

MEETING ABSTRACTS

THE CHALLENGES OF MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN EUROPE-NOW AND BEYOND

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The war in Ukraine has significantly reshaped the strategic posture of NATO's eastern members, including the Czech Republic, prompting a reexamination of both material and psychological preparedness. This paper explores a central and enduring paradox in military psychology: although the discipline emerged in part from wartime needs—through innovations in personnel selection, stress research, and performance assessment during global conflicts—military psychologists today often serve in peacetime roles that closely resemble those of civilian psychologists in police, fire services, or public health sectors. While these roles are very valuable, they may not reflect the demands of military operations in wartime. Under combat conditions, the function of military psychology must shift toward forward mental health care—offering early intervention, acute stress triage, and psychological support close to operational units. Although reliable psychological data from the Ukraine conflict are very limited, the nature of the fighting—marked by prolonged threat exposure, urban warfare, deployment of drone and chemical agents—suggests that a extremely high proportion of soldiers may experience combat stress reactions. In the Czech Armed Forces, as in many NATO militaries, the capacity to respond to such conditions forward may remain overlooked or insufficiently developed. Drawing on the Czech experience, this paper argues for renewed attention to forward mental health care as an essential, mission-focused capability. Military psychology must remain adaptive, moving beyond peacetime routines to support psychological resilience and operational effectiveness across the entire mission spectrum.

Keywords: forward mental health care; early intervention; acute stress triage; operational effectiveness; adaptive nature of military psychology

