

POLAND'S ARMED FORCES IN NATO. TWO DECADES OF TRANSFORMATION

POLSKÉ OZBROJENÉ SÍLY V NATO. DVĚ DESETILETÍ TRANSFORMACE

Eugeniusz Cieślak^a

Abstrakt

Článek se zabývá změnami polských ozbrojených sil vyplývajícími ze členství Polska v NATO. Článek se pokouší posoudit, jak členství v NATO ovlivnilo transformaci polské organizace, personálu, vzdělávání a odborné přípravy ozbrojených sil a také jejich technickou modernizaci. Článek se zabývá situací před členstvím v NATO, transformací, k níž došlo v prvním desetiletí v NATO, a změnami, ke kterým došlo v průběhu druhé dekady členství. Zvláštní pozornost byla věnována období po roce 2014.

Abstract

The article discusses the changes in Poland's Armed Forces resulting from Poland's membership to NATO. The article attempts to assess how the membership in NATO influenced the transformation of the organization, personnel, education and training as well as technical modernization of Poland's Armed Forces. The article addresses the situation prior to the NATO membership, the transformation that took place during the first decade in NATO and the changes that took place during the second decade of the membership. Special attention has been given to the post-2014 period.

Klíčová slova

Polsko; ozbrojené síly; NATO; proměna.

Keywords

Poland; Armed Forces; NATO; Transformation.

^a Institute of Social Sciences and Security Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland. eugeniusz.cieslak@uph.edu.pl. orcid.org/0000-0002-6476-3643.

INTRODUCTION

The membership in the North Atlantic Alliance has become the engine of transformation for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. Over the two decades of Polish membership in NATO, the international security environment has changed in the regional and global dimensions. The Alliance has also changed, and finally, Poland itself has changed. An attempt to look more broadly at the changes that have occurred to the Polish Armed Forces as a result of NATO membership requires references to all of the above-mentioned aspects. The security environment has been changing dramatically since the nineties of the last century. The end of the Cold War in Europe diminished the threat of a nuclear confrontation between the East and the West. However; it turned out soon that it was replaced by the threats resulting from the instability in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the continent. A decade later, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, international security assessments were dominated by terrorist threats whereas the risk of armed aggression in the Euro-Atlantic area was considered negligible. A decade later, the Russian aggression in Ukraine showed that such assessments of security threats were overly optimistic. The category of a state opponent and a peer competitor has returned to assessments of threats to international security, and the risk of an interstate armed conflict in the Euro-Atlantic area has become more realistic.

Changes in the security environment have contributed to the evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance. From the political-military organization focused almost exclusively on ensuring military security to its member states during the Cold War, NATO gradually transformed into an organization increasingly engaged in solving crisis situations outside the area defined in the North Atlantic Treaty. After a decade of peace support experience in the Western Balkans, NATO launched its largest expeditionary operation as part of the ISAF forces in Afghanistan. The beginning of the first decade of the 21st century was a period when NATO focused to a lesser extent on collective defence than on crisis management and out-of-area operations. The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the emergence of an undeniable military threat to the NATO member states from the Russian Federation restored the importance of collective defence in the North Atlantic Alliance's activities. The military threat from Russia has become the premise for NATO to undertake a series of ad hoc and long-term political and military activities that affect allied cooperation in the field of security and defence.

Considering the changes that have taken place in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland within twenty years of Poland's membership in NATO, one must take into account the changes that were experienced by the state and society. After the democratic changes in 1989, Poland could finally independently shape its security and defence policies. In the face of the threat of instability after the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the absence of sufficient military and economic potential to ensure security on its own, Poland made strenuous efforts to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. Obtaining membership in NATO in 1999 increased the security of Poland. It also revealed a number of fundamental requirements related to membership in the organization and challenges in the area of allied cooperation. The economic growth resulting from Poland's membership in the European Union since 2004 has increased the capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces to meet allied requirements

for implementation of technical modernization and transformation. After a decade of concentrating efforts on participating in the alliance and coalition crisis response operations outside the country, in the face of a growing military threat from Russia, Poland decided to intensify its efforts to strengthen its armed forces' capabilities of collective defence. This was reflected in the involvement of the Polish Armed Forces in initiatives related to NATO adaptation to changes in the security environment, as well as in the plans for development and technical modernization implemented at the national dimension.

The article attempts to present an assessment of a long-term influence that NATO membership has had on the transformation of Poland's Armed Forces. While the objective of research does not seem overly ground-breaking, the topic has not received a more detailed treatment in literature yet. While there are numerous articles dealing with short-term changes in armed forces or specific aspects of transformation, there are hardly any publications focusing on long-term transformation of Poland's Armed Forces and its linkages to Poland's membership in NATO.

