

ASYMMETRIC THREATS IN THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF A MODERN STATE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the possibilities of Security Education from a processual and workroom aspect (educational aspect) in order to prevent threats to human space. The main research problem formulated by the Author is "What are the main threats for man and how does Security Education prevent them?"

The content of the article consists of two main parts: determinants of the safety education process and the essential social and cultural threats to human existence. Much attention has been devoted to the risks to personal security.

KEY WORDS

Threats, safety, education for security, feeling of security.

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Introduction

Security is a multidimensional concept with an extremely wide scope and relevance¹, which fosters the ability to distinguish numerous dimensions and planes of safety². It belongs to particularly complex areas of human existence³.

Security⁴ of a state⁵ is an unsteady value and highly volatile in time. It is de-

pendent on many factors of a nature external to it, as well as of an internal origin. It is difficult to weigh which are more important as the rapidly advancing process of globalisation of the world is gradually blurring the distinctions between these spheres. Similarly, the nature of classic conflicts between states, and at the same time the nature of the subjects acting as parties to the conflict, is becoming increasingly obscured.

Most frequently safety is perceived through the prism of the procedure⁶. In this case, "we should be aware that the variables in this process⁷ will create

¹ B. Wiśniewski, R. Kowalski J. Koziół, M. Szyłkowska, *Bezpieczeństwo procesów decyzyjnych*, TUM, Wrocław 2018, p. 10.

² More, K. Jąłoszyński, B. Wiśniewski, T. Wojtuszek (ed.), *Współczesne postrzeganie bezpieczeństwa*, WSA, Bielsko-Biała 2007 oraz Wiśniewski B., Prońko J., *Ognia ochrony państwa*, AON, Warszawa 2003.

³ P. Lubiewski, *Bezpieczeństwo państwa – reminiscencje*, „Zeszyty naukowe PWSZ im Witelona w Legnicy”, Nr 31/4/2020, p. 51.

⁴ B. Wiśniewski, *Praktyczne aspekty badań bezpieczeństwa*, Difin, Warszawa 2020, p. 20 and B. Kaczmarczyk, B. Wiśniewski, R. Gwardyński, *Security of an individual*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Witelona w Legnicy”, Nr 3/28/2018, Legnica 2018, pp. 67-78.

⁵ *Administracja publiczna a bezpieczeństwo państwa*, Z. Piątek, B. Wiśniewski, A. Osierda (ed.), WSA, Bielsko-Biała 2007, p. 15.

⁶ B. Kogut, P. Lubiewski, *Management and coordination of rescue activities*, Вісник Львівського Державного Університету Безпеки Життєдіяльності, Nr 17, Львів 2018, pp. 68-73.

⁷ R. Gwardyński, *Safety in Praxeological Approach*, [in:] *Security – Threats, Law and Organization*, Schriften zu Mittel- und Osteuropa in der Europäischen Integration, Band 24, (ed.) B. Wiśniewski, G.G. Sander, P. Kobes,

a different level of security each time. The security process also means a certain cycle in which safety evolves after the occurrence of certain conditions, having a variable value in each phase of its development. The end of a given cycle may produce a result which we shall define as the state of safety in certain conditions: spatial, temporal, material, decision-making and at a given scale of threat⁸.

Analysis of the level of security of the modern state⁹ requires intensive observation of the essence of unconventional conflicts, and in particular the form of application of various means, which in their essence will trigger hazards of asymmetric nature.

The multifaceted nature of security¹⁰ that has been indicated so far is related to the subjective assessment of phenomena occurring around a specific entity, or in it alone¹¹.

The nature of the asymmetrical threat

To understand the nature of asymmetric threats, it is worth referring to the definition of the threat itself. In the literature on the subject, one can find a number of meaningful takes on the term threat. This demonstrates that danger is complex in its essence. Commonly, the term threat is "intuitively understood and associated

with human fear of loss of values such as: health, life, freedom, liberty or material goods¹². In the literature on the matter various sources define this term"¹³. For example, Brunon Holyst proposes to consider as a hazard "a difficult situation, which occurs when there is a fear of losing a value highly esteemed by the subject"¹⁴. A slightly different perspective is presented by Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, who sees danger as "the possibility of the occurrence of one of the negatively valued phenomena"¹⁵.

