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Enhancing Decision-Making Resilience through Mission Command. The particular case of Ukraine

Zvýšení odolnosti rozhodovacího procesu prostřednictvím úkolového velení. Konkrétní případ Ukrajiny

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to present some particularities of mission command during the conflict in Ukraine. Intended as a framework of analysis, it describes the ways in which the involved parties manage warfighting from the perspective of practicing mission command as a method to enhance military effectiveness. Using qualitative methods, combining literature review, critical analysis of relevant resources, comparative analysis and indirect observation, the findings are related to aspects of mission command that are critical for enhancing operational and decision-making resilience, through identifying and examining various situations involving Ukrainian and Russian military forces. At the same time, the results of the study highlight some potential ways of innovating the principle of mission command from the perspective of multi-domain operations.

Abstrakt: Účelem tohoto příspěvku je představit některá specifika úkolového velení během konfliktu na Ukrajině. Rámec analýzy popisuje způsoby, jakými zúčastněné strany řídí válčení z pohledu realizace úkolového velení jako metody ke zvýšení vojenské efektivity. Pomocí kvalitativních metod, kombinujících přehled literatury, kritickou analýzu relevantních zdrojů, komparativní analýzu a nepřímé pozorování a zjištění týkají se aspektů úkolového velení, které jsou kritické pro zvýšení operační odolnosti a odolnosti rozhodovacího procesu, a to prostřednictvím identifikace a zkoumání různých situací zahrnujících ukrajinské a ruské vojenské síly. Výsledky studie zároveň zdůrazňují některé potenciální způsoby inovace principu úkolového velení z pohledu multi-doménových operací.

Keywords: Decision-Making Resilience; Mission Command; Operational Effectiveness; Operational Resilience; Resilience.

Klíčová slova: odolnost rozhodovacího procesu; úkolové velení; operační účinnost; operační odolnost; odolnost.

INTRODUCTION

The mission command approach is not recent, but it has lately acquired a special value, having the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a framework and being related to different forms of resilience and the management of warfighting. Although it has been tested in countless conflict situations or during various operations, what differentiates it in the context of the Ukrainian conflict is the applicability of mission command by the weaker opponent (Ukrainian forces), which had not been encountered in previous situations, mission command being applied by the stronger opponent, and analysed according to the value of conventional combat power. Furthermore, another aspect of novelty is the mission command contribution to the development of the conceptual component of the fighting power, considering its positive influence on the operational resilience and, implicitly, on the decision-making resilience through its timely applicability and the appropriate management of warfighting.

Therefore, the main concepts that must be operationalized are mission command, operational effectiveness, resilience, operational resilience, and decision-making resilience. Regarding the clarification of the first three concepts, things are extremely clear, given that their definitions have not experienced significant changes over time. However, the last two are relatively new, because the definitions are few and the existing ones are not extremely conclusive. In the present study, the meanings of the key concepts are:

- Mission command – command philosophy that “embraces decentralised execution, providing the freedom of action to adapt to circumstances on the ground whilst still achieving the commander’s intent” (JDP 0-20 2023, 33); it “empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation”(ADP 6-0 2019, 1-3);
- Operational effectiveness – the ability of military forces to fulfil designated missions and tasks; it largely depends on the capacity to stimulate fighting power (conceptual, physical, moral) and to maintain combat power (leadership, information, warfighting functions) during military operations; it is manifested through the operational resilience of the military forces and the decision-making resilience of military leaders;
- Resilience – “capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks” (Walker et al. 2014);
- Operational resilience – “the capacity of a force to withstand attack, adapt, and generate sufficient combat power to achieve ... objectives in the face of continued, adaptive enemy action” (Hagen et al. 2016, xi); it implies the harmonious integration of warfighting functions that must be adaptable, interchangeable, and expandable;
- Decision-making resilience – “the application of a consistent, holistic, integrated decision-making system designed to support optimal during-event decision-making, and robust post-event review” (Wright 2022, 218); it ensures the ability to remain calm during adverse situations, to manage ambiguity, and to overcome

adjustment decisions which are not characterised only by volatility and uncertainty, but also by complexity and ambiguity.

