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## Changing character of war

*“The character of war is constantly evolving, shaped by the interplay of technological advancements, societal shifts, and strategic innovations. As we adapt to these changes, we must strive to understand that victory in modern warfare goes beyond mere firepower - it requires the ability to comprehend and navigate the complexities of the human domain.”*

*General David L. Goldfein, 21st Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force.*

**Resume.** The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, started in 2014 with Crimea annexation, hybrid warfare in the Donbas and shifted into full scale aggression in February 2022, shows no signs of ending soon and could persist for an extended period. It might take several years to thoroughly assess all the lessons derived from this war. Despite the expectations the Russia-Ukraine war didn't become well explored conventional war in which a decisive role had played traditional means of destruction. Accordingly, this Article will analyze how the character of Russian-Ukrainian war changing during the different stages.

**Keywords:** Russian-Ukrainian war; nature of the war; armed aggression; defense forces; defense capabilities, technologies.

According to the Oxford Dictionary war is a situation in which two or more countries or groups of people fight against each other over a period of time. As we focus on what war is and why it is fought, we need to address the changing Character and enduring Nature of War. The Nature of War is unchanged: it's dynamic, characterized by violence, guided by some purpose, surrounded by a fog of uncertainty, and always accompanied by some degree of friction. Some experts describe the Character of War as the soul of a nation, capturing its strengths, capabilities, values, and ethics. Every age has own kind of war, with limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions. Each period, therefore, would have held to its own theory of war.

Different factors impact the Character of War. These factors are variable and when any of them changes, it can affect other factors in the Character of War. We can divide them into three main groups:

- who fights – specific social groups, entire nations or alliances? If specific social groups are involved in the fighting, the intensity of the conflict might be less than if the entire nation participates.

- why do they fight – for surviving, resources, influence, territories, beliefs, religion? If an entire nation or people are fighting for its survival, the intensity of the conflict could be very high and national resistance could be extensive and prolonged.

- how do they fight – with conventional/unconventional means and ways, which technologies are using? If the combatants are only attacking military targets, the level of violence would be lower than if population centers are being deliberately targeted. If weapons of mass destruction are being used, the violence will be higher than if only cyber weapons are being employed.

So, using the chronology of the first year of full scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, let analyze how the character of the war had changed on the different stages of war.

The Russian Federation launched a large-scale armed invasion of Ukraine on the morning of February 24, 2022 under the guise of a so-called special military operation in Donbas. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation shelled Ukrainian border posts with artillery, simultaneously launching massive missile strikes, including the use of high-precision cruise missiles of the “Kalibr” type and the operational-tactical missile complex “Iskander”, on airfields and other military facilities throughout Ukraine.

The strategy of the Russians was almost entirely based on the fact that the Ukrainian military and society would not resist. In the first hours of the invasion, Russian officials called Ukrainians with offers to surrender in order to avoid casualties. On the twenty-fourth of February, the then curator of Donbas from the Kremlin Dmytro Kozak called the President's Office and called to give up. The next day,

russian president Vladimir Putin personally addressed the Ukrainian military, urging them to "take power into their own hands" and negotiate an end to the war. On February 26, Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov received a phone call from his Belarusian colleague and also conveyed an offer from Russia to surrender. Ukrainian generals also received messages or calls from the russians urging them to surrender. Almost all senior Ukrainian officers received similar messages from unknown numbers.

In advance, Russia planned only one truly military operation - the suppression of Ukrainian air defenses. In the first days of the war, the russians hit air defense positions, airfields, and radar stations it was important for them to block aid to Ukraine by air. Also, rocket strikes were supposed to shock and fear the population and convince them not to resist. In the south of Ukraine, the russians succeeded, but in other places air defense was restored within a few hours or a day.

In the first days of the war, Russia tried not to engage in fighting, but instead bypassed, shackled and isolated Ukrainian units. Russian strategy relied almost entirely on the success of non-military operations, but this plan failed. This can be considered one of the main strategic mistakes made by Putin personally.

