

THE MAIN EVENTS OF THE FIRST PERIOD OF ARMED CONFLICT IN THE EAST OF UKRAINE (APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2014)

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Abstract: *The authors' fundamental objective is to bring to the attention of the international academic community the results of the military-historical investigation on the main events of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The importance of this work is conditioned by the need of the Ukrainian society and the democratic international community for a comprehensive, objective analyse of the events associated with the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. For a better understanding of the military-historical processes, the authors suggest their own periodization of this armed conflict. The first period of the conflict is divided into three stages, each having its own features and characteristics.*

Keywords: *Armed conflict, Ukraine, aggression, Russian Federation, antiterrorist operation, periodization, Crimea, Donbas.*

Rezumat: *Principalele evenimente ale primei perioade a conflictului armat în estul Ucrainei (aprilie – septembrie 2014). Obiectivul fundamental al autorilor constă în aducerea la cunoștința comunității academice internaționale a rezultatelor investigației militar-istorice pe marginea principalelor evenimente ale conflictului armat din estul Ucrainei. Importanța acestei lucrări este condiționată de necesitatea societății ucrainene și a comunității internaționale democratice pentru o reflectare cuprinzătoare și obiectivă a evenimentelor asociate agresiunii Federației Ruse împotriva Ucrainei. Pentru o mai bună înțelegere a proceselor militar-istorice, autorii propun propria lor periodizare a acestui conflict armat. Prima perioadă a conflictului este împărțită în trei etape, fiecare având propriile trăsături și caracteristici.*

Résumé : *Les principaux événements de la première période de conflit armé dans l'est de l'Ukraine (avril - septembre 2014). L'objectif fondamental des auteurs est de porter à l'attention de la communauté universitaire internationale les résultats de l'enquête militaro-historique sur les principaux événements du conflit armé dans l'est de l'Ukraine. L'importance de ce travail est conditionnée par le besoin de la société ukrainienne*

et de la communauté internationale démocratique de couvrir de manière exhaustive et objective les événements liés à l'agression de la Fédération de Russie contre l'Ukraine. Pour une meilleure compréhension des processus historico-militaires, les auteurs suggèrent leur propre périodisation de ce conflit armé. La première période du conflit est divisée en trois étapes, chacune ayant ses propres typiques et caractéristiques.

INTRODUCTION

A famous American geostrategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, expressed in his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, some ideas on bringing the post-Soviet Russia closer to the Western world. But, despite all the efforts made by the West to integrate Russia into a global economy based on free market principles, the Western expectations to have a post-imperial Russia as an European democracy, rather than an Eurasian state, failed. The Russian foreign policy establishment believe in a special Eurasian role, one that entails the subordination of the former Soviet Union republics to Moscow. Ukraine has a significant importance for Russia, due to its territory, population, geographic location, economy and culture.

As Z. Brzezinski mentioned, “without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an Eurasian empire”.¹ The failure of the American-led effort to expand NATO in terms of offering to Ukraine and Georgia the NATO Membership Action Plans in Bucharest in 2008, as envisaged by Z. Brzezinski, reawakened to a greater extent the ambitious Russian desires.² It provoked and attacked Georgia later the same year with impunity. The “reset” red button pushed by America and Russia gave to the latter a chance to follow its hidden agenda of rebuilding the collapsed empire.

All means to reach that aim were on use. These were the economic instruments, such as import restrictions on the Ukrainian agricultural products going to the Russian market, gas supply as a tool to constraint the Ukrainian government to make some political and economic concessions; political pressure and influence on the Ukrainian political elite; information and psychological operations conducted well before a consequent military invasion.

The occupation of the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea by Russian “little green men” backed by Russian Black Sea Fleet and regular troops for the South-West of Russian Federation and the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine are

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997, p. 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

not isolated events. They are just decisive points of operational design in a Russian campaign plan against Ukraine. Labels such as “Ukrainian internal conflict” or “Civil war in Ukraine” are constantly being used by Russian aggressors to disguise their real intentions to return Ukraine under Russian control.³

The historiography of the events of that period is quite vast and it drew the attention of politicians, military specialists and civilian experts.

First, there are the Ukrainian sources of information – official documents, such as laws, government’s decisions and acts,⁴ the Ministry of Defence and the Ukrainian Armed Forces orders, the intelligence reports,⁵ witnesses’ history

³ *Сочинская речь президента Путина (полная версия видео)* [President Putin’s Speech in Sochi (full video version)], In “Русская весна” [Russian Spring], 25.10.2014, in http://rusvesna.su/recent_opinions/1414226504 (Accessed on 04.08.18); *Украина: предпосылки кризиса и сценарии будущего* [Ukraine: Prerequisites of the Crisis and Scenarios of the Future], Валдай: Международный дискуссионный клуб. Москва, 2014 года, in http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/ukraine_rus.pdf (Accessed on 03.08.18); Александр Дугин, *Украина: моя война. Геополитический дневник* [Ukraine: my war. Geopolitical diary], Москва, Центрполиграф, 2015, 624 с.; Путин, *На Украине идет полномасштабная гражданская война* [There is a full scale Civil War in Ukraine], in <https://ria.ru/world/20140523/1009021933.html> (Accessed on 06.01.18).; Путин, *На Украине идет гражданская война, уже многие там это понимают* [There is a full scale Civil War in Ukraine, many people there have already understood that], in <https://ria.ru/world/20150126/1044360467.html> (Accessed on 06.01.2018); Песков, *Донбасс не оккупирован Россией, там идет гражданская война* [Russia did not occupy Donbas, a Civil War is going on there], in <https://iz.ru/605571/2017-06-13/peskov-donbass-ne-okkupirovan-rossiei-tam-idet-grazhdanskaia-voina> (Accessed on 06.01.2018).

⁴ *Самопроголошені республіки у Донецькій та Луганській областях кваліфіковано як терористичні організації, 16.05.2014.* [Prosecutor's General's Office of Ukraine recognized so-called DNR and LNR as terrorist organizations], in https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/news.html?_m=publications&_c=view&_t=rec&id=138582 (Accessed on 20.07.18).

⁵ *Аналіз ведення АТО та наслідків вторгнення РФ в Україну у серпні-вересні 2014 року (офіц. сайт МОУ, 13 серпня 2015 року)* [Analysis of the ATO and the consequences of RF’s invasion into Ukraine in August-September 2014, MOD official site, 13 September 2015], in <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2015/08/13/analiz-vedennya-antiteroristichnoi-operaczii--12694/> (Accessed on 26.07.18).; Ukrainian MOD Defence Intelligence, *Servicemen of the Russian Armed Forces who took part in combat actions in Ukraine*, in <http://gur.mil.gov.ua/en/content/russia-cambatants-suspected-of-committing-war-crimes.html> (Accessed on 20.07.18.); *Ukraine – a proving ground for modern and application of prohibited Russian weapons.* In

materials, military reports, investigations⁶ etc. It is worth to highlight the difficulties of foreign researches to work with these materials. Some of them required some access to restricted documents and data. There is a need to make some field trips in order to get information from the conflict zone, the military, the population. The researchers had to overcome some linguistic obstacles.

Secondly, there are the Western publications: the European and the North American. As stated by Volodymyr Kravchenko, researcher from the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies of the University of Alberta, they may be divided in two categories: anti-Ukrainian (pro-Russian) and pro-Ukrainian.⁷ The former one is predominantly represented by scholars of the Russian politics who focus their researches specifically on Russia, such as Richard Sakwa - the British researcher on Russia,⁸ Gerard Toal - an Irish political geographer,⁹ Samuel Charap - a RAND expert on Russia and Eurasia, Timothy Colton - an expert on Russia at Harvard University,¹⁰ Giovanna De Maio¹¹ - an Italian researcher and others. As some critics noted, being that Russia-centric, they are "heavily reliant on secondary sources and quotes from official Russian sources".¹²

Thirdly, the pro-Ukrainian "camp" embraces scholars on Ukraine, such as Taras Kuzio¹³ - a British-Canadian scholar and expert in Ukrainian political,

<http://gur.mil.gov.ua/en/content/list-of-russia-armed-aggression-against-ukraine.html> (Accessed on 20.07.18).

⁶ Mykola Balaban et al., *Donbas in Flames: Guide to the Conflict Zone*, Lviv, Security Environment Research Center "Prometheus" NGO, 2017, 100 p., in https://prometheus.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Donbas_v_Ogni_ENG_1-5_web.pdf (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁷ Volodymyr Kravchenko, *Review Essay: Frontline Ukraine*, in "East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies", 2016, Volume III, No. 1, p. 160.

⁸ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, London: I. B. Taurus, 2015, 297 p.

⁹ Gerald Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, 2017, 272 p.

¹⁰ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukrainian Crisis and the Ruinous for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Routledge (Adelphi series), 2016, 212 p.

¹¹ Giovanna De Maio, *Russia's view of Ukraine after the crisis*, in "IAI Working Papers 16", 04 February 2016, 21 p.

¹² Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine 'Experts' in the West and Putin's Military Aggression*, in "Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper", 06 September 2017, No. 17, in http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Kuzio_Western_Experts_on_Russian_Aggression_Ukraine.pdf (Accessed on 26.07.18).

¹³ Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2015, 611 p.; Taras Kuzio, *Putin's*

economic and security affairs, Paul D'Anieri¹⁴ - an American political scientist, Igor Sutyagin¹⁵ - a British-Russian expert on Ukrainian-Russian relationships, Tor Bukkvoll¹⁶ - a Norwegian researcher, and others.

