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BIRDS OF A FEATHER?

The Curious Case of U.S. – Polish Military Partnership and Defense Reform

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I. Introduction and Thesis. In 1989, the house of cards called communism collapsed in Central Europe. Regimes and political parties that had endured nearly unopposed for 40 years suddenly ceased to be. Much like William Cowper Brann's socialites of the 1890s, these "sartorial kings and pseudo-queens have strutted their brief hour on the stage, disappearing at daybreak like foul night-birds or an unclean dream..."¹ Standing in the ruins of this precipitous demise were the leaders of the democratic rebellious factions, who were now charged with putting their countries back together again. In the decades since, there has been much academic work published on the marvelous transformation of communist political and economic enterprises into liberal democracies with market economies. However, another remarkable revolution has taken place that scarcely is appreciated or recognized: the successful transformations of communist-era militaries from instruments of control and repression into sources of national pride and stability.

In the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of communism, most governments in the region realized that security and stability lay with the west, specifically with the United States, the European Community (later the European Union), and NATO. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the disintegration of the Soviet Union set the roulette wheel of alliances in Europe spinning, and for most of the former Warsaw Pact nations, the ball landed on NATO. Thus began a complicated struggle to modernize and transform Soviet-dominated militaries into entities that NATO would consider viable enough in order to extend its defensive umbrella. This change was neither automatic nor simple. It took the concentrated effort of the civilian governments and the military leadership, in conjunction with NATO and American influence, to mold what would become (they hoped) modern effective defensive forces.

This essay seeks to deepen understanding of how military transformation is influenced by active partnerships, through a comprehensive analysis of the Polish armed forces between 1990

and the present. While Poland would have surely modernized in any case, the main argument presented is that the United States' partnership with Poland was primarily influential on the direction of reform and modernization, which also strengthened the international bonds of friendship and cooperation. Initially, the security situation over the past two decades within Central Europe is reviewed, especially as it relates to changes in the armed forces. The evolution of civil-military relations and force modernization over two decades will be discussed. The next section will review the efforts by the United States to assist Poland throughout this timeframe. Finally, this essay will discuss the actual impact of the United States on this process as way of illuminating the value of security assistance in general.

II. Evolution of the Polish Security Situation. Between 1990 and 1992, the newly democratic Republic of Poland was in a very difficult position. The German Democratic Republic to the west imploded and then reunified with West Germany. To the east, the USSR came apart at the seams, even as it maintained two armored divisions on Polish soil. Czechoslovakia to the south was undergoing its "velvet divorce." In the 1990, Poland had several security questions that needed to be solved. Would reunified Germany recognize the Oder-Neisse border? Would the Soviets contest the withdrawal of their troops from Poland? What would the threat be from the former Soviet Republics Belarus and Ukraine after the dissolution of the USSR, especially regarding Polish territory that was ceded to Ukraine after World War II? These were dangerous times indeed, and Poland saw threats to its sovereignty from every direction. In 1990 the MoND (Ministry of National Defense) issued the *1990 Defense Doctrine of the Republic of Poland*. Due to the rapidly changing security situation, unfortunately it was "invalid the moment it was enacted," primarily because it was premised on the existence of the defunct Warsaw Pact.² The

most significant aspect of the *1990 Defense Doctrine* was that it stated that Poland considered no country as its enemy, distancing itself from its adversarial communist past.³

During this time Poland pursued robust political and diplomatic solutions to its immediate security problems. Between 1990 and 1992, Poland signed significant treaties with Germany, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Soviet Union. The border between Germany and Poland was a potential issue of consternation. The Oder-Neisse line had been established in 1945 as the demarcation between the post-war Soviet German Sector and Poland. Although previously both West and East Germany had separately recognized the border as legitimate, West Germany had insisted that no border would be considered final until after unification. Fortunately, in late 1990, Warsaw and Berlin were able to sign a Border Treaty with almost no fireworks on either side. In one fell swoop they had settled an issue that had been a source of instability between Poland and Germany since Frederick the Great partitioned Poland in the 17th century. The following year, in 1991, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia formed what was known as the Visegrad Group (named after the town in Hungary where the accord was signed).⁴ The Visegrad Group offered its members a rapid official pivot away from the Warsaw Pact and towards the west, although its members were quick to reassure the Soviet Union that the Group was not a threat.⁵ In 1992 Poland also entered into treaties of cooperation and friendly relations with Ukraine and Belarus.

The issue of Soviet troops on Polish soil proved to be a bit of a “sticky wicket.” The calls for Soviet troops to leave Poland began almost immediately after Solidarity gained control of the government. However, the vagaries of the still extant Warsaw Treaty and the intransigence of Moscow mitigated a quick resolution to the issue. Moscow initially tried to pressure Warsaw into signing heavy-handed bilateral “agreements” that included demands of remuneration for the

cost of troop withdrawal. Felicitously, by 1992 the new Russian government relented and a treaty was signed to normalize Russian-Poland relations and withdraw all Russian forces.⁶

