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Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine: Comparative Analysis of Two Cases and Identification of Critical Elements in the Successful Application of Hybrid Tactics

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Abstract

After the military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, and the swift, bloodless annexation of Crimea, the international community recognized Russia as an expert on hybrid warfare. However, the ongoing conflict in Donbas unleashed by Moscow during the second less successful hybrid campaign remains a sore point not only for Ukraine but also for Russia which has to cope with costly consequences in order not to lose in the East of Ukraine and more importantly in its undeclared war on the West. This thesis conducts a comparative analysis of two Russian hybrid warfare models: (1) in Crimea; (2) in Eastern Ukraine, and focuses on the following research questions: Why was the Russian hybrid warfare in Crimea more successful than in Donbas? What measures can the state take to improve its ability to face hybrid attacks? The findings reveal that despite the presence of a set of common factors, the different degrees of success and outcomes of both cases are attributable to the fact that successfully employing the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, is actually bound not only to a number of prerequisites but also with specific favorable features of the conflict zone and several critical elements. While hybrid tactics vary depending on country and region, it is built on exploiting the enemy's vulnerabilities, the shortcomings of its political system, governance, economy, military sphere, and society, which, to one degree or another, can be characteristic of any state. Considering the range of domains in which an attacker is waging hybrid warfare, the most exploited fault lines and the inherent weaknesses of the target country, this thesis proposes recommendations for improving the ability of states to face hybrid attacks.

Abstrakt

Po vojenské intervenci na Ukrajině v roce 2014 a rychlé nekrvavé anexi Krymu uznalo mezinárodní společenství Rusko jako experta v oblasti hybridní války. Probíhající konflikt na Donbasu, který rozpoutala Moskva během druhé méně úspěšné hybridní kampaně, však zůstává bolestivou otázkou nejen pro Ukrajinu, ale také pro Rusko, které musí zvládat nákladným důsledkům, aby neprohrálo na východě Ukrajiny a nejdůležitější ve své nehlášené válce se Západem. Tato diplomová práce provádí komparativní analýzu dvou ruských modelů hybridní války: (1) na Krymu; (2) na východní Ukrajině a zaměřuje se na následující výzkumné otázky: Proč byla ruská hybridní válka na Krymu úspěšnější než na Donbasu? Jaká opatření může stát přijmout, aby zlepšil svou schopnost čelit hybridním útokům? Zjištění ukazují, že navzdory přítomnosti společných faktorů, různé stupně úspěchu a výsledky obou případů přičíst skutečnosti, že úspěšné využití celého spektra hybridní války závisí nejen na určitých nezbytných podmínkách, ale také na příznivých charakteristických rysech zóny konfliktu a několika kritických prvcích. I když se hybridní taktiky v jednotlivých zemích a regionech liší, je postavena na využívání zranitelnosti nepřítele, jeho slabých stránek v politickém systému, správy, ekonomiky, vojenské sféry a společnosti, které mohou být do určité míry charakteristické pro jakýkoli stát. S ohledem na rozsah domén, ve kterých útočník vede hybridní válku, nejvyužívanější zlomové linie a inherentní slabosti cílové země, navrhuje tato práce doporučení pro zlepšení schopnosti států čelit hybridním útokům.

Keywords

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague 24th December 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, Russian foreign policy inherited many of the characteristics and elements of the old era, including legacy of complicated geopolitics, difficult relationship with the West, great power ambitions, and a diverse toolkit to advance them. Over the years, the Russian leadership has improved the skills in applying these tools while advancing the national interests in the post-Soviet space (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). To contain the slow decay of its influence and *"blocking any prospect of NATO and European Union enlargement in its backyard,"* Moscow resorted to using a whole range of means from soft and semi-hard to hard power (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019; Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 18). Nevertheless, neither Western policymakers nor the rest of the international community did not expect that Russia's determination to keep a neighboring country in its orbit after the ouster of Ukraine's pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych would result in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and fueling separatist unrest in Eastern Ukraine (Casselman, 2017, p. 4). Along with the propensity to take risks and punch above its weight, the Russian Federation (RF) has demonstrated to the world its improved abilities in using the synthesis of *"symmetric"* and *"asymmetric"* tactics, or what has been labeled as *"new generation war"* in Russian military circles, and in the West as hybrid warfare (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019; Radkovets, 2016).

The term hybrid warfare has many definitions that try to capture *"the complexity of the 21st-century warfare, which involves a multiplicity of actors, blurs the traditional peace distinctions between types of armed conflict, and even between war and warfare."* (Wither, 2020, p. 7) As a rule, this form of warfare does not change but rather adapts and optimizes the violent nature of war (Wither, 2016, p. 86; McCulloh & Johnson, 2013, p. 16). The scale, method, and application of the aggressor's tools of power projection (military, political, civil, informational, and economic) against the perceived vulnerabilities of the target depend on the hybrid warfare actor's capabilities and goals, the susceptibility of its opponent's weaknesses (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 9). However cognitive elements in contrast to kinetic ones, assume a prominent place in hybrid warfare strategy (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 4). From this perspective, the Russian hybrid campaign in Crimea proved to be more exemplary than subsequent actions in Eastern Ukraine, also known as the Donbas region.

To force Ukraine to accept its domination, Russia for years created leverage and undermined the political system of the neighboring state through covert hybrid operations conducted in different parts of Ukraine, using an integrated approach of various methods: psychological and information operations, economic coercion, creating a fifth column in the

Ukrainian security and armed forces, ideological training of the local population (especially the Russian-speaking population), programming false goals and other relevant activities (Dayspring, 2015, p. 141; Hofmesisterova, et al., 2018, p. 52). The challenges that the Ukrainian government faced in 2014: the occupation of Crimea by Russian armed forces without insignia, the incitement of anti-government sentiment and the violent separatist uprising in Donbas are relatively recent stages of the actual attack of two hybrid models that share a set of common factors and differ in the degree of success and the strategic goals pursued. Although both operations were closely related in time and by the *"shared target government"*, had signs of previous planning and initially *"followed a similar pattern"* using almost the same tools, against the background of the first — rapid and bloodless annexation of Crimea, the second — hybrid war in Donbas (Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic) began to acquire uncontrollable and subsequently more prone to a *"traditional military invasion"* character (Dayspring, 2015, p. 177; Racz, 2015, p. 64; Gorbulin, 2020).

For the sake of academic clarity, it should be noted that, although since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, official Russian sources have continued to deny the involvement of the Russian regular forces in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, as opposed to the operation on the Crimean Peninsula, according to the *International Criminal Court*, the RF instigated an *"international armed conflict"* with Ukraine no later than 26 February 2014. *"The legal definition of its aggressions in Eastern Ukraine is still being worked out."* (Midttun, 2019) Furthermore, there is ample evidence that contradicts Russia's official statements, in particular: published information from Western intelligence services, satellite imagery of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), reports from independent media and social networks, testimonies of captured separatist fighters, killed and captured Russian soldiers, photos and videos of the presence in Eastern Ukraine military equipment and vehicles with clearly visible *"Russian tactical marking,"* and other corresponding confirmations (Racz, 2015, p. 12). All this evidence provides sufficient grounds to assert active Russian participation in the armed conflict in Donbas.

The relevance of this study is determined by the Ukrainian experience, which demonstrated that any state can become a theater in new generation war since each state has different types and degrees of national vulnerabilities, which can be cultural, economic, military, political, migration, energy or concern other relevant critical aspects. Adapting to NATO's *"temporarily military domination,"* the RF has introduced a *"conflict design"* that operates on its own terms, avoiding strengths while exploiting enemy weaknesses (Midttun, 2019). Even considering that since the formation and development of the Ukrainian political and military crisis in 2014, the North Atlantic Alliance, in cooperation with the European Union (EU), has been

working towards creating and developing a solid foundation for collectively countering hybrid threats, it is important not to lose sight of that the main responsibility for responding to hybrid threats or attacks rests with a potential target country, and that *"the Russian approach is permanently adapting on the basis of trial and error."* (NATO, 2019; Sahin, 2017)

Hybrid warfare is not a new concept, and although many international experts and researchers have begun to pay greater attention to it since 2014 and definitions of hybrid warfare continue to evolve, there is no general classification that could be effectively used against different states (Seth, 2015, p. 3; Wither, 2020, p. 7). As a rule, the threat of hybrid warfare becomes more possible in the presence of certain favorable conditions for the aggressor, and its tactics should vary depending on the country and region (Chausovsky, 2019). In this regard, the countries located on Russia's periphery, in particular the Baltic States, the Caucasus region, and the *"EU borderlands,"* are most vulnerable to its full-scale hybrid aggression (Blau, 2014). Within this thesis, the author intends to:

•   Provide some conceptual clarity into the term 'state hybrid warfare';

•   Identify the main elements and conditions that contribute to the most successful implementation of hybrid war;

•   On this basis, propose measures to improve the ability of the state to face hybrid attacks.

The main goal of this thesis is to examine and compare two models of Russian hybrid warfare: (1) in Crimea; (2) in the East of Ukraine, in order to identify the cause-and-effect relationships and critical elements that influenced the success and led to the opposite outcomes of these cases: a quick victory and bloodless annexation of the peninsula, and the bloody ongoing conflict in Donbas. To this end, the author, drawing off the concept of hybrid warfare, will consider the whole range of tools of the Russian hybrid war, the conditions and circumstances of their use, which were characteristic of two specific cases in Ukraine.

The following **research questions** will be investigated: (1) Why was the Russian hybrid warfare in Crimea more successful than in Donbas? And (2) What measures can the state take to improve its ability to face hybrid attacks?

Before answering these research questions, it is necessary to establish criteria for evaluating the hybrid war in Ukraine. In order for hybrid warfare to be successful, the costs and consequences of its actions must not exceed the achieved goals (Gage, 2017). Therefore, the author will analyze the goals that the Russian Federation pursued in each of these hybrid campaigns, and

compared them with the economic costs and political consequences that they had for the aggressor country.

The method employed in this thesis will be the comparative case study of two specific cases of Russian aggression against one country. Comparative case studies are in-depth examinations of *"two or more cases that share a common focus or goal"* and *"involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns"* between them (Goodrick, 2014, p. 1). To identify the critical elements that had a direct impact on the general character and, as a consequence, different outcomes of the two models of hybrid warfare, a framework should be established that can be used in the cross-case comparison. To this end, the author refers to the model of Unrestricted Warfare presented in the Callard and Faber's Table of 27 Forms of Warfare, in which three main types of means of war are distinguished: military, above-military, and non-military means (see more in Chapter 2.1.2).

The source material for these cases will mainly draw upon a base of secondary literature, a broad part of which is provided by foreign-language sources, especially Russian-language ones. Primary sources such as resolutions of both the Russian and Ukrainian governments, speeches and statements of Russian and Ukrainian officials, documents from international organizations also were used in the processing of the work. Particular attention will be paid to the report of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF *"The value of science in foresight"* or *"Gerasimov Doctrine"* since among Western experts this Doctrine is considered as a theoretical basis for current Russian military thinking and a new warfare strategy (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 370).

Notwithstanding this thesis mainly focuses on the practical aspects of the implementation of Russia's hybrid war between February and August 2014, it also covers to the necessary extent the events that took place before the starting point — the change of power in Kiev in February 2014, which followed the Euromaidan and provoked the RF to launch the operation in Crimea; and after the end point in August 2014, when Russian battalion tactical groups openly clashed with the Ukrainian regular units near Ilovaisk, and the general character of the conflict changed towards *"conventional interstate war, albeit of limited size and scope"* with elements of hybrid warfare (Minasyan, 2015; Racz, 2015, p. 14). This is particularly important for understanding the aggressor's intentions, the general pattern of hybrid warfare, and how its mechanism operated at different stages.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, the first two of which further divided into subchapters and sections. The first chapter covers the origin and evolution of the concept of hybrid

warfare and also analyzes the Gerasimov Doctrine. This chapter focuses mostly on the operation of the hybrid war mechanism and the conditions for its functioning.

Within the practical part of the work, the author answers the research questions stated above. The second chapter of the thesis is devoted to Russian hybrid campaigns in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. In particular, the author examines and analyzes both shared and specific strategic goals pursued by the Russian government in Crimea and in Donbas, the use of various forms of above-military, non-military, and military means of hybrid warfare, as well as their effectiveness in implementation of standard categories of tasks under certain conditions specific to each case. In the last subchapter, on the basis of the considered economic and geopolitical context of costs, risks, and benefits for the aggressor state, the success of the two hybrid models is assessed. The third chapter provides a comparative analysis of two cases, summarizing and identifying the necessary prerequisites and requirements for the successful application of hybrid tactics. The concluding chapter brief analyzes the principal measures undertaken by Western organizations, in particular NATO and the EU, to collectively combat hybrid threats, and based on the findings of this work, proposes a number of recommendations on improving the ability of states to face hybrid warfare.

1. CONCEPTUAL LENSES

1.1   Hybrid Warfare Concept

Although the intense hybrid warfare debate started long before this term began to permeate into the EU and NATO doctrines and military concepts, and subsequently became synonymous with Russian aggression in Ukraine, a number of criticisms remain in military theory and academia regarding the validity and the use of the hybrid warfare concept (Caliskan, 2019). When developing the hybrid design, the emphasis had at first been on the characteristics of the enemy, then at different times, the definition and meaning of the term *"hybrid warfare"* changed according to the subject of analysis, and thus resulted in a lack of conceptual clarity. This can be seen in the framework of the concept's evolution in Western defense circles, starting with discussions regarding the form of hybrid warfare conducted by non-state actors and ending with a newer and more distinct method of warfare conducted by states — most notably by the case of Russia's hybrid warfare in Ukraine. Criticism of hybrid warfare is also related to the distortion of the traditional differences between peace, and conflict and war; their vagueness and widening lead to a comparison of grand strategy (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 1). While most criticism is valid, hybrid warfare is a useful concept for describing new security challenges. Moreover, it provides a reason to rethink and discuss the future of *"warfare and war."* In Western military theory, the interpretation of war occurs to a greater extent in its kinetic, combat, and instrumental understanding, while in hybrid warfare, the focus is shifting to more non-kinetic components (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 1). The formula can be changed to fit the context. For example, the scale and method of application of the aggressor's instruments of power, such as above-military, non-military and military means can be changed depending on its goals and capabilities, and the susceptibility of the enemy's vulnerable characteristics (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 9). However, the cognitive elements, in contrast to military force, play a leading role (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 4). They allow the aggressor to simultaneously in several dimensions and at several levels wage hidden warfare, or, as experts in this field note, act in *"grey zone;"* the borders of which are erased sooner or later, as the consolidation of the achieved successes requires an open character of the use of armed forces (Banasik, 2015, p. 21).

Accordingly, the most relevant way to understand hybrid warfare is to focus on its means and methods of their use, and the various characteristics of the actors' capabilities and vulnerabilities. In-depth consideration of the degree of novelty of hybrid warfare and its appropriate significance other than grand strategy or war is not as important as the need for the

concept clarification to make it practical and useful (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 1). To this end, an analysis of the literature on hybrid warfare and case studies will trace the evolution of this term and identify several common characteristics that create a more or less clear model within the framework of a single descriptive concept of hybrid warfare designed to provide conceptual clarity to the term 'hybrid warfare.'

1.1.1 Evolution of the Concept

As mentioned above, there is no consensus on a unified definition of hybrid warfare. The earliest use of the term occurs in 1998 by US Marine Corps (USMC) Lieutenant Robert Walker in his NPS master's thesis titled *"SPEC FI: USMC and Special Operations."* In his work, Walker discusses the expeditionary capability of the Marine Corps and compares it to *"hybrid force for a hybrid war,"* of which the latter appears as *"that which lies in the interstices between special and conventional warfare."* (Brundtland Steder, 2016, p. 8) Although Walker was the first to introduce the term, in most scientific literature there is a tendency to consider a master's thesis written in 2002 by another NPS student, Major William Nemeth, as the starting point for the development of the hybrid warfare concept. His work, entitled *"Future War and Chechnya: A Case of Hybrid Warfare"* triggered discussions under which hybrid warfare began to be used to describe the increasing complexity and sophistication of actions by non-state actors on the battlefield in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon against superior militarily state opponents (Herta, 2017, p. 138; Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 1). In this case study of the Chechen separatist movement tactics, Nemeth examines the links between military and civilian entities equating them with *"mixed and hybrid societies"* and focuses on how they use a combination of traditional and modern approaches and conduct civilian and military operations, which in conjunction became an *"effective hybrid force"* against Russian troops (Brundtland Steder, 2016, p. 8). He claimed that the unique hybrid nature of Chechen society, which was at the stage of transition from a traditional clan structure with an emphasis on family ties to a more modern one, allowed the separatists to mobilize Chechens for war and, due to family ties, enlist broad support in this struggle. Such structure demonstrated some success because, in addition to *"military virtues,"* it allowed "newly-minted" field commanders to rely on the loyalty generated by family and religious ties, which played an important role in their high resistance, including to Russian propaganda efforts (Racz, 2015, p. 28). Most importantly, Nemeth's perspective illustrates that this hybrid society has created a hybrid form of warfare, effective and flexible in nature, and combining irregular and regular elements of power (Jojart, 2019, p. 2). He considers it adapted according to the actions of the enemy; a synthesis of guerrilla tactics with classical and terrorist

operations, which used elements of Soviet and Western military doctrines, including the sophisticated use of highly developed technologies and modern methods of mobilizing the masses (Banasik, 2015, p. 25). In addition to the traditional ambush tactics, Chechen separatists, based on the *"principles of network-centric warfare,"* conducted larger, decentralized and well-coordinated, *"but at the same time fluid operations,"* which, according to Nemeth, is one of the main features of the *"contemporary form of the guerrilla warfare."* (Racz, 2015, p. 28; Banasik, 2015, p. 25) On the other hand, the tactics of the Chechen separatist movement included psychological and information operations. Fluency in the Russian language and deep knowledge of the enemy's culture contributed to their effective implementation. As a result, besides undermining the morale of Russian soldiers, the Chechens were able to gain sympathy and support from the West (Racz, 2015, p. 29). Thus, applying the hybrid warfare concept to the events in Chechnya, Nemeth not only demonstrates the strengths of the *"Chechen insurgency,"* such as innovative ideas, a decentralized approach, the ability to adapt to the enemy's tactics, a strong belief in the cause, and charismatic leaders; but more importantly, he deduces one of the key characteristics of hybrid warfare – the expansion of the battlefield beyond the purely military sphere and the increasingly important role of non-military tools of power (Herta, 2017, p. 138; Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 2).

Nemeth's ideas were further developed by John J. McCuen in his authoritative article titled *"Hybrid Wars"*, published in the 2008 Military Review. McCuen shares Nemeth's thoughts on hybrid warfare and argues that such a form of warfare is effective if strategic goals are achieved in the *"physical and conceptual dimensions,"* the first of which implies the use of physical methods of warfare and, accordingly, the second – the use of non-military means of warfare and the struggle for control and support of societies (McCuen, 2008, p. 108). Based on his analysis of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, he concludes that one of the important elements of hybrid warfare for non-state actors which do not have sufficient military power to wage war directly is to use the population as a battlefield (Tienhoven, 2016, p. 10). According to McCuen, *"asymmetric battles fought within these populations (conflict zone population, home front population, international community) ultimately determine success or failure."* (McCuen, 2008, p. 107) Thus, the key to victory in a hybrid conflict is the simultaneous implementation of major military and social efforts on all fronts (Racz, 2015, p. 31). Considering the social method of warfare, it should be noted that it mainly consists of: fighting and controlling the population of the conflict zone, persuading its hostile inhabitants and attracting their domestic support. For this, the interfering forces must immediately ensure security to minimize human losses, and at the same time, it is necessary to restore infrastructure, basic services, local authorities and the basic elements of the

economy (Tienhoven, 2016, p. 10). McCuen indicates this because otherwise non-state actors will be able to fill the vacuum created by the advancing forces of their adversary, prompting disgruntled local people and, possibly, external forces to an organized prolonged uprising (McCuen, 2008, p. 111). Moreover, in the case of long protracted hostilities, the aggressor should obtain support from *"home front population and international community."* (Racz, 2015, p. 31)

Notably, the hybrid warfare description provided by McCuen and his approach of focusing on the social method of warfare as its key element, have some discrepancies with the dominant works of Frank Hoffman, another accredited academic in this field. His extensive studies in the hybrid warfare area, starting with the article *"Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars"* published in 2005 in collaboration with James Mattis, and ending with relatively recent more adapted works, have become the gold standard for understanding the hybrid power and synergistic effects, and were used by many military theorists, including in the defence community of the United States (US), Great Britain (UK), and Israel, to orient their work *"to agree, disagree, or attempt to expand on his concepts."* (McCulloh & Johnson, 2013, p. 9) Hoffman and Mattis, as early as 2005, suggested that the superiority of countries in the field of conventional and technological armed forces, including the US, could be challenged not only by other states but also by non-state actors, with the combined use of less advanced technologies (Brundtland Steder, 2016, p. 9). These adversaries can use combinations of regular and irregular tools of power projection and other opportunities where terrorist, guerrilla and insurgent tactics, in conjunction with information operations, can compensate limited capabilities and provide an advantage to non-state actors in war (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 26). The 2006 Lebanon War, like Afghanistan and Iraq cases, became a central example of this phenomenon and also contributed to the hybrid concept development. In this context, Hoffman used the term hybrid to demonstrate how such non-state actors as Hezbollah was able to achieve surprising success against the well-trained and equipped Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Racz, 2015, p. 31). In the 2006 article titled "*Lessons from Lebanon: Hezbollah and Hybrid Wars,"* he considers Hezbollah's actions as a new tendency in the combination of *"an organized political movement with decentralized armed cells employing adaptive tactics in ungoverned zones."* (Hoffman, 2006) These distributed cells are highly disciplined and well trained to apply a mix of guerrilla tactics and technology against the modern conventional forces of their adversary in densely populated urban areas. In addition, Hoffman points out difficulties in issues of their *"finding and fixing,"* which are partly related to the nature of the terrain and blurring of borders between combatants and noncombatants (Hoffman, 2006). It should also be noted that Hoffman adds one of the important characteristics of non-state hybrid warfare, namely, these participants tend to show an increased level of military complexity as the

capabilities increase. They successfully deploy modern weapons systems, such as those used by Hezbollah C802 anti-ship cruise missiles, use high-tech capabilities, cyber technologies and employ combined arms tactics, which were previously considered inaccessible to non-state actors (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 2). Therefore, Hoffman concludes that emphasis on greater military complexity and capabilities is one of the key features of non-state actors, and at the same time, the increasing destruction potential of modern weapons systems is the determining factor in the effectiveness of hybrid warfare (Racz, 2015, p. 32). However, in contrast to his previous article, in *"Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars"* 2007, Hoffman defines not high-tech or revolutionary technologies as the *"disruptive component of Hybrid Wars"* but criminal activity and terrorism (Hoffman, 2007, p. 29). Although in this article there is only one brief mention that *"criminal activity is used to sustain the hybrid force or to facilitate the disorder and disruption of the target nation,"* the nature and definition of this activity are discussed in more detail in his next work – *"Hybrid vs. compound war: The Janus choice: Defining today's multifaceted conflict,"* published in 2009. This *"disruptive social behavior"* is carried out in the forms of smuggling, human and drug trafficking, extortion, and other corresponding forms by *"narco-terrorist and nefarious transnational organizations"* to disrupt *"the legitimacy of local or national government."* (Hoffman, 2009) Analyzing Hoffman's contribution to the development of the hybrid warfare concept, it also should be noted that he was one of the first who used the term *"hybrid threats."* Initially figured in 2007, this term underwent a few changes in subsequent Hoffman works, and was mainly used to describe the actions of not only non-state actors, but also state actors, or, as mentioned in article 2009 *"any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives."* (Hoffman, 2009)

Another American expert, Russell Glenn, complements the definition of hybrid threats in his *"Thoughts on "Hybrid" Conflict,"* published in the Small Wars Journal in 2009. According to Glenn, hybrid threat is *"an adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some combination of (1) political, military, economic, social, and information means, and (2) conventional, irregular, catastrophic, terrorism, and disruptive/criminal warfare methods."* This threat can come from both state and non-state actors (Glenn, 2009, p. 2). At first sight, this definition has many similarities with Hoffman's hybrid threat model, nevertheless, the main novelty consists of two main changes: the highlighting of non-military means category and the inclusion of catastrophic elements. Considering the 2006 Lebanon War, Glenn ascertains as the main component of Hezbollah's strength in the hybrid war that this non-state entity was *"more than a military force"*, in terms of the availability of non-violent economic, political, diplomatic,

social, informational components that provided *"bedrock support for its military organization."* (Glenn, 2009, p. 3) Another important point of his article is the use of the catastrophic element as one of the methods inherent in the hybrid threat. Referring to the publication of the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Glenn defines the term *"catastrophic"* as *"any natural or man-made incident, including terrorism, which results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the population, infrastructure, environment, economy, national morale, and / or government functions."* (Glenn, 2009, p. 2) Therefore, he emphasizes that impact on society as a potential goal of hybrid warfare.

An analysis of the above works on hybrid warfare demonstrates that the term hybrid warfare was originally used primarily for non-state actors waging sophisticated wars in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya against militarily superior state opponents. At the same time, two key characteristics were attributed to non-state hybrid warfare. Firstly, non-state opponents, such as Hezbollah, IS, emphasize greater military complexity and capabilities, successfully deploying modern weapons systems, using advanced information technologies, and other corresponding capabilities that were previously considered inaccessible to them. Another important characteristic of hybrid warfare conducted by non-state actors is the expansion of the battlefield beyond the purely military sphere and the increasing role of non-military tools of power. Summarizing the contributions of Nemeth, McCuen, Hoffman, and Glenn that underlie the traditional concept, several different hybrid warfare means can be noted: military (conventional) capabilities, irregular tactics, criminal activity, terrorism, political, diplomatic, informational, social and economic; of which the first four, according to McCuen's categorization, can be considered as physical methods and, accordingly, the last five as conceptual (McCuen, 2008, p. 108). Their application varies in different degrees of multimodality, simultaneity and disaster potential (destructive influence and consequences). Thus, after lengthy discussions in the academic and military circles, these changes and key characteristics of the hybrid war were recognized in the Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010, in which US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates used the term to describe complex tools of power projection that are both state and non-state actors will use to alleviate the usual inconvenience with the US (Gates, 2010, p. 8).

