

## Diplomacy in the era of hybrid conflicts: The examples of Europe, Africa and the Middle East

Anna Stychynska\*<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine

**Abstract.** The aim of the study was to justify new approaches to understanding diplomacy as an adaptive system capable of integrating military, information, legal and economic instruments for effective interaction in the context of hybrid threats. The methodology was based on a combination of an interdisciplinary approach, which included instruments of political science, international relations, security studies, law and communication studies, with the use of comparative analysis, case studies, institutional analysis and critical discourse analysis. The results of the study showed that diplomacy in hybrid conflicts has undergone qualitative changes, moving away from the classical model of inter-state negotiations in favour of a multidimensional approach integrated with military and information tools. An analysis of peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Mali, Congo and Ukraine confirmed the decisive role of combining diplomatic and security components to achieve stability. It was found that international organisations such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance acted as key coordinators in shaping the institutional framework for responding to hybrid threats. The study highlighted the growing importance of “third parties” in conflict resolution, as demonstrated by Turkey and Qatar, which used humanitarian and economic instruments for mediation. One area of focus was countering disinformation campaigns, where the United States, France and Eastern European countries demonstrated different models of institutional responses, including legislative initiatives and the creation of specialised centres to combat propaganda. The analysis showed that the development of cyber diplomacy and institutional initiatives, in particular European strategic communications projects, have become necessary to ensure the sustainability of states. It was found that the effectiveness of diplomacy depended on the ability to combine traditional negotiation practices with new tools of digital interaction and strategic communications. Based on the analysis, it is recommended to develop integrated diplomatic strategies that combine traditional negotiations with modern tools of cybersecurity and countering disinformation, taking into account regional specifics. The results can be used to improve national and international strategies for countering hybrid threats and to develop effective diplomatic practices in the new global security environment

**Keywords:** peacekeeping missions; countering disinformation; cyber diplomacy; information security; coordination

### INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the research topic is determined by the radical transformation of the international environment, in which diplomacy and security practices are increasingly operating in conditions of hybrid conflicts. Modern wars and confrontations go beyond traditional military logic, combining political, informational, economic and technological instruments of pressure. This creates multi-level challenges for states, international organisations

and non-state actors, as countermeasures must take into account military, diplomatic and informational dimensions simultaneously. Hybrid warfare is a key paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which has reformatted the very nature of diplomacy, forcing it to adapt to realities where information attacks, cyber operations, terrorist proxies and instruments of economic coercion are becoming structural elements of international interaction. The problem of the

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\*Corresponding author



study was the lack of a comprehensive approach to the analysis of diplomacy in the context of hybrid conflicts, where classical negotiation practices are intertwined with new forms of influence that do not always fit into traditional legal or institutional frameworks.

In scientific literature, the problem of hybrid conflicts and diplomacy has been studied from various angles. M.F. Shabbir (2022) emphasised that hybrid warfare between major powers created conditions for the active involvement of non-state actors and terrorist proxy forces, such as Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or groups used by India in Pakistan. The author argued that hybrid warfare created conditions for the integration of terrorist groups into the strategic mechanisms of states, transforming them into a structural element of hybrid threats and requiring the development of a unified comprehensive approach to counter these interrelated challenges. In a study by M.T. Teibowei (2024), the focus was on the convergence of digital diplomacy and language policy, which radically transformed global communication. The author argued that governments needed to improve their language proficiency and master digital tools in order to effectively shape global perceptions and build constructive international relations in a world that was digitally interconnected. M. Weissmann *et al.* (2021) offered a comprehensive analysis of hybrid warfare as a multi-component strategy combining conventional warfare, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and diplomatic tools. Significantly, the authors not only considered examples from Ukraine, the Baltic states and Taiwan, but also proposed an original theoretical model – the ‘Hybridity Blizzard Model’ – which explained the nature of combined threats and could be used to neutralise them. B. Piskorska (2025) emphasised the transformation of the UN (United Nations, n.d.) from a “soft” power into an entity capable of applying elements of “hard” power, in particular through military aid to Ukraine and sanctions policy against Russia. The author analysed these changes in three areas: the redefinition of the EU’s international identity, institutional transformations after the Lisbon Treaty, and the adaptation of diplomacy to hybrid threats in a turbulent international environment.

C. Bjola & I. Manor (2022) showed in their study how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the formation of hybrid diplomacy, combining physical and virtual formats of interaction. Based on surveys of diplomats, it was proven that although virtual meetings did not replace full-fledged offline communication, they ensured the continuity of negotiation processes and contributed to the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation. W. Song & E. Fanoulis (2023) studied EU public diplomacy, focusing on its perception in different countries. They demonstrated that attitudes towards the UN’s diplomatic efforts varied depending on the socio-economic and political context, which required greater flexibility and adaptability in the application of diplomatic strategies. S. Kіçmari (2024) conducted a retrospective analysis of the functions of diplomacy enshrined in the 1961 Vienna Convention, emphasising their relevance in

the contemporary international environment. The author stressed that, despite new threats, the fundamental tasks of diplomats – representation, negotiation and promotion of peace – remained unchanged but required new methods of implementation. F. Akgül (2021) questioned the conceptual boundaries of the term “hybrid warfare”, drawing attention to the spread of the term “grey zone” in academic debates to describe the actions of Russia and China. He argued that these concepts are not identical, and that their distinction reflected a strategic shift in the United States’ focus from Russia to China, which was important for understanding the evolution of modern conflicts.