Having clarified the research preamble and the key concepts, the purpose of this study is determined by illustrating the contribution of mission command to the operational effectiveness of the Ukrainian military forces. The research objectives (RObj) adjacent to the research consist in:

- RObj₁ – identifying the main achievements in the field;
- RObj₂ – defining the particularities of the mission command of the Ukrainian tactical military forces;
- RObj₃ – describing the relationship with manoeuvrist approach during current operations.

To achieve the purpose and research objectives, the main research hypothesis has been formulated, as follows: *mission command highly impacts the operational and decision-making resilience of the Ukrainian military forces and leaders*. Also, to validate the previous research hypothesis, additional research questions (RQs) have been established:

- RQ1 - What are the main findings in the field?;
- RQ2 - How does mission command manifest itself at tactical level?;
- RQ3 - Are there any indicators of the mission command applicability from a single-domain perspective?;
- RQ4 - Are Ukrainian tactical leaders motivated enough to practice mission command?;
- RQ5 - Is mission command a method of demonstrating adaptive leadership?;
- RQ6 - Can a relationship be established between mission command and manoeuvrist approach in the situation of the operations carried out by the Ukrainian military forces?.

1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative methods, combining literature review, critical analysis of relevant resources, comparative analysis and indirect observation. The correlations of RObj, RQs and research methods (RMs) are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Research design and methodology

ROBJs	RQs	RMs
RObj ₁	RQ ₁	literature review
RObj ₂	RQ ₂ , RQ ₃ , RQ ₄ , RQ ₅	critical analysis of relevant resources
RObj ₃	RQ ₆	comparative analysis indirect observation

By referring to the table above, the RMs will be used as follows:

- Literature review - determining the stage of addressing the proposed topic at the national and international level;

- Critical analysis of relevant resources - identifying relevant sources and developing the contextual assessment to answer the proposed RQs;
- Comparative analysis - highlighting the differences regarding the promotion of the mission command's principles by the opponents within the Ukrainian conflict;
- Indirect observation - identifying mission command's operational challenges based on exploring open sources and leveraging personal expertise.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As a preamble to literature review, it can be stated that although there is an abundance of articles dealing with the conflict in Ukraine, the same principle does not apply when variables such as mission command, operational resilience or decision-making resilience are introduced in the equation. Focusing on these variables, most articles deal with aspects related to general resilience, addressing societal resilience. Moreover, there are articles that analyse the applicability of mission command or of other defence capabilities in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as in other conflicts or operational environments, which could be linked with the topic of this study.

In this regard, a first article highlights the steps that Ukraine has taken in the field of military reform since 2016, where most of the defence resources have been directed to reconfiguring the force structure and command and control (C₂), as well as optimizing procurement priorities. The reconfiguration of the force, focused on a hybrid model of transformation, has left its mark on the special operations forces (SOF) and non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps, largely following the Western model. For both categories, SOF and NCO, the measures taken are aimed at achieving operational standards that would ensure the interoperability between the Ukrainian military forces and those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Moreover, the Ukrainian army has developed a SOF component for each service, such as land, maritime, and air, and has also extended the principle of mission command among NCOs. In addition, the C₂ adjustment through mission command at all levels is another priority of the Ukrainian military reform. In what regards the optimization of defence resources, the article highlights the priorities for procurements, among which long-range artillery platforms, guided missile systems, or anti-tank missile systems have become essential (Sanders 2023, 312-328).

Other authors have taken a different approach and argue that the conceptual component can counterbalance the much more developed physical component of the adversary, having Ukraine and Russian Federation as actors. The authors' contribution is edifying because it proposes prioritizing the use of defence resources for developing and optimizing education and training, thus emphasizing the importance of the conceptual element from the fighting power. By responding to the operational requirements, such as the continuous dynamics of the common operational picture (COP), adjusting the direction of the joint action, assuming responsibility in ever-changing situations, etc. the article identifies education and training needs such as the development and promotion of mission command at all echelons, the development of decision-making

resilience based on moral support, multi-domain support and exploiting the operational experience from the field. According to the authors, all these needs are operationalized in the curricula and through training programs, which are made possible by allocating and directing the necessary internal and external resources. The article ends with some recommendations, the most important of which are the continuous adaptation of the education and training systems in the field of human resources (officers, NCOs) and the improvement of English language skills to facilitate interoperability with NATO member states (Salkutsan and Stolberg 2022, 67-76).

