

Stability Policing as a Tool for Strengthening National Defense in the Contemporary Geopolitical Environment

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Abstract

This paper examines Stability policing as a key tool for strengthening national defense in contemporary hybrid threat environments. Using a qualitative approach that combines a literature review, comparative analysis, and a case study of Ukraine, it analyzes its role across the conflict spectrum. The findings show that Stability policing bridges the gap between military operations and law enforcement, enhances resilience, and enables accountability through battlefield evidence collection. The study highlights its strategic importance for countering hybrid threats and preventing security vacuums. It contributes by conceptualizing Stability Policing as a proactive and integral component of national defense systems.

KEY WORDS: *Stability Policing, national defense, hybrid threats, rule of law, Ukraine, war crimes, battlefield evidence, multi-domain operations, security governance.*

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1. Introduction

The contemporary geopolitical environment is increasingly shaped by complex, multidimensional, and rapidly evolving security threats that transcend traditional forms of interstate conflict and conventional military engagements. Modern security challenges include hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, information warfare, and large-scale disinformation campaigns, as well as terrorism and destabilization activities. These threats do not occur in isolation; rather, they interact and reinforce one another, creating a highly volatile and unpredictable security landscape [1]. While NATO and national defense planning (mainly in the USA) have recently re-emphasized high-intensity warfare, such an orientation risks overlooking the more probable forms of conflict that unfold below the threshold of conventional war [2].

As a result, national defense can no longer be limited to purely military capabilities, and the traditional division between military and law enforcement functions is becoming increasingly inadequate. Contemporary conflicts blur the lines between war and peace, combatants and civilians, and internal and external security. This development places new demands on national defense systems, which must be capable of responding not only to military threats but also to complex societal disruptions. It must incorporate mechanisms capable of addressing both kinetic and non-kinetic dimensions of conflict. NATO operations demonstrate that relying predominantly on military force is often insufficient to achieve long-term security outcomes. The case of Afghanistan illustrates that the absence of an effective law enforcement dimension may undermine strategic success, despite initial military achievements. This highlights the existence of a so-called “public security gap,” which requires capabilities to enforce the law, protect the population, and support legitimate governance structures [1].

In this context, Stability policing has emerged as a relevant interdisciplinary framework that integrates military, police, and civilian capabilities to ensure stabilization, maintain public order, protect civilian populations, and support the rule of law during crises and armed conflicts [3]. It is a critical tool for bridging the gap between military operations and civilian security functions by reinforcing or temporarily replacing local law enforcement [1]. It represents the shift toward a more comprehensive and integrated approach to security governance. Stability is not only a side-effect but also a strategic aim, an operational tool, and a tactical means for both large-scale and non-large-scale combat operations. When assuming a worst-case scenario of war, it is necessary to include proxies, hybrid, and gray-zone warfare. In both types of operations (large-scale and non-large-scale operations), “the stability is the critical, non-optional, shaping component to success” [2]. Without

a minimum level of stability, military forces are unable to project power, sustain operations, or secure long-term outcomes. Stability policing operates at the intersection of military, civilian, and international governance frameworks, primarily shaped by institutional support from NATO, the EU, and the UN. NATO defines the military framework, security, and stability operations. The European Union focuses mainly on civil tools, the rule of law, and police missions. The United Nations promotes the legitimacy and mandate. However, these institutions do not cooperate on the ground, which creates pressure between kinetic operations and accountability, including criminal liability. Modern conflicts require the simultaneous conduct of combat operations and legal documentation. Stability policing bridges the gap between military operations and criminal justice by enabling the collection of battlefield evidence.

This article examines the role of Stability policing in comprehensive national defense systems and in the approach to multi-domain operations, with a particular focus on its relevance in hybrid threat environments. The analysis is situated within the broader context of current geopolitical developments, particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine, offering important empirical insights into contemporary security dynamics. In the conflict in Ukraine, the rapid restoration of law enforcement and judicial functions has proven essential to stabilization and state resilience [3]. Furthermore, recent developments, particularly the annexation of Crimea in 2014, demonstrate that hybrid warfare exploits vulnerabilities in internal security structures. The paralysis of Ukrainian law enforcement and defense institutions in Crimea revealed the inability of traditional military responses to address threats operating within the civilian domain [1].

