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Oleh Sokolovskyi

Vadym Sluysar

Olha Hordiichuk

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THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHAPLAINCY MOVEMENT IN UKRAINE

By **Oleh Sokolovskyi, Vadym Slyusar, and Olha Hordiichuk**

Oleh Sokolovskyi, Doctor of Sciences (Phylosophy), Professor, Professor of the Departament of Phylosophy and Political Sciense of Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University. Zhytomyr. Ukraine.

E-mail: osokol_83@ukr.net

ORCID: 0000-0003-2228-3040

Vadym Slyusar, Doctor of Sciences (Philosophy), Docent, Head of the Department of Philosophical and Historical Studies and Mass Communications of Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University. Zhytomyr. Ukraine.

E-mail: vadmyksl@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-5593-0622

Olha Hordiichuk, Doctor of Philosophy, Docent, Head of the Department of Philosophical and Historical Studies and Mass Communications of Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University. Zhytomyr. Ukraine.

E-mail: hordiichuk@ztu.edu.ua

ORCID: 0000-0003-4606-9188

Abstract

The formation and development of relations between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and religious organizations, as well as the conditions and factors that influenced the formation of the institution of military chaplaincy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, were analyzed. It was determined that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine actualized the issue of urgent reform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The modernization of the Ukrainian army required not only structural changes in the military administration, the transition to NATO standards, but also the creation of qualitatively new conditions for meeting the religious needs of Ukrainian servicemen. With the beginning of hostilities in the East of Ukraine, the number of military believers increased significantly, which created the need for further improvement of military-religious relations and the search for effective forms and methods of pastoral care for the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is proven that military-religious relations between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and religious organizations before the full-scale invasion were outlined by measures, at the level of established traditions of interpersonal communication, which were aimed at the development of spiritual values. This was expressed in conducting joint scientific and scientific-practical events, the results of which formed further joint steps and prospects for the introduction of the institute of military chaplaincy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Therefore, the process of improving the legal framework for establishing cooperation with religious organizations and the gradual introduction of the institute of chaplaincy in the Armed Forces of Ukraine took place. The peculiarities of military chaplaincy activities of representatives of Christian and Muslim religious organizations in units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, and other military formations formed in accordance with the laws of Ukraine have been determined.

Keywords: religion, religious organizations, Christianity, Islam, chaplaincy movement, chaplain, military chaplaincy service, pastoral care, moral and psychological support.

Introduction

A regularity of the military construction of many armies of the world is the formation, along with other structures, of the service of military chaplains, which satisfies the religious needs of military personnel, engages in educational work, and advises commanders on the day-to-day activities of the troops. The presence of military clergy serves as one of the standards for the functioning of the armed forces in most European countries and the United States. The use of religious ideology in military formations is explained by the fact that religion is interpreted as an integral part of the people's culture, having a number of common functional characteristics.

The Institute of Spiritual Care functions in almost all armies of the world, in particular in the armies of NATO member countries. The nature of the tasks assigned to military chaplains indicates that they are not only engaged in meeting religious needs, but are also included in the system of ideological and psychological influence on the entire personnel of the troops, regardless of the worldview orientation of each. Religious education is incorporated into the system of moral-psychological and combat training of military personnel and is subordinated to the main task, which is to maintain the proper spiritual-psychological potential of the troops. Chaplains are present in the daily activities of the troops, during ceremonial events, in the combat zone, etc.

The armed forces of foreign countries have accumulated considerable experience in the pastoral care of servicemen, which must be taken into account during the formation and development of the chaplaincy service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the improvement of the legislative framework regulating the sphere of religion and state-religious, in particular, military-religious relations. The experience of conducting military operations in the East of Ukraine gives an understanding of the specifics of pastoral work in the Ukrainian army. At the same time, it is important to take into account the experience of meeting the religious needs of the personnel of the armed forces of foreign countries, where the institution of chaplaincy has already become a common practice and an integral element of the armed forces.

There is no common doctrine for chaplaincy services, even in NATO countries chaplaincy models differ. Each state has its own unique format of service for the spiritual care of military personnel, built in accordance with the mentality and historical development of the people. During the introduction of its own institute of military chaplaincy, Ukraine should use not only

foreign experience, but it should also be based on spiritual traditions, as well as the experience gained during the Russian-Ukrainian war. In light of recent events, with the rise of competition in the information sphere, the role of the military chaplain will only grow.

