

## POLAND'S TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS TO US-LED MILITARY OPERATIONS AS A SECURITY POLICY INSTRUMENT

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### **Summary:**

*This article addresses the issue of Poland's troop contributions to US-led military operations, which for Poland constituted a salient instrument for attaining its security policy goals. It is argued that the United States of America played a pivotal role in Poland's security policy, and by providing it with active support for the military operations in which the US exercised political and/or military leadership, Poland hoped to advance its security agenda. This assumption stemmed from America's leading role in the global system and a conviction that it could influence its development in the way suiting the Polish interest.*

*The article is in four parts. First, it examines the significance of foreign deployments as an instrument for attaining Poland's security policy goals. Next, it explains the role the United States was assigned in Poland's security policy. After that, it recounts the operations of Polish military contingents in US-led allied and coalition military operations. Finally, it discusses whether and how the engagement in those operations contributed to enhancing Poland's security.*

*The article embraces the period from the first military operation to which Poland deployed troops following the collapse of the Communist bloc in 1991 to the termination of the ISAF operation, which has had the largest Polish presence to date, in 2014.*

### **Keywords:**

*Poland's security policy, the United States of America, US-led military operations, Polish military contingents*

## INTRODUCTION

Poland has contributed military and civilian personnel to a variety of international missions and operations since the end of the Korean War in 1953, initially to international commissions of control and supervision, military observer missions, and then UN forces. In the post-Cold War period, this was no longer limited to UN peacekeeping, but included military operations led by other international organisations. In addition to this, troops would deploy to multinational coalitions formed on an ad hoc basis. It was characteristic of many of those operations that they were led politically and/or militarily by the United States.

After the fall of communism, it was assumed that active involvement in global efforts in support of international security was in Poland's interest as a sovereign state and would constitute a significant instrument for pursuing its security policy goals. It was also believed that their attainment would require sustained advocacy by the United States, which was viewed as the leading actor in the global system. In consequence, to gain US support for its security agenda, Poland would back American politics, which in practical terms manifested itself through troop contributions to the military operations led by the US: in the Persian Gulf (1991), Haiti (1994), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2004), Kosovo (1999 onwards), Afghanistan (2002-2014) and Iraq (2003-2008).

The question consequently arises as to whether the deployment of troops to those operations was a good security policy instrument and whether this instrument was employed properly and effectively. In other words, how did Polish presence in those operations contribute to the attainment of the goals formulated within the scope of its security policy?

### 1. FOREIGN DEPLOYMENTS VIS-À-VIS POLAND'S SECURITY POLICY GOALS

Troop deployment to military operations abroad is anchored in Poland's security policy and strategy papers, in accordance with which one of the fundamental goals since the end of the Cold War has been to strengthen global governance and security while consolidating its own independence and security [41]. In order to reach this goal, Poland would contribute troops to military operations abroad, at the same time acknowledging that there was a strong connection between national and international security, which required active engagement in international processes [8].

After Poland's accession to NATO, also in response to ongoing globalization processes, which made it imperative to adopt a holistic approach to security by combining its internal and external aspects, the willingness and readiness to deploy troops in order to support the international community in its efforts to counter existing and emerging threats was upheld in the national security strategies adopted in the 21st century. Needless to say, this took on a special significance after 9/11. At the same time foreign deployments were regarded as another opportunity to strengthen Poland's international position and promote its image as a steadfast and responsible ally fulfilling its obligations. It was also assumed that in this way Poland would enhance its capability to directly fashion relations in the international environment in accordance with its own interests. For instance, the Strategy for the Participation of the Polish Armed Forces in

International Operations [36] indicated that the employment of the Polish military abroad was a crucial foreign and security policy instrument which guaranteed Poland a certain level of security and allowed it to pursue its major interests. Furthermore, it had a positive impact on the development of the Polish Armed Forces, which in turn enhanced their capabilities to defend the state and counteract aggression.

