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Multilevel Analysis of the 2021 Poland-Belarus Border Crisis in the Context of Hybrid Threats[1]

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Abstract
This article aims to provide a deeper context of the Poland-Belarus crisis, which is interpreted through the lens of hybrid threats and hybrid warfare. A multilevel analysis of the crisis assesses four dimensions: political, strategic, tactical, and operational. Emphasis is put on the executive (operational and tactical) dimensions, which are well suitable for analysing the effects of hybrid threats and hybrid warfare. The author argues that the crisis per se may be considered a hybrid threat, but in a broader context, it is a part and one of the tools of hybrid warfare. A DIMEFIL classification is proposed for analysing and designing tools for addressing hybrid threats and warfare.

1. Introduction

In July 2021 borders between Poland and Belarus (and to a lesser degree also borders between Belarus and Lithuania or Latvia) become the new frontline of the hostile activities conducted against the European Union. Thousands of migrants were misused to create artificial pressure at the EU's external border. Humans were used as one of the tools of the hybrid warfare against the EU, its policies, principles, and values. Despite the

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primary migrant nature of the crisis, in many aspects, the incidents on the eastern border of the EU are far from the standard perception of threats or conflict. This is mainly due to the active involvement of Belarus in the crisis and the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon. First, the crisis was artificially created and fuelled by actors outside the EU. Foreign authorities unofficially provided help to smugglers and traffickers to put Poland and the EU under pressure. Second, the crisis itself created enough materials for pro-Kremlin propaganda and polarization of the public in some EU member states which remain sensitive to migration. Latest in January 2022, when the situation between Russia and Ukraine escalated due to assembled invasion-capable Russian army close to the borders, it was evident that the border crisis on the Belarussian borders was conducted as a part of a greater strategy to challenge power distribution in Europe and open a new branch of hybrid conflict.

The main aim of this article is to assess the Polish-Belarussian border crisis in the context of hybrid warfare. For this reason, the first part is dedicated to brief definitions and conceptualization of hybrid threats and hybrid warfare. It leads to the identification of key features, which will be later used as an analytical framework for the selected case. The ambition is to create a simple, but universal framework applicable to similar situations. The second part of the article is dedicated to the analysis, which will focus on the features identified in the first chapter in the five dimensions related to some of the DIMEFIL dimensions3 of the crisis. The article claims that the 2021 crisis at the eastern border of the EU may be fully considered a hostile act of hybrid conflict directed against the EU and its member states. Hopefully, the added value of the article will go beyond identifying aspects of the hybridity in the referred crisis but will provide some constructive feedback for the concept of hybrid warfare (on the theoretical level) and suggest some measures for preventing the negative effects of hybrid warfare. This will be the subject of the last chapter entitled as discussion which also opens the distinction between hybrid threats and hybrid warfare.

To highlight the heuristic nature of the article, the research questions are as follows: RQ1: how can be the theoretical concept of hybrid warfare be turned in into the general analytical framework suitable for analysis of hybrid operations? RQ2: What aspects of the analytical framework for analysing hybrid warfare are matching the case of the 2021 EU eastern external border crisis? RQ3: What are the main implications for the theoretical concept of hybrid warfare and its prevention? Or in other words, is the case providing some critical feedback for the existing concepts associated with its application? Each research question is explored in the individual chapter.

At the time when this article was almost finished the first study dedicated to the topic was published. Piotr Łubiński (2022) published an article entitled "Hybrid Warfare or Hybrid Threat – The Weaponization of Migration as an Example of the Use of Lawfare

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3 Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial and Legal Enforcement.

– Case Study of Poland" in the Polish Political Science Yearbook. Łubiński concludes, that the Republic of Belarus has operated lawfare as a part of the hybrid threat spectrum. A legal analysis found violations of international law, which might according to Łubiński result in a court proceeding before the International Court of Justice in a case against Belarus. While the analysis of Łubiński focused on the lawfare dimension (which I appreciate as very beneficial regarding this topic), this article is offering a broader geopolitical context to the case study and offers a slightly different perspective. Contrary to Łubiński it looks at the issue through the lens of hybrid warfare, instead of hybrid threats, showing some weak sides of both concepts.

