

**POST-WAR SECURITY
SECTOR REFORM IN
UKRAINE'S
STRATEGIC HORIZON:**

**NAVIGATING WAR REALITIES
AND POST-WAR CHALLENGES**

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About this publication project

This publication is part of a policy research project on Post-War Security Sector Reform, entitled 'Striking a Balance between Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability within the Defense Sector: Learning lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view of Ukraine' undertaken by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

This comparative policy research project aims to identify challenges and best practices of post-war Security Sector Reform (SSR). It focuses on external strategies for building defense and security alliances, and internal strategies aimed at enhancing credible deterrence, democratic civil-military relations, and accountability—drawing lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view to Ukraine. In a similar way as Ukraine, these countries were at war and have experienced a permanent threat of war over decades. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in enforcing their sovereignty despite facing asymmetrical power relations and being on the edge of geopolitical tensions. Moreover, they have managed to become consolidated democracies despite the constant pressure of securitization. What lessons can inspire, and which challenges may provide food-for-thought for Ukraine's own SSR efforts during and post-war?

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|------------------|---|
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| EU | European Union |
| MAP | Membership Action Plan |
| AANP | Adapted Annual National Program |
| NRU | NATO Representation in Ukraine |
| JATEC | NATO–Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training, and Education Centre |
| CAP | Comprehensive Assistance Package |
| CHOD | Chief of Defence |
| NUC | NATO–Ukraine Council |
| NSATU | NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine |
| US | United States |
| G7 | Group of Seven |
| NASAMS | National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System |
| HIMARS | High Mobility Artillery Rocket System |
| UN | United Nations |
| MoD | Ministry of Defense |
| PPBE | Planning, Programming, Budgeting & Execution |
| NATO DEEP | NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| CHOD | Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine |
| C2 | Command and Control |
| IHL | International Humanitarian Law |
| NAC | National Agency for Corruption Prevention |

About the author

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Introduction

In 2003, the Russian Federation sparked a territorial dispute with Ukraine regarding Tuzla Island by asserting that the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine only applied to the mainland portions of the peninsula. This claim contradicted the fact that the island had been administratively part of Crimea since 1941.¹ In February/March 2014, Russia illegally occupied and annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. In April 2014 the Ukrainian government launched an anti-terrorist operation to restore territorial integrity and ensure law and order in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, where Russian armed forces and separatists had initiated unrest and disorder. This war gradually escalated over the years, marked by intermittent fighting and fragile ceasefires. However, in February 2022, the situation drastically intensified as Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, expanding the war far beyond the eastern territories. The war has since evolved into an all-out war that continues to rage across Ukraine and Russia, with no ceasefires or peace agreements in place (a capitulation agreement was offered to Ukraine in March 2022). The only arrangements that have been made involve limited prisoner exchanges and the establishment of a grain corridor to facilitate the export of Ukrainian agricultural products amid the ongoing hostilities. In this context, Ukraine is actively seeking the most effective security arrangements to navigate the highly complex and challenging circumstances it currently faces.

This article aims to analyze Ukraine's strategic security roadmap, focusing on NATO integration as the cornerstone of its long-term security and defense strategy and exploring complementary measures, such as EU-led initiatives and bilateral arrangements, that can enhance Ukraine's security during the transition period. The article is divided into three key chapters.

The first chapter presents external balancing strategies, encompassing NATO integration, the European Union as a security pillar for Ukraine, and bilateral security arrangements. The second chapter delves into internal balancing strategies, focusing on strengthening the effectiveness of the defense sector. The third chapter examines accountability, democratic oversight of the armed forces, human rights, building integrity initiative, and the role of civil society in security governance based on Euro–Atlantic standards.

The article concludes that there is no alternative to Ukraine pursuing NATO membership and the Ukraine can not only support its own security architecture but also position itself as a reliable partner within the Euro–Atlantic community. However, the current uncertainties within NATO highlight the need to explore EU-led security initiatives and bilateral security guarantees as viable additional options to maintain stability and ensure security during the transition period.

The article is grounded in a comprehensive literature review, insights from interviews with national and international experts, and consultations with Ukrainian security sector representatives and international experts that was held in Geneva on 19–21 February 2025. However, it has certain limitations. Given the complexity of Euro–Atlantic membership, the article focuses on the defense sector and does not cover all aspects, particularly political considerations. Moreover, the recent shift in US policy and the wake-up among EU countries could lead to certain short-term changes in Europe's security architecture, a development that is only partially addressed in the article.

¹ Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs of Ukraine (2018) 'Ukrainian Ministry urges the world not to accept the transfer of Tuzla Island to Russia', Freedom. Available at: <https://uatv.ua/en/ukrainian-ministry-urges-world-not-accept-transfer-tuzla-island-russia/> (Accessed: 5 March 2025).

External balancing strategies: in search of the optimal security model

2.1 Integration into NATO

In February 2025, President Volodymyr Zelensky reaffirmed that joining NATO remains a key security guarantee for Ukraine. He highlighted that Ukraine's 800,000-strong army would serve as a valuable asset to the alliance. Without firm security assurances from Ukraine's allies, any agreement with Russia would only pave the way for future aggression.² Ukraine's pursuit of NATO membership has been a cornerstone of its foreign and security policy, a stance consistently reflected in its constitution and laws, governmental programs and strong public support. In the current context, no viable alternatives for ensuring Ukraine's security exist. Russian officials have made statements asserting that Ukraine is an artificial construct and should be integrated into Russia. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, in 2024 underlined that "the existence of Ukraine is mortally dangerous... I'm talking about any, absolutely any Ukraine."³ On September 30, 2022, Putin announced the annexation of four Ukrainian regions—Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, claiming they would be Russian citizens "forever."⁴ Given that nuclear-armed Russia has aggressively and unprovokedly attacked Ukraine, and temporarily occupied and annexed portions of its sovereign territory, Ukraine faces an existential security challenge. Russia's immense military capabilities and its ongoing campaign targeting Ukraine's infrastructure, civilian populations, and economic stability does not leave Ukraine any other strategic option.

Between 2023 and 2024, significant progress was made in advancing Ukraine's integration into NATO through the adoption of key documents and the implementation of critical initiatives. At the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, the NATO–Ukraine Council (NUC) was established, replacing the previous NATO–Ukraine Commission. This significant development marked a deepening of the partnership between NATO and Ukraine.⁵ At the 2024 Washington Summit, NATO Allies established the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to provide coordinated military equipment, training, and logistical support for Ukraine.⁶ While this is a commendable initiative, its long-term success will largely depend on the sustained commitment and assistance of allied nations. Furthermore, NATO has maintained a significant presence in Kyiv and in July 2024, NATO enhanced its engagement with Ukraine by appointing Patrick Turner as the senior representative to lead the NATO Representation in Ukraine (NRU). This appointment builds upon the existing NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv, expanding NATO's political mission in the country. The NRU serves as the primary channel for political dialogue and strategic cooperation between NATO and Ukraine, coordinating NATO's efforts and providing assessments and advice on the situation in Ukraine.⁷ NRU is fully operational and it is crucial for NATO to appoint the right experts for these roles in Ukraine and to ensure their sustained presence over the long term. Continuing these efforts, the NATO–Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC) was

² Mazurenko, A. (2025) 'Zelensky on NATO membership: Ukraine's 800,000-strong army could be a bonus for the Alliance', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 2 February. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2024/02/8/7441019/> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

³ Telegram: t.me/Medvedev_telegram/437 – January 17, 2024.