It seems, therefore, that the essence of a threat is the occurrence of a specific phenomenon, event and its subjective assessment by the entity perceiving said threat. Therefore, a hazard is strongly conditioned, in terms of its evaluation, by a subjective psychological factor. This conditioning was aptly presented by Daniel Frei, who highlighted the states of perception of safety in relation to threat assessment, referring to:

- insecurity state (existence of danger)
- occurs when there is a large real threat and its perception is accurate;
- obsession state – exists when a minor threat is perceived as a major danger;
- faux-security state – occurs when the threat is serious but is perceived as minor;
- security state – this is when the external threat is low and its interpretation is correct¹⁶.

The complex essence of threat is also shown by Leszek F. Korzeniowski, pre-

Verlag Dr. Kovač, Hamburg 2019, p. 11.

⁸ A.Czupryński, *Bezpieczeństwo w ujęciu teoretycznym*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria – Badania – Praktyka*, A. Czupryński, B. Wiśniewski, J. Zboina (ed.), Centrum Naukowo-Badawcze Ochrony Przeciwpowarowej Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, Józefów 2017, p. 15.

⁹ More, A. Czupryński, B. Wiśniewski, J. Zboina, *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie. Wybrane problemy badań*, Centrum Naukowo-Badawcze Ochrony Przeciwpowarowej im. Józefa Tuliszkowskiego Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, Józefów 2017, p. 6.

¹⁰ B. Wiśniewski, *Przygotowania obronne resortu spraw wewnętrznych*, MSWiA, Warszawa 2014, p. 9.

¹¹ M. Cieślarczyk, B. Wiśniewski, *Współczesne rozumienie bezpieczeństwa*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo w teorii i badaniach naukowych. Wydanie drugie uzupełnione*, B. Wiśniewski (ed.), WSPoL, Szczytno 2018, p. 15.

¹² More, B. Wiśniewski, J. Falecki, *System zarządzania kryzysowego państwa, w tym Sił Zbrojnych RP*, Bielsko-Biała 2009, p. 17.

¹³ B.Wiśniewski, *System bezpieczeństwa państwa. Konteksty teoretyczne i praktyczne*, WSPoL, Szczytno 2013, p. 31.

¹⁴ L. Korzeniowski, S. Puzyński (ed.), *Encyklopedyczny słownik psychiatrii*, Warszawa 1986, p. 535.

¹⁵ F.X. Kaufmann, *Sicherheit als soziologisches und sozialpolitisches Problem*, Stuttgart 1970, p. 167.

¹⁶ D. Frei, *Sicherheit: Grundfragen der Weltpolitik*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1977, pp. 17-21.

senting its intricacy in the introduced typology. The variety of features that characterize hazards permits to divide them into:

- objective (real) or subjective (individual, referring to the subject's sense of security);
- intrinsic (interfering with the stability and harmony of a particular organism, system) or extrinsic (relating) to disruptive actions by other parties);
- abstract (on average constantly occurring in specific situations) or concrete (actually occurring in a given situation);
- potential (referring to an actual but passive action that could potentially occur) or active (referring to an actual and active action that threatens an entity, a system);
- static (the force of the interaction is inactive or less than the potential of the counteracting system) or dynamic (the interaction is active and strong enough to cause undesirable changes);
- individual (refers to an individual) or group (called universal, where the influence is directed towards many people)¹⁷.

It therefore stems from the above that a threat is a destructive element for the broadly understood existence of a human being. Of course, the degree of destruction may vary from slight to extreme, jeopardising or even depriving the individual of life. It seems that the foregoing conclusion can be applied to any entity. Hence, in the case of human beings these will be risks to their existence, while in the case of the state it will be risks to its attributes¹⁸. In spite of the mentioned

above, however, the consequences of the security threat will always be felt by a person as the final beneficiary of security¹⁹.

So what is an asymmetric threat? Is it a new kind of menace, so far unexplored in its essence, resulting perhaps from the combination of features of other threats? To answer this question it is necessary to note that more and more changes are seen in the classical understanding of armed conflict according to Clausewitz, although its essence in the notion of forcing the opponent to fulfil the will of the aggressor is still the same. The non-classical approach to conflict results in an increasing use of atypical measures and, moreover, the state as an actor of action cannot often be clearly perceived.

