

Original article

Civil defense in Poland from a historical perspective

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the study is the history of the creation and development of civil defense activities in Poland. The issue is crucial as it illustrates the history of transformations of defense formations, such as Air and Antigas Defense, Universal Self-Defense into the Civil Defense formation, and the scope and duties of Civil Defense in the protection of property, health, and life of people in the interwar period until modern times.

KEYWORDS

Air Defense and Gas Protection, self-defense of population,
Local Anti-Aircraft Defense, universal self-defense



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Introduction

Ensuring the safety of citizens is a priority duty of the state. For this purpose, the Civil Defense of the country was established. The beginning of the Civil Defense formation dates back to World War I. The bombing of Paris, Petrograd, and Freiburg resulted in significant damage to civilian facilities and losses to the civilian population. Attacks by the enemy made individual states aware of the need to establish a defense system to protect the state. The first countries to initiate a defense system known as Air Defense were France, Great Britain, and Germany. Poland also began to organize the defense of the non-fighting population. For this purpose, civilian defense formations were established to prevent the effects of the threats.

The main research problem that was undertaken in the study concerns transforming defense formations and paramilitary organizations into the structure of the country's civil defense. An attempt was made to answer the question: Can the national civil defense formations be useful in counteracting the current threats and protecting the civilian population?

The thesis was adopted that despite the transformation, the state of functioning of the Civil Defense will not ensure effective protection of the population against threats. This problem requires effective legal solutions. The method of collecting source materials was used to obtain an answer to a bothering research problem.

The article aims to present the history of the transformation process of Civil Defense and activities related to people's protection in times of peace and war.

Air and Antigas Defence

In 1921, Poland established the Social Committee for Antigas Defense, which was the first association of civil and military people in the country. They aimed to prepare the civilian population for protection against the effects of an armed conflict. It was an extremely burdensome activity, considering the intimidating degree of illiteracy of the society at that time [1, p. 54]. The next step was the creation of the State Air Defense League (LOPP) on May 23, 1923. The Ministry of the Interior approved the LOPP statute which defined the goals of the organization, the nature of membership, and the legal basis for its financing. According to Article 3 of the statute, the main assumption of the League was to support the development of Polish aviation in all its areas by:

1. Promoting the idea of aviation among the society and striving to meet the needs of air defense.
2. Supporting Polish scientific literature and inventions in the field of aviation.
3. Publishing a periodical, scientific, and theoretical works and practical manuals.
4. Establishing libraries, museums, and research laboratories.
5. Organizing conventions, readings, exhibitions, competitions, shows and talks.
6. Building airports and all airport devices, cooperation in creating state air defense means.
7. Supporting the training of professional personnel.
8. Development of drafts of relevant laws, regulations, and provisions.
9. Presentation of relevant requests to the legislative and executive authorities,
10. Organizing aviation sports clubs [2].

In 1924, the Social Committee for Antigas Defense was transformed into the Antigas Defense Society (TOP). The institution focused all its energy on the construction of the Antigas Institute in Warsaw. Later she moved to broader propaganda and organizational work in various circles of society.

A breakthrough event was the adoption of a new TOP statute in January 1925. From then, the Society's field branches launched lecture campaigns on antigas defense and conducted training courses, e.g., they organized the first exercises at universities, especially demonstration, traveling exhibitions, they published posters and brochures, overview boards and slides [3, p. 19].

The organization's activity was to make the society aware of the chemical dangers during war and peace, and inform about antigas defense measures [4, p. 25].

On May 25, 1928, the two institutions were merged due to similar ideological premises related to the implementation of the society's protection. That gave rise to the existence of the Air and Antigas Defense League (still called the LOPP) that aimed to support Polish aviation in all its fields, comprehensive research on chemical defense measures, and population's preparation for antigas defense. The League acted as part of the preparation of general defense; it was coordinated by the State Office of Physical Education and Military Training (PUWF and PW) [5, p. 25; 6] created by the regulation of the Council of Ministers of January 28, 1927. The tasks of the Office included, among others, managing all works related to physical education and military preparation of the society, establishing guidelines and methods of carrying out tasks, presentation to competent ministers of conclusions and opinions on the regulations issued by them, as well as inspecting and supervising institutions dealing with the defense [7, p. 72].

As part of the implementation of the universal defense program of “civilians”, the PUWF and PW, the Polish Red Cross (PCK), and the Fire Brigade Association undertook to conduct training in the field of rescue and treatment, and cooperate with the authorities.

