

Marko Parezanović*

Academy for National Security in Belgrade

RUSSIAN SPECIAL OPERATION IN CRIMEA IN 2014

Resume

The Russian special operation of capturing the Crimean Peninsula represents a highly complex military-political operation, carried out by the Russian Federation at the end of March 2014, shortly after the color revolution in Ukraine. With the skillful, lightning-fast and daring engagement of its military forces and special services, Russia captured and established itself in Crimea in a short time, to the surprise not only of official Kyiv, but also of the entire international public. Using available legal and political mechanisms, Russia supported the implementation of a series of activities that resulted in the declaration of independence of the Republic of Crimea and its accession to the Russian Federation.

Keywords: Crimea, Russian Federation, special operation, color revolution, referendum.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian special operation in Crimea in 2014 refers to the capturing of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian army and Russian special services, with the aim of permanently securing this territory and annexing it to the Russian Federation. In Russian literature, this event is often called the "Crimean Spring".

After the outbreak of the color revolution in November 2013, it became clear that the contradictions and divisions in Ukrainian society had reached such a level of polarization, on the pro-Russian and pro-Western side, and that there were no chances for a peaceful solution to the crisis. Although all the most important international factors advocated the necessity of a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis, in essence

* Contact: beogradbg15@gmail.com.

each of these actors worked in the opposite direction, following their own interests.

The circumstances in Crimea were very specific, but also favorable from the Russian point of view, primarily due to the territorially limited and clearly defined geographical area (it is a peninsula), the majority of the population consisted of ethnic Russians, as well as the already established Russian bases in Crimea, which was in the immediate vicinity of Russia (Granholm and Malminen 2014). Also, according to the official data of the Ukrainian Statistical Office from 2009, nearly two million inhabitants lived in Crimea, of which almost 60% declared themselves to be of Russian nationality, and after 2014 the percentage of Russians increased further.

In December 2013, the Autonomous Region of Crimea formed its organized “Self-Defense” formation, which, in principle, represented a form of territorial defense, while its armament was not legalized, primarily because there were no formal-legal prerequisites for it. “Self-defense” was formed by the residents of Crimea, who voluntarily joined the said formation, and as the situation on Maidan worsened, “Self-defense” gained more and more importance among the residents of Crimea. It is known that extremist and neo-Nazi structures from Maidan organized attacked and carried out violence against the pro-Russian part of the population of Ukraine, which is why this form of organization of the inhabitants of Crimea was a kind of response to that, bearing in mind that the Ukrainian state authorities at the time had no desire, but nor the ability to ensure the safety of all citizens of Ukraine.

Based on the analysis of a large number of documents, the review of dozens of hours of documentary video materials and the testimonies of various and unrelated actors, but also based on the suitable time distance, we are free to express the opinion that the Russian special operation in Crimea is a forced action by official Moscow. By all accounts, Russia made the decision to seize Crimea in a very short period of time, without long-term planning and developing appropriate strategies, in order to do it in some different and, conditionally speaking, more usual circumstances.

In this sense, we believe that the real reason for the quick reaction of the Kremlin was the result of acknowledging that after the color revolution, the new Ukrainian authorities will allow NATO forces to occupy Ukrainian military bases on the entire territory of Ukraine, including those located on the Crimean Peninsula. It is known that NATO has been operationally present in Ukraine since the “Orange Revolution” in 2004 (Парезановић 2013, 80-83), and that numerous advisers from Western countries have been involved in the Ukrainian special services,

who were in charge of training and “reforming” the Ukrainian military and security system, since then. Given that Ukraine was not a member of NATO, the formal legal reason for the legalization of NATO’s presence on Ukrainian territory would be found in the resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, through an agreement on military-technical cooperation or similar. In this way, although Russia has the headquarters of its Black Sea Fleet based on the international agreement in Simferopol, would not have an even remotely safe position, nor an appropriate strategic and tactical potential, surrounded by NATO forces in the immediate vicinity.

In addition to the above, when considering the necessity of launching a special operation to seize Crimea, Russia also had in mind the humanitarian component, which is to ensure the safety of pro-Russian citizens and the unequivocal will of the Crimean population to be part of the Russian Federation in the future, which was confirmed by an overwhelming majority in the conducted referendum.

