

Oryginalna praca badawcza

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THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND POLISH SECURITY AS PERCEIVED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

WOJNA NA UKRAINIE A BEZPIECZEŃSTWO POLSKI W OCZACH LOKALNEJ SPOŁECZNOŚCI

Abstract: The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a turning point for the global security architecture. In a globalised, interdependent world, such a war cannot be confined to one region. We cannot limit its impact on the security of Poland's society or eliminate its citizens' sense of fear. This new type of hybrid war, involving a serious humanitarian and economic crisis and hardship, as well as disinformation and propaganda campaigns and far-reaching political tensions over energy supplies and the threat of nuclear war, will have far-reaching consequences. The outbreak of this military conflict represents a watershed period and forces a shift in regional and global security thinking. This change has brought about transformations in foreign policy, as well as influenced our social and economic life, leaving its mark on Poles' sense of security. This article presents the results of an original empirical study in which various aspects of the perception of the conflict in Ukraine related to Poland's security are presented.

Zarys treści: Rosyjska inwazja na Ukrainę była punktem zwrotnym dla globalnej architektury bezpieczeństwa. W zglobalizowanym, współzależnym świecie taka wojna nie może być ograniczona do jednego regionu. Nie możemy ograniczyć jej wpływu na bezpieczeństwo społeczeństwa polskiego ani wyeliminować poczucia strachu u obywateli. Ten nowy rodzaj wojny hybrydowej, wiążący się z poważnymi

kryzysami oraz trudnościami humanitarnymi i gospodarczymi, a także kampaniami dezinformacyjnymi i propagandowymi, daleko idącymi napięciami politycznymi dotyczącymi dostaw energii oraz groźbą wojny nuklearnej, będzie miał dalekosiężne konsekwencje. Wybuch tego konfliktu zbrojnego stanowi przełomowe wydarzenie i wymusza zmianę w myśleniu o bezpieczeństwie regionalnym i globalnym. Zmiana ta pociągnęła za sobą przeobrażenia w polityce zagranicznej, a także wpłynęła na nasze życie społeczne i gospodarcze i odcisnęła piętno na poczuciu bezpieczeństwa Polaków. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki oryginalnego badania empirycznego, w którym przedstawiono różne aspekty postrzegania konfliktu w Ukrainie związane z bezpieczeństwem Polski.

Keywords: state security, Poles, war in Ukraine.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo państwa, Polacy, wojna na Ukrainie.

Introduction

Security is ranked among the most important needs and values of every human being. It represents both a personal and a social good in local, national and global terms. The need for security is one of the basic human needs, although the history of mankind's existence largely comprises the history of wars and conflicts involving the use of military force. War and peace are elements that have accompanied the world from the dawn of human existence up to the present day, and give rise to the interest of states and societies. Russia's military attack on Ukraine has brought about transformations affecting our social and economic life. The Russian-Ukrainian war, launched by the Russian attack on 24 February 2022, has influenced the future overall security of the world. Entrenched Russian imperialism has taken an unheard-of form since the end of the Second World War, where the independence of the sovereign state of Ukraine has been violated, through the slaughter and looting of civilians, and where there is no chance of victory, towns and villages are destroyed and civilians are kidnapped and taken deep into Russia. The passing of time has proven that the war in Ukraine has reached many aspects of the functioning of states in its political, legal, economic and social dimensions. In relation to Poland, this is not a war that is a geographically distant theatre of operations. It is being waged near our border and directly affects

the security of Poland and its neighbours, but also the security of Europe. Its impact also has global repercussions. The war in Ukraine has led to a general heightened sense of insecurity among the public about the occurrence of similar events in Poland. The media machine and a range of propaganda information in the Internet space are increasing this feeling of fear. The subject of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, is the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine and the related security of Poland. The aim of the research was to assess the opinion of the local community regarding the security of Poland with this support of Ukraine as a result of the escalation of the war in 2022. The main research problem was formulated in the form of the question: What effects will the Russian invasion of Ukraine have on Poland's security? In relation to the question thus posed, the following specific questions arise: Will the Russian invasion of Ukraine evolve into a migration crisis? How has the war caused a change in the perception of the security of Poland as perceived by the local community? How will the Russian invasion of Ukraine change the regional security architecture?

