3HZ1LZy>

163 PROFOOTBALL Digital, "Khersonski ultrasy na viyni / TRO Azov / Futbolist Kristala z druzhinoyu v ZSU / Pivden NE zdaly," *YouTube*, 7/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/49uhMT7>

164 "OZSD 'Centuria' Poltava," *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/centuria_plt

165 "Informatsiyina storinka UNSO Volyn," *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/unso_volyn_1



2. Greater freedom in choosing the field of combat operations

The nationalist units, subordinated to the official command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, use horizontal connections (individual members often serve in other units, including in command positions) to choose their area of deployment. For example, the commander of the STG Karpatska Sich reported that following the Kyiv campaign (February-March 2022), the group moved to clashes in the Kharkiv region in response to a call for assistance from the command of the 93rd separate mechanized Brigade.¹⁶⁶

Some units do not select specific assignments but have greater freedom of action, such as Yevhen Karas' unit,¹⁶⁷ the Revanshe group,¹⁶⁸ or the Bratstvo battalion.¹⁶⁹ Their activities resemble the tactics used by Special Operations Forces. These groups are given broad tasks, such as subversion missions or reconnaissance at the request of the operational commanders or brigade commanders.¹⁷⁰

Another format for increased group mobility in combat operations is the formal registration of unit dislocation in the rear positions. Part of the unit operates autonomously or in agreement with the operational-tactical command, even though the unit is stationed outside the combat zone.¹⁷¹ Usually, this is about attaching a unit.¹⁷²

Nationalist movements also form the local units and mobilize their members in the sector of the active combat actions. The Tactical Group "Azov-Dnipro" was formed from participants of the Dnipro, Kherson, and Mykolaiv centres of the movement and ultras from football teams, primarily due to the need for troops in southern Ukraine.¹⁷³ Units such as KRAKEN¹⁷⁴ and Fraikor¹⁷⁵ have formed separate groups precisely due to the need for combat groups to defend Kharkiv. The amalgamation of the Azov movement's units into "assault" brigades was also driven by demand for reliable storm troops to be used in the critical areas of the ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensive operations.¹⁷⁶ In fact, the majority of nationalist groups have been actively used in the most intense combat zones – the defence of Bakhmut (where the 3rd Assault Brigade,¹⁷⁷ along with the 10th Mountain Mechanized

¹⁶⁶ Butusov Yuriy, "Fermopili Oleha Kutsyna," *Istorychna Pravda*, 13/10/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/327mty8k>

¹⁶⁷ T. D., ex-combatant of DUK-PS before 2018, personal interview, Kyiv, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ PRESSING, "Vony roblat' dyversiyi v Rosiyi/Poluyannya na ofitseriv FSB/Zamakh u tsentri Kyyyeva/ Dyversanty bilya Kremlya," *YouTube*, 19/5/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3ty2tvh4>

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Telebachennya Toronto, "Trofeyni tanky ydut' na donetsk: reportazh pro batal'yon 'Karpats'ka Sich' (ENG SUB)," *YouTube*, 24/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/fk97yys6>

¹⁷² T. D.

¹⁷³ PROFUTBOL Digital, "Khersonski ultras na viyni / TRO Azov / Futbolist Kristala z druzhynoyu v ZSU / Pivden' NE zdali," *YouTube*, 7/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/49uhMT7>

¹⁷⁴ Svit navyvorit, "RIK - avtorsky dokumentalnyy proyekt Dmytra Komarova | Chastyna druha," *YouTube*, 24/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/42p48k29>

¹⁷⁵ Freikorps, "Fraykor mobilizuyetsya!!!," *Telegram*, 24/2/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/freikorps_org/3511

¹⁷⁶ Natsionalna Hvardiya Ukrainy, "Bryhada 'AZOV' nabiraye dobrovol'tsiv dlya nastupu," *YouTube*, 16/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/54cjtsm3>

¹⁷⁷ Vodnitska Hanna, "Boyi za Bakhmut. Biytsi 10 bryhady 'Edelveys' zvilnyly mayzhe 4 km² terytoriyi ta zakriplysya na novykh pozitsiyakh," *Suspilne*, 19/5/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3uD5x7X>

Brigade,¹⁷⁸ became the main forces of counter-offensive actions in May 2023), Kherson region (SSO Azov,¹⁷⁹ Bratstvo,¹⁸⁰ Revansh¹⁸¹, and Kharkiv region (STG Karpatska Sich¹⁸² and Kraken).¹⁸³

It is worth noting that the freedom of action was regulated by the command of the General Staff or other security agencies and through internal pressure and dissemination of information within the network. The nationalist volunteer formations are watching each other to prevent passivity in conducting combat actions. The primary motivation of volunteer battalions is to avoid passive secondment and bureaucratic restrictions¹⁸⁴ and to have constant presence in the zone of active combat actions.¹⁸⁵ Thus, units can retain their mobilization potential and battlefield efficiency.

