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# The mirror principle in assessing hybrid threats emanating from Russia and Belarus

**Abstract**

In this article, the author describes how the mirror principle used in psychology, which is based on finding in other people traits that an individual tries to suppress, can be used to identify potential threats from Russia and Belarus. She puts forward the hypothesis that by analysing the greatest threats mentioned by these countries, e.g. in strategic documents, it is possible to deduce, according to the principle of the mirror, in which spheres they will most actively conduct hostile actions against NATO members. Among other things, the hybrid actions that Russia and cooperating Belarus may take against Western states are indicated, but without an in-depth analysis of these issues. Thus, the article does not exhaust the topic, but merely attempts to signal one method of analysing the threats emanating from Russia and Belarus.

**Keywords**

Belarus, Russia, Poland, NATO, mirror principle, asymmetric threats, hybrid threats.

The mirror principle is defined in psychology as (...) *seeing in others our own qualities. Those that we try to put down (...) and subconsciously want to deny*[1]. It refers to the concept of personality structure proposed by Carl Gustav Jung and is one of the most well-known methods of exploring an individual's weaknesses and hidden complexes. *Mirrors have been studied by cognitive psychology to understand self-knowledge, identity and self-awareness*[2]. Scientists use mirrors in psychological research because (...) *they are practically perfect imitators of the observer's own corporeal face, since the mirror's feedback is instantaneous. Moreover, if the mirror is flat and without visible imperfections, the reflected image is completely consistent in space with respect to the original visual stimulus*[3]. Thus, Jung argued, mirror projections turn the world into a replica of one's own unfamiliar face. According to the researchers, they are able to show the observer (...) *images of others that are generated by the psyche and based on our own fears, desires, impulses and unresolved issues, most of which are unconscious*[4]. The mirror principle is therefore helpful in projecting onto other people one's own repressed qualities and intentions, considered bad by the individual and therefore unacceptable.

International relations are shaped by politicians who, in creating them, are often guided by their fears or needs or by collective desires and emotions. Therefore, the principle of mirroring can also be used to make predictions about the policies of states taking aggressive action on the international stage.

The author posed the question of whether the use of the mirror principle in relation to the threats indicated by Russia and Belarus could be useful in forecasting the threats posed by these countries to members of the North Atlantic Alliance and foster more effective prevention. Her aim was to show that, on the basis of an analysis of the threats to their own security signalled by these countries, it is possible to predict what kind of foreign and security policy Russia in cooperation with Belarus will pursue in the near future and in which spheres these countries may take offensive action against members of the Alliance.

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[1]  K. Florez, *Zasada lustra – na czym polega?* (Eng. The mirror principle - what is it?), Krok do zdrowia, https://krokdozdrowia.com/zasada-lustra-czym-polega/ [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[2]  G.B. Caputo, *Archetypal-Imaging and Mirror-Gazing*, National Library of Medicine, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4219253/ [accessed: 11 VI 2023].

[3]  Ibid.

[4]  M. Klerk, *Projection: You Are My Mirror and I Am Yours*, Jung Society of Utah, 29 IV 2016, https://jungutah.org/blog/projection-you-are-my-mirror-and-i-am-yours-2/ [accessed: 10 VI 2023]. See also: C.G. Jung, *Archetypy i nieświadomość zbiorowa* (Eng. Archetypes and the collective unconscious), Warszawa 2016.

In pursuing the research objective, the author used research methods such as policy document analysis and literature criticism, observation, inference and generalisation.

## Security threats identified by Russia and Belarus

Both countries present a similar catalogue of threats from Western states (primarily NATO members, including Poland). In their military and security doctrines, both Russians and Belarusians state that the greatest challenges to their security are the strengthening of the Alliance's military presence near the border of the Union State of Belarus and Russia (Union State), the deployment of equipment and military components of the U.S. armed forces there, and the progressive militarisation of Poland.

Meanwhile, after 2016, it was Russia that decisively increased its military capabilities by expanding existing brigades to division level and creating new divisions, especially in the Western Military District bordering NATO countries[5]. Moreover, even before the invasion of Ukraine began, in January and February 2022, using the "Allied Resolve" exercise, it deployed some 35,000 troops on Belarusian territory, most of whom took part in the aggression[6]. Several thousand Russian troops are currently (in 2023) stationed in Belarus and Russia has deployed its tactical nuclear warheads there[7].

In Russia's 2014 military doctrine[8], the strengthening of NATO capabilities, terrorism (including terrorist acts using chemical, biological or so-called 'dirty bomb' agents) and extremism, so-called 'colour revolutions' in countries bordering Russia and the actions of the secret services of other countries (coalitions of other countries) targeting the Russian state were identified as threats to the Russian Federation (RF).

It was Russia, however, that decided to use chemical agents on the territory of NATO countries. In the UK, there was the poisoning of former Federal Security

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[5]   A.M. Dyner, *Russia Beefs Up Its Western Flank*, PISM, 19 XII 2018, https://pism.pl/publications/Russia_Beefs_Up_Its_Western_Flank [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[6]   A.M. Dyner, *Before the Invasion: The Russian-Belarusian Allied Resolve Exercises*, PISM, 24 II 2022, https://www.pism.pl/publications/before-the-invasion-the-russian-belarusian-allied-resolve-exercises [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[7]   M. Terlikowski, A.M. Dyner, *The Belarusian Vector of the Russian Threat to NATO*, PISM, 10 VII 2023, https://pism.pl/publications/the-belarusian-vector-of-the-russian-threat-to-nato [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[8]   *Военная доктрина Российской Федерации*, https://docs.cntd.ru/document/420246589 [accessed: 2 V 2023].

