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RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR. INSIGHTS FROM MODERN CONFLICTS FOCUSING ON THE POLISH TERRITORIAL DEFENSE FORCES THROUGH A POLEMOMOLOGY AND IRENOLOGY APPROACH

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study explores the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Poland's Territorial Defence Forces (TDF), focusing on their adaptation to hybrid threats and expanded civil-military roles. Through comparison with defence models in Finland, Israel, and Ukraine, it proposes measures to strengthen resilience, decentralisation, and societal integration.

Material and methods: The study used a qualitative approach combining polemology and irenology. Methods included analysis of official documents, 11 expert interviews (with TDF officers, civil defence managers, analysts), and comparative study of Ukraine, Finland, and Israel. Clausewitz's strategic depth and Galtung's violence typologies framed the analysis. Despite limited access to operational data, triangulation ensured validity. Findings focus on hybrid defence, civil-military integration, and regional security architecture.

Results: TDF development shows progress in hybrid readiness, drone use, and community-based defence. Strategic areas – ports, rivers, and borderlands – require more brigades. Recruitment faces challenges due to lack of employer support. Modular, short-term training is gaining interest. TDF's social role has grown – supporting crisis response, disinformation and psychological resilience. Comparative insights highlight the value of decentralised, civic-anchored defence systems.

Conclusions: The study confirms that effective defence must combine kinetic capacity with civil resilience. TDF's evolving role – military, social, and symbolic – demands expanded deployment (e.g., 30 brigades in key zones) and full integration into national cybersecurity and crisis systems. Combatting *cultural lies* and strengthening civic trust are vital. TDF represents a shift toward multi-domain deterrence, bridging state and society, warfighting and peacebuilding.

KEYWORDS: *Russo-Ukrainian War, Irenology and Polemology, Polish Territorial Defense Forces, qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews, case study comparison, Territorial Defence Forces*

INTRODUCTION

Peace and armed conflict represent two fundamentally opposed states of human experience – symbolising the tension between stability and disruption, cooperation and hostility, and ultimately, between societal development and its collapse. While often examined separately, the dual study of peace and conflict offers profound insights into how states, societies, and institutions interact, negotiate coexistence or fracture under pressure. These interactions do not occur in isolation but are embedded within larger civilisational, cultural, and geopolitical frameworks – understood here as encompassing religious traditions, historical experiences of statehood and conflict, prevailing value systems (such as collectivism or individualism), and national narratives that influence perceptions of security, sovereignty, and legitimacy. In the Polish context, such frameworks are shaped by post-communist transformation, Catholic social teaching, and memories of foreign occupation and resistance in Ukraine and Russia by competing interpretations of shared history and identity formation. (Bauman & Tester, 2013, p.11). In this light, integrating polemology – the study of the causes and dynamics of war – with irenology – the study of the mechanisms for sustaining peace – allows for a more nuanced, interdisciplinary understanding of both the conditions that ignite armed conflict and the institutional and social architectures that promote lasting stability. While science alone may not directly influence political or military realities, raising awareness of potential threats and fostering a deeper understanding of peace can facilitate strategic thinking and policy formation shifts. As Ferguson (2013, p.34) argues, the education of future generations on these complex conditions is essential, but its effectiveness hinges on societies' ethical and intellectual progress. The contemporary relevance of this dual framework is vividly illustrated by the Russo-Ukrainian War, which exemplifies the emergence of hybrid warfare – an intersection of conventional military operations, cyber offensives, disinformation campaigns, and proxy engagements. Russia's actions during the annexation of Crimea and its support for separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk reveal a strategic blend of kinetic force and information warfare (Dijkstra et al., 2022). These tactics undermine physical and psychological resilience by exploiting

political ambiguities and destabilising institutional trust, particularly in democratic states (Galtung, 1969, p.37).

Countering such hybrid threats demands strategic adaptations that transcend the traditional battlefield. Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) have shown that contemporary security challenges blur the boundaries between military and civilian spheres, physical and virtual domains, and official and unofficial actors. Therefore, nations must cultivate defensive, decentralised and socially embedded architectures capable of repelling armed aggression, mobilising civil society, maintaining narrative control, and fostering national cohesion. The Polish Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) emerge as a particularly instructive case within this context. Informed by the theoretical underpinnings of polemology and irenology, the research explores the evolving role of the TDF in responding to hybrid threats while simultaneously strengthening societal resilience. The proximity of the Polish security environment to the Ukrainian conflict and the shared exposure to Russian strategic ambitions make this comparison relevant and necessary. This article aims to demonstrate how contemporary experiences of conflict inform the development of defensive and civilian-military structures and how these lessons might be applied to recalibrate national defence strategies. The following sections will investigate how TDF doctrine has responded to the shifting character of modern warfare, incorporating innovations in mobility, technology, and community integration. At the same time, this study seeks to apply the ideological lens to assess the peace-promoting functions of the TDF, particularly its role in civilian education, public trust-building, and crisis preparedness. By doing so, the paper contributes to the broader academic discourse on war and peace while offering practical insights for policymakers engaged in defence transformation and resilience planning.

