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POSSIBLE SCENARIOS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRANIAN WAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GERASIMOV DOCTRINE

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Abstract: *In this article, we conduct an objective analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war from the perspective of strategic military art. We start by formulating five working hypotheses, which are anchored in the reality of the battlefield and extended to the economic, diplomatic and technical-scientific domains. The Gerasimov doctrine represents the basis for interpretation of all the actions and activities carried out by the Russians in this confrontation and a strong point in drawing real and probable conclusions. We believe that an interpretation of the war outside this doctrine is an erroneous process, false and unrelated to scientific research. The Russian Federation, although the heir of the former USSR and furthermore of the Tsarist Empire, thinks and acts in a completely different way after the year 2000. In this regard, the military action conducted between Ukraine and Russia is supporting the economic actions directed against other military and economic powers and China plays an essential role in this global economic and political confrontation. This scientific approach highlights a new way of understanding the current and future military phenomenon and represents a starting point for other studies related to this theme.*

Keywords: war, food, infrastructure, critical, transport, strategic, hypothesis, Gerasimov, doctrine, world, order.

1. Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war, from the perspective of strategic military art and the Gerasimov doctrine, is probably unfolding according to a scenario designed many years ago. Although deciphering it seems complicated, it is still possible, if the analysis has as a starting point the strategic directions and objectives included in the new security strategy of the Russian Federation. Thus, the Russians propose to wage a new type of hybrid war, called nonlinear, which from the perspective of the classical approach, i.e. a continuation of politics with violent military means, does not fit into a plausible and predictable scenario. From the perspective of the Gerasimov Doctrine, this product of the Academy of Military Sciences of the Russian Federation, war is no longer a continuation of politics with violent means, but only an action to support political, diplomatic and economic efforts. Imagological-propagandistic actions intertwine effectively and congruently with military ones, amplifying or diminishing group perceptions, attitudes and social behaviors and economic and diplomatic actions.

2. Working hypotheses in the analysis of the strategic actions of the belligerents

In a scientific analysis of a war-type conflictual social phenomenon, the

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formulation of working hypotheses and their operationalization is the key to a scientifically correct, predictable approach. In this case, in order to correctly decipher the possible scenarios of the strategic action, the hypotheses are not included in the declared strategic objectives, but in the undeclared ones, justified by national security doctrines.

The Russian Federation justifies the aggression against Ukraine as a special military operation generated by the following causes:

- the expansion of NATO to the east by the accession of Ukraine in the near future;
- the "nazification" of Ukrainian society in general and that of the Donbas area and the western coast of the Sea of Azov in particular;
- the imminent invasion of Ukraine against the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and the protection of the Russian-speaking population in these areas [1].

As a result of the territorial losses in 2014, Ukraine sets as its strategic goals a series of political, economic and diplomatic actions to bring the separatist regions back under state control [2]. This strategy for the sustainable development of Ukraine, in addition to a series of economic, political and social reforms, aims to reform the security and defense system as well, in accordance with the strategic and geopolitical realities.

It follows that the declared strategic objective of the Russian Federation is the denazification of the space adjacent to the Azov Sea and ensuring the security of the ethnic Russians in the Donetsk and Luhansk republics, and the objective of Ukraine is the reform of the overall social system, including the military system in order to prevent the possible expansion of inter-ethnic conflicts in the separatist areas and defense against Russian expansion.

If the strategic objectives are clear and public, the real ones, complementary to the declared ones, are not public, but can only be deduced and justified with scientific and logical arguments.

Thus, the Russian Federation could have the following real and undeclared strategic objectives:

- control of critical global or regional infrastructures in the resources domain and control of sea and land transportation
- control of the economic space of the countries of the former USSR, including Ukraine and the countries of the European Union;
- the "de-dollarization" of the world market and the conquest of a segment of the world market in which the ruble becomes a currency of exchange between states.

