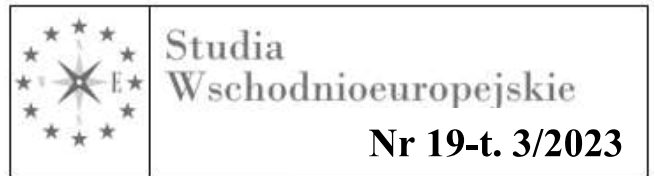


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The military and social aspects of the conflict in Ukraine

Introduction

The establishment of a sovereign Ukraine in 1990 was a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and heralded an era of peaceful coexistence among the nations of Central and Eastern Europe following the Cold War. The vast territory of Ukraine, which encompasses 604,000 km², ranks it as the second largest country in Europe in terms of area. The exemplary intentions and significant contribution of Ukraine to bolstering regional and global security are exemplified by its adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the transfer of its strategic nuclear arsenal to the legal successor of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation. In return, Ukraine received commitments from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity⁸⁷.

In 2014, less than two decades after the signing of this agreement, one of the parties to the agreement, the Russian Federation, engaged in an unlawful intervention in Ukraine's territorial integrity by annexing the Crimean Peninsula⁸⁸.

Scientific reflection on the conflict, triggered by the aggression of the Russian Federation against the neighboring state - sovereign Ukraine, was conducted using both theoretical and empirical methods characteristic of security studies, including source analysis and expert interviews⁸⁹.

A thorough analysis was conducted on publicly available information about the conflict, as well as reports from Geopolitical Intelligence Services. The findings of the research were enriched with expert interviews (17 interviews), conducted with individuals professionally and

⁸⁷ Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, porozumienie międzynarodowe podpisane przez USA, Wielką Brytanię, Rosję i Ukrainę w Budapeszcie 5 grudnia 1994 roku.

⁸⁸ P. Grzebyk, A. Skorupa-Wulczyńska, A. Pudło (i inni), *Aneksja Krymu przez Rosję w świetle prawa międzynarodowego* [w:] H. Szlajfer (red. nauk.), „Sprawy międzynarodowe” Nr 1/2014, PISM 2014.

⁸⁹ B. Wiśniewski, *Praktyczne aspekty badań bezpieczeństwa*, Difin, Warszawa 2020, s. 119-129.

academically engaged with the subject. The research was carried out in the period of October–November 2023. Experts were asked two multiple-choice questions. The first question pertained to Ukraine's current needs in terms of weapons and ammunition. The second question was about the prospects for the conflict's resolution. Additionally, one open-ended question was posed, which simultaneously represents the main research problem: what challenges arise for Ukraine, the European Union, and NATO from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and what are Ukraine's chances of rebuilding the state within its pre-2014 borders? In the research process, the hypothesis was adopted that Ukraine has a chance to regain territories seized by Russia only if it receives significantly more support than it has to date from the European Union member states and the United States. This appears to be very challenging due to the complicated decision-making processes in the European Union and the complex political situation in the USA. Increasingly, there are also signals of a lack of willingness among parts of Western societies to bear the costs of this war.

The military aspects of the armed conflict in Ukraine

The annexation of Crimea by Russia exposed the weakness of the Ukrainian military. This weakness primarily stemmed from underinvestment in the military and low morale among its personnel. It is important to note that many commanders were officers originating from the army of the former Soviet Union, which raised questions about their loyalty to the young state of Ukraine. Additionally, a portion of the lower-ranking personnel and rank-and-file soldiers identified with the narratives promoted by Russian propaganda.

The Ukrainian army underwent significant personnel changes after 2014, but the arsenal still largely consisted of Soviet-era assets, including main battle tanks (about 2,500), artillery and rocket systems (about 2,000), aircraft and helicopters (around 130 units), and medium-range surface-to-air missiles. Compared to the military potential of the Russian Federation, the quantity of the Ukrainian army's armaments was significantly smaller. Nonetheless, in February 2022, this armament enabled Ukraine to thwart Putin's initial plans, which presumed a rapid occupation of Kyiv and control over Ukrainian territory, as indirectly confirmed by a dispatch from the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti, published automatically on the morning of February 26th, containing information about Ukraine's unification with Russia.

It is also worth noting that at the onset of the war, Ukraine had a small quantity of anti-tank guided missiles and man-portable air-defense systems (Javelin, NLAW, and Stinger), supplied by Western countries.

