

MILITARY ASPECTS OF COUNTERING HYBRID AGGRESSION: UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.24.1.6>

Viacheslav Semenenko*, PhD
Valery Frolov**, PhD

Abstract: Ukraine became the object of military aggression by Russia, which became the realization of the final phase of hybrid aggression. This aggression has been carried out without stopping all the time since the independence of Ukraine. Economic blackmail, gas wars, the Budapest memorandum, internal destabilization, the 5th column and Russian citizens in the Ukrainian govern-

* Colonel Viacheslav Semenenko, PhD. The Deputy Head of the Center for Military and Strategic Studies of the National Defence University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskiy, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5774-0868>

** Valery Frolov, PhD, lieutenant-general ret., The leading researcher of the Center for Military and Strategic Studies of the National Defence University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskiy, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0105-6439>

ment, the Russian church in Ukraine, the distribution of pro-Russian content in the information field of Ukraine etc. All of these events were elements of Russian "soft power" against Ukraine which created favorable conditions for the final blow by the so-called 2nd army of the world.

Keywords: Ukraine, Hybrid aggression, NATO, Russia

Introduction

The NATO Science and Technology Organization has launched a SAS-161 international project / Military aspects of countering hybrid warfare: experiences, lessons, best practices under the framework of NATO – Ukraine Platform on Countering the Hybrid Warfare [1]. Project were completed before the large-scale invasion of the Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine. We will compare it with the current situation. We would like to give attention to the monograph “Military Aspects of Countering Hybrid Aggression: Ukrainian Experience” prepared by an authoring team of the National Defence University of Ukraine during 2019-2020 in the framework of the KALMIUS research work [2].

The monograph 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.

The main results of scientific research defined:

1. systemic features of modern military conflicts;
2. systemic military-political features of the military conflict on Ukrainian territory;
3. systemic features of the transformation of the regional military-political situation during 2012–2021;

4. long-term interests and current goals of military and political forces in the region around Ukraine;
5. features of the use of troops (forces) in counteracting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and recommendations for counteracting "Hybrid" threats from the Russian Federation at sea.

Russian aggression

At the geopolitical level, the conflict 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 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 Russian Federation preferred the use of military, informational and psychological, as well as economic and political resources.

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

1. temporary occupation of the Ukrainian 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 are unacceptable to Russia. Russian leaders have formed a "second echelon" of intervention.

On the eastern border with Russia and in the temporary occupation 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. We would like to emphasize that it was written in the year 2020. Threats of a military (and hybrid) nature formed not by purely military but rather non-military factors require equally comprehensive response.

Countering Hybrid threats

It should be noted that countering hybrid threats is a complex process due to a large number of different factors shaping these threats and difficulties in predicting changes in the intensity of their impact. In order to practically implement the determined forms and methods of integration of military and non-military forces and means of counteraction, we have proposed the Conceptual model of managing the integrated countermeasures potential (Figure 1).

It gives an opportunity to substantiate a rational composition of forces and means for de-escalation of the identified 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.

One of the main conclusions from Russia’s hybrid war against Ukraine is that the role of its information component has multiplied. It gives an opportunity to substantiate a rational composition of forces and means for de-escalation of the identified 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. One of the main conclusions from Russia’s hybrid war against Ukraine is that the role of its information component has multiplied.

