

## **HYBRID THREATS, CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITIES**

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**Abstract:** This article identifies threats to the national security that have occurred in recent years. Some of the threats go beyond the traditional concepts and can be used for hybrid warfare. The authors seek an answer to the question what are the challenges, posed by the hybrid threats, and to identify possibilities for building institutional capabilities for countering such threats. The emphasis is placed on comprehensiveness, resilience, inter-agency and international operation.

**Keywords:** hybrid threats, challenges, integrated security system.

The security environment has changed vastly over the past years and the trends indicate continuing complications. New risks and challenges have appeared related to the intensifying processes of geopolitical confrontation, and extension of the areas of instability and occurrence of new crises and conflicts in regions near Bulgaria. In this regard, we have to note the global crisis provoked by irregularity of allocation of the resources and the necessity for changing the model of common existence of the humanity.

Security threats have become multi-layered and have acquired a hybrid character in the complex circumstances of existence of our society. They are related to the use of different means such as propaganda, disinformation, cyberattacks, organized crime, economic and political pressure, and terrorism. They all lead to the destabilization of the social-political and economic components of our society. These elements are new in the security environment and the security systems do not have capabilities for countering them effectively.

The observed negative processes in the worldwide security environment and the new trends in respect of 'hybrid' forms and methods of destabilization of the security environment set up the necessity for serious analysis in direction of preparing and building capabilities for countering hybrid threats.

In order to allow the building of institutional capabilities for countering hybrid threats, we need to first answer the question:

*What are the main challenges related to hybrid threats and what measures need to be taken for increasing the capabilities to counter them?*

The main challenge can be defined as identification of the risks and hybrid threats. This can be achieved through targeted monitoring of the security environment, analysis and timely assessment for their early identification. The building of capabilities for carrying out these activities in all institutions in the area of security is of special importance. The cooperation and coordination not only on the interinstitutional level but also on the bilateral and multilateral level is of significant importance for the effectiveness of decision making.

It is increasingly important as well to build an integrated analytical potential with the purpose of achieving a comprehensive approach for identifying sophisticated risks and threats to the national security.

Another important challenge is the identification of the available capabilities of the institutions and organizations by the national security system for countering hybrid threats and the readiness for using them, and the exploration of new forms and methods for interinstitutional cooperation.

Furthermore, it is important to build resilience of the structures and processes, which is expressed by the capabilities of the affected country to resist the hybrid actions and to promptly recover after that. Such resilience needs to be built-in in the state institutions as well as in other areas of the social-economic life.

The building of resilience at national level includes: establishing conditions for better and more effectively functioning state institutions and a political system with wide public support, increasing the transparency in spending public resources and in the activities of the state institutions; ensuring a set of measures for the continuous functioning of the state institutions; supporting internal security and countering hybrid attacks. Hybrid threats are often aimed at several countries. That is why, it is necessary to build resilience at international level.

The building of a modern, integrated national security system that will provide a high level of coordination in the security sector, effective use of the resources and the capabilities of separate elements of the system should be the main drive towards the provision of enhanced resilience.

The experience shows that establishing security systems based on a concrete threat is not effective. In view of the fact that contemporary security threats are complex and dynamic, the security system has to ensure not only timely and adequate response but

it also needs to be reliable, effective and to be hard to overcome by external attempts for intervention, including hybrid treats.

The effectiveness of a security system is based on: integrated information systems, high level of preparedness of experts and development of specific expertise, integration of governing authorities and structures and accepting unified standards for preparation and training in the security sector.

The integrated information systems are exceptionally important for good coordination, exchange of information and rapid reaction. They have to ensure uninterrupted communication, accessibility, timeliness and protection of the information.

The high level of preparedness of the experts and the development of specific expertise are fundamental to the correct and timely analysis of risks and threats and for providing expert opinion at the highest level.

The prudent course of action should be to integrate the governing authorities and structures in the management of different types of crises. In practice, this will provide for the integration of the security systems and will enhance effectiveness, coordination and operational compatibility.

The unified standards for preparation and training in the security sector will contribute to achieving equal basic knowledge and capabilities of the personnel engaged in every element of the system and to unifying the understandings of terminology, procedures and processes as a whole.

For the purpose of building institutional capabilities for countering hybrid threats, the Bulgarian Government has taken a number of consecutive measures and adopted, with a decision of the Council of Ministers, a *Strategy for Counteraction to Radicalization and Terrorism* and a plan for implementation of the Strategy and a National Plan for Counteraction to Terrorism that include a scale with levels of threats by terrorism and related grades of readiness for reaction of the competent bodies. This plan determines the functions and responsibilities of institutions in the case of a pending terroristic threat and upon a terroristic act. The plan is adopted in January 2016 by decision of the Council of Ministers.