⁴ Kremlin (2022) President of Russia: Address by the President of the Russian Federation. Available at: <https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

⁵ NATO (2024) 'NATO-Ukraine relations: Key developments', *NATO Official Website*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_217652.htm (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁶ NATO (2024) 'NSATU assumes responsibilities to support Ukraine', *Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)*. Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2024/nsatu-responsibilities> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁷ NATO (2024) 'NATO Allies reaffirm commitment to Ukraine's security', *NATO News*, 10 July. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_228106.htm (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

opened in Bydgoszcz, Poland, in February 2025 to strengthen Ukraine's armed forces and interoperability with NATO. It is the first joint NATO–Ukraine structure, enhancing cooperation by integrating lessons from Russia's war into strategies and operations.⁸ And finally, at the 2023 Vilnius Summit, NATO Allies reached a historic agreement to develop the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine into a robust, multi-year program of support.⁹

NATO made the decision to waive the requirement for Ukraine to undergo a Membership Action Plan (MAP), a process traditionally used to prepare nations for membership. This move marked a significant step in simplifying and accelerating Ukraine's path toward joining the alliance. Instead, the Adapted Annual National Program (AANP) and the Roadmap for Interoperability were launched. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for Ukraine to advance its Euro–Atlantic aspirations. However, none of them explicitly include the term “membership” in their titles, leaving the procedural aspects of Ukraine's accession to NATO unclear. AANP defines the strategic objectives and priorities for Ukraine's integration into NATO, outlining necessary reforms and cooperation areas. It is updated yearly and serves as a comprehensive roadmap for Ukraine's political, economic, defense, security, and legal reforms to meet NATO's membership criteria.¹⁰ The Roadmap for Interoperability focuses on ensuring that Ukraine's armed forces can effectively

operate alongside NATO forces. This document provides guidance on harmonizing Ukraine's military capabilities, standards, and procedures with NATO requirements.¹¹ While both documents are instrumental for integration, they do not explicitly guarantee NATO membership. Instead, they focus on aligning Ukraine's systems, policies, and practices with NATO standards, which are prerequisites for membership.

With these developments, Ukraine's security has become inextricably linked to NATO. Nevertheless, the current geopolitical dynamics, including differing strategic priorities and perspectives between European allies and the United States, could influence the trajectory and speed of the implementation of this initiative. In recent statements, President Donald Trump has expressed a clear stance regarding Ukraine's relationship with NATO. He asserted that Ukraine can “forget about” joining the NATO military alliance, attributing the ongoing conflict with Russia to NATO's actions.¹² He also indicated that while the US would assist Ukraine in reclaiming as much territory as possible through negotiations with Russia, NATO membership for Ukraine is not an option.¹³ The United States is not the only country skeptically considering Ukraine's invitation to join NATO. Ukrainian sources quoting Politico indicate that Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Belgium, Slovenia and Spain might also be resisting the move.¹⁴ While recognizing that NATO takes decisions on a consensual basis, political decisions

⁸ NATO. (2025) 'Relations with Ukraine', NATO. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm#jatec (Accessed: 2 March 2025).

⁹ NATO (2024) 'Official text: NATO-Ukraine Council Joint Statement', *NATO Official Texts*, 10 July. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/ge/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm (Accessed: 1 February 2025).

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2024) 'Adapted Annual National Programme of Ukraine-NATO Cooperation for 2024', *Official Website of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.mil.gov.ua/diyalnist/mizhnarodne-spivrobotnicztvo/adaptovana-richna-naczionalna-programa-spivrobotnicztva-ukraina-nato-na-2024-rik.html> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

¹¹ NATO (2024) 'NATO's roadmap for Ukraine's interoperability', *NATO Official Website*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84112.htm (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

¹² The Sun (2025) *Trump says Ukraine can 'forget about' NATO as he prepares to host Zelensky in Washington DC to sign a 'big agreement'*, The Sun. Available at: <https://www.the-sun.com/news/13631278/zelensky-confirms-trump-meet-ukraine-russia/> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ivashkiv, O. (2024) 'At least 7 countries oppose Ukraine's accession to NATO – Politico', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 24 October. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/10/24/7481114/> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

can be made based on transactional politics and circumstances considering Ukraine's readiness to contribute to the alliance's security. Ukraine has made great efforts to act as a full-fledged NATO member. It has already transitioned from being merely a recipient of assistance to becoming a valuable contributor of expertise. Ukraine's decade-long experience in the Russian–Ukrainian war, coupled with the innovations and battlefield practices developed during the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion, provides critical insights that are influencing NATO's operational approaches and standards.¹⁵ This unique combat experience, particularly in countering hybrid warfare, cyber threats, and large-scale conventional military operations, is already reshaping NATO's ability to address emerging defense challenges and threats. The lessons learned from Ukraine's ability to adapt and innovate under extreme circumstances may be integrated into NATO's doctrines, tactics, and training programs.¹⁶ As a result, Ukraine is not only strengthening its own military capabilities but is also sharing its experience to enhance the collective defense positioning of the alliance.

2.2 Bilateral security commitments to Ukraine

NATO welcomes the bilateral, long-term security commitments that the allies and NATO partners have agreed with Ukraine based on the G7 Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine launched at the 2023 Vilnius Summit. As of February 2025, 29 allies and partners have signed bilateral security agreements with Ukraine, giving Ukraine enduring security commitments.¹⁷ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has touted these agreements as the “new pillars for the rules-based international order.”¹⁸ This serves as an additional security measure, which strengthens Ukrainian–NATO defense cooperation and ensures continued military aid and consultation mechanisms.

These agreements are mutually reinforcing. These commitments, together with the decisions taken at the 2024 Washington Summit, provide for sustained and enduring support to Ukraine as it contributes to the defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and supports Ukraine's Euro–Atlantic integration.¹⁹ It sounds great on paper and it sends a political message to both Ukraine and Russia about allied support. However, the degree and terms of this support are not clear. None of the agreements are ratified by the parliaments of the signatory countries, which would have required much more time and specific commitments for the years ahead.²⁰ The new security agreements for Ukraine do not amount to full mutual defense

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2024) 'Stanislav Haider: Interoperability with NATO is our national interest', *Ministry of Defence of Ukraine News*, 18 April. Available at: <https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/stanislav-haider-interoperability-with-nato-is-our-national-interest-1> (Accessed: 20 January 2025).

