

ARTICLES

Jerzy J. Wiatr

Europejska Wyższa Szkoła Prawa i Administracji¹

CONTEMPORARY ARMED CONFLICTS: AN OUTLINE OF A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Armed conflicts – both between states and internal – take place in history from time immemorial. Their character changes under the impact of two circumstances: the evolution of political relations and changes in the modes of struggle.

I define „armed conflicts” as such group conflicts, in which all parties are capable of using military force for a relatively prolonged period of time. Therefore, I do not include here the unilateral use of armed forces by the subject so strong that its target cannot offer an effective defense even for a few days. Therefore, I do not include here such instances of using armed forces as putting down spontaneous protests of an unarmed population, coups d' état which have not been met by an effective opposition, and terrorist attacks directed at the defenseless population.

Calls for the sociological study of war for the first time have been formulated by Polish scholars Mieczysław Szerer (1916), Adam Krzyżanowski (1918), and Aleksander Hertz (1946). A few years later a sociological interpretation of wars appeared in Germany (Steinmetz 1929). In the between-wars period, comprehensive studies on war were undertaken in the United States, resulting in the fundamental work of the scholars from the Chicago University (Wright 1942). For years, the sociology of war have been focusing on the analysis of the social context of armed conflicts between states (Fraga Iribarne 1962) and on the psychosociological conditions leading to the decisions to launch a war (Stoessinger 1985). Relatively less attention was given to the sociological aspects of internal armed conflicts, but one should mention Ted Gurr's interesting studies of revolts (1970, 1993), the comparative analysis of French, Russian and Chinese revolutions by Theda Skocpol (1979) and the comparative analyses of military coups d'état presented by Morris Janowitz and his collaborators (Janowitz, van Doorn 1971).

With the passing of time armed conflicts evolved under the impact of changing political relations within states and relations between states, as well as due to changes in the armaments and in the way of conducting wars. Recently, Annette Idler proposed an interesting scheme of studying armed conflicts based on five

¹ E-mail: jwiatr@ewspa.edu.pl

dimensions: actors, environment, methods, resources and consequences (Idler 2024). In all these aspects, the second world war constituted a breakthrough. It caused deep changes in the inter-state relations by creating a bi-polar division of the world, dominated by two great powers which won the war and divided Europe in their respective zones of dominance. In the last stage of the war, the United States used atomic weapons against two Japanese cities (Hiroshima and Nagasaki) initiating a new type of arms race based on weapons of mass destruction. The Soviet experimental explosion of the atomic bomb (1949) signaled the emergence of a qualitatively new type of balance of force between two superpowers based on the threat of mutual annihilation. In consequence, there emerged an understanding of the impossibility of victory in the total war between powers armed with the weapons of mass destruction (Brodie 1959; Aron 1962; Beaufre 1968). Such an understanding did not eliminate such weapons from strategic analyses. Henry Kissinger was the first to put forward a controversial thesis that in the case of the war with the USSR the United States should be the first to use nuclear bombs, since only such threat would constitute an effective deterrent (Kissinger 1957). The so-called „hypertrophy of total war” has not eliminated the armed conflicts but it gave them a new character. Contemporary wars between states are fought in the shadows of a nuclear catastrophe. Participants in such wars are aware of the fact that the escalation of the war can lead to the mutual nuclear annihilation. Such an understanding results in far reaching consequences for the way in which wars are conducted. It does not mean, however, that armed conflicts – both international and domestic – became less intense. They remained an important element of political relations, but their character changed (and keep changing). After the second world war, the French pioneer of the sociology of international relations, Marcel Merle, pointed to the growing importance of new conflicts between states, resulting less from the conflicting national interests and more from opposed ideologies (Merle 1974: 213–233). Fifty years later, it is quite obvious that the ideological conflicts have not disappeared but also that national interests as well as imperial ambitions of great powers play a growing role in armed conflicts between states, as illustrated in the current century by the American invasion of Iraq and by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

