

Original article

## US political and military involvement in the security of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 – the example of Poland

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses how the United States of America has contributed to the security of Central and Eastern Europe, both politically and militarily, since the end of the Cold War, using Poland's example. It shows that the United States committed itself to the security of both Poland and the region, following the collapse of communism in Poland in 1989, albeit to a varying degree in different countries. America played a pivotal role in NATO enlargement in the 1990s, and in extending security assurances to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, as well as to other countries in the subsequent years. It has continued to assist Poland with its defence reform, thus enhancing its military capabilities. It was also instrumental in strengthening NATO's eastern flank after 2014, a salient point on Poland's security agenda since it acceded to the Alliance. It is argued that American political and military involvement in Poland's security has been both substantial and beneficial, and there is a real need for continued political and military cooperation with the USA and its presence in the region. In the article, the determinants of Poland's post-Cold War security policy are outlined. Next, the roles that both countries have played in each other's policies are explained. After that, the US contribution to Poland's security, both in the political and military spheres, is presented. Finally, an attempt is made to evaluate American involvement, and the author's perspective on the future of the Poland-US cooperation is offered.

### KEYWORDS

Poland's security, Poland's security policy, the United States of America, Central and Eastern Europe



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## Introduction

With the regaining of sovereignty after the collapse of communism by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), security became a critical issue. The fall of the Iron Curtain led to fundamental changes in the international area, as a result of which CEE countries found

themselves in a radically new geopolitical landscape. Consequently, they were compelled to formulate their security policies practically from scratch [1, p. 119]. They had to face a multitude of new challenges and threats emerging with the disintegration of the bipolar world order, such as the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationing on their territory, the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact, the implications of the unification of Germany, instability on their eastern and southern borders following the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, restructuring of their relations with the West, and the need to reform their Soviet-era armed forces.

It should be emphasized that after the period of remaining under the complete dominance of the Soviet Union and as members of the Warsaw Pact, CEE countries were not prepared to confront this novel situation. They had to adapt to new conditions and take advantage of the fact that they were finally regaining their independence and freedom to decide their fate and, consequently, acquiring the most reliable security guarantees. It was a matter of the utmost importance, as with the demise of communism, CEE countries found themselves on the boundary between the Western security community and the zone of instability to their East and South [2, p. 11].

Historically, the experiences of CEE countries with European powers in connection with their security had not always been positive. The only country with which those experiences had been different was the United States [3, p. 204-5]. The majority of Central and Eastern Europeans saw the United States as the only significant Western power that had never posed a threat to any of them. On the contrary, it was behind the creation of many of their countries and their liberation from, initially, Nazi Germany, and then Soviet-dominated communist rule. Independence and the very existence of the region of Central and Eastern Europe at the end of World War I is attributed to the power of America, its diplomacy, and the idealism of President Woodrow Wilson.

Given the above, it does not come as a surprise that after 1989 Central European elites would demonstrate pro-American attitudes, and regardless of the security concepts they were considering at that time, they would regard the United States as their most significant partner and guarantor of their security. Turning to the United States in this respect was also due to other Western states' initial restraint towards opening to CEE countries, not being too inclined to offer solutions that would realistically strengthen the security of the region, including the admittance of CEE countries to European and transatlantic security institutions.

In the long run, the United States responded positively to the expectations of the region. Admittedly, it would also at first reveal a somewhat reserved attitude, and any accession efforts were more supported by Germany than the USA [4, p. 62]. However, the Clinton administration gradually grew to this idea and eventually acknowledged that enlargement of NATO and extension of security guarantees to the countries of Central Europe was also in its interest. Washington's position was pivotal on this matter.

Poland, a country considered a pioneer of change in the region, was also one of those CEE countries that addressed the United States about security guarantees. Relations between the two countries go back further beyond 1989, and the nations' histories have been entwined ever since. Polish national heroes, Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski, fought for American independence. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson, as mentioned earlier, called for the creation of an independent Polish state by including this issue in his Fourteen Points. The United States supported Poland in its struggle for freedom from communist rule. For

instance, it opposed Moscow by condemning the imposition of martial law, while other Western European states were in favour of détente with the Soviet Union. President Ronald Reagan had the courage to call the Soviet Union an “evil empire” [4, p. 60].

As a result, the United States supports Poland in the attainment of its security policy goals, and the security cooperation undertaken just after the fall of communism in 1989 is consistently continued and expanded. Regardless of the security concepts formulated, America is perceived as the solid basis and guarantor of Polish security, and relations with Washington are referred to as strategic. This state of affairs stems from the factors determining Poland’s security policy.

## **1. Determinants of Poland’s post-Cold War security policy**

As there are two dimensions to state security: internal (intrastate) and external, pursued in immediate and distant international environments, it can be argued that the security policy of the state is conditioned by a number of determinants, both internal (intrastate) and external ones, originating from the international environment [5, p. 13]. Among the internal determinants, the most significant ones include the potential (strength, power) of the state (economic, demographic, and social potentials), history and historical legacy, political culture, and strategic culture [6, p. 363]. Among various external determinants, the most considerable importance should be attributed to geographical conditions and the state’s environment: Is it friendly, hostile, allied, or neutral? Are there bi- and multilateral treaties signed? Are borders settled? Are there minority issues?, and others [6, p. 363].

