

The Intelligence Importance in the War in Ukraine – A HUMINT Perspective to the Human Terrain

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Abstract. *The war in Ukraine provides invaluable lessons for global diplomacy and nations' foreign policy and national security, military assistance and operations planning and execution, strategic communication and deterrence, cybersecurity, the global economy, the energy market, and the effects of soft-power sanctions. What are less visible and are still analysed in line with the operational tempo, are observations and lessons with critical importance in adapting the military power (among the other instruments of power) in gaining desired effects on the battlefield. In this large-scale multi-domain operation, intelligence collection is vital, with various assets such as HUMINT, CYBERINT, MASINT, and OSINT contributing to situational awareness. HUMINT, in particular, operates in local communities within the Area of Intelligence Interest, emphasizing the importance of understanding the "human terrain" and the roots of the conflict based on history, language, ethnicity, and border issues. This understanding shapes the principles of HUMINT organisation, interactions with local communities and organisations, operational security, and counterintelligence measures. The paper provides an empirical analysis of the human terrain, based on open-source reports and war stories, and following several lines of the HUMINT tradecraft. It aims to engage the HUMINT professional community in multidisciplinary analysis of human factors, defence scenario modelling in complex human terrain, and simulating HUMINT activities in hybrid warfare conditions. To address the evolving landscape of warfare, it is crucial to upgrade training and exercising settings, focusing on individual knowledge and skills, especially concerning emerging and disrupting technologies that impact modern warfare tactics, techniques, and procedures.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Intelligence, HUMINT, human terrain, human geography*

Introduction

Intelligence plays a crucial role in any armed conflict, and the war in Ukraine is no exception. Intelligence operations consisting of gathering and analysis of data are vital for both sides involved in the conflict. Additionally, other states and organisations are involved in collection process for a series of valid reasons.

In the wake of the Ukrainian war, intelligence disclosure by Western countries has become a critical tool for shedding light on the conflict's dynamics, revealing Russia's covert actions, and informing international responses. NATO and the Western countries have utilised various intelligence, diplomatic, and military channels to monitor, assess, and communicate information related to the initiation and continuation of the conflict in Ukraine.

Early warning information was shared with international partners and organisations through diplomatic channels, including the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – since its deployment in Ukraine in 2014,

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following a request by Kyiv, and the engagement in the Trilateral Contact Group¹ – to raise awareness, build consensus, coordinate military support and humanitarian response (to include the management of the refugees), impose sanctions (and advocate for international sanctions), support war crimes prosecution, and seek resolution to the conflict.

Public opinion on Russia's war against Ukraine² is another important element. Widespread awareness and public confidence (following disclosure of classified intelligence) ensured the success of the US and European support to Ukraine³.

The paper further provides an overview of the Intelligence function in war (with a practical example from Ukraine), pointing out the in-theatre intelligence function versus persistent surveillance and strategic collection performed by the concerned powers. In the second stage, the focus turns to the human terrain in a conflict, where human intelligence (HUMINT) collection has a major stake, by engaging the local population in its effort to collect valuable information.

The Intelligence functions in a conflict

The primary function of intelligence in military operations is to offer commanders a comprehensive view of key aspects within the operational environment. Information gathered from various sources is processed and converted into intelligence that answers the commander's information requirements, ultimately influencing the decision-making process.

Intelligence collection is planned and directed, and the resulting data and information are processed by analysts, who contribute to the production and dissemination of various intelligence products (summaries, assessments, problem profiles, subject profiles, human network analysis, prognoses, etc.). The representation of the intelligence cycle may vary; as a difference to the US strategic interpretation (**Fig. 1**), NATO integrates Processing & Exploitation with Analysis & Production under a Processing step, which undertakes the products resulting from the Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (JISR) results for collation, interpretation, evaluation, analysis, integration, and production.

Information gathering is built on the methodologies of various single-source collection disciplines, either based on technical sensors (signal intelligence – SIGINT, measurement and signature intelligence – MASINT, imagery intelligence – IMINT), human sources (HUMINT), digital figures (cyber intelligence – CYBERINT), or publicly available information (open-source intelligence – OSINT), completed by the output of surveillance (*the persistent monitoring of a target*) and reconnaissance (*information-gathering conducted to answer a specific military question*)⁴. The ratio of each collection capability's

¹ “Ukraine War ‘Most Severe’ Test Ever for European Security Body,” *UN News*, 14 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113912>.

² European Parliament, “Public Opinion on Russia's War against Ukraine,” accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/public-opinion-on-the-war-in-ukraine>.

³ General Hockenfull, Commander Strategic Command, “How Open-Source Intelligence Has Shaped the Russia-Ukraine War” (Speech RUSI Members Webinar), 9 December 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-open-source-intelligence-has-shaped-the-russia-ukraine-war>.

⁴ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, “Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance,” accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111830.htm.

contribution to the operational picture varies based on the type or phase of the operation, the mission's objectives and end state, the availability of the collection assets, and their coverage.

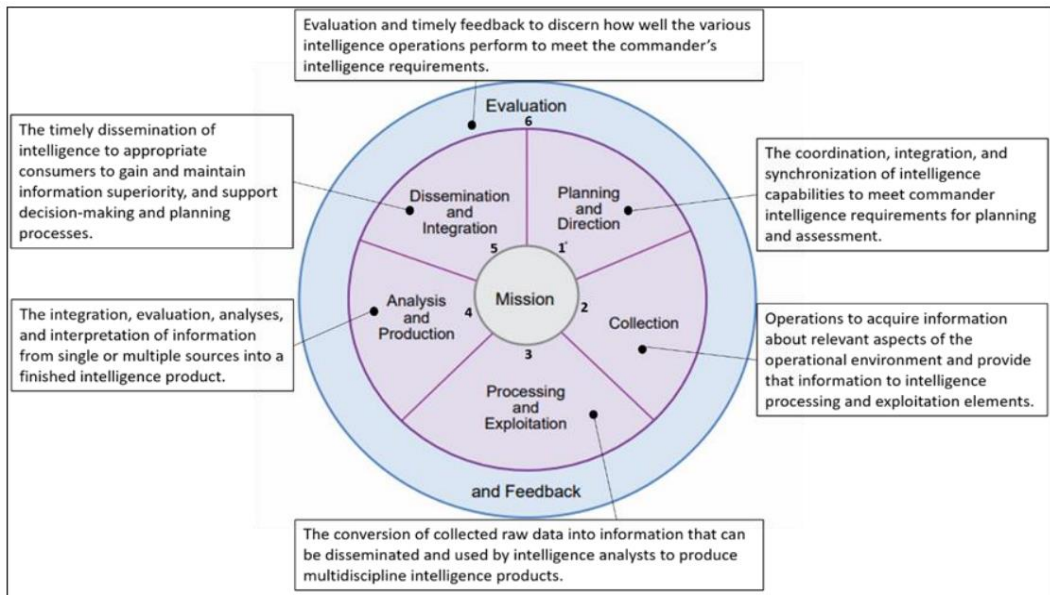


Figure 1. The US Joint Intelligence Process⁵

At the military level, strategic collection on the adversaries during peacetime is rather based on military intelligence liaison, OSINT, and, to a certain extent, other Intelligence gathering means. Until the Ukraine war, having Western countries and NATO confronted mostly with threats coming from non-state actors, made Lt Gen Samuel Wilson, former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), stating that “Ninety percent of intelligence comes from open sources. The other 10 percent, the clandestine work, is just the more dramatic. The real intelligence hero is Sherlock Holmes, not James Bond.”⁶ Nowadays, Bond is back in business, and Holmes has a major problem with the credibility of the publicly available information, corrupted by the malign objectives of cognitive warfare⁷ and boosted by the development of digital technologies⁸.

In the complex web of ISR sensors (**Fig. 2**), Intelligence agencies and organisations use a combination of these assets to gather a comprehensive understanding of threats,

⁵ Nishawn S. Smagh, “Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Design for Great Power Competition,” *Congressional Research Service Report R46389* (4 June 2020): 4, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/intel/R46389.pdf>.