Russian agents proved to be unprepared and unsuitable for a full-scale war, for example, to carry out sabotage in the rear. Moreover, russian war crimes against the civilian population have changed the attitude towards Russia even among representatives of pro-russian organizations.

Russian intelligence operations and cyber-attacks in the early days of the invasion were aimed at containing and minimizing resistance. First of all, the russians targeted communication systems. Most of the attacks were repelled by the State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection, but the russians managed to hack a Viasat satellite that provided Ukrainians with high-speed Internet. Also successful were informational attacks aimed at unconcerned and vigilant civilians, especially in the rear regions. Russia actively disseminated information about the infiltration of saboteurs, in particular, called on residents to report suspicious markings on buildings to the police (probably the same markings). Because of this, law enforcement officers received a huge number of false requests, which overloaded their work. Also, due to information about saboteurs in the rear, Ukrainians opened friendly fire, which slowed

down the movement of the Armed Forces and politicians around the country.

Analyzing the retreat of the russian occupiers from the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions, the commander of the Ground Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Colonel-General Oleksandr Syrskyi, told what was the reason for such a decision of the russian command. He noted that the russian Federation really counted on the success of the blitzkrieg and was going to take Kyiv in three days "without much effort", but the enemy faced heroic resistance from the defenders of Ukraine, suffered heavy losses and was demoralized. Thus, due to the steadfastness of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the resistance of the Ukrainian nation, russian military and political leadership have been forced to change its plans, as the war dragged on and went in a completely different direction than it was supposed to.

After russian troops had defeated from the Kyiv, the military-political leadership of the russian Armed Forces specified the goal of the invasion to seize the entire territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. War criminal Vladimir Putin has changed his rhetoric and seems to have forgotten his initial statements regarding the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine. He called the main goal of the so-called "special operation" "helping people in Donbas". The occupation troops who escaped from Kyiv were regrouped and used on Donbas where russian had launched a massive offensive in the second half of April. The russians announced the second stage of the so-called "special operation". Western commentators actively proclaimed the beginning of the second phase of the "battle for Donbas".

So, after the russian armed forces large-scale invasion into Ukraine, the aggressor's troops in addition to the occupied territories on Donbas managed to capture the northern part of the Luhansk region and Volnovaha. Other cities, especially Mariupol, Severodonetsk, Lysychansk, Zolote, and Girske, were under heavy fire from artillery and airstrikes during April. They were partially destroyed. From the north, russian troops developed an offensive from Izyum to Slavyansk; in the south, Mariupol is in their blockade. Western intelligence and the Ukrainian command, after the defeat of russian troops near Kiev and the actual failure of a large-scale operation within the borders of Ukraine, predicted that the kremlin would pull all its forces to the east and launch a powerful offensive there. The local authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions for several weeks called on the entire civilian population to

temporarily leave the region. Most people did. Some civilians still remained.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine concluded that the enemy is concentrating its main efforts on preparing for an offensive operation in the Eastern operational zone with the aim of defeating the Ukrainian Forces and establishing full control over the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Russians completes the formation of an offensive group in the Eastern operational zone, builds up the management system and searches for weak points in the defense of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The intention of the russian command was quite obvious and consisted in striking in converging directions. For this purpose, strike groups were created during the month. A group consisting of up to twenty-two battalion tactical groups was concentrated in the area of Izyum. It was supposed to strike one blow to the southwest in the direction of Izyum - Barvinkovo - Gulyaipole, with a further offensive in the direction of Zaporizhzhia - Kryvyi Rih. The other is in the direction of Kramatorsk - Sloviansk. From the south, the enemy from the Vasylivka - Pology district was supposed to advance to meet the Izyum group, which was supposed to achieve the encirclement of the Ukrainian troops. The lack of fire parity between the Ukrainian and russian troops in June 2022 forced the Ukrainian command to use maneuverable defense tactics all the time.

