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## **THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE CONCEPT OF A PERMANENT BASE OF THE US ARMED FORCES IN POLAND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The beginnings of the stationing of the US Armed Forces in Poland date back to the rotational deployment in April 2010 in Morąg of the Patriot missile system with its personnel. In November 2012, the 52nd Operations Group Detachment 1 (OGD) – an American detachment of several dozen soldiers operating the F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft – appeared in Łask. In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, at the NATO summits in Newport in September 2014 and in Warsaw in July 2016, President Barack Obama announced a significant strengthening of the Alliance's eastern flank. He was determined to leave on a note of strength and determination of the United States (Keller, 2017: 54). Under Operation Atlantic Resolve (ORS), funded through the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), the Americans sent further groupings of armed forces to Poland. In March 2017, Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) equipped with various types of helicopters and Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) element arrived in Powiż, and since May 2018 52 OGD 2 equipped with MQ-9 Reaper drones have been stationed in Mirosławiec. In January 2017, the United States deployed a rotational Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) with headquarters in Żagań and battalions in Bolesławiec, Skwierzyna and Świątoszów. Individual rotations are equipped with various military equipment, including M1 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles. To ensure the command of the US Army on the eastern flank, in May 2017, the Mission Command Element (MCE) was moved to Poznań. In turn, since April 2017, as part of NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), the United States has led a battalion battlegroup in Poland, equipped, among others, with Stryker armored fighting vehicles. The US has been also building an Aegis Ashore Ballistic Missile Defense facility in Redzikowo near Słupsk since May 2016. Along with the increase in the number of personnel of the US Armed Forces, the amount of American arms and military equipment deposited in Poland has been increasing.

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Although the ambitious 2018 project to locate a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in Poland was not implemented, the 2022 war in Ukraine accelerated the growth of the US rotational military presence.

The aim of the paper is to analyze and evaluate the possibility of locating a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in Poland. The considerations are conducted in the context of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The main research problem is whether after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine the chances of locating a permanent US military base in Poland increased? The hypothesis assumes that with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, a permanent US military base in Poland has become more likely. This is due to the growing importance of Central and Eastern Europe in the US European policy and the growing role of Poland as a pillar of NATO defense and deterrence. The final decision in this regard will, however, depend mainly on the approach of the American administration, which will be significantly conditioned by the dynamics of the war in Ukraine and the conditions that provide a perspective for its end. The political factor is decisive when making political decisions, including those regarding sending troops abroad. Strategic, operational, financial and technical arguments regarding the stationing of troops are mutually conditioned by the political factor.

The first section of the paper synthetically presents the formal basis for the stationing of the US Armed Forces in Poland. The second section outlines the specificity of the “Fort Trump” concept, the main arguments presented in the American expert debate on this concept, as well as the reasons for the project’s failure. In the third section, the increase in the US military presence on NATO’s eastern flank and in Poland is indicated in the context of Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine. The fourth section presents the views of selected American scientists and experts on the possibility of permanent stationing of the US Armed Forces in Poland.

Qualitative methods were used in the research. The first research method used was content analysis of text sources. It was used to analyze the content of documents that constituted the formal basis for the stationing of US Armed Forces troops in Poland. This concerned bilateral international agreements as well as high-level political declarations. Using this method, the expert debate conducted by selected key think tanks from the United States and Europe was also traced. The second qualitative method was to conduct interviews with scientists and experts in the fields of international relations and security policy from research centers in Washington D.C. and New York. The interviews were individual, non-standardized and in-depth. Pragmatism was adopted as the general theoretical perspective, which was determined by the purpose of the research, i.e. explaining a specific political phenomenon, in this case the issue of the permanent stationing of the US Armed Forces in Poland. Pragmatism allowed for reaching into the literature and conducting interviews with researchers presenting various theoretical trends. This perspective also allowed for accepting the fact that the author has access to only a certain fragment of knowledge concerning the research area. In practice, some of the works are not cited in the article, and some documents are omitted, either intentionally or in the face of the vastness of the available research material.

