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RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE - ABKHAZIA 1993-1992

This paper discusses the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia through the theory of Russian hybrid warfare. It underlines the hybrid tactic and adapted elements the Russian Federation used against Georgia in terms of tactical level as well as operative and strategic levels. In addition, within the framework of the paper, I endeavoured to break Russian hybrid warfare into phases and subcategories, such as preparation and active phases of hybrid warfare, indirect support and direct military support, joint operations of Russian regular and irregular forces, categories of information, and political warfare.

Keywords: Russian hybrid warfare against Georgia, Russian hybrid warfare, war in Abkhazia.

Hybrid warfare has been recently one of the most frequently cited terms used by politicians as well as by military theorists, security researchers, and society at large. Russian hybrid warfare drew attention of International society on the 27th of February 2017 when in Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, individuals dressed in green uniforms, armed with machine-guns and sniper rifles, and having no identification marks took over the building of Parliament and hoisted the state flag of Russia over it. (Hahn 2018, 370). Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine started in the aftermath of this event. The warfare consisted of the following activities: stirring up local pro-Russian separatists, supplying rebels with military hardware, massive fire support from Russian artillery systems laid near the border, hybrid tactical operations of regular and irregular subunits, etc. (Karber, 2015). It is noteworthy that the warfare in the east of Ukraine with its structure and characteristics is similar to the war in Abkhazia during 1992-1993 in respect of tactical, operational and strategic levels. Correspondingly, in this paper I will venture to examine the war in Abkhazia through the lens of Russian hybrid warfare theory emphasizing Russian operation phases and analyzing them.

What is Hybrid Warfare?

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the establishing of a unipolar world order created a sense that big conventional wars would never take place again. Therefore, there was a need for establishing theories about future warfare in military sciences. As a result, new theories on military operation methods of the 1990s emerged, among them are the following: “fourth generation warfare”, “unrestricted warfare”, “low-intensity conflict”, etc. In 2007, US retired officer F. Hoffman put forward a theory about hybrid warfare. According to him, future warfare are lead by state and non-state actors who, for their political objectives simultaneously and adaptively within one military zone, use regular and irregular forces, terrorist and criminal methods (Hoffman 2007, 8). Afterwards, the hybrid warfare theory proposed by Hoffman has evolved and other activities in noncombat situation have been added to it, such as information, politics, economy, finances, democracy, social media, etc. Because of the complexity and diversity of methods for the prosecution of war, an operation is carried out in three stages which can be conventionally subdivided into preparatory, offensive and stabilization phases (Racz 2017, 57-64).

Russian Hybrid Warfare in Abkhazia

The preparatory phase of hybrid warfare component in Abkhazia started already from the Soviet days by encouraging a separatist movement. This fact included the intensification of ethnolinguistic differences, the falsification of history about ethnic minorities and their settlement area, the creation of separatist movement and the establishment of Abkhazian ultranationalistic unions. The first attempts of the falsification of history of Abkhazia started already during the Russian Empire by N. Voronov in 1907 and later at the initiative of Nestor Lakoba in the 1920s (Papaskiri 2007, 160). The aim of Abkhaz historians was to prove that the only indigenous residents of the territory of Abkhazia were Abkhazs and the Georgian nation never lived there. Thus, yet in case of any counterargument or a neutral viewpoint put forward from Georgian scientists, an aggressive anti-Georgian campaign would begin in Abkhazia. The campaign would always end against academic standpoint and in favour of Abkhazs instigating them further to spread ultranationalistic ideas and to inflame separatism. Abkhazian-Georgian confrontations based on similar motives happened in 1956-1957, 1967 and 1977. Abkhazian political and academic elites were sending letters of complaint to Moscow in which one of their claims was to join Russia as a constituent part with the status of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The Communist party leadership would always reject Abkhazian political claims (Papaskiri 2008, 156-185). However, through the political games Moscow would demonstrate to the Georgian side that it possessed the levers of pressure. Moreover, Russia warned Georgia that in case of any slightest resistance it would “explode” the region.

Correspondingly, when the Georgian dissident movement launched anti-Soviet demonstrations, the Soviet authorities started to ignite Abkhaz separatists.

