



Transformation of the Polish Armed Forces: A Perspective on the 20th Anniversary of Poland's Membership in the North-Atlantic Alliance

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents the changes in the Polish Armed Forces during the 20 years of Poland's membership in NATO. Transformational processes of varying intensity and effect involved organizational and technical modernization and active duty force professionalism. An important aspect was the participation in operations under the NATO flag. Combat experience contributed to significant changes in their functioning, including combat technology and procedures, and provided to achieving interoperability within the NATO. What is more, future changes in the Polish Armed Forces will be directly connected with challenges related to the engagement of Poland in a political, economic and military dimension to NATO.

KEYWORDS:

Polish Armed Forces; changes in the Polish Armed Forces; the 20th anniversary of Poland in NATO; combat experiences of Polish Armed Forces, interoperability of the Polish Armed Forces



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Introduction

The sovereignty regained by Poland in 1989 was the first step to building the confidence of Western partners. Despite the difficult and painful experiences after World War II, when it was under the influence of the Soviet Union, Poland has always professed values equal to those of Western Europe. Building European and international trust was particularly important in security affairs. The bipolar world had collapsed and the question was what to do next. Was the transformation in Poland going to end peacefully?

Re-establishing relations with Western Europe in the political, economic and military dimensions was a challenge for Poland. Could an Iron Curtain country shake off influence of the Soviet Union and make the right decisions to determine its long-term future? One of the key tasks was to ensure military security. Despite apparent weakness of the collapsing Soviet Union, there might still be forces in the East that could negate Poland's regained sovereignty.

The decision on Poland's accession to NATO, although political, had a direct influence on its armed forces. It was a key impetus for their transformation, proceeded with varying intensity and effect. Many aspects of change in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland were a success, but there were also failures.

Literature Overview

The article is of a review nature, therefore it is based on available literature. The identified and characterized changes in the Polish Armed Forces are based on source documents: normative documents and legal acts. Among them, the most important are the modernization programs of the Polish Armed Forces adopted by subsequent governments to increase Poland's defense potential. The second group includes articles in professional publications, such as *Nowa Technika Wojskowa*, *Lotnictwo* or *Raport*, presenting credible opinions of the authors on issues related to changes in the Polish Armed Forces.

Methods

Comparative literature and document analysis method was used throughout this study. Article firstly reviews crucial areas of changes in the Polish Armed Forces focusing on professionalization of the Polish Armed Forces, technical modernization, combat experiences – participation in missions under the NATO flag and organizational changes. Second part is devoted to consider challenges for Poland and its armed forces in the next decades.

Crucial Areas of Changes in the Polish Armed Forces

Poland's accession to NATO resulted in the need to adapt the Polish Armed Forces (PAF) to NATO standards. The North Atlantic Alliance became a catalyst for change in many

dimensions – mainly in the technical and procedural spheres. Membership in NATO obliges the armed forces to modernize and develop constantly, taking into account current and future technological trends. Although NATO did not and does not dictate specific solutions, it has been and still is, without doubt, a stimulus for the transformation of the PAF.

Professionalization of the Polish Armed Forces – the End of Conscription

In the first years of membership of Poland and its armed forces in the North-Atlantic Alliance, the key challenges were changing the way of thinking – the mentality – especially in the approach to decision-making and command. It was a lengthy process because commanders were not trained for, or used to, making independent decisions within their competences. In May 2000, the government adopted the guidelines for the creation of the PAF development program for the years 2001–2006, which emphasized the reconstruction of internal structure of the professional staff, and increasing the level of professionalization. The decision was made to change the proportion between composition of the professional military force so that officers constituted 30% and professional soldiers – 70%. As a result, the force composition on January 1, 2008 was as follows: officers 19%, non-commissioned officers 33%, and privates 47%.¹ This was the last year of conscription. The official adoption by the Council of Ministers of the Polish Armed Forces Professionalization Program in 2008, i.e. nearly a decade after Poland's accession to NATO, was another important step on the road to professionalization of the armed forces.² As a consequence, the implementation of the above program resulted in: suspension of conscription, introduction of contractual professional military service, establishment of the National Reserve Forces (including reserve soldiers with assigned crisis assignments under a contract), as well as the possibility of women performing active military service. This was a milestone enabling further reconstruction of the armed forces in structural and functional terms and the shaping of the current state of the Polish armed forces. Unfortunately, in the Polish Armed Forces Professionalization Program marginal treatment was given to matters related to army technical modernization (the expenditure was reduced to the minimum statutory level – 20%). The reduction of the budget of the Ministry of National Defense resulted in the modernization programs being suspended or implemented to a minimal extent in subsequent years.³ Undoubtedly, as a result of professionalization, the potential of the PAF and operational capabilities increased. First of all, there was a break from the dominant quantitative approach in favor of the qualitative approach. Quantitative philosophy dominated the Warsaw Pact for decades, and influenced the attitudes of decision-makers. This is the