Due to these diverse conditions, both internal and external, each sovereign state pursues its own, to some extent original, security policy, and formulates appropriate strategies for its implementation. The majority of the factors determining the national security policy of Poland, and other countries alike, are dynamic in nature and subject to change. So are the challenges and threats to both state security and international security [7, p. 14]. Along with the change of threats and challenges, the priorities in national security policies change too.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that as in the case of security itself, what plays a consequential role in the security policy pursued by the state is its subjective aspect, and above all the perception of threats by foreign and security policymakers, including their accurate or inaccurate identification of threats to the security of a given state [7, p. 14].

In the case of Poland, what appears to largely drive its security policy is its geopolitical position between the West and the East, between Germany and Russia (the Soviet Union in the past). Contrary to popular opinion, it is not considered as unequivocally positive or clearly negative. It is often referred to as a “bridge”, “meeting space”, or “smart go-between” between the East and the West. Some see Poland as being in “the heart of Europe” [8, p. 285]. For some, it may be an asset providing Poland with the opportunity to play a crucial role in international politics, while others see it as something that has often put Poland at a disadvantage. After all, it was the main reason why Poland was under constant threat of numerous conflicts (external wars and internal crises). Moreover, it contributed to the fall of Poland in the thirteenth century and again in 1939, and the imposition of communist rule following World War II.

This geopolitical location and a history of wars with neighbouring Russia and Germany meant that security issues were invariably a primary concern for Poland’s authorities [9,

p. 9]. Moreover, even though Poland's geopolitical conditions have been the most favourable since the end of the Cold War, the profoundly entrenched fears have not dissipated, and Poland's security policy is still underlain by "strategic uncertainty" [10, p. 269]. This uncertainty implies that even after 1989 and the collapse of the bipolar world order, the concept of Poland's security is oriented at threats of a military nature, unlike in the case of other Western European countries, and Polish policymakers find military security issues more significant than non-military ones, such as migration or threats to the natural environment [11, p. xi-xii]. What is more, uncertainty remains an essential element in the Polish thinking about security [12, p. 125], regardless of Poland's membership of NATO and the EU. That, in turn, signifies that the Polish security policy is under the influence of the neorealist paradigm, according to which the main actors of international relations are states that pursue policies that always and foremost seek to ensure the classic security seen in the so-called narrow way, namely as survival, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty [11, p. xii].

The security situation perceived in this way requires that action is taken to strengthen Poland's military potential; notwithstanding, it also must be acknowledged that Poland is not in a position to ensure its security on its own without any external assistance. Consequently, when Poland found itself in a strategic vacuum, the so-called grey zone of security, outside any system of hard security, it was decided to seek security guarantees from other international institutions. These included NATO and countries, such as the United States, whose presence in Europe was invariably considered indispensable, in particular in the context of countering a potential Russian threat. For this reason, Poland has been anxious to maintain American interest in its security.

## **2. The United States in Poland's security policy**

As was noted above, since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been seen in Poland as its most significant security partner and guarantor. That was mainly since the US emerged as the winner from the bipolar confrontation with the Soviet Union, which earned the US the leading position in the international system. As such, it would have the most significant impact on Europe's events at that time. With the security concerns and challenges that Poland was then facing, as were other countries of the region, and given Western Europe's initial reaction to the end of the Cold War and lukewarm enthusiasm for extending its security guarantees over the countries of the former Soviet bloc, it was concluded that Poland's security agenda would require American backing [13, p. 131]. As a result, sustained efforts were made to attract American attention to the security affairs of Poland and the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe alike. Thus, the issues were made a permanent item on the agenda in bilateral relations. It was stressed that political and military involvement of the United States in Europe was crucial for the peace, security, and stability of not only Poland but the whole continent.

The United States positively responded to these expectations, which was reflected in the signing on March 20, 1991, of the Declaration on relations between the Republic of Poland and the United States of America, in which it was stated that "The United States attaches great importance to consolidating and guaranteeing democracy and Poland's independence, considering it as indispensable for a new Europe, indivisible and free" [14, p. 73]. Although the

document was merely a declaration of the parties, at that time it was a substantial starting point for further action. The relations between the two countries intensified once the Polish authorities resolved that Poland would seek membership of NATO. It was clear that only Washington would be in a position to overcome the seemingly insuperable Russian opposition, dispel other allies' doubts and do away with their reluctance [3, p. 209]. Despite some initial reservations concerning the enlargement of NATO, the US authorities eventually came to the idea of enlargement and decided to support it. Owing to the American leadership and promotion of its values, Central Europe was pulled out of the security vacuum [15, p. 73].