## **FORMAL GROUNDS FOR THE STATIONING OF THE US ARMED FORCES IN POLAND**

In Poland, there is a consensus among the biggest political parties regarding the great importance of the United States in the country's military security policy. There is also such a consensus regarding support for the stationing of the US Armed Forces on the territory of the Republic of Poland. The differences mainly lie in the extent to which Poland should be assertive in tightening military relations with the US and to what extent it should take into account the interests of Western European powers. While Law and Justice is clearly pro-American and ready to make serious concessions to the US, the Civic Platform advocates for greater pragmatism and a greater role for the European Union in Poland's security policy.

As for the United States, it is characteristic that in the 21st century, Republican administrations were more willing to cooperate in the military area with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, because they fell into various political disputes with Western European powers, mainly Germany and France. Particularly close cooperation took place between the Donald Trump's Republican administration and the Law and Justice authorities, which was significantly supported by ideological closeness and aversion to the European Union and Germany (Kuźniar, 2025). The most important agreements and declarations on the stationing of US Armed Forces in Poland were signed, while the Republicans were in power in the USA.

The foundations for military strategic cooperation between Poland and the US were laid by "the Declaration on Strategic Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Poland" of 2008 (*Declaration on Strategic...*, 2008) signed in Washington D.C. by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski and the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. It accompanied the agreement on the location of an element of the American missile defense system in Poland (*Agreement Between...*, 2008). The declaration did not take the form of a legally binding act, but it assumed the deepening of the political and military alliance, the intensification of consultations and cooperation to combat security threats, as well as the scientific and technical cooperation of military industries. In the following years, bilateral agreements were concluded creating the basis for the stationing of the US Armed Forces in Poland, including: signed at Warsaw December 2009 "the Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Poland on the Status of the Armed Forces of the United States of America in the Territory of the Republic of Poland" ("the SSA"); and effected by exchange of notes at Warsaw June and July 2015 "the Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Poland Concerning Cooperation" ("the ACC").

Along with the significant increase in the number of American soldiers in Poland, further declarations and agreements appeared. In September 2018 in Washington D.C., President Andrzej Duda and President Donald Trump signed a joint declaration on the Polish-US strategic partnership – "the Safeguarding Freedom, Building Prosperity through Poland-US Strategic Partnership" (*Safeguarding...*, 2018). The declaration is an update of the 2008 declaration and assumes deepening of strategic bilateral cooperation. Among the goals indicated in the document in the area of security, there is

a tightening of military-to-military ties and an increase in the US military presence in Poland. The states declared joint responses to contemporary threats and challenges, including Russia's aggressive actions. In June 2019 in Washington D.C., Presidents Duda and Trump signed "the Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation Regarding U.S. Force Posture in the Republic of Poland" (*Joint Declaration on Defense...*, 2019). The declaration announced an increase of 1,000 (from the then 4,500) number of American soldiers stationed in Poland. It was emphasized that the rotational presence of US forces on the territory of the Republic of Poland was to be of an "enduring presence". To support the movement, stationing and training, Poland undertook to prepare the infrastructure at its own expense, including the establishment of: area support group; Combat Training Center (CTC); and other infrastructure elements. In September 2019 in Washington D.C., the presidents signed "the Joint Declaration on Advancing Defense Cooperation" (*Joint Declaration on Advancing...*, 2019). They determined the locations of new units and infrastructure elements in Poznań, Drawsko Pomorskie, Wrocław-Strachowice, Łask, Powidz and Lubliniec.