This perspective was maintained in the Strategy of Development of the National Security System of the Republic of Poland 2022 [38], which substituted the above-mentioned Strategy for the Participation of the Polish Armed Forces in International Operations. The document placed troop contributions to military operations within the first objective, namely formation of a stable international security environment at regional and global levels, the implementation of which affected the attainment of the second objective, namely strengthening of the state's defence capabilities. It regarded foreign deployments as a policy instrument that had a direct bearing on Poland's prestige and position in the international area, enabling it to strengthen the institutions it found significant, in particular NATO and the EU, and to increase cooperation with selected partners, most notably the United States. Moreover, it was concluded that engagement in military operations abroad helped to build professional and modern armed forces, was a source of valuable experience, provided a boost to technical modernisation, improved the level of training, upgraded organisational structures, including command and control, thus strengthening the state's defence capabilities and helping to meet its commitments as an ally.

That military operations outside Poland are significant for foreign and security policy goals has also been corroborated in the statements made by foreign ministers. Already in 1992, involvement in the efforts led by the United Nations and other international security organisations by contributing troops to peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN was included in the tasks that were within the government's attention by Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski [33]. Once the strategic security policy goal for the 1990s had been set, special significance was attached to the operations led by NATO. According to Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati, not only were they Poland's contribution to the process of restoring world peace, but also a way to prepare Poland and its armed forces for membership by establishing mechanisms for military cooperation with NATO member states at the operational level [31].

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, another reason for deploying troops to military operations abroad, apart from the desire to further consolidate Poland's image as a staunch ally and active NATO member state, was joining the US-led anti-terrorism coalition, which was expected to become the main platform for Polish-US cooperation [6]. When it was agreed to deploy troops to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the size of the contribution and the Polish role in the operation turned the political and military engagement in the Iraqi stabilisation into one of the factors determining the directions in Poland's foreign policy, thus creating a new quality and giving it a new dimension [7]. As in the case of the operation in Afghanistan, it was hoped that in this way bilateral relations with the United States would take on a special significance and the part-

nership between the two countries would be elevated to a higher level, providing various political benefits and strengthening the country's position in Europe [7].

Foreign deployments fitted into the three main pillars of Poland's security. True, they involved costs and risks, but they were a source of benefits, which politically included confirmation of Poland's credibility as an ally, and militarily contributed to improving the quality of Polish troops. It was claimed that Poland's active attitude provided strong grounds for formulating expectations towards the allies, such as to enhance security guarantees in the treaty area [32].

## **2. THE UNITED STATES IN POLAND'S SECURITY POLICY**

Since Poland restored its sovereignty after the end of the Cold War, with the consent of all political parties, the United States has invariably been regarded as the most significant partner and guarantor of Poland's security. This special role of the United States, the stabilising nature of American military presence in Europe and the willingness to develop close ties have been underscored in the above-mentioned policy and strategy papers since 1992. The security and defence cooperation between the two countries initiated soon after 1989 is consistently developed and expanded.

This pro-American orientation of Poland's foreign and security policy has its roots in the experience from the end of the 20th century and the leading role the United States played in the overthrow of communism, emerging from the Cold War confrontation as the winner. Occupying a central position in the international system, it was the United States that determined the course of events in Europe. It was then realized that Poland's post-Cold War security policy concept would require American advocacy [35]. This is why intensive attempts were made to attract American interest to the security of Poland and East-Central Europe in order to extract it from the security vacuum by granting it membership of NATO, prevent any conflict from breaking out in its territory or prevent restoration of the Russian sphere of influence.

Turning to the United States with their agenda by Poland and other East-Central European countries stemmed from the conviction that they could be understood only in Washington, particularly given the initial reaction of Western Europe to the end of the Cold War and its lack of enthusiasm for any hopes of integration with its structures. And so it happened. Despite the US administration also had reservations about enlargement of NATO [42], it ultimately became convinced that it should support this idea. It soon emerged that it was only Washington that wanted and was in a position to oppose Russia in this respect, dispel other countries' doubts and overcome their reluctance. Owing to American leadership, East-Central Europe managed to leave the security vacuum.

