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OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THREATS TO THE SECURITY OF NATO'S EASTERN FLANK. CONTEXT OF HYBRID ACTIVITIES

Abstract

Objectives: The aim of the study is to assess the strategic and tactical environment in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, especially between the EU and Belarus, taking into account the results of political and operational analyses of the situation on the border between Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and Belarus.

Material and methods: The paper collects and thoroughly analyzes the most important sources on threats to the security of NATO's eastern flank. The purpose of the research is an operational analysis comprehensively covering the main factors posing threats to the security of Poland.

Results: In the result of the operational analysis of hybrid warfare, the following factors were identified: demographics, military and non-military issues, the existence of a well-formed democratic society, critical infrastructure, and cybersecurity. All the above factors were discussed in the context of hybrid activities undertaken by Belarus and Russia.

Conclusions: It can be predicted that special elements conducting the aggressor's hybrid activities will use exceptionally sophisticated forms of the aggressor's influence, including blending in with the local community. The area of operation of non-military elements in the hybrid wars waged so far by Russia is likely to further expand and change forms in order to blindside the attacked state inducing fear, ineptitude and confusion of the society.

Keywords: *operational analysis, state management, security, NATO, hybrid operations*

Introduction

The art of war has been developing since ancient times together with the development of civilizations and scientific progress, and it is principally aimed at ensuring the security of the state and improving the national existence (Niou and Ordeshook, 1994). The international law of armed conflict, codified mainly in the Hague and Geneva Conventions and enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations as well as other conventions and treaties, does not provide a guarantee of peace nor is it a deterrent against the use of military force involving modern technologies and armaments (Benvenisti and Cohen, 2014). On the contrary, the world is constantly looking for new technological solutions, and therefore

modern ways of conducting military operations and using non-military potential to achieve strategic goals of state policy, including the goals of war.

Hence, from the perspective of Poland and other countries of the region, the key issue in the area of contemporary warfare and security is to develop an objective assessment of the operating environment, based on geopolitical conditions, including socioeconomic and military determinants (Gizicki, 2020). Our reflections concern threats in Central Europe and Eastern Europe in the context of new political trends in the development of international relations as regards forms and methods of preparation and course of armed conflicts, including wars and hybrid activities (Radomyski and Michalski, 2019). The subject of research is the geopolitical situation in the region of Central Europe and Eastern Europe as well as armed conflicts and warfare conducted over the last thirty years, since the beginning of the political transformation in Europe and the end of the *Cold War*. We will thoroughly analyze current conflict on the EU's border with Belarus, as its characteristics are hitherto unparalleled in relations between countries (Sadowski and Maj, 2022).

The aim of the article is to assess the strategic and tactical environment in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, especially between the EU and Belarus, taking into account the results of political and operational analyses of the situation on the border between Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and Belarus. In addition, we made forecasts for further strategic actions of the Belarusian and Russian authorities in terms of using military and non-military forms of threats, provocations and armed incidents in relation to EU countries bordering Belarus and Ukraine, as the latter one is seeking integration with the EU and NATO and is at war with Russia.

The first research problem, a specific research objective, is to explain the political and military conditions determining the change in the forms and methods of settling disputes and conflicts between states, especially Russia and newly created countries or states liberated from Russian domination. Those are clearly moving away from classical military aggression, acquiring and enhancing non-military forms until recently used only by weaker states and non-state actors, including terrorist organizations. The conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine led us to conclude that the intention was to avoid the dissonance between international agreements and consensuses and the practice of settling

disputes in the light of the provisions of international law. Therefore, the motivation of aggressor states to use non-traditional forms of conducting armed combat is on the rise.

The second research problem is to demonstrate why contemporary actions in international relations are often called wars or hybrid actions and whether they can really be effective in achieving strategic goals by aggressor states, mainly on the example of Russia and Belarus.

