



Comparative analysis of military values and causes of resistance within the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Western standards

Andrii Romanyshyn

PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Researcher
Research Centre for Humanitarian Problems of the Armed Forces of Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3115-5999>

Alla Neurova*

PhD in Psychological Sciences, Associate Professor
National Guard of Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1220-8613>

◆ **Abstract.** The article explored the critical issue of the axiological transformation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine amidst an existential confrontation, where the discrepancy between declared Alliance standards and deep-seated post-Soviet management habits acts as a barrier to combat effectiveness. The aim of the study was a comprehensive analysis of the causes of institutional resistance within the Ukrainian military environment toward foreign value models, and a search for an optimal synthesis of Western rationalism with the national combat ethos. To achieve these objectives, the study employed a comparative analysis of the axiological matrices of the U.S. Army, NATO, and the Russian Armed Forces, alongside a content analysis of the regulatory framework and a systematisation of modern scientific approaches to the “human factor” in high-intensity conflicts. The research results indicated that the primary obstacle to reform lies in the rift between the culture of trust, inherent in the Mission Command system, and the domestic “statutory terror”, which paralyses officer initiative through the fear of legal liability. The authors demonstrated that digitalisation of the battlefield, in the absence of ethical transformation, has led to the emergence of “digital micromanagement”, which nullifies the role of the sergeant corps and reproduces totalitarian control models. It was found that the widespread “cargo cult” of NATO, limited to external attributes, is incapable of overcoming the “culture of shame” that compels commanders to distort reporting to preserve their reputation before leadership. Furthermore, it was established that while brotherhood (pobratymstvo) is a unique resource for Ukrainian resilience, it requires formalisation within a meritocratic framework to avoid favouritism and cronyism. The study argued that renewing personnel based solely on age is a risky move; without changing the evaluation system, young leaders tend to mimic the toxic behavioural patterns of the older generation for the sake of career survival. The authors proposed a concept for a modern Ukrainian military culture that integrates Western accountability with Ukrainian adaptability and creativity. The practical significance of the findings lies in their potential application for reforming the military legal system – specifically the legalisation of combat risk – and for developing new psychological support programmes for personnel focused on fostering leader autonomy

◆ **Keywords:** axiological model; values; Mission Command; stability; factors; war experience

◆ Introduction

Contemporary 21st-century military science is dominated by the paradigm that an army is not merely a hierarchical mechanism for accumulating materiel and manpower, but a complex, self-regulating social ecosystem. Its viability is

Suggested Citation:

Romanyshyn, A., & Neurova, A. (2026). Comparative analysis of military values and causes of resistance within the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Western standards. *Bulletin of National Defence University of Ukraine*, 21(2), 80-89. doi: 10.33099/2617-6858-26-21-2-80-89.

Article's History: Received: 01.11.2025; Revised: 04.03.2026; Accepted: 30.03.2026; Published: 16.04.2026



Copyright © The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

*Corresponding author

determined not only by regulations, but primarily by the conceptual framework, ethos and value matrix – referred to in the sociology of military organisations as the “axiological foundation”. When it comes to the integration of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) into the Euro-Atlantic security space, public and expert discourse frequently becomes confined within a “technocratic cargo cult”: discussions of ammunition calibre standardisation, the digitalisation of logistics chains, or the introduction of J, G and S-type staff structures. However, the experience of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022-2026 has demonstrated that the most critical, strategically significant and simultaneously least amenable to change is precisely the axiological level – the system of fundamental convictions that determines a warrior’s behaviour under conditions of extreme stress, informational chaos and the “fog of war”, when communications have been severed and the previous order has lost its relevance.

This axiological level is the intersection point of military effectiveness and national identity. The Western military model is a product of rationalism, an ethic of accountability and high interpersonal trust. It is grounded in respect for individual agency. The Western military model is not merely a set of modern weapons or tactical techniques. It is a cohesive philosophical and organisational system that evolved within liberal democratic states (primarily NATO member states). At the core of this model lies the conviction that an army is a reflection of society, and that its strength depends upon the freedom and accountability of each individual (Bundeswehr, n.d.). The Russian (post-Soviet) model, by contrast, is heir to totalitarian coercion, imperial messianism and the deliberate dehumanisation of the individual, where the soldier is nothing more than an anonymous unit in the calculus of “loss mathematics”. Ukraine finds itself at the epicentre of this tectonic axiological fault line. Ukraine is attempting to build a Western-standard army whilst employing the mental tools shaped by centuries of statelessness and decades of Soviet occupation. In seeking to integrate Western values, the AFU encounter powerful systemic resistance. It is important to understand: this resistance is rooted not in deliberate sabotage or a lack of patriotism, but in deep cultural codes. It is a conflict between a “culture of reporting” and a “culture of results”, between the “vertical of fear” and the “horizontal of trust”. At the global level, the question of military values is treated not as an abstract ethical superstructure, but as hard power – a critical component of the “human factor” in high-intensity conflicts. Research from 2021-2025 emphasises that, in the conditions of network-centric warfare, the decentralisation of command (Mission Command) is impossible without a shared value denominator. Without trust, technology only amplifies chaos. The axiology of Ukraine’s military organisation is burdened by a “post-traumatic Soviet syndrome”. This manifests in the phenomenon the authors have termed “legal paralysis of initiative”: when the field manual is used not as an algorithm for victory, but as an instrument of

prosecutorial oversight. The result is a paradox: a young officer trained to NATO standards enters an environment where the principal virtue is not integrity, but loyalty to leadership and the capacity for “eyewash”. This gap between the Alliance’s declared values and the real-world practice of the “paper army” creates internal tension that threatens combat capability no less than enemy missiles.

