

POLISH SPECIAL FORCES - IN SEARCH OF A NEW POSTURE

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The Polish Armed Forces have just entered the ninth year of their reform. These reforms, despite numerous statements by leading defence officials, have not so far led to creating a new model of the armed forces which would meet present and potential requirements as well as reflecting the economic capacity of the state. Most of what has happened in terms of military reform since 1990 can be called without too much exaggeration, a "semi-reform", that is a reform of "semi-concepts", "semi-ideas", their "semi-implementation" under conditions of not necessarily a full commitment. No defence minister since 1990 has been able to introduce convincing solutions, moreover over the years the actual areas of competence and of responsibility of civilian and military authorities within the defence branch have become more difficult to identify precisely. As a consequence, the Polish Armed Forces in 1998 AD still remain plagued by some attitudes inherited from the Warsaw Pact as well as relatively unprepared to function within NATO both in intellectual and technological terms. The previously announced armed forces development concepts which were made public to different degrees, like the "Structure 1992"¹, presidential "Armed Forces 2010"² or recently completed "*Tenets for the Programme of the Armed Forces Modernisation 1998-2012*"³ are all characterised by basically the same methodological error (the extent of which varies in each of the programmes). They do not apply a strategic planning scheme which is simple, logical and well known among NATO nations and is well rooted in Clausewitz' thinking on the organic relation between war and politics. Simplistically speaking, this scheme is based on the following chain of subsequent actions:

- * analysis of threats and own country's national interests;
- * definition of strategic political goals and - eventually - definition of required defence roles and military tasks;
- * characterising of required defence capabilities;
- * general optional definition of force size and structure needed to obtain these capabilities;
- * analysis of resources actually available and to be available in the long-term (primarily the financial ones) and finally;
- * selection and implementation of practical solutions.

The previous and current programmes are characterised by the following basic deficiencies in applying the above structure:

1. size and structure of planned forces **often do not correspond to the nation's political priorities and possible threats and likely risks** to be coped with. Poland still possesses armed forces best suited for participation in a full-scale armed conflict (a relatively large number of poorly manned divisions, a mobilisation system prepared for relatively long mass mobilisation);

2. the planned force structure does not take into account the **actual economic capabilities** of the state (and may be called overgrown). Again a large number of retained units as well as a persistent tendency to keep up to the CFE limits (the latter attitude seems to be only partly overcome in the latest programme) provide some evidence of this.

3. **readiness and training levels are rather low** - training limits and standards are in most categories below NATO requirements.

A common reaction to these universally realised facts is the helplessness of defence ministers, reflected by their lack of activity in terms of creating a new force structure⁴ and complaints by most of the generals about a lack of sufficient defence funding. It is however impossible to forget about the hard reality: a defence spending at a level of 3% of GDP (some 4.5 US\$ bn in 1997) can be treated merely as a dream. The only actual source of its increase can be the economic growth and this allows - in a best case - maintaining it at a current level of approximately 2.4% of GDP.

It is also still quite difficult to observe an intellectual breakthrough in terms of military thought. The National Defence Academy (AON) in Rembertow, which is bound to become a centre of generating long-term defence strategy concepts and actively support Poland's preparations to take a fair place within NATO's integrated military structure, keeps promoting somehow anachronous and - for many reasons - impossible to implement concepts of defence self-sufficiency⁵. One of the major reasons for such a stalemate seems to be a lack of lecturer rotation (there are tactics teachers who have been lecturing at the AON for 20 years without line service). One can also hardly resist an impression that the Polish Armed Forces still remain somehow backward in the area of formulating concepts of using the forces. The three services do not have doctrines, in the Western sense of this term, that is documents defining their key tasks, listing types of operations they can be involved in as well as ways and means to implement them.

During the last couple of years, when subsequent modernisation plans were being decided upon, the problem of special operations as well as the role and organisation of the special forces were barely touched upon. It may even be justified to say that they were not discussed at all. Presumably, the reason behind this is not only a typical tendency of all militaries to protect information on their special forces but also, and perhaps first of all, lack of a complex concept of approach towards the issue. In military literature one could sometimes find articles on raid or irregular operations (in the enemy's rear or occupied areas) and other tactical issues. It is, however, virtually impossible to mention an article which presented a comprehensive diagnosis of the state of Polish special forces and a vision of their further development.