Research question:

How does Stability policing contribute to strengthening national defense in the context of hybrid threats?

2. Literature Review

The concept of Stability policing has primarily been developed in the context of international crisis management and peace support operations and has attracted growing attention in recent years, particularly in peacekeeping operations, post-conflict stabilization, and rule-of-law promotion. Stability policing is defined as a set of activities aimed at *“establishing a safe and secure environment, restoring public order and security, and establishing the conditions for meeting longer-term needs with respect to governance and development”* [3]. Existing literature generally conceptualizes Stability policing not only as a post-conflict activity, but also as a bridge between military operations and civilian law enforcement structures, as a capability applicable across the full spectrum of conflict, from peacetime management to high-intensity conflict. It is often associated with activities such as restoring public order, supporting judicial processes, and protecting civilian populations in fragile and conflict-affected environments during the missions led by NATO, the European Union, or the United Nations. The core functions of Stability policing are typically grouped into operational domains:

- Establishing and maintaining public order is often the first priority in post-conflict zones where police capacity is weak or absent;
- Combating serious and organized crime: Stability policing units often target crime-conflict nexuses, where criminal groups undermine stability;
- Supporting criminal justice and the rule of law, linking policing to broader rule-of-law institutions;
- Building the capacity of local police forces is a long-term sustainability goal that enables local ownership of security;
- Intelligence-led policing, crucial in complex hybrid environments;
- Protecting vulnerable groups, such as minorities and displaced persons, which helps rebuild trust between the population and authorities;
- Countering hybrid threats, increasingly relevant in the context of Ukraine;
- Forensic and investigative support, including the investigation of war crimes in conflict zones, is often linked with institutions like Eurojust;
- Bridging security and development means that Stability policing operates at the intersection of security, justice, and governance. [3]

Therefore, Stability policing expands the traditional military instrument by integrating policing functions, thereby addressing the growing overlap between war and crime, often described as *“lawfare”* [1]. This reflects the evolving nature of modern conflicts, in which non-military means increasingly rival or exceed the effectiveness of conventional military force. Scholarly and policy-oriented works emphasize that Stability policing plays a crucial role in ensuring continuity between military interventions and civilian governance. It contributes to the re-establishment of the rule of law, supports the investigation of crimes, including war crimes, and helps prevent the resurgence of violence.

At the same time, contemporary literature also highlights that modern conflicts involve hybrid actors and non-traditional threats, including organized crime networks, political manipulation, and information operations. These dynamics reinforce the need for integrated military-police approaches capable of identifying, analyzing, and countering such threats within the civilian environment [1]. Research on hybrid threats underscores the growing complexity of modern conflicts. Hybrid threats blend military and non-military means, including cyber operations, information campaigns,

and the exploitation of societal vulnerabilities. These threats require coordinated responses across multiple domains and among institutional actors.

Despite these developments, a significant gap remains in the literature. Stability policing is still largely viewed as a post-conflict or auxiliary activity rather than an integral, continuous component of national defense systems. Research on its role in ongoing conflicts and hybrid threat environments is limited.

This article seeks to address this gap by analyzing Stability policing as a proactive, embedded element of national defense, particularly in the context of hybrid warfare.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multilayered methodological approach designed to capture the complexity of Stability policing within the contemporary security environment.

First, a systematic literature review is conducted to identify key theoretical frameworks, concepts, and debates on Stability policing. This provides the conceptual foundation for the analysis. It includes academic publications as well as doctrinal documents of national and international organizations such as NATO, the European Union and the United Nations.

