Marian Kopczewski*

Armed conflicts and state security through the prism of the war in Ukraine

Konflikty zbrojne a bezpieczeństwo państwa przez pryzmat wojny na Ukrainie

Abstract: In recent years, we have seen a wide range of forms of armed conflict, varying in scale, intensity, complexity, and duration, blurring the lines between war and peace. These and other conditions were the reason for undertaking research aimed at identifying scenarios for the development of the international security situation and scenarios for the use of the Polish Armed Forces in relation to threats of a military nature in our country's neighbourhood, in the region, and across the world. With this in mind, while conducting research on the above-mentioned issues, the article focused attention on a research problem which took the form of a question: How does the development of military threats and potential armed conflicts, including the one in Ukraine, affect the shaping of state security? The hypothesis took the form of an assumption that military threats and, consequently, armed conflicts are one of the main determinants of shaping state security. In the face of the threat of an armed conflict, states take actions to ensure their security, in particular, political, organisational, and modernisation activities, and above all, to increase their defence potential in view of war.

The research was conducted in military universities, and the general population (N) included research and teaching staff. The research tool was a questionnaire posted on the MS Teams online platform, which is also used to educate students at military universities.

Keywords: security, research, conflicts, scenarios, forecasts

Streszczenie: W ostatnich latach mamy do czynienia z szerokim spektrum form konfliktów zbrojnych, różniących się m.in. skalą, intensywnością, złożonością i czasem trwania oraz zacieraniem się granic między wojną a pokojem. Te i inne uwarunkowania były powodem podjęcia badań, których celem było zidentyfikowanie scenariuszy rozwoju sytuacji bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego i scenariuszy użycia Sił Zbrojnych RP w odniesieniu do zagrożeń o charakterze militarnym w sąsiedztwie naszego kraju, w regionie oraz na świecie. Mając powyższe na uwadze, prowadząc badania nad wyżej wymienioną problematy-

*   Marian Kopczewski, Professor, General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military University of Land Forces, Faculty of Security Studies, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0402-0477, e-mail: marian.kopczewski@interia.pl

ką w artykule skupiono uwagę na problemie badawczym, który przyjął formę pytania: Jak rozwój zagrożeń militarnych oraz potencjalne konflikty zbrojne, w tym na Ukrainie, wpływają na kształtowanie bezpieczeństwa państwa? Hipoteza przyjęła natomiast formę założenia, że: zagrożenia o charakterze militarnym, a w konsekwencji konflikty zbrojne, stanowią jeden z głównych determinantów kształtowania bezpieczeństwa państwa. Państwa, które w obliczu zagrożenia wystąpienia konfliktu zbrojnego podejmują działania zmierzające do zapewnienia swojego bezpieczeństwa, są to zwłaszcza działania o charakterze politycznym, organizacyjnym, modernizacyjnym, a przede wszystkim zmierzające do zwiększenia swojego potencjału obronnego w obliczu wojny. Badania prowadzono w uczelniach wojskowych, a populacja generalna (N) objęła kadrę naukowo-dydaktyczną. Narzędzie badawcze stanowił kwestionariusz ankiety zamieszczony na platformie internetowej MS Teams, wykorzystywanej również w kształceniu studentów uczelni wojskowych.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo, badania, konflikty, scenariusze, prognozy

Introduction

There are around 200 countries in the world and several times that number of ethnic, national, and tribal groups. States and groups have their own interests and goals, which can be either common or divergent. If a group of entities has common interests and goals, they often cooperate. If there is a divergence of interests and goals, a conflict, war, or an international dispute may arise. According to those criteria[1]:

■ war means the breaking of peaceful relations between states and the transition to war relations. However, a state of war does not necessarily imply the automatic conduct of military actions.

■ an armed conflict is a situation when armed force is used between the parties. This means that conflicts include all manifestations of armed struggle. The cause of conflicts is the divergence of interests and goals of given entities. However, not every divergence of interests leads to armed conflict. It occurs when the parties are unable to or unwilling to reconcile peacefully. One can find the sources of armed conflict in economic, political, or ideological factors.

