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HYBRID WAR: IT'S JUST THE BEGINNING...¹

In January 2015 we presented our opinion on the Russian aggression, its forms and geopolitical foundations. We also pointed out to the key steps Ukraine should take to cope with the consequences of the hybrid war. The eventful year 2015 not only did not refute our projections, but also deepened and strengthened the case for some of them. Moreover, we can state that the hybrid warfare as a form of Russia's aggressive solution to its geopolitical issues went beyond Ukraine. It continues developing in every possible way, becomes more and more sophisticated and spreads out to new battlegrounds. Thus a kind of a prophecy, made by the President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė in 2014, is currently fulfilling: "If a terrorist state that is engaged in open aggression against its neighbor is not stopped, then that aggression might spread further into Europe." Indeed, it did spread further. In the most intricate forms.

Hybrid warfare: first outcomes and new directions

The preponderance of the hybrid warfare as Russia's primary method of warfare for the long years to come is also evident in the new article by General Gerasimov, entitled "On Syria's experience". This is the very General Gerasimov who provided the first public articulation of Russia's vision of modern conflicts as the hybrid warfare in the beginning of 2013. His new article is based on his conference speech at the Academy of Military Science on February 27, 2016. Gerasimov does not present any fundamentally new points there (as compared to his 2013 speech). Still, he very clearly outlines key priorities of the Russian vision of the hybrid warfare's goals (in this article hybrid war is referred to as "blitzkrieg of the 21st century"): "achieving political goals with minimal armed pressure on the enemy." However, in line with the Russian mainstream, Gerasimov attributes all this exclusively to "malevolent West." Here we are obviously dealing with the psychological phenomenon of "projection": attributing the opponent with one's own (negative) features.

Gerasimov says that the goals of the "hybrid warfare" should be achieved through undermining enemy's military and economic potential, applying information and psychological pressure, actively supporting domestic opposition, using guerilla and diversionary methods.

He also rightly notes that in contemporary world the ability of the armed forces to conduct quick and effective operations on any battleground, especially unconventional one, matters more than their size. This trend is further amplified by the quick rise of non-military methods of warfare: "the

¹ The original article in Ukrainian has been published in the Ukrainian weekly "Dzerkalo tyzhnya" on March 25, 2016. http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/gibridnaya-voyna-vse-tolko-nachinaetsya-_.html

complex use of political, economic, information, and other non-military measures, which are implemented with reliance on military force.”

What is more, it is difficult to disagree with one of Gerasimov’s key conclusions: “combination of the traditional and hybrid methods is already typical of every armed conflict. And while the latter can be used without explicit use of force, classic military operations can no longer be successful without hybrid ones.” And indeed, Russia openly develops and implements similar approaches into practice and has no slightest intention to stop. Russia actively polishes this new type of aggression, manipulates its components, carefully (not always though) dosing them in each specific case and checking what and where works efficiently, making adjustments to the direction of the strike underway. In fact, Russia – for the first time in a while – managed to transform the limitations of its strategic culture (tactical sagacity combined with minimal strategic planning and predictions of the long-term consequences of actions) into a strategic advantage (since the objective of Russia on the global level is de-facto a “global anarchy”, which Russia believes to be the desirable state of world geopolitical space). Today we can identify several key components that correlate to the activities pursued within the framework of “hybrid wars” in current Russian practice, which can be further combined into three large groups.

1. Traditional military means (use of regular military units and weapons as well as special operations forces).
2. Quasi-military activities (creation and support of illegal armed groups, support and radicalization of separatist movements, formal and informal private military companies).
3. Operations of non-military influence, especially in terms of special information operations and “active measures” (including economic pressure, operations in cyberspace, diplomacy, manipulating information space).

Within those three groups Russia adjusts its actions to apply hybrid attack techniques to specific countries or regions. In each specific case at different stages a particular group is preferred, which depends on current military, political and economic situation. Moreover, Russia succeeds in consciously (or rather unconsciously) achieving synergetic effect in different areas of hybrid confrontation intensifying certain forms of hybrid warfare in other arenas. However, as it was repeatedly said by various experts, there is nothing fundamentally new in each particular element of a hybrid war. What in fact is rather new is an elaborate interrelation of all asymmetric methods used and the intensity of their use to achieve strategic goals.

Nowadays we are witnessing at least three ongoing large-scale “hybrid” operations, which are very similar despite a certain difference in external representation: Syria (Turkey), European Union, Ukraine.