¹⁶ For instance, for the first time, the Ukrainian Navy participated in NATO exercises focused on the use of unmanned systems in maritime operations, known as REPMUS 24. During the exercises, the Ukrainian combat system DELTA coordinated the operations of more than 50 unmanned devices of various types, including underwater, maritime, ground, and aerial systems. Suspilne Media (2024) *For the first time, the Ukrainian Navy participated in NATO exercises on unmanned systems*, *Suspilne Media*, 21 October 2024. Available at: <https://suspilne.media/862589-vperse-v-navcannah-nato-z-bezpilotnih-sistem-vzali-ucast-vms-ukraini/> (Accessed: 20 January 2025).

¹⁷ NATO (2025) *Support for Ukraine*, NATO. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

¹⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2024) 'Getting Ukraine's security agreements right'. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/07/getting-ukraines-security-agreements-right> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

¹⁹ NATO (2024) 'Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine', *NATO Official Website*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

²⁰ Kendall-Taylor, A. and Kimmage, M. (2024) *The power of a promise: Understanding Ukraine's bilateral security agreements*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-power-of-a-promise-understanding-ukraines-bilateral-security-agreements/> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

commitments. These agreements commit Ukraine's partners to sustaining military and other support at the scale provided since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Additionally, the agreements include commitments to help Ukraine build its "future force" and to help in deterring and defending against potential future Russian aggression.²¹ One of the most important aspects in this context is the feasibility of the US providing explicit bilateral security guarantees to Ukraine. It has been a subject of extensive discussion. In June 2024, Presidents Biden and Zelensky signed a 10-year bilateral security agreement designed to bolster Ukraine's defense capabilities and deter future aggression.²² According to President Biden, "[the United States'] goal is to strengthen Ukraine's credible defense and deterrence capabilities for the long term. A lasting peace for Ukraine must be underwritten by Ukraine's own ability to defend itself now and to deter future aggression anytime... in the future." The agreement builds upon existing security partnerships between the United States and Ukraine, including the Strategic Defense Framework, signed August 31, 2021, and the US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed November 10, 2021.²³ However, this agreement does not equate to mutual defense like NATO's Article 5, as it signifies a commitment to assistance rather than a legally binding obligation to military defense. Following the meeting between President Zelensky and President Trump in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2025, the absence of a clear response from the US regarding security guarantees has raised concerns about the reliability of American commitments to Ukraine's security. The blunt silence on this critical issue suggests that the prospect of firm US guarantees remains uncertain in the short term, reinforcing doubts

about whether Washington is willing to extend long-term and much needed binding security commitments to Kyiv. Clear US security guarantees could act as a powerful deterrent against Russia, discouraging further attempts to expand its occupation of Ukrainian territory. These guarantees would also enable greater military assistance, including enhanced training and intelligence sharing, with a particular focus on strengthening Ukraine's air defense capabilities. According to former Lithuanian Minister of Defense Laurynas Kasčiūnas, replacing the absence of NASAMS—a crucial short-to medium-range ground-based air defense system—will be a significant challenge.²⁴ These systems play a vital role in intercepting aerial threats, and their absence could leave critical vulnerabilities in Ukraine's air defense. Additionally, another pressing concern is the potential lack of HIMARS, which have been instrumental in providing long-range precision strike capabilities.²⁵ Needless to say that as the leading NATO member, the US plays a decisive role in shaping the alliance's stance on Ukraine's potential membership, which creates another complexity in the given circumstances. Recently, US policy has shifted towards transactional engagements as a form of indirect security assurance. For instance, the US proposal to secure access to Ukraine's rare metals without offering security guarantees in return may fall short of addressing Ukraine's pressing security concerns. Therefore, while bilateral security guarantees from the US to Ukraine are possible, needed and have been partially implemented through agreements like the 2024 pact, the extent and nature of these guarantees are constrained by transactional policy and temporary unwillingness to offer a pragmatic path forward towards a just peace. President Trump has recently stated "I'm

²¹ Ibid.

²² US Department of Defense (2024) *Biden, Zelenskyy Sign 10-Year Bilateral Security Agreement*. Available at: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3806792/biden-zelenskyy-sign-10-year-bilateral-security-agreement/> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

²³ Congressional Research Service (2024) *U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine: Issues and Considerations*. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12385> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

²⁴ Delfi (2024) *Ivardijo, kokios karinės paramos Ukrainai negali kompensuoti Europa*. Available at: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/politics/ivardijo-kokios-karines-paramos-ukrainai-negali-kompensuoti-europa-120090890> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

²⁵ Ibid.

not going to make security guarantees beyond very much... we're going to have Europe do that.”²⁶ He has ordered the cessation of military aid and decided not to share intelligence information with Ukraine. However, US President Donald Trump’s national security advisor, Mike Waltz, has already stated that the unfreezing of military aid to Ukraine could be considered by the White House if there is success in organizing peace negotiations and if measures are taken to “build trust.”²⁷ While these remarks may carry an emotional undertone and the situation can rapidly change, the core implication is clear: in the short term, Ukraine should view bilateral security guarantees as a supplementary measure rather than a primary pillar of its security strategy. This underscores the need for Ukraine in the short term to strengthen its defense capabilities, reinforce its NATO security partnership, and consider cooperation with European allies to ensure long-term stability and resilience in the transition period.

2.3 The European Union as a component of Ukraine’s security framework

As the United States and Russia engage in direct negotiations over Ukraine’s future, the European Union is urgently trying to assert its relevance. This wake-up call was well illustrated by the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who said that “the paradox is that 500 million Europeans are asking 300 million Americans to defend them against 140 million Russians. We must rely on ourselves, fully aware of our potential and with confidence that we are a global power.”²⁸ Amid a series of high-level meetings involving European leaders, a clearer strategic direction is beginning to take shape.²⁹

However, it remains uncertain whether Ukraine will be involved throughout the entire process. President Zelensky has already participated in the London Summit and it would be logical for Ukraine to continue to be included. The EU granted candidate status to Ukraine, making its long-term commitment to integrating Ukraine into European structures and most importantly into European security structures. Ignoring Ukraine in the newly emerging security framework would contradict the EU’s value-based policy coupled with realpolitik stance on Ukraine’s sovereignty and future within Europe. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has introduced a five-step plan to rearm the EU and strengthen support for Ukraine. The plan includes:³⁰

- Increased defense spending—enabling EU member states to allocate more funds to defense by bypassing the Growth and Stability Pact, potentially unlocking €650 billion over four years
- New loan instrument—providing €150 billion in loans for defense investments, including air defense, artillery, missiles, drones, and joint procurement of military equipment
- EU budget utilization—allowing member states to use cohesion funds for defense spending, which cannot be blocked by Hungary or Slovakia
- Private capital mobilization—expanding the defense investment market
- European Investment Bank involvement—leveraging the bank to fund defense initiatives

²⁶ Al Jazeera (2025) *No security guarantees yet in US-Ukraine minerals deal, Zelenskyy says*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/26/no-security-guarantees-yet-in-us-ukraine-minerals-deal-zelenskyy-says> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

²⁷ Kutieliava, I. and Pohorilov, S. (2025) ‘Waltz outlines conditions under which Trump will “carefully consider” unfreezing military aid to Ukraine’, *Ukrainska Pravda*, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2025/03/5/7501397/> (Accessed: 5 March 2025).

