

UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE INDICATORS IN MOLDOVA

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Abstract: *Considering that most of the recent specialized military literature is strongly focussed on the concept of hybrid warfare, in all its forms, this paper aims to establish the current relevance of a specific 20th century concept, which facilitated the evolution of hybrid warfare - unconventional warfare.*

In order to answer this question, the main approaches to unconventional warfare in recent history were evaluated, and subsequently, an analysis was conducted on the hypothesis that in the period 2022-2024, the Russian Federation carried out activities specific to unconventional warfare on the territory of Moldova. The most significant information that formed the basis of the case study refers to the public information of the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) of Moldova, regarding the interference of the Russian Federation in the electoral process of Moldova.

The results indicate the presence on the territory of Moldova of five of the six activities specific to unconventional warfare, as understood by the doctrine of the United States of America (USA), but taking into account the ambiguity specific to unconventional warfare and the relativity of the current information environment, formulating a verdict on this subject is not certain.

However, this article manages to provide an objective perspective on the Russian Federation's interference in the internal affairs of Moldova, highlighting the relevance of unconventional warfare in the current operational environment.

Keywords: *Unconventional warfare, Moldova, Special Operation Forces, insurgency, Russia*

1. INTRODUCTION

At a time when international public opinion and specialized military literature are focusing all their attention on the war initiated by the Russian Federation on Ukraine, through "ghibridnaia voina" type actions, completely different from the Western conception of hybrid warfare, it is of interest to objectively analyze the hypothesis according to which the Russian Federation takes advantage of this scenario and executes, in parallel, soft offensive actions, with a high degree of ambiguity, specific to unconventional warfare (UW) on the territory of a country directly targeted by the "Novorossiia" concept - the Republic of Moldova [1].

As described by Lesenciuc in 2023 [2], ghibridnaya voina applied in Ukraine simultaneously involves actions specific both to soft and hard wars, with the purpose of total destruction of the enemy: "Ghibridnaya voina is not a form of hybrid warfare, but one of total war, a massive war, of yesterday, wearing the illusory cloak of the war of future" [2]. On the other hand, the conduct of UW facilitates the achievement of strategic-level objectives through structures that act at the tactical level, predominantly indirectly, through soft-type actions and with support of the local populace. This hypothesis also implies the existence of the Russian Federation's intention to install a favorable political elite in Chisinau, which would promote the Kremlin's interests both in Moldova and on the eastern flank of the NATO/ EU alliance.

In the attempt to carry out an objective analysis on this subject, only information validated by representatives of public institutions with responsibilities in the field of national security of Moldova was interpreted. The main source of information that was subjected to this critical analysis is the Public Report of the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) of Moldova dated 23.12.2024, on „*Electoral Frauds Found in the Presidential Elections and the Republican Referendum*” [3].

The research was carried out sequentially, starting with the study of the military doctrines specific to the UW. This was followed by the collection, verification, processing and analysis of data presented by the media channels of Moldova, Romania and Russia, and finally, these were corroborated with the information published by SIS Moldova regarding the interference of the Russian Federation in the elections of Moldova.

During the case study, independent use of data presented by media organizations was avoided due to possible interference by the Russian Federation in this area. Carrying out checks by consulting multiple official sources was one of the measures that contributed to the clear distinction between propaganda and accurate public information.

2. UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE - DIFFERENT APPROACHES

UW is understood differently by the major global military powers, therefore it is natural to review the main methods of implementing this type of confrontation in contemporary military art.

In US military doctrine, the concept of UW encompasses “*activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area*”[4]. This definition highlights the essential condition underlying the initiation of the UW planning process - the existence of a segment of the population motivated to oppose the governing force.

In the early phase of the UW mission planning process, specific activities related to Preparation of the Environment (PE) are performed, as Special Operations Forces (SOF) detachments are made up of a small number of specialists and are extremely vulnerable once infiltrated into enemy territory (denied area). At the same time, this is the moment when the ideology and capabilities of the resistance/ insurgency group are evaluated in order to establish the reliability of the UW mission.

In this context, the quality of the inter-institutional collaboration between SOF and the intelligence structures represents the guarantor of the success of the PE missions and, subsequently, of the UW: “*PE is an umbrella term for activities conducted by selectivity trained SOF to prepare the operational environment for potential special operations. (...) The information provided by these operations can enhance joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment to support subsequent military operations*” [4].