The concept of hybrid warfare and hybrid threats is relatively well examined in Eastern Europe, especially regarding Ukraine and conflict asymmetry or a theoretical perspective in general (see for example DeBenedictis 2021; Galeotti 2020; Waals 2020; Orestein 2019; Filipec 2019: 52–70; Fridman 2018; Banasik 2017; Schnaufer 2017: 17–31; Renz and Smith 2016; Renz 2016: 283–300; Lenoszka 2016: 175–195; Bachman and Gunneriusson 2015: 198–211). Hopefully, this article will present a decent contribution to the topic by providing the broader context of a case study having exploratory and interrogatory character.

2. Hybrid warfare: towards a comprehensive analytical framework?

In recent years there is a popular trend to label phenomena as "hybrid" which led to certain criticism of the term. For example, many authors start a theoretical introduction with the claim, that "hybrid warfare" is not new and supports this claim concerning the famous Art of War by Sun Tzu, various ancient generals, or more contemporary strategists such as Carl von Clausewitz and his work "On War" (Sun Tzu 2011; Clausewitz 2010). Others such as Murat Caliskan go further in argumentation and see the term hybrid warfare through the lens of strategic theory, arguing that hybrid warfare does not merit the adoption as a doctrinal concept (Caliskan 2019). Indeed, conflicts throughout history had varying natures, and fighting with weapons was only a partial, but usually, very visible manifestation of it, depending on the intensity or the level of violence involved. In other words, most international conflicts are happening in several areas at once and conflicts are having different intensities, from the lowest levels (see Evans 1987) to the use of nuclear weapons, which might be the hypothetical top of the conflict going beyond the point of no return. And very similar perception may be dedicated to the "hybrid threats".

Threats, unlike warfare, are having many dimensions and areas that may vary from political and diplomatic, to economic, cultural, or military, with varying subfields and possible extensions depending on the issue. In this regard, many countries are using the DIMEFIL classification of areas (or instruments) refereeing Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement areas of the national power. It is important to mention, that precise separation of areas is not possible as

designed instruments have cross-cutting nature and usually affect several areas at once. For example, sanctions are primarily a financial tool that might be considered as an alternative to military tools, but at the same time are having significant diplomatic dimension and most probably also economic impact for both sides. On the other side, a well-conducted intelligence operation may decrease the military options of the enemy, without the influence on the diplomatic solution. In most of the attacks, it is possible to recognize the primary dimension but sometimes the primary dimension is purposefully hidden and thus unknown). Nonetheless, DIMEFIL is used for some time in national strategic planning and security analysis (see Ti 2021). DIMEFIL builds on a more "classic" model of traditional four powers (DIME) and extends them with Financial, Intelligence, and Legal instruments (for further details see example Rodriguez, Walton and Chu 2020).

The situation is complicated also with the fact, that there is no accepted definition of hybrid warfare or hybrid threats. As Frank Hoffman referred to in his pivotal work: *"Hybrid Wars incorporates a range of different models of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics **and** formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence **and** coercion, **and** criminal disorder"* (Hoffman 2007: 14). In this regard, hybrid warfare presumes a combination of civilian and military activity, which is reaching significant intensity, usually resulting in some level of violence. However, due to the complexity of the phenomenon, it is a question of how we recognize, that the definition has been matched? Or for example, how strong shall be the military involvement in such a type of activity? Or, maybe the military activity was replaced by the activity of security forces or the intelligence?

Similarly problematic is the definition of the term "hybrid threats". Generally, the threat refers to any phenomenon, which is having the potential ability to harm interests and values protected by the subject (a state or a non-state actor) while the level of the threat is given by the potential effects. As for hybrid threats, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats refers to: *"An action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm a target by combing overt and covert military **and** non-military means"* (Hybrid CoE 2022). Again, it raises the question, how much military involvement is enough to classify a threat as a hybrid? Or is it possible to classify a threat as a "hybrid" without military involvement? From this perspective, the definition is quite strict, as propagandist and disinformation operations (conducted by civilians) can cause huge damage to democratic institutions or electoral interference may cause irreversible political damage and undermine the military capability of the state at the political level. In this sense, relying on exact criteria might be counterproductive and the above definitions are "too heavy" to match.