Asymmetric threats are not new and previously unknown phenomena. Among their determinants we can distinguish such features as the unexpected, surprising, unusual or new impact on the subject. They may also be characterised by the use of novel, flexibly developed tactics, with the use of unconventional elements which are not often weaponry, but fulfil such a function. An important feature of those is that they do not find their sources in the powers of nature, but in the conscious and directed activity of a human being, a party to a potential conflict. It is noticeable that asymmetric threats target undervalued gaps in the existing security of protected areas, zones, systems and usually trigger surprise. Attacking at unforeseen times or in unexpected ways enhances that surprise, as does concealing preparations or misleading the victim about objectives, strategies, capabilities and deployment. These are important

¹⁷ L.F. Korzeniowski, *Podstawy nauk o bezpieczeństwie*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 88-92.

¹⁸ J.Prońko, *Bezpieczeństwo państwa. Zarys teorii problemu i zadań administracji publicznej*, WSA, Bielsko-Biała 2007, s. 9.

¹⁹ More, P. Lubiewski, Drózdź A., *Zagrożenie – rozważania na gruncie teorii*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Witelona w Legnicy”, 34(1)/2020, pp. 77-88.

characteristics that allow the adversary to avoid a confrontation that is unfavourable to the latter. This course of action enables one to attain multiple objectives and evade retaliation²⁰.

The essence of asymmetric threats, it would seem, is not the emergence of a new kind of destructive phenomena, but lies in a novel strategy of application, exploitation of existing hazards. So these are not new dangers, but rather a fresh form of their application in conflict. Unfortunately, asymmetric threats can appear across the entire range of CBRN-type risks. In their essence, symmetric dangers "rely primarily on strategy, on addressing the planes in the adversary where the attacking state has the superiority. In such conflicts, the opponent is also perceived differently: he ceases to be known and becomes dispersed, unfamiliar and thus nullifies the possibility of retaliation (...). The definition of asymmetric threats in military terms is based on the opponent's use of unconventional means of action, resulting from disproportionality in military capabilities. In political science, however, researchers go beyond the scheme of regular military operations and traditionally understood armed conflicts and shift the weight of the definition to the activities of non-state players, listing terrorism, organised crime, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, and the use of information²¹ and communication technologies, among others. There is a complete detachment from time and place (transnationality and aterritoriality)

of the operations being undertaken in this way. Such activities acquire a total character, without a specific battlefield and time, and in relation to entities of a dispersed character, without a designated decision-making centre"²².

One can see this form of threat when there is a conflict between two or more parties. According to Robin Geiß, coupled with the increasing involvement of non-state subjects, the disparity between the belligerent parties is steadily increasing and the various contemporary armed conflicts appear to have an increasingly asymmetric structure. In contrast to the geostrategic arrangement that prevailed throughout the Cold War, a widely recognised paradox of today's strategic environment is that military superiority can actually accentuate the threat of nuclear, biological, chemical and generally perfidious attack. Indeed, direct assaults on civilians, hostage-taking and the use of human shields – practices that have long been outlawed in armed conflict – have seen a revival in recent hostilities, in which a much weaker side has often sought to gain comparative advantage over a militarily superior enemy by resorting to such practices as a matter of strategy. International terrorism, although not necessarily waged in the context of armed conflict leading to the application of international humanitarian law, is commonly regarded as the epitome of such asymmetry²³.

In the modern arena of political conflicts, "cultural differences in the contemporary, globalised world, especially the frictions occurring on religious basis, are

²⁰ B.W. Bennett, *Responding to asymmetric threats* [in:] Stuart E. Johnson, Martin C. Libicki, Gregory F. Treverton, Bruce W. Bennett, Nurith Berstein, Frank Camm, David SC Chu, Paul K. Davis, Daniel B. Fox, James R. Hosek, David Mussington, Stuart H. Starr, Harry J. Thie, *New Challenges, ew Tools for Defense Decisionmaking*, RAND 2003, pp. 43-44.

²¹ More: P. Guła, J. Prońko, B. Wiśniewski, *Zarządzanie informacją w sytuacjach kryzysowych*, WSA, Bielsko-Biała 2009.

²² E. Sadowska, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne – definicja, świadomość społeczna i rola we współczesnym świecie*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego” 2017, Vol. 11, Nr 2, p. 24.