The methodology of the article rests on a comparison of consecutive Poland's official strategic documents describing the concepts and plans for the transformation of the armed forces and the results of the implementation. Such approach was adopted to identify the possible influence of the NATO membership on the changes in the Polish Armed Forces over the last three decades. The chronologic perspective allows identifying major trends in geopolitical factors that shaped NATO policies and actions thus being an external catalyst for the transformation of Poland's Armed Forces. The analysis is based both on primary sources such as Poland's security and defence strategies between 1989 and 2019 and secondary sources such as research papers.

The article is divided into four parts that describe consecutive periods of the Armed Forces transformation resulting from Poland's membership in NATO. The analysis starts with a decade prior to the NATO membership as it determined the state of the Polish Armed Forces at the beginning of the alliance membership. The second and third parts of the article focus on the first decade of the NATO membership and Poland's efforts to transform its armed forces to meet allied standards and attempts to complete the technical modernization. The last part of the article focuses on the changes in the Polish Armed Forces that has taken place after 2014 as a result of NATO adaptation to new security situation in the transatlantic area.

The analysis focuses mainly on military aspects of Poland's security over the last three decades and as such falls into the category of security studies. However, the scope of research may also be of interest to theoreticians and practitioners of international relations and strategic studies.

THE STARTING POINT

The democratic changes in the eighties, which culminated in the parliamentary elections in 1989 and the end of the communist regime, led to the regaining of Poland's sovereignty in the sphere of security policy. Although the Warsaw Pact still existed, it was known that the cooperation within its framework would no longer play a significant role in ensuring Poland's security as a new, post-Cold War, pan-European security system was being established. In July 1991, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and

Poland found itself outside the structures of any political and military alliance in the face of the ongoing destabilization of the security environment in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The “Assumptions of the Polish Security Policy” and “Security Policy and Defence Strategy of the Republic of Poland” adopted in 1992 included direct references to the North Atlantic Alliance.

In the contents concerning external aspects of security policy, NATO was clearly identified as the main factor of stability and security in Europe and it was declared that “Poland aspires to gain membership in NATO.”¹ Initially, however, the participation in the “Partnership for Peace” program was offered to Poland in 1994. At that time, it was not considered by many Poles as any guarantee of future membership in NATO. The true beginning of the formal accession process took place in 1997 and ended with the admission to NATO on March 12, 1999. The long-sought membership ended nearly a decade into Poland’s “grey security zone” which was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The years between 1989 and 1999 were defined in the Polish history as the period of defensive independence, in which the military security of Poland had to depend purely on the capabilities of the armed forces at hand.

The state of the Polish Armed Forces in 1989 was a derivative of earlier commitments under the Warsaw Pact and the result of the decade of the economic crisis during the eighties in Poland. As a consequence, Poland had armed forces with operational capabilities not fully adequate to the defence requirements of the state, excessively expanded in numerical terms and deployed predominantly in the western part of Poland, in accordance with the Warsaw Pact’s war plans.

The process of technical modernization of the armed forces was essentially interrupted at the end of the seventies due to the economic crisis in Poland. Therefore, in early nineties, most of the Polish Armed Forces’ weapon systems were not modern ones and number of new equipment was limited. There was also a significant portion of weapon systems and equipment that needed repairs and servicing. Such a situation necessitated quick and drastic reductions of personnel, retirement of non-prospective armaments and passing surplus infrastructure to the civilian authorities.

At the same time, due to the needs related to the ability to provide defence against aggression from all directions, actions were taken to rebuild the potential of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in the eastern part of the country. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of armed forces’ personnel in Poland was reduced from around 347,000 to less than 200,000.² The oldest weapon systems were also withdrawn from service without making new purchases and limiting the modernization of remaining weapon systems and military equipment. Despite significant reductions, due to the unfavourable economic situation of the state in the first years of economic transformation to the free market economy, there were difficulties in maintaining even such a reduced potential of the armed forces.

THE FIRST DECADE IN NATO

¹ Poland. *Doktryna obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, załącznik do Uchwały Komitetu Obrony Kraju z dnia 21 lutego 1990 roku w sprawie doktryny obronnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. In: *Monitor Polski* nr 9 z dnia 16 marca 1990 r., poz. 66, part II. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2HzGKXF>

² GAĞOR, Franciszek. *Dziesięć lat w NATO, Kwartalnik Bellona*. Warszawa: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 2009, No 1/2009, p. 9 ISSN 1897-7065

Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization created a qualitatively new situation for the development of the Polish Armed Forces. In the "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland" adopted on the 4th January, 2000, NATO was recognized as the main factor of political and military stability in Europe and the real basis for ensuring security and defence for Poland. Poland declared active participation in strengthening the Alliance and maintaining its ability to perform basic security tasks. In the strategy quoted, it was realistically assessed that Poland's accession to NATO did not complete the integration process with its political and military structures. This integration, taking place at many levels and in many areas, included "full military integration".³ Full military integration with NATO was to be a long-term and multi-faceted process. It was recognized that it would have to include not only technical and organizational interoperability of the military, but also civil-military relations, education and training as well as other aspects of the functioning of the armed forces. In the national security strategy of 2000, it was considered necessary to accelerate the integration process through increased organizational, financial and conceptual efforts.