In his book *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao Tse-tung structures UW into three main phases, which must be completed in a mandatory sequence so that the threshold of violence is not crossed prematurely: *strategic defense* (preparation, organization, and consolidation), *strategic stalemate* (progressive expansion), and *strategic attack* (destruction of the enemy) [5].

The US military academic environment strongly resonates with this approach, and the three phases of UW proposed by Mao are studied and successfully applied both during the training of future operators within the SOF and during the planning and execution of combat missions.

Based on the three pillars established by Mao Tse-tung, the US SOF proposed a more detailed approach to UW, in seven phases, the duration of which is dictated by the evolution of the operational environment. Transitioning too abruptly from one phase to another can permanently compromise the mission and trigger immediate repressive actions on one's own forces, culminating in the deterioration of political and diplomatic relations between the opposing states/ entities. To mitigate this risk, it is recommended to regress to an earlier phase in the event of prematurely reaching a threshold of violence atypical for the operational environment. The gradual implementation of the activities corresponding to the seven phases is carried out as follows: *Preparation, Initial Contact, Infiltration, Organization, Buildup, Employment and Transition* [4].

At the opposite pole, the strategy adopted in recent years by decision-makers in the Russian Federation (2014 - Crimea, 2022 - Ukraine), reveals a distinct approach to activities that can be associated with the UW spectrum. During the execution of these missions, the Russian Federation demonstrated the ability to significantly compress the time allocated to the early phases of the conflict in order to capitalize on the enemy's surprise and to achieve an almost instantaneous transition to conventional warfare [6].

According to the military reorganization that the armed forces of the Russian Federation underwent in 2009, the specific UW duties are assigned to the SOF (*Силы специальных операции - SSO*), in close coordination with the Main Intelligence Directorate (*спецназ - GRU Spetsnaz*): "*SSO and GRU Spetsnaz train and support proxy forces conducting offensive actions*" [7].

General Valery Gherasimov's vision of the use of SOF in new forms of conflict is detailed in his work "*The Value of Science Is in the Foresight. New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations*" [8]. The general confirms the Russian Federation's increased interest in continuously adapting military strategy to the combat characteristics of the current operational environment and proposes several research directions for the Russian military scientists, including the integration of artificial intelligence into military operations, the robotization of the battlefield and, last but not least, the large-scale use of SOF for conducting informational and asymmetric operations (specific to UW), which would capitalize on the experience of the Russian Army in using resistance/ insurgency forces: "*we must not forget about our own experience. I mean the use of partisan units during the Great Patriotic War and the fight against irregular formations in Afghanistan and the North Caucasus*" [8].

In contrast to the current situation on the Ukrainian front, where the conflict has the characteristics of a total war, the military strategy of the Russian Federation has developed around ideological concepts strongly anchored in the specifics of UW. Relevant is the concept of subversion-war, proposed by Evgeni Messner, who highlighted the importance of influencing the population and amplifying their grievances in order to achieve political objectives: "*Direct or indirect utilization of already existing domestic political, social, economic and other turmoil, created by accelerated political-socio-cultural transformations, for political benefits*" [9].

According to Romanian legislation, the SOF are responsible for executing UW missions "*on the territory of the Romanian state or outside it, independently or together with other national and/ or allied forces*" [10].

The same document highlights the existence of legislative gaps regarding "*the definition, development, experimentation and implementation of the concept of armed resistance*" (an essential element for the successful execution and countering of UW missions) and aims to clarify them in the period 2021-2024 [10].

Another relevant clarification for Romania's approach to UW is found in the 2021 Romanian Defense White Paper, which states that (in a state of war situation) *"in the event of temporary occupation of a part of the national territory, the Romanian Army is the structure responsible for leading the resistance movement while preparing and executing the counter-offensive to restore territorial integrity, in a national or allied context"* [11].

Therefore, the Romanian Army proposes the use of UW as the main instrument specific to the state of war, in the context of executing a counteroffensive, through which the SOF operates on the territories occupied by the aggressor, with the aim of organizing and leading resistance forces to counter the occupation forces and shape the battlefield in favor of its own conventional forces. At the same time, the SOF represents a force multiplier for the achievement of strategic level objectives of the Romanian Army or NATO, through the execution of missions by tactical level elements.