On the other hand, Hedenskog promotes a much more comprehensive perspective on the resilience of the Ukrainian army, having as essential factors reforming the military forces and directing them through a single command, optimizing cyber security, and boosting logistics and communication information systems (CIS). All these objectives could be achieved based on appropriate optimization of defence resources as a result of the collaborative activity between the Ukrainian authorities and NATO partners, as well as on applying decentralization of decision-making. One of the most remarkable contributions of the article refers to the commitment of the civilian population to the overall effort to achieve societal resilience and defend national territory. The article concludes in the same vein, highlighting the positive result of Ukraine's societal resilience as a result of decision-making decentralization, political pluralism, individual and collective initiative, and strong national will respectively (Hedenskog 2023).

Also, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence (MoD) presents specific aspects related to mission command and resilience. Following the optimization of the C2 and the coherence of the decision-making process, the document imprints the mission command as an essential solution to the current conflict by delegating the authority of multi-echelon commanders for grappling with operational requirements and situational changes. Instead, since the beginning of the document, resilience is highlighted as an elementary defensive strategy of the Ukrainian state along with deterrence and interaction. In addition to the societal resilience, the individual psychological resilience of the military personnel is also emphasized, as a defining element of the operational resilience for the achievement of missions and tasks in the most difficult conditions. Another perspective of resilience that is mentioned correlates military resilience with societal resilience. Being developed with external support, military resilience contributes to the enhancement of societal resilience through the sustenance and assistance of the civilian population during the conflict. Last but not least, the importance of managing defence capabilities is highlighted by the establishment of the Central Directorate of Defence Resource as a dedicated structure within the Ukrainian General Staff (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine 2022).

The importance of defence capabilities in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is also stressed by other authors who place great emphasis on logistical resources. Again, variables of interest such as mission command, resilience, or defence capabilities are analysed, but this time the perspective is totally different, and narrower, because only the logistical support appears in the foreground. Broadly speaking, the article praises the role of logistical support in the resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, constituting the bridge between various levels of warfare and at the same time generating strategic rather than operational or tactical effects. The authors discuss another dimension of resilience, by addressing logistic resilience, which, in order to be effective, is based on

principles such as delegation and flexibility, promoted by practicing mission command. To effectively illustrate the proposed conceptualization, the authors carry out a comparative analysis between 'pull' and 'push' logistical systems, the former being suitable for the mission command applicability. The conclusions of the article underline the logistic resilience of the Ukrainian army, facilitated by promoting mission command at all levels, as well as the superiority of the Ukrainian 'pull' logistic system compared to the 'push' system employed by the Russian Federation (Ti and Kinsey 2023, 381-398).

One last reference source illustrates an eloquent macro-level study on the status of Ukraine's national resilience grappling with multiple challenges, the most significant being the conflict with the Russian Federation. National resilience is analysed from multiple perspectives: criteria, levels, indicators, management, factors, processes, principles, and achievement mechanisms. The management of risks and threats faced by Ukraine, which tests the national resilience, can be achieved through the coherent allocation and direction of resources of any nature, where defence resources become paramount. Based on the numerous applications presented in the field of defence, the study concludes with the necessity to develop a multi-level organizational mechanism for optimizing national resilience that allows the continuous assessment of risks and capabilities, the identification of threats and vulnerabilities, as well as the improvement of the specific legal framework (Reznikova 2022).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As previously emphasized, mission command is one of the most important doctrinal principles of the NATO. When properly applied, it ensures decision-making initiative and the operational flexibility necessary to approach the ever-changing operational environments and, implicitly, the designated areas of operations (AO).

Based on the lessons learned from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it can be noticed that mission command has become an invaluable operational principle for the Ukrainian military forces, considering the large-scale practice of tactical initiative within highly urbanized AOs. Also, correlating this with the fact that mission command was a very useful method for enhancing desired end states during various operations such as "Iraqi Freedom", "Enduring Freedom" or "Inherent Resolve", the emerging research hypothesis which has been formulated in the introduction is: *mission command highly impacts the operational and decision-making resilience of the Ukrainian military forces and leaders.*

By performing a critical analysis of relevant resources, comparative analysis and indirect observation, the validation of research hypothesis is built by covering five essential aspects related to the Ukrainian military forces:

- Promoting mission command at all operational levels;
- Using mission command in different services and during combined arms warfighting;
- Applying mission command by highly motivated leaders;
- Stimulating mission command through manoeuvrist approach;
- Using mission command as an effective method for adaptive leadership.