Role of Special Forces in Contemporary Conflicts

The end of the Cold War meant not only a disintegration of one of the then existing great military blocs and a defeat of probably the Twentieth Century's most criminal ideology, but as well a general change of the contemporary world's geostrategic order. The political and military bipolarity which had dominated before 1989 had tremendous influence on military preparations of all European countries. The strategic situation increased the probability of a full-scale conflict in Europe. At the same time, the existence of a mutual "balance of fear" caused the emergence and maintenance of a relative regional and local balance - the great powers' pressure enabled a pacification of each potential crisis situation without the use of military power⁶. The NATO and

Warsaw Pact armed forces were being prepared for participation in nuclear (later also conventional) high intensity conflict including the use of masses of troops and heavy equipment. Basically, a rather long warning time was assumed, that made it possible to lower the readiness of a substantial part of the forces.

The experience of the first half of the 1990s has confirmed that the transformation of the political order in Europe has also brought about new military conditions. The "lesser threat - more conflicts" formula probably best describes the essence of the change. It became apparent that under new circumstances the threat of a full scale conflict has dramatically diminished, while at the same time there emerged a growing danger of local conflicts, often of ethnic background, conflicts with a long escalation period, gradually crossing the threshold of open hostilities, and conflicts in which countries act against each other informally or indirectly, officially maintaining diplomatic relations, and finally also of semi-internal ones. It is by no means difficult to illustrate the phenomenon - wars in former Yugoslavia and Chechnya, conflicts in Transcaucasus or Transdnistria speak for themselves. Simultaneously one can observe a growing number and intensity of various military activities which are commonly known as peace operations. Another phenomenon characterising the decade of the 1990s is the rapid growth of international terrorism (often classified even as state terrorism) as well as organised crime which frequently uses paramilitary means (so far primarily in Latin America). Under such conditions the use of military forces becomes habitually a delicate question and, at the same time, the political aspect of military operations is gaining key importance.

Modern special forces, whose history was originated by a number of spectacular operations during World War II, in the post-war period despite numerous troubles were gradually consolidating their position as an inevitable tool of contemporary warfare and - simultaneously - special operations found their place in Western military handbooks as a separate category of military operations. The conduct of the majority of military conflicts during the past fifty years proved that special forces could be effectively used not only in their "classical" roles, i.e. for sabotage actions and deep reconnaissance (Vietnam, Arab-Israeli wars, Falkland War) but also with a degree of success in peace and low-intensity conflict environments (American advisers in Central America or the counter-insurgency operation in Malaya). Different experience and different visions of contemporary warfare have led to a distinct development of views on the use of special forces in the West and in former Warsaw Pact countries. In NATO, not without experience of the USA and colonial wars, an "autonomous model" has been developed. In most of the allied countries the broadly understood "special operations" were defined as a separate category of military operations and - subsequently - special forces were provided with a significant degree of autonomy in terms of training, financing and administration. Usually they were also gaining a notable operational independence that was displayed in a process of the creation of separate operational commands subordinated directly to supreme military authorities (chiefs of staffs or supreme commanders). The USA became an extreme example of that process with its strategic level Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) established in 1987, which presently controls over 40,000 troops. In the former Warsaw Pact the linkage between special forces and the so-called operational (conventional) forces was always closer (with a few exceptions). Their units were usually subordinated to operational level (army) commanders or - in the case of the Soviet Union - also to strategic-operational level commanders (front). Special units were planned to fulfil offensive tasks in favour of ground forces commanders of respective levels within the so called "strategic defensive operation". Again, the Soviet Army was an exception to a certain degree, as several Spetsnaz units were directly

subordinated to central level authorities (GRU).

Under new conditions, the importance of special operations not only has not diminished compared to the Cold War period, but on the contrary, has gained a new dimension. First of all, the scope of special forces' tasks and roles has increased. Apart from traditional "war" missions which include both operations in favour of friendly regular forces at corps level (deep reconnaissance, raids, covert monitoring of objects in the enemy's rear) and independent combat operations (sabotage, destroying fixed objects of strategic significance), increasing attention is being given to tasks classified as operations other than war (OOTW), that is: counter insurgency operations, participation in military assistance programmes (training), combating organised crime, certain counter terrorist activities and - last but not least - psychological warfare. An entirely new dimension of special forces' activities are peace operations and, within their framework, such missions as escorting of political delegations and negotiation teams, arresting war criminals, key policing activities or establishing relations with the population of crisis areas.

Under such new conditions, during the last five years we have witnessed several trends in terms of special forces development:

- * tendency towards defining special operations as a separate type of armed operations;
- * development of distinctive special operations doctrines;
- * creation of separate, independent command and control structures for special forces within national C2 systems;
- * organisational growth and deepening specialisation of special forces units;
- * development of specialised military technologies applied in special operations.