The hybrid context of Syrian knot: prevalence of the military component

Due to Russia’s intervention, Syrian conflict - much alike Ukrainian - has entered a lengthy phase of sluggish negotiations. Given quite a tentative nature of deliverables following the negotiations between the US and Russia (similarly to Ukraine, the ceasefire regime in Syria is

rather fictitious), the task for Russia remains the same as the one in Ukraine - to “freeze” the conflict if Moscow is unable to benefit from its solution.

Russia’s interference into Syrian conflict that lasted since 2011 was not sudden, but drastic and systematic. Nevertheless, in contrast to the aggression against Ukraine, Russia openly and immediately started to use its armed forces (aircraft, missiles). It is plausible that it is a result of scrutinizing the Russia’s actions in Ukraine. After all on March 1, 2014 Ukrainian ex-president Yanukovich, who had already been hiding in Russia at that time, addressed Putin with a request to intervene on Ukraine’s territory. At that time Russia did not carry out direct invasion, entrusting paramilitary units with the role of vanguard instead. As a result, Russia is still compelled to officially conceal and deny its military presence in the east of Ukraine. It seems that a decision was taken to exercise different approach in Syria - declaring Russian presence right away.

Generally, Syrian campaign was based on the use of conventional weapons and special forces troops. However, Russia did not fully abandon the use of “militia” and Russian “little green men” – private military companies. What is more, mercenaries for Syria were recruited among those fighting for “DPR” and “LPR” with a promise of higher salary, official status and advantages of being a “liberator of the Syrian people”. Information (non-military) component has been virtually absent in Syria (due to the specifics of military and political background). Still that was not the case of so called “active measures.” Especially, while Russian intelligence units are ever-present in Syria in large numbers and experts are making intelligent judgments regarding ties between Russian special forces and ISIS militants.

Therefore in Syria Russia has de facto accomplished what can be described as an almost perfect “hybrid operation”: a number of certain positive results for present Russian foreign policy were achieved at a minimal (military) cost. At the same time, Syrian campaign is not only the operation either to cover Russia’s own mistakes in other arenas (e. g. in Ukraine), obtain additional foreign policy bargaining chips or consolidate its positions in the Middle East (what seemed a bit problematic after Qaddafi’s fall and a series of “Arab Spring” revolutions), but also a demonstration of Russian Federation armed forces’ readiness to perform operations on the distant war theaters. In sum, Russia has quite actively started renewing the discourse of the Cold War: mainly, by permanent provocations by its armed forces all around the world. First of all, with its submarines (incidents with the Russian submarines in the waters of Sweden, the US, the UK, and France could be mentioned here) and aircraft (in 2015 only, NATO fighters accompanied more than 160 Russian aircraft, the Russian aviation permanently appeared “by a mistake” over territory of other states). This will periodically cause incidents similar to that with the SU-24 downed by Turkey, but generally, it will provoke accumulation of uncertainty and anxiety in the international security sphere.

Russia has transformed its “hybrid” war method from a testing mode to a daily (technological) level, which is proven by its reaction to the downed aircraft and the decision to escalate carefully but toughly the confrontation with the Turkish leadership. The whole set of pressure measures was implemented very soon that proved either it had been prepared in advance or it represented an established technique (these included introducing of quite extensive economic sanctions,

provoking the Turkish armed forces by permanent Turkey's airspace violations, making statements to support Kurds, etc.).

And it seems that Europe becomes an arena for Russia's new showcase operation (similar to the Crimean scenario).

Full-scale non-military operation in the EU: provoke as much hate and confusion as possible

The second hybrid operation is being carried out within the EU. Despite the fact that some experts predict an imminent large scale war for Eastern Europe and the whole world, its probability is still low. Nevertheless, the Baltic states have reasonable grounds to fear a "hybrid threat" from Russia and they treat this threat rationally, taking preventive measures and learning from the Ukrainian experience.

"The migrant crisis", caused by a huge amount of Middle East refugees expelled by the Syrian war moving in European direction, put the European capitals into a complicated situation and diverted their attention from other problems for a long time. In particular, this is due to the fact that this crisis, having allegedly external roots, has produced a whole series of much deeper internal crises. These include tough debates about internal and external borders, about who should settle refugees and in what manner, what to do with them in the future, how shall the EU react to the crisis in general (by strengthening unity on the common values ground or via isolationism). All this has sparked the rise of radical nationalistic groups and parties, which are already converting the crisis into political dividends. About half a year into the crisis, experts of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence openly point out that Russia is behind the migrant crisis (or being more precise, behind orchestrating crisis radicalization using right-wing organizations and various Russian "compatriots"): "Russia is establishing a network that can be controlled. You can use it as they have tried to do in Germany, combined with the legitimate issue of refugees, to undercut political processes in a very serious way... They are using Russian speakers, social media, trying to build on the existing fault lines. Use the far right narrative and exploit that." This issue became so urgent that according to media German Government officially assigned German intelligence and counter-espionage agencies to analyze whether Russia uses so called "active measures" against Germany.