Research problems were posed in the context of wars and armed conflicts in international systems and relations determined by *constant* and *variable* elements. *Constant* elements in state policy are, among others, geopolitical and military conditions regarding geographical location; the formation of the boundaries and geographical characteristics of the state; national sovereignty and identity; the system of governance; socioeconomic system, education and culture. The *variable* elements in the international order are those that constitute the subject and object of influence on the opposing side in war and conflict, i.e., the sovereign, as the power and the general society in the state, as well as all the economic and defense potential that this sovereign has at its disposal and can use for military operations against the opposing party. Variable elements are constantly being improved in accordance with operational needs, where threats from foreign states set development priorities in the field of security and defense of the state.

The phenomenon of war and armed conflict does not have to translated into constant clashes and armed struggles between the feuding parties. Moreover, from the point of view of the international law of armed conflict, *war* is a specific state of bilateral relations (diplomatic and political, economic and social, military, cultural, etc.) between governments, not between nations and citizens.

Hence, the research effort was focused on the assessment of the strategic and tactical environment in Central and Eastern Europe, especially between the EU and Belarus, taking into account the results of political and operational analyses of the situation on the border between Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and Belarus, after the last Belarusian presidential elections. In addition, we made forecasts for further strategic actions of the Belarusian and Russian authorities in terms of using military and non-military forms of threats, provocations and armed incidents in relation to EU countries bordering Belarus

and Ukraine, as the latter one is seeking integration with the EU and NATO and is at war with Russia.

1. ASYMMETRY AND HYBRIDITY IN THE ART OF WAR IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Due to the specificity of the political and military situation of the post-Cold War period and the so-called political transformation, especially in the area of Central Europe and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new international order, there was a general reduction in tension and unrest in liberated and sovereign states, as well as great hope for a better and more stable future (Allin and Jones, 2022). This hope was not a utopia or a pipe dream, but a real assessment of the situation, confirmed by real transformations and achievements in the fields of security, socioeconomic development, scientific and educational cooperation, culture and regional cooperation.

Despite the desire of the majority of its Member States to further integrate, develop and cooperate, consolidate security and expand to new states, the functioning of the European Union has been seriously disrupted in the recent years. On some sections of the Polish border, which is also the longest land border of the EU, the authoritarian authorities of Belarus caused a crisis situation, agitating and convincing citizens and entire families originating from the Middle East, Afghanistan and other countries affected by conflicts and persecutions against their own citizens to migrate to Belarus to be later transferred to Poland, or through Poland and Lithuania – to other Western European countries. This criminal procedure is still ongoing and on the Polish border, where from several hundred to several thousand immigrants are camped out on the Belarusian side.

However, the current situation on the border between Belarus and EU countries has a different background and is part of a larger common policy and strategy of Russian and Belarusian autocrats. Russia, taking advantage of the situation after last year's presidential elections in Belarus, has led its authorities to full dependence and forced actions that are part of Russia's hybrid war against the EU and NATO (Mészáros and Vasile Țoca, 2023).

The border conflict caused by the Belarusian dictator's regime on the border between Poland and Lithuania, in addition to the broad Russian context, is primarily motivated by political reasons, embedded in the current policy of Belarus. It is one of the new forms and methods of achieving Lukashenko's strategic goal which consists in forcing political concessions from the European Union countries and acceptance of the status quo of Belarus' internal policy. The Russian context resides in creating favorable conditions for Russia's policy in relations with the United States, NATO and the EU on the future of Ukraine. This situation is therefore a kind of latent and officially undeclared political and economic conflict between Russia and Belarus on one side and the European Union, NATO and the USA on the other, although no military force has been exercised. The dispute and conflict are mainly rooted in Ukraine's desire to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state and its hope for future integration with the EU and NATO, as opposed to Russia's great-power strategy and political goals which do not provide for such a scenario. As part of this objective, it is estimated that the government of Belarus is striving to:

- force the EU to recognize the recent presidential elections in Belarus as legitimate and lawful, and thus accept Lukashenko as a duly elected president with the right to exercise power in Belarus;
- obtain from the EU, the Member States and the US the mitigation and reduction of economic, communication and diplomatic restrictions imposed on Belarus for political persecution, restrictions of human rights and freedoms, and torture of political prisoners;
- demonstrate loyalty and credibility to the Russian leader by performing the tasks of a union state seeking greater military and economic cooperation;
- divert the attention of the international community and cover the concentration of Russian armed forces on the eastern and northern borders with Ukraine, as Russia pursues its strategic and political goals, mainly the restoration of the Cold War zones of influence and the achievement

of a great-power position in political, military and socioeconomic terms, aimed at the creation of a new international order;

- undermine the status and prestige of EU Member States, mainly its neighbors: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Romania, through false propaganda and deceitful presentation of inept state management, non-compliance with international and humanitarian laws in respect of migrants whom Belarus forces to violate the law and illegally cross state borders, which also constitute the EU's eastern border.

The above clearly indicates why the Belarusian dictator took actions typical of hybrid war operations to achieve his goal. Such measures, according to the assumptions and theory of hybrid warfare, should lead to the attainment of such political targets without conducting classic military operations comprising massive use of armed forces, air and land strikes from armored and mechanized troops, i.e., without an official declaration of war and open aggression against adjacent states (Thomas, 2016).

The hybridity of military operations is not a new phenomenon in the art of war, as its roots reach back to historical eras when hostilities compiling the use of all economic, diplomatic, technical, transport, personnel and logistical means were not uncommon (Copeland and Potter, 2008). In the context of war, these are various hidden and overt actions of all centrally operating actors of the aggressor state, simultaneously combining diverse measures and methods of violence aimed at forcing the opposing side to submission on a strategic scale. In foreign policy, this means losing sovereignty, independence and civil liberties and subordination to a foreign state. Such activities are usually carried out in the long term, with observance of operational camouflage and gradual takeover of administrative power as well as industrial and service facilities and institutions, preferably on the initiative of a dissatisfied public, where possible.

The strategic level of preparation and conduct of hybrid operations requires an analysis of the main political assumptions from the state level, i.e., the highest state authorities that plan, supervise and influence the implementation of national strategic concepts. Hence, in modern conditions, states, former and new aspiring powers strive to expand their spheres of influence and achieve a great-power position, cannot openly pursue their expansionist strategic goals

and expose themselves to universal criticism and various restrictions. They are therefore forced to use hidden combat methods and strategic actions, with a clear predominance of non-military factors which would exercise comprehensive pressure on the state and society, without declaring war and conducting overt military operations to openly defeat and subjugate a given state (Krieg and Rickli, 2018).

An adequate example where the above requirements were fully conducive to hybrid activities was the creation of the separatist Abkhazia, then the annexation of Crimea, the creation of the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, or the recent seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan (Laryš, 2023). In all the above examples, through the use of hybrid measures, with active but strongly camouflaged involvement of the military factor, Russia has been recreating its zones of influence and implementing its far-reaching strategic goals (Toria and Balaban, 2022). However, Russia is currently using the military factor coupled with maximum conviction about its decisive role in the modern world on the eastern border with Ukraine.

2. SYMPTOMS OF HYBRID ACTIVITIES AFTER THE TRANSFORMATION

After Poland joined NATO in 1999, there were no clear signs of a resurgence of military threats or the identification of new ones. Russia and most post-Soviet states dealt with their political, economic, social and foreign cooperation problems, striving to achieve their proper place and role in the international environment. Within a few years, NATO's political-military bloc developed and expanded significantly and in 1999, it included Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Asymmetry in the political and military sense became a fact (Epstein, 2004, p. 66). However, there was a problem as to what role the NATO alliance should play in the new reality, especially as more and more countries were aspiring to join it (Marten, 2018, p. 142).