⁶ See Michael T. Flynn, Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,” Center for a New American Security (January 2010): 23.

⁷ Alexandru Kis, “A Projection of the Cognitive Warfare in Human Intelligence,” under publication in the Proceedings of the International Conference *STRATEGIES XXI*, National Defense University Carol I Bucharest, (27–28 June 2023).

⁸ Bobby Allyn, “Deepfake Video of Zelenskyy Could Be ‘Tip of the Iceberg’ in Info War, Experts Warn,” *NPR*, 16 March 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/16/1087062648/deepfake-video-zelenskyy-experts-war-manipulation-ukraine-russia>.

opportunities, and potential actions by adversaries. The choice of discipline depends on the nature of the intelligence task and the available resources and capabilities.

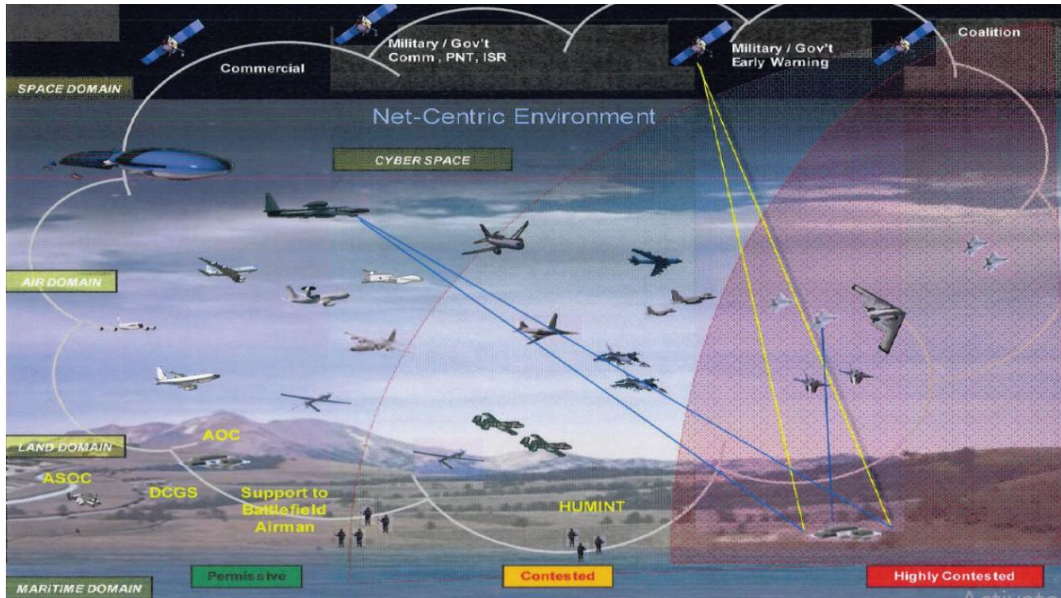


Figure 2. An integrated ISR operational view across domains in permissive, contested, and highly contested environment⁹

At the same time, there is an open competition to improve the current capabilities and to innovate, to ensure Intelligence superiority.

Intelligence in the warfare; examples from Ukraine's war

In the ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) spectrum, Intelligence provides political leaders and military commanders at all levels with real-time information about the evolving situation in the operational environment, based on the information collected by various sensors. This includes details on troop movements, enemy positions, logistics, supply lines, and even troops' morale and intentions of the enemy.

Having accurate and up-to-date situational awareness and understanding the challenge is critical for making informed decisions and adapting resources and strategies in a dynamic conflict like the one in Ukraine. Situational awareness in Ukraine is supported by a web of sensors. Besides the surveillance and reconnaissance that has a certain level of dependency on air superiority (**Fig. 3**), other critical collection assets contribute with specific products to the operational picture, like HUMINT, CYBERINT, or OSINT.

⁹ National Research Council, *Capability Planning and Analysis to Optimize Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Investments* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2012), figure 2–1, accessed October 21, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.17226/13421>.

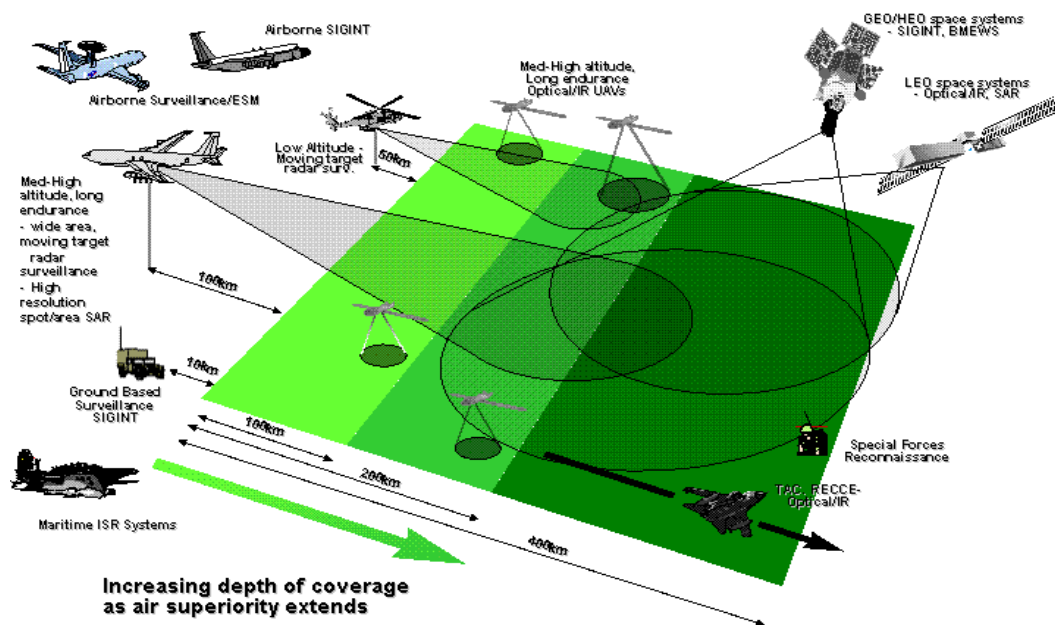


Figure 3. Theatre-wide surveillance and reconnaissance¹⁰

In the course of active combat operations, ISR plays a dual role. It offers targeting information for engaging enemy forces with weapon systems and supplies threat data to safeguard friendly forces.

Intelligence helps **identify high-value targets**, such as enemy commanders, key infrastructure, high-payoff military assets, or supply depots. The rate of Russian generals killed or injured (by sniper shots, artillery or missile strikes, or anti-aircraft missile strikes) is unprecedented in the Ukraine war¹¹ (based on information retrieved from SIGINT interception,¹² or HUMINT information regarding their presence at a determined location and time¹³). However, other collection capabilities (IMINT, MASINT, etc.) are intensively employed to detect and identify the enemy's complex weaponry.

Besides satellites and drones, human sources have been also widely used by both parties in identifying and marking locations of key infrastructure or important military

¹⁰ John L. Mahaffey, "Observations in the Dissemination of Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Data and Information within a Coalition Environment," accessed October 22, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Theatre-Wide-ISR-Systems_fig1_228559973.

¹¹ As is the case for the Russian generals, killed at a high rate. See Jack Detsch, "Winging It: Russia Is Getting Its Generals Killed on the Front Lines," *Foreign Policy*, 21 March 2022, accessed October 22, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/21/russia-generals-dead-ukraine>.

¹² Tom Porter, "Ukraine Killed a Russian General after He Made an Unsecured Call that Gave Away His Location, Report Says," *Business Insider*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-general-killed-after-ukraine-intercepted-unsecured-call-nyt-2022-3>.