Diplomacy had resolved the most immediate security threats by 1992. Amazingly, Poland had negotiated its way into the best security situation it had experienced in over three hundred years! Seeking to solidify these diplomatic gains in the near future, in 1992 the MoND published the *Assumptions of the Polish Security Policy*. This would be the foundational document that established the principles of Polish security thinking for the next eight years. In this document Poland continued to see the main security threat vector coming from the east. Whether because of immigration or restriction of trade, Poland semi-officially recognized that Russia was a potential adversary and competitor in Central Europe. Unfortunately it had inherited a military that was created wholly for one purpose: to serve the strategic needs of the Soviet Union. The Polish Armed Forces (*Wojsko Polskie* or *WP*) in 1992 was a “legacy force”, heavily mechanized, and designed to support a Soviet attack on Western Europe.⁷ Previously in Warsaw Pact exercises, the role of the *WP* was purely offensive; there had been little doctrine or training in defensive maneuvers, especially in the east. Warsaw recognized that it needed to restructure the military and reduce its size and scope to something it could both use and also afford. The 1992 *Assumptions* recognized the potential threat due to this downsizing, and set forth the goal of eventual NATO membership.⁸

Initially Poland found that its desire to join NATO was not necessarily reciprocated as strongly by the United States and the West. Some in Poland saw their accession to NATO as automatic, owed to them after suffering from decades of communism.⁹ Unfortunately, the NATO allies were hesitant. There was a vigorous debate on whether NATO should expand at all or conversely, if it should even continue absent the Soviet threat. However by 1993 the United

States was in favor of expansion and NATO set about the business of adding new members. In 1994 NATO established the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, which allowed any European nation to enter into a bilateral cooperation agreement with NATO.¹⁰ While membership in PfP was (and continues to be) open to all, for all practical purposes it has been used as a vetting tool for potential new members. Poland was one of the first nations to join PfP in 1994, along with twenty two other nations (including the other members of the Visegrad Group).¹¹ Eleven of the twelve PfP nations that eventually joined NATO were 1994 signatories. (The lone outlier is Croatia, a nation that did not exist independently at the time.)¹² By 1997, NATO formally extended an invitation to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to join the alliance. Two years later, in 1999 the three nations completed the necessary legal mechanisms and officially joined NATO as full partners. It was the fruition of the goals of the 1992 *Assumptions*, and marked the end of the first phase of Poland's security transformation.

Between 1999 and 2003, Poland found its security complicated by threats it couldn't have imagined a decade before. Just weeks after Poland's accession, NATO embarked upon a 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia. Operation Allied Force would prove to be a test for NATO's newest members. While Poland had previously friendly relations with Serbia, it enthusiastically threw in its lot with NATO. Politically, Poland was vociferous in its support of NATO's right to intercede with force in the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo by Serbia.¹³ While it was not able to provide combat aircraft for the operation, it did allow NATO unrestricted use of its airports, and later contributed ground forces that participated in KFOR. Operation Allied Force was an abrupt reminder that the NATO Poland joined was not the same NATO they aspired to in 1992. NATO had transformed from a purely defensive Article V alliance, into the guarantor of peace in stability within Europe. For Poland, Kosovo offered a chance to prove its mettle to NATO.

Others, however, saw ominous portents for Poland. As early as 2000, academics began to worry that Poland was attempting to “punch above its weight in NATO.”¹⁴ Unfortunately, the calls for caution would be quickly drowned out by the acts of September 11.

In late 2001, the United States was attacked by the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda. Poland, along with the rest of Europe, was shocked and immediately stood ready to assist. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, followed by the invasion of Iraq in 2003, represented an evolution of security threats that Poland could not have foreseen. In 1999, Poland envisioned a world order that was stable and secure, where there was no expectation of major combat operations. In 2000, Poland issued an updated *Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland*, wherein major security challenges included participation in peacekeeping operations, strengthening the alliance, and military cooperation.¹⁵ Terrorism received only a passing mention.¹⁶ However, Poland was not alone in this line of thinking. *The National Security Strategy* of the United States for the year 2000 included terrorism within a spectrum of transnational criminal activities, handled by law enforcement and diplomatic channels.¹⁷

In the aftermath of 9/11, Poland began to envision its security solutions more in terms of its relationship with the United States versus Europe. This “drift towards atlanticism” had many roots, but the result was clear.¹⁸ By 2003 Poland was ready to stand by the United States, even as other European powers found themselves opposed to American policies. In 2003 Poland also released a new *National Security Strategy*, which listed international terrorism, failed states, and weapons of mass destruction as the new global threats. With the release of this new strategy, the pivot towards the United States was complete. Over the next eight years, however, an incipient sense of feeling taken advantage would lead to a gradual easing of this preference.

From 2003 until nearly the present day, the Polish armed forces experienced an era of operational overreach. First and foremost, Poland joined the United States in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. After initially deploying 200 troops, Poland's contribution quickly grew to 2500 troops plus some special forces.¹⁹ Poland was given a division level command in the south of Iraq, overseeing the operations of seventeen nations. Poland also joined with ISAF in 2003, sending forces to Afghanistan in increasing amounts corresponding with force reductions in Iraq, peaking at about 2500 in 2011. While Iraq and Afghanistan represented the focus of the *WP*, Poland also maintained forces in support of a multitude of other regional operations, including KFOR, IFOR, EUFOR Chad, EUFOR Congo, and the EUFOR Althea mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In short, since 2003 the Polish Armed Forces have taken a very active and proactive role in participating in coalition operations. A notable exception however was Poland's refusal to participate in operations against Libya during 2011, which is discussed later.