After the enlargement of NATO, the United States retained its significance to Poland's security. One reason for this was fears about the potential weakening of transatlantic ties, consequently undermining NATO's capability for collective defence in the face of some countries slacking on their obligations towards the Alliance and European aspirations for security autonomy. It was seen as detrimental to Polish interests since, as due to Poland's geographical location, the guarantees under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty were absolutely vital. It was thought that this situation could only be prevented by the American leadership in NATO and the maintenance of its strong military presence in Europe. Another reason was that it was assumed that close military cooperation with the US would enhance Poland's defence capabilities through the purchases and acquisitions of American weapons, equipment, services and military training, funds granted for the modernization of the Polish Armed Forces, and cooperation in military operations [16, p. 83-4]. Finally, it was expected that by supporting US interests Poland would become one of American closest allies. That, in turn, was supposed to enhance Poland's prestige in the international arena, add more credibility to Poland, and strengthen its position in NATO and the region. It was also hoped that the US would promote Polish interests in the Alliance, such as eastward enlargement of NATO, the deployment of defence infrastructure in Poland, or the appointment of Polish candidates to high-ranking positions [16, p. 83-4].

In consequence, Poland would frequently take the American point of view and endorse the initiatives undertaken by the US. It was treated as an insurance policy, and it was avoided to adopt a stance contrary to American interests [17]. That included such issues as NATO's reform and its relation to the EU's security and defence initiatives, out-of-area operations, further enlargement and relations with Russia, combating terrorism, US missile defence programmes, and US policy towards Eastern Europe. Poland backed Operation Allied Force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the intervention in Iraq in 2003, even though the United Nations Security Council had authorized none of them [15, p. 74].

A change in Poland's approach to the US came about in late 2007. The newly formed government reformulated its foreign and security policy, which, from then on, was supposed to be based on the triad of NATO, the EU, and the United States [18, 19]. NATO was to be the main pillar and guarantor of Poland's security. The second "obvious security guarantee" was membership of the EU. As far as relations with the US were concerned, they were to be determined by Poland's membership in NATO and the EU. It was desirable to strengthen the security cooperation of the United States with the whole Europe. The special significance of bilateral relations with the United States was confirmed. However, the intention was to strive for their further development in the spirit of sustainable partnership, which implied rationalization in mutual relations and refraining from uncritical advocacy of American policy. It was then that Poland's involvement in Operation Iraqi Freedom was terminated, and the

arrangements concerning the Ballistic Missile Defense Program and Poland's participation in it were renegotiated. This change, however, was not one-sided, as it somehow concurred with the profound reorientation of the American foreign policy after Barack Obama's victory in the US presidential election, one consequence of which was the redirection of American involvement from Europe towards Asia and the Pacific. Nevertheless, bilateral relations continued and were largely dominated by security and defence cooperation.

The significance of the United States in Poland's security policy increased again as a result of the conflict that had broken out in Ukraine at the turn of 2013 and 2014. Poland would seek deployment of NATO troops on its eastern border. Again, it was understood that such a plan would not be implemented without American consent and support. Currently, vigorous attempts are being made to establish a permanent American presence on Polish soil in the form of an American military base.

### **3. Poland in the American foreign and security policy**

The interest in strengthening cooperation was not exclusively on the Polish side. At the various stages of bilateral relations, Poland was also attributed a specific role to play in the American foreign and security policy, thus contributing to its implementation. The United States expected Poland to back American interests, particularly as it was developing into a regional leader, and its significance could still grow [20, p. 125]. Besides, it should be borne in mind that as the possibility of ensuring national security, prosperity and freedom of the American society is influenced by the state of the international security environment, the United States aims to reduce all the threats affecting this state and strives to maintain its freedom to influence international relations, in particular in the sphere of security [21, p. 42].

Following the end of the Cold War, a significant issue for the United States was the stabilization of Central and Eastern Europe, a region that historically had been perceived as a tinderbox. At the same time, the United States wanted to secure the outcome of the bipolar confrontation and ensure that the Russian sphere of influence would not be rebuilt. Hence, it was intent on the promotion of freedom, democracy, and transformation in the region, and, in the long run, on the gradual incorporation of new democracies into the zone of stability and security [22, p. 108].

Since Washington regarded Poland as a pioneer of transformation and democratization of the region, it was assumed that it would play a large part in attaining these goals. Poland's consistent implementation of reforms and its stabilizing role in the region, commitment to establishing good relations with neighbours, and strengthening regional cooperation as well as adopting an active attitude towards its security were of great significance in making this decision. Poland was also the first country to raise the issue of opening NATO to the countries of the former Soviet bloc. In this way, it was ideally suited to shaping the situation in the region and advancing American initiatives in this part of the world, aiming to implement its vision of "Europe whole and free".

It was this vision of "Europe whole and free" that constituted the starting point for the European policy of the United States. The Americans saw their security as inseparably linked to the security of Europe, which was indivisible. In the face of the USSR's progressing disintegration, it was recognized that the best way to secure the interests of the United States and

Western Europe would be to support the democratization of the Eastern bloc countries and, subsequently, erase the dividing lines on the continent. This willingness to take responsibility for Poland's security was manifested by the signing of the abovementioned *Declaration on relations between the Republic of Poland and the United States of America* of March 1991.