■ ARMED CONFLICTS DURING THE COLD WAR

The social context of armed conflicts after the second world war was defined by two elements of the new international situation. The first was the ideological rivalry between the two superpowers and dominated by them blocs of states. The second type of conflicts resulted from the termination of colonial rule, first in Asia and soon later in Africa. The ideological conflict between communist and democratic states resulted in the Korean war (1950–1953), the second Vietnam war (1960–1975)

as well as in military interventions of the USSR and the USA in their respective spheres of influence. American involvement in Korea and Vietnam was motivated by the perception of local conflicts as the elements of the communist threat on the global scale (Paige 1968). The Korean war was the only conflict in which American and Chinese armed forces fought each other. During the Vietnam war, the American perception of the war stressed its ideological, rather than national, character. Lyndon Johnson, in conversations with his biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin, argued that „if the aggression succeeded in South Vietnam, then the aggressors would simply keep on going until all Southeast Asia fell into their hands, slowly or quickly, but inevitably at least down to Singapore, and almost certainly to Djakarta” (Kearns Goodwin 1976: 330). History proved him dramatically wrong. The defeat suffered by the United States in Vietnam gave birth to the critical analysis of the decision to undertake a military intervention and of its continuation (Karnow 1983; Zoellick 2020: 341–343).

Numerous domestic conflicts of the cold war era had distinctly ideological character which reflected the global ideological confrontation. One of the sharpest such a conflict took place in Argentine (1976–1982) following the military coup which terminated the rule of the Peronist party, to which the radical Left responded by launching a guerilla warfare. In several Latin American states intense domestic violence was caused by the ideological rift between the nationalist Right and the Marxist Left (Perlmutter 1977: 166–201). One of the most brutal instances of such conflicts was the massive use of force by the rebellious military in Chile after the coup of September 1973.

In the last stage of the cold war new ideological conflicts resulted from the intensification of Islamic fanaticism and its victory in the Iranian revolution of 1979. This type of ideological conflict survived the end of the cold war and colors the international relations contemporarily in the Middle East.

Ideology was not, however, the only source of armed conflicts during the cold war. Both superpowers followed their imperial interests, mostly at the expense of smaller and weaker partners. The best known and potentially most dangerous confrontation between imperial interests of the two superpowers took place in Central America where the victory of the Cuban revolution (1959) gave the USSR an opportunity to establish its military base very close to the American borders. The American response was a skillful combination of the naval blockade and the readiness to negotiate (Allison 1971). In the last years of the cold war the United States offered indirect help to the anti-Soviet guerilla forces in Afghanistan preventing the USSR from obtaining the goals of its intervention there in 1979.

The ideological conflict between two world superpowers did not exclude several local wars, caused more by conflicting national interests than by ideologies. The most important among them were: three wars between India and Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971), five wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors (1948/1949,

1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982), two short-lived armed conflicts between China and India (1962) and the USSR (1969). In 1974, the sharp conflict between Greek and Turkish communities of Cyprus led to the political confrontation and to the oldest „frozen conflict” in Europe (Bebler 2015: 19–41).

A separate category of armed conflicts during the cold war were the civil wars in newly independent countries of Africa and Asia (Congo 1960, Nigeria 1967–1970, Pakistan 1971, Ethiopia 1974–1991 and Uganda 1981–1985). In some of them one of the superpowers (or both of them) offered help to one of the contesting parties.

From the perspective of the intensity of armed conflicts, the cold war era can be divided in two periods, with 1973 as the dividing point. The first period was marked by intense armed conflicts, particularly in Asia. This period ended with the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam, the communist victories in Indochina and the consolidation of China’s position as the third world superpower. The remaining years of the cold war were marked by the relative weakening of the ideological confrontation between two superpowers. The policy of *détente*, however, did not last long. In 1979 the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan caused a prolonged local war, in which the anti-Soviet guerrilla benefited from the indirect help offered by the United States. Another field of political confrontation emerged in early 1980s in Poland, caused by the repeated threats of a military Soviet intervention and the imposition of martial law in December 1981. In early nineteen-eighties nobody predicted that the cold war would end soon. In the final stage of the cold war Zbigniew Brzezinski predicted that the Soviet-American rivalry would last for several more decades (Brzezinski 1986). He was not alone. In 1978, the British general John Hackett published a fictitious history of the new world war, started by the Soviet attack on democratic states in Europe and resulting in the Soviet defeat, followed by the dissolution of the USSR (Hackett 1979). Even if such scenario remained a political fiction, the belief in the permanent character of the cold war conflict prevailed in political narrations.

