

Willingness to fight for Ukraine: Lessons for the Baltic states

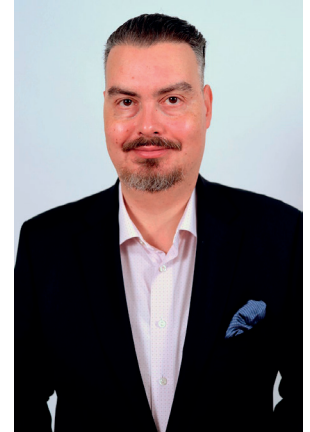
By Jānis Bērziņš and Victoria Vdovychenko

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Abstract

Although not necessarily new, indirect and asymmetric methods of warfare have become more common in the last 30 years. This is the result of the development of new technologies and the rise of what the West calls "hybrid warfare," with the fabrics of the nation being increasingly targeted by hostile actors to achieve the ultimate objectives of warfare in the political realm. Since the threat is multilayered and targets the nation's very existence, war and defense should go beyond the armed forces and involve the whole of society. Therefore, the whole of society is a legitimate target and should take part in defense and war efforts. Since contemporary warfare targets a nation in its totality, defense must go beyond the traditional military realm. It must include the people, information system, culture, politics, economics, and infrastructure to increase the nation's resilience. One fundamental factor determining a country's resilience is the relationship between the social and the political realms. Data from the World Values Survey shows that, before the escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine, a considerable gap existed between both realms with antagonistic characteristics. Taking the above into account, a fair question to be answered is why Russia's war against Ukraine helped consolidate the Ukrainian nation and reduced the gap between the social and political realms resulting in greater resilience? This article uses Ukraine as a case study to draw lessons about resilience in non-kinetic/hybrid warfare to the Baltic states that might be extended to Western countries.

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1. Introduction

When thinking about conflict and warfare, people usually imagine their occurrence as kinetic actions like the ones from movies. In other words, analogous to WWII or Vietnam. Although this is to expect, the development of new technologies has been changing the way wars are fought. An unfortunate example is Russia's current war against Ukraine. The operational design of Crimea's annexation and the initial campaign in the Donbas region showed that today warfare is an increasingly multi-layered and multi-faceted phenomenon that mixes kinetic and non-kinetic elements.¹

Although not necessarily new, indirect and asymmetric methods of warfare have become more common in the last 30 years. This is the result of the development of new technologies and the rise of what the West calls "hybrid warfare," with the fabrics of the nation being increasingly targeted by hostile actors to achieve the ultimate objectives of warfare in the political realm as postulated by Clausewitz (Clausewitz, 1989). Since the threat is multilayered and targets the nation's very existence, war and defense should go beyond the armed forces and involve the whole of society, as discussed by Ludendorff back in 1935 (Ludendorff, 1935). His ideas today are considered a relic in the West, albeit the notion of contemporary warfare as multilayered phenomenon going beyond the military realm is an important part of the strategy of malign actors today. Thus, warfare today is directly aimed against the constituent factors of the nation, including its people making the whole of society a legitimate target.

The recent escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine has been showing how society's participation in defense is fundamental. Also, that in Ukraine's case self-organized grassroots movements without the participation of the government have been fundamental for the war efforts. However, there is a significant level of distrust from the Ukrainian society about most political institutions including the government, the Parliament, the political parties, and the judicial system resulting in what one could call internal political exit.² At the same time, political instability and corruption might have resulted in disillusionment with what has been called the democratic system. Nevertheless, a poll by Rating showed that 80% of respondents are ready to defend the country's territorial integrity with weapons.³ A fair hypothesis is that they are not fighting for the current political, economic, and social system but for something else.

Similarly, low levels of political trust are also observed in the Baltic states. Accordingly to Bērziņa and Zupa (2020) there are indications of a significant gap between society and the state in Latvia which also seems to apply to Lithuania. Since the Baltic states are NATO members, Russia has been trying to leverage these idiosyncratic fragilities using non-kinetic instruments to achieve its strategic objectives.

2. Russia's strategy in the Baltic states

The Clausewitzian idea that the ultimate objective of warfare is political is reflected in the fact that society has been increasingly targeted to achieve political goals which would usually be pursued by kinetic means. They include but are not limited to psychologic, information, and influence operations which became recently known in the West as hybrid warfare as proposed by Hoffman (2018, 2014, 2007). Since nowadays warfare targets a nation in its totality, defense must go beyond the traditional military realm. It must include the people, information system, culture, politics, economics, and infrastructure to increase the nation's resilience.

Therefore, security and defense must be considered within the concept of resilience. In this case, a society is resilient when "if all, or at least most, individuals have the option to react in order to bounce back. In a non-resilient society, some people might never recover from a severe crisis. (...) Overall, resilient societies are able to react in a coordinated way and institutions can be reinvented" (Brunnermeier, 2021, p. 15). The level of resilience is at the same time a symptom of and factor reflecting a wide range of social and individual attitudes and values. They include external threats and interference, historical experience, national pride, trust in armed forces and institutions, religiousness, conscription, along with such individual-level factors as age, education, financial situation, marital status, place of residence, religious, and ideological beliefs.

1 Kinetic elements are those used in active warfare, including lethal force. Non-kinetic refers to other forms of warfare as psychological operations, cyber, information operations, among other.

2 The notion of internal exit is explored in the next section.

3 See https://ratinggroup.ua/ru/research/ukraine/vosmoy_obschenacionalnyy_opros_ukraina_v_usloviyah_voyny_6_aprelya_2022.html

These factors have greater or lesser influence directly depending on the level of “exit” in a country. This concept was developed by Albert Hirschman in his theoretical framework of voice, exit, and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970). People can express discontent in two ways: one, by directly communicating their dissatisfaction by voice, other, by exiting, usually the result of a citizen becoming convinced that voicing has no results. The conclusion is that more voice is equal to more loyalty, but more exit means less loyalty. To exit makes sense in economics, as it is the way the market mechanism works. However, at the political level, it is associated with negative trends, as voice is the basis for political participation, therefore for the democratic system to work. In this sense, the most radical form of exit is emigration.

