

## MODERN UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN THE ARMY: REALITIES AND PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:** The article is devoted to the analysis of the problem of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the realities of war in the gender dimension, the prospects of women in the army, and the issue of the leadership of servicewomen in Ukraine. The issue is extremely relevant today due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. The authors aim to find out the prospects of Ukrainian women in the Armed Forces, including leadership positions of Ukrainian women in the army following the example of NATO and a number of countries all over the world. There are already about 8,000 female officers in command positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is noted that modern Western Europe demonstrates a tolerant attitude towards women who serve in the military forces or participate in armed conflicts as warriors. It is considered effective to use the synergy of women and men on the battlefield to achieve military goals. The article analyzes both the attitude of modern Ukrainian society to women warriors and the reactions and experiences of the women warriors themselves, who are well-known to the Ukrainian public. In conclusion it is stressed that a qualitatively new state of the Ukrainian army has been formed, in particular, thanks to the active participation of women.

**Keywords:** Armed Forces of Ukraine, gender component of military policy, servicewomen, military elite, Russian-Ukrainian war.

### 1 Introduction

When it comes to the Ukrainian women who are fighting in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine against the Russians for the right of their people to exist, to live a full life in freedom, it is not difficult to perceive that in a society that has felt a real threat of destruction by a cruel enemy, a positive, moreover, grateful attitude towards their defenders has been formed during the open full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation. At the same time, however, an average Ukrainian still believes that this state of affairs is due to a certain deficiency of servicemen, and therefore certain hopelessness, not thanks to a free and conscious choice of the women who joined the ranks of the Armed Forces. Moreover, sometimes in the public informational field of Ukraine, the voices are heard which deny the need and even the possibility of women's participation in military operations as servicewomen, and their service in the army on the whole (Hrabovska, 2022b). Such beliefs clearly contradict current global trends. It is worth mentioning that today Ukraine has surpassed NATO countries in the number of women serving in the army, which is unprecedented for NATO member states. It is worth recognizing that Ukrainian women join the ranks of the state's defense forces not only and exclusively because of their own desire, but due to the pressures of the life circumstances or military duties as in the case of doctors and nurses. However, there are no relevant surveys or sociological studies on this issue at present.

Today, in a large number of armies around the world women soldiers have become commonplace. Wikipedia, the most accessible resource for the mass reader, provides the following information about women in armies around the world: "The proportion of female military personnel in the world's armies varies. It is about 3% in India, 10% in the United Kingdom, 15% in France, 13% in Sweden, 16% in the United States, 15.3% in Canada, and 27% in South Africa." (Wikipedia, 2024). The most prominent example of women's presence in the army is Israel. However, women also serve in the armed forces of France, Germany, Canada, Spain, Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, China, Eritrea, North Korea, Peru, Malaysia, Benin, and others. Obviously, this is a global brand today which should be seriously analyzed.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current realities of the Ukrainian women's participation in the war against the Nazi occupiers and to assess the prospects of women in the Ukrainian Defense Forces, including such an important issue as prospects for the women's leadership in the army.

### 2 Analysis of scientific publications

There are few academic studies devoted to the participation of the Ukrainian women in the war against the Russian aggressors. However, both the problem itself and the specifics of its coverage in the scientific research of the contemporary Ukrainian social and humanitarian studies deserve special attention, primarily due to the fact that this massive recruitment of women into the ranks of the Armed Forces during a full-scale war in the center of Europe is a unique phenomenon. This reality requires special attention and investigation.

The formation the existing gender stereotypes are emphasized by such researchers as O. Syniavska, N. Tymchenko, and L. Tymoshenko who analyze the protection of women's rights in the military forces in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war (2023). It is worth accentuating the authors' statement that "the experience of 2014 showed that from the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine women have joined the fight side by side with men. They have responded to the mobilization, some of them have become volunteers, and together with men they performed all the necessary duties required at that time. This trend is still going on. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war significant reforms have been made to protect the rights of women in the military forces, which are primarily aimed at gender equality and security. Ukraine actively supports equal opportunities for women in the military ranks, ensuring their access to various professional opportunities and career growth. This contributes to the development of women's individual potential and strengthening their status in the military community" (Syniavska, Tymchenko and Tymoshenko, 2023, 114).