Of particular importance is "the U.S.-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement" signed in August 2020 (*Agreement Between...*, 2020) in Warsaw between the Minister of National Defense Mariusz Błaszczak and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, which superseded "the SSA" and "the ACC". The agreement creates a detailed legal framework for Polish-American cooperation in the field of defense, including in particular the presence of a military contingent of the US Armed Forces in Poland. It regulates the legal status of US forces stationed on Polish soil, assuming that Poland is to exercise criminal jurisdiction over US soldiers in cases it deems particularly important. The agreement defines the rules of access and use by American personnel of military facilities in Poland and introduces the division of costs of stationing American troops in Poland. According to it, generally the US bears the costs of salaries, training, equipment and deployment of forces in the territory of the Republic of Poland, and Poland bears the costs of hosting these forces in the country, including: accommodation; meals; specific fuel limits; support for the storage of equipment and armaments; and the operation and protection of the infrastructure used. There are no financial details available about the agreement, but it is certainly much more expensive for Poland than Germany pays for the stationing of American troops per soldier.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Given President Trump's transactional approach, the financial factor was one of the key factors. President Trump wanted Poland to set an example that there are countries willing to pay much more for preparing the base and stationing American soldiers than Germany, who participates in these expenses to a very small extent. The German Ministry of Finance reported that during the entire second decade of the 21st century, Germany spent over EUR 1 billion on stationing American troops, of which EUR 648.5 million on expanding and maintaining infrastructure, and EUR 333.9 million on "costs supplementing defense issues," including payments of aid to former employees of the US armed forces, repairing damage caused by American soldiers, and returning American investments in military bases. Considering the number of approximately 35,000 US soldiers stationed in Germany, this was a very small amount. In 2020, for example, the US spent over USD 8 billion on maintaining military capabilities in Germany, and the German contribution amounted to only EUR 132.4 million (JR, JP, 2020). On the other hand, US allies from East Asia pay much more. In 2021, South Korea paid over USD 1 billion for the stationing of approximately 28.5 thousand American soldiers, and Japan paid USD 1.91 billion for the stationing of approximately 55 thousand soldiers (PAP, 2021).

Importantly, in the context of the possibility of increasing the number of US military personnel, the agreement assumes the admission of up to 20,000 US troops.

### THE “FORT TRUMP” CONCEPT

In May 2018, the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Poland (MON) issued “the Proposal for a U.S. Permanent Presence in Poland” (*Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland...*, 2018). The proposal included locating in Poland a permanent U.S. armored division. Poland offered USD 1.5–2 billion to establish joint military installations and provide for more flexible movement of American forces.<sup>3</sup> The Bydgoszcz–Toruń region in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship was proposed as the location of the base. The justification for the choice of the site was: the location of military units, including NATO institutions; extensive social, transport and training infrastructure; and proximity and good communication with currently stationed US units in Poland and Germany. The MON argued that the project was of great importance for increasing deterrence and defense on NATO’s eastern flank, as well as for tightening US cooperation with Poland and CEE. President Duda proposed that in honor of President Trump’s merits for the security of the region, the base be named “Fort Trump.” It can be assumed that it was a tribute to the narcissistic nature and exuberant ego of the American president (Willis, 2018).

The proposal sparked a debate in the United States on the possibility of locating a permanent military base in Poland. Most American think tanks dealing with military affairs and international security issues took part in this debate. Among them were the Atlantic Council, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Strategic Forecasting, the Federation of American Scientists; the Brookings Institution, and many other. There were also many expert opinions of other institutions, including the US Army War College. Some of the arguments were strictly political in nature, but even those of an operational, economic or technical nature were, at least to some extent, politically motivated. In these expertise, the arguments in favor of locating a permanent base included, above all: increasing security guarantees and deterrence on NATO’s eastern flank; better understanding of the operational environment by the US contingent and harmonizing it with troops from Poland and the region; reducing disproportions in NATO infrastructure between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe; better financial efficiency by avoiding the costs of continuous rotation; and higher morale of soldiers by avoiding separation from families. The main arguments in favor of maintaining the rotational stationing formula included: greater flexibility in the use of US forces on the eastern flank; higher level of combat readiness; continuous development of mobility and logistics capacities; superficial familiarization of much more American troops with the conditions in the region and the armed forces of

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<sup>3</sup> By comparison, the expansion of Camp Humphreys in South Korea, which could accommodate up to 45,000 American troops, cost USD 10.7 billion, with the Koreans paying about 93 percent of the cost. This was in addition to what the Koreans pay the Americans for stationing their troops on a 50–50 split basis (Letman, 2017).

CEE countries. Arguments against permanent stationing played a key role, including: increasing tensions in NATO-Russia relations; a likely response from Russia in the form of an increased military presence on the NATO border, including in Belarus and Kaliningrad; and no consensus in NATO. The scale of the proposal, i.e. a base for an army division, also raised great doubts. Experts pointed to the lack of an available armored division and the uncertainty as to whether Poland was ready to host permanent personnel with their families in such large numbers, primarily to provide them with the required infrastructure in terms of accommodation and training (Jureńczyk, 2021: 85–86).