3.1 Promoting Mission Command at All Operational Levels

Although, at first sight, it can be said that the Ukrainian military forces do not benefit from any significant operational advantages in relation to the Russian opponent, a more detailed analysis highlights some contradictory aspects. In this sense, the support of the Westerners cannot be limited only to political, financial, economic, or military aspects, but especially to educational ones. The principle is quite simple and consists in the limitations of forces that encounter difficulties when operating effectively even though they are well equipped and supported. The mentality of assuming responsibilities and determination to fulfil designated missions and tasks are the direct result of effective military education and training. Also, as is the case of Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), this mentality and determination that unfolds on resilience and operational effectiveness happens as a result of promoting and manifesting mission command at all levels and all echelons which allows “to deviate from a specific plan if necessary; encourage disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent” (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine 2022, 22). Perhaps one of the most conclusive examples of promoting macro level mission command during war in Ukraine can be attributed to the president Zelensky when he promoted the two-star general Zaluzhnyi from Operational Command North to the commander-in-chief of the UAF (Detsch 2023). However, what makes the difference in favour of the Ukrainian forces, even if it seems that Russian forces have some advantages, is the application of mission command at the lowest levels such as squad and platoon: “During the conflict with Russia, the UAF has adopted NATO-style principles of command, such as the delegation of authority to local command as well as to junior and lower-level officers including NCOs” (Sanders 2023). Also, the UAF success in adopting mission command is mainly supported by the positive manifestation of the commander’s intent on the battlefield (Janguzza and Lelito 2024).

Another effect of practicing mission command at lowest levels is given by the decisional deconfliction and overriding of adjustment decisions, which is not applicable in the case of the Russian commanders due to the fact that the decision is strongly centralized towards the highest levels of command. This is observed especially in urban operational areas, where squad and platoon leaders are subject to cascading adjustment decisions for maintaining the operational rhythm and initiative. This might be favoured by the UAF’s adoption of organizational military structures that facilitate the delegation of command (dispersed command), which allows for making adjustment decisions not only during issued missions, but also during missions deduced by tactical commanders. From this reason, “by not needing to mass in large formations or have every movement orchestrated from one central command hub, Ukrainian fighters were able to leverage an element of surprise and themselves become smaller and much less vulnerable targets available to Russian attackers” (Osborn 2022).

3.2 Using Mission Command in Different Services and During Combined Arms Warfighting

Another viewpoint that competes to validate the emerging research hypothesis focuses on using mission command during combined arms warfighting (CAW) within various military services. Even if it may seem like a difficult objective to achieve for many modern armies, the mission command is more than opportune to meet the requirements of the ever-changing battle space. Although it cannot be said that Ukrainian leaders have extensive experience in using mission command across different domains, it is commendable that they are trying to improve themselves and the results have already started to appear:

- Land forces – using large scale tactical initiative: “Even without higher instructions, the immediate task was clear to these units, and, at the tactical level, Ukrainian forces therefore retained the tactical initiative. For the 1st Tank Brigade, for example, the first days of fighting saw numerous meeting engagements in forests at around 100–200 m range, where restricted movement limited the Russian ability to bring their mass to bear against a specific tactical situation” (Zabrodskyi 2022, 28);
- Naval forces – combining team cohesion and disciplined initiative: sinking the Moskva flagship was possible by the outstanding cooperation of different capabilities sharing a common understanding of the situation and applying mission orders (land-to sea missile - Neptun, UAV coverage – Bayraktar 2) (Kamaras 2023);
- Air forces – camouflaging decentralized command within dispersed operations: this ability “was critical to survivability. Without this capability – to disperse and maintain aircraft in the field for a limited period, while periodically returning to main bases when repairs allowed – it is likely that the Ukrainian Air Force would not have survived” (Zabrodskyi 2022, 53);
- SOF - directing tactical initiative to surprise Russian forces: “the Central Group of Forces, attacking via Chernihiv towards Kyiv, and via Sumy, faced a different dilemma. Having bypassed large Ukrainian combat units, while attempting to traverse over 200 km of densely wooded terrain, these forces had dissipated much of their combat power and were suffering heavily in ambushes and meeting engagements. Here the tactical initiative of Ukrainian tactical units and special forces inflicted heavy casualties” (Zabrodskyi 2022, 33).