Hirschman went as far as analyzing the effects of emigration in small states but did not touch the political nor the security implications of another kind of exit, the one that can be called internal exit. In this way, a logic theoretical development of this framework is the case when instead of emigrating, people become, voluntarily or not, isolated from the political, economic, cultural and social system of the country where they live. Most of the times, it results from the combination of multiple factors, although the most important seems to be political and economic alienation. In this case, the level of loyalty to the country’s macrostructures, including its political and economic model, is negatively correlated to the population’s level of internal exit. Thus, it is one of the most important determinants of the success of foreign psychologic, information, and influence operations that might be used to, for example, promote regime change. In this sense, it is related also with the idea of resilience as discussed above.

An attacker might aim to achieve its political objectives with non-kinetic and hybrid instruments instead of relying on kinetic warfare. As warfare might be non-kinetic, hybrid, and/or kinetic, the notion of fighting for the country must be understood more broadly than just kinetic engagement by military means. It must include fighting for the country’s political, economic, and social model. The rise of populist political forces in recent years is a symptom that the current political, economic, and social model based on Neoliberal ideology has deepened the gap between society and the state. It gives leverage to malign actors and should not be underestimated. Donald Trump’s election in the United States and the BREXIT in the United Kingdom, two of the strongest democracies in the world, show that system fragilities have reached a point where anti-systemic sentiment might give leverage to malign actors.

Until the escalation of the war against Ukraine, Russia was exploiting these systemic fragilities against the Baltic states with different degrees of success, following its strategic interests. Although occupation and annexation are not part of the current Moscow’s strategic objectives, it does not mean that Russia is not interested in the Baltic states. On the contrary. Russia believes to have a natural sphere of influence called the “near abroad,” encompassing the post-Soviet space. Since the Baltic states are firmly part of the West, Russia’s main objective seems to maintain and, possibly, to increase its influence in the region to achieve a situation of “Finlandization” (Skachkov, 2018). The term has its origin in Finland’s foreign policy of accommodating the Soviet Union’s interests in Northern Europe, but at the same time maintaining non-bloc neutrality and democracy. In other words, by external realpolitik to maintain internally values.

The argumentation to justify the Baltic states’ Finlandization is economic. The Russian argue that although they are firmly part of NATO and the EU, their current economic and social indicators, pace of macroeconomic development and demographic trends mean these countries will likely be depopulated by the middle of this century.”The solution is to frozen NATO membership at the same time maintaining the EU status together with “restorative (sic) Eurasian integration” (Voronov, 2019). Therefore, the strategic objective is to push Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania from the Western sphere of influence back to Russia’s near abroad without militarily attacking, annexing and occupying these countries. This is to be done indirectly, by using democracy as a weapon. The Russian strategy has nine points (Nagorny and Shurygin, 2013):

- 1) The stimulation and support of armed actions by separatist groups with the objective of promoting chaos and territorial disintegration.
- 2) Polarization between the elite and society, resulting in a crisis of values followed by a process of reality-orientation to Western values.
- 3) Demoralization of the armed forces and military elite.
- 4) Strategic controlled degradation of the socio-economic situation.
- 5) Stimulation of a socio-political crisis.

- 6) Intensification of simultaneous forms and models of psychological warfare.
- 7) Incitement of mass panic, with the loss of confidence in key government institutions.
- 8) Defamation of political leaders who are not aligned with Russia's interests.
- 9) Annihilation of opportunities to form coalitions with foreign allies.

It is very difficult to engage in such influence operations without having something to explore. In other words, influence operations are effective to the extent that vulnerabilities in a society allow them to be effective. These vulnerabilities can only take advantage of realities being created by underlying trends. Therefore, the strategy is to exploit the endogenous fragilities of the subject under attack. One of the most significant fragilities is the lack of trust of a society in the country's political system. Considering the low level of political trust in the Baltic states (see Figure 1), especially in Latvia and Lithuania, Russia has significant possibilities to engage in non-kinetic and hybrid operations.

If Russia was exploiting the minority issue before, now the narrative is not pro-Russia and pro-Eurasia. Instead, the main aim is to convince the population that the current alignment with the West, democracy as political model, NATO and EU membership are impeding them to achieve its full potential of development. Also, to try to convince that the natural moral values of the Baltic states' population are different from the Western values and similar to the specific traditional values championed by Russia. The desirable outcome is populist anti-NATO, anti-European Union, and anti-West politicians being democratically elected resulting in a natural re-alignment with Russia.

3. Resilience in Ukraine

People in Ukraine are fighting for their individual well-being, living standard, and way of life. According to the sociological group "Rating", life resilience of the Ukrainian people is marked as 3.9 out of 5 (<https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/b29c8b7d5de3de02ef3a697573281953.html>). Such an index is composed out of psychological and physical resilience and is based on the analysis of Ukrainian approach in trusting civil society organizations/institutions more than government or official authorities (Hunter, 2018). Civil society is a key component related to the local self-governing mechanism. Historically, Ukrainians trust local authorities more than the regional or national government. Thus, the Ukrainian society has been developing what may be called "community resilience" in the form of practice and interest through special networks of actors, who have the role of preparing and responding in case of crisis or disaster (Benekos et al., 2022). It is also interconnected with rationalization of the meaning of life for Ukrainians as a noticeable sign of value dynamics, the indicator of which is the growth of the share of the population that relied on solving its problems and not relying on governmental support.

Such type of resilience is also interconnected with rationalization of the meaning of life for Ukrainians as a noticeable sign of value dynamics, being a part that Ukrainians consider related to Soviet times. By the protection of this system, Ukrainian scholars understand anti-corruption activity, supporting the civil preparedness as well as infrastructure development (Nazarov, 2020). However, the relevant economic dynamics should be traced up to the uprising trend of decreasing paternalism in combination with other indicators, such as the attitude of Ukrainians to competition, the difference in income, the ratio of private property to state ownership. In other words, the Ukrainian society demands an accountable and transparent judicial system, rule of law, and a functional financial and economic sector.