■ an international dispute, when the confrontation between the parties is carried out by methods other than armed struggle, e.g., using economic, diplomatic, or informational means.

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[1] Developed based on: M. Kopczewski, *Konflikty zbrojne jako główny determinant bezpieczeństwa państwa. Element do uczelnianego projektu Model III Wojna Światowa Delta*, expert opinion, Wrocław 2021.

In 2014, the international community witnessed the development of a multifaceted armed conflict on the eastern borders of the European Union. The armed conflict between two countries in Europe ended the period of relative peace on the European continent. For the first time in a long while, Europe witnessed open interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, open aggression of one state against another, violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the changing of borders as a result of annexation and violation of international law. This was a clear undermining of the international order and the principles of international law (i.a., included in the Charter of the United Nations and in the CSCE/OSCE Final Act,) by the Russian Federation (RF).

Since the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Kremlin's goal has been to prevent Ukraine from integrating with the West. The brutal war forced over a dozen million people to leave their homes and killed over 100,000 soldiers and civilians from Ukraine and over 120,000 from the RF. Despite many internal problems, Ukraine is gradually integrating with the European Union (DCFTA Agreement) and the North Atlantic Alliance[2]. The Kremlin is putting pressure on Ukraine to force it to implement Russia's interpretation of the agreements and thus grant the so-called separatist republics broad political and economic autonomy. At the same time, Russia has consistently blamed Ukraine for the situation in the Donbas claiming, contrary to the obvious facts, that it is not involved in the conflict; heroic Ukraine has resisted Russian pressure so far. In any case, the war has lasted over a year, and there is every reason to believe that this temporary period will extend beyond the limits of another year. Therefore, it is natural to start thinking about future prospects now, and we are doing so not only in the form of forecasts and assumptions. It is quite logical that, in addition to exciting theoretical discussions, there is an entirely utilitarian side of the search for an answer to that question; the answer is the research carried out by the Polish Armed Forces, which is presented in this article.

2   D. Szkołuda, M. Strzoda, *Cooperation of the Territorial Defense Forces with a non-military system during armed conflict*, "Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces" 2020, vol. 198, no. 4, p. 894.

The starting point of the conducted research was the assumption formulated in the "Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland" in 2017, according to which, regardless of the diverse visions of military development that may appear in a democratic state, the government of the Republic of Poland should be able to conduct a defence policy based on reliable data analysis[3]. To this end, actions have been and will be taken to build expert teams within the Ministry of National Defence as well as to integrate the knowledge of different public and non-public institutions.

As a consequence of the research, the adopted variant of threats and the development of the international security situation leads to the identification of possible scenarios for the use and operation of the armed forces and, consequently, the determination of the needs within their operational capabilities. In a further stage, this translates into a comprehensive identification of activities in the field of acquiring the desired capabilities in relation to their individual components, i.e., doctrines, the structure of the armed forces (individual military units), training, personnel, the competence of commanders, equipment and armaments, infrastructure, and interoperability.

In the course of the research, the team's knowledge was developed and skills were gained in identifying scenarios that make it possible to describe[4]:
1. Possible events concerning the international security environment and the development of the armed forces, taking into account internal and external factors;
2. The state of the environment, the possible strength of the impact of particular environmental factors on the armed forces, and the probability of their occurrence;
3. The environment of a particular element (type) of the armed forces and the factors affecting it;
4. Scenarios of processes in the environment.

The results of the research were presented during scientific conferences attended by individual members of the research team.

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3   The Ministry of National Defence, *Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland*, Warsaw 2017, p. 67.
4   K. Wizimirska-Napora, *Modelowanie rozwiązań konfliktów międzynarodowych w świetle rozważań nad bezpieczeństwem*, Poznań 2021.

