

FROM THE EDITOR

THE GALLOP OF HISTORY AND THE STRATEGY OF A FLANK MARCH

Over the past 30 years the international situation has been exceptionally favourable for Poland. It has been a time of peace—not a very frequent state for this country located between Russia and Germany; a time for Poland to build new relations with all its neighbours, none of whom has any territorial claims against it; a time of dynamic growth and catching up with the world’s most developed countries. Today, Poland is ever closer to being one of the world’s 20 most industrialized nations and will presumably become a full-fledged member of this elite club in the coming decade. Such an outcome was made possible by three decades of uninterrupted economic growth. A precondition for this was an international situation that made it possible for Poland to reintegrate with the world system; to participate in the European free market and unrestricted movement of goods; as well as to join NATO—the most powerful and effective political-military alliance in history. This exceptionally favourable climate ensued from the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Toward the end of the 20th century the economic and technological success of the democratic West, based on individual freedom, placed Soviet communism, which curtailed this freedom in the name of class interests, on the defensive. This ultimately led to its ideological, moral and, in time, economic bankruptcy. The Soviet Union’s ideological defeat in its clash with the West ended the Cold War and initiated the process of disintegration of the last European empire—Russia. The triumph of democracy, human rights and individual freedom ended the post-Yalta division of Europe and—as Józef Piłsudski put it—“ripped Russia along its national seams.” Historical experience indicated that

imperialism is an existential threat for Poland. The growing intensity of imperialist trends in European politics of the 18th century first led to the Polish state's inability to decide about its own affairs and then, at the end of the century, to Poland being erased from the map of Europe by its three neighbour empires—Russia, Prussia and Austria.

At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, Polish political thinkers rightly observed that the national awakening was the Achilles heel of all European empires, especially the Russian one. But the reborn Polish state, which had consolidated its borders in the years 1918–1921, was too fragile itself, however, to take advantage of this weakness and restrain Russian imperial revisionism. The attempts made by Józef Piłsudski to support the national liberation aspirations of East-European nations proved unsuccessful. The aspirations of the Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Georgians and other inhabitants of the Caucasus proved too weak and politically immature to allow them to sustain the effort of defending their independence from Soviet Russia. The Second World War made it possible for the Russian empire to re-conquer Poland and all of Central Europe. Thus only the Soviet Union's ideological defeat half century later, at the hands of the free and democratic world ended the ice age in Polish history that lasted all in all almost 250 years, not counting a 20-year intermission in the inter-war period. Juliusz Mieroszewski wrote in 1970 that in the eyes of the West “Eastern Europe is the proverbial quicksand,” but we—the people from the East—“know that the quicksand is inhabited not only by ‘other people’ [i.a. Poles, Lithuanians, Czechs, Romanians, Bulgarians,] but also by the English, the French and the Germans. All of Europe is a quicksand. People in a flank march have heard the gallop of history so many times that, by sheer force of habit... they listen.”¹

The international situation, so favorable to Poland, is beginning to change. I have already mentioned in my previous articles certain aspects of these alterations, which are due to a lack of faith in the world's liberal order and its institutions; to a redefinition of transatlantic relations; and to the breakdown of the world's richest countries'

¹ J. Mieroszewski, “Wstęp,” in: *Modele i praktyka*, Paris 1970, p. 8.

parallel integration within the European Union and NATO. As a result, the international order is becoming increasingly authoritarian,² and the global political landscape is beginning to be shaped by three megatrends, all three unfavorable to Poland: growing rivalry between the USA and China; the revisionist policy pursued by Russia, which is reverting to a limited war doctrine; and the stopping the European integration process in connection with Brexit and the fact that the treaty changes which it requires became depended on ratification plebiscites in member countries. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at these three trends.

AMERICAN-CHINESE RIVALRY

The rise in tensions between the United States and China, which has greatly increased its economic, political and military power over the past two decades and which is pursuing its interests in the world with ever greater assertiveness, reflects a growing competition for the position of a global hegemon. For over a century, the United States has been the world's largest economy. It still is, not only nominally in GDP terms, but also, for example, in terms of outlays for research and development (it spends more on R&D than all other G7 countries combined), and of innovation and attractiveness for foreign direct investors. But in terms of GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), in 2014 the USA gave way to China. In addition, the USA's superiority in conventional military power, research in high-tech weapons, A2/AD weaponry, and supersonic and autonomic systems is also diminishing. China is essentially following the indications of Alfred Mahan, an American strategist who, at the start of America's rise to global hegemony in the early 19th century, formulated a doctrine in keeping with which the prerequisites for great power status are a strong navy; a growing merchant fleet; a foreign trade surplus; and the possession of colonies and maritime bases beyond one's own territory³. According

² S. Dębski, "Polska w epoce szalonego króla," *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, no 3(74), 2018.

