

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

THE UKRAINE CRISIS AND THE V4'S DEFENCE AND MILITARY ADAPTATION. AN ACADEMIC INTERVIEW

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In August 2015, I was approached by the Prague Security Studies Institute, to share my scholarly and practitioner's perspective on the impact the war in Ukraine has had on Polish defence, and Poland's expectations concerning military cooperation within the so called Visegrad Group nations (V-4: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary). It has been part of a broader international scholarly research project conducted by the Institute. Beyond the *net value* of the project itself, all issues raised in the questionnaire, I consider relevant for understanding the situation regarding the region's defence following Russian aggression in the Ukraine. They are also useful in the academic field for sharing some hard data and analysis regarding Poland, and V-4 defence.

The questions (see: below) I'm attempting to respond to bring-up issues frequently asked in current academic research conducted in the field of security studies, as well as by many think-tank analysts. By a long way, the responses do not offer any final and once-and-for-all exhaustive explanation of national decision-making concerning defence policies, resource allocations, and international defence co-operation in the face of the situation in the Ukraine. It is not the main purpose of any academic interview, considered as a valuable, yet imperfect research tool. However, they contribute to

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the general understanding of the problem and present an orderly attempt to collect, systemise, and analyse relevant information. In this context, the Polish perspective might be particularly interesting, given the relative “weight” of this state in regional co-operation, the size of its defence budget (well exceeding the aggregate spending of the rest of the V-4 partners), and its threat perception.

That is how I see the usefulness of the material presented below. For the sake of this publication, I took the liberty of using the questionnaire sent by the Prague Security Studies Institute, and then formulated my responses. However, I feel solely responsible for the entire text below.

1. Has the political leadership of the country reassessed its security environment? Have the threat perceptions of the political leadership changed? Is Russia perceived as a direct or indirect threat to the respective country or its allies?

Since the end of the Cold War, Polish assessment of the security environment in Europe has been consistent, sober and did not share the illusions of any “military threat-free” Europe. The events which followed mass protests in Kiev in November 2013 gave a natural impulse to the review of the situation. Despite the quick pace in which the security situation deteriorated, and the scale and intensity of Russia’s illegal actions, the crisis confirmed the immortal *clauswitzian* logic of war and peace. The situation in Ukraine has sharpened the perception of potential risks, revalidated the necessity of proper defence, and shown the new, and in a very intensive way, the new (hybrid) faces of modern conflicts.

In general terms, in the foreseeable future, diverse military threats and challenges will continue to shape our security agenda. The security environment will be more dynamic, complex, interconnected and unstable with some unpredictability in the neighbourhood, marked by blurred borders between its internal and external, military and non-military aspects. The “new normal” will be the unpredictability of Russia’s policy, aimed at restoring its power status and protecting the domestic interests of the regime by military and other means. This constitutes a long-term challenge, not only for the East European nations, but for the entire post-Cold War security structure in Europe.

In the mid-term perspective, four main factors will de facto determine the security situation in the region: NATO, the EU, the strategic military presence

of the United States in Europe, and relations with Russia. Stability can only be ensured and strengthened through determination in reinforcing the effectiveness of key security organisations (NATO, the EU, the OSCE) and the solidarity of their members. A part of the overall response must become a consistent development of necessary defence capabilities, underpinned by political resolve and sufficient resources.

2. Have the defence and military priorities changed? Has the role of expeditionary, territorial and collective defence operations changed in the political and military thinking? What have been the messages communicated by the political leadership? Have there been any practical developments in this sense at bureaucratic and military levels?

The crisis in Ukraine has cemented our political and popular consensus on security and defence, including its financial dimension. The fixed 2% share of the annual GDP to be spent on defence became our national law. There is also quite a healthy share of modernisation expenditure (exceeding 25%) in the overall defence budget. It allows for an ambitious multi-year programme of Armed Forces development.

The defence and military priorities haven't changed dramatically, though. The priority given to the territorial and collective defence remains valid (in air defence, land forces mobility, naval modernisation, and CJ4ISR). The lessons-learned from the crisis, however, refreshed these concepts, especially as regards their "compound" dimensions.

This has been reflected in newly adopted planning documents that envisage, among other things:

- development of required national defence capabilities, interoperable within NATO and the EU;
- a robust modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces;
- contribution to NATO's readiness and ability to perform collective defence, while maintaining coherence with the EU;
- development of close cooperation with our close neighbours and building up partnerships with other states.

Those are practical lessons, sharpening processes that started earlier-on.

3. Are the main strategic documents (such as security, defence, military strategies) updated and corresponding to the changed thinking and behaviour? What does the revision process look like? What are the positions towards the new European Security Strategy and NATO Strategic Concept?

