

UNCONVENTIONAL WAR AND WARFARE IN THE GRAY ZONE. THE NEW SPECTRUM OF MODERN CONFLICTS

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Experiences of the last couple of years indicate that political objectives are increasingly achieved without official declarations of war. Armed forces are used in untraditional ways and the so-called substitute troops begin to play an increasingly bigger part. The article aims to characterize the conflicts of alternative nature below the level of open war that are on the border between war and peace. The content of the article presents the theory of unconventional warfare and its description, and familiarizes the reader with the concept of grey zone conflicts. It further shows the challenges linked to rivalry for influence zones and security provisions.

Key words: *gray zone warfare, unconventional warfare, conflict, challenges, armed force.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the second decade of the 21st century in the field of international security one can explicitly observe a new trend in conflicts taking place in an untraditional manner. The scale and scope of the actions conducted as part of the conflicts are deliberately limited and kept by aggressor at the level below identifiable regular, open war-level. Armed forces, however, do not play the crucial part they used to. Non-state actors, terrorist and criminal, oppositional and insurrectional, national-liberation organizations and others come first. Challenges for the world related to instabilities, uncertainties and changes in the environment of international security are created chiefly by non-state networked transnational organizations. It

does not mean, however, that state establishments or the organizations that consider themselves as states do not stand behind those organizations. The annexation of Crimea made by the Russian Federation (RF) and support granted to Ukraine as a result of that, aggressive operations against China in the South China Sea, advertising and expansion of the Islamic State are examples of unconventional warfare. At the same time, it is more and more difficult to indicate the difference between war and peace and that creates big problems for politicians to prepare appropriate answers. Combination of unconventional and irregular operations along with asymmetric measures, manipulation in political and ideological area points out unconventional operations transferring into a grey zone. Wars in the grey zone also

referred to as unconventional wars are characterized by impact in all possible dimensions, usage of a variety of methods, measures and combat tools and they have a great impact on the destabilization of the global security environment. To use force nowadays in an era of limited resources and opportunities by taking challenges efficiently while also mitigating the contradiction between diagnosed and undiagnosed threats requires an integrated approach to the war in grey zone, as well as an international strategy enabling forces to fight between war and peace.

In such a problematic situation, the aim of this article is to explain the concepts and the core of modern conflicts below the threshold of open war. Its contents present solutions to the following problems:

- 1) What is the theory on waging unconventional war?
- 2) What does the concept of grey zone refer to?

2. UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

The term of unconventional war has been used since the 50s, but its elements could be identified even in ancient times. The characteristic feature is that there were many concepts in use to define the same phenomenon which caused the concepts of revolutionary war, insurrectional, rebellious actions, 5th column, special, unconventional and terrorist war to be used interchangeably. The understanding of these concepts was, nevertheless, restricted to the method of waging war. President J. F. Kennedy giving his speech at West Point in 1962 indicated the common characteristics

are rather examples of common means that use tactics and techniques of combat. In other words either intelligence operations of Special Forces or guerilla operations are not unconventional warfare (Wall, p. 111). Unconventional warfare differs from other forms of wars by the use of irregular, local or proxy forces (armed subdivisions) against local power or newly established governments. The context above shows that the intervention operations of forces in Iraq or Afghanistan consisting in the organization, equipment, training and support of local security force in the fight against rebels cannot be understood as unconventional warfare. Nevertheless, local force can for example conduct campaigns with the use of various forms and methods of combat against official power and can be supported from outside by other states. Support can be done by provision of financial sources, military equipment or building new capabilities on the spot. It can be also done by organization of training, advising on operational issues, coordination by diplomatic assistance, supporting by logistics, or even conducting kinetic operations for gaining the advantage of local rebellious or rebel force (Counter-Unconventional Warfare 2014:3). Thus, the interests of external states are supported by local armed forces that thus substitute the forces of the sponsor-state.

