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## LESSONS IDENTIFIED IN THE RUSSIA’S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE\*

• *Military* • *International Law* • *NATO and EU* • *Economic and Financial*  
• *Humanitarian and Societal* • *Nuclear* • *Propaganda and Disinformation*

### The Military Dimension

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Entering the second year, the Russian-Ukrainian war continues to keep the headline in every scientific endeavour on security and defence and, also, in the media. The surprise is not as much as it happens, because after the 2014 Crimea annexation, the ensuing tensions in Donbas and the Winter 2021 Russian build up forces in the area, the perspectives of war were very high, not to mention, obvious. The eyebrows are raised when examining how Kremlin has decided to follow its objectives, whatever they may be, because during the military conflict, they have morphed along the entire spectrum of Military Art: strategic, operational and tactic. In this matter, as demonstrated many times, taking into account the Russian (even) official declarations is not an option to reach realistic conclusions. Thus, the surprise comes from the belligerents’ approach to war, especially from the ways adopted in the strategies implemented in achieving their goals. Choosing the armed conflict with classic military operations carried out in a *non-joint* approach, instead of the

resonantly announced non-linear warfare, the low effectiveness of implementing the conceptual Triade ‘*subversive - network centric - information warfare*’, the use of obsolete military equipment in old-fashioned tactics with *non-battle-groups* organization instead of the modern weapons implementing the high-end technology that the Russian officials boastfully advocated many times in the prelude of war, the excessive use of artillery and missile with low precision instead of the Air Force are some of the most relevant military-connected elements of surprise from the way Russia is conducting modern warfare. On Ukrainian part, *the extraordinary national cohesion around its strategic leadership and the democratic values, the military (and societal) resilience, very much augmented by the Western support* (many democratic states and the regional security organizations rounded-up admirably) and *determination to fight in order to defend their country*, all of these come to complete the panel of surprises.

Along the elements of surprise briefly mentioned above, there are some deductions from conducting all military operations throughout the past 15 months, some items that should be taken in analysis as lessons identified<sup>1</sup>. These lessons

\* This special edition is dedicated to lessons identified and reconfirmed 15 months after the outbreak of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The briefing was prepared by the research team of the Centre for Strategic Defence and Security Studies, “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on lessons identified in analyses „Intervenția militară a Federației Ruse în Ucraina” previously published in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(195)/2022 (pp. 1-5), no. 3(197)/2022

(pp. 1-8), no. 5(199)/2022 (pp. 1-5), no. 7(121)/2022 (pp. 1-5), no. 9(123)/2022 (pp. 1-5), no. 1(209)/2023 (pp. 1-5) and scientific studies *Convențional și hibrid în primul an al războiului Federației Ruse împotriva Ucrainei. Concluzii și lecții desprinse din război*, NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023 (pp. 57-63) and „Evoluția războiului ruso-ucrainean și schimbările majore ce se întrevăd în noua ordine mondială”, in Florian Cîrciumaru (ed.), *Evaluare strategică 2022. Lumea între pandemie și război*, NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023 (under publication).

are meant to better explain the concerning events and provide knowledge that help us understand their causes and the consequences in order to build experience, identify the necessary changes to current approach to warfare and implement them in doctrines. Obviously, these lessons can be identified at all levels of the Military Art, and some of them have multi-level implications. We will focus on the strategic level, with some insertions, where necessary, from operational and tactical levels.

The Russian-Ukrainian war opposes two dichotomous strategies (since they are supposed to emerge from the same root of soviet military thinking): *active defence* vs. *porcupine defence*. *Active defence* involves carrying out preventive attacks/strikes, using various instruments, among which the military instrument holds the main role, to deter and eliminate a probable threat to national security. In its implementation at the strategic level, the Russian warfare was focused on mass (and rapid) attack followed by a protracted war, with *an extensive reliance on the component of land operations*, mostly marked by generating effects through artillery and missile fires. Alternatively, *very few effects have been considered by using the Air Force and the Navy, and almost none by carrying out joint operations*. The opposing strategy has been tailored according to the obvious quantitative disadvantage specific to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Very much based on the Western view on warfare, they have sought to avoid the decisive engagement of the attacker's forces. They have *used numerically reduced forces (battalion-type), but well trained, motivated (this characteristic became an invaluable asset, which will be addressed later in this article, as a social general feature) and equipped*, in order to cause significant losses to the opponent and wear him down physically and morally. The result was, nevertheless, *the abandonment of the offensive and even the emergence of a counter-offensive opportunity for the defender*.

