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# The conflict between Russia and Ukraine: The causes of the war, security studies and the formation of an epistemic community in Poland

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to link three research problems. The first issue is the escalation of the war between Russia and Ukraine. The second issue is the reception of this war in the Polish community of experts in the field of security studies. The third issue is the process of developing a certain community of experts dealing with the problems of this war. To link these three issues, the concept of *epistemic community* was used.<sup>1</sup>

What are epistemic communities? An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized knowledge and competence in a given field of state policy. This concept – as Peter Haas states – is based on the pre-war ideas of the Polish scientist Ludwik Fleck, who in the 1930s published works on the ‘thought collective.’<sup>2</sup> This term denotes a group of scholars who have developed a common ‘thinking style.’ As Haas notes, experts may be characterized by (1) similar intellectual

<sup>1</sup> See: E. Adler, P. Haas, *Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program*, “International Organization” 1992, vol. 46, no. 1: *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination*, pp. 367–390.

<sup>2</sup> The work was originally published as: L. Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*, Benno Schwabe und Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung, Basel 1935; I used the Polish post-war edition: L. Fleck, *Powstanie i rozwój faktu naukowego. Wprowadzenie do nauki o stylu myślowym i kolektywie myślowym*, Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, Lublin 1986.

background. They also (2) adhere to similar principles and (3) share common beliefs about the causes and effects of certain phenomena. Experts are at the head of the knowledge hierarchy of modern democratic states.<sup>3</sup> They have professional criteria for evaluating social practices.<sup>4</sup>

What do security policy experts do? Thanks to their knowledge and social position, experts are considered capable of explaining cause and effect relationships, connections, and interests of various political actors. As a result, they play the role of advisors and interpreters of reality, which allows them to create media discourse and influence the formulation of state policy. Experts are whistle-blowers who contribute to the securitization process.<sup>5</sup> The escalation of the war between Russia and Ukraine has led to the activation of specialists in the field of security. This topic has become significant especially in the countries of the so-called Eastern flank of NATO, including Poland.<sup>6</sup>

In the further part of the article, I will assess the course of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and present the results of research conducted in 2022 among Polish security experts, which have led me to hypothesize that Polish experts developed a coherent way of explaining the problems of security policy. This makes it possible to justify the statement about the existence of an epistemic community.

## War of Russia and Ukraine in 2022

The problem of war is one of the main issues of political studies because for centuries it affected all elements of states, which are: territory, population, and legitimized power.<sup>7</sup> International relations scholars have developed dozens of theories about the causes of wars. It was in the shadow of the Cold War that almost all the key concepts such as power, balance of power, alliance, international anarchy, deterrence, peace, security, international system, interdependence, or international regimes were developed.<sup>8</sup> Also the idea of levels of analysis, introduced by Kenneth

<sup>3</sup> M. Noordegraaf, *The making of professional public leaders*, [in:] *Leadership in the Public Sector. Promises and Pitfalls*, eds. Ch. Teelken, E. Ferlie, M. Dent, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London – New York 2012, pp. 214–220.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ashgate Research Companion to New Public Management*, eds. T. Christiansen, P. Laegreid, Ashgate, Farnham 2013.

<sup>5</sup> O. Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, Working Papers, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, 1993, no. 5.

<sup>6</sup> The term “NATO’s Eastern flank” appeared in the public debate around the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016; see: J. Gotkowska, *NATO’s Eastern Flank – a new paradigm*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw 2016.

<sup>7</sup> I refer here to the classic definition of the state formulated by Georg Jellinek in his *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, Verlag von O. Häring, Berlin 1905.

<sup>8</sup> See: T. Diez, I. Bode and A. Fernandes da Costa, *Key Concepts in International Relations*, Sage, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi – Singapore 2011.