The most difficult situation has occurred with the sources. Despite of the great amount of publications, one should notice the absence of any pluralism of opinions, the censorship, the total closure of sensitive information (especially casualty statistics), and the assassination practice of the opposition leaders and critics¹⁷. The ordinary readers will hardly separate facts from propaganda and information operations. Usually, authors of publications follow a certain official justification logic for the Russian actions in Crimea and Donbas, they usually cite predominantly Russian sources, exploit Russian imperial and Soviet time myths on Ukraine history¹⁸, identity etc. Some authors admit and excuse the Russian military intervention in Ukraine;¹⁹ others deny the Russian involvement as a key part of the

War Against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime, Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, 474 p.

¹⁴ Paul D'Anieri, *Understanding Ukrainian politics: power, politics, and institutional design*, Armonk (NY), Sharpe, 2007, 299 p.

¹⁵ Igor Sutyagin, *Russian Forces in Ukraine*, Royal United Services Institute, March 2015, in https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201503_bp_russian_forces_in_ukraine.pdf (Accessed on 26.07.18).

¹⁶ Tor Bukkvoll, *Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas*, in "Parameters", (46)2, Summer 2016, in http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pub/parameters/issues/Summer_2016/5_Bukkvoll.pdf (Accessed on 31.07.18).

¹⁷ Ingo Mannteufel, *Opinion: Political assassination of Boris Nemtsov still not solved*, in <https://p.dw.com/p/2ffju> (Accessed on 11.07.18); *ESDP and NATO: better cooperation in view of the new security challenges*. Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the Interparliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP, Riga, Latvia, 5 March 2015, in https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_117919.htm (Accessed on 03.07.18).

¹⁸ Геннадий Зюганов, *Кризис на Украине и его глубинные корни* [Crisis in Ukraine and its deep roots], in <http://www.politpros.com/journal/read/?ID=3779&journal=167> (Accessed on 03.08.18).; Геннадий Осипов, *Политический шантаж – преддверие глобальной катастрофы* [Political blackmail – the eve of the global catastrophe], in "Экономические и социальные перемены", ИСЭРТРАН, № 4 (34), 2014, с. 24 – 35, in <http://esc.vscs.ac.ru/article/549/full> (Accessed on 04.08.18).

¹⁹ Дмитрий Лабаури, *Донбасский разлом: причины, суть, итоги конфликта на Юго-Востоке Украины* [Donbas Fault: causes, essence, results of the conflict in the South-East of Ukraine], in <http://magazines.russ.ru/ural/2015/1/12lala.html> (Accessed on 03.08.18).

conflict and insist on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a civil war²⁰. Sometimes, Russian authorities organise some forums, such as the Valdai Discussion Club (a Moscow-based think tank) with the aim of promoting an official policy toward Ukraine, to suggest Moscow-desired future scenarios for Ukraine.²¹

The authors believe that it is appropriate to show the military events in Ukraine based on Ukrainian perspective, instead of viewing the Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine through the lens of Moscow.

Fourthly, East-European researchers, such as Slovakian Róbert Ondrejcsák²² and Soňa Rusnáková,²³ Latvian researches Artis Pabris and Andis Kutors,²⁴ experts who work for the NATO STRATCOM Centre of Excellence in Latvia, and counter the Russian propaganda and fake news on the events in Ukraine.

Finally, there are the international official documents, such as the UN resolutions, the International Court of Justice Appeals,²⁵ the International

²⁰ Анатолий Цыганок, *Донбасс: неоконченная война. Гражданская война на Украине (2014-2016). Русский взгляд* [Donbas: unfinished war. Civil War in Ukraine (2014-2016). The Russian view.], Москва, АИРО, 2016, 576 с.; Иван Котляров, *Украина: гражданская война и попрание международного права украинскими вооруженными формированиями* [Ukraine: Civil War and International Law Violations by Ukrainian Armed Forces], in "Политическое просвещение", 2014, №5 (82), с. 100 – 118, in <http://www.politpros.com/journal/read/?ID=3786&journal=167> (Accessed on 04.08.18).

²¹ *Украина: предпосылки кризиса и сценарии будущего* [Ukraine: Prerequisites of the Crisis and Scenarios of the Future], Валдай: Международный дискуссионный клуб, Сентябрь 2014 года, Москва, in http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/ukraine_rus.pdf (Accessed on 03.08.18).

²² Róbert Ondrejcsák, *US Policies towards Russia in the Light of War in Ukraine: From Engaging a "Cooperative Power" to Defensive Containment of Regional "Challenger"*, in http://stratpol.sk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Panorama2014_Ondrejcsak.pdf (Accessed on 28.07.18).

²³ Soňa Rusnáková, *Russian New Art of Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine*, in "Slovak Journal of Political Science", 2017, no. 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sjps-2017-0014> (Accessed on 28.07.18).

²⁴ Artis Pabris, Andis Kutors (eds.), *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe*, The Centre for East European Policy Studies, University of Latvia Press, 2015, 182 p., in https://www.academia.edu/12573225/The_War_in_Ukraine_Lessons_for_Europe (Accessed on 30.07.18).

²⁵ *Україна подала позов проти Російської Федерації до Міжнародного суду ООН* [Ukraine filled a lawsuit against the Russian Federation before the International Court of Justice], in <https://mfa.gov.ua/u/press-center/news/53743-ukrajina-podala-pozov-proti-rosijsykoji-federaciji-do-miznarodnogo-sudu-oon> (Accessed on 26.07.18).

Criminal Court²⁶ and the MH17 catastrophe investigation materials.²⁷

There were not any expectations in the Ukrainian society in 2014 that a military conflict would ever emerge in the Ukrainian territory at that time. Implementing the imperial plans of the Kremlin leaders, the Russian Federation launched a so-called “hybrid war” against Ukraine, which consists in the occupation of a part of Ukraine, hidden military aggression, elements of information, economic warfare, support for terrorism and irredentism.

With the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine, there is a need for a comprehensive reflection on the historical experience of the development of forms and methods of armed confrontation in order to incorporate it into the struggle for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A large variety of literary sources dedicated to the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine²⁸ covers the military-historical issue in the field of the ideological struggle.

²⁶ Report on Preliminary Examination Activities. International Criminal Court. Office of the Prosecutor, 4 December 2017, p 19-27, in https://www.icc-cpi.int/itemsDocuments/2017-PE-rep/2017-otp-rep-PE_ENG.pdf (Accessed on 04.08.18).

²⁷ JIT: Flight MH17 was shot down by a BUK missile from a farmland near Pervomaiskyi, 28 September 2016, in <https://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/mh17-crash/@96068/jit-flight-mh17-shot/> (Accessed on 04.07.18); Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament: Annual Report 2016–2017, the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 2017, 52 p.

²⁸ В. Брехуненко, В. Ковальчук, М. Ковальчук, В. Корнієнко, „Братня” навала. Війни Росії проти України XII-XXI ст. [“Brothers” invasion. Russia’s Wars against Ukraine in the 12th -21th centuries], Київ, ТОВ “Бізнесполіграф”, 2016, 248 с.; Г. М. Перепелиця, Україна – Росія: війна в умовах співіснування [Ukraine – Russia: war in the Conditions of Coexistence], Київ, Видавничий дім «Стилос», 2015, 880 с.; Г. Боряк, В. Головка та інші, 25 років незалежності: нариси історії творення нації та держави [25 Years of Independence: Essays of the History of the Building of the Nation and State], НАН України; Ін-т історії України, Київ, Ніка-Центр, 2016, 796 с.; Т. Березовець, Анексія: острів Крим: хроніки “гібридної війни”: дослідження захоплення півострова [Anexation: Crimea: Chronicles of the “hybrid war”: Exploration of the Capture of the Peninsula], Київ, БрайтСтарПаблішинг, 2015, 391с.; В. Гусаров, Ю. Карин, К. Машовець, Д. Тымчук, Вторжение в Украину: Хроника российской агрессии [Invasion of Ukraine: Chronicle of the Russian Aggression], Київ, БрайтСтарПаблішинг, 2016, 240 с.; В. П. Горбулін, Донбас і Крим: ціна повернення [Donbas and Crimea: the Return Cost], Нац. ін-т стратег. дослідж., Київ, НІСД, 2015, 473 с.; С. Лойко, Аеропорт [Airport], Київ, БрайтСтарПаблішинг, 2015, 328 с.; Серж Марко, Хроника гибридной войны [Chronicle of Hybrid War], Київ, Альтерпрес,

And this is not an accident. Those who won are largely determined on the ideological front. The President of Ukraine, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko said on the eve of the Ukraine Defender Day in 2016: "Who would have thought that such a great significance of the state defence belonged to historians ...? The defence of Ukraine should take place not only with arms in hands. Historians can give a battle in hybrid warfare".²⁹

ARGUMENTATION

The armed conflict in the East of Ukraine is just one chain in the "hybrid war" enforced by the Russian leadership at the beginning of the 21 Century. "Hybrid warfare" is currently the most used concept for the description of the aggression of Russia.

The Russian Federation is making enormous efforts to hide its aggression from the international community, trying to treat the events that took place, since 2014, on the Crimean Peninsula and Eastern Ukraine, as an internal conflict in the form of a civil war. However, beyond all reasonable doubt, this is precisely aggression. The definition of aggression is given by the UN General Assembly resolution No. 3314 (XXIX) of December 14, 1974. According to the Art. 1, "aggression is the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, as set out in this Definition". And according to the resolution's Art.3, "any of the following acts, regardless of a declaration of war, qualify as an act of aggression: (...) (c) The blockade of the ports or coasts of a State by the armed forces of another State; (d) An attack by the armed forces of a State on the land, sea or air forces, or marine and air fleets of another State; (e) The use of armed forces of one State which are within the territory of another State with the agreement of the receiving State, in contravention of the conditions provided for in the agreement or any extension of their presence in such territory beyond the termination of the agreement; (g) The sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another

2016, 248 с.; В. Н. Ткаченко, *Россия: беспутье агрессора* [Russia: Aggressor's Off-road], Київ, Издательство ЛОГОС УКРАИНА, 2016, 432 с.

