

## ANALYSIS OF WARFIGHTING FUNCTIONS- THE UKRAINIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE IN CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a detailed analysis of warfighting functions during the counter-offensive of the Ukrainian forces against Russian forces, as well as the efficiency of warfighting functions, which has a significant impact on the results of the war. It will cover the period from the start of the counter-offensive of the Ukrainian forces, from June 2023, when some victories were recorded by the Ukrainian forces.

Through the analysis and processing of confidential and already available information from social networks, media and the Washington Post, and in accordance with the comparison with the US doctrine, a special emphasis was placed on one of the warfighting functions in Ukrainian counter-offensive, that is, the system for combat service support. The method of analyses and synthesis was used to summarize the results and arrive at the conclusion.

Hence it is confirmed that in terms of the organization and implementation of the combat service support warfighting function, the Ukrainian forces have failed to meet the right requirements in the right place and at the right time. The main culprit in all of this is the lack of sufficient time for preparation and training of personnel for different models of the same type of assets that were donated by Western countries during the war, as well as the rejection of US military officials' advice to use frontal attack along one axis.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian forces, warfighting functions, service support, analysis.

### Introduction

The effectiveness of warfighting functions during offensive operations has a significant impact on the overall outcome of a war. Warfighting functions include a wide range of elements, including deciding tactics, strategies, armaments, communications, logistics, and

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coordination. A well-prepared and advanced warfighting function provides an advantage to the forces that are on the offensive. This may refer to superior weapons possessed by the party on the offensive, better and more advanced communication systems, and advanced intelligence capabilities. Communications and coordination are critical to the success of offensive operations. Fast and safe communication between units allows us to maintain the unity of the forces and to quickly adapt them to the changing situations on the battlefield. Furthermore, precision, long-range missiles, advanced intelligence and reconnaissance tools can significantly disrupt enemy defenses and enable offensive forces to deliver decisive strikes. Effective logistics and maintenance capabilities are of exceptional meaning in being able to supply forces with ammunition, fuel, food and medical support all to maintain the pace of offensive operations. Also, information warfare occupies a significant role in modern conflicts. Hence, warfighting functions that successfully integrate cyber warfare, electronic warfare, and psychological operations can destroy an enemy's command and control system, cause confusion and influence the course of events (Cvetkovic, 2002:28).

The following analysis will assess the level of success of each warfighting function deployed on the battlefield by Ukrainian forces, in the long-awaited and planned offensive necessary to retake part of the territories occupied by Russian forces during 2022. Furthermore, through the analysis of the „Combat-service support” warfighting function, specific proposals will be made on how it could be better applied this warfighting function in the offensive actions by the Ukrainian forces for better success.

According to Slobodan Cvetkovic in his Textbooks “Overall tactics” and “Tactics as a skill - combat operations of a battalion”, the warfighting functions of the „battalion” are grouped into seven management combat systems known as: Command and control, Intelligence activities, Maneuver, Fire support, Anti-aircraft defense, Mobility and determination and Combat service support (Cvetkovic, 2000:3-1). In the theory of tactics, they are known as combat systems that rule the battlefield. In U.S. military doctrine, there are six warfighting functions, which closely align with the warfighting functions (combat systems) described by Cvetkovic. Though they may differ slightly in terminology, their core purposes largely overlap.

**By analyzing the warfighting functions in the offensive of the Ukrainian army against the Russian forces, we can determine which of them were well applied and which were not, after the following:**

1. Command and control: The function of command and control as a process that continuously take place and direct the activities in the conduct of the offensive operations by the Ukrainian forces did not give the desired results in terms of the planned tasks and activities. From the very beginning the Ukrainian army encountered challenges in the process of the making military decisions, and later with the coordination of the forces. The Ukrainian army receives significant assistance from the United States and other allied forces, all in the order to improve the system of command and control, using simulations and training of Ukrainian forces by the allied countries (Army.mil, 2024). The Ukrainian commanders, despite the advice from the allies, independently made decisions regarding the way the offensive took place. It is negative that in the way of planning and during implementation of offensive operations, the United States and the allied forces

did not agree with the way in which they were conducted. The weather conditions at the beginning of the counter-offensive also had a negative impact, so that the muddy and impassable terrain significantly slowed down the start and pace of the operations. The U.S. proposal to launch an assault along the southern axis was not followed. Instead, attacks were launched at three distinct points along a 600-mile front, moving southward toward both Melitopol and Berdyansk on the Sea of Azov, and eastward toward the embattled city of Bakhmut in Ukraine. This decision significantly impacted the leadership, motivation, and synchronization of its own forces. The failure of the Ukrainian forces to make timely preparations, allowed Russian forces more time and space to establish their defensive positions. The deployment and control of the forces did not give the desired effect, due to the careless execution of the same and not considering the effects of the geostrategic position of the country and characteristics of the battlefield (U.S. Army Europe and Africa, 2022).