On March 15, 1934, the Council of Ministers adopted the Law on Air and Antigas Defense [8]. The Act immediately resolved the five most important issues of managing passive air defense (OPL) in the state, the scope of preparations for air and antigas defense, the method of preparing the population, sources of financing preparations, and organizers of preparatory works [3, p. 24]. Through regulations, Article 5 defined authorities’ powers and the scope of tasks included in 16 points. They concerned, among others, rescue and treatment of people that fell victim to an air or gas attack, organizing and training defense personnel and its appropriate equipment, adapting building structures and other real estates to defense needs, masking towns and communication facilities, and organization and observation and alarm network.

Another document was the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of January 29, 1937, on preparing the state’s air and antigas defense during peacetime. In formal terms, the Regulation was implementing the Act on the OPL and the President’s Decree on the establishment of air and anti-gas defense inspector (OPP). It established the universality of passive air defense preparations and defined civil authorities’ duties, which were obliged by orders and in cooperation with social associations to facilitate and help citizens fulfill their obligation to protect themselves against the effects of war [9].

The Regulation entered into force on January 29, 1937. The State Air Defense League (LOPP) introduced a division of air and antigas defense into active and passive. The first one concerned the Armed Forces and mainly involved air combat and preventing the enemy from entering areas essential for the Armed Forces. In the case of active defense, the civilian population’s task was to cooperate with the military authorities, operate the observation and reporting posts, and prepare an appropriate number of shelters resistant to enemy air bombs. In turn, passive defense covered all activities not related to direct contact with the enemy [10, p. 45].

According to Jerzy Suwart, the establishment of air and antigas defense was accompanied by assumptions following the then pan-European pattern. They could be reduced to several groups of general statements:

1. Socialization of air and antigas defense, expressed in involving both civil authorities and society in its affairs, often articulated and justified by the forecast that the whole nation, not only the Armed forces, will participate in the future war,
2. Inclusion of air defense criteria in some areas of urban spatial planning, including the OPL normative requirements in industrial and housing estate construction,
3. Solving all the then problems that faced passive air and anti-gas defense and translating the resulting tasks into an instructional language for practical use. They mainly concerned the detection of air targets and alerting the population, collective and individual protection of the population, providing aid to the injured and contaminated, fighting the fire, masking and immunizing objects, preparing the population,
4. Adapting the objectives of the passive air defense to the two clearly outlined, from the assessment of the military threat to the interior of the country, necessary undertakings: protection against the effects of an air attack and combat gases,
5. Organizing passive air defense based on the civil structures of the state in peacetime, and hierarchically subordinate to the military leadership of the state during the war,

6. Applying the principle of focusing the main effort in air defense preparations on the cities and objects most endangered by airstrikes and the related gradation (sequence of preparations),
7. System approach to the preparation (training) of the population, in connection with the goals and tasks of passive air defense [3, p. 79-80].

The LOPP's dynamic activity and organizational changes in the second half of the 1930s contributed to the increase in the number of members of this institution. The "Strzelec" and "Sokół" social organizations were also pro-defense. They were aimed at military training of members associated in the above-mentioned organizations in defense activities of the country. The organizations' activities contributed to the protection of the citizens' property and life, which initiated a broader expansion of self-defense structures.

Self-defense of the population during the war and occupation

Self-defense of the population is a component of civil defense, comprising a complex of undertakings aimed at preparing and carrying out works related to civil protection in times of peace, crisis, and war [11]. It is the protection of human life, health, and material and spiritual property.

The outbreak of World War II led to enormous damage and panic among the civilian population, thus causing a mass evacuation and the collapse of the passive air defense system. It also revealed the shortcomings in the preparation of the civilian population and the shortage of protective structures. In a situation of disorganization and the growing need to ensure law and order, the population spontaneously turned to methods of self-defense in order to protect themselves and their relatives.

Organizationally, it was based on the community living in the house, in line with the principles of the organized self-defense [3, p. 66]. The self-defense of a human being created the first "ceiling"; namely, one person that was supposed to take care of their safety: be able to give themselves first aid, adequately respond to air, gas, and fire alarm signals, and be able to fight a fire. The next ones formed the smallest self-defense team: the family and tenants, who lived together. Since it was already a human team, its tasks were also team-based. Shared tasks comprised, for example, the preparation of one room to hide from combat gases, and if it was made of brick, also from some effects of exploding air bombs. Next, stocking up on replacement respiratory protective equipment, gathering materials for darkening, extinguishing a fire, lamps or candles for lighting, rescue tools, and food and water supply [3, p. 67]. The tenants, who lived in blocks of flats, played the most precise role in defending and protecting the inhabitants from danger. For this purpose, a commandant was appointed; it was his/her duty to inform about attacks and the enemy's arrival. The wartime dictated many new tasks for which society was not prepared. In defense of life, self-defense was the only alternative for the Polish nation. The primary purpose of self-defense was warning and evacuating the population against dangers and air attacks, providing aid to the injured and victims, organizing shelters – the adaptation of cellars, protection against contamination of food, feed, water, and livestock, and protection of cultural assets. The self-defense program, i.e., civil combat, was also implemented under the leadership of the Polish underground state. There were various forms of help built on simple solidarity and interpersonal kindness.

