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ASYMMETRY OF THE MODERN CONFLICTS

INTRODUCTION

The escalation of internal and external threats faced by countries in modern conditions has led to an increase in military spending worldwide. Military expenditures can harm economic growth; however, in the face of external threats, they can also contribute to it.

The problems of conflicts, their sources and motives, assessment and modelling tools are the focus of attention of many researchers. Studying conflict theory, Intriligator M. (Intriligator, 1982: 307–327) substantiated eight analytical approaches and areas of application using mathematical methods, including arms races, timing of conflict initiation/cessation, war strategy, alliances, military budgets, etc. The study of economic consequences of conflicts is presented in the scientific works of T. Sandler (Sandler, 2000: 723–729), who proposed a model of transnational terrorism cycles. P. Collier, A. Hoeffler (Collier, Hoeffler, 2000) draw attention to the motives of conflicts, the main of which the researchers call greed and dissatisfaction. J. Fearon, D. Laitin (Fearon, Laitin, 2003: 75–90), consider economic inequality as a source of conflicts in society, first of all. It is the inability to satisfy one's needs for a long time due to poverty and inequality that increases internal tension, which can eventually transform into a corresponding conflict, emphasises T. Gurr (Gurr, 1968: 1104–1105). In studying the asymmetric nature of modern conflicts, P. Dunne, M. Garcia Alonso, P. Levin, R. Smith (Dunne, Garcia-Alonso, Levine, Smith, 2004), identify several dimensions that define the asymmetry of the conflict: resource provision, societal norms-related constraints, and the cost of conflict. There is a correlation between the level of development of democratic principles in society and armed conflicts, emphasises H. Hegre (Hegre, 2014: 1–14). The contemporary challenges facing the world order concern not

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only the distribution of spheres of influence. It is about defining priorities and values around which the system of international relations will be built. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is a challenge to the democratic world (Lavrynenko, Donaj, 2023: 321). The quality of the country's governance system, the appropriateness of economic policy, and the level of corruption in the country affect the ability of governments to prevent internal violent conflicts (Hegrel, Nygard, 2015: 985). In studies, conducted by Sung Chul Jung (Sung, 2022), T. Theiler (Theiler, 2018: 318–343), attention is focused that economic slowdown and accumulation of internal development problems increase the likelihood of interstate military conflict.

In previous research (Bulatova, Osaulenko, Zakharova, 2021: 27–28) the authors of the article identified that the deepening of global processes affects the emergence and development of new conflicts, among which the struggle for resources and environmental degradation plays a dominant role. War is not only a battlefield, it is also an economic confrontation (destroyed logistics network, structural changes and others) (Hrynychak, Yatsenko, Bulatova, Ptashchenko, 2023: 13–28). Local conflicts reflect current global trends. The way they erupted, sustained and resolved reflects changes in relations between the great powers, the intensity of their competition and the breadth of ambitions of regional players.

The objective of the article is to define the essence of asymmetry in modern conflicts to substantiate current trends in the international security environment in the context of Russian war against Ukraine. The article poses the main questions: to determine the dimensions of the asymmetry of modern conflicts; to analyse the ranking positions of the countries with the highest level of military spending according to various global ratings containing a security component. During the study of the dynamic changes in modern conflicts, a comprehensive approach was applied using the Conflict Assessment System Tool, which includes the evaluation of statistical databases accumulated by international organizations, content analysis of conflict dynamics indicators, and expert assessment methods, the results of which are reflected in annual international indices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the end of World War II, world leaders made a collective commitment to promote social and economic security. It was expected that the world would move steadily towards a situation in which most citizens of industrialised countries would be protected by social services, transfers and institutions, and economic growth and development would strengthen the fundamental foundations of the global security system.