2. Intelligence activities: Efficient management of offensive operations relies on accurate intelligence and other relevant information regarding enemy forces, weather, and terrain. The maneuver of the Ukrainian forces in the conduct of offensive actions should bring their own forces to more favorable position before reaching contact with the enemy. The positive side for Ukrainian intelligence activities is that they are on their own territory, which they know well. According to information from the field, there were data that the fortifications on the Russian side were strengthened during the winter, and for those reasons, it was requested that the offensive should begin at the beginning of April, in order not to allow Russian forces to further strengthen the defensive positions (AP News, 2023). Ukrainian forces prepared a plan for a counter-offensive with the goal of stretching enemy forces along a 600-miles front, but intelligence data again did not yield the expected outcome. The negative side is represented by unfavorable weather conditions and the difficult maneuver of the forces. The desired breakthrough was not achieved, and progress was only twelve miles. The data regarding the assessment of the weak morale of the Russian forces also failed in a precisely defined time context, as well as the depth of the enemy's defenses. Much of the information obtained through reconnaissance operations on the ground was put into the background, which proved to be a weakness in the offensive operations. All this resulted in heavy losses in their own forces, resources, and equipment, so that the Ukrainian forces were put in a situation of defense, instead of conducting operations to liberate the occupied territories.
3. Maneuver: The purpose of the maneuver as a warfighting function is through a set of measures and procedures, to bring the units by movement and fire strike into the most favorable position in relation to the enemy for the performance of the assigned task (Washington Post, 2022). The form of maneuver used by the Ukrainian army in conducting offensive operations is to engage a larger enemy force on a wide front through a three-pronged frontal attack. The improper use of maneuvers negatively impacted and in its entirety. The lack of pronounced combat superiority, the untimely preparation for the execution of a quick attack, the lack of speed and simplicity did not maintain the desired pace and initiative of the attacks

undertaken (Riley B., Karolina H., Nicole W., and Mason C., 2023). Furthermore, the layout of minefields and tank ambushes by Russian forces made it difficult for the maneuver of Ukrainian forces. The lack of air support significantly affected the inability to maintain the pace. Namely, building adequate capabilities for fire support, including aviation and anti-air defense is necessary to enable successful action against the active aviation of Russian forces and the fight against the use of drones (Washington Post, 2023, „Miscalculations, divisions marked offensive planning by U.S., Ukraine“).

4. **Fire support:** Fire support is one of the main functions performed on the battlefield. Fire support is the overall and synchronized integration of the fire and effect action of air, land, and naval indirect fire systems, as well as electronic warfare systems that directly support maneuver forces. With the fire support, the task of the maneuver forces is to contain, destroy, turn, hinder, and neutralize the opposing forces to realize the planned operational and tactical objectives. From the analysis of the main direction of attack, we can determine that the Ukrainian forces had artillery support available. But they lacked the air support of maneuver forces. Then the lack of precise systems and systems with a long range that would hit targets in the rear of the Russian forces, was convicted of obstructing the Russian command and control system and supply routes. Russian forces were significantly more dominant in terms of the use of artillery, drones, aviation, and other fire support, and hence the Ukrainians suffered serious consequences in conducting offensive actions (Ryan, Horton and DeYoung, 2023). All this made it difficult to coordinate the fire and the effect of the action of one's own forces on the enemy and to conduct the planned operations.
5. **Anti-aircraft defense:** The basic purpose of air defense (aircraft defense) is of forces protection against missile attack, air attack and airspace control, which ensures the destruction of ballistic missiles, action against enemy aircraft and helicopters. On the plus side for Ukrainian forces is the improved concentration of air defense assets on the battlefield with air defense assets received by the US and allied forces. Quick and easy adaptation of the use of these systems by Ukrainian forces increased the efficiency of offensive operations. However, the downside is that Ukrainian forces had few air defense assets at their disposal, limited resources, and an inability to operate in the rear of Russian defensive forces due to limited range. Furthermore, the capacity to accommodate an additional number of air defense systems from Ukraine's allied countries was also limited.
6. **Mobility and entrenchment:** Ensures that forces can move freely on the battlefield, overcoming obstacles and maintaining operational momentum even in adverse conditions. Determination reflects the resilience and sustained combat capability of the unit. Ukrainian forces were initially well positioned and determined, all to prevent a possible Russian counteroffensive. Before the offensive, Ukrainian forces are receiving additional engineering vehicles to deal with the minefields to enable mobility and freedom of maneuver to break through the line of the front. On the other hand, the Russian forces made significant use of the conditions on the ground for formation of defense in depth, with the task of performing (fix and disrupt) frisking and hindering the attack, how would we achieve the goal of deterring the

Ukrainian forces. Russian forces exceeded the number of expected minefields and their density. Everything it hindered the mobility and freedom of maneuver of the Ukrainian forces (Gerry D., Vijdan M. K., and Adolfo A., 2023).

