

MODERN MILITARY ACTIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract: *The end of the 21st century finds the world in a great economic and political turmoil. On the one hand, the highly developed countries try to extend their influence outside the territorial borders to the resource-rich areas, on the other hand the developing countries try to reach the great powers, and not least the poor countries that are in fierce struggle with poverty. An unfair world we could say and unequal in terms of power vectors.*

If we think that the two great world conflagrations of the last century were preceded by strong economic crises, we will come to wonder whether or not we are in a new war or on the verge of a new world war. The beginning of the 21st century brings new types of battlefield actors, new types of threats and new methods and techniques for approach of the battle actions.

Keywords: *military action, military intervention, coalitions, planning, surprise.*

Introduction

Since its inception, mankind has marked its development through various facts and actions, which have been constituted in historic moments. Of these facts and actions, the armed confrontations were and are the most distinct landmarks. Over time, following armed confrontations, there disappeared civilizations that put their mark on human evolution and development, but also after armed confrontations, new civilizations appeared.

Thus, all the armed conflicts, from the wars of antiquity and the Middle Ages, to the two world conflagrations of the 20th century are very

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well evidenced by historians. Armed conflicts have developed and modernized in parallel with the society, being supported by the technological advances that it has made, reaching at the beginning of the 21st century to asymmetric and hybrid conflicts, in which new actors and belligerent forces appear, and the battlespace develops and knows new dimensions. It is worth mentioning that almost all technological discoveries, sooner or later, have found and continue to find their applicability in the military field, bringing advantages in the battlespace and causing increasing losses of human lives.

What is military action?

About 2500 years ago, in China, the first treaty on military action was devised, in which the author Sun Tzu mentioned that „*War is an issue of vital importance to the state, the field of life and death, the path that leads to survival or destruction*”¹.

General (Ret.) Prof. Vasile Căndea, Ph.D. emphasized in the introductory part of the Journal of Military Sciences no.1 / 2010, that „... *war is a continuation of politics and an instrument of politics. War is a product of interests, therefore of politics, taking into account political, social, economic and cultural relations*”². On this issue, it can be appreciated that the use of the armed forces and the initiation of a military action is a political decision, which aims to achieve foreign policy objectives of a state that cannot be achieved by other means.

The end of the 20th century brings to the fore an intense process of studying the military actions that are carried out at the same time with different projects to limit the weapons or to reduce the number of the armed forces personnel. The process of globalization has effects in the sphere of military actions, where there can be observed a tendency to form international coalitions and make them available to international political organizations created at regional or global level.

Although the first decade of the 21st century is marked by the same projects to limit the weapons or to reduce the number of the armed forces personnel the second decade highlights a repositioning of the political-

¹ Sun Tzu, *Arta Războiului*, Editura Antet XX Press, București 1993, p. 7.

² General (Ret.) prof. univ. dr. H.C. Vasile Căndea, *Revista de Științe Militare*, editată de secția Științe Militare a Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România, Nr. 1 (18), Anul X, 2010, p. 5.

military lines of the countries in relation to their own interests and the new political-military situation. At the same time, these changes of position gave rise to a new arms race, started by the Russian Federation, after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, in 2014, continued by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and emphasized by the divergence of interests in the conflict in Syria.

In the book „*The Aviation Actions in Joint Operations*”, commander Vasile Bucinschi defines military action as „... *the set of activities, measures, concerns, etc., organized and carried out by army structures through the use of the means of endowment, in order to achieve an overall purpose or a mission in detail*”³.

From the tactical point of view „*military action represents the manifestation of the will of the commander to achieve a finality through military means with a structure that includes military elements and therefore has a military character*”⁴.

In order to appreciate the approach of all military actions from the beginning of the 21st century, we have chosen to analyze the military actions developed by the Russian Federation for the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, between February and March 2014. We stopped at this example because we considered it to be a complex one in which the Russian Federation used the full spectrum of actions from the use of soft power up to information war.

In the beginning of the study and analysis of the specific elements of the information war we started from the idea that information was, is and will be the key element of all information processes.

In a book recently written in this domain it is emphasized that „... *during the analysis activity of a military intelligence process, information could be considered **raw material, purpose, weapon** and its protection is a very important and complex activity*”⁵.

³ Vasile BUCINSCHI, *Acțiunile aviației în cadrul operațiilor întrunite*, București, Editura AISM, 2002, p.77.

⁴ Gheorghe BOARU, *ASPECTE ALE CONDUCERII SISTEMELOR MILITARE*, București, Editura AISM, 1999, p.124.