The adaptation of the organizational structures of the Polish Armed Forces was considered to be a priority for military integration with NATO, so that it would be possible to achieve the required level of interoperability with the armed forces of other NATO countries. The proper preparation of staff for work in NATO structures and in accordance with its standards as well as continuation of analytical and research work on full integration with the Alliance was also of the highest priority in the early years of Poland's membership in NATO. The strategy of 2000 assumed the need to adapt the defence planning process, including the budgetary dimension, to NATO standards and to guarantee stable financing for defence in the long-term perspective. It was important, from the point of view of military integration with NATO, that the NATO investment program in the field of security (NATO Support Infrastructure Program - NSIP) was appropriately used to develop the infrastructure necessary for allied operations in Poland and the host state's (HNS) duties. It should be noted that the 2000 national security strategy included direct references to the Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) adopted at the Washington Summit in 1999. Poland perceived the initiative as a way of increasing the ability of the Republic of Poland to defend itself and participate in other initiatives initiated by the North Atlantic Alliance.⁴

In subsequent editions of the national security strategy, in 2003 and 2007, the assumptions regarding the priority importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for security in the Euro-Atlantic area were maintained. In the strategy of 2003, Poland declared its willingness to strengthen the North Atlantic Alliance and support NATO's evolution towards new missions and capabilities, while maintaining a credible potential and the ability to perform the classic functions of collective defence. This strategy also pointed at the need to increase the effectiveness of task implementation by the Polish Armed Forces by increasing their operational capabilities. The types of operational capabilities, defined in the above-mentioned strategy document, included, among others, protection of troops against weapons of mass destruction, increasing the

³ KUPIECKI, Robert (ed.) *Strategia bezpieczeństwa narodowego RP. Pierwsze 25 lat.* Warszawa: Wojskowe Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2015, pp. 258. ISBN 978-83-63755-9-40

⁴ Ibid.

efficiency of command and control systems, ensuring the effectiveness of combat operations and achieving required NATO standards by deployable forces.⁵ The strategy also called for sufficient deployment capabilities of combat units and continuity of their support. In the national security strategy of 2003, the requirement to provide the High Readiness Forces and selected units of Lower Readiness Forces with modern armaments and military equipment corresponding to NATO standards was clearly indicated. The armed forces were also obliged to maintain the potential of expeditionary forces enabling participation in operations outside the state's territory within the framework of NATO, European Union and United Nations operations.⁶ The national security strategy adopted in 2007 declared, for the first time in the post-1989 history of Poland, the correlation of the content of national strategic assumptions in the field of security with NATO's strategic concept and European Union's security strategy. Most of the provisions regarding the role of the North Atlantic Alliance for the security of Poland constituted a continuation of the assumptions included previously in the 2003 strategy. It should be noted that the strategy of 2007 maintained Poland's support for selective involvement of NATO in stabilization missions in the non-European area, provided, however, that the Alliance retained the credible potential and full ability to collectively defend the Member States.⁷ The strategy also pointed out the need to take into account the influence of non-European NATO activities on the course, pace and costs of modernization and transformation of the armed forces of allies, including Poland.

The first years of Poland's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance were a period of intense activities aimed at adapting the armed forces to NATO standards. Poland's membership in NATO translated into major changes in the staffing structure, organization of armed forces, armaments and military equipment, training system, doctrine, regulations and procedures. Changes were introduced in all services and branches of armed forces as well as in functional systems. The most visible was the influence of membership in the North Atlantic Alliance on the size of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland and the structure of the military personnel. At the time of joining NATO in 1999, the armed forces numbered 198,500 soldiers (with an available strength of almost 226,000). However, it turned out to be too heavy a burden for integration projects. Until January 1, 2004, the Polish Armed Forces were reduced to the level of 150,000 soldiers and this number continued being maintained for the next five years. The level of professionalization of the armed forces was systematically increasing, starting from 42% of all positions for professional (volunteer, not drafted) soldiers in 1999, reaching 61% at the beginning of 2008.⁸ Since 2009, after the suspension of the compulsory military service, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland became a fully volunteer force. The membership in NATO revolutionized the structure of personnel in the armed forces. In 1999-2008, the size of the officer corps was significantly reduced, the corps of the warrant officers was liquidated, the role of non-commissioned officer corps was strengthened and a professional enlisted corps was created.