Accession to NATO did not diminish the significance of the United States in Poland's security policy. There were a few reasons why this might be the case. First, it was feared that transatlantic ties might be weakened and NATO's effectiveness for collective security might be undermined because of several member states' seemingly attempting to dilute the Alliance, and the EU aspiring to possess its own security and defence capability. The loosening of transatlantic ties was to be prevented by US leader-

ship in NATO and strong American military presence in Europe, which would automatically contribute to the security of Poland and the whole Europe. Second, it was assumed that close military cooperation with the US would enhance Poland's defence capabilities. This objective was to be achieved predominantly through (a) purchases and acquisitions of American weapons, equipment, services and military training, (b) the Foreign Military Financing funds granted for the modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces, and (c) cooperation in military operations [9]. Third, it was expected that because of the support offered to the United States, Poland would become one of its closest allies, which would further enhance Poland's prestige in the international arena and strengthen its position in NATO. Poland hoped for American backing for its interests in the Alliance, for instance eastward enlargement, the deployment of defence infrastructure in Poland or the appointment of Polish candidates to high-ranking positions. American political and military support was expected to add more credibility to Poland and help to pursue its interests in the region. Poland was also interested in expanding its activities to the Middle East [9].

It should also be noted that what additionally mattered to the countries in East-Central Europe, countries that had freed themselves from totalitarianism, and what affected their attitude to the US was American idealism and values such as freedom, democracy and human rights [34]. Another aspect that was of some importance was Poland's past experience with European powers: Germany, Russia, France and Great Britain.

In consequence, Poland would frequently agree with the point of view expressed by the US and provide political and military support to the initiatives it would take. This included NATO's transformation/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 none of them had been authorised by the United Nations Security Council.

To conclude, it should be stressed again that Poland's desire to become America's strategic partner in the 21st century to a large extent stemmed from its assessments of the state of transatlantic relations and the existing as well as potential threats, and strategic calculations taking account of its geography, history and *raison d'état* [1]. For instance, despite the fact that the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, conducted in distant theatres of operations, exceeded the capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces, this was the price that Poland was willing to pay for the maintenance of US engagement in European security, in particular its East-Central region, and strengthening of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty [4].

### **3. POLISH MILITARY CONTINGENTS IN US-LED MILITARY OPERATIONS – ROLES, STRENGTH, ORGANISATION AND TASKS**

As was noted above, Poland's support for the American politics in the international arena included the deployment of troops to the military operations that were politically and militarily led by the United States: in the Persian Gulf (1991), Haiti (1994), Bosnia

and Herzegovina (1996-2004), Kosovo (1999 onwards), Afghanistan (2002-2014) and Iraq (2003-2008).

### **3.1. Operation Desert Storm in The Persian Gulf (1991)**

Poland's contribution to a broad coalition of 38 nations formed by the United States against Iraq in Operation Desert Storm included a military contingent assigned to the Support Force in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It comprised the hospital ship *ORP Wodnik* for evacuation and treatment of wounded persons, the salvage ship *ORP Piast* for general rescue operations, and specialized medical personnel. Its total strength was 282 persons [17].

The ships were on operational duty from February 10, 1991 to April 23, 1991. During that time, they were on eight several-day combat patrols in the Persian Gulf. *ORP Wodnik* also cooperated with the US hospital ship *USNS Mercy*. The ships were called in to participate in several search and rescue operations. *ORP Piast's* crew detected a drifting mine that was detonated by a Saudi mine disposal team. Throughout their duty in the Persian Gulf, both crews experienced twelve air alerts [19]. The medical personnel flew to Saudi Arabia on January 9, 1991. They were busy working in three hospitals from the very start of Operation Desert Storm till May. They returned home in early June 1991.