1. Characteristics of the respondents (the research sample)

In the research project, a quantitative research method was used in the form of a diagnostic survey method performed using the technique of auditorium survey research. The research tool was a survey sheet in electronic form posted on the MS Teams platform, and the respondents were officers.

The purpose of the survey research was to collect the opinion of a large group of representatives of Polish Army officers on the possible (probable) actions of the Russian Federation towards the former socialist bloc countries and the capabilities that the Polish Armed Forces should have to be able to face possible threats from the Russian Federation. The size of the research sample (120) was selected using a purposive method.

The survey consisted of closed questions (20 in total), including conjunctive (with the possibility of choosing several answers) and disjunctive ones (with the possibility of choosing one answer). In some questions, the respondents could choose the option "other" (indicating their own answers). There were five questions concerning personal information. To illustrate the results of the analysis of the answers to individual questions in a more effective way, various types of charts were used:

- quantitative distribution of the number/categories of individual responses;
- the percentage of the number/category of individual responses, including the number of respondents.

In each case, the number of respondents who answered a question ("N") was given; in the presented material, due to the volume limitations of the article, the most important research results affecting the research problem are presented.
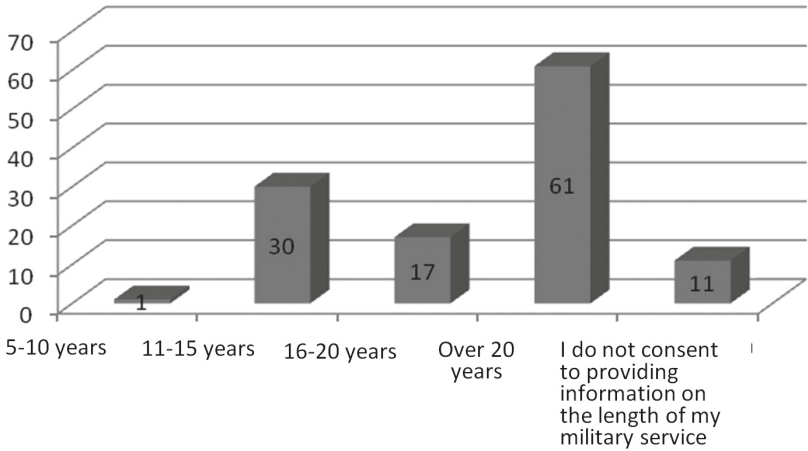
2. Analysis of survey responses

Analysis of responses to the questions concerning personal information

One of the analysed characteristics of the respondents was the length of military service. This question was answered by 91% of the respond-