At the end of June, the first four American M-142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), capable of hitting targets at distances of up to 70-80 km, were put into service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. On June 24, the first use of HIMARS took place in the Zaporizhzhia region. The targets of the Ukrainian rocket launchers were ammunition depots located 40-60 km deep in the enemy's defenses. With systematic strikes on such objects, the Ukrainian command tried to neutralize the advantage of the enemy in artillery ammunition.

Appearance and use of long-range foreign artillery and missile systems in the arms of the Ukrainian defense forces in June and early July delivered significant fire strikes on the enemy's rear. Due to the HIMARS bigger fire range the russian advantage in artillery firepower had been partly neutralized. The russian ministry of defense officially announced the beginning of an operational pause for "rest and recovery". The high effectiveness of the impression of Western artillery weapons systems forced the invaders to withdraw their headquarters and warehouses deep

into the rear areas. According to operational data of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the enemy completely changed the order of ammunition and fuel supply, moving brigade-level ammunition depots 100 km from the front line.

On July 18, an important meeting was held between the russian federation minister of defense, Sergei Shoigu, and the commander of the Eastern group of russian troops, lieutenant general Rustam Muradov. Analyzing the tasks set by the minister, international military observers came to the conclusion that the kremlin realized its inability to carry out an operational encirclement of the Ukrainian group in Donbas, and therefore preferred the tactics of gradual capture of Donetsk region. Thus, the occupiers intended to continue local offensive operations in the direction of Siversk and Bakhmut.

An important aspect of the military operations was the use by the russians of special services and the "Wagner" Private Military Company. According to the initial plan of the occupation, the russian special services were supposed to carry out strategic intelligence tasks, but in practice they helped the occupying administrations to establish power. This happened because Russia was unable to occupy the entire territory of Ukraine, and the tasks of the special services at the front became less. When heavy fighting began at the front, russian Special Forces were partially transformed into light infantry. The main reason: in recent years, the number of Special Forces in Russia has been inflated, and the regular troops have remained understaffed. This deficit was compensated not only by Special Forces, but also by the active mobilization of men in the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

As for the use of "Wagner" PMC, at first the russian authorities played a peripheral role in the military campaign – to look for volunteers in Syria and African countries to simulate international support for the invasion. There were no plans to wind down the African operations of the "Wagner", and at the beginning of a large-scale war, they even intensified their activities in Mali. But the failures of the russians in Ukraine in the first weeks showed that an additional contingent cannot be dispensed with.

Since its foundation, the "Wagner" actively cooperated with the russian Main Intelligence Directorate, but later, in particular, due to the publicity of the mercenary owner Yevhen Prigozhin, the "Wagner" became a separate center of influence. Over time, specialized PMCs began to appear, for example, the Redut PMC

engaged in intelligence and sabotage. Analysts predict that the number of private military companies in Russia will grow in the future.

Civilians willing to resist the Russian occupation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine were and still are not lacking, but their activities in the rear have several nuances. At first, patriotic citizens went to mass rallies against the occupation, but this did not have a significant effect, and later the activists became the targets of the Russians. They decided to abandon this tactic. Also, the Ukrainian underground left Ukrainian signs in the occupied territories, such as postcards or painted flags – this encouraged the patriots, but did not scare the Russians.

Active violent opposition to the occupiers under such circumstances makes sense only simultaneously with the army's offensive and must be well coordinated – otherwise the level of damage to the enemy is insignificant, unlike the risks for the partisans. That is why the Ukrainian underground is now primarily playing the role of informers – transmitting information about the location of Russian positions and weapons depots. This became especially useful when partners provided Ukraine with precision long-range missiles like GLMRS.

Russians have no problems with obtaining data on targets in Ukraine. Also, they have their own network of agents on the free territory of Ukraine. They are occasionally involved in direct action – more often in informing about the locations of the Ukrainian military and critical infrastructure facilities. For this, they often use messengers, messages are forwarded to intermediaries in the countries of Western Europe. Their network of agents is quite large. It is known that all the data collected by Russian agents in Ukraine about the objects that the Russians want to target flow into one analytical center. Next, he sends data on the target to the Russian army units - depending on its type, it is either an artillery unit, or an air force, or a naval fleet. Next, these units attack the objects - and often not in order of priority, but in the same sequence in which they received the information. Often, data transfer lasts much longer than a day – during this time, the location of some objects changes. It is also known about the cases when the Russians attacked buildings that have not been of military importance for many years. This shows that for the occupiers, it is often the number of strikes that is important to report to the leadership, rather than their actual effectiveness.