1 M. Mróz, *Program Przebudowy i Modernizacji Technicznej Sił Zbrojnych RP w latach 2001–2006. Synteza*, Raport 197, Warszawa 2001, p. 7.

2 Vide: M. Chmielecki, *Profesjonalizacja – założenia i realizacja*, "Zeszyty Naukowe AON" Vol. 81, No. 4, 2010, pp. 403–417.

3 M. Paszkowski, *Profesjonalizacja Sił Zbrojnych RP jako przykład zmian w wielkich grupach społecznych*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" Vol. 19, No. 3, 2011, pp. 225–239.

opposite philosophy from that prevailing in NATO, according to which the main alliance requirement is not quantity but quality.⁴ The conditions of soldiers' service also improved, and the competence requirements for commanders increased. A rapid pace of change should also be emphasized, especially with regard to successful professionalization of the armed forces. The armed forces have become fully professional and able to cooperate within NATO with other allied armies.⁵

Technical Modernization of the Polish Armed Forces

Technical modernization was one of the main challenges during the two decades of the PAF as a member of NATO. This was a long-term and continuous process, dependent on many factors, including political and economic ones. The beginning of the PAF technical modernization was primarily related to the acquisition or adaptation of command and communication systems, and friend-or-foe identification systems, which was necessary for cooperation with NATO allied forces. Individual branches of the armed forces had only the Soviet equipment from the Warsaw Pact era, although a few modernization programs introduced the first versions of the Polish-built *Grom* portable anti-aircraft system and the PT-91 *Twardy* tank.⁶ Before joining NATO, Polish analysts studied the modernization of armaments and military equipment, and concluded that the main modernization areas should be the short- and very short-range air defense and artillery systems. The strategic government programs such as *Grom* and *Loara* were undertaken, the first of which was successful and the second cancelled.⁷

In 2001 the Act on the Reconstruction and Technical Modernization and Financing of the Polish Armed Forces in the Years 2001–2006 was adopted⁸ together with the Program for the Reconstruction and Technical Modernization of the Polish Armed Forces in the Years 2001–2006. The technical modernization specified in these documents included modernization of air defense systems and a command system; acquiring 60 multi-purpose aircraft; modernizing the T-72 tanks to NATO standards, and acquiring qualitatively new tanks. Modernization further included the introduction of wheeled armored personnel carriers; introduction of new anti-tank guided missiles; equipping ships with modern rocket systems; modernization of Mi-24 combat helicopters, and the purchase of 12 medium-sized transport aircraft. The documents also stipulated the withdrawal of unpromising armaments and military equipment.⁹

4 M. Ojrzanowski, *Transformacja polskich sił zbrojnych – miara sił na zamiary*, "Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego" 7 (2013), pp. 78–103.

5 M. Pawłowski, *Cele i wyzwania profesjonalizacji Sił Zbrojnych RP*, accessed on December 20, 2019, <http://www.polityka.globalna.pl/2009/12/cele-i-wyzwania-profesjonalizacji-sil-zbrojnych-rp-4/>.

6 N. Bączyk, *Modernizacja techniczna Sił Zbrojnych RP*, "Nowa Technika Wojskowa" 3 (2011), p. 24.

7 M. Sulek, *Programowanie gospodarczo-obronne*, Warszawa 2008, p. 45.

8 Act of May 25, 2001 on Rebuilding and Technical Modernization and Financing of the Polish Armed Forces, Journal of Laws 2001 No. 76 item 804.