The above tendencies are primarily reflected in the forces of NATO allies where, following the adoption of the 1991 New Strategic Concept of the Alliance, a stress was put on the development of reaction forces. Further development of special forces has appeared to become a natural consequence of acquiring increased expeditionary operation capability as well as gradual adjustments for operating in low-intensity conflict environments. The following examples can illustrate the trend: the creation of German Special Operations Command (Kommando Spezialkraefte - KSK) in 1996, expanding the Belgian Paracommando regiment to the size of a brigade, or adding another company to the Dutch commando battalion. Also in the USA, despite reductions of defence spending and force levels, the special operations budget even grew slightly⁷. A very spectacular example of appreciating the importance of special operations is certainly the 1997 nomination of Commander-in-Chief US Special Operations Command Gen J Shelton to the post of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS).

In the Polish Courtyard

Meanwhile, the current state of Polish special forces does not entirely reflect present world-wide trends in this respect, both in doctrinal and organisational dimensions. At present, the Polish Armed Forces possess the following units performing duties related to special operations:

- * 1st Special (Commando) Regiment, subordinated directly to the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces;

- * Navy Combat Divers Group;

- * small psychological warfare units each subordinated to the respective military district commands;

- * Mobile Operational Reaction Group (Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno-Mobilnego - GROM), an all-professional unit subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration;

- * small anti-terrorist units (platoon size) of the Internal Troops (NJW).

It remains disputable how to classify the divisional reconnaissance battalions, reconnaissance companies of each army brigade and the independent 2nd Reconnaissance Regiment of the Cracow Military District. In terms of their roles and missions all at least partly fit the classification; on the other hand, they originally belonged to "ordinary" parent army formations.

These special units of the Polish Armed Forces do not constitute a separate arm of service and do not operate according to a unified doctrine. In Polish military literature the term "special operations" is used sporadically and is not subject to a single, commonly accepted definition. It results on the one hand in a remarkable intellectual chaos and contemporary lack of ability to generate a concept of special operations which would meet the requirements of a modern approach to national defence and the contemporary battlefield, and which on the other hand would enable bringing the special forces to the level of a separate arm of service. The lack of a comprehensive concept of employment of the special forces creates a danger of their insufficient use in the case of Poland's participation in an armed conflict or - which seems particularly threatening - their accidental and incorrect use as well as subsequent exhaustion without a satisfying effect.

Presently Polish special forces comprise units subordinated administratively and operationally to two ministries - the Ministry of National Defence (MON) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (MSWiA). Theoretically, this distinction reflects the different missions the forces are there to perform - the MSWiA forces are supposed to be general purpose units for use in peacetime, crisis and war, almost fully manned. The forces subordinated to MON comprise mobilisation units whose employment may basically take place only in a full scale war. However one can observe lack of command and control cohesion also within particular ministries. The 1st Special Regiment is subordinated directly to the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces while the combat divers report to the Navy Command. Within the MSWiA the GROM unit is in practice placed directly under the Minister of the Interior and the anti-terrorist units report to the NJW Command. Such a situation does not contribute to creating positive premises for increase the training level of these units, particularly tactical and specialised training. It also prevents promoting special operations as a separate type of military mission. In practice the needs and requirements of the majority of special units (with the partial exception of GROM) are of secondary importance for the supreme echelon commanders and tend to melt away in a sea of other priorities.

The current structure of the Polish special forces may also be a source of a certain

doubt. They are a collection of units of different size, not entirely defined purpose and inconsistent subordination links. One can for instance speculate whether concentrating all the army special forces units in one regiment is the most appropriate solution or if rather a bigger degree of force diversification would contribute to achieving more specialisation and introduce a competitive factor among the units. Polish special forces still do not possess an organic aviation component, which limits their mobility.

The existing units are underinvested and are not provided with budgets for conducting advanced training. Obviously, such a situation results negatively in a condition the each and every arm of service, yet in the case of elite units, the decrease of combat capability is the most painful and most difficult to recover from. On the other hand, one can easily state that an increase in funding of these units, almost unnoticed in terms of the whole armed forces, could substantially improve their equipment and training. An expense comparable to the price of one medium class main battle tank (approx 2 US\$ mn) could for instance solve all of the problems of a unit like GROM in the field of basic weapons and specialised personal equipment.

Dilemmas of Special Forces

In the context of the current situation of the Polish special forces, one can speak of several dilemmas. The existing problems cannot be solved by unit commanders - decisions should come from above, from the leadership of the government and the armed forces. Solutions for these problems cannot be considered separately from the major reform of the armed forces. In order to make the expected decision satisfactory from the special forces point of view, one precondition must be fulfilled - **the question of special operations must be acknowledged as a separate issue within the broader framework of discussion on the future of the Polish Armed Forces.** Therefore it also has to be included in the debate at a very high level, that is during the process of defining the armed forces' tasks. In any other case there always will be a threat that the problem will continue to be marginalised and treated as secondary.