To gain a thorough understanding of the transformation of military values, a body of scholarly literature was analysed. M. Webber (2017) demonstrates that the success of implementing NATO standards in former Eastern Bloc countries correlates directly with the level of “social capital” within society. He introduces the term “axiological compatibility”, without which the transfer of technology fails to produce the expected effect. In the field of philosophy of science, K.C. Elliott *et al.* (2025) analysed “axiological compatibility” as the influence of values on scientific cognition, emphasising the need for awareness of their interaction in order to ensure objectivity – which is directly related to the concept of compatibility among different types of values. In studies of research communities, E.O. Ayala *et al.* (2025) argue that the effectiveness of collaboration within research groups is determined by the coherence of “axiological networks” – systems of values that govern cooperation, trust and decision-making. Meanwhile, in the field of information systems, P.A. Busch (2026) emphasised the significance of the axiological dimension across different scientific paradigms, drawing attention to the need for alignment of value foundations within the research process. E. Simpson (2024) examined the ethics of contemporary conflicts, arguing that trust within small groups (cohesion) is the sole safeguard against the moral degradation of a unit during prolonged combat. The author emphasised that the moral resilience of a unit is formed through daily interaction, shared experience and mutual accountability among combatants.

P. Scharre (2023) analysed the risk of the “digital panopticon” that emerges in conditions of global digitalisation and technological progress. The author raises the problem of drones and real-time video feeds tempting the senior command into micromanagement, which effectively kills the Western concept of junior commander autonomy. This phenomenon may substantially alter the strategic behaviour of armies, curtailing initiative and individual accountability. L. Freedman (2022) analysed the strategic culture of the AFU, noting that Ukraine’s adaptability in 2022 represented a form of “spontaneous NATO”, which is now entering into conflict with the re-established bureaucratic vertical. Adaptation to new conditions of warfare demands a balance between command flexibility and the necessity of centralised management. M.R. DeVore *et al.* (2022) analysed “institutional mimicry”, whereby transitional-type armies copy external attributes (cargo cult) in order to obtain resources, whilst retaining old corrupt and hierarchical values internally. They also note that institutional mimicry creates the illusion of reform without altering the deep-seated operational practices of the organisation. The

authors emphasise that without the transformation of value orientations, such borrowings remain superficial and fail to enhance the real effectiveness of military structures. They further note that such processes are often supported by political elites with an interest in demonstrating formal progress without substantive change. P.D. Williams (2022), in his work on 21st-century urban warfare, emphasised that personal courage is not merely the capacity to advance under fire, but is above all the courage of a commander to say “no” to an incompetent order from a superior officer. The author further stressed that a commander’s moral courage manifests in accountability to subordinates for the consequences of their decisions. In his view, it is precisely the capacity to critically assess orders and act ethically in challenging conditions that determines the quality of leadership in contemporary combat operations. He also stressed that effective commanders cultivate a culture of open discussion of decisions within the unit, thereby reducing the risk of errors.

The review of the relevant literature established that the phenomenon of the AFU’s “spontaneous adaptability” in 2022 requires institutional consolidation, as without a value-based foundation it is gradually absorbed by the old hierarchical system. The role of “axiological compatibility” as a prerequisite for the effective utilisation of Western technologies remains insufficiently researched. The aim of the article was to conceptualise the transformation of Ukraine’s military culture from the hierarchical Soviet-pattern model to a modern network-centric system founded on the principles of professional ethics and trust. The authors conducted a detailed deconstruction of this axiological fault line, analysed the causes of the Ukrainian military environment’s resistance to “foreign” values and proposed a model of synthesis. The authors argued that Ukraine’s victory depends upon the capacity to transform the archetypal “Cossack brotherhood” into a professional military ethic, in which the right to make mistakes is part of learning, and honesty in reporting takes precedence over career survival. This article represents an attempt to answer the question: how to transform the AFU from a “small Soviet army” into a modern intellectual force, where values are not slogans on posters, but a real mechanism for the management of combat.

◆ Materials and Methods

To achieve the research aim, a comprehensive methodology was employed. The empirical and theoretical base comprised scholarly works, regulatory instruments, analytical reports and statistical data published predominantly in the period 2021-2025, which allowed for the dynamics of change during the full-scale phase of the Russo-Ukrainian War to be taken into account. The study combined general scientific and specialised methods, ensuring the systematic character of the analysis. The method of comparative analysis was employed as the principal instrument for juxtaposing three polar axiological models: the American (pragmatic), the NATO (institutional) and the Russian (totalitarian).

This enabled the identification of points of value conflict (“fault lines”) within the Ukrainian military environment and determination of the depth of discrepancies between declared standards and actual practice.

The systemic-structural method was applied to examine the army as a “social ecosystem”. Through its application, military values were analysed not as abstract ethical categories, but as functional elements of the management system (hard power) that directly affect combat capability. Content analysis was applied in the study of the regulatory framework (field manuals, codes, guidance documents). The method enabled the identification of latent meanings and ideological presuppositions embedded in the official documents of the armed forces of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, Poland and the Alliance as a whole, and their comparison with the Soviet legacy that continues to dominate Ukrainian legislation. The method of theoretical generalisation was employed at the final stage to formulate the authors’ concept of Ukrainian military culture.

