HYBRID CONFLICTS ACTORS' ACTION MODELS ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *The present article highlights the need to understand the physiognomy of hybrid conflicts, the action methodology of the actors in these conflicts, and aims to identify the correlation between the characteristics of the hybrid operational environment and the typology of participating actors in order to model future military actions. The ever-changing nature of the operational environment emphasizes the importance of understanding the military phenomenon in terms of the process of conflict management and resolution, in general, and of the hybrid conflicts in particular.*

Keywords: hybrid conflict, security generating actors, insecurity generating actors, action models

1. Methodological introductory aspects

The events and the characteristics of the latest conflicts have shown that “war” no longer presents itself as a confrontation between symmetrical entities, between conventional belligerents, but it acquires an atypical and unconventional character, thus making it difficult to manage conflict and draw a pattern of actors’ actions. Hybrid conflicts have their own dynamics and, consequently, operations must be adapted, conceptually and actionally, to well-defined and individualized specific circumstances. The nature and content of the confrontations may change even during their conduct, necessitating thus the resumption of the process of planning, training and execution of military operations.

Using specific theoretical and methodological tools (critical and interdisciplinary approach to the subject, case studies) we analyzed the characteristics of the battlefield from the

perspective of elements constituting the environment of contemporary hybrid confrontations and focused on the study of the action model of actors involved in hybrid conflicts, and their influence on operational design, in the sense of identifying practical ways and tools to more effectively manage this type of situations.

2. Combat space characteristics in hybrid operational context

The conduct of military operations in the conflicts of the 21st century has outlined the multidimensionality of the current combat space and the importance of analyzing the decisive factors of the operational environment. Interdependence as a global phenomenon also has effects on the military organization, and, implicitly on the way military actions are carried out.

The new physiognomy of contemporary military actions has largely changed as a result of changes in their approach and use of tools (political, military, diplomatic,

economic, informational, etc.) available to state and non-state actors to fulfill proposed objectives.

Therefore, the need to define and understand the military phenomenon and the environment in which it produces its effects is the main objective for military analysts. The operational environment cannot be seen as an abstract, independent element, as it is closely related to all subsystems of society. All social phenomena (including the military phenomenon) occur as a result of the interaction of these subsystems and of the all actors involved in a given space.

Thus, the operational environment in the current context can be understood as a complex of conditions, circumstances and actions, created by the multitude of actors that interact in a given area, pursuing their own interests and influencing decisions on engaging the available military and non-military capabilities in order to achieve the intended objectives.

The operational environment is often wrongly believed to belong to the military field; in fact, it is at the intersection of all fields. In another view, the operational environment „represents a set of conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the use of own forces and that require commanders' decisions" [1].

Consequently, all those conditions and characteristics underlying the definition of the operational environment, the interactions between them, the circumstances underlying the decision-making process by commanders and which are closely related to the civilian population and other actors involved must be analyzed. In a detailed analysis, the most relevant constituent elements of the hybrid operational environment could be the following: physical environment (terrestrial, air, naval), *actors producing threats and dangers*, civilian/ local population, agencies and organizations, independent actors, unknown actors; *informational and cyber environment*.

From a synthetic perspective, without going into details, the influences within the operational environment can be grouped into three distinct dimensions: *the physical dimension*, *the moral dimension* and *the informational dimension*.

3. Analysis of hybrid conflicts actors

Use The complexity of the current security environment and the changing nature of the war in the 21st century have led opponents to move from the predominantly traditional warfare, armed force against armed force, to atypical/indirect, unconventional approaches in order to attack the key elements of a military power. Their strategies, some of which can be classified as irregular warfare, are specifically designed to avoid the costs and risks of direct confrontation with superior military forces.

In many cases, strategies based on irregular/hybrid conflict are driven by limited military capability to accomplish objectives, and are the only strategies available to a weaker force. Actors who adopt hybrid actions deliberately avoid the advantages of military superiority and exploit the vulnerabilities of their opponents, while trying to undermine not only international support, but also the domestic one/ in the area of confrontation.

The increase of hybrid threats and their effects is a major challenge for the interests of state actors and their security. Hybrid threats involve the use in the operational environment of unconventional capabilities (suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, dangerous material devices, cyber attacks, subversion, etc.) because they do not have the ability to effectively challenge the dominance of conventional armed forces. But it is the combination of conventional and unconventional elements that define the complexity of hybrid approaches.

The concept of hybrid conflict tends to replace other previously used concepts (asymmetric conflict, Irregular Warfare,

etc.), but the techniques and methods used by the actors involved are not new. Thus, the classification of actors involved in such types of conflicts is a major object of study in terms of the possibility of understanding the military phenomenon, in line with the trend of hybridization of military operations.