A remarkable example of the resilience and initiative of these volunteer battalions was a high-risk mission to the besieged Azovstal plant in Mariupol. In this operation, helicopters flew troops into an encirclement in Mariupol to deliver ammunition and other supplies.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, they were tasked with the evacuation the wounded and stay on to support the military forces on the ground, effectively rotating several fighters.¹⁸⁷

One of the leaders of this mission was Rodion Kudryashov, known by the call sign “Ridik” responsible for the logistics of the Azov regiment and has since become the deputy commander of the 3rd Assault Brigade.¹⁸⁸ According to him,¹⁸⁹ all fighters in the mission volunteered for this high-risk operation. This exemplifies the motivation and dedication underpinning the operations of these volunteer formations.

The nationalist networks enable rapid movement of personnel from unit to unit on the individual and group levels. It is essential because the formal UAF transferring procedure is very complicated and bureaucratic and does not guarantee approval of the transfer of military personnel. Thus, volunteer units can quickly accumulate and exchange experience within their ranks, amalgamate fresh and battle-hardened servicemen/women, and ensure that their troops can accomplish missions.

For instance, the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade (SAB), commanded by Andriy Biletskyi, was formed based on the Azov-Kyiv Special Service Operation (SSO) and the Azov-Dnipro Territorial Defence Force

¹⁷⁸ Mazurenko Al'ona, “Tretya OSHB proralas na okolitsyakh Bakhmuta - tse platsdarm dlya podalshoho kontrnastupu,” *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 18/5/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/492chd89>

¹⁷⁹ “Sily nashoho pidrozdilu u skladi ZSU zdiisnuiut uspihni nastupalni dii na Khersonskomu napriamku,” 3-tia okrema shturmova bryhada, *Telegram*, 11/11/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/ab3army/1943>. also need to notice – in 2022 this channel called SOF Azov.

¹⁸⁰ Batalion Bratstvo, “Zvit pro robotu,” *YouTube*, 7/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4dsw6348>

¹⁸¹ Revansh: Takychna hrupa, “Dopomozhit' dobrovol'tsam! Viz'memo Kherson razom!,” *Telegram*, 19/4/2022 at 10:47, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/revanche_tactical/337

¹⁸² Telebachennia Toronto, “TROFEYNI TANKY YDUT' NA DONETS'K: reportazh pro batalyon 'Karpatska Sich' (ENG SUB),” *YouTube*, 24/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/fk97yss6>

¹⁸³ Svit navyvorit, “RIK - avtorsky dokumentalnyy proyekt Dmytra Komarova | Chastyna druha,” *YouTube*, 24/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/42p48k29>

¹⁸⁴ Sinchchenko, “Na front bez povistky.”

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Karas Yevhen, “ZAMKOMBRIGA KUDRYASHOV. TRETIA SHTURMOVA,” *YouTube*, 7/5/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yecuvuw7>

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.



(TDF) unit. The Ultras of Dnipro, a group of football fans known for nationalist leanings, established their own company within the Azov-Dnipro TDF, which later became part of the 3rd Storm Assault Brigade. Additionally, the Brigade separately incorporated Ultras from Mykolaiv and Kherson.

Another instance of such transformation is “Honor”, which established the TDF for the 130th Special Assault Corps (SAC) “Wolves of Da Vinci” in the summer of 2022. This again underscores the fluidity and adaptability of these volunteer formations in response to evolving military needs.

Nationalist Volunteer Response to the Full-Scale Russian Invasion

From the first day of the war, volunteer pre-emptive preparations and networking made it possible to mobilize and form battle-ready units quickly.

The Azov movement is an illustrative example. In December 2021, it launched training courses for the citizens, “*Do not Panic, Prepare Yourself*,” focused on tactical first aid, basic combat skills, and civil defence awareness. It covered 12 regions of Ukraine and was especially popular in Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Mariupol. Before the invasion, around 10,000 Ukrainians took part in these courses.¹⁹⁰ As of the beginning of 2023, it has at least two brigades (3rd Separate Assault Brigade and the “Azov” Assault Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine) and two unique units. In addition, the movement participants also created separate units within the SOF (SOF unit “Lubart”), which are currently not officially related to the Azov movement and did not become part of the newly created Azov brigades.