As the conflict intensified, ammunition supplies for the post-Soviet armaments began to diminish rapidly, necessitating urgent organization of weapon and ammunition supplies from the West. From mid-April 2022, countries organized under the leadership of the USA as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) began supplying Kyiv with multiple rocket launch systems (M142 HIMARS and M270 MARS), SAM systems (NASAMS, IRIS-T, and Patriot), main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, 155 mm and 105 mm howitzers, and air-to-ground cruise missiles, including anti-ship missiles. Artillery emerged as a key military branch in this war; hence, supplies of equipment and artillery ammunition were given the highest priority. American deliveries of M142/M270 systems and guided munitions for multiple rocket launch systems (GMLRS) enabled Ukraine to halt the Russian aggression and even create conditions for offensive operations, thanks to the ability to destroy enemy logistics and command centers.

The change in Russian tactics in the last months of 2022, which involved attacking Ukrainian energy infrastructure with cruise missiles launched from the air and Iranian-supplied kamikaze drones, aimed to disrupt the social life of Ukrainian society before the approaching winter and lower civilian morale. Meanwhile, the reserves of post-Soviet SAM missiles in Ukraine diminished, limiting air defense capabilities.

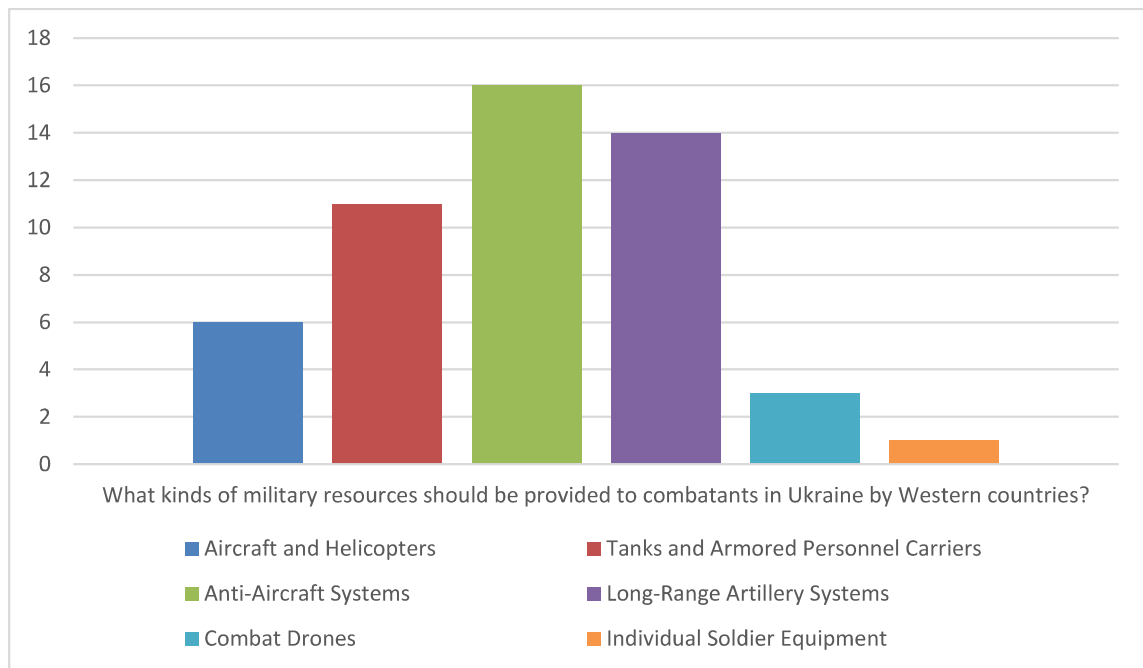
The war in Ukraine is gradually evolving into a drone conflict. Unmanned aerial vehicles of the Bayraktar class proved very effective in the initial phase of the conflict, and tactical drones became invaluable at the front line. Ukraine's requirement for drones remains high, as Russia holds a numerical advantage of five to one in drones of various types⁹⁰.

The dominance of Russia in the airspace has been a notable obstacle since the conflict began. Ukraine lacks multirole aircraft, and acquiring them entails the need for pilot training and the preparation of appropriate infrastructure and technical support systems. These are time-consuming processes, time which Ukraine does not have. Additionally, the possibilities of supplying Ukraine with Soviet-era aircraft, which are still in service and stored in some post-socialist countries, are also coming to an end.