The term of unconventional warfare is not quite accurate from the international law point of view. The word unconventional can be misunderstood and it means that this type of warfare is inconsistent with international conventions which constitute the source and base for military law. In the opinion

of those wars by ambush, subversions, assassinations, infiltration and avoidance of confrontation that thus attrite and exhaust the enemy instead of engaging him (Kennedy, 1962). Literature on the subject includes many definitions of unconventional war. The term, however, has different meanings depending on the nation and institution that uses it. For the Special Forces of the USA unconventional war is understood as the activities that enable a resistance movement or insurgency forcing the enemy to surrender, conquering or overthrowing the governmental or occupational powers by operating under ground, using guerilla operations or assistance force in the areas denied (Special Forces, 2010:1-1). The definition above gives a new context to the concept of unconventional warfare which means that it is not a synonym to unconventional subdivisions, unconventional tactics or methods. It becomes an activity or operation sponsored from outside and it is not restricted to internal resistance movements. Identification of sponsors and functions implemented as part of the mission leads to simpler understanding of the role of actors taking part in war and the desired final state reached as a result of the unconventional warfare. Thus, oriented reasoning opens a new discussion and inspires to study the theory.

Perceiving warfare as a mission instead of a method of action allows the researchers to consider historical efforts from a new perspective. According to R.C. Agee and M. K. DuClos certainly not all cases will be able to be qualified as unconventional warfare, because they do not meet the criteria of the definition. It seems, however, that they will be able

to be fit in the terminology of irregular wars (Agee and DuClos, 2012, p.5). Irregular warfare is defined very widely and includes a violent struggle (combat) among states or non-state actors for legitimacy of function of power and influence over a specified population (The Joint Publication 1-02, 2016:119). A. E. Wall indicates the relationship between irregular warfare and unconventional warfare and defines three distinctive features that constitute them. He includes (Wall, 2011):

- 1) unconventional warfare waged by means of local force;
- 2) local force as an irregular (non-state) force;
- 3) unconventional warfare that supports activities oriented against official government or occupational force.

The criteria of distinction between irregular and unconventional warfare is the third distinctive feature. It shows that irregular warfare is combat with the use of violence between state and non-state actors, but unconventional warfare can be waged in order to support unconventional conflicts (state against state) or insurrectional operations. The doctrine of Special Force of the USA points out that unconventional warfare includes a wide spectrum of military and non-military operations, usually spread in time, conducted by proxy forces that are organized, equipped and trained as well as supported to various degrees and commanded from the outside (The Joint Publication 3-05.1 2007:399). Activities conducted as part of unconventional warfare include but are not limited to guerrilla and subversive operations, sabotage, unconventional assistance and intelligence operations, and

of C. R. King it should be obvious that the word means atypical and unorthodox methods of warfare. In no way, however, it should have any consequence leading to questioning the international law in conducting military operations (King 1972:94).

Unconventional warfare aims at ensuring the interests of the state focused on the use of the weaknesses of the adversary in the political, military, economic and psychological fields by creating and assisting the local resistance forces. In order to reach those objectives instruments with military, political, economic and psychological impact are utilized. Unconventional warfare is indirect, relies on local methods of waging combat and includes underground activity of volunteers, revolutionists, partisans, spies, saboteurs, provocateurs as well as the application of corruption and blackmail (Wall 2011:111). These activities cannot be, however, discretionary. They require deliberate organized operations, thus, they require a campaign plan usually executed under the command of a geographic combatant commander. Secondly, employment of elements of impact instruments being at disposal of state that seek to reach its own objectives will require strategic decision-making. The command and control of a state waging such an unconventional warfare will then decide whether state governments of the opposing side should be coerced only to selectively specified actions or the aim will be to destabilize the internal situation, or to overthrow the legal or illegal governments completely. Non-state actors who occupy specific territory can be also

removed from power, as it is the case of the Islamic State. Thirdly, intelligence and tactical employment of the special forces through and with the local underground forces, guerilla forces or other oppositional forces is usually relevant (Manea, 2015). It is worth remembering that both a state and a non-state entity can resort to unconventional warfare.

3. THE CONCEPT OF WAR IN THE GREY ZONE

The conflicts of the second decade of the 21st century demonstrate the occurrence of a wide spectrum of activities and entities taking part in it, the use of armed forces, refined methods and ways of impact. It is possible to see a variety of aspects of waging armed struggle, violence, forms of warfare, aspects that are defined as complex ones. There are academic debates on hybrid, nonlinear, asymmetric or new generation warfare and the term of irregular war becomes predominant. The conclusion of those discussions can come down to seemingly the trivial question as to what nowadays the term of war should mean. The classical understanding of this concept loses its significance, because modern conflicts take place between the state of war and the state of peace, the momentum of military operations is intentionally restricted and the aggression level is stimulated. Together with the conflict in the Ukraine and occurrence of the term of hybrid war one can more and more often notice the concept of war in the grey zone or below the level of