On February 24, Svoboda announced a mobilization of their TDF battalion.¹⁹¹ Four hours after the full-scale invasion started, Bratstvo announced their movement’s mobilization and created a Telegram channel, “Battalion Bratstvo.”¹⁹² Eugen Karas also mobilized ex-C14 members so that they do not fight alone in different units.¹⁹³

The nationalist volunteer units that participated in the combat operations as part of the Defence Forces of Ukraine can be divided into three main categories: light (assault), unique (SOF), and mechanized infantry. This distribution is somewhat arbitrary due to the dynamic changes in the structure and composition of groups and their constant integration into the regular forces.

Revansh is officially a separate Special Forces company.¹⁹⁴ The Svoboda NGU battalion also started its journey as a unique force battalion. After integration into the National Guard, it operates as part of a rapid reaction brigade. The DUK-PS acted as a light special forces’ infantry before transforming into the 67th Brigade.

¹⁹⁰ AB, commander of the 3rd Assault Brigade since 2023, Personal Interview, Kyiv, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Oleh Tiahnybok, *Telegram*, 24/2/2022 at 11:20, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/tiahnybok/1223>

¹⁹² BatalionBratstvo, *Telegram*, 24/2/2022 at 8:34, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/BatalionBratstvo/8>

¹⁹³ Evgen Karas`, *Telegram*, 24/2/2022 at 00:45, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/KARAS_EVGEN/3507

¹⁹⁴ Revansh: Tactychna hrupa, *Telegram*, 3/2/2023, 23:54., accessed on 28/5/23, at: https://t.me/revanche_tactical/571



The role of nationalist units as assault troops was particularly prominent during the Kyiv campaign.¹⁹⁵ For example, the Bratstvo battalion took part in the battles for Nova Basan.¹⁹⁶ and Lukyanivka.¹⁹⁷ It is also known for its role precisely as supporting infantry against enemy armoured vehicles.¹⁹⁸

Some nationalist units also moved from volunteer formations and units of the Territorial Defence Forces to the Special Operations Forces. A unit, “Azov-Kharkiv,” known better as “KRAKEN” (SOF “Azov-Kharkiv”), was formed in Kharkiv in the first month of the invasion. The “KRAKEN” unit now operates as Special Forces under the main directorate of intelligence, mainly in the Kharkiv direction.¹⁹⁹

Some combatants act autonomously as light assault infantry or support groups for the mechanized and tank brigades, although they are not in assault or special units. For example, the UNSO mainly operates within the framework of the TDF.²⁰⁰ There is also an integrated unit of the UNSO, the purpose of which is reconnaissance in the enemy’s rear.²⁰¹ Similar activity is also carried out by Yevhen Karas’ unit C14,²⁰² as well as the Bratstvo battalion.

Recently, Bratstvo revealed the facts about deep forays into the far rear of the enemy. On 27 December 2022²⁰³, the death of four of its “brothers-in-arms” in the Bryansk region was reported.²⁰⁴ The official position of Korchynskiy’s organization confirmed that these members were carrying out acts of sabotage.²⁰⁵

During the 2022 battles, volunteer nationalist units possessed significant military trophy equipment. For example, the 93rd “Karpatska Sich” brigade’s rifle company and the volunteer corps formed a tank company, most of which were received after the offensive of the Defence Forces of Ukraine in the Kharkiv region.²⁰⁶ Currently, the unit calls itself the “operational-tactical group of Karpatska Sich,” which is subordinate to the rifle company commander.²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁵ STALKERUA, *Telegram*, 2/2/2023 at 11:31, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/ua_stalker/2378; 3-tya okrema shturmova bryhada, *Telegram*, 28/3/2022 at 14:59, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/ab3army/967>

¹⁹⁶ Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Rozvidka Brat'stva pratsyuye,” *YouTube*, 5/4/2022, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <http://tinyurl.com/47ptfcd7>; Korchynskiy Dmytro, “Selyshcha Peremoha y Nova Basan' povnisty nashi,” *Facebook* 31/3/2022, accessed on 25/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3SBQPGs>

¹⁹⁷ Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Biy batal'yonu BRATSTVO. Smt. Luk'yanivka zvil'nene!,” *YouTube*, 24/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/57whpcz8>; Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Zvil'nene selyshche Luk'yanivka. Trofeyni tanky,” *YouTube*, 1/4/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdd4s2tt>