Nevertheless, it was precisely Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014, which Western analysts regarded as *"combination of military action, covert operations and an aggressive program of disinformation,"* that triggered increased interest in this issue and began to occupy a special place in political documents and literature on hybrid warfare, thereby laying the foundation for the tendency to associate hybrid warfare with states' behavior (Wither, 2016, p. 76). Along with the advancement of states to the forefront of the development of this concept, the task of identifying

the differences between hybrid warfare in the form in which it is used by states and non-state actors arises. *"The underdevelopment of the literature on the hybrid threat posed by most dangerous current non-state actor"* makes it even more difficult to reach an absolute consensus on this issue (Hashim, 2017). However, among some professionals and analysts dealing with security matters, there is common ground regarding the perceived possibilities of state hybrid warfare. For instance, as Ahmed Salah Hashim noted one of them in his 2017 *"State and Non-State Hybrid Warfare"* article, he conducts a comparative analysis of the use of hybrid tactics by two completely different entities. On the one hand, Russia which simultaneously and coordinately used various methods of warfare against Ukraine, and on the other hand ISIS, which defeated four divisions of the Iraqi army and captured Mosul. Hashim defines Russian hybrid capabilities as a *"'cocktail' of measures that were used to achieve one's goals in lieu of going to full-scale war."* Exactly as state parties can, non-state actor waging a hybrid war can also use a *"cocktail"* of measures containing various methods, including methods of *"political warfare"* such as implementing propaganda, recruiting supporters, and creating *"human terrain" on the ground in the conflict zone"* as its support. However, unlike states that have all the necessary resources to develop reliable hybrid capabilities, only a few non-state actors such as ISIS or Hezbollah are able to have almost the same effective potential in hybrid warfare (Hashim, 2017). Such organizations also tend to increase the range of military operations to create and develop impressive semi-conventional forces, allowing defensive and offensive operations against more impressive and developed conventional enemy forces (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 2). At the same time, they do not limit themselves to the use of a *"primitive and illegitimate form of political violence"* such as terrorism, or the more *"advanced"* and reliable guerrilla *"hit and run"* tactics. Thus, this limited number of non-state actors is characterized by the ability to develop their hybrid capabilities, starting with more accessible primitive forms such as terrorism, then to an advanced guerrilla warfare and subsequently to more sophisticated semi-conventional ways of warfare. Despite this, their tactics are not limited to high forms and thus slide up and down this spectrum of violence depending on adversaries, situations, environment, and other corresponding factors. Therefore, Hashim concludes that *"for an advanced and well-developed non-state actor hybrid warfare is part and parcel of their arsenal of war whereas for states it can be used in lieu of outright war."* The main difference between hybrid warfare conducted by modern non-state actors, such as ISIS, and by state actors is that along with the advancement to higher war capabilities, non-state actors do not discard smaller forms of war (Hashim, 2017).

James K. Wither in his article *"Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare,"* claims that the hallmark of hybrid warfare waged by state actors is "*the emphasis on non-military methods of conflict and,*

in particular, information warfare." (Wither, 2016, p. 76) Patrick Cullen slightly expands this idea, focusing on the fact that although the scale, method, and use of actor's tools of power (military, political, civil, informational and economic) depend on the actor's capabilities; its goals, the susceptibility of the enemy's vulnerable sides, and cognitive elements, in contrast to military force, play a paramount role in hybrid warfare (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 9). The same conclusion had been reached by Alexander Lanoszka. In the case study *"Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe,"* he associates hybrid warfare not with a new form of warfare, but with strategies, since it involves the use of irregular formations against the enemy's most vulnerable areas, while conventional armed forces are used as a means of intimidation, and as a result, their direct participation in the conflict takes place at a minimal level. The main advantage of the aggressor is that it destroys the enemy's potential without engaging in direct military conflict (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 178). The use of non-military means aimed at political, infrastructural, cultural, economic, informational and cyberspace allows the aggressor to achieve the desired political, strategic results most successfully, without allowing the victim state to rely on the support of the people and mobilize internal resources, thereby significantly weakening and, possibly even destroying the enemy's ability to resist (Racz, 2015, p. 61). The squeezed use of military power tools in state hybrid warfare is also closely related to what Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud and Patrick Cullen characterize as *"ambiguity."* They use the term *"ambiguity"* to refer to *"hostile actions that are difficult for a state to identify, attribute or publicly define as coercive uses of force."* This ambiguity complicates and undermines the enemy's decision-making processes, and accordingly complicates its military or even political response to the aggressor (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 2).

As D. Barno notes, *"inseparable, violence accompanies the classic war."* However, this is difficult to notice in informational, psychological or diplomatic activities. It's impossible to notice *"the physical violence in elements being a component of the political war."* Therefore, he compares hybrid warfare with a more modern version of shadow conflicts, in which there are no clear attributes of statehood (Banasik, 2015, p. 21). In hybrid warfare, aggressor observes the *"perceived "red lines"* or thresholds of the potential adversary and tries to act below them; it finds *"gray zones"* where these red lines are not formulated and exploits these unprotected spaces; and aggressor hides its military means, emphasizing non-military methods to achieve its political goals (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 2). For an aggressor state, hybrid warfare means the most acceptable covert way to achieve its political and strategic goals, without crossing the threshold of war as a violent clash of kinetic forces, thereby limiting the possibility of retaliatory measures. At the same time, it should be noted that although hybrid warfare erases the distinction

between peace and war, with the involvement of the aggressor's armed forces this warfare necessarily takes on an open character (Banasik, 2015, p. 21). Given the foregoing, it can be concluded that the main important extension and change in the concept of hybrid warfare with regard to states is the strategically innovative use of ambiguity, which is achieved through the use of non-military means as the main aggressor's tools of power in hybrid warfare.

The evolution of the hybrid warfare concept and its key characteristics undoubtedly demonstrate the presence of distinctive features between hybrid warfare conducted by state and non-state actors. Nevertheless, the hybrid warfare strategy of these two types of actors is united by some conceptual similarities, namely asymmetry, multimodality, and varying degrees of emphasis on creative approaches and the use of cognitive elements against the supposed spectrum of enemy vulnerabilities to create a synergistic effect (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3). Consistent with the purposes of this research, the definition of hybrid warfare was produced by state actors as *"the employment of military and non-military forms of war to attack select political, informational, military and economic targets across an adversary's strategic depth to similarly overwhelm his ability to process what is happening and respond effectively,"* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 54) to the same extent, can be applied to describe two different (state, non-state) models of the same phenomenon, where the means and methods vary.

1.1.2 Hybrid Warfare Model: Synchronization of means, escalation and main phases

Since the instruments of power that hybrid warfare actor, both state and non-state, leveraged against an enemy's weaknesses are contextual in nature, in the literature on hybrid warfare, they are usually referred to more broadly as *"military or non-military,"* or as a basic set of MPECI (military, political, economic, civil and informational) tools and techniques (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 12). However, as an alternative way to consider hybrid warfare categories in a narrower range, Callard and Faber's Table of 27 Forms of Warfare can be used. (Callarad & Faber, 2002, p. 63) It should be noted that the forms identified by them are by no means exhaustive since it is difficult and practically impossible to provide a general list of instruments of power used in hybrid warfare, including the fact that some hybrid actors cannot have a clear border between the use of military, political and civilian means (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 4). At the same time, the categorization made by James Callard and Peter Faber of *Liang and Xiangsui's "10,000 forms of 16 beyond-limits combined war"* as military, above-military and non-military means of war, in contrast to general terms, gives a more or less detailed

picture of a possible range of hybrid warfare instruments (Dayspring, 2015, p. 15). The category of military means includes guerrilla, terrorist, concussion, conventional, ecological, bio/chemical and other corresponding forms of warfare; and above-military: network/cyber, information, diplomatic, cultural, intelligence, psychological, technological, smuggling, drug and other corresponding forms of warfare; and non-military means: financial, trade, resources, economic, legal/moral, media/propaganda, migration/forced population shifts, sanction, and ideological warfare. Callard and Faber compare the various forms from these three categories with *"Lego pieces"* that *"can be used together with other pieces, to build a more complex and therefore bewildering threat."* (Callarad & Faber, 2002, p. 63) Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, the use of various tools of power projection in hybrid warfare depends on the susceptibility of the opposing state's vulnerable sides, aggressor's capabilities and its goals. State hybrid warfare actors, in contrast to non-state, have more capabilities and wider range of available tools. They also differ in the methods of applying their means. However, both types of hybrid warfare actors in a synchronized way use their military, above-military, non-military means against adversary's perceived vulnerability across the PMESII (political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructure) spectrum (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 5). Synchronization of means is *"the ability of a hybrid warfare actor to effectively coordinate instruments of power in time, space and purpose to create the desired effects."* (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 12).

The model of using military, above-military, and non-military instruments of power by hybrid warfare actors across the PMESII vulnerabilities of a target system can be depicted through the vertical and horizontal axis of escalation. Synchronization carried out on the horizontal axis allows an aggressor to simultaneously use military, above-military, and non-military means in the same battlespace, while the aggressor can both *"escalate"* or *"de-escalate"* them to create greater effects (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3). By escalating along the horizontal axis, through synchronization of above military and non-military power tools, a hybrid warfare actor can cause significant damage to its opponent, while remaining below the detection threshold (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 12). For instance, the synchronized use of a mixture of operations that are hardly visible or difficult to identify as an aggressive act, such as propaganda operations, cyber operations, the spread of counterfeit foreign currency (smuggling warfare) and other corresponding operations, aimed at certain vulnerabilities, may with high probability be *"death by a thousand cuts"* for the enemy (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 15; Callarad & Faber, 2002, p. 63). At least at the initial stage, a victim may not even detect an aggressor's hybrid warfare attack with the use of above-military and non-military means. Although, if it

happens many times and simultaneously in several sectors, synchronized efforts can lead to cumulative and non-linear effects; as a result of which, the actions of the aggressor cross the target's thresholds of detection and response (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 20). Accordingly, synchronization, acting as a force multiplier, allows hybrid warfare actors to create effects *"similar, or even greater, than applying overt coercion."* (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 12) Moreover, it allows, by de-escalating one or more instruments of power to maintain the overall escalation at a certain level at which the effects created by the aggressor, aimed at changing of state of an entity, do not exceed target's reaction thresholds (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 13). The vertical axis demonstrates the increase or decrease in the degree of intensity of the use by hybrid warfare actors of military, above-military, non-military means against the target's PMESII spectrum of vulnerabilities. Therefore, a hybrid warfare attack, conducted by both state and non-state actors, does not develop in stages, but through simultaneous escalation and de-escalation at the tactical and operational levels, and along the vertical and horizontal axis (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3).

Some studies of hybrid warfare use phases to explain its functioning, in particular with the example of the Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine. Phases represent the traditional way of thinking about war, in which *"events are seen as following a linear causal trajectory towards a given end."* (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3) However, considering that hybrid campaign operates along the horizontal and vertical axes of escalation, as a result, it does not necessarily evolve linearly or follows a causal trajectory, thereby hybrid warfare *"does not neatly fit into traditional attack-phase thinking."* (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 20) The fact that the nature of hybrid warfare depends on the context, a particular country or region for instance, also complicates the idea of its phases under the concept (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 9). At the same time, it is difficult to determine the beginning or end of hybrid campaign, or to distinguish between legitimate activities, coercive diplomacy and war (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3). Therefore, the concretization of hybrid warfare stages carried out by some experts such as Janis Berzins, who, based on the analysis of Russian military strategies, deduces eight phases of hybrid warfare model, may provide grounds for reflection on hybrid warfare, but due to its strict linearity it cannot take into account all kinds of variations or some of the important hybrid warfare aspects (Wojcik, 2014). Nevertheless, in a more generalized form, the development model of hybrid warfare always adheres to three main stages: preparation, attack, and the final stage. The preparation stage is the initial phase at which the steps, situations, and decisions made prior to the actual attack are designated *"in order to secure advantageous environment to carry out the attack itself."* (Richterova, 2015, p. 8) This stage can be divided into three types of preparation (Racz, 2015, p. 59). Strategic preparation includes assessing the state of power balance, identifying the

target's weaknesses and its PMESII vulnerabilities, and creating and preparing the means necessary to attack them (Dayspring, 2015, p. 28). Practical examples of this type of preparation, include mapping adversary cyber networks, assessing the degree of government grievances of enemy's population, creating networks of loyal NGOs and media channels, or other tools for future influence on population in a conflict zone or international audience, and other corresponding activity (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3; Racz, 2015, p. 59). Political preparation is characterized by a more dynamic activity aimed at strengthening the aggressor's control over the target's critical spheres and stimulating its internal contradictions of a political, interethnic, and interreligious nature (Racz, 2015, p. 59). These actions may include strengthening control over the information space, bribery of influential government officials and law enforcement authorities, the use of special *"zombie"* methods to foment ethnic or social tension, and other corresponding activity (BramaBy, 2017). The key feature in operational preparation is the process of mobilizing non-military coordinated actions, usually disinformation and political pressure, to weaken the target country. In this sense, mobilization can occur in relation to *"bought"* criminal groups or officials, officers, grievances population as a protest potential (Racz, 2015, p. 59). As a result, the preparatory stage of a hybrid campaign has a very wide scope, starting from assessing the situation and creating the necessary aggressor's non-military tools of power, to mobilizing and coordinating them. These measures taken by hybrid warfare actors, as a rule, have a hidden form and, accordingly, should not exceed the target's thresholds of detection and response (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 26). The second stage of hybrid warfare — the attack phase — is usually one of the shortest main phases, which contains the selected combination of available and well-known military and non-military aspects of the attack (Richterova, 2015, p. 9). It is worth noting that at this stage, the attacker periodically escalates and de-escalates along the horizontal and vertical axes to control operational tempo and the coordinated use of various tools of power projection across an adversary's strategic depth (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Cullen, 2017, p. 3). The more elements of non-military and above-military means that are used by a hybrid actor in the mix the more difficult causality becomes (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 13). Their effects are often unpredictable, in particular, one action does not necessarily lead to the expected result and, moreover, may cause another effect in a different context. This means that the aggressor does not have full control over these effects and, as a result, *"they will need to be highly adaptable if they are to be ready to capitalize on the different effects of their actions as they occur."* (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 14) However, the most distinctive and obvious feature of the attack phase is the use of the military component of hybrid warfare, such as launching military operations or terrorist attacks (Racz, 2015, p. 60; Richterova, 2015, p. 9). Accordingly, this involves the use of open, to a varying degree limited, organized violence, and a prerequisite for the presence of

aggressor forces on target's territory (Richterova, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, the attack phase is the most revealing and substantive in relation to NATO's definition of hybrid threats, namely threats, *"simultaneous and conversion applying of conventional and unconventional means in order to achieve the established effects."* (Banasik, 2015, p. 26) The final stage of hybrid warfare is often described in some literature in hybrid warfare as the *"defending the end state"* or the *"stabilization phase."* (Richterova, 2015, p. 9; Racz, 2015, p. 64) However, its overall significance boils down to ensuring the achievement of mission objectives and consolidating results. Depending on the situation and objectives, the actions of a hybrid warfare actor can range from a series of diplomatic and political steps to further consolidating their results through the use of military force (Richterova, 2015, p. 9).

Having considered the hybrid warfare design, it can be concluded that although it follows three main stages, it depends on many characteristics and is difficult to predict in terms of accurately determining the place of attack, specific means that will be used by hybrid warfare actors or specific target's vulnerabilities that will be affected. Nevertheless, the shadow work of the hybrid mechanism makes its tactic vulnerable. As it becomes clear how it works, the hybrid campaign will cease to operate effectively (McKew, 2017). This mainly requires monitoring the target's vulnerabilities, hybrid actor's capabilities, and actions, as well as the possible consequences of its hybrid attacks (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017, p. 21).

1.1.3 Conditions for Hybrid Warfare

Both state and non-state actors wage hybrid wars against a state adversary, its armed forces and civilian population. However, the conditions for hybrid warfare conducted by these two types of actors are significantly different, including their goals. Focusing the further attention of this research on state hybrid warfare actors, it should be noted that non-state actors use a hybrid strategy for secession or forestall a state actor from intervening, while state hybrid actors pursue more *"self-interested objectives."* (Sloan, 2018)

First of all, given that the aggressor state is an offensive realist which is ready to use violence in peacetime and is able to synchronize all its power tools. Before starting a hybrid campaign this state needs to have a strategic goal in relation to which its efforts will be directed. In the modern global landscape, the worldview closest to the prospect of an offensive realist has rising regional powers that aspire to regional and global supremacy — hegemony (Dayspring, 2015, p. 32). A key component of hegemony is power, which is seen in the context of tangible, intangible resources, and in terms of outcomes as the ability to impose one's will upon other

countries (Norrlof, 2015). In this regard, hybrid warfare is a more convenient way, in terms of minimizing the risks of external factors, for states that are not satisfied with the status quo and seek to influence other parties and thereby satisfy their interests (Sloan, 2018). To start a hybrid campaign, namely to use non-military and above-military tools of power, there is no particular need for an aggressor state to have a high economic or scientific-technical potential. Since, for instance, information operations, due to the availability of modern technologies and the Internet, are very simple and relatively cheap, as well as cyber operations that don't require highly technical malware (Nurk, 2016, p. 14; Valeriano & Jensen, 2018, p. 74).

From the beginning, the aggressor state has to hide its intentions so that its efforts in diplomatic, informational, economic, and other coercion are not considered as acts of hostility and thus the possibility of retaliatory measures would be limited. Even if the aggressor, as an actor in hybrid warfare, does not distinguish between peace and war, it understands that other states do this (Dayspring, 2015, p. 33). It takes advantage of this awareness to avoid thresholds of open conflict and circumvent international legal norms regarding the use of force and violation of states' sovereignty (Sloan, 2018). At the same time, the aggressor can use the *"instruments of the liberal international order,"* such as international treaties, United Nations (UN) mandates, environmental laws, and another corresponding "tools," as mitigating circumstances of its activity, as long as they bring aggressor certain benefits — mask its actions and any build-up in forces (Dayspring, 2015, p. 33). However, when its intentions suddenly become known, the aggressor becomes vulnerable because simultaneously there is an opportunity to confront it before the strengthens control over the target. If the state hybrid actor determines that the enemy does not have the preconditions for resistance, it will dynamically change interstate relations through the unexpected use of military force (Dayspring, 2015, p. 32). Besides the fact that the attacked country has to simultaneously confront non-military and military attacks on several fronts, its ability to conduct armed resistance to the aggressor's military means is further reduced if the hybrid actor has military superiority (Bartosh, 2018). This may mean that the attacked state does not want to use its self-defense capabilities at all, due to the high risk of an overwhelming conventional attack, or they are greatly weakened (Racz, 2015, p. 74). An additional factor that allows the state hybrid warfare actor to carry out its dynamic actions related to the use of military force is the enemy's lack of allies, capable and willing to guarantee its defense (Racz, 2015, p. 75). Nevertheless, in these conditions, the aggressor state has to prevent a gradual increase in tensions. Using deception operations or situations favorable to it, such as significant world events that are dominating the attention of the international media, the aggressor should try to hide any changes in its activities as long as possible, including the sudden use of military force against the opponent state. The degree of use

of the aggressor's military force should also conform to its intended purposes and must be minimized as soon as possible to reduce the motivation for international intervention (Dayspring, 2015, p. 34). It should also be noted that hybrid warfare is time sensitive. To some extent, all its parties, and especially the population of a conflict zone, are subject to moral, economic, and physical deterioration (Pekar, 2015). The longer hybrid warfare is waged, the weaker an aggressor. Therefore, a successful hybrid campaign requires the smallest, most flexible, and, if possible, the clearest plan with *"multiple branches and sequels."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 35)

1.2 Gerasimov Doctrine

Russia's operations in Ukraine acquired an official hybrid warfare label, due to the *"NATO Review video posted on 3 July 2014,"* in which *"NATO publicly declared this new form of warfare to be a 'hybrid war.'"* (Racz, 2015, p. 41) Shortly thereafter, a tendency appeared among Western military theorists to connect the "hybridity" of Russian military thinking with the report of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF *"The value of science in foresight"* or according to its Western interpretation, *"Gerasimov Doctrine."* (Plekhanov, 2017) In this article, published in Military-Industrial Courier in 2013, General Valery Gerasimov referring to *"the lessons of the Arab spring,"* formulated his views on the changing nature of conflict and *"comprehensive threats facing Russia, threats which required an equally comprehensive answer.*" (Gerasimov, 2013; Galeotti, 2018)

He does not use the term "hybrid" in his discussion, however, the model of *"new-type conflicts"* described by him, shifts the emphasis of combat methods from military to non-military means, which *"have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."* (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 24) A particular place in the article is occupied by the critical potential of an informational conflict, which allows aligning the positions and even achieving superiority over an adversary in a subsequent possible armed struggle (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 27). At the same time, in contrast to most discussions about hybrid warfare, Gerasimov attaches great importance to the *"protest potential of the population"* as a component that contributes to the maximum effectiveness of non-military measures applied against opponents. The presence of a discontented population in adversary territory provides the aggressor an easy opportunity to become a sponsor for their mobilization and, as a result, additional political and military power within the target's territory, as well as a possibility to justify aggression as a necessary intervention (Dayspring, 2015, p. 116).

For economic, political, informational, psychological, humanitarian and other non-military operations, military means of a camouflaged nature, such as special forces, serve as an additional component of a hybrid campaign and are aimed at creating a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the adversary state. The involvement of small units of mobile, mixed-type groups of forces operating in a *"single intelligence-information space,"* allows strengthening the dynamism and effectiveness of military actions (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 24). In coordination with the *"new means of military conflict,"* as Gerasimov emphasizes, the domestic experience of using partisan units, as an additional force for irregular formations, should be taken into account (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 26). The use of forces gains an open

character towards the end of the hybrid campaign, with the military deployment, under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis management, in target's territory. To achieve ultimate success in the conflict, not only the speed, quick movements of regular troops, but also *"creating a system of armed defense of the interests of the state outside the borders of its territory"* is of particular importance (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 27). To this end, the attacker should carry out preparatory work regarding the introduction of simplified procedures for crossing the border of a potential enemy, the use of its airspace, territorial waters, and other corresponding spaces. A peacekeeping operation is one of the forms that allows to hide the real intentions of state hybrid actors and justifiably deploy armed forces on the target's territory. According to Gerasimov, its tasks, in addition to the traditional methods of action of regular forces, should be expanded with specific missions such as rescue, special, humanitarian, and evacuation missions, *"that, possibly, regular troops will have to carry out."* (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 27)

Another factor influencing the change in character of conflict is the use of high-precision weapons, modern technologies, for instance, unmanned aerial vehicles such as DRONE or multi-functional robots (Banasik, 2016, p. 171). Modernization of armed forces along with research in the area of artificial intelligence are a prerequisite for adaptation to modern *"rules of war."* (Gerasimov, 2016 (February 26, 2013), p. 24) These rules, based on Gerasimov's views, do not imply a declaration of war, they are driven by the need to rely on asymmetric methods and seek for the enemy's weaknesses to conduct targeted strikes well behind its lines to destroy target's critical infrastructures regarding both its military and civilian elements, preferably in a short period (Racz, 2015, p. 36).

General Valery Gerasimov's article demonstrates the defensive narrative which is typical of a chaotic modern era. He often refers to external challenges and threats, while pointing to the need to protect the Russian Federation from a new form of war that the West waged in the Arab world (Gerasimov, 2013). However, Western experts who were witnessing events in Ukraine and evaluated them in terms of hybrid warfare, subsequently found a lot of logical justifications to consider Russia's actions in Ukraine not just as improvisation, but a reflection of the main provisions of the "hybrid" doctrine (Fridman, 2018, p. 113). In this context, Gerasimov's article is consistent with Mark Galeotti's conclusion, who argued that *"in reality the General probably meant the opposite, namely that this was the type of war that Russia should wage."* (Racz, 2015, p. 49)

2. RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE IN UKRAINE

The annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in the Donbas region are often considered by international observers as a single hybrid scenario of aggressive Russian actions that began in February 2014 to split Ukraine (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 31). Nevertheless, from a technical standpoint, both events are two different models of hybrid operations in which the above-military and non-military means were heterogeneously involved well before the application of the military component (Midttun, 2019). The mobilization of irregular and conventional military forces without insignia in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine gave these operations an open-ended nature and marked the attack phase; which in the first case ended with the bloodless annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and in the second case reached hybrid warfare limits as a traditional military conflict (Jagello 2000, 2015, p. 11). In some way or another, Russia's military invasion and subsequent actions in Ukraine demonstrated signs of premeditation *"due to the comprehensive and cross-sectoral Russian effort."* (Midttun, 2019) Most experts concur that both cases were contingency plans as annexes to Russia's ongoing efforts *"to subvert Ukrainian sovereignty."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 103; Dayspring, 2015, p. 117)

The success of hybrid warfare is determined by the fact that *"the costs and repercussions of their actions must not outweigh their achieved goals."* (Gage, 2017) As a result, in order to assess both cases it is necessary to consider the specific goals that the Russian leadership pursued in the Crimean Peninsula and Donbas region, the degree to which they were achieved, and compare them with the risks and consequences that they had and continue to create for the country.

2.1 First Case: Hybrid Warfare in Crimea

On 18 March 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an agreement on the accession of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol in the Russian Federation. Subsequently, on March 21 the document was ratified by the Federal Assembly (ITAR-TASS News Agency, 2020). For most of the international community this step was a turning point, as it marked the first annexation of the territory by a foreign power in Europe after the Second World War (Dayspring, 2015, p. 103). Meanwhile, in Russian minds this previously hypothetically impossible *"return"* of the long-lost territory meant the first step on ways to restore the country as a world power (Kiselev, 2014). Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the Russian leadership as well as official Russian sources in general, have denied the country's involvement in this event. When asked about the *"little green men"* in Crimea, Putin answered that *"There are many military uniforms. You can find them in any shop."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 40) A month later, he admitted that *"Russian soldiers helped Crimeans openly, honestly, with dignity to express their opinion in the referendum."* (RIA News, 2020) Despite Putin's comments, there is plenty of evidence that contradicts this statement and demonstrates that *"actions in Crimea are an example of coercive diplomacy."* (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 37) Subsequent Western sanctions, introduced for violation of international law, could not affect this situation. Partially, this fact further reinforces the belief that the Russian annexation of the peninsula was formalized through a *"carefully staged process which quickly created facts on the ground."* (Sasse, 2017) In less than a month, tens of thousands of well-equipped Russian military men in uniform without insignia invaded the peninsula and, in tandem with the local security forces, seized the seat of political power, organized a regional referendum declaring Crimea sovereign from Ukraine, and forced almost without bloodshed all Crimea's military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) to lay down their arms, all while professing to the world that Russia was not involved in these actions (Dayspring, 2015, p. 103).

In order to understand how the Russian leadership managed to achieve such a result, it is necessary to look first at the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, in which the long use of the above-military and non-military tools is relatively clearly traced as part of the Russian hybrid strategy to undermine the sovereignty of its neighbor. In this hybrid warfare, de facto annexation of the peninsula was intended as a means to achieve the goals of the Russian leadership; a mean which could be implemented in a relatively short period while temporarily remaining in the shadow of other world events. (Dayspring, 2015, p. 103).

2.1.1 Background

As of 1991, Ukraine was the richest of all the former Soviet republics, and with a highly developed agricultural, industrial, and scientific potential had a chance of becoming equal economic partners to countries such as Britain, France, and Germany (Dayspring, 2015, p. 104). However, the country's current economic development occupies one of the last places in the post-Soviet space (UNIAN, 2018). Following the secession from the USSR, the expectation of the newly formed state to become a *"bridge between two civilizations,"* but in reality it turned out that Ukraine became *"sandwiched between Russia and East Central Europe,"* which as a result *"contributed to its identity crisis."* (Korchinsky, 2010; Wishnick & Jacobson, 1994) The periodic attraction to prosperous Europe and the forced habit of acting in response to the reaction of Russia as a result of past decades of Soviet domination led to the fact that Ukraine's foreign policy faced two main problems: dealing with Russia and joining Europe (Wishnick & Jacobson, 1994).

