

HYBRID THREATS: ESSENCE, CHARACTERISTICS, PRECONDITIONS FOR ESCALATION

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Hybrid Threats: Essence, Characteristics, Preconditions for Escalation

The article aims at clarifying the essence of hybrid threats through systematizing their key characteristics and determining preconditions for conflict escalation. Common definitions of hybrid threats are considered and the lack of a unified approach to their interpretation is emphasized given their diversity and comprehensive nature. The high destructive potential of hybrid threats due to their hidden nature and focus on the most vulnerable aspects of the hybrid aggression object are substantiated. The specifics of carrying out hybrid threats in the economic sphere is analyzed, and the example of foreign trade relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation shows that the economic sphere serves as a space for hiding and deforming a hybrid conflict. The essence of the synergetic effect made by the synchronous realization of hybrid threats in different confrontation areas is considered. It is demonstrated that the key feature of hybrid conflicts is their staying outside the legally justified intervention of other states and international organizations. Emphasis is placed on the rapid spread of hybrid threats in the economic sphere and on the special risks that conflicts hybridization creates for economically weak states. Another important feature of hybrid threats is identified, namely, the high probability of their escalation due to unforeseen events, the global pandemic COVID-19 in particular. It is substantiated that the expected risk of the post-pandemic period is the transition of most national economies to protectionist policies, which will inevitably increase the risk of hybrid threats escalation for economically weak states due to the desire of more powerful states to protect their national economic interests. Having analyzed the specifics of hybrid threats and understanding hybridity as a result of combining different forms, the authors identify the key characteristics of hybrid threats and further combine them into the following groups according to their essence: general aspects; specifics of methods and tools; areas of implementation; prerequisites for efficiency.

Keywords: hybrid threats, interstate conflict, systematization, tool, synergetic effect, post-pandemic crisis, national economic interests.

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УДК 339.986:355.019
JEL Classification: F02; F51**Калюжна Н. Г., Ковтун Т. К. Гібридні загрози: сутність, характеристики, передумови ескалації**

Статтю присвячено уточненню сутності гібридних загроз на підставі систематизації їх ключових характеристик і визначення передумов ескалації. Розглянуто поширені визначення гібридних загроз і наголошено на відсутності єдиного підходу до їх трактування з огляду на різноплановість і всеохоплюючий характер. Обґрунтовано високий руйнівний потенціал гібридних загроз через їх прихований характер та орієнтованість на найбільш уразливі сторони об'єкта гібридної агресії. Розглянуто специфіку реалізації гібридних загроз в економічній площині та на прикладі зовнішньоторговельних відносин між Україною та Російською Федерацією засвідчено, що економічна сфера слугує простором для приховування та деформалізації гібридного конфлікту. Розглянуто сутність синергетичного ефекту від синхронної реалізації гібридних загроз у різних сферах протистояння. Визначено як ключову рису гібридних конфліктів їх перебування поза межами юридично виправданого втручання інших держав і міжнародних організацій. Акцентовано увагу на стрімкому поширенні гібридних загроз в економічній площині й особливі ризики, які гібридизація конфліктів створює для економічно слабких держав. Як важливу ознаку гібридних загроз визнано високу ймовірність їх ескалації унаслідок настання непрогнозованих подій, зокрема світової пандемії COVID-19. Обґрунтовано, що очікуваним ризиком постпандемічного періоду є перехід більшості національних економік до політики протекціонізму, що дозволяє прогнозувати зростання ризиків ескалації гібридних загроз для економічно слабких держав унаслідок прагнення більш потужних держав до захисту національних економічних інтересів. На підставі аналізу специфіки гібридних загроз та виходячи з розуміння гібридності як результату поєднання відмінних форм визначено ключові характерні риси гібридних загроз, які додатково поєднано відповідно до сутності в групи: загальні аспекти; специфіка методів та інструментів; сфери реалізації; передумови ефективності.