In history unexpected events do happen. The election of Michail Gorbachev to the post of the general secretary of the ruling party opened a short period of a rapid political change, an important part of which was the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan and the acceptance of a profound political change in the Soviet dominated part of Europe. The process of a peaceful political transformation began in Poland with the round table negotiations, contested election and the formation of a new government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki – the first non-communist prime minister in the Soviet dominated part of Europe after 1945. Following the Polish democratization the regime change took place in all states of the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe. In all these states – except Romania – the regime change was peaceful. Accepting these changes Gorbachev became the main architect of the new period of international relations after the end of the cold war (Leffler 2007: 466 and 467). Gorbachev’s biographer Archie Brown

stressed the historical role of the last Soviet leader in attempts to create a new world order based on co-operation between nations (Brown 1996: 315–318). The end of the cold war produced, however, a very deep political conflict in the USSR which led to the abortive coup d'état of August 1991 and to the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991.

The rapid change in Soviet policy followed by the intense domestic conflict and the dissolution of the USSR caught almost all foreign commentators unprepared. The biggest and potentially the most dangerous international conflict of our time ended peacefully in the political victory of the democratic West.

The common characteristics of armed conflicts during the cold war was their dependence on the state of relations between the two superpowers. Even local wars – like the wars between Israel and the Arab states – were fought within limits resulting from the quite real possibility of the escalation which would bring a direct involvement of one of the superpowers (or both of them). The main consequence was the fact that wars of the cold war era were limited – both in the use of arms and in the definition of their objectives.

■ AFTER THE COLD WAR

The end of the cold war gave birth to expectations of a new world order based on co-operation of great powers and on elimination of armed conflicts between states. Effective international collaboration, based on the decision of UN Security Council, which had authorized member states to use force against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, resulted in the success of international military operation called „the Desert Storm” (Clancy, Franks 1997). The success of this operation created hopes for a new world order based on a peaceful co-operation of states and on the respect for international law. The reality, however, showed the futility of such hopes. The end of the cold war – universally perceived as the beginning of a new era of international co-operation – resulted in a deep change of international relations, but not in the establishment of a universal peace. New dangers emerged.

The first such a danger emerged soon after the end of the cold war as the result of a dissolution of two multi-national federations – the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The last decade of the twentieth century was marked by the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia – in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. In the last two of them, the decisive role was played by the armed intervention of the USA and its allies. It was tis intervention that forced Serbia to accept the peace agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the independence of Kosovo.

Compared with the dramatic events in the former Yugoslavia, the dissolution of the USSR was a relatively peaceful process. There were, however, several armed conflicts between ethnic minorities and the newly independent republics. In several

cases such conflicts resulted in the de facto secession of regions populated by ethnic minorities, particularly in Georgia and Moldova. In the Russian Federation the sharpest armed conflict took place in the autonomous republic of Chechnya, which declared its independence in 1994 and was subdued by the Russian military forces after a few years of intense fighting. In the nineteen-nineties the Russian Federation minimized her support for the secessionist regions in the former Soviet republics.