²⁹ *Зустріч Президента України Петра Порошенка з істориками* [The Meeting of the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko with Historians], in <http://www.Pravda.Com.Ua/News/2016/10/6/7122836/>.

State of such gravity as to amount to the acts listed above, or its substantial involvement therein".³⁰

In our opinion, the actions of the Russian Federation, which have been committed by it on the territory of Ukraine since February 2014, are covered by the norms of the afore-mentioned resolution. In such context, it is necessary to draw attention to the decision of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, dated March 1, 2014 No. 48-СФ "On the Use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine".³¹ This step was aimed at legalizing the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation against the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other military formations and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the south of the Kherson region in order to block the actions of the Ukrainian authorities, capture the bases of the Ukrainian military units and the units of law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, the mass media offices and the lines of strategic communications of the Crimean peninsula. These actions actually began on February 20, 2014.

Within a month, the Russian Federation achieved complete control over the territory of the occupied Crimean Peninsula. On March 16, 2014 an illegal referendum was held, which came into force with the Federal Constitutional Law of March 21, 2014 No. 6-ФКЗ.³² Therefore, from the date of 21.03.2014 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol are considered Moscow territory. Hence, the decision of the Federation Council on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine has become obsolete.

But this decision was cancelled only on July 25, 2014 by the relevant decision of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian

³⁰ UN General Assembly resolution No. 3314 (XXIX) of 14 December 1974, in <http://www.un-documents.net/a29r3314.htm> (Accessed on 06.08.18).

³¹ *Об использовании Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации на территории Украины : Постановление Совета Федерации* [On the Use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine], in <http://council.gov.ru/activity/documents/39979/> (Accessed on 03.08.18).

³² *О принятии в Российскую Федерацию Республики Крым и образовании в составе Российской Федерации новых субъектов – Республики Крым и города федерального значения Севастополя* [On Adoption in the Russian Federation of the Republic of Crimea and the creation of new subjects in the Russian Federation: the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, the city of the federal level], Федеральный конституционный закон от 21.03.2014 г. № 6-ФКЗ, in <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38220> (Accessed on 03.08.18).

Federation No. 296-СФ³³. The fact testifies that the purpose of military aggression was not exhausted by the occupation and annexation of Crimea. The authors believe that the abrogation of this decision is related to the reaction of the international community to the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation, and meant to avoid the occurrence of negative consequences announced for the Russian Federation by international organizations and other countries.

The Resolution 68/262 adopted by the UN General Assembly on March 27, 2014 underscores that the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on March 16, 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol.³⁴ The Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are recognized as temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, where human and civil rights of the Ukrainians, the Crimean Tatars and the persons belonging to other ethnic and religious groups have being violated by the Russian occupation authorities.³⁵ The National Security Strategy of Ukraine from 2015 emphasised this fact: "Section 1. Initial Provisions. ... The Russian Federation, striving to reverse the will of the Ukrainian People for the European future, has occupied a part of the Ukrainian territory: the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and launched military aggression against Ukraine in the eastern regions attempting to undermine unity of the democratic international community, to revise the world order which was formed upon the end of the World War II, and to violate fundamentals of international security and law, enabling unpunished use of force in the international arena."

³³ *Об отмене постановления Совета Федерации Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации от 1 марта 2014 года № 48-СФ «Об использовании Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации на территории Украины»*: Постановление Совета Федерации [On the Revocation of the Resolution of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation dated March 1, 2014 No. 48-СФ], in <http://council.gov.ru/activity/documents/44424/> (Accessed on 07.08.18).

³⁴ *Territorial integrity of Ukraine*: The UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262, in http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/262 (Accessed on 07.08.18).

³⁵ *Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)*: UN General Assembly Resolution № 71/205 dated 19.12.2016, in http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/205 (Accessed on 08.08.18); *Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine*: UN General Assembly Resolution № 72/190 dated 19.12.17, in http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/72/190 (Accessed on 08.08.18).

Also, the Section 4.3: "... Ensuring readiness of the state, its economy and society to defend and repel the armed aggression in all of its aspects (including hybrid warfare), and upgrading the defence capability of the state are the key priorities of the national security policy".³⁶ The Military Doctrine of Ukraine of 2015 also defined in item 28 that "nowadays, Ukraine considers the Russian Federation as its military enemy".³⁷ The resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, dated January 27, 2015 and the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2067 "Missing persons during the conflict in Ukraine", dated June 25, 2015, recognized Russia as the aggressor state. Contrary to all international laws, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was annexed. The war in Donbas, unresolved and artificially supported by the Russian Federation, is continuing.³⁸

On November 16, 2016, Fatou Bensouda, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court disclosed the Report on the preliminary examination of the situation in Ukraine (2016), which concerns both the situation in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, linking events in these regions. Paragraph 158 of this report states that the situation on the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol is equivalent to the international armed conflict which began at the latest on 26 February, when the Russian Federation deployed members of its armed forces to gain control over parts of the Ukrainian territory, without the consent of the Ukrainian Government. And paragraph 166 highlights two periods of particularly intense battles in the East of Ukraine, in Ilovaisk (Donetsk oblast) in late August 2014 and in Debaltseve (Donetsk) from January to February 2015 in particular, when the increased intensity of fighting during these periods has been attributed to alleged corresponding influxes of troops, vehicles and weaponry from the Russian

³⁶ Oleksandr Lytvynenko, Philipp Fluri, Valentyn Badrack, *Decree of the President of Ukraine "On Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine on May 5, 2015, «On the National Security Strategy of Ukraine»"*. The Security Sector Legislation of Ukraine [Third Edition], Center for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies, Kyiv, 2017, 714 p., in http://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Security-Sector-Legislation-Ukraine-2017_eng.pdf (Accessed on 10.08.18).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Постанова Верховної Ради України "Про Звернення Верховної Ради України до Його Всесвятості Варфоломія, Архієпископа Константинополя і Нового Риму, Вселенського Патріарха щодо надання автокефалії Православній Церкві в Україні" [On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to His Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, Ecumenical Patriarch to Provide Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine] від 16.06.2016 року № 1422-VIII, in <http://zakon0.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1422-19> (Accessed on 24.07.18).

Federation to reinforce the positions of the armed groups.³⁹

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation began on February 20, 2014, when the first cases of violation of the Ukraine state border crossing over the Kerch Strait by troops of the Russian Federation were recorded. Already after the actual armed aggression, on March 1, 2014, the Council of Federation adopted a statement of the President of Russia, V. Putin, on the permission given to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to operate on the territory of Ukraine. The medal “For the return of Crimea”, which was established by the order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation dated March 21, 2014, is among the vast variety of evidence of Russian armed aggression. The dates of these special operations of Russians in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea - from February 20 to March 18, 2014 - were engraved on the medal. V. Putin testified that the operation of the Russian intelligence services involving military units and squads took place, particularly in the film “The Crimea. The Way to the Homeland”.⁴⁰

After the Crimea annexation and having ambitious plans to seize territories in the East and South of Ukraine, in spring 2014 the Russian intelligence services conducted a series of operations under the title “Русская весна” (Russian Spring) to create a quasi-state entity, the so-called “Новороссия” (New Russia). In order to create a threat of invasion and use force, the leadership of the Russian Federation deployed troops close to the Ukrainian borders.⁴¹ On February 28, 2014, at a meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, the Defence Minister reported that up to 38 thousand servicemen, 761 tanks, 2200 armoured vehicles, 720 artillery systems, about 90 combat aircrafts and 40 attack helicopters were concentrated along the state border with Ukraine in direction to Kyiv, Kharkiv and Donetsk.⁴² Following instructions from Moscow, the armed

³⁹ *Report on the preliminary examination of the situation in Ukraine*: The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, in https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-pe_eng.pdf (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁴⁰ *Крым. Путь на Родину* [The Crimea. The Way to the Homeland], in https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/59195/episode_id/1180834/video_id/1147633/ (Accessed on 05.09.17).

⁴¹ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the East of Ukraine in 2014–2016*, NATO Graphic & Printing, 2017, p. 19, in <http://nuou.org.ua/pro-universytet/dokumenty/finish/8-zahalna-diialnist/1941-the-white-book-of-the-anti-terrorist-operation-in-the-east-of-ukraine-in-2014-2016/0.html> (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁴² *Стенограма засідання РНБО України у зв'язку з початком російської агресії в Криму* [Transcripts of the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine in connection with the beginning of Russian aggression in the Crimea], in

conflict in the East of Ukraine unfolded from the beginning of April 2014. Russian agents and mercenaries controlled by Russian intelligence services moved to an armed confrontation with the legitimate authorities.

The flow of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine was divided by the article authors into periods which, in turn, were divided into stages, according to the specific features. The first period was called **“Overcoming the «hybrid aggression» and the active engagement of the ATO forces in the liberation of Donetsk and Lugansk regions from the Russian terrorist groups. Holding off the Russian troops invasion (beginning of April – September 5, 2014)”**. We have to mention that the first period, analysed in this study, is divided into three stages.

