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# ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS BY NATO INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES: TRENDS AND EXPERIENCE

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the approaches of NATO member states intelligence agencies towards assessing threats that have a destructive impact on their and Ukraine's national security, considering the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the consequences of Russian aggression, and changes in the international policies of leading countries.

It has been proved that special services of the above-mentioned states prioritize the following destabilizing factors of influence: unlawful interference in the country's internal affairs, sponsorship of extremism and terrorism, numerous cyberattacks on various information structures and networks, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and influence operations, etc.

It has been determined that a particular danger to the national security of NATO member states is primarily the intelligence and subversive activities of Russian and Chinese special services as an integral part of the state security architecture of these countries. NATO member states special services also take into consideration the destructive influence on national security caused by the intelligence services of Iran and Turkey since these countries support the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation in the international political arena.

**Key words:** national security, security environment, anti-Western position, destructive influence, foreign intelligence services, counterintelligence, extremism, terrorism.

## **Introduction**

"Geopolitics is back, and it is back to take revenge on us for the disregard for the lessons of history that we demonstrated in the post-Cold War period," is how former US National Security Advisor H. McMaster characterized the current situation in the world (Makmaster, H.,2023).

The war of the Russian Federation (RF) against Ukraine changed the world more than any other event since the end of the Cold War. The erroneous assessment of the results of the Cold War and the inability to clearly explain the essence of the processes that took place in the post-Soviet space in the early 1990s led to a number of wrong political decisions on the part of the West. Instead of creating a balanced security space that would exclude a new nuclear confrontation, a decision was made to "reset" relations with Russia and integrate it into international structures.

All these attempts failed back in 2014, and then, finally, on February 24, 2022, when the destruction of the international security system and arms control began. For the first time, the aggressor is using the tactics of nuclear terror against Ukraine, the deliberate, consistent, and brutal destruction of complex civilian infrastructure, and is carrying out the largest attacks in history using drones, cruise and ballistic missiles, mines, cluster and phosphorus bombs.

Thus, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has fundamentally changed the perception of the security situation in the world at the global, regional and subregional levels.

This, in a turn, has led to fundamental changes in the policies of leading states, as well as the European Union and NATO, and has stimulated the strengthening of transatlantic ties.

**Analysis of relevant research.** The study of the transformation of intelligence activities is one of the important areas of scientific research both in the domestic political space and on the international arena (Hvozď, V., 2018; Verfassungsschutzbericht, 2022; Annual report for 2023; Danmarks trusselvurdering 2024; Annual report for 2023; Public Report 2022; CSIS Public Report 2023). In particular, the monograph (Hvozď, V., 2018) presents the results of a comprehensive study of the role of intelligence activities in the system of ensuring the national state security.

Despite a number of scientific works on this problem, there is a need for a systematic analysis of intelligence activities' transformation within the framework of a new security architecture formation, caused by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

**The aim of the study** is to research the transformation of intelligence activities in the context of a new international security architecture formation, the need for which was caused by the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine.

### ***Theoretical background***

The war in Ukraine has accelerated global processes, led to increased uncertainty, unpredictability, and, accordingly, nervousness in the behavior of individual players. This significantly complicates determining strategic and tactical priorities, coordinating current cooperation between countries within the framework of joint actions aimed at overcoming crisis phenomena.

The study identified the positions of a number of foreign special services regarding the assessment of modern challenges and threats that directly affect the national security of NATO member states. In particular, the specifics of the approaches to identifying modern challenges and threats to national security of the following foreign special services were analyzed:

Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution of Germany (BfV).

Joint Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD), Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD).

Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS), National Security Authority of Norway (NSM), Police Security Service of Norway (PST).

Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), Military Intelligence Service (FET), Center for Terrorist Analysis (PET).

State Agency for National Security of Bulgaria (SANSB).

Security and Intelligence Agency of the Republic of Croatia (SOA).

Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS).

### ***Result and Discussion***

As a result of the analysis, it was found that the above-mentioned special services primarily identify those challenges and threats to the national security of the state that are primarily associated with the Russian threat, in particular:

intelligence activities against the country and information warfare;

foreign interference in the politics of another state;

destructive impact on the state of the democratic system;

the problem of international terrorism;

extremism on socio-political grounds;

risk processes associated with migration.

