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The Assessment of Current Threats to the National Security of the Baltic States and Finland in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War

The large-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory by Russia has forced NATO member states to actualize the issue of identifying weaknesses in the defense system, finding solutions to strengthen borders, and deepening military cooperation to counter the aggression. This research aims to analyze the current threats to the national security of the Baltic States and the Republic of Finland in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and identify further potential areas of military cooperation with Ukraine.

To achieve this objective, general scientific research methods were used, including analysis and synthesis, content analysis, comparison, and classification. These research methods allowed for an analysis of the security environment of the Baltic States and Finland, with particular attention paid to current military and political threats to their national security.

The article reveals the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the formation of further tasks in implementing the foreign policy of the Baltic States and Finland in the context of the transformation of the international security system. In particular, the author identifies the spheres, tools, and methods of Russia's direct influence. Based on the analysis, the author confirms the importance of developing cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, and Ukraine in the military-political sphere as a necessary step in strengthening the European security system as a whole. Therefore, the relevant conclusions in this area of research are formulated.

Keywords: security, international security, regional and global security, cooperation, transformation, threats, defence, Russia-Ukraine war.

Анастасія Присташ[1]

Оцінка сучасних загроз національній безпеці країн Балтії та Фінляндії в контексті російсько-української війни

Повномасштабне вторгнення росії на територію України змусило країн-членів НАТО актуалізувати питання виявлення слабких місць в системі оборони, пошуку шляхів до посилення кордонів, а також поглиблення військового співробітництва з метою протистояння агресії.У контексті зазначеного, метою даного науково дослідження є аналіз поточних загроз національній безпеці країн Балтії та Фінляндської Республіки в контексті російсько-української війни з метою визначення подальших потенційних напрямків військової співпраці з Україною.

Для досягнення поставленої мети було використано загальнонаукові методи дослідження, серед яких: аналіз та синтез, контент-аналіз, порівняння та класифікація. Зазначені методи наукового дослідження дозволили здійснити аналіз безпекового середовища країн Балтії та Фінляндії, де особливої уваги було приділено сучасним загрозам воєнного та політичного характеру для національної безпеки визначених країн. Разом з тим, визначено коло суб'єктів міжнародних відносин, які становлять небезпеку для зазначених країн в умовах російсько-української війни. Наявні загрози виокремлено в певні категорії, у рамках яких здійснюється

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дослідження. Зазначені загрози розглядаються в дослідженні як напрями для подальшого поглиблення співпраці між Литвою, Латвією, Естонією, Фінляндією та Україною в умовах трансформації міжнародного безпекового середовища. За основу взято деякі із звітів оборонних відомств зазначених країн, а також наукових установ та організацій з безпеки.

Розкрито вплив російсько-української війни на формування подальших завдань при здійсненні зовнішньої політики країн Балтії та Фінляндії в умовах трансформації системи міжнародної безпеки. Зокрема, виокремлено сфери, інструменти та методи прямого впливу Росії. Водночас, досліджено роль та місце України в контексті посилення національної безпеки визначених країни при наявності спільного ворога на кордонах. На підставі проведеного аналізу підтверджено важливість розвитку співробітництва між Литвою, Латвією, Естонією, Фінляндією та Україною за військово-політичним напрямом як необхідний крок у посиленні системи європейської безпеки в цілому. Відтак, сформульовано відповідні висновки за напрямом дослідження.

Ключові слова: безпека, міжнародна безпека, регіональна та глобальна безпека, співробітництво, трансформація, загрози, оборона, російсько-українська війна.

Introduction. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused a crisis in the international security system. Primarily, this transformation has affected those countries that share borders with the aggressor.

In this research, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland are of scientific interest due to the following factors:

- Active cooperation in countering hybrid threats and cyberattacks by Russia. For example, Estonia is a center for developing NATO's cyber defense system. Since 2014, Ukraine's security and defense forces have been actively involved in exchanging experience in the context of bilateral military cooperation. Therefore, it can be expected that this cooperation will further deepen in the format of the Baltic States and Ukraine;

- The Baltic States and Finland have become a unique educational hub for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Ukraine's security forces are gaining compatibility with NATO forces as part of their exercises, advanced training, professional development, language, and combat training. The leading primary military institutions where Ukrainian service members study are the Baltic Defense College, the Lithuanian Military Academy, the National Defense University of Finland, and the National Defense Academy of Latvia. Their experience and active involvement in the process of reforming Ukraine's defense sector contributed significantly to the creation of the Special Operations Forces and the National Guard of Ukraine.

- In the context of a direct military threat from Russia, it is important to deepen and expand joint exercises to develop common defense approaches and tactics against the aggressor.

- Before the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Republic of Finland was neutral in international security matters. Nevertheless, the current military-political situation in the region and Russia's direct military threat forced Finland to join the Euro-Atlantic security system, NATO, which in turn significantly strengthened the Alliance's defense capabilities.

In the context of Ukraine, Finland is viewed as one of the European armies with significant land and naval capabilities, including NATO weapons and equipment, a large share of artillery, a high level of mobilization resources, and a long history of bilateral military cooperation with Ukraine. Therefore, Finland is considered a strategic partner for Ukraine in military cooperation and is valuable as a NATO member state.

