

# Гібридна війна і національна безпека

УДК 327.88

## UKRAINIAN FRONT OF THE HYBRID WORLD

*Volodymyr Horbulin*

*The article* deals with the problem of forming a new hybrid world order, starting point of which was the Russian aggression against Ukraine. It is underlined, that for the destruction of the old world order is responsible not only Russia but also the West, which allowed new forms of global confrontation – a hybrid war. The causes and preconditions of Russian aggression against Ukraine, as well as the features of hybrid war in military, political and informational dimension, are considered. It is proved that Russia's geopolitical aim at solving global hybrid conflict was the destruction of the existing world order to restore world order of the Cold War period and strengthening its dominant position in it.

It is determined that within new hybrid world (dis)order Russia is very sensitive to the tools, mechanisms, techniques and methodologies of hybrid war, if they are used against it, especially in the problematic regions. First of all, it means problems, touching Far East and China expansion. In the article the priorities for implementing an effective response to the hybrid aggression against Ukraine and positioning our country in the international arena are formulated.

**Keywords:** hybrid war, Ukrainian front, military aggression, the new hybrid world order.

*Стаття* присвячена проблемі формування нового гібридного світоустрою, точкою відліку якого стала російська агресія проти України. Констатується, що за руйнування старого світопорядку відповідальна не тільки Росія, але й Захід, який допустив новітню форму глобального протистояння – гібридну війну. Розглянуто причини та передумови російської агресії проти України, а також особливості ведення гібридної війни у воєнному, політичному та інформаційному вимірі. Обґрунтовано, що геополітичною метою Росії при розв'язуванні глобального гібридного конфлікту було руйнування існуючого світопорядку з метою відновлення світопорядку періоду холодної війни і закріплення домінуючих позицій в ньому. Визначено, що в умовах нового гібридного світо(без)порядку Росія стає дуже вразливою до інструментів і механізмів, методів і методологій гібридної війни у випадку їх використання проти неї, особливо в проблемних регіонах. Йдеться насамперед про Далекий Схід та експансію Китаю. У статті сформульовані пріоритетні завдання для реалізації ефективної відповіді на гібридну агресію проти України та позиціонування нашої країни на міжнародній арені.

**Ключові слова:** гібридна війна, український фронт, воєнна агресія, новий гібридний світоустрій.

**Volodymyr Horbulin** –  
Doctor of Technical  
Sciences, Professor,  
Academician of the  
National Academy  
of Sciences of Ukraine,  
Director of the National  
Institute for Strategic  
Studies

**Горбулін Володимир  
Павлович** – доктор  
технічних наук,  
професор, академік  
НАН України, директор  
Національного  
інституту стратегічних  
досліджень

Today mankind faces the challenge of hybrid wars, whether we like it or not. These wars will breed the new hybrid world or, to be more precise, the new hybrid world order. We must face these challenges earnestly and accept them as part of the new reality in which we live.

Russian aggression against Ukraine became a starting point for the formation of the new hybrid world order. This is not the portrayal of the situation in Ukraine from a Ukraine-centric point of view; instead, we've attempted to offer an objective view of the current state of affairs in Ukraine. Just as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo released a spring of deep animosities and complicated processes that led to World War I, so the direct annexation of the Crimea carried out by Russia and its following actions in Donbas triggered the new world hybrid war.

**The purpose of the article** is to determine the features of Russian hybrid war against Ukraine, as well as the place and role of our country in the formation of a new hybrid world order.

"There is nothing constant in this world but inconsistency," wrote Jonathan Swift. The key problem of the current "processual moment" is that many people, including politicians, experts, scientists and journalists, still perceive the current state of affairs as something temporary in nature. They often handle and interpret it as something abnormal, or rather as a "transit phase" on the path to a fundamentally different, "better future". More importantly, those who have destroyed the world order, which until recently seemed strong and inviolable, have similar thoughts: the Kremlin state apparatus with its political, intellectual and military establishment, can be considered as "elite" only relatively. In general, both Russia and the West are clearly ill-prepared to accept this new reality.

Whether or not this is a consequence of the inability to comprehend the current moment or is the fear to accept it is another matter. "The real secrets become secrets not because nobody knows about them," warned Carl Gustav Jung, "but because nobody understands them". Meanwhile, this hybrid war, a sort of paramilitary aggression, is unique due to many parameters. These parameters include: the momentary and imaginative cause at the onset of the war, deception, the near total moral decay and degradation of many citizens of the aggressor country, aggression that was sanctioned by the permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and the creation of mass media support to legitimize actions. The application of these methods of "active measures" of political warfare have resulted in the consequences of untold proportions. The real trouble faced by the aggressor occurs when it attempts to put together the aims and methods of the hybrid "war of the future" with the world realities of the past.