¹³ George-Andrei Cristescu, "Noi detalii asupra atacului cu rachete de la Sevastopol. Zeci de morți și răniți. Soarta comandantului Flotei ruse a Mării Negre, incertă" [New details on the rocket attack at Sevastopol. Tens dead and injured. The faith of the Black Sea Fleet commander unclear], *Adevărul*, 23 September 2023, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/europa/noi-detalii-asupra-atacului-cu-rachete-de-la-2302488.html>.

assets, validating targets, or reporting the measure of effectiveness. Hundreds of suspects for actively supporting Russia have been arrested by the Ukrainian authorities only in the first 6 months of the conflict; collaborators have reported the locations of Ukrainian targets like garrisons or ammunition depots, sheltered Russian officers and informed on Ukrainian activists in Russian-occupied areas, or even had removed explosives from bridges, allowing Russian troops to cross.¹⁴

Anyway, Ukraine has been the subject of intensive Russian covert actions since 2014 (with the occupation of Crimea and initiation of the conflict in Donbas), also a key date since when Western intelligence agencies started training Ukrainian counterparts;¹⁵ military **counterintelligence** remained essential during the active phase of the conflict, in its efforts to detect and counter-espionage,¹⁶ sabotage,¹⁷ and subversion¹⁸ attempts by the enemy, to maintain the integrity of its forces, and prevent security breaches.

Further, **understanding the enemy's intentions** is crucial for countering their moves effectively. Intelligence strives to analyse the enemy's objectives, decision-making processes, and potential actions, as well as its resources and morale. This information allows military leaders to anticipate and respond to threats proactively. Sometimes, **actionable intelligence** is hardly obtained, as was the case for the difficult Ukrainian counter-offensive of 2023; the penetration of the Russian defensive lines was possible only through combat reconnaissance (performed by ground troops formations supported by drones and artillery), meant to test the weakest points of the defence, suitable for penetration and exploitation.

Regarding the evaluation of the Russian **troops' morale**,¹⁹ two main sources have shown the state of it in the ranks of various military formations, or its evolution in time: SIGINT interceptions of unsecured phone calls of the Russian troops contacting their families, and interrogation of the prisoners of war. Both sources also contribute to the instrumentation of war crimes²⁰.

Overall, morale in warfare matters not only in the military but also at the nation's level or local communities, which can be supportive of the war effort or may act to determine a

¹⁴ Andrew E. Kramer and Valerie Hopkins, "Zelensky Takes Aim at Hidden Enemy: Ukrainians Aiding Russia," *New York Times*, 18 July 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/18/world/europe/zelensky-ukraine-russian-spies.html>.

¹⁵ Gordon Corera, "Ukraine: The Spy War within the War," *BBC*, 14 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61311026>.

¹⁶ Tom Balmforth and Max Hunder, "Sideline of Spy Chief Spotlights Ukraine's Battle to Purge Russian Agents," *Reuters*, 19 July 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sideline-spy-chief-spotlights-ukraines-battle-purge-russian-agents-2022-07-18/>.

¹⁷ Paul Sonne, Missy Ryan, and John Hudson, "Russia Planning Potential Sabotage Operations in Ukraine, U.S. Says," *The Washington Post*, 14 January 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russia-ukraine-invasion-sabotage-operations/2022/01/14/769314a2-754f-11ec-8ec6-9d61f7afbe17_story.html.

¹⁸ Ukrainska Pravda, "Security Service of Ukraine Neutralises Subversion and Reconnaissance Group that Prepared Assassinations of Commanders of Special Operations Forces," *Yahoo!news*, 9 November 2022, <https://news.yahoo.com/security-ukraine-neutralises-subversion-reconnaissance-081928090.html>.

¹⁹ Helene Cooper, Julian E. Barnes, and Eric Schmitt, "As Russian Troop Deaths Climb, Morale Becomes an Issue, Officials Say," *New York Times*, 16 March 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/us/politics/russia-troop-deaths.html>.

²⁰ "New York Times Reveals Details of Russian Soldiers' Calls," *Al Jazeera*, 29 December 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/29/nyt-reveals-details-of-intercepted-russian-soldiers-calls>.

political will to cease fighting. The people's attitude is subjected to influence through the means of psychological operations (PSYOPS) and information operations (INFOPS), as part of a more extended **cognitive warfare**²¹. Intelligence supports PSYOPS and INFOPS by providing information and analysis to enhance their effectiveness, by gathering information about the target audience, assessing their attitudes and vulnerabilities, and measuring effectiveness, or locating, monitoring, and transcribing threat communications²². The war in Ukraine witnessed the massive use of cognitive warfare as a part of hybrid warfare strategies by both parties, seeking to shape public opinion, demoralise enemy soldiers and civilians (see either the Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure – energy, hospitals, schools, etc., with the prospect of committing war crimes²³ or active propaganda²⁴), and gain international support through legal means²⁵.

The cognitive warfare also highlighted the significance of a whole-of-society approach to hybrid warfare, by leveraging informational competition of the warring parties on social media platforms²⁶, and demanding competent **social media intelligence** and engagement of the population in supporting various **collection platforms** by spotting the enemy (e.g. Diia application²⁷). On the other hand, **cyber intelligence** is meant to prevent and counter cyber means for espionage, disruption of public services and military actions, propaganda, etc.

Intelligence is not only about military operations but also about ensuring the safety and well-being of civilians (**support to human security**)²⁸. It helps in identifying areas with vulnerable communities, enabling humanitarian organisations to plan and deliver aid effectively and ensure the evacuation of civilians.

Intelligence is not limited to the battlefield. It also plays a significant role in shaping diplomatic and political strategies. Gathering information on the intentions and capabilities of negotiating parties helps in consultation, international diplomacy, and decision-making at the national level, or influences it on the international stage. President Volodymyr Zelensky has been making huge diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine, by touring capitals and summits and trying to keep Ukraine on top of the international agenda; any

²¹ Kis, “A Projection of the Cognitive Warfare...”

²² Headquarters, Department of the Army, “Chapter 7. Intelligence and Electronic Warfare Support to Psychological Operations,” in *FM 34-36 Special Operations Forces Intelligence and Electronic Warfare Operations* (Washington, DC, 30 September 1991), accessed October 23, 2023, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm34-36/ch7.htm>.

²³ Stephanie van den Berg, “Explainer: When Are Attacks on Civilian Infrastructure War Crimes?” *Reuters*, 16 December 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/when-are-attacks-civilian-infrastructure-war-crimes-2022-12-16/>.

²⁴ Vera Bergengruen, “Inside the Kremlin’s Year of Ukraine Propaganda,” *Time*, 22 February 2023, <https://time.com/6257372/russia-ukraine-war-disinformation/>.

²⁵ Koichiro Takagi, “The Future of China’s Cognitive Warfare: Lessons from the War in Ukraine,” *War on the Rocks. Texas National Security Review*, 22 July 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/the-future-of-chinas-cognitive-warfare-lessons-from-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

²⁶ Vera Bergengruen, “How Telegram Became the Digital Battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine War,” *Time*, 21 March 2022, <https://time.com/6158437/telegram-russia-ukraine-information-war/>.

²⁷ Yaroslav Druziuk, “A Citizen-Like Chatbot Allows Ukrainians to Report to the Government when they Spot Russian Troops — Here’s How It Works,” *Business Insider*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-military-e-enemy-telegram-app-2022-4>.

²⁸ Alexandru Kis, “Human Security – A Cross-Cutting Topic in Military Operations. A Study Case for HUMINT in NATO,” *Studia Securitatis* volume XVII, no. 2/2023 (Sibiu) (27 October 2023).

negotiation or request for military, economic, and political support is backed by solid preparation on the existent opportunities and sensitiveness of each encounter, supporting the adaptation of the approach to attain maximum effects.

The outer (foreign) Intelligence

Western countries have shared intelligence with Kyiv since before the invasion, with caution to not revealing sources and escalate the conflict;²⁹ anyway, Russia accuses Western backing after each Ukrainian successful strike on high-profile targets (the attack on the Black Sea Fleet headquarters,³⁰ the killing of the Russian military blogger Vladlen Tatarski,³¹ coordination of HIMARS missile strikes,³² etc.).

