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America's Best Friend?

Poland's Atlanticist-European Strategy

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Polish President Kwasniewski was met by much flattery from his hosts during his visit to America in mid-January. President Bush described Poland as the "best friend of the United States" in Europe, while Secretary of State Powell referred to Poland as an "equal partner." Although this appreciation is nothing new, it reflects Poland's particular loyalty towards the United States in the current world-political situation. The sweeping solidarity with the U.S. in the Iraq question, as well as the decision taken at the end of 2002 to equip the Polish Air Force with US fighter jets, has consolidated the positive image of Poland in the U.S. In Europe, on the other hand, this has nourished suspicions of Polish pro-Americanism. Should Poland, as a member of the EU, over-identify with American positions, it would strengthen the camp of the firmly American and Atlantic-oriented countries, therefore bolstering co-ordination with Great Britain. On the other hand, EU membership could lead to an increased Europeanisation of Poland's Atlanticism in the medium term.

During his stay in Washington, Poland's President assured his American partners that Poland would also support the U.S. if diplomatic and political efforts to disarm Iraq were unsuccessful, and if the decision were made to wage a war as the last option. He also stated that Polish units might participate in a military offensive. By declaring this readiness, Kwasniewski put in concrete terms a relatively reserved official statement by the Polish Foreign Ministry, which was published immediately after the adoption of UN Resolution 1441. This called on Iraq to fulfil all the UN Security Council resolutions passed since 1990, especially regarding the destruction of its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and launching systems. The adoption of the resolution was greeted with as much enthusiasm as Iraq's declaration that it intended to comply with it.

In a keynote speech on Polish foreign policy in the Polish parliament on 22nd January, Foreign Minister Cimoszewicz's reaction was as clear-cut as President Kwasniewski's. His exact words were: "We are of the opinion that any serious Iraqi violation of Resolution 1441 requires a resolute response. Poland is ready to support such a response. We are firm in our belief that the problems can be solved by peaceful means." The Polish Foreign

Minister also expressed the opinion that a military operation should not be excluded on principle, but should remain as a "last option."

Before his speech in the Sejm, Cimoszewicz even stated that, in the interests of legitimising any offensive against Iraq, Poland's goal would be the adoption of a new UN Security Council resolution. However, he continued that, if necessary, Warsaw was ready to support the use of force by the U.S., even without an appropriate UN resolution, and that this would not be limited to just political support.

According to Polish press reports, troops of the elite units GROM and Formosa, as well as the Frigate "Konteradmiral Xawery Czernicki," have been stationed in the crisis area for some time. Paratroopers, pioneers or ABC experts could be mustered, if necessary. Cimoszewicz admitted that the Polish contribution would, at any rate, be "modest."

Against this background it is hardly surprising that Poland's Prime Minister, Leszek Miller, signed the letter from the eight European states assuring the U.S. of their support. And after U.S. Secretary of State Powell's speech to the UN Security Council, the Polish Foreign Ministry announced that without the "full, immediate and active co-operation of the Iraqis, the use of other options would become indispensable" (communiqué Polish Foreign Ministry, 6.2.2003).

F-16 for the Polish Air Force

The decision, announced at the end of 2002, to modernise the Polish Air Force with American F-16 Falcons was officially justified through the better technological and economic parameters, with which the French (Mirage) and the Swedish-British (Gripen) alternatives could not compete. Faith in the strength and sustainability of the American industry probably also played an important role. Meanwhile, it is difficult to identify any political motivation for the buying decision.

In addition, the total acquisition of 48 jets is tied up with American offsetting investments. Initially, the American bidder promised up to 9.8 bn Dollars. Even though, after sober consideration, the Polish selection committee had calculated a more realistic sum of 6 bn Dollars, President Kwasniewski nevertheless attempted to negotiate an increase of the originally promised sum with the head of Lockheed Martin – evidently without success. Prime Minister Miller's efforts to at least secure the original offer of 9 bn Dollars in the U.S. in early February were also futile. Defence Minister Szmajdziñski even warned that Poland might revise its decision and come back to the Swedish-British offer (Gripen).

