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### International Migration as an Instrument of Hybrid Aggression

Migration element of the hybrid strategy is becoming one of the dominant methods in the geopolitical confrontation and struggle for influence within the framework of the system of international relations. Artificially supported migration processes are becoming powerful weapons that are used by both asymmetric actors and revanchist states. Migration can cause an outflow of labor and intellectual resources from the state, undermining its potential. Also, temporary labor migrants could become an agents on influence of the foreign forces in their home state. However, the practice of destabilization of countries-recipients of migrants due to specially created migration flows directed to its territory is becoming even more dangerous. Artificially strengthened movement of migrants to EU states from the Middle East, which was seen in 2015-2016 and which is being implemented by Belarus's authorities in 2021, undermines the unity of Europe and challenges the values of the Western world.

**Keywords:** international migration, hybrid warfare, European Union, migration crisis, information campaign, Russian Federation

### Міжнародна міграція як інструмент гібридної агресії

Сьогодні міграційний елемент гібридної стратегії стає одним із домінуючих методів геополітичного протистояння та боротьби за вплив в рамках системи міжнародних відносин. В умовах формування нового світового порядку штучно ініційовані та підтримувані міграційні процеси стають потужною зброєю, яку використовують не лише асиметричні актори, а й реваншистські держави. Основні форми використання міграції як інструменту гібридної агресії були охарактеризовані К. Грінхілл та Н. Стеджером. На основі узагальнення їхньої класифікації в статті пропонується авторський підхід до визначення видів міграційного впливу на геополітичних конкурентів та опонентів. Згідно з ним, пропонується розглядати в якості гібридних дій сплановані операції, що спрямовуються на: витягування людської ресурсної бази з території іншої держави; застосування тимчасових (трудова) мігрантів в якості агентури впливу країни перебування в країні походження; дестабілізацію держави, яка стає кінцевою ціллю міграційного руху. В останньому випадку за рахунок забезпечення надмірного міграційного потоку можна домогтися виснаження матеріальних ресурсів та загострення внутрішніх конфліктів у суспільстві країни-конкурента. Важливою складовою такої стратегії є не лише сприяння інтенсифікації міграційного явища, але й активна робота в інформаційному середовищі з використанням засобів пропаганди, спрямована на посилення протиріч, що ґрунтуються на міграційній проблематиці. Найбільший інтерес викликає штучне створення спрямованого і контрольованого (за рахунок широкого комплексу інструментів) міграційного потоку. Така тактика дестабілізації країн-одержувачів мігрантів стає дедалі небезпечнішою. Прикладами її застосування може вважатися європейська міграційна криза 2015 року (роль Росії в цих процесах) та актуальна ситуація на білорусько-польському кордоні (штучно створений режимом О. Лукашенка міграційний потік – операція, яка ймовірно здійснюється під патронажем Москви).

**Ключові слова:** міжнародна міграція, гібридна війна, Європейський Союз, міграційна криза, інформаційна кампанія, Російська Федерація.

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**The problem formulation.** Today, the existing system of international relations is undergoing profound transformations. The revisionism of certain states, which seek to change the situation in their favor, affects the quantitative characteristics of the world order – the place, potential and influence of different actors. However, there are also qualitative changes that reformat the very nature of international interaction. The Liberal Model of the End of History has collapsed – it is being replaced by an era of global competition in which states use all the tools at their disposal to achieve their goals. At the same time, along with traditional methods of influencing partners, competitors and opponents, the practice of innovative strategies based on mediated actions is developing. This trend leads to the formation of a new – hybrid – element as an important factor influencing the world order.

As V. Gorbulin writes in his work, “This new world order is being formed before our eyes. ... It will be a world (dis)order with a new distribution of power between the countries and with a new set of hybrid wars, initiated by the new players against the enemies and the former allies alike”<sup>2</sup>. In this new world, differences between peace and war, political and military interaction blur. At the same time, many spheres of state policy – those that until recently were considered primarily as part of peaceful relations – acquire significance as a tool of hybrid aggression. We are talking about the information component, energy policy, cultural interaction, and – including – a migration phenomenon that also gains fame as a weapon in a hybrid arsenal.