¹⁹⁸ Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Nichni boyi batal'yonu BRATSTVO,” *YouTube*, 17/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc6uwe6u>; Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Oborona pidstupiv do Kyyyeva,” *YouTube*, 17/03/2022, accessed on 28/05/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3b25dx6e>; Korchynskiy, Dmytro, “Biitsi Bratstva nareshiti vyprobuly Pantserfaust z nimetskoyu humdopomohoyu.” *Facebook*, 11/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/4bAkZCrl>; Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Rozvidka Bratstva pratsyuye,” *YouTube*, 5/4/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/47ptfcd7>; Batal'yon BRATSTVO, “Bombymo okupantiv,” *YouTube*, 15/5/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mv45yu62>

¹⁹⁹ Chili i Ko Khar'kov, *Telegram*, 21/9/2022 at 20:44, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/chilli_1654/130

²⁰⁰ #Babylon 13, “Mykola Karpyuk pro viynu, UNSO ta ukrayintsiv,” *YouTube*, 10/3/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2nydb76u>

²⁰¹ UNA-UNSO Ofitsiyina storinka, “UNA-UNSO Ofitsiyina storinka,” *Facebook*, 3/5/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3ve66rd6>; UNA-UNSO Ofitsiyina storinka, “UNA-UNSO Ofitsiyina storinka,” *Facebook*, 1/2/2023, accessed on 28/5/23, at: <http://tinyurl.com/edacn3ea>

²⁰² Evhen Karas, “BIY OKUPANTA!,” *YouTube*, 14/4/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2hzvjtwm>

²⁰³ Batal'yon Bratstvo Dmytra Korchynskoho, *Facebook*, 6/9/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3HRmajk>

²⁰⁴ “U Bryans'kiy oblasti RF zahynuly chotyry ukrayins'kykh biytsi,” *Texty*, 27/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/4vr5zank>

²⁰⁵ Dmytro Korchynskiy, *Telegram*, 2/2/2023 at 16:46, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/korchynskiy/5840>

²⁰⁶ Telebachenia Toronto, “TROFEJNI TANKY YDUT' NA DONETS'K: reportazh pro batal'yon «Karpats'ka Sich» (ENG SUB),” *YouTube*, 24/12/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/fk97yss6>

²⁰⁷ KARPATSKA SICH Okrema taktychna hrupa, *Telegram*, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/karpatsich>



The formation of the “Da Vinci Wolves” possessed several trophy tanks²⁰⁸ (mostly T-72B3 and T-80) and formed its own tank company.²⁰⁹ UNSO units have access to heavy trophy equipment, including self-propelled artillery (at least 1 unit of 152-mm NONA-K self-propelled guns is known),²¹⁰ as well as at least one trophy tank²¹¹, used for infantry fire support.²¹² The 3rd Assault Brigade also gained trophy armour and artillery, such as MSTA-S self-propelled howitzer,²¹³ BTR-82 APC,²¹⁴ T-72,²¹⁵ T-64²¹⁶ and the newest Russian T-90 tanks.²¹⁷ DUK-PS uses trophy APC “Tigr”, BTR-82A and BTR-82.²¹⁸ Troops like Fraikorps also publicize how some volunteer and TDF troops search 152-mm artillery ammunition in abandoned Russian warehouses.²¹⁹ All mentioned units independently clean, filter, and inspect captured ammunition for usability. If the ammunition is unsuitable for their artillery systems, they transfer it to regular units.²²⁰

Conclusion

Early into the full-scale Russian invasion, volunteer formations of Ukrainian nationalists performed many special military tasks. Their ability to organize effective defence in areas of complete encirclement, such as Mariupol, and to stop the advance of Russian mechanized forces at critical points, such as Kharkiv, Iziurm-Barvinkove, Rubizhne-Sievierodonetsk, and Bakhmut, demonstrated their operational effectiveness and strategic importance in the Ukrainian defence apparatus.

Furthermore, nationalist formations played an important role in conducting special operations behind enemy lines or near Crimea and also on the territory of mainland Russia, highlighting their role as effective assault and reconnaissance units during successful offensive actions. The wide range of units involved in these operations, such as the Taras Deyak’s “Karpatska Sich”, SSO “Azov”, Revansh, KRAKEN unit, SSO “Lubart”, and the “Brotherhood” battalion, underscores the diversity and adaptability of these formations in response to various conflict dynamics.