⁵ Gheorghe BOARU, Iulian Marius IORGA, *SECURITATEA SISTEMELOR INFORMAȚIONALE MILITARE*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, 2018, p. 6.

It is noteworthy that before the military intervention in the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian Federation used the intelligence services to prepare the „ground” and later switched to the use of hard power in which, besides the conventional Armed Forces, paramilitary formations were used.

From the point of view of a specialist in this domain it is emphasized that „*It is important to note that information technology not only allows the development of modern warfare, but also adds a new dimension to conflicts*”⁶.

Steps of the military intervention

Five years after the Russian military intervention in Crimean peninsula, in the article „*Russia’s 3-step plan for any military intervention*”, published on the „*Business Insider*” website, Evgenia Sokolovkaya notes that, in any military intervention, Russian Federation implements a three-stage military intervention plan.

In the first stage, the sale of Russian military weapons and equipment takes place in the conflict area where the military intervention is planned. Here we note that usually a trade takes place with military weapons and equipment towards the belligerent side that the Russian Federation is going to support.

In the second stage, it sends mercenaries to the area, through „*private military companies*”. They are used for the protection of the official authorities in the area, for providing assistance in the preparation of the forces, as well as for training them on how to use the Russian weapons and military technique. In this regard, both the author of the article above-mentioned and other analysts through various publications, consider that one of the most intensively used would have been the Russian company “*Wagner*”.

The third and final stage of this military intervention plan is the official involvement and deployment of regular troops in the intervention area.

Planning and preparation of the military action

One of the questions that fluctuated in the analysis environment had to do with whether the Russian military intervention in Crimea was a planned

⁶ Col. prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe BOARU, *RĂZBOIUL INFORMAȚIONAL ȘI OPERAȚIILE INFORMAȚIONALE*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare, București, 2004, p. 26.

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action or simply the Russian leaders used the opportunity created by Ukraine's internal problems at that time.

In an article published on the website of the Mediafax agency, the journalist Valentin VIDU emphasizes that during an official visit to Poland of Vladimir PUTIN, in 2008, he would have proposed to the Polish Prime Minister at that time Donald TUSK, that the two countries should divide Ukraine between them. In the same article it was mentioned that „*Ukrainian intelligence services indicated that Russian operative agents began to come to Crimea in 2012, possibly even in 2010*”⁷.

In March 2015, in an article signed by Jenna CORDEROY, on the website www.vice.com, it was mentioned that the Russian President Vladimir Putin stated a plan to annex the Crimea during a secret meeting with the heads of security services which took place in the day the former Ukrainian President, a close friend of Moscow, Victor Yanukovich, fled Kiev.

The ones above-mentioned are only two pieces of the information published by the media indicating that Russia had a plan regarding the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which certainly included the military action developed in this regard.

Given the background of the internal problems from Ukraine and the violent protests from Kiev, on 24th of February 2014, military groups with no signs to prove their belonging took control of the buildings of civilian and military institutions in the Crimean peninsula. This indicates that the most efficient information networks have been used.

It is appreciated that „*The information infrastructure through its content and the technologies that compose it is now considered the object of an information war, but also it is a subject with same strategic complexity and traditional dimensions (air, land, sea and space). Information networks make up a new battlefield, and information itself becomes a target. Each of them became separate, but also in combination with the others both weapon*

⁷ Valentin VIDU, „*Putin a propus Poloniei să împartă Ucraina. Declarațiile fostului ministru de externe polonez*”, <https://www.mediafax.ro/externe/putin-a-propus-poloniei-sa-imparta-ucraina-cu-rusia-declaratiile-fostului-ministru-polonez-de-externe-13426501>, accessed on September 25, 2019.

and target”⁸.

It was appreciated that these military formations most likely belonged to the Russian Special Operations Forces. However, we appreciate that it is very possible that among these were also elements of private military companies, such as „Wagner”.

Some forms of information warfare or even hybrid warfare were also used by other states before the Russian Federation in the military action to annex the Crimean peninsula: „*Becoming aware of the fact that in the modern world everything translates into information, the Americans were the first who established the theory of information warfare. In USA the military and civilian institutions dealing with this issue are proliferating*”⁹.

Carrying out the military action

The journalist Alexandru GRUMAZ mentioned in an article published on 10th of March 2014, that „... on 27th February, Putin declared alert for Russian armed forces and mobilized fighter jets on the border with Ukraine. The fighter jets of the Western Military District have been placed on high alert status to this day”¹⁰.

At that time the number of military forces present on the peninsula was approximately balanced, respectively Ukraine had about 14,600 soldiers, and the Russian Federation about 15,000. At that time, a memorandum of understanding between the two states was in force regarding the stationing of the Russian military forces in Crimea, valid until 2047.