³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783*, (Dover Military History, Weapons, Armor), 1987 Book was firstly published at 1890.

to some observers, the idea that the USA might lose its position as global hegemon to China could awaken among Americans the “fear” which, according to Thucydides, pushed the Spartans toward war with Athens (the so-called Thucydides Trap).⁴

China managed to catch up with its developmental lag in a short time. This process was helped along by the West, which “ended history” when it won the ideological rivalry with the USSR and announced that the free world had ultimately won. Out of sheer momentum, America backed out from its ideological rivalry with still communist China. After the end of the Cold War, China remained communist and hostile to very fundamental for the free world notions like individual freedom, human rights and democracy. With Hong Kong’s return to Chinese sovereignty, the West was tempted by the prospect of having access to the large Chinese market, began to share almost unrestrainedly its technology and accepted the official Chinese doctrine of “one country, two systems”, even though one of them remained very hostile to freedom.

The West’s withdrawal from ideological rivalry with China had some unexpected consequences. Communist China’s economic success undermined the conviction—which had been fundamentally important during the free world’s rivalry with the Soviet Union—that democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the market economy are a precondition for economic development and progress. Taking advantage of the West’s demobilization, communist China created its own developmental model and enabled the mass creation of wealth... without freedom. Against the background of the crises affecting the West, China’s economic successes began to form an attractive alternative to the western democratic model of development in some countries of Asia and Africa. So much so, that even some small European states were tempted.

It may thus seem paradoxical that for this very reason, the American-Chinese economic competition is beginning to take on an

⁴ See: G. Allison, *Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. Also: R. Stemplowski, “Czy wojna między Chinami i USA jest nieunikniona,” *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, no 1(76), 2019, p. 150–162.

ideological dimension. The tactics used by China to extend its influence may be referred to as the “Kung-fu tactic”—take over your opponent’s power and direct it at him. In truth, China may not have at its disposal the resources, the ideological attractiveness and influence, which Joseph Nye called “soft-power,” equivalent to those of the United States⁵. For this reason, it is extending its influence by using the power of the free world, by turning it around and transforming it into an instrument of rivalry with the United States. In contrast to the West, China doesn’t formulate political expectations directed at its trade partners, it doesn’t hold against them any departure from democratic standards, the rule of law or respect for human rights. In this manner it is building a competitive advantage over Washington which usually makes its involvement, sooner or later, dependent on fulfilling demands of an ideological nature. What’s more, in many places all over the world, China has begun to take advantage of conditions shaped and financed by the United States, like in Afghanistan and even the Caribbean, where the United States guaranteed the security of Chinese investments.

China’s growing power and assertiveness began to stir anxiety in American political milieus and expert circles some two decades ago. Few remember today that George W. Bush announced, following his election to the US presidency, that his administration would increase America’s interest in matters of the Pacific and in Chinese competition. America’s shift toward Asia was supposed to reduce the scale of its involvement in European affairs even then. The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 thwarted those plans. Once again, America intervened in the Middle East and in Central Asia. Thanks to this, China gained two decades in which to reduce its developmental gap with regard to the United States without generating any particular excitement. Today, rivalry with China is the main, and at times the sole, topic drawing the attention of Americans in debates on US foreign and security policy. Members of Congress

⁵ J.S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Wydawnictwa Akadmicke i Profesjonalne 2007.

are also aware that their voters consider China to be a threat to their prosperity.

In its publicly announced strategies, the Trump administration prepares Americans for the arrival of a new era of struggle between the powers, one in which the future conflict with China is to be crucial⁶. Announced in December 2017, the US National Security Strategy states that “following the remarkable victory of free nations in the Cold War, America emerged as the lone superpower with enormous advantages and momentum in the world. Success, however, bred complacency. A belief emerged, among many, that American power would be unchallenged and self-sustaining. The United States began to drift. We experienced a crisis of confidence and surrendered our advantages in key areas. As we took our political, economic, and military advantages for granted, other actors steadily implemented their long-term plans to challenge America and to advance agendas opposed to the United States, our allies, and our partners. [...] China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence. [...] The United States will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world”⁷.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that the United States is slowly giving up on developing the defense capabilities that would enable it to engage in two major conflicts at once. In the future, its potential should allow it to participate in only one such conflict. This is due to the United States’ diminishing technological advantage over its potential rivals and the growing scarcity of resources. It is precisely these limited resources which lead America to pressure its allies to increase their defense spending and to bear a larger share of the costs of US military presence in Europe.

⁶ “Remarks by A/S Wess Mitchell: Anchoring the Western Alliance,” U.S. Mission to European Union, 5 June 2018, <https://useu.usmission.gov>.

⁷ “National Security Strategy of the United States,” 18 December 2017, www.whitehouse.org.

Increasingly often one can hear opinions that in anticipation of a possible clash with China—which could take place within 10–15 years according to some estimates in Washington—the United States will not be able to sustain all the forms of its engagement in maintaining global security.⁸ That is why it is already giving notice that it will gradually withdraw from those world regions that will not be crucial in terms of its rivalry with China – such as the Middle East and, perhaps, Europe. Such a withdrawal, or realignment in the event of a clash with China, could lead to new instances of strategic vacuum in the world.