EVENTS ON THE MAIDAN AS A TRIGGER FOR LAUNCHING A SPECIAL OPERATION

In November 2013, mass protests began in Kyiv’s central Maidan square against the then Ukrainian authorities led by President Viktor Yanukovych. The formal reason for the protests was the refusal of the Ukrainian authorities to sign the then unfavorable Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. Then the International Monetary Fund (IMF) added fuel to the fire, which suspended further credit arrangements with Ukraine, i.e. it gave Ukraine extremely unfavorable conditions which, in case of acceptance by the Ukrainian side, would produce social and economic difficulties in the country that would be unbearable (the request of the IMF referred to the “recommendation” that Ukraine immediately increase the price of energy and heating by 40%, as well as significantly reduce budget expenditures).

On the other hand, Russia latently pressured Ukraine regarding its membership in the Eurasian Union and closer cooperation on energy issues. President Yanukovych achieved the new presidential mandate and the parliamentary majority in the Verkhovna Rada on the basis of pro-European policies and promises, however, in the vortex of complex and tense geopolitical relations between the West and Russia (Пророковић 2018), Yanukovych “began to wander” and did not find his way in the role of balancing between opposing side. Certainly, the key actors and organizers of the color revolution were the Ukrainian opposition and the Western external factor, which is most responsible for the realization of

the political coup in Kyiv.

Given the pronounced pro-Western narrative of the new Ukrainian revolutionary authorities, it was absolutely clear that there would be intense pressure and a process of political and any other social isolation and ostracism of the pro-Russian population in Ukraine. And not only that, numerous extremist organizations that followed the neo-Nazi ideology, according to the mentioned category of the population, also proposed significantly more radical scenarios, such as the crime in Odessa in 2014, when 48 pro-Russian citizens were set on fire in the building of the House of Trade Unions. In such circumstances, the residents of Crimea and other areas in the southeast of Ukraine could not sit idly by and desperately called official Moscow to help them and protect them from the neo-Nazi wave. Thanks to the Kremlin's reaction, that wave failed to wash over the Crimean Peninsula, but it washed over and submerged the Kharkov, Luhansk, Donbas, Kherson and Odessa regions from 2014 to February 2020, that is, until the beginning of the Russian special military operation.

According to a number of Western authors, the Russian goals of the special operation are twofold. On the one hand, there is geopolitics, because Ukraine belongs to Russia's sphere of interest, and in 2014 it was considered that Ukraine would join the Eurasian Union. Also, the naval base in Sevastopol is of special military-strategic importance for Russia. On the other hand, the goals were also contained in the internal policy of the Russian Federation, because President Putin wanted to further unite the country around traditional values, to raise his popularity and to make it clear that no Maidan or color revolution would be tolerated in Russia (Persson and Vendil Pallin 2014, 25).

COMPLEX POLITICAL AND SECURITY EVENTS IN CRIMEA

After the embodiment of the color revolution on Maidan, on March 23rd and 24th, 2014, large rallies were held in Crimea, from which messages were sent that the violent and illegal change of power in Kyiv is not recognized, and that the population of Crimea demands joining the Russian Federation. However, the new authorities from Kyiv reacted swiftly and organized a counter rally in the capital Simferopol, where they mobilized thousands of Crimean Tatars¹ and "Right Sector" extremists

¹ Crimean Tatars are a people of Turkish origin who mainly live in Crimea, where they make up about 10% of the total population. They are Muslim, and official Kyiv, during the period of complex political and security events in Crimea, intimidated members of this nationality that mass

who had traveled to Crimea from Kyiv and the western parts of Ukraine for this purpose. The Ukrainian police in Crimea, which was still under the formal control of official Kyiv, did not do anything to prevent violence and conflicts at the aforementioned meeting. It was a group of extremists from the “Right Sector”, which had rich experience from the protests on Maidan in carrying out violence, causing disorder and forcibly occupying buildings, that tried to occupy the building of the Supreme Council in Simferopol (the central government building of the then autonomous region of Crimea), however the Crimean “Self-defense” prevented them from doing so as soon as the violent groups entered the ground floor of the mentioned building. There are indications that members of the Russian special forces were already in the building at that time, well-armed, in green camouflage uniforms and without signs of their affiliation. Also, a week before the beginning of the special operation, the Russian special services disrupted all radio-telephone communications and Internet traffic between Ukraine and Crimea. Ukraine actually had difficulties with command and control over that part of its territory, due to strong cyber-attacks from the Russian side². These attacks were initially carried out by hacker attacks, as well as special electronic actions from the ships of the Black Sea Fleet from Sevastopol.