Of course, the critical approach to such widening of the use of term also exists. For example, H. Schoemaker emphasizes that such construct is too wide and uncertain. In his opinion, “hybrid warfare appears to have become the latest term for covert action”<sup>3</sup>. In answering this, we agree that the concept of hybrid warfare (in its broadest sense) should not be presented as a unique product of our time. But at the same time, we emphasize that a visible expansion of the tools of pressure on geopolitical opponents exists in modern times. This is proved by the study of practical aspects of modern international relations. Therefore, it does not really matter in the first place, what term is used in academic circles in order to characterize the use of migration phenomenon or energy policy to achieve political preferences (whether it is hybrid or covert operations). The most important thing is that their use in geopolitical struggle becomes indisputable, and therefore requires an adequate response.

The migration component plays an increasing role in determining the nature of interstate relations in the modern world. Mass migration has the potential to be used as a geostrategic weapon capable of changing the balance of power, to ensure the redistribution of economic and political resources. Thus, it becomes one of the newest tools of hybrid exposure to the opponent. So, its study is of great importance in order to understand these tactics and present adequate response for such actions.

**The analysis of sources and recent researches.** The specific problem of migration element of hybrid aggression is not fully forgotten by the scientific circles. Sun authors as Kelly M. Greenhill, Scott A. Porter, Peter Roell, Sascha-Dominik Dov Bachmann and Anthony Paphiti, Taras Kuzio and Paul D’Anieri, J.R. Nyquist and Anca-Maria Cernea. Oleksandr Demidenko had worked on it. But this topic is having a lot of blind spots, which demands further investigation. Also, a lot of works describe the hybrid warfare in general, and only occasionally mention its migration dimension – so this factor underlines the need for more concrete scientific search.

**The publication’s purpose.** This article is primarily of empirical value. Its goal is to define the essence of migration as a tool of hybrid aggression. To this end, it is proposed to analyze the theoretical aspects of this issue, considering the various options for using the migration phenomenon to reformat the international order. From the practical point of view this study provides a detailed analysis of the Russian hybrid policy, which today is aimed at confronting the collective West. The use of the migration factor as an element of aggression against European civilization are considered in this context.

**Main material presentation.** The famous German theorist Karl von Clausewitz introduced the concept of “Frictions of War”. By this he understood the factors that ensure the difference between the actual events of the conflict and the plans and developments planned on paper. For classical conflicts, he considered it necessary to pay attention to such elements as: danger, physical tension, uncertainty and unreliability of information; random events that cannot be foreseen; physical and political limita-

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<sup>2</sup> Gorbulin, V. (2017). *The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront*. Kharkiv: Folio, 158.

<sup>3</sup> Schoemaker, H. (2019). Allegations of Russian Weaponized Migration Against the EU, *Military Spectator*, Available from: <https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/internationale-veiligheidspolitiek/artikel/allegations-russian-weaponized-migration-against-eu> (Accessed: 10.08.2020).

tions in the use of force; unpredictability; gaps between causes and consequences of war<sup>4</sup>. But in the context of updating the hybrid format of the confrontation these views should be modernized in accordance with the requirements of the era. New forms of “friction” are determined by the peculiarities of a specific hybrid conflict. And there is a migration problem among them. After all, today the influence of migration on the situation in the course of hybrid warfare requires close attention<sup>5</sup>.

Hybrid warfare combines the use of conventional, irregular, and asymmetric means, including the constant manipulation of political and ideological conflicts. Its tools traditionally include special operations; the use of conventional armed forces; espionage; initiation of political provocations; active influence on the information field in the form of propaganda; methods of economic influence and pressure; cyber-attacks, as well as support for paramilitary proxy formations, terrorists and criminal elements<sup>6</sup>. But an objective assessment of the situation makes it possible to add to the arsenal of a hybrid war a new strategic concept based on the extensive use of the sociological factor, manifested as a migration phenomenon. The mere relocation of a large mass of people into the territory of the enemy leads to chaos, conflicts and negative economic consequences. At the same time, the aggressor does not have to make a single shot or show its role in initiating a threat – its actions are indirect and, accordingly, it is difficult to bring direct charges of aggression against him<sup>7</sup>.

The theory of the use of migration as a tool of military action is not new. Back in 2010, K. Greenhill published the book “Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy”, which addressed this phenomenon<sup>8</sup>. It outlined the main principles of this strategy. Greenhill combines the principles of impact on the victim of aggression using the migration factor under the term “strategy of coercion punishment”. It can be implemented in two ways. The first is based on direct threats aimed at suppressing the ability of the target to resist the influx of refugees or migrants. Within the framework of the second, there is a kind of political blackmail, which uses the existence of legal and regulatory obligations to refugees in democratic societies.