The analysis hypotheses through which we can validate these strategic objectives in the short, medium and long term could be:

- Hypothesis 1 - The Russian-Ukrainian war has as its strategic objective the control of the critical transport infrastructure in the Black Sea area.
- Hypothesis 2 - Russia seeks to dominate critical infrastructure and the global grain food market in order to maintain geopolitical dominance and increase gross domestic product;
- Hypothesis 3 - Russia aims to create an economic-financial crisis through which to disrupt the normal functioning of the global financial system and the dominance of the dollar in commercial exchanges and the control, together with China, of the global financial banking infrastructure or from the sphere of influence of the BRICS countries;
- Hypothesis 4 - Russia has prepared and is waging an economic war in order to conquer new spheres of economic and political influence.
- Hypothesis 5 - Russia aims to conquer the entire territory of Ukraine and annex it to the federal structures as an autonomous republic.

These probable hypotheses, subject to geopolitical analysis with scientific arguments can constitute the premises for the development of the most probable scenario of the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict.

3. Analysis of the economic and military actions of the Russian Federation from the perspective of the Gerasimov Doctrine

We start with the economic domain because we consider that wars always have as cause a conflict in the economic or financial sphere. Money, the wealth of the soil and the subsoil, as well as the goods produced by society have always been a cause of war. While the military are the ones who prepare, lead and carry out the military action, the economists and managers are the ones responsible for the defensive or offensive economic strategy.

In this sense, we will analyze the economic competences of the leadership of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [3]. Thus, out of 14 members of the leadership of the Ministry of Defense, 7 are doctors or experts in economics, as well as experienced in leading national, regional, state or private economic activities [4]. It follows that the Ministry of Defense has top management specialists with expertise proven by their skills and experience and can successfully plan and conduct offensive or protective actions in the economic field.

"In the 21st century, there is a tendency to blur the distinction between the state of war and the state of peace. Wars are no longer declared, and when they start, they do not follow the pattern we are used to [...]. In some cases, the use of political, economic, informational and technological measures, implemented with the use of the population's protest potential significantly exceeds the power of weapons" [5] states the Gerasimov doctrine. Thus, it follows that we who analyze the war waged by the Russians must take into account the new Russian way of thinking and action, which requires a different approach to the strategic field (military, political-military, economic and political-economic).

After a year of war the following results:

- following the 10 packages of economic sanctions imposed by some of the countries of the world in order to weaken Russia's ability to finance the war and in the conditions of a costly war, the Russian economy has a decrease in the gross domestic product, in the year 2022, of only 2.1 to percent compared to the year 2021[6]
- The information war waged by the Russian Federation, which started a long time ago and is in full swing, has the following objectives: undermining global support for the Ukrainian war effort; undermining Ukrainian morale; undermining confidence in Ukraine as a reliable partner; undermining sympathy for the people; undermining its relations with its neighbors and undermining financial support and military aid. Some of these objectives have not been achieved, such as the financial and military support, and some, such as decking Ukrainian morale, are on the verge of being achieved [7].
- energy is a subject included in the Gerasimov doctrine and which Russia uses as an ECONOMIC-FINANCIAL weapon. Energy ensures the stability of the Russian economy and creates global problems for countries dependent on imported energy. The economic sanctions did not have major consequences, but only redirected supply flows to China and India, giving them the opportunity to become competitive with Western products or eliminate them through price from the markets of emerging economies.
- the partial mobilization had as its stated purpose the recruitment of 300,000 reservists. in reality, the hidden purpose was to mobilize part of the economy for the transition from peace production to war production. By mobilizing part of the labor force and by switching some enterprises from peace production to war production, the Russian economy had a rather important setback. However, it seems that the measures adopted (especially in the area of energy production and sale) have minimized the negative impact of the mobilization of the population and industry on the Russian economy;