Despite all the shortcomings of the Russian information processing system, it works. This means that in future conflicts, exposing the

enemy's intelligence network should be one of the priority tasks.

The success of the Kharkiv and Kherson offensive operations confirmed the inability of Russian troops to hold previously captured territories and sharply hit the prestige of the Russian armed forces and the aggressor state as a whole.

In summary, Ukrainian actions on the right bank of the Dnieper and in the Kharkiv region should not be considered as two offensives, one of which should have been more important. This is one operation aimed at seizing the initiative, initially operational, that is, in individual areas, and ultimately strategic, that is, in the entire area of operations. A condition for success is not only the victory at Izyum and Kupiansk, but also the capture of Kherson. However, the operation itself began with the formation of favorable conditions for the start of operations, and the strikes in the south and north are probably only its stage. This is in line with NATO doctrines, where such actions can take the form of an operation lasting several months.

The Ukrainian offensive had other consequences. In particular, the enemy started a partial mobilization in order to replenish losses and annexed the partially occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions. Wagner's Russian paramilitary group began openly recruiting Russian prisoners.

In addition, with the aim of an asymmetric response to the Ukrainian offensive, the enemy began to strike civilian targets and energy infrastructure facilities in Ukraine. Next, Russian officials began to threaten the use of tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine, at the same time intensifying the blackmail of European countries by cutting off gas supplies. Moreover, Russia began to concentrate its forces in Belarus, deploying a regional alliance of Russian-Belarusian forces there.

A series of crushing defeats of the occupying forces caused the aggressor country to seize the initiative and gain revenge. According to analysts, the main focus in the confrontation in the east of Ukraine at the end of 2022 - the beginning of 2023 was focused on the defense of Bakhmut. Initially, the battle developed as an additional direction of the attack on Severodonetsk. But after the retreat from Kharkiv region, became the main direction of the attack on the north of Donetsk region. The enemy concentrated the main forces here.

The battle for Bakhmut became one of the fiercest and longest in this war. It began back in August, when Russian troops resumed their

offensive after the capture of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. During this time, the intensity of the fighting only increased. It was here that Russia first used assault squads of Wagner prisoners. The heaviest trench battles took place here in autumn, which reminded military historians of the bloody battles of the First World War.

After the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region, the Russians lost the Izyum bridgehead. The front line moved 30-40 km away from Sloviansk, and the strategic importance of Bakhmut changed. The city turned from a military purpose into a political one.

Bakhmut could become the first relatively large city (population 70,000 before the war) that the Russians would capture from the end of June, when the Ukrainian Armed Forces were forced to retreat from Severodonetsk and Lysychansk after two months of fighting. The capture of Bakhmut could interrupt the sequence of heavy defeats of the Russian Federation in Kharkiv and Kherson regions.

At the end of August, the Russian army managed to get close to the city. Captured Pokrovske northeast of Bakhmut opened a direct path to the suburbs and the private sector. But the Russians were stuck in heavy battles around the city for many months. Russia lost at least half of the prisoners recruited by the Wagner here. At the beginning of January, the losses of the "Wagner" group were estimated at approximately 15,000 killed and wounded. After that, the intensity of the fighting increased significantly.

The sharp increase in losses is explained by the transition from trench warfare tactics to assault waves, which mostly rely on poorly trained infantry. Russia is trying to force events, this brings greater dynamics, but also significantly greater losses.

During the long months of fighting, Bakhmut became a symbol of indomitability. But cold calculation and the ability to conserve strength win in war.