In July 2016, the National Cyber Security Strategy called “Cyber Resilient Bulgaria 2020” was adopted. The Strategy expresses the collective engagement and responsibility of all involved parties and the will of the authorities to ensure modern frames and steady environment for development of the national system for cyber security and achieving open, safe and secure cyberspace. The goal of achieving a Cyber Resilient Bulgaria defines the stages of development from basic information security to an accomplished information society that has the ability to resist cyber and hybrid threats in all areas.

A draft bill for countering terrorism has been prepared. It establishes the main rules for providing antiterrorist operations in cases when there is information for concrete threat or terrorist activity. The national institutions are working on a draft strategy for countering hybrid modes of warfare. All these documents are in accordance with the Management and Functions of the National Security Protection System Act.

The assessment of the arising terrorist threat which originates from the complex security environment in nearby regions led to an analysis of the activity of the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC) established in the State Agency for National Security with a view to improve its work and to adopt good practices used by partner services. NCTC collects and analyses the data received from different sources, continuously interacts with competent state structures and foreign partners, and provides in timely manner the information needed for quick and coordinated decisions regarding people, groups and organizations involved in terrorist activity. In March 2015, NCTC was highly appreciated by the FBI for its organization and activity.

The effective counteraction to the national security threats, including the ‘hybrid threats,’ is not possible without the coordinated interaction between the national institutions. A good basis for interaction between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior is the Instruction for Interaction between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior adopted in 2011, amended and supplemented in 2014 and again in 2015. This instruction defines the order and organization for interaction in the implementation of activities under the Defence and Armed Forces Act and the Ministry of Interior Act of the Republic of Bulgaria.

As a result of the rapid change of the security environment caused by the migration pressure at the state border with the Republic of Turkey, in 2013, by an order of the Minister of Interior, a joint specialized police operation started and was conducted with the participation of equipment and forces from General Directorate “Border Police” and the regional directorates of the Ministry of the Interior. Regarding its duration, number of participating personnel and equipment, this joint specialized police operation is unique. Because of the limited resources of the Ministry of the Interior as well as the work load of the personnel participating in the different stages of the operation, measures were taken for improving their activities. By decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria in April 2015 and under a joint order of the Minister of Defence and the Minister of the Interior logistic support was ensured from the structures of the Ministry of Defence, which allows the enhancing of the mobility of participating personnel. This activity started in April 2015, and the number of the participating personnel from the Bulgarian Army and the equipment vary depending on the tasks. Due to the increasing migration pressure, the rendering of assistance for transportation of people, including police personnel in trucks, is very important for the Ministry of the Interior. The efficiency of the preventive measures that

the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence realized in respect to migrants is the result of a solidly established cooperation.

In conclusion, hybrid threats with their specific characteristics, complexity of the challenges and variety of their manifestation will continue to be among the significant challenges to the security systems of contemporary societies. In this respect, it is necessary to take measures for improving the effective joint activities between the competent institutions in cases of change of the security environment and detection of indications of 'hybrid threats.'

It is obvious that NATO and EU have to thoroughly develop the issues related to the hybrid forms of the future wars, considering that the military components are only part of all complex forms and methods. It is necessary to re-orientate and stabilize the intelligence and analysis services and to take durable measures, applied by the competent institutions. The coordination and joint operations with a number of non-military structures are necessary. Also, concentrated activities for enhancing inter-institutional and international cooperation have to be taken in order to exchange experience and achieve synergistic effects. Approaches for counteraction to hybrid threats require comprehensiveness, flexibility and complexity of the activities at strategic level, supported by concrete measures in conformity with the threat at operational and tactical level. Taking into account the membership of the Republic of Bulgaria in EU and NATO, the strategic approach includes the integrated model for response to hybrid threats, which is included in fundamental strategic documents as the Strategy for the Role of NATO in Countering Hybrid War (2015) and Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats (a European Union Response, 2016).

Finally, for enhancing the national capabilities and capacity for countering hybrid threats and building resilience to them, it is essential to establish organization for preparation, prevention and effective counteraction as well as conducting joint training and exercises on scenarios which include hybrid threats. It is important to take measures for improving the exchange of information, for inter-institutional coordination and interaction, for coordination with international organizations, to use the possibilities of early warning systems for information exchange with the allies, and to ensure efficiency of consultations and decision making.

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