### **3.2. Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti (1994)**

In response to the American request for contribution to Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti, made directly to Poland in September 1994, it was decided that the contingent would consist of 51 soldiers from the military unit GROM, which at that time operated within the Ministry of the Interior and for the duration of the operation was subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence. The GROM soldiers were accompanied by a chaplain and a few US Special Forces soldiers who were tasked to provide assistance if needed and evaluate their operations. In addition to this, four officers from the Ministry of National Defence deployed to the Headquarters of International Police Monitors.

The major task assigned to the Polish soldiers primarily consisted in close protection of important persons that were permanently or temporarily in Haiti, such as the United Nations Secretary-General, the US National Security Advisor and other prominent politicians or high-ranking officers from the United States and the Caribbean. Moreover, the soldiers would go on patrols in their area of responsibility and participate in emergency situations to protect the local population. They would also give first aid or share food with the locals.

The GROM soldiers returned to Poland on December 13, 1994. The other four officers arrived home in mid-January 1995. This was the only deployment to Haiti.

### **3.3. The implementation/stabilisation force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2004)**

The NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) was deployed in December 1995 for one year to implement the military aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which put an end to the 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. IFOR was a 60,000-strong

force with contributions from 15 NATO and 16 non-NATO countries. It was organised into three multinational divisions.

Poland deployed a battalion-sized contingent of 671 troops [17], which became part of the Nordic-Polish Brigade (NORDPOLBDE) along with battalions from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. NORDPOLBDE was one of the components of the US-led Multi-National Division (North) (MND-N). The strength of NORDPOLBDE was 4,600 men [27].

The Polish troops were assigned the following tasks [39]: monitoring the zone of separation; patrolling the area of responsibility, and overseeing and controlling its routes; manning checkpoints on the main routes leading to the zone of separation; overseeing the removal of weapons and equipment outside the agreed zone; providing support to humanitarian efforts; gathering information on minefields; cooperating with representatives of international organisations and ensuring they were protected; and overseeing demining conducted by the troops of the parties to the conflict.

After one year, in order to maintain a safe and secure environment necessary to consolidate peace in the Balkans, IFOR was replaced by the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), but its strength was reduced to approximately 35,000 troops. NORDPOLBDE would still make up MND-N along with brigades from the US, Russia and Turkey. Its strength decreased to approximately 3,000 men.

Poland continued its battalion-sized presence in Bosnia and Hercegovina, but the contingent's strength was reduced to 471 troops [17]. The tasks assigned to the battalion to a large extent stayed the same. It should also be noted that this was not the only contribution to the operation in Bosnia and Hercegovina, as another battalion was deployed to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's Strategic Reserve Forces.

SFOR's mandate was regularly prolonged, but its strength, organisation and the size of the Polish contribution would be adjusted and gradually diminished, which resulted from the improved security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the one hand, and increased engagement of troop contributing nations in other theatres of operations on the other. Eventually, on 2 December 2004 SFOR was replaced by a EU-led force, known as Operation Althea, to which Poland deployed a 300-strong contingent.

#### **3.4. The Kosovo force (1999 onwards)**

The Kosovo Force (KFOR) was established in the wake of NATO's 78-day air campaign that put an end to the Serb-Albanian conflict in Kosovo. KFOR was a NATO-led force that at the start of the operation consisted of approximately 50,000 troops, provided by NATO member countries, partner countries and other non-NATO countries, who were organised into five multinational brigades. The troops were deployed in the province (42,500 men), but also in support units in FYR Macedonia, Albania and Greece (the other 7,500 men) [20]. KFOR entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999.

Poland deployed a battalion-sized contingent of approximately 850 troops, which became part of the US-led Multi-National Brigade (East) (MNB-E). The contingent was additionally joined by a Lithuanian platoon and a Ukrainian infantry company [13]. In

July 2000, the contingent's tasks were taken over by the Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion (POLUKRBAT), which was deployed in Kosovo until the end of 2010. As of 31 December 2014, KFOR's Polish contingent was mainly formed by the 8th Koszalin Air Defence Regiment (Rotation XXXI).