The Polish population also carried out self-defense on the economic level, opposing the inhuman exploitation of the Polish workforce and protecting material goods against plunder. On

their own initiative, the workers hid the tools needed to dismantle factories and workplaces, machine parts, and technical documentation to counteract the looting. Railwaymen changed the addresses of railway transports with the removed property [3, p. 110]. In extermination camps, escapes of prisoners, celebrations of historical anniversaries, and book reading were organized. It all happened thanks to the outside help of the Polish underground. Mobilization of human forces and spontaneity helped to survive even in the most unfavorable conditions. The war and occupation created a very strong self-defense of the population, which at the cost of people's lives defended an innocent society.

Local Air Defense

The new stage of civil defense in Poland took place in July 1950 by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers on the establishment of air defense commands at the presidencies of national councils. The appointment of the General Headquarters of Local Air Defense [3, p. 125] resulted in a departure from the assumptions of international law in the field of civil protection. Besides, it stemmed from the assumptions of another Resolution of the Council of Ministers of March 17, 1951, on the establishment of local air defense bodies in some ministries [12].

On February 26, 1951, the Sejm passed the Act on Local Air Defense (TOPL) [13], which initiated a new period of civil protection in Poland. The guidelines on the principles of the TOPL's organization and tasks were included in the Letter No. 030 of January 30, 1951, even before the adoption of the Act. They concerned:

1. Organization and preparation of the general population, industrial and public utilities, communications and communication facilities, offices and state institutions, as well as all kinds of enterprises to defend against air attacks and to quickly and efficiently remove the effects of these attacks.
2. Organization and preparation of an alarm, blackout and registration network.
3. Organization and preparation of services adequate quantitatively and qualitatively, and emergency services, depending on the nature and needs of individual cities, housing estates, and objects.
4. Training of services, emergency services and the society in the field of TOPL.
5. Adaptation of industrial, administrative, and residential construction for TOPL needs.
6. Preparation of appropriate safety devices in cities, housing estates, and objects.
7. Planning of supplying the general population, cities, housing estates, and facilities (industrial, municipal, etc.) with TOPL equipment and resources,
8. Operational management of the TOPL defense action [14, p. 24].

The functions and tasks of TOPL were derived from the potential military threat to the state. Responsibility for the implementation of the TOPL tasks was also borne by social organizations: the League of the Soldier's Friends (LPŻ), the Volunteer Fire Service (OSP), the Defense Training (PO) "Służba Polsce", the Polish Red Cross (PCK), the Women's League, and the Polish Scouting Association (ZHP). At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, in the era of the escalation of the "Cold War", a new type of threat related to the use of nuclear weapons was noticed. It influenced the shape and nature of TOPL's tasks [15, p. 142].

The results of the work of the Interministerial Committee for Anti-Nuclear Defense, established on May 14, 1956, were of decisive importance. It communicated seven problems for implementation:

1. Training of specialists and the public in the field of nuclear defense.
2. Commencement of preparation of the health service for tasks in the area of nuclear impact.
3. Development of tactics of extinguishing spatial fires.
4. Preparation of shelters and other hiding places ensuring protection against the effects of nuclear weapons.
5. Development of technical rescue tactics,
6. Engineering and technical security for industrial work continuity,
7. Organization of an efficient observation, reporting and alarm service, preparation of individual protection, both in terms of equipment and methodology [3, p. 144-145].

In March 1957, the Sejm Committee for Internal Affairs criticized the TOPL's preparation to date. Changes were made to adapt the then-existing regulations to the needs of nuclear war. The Ministry of National Defense, out of concern for national security, established the National Defense Committee (KOK) on February 18, 1959, which set new goals and tasks for the TOPL. They referred to, among other things, the preparation of civilians for the war, the adaptation of shelters, and an evacuation plan. To improve the situation, the TOPL was incorporated into the structures of the Territorial Defense System (OTK), and then efforts were made to adjust its functioning to the requirements of rescue operations. Despite the changes in 1965, the TOPL was dissolved, and a new civil protection organization was created.