The Main Material and Results

The world military conflicts, taking place in the 20th and 21st centuries, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the aggressor in 2022, convincingly proved the need for pastoral care of military personnel. The service of chaplains significantly affects the consciousness and behavior of the military, forms the appropriate level of moral and psychological stability and readiness to perform various types of tasks. The socio-political and religious situation in Ukraine had a significant influence on the establishment of the military chaplaincy institute. During the 1990s, the necessary historical prerequisites for the formation of military-religious relations in the Armed Forces of Ukraine were created. During this period, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of state independence of Ukraine took place, which caused the process of national revival in Ukraine and started the development of the Ukrainian army. The state and military leadership of Ukraine was aware of the need to build its own military forces that were different from the Soviet atheistic model.

The first step in building military-religious relations was the approval by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine on March 5, 1992, of the Concept of the Social and Psychological Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Among the main tasks of the newly created service was to ensure friendly relations of all religious denominations, churches, organizations, equal opportunities for their self-realization and satisfaction of needs, fair treatment of them, self-assertion and personality development of each soldier.¹

The need to meet the religious needs of military personnel is evidenced by sociological studies. The results indicate the existence of a steady trend towards an increase in the number of religious servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Thus, in 1996, among conscripts, 35.5% believed themselves to be believers, 37.8% were atheists, and 26.7% were hesitant about having faith.² Almost 60% of officers, ensigns and midshipmen considered themselves

¹ Концепція соціально-психологічної служби Збройних Сил України. [Concept of the Social-Psychological Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine]. *Народна армія*, 1992, № 120 (173), 2.

² Звіт з науково-дослідної роботи “Проблема реалізації права військовослужбовця на свободу совісті та віросповідання у процесі демократизації Збройних Сил України. [Intermediate report on the research work “The Issue of Implementing the Right of Military Personnel to Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Process of Democratization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”]. Київ: НДЦ ГП ЗСУ, 1996, 28.

atheists.³ As a result, according to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, in the period 1992-1996, the total number of believers of all categories of servicemen increased from 4% to 29% and had a steady upward trend.⁴

Taking into account such indicators, the military leadership launched the work of informational influence on the consciousness and spirituality of the personnel through the introduction of advanced forms and methods at the time, in particular, the creation of a new, completely depoliticized and de-ideological structure, whose specialists would cooperate with religious organizations on the basis of national-patriotic traditions of the Ukrainian people. The positive dynamics of the strengthening of religious consciousness among Ukrainian contract servicemen was reflected in a sociological survey of 1997. In this social group, 67.7% of respondents considered themselves believers, 12.8% were non-believers, and 19.5% were undecided. The majority of religious servicemen (81%) were adherents of various denominations of Orthodox churches: Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter UOC MP 58.8%, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (hereinafter UOC KP) 10.7%, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (hereinafter UAOC) 2.8%. About 3% of respondents considered themselves to belong to the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine (hereinafter RCC), 2.7% to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (hereinafter UGCC), Protestants 2.6%, Muslims 0.8%, and Buddhists 0.5%. 27.7% of respondents did not identify their affiliation to any denomination.⁵ Thus, as of 1996, the leadership of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was forced to take into account the rights to freedom of religion of at least two-fifths of the personnel and create conditions for meeting their religious needs.

Starting in the mid-1990s, one of the organizational forms of cooperation between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Christian Churches was the creation of “interfaith chaplain associations” in 1994, 2000, and 2015 that cooperated with the military.⁶ Since 1996, heads of religious organizations have initiated the creation of church structures responsible for

³ Звіт з науково-дослідної роботи “Проблема реалізації права військовослужбовця на свободу совісті та віросповідання у процесі демократизації Збройних Сил України”. [Final report on the research work “The Issue of Implementing the Right of Military Personnel to Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Process of Democratization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”]. Київ: НДЦ ГП ЗСУ, 1997, 89.

⁴ Звіт з науково-дослідної роботи “Соціальний механізм реалізації державної програми реформування та розвитку Збройних Сил України на період до 2005 року”. [Final report on the research work “Social Mechanism for the Implementation of the State Program for Reforming and Developing the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the Period up to 2005”]. Київ: НДЦ ГП ЗСУ, 2003, 220.

⁵ Душпастирська опіка у Збройних Силах України: досвід, проблеми, перспективи: монографія. [Pastoral care in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: experience, issues, perspectives: a monograph]. Київ: НДЦ ГП ЗСУ, 2010, 258.