INTEGRATING POLEMOLOGICAL AND IRENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on peace and armed conflicts delves into the causes and outcomes of war, with irenology studying mechanisms promoting coexistence between nations such as Russia and Ukraine and polemology analysing the roots and nature of war. Both fields are interconnected, as conflicts disrupt peace, and post-conflict peace restoration becomes paramount. Peace signifies social and political harmony but requires addressing underlying societal issues and threats, like violence stemming from social injustice (Ferguson, 2013; Galtung, 1969). Combining irenological and polemological approaches is essential to understanding conflict origins and promoting lasting peace. Polemology, grounded in positivism, seeks to comprehend war's origins to prevent future conflicts (Bouthoul, 1970, p.50). Its analytical principles have influenced various strategic doctrines, including NATO's Comprehensive Approach concept, which integrates military, political, and civil instruments to address root causes of conflict rather than merely containing its symptoms. For example, polemological research into ethnic violence and structural injustice informed elements of the UN's Agenda for Peace (1992), encouraging the adoption of preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peacebuilding as formal components of international security policy. Its theory connects to societal progress but has been linked to nature, suggesting conflict's inevitability and resource struggles (Grotius 1901; Malthus 1925). Typically, real war motives lie in political entities' economic and political conditions (Gleditsch, Metternich, Ruggeri 2014). The Russian-Ukrainian conflict exemplifies *cultural lies*. Russia perpetuates the narrative of Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people', thereby undermining Ukraine's distinct historical and national identity. President Vladimir Putin articulated this view in his July 2021 article *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, published on the official Kremlin website. In it, Putin claimed that *Russians and Ukrainians were one people-a single whole*, attributing the current division to Western influence and alleged artificial separation. He further stated that *true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia*, a formulation that not only delegitimises Ukrainian independence but also lays ideological groundwork for military and political intervention (Putin, 2021). The annexation of Crimea leveraged historical

narratives, and state media shaped the conflict's portrayal, often demonising Ukrainian forces (Galtung, 1969, p.15). These cultural misrepresentations hinder peace and reconciliation, emphasising the need to revisit shared histories with a focus on mutual understanding.

The research underscores the role of demographics in the study of armed conflicts. This idea, drawing parallels with Malthus's demographic-economic conflict assumptions (Malthus, 1925, p.47), asserts that excessive population growth without proportional consumer goods production could incite wars of conquest (Dahrendorf, 2012; Galtung, 1981; Sorokin, 1927). Figures like Plato, Malthus, and Bouthoul identified demographic-economic causes but did not endorse wars based on these reasons. Bouthoul suggested that wars handle demographic surpluses (Bouthoul, 1970, p. 28), aligning with Malthus's perspective. For Sorokin, social stratification creates conditions ripe for conflict (Sorokin, 2017, p.44), while Bouthoul associates conflict with economic surpluses and political motivations, not biology. Bloch (1899) asserts that technology and weapons precipitating war have yet to materialise fully, emphasising that conflicts are politically and economically driven.

Polemology, the study of conflict, integrates various disciplines but needs to be more specialised, often failing to impact societal reality (Czupryński, A., El Ghamari, M., & Zboina, J., 2021). Despite its advancements, global understandings of war have evolved (Stiglitz; Kaldor 2013), emphasising the central role of violence in conflicts. However, defining wars should go beyond merely counting casualties, as they can be legally contextualised between political entities (Grotius 1957; Zwoleński 2003). It is vital to examine all forms of armed and structural conflicts, the latter relating to internal social issues in a country. Such structural conflicts can escalate to armed confrontations, or post-resolution can resurface due to societal disagreements (Galtung, 1981, p.21).

In contrast to polemology, **irenology focuses on the proactive construction of peace**, addressing the absence of violence (negative peace) and the presence of justice, equity, and participatory governance (Galtung, 1969; 1981). Irenological frameworks examine the social conditions that enable peaceful coexistence, such as trust-building, institutional legitimacy, and intergroup reconciliation mechanisms. In the post-conflict context of Eastern Europe, this perspective is particularly relevant, as Ukraine and its neighbours seek long-term solutions

to ethno-political fragmentation, war-induced trauma, and cross-border tensions. Scholars such as Lederach (1997) argue that sustainable peace requires *transformational processes* rooted in dialogue, memory work, and inclusive governance – elements often marginalised in purely strategic or security-centred approaches. Irenology thus complements polemology by illuminating the socio-political scaffolding necessary for peace resilience, particularly through non-military actors such as civil society, education systems, and religious institutions. Both approaches allow for a holistic understanding of conflict dynamics and the multidimensional pathways towards stability when applied together.