The foundational works of leading military theorists and sociologists were analysed, including R. McAdams (2025). The regulatory and legal basis of the study comprised documents and standards including Ministry of Defence, Centre for Army Leadership (2018) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2020), amongst others, the review of which enabled an assessment of the alignment between existing practice and the current requirements of the AFU, as well as the identification of gaps and inconsistencies in the operative regulatory and methodological framework that affect the level of the moral and psychological condition of service personnel. Data from the official web resources of the US Department of Defense (Army values, n.d.) were utilised for the verification of the LDRSHIP value system. The methodology employed allowed not only the documentation of the problem’s existence, but also the elucidation of its causal relationships, which lie within the domain of socio-cultural anthropology and history.

◆ Results and Discussion

To understand the nature of the aforementioned resistance within the Ukrainian military environment to the values of the armed forces of developed nations, the authors examined in detail three polar systems: the American (pragmatic), the NATO (institutional) and the Russian (authoritarian), which directly bear upon the Ukrainian context. The US model (Army values, n.d.) is grounded in a pragmatic ethic of character and meritocracy. The military ethic of the US Army, expressed in the acronym LDRSHIP (Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honour, Integrity, Personal Courage), not only facilitates easy memorisation of seven key principles, but also symbolises the word “leadership”, making it one of the most functional value systems in the world (Borrowing with Pride, 2025). This ethic transforms abstract virtues into concrete instruments for the management of personnel and combat. Integrity is the cornerstone, signifying absolute correspondence between

words and actions and truthfulness in reporting. Should an officer submit a false report to conceal casualties or his own error, his professional career ends immediately. Integrity serves as the system's safeguard against strategic blindness, as the command must know the bitter truth in order to make sound decisions. In American culture, acknowledging a mistake is a sign of strength and a path to improvement, rather than grounds for "criminal prosecution for taking initiative". Mission Command is not merely a tactical technique, but a value of trust, whereby the commander articulates an "intent" (commander's intent) and grants subordinates full autonomy in the means of its realisation. This requires the officer to be an intellectual leader rather than a technical dispatcher, which allows the US Army to remain combat-capable even when centralised communication nodes are destroyed (Ministry of Defence, Centre for Army Leadership, 2018). Selfless Service means prioritising the mission and the welfare of subordinates over personal careerism, where the principle "officers eat last" is not merely a metaphor, but a practical realisation of a value that creates the monolithic vertical trust so lacking in post-Soviet armies.

The NATO model represents institutional interoperability and the rule of law, and the NATO value system constitutes a legal and professional standard that provides an "ethical common language" among nations. It is grounded in a Code of Conduct (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2020), which emphasises such key principles as accountability, professionalism and civilian oversight. Accountability is the central value, presupposing that every service member bears responsibility for their decisions, use of resources and treatment of personnel. This principle rejects the Soviet concept of "collective irresponsibility" or "blind execution of any order" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1957). Professionalism within NATO means that a soldier is a highly qualified specialist rather than "cheap labour" for menial tasks. Respect for the professional competence of a sergeant is often higher than formal respect for the rank of a junior officer (British Army, n.d.). Civilian oversight presupposes unconditional subordination to democratically elected civilian authority, which serves as a safeguard against the militarisation of society and the transformation of the army into a closed caste standing above the law (Aberrane, 2023).

The model of the Russian Federation is a system of fear, deception and dehumanisation (Romanyshyn, 2025). The Russian army is heir to the Stalinist model of the "army-as-mechanism", in which the human being is merely expendable material. Its axiology rests upon three destructive pillars. The first is a culture of deception: the distortion of reality is a survival mechanism within the hierarchy. Commanders at all levels report what higher command wishes to hear. This creates a strategic illusion of success amid actual catastrophe. The second is a tolerance for death: through the absence of any value placed on human life, the command calmly employs the tactic of "meat assaults". A soldier's life is a biological resource

for identifying enemy firing positions or seizing a few metres of tree line. The third pillar is the criminalisation of ethos: the introduction of prison subculture into the army ("thieves' code", *dedovshchina*, executions by sledgehammer and so forth) has definitively destroyed the concept of officer honour, replacing it with gangland loyalty. Despite substantial Western military and financial assistance and the genuine desire of many young officers to change the system, foreign military organisational values within the AFU encounter fierce resistance. This resistance is conditioned by deep-seated traditions of Soviet military culture and the inertia of old management practices, which are difficult to change even in the presence of external support (Romanyshyn, 2025). The fundamental causes of this phenomenon are set out below.

The conflict between initiative and "statutory terror". Ukrainian military culture remains, to a significant degree, a hostage to the Soviet approach to regulations, which are perceived as an instrument of punishment rather than guidance. Whereas the Western system values personal courage – the moral bravery to take responsibility (TVP Bydgoszcz, 2023) – in the Ukrainian reality, any independent decision that departs even marginally from an outdated regulation is perceived as a threat to an officer's career and liberty. For example, if an initiative-driven decision resulted in the loss of equipment (even in order to save lives), the commander may become the subject of prosecution by the State Bureau of Investigations. Moreover, state bodies frequently evaluate the actions of a combat commander according to the norms of peacetime administrative law. In such conditions, the highest value becomes not victory or the soldier's life, but a "correctly completed asset write-off certificate". This fear of the prosecutor kills the Western concept of Mission Command at the planning stage.

