

CURRENT THREATS NEAR THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE AND THEIR POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

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Summary

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine is one of the main threats and challenges to the national security of Ukraine. Ukrainian society is already tired of long-term impossibility to resolve the issue of ending the war, thus there has been a tendency in favor of direct negotiations with a neighboring country, namely the Russian Federation, with the social opinion supporting such procedure for resolving a sensitive issue.

The Minsk agreements have failed and in the near future will fail in finding a positive solution to the armed conflict in favor of one of the parties, and Ukrainian society is divided over the consistent implementation of their measures. Some people have an extremely negative attitude to the implementation of certain provisions, others support their implementation, while a third of the society generally votes for the separation of Donbass from Ukraine.

Although the armed conflict is formally happening between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the illegal military formations of the DPR/LPR, it has a much deeper and more complex structure.

Given the lack of national unity in the state regarding the settlement of the conflict in the Donbas, an important issue arises regarding the beginning of a socio-political dialogue within Ukraine and the development of effective mechanisms for state response to threats to national security. Holding open and transparent discussions between all regions of Ukraine, between two neighboring countries, taking into account the socio-economic situation, cultural and family ties, will provide an opportunity to develop common ways to solve aggravated problems supported by the majority of society.

Keywords: national security, armed conflict, threat, full-on assault, state border, Minsk agreements.

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1. Introduction

After declaration of independence, Ukraine became a full-fledged subject of international relations and an independent, full member of the international community. At the same time, for the implementation of an effective foreign policy of the state, a stable foreign policy course, a regulatory database of relations, scientific justification, research work and practical studies on these issues are necessary, especially with regard to the analysis of threats and risks in the field of national security. The relevance of the research problem relates to the issues of relations between Ukraine and its neighboring countries in the contemporary context and becomes significant against the background of dissemination of information on the possible assault of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of the state.

Analysis of recent research and publications The issues of state protection in modern conditions, its participation in the collective security system were considered in the classical general theoretical works of domestic and foreign scientists, including O. Aliaiev, L. Vorobiova, A. Halchynskiy, O. Honcharenko, K. Hryshenko, V. Derhachov, O. Manachynskiy, I. Hraban, V. Shakhov. The conceptual foundations of international security were studied in the works of scientists from Western European countries, in particular by R. Arona, Z. Brzezinski, D. Baldwin, K. Doych, E. Carra, J. Kennan. At the same time, the problem of the national security system for Ukraine is constantly changing and being updated under the influence of new threats and therefore requires constant analysis and development of new mechanisms for state response in the field of military security and a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in the east of the state.

Formulating the goals of the article (setting the task). The purpose of the article is to consider issues related to modern views on the formation of the security system in the light of external and internal problems of state development and various approaches to its development. Taking into account irregularity of existing approaches to collective security, the possibility of Ukraine to determine the directions and content of the state response to resolving issues of relations with its close neighbors in order to improve the effectiveness of national security and settle the armed conflict in a peaceful way, returning temporarily occupied territories has been considered.

2. Presentation of the main research material

At the end of October and beginning of November 2021, starting with the publication of the influential American edition “The Washington Post”, the whole world became agitated with the news about the alleged discovery of a large formation of Russian troops near the Ukrainian-Russian state border. Later, Bloomberg, Politico and other Western media outlets wrote about the pileup of Russian forces. Thus, it was immediately concluded that the Russian Federation intends to carry out a full-scale offensive operation to capture a significant territory of Ukraine, the so-called Novorossiia, which will include such regions as Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Mykolaiiv and Odesa.

Immediately according to the publications of influential media, the Pentagon informed the European leadership about the formation of a group of Russian troops near the Ukrainian-Russian state border and in the Crimea with the transfer of its airborne formations from the depths of the country. The European Union and the United States warned Russia about the consequences, and NATO said they are closely monitoring the situation, while deploying their forces and assets near the Russian border in the Baltic states, on the Belarusian-Polish border due to the so-called migration crisis and sending their warships to the Black Sea to support the allies and Ukraine, first of all (*The Washington Post*, 2022).