Growing American-Chinese rivalry has consequences of fundamental strategic importance for Poland: American commitment to transatlantic relations may weaken over the next 10-15 years as Americans reduce their exposure in connection with anticipated problems in relations with China, as well as to probable tensions between America and Europe about the costs of common defense. Even if, for some other reasons, US military presence on NATO's eastern flank, including Poland, should increase and become more permanent during this period, Polish policymakers cannot rule out the possibility that the numbers and configuration of US forces might prove insufficient to deter Russian aggression. Even supposing that the conflict in Asia will not be a momentous clash, the United States will have to take into account the possibility that it may escalate to such a level, if not a greater one.

RUSSIAN REVISIONISM AND LIMITED WAR DOCTRINE

The second negative megatrend affecting Poland's situation is generated by Russia, whose integration with Europe and, more widely, with the democratic West, has failed as a consequence of the failure of the democratization processes there. It thus proved impossible to fully realize the vision of a united and free Europe, in which all states respect the right of nations to choose their mode of development and

⁸ “The United States does not have the capacity to do everything it has to do in Europe and in the Pacific to deal with the Chinese threat”—V. Gera, “Retired general warns of U.S.—China war in 15 years,” *The Washington Times*, 24 October 2018.

their alliances in a fully sovereign fashion. Central Europe managed to integrate with Europe but Ukraine, which tried, didn't. Russia, however, never attempted it. For Poland, the optimal situation would be if it bordered solely with allies, democratic states interested in the prosperity and well-being of its own citizens. Unfortunately, after the end of the Cold War Poland and other Central European countries found themselves bordering on areas with various developmental models: the free world based on the free market, the rule of law and civil liberties on the one hand, and an—de facto—authoritarian world built on the inter-dependence of politics, business, demoralized secret services and crime on the other. In Russia, democratization turned out to be an instrument of internal political struggle, first used by Boris Yeltsin against his opponent Mikhail Gorbachev who, in the last years of the Soviet Union, led the glasnost and perestroika reform camp and whom Yeltsin sought to outbid politically by demanding full democratization. Yeltsin used anti-communist slogans for the same reason, and called for an account-taking of the communist era, including punishment of those guilty of crimes by a special "Nuremberg for communists."

Yeltsin's political tactics had consequences for Russia's policy toward the Soviet constituent republics and for its foreign policy. In seeking allies against Gorbachev, Yeltsin supported the emancipatory trends in the constituent republics, and also called for the democratization of relations with former Soviet satellite states in Central Europe. The apogee of this policy was Yeltsin's, that is the Russian president, visit to Warsaw in the signing on August 25, 1993, when he and the Polish president issued a declaration stating that "the [two] presidents talked about the question of Poland's intention of joining NATO. President Lech Wałęsa clarified Poland's known position in this matter, and this was taken with understanding by President Boris Yelstin. In the event, such a decision by sovereign Poland, aimed at pan-European integration, is not contrary to the interests of other countries, including Russia,"⁹

⁹ "Wspólna deklaracja polsko-rosyjska, Warszawa, 25 sierpnia 1993 r.," in: R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.), *Stosunki NATO-Federacja Rosyjska w świetle dokumentów*, PISM, 2018, p. 127.

Three weeks later, however, the Russian President sent a letter to the leaders of the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, in which he withdrew from the position he had adopted in the Warsaw declaration and signalled Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement. He indicated that Russia's aim was to establish a buffer zone between NATO and Russia in Central Europe: "Generally speaking—he wrote in his letter—we prefer a situation where the relations between our country and NATO should be by several degrees warmer than those between the Alliance and Eastern Europe." He also proposed that NATO and Russia jointly extend security guarantees to the countries of the region, instead of them joining NATO.¹⁰ This letter signalled a turnaround in Russian policy, away from a democratic axiology and toward Russian imperial tradition. Yeltsin proposed nothing less than that the democratic West ignore the Central European nations' aspirations for freedom and security and that it join Russia in turning their countries into a buffer zone. A few weeks later, the Russian president used tanks as an argument in Russia's domestic politics, and then decided to intervene militarily in Chechnya to crush its separatist ambitions. And last, in order to win the elections and prolong his power, he reached for the help of the oligarchs, the special services and the criminal world. Against such a background, the withdrawal from the Warsaw Declaration was just one more symptom of the breakdown of the democratization process in Russia.