In close connection to the above mentioned lesson, comes that *the modern warfare grants the upper-hand to the execution of conventional military operations in joint or, even more effective, multi-domain (MDO) format*, especially in the context of the outstandingly growing pace of disruptive technologies development. However, when used by a potential enemy, *their effects can be integrated with those produced in other domains (economic, political, social, informational-ideological, nuclear, etc.) in a hybrid/non-linear warfare configuration*. In Ukraine, very few of the military operations on both sides managed to unfold in a joint approach (not to mention MDO). *Cyber-attacks were not considered as stand-alone leverage, but only having a marginally facilitating role for the ground operations and from Russian*

part they had very few effects. This inadvertence demonstrates that *achieving control over cyberspace and information environment will be decisive for the success of military operations*. In spite of the current *modus operandi* in Ukraine (conventional-classic), this may become a standard in the future, integrating non-military means, used primarily and in parallel with military ones, exploiting technological advance, so one need to keep it mind and prepare to counter such aggression.

*The military support from third parties proves an essential element in sustaining effective operations, as a token of the real importance that international partnership holds*. The Western states contribution, mainly in *military equipment and weapons* has been combined with the *high level of readiness* implemented by the Western approach to thinking and training for warfare, and with *the outstanding national resilience built on the will to resist and on democratic values*. These three assets, under a *good leadership and with strong public support*, are crucial for the relentlessness Ukrainian defensive and counter-offensive. In this regard, the clear expressing of the Ukrainians willingness to seek freedom and democracy and *the exceptional effort focused on StratCom (horizontally and vertically, national and international)* have proven very effective in coagulating the partnership critical mass needed to resist and even to create good opportunities to thrive. Close to this, *the Euro-Atlantic community has passed the important "test" of cohesion around the democratic values and the freedom of choosing its own path granted to a sovereign state, displaying the firm solidarity with Ukraine and endorsing altogether the indivisibility of security*. Although NATO keeps its fundamental role in terms of the deterrence and defence posture, the EU demonstrates that it can contribute to crisis management and function as a security provider. This emphasize *the complementarity between the two organizations*.

A lesson that is reconfirmed relates to *the operational relationship across the chain of command*, especially at the highest tier. No experienced 'Special Military Operation' commander and too many changes (four operation commanders in less than a year), the obvious difference between the political and military objectives and approach, and even the lack of communication have introduced many hardships in planning and executing military operations. This situation stands resolute for the vital importance of *having a sound and viable command and control strategy implemented and trained along a strong, clear and comprehensive chain of command architecture*, from political level, all the way down to rank and files. Complementarily, *Mission*

*Command over Detailed Command, initiative (of young commanders) that gives the action proactivity over reactivity, quality intelligently used over quantity, accurate and clear intelligence over the fog of war, new technology over obsolete systems, all of these are just as many factors that can make the difference (or, as in this case, compensate the quantitative inequality) in the battlespace. To this, we can add the reconfirmed lesson regarding the vital role of logistics, both in terms of the quality of military equipment and the continuity of flow.*

Another lesson to be taken into account and reconfirmed comes from the situation when a potential adversary centres its own military actions on non-contact kinetic effects produced with artillery, missiles and, eventually with air assets (manned or unmanned), it will primarily seek to destroy elements of critical infrastructure, mostly civilian. In Ukraine, the actions of both belligerents to strike by fire reiterated the relevance of long-range strikes, especially high-impact artillery, and demonstrated, once again, the strategic importance of kinetic strikes. To this, one must be aware that the destruction over the critical infrastructure generates disruption of essential services provided to population and can inflict extensive damage to the society support towards the war effort.

Last but not the least, the military operations carried out by the belligerents in Ukraine surfaced an important lesson that having enough professional human resource is a major condition for sustaining the war effort. In conventional warfare, shortage can lead to the necessity of using a mixture of professionals with conscripts, as well as foreign fighters (mercenaries). However, when kinetic actions prone to unconventional, using privateers and/or foreign fighters comes with a whole other meaning. For NATO and the West, using conscripts in battle has been proved to be ineffective and unproductive and the best approach to future conflicts remains a total professional force.

## International Law Dimension

Mirela ATANASIU

In this section, there are presented some of the identified and reconfirmed lessons regarding the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the law

corresponding to the actual international rule-based system<sup>2</sup>.

- *The war in Ukraine highlighted some significant technical gaps in the international system that require urgent attention, including the implementation of mechanisms to manage the global effects of unexpected shocks – be they pandemics, classic wars or natural disasters – on the international economy, mechanisms to combat disinformation that exacerbates crises of all kinds and can generate new conflicts, but also mechanisms for arms control and confidence-building in an increasingly conflictual international environment.*

- *The need to reform the voting method in the UN Security Council, based on the unanimity of the P5 members, so as to avoid situations similar to the current one in which Russia, often accompanied by China, blocks decisions that do not serve its interests.*

