

HYBRID WARFARE CASE STUDIES – CROATIA AND UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT: Croatia's Homeland war and aggression to Ukraine are clear examples that can be described with term Hybrid warfare. Different phases during conflict and war (every conflict is not a war; every war is a conflict) has a lot of similarities,

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but also has a difference. It is important to make deeper analysis to provide better and efficient lessons-learned preventive and active measures for future conflicts.

This article starts with a short overview of Croatia's Homeland war and continues with short overview of Ukrainian experience. It contains lessons-learned tools and suggestions for future activities.

KEYWORDS: Hybrid warfare, Homeland war, Croatia, Ukraine, Russia, Crimea, Lessons learned

Introduction

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century in Europe were marked by two wars: the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and the aggression against Ukraine. Although they took place in different historical contexts, they have several common topics. The most important link between these two wars is that they represent a prime example of the type of war that, in recent years, has been called a hybrid war. Attacks on basement of all societies during the first phases of conflict (values, beliefs and principles) to divide society was visible. Importance of defending those pillars of any society was recognized and efficient countermeasures were adopted to win the war (in case of Croatia) and to stop the aggression (in case of Ukraine).

Croatia's Homeland war

One of the wars that took place during and after the political disintegration of Yugoslavia was the Croatia's Homeland War (1990-1996). Considering the activities of the aggressors against Croatia, and the subsequent activities of

liberating the occupied parts of Croatia, the Homeland War can be divided into several phases according to its hybrid characteristics:

- (1) Phase dominated by information warfare and psychological operations by which the then political and military leadership of Yugoslavia, and primarily Serbia and Montenegro, tried to prevent the beginning of political democratization and possible political changes (organization and implementation of the first multi-party, democratic and free elections in Yugoslavia) in Croatia (1988-1990)
- (2) In the second phase (1990- mid 1991), after the democratic elections and the complete change of the political paradigm in Croatia and Slovenia, information and psychological operations were further intensified by Yugoslavian and Serbian side with stronger and more visible use of armed paramilitary formations and the involvement of armed forces on the rebel side under the motto "prevents further escalation of conflict and stopping violence". This phase was marked by significant activities in the field of spreading anti-Croatian propaganda in foreign media by distributing numerous disinformation with the aim of imposing the view that Croatia is a neo-fascist state in order to prevent the internationalization of aggression against Croatia and to prevent expected international

recognition of Croatia. At the same time, there was an intensification and threats of stronger engagement of the armed forces of Yugoslavia and Serbia if the democratically elected government in Croatia is not overthrown. This is a phase that can still be called a conflict of a hybrid nature because influence operations dominated in a spectrum of conflicts. The decision to make full use of the kinetic force on the aggressor side has not yet been made.

- (3) Third phase (mid 1991 - early 1992) was characterized by an armed aggression against Croatia when the Yugoslav and Serbian armed forces, together with the rebel Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, occupied almost 1/3 of the territory of the Republic of Croatia. This is the phase when the hybrid conflict passes into the phase of a hybrid war in which the dominant role is taken by using kinetic force while the influence operations were conducted as a support tool in the background.
- (4) After the Republic of Croatia was recognized by the international community in January 1992, the armed aggression was calmed down and stopped. However, influence operations continued with the same goal as before the beginning of the armed aggression. During 1992 and 1993, Croatia actively worked on creating conditions and developing its abilities and power to liberate the

occupied parts of its territory. The Croatian state leadership makes decisions that go in the direction of creating and developing military-civilian capabilities, based on positive experiences from the history of conflicts and wars, and following the example of Western democracies, the organization of its armed forces and the intelligence community. The developed capabilities were integrated into a functional unit in order to achieve the expected results by working together and acting, provided that the number of possible/expected victims (on both sides) were reduced to the lowest possible level, just as destruction of property as low as it is possible, and kinetic operations needs to be conducted as short as possible. This time, until mid-1994, was marked by the continuation of influence operations conducted by the aggressors. However, Croatia has developed its own defense capabilities that have reached the level of early recognition, identification and disclosure of distributed disinformation infiltrated into the Croatian and international public media space. The capabilities of the intelligence community were developed, which effectively competed with the aggressor, because the basis of all serious influence operations are the operations of the aggressor's intelligence community. In this way, the defenses abilities were

increased, as well as the capabilities for preparing the liberation of the occupied parts of the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