In this regard, it is hard not to notice Russia's cumulative exploitation of the "migration crisis" potential for its own purpose, which is visible at all stages and levels. Meanwhile, the very fact of Russia's active airstrikes of north Syria bolsters migrant flows to Europe. Already in March 2016 General Breedlove connected airstrikes and ground campaign in Syria with growing intensity of migration to the EU in one logical chain.

Meanwhile, in Europe itself Russia effectively promotes xenophobic attitudes by using its media and proxy radical political parties and groups (financially controlled), many of which were created deliberately for intensifying this crisis (this looks very plausible in the case of NGO "Donetsk Republic", created already in 2005 by one of the current "DPR" leaders – A. Purgin). The most

vivid example of this smooth interplay (orchestrated by Moscow) between the “anti-European International” members was the case of “girl Liza” in Germany, which even caused international scandal and harsh remarks of the German Foreign Minister addressed to S. Lavrov.

In general, the issue of “anti-European International” created by the Kremlin within the EU is steadily rising to the top of the agenda of the European capitals. An official report on the this process by the Czech anti-espionage agency Security and Information Service comments it in the following way: “Russia creates the ideological structure in Europe, which could be recognized by the whole European political establishment – from the left extremists via populists to right wing extremists, which is considered to be the turn to the COMINTERN concept, created and coordinated by the Soviet Union.” The validity of abovementioned assessment is strongly supported by the Ukrainian journalists’ investigation regarding Czech President M. Zeman and his close circle. There are plenty of similar cases – from multiple instances of providing loans for the political activity of the French “National Front” to direct accusations of the members of Hungarian political party “Jobbik” on espionage on behalf of Russia. And this list is much longer. According to different assessments, the political projects (either certain politicians or experts), who act in favor of Russia’s foreign policy, are active in at least ten EU member states.

And most of these European states are quite important: besides the already mentioned France, Germany, and the Czech Republic, they also include Austria, Hungary, Greece, Italy and a few others.

What is revealing about members of this “International” (representing mostly far-right parties, though not exclusively as there is also a fairly large number of groups that have nothing to do with radicalism) is that they demonstrate similar “troglodyte” approach to the fundamental European concepts (like “political responsibility” or “political culture”), as do their Kremlin curators in their internal political process. Even direct accusations of getting funds from Moscow not only fail to render their leaders politically dead, but only add up to their public profile.

Of no lesser scale were the actions of the same “International” (or groups of “useful idiots”) regarding the initiative to hold a referendum on the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement in the Netherlands. Although it would be more appropriate to state that Dutch were being used in the dark”, “which is characteristic of the “active measures” practices.

The Dutch example is telling as it is dangerous for Europe from a strategic point of view, since Russia used strictly internal (referendum), legitimate mechanisms (including those of financial nature) for the achievement of its foreign policy goals. If this goes on, the entire internal social and political system logic might as well be discredited.

However, this corresponds to the general Russian ‘hybrid’ approach: using internal mechanisms and rhetoric of the West for its own destruction. Earlier, the same kind of attack was launched along the lines of ‘freedom of speech’ when, while appealing to the traditional values of freedom of speech, the Russian media (“Russia Today” in the first place) actively manipulated information while portraying such manipulations as “an alternative point of view”. Sometimes, the political correctness of Europe in this area results in grotesque situations. One such recent

example provided the participation of the representatives of a purely propagandist TV channel “Zvezda” (The Star) affiliated with the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation at the OSCE “Propaganda for Hatred and Freedom of the Media” conference.