ents. 11 officers did not agree to disclose the length of their military service. The results are presented in Figure 1.
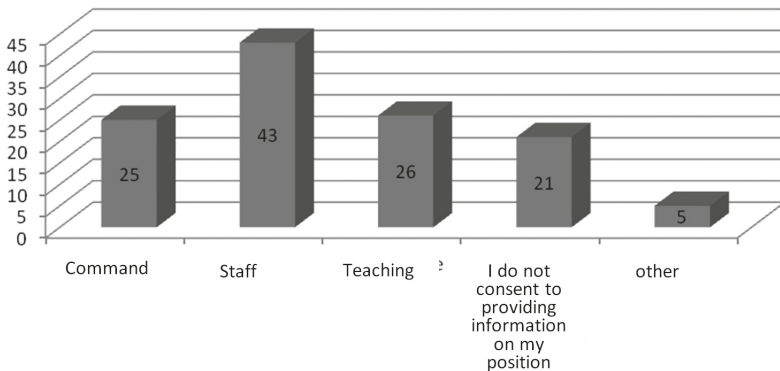
Figure 1. Characteristics of the study population in terms of the length of military service (N=109)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Another analysed characteristic of the respondents was their position. This question was answered by 82% of the respondents. 21 officers did not agree to provide information on their position. The results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Characteristics of the study population in terms of position (N=99)
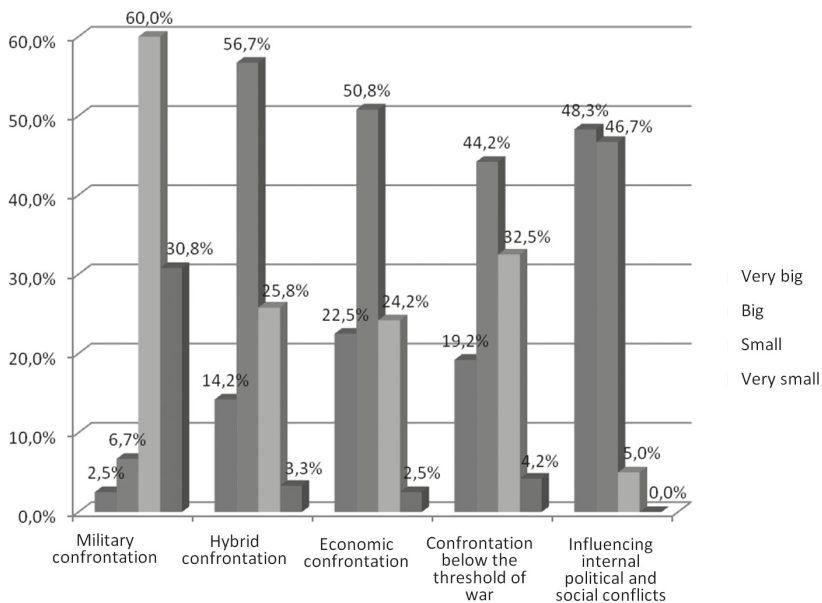

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The fourth analysed characteristic of the respondents was the type of represented Armed Forces. This question was answered by 87% of the respondents. 16 officers did not agree to specify what kind of Armed Forces they represented. The results are presented in Figure 4.

Analysis of the responses from the main part of the survey

One of the questions in the survey concerned the likelihood of the Russian Federation to seek a confrontation with the countries forming the eastern flank of NATO. The question was answered by all respondents, and the percentage results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Percentage scale of answers given to the question: "In your opinion, how likely is it for the Russian Federation to seek confrontation with the countries forming the eastern flank of NATO" (N=120)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Indicating the possible scenario of the Russian Federation's actions towards the countries forming the eastern flank of NATO, the respondents selected the following most likely scenarios:
1. Influencing internal political and social conflicts – 95% (48.3% very high probability and 46.7% high probability).
2. Economic confrontation – 73.3% (22.5% and 50.8% respectively);

3. Confrontation of a hybrid nature – 70.9% (14.2% and 56.7% respectively);
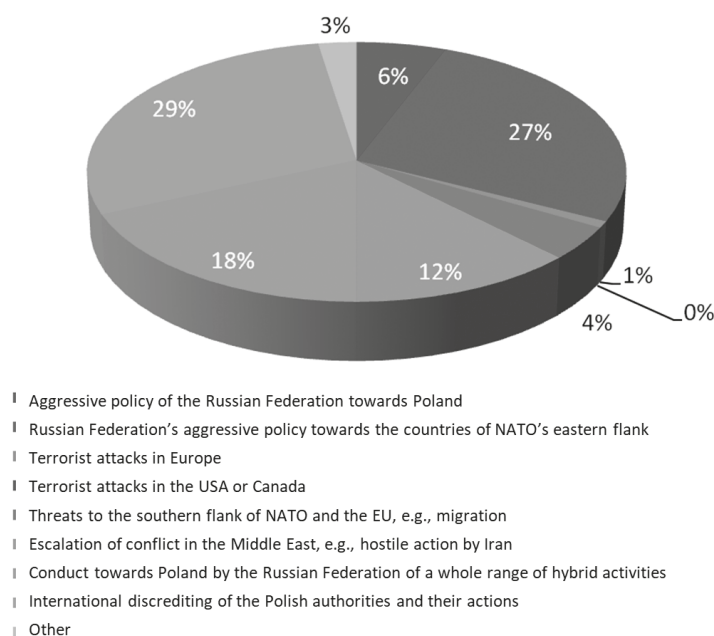4. Confrontation different from war – 63.4% (19.2% and 44.2% respectively).