The New National Security Strategy was approved in November 2014. The final stage of work on this document overlapped with the outbreak of Ukrainian crisis. As a lasting trend in the Polish security environment, it necessarily focused a lot of attention throughout the strategy-revision process. As a result, the strategy puts more emphasis on traditional threats and challenges; it states that local and regional threats exist in Poland's neighbourhood that may impact on the country's security, directly or indirectly. It recognises that Poland is not free from forms of political pressure, which can include military arguments, especially taking into account the large concentration of military capabilities in Poland's closest vicinity. It highlights possible escalation of Russia's confrontational policy, and a need to strengthen national defence capabilities. It also stresses the need to respect international law and the principle of reciprocity as a condition for cooperation development.

The National Security Strategy provides a substantial framework for all defence planning spheres and disciplines and makes the point of reference for operational-level planning documents. All of them have been either updated, or are currently in-process.

As for the European Security Strategy, it is necessary to reflect the analysis of the crisis in Ukraine in the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy. Such a reflection should help in shaping the EU strategy as a comprehensive and valuable asset in policy-making. Its role is not to dictate any concrete policy solutions, but to offer them a sound situational awareness about current and emerging threats, a sense of priority and clarity about the existing crisis-management tool, and ways it should be developed (also bearing in mind a possible territorial defence context).

Poland also believes that the option of a revision of the NATO Strategic Concept, taking into account the new security situation, should not be ruled out *a priori*. An open question is, when should it start, and clearly it cannot be considered

any substitute for a concrete military re-adaptation with collective defence in the forefront.

4. Have there been any changes to the defence budget (either real or in declarations) in the response? What is the current and envisaged state of defence spending (absolute numbers, percentage of the GDP, composition of the expenses, input-output ratio)?

Until 2014, the level of financial expenditure for defence in Poland was guaranteed by the Act of 25th May 2001 on Reconstruction, Technical Modernisation and Financing of the Polish Armed Forces. Under this law, no less than 1.95% of GDP (of the previous year) has been allocated on defence annually. Following the defence investment pledge from Newport, in July 2015, the Parliament approved the amendment to this Act, raising the bar of defence expenditure up to 2% of GDP. The amendment also guarantees no less than 20% of defence budget for modernisation (with 20% of the modernisation budget envisaged for air and missile defence). In actual terms, these figures are higher. The current share of modernisation expenditure in our defence budget (based on 2014 data) is at a plus 26% - indeed a "healthy" figure.

Despite individual efforts by some allies, the general trend of defence spending in NATO remains negative. The political objective for the NATO Warsaw Summit should be to stop and reverse this trend, solidifying the material underpinning of collective defence. The open question is, how does the European Union take up this challenge, bearing in mind that the defence pledge has been binding for the majority of its members. At stake is not only a synergy of these two organisations' military effort, but a direct way of strengthening a direct material contribution for the European Security and Defence Policy.

5. Are there any implications for defence capabilities (either declaratory or real)? If yes, do they relate to the speed of capability development, adjustment of the related documents, defence planning and acquisition priorities?

A quick review of the main modernisation programmes has been conducted to check up: a) the accuracy and validity of the established priorities; b) options to speed up the delivery or increase the quantity of the planned equipment. The results confirmed that the main priorities - reinforcement of air and missile

defence capability, mobility, surveillance and reconnaissance capability - had been rightly identified. However, it was decided to adjust operational requirements and speed up delivery timelines with regard to some programmes. It applies *inter alia* to the following:

- medium range MD-capable air defence systems (G2G contract is being negotiated with the US);
- multipurpose helicopters (the tender is close to finalisation);
- attack helicopters and long range reconnaissance (the tenders and delivery schedules have been accelerated);
- combating maritime threats (the operational requirements have been adjusted);
- armoured warfare (additional batch of anti-tank guided missiles to be ordered).

It was also decided to acquire additional capabilities, previously not envisaged in development plans:

- JASSM missiles (contract has been signed);
- Other activities:
 - Smart Defence: a project to establish Polish Maritime Command (POLMARFOR), to support joint operations in Baltic region, has been launched;
 - NATO Force Structure: decision to reinforce Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) in Szczecin has been taken;
 - training and exercises: it was decided to extend the exercise programme (mostly with focus on livex Art. 5 scenarios);
 - establishment of Cyber Operations Centre
 - establishment of Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence (CI COE), in cooperation with Slovakia.

Adjustment of the related documents

New National Security Strategy², and subordinated sub-strategic and defence planning documents.

² See my responses to question 3.

Also, the act concerning HNS and stationing of Allied forces on Polish territory has been adjusted.

