RESILIENCE, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND THE INTANGIBLE ASPECTS OF WAR. UKRAINE'S LESSONS LEARNED

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Explaining the achievements on the ground during war times, in the full-scale, high-intensity and long-term war of aggression launched by Russia in Ukraine has led us to studying the conundrum formed by resilience, societal security and the intangibles of war. The layered resilience that NATO has embraced[1] as concept is not enough. The difference between success and failure in the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine has come from the intangibles of the war[2], difficult to put under nominal indicators, but more suitable to be evaluated under qualitative criteria. That has made the difference between the effectiveness of both parties in war, together with Ukraine's societal resilience that includes both the basic indicators of societal security and an important part of the intangibles of war. We are very much aware, at the same time, that numbers do matter, and that weapons, manpower and will to fight have no alternative to grant support for any long- term war.

Keywords: resilience; societal security; intangibles of war; layered resilience; war of aggression;

A CONUNDRUM OF RESILIENCE, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND INTANGIBLES OF WAR

When discussing the **perspectives of a war**, the first elements in mind come from the very clear tangible and measurable physical characteristics that define **power**[3], in realpolitik, or even extending it to the **alternatives of power** – hard, soft, smart power (Keohane, Nye, 2009; Nye, 2012) –, meaning the one including influence not only constraint and force. We could even arrive at the **geopolitical capability of the states** (Roger, 2019), a more refined way of comparing states that includes some intangibles, non-measurable indicators, like **cultural prestige** (15% ponder on the total result), governance effectiveness (7% of the total) and 3% – **national resolve**, 1% for each of the economic, strategic and altruistic resolve.

Anyone who had mechanically considered the **power characteristics** or even the **geopolitical capability** (as defined by the Henry Jackson Society) between Russia and Ukraine would have given – and did it – the Kremlin's war the upper hand. But **Russia's large-scale, high-intensity, sustained war of aggression in Ukraine** has demonstrated the relevance of other characteristics that make a difference. For sure, resilience is one of them, composed not only by **infrastructure resilience**, a tangible component[4], but also by the conundrum formed by **societal resilience** (Chifu, 2018, pp. 23-30; 2021, pp. 10-21; 2022-1, pp. 5-13), **societal security** – societal identity and cohesion alike (Chifu, Nantoi, Sushko, 2008), and especially what we have called the **intangible characteristics of war** (Chifu, Simons, 2023). We have already proved the relevance and importance of this conundrum societal resilience-societal security – intangibles in war times (Chifu, 2023-1).

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1. NATO, *Secretary General Annual Report 2021*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193590.htm?selectedLocale=en, retrieved on 22 August 2023.
2. Chifu, Simons (2023). *Rethinking Warfare in the 21st Century. The Influence and Effects of the Politics, Information and Communication Mix*. Cambridge University Press, ISBN:9781009355247.
3. See Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and von Clausewitz for those issues.
4. *EU-NATO Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure*, Final Assessment Report, June 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/EU-NATO_Final%20Assessment%20Report%20Digital.pdf, retrieved on 12 August 2023.

Societal resilience, national resilience, community resilience, in general, is seen as a characteristic of the human community itself that involves not only **reacting to shocks and crises** and surviving, but also **rebuilding society**, a feature that measures the capacity to work together in such times (Faulkner, Brown, Quinn, 2028). In the analysis of the Ukraine case (Goodwin, Hamama-Raz, Leshem, Ben-Ezra, 2023), certain characteristics emerge: **the degree/level of resilience** – in the case of Ukraine, the third-generation resilience – **the level of societal security, and the tangible and intangible elements in war** (Chifu, Simons, ib.).

Community resilience is defined as a property of dynamic social-ecological systems and assesses the extent to which communities can respond positively to several **risks, including shocks, extreme events or other changes** (Faulkner et al.). The characteristics identified vary from author to author (JRC, 2017). They often include references to attachment to community place, leadership, community cohesion and effectiveness, established and functioning community networks, knowledge and learning. These characteristics would be useful for community conservation, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and community development (Faulkner et al.). **Societal resilience** already refers to societies, it has the basic characteristics of community resilience, but raised to the level of complexity, cohesion and sophistication of society, including the responsibilities to its members[5].