Since 2014 civil society organizations have been substituting or helping governmental institutions in such activities as evacuating civilians, buying ammunition for the Armed Forces, logistic support for the civilian sector, offering legal support, and even drafting new laws. Volunteer organizations and movements filled the gap left by the state by evacuating, accommodating, and providing first-aid to displaced persons. Another example is legal assistance. Non-governmental organizations launched many hotlines for legal assistance. They also opened waiting rooms to provide secondary legal assistance, prepare procedural documents, and assist in courts. It was through these resources of civil society organizations that internally displaced persons and those who remained in the occupied territory were able to get help. Military forces, especially those deployed during crises and conflict, heavily depend on the civilian sector

for transport, communications, energy, and even basic supplies such as food and water, to fulfil their missions. Civil preparedness ensures that these sectors are ready to withstand external attacks or internal disruptions and remain operational.

To increase resilience at the state level, President Zelensky approved the National Security Strategy determining the risks, threats, and national structural weaknesses to be addressed (National Defense Strategy of Ukraine, Decree of the President of Ukraine no. 392/2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4792021-4018>).⁴ To increase the level of coordination, the Ukrainian government approved the Presidential decree no. 479/2021 establishing the national resilience system and defining the purpose, basic principles, directions, mechanisms and terms of implementation and functioning of the national sustainability system aimed at ensuring the ability of the state and society to identify threats, identify vulnerabilities and assess national security risks, their negative impacts, respond effectively and recover quickly and fully from emergencies or emergencies of all kinds, including but not limited to hybrid threats. In addition, the government adopted a new Military Defence Strategy (March 25, 2021) introducing the concept of total defence and establishing how the national resistance movements collaborate with the military.⁵ Finally, the Parliament of Ukraine passed the “Law on National Resistance” introducing a new system of Ukrainian territorial defense to support the regular army.⁶ They reflect the challenges resulting from the combination between non-kinetic, hybrid, and kinetic warfare, where it is necessary to adopt a whole-of-society approach similar to the Baltic states and Finland.

Although the government participation in organizing civilian initiatives has increased, many volunteer initiatives that arose in 2014 and later grew into large public organizations and charitable foundations that are still helping war victims. An important lesson is that, in case of kinetic warfare, the civilian society has a fundamental role in supporting itself and even the Armed Forces. Hence, it is important to plan and establish relations with civilian organizations that may want to take part in the war effort to avoid the state losing control of the situation. It also serves to boost the confidence in the government.

Communication, especially crisis communication, is a critical element of activity of each state institution as well as a tool of ensuring transparency and responsibility of the state before its citizens, and a mechanism of public trust toward state policy and reforms. The experience of resisting Russian aggression confirmed the need for urgent measures to build an effective system of government (state) communications at all levels. The lack of such system, especially within the strategic level of decision-making, resulted in strategic leverage for Russia, even though the personal communication of President Zelensky fostered the international community to know more about full-scale invasion since February 24, 2022.

Nevertheless, until now, the Ukrainian government has been unable to implement a holistic legislative system defining the information cooperation (communication) between the state and society. As a result, the state (government) communications lack systematicity, tenacity (oriented on result and information needs of different groups of society), consistency, comprehensiveness, integrity, deepness, and differentiability. The outdated national legislation and the need to adapt it to the European Union’s standards, including increased protection of journalists’ professional activities are also essential problems.

On February 28, 2022 President Zelensky submitted an application to join the European Union. In this sense, this is a logical continuation of the efforts to develop a fully democratic society based on Western values and to tackle the problems discussed above. As of the end of 2021, the level of implementation of the Association Agreement was estimated by the Ukrainian side to be 63%. At the same time, the support for Ukraine’s accession to the EU is steadily growing. In April 2014, the support for EU membership was 54% but in March 2022 it reached 91%. An important step was also the joining of Ukraine’s unified energy system to the energy grid of continental Europe (ENTSO-E), which took place on March 16, 2022, ahead of schedule.

On 4-5 July 2022, Switzerland and Ukraine hosted the international Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano.⁷ In the conference the Ukrainian delegation presented the Ukrainian analogue of the “Marshall Plan” - Ukraine Recovery Plan. In particular, the country’s Recovery Plan is designed for the next 10 years, during which the Ukrainian leadership expects to implement 850 projects in the field of economic recovery,

4 See National Defense Strategy of Ukraine, Decree of the President of Ukraine no. 392/2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4792021-40181>

5 <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1212021-37661>

6 <https://euromaidanpress.com/2022/02/01/how-ukraine-is-building-its-territorial-defense-results-of-first-month>

7 <https://www.urc2022.com/>

industry, energy, agriculture, social recovery, digitalization, infrastructure recovery, and environment.⁸ A 2,000 pages recovery plan was developed over the past two months under the leadership of the Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Andriy Yermak, head of the presidential office. To restore the country, Ukraine wants to attract about \$ 750 billion, which will be used by national programs.⁹ On September 9, 2022 the Government of Ukraine, the European Commission, and the World Bank informed their joint average estimates regarding the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine in the amount of € 349 Billion. This figure is expected to increase in case the war continues.¹⁰

The conference approved the “Lugano Declaration.” The document provides seven principles of the process of restoration of Ukraine: 1) partnership; 2) reform focus; 3) transparency, accountability and rule of law; 4) democratic participation; 5) multi-stakeholders engagement; 6) gender equality and inclusion and 7) sustainability.¹¹ The efficiency and competitiveness of the economy is to be achieved by reducing the number of state monopolies, liberalizing the economy as much as possible, reforming the fiscal system, and creating a favourable business climate. Among some of the first steps is the so-called “leniency program,” a key tool for detecting cartels. It allows businesses to provide the competition authority with information about cartels in which they participate in exchange for full or partial immunity from fines for such violations.