For further consideration and analysis, a hypothesis was adopted assuming that the full-scale Russian attack on Ukraine, which increased feelings of threat to Poland's security among Poles, translated into an increase in support for tighter restrictions in relations with Russia and increased aid to Ukraine. In order to achieve the stated aim of the study and to obtain an answer to the problem question posed above, a survey in the Starogard district was conducted in May/June 2024. The research group consisted of a total of 206 people, 113 men and 93 women aged between 18 and 65, living in Starogard Gdański. A diagnostic survey method was used to collect data. The research tool used was a questionnaire, which was filled in by the respondents themselves, which was used to analyse the sense of security of the surveyed local community and allowed for the formulation of final conclusions. The research group was defined in the study, which had the necessary effect of providing a specific answer to each question, and a method of critical analysis was applied to the available source material (articles, reports, monographs). A significant difficulty in the research process was the issue of using available Internet sources in situations where posted articles are clearly propagandistic in nature and thus of little substantive value.

Actions of the Polish authorities in the face of the Ukraine-Russia conflict

The Ukrainian crisis has contributed to the threat to the security of Poland and Central and Eastern Europe. The ongoing strategic activities of the Russian Federation (FR) resulting from the National Security Strategy of Russia are not without significance. In the National Security Strategy of Russia, among others, the following provisions can be seen: ‘Western states (mainly the USA) and NATO, which not only destabilise the situation in the world, but carry out hostile actions against Russia, have been recognised as a source of threats of a military nature’.¹ It is in Poland’s vital interest, on the one hand, to end the conflict as soon as possible and, on the other hand, to reinforce the territory of the Republic with US troops, which would in effect give Poles a greater sense of security. Poland’s influence on developments in Ukraine is limited. The war in Ukraine ‘has raised concerns about the security of Poland and the region, for which threats were seen primarily in the aggressive actions of Russia’.²

The security policy sets out the principles, processes and methods of the state security management system to achieve the desired security outcomes. It also defines the commitment of senior management to the continuous improvement of security in all aspects of its activities. The management bears full responsibility for the level of state security. In Poland’s security policy, Russia has always been a difficult partner, especially after the aggression in Ukraine.³ The war in Ukraine has worsened Poland’s security and increased the sense of threat from Russia. Some Polish political parties, and the journalistic circles supporting them, have had a strong influence in sustaining and strengthening the sense of threat from Russia in a significant part of Polish society. In relation to the processes taking place in Ukraine, one may be particularly surprised by the attitude of certain politicians who, in the face of the threat to the state, look for enemies in neighbouring countries and in the European Union, and at the same time meet with the leaders of European conservative

¹ A. Kwiatkowski, *Bezpieczeństwo Polski w świetle działań wojennych Rosji na Ukrainie*, “De Securitate et Defensione. O Bezpieczeństwie i Obronności” 2023, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 37.

² J. Bornio, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe Polski w kontekście kryzysu ukraińskiego. Wymiar polityczno-militarny*, Difin, Warszawa 2020, p. 11.