Holistic research in irenology and polemology is advocated when studying peace and armed conflict in Ukraine. The data gathered in these studies pertains to peace and war, as they are intertwined social phenomena influenced by the observer's perspective. It is emphasised that peace and conflicts are inseparable from their immediate and broader contexts. One can posit that conflicts do not arise without links to these environments. The research environment, object, and subject relationships are paramount in shaping the research outcome. Understanding the conditions that maintain or threaten peace and the origins of armed conflicts necessitates examining shifts in the peace landscape and its surrounding context. These shifts either lead to conflict escalation or peaceful coexistence.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERRITORIAL DEFENCE FORCES IN SHAPING THE POLISH CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN THE LIGHT OF THE UKRAINE CONFLICT: A PRACTICAL ANALYSIS

The Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) constitute, alongside the Land Forces, Air Forces, Navy, and Special Forces, the fifth branch of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (AFRP). Currently, their operation is regulated by internal acts of the Minister of National Defence and procedures established by military commands (Zapałowski, 2019, p.11). The role and position of the TDF in defensive operations are detailed in normative documents that delineate the tasks of the AFRP, especially the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland (NSSRP). This strategy outlines three primary

missions for the AFRP: 1) Ensuring the defence of the state and opposing armed aggression; 2) Supporting protective subsystems in the domain of internal security and assisting the society; 3) Participating in the stabilisation of international situations, including international crisis management operations. It is imperative to note that the defence mission of the state, encapsulated in the National Security Strategy, also encompasses fulfilling the function of military deterrence by showcasing defence readiness maintained during peacetime and readiness for mobilisation in the event of war (Sokół, 2017, p.27). This is of particular importance during the ongoing war in Ukraine. Analysis determined that the tasks of the TDF primarily align with the first and second missions of the AFRP, and tasks under the third mission (operations outside the country's borders) will not be undertaken (at least at the current stage of TDF development) (Klisz, 2017, p.36). As indicated by the crisis management act, if, during a crisis like Russian aggression, the use of other forces and means is impossible or may prove insufficient, unless other regulations provide otherwise, the Minister of National Defense, upon the request of a provincial governor, may allocate units or subunits of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, hereinafter referred to as *military units*, to execute tasks related to crisis management (Klisz, 2017, p.27). In a crisis, the AFRP, including the TDF, are thus obligated to act towards preventing or mitigating the consequences of natural disasters. However, it must be underscored that mobilising military forces and resources requires implementing specified legal procedures. These procedures are linked with operational planning activities associated with crisis assessment, action variant designing, and identifying the necessary resources and forces for crisis management tasks. This takes place when the use of other forces proves impossible or insufficient, subsequently activating the military. Thus, the deployment of the army hinges on whether and when the capacities of other services are exhausted. It must be distinctly emphasised that during periods of stability and peace, the TDF neither replace nor complements (and supports) the existing non-military *response system* (Sokół, 2017, p.35).

Aligned with their mission, the Territorial Defence Forces support internal security, societal assistance, and defensive duties within Poland. Their role in crises is outlined through legal acts like the Act on Poland's Defence Obligation, the Crisis Management Act, and Natural Disasters (Zapałowski, 2019, p.13).

These regulations dictate the Armed Forces' involvement in natural disasters, anti-terrorism efforts, search and rescue operations, and crisis management tasks. The TDF specifically aids in internal security measures along the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borders and provides societal assistance during crises. Emphasising their unique territorial role, the TDF focuses on local community defence, operating under Permanent Responsibility Areas, which signifies their foundation on local resources (Klisz, 2017, p.33). Following a 2018 Minister of National Defence decision, the TDF became integral to the National Defence Department's Crisis Management System (Zapałowski, 2019, p.58). This system coordinates the TDF's response to crises, ensuring swift assistance to communities. This framework includes mechanisms like the Support Assessment and Reconstruction Support Teams, which evaluate crises and assist in post-crisis reconstruction, respectively (Brzezinski, 2013, p.26).

The war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on decisions concerning the development and financing of the Territorial Defence Forces within the broader defence strategy of Poland. The TDF was established to bolster Poland's defensive capacities at both the local and territorial levels. They are designed to operate domestically, supporting civil and military endeavours in crises, such as natural disasters, terrorist incidents, or other emergent events. Given the heightened regional tensions brought about by the Ukrainian conflict, the TDF plays an essential role in equipping local communities against potential threats and fortifying the sense of security among the populace. The conflict in Ukraine further underscored the importance of maintaining well-trained and adequately equipped armed forces capable of addressing a diverse array of threat scenarios. This realisation may catalyse increased investments and resource allocation to the TDF, ensuring their readiness and efficacy in safeguarding Poland.

METHODS

Conducted research employed a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and theory-informed research design, integrating analytical tools from both polemology (the study of war) and irenology (the study of peace) to investigate the implications of the Russo-Ukrainian War for the Polish Territorial Defence

Forces (TDF). The research was conducted as a mixed-methods study, structured around three principal pillars: (1) qualitative document analysis, (2) comparative case study methodology, and (3) semi-structured expert interviews, each triangulated for validity.