Second, a comparative analysis examines how Stability policing is understood and implemented across institutional and strategic contexts. This approach helps identify common patterns, differences, and best practices. A particularly valuable analysis is based on three interrelated dimensions of stability: as a strategic objective, as an operational mechanism, and as a set of tactical tasks. Building on this framework, the study evaluates models of Stability policing, including civilian-led approaches, military-led solutions, hybrid structures, and gendarmerie-type forces. These models are assessed against key criteria, including scalability, responsiveness, interoperability, and the ability to transition to civilian control.

Third, the research incorporates a case study analysis, focusing particularly on the war in Ukraine. This case study provides a valuable empirical insight into the practical application of Stability policing in a high-intensity hybrid environment. It highlights real-world challenges related to restoring public order, ensuring accountability, and maintaining state authority in liberated territories [2].

Fourth, a normative analysis is applied to assess the role and future potential of Stability policing within national defense systems. This includes evaluating its strategic relevance, institutional requirements, and implications for national defense planning and policy development.

The combination of these methods enables the identification of structural trends, operational determinants, and future development scenarios for Stability policing as a tool of national defense.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, access to classified and operational data from ongoing conflicts is limited, which constrains the depth of empirical analysis. Second, the dynamic nature of the geopolitical environment may affect the long-term validity of certain conclusions. Finally, the transferability of institutional models across different national contexts may be limited by legal, administrative, and cultural differences.

4. Results

The findings indicate that Stability policing represents a multidisciplinary approach that integrates military, law enforcement, and civilian mechanisms. This integration is essential for maintaining public order, investigating crimes, including war crimes, and minimizing instability in conflict-affected environments [3].

The analysis confirms that stability plays a crucial role across all phases of contemporary conflict: competition, armed conflict, and post-conflict transition. In the competition phase, stability contributes to societal resilience and counters gray zone activities such as disinformation, corruption, and proxy influence. During conflict, stability enables the projection of combat power by ensuring secure lines of communication, functioning infrastructure, and manageable civilian environments. In the post-conflict phase, it becomes the central objective, facilitating the transition from military control to legitimate civilian governance [2].

The findings confirm that Stability policing significantly enhances the effectiveness of collective defense by complementing conventional military capabilities. It enables NATO forces to operate in the civilian domain by addressing internal security challenges, supporting law enforcement, and maintaining public order. Stability policing contributes to situational awareness by identifying, collecting, and analyzing police- and crime-related information, which feeds into the broader intelligence cycle and improves understanding of the operational environment. A key contribution of Stability policing is the concept of legal targeting, which focuses on disrupting adversaries through law enforcement measures such as investigations, arrests, restrictions on movement, and the dismantling of criminal or insurgent networks. This approach enables military operations to achieve strategic effects through non-kinetic means. The analysis also confirms a structural gap between military capabilities and civilian law enforcement capacity. Stability policing helps bridge this gap by providing specialized forces, including gendarmerie-type units, capable of operating across both military and civilian domains [1].

4.1 Lessons from Ukraine

The war in Ukraine clearly demonstrates the strategic importance of Stability policing. It illustrates that military success alone is insufficient without parallel efforts to maintain internal order, protect civilians, and sustain essential services. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, Ukraine wasn't prepared for the unexpected hybrid war and to react properly [1]. Later on, after the war began in 2022, in both liberated and contested areas, the absence of effective policing structures creates vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit through sabotage, criminality, and information operations [2].

After areas like Bucha, Irpin, and parts of Kherson and Kharkiv were liberated, Ukrainian authorities immediately faced challenges in restoring public order and rebuilding governance structures. Law enforcement agencies were quickly deployed to secure territory, document crimes, and begin investigations. At the same time, police and security forces helped restore basic public order, support humanitarian operations and evacuations, and assist in demining efforts.

The investigations in Bucha revealed evidence of unlawful killings, mass graves, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law [4]. These investigations involved coordinated efforts between Ukrainian authorities and international actors, including forensic documentation and evidence preservation. The documentation of war crimes in Bucha underscores the vital role of policing functions in ensuring accountability [5]. The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into the situation in Ukraine, highlighting the importance of early evidence collection [6]. Similarly, reports by Human Rights Watch documented summary executions and other abuses in the Kyiv region, further underlining the need for immediate policing and investigative capacity [7, 8].