3. CASE STUDY – INDICATORS OF UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN MOLDOVA. ANALYSIS FROM THE AMERICAN MILITARY DOCTRINE PERSPECTIVE

Intelligence. UW-specific intelligence activities have several particulars, but the most important of these is that they ensure the survival of the resistance/ insurgency group and the SOF operators involved in the UW. Since the UW is carried out in a denied area, the development of an intelligence network that ensures early warning of its own forces is essential. If the operational environment allows, the network is completed before the SOF infiltrates enemy territory. To achieve this goal, the underground forces develop a network that allows permanent monitoring of any repressive actions planned by the security forces against the resistance/ insurgency group.

In this context, it is important to clarify the term underground force, as they significantly contribute to the quality of intelligence actions: *"An underground is a cellular covert element within unconventional warfare that is compartmentalized and conducts covert or clandestine activities in areas normally denied to the auxiliary and the guerrilla force"* [12].

Having maximum freedom of movement in enemy territory, these forces are able to collect information about the operational environment, capabilities, movements, plans and morale of the enemy, respectively about its critical infrastructure, contributing to situational awareness and to the planning of missions in the UW spectrum.

Two of the main characteristics of intelligence actions are discretion and dissimulation, and for this reason, this study does not aim to identify the intelligence agency of the Russian Federation on the territory of Moldova, but to correlate information relevant to this subject that is available through open sources and has been validated by public authorities with responsibilities in the area of national security of Moldova.

It is relevant to analyze the three press releases of SIS Moldova [13, 14, 15] from February 2023, July 2023 and July 2024, according to which four people were investigated on suspicion of intelligence gathering and treason.

On 27.02.2023, SIS Moldova identified two foreign citizens who carried out data and information collection activities for the implementation of a plan to destabilize the internal situation in the country, with the aim of violently changing the constitutional order of Moldova.

They carried out reconnaissance missions of critical infrastructure and government institutions. The two were declared undesirable persons for a period of 10 years and were expelled from the country.

On 31.07.2024, SIS Moldova made public the information according to which two officials from the Parliament, respectively from the Border Police, were arrested and are being investigated for treason and conspiracy against Moldova, as a result of collecting information and providing it to an employee of an embassy in Chisinau.

Information activities. These use the power of word as a tool to agitate the population, by constantly and consistently promoting themes and messages, personalized for each segment of the population. The main goal of these methods of influence is to identify the grievances of the target audience and to create the false impression that the sender sincerely empathizes with the needs of the receiver.

Moldova's intelligence services identified five main themes on the basis of which Moscow's propaganda messages were developed: (1) Promoting civil disobedience, (2) Denigrating the West, the European Union (EU) and the referendum for EU accession, (3) Promoting the image of the Russian Federation and the Eurasian Economic Union, (4) Imminence of war as a result of the militarization of Moldova and (5) Denigrating the government and state institutions. Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of the methods of influence used by the broadcaster, depending on the grievances of the target audience [3].

Table 1 – Influence methods used by Russian Federation in Moldova

Influence method	Exploited grievances	Targeted populace
Spreading messages through religious personnel In 2024, Approx. 500 Moldovan priests traveled to Moscow	Validation and appreciation from religious personnel; Monetary compensation of clerical personnel.	Orthodox Christians; Elderly; Rural environment; Clergy personnel.
Political Parties as a Means of Propaganda „Chance”, „Renaissance”, „Victory” and „the Alternative Force for the Salvation of Moldova”	Members of the political environment confer a certain level of authority in the collective mind; Using semantics to trigger emotions.	People with civic spirit; Young people; People with a certain level of education; Urban environment; People with a sense of patriotism.
Indoctrination through participation in camps. Get to know Russia; The land of childhood; Eurasia - the continent of opportunities.	Participants are rewarded through scholarships - a relationship of dependency of the participant towards the organizer	Young people; People with low financial income; Rural environment.
NGOs that promote the interests of the Russian Federation. Cultural Moldovan Educational Center	The need for group affiliation; Patriotism.	Diaspora; Urban environment; People with a certain level of education; People with civic spirit.
Mass media (Russian, Romanian and English) Radio, TV, Printed materials, Social-Media, call-centers; Russia Today, Sputnik, > 43 Vkontakte bots, > 70 Facebook groups, > 90 Tiktok channels, >110 Telegram channels.	The desire for information, group affiliation, and the need for validation in the case of social media	All age groups, All social backgrounds, regardless of financial status or education level; National and international public opinion.
Symbols Ilan ȘOR; Church; Chance, Renaissance, Victory and the Alternative Force to Save Moldova.	The politician's name is the core of the resistance/ insurgency movement developed in Moldova; The name of the political bloc Victory generated a sense of fighting on the winners side; The names of the parties that were included in the political alliance trigger strong patriotic emotions.	Ilan ȘOR supporters; Patriotic people; Pro-Russian segment of the population; Political supporters of the four parties.
Personalized materials with the symbol "victory" Placards, clothing, office items	Group membership; reward through goods.	People with low financial income.