Data collection and sources. Primary data were obtained from:

- **Official documents** include strategic policy papers, national defence doctrines, and legislative acts such as the *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland* and the *Crisis Management Act*. These documents were accessed through institutional portals of the Ministry of National Defence and the Polish Armed Forces.
- **Expert interviews** (n=11) were conducted between September and December 2024 with Territorial Defence Force officers (n=4), crisis management officials (n=3), analysts from civilian-military cooperation units (n=2), and regional defence coordinators (n=2). All respondents had at least 10 years of professional experience in national security or military logistics and held roles within operational or policy development divisions. Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders, and all interviews were anonymised for confidentiality. The interviews followed a flexible thematic guide, allowing context-sensitive elaboration (Table 2).
- **Secondary sources** comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, legal commentary, historical monographs, and media discourse analyses from curated academic databases, including JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and PISM's national security repository.

Publicly available press releases and speeches by Polish and NATO defence officials were also examined to contextualise current TDF developments within the broader European security discourse.

Analytical framework. Data were subjected to qualitative content analysis using Philipp Mayring's systematic framework, allowing for inductive category formation and thematic abstraction. Key categories included: *hybrid warfare adaptations*, *TDF operational capabilities*, *civil-military integration mechanisms*,

crisis resilience and public mobilisation. To guide theoretical interpretation, the study applied Clausewitzian models of strategic depth (Von Clausewitz, 1995) and Galtung's typologies of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969; 1981). The dual framework enabled a nuanced reading of the TDF's evolving roles across offensive-defensive thresholds and within peacebuilding domains.

Comparative component. A structured comparative case study was undertaken to position Poland's TDF within the broader international landscape of decentralised territorial defence. The study included analyses of the following countries:

- **Ukraine.** The operationalisation of community-based defence through volunteer networks, adaptive militia formations, and extensive UAV deployment during the 2022–2023 Russian invasion served as a contemporary benchmark for resilience under existential threat.
- **Finland.** Though not currently engaged in conflict, Finland's Total Defence Concept, grounded in universal conscription and peacetime preparedness, offered a model of civil-military integration through formal institutions, civil defence education, and statutory frameworks.
- **Israel.** The Israeli reserve-based defence ecosystem – characterised by rapid mobilisation, civic duty norms, and preparedness across kinetic, cyber, and psychological domains – was a case of a highly integrated, multi-domain deterrence strategy.

In each case, national legislation, military doctrine, civilian-military co-ordination protocols, and public mobilisation strategies were examined using a uniform comparative matrix. Legal documents (e.g., Israel's Civilian Service Law, Finland's Comprehensive Defence Act, Ukraine's Martial Law & Mobilisation Acts) were reviewed alongside national security strategies and official communications. This comparative component allowed for identifying transferable practices and structural divergences between Poland and its international counterparts, especially concerning hybrid conflict readiness, civilian integration, and decentralised force deployment. Particular emphasis was placed on the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces during the Russian invasion (2022–2023), with cross-case insights drawn on drone reconnaissance

deployment, local militia integration, and civil defence mobilisation (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Sharma, 2015).

Validity, triangulation and ethical considerations. Triangulation was ensured through cross-referencing between documentary sources, interview data, and existing academic literature. Member-checking procedures were conducted with five interviewees to verify the accuracy of thematic interpretations. The research adhered to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all personal data were anonymised and securely stored in compliance with GDPR and institutional guidelines. While comprehensive, the study encountered several limitations. Most notably, restricted access to classified military operational data constrained deeper tactical insights. It limited the scope of analysis in key areas such as unit mobility, logistical coordination, and real-time deployment efficiency. This absence may have led to an underrepresentation of specific operational vulnerabilities or adaptive capabilities of the Polish Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) in high-pressure scenarios. As a result, while the study identifies general force distribution gaps and doctrinal challenges, it cannot fully assess the effectiveness of logistical support chains, internal command responsiveness, or the dynamic allocation of resources during hybrid threat engagement.

Future research outlook. Further research would benefit from longitudinal field studies examining the evolution of TDF doctrine in response to protracted conflict dynamics and comparative evaluations based on access to non-public military planning archives. Enhanced insights into civilian-military synchronisation across regional governance layers could also refine the national resilience architecture.

RESULTS

The empirical findings of this study reflect the evolving nature of territorial defence in light of hybrid conflict dynamics, as exemplified by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. These findings were derived from a triangulated methodology combining strategic document analysis, international comparative case studies, and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including Polish Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) officers, civil defence coordinators, and security policy analysts.

Primary source materials included official Polish documents – such as the *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland*, the *Crisis Management Act*, and internal ministerial guidelines – accessed through institutional portals of the Ministry of National Defence and the Polish Armed Forces. These documents provided the doctrinal, legal, and procedural frameworks essential for understanding the evolving mandate of the TDF, particularly its dual function in state defence and societal support during crises.