Service (FSB) lieutenant colonel Alexander Litvinenko and the attempted murder of former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. It is Russia that is involved in causing social polarisation in Western countries and interfering in election campaigns, the best examples being the U.S. presidential election[9] and the 2016 referendum on the UK's exit from the European Union[10].

The Russian security strategy adopted in 2021[11] lists among the threats Western attempts to maintain its international hegemony, the rise of radical and extremist sentiment and attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation.

Russia also accuses the West of attempting to falsify history with the aim of portraying the Russian state in a bad light. At the same time, it is Russia that not only interferes in the internal affairs of other states, as exemplified by its actions in Ukraine that began even before the outbreak of war in 2014, but also pursues a historical policy that aims, among other things, to discredit Poland and make it responsible for the outbreak of World War II[12].

Russian doctrinal documents also show that for Russia the sectors most important to the functioning of the state are energy and transport, and that it places great emphasis on the acquisition and development of military technology. The Russian maritime doctrine of 2022[13] emphasises the need to secure maritime transport and the functioning of port infrastructure and maritime pipelines, as well as the leading role of the Navy in protecting Russian interests. The document also explicitly points out that the greatest threat in the Atlantic direction (which includes the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, among others) is the increasing potential of NATO.

Meanwhile, it was Russia that was increasing its military presence in the Baltic, including by expanding the Baltic Fleet. In addition, it started blackmailing Western Europe with gas prices in 2020 in order to force the EU, among other things,

[9] United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election. Report*, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/publications/report-select-committee-intelligence-united-states-senate-russian-active-measures [accessed: 2 V 2023].

[10] R. Ellehuus, *Mind the Gaps: Assessing Russian Influence in the United Kingdom*, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/20720_Ellehuus_GEC_FullReport_FINAL.pdf [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[11] *Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г. № 400 о Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации*, Kremlin.ru, www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046 [accessed: 2 V 2023].

[12] A.M. Dyner, *World War II in Russia's Foreign Policy*, PISM, 28 I 2020, https://pism.pl/publications/World_War_II_in_Russias_Foreign_Policy [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[13] *Морская доктрина Российской Федерации*, Kremlin.ru, static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/uAFi5nvux2twaqjftS5yrIZUVTJan77L.pdf [accessed: 2 V 2023]. See also: A.M. Dyner, *Russia Adopts More Confrontational Maritime Doctrine*, PISM, 2 VIII 2022, https://pism.pl/publications/russia-adopts-more-confrontational-maritime-doctrine [accessed: 2 V 2023].

to complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The circumstances of the blow-up of both Nord Stream 2 and Nord Stream 1 are still unclear.

In turn, Belarusians in the draft of the new national security concept[14] mention among the most important threats: a change in the balance of power in the world, attempts to violate the territorial integrity of their state and undermine its constitutional system, interference in its internal affairs, the application of sanctions against it, information warfare conducted against Belarus, attempts to destabilise its financial system, terrorist threats, including critical infrastructure, tensions at the border. The draft document also draws attention to the escalating confrontation of world powers, the crisis of the arms control system, international terrorism and hostile actions of foreign secret services against Belarus.

Some of these threats were already identified in the 2016 Belarusian military doctrine[15], such as those related to the United States' desire to maintain a unipolar world. In addition, it draws attention to the problem of militarisation of neighbouring states or increasing NATO capabilities (although the Alliance is not mentioned explicitly). The paper also discusses the dangers of information warfare or psychological operations. It also points out the growing importance of Special Operations Forces and the widespread use of sabotage and terrorist methods as a means of warfare, the desire of warring parties to disorganise their opponent's state and military control systems and to damage and disrupt critical infrastructure facilities.

Meanwhile, it is Belarus which, together with Russia, is waging an information war against EU and NATO countries, and by making territory available to Russia for the invasion of Ukraine, has become an aggressor state. It is Belarus that maintains a state of crisis on the border, mainly with Poland, and its services support migrants in attacks on Border Guard patrols and attempts to cross the border against the law. Belarusian services have also conducted psychological operations against Polish uniformed services protecting the border. Moreover, in March 2023, the Internal Security Agency revealed that a group of people accused of attempting to damage a railway line leading to Ukraine in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship included persons with Belarusian passports[16].

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[14] *Постаиовлене Совета Безопасности Республики Беларусь о рассмотрении проекта новой Концепции национальной безопасности Республики Беларусь*, Национальный правовой Интернет-портал Республики Беларусь, 6 III 2023, https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=P223s0001 [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[15] *Закон Республики Беларус об утверждении Военной доктрины Республики Беларусь*, *Национальный правовой Интернет-портал Республики Беларус*, 20 VII 2016, https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H11600412 [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[16] *ABW zatrzymała kolejnego szpiega z siatki pracującej na rzecz Rosji* (Eng. ISA detains another spy from a network working for Russia), PAP, 10 VII 2023, https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/

Both countries point to NATO's activities, especially the expansion of the Alliance's infrastructure in the Eastern Flank states, as a challenge to their security in the Union State's military doctrine[17]. They attach great importance to issues related to information security or the functioning of critical infrastructure. Increasing tensions along the NATO-Union State border, including through the Alliance's organisation of large-scale military exercises, is also cited as a threat.