Waltz in the 1950s, continues to be influential in international studies.<sup>9</sup> Its structure is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Causes of wars and the rationale of the Russian-Ukrainian war

Analysis level	Examples of explanations of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Polish debate
Level 1: Leaders, elites and other people	Vladimir Putin's ambitions; the Russian elite's fear of NATO; belief in the weakness of Ukrainian politicians; the need for historical success and other private views of Russian politicians; conviction about the weakness of the Western elites; Russia's desire to intimidate democratic politicians
Level 2: The state and its policies	The growing assertiveness of the Russian security strategy; the militarization of Russian security policy; the strategy of Russia's domination in the area of the former USSR; assertive and pro-European policy of Ukraine (cooperation with the EU and NATO); demanding the return of Crimea and Donbass; an arms race in the region; loss of Russian influence in the area of the former Soviet Union
Level 3: The international system and its rules	The rivalry of states for hegemony in Eurasia; the growing number of fields of rivalry between China and the US creates space for local conflicts; Russia is on the side of an alliance with China, which means a conflict with the West; Russia wants to test the reaction of the West and increase its prestige and importance in the international system; division of the international system into blocs: democratic and authoritarian

Source: Author's own study.

The process of explaining war in international relations is based mainly on categories developed in political science. Since the times of Clausewitz, war has been interpreted as an instrument of political power in Western thinking, which means that the elites explain war in the context of politics. Therefore, there is no single cause of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Practically all the issues mentioned above are present in the Polish debate.

1) The first phase of the war was the offensive of Russian troops along almost the entire border of Ukraine with Russia and Belarus. The pretext for the attack was the fact that on 21 February Russia recognized the independence of the 'republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk, which then on 23 February asked for help in repelling Ukrainian 'aggression'.<sup>10</sup> The wide-ranging nature of this invasion – shown on TV maps around the world – was designed to scare the people of Ukraine and shock the Western world. An offensive of about 10,000 soldiers from garrisons in the Russian Far East was directed at the city of Kiev alone. Similar forces were sent to Kharkov. Most of the forces in this direction, however, were made up of units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards

<sup>9</sup> K.N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York 1959.

<sup>10</sup> *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, The Kremlin, Moscow, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

Tank Army. After several days of rapid progress, however, the Russian troops ran out of fuel, ammunition, and food. The Russians reached the outskirts of Kharkov and Kiev but were driven back. Russian logistics turned out to be inefficient and poorly commanded.<sup>11</sup> The immobilized Russian equipment was abandoned by the soldiers, which the Ukrainian information services quickly took advantage of. In a few weeks, the image of the Russian army as one of the world's main armed forces was destroyed. The first phase of the invasion ended in defeat for the Russians when they were forced to withdraw from northern Ukraine in early April without having captured Kiev, Chernihiv, or Kharkov. The Ukrainians have not given up any large city to Russia, except for Kherson, captured in March as a result of treason (the Ukrainians regained Kherson in the fall of 2022).<sup>12</sup> The symbolic end of this phase of the war was the sinking of the Russian cruiser Moscow in the Black Sea on 14 April 2022.<sup>13</sup>

During the first phase of the war, there was a quick reaction from the Polish news media, which broadcast programmes about the war around the clock. For the purpose of describing and evaluating the reported events, numerous military and political experts were invited to the studio. In total, we are talking about several dozen people, mainly former military personnel and political scientists. The first stage of the formation of the epistemic community took place, in which rules for describing and explaining events began to be created.

2) The second phase of the war took place from April to July 2022, with particular emphasis on the fighting in the south and east of Ukraine. Russian troops successfully advanced on Mariupol, whose heroic defence was completed in mid-May. Russia's success was the fact that after the fighting in Mariupol ended, they managed to create a 'land corridor' leading from Crimea to the Donbas. The Ukrainians were also forced to retreat in the Donbas, surrendering Severodonetsk and Lisichansk at the turn of June and July.<sup>14</sup> It was the greatest military success of the Russian army in 2022, although the Ukrainian forces could not be encircled or destroyed. In most cases, the Ukrainian army avoided clashes in major cities to avoid civilian casualties. The Ukrainian army moved to another line of defence near the city of Bakhmut. In this phase, the West began to respond more clearly to calls for help and to supply

<sup>11</sup> J. Van Tol *et al.*, *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region. New Realities*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington 2022.