Existing works did not sufficiently explore aspects of the integration of diplomatic instruments with mechanisms for countering information threats and the practices of non-state actors in hybrid wars. The problem of the interaction of traditional diplomatic formats with new practices of cyber diplomacy and mediation, as well as the issue of the effectiveness of institutional responses by international organisations, required further consideration. The aim of this study was to identify the transformations of diplomacy in the context of hybrid conflicts and to identify institutional and practical mechanisms for its adaptation to contemporary challenges. The objectives of the study were: to analyse key cases of diplomacy in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, taking into account regional specifics; to establish the role of international organisations and “third parties” in resolving hybrid conflicts; to explore the institutional and legal frameworks for countering disinformation campaigns and cyber threats in diplomatic practice and to formulate practical recommendations for improving diplomatic strategies to counter hybrid threats.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The key tool was a comparative research methodology that allowed for the comparison of peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ukraine based on a number of criteria, including: the institutional framework and mandate of the mission; the size and composition of the contingent; the nature of the challenges (from peacekeeping to enforcement operations); the level of integration of diplomatic, military and humanitarian components; and effectiveness in achieving stability, taking into account the political context and regional specifics. The study also covered cases of “third party” mediation (Turkey, Qatar) and institutional responses of individual states (the United States, France, Eastern European countries) to disinformation campaigns. Structural and functional analysis was used to identify transformations in diplomatic instruments under the influence of cyber operations, disinformation and economic pressure. To clarify the specifics of the institutional response to hybrid threats, the activities of a number of key institutions were analysed, such as The European Centre of Excellence... (n.d.), NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (n.d.), as well as special digital diplomacy departments in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom, France

and Ukraine. The institutional analysis method was used to study the activities of international organisations such as the UN, OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, n.d.), ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States, n.d.), as well as the OSCE mission in Ukraine (OSCE Special Monitoring..., n.d.). The analysis examined the institutional mechanisms through which states and international organisations implement adaptation strategies in hybrid conflicts, focusing on structural elements, competencies and functional links between them.

Attention is paid to regulatory acts and documents that have become important benchmarks in the field of countering disinformation and developing cyber diplomacy. The study takes into account the Law of the United States No. 114-328, 2016, which for the first time defined information security as a component of national security, Act of the United States No. H.R. 3776 (2018), which institutionalised cyber diplomacy within the US State Department, and the activities of the Global Engagement Centre (US Department of State, n.d.), which is responsible for countering propaganda. The French experience is presented through an analysis of the legislative initiative Act of France No. 151 (2018), aimed at combating fake news. In addition, the methodology uses materials from the European External Action Service, in particular EEAS Strategic Communication Task Forces (2025) and the EUvsDisinfo (n.d.) project, which have become institutional tools for countering disinformation campaigns in Europe. The method of critical discourse analysis was used to study information attacks and their impact on diplomatic practice. In this context, the studies by G. Eady *et al.* (2023) and E. Kondratov & E. Johansson-Nogués (2023), which show the experience of the United States and France in countering external information campaigns, as well as the experience of Ukraine, where the Center for Countering Disinformation (n.d.) operates under the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine. The method of analysing diplomatic narratives was used to study the processes of forming and using narratives in diplomatic negotiations, as well as their impact on the international image of states. Within this method, the mechanisms of narrative construction, their functional role in communication, and their integration into diplomatic practices were studied. The method of comparative typology was used to systematise regional differences in approaches to diplomacy. The analysis covered diplomatic strategies in Europe, Africa and the Middle East according to the following criteria: the degree of institutional integration and the role of international organisations; the balance between “hard” and “soft” power instruments; the nature of priority threats and security challenges; the role of non-state actors in diplomatic processes; the level of adaptation to the digital environment and information threats; the model of negotiation and mediation; the degree of integration of diplomacy with security and peacekeeping mechanisms. Structural and functional differences in diplomatic strategies between regions were assessed separately.

## RESULTS

### **Adaptation of diplomatic practices to the challenges of hybrid conflicts**

Hybrid conflicts are one of the most complex forms of contemporary threats to international security, as they combine traditional military actions with asymmetric and non-traditional instruments – cyber operations, economic pressure, information attacks and the use of non-state actors (Khan, 2025). Unlike classic interstate wars, where the line between peace and war is relatively clear, hybrid conflicts are characterised by a blurring of this line and a multi-level impact on the political, economic, information and humanitarian spheres. They arise in a space where sovereign states are increasingly forced to interact with transnational networks, private military companies, quasi-state entities or terrorist groups. In this context, diplomacy takes on new functions. Traditional diplomacy, which has developed over centuries as an instrument of inter-state communication, has undergone transformations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its classical model was based on direct negotiations, the conclusion of international treaties and the maintenance of permanent diplomatic missions (Abu-Jaber, 2024). This approach remained relevant in the era of the “balance of power” and the “Cold War”, when the international system was relatively predictable and functioned according to established rules. However, in the current context of hybrid conflicts, where the boundaries between war and peace, state and non-state, open and covert are increasingly blurred, traditional diplomacy is forced to adapt by integrating new instruments and methods of influence. One of the factors behind this evolution was the emergence of multidimensional threats that could not be resolved solely through inter-state negotiations. Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns, and manipulation of energy and food markets are shaping a new reality of conflict. In these conditions, diplomacy takes on not only the classic tasks of concluding peace agreements, but also the function of coordinating international responses to hybrid challenges. For example, the creation of The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (n.d.) in Helsinki in 2017 demonstrates that diplomatic mechanisms go beyond political negotiations and include the coordination of expert networks, scientific institutions, and security agencies.