The swift re-establishment of law enforcement and judicial functions was crucial in stabilizing liberated areas and rebuilding public trust.

4.2 Countering hybrid threats

Stability policing plays a crucial role in countering hybrid threats by integrating multiple security domains. This includes cyber resilience and digital forensics, information security, counter-disinformation measures, and traditional public order management. Such integration enables a comprehensive response to threats that operate simultaneously in physical, digital, and informational spaces [1].

In Ukraine, the law enforcement agencies have been involved in identifying collaborators, countering disinformation, and supporting information resilience. The European External Action Service (EEAS) reports yearly, since the beginning of the war, that Russia uses information as a direct weapon to fuel the invasion and justify the war of aggression. To escalate its efforts, Russia has also been targeting the Ukrainian leadership, including President Zelensky and First Lady Olena Zelenska [9].

Cyberspace erases state boundaries. The main task of the armed forces is to protect the country against external attack [10], while the police corps protects the security of inhabitants and property, maintains public order, and prevents all kinds of crime within the state [11]. In cyberspace, where the boundaries do not exist, the roles of both institutions are expanding. The national police investigate online hoaxes on a daily basis. These hoaxes include fraudulent investment platforms and call centers run by fraudsters posing as bankers and police officers operating from Ukraine, as well as bomb threats via e-mails, mainly addressed to Czech schools, to name a few. They are defined by law as serious, internationally organized crimes. Joint investigation teams are created to investigate such crimes [13].

Since the COVID pandemic, society has had to confront increasingly frequent manifestations of violent behavior, including the growing radicalization among children. There are many cases of radicalization of children via mainstream computer games, such as Call of Duty and Minecraft, and social networks. Within online games, children can be influenced by a radicalized person or group. If there are no proper parental and school authorities to prevent and protect children from such a dangerous path, it can result in a real attack on a synagogue. Hybrid attacks are threatening the current population from childhood, so it is necessary to address the threat and protect the inhabitants [10]. This all creates a space for Stability policing.

4.3 Security vacuum risks

The analysis reveals a significant stability gap between the demand for stabilization activities and what is available. Civilian agencies often lack the capacity to operate in high-risk environments or at the necessary scale, while military forces are not ideally trained or structured to carry out policing functions. Consequently, military units are frequently assigned stability-related duties, which can diminish their combat effectiveness and lead to suboptimal outcomes [2].

The insufficient coordination between military and law enforcement agencies creates a security vacuum that can be exploited by hostile actors, organized crime, and disinformation networks. The Ukrainian example shows that delays in establishing effective governance and policing structures increase the risk of instability and weaken state authority. By bridging institutional divides, Stability policing improves operational coherence and enables a more effective response to complex security challenges.

In multi-domain operations (MDO), Colvin sees the greatest potential in gendarmerie-type units, which combine military strength with policing skills, enabling them to operate effectively across the conflict spectrum and bridge the divide between military and civilian areas [2]. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that Stability policing is not carried out by a single actor but emerges from the combined efforts of NATO, the EU, and the UN frameworks.

The European Union possesses several key entities to support Ukraine, such as the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust). Each of these institutions provides different tasks. EUMAM's aim is to strengthen the capacity of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), primarily by training troops and providing military equipment [11]. EUAM aims to support the Ukrainian civilian security sector to ensure the public's trust. To fulfill this task, EUAM uses mobile units comprising experts in law enforcement, the rule of law, border management, human rights, and strategic communications [12]. Eurojust is a hub whose main purpose is to investigate and prosecute transnational crime, including war crimes in Ukraine. It's a network of liaison prosecutors that work together to fight cross-border crimes [13].