In order to promote the five main themes mentioned above, the Russian Federation developed a cellular, decentralized network specific to auxiliary forces, whose activity contributed to the main specific objective of the UW – the establishment of political figures favorable to the Kremlin at the leadership of Moldova. According to the definition, auxiliary forces are „*the support element of the irregular organization whose organization and operations are clandestine in nature and whose members do not openly indicate their sympathy or involvement with the irregular movement*”[12]. Most often, the auxiliary are not realizing the extent of the UW network of which they are part due to decentralization.

In the present example, a pyramidal auxiliary network has been developed at the level of Moldova, which provides a high level of protection through decentralization. The network includes 119 territorial cells to which over 1900 primary cells are subordinated. Each primary cell corresponds to a certain number of activists, and the chain ends with the recruitment of voters (sympathizers) by the activists. The advantage of such a network is that if a cell or a leader is compromised, the network can continue to carry out its activity [3, 19].

Subversion represents the set of actions aimed at undermining the military, economic, political or moral power of a governmental authority [12].

This activity has two roles in the execution of UW: strengthening the ideology around which the resistance/ insurgency group is coagulated and influencing public opinion (both nationally and internationally) to obtain support from the population, which is essential in UW campaigns.

During 2024, an intensification of subversive actions carried out by the Russian Federation against Moldova was observed, some of the most significant being: interference in the electoral process to establish political elites favorable to the Kremlin (the success in taking over political control over the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia is noteworthy), compromising the path towards Moldova's European integration (influencing voters against the referendum for EU accession), energy blackmail starting with January 2025 (impact on both the economic field and the morale of the population), respectively the organization of meetings with the aim of indoctrinating Moldovan citizens in favor of the Kremlin [3].

Subversive manipulation of the masses. This activity requires extensive planning, and the basic condition for achieving the desired result is that a relevant segment of the target audience resonates strongly emotionally with the grievances exploited and amplified by the agitators.

According to the SIS report, in July 2024, a number of 115 citizens of Moldova traveled to Moscow, where they were involved in training sequences on techniques, tactics and procedures (TTP) specific to subversive manipulation of the masses: (1) Tactics of provocation of the police; "intelligent" confrontation of police cordons; (2) Procedures for disarming public order forces; (3) Procedures and tactics for using pyrotechnic and smoke devices; (4) Procedures for launching improvised "projectiles" (stones, eggs, paint balloons); (5) Tactics for protecting leaders/key individuals during protests; (6) Tactics for "neutralizing" police officers who carry out their activities undercover during protests [3].

While the training sequence carried out in the Russian Federation (Moscow) focused mainly on non-lethal TTPs, an advanced training sequence was organized on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banja Luka) where Moldovan citizens were taught including violent TTPs, specific to the process of manipulating the masses: preparation of homemade incendiary devices; tactics for penetrating police cordons; blinding police officers with paint or light signals; use of drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle - UAV) and mass psychology.

These situations reveal the practice of the Russian Federation of using one of the specific UW instruments, the sanctuary, which involves the use of a relatively safe area (in this case - Moscow and Banja Luka) where the training of resistance/ insurgency forces can take place in maximum safety conditions.

The specific training for subversive manipulation of the masses was put into practice and validated by the influence agents of the Russian Federation in Moldova during peaceful protests organized at the Chisinau courthouse (26.06.2024, 03.07.2024). In their modus operandi, specific indicators of training in the field of mass manipulation were identified, such as the use of vocal leaders (as agitators) to promote themes and messages of interest to Kremlin propaganda.

