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USE OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE IRAQ MISSION

Abstract

The government in Warsaw decided to dispatch a regular force as the Polish Military Contingent in March 2003. At that time, Poland did not voice any reservations, nor did it lay down any conditions relevant to issues such as national interests (e.g., economic ones, etc.) when it agreed to the proposals of the US and Great Britain to send a reinforced military component to Iraq. Under UNSC Resolutions 1441 and 1483, the US and Great Britain were recognized as the interim authorities in Iraq in the new political and military situation that followed Iraq's defeat. In such circumstances,

Poland agreed to participate in a military scope in the ‘peacekeeping and stabilization mission’ and to take over the central-south zone in Iraq and take command of the Multinational Division Central-South – MND C-S). At that point, the process of collecting data on the specifics of the future mission, its analysis and an assessment of the situation began. At the same time, the process of selecting and preparing military units for these operations was initiated.

Key words

Operation Iraqi Freedom, Polish Military Contingent, war, weapon of mass destruction

Introduction

As a sovereign and democratic state, Poland has been a respected member of the United Nations (UN) since 1945. Poland has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) since 1999. Membership of both these organizations treats Poland with commitment and loyalty to their core ideas and mutual obligations¹. By virtue of the obligations assumed, the Polish Armed Forces, at the call of these international organizations, have participated for many years in UN peacekeeping missions (since 1953) and combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan².

On March 18, 2003, the US President George W. Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraq ordering Saddam Hussein and his sons Uday and Qusay to leave Iraq within 48 hours under threat of war. In response, Saddam Hussein declared that “he was born in Iraq and intends to die there”³.

The following day, i.e., on March 19, US troops entered the demilitarized zone and on March 20 at 03:33 the Americans launched their first air strike on Baghdad. In doing so, they decided on a unilateral, forceful solution to the “Iraqi problem”, despite the unequivocal opposition of the international community,

stemming from UN Security Council resolution and NATO’s negative stance⁴. The coalition built on the eve of the war numbered 44 states.

Members of the Polish government publicly argued strongly for the military participation of the state in the intervention in Iraq with visions of benefits for the country, economy, and defense. Poland was to gain new markets for its economy, contracts, and many other political and economic benefits⁵. At that time, the public learned from the media that Polish military support for the American intervention in Iraq would result in the abolition of the obligation for Polish citizens to obtain a visa to enter the USA and would have a positive impact on the tender and the American side’s increase in the offset offer for the purchase of F-16 aircraft⁶.

The government communiqué emphasized: “We also see Poland’s participation in the operation as an implementation of the agreement of the heads of state and government at the NATO Summit in Prague to provide support for the enactment of Resolution 1441”⁷.

The president told the media at the time: “If you had asked me whether I was for war or for peace, I would have said that I was for peace. If you were to ask whether it is necessary to risk the

1 A. Tavares, W. Kolano, *The role of Poland in ensuring European Security*, „Security Forum” 2022, vol. 6.

2 A. Drzewicki, *Strategia udziału Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w operacjach międzynarodowych. Aspekty polityczne i wojskowe*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa” 2011.

3 pkwirak.wp.mil.pl (access: 10.02.2023).

4 J. Bielecki, *Europejczycy odcinają się od Amerykanów*, „Rzeczpospolita” 2002, 11.

5 E. Ambroziak, *Wojna za...złoty. Polska misja stabilizacyjna w Iraku-bilans zysków i strat*, „Polityka & Bezpieczeństwo” Nr 2/2013.

6 Ł. Jureńczyk, *Polska misja w Iraku – implikacje dla Iraku i Polski*, Bydgoszcz 2010.

7 The position of the Council of Ministers, in connection with the request for a decision by the President of the Republic of Poland on the participation of Polish Military Contingents in the International Coalition Forces to enforce compliance by Iraq with the UN Security Council Resolution, Warsaw, 17 March 2003, www.kprm.gov.pl (access: 23.04.2023 r.).

lives of Polish soldiers, even to a limited extent, I would have said I also had my doubts. But if you were to ask me and my compatriots whether or not they wanted to ensure Poland's security and freedom from the threat of terrorism, I am convinced that the vast majority would answer that they wanted security⁸.