Poland has seen its relationship with the United States wane somewhat over the past eight years while regional threats seemed to be re-emerging.²⁰ In 2004, the relationship was so strong that the Polish President stated during a lecture at Wrocław University, “[Poland] must have excellent relations with America...I am convinced that, *without the United States, Europe is, for the time being, incapable of assuring itself security.*” [emphasis added]²¹ As an extension of this policy, Poland saw its role in supporting the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan as key to its identity as a “reliable partner.”²² Since 2003 however, from the Polish point of view, this support has not been adequately rewarded.²³ While the United States has assisted Poland with military aid programs, the cancellation of a planned missile defense shield in 2009 was handled politically indelicately.²⁴ Additionally there have been significant problems with some of the equipment modernization programs the United States provided to Poland, such as the F-16 and C-130

aircraft. Some Polish military leadership began speaking out, claiming that the United States was “...pursuing a narrow, self-serving agenda” engaging in a global strategy, incompatible with Polish capabilities or military tradition.²⁵ Furthermore, operations overseas have hindered modernization, leaving Poland further behind in its efforts to transform the armed forces.²⁶

While the period since 2003 has been marked by high levels of cooperation between Washington and Warsaw, the Poles focus has recently begun to turn inward again. Libya provides an excellent example of where U.S. and Polish interests failed to converge. It is unclear from open source documentation whether Poland’s refusal to participate in combat operations over Libya was due to political opposition to the operation or a lack of capability to join the mission. Poland officially stated that their refusal to conduct combat operations was due to the fact that Libya was not within Poland’s national interests, and furthermore the operation did not lie within the regime of Article V of the NATO treaty.²⁷ However, other commentaries at the time suggest that Poland recognized its overreach: “After a brief and premature foray into the league of superpowers, we have come back to our place in the ranks,” stated the editorial of a leading Polish periodical.²⁸ This same commentary also notes that in 2011 Poland’s F-16s were not capable of performing air attack missions, nor could the country bear the costs of the operation.²⁹ Poland did, however, offer to assist with future stabilization efforts in Libya.

Poland’s current (post Iraq) *Defense Strategy*, released in 2009, still mentions terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as threats, but now primarily states, “Counteracting threats to energy security and a potential weakening of bonds linking the European and transatlantic communities are priorities....”³⁰ The strategy declares conditions for national security and lists NATO, the EU, the ESDP (European Security and Defense Policy),³¹ and the EDA (European Defense Agency), before it discusses the significant bilateral relationship between Poland and

the United States. This is not to say that Poland has taken a policy stance against the United States, but perhaps it demonstrates that the foreign policy of Poland more accurately reflects the complex security problems in Central Europe.

III. Civil-Military Reformation. In 1990 Poland inherited a legacy communist military, with illusory civilian (or even Polish) control, designed to maintain the power of the Warsaw and Moscow regimes. One of the first tasks that faced the Solidarity government was to de-communize and de-politicize the military, to affirm the control of the civilian government, and to reorganize the MoND and the General Staff. This final step was particularly important, as it was a key requirement for NATO accession, and yet the most vexing over time. These tasks were simple in concept yet in some cases very difficult to execute.

Reforms proceeded at a quick pace initially, and then slowed down as the democratic political process brought about different successive governments. The first order of business was to eliminate the Main Political Department (*GZP*), and the thousands of “political officers” posted throughout the *WP*. Their function had been to ensure the military’s subordination to Moscow as well as propagandize the Polish soldiers into good communists. Following the abolition of the *GZP*, laws were passed banning membership in any political party by a military officer. Next was the reform and restructuring of the military counter-intelligence service (*Wojskowa Służba Wewnętrzna* or *WSW*), which was basically an intelligence channel direct to Moscow. The *WSW* was abolished, and in its place were two new agencies: the Military Information Service (*Wojskowe Służby Informacyjne*, or *WSI*) and its civilian counterpart, the Office of State Protection (*Urząd Ochrony Państwa* or *UOP*). After the military had been effectively de-communized, reform moved into the strengthening of civilian oversight.

Under communism the defense minister had always been a military officer, and the ministry was mostly uniformed. In 1990 two civilian deputy ministers were appointed, followed by a civilian minister in 1991. In 1992 the “Small Constitution” was approved, but it had only vague language regarding how the President and Prime Minister would share authority over the military. The ministry was split into two organizations – the civilian MoND and the military General Staff. Unfortunately the “Small Constitution” left unclear who the General Staff worked for: the Defense Minister or the President. Two incidents illuminate the initial problems between the President, the MoND, and the General Staff: the so-called “Parys” and “Drawsko” affairs.