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WAR.
UKRAINE AT THE LEVEL OF THE THIRD-GENERATION RESILIENCE

Where are we in terms of Ukraine's resilience in Russia's full-scale war of aggression? We can briefly refer to the three-dimensional formula, **shock absorption, shock adaptation and transformative resilience**, i.e., reform during crisis (Faulkner et al.). There is no question of a direct leap to the fourth-generation resilience, i.e., studying, preparing for and preventing future crises, anticipating

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them through prospective studies and **dynamic adaptive capacity** (Chifu, 2023-1). But certainly, Ukraine's actions have shown us its adaptive and transformative capacity.

It is proven by multiple cases based on the **traits, individual skills, characteristic of those involved in war, improvisation** (Gerasymchuk, 2008) in case of jamming or lack of communications, the ability to assume **autonomy and improvisation**, the ability of commanders at intermediate and lower levels to **independently assume decisions**, **to adapt old technologies to current situations**, to use the things at hand to compensate for the absence of adequate supplies of capabilities, ammunition or fuel. **Adaptability to new weapons**, rapid learning of how to use them, development of creative means, tactics and ways, such as the **use of Patriot to shoot down hypersonic missiles** – even if it was not the original purpose of using such air defence weapons – are also part of resilience.

It is also true in the case of **absorbing the consequences of disrupting critical services and utilities**, such as electricity and heating in Ukraine, once such critical infrastructure falls under Russian missile attack. Building **safety points inside cities** where everyone can come, get warm, charge their phones, have a glass of water and a piece of bread or meat is also a result of this **resilience and adaptability**. All these are part of a society's resilience.

As far as **societal security** is concerned (Chifu, Nantoi, Sushko, ib.), the assessment criteria are **societal cohesion and identity**. Both are also found in classical community (Faulkner et al.), the EU and European definitions of resilience (JRC).

If we are to relate concretely to Ukraine, there are elements that are undoubtedly present here, some of which also relate to the intangibles of war that have made the difference. It is society that both **provides the reserve forces** in large-scale, long-term warfare and **sustains the war effort**. In the first case, we can take the example of **queues at recruitment and volunteer centres** (not to deny the illegal border crossings by some to avoid being drafted).

This is also where we can find the **motivation to wage war** (Chifu, 2023-2, pp. 318 and on) and to accept the destruction of one's own territory for a higher goal – **real independence, the survival of the nation, national identity, prestige and dignity** (Faulkner et al.).

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[5] *Resilience, a core element of collective defense*, NATO document, https://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2016/Also-in-2016/nato-defence-cyber-resilience/EN/index.htm, retrieved on 21 July 2023.

These elements are at the same time **consequences of a solid and assumed identity**, accentuated by Russia's large-scale war of aggression and the **ignorance, trivialisation and attempted annihilation of Ukrainian identity**, different from the Russian one (Chifu, 2022-4, pp. 5-12; 2022-5, pp. 3-10; 2022-6). Here, again, societal cohesion, solidarity and the strength to fight are evident[6].

THE INTANGIBLES IN WAR TIMES

Some of the elements revealed above are direct and **tangible**, while other elements are mainly **intangible in war**. The most important intangible under discussion, directly related to **societal security**, is **the capacity for sacrifice** – the ability to sustain a war effort and to absorb the costs of a long war, the acceptability of the expenses during war times, and the power **to endure the suffering, hardship and pain of loss of loved ones in a war**. These elements are difficult or impossible to measure, to place among the tangibles of war, remaining in the space of intangibles.

The **intangibles of war** are those elements that have made the difference between the Russian armed forces – self-proclaimed to be the second largest armed forces in the world – and the Ukrainian armed forces, smaller in number but **much more determined** and capable of fighting for a purpose, the **real Ukrainian war of independence**. These intangibles relate to **reputation, credibility, even the country's brand**. Intangible elements, such as **culture and perception**, effectively shape the interpretation and evaluation of the physical realm by the cognitive realm. And the list of crucial intangibles also includes **leadership, morale, cohesion, unity, level of training and experience, situational awareness and support from public opinion**. And many, many others, such as the **will to fight or the determination to defend their country** (Chifu, 2023-3).