When speaking about using (or rather indulging in some domestic developments) of legal mechanisms, which could lead to the collapse of the EU, one cannot but mention the situation related to the Great Britain and its Brexit referendum on the issue of exit from the European Union. Incited by Russian propagandist forces (both media and political), the Great Britain became deeply divided on this issue and the idea “to exit the EU” suddenly transformed from marginal to mainstream. The outcome is yet to be seen on June 23. In the meanwhile, in case of positive vote on Brexit, the situation will develop further: experts predict (or, in fact, even speak of it as inevitable) a referendum on independence of Scotland, intensified confrontation over the status of Northern Ireland, and the need for the EU to revise many of its approaches (including those related to security and regional economics). British journalists put it straight that the only winner of a “yes” in the Brexit referendum will be Vladimir Putin who, as pointedly remarked by a British journalist, is “stress testing the European Union.”

One cannot say that such Russia’s activities are fully ignored by the EU. For example, strategic communication units have been put in place and partially started to function within both the EU and NATO. However, this response appears to be rather reactive (e.g. dismissing the lies of Russian media or conducting general studies of current Russian narratives). The situation with possible proactive approaches is still ambiguous.

In the meanwhile, Russia’s activities amplify internal political tensions, aggravate economic problems and strengthen the influence of domestic destructive opposition in the EU. All combined, these are what Gerasimov has proclaimed to be the purposes of a “hybrid warfare.”

Russia’s goal in Europe was recently precisely described by James Sherr. According to him, the West does not doubt, it knows that Russia is going through economic difficulties in different spheres. Understandably, this cannot last a long time and the Russians are willing to find a handsome way out. But why they don’t stop shooting? For Sherr, the answer is pretty obvious – because Russians understand that the West is as weak politically as Russia is economically. They believe that political variable is decisive and that unity of the West, at least in its current form, is unstable and not lasting. Hence, if they win the political battle, all other issues, including related to the economy, will get settled as well. Sherr does not argue that they are right, but he believes this is how the situation is perceived in the Kremlin.

Still the question is much more acute: will Russia be able to destroy not only the European political solidarity on certain issues, but also the European structure as a whole? Unless counter measures are taken, it is quite possible that the answer is “yes.”

Until recently, unfortunately, Europe has not been able to muster the strength to address this threat in a comprehensive manner (as shown by local elections in Germany where representatives of the Alternative for Germany party, which is linked to the Kremlin, were able to gain seats in some local parliaments). And the problem is not that the attacks come from a variety of directions

and they are difficult to counter. The problem is rather that Europe (or at least a significant part of it) has yet to realize the new geopolitical reality where “peace” is not an equivalent to the “there-is-no-shooting” state-of-play. The destructive hybrid activity of Russia blurs the boundaries between “peace” and “war”. A specter of a ‘Cold War’, in its new shape, has not only come to the EU border, but has been very much active there, something the Europeans prefer not to notice. Or rather they are not ready to change their understanding of the reality in order to respond adequately to the obvious challenge. NATO’s attempts to tackle this issue have been more successful, although still not sufficient.

Ukraine: two years of countering hybrid warfare

For more than two years already, Ukraine has been countering the Russian-terrorist forces and Russia’s massive aggression in the form of “hybrid warfare.” In this timespan we have faced, probably, all its manifestations outlined at the beginning of this article: direct military aggression, use of subversive and reconnaissance groups, attacks of quasi-military structures (such as “militia” and ‘Cossacks’), constant incitement of separatist movements across all of Ukraine, economic pressure (through imposing of sanctions and phytosanitary control, demanding the payback of a USD 3 bln. loan issued to the Yanukovych regime, smuggling of the remaining industrial complex facilities from the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into the territory of the Russian Federation), diplomatic pressure on all levels (local, regional, and international), permanent information and psychological warfare, and finally, probably the first in the world successful cyber-attack against an object of critical infrastructure (Prykarpattiaoblenergo regional power distribution company).

One should not forget that the aggression became possible not only because Russia was physically capable of launching it. The weak reaction of the West to Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 gave rise to the sense of permissiveness and impunity in the minds of Russian leaders. Although, when one speaks about Russia’ hybrid warfare against Ukraine, it often appears overlooked that the aggression has been launched by a nuclear nation that reminds, every now and then, about its nuclear status to the rest of the world. Besides, it is hard to ignore a purely numerical superiority of the Russian Federation over Ukraine in both live force and weapons.

The goals of the Russian Federation regarding Ukraine, by all and large, have changed little in the last two years (in fact, this period is longer). They still comprise the same task of creating a territorial entity uncontrolled by Ukrainian government inside Ukraine, general destabilization of the social and political situation, economic exhaustion of Ukraine, redirecting Ukrainian resources from current issues, and blocking European integration processes.