It remains to be seen whether the heavy American offsetting investments really do give the Polish arms industry the hoped for economic and technological impulses, and contribute to enhancing the flagging Polish-American economic relations. From previous experience with such programmes, caution would be rather more appropriate. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen to what extent the co-operation between the Polish arms industry and European partners will be dented by the expected American involvement.

Polish society and America

So far, Polish politicians could always rely on a distinctly pro-American sentiment in Polish society. According to a survey published by the CBOS polling institute in Warsaw in early January 2003, 58 percent of Poles are sympathetic to Americans – more positive sentiment than is felt for the citizens of any other nation. On an international scale, too, Polish society clearly belongs to the group of "Americanophiles." The Pew Research Center in Washington found that almost nowhere in Europe does America have such a high standing like in Poland.

However, Polish public opinion, too, is sceptical about participation in any

military operation against Iraq. According to a CBOS survey from the beginning of February 2003, 62 percent of Poles are against Warsaw supporting any military intervention by the U.S. Half the Poles surveyed criticised Prime Minister Miller's decision to sign the letter of the eight states (only 29 percent supported this). Three quarters were against sending Polish troops to the Gulf region.

However, these figures should not be interpreted as an expression of a new America-critical sentiment. Rather, they display the rejection of military action, and the fear of becoming involved in such actions, that is evident throughout Europe.

Regardless of such survey results, pro-American sympathies within Polish society and large portions of the political establishment should remain stable. After all, it is based on a historically-rooted, extremely positive image of America: America stands for those values and principles which Poland has always desired: freedom, prosperity and security. The closeness to America manifests itself in the countless personal and familial ties with the large group of Americans of Polish origin, the *Polonia*. These socio-cultural affinities, so to speak, form the soft substrate of Polish-American relations.

American interests

Nevertheless, the hard core of the Polish-American friendship is based on shared fundamental foreign policy and security interests. Even though one should be realistic when it comes to the importance and the possibilities of Polish foreign policy, Poland is still a significant, even privileged American partner in Europe.

- With its political loyalty, Poland recommends itself as a possible member of international ad-hoc coalitions of the willing. Poland's solidarity offers the U.S. an opportunity to enlarge the classical American-British core of such coalitions. This involves less (limited) military or financial-economic contributions, but rather political support that lends American actions a greater degree of legitimacy.
- As the most influential country in Eastern-Central Europe, Poland could also act as the standard-bearer and core manifestation of pro-Americanism in its region, gathering the America-friendly states and governments amongst the ex-communist reform states around it.
- From the point of view of the U.S., Poland has an important role to play in the creation and maintenance of stability and security in Eastern Europe. Its own success in socio-economic transformation and building democracy and the rule of law could serve as an example for reform in the states further east. Above all, Poland's commitment to Ukraine, and, in general, its ambitions in the field of "Eastern policy," are seen in America as valuable contributions to the transfer of stability. At the beginning of January, the US Ambassador to the Ukraine once more referred to the importance of the trilateral dialogue between America, Poland and the Ukraine, emphasising the "important contribution" of the Polish president and other Polish politicians.
- Poland's efforts at gaining a profile as a positive regional force in the fight against terror after September 11th 2001 were also greeted with enthusiasm. Already in November 2001, a regional conference involving heads of state and government leaders from 17 countries took place in Poland. President Bush also took part via a video link-up.
- Poland's more specifically military contributions do not extend beyond selectively reinforcing the US units. In the medium term, however, as a politically reliable and socio-economically stable partner, Poland could become an interesting location for military infrastructure. However, the decision on this will depend on Washington's geopolitical considerations and U.S. military strategy.

- With its entry into the EU, Poland will strengthen the camp of the Atlanticist-oriented countries. In EU foreign policy in particular, Poland will take care to ensure that Europe does not "cut the cord" that binds it to America.