In a short time, Russian Federation managed to move on the peninsula about 5,500-6,000 soldiers, using the air route through the airport near Simferopol and on the sea through the port of Sevastopol or with the help of ferries over the Kerch Strait. Most of these troops belonged the Southern

⁸ Col. (r.) prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe BOARU, *RĂZBOIUL INFORMAȚIONAL – UN OBIECTIV AL SECURITĂȚII NAȚIONALE*, Revista Academiei de Științe ale Securității Naționale, Nr.2/2019, p.29.

⁹ Col. (r.) prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe BOARU, *RĂZBOIUL INFORMAȚIONAL – UN OBIECTIV AL SECURITĂȚII NAȚIONALE*, Revista Academiei de Științe ale Securității Naționale, Nr.2/2019, p.30, apud Vladimir Volkoff, *Tratat de dezinformare - De la Calul Troian la Internet*, Editura ANTET, p. 210.

¹⁰ Alexandru GRUMAZ, „*Planul de război. Cum a ocupat Rusia Crimeea fără să tragă niciun glonț*”, <https://www.qmagazine.ro/planul-de-razboi-cum-a-ocupat-rusia-crimeea-fara-sa-traga-niciun-glont-2/>, accesed on September 27, 2019.

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Military District of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, but also forces from other military regions were present. The Polish journalist Andrzej WILK appreciated that elements of the following military units had been introduced on the peninsula¹¹:

- 22nd Spetsnaz Brigade from Krasnodar;
- 382nd Marine Infantry Battalion from Temruk;
- 31st Airborne Brigade from Ulyanovsk.

We observe that at the beginning of the military intervention in Crimea, the Russian Federation used mostly well-trained military personnel from the special units with adequate information resources who had increased mobility and were able to execute the dislocation in the region in record time thus achieving both numerical superiority in the region and surprise.

Accordingly, our opinion is that in this conflict modern procedures and technical equipment were used, which made the difference between it and other classical conflicts: „... *It is important to note that information technology not only allows the development of modern warfare, but also adds a new dimension to conflicts*”¹².

Between February 28 and March 4, 2014, the units of the Russian Federation armed forces together with the local paramilitary formations began to occupy the strategic infrastructure points of the peninsula, including here airports, ports, stations, headquarters of local government institutions and agencies.

Subsequently, the barracks on the peninsula where the Ukrainian Armed Forces had been dislocated had surrounded and blocked and after that one by one, all of them surrendered. It is worth noting that the Russian State Duma approved the Russian President's proposal regarding the deployment of troops to the Crimean Peninsula on 1st of March 2014. There were also situations in which the Ukrainian soldiers voluntarily passed to the Russian side. An example is the frigate "*Hatman Sahaidacni*", which was returning from a mission under NATO aegis in the Gulf of Aden and

¹¹ Andrzej WILK, „*Russian military intervention in Crimea*”, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-05/russian-military-intervention-crimea>, accessed on September 27, 2019.

¹² Col. prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe BOARU, *RĂZBOIUL INFORMAȚIONAL ȘI OPERAȚIILE INFORMAȚIONALE*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare, București, 2004, p. 26.

chose to pass to the Russian side, refusing to follow the orders of the military leaders from Kiev.

Finally, the Ukrainian Armed Forces withdraw from the peninsula, their barracks being occupied by the Russian Federation Armed Forces. On March 17, 2014, the declaration of independence of the Crimea took place, and on March 18, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the decree by which the peninsula was integrated into Russian Federation.

Conclusions

The takeover of military control over the Crimean peninsula in a relatively easy manner by the Russian Federation Armed Forces shows on the one hand a very good training of the Russian troops in carrying out this type of military action, and on the other hand a high level of planning, organization and management of the Russian political-military leaders.

We identify a timely military action planning which was quickly adapted to the existing situation as well as the ability of Russian political-military leaders to make the most of the situation created inside Ukraine in order to achieve their goals.

An absolutely remarkable fact was the use of intelligence services in support of military action, being signaled the intensification of their actions with a rather large period of time before the military action started, as well as the application of new tactics through the use of private military companies.

We also see an increased capacity of dislocation of military forces in the conflict area in a short time and under conditions of camouflage and high security.

From another point of view, it can be said that the success of this military action was also based on surprise which created a general state of confusion among the Ukrainian Armed Forces located on the peninsula. It is also worth noting that once the Russian Armed Forces gained the advantage created by surprise over the Ukrainian Armed Forces remaining on the peninsula, they maintained the initiative, fact which led to reaching the final objectives of the military action.



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