Despite all this, Ukraine persists in actively countering the aggression. This does not mean any reduction of threats from the Russian Federation, though. The direct military aggression remains to be a real and tangible threat for Ukraine (possibly, for many Eastern European nations as well). It is worth mentioning that we, like our Western partners, with stubbornness better applied elsewhere, often continue to underestimate the changes that have taken place as a result of the

so-called Serdyukov reform. All the related scandals notwithstanding, many experts agree that the reform carried out by Serdyukov was the most encompassing one in Russian armed forces since 1930s. First of all (according to Gerasimov), there has been a gradual shift from a massive conscript army to high levels of permanent combat readiness of units and improvement of interoperability of forces. For instance, 23 cumbersome divisions have been replaced with 40 more maneuverable brigades capable of acting independently. A significant step has been made to get rid of the so-called “paper” units, staffed with carrier officers only serving with warehouses of unused weapons and military equipment. Combating that, a shift towards full-staff units has occurred. Efforts to create a contract army become more targeted, since it is impossible to train conscripts to adequately use the increasingly sophisticated military equipment, specifically in the context of rearmament plans of the Russia’s “State Armaments Program 2020.” Russians have also improved the interoperability of their forces through the creation of five strategic commands allowing for better control by field commanders of all groups of forces within their area of responsibility.

Minister Shoigu has only consolidated these changes. Drastic improvements in military training and rapidly increased frequency of exercises have been probably the most important achievements of the new Russia’s defense minister. When speaking about the exercises, one should remember that those are snap exercises and not show-exercises that are held with a half year advance notice. In this way, combat-like conditions for the exercises are created.

To summarize these changes, we can refer to the opinion of experts of the European Council on Foreign Relations: “For the first time, the Russian army had a pyramid structure, with few decision-makers at the top and more officers servicing the troops... While such high readiness levels have not yet been achieved, one has to bear in mind that before the reforms some Russian divisions needed about a year of preparation before deploying to Chechnya.” Outstanding success of this reform could be illustrated by the following: Moscow was able to maintain thousands of fully equipped troops at a constant state of readiness near the Russian-Ukrainian border for several months and simultaneously conduct military exercises with participation of 80 thousand of troops in other parts of the country.

Several important aspects withhold these transformations and give us time to find solutions and increase our defense capability:

- rampant corruption (one might even say “state creating” corruption, as in Stanislaw Lem’s artificial state of Lamblia). It is impossible to overcome it in modern Russia, because it is cementing the foundation of the current political regime;

- demographic crisis, which complicates any form (contract or enlistment) of new soldiers’ recruitment (which might lead to considering the need to reduce the sheer number of troops);

- ambitions of political and military leadership that do not always correspond to real economic capabilities of the state (this leads to various megalomaniac projects, whose number, however, is steadily decreasing).

However, these constraining elements should not spur the deceptive calm. The Russian army is not just the crowd of “cannon fodder” as some “experts” try to depict. It is the force which has to be taken into account and we must be ready to face it on the battlefield. Therefore, the development of defense and security sector, defense industry is an objective long-term priority for the country, regardless of the current political situation.

Besides, Russia does not give up hopes to forge a kind of an “army” using personnel of the “DPR” and “LPR”, based on the Russian model. The Southern District Command of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Reserve, which has been created to perform this task, works on that. Major command and staff positions in such a “military” corps have been occupied by Russian officers. Up to 40% of the ranks of these armies are the inhabitants of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Altogether, it allows Russia to keep forces sufficient to start offensive actions in the occupied territories.

However, Russia is not going to rely only on its own Armed Forces and proxy pseudo-armies in pseudo-republics - from year to year Russia is increasingly active in using its own private military companies and will continue to increasingly expand the practice. Ukrainian experts provide quite a detailed description of the exploitation of various PMCs by Russia (under the guise of “security firms” or their analogues) in numerous “hot spots” - from Bosnia to Ukraine and Syria.

The highest level of attention to this issue is corroborated by a discussion on this matter at a recent conference of the Academy of Military Sciences of the Russian Federation on February 27, 2016. And, most likely, the pressure of these various PMCs on Ukraine will only grow as well as the activities of different sabotage-reconnaissance groups. But only Ukraine should expect increased activity of these structures on its territory - many of Russia's neighbors (formally - allies) may “accidentally” find themselves under attack.