Nevertheless, there are still many problems caused by the specifics of the conflict situation in Ukraine, which are constantly emerging during the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the existing stereotypes of the mass consciousness as for the gender roles in the society.

The correlation of this issue with the historical reality, wars, conflicts, and revolutions, in which women have taken an active part is interesting and useful. This is the subject of the study by Kiriukhina M. V. and Khomiak O. V. "Historical Feats of Women from Ukraine in Wars" (2023). The authors prove that "war makes no exceptions, affecting both women and men. At the same time, women's history in war has long remained unwritten. In Soviet times, the truth about the fate of women in the war was forbidden, suppressed, or even distorted" (Kiriukhina and Khomiak, 2023, 62). The need to recreate historical justice regarding the role of women, for example, in World War II, changes some fundamental accents regarding the importance of participation or non-participation of the entire citizenry in the struggle for the country's survival, the ability of the community to consolidate and organize popular resistance to the enemy.

The article "Equality of Rights of Men and Women in Military Service in Ukraine: Wartime Challenges" by O. Chervyakova, O. Sereda, and Yarygina analyzes the parity of rights and responsibilities of women and men in the defense and security sector of the modern Ukrainian state. The article focuses on the current state and promising ways to ensure gender equality in the defense and security forces of Ukraine. The authors emphasize that the main purpose of their research is to study the policies, standards and procedures of NATO member states and other countries that have succeeded in reforming their own defense

and security forces (Chervyakova, Sereda and Yarigina, 2022, 109).

The authors of the report pay special attention to this issue in a number of scientific articles and a monographic studies (Vlasova, Hrabovska and Halytska 2018).

Some special attention should be paid to the academi publications devoted to the problem of Ukrainian women as a possible military elite of the country, the problem which is obviously absent in the socio-humanitarian discourse of modern Ukraine. Meanwhile, it seems that this topic should become one of the most relevant in the context of the study of gender aspects of reforming the Armed Forces in accordance with NATO principles. (See more about this: Hrabovska and Tsiurupa, 2023).

### 3 Results

In Ukrainian history, as well as in the histories of other peoples of the Earth, women's participation in combat was sporadic and never widespread, unless we recollect the legendary Amazons, whose testimonies of military victories should still be attributed to myths and legends, not to the scientifically proven facts, despite the existing modern historical research on this issue (Roslyakov, 2004).

However, we have many examples of stories of Ukrainian women who along with men stood up to defend Ukraine in wars against an external aggressor and in the national liberation wars, which were numerous in the Ukrainian history. Some of these fighters expressed indignation at the unequal treatment of women as partners in the struggle. Thus, Ulas Samchuk testified that Olena Teliha categorically refused to stay in the safe Lviv when her comrades went to the East in 1941 during World War II. Samchuk writes that Olena: "strongly and completely disagreed with the decision of the OUN leadership in Melnyk to expel her from the group. How? Will she stay here? "Alone"? At a time when "there"... And so on, and so forth. Oh, no! Never! Her stormy, explosive nature is overflowing, her small room is full of noise, she is engaged in fierce battles and negotiations with all members of the group, proving that this is utter nonsense, mobilizing the opposition of our entire army, demanding justice. ... *What does war mean? What are the benefits? How can we divide into men and women here? No and no! She does not agree with this, she will not agree with this!*" (emphasis added) (Samchuk, 1998, 85).