Some Western analysts believe that the experience of the months-long fighting in Bakhmut shows that it is better for Ukraine to move away from the "game of attrition" and continue the practice of forcing Russia to fight the enemy in the most unfavorable conditions for it.

Regardless of what goals of the war against Ukraine are formulated and presented by the Russian leadership, the Kremlin's main goal remains the destruction of Ukraine as an independent state, the destruction of its military and civilian infrastructure, as well as the arbitrary dismemberment of its territory by annexing

individual regions and creating pseudo-state puppet entities. Accordingly, for Ukraine, the main goal of the war is to neutralize external threats to the existence of the state and nation, restore full state sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders of 1991. This definition of the existential tasks and goals of the parties to the conflict determined the main factors that influenced the changing character of the war on its different stages.

Putin's hopes for the success of non-military actions, the weakness of the Ukrainian leadership, the shock and fear of the population from missile attacks, the huge support of the "fifth column", the rapid surrender of the Ukrainian Armed Forces turned out to be unjustified and the blitzkrieg turned into a war of attrition.

The comprehensive defense strategy used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine contributed to the failure of the large-scale operation of the Russian Federation within the entire territory of Ukraine and forced Putin to change his rhetoric about the denazification and demilitarization of all Ukraine to the possession of the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. At the same time, the Kremlin was aware of its inability to carry out the operational encirclement of the Ukrainian group in the Donbas, so it preferred the tactics of the gradual capture of the Donetsk region.

With the appearance and use of foreign long-range artillery and missile systems in the Armed Forces of Ukraine service which delivered significant fire strikes in the enemy's rear and successfully operated in counter-battery combat, as well as the persistent activity of partisan detachments and Special Operation Forces in the enemy's rear, the Russian Ministry of Defense officially announced the beginning of an operational pause for "rest and recovery."

In response to the Ukrainian offensive in the fall of 2022, the enemy began to strike civilian targets and energy infrastructure facilities in Ukraine, began partial mobilization to replenish losses, and Russian officials began to threaten the use of tactical nuclear weapons against it. Russian war crimes against civilians have changed attitudes towards Russia even among representatives of pro-Russian organizations, Ukrainian resistance will only grow, and therefore, even taking into account its own mistakes, the Russian army is doomed to defeat.

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## Зміна характеру війни

### Анотація

Однополярний світовий порядок, усталений після завершення холодної війни, зазнав трансформаційних змін спричинених війною російської федерації проти України та зростаючою конфронтацією Китайської Народної Республіки зі Сполученими Штатами. Зміна світового устрою з однополярного на багатополарний сприяє посиленню протистояння тоталітарних режимів і створених ними союзів із країнами відданими демократичним принципам і цінностям, що у підсумку призвело до повернення конфронтації між великими державами та загрози початку нової світової війни.

Збройна агресія РФ проти України, що почалася в 2014 році з анексії Криму і гібридної агресії на сході України, з 24 лютого 2022 року переросла в повномасштабну війну, яка, на жаль, не має ознак скорого завершення. Безумовно, знадобитися багато часу для ретельної оцінки та вивчення всіх уроків, які мають бути винесені з цієї війни.

Незважаючи на очікування експертів, російсько-українська війна не стала звичною, добре вивченою війною, в якій вирішальну роль мали відігравати традиційні засоби ураження, такі як авіація, танки і, звичайно, артилерія. Навпаки, неспіврозмірність військових, економічних та людських потенціалів сторін збройного конфлікту та стійкість України спонукала противників до стрімкого розвитку і застосування у збройній боротьбі нових технологій таких як безпілотні автономні системи, гіперзвукова та високоточна зброя, широке використання штучного інтелекту та електромагнітного спектру, зростання ролі кіберборотьби тощо.

У цій публікації, на основі безпосередніх подій на полі бою здійснено аналіз того, яким чином змінювався характер російсько-української війни на різних етапах першого року повномасштабної збройної агресії РФ проти України та які чинники були каталізатором цих змін.

**Ключові слова:** російсько-українська війна; характер війни; збройна агресія; сили оборони; оборонні спроможності, технології.