war being in use (Konferencja w AON 2015). In the official doctrinal documents of the USA the concept of grey zone appeared in the four-year defense review in 2010 for the first time. The documents say that ambiguities caused by the state of war and peace will constitute the challenge for the strategic security environment (Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010:73). The term of war in the grey zone means deliberate, multidimensional impact on the states below the limit of armed force aggression (Hoffman 2016:26). In these types of conflicts, in the opinion of F. Hoffman, an integrated suite of national and subnational instruments of power are employed in an ambiguous war to gain specified strategic objectives. In order to increase the level of military power impact proxy subdivisions are applied without explicit indicators as to state integrity and that makes it possible to unmask them (Hoffman 2016, p. 26). P. Kapusta understands the war in the grey zone somewhat differently. His definition referring to the challenges of the grey zone is more general and also includes non-state objects. According to him, the grey zone includes competitive impacts between and within the borders of states as well as non-state actors taking place between the duality of war and peace (Kapusta 2015, p. 20). Duality is the cause of ambiguity. Ambiguities result from the nature of conflict, lack of certainty as to the actors engaged, uncertainty of policy and the aspects of political regulations. The challenges of grey zone result from the combination of a variety of conflicts characterized

by common features, but in reality conflicts become unconventional. It means that they do not start when the armed struggle begins. Threats or possibilities for extending past conflict termination by virtue of the increasing hostility occur, though they are not always clearly recognizable. In the grey zone single armed clashes of unorganized groups that are not seeking to achieve any political or military objectives but may be exploited by external actors may take place. Unconventional conflicts can be the consequence of government collapse and anarchy in society. Violence and often terrorist-like activity can occur out of social frustration with no identifiable purpose. This type of conflict is non-conventional, because it is difficult to determine the objectives and methods of the actors, and perhaps difficult to even determine the actors, and thus hard to apply conventional elements of power (Maxwell, 2015). It should be noted that there is a lack of simple solutions to respond to challenges, because every situation involves unique actors and a variety of complex aspects as root of problems. According to P. Kapusta the challenges of the gray zone go beyond the ordinary, normal, peaceful geopolitical rivalry. They are aggressive in their nature, ambiguous and depend on the perception of the problem (Kapusta 2015:20).

The concept of grey zone warfare is controversial in its essence. Some analysts indicate that in the future it will constitute the basic source of challenges for international security. Others claim that it is too much publicized and brings nothing new to the theory of the art of warfare.

A. Elkus confirms quite controversially that the grey zone wars concept lacks strategic sense (Elkus 2015). One can ask then, what in fact is the grey zone warfare? Certainly, it is not a formal warfare and does not resemble traditional armed conflicts between states. Grey zone conflict is unique for its particular characteristics that should include amplitude with its variety, repressions referring to many areas of state function, force used in many ways but so as to create ambiguity in the assessment of the operations objectives and the entities taking part in it, as well as difficulties in the assessment of actual involvement of armed force, compliance to international regulations and legal norms (Barno, Bensahel 2015). Nevertheless, the level of aggression is never exceeded which is a hallmark of an open interstate war.

The activities in the grey zone are such forms of conflict where political objectives are reached by coherent and integrated campaigns chiefly with the use of non-military and non-kinetic tools. It does not seek spectacular success for a specific moment, but rather moves gradually seeking to achieve the planned final state in a longer period of time (Mazarr 2015, p. 58). The objectives that aim at the modification of some security environment aspects and more specified advantages than conquering territory are reached by minimization of the scope and scale of outright struggle, but the conflict alone is ambiguous. In the opinion of J. I. Votel success of the struggle will depend on the ability to navigate between traditional war and peace (Votel 2015, p. 7), so not to exceed the clearly specified red line and avoid

unmasking and exposing to some punishment, e.g. from international organizations. Minimizing the scale and scope of aggression is not a new phenomenon as it can be seen in Sun Tzu's works (Tzu, p. 22). It seems also that Clausewitz' total warfare without political limitations in practice is rather impossible. The political context of war in practice always imposes limitations both in scope and scale, as well as in the violence level (Elkus 2015).

A relatively low level of aggression is also the main determinant for moving the challenges related to rivalry to the grey zone. These challenges are very wide-spread and ambiguous in their nature. More and more states experimenting with conflicts in the grey zone apply substantially techniques of conventional armed struggle. Asymmetric operations are widely used. Conflict might as well turn into outright operations if so far irregular operations do not bring the results expected. Grey zone can be also intentionally used for campaign before outright warfare starts and not as its alternative (Mazarr, p. 58).