⁶ Л. Владиченко, Т. Кожушко. Інституювання військового капеланства в Україні: акцент на діяльності католицьких церков. [Establishment of military chaplaincy in Ukraine: emphasis on activities of the Catholic Church]. *Українське релігієзнавство*, 2020, № 91, 83–109.

the pastoral care of military personnel. Thus, the UOC MP created the Synodal Department of the UOC for cooperation with the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine, the UOC KP – the Synodal Department of Spiritual and Patriotic Education in Relations with the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine, the UGCC – the bishopric of the UGCC in matters of chaplaincy for all types of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In the RCC, the assistant bishop of the RCC was responsible for this line of work, and in the UAOC – the bishop of the UAOC.⁷

During this period, both the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ukrainian clergy took the first steps towards cooperation on strengthening the morale and psychological state of personnel, spreading knowledge about the religious traditions of the Ukrainian people and troops in the military environment, celebrating religious holidays, etc. Gradually, the range of tasks of priests who worked with military personnel was defined. The first joint events were held with the participation of representatives of religious organizations during the military oath taking by servicemen, the graduation of young officers from higher military educational institutions, the holding of services at events dedicated to the memory of fallen fighters for Ukraine. The first proposals regarding the creation of a chaplaincy institute in the Armed Forces of Ukraine came from the representatives of the churches.

At the beginning of the 2000s, a steady trend of the growing role of the church-religious factor in the socio-political processes of the Ukrainian state was outlined. The church gradually turned into one of the important social institutions. Thus, according to the results of a sociological study, the total number of Ukrainians who considered themselves believers reached 57.8% in 2000, and 71.4% in 2010. Later, during 2010–2023, the share of believers among adult citizens of Ukraine averaged about 70%. Accordingly, the number of believers in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine increased. This prompted the leadership of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to take certain steps in the issue of normalizing the pastoral care of servicemen in the conditions of military service.⁸

The use of foreign experience in meeting the religious needs of the armed forces contributed to the formation of a legal framework for the regulation of relations between religious organizations and the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. The result of mutual

⁷ С. Соколюк, О. Ворошук. Становлення військово-релігійних відносин в Україні (1991–1994). [Formation of military-religious relations in Ukraine (1991-1994)]. *Воєнно-історичний вісник*, 2019, № 3 (33), 102–118.

⁸ Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000–2020 рр. Інформаційні матеріали Круглого столу “Релігія і влада в Україні: проблеми взаємовідносин”. [Features of religious and church-religious self-identification of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2020. Information materials of the Round Table “Religion and Power in Ukraine: Problems of Interaction”]. Київ, 2020, 110.

cooperation was the signing on April 21, 2006, of the directive of the Minister of Defense of Ukraine “On streamlining issues of meeting the religious needs of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.” The document provided for the prevention of any coercion regarding the military serviceman's determination of his attitude to religion, to professing or refusing to profess religion, to participating or not participating in religious services, religious rites and ceremonies.⁹

In order to further develop and coordinate the activities of military-religious relations, a sector of work with religious organizations was created under the Ministry of Defense. In 2008, representatives of this structural unit signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with religious organizations in the pastoral care of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The document declared the intention of joint actions of the institutions in matters of creation of a consultative and advisory body under the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine of the Council for Pastoral Care of Servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the creation of an institute of military clergy (chaplaincy). In 2009, the Minister of Defense approved the Regulations on the Council for Pastoral Care, which operated on a public basis.¹⁰

An indicative criterion for the implementation of pastoral care in military structures was the sociological survey “Attitude of officers to the introduction of the system of meeting the religious needs of religious servicemen and the introduction of the institute of military priests (chaplains) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”, which was initiated in 2010 by the Scientific Research Center for Humanitarian Issues of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The total sample consisted of more than 400 officers of all types of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 16 garrisons. The study found that 64% of officers consider themselves believers, 27% were not sure, and the rest declared themselves non-believers. Regarding giving priority to certain denominations, 34% attributed themselves to the UOC MP, 25% to the UOC KP, 3% to the UGCC, and 2% to the UAOC. The introduction of the institute of military priests (chaplains) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine was supported by 44% of officers.¹¹

The events of 2013–2014, related to the Euromaidan and the beginning of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, sharply turned the vector of the chaplaincy movement in

⁹ Душпастирська опіка у Збройних Силах України: досвід, проблеми, перспективи: монографія. [Pastoral care in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: experience, issues, perspectives: a monograph]. Київ: НДЦ ГП ЗСУ, 2010, 258.

¹⁰ Положення про Раду у справах душпастирської опіки при Міністерстві оборони України. [Regulation on the Council for Pastoral Care Affairs at the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine]. *Верховна Рада України*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0115322-09#Text>

¹¹ С. Бабаков. Руслан Коканчук: “В Україні кількість прибічників капеланства постійно зростає”. [Ruslan Kokhanchuk: “The number of supporters of chaplaincy in Ukraine is constantly growing”]. *Камуфляж*, 2012, № 03, 8–9.