Military forces, especially those deployed during crises and conflict, heavily depend on the civilian and commercial sectors for transport, communications, energy, and even basic supplies such as food and water, to fulfil their missions. Civil preparedness ensures that these sectors are ready to withstand external attacks or internal disruptions and remain operational.

The Ukraine’s State Emergency Response Plan introduces government assistance and support measures to Ukrainian nation and works as a contingency plan.¹² The Civil Protection Code regulates the system of crisis management regarding environmental emergencies, armed conflict, or mass revolt, outlines evacuation and determines other measures to protect civilians in case of crisis.¹³

A fundamental aspect to increase resilience is the reform of the judicial system, since it is one of the main indicators that Ukraine is ready to join the European Union. Resuming the activities of the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine will make it easier for people to have access to justice and participate in the administration of justice. This has negative consequences to the integrity and transparency of the judicial system as shadowy interests continue to be a powerful regulator of Ukrainian social behavior at all levels. Because of this dysfunctional system, many human rights organizations became experienced in documenting war crimes committed during hostilities and appealing to authorities so that war criminals were punished.

At the heart of this reform is a transparent competition for the Constitutional Court, which will include a vetting of candidates based on integrity.¹⁴ Ukraine also has to complete the reform of the High Council of Justice with the participation of the Ethics Council and make a transparent selection to the High Qualifications Commission. The European Commission notes that if Ukraine’s judicial reform is successful, it will not only build an independent and accountable justice system, but also reduce the influence of stakeholders who have previously used the justice system to undermine the rule of law in Ukraine.

Corruption remains the pivotal challenge for Ukraine. This message was clearly voiced during the Lugano Recovery Conference by the EU and other international partners. Prior to the full-scale invasion by Russia, Ukraine was already fighting corruption. The anti-corruption infrastructure includes several state bodies covering various aspects of anti-corruption activities. In particular, the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) develops and implements the State Anti-Corruption Policy. Another important agency is the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU). It investigates corruption at high levels under the procedural guidance of the prosecutors of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAP) and

8 https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/621f88db25fbf24758792dd8/62c166751fcf41105380a733_NRC%20Ukraine%27s%20Recovery%20Plan%20blueprint_ENG.pdf

9 <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/promova-premier-ministra-ukrainy-denysa-shmyhalia-na-zasidanni-uriadu-7-7-22>

10 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/09/ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-estimated-349-billion>

11 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/outcome-document-ukraine-recovery-conference-urc2022-lugano-declaration-lugano-4-5-july-2022>

12 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Decree ‘On approval of the State Emergency Response Plan’ - “Про затвердження Плану реагування на надзвичайні ситуації державного рівня”, 14 March 2018, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/223-2018-%D0%BF#Text>

13 Law of Ukraine, ‘Civil Protection Code of Ukraine’ -- “Кодекс цивільного захисту України”, 2 October 2012, <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5403-17>

14 https://jurliga.ligazakon.net/analytics/212893_yak-reformi-v-sfer-pravosuddya-ma-proyti-ukrana-na-shlyakhu-do-s

the newly created High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC). Since 2015, the Business Ombudsman Council has been introducing integrity standards in the public and private sectors of the economy.

On June 20, 2022, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021-2025.¹⁵ This key development was voiced by the Ukrainian authorities in Lugano as well as other international fora. The law that approved the strategy also provides changes to help improve the work procedures of the anti-corruption bodies. The document defines the following five basic principles of anti-corruption policy for 2021-2025: 1) optimize functions of the state and local self-government authorities (and avoid their duplication); 2) digitally transform the powers exercised by state authorities and local self-government bodies; 3) create more convenient and legal ways to meet the needs of individuals and legal entities, in contrast to existing corrupt practices; 4) ensure inevitability of legal responsibility for corruption and corruption-related offenses and 5) form public intolerance to corruption, establishing a culture of integrity and respect for the rule of law.

Therefore, it will significantly reduce the level of corruption in areas that Ukrainians consider to be the most corrupt (customs and taxation, courts and law enforcement agencies, state regulation of the economy, construction and land relations, the defense sector, health care and social protection).

The war might also create new opportunities for corruption and may also be a great risk for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine and its development towards European integration and recognized international practices and standards. It affected the functioning of many public and private institutions. Because of the war, submission of electronic declarations of persons authorized to perform functions of the state and local self-government has been suspended, and financial control measures, particularly full verifications of officials' declarations, are temporarily not carried out.¹⁶ Since martial law is in effect, it is necessary to develop and adopt balanced decisions on how to fully apply anti-corruption legislation. Many anti-corruption officers as well as civil society volunteers have joined the armed forces to fight the enemy at the front.