The implementation of the American vision of "Europe whole and free" was not the only premise for the United States to engage in bringing Poland closer to Euro-Atlantic structures. It is argued that there were also other motives [13, p. 134; 23, p. 33]. They included the willingness to further stabilize Central Europe by containing the security vacuum, and thus proving that NATO could play a stabilizing role in Europe, striving to strengthen the US leadership in NATO by enlarging it with a group of so-called Atlanticists, and permanently restricting Russia's influence in the region, including the former Soviet republics. NATO enlargement, as supported by the United States, was to occur not in connection with the emergence of some new threat, but to extend the zone of security and stability over the entire region. In this context, it was stressed that it was justifiable to develop cooperation with Poland, which the United States regarded as a model for other CEE countries in the efforts to guarantee their own security [24]. Since Poland managed to build good relations with its neighbours, including Russia and Ukraine, it was thought that NATO enlargement would provide the Alliance with the opportunity to build relations with these two countries through Polish mediation, thus bringing the American vision of "Europe whole and free" closer to fulfilment. While supporting Poland's accession efforts, the United States also gained a loyal and valuable ally for its agenda [23, p. 34].

After the events of 9/11, the "Europe whole and free" programme naturally became secondary, and Poland's position in the US foreign policy and security was determined by its contribution to the Global War on Terrorism and combating other threats to international security. Poland resolved to join the United States and support it politically. It also declared readiness to provide any other type of assistance, including the military one. The support provided by Poland and other countries was of considerable significance to the United States, but it mattered more in political than operational terms [25, p. 102]. In the face of mounting criticism from their allies in Western Europe, the Americans were more concerned about the legitimacy and de-Americanization of their interventions, particularly in Iraq.

As EU-US relations remained vital in many aspects, the United States was intent on maintaining cooperation with European countries, and any rivalry with them or their potential withdrawal from global affairs were not in the American interest. The support of Poland and other CEE nations was to [26, p. 39-40, 46]:

- 1) prevent the adoption of solutions undermining American interests,
- 2) help shape the European security and defence policy so as not to jeopardize transatlantic relations,
- 3) guarantee the support and capability of European countries to actively contribute to crisis response operations, thus reducing the military costs of the global US leadership,
- 4) help reach a consensus on crucial and/or sensitive matters in the EU and other international organizations, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization,
- 5) lead to further EU and NATO eastward enlargement.

The United States was aware of progressive multilateralism in contemporary international reality, in which it was becoming increasingly difficult to pursue an American agenda, hence seeking the favour of other countries.

In addition, the United States anticipated that Poland would have a role in the Ballistic Missile Defense System. It was an American flagship project that was to earn President George W. Bush a place in history for his significant contribution to making the United States safer. Hence the American determination to finalize the compact with Poland. In this way, Poland's political consent had a direct bearing on the security of the United States.

The position of Poland, as well as Europe as a whole, in the eyes of Washington changed when President Barack Obama took office. He reformulated the US foreign policy, shifting its focus from the Middle Eastern/European sphere to East Asia and the Pacific. As a result, Europe became the object of benign US neglect, even though Europe was still expected to partner the United States in global security efforts. Higher on the list of American foreign policy priorities, at the expense of any strategic partnership with Europe, ranked relations with Russia, appreciably strained during the two terms of President George W. Bush. The manifestation of the Obama administration's reset policy with Russia and striving for rapprochement between the two countries was the reinvigoration of bilateral strategic dialogue and the abandonment of the Ballistic Missile Defense System as drafted by the Bush administration. As one would expect, Washington's policy was a cause for concern, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, which was voiced in an open letter of July 15, 2009, to President Obama by former presidents from the region, including Lech Wałęsa and Vaclav Havel, as well as former prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers, ambassadors and experts. The letter did not effect the anticipated policy change. What eventually did make the US foreign policy focus on Central and Eastern Europe was the abovementioned conflict in Ukraine.

It should also be noted that for the first time ever, Poland was referred to in the US National Security Strategy of 2015, but as one of the countries, apart from Nordic and Baltic nations, that contributes to making NATO stronger and more cohesive [27, p. 7]. That may indicate that as long as NATO and transatlantic relations rank high on the American security agenda, Poland's significance to the United States will largely be determined by its involvement in strengthening NATO. Although the 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America does not mention Poland by name anymore, it acknowledges the vital importance of Europe to the security of the United States by being in a position to help America defend shared interests and ideals as well as confront shared threats [28, p. 47-8]. That seems to delineate Poland's role in this strategy.

## **4. The US contribution to the security of Poland**

### **4.1. Supporting a path to NATO membership**

Supporting Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization constituted the central focus of the American policy towards Poland in the 1990s. NATO membership became Poland's security policy goal in 1992. Initially, NATO member states, including the United States, were reluctant even to consider admitting former Eastern bloc countries to the Alliance out of concern that this would alienate Russia and involve NATO in security commitments to the countries that were not yet fully established democracies. Nevertheless, NATO enlargement



was regularly on the agenda during numerous bilateral contacts at various levels. In 1993, this issue was already discussed within the American administration and in the US Congress, where two opposing views clashed: the expansion of NATO to Central European countries and no enlargement at all because of Russia's stance. The former was advocated by Senator Richard Lugar, whereas the latter was articulated by Strobe Talbott [29, p. 122-3].