Immediately before the beginning of the Russian special operation, Ukraine had about 18,800 soldiers in Crimea, most of whom belonged to the navy. However, at the end of February, Igor Tenyukh estimated that this number was lower and amounted to 15,000 soldiers (Howard and Pukhov 2014). On the other hand, Russia at that time had about 12,000 soldiers in the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, and at that time these forces were inferior to the Ukrainian units in Crimea. They lacked infantry fighting vehicles, armored-mechanized units and artillery pieces. However, there were good conditions, which were part of the international agreement, to deliver significant military potential to the base of the Black Sea Fleet from Russia in a short time, which would strengthen the firepower and overall capacities of the existing Russian units (Kofman et al. 2017, 6).

Although in available open sources, the official beginning of the Russian special operation in Crimea is given as February 27, 2014,

violence would be carried out against them on the Russian side as a sign of decades-long and historical intolerance between the two peoples, which was certainly part of a planned special war disinformation by the Ukrainian authorities.

2 Cyber-attacks are almost always a prelude to military interventions. In 2020, the Azerbaijani army was taught this Russian doctrine, also a few days before the start of the military intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh, it carried out strong cyber-attacks on Armenia and Armenian positions in the Nagorno-Karabakh area.

based on the results of the research, we reasonably assume that the direct Russian military presence in Crimea, and also on the territory of Ukraine, existed a few days before official announcements. Namely, on the night of February 22 to 23, from the Donetsk region (the city of Berdyansk, on the coast of the Sea of Azov), a detachment of Russian special forces, using military helicopters, secretly evacuated Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to Crimea, after whom the new Ukrainian authorities and extremist structures intensively searched after the political coup (Баранец 2019, 188-195).

When organizing and realizing goals of this nature, it is very important to find legal models to satisfy the legality and legitimacy of all actions, which will also follow the course of military actions, and legalize them in a certain way, to the extent that it is objectively possible. For the above reasons, on February 26, a session of the Supreme Council of Crimea was held, during which the decision was voted to hold a referendum on the future status of the peninsula in the upcoming period, which definitely gave the full political support of the Crimean authorities for the further implementation of the special operation.

In addition to the above, from the aspect of the topic we are investigating, a very important event took place on February 27, and it refers to the military and civilian part of the airport in Simferopol. For the rebels in Crimea, it was of particular importance, because there were indications that the authorities in Kyiv would use the said airport to carry out the landing of military forces in order to take the peninsula by force. The plan was to join the disembarked forces with regular units of the Ukrainian army and police, about twenty thousand of whom were already in Crimea, to isolate the Russian base of the Black Sea Fleet, as well as to seize and put under control all of the most important administrative facilities of the political government. On the other hand, the establishment of control over this airport enabled the landing of a large number of Russian military transport planes, which delivered a large number of personnel and military equipment to Crimea in a very short period of time. At the same time, two more strategically important military airfields in Crimea were captured, namely Kacha (Russian: Кача) near Sevastopol and Dzhankoyi (Russian: Джанкой) in the south of the peninsula, where transport planes were soon located (Баранец 2019).

Figure 1. Operational situation on the ground on March 3, 2014



Source: (Баранец 2019, 214)

At the beginning of March, the Russian sides in Crimea were strengthened edlanding ships and occupied Ukrainian naval bases. Great firepower and extreme mobility were the main characteristic of the Russian forces in that period. Russian troops exerted strong psychological pressure and propaganda actions towards the Ukrainians commanders, providing them with security guarantees if they go over to the Russian side. In mid-March, through the Kerch ferry crossing, Russia began a mass landing conventional troops, primarily motorized rifle brigades, heavy artillery, various air defense unit and several anti-ship missile batteries (Kofman et al. 2017, 10).

Regarding the number of soldiers engaged for the implementation of the special operation, Russia issued already existing international agreements, according to which she had approval to enter composition of the base of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea can simultaneously contain a little more than twenty thousand soldiers, so it used the provisions of that agreement for formal and legal purposes cover and engagement of their forces. This means that the President of Russia did not have to ask for approval of the Federation Council for the engagement of the military abroad. Estimates indicate that it this special operation carried out with a smaller number of engaged forces, that is, that it was not exceeded the figure of twenty thousand participants, which is not the result of successful action of Russian forces, but also the support of the local

population. Without the support of the local population, no territory can be held. It can be conquered, but in order to keep it under control and make it stable for a longer period of time, the aforementioned support is necessary. Also, when it comes to the number of engaged forces, in the execution of special operations of this type, the quality of soldiers is much more important than their number. The quality of a soldier implies his ability to participate in operations of this nature, because it is not about classic conventional combat operations at the front, but about a very delicate form of a hybrid model of task implementation.