²⁰⁸ Vovky Da Vinchi, *Telegram*, 26/1/2022 at 17:13, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <https://t.me/smertvorogy/461>;

²⁰⁹ T. D., ex-combatant of DUK-PS before 2018, Personal interview, Kyiv, 2022.

²¹⁰ UNA-UNSO Ofitsiyna storinka, *Facebook*, 19/8/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mrxd33vn>

²¹¹ Zvedenny pidrozdil UNSO, *Telegram*, 24/8/2022 at 16:35, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: https://t.me/una_unso1/149

²¹² D H, soldier of 24th Territorial Defence Brigade, Personal interview, Kyiv, 2022.

²¹³ 3 okrema shturmova bryhada, “3 OSHBr vypalyuye voroha yoho zh zbroyeiu: vidzhaly 'Msta-S' – spalyly sklad BK,” *YouTube*, 25/3/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/3x7388hx>

²¹⁴ 3 okrema shturmova bryhada, “Mozhna pality rusnyu v prjamomu efiri: yak inzheneri SSO AZOV vdoskonalyly trofeynyy BTR,” *YouTube*, 21/7/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2s3sjbdf>

²¹⁵ 3 okrema shturmova bryhada, “Znayomtesya, tse Varvara y Volodya: ohlyad na trofeyni azovskiy tanky,” *YouTube*, 13/11/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/bdcpsnj>

²¹⁶ 3 okrema shturmova bryhada, “Yak SSO AZOV poliuye na trofeyni tanky. Tekhnika okupantiv sluzhytyme na potreby ZSU,” *YouTube*, 7/7/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/mrx5rbmx>

²¹⁷ 3 okrema shturmova bryhada, “Znayomtesya, tse Varvara y Volodya.”

²¹⁸ Pravyi Sektor, “Prysiha biytsiv 2-ho batal'yonu DUK 'Pravyi Sektor',” *YouTube*, 19/5/2022, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/2x4dnf88>

²¹⁹ Dobrovol'chyy pidrozdil 'Fr'yor', “Rosiys'kyy lend-liz. Zdobuvayemo snaryady na deokupovanykh terytoriyakh,” *YouTube*, 8/5/2023, accessed on 28/5/2023, at: <http://tinyurl.com/649ku25r>

²²⁰ Ibid.



The active participation of these formations in counter-offensive operations in Kherson and Kharkiv regions underlined their utility in both defensive operations and the offensive sphere. Nationalist formations were not static; they constantly adapted and evolved in accordance with the demands of the conflict, indicating their potential for further growth and development in future military operations.

In essence, nationalist units were a crucial component of Ukraine's defence strategy. Their contribution, marked by operational effectiveness, adaptability, and resilience, played a significant role in shaping Ukraine's defence and counter-offensive operations against Russia. They demonstrated ability to respond to the complex and rapidly changing dynamics of the conflict, contributing to Ukraine's defensive capacity. Their ongoing participation and evolution underscore the potential of their further role in the confrontation as one of the leading military forces of the Ukrainian army.

The adaptability to the drastic change in social reality enabled nationalist movements to quickly transform into a military force, adapt to new combat technologies and strategies, demonstrating their significant role in Ukraine's defence. This process of integration, though fraught with challenges, also highlights the potential for maintaining motivation and operational flexibility of these units in new, more formal military frameworks. The balance between official integration and the preservation of traditions and practices of the movement created *de facto* innovations, new adaptive qualities that these formations bring, and offers valuable lessons for the development of military strategy and management of volunteer or social military units worldwide.

Thus, the experience of Ukrainian nationalist formations, analysed through the bricolage concept, has implications for military strategy and interaction within the framework of civil-military cooperation. The journey of these formations from grassroots volunteer squads to integral components of national defence forces exemplifies the transformative power of bricolage – using available resources, combat experience and ideological principles for adaptation and flourishing in an official military environment. Collective actions for the development of political activity have become an additional advantage for the leaders of these movements, both in ambitions to create new military formations and in adapting their role to the new reality. This approach excludes a review of other, significant, activities of right-wing movements in Ukraine, but still vividly characterizes that many practices, which social movements used in peacetime, could be utilized for effective resistance against an external enemy. It enriches our understanding of their significant contribution to Ukraine's defence, and potentially highlights methods for future integration of similar formations into state defence structures, balancing innovation and organizational cohesion.