Russia and Ukraine have common historical roots and ethnic ancestry but despite this, relations between the two countries always had tensions caused by differences in language, religious identity, and *"alignment during conflicts,"* most significantly World War II (Dayspring, 2015, p. 104). Currently, out of 43 million Ukrainian citizens, 77% are identified as Ukrainians, while Russians are the largest minority and take second place with almost 17% of the population (World Population Review, 2020). This difference is largely determined by language (Dayspring, 2015, p. 104). Russian is the second most common language in the country spoken by about 24% of the total population (World Population Review, 2020). Another division that still plays an increasing role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine identity narrative is Ukraine's status and the actions of Ukrainians in World War II, when the country fought both on the side of Nazi Germany and on the side of the Soviets. The term *"Banderites"* from Stepan Bandera — the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in Western Ukraine, became a popular Soviet propaganda tool for *"pro-Nazi"* Ukrainian nationalism. In the Russian psyche the link between *"Bandera, Nazism and Ukrainian nationalism has not lost its appeal,"* which has been the reason for its renewal and active use in Russia's propaganda campaigns (Dayspring, 2015, p. 106).

Soviet ethnic and administrative shifts regarding the Crimean Peninsula further exacerbated ethnolinguistic differences within Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 106). Some analysts believe that Kiev has always considered the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as *"a region apart"* and *"Cinderella of the Ukrainian state."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54) This is partially due to the geographical position of the peninsula, which is bordered on the west and south by the Black Sea, and on the east by the Azov Sea, thus connected to the mainland only by a thin strip of land

(Crimean Peninsula, 2016; Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54). In 2014, the majority of the Crimean population were Russians — about 60% — *the only part of Ukraine where ethnic Russians constituted the majority."* (Pifer, 2020) An even larger percentage of Russians lived in Sevastopol, a city in the peninsula's southwest where the Russian naval base is located. In addition to the Russian population for 2014, the population of Crimea totalled 24% of Ukrainians and 12% of Crimean Tatars (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 150). Since the middle of the last century, the Crimea was characterized by dominant Russian political entities, which soon after the separation of Ukraine (with the Crimean Peninsula) from the USSR, *"encouraged by Moscow"* began to doubt the legitimacy of the Ukrainian authorities and announced the Declaration of Independence of Crimea, which was soon withdrawn. However, at the same time, Russia's parliament voted to transfer the peninsula in 1954 as unconstitutional. Some analysts consider these events as a signal that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian leadership has begun to foment separatist sentiments in the Ukrainian peninsula (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 150). In the Kremlin, it was more than obvious the transfer of Crimea, as well as its subsequent assignment to independent Ukraine was a mistake that needed to be corrected (Znak, 2019). Although, since the mid-1990s, this idea has ceased to be actively promoted, it has remained a *"popular nationalist theme."* This was related to turmoil in Moscow and outbreaks of violence in some of the other former republics, which as a result weakened the ability of the Russian leadership to impose a definitive resolution on the Crimean situation (Dayspring, 2015, p. 109). Moreover, amid a lack of resources to give the plan for the annexation of Crimea any real substance, in 1997 Russia temporarily solved the problem with the Black Sea Fleet by signing a lease agreement with Ukraine. With this, the fleet could be based in Sevastopol until 2017 with the possibility of further extension of the lease term (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 151).

In general, the 1990s became a difficult transitional period for both Ukraine and Russia, which struggled to move away from communism towards capitalism and democracy. Although after the lost its *"superpower"* label when the Soviet Union fell, Russia worked towards establishing a democratic form of government, nevertheless the country sought to return to the balance of power that was evident during the Cold War (Seth, 2015, p. 64). Recognizing and guaranteeing respect for the sovereignty of the countries of the post-Soviet space, the Russian leadership has never changed its opinion regarding the former Soviet republics as nothing more than the sphere of its natural influence. This Russian vision has been repeatedly tested by time. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration documented the Kremlin's determined efforts to *"undermine, subvert or control the governments"* in several former Soviet republics, including Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 110). In turn, to exclude the possibility of undermining its

sovereignty, Ukraine initially began to adhere to a more cautious position in respect to the Moscow government. Since the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991, Ukraine has been an associate-member of this regional organization, and although it has refused full membership out of disagreement with Russia's dominant role in determining the organization's policy, Kiev has decided to maintain bilateral relations in which it recognized its role as *"little brother."* (Trenin, 2018; Rambler, 2018) Nevertheless, since 2002, the country has been at the center of even more *"severe geopolitical competition"* between the EU and Russia (Seth, 2015, p. 65). The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which brought a more pro-Western government to power, became a strong alarm signal for the Russian leadership, or as Russian political technologist Pavlovsky notes *"our 9/11."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 93)

In 2010 the authoritarian regime in Moscow experienced some relief when the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych was elected the President of Ukraine (Seth, 2015, p. 65). Nevertheless, given the experience associated with the *"color revolutions"* in the post-Soviet space, and the Arab spring gaining momentum around the Mediterranean, the implementation of which Russia attributed to the US and its intention to reshape the political landscape through the overthrow of *"long-standing dictatorships,"* Russian thinking regarding the post-Soviet space continued to develop in tandem with the proposed military reforms launched in 2008 (Dayspring, 2015, p. 111). The trigger for Russia's actions in Ukraine was the overthrow of Ukrainian President Yanukovych and the subsequent turn of Ukraine to the West, *"predominantly in Kiev."* (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 38) When, in November 2013, under Moscow's economic pressure, Yanukovych refused the previously planned signing a *"deal supposed to open European Union markets for Ukrainian goods and put the country on a pathway to possible EU membership,"* this was followed by a massive multi-month protest among pro-Western Ukrainians in Kiev, which later became known as *"Euromaidan"* or *"Revolution of Dignity."* (Vasilyeva, 2018; Shandra, 2019) However, the catalyst for pushes in the direction of anti-government movements was the brutal repression carried out by the Ukrainian Special Police Force *"Berkut"* against several hundred peaceful student-aged demonstrators on 30 November 2013 (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 39). The most dramatic part of the Revolution of Dignity occurred on 20 February 2014 when pro-government forces opened fire on a crowd of protesters, killing more than 100 people. As a result, on 21 February, Yanukovych was forced to flee the country, and soon power was assumed by the opposition (Semenova, 2020). During this time, Russia conducted a large series of quick military exercises across the Russian-Ukrainian border, and on 20 February, in accordance with the date on the Russian campaign medals, launched an armed intervention to capture Crimea (Seth, 2015, p. 66; Atay, 2016, p. 48).

2.1.2 Strategic Goals and Requisite conditions

Strategic goals

Some analysts suggested that the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula was unlikely to be a specific Russian goal before the events of Euromaidan since the country's leadership represented by Putin *"would have accepted Ukraine as a unified client-state, dependent on Russia for trade and defense, yet just independent enough to serve as a resurrected Cold War buffer between Russian territory and NATO."* Although, this decision would directly depend on reliable pro-Russian leader in Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 122). This was clearly demonstrated when Viktor Yushchenko, an ardent supporter of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, came to power in Ukraine (Usova, 2011, p. 157). In 2008, at the private meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in Bucharest, Putin addressing US President George W. Bush, mentioned that in the case of Ukraine's joining the alliance, it may cease to exist as a single state, hinting that *"Russia may begin to tear off the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."* (Forum.msk.ru. Open Electronic Newspaper, 2008) Given these circumstances and the signs of a *"well-prepared"* invasion, it is most obvious that the military seizing Crimea was the contingency plan, if efforts in *"continuous subversion of Ukraine"* to impose Russian dominance on the country, would be insufficient or failing (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 103; Dayspring, 2015, p. 123).

Fundamental to Russia's national interest, like any other country operating in the anarchic international system, is to ensure the security of the Russian state and its regime from external and internal threats (Person, 2019, p. 7). In its understanding, security was and remains inextricably linked to the inadmissibility of the spread of Western influence on its natural *"sphere of influence"* — the post-Soviet space (Kofman, 2019). Besides the fact that the former Soviet republics relate to Russia by a myriad of social, political, and economic threads, they are a buffer zone against NATO. Accordingly, one of the main external threats to the RF, stated in the 2010 Military Doctrine, is the deployment of NATO's military infrastructure close to its borders by further expanding the bloc, and, as such the spread of Western influence in the region (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation , 2010). For the implementation of these tasks, Russia uses a number of state power instruments in relation to its neighbors, starting with *"soft power"* and ending with economic pressure and the use of military force (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 18). To a greater extent, this Russia's vector of thinking was reinforced with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in 2000, whose main goal was *"'recovery of lost pride' by Russia after the collapse of the USSR."* (RIA News , 2017; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 6) This intention implied that the country must maintain the same sphere of influence over Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union had. As Kremlin

seems this solution is possible by building dominant relations with the former Soviet republics and hindering their democratization, liberalization, and integration with Western institutions and any form that the RF perceives as expansion into the West (Seth, 2015, p. 64). In this regard, the EU is considered as a genuine strategic threat capable *"to reform associated countries in ways that pull them away from Russia."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 117) In 2014, when Moscow realized that it was impossible to rescue the pro-Russian regime in Kiev, it decided to apply the military means in the framework of its hybrid warfare and guarantee the long-term disqualification of Ukraine's bid for membership in Western structures through undermining the country's territorial integrity (Dayspring, 2015, p. 122).

Another important strategic goal of which Vladimir Putin was guided by deciding on a military invasion of Ukraine is to rectify the domestic political situation by Crimea's reunification with Russia (Znak, 2019). Since his first election as President of the Russian Federation, Putin has stubbornly promoted and supported the need for continuity of government. If during his first years in power, Putin was the successor, then by the end of the first presidential term his authority became unshakable and he *"finally formed as the main political subject"*, the *"inheritor"* began to turn into a *"testator."* (Kiselev, 2006, p. 115) As a result, after a short hiatus in 2008 as Prime Minister, he reassumed the title of Russian President for the third time in 2012 (RIA News , 2017). However, in 2013, the rating of its internal popularity began to decline significantly, reaching 45% by the middle of the year, and 29% by January 2014 (Dayspring, 2015, p. 116; Znak, 2019). Amid discontent with Russian citizens with low living standards, the unjust political system, the situation was aggravated by widespread corruption, which during the preparation for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics reached *"extravagant heights"* — $ 25-30 billion, according to opposition estimates (Nardelli & Rankin, 2015). Russia with the already fragile economies, and at the same time being *"non-militaristic"*, would have turned out to be a country whose power over which the former KGB major, and *"provocateur leader"* would likely be lost (SOBYTIYA.INFO: Crimea News , 2017). For Vladimir Putin and his inner circle, this was more than obvious. Therefore, being able to use any opportunity to his advantage, the task of the Russian leader regarding Ukraine was to create an external threat to rally nationalist support and suppress internal opposition. Depicting the West as the instigator of Euromaidan, Putin received an occasion and support for interfering in a neighboring country and the opportunity to raise his internal rating by *"returning Crimea to its homeland."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 117)

Outside of domestic and international political dynamics, the annexation of Crimea served another important goal: consolidation of the permanent basing of the strategically important Black Sea Fleet and Russian military contingent, the number of which before the occupation of the

peninsula, according to approximate data, was 10-12 thousand personnel (Dayspring, 2015, p. 118; Krym Realii, 2020). The recent pragmatism of the Russian leadership was attributable to the fact that despite the presence of the Novorossiysk and Ochamchire Black Sea Ports, Sevastopol remains the only naval base on the Black Sea with the necessary potential to equip and dispatch new ships and military vehicles (Petrov, 2018, p. 26; Varettoni, 2011, p. 90). Ownership of the peninsula not only allows Russia to dominate the Black Sea but also to remain the only power in the most important strategic region, bordering the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. This allowed the RF to secure a key transit route for pumping Middle Eastern and Caspian oil to the EU countries, while ensuring Russia's military security from the southwest direction (Kasatonov, 2017). Before the Ukrainian crisis, Russia used the Sevastopol port on a leasehold basis, which could have been long-term and acceptable with the presence of a Russian proxy in Kiev, *"but the Kremlin's offensive-realist perspective has long chaffed at the necessity of having to pay rent to a foreign entity for the privilege."* After the Russian military invasion of Georgia in 2008, Ukraine's determination to join the North Atlantic Alliance increased significantly, and the further basing of the Black Sea Fleet in the Ukrainian port under the circumstances was in serious doubt (Dayspring, 2015, p. 118). In 2008, Viktor Yushchenko threatened to prevent the return of the Russian fleet to Crimea, hinting that the lease of the Sevastopol port is unlikely to be extended after 2017 (Salikhovich, 2010, p. 134). Although the next President of Ukraine Yanukovych provided to Russia basing rights for the fleet at Sevastopol in Crimea until 2042 for an *"exorbitant price,"* the legal status of this Agreement remained controversial, since it contradicted Article 16 of the Ukrainian Constitution, according to which the presence of foreign military bases in Ukraine is prohibited. This was repeatedly stressed by government officials in Kiev (Operativno , 2010; Kilinskas, 2016, p. 151).

The Russian decision to capture Crimea also included an energy component. Vast gas and oil fields are located on the Black Sea shelf in the Crimea area, of which Ukraine developed only 4% of the total capacity at the end of 2013, and considered their further gradual development as an efficient way to reduce dependence on gas supplies from Russia (Unified Information Portal , 2014). Taking Crimea and the nationalization of its oil, gas resources and enterprises led to a significant deterioration in the situation in the Ukrainian energy sector. From that perspective, this step could undermine Kiev's ability *"to break free from Russian energy dependence"* and *"the associated Russian political leverage."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 119) At the same time, it also opens up a potentially lucrative resource for Russian multinational energy companies such as Gazprom, which can ultimately offset the *"fiscal liability"* that Crimea represents to Kremlin (Unified

Information Portal , 2014). Nevertheless, the events in Ukraine in 2014 and the Russian annexation of Crimea are ultimately connected not with energy but with political power.

Requisite conditions

While Crimea was strategically important for Russia, the availability of certain conditions for the implementation of this operation made the peninsula a *"near-ideal target."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54) As mentioned above, Crimea is a self-enclosed peninsula, that is connected to the mainland by a narrow land bridge. This geographic feature makes it possible to cut off Crimea from the mainland and /or limit the potential military response (Krymology , 2016). At the same time, the presence of the hypothetically favorable ethnic composition for the aggressor, namely a receptive Russian-speaking population with a history of supporting separatism in the 1990s, corresponds to both operational and political considerations under the hybrid strategy (Pifer, 2020; Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 53). In operational terms, this combination hypothetically suggests a higher sensitivity of the population, unlike other parts of Ukraine, to Russian propaganda, information, and psychological campaigns and as a result, a stronger influence on their political views. András Rácz also notes that for the attacking country, the presence of their ethnic groups in the victim's territory simplifies the task of mobilizing the local population, since among their fellow citizens *it is probably easier to find people dissatisfied with the central power"* and recruit them for the aggressor's purposes (Racz, 2015, p. 80). The widespread use of the Russian language in the Crimean territory is an additional factor in the successful disguise of the special forces of the aggressor under the local population and the complication of discovering his involvement in subversive actions (Racz, 2015, p. 80). From a political perspective, the massive presence of national minorities of the aggressor's country on the territory of a potential adversary can create the appearance of *"legal"* grounds for interference under the pretext of protecting their interests (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 19).

Another important circumstance serving as a favorable environment for the use of above-military, non-military, and subsequently military means of hybrid warfare was the long-term regionally concentrated dissatisfaction with the central Government and its weak legitimacy, which became the main reason for the low level of social cohesion of the Ukrainian society (Racz, 2015, p. 76). Such social frustrations, exacerbated by *"ethnic and language-related elements,"* high levels of corruption, and *"dysfunctionality of the earlier Ukrainian governments during the previous two decades,"* was present in Crimea (Racz, 2015, p. 78). A survey of residents of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, conducted by the International Republican Institute and the Gallup Organization in May 2013, demonstrates that about 62% of the local population perceived the situation both on the peninsula and in the country as deeply negative, not only because of

Ukraine's leading position among the most corrupt countries in the world but also due to problems of unemployment, sharp price growth, and low industry production (IRI.USAID /The Gallup Organization , 2013, p. 4; RIA, 2014). In the case of the first model of hybrid warfare, another important fact is that in addition to the massive protests that began on 21 February 2013, the already unstable situation in the country was exacerbated by the weak legitimacy of the opposition government in Kiev, which came to power after Yanukovych's ouster. The problems of the low level of leadership legitimacy which had a negative impact on the ability of its *"everyday functioning,"* mainly continued until the election of Petro Poroshenko as President of Ukraine on 25 May 2014 (Racz, 2015, p. 76).

Considering that *"A full-spectrum hybrid war cannot operate in isolation,"* the Black Sea naval base located in Crimea was seen by the Russian leadership as potential necessary logistical support in the military seizing of the peninsula (Racz, 2015, p. 82). Apart from providing the aggressor's forces - including both special forces and their local allies - with shelter, ammunition, fuel, equipment and weapons, its close proximity to the Novorossiysk Naval Base, used as a naval rear-based area of the Black Sea Fleet, is also a favorable prerequisite for the rapid transportation of Russian irregular/regular military personnel to the Crimean Peninsula (Rambler , 2017).

In order to mask the dynamic change in the status quo, the start of the actual attack, as part of the Crimean hybrid operation was successfully coordinated with the current international and Russian domestic situation. The government under Putin has always shown a willingness to grasp the opportunities created by the actions or inaction of the West (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). This ability was once again demonstrated when Russia's leader calculated that *"international attention was held elsewhere in February 2014"* and ordered the military command to change political relations with Crimea (Dayspring, 2015, p. 120). The armed conflict in Syria, which was gaining momentum in September 2013, after the capture of the city of Raqqa by ISIS and a *"highly publicized campaign of murder,"* provoked great indignation from the Western community and doubts regarding efforts to overthrow the Assad Regime (Dayspring, 2015, p. 120). At the same time, the US's reluctance to intervene in conflicts abroad became more apparent after the information about the regime's chemical attack was ignored and the consequences of the red line crossing, previously promised by US President Barack Obama, did not follow (Smith, 2017). After the U.S. government shutdown and *"subsequent fiscal sequestration in October 2013,"* Putin was once again convinced that the US did not have a clear idea of how best to deal with *"ongoing post-Arab Spring conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 121) In this regard, the likelihood that the US or Europe will begin active intervention in the Ukrainian conflict was negligible. When the events of Euromaidan in January 2014 began to gain more violent

momentum, at the Russia-EU Summit held in Brussels on 28 January, Putin openly positioned his policy of non-interference in the affairs of a sovereign state (Danyuk, 2018). The European side, which blamed Kiev authorities for the violent protests, was partly sure of this. This was reinforced by the view that Russia was not likely to decide to engage in open aggression on the eve of the Sochi Olympics Games, *"because any disruption of the Olympics would have a significant impact on the Kremlin's image, both domestic and foreign"* and generally put the country at risk (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 40). Indeed, for the Russian government, the Olympics Games (7-23 February) were a matter of concern, with an investment of $ 50 billion (Filipov, 2017). Nevertheless, the wide media coverage of *"peaceful competitions"* and the grandeur of this event to promote Russian identity and the desire to become *"part of the world community"* rather served as an operational disguise of the Russian plan (Dugrichilov, 2017). The location of the city of Sochi along the eastern coast of the Black Sea and not far from the *"restive"* Caucasus raised the issues of ensuring the security of this event, especially after two terrorist bombings, which took place in the region shortly before the opening ceremony (Dayspring, 2015, p. 121). Thus, hiding behind the need to ensure the safety and security of the Olympic Games, the Kremlin began *"military exercises"* by concentrating elite armed forces in the region, including naval and air forces, and ground forces (Dugrichilov, 2017). Moreover, for the same purpose, new formations and units were formed, such as special services and reconnaissance brigades of a new type (News 24 Today , 2018). In the context of the Russian hybrid warfare, the Olympic Games in Sochi were a considered step to reduce the sensitivity and concern of international observers to the mass displacement of the Russian Armed Forces' military units to the Ukrainian borders (Dayspring, 2015, p. 134).

The equally important precondition that was present in the hybrid warfare in Crimea is the military superiority of the aggressor and the attacked country's lack of allies committed or able to guarantee its defense. The entire Ukrainian security sector was characterized by insufficient training and absence of combat experience, chronic underfunding, and consequently, old and poor equipment and weapons, which was an indicator of lack of country's operational effectiveness (LiveJournal , 2014). Although Russia is not able to project its conventional military power on a global scale, due to military reforms carried out since 2008, the Russian army had significant combat effectiveness by 2014, ranking second among the leading armies of the world (Bender, 2014). The attacked country's lack of reliable allies in conjunction with NATO's low probability of reacting, caused by ponderous decision-making process and the objective unwillingness to risk a possible war with Russia over Ukraine, against the backdrop of tactical surprise were the

prerequisites for successful military capture of Crimea (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019; Racz, 2015, p. 75).

2.1.3 Appliction of above-military forms of war

Some Western researchers, analyzing the Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine in a historical context, refer to the Orange revolution of 2003-2004 as a starting point (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 92). Although these events are indeed a turning point in the strategic reasoning of the Russian leadership, they rather mark the beginning of a hybrid campaign in Eastern Ukraine, while in the case of Crimea - the beginning of a period of more *"active preparation."* (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 31) Since the middle of the 1990s, the Kremlin has gradually begun to use above-military and non-military tools to force the former Soviet Republic to accept and remain under Russian domination. This task involved creating a disruptive mechanism capable to *"keep Kiev so weakened that it is unable to move away from Russia, but not so unstable that it becomes a massive security problem on Russia's western borders."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 123) In this scheme, the still sluggish, but multilateral Russian subversive efforts against a neighboring country were implemented not only through direct interaction/influence and pressure on the leadership in Kiev, but also its weakening through such machinations as undermining confidence in the government and inciting social antagonism (Varettoni, 2011, p. 96). From this perspective, the Crimean region, with its shared historical past, *"ethnic tensions"*, and the Russian majority prone to separatism was considered the most convenient platform for maintaining manageable instability (Varettoni, 2011, p. 88).

In the hybrid campaign in Crimea, the use of the above-military, namely, diplomatic, cultural, psychological, corruption, intelligence, and cyber instruments occurred both in the preparatory phase and in the attack phase. Cultural and diplomatic *"coercion"* included the creation of political and non-governmental organizations loyal to Russia, reinforcing separatist movements and other anti-government sentiments to exert pressure on the target government (Racz, 2015, p. 58). One of the largest and most influential organizations supported and financed by the Kremlin is the Russian Community of Crimea, which has been active since 1993 as an umbrella that unites 25 non-governmental organizations with 15,000 members through political, social, and economic networks (Evtyushkin, 2018; Kilinskas, 2016, p. 151). The main active Russian organizations in Crimea are the Russian youth center of Crimea (1997), Russian cultural center (2001), people's front Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia (2005), youth organization *"Proryv"* (2006), Eurasian youth Union (2004) and *"Nashi."* (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 151) These organizations have steadily served the Kremlin as a common platform for forming a Pro-Russian movement

based on the Russian idea and possessing the organizational, personnel potential, and mass character to undermine confidence in the authorities and law enforcement agencies, portraying the latter as *"Banderetis."* (Evtyushkin, 2018; Taurica.Net, 2019) Concurrently, the propaganda of Crimean Russian patriotism, the Russian language, and work to promote the Russian national identification and sense of pride in belonging to the Russian people, and other corresponding measures were continuously conducted (Evtyushkin, 2018). These organizations strictly adhered to the actions of the Kremlin and made synchronous efforts to push Ukraine away from the EU and NATO and turn Ukraine toward union-political relations with Russia (Polunov, 2009, p. 4). Thus, for instance, when after the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004 the efforts of Russian political technologists aimed at discrediting candidate Viktor Yushchenko failed and he came to power, Pro-Russian organizations orchestrated mass protests in Crimea with slogans about *"political and legal lawlessness."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 37; Evtyushkin, 2018) Sharp protests by Russian organizations in 2006-2009 were also caused by measures taken by the Ukrainian government to bring Ukraine closer to the NATO bloc or to hold joint exercises with the bloc's troops on the Peninsula, such as *"Sea Breeze"* and others (Polunov, 2009, pp. 4, 8). In this way, throughout 20 years, the hostile activity of these political and non-governmental organizations escalated depending on the threat of a Ukrainian reversal towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration and de-escalated with the accession of Russian proxy to power (Evtyushkin, 2018; Polunov, 2009, p. 14). As demonstrated by the Public Opinion Survey Residents of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea conducted at the end of 2013, their efforts to promote the idea of the Ukrainian Eastern geopolitical vector in the local public mood were quite successful. Only 17% of Crimeans supported the integration of Ukraine into the EU, 53%- voted for *"Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan"* and 22%-did not decide on the answer, while according to another survey of the same year, the topic of the country's accession to NATO was sharply rejected (IRI.USAID /The Gallup Organization , 2013, p. 14; Danylyuk, 2016, p. 38). At the end of 2013-2014, these political and non-governmental organizations, with the clandestine support of the Kremlin, were part of the *" Antimaidan organizations"* as a stronghold of countering the spread of allegedly *"nationalist ideology"* in Crimea and confronting the Crimean *"Euromaidanists."* (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 41; Evtyushkin, 2018)

In the political sphere, Putin relied on the formation and expansion of players affiliated with the RF in the Ukrainian institutions, namely the Party of Regions of Yanukovych and the Communist Party of Ukraine, which under the conditions of presidential-parliamentary republic blocked Yushchenko's attempts to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic course (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016). Russia's divisive attempts to bring Ukraine under its direct control began in 2004 with the

unsuccessful presidential election of Viktor Yanukovych, a previously convicted criminal from Donetsk who was then Prime Minister of Ukraine. The 2004 elections were considered by the Russian leadership as a convenient opportunity to *"export 'managed democracy' next door."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 124) To achieve this objective, Russian political technologists took a whole range of measures aimed at discrediting and removing the most powerful opposition candidate Yushchenko (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 37). Although Yanukovych won as the Party of Regions candidate, the allegations of vote-rigging and fraud triggered mass demonstrations which became the so-called *"Orange Revolution,"* against the *"Russian agent of influence."* (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016) Owing to growing discontent from both international observers and Ukrainian citizens, the Ukrainian Supreme Court eventually annulled the election results, and Yanukovych lost in the second round of elections, losing the office of Ukraine's President to Yushchenko (Dayspring, 2015, p. 124). However, constitutional reform in December 2004 allowed *"to remove the strong institution of the President,"* which could block actions to dilute Ukraine (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016). Yushchenko's rise to power further opened the way for oligarchs who privatized the state. Moscow supported this process in every possible way, playing on the contradictions between the oligarchs, it strengthened its economic base in Ukraine by buying up various assets. This created some leverage against Kiev, *"regardless of which government was at the helm,"* but insufficiently reliable to provide the Russian leadership confidence that Ukraine would once and for all renounced its Westernization efforts (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016). Therefore, since 2004, the RF began more actively prepare the ground for its contingency plan for operation in Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine. The election of the Moscow-backed Yanukovich as President of Ukraine in 2010 not only provided the country with a Pro-Russian orientation, it also opened up more opportunities for the preparatory stage of Putin's hybrid campaign (Costea, 2019, p. 21).