At the same time, neither the intelligence department of the State Border Service, nor the Foreign Intelligence Service and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine were able to confirm this information. The heads of these departments did not consider the movement of Russian troops from Belarus after the Zapad-2021 military exercise to the places of permanent deployment and the planned rotation of military units of the South-Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces as the formation of offensive groups to attack Ukraine. Given the fact that today the digital world and the capabilities of the military potential of the United States of America in the space sphere are very powerful, and the area of the Bryansk, Voronezh and Rostov regions is mostly open, the formation of offensive groups near

the border, deployment of artillery and air defense equipment would be immediately noticed by means of intelligence both from space and ground-based electronic means.

However, during the trip of the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine Kyryl Budanov to the United States and his meeting with the colleagues, the latter immediately stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin could resort to invading the south and east of Ukraine. It was noted that more than 92 thousand Russian troops are concentrated near the borders of Ukraine, and according to him, the likely offensive against Ukraine will begin with attacks from air- and land-based fires and armored thrust, followed by the landing operation in Odessa and Mariupol, as well as a smaller invasion through the territory of Belarus.

As early as on November 22, 2021, US intelligence shared with European allies the data and maps on the scenario of three possible axes of advance of Russian troops – from the occupied Crimea, in eastern Ukraine along the entire length of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, and from Belarus. According to US intelligence officials, about 100 battalion tactical groups, totaling up to 100 thousand people, will be involved in the attack. The offensive will be supported by combat air force. According to Ukrainian intelligence, half of these forces are already in position and ready to attack. In its turn, US intelligence noted that Russia had increased propaganda and disinformation attacks on Ukraine. It is obvious that the Russian Federation is also training agents to destabilize the situation in Ukraine in order to have an easier path over the territory, and also reports on the unprecedented mobilization of reservists since the collapse of the USSR, who are probably assigned with the role of holding possible future occupied territories (*Europe XXI Foundation, 2021*).

So why did this issue arise at the end of the year, why did Western countries led by the United States of America begin to bring up the issue of pileup of Russian troops near the state border of Ukraine and focus on a full-scale offensive by the Russian Federation against Ukraine? Why hasn't martial law been declared in Ukraine, with the threat of a full-scale offensive and taking into account the consequences of the events of 2014, as required by the Law "On Defense of Ukraine", and defense, mobilization and territorial defense plans have not been put into effect?

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has been going on for 8 years in a row, it has passed into the stage of trench warfare and is increasingly negatively affecting the internal political and economic situation in Ukraine. At the same time, over all these eight years, the Ukrainian population has been constantly fed with the same news that a full-scale offensive of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on Ukraine will soon take place. Western countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, EU member states, etc. imposed economic, political and other sanctions on the Russian Federation following Russia's illegal actions against Ukraine, namely annexing the Crimean Peninsula and maintaining the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, hoping that under this pressure Russia will not be able to fight for Ukraine and will disintegrate.

In addition to that, the Minsk negotiation process, which was aimed to resolve the armed conflict, is in a dead end both through the efforts of Ukraine and the Russian Federation and Western partners – Germany and France. For more than a year, the Normandy format has failed to meet to discuss the results of the agreements reached earlier in order to move the issue of resolving the armed conflict further. Firstly, there is still no ceasefire on both sides of the contact line; secondly, the issue of opening entry and exit checkpoints on the line of demarcation has not been resolved; thirdly, the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine has not been determined; fourthly, the Steinmeier's formula has not been taken

into account, concerning the provision of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine with a special procedure of local self-government and the holding of local elections in these territories, and most importantly, peace has not been established and economic ties have not been restored, neither have the supplies channels for the Ukraine's own resources.