The document analysis and comparative insights (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Sharma, 2015) challenge long-standing assumptions within Western defence paradigms – particularly the belief that a small, highly specialised, and technologically superior force is sufficient for national security in the face of contemporary threats. The Ukrainian experience during the 2022–2023 Russian invasion has exposed the critical limitations of such a model. Instead, it has highlighted the necessity of multi-layered, decentralised, and territorially embedded defence frameworks capable of integrating conventional military assets (infantry, artillery, anti-aircraft systems) with non-conventional technologies and localised civil mobilisation, including the effective use of crewless aerial vehicles (UAVs) and grassroots defence units.

Interview respondents from the Polish Armed Forces consistently underlined that excessive centralisation and over-reliance on high-technology systems diminish operational flexibility and long-term resilience. One senior officer noted, *Despite sophisticated command systems, without geographic redundancy and local anchoring, the national defence can be paralysed in a matter of days under coordinated hybrid assault*. Such comments reinforce

the doctrinal shift toward territorial dispersion and multifunctional civilian-military coordination observed in several NATO and partner countries.

A structured comparative case study examined territorial defence architectures in Finland, Israel, and Ukraine to contextualise Poland's approach. These countries were selected due to their unique but converging experiences with decentralised defence doctrines, adaptation to hybrid threats, and legal frameworks enabling the integration of civil society into national defence strategies.

Table 1, *Comparative Analysis of Territorial Defence Models*, synthesises key dimensions of this cross-national analysis. It reveals both structural parallels and divergences in operational focus, societal integration, and institutional resilience:

- Ukraine has operationalised community-based defence on a large scale, integrating volunteers, militias, and local governments into a flexible wartime structure. Its extensive deployment of UAVs and adaptive militia networks presents a high-functioning model of decentralised mobilisation under existential threat.
- Although not currently in armed conflict, Finland maintains a total defence concept rooted in universal conscription and long-term societal resilience planning. It features high levels of civilian-military coordination but limited reliance on volunteer militias.
- Israel operates a highly integrated, reserve-based defence ecosystem underpinned by legal and cultural norms of civic duty. It merges local governance, rapid mobilisation protocols, and multi-domain preparedness – including cyber and psychological operations – making it a model for sustained deterrence.
- Poland's TDF, while undergoing modernisation, remains in a transitional phase. It exhibits moderate civic-military integration and is increasingly involved in hybrid preparedness operations such as reconnaissance drone deployment and civil protection training. However, as reflected in Table 1, its legal and institutional infrastructure, especially the implementation of the Crisis Management Act, is still insufficient to enable systemic integration of civil society into defence at scale.

This comparative perspective underscores both the potential and current limitations of the Polish Territorial Defence model. While policy innovations and doctrinal realignments are underway, the data reveal persistent gaps in regional force distribution, availability of specialised units, and coordination mechanisms between military and civilian emergency response frameworks. These deficiencies' strategic and operational consequences are further explored in the subsequent subsections, particularly regarding geographic force imbalances, personnel dynamics, and inter-institutional coordination (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Comparative analysis of Territorial Defence models*

Country	Decentralised Structure	Civic-Military Integration	Use in Hybrid Conflict	Drone Reconnaissance	Militia/Volunteer Integration	Legal Framework
Poland (TDF)	Yes	Moderate (in development)	Emerging	Deployed (limited)	Moderate	Crisis Management Act
Ukraine	Yes	High (community-based)	Direct and extensive	Extensive use	High	Martial Law & Mobilisation Acts
Finland	Yes	High (universal conscription)	Preparedness focus	Experimental	Low	Comprehensive Defence Act
Israel	Yes	Very High (reserve-based society)	Constant low-intensity threats	Operationalised	Moderate	Civilian Service Law & IDF Regulations

Source: *Own research*

Interview data revealed that modern infantry formations – often termed *digital infantry* – while technologically sophisticated, remain limited in terms of mobility and endurance. One senior officer (Interview #4) noted: *Despite high-tech communications, we must not lose sight of physical presence and redundancy in case of infrastructure degradation.* Such reflections reinforce the need to adapt traditional doctrines to the demands of hybrid, non-linear battlefields.

Strategic and Operational Adjustments in the Polish TDF. Data from internal military reports, comparative analysis and interview responses indicate three key vectors of strategic transformation in the TDF:

- Strike capability enhancement, including the procurement of mobile howitzer units and the establishment of regional combat training centres;

- Crisis rescue capacity, particularly in response to symmetrical conflicts where medical evacuation and basic logistics may be delayed or compromised;
- Defence awareness campaigns are implemented through institutional cooperation with public sector bodies and local administrations.

These strategic shifts mirror elements adopted in Ukraine and Finland and were highlighted in the comparative analysis of Israeli reserve defence models. The TDF's use of reconnaissance drones and digital mapping for situational awareness at the Polish-Belarusian border represents a growing reliance on civilian-military technological synergies.