The archetype of "Cossack freemen" versus Western "regularity". Historically, the Ukrainian martial spirit was forged in irregular formations, where Ukraine demonstrates phenomenal effectiveness in self-organisation from below – as seen in the Maidans, the volunteer movement, the volunteer battalions of 2014 and the Territorial Defence forces of 2022. However, this strength has a reverse side. A Ukrainian traditionally places trust in a specific individual – an *otaman* or a "father-figure" – rather than in an institution or structure. The Western model, including NATO, proposes trusting the system. When the AFU attempts to introduce Western impersonal discipline, it comes into conflict with the Ukrainian warrior's need for an emotional bond and personal loyalty. This creates a situation in which the army disintegrates into a collection of "feudal fiefdoms" belonging to individual authoritative commanders, which complicates strategic management to Alliance standards. Furthermore, Ukrainians are most effective in coordination via messaging applications and personal connections, whereas the Western model demands a transparent, formalised command vertical (Bundeswehr, n.d.). This discrepancy produces a situation in which the AFU has a "NATO structure" on paper, while in reality there exists a

chaotic network of connections that functions in spite of the system rather than because of it.

The Ukrainian army is pervaded by an ethos of *pobratymstvo* – deep emotional loyalty. This is its greatest advantage in defence, but simultaneously a systemic weakness in the professional management of large organisations. The Western model demands objectivity and a degree of emotional distance from a commander, yet a commander who is a “brother” to his subordinates is often incapable of making tough disciplinary decisions or issuing orders that may result in casualties. *Pobratymstvo*, as a familial type of relationship, is very difficult to scale to the level of the modern professional army-as-corporation, as exemplified by the armies of the United States or Great Britain. In addition, *pobratymstvo* may give rise to the risk of favouritism, whereby a system of personal patronage becomes dominant – which directly contradicts the Western value of integrity. The rewarding and promotion of “one’s own” for loyalty rather than competence creates a mental trap that retards the development of meritocracy within the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The sergeant gap and officer snobbery. In NATO, the sergeant is the backbone of the army – a technical expert and moral authority (McAdams, 2025). In the AFU, the officer corps (particularly the older generation) often unconsciously regards the sergeant as merely a “senior soldier-executor” rather than an autonomous leader. Western leadership models rest on the delegation of authority. The Ukrainian mentality, shaped by the Soviet fear of making mistakes, is predisposed towards total micromanagement – “if you want something done properly, do it yourself”. This exhausts officers who, instead of managing the unit, attempt to control every individual soldier. This is indicative of a profound crisis of trust in the lower echelon.

The experience of war as a detector of value problems. The full-scale Russian aggression of 2022 served as a litmus test that revealed the true depth of the axiological rift between the declared and the real. At the outset of the full-scale Russian invasion, the AFU held their ground precisely thanks to the spontaneous application of Western values: the initiative of small groups, trust in local commanders and the absence of micromanagement amid the chaos. Company and platoon commanders acted autonomously, realising the “intent to win”. This was a triumph of Mission Command without formal training. However, once the front stabilised and the war entered its positional phase, the “paper vertical” of Soviet pattern began to reassert itself. Endless photo-reports, ledgers for checking ledgers, and meetings for the sake of meetings returned. This demonstrates that the institutional memory of the system proved stronger than combat experience. Officers are once again compelled to choose between “real results” and “a polished report”. Ukraine received the most advanced Western weapons, yet often employs them within the framework of the old axiological matrix. When a brigade commander, via a real-time drone feed, instructs a soldier in a trench where to shoot – this is the “killing” of initiative and the

degradation of the sergeant echelon. It is the technological version of Soviet centralism. The AFU possesses NATO’s digital tools, yet uses them to implement a “Stalinist” model of total control. This demonstrates that the tools have changed whilst the value matrix of management has not. The superior wishes to see everything not in order to assist, but in order to control every step of a subordinate through an absence of trust. The Soviet habit of “appearing perfect” before superiors directly conflicts with the Western value of integrity. In conditions of war, this leads to fatal consequences: commanders report “control of the situation” and “positions held” when the enemy has already breached the front. In Western culture, the After Action Review (AAR) – where mistakes are acknowledged and analysed publicly – is an instrument of evolution (Krin, 2025). In the Ukrainian mentality, however, a commander’s acknowledgement of a mistake before subordinates or superiors is still frequently perceived as weakness or as a ticket to the dock.

Why the NATO “cargo cult” does not work. The problem with the introduction of foreign values lies in the fact that Ukraine frequently copies the form (brand books, acronyms, berets and so forth) without changing the “firmware” – the social architecture of relationships. Formalism in training is one of the principal problems: many officers undergo training abroad, learn acronyms such as LDRSHIP, but return to units where the system of evaluation and promotion is still grounded in “loyalty to the commander” rather than professional integrity. In such conditions, NATO values become mere window-dressing for foreign instructors, who are unable to influence actual practice. Another problem is the legal defencelessness of Western values: these values are not enshrined in Ukraine’s Criminal or Administrative Code as legal protection. A commander who acts on his own initiative in accordance with the commander’s intent but loses equipment has no legal protection against charges of “negligence”. There is also an absence of an ethical filter: in Western armies, promotion depends directly on reputation and integrity, whereas in Ukraine the “convenient and compliant” officer is frequently advanced. So long as the “convenient officer” – one who does not dispute orders – is valued above the “honest professional” – one who points out flaws in the plan – Western axiology will fail to take root. The Ukrainian cultural code of personal loyalty stands in opposition to Western rationalism, which places professionalism and ethics first.