Another important point to mention is that in the context of the war in Eastern Europe, certain countries decided to substantively examine and update the list of challenges and threats reflected in strategic security concepts to reassess their own security and develop new strategies.

This research will allow us to outline the key security priorities of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. To Ukraine, this is of particular importance in the context of further establishing close cooperation in the identified common areas of vulnerability to develop joint tactics to counter the aggressor.

Hence, determining the priorities of these countries at both the national and international levels will allow us to predict Ukraine's future place and position in the context of developing and deepening military-political cooperation.

This will also outline the range of countries that are ready to support both in word and in action in a war against an aggressor. First of all, this concerns the development of further security guarantees for Ukraine. However, it is not about the security of one country but about ensuring the security of those bordering the aggressor, accordingly, along the entire line of NATO's eastern flank, where Ukraine is of crucial importance.

Literature review. Nowadays, various scholars are engaged in research in the fields of international security, international organizations, and international cooperation. The research topics are wide-ranging and not limited to just one category of issues.

The Baltic and Finnish academic communities have actualized their research into the threats presented and perceived by Russia to their countries. For instance, Krzysztof Kaczmarek focuses on information security and cyberattacks, especially at a time when Finland has become a part of NATO and has become an even bigger target for the Kremlin[2].

Ināra Mūrniece examines the issue in the context of significant geopolitical shifts. Accordingly, in confronting the aggressor, the Baltic states and their European partners must create the preconditions for Ukraine's victory. It is essential against the background of the formation of the Russia-China-North Korea-Iran axis[3].

A representative of Estonian academic scholarship, Zdzisław Śliwa, views Russia as an existential threat to the world. At the same time, the Kremlin's war against Ukraine is defined as a challenge for Estonia in the following areas: political, social, and military. Accordingly, his research aims to improve regional and international cooperation in small alliances[4].

The analysis of scientific works by representatives of the Ukrainian scientific community revealed the following.

The study of V. Zagursky-Antonyuk is quite relevant. According to it, globalization is not limited to the global level but instead leads to regional integration and provides a new context for using force. The stability of international security is possible only in the context of sustainable development. Therefore, it is essential to develop international cooperation. After all, the ability of states to ensure their security on their own is becoming increasingly difficult in current circumstances[5].

According to O. Sukhobokov, the support of democratic states has intensified since the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine — for instance, the Baltic states, which are closely linked to Ukraine by historical and cultural ties. In addition, the intensity of information attacks on all Western countries has increased. As a result, the fight against new threats requires cooperation to overcome them[6].

The National Institute of Strategic Studies' research clearly outlines a range of other threats to Ukraine's partner countries. For example, some of these countries, including neighboring Belarus, host large Russian ethnic and Russian-speaking communities. Belarus has become an accomplice in Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine – providing its territory for the invasion of Russian troops and allowing Russian nuclear weapons to be deployed on its territory[7].

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[2] Kaczmarek, K. (2024) "Finland in the light of cyber threats in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine", *Cybersecurity and Law*, 9 (1), pp 204-214. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377598951_Finland_in_the_light_of_cyber_threats_in_the_context_of_Russia's_aggression_against_Ukraine.

[3] Mūrniece, I. (2025) "The Time of Unused Opportunities: Ukraine and its Allies", *The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook,* pp. 1-200. Available at: https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/latvian-foreign-and-security-policy-yearbook-2025-1359.

[4] Zdzisław, Ś. (2023) "The Impact of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine on Estonian Security", *Studia Europejskie-Studies in European Affairs,* 4, p. 71-92. Available at: https://journalse.com/the-impact-of-russian-aggression-against-ukraine-on-estonian-security.

[5] Загурська-Антонюк, В. (2020) "Міжнародна безпека у контексті глобалізації сучасного світу", *Інвестиції: практика та досвід.* № 13-14, с. 103-109. Доступно за: http://www.investplan.com.ua/pdf/13-14_2020/18.pdf.

[6] Сухобокова, О. (2022*)* "Гуманітарна допомога країн Балтії Україні на початку повномасштабної війни Росії проти України (лютий – травень 2022)", *European Historical Studies,* № 21, с. 113-127. Доступно за: http://eustudies.history.knu.ua/humanitarian-assistance-from-the-baltic-states-to-ukraine-at-the-beginning-of-russia-s-full-scale-war-against-ukraine-february-may-2022/.

[7] Палій, Н. (2024) "Зміцнення безпеки країн Балтії в контексті зміни стратегічної концепції оборони НАТО. Значення для України", *Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень.* Доступно за: https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/zmitsnennya-bezpeky-krayin-baltiyi-v-konteksti-zminy-stratehichnoyi.

The issues under study in international security and international cooperation are extensive. Nevertheless, estimating the actual military and political threats to the countries that directly border the most significant aggressors of the 21st century is crucial. The war in Ukraine is no longer localized; Russia's ambitions are genuinely imperialistic. Accordingly, it threatens many Eastern European countries. For this reason, the research on threats to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland will allow us to identify common threats from Russia and other authoritarian states. It will also allow us to identify common steps to overcome these threats. Indeed, the path to restoring European security today goes through Russia's military failure.

The purpose of this article.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the current threats to the national security of the Baltic States and the Republic of Finland in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war in order to identify further potential areas for military cooperation with Ukraine.