The content of the main modern challenges and threats identified by foreign intelligence services is disclosed as follows:

*Intelligence activities and information wars against European countries.* European countries that play an important role in the EU, NATO and other international organizations, as well as supporting Ukraine in organizing resistance to Russian aggression, have become the object of intensified intelligence and subversive activities (ISA) by Russian special services and those foreign countries that support the Kremlin's policy. Among such countries, special services of NATO member states distinguish: the Republic of Belarus, China, Turkey, Iran. In the context of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine, such ISA is becoming increasingly multifaceted and sophisticated and is constantly being improved by the specified countries.

The main activities of the Russian special services are intelligence, sabotage and disinformation, unlawful interference, sponsorship of extremism and terrorism, and cyberattacks, which pose a serious threat to the national interests of NATO member states. Russian special services are increasing their activity in implementing the following activities: obtaining intelligence in the context of sanctions against Moscow and support for Ukraine by Western countries; conducting hostile activities in cyberspace; obtaining classified information in the political, business, research, technological, and military spheres; increasing social tension in European countries, etc. The same applies to the activities of Belarusian special services, although their capabilities and needs are much smaller than those of Russia.

China's intelligence agencies have broad powers, which they use primarily to prop up the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC). They play a key role in Beijing's drive to realize the "China Dream" by 2049, which would see China become a global leader and superpower at least equal to the United States.

To achieve its goals, the PRC uses economic, scientific and technical intelligence, due to which they partially or completely take over advanced European technology firms and purposefully recruit experts from foreign enterprises. Chinese intelligence services primarily focus on obtaining information about the structure, armaments and training of NATO member states for possible armed aggression by the Russian Federation against the Alliance, as well as on the acquisition of modern military technologies. At the same time, the PRC intelligence services conduct influence operations, through which the CPC tries to promote its own interests abroad based on long-term plans.

The Intelligence Law, adopted in 2017, obliges Chinese citizens and companies, regardless of the country where they are located, to cooperate with the PRC's intelligence services. In recent years, China has been implementing a national strategy called "Military-Civil Integration", which aims to strengthen scientific and research cooperation between universities, private companies, and the armed forces. In practice, this means that during international contacts in the scientific field, there is uncertainty about whose interests Chinese business partners actually represent. Therefore, research institutions and companies from European countries risk transferring knowledge or technology to the PRC that will be used to build the potential of the Chinese army or, when developing technologies, for the security agencies of a totalitarian regime. In addition, it has been proved that China sometimes acts as a medium destination in illegal purchases for countries under sanctions, such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Beijing establishes contacts with the Chinese diaspora around the world through the United Front Work Department, which is subordinated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

The activities of Iran's intelligence services are determined by the political situation in this country and in the Middle East in general. The main direction of the work of Iran's intelligence services is the fight against opposition groups and individuals who the country's authorities consider to be a threat to the existence of the regime. Iran has declared its enemies not only the United States, but also Israel and the Jewish community. The targets of the Iranian intelligence services are the representative offices of Jewish states and pro-Israeli organizations in other countries. Another direction of Iran intelligence services' work are attempts to acquire materials for their nuclear program.

Turkey intelligence services play a key role in the system of state power. They are a reliable support for President R. T. Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party in ensuring internal security and collecting information for preparing political decisions. In European countries, Turkey intelligence services spy on those organizations and individuals who oppose the current Turkish government.

*Foreign interference into the politics of another state.* In order to achieve certain goals, countries that support the Kremlin's policy have intensified hostile actions against other leading democratic countries in the world. Among such actions, the spread of various kinds of disinformation can be considered an important destructive factor. The main goal of spreading disinformation materials is to undermine the trust of the population to governmental institutions or electoral processes. In addition, special services of the Russian Federation, China, Iran and Turkey are trying to control, intimidate and persecute representatives of their diaspora (especially dissidents), as well as promote favorable for them narratives. A vivid example of this is that the Chinese Ministry of Public Security has illegally created three so-called police stations in Canada. There have been cases when representatives of the Chinese law enforcement agencies, without the consent of local authorities, came to Canada and tried to force Canadians of Chinese origin to return to China.

In such a way, special services of the specified countries, directly or through proxies in the governmental institutions of NATO member states, can covertly interfere into electoral processes in EU countries, shape public discourse, or influence on the political positions of elected to European structures officials.