Coverage of the escalation of the situation on the Ukrainian-Russian state border is aimed primarily to expand military assistance to Ukraine, as was previously stated by the leadership of the Ukrainian state after a meeting of two presidents – of Ukraine and the United States, and later of other state officials with their colleagues from Great Britain and Canada. So, according to official data of the US State Department, America's security assistance to Ukraine amounted to a total of 2.5 bln. U.S. dollars since 2014, with 400 mln. committed only in 2021. If additional assistance provided by the governments of Great Britain, Canada and some EU member states is added to this amount, then security assistance for Ukraine starting from 2014 will amount to more than 6 bln. U.S. dollars.

Despite the constant statements of the leaders of developed Western countries, the leaders of the European Union and NATO about the constant assistance and support of Ukraine in its struggle for territorial integrity and sovereignty, such significant assistance to Ukraine in the field of security was mainly aimed to provide non-lethal weapons and logistics support to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, train their personnel according to the standards of NATO member countries. Today, assistance to the Ukrainian state in the military sphere continues, and allies and partners undertake to gradually expand it in such areas as providing ships and boats for the navy and the state border service of Ukraine, anti-tank and air-defence weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles.

At the same time, the amount of assistance provided to Ukraine which is allegedly very significant has failed to strengthen the country's defense capability so much and increase the combat potential of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Over eight years of the armed conflict that continues in eastern Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other units of the defense sector have received practically no latest modern military equipment, – at best they were provided with the modernized and repaired samples of military equipment and specialized vehicles of the Soviet and western type.

Along with providing practical assistance, NATO member countries have increased their presence in the Black Sea region in order to conduct intelligence, study the real situation and the ability of the Russian Federation to respond to joint actions of Ukraine and partner countries. Unfortunately, such actions do not promote easing of tensions both at the regional and global levels.

The analysis of the events and threats to the modern world that have emerged over the past 20 years, especially on the European continent, indicates that the United States of America and its allies, represented by the member states of the European Union, began to lose hegemony over the countries previously being under their influence, as well as over the technologies in the economic and military spheres and standards that they set themselves for democratic countries. Now it's no secret that the world has changed and ceased to be bipolar. Instead of the United States and the EU, such powerful countries as China, India and Russia enter the arena of global hegemony, and the situation in different regions of the world depends on their influence.

With the end of the Cold War, the defeat of the USSR and the liquidation of the military bloc of Eastern European countries – the so-called“ Warsaw Pact”, the United States and its allies did not stop at the line that used to share the spheres of interest of two different social formations, namely, capitalist and communist. With the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of new independent countries in the space of the Eurasian continent, rapid steps aimed to break

union ties, sometimes impulsive and led purely by personal grudges of the leaders of already independent republics left many territorial, economic, social and cultural issues unresolved, which later resulted into a threat of conflict situations, and subsequently developed into conflicts on the state border or within states.

The North Atlantic bloc, considering itself a winner and a powerful leader within the collective security system around the world, began to pursue a policy of expansion, accepting new members both from the countries of the Eastern European region that used to be a part of the zone of communist influence, and former post-Soviet republics. This was done too quickly, ignoring the interests of other countries, justifying it by internal affairs of the Alliance and third countries have no right to interfere. Such a rapid pace of expansion of the North Atlantic bloc can be explained by several reasons. First of all, the United States and its allies expanded the zone of influence of their interests; secondly, this is a revenge for the so-called defeat in World War II, successful expansion of the communist ideology to Eastern European countries and split of Europe, and especially Germany; thirdly, the countries that left the zone of influence of the USSR were weak and were not ready to independently defend and pursue their own international policies, so they immediately perceived the EU and NATO as a new collective formation that will ensure their further peaceful coexistence; fourthly, it is of course, pressure on Russia to prevent it from waking up from defeat in the “cold war” and impose its own rule of hegemony; fifthly, aim to expand the economic space and promote its own economic interests to other territories; sixthly, will to create a new buffer zone between the members of the NATO bloc and Russia.