Multilateral diplomacy plays one of the roles in the adaptation process. While the main arenas used to be the UN (United Nations, n.d.) or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (n.d.), in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, less formalised platforms such as the “Normandy format” in the settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine or the “Astana process” on Syria are gaining importance. Their specificity lies in their flexibility, which allows not only states but also international organisations, regional actors and even humanitarian structures to be involved in negotiations (Rao, 2022). This format reflects a change in the nature of diplomacy, where not only the status of participants but also their real ability to influence the course of

events becomes key. The role of so-called “public diplomacy” is also growing, which was previously considered a secondary element but is becoming a leading tool in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In response to disinformation campaigns actively used in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, states are developing communication strategies aimed at shaping a positive international image and mobilising public opinion abroad. An example of this is the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (n.d.) in Riga, which specialises in identifying and neutralising information manipulation. This shows that diplomacy in a hybrid environment is increasingly linked to information security and communication management. Changes are also taking place at the level of bilateral diplomacy. Traditional embassies, which previously served as the main channel of communication between governments, are forced to adapt to the digital age in the 2020s. The phenomenon of “digital diplomacy” is emerging, with states actively using social networks, online platforms and specialised communication channels to directly influence audiences in other countries (Barman, 2024). The foreign ministries of the United Kingdom, France and Ukraine have entire departments dedicated to digital diplomacy, which respond quickly to crisis situations, shape information narratives and support international coalitions in the virtual environment. The adaptation of diplomacy is also evident in closer integration with military and security structures. Hybrid conflicts are often accompanied by “frozen” zones of confrontation, where diplomacy must interact with peacekeeping missions, humanitarian organisations and intelligence structures (Dursun-Özkanca, 2024). An example is the OSCE mission in Ukraine (OSCE Special Monitoring..., n.d.), which combined monitoring of the military situation with diplomatic efforts to maintain dialogue between the parties. This experience shows that diplomacy is becoming part of a broader crisis management system, where its role is determined not only by its ability to negotiate, but also by its ability to integrate various resources into a single strategy.

Peacekeeping missions, which during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were considered one of the basic instruments for maintaining international peace and security, have undergone a transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While traditional peacekeeping in the period after

World War II (1939-1945) was based on the principles of neutrality, non-interference in internal affairs and the deployment of contingents solely for the purpose of separating warring parties, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century these missions are multidimensional in nature. They include not only a military component, but also political, humanitarian, legal and economic components (Gizelis *et al.*, 2016). Contemporary practice shows that the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations is determined by the ability to combine military control over the situation with active diplomatic and institutional support for countries in crisis. The most illustrative examples in this context are Kosovo, Mali, Congo and Ukraine. In each of these cases, peacekeeping missions faced specific challenges reflecting different regional contexts. Kosovo became a kind of “precedent” for international diplomacy, as Operation KFOR (Kosovo Force), launched in 1999 under the auspices of NATO, had a mandate not only to ensure security but also to create conditions for the formation of local institutions (Szeląg, 2024). In Mali, the UN peacekeeping operation (MINUSMA – Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali) faced the task of stabilising a state divided by terrorist activity and ethnic conflicts, where military presence was combined with programmes for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of militants. It was the most dangerous UN mission, with over 300 casualties among peacekeepers (Boutellis, 2024). In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the MONUSCO (2025) mission – United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – became the largest in UN history, and its evolution from an observation to a “robust” operation using offensive units illustrates the expansion of the range of peacekeeping tasks. During the mission, more than 1 million civilians were protected in 2022, but the number of internally displaced persons remains high – more than 6.9 million (Whitehurst, 2023). The Ukrainian context demonstrates another dimension – the debate over the possible deployment of peacekeepers in Donbas reflects political disagreements in the UN Security Council that block decision-making in a hybrid environment where peacekeeping becomes the subject of geopolitical competition (Murithi, 2022). A detailed comparison of these missions is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of peacekeeping missions

| Country/<br>Region | Organisation<br>and name<br>of mission | Period<br>of activity | Main mandate                                                                             | Key instruments                                                                                                                       | Achievements                                                                                          | Main problems                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kosovo             | NATO<br>(KFOR) + UN<br>(UNMIK)         | 1999 to<br>present    | Ensuring security,<br>supporting<br>institution building,<br>coordination<br>with the EU | Military contingent<br>(approx. 3,500<br>troops), civil<br>administration,<br>EULEX participation<br>in police<br>and judicial reform | Ending mass<br>violence, launching<br>the state-building<br>process, reducing<br>inter-ethnic clashes | Incomplete<br>international<br>recognition, political<br>instability, tensions<br>between Serbian<br>and Albanian<br>populations |

**Table 1.** Continued

| Country/<br>Region                 | Organisation<br>and name<br>of mission                                                                       | Period<br>of activity      | Main mandate                                                                                                    | Key instruments                                                                                                      | Achievements                                                                                                                              | Main problems                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Small                              | UN<br>(MINUSMA)                                                                                              | From<br>2013 to<br>present | Stabilisation of the<br>country, protection<br>of the civilian<br>population, support<br>for political dialogue | Military units<br>(13,000), police<br>forces, civilian<br>personnel, DDR<br>programmes                               | Reduction of<br>violence in cities,<br>facilitation of the<br>signing of the 2015<br>Algiers Agreement                                    | High casualties<br>among peacekeepers<br>(most dangerous UN<br>mission), limited<br>control in northern<br>areas, increase<br>in terrorism          |
| Democratic<br>Republic<br>of Congo | UN<br>(MONUSCO,<br>formerly<br>MONUC)                                                                        | 1999 –<br>present          | Protection<br>of civilians,<br>disarmament of<br>armed groups,<br>support for<br>democratic processes           | 16,000 military<br>personnel, aviation,<br>rapid response<br>brigades, civilian<br>human rights<br>missions          | Demobilisation of<br>some armed groups,<br>support for elections,<br>protection of large<br>population centres                            | Chronic instability<br>in the eastern<br>provinces, sexual<br>violence, limited<br>resources                                                        |
| Ukraine<br>(Donbas)                | Discussion<br>initiative<br>within the<br>UN and<br>OSCE (OSCE<br>mission –<br>non-military,<br>observation) | Since<br>2014 –<br>present | Monitoring of the<br>ceasefire regime,<br>observation of troop<br>movements                                     | Civilian personnel<br>(up to 700<br>observers), technical<br>monitoring<br>equipment (drones,<br>cameras), reporting | Documenting<br>violations,<br>maintaining a<br>minimum channel<br>of dialogue, forming<br>a basis for a future<br>peacekeeping<br>mission | No mandate for<br>enforcement, limited<br>access to territories,<br>blocking of decisions<br>in the Security<br>Council due to<br>Russia's position |