The tasks assigned to the contingent included the following [18]: overseeing and if necessary enforcing the terms of the peace agreement; overseeing demilitarisation; providing support to humanitarian efforts and assisting with the return of displaced persons and refugees to Kosovo; maintaining and enforcing public order; and providing support to the local administration.

Poland's additional contribution to the operation in Kosovo was a battalion deployed to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's Strategic Reserve Forces. Its mission lasted until the end of 2002. During that time, it operated in the province twice.

With the improvement of the security situation, KFOR's structure has been adjusted and its strength gradually reduced since 2002 to approximately 4,500 troops in late 2014 [43]. Currently, Poland provides a 250-strong contingent.

### **3.5. Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF's mission In Afghanistan (2002–2014)**

Poland supported American operations in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington from their onset. The decision to contribute troops to US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was made in November 2001. The contingent of 87 troops [40] deployed to Afghanistan in March 2002. It was placed under Regional Command East (RC-East) and located at Bagram Airfield. The Polish troops mainly conducted engineering and demining tasks. In addition, Poland contributed the logistic support ship *ORP KontradmiralXaweryCzernicki*, which operated in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea to provide assistance to coalition special operation forces. Until August 2006 the strength of the Polish contingent in OEF was approximately 100-120 troops.

Polish presence in Afghanistan substantially increased after the contingent was moved from OEF to the parallel NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (Rotation I from April 2007), peaking at 2,600 troops and civilians, and additional 400 in reserve in Poland (April 2010 to October 2011).

During the first three rotations, the components making up the contingent were dispersed and operated under four different regional commands, usually as part of American divisions. In October 2008, the contingent was reorganised and consolidated, taking over the responsibility for Ghazni Province. Its core was Task Force White Eagle, equivalent to a brigade-sized battle group.

The tasks assigned to the Polish troops included the following [16]: protection of the Kabul-Kandahar road; conduct of stabilisation operations in order to provide security and public order in the area of responsibility; demining and removal of war damage; protection of key infrastructure, cultural sites, and weapons and ammunition caches; assistance in the establishment and functioning of local authorities and administration; support for the process of building and training of the Afghan national army and po-



lice; provision of development projects to the local population through the Polish-American Provincial Reconstruction Team; and provision of humanitarian assistance to the local population.

It should also be noted that from 1 April to 1 October 2009 Kabul Afghanistan International Airport was managed by Polish military personnel.

The Polish troops exercised responsibility for security in Ghazni until 9 May 2013, when the province was officially handed over to Afghans. The operations of the contingent in Ghazni finished on 4 May 2014. The last, fifteenth rotation was stationed at Bagram Airfield. In total, in the years of 2002-2014 Poland deployed more than 28,000 military and civilian personnel, including approximately 1,300 to OEF and 27,100 to ISAF.

### **3.6. Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003–2008)**

Poland was among only four countries that deployed troops to the combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), despite much opposition and controversy it had been raising internationally. Then it made substantial contributions to the process of the stabilisation and reconstruction of Iraq, on 3 September 2003 assuming responsibility for one of the four zones and command of Multinational Division Central-South (MNDC-S). During the first rotation, the Division comprised approximately 8,500 military and civilian personnel from 24 countries, including 2,400 Poles [25].

The major task assigned to MNDC-S was to conduct stabilisation operations to create conditions for the transfer of responsibility for the country to its authorities, and then to withdraw the forces under its command. The detailed tasks included [15]: provision of security and public order in the area of responsibility; removal of hazardous materials and war damage; protection of key infrastructure, and weapons and ammunition caches; assistance in the establishment and functioning of local authorities and administration; support for the process of building and training of Iraqi security forces; provision of humanitarian assistance.

Apart from the strategic objectives, the Polish contingent was assigned additional national goals and tasks, such as [2]: strengthening of Poland's image as a member of the international community and a NATO country actively engaging in multinational efforts to combat terrorism, provide humanitarian assistance and consolidate world peace; practical confirmation of the capability of the Polish Armed Forces to operate in a multinational military environment, command a multinational task force and conduct stabilisation operations; and gaining of further experience allowing for the improvement and attainment of interoperability with the armed forces of NATO and non-NATO countries.