Some countries fully apply migration issues when building their relations with Europe. Taking advantage of their geographical location and the status of sources of origin or transit countries for mass migration, they resort to blackmail in relations with European partners. As a payment for strengthening control over migration flows, designed to reduce the volume of refugee migrants entering Europe, they acquire certain preferences for themselves. The Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi actively used this idea. It is the form that the Kingdom of Morocco implements its migration policy. It receives financial assistance from the European Union aimed at increasing state capacities in the area of countering illegal migration processes.

Another example can be considered in the case of the Turkish position in the framework of the negotiation process with the EU on solving the problem of Syrian refugees. In early 2016, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu managed to conclude an agreement with Brussels, according to which Ankara promised to counteract the movement of migrants to Europe, and in return received long-awaited preferences regarding the process of its own European integration. However, in the future, tensions between Turkish and European authorities led to an aggravation of diplomatic relations between Ankara and Brussels, and as a result – the failure to fulfill the terms of the deal. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself very harshly reacted to criticism from the EU countries of his actions against the opposition, which the Europeans considered anti-democratic repression. In response, he threatened to loosen border controls and flood European countries with migrants. In recent years, this rhetoric became the traditional feature of the Turkish position in the dialog with Europe on the confrontational issues. For example, in response to the European criticism, which was directed against Turkish operation “Peace Spring” in Northern Syria in October 2019, Erdogan threatened to open Turkish borders for 3.6 million Syrian refugees, who live in Turkey. The message

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<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz, Carl Von. (1832). *Vom Kriege*. Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler

<sup>5</sup> Бартош, А. А. (2018). Гибридная война – переход от неудач к победе. *Независимое военное обозрение*. Available from: [http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2018-06-01/1\\_998\\_hybrid.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2018-06-01/1_998_hybrid.html) (Accessed: 01.04.2019).

<sup>6</sup> Roell, P. (2016). Migration – A New Form of “Hybrid Warfare”?. *ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security*, 422, 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> Warfare.Today (2017). *Weaponized Migration is the New Battlespace*. Available from: <http://www.warfare.today/2017/01/23/weaponized-migration-is-the-new-battlespace/> (Accessed: 05.04.2019).

<sup>8</sup> Greenhill, K. M. (2010). *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*. New York: Cornell University Press.

to Europe was clear – do not interfere in our campaign against Syrian Kurds, or we will stop to control the migrant flow and you will face the second round of the migrant crisis<sup>9</sup>. The very same approach was used by Ankara at the beginning of 2020. Escalation of the situation in the Syrian province of Idlib, where Bashar Assad's forces began their offensive against pro-Turkish militias, required intervention of Turkey. During the crisis, in order to draw Europe's attention to the Syrian problem, to secure support for Turkish actions, Erdogan one more time used a migration factor as an element of influence. In order to actualize Syrian issue for Europeans, Turkey has encouraged Syrian refugees to move to Europe. The media noted that in late February, Turkey opened the border for refugees to go to Greece and began prodding them to leave within a 72-hour window. Within days, Greece was forced to face an increase of the migrant flow to its territory<sup>10</sup>. In our opinion, such cases are a prime example of the “weaponization” of migration issues on the political level, in the context of an implementation of pressure on opponents.

However, in this case we are talking about the use of already formed migration flows in the interests of some states. These actors do not initiate this phenomenon; they are not active players – they only turn to the resources that were in their possession. But, unlike these examples, today we can see other phenomena – the actions of certain states that independently create a migration precedent to ensure their interests. It is this strategy, in our opinion, that is the main manifestation of the migration factor as a tool of hybrid influence.

In practical field, different models of the use of directed and controlled migration as political and military weapons could be identified. This topic was researched by K. Greenhill as well<sup>11</sup> – but in recent years it was deepened in the work of N. D. Steger. While talking on the issue, he proposes to consider seven, non-mutually exclusive variants of weaponized migration: coercive; dispossessive; expulsive; economic; “fifth column”; militarized; propaganda/political<sup>12</sup>.

It is necessary to pay attention to various dimensions of the influence of migration processes on state actors. First, migration directly affects the potential of states – after all, donor countries of irrevocable migrants lose both their labor/intellectual resources and funds spent on their education; at the same time, the recipient countries of such immigrants use these revenues for their own gain. Secondly, migration is a potential destabilizing factor for host societies, since a massive influx of foreigners very often leads to an increase in their level of conflict potential – especially when it comes to mass migration of unskilled workers and representatives of other civilizational spaces. Thirdly, the stable migration links of the two countries, especially in the format of labor migration, increase their dependence on each other and can affect their image and perception in the eyes of societies involved in the relevant migration processes<sup>13</sup>.