<sup>12</sup> According to estimates, Moscow controlled 25% of Ukrainian territory in March, compared to about 15% in November 2022. P. Breteau, *Nine months of war in Ukraine in one map: How much territory did Russia invade and then cede?*, *Le Monde*, 25 November 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/11/25/nine-months-of-war-in-ukraine-in-one-map-how-much-territory-did-russia-invade-and-then-cede\\_6005655\\_8.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/11/25/nine-months-of-war-in-ukraine-in-one-map-how-much-territory-did-russia-invade-and-then-cede_6005655_8.html) [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>13</sup> *Sunken Russian warship Moskva: What do we know?*, BBC News, 18 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61103927> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>14</sup> *Fall of Severodonetsk is Russia's biggest victory since Mariupol*, Al-Jazeera, 25 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/25/fall-of-severodonetsk-is-russias-biggest-victory-since-mariupol> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

Ukraine with significant amounts of ammunition and military equipment. Meanwhile, in the Polish public debate, most stations established permanent lists of war commentators. The general framework and ways of interpreting the war were also established. The first scientific and review papers and reports from Ukraine also began to appear.<sup>15</sup>

3) The third phase of the war took place from August to November 2022. 9 August was a symbolic date here, when Ukrainian troops began to attack enemy positions using HIMARS systems, destroying the Russian logistic base. A month later, around 6 September, the Ukrainian counteroffensive near Kharkov began. Within two weeks, the Ukrainians recaptured the city of Iziium and a territory of over 8,000 square kilometres. In response to the internationally commented flight of Russian troops, Vladimir Putin announced a partial mobilization in Russia on 21 September, leading to the exodus of around 1 million young men from the country. On 30 September, Putin announced the annexation of the Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Luhansk and Kherson regions to Russia.<sup>16</sup> The development of the Ukrainian offensive also sparked a discussion about the possible use of nuclear weapons by the Russians, which, however, did not materialize. In October, Ukrainian forces recaptured the area around Kherson and forced Russian troops to retreat to the eastern bank of the Dnieper on 11 November.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, in the Polish expert debate at that time, there was already an extensive discourse on armaments, purchases of military equipment, civil protection, changes in NATO, and the reconstruction of Ukraine. The first more serious analytical reports also appeared.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Probably the first Polish book on the Russian-Ukrainian war was a collective publication of the Nowa Konfederacja portal: *Geopolityczne trzęsienie ziemi. Jak rosyjska agresja na Ukrainę zmieniła świat*, Wydawnictwo Nowej Konfederacji, Warszawa 2022.

<sup>16</sup> 'By deciding to annex four Ukrainian oblasts within their administrative boundaries (their total area is approx. 110,000 km<sup>2</sup>; they account for 18.2% of Ukrainian territory), Russia is also attempting to incorporate territories that its armed forces do not even at present control. According to Ukrainian estimates, until recently about 88% of Kherson oblast, 67% of Zaporizhzhia oblast, 57% of Donetsk oblast and 99% of Luhansk oblast were under occupation. Ukraine has also lost 4% of the Mykolaiv oblast, an area that Moscow has counted as part of the occupied Kherson oblast.' M. Menkiszak, M. Domańska, P. Żochowski, *Russia announces the annexation of four regions of Ukraine*, 03 October 2022, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw 2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-10-03/russia-announces-annexation-four-regions-ukraine> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

<sup>17</sup> J. Landay, *Ukrainians celebrate soldiers retaking Kherson, Russia's latest defeat*, Reuters, 11 November, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-urges-ukraine-be-open-talks-with-russia-washington-post-2022-11-06/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>18</sup> Major Polish think tanks analyze the situation in Ukraine on an ongoing basis. These include the Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, PISM) and the Center for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, OSW). A lot of valuable materials and broadcasts are also published on numerous specialist social media channels, to which a separate publication should be devoted. In the autumn, a publication by strategic studies analysts from the University of Warsaw was also published, see: *Bezpieczeństwo Polski*

4) The fourth phase of the war, which can be called the winter period, consisted mainly in Russian missile attacks on Ukrainian critical infrastructure. Ukraine's acquisition of Western anti-aircraft systems led to a reduction in losses from Russian missiles and drones. The main area of land fighting at the turn of 2023 was the area around the city of Bakhmut. The Russians began storming the city with the help of newly mobilized recruits and mercenaries recruited for a private military company, the so-called Wagner Group. This led to gigantic Russian losses on the front, counting hundreds of casualties every day. In the spring of 2023, an offensive was expected on both sides of the conflict. The Russians hoped to break the Ukrainian defences and open a new front near Kharkov. The Ukrainians hoped to acquire long-range missiles and tear apart the 'Russian land corridor' from Crimea to the Donbas.