The specificity of the project meant that it was highly politicized by both the USA and Poland. The American administration used the Polish proposal, including its financial aspect, to put pressure on the countries where American soldiers were stationed, mainly Germany, to increase defense spending and share in the costs of maintaining US military bases. There was no consensus within NATO on the issue of a US base in Poland. While this concept was supported by most countries of the eastern flank, the countries of Western Europe were much more skeptical about it. This resulted, among other things, from attachment to the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, which excluded the possibility of establishing large allied installations in new member states. Reluctance in Western Europe was also aroused by identifying the project with President Trump, who had political conflicts with its leaders. In turn, relations between the Law and Justice government and the authorities of Western European countries were burdened by the question of undermining the principles of democracy and the rule of law. In addition, although Poland assured that the project was not to be implemented at the expense of the American presence in Germany, looking more broadly at Polish-German relations after 2015, it was hard not to get such an impression. During the negotiations, Poland and the US were also to be unable to reach an agreement on issues such as: location of the base; level of Poland's financial participation; and legal status of U.S. troops (Plucinska, Ali, 2020). According to Cynthia Roberts, building a permanent US military base in Poland and naming it after President Trump was abstract from the beginning: "That was never realistic. It was a foolish idea. I didn't imagine most Polish serious analysts believed it [...] it was a pipe dream." (Roberts, 2022) Ultimately, the "Fort Trump" project was not implemented, and instead it was decided to gradually increase the American military presence on a rotational basis.

### **INCREASING THE US MILITARY PRESENCE ON NATO'S EASTERN FLANK AND IN POLAND DURING THE FULL-SCALE WAR IN UKRAINE**

The outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine has changed the strategic Euro-Atlantic security environment, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Koziej, 2022). President Joe Biden's administration from the Democratic Party unequivocally condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, considering it illegal and barbaric. It decided to support the attacked country and strengthen transatlantic ties within NATO, assuring its readiness to defend every inch of the alliance's territory. This was an expression

of commitment to the basic principles of international law and democratic values that are the foundation of the Western community (Jureńczyk, 2023). These actions had a broader strategic context, as democratic values and close cooperation between Western states were intended to discourage authoritarian powers from revisionist attempts. This was particularly intended to send a clear signal to China, a strategic rival of the United States, not to think about attacking Taiwan.

The buildup of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine at the turn of 2021 and 2022, as well as intensified Russian-Belarusian military exercises, significantly increased the risk of a war. Accordingly, the United States began to reinforce the military contingent stationed in Europe, including Poland (Soysal, 2022: 32). An additional 20,000 US troops were sent to Europe and in the first years of the full-scale war in Ukraine they are maintained at a level of around 100,000 troops. Additional units were sent primarily to the eastern flank of the Alliance – to Poland, the Baltic states and Romania, but also to Germany, Italy, Spain and Great Britain (Shalal, Landauro, 2022). At that time, the number of soldiers stationed in Poland was doubled, reaching 10,000 troops (U.S. Department of State, 2022). The American forces stationed in Poland are combat-ready, but mainly act as a trip wire, triggering reinforcements in the event of a Russian assault (Big-Alabo, MacAlex-Achinulo, 2022: 30–31). During the June 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, several allies, including the United States, announced plans to send additional forces to the region. Among other things, it was decided to increase the eFP Battle Groups from a battalion to a brigade size. The United States decided to establish on a permanent basis the V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post, an Army Garrison Headquarters, and a Field Support Battalion (Graham, 2022). These forces are the first permanent U.S. forces in Poland and on NATO's Eastern Flank. They are to improve American command and control capabilities, interoperability with the armies of European NATO countries, and management of prepositioned equipment. From the US perspective, increasing the military presence in Poland results from the central role it has played in supporting NATO's combat credible deterrence and defense posture (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). Poland has doubled its defense spending, which allows it to make huge purchases of modern weapons, including from American defense companies. The positive opinion of the US authorities about Poland is supported by Poland's decisive reaction to the outbreak of war in Ukraine, including the provision of armament and military equipment to the Ukrainian army and playing the role of a hub for military aid supplied from the West, mainly the US.