Empirical research results confirm the urgent need for military support for Ukraine. On the multiple-choice question - what military means should be provided to fighting Ukraine by Western countries - experts had the option to select three out of six types of weapons and military equipment: 1) aircraft and helicopters; 2) tanks and armored personnel carriers; 3) anti-aircraft systems; 4) long-range artillery systems; 5) combat drones; 6) individual soldier

⁹⁰ O. Danilov, *Why Ukraine needs weapons right now*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 4.08.2023., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 12.09.2023].

equipment. The results are presented in Chart 1. It should be emphasized that this was a multiple-choice question, hence the sum of the responses does not equal 100%.



Source: *Own study*.

Chart 1. Military Needs of Ukraine According to Experts.

Experts primarily indicated the need for effective anti-aircraft defense and striking capabilities of land forces. They emphasized the necessity of supplying each type of weaponry with enough ammunition to avoid the need to limit the intensity of operational activities. It was also stated that three responses were indicated solely because that was the premise of the study; ideally, they would have chosen all options.

In response to the first part of the open-ended question – what challenges arise for Ukraine, the European Union, and NATO from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – experts highlighted the far-reaching consequences of the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation on regional and global security. They warned against a situation where the societies of the European Union and NATO countries lose interest in this conflict, which could result in decreased acceptance levels for providing military and financial assistance to Ukraine.

Currently, the main challenge that Ukraine may face, both during defensive and offensive operations, is the shortage of 122 mm, 152 mm, and 155 mm fragmentation ammunition. The Biden administration has decided to supply Ukraine with M864 cluster munitions, both to support the Ukrainian offensive and to buy time to increase the production of these

fragmentation shells. However, issues arise at the level of the U.S. Congress in approving funding for these initiatives.

Furthermore, Ukraine still needs more short-range cruise and ballistic missiles capable of striking command posts and key logistical routes deep behind enemy lines. The decision by the British and French governments to supply air-launched cruise missiles (Storm Shadow/SCALP) may ultimately persuade the U.S. Congress to approve the supply of short-range ballistic missiles (ATACMS) to Ukraine, as well as other types of the latest generation weaponry⁹¹.

Political and Social Aspects of the Armed Conflict in Ukraine

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the assumption of legal succession by the Russian Federation, desires to rebuild the former empire have emerged in Russian society with varying intensity. The current policy of the Russian Federation is directed towards this goal. The Ukrainian nation, which has been severely affected by Moscow's imperialist policies over the last century, strongly opposes such a policy. Ukrainians particularly remember the three famines caused by Soviet totalitarianism between 1921 and 1947, during which around 10 million residents of Ukraine lost their lives due to malnutrition and extreme exhaustion⁹².

Of course, this is only a part of the grim statistics that illustrate the victims of the communist regime, an ideology to which the modern Russian Federation largely refers. It is sufficient to say that in today's Russia, homage is still paid to Stalin, under whose rule in the former Soviet Union nearly 30 million people were executed, starved, or worked to death in lethal labor conditions⁹³.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Ukrainian society aspires to create a fully sovereign, democratic state oriented towards integration with the European Union. It must be emphasized that the primary reason for the aggression of the Russian Federation was indeed Ukraine's aspirations to integrate with the West.

While the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war in eastern Ukraine did not arouse strong international interest, the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, caused real concerns about security in the region. The European society unequivocally sided with the attacked Ukraine. The European Union and NATO undertook intense political actions aimed at compelling Russia to cease military operations. One of the

⁹¹ O. Danilov, *Why Ukraine needs weapons...*, op. cit.

⁹² *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, pod red.: B. Kaczorowski, W. Batur, tom 8, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2004, s. 385.

⁹³ D. Alton, *Zachodniej demokracji nadal potrzebne są chrześcijańskie wartości*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 22.12.2017., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 8.11.2023].

more significant political events confirming support for the fighting Ukraine was the NATO summit in Vilnius⁹⁴.

Paul Schwennesen, a senior expert at Geopolitical Intelligence Services, believes that "The West's material support is an important, but not overarching, factor in Ukraine's long-term ability to resist Russian aggression. The entire nation, including volunteer partisan resistance fighters, civilian logistics networks and the Ministry of Defense, is mobilized against Russian occupation. This integrated system is robust and shows no immediate signs of substantially waning."⁹⁵

Empirical research results indicate diverse expert opinions regarding the prospects for ending the armed conflict in Ukraine. Faced with a multiple-choice question - what are the prospects for ending the war in Ukraine by the end of 2025 - experts had the opportunity to indicate more than one of the four most likely scenarios for the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war: 1) the war will end with Ukraine's victory and the recovery of its entire territory; 2) the war will end with a peace treaty at the cost of losing eastern parts of Ukraine; 3) the war will last longer than until the end of 2025; 4) the war will end with the victory of the Russian Federation and the subjugation of the Ukrainian state. The results are presented in Chart 2.