4. Exit and willingness to fight for one's country

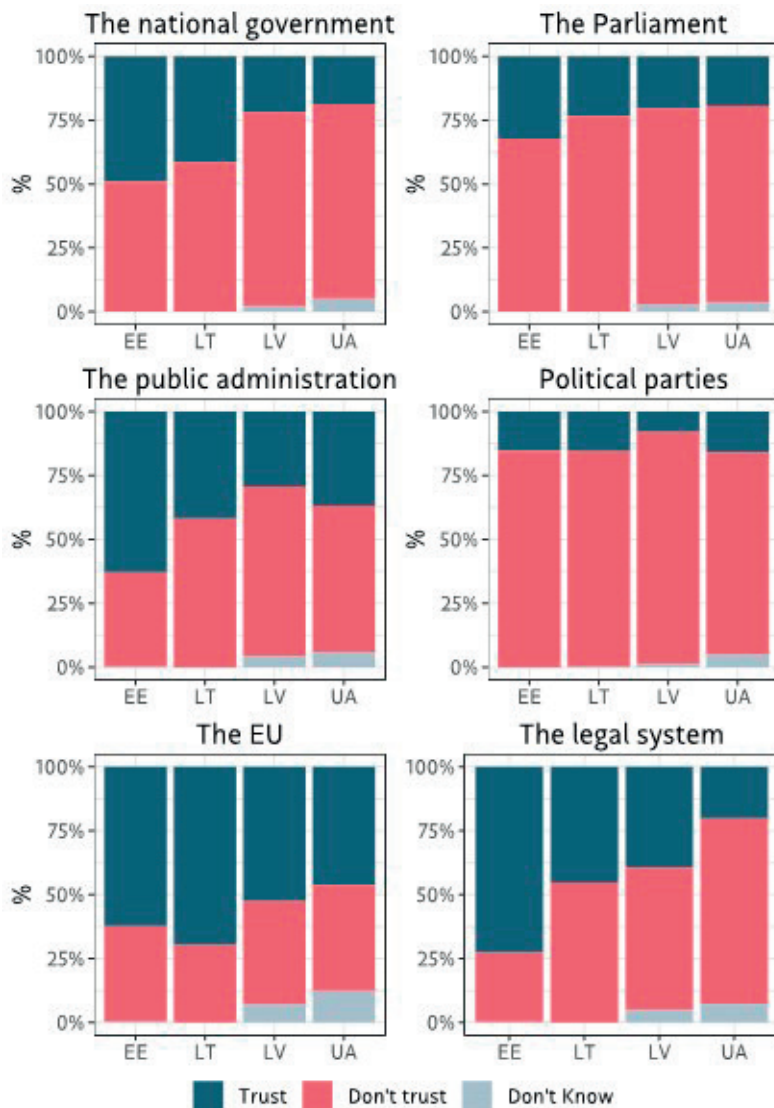
The World Values Survey and the European Values Study are international research programs with the objective of researching political, economic, social, religious, and cultural values of societies. They have specific questions that help to identify the factors determining the willingness to fight for one's country. They include trust in political institutions, nationalism, support for democracy, and other variables. They also include a specific question about the willingness to fight for one's country since the mid-1980s: *"Of course, we all hope that there will not be another war, but if it were to come to that, would you be willing to fight for your country?"*

The problem with this formulation is that it implicitly presupposes traditional kinetic warfare, while today non-kinetic and hybrid methods might accomplish significant strategic objectives if the right conditions are present. There is a difference between land and the nation, and the government/state, where the idea of nation is related to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities. Nation is a socially-constructed community by people perceiving themselves as part of a group (Anderson, 2016). In democratic societies, the government/state is expected to represent the nation and its people. Nevertheless, in some cases, there is a gap between both, and the political system ceases to represent the nation for at least part of the nation's people. The deeper this gap is, the more vulnerable the nation is in case of non-kinetic and hybrid warfare.

15 <https://nazk.gov.ua/uk/novyny/verhovna-rada-uhvalyla-antikoruptsijnu-strategiyu-na-2021-2025-roky/>

16 <https://nazk.gov.ua/uk/novyny/chy-obov-yazkovo-podavaty-deklaratsiyi-pid-chas-vijny/>

Figure 1. Trust in political institutions, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine

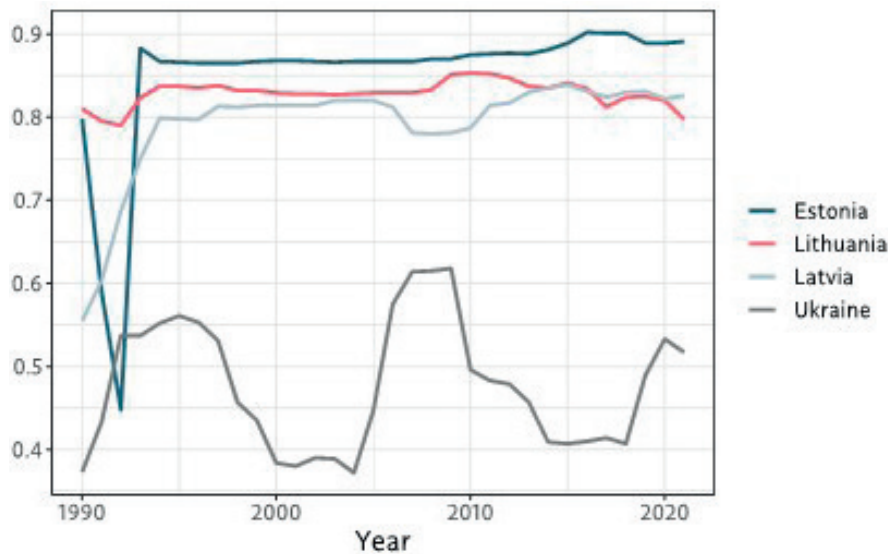


Source: Own calculations based on the Eurobarometer 96.1 and the European Values Study.

There are signs that a significant gap exists between society and the government/state in Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Thus, because of the separation between the land /nation and the government/state, the willingness to fight for one’s country may exclude the latter and focus on the former. The implication for defense is that, in case of non-kinetic and hybrid operations, the attacker might even gain support from the local population to its strategic objectives, if they are properly formulated.

The Baltic states are consolidated democracies with high levels in the electoral regime classification of the Varieties of Democracy Research Project. It consists of five sub-components capturing Robert Dahl’s seven institutions of polyarchy (Dahl, 1972): 1) freedom for form and join organizations, 2) freedom of expression, 3) right to vote, 4) right of political leaders to compete for support, 5) alternative sources of information, 6) free and fair elections, institutions for making government policies depends on votes and o7) ther forms of preferences. It captures the extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedom of association and expression are guaranteed.

Figure 2. Electoral regime*



* Classification: 1 = electoral democracy; 0 = electoral authoritarianism.