There is a whole variety of problems which will quite naturally face the MON leadership once they decide to treat the issue of special operations as a separate programme. The most significant of them, which could well become chapter titles of an eventual ministerial programme, are discussed below:

1. The role of special operations and tasks of special forces

An answer to this question is part of a broader task which faces the constitutional institutions of executive power and the MON, with parliamentary participation. The so-called "Defence Doctrine of the Republic of Poland" of 1992⁸ has already lost its actuality and - additionally - puts the question of the armed forces tasks in a very general way. A particular stalemate can be observed in the area of defining potential military and paramilitary threats and risks as well as discussing types and characteristics of armed conflicts in which Poland can become potentially involved. Within the framework of elaborating a new doctrine, the basic question concerning the major defence roles must be put forward. One can suggest the following possible answer:

* **national defence:** independent or allied defence of national territory or part of it under the conditions of a small-to-medium-intensity conflict;

* **allied activities:** participation in allied military operations both within and

out of NATO area;

* **deterrence**: sustaining a deterrence potential credible against a potential medium size aggressor, treated as separate role.

A result of defining the above roles would be for the Minister of National Defence to formulate detailed tasks with the support of the General Staff in the shape of a "National Defence Strategy". The three above-mentioned defence roles of the Polish Armed Forces (or others as defined) will have a decisive influence on defining the place of the special forces within the broader scope of means possessed by the Polish forces. The following questions will have to be answered:

* Are special operations going to form a **separate category of military activities at operational level**; that is would Poland decide to achieve a capability to conduct special operations? In case of a positive answer to that question, one of the basic tasks of the special forces will be to conduct independently such operations;

***In which of the three roles will the special forces participate?** Creating special forces tasked to conduct operations within the national territory requires structures different to that of forces planned to take part in allied military operations (in such a case the importance of mobility grows). Putting additional stress on the deterrence role of the armed forces, including their preparation for irregular warfare, would bring about specific consequences for the special forces as well, particularly in terms of their training, organisation and logistics. Summing up, the more missions for special forces we plan and the more specialised they are, the bigger becomes the importance of their operational independence, development of their training base and increased funding;

* Is the special operations capability going to remain the **domain of regular forces** or would it be sensible that it is achieved also by elements of territorial defence forces? This problem is related mainly to the issue mentioned above of preparations for hypothetical irregular warfare based on a system of common defence;

* Do the Polish Armed Forces need the **capability to conduct specialised kinds of special operations** (for example in favour of the air force)? A positive answer would have to be reflected in an appropriate special forces structure as well as their operational chain of command.

2. Special forces and the national command and control system

The key problem for every armed service is the question of administrative and operational subordination. It determines most elements, such as the shape of decision-making process in the area of command, the organisation of the training and logistics systems and force organisation. Placing a force component in a command and control structure must result in a definite determination of who is responsible for its operational control, support of operations, administrative and logistical aspects of its functioning. In this respect, the current situation of Polish special forces is far from clear - due to diversified subordination and not entirely defined competencies one can hardly speak of them as a cohesive component of the Polish Armed Forces.

The most crucial dilemmas that the MON leadership faces at the moment can be effectively presented as a number of alternatives. Some are listed below - adopting any of those solutions would significantly influence further development of these forces:

* the question of special forces autonomy has several aspects. The first of these is whether a **separate arm of service** should be formed within the army and the Ministry of Interior troops. Their recognition as a separate arm of service has to result in the creation of their own administrative and training organisation. If an autonomous role for the special forces in the new defence doctrine is recognised, such a process is necessary and natural. Theoretically a similar process should take place in the case of the navy special forces unit, although due to its size it would be less spectacular (simply the creation of a separate special operations section within the Navy HQ).

* the question of **achieving autonomous responsibilities by the special forces** within the general force organisation, that is the creation of an autonomous planning and command centre for the co-ordination and conduct of special operations. This would have the operational control of all three services special forces units as well as the MSWiA forces, possibly retaining their administrative control by parent services. This proposal, based on the assumption that special forces would gain more significance under the new doctrine, refers to the US SOCOM structure. This solution would certainly not enjoy the support of a traditionally inclined military establishment.