³ M. Stolarczyk, *Dylematy bezpieczeństwa Polski w kontekście kryzysu i konfliktu ukraińskiego w latach 2013–2014*, in: K. Czornik, M. Łakomy (eds.), *Dylematy polityki bezpieczeństwa Polski na początku drugiej dekady XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Regionalnego Ośrodka Debaty Międzynarodowej, Katowice 2014, p. 59.

and right-wing parties and promote the Prime Minister of Hungary, Orbán, who has a positive attitude towards the Russian President Putin. Such a negative attitude on the part of some politicians, as well as demonstrating the inability of state institutions to protect and defend citizens, and looking for enemies for themselves, significantly reduces the effective management of the state and the critical opinion of the Polish public.⁴

Public perception of security issues

One of the most powerful and creative sources and elements of Poland's defence strength as a sovereign and democratic nation-state, and as a member of the NATO defence community, is our society. We experienced during the periods of partitions, wars and occupations, as well as the activity of 'Solidarity' (1980–1989) the power of organised patriotism.⁵ We need to be aware of our national weaknesses – 'the hereditary features of our national character that led to the collapse of the Republic, (...) the pathological overgrowth of individualism that does not allow an individual or a group united by a common interest to submit to the will of the majority. In its effects, this leads to anarchy and decomposition of state power'.⁶ In the creation of an effective national defence, it is important to maintain a widespread feeling of love for the fatherland and the need for sacrifice. J. Nowak-Jeziorański stated that 'the most important strategic area, (...) are the issues of youth and its upbringing in the spirit of our traditional values'.⁷ It is becoming a subject of politics, and the neutralisation of threats, the strengthening of the condition of security structures and the management of potential risks are indispensable actions, being the result of resistance to unfavourable changes in international relations.⁸ Security, like any concept with a very broad scope, is an ambiguous concept and can be considered from various aspects.⁹

In the objective aspect, security is the overall actions of other actors in society that are disadvantageous and dangerous for the subject in question, or in the

⁴ A. Kwiatkowski, op. cit, p. 37.

⁵ R.P. Depczyński, *Edukacja patriotyczna młodzieży. Szkoła Rycerska, Korpusy Kadetów, Ogólnokształcące Licea Wojskowe, Klasy mundurowe*, SOWA, Warszawa 2013, p. 74.

⁶ J. Nowak-Jeziorański, *Polska wczoraj, dziś i jutro*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1999, p. 211.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ J. Stańczyk, *Współczesne pojmowanie bezpieczeństwa*, Tezeusz, Warszawa 1996, p. 67.

⁹ D. Czarnecki, N. Tsyhanovska, D.W. Skalski, *Zarządzanie i bezpieczeństwo w administracji publicznej. Wybrane zagadnienia*, PSW, Starogard Gdański–Charków 2023, p. 174.

subjective aspect, i.e. the state of the psyche, awareness, assessment of threats and actions. The social perception of security is therefore based on knowledge shaped by mass media, election campaigns, public opinion and public debate. In the social debate on security alternative realities are constructed and, in terms of their reach and power of influence, sometimes even surpassing expert opinions. They condition the political actions taken: they legitimise their legitimacy, decide on the allocation of resources for them and create pressure on those in power to solve the problem. Finally, empowered with the ability to make political decisions, citizens have the ability to create a new international situation – they decide to join an international structure, dismiss those in power because of unfavourable security policies and sometimes create international or supranational bodies.¹⁰ The author of the study believes that reflection on the social perception of state security as a result of the escalation of the war in Ukraine is an important and potentially fertile direction of analysis of the state of security of local communities. It causes the authorities to focus on exploring the research process by understanding the surrounding phenomena in time and space. This significantly broadens the research perspective, increasing the formulation of new problems in the study of local community opinion.

Research findings

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict affects Poland's security primarily due to the two countries' proximity. Hostilities in Ukraine directly affect local communities, causing a period of great uncertainty and lowering the sense of security of those fearing for their future. The questions posed to respondents were intended to bring out their opinions on the Russian-Ukrainian war. Respondents responded to statements selected by the author of the study regarding the war in Ukraine: their own fears, the reception of refugees in the local community, the presentation of the risk of Russia's aggression against NATO countries, the increase in citizens' security through the actions of the state authorities and forms of assistance for Ukrainian citizens. Below is the structure of the sample of people who took part in the study.