In the period from the late 80s to the late 90s of the last century, the Russian Federation, due to the state of its economic, military and social development, lost its authority and attractiveness to many former Soviet republics. The Commonwealth of Independent States, which was supposed to replace the structures and procedure for interaction of the former Union republics, giving everyone a free choice of their development, strand of policy, but keeping them in a single economic, social and cultural space, could not solve all pressing issues and later, due to economic deterioration, and then the loss of many economic ties, remained only a formal organization. Such state of affairs in the post-Soviet space completely suited the United States and its allies, let them loose and contributed to their economic expansion due to the loss of such a competitor as the USSR, especially in the energy, military and space spheres. In the future – it might be fragmentation of such large states as Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation into several parts and the acquisition of all their resources.

Ukraine has also suffered from the period of decline and search for its own way both at the regional and international levels. Unattractiveness of the situation in the Russian Federation, constant disputes concerning political, economic and territorial issues between Ukraine and Russia, created many threats and stumbling blocks in interstate relations, which later only aggravated rather than eased. This was especially visible in foreign policy, energy sector, demarcation and passage of the state border, the status of the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol, deployment of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, and so on. Failure to solve such burning historically interrelated issues of the two neighboring states, the intervention of other external players in their relations later on, namely in 2014, prompted the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, the emergence of an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the loss of part of its territory.

Since the 2000s, the Russian Federation, unlike Ukraine, has begun to implement its own reforms in the economic, political, military, ideological and social spheres, while refusing the assistance and influence of the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank,

using only internal resources. Subsequently, having overcome several crisis periods, without changing approaches to solving the main tasks of reforms, the country was finally able to improve the state of economic, military and political potential, and most importantly, resolve the issue of the armed conflict in the North Caucasus. During the same period, the Russian Federation improved interstate relations with a number of neighboring countries, especially with China, which is becoming one of the leaders in economic development in the world, Kazakhstan, Belarus and others.

The economic, political and military potential, which has noticeably changed for the better in recent years, gave confidence to the political leadership of the Russian Federation supporting it once again in declaring its strength and the existence of national interests in the post-Soviet space. Such successes, and even more so the statements about extending their national interests beyond the state border of Russia, caused not only concern among the Western world, but also the threat of destroying the entire bipolar world order. Therefore, in order not to allow the influence of the interests of the Russian Federation to spread to former, already independent republics, to establish lost economic relations, the EU and the United States pursued a policy of good-neighborly relations with individual post-Soviet countries, (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) primarily to prepare them for alleged accession to the EU and NATO, while according to EU and US own scenarios and standards (Guam, Eastern Partnership, Annual National Programs of cooperation with NATO, etc.).

Of course, Russia's success could not but worry Western partners, so the policy of accelerated admission of new members to the European Union and NATO, with the gradual approach of economic and military space to the borders of Russia, increasingly caused concern and irritation of the latter. Ukraine, which was considered an integral part of the Slavic unified ethnic group, an associate in economic issues (agriculture, animal husbandry, heavy and light industry, developed during the Soviet era) chose the European and Euro-Atlantic course of foreign policy under the influence of constant promises from the United States and EU member states to be one of the countries of the single European Union and the collective security system on the one hand, and the break in relations with Russia due to their unattractiveness on the other.

There continued to appear political quarrels, insults and economic "gas" or "transit" wars breaking economic ties, constantly against the background of inconsistent positions in the energy sector between Russia and Ukraine. In solving these difficult, though interstate, neighborly relations with Russia, Ukraine was constantly looking for intermediaries or influential assistants in the face of the United States and the EU. Thus, it's Ukraine's loss that it found itself caught between two fires that allowed not only Russia, but also other external players to interfere in its internal affairs.