The key to the successful Crimean operation would be the lack of effective resistance from the Ukrainian defense forces (Dayspring, 2015, p. 126). Through the aforementioned Crimean political and non-governmental organizations, Russia was able to secure some local pro-Russian supporters and separatists and to create the appearance of public support in the peninsula, but this would not be enough to seize control of Crimea, since *"If any had fought back, Russia's narrative of a bloodless, popular transfer of administrative control would have been lost."* (Racz, 2015, p. 78; Dayspring, 2015, p. 126) Accordingly, one of Russia's primary tasks was to undermine the military stability of the victim (Rukomeda, 2018). Although the intensified counter-intelligence activities of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) during Yushchenko's presidency significantly limited Russia's efforts in this direction, Yanukovych's being in power, forced the SBU to change

its focus from counterintelligence of Russia to counterintelligence against the US (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152; Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 28). This allowed the RF to effectively dismantle the Ukrainian armed forces in less than four years (Midttun, 2019). Due to intensive cooperation between the Ukrainian and Russian defense and security structures, Putin's personal military circle not only had a clear vision of the situation in the Ukrainian army and the country as a whole, but it also placed Russian generals at the head of Ukraine's armed forces and security agencies, and recruited intelligence officers and police officers (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152; Dayspring, 2015, p. 126). Moreover, given the increased vulnerability to infiltration and bribery in Ukraine, generated by the weak central leadership, a poorly functioning state administration, and underpaid SBU, Russia used the culture of endemic corruption *"to buy the allegiance of those in the position to resist."* (Racz, 2015, p. 78; Dayspring, 2015, p. 126) The creation of the fifth column within the local police, security forces, and Ukraine's armed forces led to the fact that at a critical moment, many units could ignore the orders of the Ukrainian leadership or defect to the invading Russian side (Dayspring, 2015, p. 126). A particular advantage of the Russian military invasion of Crimea was the extensive penetration of the RF Federal Security Service (FSB) officers into Ukraine's intelligence service. This enabled temporarily undermine the situational awareness of the new Ukrainian government regarding Russia's involvement, while its forces and surrogates began to surround Crimean military bases and occupy the administrative centers (Dayspring, 2015, p. 126).

It should be also noted that in addition to using the mechanisms of foreign agents, the corruption of the Ukrainian defense sector was carried out through *"the sale of troops, demoralization, criminal reduction of the military personnel, elimination of the logistics system, elimination of the training system."* (Midttun, 2019) As a result, at the beginning of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian armed forces did not possess sufficient weapons, heavy vehicles, special equipment, uniforms, and food (Rukomeda, 2018). Excerpts from the available transcript of the meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC) of 28 February 2014 on the situation in Crimea, also demonstrates that the maximum combat contingent that the Ukrainian leadership could, but did not dare, mobilize to fight against the Russian invaders was only 5 thousand personnel and officers, most of whom did not have military training (Tishcenko, 2016). When the military operation began, the Ukrainian armed forces and security agencies in Crimea only observed how *"rallies were going on, roads were being blocked and government buildings were being seized,"* but they did not take any action (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152). Consequently, the use of corruption and intelligence services as hybrid warfare instruments provided to Russia quite a strong advantage during the capture of Crimea — almost zero Ukraine's fighting capacity.

Within the framework of the Russian hybrid company, a particular significance also was given to conducting psychological operations in the armed and internal security forces, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 37). These actions actively carried out by FSB officers, pro-Russian local organizations and factions, and other agents of influence appointed by the heads of psychological operations departments that worked actively to incite social antagonism, demotivate security sector personnel, and strengthen radical anti-government sentiments among them (Rukomeda, 2018; Danylyuk, 2016, p. 38). For instance, in 2013 *"the rape and attempted murder of a young woman by police officers in Vradiyivka was used by the pro-Russian faction"* to incite hatred of Ukrainian citizens against law enforcement personnel, thereby causing protests against the police and riots throughout the country (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 38). During the protests on 18 February 2014, Russian agents, or as they called themselves "*Antimaidan activists,"* used firearms against Ukrainian security forces and peaceful demonstrators. There is evidence that more than 500 units of automatic firearms were provided to them by representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 41). Concurrently, some of the FSB officers, participating in the confrontation on the streets, dressed in the form of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, while others acted under the guise of civilians. Their main task was to *"to stoke the violence between protesters and police, inflaming it to the point of irreversibility,"* which was done (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 41). The increased social hostility to the Ukrainian security forces and the numerous casualties among their personnel led to the fact that many of them were demotivated and reluctant to carry out their official duties (Racz, 2015, p. 61; Strana, 2020). It created tension and a lack of confidence in the security sector in the country's leadership (Dayspring, 2015, p. 126; Atay, 2016, p. 49). Nevertheless, the most powerful psychological effect that contributed to the rapid and bloodless annexation of Crimea was the demonstration of Russian military power in front of its adversary in late February 2014 (Racz, 2015, p. 74). At that time, the unreasonable sudden militarization of the Black Sea and the concentration of Russian troops with heavy military equipment along the entire Ukrainian-Russian border, forced the newly formed interim government in Kiev *"to consider a Russian move against the Ukrainian capital,"* which further worsened Kiev's ability to respond to reports of armed *"little green men"* appearing in Crimea (Echo Moskvy , 2016; Dayspring, 2015, p. 136). The Transitional President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov and his proxies were aware that because of the absence of military support from the West, a response to Russian aggression and possible casualties among the civilian population or personnel of the Black Sea Fleet could become a justification for *"a massive, devastating military attack from Russia."* (Racz, 2015, p. 75) Therefore, the country's leadership came to a joint, most appropriate in their opinion, decision — not to render armed resistance to Russia (Echo Moskvy , 2016).

The RF has also used various state and non-state actors to conduct cyber-attacks against Ukraine. In 2010, it was determined that Ukrainian government computer systems were affected by malicious known as *"Uroburos,"* which is one of the components of the Russian cyber espionage campaign, code-named *"Snake."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 128) This rootkit allows remote users to spy, control computers, and launch attacks that can destroy data or disable networks (Inopressa , 2014). To facilitate monitoring and disruption of the cellular network, Moscow also attacked the Ukrainian cyberinfrastructure by using special forces (Dayspring, 2015, p. 128). On 28 February 2014, after Russian troops seized key facilities on the peninsula, the Ukrainian national mobile service provider Ukrtelecom announced the loss of technical ability to provide communications between the Crimean Peninsula and the rest of Ukraine after the seizure of his company's offices by unidentified armed men and damage to fiber optic cables (NEWSru.co.il , 2014). Subsequently, Russian special services used Ukrtelecom equipment located in the Crimea for *"IP-telephonic attack"* on mobile communications of members of the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 361). In March 2014, the pro-Moscow hacking collective-CyberBerkut was involved in numerous cases of cyber espionage and attacks, including *"distributed denial of service attacks"* (DDoS) against Ukrainian government websites, which reached the maximum limit at the end of March before the referendum (Stewart, 2017, p. 39; Dayspring, 2015, p. 129). Nevertheless, considering the capabilities of Russia's cyber weapons and the improved computer capabilities of the country's services agencies, it should be noted that during the Crimean crisis Moscow did not use this full potential (Paganini, 2014; Dayspring, 2015, p. 129). Establishing control over telecommunications and isolating the peninsula from independent news from the outside world provided Russia with an exceptional influence on public perception in Crimea, which with the intensive use of propaganda means, could provide more opportunities to facilitate the annexation of the peninsula (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 360).

2.1.4 Application of non-military means

When the RF slowly rebuilt its national power under Boris Yeltsin and his successor Vladimir Putin, its leaders learned to use economic interdependencies, information networks, and legitimacy as instruments to achieve their offensive-realist goals of *"dominating the near abroad and undermining cohesive resistance among those they perceived to be their principal threats."* (Dayspring, 2016, p. 23)

Since the early 1990s, Moscow began to actively promote the energy component in its relations with Kiev, offering loans and subsidizing Ukrainian gas tariffs at rates that *"were too*

good for the Ukrainians to pass up." (Seth, 2015, p. 74; Dayspring, 2015, p. 130) These, at first sight, favorable circumstances became the main reason limiting the Ukrainian government's willingness to develop or seek alternative forms of energy on the side and as a consequence further strengthened the country's dependence on Russian gas, in fact placing the political establishment of Kiev under the Kremlin's dictates (Dayspring, 2015, p. 130). Such superiority created an instrument for the Ukraine's economic depletion through gas prices. Every time the political activities of its neighbor did not please authorities in Moscow, Russian gas companies such as Gazprom raised prices significantly and threatened to limit or shut off gas during the coldest periods of the year (Seth, 2015, p. 74). This was followed by a rapid increase in debt, which further limited the space for Kiev to maneuver, and fomented numerous gas conflicts between the two sides (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016). The fact that Russian threats to suspend gas supplies to Ukraine came only in the winter season, when there is the greatest demand for heating and, accordingly, its absence, entails a high risk of discontent among Ukrainians, is an example of the *"weaponization of economic interdependence."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 130) This process continued until the election of Victor Yanukovych whose pro-Russian orientation, would have to provide Russia's condescending attitude. In exchange for a 30% discount on Russian gas supplies, the Ukrainian leader extended the basing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea until 2042 and gave a promise that the country would not join the North Atlantic Alliance. (Romashenko, 2010). In 2012, Ukraine initialed a partnership agreement with the EU, which had to be signed at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius at the end of November 2013 (ITAR-TASS News Agency , 2014). As this process neared, *"Moscow imposed trade embargoes on various Ukrainian exports to Russia"* and assured that Ukraine might experience hardship if it refuses to associate with the Customs Union in favor of the EU (Dayspring, 2015, p. 130). Kiev's "contradictory" conduct in relation to the EU and Russia, converged on that just a week before the start of the economic cooperation summit, the country's leadership suspended the process of concluding an agreement with European colleagues, citing the extremely difficult economic situation in Ukraine. This decision was the starting point of the political crisis in Ukraine (ITAR-TASS News Agency , 2014).

Russian propaganda efforts represent one of the most *"unprecedented"* manifestations of the Russian hybrid war in all its stages in terms of their focus, scale, and content. (Radkovets, 2016). As early as in the Russian National Security Concept of 2000, the country's leadership outlined a tendency toward increasing threats to national security in the information sphere, and in the *"Foreign Policy Review of 2007"* recommendations were made *"on increasing the amounts of foreign broadcasting of Russian state news agencies and expanding their offices abroad".*

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation , 2000; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 10) Thus, the Russian government decided not only *"to curb free-speech domestically,"* but also *"weaponized"* it and launched one of the fronts in government-sponsored news channels, social networks, the press, and other relevant sources, against its citizens and the rest of the international community (Dayspring, 2015, p. 131). Although in the context of Ukrainian events, Russian propaganda sought to influence, confuse, and demoralize its target audience, nevertheless, it had certain tasks specific to different targets (Stewart, 2017, p. 38). Among the population of Crimea and other regions of Ukraine, Russia strived to manipulate information in such a manner to attract the Russian-speaking minority and create, if not the pro-Russian moods themselves, then at least the appearance of their presence. This would enable the country, without any resistance or the use of force, to legitimize its illegal actions — the annexation of Crimea (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 359). For many years, the Kremlin has actively developed and exploited the cultural and emotional ties of ethnic Russians in Crimea, promoting through the local Russian media channels the concept of the *"Russian world"* based on the *"historical and cultural commonality of the Russian-speaking communities"* which must be united by different means, often mentioning such ideas as *"Crimea belonging to Russia"* or the unification of Ukraine with Russia (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, pp. 11, 12). The main structural element of propaganda and information operations in this hybrid campaign also were simulacra — *"images of that which in reality does not exist,"* which began to actively affect and abuse themes of fascism, and draw parallels with historical nationalism (Gorbulin, 2020). Thus, from 2008-2009 in the Ukrainian media periodically observed themes of *"Bandera revenge,"* *"fascists in Kiev,"* and the *"neo-Nazi threat."* (Romanenko & Klimovsky, 2016; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 12) A few years before the capture of Crimea, Russian channels in Ukraine, such as Russia-24, Sputnik News, RTR, began more frequently to broadcast reports and feature films on the Great Patriotic War to *"support old myths glorifying Russia and help create new ones."* (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 18) Russian information specialists and agencies applied a linear strategy in constructing its narrative, starting with Peter the Great, with a historical focus on the events of World War II, *"to ignite the pathos associated with Nazi elements."* In this context, the inhabitants of Western Ukraine were portrayed as Bandera-followers (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 18). This greatly mitigated the abrupt start of the escalation of Russian hostile propaganda, making it easier to label Euromaidan activists as Nazis, Fascists and anti-Semites, and Ukraine as a *"victim of a fascist coup, taken over by a Western puppet regime."* (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 19; Seth, 2015, p. 68) Such messages designed to instill fear among the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, that nationalist radicals will resort to violence, confiscate their property, or the Russian language will be prohibited, had effective multi-conduit distribution (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 19).

Television is the dominant media in Ukraine. Almost all Ukrainians (96.8%) watch television for news at least weekly, including 95.7% of Crimeans (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 15). In this regard, the *"television switching"* of Crimea to Russia was one of the important objectives vested by Putin in the FSB (Novikova, 2019). Soon after the appearance of armed groups in the peninsula, an operation began to seize broadcast equipment and replace all Ukrainian channels with Russian ones. By 10 March 2014, not a single Ukrainian channel was operating in Crimea (Novikova, 2019). A week earlier, Russia also successfully established control over *"the notionally independent internet,"* and as a result, Crimea was isolated from independent news from the outside world (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 360).

Social networks were also used as one of the main vectors for Russian propaganda attacks carried out by the so-called *"troll farm,"* the highest activity of which was recorded in February 2014 (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 22). According to the Russian independent investigative newspaper *"Novaya Gazeta,"* the mass selection of pro-Kremlin trolls or online commentators began in August 2013 (Garmazhapova, 2013). Their job is to maintain blogs, Facebook, Twitter, VKontakte (VK) accounts, attract new followers, participate in discussions and post comments on the Internet to manipulate and misinform for Russia's benefits, resist Western influence and promote pro-Kremlin content (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 22; Stewart, 2017, p. 40). As the Ukrainian crisis escalated, pro-Russian accounts became increasingly visible on social networks, involved in heated discussions about the fascist government in Ukraine or Crimea's belonging to Russia and other corresponding topics (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 22; Rusnakova, 2017, p. 360).

Although, as the results of a survey conducted by the International Republican Institute in May 2013 demonstrate, not all Crimean residents expressed interest in joining the RF, only 23% would agree with this scenario, while 53% supported Crimea's autonomy within Ukraine, Moscow's propaganda machine played an important role to prepare the ground for the operation in Crimea (IRI.USAID /The Gallup Organization , 2013, p. 17; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 12). For the Russian leadership, the active support of the Crimean population in this matter was not so important as ensuring the absence of resistance and opposition from the local population to Russian actions in Crimea (Rukomeda, 2018). The long-term functioning of the Russian media on the peninsula and multi-conduit messages distribution regarding *"Russia's friendship"* and different appeals, emphasizing distrust of the Ukrainian central government, even if couldn't convince some of the local residents to stand on Russia's side, they could disorient and make them more susceptible to Russia (Rukomeda, 2018; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 28). The isolation of the attacked region from any information emanating from the capital was also a decisive factor for

ethnic Russians, most of whom did not feel any loyalty to the Ukrainian government, at best to join the separatist movement, at worst, to remain passive (Seth, 2015, p. 74; Racz, 2015, p. 89). Those few people who were opposed to annexation and could resist were frightened, both by pro-Russian supporters and by the presence of Russian military personnel without insignia (Seth, 2015, p. 74). In the prevailing situation, all that the Russian propaganda company had to do was *"to sustain the pretense that the fighting force was wholly indigenous, supplemented by no more than some friendly volunteers from over the border,"* which was ultimately achieved (Seth, 2015, p. 68; Echo Moskvy , 2016). In this case, Putin and his entourage had a prepared plan with the secret involvement of special forces who were disguised as civil society activists and members of the local opposition (Racz, 2015, p. 89).

Concurrently, propaganda operations were carried out both against Russian citizens and the population of Western countries. By deploying one of the information fronts against an internal audience the Russian leader sought not only to provide public support to justify his actions in Crimea, but also to create an external threat, the fight against which could strengthen the Russian image, in particular country's leadership, as an unshakable defender of its citizens, and Russian compatriots abroad (Radkovets, 2016). Given the ability of the Russian state to limit the activities of the opposition and independent media, this task was relatively easily attainable (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 25). At the same time, Putin was creating his global infrastructure of political influence by launching English-language media projects like Russia Today, Sputnik News, *"that bills itself as an alternative to the Western mainstream media."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 132; Stewart, 2017, p. 39) Russia's propaganda attacks through the news media were further supported by a very effective *"trolling"*, including jamming and disinformation conducted on popular news websites and online forums, as well as on social networks of many Western and Central European countries (Racz, 2015, p. 82). Consequently*, "Russians have strongly dominated the information space creating a very blurred and mixed image of the Crimean events."* (Kruk, 2019) The Kremlin's propaganda tactics against the West have been *"to sow confusion via conspiracy theories and proliferate falsehoods."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 132) Although Russia's military involvement was quite obvious from the beginning, the relatively complete picture and nature of the country's hybrid actions have become clearer only after a certain period of time. In February 2014, Russian propaganda tried to disorient the international community by hiding the *"true nature"* behind Crimean local movements, green men, protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population, and referendum (Kruk, 2019). Putin himself also became part of this disinformation campaign when, at the beginning of March at a press conference, he began to deny the Russian origin of the military personnel which suddenly appeared on the peninsula, calling

them *"local self-defense units."* (Pifer, 2014) This partially explains the confused and restrained first reaction of the West, despite the violation by Russia of at least five international treaties: Helsinki Final Act of 1975, Non-intervention provisions in the United Nations Charter; 1990 Paris Charter, 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the RF and Ukraine (Kruk, 2019).

Denial of the participation of Russian troops in the occupation of Crimea continued until mid-April 2014, when during the *"Direct Line with People",* President Putin admitted that Russia did carry out the operation, primarily for the purpose of protecting Crimean residents (Leonova, 2014). Using a legal basis and legitimacy to justify an act of Russian aggression is an important part of Putin's hybrid campaign. The actual instrumentalization of Russian-speaking minorities as *"reference points for coercive actions"* was enshrined in the 1999 Federal Law on State Policy of the Russian Federation in respect of compatriots abroad (President of Russia , 1999). Subsequently, the country's leadership introduced numerous amendments to this law related to the expansion of the compatriot's definition and to encourage a more aggressive position of the country in protecting their rights (President of Russia , 1999; Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 9). To provide an even more compelling reason to justify a possible military invasion, Moscow in 2008 began to pursue an active policy of granting Russian citizenship in Crimea (Akhmetova, 2008). According to some sources, until 2014, approximately 170-200,000 Russian-speaking residents of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine obtained Russian passports (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152). This provides a solid foundation for the Russian government's claims that it followed its moral duty when ethnic Russians in Crimea were prosecuted and needed protection from *"aggressive nationalism."* (Dayspring, 2016, p. 24; News.ru.com, 2014) With regard to the allegations against Russia in violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in which the country pledged to respect the sovereignty and to refrain from any threats against its neighbor, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) promotes the position that the Ukrainian government itself had violated he memorandum by destroying the integrity of the country with their policies, *"primarily in relation to national minorities"* and *"anti-constitutional coup."* Moreover, representatives of the RF MFA add that Russia did not commit at the Budapest Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) *"to force part of Ukraine to remain in its composition against the will of the local population."* (News.ru.com, 2014) Similarly, by creating the appearance of legitimacy through democratic processes, Putin exposes his hybrid warfare in Crimea as *"self-determination and not overt subjugation."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 127) Turning to the principle of the right of self-determination of nations, laid down in the UN Charter, Russia also draws a parallel between the case of Crimea and the well-known Kosovo precedent, missing the point that both

cases were characterized by completely different conditions (Znak, 2019). Legitimacy through *"referendum"* occupied such a central place in Putin's plan that the seizure of the local parliament building was one of the first tasks of Russian Special Operations Forces (SOF), under which supervision an assembly was also organized and a proxy civilian leader was elected who then petitioned Putin for Russian further military intervention in Crimea (Dayspring, 2015, p. 128). The Crimean status referendum, organized on 16 March 2014, was held without the participation of authoritative international observers, with the exception of Russia's ones, and with some other violations (Veselova, 2019). The results of this "*act of free expression of the will of the Crimean people"* became part of Russian disinformation propaganda, according to which 97% of the population out of 80% of the voter turnout chose the reunification of the Crimean Peninsula with the RF, although numerous sources confirm that the turnout reached only 30%, half of which voted for *"status Crimea as part of Ukraine."* (Veselova, 2019; Rusnakova, 2017, p. 359)

2.1.5 Application of military means

Although most of the actions in Crimea during the attack phase were carried out with the simultaneous use of non-military and above-military instruments, Russia's fulfillment of a number of traditional military tasks of capturing key targets, blocking Ukrainian military units, and controlling the local population with the help of a *"nontraditional mixture."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 133) This combination of Special Operations Forces, notably the Main Intelligence Directorate (Spetsnaz GRU), Spetsnaz FSB, Special Operations Command (SOC), elite airborne troops (VDV) and naval infantry (Naval Spetsnaz); and irregular militias, criminal gangs, volunteer and private security agencies *"as the vanguard for a follow-on conventional occupation force"* played an important role in the direct capture of the peninsula (Renz & Smith, 2016, pp. 26, 28; Dayspring, 2015, p. 133). Therefore, the overt use of military means during the aggressor's intervention marked only one short phase of the hybrid campaign in Crimea, and one dramatic moment in the larger Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 133).

In the documentary *"Crimea: Path to the Homeland"* 2015, President Putin claims that on the night of 22 February 2014, he ordered the Russian military leadership to *"start the work"* on the reunification of Crimea with Russia (Rusnakova, 2017, p. 366; Birnbaum, 2015). The formal, albeit indirect, confirmation that a planned special operation took place in Crimea was the establishment in the spring of 2014 by the Ministry of Defense of the RF of the medal "*For the Return of Crimea"* with the indicated on it the operational date: 20 February 2014, on the day when Yanukovych was still considered the official President of Ukraine (Nemtsov, 2015).

Nevertheless, even a few weeks before these two dates, decisive preparatory actions were taken for the military seizure of the peninsula. At the beginning of February 2014, former Deputy Prime Minister of the RF, Vladislav Surkov, met with the Crimean authorities in Simferopol to discuss *"autonomy and to propose a bridge across the Kerch Strait that would link Crimea directly to the Russian mainland."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 134) The bridge project was a *"cover for an influx"* of Russian surrogates and equipment and served as *"an investment"* that would have to be protected with supplementary military means if the security situation in Ukraine became uncertain and dangerous. In February, thousands of Russian personnel and volunteers began secretly joining the already-based Russian naval contingent in Crimea (Dayspring, 2015, p. 134). The presence and use of these naval bases allowed the aggressor's special military units to move freely among the civilian population, carry out intelligence, and sabotage activities, and coordinate the actions of local separatists (Dayspring, 2016, p. 135).

Concurrently, when the attention of the international community was drawn to the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, the RF under the guise of military exercises, began a gradual concentration of its troops on the northern and eastern borders of Ukraine (Zvezda, 2015). Within a few weeks of training, by 26 February, their number reached 150,000 personnel armed with numerous tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, attack helicopters, and fighter aircraft (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152; Echo Moskvy , 2016). This military power was additionally reinforced by 80 Russian warships in the Black Sea (Echo Moskvy , 2016). From a political perspective, Russia's demonstration of military power and determination to defend its interests in Ukraine by military means was intended to dissuade any outside forces from possible intervention (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152). At the same time, this military exercise became a distraction that forced the Ukrainian *"three-day-old interim government,"* in the absence of clarity of Russian intentions, to focus its attention on the potential threat to Kiev and forget about Crimea in which, meanwhile, well-trained units of Russian unmarked personnel, also known as *"little green men"* or *"polite people,"* were activated (Zvezda, 2015; Dayspring, 2015, p. 136; Rusnakova, 2017, p. 366). In the event of armed resistance to the aggressor's actions, large groups of troops concentrated near the border were to invade Ukrainian territory and provide support to Russian military units in Crimea (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152).

The Crimean operation was characterized by surprise and speed resulting in establishing facts on the ground, thereby making it difficult for a military response from the Ukrainian side. Russia's victory was secured by the transfer of additional troops to the peninsula but decisive were the first actions by the special and elite forces, and non-regular military formations, also designated in public discourse by the term *"Crimean self-defence units."* (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 28;

Kilinskas, 2016, pp. 155, 156) At the end of January, as the Euromaidan protests neared their culmination, future Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov, and formerly a member of the criminal organization Salem operating on the peninsula, began to form a strong battalion from the *"criminal element"* to fill out the ranks of self-defence units (Dayspring, 2015, p. 135; Kilinskas, 2016, p. 156). By the time Yanukovych was ousted from the Ukrainian presidency, Aksyonov's militia numbered several thousand but it was not the only non-regular formations (Dayspring, 2015, p. 136). Russian FSB Colonel Igor *"Strelkov"* Girkin admitted that on 21 February 2014 he was on the Crimean Peninsula to organize a militia. According to him, the local population with pro-Russian views was present in the separatist movement, nevertheless, the majority of them were Berkut officers, who after the bloody Euromaidan events were disbanded and enlisted in the ranks of the Crimean separatist forces *"to provide manpower to the core"* of Russian SOF (Dayspring, 2015, pp. 137, 138). Other volunteers and mercenaries recruited from different Russian and Ukrainian regions and formed various groups of Crimean self-defense units were the Kuban Cossacks, members of the Russian biker club Night Wolves, veterans of the Afghan and Chechen Wars, and employees of private security organizations (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 155). In coordination with the Spetsnaz GRU, FSB, the 45ths special forces regiment of VDV, and *"the 810th Independent Naval Infantry Brigade already based there,"* these groups participated in the seizure of buildings and other strategic facilities on the peninsula and blockaded Ukrainian military bases (Atay, 2016, p. 48; Zvezda, 2015). Simultaneously, Russian surrogates blocked the Chongar and Armyansk roads that connect the peninsula to the Ukrainian mainland, established illegal checkpoints to restrict access to the Crimean capital Simferopol, and obstructed the work of journalists (Dayspring, 2015, p. 138). While there have been cases where some of the mercenary members of these groups have displayed *"evidence"* of violent activity, the armed Russian special forces behind all these separatist movements demonstrated well-organization, high tactical skills, and acted with the least amount of force possible (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 157; Racz, 2015, p. 60; Seth, 2015, p. 67). In particular, under the guise of Crimean self-defense units, Spetsnaz operators and elite forces dressed in civilian outfits participated in the bloodless seizure of the Crimean parliament building on February 27 (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 153). Police and local security forces s offered no resistance to the 50 well-equipped invaders, mainly owing to the lack of clear commands from the leadership, as well as due to the pro-Russian stance of some officers, low morale, and inadequate equipment (Atay, 2016, p. 48; Racz, 2015, p. 60). A possible response by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies to the actions of irregular formations was also complicated by the fact that the use of violence against the *"alleged Russianspeakers"* could become a pretext for the intervention of regular Russian armed forces mobilized near the country's border (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 156). The seizure of the Crimean parliament and the subsequent holding of an emergency

assembly under the close control of the pro-Russian forces enabled to elect of the *"Russian marionette"* Sergei Aksyonov as the new Prime Minister of Crimea (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 28; Dayspring, 2015, p. 137). The assembly then voted to hold a referendum on secession of the peninsula from Ukraine, and Aksyonov immediately appealed to the Moscow leadership with a request for Russian intervention in Crimea, thereby guaranteed *"legitimacy"* for the sending a greater number of the RF troops (Dayspring, 2015, p. 137). Consequently, Russian special and elite forces became *"the first wave of Putin's 'polite people'"* to mobilize local ethnic Russians to carry out a mission and to give the uprising a spontaneous character, and at the same time became its central part by participating in the seizure of administrative buildings, Ukrainian military's headquarters, airfields, information agencies and establishing checkpoints (Dayspring, 2015, p. 136; Atay, 2016, p. 50).