Geographic Prioritisation and Gaps in Force Deployment. The TDF has identified some critical national infrastructure zones and defence priorities, including:

- maritime and port zones,
- energy production sites,
- mountainous southern terrain (e.g., Bieszczady),
- river crossings along the Vistula and Oder,
- industrial hubs and administrative nodes.

Despite this strategic orientation, interviewees noted regional imbalances in force deployment. A gap persists in the Masurian Lake and Elbląg region, where only partial TDF presence is maintained. Moreover, in a significant conflict, the area between the Bug and the Vistula Rivers would require a minimum of 8–10 brigades, whereas only 5–6 are presently stationed or mobilised (Zapałowski, 2019).

Personnel Dynamics and Societal Engagement. The latest *Ministry of National Defence* data (2024) show that the TDF currently counts approximately 33,000 troops, with projections of 36,000 by end-2025 and a long-term target of 50,000 volunteers and 7,500 full-time soldiers. Despite targeted recruitment campaigns, many enlistees resign due to external socioeconomic pressures. Several respondents (Interview #6 and #8) suggested that the lack

of structured support for dual-role employees – balancing military duties with civilian careers – is a key factor in fluctuating recruitment numbers.

The trend toward short-term training modules (7–14 days) has increased, reflecting a demand for flexible service models that accommodate civilian schedules. This trend also aligns with Scandinavian practices of reserve readiness.

Civil-Military Integration and Resilience Building. One of the most consistent themes across interview data was the TDF's function as a bridge between military operations and civil institutions. This integration takes several operational forms:

- training public sector employees in crisis response and civil protection protocols;
- supporting resource mobilisation during emergencies (e.g., floods, infrastructure failures);
- psychological resilience-building through public engagement campaigns to counter disinformation and bolster national morale.

These activities correspond with Galtung's (1981) theory of positive peace and structural security, as they focus not only on the deterrence of aggression but also on the cultivation of societal capacity to withstand prolonged crises. One respondent (Interview #2), a regional crisis coordinator, stated: *We are no longer dealing with traditional threats. The battlefield begins in the community, in the mind, and on the screen.* This observation was reinforced by a document analysis of internal TDF briefings detailing collaborative frameworks between military units and local governments. These include joint simulations, logistical planning for refugee intake, and cybersecurity coordination mechanisms.

Table 2. *Summary table linking each empirical result with its respective source*

Empirical Result	Source Type	Interview Quote
Challenge to the model of a small, high-tech army in hybrid warfare	Comparative case study (Ukraine, Finland), Document analysis	"What Ukraine has shown us is that technology alone doesn't hold the line — territorial control demands manpower and resilience." – Interview #3
Strategic priorities of the TDF: <i>strike capabilities, rescue readiness, institutional cooperation</i>	Expert interviews (#3, #5, #6), Military documents	"We're not just training shooters. We're building medics, logisticians, and communicators who work across institutions." – Interview #5
Use of drones and digital tools for border operations	Interview data (#4), Internal reports, Comparative study (Israel)	"Drones have become our eyes in the field. Especially along the Belarusian border, their use is a game changer." – Interview #4
Identification of critical defence zones (e.g., Masuria, Elbląg, Vistula crossings)	Strategic planning documents, Interview data (#2, #9)	"If we lose Masuria, we lose our depth. The terrain is our best defence, but only if we occupy it properly." – Interview #9
Recruitment fluctuations and dual-role resignation issues	TDF personnel data, Interview data (#6, #8)	"Several of our members left because employers weren't supportive. Civilian life doesn't pause for training." – Interview #6
Increase in short-term training interest	Interview data (#1, #7), TDF recruitment statistics	"Weekend trainings have seen a spike in participation. People want to contribute, but they need flexibility." – Interview #7
TDF's role in civilian resilience and psychological defence	Interviews (#2, #5), Galtung's peace theory, Civil defence manuals	"It's not just about defending borders – it's about defending minds. Public trust is a strategic asset." – Interview #2
Joint training programs with civil institutions	Policy documents, Interview data (#3)	"We now conduct crisis response simulations with local governments twice a year. The synergy is real." – Interview #3
Cyber and disinformation response strategies at local levels	TDF briefings, Interview data (#2), Cybersecurity coordination plans	"Every phone is a battlefield. That's where the enemy sows doubt and fear – and that's where we respond." – Interview #2

Source: *Own research*

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, grounded in both pomological and ideological frameworks, reaffirm the fundamental duality of peace and armed conflict introduced at the outset of this article. As noted in the introduction, these contrasting states of human existence – stability versus disruption, cooperation versus hostility – form the basis for understanding the strategic

transformations in the TDF under the conditions imposed by the Russo-Ukrainian War. The hybrid nature of modern warfare, with its overlapping domains of conventional battle, cyber operations, and disinformation campaigns, necessitates a broader interpretative lens – one that goes beyond traditional military analysis and embraces the epistemologies of peace studies and conflict sociology (Bauman & Tester, 2013; Galtung, 1969; Ferguson, 2013). From this perspective, the TDF emerges as a military formation and a socio-political institution responding to multidimensional threats. The war in Ukraine has illustrated how narratives, identities, and technologies are instrumentalised to ignite and manage conflict (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Gleditsch et al., 2014). The TDF's doctrinal shift – towards decentralisation, community anchoring, and dual-use functions – mirrors Clausewitz's theory of defence-in-depth while also reflecting Galtung's positive peace approach, wherein resilience-building and institutional trust become strategic imperatives.

