

My essay "Shifting Tides: Analyzing How the Ukraine War Shapes Poland's Position and Policies in the Evolving Landscape of European Defense and Security" was included in my portfolio because it documents a pivotal point in European and international security policy, one that is still being played out today. The war in Ukraine is still a horrific and ongoing battle that impacts not only Ukrainians but also nearby countries like Poland and the international community at large, even though it may not be making headlines as much as it did at first. Since the current administration has already issued executive orders with worldwide repercussions, I believe this piece is significant because it emphasizes the importance of continuous involvement, support, and preparedness. In addition to providing a thorough analysis of a current geopolitical topic, this essay serves as an example of how academic research can shed light on the connections between global conflicts, alliances, and long-term policy decisions. It demonstrates my dedication to comprehending intricate security issues and promoting more robust, collaborative solutions that place regional resilience and international stability first.

Shifting Tides: Analyzing How the Ukraine War Shapes Poland's Position and Policies in the Evolving Landscape of European Defense and Security

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The European Union's Shift Towards a Stronger Defense Dimension

Despite its wealth, size, and technological advances, Europe remains militarily dependent on the United States for its security. There needs to be a reevaluation given the ongoing war in Europe, the growing threat posed by superpowers in the Indo-Pacific, and the United States developing ambivalence concerning NATO and transatlantic relations. On the one hand, Europe was taken aback by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which highlighted the need for security and defense. States in Europe have committed to increasing their defense budgets significantly. NATO's primary goals of deterring Russia and getting ready for conventional combat have been sharpened by the conflict. The European Union has developed into a significant player in the defense industry, helping to secure Ukraine, educating its armed forces, and financing the expansion of ammunition manufacturing. Europe is today more concerned with its security than it has been since the end of the Cold War. Therefore, the continent may be about to undergo a period of profound change, with European nations starting a period of significant defense expenditure. NATO will likely be strengthened by the stronger and more effective militaries in Europe by 2030 (Bergmann & Svendsen, 2023).

On March 21, 2022, the Strategic Compass was formally approved by the Council. By 2030, the European Union will have a more robust security and defense strategy thanks to the ambitious action plan provided by the Compass. The Compass covers all aspects of the security and defense policy. It includes establishing rapid deployment of troops whenever a crisis erupts, enhancing military mobility, reinforcing the EU's civilian and military CSDP missions and operations, making full use of the European Peace Facility (EPF), boosting its intelligence analysis capacities, discussing national goals for bettering and increasing defense spending to meet the security needs, boost defense innovation and decrease technological and industrial

dependencies, and strengthen cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO (European Council, 2022).

In addition, the European Parliament approved on September 12, 2023, the European Defense Industry through the Joint Procurement Act (EDIRPA), which is a €300 million fund that intends to assist EU nations in meeting their immediate defense needs due to the transfer of military aid to Ukraine. EDIRPA works alongside the European Defense Fund (EDF) and the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) to prevent fragmentation of armaments. Furthermore, ASAP will make it easier for the EU to increase its missile and ammunition production capacity, enabling the European defense sector to support the member States and Ukraine (European Parliament, 2023).

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced defense strategy intentions at the 2023 EDA conference. She stated that an entirely functional European Defense Union is the next phase and plans early in the next year the Commission will propose a European Defense Industry Programme. The goal of the Commission's plan is to strengthen EU defense cooperation, “we need a strategic planning function that ties together national and EU-level planning. This will give predictability and reduce fragmentation” (European Defense Agency, 2023).

Having stated all of this, it is evident that the EU hopes to enhance integration and avoid fragmentation with its new initiatives, however, member states are desperate to replenish their stock and replace the military equipment sent to Ukraine in support. That is why, countries like Poland are reaching out to third parties like South Korea to restock their supplies, seeing that acquiring German supplies would take considerably longer. While it makes sense to prioritize prompt delivery, doing so further fragments Europe's defense industrial base at a time when the

continent is already heavily dependent on the US. Nonetheless, Europe lacks enough production capacity to meet demand (Koenig & Schutte, 2023).