Russia was still grappling with a crisis, but its change of political course was immediately perceived in Warsaw. Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Polish foreign minister, immediately and succinctly characterized Yeltsin's letter to the western leaders on October 4, 1993, when he described Poland's position with respect to Russia's new aspirations: "Poland's efforts to join NATO are part of our policy [...] It is a policy that has to do with western defence and security organizations, with making them to a greater degree European through Poland's participation in them instead of maintaining—as until now—their solely

¹⁰ "List prezydenta Rosji Borysa Jelcyna do prezydenta USA Billa Clintona, 15 września 1993 r.," w: R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 130.

western character. Otherwise, Europe's division will continue. This policy corresponds to Poland's most vital interests, it corresponds to maintaining its independence gained with much difficulty—we will not give up this policy. [...] In the same way that we will be against isolating Russia, we will be equally determined in our opposition to placing Poland in a buffer or grey zone between East and West. The idea of Russian guarantees will lead, sooner or later, to such a zone, that is, to dependence. There is no word of this in the declaration of Wałęsa and Yeltsin. We already have unfortunate experiences of such guarantees—already in the 18th century, prior to the partitions, and in the 20th with Teheran and Yalta. Our policy is a policy of independence within the framework of Euro-Atlantic security.”¹¹

Russia's return to its imperial traditions then manifested itself in its attempts to impose on the West its own interpretation of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, signed in Paris on May 27, 1997. In this document, the Alliance confirmed that “in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defense and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.”¹² Meanwhile, Russia began to recognize that these formulations de facto establish an unequal membership status for Central European countries in NATO, which differs from the status of Western European members in terms of the restrictions on the permanent stationing of the Alliance's troops agreed with Russia.

Even before the aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, Russia repeatedly tried to use this argument in order to exact the agreement of the United States and West-European NATO members

¹¹ “Wypowiedź ministra spraw zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Krzysztofa Skubiszewskiego dotycząca polityki Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zwłaszcza w związku z listem prezydenta Rosji Borysa Jelcyna z 15 września 1993 r. do przywódców Francji, Niemiec, USA i Wielkiej Brytanii, Warszawa, 4 października 1993 r.,” in: R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 132–133.

¹² “Akt stanowiący o stosunkach dwustronnych, współpracy i bezpieczeństwie między NATO i Federacją Rosyjską, Paryż, 27 maja 1997 r.,” in: R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 250.

to its interpretation of the Founding Act. In this manner it tried to block the building of American anti-missile installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. William J. Burns, US ambassador in Russia 2005-2008, in his recently published memoirs, commented on this by saying that “for many in Russia, especially in Putin’s orbit of security and intelligence hardliners, you could build a Disney theme park in Poland and they would find it faintly threatening”¹³.

Until the end of the 1990s, Russia considered that the mid-term aim of its foreign policy was to reduce the status of the countries lying in its immediate vicinity: Russian policymakers thought that the *Smuta* period which had begun at the end of the end of the Cold War would, like the previous ones in Russian history, be over soon. As Russia was too weak to control Central and Eastern Europe, it had to hold back that region’s processes of integration with the West and its institutions, simulate dialogue and collaboration from time to time, but never renounce its own imperial instincts.¹⁴

Until 2008, Russia pursued this aim using political and economic instruments. It sought compensation for the admission of Central European countries to the EU, it introduced trade embargoes directed solely at countries of the region, it refused to participate in the policies of the European Union addressed to its eastern neighbourhood, demanded privileged treatment in its relations with the EU, and diversified the status of its neighbours, even in such petty technical matters like returning to Poland the wreckage of the presidential airliner plane which crashed near Smolensk in 2010.

A fundamental change in the way Russia pursued this aim took place in 2008 and 2014, however, when the Kremlin resorted to the unilateral use of armed aggression as a foreign policy instrument. This was masked by a specific interpretation of international law, which was

¹³ W.J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its renewal*, Random House, 2019, p. 231.

¹⁴ The collection of documents on NATO-Russia relations, edited by Robert Kupiecki and Marek Menkiszak, and published by the Polish Institute of International Affairs last year provides convincing evidence in favour of that thesis: R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.), *op. cit.*

used instrumentally to justify aggression (*lawfare*).¹⁵ Russia is an authoritarian state, which means that the internal political costs of attacking one's neighbours are much lower than they would be in a democratic system. Moreover, given their full control over the media, Russian policymakers may assume that the decision to begin a local, that is, a limited war ending in relative short-term success may even make them more popular and become an alternative source of political legitimacy. They learnt that war can thus be a politically profitable investment, to distract society from internal problems, for example. Of course, the unilateral use of force, a war of aggression, and the annexation of someone else's territory are all prohibited under international law, beginning with the United Nations Charter. However, the experience of Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine seems to indicate that international reputation is not something that is particularly valued by the Russian governing class. In addition, one should bear in mind an important theoretical observation concerning costs to reputation in the context of international law violations: "Nazi Germany's failure to comply with the Munich Accord was, to be sure, a failure of international law, but it is not one that should surprise us. It is clear (at least in retrospect) that Nazi Germany had no reason to value a good reputation. Hitler's ambitions required that he ignore international legal norms, including the national boundaries of other states. [...] In other words, the harm to Germany's reputation as a result of its violation of the Munich Accord imposed only a modest cost on the state".¹⁶ From a theoretical viewpoint, this experience leads to the following conclusion: "First, the force of reputation is affected by a state's interest in developing or maintaining a good reputation. States that anticipate little or no return from investments in reputation are less likely to comply with international law. [...] Second, the force of reputation is limited. Even a state eager to nurture its reputation will violate its

¹⁵ Defined by Charles J. Dunlap as: "the use of law as a weapon of war." More; Ch. Dunlap, "Law and Military Interventions: Preserving Human Values in 21st Century Conflicts," 29 November 2001, <https://people.duke.edu>.