⁵ KUPIECKI, Robert (ed.) *Strategia bezpieczeństwa narodowego RP. Pierwsze 25 lat.* Warszawa: Wojskowe Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2015, pp. 292-293. ISBN 978-83-63755-9-40

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 296-297

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 315

⁸ GAĞOR. *op. cit.* pp. 10-11

After the first decade of NATO membership, almost 50% of officers and about 80% of non-commissioned officers in the armed forces were people who began military service after 1998. Out of over one hundred and twenty generals in service in 2009, only ten remained, who received general promotions before Poland's accession to NATO. During the first decade of the Polish membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, a generation change took place in the armed forces. Achieving allied standards in the preparation of military personnel was possible thanks to the extensive use of assistance from allied countries in the education and specialist training of soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces. In the first decade of Poland's membership in NATO, 171 soldiers completed post-graduate studies at military universities in the USA, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands, and 44 soldiers completed graduate studies there. At the same time, 2259 soldiers completed specialized training at military training centres in NATO countries.⁹

Poland's membership in NATO caused fundamental changes in the education and training system for the needs of the armed forces. After 1999, the curricula and training programs were completely changed in all academies, schools and training centres. In the new rules of the Ministry of Defence for personnel policy, adopted in 2003, the requirement for continuous education and training of soldiers was required. The quality of training of professional soldiers improved significantly as the Polish Armed Forces expanded participation in out-of-area operations led by NATO, the EU, the UN and created ad hoc coalitions. Given the scale of the involvement of troops, the greatest impact on the level of troop combat training was achieved by the participation of Polish military contingents in the US-led coalition in Iraq in 2003-2008 and the participation in the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan in 2007-2014. In the first decade of membership in NATO, the Polish Armed Forces took part in 72 of the most important exercises of Allied Effort allied series, BALTOPS, Clean Hunter, Air Meet, Steadfast, Cooperative and Common. Some of the NATO exercises took place in Poland. Among others, exercise Strong Resolve 2002 and NATO Air Meet 2003 were conducted on the Polish territory at that time. The level of interoperability of the Polish Armed Forces was also improved by Polish soldiers' service in the NATO integrated command structure. Initially in 1999, only 65 soldiers served in the NATO headquarters, while in 2008 they were as many as 318.¹⁰

Poland's membership in NATO has fundamentally influenced the technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces. The first consequences of Poland's accession to the Alliance were decisions to withdraw a significant amount of obsolete weapon systems from use and change priorities in the process of technical modernization. In 1999, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland possessed mostly technically obsolete weapon systems and equipment, whose combat effectiveness was marginal. Some of the weapon systems and military equipment were not available as a result of a long-standing lack of funds for repairs and technical services.¹¹ A former Chief of General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces Gen. Gągor, in an article summarizing the tenth anniversary of Poland's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, emphasized that “it

⁹ Ibid. pp. 12

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 14

¹¹ Poland. Raport o stanie państwa i działaniach rządu w latach 1997-2001. Warszawa: Kancelaria Premiera Rady Ministrów, 2001, pp. 193-197

would be no exaggeration to say that in the field of arms and equipment we had the greatest distance to make up for the armed forces of our new allies.”¹² Although numerically the state of possession of the Polish Armed Forces was impressive, in most cases these were weapon systems designed in the USSR in the 1950s and towed artillery remembered the period of the Second World War. In the Land Forces, relatively modern weapon systems and equipment constituted only about 10% of total ownership at the time of Poland's entry into NATO. The situation in the Air Force and the Navy was similarly bad. The need to find funds for military integration with NATO caused a rapid withdrawal of all T-55 tanks and all towed artillery sets, MiG-21, MiG-23 and Su-20 aircraft, and more than thirty, mostly light, Naval vessels during the first two years of Poland's membership in NATO.¹³

The prospects of technical modernization allowing to achieve interoperability within NATO were positively influenced by political decisions on the statutory guarantee of the size of the defence budget of Poland. In the Act on Restructuring, Technical Modernization and Financing of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland adopted on May 25, 2001, the level of at least 1.95% of GDP from the previous year was guaranteed as the minimum level of state expenditure on national defence.¹⁴ The constant level of the Ministry of Defence's budget in connection with the increase of its share of capital expenditures contributed to a noticeable progress in the technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces in the first decade of NATO membership. In 1999-2008, 18.7% of the total budget of the Ministry of Defence was spent on technical modernization, and capital expenditures in that period accounted for 75.9% of all funds for technical modernization. In the first decade of NATO membership, purchases of modern weapon systems and the modernization of older equipment became the basic form of technical modernization. In the Land Forces, Leopard tanks, Rosomak wheeled armoured personnel carriers, Spike anti-tank missiles and modern communication systems were introduced into service. Technical modernization of air defence missile systems and most helicopters was carried out. An important element of technical modernization in the Land Forces, in the context of Poland's membership in NATO, was marked with the introduction of new generations of small arms compatible with munitions of other NATO countries, night vision equipment and personal equipment of soldiers.