¹⁰ W. Jagiełło, *Wybrane problemy bezpieczeństwa państw, narodów oraz społeczności lokalnych na początku XXI wieku*, PWSZ, Wałbrzych 2008, p. 38.

Table 1. Structure of the study sample

Variable		The percentage of respondents
Gender structure		
Women	93	45%
Men	113	55%
The structure of education		
Higher	103	50%
Secondary	69	32%
Vocational	31	15%
Primary	3	1%
Age structure		
18–25	20	10%
26–34	48	23%
35–44	55	27%
45–54	44	21%
55–65	39	19%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

Analysis of the research shows more than half of the respondents, 74%, considered that the war in Ukraine directly threatens Poland. The answer ‘Definitely yes’ was given by 32% of respondents (38% of women and 26% of men), and ‘rather yes’ by 42% of respondents (47% of women and 37% of men), 19.5% considered that the war in Ukraine ‘rather does not threaten’ (11% of women and 28% of men) the security of Poland, and 6.5% that it ‘definitely does not threaten’ (4% of women and 9% of men). These results show that more women are concerned about the threat of danger from Poland’s eastern border than men.

Figure 1. Does the war in Ukraine threaten Poland’s security?

Does the war in Ukraine threaten Poland’s security?		
Answer	Women	Men
Definitely yes	38%	26%
Rather yes	47%	37%
Rather not threatening	11%	28%
It definitely does not threaten	4%	9%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

Among respondents, 58% supported accepting refugees from Ukraine. The answer ‘Definitely yes’ was given by 26% of respondents (27% of women and

25% of men), and ‘rather yes’ by 32% of respondents (34% of women and 30% of men), 22% considered ‘rather not’ (20% of women and 25% of men), while a fairly large 16% proportion of respondents replied ‘definitely not’ (13% of women and 18% of men) against accepting refugees from Ukraine. These responses show that the scale of Poles’ support for refugees from Ukraine is decreasing, both among women and men. The analysis also reveals the mentality of the community receiving refugees and their concerns, which could be the basis for indicating to the legislature and society at large what legal steps should be taken and whether the needs of refugees have been taken into account, which will affect the social cohesion of the country.

Figure 2. Do you support the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine?

Do you support the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine?		
Answer	Women	Men
Definitely yes	27%	25%
Rather yes	34%	30%
Rather not threatening	20%	25%
It definitely does not threaten	13%	18%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

The responses also show that more than half of the respondents (74%) exclude the risk of an armed attack by Russia on NATO countries. The answer ‘Definitely yes’ was given by 10% of the respondents (11% of women and 9% of men), and ‘Rather yes’ by 15% of the respondents (16% of women and 15% of men), 44% replied ‘Rather not’ (43% of women and 45% of men), while 30% considered ‘Definitely not’ (30% of women and 31% of men) for an armed attack by Russia on NATO countries. This shows that the majority of men do not fear a conflict between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, increasing all the more the feeling of security in our society.

Fig. 3. Is there a risk of a military attack by Russia on NATO countries?

Is there a risk of a military attack by Russia on NATO countries?		
Answer	Women	Men
Definitely yes	11%	9%
Rather yes	16%	15%
Rather not threatening	43%	45%
It definitely does not threaten	30%	31%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

All respondents (100%) supported increasing the country's security. The response 'Membership of Euro-Atlantic structures' was given by 30% of respondents (30% of women and 30% of men), which shows a high confidence in the NATO security alliance. On the other hand, 'membership of European Union structures' was given by 29% of respondents (31% of women and 27% of men). 'Increasing the size of the army and the reserve system' was favoured by 24.5% (21% of women and 28% of men), 'creating a strategy and protecting citizens' by 6.5% (8% of women and 5% of men), while 'universal defence' was supported by 4.5% of respondents (5% of women and 4% of men). The suggestion for respondents was 'developing the industry of national security capabilities', with 4% of respondents favouring this idea (4% of women and 4% of men), followed by 'cyber warfare' with 1.5% (1% of women and 2% of men). It can be seen from this that Poles want to ensure their security by participating in NATO membership, the EU or increasing the size of the Polish army.

