

# Decision-making Pragmatism in the Context of Hybrid-type Aggression

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## Abstract

Decision-making pragmatism plays a crucial role in managing hybrid aggression, a complex type of conflict that combines conventional techniques with cyberattacks, information manipulation, and economic pressure. In the face of such a threat, leaders must make swift and flexible decisions, constantly adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. Decision-making pragmatism involves using innovative and effective solutions that integrate technology, informational resources, and collaboration between civilian and military authorities. International cooperation and legislative adaptation are also essential in countering the effects of this type of conflict, given global interdependence. The pragmatic approach focuses on anticipating and responding quickly to unpredictable threats, thereby strengthening both national and international resilience. The conflict in Ukraine serves as a relevant example of the application of these principles, demonstrating the importance of pragmatism in effectively responding to hybrid aggression and contemporary challenges.

## Keywords:

decision-making pragmatism; hybrid aggression; modern conflicts; cybersecurity; information manipulation; technology and warfare; international cooperation; national resilience.

## Article info

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In recent decades, amid the rapid evolution of information technologies, globalisation, and changes in geopolitical structures, modern conflicts have become increasingly complex, and their nature has evolved considerably. As a result, conventional warfare as we knew it in the past has given way to much more sophisticated forms of aggression, which go beyond direct confrontations between armies. One of the most significant transformations in this regard is the emergence of hybrid aggression, a type of conflict that simultaneously integrates traditional combat methods with information warfare, cyberattacks, economic pressure, and even public opinion manipulation (Grigore 2015).

This major shift in the dynamics of conflict poses new challenges for the decision-making processes of states and international organisations involved in crisis management. In the face of a hybrid threat, decisions must be made in a context characterised by uncertainty, speed, and complexity. Thus, decision-making pragmatism becomes a key factor, especially in crisis situations, where every choice has the potential to influence the course of the conflict.

In this era of hybrid warfare, decisions are no longer merely a matter of strategic options on the battlefield; they also encompass areas such as cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, international relations management, and the coordination of public information and mobilisation efforts. Therefore, authorities must adopt innovative and flexible approaches that allow for quick and adaptable responses in the face of an unpredictable and multifaceted enemy.

In this context, the decision-making process becomes essential not only for military strategy but also for safeguarding the social and economic integrity of the state. Hybrid aggression presents political leaders, government institutions, and the military with complex dilemmas regarding available resources, coordination of actions, and prioritisation of objectives.

Thus, analysing decision-making pragmatism in the face of hybrid aggression addresses multiple fundamental dimensions of modern conflict. The response to this challenge is not limited to technical or military solutions, but requires the integration of a wide range of resources, from economic and political strategies to information management and the involvement of civil society. In this sense, decision-making pragmatism is not just a matter of efficiency, but an absolute necessity for ensuring the security and stability of a state in the face of a complex and often unforeseen attack.

## **Hybrid Aggression – A New Paradigm of Conflict**

Hybrid aggression represents a sophisticated and complex form of warfare, characterised by a synergistic combination of conventional and unconventional means, state and non-state actors, and both overt operations and covert tactics

(Ștefănescu 2024). The military component of hybrid aggression is subtle but highly effective, as it involves the use of armed forces in an indirect and strategic manner, often under the guise of civilian or non-military actions.

One of the most striking features of hybrid aggression is the use of military force below the threshold of conventional war, thereby avoiding a direct international response. For example, in the case of the annexation of Crimea, Russian armed forces operated without official insignia, leading to their being labelled as “little green men.” This technique allowed Russia to maintain a degree of plausible deniability and avoid an open military confrontation with NATO.

Moreover, the military means employed in a hybrid conflict are often accompanied by intense disinformation campaigns, psychological destabilisation, and information warfare, aimed at weakening the morale of the target state’s armed forces and sowing confusion among the population. “Shock and awe” tactics no longer require massive bombings, but instead may involve cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, disrupting power grids, communications, and military logistics.