On the basis thereof, and taking into account Greenhill/ Steger classification, we present our own vision on the forms and models for using migration as an element of pressure and aggression. They are determined by the role played by the target country in the global migration space (whether it is a homeland or recipient of migrants).

In the simplest format, the migration phenomenon becomes an element of aggression, when the state, by its actions directed against the opponent, causes the activation of emigration processes from opponent's territory. Due to a set of actions aimed at destabilizing the situation, worsening socio-economic conditions or inflating political confrontation, prerequisites are created for the victim to lose its human resources. Simplification of transport opportunities for migrants presents another approach to the issue. The US policy towards Cuba could be considered as an example of implementation of such strategy. Between 1965 and 1973 so-called Freedom Flights bring near 300 000 refugees from

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<sup>9</sup> Jennequin, A. (2020). Turkey and the Weaponization of Syrian Refugees, *Brussels International Center Policy Brief*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Frantzman, S.J. (2020). Turkey Weaponizes Refugees Against Europe, *The Hill*, Available from: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/486291-turkey-weaponizes-refugees-against-europe> (Accessed: 12.01.2021).

<sup>11</sup> Greenhill, K. M. (2008). Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War. *Civil Wars*, 10. (1), 6-21.

<sup>12</sup> Steger, N. D. (2017). *The Weaponization of Migration: Examining Migration as a 21st Century Tool of Political Warfare*, Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive DSpace Repository, Available from: <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/56815> (Accessed: 14.08.2020).

<sup>13</sup> Касьянова, М. М. (2017). *Українці в міграційних процесах східної Європи в умовах постбіполярної трансформації міжнародної системи*, Вінниця: Документ Принт, 520.

Castro regime to Miami. This program was an element of a new approach towards Havana from Washington authorities. When they realized the failure of the military solution of the issue, another plan of more indirect pressure on the opponent was made. Americans tried to neutralize Cuban potential for stable development – and extraction of its labor resources was one of the key aspects of this strategy.

The highest form of such actions can be a pullout of resources, when, along with the weakening of the opponent, an increase of the own labor and intellectual capital is achieved. This is especially pronounced in the presence of close economic and industrial relations between states suffering from the deterioration of relations within the framework of a hybrid confrontation. Such a model is characteristic of the migration policy of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space, including in matters of Ukraine. Today even such important sectors of the Russian economy as the defense industry complex remain tied to Ukrainian partners in some aspects. After the events of 2014, the continuation of bilateral partnership became unlikely. However, the need of the Russian Federation in the developments of Ukrainian enterprises (“Antonov”, Yuzhnoye”), the experience of Ukrainian experts has not disappeared anywhere. As a result, the promotion of emigration to the Russian Federation of relevant Ukrainian specialists becomes an important task and the desired result of the Russian state migration policy<sup>14</sup>.

Using the migration phenomenon as an element of a hybrid attack – when an artificially inspired migration flow becomes in itself a threat to another state – is a fairly new phenomenon in the practice of international relations. But its roots could be found in the well-known military strategies of the past ages (such strategy was used by Mongols during the conquest of China). In the confrontation between two powers the idea to present to opponent some people, who are unwanted by him, and who have no place in his plans, is quite old. This act is aimed to waste his resources and/or create additional destabilization. Today’s usage of more global migration flows is the same strategy by nature – aimed to undermine the abilities of the enemy.

Theoretically, this method of influencing an opponent is already quite developed. In this case, the use of migrants as an element of hybrid action serves two purposes. First, it overwhelms the territory of the enemy with a huge number of displaced persons, causing internal contradictions and destabilization regarding how this issue should be resolved. On the other hand, a powerful migration flow that is difficult to control simplifies the infiltration of agents/militants who are able to strike in the future with their direct traditional terrorist activities.