Fig. 4. How to increase Poland's security?

How to increase Poland's security?		
Answer	Women	Men
Membership in Euro-Atlantic NATO structures	30%	30%
Membership in European Union structures	31%	27%
Increase in army personnel and reserve system	21%	28%
Creation of a citizen protection strategy	8%	5%
Universal defence	5%	4%
Development of the national security industry potential	4%	4%
Cyber warfare	1%	2%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

A large majority of respondents, 95% said they supported the government's 'Shield East' programme. The response 'Definitely yes' was given by 73% of respondents, (65% of women and 81% of men) and 'rather yes' by 22% of respondents (30% of women and 14% of men), 3% replied 'rather no' (4% of women and 3% of men), while a very low percentage of respondents, 1.5%, responded 'definitely no' (1% of women and 2% of men) to the government programme. This obviously shows that the National Security Plan 'Shield East' enjoys a great

deal of interest and public support among those surveyed, clearly showing a desire to ensure the security of citizens.

Fig. 5. Do you support the government programme “Shield East”?

Do you support the government programme “Shield East”?		
Answer	Women	Men
Definitely yes	65%	81%
Rather yes	30%	14%
Rather no	4%	3%
Definitely no	1%	2%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

With regard to ‘Increasing the supply of military equipment’, 53.5% of respondents (52% of women and 55% of men) agreed, 40% of respondents (41% of women and 40% of men) agreed to ‘Financial support’, 4.5% suggested ‘Integration of the defence industry into NATO and EU security and defence structures’ (5% of women and 4% of men), while 1.5% suggested ‘Political humanitarian aid’ (2% of women and 1% of men). The vast majority of women and men surveyed favoured increasing the supply of military equipment and financial support, which allows for translation into the immediate military situation in Ukraine and an increased sense of security among Ukrainian citizens.

Fig. 6. What support does Ukraine expect from other countries in the face of the war with Russia?

What support does Ukraine expect from other countries in the face of the war with Russia?		
Answer	Women	Men
Increase in military equipment supplies	52%	55%
Financial support	41%	40%
Integration of the defence industry with NATO and EU security and defence structures	5%	4%
Political and humanitarian assistance	2%	1%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

From the analysis of our own research, we observe a decrease in optimism among the Polish community regarding the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Although a large percentage of respondents assume a positive scenario for Ukraine,

there are now also negative predictions. The statement that ‘Russia will subjugate the whole of Ukraine’ was agreed with by 17% of respondents (19% of women and 15% of men), while to the statement ‘Ukraine will have to give up part of its territory’ 26% of respondents agreed (29% of women and 23% of men), 38.5% agreed with the statement ‘Russia will withdraw from the attacked territories of Ukraine’ (35% of women and 42% of men), while 10% stated that ‘Ukraine will win the war’ (16% of women and 19% of men). The statement ‘Difficult to say’ was agreed with by 1.5% of respondents (2% of women and 1% of men).

Fig. 7. How will the war in Ukraine come to an end?

How will the war in Ukraine come to an end?		
Answer	Women	Men
Russia will subordinate all of Ukraine	19%	15%
Ukraine will have to relinquish part of its territory	29%	23%
Russia will withdraw from the attacked territories of Ukraine	35%	42%
Ukraine will prevail in the war	16%	19%
It is difficult to say	2%	1%

Source: own elaboration based on conducted survey.

Analysis of the results

The aggression against Ukraine has consequences in various areas of social life and impacts society in multiple ways. The majority of the surveyed local community remains convinced that the war in Ukraine threatens our security. There is a prevailing belief that the actions of Ukraine’s allies, the USA and the European Union, regarding the conflict significantly influence security in the region by increasing the supply of military equipment and financial support. It is also worth noting that close cooperation with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as the deployment of a greater number of American troops in the territory of the Republic of Poland and the eastern flank countries, provides guarantees for the security of our state.