Special forces play a crucial role in hybrid aggression. These well-trained units can carry out reconnaissance, sabotage, infiltration, and influence operations among local populations. Their missions are generally fast, efficient, and difficult to directly attribute to a state actor. These forces are also logistically supported by a parallel civilian infrastructure, allowing them to operate covertly in seemingly peaceful environments.

Technology has a decisive impact on the military component of hybrid warfare. Drones, surveillance satellites, facial recognition technologies, and big data analytics software are used to gain strategic advantages without the need for massive troop deployment. As a result, instead of a traditional battlefield confrontation, we see an invisible but lethal battle fought simultaneously on multiple fronts.

Another important aspect of hybrid aggression with a military focus is the exploitation of local conflicts or ethnic tensions to legitimise so-called “humanitarian” interventions or actions to “protect minorities.” Under this pretext, the aggressor’s armed forces are deployed to foreign territories with the apparent goal of maintaining peace, but in reality, they contribute to territorial occupation and manipulation of local power structures.

In addition to all of this, the importance of modern military doctrines cannot be underestimated. States that are potential victims of hybrid aggression must adapt their military strategies, modernise their armed forces, and invest in the training of specialised units for rapid response, urban warfare, and cyber defence. Doctrinal flexibility and rapid response capability are essential to counter the effects of hybrid aggression.

Therefore, the military dimension of hybrid aggression does not manifest through classical invasions, but rather through a subtle, persistent, and multidimensional presence. To counter this type of threat, a profound reconfiguration of how military capabilities are conceived and employed is necessary, integrated with the broader framework of national security.

### **The Foundations of Decision-Making Pragmatism in Crisis Situations**

In the context of hybrid aggression, the decision-making process is subjected to unprecedented pressure, as political and military leaders must manage a type of conflict that does not follow traditional patterns. Within this framework, decision-making pragmatism is not merely an efficient option but an imperative necessity. Pragmatism means orienting decisions toward concrete results, efficiency, adaptability, and flexibility, while avoiding the pitfalls of ideological rigidity or decisions based solely on precedent.

In crisis situations characterised by uncertainty, time pressure, and an imbalanced flow of information, decision-makers must adopt an approach based on continuous analysis of risks and opportunities ([Dumitru 2022](#)). The fundamental elements of such pragmatism include:

- 1. Real-Time Contextual Evaluation** – Decision-making pragmatism requires constant adaptation to the dynamics of the threat. In the case of hybrid aggression, the unpredictable nature of events demands continuous monitoring of the operational environment using multiple sources: military intelligence, diplomatic channels, media, and open-source analysis.
- 2. Strategic Flexibility** – A core principle is the avoidance of rigid planning. Under hybrid aggression, where the adversary's tactics shift rapidly, response strategies must be modular, scalable, and reversible. This implies having predefined scenarios, as well as the ability to adjust them in real time.
- 3. Data-Driven Decision Making** – Instead of impulsive reactions or intuition-based decisions, pragmatism promotes the use of data-driven analysis: predictive models, simulations, and machine learning algorithms. These tools support rational decision-making—concise, informed, and grounded in reality.
- 4. Rapid and Accountable Decisions** – In the context of a hybrid attack, delaying decisions can lead to devastating consequences. Pragmatism involves accelerated decision-making processes and an institutional culture where accountability is encouraged. Effective leaders must act under uncertainty and be ready to correct course as the situation evolves.
- 5. Interinstitutional and Multidisciplinary Collaboration** – Decisions can no longer be made in isolation. In the face of hybrid aggression, where military, economic, cyber, and social dimensions are simultaneously targeted, collaboration among institutions is essential: military, intelligence services,

government, academia, and the private sector.

**6. Adaptive Thinking and Anticipatory Leadership** – A pragmatic leader anticipates crisis scenarios and prepares the organisation for response and resilience. This means fostering a learning culture in which lessons from past crises are documented and translated into viable policies.

Beyond these operational and strategic elements, decision-making pragmatism is also influenced by the individual traits of decision-makers: emotional intelligence, stress management ability, empathy, and communication skills. In an environment marked by informational chaos and social panic, a leader's ability to project calm and coherence becomes a crucial vector of stability.