MNDC-S was deployed in Iraq until October 2008. During that time its mission and tasks were adjusted. Major modifications were also made to its area of operations, composition and organisation. The Division's strength suffered its first major weakening blow when the Spanish contingent was withdrawn in 2004. During its last rotation, the Division comprised merely 1,200 troops from 10 countries. As regards the Polish contingent, its strength decreased from 2,600 to 900 [11].

In total, over the period of five years Poland deployed over 15,000 military and civilian personnel to Iraq. After 2008, Polish presence there was limited to only several soldiers making up a Military Advisory Liaison Team (MALT) as part of the NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I), which came to an end in December 2011.

#### **4. THE OUTCOMES OF POLISH PRESENCE IN US-LED MILITARY OPERATIONS**

##### **4.1. Political goals**

The fact that soon after restoring its sovereignty Poland joined international efforts to strengthen world peace and security and dispatched contingents of troops to the operations in the Persian Gulf and Haiti had little military significance, but was meaningful from the political perspective, in particular given Poland's security policy goals and its ambitions to emerge as independent in international relations. Poland was in a position to demonstrate that after the fall of the Iron Curtain its foreign and security policy had taken a pro-Western direction, that it was a committed partner for democratic countries and the leader of transformation in the region capable of making autonomous decisions, and that its interests were concurrent with the ones of other actors in international relations. Of equal significance was the opportunity to tighten relations with the United States. For instance, the deployment to Operation Desert Storm was said to have been Poland's first step towards integration with NATO [3] and participation in Operation Uphold Democracy coincided with Poland's intensive attempts to secure membership of the Alliance. Interestingly, a marked shift in the American stance regarding enlargement of NATO occurred in autumn 1994, when Washington decided to accelerate this process [12].

Troop contributions to I/SFOR, the first ever opportunity to engage in a NATO-led operation, in which the key political and military role was played by the US, opened a new chapter in the history of Poland's activity in the international arena. Given determined efforts to join the Alliance, Polish presence in those operations carried considerable weight. It underscored the government's willingness to pursue the strategic security policy goal, which was further corroborated by the promptness with which the decision to contribute troops was made. This sent a clear signal that Poland would be a steadfast ally, actively supporting NATO's operations. At the same time it reinforced Poland's image as a member of the democratic community that was a security provider, not only a security consumer. In view of the American role in the peace process in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Polish military presence in the Balkans additionally strengthened bilateral relations with the United States.

That Poland would honour its commitments as an ally was proven by agreement to deploy troops to KFOR's operation in Kosovo, which commenced immediately after enlargement of NATO. The decision made by Poland met with approval of NATO's leadership and other member states, particularly the United States. Poland effectively used this opportunity to build its credibility as a NATO member state. It also testified that Poland was politically well-prepared for membership [37]. Joining the position of the United States and NATO had a positive impact on Poland's integration with the Euro-Atlantic security structures [18].

Troop contributions to the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq had much further-reaching political effects than in the case of the operations discussed above, if only because of their size. Active support for the US-led anti-terrorism coalition was another opportunity for Poland to establish reputation as a staunch ally. In this context two decisions can be regarded as particularly in Poland's interest: 1) to augment the contingent and subsequently consolidate it in Ghazni, and 2) to stay in the ISAF operation until its conclusion by NATO in 2014, which was additionally indicative of political maturity and credibility. Presence in the Afghan operation consequently became a significant political instrument for pursuing Poland's agenda in NATO, giving reasonable grounds for formulating expectations towards the Allies related to the issues important for Poland, which undoubtedly included restoring the credibility of Article 5 guarantees and strengthening security on NATO's eastern flank.

It can be claimed on that account that presence in Afghanistan contributed to the favourable perception of Poland by the United States and the maintenance of its commitment to Poland's security. Washington played a leading role in mobilising the support of the Allies for increasing the presence of NATO troops on the eastern flank and initiating the process of the adaptation of the Alliance to military threats from the East.