Shocks have become the main triggers for change, as three global crises have shown over the past decade: 9/11 the sharp rise in food and oil prices that peaked in 2008, and the global financial and economic crisis. They also demonstrated that the international system has its design flaws and is unable to withstand the volatility of modern globalisation. Accordingly, the risks of violent conflicts have increased in the world. According to ACLED (2024), an international organization providing monitoring across 234 countries and territories, compared to 2020, there was a 40% increase in

the number of conflicts worldwide in 2023 (totalling over 147,000 conflicts), including a 12% increase compared to the previous year, when the open phase of Russia's military aggression began on the European continent. Conflicts vary in their asymmetry, intensity, frequency, and form. Observational results indicate that a certain level of conflict occurs in almost every country, with 50 countries experiencing the highest level (Myanmar, Syria, Mexico, Ukraine, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.).

Research into modern conflicts allows for identifying the following characteristics that determine their asymmetry.

Political and legal environment. Authoritarian states re-implementing increasingly repressive domestic and foreign policies. The fact that liberal democracy endangers their political regime, forces them to act aimed at creating a global order that is for autocracy. A country is most likely to initiate a military conflict when it experiences the highest degree of economic decline when the level of economic slowdown of the aggressor country is greater than that of the country against which the war is started, and the latter has a quite high level of dependence on the aggressor, and finally, autocratic countries are most likely to initiate military aggression against an economically dependent and politically dissimilar country. It should be noted that in the current global environment, there are rather negative forecasts for the development of economic activity in the world (slowdown in the growth rates of the world's largest economies (USA, China), destructive changes in supply chains, inflationary processes and financial instability, which together increase the risks of a slowdown in economic development in many countries. Therefore, the initiation of an international conflict may bring corresponding benefits to the leaders of those countries that are experiencing internal problems and slowing economic development. The situation becomes even more acute when it comes to an autocratic country with weak democratic institutions. The relationship between the state and its citizens is an important indicator of the rule of law in countries, human rights, and equality.

Economic environment. The available resource potential of countries determines the basic capabilities of conflicts. The capabilities of states depend on many factors, including national income, army size, and population. Developed states use their financial resources to create large armies. This military potential allows for exerting pressure on another state or international actor, forcing them to comply with certain political demands, often threatening to impose punitive sanctions for non-compliance. As of 2023, the military spending of the top 10 countries in the world reached 1.85 trillion USD (table 1), confirming the asymmetry of resource provision and conflict engagement capabilities.

Table 1

Top 10 countries in the world by military expenditure in 2023

	Military expenditure by country, in millions of US\$ at current prices and exchange rates, US \$m.	Military expenditure by country as a percentage of GDP, %	Military expenditure per capita by country, US\$
1	2	3	4
United States	916014,7	3,36	2694,2
China	296438,6	1,67	207,9

1	2	3	4
russia	109454,4	5,86	757,8
India	83574,6	2,44	58,5
Saudi Arabia	75813,3	7,09	2051,9
United Kingdom	74942,8	2,26	1106,4
Germany	66826,6	1,52	802,3
France	61301,3	2,06	946,6
Ukraine	64753,2	36,65	1762,2
Japan	50161,1	1,20	406,8
Korea, South	47925,6	2,81	925,5

Source: SIPRI, 2024.

It should be noted that modern military spending has reached a historical maximum, and global security has significantly deteriorated, leading to numerous human and economic losses. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (SIPRI, 2024), global military expenditures amounted to \$2,443.4 billion in 2023. This rapid growth has been driven by several factors. European countries significantly increased their military expenditures (by 20.3% in 2023), on the one hand, to expand assistance to Ukraine, and on the other hand, to enhance their security. In Ukraine, they have increased 9.5 times, compared to 2021, and amounted to 64,753.2 million USD (37% of the country's GDP in 2023), the total amount does not include international military assistance. However, even with such growth, Ukraine's spending remains lower than that of a terrorist country, as russia's expenditures amounted to 86373.1 million USD (SIPRI, 2024). Unfortunately, despite the sanctions imposed by the world, the russian economy has sufficient potential for further financing of military needs. Now Ukraine plays a key role in the strategic competition between the US and russia after the Cold War (Jureńczyk, 2023).

