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Evolution of the Methodology of Conducting Military Operations on the Example of the Clash of Two-Speed Civilisations During the Conflict in Ukraine 2014–2022

Abstract: he difference in the methodology of conducting military operations by Russian and Ukrainian troops during the war ongoing since February 2022 is striking. It does not result only from the adopted convention of conducting these activities but is conditioned on a much deeper mental level resulting from cultural conditions. They determine the perception and understanding of the phenomenon of war. In other words, the operational and tactical methodology can be adapted to changing realities, provided that the essence of such a change is understood in terms of achieving the assumed military and non-military goals. Furthermore, these goals could be achieved by conducting military operations according to a completely different methodology, probably with much greater effectiveness. Why, in such a perspective, did the Russian side choose such a barbaric way of conducting war, characterising the methodology of military actions of the past decades or even centuries? This paper aims to answer the research question: What premises condition the Russian methodology of military action in the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022? Empirical methods were employed to obtain an answer to this question.

Keywords: *military operation, war in Ukraine, two-speed civilisations, Russia, Ukraine*

Methodological Assumptions

A literature review and using the "desk research" method in relation to current media reports emerged a question, to which no clear answer has been given so far: *why did the two sides of the conflict choose different methodologies of conducting war?* The difference in the methodology of conducting military operations by Russian and Ukrainian troops during the war ongoing since February 2022 is striking. It also seems that this difference does not result only from the adopted convention of conducting these activities but is conditioned on a much deeper mental level resulting from cultural conditions referred to – for instance, by G. Hofstede et al. (2007, pp. 16–19) – as "cultural programming", which in the described case, determines the perception and understanding of the phenomenon of war. In other words, the operational and tactical methodology can be adapted to changing realities, provided that the essence of such a change is understood in terms of achieving the assumed military and non-military goals. Adequately adopted strategic objectives requiring – according to Russia – military action in no way determine how to achieve them in a strictly military level. Furthermore, these goals could be achieved by conducting military operations according to a completely different methodology, probably with much greater effectiveness. Why, in such a perspective, did the Russian side choose such a barbaric way of conducting war, characterising the methodology of military actions of the past decades or even centuries? Regarding presented consideration, the authors decided to ask the following research question:

What premises condition the Russian methodology of military action in the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022?

In order to obtain an answer to this research question, empirical methods were employed in the form of literature query and desk research, and among the theoretical methods: analysis, synthesis, comparison, and inference (deduction technique) were used.

Introduction

Humans are a unique species, distinguished by a unique brain that allows them to perform complex and thought processes unattainable for other living beings. Over the past millennia, representatives of *homo sapiens* have taken over the entire planet, while other humanoids with comparable mental abilities have disappeared from the pages of history in the last tens of thousands of years (Harvati, 2019, pp. 500–504). According to current archaeological data, the hunter-gatherer model dominated at this stage of civilisational development. It began giving its way during the so-called Neolithic revolution in a new era in the history of humanity civilisational development (Bocquet-Appel, 2011, pp. 560–561). With the gradual warming of the climate, some human groups began to gradually decide on a sedentary lifestyle, giving rise to the so-called agrarian phase (Pringle, 1998, p. 1446). At that time, the first, more serious clashes within their own species occurred. Previously, hunter-gatherer groups rarely competed with each other, and there are even known cases of mutual support

by such groups to survive in unfavourable climatic conditions. These conflicts increased with the emergence of agrarian communities, which, for a long time, accumulated food and resources that could become attractive prey for other communities. Along with the developing settlement and the shrinking of attractive areas (for instance, with access to water, natural defensive values, in the vicinity of hunting grounds, and suitable for cultivation), the area also began to acquire a value worthy of forceful takeover. Later clashes, and, over time, long-lasting military campaigns from antiquity to modern times, in most cases, were conducted for broadly understood resources or attractive terrain. Sometimes the reason for the war was also the desire to eliminate the potential threat from other communities. Wars conducted for personal reasons, e.g., ambitious, were much less frequent. Along with the development of civilisation, the catalogue of resources for which people were ready to murder each other gradually grew. Starting from food, through everyday goods, and ending with rare metals and minerals. Areas that allowed societies to control their international environment, such as key areas for the course of trade routes, access to sea basins allowing to control the movement of goods and people in these waters, terrain points constituting natural fortresses also were gaining in importance. With the entry into the information era, apart from metals and minerals necessary for the production of technological infrastructure for information processing, intangible elements, such as codes on which software crucial for information turnover was based, have become important.