The biggest breakthrough and modernization program, during the first decade of Poland's membership to NATO, was achieved by procurement of 48 multi-role aircraft F-16, which allowed smooth achievement of full interoperability with Allied air forces. The purchase of medium-sized C295 transport aircraft should be also noticed, as it increased the capabilities of military forces to deploy and sustain in out-of-area operations. The Air Force also modernized air surveillance and air defence command and control of national air defence for full integration within the NATO Integrated Air Defence System. The support from Allies allowed the introduction of NATO compatible

¹² GAGOR. op. cit. pp. 14-15

¹³ KARKOSZKA, Andrzej. Combating terrorism and its implications for the Polish Armed Forces. WINKLER, Theodor H. et al (eds.). *Combating Terrorism and Its Implications for the Security Sector*. Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005, pp. 104-108. ISBN 91-89683-98-6

¹⁴ Poland. Ustawa z dnia 25 maja 2001 r. o przebudowie i modernizacji technicznej oraz finansowaniu Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. In: Dziennik Ustaw nr 76 z 25 lipca 2001 r., poz. 804. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2FglQtj>

combat ships into Polish Navy. Two missile frigates of the Oliver Hazard Perry class entered service in 2002, and four Kobben class submarines became operational in 2002 and 2003.¹⁵ The acquisition of these ships allowed the contribution of the Polish Navy to allied maritime operations in subsequent years, including, inter alia, the operation “Active Endeavour” in the Mediterranean. It also helped to maintain the Navy’s operational capabilities in the field of submarine operations.

Poland’s membership in the North Atlantic Alliance directly enforced the introduction of modern organizational structures in the Polish Armed Forces. Already in the first years of NATO membership, serious measures were taken in terms of reducing the number of military units, flattening organizational structures and separating of combat forces from support units, training centres and military administration. The organization of combat troops was adjusted taking into account new operational requirements and availability of weapon systems and military equipment. Military units with an insufficient number of weapon systems were disbanded and military equipment without an adequate level of manning was abandoned. Military units with similar tasks were combined and the troops were concentrated in selected garrisons with appropriate infrastructure and good training conditions. In the first decade of Poland’s membership in NATO, 2094 military units were disbanded, 698 new units were formed, and 3240 were reorganised. Out of 235 garrisons and so-called military towns in 2000, only 126 garrisons remained in 2009. Between 1999 and 2008, the number of divisions in the Land Forces was reduced from eight, first to six, and then to four.¹⁶ The number of combat brigades was reduced from twenty-two to eighteen, and then to fourteen. The maintenance of undermanned and underequipped military units was considered unreasonable and the Land Forces planned further consolidation of their organizational structures. Poland’s membership in NATO contributed to changes in the organizational structures of the Air Force. In combat aviation, attempts were initially made to separate support units from flying squadrons which resulted in creating airbases. However, due to practical reasons of coordinating flying and ground operations, in the following years the integration was restored within the air brigades and then air wings. The assets of the Air Force air defence and radar troops were also integrated into single brigades. Relatively the smallest changes took place in the Navy. It was only after 2004 that one of the three naval fleets was disbanded, the Navy Aviation Brigade was reorganized and the logistic units were subordinated to the Inspectorate of Support for the Armed Forces.

The first decade of Polish membership in NATO became the period of engagement of the Polish Armed Forces into a series of allied international cooperation programs. Since 2006, Poland has been participating in the AWACS program. In the same year, Poland started cooperation within the framework of the allied Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS) program, which proved useful in sustaining Polish troops in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The growing involvement of the Polish Armed Forces in allied operations should be also noticed. From the beginning of NATO membership, the Polish Armed Forces continued their involvement in operations of the NATO-led Stabilization Forces (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (until 2004), Albania (AFOR), Macedonia and Kosovo Forces (KFOR). Since 2005, the Navy participated in the operation “Active Endeavour” in

¹⁵ KARKOSZKA. op. cit. p. 108

¹⁶ GAĞOR. op. cit. p. 25

the Mediterranean. A separate component of engineering troops took part in the allied operation for helping the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. Along with the reduction of the Polish military contingent in Iraq, the involvement of the Polish Armed Forces in the ISAF forces operation in Afghanistan increased.¹⁷

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE SECOND DECADE IN NATO

The “Defence Strategy of the Republic of Poland”, adopted in 2009, constituted the sector strategy for the national security strategy of 2007. It assessed that *“the probability of a large-scale armed conflict on the foreseeable future is low.”* However, it was not excluded that a local conflict near Poland might break out, and the need to maintain the ability to respond to such a threat was assumed. Membership in NATO and in the European Union together with the strategic partnership with the USA was defined in the defence strategy as the “main reference point for Polish foreign and defence policy”.¹⁸ In the above-mentioned strategy, Poland declared the priority treatment of development, together with other member states of the Alliance, of instruments strengthening the collective defence ability.