In November 1988, in order to “punish” the Georgian national movement that held a powerful protest march against new amendments in the USSR constitution, by the permission of the USSR central authorities, official organizations of local national movements “Aidgilara” and “Adamon Rykhas” were established (Papaskiri 2007, 197). Shortly afterwards, with the efforts of “Aidgilara”, Abkhazs summoned a several thousand strong assembly in Linkhni on 18 March 1989 and issued the famous Likhni letter provoking the indignation of Georgian society (Jojua 2009, 116). The tension inspired by Moscow was at its peak in the summer of 1989 when the actions of Abkhazian radical groups inflicted casualties on ethnic Georgians on the 15th-16th of July (Papaskiri 2007, 242-243).

Against this background, an anti-Georgian organization called the Confederation of Mountain People of the North Caucasus was established in the North Caucasus, August 1989. The capital of the organization was Sokhumi (Papaskiri 2007, 25). The organization, which in essence had to be also anti-Russian, played a significant role over the course of the war in Abkhazia.

On the initiative of V. Ardzimba, during the same time period an illegitimate military unit was created – “an Abkhazian guard the militants of which passed their combat training in the city of Grozny. The mentioned unit was the backbone of separatist politics of the Abkhaz leaders and exactly the militants of this unit opened fire on Georgian regiments in August of 1992 and launched war in Abkhazia (Papaskiri & Kalichava 2021, 293).

According to the abovementioned, we can single out the following activities of the preparatory phase of Russian hybrid warfare: the encouragement of Abkhazian/Ossetian separatists; the support of an anti-Georgian narrative; the support of the politicians distinguished by their anti-Georgian attitudes; the creation of a military base in Abkhazia.

The active phase of Russian hybrid warfare that started in August of 1992 can be divided into three subcategories: Russian indirect military assistance to separatists, military interference, and non-military support.

Indirect Military Assistance

From the very first day of the war in Abkhazia, the Russian Federation officials started to supply Abkhaz separatists with hardware and ammunition. The Russian 643th missile regiment gave them 267 pistols, 18 machine-guns, more than 500 hand grenades, 984 automatic rifles, more than half of a million bullets, trucks, etc. (Kolbaia et al 1999, 208). In addition, the head of the Gudauta aerial port supply, Lieutenant Colonel

Dolgopolov handed over to them 6 armoured infantry fighting vehicles with full set, up to 400 hand grenades, up to 50,000 cartridges and 6 machine-guns (Nadareishvili 2000, 56). By October of 1992, during an assault on Gagra Abkhazs and their allies already had in-service T-72 and T-80 tanks (Urigashvili 1992, 2). Concerning this event, Eduard Shevardnadze accused the Russian generals of the plot against Georgia at the press conference held on the 6th of October. He remarked that the generals Kontradiev and Sungutkin were personally responsible for the tragedy that unfolded in Gagra. During the conference, the country's paramount leader said that the T-72 and T-80 tanks and air defence missile systems held by Abkhaz militants arose many questions because even the independent Georgian state had no similar armaments. Moreover, the prohibition of sorties of Georgian pilots by Russian station commanders in Gudauta could be considered as one of the facts of interference of Russians in the war of Abkhazia against Georgia. Eduard Shevardnadze expressed concern over B. Yeltsin's statement that Russia would do its best to protect the Russian-speaking population of Georgia (Urigashvili 1992a).

One of the political neutral international organizations such as Human Rights Watch was writing about military assistance to Abkhazs from the Russian side. According to its report, in October and December of 1992 the Abkhazs who had light weapons in the beginning used heavy artillery, tanks, and arms. As Georgians were not able to provide Abkhazs with the mentioned armour, Shevardnadze named Russians as the only source of supply (Human Rights Watch 1995, 30). In October of 1993, the newspaper *Izvestiya* published an interview of a Russian volunteer captured by Georgians. According to his words, a Pskov airborne division was giving many types of arms to the Abkhazian side free of charge. Besides, there was an organization in Moscow which was dispatching a large number of weapons to Abkhazia (Eligulashvili 1993, 8). According to the same newspaper, "Russia handed 75 tanks, 20 armoured vehicles, 12 artillery pieces including the "Uragan" and the "Grad" rocket launcher systems over to separatists" (Jojua 2009, 187). Apart from the hardware support, Russians provided financial assistance to separatists and the Moscow banks transferred to Abkhazs up to 20 billion Russian roubles over the course of the conflict (Nadareishvili 2000, 65).

One of the covert methods of military assistance to Abkhazs was Russian humanitarian aid. Under the guise of humanitarian aid for Tkvarcheli, Russians always carried out combat airlifts, e.g.: prior to the Tamishi operation in July of 1993, from May onwards 7-8 helicopters of Russian MI-8 type were transporting freight to Tkvarcheli direction on a daily basis. On the 16th of June, 30 Kamaz trucks and 3 buses brought a large quantity of weapons in besieged Tkvarcheli (Kolbaia et al 1999, 149). It should be noted that similar methods of supply were used also in

Ukraine when bringing Russian armaments by several tens of lorries in Donbas and Lugansk (Snegovaya 2015, 8).