It is noteworthy that Olena Teliha appeals to the sense of justice, which is one of the key elements of the Ukrainian mentality (Hrabovska, 2022a). Now modern Ukraine is sure to undergo revolutionary changes. And this is not only due to reforms in the Armed Forces on Ukraine's path to NATO, but also due to the realities of the 10-year war with Russia. The reflections of real war "practitioners" are extremely interested for the consideration of the problem discussed here. For example, Ruslan Onyshchenko, the former commander of the Shakhtar volunteer battalion (the Shakhtar volunteer battalion was transformed into the Tornado company during the ATO), while noting that he is generally against women in war, nevertheless admits that it is very difficult without them. He writes that one of his mistakes as a commander was that: "...I allowed girls to serve in the battalion. The best girl fighter remains a woman, and this is a problem. ... Why did I gather all the women who wanted to serve in the battalion? Because nothing can replace women's hands. When a soldier is wounded, women's hands make him endure and survive, and this is a fact. Anyone who knows anything about war will understand me. And so, knowing that women's hands are needed by fighters, I endured women's follies, women's flirtations and romances, which are unavoidable if you have women in your unit. But all this was worth for the sake of the magical power of women's hands. And I will say not only hands, but also lips, breasts, stomach, and ass" (Onyshchenko, 2021, 126-127).

Perhaps too frankly and unusually for our "chaste" humanities, but this is the truth of war and it is worth hearing, knowing and working with. And then the warrior author turns to the philosophical reflections on life, which also deserve attention. So "...when a young fighter is wounded, he is scared because he feels he is losing his strength, he wants to see a woman next to him. This is probably an instinct. We come into the world and are put on a woman's chest. And when we leave the world, we want to hold a woman's breast or a woman's hand. ...If you do not understand what I am talking about, then you are lucky and have not died and have not felt how loudly death breathes and how cold its breath is. ...Death loves heart-to-heart conversations while you can still speak. So, believe me, before death or when it seems like it's the end, you want to confess something and cling to the sweetest thing - a woman's breast or lips. That's how we are as people, and it's normal, because a woman is the beginning of life, and you always want to be in an embrace with life. Yes, that's exactly right. That's why I was patient and accepted girls into the battalion who remain girls even in uniform" (Onyshchenko, 2021, 127).

These reflections of an experienced Ukrainian military commander echo the statement made by US General Robert B. Heller to the US Senate after the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan saying that it is no longer possible to go to war without women, and that the synergy of men and women should be used to resolve global conflicts (Trobaugh, 2018).

The full-scale war of eruption against Ukraine has accelerated the speed of social time for Ukrainians. Public opinion and public opposition often lag behind the realities of this war. While objections are raised against women's participation in combats, or healing properties of women's hands, breasts, lips, etc. are praised, Tetyana Chornovol is driving the racists away from Kyiv with her Stuhna. And we already have had many examples of the undeniably heroic participation of Ukrainian women in combat (Bilozerska, 2021). The Ukrainian community should listen to the opinion of Lyudmyla Darahan, State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine: "We have already overcome the stereotype that women cannot fight. Now we need to overcome the stereotype that a woman cannot command." (Espresso TV, 2023).

It is significant that "Today, on the battlefield in Ukraine, we have the largest number of women in modern world history. They prove themselves not only as good military financiers or doctors, but also as brave soldiers who faithfully defend their homeland. Our task is to do everything we can to help them build their careers," said Natalia Kalmykova, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Veterans Fund and now Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine. (Armyinform, 2023) Obviously, Ukraine will follow the path of modern Israel in reorganizing its army, when women and men who are fit for military service serve in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). In Israel, all women are liable for military service on an equal footing with men. However, women serve one year less than men, namely 2 years, and may not be mobilized due to pregnancy or religious beliefs. Israeli women join the IDF at the age of 18, just like men in this country. Like men, they participate in combat operations. Women in this country can serve in the air force, ground forces, navy, artillery, border guard, assault forces, etc. Even before the war with Hamas, every third Israeli soldier was a woman.

In 2011, the Israeli army welcomed General Orna Barbivai, who, upon taking office as Major General of the IDF, declared her support for the principle of gender equality and equity in her country's army and congratulated women who are able to break down established stereotypes and barriers. This is not the only example in the modern world when a woman becomes a representative of the country's military elite (Hrabovska and Tsiurupa, 2023) E.g., Brigadier General Pamela McGahan joined NATO's top military and political leadership, and General Jacqueline D. van Oost became the commander of the Department of Logistics of the US Department of Defense.