Before the NATO summit in Madrid, there were many voices supporting the idea of locating permanent Alliance bases on the eastern flank. Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen believed that the allies should have decided to establish bases in Baltic countries, Poland, and possibly Romania (Walla, 2022). As noted by CEPA experts: “an era of sustained confrontation with Russia – or indeed a security environment conditioned by the disorderly collapse of the Putin regime – will require NATO to rethink its long-term strategy, posture, and presence.” This would include a shift toward more robust deployments on NATO's eastern flank, including permanent bases (Polyakova, Lucas, Lo, Lamond, Speranza, 2022). As the British journalist and historian of war Max Hastings wrote: “The case certainly

seems unassailable for stationing credible NATO forces in Poland and the Baltic states permanently, to deter and if necessary resist further Russian aggression.” He added that the West could not give it up, even under pressure from Russia’s threats, including threats to use nuclear weapons (Hastings, 2022). Daniel Goure from the Lexington Institute believed that the US should have permanently deployed a full heavy armored corps in Poland, or at least an additional Army armored brigade (Goure, 2021). It would be kind of a “surge of NATO troops” to Poland, to create the ultimate tripwire that would deter Russia from making any aggressive military moves (Carpenter, 2021). An intermediate solution was proposed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley: “to create permanent bases but don’t permanently station.” This would give the effect of permanence by cycling rotational forces through these permanent bases. This would not entail the need to develop infrastructure for the families of soldiers. He also expressed his conviction that some countries of the eastern flank, including Poland, were ready to build and participate in the costs of maintaining such bases for American soldiers (Garamone, 2022). At the NATO summit in Madrid, no breakthrough decisions were made regarding the location of a permanent base with a larger tactical unit on the eastern flank of the Alliance. The United States declared that they would seek to enhance its rotational force presence in Poland (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). Also, during President Biden’s visit to Poland in February 2023, including the meeting with Bucharest 9 (B9) group, no declaration was made about the permanent stationing of US troops in the region. During the war, however, it does not seem reasonable for the United States to make decisions of this kind. This could further increase tensions in NATO-Russia relations and be used by Russia to increase its military presence in Belarus. Moreover, it could weaken the unity of the US-led anti-Russian coalition.

President Trump’s return to power in January 2025 means that Poland must consider the prospect of reduced US involvement in Europe and reduced military aid for Ukraine. The “America First” policy, the downplaying of Europe’s strategic importance in maintaining the US’s dominant position in the world, and the attempt to rebuild relations with Russia undoubtedly raise such concerns. On the other hand, Poland has for years supplemented the multilateral US security guarantees for Europe within NATO with bilateral Polish-American agreements in the area of defense (Smolar, 2025). Poland spends the most on defense in NATO in relation to GDP, i.e. over 4 percent, which makes it a model example for the American administration in this crucial issue. It is not ruled out that there will be a certain reduction in the US military contingent in Europe, which may be accompanied by their regrouping on the continent. Paradoxically, Poland may become the beneficiary of a larger number of American soldiers on its territory. This results from the role that Poland plays as an increasingly important pillar of security on NATO’s eastern flank. The election of Karol Nawrocki as president in Poland seems to favor this possibility, given his clearly pro-Trump approach. However, this will depend on many factors, including the dynamics of US-Russian relations and the course of the war in Ukraine. If President Trump realizes that he is being played by President Putin over peace in Ukraine, his policies toward Russia and Central and Eastern Europe could undergo far-reaching changes.

## **AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC AND EXPERT DISCUSSION ON THE PERMANENT STATIONING OF THE US ARMED FORCES IN POLAND**