Adjustment of defence planning

a) in the national context:

- adjustment of the act on restructuring, technical modernisation and financing of the armed forces - increase of the defence budget up to 2% of GDP since 2016;
- reform of the national reserve forces;
- reinforcement of military units on Poland's eastern flank;

b) in the NATO context:

- efforts to put more emphasis on collective defence, readiness and responsiveness, high-end capabilities, requirements of MJO+ operations and contingency plans (e.g. in PG 15);
- implementation of the RAP-related activities (VJTF, NFIUs, MNC NE, pre-positioning) and the US *European Reassurance Initiative*;
- return to AGS programme.

6. How has the situation influenced country's position towards Visegrad defence cooperation? Has the relevance of the platform increased or decreased? Have the priorities for the Visegrad defence cooperation changed? What are the improvements or projects worth mentioning?

Visegrad cooperation in security and defence has played a key role for Poland for two decades and more. We appreciate regular consultations and the coordination of V4 on various issues on the NATO and EU agenda. The practical cooperation, developed over the last few years, has become more and more important. Our overall ambition was to strengthen regional cooperation, as well as to ensure synergy between the V4 and NATO and EU efforts, especially those aimed at capability development.

The war in Ukraine strongly reinforces Polish perception that V4 defence cooperation must be tightly-knit with the security developments in Europe, especially those on the Eastern flank. This has also been recognised and clearly stressed by all V4 countries on many occasions, and supported by political declarations and implementation plans.

It is the understanding of Poland that:

- special attention ought to be put on feasibility for joint V4 contribution to NATO initiatives concerning longer-term adaptation, like the VJTF, NFIUs, the Multinational Corps Northeast, development of NATO infrastructure;
- equally important remains the need to further expand practical quad-trilateral cooperation with regard to the development and acquisition of specific capabilities, with armoured vehicles and (possibly) radars being potential examples;
- the practical mil-to-mil cooperation must be continued, with the perspective of establishing the *Permanent V4 Modular Force*, based on lessons-learned from the V4 EU BG 2016. Such initiative can bring added value to the overall pool of rapid response capabilities in Europe;
- V4 Training & Exercises Strategy must be implemented, including with regard to regular V4 high visibility exercises focused on Article 5;
- further enhancement of specific capabilities for NATO remains an imperative. The most promising areas of V4 cooperation are CBRN capabilities, Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, logistic support, and training of Special Operations Forces.

These elements demonstrate that V4 cooperation offers a potential that can both expand the pool of available capabilities but also the visibility and strength of the voice of this region in other organisations. The *Action Plan*, approved by V4 defence ministers in April 2015, can bring positive impulse to these efforts. There is also a more ambitious blueprint for our V-4 defence cooperation, presented in 2014 by Poland as the *New Opening Concept*.

7. What is common and what are the differences in security/defence area among the Visegrad partners? How have the recent developments changed the V4's unity and reputation within the EU and NATO?

The most obvious common elements in security and defence are the challenges of our neighbourhood, historical background, membership in NATO and the EU, and a willingness to strengthen regional cooperation. We all need a strong and effective NATO, with Article 5 guarantees, and share similar views on the value of the transatlantic bond. We all support the development of Common Security and Defence Policy within the European Union - with no duplication, nor at the expense of NATO collective defence - as well as reinforced partnership

between NATO and the EU. We support stronger relations with Eastern partners. Our armed forces use similar armaments and military equipment - a “heritage” of the Warsaw Pact, and identify similar shortcomings and requirements. The latter, however, should be treated as an opportunity for co-operation in military modernisation and synergy-building.

What differs in the V4 countries are defence budgets, level of ambition in military capabilities build-up (followed by differences in operational requirements and modernisation priorities). There are differences in our political relations with neighbours in the East (Russian Federation, Ukraine), as well as different motives for boosting the V4 defence cooperation. Poland is oriented at projects putting military capabilities in first place, while, for other V4 partners, project-based cooperation is often the way to sustain their industries. The intensity of consultations helps in bridging perception gaps, and gives some good grounds to expect practical results.

The crisis in Ukraine revealed that the threat perception of the V4 countries can differ to some extent. While for Poland it was a “game changer”, our partners took a somewhat softer line, sending some mixed signals regarding the developments in Ukraine, and their practical consequences for their defence-related effort, bilateral, NATO, and EU-wide cooperation with Russia. However, it is crucial that, despite differences, all V4 countries have supported decisions taken both in NATO (esp. in Newport) and in the European Union (sanctions).

8. What are the country's positions and action with respect to the Readiness Action Plan (RAP)? What are the expectations for the NATO Warsaw Summit? Are there any objectives that could be better achieved through Visegrad cooperation?

The decisions of the NATO summit in Wales, especially the adoption of the *Readiness Action Plan* (RAP), provided an essential framework for the military adaptation of the Alliance in the changing security environment in and around Europe. The assurance and adaptation measures, as developed on the basis of RAP, are key in increasing NATO's readiness and responsiveness *vis-à-vis* the new security landscape.