The second challenge to the new world order resulted from the growing strength of China which challenged the American domination in East Asia. The American political scientist Graham Allison recalled in this context the famous „Thucydides’s Trap” explaining the potential danger resulting from the emergence of a new great power (Allison 2017). One of the sources of tensions in the region is the Chinese intent to recapture Taiwan and the American commitment to protect the island. The Chinese foreign policy has been characterized by moderation but there are mounting signals of the more aggressive stand on the Taiwan issue. The growing economic and military strength of China makes the potential conflict over the hegemony in Eastern Asia one of the main challenges to the present status quo in the region. Recent sociological surveys show that the American support for Taiwan’s independence results in the greater readiness of the Taiwan population to offer armed resistance in a case of the Chinese attack on the island (Wu and others 2024). In such a situation the Chinese invasion on the island looks less likely than a prolonged diplomatic conflict between China and the United States. One of the consequences of such a conflict is the assistance offered by China to Russia in her aggressive war in Ukraine. The present American-Chinese relations have some similarities with the American-Soviet relations during the cold war. The essence of such a relationship is avoiding direct military confrontation between great powers combined with the use of military (and non-military) means to impose their will on weaker partners.

The third source of international conflicts was the more aggressive policy of the United States vis-à-vis smaller states considered to be hostile to the American interests. Such political turn took place almost immediately after the end of the cold war and after the dissolution of the USSR. Its main source was the emergence of a radical Islamism, hostile to the West, and particularly to the United States. The Iranian revolution of 1979 not only deprived the United States of a valuable ally but also resulted in the growth of hostilities directed against it in countries with Islamic majorities. At the same time, the disappearance of the Soviet Union eliminated the danger of the third world war and gave the United States a free hand in promoting its interests, even by the use of military force. The American intervention in the Persian Gulf, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq would not have been possible in times of the real Soviet danger (Madej 2017). After the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001, the American society, and particularly its

political elite, was more likely to accept and support president G.W. Bush's slogan of the „war on terrorism”. This led to the acceptance of the erroneous decision to invade Iraq, justified by the false accusation of Iraq for allegedly assembling weapons of mass destruction and of supporting the terrorist network, responsible for terrorist attacks against American targets in September 2001. Precisely, because of the American decision to invade Iraq, Zbigniew Brzezinski called the Bush presidency „catastrophic” (Brzezinski 2007). Attacking Iraq caused critical assessment by several American (Holmes 2007; Herspring 2008; Nye 2009), as well as Polish (Wiatr 2002; Kuźniar 2006; Balcerowicz 2017) scholars. Even American diplomats who supported the attack on Iraq admit (after many years) that the plan to establish democratic and pro-American regime in Iraq failed (Kissinger 2016: 304; Zoellick 2020: 471). It became clear that in spite of their military success the United States has not been able to transform Iraq into a stable democratic state, on whose support it would be able to count in the American fight for hegemony in Asia. After twenty years, the American forces had to leave Afghanistan (in August 2021), where the anti-American fundamentalists returned to power. The defeats in the „war on terrorism” weakened the international position of the United States, creating perhaps an incentive for the Russian authorities to abandon their policy of co-operation with the West and to adopt a more aggressive stand in international relations. While this in no way justifies the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation, it helps to understand why it chose such a radical change in its foreign policy.

The fourth source of armed conflicts of the present century are the ethnic conflicts in Africa, the most important cause being the multi-ethnic composition of the population, itself a remnant of the colonial times. It is combined with lack of a democratic political culture and with the chronic weakness of government. The most important African civil wars after the end of the cold war occurred in Burundi (1993–2000), Djibouti (1991–1994), Ethiopia (since 2023), Mali (2012–2013), Central-African Republic (2004–2007 and since 2012), Rwanda (1990–1994) and South Sudan (2013–2014).

The fifth category of armed conflicts of the present century constitutes one of the consequences of the so-called Arab Spring that begun in January 2011 by the collapse of the authoritarian government of president Zin Ben-Ali in Tunisia. In the following years there were two military coups in Egypt and three civil wars: in Yemen, Libya and Syria. Other states got involved in those wars: Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen, France and the US in Libya, Russia, Turkey and the US in Syria. One of the consequences of the Arab Spring is the growth of a radical Islamism that leads to an intensification of armed conflicts. In October 2023, the radical Palestinian organization Hamas attacked the civilian Israeli population in the localities close to the Gaza enclave causing the death of over one thousand civilian victims and provoking a crushing Israeli military response, which during

the six month of fighting caused more than thirty thousand Palestinian deaths, mostly innocent civilian population, and huge destruction of living infrastructure. These tragic events terminated a forty years long freeze in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – one of the most lasting conflicts of our time.