Ukraine. Under the conditions of a complex socio-political situation in Ukraine, the issue of meeting religious needs and creating an institute of military chaplaincy is becoming particularly acute and urgent. This put on the agenda new requirements regarding its practical implementation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Therefore, on July 2, 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine issued an order “On the service of military clergy (chaplain service) in the Armed Forces, the National Guard and the State Border Service”. It instructed the relevant state structures to develop and approve, in accordance with their competence, regulations on the service of military clergy in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.¹²

It should be noted that the chaplaincy movement in the Ukrainian army began before the Russian aggression in 2014. Priests of various denominations showed an active civic position through volunteer service, which unfolded on Independence Square during the Revolution of Dignity. Later, this movement acquired a mass character in 2014-2015 during the active phase of the anti-terrorist operation in the East of the country.¹³ The result of such activity was the adoption of the decision of the Chief of the General Staff, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, from 2016 regarding the introduction of military clergy service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The process of introducing and staffing the posts of military priests (chaplains) was started and was divided into two stages. At the first stage (until June 30, 2017), the implementation and staffing of civilian positions of military priests (chaplains) in the combat brigades of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as in medical institutions where combatants were treated and rehabilitated, was foreseen. During the second stage (until the end of 2017), it was planned to introduce and staff, based on the proposals of the commanders of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, civilian positions of military chaplains (chaplains) of designated combat military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine up to the level of a separate battalion (battalion). During the first stage, 66 positions of military priests (chaplains) were introduced to the staff of units, during the second stage – 36 positions. At the end of 2017, 110 positions of military chaplains were introduced to the staff of combat units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, of which 73 positions were filled.¹⁴

¹² Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України №677 від 02.07.2014 “Про службу військового духовенства (капеланську службу) у Збройних Силах України”. [Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 677 dated July 2, 2014 “On the Military Chaplaincy Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine”]. *Верховна Рада України*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/677-2014-%D1%80>

¹³ Т. Ковтунович, Т. Привалко. Капелани. На службі Богу і Україні. [Chaplains: In Service to God and Ukraine]. Київ: ФОП Гончарук А. Б., 2019, 424.

¹⁴ Військові капелани запрацюють у всіх бойових частинах вже з 15 травня. [Military chaplains will start working in all combat units starting from May 15th.]. *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. 21.04.2017. https://risu.ua/viyskovi-kapelani-zapracyuyut-u-vsih-boyovih-chastinah-vzhe-z-15-travnnya_n844

Please note that the leading religious organization that provided pastoral care for servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine until 2014 was the UOC MP. With the beginning of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the number of supporters of this Church, which did not recognize Russia as an aggressor state and did not distance itself from the position of the Moscow Patriarchate, significantly decreased. This led to the formation of a negative attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards the official position of the UOC MP. Instead, the number of patriotic believers of the UOC KP constantly increased, which in 2017 was 29% (in 2013 – only 18.3%). The number of faithful UACs remained insignificant, hovering around the 1% mark.¹⁵ Therefore, on November 20, 2018, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine issued an order “On approval of the Regulation on spiritual centers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”.¹⁶ In accordance with his requirements, it was forbidden to allow representatives of religious organizations, whose centers are located on the territory of aggressor countries, to the spiritual centers of military units, institutions and institutions of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, whose activities can cause inter-religious conflicts in the military environment, as well as negatively affect the moral and psychological state personnel. This meant that the activity of representatives of the UOC-MP in the Armed Forces of Ukraine fell under the ban. Instead, the positions of military chaplains, after a thorough check by the Security Service of Ukraine, were filled with representatives of patriotically oriented religious organizations.

In addition to the presence of Orthodox churches, religious organizations of Muslims and Protestants took an active position in the movement. The corresponding proportional distribution was also observed in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is precisely because of the similar multi-confessional nature of Ukrainian society that the developers of various draft laws on chaplain service faced the problem of distributing ministers in units according to religious affiliation.

Finally, on November 30, 2021, with the revision of March 19, 2022, the Law of Ukraine “On the Service of Military Chaplaincy” was adopted, which defined the principles of

¹⁵ Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000–2020 рр. Інформаційні матеріали Круглого столу “Релігія і влада в Україні: проблеми взаємовідносин”. [Features of religious and church-religious self-identification of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2020. Information materials of the Round Table “Religion and Power in Ukraine: Problems of Interaction”]. Київ, 2020, 110.