Poland endorses and rigorously does its part in implementing NATO decisions, e.g. on:

- continuous rotational presence of allied forces in the region for training and exercises, as a manifestation of Alliance resolve and solidarity;
- enhancement of the NATO Response Force, incl. by establishment of the VJTF force;
- establishment of NFIUs;
- strengthening the MNC NE in Szczecin;
- broader maritime presence of NATO on the Baltic Sea;
- reinforcement of infrastructure and other enablers in the region;
- enhancement of NATO advance planning.

Poland has also meaningfully contributed to both conceptual discussion and practical implementation of these measures. We have *inter alia*:

- provided additional rotations of airplanes, as well as an air base for the *Baltic Air Policing*;
- contributed an armoured unit to the initial VJTF rotation and hosted its first *livex* exercise (*Noble Jump 15*);
- together with other framework nations of the Multinational Corps North-East HQ in Szczecin, embarked upon the process of strengthening readiness and capabilities of this HQ;
- established a NATO Force Integration Unit on our territory and seconded our military personnel to serve in NFIU's located elsewhere.

Bearing in mind the lasting instability and unpredictability of security conditions east- and southward, there remains a need for the Alliance to continue with the reinforcement of its readiness and responsiveness, including strengthening its military presence along NATO's Eastern flank. In the run-up to the Warsaw summit, NATO must define further steps in this process. Poland has put forward its own proposals in this regard (**as the Warsaw Strategic Adaptation Initiative**), which are currently processed by NATO International Staff.

Specific strands of action might include:

- a more systematic and complex approach to the *assurance measures* (e.g. strengthening its deterrence function, establishing a long-term plan of rotations);
- further strengthening of the NRF;
- further build-up of the allied infrastructure;
- enhancement of the NATO Force Structure and NATO Command Structure;

- more emphasis on demanding capabilities necessary in heavy-combat operations.

It is our understanding that the strategic adaptation should serve the full spectrum of NATO missions and operations, first and foremost collective defence, but not neglecting capabilities indispensable for Crisis Response Operations. NATO military missions start from collective defence and its corresponding material and military capabilities.

The V4 format has potentially an important, multifaceted role to play in this process. It can:

- serve as a platform for coordination, consultations and further promotion of practical proposals;
- stimulate development of specific capabilities;
- serve as an example of regional cooperation reinforcing NATO adaptation.

9. Could you compare the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on your country's security discourse with other security challenges, such as ISIS, instability in Libya and the Sahel region?

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has had a far greater impact on the Polish security policy debate than any other contemporary challenge, e.g. the crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. The decisive factors in this context are:

- the threat of traditional military conflict is still present in Europe;
- geographical proximity of the conflict, and its spill-over potential;
- Russia is ready and able to deploy military power in neighbouring countries, adjacent to the EU and NATO;
- NATO and the EU ability to deter/prevent such crises in the direct vicinity of their borders requires further efforts;
- the conflict in Ukraine can potentially lead to a negative development - a permanent "belt of instability" eastward from EU/NATO territory.

Thus, the Russian annexation of Crimea and military engagement in Eastern Ukraine have influenced the public sense of security in Poland. For that reason, the security situation in Eastern Europe remains, and will remain in the foreseeable future, a focal point for security policy debate in Poland.

At the same time, as a member of the EU and NATO, Poland supports international efforts aimed at tackling challenges in the southern neighbourhood of Europe. The advance of ISIS in Iraq and Syria does not only have far-reaching consequences for the Middle East, but has a direct impact on European security, including through massive migration. This factor cannot be neglected by anybody in Europe.

Our country has offered humanitarian aid to civilian populations in territories suffering from war in Iraq and Syria. Poland supports the activities of the UN and the EU, which are looking for a peaceful solution of the Libyan conflict. The scope of other forms of the practical engagement of Poland in these areas is a matter for further internal discussion.

Last, but not least, threat perceptions of NATO and the EU nations, differentiated along the “East-South” cleavage, should also be treated seriously as a potentially divisive factor. Our unity and solidarity cannot break against this challenge.

10. Any recommendations?

The crisis in Ukraine offers a potential boost to cooperation for the V4, and the one with their Eastern partners, including in security and defence reform. This is an area where V4 together can do better as a group. More reflection in this regard is required.

The deficit of capabilities remains one of the practical challenges for NATO, the EU and national planning. Reinvigorating cooperation in that particular area brings a collective V4 added value to NATO and EU efforts. Quality-based “visibility raise” of V4 is also an important political stake. It should be defined by aggregating our strengths, and not the weaknesses. The latter hardly ever produces a success.