More clarity is brought by Monaghan (2019), providing a distinction between hybrid threats, having a lower intensity than hybrid warfare, which is close to irregular warfare, and limited conventional war (Monaghan 2019: 87). However, both conventional war and irregular warfare (or even terrorism on a lower level) are still having a significant

element of violence. The level of violence may be linked with the involvement of the military and the scale of operations. But this perspective on the role of the military is somehow overcome as the military plays much broader roles than two decades ago, also having important civilian dimensions in rescue operations, education, physical training and preparedness, sport, or cybersecurity.

Due to the hybrid aspect diminishing boundaries between civilian tools and military weapons, hybrid attacks might have lower intensity and took place in the "grey zone" far from war (negative delimitation) but also far from peace understood in a positive sense. Migration might be considered one of those tools. When skilfully accompanied by a tailored disinformation campaign, it might help to alienate the population against the EU or NATO in a target country, and at the same time strengthen the support of domestic citizens. Or it may lead to changes in politics, redirecting foreign policy, and cutting military spending. In other words, civilian operations might have an important military dimension and be much more effective than military operations.

Finally, any conflict may be seen through various levels of the organization. Regarding the levels of the organization, there is (1) an operational level, on which battles and operations are executed; (2) tactical level, at which campaigns, operations, or missions are planned; (3) strategic level – at which general objectives in line with state interests are developed, including allocation of resources from the state budget, and usually also (4) political level, referring to the policy and orientation of the country. Sometimes under the tactical level, there is also a technical one, referring to the individuals and equipment available for the execution of the operation. In hybrid warfare, the attacker is exploiting the vulnerabilities of the enemy. For that purpose, a great variety of tools is used, including cyberattacks, disinformation and propaganda, lawfare, and many other phenomena, which might be referred to as a hybrid threat.

So how can be the theoretical concept of hybrid warfare be turned in into the general analytical framework suitable for analysis of hybrid operations? (RQ 1)? By a combination of DIMEFIL classification of the areas and various levels of the organization a very complex analytical framework can be created, which is very similar to the analytical framework created by Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000) which is also employing various fields and various levels of analysis (Buzan and Little 2000). Conducting of full analysis on all levels in all areas is out of the scope of this article. Instead, the following chapter offers insight into the most significant areas of DIMEFIL as exposed by the Belarus-Polish border incident. Like in the case of the framework used by the Copenhagen school, the researcher may stay focused on selected levels, selected areas, or selected combinations of both. In this article, there are four levels related to hybrid threats presented and assessed. However, it is important to note, that hybrid warfare is mainly linked to the executive dimension of the policy, and thus most evident at the tactical or operational level, which is much closer to the executive dimension than the strategic or political level.

3. Poland-Belarus Border Crisis and Four Levels of the Hybrid Warfare

In this part, the Poland-Belarus border crisis will be examined at four levels (political, strategic, tactical, and operational) and put into the broader context of hybrid warfare. The main aim is to interpret events at Polish-Belarus (EU external border) about broader political objectives.

3.1. Political level of hybrid warfare and its context

The political level of hybrid warfare refers to broader and very general aims associated with state interests. It refers mainly to the general goals and directions towards which hybrid warfare is oriented. Since the fall of the Soviet empire, the relations between Belarus and Russian Federation were always very close due to the strategic significance of Belarusian territory, economic dependence, and the nature of the Lukashenko regime. Despite the creation of the Union States of Russia and Belarus in December 1999, it seems that cooperation between Belarus and Russian Federation got new momentum after the outbreak of protests in 2020 which threatened Lukashenko's regime after fraudulent elections. The tense situation in Ukraine together with unrest in Belarus, or previous rebelling attitudes of Lukashenko, led Moscow to ensure the situation and excerpt greater control over Belarus (see Coes 2021). Despite the intervention was not so visible as in the case of Kazakhstan in 2022, after the protests Belarus become participating in large-scale military exercises (Zapad 2021) and Russian security advisors may be employed in most important security areas.