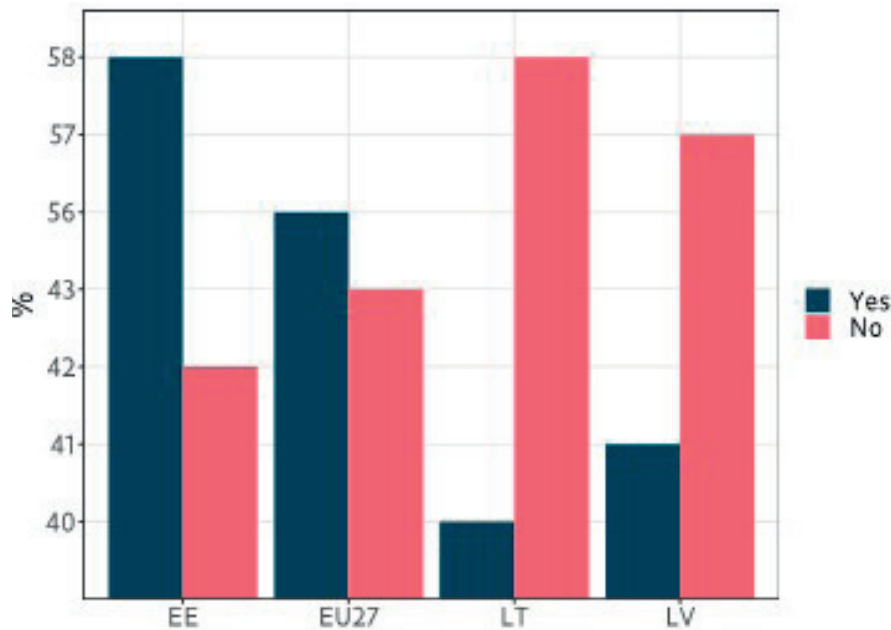
Source: Own elaboration with data from the Varieties of Democracy Research Project.

As shown in Figure 2, Ukraine's electoral regime has been primarily on the authoritarian side. This is the result of the high level of state capture by specific interest groups.¹⁷ In contrast, since the beginning of their independence, the Baltic states developed solid democracies while Ukraine has been struggling ranging from almost electoral authoritarianism to slightly electoral democracy. Data from the latest Eurobarometer shows that, although 58% of the Estonian respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works, 57% of the Latvian and 58% of the Lithuanian respondents are not satisfied. The average of the European Union is 56% satisfied and 43% not satisfied. The high level of support in Estonia is the result of the Estonian population having greater trust in key government institutions as the national government, the public administration, and the legal system showing a considerably lower level of exit.

This has serious implications. Although Huntington was convinced of a clash of civilizations (Huntington, 2011), the world is seeing a fight between different political and economic models against Western neoliberal globalization. Often the mistake is to believe that a malign actor will always engage in activities supporting their direct objectives. For example, until approximately 2017, Russian political warfare in the Baltics focused on Russian language, education, pro-Russian politicians, Soviet nostalgia, to cite the most relevant. Nowadays, the focus has shifted to fomenting populist anti-West, anti-neoliberal globalization, anti-homosexuality and for pseudo-traditional values, anti-science, anti-vaccine, and other. Low levels of trust in political institutions and satisfaction with how democracy works, thus, of exit, gives a fertile field for malign actors to engage in influence operations and achieve their strategic objectives.

17 For a discussion about state capture and corruption in Ukraine see Kuzio (2015).

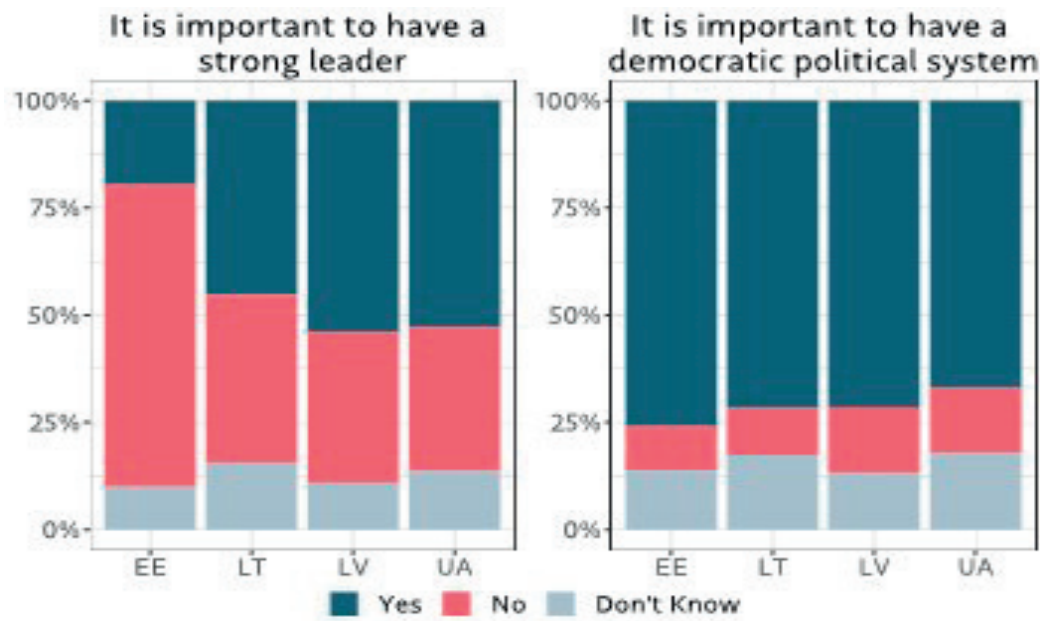
Figure 3. Satisfaction with how democracy works, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the European Union – winter 2021-2022



Source: Eurobarometer 96, winter 2021 - 2022.

At the same time, data about the support for the Western democratic model shows some contradictions. Three indicators may be used to measure it: trust in political institutions, considering important to have a strong leader able to govern the country autocratically, and considering important to have a democratic political system. The results from the latest wave of the European Values Study show that more than half of the respondents from Latvia and Ukraine and 45% of the respondents from Lithuania believe it is important to have a strong leader compared to only 20% of the respondents from Estonia. Paradoxically, around 70% of the four countries' respondents answered that it is important to have a democratic political system. A potential explanation for this contradiction is that part of the population may believe that a strong leader, one with the highest ideals of honesty and commitment with the nation, will fix the system. This strong leader would free the nation from corrupt malign forces and real democracy would finally flourish.