Among American scientists and experts in the fields of security and international policy, there is no consensus as to the legitimacy of locating a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in Poland. According to James Goldgeier, even after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbass, there was a commitment in the West to the NATO-Russia founding act about not establishing permanent infrastructure in the states that came in after 1999. He believes that after the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 the founding act “is dead” and he would be surprised if there wasn’t an effort to put more permanent infrastructure in Poland and other Eastern frontline states of NATO, including Finland after its joining the Alliance. Goldgeier believes that this discussion becomes much more advanced with further crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine (Goldgeier, 2022). Also according to Steven Pifer, the war in Ukraine caused such a significant change in international circumstances that it became justified to formally renounce or withdraw from the 1997 founding act with Russia, which would remove bars on things like permanent station of a combat forces on the territory of new member states, including Poland (Pifer, 2022). Carrying out a full-scale aggression in Ukraine, the aim of which was to take away its sovereignty and, in the long term, to destroy its statehood, was a manifestation of Putin’s Russia’s contempt for the basic principles of the international community. Waging a war aimed at destroying civilian infrastructure and crushing Ukrainian society resulted in a number of crimes against the civilian population. These actions were accompanied by threats of an attack, including a nuclear attack, against NATO states that decided to support Ukraine. All of the above actions have broken the promises made in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, so NATO cannot consider the treaty to be binding (NATO, 2022). NATO member states have recognized the Founding Act as finally and completely abrogated by Moscow (Jureńczyk, 2024). Therefore, there is no formal barrier to locating a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in Poland.

Stephen Biddle believes that the US troops presence in Europe is headed up pretty much regardless of what happens in Ukraine at this point. He would not be surprised to see American brigades in Poland and in the Baltics. Whether it will be permanent or rotational stationing with a guarantee of continuous presence, he sees it more as an administrative detail that will depend on what the Pentagon thinks is more efficient. He believes that the US has not done enough to deter Russia successfully in February 2022. To not repeat this mistake it will have to be more forceful. Given the change in the perceived threat environment he thinks that US troops presence will go up, especially since in budgetary terms, the cost of deploying an American brigade in Poland or the Baltics isn’t radically higher than it is to base it in the United States (Biddle, 2022). The discussion that accompanied the concept of “Fort Trump,” regarding the effectiveness of permanent and rotational stationing on NATO’s eastern flank, will certainly be revived.

According to Richard K. Betts increased and permanent, rather than just rotating, stationing of international forces in Poland and other counties of NATO’s eastern flank

will probably appear to be the logical adjustment to the increased threat represented by the Russian attack on Ukraine. Some stationing of larger number of US troops is likely unless a peace agreement negotiated for Ukraine includes some tradeoffs that limit forward presence of NATO forces (Betts, 2022). Michael Doyle would not be surprised if permanent NATO military bases appeared in Poland or even in the Baltic states. However, he believes that a better, albeit idealistic, solution would be to limit the military presence on both sides of the border between Russia and NATO, including, for example, abandoning the anti-missile installation in Poland. This follows from the logic that the militarization of the region increases tensions and the risk of armed incidents. This, however, would require the end of the war in Ukraine and the conclusion of a peace agreement (Doyle, 2022). Such an idealistic approach in relations with Russia seems to be unfounded. The shape of the peace agreement will largely depend on the situation at the front. The United States has invested so much political capital, and to some extent also military and financial capital, in supporting Ukraine that it is hard to imagine that it would allow Russia to achieve its main political goals in the region. Russia's retention of Crimea and Donbass, as well as concessions regarding the US military presence on NATO's eastern flank, would be a victory for Russia and a defeat for the US-led West. The United States would cease to be a credible guarantor of security for Europe, which would undermine the position of the US and the entire West in the world. Such a peace would not be sustainable, because Russia counts only on the argument of force and will not voluntarily depart from the goal of destroying the Ukrainian state. It would also be a clear signal to other authoritarian states, including China, that by starting a war and breaking the basic principles of international law, political goals can be achieved. Thus, the creation of a new security architecture in the region as part of the logic of concessions to Russia seems to be repeating earlier mistakes.

In the context of locating a permanent NATO base in Poland, there was a problem of the Law and Justice government's recognition of the principles of democracy and the rule of law, whose global promoter is the United States. This issue is especially important to the Democrats, what was manifested by the Biden administration. It has been overshadowed in Polish-American relations by the war in Ukraine. Michael Miller, however, believes that this problem was not so important in the context of US tightening military cooperation with Poland. The US has a very long history of military engagements and alliances with non-democratic countries, like Saudi Arabia. There were also several non-democratic members of NATO like Portugal, Spain, Greece or Turkey. Even nuclear warheads were transferred to countries with dubious democracies like Turkey. According to him, decisions of this kind are mainly based on strategic considerations. For this reason, the question of the erosion of democracy in Poland should not influence decisions regarding the stationing of troops. It would be different if a civil war broke out in Poland, which is unlikely despite existing divisions. Miller notes that, paradoxically, democracy can be a factor that increases the uncertainty of the continuity of military cooperation, as potentially a newly elected parliament and government can oppose a permanent American military presence. In the case of Poland, the unambiguously pro-American government of the Law and Justice had been a guarantee to close military cooperation with the US (Miller, 2022).