Source: *Own study*.

Chart 2. Scenarios for Ending the Russian-Ukrainian War According to Experts.

⁹⁴ P. Brookes, *Ukraine's long path to victory and NATO*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 22.08.2023., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 18.10.2023].

⁹⁵ P. Schwennesen, *Eyewitness to war: Assessing the Ukrainian capacity to fight*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 6.10.2023., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 19.10.2023].

Given the option to choose multiple scenarios, experts most frequently selected two responses. One of these was the lack of resolution of the conflict within the next two years. The majority of them stated explicitly that Russia would intentionally prolong the conflict to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. They believed that Putin also counts on the diminishing interest of Western societies in a protracted conflict. The second indication was peace in exchange for territorial concessions. All experts agreed that the outcome of the war would primarily depend on military and economic assistance from the West. Experts pointed to the complex situation in the USA, where presidential elections are due in 2024. However, they had no doubts about the determination of the Ukrainian nation to strive for victory. As with the previous question, it should be noted that experts could choose more than one answer, hence the sum of responses does not equal 100%.

In response to the second part of the open-ended question – what are Ukraine's chances of rebuilding the state within its pre-2014 borders – experts highlighted two significant issues. First, it is unlikely that Russian troops will withdraw from all occupied territories, especially Crimea. Second, the Ukrainian administration may face difficulties in properly utilizing funds from the European Union. The main obstacle could be corruption among Ukrainian officials.

Emmanuel Martin, a senior expert at Geopolitical Intelligence Services, points out the issue of corruption in Ukraine: "Ukraine is among the most corrupt countries in Europe and toward the bottom globally. According to Transparency International, its 2022 Corruption Perception Index was still 33/100, ranking 116 out of 180 countries. The realities have prompted foreign investors to shy away, or in some cases run away, from a nation seen as a playground controlled by a handful of oligarchs"⁹⁶.

Although the war may crystallize a sense of national responsibility, thereby reducing tolerance for corruption and increasing acceptance of reforms, it can also lead to more corruption, as recent scandals seem to confirm. In January 2023, the deputy minister of defense and the deputy minister of infrastructure were accused of corruption. The second obstacle could be the tax system, which excessively burdens entrepreneurs and creates a situation where conducting business in Ukraine becomes unprofitable. A more favorable business climate is essential if Ukraine is to reduce its dependency on foreign aid and rely mainly on its own economic growth, based on the country's ability to attract domestic and foreign investments⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ E. Martin, *Ukraine's other war*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 22.05.2023., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 12.09.2023]

⁹⁷ Ibidem

Karl-Peter Schwarz, a senior expert at Geopolitical Intelligence Services, believes that in the foreseeable future, a victory for either side in the Russian-Ukrainian war is not feasible. A ceasefire will also not be a step towards ending the war but merely a pause for each side to strengthen for the resumption of hostilities and mobilize further resources. It is also increasingly difficult to imagine a resolution to this conflict through political means or diplomatic actions. According to this expert, Ukraine may face a scenario similar to the "frozen" post-Soviet conflicts in Moldova and Georgia⁹⁸.

The current course of the conflict demonstrates that both Russia and Ukraine are capable of waging a prolonged war. Russia has not succumbed to the economic sanctions imposed by democratic countries. Russia's resources, especially due to its partnership with China, seem sufficiently robust to endure a long war. A protracted war may lead to diminishing interest among Western societies, which could be advantageous for Russia. On the other hand, Ukraine is determined to continue fighting. The Russian Federation's aggression, particularly crimes against the civilian population, has caused even the Russian-speaking part of society to see no possibility of full reconciliation. High morale, combined with Western arms supplies, may enable Ukraine to continue fighting the invaders. However, while the human resources of the Russian Federation seem inexhaustible, Ukraine may face a serious crisis in this area. The war has caused massive emigration, mainly of mothers with children. Some of them will not return to Ukraine. On the other hand, men of working age are dying on the front. Such a situation could lead to a serious demographic crisis in Ukraine.

In Europe and the USA, there are increasingly more voices warning of the consequences of a prolonged war. If Ukraine fails to demonstrate that Western military aid is producing tangible effects in the form of front-line successes, Kyiv risks a gradual reduction in the scope of this aid. Solidarity with Ukraine will weaken, and the inclination of Germany, France, and other European Union countries to "normalize" relations with Russia will increase. This is particularly likely in countries where populist parties advocating a neutral course and an end to military aid are prominent in electoral politics⁹⁹.