Figure 2. Military capacity agreement that was in effect during the outbreak period of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014



Source: (Ria.ru)

In response to the Russian special operation in Crimea, NATO soon organized a military exercise in the Black Sea with the participation of a large number of forces and the use of offensive weapons. As a countermeasure, the Russian side additionally strengthened the forces of the Black Sea Fleet, among other things, by installing the “Bastion” anti-ship system, as well as the S-400 air defense system, in such a way that it would be visible, so that the rival side could register the presence of a strong military- of technical potential in Crimea (deterrence factor).

In order to better analyze the operational and tactical elements of the military operation in Crimea, Western authors believe that it is necessary

to explain the strategic characteristics of hybrid warfare. In this sense, one of the first specificities of hybrid warfare is that such an undertaking most often represents a military-political campaign with insufficiently defined, i.e. fluid strategic goals, whereby military force plays the role of an auxiliary means. The overarching character of hybrid warfare is essentially non-military given the nature and scope of the instruments of state power employed. The instruments used include cyber-attacks, pressure diplomacy, economic mechanisms, threats related to energy issues and the intensive use of media to build a political narrative and legitimize military operations. Until February 2014, this included the use of volunteer units, the provision of logistical and armed assistance to separatist groups, and the constant presence of the Russian army on the borders of Ukraine, which occasionally helps rebel groups with direct or indirect actions (Pejić 2019, 429).

In this sense, in the years preceding the special operation in Crimea, the Russian armed forces carried out a reorganization of the military structure. Two elite divisions of the land army (fourth Tamanskaya and fifth Kantemirovskaya), which were previously organized according to the principle of brigades, were restored. The increase and reorganization of units was also noticeable in the airborne forces. Three new airborne brigades assigned to the southern and eastern military districts have been redeployed as rapid response forces in crisis situations (Pejić 2019, 432). It is important to emphasize that the share of defense expenditures in Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) increased from 1.5% in 2010 to 3.2% in 2013 and 4.1% in 2014 (Baev 2015, 8).

Immediately before the beginning of the special operation in Crimea, the distribution of members of the Russian armed forces by military districts was visibly uneven. While in most districts the number of troops was lower than planned, the occupancy was around 60%, in the southern military district covering the Transcaucasia (Жељски 2018) and Black Sea area, the occupancy was around 95%. This information indicates the importance of the southern military district and the perception of Russian foreign policy from where threats can come, as well as the possibility of projecting Russian military power in the region (Pejić 2019, 432).

A very significant part of the operation was related to the peaceful surrender of twenty thousand Ukrainian soldiers who were stationed in Crimea in various units. At first, those events did not go well for the Russian side, because the Ukrainian army in Crimea received commands from Kyiv, which has since changed its government. The soldiers were aware that by handing over objects, military equipment and themselves,

they were breaking their oath and committing criminal acts. Criminal proceedings were initiated against those who switched to the Russian side in the first days before the military court in Kyiv. When it comes to the oath, there were different interpretations and views among the Ukrainian soldiers themselves, and more and more the question arose among them to whom they actually swore. Whether to the deposed Yanukovich, who at that time was still legally and legitimately elected president, or to the new Kyiv authorities who, on the wave of the colored revolution, came to power illegally and violently. In the negotiations on surrender and transfer to the Russian side, not only Russian military forces and special services participated, but veterans of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church also made a significant contribution.

The only Ukrainian military formation in Crimea that did not want to voluntarily lay down its arms and hand over its facilities was the first battalion of naval infantry in the town of Feodosia, which was mainly composed of soldiers from the west of Ukraine. By the way, since January 8, 2014, that battalion has been subordinated to the NATO rapid reaction forces, which was also documented by the official agreement between the Ukrainian army and NATO. It is interesting that the battalion commanders in Feodosia maintained direct contact with the United States Consulate General in Kyiv from their base. In a short time, this facility was also placed under the control of the Russian forces, and it was the only direct use of force by the Russian forces during the realization of the special operation. The captured soldiers were extradited to Ukraine, but they later operated in Donbas and Donetsk, where they committed war crimes and atrocities against the pro-Russian population as part of the Galicia battalion.