* a derivative of the two above problems is the question of **subordinating the special forces units** to various elements of defence ministry top level institutions. Several different solutions are possible. Assuming that the special forces can achieve autonomy within their parent services or the whole armed forces, one can imagine their future subordination directly to the Chief of General Staff (with a position of C-in-C Special Forces at the level of military district commanders) or their subordination (through the Chief of General Staff) directly to the Minister of National Defence. Several factors suggest the latter solution: special forces are by definition politically the most sensitive part of each armed forces (due to their preparation for covert, peacetime and not always "clean" operations) and therefore they require strict control as well as a chain of command that is short, close to the centre of political power (government) and which provides for a fast decision-making process. Apart from the problem of operational subordination, there is doubtless a need to create a special and unconventional operations division within the "civilian" structure of the MON (within the Defence System Department or the hypothetical Defence Policy Department). A similar although proportionally smaller structure should be established in the MSWiA.

3. Organisation of the special forces

Following the adopted doctrinal assumptions and defining the place of special forces within the national command and control system, one should put an effort into determining their target structure and the timetable of implementing it. It is not only the matter of defining the number of battalions, companies and their personnel strength but also issues such as the degree of specialisation of particular units and their readiness and manning levels. It remains obvious that the organisation and personnel strength of the special forces cannot just be a result of an enthusiasts' approach - "the more, the better", but should rather reflect doctrinal priorities of the armed forces and national interests.

Several organisational and structural regulations remain to be determined. One can list the following:

* **the size of the special forces** is the consequence of their role in the defence strategy of the country and the actual financial capacity of the MON. In case of change of their role and formulating new tasks, the current size of these formations, that is

some 2,500 troops, would certainly have to be changed. It is virtually impossible to determine the target personnel strength of the special forces - any number provided would only be speculation. One can only state with some degree of certainty that even maintaining only the existing units, and simultaneously increasing their operational readiness, their capability for conducting specialised forms of special operations and mobility, their size can well be doubled. In the case of their further organisational expansion, one can theoretically speak of reaching a level of even 10,000 troops.

* **only regular forces or inclusion of territorial component?** If the Ministry of National Defence decides to begin to implement a concept of creating a common defence system based on territorial defence units, a question would emerge whether it is reasonable to create separate special operations capable units within the system. This would be particularly significant if one of the tasks of the territorial defence system was also to conduct irregular operations in enemy-occupied territory. In such a case, hypothetical cadre (or fully manned) platoon or company sized units could perform at least two tasks: conduct particular sabotage actions and serve as a core for guerrilla units (conducting insurgency warfare). The best solution for such an environment would be company-size units of flexible structure, operating in small teams and organised on a regional basis. These units could do their training either separately or together with regular special forces units.

* **the structure of special forces subordinated to the MON** depends primarily on the missions with which they would be tasked. The first of a number of questions to be resolved is whether every service should possess its own specialised special forces units. Experience of several countries suggests that not only the army and the navy can profit from having their own special forces units. There are air force units in the USA and France whose missions portfolio consists of special SAR (rescuing shot down aircrews), evacuation of personnel and equipment from the enemy's rear, targetting of precision guided munitions or verification of air strikes' effects. It is therefore at least theoretically possible to establish within the Polish Air Force a flight (squadron or company) of 6-8 adequately prepared helicopters with 4-6 small (4-10 person strong) search and rescue teams. Another question is the development of the navy special unit. The existing combat divers group can be expanded. There is also the possibility of a further build up of the navy special forces to two differently profiled units (for example sabotage and mine warfare units). It remains open either to maintain two separate units or to join them into a bigger entity. The army exercises the largest part of the special forces which would be tasked with most of the burden of conducting special warfare. Potentially, there are several options for their development - retaining the existing 1st Special (Commando) Regiment or adding other units (optionally even another regiment, 1-2 independent battalions or several independent companies, 1-2 aviation flights). Another problem is the question of how specialised the special forces units should remain. Theoretically, we can speak, for instance, of separating units of assault profile (like the US 75th Rangers) and those tasked with more "subtle" missions such as deep reconnaissance or selected sabotage (similar to the French 13th Dragoons). It is also important to equip the army special forces with specially prepared small helicopter units. One can imagine the following hypothetical structure of the army special forces: a special regiment, 1-3 special forces battalions (similar to the US Green Berets), 1-2 aviation flights (small squadrons), 3-4 psychological warfare groups (company size).

* **units subordinated to the MSWiA** could in general retain their current structure, although one can consider the exclusion of the anti-terrorist units from the NJW and establishing a joint headquarters for them and the GROM.