²⁸ Government of Poland (2025) *Historic Summit in London – Western Leaders Stand Together for Security and Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/historic-summit-in-london--western-leaders-stand-together-for-security-and-ukraine> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

²⁹ RFE/RL (2025) *EU Struggles to Stay Relevant in Ukraine Peace Talks as U.S. and Russia Take Lead*. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-ukraine-peace-talks-strategy-relevance-wider-europe-jozwiak/33332636.html> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

³⁰ *Ukrainska Pravda* (2025) *Фон дер Ляєн представила план переозброєння ЄС і підтримки України на 800 млрд євро*. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2025/03/4/7501179/> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

Von der Leyen stressed that this initiative could mobilize €800 billion in defense spending, ensuring Europe's security and resilience. Ukraine has requested €66 billion for its battlefield needs in 2024, as stated by Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha during an EU foreign ministers' meeting on February 24. Previously, an informal arrangement had Ukraine covering 40% of the costs, with the EU and US splitting the remaining 60% equally.³¹ However, with the US potentially withdrawing its contribution, Ukraine has adjusted its offer, committing to 50% of the total sum and asking the EU to cover the remaining €33 billion.³² It is still too early to draw definitive conclusions, but indications suggest that the European Union is preparing to make significant investments in its security, including support for Ukraine. One potential approach could be the formation of a "coalition of the willing," allowing like-minded states to advance security initiatives while bypassing those EU members that may be unwilling to maintain unity or hold differing views on Russia's role in the European security architecture. The new EU security architecture will begin to take shape at an emergency meeting of EU leaders on March 6. EU leaders will discuss how the EU can further support Ukraine and the principles that should be respected going forward. In this context, they will exchange views on European contributions to the necessary security guarantees required to ensure a lasting peace in Ukraine.³³ Then, on March 19, 2025, the EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja

Kallas will present the new defense-industrial strategy. However, it remains uncertain how effectively these EU-led security initiatives will materialize, given the challenges of decision-making and the difficulty of achieving consensus. It is possible that a coalition of willing countries may emerge as a more practical approach.

³¹ RFE/RL (2025) *EU Struggles to Stay Relevant in Ukraine Peace Talks as U.S. and Russia Take Lead*. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-ukraine-peace-talks-strategy-relevance-wider-europe-jozwiak/33332636.html> (Accessed: 4 March 2025).

³² Ibid.

³³ European Council (2025) 'Special European Council, 6 March 2025', Consilium.europa.eu. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2025/03/06/> (Accessed: 5 March 2025).

Internal balancing strategies (1): establishing the effectiveness of the defense sector

The second chapter provides an analysis of internal balancing strategies, emphasizing efforts to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of the defense sector. A key focus is placed on interoperability requirements, which are essential for Ukraine's integration into NATO's framework and the broader transformation of its armed forces. This section examines several critical components necessary for strengthening national defense, including strategic defense planning, institutional joint management, decision-making processes in the defense sector, organizational and working culture in security institutions. It encourages a modern, accountable, and mission-oriented culture to improve operational efficiency and trust within the defense sector. Finally, the chapter covers investment in and modernization of the national defense industry. By addressing these areas, this part outlines a strategic framework for internal defense strengthening, aligning national security priorities with NATO integration objectives and ensuring the long-term resilience of Ukraine's defense sector.

3.1 Interoperability

According to the Allied Joint Doctrine, interoperability is defined as the ability of NATO forces and, when appropriate, the forces of partner nations to operate together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve allied tactical, operational, and strategic objectives. This encompasses three dimensions:

- Technical interoperability: Systems and equipment, such as communication and information systems, and their ability to operate together
- Procedural interoperability: Common doctrine, procedures, and terminology
- Human interoperability: Mutual trust and understanding achieved by strengthening relationships in training and operations³⁴

Interoperability is a key precondition for Ukraine's integration into NATO and for the purpose of this article, it is broadly divided into two dimensions: technical interoperability and institutional–intellectual interoperability. Both are essential for Ukraine's defense forces to operate effectively within the alliance and contribute to collective security. Technical interoperability refers to the ability of Ukraine's military forces to use compatible equipment, systems, and operational procedures with NATO member states.³⁵ Institutional–intellectual interoperability refers to the alignment of Ukraine's defense governance, doctrines, strategic thinking, and decision-making processes with NATO's structures and principles.

Experts agree that Ukraine has made substantial progress in technical interoperability, demonstrating remarkable proficiency in deploying various NATO weapon systems on the battlefield and seamlessly

³⁴ NATO (2017) *Allied Joint Doctrine*, AJP-01 Edition E Version 1. Available at: https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-01_EDE_V1_E_2437.pdf (Accessed: 25 January 2025).

³⁵ NATO (2024) 'Interoperability: Connecting Forces', NATO Topics. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_84112.htm (Accessed: 23 January 2025).

integrating them into military operations.³⁶ The director of the Defense and Security Cooperation Directorate of NATO's Operations Division, Piers Cazalet, stated that "to achieve full operational interoperability is very, very difficult. Even the armed forces of NATO member states continue to work towards this goal. Ukraine is already moving toward interoperability, and we must help it raise this level as much as possible. And, of course, as long as Ukraine is at war, resisting the Russian invasion, it is very difficult to set long-term goals while the daily battle continues on the front lines."³⁷ He further stated that NATO acknowledges Ukraine's achievements, particularly in military education, medical support, and battlefield integration with NATO doctrine, which has been enhanced by recently provided allied equipment. However, concerns remain regarding specific aspects of command and control and the operations of the defense forces. An important question still arises: What degree of interoperability is truly necessary for Ukraine? It is worth examining whether the interoperability standards and requirements imposed on Ukraine are fair and realistic, especially considering that even some current NATO member states have not yet achieved full interoperability within the alliance. This raises concerns about whether Ukraine is being held to an unnecessarily high standard or subjected to expectations that exceed those placed on existing members or that the problem lies within geopolitical concerns.

3.2 Strategic defense planning

Establishing the effectiveness of the defense sector requires optimizing the management of defense ministries, agencies, and force structures, including strengthened inter-agency cooperation and ensuring compliance with international norms and practices within the defense sector. It is undoubtedly linked to defense planning process, which requires additional attention from Ukraine's Ministry of Defence. In 2020–2021, Ukraine approved key strategic documents shaping its national military and defense policies. On September 14, 2020, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed Decree No. 392/2020, enacting the National Security and Defense Council's decision to approve a new National Security Strategy for Ukraine.³⁸ The Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, enacted by Presidential Decree No. 121 on March 25, 2021, outlines the nation's defense goals, priorities, and objectives, emphasizing a comprehensive approach through deterrence, resilience, and cooperation.³⁹ Building upon this, the Strategic Defense Bulletin of Ukraine was approved by Presidential Decree No. 473 on September 17, 2021. This foundational document specifies the main directions for implementing Ukraine's defense policy, detailing requirements for the future structure of the armed forces and other defense components, and setting development and reform targets through 2025.⁴⁰

³⁶ Interview with defense planning experts Col. Dmytro Krylov, Robertas Sapronas and Col. Dalius Polekauskas, Feb. 10–13, Kyiv.