At the other extreme of probability, there is military confrontation, and only 9.2% of the respondents indicated that the probability was very high (2.5%) or high (6.7%).

In the next question of the survey, the respondents had to indicate the probability of the Russian Federation taking action against the countries that form the eastern flank of NATO. This question, as the previous ones, was answered by all respondents who indicated possible goals of the Russian Federation with regard to the countries of NATO's eastern flank:

1. Information chaos and disinformation – 96.6% (50.8% very high probability and 45.8% high probability);
2. Destabilisation of the political situation – 91.7% (30.0% and 61.7%, respectively);
3. Discrediting in the international arena – 82.5% (22.5% and 60.0% respectively);
4. Undermining the unity of NATO – 80.8% (23.3% and 57.5% respectively);
5. Influencing political decisions of a given country – 77.5% (19.2% and 58.3% respectively);
6. Destabilisation of the economic situation – 75.8% (20.0% and 55.8% respectively);
7. Restricting access to energy resources – 60.8% (20.8% and 40.0% respectively);
8. Creation of conflicts of an ethnic nature – 60.0% (10.8% and 49.2% respectively).

In the next question, the respondents were asked to indicate the most likely scenario of the development of the international security situation. The question was answered by 100% of the respondents, the results on a percentage scale are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Percentage scale of responses to question 8: "What, in your opinion, is the most likely scenario of the development of the international security situation:" (N=120)

▮ Aggressive policy of the Russian Federation towards Poland
▮ Russian Federation's aggressive policy towards the countries of NATO's eastern flank
▮ Terrorist attacks in Europe
▮ Terrorist attacks in the USA or Canada
▮ Threats to the southern flank of NATO and the EU, e.g., migration
▮ Escalation of conflict in the Middle East, e.g., hostile action by Iran
▮ Conduct towards Poland by the Russian Federation of a whole range of hybrid activities
▮ International discrediting of the Polish authorities and their actions
▮ Other

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Indicating the possible scenarios of the development of the international security situation, the respondents selected the following:

Discrediting the Polish authorities and their actions in the international arena – 29%;

Aggressive policy of the Russian Federation towards the countries that form NATO's eastern flank – 27%;

Hybrid actions against Poland – 18%;

Escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, e.g., hostile actions of Iran – 12%;
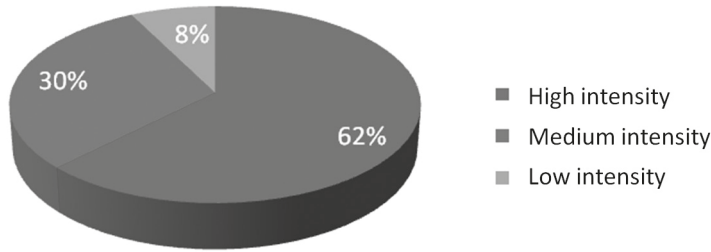
Aggressive policy of the RF towards Poland – 6%;

Other actions – 3%;

Terrorist attacks in Europe – 1%.

In the next question of the survey, the respondents were asked to express their opinion as to whether the Polish Armed Forces should be prepared to conduct high-, medium-, or low-intensity military operations. The question was answered by 100% of the respondents, and the percentage results are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Percentage scale of responses to question 15: "In your opinion, should the Polish Armed Forces be prepared to conduct military operations:" (N=120)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

When indicating the intensity of operations that the Polish Armed Forces should be prepared to conduct, the respondents pointed to:
- High intensity – 62%;
- Medium intensity – 30%;
- Low intensity – 8%.

The results obtained in this respect contradict the determination of the potential nature of actions in cyberspace unless the intensity of actions is currently not associated only with the kinetic impact but also the intensity of the conducted actions – regardless of the battle space.

