



The 17th International Scientific Conference
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
IN THE 21st CENTURY”**
Braşov, October 28th-29th 2021



**SHORT COMMUNICATION: THE CORRELATION BETWEEN
WARTIME INFORMATION STRATEGY AND DEFENCE
CAPABILITIES.
THE CASE OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR**

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Abstract:

The Russo-Ukrainian war has undoubtedly caused demand in the arms industry. However, the capabilities of domestic arms markets of warring parties is not a determining factor of the result of the war. Activities in the information sphere are also of great importance, as they often influence the support awarded by the international community. Western arms supplies to Ukraine may serve as a good example of such correlation. The support gained by Ukraine is the result of geopolitical considerations, as well as Kyiv's well thought-out actions in the information environment. This paper aims to explain the correlation between wartime information strategy and defence capabilities in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Key words: the Russo-Ukrainian War; Information Strategy; Strategic Communication; Defence Capabilities; Defence Industry; StratCom; International Community.

1. Introduction

In 2021, global military spending reached a record level of \$2.11 trillion. According to the data published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States was the top nation in terms of arms expenditure, spending \$801 billion for that purpose (See Table 1). As regards Russia, military expenditures increased by 2.9 percent, and accounted for 4.1 percent of its GDP. Ukraine's arms expenditure amounted to \$5.9 billion last year, which corresponded to 3.2 percent of Ukraine's GDP. It should be noted that, since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukrainian defence expenditure grew by 72 percent. [1] The Russo-Ukrainian war has undoubtedly caused demand in the arms industry.

However, the potential of domestic arms markets of warring parties is not a determining factor of the result of the war. Activities in the information sphere are also of great importance here, as they often influence the reaction of the international community. Support from the western states plays a key role in the Russo-Ukrainian war. In the public discourse it is stressed that “America has saved Ukraine from defeat. Without its political and military power, Ukraine would be able to defend itself only for a month. Were it not for President Joe Biden, Ukraine would fall victim to European stupefaction in the face of the energy crisis. Without American arms and ammunition, the country would probably get some post-Soviet equipment from Poland, Lithuania and Estonia, and only extend its agony. But it would ultimately fall.” [2] Support from the international community bolsters Ukrainian defence capabilities. Although it is dictated by obvious geopolitical considerations, the response of the western states also depends on activities in the information environment.



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Rank in 2021	Country	Spending (\$ b.) in 2021	Change (%) in 2020-21
1	United States	801	-1.4
5	Russia	65.9	2.9
36	Ukraine	5.9	-8.5

Table 1. Military expenditures of the United States, Russia and Ukraine in 2021. [3]

2. Ukraine's defence capabilities

Ukraine inherited a sprawling arms industry from the Soviet Union. A substantial portion of the Soviet defence industry's capabilities was located in the territory of Ukraine, and it produced a wide range of products (including tanks, armored vehicles, missiles, ships, aircraft, radars and electronics). In recent years, it underwent profound restructuring and consolidation. The maintenance of these capabilities after the fall of the Soviet Union was a challenge – Ukrainian defence spending accounted for less than one percent of GDP, out of which only 10-11 percent was allocated for the modernisation of Ukraine's army. This led to the bankruptcy of a vast majority of plants. [4]

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the situation of the Ukrainian defence industry has changed. There was a need to rebuild the volume lost as a result of fights in Donbas. Additionally, Ukraine lost 13 plants manufacturing products for export. However, the growing threat from Russia was the main reason to increase expenditure for military purposes, and thus the number of contracts within the domestic market. This was accompanied by an increase in import contracts and arms export. The scope of cooperation with other states was also being extended. For Ukrainians, the suspension of collaboration with Russia meant the loss of an essential foreign market, as well as the loss of a major partner in the sphere of arms production. [5] Despite these challenges, a state-owned corporation called “Ukroboronprom” managed to complete all government contracts by the end of 2014. Currently, “Ukroboronprom” oversees the defence industry, which comprises over 130 state-run companies. [6]

Today, multiple security documents lay out Ukraine's military strategy and defence policy. Ukraine's 2016 Strategic Defense Bulletin outlined several priority reforms to achieve NATO standards, and its subsequent State Program for the Development of the Armed Forces outlined implementation steps. In 2018, the new Law of Ukraine on National Security created a framework to simplify Ukraine's defence planning, as well as to implement civilian control over the army. It required that at least 5% of GDP be spent on security, with 3% of the total going to defence. Economic realities, however, made defence spending in real terms lower – around 2.5% of GDP. Ukraine's defence budget was 117.6 billion hryvnia (\$4.2 billion), 127 million hryvnia (\$4.6 million) less than 2020's budget. Ukrainians updated also their National Security Strategy and their Military Security Strategy in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The first document sets out the main principles of the country's national security, which include, for example, identifying Russia as a long-term threat to Ukraine's national security. Another principle is to develop closer relations with the European Union, NATO, and the United States. The second document replaces Ukraine's 2015 Military Doctrine. The army also continues to improve training. The process is carried out with the support of NATO and the United States, although most training is limited to the battalion level. It should be added that despite this progress, the Ukrainian defence industry still faced serious challenges related to bureaucratic inefficiency, low transparency, corruption and political struggles. [7]