- *Although a war with an important characteristic of classical military confrontation, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict also has a significant hybrid component used especially to demoralize the Ukrainian people (use of information warfare means, directing cyber or physical attacks on critical medical infrastructures, or water and energy supply, etc.), which makes it necessary to pay more attention to the observance of the norms of international humanitarian law, but also to encourage the non-involvement of the civilian population in military operations.*

- *Wars were the prerequisites for the transformation of the international system: World War I led to the creation of the League of Nations; World War II triggered the creation of the UN basic structure; the civil wars that occurred at the end of the Cold War determined the rethinking of peace operations and the protection of civilians in terms of international law; the Ukrainian war is currently leading to the reconfiguration of the international order and its legal basis.*

- *Outlawing of war as phenomenon did not also represented the renunciation to war by the states, but the finding of illegal artifices to justify the aggression of other sovereign states. Russia has called its military intervention in Ukraine a “special military operation” justified by the need to defend Russian citizens, while it is in fact the largest conventional unjustified war in Europe since World War II.*

- *Although challenged, the liberal order*

<sup>2</sup> The lessons are based on the analyses reflected in the series of materials I published in the *Colocviu strategic* (supplement of the *Strategic Impact* journal) between February - October 2022: „Efectele conflictului armat asupra copiilor și femeilor din Ucraina”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 10(204)/2022, pp. 1-6; „Războiul ruso-ucrainean. Consecințe în planul dreptului internațional”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 9 (203)/2022, pp. 5-9; „Războiul

ruso-ucrainean între abuzuri mediatizate la adresa dreptului internațional, sancțiuni și negocieri de pace”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 7(201)/2022, pp. 5-7; „Reglementări și încălcări ale dreptului internațional în intervenția militară din Ucraina”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 3(197)/2022, pp. 7-10; „Coordonate juridice ale războiului din Ucraina”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(195)/2022, pp. 5-7.

*established under the auspices of the UN remains resilient.* This is reflected in the continuation of the organization's actions to mitigate world crises and conflicts, according to its mission, without neglecting the problem in Ukraine (a series of measures were taken against the Russian Federation to make it to give up the illegal war).

- *War represents an environment conducive to the violation of human rights.* During the Russian-Ukrainian war, numerous cases of violation of the right to life, education, physical and mental health of Ukrainian civilians were reported.

- *Demonstrating the need for the existence of the framework of international humanitarian law, especially regarding the protection of vulnerable categories of civilians, women and children,* given that the violence against them has multiplied in the climate of war in the Ukrainian territory.

## NATO and EU Dimension

*Cristina Bogzeanu*

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine put a clear and decisive end to the image of European continent being safe from a military threat. Most European state and non-state actors reacted on two main directions – increasing their own security and supporting Ukraine in its fight for territorial integrity and independence. NATO and EU have been among the most important frameworks in which this reaction was coordinated and put in practice. However, the train of events preceding and succeeding Ukraine's military invasion by Russia brought into the limelight a series of lessons regarding not only NATO and EU role in European security, but also their internal processes. This paper<sup>3</sup> presents in brief some of these lessons.

- *NATO and EU historical responsibilities in European security and defence are not out-of-date.* In Russian-Ukraine war context, NATO and EU valued their strengths – the EU applied various crisis management tools, while NATO consolidated deterrence and defence on its Eastern flank. NATO and EU centrality in European defence and security is also confirmed by Denmark decision to give up its 30 yearlong CSDP opt-out clause, Finland and Sweden bid to join NATO, European states increasing military budgets.

- *NATO remains the cornerstone of European security, but EU's progresses in the area of*

*defence and crisis management are neither a waste of efforts nor funds.* Not only its complex crisis management tools or the institutional and procedural developments allowed the EU to support politically, economically, humanitarly and even military Ukraine, but also its nature as regional integration organization and its composition which made it possible to involve in this crisis without a significant escalation of the conflict between the West and Russia.

- *Having gone for a significant time through a period of loss of unity and cohesion, NATO and EU created the image of a weak Western security community for the revisionist Russia that considered it a proper time for attacking Ukraine and thus further destabilize the West. Working on cohesion and solidarity, consolidating the common ground on which they are founded, countering attacks is central for regional security.*

- *Complementarity between NATO and EU can bring added value in supporting Ukraine, while retaining the ability to preserve their own security.* The organizations acted in a complementary manner in order to reassure European countries security and to support Ukraine in its fight for territorial integrity and independence. European states were able to provide military equipment to Ukraine on a bilateral or within the EU framework without losing their capacity to defend themselves as they benefit of the collective security under NATO's aegis.

- *EU's enlargement policy needs to be maintained and adapted to the new context.* EU showed an unexpected openness towards Ukraine's bid to become an EU member state despite being under full attack of the Russian armed forces. However, the cautiousness developed over the last years in this respect remained, all the more as the applicant is experiencing a fully-fledged war – Ukraine is given candidate status, the adhesion being made under the previously established procedure, not under a special rapid one. The lack of a special rapid accession procedure was compensated by including Ukraine in the European Political Community – an intergovernmental discussion forum for political coordination.