Striving to understand the essence of this civilisationally fundamental transformation and how it influenced the priorities of the most advanced societies, it is worth going back for a moment to Toffler's (2006, pp. 155–160) concept of three waves. In the agrarian phase, the area and resources were crucial, especially the cultivated areas. Control over food production made it possible to control the economy of entire regions, on a par with the control of trade routes through which this food was transported. With the advent of the industrial age, agricultural production lost its importance in favour of industrial production, and the greatest importance and influence was gained by the owners of factories, whose production directly affected the economic and thus financial capabilities of a given state. Then, the range of goods for which they began to compete expanded noticeably. Only the information phase reversed this situation, and the key importance began to gain "information producers", i.e., entities involved in producing and processing information using publicly available information technologies. Therefore, there has been a significant re-evaluation of goods worth fighting for (Manuel, 1996). It should be added that the industrial era's decline and the beginning of the post-industrial and information era laid the foundations for developing global economic mechanisms (Szczurek, 2019, pp. 47–87). A peculiar prelude to this transformation was globalisation, in which the leading role was taken by states controlling the flow of goods and services, thus controlling the areas ensuring the production and provision of these services. On a global scale, it was the equivalent of a road connecting producers, traders, and buyers. According to the old Chinese saying, in order to get rich, you have to build a road. Then, full control over the transported goods will be preserved. Therefore, one can

influence their prices and even the economic and political situation in the countries that produce and purchase these goods by imposing duties or preventing the transport of certain goods. In the global system, the economically strongest state has become the equivalent of the "owner of the road" as it controls most of the international flow of goods, services, and information, and makes other participants in this trade dependent on each other striving for successive economic development.

As a result, all societies, even economically weaker ones, could become beneficiaries of global trade in goods and services. Thus, the standard of living in these societies began to improve, and thanks to information technologies, access to knowledge gradually became widespread. At the same time, control over the flow of information allowed to influence the mental formation of future generations, i.e., raising them based on a specific and beneficial catalogue of values, in consequence skilfully created in the mental sphere of needs (Nye, 2011, p. 84). Globalisation has thus given rise to consumerism that so effectively binds successive generations around the world (Sroczyński, 2013, pp. 347–356). Looking from the perspective of the past few decades, it can be assumed that in the long run, globalisation is a trend leading to the cultural unification of the societies involved in this process (Manfred, 2007, 367–382). Those who did not want to participate in this process were condemned to marginalisation, and the only thing that could delay civilisational regression was the disposal of sufficiently large, own resources. Small states were by definition doomed to failure as long as they were not involved in worldwide socio-economic unification. However, it is worth remembering that without a properly developed technological background and organisational culture, it is not possible to use resources even by these potentially self-sufficient societies (Górnikiewicz, 2018, pp. 38–40, 309). Taking a sufficiently distant perspective, it can be seen that civilisations of different speeds are beginning to distinguish in relation to the level of civilisational and technological advancement of individual societies. Moreover, this advancement is correlated with the mental level, which, in turn, determines the priorities recognised in domestic and foreign policy. The example of the war in Ukraine shows the clash of civilisations of different speeds: civilisation striving for the post-industrial-information level and civilisation almost classically industrial. From the perspective of the former, competition for attractive areas and resources is pointless, given the possibility of participating in multilaterally beneficial, global trade in goods and services within the globalisation framework. From the latter's perspective, the appropriation of other people's resources and territories seems fundamental to survival in the face of potential crises and conflicts with other blocs of states. This difference in the perception of the ways in which strategic interests are pursued has led to a conflict that might not have occurred if both civilisations had similarly interpreted the opportunities and threats in their immediate international environment.

The Kremlin has never ceased to see the North Atlantic Alliance and the so-called Western world in general as a potential threat (Leventis & Hadjikoumis, 2022). According to Russian decision-makers, today's peaceful so-called "West" does not have to remain so in the long run, and time inexorably works to the disadvantage of Russia through the dynamically growing

disproportion of forces and resources in favour of the "West". Furthermore, the Kremlin continues to base its defence strategy on the absolutely outdated concept of the so-called "buffer zones", which is part of the theory of the balance of power proposed in the nineteenth century by Adolphe Tiers (Fazal, 2004, pp. 311–344). For several decades, this concept formed the foundation of the defensive strategy of the British Empire, which built its power based on unreflective colonialism. In conclusion, Russian decision-makers mentally function based on strongly industrial, nineteenth-century priorities. Therefore, the Kremlin's international activity seems completely incomprehensible to societies already functioning in the realities of the post-industrial and information era. It can be assumed that such powerful support for the so-called Western world given to Ukraine was a huge surprise from the Kremlin's perspective and was considered an almost hostile act. However, from the perspective of Western societies, it is an attempt to stop this incomprehensible "madness" so that it does not "spill over" to other European countries. In conclusion, the Kremlin has made a dramatic move that will give any chance of maintaining outdated Russia's *status quo* in the face of the technological momentum of Western civilisation, which Ukraine is understandably trying to join.