Furthermore, Russia employed a “negation tactic” over the course of war in Abkhazia and the Russian officials always used to assert that they never gave formal permission to provide Abkhazs with military hardware. Accordingly, the hardware in the Abkhazian armaments was either loot taken by force from Georgians units or a result of looting of Russian military bases (Karber 2015, 25). During the developments of 2014 in Ukraine, representatives of Putin’s Russia responded likewise to the accusations of helping Ukrainian separatists. Allegedly, Ukrainian separatists gained weapons after robbery on Ukrainian military bases and from Ukrainian soldiers as a booty. In order to strengthen the statements, in an early stage of the conflict Russians supplied rebels with hardware which Ukrainian soldiers had in armament. Only after successful anti-terrorist operations in Ukraine, Russians started to give Ukrainians most recent Russian hardware in order to avoid defeat (Karber 2015, 26). The same fact happened in case of Abkhazia when Georgians in the first stage of the war captured Sokhumi and had control over the Georgia-Russia border virtually bringing Abkhazs to a dead-end. After that Russians began to give hardware to separatists due to which Abkhazs captured Gagra, Leselidze, and Gantiadi and stopped at the Psou river in October of 1993 (Papaskiri & Kalichava 2021, 301).

Abkhazian units underwent training in Pskov (Karkarashvili 1992) as well as in village Chlou where Russians established a training centre (Kolbaia et al 1999, 134). These events can be considered as part of irregular military assistance.

Over the whole war in Abkhazia, Russia provided active logistic support to separatists in terms of different kinds of weapons, hardware and ammunition playing a decisive role in settling the conflict to the advantage of the Abkhazian side. However, the delivery of armaments from Russians to Abkhazia, the dispatch of military instructors and the opening of training centres do not turn the conflict into a Russian hybrid war, as so called a “proxy” war, not being a novelty in the history of military art, is waged by means of similar methods. The Soviets were supplying the Vietnamese exactly in the same way during the war, while the US were supplying the Afghans in the 1980s. Correspondingly, when we reflect on the Russian hybrid interference in the war of Abkhazia, along with the aforementioned indirect assistance we also take into consideration the participation of the Russian military forces together with the Abkhazian irregular forces in military operations during the conflict on tactic and operational levels. Furthermore, we should make allowance for information war against Georgia, political and economic pressure, and participation of the citizens of Russia as volunteers in the conflict as well.

Russian Volunteers in the War of Abkhazia

Volunteers appeared on the Abkhazian side from the very beginning of the war when the Confederation of Mountain People of the North Caucasus declared war on Georgia and its militants using the Caucasus mountain passes started to go to Abkhazia en masse on the 21st of August in 1992 (Gasviani & Gasviani 2005, 172-173). Besides, along with the North Caucasian warriors, the Abkhazs who were citizens of Turkey (Nadareishvili 2000, 110), Transnistrian volunteers (Shamugia 2018), Cossaks and even ethnic Russians (Zverev 1996, 3) fought in the war on the Abkhazian side. It is noteworthy that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union approximately 30,000 citizens of Russia participated as soldiers of fortune in different conflicts (Yakov 1993, 3). Notwithstanding the participation as a mercenary in military operations was considered to be a violation of international legal norms and a mercenary, if taken captive, faced maximum penalty, the Russian Federation citizens were involved in the conflict for various reasons even creating some diplomatic problems for Russia. One of the Russian influential newspapers *Izvestiya* touched upon this problem. The newspaper was writing that the participation of a large number of citizens of Russia in military operations was making a problem for the state. Its participation was showing that the Russian Federation was the third side of the conflict. However, the authorities were not reacting to these concerns. On the contrary, they even tended to stimulate the situation. One of the organizers of volunteer recruitment and their deployment to Abkhazia was an ultra-rightist national patriotic party which was staffed by chauvinists who were backing the idea of restoration of the Russian Empire. The party had established a paramilitary group of several thousands of people who actively participated in post-Soviet conflicts (Yakov 1993, 3). Moreover, the Russian parliamentary opposition, so called “red-browns” (the alliance of communists and nationalists), was supporting Abkhaz separatists (Urigashvili 1992b) and made several statements for the benefit of them. Presumably, Human Rights Watch was writing about these government branches when it declared that the Russian government establishment was supervising the collection of Russian militants, their arming and deployment in the conflict region to participate in the war of Abkhazia (Human Rights Watch 1995, 50).