9 M. Mróz, *Program Przebudowy i Modernizacji...*, op.cit., p. 9.

The implementation of the technical modernization plans proceeded with varying degrees of success. In the land forces, only the 2A5 and 2A4 *Leopard* tanks meet the requirements of the modern battlefield (subject to the purchase of modern anti-tank ammunition). The vast majority of tank battalions still use the T-72 and PT-91 tanks. The plan to modernize these tanks has never been implemented during two decades of operation in NATO. The acquisition of the Polish-built *Rosomak* armored personnel carrier is a success, although the introduction of its specialized versions lags behind. The remaining shortcoming is that the army is still equipped with infantry fighting vehicles, some of which have been in service for over 40 years. Acquiring new infantry fighting vehicles should be one of the priority tasks in the development of mechanized and armored troops. In the land forces, from 2005, all tactical ballistic missile launchers that were to be replaced by new launchers under the Polish *Homar* program were withdrawn. The goal of the program is to restore to artillery the ability to attack targets over distances of more than 40 km. As part of the program, in 2019, the *Himars* high mobility rocket artillery system was purchased from US, which should be considered a success, although there are ongoing discussions about the possible benefits (or lack thereof) of offset program for the Polish defense industry. There are also major problems with the introduction of new sets of tube artillery. The start of deliveries of *Krab* field guns and *Rak* mortars and implementation of the *TOPAZ* Automated Fire Control System seem to be part of the solution to the problems. In turn, the shortage of anti-tank guided missiles is a problem. Despite the purchase of Israeli *Spike* anti-tank guided missiles, there are no plans to launch them from helicopters, in particular the Mi-24, and *Rosomak* armored personnel carriers.¹⁰

One of the biggest successes in the modernization process of the PAF was the acquisition of 48 F-16 multi-purpose combat aircraft in 2006–2008 and, recently, the Lockheed Martin long-range JASMMs. In retrospect, the estimation of requirements was too low as they only cover about 40% of the minimum needs. Combat aviation still has obsolete Soviet MiG-29 and Su-22 aircraft that can be used only in a limited way. The need to upgrade combat aviation is decidedly greater; it is necessary to equip at least four additional squadrons with multi-purpose combat aircraft, including fifth generation. So, the last decision about buying the new F-35 5th-generation aircraft will improve air combat skills of the PAF. The retrofitting of aviation transport such as the Airbus C-295M CASA and the Polish M28B/PT *Bryza* tactical purpose aircraft was a success. C-130 transport aircraft were also obtained from the USA, but they need to be replaced due to age. Similarly, in training aviation, the changes that have occurred are positive, although they took place only in recent years, when the advanced training system was purchased, which includes the Italian M-346 *Master* aircraft intended for training pilots of multi-purpose combat aircraft.¹¹ Thus, the Polish-built TS-11 *Iskra* training jet aircraft will be systematically withdrawn.

10 T. Dmitruk, *Dwie dekady w NATO – modernizacja techniczna Sił Zbrojnych*, "Nowa Technika Wojskowa" 8 (2018), pp. 16–29.

11 T. Dmitruk, *Dwie dekady w NATO – modernizacja techniczna Sił Zbrojnych*, "Nowa Technika Wojskowa" 9 (2018), pp. 6–15.

Unfortunately, when it comes to aviation, the Mi-24 attack helicopters have not been replaced. Their average age already exceeds 30 years, there was a lack of thorough modernization, and their number is regularly decreasing. The program for their exchange (under the name *Kruk*) has been postponed to later years. The aviation potential of land forces should be considered insufficient, despite the purchase of new Polish-based Sikorsky S-70i *Black Hawk* helicopters. The same applies to helicopters used by the Navy – the needs are even greater there. Although it has already been decided to buy anti-submarine warfare helicopters and combat search and rescue, they will not meet the identified needs.¹²