**Note:** EULEX – European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo; UNMIK – United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo; DDR programmes – Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration; MONUC – Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo

**Source:** compiled by the author based on T. Murithi (2022), T. Whitehurst (2023), P. Szeląg (2024), A. Boutellis (2024)

First, the mandates of modern missions are broader than in the past: they combine military, political and institutional tasks, transforming peacekeeping into a comprehensive instrument of state-building. Secondly, peacekeeping operations are increasingly carried out in close cooperation with regional organisations and international partners, as seen in the cases of Kosovo and Mali. Thirdly, the effectiveness of such missions directly depends on the level of political support and staff security. In Mali, the high level of threats to peacekeepers reduces their effectiveness, while in Congo, despite its scale, the mission is unable to completely neutralise chronic instability. The Ukrainian example, in turn, shows that the very fact of blocking decisions in the UN Security Council can become a factor hindering the deployment of a full-fledged mission.

An alternative to classical diplomacy, which is limited by the formal framework of international organisations, may be the mediation of a “third party” in the settlement of conflicts in modern international relations. In an era of hybrid conflicts, when traditional settlement mechanisms are losing their effectiveness due to political contradictions between major powers, it is precisely mid-level mediators who are able to ensure communication between the warring parties. Turkey and Qatar are prime examples of such “new generation mediators” as they combine geopolitical ambitions with flexibility, the ability to attract financial, humanitarian and information resources, and the desire to consolidate their own authority in the international system. Turkey actively positions itself as a key mediator in the resolution of

regional conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and even Eastern Europe (Sarı & Sula, 2024). Its role became prominent during the war in Ukraine, when Ankara facilitated the conclusion of the 2022 “grain agreement” with the participation of the UN, which allowed Ukrainian grain to be exported via the Black Sea. This example demonstrated that Turkey is capable of simultaneously maintaining relations with opposing parties – Russia and Ukraine – and acting as a guarantor of the implementation of agreements. It applied a similar tactic in the Syrian conflict, where, despite its own military presence, Ankara participated in the Astana process alongside Russia and Iran, demonstrating its ability to combine the roles of regional player and international mediator (Sofos, 2022). Qatar, in turn, specialises in soft power diplomacy and communications with various, often opposing political forces. The most famous case was Doha's mediation in the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, which ended with the signing of an agreement in 2020 (Sadr, 2024). At the same time, Qatar is actively involved in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, providing financial support to Gaza and mediating between Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) and Israel. Its diplomatic success is linked not only to financial resources, but also to the image of a state that maintains contacts with a wide range of actors, from Western states to Islamist groups. In this way, Qatar creates a unique diplomatic platform where even irreconcilable opponents agree to dialogue. A distinctive feature of mediation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that it is not limited to formal negotiations. Turkey and Qatar actively use humanitarian

initiatives, economic programmes and information resources to strengthen their authority as neutral moderators. In practice, both states combine classic diplomatic methods (high-level meetings, signing agreements) with public diplomacy tools that ensure the legitimacy of their actions in the international community. This indicates an expansion of the concept of mediation, which encompasses not only the direct conclusion of agreements, but also the creation of an environment of trust between the conflicting parties.

### **Operational and strategic aspects of countering disinformation in the context of hybrid threats**

Disinformation campaigns have become one of the most destructive challenges for diplomacy, as they undermine not only trust in individual political actors, but also the very institutional foundation of international relations. Unlike traditional military or economic threats, information attacks are covert, their effects are not immediately apparent, and their impact can be global. In hybrid conflicts, disinformation is used as a strategic tool to delegitimise governments, divide societies, manipulate international public opinion and weaken the positions of competitors in diplomatic negotiations. This poses fundamentally new challenges for diplomacy: not only to conduct negotiations, but also to actively fight for control over the information space, shape narratives, and create systems for the early detection of information threats. The experience of the United States shows how significant the impact of external disinformation campaigns can be on domestic political processes and, as a result, on international diplomacy. The investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election revealed that targeted fake news was spread through social media with the aim of polarising American society. For diplomacy, this case had a double effect (Eady *et al.*, 2023). First, it raised the issue of information security as a component of national security, which needs to be defended in international negotiations. Second, it undermined confidence in the United States as a "model of democratic resilience", complicating its ability to convince partners of the need to adhere to standards of transparency and openness. In response, American diplomacy began to more actively develop cyber diplomacy mechanisms, create special units within the State Department responsible for identifying and neutralising information threats, and promote international initiatives in the field of cybersecurity. One of the steps was the creation in 2016 of a special unit within the US State Department, the Global Engagement Centre (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), which was given a mandate to coordinate countermeasures against propaganda and disinformation directed against the US and its allies. Its activities are based on the Law of the United States No. 114-328, 2016, for the 2017 fiscal year, which for the first time defined the strategic importance of information security as a component of national security. In addition, in 2018, the United States passed Act of the United States No. H.R. 3776 (2018), aimed at institutionalising cyber diplomacy

and creating the position of Special Coordinator for International Cybersecurity within the State Department.