¹⁶ A.T. Guzman, *How International Law Works: A Rational Choice Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York, 2008, p. 111.

legal commitments if the non-reputational payoff from doing so is large enough. This implies that when the stakes are very high, the likelihood that reputation can influence the outcome [of the decision process] is smaller. Certainly when states have honest concerns about fundamental security interest, for example, international law is unlikely to have much influence on their decisions. If this is correct, we should expect to see (as we do) international law largely put aside during moments of extreme national crises. Something like this is true of domestic law, where it is sometimes said that *inter arma silent leges* (“in times of war the laws are silent”). In such moments of crisis, more powerful forces than international law are likely to push it aside”.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Russia triggers crises for this very purpose, and the reputational costs that it has had to pay until now for its acts of aggression against Georgia and Ukraine mean that each successive bill will now be relatively lower. From Poland’s viewpoint, this means that the risk of Russian aggression has increased.

The political aim of Russian aggression against Georgia and Ukraine was to block those countries’ aspirations for membership in NATO and the European Union. On this basis, we know that the unilateral use of force, including war of aggression, has once again become an instrument of Russian policy. The experience of aggression against Georgia became part of both the strategic and tactical Russian doctrine of the use of force and was used during Russia’s aggression against Ukraine¹⁸. The Ukrainian experience, in conjunction with that gained from the intervention in Syria, will presumably influence Russian thinking and strategic doctrine, and this means that they may be used in the future in a possible aggression against NATO countries, including Poland. “The basis for ‘our response’ is the ‘active defence strategy’—said General Valerii Gerasimov¹⁹, Chief of the General Staff

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 112–113.

¹⁸ L. Bechner and other, “Analyzing the Russian Way of War. Evidence from the 2008 Conflict with Georgia. Evidence from the 2008 Conflict with Georgia: A Contemporary Battlefield Assessment by the Modern War Institute,” 20 March 2018, <https://mwi.usma.edu>.

¹⁹ “Wiektoy razwitija wojennoj strategii, Naczalnik Gienieralnogo sztaba Wooruzionnych Sil RF gienieral armii Walerij Gierasimow wystupil na obszczem sobranii Akademii wojennych nauk,”

of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, in March 2019 during an interview at the Military Sciences Academy—which, taking into account the defensive character of Russian military doctrine presupposes an array of steps whose purpose is the preventive neutralization of threats to state security.”

In this context, general Gerasimov then went on to discuss the Russian “limited action strategy.” All these concepts refer back to Soviet offensive doctrines. “Active defense” is a euphemism that was used to mask preparations made by the “peace loving homeland of the proletariat” for aggressive steps meant to move the “defense” to the adversary’s territory.²⁰ The expression “preventive neutralization of threats” plays a similar function in Russia’s strategic tradition. It is yet another euphemism used in the past to camouflage the Soviet Union’s aspirations to possess the strategic initiative from the very first hours of a conflict, that is, a euphemism for aggression. And lastly, “limited action”, that is, an armed conflict with limited political aims. During the Cold War, the aim of this Soviet strategy was to bring about divisions within NATO against the background of the Alliance’s military reaction to the USSR’s annexation of West Berlin.²¹ Russian strategic thinking’s return to concepts known from Soviet war doctrine may signify that Russian strategists are beginning to see the possibility of using them again.

Russia’s aggression against Georgia and Ukraine indicates that the aim of Russia’s “limited war” today is to occupy the neighbour’s territory in order to attain two limited political goals: forcing the West to the negotiating table at which, in exchange for “de-escalation,” Russia will demand a stop to the West’s European and trans-Atlantic

Krasnaja zvezda, 4 March 2019, <http://redstar.ru/vektory-ravitya-voennoj-strategii>.

²⁰ That is a long tradition in Russian doctrine to use those terms. It was made by the Soviets before World War II. I wrote on this in: S. Dębski, *Między Berlinem a Moskwą. Stosunki niemiecko-sowieckie 1939–1941*, PISM, 2007, p. 527–587.

²¹ NATO’s response was, inter alia, the strategy of massive retaliation. The best overview of NATO’s strategic problems in: R. Kupiecki, *Sila i solidarność: strategia NATO 1949–1989*, PISM, 2009, p. 172 and next. It is also worth mentioning the thoughts on limited war by R.E. Osgood, “Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy,” University of Chicago Press, 1957, and his next book: “Limited War Revisited,” Westview Press, 1979.

integration; and to gain an instrument of blackmail with which to force the neighbor under attack to make political concessions using threats of escalation. In the event, Russian victory does not consist of gaining military domination over its opponent and inclining it to accept peace terms, but rather in driving a wedge between the victim of Russian aggression and the West and forcing concessions at the cost of the state under attack, its territory, political system and aspirations.