FIRST STAGE

The first period began with the stage “Deployment of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine by the intelligence services of the Russian Federation (April-June 2014)”. At the initial stage of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine, the efforts of the intelligence services of the Russian Federation were focused on destabilizing the situation in the Donetsk region, including massive creation of illegal armed groups, arms engagement and terrorist methods and ways of confronting the legitimate authorities. Moscow sent mixed forces, comprising military personnel (“vacationers” and “retirees”), Russian nationalists, so-called “soldiers of fortune”, the veterans of the Caucasian and Balkan wars and other “hot spots”, and just criminals who were mixed with the local recruits to the East of Ukraine.⁴³ Created by the Kremlin authorities, illegal armed groups were run by citizens of the Russian Federation, mainly the officers of the Russian intelligence services, particularly I. Girkin (“Strelkov”), B. Sisenko (“Iskra”), I. Bezler (“Bess”), as well as the criminal representatives, as A. Pavlov (“Motorola”). Combat groups were formed in the territory of the Russian Federation and in the occupied Crimea. They were armed and then transported across the border. All this suggests that the real causes of the armed conflict lie not in domestic Ukrainian problems, but in the interference and incitement of armed confrontation outside. The events in April 2014 in Donbas were a Russian intelligence services-special operation that was concealed as civilian protests.

<https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/02/22/7099911/> (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁴³ Дмитрий Лабаури, *op. cit.*

According to the information of the resistance group, as of April 9th, the number of the illegal armed group personnel exceeded 2.5 thousand people.⁴⁴ The Russian special forces and the terrorist groups, which they created, attacked border guard units, seized the police and secret service departments, vehicles, banking and media facilities, blocked military installations, blackmailed and brainwashed the local population, seized hostages and committed intentional murders.⁴⁵ Thus, as a result of the aggressive actions of the Russian invaders, the concealed occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk regions began. The Russian Federation makes all possible efforts to conceal its own aggression as a civil war in Ukraine.

In order to intensify the armed conflict in Ukraine, Kremlin leaders sent the paramilitary formations of the Russian “Cossacks”; battalion “Восток” (East), manned by Chechens, who were citizens of the Russian Federation; armed terrorist groups “Русский Сектор” (Russian Sector), “Оплот” (Bulwark) and others. Under the leadership of representatives of the Russian intelligence service, some illegal armed formations were created in the East of Ukraine, namely “Армия Новороссии” (The Army of New Russia), “Армия Юго-Востока” (The Army of South-East), “Народное ополчение Донбасса” (People’s Militia of the Donbas), “Луганская Гвардия” (Luhansk’s guard).⁴⁶

Obviously, it is not correct to call these illegal armed formations as “separatists”, “pro-Russian” and their representatives as “bandits”, “militia” (although this practice still exists). Politicians, military, science and media representatives from different countries cannot find the right terms to describe the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine. These difficulties are not accidental, as they are the result of hybrid war techniques. Moscow political strategists and tacticians put a lot of effort to create the illusion of a civil war in Ukraine⁴⁷. They also provoked the Ukrainian side, and especially the international community, to use distorted and inaccurate terminology to impede the correct evaluation of

⁴⁴ В. Гусаров, Ю. Карин, К. Машовец, Д. Тымчук, *Вторжение в Украину: Хроника российской агрессии* [Invasion in Ukraine: A Chronicle of Russian Aggression], Киев, БрайтСтарПаблицинг, 2016, 240 с.

⁴⁵ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist...*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ *Про відсіч збройній агресії Російської Федерації та подолання її наслідків* [On counteracting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation and overcoming its consequences], Постанова Верховної Ради України про Заяву Верховної Ради України, 21 квітня 2015 року № 337-VIII, in <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/337-19> (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁴⁷ Анатолий Цыганок, *op. cit.*; Иван Котляров, *op. cit.*

happenings and form a negative perception of the public opinion and institutions towards the events in Ukraine.

The fact that, on April 6, 2014 the terrorists seized the buildings of the regional state administration in Donetsk and Kharkiv, and the office of Security Service of Ukraine in Luhansk (where a considerable number of small arms was stored) almost simultaneously⁴⁸ indicates the coordination of actions by Russian sabotage and terrorist forces and local traitors. On April 7, 2014 the collaborators controlled, managed and funded by Russian intelligence services announced the creation of a so-called “Донецкая Народная Республика” (Donetsk People’s Republic) and “Харьковская Народная Республика” (Kharkiv People’s Republic). A headquarters of resistance in the South and East (“Штаб Южно-Восточного сопротивления”) that insisted on secession of the Eastern regions from Ukraine (creation of so-called Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) (“Луганская Народная Республика”) was announced on April 27, 2014 and was established in Luhansk.⁴⁹ At the same time, there were attempts of the Russian intelligence services to destabilize the situation in Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Odesa and Dnipropetrovsk regions.

The “initiation” of the massive use of weapons is clearly revealed in simultaneous capture of Sloviansk, city council in Artemivsk, city police station and city council in Kramatorsk, by the armed Russian-terrorist groups and the armed attack in Krasnyi Lyman on April, 12. The next day, the reconnaissance group of officers of the main office (Bureau) of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Alfa unit were ambushed and suffered losses near Sloviansk. The first battle of the Russian terrorist groups with representatives of the security and defence sector of Ukraine took place⁵⁰ then.

Due to the direct threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state, and in order to stop the surge of terrorism, organized by the Russian intelligence services in the Eastern regions of Ukraine, on April 14, 2014 the leadership of Ukraine announced the beginning of an antiterrorist operation (ATO).⁵¹ The term

⁴⁸ Mykola Balaban et al., *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35.

⁵⁰ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 21.

⁵¹ Про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 13 квітня 2014 року "Про невідкладні заходи щодо подолання терористичної загрози і збереження територіальної цілісності України". Указ Президента України [On the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of April 13, 2014 "On urgent measures to overcome the terrorist threat and preserve the territorial integrity of

“terrorists” was used in view of the actions that had been taken place in East of Ukraine, with regards to the Ukrainian Law “On countering terrorism”, which defines “terrorism as a socially dangerous activity that lies in deliberate, purposeful use of violence through hostage-taking, arson, murder, torture, intimidation of people and authorities”.⁵² Interestingly enough, the Russian Federal Law “On countering terrorism” gives even more relevant details on what was happening in the Eastern and Southern Ukraine in the definition of “terrorism – ideology of violence and practice of influence on decision-making by public authorities, local self-government bodies or international organizations connected with frightening the population and (or) other forms of unlawful violent actions”.⁵³ Since then the state has begun to function under special conditions.

All structures of the defence and security sector have been involved in the ATO: the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, the State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine, the State Special Transport Service and other agencies formed, in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, military formations and specialized law-enforcement bodies. In addition, volunteer formations, known as “volunteer battalions”, joined the ATO. The emergence of such phenomenon in the Ukrainian society as the volunteer movement is associated with the “Революція гідності” (Revolution of Dignity) (or “Maydan Uprising” against the President Yanukovich’s decision to stop the Ukrainian integration into EU and drift the country into Russia’s political-economic project “Таможенный союз” (Tax Union) and due to the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. As of April-May 2014, the following Ukrainian volunteer groups (formations) acted in the ATO area: “Добровольчий український корпус” (Volunteer Ukrainian Corps), battalions “Азов” (Azov), “Донбас” (Donbas), “Дніпро” (Dnipro), “Айдар” (Aidar) and several hundred volunteers, as well as a number of other volunteer groups which called themselves battalions, but their number was insignificant. However, the government forces failed to take full control over the situation in the East of Ukraine immediately. As a consequence of the help of armed units of the

Ukraine”: Decree of the President of Ukraine], in <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/405/2014> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁵² *Про боротьбу з тероризмом* [On the countering terrorism], Закон України від 20.03.2003 № 638-IV, in <https://zakon.help/law/638-IV/> (Accessed on 10.08.18).

⁵³ *О противодействии терроризму* [On the countering terrorism], РФ, Федеральный закон от 06.03.2006 г. № 35-ФЗ, in <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102370057&backlink=1&nd=102105192&rdk=0> (Accessed on 10.08.18).

Russian Federation, consisting of regular units and units subordinated to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, units and special units subordinated to other agencies of security and defence sector of the Russian Federation, their advisers, instructors and irregular illegal armed groups, armed gangs and groups of mercenaries that were created, subordinated, managed and funded by the Russian Federation, as well as through the occupation administration of the Russian Federation in Ukraine,⁵⁴ the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions was aggravated considerably. The enemy used guerrilla-war tactics, attacked the roadblocks and the ATO base camps, and ambushed military vehicles convoys.

On the 16th of January, Ukraine submitted to the International Court of Justice the Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Race Discrimination.⁵⁵

In a series of events aimed at the struggle for Ukraine, terrorists showed inhuman cruelty and sadism.⁵⁶ Thus, on May 9, 2014 the enemies captured colonel Serhii Demydenko, deputy commander of the Dnipropetrovsk territorial defence battalion (he was promoted to colonel posthumously) during the battle, cut his ears and poked his eyes.⁵⁷ On May, 13, the terrorists ambushed the convoy of one of the units of the 95th separate airmobile brigade near Sloviansk. As a consequence, 6 soldiers lost their lives and 11 were wounded. Existing positions, containers from Russian RPG-18 "Mukha", RPG-26 "Ahlen" were found at the

⁵⁴ Закон України "Про особливості державної політики із забезпечення державного суверенітету України на тимчасово окупованих територіях у Донецькій та Луганській областях" від 18 січня 2018 року [Law of Ukraine "On the peculiarities of state policy on ensuring state sovereignty of Ukraine in temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts" dated January 18, 2018], in <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2268-19/page> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁵⁵ Україна подала позов проти Російської Федерації до Міжнародного суду ООН, in <https://mfa.gov.ua/u/press-center/news/53743-ukrajina-podala-pozov-proti-rosijsykoji-federaciji-do-miznarodnogo-sudu-oon> (Accessed on 26.07.18).