Russian Military Assistance

During the war in Abkhazia, the Russian armed forces carried out military operations in support of Abkhaz separatists and sometimes took part even in combat operations together with them. The first interference in the conflict by the Russian regular army took place on the 29th of August when Georgian regiments with 600 soldiers, 3 tanks and 6 infantry fighting

vehicles broke the front line, crossed the Gumista river and gained several hills. The Georgian forces started an attack in order to expand its success to Gudauta direction, but it was confronted by the Russian Federation military blocking of the Georgian attack by simultaneous ground and air operations. As a result, 40 servicemen died, 3 tanks and 4 armoured infantry fighting vehicles were destroyed (Jojua 2017, 151). Russian land army servicemen took part in the Tamishi operation in July of 1993, namely approximately 300-500 militants (Kolbaia et al 1999, 150) whose documents were formed in that manner as if they were on leave (Topuria 2021). Russian soldiers took part in military operations in Donbas and Lugansk for the same purpose so that the Russian diplomacy could explain that they the Ministry of Defence was not able to control the activities of those soldiers who were on leave (Means of Russia Hybrid warfare 2017, 25).

Apart from the land army, the Black Sea fleet of Russia actively participated in the conflict of Abkhazia which was performing basically the following three tasks: 1. the Russian army was blocking beach landing to the rear of the Abkhazs, as they did during the Gagra operation in October of 1992 (Kolbaia et al 1999, 208); 2. it performed beach landing to the rear of the Georgian army, e.g., they tried to carry out beach landing in Sikhumi during the operations on the 17th of March in 1992 (Melashvili 2019, 100), while during the Tamishi operation they did it successfully on the 2nd of July in 1993 (Topuria 2021); 3. the Russian military support was provided to Gudauta by water (Jojua 2009, 173-174).

In terms of efficiency in the war of Abkhazia, the Russian air force having an airbase in Gudauta plaid a significant role. Yet in October 1992, the Russian government issued a sanction that in case the Georgian side opened fire on Russian soldiers, Russians could return fire (Human Rights Watch 1995, 28). This sanction hampered the activities of Georgian soldiers. The Abkhazian artillery, which was bombing Sokhumi, was deployed near this laboratory. Therefore, the Georgian side could not open air and artillery fire to the Abkhazian battlefields as far as it was afraid to receive counterfire. The aircrafts belonging to the Russian air force bombed the Georgian positions several times, among them they were bombing residential buildings in Sokhumi as well. Below I am referring to certain events recorded by the Georgian and foreign sides: on the 15th of October the Gumista river front line positions were bombed; 18 November – the built-up area Kelasuri; 2 December – Sokhumi; 5 December – the Gumista river positions; 9 December – Sokhumi; 10 December – village Akhaldaba; 12 March 1993 – village Tsagera; 13 March – the Gumista front (Kolbaia et al 1999, 132-146).

It is worthwhile to mention the developments in February of 1993 when Russian Su-25 attack aircrafts bombed Sokhumi on the 20th of February. The Georgian side was protesting against this fact and Georgia-Russia

negotiations were on the verge of collapse. At first, the Russian side refuted its participation in the bombardment. The Russian officials even said that the operation was conducted by the aircrafts of the Confederation of Mountain People of the North Caucasus (Taranov & Urigashvili 1993, 1). However, they were finally compelled to confess that Russian pilots carried out the bombardment in order to retaliate against the operations of the Georgian side (Human Rights Watch 1995, 36). I have to note that Russian aerial assets targeted not only ground aims but also Georgian pilots. Gudauta air force base servicemen had an order to demolish all Georgian aircrafts within the 70km radius from Gudauta (Nadareishvili 2000, 117). Correspondingly, when 2 items of Georgian Su-25 was trying to destroy the Abkhazian artillery targets deployed on the Gumista front, Russian Su-25 dropped one of them and the second one was constrained not to fulfil its mission and return to the base on the 1st of May in 1993 (Kolbaia et al 1999, 146). Not only Russian fighter planes were protecting the Abkhazian positions from Georgian pilots but also air defence systems of Russia. From the very the outset of the conflict, the systems created two operational bases. One of them secured the airspace of the Gumista river, whereas the second one was protecting the Gumista front (Jojua 2017, 147). In addition, the Russian secret services were acting to the advantage of the Abkhazian side. Their agents were spying in favour of Abkhaz separatists, e.g., Lieutenant A. Sitnikov was detained in Sokhumi during a sabotage on the 31st of March in 1993 (Nadareishvili 2000, 54). On the 1st of April another militant of the Russian military unit N2011, radio operator sergeant A.O. Lunin shared the same fate who was caught red-handed in Sokhumi (Kolbaia et al 199, 208). Furthermore, the Russian secret services participated in the decisive assault on Sokhumi as so called “shock force” in September of 1993 (Kolbaia et al 1999, 210).