As the researcher Elizabeth M. Trobeau notes: "Women have been part of the U.S. Army and its campaigns since the American Revolution. With the advent of the Women's Army Corps in 1943, women could officially enlist in the military. During this time, recruits faced unofficial smear campaigns that dramatically reversed recruitment. Over the past 70 years, the roles of women in the military have changed as rapidly, and in some cases faster, than society has changed. Many of these changes have been good. For example, many women have excelled in careers, specialties and skills. However, women still face stereotypes about who they are and how well they perform. These attitudes and beliefs threaten the integrity of the Armed Forces, as well as their mission to defend the United States, notes the author of the analytical report on women in the US Army" (Trobaugh, 2018).

It is worth paying attention to the valid fact that women's political leadership is much more "numerous" and well-known than military leadership. Nevertheless, even in the military sphere, women have certain achievements, which still vary depending on the country and its military policy (An Interview with Jacqueline D. Van Ovest, 2022). The facts of women's military leadership deserve attention and study, for example: in 2018, Susan Helm (UK) became the General of the British Army; in 2008, Igrid Grenset became the first female General of the Norwegian Armed Forces; in 2019, General Juliet Charron became the first woman to command the Canadian Armed Forces; in 2001, Wanda Karachi became the first female General of the Bundeswehr (Germany); from 2015 to 2017, Loretta Lynch served as Secretary of Defense of the United States and was the first female Secretary of Defense of the United States; in 2016, Patricia Horner became the first woman to serve as Commander of the U.S. Northern Command; in 1994, Marianne Nilsson became the first female general of the Swedish Armed Forces; in 2011, Miriam Alsheville became the first female general of the Israeli Defense Forces, etc. Modern Ukraine cannot yet boast of such achievements in the field of implementing the principles of gender democracy in the military, but such prospects are now widely available to Ukrainian women in the army.

As it is known, military leadership is represented by individuals who hold key leadership positions in the armed forces of their own country or military alliances. They may hold different positions in the military and have different ranks. They are responsible for the strategic and tactical direction of military operations. They also control the discipline, training, defense and offense of troops in accordance with national security objectives. Military leaders include: generals, admirals, marshals, armed forces commanders, and field commanders. Each of the above military leaders is responsible for a specific area of work in the army. The highest ranking officer in the army is a general. They can hold various positions, including commanders of brigades or military districts, command the air force, and be responsible for operations in airspace. Admirals are responsible for operations at sea and on the water. They are the leaders of the naval forces. Outstanding military leaders of the highest rank, who have a special status for their merits in military service, are given the rank of marshal. The military elite also includes the commanders of the armed forces. These are ministers of defense and chiefs of general staff. These military officers coordinate the work of the entire army. Field commanders, who lead troops on the battlefield, can also be military leaders when they show charisma and heroism.

Today, there are 7,700 female officers in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Evidently, some of them can make their way to military leadership. In the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, there are 81 freelance gender advisors, and 74 more volunteer advisors monitor the implementation of NATO principles on gender equality.

In 2023, the statistics of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is as follows: "As of October 2023, there are more than 62 thousand women, which is 7% of the total number of the Armed Forces. Of these, 43.5 thousand are servicewomen, and 18.6

thousand are civilian personnel. 7.7 thousand women are officers; 11.7 thousand are non-commissioned officers, and 22.7 thousand are soldiers. At the same time, approximately 5 thousand women from the Armed Forces are in the combat zone." (Espreso TV, 2023).

Compared to 2021 before Russia's full-scale invasion, by now the number of women in the Armed Forces has increased by 40%. The Ministry of Defense is actively pursuing gender reforms in the Ukrainian army. In particular, it: "abolished restrictions on positions for women. Now a woman in the army can be a driver, grenade launcher, deputy commander of a reconnaissance group, commander of an infantry fighting vehicle, repairman, machine gunner, sniper, etc.; abolished age restrictions: previously, women aged 18-40 could sign a contract, now they can become contractors up to 60; they are provided an opportunity to receive military education at all levels. Women can master the same specialties as men and then serve in a wide range of positions which raise awareness in the army on the issues of equality of the Ukrainian army (trainings, seminars, educational programs, round tables with the participation of international organizations); all documents developed by the Ministry of Defense are subject to gender expertise taking into account all aspects of equality; women can work on the logistics as servicewomen to ensure that clothing and ammunition meet their anatomical features; to work to prevent sexual harassment and other human rights violations" (Barsukova, 2023).