Polish interests

For Poland, it is mainly security issues and strategic interests that form the core of the mutual relationship. One of the main goals of Polish foreign policy since 1989 has been to develop institutionally sustained security ties with the United States. This goal was achieved with Poland's integration into NATO. Two motives were decisive for this aim.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Poland looked back at four decades of Soviet rule and bitter historic experience with the big Eastern neighbour. That is why independent Poland has been consistently striving for institutionalised reinsurance against traditional security risks. For Poland, only America, with its unyielding stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and with its military and, above all, nuclear potential, seems to offer effective protection from the consequences undesirable developments and possible neo-hegemonic trends in the East.

Over the past decades, especially since its integration into NATO, Poland has developed an essentially tension-free relationship with Russia. From the Polish point of view, Russia today mainly poses a threat as a possible epicentre of economic, social, political and ecological instability. In contrast, the Lukashenko regime in Belarus is also considered by some Polish observers to pose threats of a military nature.

A second, less emphasised motivation for the strategic orientation towards America stems from a more geopolitical assessment of Poland's own situation: "Without America's membership of NATO, and without the American military presence in Europe, Germany would become the dominant power on the continent due to its huge economic potential. Europe would once again fall into several rival blocks" (Jan Nowak-Jeziorański). According to this interpretation, Poland needs the United States as an "element of equilibrium" to outweigh both German and Russian influence.

Poland's desire for a permanent U.S. presence in Europe and in NATO has been reassessed in recent years and months. Developments in the global and European security environment, new developments in European – or EU – security affairs (especially ESDP), the transformation of NATO and tensions in transatlantic relations could collide with Polish interests in the longer term. For Poland, it would be especially problematic if

- the U.S. were to gradually apportion less importance to NATO in its strategic considerations,
- Washington were to question its massive military presence in Europe,
- the links between Europe and America on security issues were loosened, which, it is feared, could happen as a result of the creation of an autonomous European security system,
- the transatlantic relationship were to break down visibly due to severe tensions.

After September 11th 2001, Poland's interests gained an additional aspect. The political scientist Przemysław Żurawski used very pronounced terms to describe Poland's imperative to become active in foreign affairs after the terrorist attacks of 2001, and with regard to a possible armed conflict with Iraq. According to Żurawski, Poland should distinguish itself as a loyal ally of the United States in Central Europe. A too intense rapprochement between the U.S. and Russia would not be in Poland's interests. For this reason, he continues, Poland should side with Washington in the Iraq question, since "a potential US attack on Iraq could cool off relations with Russia. This is not desirable from the point of view of the EU, but it is in Poland's interests. A further rapprochement between Russia and

the West could lead to an erosion and marginalisation of the political status of the Republic of Poland."

Radosław Sikorski, a former Polish Deputy Foreign Minister, similarly calls for support for America in a war against Iraq, even without a new UN-resolution, adding that as a reward for Warsaw's solidarity, Washington would move to ensure that a future democratic Iraqi government would repay the sum of 500m Dollars it owes to Poland. Furthermore, Polish support would make it more probable that Washington would transfer the troops currently stationed in Germany to Poland. However, after a meeting with his American counterpart in February, Polish Defence Minister Szmajdziński denied that there were any such plans. He did not rule out the possibility, though, that as a result of the rearrangement of NATO's command structure, a regional command centre could be located on Polish territory.

Positions such as the above mentioned may not portray the stance of the Polish government, but in many ways they do mirror the stance of the large America-oriented sector of Poland's foreign and security affairs community. And they certainly do endorse considerations of strengthening the Polish-American security partnership and Polish security interests, which – regardless of the Iraq question – are already manifested in official Polish foreign policy.

This applies, for example, to the positive reaction to the NATO Response Force (NRF), one of the "most promising initiatives of American-European co-operation" (Kwasniewski). The success of this perhaps ultimate project within the context of NATO, which the United States still consider to be of great significance, is extremely important for Poland. Perhaps Warsaw secretly hopes that the NRF – despite the officially declared compatibility with the European Rapid Reaction Force – could become a rival for Europe's "Helsinki force," which would reduce the dynamic of Brussels' ESDP.