For the achievement of this goal, the following tasks are outlined:

- determine the major threats to the national security of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland according to the reports of the defense ministries of the identified countries, as well as scientific institutions and security organizations in 2024;
- investigate the impact of the outlined threats to the national security of each of the above countries;
- based on the above, the importance of deepening military cooperation with Ukraine along the outlined threat areas should be substantiated in the context of enhancing the common security policy and the European security system in general.

The research results. The current state of the international security system makes it evident that international security organizations do not have accurate mechanisms for resolving military crises, aggressive actions, and local conflicts. All actors in international relations realize this today. Therefore, regional coalitions within the bilateral and multilateral cooperation framework have come to the fore, where countries need more restrictions in implementing their direct assistance. Indeed, this raised doubts about the existence of such definitions as international organizations, international legal order, and international law, ensuring peace by all available means.

Ukraine clearly understands that finding ways to resolve the war with Russia while retaining its territories is its only priority. Therefore, it is essential to search for partners who recognize Russia as a real threat to their independence and the critical place here that is occupied by countries that share a physical border with the aggressor. The issue of military-political cooperation is a priority. Indeed, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has revealed the weakness of international mechanisms for resolving such situations, thereby raising the issue of finding military partners. The renewal of weapons also influenced the development of joint action tactics, exercises to exchange experience, and others.

Nowadays, Eastern European countries clearly understand that Ukraine is the only barrier separating them from a direct war with Russia. The aggressor has clearly outlined its imperial ambitions and the extent of its desires, primarily for the countries of the former USSR.

First, the Baltic states and Finland have common points of contact with Ukraine. This concerns the past as part of the USSR, the fight for independence, and the struggle for their language. These countries understand the value of their freedom and the importance of defending their independence. That is why they have been among the first to consistently and resolutely support Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty in 2014. The Baltic states have provided humanitarian, military, diplomatic, and medical assistance since the beginning of the large-scale invasion. In this context, Ukraine must explore further cooperation with these partner countries.

For the purpose of identifying threats to such countries as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, the following documents were selected for further analysis:

- National Threat Assessment 2024, Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania[8];

[8] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024) *NationalThreat Assessment*, Military Cartography Centre of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, Kaunas, pp. 1-41. Available at: https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GR-2024-02-15-EN-1.pdf.

- The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2024, Latvian Institute of International Affairs[9];
- International Security and Estonia 2024, Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service[10];
- The Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy 2024, Finnish Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland[11].

The present paper outlines the threats that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland see and recognize regarding their security and the existence of democracy in general in the coming years. Hence, there are threats to national security and the existence of the Western world.

Within the framework of the above, the distribution of common national threats for the mentioned countries is as follows: espionage and cyber-espionage, cyberattacks, information and psychological operations, information influence, military buildup, and military invasion by Russia. The countries where these threats arise are also clearly identified – Belarus, Russia, and China.

The threats that can be attributed to the global scale, which can cause damage to the existence of democracy in general, are as follows – threats from the Global South, from the Third World, the expansion of the BRICS, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and nuclear war.

However, it is critical to mention that specific threats can be of a twofold nature. For example, the Russian-Ukrainian war is considered in the context of its impact on each country's national security and triggers for the continued existence of the international security system and, accordingly, the democratic world. Therefore, we will consider each of the threats in some detail.

Indeed, such issues as terrorism, migration, and climate change are also threats that certain countries identify for themselves.

Considering this broad scope of challenges and threats, the research focuses on military-political dangers. Therefore, it will be analyzed in the context of the following sections:

- Espionage and cyber-espionage;
- Cyberattacks, information-psychological warfare;
- Military buildup and the possibility of military invasion by Russia;
- The possibility of military invasion by Belarus;
- Strengthening cooperation between Russia and some countries of the Global South.

Within the analysis's framework, Russia is the largest threat actor in international relations. Meanwhile, Belarus, China, and some of the countries of the Global South are considered close partners of Russia in achieving its goals.

Espionage and cyber-espionage

Increasing Russian and Belarusian diasporas in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have allowed both Belarusian and Russian intelligence services to expand their reconnaissance operations abroad and find new targets for recruitment.

The Defense Intelligence and Security Service report of the Ministry of Defense of Lithuania determined that Belarusian intelligence services exploit former employees of Belarusian state institutions who currently reside in Lithuania. This activity is made possible by the system of agent recruitment in Belarus, where the country's intelligence services run in state institutions, strategically essential entities, and the armed forces. Belarusian intelligence services have recently begun to establish and re-establish contacts with members of the Belarusian diaspora and recruit new intelligence assets using modern remote communication methods[12].

The Russian Federation has long proven its ability to conduct intelligence and counterintelligence activities effectively. The recruitment targets are entirely different categories of people in different spheres—embassies, universities, media, businesses, etc.

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[9] Broka S., Bukovskis K. (Eds) (2024) *The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2024*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga. pp. 1-176. Available at: https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/latvian-foreign-and-security-policy-yearbook-2024-1188.

[10] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024) *International Security and Estonia 2024*, pp. 1-86. Available at: https://raport.valisluureamet.ee/2024/en/.

[11] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024) *The Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*, pp. 1-55. Available at: https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/165723/VN_2024_35.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[12] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 33.