C. Roberts believes that if NATO decides on a permanent base of NATO troops in Poland or other countries in the region, it should be European rather than American forces anyway. This is due to the fact that the strategic rival of the US is China, so the Americans must focus on stopping them in the Indo-Pacific (Roberts, 2022). According to S. Pifer, after the end of the war in Ukraine, there will be some reduction of US forces assembled in Europe at the turn of 2021 and 2022, due to the renewed focus on the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, in the overall balance, American troops in Europe are likely to remain in greater numbers than before the war. He believes that some of the troops that the US sent to NATO's eastern flank, mainly to Poland, could remain under the formula of permanent stationing (Pifer, 2022). A separate issue is the isolationist movement, both from the progressive left wing and the conservative right wing, which advocates limiting the role of the US in global politics, including in Europe. However, as James H. Lebovic notes, currently the isolationists have little support among Americans, so there is no risk of the United States abandoning Europe (Lebovic, 2022).

In Washington, some political forces believed already in the 1990s that the US, in order to maintain its hegemonic position in the world, should have focused on inhibiting the development of China's power and influence. The global war on terror, however, caused the US to concentrate on the broader Middle East, which gave China another decade of unhindered development. The "Pivot to Asia" announced by President Obama was limited, among others, by Russia's military actions in Ukraine in 2014. American political elites have no doubts that China is a strategic rival of the United States. To be able to focus on competing in the Indo-Pacific, the US needs a stable and secure Europe. Therefore, the US has been trying for years to convince its European allies to take greater responsibility for their own security. After the Russian aggression of 2022, declarations in this regard were made, but practice will show whether they will be implemented. Poland shows that it treats the issue of increasing defense spending very seriously, becoming a leader not only in the region, but throughout Europe. Poland's defence spending in 2023 and 2024 was to amount to 4.2% of GDP, which is twice as much as the minimum required by NATO. Even though the authorities were not able to spend them in full, they still make a big impression (Dmitruk, 2024). If Poland turns out to be not only financially credible, but also a competent ally, it may play an increasingly important role in the US European security policy. Along with this, the chance of transferring part of the permanent US military infrastructure from Western Europe to Poland may increase. In order not to damage NATO's cohesion, the solution could be multilateralization of the project rather than negotiate with Washington on a bilateral basis (Lanoszka, 2020: 466).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the 21st century, the United States has been the most important external guarantor of Poland's security. Therefore, the Polish authorities have been seeking a US military presence on Polish territory for years. After the outbreak of the war in Donbas in 2014, the number of American soldiers in Poland began to grow dynamically. The expectations of the Polish authorities grew even faster, which resulted in the proposal to build a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in the size of division. This ambitious

project seemed unrealistic from the beginning and was ultimately not implemented. However, this did not dampen Poland's efforts to increase the number of American troops. The full-scale aggression of Russia against Ukraine in 2022 caused the Americans to double the number of soldiers in Poland. Significant amounts of American weapons and military equipment have been transferred to Poland, which allows for the quicker appearance of larger American forces in the event of a military crisis. There has also been a revival of the debate in the US regarding the legitimacy of changing the formula for stationing troops in Poland from rotational to permanent. Although there is no unanimity on this issue, the majority of scientists and experts are in favor of permanent stationing in Poland of at least some of the troops.

Due to the war in Ukraine and the decisive reaction of Poland to the war, the focus of responsibility for Europe's military security is shifting from Western Europe to Central and Eastern Europe. If Poland convinces the United States that it can competently act as the main security pillar of NATO's eastern flank, it is possible that permanent US military installations will be built in the country. This may take place as part of the transfer of some forces from Germany. However, the American authorities have so far not decided to permanently locate a larger tactical unit in Poland. The US decision will largely depend on the possibilities and international conditions for ending the war in Ukraine, including Washington's relations with Moscow. Even if President Trump downplays the strategic importance of Europe in maintaining the US position in the world, including its strategic rivalry with China, he will still need a safe eastern flank of NATO. Considering the dynamically increasing military potential of Poland and the pro-Americanism of Polish society, Poland may become one of the key recipients of US European policy. This, in turn, could translate into the permanent stationing of US troops on the territory of the Republic of Poland.