Given Russia's strong opposition, in October 1993, at the initiative of the United States and with Germany's support, the Alliance came up with the proposal of the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP), which was created to address the need for cooperation with former Warsaw Pact countries, providing them with a path to NATO accession, while at the same time soothing European concerns about isolating Russia through rapid NATO expansion. In some way, it was a response to the expectations of CEE countries for accession, as it constituted some form of membership, though not so far-reaching. Poland's attitude towards the PfP was sceptical. On January 12, 1994, in Prague, in a face-to-face conversation with President Bill Clinton, President Lech Wałęsa said that Poland would consider it as a step toward full membership, albeit a short one. It was then that President Clinton declared that whether NATO would enlarge was no longer a question of "if", but of "how" and "when" [22, p. 49].

That the United States would eventually support enlargement became evident when this issue became a subject of debate in the US Congress, gaining a majority there. It was a symbolic, yet clear signal sent out to other allies when the American Senate adopted *NATO Participation Act of 1994*, under which the President was authorized to establish a programme to assist the transition to full NATO membership of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and other PfP countries emerging from communist dominance. In addition, on December 1, 1994, at the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Council, it was resolved that internal debate on the manner and principles of enlargement and its impact on European security would be held [22, p. 53]. Significant was also a statement by President Bill Clinton at the Budapest Summit Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in December 1994 in which he announced the gradual enlargement of the Alliance, an open-door policy for each state, and no veto on expansion by a non-NATO country [30, p. 35]. With US support, in 1995, *Study on NATO Enlargement* was released, recommending NATO expansion. Soon afterwards, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were named the first PfP countries to become members of NATO. NATO enlargement was also referred to in *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* published in February 1996, as promoting American interests by reducing the risk of instability or conflict in Europe's eastern half [31, p. 38].

The United States began to perceive enlargement as part of a broader debate on the reform and future of the Alliance after the end of the Cold War. NATO member states would gradually contain the invariably negative attitude of Russia. On June 4, 1996, the US Congress adopted another piece of legislation: *NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996*, specifically naming Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as having made the most progress, thus becoming eligible to receive additional assistance to expedite the transition to full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. On October 22, 1996, in a speech delivered in Detroit, President Bill Clinton for the first time presented the specific NATO enlargement date, stating that the first new member states from Central Europe should be admitted to the Alliance in 1999, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO, at the latest [32, p. 130-1]. To break Russia's resistance, the Clinton administration proposed that a NATO-Russia agreement should

be concluded. As a result, on May 27, 1997, in Paris, the *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation* was signed, providing the formal basis for relations.

In 1999, Poland achieved full NATO membership, a historic moment that, in the words of President Clinton's 1997 Warsaw speech inviting Poland to NATO, "fulfill[ed] Poland's destiny as a free nation at the heart of a free Europe, a new Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace" [33].

The US support connected with accession to NATO was not limited solely to political engagement, but also included assisting Poland in preparing for full membership. That included a variety of activities creating conditions for cooperation with NATO troops, familiarization with the Alliance's military culture, and its procedures related to the organization, planning, and conduct of military operations. It helped to achieve compatibility between the elements of Poland's defence system and NATO's, and improve interoperability with the military structures of the Alliance. Particularly significant was cooperation during the IFOR and SFOR operations in the Balkans, where Polish troops were deployed under US command.

Furthermore, Polish military personnel could undergo training in the United States, and military students were admitted to American military academies. Military training focused on several key areas: professional military education, including leadership training and other courses aimed at developing critical professional skills, English language, command and general staff courses, security assistance, and advanced management courses to improve interoperability and develop a common perspective on leadership and management. Specialty training in logistics, intelligence, air traffic control, and field artillery helped develop critical skills necessary to understand and operate allied weapon systems while employing common doctrine, strategy, and tactics in a modern battlefield. That was essential to the systemic changes in the Polish Armed Forces. The US-educated personnel in the following years played a crucial role in the modification of doctrines, procedures and organizational culture.

#### **4.2. Security assistance after 1999**

After Poland acceded to NATO, the United States remained involved in Poland's security, and the defence relationship continued. As a new member state, Poland was praised for its contributions to a broad range of multinational security efforts and becoming a close partner with the US, for instance, by supporting the Kosovo air campaign only weeks after joining NATO. It was noted that Poland effectively integrated into the Alliance and was striving to meet its commitments. However, in the assessment of Polish capabilities, it was observed that the greatest challenge Poland was facing was the implementation of their NATO Force Goals. It was estimated that it would take several years for the Polish Armed Forces to achieve full integration with the military structures of the Alliance.

In consequence, all the efforts undertaken by the United States were first of all inspired by the contribution "to the foreign policy and the national security objectives of the United States by helping to improve the security of a NATO ally". The US was aware that it was necessary to provide Poland with assistance in the defence reform to meet Poland's NATO commitments, elevate the capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces to conduct activities in pursuit of shared foreign and security policy objectives and integrate them better with US forces in NATO and elsewhere internationally, and strengthen the partnership to more effectively counter

emerging threats. Stronger Poland would mean a stronger NATO ally, which, in turn, would contribute to a stronger NATO, hence more secure America. There have been two security assistance programmes in place: International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF).