The agitators demonstrated minimal training in the field of mass manipulation, spreading messages supporting Russian narratives through sound amplification devices (megaphones and microphones). In parallel, individuals responsible for directing the protests were identified, who aimed to distort reality and manipulate public opinion through video images transmitted online. They distributed banners to protest participants and repositioned people in the crowd in such a way that young people occupied the front positions of the group, creating the false impression that a significant number of people from diverse social categories were participating in the protest and wanted to send a sincere, unified message to the political environment.

The reality is that the representative segment of the population that accepted to participate in the protests were retirees, and their motivation is financial and not ideological. The consequence was a state of general apathy of the participating masses, a state of repulsion towards the messages they were supposed to chant and, in some situations, confusion regarding the purpose of organizing the protests [16].

Sabotage consists of „*act or acts with intent to injure, interfere with, or obstruct the national defense of a country by willfully injuring or destroying, or attempting to injure or destroy, any national defense or war materiel, premises, or utilities, to include human and natural resources*” [17]. Nevertheless, there is also a variation with a reduced coefficient of violence – simple sabotage. This activity does not involve specialized training and can be carried out by ordinary citizens, and not infrequently, it is used to increase the morale of the resistance/ insurgency group (confidence targets), and to train insurgents for the execution of more and more complex missions.

The SIS report reveals that some of the people who benefited from training in the camps organized in Moscow were paid (5,000 EUR) to engage in simple sabotage activities by vandalizing institutions with symbolic value for Moldova - breaking windows and spraying paint on the offices: Teleradio Moldova, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Central Electoral Committee, the Ministry of Labor and the Government [3].

Guerrilla warfare is characterized by military and paramilitary operations carried out predominantly by resistance/ insurgency forces, in hostile or enemy-controlled territories (Ibidem). This is the most violent side of UW and most of the time, UW objectives cannot be achieved without the use of kinetic means. However, US military doctrine recognizes that premature use of guerrilla warfare poses a significant risk to force protection and recommends implementing kinetic actions only when the other mechanisms of UW (information activities, intelligence, subversion) are working within normal parameters.

In the case of this case study, it can be appreciated that if the guerrilla forces controlled by the Russian Federation exist, they are currently underdeveloped, and initiating direct actions against the Moldovan security forces would be a mistake. On the other hand, in the SIS report on the Russian Federation’s external interference in the electoral processes of Moldova, there is information according to which Moldovan citizens have benefited from military training that can be used to carry out ambushes,

raids or sabotage (preparation of homemade incendiary devices and the use of UAVs). However, the Russian Federation's modus operandi involved the use of a sanctuary to train Moldovan citizens, which reveals the lack of mobility of any guerrilla forces on the territory of Moldova [3, 18].

Another relevant argument in support of the idea of training guerrilla forces by the Russian Federation refers to the press release of the Police of Moldova dated 17.10.2024, which uses the term "*guerrilla camps*" to describe the sanctuary in which Moldovan citizens were trained [18]. Representatives of the police confirm much of the information made public by SIS Moldova in 2023 and their role contributes to the state's objective of increasing citizen resilience through institutional transparency, communication and education.

4. LESSONS IDENTIFIED. THE PARTIAL SUCCESS OF RUSSIA UW IN MOLDOVA

4.1. Exploitation of the linguistic component

Observation: The Russian Federation has professionally exploited the linguistic component of the electorate in Moldova.

Discussion: The propaganda efforts undertaken by the Russian Federation have addressed both Russian and Romanian/ Moldovan speakers. This approach has allowed the expansion of the sphere of influence of Russian propaganda and access to the majority of citizens of Moldova, regardless of the language spoken. Communication through a single language can generate a sense of exclusion among some segments of the population, resulting in their aversion to the broadcaster.

The results of the census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova in 2014 show that people who declared that they usually speak Russian represent approximately 14.5% of the population [20]. However, it is certain that the percentage of the population that is able to communicate in Russian is significantly higher.

Conclusion: The narratives of the Russian Federation were submitted in the main languages of circulation in Moldova in order to target all segments of the population, and this modus operandi represents a model of good practices in order to execute effective informational operations.

