

Rui Alexandre Correia Ribeiro

Lusofona University of Porto

e-mail: alexandrecorreiaribeiro02@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-3759-2399

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THE IMPORTANCE OF POLAND FOR NATO

Abstract

Security has been a strategic necessity to understand the geopolitics of each State, its types of behavior in the face of contemporary challenges are due to its culture, historical influence, and objectives around protecting its territory. In promoting the guarantee of security, certain countries adopt alliances in their foreign policies, which can certainly play an essential role concerning a firm international position. All countries need a good ally to increase their defensive capacity against the external enemy. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the end of the Cold War, there was a change regarding the world order with a series of expansions of alliances, Poland, in 1999, was an affirmative country in international matters regarding defense and decided to join NATO. Being that its primary objective would be its protection given the historical factor of a possible military threat from Russia after decades of Soviet domination and influence, especially from the political point of view to bring political stability with commitments before a collective defense organization, being, therefore, an essential step in the matter in which the entry of the Polish State thus assumes a common goal and integration with Western Europe in terms of economics, politics and fundamentally security.

Key words

collective security, international politics, world order, situational awareness

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, Huntington stated that the international society affirmed that world conflicts would be between civilizations, an increasingly structuring factor in international relations¹. As such, we have evidenced this in our day with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, alerting us to a more significant concern of European states, especially the Baltic countries on the border. As such, Poland has been duly concerned about current Russian action, therefore, to ensure the strengthening of its internal security. On July 4, 2022, the Polish government presented an Army expansion program that included doubling the number of personnel, increasing defense spending in GDP, and modernizing equipment, with the purchase of tanks and military aircraft. The President of the Polish Government Party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, stressed the importance of defending the border, specifically in the Russian case.

A combination of factors determines the importance of this country for the North Atlantic Treaty. We are dealing with significant behavior in promoting security to defend its sovereignty and political interests. This type of military investment promoted by Poland is vital in European defense within NATO².

Poland has already been a critical member of NATO since its entry in 1999, which in a way, has contributed to Poland's assertion in the Baltic region

as a strategic geographical corridor in security in Central and Eastern Europe³. Since joining NATO, it has been evident the Polish effort to assert itself within the organization both militarily and diplomatically, in the operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, in addition to supporting the modernization and transformation of NATO to face the main security challenges in the twenty-first century, such as again the rise of the Russian question. According to the perspective of Russian foreign policy, it sees the entry of Eastern European countries into NATO as a territorial threat. These are one of the arguments that led to the invasion of Ukraine to counter the Ukrainian rapprochement with the Western powers and maintain its zone of influence on European territory. In addition, the expansion of the East allowed a Westernization of countries such as Poland, which after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which freed itself from communism only a decade earlier, entry into NATO was seen as a guarantee of security against Russia, through historical factors, thus leaving the Russians increasingly isolated, determined to take a position against the expansionism of Western influence on their nearby territory⁴.

To clarify, introducing in a way the Polish importance in the North Atlantic Treaty, if we look at it from the perspective of the geopolitical landscape, NATO can quickly deploy through Polish

1 S. P. Huntington, *O Choque das Civilizações e a Mudança na Ordem Mundial*, Gradiva, Lizbona 1999.

2 N. Prudêncio, *Retrieved from Como a Polónia se tornou na nova protagonista da NATO*, Euronews 2023, source: <https://pt.euronews.com/2023/02/20/como-a-polonia-se-tornou-na-nova-protagonista-da-nato> (access: 22.04.2023 r.).

3 A. Tavares, W. Kolano, *The role of Poland in ensuring European Security*, „Security Forum” 2022, vol. 6, p. 25-26.

4 Source: <https://observador.pt/2022/07/04/polonia-prepara-se-para-uma-invasao-russa-ereforca-exercito-com-15-000-soldados/> (access: 10.02.2023 r.).

territory, it can quickly deploy forces in other parts of Europe, being under threat, particularly in defense of the Baltic countries, which border Russia and are considered vulnerable due to their demographic aspect, military and territorial⁵.

Methodological and methodical assumptions

This article constitutes an analysis and was created based on content analysis method and qualitative statistical data analysis. The article's purpose is to characterize the importance of Poland in various aspects of the military alliance, its role in regional and global security being an indispensable member of NATO.

Strategic location

When we look at the panorama of the history of NATO, we notice that the entry of Poland in 1999 demonstrates, in conjunction with the Czech Republic and Hungary to be a feature of NATO's geostrategy extending outside its zone to encompass countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact. Since its strategic location is in Central and Eastern Europe, its location is fundamental to the security of the region and Europe. This presents a new strategic concept, with the enlargement of Eastern Europe around its former enemy Russia, preserving the importance of collective defense.