Conclusions

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union created conditions for Ukraine to build a democratic and sovereign state. In 1994, in exchange for relinquishing the

⁹⁸ K. P. Schwarz, *War in Ukraine: Assessing the EU's response*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 1.05.2023., <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 17.09.2023]

⁹⁹ Ibidem

Soviet-era nuclear weapons, Ukraine received security assurances from three major nuclear powers: Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. These assurances turned out to be worthless just two decades later, when Russia initiated its first invasion in 2014, occupying the Crimean Peninsula and parts of eastern Donbas. Experts emphasize that the fundamental issue with security assurances is that they are only credible when the guarantors perceive keeping their promises as a vital national interest¹⁰⁰.

Russia has not abandoned its aspirations of establishing an Eurasian empire and is actively seeking to reestablish its influence in the region that was previously under Soviet control. To achieve this, Russia employs hybrid actions, political pressure, economic measures, and military tactics both within the former Soviet space and in countries like those in the Visegrád Group¹⁰¹.

The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2024, confirmed that peace in Europe is not guaranteed forever. The recognition of the threat posed by a common adversary has sparked a sense of solidarity within European society towards Ukraine. This solidarity is demonstrated through significant military and financial support for Ukraine, as well as declarations of Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union and NATO. The attitude of most European countries towards cooperation and economic ties with Russia has also radically changed. Experts, however, express concerns about the sustainability of European solidarity in the face of a prolonged conflict.

Modern warfare aims to gain and maintain control of the situation, take initiative, ensure superiority in terms of efficiency and mobility, and have the capability for precise long-distance strikes. Therefore, experts emphasize that Ukraine needs timely deliveries of weapons and ammunition in quantities that allow for unrestricted use in combat. Ukraine must also receive anti-aircraft systems and modern multirole aircraft from Western countries because contemporary large-scale military operations are impossible without air superiority. To conduct ground operations, Ukraine requires long-range missile systems, tanks, and armored personnel carriers. With the ongoing conflict and changes in the political landscape of some Western countries, there is concern about maintaining support at the appropriate level. According to

¹⁰⁰ Hedlund S., *Ensuring Ukraine's postwar security*, Geopolitical Intelligence Services, 29.11.2022, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com> [dostęp 2.10.2023]

¹⁰¹ M. Górniewicz, T. Szczurek, M. Walkowiak, *Foresight of the Russian influence on Poland in the era of political and economic changes in the third decade of the 21st century*, [in:] M. Górniewicz, R. Bielawski (eds.), *Influence of Russian Activities. Middle-East Europe, the Visegrad Group Countries and Ukraine*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage, 2023, p. 127-132.

research, there exists an uncertain scenario for the resolution of this conflict, with the majority of experts anticipating its long-term nature.

Streszczenie:

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono wyniki procesu badawczego ukierunkowanego na ocenę przebiegu wojny Rosyjsko-Ukraińskiej oraz wpływu tego konfliktu na przyszłość Ukrainy. Wieloletnie zmagania Ukrainy o utrzymanie integralności terytorialnej, zapoczątkowane wojną hybrydową i aneksją Krymu w roku 2014 a następnie pełnowymiarową agresją zbrojną wojsk Federacji Rosyjskiej 24 lutego 2022 roku, pokazały determinację narodu ukraińskiego do walki o własne, w pełni niepodległe państwo, silnie związane ze strukturami Unii Europejskiej i NATO. Konflikt pokazał też szereg słabych stron zarówno w systemie państwa ukraińskiego, jak i systemowych rozwiązań obowiązujących w Unii Europejskiej a także słabość wspólnoty międzynarodowej w egzekwowaniu norm międzynarodowego prawa konfliktów zbrojnych. Wnioski zawarte w raportach *Geopolitical Intelligence Services* i innych materiałach źródłowych oraz opinie ekspertów wskazują na bardzo trudną sytuację Ukrainy, która bez silnego wsparcia państw zachodnich nie będzie w stanie zrealizować ambitnego celu, jakim jest wyparcie agresora i odbudowa państwa w granicach sprzed roku 2014.

Słowa kluczowe:

Wojna w Ukrainie, polityka bezpieczeństwa, Unia Europejska, NATO

Key words:

War in Ukraine, security policy, European Union, NATO

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