As in the case of any other action strategy, today we can distinguish several stages in the implementation of such a scenario. As a first stage, it is proposed to create a source of instability, designed to intensify migration processes directed towards geopolitical opponents. This is an artificial design of the situation, which will lead to a predictable or controlled migration flow. The second stage begins when a critical mass of migrants reaches the states to which the aggressor seeks to exercise a hybrid influence. Within its framework, the internal political situation is already exacerbated within their borders. For this purpose, provocations are being organized, designed to aggravate the migration problem in the eyes of society and destabilize the state. In parallel, through the work of agents, representatives of different political poles are mobilized, and conditions are created for the exacerbation of relations between them due to differences in views on the problem of migrants. The nature of the third stage depends on the specific goals that the aggressor sets (change of government in the victim-state or total destruction of its potential) and the resources that are at its disposal (extent of initiated migration movements and the potential of the aggressor’s agents of influence). In the case of a moderate scenario, it is proposed to increase financial and informational support of the loyal political forces in order to ensure their electoral success. In the case of a radical scenario, the strategy involves provocation of real clashes between proponents of different approaches to solving the migration problem, which deepens the division of society and, in the worst case, can initiate an internal conflict.

In this context, the already mentioned use of migration flows to cover the infiltration of special forces or militants/terrorists into enemy territory becomes a specific threat that lies at the junction of hybrid and conventional military operations. It is believed that this tactic, called “stealth jihad”, was actively used by the ISIS leadership. Implementing a policy of radical terror in the organization-

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<sup>14</sup> Демиденко, О. І. (2018). Міграційні процеси в якості елементу гібридної агресії. *International Security in the Frame of Modern Global Challenges. Collection of scientific works*, 231-237.

controlled territories of the Middle East, it initiated a massive departure of the region's population to Europe. At the same time, terrorists joined this difficultly controlled movement of huge masses of people, penetrated the territory of European states and were ready to strike. In a situation where, during 2015, up to 1.5 million refugees arrived in Europe, it was physically impossible to organize proper testing and identify such a "Trojan horse"<sup>15</sup>.

Another example of the modern use of migration factor in terms of military confrontation is presented by the actions of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic at the end of 1990<sup>th</sup>. In his desperate attempts to keep together the remains of the already collapsing Yugoslavia, and understanding the impossibility of direct fight against Western coalition, which was preparing to put an end to his campaigns against minorities, he turned to other strategies of intimidation of his opponents. In the eve of the NATO campaign, aimed to stop violence in the region of Kosovo in 1999, he had threatened to destabilize the neighboring states by means of artificially created migration flows. It did not stop the Brussels from the operation – and even now it is hard to define for which extent the mass migration from its zone was the result of Alliance' bombing, and for which – the fault of the special actions of Yugoslavian army. But in any case, the latter was proclaimed as an element of Yugoslavian answer to the NATO actions.

Of course, the success of using the migration factor in the framework of hybrid aggression depends on many subjective factors. The effectiveness of such a step directly depends on the natural tolerance of the society of the opponent country to external migrants. The migratory component of interstate pressure achieves the greatest efficiency when being used against democratic regimes. The liberal paradigm inherent in the Western world creates an ideological trap for it. Respect for human rights and recognition of the highest value of life and personal security leads to the impossibility of strict control of migratory movements and the effective restrictions on the way of refugees. However, their excessive influx threatens the internal stability of recipient states. Thus, large-scale migration generates internal divisions between proponents focusing on the security threat to the nation and those who are more concerned about the humanitarian dimension of the problem. In conditions of widespread coverage of such a conflict in the press – which cannot be avoided with real freedom of speech – authorities may face serious opposition to its policies from supporters of the different points of view. The situation is exacerbated in cases where migrants do not adapt to receiving communities – either fundamentally refusing to accept indigenous culture and values, or not understanding how their own values should be subordinated to certain principles of their new home, regardless of whether they agree with them or not. As a result, there is a proliferation of anti-migrant sentiment, which becomes another destabilizing factor<sup>16</sup>. This in turn leads to an increase in the popularity of conservative anti-migrant forces. But such a development in itself testifies to the defeat of Western liberalism – after all, it results in the rejection of the same values that underlie it.

While talking about practical aspects of such threat to the European unity and Western values, it is important to consider the case of the migration crisis, caused by the Syrian conflict – as an example of a new type of military action using a hybrid approach. The war led to the fact that about 5 million Syrians fled outside the country. Such a massive migration displacement significantly influenced the policies and potential of countries forced to take care of Syrian refugees.