In these considerations, one should also consider the fact that Iraq had financial obligations to Poland in the amount of several hundred million dollars, due to industrial and road investments carried out by Polish companies. For several decades, the Polish state had very good trade and investment relations with Iraq. With the fall of Saddam Hussein's power in Iraq, Polish expectations of settling these financial debts were also lost.

In many situations, even on a day-to-day basis, the media and officials called the peacekeeping mission a mere slogan in the face of the dangerous wartime reality found in Iraq by Polish soldiers, among others. The use of weapons by Polish soldiers from the Polish Military Contingents was subject to the legal regulations in force in Poland. The penal code and military regulations formally applied to Polish soldiers as they did when they stayed in the country in peacetime conditions. The several thousand Polish soldiers sent to Iraq during these years were in fact operating under the constant threat of war⁹. Until the end of the stay of the Polish Military

Contingents in Iraq, typical irregular operations continued there, organised ambushes with booby traps, shelling of patrols and convoys, permanent military bases were shelled with rockets and mortars. Neither Polish politicians (of all party options) nor the legislative authorities did anything regarding the legal protection of Polish soldiers sent to war in foreign territory. This discomfort was not experienced by soldiers and officers of the US, British, French, and other NATO armies. During the period of the 'peace and stabilization mission', while conducting various military tasks also of a humanitarian nature, helping the local population, suddenly (a patrol, a platoon, a transport column, etc.) would come under fire or the danger of a prepared attack was perceived¹⁰.

Methodological and methodical assumptions

The aim of the article is to present the use of the Polish Armed Forces on the example of the mission of the Polish Military Contingent in Iraq in the analysis of military combat presence and expected economic benefits. The subject of this analysis is also to show the interdependencies between political decisions that cause the sending of the Polish Military Contingent on a stabilization mission to Iraq and the multi-threaded positive and negative effects for the

8 M. Wągrowka, *Udział Polski w interwencji zbrojnej i misji stabilizacyjnej w Iraku*, „Raporty i Analizy” 2004, nr 12/04.

9 R. Lewandowski, W. Lewandowski, *Konsekwencje zaangażowania Polski w Iraku*, Raport, Warszawa 2009.

10 The first cases of fallen soldiers and physical impairments suffered by soldiers in Iraq revealed that the Polish legal system, including military regulations (on social issues, military service, family support in these random situations, etc.) treated these soldiers (and their families) on the level of unfortunate employee accidents. This manifested itself to families after television coverage of military ceremonies held at coffins with the fallen, and to crippled veterans after a period of treatment and rehabilitation, when they were left alone with their own disability and social problems.

army and the interests of the state. The article also outlines the impact of combat experience on the development of the Polish Armed Forces.

The following implementation methods were used to reach the adopted objective of the paper:

- historical method to reconstruct the events that led to the use of the Polish Armed Forces in the military intervention of Iraq as a foreign policy measure and the expected economic benefits for the state,
- a legal method to present the norms of international and national law related to the issue in question,
- in addition, an attempt was made to reconstruct the interests and objectives of the parties. This made it possible to use a method of analyzing economic, military, and social benefits in relation to the Polish conditions.

Legal and political background

The issues concerning the subordination and use of the Polish Armed Forces are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997. The enshrinement of separate principles in relation to the Armed Forces in the chapter regulating the constitutional foundations of the state results from the specific tasks for which they are intended. Article 26 section 1 of the Constitution states that the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland serve to protect the independence of the state and the indivisibility of its territory and to ensure the security and inviolability

of its borders. In practice, the most important decisions concerning the operation and use of the Armed Forces are taken by the relevant constitutional bodies. Among other things, the civilian authorities decide on sending Polish soldiers on missions abroad. According to the Constitution, the rules for the use of the Armed Forces outside the country are defined by a ratified international agreement or law. The Constitution does not specify the circumstances that must exist for the Armed Forces to be used outside the country. The rules governing the sending of Polish military units out of the country are regulated by a statutory act¹¹. For the purposes of the Act, military units are operational and tactical compounds, as well as divisions and subdivisions. The Act distinguishes between two different situations, i.e., the use of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland outside the country and the stay of these forces outside the country. The use of units abroad means their presence abroad to participate in three types of engagements:

- an armed conflict or to strengthen the forces of the state or allied states,
- a peace keeping mission,
- an action to prevent acts of terrorism or their consequences.