- *Internal dissensions within NATO and EU can actually affect their ease of action.* Even more, *these dissensions can spill over from one organization to the other.* Türkiye and Hungary

<sup>3</sup> This paper is based on my previous research and analyses: „NATO și Uniunea Europeană: între sprijinirea Ucrainei și reasigurarea Aliaților”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(195)/2022, pp. 7-9; „Evitarea escaladării și consolidarea securității” in *Colocviu strategic* no. 3(197)/2022, pp. 10-11; „Summiturile NATO, UE și G7: Linii de efort în contextul provocărilor de securitate determinate de războiul din Ucraina”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 5(199)/2022, pp. 5-8; „Ucraina - de la cererea de aderare rapidă la UE

la perspectiva comunității politice europene”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 9(203)/2022, pp. 9-13; „NATO și UE. Surmontarea limitelor și evitarea escaladării”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1 (209)/2023, pp. 9-13; „Democrație, coeziune și securitate în Europa: modificarea tendințelor în contextul războiului din Ucraina?”, in Florian Cîrciumaru (ed.), *Evaluare strategică 2022. Lumea între pandemie și război*, NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023 (under publication).

delayed to ratify Sweden and Finland accession protocols to NATO. On the one hand, Türkiye's decision has been based on the refusal of the two Nordic states to extradite PKK members allegedly involved in 2016 failed *coup d'état* in Ankara and who were in exile on their territories. Another reason for this refusal can be attributed to previous tensions between Ankara and other allies. Hungary, on the other hand, may have been used this context in order to determine Stockholm and Helsinki to give up their opposition to Hungary being granted access to EU funds despite its failure of complying with rule of law conditions requested by the EU.

The escalation of the tensions between Russia and West in the context of the Ukraine war, the attacks on North Stream 2 and the attempt to "weaponize" energy in this conflict determined NATO and EU to launch a *NATO-EU Task Force on Resilience of Critical Infrastructure* (March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

## Economic and Financial Dimension

*Cristian Băhnăreanu*

The Russian war of aggression, the sanctions imposed and the subsequent geopolitical tensions have added a new stressor for the European and global economy in 2022, already weakened by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Economic vulnerabilities and risks have intensified, inflation and energy/food prices have risen rapidly, financial conditions have tightened, public deficits and debt have deepened exerting pressure on the global economic and financial system and existing multilateral frameworks. In this chapter, we identify the most important economic, financial and trade lessons that have emerged from just over a year of conflict<sup>4</sup>.

• *Economic sanctions failed to prevent or end the war in Ukraine.* The sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries during 2022 proved to be among the strongest in modern history. However, they have not yet had the expected effects, with the Russian economy ending the year with a contraction of only 2 to 4%<sup>5</sup>. Putin appears willing to bear the economic costs of the war as past crises (the 2007-2009 global financial crisis, the 2014-2015 Russian financial crisis, the 2020-2021 pandemic economic crisis) and measures

taken by the Moscow government have increased the resilience of the Russian economy to external shocks. Moreover, Russia has partially managed to avoid some restrictions through various methods, for example, relocation of Russian companies to CIS countries or parallel imports and re-export schemes. International sanctions should target all economic, financial and commercial activities related to Russia with long-term impact, even if this means economic difficulties for the countries imposing such measures.

• *Russia's use of energy as a weapon failed.* At the end of 2020, Russia was the largest exporter of hydrocarbons to Europe (43.3% gas, 25.7% oil and 53.9% coal<sup>6</sup>), however, European countries managed to reduce/eliminate dependence on Russian oil and gas in 2022 (see the case of Germany, where political will and economic power quickly solved this problem). Europe compensated the deficits by increasing imports of gas and LNG from Norway, Algeria and the USA, filling more than 80% of EU gas storage capacity, reducing industrial and domestic consumption, increasing energy efficiency and sharing energy resources and, last but not least, returning to coal and nuclear power (it may put the climate change mitigation policies and targets on hold). However, energy disruptions will accelerate the European countries process of implementing solutions to compensate for oil and gas shortages by creating reliable, resilient, low-carbon and affordable energy systems, diversifying supply sources and reorganizing supply chains.