The Impact of the Ukraine War on Poland's Defense Policies

Geopolitical Realities: Proximity to the conflict zone

Poland is located very close to the conflict zone and has witnessed the direct consequences of Russia's actions and the changes in Eastern European geopolitics that followed. Poland now needs to reevaluate its military and security policies and its previous partnerships and tactics as a result.

Polish support to Ukraine has been extremely valuable, in addition to providing the Ukrainian military with ammunition, tanks, and fighter jets, it has welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees because of its geographic proximity. Moreover, Poland was a very important player when convincing Germany to help Ukraine with modern military supplies such as Leopard tanks (Dickinson, 2023). However, Poland has been increasing its defense spending due to the fear of a Russian attack. Its concern stems from the proximity to Ukraine and Belarus, a Russian ally, on its eastern border. Additionally, Poland is moving 10,000 additional troops to the border with Belarus to support border security to scare the aggressor away. This fear was heightened by the hundreds of battle-hardened Wagner mercenaries Alexander Lukashenko welcomed to Belarus in July (Al Jazeera, 2023). This undoubtedly created fear and insecurity in the region and made Poland strongly favor more NATO forces in the territory permanently (Kaminski & Sliwa, 2023). Certainly, with Poland's geographical proximity to the war, it is still largely in favor of supporting Ukraine. Poles believe that if Russia won just across the border, their country would be in danger (Gera, 2023).

Historical Perspective: Poland's Transatlantic Alliances

From the end of World War 2 until the fall of the Berlin Wall, Poland was part of the Eastern Bloc allied with the communist Soviet Union. Poland was a key player in the Warsaw Pact, a treaty on collective defense drafted by the USSR. Because of their ideological differences, NATO and the Warsaw Pact gradually strengthened their defenses, which sparked an arms race that lasted the entire Cold War (NATO, 2023.). However, Polish society protested rising food prices by the Polish Communist government, this became the movement of Solidarity. Solidarity was the first autonomous labor movement in a country of the Eastern Bloc in 1980. It continued until 1989 when Solidarity confronted the Communist Party after gaining official political party recognition and won the senate elections. This movement was crucial to a democratic Poland (Center for European Studies, 2023). Poland, Hungary, and Czechia had all stopped participating in Warsaw Pact military drills by October 1990. In March and July of 1991, the Warsaw Pact came to a formal end as the Soviet Union dissolved (United States Department of State, n.d.). After the end of the Cold War, NATO invited former Eastern Bloc countries in 1997 to begin accession talks seeking enlargement to enhance security and stability. On March 12, 1999, Czechia, Hungary, and Poland became the first former Warsaw Pact states to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023).

The Significance of NATO and Poland's Historical Security Mindset

According to Poles, Poland joining NATO had a direct influence on enhancing the security of the nation. In addition to this, more than half of the Polish population believe that NATO's efforts to maintain peace and avoid armed war are worthwhile.

NATO has brought many benefits to Poland. Among these, one of them was the increase in the prestige of Poland in the international arena. By being a member of NATO, Polish forces are able to participate and train with other member state's armed forces, making Poland a reliable partner in NATO and outside of NATO. Of course, another benefit of joining NATO was the technical modernization and the major restructuring of its command system. NATO contributed to the level and professionalism of Poland's military forces, as well as gaining experience in several allied missions. The alliance has additionally contributed to Poland's infrastructure with its NSIP investment packages along with the upgrading of naval bases, fuel depots, and airports. Becoming a member of NATO also means Poland's defense capabilities will always be strengthened. Poland continues to enhance the caliber of its armed forces and contributes significantly to the collective defense and emergency response of its allies, meeting the requirement of allocating 2% of GDP to defense, irrespective of the form and direction of threats (The International Security Policy Department, 2020).

