

# MOTIVATION, COMPETENCE, AND ADAPTABILITY: LEVERAGING CIVILIAN-MILITARY TALENT SYNERGY AS UKRAINE'S STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE ADVANTAGE

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*Ukraine's experience in defense human resource management during times of crisis underscores the strategic importance of aligning talent with tasks rather than focusing solely on numbers. The effective mobilization of educated, experienced civilians into leadership roles within the armed forces has significantly enhanced Ukraine's resilience and operational effectiveness. While civilian specialists have not wholly replaced military leaders, their integration has acted as essential lubrication for the complex machinery of the defense system, increasing efficiency and reducing obstacles. Institutionalizing this hybrid model, supported by targeted training, inclusive leadership doctrines, and clear policies recognizing civilian contributions, offers a paradigm for contemporary and future security challenges. As warfare becomes more hybrid and multidimensional, Ukraine's model illustrates that adaptability, diverse skillsets, and intelligent human resource management can be decisive factors in military success. The combined motivation, advanced leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit of civilian specialists, when strategically integrated, have become core elements of Ukraine's defense resilience and a source of international admiration. This study contributes a key lesson for nations navigating modern defense personnel challenges in volatile security environments.*

**Key words:** *Civilian-military integration, defense human resource management, hybrid warfare, talent management, crisis mobilization, strategic leadership, adaptability, Ukraine defense forces, military resilience, security workforce development.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

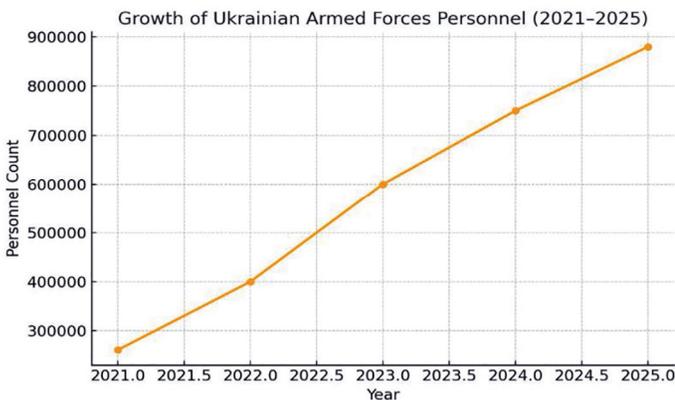
In the field of Human Resources Management, especially within the realm of Defense Resource Management, the principle of assigning the right people to the right positions at the right time remains a cornerstone of organizational efficiency and national security. This becomes increasingly relevant during periods of heightened threat or conflict, when effective human resource deployment may determine not only operational success but the survival of the state.

In February 2022, Ukraine was subjected to an unprovoked, full-scale military invasion by the Russian Federation, whose armed forces significantly outnumbered Ukraine's Defense Forces in both manpower and equipment. This numerical superiority played a crucial role in the initial success of the invasion, which advanced from seven different directions. As a result,

Ukraine suffered the rapid loss of extensive territories in the early days of the conflict. In an effort to support the embattled Ukrainian military, ordinary civilians - professionals from various sectors - rushed to assist. The world watched in awe as footage circulated globally, showing Ukrainian authorities handing out Kalashnikov rifles to anyone willing to defend their country. What emerged was a hybrid defense force - composed of traditional military personnel and highly educated civilians - whose synergy proved vital to Ukraine's resilience.

## 2. THE CHALLENGE OF WAR: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

With the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) experienced an unprecedented demand for manpower. The mobilization of hundreds of thousands of individuals



**Fig. 1** Growth of AFU personnel (2021-2025). The figures given based on the President Zelensky's claim, including several open sources data. [1]

became necessary to counter the aggression. As the numbers of servicemen and women grew, so too did the size and complexity of the military's structural units and command apparatus. However, the rapid scaling of the armed forces exposed a significant shortfall: a shortage of qualified officers and administrative personnel capable of effectively managing the growing military infrastructure.

Unlike enlisted personnel, senior officers cannot be trained or promoted in a matter of weeks or even months. Years of education, experience, and leadership development are typically required to produce competent military commanders. This created a critical gap in the operational capabilities of the entire Defense Forces of Ukraine.

### **3. UKRAINE'S HYBRID SOLUTION**

To mitigate the shortage, Ukraine turned to an unconventional yet effective solution: integrating highly educated civilian professionals into military roles. These included top managers, project managers, IT specialists, logistics professionals, and administrative experts - individuals with strong leadership backgrounds and social influence but no prior military experience. These professionals, whom we may refer to as "hybrids," brought to the Armed Forces a fresh perspective, modern management skills, and agile problem-solving capabilities.