1. Features of nationalist units

The success of nationalist formations was due to the intensive and continuous preparation of a large part of the movement, which included both tactical and moral-psychological mobilization of their network, opening training headquarters for civilians, using horizontal contacts, and the tradition of volunteer formations. Along with the motivation of political entrepreneurs to preserve their



resources, there was also a willingness to adapt best practices and ultimately provide additional incentives to make their results visible to the public. The civilian element of the movements did not disappear but rather transformed into material and technical support, helping to strengthen the media presence of their comrades in combat. This resulted in better readiness, a higher level of willingness to join these units, and a large potential resource of leaders and commanders.

Practices that were supported and valued by the movement as tools to support their reputation and to compete with other movements, allowed for the quick deployment and mobilization of the movement's network. Besides human resources, this also provided additional auxiliary supplies in the form of their initiatives (mostly charitable funds) to assist the military independently of state resources. The existing hierarchy, which included combat experience as an important element for role recognition within the movement, contributed to better command cohesion, and professionalism as a decisive attribute of advantage became critically important for the effectiveness of combat units.

Nationalist battalions often demonstrated a high degree of specialization, focusing on specific tasks or combat roles, such as reconnaissance, special operations, artillery support, guarding specific areas, or conducting assault operations. Their training covered physical, professional, and ideological components, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective performance of their roles.

In the initial period, these volunteer units also demonstrated a certain level of independence and autonomy, even while being on the side of the Ukrainian armed forces. Such operational flexibility allowed them to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, enabling them to effectively perform their functions and make a significant contribution to the Ukrainian defence forces.

Volunteers who joined such units due to their professional reputation and ideological resilience played a significant role in these nationalist formations. Individuals motivated by nationalist ideologies joined these formations, fostering shared ideological values, especially among increasingly radical Ukrainians towards Russia.

Moreover, these formations were innovative in their tactics, including the use of civilian drones for reconnaissance and strikes, and quickly adapted to new types of heavy equipment. These innovative tactics underscore their adaptability and inventiveness, contributing to their operational effectiveness and success in various military operations.

In summary, the unique qualities, tactics, and innovations of these nationalist volunteer formations significantly contributed to their operational effectiveness and adaptability. Factors behind their success, including intensive training, operational flexibility, application of innovative tactics, and a strong sense of unity and camaraderie, laid the foundation for their significant contribution to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. These elements became the causal sets for the bricolage mechanism, enabling a swift transition from public activists and "street hooligans" to the regular Armed Forces of Ukraine.



2. Integration into the Armed Forces and personal reflections

Over time, attempts were made to integrate volunteer battalions into the overall structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This integration involved the standardization of command and control structures, the creation of official training programs, and aligning the activities of volunteer units with broader military objectives. This ensured that these formations did not operate in isolation but were part of a unified defence force, enhancing the overall effectiveness of Ukraine's military response.

The integration of these volunteer formations into the regular armed forces also had implications for the management and control of these units. After integration, these formations came under the 100% control of the Ukrainian government, ensuring that their operations and activities were aligned with the country's defence goals and strategies.

While the integration process posed challenges, it was also accompanied by significant benefits. It allowed these formations to utilize the resources, training, and support of the army, enhancing their capabilities and efficiency. This enabled the expansion of units into regiments and brigades, made mobilization more inclusive, and ultimately increased access to critical and hard-to-reach resources such as military equipment and ammunition. It also provided a more coordinated and unified defensive response, allowing these formations and the regular armed forces to collaborate more effectively in defending Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The process continues amid ongoing active combat operations. This could signify the potential for the phenomenon to fade away or further changes that will directly depend on the dynamics of the war's development. Undoubtedly, such a complex process cannot be fully examined outside the context of accompanying social shifts, changes in the structure of political opportunities in Ukraine, and many external factors. Institutional transformation will require further research, a deeper comparison of the transformation of more and less institutionalized movements, but this aspect is only possible in a longer retrospective and after the possibility to outline the current episode of confrontation that has been ongoing since 2022. In the future, it is also worth examining in more detail other changes in civil society and among political actors and how they were affected by Russia's full-scale invasion.

In summary, nationalist formations in Ukraine transformed from volunteer battalions into integral parts of the regular armed forces, making a significant contribution to Ukraine's defence. Their integration into the Armed Forces of Ukraine ensured the consistency of their operations with the country's defence goals and strategies. The experience of these formations offers valuable insights into the role and potential of volunteer forces and socio movements in democratic countries for national defence and the challenges and opportunities associated with their integration into the regular armed forces.



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