

REVIEW PAPER

The Role of Defense Forces in Ensuring National Military Potential: A Comparative Analysis of Countries

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ABSTRACT

In a multipolar geopolitical landscape, the proliferation of threats to nation-states is escalating, necessitating the cultivation of military capabilities commensurate with contemporary exigencies and proficiency in safeguarding national interests. Within the intricate framework of a nation's military prowess, paramount importance is ascribed to its defense forces, whose primary mandate is the execution of defensive functions. This paper aims to systematically scrutinize the influence exerted by defense forces on the military potential of contemporary nations. The principal method employed in this study is the comparative approach, facilitating the elucidation of the position and contribution of human resources in fortifying the military potential of states through the evaluation of multiple criteria. The primary criteria considered for conducting the comparative analysis encompass population size, the aggregate strength of defense forces along with their constituent elements, and the mobilization resource. Through correlation analysis, discernible interrelations between these indicators have been identified. The investigation ascertained that the concept of "military potential" is intricate, encompassing the entirety of both material and spiritual resources within a state that is indispensable for safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, the multifaceted nature of this definition, coupled with a considerable array of influencing factors governing the formation and evolution of military potential, introduces complexity into the process of state ranking and the development of global indices. The study reveals that economically more advanced states demonstrate a capacity for higher defense expenditure, and the size of defense forces exhibits a discernible correlation with the population, albeit not conclusively determinative. It is established that larger defense forces may exhibit inferior quality owing to their composition, inclusive of a substantial presence of reserves and paramilitary units. Simultaneously, no direct correlation is observed between the means of manning defense forces and the quality thereof.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ① The magnitude of military potential is contingent upon the economic standing of the state, with more developed countries having the capacity to allocate greater resources to defense.
- ① An essential aspect in the scrutiny of military potential is the mobilization potential, notably prominent in several Asian countries.
- ① The principles of manning, while significant, are not determinative and are influenced by diverse factors, ranging from the size of the state to the level of motivation among the population.
- ① In Ukraine, the participation of volunteers and territorial defense forces assumes a crucial role, especially amid increasing patriotism in response to Russian aggression.

Keywords: Military potential, defense forces, nation-state, mobilization resource

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The contemporary global shift towards a polycentric model markedly heightens the risk of regional and global conflicts (Wallace, J., Hartley, R., Bowman, G., Coburn A., Ruffle S., 2013). Presently, several pivotal conflict zones have emerged on the world stage. Foremost among these is the Russian-Ukrainian war, characterized by its intensity, direct threat to Europe, and consequential global socio-economic ramifications. Additionally, the enduring conflict in the Middle East, with its protracted history and a multitude of participants, proves challenging to resolve and exerts an impact on energy pricing. Notably, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region has recently witnessed increased complexity. China's territorial claims to Taiwan introduce a risk of a global conflict between the United States and China, potentially incurring a 10% loss to the world economy (Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, 2024). Furthermore, North Korea's escalating provocations against neighboring nations, South Korea and Japan underscore the nation's increasingly audacious behavior.

Consequently, the augmentation of military capabilities emerges as a primary imperative for contemporary states tasked with ensuring their security. Central to the composite structure of military potential is the human resource element, embodied by the defense forces of nation-states.

Literature Review

Within the scientific discourse, the examination of military potential has garnered considerable attention from researchers, particularly in the context of comprehending a state's capacity to engage in warfare. Mercantilist scholars, such as Heckscher, underscored the significance of the economic factor. Their analyses, encompassing financial, commercial, industrial, and demographic dimensions, aimed to discern the "sinews of war" (Heckscher, E., 1955). The evolution of warfare, exemplified by the world wars, has transformed its nature. Total warfare has emerged, characterized by general mobilization and civilian suffering resulting from city bombings. This transformation amplifies the role of the spiritual factor in a state's military potential. As articulated by Knorr, military potential constitutes the material from which military force can be mobilized during war or international tension. Its principal components extend beyond industrial

power to encompass administrative proficiency in management and the morale or motivation for war. The latter significantly determines the segment of the national economy available for the production of military force (K. Knorr, 1956).