The period of transformation and relative peace after the Cold War did not last long, as already in 2008 Russia displayed its expansionist tendencies and imperialist face, triggering the Caucasian conflict in Georgia which was

dynamically seeking full sovereignty, territorial independence and integration with NATO. Russia's interference in Georgia's internal affairs led to separatist actions by Abkhazian nationalist groups. Georgia's use of force to appease the situation in Abkhazia was a sufficient pretext for the incursion of Russian troops into Georgian territory and the establishment of the separatist republic of Abkhazia which is fully dependent on Russia.

During the period of transformation, Russia has repeatedly used hybrid activities to expand its influence and recreate the imperial position it enjoyed during the Cold War era. An analysis of Russia's conduct towards the states created after the collapse of the Soviet Union indicates that the process of involvement in the destruction and disruption of the stabilization of their functioning is a continuous and far-reaching goal aimed at restoring Russia to its former *glory*.

In terms of Poland's security, the *Ukrainian model* may be an adequate way of influencing Russia, due to the purposefulness of concealing overt attack and the use of *aggression below the threshold of war*. The events in Ukraine have made it clear that the initiative of hybrid warfare adopted by the aggressor makes it possible to hide the scale and type of the operation, making the unambiguous determination of the state of war and the aggressor's identity impossible, which helps prevent or delay the reaction of the international community.

In the case of Russia's annexation of Crimea, irregular actions were observed, involving the large-scale use of the Russian community and officers of Russian special services and special units, in the form of *local self-defense units*. Their task was to inspire the discontent of the local population, manipulate them, and, in the final stages of the entire operation, take control of the security of government administration buildings, critical infrastructure and military units. In the next stage of destabilizing operations in South-Eastern Ukraine, the prevailing actions were conventional military operations carried out by organizations and branches of pro-Russian separatists, the so-called *Russian volunteers* and mercenaries from other countries. Terrorist activities, such as kidnapping of political and social activists loyal to Kyiv were carried out in parallel, whereas civilians were used as human shields.

Non-military warfare in hybrid conflicts is mainly aimed at affecting civilians and the international community. Their task is to weaken the will to resist, increase the level of discouragement and social dissatisfaction, which in turn is designed to tip the balance in favor of the aggressor. The main forms of non-military hybrid actions used by Russia in recent decades are primarily economic pressure, high activity of special services, offensive activities in cyberspace and multidirectional diplomatic pursuits.

A completely new, inhumane and criminal hybrid action in international conflicts, as in the case of Belarus against the EU and its members, is the deception, exploitation and manipulation of international migration for political purposes. This involves the Belarusian regime delivering hundreds of thousands of people from Asia, the Middle East and Africa to the EU's land border with Belarus, pushing them to the Polish and Lithuanian side and convincing them of easy access to the western countries of the EU (Bekić, 2022, p. 152). It is a method of exerting political pressure on other states or international organizations in order to force them to ease economic restrictions, while disrespecting the rules of border controls and demanding political concessions, such as: recognition of unconstitutional presidential elections, acceptance of undemocratic systems of governance, disregard for freedoms and human rights, undermining the independence of the courts and judges, persecutions of own citizens, etc.

All the named forms of hybrid activities include multifaceted offensive actions of the aggressor state for which the attacked country is an asymmetric opponent, poorly versed in the situation and intentions of the aggressor, and unprepared to effectively repel individual elements of hybrid war.

3. OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF HYBRID WARFARE FACTORS

The reflection of specific political directions of the state in relation to other states is usually a bilateral agreement between them in the field of foreign policy, visible and implemented on the international forum, socioeconomic relations and military, cultural, scientific, historical, tourist and other cooperation. It is estimated that a current example of such an approach is the policy of Russia towards Russia's neighboring countries, especially in Central Europe

and Eastern Europe, as it is a dominant country both in the geographical region and in the arena of strategic interest. This applies to the countries that have freed themselves from Russian domination and gained full sovereignty in the period of transformation, introducing a democratic system and a parliamentary-cabinet model of governance. In the light of the above, starting a discussion on the nature and possibility of causing hybrid threats in the region of Central Europe and Eastern Europe is in every respect advisable and necessary, because the threat of using hybrid activities is real and can be carried out with full operational camouflage.