Besides, China has also activated its intelligence activities against certain countries, the priorities of which are internal affairs, political disagreements, and foreign policy. The most widespread methods of reconnaissance activities are social networks disguised as representatives of various companies, scientific institutions, analytical centers, telecommunications and business companies, and others.

For example, Estonia has a growing threat in a completely new area – electricity systems. Chinese companies seek to integrate inverters and energy storage systems into the Estonian power grid. These inverters are connected to the Internet for control and monitoring, which allows for further remote control. Moreover, they require constant software updates. Therefore, the threat of China's information intelligence gathering through such methods is also relevant[13].

A similar threat also applies to ordinary household electronics, such as robot vacuum cleaners, which scan their entire environment. Furthermore, there is a risk that personalized services offered by Chinese technology companies, combined with accounts for mobile applications, collect information about consumers based on their behavior[14].

At the same time, Finland recognizes these risks. According to The Government report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy 2024, Finland is committed to reducing its technological and industrial dependence on China. The objective is set at both the national and international levels[15].

Cyberattacks, information-psychological warfare

Recently, the frequency of cyberattacks in the Baltic and Finland has increased significantly. In the war against Ukraine, Russia seeks to undermine the West's resolve to provide any assistance. It also spreads fear and doubt among society, disrupts the work of state institutions, accesses information systems, damages critical infrastructure, etc. A particular category of Russia's cyber capabilities is the spread of fake news and manipulative narratives, changing the truthful information in official Ukrainian and European sources to the one that meets Russian interests. For this purpose, Russia actively uses social networks such as Telegram and TikTok[16].

A high level of threat to the specified countries carries information and psychological operations, information influence by Russia, and implementation of information campaigns, including psychological influence. One category being influenced is Ukrainian refugees living in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The purpose is to create tension and pressure. One such attack, for example, was the spreading of information that Ukrainians who met the mobilization criteria would have to be sent back to Ukraine.

A more global attack was the information campaign that broadcasted information about the involvement of NATO forces in the war in Ukraine. It was quite an aggressive campaign to generate public dissatisfaction with the government, spreading fear and panic. The above attack had a truly significant impact, and the myth of European countries' physical involvement in the war in Ukraine is still alive. Another popular propaganda narrative spread by Russia is to reduce the impact of Western sanctions on the Russian economy[17]. Russia is trying to minimize the importance of Western assistance and create the idea that the Ukrainian people do not appreciate what the partner countries have done. In this way, Moscow tries to undermine the will of the West to support Ukraine.

The example of one of the publications is that the war in Ukraine is unimportant to the West. After the outbreak of the Israel–Hamas war, Russian propaganda began to spread the narrative that the armed conflict in the Middle East was much more critical for the West than the war in Ukraine. Therefore, Western countries will not only suspend military, financial, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine but also will lose all interest in Ukraine[18].

An interesting way for the Kremlin to implement its propaganda is through press tours. The Kremlin authorities create "independent witnesses" from Western media activists and organize trips to occupied Ukrainian territories. The main goal is to present distorted information. The Kremlin uses these witnesses to justify Russia's activities in discussions on Ukraine among international organizations.

[13] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 41.
[14] Ibid., p. 74.
[15] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 4.
[16] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 60.
[17] Ibid., p. 14.
[18] Ibid., p. 61.

Russian attempts to force the Western community to believe that it is the Ukrainian side responsible for war crimes have long been a proven fact. The existence of such tactics is primarily aimed at convincing the countries of the Global South of this thesis and swaying them to its side. It is also intended to illustrate the conflict in the Western community's attitude toward Ukraine[19].

Regarding the Belarusian regime, mentioning information operations on Lithuanians is vital. The aim is to inflame confrontation between Belarusians residing in Lithuania and Lithuanian society.

In late 2023, the Belarusian cell of the international right-wing extremist network "Active Club" was established in Lithuania. "Active Club" is an extremist movement inspired by the American far-right activist Robert Rundo. Its followers combine the promotion of right-wing extremist ideologies and the dissemination of propaganda with martial arts and other physical activities[20].

China has also increased its cyberspace activity. The opening of the Taiwanese Mission in Lithuania had an impact on this. The purpose of these attacks is to gain access to the information systems of Lithuanian institutions for further cyber-espionage. Hackers will look for new security vulnerabilities unknown to the cybersecurity sector in order to gain illegal access to targeted organizations. However, likely, attackers will also use proven attack methods, the effectiveness of which is enhanced by insufficient attention to cybersecurity[21].

Moreover, in the context of the war in Ukraine, China began to spread narratives about its assistance in the war and its warnings about Russia's use of nuclear weapons. In this way, it has created an image of an honest and independent observer interested in keeping the international world order from undergoing significant changes.

Military buildup and the possibility of military invasion by Russia

The large-scale Russian war against Ukraine has been going on for several years. Furthermore, it has sufficient financial, human, material, and technical resources to maintain the same intensity of hostilities, at least in the short term. It is also clear that Russia's economy is in better shape than expected by its Western partners. Due to high oil prices, government spending, and the ability to circumvent sanctions, it is not under pressure to continue the war[22].