• *Gas and oil resources no longer guarantee Russia's economic development.* The Russian economy has significant reserves of hydrocarbons and continues to depend largely on revenues from energy exports (approximately 60% over the years<sup>7</sup>). But the current conditions – European demand has fallen sharply amid economic sanctions, oil and gas prices on international markets have decreased, the redirection of Russian energy exports to China and India requires large investments in pipelines and other facilities and preferential pricing, Russia's influence within OPEC has declined – making it increasingly difficult for the government in Moscow to maintain energy revenues. For example, Russia's earnings from gas delivered to foreign markets fell by 46% in 2022 compared to the

<sup>4</sup> This paper is based on my previous analysis: „Implicații economice ale războiului din Ucraina”, published in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(209)/2023, pp. 13-17 and „Economia mondială în al treilea an de pandemie și primul de război”, under publication in Florian Cîrciumaru (ed.), *Evaluare strategică 2022. Lumea între pandemie și război*, NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> European Council / Council of the EU. March 17, 2023. *Infographic - Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy*. Accessed on May 8, 2023. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

[infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy).

<sup>6</sup> European Commission. September 2022. “EU energy in figures”. *Statistical Pocketbook 2022*. Publications Office of the European Union. p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> The International Working Group on Russian Sanctions. November 28, 2022. *Implementation of the Oil Price Cap*. Working Group Paper #10. p. 3. Accessed on May 9, 2023. [https://fsi9-prod.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-04/working\\_paper\\_10\\_oilpricecap.pdf](https://fsi9-prod.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-04/working_paper_10_oilpricecap.pdf).

previous year<sup>8</sup>. In the coming years, Russia's status as an energy superpower is likely to decline.

- *The burden on Ukraine and donors increases as the war drags on.* The Ukraine's economic decline has reached 36%<sup>9</sup>, with more than \$700 billion in damages by the end of 2022<sup>10</sup>, and much of the residential buildings and critical infrastructure has been damaged by Russian attacks, including industrial and agricultural production capacities, railways, road networks and bridges. Under these circumstances, financial assistance from international donors reached €143 billion by mid-January 2023<sup>11</sup>. The prolongation of the war will continue to severely affect the Ukrainian population and economy and increase burden for donors, requiring significant assistance and additional reconstruction efforts from the international community.

- *Western sanctions have strengthened economic and trade relations between Russia and China.* Although the sanctions imposed were also intended to discourage other countries, such as China, from directly or indirectly undermining measures taken against the Russian economy, it seems that ties between the two countries have become even closer. A Russian state weakened by economic sanctions and war costs is good for China, as long as the geopolitical situation does not jeopardize its economic expansion centred on *Belt and Road Initiative* and access to European markets. Russia has now become the "junior" partner, increasingly dependent on Beijing as the trade between the two countries increased by about \$40 billion in 2022 compared to 2021<sup>12</sup>. The Russian hydrocarbons offer a strategic advantage that can support China in what is seen as a long-term strategic competition with the US.

<sup>8</sup> TASS. February 6, 2023. *Russia's oil and gas budget revenues down 46% in January*. Moscow. Accessed on May 10, 2023. <https://tass.com/oil-gas-industry/1572379>.

<sup>9</sup> UN. 2023. *World Economic Situation and Prospects*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York: United Nations publication. p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Kachkachishvili, Davit. January 4, 2023. "Ukraine war has caused over \$700B in damage to nation's economy: Premier". *Anadolu Agency*. Ankara. Accessed on May 10, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/ukraine-war-has-caused-over-700b-in-damage-to-nation-s-economy-premier/2779130>.

<sup>11</sup> Trebesch, Christoph et al. February 2023. *The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?* Kiel Working Paper, Kiel Institute for the World Economy. p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff, Stefan. April 5, 2023. "The Russia-China relationship: the perils of a 'friendship with no limits'". *UK in a Changing World*. Accessed on May 10, 2023. <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-russia-china-relationship-the-perils-of-a-friendship-with-no-limits>.

<sup>13</sup> This paper is based on analyses I have previously published in *Colocviu strategic* („Războiul ca factor al cronicizării crizei umanitare în Ucraina”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(195)/2022, pp. 16-18; „Civili – victime colaterale sau ținte ale invaziei ruse în Ucraina?”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 3(197)/2022, pp. 18-20; „Refugiații din Ucraina și asediul orașului Mariupol – simboluri

- *The invasion of Ukraine has led to a reinforced security in Europe.* Building security will be difficult and costly for Europe and will weigh heavily on the financial balance of countries on the continent. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has increased pressure to reassess European security by increasing contributions to the development and modernisation of common defence capabilities. Most European NATO members, especially those on the Eastern flank, and even Germany (the most sceptical country), have reinforced their commitment to rapidly increase military budgets to at least 2% of GDP.

## Humanitarian and Societal Dimension

Alexandra Sarcinschi

The analysis of the humanitarian and societal components of Russia's aggression against Ukraine<sup>13</sup> shows that, in a multidimensional interconnected world, such a war cannot be rapidly won by military nor even hybrid means. Considering this, the main lessons identified derive from two concepts: *strategic engineered migration*<sup>14</sup> and *resistance of the whole of society*<sup>15</sup>.