The way of looking at the world and civilisational mental conditions also strongly affect the adopted optics of the methodology of conducting warfare. Assuming that the Russian military mentally remained at the stage of wars conducted in the industrial period (especially with regard to the methods used during the First and Second World Wars), it is not surprising the absolutely inhuman and barbaric way of conducting wars, the indirect and partly direct goal of which is the civilian population. Therefore, treating own soldiers as cannon fodder and the civilian population as a kind of "loot" also is not surprising (Graham-Harrison & Dyke, 2022). The Ukrainian army's approach is already different despite the harm suffered from the Russians, definitely closer to the standards of the Western world, and thus inscribed in the optics inherent in post-industrial and information civilisation (Mierzejewski, 2010). Therefore, Ukrainians are not only fighting for their country and independence but also to ensure that their society, submitting to the dictates of the Kremlin, is not civilisationally regressed to the previous era.

Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the differences in the methodology of conducting military operations, characterising these two, completely different civilisational and mental approaches. Starting with an attempt to characterise the Russian art of war, it is worth identifying a reference point indicating the mental conditions of the Russian decision-making process. It will not be possible without reaching deep into the methodology of military operations of the industrial period.

Industrial Period of the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

At that time, hostilities were based on the clash of "army masses", where human losses were not taken into account, and the only thing that mattered was the achievement of the assumed military goals enabling the implementation of political goals. This approach is influenced

by the division of people into a privileged class (aristocracy) and a class of subjects (the rest of society) conditioned by upbringing in the feudal system (Scott & Bell, 2007, p. 273; Penney, 2003, p. 189; Encyclopedia, 2007, pp. 64, 620, 849, 921).

As a result, due to the imprecise nature of the firearms used at that time, and at the same time, the lack of respect for human life, compact formations (e.g., the so-called quadrilateral – Ross, 1979, p. 25) were used, which on the one hand, increased the strength of imprecise fire, and on the other hand, in the case of firing by the enemy, caused losses among its own troops (Bruce et al., 2008, pp. 171–173). Striving to control the human survival instinct, soldiers were subjected to a murderous drill, which can be compared with training. It was to ensure thoughtless execution of orders despite the huge risk of mutilation or loosing life. Thus, the civilian population was treated as the "loot" of marching troops, a kind of compensation for discipline and constant risk of life and health for the benefit of the warring aristocracy. In this well-established scheme of approach to warfare, the "bright" point is the way Napoleon conducted hostilities. The "ossified" aristocratic armies based on centuries of unchanged patterns suddenly began to lose, battle after battle and war after war with the army formed based on the revolutionary movement. Why? The answer is very simple. Napoleon broke out of these schemes. Speed, movement, manoeuvre, economics of force, and surprise became the determinants of the modern methodology of warfare, which the "ossified" aristocratic armies could not cope with. Despite this methodology, it became a precursor of new concepts of warfare, which were used only in the twentieth century (e.g., blitzkrieg).

Industrial Period – The First Half of the Twentieth Century

The methodology of conducting military operations during World War I was a condensation of the previous approaches, but already on a mass and global scale. A kind of fuel intended to additionally drive soldiers of both sides to self-sacrifice was patriotism supported by successive dehumanisation of the opponent (Demm, 1993, pp. 163–192). From the Springtime of Nations to the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of a modern nation evolved, and members of societies identified themselves by belonging to a given nation, which was effectively used by the propaganda machine on both sides of the conflict, motivating people to make massive, almost unimaginable sacrifices (Zgórniak, 1987). Still, the key role in the international decision-making was played by elites who came largely from the aristocracy, and only to a lesser extent, from the financial elites that gradually grew in strength since the beginning of industrialism. At the same time, the approach to the value of life of own soldiers, civilians, and the opponent has not changed much since the nineteenth century.

Industrial Period – The Second Half of the Twentieth Century

During World War II, in which Americans began playing the main role, who were brought up with a completely different system of values, attention began to be paid to the importance of human life, although it was much more declarative than practical. As a result, the commands of both sides were ready to make huge sacrifices, if only there was a chance to achieve the assumed military goals (McEvedy & Jones, 1978, pp. 342–351). Since this time, it was a real war not only between troops but societies, the level of destruction and devastation of civilian infrastructure was much higher than during World War I. Thus, the scale of destruction did not result only from the conducted military operations with a high dynamic of change, as opposed to the positional war characterising the first global conflict. It is worth adding that the propaganda machine of both sides, which was supposed to mobilise not only their own soldiers but also society, was much more developed than during the previous conflict. New and previously unknown means of transferring information were helpful in this (Linebarger, 1959, pp. 105–138).

