

## Hybrid Cold War in Europe

The post-Cold War era of international security in Europe has come to an end in 2014. An open political confrontation between the West and Russia is currently emerging. The participants of the dispute use certain measures such as diplomacy, information warfare, propaganda, economy (e.g. sanctions) as well as the military. Russia's foreign policy is becoming militarised and littered with aggression toward its neighbours. Furthermore, growing military pressure against the West (e.g. its confrontational doctrine introducing the famous term of 'nuclear de-escalation'), information concerning its military potential, military manoeuvres as well as military encounters including violation of the airspace, maritime incidents etc. characterise current Russian policy toward the Western world.

### The essence of hybrid cold war

Political confrontation involving military measures is a crucial part of cold war. However, there is no doubt that the current confrontation is different than the

Cold War in the 20th century. Current confrontation does not involve specific elements of the Cold War such as a harsh ideological clash. However, given the political confrontation and military factors, it seems certain that the essence of the dispute remains the same. Therefore, it is necessary to define this phenomenon and specify the general meaning of this term.

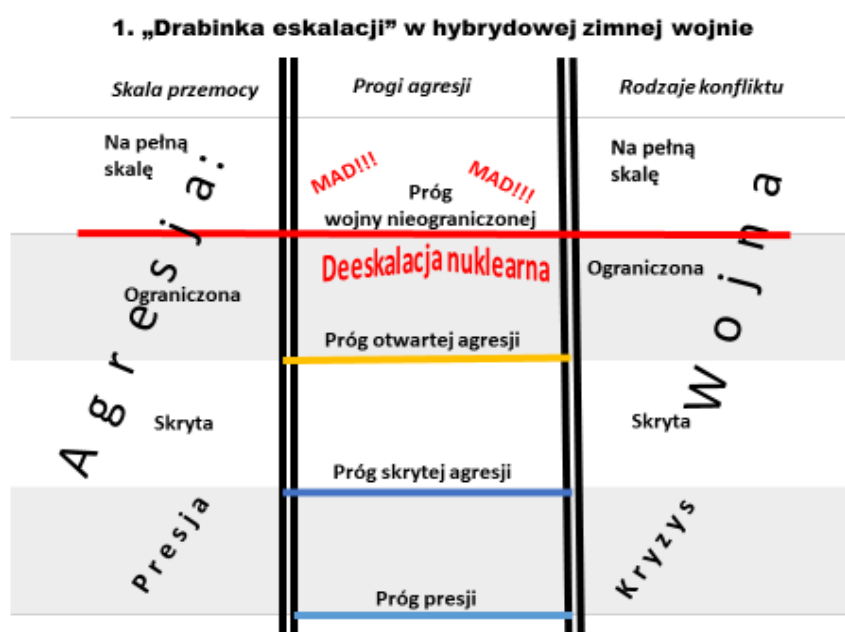
During the Cold War in the 20th century the military factors (nuclear in particular) were dominating the non-military factors, however, the latter (especially the economy) were decisive in determining the outcome of the conflict. In the case of contemporary political confrontations, the relation between military and non-military factors is much more balanced and none of them is decisive. These circumstances are extremely varied; therefore, the confrontation can be perceived as a hybrid conflict. Consequently, the term 'hybrid cold war' seems to be appropriate to describe the current state of international security affairs.

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An analysis of a hybrid cold war should start with a description of a potential 'crisis escalation ladder' in the security affairs between Russia and the West (Picture 1.). There is no doubt that Russia is putting pressure on NATO member states (e.g. information warfare, propaganda, espionage, economy etc.), particularly on Russia' neighbours (but also the countries located in Western Europe) that seem to be vulnerable to Russian 'arguments'. This pressure has serious consequences on crisis in Russian–Western (especially the United States and NATO) relations. A potential outbreak of armed conflict is a crucial part of Russia's blackmail strategy. In general, it is possible to differentiate three levels and three scenarios concerning the risk of war: a subliminal conflict (not a regular, open war), limited war (a conflict is limited to certain goals, scale, area, time, and measures) and full-scale (total) war.