At the same time, it is Russia and Belarus that have, since 2022, significantly increased the number of military exercises carried out right on the border with NATO countries[18]. Both countries carry out numerous cyber-attacks, targeting, among other things, the critical infrastructure facilities of NATO countries.

In Russian and Belarusian strategic documents, it is therefore possible to see a great deal of convergence in terms of formulated threats and perceptions of how contemporary armed conflicts are conducted. This provides an alibi for inferring, according to the mirror principle, how these countries will conduct operations against the actors they define as potential adversaries.

In summary, the common catalogue of threats reported by Russia and Belarus thus includes: attempts by Western states, mainly the U.S., to maintain their hegemony; NATO actions, especially the strengthening of the Eastern Flank; the use of economic blackmail in the form of a sanctions policy; attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Russia and Belarus, waging information warfare; destabilising the functioning of border infrastructure and creating threats to critical infrastructure; cyber threats; terrorism and extremism; reducing arms control and destroying the existing international order. It is also worth noting that Russians and Belarusians see Western states' support for Ukraine, which is fighting the Russian

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news%2C1595110%2Cabw-zatrzymala-kolejnego-szpiega-z-siatki-pracujacej-na-rzecz-rosji.html [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[17] *Военная доктрина Союзного государства*, Правовой портал Союзного государства, https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fxn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1a-i%2Fupload%2Fiblock%2F18c%2F%25D0%2592%25D0%25BE%25D0%25B5%25D0%25B-D%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B0%25D1%258F%2520%25D0%25B4%25D0%25BE%25D0%25BA%25D1%2582%25D1%2580%25D0%25B8%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B0%2520%25D0%25A1%25D0%25BE%25D1%258E%25D0%25B7%25D0%25BD%25D0%25BE%25D0%25B3%25D0%25BE%2520%25D0%2593%25D0%25BE%25D1%2581%25D1%2583%25D0%25B4%25D0%25B0%25D1%2580%25D1%2581%25D1%2582%25D0%25B2%25D0%25B0.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK [accessed: 3 V 2023]. See also: A.M. Dyner, *New Military Doctrine of the Union State of Belarus and Russia*, PISM, 15 II 2022, https://www.pism.pl/publications/new-military-doctrine-of-the-union--state-of-belarus-and-russia [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[18] A.M. Dyner, *Russian and Belarusian Military Drills*, PISM, 10 X 2023, https://pism.pl/publications/russian-and-belarusian-military-drills [accessed: 11 X 2023].

invasion, as a danger, and that they only refer to those coming from the West as hybrid threats.

In response to such perceived threats, Vladimir Putin, at a meeting of the FSB Collegium on 28 February 2023[19], instructed to expand the service's cooperation with the armed forces and increase counter-intelligence cover for troops fighting in Ukraine, to intensify and expand counter-intelligence activities within Russia. The Russians further announced increased protection of their border, both maritime and land, and noted the need for increased counter-terrorism security, including those related to weapons of mass destruction.

Similar announcements were made by Alexander Lukashenka and the head of the Belarusian State Security Committee (KGB) Ivan Tertel. The development of cooperation between Belarus and Russia for the protection of the Union State border was announced on 4 May 2023 at a meeting of the College of the Union State Border Committee[20]. Both countries pledged to expand the activities carried out by their special services and to deepen cooperation between Russian and Belarusian institutions.

In addition, on 4 April 2023, during a visit to Minsk by Sergei Naryshkin, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR), it was announced that the service would expand its cooperation with the Belarusian KGB[21]. There was also a declaration that the two countries would develop a joint security concept for the Union State, which would be the first document of its kind. Its implications, however, will be much broader than the creation of a combined catalogue of threats to both countries. They will most likely involve giving Russian services wider opportunities to operate on Belarusian territory and Belarusian services to operate on Russian territory. It can also be expected that their competences will be largely unified. The adoption of the joint concept will probably result in changes to the criminal codes of both countries - some provisions, including those related to punishment for crimes such as terrorism, will be unified.

The two countries also plan to increase protection of the border with Ukraine, expand cooperation in countering terrorist threats, increase control of the internet and protect critical infrastructure.

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19   *Заседание коллегии ФСБ России*, Kremlin.ru, special.kremlin.ru/catalog/keywords/78/events/70597 [accessed: 2 V 2023].

20   *Беларусь и Россия обсудили охрану границы Союзного государства*, Reformation, 4 V 2023, https://reform.by/belarus-i-rossija-obsudili-ohranu-granicy-sojuznogo-gosudarstva-2 [accessed: 4 V 2023].

21   *Лукашенко встретился с директором Службы внешней разведки России Сергеем Нарышкиным*, Белта, 4 IV 2023, https://www.belta.by/photonews/view/lukashenko-vstretilsja-s-direktorom-sluzhby-vneshnej-razvedki-rossii-sergeem-naryshkinym-32720/ [accessed: 4 V 2023].

