
The Potential of separatism in Russia

Andrii Novik

PhD student, e-mail: rebusplus@ukr.net, ORCID: 0009-0000-0272-3120

Yevhenii Berezhnyak Military Academy, Kyiv, Ukraine

Received: November 25, 2022 | **Revised:** December 21, 2022 | **Accepted:** December 31, 2022

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10449262

Abstract

The article examines the potential of separatism on the territory of Russia. It has been established that separatism is a natural phenomenon for a post-colonial state, which is generated by the desire of disaffected ethnic and sub-ethnic population groups living within the historical homeland and defined borders of the Russian Federation for independence or autonomy for one reason or another.

The instability of the situation in Russian regions is a manifestation of economic stagnation, corruption of officials, state exploitation of natural resources, complex social situation and, as a result, dissatisfaction of the population, lack of real federalism, democracy, effectiveness of regional policy and government accountability. At the same time, the central government of the Russian Federation does not pay enough attention to the needs of the regions, considering them exclusively as resources.

The results of the study are particularly relevant in the framework of the search for opportunities for Ukraine to conduct asymmetric actions against the background of the ongoing Russian hybrid war, considering the superiority in military power and resource potential of the Russian Federation.

Key words: separatism, the potential of separatism, hybrid war, asymmetric actions.

Introduction

The strategic goals of the Russian government, despite any cosmetic statements of its officials, remain unchanged: the return of Ukraine to the zone of its complete influence, the elimination of its national identity and independence, the establishment of external control over the processes taking place in our country, the termination of the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state. The Russian political regime, using the multidimensionality of hybrid forms and methods, tries to achieve advantages in the military, political, economic, information and cyber security spheres, stirs up social conflicts on the basis of language and religion (Kondratyuk V.).

There is no doubt that official Moscow will continue its “hybrid activity” in order to destabilize the situation in Ukraine to return our State to the “Russian world”, using a wide variety of tools for this purpose. In particular, the Russian special services permanently stage manifestations of regional separatism in Ukraine, using historical conflicts between Ukraine and its neighbors to demonstrate the alleged artificiality of the formation of the Ukrainian State and with the aim of organizing a scenario of the development of events, similar to the one in 2014.

At the same time, the situation with separatism in Russia is even more complicated than in any European country, including Ukraine.

Considering the above and analyzing the events of the previous years (annexation of Crimea by Russia and aggression of the Russian Federation in the East of Ukraine), the issue of using asymmetric methods of combat against an enemy that is superior in terms of its military power has become particularly relevant at the present time (Leonov V.V., Vorovykh B.O.).

Theoretical background

According to many political scientists, after the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, the Russian Federation was also on the verge of collapse (Minahan James). A number of national republics pursued a fairly independent policy, which in certain manifestations could be classified as separatism.

Historical facts testify to social tensions and a significant number of conflicts within the Russian Federation. For example, up to 20 cases of the declaration of republics were recorded in the North Caucasus, as a result of which the Russian authorities conducted 6 military and counter-terrorist operations, in particular the first and second Chechen wars (Dobaev I. P., 2012; Markedonov S. M., 2008). In addition, in 1990-2000, there were 23 attempts to declare independence, as well as protests against autonomy within the Russian Federation, attempts to create independent currency institutes at the level of subjects (Markedonov S. M., 2008).

In (Separatist tendencies in modern Russia, 03.11.2016), specialists of the National Institute of Strategic Studies considered the main trends of separatism in modern Russia. The main manifestations of secession, the state policy of preventing and countering it are analyzed and summarized, and a general assessment of the potential of centrifugal movements in the Russian Federation is given.

The research mainly uses a synergistic approach (in particular, the idea of self-organization of highly complex systems under conditions of increased instability and imbalance, which will contribute to understanding the mutual influence of threats and risks in the context of globalization/counter-globalization and glocalization processes with the catalyzing of separatist tendencies, the prospect of the emergence of “quasi-state entities”), ideas of metamodernism (determining the value of past experience for the present).

The purpose of the article is to determine the potential of separatism on the territory of Russia, which is particularly relevant in the framework of the search for opportunities for Ukraine to conduct asymmetric actions against the background of the ongoing Russian hybrid war.

Result and Discussion

Separatism is a phenomenon potentially present in any state entity. Separatism is activated under certain conditions, under the influence of various groups of factors related to the political and socio-cultural transformation of society, a significant weakening or strengthening of the central government. In general, separatism as the desire of some regions of the state to separate, acquire greater political independence, sovereignty is partly a manifestation of a defensive reaction to processes that do not suit one or another part of society at critical moments of its development (Potential threats ..., 2014).