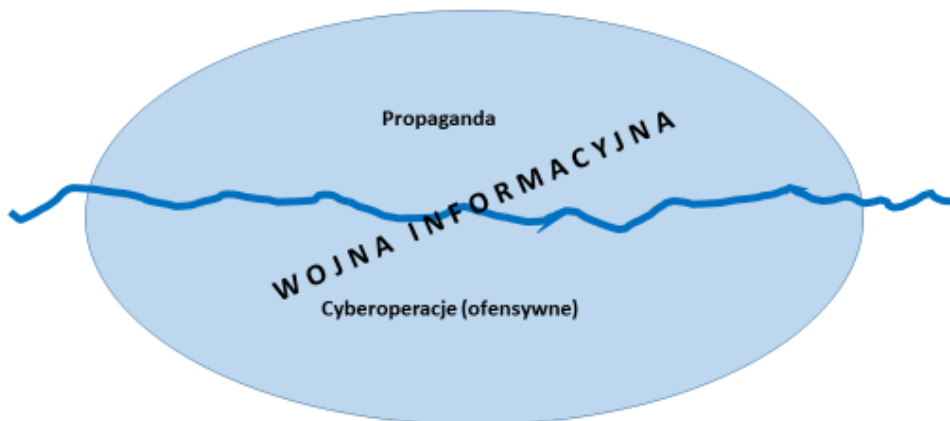


In conclusion, Russia's hybrid cold war against the West includes real political and military pressure and three potential risk scenarios: a subliminal conflict, limited warfare and unlimited warfare.

## Political and military pressure

Russia's political pressure on the West is a key part of the hybrid cold war. The information warfare is the most important environment and measure to fight the enemy. Russia is putting pressure on the West on two levels: explicit and implicit which means the propaganda and cyber operations (Picture 2.)

## 2. Poziomy wojny informacyjnej



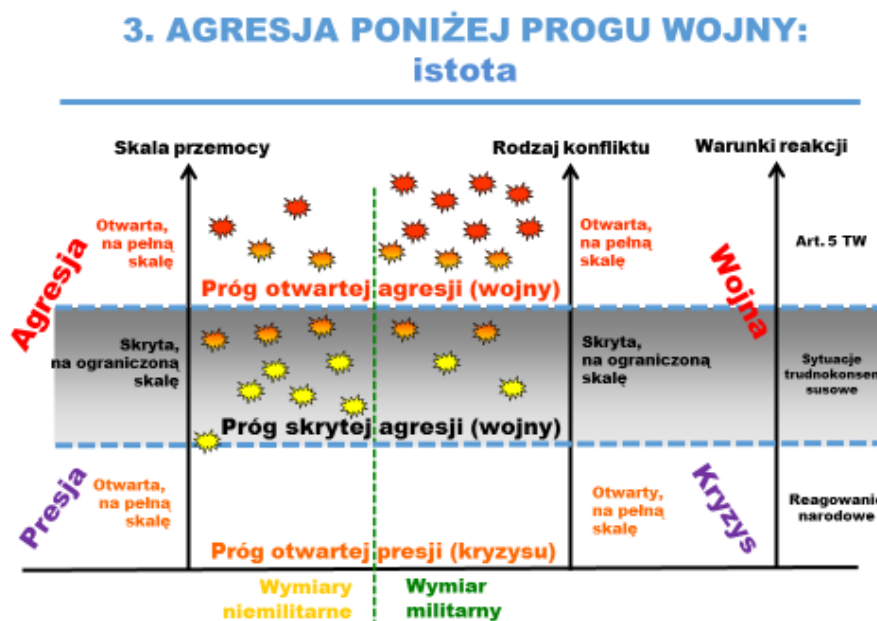
Russia has developed certain propaganda techniques aimed at citizens of Western countries. Specialised media institutions are supposed to achieve goals in this field (e.g. Russia Today). However, state institutions are also directly involved in this process, including the personal involvement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, President Vladimir Putin and Members of Parliament. The blackmail and intimidation are a crucial part of the neo-Cold War propaganda. The threat from Russia is based on consequences of a potential armed conflict, including the nuclear one, that could begin if the West stands out against Russia's strategic interests. Russia will intentionally provoke military incidents and manoeuvres and deliberate information concerning its military development programmes as a pretext for information operations.