The Russian Federation was pursuing its economic policy in a different way at that time, given the defeat in the Cold War, economic collapse and decline. It was a policy of capitalism and an open market. Russia, as the main supplier of energy resources, offered its natural resources at the prices determined by the world market, the reduction of prices on resources was influenced by many factors, and the last word was left to those who own and supply these resources, – everyone works this way and so does the market.

In 2014, in response to the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the outbreak of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, the West collectively imposed economic sanctions on the Russian Federation in the hope of giving a vulnerable blow to its economy and forcing it to abandon its intentions to influence and keep Ukraine in the field of its national interests. But, the collective West acted in accordance with the economic laws of the same capitalist market, – it imposed sanctions on Russia, while still using its own capabilities, leaving

the window for cooperation with the Russian Federation in favor of the West, and not Ukraine, which was considered a victim. Having received sanctions, Russia has not stopped supplying energy resources, trading with the countries that imposed sanctions on it. It was building new pipelines with EU member states and other neighboring countries (South Stream with Turkey, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Serbia and Slovenia; Nord Stream – with Germany, etc.) and had the right to decide which way to do this, since it is a supplier of those energy resources. At the same time, Ukraine is not among those countries.

When we live in the countries that are our close neighbors, in the context of capitalism and globalization, where there are market rules, we must realize that we depend on our attractiveness of being competitive, our ability to be fair in competition, our reliability as an economic partner, while doing long-term strategic analysis of associated risks and threats to national security. Having lost the Donbass with its resources and enterprises, Ukraine is forced to buy coal several times more expensive in other countries, but they do not give us their products for nothing or at reduced prices, although they support us in every possible way on the diplomatic arena. No complaints as they did not refuse to supply it, but at what price for Ukraine? At the same time, constantly emphasizing that the country has all the opportunities and resources to meet its own needs, we have been buying energy resources from abroad year in year out, spending a lot of money. The association agreement between Ukraine and the EU did not give equal rights to Ukrainian producers in cooperation on the European market nor a clear answer to the question of Ukraine's accession to the European Community.

According to the Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Commission Peter Stano, "Ukraine is not expected to join the EU. We are talking about the Western Balkans, not Ukraine. It is a neighboring partner country, with which we are developing a partnership within the framework of the association agreement. We are aware of its European aspirations. We developed this partnership as part of the Association Agreement, which is the most ambitious of the association agreements we have had with neighboring countries. Now we are working on the basis of the Association Agreement with Ukraine" (*News Website Dilo, 2022*).

The same applies to the military aid. Having received such assistance from the United States and NATO member countries, Ukraine paid off with money provided by the same partners. And in general we should forget about the full-scope assistance by members of the NATO bloc in the event of a full-scale Russian offensive against Ukraine, since Ukraine is not yet a member of this bloc and it is not subject to the requirement of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Pact. Therefore, the words of support from Western partners remain the words, and Ukraine will be left alone with its problems.

Neither the concern of NATO and its leaders, nor the constant intimidation by the United States and critical statements by EU leaders about the Russian troops near the state border of Ukraine produced the results that the collective West expects from Russia. This proves that Russia will not deviate from its plan and will continue to influence the policy of Ukraine and protect its spatial national interests within the post-Soviet republics, as evidenced by recent events and the provision by Russia of proposals to international agreements with the United States and EU countries on security issues and ending the expansion of the NATO bloc. So, whether we want it or not, we need to develop a new policy with the neighboring state, relying on our own strength and capabilities, while at the same time being attentive to international relations between powerful countries of the world.

Given the tense situation in the Eastern European region, the increase in diplomatic relations between Russia and the West, and information about the outbreak of war against

Ukraine, the Russian president warned the West against crossing the “red lines” established by Russia, citing the deployment of US air and missile strike systems in Ukraine as an example, and called for establishing relations. At the same time, stating the hope that the situation will not go so far, the Russian President reminded that in 2022 the Russian Navy will receive new hypersonic missiles (*Kommersant news website, 2022*).