The potential of separatism depends primarily on the strength of the regional community, in the midst of which separatist sentiments spread or can spread. It is about both its number and the attractiveness of the corresponding identity; the presence of common interests, different from the interests of the rest of the country's population; the existence of noticeable linguistic, cultural, and confessional features determined by the history of the region. Quite often, the formation of such a community is facilitated by the existence of certain geographical barriers that complicate communications within the state, in particular, water obstacles, mountains, etc. (Potential threats ..., 2014).

It is worth noting that local conflicts arising on ethnic or inter-religious grounds could not have reached threatening proportions without permanent external support. Local separatism, which becomes a policy tool of external forces, turns into one of the leading factors of producing and maintaining instability. Unresolved conflict situations, their artificial “freezing”, the constant

escalation of tension leads to the strengthening of other threats (Gorbuln V., p. 77).

In particular, Russian special services formed and coordinated the activities of an extensive network of anti-Ukrainian organizations, various Orthodox groups focused on the ideas of the “Russian world”, separatist political groups (“Donetsk Republic”), criminalized paramilitary organizations (“Cossacks”) in the southeastern regions of Ukraine and Crimea formations, fighting clubs, primarily in Crimea, the Oplot organization, security structures) (Gorbuln V., p. 271).

At the same time, one of the main activities of the Russian special services has become the organization and implementation of information campaigns to discredit Ukraine, both at the international level and within the country to form the appropriate separatist foundation. During such events, attempts to destabilize the situation in the country and introduce a split into Ukrainian society continue, the theme of separatism and the collapse of Ukraine is inspired, and historical facts are manipulated (Gorbuln V., p. 272).

The peculiarities of the organization of separatism by the Russian special services in the Ukrainian Donbas are (International experience):

- the absence of systematically organized separatist movements with recognized leaders and broad support from the population in the specified region, as well as areas of compact residence of representatives of certain peoples, ethnic or religious groups. The above shows that the emergence of separatism in this region is not the result of an intra-state conflict on inter-ethnic, inter-confessional or other grounds;

- the development of the ideological foundations of such separatism was done outside of Ukraine in the form of the “Russian world” project. Organizational and financial support of the activities of the quasi-state entities “DPR” and “LPR” is also carried out mainly from the territory of Russia under constant control by curators from the government of the Russian Federation and the FSB/GRU;

- ongoing active “state-building” of the “DPR” and “LPR” against the background of the declaration of the inseparability of the “republics” from Ukraine (including confirming the intention to hold local elections in these territories according to Ukrainian legislation), in particular, the introduction of Russian currency into circulation, the introduction Russian standards in various areas (issuance of passports, etc.). Therefore, it is quite likely that even after the end of the armed conflict, the most radical elements may resort to continuing the struggle with partisan methods with the covert or overt support and assistance of the Russian Federation;

- destabilization of the socio-political situation, undermining the foundations of civil peace in Ukraine, ensuring the possibility of constant influence on the internal and external politics of Ukraine through the puppet regimes in Donbas controlled from Moscow are part of the geopolitical strategy of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine.

At the same time, in Russia itself, separatism is a natural phenomenon for a post-colonial state, which is generated by the activity of numerous disaffected ethnic and sub-ethnic groups living within the historical homeland and the declared borders of the Russian Federation, before independence or autonomy for one reason or another.

The federal system of the Russian Federation is a solution to the problem of ethnic and economic heterogeneity of the country through the formation of “national republics”, which became the reason for the population’s blurred understanding of the federation as a single center or the integrity of the state as such. Given the above, the prospect of secession of part of the territory from the federation may be acceptable for the population of certain regions of Russia (primarily “national” republics).

According to the analysis of the typology of separatism in Russia carried out by the Center for Studies of the Problems of the Russian Federation (Separatist tendencies ..., 03.11.2016), its most striking manifestations are:

1. Ethnic or national separatism (example – republics of Dagestan, Tatarstan).
2. Political separatism (example – Cossack movements, organizations).
3. Economic separatism (example – Kaliningrad region).
4. “Combined” separatism (example – the Siberian region of Russia).

At the same time, currently, among the main causes (causing agents) of separatist sentiments (tendencies) in Russia, it is possible to single out:

1. Pan-Turkism, which consolidates anti-Russian orientation for Turkic peoples, as well as Buryats, Kalmyks, and peoples of the Tunguso-Manchurian group. One of the varieties is Pan-Turanism.

2. Islamist movements, spread primarily in the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, etc. Separately, it is worth highlighting Wahhabism as an ideology of the destruction of weakening states.

3. Finno-Hungarian nationalism (considers the Finno-Hungarian peoples as the indigenous population of the northern half of the European part of Russia and western Siberia).

4. Pan-Slavism, which is a nationalist project and involves the formation of a single Slavic Russian state. It is worth noting that separatism is an extreme manifestation of nationalism.

