



As well as their armed assault transport tasks, Ukrainian 'Hips' have a number of other important duties. This 3rd Brigade Mi-MTV-2 is demonstrating the para-dropping (left) and combat search and rescue (below) roles. Other tasks include peacetime SAR and fire-fighting, while Army Aviation also operates the Mi-9 command post version.



Armed Forces had to be viewed in the context of both a planned reduction of the army's numerical strength and this integration. This process started on 9 July 1997, when at the Madrid Summit the then-President of Ukraine, L.D. Kuchma, signed the NATO-Ukraine Special Partnership Charter, which determines political commitments on both sides at the highest level. In line with this, on 23 April 1999 the NATO Liaison Office (NLO) was opened in Kyiv to further strengthen the partnership.

To date, Ukraine maintains its non-nuclear and neutral status, while in the meantime it remains strongly committed to support efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area and in the United Nations-designated mission countries.

Army Aviation

Just before Ukraine declared its independence, the Soviet Union transferred most of its combat, combat transport and transport helicopter previously operated by the Vovyno Vozdushniy Sily (air force) to the Army. This move was reversed by the Russian Federation in 2003, but in Ukraine currently all helicopters are operated by Army Aviation, except for those operated by the air academy at Kharkov, some staff helicopters attached to the Air Force headquarters in Vinnytsa, and the special mission helicopters like the Mi-8PPA ('Hip-K'), which are all operated by the air force.

As laid down in the State Programme, the process of reformation of the Armed Forces will affect all parts of the Army. The main task of the reformation and development of the Army is the creation of combat-ready and combat-effective units, equipped with modern types of weapons and military vehicles. The most peculiar feature of this process will be the transition from a division-regiment to a brigade-battalion

Ukraine's 'Hip' fleet includes many first-generation Mi-8Ts, such as this 7th Brigade 'Hip-C', as well as up-engined Mi-8MTs and Mi-8MTV-2s. The older aircraft are in need of replacement, possibly by the Mi-171.



type of structure, which will allow the formations and units to increase their autonomy, mobility, and firepower.

For Army Aviation this implies a similar structural reorganisation, with the transformation to a brigade structure, each operating two squadrons of mixed types (each equipped with a combination of 'Hips' and 'Hinds'), while upholding the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) treaty limiting Ukraine to a total of 350 attack helicopters.

Current force

Today, the Ukrainian army is organised in three Operational Commands (OC), comprising the Western OC with its headquarter in Lviv, Southern OC (HQ in Odessa) and Northern OC (HQ in Chernihiv). Only the Western and Southern commands maintain helicopter assets. The majority of helicopters reside under the Western Operational Command, which has two helicopter brigades at its disposal.

The biggest brigade of these two is the 7th Independent Brigade of Army Aviation, which has its base at Novi Kaliniv, near a small village

of the same name located 80 km (50 miles) south west of Lviv. Although the nearby village is small in size, some 5,000 people reside in the housing complex adjacent to the base (and away from the village), which has its own primary school, supermarket etc. In total, the brigade covers an area of around 360 hectares (890 acres).

On 1 April 2004 the unit celebrated its 50th anniversary, originally being an air transport regiment at Nezhin air base equipped with the Li-2 (Douglas DC-3) aircraft. In 1955 the unit transitioned to operate its first helicopters in the form of the Mi-4 and Mi-6. The Mi-8 'Hip' entered service in 1970 and in 1986 the unit received its first Mi-26 'Halo'. In 1991 the unit provided its helicopters to fight the Chernobyl reactor fire caused by the explosion of the nuclear power plant, losing many of its crews in the aftermath. In 1995 and 1996 the unit provided Mi-26s to Zagreb, followed by Mi-24s and Mi-8s to Croatia as part of Ukraine's peace-keeping contribution to the United Nations. During 1996 and 1997 the unit's 'Hips' and 'Hinds' once more were active in East Slovenia, while during the period 1999 and 2001 Mi-8s were based in Kosovo.

Until 1989 an attack regiment of Su-25 'Frogfoots' was based at Novi Kaliniv alongside a single mixed helicopter regiment. Upon the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, one of the war-weary regiments, the 335th OBVP of the Russian Army Aviation previously based at Glazun, Afghanistan, returned to the motherland and was relocated to Novi Kaliniv.

Today only the 7th Brigade remains, but the remnants of the two helicopter regiments previously operating from the base are still evident. Although the brigade officially has some 48 helicopters on strength, a total of 89 helicopters currently reside on the base.