The IMET programme is an instrument of US national security and foreign policy and a key component of US security assistance that provides training and education on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations [34]. The IMET-funded activities have allowed Polish military personnel to benefit from a variety of forms of professional military education, becoming cognizant of American military training and doctrine. They have also helped to contribute to building competence in key areas, increasing the professionalization of forces, promoting democratic values, and forming lasting relationships between Poland's emerging military leaders and their American counterparts.

The FMF programme is a critical foreign policy tool for promoting US interests around the world by ensuring that coalition partners and friendly foreign governments are equipped and trained to work toward common security goals and share burdens in joint missions. FMF provides grants for the purchase of US defence equipment, services, and training, which promotes US national security by contributing to regional and global stability, strengthening military support for democratically-elected governments, and containing transnational threats including terrorism and trafficking in narcotics, weapons, and persons. FMF enables eligible partner nations to purchase US defence articles, services, and training through either Foreign Military Sales or, for a limited number of countries, through the foreign military financing of direct commercial contracts (FMF/DCC) programme [34].

FMF has supported the modernization of Poland's military and strengthening its defence capability. The FMF grants that Poland received were to help fund NATO Force Goals and national procurement requirements. Grant and loan expenditures have focused primarily on the F-16 fighter aircraft, C-130 transport aircraft, HMMWVs, tactical radios, Scan Eagle, C4I enhancements (air sovereignty operations centre, navigation aids, communications equipment, and computers) and support for Perry-Class frigates and SH-2G helicopters, and JASSM missiles [35, p. 48].

In the years of 2000-2018, of the three countries admitted to NATO as the first ones, Poland was the biggest benefactor of US security assistance funds. Under IMET, Poland was granted approx. 37.5 million USD, whereas the Czech Republic and Hungary received approx. 34 million USD and 25 million USD respectively. For the FMF programme, the difference is even more staggering: approx. 446.5 million USD for Poland, compared to approx. 105 million USD for the Czech Republic and 69.7 million USD for Hungary.

It should also be noted that any purchase of US-made equipment, apart from the apparent enhancement of the capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces, is conducive to establishing a platform for interoperability, thus cementing the partnership between the two countries, and strengthening the relations between their militaries as well as defence industries. What is more, it may entail the presence of US personnel in Poland, which in itself manifests engagement in Polish security. Such an effect was produced by the said procurement of 48 F-16 fighter aircraft and the creation, development, mentoring and training of the Polish Special Forces [36].

Furthermore, the United States contributes to Poland's security through regular consultations at the highest levels of government to discuss security issues that are of vital importance to

both countries. The consultations are held within the framework of the Strategic Dialogue and Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group between the State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the High Level Defense Group between the Department of Defense and the Polish Ministry of Defence [37, p. 260].

To help Poland further improve its interoperability with NATO forces, the United States conducts numerous military training exercises with Poland. Polish troops regularly participate in US-led security cooperation activities and attend formal US training programmes. For instance, troops from both countries jointly trained before each Polish ISAF deployment [37, p. 261].

Since November 2012, US troops have been stationing in Poland, which was facilitated by *the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Poland on cooperation of the Air Forces of the United States of America and the Republic of Poland, on the territory of the Republic of Poland* signed on June 13, 2011. Under the Memorandum, a US Aviation Detachment at Łask Air Base was established, enhancing interoperability and providing an ability to jointly face security challenges [37, p. 262]. Another opportunity in this respect will be provided by the missile defence system constituting part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach located at Redzikowo Air Base. It will help to counter threats to Europe's security, thus boosting Poland's national defence too.

### **4.3. Strengthening NATO's eastern flank**

As was noted earlier, the United States became directly involved in Poland's security and all Central and Eastern Europe in connection with the conflict in Ukraine. President Obama promptly condemned Russia's actions against Ukraine and made the European Union and the G7 countries impose sanctions on Moscow. It was also resolved that the defence of Central and Eastern European countries should be strengthened.

In 2014, a "U.S.-Poland Solidarity and Partnership Program" was launched. It serves as a basis for the joint implementation of activities a view to enhancing Poland's defence capabilities, promoting interoperability and strengthening the entire Alliance. The plan provides for air defence cooperation, Special Forces and Air Forces cooperation, joint military training and exercises, development of regional military capabilities, pre-positioning of heavy equipment and vehicles to improve Poland's capacity as a host nation, and support for Poland's programme of the Armed Forces modernization [38].

One of the first practical manifestations of the programme included the arrival on April 23, 2014, of 150 US paratroopers from US Army Europe's 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) in Świdwin, Poland, to begin exercises with Polish troops, and the augmentation of the Aviation Detachment in Łask with additional F16s and C-130s.