The French experience is indicative in the context of countering disinformation campaigns during election processes. In 2017, during the presidential election, there was a large-scale attempt to influence the campaign by leaking Emmanuel Macron's campaign emails (the so-called "MacronLeaks" operation) (Kondratov & Johansson-Nogués, 2023). Although the direct impact on the voting results was minimal, the very fact of the attack revealed the vulnerability of the political system to information manipulation. France's response was to quickly establish a legislative framework to combat fake news, in particular by adopting Act of France No. 151 (2018). For French diplomacy, this situation had an additional dimension: Paris began to actively promote the issue of combating disinformation within the EU, initiated the creation of joint mechanisms for verifying information and strengthening the role of the European External Action Service in the field of strategic communications. In this way, France turned its own experience into a tool of foreign policy influence, using it to strengthen European integration in the field of information security.

Eastern Europe is vulnerable to disinformation campaigns due to a combination of several factors: the historical legacy of Soviet propaganda, the existence of "frozen" conflicts, low levels of trust in state institutions, and strong political polarisation. Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia are systematically targeted by information attacks aimed at undermining their foreign policy orientation and weakening their ties with the UN and NATO. In Ukraine, information operations related to the war in Donbas and Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 play a role. Disinformation is used both on the front lines and internationally, in particular to delegitimise the Ukrainian government and discredit partner assistance. The diplomatic response has been to establish the Center for Countering Disinformation (n.d.) under the National Security and Defence Council, to actively cooperate with the UN and NATO in the field of strategic communications, and to promote international initiatives to hold accountable states that use information attacks as a tool of hybrid warfare. Ukraine actively cooperates with the European Union within the EEAS Strategic Communication Task Forces (2025), which operates within the European External Action Service and is responsible for the EUvsDisinfo (n.d.) project, aimed at exposing Russian fakes. For example, according to the EUvsDisinfo project, as of 2023, more than 15,000 examples of disinformation related to Russia have been identified and refuted. Another area of focus is cooperation with NATO through the Strategic Communications Centre... (n.d.) in Riga, which allows for the coordination of approaches to information security at the Alliance level. On the new technological front of hybrid conflicts, diplomacy is increasingly relying on big data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

For example, machine learning algorithms are used to proactively monitor social networks for early detection of coordinated information attacks, which often precede

or accompany diplomatic or military provocations (Borges, 2024). AI allows for the analysis of incredible amounts of data in real time – from trends in the media space to bot network posts – revealing patterns of disinformation dissemination and identifying its sources with high accuracy. In addition, diplomatic agencies are experimenting with the use of AI to analyse large amounts of historical diplomatic correspondence, international treaties and transcripts of negotiations. This opens up opportunities for predictive modelling: the system can detect hidden trends, analyse the language of diplomatic documents for signs of escalation or, conversely, willingness to compromise, helping to shape preventive and more informed strategies (Gupta, 2025). Thus, Big Data and AI technologies are transforming diplomacy from a reactive to a proactive state, turning it not only into the art of negotiation, but also into a knowledge-intensive field where technological awareness becomes a critical competitive advantage.

However, this technological dimension is integrated into the diplomatic practices of different regions in different ways, depending on their specific characteristics. The regional specificity of diplomacy in the era of hybrid conflicts is shaped by historical context, socio-economic conditions, political traditions and the nature of security challenges. In Europe, diplomacy is based on institutional integration and multilateralism, as reflected in the activities of the European Union and NATO. These structures form a framework for conflict resolution, in which negotiations, legal mechanisms and a common sanctions policy play a central role. An example is the response to the Russian-Ukrainian war, when European diplomacy combined economic sanctions, political pressure and support for Ukraine through diplomatic, financial and humanitarian mechanisms. However, even within Europe, there are differences in approach: Central and Eastern European countries are more inclined to take a hard line

against aggressors, while Western European states traditionally try to combine sanctions with channels for negotiation. Africa is characterised by multidimensional conflicts in which economic, ethnic and religious factors are intertwined with the consequences of colonial heritage (Teixeira, 2024). Here, diplomacy often deals with “failed states” where national institutions are weak and international organisations play a leading role in maintaining stability. The African Union has become a central platform for diplomatic mediation, but its capabilities are limited by a lack of resources and dependence on UN and EU support. Examples include peacekeeping efforts in Mali and the Central African Republic, where regional initiatives are combined with multinational operations under the auspices of the UN. The specificity of diplomacy in Africa lies in the fact that informal channels of negotiation, mediation by traditional leaders and the use of regional mediators such as ECOWAS (n.d.) play a role here.

The Middle East is an area where diplomacy is in constant tension between regional contradictions and global interests. Here, diplomatic processes often combine traditional negotiations with the use of force mechanisms and external guarantees. The resolution of conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen demonstrates the multi-level nature of diplomacy: local agreements concluded through the mediation of regional actors (Turkey, Iran, Qatar) coexist with international negotiations under the auspices of the UN. A characteristic feature is the presence of numerous “conflict triangles”, where regional rivals simultaneously act as mediators and participants in the conflict. In addition, the Middle East is an area where energy and economic levers of diplomacy are actively used, as control over resources often becomes a decisive factor in negotiations. To systematise these differences and common features, it is useful to present them in Table 2, which allows us to see more clearly the logic of regional diplomatic strategies.