5. Siberian regionalism (the idea of the separateness of the ethnic group of the Russian population of Siberia and the Far East).

6. Quasi-ethnic confederalism and Russian separatism (dissatisfaction with the policy of the federal center, the concept of separate Russian nations within certain regions: “Urals”, “Pomors”, “Volgars”).

7. The presence and emergence of new religious sects (is an additional factor of aggravating the situation in the event of a corresponding development of events).

8. Organized crime (they use anti-government rhetoric to gain support from the local population).

The instability of the situation in Russian regions is a manifestation of economic stagnation, corruption of officials, state exploitation of natural resources, complex social situation and, as a result, dissatisfaction of the population, lack of real federalism, democracy, effectiveness of regional policy and government accountability. At the same time, the central government of the Russian Federation considers the regions exclusively as resources that can be used at its own discretion, but still carries out a certain policy in their relation to curb the fragmentation of the state.

Throughout the entire imperial history, Russian rulers nurtured a neurotic fear not only of enemies outside the empire, but also of conquered peoples within it (Etkind A.).

Therefore, there is a large number of all kinds of internal misunderstandings and problematic issues on the most diverse basis, which take place among the large population of the “Russian world” on the vast territory of the Russian state.

The military potential of Ukraine will not allow us to succeed in returning the occupied territories of Crimea and the East of our State in a direct confrontation with the Russian army, which is superior in all respects. Therefore, the only available option to eliminate the advantage of the opponent in the military struggle is the wide use of asymmetric actions aimed at the weak points of Russian imperialist state-building.

Examples of such actions can be the above-mentioned measures of the Russian side in relation to Ukraine, as well as Georgia and Moldova, on whose territories Russian special services have ignited the fires of separatism that have grown into quasi-state formations: “LPR”, “DPR”, “Republic of Abkhazia”, “Republic of South Ossetia” and “Transnistrian Moldavian Republic”. Such artificial state formations are used by the aggressor as instruments of influence on the politics of the above-mentioned countries, forcing their authorities to make decisions beneficial to the organizers (“puppet masters” from the Russian Federation, who are behind the illegitimate players).

Conclusions

The Kremlin authorities widely use a variety of tools to influence the situation in Ukraine and beyond in the course of waging a hybrid war, including by igniting “hotbeds of separatism”. By taking appropriate measures, the Russian authorities underestimate the likelihood of asymmetric retaliatory actions, especially given the presence of a significant potential for separatism on the territory of Russia.

Conflicts of a local nature arising within the borders of the state, primarily on ethnic or religious (inter-confessional) grounds, would definitely not have a significant development without the permanent intervention of external interested parties.

At the same time, one of the main factors contributing to instability is regional separatism, which is used as a tool to influence the political situation by interested external players. Further “freezing” of such situations and the periodic escalation of tensions cause the emergence and strengthening of accompanying threats.

Actions of a destructive nature by the Russian authorities, aimed at strengthening their own influence on the processes taking place in neighboring countries, may have the opposite reaction, since instability tends to spread to the maximum.

References

- Dobaev I. P. (2012). Modern terrorism in the North Caucasus: evolution of forms and methods of specific practice. State and municipal management. *Scientific notes of the SKAGS*. 2012, № 1, p. 132-140.
- Etkind A. Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience. Polity, 2011, 264 p.
- Gorbulln V. Global hybrid war: the Ukrainian front. Kyiv: NISD, 2017, 496 p.
- International experience of fighting separatism: conclusions for Ukraine: analytical report. / O. O. Reznikova, A. O. Misiura, S. V. Dromov, K. Ye. Voitovskyi. Kyiv: NISD, 2016, 52 p.
- Kondratyuk V. Relaxation is not in time. Retrieved from: <https://zn.ua/ukr/internal/relaks-ne-nachasi.html>.
- Leonov V.V., Vorovych B.O. Paradox asymmetry in modern international armed conflicts. NUOU. 2016. Retrieved from: <http://znp-cvds.nuou.org.ua/article/view/127737/122548>.
- Markedonov S. M. (2008). De facto states of the post-Soviet space: elections and democratization. Bulletin of Eurasia, № 3, p. 75–98.
- Minahan James. One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups. *Bloomsbury Academic*, 2000, 781 p.
- Potential threats of regional separatism in Ukraine. (2014). *Analytical note NISD*. Retrieved from: <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarniy-rozvitok/potencialni-zagrozi-regionalnogo-separatizmu-v-ukraini>.
- Separatist tendencies in modern Russia. (03.11.2016). *Analytical note NISD*. Retrieved from: https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/mizhnarodni-vidnosini/separatistski-tendencii-u-suchasniy-rosii-analitichna-zapiska#_ftn10.