From the very beginning, Poland was also conducive to American plans for a missile defence system (MD). The general support from within the ranks of the Defence Ministry and the general staff some time ago, and offers to station technical components on Polish territory, may have been softened – especially from the Foreign Ministry – but goodwill has generally been displayed. The only condition was that a missile defence system should cover the whole NATO territory. Since the discussion over missile defence died down, newly perceived threats, and political considerations regarding the assumption of functions as an integral component of a possible Atlantic missile defence system, could mean that the discussion regains its intensity in Poland, too. The security expert Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas, for instance, recently demanded that Poland make efforts at having MD elements located on Polish territory. This would create an "anchor of American involvement in Poland and Central Europe." At the same time, Poland would become strategically more important, and move into the "top league" of international politics.

Since some time, apart from just security interests a more fundamental political motive has become part of Polish considerations regarding the friendship with the U.S. Some sort of "special relationship" with America, it is hoped, will lend Poland more weight in international and European politics than its territorial size, its economic potential and military capabilities would justify. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld closer Polish relations with the U.S. will give his country a higher weight in the EU and in relation with Russia. Considering its future EU membership, Poland could use its special relationship as a lever to increase its influence within the Union, and to raise its status in Central Europe.

Differentiated internal discussion on America

Against the background of the Iraq conflict, a discussion has begun in Poland which critically illuminates the prevailing pro-American position. Poland's former Defence Minister, Onyszkiewicz, cautions against a "vasallisation" of his country. If Poland continually follows the American course, it would – in contrast to dominant, currently held opinions – lose influence in the EU and gamble away its status as an important partner. Zdisław Najder, a distinguished publicist, accuses Polish politicians of "naive pro-Americanism," and names examples in which American policy runs fundamentally against Polish goals (for instance, the American attitude of indulgence towards Russia in the Chechen conflict). In the opinion of the left-wing publicist Janusz Rolicki, Poland's love for America took on an "irrational" character, inasmuch as the U.S. had "not even risked a button for the Polish cause" in decisive historical situations.

Opinions as to how far solidarity with the USA should go vary in every segment of the political spectrum. There are defenders of much closer identification with the USA (who also back a generally stronger European orientation) both amongst the Polish right, i.e. in the conservative-liberal *Civic Platform*, or the patriotic *Law and Justice* Party (combined here with a moderate Euroscepticism), as well as in the ruling left-wing alliance (SLD). Amongst the critics of such a position are politicians of the ex-communist SLD, as well as liberal and conservative figures. So far, however, this lively discussion over Poland's relationship with America has not yet found its expression in foreign policy-making.

Poland in the EU: Europeanisation or Atlanticism?

How will Poland act as an EU member? Where will it position itself in European-American discussions? Two extreme positions are generally imaginable:

1. Poland "Europeanises" little by little.
2. Poland becomes even more pro-American. Some pro-European tendencies would gradually fade away after membership. They would have been simply an expression of Polish pre-accession tactics.

The probability of either of these scenarios is rather small. Whether one of the two positions gets the upper hand depends on the interplay of many separate factors.

The power of money. Supporters of the Europeanisation thesis refer to the economic interweavement with the European Union, which will also make itself felt in politics. In fact, this interweavement is much more developed than are economic relations with America. Only 3 percent of Polish exports go to the U.S., whereas 70 percent go to states of the European Union. Foreign investment in Poland is another area in which American investors clearly lag behind the Europeans (only one seventh comes from America). For example, there are no US aid packages comparable in size to the substantial finance transfers in the framework of European structural and agricultural policy. Of course, one cannot draw conclusions about foreign policy from the intensity of economic and financial relations alone. Some EU member nations currently benefiting from financial redistribution prove to be undeterred by this in their foreign policy. Additionally, there are widespread doubts in Poland regarding the sustainability of the European economy. For this reason, efforts are being maintained to intensify economic contacts with the U.S., in order to strengthen ties with the supposedly more sustainable and superior American national economy.