Embracing Europeanization: Poland's Shift in Defense Strategy Recognizing the Benefits: A Cohesive Approach to European Security

For the first years after joining NATO, Poland's security priority was working alongside the United States and NATO. It was hesitant of European Defense efforts that did not include Washington. This was largely due to the mistrust between Poland and some of the EU member states like Germany. Poland was skeptical of the EU's emerging common security and defense policy (CSDP) and worried that military cooperation among EU members would distance the US from European security. This fear was shared at the time by some Atlanticist EU members as well as some powerful circles in Washington. Poland and Britain both thought that EU's

permanent military headquarters were useless since NATO was their security pillar. It was also skeptical about PESCO, Mutual Aid Assistance, and Solidarity.

Nevertheless, that changed when the relationship with the US was strained with the Bush and Obama administrations. Poland, noticing it was struggling to keep the US involved and former President Obama trying to improve relations with Russia, led Poland to believe that the US was overlooking its Central European allies. The Trump administration was of no help after this, former President Donald Trump was the first US president in recent times to not support European integration, see the EU as a danger, and add conditionality to NATO (Whineray, 2020).

Poland's Turnaround in European Defense Departure from Atlantic-Centric Strategies

Poland is now among the most outspoken supporters of the defense initiatives of the European Union. Furthermore, it has endeavored to collaborate with Germany more closely and to take the lead in the EU. Poland's efforts were previously met with resistance from other member states uninterested in deepening defense. Even Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, which share concerns about the Russian threat, were uninterested and did not fulfill the commitment of 2% spending of their GDP in defense (O'Donnell, 2012).

By highlighting the significance of a cohesive defense policy, Poland has taken steps to increase its involvement. On the other hand, this pro-EU attitude is consistent with broader political developments. Law and Justice, a conservative nationalist party that has long been at odds with the European Union, ruled for eight years until Mr. Tusk, a former prime minister of Poland and now a prominent EU official in Brussels, returned to power (Higgins, 2023).

The triumph of the centrist opposition presents a chance for the much-discussed eastward power shift inside the European Union, and it creates the opportunity for a shift of powers within the EU. More importantly, though, is that a new pro-EU government in Poland may pave the way for more European integration, including the necessary changes that the EU must implement to become a more unified geopolitical player on the world stage. The results of these elections came in very good timing since Germany and France are stuck and more than ever in need of someone like Poland's new Prime Minister to set a direction for a course of action for the Ukraine war and pressure Germany.

Donald Tusk made clear that one of his top priorities is consolidating international support for Ukraine. After Western European governments expressed they were tired of the situation in Ukraine and that they did not have enough strength, Tusk said it was Poland's duty and everyone's duty to vehemently and loudly demand that the entire Western community fully commit to supporting Ukraine in this battle. The US Congress has been unable to adopt a significant new aid package in recent weeks due to internal political issues, while EU leaders have reportedly found it difficult to agree on a multi-year aid effort in the face of opposition from Hungary, Russia's closest EU partner. These delays have been received enthusiastically by Germany, proving that the West has grown weary of Ukraine and is getting ready to hand the nation over to the Kremlin (Dickinson, 2023).

An emerging pro-EU Polish government under Tusk, the previous president of the European Council and someone familiar with Brussels might assist in mobilizing the European Union. Poland might partner with France to develop a distinct vision for the European Union (Bergmann, 2023).

Poland supports the CSDP's strengthening and an increase in the European Union's global influence in addition to the work carried out by NATO. Poland is an observer in seventeen PESCO initiatives and a participant in thirteen of them. It also takes a leading role in other projects that enhance the military crisis response capacities of the EU. The country participates in the work of the European Defense Agency which seeks to harmonize the development of defense capabilities of the member states and improve the efficiency of the member states' joint use of resources for conducting operations. Furthermore, Poland is actively contributing to the formation of Battle Groups, or quick reaction troops, which allow the EU to act quickly when faced with emergencies outside of its boundaries (Ministry of National Defense, 2022).