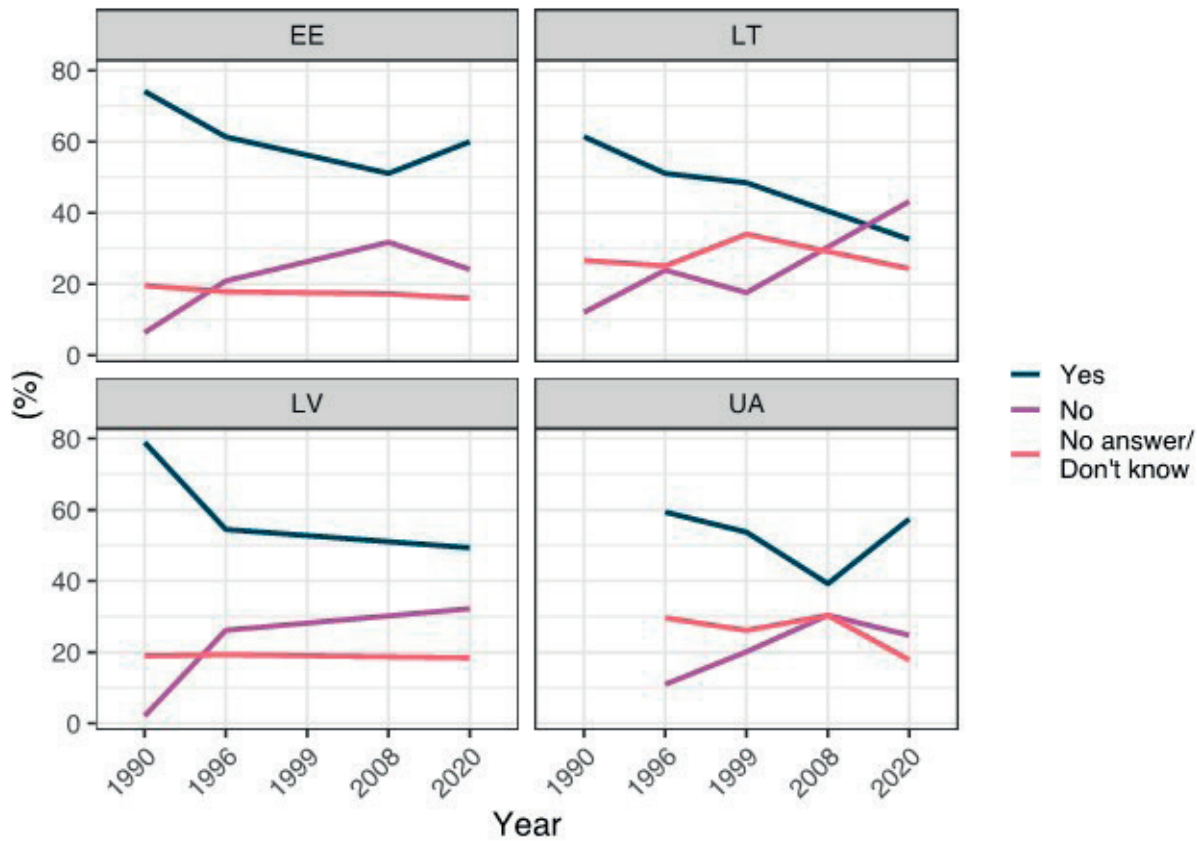
Figure 4. Support for democracy, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine – 2020



Source: Own calculations based on the European Values Study.

Although this hypothesis must be tested yet, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that this might be case. If so, these societies are not against democracy. The combination between low levels of trust in political institutions with considering important to have a strong leader and, at the same time, a democratic system just reflex the political system's low levels of legitimacy. In the absence of a direct kinetic threat similar to the recent escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine, low levels of trust in the political system results in the decline of the willingness to fight for one's country. Since non-kinetic and hybrid warfare do not represent an apparent threat to a country, it gives considerable leverage for malign actors to pursue their strategic objectives. The population might even support the enemy's information, psychological, and influence operations believing that their objectives might be the best for the country.

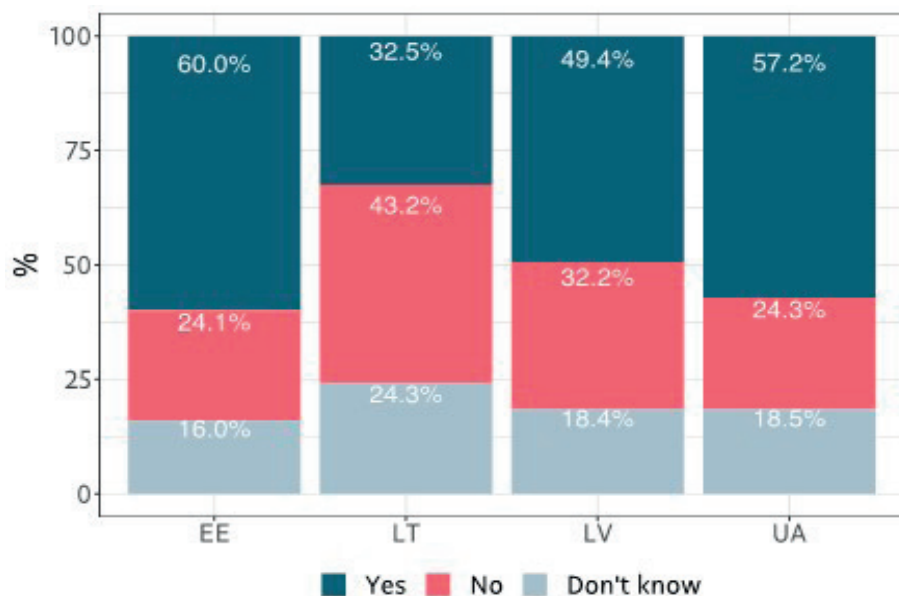
Figure 5. Willingness to fight for the country (1990-2020), Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine



Source: Own calculations with data from the World Value Survey and the European Values Survey.