4. Special forces personnel recruitment

In most of the Western countries, special forces personnel consist entirely of professionals, soldiers serving under contracts lasting several years. France is an exception as there are several units which are manned partly by conscripts. The situation in Polish special forces units is different and - except for GROM and the navy unit - remains typical of Warsaw Pact patterns. There is thus no doubt about the need to move towards professionalising the special forces personnel. The only thing that remains debatable is the extent and speed of that process. Total professionalising seems to be an optimal solution. It is the only way to select the best human resources available and provide the troops with appropriate training. The value of professional specialists in the case of special forces is especially significant - acquiring skills and consolidating habits takes too much time and money to get rid of trained soldiers after 18 months of service. At the same time, compared to the whole armed forces budget, the additional costs resulting from the transfer of all special forces personnel to professional status, assuming 100% increase in manpower, would not be overwhelming and would end up as some extra 100 mn PLN (29 US\$ mn) yearly, that is less than 1% of the Ministry of National Defence 1997 budget⁹.

Providing a stable and credible recruitment base is always a problem in acquiring personnel of special attitudes. In special military units it refers not only to people of proper physical and psychological condition but also those motivated to serve in the armed forces and of patriotic orientation. Optimally, the special forces should be able to monitor potential candidates for service even before they reach the minimal required age. From this point of view, it could be interesting to establish relationships between the special forces units and circles which assemble potential candidates for service, such as the "Rifleman" Association¹⁰ or selected Scout groups. Certainly a proper structural solution would be to create a separate special forces recruitment cell (for instance within the eventual special forces command), with the right to identify and select appropriate candidates from amongst the available conscripts, and eventually independently to conduct the recruitment of volunteer candidates for special forces service.

The last problem is how to manage the question of special forces personnel completing their service. An interesting example in this respect is provided by the United Kingdom, with its two SAS battalions forming part of the Territorial Army. In the Polish case one possible solution could be to concentrate former special forces soldiers in special forces units of territorial defence (if such units are created).

5. Training

It is not the author's intention to discuss here the details of current and future training requirements for the special forces, as this is definitely a problem for a separate article. Instead it is worthwhile to focus on the organisational and administrative dimensions of the training process which decisively influence such a basic issue as providing an environment for optimal preparation of special forces personnel.

One of the most crucial issues is the development of extended training infrastructure for special forces. It is possible, for instance, to establish a Special Forces Training Centre as a separate organisation subordinated to the future Special Forces Command and responsible not only for providing various training programmes for these forces but also - along the US pattern - for doctrinal studies and preparing field manuals. Such a Centre should be fitted with an adequately large training ground, together with an airfield and appropriate infrastructure. An adaptation of one of the big former

Soviet installations could be a good solution. Another precondition ensuring the best possible results of training would be to provide the possible new command with maximum autonomy in creating and implementing training programmes. It is also reasonable to examine the idea of introducing a legal framework for making selected objects located all over the country and belonging to legal subjects other than the armed forces available for special forces training, if required.

The introduction of voluntary service would also influence the training process. Training of smaller numbers of soldiers over longer periods of time would enable more money to go into advanced training and exercises, such as parachute jumping under various conditions, exercises with the use of helicopters and electronic warfare means.

Another undertaking that will strongly influence the structure of the training effort of the Polish special forces as well as their level of training is the continued strengthening of co-operation links with partners from selected NATO special forces. It seems particularly urgent to develop a programme of expanding this institutional co-operation for the 1st Special (Commando) Regiment.

6. Procurement of weapons and other equipment

Polish special forces require massive investment. Its extent and priorities should be defined by a long-term restructuring programme. It should be based on several general principles, of which the first would be to fit the special forces units with a full set of equipment necessary to make them capable of performing their organic missions, that is not only personal weapons and equipment but also communications, navigation or reconnaissance systems. Subsequently, creating special forces as an arm of service requires introducing basic equipment providing for mobility, i.e. separate helicopter units.

Apart from the general shape and size of the special forces budget, it is crucial to guarantee that they are relatively independent in working on its details. This very specific type of purchase (small numbers of highly specialised equipment) requires that the process of their planning and implementation remains free from unnecessary bureaucratic interventions and, at the same time, future users of the systems should be present at literally every step of the procurement process.

The issue of the size of investment required should be subject to special consideration.

Apart from the contents of the modernisation plans which would first of all influence the amount of money authorised for investment, it is important that the special forces procurement plans are included in a wider (5-15 year long) programme of their transformation. Only this would enable them to avoid inappropriate purchases and would help to keep the reform costs down.

7. International co-operation

The international co-operation issue has already been mentioned several times. Creating and maintaining a country's own special forces in isolation from the "outer world" has indeed some advantages. First of all it guarantees secrecy and protection of its own tactical solutions. However the disadvantages of such a solution are greater. Opening up for contacts means a possibility to increase one's skills, access to unknown and frequently quite attractive training methods, opportunities for training with new equipment and, last but not least, forging mutual confidence by developing military co-operation links in the most sensitive area.