Little has been done in naval modernization. Twenty years after joining NATO, only eight ships were acquired, of which only one was new. There are deficiencies in new equipment for surface and submarine ships, and the *Silesian* patrol ship after being 18 years under construction was officially put to sea in 2019. The program of building *Kormoran II* mine destroyers and anti-ship missile retrofitting of small patrol ships should be considered as positive aspects of modernization in the Polish Navy's area of responsibility.¹³

The equipment modernization of the PAF has been and still is a major challenge. During 20 years of NATO membership, the military equipment and armaments of the armed forces have changed significantly, ensuring cooperation with allied forces, as demonstrated during foreign missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Apparently, policy makers took too optimistic an approach to their financial sources, including consideration of how real gross domestic product translates into the budget of the Ministry of National Defense. On the other hand, Poland is one of the few countries that fulfils its commitment to allocate 2% of GDP to defense with the prospect of 2.5% by 2030. One factor affecting modernization plans is the lack of defining the real needs and their priorities. These needs usually change with every change of political decision-makers, while a political consensus is required by all decision-making centers and guarantees of their implementation, regardless of whichever political group holds the power.

Combat experiences – participation in missions under the NATO flag

The membership of Poland and its armed forces in the North Atlantic Alliance includes obligations to participate in combat missions in which NATO plays a key role.

The PAF have participated in NATO missions since 1996 as a partner, and since 1999 as a member of NATO, contributing to stabilizing the security environment in Europe (missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia) and the global security environment (missions in Iraq and Afghanistan). After the end of the Cold War, NATO undertook missions outside its territory. Poland adapted to this quickly, and participated in missions and commitments associated with the Alliance under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The participation of Polish soldiers in the operation in Afghanistan is an example. In March

¹² Ibidem, p. 8.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 12.

2002, Polish soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan as part of the US Operation Enduring Freedom. The largest contribution of the PAF to NATO operations was being a part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The main missions of the Polish contingent were ensuring security and stability in Ghazni Province, training the Afghan Security Forces, supporting Afghan authorities and local administration through the implementation of development programs and the reconstruction of civil infrastructure. During 2010 and 2011, 2,600 Polish soldiers and army employees were in Afghanistan. It was the largest contingent in the entire history of the peace and stabilization missions of the PAF. The Polish Military Contingent (PMC) in Afghanistan was fully equipped, including transport aircraft, helicopters and artillery. Operational restrictions or *national caveats* were not imposed on the contingent, enabling the full use of PMC troops. The ISAF mission ended in 2014. By this time over 28,000 Polish soldiers and army employees had served in Afghanistan.¹⁴ Currently, soldiers of the PAF and employees (400 people) are participating in Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, which consist of training, advising and the support of allied Afghan forces.¹⁵

The second largest contingent of the PAF outside the country after the Cold War was in Iraq. At the peak of the mission, about 2,500 Polish soldiers were in Iraq. In the years 2003–2008, the commander of the PMC was also the commander of the Multinational Division Central-South, which initially controlled forces from 22 other countries. The main objectives of the mission in Iraq included: ensuring security and public order, supporting the creation and functioning of state organs and institutions, rebuilding basic infrastructure, improving the material conditions of the local population and supporting economic development in designated areas of responsibility.¹⁶ As part of the PMC in Iraq (which involved more than 15,000 soldiers during their Iraq mission), Polish sappers destroyed 3,600,000 items of unexploded ordnance and duds. Polish soldiers conducted 88,000 patrols and convoys, set up 46,000 checkpoints and searched 3,000,000 people.¹⁷

The involvement of the PAF participated in the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission to patrol and prevent violation of the airspace of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia is also important. Airspace protection mission in these countries has been conducted since they joined NATO in 2004. Poland lent forces to the operation in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019. The composition of the PMC each time amounted to 100–120 people.

The PAF also support NATO maritime operations. Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean was launched in November 2016 as a continuation of the 2001 Operation Active Endeavor. The Polish Navy would sent units to carry out missions under Operation

14 A. Dąbrowska, *O korzyściach z misji w Afganistanie*, February 10, 2015, accessed on December 20, 2019, <http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/15079?t=0-korzysciach-z-misji-w-Afganistanie/>.