In the next question of the survey, the respondents were asked to indicate the actions that should be taken in response to the hostile activities of the Russian Federation. This question was answered by 100% of the respondents. When indicating actions that should be taken as a response to the hostile activities of the Russian Federation, the respondents selected the following:
- Modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces – 19%;
- Creation of cyber forces – 15%;
- Development of anti-access capabilities – 13%;
- Development of international cooperation – 10%;
- Strengthening the international cooperation – 9%;
- Increasing the size of the Polish Armed Forces – 9%;
- Increasing the number of allied troops on the territory of Poland – 8%;
- Establishment of a permanent base of allied troops on the territory of Poland – 6%;
- Development of Territorial Defence Forces – 5%;

- Involving paramilitary organisations in the state defence system − 5%.

The obtained results indicate that the modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces, including the creation of cyber forces, should be the fundamental challenge for Poland.

The results of the survey made it possible to develop a scenario of the emergence and development of conflicts in the zone of Russia and its former republics (Table 1).

Table 1. Scenario of the emergence and development of conflicts in the zone of Russia and its former republics[5]

Threats/combat capability	Probability	
	high	low
Actions of the Russian Federation towards the countries of the former socialist bloc		
Method of commencement of military operations	No declaration of war	After declaration of war
Type of actions	Non-military hybrid activities	Total war
Type of armed forces	Special forces	Armoured and mechanised forces
Ways of fighting	Cyberspace activities	Weapon of mass destruction
Nature of confrontation		Military confrontation
	Influencing internal political and social conflicts	
Activities to…	Create information chaos and disinformation	Create conflicts of an ethnic nature
Scenario of development of the security situation	Discrediting the Polish authorities and their actions in the international arena	Terrorist attacks in Europe
Time horizon	Medium (6-10 years)	Shorter (up to 5 years)
Actions of the Polish Armed Forces against possible activities of the Russian Federation		
Environment of military operations	Cyberspace	Large urban agglomerations
Determinants of defence effectiveness	Involvement of Allied troops	Structure of troops allocated to a defence operation
Type of kinetic actions	Hybrid actions (combination of conventional and unconventional actions)	Conventional combat actions (e.g., defence, attack, relief…)
Should the Polish Armed Forces have specially prepared troops (components, army) to conduct unconventional operations?	Yes	

5 Considered: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation of 2 July 2021.

Non-kinetic actions	Cyberspace activities	Hybrid actions of a non-military nature e.g., demonstrations…
Non-kinetic forces for a defensive operation should be allocated by	Civilian NGOs supported by military units	Civilian NGOs
Intensity of action	High	Low
Poland's response to the hostile activities of the Russian Federation	Technical modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces (creation of cyber forces)	Inclusion of paramilitary organisations into the state defence system and development of the Territorial Defence Forces

Concept of use (implementation) of the obtained research results

The conducted research has shown that forecasting the future is an important element in shaping the future of the Polish Armed Forces. The development of knowledge and skills in the field of analytical work and creativity of the personnel (soldiers and civilian experts) leads to the creation of personnel potential capable of identifying and developing the operational capability of the armed forces in the context of meeting the challenges of the changing international security environment and the contemporary and future battle space (actions in crisis situations)[6].

In the case of military universities, such activities are of particular importance as they involve both the formation of future officers and the development of their competence (more broadly personnel) at the subsequent stages of their (professional) careers.

Therefore, the learning programmes in military education should include as much content as possible related to innovation and creative thinking, which will result in more effective performance of tasks by future officers.

With the above in mind, the curricula and courses should include issues related to the identification of threats and the development of the international security situation, the methodology for identifying possible scenarios of the use and operation of the armed forces (or their components) and determining the needs within their operational capabilities. As a consequence, officers should be able to define activities in the field of obtaining the desired operational capabilities (in particular, the ability of troops to command, identify, protect and defend, destroy and provide logistic support), in relation to their individual components, i.e.:

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6   Based on: The Ministry of National Defence, Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland…

- doctrines (instructions, regulations);
- structure of the armed forces (individual military units);
- training;
- personnel (their competence: knowledge, skills, experience);
- competence of commanders;
- equipment and armaments;
- infrastructure;
- interoperability.