In keeping with the requirements of shaping an optimal response strategy, Polish policymakers should take into account the worst case scenario. This means that Russia may embark on a limited war against Poland or its allies on NATO's eastern flank. The political aim of Russia's "limited war" or its "preventive neutralization of threats" may be to force the Alliance to agree to a "non-Russophobic" government in Poland, the "demilitarization" of NATO's eastern flank, and the departure of Allied troops from Central Europe, pending the withdrawal of Central European countries from NATO after the installation by Russia of pro-Russian governments in their capitals.

The minimum goal of Russia's strategy of limited war on NATO's eastern flank may be the further institutionalization of the Central European countries' different status in the Alliance and in the European Union, while the maximum goal could be to alter the status quo established in the region following 2004.

SLOWING DOWN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The third negative trend contributing to the worsening of the international situation is the interruption of the European integration process. In 2016, one of the most important and richest European member states decided that the European Union didn't guarantee optimal conditions for development. While we still don't know, three years after the Brexit vote of June 23, 2016, on what conditions and when the United Kingdom will ultimately leave the EU and, therefore, what long-term consequences this event will bring for that country—besides the loss of its reputation as one of the world's oldest and most rational and democratic political and strategic cultures. Whatever we may

think of the referendum's result, or about the very process by which the British are leaving the EU, we can rest assured that it will have serious consequences for the European integration process.

First, it will incline certain policymakers in the EU's remaining member states to seek ways to deepen and accelerate European integration. During its history, the European Union has worked out the practice of overcoming successive crises by deepening integration or broadening its scope. Naturally, Brexit will stimulate references to this European tradition. The pronouncements of French President Emmanuel Macron, who rode to power in 2017 on the slogan of France's return to the role of a European integration leader is a prime example. Macron – in contrast to his political opponent Marine Le Pen, who isn't exactly averse to the possibility that France might one day leave the EU—called for deeper integration and for rebuilding its social attractiveness, even at the expense of the EU's cohesion and unity.

The French President hoped to gain political support from Germany for his integration vision, but it soon became clear that the internal political dynamics of Germany and France differ in at least two aspects. It turned out that Germany was no longer willing to accept the French proposal to bring the European Union out of the political crisis in the traditional manner—by shouldering greater financial costs for deeper integration than other member states.

On the other hand, the psychologically de-militarized German society opposes increasing expenditures on defense. This, however, is absolutely indispensable in the new political circumstances that have to do with maintaining NATO cohesion in the face of growing American calls for greater solidarity in shouldering defense spending, and strategic ones having to do with growing superpower rivalry. Meanwhile, the German Social-Democratic party, grappling with an identity crisis, which has been part of successive coalition governments since 2005 (with a 4-year break in 2009–2013), and which loses support with every election, is now trying to re-define itself as the “peace party.” At the same time, it is the political force in Germany that is most enmeshed in political, business and corruption relations with authoritarian Russia.

All this paralyzes the policy of the German coalition government in the sphere of defense, sets off political bidding for the most “peaceful” and “progressive” German political party. It also has a destructive effect on German strategic thinking, which is hampered by a lack of political consensus about Germany’s role in Europe, about the expenditures necessary to sustain it, and about methods of restraining German power for the sake of European unity.

This situation is beginning to resemble that of Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the parliament was opposed, in the name of “peace”, to the maintenance by the state of a standing professional army, on the grounds that this may lead the king and the “government” to conduct a more assertive policy, lead to unnecessary wars and serve to strengthen royal power over the parliament, on the presumption that a king with a permanent army and an assured budget would be less likely to make political concessions. This attitude, while very progressive by nature, led to the weakening of the state, loss of sovereignty and, ultimately, to Poland’s disappearance from the map of Europe for 120 years after its territories had been invaded and annexed by its neighbours.

The reluctance of the Germans to spend more on spending is beginning to affect the way they conduct foreign policy and is causing tensions in transatlantic relations. Given the growing rivalry between the powers and pressure from China, the United States, irrespective of its administration, will put pressure on its European allies to increase their defense spending and bear greater responsibility for peace in Europe. And this responsibility must entail creating a credible deterrent and an effective defense of one’s territory. Without investment in defense, words about allied credibility are just talk. Meanwhile, in Berlin voices can be heard arguing against the demands, raised by allies lying on NATO’s eastern flank, to increase the presence of NATO forces, particularly of US troops, on their territories. German diplomacy tends to invoke the provisions of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which have been repeatedly broken by Russia, as an argument against increasing this presence and thus the Alliance’s deterrent potential. This is a policy that leads to the weakening of allied treaty

obligations under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty by using political tools such as the declaration of intent—the Russia-NATO Founding Act of 1997. This is undoubtedly in Russia’s favour. At the same time, the German foreign minister is calling on the aggressor and the state being aggressed to “mutually deescalate”²². This does not strengthen Europe’s international authority and undermines confidence in Germany as a NATO member state politically and militarily capable of providing effective aid to an ally under attack.