Recommendation: Development of themes and messages, personalized, in all languages of circulation in the area of influence but also in the area of interest, for each segment of the population.

4.2. Identifying and exploiting electorate motivations

Observation: The Russian Federation capitalized on the urgent financial needs of the electorate, with formidable effects in recruiting personnel for the auxiliary group.

Discussion: The majority of individuals who joined Moscow's efforts to compromise the elections in Moldova were retirees willing to sacrifice their time for financial benefits. This need was properly capitalized on, and the periodic remuneration of network members for spreading propaganda, participating in protests, and recruiting new network members produced results.

Conclusion: The efficient development of a network for financing illicit activities on the territory of Moldova and the use of funds for constant rewarding of members contributed to the quantitative growth of the insurgency group, but not its qualitative growth.

Recommendation: Achieving a balance between financial and ideological recruitment, to obtain both quality (key positions) and quantity for the insurgent group.

4.3. The role of new technologies in unconventional warfare

Observation: New technologies (cryptocurrencies, encrypted communication channels) were integrated into the process of developing and protecting the electoral scheme financing network

Discussion: The successful use of new technologies is noted, mainly in order to increase the efficiency of network protection measures. In this regard, members of the auxiliary forces were trained to use the Telegram messaging application for conducting communications in an encrypted (relatively secure) manner. On the other hand, there were situations in which cryptocurrencies and virtual bank cards (BYBIT, BYNANCE) were used by network members for the illegal financing of electoral and propaganda activities [3, 19].

On the other hand, the messaging application facilitated the easy dissemination of propaganda materials, communication between network members, monitoring the activity of sympathizers, evaluating performance and keeping a clear record of staff fluctuations.

A disadvantage of integrating new technologies into the management of the auxiliary network refers to the difficulty of adapting the elderly to their use. One of the consequences required the allocation of additional human resources to familiarize network members with smart devices.

Conclusion: The efficient use of new technologies for the development of UW-specific financial and communication networks in the current operational environment is noted. The UW doctrine represents the method of application, but it provides flexibility for the choice of means that lead to the achievement of objectives.

Recommendation: Integrate new technologies into UW planning and execution, with an emphasis on the Think Outside the box principle.

4.4. The relevance of the sanctuary in the current operational environment

Observation: The Russian Federation trained members of guerrilla forces outside Moldova, in order to minimize the risks of exposing its own forces.

Discussion: The guerrilla forces were trained in sanctuaries, in order to maintain a low level of violence on the territory of Moldova. The main reason why the Russian Federation resorted to this tactic refers to the political context at the end of 2024. The conduct of the presidential elections, but also the referendum for accession to the EU, determined the Russian Federation to adopt additional measures to protect the auxiliary and underground network already developed on the territory of Moldova, as there were chances that they could achieve the strategic objective of compromising the elections without exceeding the threshold of violence. Moreover, the training of guerrilla forces through the sanctuary reveals a possible uncertainty interval that the Russian Federation has taken into account - the development of guerrilla forces for the situation in which the objectives of the mission cannot be achieved without the use of violence.

Conclusion: The sanctuary allowed the protection of the auxiliary and underground group by developing, in parallel, guerrilla forces on the territory of other states.

Recommendation: The use of sanctuary when the operational environment does not allow the development of guerrilla forces in the denied area, simultaneously with the use of underground and auxiliary forces to execute non-kinetic offensive actions.

4.5. Security culture in unconventional warfare

Observation: The Russian Federation has paid special attention to the development of the security culture of the insurgent group.

Discussion: Good practices in the implementation of security policies to increase the level of protection of the organization were noted at the level of the insurgent group. Participants in protests and meetings were occasionally trained in the risks they expose themselves to by discussing political issues on the phone, or with people outside the

network. One of the practices adopted unanimously refers to the use of the encrypted messaging application, Telegram [3, 16].

The network adheres to the principles of decentralization, to limit the interaction between microstructures and to implement the need-to-know principle. Intermediaries have been introduced to manage funds transferred from the Russian Federation and to protect key individuals in the organization.

Recruitment of network members based on referrals is another factor contributing to the active measures to protect the network.

Conclusion: The importance given by the Russian Federation to the implementation of the security culture of the resistance/insurgency group for its sustainable development is noted.