Universal Self-Defense

Universal Self-Defense was established on December 20, 1965. It was ascribed a general, nationwide character of preparation and defense against the effects of various types of threats related to armed conflict [3, p. 156].

The concept of "self-defense" is defined in two ways. First, as defending an attack on oneself, against one's good, against a threat to interests, defending oneself [...], and as an organization of civilians to defend the country or prepare for defense in the event of threats [16].

The scope of tasks of Universal Self-Defense concerned mainly:

1. Preparation of the population's universal self-defense.
2. Performing tasks in the field of alerting people about the danger of an air attack.
3. Cooperation with the authorities in preparing for the regrouping of the population and individuals to be militarized.
4. Implementation of engineering and technical projects ensuring protection of the population in the event of war.
5. Supplying people with personal protection equipment.
6. Conducting defense training of the population [14, p. 24].

Training the population in universal self-defense is one of the forms of fulfilling the civic duty of Poles contained in the Act on the universal obligation to defend the Republic of Poland [17]. Its aim is to prepare the population for defending themselves against the means of mass destruction and other enemy actions.

Universal self-defense of the population may be implemented in the form of basic classes or practical exercises, which may also involve participation in combating environmental threats and natural disasters, and removing their effects. As part of preparation for self-defense,

persons with Polish citizenship may be required to obtain personal protective equipment and other articles and items necessary in the event of an emergency. Besides, they may be supposed to:

1. Prepare to protect the building or apartment and personal and individual property.
2. Secure own sources of drinking water and foodstuffs against pollution or contamination.
3. Maintain and repair the equipment and means of protection.
4. Maintain and repair home security rooms.
5. Carry out other activities aimed at protecting one's life, health and property, and providing aid to the injured [18, p. 3-4].

The activity of Universal Self-Defense developed by expanding its task force. It was supported by numerous youth organizations and associations that acted in support of defending the country's territory. These included the National Defense League, the Polish Red Cross, the Polish Aero Club, and the Volunteer Fire Service Association. Despite the organizations' positive activity, a search for better organizational and task solutions commenced. There was a concept of dissolving Universal Self-Defense and creating a new, more perfect organization that would meet the obligation to protect the population.

The transformation process of civil defense in 1973-1995

On May 18, 1973, the Council of Ministers established Civil Defense by the Resolution No. 111/73 [19].

The new organization aimed to carry out specific tasks related to:

1. Preparation and operation of the universal population warning system about the risk of air strikes, contamination, and infections.
2. Preparation and ensuring readiness for using protective structures, in particular, shelters, anti-aircraft gaps, protective hiding places in basements, shelters protecting against contamination, and special devices, in particular decontamination and deactivation posts, sanitary treatment posts, etc.
3. Preparation of civil defense forces for the operation.
4. Providing equipment and personal protection measures against weapons of mass destruction for the population, mainly gas masks and protective clothing, preparation and redistribution of the population and staffs.
5. Preparation and organization of protection of workplaces and public utilities against means of destruction.
6. Ensuring the darkening of cities, villages and workplaces.
7. Organizing the protection of animals, crops, food products, and water against contamination and infection.
8. Preparation and ensuring the protection of cultural property against the means of destruction.
9. Organizing and conducting training of the population in universal self-defense as well as popularization and propaganda activities in the field of civil defense.
10. Preparation in terms of organization, as well as materials and technology, and conducting rescue operations aimed at protecting the life and health of the population, as well as providing assistance to the injured [20, p. 140-141].

The main goal of civil defense was the direct and indirect protection of the population and rescue.

Paragraph 2 (4) describes that [...] forces and means of civil defense may be used to participate in the prevention and suppression of fires, floods, and other natural disasters and catastrophes, as well as carry out work necessary for civil defense purposes [12]. It was incorporated into the organizational structures of state and economic administration. The state-wide civil defense authority was the Head of the National Civil Defense. It worked in accordance with the resolution and decision of the Council of Ministers and the National Defense Committee. He was also the Deputy Minister of National Defense and the Chief Inspector of Territorial Defense.

The Chief of State Civil Defense established general rules for the implementation of civil defense tasks by the supreme and local administrative bodies, including preparation of draft principles of civil defense operation and development of plans and assumptions for civil defense exercises. He/She also had the following powers: the right to control the performance of civil defense tasks, issue guidelines, instructions, regulations, and civil liability publications. He/she was obliged to submit conclusions and proposals to the KOK, including matters of material and financial resources necessary for the implementation of civil defense. The Head of the State Civil Defense was obliged to consult various matters with the ministers concerned and the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces [3, p. 183].