The foundations of decision-making pragmatism in crisis situations are deeply rooted in the complex realities of the 21st century, where hybrid aggression demands a profound reconfiguration of decision-making mechanisms. This modern paradigm cannot be reduced to simple manuals or doctrines, it must become an integral part of organisational culture, leadership education, and institutional architecture. Only through such a coherent and multidimensional effort can an effective, legitimate, and sustainable response to contemporary hybrid threats be ensured.

## **Decision-Making Tools and the Management of Hybrid Aggression**

Managing hybrid aggression involves a complex set of decision-making tools capable of responding to the multifaceted challenges of modern conflict. These tools must integrate strategic, operational, and tactical dimensions within a coordinated and adaptive action framework (Dojan 2016). In this context, the role of the pragmatic decision-maker is to select and operationalise the most appropriate tools, depending on the nature of the aggression, the scope of the threat, and the internal capabilities available (Cullen 2017).

**1. Integrated Early Warning Systems (IEWS)** – These represent the first line of defence against hybrid aggression (Botea 2019). The early collection and analysis of weak crisis signals from multiple sources – social, economic, military, and cyber – enable the activation of response mechanisms before the effects become critical. Pragmatic decision-making involves the efficient real-time use of these tools, avoiding decision paralysis.

**2. Interagency Crisis Cells** – In the face of hybrid threats, an effective response requires a multisectoral approach. Creating crisis cells with representatives from defence, public order, intelligence, strategic communication, and the private sector ensures a collective decision-making process, based on the rapid sharing of information and the ability to act simultaneously on multiple fronts.

**3. Simulations and Wargaming** – These tools allow for the testing of hybrid aggression scenarios in a controlled environment. They help

identify vulnerabilities, test decisions under stress conditions, and refine institutional responses. Pragmatic decision-makers use these exercises not only for preparedness but also to develop an organisational culture focused on anticipation and adaptation.

**4. Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Decision Platforms** – In the digital age, AI can process vast amounts of data to provide rapid and precise decision support. Machine learning algorithms can detect behaviour patterns, anticipate hybrid actors' moves, and suggest response options. The implementation of these platforms must be done cautiously, ensuring constant human oversight over critical decisions.

**5. Strategic Communication and Counter-Narratives** – Hybrid aggression often includes a strong informational component. Combating disinformation and manipulation requires clear mechanisms of strategic communication through which the state can convey coherent, credible, and synchronised messages. Pragmatic decision-makers must understand the importance of this dimension and integrate it into the response architecture.

**6. Societal Resilience Mechanisms** – An effective response to hybrid aggression cannot exclude the civilian population. Pragmatic decision-making also involves investment in civic education, digital literacy, volunteerism, and community infrastructure – all aimed at reducing vulnerability to manipulation and supporting social cohesion (Buica 2022).

**7. Legal and Normative Instruments** – Responding to hybrid aggression requires a legal framework that enables rapid interventions without sacrificing democratic values. Pragmatic decisions must be legally sustainable, and the normative framework must be periodically revised to keep pace with the evolving nature of threats.

The decision-making tools used to manage hybrid aggression must reflect a holistic and integrative approach, so that they are aligned with each other through a clear, coordinated, and pragmatic decision-making process. Effective leaders are those who understand the complexity of these tools, select them based on context, and apply them in a flexible yet firm manner. Only in this way can a coherent and effective response be ensured in an increasingly fluid and challenging geopolitical landscape.

### **Decision-Making Pragmatism in the Context of the Conflict in Ukraine**

The conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated in 2022 with the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, represents a relevant example of the application of decision-making pragmatism in a hybrid aggression context. The war in Ukraine combines conventional warfare techniques with cyber operations, information warfare, economic pressure, and manipulation of public opinion. Faced with this complex hybrid threat, Ukrainian authorities were forced to make rapid and effective decisions to protect national territory and maintain internal

stability, demonstrating their ability to respond flexibly and adaptively in a fluid and unpredictable environment ([Lesenciuc 2023](#)).