Russia is not solely responsible for the destruction of the old world order. Certainly its aggression against Ukraine (and earlier, against Georgia) became the direct cause of everything that is happening now; however, the West bears some responsibility for its policy of "washing its hands of the affair". Western analysts are increasingly emphasizing the part the West has played. Peter Dickinson, aptly noted how the majority of the Western media suddenly went blind as to who the aggressor was in the Ukrainian conflict and what to call the Russian occupation. Alternatively, journalists invented some new words and word combinations whose sole purpose was to avoid the direct naming of the Russian aggression.

Perspectives similar to the beliefs held by Robert Kaplan were small solace when he said: "No matter how it would limit the possibilities of Ukraine, no matter how it would complicate the existence of the EU itself, neither the European Union nor NATO will bring Ukraine into the fold... [but] your future doesn't look grim".

In the meantime, the Western media, with its liberal-democratic worldview and principles, became a victim of the new hybrid reality. Their attempt to approach the political scene in accordance with the democratic standards of peaceful and rational coexistence was ineffective. Meanwhile, Russia was attempting to "revalue democratic values" through the lens of its "sovereignty". By anticipating the classic standards of journalism, which consist of demonstrating at least two views for a given situation, they were able to consciously shift the "objectiveness point" and replace it with an elaborate and massive string of lies, thus turning an objective view of the situation into something absurd.

The West began to awaken after the first shock in 2014. It is unclear if the initial attempts to counter Russia were successful. But it is absolutely clear the West needs to change in order to find an answer. This is a serious matter that few are prepared to handle.

The punitive measures levied against Russia were appallingly inadequate for the level of aggression shown and were guided by the logic of the "old world". And Russia was most likely prepared for the consequences of its actions.

On the one hand, from the geostrategic point of view, Russia may intend to destroy the existing world order of the West's domination of the global arena. A task, which Russia is currently managing very well, and from its perspective, its actions are beneficial to restoring Russia's status as a "superpower".

But on the other hand, from the geohistorical point of view, one of the purposes is to return the world back to the reality of the middle of the 20th century – back to the period of the classic political realism rhetoric

(“zones of influence”, “battle of the systems”, “interests balance and power balance”, etc.).

In other words, the geopolitical purpose of Russia with the start of the global hybrid conflict was: to destroy the existing world order in order to restore the tension of the Cold War period and to occupy a position of power in this new world order while taking into account the strengthened China.

This new world order is being formed before our eyes. Russia's efforts and actions are playing a significant role in this process. However, the problem is that the new hybrid world (dis)order will have nothing to do with the world order Russia so desperately wants to restore. It will be a world (dis)order with a new distribution of power between the countries and with a new set of hybrid wars, initiated by the new players against the enemies and the former allies alike. The new world order will feature hybrid decisions in problematic situations, often beyond the legal boundaries of the countries, or in the so – called “grey zones” of national and international law, and within hybrid international law as well.

It is necessary to understand and accept that the new hybrid world (dis)order being built before us is not some kind of “transition stage”. It is actually the new reality that cannot be extended from the fundamental reality of the past. Moreover, Russia may as well has no rightful place in this new reality due to Russia's inefficient economy, inefficient state authority and government, and its outdated vocabulary for ideological description and axiological comprehension.

In this new “beautiful world”, the risks for Russia itself have increased immensely as it released the genie of hybrid war from his bottle and agreed that these new norms and principles of the “geopolitical debacle” apply to it as well.

Avoiding the fundamental principles of the world order and violating the norms and rules of international relations, Russia thereby has lost sufficient trust and credibility as a respected international partner. Western sanctions imposed upon Russia are just the overt response to this trend. Russia's access to the critically important resources, from financial to technological, is not limited, but their usage is now more difficult.

Russia has become sensitive to the instruments and mechanisms, methods and methodologies of hybrid war in the event they are used against it, especially in the regions that are already of weakened military strength, or whose administration has been abandoned. The most susceptible region, the Russian Far East, is open to Chinese creeping expansion, which could probably start in the near future, and could last for decades.

For the time being, Moscow continues to work in its domain of expertise – trying to destroy the existing

reality, and it is doing it fairly successfully. It is difficult to compete with Moscow when it comes to destruction. However, constructive decisions and measures have always been Russia's weak spot, particularly nowadays.

The Russian Federation has nothing to offer the world, neighboring countries, or its own citizens. It is significant that the lion's share of Russia's public strategic and analytical documents in recent times almost never refer to the issues of development within the country. There are almost no documents concerning new strategies in its economy, social policy, ethnonational policy, medicine, health care, etc. Instead, there are plenty of “outwardly-oriented” documents concerning the foreign policy, possibilities of returning to force (in all of its aspects) abroad, and analysis of the external foes and allies.

In addition, there is no internal political opposition that guarantees the development of the political system and ensures control of government institutions in Russia. There is actually no open political life per se, as it is truly determined by the behind-the-scenes struggle of particular clans and interest groups. The situation closely echoes the famous phrase from the Kill the Dragon film based on Yevgenii Schartz's play: “Well, if we are not allowed to protest, let us at least debate...” However, even the possibility to argue is being gradually destroyed as well.