On the other hand, in order to exploit the mission command to the maximum, the UAF should borrow the United States (US) model regarding its applicability from a multi-domain perspective. To understand its advantages, Table 2 provides a comparative analysis between the current version (single domain) and the upgraded version (multi-domain).

Table 2: Comparative analysis – single domain versus multi-domain mission command

Type Criteria	Single domain mission command	Multi-domain mission command
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ease of applicability: both during centralized planning and decentralized execution; - effective in linear operations: traditional combat operations such as offensive or defensive operations can be included in this category; - integrates and directs one domain capabilities: could be physical (manpower, equipment) or moral (leadership, ethical foundations) capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - effective in linear, but especially in nonlinear operations: it is a prerequisite for dealing with hybrid operations and hybrid adversaries, the latter being focused on blended tactics (conventional, unconventional, asymmetrical); - triggers interconnected effects: being able to manage multiple capabilities from various domains generates interconnected effects that might be of first, second or third order; - enhances decision resilience: when it works properly, it represents a force multiplier for decision-making resilience in grappling with adjustment decisions.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low effectiveness in nonlinear operations: managing and directing capabilities from one single domain it has low coverage in hybrid operations or in other types of operations which are volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA); - low probability to generate interconnected effects: capabilities are not so diversified; - limited in fuelling decision-making resilience: especially in VUCA contexts which require a wider spectrum for actionable capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - difficulty of applicability: managing diverse capabilities and working with subordinate leaders from various domains might be challenging and very demanding; - can be discrepant or confusing: considering the high complexity generated by the accentuated diversity of capabilities and the difficulty in managing informational flows from multi-domain sensors might influence decision-making negatively.

It is clear that it is quite difficult to apply the mission command from a multi-domain perspective, since the principle is still being validated even at the level of the US Army.

These are some of the current (single domain) and future (multi-domain) coordinates according to which the Ukrainian leaders try to guide themselves in carrying out military operations. So far, it can be said that they have achieved operational success even though the Russian forces still occupy significant parts of the Ukrainian territory. In this sense, the UAF’s multiple strikes on Chornobaivka against Russian command posts is just one example of attempting to use mission command from a multi-domain perspective: “Pinning Russian woes solely on ineptitude, while true to some extent, downplays the effect Ukrainians are having in systematically dismantling their enemy’s command-and-control system through multidomain targeting” (Beagle, Slider, and Arrol 2022, 12).

Moreover, an analysis of the advantages of the multi-domain mission command (Table 2) provides significant clues to elucidate the question of how the Ukrainian forces have managed to withstand the overwhelming fighting power of the Russian Federation: “The Ukrainians are struggling to break through Russian lines at the moment, but my goodness it’s been a David and Goliath struggle, and their comparative advantage has been the fact that they are further ahead in MDO than the Russians evidently are” (Clarke 2023); “Nevertheless, the Ukrainians are showing that MDOs are important to conduct even at the lowest levels” (Clarke 2023). Broadly speaking, this has happened not only because Ukraine has succeeded in adapting its capabilities to the hybrid conflict context, but also due to the Ukrainian military leadership which has tried to apply mission command to the requirements of non-linear operations. On the other hand, this was enhanced by “Ukraine’s ability to encourage and stimulate military innovation because of the non-hierarchical organizational culture of its armed forces ...” (Mannerfelt 2023, 8).