The war in Ukraine has already entered a prolonged phase, which is why Russia has moved the majority of its troops from the regions bordering NATO. At the same time, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO forced Russia to consider strengthening its military presence on the borders. This has raised the threshold for using force against the Baltic states and Finland. However, to strengthen its military capabilities and regional deterrence in the Baltic Sea region, Russia has increasingly used air, naval, and nuclear capabilities. To illustrate, in 2023, for the first time, ships capable of carrying missiles were deployed on Lake Ladoga. In addition, the same year, Russian Tu-22M3 bombers made five flights over the Baltic Sea for the first time[23].

The military industry in Russia continues to be at a high level. In the past, this was mainly due to accumulated stockpiles. This is possible through the supply of equipment and components from third countries. Iran and North Korea, which are themselves under sanctions, are openly supplying Russia with military equipment[24]. They provide the weapons and ammunition necessary for Russia to continue the war.

Russia has also demonstrated its mobilization capacity. Financial incentives for personnel have increased, communication between government agencies has improved, and control over the recruitment process at all levels has been strengthened. The reorganization also took place more structurally.

The Pacific, Black Sea, and Baltic Fleets, which were previously part of joint strategic commands, have been brought back under the direct command of the Russian Navy. The joint strategic command formed around the Northern Fleet during past reforms has been dissolved, returning it to a regular structure. The air and air defense forces have been reorganized and no longer subordinated to the military districts. Instead, they now operate under the command of the Russian Aerospace Forces[25].

[19] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 26.
[20] Ibid., p. 32.
[21] Ibid., p. 56.
[22] Ibid., p. 6.
[23] Ibid., p. 15.
[24] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 48.
[25] Ibid., p. 16.

Therefore, since February 26, 2024, Russia has been divided into five military districts: Moscow, Leningrad, Southern, Central, and Eastern. The occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions became part of the Southern District.

The possibility of military invasion by Belarus

Belarus is another threat recognized by the Baltic states and Finland. The Lukashenko regime, learning the lessons of Russia's war against Ukraine, is increasingly paying attention to the mobilization and combat readiness of the armed forces. In addition, Belarus has already intensified the training of maneuverable units in combat readiness. They also conducted exercises involving private military companies' recruits to share their experience [26]. From the beginning of 2023, Belarus acquired significant modern military equipment. They have strengthened their Air Defense Forces with new S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems and Mi-35M attack helicopters. Also, Russia delivered an Iskander tactical missile system to Belarus. All this has significantly enhanced the military potential of the country, which in turn increases the level of danger to the Baltic states.

The above confirms that the threat of an invasion by the aggressor is significant. The war in Ukraine and its outcome will determine how high this probability is. However, in all strategic concepts of each NATO country, Russia is identified as a number one threat. The countries of Eastern Europe are the most affected, which is why they are active in building up their military capabilities. For the Baltic states, strengthening military capabilities and defense resources is essential for defense and security enhancement. For this purpose, changes in approaches to conscription are being implemented. The government actively works to return compulsory military service to citizens. In order to ensure a high level of readiness at the national level and for collective defense[27].

The changes are intensified in the security framework legislation and in reviewing the instruments for countering challenges. Latvia has updated its National Security Concept. It provides measures to strengthen international security, neutralize threats in the information sphere, protect the national language, ban media broadcasts in Russian, and promote energy and economic independence. This law increased defense spending to 3% of domestic GDP and changed policy priorities in defense, foreign policy, economics, internal security, and other sectors.

In addition, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania agreed to build barrier walls on their borders with Russia and Belarus. They also have joint plans to close the borders and checkpoints if the situation worsens and synchronize actions in the shared border perimeter.

In Finland's case, its membership in NATO has strengthened its military power in the region. The Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy 2024 clearly emphasizes that it, together with its EU and NATO partners, is preparing for the expansion of Russian aggression in Europe[28]. The report also notes that in the future, Ukraine will be Finland's partner in the field of security and defense cooperation.

As Finland has the longest border with Russia among all NATO and EU countries, bilateral and multilateral cooperation with allies and partners is a priority of Finland's foreign and security policy. According to The Government report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy 2024, Scandinavian cooperation will be promoted not only through Scandinavian cooperation structures but also in the EU, the UN, and other international forums, as well as through relations with various groups of countries[29].

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are essential partners for Finland in the EU, NATO, and bilaterally. Finland's and Sweden's membership in NATO also provides an opportunity to deepen security cooperation among the Scandinavian and Baltic countries in Finland's neighborhood. Finland's main foreign policy framework is the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) cooperation format, strengthening the dialogue with Germany and Poland.

Therefore, the changing situation in the Baltic region and in Eastern Europe, in general, emphasizes the importance of cooperation between like-minded countries. This, in turn, confirms the importance of defending Ukraine's borders, uniting to defeat the enemy, and integrating Ukraine, especially into NATO. Deepening international military cooperation is also crucial in the context of strengthening the security environment in the region.

[26] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 22-24.
[27] Палій, Н. (2024). Вказ. пр.
[28] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p.39.
[29] Ibid., p.24.

Strengthening cooperation between Russia and some countries of the Global South

Simultaneously, while Western countries are strengthening their defense capabilities and seeking ways to increase cooperation between partner countries, Russia's aggressive policy contributes to global instability. Russia's main objective is to undermine the stability of the West. In this context, more significant threats are coming to the center stage.