Recommendation: The only guarantee for the survival of UW networks in the denied area is the cultivation of a security culture for all members of the resistance/insurgency group.

4.6. The will of change from the populace

Observation: UW is set for failure if the population does not have the desire to change the political class.

Discussion: Moldova is represented by an electorate oriented mostly towards the West and towards democracy. Two of the reasons are represented by the majority migration of the population to the West and the significant number of Moldovans who have acquired Romanian citizenship (between 01.01.2000 and 31.12.2020, a number of 642,149 Moldovans obtained Romanian citizenship) [21]. This aspect contributed to the embrace of democratic values, to their promotion among the family environment in Moldova and implicitly, to the determination of the diaspora to exercise their vote in favor of joining the EU (the Moldovan diaspora that cast their vote in the EU accession referendum represented a number of 235,503 votes, of which 76.79% were in favor of joining the European organization) [22].

The Russian Federation tried to mobilize a resistance/insurgency group to divert Moldova from its European path, despite the reality that demonstrated that a large part of the population does not want this.

In the case of Moldova, the shaping of the operational environment by the Russian Federation was still underway at the time of the elections at the end of 2024, but the chance to change Moldova's European path forced the Russian Federation to act, hoping for a favorable outcome.

Conclusion: Before initiating UW missions, it is necessary to establish their viability. In the initial phase of the mission, it is necessary to prioritize resources to obtain national and international support from the populace.

Recommendation: The execution of UW missions is not viable without the support of the populace.

4.7. Measures to counter unconventional warfare

Observation: Moldova managed to counter Russia's actions through societal resilience, strategic communication and the support of international public opinion.

Discussion: Although the effects of Russian actions managed to mobilize a significant percentage of Moldova's population to compromise the elections, the measures adopted by the state authorities to counter these illegalities had an effect. Strategic communication of the authorities with responsibilities in the field of national security, the free press as a tool for educating citizens, the condemnation of Russian interference in the Moldovan electoral process by the EU and the numerical reduction of the Kremlin's propaganda channels were the main defensive measures successfully implemented in Moldova.

As Lesenciuc concluded in his work on the current manifestations of hybrid warfare, "*the anti ghibridnaya voina shield implies protecting society through education and security culture, through strategic communication and through societal resilience*" [2].

Conclusion: The permanent orientation of the political environment towards security culture, meeting the needs of citizens, quality strategic communication and decision-making transparency, significantly reduces the risk of strengthening an insurgency group within the state.

Recommendation: Adopt proactive measures to increase societal resilience, security culture and strategic communication of the population.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has achieved its objective of identifying the relevance of specific UW activities in contemporary conflicts. At the same time, it can be stated that, strictly related to the relationship between the Russian Federation and Moldova, the Russian military strategy has not abandoned the old doctrinal concepts that emphasize non-lethal tactics, but has only adapted them to the current context. Until now, the destabilizing actions carried out by the Russian Federation on the territory of Moldova coincided, to a large extent, with the principles of the American UW doctrine, but the physical presence of operators from the Russian SOF could not be confirmed.

On the other hand, the offensive activities of the Russian Federation against Ukraine demonstrate that the Russian doctrine of hybrid warfare (*ghibridnaya voina*) has taken over some of the specific activities of UW, but has replaced guerrilla warfare with the large-scale use of conventional forces to wage total war. In this way, one of the basic principles of UW, which is to ensure that the population and territories to be conquered suffer minimal physical damage, has been abandoned.

According to the UW definition, the study was able to highlight the efforts of the Russian Federation to use resistance/ insurgency movement to create and develop auxiliary and underground forces in a denied area, with the ultimate goal of constraining, disrupting or overthrowing the government and Moldova's European path.

Although the threats specific to UW have gained momentum in Moldova, the effort made by the current government to counter the aggression of the Russian Federation by improving the security culture, intensifying strategic communication and increasing societal resilience is noteworthy.

I consider that this paper draws attention to a scenario that may be repeated in the future and to a country like Romania. It is necessary to realize that political stability is extremely fragile in the face of the ambiguity of the modern battlefield. In this regard, it is necessary to increase the level of inter-institutional cooperation between the Romanian SOF, which have an important role in countering and conducting UW and the other structures of the national defense system, respectively the implementation of measures to increase the resilience and resistance of the population.

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