³⁷ ArmyInform (2024) *Ukraine will require assistance for many more years, NATO understands this and is preparing*, *ArmyInform*, 18 April. Available at: <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/04/18/ukrayina-potrebyvatume-dopomogu-she-bagatorokiv-y-nato-tse-usvidomluut-i-gotyutsja/> (Accessed: 20 January 2025).

³⁸ President of Ukraine (2020) 'President approves the National Security Strategy of Ukraine', *Official Website of the President of Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/glava-derzhavi-zatverddiv-strategichnij-oboronnij-byuleten-uk-70713> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

³⁹ President of Ukraine (2021) 'President approved the Strategic Defence Bulletin of Ukraine', *Official website of the President of Ukraine*, Available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/glava-derzhavi-zatverddiv-strategichnij-oboronnij-byuleten-uk-70713> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁴⁰ Ukrinform (2021) *President approves Strategic Defence Bulletin of Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-defense/3317884-president-approves-strategic-defense-bulletin-of-ukraine.html> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

Ukraine seeks to follow a structured, multi-tiered approach aimed at ensuring national security and the optimal use of military resources. This process is divided into long-term, medium-term, and short-term planning, each serving distinct purposes and addressing different time horizons. For defense planning to be effective, it must be coordinated across all three levels:⁴¹

- Long-term strategic planning (10 to 20+ years) must shape medium-term resource allocations and short-term operational decisions. It focuses on a strategic vision for national defense, including capability development, force structure, and future security challenges. It involves large-scale investments in infrastructure, advanced technology, and human capital. It aligns with long-term geopolitical forecasts and partnerships, such as NATO and EU security strategies.
- Medium-term planning (4 to 10 years) should translate strategic aspirations into practical, budgeted programs and procurement processes. It converts strategic objectives into actionable plans, covering procurement programs, infrastructure projects, and force modernization. It aligns financial planning and resource allocation with national defense priorities. It ensures interoperability with NATO standards and regional security frameworks.
- Short-term planning (up to 3 years) must ensure immediate operational readiness while remaining flexible to adjust based on new developments. It focuses on immediate operational readiness and crisis response capabilities. It addresses budget

allocations, troop deployments, and training programs to maintain force effectiveness. It adapts to rapid geopolitical changes, ensuring flexibility in response to emerging threats.

Amid a full-scale invasion, Ukraine must continue to establish a coherent and structured defense planning process, despite the immense challenges posed by the ongoing war. While policy documents are adopted at the highest political level, there is a lack of clarity regarding the extent of involvement of defense and security institutions in shaping these policies.⁴² This raises concerns about the ownership of the defense planning process. To ensure effective and sustainable defense governance, strategic and planning documents should be firmly rooted within security sector agencies, rather than being dictated solely by leadership. These institutions must play a central role in optimizing the management of defense ministries, agencies, and force structures, improving inter-agency cooperation, and ensuring that planning processes align with operational realities and long-term strategic goals. At present, Ukraine's defense planning covers the budgeting and financial management for current military activities and setting long term national strategic objectives, but does not provide a multi-year timeframe to bridge the gap between strategic planning and budget formulation.⁴³ Effective defense planning requires coordination and integration across long-, medium- and short- term timeframes. Strategic objectives set in long-term planning should inform medium-term resource commitments and short-term planning, while ongoing assessments should feed into future long and medium-term strategies to ensure adaptability and responsiveness to changing security environments.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview with defense planning expert Col. Dalius Polekauskas, Feb. 10-13, Kyiv.

⁴² Interview with defense planning expert Col. Dalius Polekauskas, Feb. 10-13, Kyiv.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

3.3 Institutional joint management, decision making and working culture

Institutional joint management, decision making and a cohesive working culture are crucial in defense structures. Ukraine has already made serious steps towards achieving this objective. In August 2023, the MoD introduced a new joint governance model to enhance coordination between civilian leadership and military command. This model delineates powers and responsibilities clearly and establishes committees, subcommittees, and working groups to foster engagement and dialogue.⁴⁵ The structure includes the Strategic Council of the Ministry of Defense and various committees focusing on areas such as strategic planning, personnel management, armament management, defense forces capability management, institutional changes, European and Euro–Atlantic integration, digital transformation, procurement, and property and resource management. While the functions of decision-making and the roles of newly established structures remain clear on paper, their implementation requires further progress. It is crucial to build capacity and ensure the effective implementation of these new governance frameworks. The challenges primarily stem from institutional working culture and an unclear division of labor where further investment in education is needed. In instilling professionalism and a working culture through education, the NATO DEEP program and allies' support play significant roles.⁴⁶

Significant progress has been achieved in the Planning, Programming, Budgeting & Execution (PPBE) model to improve decision-making in the defense sector. The newly adopted system aligns with NATO standards and will guide the development of the Armed Forces'

capabilities over the next 5-10 years.⁴⁷ It involves transparent expenditure allocation based on a multi-criteria analysis of defense capability development; cost evaluation of military capabilities, considering real resource needs; and assessment of life cycles and efficiency of weapons and military equipment across different branches. The model will be implemented in a specific branch of the armed forces by the end of 2025, with plans to eventually expand it to all defense forces⁴⁸.

Greater efforts are needed in human resources policy, as highlighted by the recent dismissal of the head of the Defense Acquisition Agency. The decision-making process within the MoD faces several structural and procedural challenges that hinder its overall effectiveness. One of the key issues is the lack of clarity over how decisions are made, particularly at the departmental level. While Ukraine has introduced joint military and civilian structures within the ministry, it remains uncertain to what extent these mechanisms absorb integrated military and civilian advice. The absence of a well-defined framework for decision-making authority at the middle level may lead to inconsistencies in policy implementation and inefficiencies in strategic planning. Another challenge is the application of the delegation principle within the ministry. Decision-making remains overly centralized, with top leadership retaining excessive control over processes that could be managed more effectively at the departmental level.⁴⁹ Strengthening the delegation of authority would enhance efficiency, allowing departments to act more proactively, while ensuring accountability through clearly defined responsibilities and oversight mechanisms. Strengthening the capacity

⁴⁵ DCAF-OSCE-Ukrainian MoD, General Staff and Experts meeting in Geneva, 19–21 February 2025.

⁴⁶ NATO *Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP)*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm#deep (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁴⁷ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2024) 'New PPBE Defence Management Model Based on NATO Best Practices to be Tested in the Armed Forces of Ukraine'. Available at: <https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/new-ppbe-defence-management-model-based-on-nato-best-practices-to-be-tested-in-the-armed-forces-of-ukraine> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ DCAF-OSCE-Ukrainian MoD, General Staff and Experts meeting in Geneva, 19–21 February 2025.

for evidence-based policymaking is essential as well, particularly in areas such as defense procurement,⁵⁰ capability development, and resource allocation. Without a systematic approach to data-driven decision-making, the MoD risks inefficiencies, misallocation of resources, and suboptimal military readiness. The MoD has undertaken significant efforts to address these challenges by implementing key reforms and improving institutional processes. However, the ongoing war presents substantial obstacles to achieving rapid and tangible results.