Ключові слова: гібридні загрози, міждержавний конфлікт, систематизація, інструмент, синергетичний ефект, постпандемічна криза, національні економічні інтереси.

Рис.: 1. **Табл.:** 3. **Бібл.:** 14.

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Introduction. The number and intensity of undisguised military conflicts in the world tends to decrease, conceding to the modern hybrid form of interstate and inter-bloc confrontation. The state initiating hybrid warfare aims to destabilize the internal (political, economic, legal, social, etc.) environment of another state with the use of primarily non-military means of influence. In contrast to the direct threats posed to the national sovereignty of the state by military confrontation, hybrid warfare threats are difficult to identify and have their own pattern of origin and escalation. The probability of the implementation of such threats is difficult to assess, while losses from their occurrence may be disastrous. The development of an effective policy to combat hybrid warfare requires the specifics of hybrid threats to be defined as a pressing challenge of our time, which has a high destructive potential and a disguised nature of implementation.

Analysis of publications. Hybrid warfare threats as urgent challenges for national security systems have their own specifics, which should be taken into account when forming a system of measures to respond to their emergence and escalation. The concept of hybrid warfare threats is defined by scientists and analysts as:

- the enemy's projection capability to simultaneously use traditional and non-traditional means, depending on the need to achieve the objectives [1];
- centralized and controlled use of various open and covert tactics implemented by military and non-military means [2];
- phenomenon arising from the convergence and interconnection of various elements, together forming a far more complex and multidimensional threat [3];
- combination of traditional and non-traditional methods used by actors to achieve specific goals, while remaining below the threshold of a formally declared war [4].

The lack of a unified approach to treat hybrid warfare threats is quite understandable taking into account their diversity and the comprehensive nature of hybrid aggression as an effective tool to destabilize the internal environment of the object state in all possible directions. In our opinion, determining the key characteristics of hybrid warfare threats according to the criteria of necessity and sufficiency will help to understand their essence and predict the negative effects of carrying them out.

The aim of the article is to clarify the essence of hybrid warfare threats by systematizing their key characteristics and determining preconditions for escalation.

The main material. While studying the nature and outstanding features of hybrid warfare threats, Ukrainian scientists often appeal to their interpretation in accordance with NATO's

2010 Strategic Concept [1], in which the hybrid warfare threat is defined as the ability demonstrated by the enemy to simultaneously use traditional and non-traditional means, depending on the goals it supposes to achieve [5–9]. This rather a «vague» definition of hybrid warfare threats is fully justified by the specifics of hybrid confrontation measures as unlimited in space, time and forms of manifestation, thus certainly complicating the process of identifying them and developing timely adequate measures to respond to their emergence and escalation.

The method of using hybrid impact is based on recognizing the key role of non-military measures in the formation of political and economic loyalty of the state through its using advocacy measures, economic and energy levers, means of socio-psychological pressure, stimulation of internal conflicts on interethnic and interfaith grounds and historical appeals. Researchers rightly recognize the information sphere to be the key dimension of hybrid warfare [5; 6; 10], because advocacy and misinformation are classic tools of asymmetric warfare helping to achieve the goals of the aggressor state by non-military means. At the same time, such an important area of hybrid confrontation as economy is sometimes unjustifiably overlooked by scientists. Economic war as a component of a hybrid war contributes to the political goals of the aggressor state by introducing restrictive measures against the object-state, the measures being of varying severity in the trade and economic sphere (sanctions, embargoes, penalties, trade disputes, etc.). In the strategic perspective, the introduction of long-term instruments of financial, economic and trade confrontation has an undeniable impact on the economic development of the conflicting parties. In today's international space, which is characterized by the interconnectedness and interpenetration of national economies, the losses from the hybrid war escalation inevitably affect the macroeconomic development of both parties.

Although the scale and strength of the repercussions for the initiator of discriminatory trade measures may be insignificant, the approach of a «boomerang effect» is almost inevitable. Thus, the long-term application of mutual discriminatory modes can lead to the depletion of the economic system of the object state and cause significant damage to the economy of the state initiating the hybrid confrontation.