The United States has the highest level of military spending, amounting to 916 billion dollars, with the total amount including military aid to Ukraine. The growth of military financing in the Middle East by 8.9% is associated with the expansion of Saudi Arabia's military potential, making it the largest country in the region in terms of military financing. The growth of military needs in Asia and Oceania (by 2%) was influenced by increases in China, India, and Japan. The deterioration of the security situation and increased tensions in the region will further contribute to the trend of rising military demand. China has been increasing its military financing for almost three decades and currently ranks second (after the United States) in terms of the size of military expenditures, amounting to 296.4 billion dollars in 2023. China's military financing grows in line with GDP growth rates and is aimed at strengthening the military-industrial complex and developing advanced military technologies. The intensification of geopolitical asymmetries and tensions in regions of the world, against the backdrop of other global challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, security, income polarization, etc., will continue to strengthen the trend of conflict escalation worldwide, leading to further growth in global military expenditure. The increase in military spending reflects countries' aspirations to enhance their influence (both globally and regionally), primarily concerning the United States and China, which will undoubtedly continue to influence the escalation of geoeconomic and geopolitical confrontation.

Analysing the ranking positions of countries with the highest level of military expenditures according to various global rankings containing a security component allows us to determine that a high level of military spending does not guarantee a high level of stability in a country (table 2).

Table 2

Positions of the top 10 countries by the level of military expenditures in global rankings containing a security component

	Fragile States Index (2024)	Global Peace Index (2024)	Human Development Index (2022)	Global Prosperity Index (2023)	Social Progress Index (2023)	Democracy Index (2023)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
United States	141	132	20	19	29	29
China	99	88	75	54	77	148
russia	48	157	56	77	76	144
India	75	116	134	103	111	41
Saudi Arabia	103	102	40	79	90	150
United Kingdom	148	34	15	12	21	18
Germany	166	20	7	9	10	12
France	162	86	28	23	21	23
South Korea	161	46	19	29	17	22
Japan	160	17	24	16	16	16
Ukraine	22	159	100	74	59	91

■ Authoritarian country.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

For instance, the Fragile States Index (Fragile States Index, 2024), which measures stability levels in countries, demonstrates that the higher a country's position in the ranking, the higher the level of institutional and social instability. Such countries and societies are more prone to conflicts. The United States (141), the United Kingdom (148), South Korea (161), Japan (160), Germany (166), and France (162) exhibit a high level of stability, as they are represented in groups characterized by high stability levels. The high level of social development in these countries, which forms the basic foundations of societal resilience, is evidenced by their Human Development Index rankings: Germany (7), the United Kingdom (15), South Korea (19), the United States (20), Japan (24), and France (28). Conversely, countries with authoritarian regimes are more likely to belong to the «WARNING» – «HIGH WARNING» groups (China (99), India (75), russia (48)). Due to russia's military aggression, Ukraine's position in this ranking has deteriorated rapidly.

According to the Social Progress Index (Social Progress Imperative, 2024), authoritarian countries are characterized by low indicators of social progress (China (77), russia (76), and Saudi Arabia (90)). It is entirely predictable that the most effective and independent state institutions that ensure a high level of development of democratic principles in these countries remain extremely low. The Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence, 2022) evaluates countries worldwide based on the level of respect for civil rights and freedoms, as well as the presence of independent and effective state

institutions. In this ranking, authoritarian countries are at the bottom of the list (russia (144), Saudi Arabia (150), and China (148)), whereas Germany, the United States, Japan, and France demonstrate high indicators of democratic development.