Amidst the Cold War milieu of the twentieth century, scientists endeavored to model potential conflict outcomes through the application of mathematical methodologies to calculate the military potential of states (G. Clifford, D. Stinger, W. Fouque, R. Claine). G. Clifford's approach is grounded in the consideration of nuclear potential, territorial expansion, population size, industrial capacity, and military resources. In contrast, R. Claine advocates for a broader spectrum of factors, incorporating the entire economic potential, which encompasses energy, industry, minerals, agriculture, and trade. Additionally, new indicators introduced by Claine include the state's will, representing the leadership's ability to guide both the population and allies and the national strategy coefficient (Kachynskyi, A., 2015).

Nonetheless, as highlighted by Sytnyk, H. (2023), a primary drawback of these models lies in their detachment from reality, as they tend to overlook several crucial indicators. An illustrative example is the Soviet Union, which possessed a formidable military potential but disintegrated rapidly, influenced by economic and national factors.

Eastern theorists have adopted functional analysis to compute the military power of states, thereby considerably broadening the scope of both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Huang, S. (1992), leveraging the capabilities of factor analysis, supplements calculations with considerations for the national leadership's capacity for coordination and unity, as well as material and intellectual support. Wang, J. (2013) introduces an array of novel indicators, including growth rate, disaster coefficient, national governance coefficient, correct and incorrect diplomatic decisions, corruption indicators, and the setbacks of national education, among others.

Mathematical models have served as foundational tools for the subsequent analysis of states' military power by various scientific institutes and institutions such as RAND, SIPRI, Stratfor, IISS, and Bloomberg. Despite the prevalence of mathematical

modeling, its application does not consistently provide a comprehensive representation of military potential. This necessitates additional analysis and consideration of various factors.

The primary objective of this paper is to conduct a comparative assessment of the role played by defense forces in shaping the military potential of nation-states within the contemporary global context.

Research Methods

The primary methodological approach in our study is the comparative method, which aims to analyze the influence of demographic resources on the development of the military potential of states. The principal criteria for the selection of countries for comparison will hinge upon their economic potential and defense expenditure. This approach is designed to facilitate the testing of the hypothesis positing a correlation between these indicators. The comparison of defense forces across leading global nations will involve an assessment of several key criteria, including the composition of defense forces, total numerical strength, reserve, and auxiliary units, mobilization resource (indicative of a state's mobilization capacity), and the annual increment in the population of military age.

Within our study, we partially rely on the annual Global Firepower Index (2023), a military power ranking encompassing 145 countries. However, given the absence of a transparent methodology, we exercise caution in its utilization. For more precise information, albeit lacking a ranking, we turn to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and its detailed annual reports, which play a crucial role in our comparative analysis. Correlation analysis is employed to either affirm or refute relationships between specific factors. Employing general scientific methods such as analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, abstraction, generalization, and systematization, we construct a research design that enables the derivation of conclusions.

Research Results

A pivotal aspect of our study involves elucidating the essence of the term "military potential." Along the same semantic lines, we explore the concept of

"state power." According to Horbulin, V. (2009), the terms "potential" and "power" align with the philosophical categories of reality and possibility. As posited by Kachynskyi, A. (2015), the complete realization of a state's military potential occurs only under conditions of full mobilization, involving the concentration of both material and spiritual forces of the state. Simultaneously, state power, or aggregate power, constitutes a segment of the material and spiritual forces within the state, society, and the armed forces. Currently, it is directed towards securing national security and achieving the geopolitical and geostrategic objectives of the state. However, from our perspective, military potential extends beyond merely deterring aggression from another state or alliance of states. It also encompasses the capability to influence the policies of other international actors.

Undoubtedly, military potential constitutes a relative concept contingent upon a state's position within the global coordinate system, ranging from superpowers or great powers to middle powers or regional leaders. Alternatively, one may consider the classification proposed by Z. Brzezinski (1998), distinguishing between geostrategic powers, which make critical decisions, and geopolitical centers, strategically located entities susceptible to influence by geostrategic powers.

The complete realization of military potential necessitates the swift mobilization of requisite forces and the availability of resources for their replenishment, encompassing human potential, the labor force, and the economy's capacity to transition to a military mode, among other factors. Notably, human resources assume paramount significance in this context, serving as both combat forces and essential labor for the rear.

In contemporary scientific discourse, the concept of "defense forces" encompasses various dimensions. While frequently employed to denote armed forces and army units, we contend that its scope is more extensive, encompassing not only traditional army units but also other power structures available for mobilization as needed. Conversely, the term "armed forces" assumes a somewhat narrower definition, characterized as "a military state structure designed to defend the state, safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability" (Skakun, O., 2016).