The scope of the instruments, forms and techniques of power employed can be varied and involve cyberspace, political fight, economic blackmail, propaganda, informative and psychological warfare, willful misleading of the international opinion, terrorist and criminal activities, sponsoring, equipment and training of underground force or oppositional force to create so-called creeping conflicts, corruption, sabotage and other random impact to the threats with use of regular armed force including the weapon of mass destruction. Generally, all operations

will be intended to create ambiguity and also to determine the culprit of the existing problems and create certain obstacles in preparation of an appropriate response. Usually, the level of aggression will grow and various extortions on the opposing side will be camouflaged, though, while intending to change the present status quo (Brands 2016).

The use of armed force nowadays is different than conventional means. An example in this respect is the conduct of China in the last decade in South-China Sea which imposes on adversaries a costly strategy based in the first place on the covert use of armed force, for example by sending the Shenyang J-11 and Xian JH-7 combat fighters to the region of the Paracel Islands at the end of February 2016. By deploying the rockets and radars as well as building runways at the reefs of the South China Sea they change the operational landscape (Interia.pl 2016). It thus tries to restore its position in the world through military operations, a method that reminds of similar methods employed by the Russian Federation. Worth reminding in this respect are the inter alia demonstrative revitalization of the Maritime Forces in the South Atlantic (Bednarzak 2016), base establishment in the region of Arctic or large-scale airborne landing forces exercises in the region of the Baltic States. Kremlin has the will and instruments to use military factor in a way that is disproportionately more determined than Western democracies would be ready for. And it is exactly in the psychological and political fields that asymmetry speaks more against the West

(Bednarzak 2016). Kremlin, similar to China, treats military activities as policy instruments.

Maintaining an uncertain peace imposes a costly strategy. Its aim is to deter or turn the rival off from decisive actions, because the consequences would be a high aggression risk in response to this type of behavior. Another strategy may consist in enabling the transformation of operations in an advantage of a political nature (Cronin and Sullivan 2015, p. 7). The Russian Federation applies such a strategy in order to influence their neighbors without any reaction from the West. The situations above show that nations may not have enough abilities to reach strategic objectives by using conventional measures. They seek, then, other methods to change international order or paralyze the effective response (Hoffman 2016, p. 26) of the international organizations (of other states) by creating ambiguity in the evaluation of the actions implemented and enabling the development of a common consensus. Also, the argument that says that nations which have necessary conventional measures of impact can decide that their own goals will be better achieved by the use of the grey zone (Hoffman 2016, p. 26) seems to be proven correct.

The literature in the field shows several assessments of conflicts taking place in the grey zone. They depend mainly on the perception of the assessing side, as well as the level of involvement in conflict. For example, the conflict in the West of Ukraine is assessed by the USA as part of white border of war (peace) area and, thus, it is also stated that

it can be resolved by diplomatic and economic means. For the Russian Federation, the conflict goes nearer to the black border (war) which suggests an inclination to more acts of aggression. The Ukraine, certainly, perceives the acts as threats to its sovereignty and its actions of mobilization and military antiterrorist operations are evidence of its perception and assessment of the situation. It seems, then, the critical point for the grey zone war challenges is understanding the view of the conflict on both sides – those directly participating in it and the parties that do not participate and yet are still interested in it for various reasons, one of which usually is related to concern for their own interests (USSOCOM 2015:4).

4. CONCLUSIONS

From a theoretical point of view the armed struggle the grey zone conflicts does not meet the criteria to define it as war. However, their occurrence in the modern world proves that the practice comes before theory due to the lack of official doctrinal documents. Making strict divisions on what is the white and black zones are relatively simple in terms of theory. Nonetheless, new technology findings, the significance of information, as well as transferring the areas of state function and citizens' lives into the virtual world make modern conflicts difficult to qualify unambiguously as pertaining to the category of war or peace. Uncertainty creates also specific difficulties in predicting the model of future war. Nowadays, it is hard, certainly, to point out what

combinations of presently known forms and methods of fight will apply in the future. For sure, unconventional warfare in the grey zone cannot be ignored. By deepening knowledge one should seek to understand the paradigm of its conduct which will help to face the challenges it poses. Skillfully operating in the grey zone will certainly improve the security and protection of interests.

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