As it is thoroughly noted in various research works [5, 12], in contrast to the classic war, economic relations during a hybrid war are not usually broken completely, which allows the aggressor state to disguise its participation in the conflict, and allows the object state to receive resources which are vital for the development of its economic system. Trade and economic relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation as parties to a hybrid conflict should be considered indicative in this sense. Significant structural changes causing reduction in

bilateral trade began in 2012 (see Fig. 1), and happened due to both the complication of socio-political and economic relations between the states, and coming into effect of Section IV of the Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU (January 1, 2016). Unconditional negative impact on the structure and vol-

ume of foreign trade between Ukraine and Russia was caused by Russia's unilateral abolition of the free trade zone agreement regarding Ukraine and the introduction of the Russian food embargo, which led to Ukraine's countermeasures, i.e. banning Russian product supplies of the equivalent total value.

Share in the trade structure

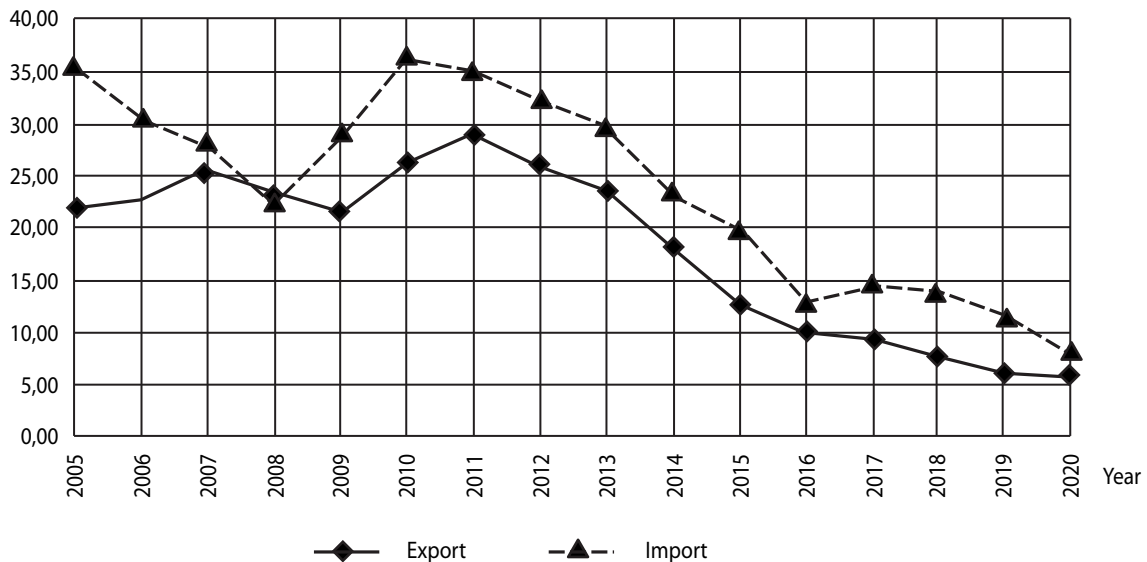


Fig. 1. The share of trade with the Russian Federation in the structure of Ukraine's foreign trade on goods in 2005–2020, %

Source: based on [13]

In the same 2020 Russia remained among the top 3 trade partners of Ukraine with its share in the country's foreign trade turnover being 8.5% (Table 1). Thus, the volume of exports of Ukrainian goods to the Russian Federation in 2020 amounted to 2706.0 million dollars, making up 5.5% of the total exports structure. Imports of goods from Russia to Ukraine in 2020 amounted to 4541.8 million dollars and 8.4% in the overall structure [13]. In other words, with the unconditional reduction of bilateral foreign trade, the existence of trade and economic relations with Russia confirms the high level of conflicts hybridity in the economic sphere.

In addition to the variety of means of hybrid aggression used, one should point at the synchronicity of their use in different areas (military, economic, information, etc.) and the high probability of a synergistic effect from their simultaneous implementation.