A very important intangible relates to **legitimacy**. It has multiple resorts, but the most important ones come from the **democratic resilience**, which influences the need for support the defence of such desirable values and **high stance** in the face of an aggression,

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[6] The details could be found in Iulian Chifu, *Reziliența în război și caracteristicile intangibile...*, op.cit.

itself creating deficits of legitimacy and costs in terms of ethics in international relations. It is about democratic **resistance or democratic fight**, the alliances and the cohesion of countries respecting the same values, and principles, situated on high moral ground.

Another important point regarding the intangibles, combining positions and perceptions as well, is to be on the **just, legally and legitimately justifiable** side of a war, with an evident **moral advantage**. In any case, one should choose to assume all the ingredients that define both a **right war** and a **good side of the conflict**. It is the one that deserves support and it can come both through political and symbolic support and through direct financial or military support in a war. Therefore, creating a **just cause** from supporting one side in such a conflict is primarily important for combat parties. A positive light will accumulate a **greater sense of legitimacy and following**.

In this case, the **use and conveyance of values and narratives** is important. It is not easy to determine a **shift on the reputation** of historically and commonly understood enemies, as it is difficult to move away from the injustices associated with the contemporary named enemy (or the *"bad guy"*). But once such reality is constituted via perceptions, it is a win in terms of legitimacy and a big hit against the enemy. These communications are rather directed to civil publics than to military ones, in order to **influence consensus** on the *"righteous"* nature of the war in question.

In the case of a **hybrid, irregular warfare** (Chifu, 2018) or of instruments of that nature used by state actors, we have a lack of a clearly defined front line and blurred distinction between combatants. It is the most probable for the actors or states that use hybrid instruments, when they are not on the negatively perceived side of the fight, to be easily labelled as **terrorists or insurgency groups**, especially if they are using such instruments as a weapon and tactic of choice. But the same reality, with **slight limits in the tactics** and invisible direct instruments that can be assimilated into terrorism, could enable the player to label its actions and tactics in a war as those of **resistance movements, liberation groups**.

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THE POLITICS, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION MIX

Tangible assets are those physical objects that can be attacked by terrorists, such as buildings, people and vehicles. They are normally of **symbolic or military value**, and are intended to weaken physically or psychologically their opponent, to undermine the **sense of security and trust** in the government and authorities of the population. **Intangible assets**, on the other hand, are objects that cannot be touched physically, but they have an impact upon the outcome of a battle or campaign. These assets are such things as **reputation, brand, sense of security, legitimacy and resolve/will to fight** (Chifu, Simons, ib.). Although these aspects cannot be physically touched, they have a profound impact upon an opponent's ability to wage or **continue to wage an effective military campaign**.

These intangible assets are adversely affected through attacks upon the tangible assets, which points to the **primary aim of attacking tangible assets is to diminish an opponent's intangible assets**. Entering the **Politics, Information and Communication Mix** (Simons, 2012), the secondary effects of **intangibles** in war are about the **degradation of an actor's – the enemy – intangible assets.** Stories constructed in this manner can actually create a **greater sense of risk and uncertainty** that would harm the enemy's war efforts and, therefore, its tangible assets too.

Let us take, for instance, the activity of **affecting recruitment efforts.** The fact is based on establishing the narrative of the **reluctance to go to war.** It is a distinct pattern of attempting to influence the perception, and therefore **influence the relationship between the people and the political leaders.** This is a core part of the role of intangibles when it is up to the control of narratives and projection of perceptions.

For those purposes, **slogans and branding** are created and applied to various wars, political and armed conflicts, and their sense of positive, ethical and moral relevance is crucial. The commonly used pattern is the **umbrella of humanitarianism,** a legitimacy vehicle that is also inclined to forge the *"contagious"* sense of hope in order to mobilise mass publics for **tangible** (to become physically engaged in an event) and **intangible action** (opinion and perception to support).