The development of cooperation with the Global South, establishing and deepening partnerships with Iran and North Korea, and attempts to consolidate its influence in Africa all indicate the formation of an anti-Western coalition[30]. The goal of building such a coalition is declared in the new Russia's Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in 2023. According to it, Russia's goal is to restore its dominance in the Commonwealth of Independent States region, building strategic cooperation with China. Africa, Latin America, and some Muslim countries are of particular interest.

The United States and Europe are described as adversaries whose influence shall be limited. Russia's stance on the Israel-Hamas and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts is an excellent example of how opportunistically Russia conducts its foreign policy[31].

The increased military cooperation between Russia and Iran is of concern to the international community. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding marked President Putin's visit to Tehran[32]. This, in turn, intensified cooperation in the field of air transportation. It increased the number of flights between the two countries, and cargo flights could be operated without capacity restrictions. The export of parts and equipment manufactured in Iran was also agreed on. These are just a minimal part of the services provided to circumvent any sanctions imposed on Russia. Active supply of Mohajer, Arash, and Shahid UAVs. The delivery of Iranian ballistic missiles, as reported by numerous Western media[33].

Certainly, Russian-Iranian relations are controversial and, in some ways, limited by the sanctions imposed on both countries. Nevertheless, this cooperation benefits both sides and will continue to deepen if there is a common interest. In the context of a war against a democratic regime, this interest will live on for a long while.

Such cooperation, as well as a partnership with North Korea, has created another threat. The internal arrangements between these countries are not known to us for sure[34]. However, the weakening of arms proliferation controls is already evident today. At the same time, the Russian-Ukrainian war has also affected the scale of arms proliferation. In particular, the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, the rapid buildup of China's nuclear arsenal in the face of possible confrontation with NATO, etc.

International security institutions have already demonstrated their ineffectiveness against aggressors. Therefore, the following question arises: Are treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty valid today?

A further challenge for the Baltic states and Finland is that Russia desires to gain Africa's support and maintain its sphere of influence. As a result, Africa has become one of the main priorities of its foreign policy[35]. In the aftermath of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia found itself between harsh sanctions and began to lose its international contacts. This makes cooperation with Africa critical for all parties. As the UN consists of 193 countries, 54 of which are African, their voting positions are significant. Hence, the West and Russia want to have them among their allies.

The Government Report on Finnish foreign and security policy 2024 mentioned that – one of the priority areas is the development of economic partnerships and trade with African countries and investments in them. The significance of Africa as a neighboring region of Europe is strongly emphasized in terms of critical raw materials, migration, and social development. The extension of the EU is

[30] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 45.
[31] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 26.
[32] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 51.
[33] Ibid., p. 55.
[34] Kariņš K. (2024) "Introductory remarks by the Minister of Foreign Affairs", in Broka S., Bukovskis K. (Eds) (2024) *The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2024.* Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, p. 10.
[35] Estonian Foreign Intelligent Service (2024). Op. cit., p. 45-47.

an essential geopolitical issue for Finland and the EU. The support of such enlargement can protect the EU's neighboring regions, especially from Russia's destabilizing actions. The goal of Finland is to ensure that the enlarged EU is more powerful than at present, both internally and externally[36].

The significant threat to both the countries in question and NATO is China. This country, as well as Russia, shares opposition to US influence at the global level. That is why it is focused on realizing its global ambitions. First, China is trying to increase its influence in Europe and achieve global superiority. China is implementing this with the help of soft power diplomacy. One of these steps is to integrate technology into critical infrastructure, businesses, and daily life to the extent that it prevents it from being forced out by Western technology. The most prominent manifestation of this is the One Belt, One Road initiative and the Digital Silk Road. Furthermore, China's strategic goal is to become a world leader in the field of artificial intelligence[37].

Additionally, China is strengthening its military capabilities, accumulating nuclear arsenals, increasing maritime and air power, etc. The country is constantly increasing its defense spending. Nowadays, China is avoiding confrontation with its strategic competitors. However, the question is that such a confrontation will eventually lead to an open confrontation. The reason for this could be a conflict over Taiwan[38]. Indeed, the possibility of an open conflict would be a global catastrophe. It would lead to significant changes in the international security system with no place for diplomatic means of resolving crises. The world's countries will face a natural choice of demonstrating their loyalty and commitment. This, in turn, would confirm the power of the existing international security institutions or create new realities in forming specific alliances. The outcome of such a global confrontation would depend on whose circle of allies, supporters, and stakeholders is wider than the opponen's.

Nowadays, the Baltic States and Finland play an active role in the international relations system. They are part of major security alliances, including NATO, the Nordic-Baltic Eight, and the UK Joint Expeditionary Force.

NATO is the most powerful alliance in the world these days. The accession of Sweden and Finland has also influenced the organization's progress in the region[39]. Moreover, NATO's spending on collective defense exceeds the funds that Russia allocates for its military needs. Nevertheless, despite Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine and the actual military threat to European countries, NATO has been unable to force the military industry to increase its military production rapidly. Besides, there is no brigade-level unit in each of the Baltic states. This significantly affects their ability to defend against an attack effectively regarding military mobility. Also, NATO cannot quickly deliver troops and equipment to the Baltic States and Finland. This has forced the above countries to not only rely on NATO's security guarantees but also to start investing in the development of their military capabilities.