15 *PKW Resolution Support*, June 16, 2019, accessed on December 20, 2019, <http://www.do.wp.mil.pl/info/zadania5/>.

16 M. Lasoń, *Próba bilansu zaangażowania Polski w interwencję zbrojną i proces stabilizacji Iraku w latach 2003–2008*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 3 (2009), pp. 78–79.

17 *Misje zagraniczne a wyzwania modernizacji Sił Zbrojnych RP*, November 2, 2012, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.defense24.pl/misje-zagraniczne-a-wyzwania-modernizacji-sil-zbrojnych-rp/>.

Active Endeavor several times. Three times the ORP *Bielik* submarine took part (2005; 2006/2007; 2010/2011), twice the ORP *Gen. K. Pułaski* guided missile frigate (in 2006 and 2008), once the ORP *Kondor* submarine (2008 and 2009) and the ORP *Kontradmiral Xawery Czernicki* naval ship (2011).

Poland sent two contingents to Romania and Latvia (approx. 200–250 soldiers in each of the PMC) in 2017 for the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and tailored Forward Presence on the eastern flank of the Alliance. This strengthened NATO's eastern and southern flanks against potential threats, including conflict. These activities represent the unity, cohesion and solidarity of NATO member states in which Poland, together with its armed forces, plays an important role.

Polish experience in Afghanistan and Iraq pointed to the need for change. Modernization and retrofitting equipment for the needs of these missions was apparent since the first units of the PMC in Iraq and Afghanistan, operated with equipment that did not fully meet the requirements and needs of soldiers in the difficult terrain and weather of these theatres. Subsequent units were equipped with new military equipment and weapons appropriate for the mission. The development of network-centric systems and satellite communications, up-arming vehicles and issuing new uniform items to meet NATO standards resulted in changes. The PAF transitioned from heavy to more mobile equipment with modular components.¹⁸ The detection efficiency of all branches of the armed forces increased due to the acquisition of more capable reconnaissance systems, including unmanned aircraft systems. Before military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the PAF were prepared for a linear conflict on the European plain. The expeditionary nature of both operations required different equipment and armaments, high land and air mobility, and troop protection. The *Rosomak* wheeled armored personnel carriers, MRAP and M-ATV armored vehicles and modern, individual equipment for soldiers under the *Tytan* program were welcome improvements. Air mobility was provided by the aviation component of land forces (*W-3 Sokół*, Mi-24 and Mi-17 helicopters) and the Aviation Group's C-295M Casa planes. The best equipment was provided for the PMC, but this limited its availability to the remaining army in Poland. The state-of-the-art military equipment and armaments for the immediate needs of foreign missions could have consequences for overall military readiness. The end of combat participation in missions outside the country (Polish soldiers still participate in training missions), allowed for a shift from expeditionary warfare to defending Poland's territorial integrity.

The participation of the PAF in missions outside the country promoted increased interoperability. Joining NATO forced them to cooperate in an international environment, in particular in missions abroad. NATO membership necessitated the adaptation of doctrine procedures, techniques and tactics of individual branches of the armed forces in order to operate within the multinational, combined branches of the armed forces. The participation of Polish soldiers in operations abroad brought the armed forces mentally and proce-

18 K. Chrzan, *Wpływ misji w Iraku i Afganistanie na zmiany w Wojsku Polskim*, "Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego" 6 (2012), pp. 199–211.

durally closer to Western military standards.¹⁹ Company and battalion commanders have acquired experience and understanding that their decisions are important or even crucial for the success of an entire operation. Participation in operations outside the country contributed to an increase in the level of individual training and competency in commanding subunits in combat, as well as cooperation in the coalition and alliance environment, use of command and recognition system, and rapid situation assessment in force protection.²⁰

Participation in operations outside the country forced a change in training within individual branches. Civil-military cooperation training was added. This was evident in the revised military education curricula, which emphasized combined and air-ground operations.²¹ Changes in the training system included areas related to the adaptation of doctrines and regulations, including typically technical ones. Military universities made changes where needed for missions outside the country and inside NATO. Instructors often had personal experience in these foreign missions.