They organized civil defense in the ministries. The scope of their duties included securing the continuity of operations of subordinate workplaces in war conditions, preparation of conditions for the needs of civil liability in the country, and civil defense of the ministry [3, p. 183].

In the field administration, the functions of heads of Civil Defense were performed by the presidents of national councils of voivodships, poviats, and cities, as well as heads of municipal offices and directors of industrial plants.

Subsequent changes took place in 1975, which concerned local administration, self-defense commands, and positions for civil defense affairs were created. In 1977, the field tasks of administration offices were amended, defense training, and organization of re-distribution were introduced. There was a process of changes in the functioning of civil defense in Poland. Two years later, in 1979, civil defense formations were established to replace self-defense. The general matter in the field of civil defense is covered by the Act on the universal obligation to defend the Republic of Poland [17]. Further changes to the functioning of civil defense took place in 1983. The office of the Chief of Civil Defense was elevated to the rank of the central body of state administration. It was separated within the structure of the Ministry of National Defense, which contributed to the adoption of the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of December 23, 1983, on the detailed scope of activities of the Chief of State Civil Defense, heads of civil defense of voivodships and cities, poviats, and communes [21].

The chiefs carried out civil defense projects by developing assumptions for the preparation of the Civil Defense, preparing the Civil Defense formation at all levels of state and local administration. In 1989, Poland underwent a rapid process of systemic changes, which contributed to the introduction of minor changes to the basics of the functioning of the new decision-making bodies of civil defense. The National Security Bureau, which was a body of the KOK, continued to be a Civil Defense body.

In 1991, on September 19, Poland ratified *Additional Protocols I and II* of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. It was a turning point for Civil Defense, as it corrected the task scope

of civil defense. The Regulation of the Council of Ministers of September 28, 1993, on Civil Defense [22] included the tasks of Civil Defense during peace and war. The structure of civil defense formations was also modified, rescue units were abandoned and the number of formations increased. In 1994, the Defense Affairs Committee was established to deal with extraordinary threats and their liquidation.

The Civil Defense structure until 1996 consisted of:

1. The central level, i.e., the Chief of the National Civil Defense, the National Civil Defense Staff, the Central Training Center for Civil Defense Personnel, the National Center for Contamination Analysis, the position of managing the Chief of the National Civil Defense.
2. The voivodship level, i.e., the Chief of Civil Defense – voivodes, civil defense voivodship inspectorate, training centers, centers of analyzing data on contamination and alerting, voivodeship commission for extraordinary threats.
3. The communal level, i.e., commune heads and mayors as well as city department inspectorates or civil defense departments [3, p. 200].

In 1995, the National Civil Defense Staff prepared a draft law on civil defense. However, it did not receive positive approval and was criticized as colliding with numerous legal regulations beyond the scope of Civil Defense.

For several years now, parliamentary projects have been submitted and they are still at the draft stage, but where is a separate act on Civil Defense? It is noteworthy that discussions are still ongoing on the organization of Civil Defense. It appears significant as it is an integral part of the national defense system and successively raises its readiness to act upon announcement of higher states of readiness.

Conclusions

Civil Defense mainly assumed the implementation of systemic solutions that would provide citizens with a sense of security in times of peace and wartime. Despite numerous transformations, the functioning of Civil Defense does not ensure effective activities for the citizens' security. That is due to the lack of appropriate legal regulations and financial resources.

The transformation process of Civil Defense contributed to an increase in defense effectiveness and became an indispensable element in the national defense system. Defense formations play an essential role in protecting and defending the civilian population against undesirable threats resulting from human activities and the forces of nature.

The progress of civilization and technology poses ever higher requirements in the field of security, thus giving more and more opportunities to use the latest technical achievements in civil defense. Over the years, Civil Defense has implemented higher technology to warn and alert the public.

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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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Obrona cywilna w Polsce w ujęciu historycznym

STRESZCZENIE

Przedmiotem opracowania jest historia powstania i rozwój działalności Obrony cywilnej w Polsce. Podjęcie tematu jest istotne, gdyż obrazuje historię przekształceń formacji obronnych między innymi takich jak: Ochrona Przeciwlotnicza i Przeciwwgazowa, Powszechna Samoobrona w formację Obrony cywilnej oraz zakres i obowiązki działania Obrony cywilnej w ochronie mienia, zdrowia i życia ludzi w latach międzywojennych do okresu lat współczesnych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Ochrona Przeciwlotnicza i Przeciwwgazowa, samoobrona ludności, Terenowa Obrona Przeciwlotnicza, powszechna samoobrona

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