In order to better understand the military background of the Russian special operation in Crimea, it is expedient to analyze the statement of the Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, who in his now famous speech in February 2013 pointed out that things have changed in the XXI century ways and doctrines of warfare. Gerasimov also emphasized that the rules of war have changed dramatically, as well as that non-military means are now much more effective than weapons themselves in achieving political and strategic goals. In his opinion, the use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military means greatly affects the protest potential of the population, as an integral part of modern conflicts. According to some Western authors, Russia used this hybrid strategy of warfare in Ukraine (Persson and Vendil Pallin 2014, 32).

In addition to the above, the special operation in Crimea illustrated

the ability of the Russian Federation for strategic coordination of military and non-military assets. It is interesting that on February 26 (just a few days after the realized political coup in Kyiv), the armed forces of Russia held a large military exercise in the Western and Central Military Districts (Norberg, Franke, and Westerlund 2014, 41). The exercise was intended to send a strong message to the new Ukrainian leadership and their Western partners. Also, Russia used its army in three ways in the implementation of the special operation in Crimea: *it threatened Ukraine with its strong military potential; the Russian army was still carrying out diversions in the depth of Ukrainian territory; the Russian army and special services supported the local population to take power in Crimea* (Norberg, Franke, and Westerlund 2014, 42).

As for the budget of the Russian armed forces, according to Western authors, it has increased significantly in the last few years. In fact, the fundamental reorganization of the Russian armed forces began in 2009. Military exercises were carried out more and more often, which resulted in the military capability of the Russian army increasing significantly. An increasing number of professional contract soldiers were hired, who were disciplined and well trained for operations abroad, above all they were durable, capable of long-term warfare and keeping the occupied territory under control. Regular infantry units, which were mostly filled with one-year conscripts with weaker morale and discipline, were gradually replaced by professional personnel.

In addition, one of the main directions of action of the Russian forces in Crimea was the control of information content and transmission media infrastructure. The Russian army and special services initially provided that media infrastructure, such as TV and radio stations, as well as base stations for Russian mobile phone operators (Norberg, Franke, and Westerlund 2014, 43).

The key factor that gave the Russian military an advantage at both the strategic and tactical levels was surprise. The high-quality and well-equipped armed forces of Russia acted synergistically and chose where, when and how to seize Crimea. Another key advantage was the large military base of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol (Гуменный 2021). Its role was reflected in the possibilities of assuming military dominance on land, as well as anti-aircraft protection and defense against potential attacks from the sea. The fleet also blockaded the forces of the Ukrainian Navy while still in their ports. Furthermore, the size of Crimea and the configuration of the peninsula naturally limited the area of operations. The developed road infrastructure, numerous airports and ports supported the landing of units, while the entire peninsula was also suitable for defense

against possible attacks from the Ukrainian side from the mainland. In addition, Crimea was already defined as an autonomous administrative region in Ukraine, as a separate entity, which in a formal and legal sense facilitated the annexation. Also, the proximity to Russia was also important, as it facilitated the landing of a large number of armed forces and their logistical support. The ethnic composition of the peninsula and the Russian-speaking area also supported the implementation of the special operation. This is very important, because there was no language barrier between the Russian forces and the local population. The weakness of the new Ukrainian authorities, as well as the weakness and disorganization of the Ukrainian armed forces, the largest number of which in Crimea went over to the Russian side (Norberg, Franke and Westerlund 2014, 45), contributed to Russia's success.

RESOLUTION ON INDEPENDENCE AND REFERENDUM ON JOINING THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Until the vote on the independence of Crimea and the referendum that followed shortly after, there were numerous security threats aimed at obstructing these political processes. The Kyiv regime tried in every possible way to destabilize the political and security situation in Crimea, using the capacities of its own and Western special services. American drones and other reconnaissance systems were present in large numbers around Crimea. In order to carry out acts of sabotage and terrorism, the Ukrainian special services used parts of the agency network of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Crimea, which remained on the line of official Kyiv, but they also introduced sabotage groups to the peninsula.

For the above reasons, the Kremlin sent specialists from the Federal Security Service (FSB) to Crimea, who in a short time stopped several diversions, sabotage and terrorist acts. As the most impressive sabotage-terrorist act that was prevented at that time, and which carried with it the greatest social danger, it referred to the attempt of Ukrainian saboteurs to poison the city's water supply in Simferopol.

According to the original plan, the referendum was supposed to be held on May 25, 2014, however, due to the rapid complication of political and security events on the peninsula and its surroundings, the decision was changed and the deadlines were shortened. Accordingly, on March 11, the Crimean parliament voted a resolution on independence and declared the independent Republic of Crimea. This created the formal and legal conditions to hold a referendum on the future status of Crimea.