Foreign intelligence liaison supporting Ukraine's political and strategic leadership requires a cautious approach. Simply receiving foreign intelligence isn't beneficial unless a military possesses the analytical capability to merge it into a comprehensive intelligence assessment, and here is the recognised merit of the Ukrainian military to have effectively blended foreign intelligence cooperation with sovereign collection and analysis (diligently built since 2014), proving their proficiency and competence.³³

If the direct Western Intelligence support across all military domains does not clearly emerge from political and public declarations or recognised evidence on targeting, its contribution to countering Russia's cognitive warfare is a fact. K. Takagi points out the U.S. prebuttal strategy, sharing classified information to bring public attention to Putin's intention to invade Ukraine before the conflict started. This strategy has received acclaim in numerous articles for its effectiveness: it undermined the credibility of Russia's strategic narrative ahead of time and promoted a sense of unity among democratic nations, resulting in tangible assistance for Ukraine.³⁴

On the other hand, NATO intelligence collection provides early warning regarding military developments in Ukraine; it shapes the Alliance's military response, such as the deployment of troops and equipment to the region to reinforce its eastern flank. Western countries and NATO have a legitimate stake in gathering information to monitor the evolving situation in Ukraine, which is essential for assessing the risk of further escalation, maintaining regional stability, and demonstrating credible deterrence.

²⁹ Cahal Milmo, "Western Intelligence Passed to Ukrainians with Key Data Missing to Prevent Russian Claims of NATO Interference," *inews*, 8 March 2022, <https://inews.co.uk/news/ukraine-western-intelligence-data-russia-nato-interference-1504727>.

³⁰ Illia Novikov, "Russia Accuses Ukraine's Western Allies of Helping Attack Its Black Sea Fleet Headquarters," *Washington Times*, 27 September 2023, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/sep/27/russia-accuses-ukraines-western-allies-of-helping-/>.

³¹ Katharina Krebs, "Putin Accuses Western Intelligence of Involvement with 'Terrorist Attacks' in Russia, Citing No Evidence," *CNN*, 5 April 2023, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-04-05-23/h_3f502eb6e1416cf0230893c13826d420.

³² Guy Faulconbridge and Nick Macfie, "Russia Says the United States Is Directly Involved in Ukraine War," *Reuters*, 2 August 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-united-states-is-directly-involved-ukraine-war-2022-08-02/>.

³³ Neeven Shaaban Abdalla et al., "Intelligence and the War in Ukraine: Part 2," *War on the Rocks*, 19 May 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/intelligence-and-the-war-in-ukraine-part-2/>.

³⁴ Takagi.

Border issues, population, and identity in the Ukrainian war

History, geography, and population are at the heart of the Ukraine war's story. Additionally to the historical claimed "rights" of Russia over the Ukrainian territories,³⁵ its position between Russia and the European and NATO spheres of influence is often cited as a main source of friction. Linked to the territory, the Ukrainian-Russian identity dynamics has been a complex and multifaceted issue.

The communist era played a crucial role in shaping identities in the Soviet Union's republics, and Eastern Europe's nations. At that time, there was an attempt to create a unified Soviet identity which often downplayed national distinctions ("the new Soviet man," in fact a *homo sovieticus* with multiple variations³⁶). The shared Soviet past resulted in a degree of commonality between Ukrainian and Russian identities, especially in the border areas where people had similar historical experiences. Even nowadays, Russian propaganda has a consistent influence in various communities and groups (not only in Ukraine), encouraged by local audience's cognitive and psychological vulnerability, ideological activism (the so-called "fifth column"³⁷), or local political interest/ corruption.

In 2014, a prevalent sense of nostalgia for the Soviet era persisted in the densely industrialised and urbanised Donbas region. Here, the post-World War II Soviet Union was idealised as a period of glory, especially in contrast to the swift economic decline experienced in the 1990s. Over the years, local politicians had consistently conveyed that revitalizing Donbas and returning it to prosperity lay in re-establishing connections with Russia. In this narrative, Ukrainian independence was portrayed as the root cause of all the region's hardships.³⁸ But independence also nurtured nationalist sentiments, which equally played a role in shaping identities. At the same time, the status of Crimea, an autonomous republic within Ukraine, had been a contentious issue. Crimea has a significant Russian-speaking population, and the majority of the population identified closely with Russia.

Across Ukraine, in the context of the tensions with Russia, Russian-speaking Ukrainians have faced discrimination and suspicions of disloyalty, often leading to a sense of alienation³⁹. The government's policies aimed at promoting the Ukrainian language have sometimes exacerbated these tensions, sparking disputes over nationalism and identity. In

³⁵ Russia conquered southern Ukraine and Crimea from the Ottoman Empire in the 18th Century; in 1954, Crimea was handed to Ukraine as a gift by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who was himself half-Ukrainian. Russia claims that the Donbas region, which includes Donetsk and Luhansk, is historically and rightfully part of Russia. Russia credits itself as being the sole successor of the medieval Kyivan Rus and laying claims to all of the lands it controlled. See Oleg Sukhov, "How Russia Steals and Rewrites Ukrainian History to Justify Its Claims in Ukraine," *Yahoo!news*, 13 June 2023, <https://news.yahoo.com/russia-steals-rewrites-ukrainian-history-204310744.html>.

³⁶ Octavian Țicu, *Homo Moldovanus Sovietic. Teorii și practici de construcție identitară în R(A)SSM (1924–1989)* [The Soviet Homo Moldovanus. Theories and practices for identity construction in R(A)SSM (1924–1989)] (Chișinău: Editura ARC, 2019).

³⁷ Phillip A. Petersen et al., "We Are at War, What's Not to Understand!" in *The Eastern Front in World War 3*, ed. Phillip A. Petersen (Warsawa: Tetragon, 2022), 44–49.

³⁸ Yulia Abibok, "The "Russian Minority in Donbas" and the History of the Majority," in *European Boundaries and Divides*, *IWMpost* 129 (2022), accessed November 02, 2023, <https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-russian-minority-in-donbas-and-the-history-of-the-majority>.

³⁹ Ievghen Afanasiev et al., "Ukraine Agonizes over Russian Culture and Language in Its Social Fabric," *NPR*, 2 June 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1101712731/russia-invasion-ukraine-russian-language-culture-identity>.

this respect, most Ukrainians view the war as a struggle for national identity and independence, while others fear that it is leading to the marginalisation of minority groups, especially Russians.

Divisive perceptions have been further alimented by media, including television and online sources, with Russian and Ukrainian media sources often presenting opposing narratives, contributing to a diverse range of perspectives in the border regions. After Crimea take-over and eruption of the conflict in Donbas, identity ambiguity still persisted. People in the government-controlled areas of the region blamed Ukraine for their situation, as much as they blamed Russia, feeling themselves left behind by Kiev and fearing extension of the conflict. On the other hand, the Ukrainian government and the West were held responsible for the conflict by majority of population in Donbas' self-declared republics (in line with Moscow's propaganda).⁴⁰ Anyway, in many situations, ambivalence is reflected by respondents of surveys who answer the questions according to which part is asking, being more interested in their welfare than in political orientation, influenced by economic considerations, historical ties, and geopolitical developments (e.g. in which country they are going to live).⁴¹

Nonetheless true, since the Euromaidan protests in 2013–2014, there has been a strong pro-European and pro-Western sentiment among a significant portion of the Ukrainian population. Many Ukrainians aspire for closer integration with the European Union and have a positive sentiment toward Western countries. These aspirations are doubled by more prominent Ukrainian national identity and language,⁴² coupled with a strong sense of national pride. This sentiment was particularly manifested in the western and central regions of the country, but spread after Russia's invasion and the success of Ukrainian military resistance, along with anti-Russian sentiment.

At the level of various ethnic minorities (**Fig. 4**), attitudes toward the conflict with Russia can vary significantly. It's important to recognise that the opinions of minority groups are not monolithic and can be influenced by many factors, as observed above (historical ties, cultural identities, geographic location, and individual perspectives).