In 2023, the disappearance of a broader public debate on the course of the war could be observed in Poland. The topic has become a specialist issue, discussed by experts in the professional media. The number of specialist commentaries in the mainstream media decreased. At the turn of 2023, comprehensive scientific publications already appeared.<sup>19</sup>

## The year of the war

Preparing the balance sheet, I took into account Barry Buzan's division into 'sectors of security.' There are five such sectors: military, political, economic, social, and environmental.<sup>20</sup> Starting from the military sector, it should be mentioned that the total number of casualties on the part of the Russian army is estimated at 200,000 at least, killed and wounded soldiers, although some Western estimates say a higher number.<sup>21</sup> Russia also lost several thousand pieces of combat equipment, including

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*w świetle wojny na Wschodzie*, ed. R. Kuźniar, Scholar, Warszawa 2022. The author of this text was a reviewer of this valuable publication.

<sup>19</sup> See: *Politics and Security of Central and Eastern Europe. Contemporary Challenges*, ed. R. Zięba, Springer International, Cham 2023. The publication discusses the main problems of the CEE region in the face of war, such as peripherality, illiberalism, militarization, energy security and many others.

<sup>20</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder – London 1998.

<sup>21</sup> 'Senior U.S. officials said this week that they believe the number for Russia is closer to 200,000. That toll, in just 11 months, is eight times higher than American casualties in two decades of war in Afghanistan.' *Soaring Death Toll Gives Grim Insight Into Russian Tactics*, New York Times, 2 February 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/02/us/politics/ukraine-russia-casualties.html> [accessed: 20 March 2023]. 'In all, Conflict Intelligence Team assumes as many as 65,000 Russians have died or gone missing in the wider war on Ukraine. Historically, modern armies suffer three or four wounded-in-action for every one soldier who's killed in action. Thus CIT's 270,000 overall figure for combined wounded and dead.' D. Axe, *It's Possible 270,000 Russians Have Been Killed Or Wounded In Ukraine*, Forbes, 7 February 2023,

numerous pieces of high-tech equipment (new models of rockets, tanks, and anti-aircraft systems).

Apart from capturing part of the southern lands of Ukraine, the Russians did not achieve lasting military successes, and the Ukrainians managed to regain about 40% of the previously lost lands. At the same time, Ukraine acquired additional military equipment from the West worth \$35 billion.<sup>22</sup> The Russians still have superior numbers and ammunition, but they have lost much of their best troops and operational initiative. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in the report *The Military Balance 2023* suggests that Russia was to lose about 1,500 tanks, or about 40% of those remaining in the line, which is a huge loss, considering the scale of the war and its relatively short duration (in comparison to, for example, the Soviet-Afghan or the Iraqi-Iranian war). According to the IISS, Ukraine has lost under 700 tanks and the number of tanks it has in its possession has increased – from 858 to 953, as it has captured about 500 vehicles on the battlefield and received several hundred post-Soviet tanks from Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries.<sup>23</sup> In the spring of 2023, Ukrainian forces also acquired several dozen Western tanks.

### Political sector

Both Russia and Ukraine retained their political leadership. The diplomatic and image-building effectiveness of the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was surprising, while Vladimir Putin was basically excluded from the circle of important European leaders. Putin withdrew from the G-20 summit.<sup>24</sup> Russia has lost its political prestige, negotiating potential, and has become a country isolated by the West, which has brought Russia closer to Asian authoritarian states such as the People's Republic of China, North Korea, and Iran. Russia had to passively accept the unfavourable changes in NATO (the armament of NATO's eastern flank countries, the increased presence of American troops, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the arming of Ukraine, and the NATO's new strategic concept).<sup>25</sup> The unity of European

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2023/02/07/its-possible-270000-russians-have-been-killed-or-wounded-in-ukraine/?sh=342b1af12eec> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>22</sup> A.M. Dyner, W. Lorenz, A. Legucka, *The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Political Stability of Russia*, 02 February 2023, Polish Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.pism.pl/publications/the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-political-stability-of-russia> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>23</sup> *The Military Balance 2023*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 15 February 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance> [accessed: 17 February 2023].