In 1991 Jan Parys was appointed as the first civilian defense minister in post-communist Poland. His rocky two year tenure would leave an indelible mark on the senior military leadership of the WP. In 1992, amidst the national debate regarding the Small Constitution, the Silesian Military District commander General Wilecki had a confidential meeting with the National Security Director Milewski, a close advisor and representative of the President. Furious, Minister Parys alleged that at this meeting Milewski conveyed an offer from the President to appoint Wilecki as chief of the General Staff; in exchange Wilecki would publically support affirming the control of the General Staff by the President.³² Parys publically accused the President of illegally intervening in Defense Ministry affairs, and also accused the General Staff of participating in political games.³³ In short order, Parys was sacked by the Prime Minister, General Wilecki was appointed chief of the General Staff, the ensuing investigation acquitted the President, and, within two months, the government collapsed and the Prime Minister resigned.³⁴ The entire episode would henceforth create the belief within Polish senior officers that “civilian oversight equaled political infighting and was a damaging intrusion....”³⁵

This issue arose again in 1994 in what became known as the “Drawsko” affair. The Parliament and Presidency were by then controlled by different political parties and an election was approaching. At the Drawsko Academy, President Walesa convened a meeting of the senior generals in the *WP*. At the official dinner, the President called for a vote by the officers on whether to dismiss the current Defense Minister, who was present at the dinner! Embarrassingly, the officers supported his dismissal overwhelmingly.³⁶ The act was later condemned by the political leadership on all sides and resulted in the 1995 bill that specified the control and subordination of the General Staff by the Minister of Defense. The President’s authority over the General Staff was henceforth limited to wartime only. This bill was enshrined in the Large Constitution passed in 1997, which endures to this day.³⁷

Another troubling area was the lack of civilian control and oversight of the *WSI*. The *WSI* had been created in the aftermath of the disestablishment of the Soviet era counter-intelligence bureau *WSW*. In many ways it represented the last bastion of military independence from civilian control. The major debate was, as always, in regards to who controlled the *WSI*: the General Staff or the MoND. In 1992, the *WSI* had been retained by the General Staff during the reorganization, which the MoND resented as a lone area which the civilians had no oversight. In 1996 the Sejm voted to enact a new “Law on the Defense Ministry,” which forced the *WSI* to be subordinated to the MoND, much to the consternation of the Chief of the General Staff.³⁸ Beginning in 2002 politicians began to call for the end of the *WSI* and the civilian equivalent *UOP* because of lack of oversight and suspicion of Russian collaboration.

The election of the Law and Justice party (*PiS*) to the Sejm and the Presidency in 2005 was a turning point for civil-military relations. While the previous governments had been center-left, the *PiS* were a right wing party elected on a campaign of eliminating corruption. The *PiS*

party was deeply suspicious of the *WSI*'s continued pseudo-autonomy within the MoND. A massive investigation was launched that ultimately resulted in the dissolution of the *WSI* and the forced retirement of dozens of officers amid charges of collusion with foreign powers.³⁹ Unfortunately, the remaining officers developed a deep suspicion of the ministry that continued for years. Even as recently as 2011, newspapers continued to report that the Ministry and the General Staff routinely deceived each other or covered up problems.⁴⁰

Finally, no discussion of Polish civil-military relationships is complete without mentioning the aircraft accident of April 2010 that killed the President, the Chief of the General Staff, and dozens of other government and military officials. The event was tragic but should be noted for the peaceful transition of power by both the civilian and military administrations. A crisis that might have plunged Poland into chaos two decades ago was handled quite peacefully and orderly. While there is obviously room for improvement in the atmosphere between the MoND and the General Staff, there is no doubt that the *WP* has transformed itself from an organ of the communist party into an apolitical service subject to civilian control.

IV. Force Modernization Programs. Since 1990, Poland has embarked on several ambitious programs to modernize its force. The modernization programs have generally focused on two areas: manpower and equipment. The Poles have made great strides in transforming from the bloated 730,000 man conscript force of 1990 to the current all-volunteer force of about 100,000. Poland has also purged much of its Soviet-era equipment in favor of modern western systems.

In 1989 Poland was left with a force of about 412,000 active personnel (with 75% conscripts) with an additional 300,000 reservists. Almost immediately Poland began shedding troops as quickly as possible. Within two years the *WP* numbered around 300,000. Between

1991 and 1997 the force was gradually reduced to approximately 240,000.⁴¹ By 2003 there were 180,000 members in the *WP*, a number that would be almost halved again between 2009 and 2011. By the end of 2011, the Polish armed forces consisted of approximately 100,000 active members and 20,000 reserves.⁴² This final reduction was mainly due to the elimination of conscription in Poland in 2009.⁴³ Another pressure on the force size of the *WP* over the past two decades was the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, signed in 1990. The original CFE was negotiated over the previous twenty years between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and was finally in force in 1992.⁴⁴ Poland, as a NATO member, was required to maintain certain troop ceilings. The CFE ceilings also apply to equipment such as tanks, artillery, and aircraft.

Not only was there a need to reduce manpower, but the rank structure needed to be reorganized. The Soviet model of rank structure was heavy on officers and conscripts, but placed little need for warrant officers and NCOs. As part of modernizing the force for NATO, the *WP* was required to build a strong warrant and NCO corps, and drastically reduce the number of officers. In 1994 officers consisted of 49 percent of all professional forces. By 2003 this number was reduced to 30 percent.⁴⁵ The end of conscription in 2009 has made the force a bit more officer-heavy for the short term, but the MoND envisions a future force with approximately 10-15 percent officers and at least 55-60 percent low ranking enlisted men. Interestingly, the rank of “General” has been established just recently within the Polish armed forces. The most senior rank traditionally was Marshal of Poland, with three junior General grades below that. In order to align with NATO, a four-star General rank was re-introduced.⁴⁶