We are already facing all of this today, in conditions of peace. In a situation of crisis, Russia will use all the instruments at its disposal to increase pressure on Germany. Yet, contrary to the energy security interests of the European Union and its Central-European members, Germany is pushing for the building of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which will enable Russia to pressure the German government and society, seeking to induce Germany to give up its role as an ally in favour of a mediator calling for “de-escalation”²³. In terms of Russian strategy, the very possibility of having such influence on Germany is a tactical success. Should Russia risk a step like aggression against NATO, facing either defeat or victory it will use absolutely all the means at its disposal to increase its chances. For this reason, every responsible Polish policymaker should point out to Germany the consequences of its position on defense spending, the importance of implementing the decisions taken at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014 to allocate at least 2% of GDP to arms spending, and incline Germany to interpret the Russia-NATO Founding Act in a way that makes it possible to increase the Alliance’s readiness to counter Russian aggression. Today’s German policy on these three points, when taken together, reduces allied credibility. Having this in mind, and thinking about the worst possible case-scenario, the responsible Polish policymaker cannot rule out that German policy might complicate Poland’s situation in the hour of Russian aggression. This increases Poland’s uncertainty about the

²² S. Siebold, “Germany urges Russia, Ukraine to de-escalate conflict,” Reuters, 18 January 2019, www.reuters.com.

²³ A. Gawlikowska-Fyk, M. Terlikowski (eds.), *Nordic-Baltic Security in Times of Uncertainty, The Defence-energy Nexus*, PISM–NUPI, 2018.

ability of the Alliance to provide rapid and effective assistance to allies on NATO's eastern flank.

This time, it will be more difficult than in the past to bring the process of European integration out of the shallows in which it is stuck. Attempts to deepen integration may encounter resistance on the part of society. Anticipating this, the European elites will seek to avoid having to obtain confirmation from society for the reforms being introduced. In some member states, such confirmation can only be achieved by referendum. Brexit has brought home the lesson of recent decades, showing that referenda about integration can easily be lost in Western Europe. In effect, in recent times, only in Central European countries seeking membership in the EU were they successful for those supporting greater integration. It should thus be expected that instead of treaty changes subject to ratification, attempts will be made to conclude inter-governmental agreements more or less in line with the Lisbon Treaty and the enhanced cooperation method it provides. As a result, Europe may see the emergence of a network of sectoral agreements of various levels and configurations, and these may be less and less transparent and built on the intention to avoid democratic ratification. In the long term, this could lead to decision-making paralysis, make the European integration management system dysfunctional, and deepen the democratic deficit in the EU.

However, even such a method of intergovernmental agreement may not be attainable. The deepening of sectoral integration without modifying the treaties will require self-restraint on the part of France and Germany, something that will be more difficult after Brexit, as the predominance of those two countries in the EU over other integrating members will only increase. This may naturally give rise to a temptation to enter into bilateral agreements about reforms and then to force them upon other member states. Such a method would sooner or later have to lead to another political crisis in the EU similar to the refugee crisis of 2015, when Germany attempted to impose its own solution on other member states without being prepared to compensate them for the political costs incurred, thus triggering a political rebellion in the EU. The UK's exit from the EU will significantly change

the voting balance of member states in the European Council and the Council of the European Union. The Lisbon Treaty already favoured large member states by giving them overly great voting power, especially to Germany. After Brexit, these disproportions will grow even more in favour of large member states—Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland. By adopting the Lisbon Treaty and reforming the Council's weighted voting system, it was not considered that one of the four most populous countries may leave the EU, and no provision for the consequences of such a scenario on the decision-making process was made. After Brexit, the ability of states to form winning and blocking coalitions will be altered. The member states with the largest populations, especially Germany and France, will dominate the EU's decision-making process to an even greater extent than now. This explains the German-French proposals to extend the Community method in decision-making based on majority voting to new areas, including matters related to foreign and security policy. France and Germany, having an advantage in the decision-making process, would like to be able to take advantage of it in as many situations as possible. But the use of majority voting in the Council is already a major cost and loss for the EU as a whole, as it nullifies the argument about the need for solidarity between member states. EU heads of Government cannot invoke the argument of solidarity when they have lost a vote. As a result, they will be increasingly reluctant to invoke European solidarity in the future and it may wane in the EU over time.

The great rivalry between the powers is de facto driven by the domestic situation of each of them, in conjunction with the context created by their internal weaknesses. Therefore, the political crisis in Europe, potential problems with overcoming it, and the resulting new political tensions between European allies which are integrating in parallel in NATO and the EU, as well as the reduction of European solidarity and inter-allied trust, all contribute to strategic conditions that are very unfavourable for Poland. The weak degree of European integration and its attractiveness may also lead to the emergence of a strategic vacuum, albeit in a different manner than would a possible decline of American involvement in Europe.