Changing threat perceptions. It is commonly believed that Russia will continue to lose significance as a threat to Polish security, and will finally disappear altogether as a risk factor. The conditions for this to happen are Poland's membership of

Western structures, Russia's co-operation with the West and further stabilisation and transformation in Russia. But one has to be careful about these estimates, too. Setbacks in Russia would quickly resuscitate old threat patterns. Deficits in democracy and the rule of law, authoritarian tendencies or "gruff treatment" of states in Russia's "near abroad" are, anyhow, sensitively recorded in Poland. Moreover, Poland considers Belarus to be a genuine security risk. Polish defence experts consider at least a "destabilisation crisis in the vicinity of the Polish borders" (general B. Balcerowicz) to be possible. Even if Russia and the "East" were seen in a new light, this would not mean that America would not have any role to play in Poland's policy on Russia. In the opinion of ex-Foreign Minister Olechowski, stated some time ago in the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Russia has to find a place in Europe. Since it cannot join the EU, a "structure is necessary that includes and involves America."

NATO's new clothes. So far, the possible consequences of Russia's integration into NATO, of the changes that are affecting the character of the alliance and of a further rapprochement between the United States and Russia have been underestimated. If these processes continue, if a further estrangement between America and Europe takes place, and if the U.S. intends to question the role of the alliance, NATO could lose its attractiveness for Poland. Could the EU then represent a functional alternative for Poland? For this to occur, certain conditions would have to be met. Presumably, a consensus would have to be found in the EU over a security and defence policy that provides some kind of mutual assistance obligation. Additionally, for Poland it would be important, not to permit Russia any far-reaching involvement in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), since similar developments as in the case of Russia-NATO could be triggered off. If these "pre-conditions" were fulfilled, the EU could become more attractive to Poland in strategic and security matters. In this case, increased Polish endorsement in questions regarding ESDP could be expected. At the same time, Poland would be likely to support a more active involvement of the EU as a global main player in foreign and military affairs. Not least the fact that, through this, Europe would become an attractive partner for the U.S. would support this idea.

Poland as a regional power in Europe. Poland hopes to assert its political and economic interests through active participation in central projects of European integration. Since Poland has ambitions of becoming a "regional power" in Eastern-Central Europe, and an exporter of stability into Eastern Europe, it needs more, not less Europe, and therefore also the support of the most important partners within the EU. Poland's long term interest isnot to distance itself permanently from France or Germany through unilateral pro-American positions.

European milieu. Recent debates on Warsaw's position regarding Iraq have shown that the generally pro-American political class is certainly not homogenous. In this connection, the weekly newspaper *Wprost* identified three types of politicians: "Americans," "Europeans" and defenders of a Polish way *(swojacy)*, whereby the "Americans" are currently the most popular group. It is imaginable that the "European" camp will be strengthened after Poland joins the EU, since Polish politics is increasingly grappling with European problems, and may even come to identify with European politics. Maybe the "Europeans" will become a part of a new "European milieu." This could be made up by certain groups of the business community or political-administrative players belong, who have to do with, or are involved in, European structures. Moreover, it should not be excluded that a more European-oriented generation will come onto the scene.

Polish foreign policy is attempting to

counter the accusations of America-favouritism. Going along with the United States is not understood as blind support, but as active co-operation that could serve as an example to other European states. Over and over again Warsaw rejects a choice between America and Europe. One should not have to choose "between one's father and mother," goes a maxim frequently quoted by Foreign Minister Cimoszewicz and others.

The current situation shows that Poland is not intending to decide *against* Europe. For one, this is not possible because there is no unified European position towards either the Iraq crisis, or generally towards American politics of recent years. At the moment, Poland is rather leaning towards the American position and, through this, it is converging with the positions of those forces and countries in Europe that traditionally feel drawn towards Washington.

More resolute tendencies towards Europeanisation will, in any case, only come into being in the medium to long term. EU membership alone will not mean that European policies will be closer to those of the representatives of the dominant political trends in the country than American policies. However, Poland's new political reality as an EU member, and its fear of losing influence in Europe because of a blunt pro-Americanism, will contribute to Poland not behaving like America's "Trojan donkey" (Zdzisław Najder). Just as in the past, Poland will not pursue a primacy of America in its foreign policy. Rather, it will try to keep the already trodden path of a "European Atlanticism," a policy of "as-well-as," the main objective of which is a close relationship between Europe *and* America. The points of emphasis shaping this policy might certainly change, but as a rule they will support the necessity of maintaining the transatlantic nexus.

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