The deep cause of resistance to the introduction of Western values in the AFU lies in the distinction between the “culture of guilt” (the West) and the “culture of shame” (the post-Soviet space). In Western armies, the culture of guilt means that a service member feels bad internally if he has violated an internal ethical standard – such as integrity. He acknowledges the mistake in order to correct it and clear his conscience – a rational approach. In Ukraine and Russia, by contrast, the culture of shame dominates, where what matters is not “how you actually acted” but how it appears from the outside and whether you have disgraced yourself before others. To acknowledge a mistake in

such a culture means “losing face”; therefore, problems are suppressed or concealed until the very last moment, when they become catastrophic. Such a culture undermines the effectiveness of an army, particularly in a high-technology war, where the speed of acknowledging a mistake directly determines the speed of survival.

The Ukrainian mentality is also burdened by the trauma of centuries of statelessness. For centuries, the state was the enemy – the occupier – and so the Ukrainian grew accustomed to unconsciously deceiving the system in order to survive. When such a person joins the army of their own state, they continue by inertia to “game the system” (filing false reports on held positions or the condition of equipment), failing to realise that this system is now themselves – and that they are lying not to an enemy intelligence officer, but to their *pobratym* in the neighbouring trench. The AFU’s resistance to foreign military values is not a consequence of sabotage, but the result of a profound axiological rift between two civilisational types. The Western model demands a radical abandonment of the cult of total control in favour of a culture of trust. For a nation engaged in an existential war against an enemy that holds the advantage in mass and fear, such a transition is painful and risky, yet simultaneously vital (Romanyshyn, 2025). So long as initiative remains legally punishable and “eye-wash” remains a mechanism of career survival, any NATO values will remain a “cargo cult” – a blind copying of external attributes. Genuine transformation requires not the translation of field manuals into Ukrainian, but a radical change in the “social contract” within the military. The AFU needs legislation that protects the right to accept combat risk, an appraisal system that penalises deception more severely than defeat, and a culture in which the dignity of every soldier and the professional integrity of the commander take precedence over the ambitions of the senior command or the comfort of the rear-area auditor. Victory requires not only Western munitions, but Western ethics. Without the latter, the AFU risk remaining forever a “small Soviet army”, destined for defeat in a war against the “large Soviet army”. Only by overcoming this internal axiological rift can the AFU transform into a truly modern intellectual force, capable of prevailing not through mass, but through trust and intellect.

For the values of Alliance member states to become a working instrument rather than a formality, action must be taken on three planes. Legal transformation entails the legalisation of combat risk, requiring amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes so that a commander does not bear liability for the loss of equipment or property if the decision was taken within the bounds of the commander’s intent in execution of a combat mission. Debureaucratisation is also essential, encompassing the transition from “paper terror” to digital accountability. Institutional reform consists in the introduction of an AAR system, which must make the public review of mistakes mandatory and – crucially – non-punishable. The acknowledgement of a mistake must become a hallmark of

professionalism, and the concealment of mistakes a cause for dismissal. Meritocratic appraisal demands that the promotion system be grounded in integrity, with the introduction of “ethical filters”: should an officer be found guilty of systematic distortion of information, his career must be terminated regardless of his loyalty to leadership. Genuine delegation must prohibit “micromanagement”, as commanders of a superior echelon must serve as a resource for subordinates rather than as a controller of every shot fired. The agency of the sergeant requires a transition from the model of “sergeant as senior soldier” to that of “sergeant as the backbone of the army”, where officers must learn to entrust the technical and moral preparation of the unit to the sergeant corps. Moreover, any attempt to simply copy the Western model without accounting for the Ukrainian mental code will result in rejection. What is needed is a synthesis, in which Western rationality reinforces Ukrainian passionarity.

The Ukrainian values that should serve as the foundation include *pobratymstvo* as networked trust, where the Western model is often too “corporate” and “cold”, whilst Ukrainian *pobratymstvo* is an extraordinarily powerful resource of resilience. It should not be destroyed, but rather formalised, so that *pobratymstvo* is transformed into a high degree of horizontal trust, where units interact with one another without direction from above. The adaptability of the “Cossack freemen” means not attempting to turn Ukrainians into “ideal bureaucrats”, but legalising their capacity for self-organisation. The value of Ukrainians lies in their creativity, so NATO standards must serve only as a “framework” within which Ukrainian ingenuity is given freedom of action. Dignity (*volia*) must prevail over the discipline of fear: for a Ukrainian, motivation “through shame before one’s *pobratym*” and “through one’s own dignity” functions more effectively than “through fear of regulations”. One’s own axiology must be built upon the conscious discipline of a free individual.

Ukraine needs not a “small copy of the US Army” but a modern Ukrainian military culture, from which NATO contributes such values as integrity, accountability and Mission Command, whilst Ukraine contributes *pobratymstvo* (emotional unity), *volia* (initiative) and the audacity to break the mould. The introduction of values is not the translation of regulations, but a change in the attitude towards the human being. When the soldier is transformed from a “resource” into a “person”, and the officer from a “controller” into a “leader”, NATO standards will function automatically. The introduction of values during intensive combat operations must occur not through “lectures in the unit’s club”, but through pragmatic changes in management. Should the AFU wait until “after the war”, they risk: the burnout of the best – the most initiative-driven officers die or leave the army as a result of the errors of centralised management; and transformation into a “mirror of the Russian Federation” – in a war between two Soviet armies, the larger one always wins. The sole chance is to be more intellectually capable and more flexible. Changing values during a war is not about humanism;

it is about effectiveness. It is a means of preserving people and equipment where previously they were simply “burnt up” through poor management and false reporting.