**Table 2.** Regional specifics of diplomacy in the era of hybrid conflicts

| Region      | Main characteristics of conflicts                                                           | Leading actors in diplomacy                                                      | Key settlement mechanisms                                                      | Examples of conflicts and solutions                                       | Similarities with other regions                                                              | Differences                                                               |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Europe      | State and inter-state conflicts, significant role of cyber and information attacks          | EU, NATO, OSCE, individual member states                                         | Sanctions policy, multilateral negotiations, support for peacekeeping missions | Response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, settlement in the Balkans | Active role of international organisations, combination of diplomacy and security mechanisms | High level of institutional integration, common sanctions policy          |
| Africa      | Intra-state and inter-ethnic conflicts, weak institutions, external dependence              | African Union, ECOWAS, UN, regional states (Nigeria, South Africa)               | Peacekeeping operations, informal negotiations, role of traditional leaders    | Mali, Central African Republic, Sudan                                     | Use of multilateral formats, need for external support                                       | High role of informal actors, lack of resources, post-colonial context    |
| Middle East | Intertwining of regional and global interests, religious and ethno-political contradictions | UN, regional states (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar), USA, Russian Federation | Third-party mediation, local agreements, energy leverage                       | Syria, Libya, Yemen, agreements between Israel and Arab states            | Complexity of conflicts, need for international and regional formats                         | Dominance of geopolitical competition, strategic role of energy resources |

**Note:** RSA – Republic of South Africa; RF – Russian Federation

**Source:** compiled by the author based on B. Aras & Ş. Kardaş (2021), H. Saliu (2021), V.A.G. Teixeira (2024)

An analysis of the table shows that, despite regional differences, all three cases have in common the growing role of international and regional organisations in diplomatic settlement. All regions also demonstrate the need to combine traditional negotiation processes with new approaches, such as combating disinformation, cyber threats or the use of economic leverage. At the same time, the differences are due to the level of institutional development: in Europe, diplomacy relies on integration structures, in Africa – on informal mechanisms and external support, and in the Middle East – on the balance of power between regional rivals. It is this difference that determines the effectiveness of diplomatic strategies: Europe demonstrates relative stability thanks to a high level of coordination, Africa remains vulnerable to protracted conflicts, while the Middle East is a field of permanent competition between global and regional players. Thus, regional specifics not only shape the characteristics of diplomacy, but also determine its limits of effectiveness in the era of hybrid conflicts. An analysis of regional cases in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, as well as the experience of peacekeeping missions and third-party mediation, shows that traditional diplomacy, based on direct negotiations and formal mechanisms of international law, is becoming insufficiently effective without a comprehensive approach that integrates multifaceted strategies for responding to hybrid threats.

Based on a comparative study, several systemic conclusions can be drawn regarding the transformation of diplomacy in the context of hybrid conflicts:

- diplomacy is no longer exclusively a sphere of inter-state negotiations, but has become a comprehensive crisis management system that integrates political, military, economic and information tools;
- the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts, especially in peacekeeping missions, is directly proportional to the level of political consolidation and resource provision by international organisations (UN, EU, NATO). Blocking decisions in the UN Security Council, as in the case of Ukraine, is a key limiting factor;
- three models have emerged: European (highly institutionalised, with an emphasis on sanctions and multilateralism), African (focused on peacekeeping with external support and informal mechanisms) and Middle Eastern (geopolitical competition, energy levers and third-party mediation);
- the fight against disinformation has evolved from a secondary function to a core element of diplomatic strategy, requiring the creation of specialised institutions (such as the Global Engagement Centre).

One of the key trends is the expansion of the range of diplomatic tools that combine political, economic, military and informational means of influence. Effective diplomacy in the modern world requires not only classic negotiations, but also active participation in shaping the information environment, countering disinformation campaigns, coordinating humanitarian and economic measures, and monitoring the implementation of agreements using technical

and analytical mechanisms. The experience of peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Mali, Congo and Ukraine shows that combining diplomatic and security components is critical to achieving stability. The success of such operations depends on a combination of multilateral settlement, coordination with regional organisations and the use of mandate enforcement systems. At the same time, insufficient political support or weak local institutions significantly reduce the effectiveness of even the most ambitious peacekeeping missions, as confirmed by the example of Ukraine, where the absence of a unified UN mandate limits the possibilities of international diplomacy. Regional specifics also determine the choice of diplomatic strategies. In Europe, multilateral integration diplomacy, which combines sanctions, international negotiations and support for legal institutions, is effective. In the Middle East, the success of diplomacy depends on the ability to combine regional and global interests, take into account conflict triangles, and use economic and energy levers of influence. Despite the differences in strategies, a common feature is the need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses both political and non-physical instruments of influence.

Based on the analysis, a number of recommendations can be formulated for states and diplomats on effective practices in the era of hybrid conflicts. Diplomacy must integrate classical and modern instruments, combining negotiations with informational, economic and humanitarian measures. The effectiveness of peacekeeping missions depends on their multidimensional nature: the experience of Kosovo has demonstrated the importance of involving civil administration and restoring state institutions, while missions in Mali and Congo show that without the development of local communities and security sector reforms, military contingents alone cannot guarantee stability. The Ukrainian case highlights the importance of international presence in the form of observation missions, which ensure transparency and trust between the parties. In the field of mediation, Turkey's practice in resolving the Syrian conflict and Qatar's role as a mediator in crises in the Middle East demonstrate the importance of involving regional and neutral players who are capable of simultaneously conducting dialogue with opposing sides and ensuring the implementation of agreements. Such mediators can be decisive in cases where direct dialogue between the parties is difficult or impossible.