For this purpose, cooperation with partners in the EU and NATO is being enhanced by developing and expanding bilateral relations. They use the potential of multilateral diplomacy and international organizations and actively participate in regional formats of like-minded countries.

Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania have signed bilateral agreements with the United States (Security of Supply Arrangement) on the security of supply in the defense sector. he agreements cover priority military needs and the procurement of weapons and special equipment, which helps to increase security guarantees in these countries.

Latvia and Canada approved a roadmap for enhancing the Battlegroup Presence to a brigade-level unit. The brigade is expected to be deployed in Latvia by 2026[40]. Currently, they are discussing and agreeing on major issues.

Threats have also been reassessed regarding the activities of the Baltic States and Finland in the Nordic-Baltic Eight cooperation format[41]. They have already begun work on assessing their capabilities to build a joint military base.

[36] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 34.
[37] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 54.
[38] Ibid., p. 48.
[39] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 13.
[40] Rostoks T. (2024) Latvia's security and transatlantic relations: from Vilnius to Washington, in Broka S., Bukovskis K. (Eds) (2024) *The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2024.* Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, p. 36.

The prevention of and response to threats and criminal acts in cyberspace has become one of the priority areas of enhanced cooperation between the specialized agencies of the Baltic States and at the international level[42]. The NATO Cyber Defense Cooperation Center in Tallinn is an example of such cooperation.

As already mentioned, the Baltic states have agreed to build barrier fences on their frontiers with Russia and Belarus to protect their borders. There are also regular joint exercises and coordination between the border guard services and other law enforcement agencies of the Baltic states.

Additionally, the Baltic States and Finland have intensified their efforts to transition to broader and multidimensional cooperation[43]. Each of the above countries emphasizes the importance of common security, support for the rule of law, democracy, human rights, equality, and freedom. However, some states do not support these values on an equal basis with others.

Therefore, to respond to such challenges, these countries have taken on the role of a voice in the international arena. The main priority of foreign policy in the medium term is "continued and comprehensive support for Ukraine until the end of the war and Russian aggression, as well as prompt and successful support for Ukraine in its integration efforts into Euro-Atlantic structures"[44]. Ukrainian integration into NATO and the EU is defined as the primary goal.

For instance, Finland will hold the OSCE chairmanship in 2025[45]. In its efforts, it has consolidated its position to promote the security and resilience of participating States and their citizens based on the OSCE's comprehensive security concept. The goal is also to support Ukraine and other neighboring countries by strengthening their security, supporting democratization processes, and respecting the rule of law and human rights.

At the same time, Latvia and Finland are applying for a seat in the UN Security Council at a time when Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine fundamentally threatens the foundations of the international relations system. They want to promote their foreign policy goals in line with their values and interests and be responsible for the rules-based international system.

The pursuit of Ukraine's interests in the international arena has been an integral part of the foreign policy of the Baltic States and Finland over the years. Developing cooperation with the Baltic states, Finland, and other countries in the North Baltic region is strategically critical for Ukraine. Presently, this cooperation is focused on the following areas: signing security agreements, adopting and implementing long-term support programs for Ukraine, and supporting Ukraine's resilience and European integration aspirations[46].

For its part, Ukraine also aims to make progress in the joint partnership. However, above all, it is crucial to include the issue of Ukraine's cooperation with the Nordic and Baltic countries in the official priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy.

The full range of military and political threats identified above, which Russia poses to the European security system and the entire world, is relevant to Ukraine's security. Accordingly, Ukraine's experience of warfare, responding to cyber threats, and resisting Russian propaganda with limited resources is invaluable and will definitely strengthen European security. In addition, the use of all types of weapons and equipment from different production and origins confirms the high ability of Ukrainian soldiers and officers to fight quickly and efficiently.

Consequently, the answer to the full range of identified threats can inevitably be found only through the joint intentions and actions of all democratic states. This includes building up military power, developing the defense industry base, and increasing the production of ammunition, tanks, aircraft, ships, missiles, and air defense systems[47]. These require real resources and a long-term plan for developing capabilities based on reliable military scenarios and joint financing.

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[41] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 24.

[42] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2024). Op. cit., p. 56.

[43] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 39.

[44] NATO (2023) *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*. Available from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm.

[45] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 46.

[46] Лупацій, В. (2024). Для них Росія теж загроза. Важливі союзники для України. *Дзеркало тижня.* Доступно за: https://zn.ua/ukr/WORLD/dlja-nikh-rosija-tezh-zahroza-vazhlivi-sojuzniki-dlja-ukrajini.html.

[47] The Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2024). Op. cit., p. 7.

The issue of Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO is a question of expanding spheres of influence in the region and, therefore, strengthening the Euro-Atlantic security system. Meanwhile, the EU and NATO countries see the issues of protecting Ukraine, enhancing its defense capabilities, and sanctions against Russia as a defense of their own independence. Therefore, an important lesson to be learned is that the conflict in Ukraine cannot be frozen. For Russia, this is a time gift and an opportunity to recover, regroup, and launch a new offensive against the democratic world with new forces and allies. As a result, the integration of Ukraine into NATO has to be the highest priority in strengthening the military power of NATO's Eastern Front.