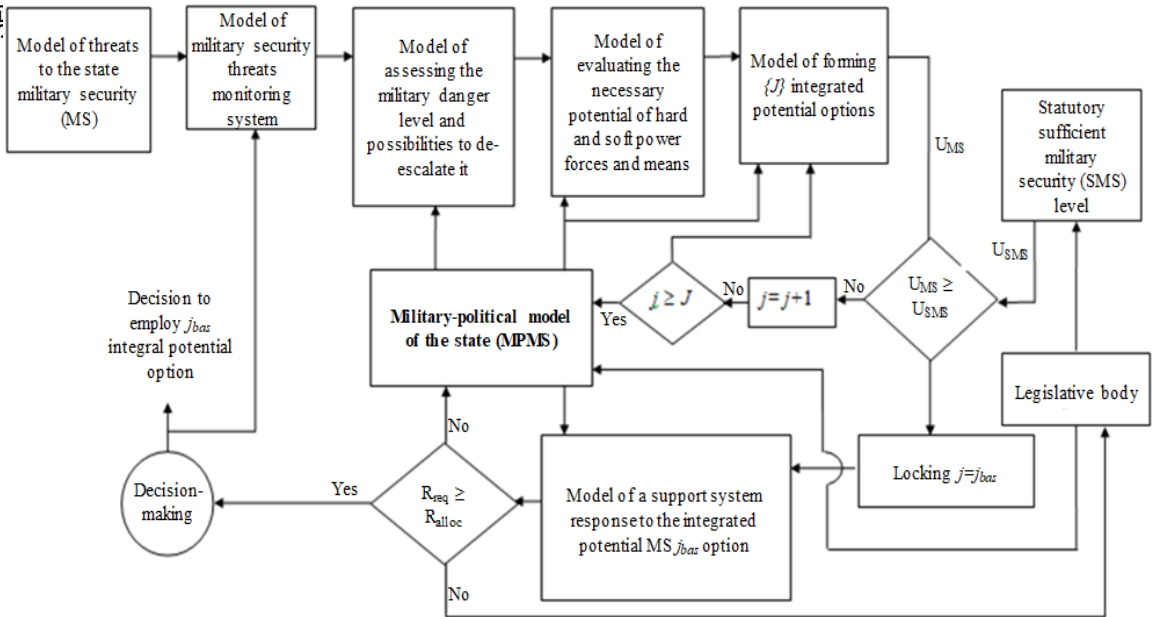


Figure 1: Model of Managing the Integrated Potential of Countering Military and Hybrid Threats to Ensure the Assigned Level of State Military Security.

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 (Figure 2). 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.

A High Mobility Internal Communications Groups Project has been implemented with support of US and Ukrainian partners as part of implementation of the strategic communications concept in the UAF to introduce new technologies of internal communications in Joint Forces units. The goal of the Group was to establish communications within military units, in particular between units and brigade headquarters. The tasks accomplished by the high mobility groups allowed creating an effective system of internal communications between commanders and personnel, to maintain and restore moral and psychological condition of units and their psychological readiness to perform combat tasks.

Particularly effective element of the work was the organization of constant feedback with staffs and units and obtaining objective information by the leadership of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, identification and prompt resolution of problematic issues that negatively affect the moral and psychological condition of personnel.

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.

An important component of the Joint Forces' activity was the Humanitarian Initiative of the Joint Forces Command "Help East" - a multidisciplinary program of targeted actions to help civilians in Donbass.

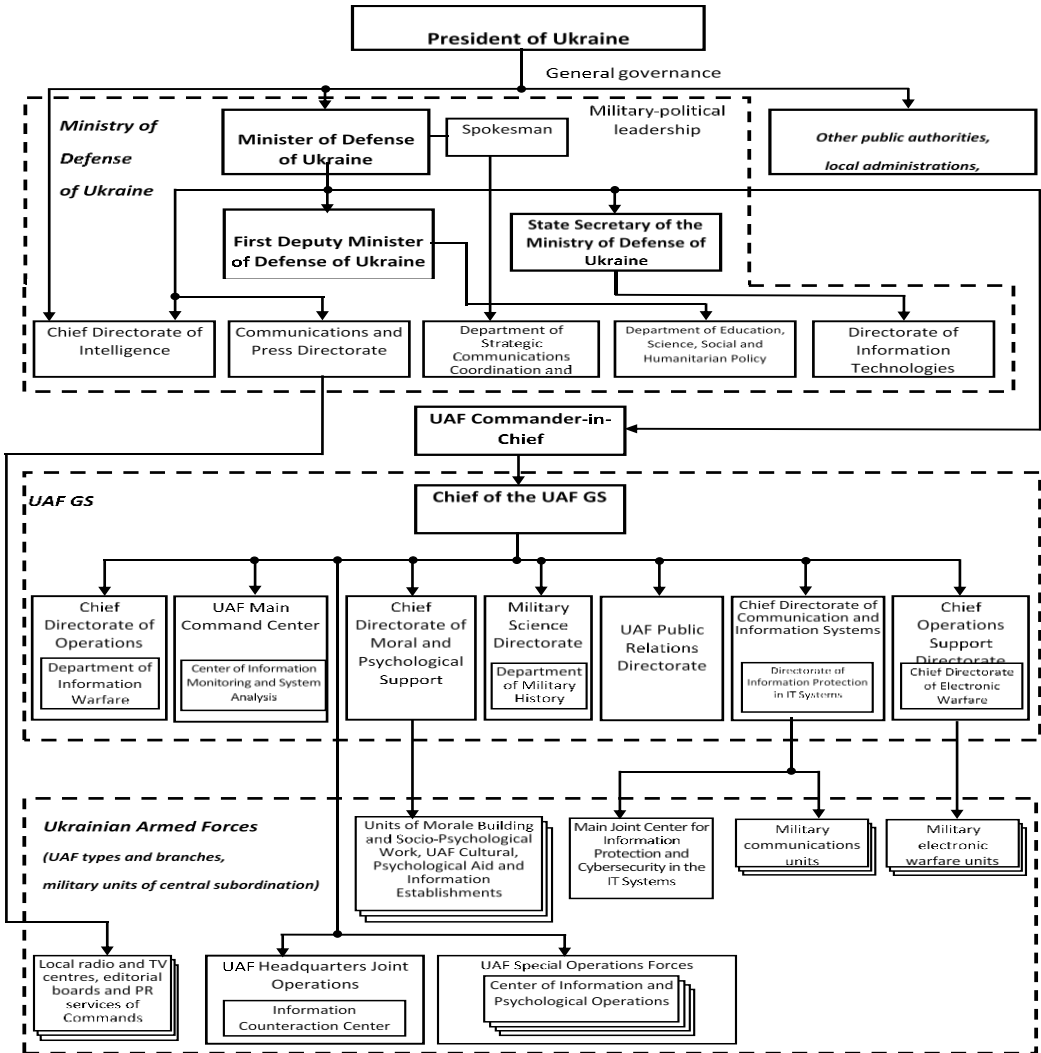


Figure 2: The Structure of the Existing System of Countering Adverse Information and Psychological Influence on the Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Strategic Communication and CIMIC

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 priorities of the Joint Forces Organization in the humanitarian sphere are protection of the civilian population, creation of conditions for sustainable social and economic development of the region, building the capacity of the CIMIC forces with the Joint Forces Command and state and local authorities, cooperation with international humanitarian organizations.