Since February 28, by air and maritime transportation, additional Russian military forces, consisting of airborne divisions, Marine, Artillery, and Motor Riflemen Brigades were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula and soon became known in the media as *"green men."* (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 154) The logistics supply routines of the Black Sea Fleet and the proximity of the Novorossiysk naval base greatly facilitated and accelerated their *"infiltration"* from the sea (Atay, 2016, p. 48). The recently formed Ukrainian interim government considered the possibility of obstructing the active airlift of the Russian servicemen, however since military transport aircrafts landed at airfields controlled by Russia, in accordance with the agreement on the Status and Conditions of the Presence of the RF Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine, officials in Kiev did not dare to aggravate the situation and provoke the aggressor (Echo Moskvy , 2016). Appearing on the streets and around the most important strategic assets, armed groups without insignia, identifiers, or even license plates performed several functions (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 154; Atay, 2016, p. 48). Although the RF Foreign Ministry initially denied any involvement of Russia in the actions in Crimea, the green men were entrusted with the task of adhering to the image of peaceful forces and performing a representative function which *"fulfilled Russia's ambition to shape the opinion in the information space that military forces had been deployed to protect Russian-speaking population from the reigning chaos."* (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 154) Nevertheless, their main military purpose was to intimidate, deter the Ukrainian army from attempting to launch a response to Russian actions, and force it to surrender (Seth, 2015, p. 67). The presence of 20,000 regular unidentified military personnel, combined with the indecision of the Ukrainian leadership, made these tasks easy to achieve (Dayspring, 2015, p. 138; Seth, 2015, p. 67). Meanwhile, as the Kremlin sought to create the appearance of a popular movement, Russian military personnel had to operate under *"the strategy to minimize bloodshed and apply strategic communication intent"* to soften

the ground and mobilize support, thereby providing some degree of legitimacy to the invasion (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 26; Dayspring, 2015, p. 3). Although a *"few shots"* were fired during this campaign, the number of deaths was minimal, which ensured the narrative of a bloodless and popular transfer of administrative control over the Crimean Peninsula (Seth, 2015, p. 67).

From the moment of the seizure of the local parliament to the procedure of the accession of the Crimean Peninsula to the RF, it took only 19 days (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 28). On March 16, through a *"manipulated referendum process"*, Crimea declared its independence from Ukraine and petitioned for its inclusion in the RF and on March 18, an agreement was signed in Moscow on the *"Establishing within the Russian Federation the New Constituent Entities"* of the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Importance Sevastopol (Dayspring, 2015, p. 138; President of Russia, 2014). Shortly thereafter, the Transitional President of Ukraine, Turchynov, signed a decree on the withdrawal of Ukrainian military units from Crimea (Obozrevatel, 2015).

The annexation of the peninsula marked the end of the attack phase of the hybrid warfare in Crimea. Nevertheless, the Russian leadership still had an equally important objective of consolidating its results or the stabilization phase. Therefore, after reunification with Crimea, Russian special forces were still actively used as monitoring tools over potentially divisive various groups of the local population (Dayspring, 2015, p. 140). The Kremlin did not waste time and also supplied on the peninsula heavy military equipment, including fighter aircraft, bombers, and advanced air defense systems (Petrov, 2018, p. 26). According to the GRU, currently, the number of deployed military personnel in Crimea has reached more than 32 thousand people (Militariorg, 2018). Similarly, the secret policy of replacing the local civilian population is carried out. In 2018, almost a million Russians were secretly resettled to Crimea, and more than 200 thousand Crimeans, most of whom are Tatars and Ukrainians, left the peninsula because of *"unbearable living conditions."* (GuildHall, 2018) All the aforementioned and other methods of consolidating the obtained result are implemented along with the actively ongoing work on strengthening the idea of the Russian world (Krym Realii , 2016).

2.2 Second Case: Hybrid Warfare in Eastern Ukraine

In early March, on the eve of the Crimean referendum, massive anti-government protests the main core of which was coordinated by the Russian special services broke out in southeastern Ukraine (Costea, 2019, p. 11). Thousands of pro-Russian demonstrators in Luhansk, Donetsk, Odessa, Kharkiv, and Mariupol regions, under the pretext of infringing the rights of the Russian minority, began to call for local referendums following Crimea's example in proclaiming independence from Ukraine (Costea, 2019, p. 11; Seth, 2015, p. 67; Jozic, et al., 2016, p. 113). However, only in Donetsk and Luhansk, known as the Donbas region, these protests turned into violent riots modeled on the already known scenario, during which well-trained and armed people began to take over public administration buildings and police stations *"by claiming that they were local separatists dissatisfied with the new Kyiv leadership."* (Costea, 2019, p. 17; Racz, 2015, p. 11) Following these actions, in April 2014, rebel leaders under Russia's guidance declared the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR), and the internationally unrecognized self-determination referendums that led to the political independence of the two republics occurred on May 11 (Costea, 2019, p. 17; Seth, 2015, p. 67). The interim Ukrainian government, incapacitated after the Russian hybrid campaign in Crimea, attempted to stabilize the situation in the country and regain control over the occupied territories of Donbas by launching the Anti-Terror Operation (ATO), which in 2018 was replaced by the military Joint Forces Operation (JFO) (Racz, 2015, p. 12; Zimmerman, 2018). On May 24, during the periodic escalation of hostilities between local separatists and Ukrainian security forces, the DPR and LPR announced the creation of Novorossiya as a confederal Union of People's Republics and *"appealed to Russia for a direct intervention."* (Jozic, et al., 2016, p. 114)

From the beginning of the Eastern Ukrainian crisis, the RF leadership has denied any involvement in these events, including the presence of regular Russian troops or military equipment on the territory of the non-recognized separatist entities, despite evidence to the contrary (ITAR-TASS News Agency , 2017; Seth, 2015, p. 69). Moscow has used for years some of the above-military and non-military means as part of its hybrid campaign in Eastern Ukraine, which ultimately, since August 2014, has gained the nature of undeclared military *"simmering Ukraine-Russia conflict."* (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42)

2.2.1 Background

Donbas had always been considered as the second, after Crimea, region with a predominantly Russian and Russian-speaking minority. Partially this factor contributed to the fact that in 2004, during the Orange Revolution, Moscow decided to turn the eastern part of Ukraine into a *"bastion of the Russian world"* and use it as an instrument of pressure on the neighboring country and on its leadership (Skorkin, 2016). Separatist pressures and protests, orchestrated by pro-Russian factions and other Kremlin assistants were unprecedented in terms of the level of political violence against the government's opponents — Viktor Yushchenko's supporters (Plekhanov, 2013, p. 290; Skorkin, 2016). What Ukraine experienced in 2014: attacks on opposition activists and their headquarters, incitement to anti-government violent demonstrations with the use of mercenary- instigators (*"titushki"*) recruited from criminal elements — all this was present in Donetsk and Luhansk back in 2004 (Skorkin, 2016). Nevertheless, although the pro-Russian elites of the South-East along with local separatists, threatened to implement their plan to split Ukraine if Viktor Yushchenko came to power, the creation of the *"Southeast Ukrainian Autonomous Republic"* did not follow (Danylyuk, 2016, pp. 33, 34).

There are many alleged reasons for Russia's abandonment of its efforts to split Ukraine in 2004. The most likely of them: the position of the then Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, who strongly opposed the division of the country and *"didn't allow the army and security forces to escalate the confrontation"* with opposition supporters and the lack of the necessary sensitivity of the local population to Russian propaganda depicting Yushchenko as a *"neo-Nazi and a threat to the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine."* (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 34) However, as noted previously, the success of the Orange Revolution was a signal for more subversive actions aimed at different Ukrainian regions, including the Russian-speaking Donbas located on the border with Russia which turned into one of the testing grounds for the Kremlin's hybrid tactics (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 93; Skorkin, 2016).

After the swift and bloodless annexation of Crimea, *"many perceived the Russian hybrid war as a new, invincible, universal menace, a weapon that Russia could deploy anywhere, at any time."* (Racz, 2015, p. 73) This prejudice has begun to fade against the backdrop of protracted events in Eastern Ukraine that demonstrate Russia's *"limited success"* in the case of the second model of hybrid warfare (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54). Putin's efforts in Donbas are an example of an attempt to force a dynamic change in the status quo when the necessary conditions for a successful hybrid war no longer existed (Dayspring, 2015, p. 145). While the central government in Kiev was too destabilized to organize effective resistance against the seizure of the peninsula,

by April, when the first pro-Russian proxies began to take over administrative buildings and declare independence in Luhansk and Donetsk, the situation changed and the Ukrainian government and the international community were paying close attention to the aggressor's actions (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 42; Dayspring, 2015, p. 153). Some experts believe that the masterful takeover of Crimea and the lack of subsequent consequences *"had a psychological effect on the Putin regime,"* spawning a *"sense of invincibility."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 145) Having underestimated the prevailing situation, Russia wanted to use the separatist areas as leverage for broader concessions from the Ukrainian government but this time Kiev was ready to armed resistance to the aggressor's efforts (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 42). After Ukraine's *"the largest countermobilization of any European army since World War Two"* and the deployment of *"fifteen Brigades east of the Dnepr,"* to prevent the defeat of its artificially created separatist movement, Russia had to move to the shadow format of a traditional military invasion (Dayspring, 2015, p. 148; Racz, 2015, p. 75). Moscow continues to attempt to maintain a narrative of non-involvement, including the concealment of financial and military support to militants, its military losses, and obscuring any other involvement in Eastern Ukraine (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 44).

2.2.2 Strategic Goals and Requisite conditions

Strategic Goals

The Donbas region has a relative energy potential, which before the outbreak of the crisis in the country was included in Kiev's calculations for the gradual transition from dependence on Russian to domestic energy sources. However, taking into account the loss of the Crimean Peninsula and its significant energy component, the fact that the potential resources of Donbas will be sufficient for Ukraine to be able to permanently eliminate energy supplies from Russia is improbable (Dayspring, 2015, p. 151). In contrast to the virtually untapped gas fields surrounding Crimea, which were considered as relatively lucrative compensation for the costs that followed the annexation of the peninsula, the coal and oil reserves of the Donetsk basin do not justify the risks and consequences of Russian participation in the armed conflict. Similarly, large industrial facilities in the region could be useful to Russia, in particular in the process of improving its military-technical potential but in the *"troubled Donbas"* most of this infrastructure can be damaged during the fighting (Gladunov, 2014). Any hypothetical future benefit would have to be achieved at the objective cost of the *"existing Russian military inventory."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 151)

Having given the order for military intervention and the seizure of Crimea, Putin and his circle were aware that this would drive a wedge between the Russian and Ukrainian fraternal peoples and that the peaceful integration of the two countries in the long term was out of the question (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 146). In the circumstances, the pro-Russian Donbas could become an opportunity to retain the Kremlin's capacity to influence the political situation in Kiev, consequently, the straightforward annexation of the occupied territories was not beneficial for Moscow (Racz, 2015, p. 66). The Crimea case has already removed a *"significant pro-Russian voting block from Ukrainian national politics,"* and the integration of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions into the RF would actually guarantee that *"no pro-Russian position would ever gain any significant support in the Ukrainian government."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 151) Consequently, more possible that the main goal of the second model of hybrid warfare was to provide and recognize federated status with the maximum possible autonomy for the DPR and LPR. In this case, the assignation *"special"* status means that the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics will remain part of Ukraine but their maximum autonomy will allow Russia to conduct independent trade relations with them and *"behind the scenes"* control the local government, which in turn guarantees that if Ukraine decides to become EU and NATO member, Moscow will have the right to vote (Rambler, 2019; Seth, 2015, p. 69). The requirement to grant special status to the two unrecognized republics is a central provision in the Minsk agreements signed within the framework of the Normandy Four summits (Rambler, 2019). The RF, as one of the leaders in the settlement of the armed conflict in Donbas, actively insists that Ukraine should amend the constitution related to the federalization of the country in order to ensure a special status for the DPR and LPR and to hold local elections before security provisions are implemented (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 108). Although, under the pressure of military aggression by local separatists, officials in Kiev agreed to the disadvantageous demands of the 2014 and 2015 Minsk agreements but decided not to comply with them (Peterson, 2020). The holding of elections in current conditions cannot be free and fair. A significant risk exists that this step will lead to freezing and legitimization of the existing control over the DPR and LPR by Russia and its representatives (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 108). Accordingly, these requirements to Kiev are increasingly resembled *"Russian Trojan Horse"* aimed at undermining the country's pro-Western aspirations (Peterson, 2020).

As demonstrated by the Law of Ukraine *"On the peculiarities of State policy on ensuring Ukraine's State sovereignty over temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions"* adopted in 2018, Ukraine is unlikely ever to agree to these concessions (Unian , 2018). According to this law, the Ukrainian government at the legislative level not only recognized Russia as an aggressor country that occupied Ukrainian territories but also significantly enhanced the legal

basis for the use of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the defense of the country (Unian , 2018). Considering that Kiev associates the conflict in Eastern Ukraine with a *"deadlock in a peace process"* while for Russia it has rather *"turned into a military stalemate"* with the huge economic, military and political costs, the achievement of the aggressor's initial objective — ensuring the DPR and LPR a special status within Ukraine — is in great doubt (Dickinson, 2020; Seth, 2015, p. 69). Apparently Moscow is keenly aware of the untenable of the prevailing situation and is taking significant steps in a slightly different direction, which is more consistent with *"integrating the noncontrolled territories."* (Milakovsky, 2019) After the *"rublization"* of the region, in 2019 Putin signed a decree on the right of Ukrainians from Donbas to apply for Russian passports under a special simplified procedure (Milakovsky, 2019; Dickinson, 2020). Satisfied that there was no decisive international response, the Russian President issued a second decree expanding the offer of citizenship to all Ukrainians living in the DPR and LPR (Dickinson, 2020). This is not the first time that the Kremlin has used passports as an instrument of foreign policy to increase its influence in the post-Soviet space. In the Ukrainian scenario, the transformation of the separatist republics into *"Russian passport protectorates"* means that the RF citizens will constitute a significant proportion of the region's population, and as a consequence, Moscow will demand the legitimate right to interfere at its own discretion in the internal affairs of the neighboring state, spreading its influence and significantly enfeebling Ukrainian sovereignty (Dickinson, 2020). Such arguments have little to do with the realities of international law, nevertheless, they are a stronger pretext in contrast to the protests against the oppression of the Russian-speaking population, on which the RF relied for its intervention in 2014.

Requisite conditions

The close proximity of the Donbas region to the RF and the common border with a virtually *"non-existent border-guard service"* are an important condition for providing constant logistical support necessary for the implementation of the second and third phases of hybrid warfare (Racz, 2015, p. 82). Other prerequisites, as in the Crimean case, were the massive presence of the Russian-speaking minority and sustained regional dissatisfaction with the central government (Racz, 2015, p. 80). The election to the presidency of Petro Poroshenko helped at the initial period of the attack phase to overcome the problem of legitimacy — one of the enablers that weaken the target country's resistance potential; nevertheless, functional difficulties remained. To a greater extent, they were associated with structural weaknesses in the public administration and the strong influence of oligarchs on the political elite, police, intelligence services, and border guards in Eastern Ukraine (Racz, 2015, p. 76).

During the beginning of the attack phase of the second Russian hybrid campaign, there was no tactical surprise factor. Following the principle of *"strike while the iron was hot,"* neither the protests in Kiev nor the disturbing events in Syria and Iraq could prevent Russia and its proxy forces in the Donbas from becoming the epicenter of world attention (Dayspring, 2015, p. 150). The Ukrainian authorities reacted painfully to the actual loss of part of the country's territory and were determined to prevent a recurrence of the Crimean scenario (Dayspring, 2015, p. 153). The implementation of a similar scheme in southeastern Ukraine, using well-publicized masked and unmarked soldiers pretending to be local rebels, and other identical instruments only increased suspicion regarding the true origin of the separatists and allowed Kiev to more or less navigate Russian intentions and subsequently suppress several small pro-Russian movements in their infancy in the Kharkiv and Odessa regions (Dayspring, 2015, p. 153; Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 101). While Moscow had sought *"to give the appearance of wide-spread popularity"* for local pro-Russian rallies, it was unable or unwilling to adequately mask its hybrid efforts in March-April 2014 (Dayspring, 2015, p. 153). This could be related to the decision of the RF leadership to shift the attention of Kiev, Washington, and Brussels to the eastern region, thereby deflecting a possible *"strike"* on Crimea and masking the consolidation and strengthening of its power on the peninsula (Ostrovok , 2014).

2.2.3 Application of above-military forms of war

After the Orange Revolution's victory, Eastern Ukraine became the main stronghold of the new government's opponents, and Donbas separatism is one of the instruments of the Kremlin's puppet local elite to stir up the situation in the country. In 2005, many pro-Russian political factions and non-governmental organizations often with radical separatist and anti-Ukrainian character, and under varying degrees of patronage of local authorities emerged in Luhansk and Donetsk (Skorkin, 2016). Despite the use of even mutually hostile concepts of Russian imperialism such as monarchism, neo-Nazism, Russian nationalism, Soviet nationalism, neo-Stalinism, paganism, and Orthodox fundamentalism, there is a common platform for all these supporters of Russian intervention is *"the rejection of an independent Ukraine and the longing for Ukraine to unite in a single state with Russia."* (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42) One of the vivid examples of such organizations operating in the South-East of Ukraine is the *"Russian Imperial Movement"* (RID) founded in the first half of the 2000s and based on monarchism, Orthodox fundamentalism, and *"statism in its most extreme forms."* (Popkov, 2020) Other most active movements are considered to be the neo-Nazi *"Russian National Unity,"* the Soviet-revanchist *"The Essence of Time,"* the

neopagan *"Svarog"* and other marginal formations (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42). *"The Donetsk Republic"*— the direct ideological predecessor of the current DPR, was the most radical of the separatist organizations in Donbas. In February 2006, this group created the Interregional Federation of Public Organizations *"Donetsk Federal Republic"* which became a link for a wide range of pro-Russian organizations (Skorkin, 2016). The high level of coordination between them suggests that they submit to a single plan or concept (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42). After Yanukovych's victory in the 2010 presidential election, for instance, their rhetoric with separatist slogans of the so-called *"federalization"* was suspended but the course of turning Donbas into a reactionary enclave continued. In 2012-2013, members of these organizations were involved in the campaign against the plans of European integration that were promoted by the then Ukrainian authorities (Skorkin, 2016). Meanwhile, before the Maidan uprising, some of these individuals were selected for military courses in Russia's Special Forces units, and then fought with pro-Kremlin separatists against Ukrainian volunteer battalions (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42).

Even more dangerous than the actions of radicals in the formation of separatist views was the position of the Donbas elites. The most reference in this regard was the situation in the Luhansk region, which was under the monopoly authority of the Party of Regions. The leading group of Luhansk *"regionals"* sought to create an ideological and political climate aimed at opposing the region to the rest of Ukraine. For this purpose, the methods of indoctrination were used, namely the specific cult of *"local patriotism."* (Skorkin, 2016) One of the examples was the program *"Patriot of Luhansk,"* adopted in 2011 by the Luhansk regional board, where loyalty to the *"small homeland"* was placed above national patriotism — *"there was only one step from such 'local history' to separatism."* (Lytko, 2011; Skorkin, 2016) The focus of this program on the younger generation implied the formation of a negative attitude towards Ukraine and European values among them, while the *"ideal Soviet Union"* was to become a role model. Special attention was also paid to all kinds of *"military-patriotic games"* held under the aegis of the Luhansk regional government and intended for the training of the future militia (Skorkin, 2016). Furthermore, there was considerable local support for such a form of youth leisure as holding in Luhansk meets of the bike clubs, including *"Night Wolves"* is a well-known participant of the pro-Russian movement *"Antimaydan."* (Skorkin, 2016; Danylyuk, 2016, p. 37). However, neither the efforts of political factions nor non-governmental organizations led to a high level of pro-Russian sentiment among local residents. According to a survey by the Kiev International Institute of Sociologists and the Democratic Initiatives Foundation conducted in April 2014, only 27,5% of Donetsk residents and 30,3% of Luhansk agreed with secession from Ukraine and accession to the RF. Concurrently, about 55% and 46% of citizens in Luhansk and Donetsk regions *"justified the seizure of buildings"*

but adopted a wait-and-see and passive position regarding direct involvement in separatist activities (Sereda, 2019).

In April 2014 during the answer session *"Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,"* in response to the query on the presence of Russia's Special Forces in the eastern regions of Ukraine, President Putin replied: *"All this is nonsense. There are no Russian units in the east of Ukraine, there are neither special services, nor instructors there. All these are local citizens…."* (INFOX.ru , 2014; McDermott, 2014) After this statement, the Russian leader named the use of tanks and aircraft in Donbas a serious crime by Kiev's leadership and called for a resolution to the crisis in Ukraine through dialogue, and not by military methods (INFOX.ru , 2014). This *"ploy of a diplomatic resolution to the conflict"* has become one of the most effective above-military means of ensuring Putin's interests (Dayspring, 2015, p. 166). Since in August 2014 the Russian hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine was transformed rather into a conventional but limited armed conflict, Russia was faced with the acute issue of maintaining the flow of weapons and soldiers to Ukraine and, at the same time, the need to hide its increasingly obvious status of an aggressor country (Racz, 2015, p. 67; Dayspring, 2015, p. 166). Therefore, the Kremlin decided to escalate and de-escalate hostilities through negotiations and the Minsk agreements. This allowed the West to *"to engage politically without being militarily committed"* and reduce for the RF the *"likelihood of further sanctions"* as well as the risk of NATO being its active militarily opponent (Midttun, 2019). In turn, the West adhered to its own considerations, in which Russia was considered as an invader but at the same time, its inclusion as a mediator supported the hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 107). In September 2014, with the mediation of the RF and the OSCE, the Kiev authorities and representatives of the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR signed the Minsk Protocol providing for a ceasefire and a number of steps to reduce military activity on both sides (Eremov, 2019). This reduced the degree of confrontation and enabled Russia to establish a systematic supply of *"humanitarian aid"* to the Donbas and to rearm the rebel army (Dayspring, 2015, pp. 164, 166). Pressured by the West, Kiev withdrew heavy weapons from the front line, which the Russian rebels took advantage of and began an armed offensive to capture Donetsk airport (Dayspring, 2015, p. 166). On 12 February 2015 the leaders of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine met in the Belarusian capital and signed the second Minsk agreement which also provided for an unconditional ceasefire and total disadvantageous conditions for the Ukrainian government, in particular, requirements for constitutional amendments to ensure maximum autonomous status for the DPR and LPR (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, pp. 106, 136). Nevertheless, one of the most intense and fierce hostilities in the armed conflict broke out in the Ukrainian town of Debaltseve, and February 2015 was a *"do-or-die moment"* for Kiev (Peterson, 2020). From the

Ukrainian perspective, the battle of Debaltseve was a clear sign that if the authorities did not accept Russia's demands for a ceasefire, they would receive a full-scale invasion. Poroshenko was forced to agree to Moscow's conditions in order to cease hostilities (Peterson, 2020). However, this agreement hardly slowed the fighting, and local separatists launched a full-scale attack on the encircled Ukrainian forces in Debaltseve, causing them to leave the strategic town and *"fight their way back to Ukrainian lines."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 166)

Although the first and second Minsk cease-fire quickly collapsed, the fact of Russia's participation and periodic demonstrative interest allows the Kremlin to play on the preferences of the Western powers and, in parallel to search for alternative ways to achieve its goal in the Ukrainian crisis (ITAR-TASS News Agency , 2018; Dayspring, 2015, p. 156). Thus, in 2017, Russia sent to the UN Security Council the Draft Resolution on the deployment of peacekeepers in the Donbas, which Kiev has long been attempting to achieve (Unian, 2017). The pitfall lies in the fact that based on the position that the Russian government occupies not as a party to the conflict but as a mediator, it claims that this step must be coordinated with the leadership of the *"separate political entity."* (Metzel, 2017; Dayspring, 2015, p. 156) This time-tested Russian tactical move converges to the point where representatives of the DPR and LPR insist on the Russian peacekeeping contingent or support the Kremlin's proposal that *"these forces must be located on the line of demarcation and not on other territories."* (Interfax , 2014; 112.UA News Agency, 2017) Obviously, the Ukrainian government will never agree to the first condition with the massive presence of the armed forces of the aggressor country on its territory, and the second does not meet its requirements regarding *"the need to deploy a mission throughout the region, including the border with the Russian Federation",* in order to disarm the armed formations of the proclaimed republics that, as a consequence, leads to the *"deadlock in the peace process"* calculated by Russia (ITAR-TASS News Agency , 2018; Dickinson, 2020).

Considering the use of the psychological component in the attack phase of the second model of the Russian hybrid warfare, it should be noted that, as in the case of Crimea, the main emphasis is placed on the direct threat of war or invasion. Since 2014, in order to maintain a constant state of tension and fear of a military invasion and massive strike, the RF has been actively massing troops at Ukraine's borders (Costea, 2019, p. 44; Nikitina, 2020). Also, Moscow periodically takes other demonstrative actions to put additional pressure on the target country. In March 2014, at Putin's request, the Federation Council of the RF allowed the President to use military force on the territory of Ukraine to protect Russian citizens (RBK, 2014). Periodically, formal hints and threats to Kiev come from the Russian leadership, such as in August 2016, when Putin promised *"serious consequences for Ukraine if it attacks the separatists in Donbass."*

(Costea, 2019, p. 44) During the initial period, these actions caused fear among the Ukrainian population and their leaders regarding a possible invasion, nevertheless, the effectiveness of the psychological component not only gradually decreased over time but also partly had a stimulating effect on the target country (Costea, 2019, p. 44; Peterson, 2020). When officials in Kiev realized that the lined-up on the border Russian regular troops were nothing more than warning action, they decided to launch the Anti-Terror Operation against Donbas separatists (Racz, 2015, p. 65). The adoption in 2018 of the law *"On the peculiarities of State policy on ensuring Ukraine's State sovereignty over temporarily occupied territories"* and the change of the ATO format to the JFO with *"broader rights and powers"* also demonstrates Ukraine's ability to adapt to the current situation (Unian , 2018; Galadzhiy, 2018). Moreover, the country is in the process of rapid modernization of its armed forces and the strengthening of defensive potential (Peterson, 2020). Against the backdrop of strengthening the protection of critical facilities and territories, an increase in the country's defense budget, military supplies, and consultations from Western countries, the combat capability of the Ukrainian army is increasing every day (Real-Vin, 2020; Rambler, 2017). *"The lion's share of the foreign military aid to Ukraine comes from the United States."* (Rambler, 2017) The US administrations provided AFU with some types of non-lethal weapons, advanced communications and reconnaissance equipment, unmanned aerial systems, and other more comprehensive assistance such as military aid packages (Rambler, 2017; Altman, 2020). A rather significant event was the recent military exercises of Ukraine and NATO member countries *"United Efforts 2020,"* which both Ukrainian and Western military experts compared with *"a model of success"* and a demonstration to the aggressor of Ukrainian capabilities and readiness to liberate the occupied territories by force (Shevchenko, et al., 2020).