THE STRATEGY OF A FLANK MARCH

Poland is one of the largest beneficiaries of the international system shaped after the end of the Cold War. For this reason, the natural strategic aim of Polish policy is to maximally prolong the conditions that have had such a positive impact on its security and prosperity over the last 30 years. For as long as NATO is able to generate a credible deterrent using all instruments at its disposal—political, strategic communications, and its military potential—the European Union will be capable to project European unity despite the political and ideological differences between the democratic political forces governing in each member state. And for as long as the United States, as the greatest extra-European power with a European heritage, remains truly interested in using its system of alliances to increase its influence on the international environment, Poland will enjoy optimal conditions for development.

Whether one chooses to look at Poland as an ally of the world's most developed countries (in the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union) or outside of this context, for American policymakers Poland remains but a flank march forming a part of the European deterrence and defense system stretching from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. A threat to any country in the region produces a mobilizing impulse in the others, in NATO and in the EU. In the global allied policy of the United States, the system of European peripheral outposts affects the functionality of a similar system in the Far East, as it forms part of America's global deterrence policy.

The three megatrends in world politics discussed above are detrimental to Poland. But taken individually, none of them entails any existential threat to Poland. For example, if the European Union generates European unity and regains the ability to make strategic decisions, including those affecting Europe's deterrent potential, even the withdrawal of the United States from European affairs, while unfavorable from Poland's viewpoint, does not have to be a problem of an existential nature.

The most dangerous case scenario for Poland would be the simultaneous correlation of all three trends. A military conflict in the Far

East between China and the United States drawing America's attention away from European affairs and vacating the Old Continent of American troops could be seen by Russia as an opportunity to reverse the course of history and attempt to use NATO's reduced deterrent credibility and reduced likelihood of massive retaliation to impose a new political architecture on Europe, perhaps using the strategy of limited war. For centuries, the political function of flank marches has been to mobilize the potential required to deter effectively any possible aggressor and should the deterrent fail, to first resist, thwart the aggressor's attempts to locate the war (use of the limited war strategy) and to alert the main forces needed to overcome them. Flank marches are not a buffer zone, but a red line whose crossing triggers a large-scale conflict. Therefore, they have always had to maintain an increased capacity for political and military response and for mobilization of the main forces. This ability is part of their deterrent potential, both autonomously and in a system of alliance.

This hints at how to reduce the probability of the occurrence of a correlation between all three negative trends that would be a threat to Poland. Poland must shape its own potential in such a way as to be able to effectively perform the classic functions of a flank march. This potential should increase within the next 10–15 years, a period currently adopted by American strategists in connection with the possibility of an American-Chinese armed confrontation. Of course, it should be borne in mind that from the American viewpoint, the two theatres of action are very different. While the Pacific theatre requires the involvement of the U.S. Navy first and foremost, Europe requires land forces. On the other hand, the key role of aviation in the American strategy in both theatres would probably result in competition between the two for the necessary resources. In addition, the aim of the United States' adaptation to the new strategic context, including the modernization of the armed forces, is to generate a potential that will ensure a credible deterrent effect and thus avoid an armed confrontation with China. The same goal must also guide Polish policymakers.

Since Poland's political and military deterrence potential is based primarily on NATO's credibility and the unity of the European Union,

its strengthening must consist in increasing Poland's ability to mobilize its allies to respond decisively in the event of a crisis and to break Russian calculations for using limited war tactics on NATO's eastern flank. An element of the Polish political strategy should be closer cooperation with the United States in order to create a close connection between the credibility of American deterrence in Europe and the Far East. On the other hand, Poland should involve Western European countries, especially Germany, in developing a credible European political and military deterrent capacity.

Involving Germany in building an effective European deterrent for Russia is a matter of strategic importance for Poland. Germany as an ally provides strategic depth for Poland – in the event of a crisis, it is on German territory that allied support forces necessary for Poland to overcome the aggressor will concentrate. Therefore, an increase in the strength of American troops deployed in Poland, together with a change in the nature of their presence from rotational to permanent, will strengthen Germany's involvement in deterring and defending the eastern flank of the Alliance. However, if American deterrence fails in the Far East, it is in Poland's interest for Europe to have sufficient capacity to act as an autonomous deterrent. And this is what Poland, along with France, should convince Germany to do.

Unfortunately, it is not very likely that such potential will be attained within 10–15. During this time, Poland will have to concentrate on expanding its land and air forces so it is able to endure in a very aggressive A2/AD environment. As the aim of Russia's limited war strategy is to occupy territory, the development of naval capabilities will have to be put off until later.

In addition, it is worth keeping in mind that Poland must be able to deploy forces—probably highly mobile units—to the allied forces group in the Baltic States, especially Lithuania, even before the conflict enters its acute phase. Such a deployment, together with the presence of allied forces, especially American ones, east of Warsaw will act as a deterrent and will create an important, perhaps final signal in strategic communication, which may help to avoid conflict. Poland's aim is to prolong the status quo established after the Cold War, which includes

the right of sovereign nations decide on their model of development and alliances. Poland, as a flank march, bears a special responsibility for the survival of the international order shaped after 1989.