Consequently, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are defined as “a specific militarized state structure established to safeguard national interests, preserve the integrity and inviolability of state borders, and uphold state sovereignty. This is achieved by training military personnel to defend the country in the event of aggression or armed conflict” (Sokurenko, V., 2015). The Defense Forces of Ukraine encompass not only the Armed Forces of Ukraine but also other military formations, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies, and specialized bodies with law enforcement functions established following the laws of Ukraine. These entities are entrusted with the functions of ensuring the defense of the state as mandated by the Constitution and laws of Ukraine (Law “On National Security of Ukraine,” 2018). Therefore, the defense forces of Ukraine also encompass the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service, and the National Police, among others (100 Questions and Answers about the Defense Forces of Ukraine, 2023).

In the comparison of states’ military potential, due consideration should be given to the economic component, as it establishes a state’s capacity to sustain and furnish defense forces.

A correlation analysis examining the relationship between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and defense spending reveals a consistently positive correlation between the two variables, with a stable correlation coefficient of 0.8. On average, states allocate between 1% and 2% of their GDP to defense expenditures. However, Russia, positioned among the top ten countries in terms of economic standing, exceeds this average by allocating more than 4% of its GDP to defense (World Economic Outlook, 2023; Military Strength Ranking, 2023).

Consequently, economically robust states possess the capacity to allocate more substantial resources to defense, facilitating the establishment of professional armies equipped with modern military technology—a crucial factor in contemporary warfare. However, noteworthy exceptions exist, such as North Korea. Despite having a comparatively lower GDP, North Korea allocates more than 15% of its GDP to defense, an amount ten times less in monetary terms than South Korea and Japan, which allocate 2% and 1% of GDP to military needs, respectively. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that Arab countries

also exhibit a notable trend, spending the largest percentage of their GDP on defense, ranging from 4% to 6% (The Military Balance, 2022).

Let us examine the correlation between population size and the magnitude of defense forces. It is noteworthy that currently, fourteen countries worldwide boast populations exceeding 100 million: China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Mexico, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Egypt. However, there exists a notable discrepancy in the size of their defense forces. For instance, Vietnam, with a significantly smaller population compared to China (14 times smaller), possesses defense forces that are 46% more populous.

Table 1: The largest countries by population and their defense forces (in thousands)

No	Country	Total population	In defense forces
1	China	1 410 000	3 135
2	India	1 390 000	5 132
3	The United States	337 000	1 800
4	Indonesia	277 000	1 080
5	Pakistan	242 000	1 704
6	Nigeria	230 800	280
7	Brazil	217 000	2 100
8	Bangladesh	167 200	6 963
9	Russia	142 000	1 330
10	Mexico	130 000	630,6
11	Japan	124 200	309
12	The Philippines	116 400	1 385
13	Egypt	107 700	1 220
14	Vietnam	104 800	5 850

Source: *The World Factbook, 2024; Military Strength Ranking, 2023.*

Consequently, the correlation analysis reveals an absence of a consistent relationship between a country’s population size and the magnitude of its defense forces, indicated by a correlation coefficient of -0.3.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, countries exhibit varying proportions of defense forces concerning their population, with North Korea leading at 7.6%, followed by Vietnam at 5.6%, Bangladesh at 4%, India at 0.4%, and China at 0.2%. In contrast, Russia reports a figure of 0.9%.