The attitude of the parties to the conflict to the civilian population plays a significant role as a catalyst for migration. Foreign forces are actively involved in the civil war in Syria – as Iranian and Russian contingents operating at the invitation of Bashar Assad's regime. The lack of proper care for local residents by such foreign units is a common practice, primarily determined by the priorities of their command, which performs the tasks set by its leadership and does not feel responsible to the citizens of this state. However, in Syria, the situation was radicalized. In this case crimes and atrocities against the local population in many cases could be carried out specifically – in order to frighten people, causing an exodus and activation of migration processes that stirred up the entire region.

The scale and depth of this actions, implemented by Assad and – presumably – by his Russian allies, as well as their influence not only on the modern conditions of the world order, but on the theoretical aspects of warfare strategies, remains the subject for attention for both researchers and politi-

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<sup>15</sup> Bachmann, S.-D., Paphiti, A. (2016). Russia's Hybrid War and its Implications for Defence and Security in the United Kingdom. *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies*, 44 (2), 28–67.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

cians/military commanders. There is no joint approach on the issue – whether to consider them as part of organized and controlled strategy, or simple use of the objective situation (like in the case of the Turkey using migrants for blackmailing Europe).

It is understandable, that the first approach was more popular among politicians and military leaders – as they are more concerned with the practical aspects of the policy, not its theoretical basis and compliance with scientifically proved concepts. Paying attention to the importance of migration threat as a new form of hybrid aggression, the United States of America was one of the first actors, who stressed out the alarm about the situation on the high military level. The Supreme Commander of the NATO forces in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, argued that in Syria, the Assad regime and its Russian allies use migration as a weapon. In his opinion, mass migration processes were artificially initiated to conceal the movement of criminals, terrorists and foreign mercenaries. They were also aimed at creating pressure on other countries, who became recipients of migrants. Breedlove said that the tactics of the Damascus and Moscow, which were used in Syrian conflict, were directed not only to the military victory over anti-Assad insurgents, but rather as an instrument of indirect pressure against Europe. From his point of view, the mass bombing of civilian targets serves to create a massive and continuous migrant flow from the conflict zone. While reporting to the Senate Armed Services Committee, he said that “together, Russia and the Assad regime are deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve”<sup>17</sup>.

Indeed, many countries were forced to revise their policies and reallocate available resources to help Syrian refugees flooding Europe. As a result, a new challenge to the national security of Western world was created<sup>18</sup>. European partners of the United States also did not stand aside from such accusations against Russia – similar claims were made by Roderich Kiesewetter, foreign and security policy expert for the CDU in the German parliament. At the highest level, this thesis was voiced by President of the European Council Donald Tusk<sup>19</sup>. The retired Romanian army general Constantin Degeratu also considered the migration crisis as an element of hybrid aggression. He stressed that the movement of migration flows to Europe seemed too well organized and coordinated. He also drew attention to the informational aspect of the actualization of the migration threat to Europe. According to the former military, this topic completely distracted Western world’s attention from the Russian actions in Ukraine. Similar thoughts were presented by a number of Ukrainian politicians<sup>20</sup>. Concerns about the organization of migration processes were also supported by the Polish professor Przemysław Żurawski. In his opinion, the Russian special services have powerful ties with the criminal transborder networks of the Balkan Peninsula, and it was through them that they could provide logistical support for migrant movements. Also, in October 2015 the Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický suggested that Russia was possibly financing the transportation of refugees to Europe<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, some experts (f.e. – Hans Schoemaker<sup>22</sup>) are critical of this assessment of Russia’s military campaign in Syria. They do not see direct evidences that increasing migration flows to Europe was a key goal of Russia’s action, or the flow itself was artificially organized. But despite such

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<sup>17</sup> Gen. Breedlove's hearing with the House Armed Services Committee (2016). *EUCOM*, Available from: <https://www.eucom.mil/transcript/35355/gen-breedloves-hearing-with-the-house-armed-services-committee> (Accessed: 10.10.2020).

<sup>18</sup> Porter, S.A. (2017). Considerations for Planning Humanitarian Operations in Hybrid Warfare. *Small Wars Journal*. Available from: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jnl/art/considerations-for-planning-humanitarian-operations-in-hybrid-warfare> (Accessed: 05.04.2019).

<sup>19</sup> Baczynska, G. (2016). EU's Tusk Says Russian Bombings Make Situation in Syria even Worse. *Reuters*. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-eu-russia/eus-tusk-says-russian-bombings-make-situation-in-syria-even-worse-idUSKCN0VI0WO> (Accessed: 05.04.2019).