In addition to being a large advocate for European Defense, Poland has been vocal about its concerns about German and Russian ties. It has accused Germany of “being in the way” of harsher sanctions against Russia. Moreover, it has spoken out about Austria and Hungary for supposedly pandering to Putin (Francis, 2023).

Strengthening National Defense Capabilities The Importance of National Preparedness

As mentioned before, Poland became a firm supporter of European Defense, mainly because of the anticipation of Russian aggression. While most of the EU members could not even commit to spending 2% of GDP on defense, Poland started to arm and prepare itself. The year 2020 saw the start of Poland's most recent military modernization initiative as part of a new National Security Strategy. Its objectives are to strengthen the operational capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces to deter and defend against security threats, with particular emphasis on enhancing the level of mobility and technical modernization and creating conditions for the Polish defense industry to meet the long-term needs of the Polish Armed Forces. It was predicted in 2020 that the domestic

industry would receive about 60% of Poland's budget for military modernization and acquisition (Cucino & Scarazzato, 2023).

Before the war started, Poland was ranked third in NATO behind the US and Greece, having already spent 2.4% of GDP on defense. However, the government decided more was needed, which is why by 2023 Poland was already spending nearly 4% on defense, making it the highest proportion in NATO. The nation intends to increase its armed forces to 300,000 soldiers.

Significant purchases from overseas include 366 US Abrams tanks and 96 US Apache helicopters; 980 K2 tanks and 648 South Korean self-propelled howitzers; hundreds of US HIMARS rocket launchers; numerous additional Patriot air defense systems; 22 UK-made air defense batteries and three UK-designed frigates; and 48 South Korean FA-50 combat aircraft from and 32 US F-35 aircraft, which will supplement its current fleet of 48 F-16s. This military preparation places Poland in a different league in European Defense on its way to becoming the EU's strongest force and may be capable of deterring Russia (Jones, 2023).

Conclusion

Shaping the Future: Poland's Pivotal Role in European Defense and Security

In conclusion, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia highlighted the importance of European Defense. The European Compass is another big step into enhancing security and defense covering all aspects of the security and defense policy. The European Union has created funds and projects like EDIRPA, EDF, and ASAP to better support the member states and Ukraine and to reduce fragmentation. Poland as a neighbor and big supporter of Ukraine has been a great ally and has provided it with aid, military capabilities, and has welcomed the Ukrainian refugees. It has also launched programs to help integrate the Ukrainians into Polish Society. Poland was one of the first countries from the former Eastern Bloc to become a NATO member, this undoubtedly

sees the path for a democratic and open Polish government. NATO was the security pillar for Poland, and it largely increased and enhanced its military capabilities by working along with allied militaries. Since the beginning, it was skeptical of European efforts in security that excluded the US. However, things started to change due to different US administrations and the fact that the US changed its focus from the EU to China and the Middle Eastern conflicts. Since then, Poland has been a big supporter of a European Defense Strategy that did not completely rely on US forces but complemented it. Even with its differences with Germany, Poland's efforts to collaborate more closely have led it to play a major role in the EU. This was largely due because Poland has always been aware of its Russian neighbor and its aggressiveness, nevertheless, its other neighbors like Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia did not have Russian aggression as a top priority in their agendas, this shows in their lack of efforts to increase their percentage of defense spending. Recently a turn of events has taken place with the election of Pro-EU Polish Prime Minister. Germany has not taken a lead role in this crisis, and it can be blamed on its dependence on Russia. Nonetheless, newly elected Prime Minister Dusk may pave the way for more European integration, including the necessary changes that the EU must implement to become a more unified geopolitical player on the world stage. In addition to supporting a stronger European Defense, Poland has strengthened its national defense due to concerns of Russia and Belarus. Poland has increased its percentage of defense spending to almost 4% making it the highest spender in the EU. It has prepared itself by making deals with third parties like South Korea to acquire modern military resources and intends to increase its armed forces. Poland has a major opportunity to influence how European military and security are shaped going forward, even as it negotiates the aftermath of the conflict in Ukraine.

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