It seems certain that cyber operations will become more and more important. Owing to the difficulties related to identification of this threat, the cyber operations can be a hidden and 'unpunished' way to cause significant disruptions and even losses in Western countries. Therefore, cyber warfare is becoming the most significant difference between a daily practice of hybrid cold war and typical conflicts of the 20th century.

### 'Subliminal' aggression

The relations between Russia and the Western world will be fraught with the risk of war and information warfare. It is expected that Russia will manipulate this risk to strengthen the impact of the information warfare and consequently, under certain circumstances, make a deliberate decision to replace political pressure with aggression. Russia can easily turn the political and military pressure into hidden, subliminal aggression which means an implicit and limited armed conflict. This method is successfully applied in the case of Ukraine, which

is supported by the West, in order to weaken Western support and undermine pressure of the Western countries on Russia, e.g. sanctions imposed on Russian economy (Picture 3.).



An open, full-scale war seems to be inconceivable for Russia because the country would surely lose this war. However, from the Russian perspective, the armed conflict under the threshold of war can be worth considering. This situation could be possible if there is a certain chance to undermine an attacked country internally, disrupt its functioning, cause severe political confrontation and its pivot to Russia. These circumstances should also include the lack of support of the entire NATO and/or the European Union in order to discredit defence credibility of these institutions within the societies of Russia's neighbour states. This issue concerns the Baltic states in particular where Russia could provoke internal disputes and conflicts and use them as a pretext for military intervention. It could concern operations conducted by special forces pretending to be local bandits, infrastructure sabotage, usage of drones, terrorist attacks, military incidents on Russian border, maritime incidents and air space violation etc.

The deployment of the multinational battalion groups of NATO significantly reduces the risk of the conflict under the threshold of war, however, this threat cannot be totally eliminated. Russian forces' would conduct sabotage operations evading direct confrontation with the armed forces and infrastructure of the Alliance. If these operations are conducted against NATO forces, Russia would certainly accuse local government and services of conducting them and not dealing with the internal threats (e.g. criminals).

## Limited warfare

The risk of open, but limited aggression is expected to be the essence of the new hybrid Cold War. The risk is not only related to the potential Russian aggression against neighbouring countries that are not NATO member states. After NATO and EU decisions such aggression will be more difficult and risky for Russia than before (Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014), but still possible. It is worth pointing out that NATO/EU member states that are Russia' neighbours (particularly Baltic states and, to a lesser extent, Poland) are threatened with such aggression. However, the risk of the conflict is much lower than in the case of the countries that are not member states of the Alliance.

Russia could take this step, but only under certain political and strategic conditions. Goals of the aggression under the threshold of war could be to undermine an attacked country, achieve political influence and discredit the Alliance. However, in the case of an open and intentionally limited conflict Russia could set more ambitious goals such as taking control over the entire territory of a country or its limited area (regions of Narva and Daugavpils, Suwalki corridor) or demonstrating strategic determination (e.g. toward the countries located in the Black Sea region). Russia can set these goals beforehand or start acting this way in the case of the so-called 'situation out of control'.

Russia is strengthening its capabilities to wage this type of war on other countries, including NATO member states, by improving three crucial instruments during large-scale military manoeuvres: rapid deployment force, mobilisation of mass armies and tactical nuclear weapons. The first one is necessary to conduct a rapid operation and create a fait accompli. The second one is crucial to defend Russia and block large-scale reaction of NATO forces.