<sup>20</sup> Герашенко, А. (2017). Кризис мигрантов для Европы придумал Путин. *NewsOne*. Available from: <https://newsone.ua/news/politics/gerashhenko-krizis-migrantov-dlya-evropy-pridumal-putin.html> (Accessed: 05.04.2019); Турчинов, О. (2015). Терроризм. Гибридная война. Россия. Укринформ. Available from: <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-polytics/1923269-aleksandr-turchinov-terrorizm-gibridnaya-voyna-rossiya.html> (Accessed: 30.03.2019).

<sup>21</sup> Nyquist, J.R., Cernea, A.-M. (2018). *Russian Strategy and Europe's Refugee Crisis*. Center for Security Policy, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Schoemaker, H. (2019). Allegations of Russian Weaponized Migration Against the EU, *Military Spectator*, Available from: <https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/internationale-veiligheidspolitiek/artikel/allegations-russian-weaponized-migration-against-eu> (Accessed: 10.08.2020).

differences in the assessment of the influence of Russian military campaign in Syria to the migration processes, the attention paid to the issue shows that such a possibility is being seriously considered by Western analysts. In general, this demonstrates that the issue of using artificially created migration as an instrument of pressure is seen by them as a very real threat. Based on this, it can be argued that such an instrument of influence has already taken its place in the strategic thinking of military-political experts, and can be used if the necessary conditions are present.

Experts also agree that during the active phase of the migration crisis this problem was widely used in order to bring additional destabilization to Europe by means of information tools. For example, in 2016, the Russian media actively disseminated a made-up story about how a 13-year-old German girl of Russian origin was kidnapped and raped by a refugee. Messages, hitting the fertile ground, caused protests in Germany. Because of this, a high-level diplomatic scandal broke out between Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov and German officials<sup>23</sup>. Thus, Russia specifically sought to use the migration crisis to deepen contradictions in European societies, with the aim of sowing grain of discord both among EU members at the state level and within each country separately.

In general, such actions have been crowned with success. The migration crisis dealt a serious blow to the unity of Europe. The decision of German Chancellor Angela Merkel to grant refugee status to Syrians led to a split in the EU. Many countries, especially those affected by the influx or transit of illegal migrants through their territories, have declared their disagreement with this approach. The initiative of equal distribution of refugees across all countries of the Union also faced criticism and open sabotage. As a result, populist nationalist parties and politicians, who built their political capital on anti-immigrant rhetoric, have achieved a significant increase in electoral support. The migration issue became an important internal challenge for the West, under the influence of which (as well as several other processes such as Brexit and the so-called “Trump effect”) it suffered from a lack of internal unity. In such conditions, the political elite of Western states is losing the ability to work out a real system of countering actual security threats and coordinating efforts in this direction<sup>24</sup>.

And the problem remains – as destabilization of the MENA region continues. Not only Syria, but other states also remain the source of the migration flow due to the internal conflicts. In 2020 Libya became the major troublemaker in this context<sup>25</sup>. And 2021 bring even more direct example of weaponization of migration factor, then migration crisis of 2015-2016.

Last year Oleksandr Lukashenko initiated a new migration threat to the EU on the Belarus-Poland border. In this case, it is difficult to deny Lukashenko’s guilt, since he openly declared his readiness to “punish” Europe for sanctions against his regime, which followed the rigged presidential elections of 2020 and repressions against the Belarusian opposition. He said that in such conditions he would not restrain the migration flow that threatens Europe<sup>26</sup>. However, the specificity of the situation is the role of Minsk in organizing the migration crisis. In this case, it was created exclusively artificially<sup>27</sup>. With the help of Belarusian diplomatic offices abroad and a national airline Lukashenko created favorable conditions for the entry into Belarus for citizens of the MENA states who wish to get to Europe. In order to support this operation, a corresponding advertising campaign and a simplified issuance of tourist visas were carried out. On the Belarus territory potential migrants received support from the local security forces, which de facto controlled their movement to the EU borders (with Poland and Lithuania). At the same time, the Belarusian border guards have completely withdrawn from their of-

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<sup>23</sup> Kuzio, T., D’Anieri, P. (2018). The Soviet Origins of Russian Hybrid Warfare. *E-International Relations*. Available from: <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/06/17/the-soviet-origins-of-russian-hybrid-warfare/> (Accessed: 04.04.2019).