<sup>24</sup> A. Teresia, *Russia's Putin will not attend G20 summit in Bali in person*, Reuters, 10 November 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-putin-will-not-attend-g20-summit-bali-indonesian-official-2022-11-10/> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

<sup>25</sup> See more: *NATO Strategic Concept*, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [accessed: 22 March 2023]; S. Monaghan, E. Arnold, *Indispensable: NATO's Framework Nations Concept beyond Madrid*, Center for International and Security Studies, Washington 2022.

countries, which announced as many as ten packages of economic sanctions within 12 months, turned out to be a surprising success.<sup>26</sup> However, the Kremlin is still able to dominate and even annex Belarus and thus threaten NATO and the countries of Eastern Europe. Perhaps this is what press leaks from the Kremlin to Western media are for, alleging that Russia plans to occupy Belarus by 2030.<sup>27</sup>

### Economic sector

Russia has suffered enormous economic losses, lost key trading partners, and lost access to the Western energy market. The Russian military industry has already suffered heavy losses. According to the European Commission, Russia may have lost more than 5% of GDP in 2022 alone.<sup>28</sup> 2023 will not be any better in this respect, as Moscow has lost the trust of Western investors for a long time, many of whom have permanently withdrawn from the Russian market, and those who have remained are under considerable pressure from the Western public opinion. The stability of the Russian currency is also uncertain, especially if Western politicians manage to confiscate Russian assets in Europe for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. The 'Asian turn' in Russian politics and economy will not bring Russia compensation for the lost market and Western partners for a long time.

Ukraine has suffered great material losses. As of December 2022, direct documented damage to Ukraine's infrastructure as a result of Russia's invasion was estimated at \$138 billion. Ukraine's GDP has shrunk by a third. A total of 149.3 thousand residential buildings were destroyed in 2022.<sup>29</sup> In Ukraine, huge areas of crops

<sup>26</sup> *EU agrees 10<sup>th</sup> package of sanctions against Russia*, 25 February 2023, European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_1185](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1185) [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>27</sup> T. Kuzio, *Putin's plan for a new Russian Empire includes both Ukraine and Belarus*, The Atlantic Council, 29 March 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-plan-for-a-new-russian-empire-includes-both-ukraine-and-belarus/> [accessed: 30 March 2023]; A. Myroniuk, *Leaked document reveals alleged Kremlin plan to take over Belarus by 2030*, The Kyiv Independent, 21 February 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/leaked-document-reveals-alleged-kremlin-plan-to-take-over-belarus-by-2030/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>28</sup> 'According to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022 was a bad year for the Russian economy. It is estimated that in 2022, Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by at least 2.2% in the best-case scenario and by up to 3.9% in the worst-case scenario. Russia's economy may continue to shrink in 2023. Its GDP is forecast to decline by 5.6% in the worst-case scenario (OECD) or by 3.3% according to the World Bank.' *Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy*, European Council, Council of the European Union, 17 March 2023 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

<sup>29</sup> O. Harmash, *Ukraine's economy stabilizes after shock of war*, Reuters, 27 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/ukraines-economy-stabilizes-after-shock-war-2023-02-27/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].



have been destroyed, a large number of people have been resettled, and the occupied territories are exploited for the extraction of rare raw materials.<sup>30</sup>

### Ecological sector

The changes on the European energy market should be mentioned first. The outbreak of war caused an increase in the prices of energy carriers. In the first two weeks of the war, oil prices increased by half, and gas and coal prices tripled. European countries decided to change their approach to energy and the energy crisis was brought under control. One year after the invasion, coal, oil, and gas prices are 15 to 35% lower than before the war. The EU has significantly reduced the import of energy resources from Russia. According to the EU *REPowerEU plan*, hydrocarbons are being replaced by renewable energy sources.<sup>31</sup> This situation is a big problem for Russia, where as much as 40% of the budget revenues were profits from the sale of energy resources.<sup>32</sup> Russia is losing its status as an energy superpower and is becoming increasingly dependent on China. In addition, the EU supported the functioning of the Ukrainian state and in June 2022 officially announced a membership perspective for Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

### Social sector

It is the most vulnerable element of the war. Due to electricity and water shortages in the cold winter months, nearly 18 million people in Ukraine were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance (according to UNHCR). About 14 million people had to leave their homes.<sup>34</sup> Most people migrated within the Ukrainian state, but a large part of the population left the country. In December 2022, the European Commission announced that 4.8 million refugees from Ukraine had arrived in the EU (the

<sup>30</sup> 'Yet SecDev's analysis indicates that at least \$12.4 trillion worth of Ukraine's energy deposits, metals and minerals are now under Russian control. That figure accounts for nearly half the dollar value of the 2,209 deposits reviewed by the company. In addition to 63 percent of the country's coal deposits, Moscow has seized 11 percent of its oil deposits, 20 percent of its natural gas deposits, 42 percent of its metals and 33 percent of its deposits of rare earth and other critical minerals including lithium.' A. Faiola, D. Bennett, *In the Ukraine war, a battle for the nation's mineral and energy wealth*, 10 August 2022, The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/10/ukraine-russia-energy-mineral-wealth/> [accessed: 20 March 2023].