■ THE RUSSIAN CHALLENGE

In February 2007, the Russian president Vladimir Putin – speaking in Munich – openly proclaimed the readiness of the Russian Federation to conduct a more aggressive policy directed against the American domination in the world. This statement indicated a turn in the Russian foreign policy. Russia declared its willingness to defend its interests even in confrontation with the United States and its allies. Such a change was not wholly unexpected. As early as in 2004, Putin's German biographer Boris Reitschuster stated that Putin „turns Russia in the direction of the Soviet Union, that is toward an authoritarian state, ruled by a clique of politicians who do not dare to stand in a free and honest election, who lose contact with society and for whom the highest value is not the good of man but the state and its power” (Reitschuster 2005: 314). On several occasions, Putin expressed his nostalgia for Russia losing the Soviet position in world politics, and described the collapse of the USSR as a geopolitical tragedy. A former American diplomat Cliff Kupchan believed, however, that because of the state of the Russian economy Putin would conduct a moderate policy consolidating the international status quo (Kupchan 2012). Most likely, this was also the hope of the Western policy-makers – like president Barack Obama – who undertook efforts to base relations with Russia on a co-operation principle. Such an expectation turned to be wrong. Putin chose the path of rebuilding Russia's power status by military means. There is no obvious explanation of this political turn.

The historian of American diplomacy (and formerly high-ranking diplomat) Robert Zoellick interpreting the new Russian policy emphasized the dangers which resulted from the dissolution of the USSR and from the „painful transformation of Russia in a postimperial state” (Zoellick 2020: 466). Such interpretation has some value based on historical analogies. In France, the transition from the imperial to the post-imperial state was connected with sharp internal conflicts, including a military coup of May 1958 (in response to the news of the government's decision to negotiate with the Algerian National Liberation Front). The French postimperial trauma, however, expressed itself in the internal politics, while in Russia it took the form of an aggression directed against neighbors.

The key to understanding changes in Russian policy can be found in the character of the state power established in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. The abortive coup of August 1991 resulted not only in the dissolution of the USSR but also in the radical change of the Russian political system. The Communist party

which had ruled the country since 1917 not only lost power but was disbanded as well. The last decade of the 20th century was marked by the internal political chaos and the inability of president Yeltsin to deal with it. Russia was on a way to become a failed state. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan pointed to Yeltsin's fundamental error consisting of abandoning a radical democratic reform immediately after the collapse of the August coup and the dissolution of the USSR. The consequence was the continuation of an authoritarian but a weak political regime and the mounting internal conflicts. Gradually, Russia was becoming a failed state. The century-old Russian dilemma was a combination of the state too weak economically to effectively compete with highly developed economies of the West, but powerful enough to challenge the West by demanding special rights in its relations with countries historically dependent on Russia. The complex of losing a world power status dominated in the Russian relation with the outside world (Malia 1999: 147).

The elevation to the top state position of Vladimir Putin turned out to become a breakthrough in Russian politics – the end of the gradual collapse of the state and the beginning of rebuilding the position of the Russian state as a regional power. Such a policy had from the very beginning a strong support of the Russian population, as indicated in sociological surveys conducted by independent institutions (Shestopal 2016: 379–383). In the first years of his rule Putin declared his willingness to continue the policy of a co-operation with the United States. One of the consequences was Russia's help offered to the US in its attack on Afghanistan in 2001. Russia not only declared its solidarity with the US, but also supplied a tangible logistic help.