At present, when Poland faces NATO membership as a near prospect, the direction of

such co-operation seems clear indeed. Strengthening links with equivalent units of the NATO allies is not just a requirement related to the future combined combat operations but would also facilitate access to the world's leading solutions in the field of special operations.

In such a sensitive and protected area as special operations one cannot speak of developing co-operation with all the potential partners. It is rather a sort of rule that every country selects a strategic partner(s) in this field which helps the respective nations in broader opening up. Such a pattern of co-operation, conducted on the ground of bilateral agreements, is typical for the majority of NATO nations. It will be a task for the leadership of MON (and the MSWiA) to make a decision on selecting such strategic partners for the Polish special forces units. Potentially there are at least two directions for such a co-operation - the Anglo-Saxon and French ones. In both cases we would establish relationships with partners of long and multi-dimensional experience in organisation and conduct of special operations, who possess a wide array of specialised formations.

Next steps?

Having discussed the most crucial dilemmas related to the development of Polish special forces we are approaching a place where one has to ask the basic question - "what should be done next?" None of the problems mentioned above can be solved overnight, without conceptual and technical studies. It seems that the basic question faced by the new MON leadership is at the moment the problem of realising the very existence of the "special operations and forces issue" as a separate set of problems and challenges of long-term strategic importance. Such a reflection would be the first step to adopting a comprehensive approach to this question and including it as a separate chapter when considering possible amendment of the 15-Year Armed Forces Modernisation Programme (1998-2012). Activities of a tactical, partial nature, aimed at improving the already existing mechanisms (limited purchases of equipment, increase of 1st Special Regiment's budget, increased intensity of parachute training, etc) are of course needed but would not qualitatively change the overall situation of the special forces. It seems that the key to solving their existing problems is first of all preparation and implementation of a long-term programme which would be well grounded in a broader context of the Polish Armed Forces modernisation plans. Such a programme could be called "Special Forces 2012" (consistent with the already existing long-term defence planning timetable). Its preparation and implementation would take place embracing the following stages:

- * preparation of a timetable of immediate undertakings aimed at gradual improvement of the existing forces' condition as well as development of a special operations concept suitable for Polish membership in NATO (conducted by a separate study team) - until the end of 1998;

- * creation of new, appropriate, operational and tactical concepts, development of target special forces structure, assessment of the programme's total cost, preparation of a detailed implementation timetable, consultations with selected NATO allies - until the end of 1999;

- * final approval to the programme (including current financial drafts) by the Minister of National Defence (and - if needed - by the Prime Minister), creation of the "Special Forces 2012" permanent working group (under the auspices of the defence minister), approval of a framework budgetary plan for the programme - until the end of

2000;

- * the programme's first medium-term implementation sub-period ("people and structures") - establishment of joint special forces command(s), a training centre and new units, completion of special forces professionalisation, verification of training programmes, first purchases of basic equipment - years 2001-2005;

- * the programme's second medium-term implementation sub-period ("modern equipment") - purchase of modern specialised equipment, meeting all requirements of the special forces, perfecting the specialised components of the special forces - years 2006-2010;

- * verification period of the "Special Forces 2012" programme and preparation of a new 10-year programme (2013-2023) - a separate verification and preparatory period seems to be inevitable due to the fact that long-term defence planning is a brand new phenomenon in Poland and the procedures introduced would require a thorough examination and improvement - years 2011-2012.

The programme should be prepared by a specially established study team, based on the eventual special operations office of the MON and conducting its activities under the auspices and personal supervision of the Minister of National Defence or the secretary of state in MON (this team would be eventually transformed into a permanent programme implementation group). The team should comprise military specialists (experts in special operations, defence planning and budgeting) of all three services (and the General Staff) as well as civilian ones (i.e. defence policy experts and others).

In its optimal shape, the "Special Forces 2012" programme should consist of:

- * a vision of the role of special operations in the defence strategy of the Republic of Poland;

- * the tasks of special forces as well as types of missions and other ways of implementing them, including NATO combined operations;

- * description of a target structure model of the special forces for peace and war, including their links with the territorial defence system;

- * a programme of transformation of current special forces units according to the new concept (including timetable);

- * special forces personnel policy programme (recruitment system and professionalisation);

- * list of key procurement and construction programmes (including assessed cost, order of priorities and framework timetable);

- * description of comprehensive training system (goals, priorities and requirements);

- * programme of international co-operation (with strong stress on NATO's priority character).

