

Policy Paper

The hybrid war dynamics and mechanisms: Why does the internal needs-assessment matter?



LAW SOCIETY
OF AZERBAIJAN



The hybrid war dynamics and mechanisms: Why does the internal needs-assessment matter?



Acknowledgements

This paper is prepared in the framework of the Project 'Enhancing civil society's role on addressing hybrid threats', implemented by the **Law Society of Azerbaijan** (LSA) in close partnership with **the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association (ESGA/ Romania)** with the support of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation and the European Union. Cover photo credits: LSA

Disclaimer:

Views expressed in the paper are solely those of the authors and do not necessary reflect the views of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation and the European Union.

Authors:

Angela Grămadă
Cătălin-Gabriel Done

Edited by: Ziya Guliyev



LAW SOCIETY
OF AZERBAIJAN



Published by:

Law Society of Azerbaijan (LSA)

Caspian Plaza 1/8, Jafar Jabbarly 44, Baku

AZ1065, Republic of Azerbaijan

T: + 994 12 505 53 12, E: info@lawsociety.org.az

Introduction

For an audience familiar with the internal realities of Azerbaijan's politics and economy, its country profile will highlight its potential to influence regional projects and energy policies. But, it will also entirely explain accelerated military sector investment¹, argued by the extended war from the Nagorno Karabakh region. An in-depth analysis will also show that Azerbaijan is developing in a dynamic environment, conditioned by the evolution of foreign policy and national security of neighbouring countries, which means that it must face several challenges to ensure harmonious development. Despite its high energy potential, the structure of government, proximity to the foreign military presence, Russia's hybrid activities in the region, and prolongation of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Azerbaijan's exposure to hybrid threats dramatically reduces the number of economic opportunities.

"Hybrid warfare" and the factors that determine it has become an increasingly used concept in the public sphere to assess the impact of the intervention of a foreign actor in the internal affairs of the states it considers to be part of its sphere of influence. The content of decisions to counteract the effects of this type of war, which considers military and paramilitary threats and civil security challenges, must be thoroughly analyzed by political actors facing these risks to deal with them. An essential thing in this reflection exercise is recognizing that government authorities must study and monitor military threats and those related to the resilience of internal public institutions and the specific challenges faced by foreign partners or opponents.

Thus, this policy paper aims to organize a process of reflections on the elements or factors that may lead to increased risks associated with "hybrid warfare": military capabilities, resources and training needs of military personnel, access to technology, foreign military presence and military bases close to national borders, solid public institutions, resilient to political, economic and social threats and challenges.

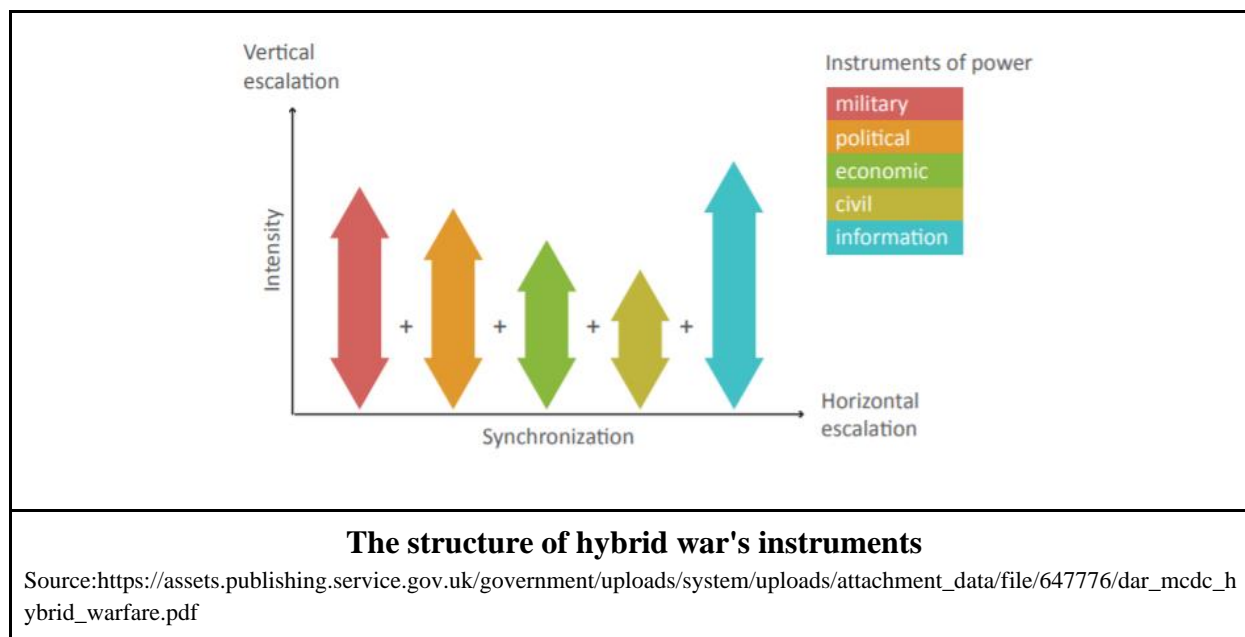
Only a few states have defined the concept of "hybrid warfare" in strategic documents. For example, the UK Government, in its programmatic and analytical documents, defines *hybrid warfare* as the actions of state and non-state actors in order to destabilize a particular actor or region, using various power tools². Also, *"hybrid conflicts [therefore] are full spectrum wars with both physical and conceptual dimensions: the former, a struggle against an armed enemy and the latter, a wider struggle for control and support of the combat zone's indigenous population, the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations, and the support of the international community [...] To secure and stabilize the indigenous population, the intervening forces must immediately rebuild or restore security, essential services, local government, self-defense forces and essential elements of the economy"*³. Thus, the actions of the new way of