Prior to the fall of communism, the Soviets ensured their Warsaw Pact allies were equipped with sufficiently advanced equipment, but never more advanced than the Soviet military itself. Typically their equipment would lag one generation of development before the

Soviets. Furthermore, the Soviets were keen on the distribution of their defense industrial network. Thus, even though the Polish Land Forces possessed over 3000 battle tanks in 1990, they lacked the infrastructure or capability to maintain the fleet. The early 1990s was a period of not just rapid personnel reductions, but one in which the most modern equipment was rendered unusable in short order.⁴⁷ While it was hoped that the reductions in personnel would free up funds for modernization of the force, the reality was that real budgets for capital investment fell until 1994, after which they slowly began to increase again.⁴⁸ Between 1992 and 1999, the priority for scarce budget zlotys became procuring equipment that was NATO interoperable.⁴⁹

After joining NATO in 1999, Poland was required to continue its modernization. The confusion stemming from the “Small Constitution” and the power sharing arrangements between the President and Minister of Defense ultimately led to a lack of consistent funding for multi-year modernization programs. After a decade of half-hearted attempts to upgrade the force, in 2000 Poland launched the “Programme of Restructuring and Technical Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland 2001-2006.” It established minimums for defense expenditures and directed the increase of the share of the budget on military equipment from 8.3% to 23% by 2006. The five year modernization program successfully brought real modernization to the armed forces. In 2009 the Ministry launched a new 10-year program aimed at completing the transition between vintage Soviet equipment to fully modern and interoperable gear. This program committed over 10 years approximately PLN30 billion (\$10.5 billion) for new equipment, as well as PLN28 billion (\$9.8 billion) on upgrades to existing systems.

The Air Force has benefited from the most significant amount of modernization. First and foremost was the acquisition of forty eight F-16s. This purchase was funded through the Foreign Military Sales program, to the tune of \$3.8 billion. The deal was unique in that the

funds were first directly loaned from the US treasury to Poland, who in turn then paid Lockheed Martin for the aircraft. The F-16 program included not just the aircraft, but also a logistics, maintenance, munitions, and training package to ensure the long term sustainability of the program. The Air Force also increased its inventory of Mig-29s fighter aircraft.⁵⁰ In order to develop a self-sustainment capability abroad, the Air Force purchased eleven C-295 aircraft. The U.S. Air Force also donated five C-130E theater airlift aircraft, although Poland was responsible for paying for the training of the aircrew as well as maintenance and logistical support. Unfortunately the C-130 plan suffered from lengthy delivery delays, as well as low initial mission readiness rates due to mechanical issues with the older aircraft. In order to assist the Polish AF, the USAF leased two C-130s to use as a stop-gap during the delivery period. In the meantime, the USAF made a serious effort to bolster the Polish C-130 program by conducting numerous joint training exercises for aircrew and maintainers. Unfortunately, the perception was that the US had given Poland junk aircraft in lieu of a substantial investment, and the entire ordeal left some at the MoND questioning the earnestness of US defense policy.⁵¹ Poland also participated with NATO in two separate programs to increase its strategic airlift capability; an aircraft-sharing program with three C-17s shared among twelve nations, based out of Hungary, and a shared aircraft charter utilizing leased An-124s that can be accessed by fourteen participating nations. Finally it should be noted that the Polish Air Force also acquired a fleet of M-28 light aircraft and W-3 helicopters, both of which are entirely Polish-produced.

The Polish Land Forces still continue to use large amounts of Soviet equipment, but they have been able to modernize a portion of their force. Because of the dramatic cuts in manpower, the Land Forces were forced to reorganize. The Army was reduced from nine divisions in 1989, to three divisions by the end of 2011. There are also five independent

brigades stationed throughout the country.⁵² The T-55 Soviet tank was completely removed from service, and the T-72 is in the process of being mothballed and placed into storage. As a replacement, Poland utilizes a newer tank, the PT-91, which draws heavily on elements of the T-72 but is a significant upgrade. The PT-91 is completely domestically built. In addition, in 2003 Germany sold Poland 136 surplus Leopard 2A4 tanks (at scrap prices) to round out its armor corps.⁵³ Besides modernizing the tank corps, the Polish Army has moved to replace the Soviet BMP-1 armored personnel carrier with the new KTO *Rosomak*. The KTO is a Polish adaptation of the Finnish Patria AMV, which is built for design export to be customized by recipient nations. While some BMP-1s remain in the inventory, the KTO is slated to completely replace them by 2018, with over 800 expected to be delivered.⁵⁴ Finally, the United States Army leased to Poland forty MRAP Cougars, to be used by the Polish ISAF contingent.