Russian–Belarusian accusations against Poland and –
more broadly – the West

The Russian and Belarusian authorities have repeatedly accused Poland of having imperial ambitions and wanting to restore the splendour of the state from the times of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. In Russian and Belarusian optics, Poland seeks to subjugate and occupy the western territories of Belarus and Ukraine[22]. To this end, it is to use hybrid operations and be ready to carry out military action.

These accusations intensified when Poland lent its support to Ukraine in 2014 - during the Revolution of Dignity and after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. At that time, Vladimir Zhirinovsky not only indicated that Poland was interested in seizing western Ukraine, but even made proposals to divide some Ukrainian lands between Poland and Russia[23]. And although Zhirinovsky was the leader of one of the few opposition groups, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, his controversial statements were often seen in Europe as an expression of the Russian government's true intentions and a way of probing the reactions of other countries.

Accusations of Polish imperialism by Russia and Belarus also reverberate during the war in Ukraine. Both countries claim that the sole purpose of Polish support for Ukraine is to prolong the armed conflict[24]. It is intended to contribute to the weakening of the Ukrainian state and enable Poland to take control of its western part. The actions of Russia and Belarus are propaganda and are aimed both at their own societies (this is one way of justifying the need for military action in Ukraine) and at the Ukrainian public, which is supposed to perceive the policy of Polish support as a lie. The Russians and Belarusians are using some borderland circles to show that thinking about the necessity of regaining eastern lands is popular in Polish society.

In contrast, allegations of Poland's desire to annex the western part of Belarus intensified after the country's rigged presidential elections in August 2020. The scale of the rigging, and later the brutality of the police forces, brought hundreds

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[22] *Путин: Польша хочет оккупировать Западную Украину под «зонтиком» НАТО*, RIA, 21 VII 2023, https://crimea.ria.ru/20230721/putin-polsha-khochet-okkupirovat-zapadnuyu-ukrainu-pod-zontikom-nato-1130218007.html [accessed: 11 X 2023]; *Лукашенко обеспокоен планами НАТО и Польши забрать Западную Украину*, Белта, 23 V 2022, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-obespokoen-planami-nato-i-polshi-zabrat-zapadnuju-ukrainu-503501-2022/ [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[23] *Жириновский предложил Польше, Венгрии и Румынии поделить Украину*, РБК, 24 III 2014, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/03/2014/570419ef9a794761c0ce8426 [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[24] А. Барабанов, *Лукашенко заявил, что Польша давит Украину из-за отмашки США*, Газета.Ru, 22 IX 2023, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2023/09/22/21343147.shtml [accessed: 11 X 2023].

of thousands of demonstrators onto the streets of Belarusian cities. Alexander Lukashenka accused Poland, among others, of provoking the riots and wanting to stage a coup. He claimed that the Polish services and authorities had for years supported the opposition, militarised his country and carried out actions aimed at annexing western Belarus to Poland[25]. It is worth noting that this is not the first time that Lukashenka has pointed to Poland's supposed imperial ambitions to at least restore the eastern borders of the Second Republic. Such accusations have also been made in previous years - especially during periods of heightened relations, which were most often related to the ongoing presidential elections[26]. Falsifications and repressions against independent circles, against which Poland protested, took place in 2006 and 2010, among others, although the scale of these phenomena was then incomparably smaller than in 2020.

Currently, the Belarusian narrative is dominated by accusations directed against Poland, but also some other NATO countries, of attempts to undermine the constitutional order in Belarus[27], escalate tensions around the common border and prepare individuals to carry out acts of terror, sabotage and diversion in Belarus, targeting both representatives of the Belarusian authorities and Russian soldiers and transports of Russian troops[28]. These accusations are being used by the Belarusian authorities to increase the powers of the country's secret services, primarily the KGB, and to expand cooperation with Russian services, mainly the FSB and the SVR. Lukashenka has also used them to develop the Regional Forces Group[29]

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[25] *Лукашенко заявил об угрозе вторжения Запада в Белоруссию*, Лента.ру, 31 III 2023, https://lenta.ru/news/2023/03/31/west_menace/ [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[26] *Лукашенко о милитаризации Польши: такая эскалация вдоль наших границ недопустима*, Белта, 28 I 2022, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-militarizatsii-polshi-takaja-eskalatsija-vdol-nashih-granits-nedopustima-481701-2022/ [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[27] *Лукашенко предупредил о «лязгающих» у границ Белоруссии войсках НАТО*, РИА, 16 VIII 2020, https://ria.ru/20200816/1575854110.html [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[28] *Лукашенко: в Польше, Литве, Украине готовят белорусских радикалов для диверсий в стране*, Коммерсант, 10 X 2022, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5606884 [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[29] The Regional Forces Group (RFG) has been in existence since 2000, which is when the Union State was established. Until 2022, it was assumed to be made up of the Belarusian Armed Forces and separate components of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces (previously, before 2009 and the establishment of the District, it was made up of components from the Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts and the Kaliningrad Special Defence Region). This changed during the Belarusian and Russian exercises "Allied Resolve", which preceded the aggression against Ukraine. Indeed, the military components of the 35th and 36th Combined Arms Armies of the Eastern Military District took part in these manoeuvres. Since then, it has been informally acknowledged that the RFG is formed by the Belarusian Armed Forces and separated components of the Russian Armed Forces. The task of the RFG is to protect the Union State. Until now, checking of its combat readiness has taken place every two years during alternating exercises "Zapad" and "Union Shield".

of the Union State, which has been used by the Russians to, among other things, train soldiers mobilised for the war against Ukraine. The State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus also gained more powers[30].