⁵⁶ Мукіла Балабан et al., *op. cit.*, p. 65–72.

⁵⁷ Ярослав Тимченко, Ірина Мороз, Максим Попов та ін., *Книга пам'яті військовослужбовців Збройних Сил України, які загинули, захищаючи суверенітет, територіальну цілісність та недоторканість України* [Memory of soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, who perished defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine], Кн.1. Вінницька, Волинська, Дніпропетровська, Донецька, Житомирська та Закарпатська області [Volume 1. Vinnitsa, Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr and Transcarpathian regions], Київ, Національний військово-історичний музей України, ЛАТ&К, 2016, с. 154.

ambush site.⁵⁸ A tragedy near Volnovakha marks a special drama among the many events. On May 22, 2014 at around 4:30 am, a Russian armed group attacked the roadblock of the ATO unit. 17 defenders of Ukraine lost their lives and 32 soldiers were wounded.⁵⁹ This is only a small part of the tragic events which unfolded in April-May 2014.

All these events prompted the development of the ATO combat power, improvement of the management system to prevent the spread of destabilization processes throughout the territory of Ukraine. On May 20, 2014 the headquarters for the anti-terrorist operation was formed on the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In order to manage the military units effectively it was agreed to divide the area of operation into sectors ("A", "B", "D", later – sector "C") and to form appropriate headquarters. In addition, taking into account the importance and territorial location of Mariupol, a separate area (area "M") was created for its security.

The Ukrainian troops conducted an operation to unblock the Donetsk airport on May 26, 2014. Airborne unit effectively supported by the Air Force defeated the enemy.⁶⁰ The remnants of the Russian armed group members left the Donetsk airport.

At the end of May, the military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, jointly with the law-enforcement authorities and the Ukrainian volunteer formations regained control over the Dobropilskyi, Oleksandrivskyi, Velykonovosilkivskyi, Volnovaskyi, Marinskyi, Volodarskyi and Starobeshivskyi regions.⁶¹

In June, the ATO forces conducted a number of successful operations and took control over Semenivka and Krasnyi Lyman. The operation that was conducted in the southern part of Krasnolymanskyi region and liberated Yampil and Zakitne on June 18-19, 2014⁶² enabled the ATO forces to block the Sloviansk area

⁵⁸ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ О. Турчинов, *Без прямого російського втручання ми б уже до кінця травня звільнили всю територію Донецької і Луганської областей* [Without direct Russian intervention, we would have released the entire territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by the end of May], in "Народна армія", 20.04.2017, in [http://na.mil.gov.ua/files/pdf/5496-\(20-04-2017\).pdf](http://na.mil.gov.ua/files/pdf/5496-(20-04-2017).pdf) (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁶¹ *В ході АТО повністю очищена від бойовиків північ Донецької області* [During the ATO the north of the Donetsk region was completely cleared of militants], in https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/v-hode-ato-polnostyu-ochischen-ot-boevikov-severdoneckoy-oblasti-146414_.html (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁶² *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 25.

from this direction. Simultaneously, the Ukrainian troops captured the Russian terrorist strongpoints in the south of the Donetsk region, neutralized the intruders and regained control of Mariupol on June 13.

Control of more than 250 km of Ukrainian-Russian border was restored by the end of June 2014. The crisis area was isolated almost completely, except for the part of the state border of Izvaryne – Sievero-Hundorivskiyi – Parkhomenko that remained open for the Russians.

One of the very important tasks was taking control of the Luhansk airport and maintaining it. The airport was isolated. However, on June 14, 2014 Russian terrorists shot down a military transport aircraft IL-76MD on approach to landing which resulted in the death of 40 paratroopers and 9 crew members.⁶³

In the second half of June 2014 P. Poroshenko, the President of Ukraine, put forward a plan for the peaceful settlement of the situation in Donbas, ordered the military formations of Ukraine the unilateral ceasefire⁶⁴ from June 20 to 27 and urged the hostile party to participate in the negotiations. Further, the unilateral ceasefire was extended up to the end of June 30. However, at the order of Moscow, the hybrid Russian armed formations continued their aggressive actions. During a week of “silence”, 27 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 69 others were wounded.⁶⁵ There were some calls like “We will advance Kyiv” in the “LPR” and “DPR” collaborationist groupings.⁶⁶

It became clear that a resolution of the armed confrontation in the East of Ukraine by political means failed and the conflict must be eliminated by military means. Under such circumstances, P. Poroshenko, the President of Ukraine, decided to end the unilateral ceasefire⁶⁷ and ordered the ATO forces to start active actions against the illegal armed formations as from July 1, 2014.

⁶³ Mykola Balaban et al., *op. cit.*, p. 38; *У СБУ розповіли, хто саме збив український Іл-76 в Луганську* [The SBU said who exactly shot down the Ukrainian IL-76 in Lugansk], in https://espresso.tv/news/2017/10/07/u_sbu_rozpovily_khto_same_zbyv_ukrayinsky_y_il_76_u_lugansku (Accessed on 08.08.18).

⁶⁴ Mykola Balaban et al., *op. cit.*, p. 38–39.

⁶⁵ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ *Мы дойдем до Киева как минимум – Бородай* [We will reach Kyiv at least - Boroday], in <http://au-donetsk.ru/forum/my-doydem-do-kieva-kak-minimum-borod/> (Accessed on 09.08.18); *Стрелков: "Новороссия" - это только начало... Скоро до Киева дойдем* [Strelkov: "Novorossia" is just the beginning ... Soon we'll reach Kyiv], in <http://mignews.com.ua/sobitiya/inukraine/4109932.html> (Accessed on 10.08.18)

⁶⁷ Mykola Balaban et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39.

SECOND STAGE

The second stage “Liberation of the territory of the East of Ukraine from Russian terrorist cells (July 1-August 24, 2014)” was favourable for the ATO forces.

In July 2014, the total number of illegal armed formations created by the Russians in the East of Ukraine exceeded 15 thousand people. Up to 50 training camps for fighters were deployed both on the territory of the Russian Federation and on the occupied territories of Ukraine. The Russian occupying forces were armed with up to 45 tanks, more than 150 armoured combat vehicles, up to 30 missile multiple launcher systems, 60 artillery pieces and mortars, 20 anti-tank missile systems, more than 25 anti-aircraft missile systems, up to 100 man-portable air-defence systems and 150 trucks.⁶⁸ The biggest part of the Russian occupying forces was concentrated in Donetsk, Luhansk, Sloviansk, Horlivka, Makiivka, and Snizhne.

The ATO forces sought an isolation of the crisis area and actively fought against terrorists and saboteurs. About 580 km, including 212 km along the state border with the Russian Federation, had been successfully isolated by that time. 125 checkpoints, 13 company and platoon positions were established.⁶⁹ The number of protected and defence facilities continued to increase.

For a complete liberation of temporarily occupied territories the ATO leadership envisaged certain steps: to restore full control over the whole state border with the Russian Federation; to divide the territories controlled by the Russian occupying forces into separate areas; to encircle large group(ing)s of the Russian terrorists and create the conditions for their further disarmament, and in case of resistance to create conditions for their defeat.

At that time, the largest Russian armed formation was located in Sloviansk, in the Donetsk region. In order to encircle Sloviansk from all directions and to cut off the supply routes, the operation was conducted on July 1-4, 2014. The aim of the operation was to liberate Mykolaivka and to take control of the main ways by which the militants were supplied with weapons, ammunition and other material. Receiving information on the absence of the Russian troops and their mercenaries in Artemivsk, the assault squad of the reinforced company of the 95th separate airmobile brigade entered the city and took control without a single shot being

⁶⁸ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

fired.⁷⁰ The head of the Russian armed formation that operated in Sloviansk, I. Girkin (pseudo “Strelkov”), realizing that the city would be encircled in a few days, decided to escape. During the night of July 4-5, 2014, the Russian terrorist groups left the city in the direction of Donetsk and Horlivka. Thus, the Ukrainian troops liberated Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, and Artemivsk and by July 7 they took full control of the territory of Artemivsk, Marinsk and Sloviansk regions.⁷¹ Subsequently, Druzhkivka (July 8, 2014), Siversk (July 13, 2014), Dzerzhynsk (July 16-17, 2014), Sieverodonetsk and Lysychansk (July 18-20, 2014), Debaltseve (July 24-26, 2014), Vuhlehirsk (July 12-13, 2014), Zhdanivka (July 15-17, 2014) were liberated (see **Picture no. 1**⁷²).

As a result of the active actions of the units in July-August 2014, the Armed Forces of Ukraine suffered significant losses in personnel, weapons and military equipment in the East of Ukraine. At the same time, they were being systematically reinforced by Russian mercenaries and servicemen of the armed forces of the Russian Federation “sent for vacation”. The supply of weapons and military equipment like tanks, artillery systems, anti-tank weapons and advanced anti-aircraft missile systems continued. In addition, there were cases when certain units of the armed forces of the Russian Federation intruded on the territory of Ukraine.