### **The Context of Hybrid Aggression in Ukraine**

The 2022 Russian invasion intensified hybrid aggression, as the Russian Federation combined conventional tactics with cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, public opinion manipulation, economic pressures, and attempts to destabilise society ([Stancu 2019](#)). Russia employed multiple hybrid tools to destabilise Ukraine and gain a strategic advantage, and Ukraine's response was marked by pragmatic decision-making. The hybrid methods used by Russia and Ukraine's responses are analysed in greater detail in the following sections.

### **Hybrid Tools Used by the Russian Federation**

The Russian Federation employed a complex combination of hybrid tools to destabilise Ukraine and undermine its government ([Giurgea 2024](#)):

- **Cyberattacks:** Before and after the 2022 invasion, Russia launched a series of cyberattacks against Ukraine's critical infrastructure, including power systems, communication networks, and banking systems. These attacks aimed to paralyse state institutions and create panic among the population.
- **Information warfare and disinformation:** Another hybrid method was the massive disinformation campaign. Kremlin spokespersons and state-affiliated media launched propaganda efforts to manipulate public opinion in Ukraine and internationally by spreading fake news, conspiracy theories, and messages that undermined trust in Ukrainian authorities.
- **Economic pressure:** Russia imposed economic sanctions and trade blockades to undermine Ukraine's economy. It also blocked Ukrainian ports and disrupted supply chains for vital resources.
- **Undermining internal political structures:** Russia used internal destabilisation tactics to create chaos among the Ukrainian population. These included attempts to stoke ethnic and sectarian conflicts and fuel internal discontent and divisions among different groups of Ukrainian citizens.

### **Ukraine's Pragmatic Response to Russia's Hybrid Tactics**

Ukraine's response to Russia's hybrid aggression was characterised by decision-making pragmatism. Ukrainian authorities quickly adopted adaptable and effective measures to counter each of the hybrid tools employed by Russia:

- ✓ **Cyber defence response:** In the face of cyberattacks, Ukraine collaborated closely with international partners, including NATO and cybersecurity companies, to strengthen its national cyber infrastructure. Swift measures were implemented to restore affected systems and protect critical infrastructure, demonstrating rapid and flexible decision-making in safeguarding national security.
- ✓ **Disinformation counter-campaigns:** Ukraine implemented information warfare strategies, using social media and mass media to provide accurate



information to the population and combat Russian propaganda. Efforts included identifying and eliminating sources of disinformation and working with international social media platforms to limit the spread of fake news. The Ukrainian president played a central role in these campaigns with an active social media presence and direct communication with Ukrainian citizens and the international community.

- ✓ **International support and strategic alliances:** Ukraine swiftly sought assistance from international partners, such as NATO, the European Union, and the United States. This support included not only weaponry but also financial aid and economic assistance to help stabilise Ukraine's economy under Russian pressure. Ukraine's pragmatic diplomacy secured a unified international response, isolated Russia, and bolstered global support for Ukraine.
- ✓ **Mobilisation of internal and external resources:** Ukraine quickly mobilised internal resources, including the military, territorial forces, and civilian volunteers, to defend the national territory. Simultaneously, authorities engaged civilians in various activities, such as defence equipment production and logistics, thereby strengthening national resilience. The rapid mobilisation of reservists and the integration of local communities into defence efforts were clear examples of effective decision-making pragmatism.
- ✓ **Protection of vital infrastructure and economic adaptation:** Ukraine implemented quick measures to protect its energy and economic infrastructure, reorganising resource distribution and finding alternative energy supply solutions. Authorities also adopted flexible economic policies to maintain financial stability despite Russian-imposed economic sanctions.
- ✓ **Rapid development of the "Diia" application:** This digital tool was essential in crisis management, providing a constant flow of information and assistance to Ukrainian citizens. The app facilitated efficient government communication and resource coordination, allowing citizens quick access to official documents, real-time crisis alerts, and participation in mobilisation processes.
- ✓ **Online recruitment campaigns:** Ukrainian authorities quickly launched online platforms to encourage citizens, including those in the diaspora, to join national defence efforts. These platforms demonstrated the authorities' rapid adaptation to the immediate needs of the conflict.
- ✓ **Use of civilian safety and location apps:** Authorities launched applications and platforms that enabled the safe location of civilians, coordination of evacuations, and information about safe shelters.