- (5) In mid-1994, Croatia started using integrated military-civilian crisis management capabilities and, with considerable preparation and use of influence operations, started using kinetic force. From the end of 1994 and during 1995, several military-police operations were carried out, liberating most of the occupied territory of the Republic of Croatia. Influential operations, planned and conducted by the Croatian side, also played a significant role in these operations. This is a phase dominated by the use of kinetic force which is why we can talk about hybrid warfare again.
- (6) With the completion of the military-police operation “Storm” (in Croatia) in August 1995 and the “Maestral” and “Southern Move” (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) in September/October 1995, conditions were created for ending the war in general. Peace talks have begun, which have also been marked by intensive influence operations planned and conducted by all stakeholders. The Dayton Peace Accords were signed, and the peaceful reintegration of the Croatian Danube region began, which was completed in January 1998 as an administrative process. This time, as well as the one after that, was marked by numerous placed

disinformation, which is why we can talk about a conflict of a hybrid nature.

Croatia: Lessons learned - integration of capabilities

Therefore, we can say that the Croatia's Homeland War is a prime example of a modern war of a hybrid nature. During its duration, the aggressor tried to achieve goals of different levels of importance in different areas of interest through numerous activities at the tactical and strategic level. It integrated the capabilities of the civilian and military spectrum. However, the coordination of their system and the integration into a manageable organizational form at the level of strategic planning and decision-making was not effective. The Croatian side has achieved just that: it has integrated its capabilities from both the civilian and military sectors, coordinated their activities and linked them into a meaningful organizational framework, clearly defined strategic goals that it efficiently communicated to its own population and the international community by developing strategic communication skills. It is this, clear vision of Croatia's future, which was communicating with the public, that has led the Croatian public to give full support to its institutions in the process of reintegrating the occupied parts of Croatia into the constitutional and legal order. In the case that we were not so strongly supported by our people, all efforts by Croatian civilian and military defense capabilities to develop and address the challenges they faced, would have been very difficult to implement.

By joining NATO and the EU, Croatia has fulfilled its goals, which have become a means of

achieving strategic goals: creating a modern, democratic, secure and stable Croatia as a responsible member of these integrations that can share its experiences with others to help them in times when they too are/were faced with the same or similar problems. In this context, the exchange of knowledge and experiences between Croatia and Ukraine should be considered in the context of dealing with modern forms of conflicts and wars of a hybrid nature.

Aggression to Ukraine

Considering the aggression to which Ukraine was exposed during 2014, given the situation in which it found itself, and the similarity with the Croatian Homeland War, there was a need to exchange knowledge and experiences at the international level.

At the geopolitical level, the conflict and war in Ukraine was caused by Russian foreign policy reversal towards competitive confrontation with the West and restoration of Russia's imperial essence. At the regional and military-strategic level, the causes of the conflict and war were Russia's restoration of its dominance within the USSR's territorial boundaries and further expansion of its influence on the territory of the former Warsaw Pact, as well as the threat to Russia and access to the Middle East. Each conflict has its own features and peculiarities. But the conflict which took part on the Ukrainian territory has demonstrated a qualitative leap in forms, methods, and procedures of using state resources to achieve political objectives.

The current goals of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine can be considered by the weakening of the central government and

ensuring the neutral status of Ukraine, greater economic and political independence of its regions. The main long-term interest of the Russian Federation can be considered to ensure the favorable political and economic course of Ukraine. In general, it can be noted that the actions of the Russian Federation have become much tougher on Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict.

Hybrid war's Expert Analysis

Expert team of the National Defense University of Ukraine during 2019-2020 wrote an analysis that addresses various aspects of a hybrid aggression concept, summarizes current views on counteracting scenarios and the use of military and non-military tools in the integrated Joint Forces Operation, provides appropriate methodological and practical guidelines for countering hybrid threats. Most of authors of this monograph took part in countering Russian aggression in the East of Ukraine.

Ukrainian experience has showed that the Russian Federation preferred the use of military, informational and psychological, as well as economic and political resources to achieve their strategic goals. Also, they are aware of the importance of integration of paramilitary organizations and conducting influence operations in any conflict.

Actions that can be classified as the armed aggression were carried out only by the Russian Federation. Such actions were:

- (1) Occupation of the AR of Crimea;

- (2) Sending armed groups of regular and irregular forces to Ukrainian territory;
- (3) Fire support of combat actions of illegal armed groups in eastern Ukraine from units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation;
- (4) Blocking Ukrainian ships travelling to ports on the Azov coast.

According to Ukrainian legislation, the actions of the Russian Federation fall under the definition of the armed aggression. From the perspective of the large-scale use of military force, Ukraine's accession to NATO, coercive return of the AR of Crimea and coercive restoration of control over the occupied territories in the East of Ukraine are unacceptable to Russia. Russian leaders have formed a "second echelon" of intervention. On the eastern border with Russia and in the annexed Crimea, the Russian military command has already deployed a nearly 100,000-strong group of career servicemen which outnumbers the occupying forces in terms of combat readiness.