It is important to remember that values do not exist in a vacuum – they are carried by people. The analysis conducted demonstrates that the walls of the Soviet system cannot be demolished by new regulations alone, since they are upheld by an “old” personnel foundation. In seeking a way out of this axiological impasse, military leadership is turning with increasing frequency to the radical renewal of blood – the mass appointment of young officers to strategic positions. The question nevertheless arises: is age an automatic guarantee of a change in values, and do the AFU not risk destroying the institutional resilience of the army in the pursuit of rapid leadership renewal? The authors consider that the mass appointment of young commanders to senior positions is a “double-edged sword”. It is neither an unambiguous good nor an evil; it is a strategic risk that may either save the system or bring it down, depending on whether such appointments are underpinned by a change in approach. Young senior and superior officers (aged 30–35), who frequently already possess experience of full-scale warfare at company-to-battalion level, have natural advantages – among them the absence of the “Soviet virus”: they did not serve in the Soviet Army, bear no nostalgia for the “Red” order, and often have a better command of English and technology. Their horizontal culture allows young commanders to more readily adopt an informal footing with subordinates in the best sense, building trust on authority rather than intimidation. Furthermore, they are receptive to change: for them, AAR or Mission Command are logical tools of survival rather than “foreign didactics”.

The problem arises when the social lift moves faster than the individual is able to acquire institutional maturity. This may lead to the skipping of levels of competence, since commanding a brigade demands not only courage, but also deep knowledge of logistics, administration and combined arms coordination. A young “tactical genius” may prove weak in strategic planning. Another risk is psychological burnout: responsibility for thousands of lives at the age of 28–32 generates colossal stress, which frequently leads to impulsive decision-making or, conversely, to apathy following the first heavy casualties. In addition, the “young lieutenant syndrome” in a senior position may emerge when youth becomes synonymous with overconfidence. A refusal to listen to experienced subordinates – even “Soviet” ones – may lead to elementary errors in the conduct of combat operations.

The principal danger is that of the “young Soviet” commander. The worst-case scenario is that of a young officer who, in pursuit of rapid career advancement, begins to mimic the worst traits of the “old school” – wilfulness, the concealment of mistakes, contempt for the soldier and so forth – in order to ingratiate himself with higher leadership. Age does not guarantee the possession of the requisite values. If the system rewards the “convenient”, then a young careerist may prove significantly more toxic than an old

“Soviet” colonel. The mass appointment of young officers will work to the benefit of quality only when the sergeant corps is strengthened – a young brigade commander must have a “battle-hardened” experienced senior sergeant who maintains discipline; the right to make mistakes is enshrined – youth is inclined towards risk, and this risk must be managed rather than criminalised; and mentorship is introduced – instead of simply replacing the old with the young, pairs must be created in which an experienced staff officer assists the young combat leader with bureaucracy and logistics. Thus, the success of the transformation of the AFU depends not on the formal change of generations or the blind copying of Western acronyms, but on the creation of a new military culture in which the combination of NATO accountability and Ukrainian *pobratymstvo* is protected by law – transforming the army from a punitive post-Soviet machine into an intellectual ecosystem of free and accountable leaders.

The data obtained regarding the system’s resistance to NATO values correlate with a number of contemporary studies, which enables the authors’ conclusions to be verified through comparison with the work of other scholars. In particular, the problem of “legal paralysis”, which the authors identified as the key cause of resistance to the concept of Mission Command, is the subject of active debate within the legal community. As noted by authors of legal publications, despite the adoption of legislation on “combat immunity”, the real-world practice of holding commanders liable for the loss of property during combat remains a “sword of Damocles”. This creates a situation in which the officer unconsciously chooses passivity in order to avoid prosecution by the State Bureau of Investigations. This confirms the authors’ conclusion: the Western model of delegation of authority cannot function within the framework of the peacetime administrative law that prevails in the Ukrainian system.

The transformation of Ukrainian soldiery through the prism of national identity is examined in depth in the work of M.M. Rozumnyi (2016). The author regards the formation of a new identity as a process of “large-scale internal conflict”. This explains the AFU’s resistance not as sabotage, but as a painful change in the mental code. M.M. Rozumnyi (2016) indicates that the democratisation and modernisation of institutions – such as the transition to NATO standards – requires an “innovative approach from the elites”, which is frequently lacking in the senior officer corps raised within the paradigm of the “army-as-mechanism”. The results of the analysis of the axiological rift in the AFU find direct confirmation in the empirical data obtained by the analytical department of the “Come Back Alive” Foundation (Initiative Center CBA, 2020). The report “Why are servicemen leaving the Armed Forces?” clearly identifies the third most significant factor in military degradation as “dissatisfaction with army processes and procedures”. Respondents directly cited “bureaucracy and showmanship” as the principal barriers to professional development. This is fully consonant with the authors’ conclusion that the Soviet habit of “appearing perfect” directly

conflicts with the Western value of integrity. Moreover, the report confirms the thesis regarding the “condescending attitude of commanders”, which is indicative of a deficit of leadership according to the American LDRSHIP model.