¹ Military expenditure (% of GDP) - Azerbaijan, World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=AZ>

² United Kingdom Government, 'Understanding Hybrid Warfare', 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647776/dar_mcdc_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

³ John J. McCuen, 'Hybrid Wars', Military Review, no. March-April (2008): 107–13.

warfare imply a perfect synchronization of several factors: regular and irregular force, economy, media, culture, political force and even human resources.



One of the experts who explained the origin of the popularity of "hybrid war" is Bastian Giegerich⁴. According to him, the term began to be frequently used around the NATO Summit in Warsaw (2016), when the Alliance set out to analyze the conflict in eastern Ukraine in the context of threats of hybrid origin promoted by the Russian Federation, which can be of military or civilian origin. This approach aimed to provide the necessary tools for the Member States to deal with new threats and risks, emphasizing at the same time that the elements are not new. The Kremlin has brought back previously used measures into a new ideological package. The model based on Giegerich's reflections will be taken up and adjusted to Azerbaijan's realities today.

The policy paper will also analyse the experience and methodology used by experts from the Republic of Moldova who proposed an early warning mechanism (EWM) adapted to the conditions in this country. However, there will also be differences of perspective due to the regional context in which Azerbaijan's internal and external affairs are developing and the foreign and security policy objectives that Romania pursues in the Black Sea region from the status of EU and NATO member state⁵. This model focuses on the interaction of the profile

⁴ Bastian Giegerich, "Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict", research article, Connections Quarterly Journal 15, no. 2 (2016): 65-72 <http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.15.2.05>

⁵ Romania contributes to counteracting hybrid challenges in the region (for example, technical assistance in the cybersecurity field for Ukraine), being involved in several projects under the auspices of NATO. The complicated regional context requires pro-active, involved and responsible behaviour at the eastern border of the European Union and NATO. In several official speeches, delivered at various forums, Romania, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisted on creating a structure at the level of the European Union that will have a mandate to contribute to resolving the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of them. "Bogdan Aureescu va solicita la ministeriala OSCE de la Stockholm creșterea eficienței în implementarea mecanismelor de

institutions (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs and other government structures and agencies), which are involved in crisis management.

Another difference will be that in the analysis of the situation in Azerbaijan, there is no specific objective for the partner experts (ESGA Association) involved in the project to propose a similar early warning mechanism. We have limited access to the decision-making mechanism and data available in this regard in English. The current approach focuses on identifying the factors, elements or decisions and policies promoted by the Azerbaijani political elite to correlate the indicators underlying the definition of specific objectives associated with counteracting the effects of a hybrid war. Creating an early warning mechanism methodology in Azerbaijan is an internal decision of Azeri experts, as cooperation with the authorities has also changed. It has become more inefficient. Preparing a model adapted to the needs of this country would offer a set of benefits for Azerbaijan: the anticipation of resources needed to counter the risks and challenges, training of personnel, and actions required to improve an effective response in case of civilian security threats; the creation of response algorithms allowing to reduce the time gap between observing the crisis event and responding to it. This can also be considered a demonstration of how a genuine partnership can benefit all parties involved in this exercise.

For this purpose, it is recommended to review the current data available for the general audience, monitor/assess the indicators, and prepare a methodology that will be more responsible in front of the citizens. Finally, following this policy review initiative there will be mapping for hybrid threats in Azerbaijan, institutions, and further to undertake an advocacy effort of the Azeri think tanks within society and government for better monitoring and assessing active hybrid threats.

Country profile: challenging external context and reduced internal resilience

For Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation is a strategic partner⁶. That means that the strategic framework of cooperation should lead to increased cooperation in different fields, including security capabilities: *"SIPRI estimates that over the decade 2011 – 20 Russia was the largest exporter of major arms to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It supplied nearly all of Armenia's major arms during the period and almost two-thirds of Azerbaijan's. Israel, Belarus and Turkey were, respectively, the second, third and fourth largest suppliers of major arms to Azerbaijan in 2011–20."*⁷

soluționare a conflictelor prelungite din zona Mării Negre", TVR Moldova, 02 December 2021, <http://tvrmdova.md/ro/romania-la-zi/bogdan-aurescu-va-solicita-la-ministeriala-osce-de-la-stockholm-cresterea-eficientei-in-implementarea-mecanismelor-de-soluționare-a-conflictelor-prelungite-din-zona-marii-negre?fbclid=IwAR0TB55o6a0KSdvHSUCtgyHYd7hkW8a5NuOFQjh6KqGXxFi6dofj4F58vxU>

⁶ It should be mentioned that the Russian Federation has the exact status of a strategic partner for Armenia.