Evidence of Russia’s military presence in the Donbass has repeatedly been published by independent think-tanks (RUSI, Atlantic Council), teams of independent investigators (Bellingcat), Ukrainian intelligence and journalists.⁷³ One of the most complete databases, containing identification findings of servicemen and units of the Russian Armed Forces recorded on the

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² Global Security, 11-14 Jul 2014, in <https://twitter.com/WarfareStudies> (Accessed on 15.12.18)

⁷³ *Аналіз ведення АТО та наслідків вторгнення РФ в Україну у серпні-вересні 2014 року (офіц. Сайт МОУ, 13 серпня 2015 року)* [Analysis of the ATO and the consequences of RF’s invasion into Ukraine in August-September 2014, MOD official site, 13 September 2015], in <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2015/08/13/analiz-vedennya-antiteroristichnoi-operaczii--12694/> (Accessed on 26.07.18); Ukrainian MOD Defence Intelligence, *Servicemen of the Russian Armed Forces who took part in combat actions in Ukraine*, in <http://gur.mil.gov.ua/en/content/russia-cambatants-suspected-of-committing-war-crimes.html> (Accessed on 20.07.18); *Ukraine – a proving ground for modern and application of prohibited Russian weapons*, in <http://gur.mil.gov.ua/en/content/list-of-russia-armed-aggression-against-ukraine.html> (Accessed on 20.07.18); Igor Sutyagin, *op. cit.*

Donbass in 2014-2016 was collected by volunteers of the international community InformNapalm.⁷⁴

In response to the successful actions of the ATO troops, Russia began to use artillery against them from their own territory. In the same points the Russian artillery units crossed the state border to fire shells from the territory of Ukraine. Systematic shelling of the military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and other Ukrainian formations in the sector "D" from the territory of the Russian Federation began on July 11, 2014. The enemy used BM-21 "GRAD" multiple rocket launchers and mortars. One of the units of the 24th separate mechanized brigade of the Ukrainian forces in the vicinity of Zelenopillia was then defeated by the fire from the Russian territory. During the shelling, the unit was almost completely destroyed: 24 servicemen lost their lives and 76 were wounded.⁷⁵ Obviously, regular artillery units and units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation were involved in firing across the border.

On July 17, 2014 a Boeing 777 passenger aircraft of the Malaysian Airlines which was flying from Amsterdam (the Netherlands) to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) was shot down by a Russian-made Buk missile system near Torez, Donetsk region. 283 passengers and 15 crew members were killed by the Russian terrorists.⁷⁶

Due to a threat that Donbas airfields could be used by the Russians, the ATO forces intensified their efforts to sustain the control of Donetsk and Luhansk airports. During July 20-21, 2014 the ATO forces conducted an operation in the area of Raivka, Vesela Hora, Kondrashivka-Nova, created a corridor for safe passage of convoys to Luhansk airport and set up roadblocks in threatened areas (see **Picture no. 277**). At the same time, they conducted the operation to liberate the area of Kurakhove, Pisky and seize Donetsk airport.⁷⁸ The actions of the Ukrainian servicemen deep in the occupied territories were decisive. So, on July

⁷⁴ *Proofs of the Russian Aggression: InformNapalm releases extensive database of evidence*, in <https://informnapalm.org/en/proofs-of-the-russian-aggression-informnapalm-releases-extensive-database-of-evidence/> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁷⁵ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation ...*, p. 28-29.

⁷⁶ *JIT: Flight MH17 was shot down by a BUK missile...; MH17 crash: Criminal investigation MH17*, in <https://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/mh17-crash/> (Accessed on 09.08.18); *US Court Fines Russian Separatist Leader £400m for Shooting Down MH17*, in <https://www.khodorkovsky.com/us-court-fines-russian-separatist-leader-400m-shooting-mh17/> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁷⁷ Global Situation, 23-27 Jul 2014, in <http://warfaresstudies.tumblr.com/image/93104087321> (Accessed on 15.12.18).

⁷⁸ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation ...*, p. 29.

2014 a unit of the 25th detached paratroopers brigade launched some assaults and raids in the direction of Debaltseve, Shakhtarsk that ensured an autonomous advance of the main raid of the core of the 95th detached airmobile brigade in the direction of Lysychansk, Debaltseve, Shakhtarsk, Petrivske, Savur Mohyla mound, Stepanivka, Dmytrivka, Miusinsk, Krasnyi Luch, Sloviansk.⁷⁹ The raid lasted from July the 18th to August the 10th, 2014 (24 days). Ukrainian paratroopers overcame more than 450 km of roads, including 170 km with engagements. On the July 28th, together with the battalion-size tactical group (further - BTGr) of the 30th detached mechanized brigade, they assaulted and captured the strategically important feature – Savur Mohyla mound.⁸⁰ They supported their comrades-in-arms on the battle field in a difficult time. At the beginning of August, they secured the withdrawal of the ATO units that carried out tasks at the state border and occurred under the Russian artillery destructive fire.

The raid tasks were assigned in consideration of the fact that in late July – early August the situation in the sector “D” seriously aggravated. Russian mass-media commented this situation as a formation of the so-called “Южный котел” (South pocket). Significant loss of personnel, weapons and military equipment as a result of artillery shelling from the Russian territory forced the ATO leadership to plan and conduct on the 3rd – 4th of August 2014 an operation of withdrawal of the Ukrainian Armed Forces units and the State Border service of Ukraine on a safe distance from the state border.⁸¹ Savur Mohyla mound became the place of Ukrainian military glory in August 2014, which from July 28, 2014 was under the control of Ukrainian defenders. On August the 12th 2014, a special purpose group of soldiers under the command of Colonel I. Gordiychuk broke through to the mound Savur Mohyla. On the 18th of August, a squad of Colonel Potiehin joined the defenders of the mound. Ukrainian soldiers controlled the movement of Russian mercenaries and columns with military equipment and goods from the Russian Federation, targeted artillery fire of the ATO forces.⁸² In order to annihilate the defenders of Savur Mohyla, Russian artillery was shelling the mound almost 24 hours a day, and the Russian mercenary troops carried out numerous attempts to

⁷⁹ *Raid. Documentary*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co-AHRfrSro> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation ...*, p. 30.

⁸² Серж Марко, *Хроника гибридной войны* [Chronicle of Hybrid War], Київ, Альтерпрес, 2016, с. 75–86.

assault a strategic altitude. Armed forces and units of the Russian Federation supported them by firing across the border⁸³. However, Ukrainian soldiers, in spite of the extraordinary pressure, firmly defended the site and retreated only by order of the Command.

In general, the situation in the East of Ukraine remained difficult, but under control. By mid-August 2014, about 40 thousand people were involved in the anti-terrorist operation. There were more than 32 thousand of the Armed Forces personnel alongside with 5.5 thousand pieces of heavy weapons and other military equipment. The National Guard of Ukraine deployed to the operation area up to 3 thousand men, the State Border Service of Ukraine – up to 3 thousand men, the Security Service of Ukraine - up to 2 thousand men.⁸⁴ During May-September 2014, the ATO forces conducted more than 40 operations, released more than two-thirds of the occupied territories, more than 100 towns and villages of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.⁸⁵ Gradually, the Armed Forces and other military units of Ukraine managed to reverse the situation and take it under control. During the liberation of towns and villages, separate hostile groups were localized and destroyed. There were no significant casualties among the civilian population. As a result of the offensives, raids, search-shocks, assaults, and special operations of the ATO forces, the narrowing of the isolation ring, the gradual removal of it from the state border and partial security of the state border in threatening directions became possible. At that time, there was a real possibility of blocking the Russian occupation forces in the districts of Donetsk, Makiivka, Gorlovka, Luhansk, their encircling and cutting into separate pockets. The preconditions of the successful end (i.e. for Ukraine) of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine were created. In these circumstances, the Russian Federation intervened to prevent this development of events.

⁸³ Maksymilian Czuperski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins, Alina Polyakova, Damon Wilson, *Hiding in Plain Sight. Putin's War in Ukraine*, The Atlantic Council of the United States, 2015, 33 p., in https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191186/Hiding-in-Plain_Sight_0529.pdf (Accessed on 09.08.18); *Russia Shelled Ukraine in August 2014. Satellite Images of 539 Craters Analysed*, in <https://informnapalm.org/en/russia-shelled-ukraine-in-august-2014/> (Accessed on 09.08.18); Sean Case, Klement Anders, *Putin's Undeclared War. Summer 2014: Russian Artillery Strikes against Ukraine*, in https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ArtilleryAttacks_with_Cover_EmbargoNote.pdf (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁸⁴ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 30.

⁸⁵ *Біла книга-2014. Збройні Сили України* [White Book-2014.The Armed Forces of Ukraine], Київ, МОУ, ГШ ЗС України, 2015, с. 10.

THIRD STAGE

The third stage “The invasion of the Russian Armed Forces military units on the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (August 25 - September 5, 2014)” shows Russia’s efforts to stop the conflict resolution on Ukrainian terms.

In August 2014, realizing the approaching collapse of the “Новоросси́я” (New Russia) project, the military-political leadership of the Russian Federation decided to deploy its regular troops to the territory of Eastern Ukraine⁸⁶. This decision led to the escalation of the armed conflict, increased destruction of the region’s infrastructure, caused a significant increase in the number of victims among military and civilian population. At midnight of August 24-25, 2014, the situation in the ATO zone changed dramatically (see **Picture no. 3**⁸⁷). After a powerful artillery strike of 200 artillery pieces from the territory of the Russian Federation, a number of Russian units covertly invaded the territory of Ukraine.⁸⁸ Russian servicemen, as before, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, did not have any documents and identification insignia on their uniforms or their military equipment. The state border was crossed by the eight battalion-size tactical groups. They moved quickly towards Ilovaisk and Luhansk. Several small groups crossed the border near Novoazovsk in the direction of Mariupil.⁸⁹ The only group of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation near the Russian-Ukrainian border in the South of the Rostov region with the spearhead to Donetsk included about 4 thousand servicemen, up to 20 tanks, up to 90 units of armoured combat vehicles, up to 30 pieces of artillery systems and up to 20 MLRS.⁹⁰ The invasion was confirmed on August 26, 2014 after the capture of 11 military servicemen of the 98th airborne division (Kostroma). Over time, it was possible to find out that units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation entered the territory of Donetsk and

⁸⁶ Дмитрий Лабаури, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Global Situation, 18-24 Aug 2014, in <http://warfaresudies.tumblr.com/image/95734796876> (Accessed on 15.12.18).