Poland and other countries of the eastern flank were reassured of NATO's and America's commitment to Article 5 in a speech by President Obama delivered at 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day in Warsaw on June 3, 2014. He also announced launching the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to bolster the security of eastern NATO allies and increase America's military presence in Europe, and demonstrate a strong US commitment to the territorial integrity of its allies and maintaining a Europe that is whole, free, prosperous, and at peace. ERI means more pre-positioned equipment to respond quickly in a crisis, exercises, and training to keep American forces ready, and additional US forces in the air, and sea, and on

land, including in Poland. Since the inception of ERI (in 2017 renamed “European Deterrence Initiative”), the authorized budget increased to 3.42 billion USD for 2017, 4.8 billion USD for 2018 (request) and 6.5 billion USD for 2019 (request), as compared to 985 million USD in 2015 and 789 million USD in 2016 [39, 40].

It can be argued that the US was also instrumental behind the adoption by NATO of the measures aiming at adapting the Alliance to the changed security situation and the adoption of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), consisting of assurance and adaptation measures. Assurance measures are to reassure the populations of NATO member countries in Central and Eastern Europe, reinforce their defence and deter potential aggression. They comprise a variety of land, sea and air activities, on and around the NATO’s eastern flank, which are reinforced by exercises focused on collective defence and crisis management. Adaptation measures are longer-term changes to NATO’s forces and command structure so that the Alliance will be better able to react to sudden crises. They include tripling the strength of the NATO Response Force (NRF), creating a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) that can deploy at very short notice, and enhancing Standing Naval Forces [41]. It was also the United States that played a leading role in convincing the Allies at the 2016 Summit in Warsaw to agree to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defence by augmenting its military presence on the Alliance’s eastern part in what is referred to as “enhanced Forward Presence” (eFP)<sup>1</sup>. It comprises rotation-based multinational forces voluntarily contributed by Allies, making up four battlegroups deployed in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland each, and led by a framework nation. The four battlegroups come under NATO command. As of February 2019 [42], the approximate total troop number for all four battlegroups was 4657 from 19 member states. The fact that the United States leads the battlegroup stationing in Poland is yet another indication of its commitment to Polish security. The United States is the backbone of the Orzysz-based battlegroup, contributing 75% of its force. The other nations currently providing troops are the United Kingdom, Romania, and Croatia.

The US armoured cavalry squadron at Orzysz is not the only American land force in Poland. As part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, the United States additionally deploys an Army Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) on a rotational basis, consisting of approximately 3,500 soldiers, 80 tanks, 120 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 10 Bradley (Variant) Fire Support Team vehicles, 15 Paladins, 500 tracked vehicles, 1500 wheeled vehicles and pieces of equipment and 850 trailers, distributed over Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania [43]. In Poland, the elements of ABCT are stationed in its western part.

Finally, irrespective of the fact that the United States has been deploying more and more troops to Poland, what would actually be considered as a real and tangible proof of American commitment to Polish security would be the United States’ decision to establish a permanent military base in Poland, something that the Polish government is earnestly striving to attain and even willing to contribute to financially.

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<sup>1</sup> At the 2016 Summit in Warsaw, Allies also agreed to develop a tailored forward presence in the south-eastern part of Alliance territory.

## Conclusions

Following the end of the Cold War, the United States was the only world power capable of occupying a leadership role and influencing the course of events in the international arena owing to its military, economic, technological, and cultural superiority. Moreover, readiness to lead the world was consequent on the conviction of its uniqueness and irreplaceability in this role, and the universalism of American values. Therefore, it was the United States that had a direct impact on the structure of future world order and the nature of international relations between its state and non-state actors. On that account and in the light of the role it fulfilled in the overthrow of communism, since 1989, as part of the implementation of the “Europe whole and free” vision, the United States has been engaged in the security of Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe and continues to hold a strategic place in their security policies. And the rationale is behind it.

In the 1990s, US involvement was predominately in connection with the enlargement of NATO. America played a decisive role in the process of extending security assurances to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and was the only country in a position to bring it to completion, given mainly the reluctance of other allies. After 1999, the United States remained committed to Poland’s security by continuing to provide it with assistance in this respect, so that it could become a more potent NATO ally, which served the American interest. It was also the United States that took the initiative for strengthening NATO’s eastern flank in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine.

Despite the fact that the US contribution can admittedly be regarded as substantial and positive, it appears that it has not lived up to all the expectations, as Poland has been hoping for more, particularly enhancing the defence capabilities of its armed forces and obtaining additional, more specific security guarantees. One indicator of such guarantees would be a permanent US presence in Poland. In order to increase and sustain American interest in Polish security, the American agenda would fervently be supported both politically and militarily, for example, by engaging in international operations under US leadership. This attitude began to wane once President Barack Obama took office.