The change in the Russian policy came after the American attack on Iraq. Russia, like many other states including America's strategic allies France and Germany, has not accepted the invasion of Iraq and saw in it an attempt to expand the American sphere of influence in Central Asia. The Russian Federation has not supported the USA, but also offered no assistance to Iraq remaining neutral in the first years of the war. It was only after the evident fiasco of the Iraqi invasion that Russia adopted a more aggressive tone in relations with the democratic West. Weakness invites difficulties.

Actions followed the Munich 2007 declaration. In August of 2008, the Russian forces invaded Georgia in response to the situation caused by the abortive attempt of the Georgian government to subdue the rebellious region of South Ossetia. Russia was close to take control of the whole country. The compromise, negotiated by France, saved the independence of Georgia, but left Russia with the dominant position in relations with the rebellious regions in the North of Georgia. The soft reaction of Western powers was most likely to be seen as an encouragement for the continuation of the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation.

The next step was taken in 2014, following the Ukrainian „revolution of dignity” which toppled a pro-Russian president Victor Yanukovich. Russia's annexation

of the Crimea and its support offered to the secessionists in the Donbass region turned out to be just a prelude to the full scale aggression starting in February 2022 and continued in the following years. Faced with the Russian aggression, the members of NATO offered Ukraine a meaningful assistance in armament and in the intelligence services. The ability of Ukraine to survive the Russian aggression depends mostly on the continuation of the support offered by the democratic nations of the Western alliance. In this way, the Russian-Ukrainian war has become a substitute for the third world war. In such a conflict, the political will plays a crucial role. Ukraine's ability to defend itself depends on the continuation of material and logistic help offered by the NATO members. In some of them, including the United States, an opposition to the continuation of such help has been voiced by influential politicians of the political Right. Because of this, the final outcome of the war depends largely on the outcomes of elections, particularly in the United States.

In his analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war John Alderdice pointed to the importance of the psychological factor – the will to fight in defense of what is considered to be a just cause (Alderdice 2024: 102 and 103). In this respect, Ukraine is in a much stronger position than Russia, because losing the war would mean a national disaster. For Russia losing the war would not have the same dramatic meaning as for Ukraine. Such a scenario, however, would almost certainly spell catastrophe for the present Russian regime.

On the global political scene, the Russian-Ukrainian war created far reaching polarization of positions, strongly correlated with the type of political regime of a particular state concerned and with the unequal distribution of wealth and poverty. The analysis presented by the research team of „The Economist” (Economist Intelligence 2023) show not only the great diversification on the position taken by states on the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war, but also a strong correlation between it and the economic situation of states concerned.

Of the 167 states included in this analysis, only 24 were considered „fully democratic”. None of them has supported Russia. On the opposite pole there are 59 states qualified as authoritarian. Russia belongs to this category along with such states as Belarus, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam – all of them support Russia. China qualifies also as an authoritarian state but it takes a more balanced position on the Ukrainian issue, what does not stop it from offering Russia a valuable assistance in arms delivery. Among the authoritarian states none openly condemned Russia for its aggression.

The majority of states that condemn Russia are democratic and wealthy. These states represent 16.1% of the population of the world but 61.2% of the world GDP. States supporting Russia or leaning toward her position represent 31.5% of the world population, but only 19.5% of the world GDP (Economist

Intelligence 2023: 31). Quite obviously, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict divides the world between the democratic and affluent North and the authoritarian (and relatively poor) South.

In this context, of a particular importance is the position of China – at present the second strongest power in the world, whose potential keep growing. China has not condemned Russia and helps Russia by arms deliveries. The war in Ukraine is in the interest of China since it has absorbed the attention and resources of the United States, restricting therefore its ability to effectively compete for the hegemony in Asia. The longer the war continues, the deeper the dependence of Russia becomes on the help offered it by China. One cannot exclude the possibility that the danger of becoming China's satellite may cause the Russian elite to reconsider its policy toward Ukraine and the West.