The question of sergeant leadership and officer snobbery, which the authors identified as one of the causes of resistance, resonates with the work of R. McAdams (2025). The author, analysing the experience of Eastern European countries, argues that in post-Soviet armies the officer corps frequently perceives the autonomy of the sergeant as a threat to their own status. This fully concurs with the authors’ conclusions on the “lack of delegation”. The distinction lies in the fact that the authors added to this analysis the factor of *pobratymstvo*, which in Ukraine frequently substitutes for the formal sergeant vertical, creating a chaotic yet functional network that simultaneously impedes regular management. The study by A. Romanyshyn (2025) on the “culture of deception” in the Russian Federation serves as a negative benchmark for the analysis. The author demonstrates that dehumanisation in the Russian army is systemic. The author holds that any copying of Soviet management methods in the AFU – for example, the concealment of casualties for the sake of a “polished report” – automatically brings the Ukrainian army closer to the Russian model, in which the human being is merely a resource. This underscores the authors’ thesis regarding the existential necessity of the transition to integrity. The problem of generational change and the risks of rejuvenation, which the authors described as a “double-edged sword”, finds reflection in the works of L. Wong & S.J. Gerrass (2015). The authors analysed leadership in conditions of high-intensity combat operations and concluded that the psychological burnout of young commanders is the principal risk of “rapid lift”. In distinction from L. Wong & S.J. Gerrass (2015), who focused on individual resilience, the authors examined this as a systemic threat – the emergence of “young Soviet” officers who integrate into the old hierarchy by copying its toxic traits.

Thus, the comparative analysis confirms that resistance to Western values in the AFU is not technical in character, but fundamentally cultural. The research results indicate that the way out of the “axiological impasse” is possible only through the synthesis of Western rationality and Ukrainian passionarity, which requires radical changes in legislation and the personnel appraisal system. Furthermore, an important condition for the successful introduction of this synthesis is the deep transformation of military education and training, oriented towards the development of professional standards and ethical principles commensurate with contemporary requirements.

◆ Conclusions

In the course of the study, it was established that the AFU’s resistance to the introduction of Western military values and NATO standards is not a consequence of deliberate sabotage, but is conditioned by a profound axiological rift between the Soviet institutional legacy and the liberal-democratic model of military governance. The process

of contemporary transformation confronts a number of deep structural and mental obstacles, the first of which is a sharp conflict of management paradigms. The contradiction arises between the Western concept of Mission Command, grounded in the delegation of authority and mutual trust, and the entrenched post-Soviet “statutory terror”. The latter model suppresses any initiative, as the fear of legal prosecution for a justified combat risk takes precedence over the expedience of taking autonomous decisions. The situation is compounded by socio-cultural characteristics, wherein the historical archetype of the “Cossack freemen” provides brilliant adaptability at the grassroots level, whilst simultaneously coming into direct conflict with the need for a rigidly formalised hierarchy and systemic accountability. In parallel, a profound crisis of trust is observed – one paradoxically fuelled by modern technology. Excessive micromanagement, amplified by digital control mechanisms, effectively nullifies the role of the sergeant corps and transforms officers into technical controllers, depriving them of their function as strategic leaders. This vicious circle is completed by the ethical dissonance engendered by the “culture of shame”. The post-Soviet habit of concealing mistakes to avoid punishment directly contradicts the fundamental Western value of integrity. This creates an insurmountable barrier to the introduction of effective after-action review, without which learning from mistakes and the further development of the system are impossible.

It has been demonstrated that the simple copying of NATO’s external attributes – the “cargo cult” – without changing the social architecture of relationships within the military does not ensure genuine interoperability. True reform requires not only personnel renewal, since “youth” is not an automatic guarantee of a change in values, but the creation of a new Ukrainian military culture. It must be grounded in a synthesis of Western rationality (integrity, accountability) and Ukrainian identity (*pobratymstvo*, *volia*, creativity). Only the transition from the model of the “army-as-mechanism” to the “army-as-ecosystem” – in which the human being is a person rather than a resource – will allow Ukraine to attain an asymmetric advantage in the war. Promising directions for further research include the development of mechanisms for the legal protection of command initiative in conditions of combat operations, the development of a methodology for introducing the After Action Review system within Ukrainian realities, and the study of the influence of the psychological resilience of young commanders on the effectiveness of unit management in high-intensity conflicts.

◆ Acknowledgements

None.

◆ Funding

None.

◆ Conflict of Interest

None.