²³ R. Geiß, *Asymmetric conflict structures*, “International Review of the Red Cross”, Vol. 88, Nr 864/206, p. 758.

becoming increasingly important. This generates the emergence of groups of a terrorist and fanatical nature, which use non-traditional methods and forms of combat. Adversaries of this type cannot in any way be fought according to traditional principles. The only solution is to undertake irregular actions aimed at combating an enemy operating in an unconventional space often resorting to means of information warfare²⁴.

However, experience to date proves that asymmetric threats do not only occur when there is an imbalance in the potential. An analysis of present-day actions, for example on the part of the Russian Federation, confirms that this type of operation is also used by the stronger parties. It is noteworthy that the use of such a strategy gives the superpowers the capacity to make themselves credible and to legitimise their actions in the eyes of world public opinion.

In the above context, possible areas for the emergence of measures defined as asymmetric hazards may be hybrid operations in the field of energy or dependence on military technology, information technology, media or in the economic sphere. Characteristic of asymmetric threats also includes a strong focus of operations that may be defined as asymmetric dangers towards the internal security environment of the state²⁵.

At these levels, active forms may appear, which correlate with major political efforts and influence, also in the sphere of diplomatic relations aimed at profoundly impacting public opinion. It is noticeable that the dominance in this area is manifested by states considered to be global

or regional powers which target minor and less developed countries.

A common target of hybrid conflict might be critical infrastructure, subjected to the effects of asymmetric threats resulting in damage, destabilization of functions, partial or total loss of control over its vital elements²⁶.

Asymmetric risks are in their essence a specific form of non-linear activity of groups or even individuals with various motives and organisational aspects. An example of such operations are numerous forms of terrorist acts²⁷ designed to cause significant harm, loss of functionality of ICT networks or other devices important for the public welfare²⁸, deterioration of health and life of people, erosion of trust in the government and the introduction of mass panic and fear.

Asymmetric threats and hybrid conflict

It must be stressed that in this context, both the physical hazard and its availability factor play a dominant role. Elements of infrastructure important to public life may be threatened through their destruction or strain via physical measures, due to terrorist acts, but also by diversion, which represent the main asymmetric forms of security dangers and even part of broader hybrid operations. The mentioned accessibility is connected with ownership resulting from functionality of material elements of public life²⁹. This

²⁴ E.Sadowska, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne – definicja, świadomość społeczna...*, op. cit., pp. 24-25

²⁵ More, Wiśniewski B., Zwęgliński T., Socha R., *The theory of Commanding*, Вісник Львівського Державного Університету Безпеки Життєдіяльності, Number 14/2016. Lviv 2016, pp. 47-48.

²⁶ More, M. Mitrović, *Critical national infrastructure in the scope of asymmetric security threats involved in hybrid warfare concept* [in:] S. Stojanovic (ed.), *Asymmetry and strategy*, Ministry of Defence of The Republic of Serbia University of Defence Strategic Research Institute & National Defence School, Belgrad 2018, p. 163.

²⁷ More, *Terroryzm – skutki i reagowanie*, B. Wiśniewski, P. Guła (ed.), *Zdrowie i Zarządzanie*, Kraków 2009, p. 8.

²⁸ *Współczesny wymiar funkcjonowania Policji*, B. Wiśniewski, Z. Piątek (ed.), AON, Warszawa 2009, p. 7.

²⁹ Z. Ścibiorek, B. Wiśniewski, R.B. Kuc, A. Dawidczyk, *Bezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne. Podręcznik akademicki*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2015, p. 36.

aspect shall be referred to the country's ability to exercise full control over, for example, infrastructure for the distribution of, inter alia, gas, oil, mineral resources, or even water, such as pipelines, supply routes, reservoirs, mines, etc. A state that does not possess full control over key aspects of its resources is potentially at very high risk of asymmetric threats in very troublesome domains of operation.

While considering the problem of asymmetric risks it is impossible not to notice that the term asymmetric threats is closely related to another one, i.e. "hybrid war". The classical approach to the state in matters of security, including defence, is increasingly turning out to be obsolete. States that do not possess organisational structures adequately prepared for asymmetrical threats become weak when confronted with such menaces. Modern protection and defence systems still show concealed weaknesses of an institutional nature, especially in the area of preventive and protective measures³⁰. In addition, if an attack cannot be attributed to a specific adversary, retaliatory actions are unlikely to materialise, and thus the threat may gain in frequency of occurrence and thereby strength of impact.