⁸⁸ В. Муженко, *Дванадцять днів що змінили хід АТО* [Twenty Days that Changed the ATO's Course], in “Народна армія”, 21.08.2015, in <http://na.mil.gov.ua/files/pdf/5410-%2821-08-2015%29.pdf> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Аналіз бойових дій в районі Іловайська після вторгнення російських військ 24–29 серпня 2014 року* [Analysis of Combat Actions at Ilovaisk after the Russian troops’ invasion in August 24-24, 2014], in <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2015/10/19/analiz-illovausk--14354/> (Accessed on 06.08.18).

Luhansk regions, in particular from the 19th detached mechanized infantry brigade, 7th and 76th airborne divisions, 31st and 56th detached assault brigades, 64th regiment of the Northern Fleet Marines.⁹¹

A special resonance in the society was the Ilovaysk tragedy (24 August 29, 2014).⁹² For the release of a group of about 1.2 thousand men encircled in the Ilovaysk region, a reserve group of up to 2 thousand men was prepared. Taking into account the current situation, the decision was made to conduct an operation to release the troops from the pocket on September 2, 2014. But due to the enemy's powerful fire impact, the Ukrainian units had to be extracted long before the planned time. With the aim to avoid bloodshed from both sides, the "safe corridors" were agreed at the highest Russian and Ukrainian military levels. Under the guarantee of Russia, the withdrawal of the Ukrainian troops from Ilovaisk was scheduled for the morning of August, 29. The movement was planned in columns according to two routes.⁹³ However, Russian troops betrayed treacherously and shot columns in the open areas of roads from their ambushes. As a result of the cunning actions of Russians, 366 Ukrainian soldiers were killed, 429 were injured, 158 disappeared, and 128 were in captivity.⁹⁴ When the columns left Ilovaisk, information from one of the special-purpose groups operating in the enemy's rear was received. According to this information, one of Russians BTRs carelessly took a base camp, where units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were deployed a week ago. Taking into account the knowledge of all coordinates and areas, the Command of ATO forces was able to adjust the artillery fire carefully. As a result of a powerful rocket-artillery strike, the operational group of the GRU (Main Intelligence Department) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation was liquidated, and the battalion tactical group of the enemy suffered significant losses: more than a hundred killed and many injured, weapons and military equipment were destroyed.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation...*, p. 31.

⁹² *Аналіз бойових дій в районі Іловайська...*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Юрій Луценко прозвітував про результати розслідування кримінального провадження за фактом розв'язання і ведення представниками влади та збройних сил Російської Федерації агресивної війни проти України 02.09.2016* [Yurii Lutsenko reported on the results of criminal investigation on the Russian state and military authorities responsibility over the beginning and conduct of the aggressive war in Ukraine], in https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/news.html?_m=publications&c=view&t=rec&id=191816 (Accessed on 05.08.18).

⁹⁵ *В. Муженко, Двадцять днів що змінили хід АТО* [Twenty Days that Changed the

The tension of the battles associated with the Russian invasion was growing progressively. Two days later intensive battles were taking place in the suburbs of Lugansk, near Novosvitlivka and Khryzchivate, Donetsk and Ilovaisk, Marinka and Starobeshev. Only on the 27th of August 2014 the ATO forces opened fire 34 times. In the Luhansk airport region, at the Hryaschivate – Novosvitlivka line, there were also encircling, fierce and brutal battles conducted by the units of the 80th airborne, 24th mechanized and 128th mountain-infantry brigades, battalion “Айдар” (Aidar) and a small group of 51th mechanized brigade.⁹⁶

The battles of the greatest intensity were in the region of Luhansk airport, where the enemy used reinforced tank battalion, with the support of the infantry against the Ukrainian defenders. The balance of power was not in favour of Ukrainians and was even worse than early at Ilovaisk. When Ukrainian troops, after fierce battles, broke through the encircling and withdrew, the Russians were afraid to advance upon Luhansk airport for another three days. During the battles near Luhansk the defenders of Ukraine demonstrated heroism and courage. The units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation suffered significant casualties.⁹⁷ According to the information received by the ATO headquarters from intelligence sources, the Commander of one of the units of the Marine Corps of the Northern Fleet of the Russian Federation, who participated in hostilities under the Luhansk airport, withdrew his unit into the territory of the Russian Federation, without permission of the Highest Command, because of some great losses of personnel.⁹⁸

After the Russian troops invasion, the ATO units were ordered to move north of Luhansk (August 30-31, 2014). At the same time, the defence of the so-called Bakhmut highway (in the Lugansk-Lisichansk section) was enforced. To stop the further offensive of the enemy on Mariupol, on September 25th, 2014, the 79th and the 95th separate airmobile brigades' raids were conducted in the area of Komsomolsk, Telmanove, and Novoazovsk.⁹⁹ These raids demonstrated to the Russian leadership that there were sufficient reserves able to strike the enemy, to break his plans on the encircling and capture of Mariupol. The enemy's intention

ATO's Course], in “Народна армія”, dated 21.08.2015, in <http://na.mil.gov.ua/files/pdf/5410-%2821-08-2015%29.pdf> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ В. Муженко, *Дванадцять днів що змінили хід АТО* [Twenty Days that Changed the ATO's Course], in “Народна армія”, dated 21.08.2015, in <http://na.mil.gov.ua/files/pdf/5410-%2821-08-2015%29.pdf> (Accessed on 09.08.18).

⁹⁹ *Raid. Documentary*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co-AHRfrSro>. (Accessed on 09.08.18).

to break through the co-called “Southern corridor” towards Crimea was not materialized.¹⁰⁰

The authors believe that the resistance of Ukrainians and the painful losses of the enemy forced the Russian leadership to refuse a second-echelon force deployment into Ukraine. Gradually, the ATO’s forces stabilized the contact line and prevented further movement of Russian hybrid occupying forces into the depths of Ukrainian territory. The analysis of the results of operations (combat actions) in late August-early September 2014 shows that, despite the unfavourable situation, the Ukrainian Armed Forces together with the National Guard of Ukraine, other military formations, law enforcement agencies and with the participation of volunteer units caused heavy casualties to the enemy and tied down its main forces, ruined the Russian leadership’s plans of seizing the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine and occupying the towns of Stanitsa Luhanska, Shchastia, Severodonetsk, Lysychansk, Debaltsevo, Artemivsk, Slaviansk and Mariupol.

CONCLUSIONS

The military occupation of the Crimea and the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine became the next steps in the “hybrid” war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Some false terms, that were suggested by the Russians for legitimization of their aggressive war against Ukraine and frequently used by medias and in some political circles, such as “separatists”, “pro-Russian”, “bandits”, “militia” - for illegal and hostile to Ukraine armed formations, and “civil war” for the events that happened in the East of Ukraine in March 2014, should not be taken for granted by academia.

There are several countries active in modern Europe where separatist movements exist. Ukraine is one of them. However, today’s events in Ukraine should not be seen much in the perspective of separatism but rather in the context of irredentism, when a certain group of people desire to join the neighbouring state to their region (if not the whole country), especially if this state has created a long-standing influence capability.

Those armed groups that were created by Russia in the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” should be appropriately called: armed formations of the Russian Federation, consisting of regular units and units subordinated to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, units and special units subordinated to other security agencies of the Russian Federation, their advisers, instructors and

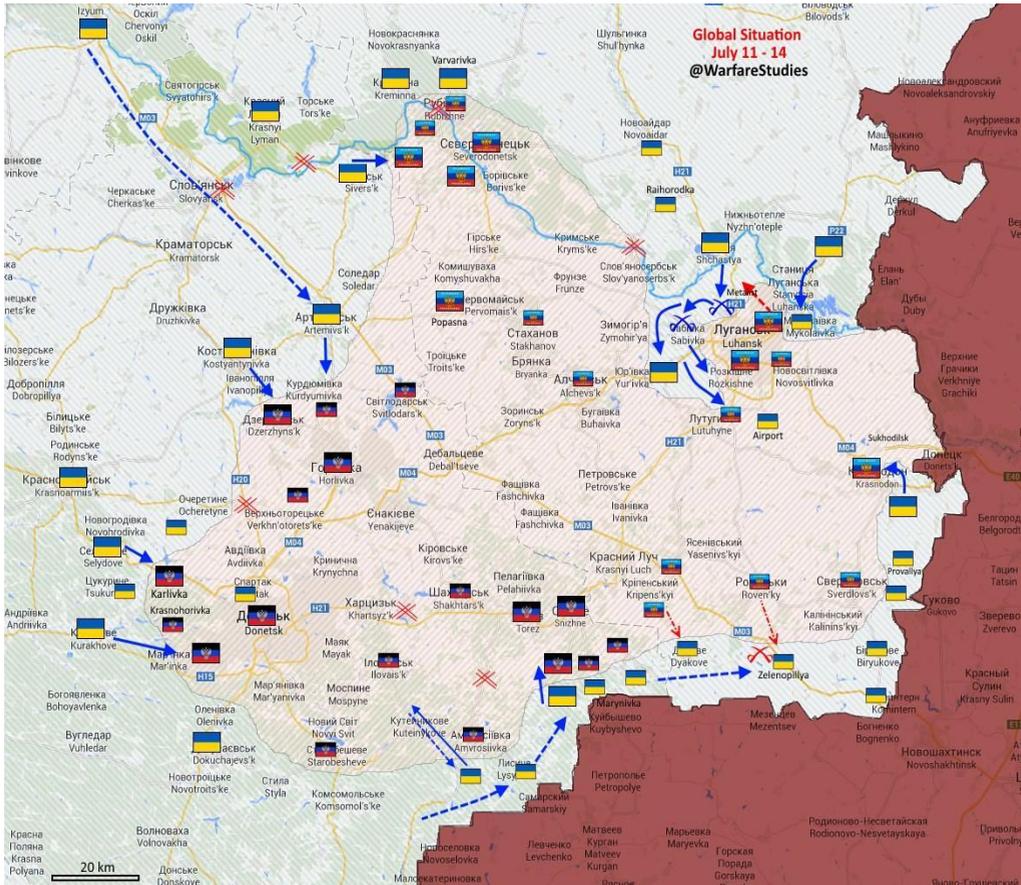
¹⁰⁰ *The White Book of the Anti-Terrorist Operation ...*, p. 32.