- the partial mobilization, completed in October 2022, has led to the establishment or operationalization of new large units that have entered an intensive training process, through which they are aiming to become operational military capabilities. It appears that they have not yet been introduced into combat and are still undergoing training and operationalization. The additional production achieved through the transition of some enterprises to war production led to the replenishment of stocks and the replacement of the losses incurred in the year 2022. When will these new forces be brought into operation?
- we wonder if the partial mobilization will continue with other waves of recruitment and transition of other enterprises to war production? We also wonder what is the potential for manpower mobilization and to what level of armed forces will Russia mobilize?
- Russia and Ukraine have a significant share of about 25 percent of the world grain production on the global wheat market, and the USA and Australia together about 25 percent. These countries also have significant shares of the global production of sunflower, corn, barley and other technical plants. Basically, Russia and the US control the critical global food infrastructure, and Russia, by controlling port facilities on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea for Ukrainian agricultural exports, also controls the food supply and implicitly can use it as a strategic weapon (by generating a food crisis leading to massive waves of migrants to Western Europe) [8].
- from a military point of view, the tactical, operative and strategic actions seem to be conducted outside the principles of military art. Frontal attacks, maneuvers of forces and means, and the massive use of artillery firepower constitute the main characteristics of the operations of the Russian armed forces, and the principle of economy of forces and means, including ammunition, seems not to be known by Russian commanders. A careful analysis of the actions of the Ukrainian forces leads to the conclusion that they too adopt the same wrong way of action, a fact that can be explained by the common military culture of the Soviet type. In this sense, we consider that the strategic initiative, even if the Ukrainians also executed offensive responses, still remains with the Russians.
- while at first, the war started by the Russians seemed to be of the Blitz Krieg type, after the conquest of the coastal area of the Sea of Azov and the realization of the land junction with the Crimean Peninsula, it turned into a war on fortified positions of the first world war type. A change in the tactics of the belligerent forces is unlikely because we believe that the strategic military objectives of the Russian Federation have been achieved, except for the land-fluvial space in the area of the port of Odessa, and the war of attrition supports the diplomatic and economic actions of both sides.

A partial conclusion, resulting from the analysis of the economic and military actions of the Russian Federation from the perspective of the Gerasimov Doctrine, leads me to affirm that in terms of duration the Russian-Ukrainian war is a long-term war and even if at a given moment the military action would be stopped, the economic action will continue at an even higher level.

Also, through the analyses and investigation methods used, we believe that the hypotheses are confirmed or denied as follows:

- Hypothesis 1 is confirmed, that is, the Russian Federation has as its strategic objective the control of critical transport infrastructure in the Black Sea area in such a way as to ensure its geopolitical dominance in Europe and in the Mediterranean and Red Sea for the exit to the Atlantic and Indian oceans;
- Hypothesis 2 - indeed Russia aims to dominate the critical infrastructure and the global cereal food market in order to

maintain geopolitical dominance and increase the gross domestic product, but the strategic goal can only be achieved with the support of China or other BRICS countries;
- Also Hypothesis 3 - by which we mentioned that Russia wants to generate an economic-financial crisis through which to disrupt the normal functioning of the global financial system, the de-dollarization of the world economic market and bringing other countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America into its area of influence, it is confirmed.
- Hypothesis 4 - is confirmed, the economic war prepared by Russia is in full swing and constitutes the main strategic objective and the military action in Ukraine, also validated in the Gerasimov doctrine, is complementary to the economic actions.
- Hypothesis 5 is the one by which we stated that Russia aims to conquer and annex Ukraine. Trough the strategic military actions carried out so far it is not confirmed. However, the Odessa region is a possible strategic space to conquer.

4. A probable scenario of the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

In developing this possible scenario of the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we took into account the previously confirmed hypotheses and the results of the analysis of the economic-military actions of the conflicting parties.

Thus, the evolution of the conflict can be as follows:

- The goal is of an economic nature and involves, directly and indirectly, other states, such as China, India, EU and USA, and the conflict will extend until the strategic economic objectives of one of the parties (countries) are reached or until the negotiations for the division of spheres of influence and implicitly the world economic order will be acceptable to all parties.
- the military action, although it currently seems to be increasing in intensity, will eventually decrease until a ceasefire;
- although the strategic nuclear threat is used, we still believe that a realistic scenario cannot even include a tactical nuclear strike for the purpose of intimidation;
- the struggle for control of critical global food infrastructure will increase in intensity and it is possible that a food crisis caused by one of the parties will tip the balance towards victory;
- the combat experience, the production capacities of ammunition and military equipment as well as the control of critical food infrastructure will be Russia's strong points in the negotiation of peace, the conquered space and the role in the world order.

5. Conclusions The scenario we propose has a high degree of probability, and the Russian Federation will take advantage of all the elements of power it has or will obtain in order to negotiate a position in the world order.

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