It would be counterproductive to employ a corporate executive or a highly qualified specialist as an enlisted soldier, especially during a strategic shortage of command personnel. Instead, these individuals were given a chance to be positioned within newly created Departments and Directorates for logistics, procurement, analytics, communication and technological support units, as well as cyber security, where their experience could yield the highest benefit.

### **4. THE LEGAL AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

Recognizing this, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed Decree No. 893/2024 [2], which allows mobilized individuals with a master's degree and at least 2 years of management experience in civilian life to be appointed to various positions, including the rank of colonel. With the simultaneous assignment of the officer rank.

"Our goal is to attract individuals with management experience to officer positions in the Armed Forces," emphasized Defense Minister Rustem Umerov. "The key factor for appointment to leadership positions should be practical management skills, not merely years of service or ranks." [3]

"Many strong professionals have joined the army through mobilization. Previously, without military education, they could only hold enlisted positions. We must replenish the Army with professional

cadres and give talented managers all opportunities for development. The Army must be technological and modern", - added Deputy Minister of Defense for Digitalization Kateryna Chernohorenko. [4]

This highlights a critical imbalance that had existed before: the military, having finally gained access to highly qualified civilian professionals - previously out of reach in peacetime - was unable to fully capitalize on their potential. These individuals, often far exceeding the capabilities and experience of junior officers, were confined to enlisted roles. This not only stifled operational effectiveness but also created tension and conflict within the ranks. The army, having finally gained the resource it had long desired - highly skilled specialists - could not use them effectively due to regulatory barriers that placed them in subordinate positions. These talented professionals were expected to follow orders from

officers who, though trained, lacked the same level of practical leadership experience. This mismatch created friction that could no longer be ignored. Addressing this imbalance through legal reform was essential to maintaining morale, cohesion, and efficient command structures.

The decree provided a structured and lawful pathway for integrating civilian expertise into the military's command and administrative frameworks without undermining military discipline. Through this legal mechanism, the UAF significantly enhanced its capacity to address planning, operational, and logistical challenges.

## 5. COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

To further explore the impact of this approach, we examine the qualitative distinctions between professional officers and hybrid officers in the table below.

**Table 2** Human quality comparison between Career Officer and Hybrid Officer (based on the author's personal observations)

Criteria	Career Officer	Civilian
Military Experience	Extensive	Limited or none
Administrative Skills	Developed within military	Advanced in civilian sector
Adaptability	Moderate	High (due to cross-sector skills)
Flexibility	Limited due to discipline and subordination	More freedom in decision making

Criteria	Career Officer	Civilian
Initiative and Creativity	Constrained due to military regulations	Rewarded financially for both
Strategic Thinking	Military-focused	Multidimensional
Leadership Style	Command-centric	Team-oriented inclusive and innovative

As a result of hybrid approach Ukrainian Army received new human qualities, that has led to notable improvements in operational and strategic effectiveness across key areas:

1. *Military Technology and Systems* – Civilian experts have been instrumental in advancing Ukraine’s use of modern technologies such as Unmanned Systems and software tools for situational awareness on the battlefield like “Delta”, application for the artillerymen “Kropyva”, and SAP-based logistical accounting systems.

2. *Defense Procurement and Logistics* – based on the market experience civilian professionals introduced efficient procurement mechanisms and supply chain management, crucial for sustained operations.

3. *International Cooperation* – Hybrid officers, often fluent in multiple languages and experienced in communication, significantly strengthened Ukraine’s defense dialogue with Western partners, improving aid coordination and support for Ukraine.

This fusion of military discipline with civilian innovation has resulted in a more agile, versatile, and forward-looking defense force, capable of responding effectively to modern security challenges.

## 6. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND NOVELTY

Historically, the integration of civilians into military operations has occurred during periods of total war. For instance, during World War II, the United States and the United Kingdom mobilized industrial managers, scientists, and engineers to support the war effort, especially in logistics, intelligence, and weapons development. However, these individuals typically worked in the civilian sector or as advisors and were rarely integrated directly into military command structures.

In the United States, in 1940 - 42, such top managers as William S. Knudsen (former head of General Motors) and Charles E. Wilson (future Secretary of Defense, then president of General Electric) were invited to join the government. Knudsen received a commission as

a lieutenant general and was put in charge of military production, but remained largely a superstructure over the army organization rather than commanding actual troops. [5]

The creation of the War Production Board (WPB) in 1942 is a prime example of the integration of civilian experts into the management of military-industrial power: the WPB coordinated production, material distribution, and resources between the Army, Navy, and industry, but did not exercise direct military control at the front. [6]

Ukraine's model is distinct in that it not only utilizes civilian expertise but does so by officially incorporating these individuals into the military hierarchy through formal ranks and responsibilities. This level of integration - during an active war - is relatively unprecedented and reflects a novel approach to defense management under crisis.