¹⁶ Наказ Генерального штабу Збройних Сил України від 20.11.2018 №417 “Про затвердження Положення про духовні центри Збройних Сил України”. [Order of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine dated November 20, 2018, № 417 “On Approval of the Regulation on the Spiritual Centers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”]. *Довідник з МПЗ*. 20.11.2018. <https://dovidnykmpz.info/zagalni/nakaz-heneral-noho-shtabu-zbroynykh-syl-ukrainy-vid-20-11-2018-417-pro-zatverdzhennia-polozhennia-pro-dukhovni-tsentry-zbroynykh-syl-ukr>

the activity of the Service of Military Chaplaincy in the field of implementation of the constitutional right to freedom of outlook and religion of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, other military formations formed in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, and also defines the legal and organizational principles and principles of the Military Chaplaincy Service.¹⁷

In the conditions of war, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (hereinafter – OCU) primarily sees its role in the continuous supply of chaplains for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Taking into account the introduction of a new order of chaplain service in the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine defined by the legislation of Ukraine, the Holy Synod of the OCU decided to call priests to serve in the army as military chaplains. In particular, it was emphasized that bishops should identify persons capable of chaplain service and encourage priests of the dioceses headed by them to undergo it. It was supposed to create a working group to develop proposals for the Holy Synod regarding the further improvement of the jurisdictional aspect of chaplaincy and the organization of the chaplaincy service of the OCU.¹⁸

According to the current legislation, a military chaplain is a clergy member who, in the army, is supposed to cover the religious needs of soldiers: to answer their questions to God and prepare them for battle. The chaplain is officially equivalent to the deputy commander of a regiment or battalion, he has a personal assistant, a personal armed aide-de-camp and is responsible for the morale of soldiers and their families, as well as mourning the dead and consecrating weapons. Currently, the majority of chaplains in the Armed Forces of Ukraine are OCU priests who are subordinate to the Synodal Administration of the Military Clergy, there are also chaplains from the UGCC, the First Ukrainian Battalion of military chaplains from Protestant pastors and imams – Muslim chaplains. In 2023, 738 full-time positions of military chaplains were provided in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 244 clergymen received mandates to carry out this activity, 78 military chaplains were appointed to the staff.¹⁹

The head of the OCU, Metropolitan Epiphany, sees his personal participation in wartime events in his visits to the front-line areas, where, in addition to the direct service of bishops' liturgies, meetings with representatives of local authorities, volunteers, and visits to

¹⁷ Закон України Про Службу військового капеланства. [The Law of Ukraine on Military Chaplaincy Service]. *Верховна Рада України*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1915-20#Text>

¹⁸ Рішення №18 Священного Синоду Української Православної Церкви “Питання подальшої організації військового капеланства”. [Decision No. 18 of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church “Issues of Further Organization of Military Chaplaincy”]. *Православна Церква України*. 18.10.2022. <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/dokumenty-zasidannyasvyashhennogo-synodu-18-zhovtnya-2022-r/>

¹⁹ Хто може бути військовим капеланом. [Who can be a military chaplain]. *Армія. Inform*. 04.04.2023. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/04/04/hto-mozhe-buty-vijskovym-kapelanom/>

hospitals where wounded soldiers are being treated are planned. President V. Zelenskyi notes the importance of the chaplains' mission and emphasizes that they are the same heroes as military personnel, because they support the soldiers and help them maintain their morale. On the anniversary of the full-scale military invasion, he met with chaplains who served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and presented state awards: the Order “For Courage” of the 3rd degree, the medals “For Military Service to Ukraine” and the “Defender of the Fatherland” medal. At this meeting, the parties discussed the importance of increasing the number of chaplains in the army, the issue of regulating the verification of spiritual education necessary for obtaining military ranks and enlisting in the army.²⁰

Separately, we will pay attention to the peculiarities of the chaplain service of Muslim organizations of Ukraine, imam-chaplains of the Office of the Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine, whose activities are aimed at meeting the religious needs of defenders who profess Islam. It should be noted that significant adjustments in the activities of Muslim organizations were made under the influence of the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war,²¹ one of the main ones being the institutionalization of chaplaincy in Ukraine. The chaplaincy movement in Islam is an organic component of the implementation of both the state strategy of involving spiritual figures in the functioning of the country's defense institutions, the penitentiary service, and the strategy of the activities of Muslim organizations. Representatives of Muslim organizations participated in the development of the concept and legal basis for the activities of the relevant state bodies responsible for chaplaincy. In particular, Sheikh Rustam Ghafouri, who represents the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine and is responsible in the organization for interaction with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, has repeatedly participated in scientific forums over the past 15 years (for example, in the international round table organized by the Council of Pastoral Care under the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine on the topic: “Experience of chaplain services of foreign armies in modern conditions, search for an optimal model for the Armed Forces of Ukraine” 13.12.2011), in the working meetings of the Pastoral Council of the Directorate of Strategic Planning and European Integration of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine as its member, in an extended meeting of the Committee of the *Verkhovna Rada* on Culture and Spirituality on February 19, 2015, at which the issue of introducing the chaplaincy