- *Using refugees as a "weapon" in war has failed.* There are several reasons for such situation, but the most important refer to the perceived community of interests, beliefs and opinions between the refugees and the population of host countries, and to Russia's image as a brutal aggressor. There are evidences that, after the initial "flight from war" phase, the massive population displacement inside and outside Ukraine is not solely controlled by Ukrainians, but is deliberately provoked by the aggressor state, through attacks on civilians and

ale războiului secolului al XXI-lea?”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 5(199)/2022, pp. 10-12; „Escaladarea crizei umanitare: refugiați, persoane dislocate intern și victime civile”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 7(121)/2022, pp. 9-11; „Refugiații din Ucraina în opinia publică europeană”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 9(123)/2022, pp. 15-19; „Crize suprapuse: între obiectivitatea indicatorilor statistici și dramatismul crizei umanitare”, in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1/(209)/2023, pp. 5-9) and *Strategic Assessments* series („Permacriză” umanitară? Războiul din Ucraina, insecuritatea percepută și acutizarea crizei umanitare”, in Florian Cîrciumaru (ed.), *Evaluare strategică 2022. Lumea între pandemie și război*, NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023, under publication).

<sup>14</sup> See Kelly Greenhill's model of strategic engineered migration (Greenhill, Kelly M. 2008. "Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War", in *Civil Wars* (Routledge) 10 (1): 6-21). It is defined as "those in- or out-migrations that are deliberately induced or manipulated by state or non-state actors, in ways designed to augment, reduce, or change the composition of the population residing within a particular territory, for political or military ends" (*Ibidem*, p. 7).

<sup>15</sup> According to Ukraine's *Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance* and Otto C. Fiala's *Resistance Operating Concept* (Fiala, Otto C. 2020. "Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)", JSOU University Press, Florida).

civilian infrastructure, in order to trigger an exodus that will pressure the countries supporting Ukraine and create currents of opinion against it. Still, Russia has not achieved its goals by these means. Europe (individuals, states, Union) has united to support refugees, and has even activated an instrument that was not used in the 2015 refugee and illegal migration crisis (EU Temporary Protection Directive, 2001).

- *It is essential to identify the psychological training needs of military personnel supporting Border Police missions in managing refugee flows in order to avoid posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).* Since the flow of refugee is large, comprises mostly extremely vulnerable population and lasts a long period of time, it is obvious that there are not only the refugees who feel the trauma of war, but also professionals and volunteers who welcome them and face the human tragedy.

- *Emigration can be both a form of protest (conscientious objectors) and a form of projection of soft power in neighbouring countries (gaining the support of other countries for the Russian population “fleeing” the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin) and destabilizing elements (infiltration of Russian agents with the aim of disrupting countries in the region and beyond).* The recent Russian emigration could be an example in this regard. At the beginning of 2023, it is estimated that more than 500,000 Russian citizens left the country after Putin’s announcement of partial mobilization (21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2022), most of them entering Georgia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Türkiye, and Armenia<sup>16</sup>.

- *It can be estimated that Russia’s cognitive operations on the Ukrainian and European populations have failed.* First of all, there are those against the Ukrainian population whose belief in victory and support for the Armed Forces and the President have been strong since the early days of the war and have grown significantly over time, despite the humanitarian crisis they are going through (according to surveys conducted by the Ukrainian Sociological Rating Group). Second, there are operations against the population of Western countries whose solidarity with the Ukrainian people is still at significant levels (according to surveys conducted by various European institutions) despite the fact that they are once again the host of a large number of refugees (after the 2015 crisis), are deeply affected by the economic outcome of the war and represent the target audience for an extensive Russian disinformation campaign.

- *Developing the resistance of society as a whole is essential to reject Russian aggression.* To this end, it is necessary for domestic authorities to prepare their citizens through information and education on both individual and family, nonviolent and passive methods of resistance (not to be confused with insurgency or revolutions), as well as on direct action against the occupying forces (but avoiding the engagement of civilians in combat). In other words, *Whole-of-Government* and *Whole-of-Society* approaches are crucial.

- *There is a stringent need to develop a national security culture as a basic component of national resistance,* especially for those social groups who are most exposed to disinformation campaigns by both a potential enemy and insiders promoting extremist nationalism.

## The Nuclear Dimension

Mihai Zodian

The nuclear dimension provided context for the Russo-Ukrainian War and influenced the range of operations and depth of support<sup>17</sup>. But it did that in a very fluid manner, to be expected from a domain where intersubjectivity and communication are essential. There are several lessons which can be induced, from diplomacy to the more general features of the international system.

The first lesson: *coercive diplomacy is ambiguous and difficult in practice.* Nuclear brinkmanship made a return, and the ability to direct policy between a dangerous escalation and appeasement is again important. This was the dilemma of the Cold War<sup>18</sup> and we are witnessing it both related to the Russo-Ukrainian War and to the tensions around the Taiwan strait. Deterrence by denial is also more significant than before and is connected to territorial defence.

