

Polish-American military cooperation: state and perspectives

The presence of the United States in Europe is perceived by the Central European countries as a guarantee for the security of the continent and support for the North Atlantic Alliance. From the Polish point of view, one of the key elements for increasing the financial security guarantee is the location of the Alliance infrastructure in Poland, e.g. military bases, ground reconnaissance systems, or joining such project as the missile defense system. In this aspect, the political and financial involvement of the USA is crucial.

The Polish support for the USA during the war in Iraq already gave the Polish Army an opportunity to gain a lot of battle and logistical experience. This was important in the context of the plan to create a professional regular army. The professionalization of the army meant a transformation of the quality and quantity of the personnel and equipment reserves. This goal was reached, among others, with the introduction of professional and contract military service and the adjustment of the number, structure and equipment of the army to the modern reality. This enables the preparation of the military to react to current and potential military and non-military threats. It also increases its defense effectiveness and improves expeditionary capabilities, allowing for efficient transportation of troops and their deployment outside the country during allied operations.

The acquisition of the so called expeditionary capabilities was an important element increasing the Polish position as a member of the NATO, but also as a potential participant of the planned joint operations of the European armed forces, which are supposed to be capable of acting outside the territory of the European Union. Thanks to this experience, the role of Poland as a partner in the debate concerning Euro-Atlantic security became much more significant.

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Between the mission in Iraq and the involvement in Afghanistan, the equipment of the Polish units changed significantly. Apart from domestic gear, they also received the light armored HMMWV vehicles (about 140) and mine/ambush resistant Cougars (about 40) borrowed from the Americans. The Department of Defense spent almost PLN 2 billion in 2007-2011 on equipment for the soldiers participating in the mission, but also - during the gradual armament of the contingent - utilized different systems and equipment provided by the Americans within the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which otherwise it would be unable to afford. These were: Blue Force Tracking, HIIDE biometric identification tools, road clearing vehicles, MRAP patrol vehicles, observation balloons, Packbot Fastac robots. The experience gained during their operation should be used to implement similar solutions in Poland. The following notions should also be mentioned: network-centric warfare, HUMINT (Human Intelligence), JTAC (Joint Terminal Attack Controller), satellite communication and unmanned aircraft, which the Polish soldiers were able to get to know in practice with the help of the Americans.

It is worth emphasizing that only the United States, the United Kingdom and Poland were ready and accepted the responsibility for the provinces of Iraq and Afghanistan. When it comes to the mission in Iraq, Poland was expecting possible economic benefits. However, the hopes that the USA would support the Polish economy by Iraqi contracts were excessive, but the internal situation in Iraq, resembling a civil war, played a much bigger role in scaring off the Polish entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, Poland gained many contracts for the export of military equipment and did not even manage to fulfill all of them. What is more important is that we learned from the Americans how to fight in modern conflicts. This is the greatest benefit. "They thought us how to fight an enemy who stings out of hiding. - Had it not been for Iraq and Afghanistan, we would not have been able to gain experience in handling modern conflicts so quickly." This translates directly into the security of Poland (gen. Waldemar Skrzypczak). Moreover, the Americans helped us build modern armed forces. "What has happened in this area in Poland within the last 20 years is truly a revolution" (gen. Bogusław Pacek).

On 20 August 2008, an American-Polish agreement was made concerning the placement of the American missile defense system within the Polish territory. After the turbulence caused by the tactical suspension of the project by the USA, it is still continued within the more general cooperation between alliances by the NATO. On 26 July 2012, the Minister of National Defense, Tomasz Siemoniak, acquired from the Pentagon a confirmation for the construction of the missile defense system in Europe, the elements of which (SM-3 anti-missiles) will be located in Poland in 2018. The agreement concerning the placement of the elements of the missile defense system in Poland provided an opportunity to acquire



tangible obligations from Washington, related to the defenses of our country. The very presence of the American installations and the additional security guarantees will constitute added value by themselves. They will significantly improve the security that the NATO provides to Poland. The cooperation related to the construction of the NATO missile defense system, as well as the new resulting possibilities, became an impulse for the proposition of President Bronisław Komorowski, made on 15 August 2012, to build a Polish missile defense system complementing the previously mentioned project.

In this context, the possibility of acquiring new military technologies and equipment based on the military and economic Polish-American cooperation is an important matter. Among the more important investments of the USA in Poland within the last few years, the investment of the Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation in PZL Mielec should be mentioned, where the concern started the production of the S-70i Black Hawk helicopter. The first complete machine of this type left the factory in March 2010. In May 2010, the Patriot (PAC-2) surface-to-air missile system, deployed on a rotation basis, was located for the first time in Morąg, 70 km from the Kaliningrad Oblast. More than 100 American soldiers came to Poland, together with six training missile launchers, a radar and a command station. In 2012, the eighth and ninth rotation of the Patriot batteries came to Poland, which were moved to Toruń in December 2010 because of protests by Russia.