It is worth adding that the new, popular before the war, idea of National Socialism effectively mobilised the entire German nation in favour of the inhuman Nazi war machine. The Communists, who took power in Russia by way of revolution, scrupulously used this experience to strengthen and develop their own propaganda machine to provide them with thoughtless support of their own society (Bartov, 2001, pp. 68–73). It quickly turned out that propaganda was effective, but its power of influence on the masses weakened over time, so the Communists organised an extensive and extremely sophisticated apparatus of repression (Valentino, 2005, pp. 91–151). As a result, the inhabitants of the Soviet empire had the choice of following power for ideological reasons in which they believed or out of fear of the consequences of resistance against an inhuman regime.

Subsequent wars conducted after 1945 gradually changed their character, although it was happening extremely slowly, as evidenced by the course of hostilities and losses on the civilian side conducted until the 1990s in various parts of the world; including countries belonging to the so-called West. The first war of a different nature, and at the same time characterised by a completely different methodology of conducting military operations, was the so-called "Operation Desert Storm" (Ciechanowski, 2010, pp. 191–205). It was a kind of prelude introducing the methodology characterising the slowly approaching post-industrial and informational period. For the first time in the scale of the whole war, the military began to take into account very seriously their own losses, losses on the civilian side, and even senseless losses on the part of the enemy's troops. It was important to take control of key areas and elements of military and non-military infrastructure, not to gradually destroy subsequent enemy groups. The effect was staggering, because most of the forces surrendered without a fight, thus not generating additional losses on the side of the attackers. The Russian methodology never even came close to the level of the mentioned operation, which was a milestone in the methodology of military operations of the "West". It can be said that

"Operation Desert Storm" was the first media and information war fought in front of the whole world. Everyone could follow its course, and the actors were not soldiers and their military equipment, but politicians and journalists, telling about it as if it was an amazing story.

Post-Industrial-Informational Period: Summary

Strategy: mastering critically important elements of the opponent's infrastructure to control the situation – political, economic, military, socio-cultural, and informational ones.

Tactics: operating small forces, the constituent elements of which are selected from the overall potential in real time according to the situation – the methodology of conducting "casket" operations.

Perception of human life: the involvement of relatively small human resources makes every soldier treated as a very valuable specialist, so conducting military operations is based on minimising own losses.

Perception of the life and health of civilians during armed conflict: striving to comply with the international law of armed conflict, which is also dictated by the desire to use human resources to quickly rebuild the economy and restore the normal functioning of a given state as soon as possible.

Perception of the life of own soldiers in the midst of an armed conflict: sacrificing the lives of soldiers is permissible only in exceptional circumstances.

Perception of the life of enemy soldiers during an armed conflict: the elimination of enemy soldiers should lead to the goal of taking control of a given area or military infrastructure, so pointless elimination of enemy soldiers is avoided.

Perception of the life and health of prisoners during an armed conflict: they are treated under the international law of armed conflict.

Perception of civilian infrastructure during armed conflict: it is treated under the international law of armed conflicts; if it is not absolutely necessary to temporarily dispose of elements such as critical infrastructure, it will be avoided.

Conclusions

The Russian methodology of conducting military operations in a classic armed conflict is based on the decision-making patterns developed in the Soviet Union. These patterns, in turn, were largely based on experiences learned from the battlefields of World War II. It is worth emphasising that the type of weapons and equipment absolutely determines the possibilities of their use on the battlefield, and therefore significantly limits the spectrum of their use during military operations. As a result, we can talk about the creation of a mental and technological loop, where, on the one hand, decision-making patterns matter, and on the other hand, armaments and equipment at their disposal. It is not easy to imagine waging