The main characteristics of the hybrid conflict, which distinguishes it from other conflicts, are given by: the specifics of actions focused on supporting and protecting the neutral civilian population and its strategic goal, to gain and maintain control/influence over the relevant population from the area of interest/confrontation. In other words, the emphasis is on the legitimacy of a political authority and the legitimacy of the actions of national and international authorities in the region. In hybrid conflicts, opponents can use conventional forces and actions, unconventional forces and actions respectively. In other cases, a single force may, in itself, adopt a combination of actions with conventional and unconventional characteristics.

From the point of view of the development of the hybrid conflict, the participating actors can be classified according to several criteria. Therefore, if we analyze the interests and the initiatives/measures regarding security at local, regional, etc. level, the actors involved, whether *state* or *non-state*, conventional or unconventional, can be divided into *security generating* or *insecurity generating actors*.

In order to complicate things even more, we were able to identify the double hypostasis in which an actor can be found, depending on the interests pursued, both as a generator of security and a generator of insecurity. On the other hand, in the course of a hybrid conflict, the inefficiency of conventional combat methods and tactics in dealing with an unconventional enemy using atypical tactics has often been proven. Also, the actors generating insecurity in hybrid conflicts may have diverse interests and

methods of achieving very diverse objectives. The analysis of recent hybrid conflicts shows that non-state actors have the largest share in terms of contributing to the insecurity of a region: insurgency, terrorism, cyber-terrorism, cross-border organized crime are the main vectors of insecurity [2].

The civilian population is not a passive actor during military operations. In conventional conflicts, the civilian population contributes to the war effort by working in the military industry, by providing food, clothing, consumables, financial aid, legal, religious or specific media services.

As hybrid warfare is a competition for legitimacy and influence, the civilian population is particularly relevant, both in the operational environment and as an object of conflict. Stealthy adversaries hide among the population, using it as a shield and willing or unwilling helper. "These adversaries often play on legitimate aspirations and grievances against unpopular, abusive, or corrupt governments to gain popular support and legitimacy" [3]. In the practice of hybrid conflict, civilian targets are predominant and much more important than in conventional conflict. Hybrid opponents aim to intimidate civilians and highlight the state's inability to provide protection. Moreover, government officials or security structures, commercial agents or even pressure groups outside the host country could be included in the relevant population that hybrid opponents are trying to influence.

In the hybrid operational environment, military forces are no longer the only tools as in the conventional conflict, but, in this context, there are other actors who have a decisive role: *governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations* in various fields (political, economic, social, cultural, religious, etc.).

Other actors in the operational environment will be considered *unknown* from the perspective of providing support for

legitimate governance or multinational forces.

4. Action model of hybrid conflicts actors

Technological development determines the change of tactical norms for the use of forces and means, the efficiency of combat equipment, as well as changes of conceptual and doctrinal level in terms of planning, preparation and conduct of future military operations. At the same time, this development has made it possible to outline military actions from an informational and cyber point of view, marking different dimensions in terms of preparing the space for confrontation in future conflicts, including hybrid conflicts. Informational supremacy is the main determinant of success in shaping the physiognomy of future military operations in irregular conflicts and its approach as a key component of the decision-making process is a defining necessity.

But, in hybrid confrontations, the social, economic, political and cultural aspects are the most relevant. Therefore, the actions taken by the conventional forces must aim at eliminating unconventional, insurgent, terrorist, informational threats, etc., as well as protecting the civilian population and critical infrastructures in the area of interest that may influence the way of life of the local population. The techniques, tactics and procedures used by conventional troops must be consistent with the unconventional threats that arise, and allow the identification and engagement of opponents without causing collateral damage.

Hybrid confrontations have a diversified, complex and dynamic character, combining regular, irregular and/or criminal groups performing conventional, unconventional and asymmetric actions, using traditional and innovative methods and techniques, which aim to achieve the objectives. Basically, hybrid operations usually take place between state-owned forces (regular forces) and unconventional forces

belonging to state actors or non-state groups. Conventional forces are based on specific doctrines, their modes of action being influenced by international law, military tradition and the capabilities of the owned complex weapons systems. On the other hand, irregular forces have no restrictions on the modalities of action, in breach of international law, and carry out their operations according to their endowment in order to cause significant damage.

Analyzing the action model of unconventional actors involved in the development of hybrid conflicts, the primary objective is also represented by the achievement of political level objectives. In most cases, but not exclusively, hybrid opponents are technologically and doctrinally inferior to conventional actors, but counteracting the effects of ingenious ways of acting is a real challenge for regular forces.