The discussion above explains why the willingness to fight for one's country has been declining in Latvia and Lithuania but increased in Estonia since the beginning of the 1990s. In Lithuania's case, it is the lowest level among the four countries. Only 32.5% of the population is willing to fight for the country. In Ukraine's case, it was also declining but substantially increased after 2014. This is the result of the low levels of trust in the political system and the consequent gap between society and the state. Estonia has the highest levels of trust in political institutions which explains the higher levels of the willingness to fight for the country. At the same time, Latvia and Lithuania have considerably lower levels of trust. In Ukraine's case, the willingness to fight for the country increased notwithstanding the lowest levels of political trust in the sample because of Russia kinetically attacking the country as representation of the nation/land. People may be ready to fight in case of an existential threat for the country but not necessarily for the political model and its structures.

Figure 6. Willingness to fight for the country – European Values Study 5th wave (2020-2022)



Source: Own calculations with data from the World Value Survey and the European Values Study.

Still in the Autumn of 2020, 57% of the European Values Study's respondents in Ukraine were willing to fight for their country (see Figure 6) even considering the Crimea's annexation and the operation in Donbas. With the escalation last February, 80% (60% in the Eastern region) of the respondents in a survey by Rating said to be ready to defend the country's territorial integrity with weapons. Compared with the previous data, this is an increase of 40 percent or 23 percentage points. This corroborates the idea that people's willingness to fight for the country is lower in case of non-kinetic and hybrid warfare, while trust in political institutions loses its significance in case of a direct kinetic attack. An important issue to be considered in this case is that political leadership is fundamental for maintaining the political and economic model intact. Although a kinetic attack might increase the willingness to fight for the country, weak leadership may result in fissures in the country's political and economic structures and anti-systemic political forces might ascend to power. The result might be detachment from the Western democratic model, and later even strategic alignment with the former opponent.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The current security environment is uncertain and unpredictable. The system of international security created after the Second World War is no longer able to respond effectively to modern challenges. International competition is intensifying with the use of all instruments of national power - political and diplomatic, military, economic, information and psychological, and cyber means. The challenges to transatlantic and European unity are growing, which could both lead to the escalation of existing conflicts and the emergence of new ones.

The Russian Federation, which continues its armed aggression against Ukraine, is trying to take advantage of the situation. To restore its influence in Ukraine, the Russian Federation, continuing the hybrid war, systematically uses political, economic, informational, psychological, cyber and military means. Russia's war against Ukraine has revealed many fundamental cross-sectorial problems. Insufficient efficiency of state bodies remains a source of threats to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and democracy, which complicates the development and implementation of effective policies. Inconsistency and incompleteness of reforms and corruption hinder the recovery of the Ukrainian economy, prevent its sustainable and dynamic growth, increase vulnerability to threats, and fuel the criminal environment.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has met with fierce resistance from the Ukrainian military, government as well as ordinary people proving that it has its own resilient approach to be further analyzed and assessed. On one hand, Ukraine continues to be a laboratory for innovative ideas and practices within the resilience domain that give substance to an all-societal approach towards security and defense. On the other hand, many new practices are available to be leveraged, and new analytical capabilities offer opportunities to rethink old solutions that may have run their course.

Arguably, the most significant lesson from the Russian war against Ukraine is that society will respond differently to non-kinetic and hybrid warfare than to kinetic warfare. In case of kinetic warfare, there is a very high probability that society will try to defend the country notwithstanding the level of trust in the government and its institutions. The situation becomes more complex in case of non-kinetic and hybrid warfare. Since the ultimate objective of warfare is political, the enemy might exploit the society's low level of political trust and dissatisfaction with the current political and economic model to change it. In this case, notions as patriotism and nationalism become fuzzy. One might believe that changing the current model is the best for the country reflecting the enemy's strategic objectives.

The Ukrainian people are fighting for the hope that democracy will put the country on the right path for development and solve the malaises of the political system. Another fair conclusion is that there is a rejection of the Russian system of governance, and political and economic model in opposition to the European model. Thus, people are fighting for a better future. This poses a challenge for the Baltic states in case of non-kinetic and hybrid warfare. Since they are already members of the European Union and the electoral regime has been democratic for years, the high level of support for a strong leader indicates that the population in Latvia and Lithuania might be disappointed with the way the democratic process happens. Still, data shows that 67% of the Ukrainian population support democracy and there is a relative high level of trust in the European Union suggesting the rejection of the current political and economic model. This gives an edge to malign actors to engage in influence operations in the Baltic countries against Western democracy and its institutions in the form of, for example, populist parties, anti-vaccine/anti-science movements, and other anti-systemic movements.

People will not defend the government and the state apparatus against non-kinetic and hybrid warfare if there is no trust in the political realm (non-tangible) but will defend the country against kinetic tangible attacks (land). It is necessary to admit there is a problem of trust resulting in a gap between state and society. It is fundamental to close this gap by increasing the level of trust in state institutions and in the Western democratic model by increasing the effectiveness and transparency of the former, including at the local level. Hence, defense must be organized to include the non-military actors that might not want to join the country's military organizations directly and be subordinated to the Armed Forces. In this way, the government may increase the coordination and control of non-state actors willing to defend the country.

It is necessary to educate people to identify fake news, analyze information critically, and be cyber resilient. Nevertheless, the actors at the political level, including politicians, civil-servants, members of the judiciary, and other stakeholders must be able to increase the population's trust in the political institutions. They must look inwards to assess their responsibility in the increasing systemic fragilities arising from the gap between society, the state, and the political elite. This is the first and most important step for establishing effective deterrence at the non-kinetic and hybrid domains. Also, since trust tends to be higher at the local level, the coordination of civilian activities supporting the war effort is best kept locally.

Finally, strategic communications to gain internal and external support are fundamental. A significant question regards the level of threat awareness of the population. In case of non-kinetic and hybrid warfare, evidence shows that threat perception normalizes and reduces after an initial peak of as happened with Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

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