Among the main strategic objectives in the field of defence, the implementation of obligations resulting from Poland’s membership in NATO and the European Union was mentioned as well as the involvement in international crisis response operations, primarily conducted by NATO and the European Union. In the main mission of the Polish Armed Forces, along with the defence of the state, the defence strategy pointed out taking part in the defence of the Allies. The 2009 defence strategy assumed that in order to fulfil the above mission, it would be necessary to continue the transformation process of the Polish Armed Forces, including their professionalization and technical modernization. It was assumed that as a result of the transformation, the military potential and operational capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces would increase and their defensive and expeditionary character would be strengthened. The strategy also included provisions regarding the possibility of deployment of part of the Polish Armed Forces as a task force to participate in a collective defence operation outside the country as declared in the allied defence planning.

The commitments regarding the military aspects of Poland’s membership in NATO were also included in the next strategic document of the “Strategy for the development of the National Security System of the Republic of Poland 2022” adopted on the 9th April, 2013. Similar to the provisions of the defence strategy of 2009, it was also assumed that in the near future the probability of conventional military aggression would remain low.¹⁹ The membership in the North Atlantic Alliance was recognized as a guarantee of the state security. Among the priorities and directions of intervention to achieve the goals related to the shaping of a stable international security environment, the strengthening of collective defence within NATO was mentioned as the first priority. The strategy defined main actions for strengthening collective

¹⁷ TACIK, Henryk. The Military Has Changed. 10 Years of Poland in NATO. *Polska Zbrojna - Wydanie Specjalne*. Warszawa: Redakcja Wojskowa, Luty 2009, p. 76, ISSN 1897-7065

¹⁸ KUPIECKI. op. cit. p. 307

¹⁹ Poland. Strategia Rozwoju Systemu Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2022 przyjęta uchwałą Rady Ministrów z dnia 9 kwietnia 2013 r. Available at: <https://bit.ly/1T91s1f>

defence within NATO. Among others, they included development of capabilities necessary to implement the Alliance's defence tasks and the organization of crisis management exercises (Crisis Management Exercise - CMX), whose scenarios were based on collective defence in accordance with the Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Poland also declared continuation of participation in NATO's development programs of selected operational capabilities, such as Airborne Early Warning and Control (NAEW & C), Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC), Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS) and Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS). The importance of actions to maintain the existing infrastructure and acquire new infrastructure on the territory of Poland was also underlined.

The strategy for the development of the national security system until 2022 emphasized the need to continue the technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces due to the progressive modernization of the armed forces of the other NATO member states. The numbers of advanced weapon systems and military equipment were considered insufficient and the strategy called for actions to improve this situation. Chances for the development of Poland's defence capabilities were seen in NATO's: "Smart Defence" initiative. The fulfilment of NATO requirements was one of the benchmarks for measuring the development of the Polish Armed Forces operational capabilities. One of the indicators allowing to assess the effectiveness of actions aimed at strengthening the defence capacity of the state was directly tied to NATO. In the strategy adopted in 2013, an additional indicator of the achievement of NATO's goals for the Republic of Poland was adopted. It was assumed that in just over a decade it would increase from 69.1% (base year 2010) to 80% (in 2022).²⁰

In line with the commitments accepted by Poland as part of the NATO defence planning, the strategy from 2013 assumed an increase in the potential of the Polish Armed Forces to fulfil the mission. The capabilities listed in the strategy included increased combat effectiveness, deployability and sustainability of military forces in out-of-area operations. The strategy reaffirmed also the requirements for actions to achieve interoperability and compatibility by the Polish Armed Forces within NATO.