Ethnic Russians living in Ukraine can hold a wide range of views. Naturally, most of them have pro-Russian sentiments, family ties and friends across the border, and support Russia's actions in Ukraine, particularly in the eastern regions. Others may have lived peacefully in Ukraine for generations and prefer a nonviolent resolution to the conflict.

⁴⁰ Wilson Center, "Public Opinion in the Divided Donbas: Results of a January 2022 Survey on Both Sides of the Contact Line" (Debate John O'Loughlin, Gwendolyn Sasse, and Gerard Toal, 23 February 2022), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/public-opinion-divided-donbas-results-january-2022-survey-both-sides-contact-line>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² If 68% of Ukrainians considered the Ukrainian language as their mother tongue, only 50% speak it in the family, and only 39% at the workplace. See "Langues en Ukraine: loi Kivalov-Kolesnichenko invalidée," *Ukraine Action*, 10 March 2018, <https://ukraineaction.org/2018/03/10/langues-en-ukraine-loi-kivalov-kolesnichenko-invalidée/>.

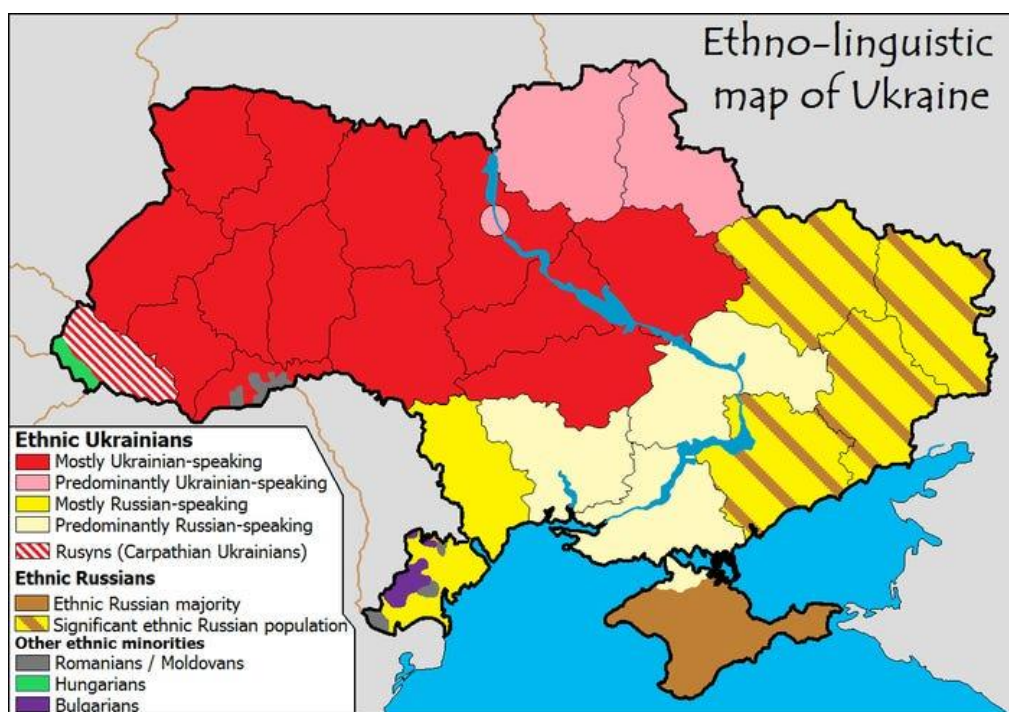


Figure 4. Ethno-linguistic map of Ukraine⁴³

The Crimean Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group native to Crimea, have a complex relationship with the conflict. Many Crimean Tatars strongly opposed Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and continue to resist Russian rule. They have faced discrimination and persecution under Moscow's control, which has contributed to negative attitudes toward Russia and the conflict.

Hungary and Romania have sizable minorities in western Ukraine. These communities may have concerns about the conflict's impact on their cultural and linguistic rights and may seek support from their home countries.⁴⁴ To a certain extent, their enthusiasm to fight in a war that apparently does not belong to them is low.⁴⁵ The Polish ethnic minority, particularly in western Ukraine, retains strong cultural ties with Poland (which is fully supportive to Ukraine's defensive efforts). While the understanding pattern and attitude of the mother countries may influence the minorities' position, it is also clear that Moscow is active in sowing discord between Ukraine and the neighbour countries with consistent minorities over the border.

⁴³ Harrison Jacobs, "This Map Explains Why Ukraine Is so Divided over Russia," *Business Insider*, 1 March 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/this-map-explains-why-russia-is-invading-crimea-2014-3>.

⁴⁴ Erika Solomon, "In Ukraine, a Minority Group Feels Ambivalence about the War," *New York Times*, 16 June 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/16/world/europe/ethnic-hungarians-ukraine-war.html>.

⁴⁵ Valentin Busuioc, "Războiul din Ucraina: Românii din Bucovina de Nord nu vor să lupte într-un conflict ce nu îi privește" [The war In Ukraine: Romanians from North-Bucovina don't want to fight in a war that does not belong to them], *Ziarul Bursa Politică*, 29 July 2014, <https://www.bursa.ro/razboiul-din-ucraina-romanii-din-bucovina-de-nord-nu-vor-sa-lupte-intr-un-conflict-ce-nu-ii-priveste-06413420>.

Features of the Ukraine’s conflict “human terrain”

One of the most significant consequences of the Ukraine’s war has been the displacement of numerous communities. As violence escalated and many localities were destroyed or partially devastated, people from various ethnic backgrounds found themselves fleeing their homes in search of safety. This displacement has affected Ukrainians (including Russian ethnics), Crimean Tatars, and others alike. Despite international support, the refugees’ situation remains serious⁴⁶, while the internally displaced persons (IDPs) often face challenges in accessing basic services, education, and employment, compounding their already dire situation (**Fig. 5**).

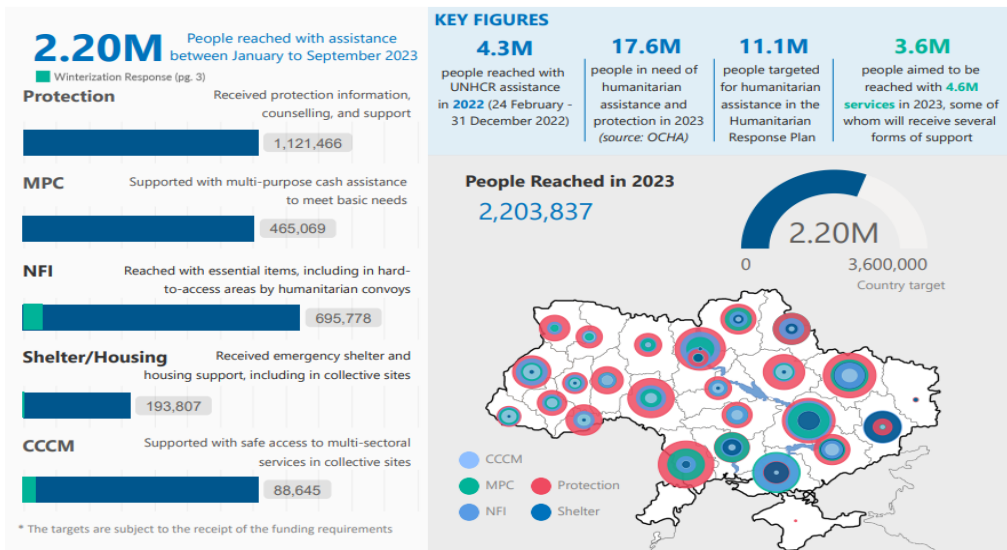


Figure 5. Key figures for the UNHCR’s support to Ukraine⁴⁷

Some attacks on the country’s critical infrastructure have affected the entire nation, including areas far from the frontlines. Moreover, humanitarian aid could hardly reach areas most affected by the hostilities, depriving the population stuck there of basic needs.