The results of research conducted during the Russian-Ukrainian war most often reveal a dominance of positive or, at least, ambivalent assessments of

integration and social relations between Polish society and economic immigrants from Ukraine. Still, the majority of surveyed women and men also support our country's acceptance of refugees from Ukraine, although there is a significant percentage of individuals critical of providing more assistance to refugees, claiming that it is already sufficient. The perceived threat posed by Russian policy and the lack of trust in the declarations of Russian authorities evidently appear to be existing attitudes within society rather than merely fanciful imaginations resulting from media speculation. It is essential to have the belief among the local community that the risk of an armed attack by Russia on NATO countries is low, which reinforces the effectiveness of the alliance's actions in enhancing the sense of security. The escalation of the war in Ukraine has confirmed that Polish society places great hopes in alliance membership. According to the majority of the surveyed local community, Poland can be confident in the commitment of its allies to the potential defence of our territory. Respondents also believe that the main way to assist Ukraine in the face of war with Russia is by increasing military equipment supplies and financial support. This opinion is also in line with the trends of European societies as well as Ukrainian authorities. Financing military equipment in Ukraine contributes to an increase in their sense of security and enhances their defensive capabilities. When assessing the security of Poland through the lens of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the majority of the local community expressed satisfaction with the actions of the authorities regarding the security of the state; however, the remaining minority was sceptical of these actions, considering them too petty and accusing them of yielding to pressure from Ukrainian authorities and Western European countries. The armed conflict at our border has shattered the foundations of the community's sense of security in our country. The illusion of a safe world has come to an end and we are living witnesses to this unfolding story. It is also worth adding that in a democratic Polish state in which every citizen is a part, defending the homeland also means defending oneself.

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Summary

Russian ambitions and inherent imperialism towards Central and Eastern Europe remain unchanged, characterised by the destabilisation of the region and the weakening of the NATO and EU alliances, and in a broader aspect, the transformation of the global security landscape. The main ally of Poland is the United States, whose cooperation and commitment to Ukraine are indisputable. It is important to remember that in addition to having allied security guarantees, possessing one's own defence capabilities is essential, and even more so, focusing efforts on enhancing the defensive awareness of society. One can also invoke issues related to the mobilisation and integration of the societies of the European Union member states in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine. This integration of efforts to support Ukraine is a visible point of agreement within the local community; however, a slight decline in support for aid actions towards Ukraine can be observed, albeit it is minimal. The general trend of acceptance for providing military and humanitarian support for Ukraine remains relatively high. It is also worth adding that despite the declared concerns regarding maintenance costs, the idea of defending European values is not abandoned in connection with the armed conflict. The increase in community trust towards NATO and the European Union is a signal that the time for joint action has come for significant forms of assistance for Ukraine's fight.

The aggression against Ukraine has affected various areas of social life in the local community in multiple ways. The author would like to focus attention on three of them. The first is the deterioration of the economic situation: i.e. the rise in energy prices and the associated inflation. The second is the resultant large number of Ukrainian refugees. The third is concerns about security, evidenced by, among other things, the fear of armed

conflict with Russia, as well as the use of weapons of mass destruction or potential radioactive contamination. The expected outcome of the armed conflict in Ukraine is moderately optimistic. There is a noticeable trend regarding the level of perceived fears and uncertainties related to the potential expansion of the conflict to Poland or other countries, as well as the use of nuclear weapons by Russia. Approval for forcing a partial capitulation of Ukraine in exchange for a coerced peace is a short-term gain that, in the longer-term perspective, may lead to the entirety of Europe becoming dependent on Russia and necessitating submission to its will in energy policy, political life and military preparedness. Russian leaders undoubtedly counted on and continue to count on such psychological effects. The conducted research indicates a rare, in Poland, high level of consensus among the community of acceptance of actions taken by the Polish authorities for the security of the Polish state.