Assessing Lukashenko's actions on the border between the EU (Poland, Lithuania) and Belarus, it must be stated that these are not hybrid actions in the sense of Belarus's strategic goal, but may have the characteristics of hybrid activities in terms of strategic goals set by Russia, in the context of its comprehensive and far-reaching policy of recreating its former powerful position. In the following part of the considerations, we discussed the factors that comprehensively capture the operational analysis of hybrid warfare.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR

An analysis of the internal situation in the political, military and socioeconomic environment in which Russia has so far used hybrid activities indicates that the most important factor determining the success of hybrid operations in a given country or region is an in-depth reconnaissance of the demographic component. This applies especially to the structure and size of national, religious, professional and ideological groups and their beliefs in terms of national identity, verification of views and outlook on expansionist Russia, as well as their moral and patriotic attitudes towards their own homeland (Fennell, 2014). Historical and cultural conditions also play a significant role, including appropriate education of the society in the spirit of historical truth and the own culture of the nation itself (Mälksoo, 2009). The above is the basis for assessing the situation and early shaping the right operational situation the elements of which will determine the course of the hybrid operation.

Minorities or national communities in the post-Soviet states play a significant role in the development of hybrid actions by Russia, especially as

regards the long-term preparation of conditions for the implementation of expansionist policies. Russian diasporas in these countries are numerous, thanks to the deliberate policy of the former Soviet Union in relation to its former republics, consisting in the shaping of the Soviet society in the spirit of superiority and predominance of the communist state, its culture, history, beliefs and the supremacy of its political and socioeconomic system.

The countries threatened by Russia should place a strong emphasis on making their own citizens aware of the impact of propaganda disseminated by various Russian centers, aimed at dividing society, its disinformation, slandering the legitimate government and causing social unrest directed against it (Lanoszka, 2019; Fridrichová, 2023). Hence, the society must be informed through objective and free media and transparently made aware of the actual threats and the possibility of losing sovereignty.

WELL-FORMED CIVIL SOCIETY

The key issue is the cooperation of civil society with public administration in the conditions of hybrid warfare. This cooperation can be a pillar of the indisputability and durability of national functional solutions and mechanisms of governance, and, above all, the backbone of the resistance to the aggressor's false propaganda by counteracting all suspicious actions and undertakings. An important operational requirement of countries exposed to hybrid activities is the agility and efficiency of operating within the framework of the crisis response system, at all levels of public administration management. This system is designed to counteract and combat all kinds of threats causing crisis situations, including asymmetric threats posed by aggressive states undertaking hybrid camouflaged actions without declaring war.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A vital factor in exacerbating the crisis situation triggered by a hybrid activity resulting in social anxiety is the impact on critical infrastructure, especially its sensitive and so-called soft elements, such as IT systems ensuring continuity, efficiency and security of local administration, as well as all supply and service

systems for people, farms and institutions. A particularly noteworthy issue for the functioning of the state is ensuring the continuity of energy, heating, supply of drinking water, food, sanitary and first aid measures, as well as the operation of banking, financial, health care and internal security systems (Pietrek, 2022, p. 120). Thus, the creation and triggering of crisis situations in the attacked state, in the initial stage of the planned hybrid operation, is aimed at reconnaissance, verification, and then destruction of critical infrastructure elements (Kitler, 2023). These include sensitive elements of the administrative structure of the state, as well as economic and service components which may be subjected to terrorist attacks, cyber attacks, physical destruction, subversion and sabotage. Such actions, as already mentioned, will be carried out in the first place, in a completely clandestine and disguised manner so as to avoid responsibility and blame the local authority for the administrative mismanagement and social unrest.