This is one of the effects of the Declaration, signed in Warsaw on 20 August 2008, concerning strategic cooperation between Poland and the United States of America. It also concerns long-term cooperation aimed at increasing the security of Poland, the USA and the North Atlantic area. The Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group was created within the political and military cooperation. Moreover, the extension of cooperation for air and missile defense was declared, as well as the establishment of American military bases in Poland and the support in the modernization of the Polish Military Forces. The Declaration also includes cooperation in terms of technology, research and defense industry.

The successful fulfillment of the offset agreement, being a consequence of the purchase of the American multirole jet fighter F-16 aircraft, is very important here. The tender was settled in December 2002 and Poland agreed to purchase 48 aircraft for USD 3.5 billion. This was the biggest contract for the purchase of weapons for the Polish army. A loan with low interest rate was acquired from Washington for this purpose, which amounted to USD 3.8 billion. Apart from the aircraft, we also additionally negotiated equipment and technologies, which the USA was supposed to produce or repair on the Polish territory within the so called offset agreement. The recent data related to this issue, published by the Ministry of Economy in 2011, shows that until the end of 2010 we concluded 16 offset agreements with foreign contractors with the value of USD 8 billion. In the opinion of the then



head of the department, “the offset helped many factories, especially in the defense industry sector, to improve their economic and financial condition. It also enabled the transfer of technology, which helped Polish economic entities to extend their product offer” (Waldemar Pawlak, Ministry of Economy). What is important is that during the inspection performed in 2010, no irregularities were found in the realization of the offset obligations. Therefore, the value of the offset agreement, amounting to USD 6.028 billion, has long been exceeded and the deadline for its fulfillment is in 2013. What is more, in July 2013 the last of five C-130E Hercules transport aircraft reached the 33rd Air Transport Base in Powidz. The planes were handed over to Poland free of charge by the United States as non-repayable military aid. Currently, these are the largest transport aircraft of the Polish army. They travel to Afghanistan and transport personnel and equipment for international exercises.

The last element of the bilateral military cooperation so far was the arrival of American soldiers to Poland on 9 November 2012, who will station in Eastern Europe permanently for the first time. The USA Aviation Detachment of the 52nd Operations Group of the 52nd Fighter Wing, being part of US Air Force in Europe, will be located at the 32nd Tactical Air Base in Łask. The American soldiers will participate in joint exercises with our pilots and technicians. The Detachment is composed of 10 soldiers, but every quarter a Rotational Detachment will arrive for two weeks with 250 soldiers as well as F-16 and Hercules aircraft. They will undergo training according to their own programs and jointly with Polish pilots and technicians. The goal of the creation of the Detachment is the mutual exchange of experience and the strengthening of the security of the NATO countries.

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An optimal way of acquiring the equipment necessary for the Polish army would be to increase the funding from the FMF program (Foreign Military Financing). Currently, the American military aid for Poland within the FMF is at the level of USD 42 billion (2011). This puts Poland among the biggest beneficiaries of this aid in Europe and Eurasia. However, it is still insufficient for the needs of the Polish army, but attaining an increase of the aid is a difficult task. This is because Poland is situated within an area of secondary strategic interest to the Americans.

Just like with the rotational presence of the Patriot battery in Poland, the main goal of the stay of the American soldiers in Poland will be training. Therefore, the perspectives for the American military presence in Poland are rather symbolic and will have little influence on the distribution of power within the region. One should also remember that the United States



is a player of a global scale with interests far exceeding East-Central Europe, which is considered a relatively stable area.

Poland is trying to increase the American military presence within its territory, but from a strategic point of view the US military bases in the area are not very important. The attention of Washington in this part of the world is mainly focused on the Caucasus and Middle East. From this point of view, one should expect stronger interest in the bases in Romania and Bulgaria. It is, therefore, possible to expect that the special treatment for Poland is to a higher degree a result of our involvement as an ally of the USA than of actual strategic needs.

Hence, it may be more beneficial for Poland to deepen the cooperation at the junction of economy and military, and acquire the American technological capital as a modernizing element.

Nonetheless, in the face of the weakness of the European Union when it comes to security, the maintenance of the American factor with regard to the diversification of the Polish security, complementing the security guarantee resulting from our membership in NATO, seems fundamental.

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