The Polish Navy has suffered from the least amount of modernization since 1990, and the situation currently is quite tragic. Like the mechanization of the land forces, under the Warsaw Pact the Polish Navy was a specialized force. The main wartime task for the navy was to be an amphibious assault against Denmark to open a northern front in Europe; thus the Polish fleet in the 1980's was dominated with a large inventory of amphibious assault ships. After a short period of divesting many of its older Soviet warships, it has had to make the best of it with a few donated ships. The last entirely new ship Poland received from a shipyard was in 1994, the minesweeping ship *ORP Wdzydze*. The United States, through a program known as the Excess Defense Articles process, donated two Oliver Hazard Perry class missile frigates in 2000 and 2002, the *ORP General Kazimierz Pułaski* and the *ORP Tadeusz Kościuszko* respectively. Additionally, between 2002 and 2004 Norway donated to Poland five Komen class submarines, which allowed Poland to retire its expensive and obsolete Soviet Foxtrot class submarines. The

Polish Navy continues to operate a single Kilo class submarine. Of the five Komen submarines, one was permanently removed from sea service, to be used for training of new submariners as well as a source of spare parts for the remaining boats. The Navy's small aviation branch was, and continues to be, almost purely coastal, consisting of An-28 patrol light aircraft and a mix of some rotary aircraft. With the addition of the Perry class frigates, Poland had for the first time two ship-borne helicopters to augment its shore based aviation branch.

The modernization of the navy has, at times, seemed like a comedy of errors. As an example, in 2001 the Defense Ministry announced an ambitious project for the Navy, in which they would acquire seven modern Gowron-class corvettes at a cost of PLN250 million (\$88 million) apiece, to be built in the Gdynia Naval Shipyard. The program was then delayed by the Sejm's inability to adequately fund construction. In 2002, just a year later, the ministry cut the order from seven ships to two. By 2009 only a single hull had been cast, and the projected cost per warship had ballooned to PLN1.6 billion (\$560 million), a six-fold increase.⁵⁵ In 2011 the Gdynia Naval Shipyard declared bankruptcy after it realized it would never turn a profit on its linchpin contract, bringing construction to a halt. In February 2012, the Prime Minister announced the entire program would be scrapped, after having spent hundreds of millions of zlotys for naught. This places the current Polish navy in dire straits. They figuratively had placed all their eggs in this basket. Even the donated frigates have turned out to be a bit of a white elephant. The frigates were originally commissioned in the early 1980s and have been very expensive to operate on an annual basis. These ships were outdated even prior to being given to the Poles, and many of the on board systems were either degraded or non-functional upon delivery.⁵⁶ The United States has offered to refurbish and upgrade the frigates, to the tune of PLN500 million. However, along with the cancellation of the corvette program, the defense

ministry in February 2012 announced they could not afford to refurbish or even continue to operate the frigates. Even the donated submarines will likely be stricken and sold for parts.⁵⁷ The likely outlook for the Navy is the loss of its blue water capability and a dependence on a shore based coastal defense.⁵⁸

V. The United States and Poland. The United States and Poland have historical ties that date from the Revolutionary War. During the war Polish Generals Kazimierz Pułaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko came to the newly independent American colonies to assist General Washington. Unfortunately, shortly after the end of the American Revolutionary war, Poland was partitioned in 1795 by the great European powers and would remain off the map for over a century. The Treaty of Versailles restored the state of Poland in 1919, and positive relations between Poland and the United States resumed. After the German invasion and then subsequent Russian counter-invasion of Poland during the Second World War, the United States continued to support and recognize the Polish government-in-exile. However, in 1945, recognizing that the Soviets occupied the Polish state with no intention of withdrawal, the United States formally recognized the installed communist government in Warsaw. This effectively put to an end most positive ties between Poland and the United States for the next forty four years. It should be noted that the United States provided economic and food aid to Poland from 1956 until 1989. Of course, since 1989, the relationship between the United States and Poland has been extremely close.

The U.S. government has an entire host of programs and policies designed to assist developing nations, most of which are outside the scope of this essay. Within the Department of Defense, partner nation security sector reform and security force assistance programs have become a major element of national security. The major programs that the Department of Defense uses are FMS (foreign military sales), FMFP (foreign military finance program, i.e.

loans and grants), and IMET (international military education and training). At the military to military level, the geographic component commands engage in bilateral and multilateral theater joint exercises, participate in personnel exchange programs (PEP), deploy joint persistent advisory teams (JPATs), as well as coordinate for the use of the National Guard State Partner Program, and joint combined exchange training (JCETs – for Special Forces only). Additionally, since 2001 the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have created new programs intended to fund training and equipping of foreign forces that are actively deploying to those campaigns.

In the realm of defense reform and modernization, the United States has been generally supportive of Poland, both diplomatically through NATO and militarily through direct assistance programs. There is a very close working relationship between the U.S. military and the *Wojsko Polskie*. Poland has been a recipient of all of the aforementioned aid programs in some capacity since 1991.⁵⁹ The IMET program has been used in Poland to foster senior level engagement with their United States counterparts, in addition to providing technical training and professional military education to junior officers.⁶⁰ In 1991 the United States provided approximately \$350,000 in IMET funds. By 2000, IMET funding levels would be around \$1.6 million annually, with approximately 750 “students” total trained in some capacity. Within ten years that would almost double again, with an average annual IMET allocation of \$2.2 million and a

total of 1,642 “students” trained over two decades.⁶¹

Poland received money from the FMFP program in two modes – loans and grants. The funds have been