⁷ Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Jordan Smith, *"Arms transfers to conflict zones: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh"*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 30 April 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2021/arms-transfers-conflict-zones-case-nagorno-karabakh>

Strategic partnership status can provide multiple opportunities if adequately managed by the actors involved in its implementation. However, the analysis should not be limited to appreciating this bilateral partnership but should also include indicators for monitoring a similar collaboration that Azerbaijan has developed with Turkey. In this case, the strategic alliance between Ankara and Baku is much more sustainable because it is based on other ties, not just strategic regional interests or expanding the influence of Turkey or Azerbaijan. Turkey's commitment to supporting the position of Azerbaijani leaders, but especially the firmness with which it penetrated the post-war negotiations (2020), is nothing more than a demonstration that Russia could be forced to act to the detriment of its strategic partnerships with the states in the region. Moreover, Azerbaijani leaders must follow the evolution of the bilateral dialogue between Turkey and Russia both from the perspective of the war in Ukraine, where Ankara has a particular position, and from the perspective of the status of NATO member state of Turkey. These elements create a complex and difficult-to-manage profile of regional relations for all involved parties, not only for Azeri decision-makers.

Returning to the need to identify the elements that should be part of the active monitoring of internal stakeholders, Bastian Giegerich, the author who tried to explain the changing character of the conflicts and the impact of Hybrid Warfare measures, focussed his attention on the following aspects: military, paramilitary and civilian measures⁸.

The military aspects refer primarily to the *military presence* near the country/region being analyzed. Also, here are studied aspects that refer to military capabilities and technical infrastructure, which can be quickly mobilized, depending on the interests and needs of decision-makers.

As mentioned in the project proposal, the presence of Russian military forces on the territory of a potential target country is a source of hybrid war risk. However, it should be noted here that the foreign military presence is different from the original model, analyzed by experts involved in correlating the methodology for the Republic of Moldova. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, resolutions are encouraging the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the presence of the Russian Federation in the region has a different legal status⁹. The parties agree on this presence. Of course, we are also talking about a different culture regarding the two types of conflict, and the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan are not belligerent parties. According to Russian officials, the presence of

⁸ Bastian Giegerich, "Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict", research article, Connections Quarterly Journal 15, no. 2 (2016): 65-72 <http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.15.2.05>

⁹ According to the common Statement signed in November 2020, along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is deployed in the amount of 1960 military personnel with small arms, 90 armoured personnel carriers, 380 units of automobile and special equipment. "Заявление Президента Азербайджанской Республики, Премьер-министра Республики Армения и Президента Российской Федерации", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 10 November 2020, Moscow, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>

peacekeepers forces makes a significant contribution to stabilizing the situation and ensuring security in the region: "Our Azerbaijani and Armenian friends appreciate this."¹⁰ The specific objective of Russia is to "keep the affected neighbouring countries in a state of instability it controls"¹¹.

There are several other potential sources of threat associated with the territorial military presence that experts point out:

- **Military base in geographic proximity** - the Russian 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia, that can ensure a fast troop mobilization, at the military deployments and weapons at the border with Azerbaijan. The military base is not a new presence in the region. The Armenian side has used it since gaining independence from the Soviet Union as a source of security. There are no preconditions to consider withdrawing this military target soon.

- **Military exercises in proximity** - the Southern District (YuVO) is the main outpost of **Russia in the Northern Caucasus**. According to the available data, YuVO is charged with the task of ensuring security in the Black Sea region and preventing the infiltration of terrorist groups in the North Caucasus. Also, the Southern District aims to support the Russian air force's campaign in the Syrian Arab Republic. According to Andrzej Wilk it is „of the most powerful districts and one of those playing the greatest roles in the armed conflicts in which Russia is engaged.”¹² The same expert added that "The current operational formations (armies) and military bases (equivalents of mechanised brigades) under the district's command in Armenia and in the occupied territories in Georgia (within the 'republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia') led to the creation of a group sufficient to monitor the military situation and respond directly should the situation take a turn unfavourable for Russia south of the Caucasus massif.”¹³

- **Russian peacekeepers involved in Nagorno Karabakh** - as mentioned above, Russia's diplomatic involvement in the mediation process and military presence after the active phase of military operations in the autumn of 2020 and after the agreement between the two warring parties have changed. The presence of Russian forces has a new status. It primarily changes the paradigm of dialogue between Moscow and Baku to ensure an additional security guarantee and humanitarian assistance by providing the presence of Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone.¹⁴ The situation in the province and the evolution of the bilateral dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan one year after the autumn 2020 military operations does not appear to be

¹⁰ "Заявление МИД России в связи с годовщиной трехсторонних договоренностей лидеров России, Азербайджана и Армении о прекращении огня в зоне нагорно-карабахского конфликта", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 09 November 2021, Moscow, https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/am/-/asset_publisher/OO85pcnduakp/content/id/4924643

¹¹ Jakob Hedenskog, Erika Holmquist and Johan Norberg, "Security in the Caucasus Russian policy and military posture", FOI-R--4567--SE, February 2018, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4567--SE>

¹² Andrzej Wilk, "Eyes west! A shift in focus in Russia's Southern Military District", OSW Commentary, 8 September 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-09-08/eyes-west-a-shift-focus-russias-southern-military-district>

¹³ Ibidem

¹⁴ "Executive Order on Interdepartmental Humanitarian Response Centre", President of Russia, 13 November, 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64408>

conducive to interaction and exchange of opinions at the highest level. Currently, monitoring the public speeches of Armenian and Azerbaijani decision-makers, we are talking about a conflict with a very complex ideological substratum, where it is impossible to highlight a shared strategic vision for its solution, even if officially military operations are not as intense as in autumn 2020.