Against the background of threats from both the West and Russia concerning the situation around Ukraine, the parties held a summit of the presidents of the two states – Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden. Before that, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met with Russian Foreign Minister S.Lavrov. The meeting resulted into nothing but new warnings and threats. At the same time, during the talks between the two leaders of powerful nuclear states, it was decided to continue the dialogue between NATO and Russia on security issues.

So, the situation is getting quite serious and Russia will not retreat, but on the contrary voices very specific demands to the West: no additional expansion of NATO and appropriate legal guarantees; no long-range foreign missiles in Ukraine; no foreign troops in Ukraine.

Given that Russia does not make concessions, and the West does not express direct support for Ukraine by military means, but only supports diplomatic and economic assistance, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signaled his readiness to negotiate with Russia and this will be one of the first proposals during the negotiations between the United States and Russia. This once again confirms that the escalation in relations between the West and Russia over Ukraine and the so-called “red lines” have worsened, but the parties note that neither of them is interested in the conflict and aim, in their opinion, to prevent the implementation of the worst-case scenario. While each side accuses the other of creating new tensions, even coup attempts against the leader of Ukraine, harsh diplomatic statements or a small incident somewhere on the border can actually lead to real clashes.

Today, the situation around Ukraine is not developing for the better, the South Stream pipelines are working, Nord Stream 2 has been built and despite attempts by the Ukrainian authorities to stop it, it is gradually being certified and will be launched in the near future, which will immediately create uneven playing field for us as a transit country in relation to the EU countries. At the same time, if the issue is resolved on the joint use of the Ukrainian GTS and easing tension in interstate relations at the interstate level with the Russian Federation, it will allow Ukraine to return the interest of Russia and the EU to the full use of the Ukrainian GTS, with both Nord Stream, and South Stream playing secondary roles.

Establishing a direct dialogue between the leaders of the two countries will provide opportunities to find common ground to resolve the most pressing issues in interstate relations and start resolving the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. This is not an easy, very sensitive issue, but without making an independent and important decision, Ukraine will continue with its crisis and economic stagnation, which will affect the social life of the population and may cause a new crisis in the future.

Also, the leaders of the United States and Russia have already initiated the work of an expert group on security issues between NATO countries and Russia, one of the key issues being the guarantees of Ukraine’s non-accession to NATO. Such a decision will be made by all NATO member countries and is unlikely to be made quickly, but it will force consideration of the issue of Ukraine’s accession to NATO onto the back burner, but will not remove the second issue –the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

So, the problem of bilateral interstate relations between Ukraine and Russia is far from being solved today, but sooner or later we will have to solve it. If it is resolved from a position of strength on the part of Ukraine, this will not only worsen the situation in the state, but

may also lead to the destruction of Ukraine itself. Therefore, we need the political will and determination of the state leadership to find non-standard and mutually acceptable solutions for establishing relations between the governments of the two states. It should be understood that such neighbors as Russia and Belarus will still be there, and their integration into the union formation will raise new issues in relations with Ukraine. Ukraine has difficulties in its relations with other neighbors, such as Poland, Hungary, Romania due to historical events. At the same time, based on the pro-European foreign policy, Ukraine was able to clarify painful issues with these countries.

Therefore, direct negotiations with neighboring countries on security issues would be the best way to resolve controversial issues, and the majority (56%) of the population of Ukraine insists on this (*News Website Novyny, 2022*).

3. Conclusion

Against the background of the constantly growing threat of military escalation on the Ukrainian-Russian, and recently on the Ukrainian-Belarusian state border, the tension is not deescalating. Ukraine is currently trying to resolve the conflict issues with Russia and Belarus with the help of external players, which does not benefit interstate relations. The continuation of the armed conflict in the east of the country and the continuing presence of threats in the military sphere regarding the possible new conflicts on the state border not only disperses the forces of the state, but also worsens the economic, political and social situation in the country.

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