3.3 Applying Mission Command by Highly Motivated Leaders

Going back again to the tactical battlespace, another binding ingredient of mission command effectiveness is its practicability by highly motivated leaders. From the beginning of the conflict, one of the most remarkable aspects has pivoted on in the determination of the fighting personnel to defend their territory, and against this backdrop, the conflict in Ukraine validates the hypothesis according to which the Ukrainian moral component counterbalances the Russian Federation overwhelming physical component. It seems that the motivation of the Ukrainian forces' commanders was activated after the annexation of Crimea peninsula by the Russian Federation, being fuelled, in particular, by their own and even the population's desire to restore territorial integrity: "in the occupied territories after 2014, Ukrainian forces were also highly motivated in preventing more of the country falling into Russian hands and morale among the troops was therefore high" (Zabrotskyi et al. 2022, 22). With the intensification of the operations and the losses suffered by the Ukrainian forces, their self-determination intensified, in some situations being recognized even by the opponents, despite their massive campaign of propaganda and disinformation. On the other hand, taking into account that "mission command is positively related to autonomous motivation" (Knevelsrud, Sørli, and Valaker 2023) and is still widely used as a core doctrinal principle in today's demanding operational environments, heavily typified by VUCA. Commanders and leaders must do whatever necessary to delegate the authority to subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative. This was the case with the Ukrainian leaders who took full advantage of the opportunities created, which cannot be said about the opposing forces' tactical commanders, who displayed a great lack of motivation, resulting from a combination of factors (lack of appropriate equipment, training and logistic support, lack of personal stake in the conflict, the Russian doctrine of attrition which resulted in high human losses and an increased personal risk). Unfortunately, low morale in the Russian troops is not necessarily a factor that significantly diminished the results of the military actions, due to cultural factors specific to an authoritarian environment, in which decision making is made at the top, personal initiative is discouraged and orders must be obeyed without order, as any lack of compliance is severely punished. Better morale as a result of the application of mission command principles can be considered as one of the factors that played and is playing a vital role in the remarkable resilience of the Ukrainian troops in the face of an enemy with superior forces in terms of manpower.

From another perspective, to effectively understand how motivation works, the relationship between delegating authority and assuming responsibility should be analysed. Delegation of authority has multiple connotations, because the one who delegates does not simply get rid of the command, but is still responsible, in relation to their superiors, for what will happen following the application of the delegated command by the subordinates. Thus, the one who delegates is responsible to the superiors for the way in which the subordinates apply the delegated command, while the latter are responsible to the one who delegated the command. In practice, a mechanism of assuming responsibility is created, the motivation influencing both the level of the delegator and the level of the delegates, with motivation being more prevalent at the level of the latter. In conclusion,

this represents another positive aspect characteristic to the Ukrainian military leaders, who are not only highly motivated to delegate authority, but are extremely encouraged to accept new challenges and assume responsibilities following the acceptance of the delegated command. From a final perspective, although the motivation of the Ukrainians can be highlighted in most situations from the beginning of the conflict, it should be mentioned that the most conclusive situations can be those in Mariupol, Bakhmut, or Avdiivka, where the Ukrainian tactical leaders surrendered the objectives only based on orders received from higher command within the designated conception of operation (CONOPS). Related to Mariupol, an example of practising motivation on a large scale within mission command can be identified in the defence of the Azovstal compound, where tactical leaders demonstrated independent decision-making despite the absence of coordination and cooperation from the hierarchical structures (Shelest 2022).

3.4 Stimulating Mission Command Through Manoeuvrist Approach

Another constant of the conflict in Ukraine is defined by the conduct of military operations in heavily urbanized areas, representing the elementary framework of the manifestation of the mission command. In such urban environments, mission command lacks precision if it is not supported by the manoeuvrist approach, the latter being defined as an “indirect approach which emphasises targeting the enemy’s moral component of fighting power rather than the physical” (AJP 3.2 2022, 37). The additional RQ that emerges at this point is the following: Why is the manoeuvrist approach so important for exercising mission command? The answer also resides in the previous definition, being initiated by “actors’ understanding, physical capability, and will and cohesion” (AC 71940 2017, 8-2) which competes for the possibility of amplifying combat power by generating and correlating lethal and non-lethal effects (Figure 1).