MILITARY FACTOR

The Armed Forces in hybrid operations, as shown by examples in the region of Central Europe and Eastern Europe, can play various roles, depending on the political and military situation and relations between countries. The aggressor that secretly organizes and conducts hybrid actions against a sovereign state will try to use military force as an agent of pressure, conducting various redeployments, exercises and maneuvers close to the border with the attacked state in order to evoke fear and belief in the possibility of armed aggression if it does not succumb to its political demands.

Throughout the entire period of preparation of a crisis situation in a sovereign state, the aggressor's armed forces are ready to carry out the aforementioned exercises or be redeployed to the areas of concentration and operational destination, as well as conduct computer simulations and trainings with the use of cyber forces, creating and playing scenarios of diverse interventions.

Hence, an extremely important challenge for smaller and weaker countries liberated from the Soviet authority is the understanding of the national, ideological, religious and cultural structure of society, because these factors largely determine the attitude and identity of citizens (Kiryukhin, 2023).

Faced with hybrid operations against their countries, the societies may adopt different attitudes.

Firstly, they may approve Russia's subliminal actions, i.e., war-like activities, albeit unofficial and unspoken, but gaining support. In such cases, there is a real potential of the society's cooperation in taking over the administration and functional departments of the state by Russia's special services and the Russian community, basically without military aggression.

Another possible response is to counteract and irreconcilably resist all attempts and acts of force against the sovereign state with whose politics and government the majority of society identifies itself and is ready to make the greatest sacrifice in defending the sovereignty of its homeland and wage a fierce fight against the aggressor.

Finally, the society may have no clear definition of its national affiliation and cultural identity, as its constituents have no strong views in this respect and may be hesitant in choosing a particular nation, religion or culture (Blitstein, 2020).

The above analysis and assessment are always carried out with regard to the future hybrid operation to be carried out on a long-term basis and commence when the hybrid operation plan is fully developed, prepared and tested. Operation plans take into account the multivariant ways in which the armed forces are deployed, depending on the behavior of the majority of the population and the degree of defense organization in a given country. The size of the armed forces, their armament and the manner of use are strictly confidential and may be engaged to such an extent and in such uniforms that they do not reveal unambiguous national affiliation. Other elements of the operational group may conduct activities in a secretive, fully disguised manner, without the risk of their disclosure. Such examples of the use of armed forces are known from Russia's hybrid operations in Georgia (Abkhazia), Crimea, Nagorno-Karabakh and Donbas where they were engaged to support the separatist people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Hybridity in the planning and execution of operations, in terms of command and control, has some elements of dysfunction, as it hinders the integration and cooperation of individual uniformed and non-military formations. It is therefore difficult to ensure effective and uniform command in real time from a central command post which must have an ongoing assessment of

the situation and the ability to affectively deploy elements of the operational group. Control and command systems are among the first attack targets, because the course of the hybrid operation and the achievement of the assumed objectives will depend on them to a decisive extent.

Non-military factor

The experiences of recent armed conflicts in the world have made the military environment unequivocally aware that the non-military factor has secured a permanent place in military operations. A feature of hybrid wars is the widespread occurrence of terrorist acts and various forms of crime. Permanent actors of these forms of activity have become non-military elements such as terrorist organizations and organized crime, special services, i.e., intelligence and counterintelligence, fight against crime and corruption, industry protection and civil defense services, as well as paramilitary and national organizations (Bartley, 2005).

Due to the above, scientific analysts and strategists of Western countries, the USA and Russia consider modern hybrid warfare as a new generation of wars whose rules have undergone significant changes. As mentioned earlier, the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has increased owing to the asymmetry of the modern battlefield in terms of threats, countermeasures and defensive fight.