3.4 Investment in and modernization of the national defense industry

In February 2025, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Ukraine's domestic arms production had significantly increased, now accounting for approximately 33–34% of the country's annual military needs. This marks a substantial rise compared to the period before the full-scale Russian invasion when domestic production covered less than 10% of Ukraine's total defense requirements.⁵¹ This growth reflects the nation's intensified efforts to strengthen its defense industry, reduce reliance on foreign supplies, and enhance self-sufficiency in arms manufacturing amid ongoing military operations. Investment in Ukraine's defense industry is essential to bridge the gap while the country awaits NATO membership.

Ukraine's defense industry has undergone a significant transformation since 2023, driven by the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion. The sector has seen increased production of ammunition, mines, and various types of military equipment. However, structural and financial challenges remain, requiring further investment and military–technical cooperation with international partners to scale production effectively. The rapid expansion of Ukraine's domestic arms production has been marked by a surge in the manufacturing of artillery shells, armored vehicles, and self-propelled howitzers, such as the Bohdana system.⁵² The shortage of artillery and ammunition has spurred technological advancements in drone warfare, with long-range strike drones emerging as an alternative to long-range missiles.⁵³ In 2025, Ukraine will have its own ballistic and cruise missiles.⁵⁴ The war in Ukraine has exposed flaws in Western military equipment—"the West prepared for high-precision warfare and limited-scale operations. However, in a large-scale war with massive troop deployment and the extensive use of equipment, we see that simpler and cheaper systems, as well as numerical superiority, provide an advantage." In this context, Ukrainian defense products are technically competitive, more affordable than foreign counterparts, and can be scaled up rapidly. The private sector has played a crucial role in the defense industry, with over 800 enterprises actively contributing to defense production and more than 300,000 employees engaged in the sector.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2024) 'How Ukraine rebuilt its military acquisition system around commercial technology'. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-ukraine-rebuilt-its-military-acquisition-system-around-commercial-technology> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁵¹ Mazurenko, A. (2025) 'Zelensky on NATO membership: Ukraine's 800,000-strong army could be a bonus for the Alliance', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 2 February. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2024/02/8/7441019/> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁵² UNIAN (2024) *Українська оборонка демонструє швидкі темпи розвитку, але для задоволення потреб ЗСУ цього недостатньо – учасники форуму VIA CARPATIA*, UNIAN. Available at: https://www.unian.ua/society/ukrajinska-oboronka-demonstruye-shvidki-tempi-rozvitku-ale-dlya-zadovolennya-potreb-zsu-cogo-needostatno-uchasniki-forumu-via-carpattia-12818166.html#goog_rewarded (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Despite increased production, Ukraine's defense industry faces financial constraints, as its manufacturing capabilities exceed the purchasing power of the Ministry of Defense.⁵⁶ Ukraine's arms production capacity is at Hr. 1.3 trillion (\$31 billion), an amount the state budget cannot currently meet, according to Herman Smetanin, Ukraine's minister of strategic industry.⁵⁷ This creates a paradox in which Ukraine can produce the necessary armaments, yet its armed forces cannot fully utilize them due to funding limitations.⁵⁸ At the same time, European defense industries have struggled to meet Ukraine's urgent military needs. Delays in ammunition and weapons deliveries have weakened Ukraine's battlefield capabilities. For instance, the European Union pledged to deliver one million artillery shells to Ukraine by March 2024 but fell short of this target, highlighting structural inefficiencies in Western military production.⁵⁹ To address these challenges, NATO countries (even in partnership with the EU) could establish a trust fund to procure Ukrainian-made weapons and equipment, ensuring a steady and sustainable supply of armaments to the Ukrainian military. By directly financing the purchase of Ukrainian-produced weapons, NATO and the EU individually or in cooperation could reduce Ukraine's reliance on inconsistent Western arms shipments and provide a cost-effective alternative to expensive Western military systems. For example, the price of the Ukrainian self-propelled howitzer "Bohdana" is approximately \$2.5 million, whereas the French Caesar howitzer costs over \$4 million per unit.⁶⁰

Beyond purchasing new weaponry, NATO and the EU could also launch a parallel initiative, or a dedicated mission, focused on the systematic repair and maintenance of Ukraine's extensive stockpile of damaged military equipment. A structured NATO-led repair initiative would restore thousands of inoperable military assets, effectively strengthening Ukraine's combat readiness. This effort would also utilize Ukraine's industrial and logistical capacities, creating jobs and boosting economic resilience while reducing pressure on Western arms suppliers.⁶¹

Finally, weapons and ammunition made in Ukraine and delivered to the frontline occasionally are not of good quality.⁶² Some weapons and ammunition supplied by partners to Ukraine for frontline use have occasionally been of substandard quality as well. NATO and EU countries should think of enhanced partnership and foreign investment in Ukrainian defense production to ensure its quality.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kyiv Post (2024) *Ukraine's defence industry expansion faces funding challenges*, Kyiv Post. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/42068> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

⁵⁹ Borrell, J. (2024) 'EU will only supply half of the promised shells to Ukraine by March', *Reuters*, 31 January. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-will-only-supply-half-promised-shells-ukraine-by-march-borrell-2024-01-31> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁶⁰ ZN.UA (2025) *Українська оборонна промисловість: які переваги, недоліки та ризики для Європи*, ZN.UA. Available at: <https://zn.ua/ukr/ECONOMICS/ukrajinska-oboronna-promislovist-jaki-perevahy-nedoliki-ta-riziki-dlja-jevropi-.html> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

⁶¹ Interview with defense planning expert Robertas Sapronas in Kyiv, 11 Feb 2025.

⁶² Yanina Sokolova. **Новий НЕБЕЗПЕЧНИЙ БРАК у МІНАХ! Що в біса відбувається?! Яніна знає!** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeuSx4DqbPs>.

Internal balancing strategies (2): accountability and democratic control

The third chapter examines internal balancing strategies, with a strong focus on accountability and democratic control within the defense sector. It explores how democratic governance, transparency, and respect for human rights contribute to strengthening the effectiveness, legitimacy of and trust in the armed forces. A key emphasis is placed on democratic control of the armed forces. The chapter highlights the importance of protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of military personnel, integrating human rights considerations into defense policies. Additionally, it examines NATO anti-corruption frameworks, including mechanisms to improve transparency in defense procurement, ensure financial accountability, and uphold ethical integrity in the defense sector. The chapter also explores the role of civil society in defense governance, explaining the dilemma of stronger collaboration between civil society organizations and defense institutions and its impact.