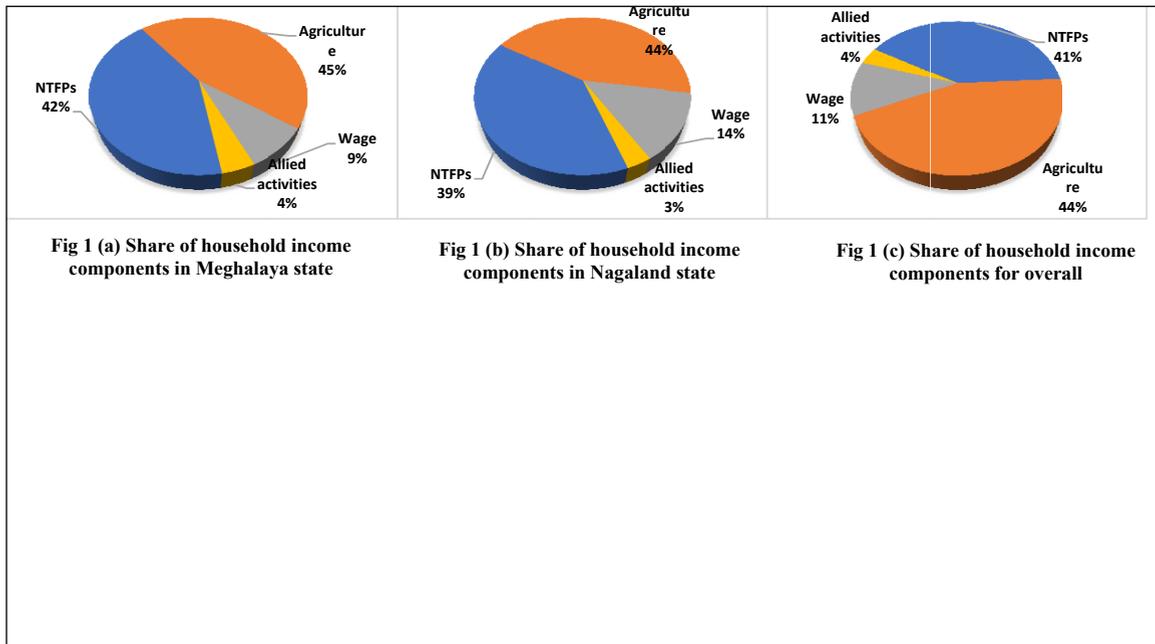


Fig. 1: Diagrams of the ranking of countries by GDP and defense expenditures, in USD million (*Source:* World Economic Outlook, 2023; The Military Balance, 2023)



Fig. 2: The numerical composition of the defense forces of the world’s largest countries, in thousands (*Source:* Military Strength Ranking, 2023)

In the analytical framework, the quantitative composition of defense forces assumes equal significance, encompassing the regular army, reservists, and paramilitary formations such as police, coast guard, and special forces.

Consequently, China (2 million), the United States (1.8 million), and India (1.45 million) boast the largest regular troops, constituting 64%, 74%, and 28% of their defense forces, respectively. This

segment represents the immediate deployable force in the event of hostilities. Notably, the highest reserves are found in countries such as Vietnam (5 million) and India (2.5 million), accounting for 86% and 49% of their defense forces, respectively. This reserve, although substantial, requires a certain duration for activation. India, alongside Bangladesh, harbors the largest number of paramilitary units within its defense forces, amounting to 1.55 and 6.8

million, respectively, constituting 30% and 97% of their overall forces. Therefore, the primary potential of the Bangladeshi defense forces lies not in regular troops but in various security forces (Military Strength Ranking, 2023).

A substantial segment of the paramilitary element within the Indian defense forces is comprised of the Home Guard and Civil Defense reserve volunteer units, numbering nearly a million. The composition of the Indian paramilitary forces also encompasses the police force (1 million 400 thousand), the coast guard, and forces dedicated to safeguarding the borders with Myanmar (Assam Rifles) and China (The Special Frontier Force). In 2020, the Special Frontier Force executed a successful Operation Snow Leopard along the border with China, thereby regaining control of strategically significant heights. These units play a crucial role in addressing the challenges posed by various tension zones along the country's borders (Op Snow Leopard: Inside Story of How Army Reclaimed Heights in Eastern Ladakh, 2020).

As per International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) assessments, South Korea possesses a robust reserve force, exceeding 3 million individuals, comprising both regular and internal reserves. Upon completion of their service in the armed forces, soldiers are obligated to serve in the mobilization reserve for four years before transitioning to the main reserve. In the event of hostilities, five divisions are envisaged to be formed from the reservists (The Military Balance, 2023). Conversely, North Korea's rapid mobilization potential, leveraging reserves, could be nearly twice as extensive, reaching 5.9 million people.

A pivotal metric is the total mobilization resource of a country, denoting its capacity to replenish the ranks of defense forces during wartime. Notably, Iran boasts the highest level of mobilization potential among nations with a substantial defense budget (ranking 10th globally at \$44 billion with a 47% ratio). Following closely are China (44.3%), Turkey (43%), and Vietnam (42.6%). Conversely, other major countries exhibit figures ranging from 35% to 40%. The Russian Federation reports the lowest result at 33%. In contrast, South Korea records a figure of 41%, while North Korea's mobilization capacity is less than 20%, indicating twice the mobilization potential in Seoul compared

to Pyongyang. European countries and the United States exhibit a mobilization resource of 35-40% (The Military Balance, 2023).