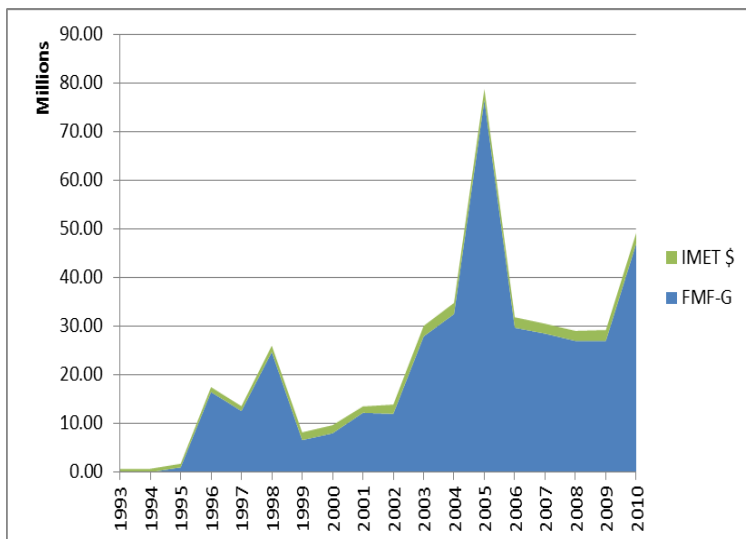


Figure 1

typically disbursed in grant form, with two exceptions. Poland then in turn used these funds to purchase defense articles, training, and services from the United States. Overall Poland has received nearly \$390 million in FMF grants from the United States.⁶² Poland also took two loans through the FMF program. In 1998 Poland borrowed \$100 million via the Central Europe Defense Loan program, and then again in 2003 Poland was granted a loan of almost \$3.8 billion, directly tied to the F-16 acquisition.⁶³ See Figure 1 for a year by year comparison of IMET and FMF funds.

Poland has used this funding very aggressively through purchases made via the FMS program. The most significant FMS case has been the purchase of forty eight F-16 aircraft as well as the ensuing training and logistical support. However there have been

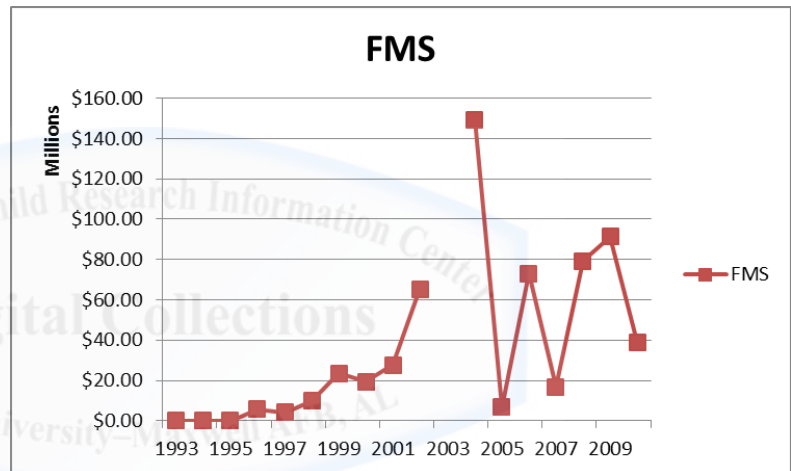


Figure 2

other purchases outside of the F-16 program. Since 1991, excepting the F-16 purchase, there have been about \$600 million in FMS sales, averaging around \$40 million per year. See Figure 2 for FMS spending since 1993. (Note the year 2003 was deleted from the graph to avoid skewing.) The United States also provided smaller amounts funding from a variety of sources, such as the Counter-terrorism Fellowship Program and the International Armaments Cooperation program. Finally the Department of Defense, through the Excess Defense Articles program, donated two Perry class frigates and five C-130E aircraft.

At the military to military level, the United States and Poland participated in a host of annual exercises and exchanges every year. Poland has taken part in EUCOM and NATO joint training exercises, to include Immediate Response, Jackal Stone, Baltic Operations, and Combined Endeavor.⁶⁴ Poland also participated in direct bilateral exercises with the United States from all branches of the military. One particular area of note for bilateral engagement is the State Partnership Program of the United States National Guard. The American state of Illinois has been strategically partnered with Poland, and Illinois National Guard and Air National Guard units have routinely trained in Poland with their counterparts since 1993. National Guardsmen trained with Polish Land Forces in effective peace-keeping operations and non-commissioned officer development. Aircrews from the Illinois Air National Guard formed the initial cadre of instructors for Poland's new F-16 squadrons, and also assisted with the introducing the C-130 aircraft into the fleet. The State Partnership Program does not have a maritime component.⁶⁵

VII. Analysis of US influence. It is difficult to assess with certainty exactly what the impact of the United States has been as a partner in Poland's modernization. America's influence can be analyzed along two separate lines: diplomatic and military. Prior to 2003, the most significant influence on Poland's modernization was the desire to join NATO and then participate as an active member. The United States, as one of the lead nations in NATO, used its political influence in the early 1990s to convince both Europe and Russia that enlargement did not pose a threat to the delicate security situation. After NATO finally committed to expansion, it was the requirements for proper civil-military relationships, finalized border treaties, and the need for interoperability that drove Poland's reforms until 2003. However, after Poland committed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, then modernization took a turn towards current operations. Poland's

choice to strategically ally with the US over Europe drove the tempo of operations over the past eight years, and thus influenced the focus of modernization. The wars were primarily light infantry land operations, with a requirement for air support for logistics. It is not surprising then that Poland moved to strengthen its land and air forces, to the detriment of the navy. In this way it can be seen that, through its diplomatic ties, the United States was at least somewhat influential in the direction and tempo of the overall Polish defense reformation process.