Russia and Belarus also accuse the West of wanting to dismantle the current international order by, among other things, changing the arms control regime. In statements by key politicians, responsibility for the disintegration of the disarmament treaty regime is blamed on the U.S. It is emphasised that it is the U.S. that has ceased to abide by these provisions, as in the case of the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty*[31]. It is Russia, however, that has repeatedly violated this treaty[32], and the suspension of the New Start agreement[33] is presented in official Russian discourse as being due to hostile U.S. policy. Russia has also repeatedly accused the U.S. and, more broadly, NATO countries of interference in electoral processes. It has also accused the West of supporting radical and extremist movements against it.

Very similar accusations against Western countries are made by the Belarusian authorities, above all by Lukashenka. He points out that the countries of NATO's Eastern Flank, especially Poland, are seeking to forcibly change the regime in Belarus, that they are conducting non-transparent military operations and, by means of a policy of sanctions, are aiming to undermine the functioning of the Belarusian economy[34].

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This was supposed to change in 2023, for which, in addition to the "Union Shield", the "Zapad" manoeuvres were announced. However, the "Zapad" drills were abandoned, and the "Union Shield" most likely also did not take place. At present, it is difficult to assess whether this is only to do with the war in Ukraine, or whether it is indicative of broader changes that may result, among other things, from the announced so-called "Shoigu reform", under which the Western Military District is to be disbanded.

[30] A. Плотникова, *Кого опасается Александр Лукашенко?*, „Голос Америки", 12 X 2022, https://www.golosameriki.com/a/lukashenko-kgb/6786965.html [accessed: 11 X 2023].

[31] A. Kacprzyk, *The End of the INF Treaty*, PISM, 5 VIII 2019, https://pism.pl/publications/The_End_of_the_INF_Treaty [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[32] Read more about examples of Russia's violations of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, in: A.M. Dyner et al., *How Russian Violations of the 1997 Founding Act Influence NATO-Russia Relations*, PISM, 6 VII 2018, https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/How_Russian_Violations_of_the_1997_Founding_Act_Influence_NATORussia_Relations [accessed 11 X 2023].

[33] A. Kacprzyk, *Russia Suspends the New START Treaty*, PISM, 24 II 2023, https://pism.pl/publications/russia-suspends-the-new-start-treaty [accessed: 3 V 2023].

[34] *Лукашенко прокомментировал желание Польши устроить переворот в Белоруссииб хвщыез*, Московский комсомолец, 25 V 2023, https://www.mk.ru/politics/2023/05/25/lukashenko-prokommentiroval-zhelanie-polshi-ustroit-perevorot-v-belorussii.html [accessed: 11 X 2023].

The Russians also accuse the Alliance of provoking them into taking military action in Ukraine, and claim that the West has de facto declared war on Russia[35]. Meanwhile, it is Russia, in cooperation with Belarus, that is using hybrid tools against NATO countries.

The implication is that both Russia and Belarus, in communicating their concerns, repeatedly show what action they will take against those they consider to be their opponents.

## Hybrid threats posed by Russia and Belarus

Hybrid operations are most often referred to as hostile activities conducted below the threshold of war, combining military and non-military instruments. The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, established by the EU and NATO, defines hybrid threats as:

> (…) actions conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm a target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state or institutional level. Such actions are coordinated and synchronized and deliberately target democratic states' and institutions' vulnerabilities. Activities can take place, for example, in the political, economic, military, civil or information domains. They are conducted using a wide range of means and designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution[36].

In turn, NATO stresses that (…) *hybrid threats combine military and non-military, as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyber attacks, economic pressure, and deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces*[37]. Other methods, including sabotage, are also indicated to influence or affect the enemy's internal situation[38].

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[35] *Парад Победы на Красной площади*, Kremlin.ru, 9 V 2023, kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71104 [accessed: 9 V 2023].

[36] *Hybrid threats as a concept*, Hybrid CoE, www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats-as-a-phenomenon [accessed: 4 V 2023].

[37] *What is NATO doing to address hybrid threats?*, NATO, 21 IV 2021, /www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_183004.htm [accessed: 4 V 2023].

[38] *New Research Division Publication - NATO's response to hybrid threats*, NATO Defense College, 10 X 2017, https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=886_156338.htm [accessed: 11 X 2023]. See also: A.M. Dyner, *The Border Crisis as an Example of Hybrid Warfare*, PISM, 2 II 2022, https://www.pism.pl/publications/the-border-crisis-as-an-example-of-hybrid-warfare [accessed: 4 V 2023].

Hybrid conflict, also referred to as asymmetric by the Russians, is also characterised by the fact that the forces of the two sides differ significantly from each other, and action is taken by the weaker side - usually politically, economically and militarily. Insurgent forces may be used in asymmetric operations and it is permissible to take action against irregular armed groups. This is why the Russians and Belarusians attach so much importance to training the operational capabilities of Special Operations Forces.

