The Dirty Business of War. Part I

What we describe below was mostly collected online. Mind you, we have no military service experience, see things through layman's eyes and have no more sources of information than anyone else. It's all out there, on the Internet and TV.

As war in Ukraine rolls on, we get a good glimpse of who is who and how things really are. Everyone must choose sides. Almost no one can seat in two chairs, but some try.

For those of us who speak neither Ukrainian nor Russian – Google Translate to the rescue. This is a war of a million eyes, ears and opinions expressed and posted across multiple platforms. Never has mankind had a closer look at war and its consequences. Of course, other conflicts – like Syria and Iraq – got their share of coverage. But the sheer intensity of this conflict, war playing so close to Europe itself, and the number of people killed, maimed, displaced, robbed and kidnapped by the invading Russian forces is staggering. Towns flattened, thousands of civilian people have been murdered in broad daylight by the occupiers. About 30% of Ukraine's infrastructure had been thoroughly and purposely destroyed (as of this writing). We don't know what Putin thinks, but we know his country would have a very large tab (probably over a trillion USD) to pay for this party. Just so you know: Germany made its final reparation payments for WW I in 2010. That's almost a century later. Why he thinks he can get away with it is beyond us. He wouldn't.

Ukraine is putting up the most valiant fight. Almost no one expected they would have the guts and stamina to sustain a battle against the "super-power". Most worthless dour Western military analysis gave Ukraine less than a week before it was to collapse. Turns out, Russia is not a superpower after all. It has a dysfunctional army – unprepared, unguided and under-trained. They came to the war of the XXI century with the XX century weapons, conscripts and misconceptions. Russia's army, like the country itself, is drowning in corruption. Corruption limits its ability to wage war, which is good for Ukraine and the rest of the world. Russia's generals stole army's money to build their own country retreats first. So far, Russia's bear roar has been a few octaves lower than expected.

We have discovered the starkest contrast between how the war is reported in Ukraine, Russia and the Western world.

Ukraine keeps very close public tabs on the enemy losses, keeps her mouth mostly shut about own military failures, but openly speaks about what is taking place on the battlefields; about its civilian population and about its political initiatives. The office of the President and the public quickly discover, speak up and squash “fake news”. They also make pre-emptive announcements about what is to come, sometimes depriving the opposing side of the elements of surprise. It seems, their entire society has been galvanized by this war and are participating any, which way they can, fighting, surviving, volunteering and just coming to work every day. This is also a war for public opinion and they are the clear winners on the Internet.

Russia, on the other hand, is totally misrepresenting anything it does. They are reporting events and victories that never took place. They lie. They threaten. They bark. They hide their own losses from everyone. One almost cannot rely on anything they say or show. Let us put it down more succinctly: when a Russian official’s mouth is open, it is almost 100% lies (modus operandi there, not our own interpretation). “The Russian Federation’s” population mostly supports the war; thanks to the state propaganda machine and oppressive legal environment threatening anyone who dares to speak against the hostilities. Simply saying you are for peace or you are against war lands you in jail, with a possibility of a steep fine (around 800 dollars) or a sentence of several years, and we are not kidding. They wage lame excuses for their own atrocities and deny the obvious and documented facts. They are the underdogs here.

And finally, our own MSM and the talking heads paint pictures that are always gloomy. In their views, Ukraine is no more than a step away from a major disaster. Russia has most of its might intact; things are about to become worse. The interviews they conduct with survivors and the war principals are limited in scope and often do not penetrate deep enough to give the broader picture. Notwithstanding the fact that Ukraine has opened up doors to every reporter (Russia is excluded) who wants to be there, they are very cautious with facts. Entire layers of events go unnoticed here. It seems like their inability to report and analyze events is based on how things were always done here. They want proof of everything and it’s not possible. This is war, most players couldn’t care less about proof of anything; events are reported “as-is” and never looked at again, as new actions totally supplant anything that happened before. High reporting standards are pretty much worthless and meaningless. They, the networks, should take their best shot at finding what is true and what isn’t, but cannot expect anything resembling peace-time news gathering. As a result, we the viewers and the readers suffer if we subscribe to Western news alone. The war mosaic is so much richer than what pops up at FOX News or, God forbids, CNN. Western press is days behind reporting on some events and is

surely behind the times, in our view.