4.1 Democratic control of the armed forces

In 2023, NATO allies outlined recommendations for key reforms that Ukraine needs to undertake prior to joining the alliance.⁶³ While the communiqué did not specify the exact reforms, offering a more general outline, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg clarified during a briefing that the priorities include combating corruption, reinforcing the rule of law, and ensuring the protection of human rights and minority rights.⁶⁴ Ukraine is working to reinforce democratic oversight and accountability within its defense and security sectors, a crucial step toward aligning with Euro-Atlantic standards and ensuring transparency in governance. However, the main obstacle is that the process of the review of the Law on National Security has stalled. The review is needed to address emerging challenges, refine existing provisions, and adapt to the evolving security landscape. For instance, in Ukraine, the appointment and dismissal of the Chief of Defence of the armed forces are executed by the president of Ukraine upon the proposal of the minister

of defence. However, there is no fixed term for the CHOD position; tenure is at the discretion of the president. The CHOD can be dismissed by the president of Ukraine at any time through a presidential decree. Therefore, legal acts occasionally need greater clarity and experts invite Ukraine to consider the following aspects on strengthening democratic civilian control:

- Reforming the command-and-control system (C2). The MoD is working to align the C2 structures with NATO standards to improve operational efficiency, interoperability, and accountability. There must be clear hierarchies and reporting lines to delineate responsibilities between civilian leadership and military command.
- Expanding the role of civilian oversight bodies, such as parliamentary committees, to ensure that defense policies and budgets are subject to democratic scrutiny. It must be clearly written what parliamentary committees can oversee, how and when.
- Enhancing the involvement of Ombudspersons, civil society organizations, independent think tanks, and experts in monitoring defense policies and practices
- Lack of specialized parliamentary committees with the necessary expertise to oversee defense and security sectors comprehensively
- Unclear legal provisions ensuring access to sensitive and non-sensitive military information, reducing public scrutiny and trust
- Potentially weak mechanisms for ensuring civilian judicial oversight over military justice processes, which are being introduced
- Reinforced oversight of security process in the de-occupied areas

⁶³ NATO (2024) 'NATO-Ukraine relations: Official texts', *NATO Official Documents*, Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/official_texts_220818.htm (Accessed: 20 January 2025).

⁶⁴ LB.ua (2023) *NATO bloc provided recommendations to Ukraine*, LB.ua, 29 November. Available at: https://lb.ua/world/2023/11/29/586638_blok_nato_nadav_ukraini_rekomendatsii.html (Accessed: 20 January 2025).

4.2 Building integrity framework

Experts have emphasized that in the process of NATO integration, the absence of anti-corruption measures is the one aspect that cannot be overlooked or excused⁶⁶. Since 2007, Ukraine has participated in NATO's Building Integrity (BI) Initiative, which provides practical assistance and advice for strengthening integrity, accountability and transparency in the defense and security sector.⁶⁷ NATO has facilitated training programs for Ukrainian defense officials, military personnel, and civil servants to raise awareness of integrity issues (for instance, anti-corruption initiatives in defense procurement or military recruitment) and equip them with tools to combat corruption. A significant focus of the BI Program has been reforming Ukraine's defense procurement system to ensure transparency, prevent fraud, and improve efficiency.⁶⁸ The program encourages the involvement of civil society organizations in monitoring the defense sector, fostering public accountability, and building trust between the government and citizens. Currently, the focus is on the following:⁶⁹

- Capacity building and improvement of the good governance and corruption prevention principles of the National Agency of Corruption Prevention
- Integration of the BI Discipline into the curriculum of the UA defense and security sector educational academies, applying the NATO BI Discipline Reference Curriculum requirements

- Strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the institutions of its system (National Police, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, State Emergency Service) in the area of building integrity and corruption prevention
- Capacity building on compliance, risk management and integrity for the Joint Stock Company “Ukrainian Defense Industry”

Despite notable progress, Ukraine faces several challenges in implementing the anti-corruption measures. In January 2025, Ukrainian authorities arrested Oleh Druz, the chief psychiatrist of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, on charges of illegal enrichment.⁷⁰ This arrest highlights both challenges and progress within Ukraine's justice systems, which aim to fight against corruption. It is highly complex to address and eliminate corruption within Ukraine's defense sector, particularly in the current context of ongoing war. Prior to the conflict, systemic corruption was already deeply entrenched in various institutions, including the defense establishment. However, the war has exacerbated these challenges in several critical ways. Some individuals who were previously implicated in corrupt practices remain in positions of power. The urgency of defense procurement and the need for rapid decision-making have prevented the imposition of anti-corruption measures. And the war has led to a massive influx of international funds and military assistance to Ukraine. While these resources are crucial for Ukraine's defense, they also present new opportunities for mismanagement.⁷¹

⁶⁶ DCAF-OSCE-Ukrainian MoD, General Staff and Experts meeting in Geneva, 19–21 February 2025.

⁶⁷ NATO *Building Integrity (BI) in Defence and Security Sectors*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natohq/topics_68368.htm?selectedLocale=en (Accessed: February 2025).

⁶⁸ NATO *Building Integrity (BI) in Defence and Security Sectors*. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natohq/topics_68368.htm?selectedLocale=en (Accessed: February 2025).

⁶⁹ Meeting with NATO representatives in Kyiv, 12 February 2025.

⁷⁰ Kyiv Post (2025) 'Ukraine's military ombudsman: In 20 days, soldiers sent almost 4,000 appeals and complaints', *Kyiv Post*, 31 January. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/45790> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁷¹ Comments provided by DCAF expert Rebecca Petra Mikova, Jan 2025.

4.3 Mainstreaming human rights

There appears to be an adequate structure in Ukraine to protect the human rights of armed forces personnel. However, the specific functions remain unclear, and there may be overlapping responsibilities. The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights monitors the rights of military personnel, investigates complaints, and ensures compliance with human rights standards. On December 30, 2024, President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed human rights activist Olha Reshetylova to the newly established position of military ombudsman.⁷² She received 3,876 appeals from servicemen in the first 20 days of work in 2025. The most frequent requests cover failure to refer to a military medical commission and treatment, and the problem of transferring soldiers between units.⁷³ However, the legal framework for military ombudspersons is not defined and her role is not supported by a staff.⁷⁴ At MoD a dedicated structure has been established—the Central Directorate for the Protection of Military Personnel—to address rights violations and improve accountability. It seems the structure primarily deals with socio-economic rights. According to Ukrainian CSO Pryncyp, Ukraine has made significant progress in this area and the work should continue to ensure adequate protections for servicemen who report violations.⁷⁵ Some improvements are needed to shield soldiers from potential retaliation. In some instances, servicemen may hesitate to file complaints due to

concerns over repercussions, particularly in cases where commanding officers possess discretionary power that could be misused.⁷⁶

Although human rights violations are not systemic and institutions do respond to them, individual cases still arise that require resolution. Ukrainian soldiers have reported extended periods of frontline deployment without adequate rest or rotation.⁷⁷ In 2025, reports indicated a desertion crisis, with soldiers expressing disillusionment due to constant attacks, insufficient support, and unrealistic orders from commanders. The government's response has included investigations and policy evaluations to address these concerns.⁷⁸ Another example is linked to a Ukrainian military officer who has been charged with abusing and humiliating cadets at the National Academy of Ground Forces for over a year, using physical violence and degrading punishments.⁷⁹ As previously noted, Ukrainian institutions have taken appropriate measures to address these issues, and their efforts should continue to ensure servicemen are protected from potential retaliation. In certain cases, military personnel may be reluctant to report violations due to fears of possible consequences, particularly when commanding officers hold discretionary authority that could be misused. Strengthening protective mechanisms, whistleblower institutes⁸⁰ and oversight structures remain essential to creating a conducive environment for reporting violations within the armed forces.