<sup>31</sup> *REPowerEU: affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe*, European Commission, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en) [accessed: 16 March 2023].

<sup>32</sup> A.M. Dyer, W. Lorenz, A. Legucka, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> *EU Enlargement Policy: Ukraine*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/ukraine/> [accessed: 27 March 2023].

<sup>34</sup> *Ukraine emergency*, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html> [accessed: 27 March 2023].

largest number of refugees came to Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic).<sup>35</sup> In March 2022, the EU launched a directive which simplified the mechanisms for obtaining a residence permit, access to the labour market, accommodation and medical assistance, and access for Ukrainian children to education in EU countries. The EU guaranteed €523 million in humanitarian aid to refugees.<sup>36</sup> On the anniversary of the Russian invasion, the United Nations reported more than 20,000 confirmed civilian casualties of the war, although it seems that human losses in the fighting areas will certainly exceed 100,000 victims.<sup>37</sup>

## Qualitative research

It should be noted that in the study of international affairs, the acquisition of evoked data is still rare. The relation between the researcher and their subject of study is so remote (inaccessibility of decision-makers, secrecy of information) that in training, political science scholars mainly learn methods of working with text or other existing data (descriptions of events, documents, speeches, strategies, and legislation).<sup>38</sup> Who or what may be covered by such research? After all, we are within the realm of the social sciences, so the phenomena we study concern people. It is people who create institutions, practices, and ideas. Adopting this assumption leads us to the conclusion that we deal with public policy. One feature of public policy is that it has its stakeholders.

The main stakeholders are, of course, the state authorities and politicians from various parties who create and comment on international events. In this circle, legal acts, government documents, strategies, and declarations are created. Reaching this circle of stakeholders is difficult and would require participatory observation. Another circle of stakeholders creating the debate on foreign policy and the state's position in the world are experts, analysts, scientists, journalists, and people professionally involved in international politics. Expert opinions, analyses, scientific publications, reports, professional journals, media relations, and public comments are created in this circle. The last circle of stakeholders are institutions which do not directly comment

<sup>35</sup> *EU Migration and Asylum Policy, Refugee inflow from Ukraine*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>36</sup> *Refugees from Ukraine in the EU*, European Council, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/ukraine-refugees-eu/> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

<sup>37</sup> *Number of civilian casualties in Ukraine during Russia's invasion verified by OHCHR from February 24, 2022 to March 26, 2023*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/> [accessed: 28 March 2023].

<sup>38</sup> Classic methodological textbooks in the field of political science show this difficulty only to a small extent, cf. D. Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, Palgrave Macmillan, London – New York 2016; *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, eds. V. Lowndes, D. Marsh, G. Stoker, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Palgrave Macmillan – Red Globe Press, London 2018.

on politics but are interested in information on this subject. These are domestic and foreign business and media available to citizens.

The circle of expert elites who have both knowledge and practical experience is the most accessible for researchers. It was decided that a selected group of experts would be the main point of reference for evaluating Polish security policy during the war in Ukraine. It was also decided that the main method of work would be interviews and expert surveys. It was assumed that experts are a kind of epistemic community as Peter Haas understands it.<sup>39</sup> When communicating with experts, it was decided to structure interviews, but in such a way as to allow for freedom in the selection of argumentation and length of statements. The respondents were selected specialists who are military professionals, diplomats, analysts, journalists, and scientists. The respondents in the study were 30 specialists (out of 42 people selected for the study). The selection of experts for the study was based on several requirements, which were: at least 5 years of experience in analysing security policy and having expert publications in this area. The experts gave a total of 236 statements related to security policy in the Eastern flank of NATO.

