

Jakub Olchowski

## **Ukraine and Great Britain – an alliance based on common interests**

**The key premise that justifies the pursuit of the announced creation of a Polish-Ukrainian-British security agreement is the similar position of the three countries towards Russia's actions. Great Britain and Ukraine also share common interests and many years of cooperation in the field of defense. Ukraine, uncertain of the prospects of NATO and EU membership, strengthens its international position by creating a network of cooperation formats. The "post-Brexit" Great Britain has ambitions to play a more important role in international relations and is active in many areas, including NATO's eastern flank. It also notices the growing importance of the Black Sea, and, while supporting Ukraine, it also pursues its own interests.**

**The alliance.** The alliance of Great Britain, Ukraine, and Poland should not be taken as a surprise. The establishment of this format may have significant political meaning, including for Poland and its international position, but it is above all a consequence of British-Ukrainian cooperation in the field of security, which has been developing since 2014. The development of this cooperation is determined by the threat posed by Russia (which also provided a key platform for understanding with Poland), but also by the shape and priorities of the security policies of both countries.

British-Ukrainian cooperation has intensified over the past few years, but the United Kingdom has been involved in NATO's northern and eastern flank and has been supporting Ukraine militarily since 2014. Since that time, a number of documents have also been signed regarding broadly understood bilateral defense cooperation. The participation of the British in training the armed forces of Ukraine and their involvement in the development and modernization of the Ukrainian navy is of particular importance here. Great Britain granted Ukraine a loan of almost £1.3 billion for the acquisition and construction of warships, and as a technological cooperation – some of the ships will be built in Ukrainian shipyards – Great Britain has become Ukraine's most important naval partner.

Since January 2021, a Ukrainian-British free trade area has been in operation based on a previously negotiated agreement on cooperation and strategic partnership, and joint institutions for trade and security have been established. When, in January 2022, the United Kingdom began to supply Ukraine with weapons publicly on a large scale, it facilitated similar actions by other countries. Finally, on February 1, Boris Johnson paid a visit to Kiev, which was seen in Ukraine as an important signal of strengthening the British-Ukrainian strategic alliance.

**UK security policy.** After leaving the European Union, British interest in European security did not diminish. Great Britain took steps to mark its own presence outside the EU (in the words of Ukraine's ambassador to London, Vadym Prystaiko, "global Britain" has returned), striving to further tighten allied relations with the United States and play a role of the most important, next to the USA, NATO member.

Great Britain is present not only in the Euro-Atlantic area, but also in the Indo-Pacific, and in Africa and the Middle East. One of the essential instruments of influence and projection of the status of Great Britain is to be once again, as it was centuries, the Royal Navy (which, incidentally, led to cuts in the budget of the land forces). The British consider the rise of China's power to be the greatest global security challenge. In this context, the cruise of the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth (in mid-2021) to the South China Sea, combined with a visit to South Korea and exercises with Indian and Japanese ships, was not accidental - these three states are key allies of the West in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition, in September 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the USA concluded a trilateral alliance – AUKUS – whose strategic goal is to limit China's abilities (Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines). This was not surprising – AUKUS is an element of strengthening ties between countries that already cooperate closely and are close to each other for many reasons.

However, Great Britain also recognizes and appreciates the growing importance of the Black Sea, hence the numerous initiatives to support Ukraine so far – especially since the British consider Russia's policy to be the most important threat in relation to the Euro-Atlantic area. By cooperating with Ukraine, Great Britain also secures its own geopolitical and economic interests, including for the military. Hence, it provided investments in Ukrainian industry, trained Ukrainian soldiers, and conducted joint military exercises, as well as expanded the British fleet's presence in the Black Sea, which causes Russia's growing discontent.

**Ukrainian strategy of "small alliances".** Ukraine is aware that the prospect of EU and NATO membership is undefined and distant – if real at all. Therefore, it pursues a policy of creating, institutionalizing, and tightening various forms of cooperation, especially regional ones - not as an alternative to the EU and NATO, but as a complement to cooperation

with these institutions. At the end of 2020, Ukrainian-Turkish cooperation was initiated under the so-called "Quadriga" (2 + 2, at the level of foreign and defense ministers), and in 2021 the Lublin Triangle and the Associated Trio were established, as well as the Crimean Platform. Through each of these formats, Ukraine is trying to play an important role. Further, it also cooperates with the Three Seas Initiative. At the strategic level, this corresponds to the assumptions of the national security strategy, assuming, inter alia, strengthening international cooperation in the field of security not solely within the NATO formula. Among the strategic partners are Turkey, Lithuania, Poland and Great Britain. On the tactical level, Ukraine aims to create a broad, formal or informal, "anti-Putin coalition" that would be able to provide coordinated and real aid to Ukraine. In addition, as clearly emphasized by, inter alia, Ambassador Andrii Deshchysia, the point is for Ukraine to be more active and visible in the international arena and better represented by partners in Western structures. Importantly, cooperation in the field of security is not limited to the military dimension, but also applies to trade, energy, and the information space. The concept of establishing an alliance with Great Britain and Poland was supported in Ukraine by the majority of the population and political (including opposition) groups.

#### **Conclusions:**

- At the level of the international environment, there is a noticeable densification of the network of security agreements, which are intended to act as a deterrent and to build a balance of power (it also proves the accelerating transformation of the global security system);
- Security cooperation is currently focused not only on the military level, but is also related to technological (cybersecurity, artificial intelligence), information, energy, supply chain continuity, and other domains – this corresponds to the concept of multidimensional (comprehensive) security;
- For Ukraine, the alliance with Great Britain and Poland is an element of a broader strategy of building international ties, despite the awareness that such agreements are not an alternative to classic military alliances, and even less so to the collective defense system;
- Great Britain demonstrates its ambition to play a more important role in international relations; however, being aware of its own limitations, it looks for new areas of activity, e.g. on the northern and eastern flank of NATO;
- The importance of the Black Sea is growing as an area where many interests of various actors clash;
- From Poland's point of view, the alliance with Ukraine and Great Britain may contribute to strengthening its international position (also in relations with the EU) – as long as the agreement is filled with content, i.e. it gains actual subjectivity and significance (e.g. AUKUS has already influenced the balance of power in the Pacific thanks to the real strengthening of Australia's deterrence potential);
- Russia will most likely see this agreement as another manifestation of the "West's expansion" and another threat to its security, which is also the rhetoric from Russia that may be expected.