As for the *paramilitary forces*, some studies reflect Russia's interest in developing such structures, as they are used in Moscow's various areas of strategic interest. The potential of such military forces in the Black Sea region has been explored in Ukraine where the Wagner network fought separatist forces. This network provides the opportunity to achieve Moscow foreign policy and security objectives in different regions. Even if Russian officials deny the connection, these capabilities are recognized for their impact:

*"With military skills and capabilities, PMCs enable Moscow to project limited power, strengthen partners, establish new military footholds, and alter the balance of power in out-of-area conflicts toward preferred outcomes while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability for the Kremlin."*¹⁵

The movements of militants from other regions are also essential to be monitored, and this is not only because it is a subject of concern for Russian president Vladimir Putin¹⁶.

To all this should be added the military capabilities held by Azerbaijan. Modern military equipment and combat tactics used in the recent war with Armenia are not to be neglected, so it is expected that there will be an intensification of dialogue between Baku and the Kremlin to pacify the region.¹⁷

Also, it is recommended to organise the monitoring mechanism more comprehensively, including reflections about cyber security, economic interaction, internal political context, propaganda, demographic and democratic challenges associated with hybrid war.

Cyber Security needs-assessment - according to experts,¹⁸ Azerbaijan is a country exposed to cyber threats. In recent years, government authorities have mobilised the expertise and resources needed to develop and implement a cyber policy¹⁹ that would also ensure the proper functioning of the mechanisms used for crises. In the absence of an optimal solution for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the same regional context creates vulnerabilities for the country's cyber security. Moreover, the target of attacks is often internal users involved in the

¹⁵ Brian Katz, Seth G. Jones, Catrina Dooxsee, Nicholas Harrington, "Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies", CSIS, September 2020, <https://russianpmcs.csis.org/>

¹⁶ According to DefenceNews, Vladimir Putin expressed his concern to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan about the presence of "militants" from the Middle East in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in October 2020. Alexander Bratersky, "Will Russian arms sales survive the Azeri-Armenian conflict?" Defence News, 16 October 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/10/15/will-russian-arms-sales-survive-the-azeri-armenian-conflict/>

¹⁷ Military capabilities require not only proper management but also technical assistance. Thus, it is crucial to see if Azerbaijan has the necessary technical capacity, know-how, well-trained military personnel to manage these capabilities inside or whether it is required to invite professionals from outside.

¹⁸ Natalia Spînu, "Azerbaijan Cybersecurity Governance Assessment", DCAF, November 2020, <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/AzerbaijanCybersecurityGovernanceAssessment.pdf>

¹⁹ Kheyrraddin Nasirzade, "Azerbaijan develops strategy for cyber security", Trend.az, 17 May 2019, <https://menafn.com/1098534619/Azerbaijan-develops-strategy-for-cyber-security>

economic circuit, diminishing their ability to produce additional resources for the state budget. For a country overly dependent on its presence in regional energy projects, the ongoing assessment of the risks associated with cyberattacks, malware, and spyware must be part of the early response mechanisms.

By continuing to reflect on the proposed model, it would be helpful to point out once again that hybrid warfare is a ***combination of tools of military and non-military origin***, that is, of civilian origin. The use of civilian measures is more difficult to fight because it penetrates the lives of societies and uses internal actors to sabotage the functioning of public institutions, undermine decision-making processes, or discredit the results of democratic reforms and policies. In this case, the foreign political force uses elements that allow power projection without using military technologies. This allows the efficient organisation of available resources. The main aspects of the measures of civil origin refer to propaganda and media manipulation. The one who manages such tools identifies internal political, economic and social vulnerabilities, explores ethnic sensitivities and conveys messages that undermine the previous achievements of the societies to which they were applied. After the Crimea annexation, Russian propaganda has also allocated significant resources to undermine international standards (Principles of International Law) and platforms (United Nations). The propaganda and manipulation through targeted messages to reach different social categories have as final objective the achievements associated with the development of democratic institutions and societies resilient in the face of threats of external origin.

Democratic challenges and internal resilience

As it was mentioned in the description of the project proposal, this project has relevance also on addressing democratic challenges and governance processes in and 'advocating for short term action against immediate threat', as well as sharing expertise through exchanges between two regions will complement the overall project objective in line with the priorities. Public institutions need to adapt to new legislative changes, political and economic processes, and effective internal development strategies capable of generating resilience to different challenges and threats. States with a clear structure of the governing act, aimed at ensuring the inclusion of all citizens in the political decision-making process, provide benefits for the whole society transparently. The formal opening of some public institutions and the opposition of the political system to specific systemic changes continued but significantly slowed. The Russian Federation's position on democratic change is rigid, discouraging the active and involved participation of a wide range of political actors. For example, the Russian Federation acts as a regional catalyst in anchoring the former Soviet republics in its spheres of influence. The process of democratization and Europeanization, which began with the restoration of independence and the conclusion of bilateral agreements with the European institutions and partners, is a critical element of the relationship with Russia (hegemonic player in the region). To show that, we will focus on five factors representing the engine of the power structure within the Linkage versus Leverage gear:

a) **Regional tensions between the proposed model states and Moscow could increase as the Kremlin forces the penetration of internal power structures, putting Azerbaijan's power centre at a standstill.** This can explain how the democratization of society and the rise of civic activism can be obstacles to keeping Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in the Kremlin's sphere of influence, and Russia's blackmail potential could include elements of the hybrid war such as misinformation, changing the security paradigm in the region, imposing sanctions. As the inter-ethnic conflicts and political instability marked their early independence period, this may be the primary source of blackmail in strengthening the Europeanization process²⁰. Moreover, as the Armenian-Azerbaijani border falls under an extended control of the Russian armed forces²¹, the direct threat becomes a reality, and instability and insecurity can dramatically affect Azerbaijan's domestic policy. That is why it is necessary to find a third way in the management process of the potential conflicts so that the mediation of the Russian Federation to be avoided.