Information Warfare

The Russian press and television were actively involved in the warfare waged against Georgia, e.g., from the very first fire in Abkhazia, a telegram sent by V. Ardzimba on the 14th of August was published in one of the Russian central newspapers Pravda. In the telegram Ardzimba was repeating a narrative elaborated in advance on the aggressiveness of the Georgian side which was destroying everything on the way, etc. (Chergonnaya 1994, 176-177).

The Russian information warfare in the conflict of Abkhazia was mostly revealed in the abovementioned “negation tactic”. In response to the allegations that the pilots of the Russian air force were bombing the Georgian positions and towns, Minister of Defence Igor Grachev publicly declared that the Georgian side itself was bombing its civilians (Human Rights Watch 1995, 36). The fact of participation of the Russian

air force was officially confirmed on the 19th of March in 1993 when in village Shroma a Russian Su-27 crashed which was navigated by Major V. Shipko. Even in case of the evident fact, the Ministry of Defence of Russia in explanation of its conduct published some information in the Russian media and confirmed that the aircraft took off from the Bombora aerial port, although it denied the fact that the plane was intended to bomb Sokhumi. Allegedly, Su-27, in contrast with Su-25, is a fighter aircraft used for destroying aerial assets but not an attack aircraft. Correspondingly, Major V. Shipko took off to destroy 2 items of Su-25 flying from Tbilisi to Sokhumi aiming at bombing Sokhumi and again accusing the Georgian side of a crime (Burbyga & Litovkin 1993, 5).

The information war was carried out also in print media and television network, e.g., in October of 1992 the government of Russia published an official statement in which it was blaming the Georgian side for violating the conditions stipulated in the Moscow agreement of 1992 leading to the assault by the Abkhazian side upon Gagra and the tragedy of Gagra (Armed Conflict in Abkhazia 1992, 1). In this respect, an interview given by the second-in-command of the South Caucasus Lieutenant General S. Bepaev is of interest. In the interview, he stated that the Georgian side thoroughly fulfilled the agreement (Urigashvili 1992, 3). According to the Lieutenant General's assertion, during the developments in October of 1992 Georgia became "a victim of political machination" (An Uncontrolled Weapon Aims at Society 1992, 3).

Political Pressure

Russia's anti-Georgian information warfare simultaneously with political warfare worked from the high tribune of parliament. A closed meeting was held on the initiative of MP Sergey Baburin, known for his anti-Georgian dispositions at the the State Duma on the 25th of October in 1992 (Gasviani & Gasviani 2005, 175). The opposition MPs adopted a resolution according to which the Highest Council condemned the Moscow agreement and dissociated themselves from it. The MPs were claiming the complete withdrawal of the Georgian subunits from the territory of Abkhazia and were blaming the state of Georgia for an attempt of forceful resolution to the problem of Abkhazia. They were appealing to the government of the Russian Federation to suspend the fulfillment of the obligations envisaged by the agreement with Georgia, to stop the provision of own military hardware to Georgia, to break economic relations with Georgia, etc. (Papaskiri 2007, 381-382). Not the "breach of the agreement" from the Georgian side but the statements and resolutions supporting Abkhazian separatists turned out to be the reason of the tragedy in Gagra.

The legislative branch appealed to the government several times to impose strict sanctions on Georgia. According to the agreement of 25

December 1992, the MPs were appealing to B. Yeltsin to fulfil the resolution of the Highes Council. Moreover, by the resolution of the Nations Council of 20 April 1993, they gave consent to accept Abkhazia as a constituent part of the Russian Federation or to take Abkhazia under its wing (Papaskiri 2007, 390; 396-397).