These measures illustrated Ukraine's decision-making pragmatism, enabling a swift and adaptive response to each phase of the hybrid aggression. These actions were essential for maintaining internal cohesion and ensuring that both internal and external resources were used effectively.



Ukraine's pragmatic decision-making was also reflected in the resilience and adaptability of Ukrainian society in the face of hybrid aggression. The population showed remarkable resilience to Russian attacks and internal pressures, actively participating in national defence efforts. Public information campaigns, citizen education, and support for civilians actively involved in protecting their territories were essential for maintaining morale and social cohesion. Civic spirit and active public engagement across various areas of national defence were key factors contributing to Ukraine's initial success in countering Russia's hybrid aggression.

The decision-making pragmatism of Ukrainian authorities, combined with international support and active public involvement, was fundamental in countering Russian hybrid aggression and maintaining a coherent and effective long-term response. This case study highlights the importance of decision-making flexibility and adaptability in an extremely volatile security environment, such as that of hybrid aggression.

## Conclusions

In today's era, marked by geopolitical instability, the proliferation of emerging technologies, and the volatility of non-state actors, hybrid aggression represents a complex, adaptive, and persistent threat. In this landscape, decision-making can no longer be an isolated, bureaucratic, or linear process, but must transform into a continuous exercise of pragmatism and anticipation. Thus, decision-making pragmatism becomes a criterion for strategic survival in the face of hybrid aggression, and in an environment dominated by ambiguity and ambivalence, the decision-maker's ability to act quickly, flexibly, and based on continuous risk assessment is crucial. Pragmatism in this context means abandoning dogmatism and continuously adapting to the changing realities of the operational environment, with decision-making becoming an act of balancing what is possible, feasible, and acceptable at a given moment.

Institutional interoperability, artificial intelligence, big data analysis, and strategic simulations are the central pillars of modern decision-making infrastructure. In a hybrid conflict where reaction time is critical, the ability to integrate multiple sources of information and extract relevant patterns in real time from large data volumes can make the difference between success and failure. Moreover, interoperability between civilian and military structures, as well as between national and international bodies, is fundamental to avoiding dysfunctions and overlaps that adversary parties could exploit.

Another critical element in the hybrid conflict landscape is adaptive, reflective, and proactive leadership. Leaders must be not only skilled strategists but also empathetic, open to feedback, and capable of managing tensions between competing priorities.

They must make decisions under intense stress, mobilise their teams, and maintain organisational cohesion amid uncertainty. Their training should include not only military preparation but also the development of emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and strategic communication skills.

The societal dimension of the response involves an integrated vision of national security. Well-informed citizens, educated in resilience and aware of the mechanisms of hybrid aggression, become active partners in the defence of the country. Combating informational manipulation, promoting critical thinking, and strengthening trust in democratic institutions are essential actions to limit the tactical success of hybrid actors. Additionally, government communication must be transparent, coherent, and adapted to modern channels to build public trust.

Last but not least, normative frameworks and democratic mechanisms must be modernised to provide both operational flexibility and guarantees for the protection of citizens' rights. Decision-making pragmatism requires a delicate balance between reaction speed and adherence to the rule of law. Legislative reforms should include clearly defined emergency scenarios, rapid activation procedures for defence mechanisms, and public-private collaboration protocols, especially in critical areas such as cyber infrastructure, media, and the financial sector.

In conclusion, success in countering hybrid aggression does not depend solely on resources or technology but on the quality of the decision-making process. A pragmatic, informed, and strategically well-articulated approach can turn vulnerability into a competitive advantage and crisis into a catalyst for reform. In a world where the boundaries of conflict become increasingly blurred, it remains essential that the decision-making process be grounded in reality but oriented toward the future.

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