Due to sanctions on Lukashenko and the isolation of Belarus, both countries share an interest in conducting operations against the EU and its member states, which may lead to policy changes more favourable to Belarus or Russia. Due to cultural proximity and similar security culture, also similar perception and narratives apply. As put by Lukashenko in the context of deepening integration within the Belarusian-Russian Union: *"We originated from a common state – from the Soviet Union, and many practices were tested there. We know what we can use from the Soviet past and what will be useless. That is why it will be a stronger, more balanced, and more advanced union"* (TASS 2021). The security culture and security policy between both states was topped by the adoption of the common military doctrine of the Union state in November 2021 with the expected integration of military forces (BELTA 2021). In other words, the security forces of Belarus are working in close cooperation with Russia and due to Russian dominance in bilateral relations, which was strengthened by integration between both countries, it might be expected, that Belarus is acting fully in line with the interest of the Russian Federation, including its priorities at the political level, which are associated mainly with Vladimir Putin.

It is the nature of non-democratic regimes that the top priorities of the state at the political level are strongly influenced by the personal aims and aspirations of the leader. Vladimir Putin – strongly inspired by the ideas of Ivan Iljin and Alexander Dugin – considers the collapse of the Soviet empire as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" and that he would reverse the Soviet collapse if he could (Reuters 2018). While pulling back Belarus and annexing parts of Ukraine serve well this political aim (having strategic significance), Putin's ambition is strongly clashing with the reality of the EU and that former Soviet-bloc countries including the Baltic States or Poland, are doing well in the EU and NATO. More importantly, this idea is moderating also the attitude of Ukraine whose pro-western orientation is undermining Russian security interests based on the zero-sum-game logic. From this perspective, the EU and NATO are Russia's potential enemies, threatening the vital interests of the Russian Federation. NATO is a historical enemy which "looked at" states from the former Soviet sphere and EU, which provides a "bad example" because the focus on democracy, human rights, and prosperity are highlighting the failures of Putin's regime. Because the EU cannot be confronted directly, Russia is trying to ignore its institutions and representatives, promotes in propaganda a negative image of the EU (and the West), or exploit the EU's weaknesses and that of its member states. These aims are well reflected at the strategic level.

There is no doubt, that political priorities might be well achieved with hybrid means and that hybrid warfare is having a significant political dimension on the top. However, political (highest level) about hybridity as a such is missing, which is in line with observations made by Caliskan (2019) and others, that politics produces policy, which is answering the question "why and what", while strategy answers the question on "how" and operational and tactical levels are about executions of concrete tasks as decided by the strategy and refer to the means (Caliskan 2019: 6). As a result, hybridity is more linked to the operational and tactical level, but the tools might be already identified at the strategic level.

3.2. The strategic level of hybrid warfare

The strategic level is often determining "what to do" which is reflected also within hybrid warfare. Or better: hybrid warfare is the answer to the question. Kremlin's aspirations were reflected and summarized on the strategic level within the so-called "Primakov doctrine" named after the Russian prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, and the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service Yevgeny Primakov (1929–2015). The doctrine embedded Russian revisionist ambitions declaring unacceptability of the US dominance and the need to strive towards a multipolar world to counterbalance US power. This objective is in line with opposition to NATO expansionism and persuasion, that Russia shall insist on its primacy in the former Eastern bloc (Rumer 2019). The effects of the doctrine are well visible in the attempts to regain position and control over parts of the

former Soviet empire: employment of hybrid warfare against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 followed by the annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas, to the involvement in countering protests in Belarus, suppression of protests in Kazakhstan or most recently escalation of conflict against Ukraine.

While Primakov's doctrine lays down revisionist aspirations and helps to understand the link between the political and strategic level of hybrid warfare, hybrid warfare (in the terms "what to do") is more connected to the doctrine well summarized in the published article by Valery Gerasimov. In his article, he stressed various non-military measures, which might be employed against the enemy. In the doctrine, various methods are presented depending on the stage of the conflict, from covert origins and escalation to the start of the conflict activities, crisis, resolution, and restoration of peace in the post-conflict phase. The tools range from creating coalitions and unions supporting the interests of the Russian Federation, conducting political and diplomatic pressure, adopting economic sanctions and breaking diplomatic relations, supporting opposition forces, etc. However, in all phases is conducted information warfare (Gerasimov 2013). Despite the undoubted strategic dimension of the Gerasimov doctrine, it has mainly been important for the operational level by proposing non-military asymmetrical tools to manage various phases of the confrontation with the West. Directing the flow of migrants to the EU fits well this concept as the migration wave provides many operational advantages at the operational level, which might be transformed into power.