A synergetic effect (from the Greek *Synergetikos* – joint, coordinated, acting) is the overall effect, which happens when two or more factors interact, and their influence significantly outweighs the effect of each individual component of their simple sum. The synergetic effect in studying hybrid wars is understood as a complex (system) of threats that are created simultaneously in key areas of hybrid confrontation and have a much greater destructive force than their simple sum, thus causing a special danger to the political and economic system of the state which is the object of aggression. Hence, R. Thiele correctly notes that the hybrid war is a construction of implicitly related elements, which are actually parts of the intended mosaic [11, p. 6]. In the work [6, p. 10] the focus is made on the

high efficiency of using combined actions of a complex nature in order to increase the protest potential of society, namely: sabotage of critical infrastructure, cyber-attacks, high-profile killings.

In addition to the synchronicity of the use of hybrid aggression means, which provides a synergetic (amplifying) effect, an important feature of hybrid threats is also their focus on taking the advantage of the opponent's weakest and most vulnerable points. For Ukraine, such weaknesses, according to Western analysts, should be recognized as [1]: weak governance and ineffective national institutions, corruption, lack of trust and support of security and defense structures by society, a significant percentage of Russian-speaking population, critical level of dependence on Russian imports and energy supplies.

It should be noted that a key feature of hybrid threats is balancing on the border of war and peace, which allows hybrid wars to remain outside the legal response of the world community. The result of the integrated use of hybrid instruments by the aggressor state is the creation of tension in the state – object of aggression (social, political, economic, etc.) without declaring an open conflict, which does not exclude the possibility of its transition to a higher stage of escalation at any time. The risk of underestimating the enemy's training and defense measures could lead to a loss in an undeclared war and catastrophic future consequences for the political and economic system of the state against which hybrid aggression is directed. In this regard, the research work [6, p. 12] states that the uniqueness of hybrid threats is that in the case of their real presence, those

The main partners in Ukraine's foreign trade in goods in 2019

Export			Import		
Country (group of countries)	Volume, million dollars	Share in total volume, %	Country (group of countries)	Volume, million dollars	Share in total volume, %
EU (28)	18612.1	37.8	EU (28)	23859.7	43.9
China	7112.7	14.5	China	8318.4	15.3
Russian Federation	2706.0	5.5	Russian Federation	4541.8	8.4
Turkey	2436.3	5.0	USA	3068.7	5.6
India	1972.1	4.0	Belarus	2874.5	5.3
Egypt	1618.2	3.3	Turkey	2418.8	4.5
Belarus	1335.3	2.7	Japan	1076.4	2.0
USA	983.9	2.0	Switzerland	876.0	1.6
Indonesia	735.6	1.5	The United Kingdom	734.2	1.4
Saudi Arabia	719.0	1.5	India	721,8	1,3

Source: based on [13]

states which are not prepared for this type of war create the illusion of war absence, although in fact this situation is a new type of threat to national security.

Any state lying in the sphere of political and economic interests of leading geopolitical actors may at some point become the object of hybrid aggression under the pretext of protecting the rights of national minorities, resolving interfaith or interethnic conflicts, and so on. Overall, the provocative nature of hybrid confrontation lies in the fact that the level of tension in the state – object of aggression is kept by the initiating state at a level that excludes legally justified intervention of other states and international organizations in direct conflict resolution (the so-called «hybrid uncertainty»). Therefore, it is extremely important to provide a coalition format for deterring hybrid aggression, which should be harmonized with the restrictions imposed by the object state.

Special attention should be paid to the rapid spread of hybrid threats in the economic sphere and those special risks that the development of conflicts and their hybridization against the background of neo-protectionism brings for weak economies.

The intensification of economic rivalry of key countries in the world and their struggle for markets increases the vulnerability of economically weak countries and creates additional threats to their economic sovereignty. The escalation of hybrid threats to the national interests of countries with weak economies, to which Ukraine belongs, will necessitate the development of comprehensive measures of economically containing the geopolitical expansion of the hybrid conflicts initiators and creating tools to combat hybrid aggression in the trade and economic sphere.