²⁰ Президент Володимир Зеленський зустрівся з капеланами, які служать у лавах Збройних Сил України. [President Volodymyr Zelensky met with chaplains serving in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine]. *Українформ*. 23.02.2023. https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3674581-zelenskij-nagorodiv-kapelaniv-aki-sluzat-u-zsu.html?fbclid=IwAR02tiFH_XulExfnbVTLZ4_IjOiwKndTCGmY_PyIN6lOzQDtoIMETb75iKs

²¹ V. Slyusar, O. Sokolovskyi, M. Slyusar. PR activity of Muslim organizations of Ukraine (on the example of the RAMU “Ummah”). *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 2024, Vol. 44, Iss. 1, Article 6, 91–104.

institute in the Armed Forces of Ukraine was meaningfully discussed, as a member of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. At the same time, the analysis of the PR activity of this organization allows us to ascertain the minimal presence of the topic of chaplaincy, the interaction of this religious organization with military structures in the information policy of the *Duma*. Thus, there is no information about the chaplaincy on the website, although information about the existence of such an institution appears sporadically on other information resources, for example, on the resource of the Religious Information Service of Ukraine it is reported about the participation of the imam-chaplain of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine Muhammed Abdul Karim in the international conference “Military chaplaincy in Ukraine: results of the first stage of institutionalization (2014-2016)”, which took place in Kyiv on May 11-12, 2016.²² At the same time, although the report mentions the participation of other Muslim organizations, detailed information about the speeches of its representatives is posted on the website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims “*Umma*.”²³

A qualitatively different approach to the problem of chaplaincy is observed in the activities of other Muslim organizations of Ukraine – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims “*Umma*.” The main emphasis is on practical activities (organization of work and its direct implementation) and coverage of the activities of *imam*-chaplains in the media. A landmark event was the official registration on February 16, 2016, of the religious organization “Management of the Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine,” headed by Serhiy (Murat) Putilin. In essence, this gave official status to the activities of the voluntary movement, which arose among the believers of the “*Umma*” *Duma* back in 2014, since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In May 2014, a soldier of the “Aidar” volunteer battalion died and the command made a request to perform a funeral rite according to Islamic traditions, in accordance with the faith of the deceased. The realization that a certain proportion of the military armed forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, in volunteer battalions, in the State Border Service are Muslims, actualized the need to create within the scope of the activities of this religious organization a specialized structure “Management of the Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine,” which constantly performs its spiritual service for Muslim soldiers, conducting prayers, holidays, and sermons for them in the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) zone and in places where military units are permanently

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

deployed.²⁴ It was also determined that the activity of *imams* at that time could not cover this direction, therefore there is a need to separate such a division.

The issue of the practical integration of the Muslim chaplaincy into the military institutions of Ukraine has been regularly raised in the last two years at congresses and conferences of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea, as well as at official meetings with delegations of Muslim countries. So, for example, during the discussion of the current problems of the Muslims of Ukraine with the delegation from the Republic of Indonesia, which included representatives of the Indonesian Council of *Ulemas*, the head of the Council of *Ulemas* RAMC Suleyman Khairullaev told the delegation about the work of the Council of *Ulemas* and the service of military chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine in the Defense Forces of Ukraine, his role in supporting not only Muslim servicemen, but also believers of other faiths.²⁵

Mufti of the RAMU “*Umma*,” Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Sheikh Serhiy (Said) Ismagilov, outlined the main areas of work of the Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine, such as: pastoral work with the military: visiting them in parts, some help and good advice from the point of view of *Sharia* experts; work in the ATO zone: visiting fighters on the front lines, spiritual support, help in overcoming stress, joint prayer; serving in military hospitals: visiting wounded Muslims, helping with medicine, hospitality, and things to those who are in a difficult situation, in which Muslim women volunteers from the volunteer movement “*Maryam*” are very helpful, visiting the wounded with hot home-cooked meals, providing moral assistance, regardless of the religion of the wounded; schools of chaplains, who all the time have to improve their own education, study tactical military medicine, certain psychological points that will help to talk with people with traumatic syndrome; humanitarian mission: humanitarian, medical aid and, if possible, care for the families of the victims. The *imam*-chaplain is also required to be patient in order to worthily endure all the hardships of war (discomfort, pain, fear). Serhiy (Sayid) Ismagilov meaningfully supplemented this thesis in an interview with religious scholar Oksana Horkusha already during the large-scale invasion as a serviceman of the Territorial Defense Forces, stressing that the situation when the chaplain himself panics leads to endangering those people who trust him as spiritual leader.²⁶ And