Also, *a model of the civilian environment* in the area of operations is extremely necessary. It must describe the complexity of the system of factors with a major impact on a security mission. Such a model should include a detailed analysis of the civilian environment specific to the area of operations [4], including, inter alia: the sources and nature of factors that may affect the operations of government/coalition forces, the ways in which the effects of certain factors are manifested and what is the impact on operations, the magnitude of the effects of certain factors (number of people, size of groups, location), etc.

The action model of the civilian population must also help to anticipate as accurately as possible the likely future actions of the civilian population, on the one hand those that support the actions of government forces and on the other hand those that put insurgent groups at advantage. These elements provide a very accurate picture of what the civilian environment means, enabling planners to integrate the efforts of

all participating forces in achieving the goal of any mission: stabilizing the conflict situation and supporting the civilian population.

In order to more accurately determine the actions of the civilian population that can influence the concept of mission accomplishment, aspects such as [5]: historical patterns of the population, conditions/desideratum that the population tries to achieve, work agenda and objectives key in the area of operations can be taken into account.

5. Conclusions

Analyzing the development of the actions of several contemporary conflicts, we can highlight an evolution of the military phenomenon, which consists in the use, both by states and non-state actors of methods to meet the most diverse and diversified military objectives, which demonstrated their efficiency by their surprising and innovative nature and by the lack of rapid and effective measures to counteract them. The physiognomy of the military conflict will be profoundly changed, being determined by significant changes in the operational environment, manifesting different forms of military action (hybrid warfare, information warfare, cyber warfare, psychological warfare, etc.). The specificity of missions and actions in a hybrid conflict depends to a large extent on the relationships that are established between combatant and non-combatant actors in the action space. The diversity of forces in such a conflict, whether regular or irregular, is determined by the complexity of the interests of the actors involved. In most cases, the identification of the relations of these security forces and the civilian population in the area determines the establishment of the mode of action for fulfilling the expected objectives.

From the experience of military confrontations in different parts of the world, we also see the complexity and hybridization of actions meant to manage

and resolve conflict and post-conflict crises. In these contexts, the emphasis is on the civilian population, and all actions carried out in the area of responsibility/conflict are aimed at gaining its legitimacy and support. Raising awareness of the importance of the human environment in such confrontations and using tools for in-depth knowledge of the civilian component (population and civil actors) facilitate cooperation, harmonization of activities, exchange of information, integrated planning and management of operations. This approach supports objectives such as: assessing the civilian environment, identifying key factors and the impact on military operations, and also how military operations influence the lives of the civilian population; relevant recommendations can be made regarding the actions with maximum effects on influencing the civil society, promoting a favorable mood among the civilian population to support government forces, contributing to the influence of the entire civil society in the region (the ultimate goal) in order to build a lasting stability/peace.

Hybridization of conventional, unconventional, asymmetric and cybernetic risks and threats amplifies the occurrence of disruptions in the contemporary operational environment, with serious consequences for state security. The actors involved in shaping the contemporary operational environment have become more diversified and radical, so that, in addition to regular military forces, we encounter irregular, paramilitary, insurgent, guerrilla, terrorist, separatist forces, government structures and civilians, leading to a complex approach to interconditioning between them.

Given the nature and specificity of the actors, the methods of achieving the objectives will be more and more diverse and complex, violent clashes and high-intensity fighting, guerrilla warfare tactics and subversive procedures, leading to the idea of a high degree wear and tear of future hybrid operations.

Consequently, states and alliances must develop those conventional, unconventional, civilian and information capabilities that ensure the planning, preparation and execution of actions from the whole spectrum of military conflicts.

Hybrid threats have elements that, as the case may be, are mainly aimed at affecting the political, diplomatic, military, economic or informational decisions of the opponent. Often, their nature is unclear or involves factors and actions in several areas. For example, sometimes, the nature of threats is not military, but military capabilities can help prevent, resolve, or manage their consequences. The broad spectrum of hybrid threats requires competent and coordinated responses from state actors as well as integrated civil-military capabilities capable of carrying out coherent and efficient actions in complex/hybrid operational contexts.

Also, within the action model of hybrid conflicts specific actors, information will play a key role in assessing the situation, formulating response options and effectively employing forces and means to achieve the objectives set and achieve the desired final state. At the same time, the organization of forces and means in accordance with the nature of the opponent's actions and the proposed goals is a main element of the actors' action model in this type of conflict.

From the point of view of military and non-military integration, it is necessary to know the elements regarding the geographical-military characteristics of the area and territory, their natural conditions and their influence on the deployment of missions, as well as having a consistent knowledge of social life, culture, religion, history etc. from the area of interest.

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