b) **The economy and developments in energy markets** play a significant role in colloquy the independence of the states in the region from the Russian Federation and Russia's attempts to maintain its influence in the regional system. Thus, policymakers in the region must adopt responsible and prudent behaviour that will give Azerbaijan, or Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova predictability and economic stability. In addition, investment in critical infrastructure development may diminish the relativism of independence from regional hegemony.

c) **Rivalry between ruling elites** may pose another threat to responding to threats. In this case, the process of Europeanization and democratization must be carried out with respect for the state's legitimate interests, without prejudice to the rule of law. Not infrequently, the interests of the Russian Federation have interfered with the legitimate interests of the actors in the region, which is why it is mandatory to coagulate a series of measures at the local level to limit destabilization from the national level. In addition, the alternation of power and pluralism are legitimate rules of law that can ensure stability.

d) **The degree of Europeanization and democratization** and the level of contacts with the West determine actions to counteract the "invasion" of the spheres of influence of the Russian Federation. In addition, the strategic interests of Western partners in the region are likely to cause a rift in the relationship between the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia, which may lead the Russian side to act, even militarily, to protect its own geostrategic status.

e) **The further development of new strategic partnerships** is a first step towards the exit from the post-Soviet geostrategic logic, allowing the region's sustainable development. However,

²⁰ It is imperative to mention that when we talk about Europeanization, we do not mean the process of European integration, but the adoption of the open governance model and the integration and interconnection with the prominent European institutions and markets.

²¹ A proposal made by the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan. "Armenia wants Russian army outposts on Azerbaijan border amid tensions", Reuters, 29 July 2021,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-armenia-accuse-each-other-ceasefire-violations-2021-07-29/>

the Russian Federation can prevent these new ways of cooperating by using hybrid forms of action, thus leading to changes in the structure of national interests.

The leverage used by the Russian Federation is the vulnerability of governments and central government institutions to pressure on them to keep the entire region captive to the interests of the Kremlin. In addition, it should be noted that this mechanism involves methods of rewarding obedience to Russian interests, such as strengthening political factors in favour of strategic partnerships with Russia or geostrategic setbacks. At the same time, "punishments" can be applied, such as military and paramilitary intervention, embargoes, some financial, energy, or political conditionalities. This is the case of Ukraine, of the Republic of Moldova. The Russian Federation is not yet ready to recognize that the process of intensive globalization that we all experience is similar and multipolar in the international system. Moreover, the use of hybrid mechanisms to keep the region of the former Soviet states in its sphere of influence is proof that the Kremlin's global power ambitions are enormous. Moving on to practical examples not very distant in time, we can see that Russia's general and particular actions benefit from a very well developed infrastructure, the management of Technology and Information being one of the formidable weapons of external actions. Evidently, the war in Ukraine and the attempts to destabilize Moldova have benefited from the support of the media, which has allowed the Kremlin to deliver its propaganda and create confusion among citizens on issues of general interest. Additionally, other forms of coercion are applied to states that want to escape the tutelage of the Russian Federation. Thus, we can see that at the social level, the actions of the hybrid war affect both society and the territorial integrity of states. Or, a destabilized society without a firm anchor is easily influenced and can become an instrument of hegemonic power.

In particular, the methodology for analyzing the risks associated with hybrid warfare should include monitoring the economic interaction with the state that promotes such mechanisms. Economic or energy dependence²² disadvantages the internal decision-making process. Moreover, because we are considering an ex-Soviet state, Azerbaijan, it is relevant to complete this analysis of economic relations and monitor speeches that appear in the circles of seasonal migrants - from Azerbaijan to the Russian Federation. Why is it relevant to include this aspect among the indicators for monitoring? The explanation is simple: these groups of migrants can be easily reached through decisions and an internal regulatory framework of the Russian Federation (legislation governing seasonal work or legislation on Russian citizenship for people from ex-soviet countries). There is no need to promote active measures in their country of origin. Propaganda messages reach them much more quickly because they are users of the information space controlled by the Russian authorities. In other words, propaganda and cultural influence play an active role in building the philosophy of the so-called "anti-politics" action, which can

²² The excessive dependence of the Azerbaijani economy on regional energy projects and the relationship with the Russian Federation is a vulnerability. The question that needs to be defined here is: how much do the processes in international energy markets influence the ability of the Azerbaijani government authorities to mobilize resources for national security needs, and what is Russia's role in this regard?

become a source of combat against those institutions and bureaucrats (or leaders) that no longer follow the guidelines set by the Russian Federation concerning regional geostrategic arrangements.