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 full-scale war Russian Federation against Ukraine.

The choice by the military-political leadership of the state of an appropriate strategy for settling the conflict is impossible without taking into account 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.).

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. Cooperation with NATO in the framework of Security Force Assistance is a promising area of foreign military assistance to counter "hybrid" threats, as this area of the Alliance's activities is aimed directly at strengthening the security and defense capabilities

of Partner countries, which NATO is now Ukraine. Analysis of the information field around Ukraine made it possible to predict scenarios for the development of a military conflict with Russia.

The selected complex factors make it possible to obtain one baseline and four derivative scenarios of the situation, namely:

1. “Slow movement” – to preserve insufficiently stable democratic development in Ukraine and bring into question its affiliation to the European political tradition while preserving the current level of support by the EU and the USA.
2. “Independence” (positive) – a steady increase in the stable democratic development (Ukraine’s accession to the EU and NATO) while increasing the level of trust and support by the world community and protecting Ukraine’s informational space.
3. “Balancing on the rope” – destabilizing the democratic development in the country in the background of large-scale aggression of the Union (Common) State against Ukraine and practical loss of support by the European community.
4. “Little Russia” (negative) – the destruction of Ukraine’s democratic development (Ukraine becomes a satellite of the Russian Federation), Ukraine loses its confidence in the world community’s sight, that is why they block their assistance and support.
5. “Russian peace” (advance of Russian “peacekeepers”) – despite the continued support of Ukraine’s pro-European state policy by NATO and other countries, there is the destabilization in the socio-political situation while the advancing of the so-called “peace-keeping forces” by Russia.

The assessment of possible scenarios shows that there would be some combined variant in reality with the separate features

of the proposed scenarios. The probability of future events in each scenario is approximately the same and depended on the local elections in Ukraine, presidential and parliamentary elections, etc. However, the probability of large-scale armed conflict Russian Federation against Ukraine is very high under the scenario “Balancing on the rope”.

The best course of events in Ukraine is based on the “Independence” scenario. Thus, the current situation (circa 2019/2020) contains preconditions for several variants of the possible political situation around Ukraine under armed aggression by the Russian Federation. However, in the coming years, this future would be limited by two key constants – large-scale armed aggression by Russian Federation and the final settlement of the political situation between Ukraine and Russian Federation.

On the eve of invasion by the armed forces of Russia, the question of Ukrainian territorial defence against hybrid threats remains acute [3]. Historical experience shows that territorial defence is one of the most difficult aspects of warfare. Much depends on the strength of the enemy’s military potential and an in-depth analysis of their methods of military action, but consideration must also be given to the domestic political situation. Formation of a modern system of territorial defence, integrated into the general defence system of the state under the leadership of the Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. These should be able to successfully maintain martial law whilst also organizing the reliable protection and defence of critical state infrastructure (especially military) [4].

Conclusion

Summarizing the above, it should be noted – 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 2014–2021 for Ukraine became a vital test of resistance to “hybrid” aggression. The effectiveness of countering "hybrid" threats can be achieved first of all by introducing adequate and mutually agreed actions (measures) not only in the military sphere, but also in other spheres of national security.

Literature:

1. Military Aspects of Countering Hybrid Warfare: Experiences, Lessons, Best Practices. <https://www.sto.nato.int/Lists/STONewsArchive/displaynewsitem.aspx?ID=495&ContentTypeId=0x010058AEAF164323DB46A46F391B932BA019>
2. Military Aspects of Countering Hybrid Aggression: Ukrainian Experience. Monograph. The National Defence University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskyi, 2020.
3. Valery Frolov: The organization of the territorial defence of Ukraine in the conditions of a hybrid war with Russia / Valery Frolov, Viacheslav Semenenko // Science and defense. – 2021. – № 2. – С 8-16. <https://doi.org/10.33099/2618-1614-2019-8-3-3-9>
4. Valery Frolov: Formation of a prospective model of the defence organization of Ukraine / Valery Frolov, Viacheslav Semenenko // Science and defense. – 2019. – № 3. – С. 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.33099/2618-1614-2019-8-3-3-9>
5. A. Syrotenko, V. Semenenko: Fundamentals of the Comprehensive Use of Military and Non-Military Forces and Means to Counter the Hybrid Aggression; National Security and the Future, Vol 23, No 2, 2022, pp. 19-52