When it comes to the Russian foreign policy in general, it undoubtedly consists of further development of capabilities for waging hybrid wars (as an implicit continuation of the policies “according to Clausewitz”) in new regions and on new levels. Moreover, it is not confined to the European arena, but also exerts influence in the Central Asian region as well. However, Ukraine remains the focus of the Kremlin's foreign policy activities. And it appears Russia's practical activities will continue to focus on supporting the artificially created pseudo-republics and on continuing the hybrid warfare against our country as they adjust to the changing conditions and developments.

Russia, as it is today, poses a huge threat not only to its neighboring countries but to itself as well. This threat will persist into the future. Hopes that sanctions could somehow “calm”, “sober”, or “bring it back to normal” are merely illusory and groundless. Hope springs from the logic of “normal countries” behavior under “normal conditions” and a “normal world order”, but “normal” no longer exists. Thus, we can only trust our own powers and decisions.

In order to achieve success, it is necessary to discover a new approach and a new reality by slamming the door on past typical decisions taken for granted in all spheres, including the foreign policy, military, economic, media, social policies, etc. Foreign policy strategy changes have been recently noted: “There is a theory that compares intercommunication and

cooperation of countries with billiard balls in the sense that foreign policy direction does not depend on the political regime as much as the force and trajectory of the strikes do not depend on the color of the billiard balls. Though in our situation, it is not the case of only the ball color changing, as almost everything has changed, including the table geometry and the character of the force of interaction”.

If we are totally honest, our main strategic goal now is not even the question of whether we are capable of finding a tactically successful response to the hybrid aggression (although it is vital), but rather whether we will be able to grasp and fully understand this new hybrid world, to understand its laws and patterns that until now have appeared to be a total chaos, and how exactly we may apply this newfound knowledge.

We should not be long in changing our strategies. Those who fail to change and transform, who refuse to accept this new geopolitical game, who only perceive it as the “return of the good old-fashioned Cold War”, will most probably lose, and may even disappear.

This moment brings new opportunities. If we are able to build a new and adequate worldview and correct our strategies, we may join the powers transforming this new world, however pathetic that may sound. We stand on the verge of deep transformation of our existing political, military, and economic alliances. We are beginning to forge new alliances. And we must take this opportunity to search for answers to new and unexpected problems. We have to be more active, more creative, and become more pragmatic in our activity. This is the essential reason for the massive revision of everything that until recently seemed basic and fundamental.

This does not mean Ukraine should refuse European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Not at all. But we must fill our perspective of this process with new, more realistic, and more achievable substance. It is also extremely important to consider how Ukrainian EU and NATO membership is still very distant and unclear. For this reason, it is difficult to prioritize the strategy when few believe we may actually achieve it. It is obvious that goal setting has to change dramatically, despite the permanence of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration vectors. This applies not only to the foreign policy, but nearly all fields.

## Conclusion

The problem is not that we “cannot see” how our strategies need to change; our problem is whether our current public administration system is capable of implementing this change. And can it act in accordance with change? In particular, are we prepared for strategies that go beyond the boundaries of traditional practices and traditional instruments?

As we undergo change, our citizens and government will likely face significant stress. If this issue is brought to the national level of perception, we must ask: Are we prepared (and if we are, when and with what outcome) to exist in the framework of the new hybrid world and to stand against hybrid wars?

There is no answer to this question today, but we desperately need to find one. Ukraine is learning about its past while trying to understand its present, and everyone may come to learn about the sphere of national security, voluntarily or not. However, even the world’s hybrid war will eventually come to an end. There will be no winners in this war. Just as the beginning is hard to measure and document, so will the ending lack any kind of a singular finite event. But this war has already changed a lot in the world in creating its own design of the world’s “hybridization”.

## References

1. Horbulin, V. (2016, February 18). Tezy do drugoi richnytsi rossiyskoy agresii proty Ukrainy [Theses to the second anniversary of the Russian aggression against Ukraine]. Ukraine crisis media center. *uacrisis.org*. Retrieved from <http://uacrisis.org/ua/40347-gorbulin-tezy> [in Ukrainian].
2. Horbulin, V., Vlasiuk, O., Libanova, E. & Liashenko, O. (Eds). (2016). Donbas and Crimea : return at what price? Kyiv: NISS, [in English].
3. Horbulin, V. (2016). The “Hybrid Warfare” Ontology. *Stratehichni priorityty – Strategic Priorities, 1*, Ser. Philosophy, 4–13. <http://sp.niss.gov.ua>. Retrieved from <http://sp.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/1-1466500182.pdf> [in English].
4. Horbulin, V. (2016). Tsinnisni resursy viiny i myru : ukrainskyi format [Value resources of war and peace : Ukrainian format]. *Stratehichni priorityty – Strategic Priorities, 3*, 11–17. <http://sp.niss.gov.ua>. Retrieved from <http://sp.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/4-1485774465.pdf> [in Ukrainian].
5. Horbulin, V. (2017). The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront: monograph abridged and translated from ukrainian. Kharkiv : Folio, [in English].