However, it is worth emphasising the significance of tactical nuclear weapons which is used to intimidate weaker countries and deter those stronger. One of the most important elements of this strategy is a doctrine of the so-called 'nuclear de-escalation', which means a pre-emptive nuclear strike if the conventional armed conflict turns out to be unsuccessful for Russia (Picture 4.).



According to this doctrine, tactical nuclear weapon is supposed to protect Russia against the large-scale war with NATO which would end up with Russia's defeat. To achieve this goal Russia could carry out a limited, 'warning' nuclear strike using tactical warheads if a conventional war with NATO turns out to be lost. In the second case Russia can recognise achievement of certain objectives and NATO poses a threat of counteroffensive. The small-scale use of nuclear tactical weapons could be based on certain strategy, e.g. evading strikes on objects belonging to NATO states possessing nuclear weapons or conducting 'neutral nuclear strikes' in sea areas and airspace as a warning signal showing determination of Russia if the war continues. Furthermore, the doctrine of 'nuclear de-escalation' is based on taking advantages of strategic differences among specific NATO member states.

### Unlimited, full-scale war

The greatest threat related to the hybrid Cold War is an unlimited, full-scale war. This type of warfare seems to be highly unlikely as in the case of Cold War in the 20th century. Deliberate and intentional unlimited aggression of Russia seems to be almost impossible, due to imbalance of strategic potential (military and non-military) between NATO and Russia. However, this kind of warfare can happen because of wrong estimates of the Russian Federation trying to succeed in a limited conflict (e.g. wrong estimates of the efficiency of the de-escalation concept using tactical nuclear weapons). Therefore, the risk of large-scale conflict seems to be a function of the risk of a limited war.

### Conclusions

1. It is necessary to undertake comprehensive countermeasures to make a stand against current threat of Russia. NATO makes correct assumptions concerning the symbiosis of three important elements: dialogue regarding current affairs, military operations other than war, as well as deterrence and defence against potential aggression.
2. Security of the Baltic states is particularly important for the entire NATO and the security of Europe. These countries are at the frontline of the territory of NATO; therefore, they are more vulnerable to Russian aggression (particularly low-threshold warfare) and pressure. The defeat in this confrontation would mean for NATO losing credibility and consequently the end of the current security system in Europe which would have a significant impact on global security. Therefore, the Baltic states should possess deterrence capabilities within NATO and be able to undertake countermeasures against a potential attack of the enemy. To make this function possible, it is necessary to introduce two elements: permanent presence of the forces at the forefront and ability to deploy high readiness forces.
3. It is important to develop capabilities against the current political and military pressure; particularly information warfare, propaganda and cyber operations. Therefore, it is crucial

to create information security systems, including cyber security systems in the Western countries, and improve organisation in these fields within NATO and the EU. It seems also positive that the Alliance acknowledged that the cyber space is an operational domain of collective defence together with land, airspace, and sea based on the Article 5 of NATO

4. The defence against low-threshold warfare should be guaranteed by Russia's neighbouring countries within their national defence systems. These countries should be specialised in this specific field within NATO defence system. This matter is extremely important due to the risk related to difficulties with consensus decision-making process of the Alliance, particularly in terms of the unambiguous assessment and a decision to launch an operation of the Alliance (an issue of consensus-building process).

5. From Russia's perspective the credibility of the 'nuclear de-escalation' doctrine determines the decision to initiate limited aggression. Therefore, the most efficient NATO's response to this threat is to undermine faith in the doctrine. During Warsaw Summit, NATO took certain steps to strengthen credibility of nuclear strike capabilities as an answer to Russia's advantage in tactical nuclear weapons. Russia must be aware that crossing the threshold of nuclear conflict will entail the threat of nuclear war in Europe on all levels, not only the tactical one.

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