3.3. The tactical level of hybrid warfare

The tactical level of hybrid warfare is focusing on the "how to do it". Driving the flow of migrants into the EU was not used by the Russian Federation for the first time. In 2016 NATO commander Philip Breedlove warned, that Russia is weaponizing migration[4] and directing it to Europe: *"Together, Russia and the Assad regime are deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve"* (DW 2016). The immediate effect of the big migration flow is the fulfilment or paralysis of the capacities of the target state, which pays additional costs for strengthened border management. At the same time, unrestricted migration poses a middle-term security risk: migration flow might be used by radicals, foreign fighters, or potential terrorists, causing another cost for intelligence services due to the increased threat of terrorism. In the long-term unmanaged migration and failed integration of migrants can contribute to negative societal effects such as fragmentation and polarization of the society, increased criminality, hate crimes and other violence, decreasing trust of citizens in public institutions and democracy, etc. Moreover, it is well known (for example according to a Eurobarometer survey) what Europeans fear the most: migration and terrorism are

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[4] For the concept of weaponized migration see Greenhill (2008).

considered long-term threats by the majority of Europeans and when operationalized effectively, they might bring political capital.

Russian intervention in Syria served many purposes, as it redirected attention from Ukraine, contributed to improving the image of the Russian Federation in the Middle East as a country helping friendly regimes, ensured strategic ports in Tartus and Latakia, and caused many problems to the EU countries, which were hit by the migration wave. It might be expected that many Syrian refugees decided to leave Syria after Russian imprecise bombings (sometimes using barrel bombs) hit civilian targets, including schools, markets, hospitals, or refugee camps, causing panic and need to escape (Business Insider 2015a; Business Insider 2015b; Foreign Policy 2016). As of 2015, there were 315 airstrikes against hospital facilities conducted by the Syrian or Russian air force, counted by the monitoring group of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR 2016). Massacres of civilians contributed to the exodus from Syria.

While the flow of migrants went from Turkey to Europe, Russia supported far-right political parties across Europe, which promised to fight against migration which was paradoxically supplied by the operations conducted by the Assad regime and Russian Federation (Futàk-Campbell 2020; Euractiv 2015). At the same time, pro-Kremlin disinformation webs and "news portals" started campaigns to demonize migrants as criminals, rapists, terrorists to scare people, polarize society and empower far-right parties (mainly anti-NATO, anti-EU but pro-Kremlin), who offered protection against "migrants" with simple solutions often inconsistent with human rights or European values, as defined in the treaties (Article 2 Treaty on the European Union). The same values were tested during the Polish-Belarus crisis. However, this crisis came at a time, when relations between the EU and Belarus were tense due to the suppression of protests in Belarus, which lead to the isolation of Belarus and sanctions imposed after the forced landing of Ryanair Flight with the regime opponent. Finally, mutual relations were worsened due to the forced repatriation of Belarussian sprinter Krystina Tsimanouska, who received a Polish humanitarian visa.

Unlike in 2016 the flow of migrants to the EU served well in the interest of the Russian federation (or Lukashenko's regime). First, it highlighted the issue of migration which again raised key agenda for far-right parties. When attending a "patriotic rally" far-right supporters demanded stronger Polish borders (AP News 2021). However, the crisis was echoed also among far-right parties and politicians in Western Europe (Dogru 2021). However, the emergence of the issue contributed also to the shift in public opinion. It is known that people in Central and Eastern Europe see immigration from the non-EU member states more negatively than those in Western Europe and Poland is not an exception to this trend (Cichocki a Jablonowski 2020: 28). The crisis at the borders strengthened the reluctance of Poles to accept migrants and refugees into the country (55 % against to 38 % in favour), and a relative majority of the Poles (47,4 %) are in favour of building the wall on the borders (compared to 43,4 % who are against and 9,2 % who

don't know) (Statista 2021). This attitude may protentional contribute to the polarization of the society divided into two groups of the approximately same size.

Second, renewed migration flow provided new ammunition to disinformation webs, which were used to demonize migrants, on one hand, compromise EU policies on the other, and implement a narrative of necessary cooperation between the EU and Belarus/Russia. Disinformation media defended Lukashenko who was at the time under sanctions and isolation for the violent suppression of protest in line with a narrative shared on social media: "EU paid 3 billion Euro to Turkey to stop migration flow, so they can pay also Lukashenko to stop it" or that "Lukashenko can stop migration effectively, he is not like the corrupted EU". A prospect, which was raised by Sergey Lavrov and echoed by Russian propaganda (Russia Today 2021a). Lukashenko was presented as a victim: Polish counter-measures including thousands of policemen close to the borders were evaluated as "significant military activity" and Lukashenko was presented as "incapable" to solve the situation, due to a lack of money caused by sanctions (Sputnik News 2021).