The interviews with TDF officers and national security experts (n=11) substantiate this dual role. On the one hand, the TDF has adapted to new battlefield logic through investments in mobile artillery, drone reconnaissance, and flexible training modules. On the other hand, it has increasingly become an instrument for state-society interaction – training civil servants, supporting regional crisis management systems, and countering the destabilising effects of hybrid threats. This dual functionality aligns with broader theoretical debates on conflict causation. Just as demographic and socioeconomic pressures were historically seen by thinkers like Malthus and Bouthoul (1925; 1970) as undercurrents of war, contemporary structural factors, such as labour-market tensions faced by reservists or local vulnerabilities in eastern Poland, are shown to influence both TDF readiness and public trust. Thus, the TDF is an operational reserve and a barometer of civil-military cohesion.

Significantly, the study contributes to polemological and irenological scholarship by illustrating how conflict mitigation is enacted on the battlefield and within institutions, discourses, and local infrastructures. Compared with Finnish, Israeli, and Ukrainian territorial defence systems, the case study method employed demonstrates the necessity of context-specific, community-based force structures to counteract kinetic and non-kinetic threats (Sharma, 2015). At the same time, this analysis acknowledges the conceptual and operational

gaps flagged by peer reviewers. Specifically, the role of the TDF in cyber defence and its intersection with national cybersecurity frameworks, including the EU Directive NIS2, remains underexplored. While the TDF's educational and preventive contributions to information security are evident, its operational integration with digital infrastructure protection mechanisms warrants further scrutiny. Future studies should examine how the TDF collaborates with civilian agencies such as the Government Centre for Security (RCB) and the Ministry of Digital Affairs in implementing cross-sectoral cybersecurity strategies.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the need for a coherent policy framework to support dual-role TDF members, whose retention is vital for long-term force sustainability. Institutionalising employer-reservist agreements and enhancing legal protections strengthens the TDF's role in deterrence and societal support functions.

Ultimately, this research supports a reconceptualisation of territorial defence not as a peripheral element of state security but as a central pillar in an integrated resilience system. It affirms that safeguarding peace and preparing for war are no longer mutually exclusive missions but interdependent and dynamically linked through civilian-military synergy, strategic communication, and normative engagement. As the introduction suggests, educating future generations on the conditions of peace and the triggers of violence remains paramount, and these educational and strategic goals converge within the operational ethos of formations like the TDF.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has demonstrated how contemporary armed conflicts – particularly the Russo-Ukrainian War – reshape theoretical understanding and practical application of national and societal security strategies. Drawing upon the conceptual frameworks of polemology and irenology, the study has underscored the necessity of an integrated approach to conflict and peace studies that deconstructs the sources of armed aggression while identifying socio-political mechanisms conducive to sustainable peace.

The findings indicate that interpreting conflicts solely through military lenses is insufficient. Armed conflicts must be analysed in broader cultural, economic, and societal contexts. One key contribution of this study has been to highlight the role of *cultural lies* – deliberately propagated narratives that distort collective memory and identity – as mechanisms that manipulate public expectations and intensify societal polarisation. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in societies undergoing geopolitical stress. Understanding these distortions is crucial for violence prevention and for preserving the integrity of both national and regional political systems. The study affirms that each armed or structural conflict must be understood within its specific local or national context. Although conflicts may share similar root causes – such as resource scarcity, ideological polarisation, or demographic pressure – these elements manifest differently depending on historical memory, institutional frameworks, and civil society structures. Therefore, scholarly inquiry into war and peace should be grounded in current empirical realities. Focusing on the past five decades of conflict offers insights more directly applicable to modern policy, diplomacy, and educational programming than distant historical analogies.

Operational insights drawn from the case of the Polish Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) reinforce these broader theoretical perspectives. In strategic terms, the area between the Bug and Vistula rivers is currently underserved, with only 5–6 brigades available to secure a zone that may require up to 8–10 in the face of hybrid or conventional threats. Critical regions such as Masuria, Elbląg, the Lublin Upland, and the Bieszczady Mountains require a significantly enhanced force posture. Particular infrastructure – river crossings, energy nodes, and coastal access points – demands the development of specialised units trained for amphibious operations, infrastructure denial, and mobility in contaminated or degraded environments. Organisationally, force structuring must be adjusted to reflect operational geography: brigades operating in mountainous regions must exhibit high-altitude resilience, whereas those stationed in urban-industrial zones should prioritise infrastructure defence and anti-access strategies. This necessitates a modular force development model – including artillery, anti-tank units, reconnaissance, combat engineering, and robust medical and evacuation support.