NATO provides several activities to support Ukraine, such as NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) and funding, like the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), to strengthen the NATO eastern flank by Forward Land Forces located in eight NATO member countries along the eastern flank. NATO also supports the 25th Military Police Training Center in Lviv, Ukraine, established in 2017, by providing instructors for the training. The Military police are essential to ensuring stability in conflict areas, as it is one of their five key functions [14].

4.4 Battlefield documentation of war crimes as a Stability policing function

One of the most important yet often underestimated functions of Stability policing in contemporary armed conflict is documenting war crimes directly in the operational environment. In modern conflicts, particularly in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, battlefield documentation is no longer viewed solely as a forensic or judicial activity but as a core security function closely linked to the restoration of public order, the legitimacy of institutions, and the long-term stabilization of post-conflict environments.

Stability policing, as defined within NATO doctrine, aims to restore and maintain public security, strengthen the rule of law, and support legitimate governance structures in fragile or conflict-affected environments. Within this framework, documenting war crimes is a critical operational activity because it creates the evidentiary foundation necessary for criminal accountability, transitional justice, and institutional trust. Without credible evidence, neither national courts nor international judicial mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court can effectively prosecute perpetrators, directly undermining both justice and long-term stability.

The scale of war crimes committed during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine demonstrates the strategic importance of this function. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, more than 170,000 war crimes have been documented since February 2022, including extrajudicial executions of prisoners of war, torture of civilians, sexual violence, forced deportations of children, attacks against civilian infrastructure, and the use of prohibited weapons [15]. These are not isolated incidents but systematic practices that require immediate documentation to preserve evidence before it is destroyed, manipulated, or lost.

From the perspective of Stability policing, battlefield documentation relies on four principal categories of evidence: personal, material, digital, and documentary sources. Personal evidence includes testimony from victims, witnesses, prisoners of war, and suspects. Material evidence encompasses destroyed infrastructure, weapons, unexploded ordnance, biological traces, and bodies showing signs of violent death. Digital evidence includes photographs, videos, geolocation data, satellite imagery, GPS records, and open-source intelligence (OSINT). Documentary evidence consists of military orders, operational plans, financial records, and personal military documentation. [16] The effective collection, preservation, and verification of these sources require specialized policing capabilities operating directly in conflict zones.

Gendarmerie-type forces play a dominant role in this process. Ukrainian National Police data indicate that approximately 95% of war crimes were documented by police officers operating in liberated territories, frontline regions, and areas affected by missile strikes [17]. This underscores the principle of police primacy, central to Stability policing doctrine: military success alone cannot secure durable peace unless supported by policing functions that preserve legal order and accountability. Moreover, battlefield documentation significantly strengthens the legitimacy of state institutions. Civilian populations are more likely to trust public authorities when crimes are investigated, victims are heard, and perpetrators are visibly pursued through lawful procedures. This strengthens the rule of law and prevents cycles of revenge, impunity, and parallel justice systems. In this sense, documentation is not only about prosecution; it is also about restoring societal confidence in the state.

The Ukrainian experience also underscores the need for multinational cooperation. International actors, including the International Criminal Court, Eurojust, Joint Investigation Teams, and UN investigative commissions, as well as NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Truth Hounds, play an essential role in standardizing evidence collection to meet international legal requirements. Their involvement strengthens both the admissibility of evidence and the broader strategic credibility of justice efforts. At the same time, serious operational challenges remain. These include the lack

of unified databases, duplication of evidence collection, limited access to occupied territories, cyber threats to digital archives, witness retraumatization, shortages of trained investigators, and deliberate destruction of evidence by occupying forces. Russian efforts to erase evidence in places such as Mariupol and Severodonetsk illustrate that battlefield documentation itself becomes part of the contested battlespace. Stability policing must therefore incorporate secure digital tools, blockchain verification, protected international data storage, witness protection mechanisms, and standardized forensic procedures.

Battlefield documentation of war crimes should therefore be recognized as a core function of Stability policing rather than a secondary legal process. It links tactical-level policing with strategic-level goals of justice, deterrence, and post-conflict reconstruction. In future NATO collective defense operations, especially on the Alliance's eastern flank, the ability to document atrocities in real time may prove as important as conventional force projection. Stability cannot be achieved solely by defeating the adversary militarily; it also requires preserving the legal truth of the conflict and ensuring that accountability becomes part of the peace that follows.