Third, migrants on the EU borders served well for domestic propaganda or propagandist channels used for a foreign audience. Russian media often showed in the news images of children and women freezing at the EU borders, trying to support the claims of a decadent, evil EU, unable to follow its own rules. As put by Russia Today: "We've seen it all: blood, death, starving kids, desperate mothers" (Russia Today 2021b). Despite some news being balanced on Russia Today and Sputnik News (international edition), the discussion under the articles was developing in the anti-NATO and anti-EU direction, presenting Kremlin narratives: EU and NATO are responsible, because destroying countries and causing migration. Hundreds of accounts on social networks encouraged and supported migration from Belarus to the EU, most likely, artificially stimulating the flow (Europol 2021).

Fourth, the immigrant flow was countered by measures implemented by border guards who had to relocate and employ human resources, equipment, and material. Rapidly increasing costs for border protection, patrol actions, and management of asylum seekers, who succeeded to pass borders. It is important to mention, that flow came at the time when Poland conflicted with the EU over the rule of law in the country, which might one of the reasons for hesitation to ask the help of the EU authorities to manage the border crisis.[5]

Finally, a combination of these factors helped to increase the blackmailing potential of both countries and to open another issue within multilateral and bilateral relations with potential transformation into political capital. In all mentioned aspects the operation was successful only partially or not at all. It did not lead to changes in policy course toward Belarus or Russia and the impact of disinformation is related to the border

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[5] In favour of Poland, there is also operational argument of greater autonomy without involvement of EU institutions, closely observing and evaluating activities of Polish security personal on the ground.

crisis is negatable. The operation probably succeeded in creating asymmetric pressure, especially in the terms of financial costs, which are debated more deeply at the tactical level. Moreover, the operation provided valuable experience to the border guards, improved border management, and led to the improved physical protection of the external Schengen borders. As a result, this hybrid operation had a contra-productive effect.

3.4. Operational level

Finally, the operational level is about the implementation of actions ("doing it"). The crisis on the borders started in July 2021 and is still ongoing but with lesser intensity than in autumn 2021. Thousands of Iraqi nationals (mainly from Kurdistan), and some citizens of other Asian or African countries started to appear on the borders with Poland. It was mainly a result of "promotions" made by some travel agencies in Belarus and Iraq, which decreased the price and started to offer flights to Belarus. At the same time number of flights between Minsk and some middle East destinations increased and some new routes were open, including Erbil or Basra. Moreover, the state administration offered fast and easy visa applications. There was an issue with the *Tsentrkurort agency* subordinated to the presidential administration in Belarus, which managed to ensure hundreds of visas for hunting purposes. After the arrival, "tourists" and "hunters" collected in the middle East were instructed how to pass EU borders and some were equipped for that purpose with various equipment, including barbed wire cutters. As reported by LRT, some migrants were cumulated in the hotels, then collected and taken to the border. Reportedly, they paid 15,000 Euro for travel and visas plus deposits worth thousands of Euro. Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kamiński claimed that Polish services identified 46 planes from Baghdad to Minsk, estimating the number of passengers at ten thousand residents (Politico 2020). However, it is important to note, that Baghdad was just one of the several destinations (including Istanbul, Antalya, Beirut, or Dubai) where migrants were taken on board.

In the above-described model, which might vary in some aspects over time and/or place, where migrants were taken, it is evident that the crisis was artificially created with the active involvement of Belarus authority's end enterprises. At the same time, it represents a very advanced model of human trafficking organization which might be even beneficial for traffickers as migrants paid a huge sum of money. These facts itself is highlighting the issue of financial asymmetry of this operation. Normally, small costs of the operation is leading to much greater costs for the enemy. In this case, it might result in a profit for the attacker and huge costs for the target country, due to implemented measures. Paradoxically, in the previous years, Belarus received transfers from the EU to improve border management.