An integral component of the mobilization resource is the annual replenishment of the population eligible for service as they reach conscription age. The most notable growth rates in this indicator are observed in Pakistan and Bangladesh at 1.9% annually, followed by Nigeria and the Philippines at 1.8%. Additionally, India, Mexico, Turkey, and Vietnam exhibit growth rates of 1.7%, while Iran and Brazil record a rate of 1.6%. Conversely, South Korea reports the lowest rate at 0.8%, while North Korea's rate is double at 1.6% (Military Strength Ranking, 2023).

The principles governing the personnel composition of the armed forces are of significance, although their measurement poses a challenge. Four primary types of manning can be identified:

1. conscription of citizens for military service, based on general military duty;
2. recruitment by contract, relying voluntarily upon;
3. a mixed approach, combining conscription and contractual recruitment;
4. police-based manning, following laws governing general military service (Savynets O., 2018).

The first type is exemplified by Israel, where the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are composed through the conscription of both men and women. Following the completion of their mandatory service, individuals are enrolled in the reserve and are annually called up for one month of military service. Consequently, the IDF can swiftly mobilize up to 700 thousand soldiers if the need arises. This was demonstrated during the fall of 2023 when, in response to an attack by Gaza militants on Israel, the country mobilized more than 300,000 reservists within two days, executing a successful operation against the militants (Heavy rocket fire on central, southern Israel; 300,000 reservists mobilized in 48 hours, 2023).

Hence, the Israeli Defense Forces undeniably represent a national army. However, in response to evolving threats, Israel is adapting its approach to the IDF by allocating increased focus to new specialized

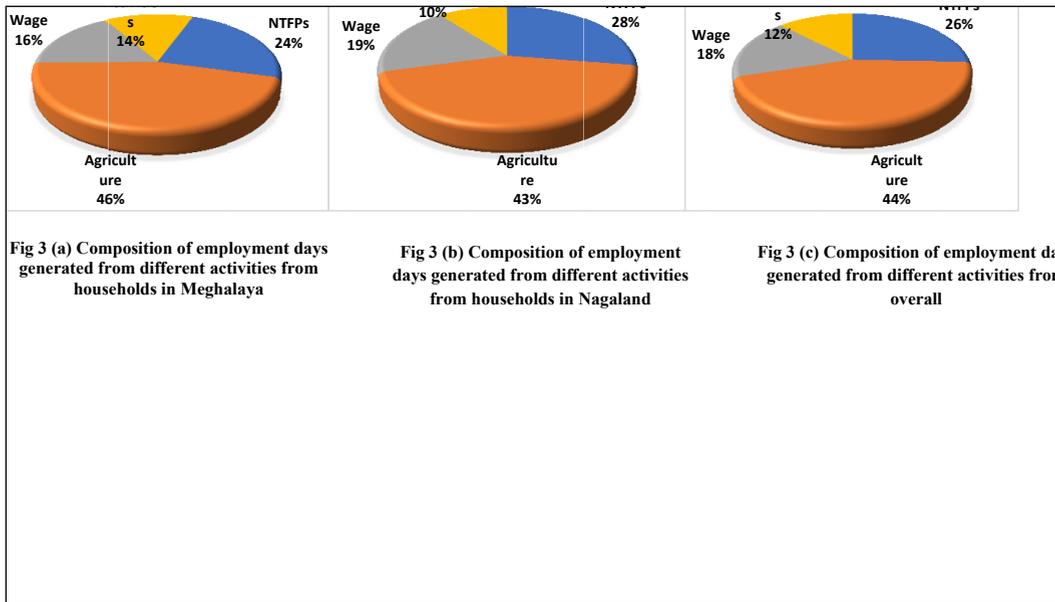


Fig. 3: Mobilization potential of the top twenty GFP countries (*Source:* Military Strength Ranking, 2023)