Regardless of its final outcome, the war in Ukraine constitutes an important turning point in world politics after the cold war. It is the first armed conflict after the cold war which might lead to the third world war. It is the first war between European states after 1945. It is also the first conflict in which NATO has been able to show its effectiveness.

It is, however, a qualitatively different conflict than the cold war. It is no longer „a struggle for the soul of mankind”, as the cold war was defined by president G.H.W. Bush (Leffler 2007). It is not an ideological war but a war for the spheres of imperial dominance. I do not share the pessimistic forecasts which stipulate that the eventual Russian success in the war against Ukraine would lead to the Russian attack on the Eastern flank of NATO, including Poland. But I do agree that strengthening of NATO (including its enlargement by admissions of Finland and Sweden) remains the most rationale response to the Russian dream of rebuilding the empire.

■ CONCLUSIONS

Armed conflicts which took place after the second world war can be divided in three main categories. The first consists of conflicts with the participation of one of the three great powers (USA, Russia and China). Their common characteristics is the attempt to defend or to expand the sphere of dominance of one of the top powers. Because of the existence of the weapons of mass destruction, the common characteristics of these conflicts is the limitation of conflicts in such a way that they would not lead to the mutual annihilation.

The second category of armed conflicts consists of wars between medium size state, fought mostly over border disputes, which are largely a remnant of the colonial past.

The third category of contemporary armed conflicts are domestic ones, mostly resulting from ethnic disputes, intensified by the end of the colonial rule, and from

the multi-national federations. A minority of the domestic conflicts have roots in ideological differences.

The geography of armed conflicts changed dramatically. Until the mid 20th century the majority of such conflicts took place in Europe. After the second world war Europe has become a peaceful region for at least a half a century. Over the last years, however, a war between European states became again one of the most meaningful events of our time. The ongoing war in Ukraine polarized the world and may become the source of future conflicts. Much depends on the way in which this war will end.

Most modern armed conflicts do not end in a clear victory, but with a compromise or some kind of freeze. This is mostly due to the fear that the escalation could lead to a global confrontation with the use of weapons of mass destruction. There is no optimistic scenario. Armed conflicts have become a part of contemporary political relations. We cannot avoid them. We have to be prepared.