Attempts to overcome the EU borders were not spontaneous, as migrants were instructed and sometimes equipped by Belarus security forces, including KGB[6], OMON[7], and the State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus (GPK). A border soon become a clash line between Polish Border Guards using mainly water and tear gas to spread the crowds and migrants who used various tools and weapons to attack patrols or fences. Those included stones, bottles, debris, wire cutters, scissors, logs, or even green lasers and strobe lights or stun grenades to blind Polish patrols. Some of the weapons and equipment indicate the involvement of Belarus security forces.

It is questionable, whether the operation was successful. There is no doubt, that in the terms of finance the operation was highly asymmetrical. There is at least doubt about the effective use of money the EU gave to Belarus to ensure integrated border management, moreover, countermeasures were costly. In January 2022 Poland started to build up a 186 kilometres long wall on its 418 kilometres long border with Belarus, which will cost approx. 350 million Euro (Euronews 2022). However, political consequences are also costly. In October 2021 Poland legalized "pushback" allowing to return migrants by force right after they enter its territory, without an individual assessment of their asylum claims, which conflicts with EU and international law and as a result strongly criticized by human rights organizations.

Important is also the intra-political dimension. While radicals and supporters of the ruling party PiS applauded the Polish way of solving things, the border crisis was used for political purposes and attempts to attack opposition by connecting them with pro-migrant stances or accusing them of siding with Lukashenko. However, the crisis also contributed to the rising of solidarity among Polish citizens and NGOs, who turned active in border regions and provided help to migrants, who succeeded in passing borders and were heading mainly to Germany. This was another critical point of the response: In September 2020 Polish authorities declared a state of emergency in the two regions neighbouring Belarus and demarcated a 3 km deep strip along the frontier with restricted access for NGOs and also journalists (NFP 2021). On one hand, Polish security forces had a comfortable environment for managing the situations, on the other hand, there are doubts about rights abuses.

4. Discussion

It is a question of whether events at the Polish-Belarussian border match the concept of hybrid warfare or are merely a hybrid. As Łubińsky pointed out, in the crisis on borders the Republic of Belarus exploited the system of international law (Łubińsky 2022: 10)

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[6] The State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus (KGB) was not renamed after the fall of the Soviet Union and still uses the abbreviation "KGB", which is often associated with the Soviet KGB.
[7] Special Purpose Police Detachment.

which is undoubtedly a very important dimension, having normative and practical implications for the existing international legal system in the area of migration. Regarding the definition of hybrid warfare, it is necessary to admit, that apart from security forces involvement (Border patrols, intelligence) there was (probably) little military involvement (if any) in this operation. Moreover, the intensity of the conflict is limited, not matching the criteria for being solved under the *Ius ad Bellum* conditions. From this formalistic point of view, the operation does not fall under the category of hybrid warfare due to the very weak military dimension and thus events can be classified as a hybrid threat.

Among arguments in favour to label, the event as hybrid warfare is the fact, that the crisis was artificially created and moderated by Belarus and might be put into the broader context. First, it was used also for other purposes, including domestic and foreign propaganda against the EU, NATO, and the West as a such. The active and hostile element on the Belarusian side in the crisis contributed to the exploitation of vulnerabilities and from this perspective are going beyond a hybrid threat. Moreover, the crisis resulted in the injured and dead, which implies some (in comparison to military operations) at least minimal level of violence. And second, it fits well into the strategic and political dimension of hybrid warfare. From this perspective, the crisis at the borders as a such is not hybrid warfare, but it is part of it, serving as one of its tools. It is a matter of perspective and flexibility of definitions.

Moreover, it is an inherent nature of hybrid warfare, that it does not match the threshold and criteria of war, which otherwise might have been responded to accordingly in a retributive, justified way. Instead, it exploits the uttermost spheres of peace using the vail of un-officialness, un-attributability, and denial of responsibility for causing harm by weaponizing previously standard phenomena which are spill-covered to other areas utilized to harm the enemy. From this perspective a migration crisis on Polish-Belarus borders is just one of the tools used in hybrid warfare, sometimes having more violent and explicit manifestations in other EU countries or its candidates (e. g. poisoning of Sergei Skripal, attempted coup in Montenegro, sabotage of ammunition depot in the Czech Republic, support of the "yellow vest" movement in France, electoral interference, etc).