On March 16, 2014, a referendum was held in which, based on the official statement of the Supreme Council of Crimea, 96.77% of voters declared that they wanted the peninsula to join the Russian Federation. For the Russian side, it was of particular importance that the referendum took place safely and without any incidents of a political nature. Two days later, on March 18, in a solemn ceremony in Moscow, the Republic of Crimea was admitted to the full membership of the Russian Federation, with the city of Sevastopol receiving the status of a city of the Southern Federal District.

Only a few countries recognized Crimea's independence, and this political-legal event caused the United States and the European Union to impose sanctions on the Russian Federation. However, although few recognized the independence of Crimea, UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 of March 27, 2014, which condemned the declaration of independence of Crimea and its annexation to the Russian Federation, further divided the world community on this issue. Namely, a significant number of countries did not vote for the adoption of that resolution, among which was the Republic of Serbia, which opened up space for new different interpretations and contradictions. The Russian side generally interprets the non-voting for the resolution as *de facto* recognition of Crimea as part of the Russian Federation, while the opposite side sees it the other way around.

Figure 3. The relation between the states regarding the independence of Crimea and its annexation to Russia

СТРАНЫ МИРА, ПРИЗНАВШИЕ КРЫМ ЧАСТЬЮ РОССИИ



Редактор: Владислава Макачук
 Дизайнер: Игорь Беляков

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АРГМЕНТЫ
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In any case, regardless of different legal-political, historical, social-economic, military-security, cultural and other views on Crimea, since 2014 this peninsula has been part of the Russian Federation and that will remain an unchanging category. In international politics, international public law and justice often do not guarantee the preservation of national interests and values, but, unfortunately, the achievement and protection of those goals also requires force (Milosavljević 2014, 149).

CONCLUSION

The Russian special operation in Crimea is an intriguing topic, which attracted a lot of international attention in 2014. However, in the

available scientific and research materials there is no proportion on that basis, that is, there is no corresponding fund of scientific works that equivalently follows that level of social interest, especially in domestic literature. We especially emphasize that during this research, relevant literature from Western sources was used to a significant extent, in order to avoid the possibility that the research would acquire the character of one-sidedness and non-objectivity.

No matter what anyone in the world community thinks about the Russian Federation, the undivided opinion is that Russia brilliantly carried out a special operation in Crimea in 2014. That operation was carried out with a large and visible use of force, but essentially non-violently. The success of its implementation is largely due to President Putin, who personally took responsibility and managed the special operation in the “manual control” mode. In this way, Russia has shown and proved that it has an efficient army and special services that are extremely capable of sudden hyper and hybrid models of combat operations.

The support of the local population was essential for the success of this operation. If it were otherwise, then it could be said that it is an occupation, with an uncertain outcome, which would mainly depend on the intensity of the use of force. Such conditions are unsustainable in the long term. Therefore, Russia knew very well that embarking on such a complex operation was only possible if it was wanted and supported by the majority population of Crimea. What is certainly not in the available literature, for understandable reasons, is that the special operation was preceded by good intelligence preparation, which could not be realized overnight, but is the result of years of continuous work by the Russian special services. This does not mean that the Russian side has been preparing for the invasion of Crimea for years, but it is caused by the fact that there was a Russian military base of strategic importance on the peninsula, that the majority of the population of Crimea was of Russian nationality, that the peninsula was located on the border of Russia, and not just any place, but in an extremely sensitive area of the Caucasus region. There are certainly more reasons, but the importance of intelligence preparation and quality intelligence work, from which, when necessary, goals of not only military and security, but also political, economic and any other vital character can be effectively realized is indisputable.

The population and political leadership of Crimea showed great courage and daring, especially in the period until the special military operation began. The violence from Maidan threatened to spread to the Crimean Peninsula, and in such social circumstances, the pro-Russian population in Ukraine did not have a secure perspective. And significantly

less than that, it can also be said that it was fundamentally endangered, bearing in mind the destructive activities of Ukrainian extremists and neo-Nazis.

The Russian state leadership perfectly harmonized the proportionality between political and military measures, whereby all mechanisms from that range were used in a timely and effective manner. In this way, it was avoided that the special operation had an exclusively military character, but in parallel with the execution of military actions, it also had a political-legal component, which is as important as the military, if not more important (declaration of independence, conducting a referendum, joining the Russian Federation and similarly).

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