The analysis further emphasises the strategic imperative of reinforcing the Warsaw–Brest axis. Given its proximity to the capital and geopolitical centrality, this corridor may become the focal point in any future high-intensity scenario. Current TDF capabilities in this region remain inadequate against a well-equipped adversary. As such, the Polish national defence doctrine must be recalibrated to include the simultaneous expansion and modernisation of regular Armed Forces (Wojsko Operacyjne) and the TDF as resilient auxiliary forces. These recommendations are aligned with observable Russian strategic doctrines, which prioritise rapid territorial seizure, infrastructural disruption, and population displacement to neutralise opposition and deny logistics to defenders. To counteract such strategies, a fully integrated model – merging regular and territorial forces within a unified command – is essential for effective deterrence and response.

Table 3. *Empirical Observations and Recommendations*

Empirical Observation	Conclusion	Recommendation
Low brigade presence in eastern Poland (Bug–Vistula region)	Operational vulnerabilities in strategic border areas	Increase number of TDF brigades in eastern zones; prioritise high-risk regions
High resignation rates among dual-role (civil-military) personnel	Lack of institutional support for reservists	Institutionalise employer-reservist cooperation and protective legal frameworks
Uneven geographic deployment of TDF units (e.g., Masuria, Elbląg)	Critical infrastructure zones remain under-defended	Reallocate and expand force deployment to identified vulnerable areas
Limited operational integration in cyber defence	TDF doctrine not fully aligned with digital security imperatives	Integrate TDF in national cybersecurity architecture (NIS2 compliance)
Public trust in TDF linked to community presence and support roles	TDF functions as a key actor in civil-military synergy	Expand peacebuilding, trust-building, and civil engagement roles of TDF
Emergence of short-term training preference among recruits	Need for flexibility in training formats for volunteer engagement	Implement modular, short-duration training compatible with civilian life
Inadequate coordination between military and civil emergency services	Fragmentation in crisis response readiness and resource planning	Develop joint operational protocols for crisis scenarios across sectors

Source: *Own research*

Beyond the kinetic dimension, this research underscores the TDF's increasing social and civil function. The Forces maintain strong public trust, grounded in their visibility and localised presence in Polish communities. Their active

participation in internal security, natural disaster response, and psychological resilience campaigns strengthens their military and civil institution status. Their integration into national emergency governance frameworks – particularly through the Crisis Management Act and the Defence Obligation Act – confirms this dual identity. However, legal and organisational frameworks have not yet fully adapted to these evolving realities. The interview data point to persistent structural weaknesses, especially the lack of institutionalised support mechanisms for reservists navigating the dual burden of civilian employment and military duty. Addressing this gap will require legislative reform and a shift in organisational culture. Employers must be incentivised to support reservist roles and acknowledge their contribution to national security.

The domain of cybersecurity has emerged as another critical area of concern. While the TDF has demonstrated substantial effort in public awareness and disinformation counteraction, its formal role in protecting digital infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Current doctrine lacks integration with broader national cybersecurity strategies, including those aligned with the EU's NIS2 Directive. Enhanced cooperation with civilian agencies – such as the Government Centre for Security (RCB) and the Ministry of Digital Affairs – is essential to constructing a coherent, decentralised, resilient digital defence system.

In summary, the Territorial Defence Forces embody the intersection of military strategy and civic responsibility. They are not peripheral to Poland's security architecture but represent a central pillar within an evolving system of multidimensional resilience. Their development reflects broader transformations like conflict, where information warfare, psychological endurance, and local community cohesion play roles equal to conventional military strength. This study reaffirms the value of investing in decentralised, technologically integrated, and socially embedded defence structures. The TDF serve as a bridge between state institutions and local communities, between historical legacies and strategic innovation, and between deterrence and peace-building. In reaffirming the theoretical claims established in the introduction, the study also contributes empirical evidence that invites a redefinition of national security in the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, this research acknowledges several important limitations. Most notably, restricted access to classified data from the Ministry of National Defence impeded a deeper analysis of TDF tactical planning, logistics, and deployment patterns, particularly in high-priority regions. While the purposive interview sample (n=11) included a range of experienced stakeholders, it does not reflect the full diversity of perspectives across military and civilian domains. Moreover, the international comparative analysis – drawing on Finnish, Israeli, and Ukrainian models – relied primarily on secondary literature, which constrained the depth of empirical triangulation. Additionally, the absence of public opinion data represents a critical gap in assessing societal perceptions of the TDF's legitimacy and effectiveness. Finally, the fast-evolving nature of hybrid warfare, especially in digital threats, makes the findings time-bound and contingent upon the ongoing implementation of frameworks such as the EU's NIS2 directive.

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