An early warning mechanism based on cohesion among internal stakeholders

The second model, proposed by experts from the Republic of Moldova, refers almost exclusively to creating an early warning mechanism based on a complex and highly disciplined interaction of national public institutions²³ and a very good connection with foreign partners, that can support structural changes in the security system, and an excellent understanding of the regional context. Suppose we are going to organize a comparative analysis of the situation of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. In that case, the study should start with some relevant but straightforward findings. Some of them were mentioned earlier in this paper. First of all, it is essential to distinguish between the balance of power and the status of the Russia-Moldova, Russia-Ukraine and Russia-Azerbaijan bilateral relations and the role of the Kremlin in the regional conflicts. Secondly, Azerbaijan's investment in military capabilities must be adequately assessed, approaching 6% of GDP. Ukraine has made considerable improvements in this regard as well. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, these investments are minimum. Thirdly, the Republic of Moldova is almost 100% dependent on the energy resources provided by the Russian Federation. By comparison, Azerbaijan is a major energy player in the region and is negotiating with its partners based on this status. Another relevant moment is how government agencies and public institutions are organized, involved in the management of various crises, including those responsible for the prevention of hybrid threats. Last but not least, the whole concept or the early warning mechanism focuses on avoiding the penetration of the political factor by external forces. Through political actors, the one who decides to mobilize resources for the organization of the hybrid war manages to gain control over a society, dominate it, and explore its vulnerabilities and fears, thus reducing its resilience.

The main purpose of the mechanism proposed by the Moldovan experts is **to prevent this foreign political control and the escalation of different types of crises** and provide elements of analysis and action to limit any attack on the integrity and sovereignty of states and the process of democratization, based on data collection and conditioned by a limited access to resources. Thus, the systematic collection, processing and analysis of information become inherent in the process of facilitating conflict mediation. At the same time, it is essential to emphasize that such a mechanism cannot substitute for the legal and constitutional framework, nor can it exist without mutual trust between society, policymakers, and foreign and security

²³ Dumitru Minzărari, "A Hybrid War Early Warning Model: Towards an Early Warning Mechanism for the Republic of Moldova", the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), 30 March 2021, Chisinau, <http://ipre.md/2021/03/30/a-hybrid-war-early-warning-model-towards-an-early-warning-mechanism-for-the-republic-of-moldova/?lang=en>

policy experts. Thus, internal cohesion is very important to be strengthened. Only in these conditions can the results delivered provide politicians and society with answers and proposals for action in order to limit any risks. Regarding the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, there is a consensus among domestic political actors.

One first step in achieving good results in setting up an early warning mechanism is **to properly assess the internal need to organize such an exercise** and to evaluate the bilateral relationship with Moscow in order to avoid eroding the political sovereignty. Azerbaijan's political elite must define its red lines in its relations with the Russian Federation, even if at the moment it recognizes the strategic partnership and its relevance and involvement in the mediation process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The foreign policy of the Russian Federation does not identify such sensitivities, and the political actors in this country take rational decisions to ensure their continuity in their presence in areas of strategic interest. Even if Azerbaijan has substantial military capabilities, and manages regional energy resources and projects, the internal vulnerabilities (those produced by weak social cohesion, energy-dependent economy, volatile regional context, complicated dialogue with Iran, poorly developed democratic institutions, etc.) can create problems for self-sufficient government authorities. Moreover, Azerbaijan's importance to the Russian Federation is strongly connected to Azerbaijan's location, which offers the Baku authorities both advantages and disadvantages in the South Caucasus and not only. First of all, Azerbaijan is a bridgehead in the Caucasus region, both for Russia and for its Western partners. This could lead to severe ideological clashes that would affect the legitimate security interests of Azerbaijani society. Secondly, "Azerbaijan's proximity to Iran also makes it a strategic location"²⁴, as Moscow and Tehran are trying to reach a compromise on the balance of power in the region, and Azerbaijan does not have the diplomatic capacity to mediate the relationship and become a spokesperson for its interests, as their own dialogue with Teheran is complicated. Thus, Azerbaijan is obliged **to strengthen its political and diplomatic position** precisely in order to be able to face potential exogenous threats.

Another step is **to evaluate how vulnerable is Azerbaijani society to deal with hybrid threats** without considering only the factor of military proximity of open armed conflict. At this stage, it is advisable to evaluate tools such as propaganda, manipulation through the media, or reformulating specific demographic policies (double citizenship), which may influence society's views as a whole or may mobilize minority ethnic groups to destabilize communities. One of the relevant indicators in this regard is those migrant workers or minorities. The migrants are in seasonal work in the territory of the Russian Federation, and the political elite can change the legal framework regulating their presence there. On the other hand, ethnic minorities can be a source of instability. Russia is also exploring the sensibilities and socio-economic status of

²⁴ Stephen J Blank, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, and Silk Road Studies Program, Azerbaijan's Security and U.S. Interests: Time for a Reassessment* (Stockholm: Central Asia- Caucasus Institute : Silk Road Studies Program, 2013). p.17.

Azerbaijani minorities in other South Caucasus states. In addition, as the Russian Federation seeks to maintain its geopolitical spheres and impose a favourable order on its own strategic interests, a new dynamic of internal security has emerged in the last decade; a wave of increased insecurity felt by states in the region following the illegal annexation of Crimea and proxy domestic destabilization. Consequently, Azerbaijani society **must maintain and even strengthen absolute internal cohesion** at the level of the institutions of force and the national political class.