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3. Increasing Ukraine’s defence capabilities through information activities

The war is accompanied by extraordinary disinformation pressure, which requires a coherent and well-thought-out information strategy. Since the beginning of his rule, Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to monopolise the media and subject them to the Kremlin’s influence. Control of the domestic media is crucial for Putin to promote the narrative to unify the nation. In the international arena, however, the Kremlin is trying not to monopolise its version of “truth”, but to undermine the credibility of foreign media and hit the international community with a wave of alternative information aimed at social disintegration. As a consequence, the Ukrainian information strategy must be directed not only to the citizens of warring countries, but also to the international community. In the case of Ukraine, information activities addressed to the citizens were aimed at boosting morale, bringing faith in victory, and motivating Ukrainian society. Through the wartime information strategy, the citizens’ readiness to fight increased, which was demonstrated by the surge of volunteers wishing to join the territorial defence forces since the initial days of Russia’s invasion. A coherent information strategy has developed the national unity, and consequently the local support system. It became apparent that information from the front line alone is not as important as messages which would bring hope to Ukrainian society.

As mentioned, the wartime information strategy is directed not only to the citizens of warring countries, but also to the international community. The support gained by Ukraine is the result of geopolitical considerations, as well as Kyiv’s actions in the information environment. An example is the media coverage, in which Ukrainians particularly emphasize the effectiveness of anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons acquired from western countries. Such a narrative encourages the West to increase supplies. Reporting on Russian war crimes has also provoked various states to express solidarity and support. It was necessary due to the initial ambiguous reactions of the international community. At the beginning of the Russian invasion, some western countries evidently postponed their decisions. Their reactions were cautious, and even disappointing at times. Russia’s brutal invasion has exposed European states’ diverging views of Moscow. Some of them were afraid that any support given to Ukraine would cause relationships with Russia to deteriorate. The potential consequences of the war, and Ukrainian communication measures gradually changed the approach of the international community. Currently, many countries are sending weapons and other military equipment to Ukraine, and generously providing housing and education to the millions of Ukrainians who have fled the war. Between 2014 and 2021, financial support for Ukraine was provided, inter alia, in the form of grants from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (€1.7 billion), in the form of loans as part of the macro-financial assistance programme (€5.6 billion), as humanitarian aid (€194 million), and through foreign policy instruments (€355 million). Since 2014, loans granted to Ukraine by the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have amounted to over €10 billion. [8] Today, this support is also accompanied by unequivocal assurances that all available resources will be used to assist in stopping Russian aggression. The West has also declared solidarity. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken expressed his conviction that the West’s unity over Ukraine would be maintained, and that the United States would support Ukraine for as long as it takes. Statements by NATO representatives also show that a uniform approach is costly, but without it the West would pay an even higher price. [9]

4. Conclusions

The post-Cold War era placed the defence industry at the crossroads. After World War II, most countries considered the Defence Industrial Base to be the main feature of their security policy. Nations preferred to maintain their own defence industries, constantly ready to respond to threats. This helped planners and defence companies – they had clear priorities, relatively stable programmes and long-term horizons. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, defence spending



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fell. The turning point for Ukraine was the Russian annexation of Crimea. In 2014, the Ukrainian army, which had been weakened by years of neglect and underfunding, faced the undeniable threat posed by Russia. Since then, the Ukrainian armed forces have made significant progress. They made efforts to adopt NATO standards and received considerable help from the West. They also carried out reforms at tactical and strategic levels, related to political and military activities. However, this progress is not enough in the fight against the enemy. The support of the international community turned out to be extremely necessary, and this support was determined not only by geopolitics, but also by the wartime information strategy.

Operations in the information domain may provide favourable conditions for military activities. Ukrainian wartime information strategy – based on maintaining Ukrainians readiness to fight, emphasizing the effectiveness of weapons received from the West, as well as informing about Russian war crimes – boosted morale, exposed Russian propaganda and influenced the international community. There is therefore a clear correlation between wartime information strategy and defence capabilities. An effectively implemented information policy may contribute to the building of a supporting context and may be decisive for universal mobilisation. The Russo-Ukrainian war demonstrates that activities in the information environment have a great impact on the effectiveness of battlefield operations.

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