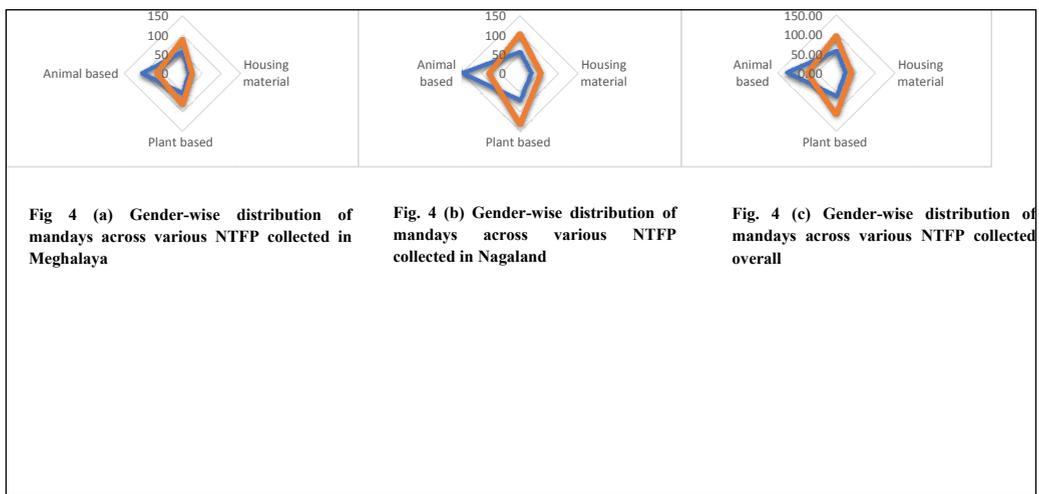


Fig. 4: The annual growth rate of persons of conscription age (*Source:* Military Strength Ranking, 2023)

units, particularly those involved in intelligence and countering cyber threats. In 2020, the country established a specialized unit comprising elite special forces and ground intelligence personnel dedicated to covert operations (Barak, O., Sheniak, A., Shapira, A., 2020).

The second type of recruitment is characteristic of the United States and the United Kingdom, while in the early twenty-first century, France transitioned away from conscription. Ukraine is also urged to gradually shift towards a professional army. This form of manning offers notable advantages, including the voluntary nature of service and the assurance that successful recruitment ensures a high level of material security and social protection for

military personnel (Heiko, V., 2010). However, a significant drawback lies in the insufficient number of reservists available for deployment in the event of hostilities. To address this issue, several types of mobilization (selective, partial, full, general) and the presidential call have been introduced, enabling the rapid mobilization of up to 200 thousand reservists when necessary.

The mixed form appears to be the most optimal, but it is not without certain drawbacks. For instance, in Germany, until 2011, all citizens were conscripted for military service lasting six months, which did not allow for comprehensive military training of the recruits. Consequently, with an annual conscription rate of 60-80 thousand, only 7 thousand individuals

were available for active participation in hostilities in Germany. In contrast, this figure is significantly higher for France and the UK, standing at 30 thousand and 22 thousand, respectively (Gulmez, D., Gulmez, S., 2020).

The fourth type, as observed in Switzerland, involves allocating mobilization resources to military units based on the place of residence, facilitating the mobilization of 0.5 million people when needed, despite a total population of 8.5 million. In some countries, military service is compulsory for women, allowing their mobilization in the event of hostilities. This approach is not exclusive to Israel but is also employed in Norway and Sweden, as well as in various African countries such as Morocco, Benin, Mozambique, Chad, among others, and notably in North Korea.

The principal advantages of a volunteer or contract-based army lie in its professionalism and its capacity to rapidly adapt to and master new military equipment and technologies. This is particularly crucial in the face of emerging and evolving threats (Kurtov A.I., Potrohosh Yu.O., 2008).

The transformation of the Ukrainian defense forces is marked by several key aspects. Initially, this involved the establishment of volunteer units at the onset of the conflict with Russia in the spring of 2014. During this period of crisis, when state mechanisms teetered on the brink of collapse and the Revolution of Dignity spurred the development of civil society institutions, over 30 territorial defense battalions were swiftly formed. Subsequently, these battalions were integrated into the Armed Forces, assuming the role of motorized infantry units (Popovych, D., 2017). As part of ongoing reforms, Ukraine is actively developing an extensive territorial defense system, with over 110 thousand individuals enlisted (Territorial Defense Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2023). The significance of territorial defense forces is underscored by the evolving nature of warfare, characterized by comprehensive and total engagement. In this context, these forces are not viewed merely as auxiliary; rather, they are recognized as essential components of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This strategic perspective is articulated by Ukrainian military experts who emphasize the need for a reevaluation of the role of territorial defense forces (Sobko, S., Punda, Yu., Muzychenko, D., 2023).