irregular illegal armed groups, armed gangs and groups of mercenaries established, subordinated, managed and funded by the Russian Federation.

Thus, the “war in Donbas”, according to the authors, can be classified as the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, which caused an armed conflict in the East of Ukraine. Ukraine used its security and defence sector’s forces to deflect and deter the aggression. The form of their application from April 14, 2014 to April 30, 2018 became a counterterrorist operation. It is divided into major periods and further on into stages that qualitatively differ in essence and content from the military-strategic, socio-political situation and the nature of the hostilities. The concept and methodology related to the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, due to its special “hybrid” character, requires further refinement by researchers.

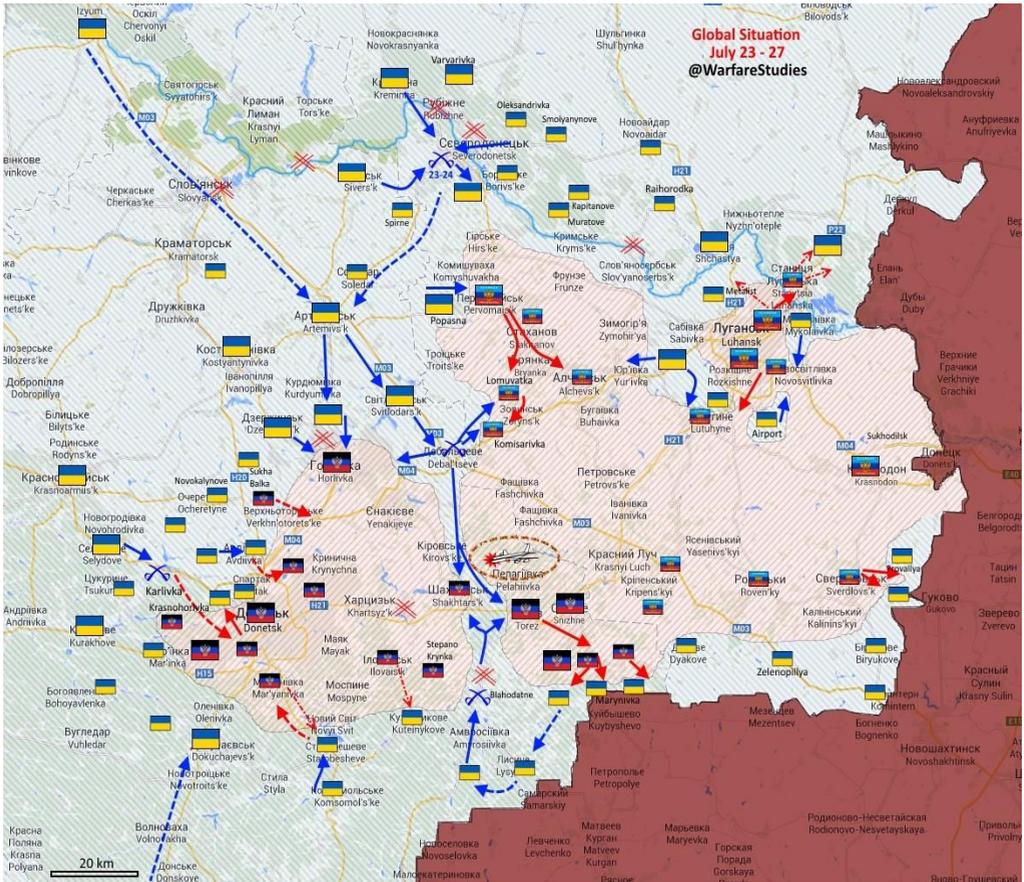
The third stage brings us to the end of the first period of proposed periodization of the conflict. The second period of “hybrid war” in the East of Ukraine, to be called as “Localization of the conflict in some districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions”, began on September 5, 2014 and lasted until April 30, 2018 when ATO was transformed into the Joint Force Operation. It consists of five stages following the previous three ones: the fourth stage – “Stabilization of the fighting line in the East of Ukraine (September 5, 2014 - January 14, 2015)”, the fifth stage – “Repelling of the second offensive of the Russian occupying troops (January 15 - February 20, 2015)”, the sixth stage – “Strengthening the line of defence in the East of Ukraine (February 21, 2015 - September 20, 2016)”; the seventh stage – “Disengaging forces of belligerent parties. Strengthening the line of defence (September 21, 2016 - November 2017); and the eighth stage – “Completion of ATO (November 2017 - April 30, 2018)”.

The range of main events of the second period of the armed conflict is the subject of a next article.

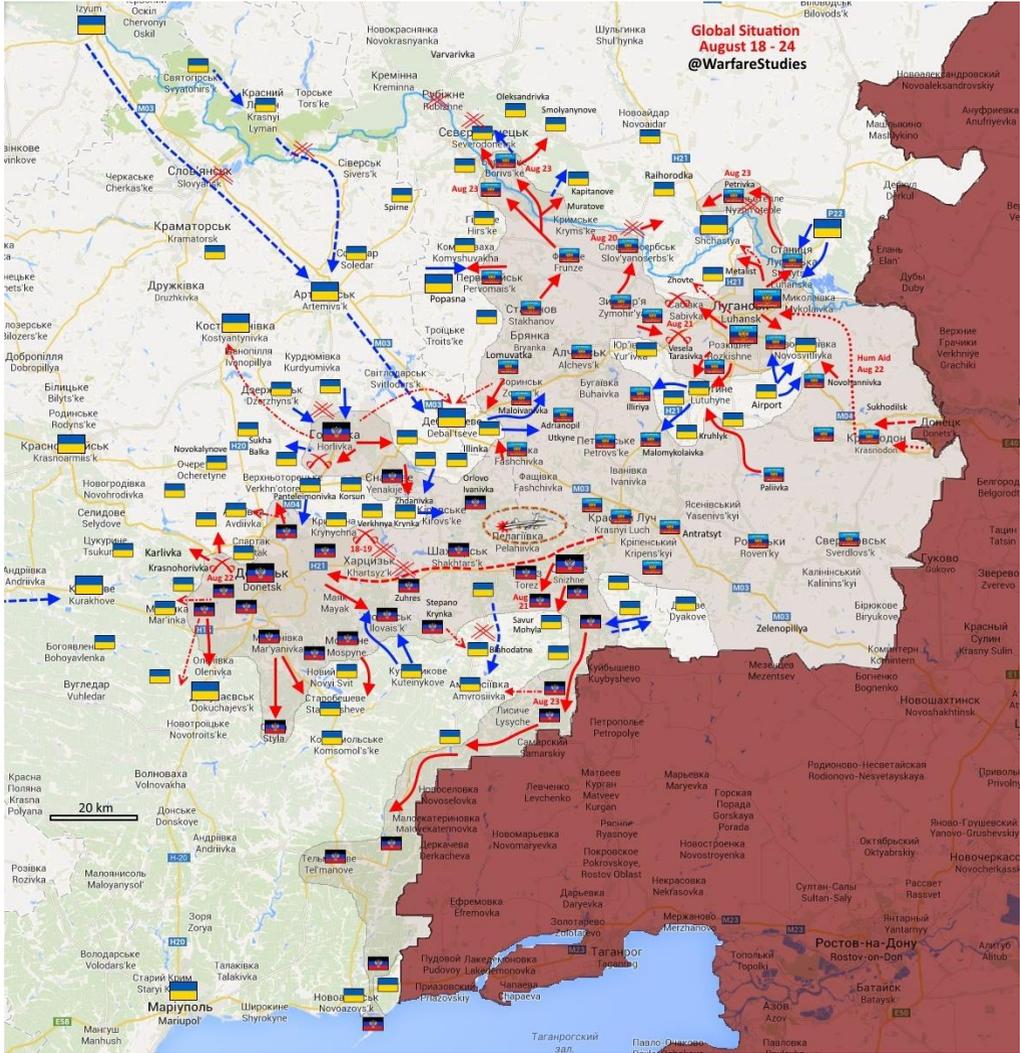


Picture no. 1. Situation in ATO zone on 11-14 July 2018

Annex no. 2



Picture no. 2. Situation in ATO zone on 23-27 July 2018



Picture no. 3. Situation in ATO zone on 18-24 August 2018