Such intensive cooperation between the EU, NATO, the Baltic States, and Finland with Ukraine strengthens the positions of all sides, consolidates the basis for bilateral and multilateral relations, and increases the arsenal of means to respond to common threats.

Conclusions. Considering the goal and objectives of the present paper, the following conclusions are made.

1. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the situation in the system of international relations, where each European country is looking for ways to regulate the security environment.

Within the context of the analyzed countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland), it is determined that the range of existing threats to national security is extensive. At the same time, it is proposed to group the key ones into specific categories due to their interconnectedness and interdependence. Attention is paid to the challenges and threats that pose a direct military and political threat. Therefore, the following categories were studied:

- Espionage and cyber-espionage;
- Cyberattacks, information-psychological warfare;
- Military buildup and the possibility of military invasion by Russia;
- The possibility of military invasion by Belarus;
- Strengthening cooperation between Russia and some countries of the Global South.

2. The article demonstrates that the Russian war in Ukraine, which the aggressor country is waging with the maximum use of traditional (conventional) means of warfare, has also shown the large-scale use of the arsenal of hybrid means.

The challenges and threats significantly impact the national security of each of the countries examined and the security environment in the region as a whole. Accordingly, Russia influences the political, economic, information, cultural, and social spheres.

In accordance with the areas of influence, a wide range of tools is used to implement the achievement of Russia's respective goals, including:

- Diplomatic efforts (establishing and deepening cooperation with countries that are of interest for counteracting the values of the West, strengthening its own positions in international organizations, etc.);
- Information technology (direct influence, manipulation, propaganda, information and psychological operations, disinformation, etc. Cyber-espionage, cyberattacks, and information and psychological operations play a significant role);
- Military and political cooperation (in the context of restoring offensive capabilities and circumventing the imposed sanctions, Russia is deepening ties with some countries of the Global South, such as China, Iran, African countries, and North Korea);
- Development of a wide intelligence network to operate in countries of interest;
- Nuclear blackmail (At the same time, it is worth highlighting the accumulation of armed forces, weapons, and military equipment and their redeployment to the borders of European countries as equivalent blackmail to intimidate them, as well as an attempt to suspend further supplies of various kinds of assistance to Ukraine.

For this reason, the Baltic states and Finland are demonstrating a clear course to strengthen their defense capabilities and protect national security. In the face of the ineffectiveness of several international organizations and the destruction of the international system of security treaties due to Russia's destructive actions, NATO and the European Union have proven to be more effective. NATO and the EU are the ones who allow these countries to strengthen their defense and security foundations.

Strengthening and deepening cooperation in implementing its foreign policy was a separate category in countering the above threats. Attention is drawn to the importance of expanding the circle of like-

minded countries and supporters, spreading democratic values, human rights, etc. In other words, multidimensional cooperation is a priority.

As part of this, Ukraine has been prioritized as a shield in the war against Russia. Accordingly, the entire available and possible range of assistance - humanitarian, economic, military, logistical, etc. - should be considered as an integral part of realizing the national interests of the Baltic States and Finland. The existing threats have forced a reconsideration of the attitude to strengthen defense capabilities individually and as NATO member states.

The Baltic States and Finland are primarily strengthening their defense capabilities through the renewal of defensive weapons, the purchase of missile systems and air defense systems, the modernization of the armed forces, etc. States are rapidly increasing military spending to replenish their defense reserves, etc. Also, strengthening cyber capabilities and developing joint defense strategies to counter cyberattacks with the involvement of other NATO and EU member states.

3. Awareness of the potential of those countries that are natural partners and potential allies has changed. Such awareness has become imperative for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland to take on the mission of Ukraine's "voice" in the EU and NATO. Uncover the significance of the Russian-Ukrainian war as a global conflict, the outcome of which will determine the future architecture of the minority system.

Considering the existing common challenges and threats, it can be assumed that there is a further prospect of forming a formalized regional coalition between the Baltic states and Finland and involving Ukraine in this format. Currently, no separate quadripartite coalition exists formally between these countries. There is clear coordination in the field of operational planning of joint actions in case of a direct invasion.

In general, the level of cooperation between the Baltic states, Finland, and Ukraine is strong. In the context of strengthening the border, where there is a common enemy, further cooperation will have military potential. It could include forming joint threat response forces by their areas of focus and interoperability through joint exercises and training. Moreover, a broader military alliance with other European countries may be formed to strengthen the European security system.

For Ukraine, the Baltic states have always been of interest, and their assistance, ranging from the exercises offered to material aid, was seen as costly and necessary in the context of the war with Russia. Finland, which has one of the most significant common borders with Russia, has also intensified its efforts to assist.

However, nowadays, Ukraine is an experienced military country, and its experience in defending its borders is invaluable for NATO member states, especially those in Russia's direct interest.

Therefore, in the context of the threats under research, Ukraine can offer its lessons, conclusions, weaknesses, and advantages in building joint defense alliances, alliances, or bilateral partnerships. For example, Lithuania and Latvia are training centers for joint exercises and a significant military ally, and Finland is the largest land army in Europe. The development of such coalitions in the areas of common threats will become the basis for strengthening the region's security policy and a renewed European security system.

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