⁷² Kyiv Independent (2024) *Zelensky appoints human rights activist Olha Reshetylova as first military ombudsman*. Available at: <https://kyivindependent.com/zelensky-appoints-human-rights-activist-olha-reshetylova-as-first-military-ombudsman/> (Accessed: 15 February 2025).

⁷³ Kyiv Post (2025) 'Ukraine's military ombudsman: In 20 days, soldiers sent almost 4,000 appeals and complaints', *Kyiv Post*, 31 January. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/45790> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁷⁴ DCAF-OSCE-Ukrainian MoD, General Staff and Experts meeting in Geneva, 19–21 February 2025.

⁷⁵ Presentation provided by CSO Pryncyp during DCAF organized meeting in Truskavets, Ukraine, July 2024.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kyiv Post (2024) *Ukraine's troops exhausted after nearly two years of war*, *Kyiv Post*. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/27248> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

⁷⁸ The Guardian (2025) 'A "tired mood" has changed: Ukrainian army faces desertion crisis', *The Guardian*, 31 January. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/tired-mood-changed-ukrainian-army-desertion-crisis> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁷⁹ Ukrainska Pravda (2024). "Beat and humiliated cadets: An officer of the National Academy of Ground Forces has been officially charged." Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2024/06/11/7460251/> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁸⁰ In September 2023, the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) launched the Unified Whistle-blower Reporting Portal (<https://whistleblowers.nazk.gov.ua>).

4.4 Civil society and possible dependence

Collaboration between the MoD and civil society organizations (CSOs) has been instrumental in enhancing the nation's defense capabilities, promoting transparency, and ensuring democratic oversight. For instance, in October 2024, the MoD and CSOs convened to prioritize improvements in medical support for service members. Discussions focused on the management of individual first aid kits, assembly of medical backpacks, and certification of Ukrainian tourniquets based on combat experience.⁸¹ Electric drones assembled by Kyiv Polytechnic students are now in service with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The ground drones were sent to evacuate wounded soldiers to the 23rd Separate Special Forces Battalion in the Eastern sector.⁸² The Ukrainian think tank StateWatch prepares a monthly digest featuring monitoring of the State Logistics Operator's procurement and other updates on Ukraine's dynamic of defense procurement reforms. They monitor and advise the MoD and other defense institutions in the area of anti-corruption measures.⁸³ DCAF and the Ukrainian CSO the League of Officers have continued and intensified cooperation with the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the General Staff in reinforcing the implementation and accountability of IHL in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

In 2024, Ukraine's Ministry of Defense established the Donor Council for Institutional Reforms, with support from representatives of civil society organizations. The donor council's work will involve various forms of assistance, including expert support, material and technical aid, the development of expert recommendations and analytical materials on national defense policy, as well as consultations on NATO interoperability.

These collaborative efforts represent a significant asset to the armed forces of Ukraine but capacity building of the defense sector needs to be prioritized. Limited funding and resource constraints for CSOs can impede the effective implementation of joint initiatives. The growing reliance on civil society organizations for service provision may inadvertently weaken the institutional capacity, expertise, and self-sufficiency of defense structures. Several CSOs and consultancies have played a direct role in supporting Ukraine's defense planning process, proving highly effective in the short term. However, this raises questions about the long-term sustainability of such involvement. This could lead to the disclosure of sensitive information and the emergence of actors lacking proper oversight and control. Over time, excessive reliance on external actors may weaken the government's authority over national defense strategies and decision-making processes.

⁸¹ Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2024) *The Ministry of Defence and civil society representatives have set priorities to improve medical support for military personnel*. Available at: <https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/the-ministry-of-defence-and-civil-society-representatives-have-set-priorities-to-improve-medical-support-for-military-personnel> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

⁸² Video posted by КПІ ім. Ігоря Сікорського. Дрони КПІшників рятують життя на фронті <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDAKujMoO-0&t=84s>.

⁸³ Interview with Head of StateWatch Chairperson, Anastasiia Khymchuk in Kyiv, 10 Feb 2025.

Conclusion

Ukraine's integration into NATO represents both a strategic imperative and a formidable challenge. Given the existential threat posed by Russia, NATO's collective defense framework would serve as a robust deterrent against future hostilities. Integration into the alliance would not only solidify Ukraine's security but also contribute to the overall stability of the European security landscape. However, NATO membership is a process and given the current geopolitical realities, it is prudent to explore EU-led security initiatives, coalitions of the willing, and bilateral security guarantees to ensure stability during the transition period.

Ukraine has made significant efforts in enhancing both technical and institutional–intellectual interoperability with NATO. One of the key outcomes of this war is Ukraine's transition to standard NATO weaponry. As the war continues, Soviet-era equipment is steadily being phased out, most military hardware now being produced by Ukraine's defense industry adheres to NATO calibers, and air defense systems are being modified to accommodate NATO missiles. At this stage, it is reasonable to conclude that the challenge of technical interoperability has been effectively resolved. The efforts to align defense procurement processes with NATO standards demonstrate Ukraine's capacity to transition into the alliance. Ukraine has proven its capability to implement NATO standards and the lessons learned from its battlefield experience contribute to enhancing NATO's standards.

Efforts related to democratic control of the armed forces, further institutional reforms, human rights and integrity need to be further continued. A gap exists in the mentality and leadership culture of senior military personnel, as only a limited number of commanders have attended Western military schools. This experience would facilitate the adoption of Western leadership styles and operational approaches. While Ukrainian military academies have incorporated NATO-standard manuals into their training, it remains uncertain to what extent these practices are

consistently applied on the front lines. Achieving full integration will require time, with military education reform and personnel policies playing a crucial role in ensuring a structured transition.

It is important to highlight that institutional and intellectual interoperability extends beyond NATO integration; it encompasses strengthening Ukraine's military capabilities domestically, strengthening more effective society-state cooperation, and reinforcing democratic oversight within the security sector. These efforts are not only crucial for aligning with NATO standards but also play a fundamental role in ensuring Ukraine's internal stability and making it a reliable security partner for the EU. By addressing these internal structural factors, Ukraine can build a more resilient and self-sufficient defense framework, which in turn enhances its strategic position in a post-war context.

To support Euro–Atlantic integration, Ukraine should continue modernization of the national defense industry. Establishing a NATO or EU trust fund to procure Ukrainian-made weaponry, along with sustained foreign investment, will be essential to maintaining production capacity and ensuring quality control. NATO and the EU could create a mission aimed at the systematic repair and maintenance of Ukraine's large inventory of damaged military equipment.

By incorporating these various elements, Ukraine can reinforce its national defense and establish itself as a credible contributor to NATO and European security while upholding democratic values. This approach will ensure that Ukraine not only continues its fight on the battlefield but also demonstrates its role as a defender of both security and democratic values.

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