An example is Georgia, where Azeri ethnic communities can be found in some provinces. The country's political elite often neglects its interests, but not the Russian Federation. The Kremlin uses this community to influence Georgian society and create instability through propaganda. The Azeri authorities have to collect data and be prepared to come up with solutions to their problems, identify the natural causes of the conflict between the representatives of majorities and minorities, and respond to possible external interference. Such an approach will lead to the anticipation of developments and will change the structure of the conflict, mitigating the impact on society as a whole. If such behaviour is not encouraged by the Azeri leadership, then there is a risk that the hybrid intervention will lead to political and economic instability. Thus, this will create conditions for missing opportunities for integration into foreign trade circuits or simply diminish its options to develop an effective foreign policy. Therefore, one of the options available to the central authority is to produce internal policies capable of strengthening domestic resilience and preventing interference in decision-making, especially that which concerns the construction of national security interests. This means encouraging solid institutions, a clear and transparent government formula that does not offer opportunities for external political pressure.

The above example, in which socially vulnerable groups are penetrated through propaganda and manipulation, requires firm decisions from the authorities. If necessary, they must correctly **identify the source of the messages distributed by the press subject to foreign interests**. In this case, the most challenging task will be combating these messages without affecting individual freedom and the right to correct information, which is a precondition for internal resilience.

In 2013, Russia waged an information war with Ukraine. The cohesion of Ukrainian society in promoting national interests was more substantial than the struggle between domestic political actors concerned with promoting particular interests, namely those of the political elite, and Moscow suffered failure in this information war. Government authorities need to know the needs of their citizens not to dominate the decision-making process but to create conditions for their economic development and ensure their security both within and outside national borders, including to public initiative that aims to protect informational space.

The elements presented above are also found in the first approach. Without ensuring the necessary conditions to avoid direct intervention on the political factor or counteracting propaganda, the institutions cannot be organized, and the necessary resources for mitigating hybrid threats cannot be unblocked. Political actors will think about strategies to ensure their benefits, and national interests will be neglected. The model presented by Moldovan experts also assesses potential threats of military origin: military proximity, military base, border conflicts, and the possibility of external aggression to extend to national territories. The only difference is the order in which the priorities are presented. This model starts from the analysis of internal factors that encourage such behaviours and studies foreign actors who apply active measures. Thus, the experts further propose evaluating the internal and regional critical infrastructure, the access routes for external assistance, and the legislative gaps that could stop the humanitarian and technical assistance from outside, the transport infrastructure, and the economic potential. The biggest challenge will be the correlation of the indicators and the communication organisation between different state institutions with attributions in counteracting such threats. The plans and guidelines that leaders will use need to be updated and adapted to new types of risks and threats.

Both models analyzed in this policy review present a series of threats of military and non-military origin, which combined generate risks and threats. But, being adapted to an individualized experience, i.e., the Republic of Moldova, the second model may be more beneficial to Azerbaijani experts because it presents the set of indicators that need to be considered in formulating a policy to counter hybrid threats. As mentioned earlier, this model offers an analysis perspective that starts from the inside, assesses internal capabilities and only later assesses the extent to which external technical assistance is needed.

Thus, the experts involved in the analysis of hybrid threats and risks should consider the following groups of indicators:

- ***Political life and government structure*** - political stability, legitimacy of the governing act, if it can be challenged by interest groups, independence from external factors, effective foreign policy, well-defined national interests, respect for the principle of separation of powers in the state, participatory process in decision-making, transparency in decision-making, external control of political life, socially-vulnerable groups, propaganda;

- ***Economy*** - the primary source of financial resources to provide the necessary tools to counter hybrid threats. The assessment of economic indicators must formulate not only the sources of economic growth and development but also the chosen model (extensive or intensive economy), dependencies and access to international markets, the economic interests of the main political groups;

- ***Efficient defence and security system*** - indicators in this group refer to factors and vulnerabilities of the military, paramilitary, military proximity, active or frozen conflicts,

participation of partners in collective security organizations, hostilities between actors involved in regional integration processes in competition, critical infrastructure, access to transport routes, military training programs and preparing the population for crises, preparing public institutions to act in emergencies, action plans constantly updated and adapted to new types of threats;

- ***International participation*** - membership in international organizations and alignment with international standards of internal realities, compliance with assumed obligations, correct assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of regional integration formulas proposed by a potential aggressor state, strategic partnerships.

These groups of indicators need to be constantly evaluated and monitored to decide on the rapid allocation of resources to mitigate hybrid warfare. This evaluation exercise aims to obtain relevant data to anticipate measures that may be promoted by an external actor to the country trying to strengthen its internal capabilities. It is important that the data obtained during the monitoring process can reach those government structures involved in counteracting hybrid threats on time. Simpler: to those who make decisions and manage economic resources to ensure the country's national security interests.