With regard to countering disinformation, the experience of the United States and France shows the need for systematic monitoring of the information space and the development of independent media, while Eastern European countries (in particular Lithuania and Estonia) demonstrate the effectiveness of rapid response through strategic communications and the combination of state and public initiatives. This not only reduces the impact of hostile campaigns, but also builds public trust in official information. Twenty-first century diplomacy must also combine multilateral formats (UN, OSCE, EU, African Union) with adaptation to local conditions and regional specifics, ensuring

flexibility and responsiveness to changes in the political and security situation. Negotiators must take into account the need to integrate diplomatic initiatives with peacekeeping missions, international organisations and regional alliances, which increases the legitimacy and effectiveness of actions. Ultimately, the era of hybrid conflicts is shaping a new paradigm of diplomacy, where its effectiveness is determined by the ability to act in a comprehensive, flexible and innovative manner. States and diplomats must be aware of the integrity of instruments of influence, regional and global interconnections, and the constant need to adapt to rapidly changing political and information conditions. Only such integrated and strategically balanced diplomacy can deliver real results in resolving hybrid conflicts and maintaining international stability.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis showed that diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has undergone a profound transformation, going beyond the classical paradigm of inter-state negotiations and acquiring a complex character, where political, military, economic and information instruments are closely intertwined. This dynamic was clearly evident in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, where, despite regional specifics, there was a common trend towards the integration of multi-level mechanisms and the strengthening of the role of international organisations. The conclusions drawn were parallel to previous studies, but at the same time highlighted new dimensions of contemporary diplomacy in the era of hybrid conflicts. The analysis by N. Maliqi *et al.* (2022) focused on the changing nature of threats and the transition from traditional forms of armed violence to the use of non-traditional instruments, in particular political, economic and informational ones. In this regard, the results of this study confirmed their thesis on the need to broaden the understanding of security and integrated response. The analysis of the cases of Kosovo, Mali, Congo and Ukraine revealed that information attacks and the use of non-state actors were key factors of instability. However, unlike the researchers' generalised concept, the conclusions of this work emphasised the role of diplomacy as a mechanism for integrating various instruments, from military and sanctions to information and mediation. Thus, it was proven that the response to hybrid threats could not remain exclusively defensive or technocratic, but had to be formed through diplomatic coordination, which broadened the framework proposed by N. Maliqi *et al.* M. Jazbec's (2021) study examined the evolution of diplomatic functions in the long term and emphasised that the most striking changes occurred in the context of globalisation and the development of social media, which forced diplomacy to move to a postmodern stage. The comparison showed that these positions were confirmed by the identified trends, in particular in the analysis of disinformation campaigns in the United States, France and Eastern Europe, where social media became the main arena of diplomatic confrontation. However, unlike M. Jazbec, who focused on the

general transformation of functions, the results of this study emphasised the operational dimension of this process – the formation of specialised diplomatic structures in the United States (Global Engagement Centre), France (2018 legislative initiatives) and Ukraine (Center for Countering Disinformation at the National Security and Defence Council). In other words, the evolution described by the author in a broader context manifested itself in specific institutional decisions that gave diplomacy new characteristics related to cyber and information security.

J. Clavijo's article (2024) highlighted the growing influence of non-state actors, who were becoming full-fledged diplomatic players capable of shaping the agenda and proposing alternative solutions to global problems. The results of the study confirmed this conclusion, demonstrating the role of Turkey and Qatar as mediators who, through the use of humanitarian, economic and religious levers, operated outside the classical state models. At the same time, the cases of Africa and the Middle East revealed that the effectiveness of "third party" diplomacy depended not only on the flexibility of such actors but also on their ability to interact with international structures such as the UN or the African Union. Thus, in contrast to J. Clavijo's emphasis on the potential of non-state and transnational actors, the results showed that it was the interaction between state and non-state actors that created the conditions for real progress in conflict resolution. In the work of P. Kacziba & B. Hasan (2022), the emphasis was placed on the concept of "adaptive diplomacy", which manifested itself in the strategies of small EU states, in particular Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus. The researchers emphasised that, in a multipolar environment, these countries did not choose linear or one-dimensional strategies, but combined various foreign policy instruments – from balancing between major powers to using the opportunities offered by regional alliances and pragmatically seeking new partners. This approach demonstrated the ability of small states to manoeuvre between pressure from stronger actors and their own security and development needs. In this sense, the results of the study were consistent with the authors' conclusions, as they also revealed the multidimensionality of diplomacy as a basic feature of contemporary international relations. However, unlike the researchers, who mainly considered the tactical and flexible steps of small states, the analysis emphasised that the multidimensionality of diplomacy was becoming a systemic characteristic of the global order, as it was implemented not only by small states, but also by medium and large actors, as well as supranational organisations. In addition, the study traced the role of information and cyber threats, while P. Kacziba & B. Hasan ignored this aspect. The article by A. Dandashly *et al.* (2021) highlighted another dimension of contemporary diplomatic challenges, focusing on the limitations of the UN in a period of growing multipolar competition. The authors argued that the divergent interests of the major powers undermined the UN's ability to formulate a coherent and coordinated crisis response policy, while the decline in the normative appeal of

the European Union hampered its ability to influence local societies and political elites. As a result, there were situations where UN policies were met with resistance not only from local forces but also from global competitors who deliberately used hybrid methods to limit European influence. The study confirmed this trend, emphasising that regional cases in Africa and the Middle East demonstrated the dependence of diplomatic effectiveness on the ability to combine the efforts of international organisations with the actions of local structures. However, unlike the analysis by A. Dandashly *et al.*, the study emphasised not so much the weakness of the EU as the general need for any international actor to comprehensively combine political, informational and military elements to overcome hybrid threats.