<sup>24</sup> Пашкова, Г., та інші. (2016). «Гібридна» війна Росії – виклик і загроза для Європи. *Національна безпека і оборона*, Вип. 9-10, 3-7.

<sup>25</sup> Grey, M. (2020). *Russia, Libya and Weaponizing Human Migration*, UA Army War College, Available from: <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/weaponizing-human-migration/> (Accessed: 18. 01.2021).

<sup>26</sup> Kuznetsov, S. (2021). Lukashenko warns EU that Belarus won’t stop migrant border surge. *Politico*. Available from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/belarusian-president-alexander-lukashenko-warns-eu-belarus-wont-stop-migrant-border-surge-lithuania/> (Accessed: 10. 11.2021).

<sup>27</sup> Grzywaczewski, T. (2021). Russia and Belarus Are Using Migrants as a Weapon Against the EU. *Foreign Policy*. Available from: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/18/russia-belarus-poland-lithuania-migrants-eu-weapon/> (Accessed: 10. 11.2021).

ficial duties, opening the border from their side<sup>28</sup>. As a result, the migration flow towards Lithuania and Poland significantly increased in the spring-summer of 2021, and in November the crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border reached its climax. Thus, Lukashenko's actions at the moment become the most striking example of the weaponization of migration. It is not surprising that in Europe they were regarded as open hybrid aggression<sup>29</sup>.

Unfortunately, even in this case European assessments turned out to be half-hearted. Only the direct victims of the crisis pay attention to the fact that Russia was behind Lukashenko's actions<sup>30</sup>. Many Western European politicians refrain from such accusations. However, practice shows that the Belarusian regime, which is finally losing its independence, cannot carry out such a hybrid operation without coordination with Russia. And Moscow continues to use such strategy in order to destabilize the unity of Europe.

So, the issue of exploitation of migrants as an instrument of aggressive policy against Europe remains as relevant as it was. It should not be put in the shadow of more traditional approaches by experts – or such lack of attention will lead to the disastrous aftermath.

**Conclusions.** As we can see, migration in modern conditions is becoming an important element of the strategy of hybrid actions, which revanchist countries use to reformat international order. This phenomenon acts as an instrument of aggressive influence on a geopolitical opponent in various forms. The traditional form of the use of migration in foreign policy remains blackmail, to which the source and transit countries of migrants resort in relations with recipient states. In exchange for financial assistance or political preferences, they provide proper control over their borders – and in the absence of such, they can weaken it and thus initiate an increase in the scale of the migration flow. In other cases, it is possible to plan and organize the extrusion of labor and intellectual resources from a competing state – in order to weaken it (and at best – to strengthen itself). Finally, the highest form of using the migration factor in a hybrid context is the artificial creation of conditions for the intensification of migration from third countries towards a geopolitical opponent, and support for this process in order to ultimately destabilize the situation on his territory. The first major example of such actions were Russian efforts to destabilize Europe by the support of the migration flow from Syria in 2015-2016. Unfortunately, despite all evidences of the Russia's influence on the migration crisis, these events did not receive proper reaction from European politicians. And such blindness in the face of a threat only pushes the aggressor to more active and demonstrative actions. An example of this is the recent actions of the regime of Oleksandr Lukashenko, clearly coordinated with Russia.

Use of migrants can be a serious tool as an element of aggressive influence – especially if it is aimed against liberal democracies with a low margin of safety against such a threat. Responding to them in order to eliminate an existing threat is quite difficult – European politicians face a dilemma between security and human rights that they cannot resolve promptly. Thus, the best option is preventive activities aimed at undermining the potential of the opponent to influence migration processes. Without waiting for the new migration crisis, Europe should pay attention to the most dangerous directions – zones of civil conflicts in MENA region – and eliminate the influence of destructive external forces on them. Only such a hybrid preemption response can eliminate this threat.

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<sup>28</sup> Adams, P. (2021). How Belarus is helping 'tourists' break into the EU. *BBC*. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58952867> (Accessed: 12. 11.2021).

<sup>29</sup> European Commission (2021). *Statement by President von der Leyen on the situation at the border between Poland and Belarus (November 8, 2021)*. Available from: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_21\\_5867](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_5867) (Accessed: 11. 11.2021).

<sup>30</sup> Wanat, Z. (2021). Poland blames Putin for instigating border crisis. *Politico*. Available from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-vladimir-putin-border-crisis-russia-belarus-mateusz-morawiecki/> (Accessed: 10. 11.2021).

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