A unique area of asymmetric threats occurrence is cyberspace, due to the wide availability of modern technologies enabling to mask the identification of the source of the threat with high efficiency, and often also its initial symptoms, providing greater opportunities to expand the field of destruction, threat. This area also concerns infrastructure, including facilities critical to the functioning of the state. Undoubtedly, "cyber threats and cyber attacks are now becoming increasingly common, complex

and damaging. Among the significant asymmetric vulnerabilities affecting critical infrastructure, stand out, intelligence and destructive activities targeting smart devices and networks (...) In the area of penetration and destructive actions, the use of various techniques has been identified. These allowed to break through security flaws in computer systems, software, network settings, such as: vulnerabilities in system security (...) failures to update computer software loopholes, inadequate security policies, ineffective detection of unauthorised activities in cyberspace, non-effective strategies to mitigate the consequences of surveillance and destructive acts. Also, campaigns aimed at destroying information used attack vectors on the Internet that consisted of sequential assaults on remote devices, database attacks, interception and modification of information between sender and receiver (...) "³¹.

Modern security planning based on the classical form of hazards will, in essence, become less and less effective over time. The asymmetric type of threat is often underestimated as a highly effective action on the part of the adversary, and thus too often comes as a shock when the contingency is realised. There seems to be a tendency for analysts to assess a potential adversary when there is little knowledge of their strategy, per analogiam to their own country's capabilities. Undoubtedly, the need to perceive a new form of menace will require out-of-the-box thinking to assess in advance how an opponent might exploit a threat in an innovative way. The classical perception of threats, limits the prediction of the consequences that asymmetric chal-

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 161-162.

³¹ J. Cichosz, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne w kontekście Nowych technologii. Unia europejska. Stany Zjednoczone – studium przypadku*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego” 2017, Vol. 11, Nr 2, pp. 181-182.

allenges may bring, and therefore limits the possibilities of changes in the area of the operational potential of the state security system, including the emergency response forces. It is notable that resource modifications tend to focus on the modernisation of forces in terms of traditional means of protection and defence. Consequently, less attention is paid to developing the means and location of equipment and the forces required to respond to unusual asymmetric contingencies. Without adequate preparation of the security system, reacting to this form of danger will require a significant quantity of military personnel for protection and defence, which may become not only uneconomical, but above all ineffective. Responding to such threats takes time³².

At this point it is advisable to quote Ryszard Zięba's thought that "the security (...) of a state is a phenomenon which changes in time. The evolution of its subjective and objective elements makes it a sequence of shifting states and a social process on an international scale. It is a process in which existing challenges and risks, social perception and concepts of their resolution clash, as well as the actions and influence of states aimed at building their confidence of survival, possession and development freedoms"³³. An excellent confirmation of this thesis are asymmetric threats that cannot be contained in the current cognitive framework, and the power of which is the unpredictability of human ingenuity.

Therefore, must modern societies expect an increase in the occurrence of such threats? It seems that due to their effectiveness, especially with the use of

the increasingly extensive information sphere (cyberspace), giving the possibility of effective action not only to the strong but also to the weak and even small entities, the intensity of their appearance is likely to intensify.

Summary

The term asymmetric threats often used in the literature seems to be a sort of mental shortcut, a significant simplification of the problem that does not reveal its essence, but rather gives the illusion of the emergence of a new type of hazard. It appears that it would be appropriate to call the issue an asymmetric form of threats, which in the author's opinion better highlights the essence of the problem. Such an approach to the issue can be seen, for example, in American studies. For example, in the American report "Strategic Assessment" issued by the National Defense University in Washington, published in 1998, the term asymmetric threat is used to describe the technique of surprise action and the use of armaments in an unconventional way. Also Polish representatives of security sciences, e.g. Piotr Gawliczek and Jacek Pawłowski, interpret the meaning of the term as organising and acting differently from the opponent, including the use of all kinds of discrepancies in widely understood potentials³⁴.

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³² B.W. Bennett, *Responding to asymmetric threats...*, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

³³ R. Zięba, *Instytucjonalizacja bezpieczeństwa europejskiego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 2001, p.47.

³⁴ More, P. Gawliczek, J. Pawłowski, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne*, AON, Warszawa 2003, pp. 11-12.

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