²⁴ Military chaplains. Ukrainian Muslims’ Military Chaplains. *ДУМУ “Умма”*: офіційний сайт. <https://umma.in.ua/en/military-chaplains> .

²⁵ Рада Улемів Індонезії в Україні! [ouncil of Ulema of Indonesia in Ukraine!]. 15.12.2023. *ДУМК*: офіційний сайт. <https://www.dumk.org/2023/12/15/rada-ulemiv-indonezi%d1%97-v-ukra%d1%97ni/>

²⁶ Священне в умовах нелюдського. Іслам. Шейх Саїд Ісмагілов. Оксана Горкуша [The sacred in the face of the inhuman. Islam. Sheikh Said Ismagilov. Oksana Horkusha]. 27.03.2022.

therefore, in his opinion, this is not only the demoralization of the soldiers, but also a reason to question the faith itself.

After the large-scale invasion, the need for the work of chaplains became urgent due to the increase in the number of Muslims serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Muslim prisoners, and the number of dead. Religious support regarding the conditions of keeping Muslims in captivity, regarding the establishment of communication, is provided by Ayder Rustemov, Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea.²⁷ Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “*Umma*” from 2009 to 2022. Serhiy (Said) Ismagilov also served as a chaplain until 2022 and actively covered this activity (from 2022 he joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but his comments are regularly published in the mass media as one of the spiritual leaders of Muslims of Ukraine on topical religious issues). In general, the topic of the activity of imams-chaplains is covered quite actively on the official website of the State RAMU “*Umma*” and its affiliated social networks (organizations and leaders). Over the past three years, it has been reported about the training of the *imam*-chaplain of the Office of the Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine Yevhen Hlushchenko at training courses for military chaplains, about the awarding of Said Ismagilov and Murat Putilin with the Order of Merit III degree, and about awarding them with the Pro Deo et Patria (“For God and the Motherland”), about the participation of the *imam* of the mosque of the Dnipro Islamic Cultural Center Edgar Devlikamov and the head of the religious community of Muslims “Renaissance” Pavel Fedosov of the Community organization “Association of chaplains in health care of Ukraine,” about the regular participation of chaplain *imams* in various official events and others.

One of the leitmotifs of media coverage of the activities of chaplain *imams* is dialogue with chaplains of other religions. Sharing his own experience as an *imam*-chaplain at the National Meeting of Religious or Belief-Based Communities of Ukraine, initiated by the OSCE Bureau of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on December 8, 2015, Sheikh Serhiy (Said) Ismagilov emphasized that this is an important tool for establishing interreligious dialogue: “If Muslim fighters feel such respect for their religious views and support—will they have a negative attitude towards Christians? I think, never! Because they see real, good, joint

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg4Tw8YgSpc&ab_channel=%D0%9E%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%93%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%88%D0%B0

²⁷ С. Хуцану. “Ця війна для нас – джихад”. Муфтії Криму Айдер Рустемов про війну з РФ очима українських мусульман [“This war is a jihad for us”. Mufti of Crimea Aider Rustemov on the war with Russia through the eyes of Ukrainian Muslims]. *The Village*. 22.03.2023. <https://www.village.com.ua/village/city/city-interview/337265-muftiy-krimu-ayder-rustemov-pro-viynu-ochima-ukrayinskih-musulman>

action, even in such delicate matters as the satisfaction of spiritual needs.”²⁸ Ayder Rustemov, *Mufti* of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea, emphasizes the cooperation of chaplains of different religions: “Today, there are five Muslim chaplains in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, who work side by side with chaplains of other faiths and help each other in a coordinated manner.”²⁹ The information support of the activities of *imams*-chaplains allows to form in the mass consciousness general ideas about Islam as a religion, about the specifics of rituals and customs, and also actualizes the discussion about the participation of Muslims in the war in the media discourse. In particular, *imam*-chaplain Sergei (Murat) Putilin emphasizes that those who are attacked are allowed to fight, defending themselves from violence, but a Muslim must fight only against the military, observing the norms of humanity and humanitarian law.³⁰ Imam-chaplain Temur Beridze, who before the occupation of Severodonetsk was the *imam* of the local mosque (it is now destroyed), notes in interview, that Muslims are an indigenous part of the population of Ukraine, the history of Islam in our country spans more than 10 centuries, and therefore they have the right to protect their homeland, which was used by many Muslims who are fighting against the enemy.³¹ At the same time, he emphasizes that the number of Muslim soldiers is now much larger than in 2015.