The Polish-American negotiation that preceded in August 2008 provided an agreement on the location of elements

of the anti-missile shield in Poland and demonstrated another distinctive feature of the behavior of the Polish alliance, the Polish territory, due to its size, population, and history, aspires to be a "half-brother" that can articulate and defend its national interests within the alliance. It seeks to express its vision for the alliance. It expects its voice to be heard and considered, especially in those aspects of alliance politics that are directly relevant to the alliance⁶. From a geographical perspective, Poland presents an important land corridor of military transport towards Eastern Europe; a practical example is the U.S. inaugurating a permanent military base in Poland on March 21, 2023; this underwrites the idea of the strategic importance of this country, this base will coordinate support to U.S. forces deployed in Poland together on the eastern flank of NATO. Therefore, with the military presence of NATO in Europe, with Polish help, it is a promoter of stability among the member countries and security, with various military programs and exercises to reach a level of affirmation to the Russian enemy.

Contributions to NATO (Military Importance)

In the military aspect, Poland plays a vital role in NATO with about 120,000 troops; its military capacity includes land, air, and naval forces. Its military contributions to the alliance's operations worldwide affirm its significant contributions to this organization. Since

5 A. Tavares, W. Kolano, *The role of Poland in ensuring...*, p.27.

6 W. Rodkiewicz, *Poland as an Ally*. In M. Wesley, *Global allies: comparing US alliances in the 21st century*, ANU Press, Australia, 2017, p. 133-139.

its accession in 1999, Poland has participated in several NATO missions⁷.

They participated in military missions such as in Afghanistan and Ghana. According to the Polish government, on June 30, 2021, states that 33000 soldiers and staff of the Minister of National Defense participated in this mission, in addition to also providing logistical support, training, and equipment to the Afghan forces. The Polish participation in this region was due to one of the objectives imposed by NATO in combating terrorism after the consequent attack on the World Trade Center in 2001⁸.

The military campaign against Iraq was conducted by a coalition of member countries, including some members of NATO, with the support of Poland; more than 15,000 Polish military personnel participated in Iraq; in addition, it was created within the framework of the international stabilization force in Iraq. On May 21, 2003, the North Atlantic Council agreed to accede to the Polish request and, on June 2, decided to assist Poland through a series of support mechanisms, including advice on force generation, the Polish command of the Multinational Division in South Central Iraq was an individual contribution from allied and partner countries⁹.

The mission in Kosovo has been of due importance since 1999, intending to

maintain peace in the Balkan region. It aims to demonstrate the importance of Polish military cooperation in the various territorial foci. Poland's cooperation in that territory characterizes a relationship of compromise around the various NATO missions, as the commander of the Polish armed forces in Kosovo, Maciej Bankowski, states, "Our cooperation has even been evident throughout more recent decades"¹⁰.

Investment in defense According to the NATO summit in 2014, Poland has also invested in modernizing its armed forces by acquiring new equipment. According to data from the International Trade Administration, Poland is already spending 2.2% of its GDP on defense and has been planning further increases. In May 2020, Poland's national security strategy put forward the target of military spending, reaching 2.5% of GDP by 2024 from 2030. This is on track with Poland's 2022 budget of more than \$14 billion, compared to \$10 billion in 2014. In May 2022, the Minister of Defense signed an agreement with the President of the BGK Bank of Poland on the operation of the "Armed Forces Support Fund." The fund presents novel solutions and regulations for financing the Polish Armed Forces. The purpose of creating this new fund is to significantly increase expenditure on the modernization of

7 A. Correia, *Breves reflexões sobre um eventual alargamento da NATO*, EuroDefense-Portugal 2019, source: <https://eurodefense.pt/a-nato-num-mundoem-mudanca-breves-reflexoes-sobre-um-eventual-alargamento-da-nato/> (access: 22.04.2023 r.).

8 H. Kissinger, *A Ordem Mundial*, Dom Quixote, Alfragide 2014.

9 F. Schimmelfennig, *NATO's Enlargement to the East: An Analysis of Collective Decision-making*, 2020, source: retrieved from North Atlantic Treaty Organization: <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/schimmelfennig.pdf>. (access: 22.04.2023 r.).

10 S. Ruiz, *Historic Polish, U.S. partnership continues in Kosovo*, Retrieved from U.S. Army, 2020, source: https://www.army.mil/article/238165/historic_polish_u_s_partnership_continues_in_Kosovo (access: 22.04.2023 r.).

the Armed Forces. It is linked to the law on “National Defense,” which regulates and defines general matters related to national defense¹¹.

In conclusion, Poland has recently invested significantly in modernizing its military capabilities, including acquiring new fighters, armored vehicles, and air defense systems. These investments have significantly contributed to strengthening NATO’s ability to defend itself against threats and increased cooperation with partner countries, including Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, all countries of the former Soviet bloc.

Poland’s importance as a NATO ally vis-à-vis Russia

Poland’s relationship with Russia has been an essential issue for NATO, first of all in the issue in which states defend their interests in an international context and define a foreign policy according to their borders and, above all, the behavior of their neighboring countries, as such Russia adopts a behavior in which it does not fit the values of the Polish State due to civilizational reasons and also due to historical relations. First, if we look at it historically, the two countries have a history of conflicts and tensions. During World War II, Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany and by the Soviet Union. After the world conflict and during the Cold War, Poland was a satellite state of the Soviets and maintained a

strong influence over Polish politics and economy¹². After the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991, relations between the two countries improved in the nineties. However, with Russia’s invasion of Crimea in 2014 plus the Ukrainian conflict in February 2022, the relationship has increasingly been based on mistrust, given that they share borders with Ukrainian territory.