The role of the Russian political elite and the nature of Russian hybrid actions are well reflected in the activities of the Vice-President of Russia during the conflict of Tkhinvali in 1992. In an interview given on the 5th of Septemebr in 2019, Alexander Rotskoy, a retired Major General of military aviation, Hero of the Soviet Union, describes in detail how he forced Eduard Shevardnadze to sign a ceasefire agreement. According to his words, Rutskoy offered the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin to retrieve intelligence information about the Georgian artillery positions via aerosurveying by military aircrafts and to bomb them by means of the air force in due time. At first, Yeltsin rejected the suggestion but afterwards he consented to it. In a couple of days, Russia bombed the positions of the Georgians, while during the telephone conversation with Eduard Shevardnadze Rutskoy threatened him that he would bomb even Tbilisi (Rutskoy 2019). The history of the war in Abkhazia demonstrates the fact that Russians employed the same methods over the whole course of the conflict by collecting information about the Georgian positions along the Gumista river and later bombed them. Rutskoy, who was Vice-President also during the war in Abkhazia, presumably used the same methods, especially when we take into consideration his past service in military aviation and a lot of weight he carried with the Russian military, one can elucidate who was directing the operations conducted by the Russian air force during the war in Abkhazia.

Within the framfork of the information warfare, the representatives of the government of Russia who were publicly supporting Abkhaz separatists, during television broadcasting and interviews were accusing Georgians of the genocide of Abkhazs, the bombardment of peaceful population, and the violation of human rights. Besides, they were threatening Georgia with a military intervention (Rustkoy 1993).

In line with the operation carried out by Russia in the war of Abkhazia, an active phase of the Russian hybrid warfare is the following:

Active Phase

1. Indirect military assistance: creation of recruiting stations for volunteers, combat trainings of volunteers and their projection to the region of Abkhazia; supplying separatists with weapons and with other hardware; financial assistance to separatists; planning of Abkhazian operations by the General Staff; opening of training centres for separatists and their retraining.

2. Non-military component: creation of an alternative political centre; partial control of local media; information warfare, misinformation campaigns against Georgia, proliferation of anti-Georgian narrative abroad as well as in Russia; depicting Georgia as an evil aggressor, blaming Georgia for genocide/ethnic cleansing; political blackmail of the government of Georgia, threats of economic and other forms of sanctions; supportive political statements for separatists made by executive and legislative branches; denial of involvement on the Abkhazian side; reception of separatists leaders and consultations; signing ceasefire and peace agreements for the benefit of separatists.

3. Military component: activities of the Russian armed forces to the good of Abkhazs: bombardments of Georgian positions and residential buildings by the air force; participation of the sea forces in Abkhazian operations, beach landing to the rear of the Georgian army, restriction of water area for Georgians; participation of Russian regular army units and special operation militants on the Abkhazian side.

We can pose a question: what was the objective of the Russian hybrid warfare in Abkhazia? As it was mentioned above, so called “red-brown” ultranationalists supporting the restoration of the Russian Empire were realizing that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union the withdrawal of Russian military bases from the South Caucasus would appear on the agenda (it was discussed also during the war in Abkhazia between Russia and Georgia) and they definitely would be obliged to implement it. According to the nationalists’ viewpoint, the absence of Russian military forces in the Caucasus was a threat to security and state interests of Russia. The existence of independent Georgia which would move towards the Euro-Atlantic area (which was declared numerous times by the dissident movement) and create a democratic state was absolutely unacceptable for Russian fascists. Thus, their aim was to weaken the newly-fledged country of Georgia with whom western countries would not cooperate, whereas Russian military bases and frozen conflicts would secure Russia that NATO would never expand to its southern border. Correspondingly, the stabilization phase of the Russian hybrid war will be as follows:

Stabilization phase: conflict freezing, deployment of peacekeepers in Abkhazia; with the existence of frozen conflicts hindering Georgia from joining a military and political alliance; assistance of illegitimate governments, financing and establishment of military bases.

As we can observe, the war in Abkhazia belongs to classical hybrid warfare expressed in joint operations of Russian regular forces as well as Russian/Abkhazian irregular forces, information war, deteriorated criminal rate, etc. That the military culture of hybrid warfare is so deeply rooted in Russian military thinking that even when the Russian central government was weak during 1991-1993 and the country had a strong parliamentary

opposition, some branches of the government independently managed to carry out war-like methods in Abkhazia. These methods were in contrast with the developments in Ukraine when Russia acted in a centralized way and for the purpose of hybrid warfare used state resources to the full. The war in Abkhazia is the prototype of Russian modern hybrid warfare. This war is not homogeneous and is variable with space and time, although the basic line is common and the only difference lies in performance levels and technical means.

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