This ambiguity lies in the difficulty to distinguish in a meaningful way between escalatory and non-escalatory actions and tools. Here, escalatory has the nuclear connotation. This allowed the West to support the defence of Ukraine and to sanction Russia, and the support has evolved over time to a more significant types of weaponry. The only meaningful distinction remains between nuclear and conventional armament<sup>19</sup>.

The second lesson: *the need to ensure nuclear safety.* Fights around Chernobyl and Zaporozhe raised the fear of a catastrophic accident and evoked the memories of the 1986 disaster. Military

<sup>16</sup> According to *The Washington Post*, which summarizes data published by institutions of respective countries (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/13/russia-diaspora-war-ukraine/>).

<sup>17</sup> This essay is based on the paper „Războiul ruso-ucrainean: diplomație, risc și coerciție nucleară”, that I wrote for the special

edition of *Colocviu Strategic* no. 1(209)/2023 ([https://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf\\_publicatii/cs01-23.pdf](https://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_publicatii/cs01-23.pdf)).

<sup>18</sup> Freedman, Lawrence and Michaels Jeffrey. 2019. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*. Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>19</sup> Schelling, Thomas C. 2000. *Strategia conflictului*. București: Integral.

operations became very risky to conduct and sometimes this led to grievous errors. The international regimes were put under pressure to provide meaningful mediation, in a period when humanitarian and environmental objections are raised against reliance of nuclear power.

The third lesson: *nuclear proliferation can suddenly become attractive*. As the cases of Iraq 2003, North Korea and Iran may also suggest, owning a nuclear arsenal or threatening to build one may represent a credible strategy for assuring national or regime security<sup>20</sup>. Especially if the goal is to avoid being invaded by a more powerful state. This will complicate both great powers policies and leave in tatters the nuclear proliferation regime.

The fourth lesson: *in a period in which norms and organizations for arms control and disarmament were in decline, the Russo-Ukrainian War increased the need for international cooperation in the nuclear issue area*. Therefore, there is a lot of uncertainty and of barely understood risk, sometimes speculated for political gains. Nevertheless, some degree of order is required in such a sensible matter and we are not yet sure if the foundations of various regimes are still holding.

The war is still ongoing and it's easy to foresee that nuclear threats and Western support will go on. Many actors are redefining their nuclear strategies and maybe options, while coercive diplomacy is practiced in a much broader area than during the Cold War. The good news seems to be nuclear revulsion<sup>21</sup> is still present, but the implicit understanding that great powers are the responsible guardians of nuclear weapons is highly doubtful now, while the obligations of the Treaty of Non-Proliferation may have been breached.

### Information Dimension: Propaganda and Disinformation

Daniela Lică

This paper aims to synthesise and highlight main identified lessons related to the information dimension, more specifically to propaganda and disinformation components in the war waged by Russia in Ukraine<sup>22</sup>.

- *The role of non-military means in achieving*

*political, strategic and military objectives has increased*; in many cases, they can be even more effective than the power of conventional weapons. One non-military means is *the information weapon*, consisting in proliferating propaganda and disinformation, as well as cyber-attacks. *Manipulation of information, together with strategic communication - StratCom aim to influence the masses*, most often using the emotional component, to achieve political and military objectives. In the present war waged by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, manipulation of information is *constantly and continuously proliferated, through multiple tools*, aiming to maximise the chances of winning, by undermining the adversary. Thus, the information weapon completes and augments the battle on the ground.

- *Russian propaganda and disinformation has been mainly directed towards the subject of the war in Ukraine* in the last year (2022), the tendency manifesting itself at present as well, replacing the prevalent topic of prior disinformation, namely the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The main *methods and techniques of disinformation* that Kremlin uses are: *distortion of facts/meaning of words; distraction* (whataboutism; shifting the blame); *dismissal* (denial); *dismay* (discouragement/demotivation); *division; invoking provocation; blaming* other actors (the West and especially NATO); *justification* for starting the war and perpetrating attacks; *invoking staging/framing; exaggeration; minimisation; concealing* (covering-up inconvenient subjects/acts of war); *manufacturing fake threats; falsification of photos* (photo-manipulation) *and videos* (deepfake) and  *censorship*, even dismantling of independent Russian media and social media sites. In some cases, several methods/techniques are combined in connection with a single event.

- *Propaganda and disinformation are proliferated by the Russian Federation by both official and unofficial means*, through an ecosystem that includes a multitude of official (Government; media; diplomatic channels), proxy (hidden sources) with local/ global address and unofficial communication channels and platforms with no demonstrable connection to Russia, such as social networks and cyber means (e.g. cloned or captured websites)<sup>23</sup>,

<sup>20</sup> Waltz, Kenneth N. 1981. "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May be Better". *The Adelphi Papers*.