4.5 Battlefield evidence collection

Stability policing extends beyond traditional law enforcement support by making battlefield evidence collection a core operational function. In contemporary conflicts, such as in Ukraine, the ability to secure, document, and preserve evidence of war crimes in real time has become essential to accountability. This requires integrating military units, forensic experts, mobile laboratories, and judicial actors within a coordinated framework, with Stability policing serving as the bridge between combat operations and criminal justice processes.

The evidence collected on the battlefield is usually obtained from mass graves and attack sites, and also includes digital evidence. The first responders are usually soldiers, not the police. Without early evidence preservation, later prosecution becomes impossible. The military personnel are not trained for evidence collection. Amid the chaos of the battlefield, the evidence obtained may be contaminated. These factors impede proper investigation and prosecution.

The experience from Ukraine shows that the forward deployment of forensic teams and mobile labs, called Field documentation teams, helps to collect proper evidence, including digital evidence.

4.6 Digital evidence and international cooperation

An important aspect of Stability policing in Ukraine is the use of digital tools and international collaboration to document crimes. Evidence gathered in Ukraine has been shared through mechanisms like the Eurojust Core International Crimes Evidence Database, which supports cross-border cooperation in prosecuting international crimes [4]. This emphasizes the growing role of digitalization and transnational collaboration in modern Stability policing.

These developments show that Stability policing is not just a post-conflict task but a vital part of operations during active conflict phases. It is necessary to interlink the armed forces, police, prosecutors, and international organizations such as the International Criminal Court, Eurojust, or the United Nations.

At the national level, the military police, as a unified armed police force, has a unique combination of capabilities, including regular police tasks [15]. Stability policing is one of the five key functions of the military police [16]. The military police can be deployed to fulfill regular police tasks in accordance with the political agreement. Therefore, it is desirable to create and train on shared standard operating procedures and to support the compatibility of both types of forces.

5. Discussion

The integration of Stability policing into national defense strategies challenges the traditional separation between military and law enforcement functions. Modern conflicts require a *"policing mindset in a military body"*, enabling forces to operate effectively in complex civilian environments and address threats emerging from within society [1]. The findings of this study suggest that Stability policing should not be viewed as a post-conflict or auxiliary activity but as a continuous and integral component of national defense. This challenges traditional approaches that separate military operations from civilian security functions. In hybrid threat environments, these distinctions blur, requiring a more integrated and flexible approach.

The analysis also contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that Stability policing has strategic significance not only during stabilization phases but throughout the entire conflict cycle. It plays a key role in maintaining state authority, ensuring accountability, and preventing the emergence of security vacuums.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to reconceptualizing Stability policing as a core element of comprehensive defense strategies. There is a fundamental tension between the military's traditional role and the requirements of contemporary operations. Military organizations are inherently oriented toward defeating adversaries through the application of force. However, modern conflicts increasingly require capabilities focused on building, maintaining, and governing rather than on destroying. This mismatch is especially evident in stability operations. Although doctrine recognizes the importance of stability, institutional priorities and resource allocation continue to favor combat capabilities,

particularly in large-scale combat operations. Consequently, stability functions are often underdeveloped, under-resourced, or treated as secondary tasks. At the same time, relying on civilian actors to fill this gap is problematic. Civilian agencies typically lack the scale, deployability, and security posture required for operations in contested environments. This creates a structural dependency on military forces, compelling them to perform tasks for which they are not ideally suited.