Of course, if it is necessary to enact a law on general mobilization in Ukraine, public sentiment and public opinion on this issue should be taken into account. Currently, there is no question of the mandatory mobilization of the Ukrainian women into the Armed Forces in discussions of the draft of a new law on calling up into a military service in Ukraine. As a part of the investigation in this project a number of colleagues from Ukrainian universities and research institutions were interviewed concerning their attitudes toward general mobilization, as a result some interesting trends are found out. Before Russia's open aggression against Ukraine the vast majority of interlocutors of different age groups were against general mobilization for women (out of 10 respondents 8 were completely against it rejecting the possibility), after two years of war, almost all of them (7 out of 8) have changed their minds, noting that "...obviously, it cannot be avoided, because this is the reality." Now all 10 respondents speak positively about servicewomen as their defenders ("...our girls are heroines! They protect all of us today, even at the cost of their own lives! Many thanks to them!" - this opinion is unanimous, all 10 respondents support those women who voluntarily joined the Ukrainian Defense Forces to defend their homeland). These are the results of a survey of colleagues on possible general mobilization for women and men in Ukraine, conducted by Iryna Hrabovska in 2021 and 2024.

This survey cannot be considered representative, but it has revealed a certain tendency for changes in the mass consciousness of Ukrainian citizens who are currently experiencing a brutal war that threatens the survival of both the Ukrainian state and the nation on the whole. It can be stated that nowadays there is an active movement in the Ukrainian intelligentsia toward recognizing the positive aspects of parity gender democracy. Now a woman in the Armed Forces is "not exotic, though not the norm either" (Korba, 2022).

In reality, even today, despite the participation of Ukrainian women soldiers in battles against the Russian aggressors, "a woman is always forced to prove that she is worth something, that she will not let the guys down, that she can be trusted and relied on. ...She is treated being more scrutinized, while a man in a combat position is automatically respected." Here we quote these thoughts of Maryna Moloshna, one of the women fighters of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, considering that they are illustrative. Similar thoughts are often expressed by women fighters who participate in the combat operations (Korba, 2022).

At the same time the reform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is taking place at a rapid pace. Oksana Hryhorieva, Gender Advisor to the Commander of the Land Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, says: "If earlier it was a post-Soviet army, rough and masculine, now the army is becoming more correct and equal, the qualitative role of women is much greater, they are really demonstrate it." (Korba, 2022).

#### 4 Conclusion

The analysis of the real situation of the Ukrainian women's participation in Russia's current full-scale war against Ukraine suggests that in general servicewomen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the country's Defence Forces play a significant role in the self-preservation of the Ukrainian nation and state while consolidating Ukrainian society around the main task of destroying the enemy on the territory of the independent Ukraine, thus bringing the victory over the enemy. The specific features of the present situation is obviously a wide representation of women warriors at the front, and their active participation in the combat operations. Today, about 5,000 Ukrainian women are fighting for their homeland in the hottest spots on the line of the direct contact with the Russian occupiers. About 8,000 women hold the rank of the officer, and many will be able to join the ranks of the Ukraine's military elite in the future, which is a unique phenomenon in the country's history. In the future, there should be developments in the gender-role distribution in the Armed Forces. The focus is on the formation of the army on the principles of general mobilisation following the example of Israel (this idea is gaining relevance in the mass consciousness of the Ukrainian society today), thus women soldiers will become a significant part of the professional Ukrainian army. The idea of admitting it as an alternative to general mobilisation also has supporters among Ukrainians. While defining the military policy of the Ukrainian state it should be stressed that nowadays the Ukrainian army is being actively restructured in terms of gender in accordance with NATO principles. Special attention is paid to the fact that the active involvement of the Ukrainian women in the country's defense forces, including the Armed Forces, is in line with the leading trends in the modern world concerning the use of the synergy of women and men in the conflicts with the aim of their successful overcoming.

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**Primary Paper Section:** A

**Secondary Paper Section:** AD