Due to russia's military aggression, peace metrics deteriorated worldwide, with Ukraine experiencing the most significant decline in 2024. Overall, the Global Peace Index for 2024 indicates that the world has become less peaceful more than any year since the inception of the Global Peace Index in 2008, 92 countries involved in conflicts outside their borders, the most since the GPI's inception (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). Among the countries analysed, Japan (17), Germany (20), the United Kingdom (34), and South Korea (46) demonstrate the highest levels of peace. Conversely, russia (157), Ukraine (159), and India (116) exhibit low levels of security. Consequently, in this group of countries, there are also high indicators on the Global Prosperity Index. In today's conditions, countries develop based on building an inclusive society where fundamental freedoms and the security of every individual are protected, creating conditions for genuine prosperity. The latter is measured globally by the Prosperity Index, with Germany (9), the United Kingdom (12), Japan (16), and the United States (19) leading the ranking of the successful prospering nations with high levels of prosperity.

In a study (de Groot, Bozzoli, Alamir, Brück, 2022: 9–22), dedicated to analysing the impact of conflicts on the global economy since 1970, the authors argue that violent conflicts have led to an average of 12% loss of global GDP. According to data from 2023 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024), the global economic impact of violent conflicts amounted to \$19.1 trillion, equivalent to 13.5% of the world's GDP. Modern terrorists are increasingly using sophisticated technologies; consequently, the «spirit of terrorism» will continue to evolve in terms of terror strategy and tactics (Wojciechowski, 2023: 15). Affected countries experiencing the most intense conflicts, along with their neighbouring countries, suffer the greatest losses. Consequently, this will contribute to the trend of internal conflicts becoming internationalized.

The impact of military expenditures on economic growth remains a controversial issue. That is why, it is worth considering the context of state functioning and economic policy (Jaźwiński, 2023). The development of military affairs and technology, as well as the transformation of the principles of warfare, have contributed to the emergence of such types of conflict as asymmetric warfare, where the technological superiority of any state is no longer a guarantee of its security. Military superiority plays an important role in international relations for major arms-producing countries, as the defence sector, due to its specific nature, represents an important part of national production, and decisions made in this area have a special impact on national economic structures.

CONCLUSIONS

The modern world is facing an unprecedented convergence of international threats and instability in the global security system. Combined with the increasing level of national and international crime, local and military conflicts are becoming increasingly intense and protracted. The spectrum of instability includes regions and states that may

not necessarily be in open conflict but are institutionally and economically vulnerable to shocks. The range of threats includes regional coercion and intervention, transnational terrorism, lack of health security, the use of chemical and other non-traditional weapons, significant displacement of people and populations, as well as enormous humanitarian crises, creating a complex operational environment.

The asymmetry of modern conflicts is determined by differences in the political and legal environment, the inability to exercise civil and political rights, protection of freedoms, religious beliefs, and a fair judicial system becoming sources of social tension and conflicts in society. The absence of conflicts is a normal state for democracies. Differences in the economic potential of countries determine the opportunities for increasing military potential; however, a high level of military expenditure does not guarantee a high level of stability in the country or its social progress. Authoritarian countries do not ensure the effective functioning of state institutions, respect for civil rights and freedoms, which, in turn, exacerbates institutional and social instability. Social and economic inequality further intensifies social stratification and tension in society, creating a fertile ground for future conflicts. The consequences of modern conflicts also have an asymmetric character: the greatest losses are suffered by affected countries where the most intense conflicts take place, as well as their neighbouring countries. This reinforces the tendency towards the internationalization of internal conflicts. Russia's war against Ukraine has increased the global level of danger in terms of tension and conflicts. The highest level of peacefulness is demonstrated by countries with a high level of prosperity, which does not necessarily coincide with a high level of military spending.

Scientific research on international conflicts in the contemporary global environment, revealing regional peculiarities in their development, will contribute to the further development of regional security complexes and the formation of a secure environment overall. In the face of growing global challenges and corresponding changes in the geopolitical landscape, further research requires appropriate economic conditions for the emergence of conflicts, as new threats and challenges are reflected in changes in the principles of peace and conflict economics.