When it comes to direct military influence, the United States had a significant impact on the modernization of the Polish armed forces, especially in the area of equipment. The F-16s, the C-130s, and the Perry class frigates provided a boost in Poland's military capacity. However, each of these programs had its own issues. The F-16 was chosen over the Swedish Gripen and the French Mirage 2000, for reasons that appeared to be politically rather than economically motivated.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the more than \$6 billion in offsets promised by Lockheed Martin failed to materialize fully, creating a sense that the deal was more favorable for the United States aviation industry than for Poland's security.⁶⁷ The C-130s and the frigates were both quite old prior to delivery to Poland, and the maintenance burden coupled with the lack of modern capability have caused the Ministry quite a bit of consternation. It is far more difficult to ascertain the impact of the IMET program and the joint military training the two countries have conducted over the past twenty years. While over 1600 students have received some training through the IMET program, and hundreds more have benefited from participating in U.S. or NATO exercises, measuring this effect is difficult at best.

An alternate method analysis would be to consider the negative proof. What would Poland look like if the United States had taken a Polish-neutral stance? What if the United States had not provided any of the FMF or IMET funding, nor enabled the F-16s, C-130s, or the Perry

class frigates? While it is impossible to state definitively, it is likely that Poland would have modernized anyhow, but with a more distinctively European flair. NATO, through the Security Investment Program, has actually provided more average year over year annual funding to Poland than the United States' FMF program and IMET combined. In either case, total foreign military aid has averaged only 2-3% of the capital investment fund of the MoND, not including 2003 with the F-16 loan.⁶⁸ Poland's modernization has been almost completely self-financed.

Without U.S. pressure, Poland would have most likely selected the Saab Gripen instead of the F-16, as the two aircraft were considered nearly identical in capability and lifetime cost during the bidding process.⁶⁹ While Poland would not have its C-130s, it would have most likely continued to increase the inventory of its EADS C-295 aircraft (after purchasing eleven in 2001). There does not appear to have been a viable alternative to the frigates, but considering that Poland is in the process of eliminating these ships, the long term impact is basically nil.

Finally, while there is no evidence that Poland's decision to participate in the Iraq invasion was tied to the US aid programs, it is not inconceivable that a Poland more isolated from the United States could have chosen to align with France and Germany. If Poland had not participated in Iraq, it would have had significantly more funds available to modernize further. However, participation has provided almost 15,000 Polish troops with actual combat experience.

VIII. Conclusion. The reforms in Poland's defense sector have been comprehensive and wide reaching, and clearly the United States has taken an active role in assisting Poland in both the diplomatic as well as the direct military avenues. The backing of the United States was critical to spurring the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe, and Poland has enjoyed a special bilateral relationship with the United States as well, especially since 2003. This strategic

partnership has fostered direct military assistance, ranging from training, loans and grants, and donation of military hardware. The militaries of Poland and the United States have trained and fought together, to the mutual benefit of both.

However, it must be noted that the analysis of the impact of military aid demonstrated that the scope of financial assistance was itself relatively insignificant, and that the hardware upgrades from the United States could have been offset from other sources. The lesson that emerges here is that even though the Polish armed forces would have surely modernized without the United States, the true measure of the partnership has been in determining the direction of modernization and reform, and the strengthening of those international bonds of friendship and cooperation. From this perspective, the Polish-U.S. partnership has been a success.

While the Polish-American relationship is certainly geo-politically unique, there are lessons regarding how partnerships influence security sector reform and defense transformations in general. All states, regardless of their size or character, seek to maximize their security through the most efficient use of resources, which usually implies military partnerships. However, the willingness of a small state to enter into a military partnership does not signal an abdication of its pursuit of national interests, nor imply an inability to improve itself *in situ*. Oftentimes, within the Department of Defense, security sector reform is seen as a linear process, in which arms and training are transferred to a readily absorptive partner, who then reciprocates by capably doing missions in lieu of American forces. When the partners fail to meet this unsaid standard, the partnership is seen as ineffective. This approach to “building partnership capacity” is short sighted and leads to improper measures of effect. Unlike traditional military combat operations, which tend to be linear task-goal oriented, security force assistance is a cyclical effort, marked by slow evolution towards mutually agreed upon end states. Direct military

assistance should be seen as a mutually reinforcing behavior that reflects an overall strategic relationship. While each geographic component command may have specific targets and goals for a particular nation to meet, the success of any individual program or training event should be judged primarily on its ability to reinforce the national-level relationship. The funding for such assistance events and programs should not be tied to short term developments, which tend to winnow the scope of effect from the strategic to the tactical level.

Poland is an excellent example of a successful military and strategic partnership. Even though there are several programs that could individually be judged as failures, when taken together and coupled with the strategic diplomatic relationship, each program has done its job of strengthening the ties between the United States and Poland, as well as influencing the scope and direction of defense reform and modernization. For it is the relationship itself that is the goal, not the speed of reform; thus, based on this measure of effectiveness, the US-Polish partnership has been remarkable in its own right. Poland and the United States have truly become “birds of a feather” indeed.

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