The transformation of the Polish Armed Forces after 2009 focused on the increase of operational capabilities of the troops, while limiting their numbers. Suspension of the compulsory military service, despite the reduction in the number of soldiers in active service, contributed primarily to the increase in the level of training. In the assessment of the first decade of Poland's membership in NATO, Gen. Gagor stated that never after the Second World War were there so many soldiers in the Polish Armed Forces with combat experience.²¹

The size of the Polish Armed Forces after 2009 amounted to about 100,000 active service soldiers and 20,000 soldiers of the National Reserve Forces. Participation in allied crisis response operations remained the primary source of combat skills and experience for Polish military. To see it in a perspective, one must be aware that about

²⁰ Ibid. part 1.6.1 Wskaźniki monitorowania celu 2

²¹ GAĞOR. op. cit. pp. 12-13

27,000 soldiers took part in the NATO ISAF operation alone.²² And there were other deployments under KFOR, "Active Endeavour" or Baltic Air Policing missions.²³

The technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces in 2009-2013 was somehow slower. The Land Forces acquired further Leopard 2A5 tanks. The greatest impact on increasing the combat potential of the Polish Navy in the analysed period was achieved with the announcement of full operational capability by the coastal defence missile squadron. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland continued their participation in the AWACS, SALIS and SAC programs. In 2012, the decision was made to return Poland to the Allied Ground Surveillance program (AGS), from which the Ministry of Defence withdrew in 2009 citing financial reasons. While the procurement of new weapon systems slowed down, the years until 2013 were a period of preparation for the next decade of extensive program aimed at technical modernization of the armed forces. Analytical and conceptual work was undertaken related to the selection of medium range air and missile defence weapon systems, multi-role and attack helicopters. However, the priorities of technical modernization had to change due to the Russian aggression to Ukraine, which fundamentally changed the priorities for the development of operational capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces, as well as the North Atlantic Alliance's approach to collective defence.

THE POST-2014 PERIOD

The Russian war against Georgia was considered a warning sign of the powerful neighbour's intentions in the post-Soviet area. However; it was Russian actions against Ukraine that persuaded political elites in Poland that the threat was more imminent than how it had been assessed just a few years earlier. In the national security strategy adopted in November 2014, it was assumed that NATO would remain the most important political-military alliance and guarantor of Poland's security. It was considered crucial for Poland's security interests to maintain the full spectrum of military and political capabilities and allied solidarity, guaranteeing the implementation of the basic mission - collective defence. It must be noted that the strategy also called for the support to developments within NATO that would enable other allied tasks resulting from changes in the security environment.²⁴ One of the three priorities of the Polish security policy set out in the 2014 security strategy was to support processes that strengthen the role of NATO in collective defence. Poland declared its focus on activities serving NATO consolidation around the defence function, including the strategic strengthening of the eastern flank of the Alliance. In the concept of strategic preparations included in the national security strategy of 2014, one of the most urgent preparatory tasks in the area of national defence was to continue the development of operational capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces. This development was supposed to take into account the achievement of the required level of interoperability within NATO.²⁵ The development

²² Poland. Ministry of Defence. 19. rocznica wejścia Polski do NATO, Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2018-03-12 [Cited: 2019-03-08]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZBMbv3>

²³ Poland. Ministry of Defence. 20 lat Polski w NATO, Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2019-03-12 [Cited: 2019-03-08]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2u3yRlg>

²⁴ Poland. Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2014, Warszawa, Available at:

<https://bit.ly/1NrCWX7>

²⁵ Ibid.

of operational capabilities was to be achieved primarily through the acquisition of modern weapon systems and military equipment, as well as by maintaining the development of its support systems. In the strategy of 2014, the development of the national air defence system, including the missile defence system, was considered a priority. In line with the allied requirements, the importance of information systems development was emphasized in order to enable the armed forces to exploit imagery intelligence and network-centric capabilities.

The most recent strategic document, in which the problems of the development and operations of the Polish Armed Forces in the context of NATO membership are considered, is the “Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland” adopted in May 2017. The model for the development of armed forces included in it reinforces the role of Poland in NATO. The concept calls for Poland “*to serve as the unifying force from All Allied activities on the eastern flank*”.²⁶ The defensive concept points directly to the Russian Federation as a source of instability. The NATO membership is perceived in the referenced document as the foundation of Poland’s thinking about collective defence. The contribution of Poland to the security of NATO’s eastern flank is to manifest itself in the intensification of exercises, creation of joint commands and formations, as well as joint acquisition of weapon systems and military equipment, if possible. According to the concept, by 2030, defence spending will increase to 2.5% of Poland’s gross domestic product.

The perception of the military threat from the Russian Federation resulted in Poland’s withdrawal from previous plans to reduce the numbers of the armed forces. By 2030, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland are planned to have 200,000 soldiers, including the newly-formed Territorial Defence Forces, with approximately 53,000 soldiers. Due to the anticipated requirements related to the defence of the eastern part of the country, a decision was made to establish the fourth division of the Land Forces and to create a territorial defence brigade in each voivodship by 2021.²⁷ The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland supported the creation of international allied commands in Poland. The Command of the Multinational Corps North-East (MNCNE) achieved readiness to exercise command and control functions over a component of land forces in allied operations in Poland and the Baltic States. In May 2017, the Headquarters of the Multinational Division North-East (MNDNE) assumed responsibility for command and control of battalion-sized battle groups in the Baltic States and Poland carrying out tasks under enhanced Forward Presence.²⁸ The presence of US military forces in Poland is also growing as part of the American initiative of the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI).²⁹

The Russian aggression to Ukraine accelerated the procurement of initial batches of long-range weapon systems that could perform the functions of Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD). In the Land Forces, the first squadron of HIMARS missiles was purchased.