Regarding OIF, the decision to deploy troops to Iraq can presumably be said to be the most debatable one in Poland's foreign and security policy after the Cold War, if only because of the doubts as to the legality of the operation, failure to provide credible evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and the desire to strengthen a partnership between Poland and the United States. As a result, there is no unanimity in the assessments of the Polish presence and role in OIF. Some consider it a success story that enhanced Poland's international position, empowered it in international relations, proved its independence, and, what is more, demonstrated that it was capable of such enormous effort and had a capacity to coordinate military cooperation of a large group of countries [21]. It was thought that in Iraq Poland emerged as a strategic entity [2] and a predictable partner cooperating with other countries in support of global security that, unlike others, did not shy away from its commitments. Critics, on the other hand, pointed out that presence in Iraq was a strategic miscalculation and a manifestation of clientelism towards the United States [22]. They maintained that Poland's international position weakened after it had so unequivocally allied itself with the US and got into a dispute with France and Germany [26].

Notwithstanding the above, it is undeniable that Poland failed to establish such a strategic partnership with the United States that at least would give it greater empowerment in bilateral relations. Moreover, Polish presence in Iraq did not lead to Poland's stronger position in European politics, nor did it elevate it to the status of a regional power.

It should also be noted that by prioritising operations led by the US and NATO, which also placed a considerable strain on the defence budget, Poland would gradually withdraw from UN peacekeeping, terminating its long-lasting presence in Syria and Lebanon in 2009. This has indubitably had an adverse effect on Poland's image as a contributor to global peace and security.

## 4.2. Military goals

Every troop deployment to the operations discussed above would pose a major challenge to the Polish Armed Forces, from the mentality of servicemen to training and organisation to weapons and equipment; it did, nevertheless, substantially benefit them in a number of ways. First and foremost, it presented an opportunity to gain practical and unique operational, logistic and organisational experience, and verify the level of training, qualifications and skills. For instance, for the GROM soldiers the operation in Haiti was their first operational engagement and the experience gained there contributed to increasing the unit's combat effectiveness, as a result of which it was in a position to successfully operate during subsequent missions. For this reason and because of Poland's efforts to join NATO, of particular significance were the operations of IFOR and SFOR. Presence in Bosnia and Hercegovina created conditions for cooperation with NATO troops at the operational level, improvement of interoperability, synchronisation of Polish and NATO units, familiarisation with the Alliance's military culture and its procedures related to the organisation, planning and conduct of military operations. This was subsequently implemented during preparations for other peace support operations and throughout the Polish Armed Forces. It helped to achieve compatibility between the elements of Poland's defence system and NATO's systems, and to improve interoperability with the military structures of the Alliance. The process initiated in Bosnia and Hercegovina was continued in KFOR's operation, the first one to which Poland contributed troops as a NATO member state.

The deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, because of the size and role of the contingents, were a quantum leap for the Polish Armed Forces. True, their political outcomes may be uncertain, but there is no gainsaying that Poland's long-running presence in those operations had an enormous and positive impact on the Polish Army. The realities encountered in Afghanistan and Iraq provided a stimulus to and accelerated the transformation of the Polish Armed Forces in terms of armament, equipment, assets, capabilities, organisation, procedures, training and personnel, thus increasing their overall combat effectiveness [5,10,14,23,24,28,29,30]. The suitability of existing and newly purchased weapons and equipment, the usefulness of procedures and their compatibility with the ones of other troop contributing countries as well as the soldiers' level of training were verified under operational conditions. Moreover, plenty of valuable experience was gained, for instance on effective military cooperation and command in a multinational environment, on cooperation in non-military (non-kinetic) operations with international and non-governmental organisations in the area of responsibility, and on conduct of operations in distant theatres. Furthermore, troop contributions to OIF and ISAF prompted the establishment of some dedicated command elements, such as the Armed Forces Operational Command, the Inspectorate of Armed Forces Support and the Inspectorate of Military Medical Service. A real asset to the Polish Armed Forces is the more than 28,000 personnel that served in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. It would not be possible for them to gain this kind of experience in field training.