Moreover, according to Russian doctrine, (...) *Russian special forces can carry out tasks in psychological operations, support of armed opposition groups, special reconnaissance of critical infrastructure facilities and elimination of key political-military personnel of the opponent. In addition, in carrying out sabotage and reconnaissance tasks, special forces can be used to paralyse the adversary's command, control and communications system and others critical to achieving the goal of the operation*[39].

For Russia (but also Belarus), hybrid actions taken against NATO states, including Poland, are cost-effective. Their aim is to destabilise the adversary socially and politically, including influencing its political decisions. Researchers on the subject of hybrid threats agree that the actions of Belarus, including the Belarusian services, can be seen as part of the hostile activity of the Russian Federation towards NATO states[40].

Thus, knowledge of the activities carried out as part of hybrid activities, combined with the threats identified by Russia and Belarus, shows, according to the mirror principle, which areas of state functioning the Russians and Belarusians consider to be the most sensitive and vulnerable to destabilisation. In this way, it is possible to indicate which fields they will focus on in operations against NATO countries.

Such actions most often concern cyberspace (e.g. attacks on critical infrastructure), the information domain (after having worked out the strengths and weaknesses of the targeted state's society) and elements of critical infrastructure (after having recognised it), including sabotage actions against transport networks[41], key energy facilities or border infrastructure[42].

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[39] M. Depczyński, L. Elak, *Rosyjska sztuka operacyjna w zarysie* (Eng. Russian operational art in outline), Warszawa 2020, p. 391.

[40] M. Świerczek, *The role of provocative-deceptive actions in neutralizing the Belarusian* opposition, "Internal Security Review" 2022, no. 26, pp. 301–336. https://doi.org/10.4467/20801335PBW.21.043.15703.

[41] *ENISA Transport Threat Landscape*, European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, 21 III 2023, https://www.enisa.europa.eu/publications/enisa-transport-threat-landscape [accessed: 4 V 2023].

[42] Cf. A.M. Dyner, *Preparing for Russian Hybrid Activities Against NATO and EU Countries*, PISM, 25 XI 2022, https://www.pism.pl/publications/preparing-for-russian-hybrid-activities-against-natoand-eu-countries [accessed: 4 V 2023].

**Activities in the cyberspace** – in Russia and Belarus, such actions are considered a cost-effective tool for influencing adversaries. Russia (and Belarus on its behalf) carries out, with the help of hacking groups but also cyber warfare, attacks on ICT infrastructure and facilities crucial to the functioning of the state[43]. Servers that hold citizens' data, especially health care data, may also be at risk. The aim is to paralyse a potential adversary without the use of kinetic actions. A successful attack on critical infrastructure also has a strong psychological impact, as it demonstrates the weakness of the adversary and its inability to defend itself effectively. The idea is to get the public of the attacked country to put pressure on the government to change its policy towards Russia.

**Disinformation activities** – according to Russia and Belarus, they are the most effective tool for shaping the social and political processes taking place in countries considered to be adversaries. While accusing the West of interfering in electoral processes in Russia and Belarus, both countries point out that they carry out such activities in other countries. The aim of outreach activities against Alliance countries is to increase social polarisation and undermine confidence in state institutions, including uniformed services, as well as in Alliance commitments and NATO's ability to defend all its members. The countries most vulnerable to this type of activity are those in which election campaigns are underway. In these, the Russians promote anti-EU and anti-NATO forces.

Part of disinformation activities can also serve to destabilise the banking system. Multi-source information that an important bank is at risk of bankruptcy can shake the entire banking system. Panic can also be caused by information about radioactive contamination, a mysterious pandemic, poisoned food.

Russians operate both through their media, including those run in different languages (e.g. "Sputnik"), and social networks. They also use platforms such as YouTube and so-called "useful idiots", as well as media networks funded (usually indirectly) from Russia, to spread their narrative lines. Very similar methods, albeit on a smaller scale, are used by Belarus.

**Sabotage activities** – their targets are mainly facilities that are crucial to the functioning of the adversary state. Acts of sabotage, like cyber-attacks, are intended to demonstrate the inability of the attacked party to defend itself effectively, cause casualties, create public panic and undermine confidence in state institutions.

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[43]   Russia focuses on targeting government institutions, critical infrastructure facilities and the IT sector. See: *Defending Ukraine: Early Lessons from the Cyber War*, Microsoft, 22 VI 2022, https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2022/06/22/defending-ukraine-early-lessons-from-the-cyber-war/ [accessed: 4 V 2023].

In particular, energy infrastructure (mainly in maritime areas[44] and large urban centres) as well as transport infrastructure necessary for people to function are exposed. In the event of armed conflict, sabotage actions are intended to delay or prevent military action by the opposing side. Russia and Belarus have several units, both within the armed forces and subordinate services and interior ministries, trained for this type of action.

**Increased intelligence activities in NATO countries** – their aim is to obtain information on military plans and, above all, military technology. Due to sanctions, Russia and Belarus have been deprived of access to the technologies necessary for the production of modern armaments. Thus, due to Russian military activities in Ukraine and the need to rebuild and expand its military potential, an increase in such activity can be expected.

**Destabilisation of the border situation** – maintaining tension at the border is primarily aimed at tiring the adversary of having to take protective measures and exposing him to the high costs involved[45]. Additionally, the instrumentalisation of migration is a tool for political and social influence. Kelly M. Greenhill in her book *Weapons of Mass Migration. Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* identified 64 such cases between 1953 and 2006, half of which were successful, i.e. achieved the objectives set by the party causing the crisis (admission of migrants, disbursement of funds)[46]. It is therefore an effective tool for influencing a potential opponent.