Operations outside the country demonstrated that special forces are necessary for abroad missions. As a result, the Special Forces were created in 2007. The professionalism and commitment of the Special Forces in allied and coalition missions led to their passing the certification process in 2015, which means that they are able to command special operations in NATO.

The participation of tens of thousands of soldiers in international operations improved the professional quality of the Polish Armed Forces. A direct consequence of the involvement of the PAF in operations outside the country was the acquisition of combat experience by soldiers, including the experience of senior officers associated with commanding large international headquarters.²²

Organizational Changes in the Polish Armed Forces

Poland's accession to NATO forced organizational and structural changes in commands and staffs, including the branches of the armed forces and the General Staff of the Polish Army. The Polish involvement in operations abroad forced in 2003 the creation of the Operational Command. The Armed Forces Support Inspectorate, responsible for logistics, administration and infrastructure, was established in 2006. Polish soldiers are part of the personnel in the international structures of the Alliance, and tactical units are part of the NATO Response Force. Poland formed the Territorial Defense Forces in 2017 to strengthen the state's defense potential and reformed the system of command and control of its armed forces in 2014. The main organizational reforms were limiting the role of the Polish

19 R. Lesiecki, *Dowódca operacyjny: 20 lat Polski w NATO to przede wszystkim zmiana mentalności*, March 29, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.defense24.pl/dowodca-operacyjny-20-lat-polski-w-nato-to-przedewszystkim-zmiana-mentalnosci/>.

20 M. Cieniuch, *Piętnaście lat w NATO*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" Vol. 29, No. 1, 2014, pp. 99–116.

21 J. Borowski, *Gen. R. Andrzejczak: przez 20 lat zmieniło się nie tylko wojsko*, March 12, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://dzieje.pl/wideo/gen-r-andrzejczak-przez-20-lat-zmienilo-sie-nie-tylko-wojsko/>.

22 Vide: M. Gocut, *Współczesne uwarunkowania funkcjonowania i rozwoju Sił Zbrojnych RP*, "Kwartalnik Bellona" Vol. 676, No. 1, 2014, p. 16.

Army General Staff; liquidating commands within the armed forces and, establishing a single General Command of the Armed Forces and expanding the Operational Command – into the Operational Command of the Armed Forces. This resulted in the elimination of four posts of commanders of the armed forces and in their place introduced the General Command of the Armed Forces and Operational Command of the Armed Forces.²³ These reforms were not entirely successful and changes in the command and control system of the armed forces are again being implemented.

The participation of the PAF in international exercises, workshops and conferences have aided Polish transition in NATO. Exercise Victory Strike, Baltops, Air Meet, Red Flag, Steadfast Jazz and Cobra are annual exercises. Since 2006, Poland has organized the biennial Exercise Anaconda – the largest combined exercise of the PAF, conducted with allies, partners and the headquarters of the Command System and NATO. Soldiers from almost all of the NATO countries and other countries belonging to the Partnership for Peace program train together with Polish soldiers.²⁴

Poland has also NATO infrastructure located on its territory. Poland, Germany and Denmark formed Multinational Corps Northeast in 1999 in Szczecin. It is certified to command a land component of NATO's rapid response forces. In 2004, NATO founded a Joint Force Training Centre subordinate to Allied Command Transformation in Bydgoszcz. It is responsible for training Alliance officers and disseminating the latest technologies and solutions in tactical operations. Co-located in Bydgoszcz is the 3rd NATO Signal Battalion (from 2010). The NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence was also formed in Bydgoszcz in 2013. It is responsible for training, analysis and support of the interoperability of military police formations. In 2015, the NATO Force Integration Unit also set up its headquarters in Bydgoszcz. It facilitates the efficient transfer of allied forces into Poland, including the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.²⁵

One of the resolutions of the NATO summit in Warsaw was to strengthen the Alliance's eastern flank. In 2017, NATO created the Multinational Division North-East to coordinate multinational battle groups as part of eFP on the Alliance's eastern flank. The division reached full operational capacity in 2018. In turn, the NATO Battalion Combat Group formed in Orzysz, cooperating with the 15th Giżycka Mechanized Brigade. The group consists of several hundred American soldiers supplemented with British, Romanian and Croatian units. A NATO Counter-Intelligence Centre of Excellence was formed in Poland in 2017, and is responsible for training the Alliance's counterintelligence services and developing doctrine and concepts that take into account current and future threats to member states.