7. Combat-service support: Provides logistical and support services such as supplies, transportation, medical care, and equipment maintenance. This function is essential for maintaining the battalion's operational effectiveness over time. As an advantage, the Ukrainian forces were constantly supported and consulted regarding the needs that could be met by the allied forces, which will improve their position and the possibility of a successful attack in further actions. The significant amounts of equipment and ammunition were a great benefit of the Ukrainian forces. Joint training and exercises with allied forces help Ukrainian forces to increase their confidence and morale to conduct subsequent operations. A disadvantage would be that most of the combat service support of the Ukrainian is based on assistance from allied forces, which Ukrainian forces have not been fully trained to use. Furthermore, certain types of equipment that arrived were not complete, and hence could not be used as intended. The impossibility of continuous and integrated supply of the forces as from Ukrainian and allied forces affected the success of the actions (Lee and Kim, 2023).

### **Analysis of one of the warfighting functions in Ukrainian offensive actions – Combat service support**

Combat service support is a warfighting function that has a key function in the organization and implementation of operations. The combat service support includes essential capabilities, functions, tasks, measures, procedures, and activities that are implemented to support all elements of the combat forces in the area of operations at all levels of warfare. From the available extract from the Washington Post, it can be concluded that the Ukrainian commanders undertook considerable efforts to create and provide the necessary conditions for the execution of the offensive actions. Requests for assistance by allied forces are timely and commensurate with the needs of Ukrainian forces. On the other hand, Russia has a considerable number of larger troops, a larger arsenal of military weapons and equipment, and the will they show through endurance, that is, the large number of losses. At the beginning of 2023, about 200,000 Russian soldiers and many experienced commanders were killed or wounded. The forces that were sent to Ukraine as a reserve lacked experience and training. Significant losses of armaments, systems and equipment also affected command and control of Russian forces. In terms of predictions for the forces that Ukraine needed to launch the offensive, it fell short both in terms of numbers and readiness (Merkx, G.W., 2023). The effectiveness of combat support failed in every aspect. The inability to use the resources that were available to them both from their own and allied forces negatively impacted the progression of operations. Emphasizing the Ukrainian forces' lack of an arsenal of weapons, systems, and air support reflects their fear of their ability to succeed. The dilapidated and old MiG-29 fighter jets that can detect targets within a radius of 40 miles and with a range of 20 miles are significantly incompetent and would not produce the desired results. On the other hand, the Su-35 from Russia can detect targets within a radius of 90 miles and has a target range of up to 75 miles (U.S. doubts Ukraine counteroffensive will yield big

gains, leaked document says, 2023). Their demands to obtain F-16a were precisely because of the significant advantage that the Russian forces have in the air space. In this regard, United States points out the inexpediency of such a shipment to Ukraine, due to the need for more resources for pilot training (which last one year), as well as the cost of the F-16 aircraft (WELT, 2023). The failure also occurs because of the unplanned and unnecessary use of artillery missiles, especially around Bakhmut, which would be significantly more necessary for Ukraine in counter-offensive actions (Ukraine short of skilled troops and munitions as losses, pessimism grow, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of sufficient vehicles for evacuation and demining was an additional problem. On the other hand, the US concluded that the Ukrainian forces failed to properly receive and maintain the equipment they received from allied forces. The need for intensive training to improve maintenance was imminent. The counter-offensive that began in early June 2023 saw small victories by Ukrainian forces. The failure of their own artillery in the initial actions led to many Ukrainian soldiers being injured and killed by Russian mortars. Ukrainian equipment losses in the first few days included 20 Bradley Fighting Vehicles and 6 Leopard tanks. All this made it impossible for the pre-planned strategy to pay off. (Jakes, L., Kramer, A.E. and Schmitt, E.,2023).

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that in terms of organization and implementation of the combat service support, the Ukrainian forces failed to meet the right requirements at the right time and in the right place. They also lacked sufficient skill in improvisation, specifically in adapting combat service support capacities to effectively meet the qualitative and quantitative demands of the evolving situation during operations. Also, they did not respect the principle of economy, to provide the necessary support with minimum cost. The very fact that support resources are always limited requires that they be used efficiently and rationally. The rational consumption of materials is also dictated by the uncertainty of military operations and losses during them. The combat service support system was not sufficient resilient to protect against destruction and damage, and as such to implement sufficient measures and actions to prevent or reduce the effect of enemy activities directed at Ukrainian forces, materials, infrastructure, and the more important information's. Donations from most of the coalition forces in combat vehicles, systems, equipment and asset tools from different models and providers, have negative impact of the war. Such non-standardization slows down the pace due to the need to train personnel for different models of assets of the same type, which takes a lot of time to make that asset operational. Other problems arising from non-standardization are the difficulty of maintaining and supplying parts, fuel, and ammunition to the systems, which makes logistics very bulky and slow. (For example, the Ukrainians own several modern western-made tanks, so special training is needed for handling and maintaining them, special tools, fuel, ammunition, and parts for each model of tank).

For Ukrainian forces to succeed in conducting offensive operations, it is essential that all warfighting functions operate flawlessly and align with a well-thought-out strategy, predetermined doctrine, and according to the already learned lessons and experiences of what has happened so far. The lack of accurate, timely intelligence, as well as timely preparation to cause the effect of surprise on the opposing sides is of crucial importance. Given that the war

in Ukraine is still being fought, continuous monitoring of the situation and adaptation to the changing course of actions should make the Ukrainian forces supported by the allied forces to change the course of events in their own favor.

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