On its part, the United States would willingly benefit from Poland’s pro-American orientation to retain its impact on European affairs, maintain a leadership role in NATO, sell US-made armament and equipment, and obtain Poland’s consent to deploy the elements of the ballistic missile system on its territory. What was of great value, however, was the support provided to the United States as part of the global coalition against terrorism, in particular for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Poland, which was about to conclude its EU accession negotiations, was one of the CEE countries that backed American plans to launch an armed intervention against Saddam Hussein, which attracted reproval from many Western European countries, most notably France and Germany. As a result, it could be demonstrated that the United States was not standing alone on this issue. At the same time, it was sending a clear signal of considerable susceptibility of Poland and other CEE countries to American influence. Poland’s steadfast and consistent attitude towards the United States did not, however, translate into any additional engagement.

Poland’s only partial effectiveness in achieving its security goals in relations with the United States can result from the fact that the security of Poland and other CEE countries has undoubtedly been significant, but not crucial to broader American interests in Europe. Much

as Poland may matter, it is still one of a number of other countries. Moreover, Poland has been affected by America's diminishing interest in this part of the world. Until late 2013, the United States perceived Central and Eastern Europe as one of the most stable regions, integrating with the West, where no conflict should be anticipated. On the other hand, it could be argued that America's policy was the real consequence of Poland's authorities' somewhat overzealous attitude. For instance, it is noted that Poland, as well as the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe, fell victim of might be referred to as the "Checkmark Syndrome." That means that the support provided to the United States was so trustworthy and loyal that America concluded that it would always be like that and would not have to do anything to solicit it [44, p. 36].

Given the current security situation in the region, the United States can be expected to remain engaged in Poland's security and the region. It recognizes that Russia poses a threat to security, intimidating its neighbours with threatening behaviour, such as nuclear posturing and the forward deployment of offensive capabilities. The American commitment to Article V of the Washington Treaty has been reaffirmed, and so have the fulfilment of obligations and presence on the eastern flank [28, p. 48].

It appears that Poland-US defence cooperation will principally be centred around the same security issues as before. Poland will be striving to sustain and enhance the US military presence in the area, and further build NATO's deterrence and defence posture. That will undoubtedly be boosted once the Ballistic Missile Defense base at Redzikowo is in operation. In all likelihood, the United States will remain Poland's key partner in the process of the modernization of the Polish Armed Forces, in particular that another large US arms procurement contract was signed in March 2018 to acquire the Patriot missile defense system. Joint training and exercises will be conducive to improving interoperability and tightening the relations between the two militaries. Whatever the scope of the cooperation is, it should not undermine transatlantic unity.

Finally, it must be emphasized that although it is in Poland's best interest that America is committed to Central and Eastern Europe, the political elites should not look to the United States for security all the time. It is still open to debate to what extent Poland will be able to rely on its allies in the event of a crisis, particularly that the United States as a global hegemon is most likely interested in maintaining dominance in the conditions of peace and stability, not necessarily becoming enmeshed in a foreign war. That is why, irrespective of American engagement, which is absolutely vital, and support of allies, Poland must continue to assiduously and rationally build its own defence capacity. It should be based on updated and multivariant defence plans and strategies taking advantage of Poland's geographical location, cutting-edge weaponry, and equipment and highly-trained troops to implement those plans and strategies. Only in this way will Poland be in a position to substantiate its defensive posture and command due respect of its allies and potential adversaries, thus increasing its leverage in international relations.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

### Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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## Biographical note

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## Polityczne i wojskowe zaangażowanie Stanów Zjednoczonych w bezpieczeństwo Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej po 1989 r. na przykładzie Polski

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### STRESZCZENIE

W artykule omówiono na przykładzie Polski wkład Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki w bezpieczeństwo Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w aspekcie politycznym i wojskowym po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Pokazano, że Stany Zjednoczone były zaangażowane we wzmocnienie bezpieczeństwa Polski oraz regionu po upadku komunizmu w 1989 r., choć w różnym stopniu w różnych krajach. Ameryka odegrała kluczową rolę w procesie rozszerzenia NATO w latach 90. oraz objęcia gwarancjami bezpieczeństwa Polskę, Czechy, i Węgry, a także inne kraje regionu w kolejnych latach. Stany Zjednoczone wspierały Polskę w procesie reformy systemu obronnego, zwiększając w ten sposób jej zdolności wojskowe. USA odegrały także kluczową rolę we wzmocnieniu wschodniej flanki NATO po 2014 r., co zawsze stanowiło istotny punkt polityki bezpieczeństwa Polski od momentu jej wstąpienia do Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego. W opinii autora polityczne i militarne zaangażowanie USA w bezpieczeństwo Polski było zarówno

znaczące, jak i korzystne, a ponadto istnieje rzeczywista potrzeba kontynuowania współpracy politycznej i wojskowej z USA oraz ich obecności w regionie. W artykule nakreślono uwarunkowania polskiej polityki bezpieczeństwa po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Następnie wyjaśniono role, jakie oba kraje odegrały we wzajemnej polityce. Dalej przedstawiono wkład USA w bezpieczeństwo Polski, zarówno w sferze politycznej, jak i wojskowej. Na zakończenie autor podjął się próby dokonania oceny amerykańskiego zaangażowania i przedstawił swój punkt widzenia na rozwój współpracy polsko-amerykańskiej w sferze bezpieczeństwa.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** bezpieczeństwo Polski, polska polityka bezpieczeństwa, Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki, Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia

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