The limited effectiveness of psychological operations partly explains Russia's intention to turn Ukraine into a *"test bed for computer viruses"* and *"breaking into servers and computer networks"* (Costea, 2019, p. 51). Increased intensity of the main operations carried out by the Russian special services in the cyber sphere against strategic state institutions of Ukraine and private campaigns, with the aim of destabilizing the situation in the country, has been observed since May 2014 (Coker & Sonn, 2015). One of the first major attacks was the hacking of the Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission server with the purpose to disable the online voting system and publish fake information that a representative of the extreme right-wing won the presidential elections in the country (Costea, 2019, p. 52; Coker & Sonn, 2015). Responsibility was claimed by the pro-Russian hacker group *"Cyberberkut."* (Coker & Sonn, 2015) According to the cybersecurity officers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defense, and the Presidential Administration for a whole year were continuously subjected to computer

attacks. The hackers' target in the military sphere were security structures, fighting pro-Russian insurgents in Eastern Ukraine, including *"a secret computer network at the headquarters of the armed forces in Kramatorsk." "The purpose of the attacks was to destroy all information on these computers"* to disable an information collection and decision-making system (Coker & Sonn, 2015). Attacks against the critical infrastructure of the target country have also become part of the Russian cyberwar strategy. In 2015, for instance, hackers managed to cut the power in several Ukrainian regions using the *"BlackEnergy"* Trojan program and the *"KillDisk data destruction utility."* Such acts were carried out in 2016 against one of the substations of the Ukrenergo company and ended with a partial power outage in Kiev (Rambler, 2019). Meanwhile, in the ranks of the Ukrainian special services were many Kremlin agents or employees bribed by Russia, which prevented taking effective measures to counter cyber-attacks (Coker & Sonn, 2015). To counter these operations and *"to ensure effective influence on the operational situation, namely: the prevention, detection, termination and disclosure of criminal offenses, the mechanism of preparation, commission or concealment,"* the country's leadership set up the Cybernetic Police Department in October 2014 and later in 2018, the Cyber-Security Situation Centre (Costea, 2019, p. 54).

2.2.4 Application of non-military means

After Moscow began active operations in Eastern Ukraine, in parallel, it continued the attempts to destabilize its adversary by economic means. The Russian leadership showed the new central government in Kiev *"the price they have to pay for choosing a pro-European path"* by announcing on 1 April 2014 that the price of Russian gas for Ukrainians will increase for the second time in two days (Costea, 2019, p. 48; Dayspring, 2015, p. 158). A few days afterward, referring to $ 16 billion Ukrainian debt, Gazprom again threatened to cut off gas supplies to the neighboring country. The RF Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev even made a statement that soon Kiev will have to make an advance payment for Russian gas supplies. This proposal also was supported by Putin, who not long after suddenly changed a decision and asked the gas campaign *"delay such a move given the difficult situation in Ukraine."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 158) In 2016, the aggressor country significantly expanded economic measures against Kiev, by withdrawing customs privileges for Ukrainian goods, imposing an embargo on certain types of products, and restricting their transportation to some post-Soviet countries such as Kazakhstan (Jozic, et al., 2016, p. 115). Considering the importance that the Russian market represented for Ukrainian exports, these restrictions and economic sanctions further affected the country's already fragile

economic situation (Costea, 2019, p. 48). However, due to the involvement of the EU, the US, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which from 2014 to 2018 provided Ukraine with the financial assistance of $ 22 billion, excluding funds for military support, the country's economy has significantly stabilized. Without the economic aid received from these actors, Kiev would not have been able to withstand Russia's economic pressure and continue the war for its Donbas territories (Costea, 2019, p. 49). The US and the EU also became actively involved in the energy issue of the two countries, when Russia loudly threatened the imminent termination of the gas transit through Ukraine (Mirtesen, 2019; NV Biznes, 2018). The imposition of *"bipartisan US sanctions"* against Russia's unfinished Nord Stream 2 pipeline project in conjunction with the rules of the *"third energy package"* and European negotiating work to bring positions closer together, led to the fact that the RF leadership temporarily abandoned its intentions and in December 2019 extended the agreement on gas transit through the Ukrainian territory for 5 years period (Atlantic Council, 2020; Sukhova, 2020; Gembarskaya, 2020).

The use of the energy potential as a *"weapon"* also could imply attacks against the enemy's critical infrastructure, in particular, the energy disruption both to achieve the aggressor's goals in the political and economic spheres and to reduce the military-economic capabilities of the attacked state (Gorbulin, 2020). Russia used this element of hybrid warfare first in the Crimean case, seizing along with the territory of the peninsula its energy facilities, offshore oil fields, and natural gas, and then applied it on the grander scale in certain areas of Luhansk and Donetsk. By targeted actions, many coal mining enterprises and transport infrastructure of the two regions were actually destroyed (Kirillov, 2019; Gorbulin, 2020). This resulted in supply problems of already mined coal to Ukrainian consumers, primarily to thermal power plants, which became a challenge for the stable functioning of the entire Ukrainian united energy system. Concurrently the information component of hybrid warfare was actively involved. The anti-crisis decisions made by the Ukrainian government in the energy field have become the subject of the formation of a negative attitude towards government bodies, officials, and the government. This information was also used to form a negative image of Ukraine among the neighboring countries and its partners (Gorbulin, 2020).

Russian propagandists made numerous efforts to *"stoke the sentiment of local rage against the Ukrainian forces."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 159) When the whole spectrum of hybrid warfare began to unfold at the second stage, almost the first thing that the militias in the East of Ukraine did was to turn off Ukrainian channels and massively connect Russian ones, thereby establishing almost complete control over the media in the occupied territories (Racz, 2015, p. 81). In some towns of the DPR and LPR, the militants established a process of searching for pro-Ukrainian

"streamers" and Internet TV journalists, and systematically obstructed their activities (Gorbulin, 2020). Russian dominance in the Donbas media space was intended to undermine of the Ukrainian and Western media transparency and objectivity in coverage of events in Donbas (Jozic, et al., 2016, p. 116). However, an intense stream of aggressor's hostile disinformation has led to utterly misleading simulacra and *"outrageous claims about Ukraine"* being broadcast on the local TV and even on the channel owned by Russia's Ministry of Defence (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 47). They ranged from the most ridiculous, for instance, *"the claim that the Ukrainian army have zombies fighting within their ranks"* to the most deplorable allegations of *"atrocities by punitive battalions"* or a three-year-old boy crucified by Kiev's forces in Eastern Ukraine (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 47; Gorbulin, 2020). Whilst reporting on the events in Donbas, journalists from Russian state-controlled media methodically used photographs from the Chechnya, Kosovo, and Syria wars to produce materials that visually support the Kremlin's preferred narrative (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 13). On 17 May 2014, the pro-Russian website Politikus.ru published an article with a photograph allegedly depicting a morgue overflowing with corpses of the Ukrainian military and national guard personnel in Sloviansk, one of the cities of Donetsk region, and an appeal to *"Mothers and Wives of Central and Western Ukraine"* to collect their deceased relatives *"who had gone to kill civilians of Donbas."* (Fedorova, 2014) The falsification of this information was noticed relatively quickly due to a photograph of the morgue borrowed from the article *"Mexico morgues crowded with mounting drug-war dead,"* published on 8 March 2009, on The San Diego Union-Tribune (StopFake, 2014; Watson, 2009). The relatively low quality of Russian disinformation activity was also determined by the tendency to use in reports the same person in different roles of *"soldier's mother," "resident of Kyiv," "refugee from Donetsk"* or, for instance, *"Crimean activist."* (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 13) In an effort to adhere to the common prevailing narrative, numerous pro-Kremlin media companies failed to develop a more unified approach to disinformation, further contributing to its limited effectiveness (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 21). This disadvantage was most clearly manifested when news agencies, trying to fabricate evidence of Russia's non-involvement in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, could not *"establish a unified alternative hypothesis for how the plane crashed,"* and submitted various versions starting with the statement that *"a Ukrainian Su-25 fired an air-to-air missile at MH17"* and to the more reckless speculation that *"the plane was flying with dead people aboard before it crashed."* (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 20)

Russia's information operations carried out during the second model of hybrid warfare turned out to be time-sensitive. Obviously, this became possible due to the lack of an element of unpredictability lost after the Crimean campaign and as a consequence of the decreasing level of

trust, against the background of which the aggressor's long and intense insistence on *"fictional descriptions of situations"* affected the quality of disinformation activities and could not withstand a constant picky gaze of the local public (Snegovaya, 2015, pp. 17, 21; Seth, 2015, p. 73). The NATO StratCom Center of Excellence report also states that *"disinformation campaigns erode over time as more and more evidence is revealed to negate lies and falsifications, hidden information is discovered, anecdotal mistakes are made by the less wary."* (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 34) From this perspective, a number of information-related measures undertaken by the Ukrainian authorities and volunteers further limited Russia's propaganda machinery (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54). The independent Ukrainian Internet project StopFake, created by scientists and students of the *"KyivMohyla Academy"* in 2014 has become one of the most successful instruments for refuting disinformation and propaganda in Ukraine (StopFake, n.d.). In addition, many other similar civil society initiatives and semi-official groups have emerged, such as the Information Resistance Group, Euromaidan Press, Kibersotnia and the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54). The reaction of the government in Kiev was also not long in coming, it imposed a series of sanctions against Russian media, journalists, artists, books, films, social networks and numerous Russian TV channels, thereby blocking Moscow's ability to impose its perceptions on the majority of the Ukrainian population (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 55). In general, since 2014 *"Ukrainians had become more sceptical towards Russian media sources,"* while in 2016 more than half of Donbas residents ceased to believe in the Kremlin propaganda and the number of people who prefer watching local TV channels has decreased by 30% (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 55; NovostiUA , 2016).

Therefore, the efforts undertaken by the aggressor country during the hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine failed *"to spur a more decisive rebellion in Donbas or a broader rebellion into Novorossiya."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 54) Most of the local residents, who were indifferent to pro-Russian calls and disinformation *"reacted as they had learned to do during the Soviet years,"* remained passive even during the riots and especially after the outbreak of armed violence (Racz, 2015, p. 79). Russian propagandists had to convince the West and Russian citizens of the opposite, namely that the anti-government uprising among the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk is growing, in this regard the information campaign has achieved partial success (Racz, 2015, p. 79). According to a survey conducted by VTsIOM in 2014, 79% of Russians were sure that the militias were *"ordinary residents of Donbas and Ukraine as a whole."* (Kolebakina, 2014) Meanwhile, calls to an internal audience to support civilians in Donbas and protect them from the new fascist government in Ukraine and its atrocities did not go unnoticed (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, pp. 15, 32). Social networks, including Russian-language social site Vkontakte (Vk), were

used to recruit pro-Russian *"volunteer"* fighters to be sent to Eastern Ukraine which was not only supposed to support Russia's myth of the popular resistance movement but also to solve the problem of lack of local separatists per se (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 23; Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 44; Dayspring, 2015, p. 162). For an external audience, on the contrary, the presence of Russian proxies in two regions was clear. Nevertheless, *"surrounding the conflict with confusion and controversy,"* Russia's information campaign *"provided support to the policy of inaction"* that allowed the country *"to avoid a larger confrontation with the West."* (Snegovaya, 2015, pp. 18, 21) Positioning Russia not as a party to the conflict, but as an actor interested in resolving this *"key security issue in Europe"*, the Kremlin media channels sent communications in relation to the readiness of the country's leadership, in cooperation with Western partners *"to spare no effort to assist Ukraine to address the problem of the southeast."* (Kurilchenko, 2020; Kommersant , 2019) However, this rather assisted in largely refraining the West from the meaningful intervention (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 21).

In early April 2014, anti-government demonstrations in Luhansk and Donetsk escalated into violent protests that followed a previously known pattern aimed at taking control of administrative buildings and declaring a new state and government (Nurk, 2016, p. 31; Racz, 2015, p. 11). While groups of demonstrators, which mainly included old and young aggressive people armed with household items, *"were waving Russian flags and shouting 'Referendum,' 'Referendum'"* several masked Russian-speaking separatists armed with clubs began to push themselves through the riot police into regional administrative buildings and seize them (Nurk, 2016, p. 31; Dayspring, 2015, p. 158). As former FSB Colonel Strelkov, who was sent to Donbas to mobilize and organize the rebels, noted that there was practically no local support for the separatists in two regions, which, in his opinion, was *"due to a lack of an effective information campaign to mobilize popular sentiment."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 157) Meanwhile, the local rebels were representatives *"of the very low percentage of the Russian speaking population that wanted to break away from Ukraine."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 158) Nevertheless, with the support of Russian intelligence and security agencies, volunteer-mercenaries, they managed to dislodge the central power from these regions and on May 11, two weeks before the election of Ukraine's President, organize referendums that were not recognized by either the Ukrainian government or the majority of international actors (Racz, 2015, p. 62; Nurk, 2016, p. 33). According to the leaders of the two newly formed republics, the turnout in the referendum in Luhansk was more than 81% and in Donetsk - 75%, while 96% and 89% of local residents voted for the independence of the regions from the Kiev administration (Nurk, 2016, p. 33). The Ukrainian Security Service released an audio recording in which approximately the same results appeared in a conversation between the

Donetsk separatist leader and the leader of the ultra-right paramilitary group of Russian National Unity Alexander Barkashov. In this recording, the leader of the separatists proposed to defer the referendum because of the DPR's *"lack of control over it region,"* in response to which Barkashov offered *"to wright 99 or 89 percent in favour of the autonomy."* (Nurk, 2016, pp. 33, 34) At that time, the interim Ukrainian government led by Turchinov, referring to data received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, claimed that only 24% of residents of Luhansk and 32% from Donetsk voted on this referendum (Nurk, 2016, p. 34). In this regard, some analysts cite the limited dynamic towards self-determination of the two republics and low local and operational support as the main reason why Putin decided not to replicate the Crimean scenario in Donbas. Strelkov also admitted that with the presence of Russia's military bases in this region such a development would be quite possible (Racz, 2015, p. 64).

In any case, Putin's refusal to the request of the self-proclaimed leaders of the DPR and LPR to consider the possibility of these republic's accession into the RF and their acceptance by the West as nothing more than *"parties to negotiations with Ukraine"* ensured the low effectiveness of the referendum as an instrument of *"constructed legitimacy"* which is necessary for *"strategic stabilization"* or consolidation of results achieved during hybrid warfare (TenGrinews, 2015; Socor, 2018; Racz, 2015, pp. 62, 64). This explains the tendency of Russian diplomacy and the Kremlin-controlled media to constantly represent the separatist authorities *"as if the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk were properly functioning states"* and as if their leaders were legitimate representatives of the local population *"in the democratic sense,"* thereby consistently building them legitimacy to obtain concessions from the Ukrainian government (Racz, 2015, p. 62). However, even considering that the alternative political power centers created by Russia in Eastern Ukraine are based not on democratic principles but rather on the rule of arms, from a territorial-administrative perspective they are able to govern the occupied territories and their *"constructed legitimacy may well suffice in alienating the locals from the central government."* (Racz, 2015, p. 62) In the Kremlin, this provides confidence that the provoked military conflict is still capable of developing, if not even in line with the immediate goals of the RF government, then at least close to its interests.

2.2.5 Application of military means

The March anti-government demonstrations that gripped the cities of the South-East of Ukraine under the pretext of the infringement of the rights of the Russian-speaking population, the long-term dissatisfaction with the central government, violent unconstitutional change of power,

and its commitment to the European course were possible rather due to the involvement of pro-Russian movements and organizations and young people with criminal records, than the mobilization efforts of the Kremlin's information campaign (Chalenko, 2019; RIA News , 2014). The report of the OSCE Mission also states that among the supporters of federalization *"with genuine anti- Maidan views"* were few local residents, most of the *"activists"* had *"Russian accent or pronunciation"* and came from other regions or the RF for a certain payment (OSCE HRAM, 2014, p. 36). The subsequent incitement to violence and the seizure of local administrative buildings and broadcasting towers with the assistance of Russian intelligence and special forces, or what Philip A. Karber describes as the *"transition from protests to terrorism,"* marked the excess of the threshold of the preparatory stage and the beginning of the attack phase of the Russian hybrid warfare (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 43).

The authorities in Kiev quickly determined that the same scheme was being implemented in the east of the country that Moscow had already used at the beginning of the unexpected occupation of the peninsula (Dayspring, 2015, p. 159). Nevertheless, the presence of 40,000 Russian personnel on the Ukrainian border, *"the precarious state of the Ukrainian army"* and the lack of funds to bring it in a state of full combat readiness hindered the ability of the central government to take measures to immediately confront the rebels, who, meanwhile were strengthening their control over a number of locations in Donbas and beginning to expand to the western part of the country (Dayspring, 2015, pp. 159, 160; Costea, 2019, p. 19). This expansion was stopped by Ukrainian volunteer battalions financed by local oligarchs, one of whom was an *"acting governor of Dnipropetrovsk,"* Igor Kolomoisky (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 104; Dayspring, 2016, p. 160). Apart from the fact that in the strategically important for the Kremlin city of Dnepropetrovsk, as well as in Kharkiv, Odessa, Zaporizhzhia and other cities of the region, pro-Ukrainian protesters predominated and *"Pro-Putin sentiment"* and support for separatism was inadequate, in these territories the rebels had to unexpectedly face *"Dnipro Battalion," "Right Sector"* and other Ukrainian irregular forces which were well equipped and organized (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 103; Dayspring, 2015, p. 160). They easily defeated the Kharkiv mutineers who stormed the opera and ballet theater *"mistakenly believing it was the city hall"* or during two-day street fighting suppress any separatist sentiments in Odesa and the surrounding areas, thereby preventing the expansion of the Russian movement and gaining time for Kiev to mobilize the state security sector for a counteroffensive (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 101). When it became clear that the Russian border regular forces were not going to attack *"due to the anticipated high political costs,"* the government decided on 15 April 2014 to launch a major counteroffensive, also known as the ATO, to liberate the occupied Donbas (Racz, 2015, p. 65). Marked by its unsuccessful start

in Kramatorsk, when a whole column of ATO armored vehicles was captured by separatists *"without a single shot being fired,"* the military campaign was able to gain momentum after the election of Poroshenko as Ukrainian President on May 25 (Racz, 2015, pp. 65, 67).

Although the ATO, according to Ukrainian military commanders, consisted of a *"cumbersome to effectively control"* combination of regular army units supplemented by volunteer militias, they became more cohesive, better organized and *"in possession of superior firepower"* compared to the mixture of Russian special forces and local fighters (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 43). The Donbas invaders were unable to properly resist the advancing Ukrainian units and were forced to retreat further to Russia's borders (Dayspring, 2015, p. 161). By July 2014, the ATO recaptured 23 out of 36 districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, putting the pro-Russian-separatist movement at risk of being completely crushed. (Peterson, 2020) At this stage, the Russian president and his inner circle were faced with the choice of either letting the Ukrainian forces continue to occupy the separatist territories or invade and assist his proxies (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 106). The introduction of the Russian artillery and rocket attacks from the RF border *"followed by a dramatic increase in Russian regular Army soldiers and heavy equipment in Ukraine"* drove the ATO units out of separatist territories and prevented Ukrainian control of the border areas but further spoiled Russia's relations with the neighboring country and the West (Dayspring, 2015, p. 161; Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 106). Putin's *"undeclared war"* became a matter of even greater concern and outrage of the international community after the shooting down of the civilian airliner Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) in the same month (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 106). In order to stop strikes of the Ukrainian Air Force on rebel positions and stay out of the spotlight, Moscow decided not to involve the Russian Air Force but to supply its proxies with Buk anti-aircraft missiles, underestimating the fact that such sophisticated equipment could only be manned by specially trained Russian personnel, and not local mercenaries. As a consequence, in July 2014, this missile erroneously shot down an airliner with 298 civilians onboard instead of alleged a Ukrainian military transport aircraft (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 106). Kremlin's attempts to deceive and camouflage its role in these events could not prevent enhancing the US and EU's reaction to the crisis and the subsequent imposition of new sanctions against the country (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 107).

From the outset, Western actors were skeptical regarding Russia's claims that neither Russian military equipment nor military personnel crossed the border between the two countries (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 107). Nevertheless, Putin continued to maintain some semblance of Russia's non-involvement, in order to preserve the opportunity to adhere to the official line of *"denial."* That was sufficient to minimize the potential political costs for the aggressor country

(Dayspring, 2015, p. 161). Apart from the direct supply of military equipment across the border to the separatists, for the same purpose, Russia has utilized and utilizes *"humanitarian convoys,"* which many military experts regard as one of the useful instrument of hybrid warfare (Gorbulin, 2020). Russian supplies of medicines, nutrition, and basic necessities not only serve to attract the sympathy of the local population but the effect of the broadcasting of these *"good intentions"* by the international media could also spread to decision-makers in states and any world institutions, and thus mitigate negative attitude to the fact that Russia operates in a foreign state without permission (Nurk, 2016, pp. 38, 39). These convoys, in addition, are rather considered by Moscow as *"Trojan Horse"* by which it is possible to continue to secretly replenish the ranks of its proxy forces and supply them arms and military equipment. The bodies of Russian servicemen killed during the hostilities are delivered in these white trucks back to their homeland, thereby supporting the Kremlin's narrative about the absence of its troops in Donbas (Nurk, 2016, p. 38).

Since early March 2014, *"hundreds of people"* have crossed the two countries' common border to join pro-Russian demonstrators in the southeast of Ukraine. These volunteers from 18 to 45 years old were recruited through social networks and were supervised the special services of the RF located in Ukraine (Costea, 2019, p. 18). In this hybrid warfare, the Spetsnaz GRU, FSB, and the 45ths special forces regiment of VDV were entrusted with an overly broad range of tasks, from covert actions (CA), special reconnaissance (SR), military assistance (MA) to direct action (DA) (Renz & Smith, 2016, pp. 28, 30). Their functional responsibilities, however, initially were limited to the role of agitators, organizing sabotage actions, and recruitment fighters from among the Ukrainians (Costea, 2019, p. 18). The lack of local residents supporting separatism led to the fact that the ranks of Cossacks, criminals, members from pro-Russian organizations, former Ukrainian officers, some local residents dissatisfied with the Kiev authorities, Russian *"patriotic volunteers"* and special operations forces had to be supplemented by soldiers from the Russian regular troops (Costea, 2019, p. 18; Dayspring, 2015, p. 161). According to the *"Communist Russian veteran of the Chechen war"* who fought in Donetsk, in 2014 about 90% of the militants fighting the Ukrainian army belonged to the Russian military and security sector (Racz, 2015, p. 79). As Moscow increasingly had to send its military personnel to Ukraine, there was a certain procedure in which they first signed *"a phony separation"* from the RF army and then were placed among the indigenous *"composite units"* of the separatist movement. This combination was supposed to prevent the defeat of any one *"parent organization"* and complicate the identification of the complete numbers of the Russian forces displaced to the territory of a neighboring state (Dayspring, 2015, p. 162).

Nevertheless, from an operational effectiveness perspective, this mix of units was unsuccessful (Dayspring, 2015, p. 162). Primarily, it should be noted that before establishing a joint coordination centre between the GRU and FSB in Donetsk in 2015, there was an acute problem of the lack of information and mutual awareness of each other's activities and inconsistencies in actions of agents of these special services (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 31). They also demonstrated reluctance to operate with local separatists and volunteers, especially in the cases where the latter not-in-service *"have been able to do the same job,"* which was another reason for the SOF's superficial implementation of its functions (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 30). As noted above, Spetsnaz FSB and GRU carried out covert actions aimed at *"initiating parts of the anti-Kiev rebellion in Donbas,"* while duties for SR and MA — collecting and providing intelligence to local rebels and their training were assigned to Spetsnaz GRU (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 30). Meanwhile, the low combat capabilities of the proxy formations LPR-DPR and the insufficient level of training of its own mechanized infantry forced the Kremlin to use the special forces in DA. In May 2014, for instance, VDV's 45ths special forces regiment participated in hostilities for control over the strategically important Donetsk airport, and in the summer of the same year, when the offensive of the Ukrainian Armed Forces brought both pseudo-republics to the brink of extinction, the SOF became particularly active (Inform Napalm, 2020).While the main task of agentura-GRU is to *"oversee Russian forces and Russian proxies"* in Donbas, the combined groups of Spetsnaz GRU and rebels, in addition to direct hostilities, carry out sabotage activities, including *"minelaying and attacks at poorly guarded Ukrainian transport convoys."* (Kuzio & D'anieri, 2018, p. 42; Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 30) The special forces of the FSB carry out a different type of DA — *"supervision and disciplining of the different separatist groups"* both through diplomacy and *"physical measures"* against recalcitrant persons (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 31). However, these responsibilities were poorly implemented, given some reports that most militias refused to obey orders and often looted (Dayspring, 2015, p. 161). In this regard, Moscow even had to carry out *"cleansing"* not only the ranks of its insurgent forces but also the military and political leadership, sending special battalions to assert its control in Eastern Ukraine (Jozic, et al., 2016, p. 115; Dayspring, 2015, p. 161). There were also morale problems among the Russian troops and their Donbas surrogates, which the Russian leadership later tried to solve by deploying the *"Russian Interior Ministry's Dzerzhinsky Division as punitive action, anti-retreat troops behind the lines of rebels and Russian regulars."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 165) Thus, Russia's combination *"of irregular and regular elements of warfare"* was inferior to Ukraine's better conventional organization (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 43).

This gap became more evident in August 2014 when the ATO almost divided the DPR and LPR, capturing the cities of Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Artemivsk (Racz, 2015, p. 75). Ultimately, *"in the Battle of Ilovaisk"* Russia resorted to massive intervention, deploying *"eight or six combined-arms battalion tactical groups"* supported by the latest generation of T-72s and killing, according to various sources, from 350 to 900 Ukrainian soldiers, thereby transforming the war from hybrid into its conventional, albeit limited, interstate version (Dunn-Lobban, 2016, p. 43; Dayspring, 2015, p. 164; Rambler, 2019). After periodical protracted escalations of violence in 2014 and 2015, *"the war settled into a dreary back-and-forth along a frontier consisting of about 270 miles of trenches."* (Kramer, 2020) It is roughly estimated that in 2015 14,400 Russian personnel were in Donbas supporting 29,300 *"separatists"* armed with the latest heavy weaponry, while another 55,800 Russian soldiers were concentrated on the border with Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 167). There have been only minor territorial shifts in the past five years; however, they have cost enormous casualties (Peterson, 2020). According to the UN, from April 2014 to 2019, 13,000 people were killed and 30,000 injured during the fighting in Eastern Ukraine (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty , 2019). The RF still consistently refuses to recognize its involvement in this bloodshed, while *"admitting that Russian 'volunteers' are helping the rebels."* (BBC News , 2020) Meanwhile, the country's leadership continues to try the West's patience by supporting the artificially created separatist entity in any way that is appropriate. Neither Moscow nor Kiev does not attempt to achieve the visible breakthrough. Rather, both sides fight by inertia, withstanding daily shelling *"to not be the side that backs down first."* (Peterson, 2020)

2.3 Economic losses and political consequences for the Russian Federation

Any conflict has its share of political and financial costs but for Russia, its hybrid efforts due to the above-military and non-military components entailed lower expenditures than could have been the case in the outbreak of a traditional military conflict. Although this scenario was partly realized in Eastern Ukraine, the undeclared nature of military aggression allowed Moscow to avoid considerably more negative international reactions than economic sanctions, *"as the international community would have more evidence to base their decisions on."* (Gage, 2017, p. 17) As noted previously, in order to determine whether the first and second models of Russian hybrid warfare were successful, the achieved goals should be compared with the consequences and costs incurred by the aggressor country.