The strategic success of Ukraine's hybrid model may thus serve as a blueprint for modern conflict adaptation, where conventional military structures are insufficient to address complex hybrid warfare challenges.

## **7. A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON INTEGRATION**

It is widely accepted that military veterans transitioning to civilian life often begin their second careers not at entry-level positions, but in senior,

well-compensated roles, thanks to their leadership experience and strategic outlook. This integration is not only normalized but encouraged by both the public and private sectors.

Following the same logic, the reverse integration - of seasoned civilian professionals into the military - should not provoke skepticism among career officers. These "hybrids" bring complementary skills to the defense sector, bridging gaps that traditional military education may not cover. This bilateral flow of expertise strengthens both spheres and provides a powerful argument in favor of flexible personnel policies during national emergencies.

## **8. CROSS-SECTOR COMPARISONS AND INSIGHTS**

Let us compare both categories from another angle - how they perform across civilian and military domains. Retired military officers often transition into senior roles in the corporate or public sectors: security directors, emergency response coordinators, consultants in strategic planning. They rarely begin at the bottom; their leadership acumen places them into influential roles.

Now consider the reverse. When civilian experts - entrepreneurs, lawyers and even MP's, program directors, communication companies top managers, engineers - are

integrated into military structures, they bring a wealth of creativity and modern approaches, as well as attract the others. Historical examples show that revolutionary and guerrilla movements often drew their leadership not from military academies, but from civilians. Che Guevara, a trained physician, became one of the most iconic guerrilla leaders. Similarly, T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), a British archaeologist, played a crucial military role in the Arab Revolt during World War I. These examples underline that the ability to lead and adapt in combat does not reside solely with career soldiers.

By incorporating civilian leadership into military frameworks, Ukraine is harnessing this dual potential - aligning wartime necessity with peacetime ingenuity.

## **9. COMPETITION FOR HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Armed Forces are in constant competition with the civilian sector for human resources. In most cases, the civilian market prevails, offering higher salaries and more flexible conditions. This problem is well known to military recruiters across developed countries, as they confront it daily. However, during wartime and general mobilization, the military gains a unique opportunity to attract a wide range of civilian professionals who are otherwise inaccessible in peacetime.

The effective and rational use of this resource necessitates a revision of certain doctrines and policies. Leadership must be open to adapting traditional regulations to new realities, where highly qualified civilian experts can play a key role in strengthening national defense.

As Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "The necessary knowledge for a high position in military action ... [is] to be gained by experience of life as well as by study and reflection... These are things the knowledge of which cannot be forced out by an apparatus of scientific formula and machinery: they are only to be gained by the exercise of an accurate judgment in the observation of things and of men, aided by a special talent for the apprehension of both." [7]

As a practical manifestation of these ideas, some of the most effective combat units in the Ukrainian Armed Forces today are led by individuals without formal military education who joined the military after Russia's full-scale aggression. Several of them have been awarded the title of Hero of Ukraine for being most effective on the battlefield.

## **10. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

Ukraine's experience offers a valuable lesson in defense Human Resource Management: in times of crisis, it is not only numbers that matter, but the strategic alignment of

talent to tasks. The mobilization of educated, experienced civilians into leadership roles within the military has contributed substantially to Ukraine's resilience and operational effectiveness. Although civilian specialists did not fully replace military leaders, they became the vital oil that kept the gears of the Armed Forces running smoothly with fewer obstacles and more effectively.

The institutionalization of this hybrid integration model could serve as a paradigm for nations navigating complex security environments in the 21st century. For this to be successful, it must be accompanied by targeted training programs, inclusive leadership doctrines, and clear policies that recognize the added value of civilian input within military structures.

As global warfare becomes increasingly hybrid and multidimensional, the success of Ukraine's model illustrates a key maxim for the future: adaptability, diversity in skillsets, and intelligent HR management may outweigh sheer numbers or traditional hierarchies in determining victory.

The motivation, experience, talents, adaptability, entrepreneurial spirit, and advanced leadership qualities of mobilized civilian specialists - when wisely and strategically integrated into the

structure of Ukraine's Defense Forces - have become one of the decisive factors behind the country's resilience. This synergy has not only become a source of national pride for the Ukrainian people but also earned admiration from international allies, who recognize in Ukraine a model of modern, adaptive warfare that meets the demands of the 21st century.

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