The communities’ condition in the Russian-occupied areas fluctuates, and it affects the civil factor’s parameters for mission analysis. M. Mirovalev identifies three different strategies of Moscow regarding the local population, by areas of interest⁴⁸ (**Fig. 6**):

a) in Donbas, partially controlled by separatists since 2014, Moscow used the scorched earth tactic and preferred to send younger residents to Russia to repopulate its regions with low birthrates, bad local economies, and excessive alcoholism and crime. Ukrainian authorities record this as forced deportation.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, “UNHCR Updates Ukraine Refugee Data, Reflecting Recent Movements,” 09 June 2022, accessed November 03, 23, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/unhcr-updates-ukraine-refugee-data-reflecting-recent-movements>.

⁴⁷ UNHCR, “Monthly Operational Update – Ukraine,” September 2023, accessed November 04, 23, https://www.unhcr.org/ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2023/10/2023-UNHCR-Response-September-Monthly-report_ENG-final.pdf.

⁴⁸ Mansur Mirovalev, “What Is Life Like in Russia-Occupied Areas of Ukraine?” *Al Jazeera*, 4 July 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/4/whats-life-like-in-russia-occupied-parts-of-ukraine>.

b) in Kherson, Zaporizhia, and parts of the Kharkiv region adjacent to the Russian border, Moscow attempts to create loyalty and legitimate it through fake referendums. At the same time, residents are being persuaded into submission with food handouts and the promises of tax breaks, higher pensions, and other advantages.

c) in the areas north of Kyiv, Russia did not try to create loyalists and relied on terror and mass crimes towards civilians, labelled as “neo-Nazis” who approve the alleged “genocide” of Russian-speaking residents of the Donbas.

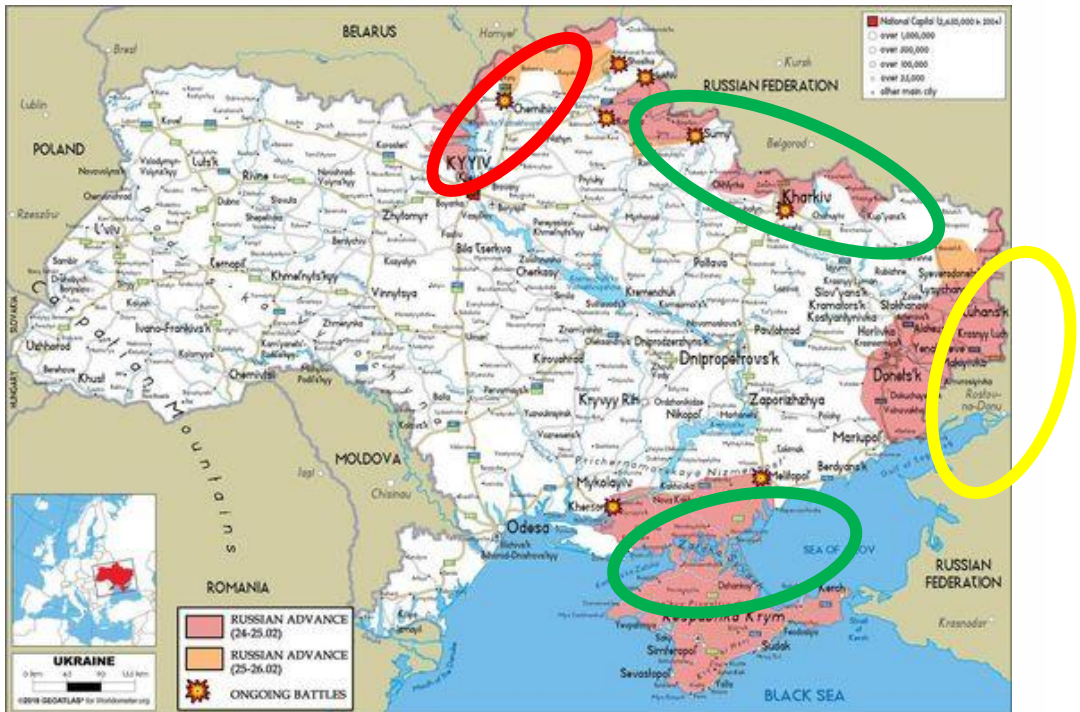


Figure 6. Russia’s directions of attack and influence on the local population⁴⁹

Anyway, even in the areas where Moscow appointed loyal officials, instructed to treat locals with a certain respect, inhabitants are subjected to humiliation, torture, robbery, abductions, or arbitrary killings. These realities fuel various attitudes and allegiances towards legal or imposed authorities.

A critical subject for the concerned communities is the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to areas under Russian control, amounting to a war crime, according to the UN investigators⁵⁰. These transfers initially meant to be temporary, often extended, causing difficulties for parents and children to reconnect. Russian policies, such as granting

⁴⁹ DRM Journal, “Situation in Ukraine,” 26 February 2022, accessed November 04, 2023, <https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/499195939959621803/>.

⁵⁰ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine,” fifty-second session (27 February – 31 March 2023), accessed November 04, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/A_HRC_52_62_AUV_EN.pdf.

unsolicited Russian citizenship and placing children in foster families, aimed to make it likely for some children to remain permanently in Russia.

Mobilisation also brought changes to the human terrain's key factors, not only by "absorbing" people from communities but also by producing effects at the level of the communities' sentiments.

Starting in 2014, waves of partial mobilisation into the Ukrainian army (to reinforce the army and support the operation against separatists in Donbas) have triggered modest political support and reaction from the Ukrainian society, which manifested discontent.⁵¹ Once the Russian invasion started, the imposition of martial law and general mobilisation in Ukraine prohibited travel abroad to male Ukrainian citizens (with some exemptions⁵²). Mobilisation was carried out in all regions and, since October 2022, equally addressed women with qualifications in the fields of chemistry, biology, telecommunications, IT, or other areas of interest, liable for military service.⁵³

The general mobilisation in the separatist republics in Donbas (Donetsk People's Republic/ DPR and the Luhansk People's Republic/ LPR) began several days before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Tens of thousands of residents were forcibly mobilised for the war, including by mass raids on men of military age, and protests against mobilisation were swiftly hindered by local authorities, which did not manifest discontent with incapacitating public services, or commercial and industrial businesses.⁵⁴ Such forced mobilisation constitutes a serious breach of international humanitarian law, violating the 1949 Geneva Convention's Article 51 IV, which prohibits civilian conscription and the promotion of voluntary participation in war for an occupying nation. Additionally, Russia breached the 1907 Hague Convention's Article 51, which prohibits civilians from engaging in activities against their own country's military forces (as many mobilised were sent outside the region to participate in combined arms operations, in hard conditions)⁵⁵.

Another particular feature of the war in Ukraine is the natural stance of the local population's resistance against perpetrators. Following the subsequent occupation of Ukrainian towns and cities, there were numerous instances of non-violent resistance. Residents organised protests and obstructed the Russian military movement. Some protests were forcefully dispersed by the Russian military, causing injuries and deaths. In a second stage of resistance, partisan groups began to be organised in mid-2022, being involved in a

⁵¹ "Отправка на войну. Чего ждать от новой мобилизации в Украине" [Going to war. What to expect from the new mobilisation in Ukraine], *Korrespondent.net*, 23 July 2014, <https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3396225-otpravka-na-voynu-cheho-zhdad-ot-novoi-mobylyzatsyy-v-ukrayne>.

⁵² "Exceptions: When a Man Can Leave Ukraine under Martial Law," *VisitUKRAINE.today* (blog), 22 March 2022, <https://visitukraine.today/blog/102/exceptions-when-a-man-can-leave-ukraine-under-martial-law/>.

⁵³ "Украинок 14 профессий обязали встать на воинский учет" [Ukrainian women of 14 professions were obliged to register for military service], *news.ru*, 13 July 2022, <https://news.ru/europe/ukrainok-14-professij-obyazali-vstat-na-voinskij-uchet/>.