war based on modern concepts characteristic of post-industrial information societies with outdated resources from the late industrialist era at their disposal. On the other hand, the much greater mental openness of the Russian command would be conducive to the use of technological innovations that can be easily and quickly adapted to increase the effectiveness of its operations, even to a limited extent. Meanwhile, these "novelties" are used not as a comprehensive complement, but as an additional support for classically (industrially) conducted military operations. The difference in approach is visible on the example of the use of drones by the Russian side, which was able to use them only as tools for long-range reconnaissance and to a very limited extent as combat support (BBC News, 2022). The same applies to real-time communication and battlefield real-time imaging systems. It would be possible to combine existing equipment at a relatively low cost into a single, coherent, and functional system, which would significantly shorten decision-making by increasing mobility and operability on the battlefield. Meanwhile, the Russian troops "pushed their masses" using the tactic of the so-called "pile of rubble", i.e., covering the attacked objects with a hail of missiles and rockets, and finally bombs, to take control of the completely destroyed area in result (including civilian infrastructure), and then move this destructive technique to the next area. On the one hand, this approach is very expensive (it requires using an absurdly large amount of ammunition), but on the other hand, it reduces the loss of life. At the same time, Russian tactics do not assume paying attention to the loss of life, and only the growing losses (including the seriously wounded, which is much higher than the number of dead) forced the command to plan military operations more cautiously than at the beginning of the invasion. As a result, the targeted strikes by the Ukrainian side on Russian supply chains have limited the possibility of using this destructive tactic to a broader extent and forced the need to channel Russian activity only in strictly defined directions. The key role has been played not only by regular forces but also by constantly expanding and efficiently operating guerrillas supported by intelligence and special forces (Davydenko et al., 2022). The transition of the Ukrainian side to a counteroffensive in selected directions showed an extremely deep level of demoralisation of Russian soldiers, which allowed to achieve the intended goals without significant losses of their own. The fact that the Ukrainian side has switched to a calculated and temporarily dosed counterattack indicates limiting further possibilities of conducting intensive military operations aimed at destroying further areas. Given the demoralisation of Russian soldiers, it can be assumed that the gradually developing Ukrainian counteroffensive aimed at the enemy's weak points will continue, leading to the collapse of subsequent sections of the aggressor's troops' defence.

The Ukrainian side, which has been using much greater mobility since the beginning of the war and flexibly adapting to the changing realities of the battlefield, in such a situation, began to use a gradual withdrawal to regroup and carry out quick and precisely targeted counterattacks. It should be emphasised that initially, the Ukrainian side did not have modern equipment, and yet the Ukrainian command, using decision-making proper to post-industrial and informational societies, could effectively use the advantages of the

equipment and weapons at its disposal, knowledge of the terrain, the mentality, and the opponent's decision-making. Over the months, the Ukrainian side began to gain increasingly more modern equipment, which it was able to use perfectly according to a completely different decision-making pattern from the Russian one. As a result, time is playing on the Ukrainian side, which with each passing week, strengthens its operational capabilities. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that starting from July this year, it began to carry out bolder and mostly effective counterattacks (*Ukraine counter-offensive measures…*, 2022). At the same time, the Ukrainian side has built, as mentioned, a very well-organised and strong resistance movement not only on the territory of Ukraine occupied by the enemy, but also in Russia itself. The Kremlin has the ability to prolong the bloody and devastating war, but the cost it incurs is higher from month to month, and when the critical mass of combat capabilities is exceeded, regardless of the resources at Russia's disposal, its troops will go on the defensive, and finally retreat. Taking the Russian perspective, Ukraine will then be set as an example of a country that was destroyed for opposing Russia, despite it protected its independence. The Kremlin does not count on the Western model with costs (neither material nor human) according to the prevailing belief in Moscow that over the years, the potential will be rebuilt with equipment and weapons produced today. What is striking about this approach is the typically industrial-imperial approach to international affairs that characterises the elites that rule the societies of a bygone era. In conclusion, the main challenge, and at the same time, an opportunity for Ukraine, is the mentality of Russian society, which limits the possibility of fully effective adaptation to the realities of the modern battlefield as far as possible. On the one hand, the mostly outdated equipment and armaments at the disposal of the Russian army are, on the one hand, a strongly binding element of the mentioned mental and technological loop, but on the other hand, it could not determine entire decision-making in such a way, if it were not for the mental functioning of the Russian command in the realities of past industrialism.

Applying a modern approach to the warfare realities, the Russian advance should be stopped after a month at the latest, the aggressor's forces should be modernised and repeated with another attempt without risking getting stuck in the conflict devastating Russian troops. An obvious comparison to Afghanistan comes to mind, and the Russians no longer even have a chance to reach the stage of occupation of the country, which, in the end, would also be too costly in relation to the possibilities. At present, the vision of Russia's gradual weakening as a result of the war in Ukraine, which is devastating these powerful countries, is becoming clearer, where the main reason for this probably long-term process is the mental backwardness of Russian society and its ruling elites. The lack of openness and thus readiness for changes like Peter I will mean that over the next decades, Russia may be relegated from the position of a regional empire to the level of a vast provincial state with such attractive areas and resources that its survival within the current borders may be very doubtful. Especially in the face of such a powerful and growing neighbour as the People's Republic of China.

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