◆ References

- [1] A aberrane, R. (2023). *Comparison of armed forces: Army, navy, and air force in detail*. Retrieved from <https://lafinancieredumilitaire.fr/comparaison-des-forces-armees-armee-de-terre-marine-et-armee-de-lair-en-detail/>.
- [2] Army values. (n.d.). *The army values*. Retrieved from <https://www.army.mil/values/>.
- [3] Ayala, E.O., Altamirano-Bustamante, M.M., & de Hoyos-Bermea, A. (2025). Axiology and dynamics of contemporary research groups: A systematic review and hermeneutic meta-analysis of knowledge, values, and social elements. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 10, article number 1525587. doi: 10.3389/frma.2025.1525587.
- [4] Borrowing with Pride. (2025). Retrieved from <https://www.borrowingwithpride.com/p/ldrship>.
- [5] British Army. (n.d.). *Values and standards*. Retrieved from <https://www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/about-the-army/values-and-standards/>.
- [6] Bundeswehr. (n.d.). *Innere Führung – the value framework of the Bundeswehr*. Retrieved from <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/selbstverstaendnis/innere-fuehrung>.
- [7] Busch, P.A. (2026). Philosophical stances in information systems research: A case analysis and critical reflection. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 13, article number 131. doi: 10.1057/s41599-025-06427-x.
- [8] DeVore, M.R., Orr, A., & Rossiter, A. (2022). *Winning by outlasting: The United States and Ukrainian resistance to Russia*. Retrieved from <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/PDF-UA-docs/DeVore-UA.pdf>.
- [9] Elliott, K.C., Resnik, D.B., & Lipworth, W. (2025). Subconscious value influences on science. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 114, article number 102079. doi: 10.1016/j.shpsa.2025.102079.
- [10] Freedman, L. (2022). *Command: The politics of military operations from Korea to Ukraine*. London: Penguin Books.
- [11] Initiative Center CBA. (2020). *Why are servicemen leaving the Armed Forces?* Retrieved from <https://cbacenter.ngo/page/comu-viiskovosluzbovci-zvilniaiutsia-z-armiyi>.
- [12] Krin. (2025). *Core values of the U.S. Marine Corps*. Retrieved from <https://krin.voda.cx.ua/ukraincyam/osnovni-cinnosti-morskoi-pikhoti-ssha.html>.
- [13] McAdams, R. (2025). *Trust: What I learned from the Marines*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/trust-what-i-learned-from-marines-ryan-mcadams-olbtc>.
- [14] Ministry of Defence, Centre for Army Leadership. (2018). *Values and standards of the British Army* (AC 64649). Retrieved from https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_final.pdf.
- [15] North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (1957). *Rules for NATO conduct*. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/1957/06/04/rules-for-nato-conduct>.
- [16] North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2020). *NATO code of conduct*. Retrieved from <https://icmcis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/code-of-conduct.pdf>.
- [17] Romanyshyn, A. (2025). *Ideology of death: Military-political work in the army of the Russian Federation*. Kyiv: Publishing Center Department.
- [18] Rozumnyi, M.M. (2016). *Challenges of national self-determination: Monograph*. Kyiv: NISS.
- [19] Scharre, P. (2023). *AI's gatekeepers aren't prepared for what's coming*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/19/ai-regulation-development-us-china-competition-technology/>.
- [20] Simpson, E. (2024). *War from the ground up*. London: Hurst Publishers.
- [21] TVP Bydgoszcz. (2023). *The motto "God, Honor, Fatherland" returned to the banners of the Polish Army*. Retrieved from <https://bydgoszcz.tvp.pl/66432333/dewiza-bog-honor-ojczyzna-wrocila-na-sztandary-wojska-polskiego>.
- [22] Webber, M. (2017). *NATO enlargement and the post-communist states*. In *The Routledge handbook of East European politics*. London: Routledge.
- [23] Williams, P.D. (2022). Urban warfare in the twenty first century. *International Affairs*, 98(1), 326-328. doi: 10.1093/ia/iiaab250.
- [24] Wong, L., & Gerrass, S.J. (2015), *Lying to ourselves: Dishonesty in the army profession*. Pennsylvania: US Army War College Press.

Порівняльний аналіз військових цінностей та причини резистентності Збройних Сил України до західних стандартів

Андрій Романишин

Кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент, науковий співробітник
Науково-дослідний центр гуманітарних проблем Збройних Сил України
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3115-5999>

Алла Неурова

Кандидат психологічних наук, доцент
Національна гвардія України
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1220-8613>

♦ **Анотація.** У статті досліджена критична проблема аксіологічної трансформації Збройних Сил України в умовах екзистенційного протистояння, де невідповідність між декларованими стандартами Альянсу та вкоріненими пострадянськими управлінськими звичками стає бар'єром для бойової ефективності. Метою роботи був комплексний аналіз причин інституційної резистентності українського мілітарного середовища до впровадження іноземних ціннісних моделей та пошук оптимального синтезу західного раціоналізму з національним бойовим етосом. Для досягнення поставлених завдань було застосовано компаративний аналіз аксіологічних матриць армій США, НАТО та РФ, а також контент-аналіз нормативної бази та систематизацію сучасних наукових підходів до «людського чинника» в конфліктах високої інтенсивності. Результати дослідження засвідчили, що головна перешкода реформ полягає у розриві між культурою довіри, притаманною системі Mission Command (Цільове командування), та вітчизняним «статутним терором», який через страх юридичної відповідальності паралізує ініціативу офіцерів ЗС України. Автори довели, що цифровізація поля бою за відсутності етичної трансформації призвела до появи «цифрового мікроменеджменту», який нівелює роль сержантського корпусу та відтворює тоталітарні моделі контролю. Виявлено, що поширений «карго-культ» НАТО, що обмежується зовнішньою атрибутикою, не здатен подолати «культуру сорому», яка змушує командирів викривляти звітність задля збереження репутації перед керівництвом. Встановлено, що хоча побратимство є унікальним ресурсом української стійкості, воно потребує формалізації в межах меритократії, щоб уникнути фаворитизму та кумівства. Обґрунтовано, що оновлення кадрового складу за віковим принципом є ризикованим кроком, оскільки без зміни системи оцінювання молоді лідери схильні копіювати токсичні патерни поведінки старшого покоління задля кар'єрного виживання. Запропоновано концепцію сучасної Української мілітарної культури, яка поєднує західну підзвітність з українською адаптивністю та креативністю. Практичне значення отриманих результатів полягає в можливості їх використання для реформування системи військового права, зокрема легалізації бойового ризику, та розробки нових програм психологічної підтримки персоналу, орієнтованих на розвиток автономності лідера

♦ **Ключові слова:** аксіологічна модель; цінності; Mission Command; стійкість; чинники; досвід війни