In the aspect of geopolitics, Poland, bordering Russia, means that there is a game of interest on the part of NATO in continuing its eastward expansion, recognizing its vulnerabilities both to the Baltic region and the rest of the Western world. Thus, in approaching to increase the security of its borders, even though they remain exposed adequately to its enemy, it sought to implement in the Baltic region Poland as a significant stabilizing element of Central and Eastern Europe, such as Germany, France, and an alliance with the USA¹³.

With the fact that Poland belongs to NATO, thus subjecting itself to a rapprochement with Western Europe, causing a political transition that seeks to associate itself with European concepts and values. Therefore, Russia, which departs from the Western concept, historically demonstrates a Polish break with the Soviet past.

Since Poland entered NATO in 1999, it has been an active advocate of strengthening NATO’s military presence in the Eastern European region, especially after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.

11 F. Melfenning, *NATO’s Enlargement to the East: An Analysis of Collective Decision-making*, 2020, source: retrieved from North Atlantic Treaty Organization: <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/schimmelfennig.pdf>. (access: 22.04.2023 r.).

12 See: R. Kupiecki, *Poland and Nato after the cold war*, Warszawa 2019.

13 See: I. T. Lapa, *anexação da Crimeia na perspectiva polaca: quais os impactos para a Polónia e para a sua política externa*, Retrieved from Repositório – Universidade Nova, Lizbona 2020.

Polish foreign policy has always been attentive to developments involving Ukraine; Russia has always sought to foster Kiev's rapprochement with Western institutions to prevent Ukraine from being dominated by Russian influence. To avoid a Ukrainian rapprochement with the Western sphere, the Kremlin decided to adopt drastic measures by invading Crimea, which led to a warning from the Poles of danger regarding their geopolitical interest in the resurgence of Russian imperialism¹⁴.

In addition to defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine and denouncing Russian intervention in the conflict, the Polish government has seriously condemned the annexation of the territory by Russia, considering it a violation of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty, in addition to the Polish discourse since then has been of severe reproach against Russian measures around Ukraine, calling on the European Union and NATO to take firm action against Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea, including economic sanctions and military actions to strengthen defense in the region. Moreover, Poland, by offering humanitarian financial support to Ukraine both after the annexation of Crimea and in the invasion of the territory in 2022, stands against Russia, promoting the idea that Poland definitively distances itself from Russia in diplomatic character, which leads to a link around a common enemy on the part of the West where Poland belongs against the Kremlin.

If we look at it from a strategic perspective, Poland being exposed to Russia and the fact that it does not have a favorable relationship with its neighboring country determines for NATO and Poland a military guarantee to protect its territories from the military pressure of the Russian Federation. Therefore, particular importance is attached to developing transatlantic military ties and bilateral agreements around a common enemy, significantly when geopolitical and security issues influence current relations in Eastern Europe¹⁵.

Summary

We note that nowadays, the policy of alliances between states is a fundamental element in constructing a cohesive security capable of facing a common enemy, the expansion of NATO to the East in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and especially Poland to contain Russian influence.

What we have seen throughout the Essay is the crucial importance that Poland presents to NATO in the military question and geopolitics. Its geographical position makes it an essential point for the defense of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states; that is, it turns out to be a committed and dependable partner for NATO to guarantee the alliance's collective security.

In addition, its military commitments actively contribute to the alliance through its participation in NATO security operations, its increase in its

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ See: B. Mandu, *As relações entre a Polónia-Rússia a partir do ingresso polonês na União Europeia*, Baje, RS, Universidade Federal do Pampa, Brasília 2023.

defense budget, and support for collective defense initiatives call for the detail that Poland is an essential piece in an international “political chess” that increasingly weighs on the security of its neighboring states. The Washington and Warsaw relationship, based on mutual interests at the military level, has been an increasingly cooperative position on the issue of security, where the Americans seek to increase the military presence on European territory by responding with the sending of additional troops and installation of military weaponry on Polish territory, in this way promoting Western security and democratic values in Eastern Europe as well as motivating a United Europe given the last events on European soil in the Eastern region of Ukraine.

In conclusion, Poland is a crucial member of NATO and an essential partner in the various projects of the organization in order to ensure positive effects on the security of European states, such as the protection of the Baltic corridor in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus, which are critical areas for the security of Europe, important to highlight the Russian rise as a border member in its growing Russian military activity is a significant challenge for Poland that each it has worked to protect its national interests at all times.

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About the Author

Rui Alexandre Correia Ribeiro, student at the Lusófona University. The representative of the International Scientific Society for Security “Save the Word” in Portugal. Representative of the Lusófona University during the VI edition of the International Geopolitical Olympiad in 2023.