⁵⁴ Meduza, "Жизнь здесь катится в хреновую сторону В ЛНР и ДНР на войну с Украиной забрали десятки тысяч жителей. Без них в тылу не работают предприятия, а спецслужбы преследуют даже жен призывников" [Life here is going in the LPR and DPR, tens of thousands of residents were taken to the war with Ukraine. Without them, enterprises do not work in the rear, and the special services persecute even the wives of conscripts], 6 July 2022, accessed November 04, 2023, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/07/06/zhizn-zdes-katitsya-v-hrenovuyu-storonu>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

large spectrum of activities: intelligence-gathering, sabotage, assassinations of pro-Russian officials and influencers, killing of Russian soldiers and militiamen, surveillance and targeting, carrying on drone operations, documenting war crimes, collecting information about collaborators with Russian Army, performing anti-occupation propaganda, or even gaining armed control over some areas⁵⁶. The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) and Special Operations Forces are involved in the coordination, direction, and support of various resistance groups, being also engaged in actionable intelligence-gathering from human sources, with the active support of the pro-Ukrainian factions in the occupied territories⁵⁷.

These are just some aspects that characterise the Ukraine conflict's human terrain, especially in the areas of active combat, with effects on the operational side (and influencing human intelligence collection efforts). The definition of the human terrain's spectrum of actors⁵⁸ and their identification, and analysis of enduring factors within the human environment⁵⁹ are part of the factors analysis and influence the projection of the HUMINT assets in a given area of responsibility.

HUMINT and the human terrain in the Ukrainian war

In HUMINT, the working environment consists of local communities and people from various organisations acting in the area of intelligence interest. The “operational language” often refers to it as “human terrain,”⁶⁰ and there are many attempts to interpret it scientifically.

An illustrative example is the US “human terrain system” (HTS), which depicts the initiative “to provide socio-cultural teams [resorting on civilian contractors, social scientists, etc. – author’s note] to commanders and staffs to improve the understanding of the local population and apply this understanding to the Military Decision-Making Process”⁶¹. If this approach has proven effective in counterinsurgency operations (despite

⁵⁶ Peter Beaumont and Isobel Koshiw, “The Occupier Should Never Feel Safe’: Rise in Partisan Attacks in Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, 6 June 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230317205055/https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/06/ukrainian-partisan-attacks-surge-russia>.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Landay and Tom Balmforth, “Insight: How a Band of Ukraine Civilians Helped Seal Russia’s Biggest Defeat,” *Reuters*, 9 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/how-band-ukraine-civilians-helped-seal-russias-biggest-defeat-2023-02-09/>.

⁵⁸ UK Ministry of Defence, *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00. Intelligence, Counter-Intelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations*, Fourth Edition (UK Ministry of Defence, August 2023), 113.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115–117.

⁶⁰ Outside of the military context, the term “human terrain” can also be used more broadly in social sciences and geography to refer to the study of human-environment interactions, cultural landscapes, and the spatial distribution of human activities within a geographic area – basically, the outfit of human geography.

⁶¹ <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>, cited by Alexandru Kis, “Human Security and the Human Aspects of the Operational Environment – A Systems View,” in *Science in the Mirror – Towards a New Method of Paradigm Comparison*, ed. Teodor Frunzeti and Marinela-Adi Mustață (Geneva, Switzerland: Éditions du Tricorne, 2012), 221–235. It was not an exclusive way to deal with cultural understanding in the US military; on the uniformed side, the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) programme, civil affairs, psychological operations (Military Information Support Operations), Army Special Forces Groups, AFPAK Hands Program, or troops’ basic training on the politics and cultures of the deployment regions are other programmes/elements involved in this endeavour. See also Lawrence E. Cline, “From Cultural Intelligence to Cultural Understanding: A Modest Proposal,” *Small Wars*

some criticism), carrying out a defensive war against a potent aggressor who occupied a portion of the country, and where the population manifests bivalent attitudes, became a difficult exam for the HUMINT and counterintelligence (CI) operators in the field.

Ukrainian operators perform their activity in a condition of a solid knowledge of the local population's intrinsic values, beliefs, social structures, and interactions, coupled with a permanent challenge to understand their transformation under the pressure of the war, in a contested environment. If the debriefing of the IDPs would not virtually pose difficulties, assessing and understanding the sentiments of the local population residing in the area of operations is crucial, both for the big picture (impact at the operational level) and the effectiveness of HUMINT collection, regarding a due assessment of the motivation of sources to support the national army and assessing the security risks.

The dilemma of considering heroes or traitors the local officials in areas overrun by Russian forces, having faced an unenviable choice between leaving or remaining to serve, protect, and represent their communities (and made this last choice), is still a debated issue in their prosecution.⁶² At the level of communities, pro-Russian collaborationism (even the assumption of the new identity) gained prevalence in the Donbas and Crimea regions during the years of Russian occupation,⁶³ but was also manifested at a lessened scale across the whole country, concretised in espionage⁶⁴ and assistance to the Russian shelling, cutting public services, striking critical infrastructure, providing lists with the names and addresses of pro-Ukrainian activists and officials (resulting in abductions and summary executions),⁶⁵ hosting the enemy, etc.

As long as many of the indicted collaborators (recorded in a dedicated “registry of collaborators”) are not under Ukrainian control, they face legal responsibility⁶⁶ and lustration⁶⁷.

Anyway, the brutality of Russian troops against civilians has turned off many pro-Russian sympathisers, but many such supporters remain and constitute a danger for the Ukrainian servicemen acting in the occupied territories. And, in the future, in case of a presumable victory, Ukraine will have to confront the looming problem of its millions of citizens with closer ties to Moscow than to Kyiv.

Journal (20 April 2017), accessed November 06, 2023, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jml/art/from-cultural-intelligence-to-cultural-understanding-a-modest-proposal>.

⁶² Tim Lister and Sanyo Fylyppov, “Traitor or Hero? Ukraine Finds It Tough to Identify Russian Collaborators,” *CNN*, 9 June 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/08/europe/ukraine-hunt-for-collaborators-intl/index.html>.

⁶³ Anna Arutunyan, “Can Ukraine Ever Win over Crimea and the Donbas?” *Spectator*, 11 March 2023, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/can-ukraine-ever-win-over-crimea-and-the-donbas/>.

⁶⁴ “Ukraine Claims Busted Large Russian Spy Network Ukraine Gathering Sensitive Defense Data,” *La Prensa Latina*, 03 October 2023, <https://www.laprensalatina.com/ukraine-claims-busted-large-russian-spy-network-ukraine-gathering-sensitive-defense-data/>.

⁶⁵ Mstyslav Chernov and Yuras Karmanau, “Ukraine Cracks Down on ‘Traitors’ Helping Russian Troops,” *The Associated Press*, 29 April 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-europe-kharkiv-51c514b6dc9cc1f935e018e4877222cc>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Crimean Tatar Resource Center, “Responsibility for Collaborationism and Treason in Crimea: What Does the CTCRC Offer?” 03 April 2023, accessed November 06, 2023, <https://ctrcenter.org/en/responsibility-for-collaborationism-and-treason-in-crimea-what-does-the-ctrc-offer>.

The subject of motivation in collaborationism is very important for the HUMINT tradecraft, as it can shape the operational security measures taken in such a context, and even turn opposite assets in their favour. There are many reasons why occupied populations might collaborate, ranging from culprits, opportunism, shifting loyalty, guilt of more than collaboration, cowardly, self-deception or deception by the occupier, powerlessness⁶⁸, or simply the struggle to survive.

Knowledge of these aspects, identification of key influencers, and accurate mapping of communities' loyalties are paramount for effective HUMINT and CI⁶⁹ activities, tailoring their strategy and tactics. In this context, it is important to note that HUMINT operations can be ethically and operationally challenging, as they often involve interacting with individuals in high-stress and potentially dangerous situations. Maintaining the trust of local populations and adhering to legal and ethical standards is paramount to successful operations and a positive outcome in the Ukrainian conflict.