Ukraine: Lessons learned – recommendations and integration of capabilities

Threats of a military (and hybrid) nature formed not by purely military but rather non-military factors require equally comprehensive response. Military threat hybridity is evidenced by hidden, purposeful, destructive, and comprehensive influence on the national security system, i.e. in a set of both military and non-military factors (intentions and actions) integrated by a single aim.

It should be noted that countering hybrid threats is a complex process due to many different factors shaping these threats and difficulties in predicting changes in the intensity of their impact. To practically implement the determined forms and methods of integration of military and non-military forces and means of counteraction, it is advisable to have a concept of their comprehensive use. It is necessary to have a Conceptual model of managing the integrated countermeasures potential. It gives an opportunity to substantiate a rational composition of forces and means for de-escalation of the identified (predicted) threats and assess real possibilities for neutralization of specific military threats and threats with signs of "hybridity". It also evaluates the effectiveness of the use of forces and means of individual Ukrainian security and Defence sector components integrated to counter the threat.

The need of joint and mutually agreed use of military and non-military forces and means in countering the hybrid aggression is do not only desire to avoid duplication of tasks for individual security and defence sector components and efficient use of resources, but also to change the role and place of purely military means in countering the hybrid aggression.

One of the main conclusions from Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine is that the role of its information component has multiplied. In resource-limited setting, the state should use all possible forms of attracting non-government actors through public-private partnerships and liaison with civil society structures and individual citizens to effectively support cyber defence. One of the state's main tasks on ensuring information security of the MoD and the UAF is to arrange and perform counteraction to the

adverse information and psychological impacts on the UAF personnel. This necessitates establishment of an appropriate system. It is especially relevant for Ukraine after the beginning of the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation, when the consequences of such an external influence became acute and tangible.

Strategic communication mechanism is the most important element of ensuring state information security and counteracting the hybrid aggression against Ukraine. Strategic communications should be considered as activity which is coordinated at the strategic (military-political) governance level and aimed at managing decision-making processes both within the country (group of countries) and abroad to defeat the enemy.

The organization of interaction between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the civilian environment (governmental and non-governmental) in the areas of deployment of military units or in the areas of deployment to perform assigned tasks is an urgent task that relies on civil-military cooperation. The creation of the CIMIC organizations was based on the study of international experience of coordination between military units and the civilian population, during peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN and other international security organizations. CIMIC servicemen work both in the "gray zone" and along the line of contact. In addition, CIMIC groups are making considerable efforts to release Ukrainian servicemen from captivity. The CIMIC released 13 servicemen of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

The groups of the Central Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are tasked with coordinating the activities of public authorities, international humanitarian organizations in the field of mine safety, delivery of humanitarian goods, restoration of critical infrastructure (electricity, gas, water supply systems), housing repair. There is a need to deepen the dialogue on the use of existing methods of providing UN military assistance, based on acts of international law, due to the threat of a full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine. The choice by the military-political leadership of the state of an appropriate strategy for settling the conflict is impossible without considering the behavior of the other side of the conflict and the nature of the assistance provided to it. Such assistance can be provided simultaneously in many areas of existing conflict (political, economic, and financial support, supply of weapons and equipment, training, etc.).

Conclusion

Croatian experience in facing hybrid aggression can be very valuable for future conflicts prediction and as basement for establishing efficient early-warning integrated all-society-system. Croatia was able, even though it was faced with more powerful aggressor then Croatia at that time, to defend its strategy. To win the battle for minds, hearts and soul, to win the war for information, against the information with the information.

The experience of conflict resolution in eastern Ukraine has shown that Russia's support to the self-proclaimed republics is comprehensive and increases or decreases in areas that correspond to the overall strategy of creating a certain

environment of influence on Ukraine's leadership.

Russia's policy on the world stage is systematic and coordinated. The Kremlin uses a wide arsenal of means of "hybrid" aggression to implement tactical tasks, among which we can single out the massive offensive propaganda of powerful Russian foreign broadcasting (Russia Today, Sputnik etc.), which is an effective information weapon, a powerful unit of rail information products and a means of targeted promotion of Russian ideology and the concept of "Russian world". The events of 2014–2020 for Ukraine became a vital test of resistance to "hybrid" aggression. The effectiveness of counteracting "hybrid" threats can be achieved first by introducing adequate and mutually agreed actions (measures) not only in the military sphere, but also in other spheres of national security.