A determination of the exact financial value of direct assets that Russia invested in the implementation of two hybrid campaigns and continues to spend on the consequences associated with them is rather difficult. Mainly because of the Kremlin's unwillingness to be frank regarding its actions in Ukraine and the disinformation spread by the country's leadership, for instance, the reported Russian defense spending (Gage, 2017, p. 18). Some interested independent parties and economists, in particular Russian and Ukrainian, based on different methods and available data, including on the Russian military sphere, calculated the approximate cost of the war waged by the RF against Ukraine. In the 2015 report *"Putin. War,"* based on the materials of Boris Nemtsov, the cost of ten months of hostilities in the east of Ukraine for the RF was estimated at $ 1.7 billion (Nemtsov, 2015). According to Nemtsov, over 53 billion rubles were spent from the Russian budget on the maintenance of *"volunteers"* and local militias, operation, and repair of military equipment. Concurrently, about 80 billion rubles (more than a billion dollars) were spent by Moscow on the maintenance of Donetsk and Luhansk *"refugees."* The state had to appropriate considerable additional funds for moral compensation to families and their consent to non-disclosure of the circumstances of their relatives' death in Donbas (Nemtsov, 2015). However, in addition to the fact that these calculations cover exclusively the military aspect of the war in Eastern Ukraine between July 2014 and May 2015, they also do not take into account the cost of ammunition supplied to separatists, weapons, in particular mortars, anti-tank grenade launchers, sniper rifles and other small arms weapons as well as heavy weapons (Nemtsov, 2015; Trust.UA, 2015). According to information security expert Vyacheslav Gusarov, the estimated cost of Russian military equipment sent to Ukraine in 2014-2015 was 1.4 billion rubles or $ 18.5 million. Concurrently, he analyzed the financial costs of the Russian leadership for the use of some above-

military and non-military means during the hybrid campaign in Donbas. In his assessment, more than $ 290 million is annually allocated from the federal budget of the RF to finance pro-Russian Donbas ideological movements, regional pro-Russian media, the Russian social Internet platform (VK, Odnoklassniki, etc.), *"hardware-software computer and network elements of influence"* (Russian hackers and Internet trolls), *"the maintenance of created controlled structures in unrecognized territories"* and another corresponding *"soft power"* instruments (Gusarov, 2015). These expenditures are relatively low compared to the operating costs of Moscow's propaganda machine in the Western information space. As noted in the 2016 report *"Russia: Implications for UK defense and security"* only for the maintenance of official outlets, such as Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, the Russian leadership annually spends between US$ 600 million to $ 1 billion (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2016, p. 16). Nevertheless, conducting a more comprehensive assessment, the former adviser to the President of the RF on Economic Policy, Andrey Illarionov, claims that the *"hybrid warfare against Ukraine"* cost Russia between $ 144 billion and $ 150 billion *"in four years"* (InfoResist , 2017; Gordon, 2015). Although the Russian economist emphasizes that *"spending on the preparation and conduct of the war with Ukraine began long before the start of military operations against Ukraine,"* for certain reasons, he does not include in his calculations the financial side of the preparatory stage of Russian hybrid campaigns and does not give details on human and property costs of the war (Gage, 2017, p. 22). Meanwhile, Illarionov points out that most of the above amount, nearly $ 94 billion, was spent on the use of non-military and military means in the east of Ukraine, and the rest in the *"Crimean direction."* (InfoResist , 2017; Trust.UA, 2015) As an economist, he also adds that *"the current war begun by the Kremlin is a war not only with Ukraine,"* and additional costs of about $ 232 billion, *"in connection with the preparation and conduct of military operations"* are also borne by the Russian private sector (Gordon, 2015).

Kiev's imposition of the economic blockade against Donbas gave the RF semi-colonial control of resources in the occupied territories, while the aggregate economic performance of the DPR and LPR since 2014 has declined by two-thirds (Milakovsky, 2019; Gricius, 2019, p. 46). The resulting profits help Russia recoup only a small part of what it spends annually on subsidizing the region's budget, social benefits, and pension which, according to some experts, range from $ 1.3 billion to $ 2 billion (Strelnikov, 2018; Milakovsky, 2019). Oleksii Reznikov, Minister of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, states that the *"maintenance"* of Donbas costs Russia about $ 5 billion a year, of which $ 1.3 billion is spent on support for local residents and $ 3.7 billion on the war (Rambler, 2020). Therefore, based on rough calculations, the annual military spending and the consequences of Russia's aggression in Eastern Ukraine each

year require a minimum of $ 1.7- $ 5 billion to $ 23.5 billion, including taking account of the use of a more complete range of hybrid instruments. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that the real figure might be even higher. As the current situation in Luhansk and Donetsk demonstrates, in any case, the direct costs for the Russian leadership are not high enough to decide to abandon their separatist project. Nevertheless, in the long term, these territories may become even less self-sufficient and more financially burdensome for the country. The Russian government will have to accept not only the fact of constantly sponsoring its proxy forces but also the need to cover the gradually growing financial demands of the two republics, since *"the productivity of coal mines and steel plants declines and the outflow of working-age residents intensifies."* (Milakovsky, 2019) And along with these considerable expenditures, Russia has the much greater losses associated with Western sanctions to consider.

Moscow also continues to bear the burden of financial consequences associated with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. In this regard, they are caused not only by adding another region but also by Putin's numerous promises to develop the peninsula's welfare (Gage, 2017, p. 23). On 31 March 2014, the Russian President signed a decree on doubling pensions for Crimean pensioners, increased wages to public employees and allocated an annual subsidy to Crimea (Pension Fund of the RF , 2014; Gage, 2017, p. 23). Meanwhile, in recent years Moscow had been devoting more and more money to the local social field, namely, on the modernization of schools, hospitals, government offices, individual industries, and on the construction of transport and energy infrastructure to reduce Crimea's dependence on Ukraine (Gage, 2017, p. 24). According to the estimates of the Russian economist, Sergei Aleksashenko, from 2014 to 2019 social payments and investments in the infrastructure of the peninsula amounted to $ 23 billion. (Novoprudsky, 2019) Moscow reported a GRP of 155 billion rubles (nearly $2 billion) from Crimea in 2014, which means that Republic's production annually is approximately less than half of its cost to the country (Gage, 2017, p. 24).

Until March 2014, Russia was negotiating with the EU on a visa-free regime and a new cooperation agreement, was a full member of the G8, and at the end of the same month, it was expelled from the *"elite circle"* of advanced countries, into which it was admitted with such difficulty more than 20 years ago (Moskovsky Komsomolec, 2014). From this point forward, the *"sanctions war"* between the West and Russia also began and continues to escalate (Novoprudsky, 2019). Initially, the US and the EU decided to confine themselves to a rather mild response to illegal Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, imposing personal sanctions on Putin's entourage, freezing assets, and *"placing travel bans."* (Gage, 2017, p. 25) In June 2014, restrictive measures were introduced on economic relations with Crimea, which included a ban on the import

and export of goods and technologies, trade and investment related to certain economic sectors, and providing tourism services (Kruk, 2019). With the further escalation of the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the severity of the sanctions against the RF increased. Although the Crimean case remained an open issue, Western attention shifted to Donbas, in particular after MH17 was shot down over Eastern Ukraine (Kruk, 2019). In order to persuade Moscow to cease all support to the separatists, multilateral sanctions were introduced (Amadeo, 2020). In regard to the energy sector, they provided for the prohibition of cooperation of American and European energy companies with Russian ones (Gage, 2017, p. 25). Moreover, access to the EU's primary and secondary capital markets was limited to some Russian companies and banks (Amadeo, 2020). Finally, sanctions affected the defense industry of the RF through the ban *"an export and import ban on trade in arms."* (European Council and the Council of the EU , n.d.) The Kremlin repeatedly alleged that Western sanctions are illegal and do not pose serious harm to the country's economy and, in turn, imposed bans on certain goods from European countries (Seth, 2015, p. 76). In 2017, the UN announced that due to the impact of the sanctions since 2014, Russia has lost $ 55 billion, while the countries that introduced them - $ 3.2 billion monthly (Interfax, 2017). Nevertheless, the sanctions policy proved to be sufficiently effective in causing damage to the RF economy, which grew by 2% from 2014 to 2019, while the world economy grew by 19% over the same period (Gage, 2017, p. 26; Novoprudsky, 2019). The country's share in the world economy continues to decline steadily and amounts to less than 2% compared to 25% for the US and 15% for China. (Novoprudsky, 2019) Russia's credit rating dropped to a low level, most of the largest international investment banks doing business in Russia have announced that they will soon cease operations in the country, and in the meantime, the major domestic banks and companies refuse to work in Crimea in order not to fall under international sanctions (Gage, 2017, p. 26; Amadeo, 2020; Novoprudsky, 2019). Thus, the RF has practically lost the ability to borrow money in international capital markets, and falling oil prices, inflation, and recession in the country have led to unemployment and the fact that the real incomes of Russians since 2014 have decreased by 11% - 12%, except for the Crimean region where *"wages increase from a low base to catch up with those in Russia."* (Novoprudsky, 2019; Rambler, 2020; Doff, 2019)

Since economic pressures affect ordinary citizens, the euphoria of Crimea's reunification with Russia is gradually fading, and Putin's domestic popularity has begun to decline. A poll published by the Moscow-based Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) in 2019 confirmed that only 39% of Russians think that the takeover of the peninsula did the RF *"more good than harm"* compared to 67% at the end of 2014 (Doff, 2019). According to *"Levada-center"*, the economic stagnation and fatigue of Russians from the country's militaristic rhetoric resulted in downgrades

of Putin's approval rating to 59% in 2017 and 35% in 2020 (Rambler, 2020). In order to remain in power in 2020 Putin had to resort to another trick — the draft law on amendments to the Constitution of the RF, known for one of its norms related to *"zeroing"* of the terms of the current head of state (Khamraev, 2020).

Opinion on Putin in Western circles and confidence in his regime also plummeted sharply since 2014 (Gage, 2017, p. 32). Many European countries, in particular the Baltic states, began to consider Russia as an even greater threat to their own security after the *"new Crimean crisis"* when on 25 November 2018, Russian coast guard ships opened fire on and captured two Ukrainian combat boats and a tug in international waters as they left the Kerch Strait (Kruk, 2019; Bakin, 2019). After this incident, ships of the US Navy and other NATO countries started to appear regularly in the Black Sea, for instance, in December, a British Navy reconnaissance ship *"Echo"* (HMS Echo) was spotted in the waters, and in February a US Navy destroyer *"Donald Cook"* with Tomahawk missiles (Bakin, 2019). Nevertheless, Russia received a more or less formal response only three months after the act of aggression, when *"EU diplomats agreed to sanction Russian individuals involved in the detention of those Ukrainian sailors."* This *"belated and soft reaction"* resumed the discussion regarding the adequacy of the steps taken by Western actors in the face of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the country's efforts in fuelling the war in Eastern Ukraine (Kruk, 2019). Back in late February and early March 2014, the US and the EU scrambled to come up with an effective response to *"Russia's blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty,"* however *"on-the-ground, immediate military opposition to Russian incursions"* turned out to be the most unrealistic option of all (Seth, 2015, p. 74; De Galbert, 2015, p. 1). The main justification for the limited response to the aggressor's actions was the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member, and, accordingly, the transatlantic alliance has no obligation to defend Ukraine's sovereignty militarily. Nevertheless, a much larger role in this matter was played by the unwillingness of Western leaders to take on the risk of a possible military escalation between the West and Russia because of Ukraine (De Galbert, 2015, p. 1). After the outbreak of an armed conflict in Donbas, NATO reached conclusions and undertook measures to protect its members from any possible attack, which were limited and legal and did not affect Russian intentions and actions in Ukraine (Gage, 2017, p. 27; Seth, 2015, p. 74). One of the alliance's first reactions was conducting major military exercises near the Russian border in the second half of 2014, such as Spring Storm, BALTOPS, Saber Strike, Ample Strike exercises, and *"increasing air sorties over Europe."* (Sivitsky, 2016; Seth, 2015, p. 74) In order to reassure its Eastern European members that it would support them in the fight against Russian aggression, initially, NATO temporarily deployed more troops on their territory, and in 2016 the transatlantic alliance announced the deployment of multinational

battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland (Seth, 2015, p. 74; Amadeo, 2020). Meanwhile, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) formed in 2014 for rapid and surge deployment anywhere in Europe, has become *"spearhead"* in NATO's strategy of containing Russia (Unian, 2020).

The steps taken by the West to isolate Russia diplomatically and economically, and the buildup of NATO's military infrastructure along Russia's border in the Baltics and in Poland were perceived by Moscow as an irritant rather than a signal to reconsider its actions towards Ukraine (Gage, 2017, p. 35). The RF as one of the main supporters of the carrot-and-stick strategy has an accurate picture of how this mechanism works when exactly there is a need to make symbolic concessions and adhere to a firm position in order not to contradict its aspiration to be recognized in the international arena as a superpower. Back in 2007, Vladimir Putin addressing the Munich Conference on Security Policy reaffirmed the geopolitical claims of a resurgent Russia, and to some extent warned that if they were ignored, events as those that occurred in 2014 and are still unfolding today are possible (Azanov & Veselov, 2017). The annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine were not only the consequences of Russia upholding its security interests in the post-Soviet space but also a matter of principle closely linked to its sovereignty, which the country's political elite values above economic and other concessions (Trenin, 2019). The issue, however, has become how long Russia will be able to pursue its intended path and fulfill its ambitions before its economy collapses and they reach a level of non-accomplishment, faced with the limited nature of the country's resources. Moscow sought to ensure that Ukraine would not fall under the influence of the EU or NATO, and partially achieved this goal (Seth, 2015, p. 77). Although Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement entered into force in 2017, regulating their gradual rapprochement in the economic and political spheres, and more recently in June 2020, the country has received the status of a partner of NATO's expanded capabilities, which *"does not imply the prospect of NATO membership,"* Ukraine joining NATO or the EU at least will not happen soon (Versia, 2019; Anisimova, 2020). NATO and the EU have *"strict rules of controlling all of one's territory."* (Gage, 2017, p. 38) It is hardly possible that Kiev will renounce its territorial claims over Crimea and Donbas for a distant and still obscure approval of its apply for membership in the Western bloc but the prospect of a return of Ukrainian-Russian relations to the pre-Crimean level is even more elusive (Rasskazov, 2020).

The first model of Russian hybrid warfare, which resulted in the *"reintegration"* of Crimea, was carried out *"in one breath and largely bloodless."* (Polubota, 2014) It also inspired Russian citizens and gave them confidence in the country and its leadership, and although these sentiments did not last for long, they enabled to raise Putin's approval rating from 29% in January

to 86% in June 2014 (Novoprudsky, 2019; Znak, 2019). Meanwhile, the RF guaranteed the permanent, strategically important basing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. By saving on no longer needed lease, Russia has also reaped significant benefits in terms of the peninsula's energy potential, which in the future should cover most of the Kremlin's social welfare and infrastructure investments in the region. As demonstrated above, the West's reaction to Russia's actions in Crimea turned out to be softer and less tangible for the country than to subsequent events in Eastern Ukraine. In the case of the second model of hybrid warfare, Russia has achieved an only partial success. Not long after the launch of the attack phase, Donbas turned from a testing ground for Russian hybrid means into a protracted and, as a result, expensive in all respects war theatre to which the close attention of the world public was riveted. Moscow was unable to ensure the special status of the DPR and LPR and, and albeit the armed conflict further delayed the prospect of Ukraine's membership in the EU, it further strengthened the country's incentive for European integration. Using force to contain the slow disintegration of its influence in the post-Soviet space, Russia at the same time engendered fears and hedging among its neighbors, causing them to be tempted rather to the position of containing a regional power and turn towards the West (Kofman, 2019). To date, in order not to miss the opportunity to keep Ukraine away from the West, and therefore in the sphere of Russian influence, Moscow is forced to maneuver between military obligations to its proxy formations in Eastern Ukraine, which constantly requires high direct and indirect economic costs, and the preferences of the Western partners with a view to reducing the *"risk of NATO being an active opponent militarily."* (Midttun, 2019)

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO CASES AND IDENTIFICATION OF CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION OF HYBRID TACTICS

Before determining why the first model of Russian hybrid warfare, conducted in Crimea, proved to be more successful than the second model in Eastern Ukraine, it is important to look at a number of shared requisite conditions or prerequisites for the use of hybrid war that existed in these two cases. Russia as an aggressor country was militarily stronger than Ukraine, and the Kiev leadership did not have per se allies capable of guaranteeing the protection of the country. Hypothetically, these two factors were supposed to disable the target country's ability to resist when the aggressor engages the military component (Racz, 2015, p. 74). At the same time, Ukraine had weak central leadership, a badly functioning state administration, and an underpaid public security sector. This contributed to the internal process of degradation of the country's military potential, for instance, *"the sale of troops,"* elimination of the logistics and training systems, *"criminal reduction of the military personnel"*, and created a strong vulnerability to external infiltration and bribery (Midttun, 2019). In the case of Ukraine, the RF found itself in an advantageous position due to the geographical and historical proximity of the two countries, relatively close social, economic, political and military, and cultural ties (Racz, 2015, p. 58).

Both Crimea and Donbas were characterized by the massive presence of the Russian and Russian-speaking minorities (see Chapter 2.1.2 and Chapter 2.2.2). As noted above, meeting this requirement provides the attacking country with a number of political and operational advantages. By adopting a law that allows the RF to intervene in another country if ethnic Russians are in danger, Moscow has legitimized the use of these minorities *"as reference points for coercive actions."* (Seth, 2015, p. 71; Racz, 2015, p. 80) Concurrently, the Russian leadership does not care *"if other countries do not recognize this law;"* it is quite sufficient that this law provides a pretext for protecting the rights and lives of ethnic Russians to justify the country's aggressive actions (Seth, 2015, p. 71). For operational reasons, the presence of Russian speakers on the territory of the target country allows the special forces to disguise themselves as local residents, activists, or members of local opposition. Consequently, this not only facilitates the performance of operational tasks by special forces but also provides an attacking country with the opportunity to formally deny its involvement in organizing violent protests in another country (Racz, 2015, p. 80). Disguising the infiltrating special forces as local civilians also limits the targeted leadership's ability to forcefully respond to illegal actions, since *"shooting at 'civilians' may weaken the overall legitimacy of the government both domestically and abroad."* (Racz, 2015, p. 80)

However, the Russian experience of the hybrid warfare in Ukraine demonstrates that the mere fact of a Russian-speaking civilian contingent presence is not always able to guarantee the presence of a pro-Russian sentiment or support for separatist ideas. As in the Crimean Peninsula and especially in Eastern Ukraine, Kremlin propagandists and informational provocateurs failed to ensure a strong, popular civilian uprising (Danylyuk, 2016, p. 42). Furthermore, according to some sources, many Russian-speaking residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are fighting on the side of the Kiev government forces (Racz, 2015, p. 80). In this regard, it can be concluded that for a successful hybrid war, only the presence of a civilian contingent speaking the same language as an aggressor country is required, and not active local support for most of its actions. The participation of SOF, pro-Russian local political and non-governmental organizations, mercenaries, volunteers, and other Russian-speaking agents of influence in the creation of an artificial protest potential of the population, allowed the Russian media and the country's leadership to promote the narrative that the majority of Russian-speakers are in favor of secession from Ukraine, thereby disorienting observers on all three information fronts (see Chapter 2.1.4 and Chapter 2.2.4).

Meanwhile, for two decades in both regions was a long-term dissatisfaction with the central government, which was used by Moscow as the *"basis for organizing first political, and then armed opposition against the central power, as well as for demands for autonomy and independence."* (Racz, 2015, p. 78) This dissatisfaction, exacerbated by ethical, linguistic, and separatist elements, was mainly related to the overall corruption and dysfunctionality of the earlier Ukrainian governments (Racz, 2015, p. 78; IRI.USAID /The Gallup Organization , 2013, p. 11). The high level of corruption in the target country is one of the most important and most common conditions for a hybrid campaign. Corruption is multifunctional in nature and often works as the support component to different instruments of the hybrid spectrum (Allen, 2019, p. 2). Thus, for instance, bribed Ukrainian politicians and journalists, NGO activists, famous figures have become an important part of Russian propaganda and disinformation (Rukomeda, 2018). Concurrently, corruption demonstratively exacerbates the cracks and vulnerabilities of the target state, generating even greater public discontent with state bodies and the central government (Allen, 2019, p. 2). Kremlin-controlled political and non-governmental organizations and the media have often exploited this widespread Ukrainian problem to discredit Kiev and have been successful in this regard. Public outrage with the high level of bribery in the country made it easier for pro-Russian activists and SOF agents to find *"like-minded people"* among local residents and *"organize civil society networks"* followed by demonstrations and unrests (Racz, 2015, p. 78). Furthermore, in a hybrid war, corruption can have the most destructive consequences for the adversary when

"undermining of the state pillars of security." (Allen, 2019, p. 2) This was especially relevant during the Crimean crisis, when the Russian special services, taking advantage of the weakened central leadership in Kiev and financial dissatisfaction of the SBU, recruited and bought the loyalty of Ukrainian intelligence officers, police officers, and military personnel, thereby giving a special advantage to the military invasion plan (see Chapter 2.1.3). During the events in Donbas, this structural weakness in state bodies did not disappear, in particular, some local oligarchs close to Putin's entourage *"had a strong influence not only on the political elite but also on the police, border guards and secret service structures."* (Racz, 2015, p. 76) Nevertheless, in late March 2014, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine began a gradual clean all its security agencies of Kremlin agents (Koleda, 2014).

While the above factors are important requirements for the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, closer scrutiny of events in Ukraine demonstrates that the successful implementation of the hybrid mechanism, both in the preparatory and actual attack phases, also depends on the presence of a number of specific favorable circumstances and features of a target region. In particular, the *"unique attributes"* of the peninsula, namely its geographic characteristics and the local presence of the Russian forces, played an important role in the success of the Crimean campaign (Dayspring, 2015, p. 142). Since Crimea is connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land, it was not difficult for pro-Russian volunteers and mercenaries led by Russian special forces to block the *"highway and railroad that lead across the Perekop Isthmus"* and thereby cut off the peninsula from the rest of Ukraine (Golts, 2014). This chokepoint allowed Russia to restrict *"sources of information covering the takeover"* and ensured that any military response from Ukraine, which had just lost most of its naval capabilities, *"would be bottlenecked on a narrow land bridge"* and highly vulnerable to artillery fire or aerial interdiction (Dayspring, 2015, p. 143). In the Donbas scenario, Russia would have been unable to overcome potential Ukrainian military resistance. A common border between the RF and Eastern Ukraine with a weak border guard service is rather more one of the logistic requirements of the hybrid company to provide ongoing material and technical support (Racz, 2015, p. 83). In order to restrain or prevent the penetration of military units from the rest of Ukraine and thereby facilitate the task of consolidating separatist control over the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, these territories, unlike Crimea, cannot be isolated from the western part of Ukraine, except for the creation of a *"full-fledged border."* (Golts, 2014) In this regard, these actions are not a secret operation, for which a combination of several hundred mercenaries and SOF agents is sufficient but a completely traditional military operation with the organization of checkpoints at all more or less significant communications. At the same time, the absence of permanent Russian military installations and personnel on the territory of Donetsk and

Luhansk complicated the invisible penetration of the aggressor's special operations forces into the enemy's territory (Golts, 2014). This circumstance became one of the decisive enablers in the Crimean scenario. The presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet with military bases and thousands of Russian servicemen, whose number in 2012 was 14,000, served as a *"Trojan horse"* to ensure the mobility and concentration of the invading force (Yuferev, 2012; Dayspring, 2015, p. 142). Obviously, such distinctive features of the Crimean operation may not always be characteristic of other potential target areas and apply automatically to any situation. Despite the limitations of this approach, the various results of hybrid models in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine reveal the crucial importance to take into consideration the unique local features of the attacked region, in particular, the geographical characteristics and the presence of military infrastructure or other additional support for the aggressor forces while determining the choice the military operation strategy within a full-scale hybrid war.

During the two hybrid campaigns, Russia initially strived to follow a similar pattern using the same hybrid tools (Racz, 2015, p. 60). Nevertheless, in contrast to the Crimean operation, their effectiveness in Donbas was significantly reduced, which, as a result, affected Moscow's ability to control the situation in the region and achieve its strategic goal. This was reasoned by the fact that successfully employing the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, *"when it exceeds the preparatory phase and an actual attack is launched,"* requires suddenness (surprise), timeliness, and speed (Racz, 2015, p. 73; Martsenyuk, 2016, p. 4). Russian action in Crimea was based on these three important elements of hybrid warfare. Neither the leadership in Kiev nor the West expected and were not ready for a Russian military intervention to seize the Crimean Peninsula, in large part because the aggressor's hybrid operations did not cross the target's thresholds of detection and the absence of a formal declaration of war. This tactical surprise was carried out at right time, which further increased the effect of confusion (see Chapter 2.1). With the escalation of the situation in the target country, exacerbated by the overthrow of Yanukovych and the weak legitimacy of the new Kiev government, combined with the West's *"little appetite for intervening"* in long-term conflicts, the Russian invasion was hidden behind another world event (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). Sochi Olympic Games served as a magnet to attract the attention of international observers and a plausible pretext for ensuring a higher level of security in the Russian region under the guise of military exercises (Kilinskas, 2016, p. 152). Thus, Moscow was able to hide its true intentions and to *"desensitize"* international observers to potential danger concerning the massive deployment of its military units on the border with Ukraine (Dayspring, 2015, p. 134). Since after the involvement of military means sooner or later hybrid warfare necessarily takes on an open character, the aggressor country must act quickly to establish facts on the ground, thus making a military

response from the attacked side difficult (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 28). Against the backdrop of the surprise factor and lack of clarity of the aggressor's goals, the demonstration of military superiority and the determination to use it through the Russian regular troops lined up on the border had a psychological effect on the government of the target country, namely, reduced its ability to respond in a timely manner and make adequate decisions (see Chapter 2.1.3). While the Ukrainian authorities were destabilized and focused their concern and attention on the potential threat to the country's capital, an operation was being carried out on the Crimean Peninsula to seize local administrative buildings and rapid deployment of unmarked Russian green men (see Chapter 2.1.5). When the aggressor's intentions became more open and the actions more obvious *"the acute danger of an overwhelming conventional attack from Russia"* triggered (Racz, 2015, p. 74). The experience of the two models pointed out that the deterrent, like most hybrid warfare means, in the attack phase is dependent on speed. The longer time elapses from the moment the military component is used to intimidate the target, the greater the chance that the attacked country, due to various circumstances, will be able to adapt, its susceptibility will decrease, and, accordingly, the deterrent effect will weaken. The attack phase of the hybrid campaign in Crimea lasted less than a month, during this short period Kiev's freedom of action was limited, it could not or did not dare to react quickly to the Russian attacks carried out on several fronts.

All of these above-mentioned elements were, to one degree or another, ignored at the active stage of the hybrid campaign in Donbas. As the takeover process of the peninsula drew to a completion, Moscow decided to "secretly" re-implement practically the similar pattern and use almost the same methods in southeastern Ukraine, *"under the complete awareness of the government in Kiev and of those in the international community who were not looking for alternative realities."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 168) As a result, a natural regularity triggered — as soon as the shadow work of the hybrid war mechanism becomes clear, it ceases to operate effectively (McKew, 2017). Although the Ukrainian leadership was not able to instantly mobilize all its available resources at that time to resist the actions of the aggressor, it began to undertake a number of gradual, small but important steps in the kinetic and, after that, in the cognitive space (see Chapters 2.2.3-2.2.5).