Cybernetic factor

The inherent feature of cyber activities in the modern world is the fact that they are invisible to the naked eye and can be overlooked thanks to the use of highly advanced technology. They create their own separate cyber space within which they can exert extremely severe impacts on the systems of controlling, managing, commanding and supporting decisions of all activities and functions within states, international organizations and corporations (Ştefǎnescu and Papoi, 2020, p. 179). Russia has always used the cyber factor in its hybrid operations, preceding disguised military actions in Abkhazia, Crimea and Donbas with offensive and intense cyber attacks. As we know,

long before the aggression against Ukraine, Russia began media expansion, buying up the information structure of the Ukrainian media by Russian media companies which in turn carried out coordinated information infiltration of Ukraine (Kuznetsova, 2023, p. 59). Ukrainian society was surprised to receive information that was beneficial to the interests of Russia, not Ukraine. A system of disinformation of the Ukrainian society was created and accompanied by the integration of pro-Russian circles and a disguised process of forming volunteer separatist forces with the participation of Russian soldiers. For example, in Georgia, before the aggression, hundreds of seemingly independent and harmless pages and social networks have emerged on the Internet. They appeared to objectively report on events, but were in fact interconnected and coordinated in the process of active disinformation.

An effective weapon in Ukraine turned out to be false information transmitted by politicians and the military in order to create an air of intimidation and distrust towards its own civilian and military personnel. In cyberspace, the weakest points of the attacked state were used, among other things, to promote negative phenomena in society and the ruling elite, such as corruption, nationalism, criminal and persecutory actions against the Russian minority.

In the case of Poland, the national cyberspace area is regulated by the Act of 5 July 2018 on the national security system which implements the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union, the so-called NIS Directive of 6 July 2016 (Ustawa z dnia 5 lipca 2018 r. o krajowym systemie bezpieczeństwa). The above Act mainly regulates the subjective scope including: public administration, state and private production and service institutions. It also governs the sectoral responsibilities of ministers and directors of central institutions, as authorities competent for cybersecurity, and their responsibilities and competences in these matters.

Conclusion

The last thirty years have witnessed profound transformations in the international order and new principles in relations between states due to the wear and tear of the bipolar world order which had dominated the world since the end of World War II. In the global sense, the transformation resulted in the liberation of many countries from the bonds of political dependence and economic, scientific, social and other spheres of influence of the Soviet Union which drew the Iron Curtain dividing the world. However, freedom movements and the socioeconomic crisis of the communist system led to the collapse of the entire socialist bloc, including the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union.

The operational analyses and assessments of Russia's actions to date (together with the dictatorial government of Belarus) in relation to the sovereign states of Europe, especially Ukraine, confirm the assumptions and thesis that hybrid wars conducted by superpower states are a continuation of the dominance policy towards weaker countries. They are an apt tool in achieving strategic goals, subordinating other nations and expanding empires in the context of existing international agreements.

In the context of the research problems posed, the operational analysis indicated that the factors of hybrid warfare are an effective tool for exerting pressure, as they can be used in various combinations depending on the country that is the target of the aggressor state's actions. The military strength of the aggressor, combined with hybrid operations understood as specific forms of preparation for a full-scale war, determines the ability to achieve the strategic goals of the state's policy. It should be stressed that the specificity of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, stemming from the different international position during the Cold War, results in a difference in sensitivity to hybrid factors.

In addition, in today's hybrid conflicts, education and proper preparation of society are issues of utter importance for sovereign but weaker states. Ultimately, the so-called civil society in democratic countries should be well shaped, integrated with the authorities around the implementation of common problems and aware of their rights and obligations. The understanding of the needs of the state and local communities and knowing the possibilities of contemporary asymmetric internal and external threats, including hybrid ones, are crucial. Hence, in accordance with the research objective, we highlighted the types of threats in hybrid warfare, the possibilities of their identification and the response of public authorities and the whole society.

From the perspective of security sciences, it is vital to undertake scientific research in the field of the art of war focusing on: the revision of the geopolitical conditions of countries and regions, the creation of real scenarios of combating the current threats, description of the ways of preparing and using the defense potential of the state in asymmetric, hybrid and military activities.

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