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It creates a new ability to handle critical information, principles, values, ideology, as well as messaging, all done effectively in order to **assist the physical military operations**. That creates and defines the relationship and nature of interaction between information, politics and armed conflict (Chifu, Simons, ib.).

War evolves in physical terms too, with the intangibles in times of war and their impact as the core instruments used in order to **win over hearts and minds**. And **information warfare** does exactly that (Chifu, Nantoi, 2016), building a real contest to influence the minds and actions of a selected audience, through information operations, psyops, waging an **information campaign alongside a military campaign**. In democracies, no actor has the ability to strictly control how the message is framed and covered in the mass media. Even in **autocratic systems**, one is the official media, and another part is the information realm with **gossip, innuendos, conspiracy theories** and all the components that create, behind the official discourse and propaganda, **public opinion**. The real one, not the one that could be captured by official or even some independent opinion polls.

Remaining in this mix of politics, ideology, information warfare and communication, we can also have some better images about the definition of **victory or defeat** in war times, some based on **interpretation in political terms**, some the result of **factual results of military actions** on the ground. Even a decisive military victory on the ground, with elements very visible on the terrain, may not translate into a **decisive political outcome**. The status of **war and peace**, especially in hybrid confrontations, is relative and always subject to interpretation and **contest for the perceptions** of a targeted public (Chifu, 2018). The operations in the information realm are intended to shape the perceptions and judgements of the cognitive realm that impact what happen in the physical realm.

The intangible elements of **legitimacy, reputation, public will and opinion** are all critical factors when shaping the information environment to support **launching, continuing or even ending a military conflict**. The relationship of the political leaders with their populations is critical, especially at a time of **increasing distrust** and **war wariness**. The **intangible factors** like the will to fight and belief

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in the fight depend on the public perception, even though they are also intrinsically linked to a certain community and reflects the **resilience of such a community in different layers**[7]. The aim of communication in war is also to **degrade the capacity and capability of the military forces and political leadership** through directly targeting and affecting the trust and credibility in war time.

The **narratives, vocabulary, values, frames and images** are also a part of the game and need to be carefully developed, spread, sanctioned and controlled in order to cultivate the desired effects upon the target publics. **Intangible assets,** before or during a war, can be both an opportunity and a threat to political regimes, depending on the prevailing conditions in the society concerned. **Support, resistance and enduring harms** cannot be maintained (Chifu, 2022-2), even if having this force to resist is a characteristic of the resilience of the community once the leadership loses its credibility or put all its force to maintain a **certain regime** or a **given personalized head of the country or community**. Putinism and Putin or any other autocrat are at peril when such conditions emerge or are formed in war times.

That comes also to another part of the **spectrum of intangibles** linked to the political, information and communication mix, essential in order to **create, shape, define and underlie intellectual differences** in the conception of what is judged to be the *"correct"* rational in the political and military components of an armed conflict in the 21st century. This is about the suitable intangible factors to influence the outcome of wars, to **legitimise** it, through the romantic notions of **moral/ethical constructs** that are used to frame it. To frame it in **romantic keys of lecture** of the evolution of the war and with a package of narratives so **chivalrous** in manner and tactics, to frame emotions in order to support *"the good side"*, to build legal, correct and communicated steps in order to put the desired part on **high moral ground**, to use principles, values, epistemology and axiology in order to frame the actions and facts on the ground as the **right desirable way** to do things in such a context.

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[7] See https://www.csis.org/analysis/current-military-operations-and-concept-forever-wars, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/17/limited-wars-are-forever-wars/ and listen to https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/are-the-forever-wars-really-forever/, retrieved on 21 August 2023.

For all those facts, **Ukraine is winning** in front of larger, more furnished, more equipped Russian Armed Forces, in front of a wealthier, richer and bigger country that unfortunately launched **a full-scale, high-intensity war of aggression** and failed to end it in the first days of the attack.

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