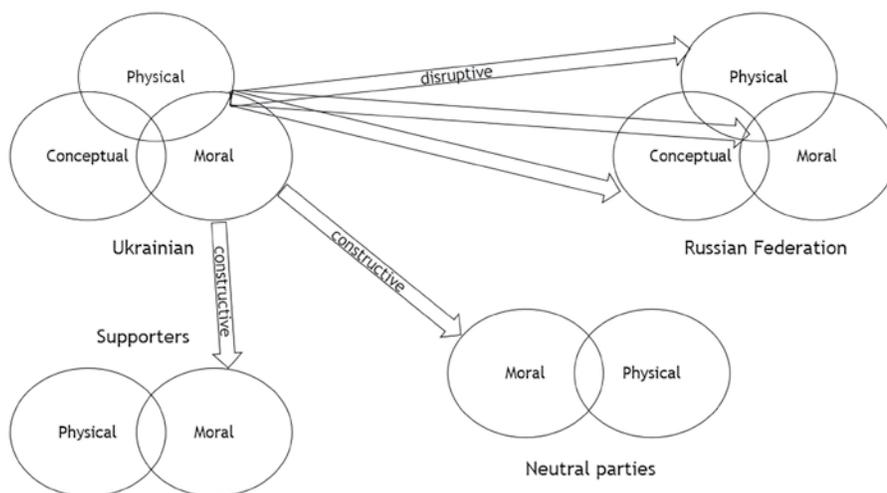


Figure 1: Manoeuvrist approach practiced by Ukrainian military forces
 Source: Figure adapted after Ducheine and Van Haaster

In other words, Figure 1 highlights the integrated approach of the Ukrainian military forces through developing constructive activities (blue arrows) to maintain and improve relationships with supporters, as well as to attract neutral parties, and through amplifying disruptive activities (red arrows) against opponent's physical, moral and conceptual components, in the present case, the Russian Federation. Most likely, the constructive activities (blue arrows) could be developed using predefined and validated tools that focus on different instruments of power. Tools that focus on military, political, economic, civil, and information (MPECI) domains (MCDC 2019, 13) or that integrate diplomatic, information, military, economic, and legal (DIMEL) domains can be included in this category (Sweijs et al. 2021, 7). Moreover, as noticed, Ukraine's ability to develop and effectively use large scale constructive activities, has significantly diminished the opponent's ability to develop own constructive activities that could have ensured the attraction of supporters and neutral parties. Going back to the relationship between the manoeuvrist approach and mission command, it can be said that there is an interdependent relationship between these two fundamental operational principles. On the one hand, this interdependence is defined by the mission command's ability to ensure the correlation of lethal and nonlethal effects through the integration of combat functions, thus enhancing the direction of their synergy at a decisive place and time. Moreover, the manoeuvrist approach facilitates the focus on the path towards decisive operation, by initially achieving non-lethal effects and later lethal ones, through developing constructive and disruptive activities. On the other hand, the subject relationship, in the form in which it was defined as interdependence, is supported by correlating the principles promoted by manoeuvrist approach and mission command. For instance, one of the fundamental principles specific to manoeuvrist approach focuses on situational understanding, which broadly implies the correlation of ends, ways and means as actions, effects and objectives. In order for this correlation to be logical and supported, military personnel and particularly tactical commanders must possess widely-shared understanding to generate a COP, which constitutes one of the principles of mission command. Furthermore, the interdependence can be exemplified by connecting the principle of seizing and retaining initiative (manoeuvrist approach) with clear commander's intent and practicing a disciplined initiative (mission command). It is very simple to understand that dictating the course of events can only be achieved through a coherent and concise mission purpose, essential tasks and desired end state, as well as by practicing an initiative which follows the commander's intent. Consequently, it can be estimated that the more practiced and present the manoeuvrist approach in the battle space, the more effective the mission command. It seems that this relationship has been deciphered and practiced by the Ukrainian forces during various operations, since they successfully cope with the increasing pressure of the opposing forces.