Given the present and anticipated state of international security, the experience and capabilities acquired by the Polish troops in Afghanistan and Iraq may be central to their ability to counter military threats in different parts of the world. What is more, their presence in those operations has also contributed to the overall quality of the Polish Armed Forces, thus enhancing their defence capabilities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the tasks carried out by the Polish military contingents appertained to combating asymmetric enemy, in geographical conditions that are unlike those of Central Europe. Hence the question is now how to maintain and effectively employ the new capabilities, and to what extent some of the armament and equipment purchased for the contingents in Afghanistan and Iraq is suitable for national defence purposes. Another issue is that although troop contributions to OEF, OIF and ISAF spurred modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces, they also halted some defence acquisition programmes that were essential for the autonomous capabilities of the Polish military<sup>1</sup>. It may be argued that Poland's armed forces became overly oriented at developing expeditionary capabilities at the expense of those necessary for national defence.

## CONCLUSION

As was demonstrated above, the deployment of troops to military operations abroad constitutes a significant instrument that helps to provide a safe and secure environment in which Poland can pursue its national interests and strategic goals. Active involvement in global efforts to support peace contributes to Poland's established reputation as a responsibility-sharing partner. In addition, foreign deployments have a beneficial effect on the Polish Armed Forces, thus strengthening the state's defence capabilities.

Since the end of the Cold War, Poland has sought to establish special relations with the United States, the reason being that it was assumed that the attainment of security policy goals would not be possible without American advocacy and involvement. In consequence, in return Poland was willing to support the US in its international efforts, one manifestation of which was troop contribution to the US-led military operations in the Persian Gulf, Haiti, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

It has been found that, on the whole, Polish presence in those operations contributed to the attainment of goals associated with them. Politically, it lent credence to Poland's security policy, allowed for the development of political and military cooperation with the United States, which advanced Poland's security interests, and ultimately contributed to membership of the Alliance. As well as this, it is believed that it helped to assert Poland's international position and its image as a committed ally: Poland promptly responded to the requests to contribute contingents and expressed unequivocal support for the operations; furthermore, Polish troops demonstrated dedication to fulfilling their mission and carried out the assigned tasks to the best of their

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples include terminating the acquisition of lightweight patrol vehicles (instead American MRAPs withdrawn from Afghanistan were accepted free of charge) or the acquisition of new helicopters (instead only some Mi-17/Mi-8 transport helicopters were purchased for the time being).

ability. In the 21st century, however, Poland's security policy exhibited considerable dependence on the US politics, in particular in the context of OIF. And this is where not all political goals were attained, although another issue is to what extent they were realistic. What is more, it can hardly be argued that the Polish troops left Iraq and Afghanistan safe and secure. Nevertheless, Polish presence there certified that Poland was a responsible member of the international community. It can be claimed that it constitutes a significant achievement in Poland's security policy that may be drawn on in relations with the US and other NATO allies. It is regrettable, though, that Poland resolved to terminate its long-established presence in UN operations.

In the military sphere, the influence of the deployment to those operations on the Polish Armed Forces was substantial and positive, thus enhancing Poland's defence capabilities. Given the size of the contingents and their roles, the most significant ones in this respect were contributions to OIF and ISAF.

To conclude, the period of nearly 25 years since the collapse of communism has been an excessively busy time for the Polish Armed Forces in terms of their involvement in various global efforts in support of peace and security, in close cooperation with the United States. It appears that long-lasting presence in international operations has strengthened Poland's image as a steadfast and efficient partner, now perceived as an experienced and reputable security provider. It is the author's considered opinion that for this reason alone Poland should continue to deploy troops to military operations abroad; decisions in this respect, however, must be based on solid grounds and be inextricably linked to well-defined national interests and security goals. It transpires that it is ill-advised to tie security policy goals too tightly with one country, even if it is a superpower.

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