In this regard, some ***general recommendations*** are helpful that can contribute to the correct and efficient collection of data and monitoring of the groups of indicators mentioned above:

- A critical and responsible approach regarding the structure of the governing act, in which the main internal stakeholders are involved in discussions to correctly define the regional context, the source of the threats, the impact and the solutions for their prevention;

- Discipline the governmental act and efficient communication between the institutions involved in counteracting the hybrid type threats;

- Establishment of a specialized agency in the field of Early Warning to work independently of the security structures of the state and to provide, in real-time, predictions of risk factors;

- Analysis of internal and external factors that can turn into hybrid threats;

- Correct assessment of the state of critical infrastructure designed to prevent threats and risks of hybrid origin;

- A good assessment of foreign policy priorities and international security, effective presence and cooperation in international fora, sustainable partnerships, expanding the number of external trade and security opportunities, to avoid dependence on a state that applies hybrid warfare;

- Several actions need to be taken at the social and institutional level so that the collection, interpretation, and operationalization of data relevant to the Early Warning process can be carried out, particularly with the help of civil society coordination bodies;

- Reorganization and improvement of internal security agencies so that the crisis response mechanism can be operational as soon as possible after its activation;

- Increase the capacity to respond to potential threats by involving private/civil society agencies in protecting the information of strategic interest to Azerbaijan so that there is clear and precise coordination between the administrative management structure and the society's base;

- Establishment of working groups composed of government and civil society experts to discuss issues related to the elements of internal destabilization;

- Strengthen the partnership between the state and the citizens to ensure cohesion between actions to combat hybrid warfare elements and public perception;

- Increasing the capacity for diplomatic action in areas such as defence, security, economy and culture; only through a diplomatic vanguard can the state project its interests in international formats and defend itself against threats.

In conclusion, our mission was to provide Azerbaijani experts with concepts that can be used to counter EWM proposals. We tried to present two different approaches, but which have the exact source of instability - the Russian Federation.

One model refers to the concepts a group of NATO member states reflects. The second involves assessing how the security of the Republic of Moldova as an aggressed state influences the region (referring directly to the indicators and mechanisms proposed by the NATO expert group).

We consider this policy paper a good start for Azerbaijani experts to launch an advocacy campaign among Azerbaijani policymakers to create such a mechanism. We reiterate that our goal was not to evaluate the indicators included in the Early Warning Mechanism but to contribute to the systematization of the concept of hybrid warfare and the elements that facilitate the application of such measures.

References:

Alexander Bratersky, "Will Russian arms sales survive the Azeri-Armenian conflict?" Defence News, 16 October 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/10/15/will-russian-arms-sales-survive-the-azeri-armenian-conflict/>

Andrzej Wilk, "Eyes west! A shift in focus in Russia's Southern Military District", OSW Commentary, 8 September 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-09-08/eyes-west-a-shift-focus-russias-southern-military-district>

"Armenia wants Russian army outposts on Azerbaijan border amid tensions", Reuters, 29 July 2021,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-armenia-accuse-each-other-ceasefire-violations-2021-07-29/>

Bastian Giegerich, "Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict", research article, Connections Quarterly Journal 15, no. 2 (2016): 65-72
<http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.15.2.05>

"Bogdan Aurescu va solicita la ministeriala OSCE de la Stockholm creșterea eficienței în implementarea mecanismelor de soluționare a conflictelor prelungite din zona Mării Negre", TVR Moldova, 02 December 2021, <http://tvrmdova.md/ro/romania-la-zi/bogdan-aurescu-va-solicita-la-ministeriala-osce-de-la-stockholm-cresterea-eficientei-in-implementarea-mecanismelor-de-soluționare-a-conflictelor-prelungite-din-zona-marii-negre?fbclid=IwAR0TB55o6a0KSdvHSUCtgyHYd7hkW8a5NuOFQjh6KqGXxFi6dofj4F58vxU>

Brian Katz, Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, Nicholas Harrington, "Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies", CSIS, September 2020, <https://russianpmcs.csis.org/>

Dumitru Mînzărari, "A Hybrid War Early Warning Model: Towards an Early Warning Mechanism for the Republic of Moldova", the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), 30 March 2021, Chisinau, <http://ipre.md/2021/03/30/a-hybrid-war-early-warning-model-towards-an-early-warning-mechanism-for-the-republic-of-moldova/?lang=en>

"Executive Order on Interdepartmental Humanitarian Response Centre", President of Russia, 13 November, 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64408>

Jakob Hedenskog, Erika Holmquist and Johan Norberg, "Security in the Caucasus Russian policy and military posture", FOI-R--4567--SE, February 2018, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4567--SE>

John J. McCuen, 'Hybrid Wars', Military Review, no. March-April (2008): 107–13

Kheyreddin Nasirzade, "Azerbaijan develops strategy for cyber security", Trend.az, 17 May 2019, <https://menafn.com/1098534619/Azerbaijan-develops-strategy-for-cyber-security>

Military expenditure (% of GDP) - Azerbaijan, World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=AZ>

Natalia Spînu, "Azerbaijan Cybersecurity Governance Assessment", DCAF, November 2020, <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/AzerbaijanCybersecurityGovernanceAssessment.pdf>

Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Jordan Smith, "Arms transfers to conflict zones: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 30 April 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgroundunder/2021/arms-transfers-conflict-zones-case-nagorno-karabakh>

Stephen J Blank, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, and Silk Road Studies Program, Azerbaijan's Security and U.S. Interests: Time for a Reassessment (Stockholm: Central Asia- Caucasus Institute : Silk Road Studies Program, 2013). p.17.

United Kingdom Government, 'Understanding Hybrid Warfare', 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647776/dar_mcdc_hybrid_warfare.pdf

"Заявление МИД России в связи с годовщиной трехсторонних договоренностей лидеров России, Азербайджана и Армении о прекращении огня в зоне нагорно-карабахского конфликта", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 09 November 2021, Moscow, https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/am/-/asset_publisher/OO85pcnduakp/content/id/4924643

"Заявление Президента Азербайджанской Республики, Премьер-министра Республики Армения и Президента Российской Федерации", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 10 November 2020, Moscow, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>