There are multiple news channels on Telegram and Twitter run by private persons reporting individual tidbits, sometimes reposts but often not. Most everyone has something unique to say. This is the real picture – not meager newspaper reports based on the reporter's single scared drive-by or an interview with the refugee out of danger. There are millions of stories to the war and they need to be told. Some events are more important than the others. Few, if any of our journalists and analysts speak the languages needed for in-depth understanding. Some of what is coming out of Russia through the official outlets of the Western press offices there is rather timidly spoken, skirting sharp critique of Putin's behavior. This is a war in Europe, but it is not a European war, in a sense that it is not playing out by the European models. This is entirely different. They don't fully grasp and understand it yet, and when they do, the judgments are those of the left-oriented press, whatever it means these days.

There is another interesting aspect that should not be missed. For many years, Ukraine was the source of IT talent to many Western companies. The country was known to create its own applications, portals systems – both private and statewide. Internet and cellular penetration is everywhere. It all came into play at war. Ukrainian software developers quickly put together applications to report enemy movements by anyone with a Telegram. Like in "see something – say something". And people did. Lives were quickly saved and enemy convoys destroyed based on just that. Every village, town and farm became eyes and ears for the Ukrainian army. It hasn't been done before, anywhere. They also put together apps advising on evacuation routes (or lack of), self-help, warnings to the general population, curfews, availability of medicines in working drugstores and much more. They even went a step further: families of Russia's MIAs could go online to Ukraine to inquire about their loved ones' fates – captured or killed. This website access was quickly blocked by the Russian government, but people still get to it via VPNs. Ukraine implements face recognition technology on a grand scale as we speak. They purchased a huge database of faces collected by Clearview AI, an industry leader, to be used in identifying enemy combatants, dead or alive. Ukraine has an opportunity to name most of the perpetrators who commit war crimes. Face recognition is controversial, but in our opinion, it is right on the money in wartime Ukraine.

The Russian Federation, on the other hand, shot itself in the foot (pun fully intended). Their coveted military communication radios, besides being expensive and in short supply to the army, were made to use cellular networks to send messages and conduct battlefield communications. Guess what they were doing in every captured Ukrainian town? They were demolishing cellular infrastructure. As

a result, their own radios no longer work in many places. Ukrainian cellular operators quickly barred the use of the Russian cell phones and also newly activated Ukrainian SIM cards (locally pilfered), from their networks. The Russian army now kills owners and steals telephones from the locals to make phone calls back home. Some of the same phones and iPads have sprung up all over Russia with fresh activation requests back to the Apple Corporation. And now that we mentioned it – several large electronics chain stores in the Russian Federation announced they will buy used electronic goods from the public, for sale on their own account. Imagine – commit murder, and then steal an iPhone in Ukraine to legally sell it with the aid of a large store that knows where it came from. What a country!

Ukraine quickly barred online real or almost real-time reporting of events by bloggers and tik-tokers. A law on the books prevents postings on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook. What is pride and vanity to some, turned out to be perfect assistance for intel-gathering Russia. Posted video showing a missile strike or text identifying what was damaged plays right into the enemy’s hands. Recent lame Kyiv TV story reporting on a tank repair depot resulted in a rocket strike a mere hour after it went on the air. People reporting on the hits in their own neighborhoods are likely to become victims of the next shelling round. Live and learn, while you still can. News no longer carry details of the actual fights and skirmishes taking place; they are now delayed by a day or two.

End of Part I

Part II **>>>**