The attempts to influence Ukraine or the realization of Ukrainian interests through diplomatic mechanisms continue unabated. At the UN level, Russia has reverted to the time-tested tactics of using the votes of some countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America in exchange for economic and military preferences. It is using BRICS and the SCO to demonstrate its emergence from international isolation. We should not also ignore the issues, which are painful for the West and could be affected by Russia – among them are presently Syria and ISIS. Although the West still preserves the unity on the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, ignoring the pressure of the Syrian question on this unity would have been short-sighted.

As we have already noted, Ukraine on its own is in a unique situation – not only have we become the first country where a full-fledged (as previously it was tried in Georgia) new model of aggression has been tested by the Russian Federation. We were able to defend ourselves (sometimes – paying too high a price) and develop mechanisms to counteract the most aggressive hybrid attacks and at the same time to continue the positional fight against a much stronger enemy. Thus our experience is not just worthy of a closer look (it is already being explored by the structures of NATO and certain Eastern European countries) - it is unique in terms

of assessment of threats which the world (and particularly Europe) will have to deal with very soon.

In his last interview with The Atlantic, US President Barack Obama said frankly that “The fact is that Ukraine, which is a non-NATO country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do.” And it is important for understanding what our Western partners’ actually expect - the ability to defend ourselves on our own. Not to rely on “NATO forces”, but to build efficient, modern and combat-ready armed forces that will be able to restrain the militaristic impulses of the northeastern neighbor.

We should not entertain themselves with illusions that Russia will give up a new kind of warfare - almost all Russian military research efforts are aimed at its further development and specification. And, recognizing the Russia’s ability to find successful local (but strategically wrong) decisions, it is necessary to understand that there are not only Ukraine and the Baltic states in the area of direct “hybrid threats”, but also all the Russia’s CSTO neighbors and Europe as a whole. As part of its “hybrid strategy” and a course towards anarchic global security environment, Russia could consciously resume a number of “frozen conflicts”, particularly in Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh and other regions. And this trend is now unfolding – Vladimir Putin has already expressed readiness to support Serbia in its position on Kosovo.

For over 20 years we have ignored or preferred not to notice the permanent threat, and we cannot afford this attitude anymore. But were we only who “did not notice” it? It's hard to ignore the stubborn refusal of the leaders of key world powers to notice more and more pronounced signs of backsliding on democracy, capacity building, strengthening of authoritarian tendencies and (primarily geopolitical) revanchism in Russian Federation. All this led to missing the point, when the actions of the Russian leadership became a serious threat to European and world security. Significantly, despite the constant “reforms” in key international security structures (OSCE and NATO) in 1990’s and 2000’s, none of them was sufficiently ready for action in the new conditions of hybrid warfare. Russia’s hybrid operations are turning the whole area of international security to a single “risk zone.” Thus a situation is being created, when the hybrid aggression can be resolutely implemented against any country or group of countries (as exemplified in Russia’s actions in the EU’s informational and political space), including military (quasi-military) methods.

Returning to the Ukrainian context, it should be clearly understood: even if the fighting does not resume (or is not overarching as it was during the summer of 2014 - winter 2015), even if the Russian side fully implements Minsk agreements and restores Ukraine's control over the border (which seems almost unbelievable at the moment) - even in this case hybrid warfare will not stop and it will be transformed only partially.

Even now it is clear that in addition to increasing informational pressure and transforming “DPR” – “LPR” into the lasting destabilize factor for the Ukrainian life, Russian Federation uses the tactics of provoking radical events in Ukraine as well as in Europe. The most recent facts of detection of Russian surveillance “embedded” into the ranks of Ukrainian volunteer battalions and national-patriotic organizations indicate that Russia is ready to fight for Ukraine “to the last

Ukrainian.” And “active measures” by the Russian special services will only accrue. An illustrative case: the most ardent supporter of the so-called “Third Maidan” protest movement, moderator of many pages in social networks, which urges Ukrainian patriots to “go out” and “fight against the regime of internal occupation” is the former separatist “militant”, living in Russia. And the number of such cases is growing.

Discussion on Donbas often overshadows the issue of Crimea. Meanwhile, the militarization of Crimea is in full swing, and quite unlikely that this is “for nothing” - Crimea might become another factor in escalation, which could be provoked by Russia quite deliberately and thoughtfully. Especially if the plans of strengthening military presence there are fully implemented.

Partial lull on the front should not provoke self-deceptive thoughts that “everything is over.” We have got quite a nominal respite (including through constantly criticized Minsk II) which we have to use for real economic reforms, improvement of the security and defense system and search of complex solutions to counter hybrid threats in the near future.

Hybrid war did not begin and will not end in Ukraine. It's just the beginning...