With regard to the organisational dimension, the research results should be used to create research laboratories and analytical centres where research on the armed forces and their environment would be conducted, which would lead to the determination of, i.a.:

- possible events affecting the international security environment and the development of the armed forces, taking into account internal and external factors;
- environmental conditions and their scale and scope of impact on the armed forces;
- risk management, by identifying negative environmental factors and estimating the likelihood of their occurrence;
- opportunity management – identifying positive factors enabling the achievement of the objectives of the action;
- environment of a specific element of the armed forces (type of armed forces, type of troops, military unit) and factors affecting it;
- process scenarios in the environment and within the armed forces (individual units).

The obtained research results and the possibilities of their application presented above should also be used during analytical works performed as part of strategic operational reviews and in the process of programming the development of the Polish Armed Forces. In both processes, scenario methods leading to the identification of relevant future events are by all means applicable. As a consequence, those activities should result in the development of documents of a strategic nature such as the strategy for the development of the state defence system (or the defence concept) and the development programme for the Polish Armed Forces.

The effect of the conducted research should also be the preparation of appropriate teaching materials in the form of a methodology

and a manual presenting the course, methods, and results of activities undertaken to:

- identify the present and possible future threats to state security;
- identify scenarios of the development of international security situations and military threats in the vicinity of Poland, in the region of Central Europe, and in the world;
- identify scenarios of the possible use of the Polish Armed Forces in the event of both military and non-military threats;
- indicate actions to be taken adequately to the identified scenarios to improve state security.

To sum up – the implementation of the results of the research should contribute to building the analytical and conceptual capacity of the Ministry of National Defence in terms of the competence of its personnel and the possibility of cooperation in the international arena. While observing the war in Ukraine, we very often look through the prism of emotions, but when we put them aside, a completely different picture emerges. When we analyse what is going on behind the scenes of the conflict considered by most politicians a war, and especially the relations between states in the context of the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, especially in the European Union, a picture of Europe and the world takes shape. First of all, some countries are breaking away from what we would call a unified European policy, which is what we would expect from the EU after the war broke out. If we look back at the actions of state governments, we will see how closely some of them cooperated with the president of Russia. The most important challenge for the Republic of Poland is to analyse and draw conclusions from the conflict/war in Ukraine and to allocate funds for the development of defence Critical Infrastructure necessary to counteract threats from the Russian Federation, bearing in mind the statements of the Ministry of National Defence: "Security has no price" and "Without a strong, numerous, well-trained and equipped army, there is no strong Poland".

The Russian Federation illegally annexed Crimea and launched full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022[7]. The Russian

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7   D. Sevastopulo, *Russia has asked China for military help in Ukraine, US officials say*, "Financial Times", 14 March 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/30850470-8c8c-4b53-aa39-01497064a7b7 [20.01.2023].

invasion resulted in unity among Western countries, unprecedented in previous years. The analysis of the current activities as part of the conflict in Ukraine (2014-2023)[8] makes it possible to notice that the records in the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation about the conflict stages can be confirmed[9]; those are as follows:

1. Political, informational, and psychological rivalry implemented practically for years, which intensified in 2014, through "softening" the opponent, weakening his morale, reducing the will to fight and resist, and making the opponent responsible for worsening the situation.

2. Non-military and unconventional actions through sabotage actions, disinformation, propaganda, information warfare[10].

3. Military actions, conducted through asymmetric-hybrid means, conflict – unconventional actions.

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10 See D. Borecka-Biernat, K. Wajszczyk, K. Walęcka-Matyja, *Rozwiązywanie sytuacji konfliktowych*, Warsaw 2022.