The designed research process required several additional skills compared to working with existing data. The researcher managed the process of data acquisition, recording, analysis, theoretical interpretation, and conclusions. The collected data needed to reflect the respondents' message as accurately as possible (in the case of working with notes from interviews, it required authorization). The next stage was the secondary analysis and forming generalizations based on the obtained data.<sup>40</sup>

## The research process

The process of preparing for the implementation of the project covered the second quarter of 2022. The intended result of the project was a short analytical report, available to the wider public opinion.<sup>41</sup> The designed qualitative research consisted of several elements: (1) theoretical analysis, (2) data collection methods, and (3) data interpretation methods.<sup>42</sup> Theoretical analysis included studies on terminology

<sup>39</sup> P. Haas, *Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination*, "International Organization" 1992, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 1–35.

<sup>40</sup> *Research Methods in Defense Studies. A Multidisciplinary Overview*, ed. D. Deschaux-Dutard, Routledge – Taylor & Francis, New York – Oxon 2021, see especially chapters 3, 4 and 6.

<sup>41</sup> The material was published as: T. Pawluszko, *The Security of Poland after the NATO summit in Madrid*, Instytut Sobieskiego, Warsaw 2022, [https://sobieski.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/NATO\\_E\\_BOOK\\_EN.pdf](https://sobieski.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/NATO_E_BOOK_EN.pdf) [accessed: 21 March 2023]. The research was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Public Diplomacy 2022 competition.

<sup>42</sup> When designing the research, I benefited greatly from these publications: U. Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, SAGE Publications Ltd, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi – Singapore 2018; J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and*

in the field of international relations, selection of theoretical position (analytical eclecticism), development of theoretical proposals for state policy, and development of a conceptual grid and questions for interviews.

Data collection methods included developing interview scenarios, preparing a list of experts for interviews or surveys, developing interview questionnaires, developing an inquiry and a brief description of the project for contact with respondents, determining the availability of experts, creating a work calendar, and conducting expert interviews/surveys (proportion was approximately 50/50).

Methods of data interpretation included preparation of notes from meetings with experts and carrying out the authorization process for each respondent undergoing a live interview, theoretical and thematic coding, analysis of the content, and selection of citations of exemplary statements for individual subchapters of the report for publication.

To sum up, the general schedule of the research first covered theoretical studies (state of knowledge, state of research, reports, publications, analyses), which were conducted in the period of April – July 2022. Their effect was the creation of a scientific foundation for empirical research, which was carried out in August and September 2022. The next empirical research included: the preparatory stage (development of research documentation, contact with respondents), the implementation stage (interviews, surveys, notes, authorization, processing, coding and anonymization of statements, categorization); the final stage of the work included the writing process, evaluation, and presentation of the results.

Table 2. Schedule of own research in 2022

Research stages (months of 2022)	IV–V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Preliminary research (literature, reports)	■	■	■			
Studies on the history of the region		■	■			
Studies in terminology	■	■	■	■		
Analysis of political positions in Poland		■	■	■		
Selection of a theoretical position			■	■		
Developing theoretical proposals				■	■	
Developing a grid of terms and questions for interviews				■	■	

Research stages (months of 2022)	IV-V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Developing the theoretical part				■	■	
Developing interview/ survey scenarios				■	■	
Preparation of the list of experts and contact				■	■	
Field work / interviews				■	■	
Transcription					■	
Authorization					■	
Coding and analysis of interviews' content					■	
Relating the results to the existing knowledge					■	
Preparation of the text of the research report					■	
Corrections after scientific review						■
Consultations with the expert community						■
Preparation of the final version of the report						■
Printing and presentation of test results						■
Promotion process on the Internet						■

Source: Author's own study.

## Key findings

As part of the research, a report was created containing several dozen statements by experts on Poland's security policy during the Russian-Ukrainian war.<sup>43</sup> Work on the report provided a better understanding of the role of experts as public policy stakeholders. Observation of expert statements also allowed the assessment of the concept of epistemic community. Conclusions from these studies, corresponding to the objectives of this article, are presented below.