Finally, an important feature of hybrid threats is the high probability of their escalation due to unforeseen events. Force majeure factors of a non-economic nature can serve as a tool for additional hybridization of interstate trade conflicts. In particular, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic poses an

additional risk that economically vulnerable states will have to face hybrid threats. Epidemiological transformations have led to decrease in the growth rate of both the world economy as a whole and the economic systems of individual states, in particular (Table 2).

Falling business activity, reduced production, the crisis of certain industries (including tourism, aviation) will inevitably lead to increasing competition among states for presence and leadership at international markets. The expected risk of the post-pandemic period is the transition of most national economies to a policy of protectionism in order to protect domestic production and reduce the trade deficit through exports. Understanding of certain patterns of the development of the world economy during recession allows us to predict an increase in the risks of escalation of hybrid threats to economically weak states due to the desire of more powerful states to protect national economic interests.

Having analyzed the specifics of hybrid threats and judging on the understanding of hybridity as a result of a combination of different forms, we can identify the key features of hybrid threats (Table 3), which can be further combined into groups according to their essence: general aspects; specifics of methods and tools; areas of implementation; precondition for efficiency.

Conclusion. Hybrid threats as an instrument of political and economic pressure and a tool for implementing the national interests of the world's powerful states have a high destructive potential due to their hidden nature and focus on the most vulnerable aspects of the hybrid aggression object. Minimizing the impact of hybrid threats requires an adequate response strategy to be created based on an understanding of their wide nature, the comprehensiveness of the impact and the variety of tools used. Identifying the key characteristics of hybrid threats can serve as a basis for counteracting hybrid aggression, taking into account the current state and prospects of the escalation of interstate confrontation.

Table 2

World economic growth indicators, % to the previous year

Indicators	Current figures			Projections	
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
World GDP, including:	3.6	2.9	-3.5	5.5	4.2
Advanced economies	2.2	1.7	-4.9	4.3	3.1
Emerging Markets and Developing Economies	4.5	3.7	-2.4	6.3	5.0
Foreign trade of goods and services, including:	3.8	0.9	-9.6	8.1	6.3
Advanced economies	3.4	1.5	-10.1	7.5	6.1
Emerging Markets and Developing Economies	4.5	0.1	-8.9	9.2	6.7
Consumer prices, including:					
Advanced economies	2.0	1.4	0.7	1.3	1.5
Emerging Markets and Developing Economies	4.8	5.1	5.0	4.2	4.2
Oil price	29.4	-10.2	-32.7	21.2	-2.4
LIBOR	2.5	2.3	0.7	0.3	0.4

Source: based on [14]

Table 3

Key features of hybrid threats

Group essence	Key features
General aspects	Being outside of the legally justified intervention of other states and international organizations in the direct settlement of the conflict
	Unlimited matters of hybrid influence in space, time and forms of manifestation
	Focus on exploiting the opponent's weakest and most vulnerable points
	A tool for the implementation of geopolitical ambitions and national economic interests of the world's leading states
Specifics of methods and tools	A combination of traditional and non-traditional means provided that priority is given to non-military instruments
	A variety of forms and methods (diplomatic, military, economic, technological, informational, etc.)
	Synchronization and systemic use of tools in different areas of hybrid confrontation
Areas of implementation	Coverage of all the areas and operation processes of the hybrid aggression object
	Recognition of the information sphere and cyberspace as the main dimension of hybrid confrontation
	Concealment and deformatization of the conflict in the economic sphere
Precondition for efficiency	Obtaining a synergetic effect from using various tools of hybrid aggression
	Adaptability, dynamism and comprehensiveness of the application strategy
	Creating special risks for politically vulnerable and economically weak states
	A high probability of escalation due to the influence of transformations (geopolitical, epidemiological, social, etc.) of force majeure nature

Source: developed by authors

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