²⁶ Poland. Ministry of Defence. *Koncepcja obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warsaw: Ministry of Defence May 2017 [Cited: 2019-03-04]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZsM8SO>

²⁷ Poland. Ministry of Defence. *Plany budowy WOT*, Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2019 [Cited: 2019-03-08]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2IR1Lfl>

²⁸ Poland. Ministry of Defence. *Wielonarodowa Dywizja*. Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2019 [Cited 2019-03-14]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2KpluoC>

²⁹ Poland. Ministry of Defence. *Zwiększenie obecności wojskowej USA w Polsce*. Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2019 [Cited 2019-03-14]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZEDG2n>

A contract for the first phase of the air and missile defence program was also signed, under which two batteries of the PAC-3 Patriot system were purchased.³⁰ In the Navy, a second squadron of coastal defence missiles achieved full operational capability. The increase of deterrence potential and improved capabilities to conduct combat operations under high-intensity conflict scenarios by the Polish Armed Forces translate into an increase in the security of NATO's eastern flank. There are also ongoing efforts focused on further development of the combat capabilities of special forces and the development of precision strike and reconnaissance capabilities based on unmanned aerial vehicles.

In the period after 2014, the intensity of the Alliance's military exercises and the participation in such exercises of Polish Armed Forces significantly increased. The number of allied and bilateral military exercises in Poland has also increased in recent years. The biggest exercises conducted in Poland included among others Anakonda 2016 and Anakonda 2018 exercises, as well as Noble Jump 2015, Brilliant Jump 2016 and Saber Strike exercises. Two of the Land Forces' reinforced companies are deployed in Latvia and Romania under the enhanced Force Presence and tailored Forward Presence.³¹ The "Orlik 8" fighter task force carried out for the eighth time tasks as part of the NATO Baltic Air Policing and "Orlik 9" is planned to start in January 2020 and operate from the Amari air base in Estonia.³² The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland continue their participation in the allied operations of KFOR in Kosovo, the NATO training mission in Iraq, and the operation "Resolute Support" in Afghanistan.

The scope of Poland's Armed Forces will remain tightly interwoven with NATO plans for strategic adaptation until 2032. The Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland adopted in 2017 and armed forces technical modernization plans for the years 2017-2026 call for the improvement of capabilities needed for collective defence. The ongoing procurement of new weapon systems for the Polish Armed Forces suggests that the level of ambition is being not merely security consumer but security producer within NATO and in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

Two decades of Poland's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance was a period of deep transformation that affected almost every aspect of the Polish Armed Forces. The character, size, dislocation and armament of military forces inherited after the period of membership in the Warsaw Pact proved inadequate to the changed geopolitical situation that occurred after the end of the Cold War. Membership in NATO became a factor that enabled the adjustment of the Polish Armed Forces to the needs of Poland's security policy and their integration within the Alliance. After two decades of NATO membership, the Polish Armed Forces are numerically smaller. Their organization has

³⁰ Poland. Ministry of Defence. Wyrzutnie PATRIOT z systemem IBCS dotrą do Polski w terminie. Warsaw: Ministry of Defence 2019 [Cited 2019-03-14]. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2TFRg6f>

³¹ MIERNICKA, Magdalena. V zmiana PKW Rumunia rozpoczyna misję. Polska Zbrojna [online]. Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Wydawniczy 6.01.2019 [Cited 2019-03-10]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2RlnMH6>

³² Kancelaria Sejmu. Biuro Komisji Sejmowych. *Pełny Zapis Przebiegu Posiedzenia Komisji Obrony Narodowej (Nr 114) z dnia 13 grudnia 2018 r.*, Warszawa, p. 8

been optimized in relation to their military potential and predicted operational requirements. There was a qualitative improvement in the state of combat skills and level of training of the armed forces, which gained experience not only in the exercises, but above all in allied out-of-area crisis response operations. The positive impact of NATO membership on the process of technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces is noticeable. Participation in the defence planning of the Alliance has disciplined Polish thinking about military development and made plans for new operational capabilities by the Polish Armed Forces more realistic. Participation in the allied AWACS, SALIS, SAC or AGS programs has given the Polish Armed Forces access to operational capabilities that would have not been achievable in the national dimension. Although progress in technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces can hardly be considered fully satisfactory, there is no doubt that membership in NATO was a catalyst for positive changes that would have probably not taken place if Poland had remained outside the alliance.