Firstly, Polish experts know that they are treated as authorities and know their environment. Secondly, half a year after the outbreak of the war, it turned out that Polish experts have quite a similar assessment of most security policy problems. Thirdly, experts used similar terminology, regardless of their professional

<sup>43</sup> T. Pawluszko, *op. cit.*

affiliation. Virtually all experts consciously and freely used terms such as: *alliance, hegemony, integration, security, strategy, crisis, expansion, sanctions, foreign policy, national interests, and power*. These concepts were present in almost every recorded utterance. Fourthly, the experts had similar opinions on the war scenarios and potential threats to regional security. They also pointed to similar mistakes made by politicians and the Russian army (weak command, inefficient logistics, ineffective combat air forces, killing innocent civilians, constant lies about the invasion) and praised Ukraine's effective strategy. In addition, the experts unanimously emphasized the constancy of the Russian threat and the need to increase NATO's armaments. The vast majority of the experts favoured Ukraine and believed that Ukraine's defence was conducive to the security of the CEE region. This opinion was shared by the majority of Polish society.<sup>44</sup>

It can therefore be concluded that Polish experts commenting on the problems of security policy have created an informal epistemic community, developed thanks to the mass demand for reliable information about the war in Polish media. Therefore, their behaviour, concepts, and style of expression meet several of the aforementioned conditions for the existence of such a community. Interestingly, this process was created independently of the policy of the Polish state (!) which was reluctant to use external expertise.<sup>45</sup>

The vast majority of the experts referred to traditional approaches to international relations. According to the experts, the survival of the state is a necessary condition for the existence of national security. Without ensuring success in this sphere, it is not possible to take care of other public values.<sup>46</sup> However, in a long-term perspective, socio-economic resources turn out to be crucial, allowing the generation of wealth, absorption of new technologies and positioning the so-called country's *soft power*.<sup>47</sup> The war makes it clear that it is necessary to supplement the study of international relations with issues of internal politics (elites, ideas, strategies, institutions). Qualitative research shows that many experts prefer to express themselves in writing rather than orally. The recorded written statements were richer in detail, while oral statements were clearer in explaining the processes. All the experts showed advanced knowledge, especially in the field of international politics and

<sup>44</sup> E. Baszczak *et al.*, *How Polish society has been helping the refugees from Ukraine*, Polish Economic Institute, Warsaw, July 2022; *Poland to spend €8.4bn supporting Ukraine refugees in 2022, highest in OECD*, 12 October, 2022, Notes from Poland, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/10/14/poland-to-spend-e8-4bn-supporting-ukraine-refugees-in-2022-highest-in-oecd/> [accessed: 21 March 2023].

<sup>45</sup> *Debaty Strategiczne BBN. Główne kierunki rozwoju Sił Zbrojnych RP*, National Security Bureau, 21 March 2023, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/9624,Debaty-Strategiczne-BBN-Glowne-kierunki-rozwoju-Sil-Zbrojnych-RP.html> [accessed: 23 March 2023].

<sup>46</sup> B. Brodie, *Strategy as a Science*, "World Politics" 1949, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 467–488.

<sup>47</sup> J.S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York 2011.

military affairs. The experts focused on observable facts, which increased the potential for objectification of their statements.

## Conclusions

The use of interviews and surveys as tools for qualitative analysis in the area of international relations was a valuable source of new knowledge. The research field of international relations has expanded significantly after the Cold War. This means expanding the conceptual base we operate on to explain increasingly complex phenomena. The Russian-Ukrainian war has become a very important event for the public opinion in Poland and the entire region, which has become an area of strategic importance for the international order. Locally, this may lead to a long-term increase in public interest in international security studies.

It should be noted that the concepts developed in the theory of international relations turned out to be a good starting point for both theoretical research and social research among experts. On the other hand, it is necessary to expand this sphere of knowledge with further issues. The study of epistemic communities in the field of security studies is a relatively new issue in Polish literature. The analysis of social practices and behaviour of experts is an important element in the self-knowledge of the scientific community.

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*The conflict between Russia and Ukraine: The causes of the war, security studies and the formation of an epistemic community in Poland*

**Abstract**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has led to an increased interest in knowledge about warfare. The public debate about this war has become a test for the expertise skills of numerous scholars and government analysts. Within a few months, a new epistemic community emerged, which began to create a security discourse around the problems of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The article tries to explain the key terms used in this discourse and to indicate what classical texts in the field of international relations say about the causes and course of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In order to compare theory with practice, the author analysed several hundred expert publications on the war and conducted a total of several dozen interviews and surveys in 2022 in the Polish expert community. This text is therefore based on both a theoretical analysis and an insight into the reasoning of the epistemic community of experts educated in the field of security studies.

Keywords: war, securitization, epistemic community, security, power, Russia