*Destructive impact on the state of the democratic system.* Recently, European countries have had to deal with a large number and a significant variety of such threats as terrorism, extremism, offensive cyber programs, the constant improvement of weapons of mass destruction by totalitarian countries, espionage, covert influence on the internal politics of another state, interference into its internal life, the organization of sabotage within the country, the increase in international crime. All this negatively affects the rule of law and poses risks to the economic security of the world's leading countries. In particular, the Russian war against Ukraine led to a gas shortage in Europe, which created a situation that gave new opportunities to supporters of anti-institutionalism to spread the conspiracy theory about the "evil elite".

Nowadays, the situation in European countries is characterized by a lack of progress in stabilization and reform processes, as well as numerous unresolved interstate and interethnic issues.

*The problem of international terrorism.* In 2022, the most affected by terrorist activity regions were Africa, the Middle East, Central and West Asia, where structures of such jihadist organizations as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda operated. The efforts of the international anti-terrorist coalition limited the potential of terrorist organizations, but did not help eliminate the threat from their activities. No attack was recorded in Europe for which one of the specified terrorist organizations would have taken responsibility. Despite the reduction in the capabilities of jihadist structures to conduct external terrorist operations, the risk of planning and committing terrorist attacks on the territory of the European continent remains. The Russian war against Ukraine did not significantly affect the activities of terrorist organizations. At the same time, they called on their supporters to take advantage of the situation for jihad against the "crusaders", which they call the EU countries.

*Extremism on socio-political grounds.* In Europe, the activities of extremist organizations of both poles have intensified. These structures focus their propaganda efforts on negative trends for European economies due to anti-epidemic restrictions and the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Currently, there is a deepening of contacts between far-right formations of individual European countries with similar structures outside the European continent. However, today the war in Ukraine is not in the focus of their propaganda campaigns, since this formation

emphasized the humanitarian aspect of the conflict and conducted campaigns to deliver aid to national minorities living in Ukraine.

*Risk processes associated with migration.* Migration movements to Europe have grown against the background of major factors related to climate change, an unstable security situation, as well as the aggravation of political, economic and social problems in a number of countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. The Russian large-scale military invasion of Ukraine had a catalytic effect on migration processes, as a result many Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war were forced to seek refuge in Europe. In a turn, this became an additional factor threatening food security, in particular, further destabilizing the situation in the countries of origin of migration flows. At the same time, starting from February 2022, the practice of using illegal migration as an element of a hybrid toolkit of influence has become established. The combined migration pressure on the southern and northern routes to Europe has caused significant problems for the economic and social systems, as well as the health care systems of the transit countries and final destinations, whose economies have not recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic yet. Currently, the increase in the number of migrants remains one of the factors of the terrorist threat. This is largely due to the fact that there is a possibility of penetration through illegal migration channels of individuals with radical views and intentions. In other words, in modern conditions, migration pressure on most European countries has significantly increased, in particular due to the large number of migrants heading to these countries. Many migrants exercise their rights to temporary protection. Various illegal migration schemes have become more active, the activities of which are stimulated by the high profitability of illegal activities and the low level of responsibility for them. There have also been more frequent manifestations of aggression against law enforcement agencies and cases of illegal movement of migrants through the territory of a particular European country.

Taking into consideration the identified challenges and threats, special services of NATO member states propose to strengthen the activities of all state institutions aimed at improving the state of ensuring national security in such areas as:

- support for sanctions policy against the Russian Federation;
- strengthening counterintelligence support for the economic and scientific sectors;
- introduction of preventive work among the local population;
- organizing a comprehensive approach to the resilience of each European country and its allies;
- updating relevant legislation;
- protection of EU countries' strategic facilities;
- strengthening global relations between EU countries in the context of the war in Ukraine;
- the formation of a security environment on the European continent;
- ensuring the EU countries' economic security;
- counteracting international terrorism and its spread on the continent by the special services of EU countries;
- educational and preventive work with the local population, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Taking into account the assessment of destructive factors arising from the activities of pro-Russian countries' special services, a number of well-founded conclusions can be made.

Firstly, the Russian Federation, China, Iran, and Turkey are trying to gain access to secret information, knowledge, and technologies, primarily from leading European countries, in order to take political, economic, and military advantage.

Secondly, the mentioned above states are making efforts to weaken social and political stability of EU countries in a covert way, as well as undermine Euro-Atlantic solidarity.

Thirdly, special services of the Russian Federation, China, Iran, and Turkey not only monitor their compatriots in European countries, but also use intimidation and violence against them.

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