23 M. Dura, *Nowa reforma systemu dowodzenia. Jakie założenia?*, March 13, 2017, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.defense24.pl//nowa-reforma-systemu-dowodzenia-jakie-zalozenia-analiza/>.

24 M. Miłoś, *20 lat Polski w NATO. Co się zmieniło w siłach zbrojnych?*, March 5, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/592765,nato-mon-sily-zbrojne-wojsko-armia-20-lat-rocznica.html/>.

25 M. Kowalska-Sendek, *NATO inwestuje w Polskę miliardy*, March 12, 2017, accessed on December 19, 2019, <http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/22043?t=NATO-inwestuje-w-Polsce-miliardy/>.

Challenges for Poland and the Polish Armed Forces in the Next Decades

During the next decade, Poland will face the same challenges that entire NATO will. Maintaining the Alliance's coherence may be a challenge. Divergent interests of member states may lead to a situation where national interests of individual states will place NATO security in the background. This is primarily related to the perception of threats by member states. Countries on the eastern flank of NATO see the greatest threat as the unpredictable policy of neighboring Russia and the consequent danger. In turn, the states on the southern flank articulate the risks associated with migration, which increases the risk of terrorist attacks.²⁶ The Alliance will need to maintain a balance in the perception of security threats and to treat member states equally.²⁷ Poland recognizes that the Alliance's primary mission is collective security. It understands that other member states consider that the threat from Russia is unrealistic and also participates in activities related to eliminating other threats in the framework of crisis management. Therefore, it accepts the functioning of the NATO principle of 360 degrees, according to which the allies will support each other, even in those places where they do not have strategic interests. Poland will build the capabilities necessary to counteract many threats, not only those related to the weakening of collective defense.

From the point of view of Poland, transatlantic relations with the US are important, as US commitment is crucial for ensuring the inviolability and the integrity of the NATO treaty area. Despite tensions between the European NATO countries and the US, the basis for the Alliance should remain partner relations between all member states. The pro-American attitude of Poland may raise some concerns of European partners of NATO, but the role and challenge of Poland, is to maintain the proper balance or even take the initiative for improving and building up a relationship with the US within NATO. Thus, Poland should be a leader in lobbying for Alliance cohesion without offending Western European allies while showing the US how crucial stability in transatlantic relations in the 21st century is for them also.

From the Polish perspective, it will be important to maintain the allies' long-standing attention to the eastern flank. In this regard, the actions of political and military decision-makers in Poland should be oriented towards ensuring that the perspective threats in this area has a strategic approach, important for the whole of NATO. This should result in a coherent policy of deterrence, generation of appropriate defense capabilities, and interest Central and Eastern Europe. Since 2014, the resolve and solidarity of the Alliance have increased. Mutual understanding of the security concerns expressed by others has improved. NATO members in the north and east understand much better the difficult situation of their southern allies, and southern allies appreciate the potential threats faced by countries in eastern NATO.

Defense spending and technical modernization will remain important. Poland is one of the few countries that spends 2% of GDP on defense. By 2030, defense spending should

26 K. Liedel, *Zwalczanie terroryzmu międzynarodowego w polskiej polityce bezpieczeństwa*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 49–50.

27 D. Zandee, *70 Years of Nato: The Alliance in Troubled Waters*, June 8, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/70-years-nato-alliance-troubled-waters/>.

be increased to 2.5% of GDP. Despite the ongoing technical modernization of the PAF, the needs in this area are enormous.²⁸ This is a huge financial challenge, which depends mainly on the state of Polish economy. It should be emphasized that the combat potential of the PAF will be modernized towards building capabilities necessary for NATO's collective defense.²⁹ The expeditionary period in the operations of the PAF meant that modernization priorities were shifted towards capabilities useful in crisis response operations. Currently, technical modernization is focused on defense capabilities, but does not exclude a simultaneous possession of capabilities necessary in the Alliance's crisis management activities. What is important is not the quantity but the quality of defense spending and proper prioritization.