Hybrid actions are intended to resonate in the administrative-political, financial-economic, military and cultural-worldview spheres. By striking in this way, Russia and Belarus will use exactly the tools they believe the West is using against them.

## An attempt at forecasting

Given that Russia accuses Western states of militarisation and imperial ambitions, it can be assumed that regardless of the outcome of the military confrontation in Ukraine, the Russians will continue to base their foreign policy on hard power.

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[44] See: M. Piekarski, *Ochrona infrastruktury krytycznej na polskich obszarach morskich w kontekście zagrożeń hybrydowych* (Eng. Protection of critical infrastructure in Polish maritime areas in the context of hybrid threats), in: *Ekspertyzy PTBN*, 2023, no. 1, https://sites.google.com/view/ptbnonline/ekspertyzy-ptbn [accessed: 4 V 2023].

[45] A.M. Dyner, *The Border Crisis as an Example of Hybrid Warfare…*

[46] K.M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration. Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Cornell University Press 2010.

Thus, an economic and social effort to increase the capacity of the arms industry and further militarisation of society can be expected to continue, including through indoctrination in schools and extensive propaganda efforts. In this context, Russia may exploit the image of NATO as the main enemy against which it must arm and conduct defence operations in order to sustain social mobilisation in its country and the long-term capacity of the population to make sacrifices.

Seeking to treat Russia as one of the world's superpowers will remain an intrinsic feature of Russian foreign policy. Thus, it will continue to undertake international activities against Western states. These are likely to be both diplomatic activities and actions by, for example, private military companies linked to the state, which can be used in local conflicts - primarily in Africa and South America - of an anti-Western nature. At the same time, the Russians will spread propaganda, influencing mainly the societies of the Middle East and Africa[47]. Reminiscent of the colonial past, including the exploitation of the countries there by rich Western European states, Russia is likely to encourage mass arrivals (to take back what the Europeans have looted). This may periodically intensify migratory flows towards Nato countries, forcing increased protection of the Alliance's borders, but also for Western states to make diplomatic efforts to combat Russian activities in Middle Eastern and African countries.

Given that only the idea of an empire - to the knowledge of the author of this article - is able to substitute for the inconvenience of, among other things, sanctions for the average Russian citizen, the Russian authorities will continue to strive to maintain control over the area they consider to be their sphere of influence, i.e. primarily the states of the former USSR, but also the territories comprising the former Russian Empire. It is therefore doubtful that there will be a change in Russian policy towards neighbouring states.

Russia will also maintain anti-Western cooperation with China and other countries that speak out against the hegemony of Western states. It will want to use the media and social networks there to spread its narrative lines. People may be recruited from African and Middle Eastern countries to work in local troll farms, whose main task will be to spread anti-Western propaganda.

Hostile actions will also continue to be taken in countries that have emerged from the Russian sphere of influence but are important to Russia, such as the Baltic states and Poland. Russia's most important objective is to push them

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[47] See in more detail: S. Nowacka, J. Czerep, *Fertile ground: How Africa and the Arab World found common language with Russia on Ukraine*, PISM, 17 I 2023, https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/fertile-ground-how-africa-and-the-arab-world-found-common-language-with-russia-on-ukraine [accessed: 5 V 2023].

into the grey zone, without real security guarantees from NATO[48]. Russia will continue to undermine the position of these countries in the Alliance, the EU and internationally[49]. Hostile action - both in the information sphere and against critical infrastructure - can be expected above all against Poland as the most important state on the Eastern Flank, heavily involved in supporting Ukraine's war effort. It can be assumed with a high degree of probability that cyber-attacks targeting critical infrastructure for state security will increase in Poland. Disinformation will also increase, with the aim of deepening social polarisation, as well as creating anxiety about the war in Ukraine and the presence of a significant number of refugees from that country on Polish territory.

Russia and Belarus will cooperate closely in undertaking activities of an anti-Polish nature. Border infrastructure will be threatened, but further acts of destruction of Polish memorial sites in Belarus can also be expected[50]. There is

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[48] An expression of this thinking was the Russian demands to NATO for the withdrawal of military infrastructure from the countries admitted after 1997, all of which now form the Alliance's eastern flank. See: M. Terlikowski, A.M. Dyner, *Potential Impact of Russia's Demands on NATO's Defence and Deterrence*, PISM, 22 XII 2021, https://www.pism.pl/publications/potential-impact-of-russias-demands-on-natos-defence-and-deterrence [accessed: 5 V 2023].