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## ABSTRACT

The United States is the most important external guarantor of Poland's security. For this reason, the Polish authorities have been seeking the closest possible allied relations with the USA for years, including its military presence on Polish territory. The outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine confirmed that the threat from Russia still exists and that it is necessary to increase deterrence and defense on NATO's eastern flank. The aim of this article is to analyze and assess the possibility of locating a permanent base of the US Armed Forces in Poland in the context of the war in Ukraine. The hypothesis assumes that with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the chance of permanent US military stationing in Poland has increased. We are currently observing a shift in the center of gravity of European security from Western Europe to Central and Eastern Europe. Due to Poland's close relations with the US, increasing military potential,

and a decisive response to the war in Ukraine, the American authorities perceive Poland as an increasingly important pillar of European security. The prevailing view among American scientists and experts is that after the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine, the permanent stationing of US troops in Poland has become more realistic. However, such a decision will probably not be made during the war, as it could negatively affect its course. The final decision on this issue will depend largely on how the war in Ukraine ends. In addition, Poland must convince the US that it can competently bear responsibility for the security of NATO's eastern flank. As part of the research, interviews were conducted with American scientists and experts. The article also used the method of content analysis of text sources.

**Keywords:** US Armed Forces, military base, war in Ukraine, Polish-American relations, eastern flank of NATO, "Fort Trump"

## WOJNA W UKRAINIE A KONCEPCJA STAŁEJ BAZY SIŁ ZBROJNYCH USA W POLSCE

### STRESZCZENIE

Stany Zjednoczone są najważniejszym zewnętrznym gwarantem bezpieczeństwa Polski. Z tego względu polskie władze od lat zabiegają o jak najbliższe stosunki sojusznicze z USA, w tym ich obecność wojskową na terytorium Polski. Wybuch pełnoskalowej wojny w Ukrainie potwierdził, że zagrożenie ze strony Rosji nadal istnieje i konieczne jest zwiększanie odstraszania i obrony na wschodniej flance NATO. Celem artykułu jest analiza i ocena możliwości umiejscowienia w Polsce stałej bazy Sił Zbrojnych USA w kontekście wojny w Ukrainie. Hipoteza zakłada, że wraz z inwazją rosyjską na Ukrainę z 2022 roku wzrosła szansa na stałe stacjonowanie wojskowe USA w Polsce. Obecnie obserwujemy przenoszenie się punktu ciężkości bezpieczeństwa europejskiego z Europy Zachodniej do Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Ze względu na bliskie stosunki Polski z USA, wzrastający potencjał militarny i zdecydowaną odpowiedź na wojnę w Ukrainie, amerykańskie władze postrzegają Polskę jako coraz bardziej istotny filar europejskiego bezpieczeństwa. Wśród amerykańskich naukowców i ekspertów przeważa pogląd, że po wybuchu pełnoskalowej wojny w Ukrainie bardziej realne stało się stałe stacjonowanie wojsk USA w Polsce. Prawdopodobnie jednak decyzja taka nie zostanie podjęta w trakcie wojny, gdyż mogłoby to negatywnie wpłynąć na jej przebieg. Ostateczna decyzja w tej kwestii w głównej mierze zależeć będzie od sposobu zakończenia wojny w Ukrainie. Ponadto Polska musi utwierdzić USA w przekonaniu, że potrafi kompetentnie ponosić odpowiedzialność za bezpieczeństwo wschodniej flanki NATO. W ramach badań przeprowadzono wywiady z amerykańskimi naukowcami i ekspertami. W artykule skorzystano również z metody analizy treści źródeł tekstowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Siły Zbrojne USA, baza wojskowa, wojna w Ukrainie, stosunki polsko-amerykańskie, wschodnia flank NATO, „Fort Trump”