Stability policing offers a potential solution to this challenge. Providing a specialized capability focused on internal security enables military forces to concentrate on combat tasks while ensuring the operational environment remains manageable. Moreover, Stability policing facilitates interaction with civilian populations, enhances legitimacy, and supports the restoration of governance structures. Moreover, the use of policing tools helps reduce reliance on kinetic force and minimize collateral damage, which is essential for long-term mission sustainability and political legitimacy [1]. For NATO, this implies the need to rethink capability development for multi-domain operations. Rather than treating stability as an auxiliary function, it should be integrated as a core component of operational design. This includes investing in dedicated Stability-policing capabilities, strengthening cooperation with gendarmerie-type forces, and improving interoperability among allies.

Stability policing also plays a crucial role in enhancing legitimacy and public trust. By focusing on the protection of civilians, the enforcement of the rule of law, and support for local institutions, it contributes to winning the “battle of narratives” and to reducing the influence of hostile actors [1]. Stability policing serves as an interface between military actors and judicial authorities. It has a deterrent effect when crimes are punished according to the law. It affects the behavior of all the actors in the conflict.

The specialized Stability policing units, such as the Field documentation teams, and standard operating procedures may help with the proper battlefield evidence collection.

The empirical evidence from Ukraine reinforces the argument that Stability policing has a direct strategic impact on conflict outcomes. In particular, the events in Bucha demonstrated that the absence of an immediate law enforcement presence can lead to severe human rights violations and long-term destabilization. Conversely, the rapid deployment of police and investigative units in liberated territories helped restore order and initiate accountability processes. Furthermore, the Ukrainian experience shows that Stability policing plays a critical role in preventing security vacuums. In several liberated areas, delays in stabilization created risks of looting, criminal activity, and the spread of misinformation. The integration of policing, military, and civilian functions also proved essential to addressing the multidimensional nature of hybrid threats. This includes not only physical security but also the management of the information space and public perception.

The case of Ukraine shows that the ability to rapidly restore public order and legal systems has direct implications for both military success and long-term stability. Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of institutional coordination and interoperability. Effective Stability policing requires close cooperation among ministries of defense, interior, and justice, as well as coordination with international partners.

6. Conclusions

Stability policing represents a critical yet underdeveloped component of contemporary security and defense strategies. As the nature of conflict evolves toward hybrid and multi-domain environments, the ability to ensure internal stability becomes as important as the capacity to defeat external threats.

This article has demonstrated that stability is not a secondary consideration but a central determinant of operational success and has examined the role of Stability policing as a tool for strengthening national defense in the contemporary geopolitical environment. The stability gap between military capabilities and civilian capacity poses a significant risk to the effectiveness of both international and national defense efforts. Effective Stability policing requires institutional synchronization among NATO, the EU, and the UN, particularly in hybrid and post-conflict environments. Addressing this gap requires developing specialized capabilities that can operate across the spectrum of conflict. The analysis demonstrates that Stability policing strengthens national defense by integrating military, law enforcement, and civilian capabilities. This integration enables states to respond effectively to complex hybrid threats, maintain public order, and ensure stability during and after conflict. The main contribution of this study is reframing Stability policing as a proactive and strategic component of national defense planning rather than a purely post-conflict instrument.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight several key priorities:

- strengthening coordination among defense, interior, and justice institutions;
- enhancing interoperability and information sharing;
- investing in training and capacity building;
- promoting international cooperation.

Ultimately, national defense in today’s geopolitical environment cannot be confined to narrow, territorial defense. It must incorporate mechanisms to maintain legal order, protect civilian populations, and counter destabilization efforts across all phases of conflict. Stability policing, particularly through hybrid or gendarmerie-type forces, offers a viable and effective solution. Bridging the divide between military and civilian functions enables a more comprehensive approach to security that aligns with the realities of contemporary conflict. Stability policing extends the operational reach of collective defense by integrating the objective of defeating adversaries with the equally important goal of stabilizing the operational environment.

It enables the transition from military operations to sustainable governance by strengthening local institutions and supporting the rule of law.

Future research should focus on the practical implementation of these capabilities within NATO structures, including force design, training, and legal frameworks. Without a deliberate effort to integrate stability policing into defense planning, NATO risks staying strategically “out of position” in an increasingly complex and unstable security environment.

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