The activities of Muslim *imams*-chaplains were sporadically covered in the international media. On the eve of the large-scale invasion of Russian troops, the Associated Press published an article about the readiness of Ukrainians for possible aggression, which also talked about 50-year-old Svetlana Putilina, whose husband is a Muslim chaplain in the Armed Forces, and about her plans in case of an emergency, about the ability to offer armed resistance.³² Before the International Day of the Military Chaplain, reports on the activities of these specialists appear in the Ukrainian media. An interesting trend in recent years is the coverage of the

²⁸ Міжрелігійна згода має бути не лише у промовах на наукових заходах, але й у простих щоденних вчинках [Interreligious harmony should be not only in speeches at scientific events, but also in simple daily actions]. *ДУМУ “Умма”*: офіційний сайт. <https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1609>

²⁹ Муфтії Криму: В лавах ЗСУ є п’ять мусульманських капеланів [The Mufti of Crimea: There are five Muslim chaplains in the Armed Forces]. *Укрінформ*. 16.10.2023. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/3774666-muftij-krimu-v-lavah-zsu-e-pat-musulmanskih-kapelaniv.html>

³⁰ Д. Куренная. “Ця війна – відновлення справедливості”: як почувуються мусульмани в українському війську [“This war is about restoring justice”: how Muslims feel in the Ukrainian army]. *Східний варіант*. 25.11.2022. <https://v-variant.com.ua/article/musulmany-v-ukrainskomu-viysku/>

³¹ А. Бойченко. Імам Севєродонецька Темур Берідзе: “Іслам забороняє бути рабом, тому ми боремось на боці України”. [Imam of Sievierodonetsk Temur Beridze: “Islam forbids being a slave, so we are fighting on the side of Ukraine”]. *#ШоТам*. 26.08.2022. <https://shotam.info/imam-sievierodonetska-tiemur-beridze-islam-zaboroniaie-butyu-rabom-tomu-my-boremos-na-botsi-ukrainy/>

³² M. Chernov, L. Hinnant. Ukrainians train in guerrilla tactics in case Russia invades. *Associated Press*. 02.02.2022. https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-world-news-russia-5d04f61f06ff3953b7a4669478c03074?fbclid=IwAR0STKMTyAJlyqWBbxRK_gHCcwXXr0R1Mr7Ouf2tnB_H-r4PoCQopXnkD8

activities of *imams*-chaplains. For example, on the “Suspilne Novyny” channel, there are stories about the experience of working as an *imam*-chaplain of Suleyman Khairullayev (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea) and Murat Suleymanov (*Mufti* of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Ukraine “Umma.”)³³ On the channel “SK-1” the report “How soldiers of different religions communicate with each other: the story of the Islamic chaplain Murad Putilin,”³⁴ in which the specifics of his activities are revealed in detail.

Conclusions

Relations between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and religious organizations during the years 1991-2024 developed under the influence of a combination of factors of a civilizational, axiological, geopolitical, domestic political, military, and religious interfaith nature. The greatest influence on the formation of the institution of chaplaincy and the development of military-religious relations was the use of the experience of meeting the religious needs of the personnel of the armed forces of foreign countries of the world; conducting informational and psychological operations against Ukraine by Russia; socio-political situation and religious situation in Ukraine; development of the legal framework for meeting the religious needs of military personnel; changes in the organization of structures that were entrusted with the task of organizing pastoral care activities for the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The work of a military chaplain, regardless of religious affiliation, has its own characteristics. Its functions are not limited to the implementation of religious rites and practices, it is also the provision of a psychological climate, and the provision of medical assistance to military personnel, etc. They are responsible for meeting religious needs and individual work with servicemen. Their responsibilities also include advising commanders on matters of religion, the religious situation and customs of the population in the areas of performance of tasks, establishing relations with public and religious organizations.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Як між собою спілкуються військові різних релігій: розповідь ісламського капелана Мурада Путіліна [How military men of different religions communicate with each other: the story of Islamic chaplain Murad Putilin]. Телеканал *СК-1*. 26.10.2022.

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