[49] One of Russia's actions may be to continue its historical campaign aimed primarily at Poland and, among other things, to blame Poland for the outbreak of World War II. An example is the film entitled *Hiena Europy* (Eng. Hyena of Europe, Russian: *Мир накануне катастрофы. XX век. Гиена Европы. Документальный фильм (2022)*, YouTube, 11 II 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6TpLLw33NQ). In it, its authors attempt to prove that for many years Poland was a collaborator with Nazi Germany, and that its volition and signing of agreements with the United Kingdom and France forced the USSR to sign a pact with the Third Reich. Similar theses can be found in Belarusian propaganda, for example in the film *Polski faszyzm* (Eng. Polish fascism, Russian: *Польский фашизм // Каким Сталин увидел Минск после войны // Как поляки издевались над белорусами*, YouTube, 21 IX 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0pZbUV9hWA), in which the Second Polish Republic is accused of pursuing a policy aimed at the extermination of national minorities, including the Belarusian. The film also suggests that in the future Belarus may wish to demand reparations from Poland for the occupation of the country's western lands during the interwar period. For more on World War II in Russia's historical policy, see: A.M. Dyner, *World War II in Russia's Foreign Policy…*

[50] In 2022, the Belarusian authorities, as part of an anti-Polish historical campaign, began destroying Polish memorial sites. In July, the quarters of AK soldiers killed in 1944 located near Mikuliszki in the Hrodna region were vandalised. Acts of vandalism at burial and memorial sites occurred in Jodkowicze, Volkovysk, Kaczyce, Stryjówka, Surkont, Piaskowce and Plebaniszki, among others. The Katyn Cross at the military cemetery in Hrodna was also damaged. See: *Zniszczone polskie cmentarze i pomniki. Bilans antypolskiej kampanii na Białorusi* (Eng. Destroyed Polish cemeteries and monuments. The balance of the anti-Polish campaign in Belarus), TVP Info, 31 XII 2022, https://www.tvp.info/65399725/zniszczone-polskie-cmentarze-na-bialorusi-smutny-bilans-roku-2022 [accessed: 11 X 2023].

also a serious danger associated with the possible location in Poland of agents who legend themselves as victims of the Belarusian regime.

Russian and Belarusian propaganda will probably continue to accuse Poland of pursuing an imperial policy and militarisation[51]. These actions will therefore be an exact mirror image of the policy pursued by Russia, i.e. the militarisation of the state, increasing arms production and maintaining pressure on neighbouring states, including military action against them (war in Ukraine).

## Counteraction options

The knowledge that Russia and Belarus perceive NATO not only as a potential adversary, but also as an organisation with which they are in a de facto state of war, is linked to the awareness of the risk of hostile actions being taken by Russian and Belarusian services. As already indicated, using the mirror principle in the analysis of Russian and Belarusian strategic documents, the areas most at risk of such actions can be singled out.

Alliance countries should focus primarily on protecting critical infrastructure, including power plants, pipelines (especially undersea ones), refineries and fuel depots, port infrastructure and the rail network (especially the routes most important for the movement of armed forces and those most used by passenger and freight depots). It is very important to secure them both in terms of cyber security (locating back-up servers in safe countries, moving data to the cloud) and against acts of sabotage. It is important to define which areas of security are the responsibility of the investor or owner of the facility and which are the responsibility of state institutions. In doing so, it is worth taking advantage of Ukraine's experience from the war with Russia, showing which facilities and servers were targeted by the aggressor in the first place. Poland should select an institution to play a leading role in shaping its policy on protection against hybrid threats.

In the case of disinformation activities, NATO members should focus on building societies' resilience to this threat. Education, already at primary school level, on the most common ways of conducting such activities, the creation of comprehensive information strategies by state institutions and the organisation of broad media campaigns, as well as the cooperation of these institutions with non-governmental organisations, are very important for countering disinformation.

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[51]  The transfer of new equipment primarily to the 18th and 16th Mechanised Divisions, whose area of responsibility is eastern and north-eastern Poland, will be cited as an example, as will the presentation of the decision to form the 1st Legions Infantry Division as having a hostile character.

Counter-intelligence cover for the defence industry and NATO military operations must be increased. In particular, information on control systems, military and law enforcement structures, defence industry companies, critical technologies and personal data must be protected.

In the context of building resilience to and responding to hybrid threats, it is worthwhile to reflect on whether a time of increased threat of hybrid action should be added to the state of peace and the state of war, which would create opportunities to grant additional powers to the armed forces in particular. A separate issue remains the answer to the question of whether NATO states should begin to conduct offensive actions, e.g. in cyberspace, against identified hostile actors. Given that the Alliance is a defensive organisation, such changes can hardly be expected.

## Summary

The article demonstrates that the mirror principle can be useful for identifying threats to NATO states emanating from Russia and Belarus. On the basis of an analysis of Russian and Belarusian strategic documents, such as the war doctrine and the state security doctrine, statements by politicians, academic articles, press publications on security issues and their threats, it is possible to conclude which areas Russia and Belarus consider most important for the stability of the state, and thus which will be attacked by them first.

Since for Russia and Belarus the most serious threats involve an increased military presence on their borders, mass protests, cyber activities, attacks on critical infrastructure facilities or disinformation, it can be assumed that in these areas these countries will remain the most offensive. Undoubtedly, their actions will change over time, but through, among other things, a careful analysis of the current accusations against NATO states, it will be possible to predict what measures Russia and Belarus may reach for in the near future.

On the basis of current declarations by Russian and Belarusian political elites, it can be concluded that, regardless of the course of the war in Ukraine, Russia will intensify hybrid actions against NATO states. In the longer term (about a decade), if the current shape of its foreign and security policy is maintained, the threat of direct military action should be expected to increase. Hence, it is necessary to counter (both non-kinetic and military) such threats both in individual NATO member states and by the Alliance as a whole in order to deter Russia and its cooperating partner Belarus.

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