The Russian regular forces concentrated on the border with a neighboring country no longer possessed the same deterrent power as during the previous operation, since once the effect of confusion disappeared and Kiev realized that Moscow was not going to attack due to the expected high political costs, it was decided to launch ATO to liberate the territories seized by pro-Russian separatists (Racz, 2015, p. 65). Although by that time the special units deployed to the East of Ukraine had managed to establish control over public administration buildings and

information infrastructure in some cities, they faced serious operational obstacles (see Chapter 2.2.5). SOF is by definition a military means that provides the first decisive action *"to attain political goals in non-combat settings."* (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 27) Relying on speed and the factor of surprise, the Special Forces become a tool of hybrid warfare, primarily when conducting covert operations, often involving the use of *"puppet forces"* behind enemy lines (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 27; Mikhailova, 2019). While during the annexation of Crimea, Russian SOF acted quickly *"in accordance with the strategy to minimize bloodshed"* mainly in two directions: CA and SR and were quite successful, in the East of Ukraine their range of tasks has become wider over time, ranging from SR, CA, MA and ending with DA (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015, p. 26; Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 31). Russian Spetsnaz had to provide military support and participate in hostilities along with irregular local formations, which, as a result, affected their tactical effectiveness. In addition to the fact that over time, the problems of coordinating the efforts of various special agencies, and ensuring their control over mercenaries, volunteers and paramilitary groups, *"which officially do not obey anyone,"* became more and more obvious, *"a well-known military history lesson was repeated on the fields of Eastern Ukraine: the irregular rebel forces could not stand against the advancing Ukrainian regular military."* (Mikhailova, 2019; Racz, 2015, p. 67) After solving the problem of legitimacy, electing Poroshenko as President of Ukraine, the ATO gained momentum, and in order to prevent the defeat of its unconventional mix of special forces and local "separatists," Moscow was forced to launch an undeclared massive intervention of its regular forces in the conflict zone, thus transforming hybrid warfare into a more conventional protracted war (Racz, 2015, p. 67).

The activity of the united rebel groups and special units in Donbas took place in combination with an increase in the intensity of propaganda operations, *"disruption of the normal information infrastructure,"* and the organization of confrontation in cyberspace (Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 32). Through their strong positions not only in Ukraine but also in the West, the Russian media *"by surrounding the conflict with confusion and controversy"* were able to *"blur the perception of events"* both on the Crimean Peninsula and in the East of Ukraine (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 21; Racz, 2015, p. 81). In terms of achieving goals within Ukraine, Russian propaganda was not universally persuasive; it rather achieved pro-Russian sentiment in Crimea than in the *"surrounding oblasts"* with similar linguistic characteristics (Radin, 2017, p. 10). This could be partly attributable to the duration of the Russian information campaign in Crimea, which was carried out throughout almost all the years of Ukraine's independence (Gorbulin, 2020). However, the main reason for the partial success of the information component of the hybrid warfare in the DPR and LPR related to the fact that in the absence of the initial element of suddenness and the

effect of confusion, *"the credibility of the side applying disinformation starts to decline dramatically"* and such operations become time sensitive (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 17). Besides the problem that over time, more and more errors, poorly falsified evidence, and contradictions were found in various Russian media sources, the attacked country adapted and took some retaliatory measures in the information sphere, which further strengthened the limitations of Russia's propaganda machinery within Ukraine (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 18). The RF faced a similar problem in cyberspace. Cyberattacks are one of the most powerful hybrid warfare tools that are used against the government and commercial infrastructure to incapacitate or hinder the operation of critical enemy targets, as well as gain unauthorized access to sensitive information (Martsenyuk, 2016, p. 4). Secrecy is one of the strengths of these operations, however, the events in Ukraine have once again confirmed that when the aggressor and his intentions become apparent, it is easier for the target country to detect and deter cyberattacks (Parshin, 2019).

The consequence of non-compliance with the elements of surprise, timeliness, and speed during the implementation of the attack phase of the second model of hybrid war was not only the attacked party's firm intentions for self-defense but also the involvement of "allies" in the conflict. Although the West was not ready to guarantee the protection of the target country, as in the case of the Crimean operation, it was already able to provide indirect and direct support, thereby creating obstacles to the aggressor's actions. Thus, following the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, the Western powers not only strengthened their sanctions against Russia, repeatedly intervened in energy issues between the two countries but also provided military-technical and economic assistance to Ukraine, thereby hindering Moscow's efforts to subordinate Kiev (see Chapters 2.2.3-2.2.4). As has been outlined, without foreign aid, Ukraine would not have been able to resist Russian economic and energy pressure and continue to fight for Donbas (see Chapter 2.2.4).

In turn, Russia would also not have been able to maintain its proxy forces and continue the conflict in eastern Ukraine without using legal and diplomatic tools of hybrid warfare. During hybrid campaigns in Ukraine, Moscow challenged several interpretations of the law and international norms. One of the Kremlin's legal arguments to justify its military invasion of the Crimean Peninsula was that after the unconstitutional coup and the ouster of the legitimate President Yanukovych, Ukraine lost its status as a sovereign state, and thus, *"all previous Russian-Ukrainian treaties were now null and void."* (Seth, 2015, p. 72) Furthermore, the Kremlin adhered to the position that Russia fulfilled its moral obligations and acted in accordance with the law on the protection of civil liberties and the lives of compatriots abroad (Dayspring, 2016, p. 24). While this view is condemned in the West, the difference in the interpretation of international law has not prevented Russia from using its legal claims to succeed in hybrid warfare and focusing the

attention of international actors on *"how the law should be interpreted instead of actually doing something about the situation in Ukraine."* (Seth, 2015, p. 72) Similarly, referring to one of the basic principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, namely the nation's right to self-determination, Putin decided to create an appearance of legitimacy through democratic processes to ensure strategic stabilization and consolidate the results achieved during the hybrid campaigns (Znak, 2019; Racz, 2015, p. 64). However, the constructed legitimacy through the referendum proved to be more effective in the case of Crimea. Despite the fact that the international community and the Ukrainian government condemned the referendums in both cases and did not recognize them as valid in any sense, in the Crimean scenario this could not change the fait accompli on the ground. (Racz, 2015, p. 64) In Crimea, the aggressor acted suddenly and quickly in accordance with minimizing violence, in the conflict zone there was massive operational support and partly the support of the local population. In addition to the fact that the Ukrainian leadership was destabilized and could not resist Russia's actions, it as the West was confused by Kremlin disinformation operations, which presented events as *"self-determination and not overt subjugation."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 127) A slightly different situation occurred in the East of Ukraine. Russia was able to provide in the *"occupied territories"* an alternative center of political power but built entirely on the rule of arms (Racz, 2015, p. 62).

Another *"legal claim"* the RF made is the denial that its regular forces were used in Donbas. This allowed the aggressor country to avoid *"being bound by the strict use of force definitions employed by the UN Charter."* (Seth, 2015, p. 71) While there is sufficient evidence of the Russian military presence in the occupied territories, the country's leadership has consistently refuted any allegations, arguing that the soldiers probably are *"volunteers"* and at the same time continuing to mask the involvement of military personnel to maintain the credibility of its narrative for further denial (RIA News , 2014). It should be noted that if the West had much more determination to resist the destruction of the Ukrainian state, the Russian interpretation of the law and the dissimulation spread by the Kremlin would not be so effective in minimizing the political costs of military aggression (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 21). Another important above-military means to which the aggressor resorted was *"the ploy of a diplomatic resolution to the conflict."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 166) Since Russia did not declare a formal war, de facto the country is not a party to the conflict which allowed it to participate as a mediator in resolving the Ukrainian crisis, thereby playing on the preferences of the Western powers and escalating/ de-escalating military actions through negotiations and the Minsk agreements (Midttun, 2019). This kind of tactics, both serving Russian foreign policy interests by reducing the probability of further tightening of Western

sanctions and the risk of the North Atlantic Alliance being an active adversary militarily, and allows not to lose in the East of Ukraine.

Thus, Russia's actions in Ukraine have become meaningful examples of the success and limitations of hybrid warfare tactics. Two models demonstrated that the goals pursued by hybrid attacker are achieved not only through an overall plan or systematic impact on the enemy's vulnerabilities using a whole range of hybrid means. Indeed, the preparation and attack phases are largely based on exploiting the inherent weaknesses of the target country, and the more closely connected and interwoven a country's relations with a targeted country, *"the more potential starting points there are for hybrid methods of warfare."* (Schmid, 2019) By synchronizing at the preparatory stage of the first and second hybrid models its hardly visible or difficult to identify as an aggressive act operations, the RF while remaining below the detection threshold, was able to increase economic influence on the targeted central government, create political and cultural organizations loyal to Kremlin in two regions, establish contacts with local politicians and decisionmakers*,* build strong media presence, stimulate internal ethnic and anti-government contradictions, create a fifth column within the Ukrainian local security and armed forces (see Chapters 2.1.3-2.1.4, 2.2.3-2.2.4). Subsequently, focusing on the presence of most of the prerequisites for launching the attack phase of the hybrid war, Russia began to sequentially implement a similar pattern in Crimea and southeastern Ukraine. However, in contrast to the first case where the Russian hybrid war reached the third phase - stabilization and consolidation of the results, in the East of Ukraine its limits were demonstrated, namely when the use of military, non-military means and minimal participation of the military component at the actual attack phase was not able to provide the delivered strategic goals in the target country and, as a result, the aggressor had to resort to the format of a more *"traditional military invasion."* (Gorbulin, 2020) Thus, there are several reasons for the different outcomes of the two hybrid campaigns. The strategy of the military operation to seize Crimea fully consistent with the unique attributes of the peninsula, which significantly helped overcome Kiev's military resistance. Success was also ensured by compliance with the critical elements during the aggressor's offensive action. The lack of suddenness, timeliness, and speed, as demonstrated by the Russian experience in the Donbas, triggers a chain reaction that can reduce the effectiveness of hybrid instruments used and increase the resilience of the attacked country, including through internal and external support.

4. PROPOSED MEASURES FOR IMPROVING THE ABILITY OF STATE TO FACE HYBRID WARFARE

Since the onset of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the North Atlantic Alliance has been sought to record Russia's use of the capabilities and methods of hybrid warfare. The concern of NATO command arises from the potential danger that the RF could repeat the Ukrainian scenario in other regions and especially in the Baltic States (Mirtahir, 2020). Therefore, in 2015 the Alliance developed a *"strategy on its role in countering hybrid warfare to help address these threats."* It mainly consists of ensuring the sufficient preparation of the Alliance and Allies to defense and deter hybrid attacks by increasing NATO's readiness and military ability to respond quickly (NATO, 2019). There is also active cooperation between NATO and the EU within the framework of countering hybrid threats. The *European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* (Hybrid COE), founded in 2017 in Helsinki, plays a unique role in facilitating this cooperation (Hagelstam, 2018). Similar initiatives are being developed by other centers of excellence, including the *Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence* in Riga, the *Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Vilnius*, the *Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence* in Tallinn (NATO, 2019). A common platform for the fight against hybrid warfare is a major effort, since a hybrid attack exploiting the target country's various inherent weaknesses may require *"not only sovereign action but also common planning and a common response."* (Hagelstam, 2018) National vulnerabilities can have consequences that go beyond borders, and as a consequence, attacks carried out by an aggressor against a vulnerable node in one country, for instance, against interconnected electric grids or transport systems, would inevitably have consequences for other countries where such weaknesses did not exist (Hagelstam, 2018).

In order to pull in the same direction and effectively counter non-linear hostile acts, a common understanding of hybrid war and its relationship with international law governing the use of force is needed (Hagelstam, 2018; Cantwell, 2017). As noted by many experts, an essential feature of hybrid warfare is the virtual absence of a line between the state of war and peace. This leads to the fact that many of the above-military and non-military components of hybrid war operate outside the scope of international law. Even in the case of the use of military means, international responsibility for such acts is difficult to prove and is *"extremely rarely brought to the final stage of implementation."* (Saznova, 2017, p. 184) Another important point is that the overwhelming majority of modern international legal documents were developed with a view to interstate conflicts but not to internal confrontation (Saznova, 2017, p. 184). Therefore, the use of international norms and principles by a hybrid attacker, such as the right of nations to self-

determination to justify their actions leads to the emergence of multiple disagreements and double standard, and thus cannot be effectively punished (Seth, 2015, p. 72; Saznova, 2017, p. 184). In this regard, hybrid warfare implies not only *"the need for serious large-scale international action to improve the rule of law of war and international humanitarian law"* but also the introduction of severe punitive measures aimed at *"modifying behavior and then isolating and undermining the regimes of aggressor states."* (Saznova, 2017, p. 183; Dayspring, 2015, p. 180) Addressing legal aspects of hybrid conflict requires proper recognition of hybrid campaigns as tantamount to aggression and more robust theorizing on what hybrid measures constitute coercive intervention. In this context, efforts such as the establishment of Hybrid COE are important contributions with regard to the possible subsequent incorporation of the established lexicon of international law into the growing body of work related to hybrid warfare, which is a major step towards *"clearing the fog of war in the gray zone."* (Cantwell, 2017)

In countering hybrid threats, it also should be taken into account that they are not only diverse but also aimed at the exploitation of *"specific vulnerabilities of specific targets."* (Hagelstam, 2018) This means that most national vulnerabilities are country-specific and the primary responsibility for responding to hybrid threats and attacks rests with the potentially targeted government. Countermeasures should include both *"passive"* elements, such as increased resilience to surprise or confusion, and more active ones including robust measures to prepare and protect the structures and functions which are convenient for hybrid attacks (Hagelstam, 2018). In this regard, the importance of the sufficiency of measures to enhance the ability of states to resist hybrid war cannot be overstated. Considering a number of domains in which an aggressor is waging a modern hybrid war, the most widespread fault lines and the inherent national weaknesses that could be exploited, the following general measures are proposed:

• *Improve domestic democratic legitimacy and increase support of the government.* In this respect, a democratic political structure, well-functioning public administration along, domestic accountability (transparency, enforceability, answerability) along with the rule of law, proper rights guaranteed to ethnic, national, religious, and other minorities are closely connected to the stability of the state (Racz, 2015, p. 92; OECD Development Assistance Committee, 2013).

• *Counter the threat of corruption* through an integrated approach based on building integrity, reducing vulnerability and increasing the robustness of law enforcement regimes, primarily to deter corruption, understanding the motives of those who permit and engage in corruption, and taking decisive measures to deter and punish the corrupt (Allen, 2019, p. 3).

• *Strengthen social cohesion of the country.* This measure concerns not only avoiding the creation of socially excluded areas, for instance, based on social status, religion or ethnicity, while pursuing active government policies but also the implementation of activities to promote social inclusion programs, reduce social inequality, creation of jobs and increasing access to the education system, and other corresponding activities (Jagello 2000, 2015, p. 14).

• *Diversify economic and energy sectors.* Potential victims of hybrid warfare must reduce their external dependency on any other single state for different resources or products and ensure multiple sources of supply from different states. The effective, albeit long-term, measure to eliminate energy leverage may be the development of renewable source projects for power production.

• *Enhance informational resilience of the state.* The country's capacity to respond to an aggressor's information operations depends upon the existence of an effective media strategy to counter hybrid threats with a clear definition of their source, and a special department responsible for identifying fake and subversive news. The main functions of this institution should include continuous monitoring of the country's information sphere, including social networks and the blogosphere in order to identify disinformation and subversive content, block negative and provide truthful information, demonstrate the main propagandists of fake news, and create public registers for unreliable/ suspicious sources (Roev, 2020).

• *Provide information and educational activities among the population concerning hybrid warfare and possible means to counteract them.* This initiative should be based on acquainting the public with the activities of a potential hybrid attacker, for instance, networks of influence which an aggressor constructs in the attacked-to-be country and with their mode of operation (Jagello 2000, 2015).

• *Systematically develop cybersecurity.* The increasing importance of cyberspace requires a comprehensive result-oriented governmental approach to addressing cyber threats. Concrete results in assuring cybersecurity are mainly achieved through special departments dealing with deterring and responding to attacks, ensuring a high level of protection for e-mail, websites and internal networks of strategic institutions by installing preeminent antivirus software. Given the constantly changing and improving nature of cyber threats, there is a great need for systematic updating of cybersecurity means and methods, constant investment in research and development of specialized software and hardware, continuing education and training of military and civilian cybersecurity specialists, and other corresponding measures (Gattarov, 2013, p. 533).

• *Strengthen military potential and ability to react in a quick and agile way.* To counter the military component of hybrid warfare, the state must ensure the balanced development of all branches of the armed forces, have the advantage in the fields of interception, surveillance, electronic warfare, and communications, as well as build military capabilities that can be used in all types of expeditionary operations. The army and security forces should have increased mobility to respond quickly to local conflicts of a non-linear nature and to carry out counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism missions (Roev, 2020).

• *Adopt a legal basis for countering hybrid threats capable of ensuring the suppression of subversive actions in relation to the country's political system.* This measure implies the creation of legislative conditions to increase the flexibility and ability of various security services to take independent actions; and to reinforce police forces and state security agencies by military personnel to combat unidentified armed groups on the national territory in the absence of an official declaration of war (Jagello 2000, 2015, p. 14).

• *Conduct continuous intelligence and counterintelligence activities.* Continuous reconnaissance aimed at obtaining reliable information for analyzing risks, which take many forms, should be integrated into the work of the relevant intelligence agencies. Such an analysis should become an integral part of the risk management system in the political and military spheres, in the field of ensuring national security. At the same time, target states must invest in rigorous counterintelligence activities to identify, isolate, and remove foreign agents from their political, military, and intelligence agencies (Bartosh, 2018).

• *Establish a dedicated body to predict hybrid threats and plan responses as part of a unified strategy to counter hybrid warfare.* The analytical activities of such an institution should be based on the collected information, exchange, and assessment of hybrid threats for the timely detection of enemy preparations for hybrid warfare, and, in particular, its attempts to launch subversive activities (Gogolashvili, et al., 2019, pp. 10-12).

• *Adopt a mentality of vigilance.* This means that first and foremost, there is a need to identify and continually update the list of countries that can act as potential sponsors of the hybrid warfare, and focus attention on them already in peacetime, including monitoring for indicators of an offensive strategy of potential hybrid attackers. Reduce to a minimum the required level of economic, diplomatic, cultural, and military relations with countries that have been assessed as potential aggressors and methodically draw up plans for defensive and offensive countermeasures against these actors in all areas related to hybrid warfare (Dayspring, 2015, pp. 181-183).

CONCLUSION

Within this thesis the author, drawing off the concept of hybrid warfare, conducted a comparative analysis of Russian hybrid campaigns in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. This analysis consisted of three main directions: (1) analysis of Russia's strategic goals and necessary preconditions for the use of hybrid warfare, which were characteristic in two cases; (2) analysis of conditions and methods of using above-military, non-military, and military means of hybrid warfare and their effectiveness in implementing operational and strategic goals in Crimea and Donbas; (3) analysis of economic and political ramifications of Russia's hybrid campaigns in Ukraine.

The Russian intervention in Crimea and then in Eastern Ukraine became an important moment for the discourse on hybrid warfare and threats. They provided hybrid warfare theorists a new model case replacing the previously favored case of the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006. The advancement of states to the forefront of the hybrid concept led to its change and extension which mainly associated with the aspect of strategically innovative use of the ambiguity achieved through the use of non-traditional means as the main aggressor's tools of power in hybrid warfare. For an aggressor state, hybrid war means the most acceptable and covert way to achieve its goals through the use of non-military, above-military and military means without crossing the threshold of war as a violent clash of kinetic forces, thereby limiting the possibility of retaliatory measures. Nevertheless, this work on the Ukrainian experience reveals, that the presence of favorable preconditions for the use of hybrid tactics does not imply that it will follow a standard pattern or expected way and, as a consequence, does not guarantee its success as a matter of course.

The only fully successful case of the Russian hybrid war in Ukraine is the first model implemented in the Crimean Peninsula, while the second in the East of Ukraine was able to achieve only partial success. Russia's maneuvers in Crimea were a brilliant example of hybrid tactics that allowed during the attack phase to annex the peninsula *"in one breath and largely bloodless,"* thereby minimizing the risk of an international military response (Polubota, 2014). Apart from the fact that the return of the long-lost territory significantly increased Putin's domestic popularity, it ruined Ukraine's chances of joining NATO or the EU. Furthermore, by annexing Crimea, Moscow eliminated the threat to the long-term basing of the Black Sea Fleet and privatized the unused gas and oil fields surrounding the peninsula, which further reduced Ukraine's ability to free from Russian energy dependence and partially offset the economic costs of the hybrid campaign. As demonstrated in Chapter 2.3, the West's reaction to the annexation of Crimea, in contrast to subsequent actions in Donbas, was limited to relatively soft sanctions and some steps to isolate the

RF diplomatically. The attack phase of the second hybrid campaign initially unfolded in the South-East of Ukraine, but quickly dwindled to the eastern part of the country, and a few months later Russia's hybrid efforts evolved into more traditional warfare with a mix of proxies, SOF, and regular forces under an *"uninterrupted campaign of denial."* (Dayspring, 2015, p. 168) The incitement of an armed conflict in Donbas was the Kremlin's enforced decision, which further removed Ukraine's chances of becoming a European ally but strengthened the country's incentive for European integration. Throughout the conflict, the actions of the Russian government reflected that the original strategic objective of the Donbas campaign was Ukraine's federalization as a means of additional guarantees to prevent the country's integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures and to reduce the country's ability to break free from Russia's orbit. However, the ideal option with a radical constitutional reform was not fulfilled and Moscow was unable to ensure the special status of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. As the military forms of war became the dominant effort in the East of Ukraine, Russia has to constantly endure high direct and indirect financial costs associated with military obligations to its separatist formations. Notwithstanding the RF was able to fragment the neighboring country without needing to admit guilt until much later, after the escalation of tensions in Donbas, the severity of anti-Russian sanctions increased significantly, cooperation with the EU practically ceased and the idea of Russia being a threat and an enemy to NATO has returned. At the same time, the perpetuated conflict in eastern Ukraine is a steady reminder of Russia's imperialist aspirations, inspiring the apprehension and hedging behavior among post-Soviet countries which drives them primarily to balance and contain the RF.

As for the first research question concerning the reasons for varying degrees of success of the two hybrid campaigns, it can be argued that the success of hybrid tactics depends not only on the presence of the necessary conditions for its application but also on appropriate consideration for the specific features of the target region and critical elements in the preliminary planning of offensive operations. The prerequisites for using hybrid warfare represent a range of enemy national vulnerabilities that are systematically exploited through the use of above-military, non-military, and military means to weaken the target country. In the experience of the two hybrid models, the phases of strategic, political, and operational preparation and the actual attack are largely based on exploiting the adversary's inherent weaknesses, and the more closely connected the relationship between countries, the more potential starting points for hybrid methods. Although, the cases of Crimea and Donbas were characterized by most of the similar and even shared prerequisites that Russia actively exploited for many years, remaining below the detection threshold, a careful look at events in Ukraine discloses that the successful operation of the hybrid

mechanism depends on the presence of a number of specific advantageous circumstances and features of a potential conflict zone. In this regard, the unique attributes of Crimea, in particular its geographic characteristics and established Russian military presence on the peninsula, helped to limit sources of information covering the takeover and overcome the potential resistance of the attacked country, thereby further increasing the chances of success of this operation. In the case of Eastern Ukraine, Russia benefited only in terms of the geographic location of the target region, however, a common uncontrolled border with the attacker largely met the necessary logistics requirements of the hybrid campaign than served as an additional favorable factor for operations. During the analysis, the author of this thesis came to the conclusion that successfully employing the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, namely when the attack phase is launched, is bound not only to the numerous adversary's structural weaknesses and specific favorable features of the conflict zone, but also the complying with main critical elements such as surprise, timeliness, and speed. From the beginning, operations to seize Crimea and incite a separatist uprising in Eastern Ukraine were carried out in a similar pattern using almost the same tools of hybrid inventory. However, in the contrast to the first hybrid warfare model, the three above-mentioned elements were ignored during the active phase of the hybrid campaign in Donbas. Surprise, timeliness, and speed are interlinked elements that create various effects capable to overwhelm the enemy's ability to assess a situation and to respond effectively, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the combined and simultaneous use of various tools of power projection. The non-fulfillment or partially met of these requirements, as was the case in the East of Ukraine, causes a chain reaction that can reduce the effectiveness of hybrid instruments used and strengthen the intentions of the attacked country to repel the aggressor and subsequently increase the resilience of the attacked country, including through the efforts of a third party. When the shadow works of the hybrid mechanism cease to exist and it becomes clear how the hybrid tactic operates, the synchronized use of the hybrid means is no longer able to create synergistic effects. As a consequence, in order to suppress the resistance of the adversary and achieve its objectives, the aggressor resorts to an increase in the degree of intensity of the different means used. In this way, during the hybrid warfare in Donbas, Russia not only crossed the target's thresholds of detection and response but also the line of war as a violent clash of kinetic forces.

The second research question asked about measures that states can take to improve their ability to face hybrid warfare. The tactics of hybrid warfare depend on country and region, however, as noted above, it is built on the use of the country's vulnerabilities, the shortcomings of its political system, governance, economy, military sphere, and society. If an aggressor country cannot detect sufficient weaknesses, then a full-scale attack cannot be launched, which means that

hybrid warfare never reaches the second, attack stage. From this perspective, most national vulnerabilities are country-specific and the primary responsibility for countering hybrid threats and attacks rests with the potential target state. While the recommendations presented in this thesis are based on the limited concrete experiences gained in Ukraine, they cover three essential domains of hybrid warfare and the most widespread fault lines and inherent weaknesses of the target country, which, especially in the context of globalization, to varying degrees can be characteristic of other countries. In this regard, measures to combat corruption, improve the functioning of public administration, strengthen social cohesion, and performing educational activities among the civil population concerning hybrid warfare and possible means to counteract them are of critical importance to a potential target country. Particular attention should be devoted to the provision of modern means of defense against cyber and information warfare and strengthening the military potential and ability to react in a quick and agile way. Another essential lesson to be learned from the events in Ukraine is that an appropriate legislative framework needs to be established to effectively counter anti-constitutional deeds, separatism, inciting social antagonism, and other actions that can serve as the basis for foreign efforts in hybrid warfare. At the same time, it should be noted that the timely detection and undertaking swift action on preventing attempts of foreign penetration is closely related to the continuous conduct of intelligence and counterintelligence activities and the existence of a dedicated body predicting hybrid threats and developing measures to respond to them. Ultimately, the first priority of any country in its efforts to counter hybrid threats must be to adopt a mentality of vigilance, which means a wary attitude towards offensive-realist, authoritarian states that can act as the sponsors of hybrid warfare.

To conclude, it can be stressed that albeit the scope of the research was limited to two hybrid warfare cases in Ukraine, the results have a certain significance in terms of understanding the implementation of full-scale hybrid warfare. They reveal that hybrid warfare is not only the melding of a variety of different tools of above-military, non-military, and military means simultaneously but also a distinct series of stages relying on, and dependent upon, specific means, necessary prerequisites, unique characteristics of conflict zones, and critical elements to achieve goals.

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