At the end of the day, the focus is to gather tactical and strategic information with relevance for the decision-making processes; in this respect, HUMINT sources can provide invaluable intelligence on enemy positions and weaponry, identity, and intentions of key enemy personnel, troop movements, supply routes, morale, measurement of strikes' effectiveness, and other information helping military forces to plan and execute operations successfully. At a strategic level, HUMINT can uncover the intentions and strategies of opposing parties, aiding in long-term planning and decision-making.

To this end, interrogation of the enemy prisoners of war is equally important. A notable aspect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been the hybrid character of the operations, but also the hybrid composition of the involved forces, encompassing a diverse array of militaries. For instance, the Russian forces have utilised a combination of their Spetsnaz (special operations units), conventional military units, separatist factions in the Donbas region, foreign combatants (e.g. the Chechnya's Kadyrovites, officially part of the National Guard of Russia), international volunteers or structured mercenary groups (like the Wagner Group),⁷⁰ local militias, or forcibly mobilised inhabitants in the occupied areas. Handling a large array of captured persons from the enemy side (defectors, surrenders, prisoners, etc.), the Ukrainian side is also challenged in cultural and procedural terms, which requires adaptation and upskilling at the level of the interrogators involved in the questioning activity.

The Ukraine war featured large-scale, nonlinear, and non-contiguous combat operations that prompted inquiries into command-and-control dynamics. This involved the engagement of Intelligence entities across various units, necessitating the harmonisation

⁶⁸ John Hickman, "The Occupier's Dilemma: Problem Collaborators," *Comparative Strategy* 36, no. 3 (2017), accessed 07 Nov 23, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319367128_The_occupier's_dilemma_Problem_collaborators.

⁶⁹ In this context, counterintelligence plays a vital role for HUMINT collection security, by detecting and countering enemy intelligence operations. Understanding how the enemy gathers intelligence and identifying their agents within one's ranks are essential for maintaining operational security.

⁷⁰ Conversely, on the Ukrainian side, as they defended their nation, they mobilised their own special operations forces, conventional military units, Territorial Defence Forces, civilian volunteers who took up arms in defence of their homeland, and international volunteers hailing from various countries. See James K. Greer, "LSCO Lessons: What the Army Should Be Learning about Large-Scale Combat Operations from the Ukraine War," Modern War Institute, 24 June 22, accessed November 07, 2023, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/lSCO-lessons-what-the-army-should-be-learning-about-large-scale-combat-operations-from-the-ukraine-war/>.

and coordination of military intelligence-gathering efforts. The management of thousands of human collectors and technical sensors deployed over extensive regions for distinct objectives, which were subsequently consolidated to generate comprehensive operational insights for decision-making or precise target intelligence for potential strikes, added to the complexity of the situation.⁷¹ On the HUMINT side, this type of dispersed warfighting tolerates the population's mobility across the contact lines and facilitates concealed infiltration and exfiltration of field collectors.

HUMINT also plays a role in cognitive/ psychological warfare efforts,⁷² by using human sources as dissemination agents for information or countering enemy propaganda in the occupied territories, and supporting the understanding of both the enemy and the local population's thinking and mindset, which is key for psychological operations. A major lesson learned in the Ukrainian conflict is the power of information and psychological operations, based on modern technology (e.g. synthetic internet and real-time sentiment analysis),⁷³ which can also help in the planning and preparation of the HUMINT activities.

RAND Corporation highlights that the war between Russia and Ukraine has demonstrated the key features of hybrid warfare in a duel between open and closed societies. The whole-of-society approach to the conflict from the international perspective goes beyond the conventional concept of mobilisation⁷⁴. Thus, HUMINT assets involved in human engagement are part of a more complex strategy, acting in synchronisation with other instruments of power.

Conclusions

The war in Ukraine provided invaluable lessons for global diplomacy and nations' foreign policy and national security, military assistance and operations planning and execution, strategic communication and deterrence, cybersecurity, the global economy, the energy market, and the effects of soft-power sanctions.⁷⁵ What are less visible and are still analysed in line with the operational tempo, are observations and lessons with critical importance in adapting the military power (among the other instruments of power) in gaining desired effects on the battlefield.

Intelligence operations are pivotal in Ukraine's hybrid conflict, with multiple actors engaged in gathering and analysing information. Western countries, including NATO, have used intelligence to monitor and respond to the conflict, sharing early warning information through diplomatic channels, but also through mass media.

Ukraine, with the Western support, countered Russia's active hybrid measures in the time preceding the invasion. Russia's efforts on social media proved ineffective, its

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Chapter 7...."

⁷³ Elizabeth Howe, "Army Special Ops Is Changing Psyops Training to Reflect Ukraine War," *Defense One*, 8 November 2022, <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/11/army-special-ops-changing-psyops-training-reflect-ukraine-war/379500/>.

⁷⁴ Weilong Kong and Timothy Marler, "Ukraine's Lessons for the Future of Hybrid Warfare," RAND Corporation, 28 November 2022, accessed November 07, 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/11/ukraines-lessons-for-the-future-of-hybrid-warfare.html>.

⁷⁵ Atlantic Council, "Six Months, Twenty-Three Lessons: What the World Has Learned from Russia's War in Ukraine," accessed November 08, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/six-months-twenty-three-lessons-what-the-world-has-learned-from-russias-war-in-ukraine/>.

espionage endeavours largely fell short, and its attempts at using cyber-attacks met with limited success. Russian propaganda and disinformation were quickly debunked and pre-emptively discredited to the point where they were dismissed upon arrival, including the justifications Russia provided for its invasion. In contrast, Ukraine successfully boosted domestic morale through social media campaigns, shaped a narrative that marked Putin as an aggressor and Ukraine as a victim (consolidating, at the political level, a unified front against Moscow), exposed Russian war crimes, garnered international support, and even facilitated crowdfunding for defensive weaponry.

These aspects shed light on the Intelligence critical functions in generating pre-emptive strategies and, further, supporting decision-making in various stages of the war, based on a proper understanding and approach to the operational environment. Part of the operational environment, the “human terrain” basically shapes aspects of human geography, adapted to the interactions between military elements and local communities in wartime.

HUMINT is on the verge of diving into the affected communities to collect information with multiple relevancies: actionable intelligence, support to other functions (targeting, assessment of effectiveness, counterintelligence, psychological operations, cognitive warfare, humanitarian aid, and prosecution of war crimes), assessment of the enemy’s morale and intentions, etc. In this respect, the intimate knowledge of the local human terrain, completed with accurate records of particular allegiances (to ensure the necessary OPSEC), ensures the frequent apparition in media of titles claiming successful strikes on high value or high pay-off targets, contributing to the war efforts and boosting the morale of the own troops and the nation.

The nonlinear and non-contiguous characteristics of the operations in Ukraine require a systematic approach from the perspective of current strategies, tactics, techniques, and procedures, including the employment of HUMINT. There is no safe sanctuary in modern warfare, where targets are quickly discovered and engaged, inclusively in the operational depth. Undetectable by ordinary observation, yet equally significant, are cyber and electromagnetic warfare tactics that complement operations in various domains. Interfering with radio communications among units, radar systems, air defences, data transmission, the internet, GPS, and drone control exerts a profound influence on the battlefield, including the setting and tradecraft of discreet HUMINT activities.

Besides the (speculative) analysis of available observations in the Ukrainian war, modelling such environment in exercises, tailoring the OPFOR structure to the complex design of the confronting powers, developing situational vignettes adapted to specific settings of the human terrain (to include fighting against cognitive biases, playing intercultural communication, triggering deception identification, exploiting stereotypes, etc.) would certainly add value to the HUMINT training and would orient changes in current procedures. Integration of modern technologies is another must, challenging this approach from a dual perspective: as a threat, and as strength.

A comprehensive understanding of the operating environment remains critical, and the most hazardous assumption is that we did enough. The external views will always lack the empathetic capacity and a genuine feeling of the acceptable and non-acceptable in human engagement, capturing critical features of the human terrain we are going to “win” in terms of minds and hearts. Thus, “train as you fight” should gain more senses in HUMINT.

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