<sup>21</sup> Tannenwald, Nina. 2007. *The Nuclear Taboo. The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons since 1945*. Cambridge University Press; Mueller, John. 1989. *Retreat From Doomsday*. Basic Books.

<sup>22</sup> The paper was elaborated on the basis of the author's prior analysis published in *Colocviu strategic* special editions dedicated to the war in Ukraine („Componenta dezinformării în conflictul din Ucraina” (Disinformation Component in the Ukrainian Conflict), in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(195)/2022, pp. 13-15; „Războiul mediatic al Rusiei în contextul atacului

asupra Ucrainei” (Russia's Media War in the Context of the Attack on Ukraine), in *Colocviu strategic* no. 3(197)/2022, pp. 15-17; „Componenta dezinformării în războiul din Ucraina” (Disinformation Component in the Ukrainian Conflict), in *Colocviu strategic* no. 1(209)/2023, pp. 21-25) and in the volume *Evaluare strategică 2022. Lumea între pandemie și război*, Florian Cîrciumaru (ed.), NDU Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023 („Propaganda rusă și dezinformarea în contextul războiului din Ucraina” (Russian Propaganda and Disinformation in the Context of the War in Ukraine)).

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2020. *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*.

used to create and amplify fake news and narratives. *Social media is the main tool of disinformation*, where text-based and deepfake content is propagated in a quasi-incontrollable manner.

- *The Russian propaganda and disinformation machine is strong, well-organised and well-funded* (which represents a *strength*), its *weakness* being that *it uses patterns and narratives that are predictable and repetitive, mostly presented in black and white*<sup>24</sup> – positive versus negative.

- *The public space is militarised by the influx of news and information about the war*, the media providing a multitude of data, details and images from the field, exposing audiences to images of war.

- *The Russian information weapon is directed against several targets*: Ukrainian authorities and public opinion (to maintain confusion and fear); Western suprastate organisations, NATO and the EU – seen as adversaries by the Russian Federation – as well as the authorities and public opinion of their Member States, supporters of Ukraine in this conflict; Romania, given NATO and EU membership; citizens of the Russian Federation, including the military fighting in this conflict (for support and legitimacy); authorities and public opinion in partner states (for continuous support); authorities and public opinion in neutral states (to attract them on the Russian side).

- *The main themes of Russian propaganda and disinformation in the war context are history*, including other sub-themes, some with positive connotations: *nationalism – Russian values*, encompassing *imperialism, lost sovereignty, Russian minority and legality (referendums)*, and others with negative connotations – *Russophobia* in the Ukrainian society, in subsidiary, human rights violations, *Nazism and fascism; military aggression* (staging attacks and massacres);

global and, in particular, Western *conspiracy, religion* (Orthodoxy); *nuclear attack* (also threats to energy supplies); *biological laboratories* financed by the USA; *food crisis*.

- *Some measures were taken to counter Russian disinformation*: as of March 2022, both NATO and the EU have *restricted access to main disinformation channels* (Russia Today - RT and Sputnik); however, the *response to counter hybrid warfare and social destabilisation through disinformation has not been very well coordinated and established at organisational and global level*, revealing strategic ambiguity (examples: the reserved attitude of China, Türkiye's position within NATO and Hungary's position within the EU).

- *Despite Russian disinformation campaigns, or as a result of countermeasures, as well as President Putin's actions, trust in the political leadership of the Russian Federation has globally declined*, as shown by Gallup's 2022 poll in 137 countries, which found that more than half of respondents, that is 57%, disapprove of the political leadership in Moscow, a significant increase of 19% compared to 2021<sup>25</sup>, illustrating *Russia's isolation in the global political arena*.

- *The effectiveness of the measures taken to counter Russian disinformation is questionable*, as the *Kremlin possesses the technical means to avoid censorship and continue to disseminate manipulative information* through proxy (hidden) sources, i.e. social networks (Telegram, YouTube, RuTube, VKontakte, TikTok) and cyber means, such as virtual private network (VPN) or online video platforms (e.g. Odysee and Rumble).

- *The Russian Federation will continue to proliferate propaganda, in parallel with disinformation, using the same methods, techniques and tools, repeating older themes, while adding new themes and messages*.

<sup>24</sup> Nimmo, Ben. May 19, 2015. "Anatomy of an Info-War: How Russia's Propaganda Machine Works, and How to Counter It". Stopfake.org. Accessed on February 12, 2023. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/anatomy-of-an-info-war-how-russia-s-propaganda-machine-works-and-how-to-counter-it>.

<sup>25</sup> Gallup. 2023. *Gallup's Latest Global Leadership Report*.

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