3.5 Using Mission Command as an Effective Method for Adaptive Leadership

A final aspect that contributes to the validation of the formulated hypothesis refers to the use of mission command as an effective method for enhancing the adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership “holds the qualities of a clear vision and mission; and the know-how to utilize the experiences and skills of their subordinates with tolerance and independence” (Chughtai 2023), possessing specific features, such as: scanning the horizon; focusing on the big picture and long term; developing a clear vision; taking into account multiple perspectives; promoting constructive critical conversations (McKimm et al. 2023). How does adaptive leadership manifest at the level of military operations, especially those carried out on the Ukrainian territory? From the perspective of hybrid operations during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, adaptive leadership manifests itself through flexible direction and command, imprinting multilevel leaders and particularly tactical ones in the form of their ability to direct combat functions and military structures, as well as to make opportune adjustment decisions. All these characteristics determine the necessity to identify and analyse some critical variables that are the subject of adaptive leadership and mission command: operations design; commander’s intent; decentralized execution; decisive, shaping, sustaining operations. From a theoretical perspective, the first variable, operations design, combines “critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe problems and approaches to solving them” (ADP 5-0 2019, 2-16). Also, it is the commander’s basic tool used in the first stage of the operations process, which, by using conceptual planning and answering the ‘What’ and ‘Why’ questions, establishes the detailed planning framework, through the operational approach and the commander’s intent. The hybrid peculiarities of the operations require, more than ever, the critical and creative thinking of the commanders, and in this sense the Ukrainian leaders proved these skills in managing various operational problems in the form of approaching the adversary innovatively. Another variable, related to the previous one, which influences adaptive leadership and represents an essential ingredient for practicing mission command is the commander’s intent. Taking into account the accentuated dynamics of the adversary and the other operational audiences, the courses of friendly forces must ensure a high degree of operational flexibility, which implies an adaptive commander’s intent, as well as flexible decisive, shaping, and sustaining operations. In this situation, through their commanders, the Ukrainian military forces, managed to show flexibility in following their intention and achieving the operational geometry. Although an increased flexibility could contradict the respect of the commander’s intent, its application did not exert a negative influence, the subordinates answering the questions ‘What’ and ‘Why’, and therefore the flexibility impacted the achievement of the purpose, essential tasks and desired end state (the ‘How’). At the same time, the flexible operational geometry positively influenced the adaptable attaining of the commander’s intent, which imposed on the Ukrainian military forces a continuous adjustment of decisive, shaping and sustainment operations, with greater emphasis being signalled on the last two. The last variable to be analysed in the context of the Ukrainian conflict refers to the disciplined initiative. Although in a multitude of

changes, such as the operational context addressed, a series of questions related to the achievement of operational discipline emerge, this aspect can be clarified by reporting back to the commander's intent. Thus, the disciplined initiative is nothing more than using initiative following the commander's intent, although, as it has been highlighted, the alarming dynamics of the situational changes could call it into question.

However, the issue of self-improvement of the UAF leaders remains open and extremely vital, because "they wish to be an intelligent force allowed to use their brains, different skills, self-motivation, and initiative and to be led intelligently not blindly ordered" (Grant 2023).

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, it can be inferred that all research questions (RQ1 - RQ6) have been addressed and answered and, consequently, the research hypothesis (mission command highly impacts the operational and decision-making resilience of the Ukrainian military forces and leaders) has been validated.

The preliminary conclusions can be summed up by practicing mission command at the lowest levels within UAF represents an essential indicator of decision-making resilience. In addition, the current applicability of mission command (CAW perspective) and potential adjustment according to MDO, optimized by the use of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs), significantly enhanced the operational effectiveness of the UAF. While there is a positive correlation with self-motivation, in order to generate the desired effects, mission command must be practiced by highly motivated leaders, as is the case of the Ukrainian commanders. In the same way, the amplification of the desired effects can be achieved by correlating the principle of mission command with a manoeuvrist approach which establishes the path to follow for achieving the decisive operation. Finally, highlighting the context of the Ukrainian conflict, mission command is instrumental to the manifestation of adaptive leadership through the flexibility of operations design, of the commander's intent, or of shaping, sustaining and decisive operations, contributing to the leaders' decision-making resilience and the military forces' operational effectiveness.

Based on these considerations, it can be concluded that a relationship of cascading influence can be established between these three concepts analysed in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, given that mission command directly influences decision-making resilience just as the latter exerts an essential impact on the operational resilience.

Moreover, considering the preliminary nature of the study, we consider that it should be further supported by other research that combines quantitative methods. In the context of Ukrainian operations, potential research topics should focus on measuring multiple correlations between mission command, decision-making resilience and operational resilience and, implicitly, on a more in-depth analysis of the factors that influence all these variables. Also, other limitations of the study are given by the existence of a small number of Ukrainian sources, most of which being available as lessons learned developed by those interested by the addressed subject.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AO	Area of Operation
C2	Command, Control
CAW	Combined Arms Warfighting
CIS	Communication Information Systems
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
COP	Common Operational Picture
DIMEL	Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Legal
EDT	Emerging and Disruptive Technologies
MDO	Multi-Domain Operations
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MPECI	Military, Political, Economic, Civil, Information
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
RQ	Research Question
RM	Research Method
RObj	Research Objective
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UAF	Ukrainian Armed Forces
US	United States
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

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