Preparation of the long-term special forces development programme cannot remove attention from the necessity of undertaking some immediate actions which, in a short-term (1-2 years) perspective, could contribute to improving the combat capability of the Polish special forces. Most of these actions can be begun almost instantly - they require the acceptance of the Minister of National Defence, including relatively small expenses in next budgetary drafts or certain transfers within the existing budget. The most urgent are the following;

- * establishing a separate special operations cell in the Ministry of National Defence - this new structure would constitute a conceptual and administrative centre for activities related to the special forces;

- * creating a partner cell in the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces;

- * creating a special and counter-terrorist operations cell at the MSWiA;

- * forming Special Forces as a separate arm of service;

- * establishing a Special Operations (or Special Forces) command with operational control over the special forces units and supervising their training process;

- * separating the special forces budget as a portion within the Ministry of National Defence budget;

- * increasing the special forces spending, mainly to fill the most urgent equipment demands;

- * transferring at least one helicopter flight from army aviation (preferably the W-3 *Sokol* or eventually the SW-4 helos) to the 1st Special Regiment and immediate start on appropriate crew training programmes.

Special forces, due to their character, the atmosphere of mystery around them and their elite esprit de corps, do not enjoy much popularity among "line" military commanders. Small in numbers, underrepresented in the military bureaucracy and without influential multi-star generals, they fight their everyday struggle for survival, appreciation and funds. This is common in Poland as well as elsewhere. At the same time, all the most significant armed conflicts of recent years have proved that they are inevitable in the contemporary battlefield. Thanks to their unique capabilities, mobility, covert actions and ability of deep penetration, special forces are capable, in a short time and with relatively limited resources, of creating situations critical for the conduct of a military operation and of performing tasks of a unique character which are impossible to fulfil even for the best trained and armed "conventional" forces. Possession and maintenance of such a unique category of combat capability has an overwhelming significance for a country of Poland's size. Special forces, due to their size always elite ones, contribute to the creation of a positive popular view of armed forces. Everyone in Poland should be keen to make sure that the stereotype of special forces is reflected by the reality.

ENDNOTES

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1. The concept named "Structure 1992" was approved by Minister Janusz Onyszkiewicz (a member of Hanna Suchocka's government) in 1992 as a result of the General Staff study led by then Chief of Staff Gen Tadeusz Wilecki. Based on a concept of a defence sustainability, the programme assumed retaining the highest possible personnel and equipment levels allowed by the CFE treaty and the structure of 12 army divisions (plus several independent brigades). Financially it was absolutely unrealistic even at its origin.
 2. A result of a study conducted at the National Security Bureau in 1996 under the supervision of its late head, secretary Jerzy Milewski, was a sort of compromise between the existing force structure and economic demands and was a more realistic approach to force structuring. It was based on several principles: achieving gradual NATO interoperability and eventual compatibility by the bulk of regular forces, creating a small and high-readiness reaction component etc, but still remained questionable in terms of overall force structure (number of high echelon headquarters).
 3. This so-called "15 Year Programme" for the first time combines reduction of an overall force size (down to 180,000 personnel, 1,300 MBTs, 1,300 IFVs, 200 combat planes) and its structural downsizing (6 army divisions and several independent brigades, 8 air force "brigades" - slightly bigger than former regiments). However its several ambitious procurement programmes are not met by credible financial projections as it assumed that the MoD budget for the period of 1998-2012 would total some US\$65.6bn.
 4. No minister hitherto has created a directly subordinate organisation within the Polish MOD whose main task would be to create a defence strategy and shaping the force structure. All related activities are thus conducted at the General Staff and the services.
 5. Vide: J. Marczak, J. Pawlowski, "On Poland's Military Defence at the Turn of XX/XXI Centuries", Warsaw 1996 and B. Balcerowicz, "Defence of a Medium Size Country", Warsaw 1997.
 6. Possibly with the two exceptions of Soviet intervention in Hungary (1956) and the Warsaw Pact "Operation Danube" in Czechoslovakia (1968).
 7. For examples see the figures of the 1994 and 1995 US SOF budgets - respectively 3.041 and 3.047 US\$ bn respectively. United States Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, Washington 1994.
 8. This name covers two documents signed on 2 Nov 1992 by President Lech Walesa - *Tenets of Polish Security Policy* and *Defence Strategy of the Republic of Poland*.
 9. This calculation covers only personnel costs and assumes wages and salaries about 25% higher than those of armoured and mechanised troops in their respective categories.
 10. The Rifle Association "Rifleman" is a teenage paramilitary organisation working under the auspices of the Ministry of National Defence. It refers with its roots back to the early XXth Century patriotic organisation of this name, famous for creating the

first Polish armed formations during WWI commanded by future Marshal of Poland Jozef Pilsudski.