Because hybrid warfare is executed at the tactical and operational level, it is necessary to adopt tools, which are addressing hybrid warfare and contribute to an effective response. DIMEFIL classification may be a valuable analytical framework, which in combination with various levels can address hybrid warfare. Soft power and hard power instruments might be adapted to counter hybrid warfare operations, which are using a coordinated approach within DIMEFIL areas. Preventive measures in building resilience together with well-balanced classical tools shall be enough to counter hybrid warfare when all areas develop synergic response mechanisms which might be used in both: defensive and offensive ways.

5. Conclusion

This article analysed the Polish-Belarus border crisis in the context of hybrid warfare. It proposed an analytical framework based on DIMEFIL classification combined with levels of war which was further applied to the case. The author argues that rather than a hybrid threat the border crisis may be interpreted in the context of hybrid warfare. It is a matter of perspective: it is not a crisis *per se*, being hybrid warfare, but it is one of the tools of hybrid warfare. In the article, there were three principal research questions: RQ1: how can be the theoretical concept of hybrid warfare be turned in into the general analytical framework suitable for analysis of hybrid warfare operations? RQ2: What aspects of the analytical framework for analysing hybrid warfare are matching the case of the 2021 EU eastern external border crisis? RQ3: What are the main implications for the theoretical concept of hybrid warfare and the prevention of hybrid threats?

As for the first research question, weaponized migration fits well into the context of hybrid warfare which might be analysed through the lens of DIMEFIL classicization combined with various levels of analysis, mainly including tactical and operational, but to a lesser degree also strategic or political, which provides deeper context to the hybrid warfare. In the case of the Polish-Belarus border crisis, it was not migration *per-se*, which is behind the hybridity, but it is just one substance in the hybridity "cocktail". As demonstrated on the tactical level, migration flows were organized and stimulated by the Belarusian authorities who were actively involved in the human trafficking operations from the Middle East to Europe. Giving false promises to migrants, providing instructions and equipment, and directing them against the border of the target country is an act of hostility, taking into count all negative security effects unrestricted migration might bring.

In response to the second question we can claim, that the migration led to the expected crisis, which was well covered by disinformation and propaganda, used for attacks against the EU and NATO and justifying non-democratic regimes integrated within the Union state of Russia and Belarus. At the same time, the issue stimulated far-right politics, which after the 2015/2016 crisis lost its major topic. The Polish-Belarus crisis fits well into the context of Primakov and Gerasimov doctrines and is in line with the political priorities of the Russian Federation, which are shared with Belarus. In line with theory, the operation was highly asymmetric, at least in the terms of expenses. While one side made a profit from involvement in trafficking activities, the other side had significant costs associated with border management and the build-up of the wall, certainly in the costs of hundreds of million euros.

Finally, there are some implications for the theory, which are rather practical. Taking into count the DIMEFIL classification, the case of the Polish-Belarus border crisis shows, that hybrid operations may expose or penetrate individual areas differently. In this case, it was evident, that there is a diplomatic (or political) pretext to the crisis reflecting Polish-Belarus relations or to a greater degree also EU-Belarus relations.

However, the information dimension seems to be most important and most visible, as the crisis provided fertile ground for propaganda against the West. While the military dimension is limited in this case, there is a significant economic dimension of asymmetry, which is related also to financial flows. Naturally, the intelligence dimension remains hidden for the author but probably played important role in assessing the scope of the issue and investigating the level of involvement of the Belarus security authorities in the case. And finally, there was an important law enforcement dimension related to the state of emergency, covering some aspects of international law, laws of migration, and human rights. This area is having most probably great potential for further analysis, due to the "pushback" controversy and significant human rights dimensions.

Whether the Polish-Belarus border crisis fits better into the context of hybrid threats or hybrid warfare, is a matter of perspective and the flexibility of definitions. Despite the case presented in this paper is matching some aspects of the hybrid warfare definition, to fit into cumulative conditions is rather short. However, there are fewer doubts about matching the definition of hybrid threats, as there is the involvement of state and non-state actors, to undermine or harm a target by a combination of overt and covert military and to a much greater degree non-military means. Nonetheless, it is questionable how much military involvement is enough to fill the condition or whether "civilian activities" conducted by the military fall within this category as the military in the contemporary world is having an increasingly important civilian dimension.

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