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ABSTRACT

The system of the modern global security space is characterized by an increase in instability, and the proliferation of local and military conflicts, which are becoming increasingly intense and protracted, thus necessitating the study of current trends occurring in the security

system at the global, regional, and national levels. The objective of the article is to define the essence of asymmetry in modern conflicts to substantiate current trends in the international security environment in the context of Russian war against Ukraine. It has been determined that modern conflicts exhibit asymmetric characteristics, which are determined by the political-legal and economic environment. The absence of opportunities to exercise civil and political rights, protection of freedoms, and beliefs, and a fair judicial system become sources of social tension and conflicts in society. Authoritarian countries fail to ensure the effective functioning of state institutions, and respect for civil rights and freedoms, which exacerbates institutional and social instability. The absence of conflicts is a normal state for democracies. Differences in economic potential among countries determine the possibilities for increasing military potential. It is argued that a high level of military spending does not guarantee a high level of stability in a country, and social and economic inequality further exacerbates stratification and tension in society. Countries with high levels of prosperity demonstrate the highest levels of peacefulness, which do not necessarily coincide with high levels of military financing. It has been identified that the consequences of modern conflicts also have an asymmetric nature, which enhances the tendency towards the internationalization of internal conflicts: the countries most affected are those where the most intense conflicts take place, as well as their neighbouring countries. Russia's war against Ukraine has heightened the global level of danger in terms of tension and conflicts.

Keywords: conflict, threats, national security, global security, asymmetry, military spending

ASYMETRIA WSPÓŁCZESNYCH KONFLIKTÓW

STRESZCZENIE

System współczesnego globalnego bezpieczeństwa charakteryzuje się wzrostem niestabilności, rozprzestrzenianiem się konfliktów lokalnych i wojskowych, które stają się coraz bardziej intensywnie i trwałe, co wymaga zbadania współczesnych tendencji zachodzących w systemie bezpieczeństwa na poziomie globalnym, regionalnym i krajowym. Celem artykułu jest zbadanie przyczyn związku między gospodarką a konfliktem w kontekście globalizacji, określenie istoty asymetrii współczesnych konfliktów oraz uzasadnienie bieżących tendencji w międzynarodowym środowisku bezpieczeństwa w kontekście wojny Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie. Określono, że współczesne konflikty mają asymetryczny charakter, który wynika z polityczno-prawnego i ekonomicznego otoczenia. Brak możliwości realizacji praw obywatelskich i politycznych, ochrony wolności, wyznań religijnych, sprawiedliwego systemu sądowego staje się źródłem napięć społecznych i konfliktów w społeczeństwie. Autorytarne państwa nie zapewniają skutecznego funkcjonowania instytucji państwowych, szacunku dla praw i wolności obywatelskich, co pogłębia instytucjonalną i społeczną niestabilność. Brak konfliktów jest normalnym stanem dla demokracji. Różnice w potencjale gospodarczym państw określają możliwości wzrostu potencjału militarnego. Uzasadniono, że wysoki poziom wydatków na cele wojskowe nie gwarantuje wysokiego poziomu stabilności w kraju, a społeczna i ekonomiczna nierówność pogłębia dalszą stratyfikację i napięcia społeczne. Najwyższy poziom pokoju demonstrują kraje o wysokim poziomie dobrobytu, który niekoniecznie pokrywa się z wysokim poziomem wydatków na cele wojskowe. Określono, że skutki współczesnych konfliktów mają również asymetryczny charakter, co pogłębia tendencję do internacjonalizacji konfliktów wewnętrznych: największe straty ponoszą dotknięte nimi kraje, gdzie mają miejsce najbardziej intensywne konflikty, a także ich sąsiedzi. Wojna

rosji przeciwko Ukrainie zaostrzyła globalny poziom zagrożenia z punktu widzenia napięcia i konfliktów.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt, zagrożenia, bezpieczeństwo narodowe, bezpieczeństwo globalne, asymetria, wydatki na cele wojskowe