A study by P. Teodosiev (2024) emphasised that the international system was characterised by increasingly deep contradictions between major powers, particularly the United States and Russia, which undermined opportunities for constructive dialogue. The analytical focus of the study was on the impact of information technology and social media, which created structural imbalances and at the same time opened up space for new actors – China, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE (United Arab Emirates). This analysis highlighted the fragmentation of the international system, its transition to multiregionalism and the growth of entropy. The study confirmed many of these assertions, as it demonstrated that regional subsystems – from Africa to the Middle East – were shaped by both traditional powers and new centres of power. However, unlike P. Teodosiev's approach, which focused primarily on macro-level trends, the results of the study revealed specific mechanisms for adapting diplomacy to these processes, in particular through the involvement of a "third party", the development of cyber diplomacy, and the strengthening of the role of international institutions. Thus, the patterns identified were consistent with the concept of increasing systemic complexity, but complemented it with empirical examples of the effectiveness or limitations of diplomatic strategies. S. Lecocq's (2024) study, based on interviews with diplomats and experts in Brussels and Beirut, demonstrated the need to take into account a wider range of hybrid actors in modern diplomacy, in particular non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations. The author showed that the diplomatic practices of the UN in the Middle East and North Africa region were determined not only by official policy, but also by informal channels of communication and the spatial context. This study emphasised that classical inter-state diplomacy was losing its monopoly on agenda-setting, and that real interaction often took place outside official platforms. The results of the study confirmed this thesis, as an analysis of peacekeeping missions and third-party mediation showed that the effectiveness of diplomacy largely depended on the use of flexible and informal mechanisms that ensured channels of communication even in situations where official negotiations were blocked. At the same time, compared to the conclusions of

S. Lecocq, the study focused not only on the multifaceted nature of the actors, but also on the systematic integration of information and cyber tools into diplomatic strategies, which was not central to her analysis.

Z. Arkan's (2025) work examined the evolution of European security narratives in which hybrid threats have become central. The author showed that NATO and the UN used the theme of hybrid threats to shape their own strategic identities, interpreting them in accordance with their own approaches: NATO treated them as a civilisational challenge requiring collective defence, while the UN emphasised their systemic nature, which required technological, social and economic responses. Z. Arkan's analysis also emphasised that the war in Ukraine had brought this theme to the fore, enshrining it in official strategies. The study found a correlation with these conclusions, as it showed that both NATO and the UN had integrated hybrid instruments into their diplomatic practices, especially in the field of countering disinformation and cyber threats. However, the analysis emphasised that these narratives did not remain merely part of strategic documents, but were reflected in practical mechanisms – from the creation of specialised structures in the US and France to the institutional strengthening of Eastern European countries. This made it possible to interpret hybrid threats not only as a discursive element, but as a real factor in the transformation of diplomacy on a global scale. Summarising the results, it should be emphasised that all the analysed works highlighted the same structural changes in the international system in different ways. The study integrated these aspects, combining structural, institutional and practical levels, and showed that diplomacy in the context of hybrid conflicts was not just a reaction to change, but became a new paradigm of interaction that required adaptation, innovation and multidimensional coordination. This conclusion allowed us to view modern diplomacy as a key tool for managing instability, where effectiveness was determined by the ability to integrate various tools and forms of interaction in response to multi-layered challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that diplomacy in hybrid conflicts has undergone a fundamental transformation. The classic model of inter-state negotiations has given way to a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that integrates political, military, informational and economic instruments of influence into a single crisis management strategy. This new paradigm requires diplomacy to function as a nerve centre for coordination between different spheres, where success is determined by the ability to adapt quickly and take proactive action. Analysis has shown that the effectiveness of such operations critically depends on the deep integration of diplomatic efforts with military and institutional components. The mission in Kosovo demonstrated the success of a model based on close cooperation between international organisations with the aim of not only ensuring security but also building state

institutions. In contrast, the experience in Mali revealed the vulnerability of peacekeeping in conditions of weak central authority and high activity of terrorist groups, where a limited mandate and heavy personnel losses restricted the scope for influence. The largest UN mission in Congo marked a transition from observation to “robust” mandates, but even these proved insufficient to overcome deep instability due to the chronic weakness of local institutions. The Ukrainian case has shown how geopolitical contradictions can paralyse traditional diplomatic mechanisms in a hybrid environment.

An analysis of the operational and strategic aspects of countering disinformation has shown that information attacks have evolved from a tactical tool into a strategic challenge to national security and international stability. The experience of the United States, France, and Eastern European countries has demonstrated the need to create specialised institutional mechanisms, such as the Global Engagement Centre in the United States or the Centre for Countering Disinformation in Ukraine. The strategic response has gone beyond refuting individual fakes, moving towards the formation of comprehensive strategic communication systems and the development of cyber diplomacy as a separate area of foreign policy. The growing importance of “third party” mediation has become another defining feature of modern diplomacy. Actors such as Turkey and Qatar have demonstrated their ability to provide communication channels where traditional formats have reached an impasse due to geopolitical contradictions. The key to the success of these mediators is a combination of flexibility, neutral status, possession of significant resources, and a willingness to operate in informal

formats. As demonstrated by the “grain deal” brokered by Turkey and Qatar’s negotiations between the US and the Taliban, the effectiveness of such initiatives is based on a pragmatic combination of classical diplomacy and “soft power” instruments.

The conclusions emphasise the development of integrated strategies that combine negotiation formats with information protection and cybersecurity mechanisms in advance; investment in the technological component of diplomacy, in particular in data analytics and artificial intelligence systems for monitoring threats; institutionalising the involvement of flexible regional mediators in the early stages of crises; and developing clearer international norms of responsibility for large-scale disinformation campaigns. The limitations of the study lie in its focus on publicly available strategies and cases from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, which does not allow for a full assessment of the closed aspects of diplomatic activity. Prospects for further research may include the development of quantitative metrics to assess the effectiveness of diplomatic tools in hybrid conflicts, as well as an in-depth study of the impact of artificial intelligence on the diplomatic decision-making process.

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