REFERENCES

- Allison Graham T. (1971), *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Allison Graham T. (2017), *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Alderdice John Lord (2024), *New insights into the psychology of individual and large groups I a world of changing conflicts*, „International Political Science Review”, vol. 45, no. 1.
- Aron Raymond (1962), *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Paris: Plon.
- Balcerowicz Bolesław (2017), *Interwencja w Iraku 2003–2010 – katastrofa w wojnie z wyboru*, w: Marek Madej (ed.), *Wojny Zachodu – Interwencje zbrojne państw zachodnich po zimnej wojnie*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, p. 147–176.
- Beaufre Andre (1968), *Wstęp do strategii. Odstraszanie i strategia*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej.
- Bebler Anton (2015), *„Frozen Conflicts” in Europe*, Opladen–Berlin–Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Brodie Bernard (1959), *Strategy for the Missile Age*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown Archie (1996), *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brzezinski Zbigniew (1986), *Game Plan: How to Conduct the US-Soviet Contest*, Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Brzezinski Zbigniew (2007), *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*, New York: Basic Books.
- Clancy Tom, Franks Frederick M. (1997), *Into the Storm: A Study of Command*, New York: Putnam Adult.
- Economist Intelligence (2023), *Democracy Index 2023. Age of conflict*, London 2023.
- Fraga Iribarne Miguel (1962), *La Guerra y la teoría del conflicto social*, Madrid: Real Academia des Ciencias Morales y Politicas.
- Gurr Ted R. (1970), *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Gurr Ted R. (1993), *Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict since 1945*, „International Political Science Review”, vol. 14, no. 2.
- Hackett John W. (1979), *The Third World War: August 1985. A Future History*, London: Sphere Books.
- Herspring Dale R. (2008), *Rumsfeld's Wars: The Arrogance of Power*, Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.
- Hertz Aleksander (1946), *Zagadnienie socjologii wojska i wojny: (próba problematyki)*, „Przegląd Socjologiczny”, 1–4, p. 119–140.
- Holmes Stephen (2007), *The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to Terror*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Idler Annette (2024), *Change in armed conflicts: An introduction*, „International Political Science Review”, vol. 45, no 1.
- Janowitz Morris, van Doorn Jacques (eds.) (1971), *On Military Intervention*, Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press.
- Karnow Stanley (1983), *Vietnam: A History*, New York: Viking Press.
- Kearns Goodwin Doris (1976), *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Kissinger Henry (1957), *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Kissinger Henry (2016), *Porządek światowy*, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne.
- Krzyżanowski Adam (1918), *Socjologia wojny*, Kraków: Drukarnia E. i K. Kozielscy.
- Kupchan Cliff (2012), *Putin's New Constraints*, „The New York Times”, March 13.
- Kuźniar Roman (2006), *Polityka i siła: Studia strategiczne – zarys problematyki*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Leffler Melvyn P. (2007), *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Linz Juan J. and Stepan Alfred (1996), *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore–London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Madej Marek (ed.) (2017), *Wojny Zachodu. Interwencje zbrojne państw zachodnich po zimnej wojnie*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Malia Martin (1999), *Russia under Western Eyes; From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Cambridge, MA.–London: Harvard University Press.
- Merle Marcel (1974), *Sociologie des relations internationales*, Paris: Dalloz.
- Nye Joseph S. (2009), *Konflikty międzynarodowe. Wprowadzenie do teorii i historii*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.
- Paige Glenn D. (1968), *The Korean Decision, June 24–30, 1950*, New York: The Free Press.
- Perlmutter Amos (1977), *The Military and Politics in Modern Times. On Professionals, Praetorians, and Revolutionary Soldiers*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press.
- Reitschuster Boris (2005), *Władimir Putin. Dokąd prowadzi Rosję?* Warszawa: Świat Książki.
- Shestopal Elena (2016), *New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0*, Lanham–Boulder–New York–London: Lexington Books.
- Skocpol Theda (1979), *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Steinmetz Sebald R. (1929), *Soziologie des Kriegeres*, Leipzig: Johan Ambrosius Barth Verlag.
- Stoessinger John George (1985), *Why nations go to war*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Szerer Mieczysław (1916), *Socjologia wojny*, Kraków: S.A. Krzyżanowski.

- Wiatr Jerzy J. (2002), *Współczesne stosunki międzynarodowe: wybrane zagadnienia*, Koszalin: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Bałtyckiej Wyższej Szkoły Humanistycznej.
- Wright Quincy (1942), *A study of war*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wu Charles K.-S., Wang Austin, Yeh Yao-Yuan, Chen Fang-Yu (2024), *Public support for the use of force in non-Western and non-major powers. The case of a China-Taiwan war*, „International Political Science Review”, vol. 45, no. 1.
- Zoellick Robert B. (2020), *America in the World. A History of U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, New York–Boston: Twelve.

Jerzy J. Wiatr

CONTEMPORARY ARMED CONFLICTS: AN OUTLINE OF A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

After the second world war armed conflicts between states underwent changes caused by the effects of the invention of weapons of mass destruction and of the division of Europe between two blocs of states dominated by the two superpowers: USA and USSR. Most of the armed conflicts during the cold war period were caused either by the crisis of colonialism or by the ethnic rivalries, mostly in the new states. The Korean war was the only armed conflict between states with the direct involvement of two great powers (USA and China) and caused by the ideological division of the world. After the end of the cold war the dissolution of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia caused several ethnic wars, with the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia. A new wave of armed conflicts was caused by the Islamic radicalism in Iran and in some Arab states and by the growing strength of China as an emerging superpower. The Russian aggression against Ukraine created a new international situation with the indirect involvement of the democratic states. Future architecture of international relations depends on the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Keywords: armed conflicts; colonialism; ethnicity; weapons of mass destruction; war