Another area, which is a challenge for Poland and NATO, is balancing European ambitions in strategic autonomy in the area of security. It is obvious that increasing the defense capabilities of EU Member States is perfectly justified, but this cannot be at the expense of the defense capabilities assigned to the Alliance. Some of the proposed initiatives, including the creation of European army, may weaken the defense capabilities of NATO. Attention should be paid to the need to lobby for complementary defense capabilities that exist in both NATO and the EU.³⁰ Poland could take on the role of a mediator, seeking in NATO and EU countries an understanding of the scope of developing complementary defense capabilities necessary for the member states of both organizations.

Conclusions

The 20 years of Poland's membership in the North-Atlantic Alliance brought changes. First, there has been an increase in Poland's security and prestige. Membership in a recognized military alliance provides guarantees under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, but also increases the importance of Poland in the international arena. The PAF are engaged in NATO activities to ensure international security. The participation of Polish soldiers in missions under the NATO flag has enabled them to build a credible position in the Alliance itself and in third countries.

Second, joining NATO was a catalyst for change in the armed forces. The need to adapt the PAF to allied standards required: technical modernization, transition from armed forces based on conscription to a professional military and reform of the command system. NATO was the stimulus for transformational changes in the PAF. This led to the professionalization of military personnel, positive changes in the military education system and the acquisition of combat experience. These changes ensured interoperability with NATO.

28 R. Lesiecki, *185 mld zł na modernizację techniczną wojska. W planach do 2026 r. m.in. Harpia, Kruk i Narew*, February 28, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.defense24.pl/185-mld-zl-na-modernizacje-techniczna-wojska-do-2026-r-jest-nowy-plan/>.

29 *Modernizacja techniczna SZRP*, February 28, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/modernizacja-techniczna-szrp/>.

30 J. Hill, *NATO – ready for anything?*, January 24, 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2019/Also-in-2019/nato-ready-for-anything-military-force/EN/index.htm/>.

Third, Poland has an increasing political role in NATO. The voice of Polish political and military decision-makers is more audible. Poland's commitment to strengthening the Alliance's capacity to provide collective defense has resulted in actions taken by NATO at the summits in Wales, Warsaw and Brussels. Consequently, deterrence and allied defense are again NATO's key tasks aimed at ensuring the security of its members regardless of their geographical location.

To sum up, the decision taken more than 20 years ago by Polish politicians to join NATO was one of the most important toward ensuring the inviolability and territorial integrity of Poland. Polish society perceives NATO as a guarantor of security. Research conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research in 2019 indicates 80% support for Poland's membership in NATO, and nearly 70% of the public believes that being a member of the Alliance provides Poland with peace and security.³¹ This is an expression of trust for NATO, but also for the involvement of the PAF in its activities. ■

31 20 lat członkostwa Polski w NATO, March 2019, accessed on December 19, 2019, https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_031_19.PDF/.

STRESZCZENIE:

W artykule omówiono zmiany, jakie zaszły w Siłach Zbrojnych RP w okresie dwudziestu lat członkostwa Polski w NATO. Procesy transformacyjne przebiegały z różną intensywnością i obejmowały zarówno zmiany organizacyjne, jak i techniczną modernizację oraz profesjonalizację sił zbrojnych. Istotnym aspektem było uczestnictwo polskiego wojska w operacjach pod flagą NATO. Doświadczenie bojowe Sił Zbrojnych RP pozwoliło na wprowadzenie zmian w funkcjonowaniu wojsk, w tym w odniesieniu do techniki bojowej oraz procedur, a w konsekwencji na osiągnięcie interoperacyjności z NATO.

Przyszłe zmiany w Siłach Zbrojnych RP będą bezpośrednim następstwem wyzwań związanych z zaangażowaniem Polski w działalność Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego w wymiarze politycznym, ekonomicznym i militarnym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

20-lecie członkostwa Polski w NATO, doświadczenia bojowe Sił Zbrojnych RP, Siły Zbrojne RP, zmiany w Siłach Zbrojnych RP, interoperacyjność Sił Zbrojnych RP

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