The second aspect pertains to the shift of the Ukrainian defense forces to a contractual basis by the year 2025. As outlined by Horbulin, V. (2021), the Ukrainian authorities had been indecisive in embracing this transition, primarily influenced by the prevailing opinion within the military elite favoring the maintenance of a mixed type of manning. Nevertheless, Horbulin contends that a contractual approach, characterized by elevated motivation, robust social guarantees, and opportunities for career development, is indispensable for cultivating a formidable and contemporary army. Such an approach is deemed essential to ensure the readiness of the military to confront a spectrum of external threats of varying complexity.

DISCUSSION

The examination of the influence of defense forces on the military potential of countries has unveiled several problematic issues. Foremost among these is the absence of a precise understanding of the concept of “military potential” within the scientific discourse. This ambiguity creates a broad space for the utilization of diverse characteristics for its interpretation, ranging from economic to ideological perspectives. In this context, we define military potential as a comprehensive amalgamation of material and spiritual forces that empowers a state to safeguard its interests and exert influence on other participants in the realm of international relations.

Secondly, employing mathematical models to rank states based on their military potential poses significant challenges. This is attributed to the intricate nature of the definition and the presence of numerous influential factors that prove difficult to quantify accurately. Notably, in the context of various scenarios and projections, Ukraine was anticipated to face a disadvantage in an asymmetric full-scale conflict with Russia; however, it has demonstrated resilience and success. Consequently, caution should be exercised in relying on military power rankings, particularly those provided by sources like the anonymous Global Firepower, which fails to elucidate the methodology employed in its calculations.

Thirdly, gauging the impact of defense forces on military capabilities presents a substantial

challenge. An analysis solely relying on the number of personnel may lead to inaccuracies, as the largest defense forces may not necessarily boast the highest quality, owing to specific compositions such as a prevalence of paramilitary structures (as seen in Bangladesh) or a significant presence of reservists (as observed in Vietnam). Additionally, the manning criterion lacks a direct correlation and is contingent on various factors, including the size of the state, the nature of the conflict, and ideological considerations. For instance, the strategy of rapid mobilization is well-suited for a comparatively small nation like Israel but may pose challenges for larger states. Addressing these complexities necessitates further research and refinement of analysis methodologies, along with the incorporation of innovative approaches.

CONCLUSION

Amid escalating global tensions and the emergence of new conflict zones, the significance of the military potential of states is markedly increasing, as it plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a nation.

The magnitude of military potential is contingent upon the economic standing of the state, with more developed countries having the capacity to allocate greater resources to defense. However, there are instances where the military expenditures of states surpass the average, constituting a substantial burden on their economies. This scenario is particularly characteristic of countries compelled to resist aggression, such as Israel and Ukraine, or authoritarian regimes that either function as actual or potential aggressors, exemplified by Russia and North Korea.

The defense forces constitute a vital component of the military potential of states, encompassing not only the regular army but also additional units such as reservists and a network of paramilitary formations, including border guard units, coast guard, special forces, national guard, territorial defense forces, and others. The size of these forces is not directly proportional to the population, even though the three most populous countries globally—China, India, and the United States—possess the largest armies. Conversely, the defense forces of Nigeria, ranking 6th in the world in terms of population, number less than 300 thousand.

An essential aspect in the scrutiny of military potential is the mobilization potential, notably prominent in several Asian countries such as Iran, China, Turkey, and Vietnam. Coupled with a high annual growth rate of individuals reaching military age, this creates prospects for numerical expansion of armies. Nevertheless, in contemporary circumstances, the sheer size of armed forces does not assume a decisive role, as it lags behind military and technological advancements in warfare, including aerial reconnaissance, unmanned aerial vehicles, long-range missiles, and more. Consequently, the foremost nations worldwide emphasize the military-technical facet as a central component of their military potential.

The principles of manning, while significant, are not determinative and are influenced by diverse factors, ranging from the size of the state to the level of motivation among the population. For nations like Israel, a nationwide approach to the defense forces is likely the most optimal in a prolonged conflict, enabling a substantial increase in size within a short timeframe. However, due to the mixed recruitment format and the brief service duration of conscripts, the German army falls notably behind the armed forces of neighboring France. In Ukraine, the participation of volunteers and territorial defense forces assumes a crucial role, especially amid increasing patriotism in response to Russian aggression. Consequently, each country must carefully select the type of territorial defense forces that aligns most fittingly with its unique circumstances.

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