In contrast, the stay of units abroad means their presence abroad in undertakings such as:

- military training and exercises,
- rescue, search, or humanitarian operations, except for rescue operations regulated by the Sea Rescue Regulations,
- representative events.

¹¹ Ustawa z dnia 17 grudnia 1998 o zasadach użycia lub pobytu Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej poza granicami państwa, Dz.U. z 2023 r. poz. 755.

The use of military units outside the country is decided by the President, who immediately informs the Speakers of the Parliament and the Senate. In the case of sending soldiers to participate in an armed conflict or to strengthen the forces of a state or allied states, as well as in the case of participation in a peace-keeping mission, the President shall decide at the request of the Council of Ministers. It is different in the situation of conducting actions to prevent acts of terrorism or their consequences – it is the President who decides at the request of the Prime Minister. Instead, it is up to the Council of Ministers or its competent members to decide on the stay of military units¹². In accordance with the Act, such a decision is taken by the minister in charge of national defense or the minister in charge of internal affairs in relation to subordinate or subordinate units, regardless of the nature of the stay. The exception is the situation of military units staying for military training or exercises if the funds for these undertakings are not included in the budget of the relevant ministry. In such a situation, residency is decided by the Council of Ministers¹³. Each time the President of the Council of Ministers notifies the President of a decision on the stay of military units outside the country. In the case of a presidential decision on the use of military units outside the country, the law introduces several formal and legal conditions. The order must contain basic information

about the mission itself and the Polish units involved. The order must include information on which military units, in what number, and for how long they will remain outside the country. In addition, it must state the purpose of directing military units abroad, the scope of their tasks and the area of activity¹⁴. The authority of the international organisation under whose auspices the operation is conducted should be identified, as well as the system of command and control of the units. It is also necessary to identify the government administration bodies responsible for cooperation with the competent bodies of the international organisation in directing the activities and supplying military units. It is also necessary to indicate what equipment the military units will be armed with. In the case of transit, information on the routes and times of movement of military units shall also be recorded. If it is necessary to extend or reduce the period of use of military units outside the country, an order is also required.

The aforesaid documents are the basic acts regulating the use of the Polish Armed Forces outside the country.

War and stability operations in Iraq

Warfare continued until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the elimination of threats after that point. The next, second stage is the efforts aimed at stabilizing the country,

12 Ł. Jureńczyk, *Wysyłanie polskich żołnierzy na misje poza granicami kraju w świetle krajowego ustawodawstwa i doktryny obronnej*, Bydgoszcz 2012.

13 www.altair.com.pl(access:17.02.2023).

14 A. Drzewicki, *Strategia udziału Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w operacjach międzynarodowych. Aspekty polityczne i wojskowe*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa” 2011.

introducing new authorities under the control of coalition troops, combating terrorist militias destabilizing the area controlled by coalitions of allied forces¹⁵.

The warship 'Konradmiral Xawery Czernicki' and the special unit GROM (Mobile Operations Response Group) were the first Polish support for the coalition of the US allied states preparing for military action in Iraq. ORP 'Czernicki' arrived in operations on 31 July 2002 and came under the operational subordination of the Commander of the 5th Fleet of the US Navy, namely the operational group TG 53 (TASK GROUP, operational group, special group), and then TG 55. In this service at sea, the ship stayed for 334 days. The ports from which it operated were Jebel Ali (the United Arab Emirates), Mina Salman (Bahrain) and Ras Al-Qualayah (Kuwait). The ship ended its participation in the operation on 31 July 2003. Its tasks concerned primarily: transport of cargo and supplies, control of navigation in the northern part of the Persian Gulf, patrolling the internal waters of Iraq, protection of communications of allied troops in the northern part of the Persian Gulf, logistical protection of the operations of the US Navy special forces. In the first phase of the operation, ORP 'Czernicki' served as a supply base for boarding groups (so-called boarding team) coming from: Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, patrolling the waters of the Persian Gulf. Since the outbreak of war and the start of 'Iraqi Freedom' Operation, the ship's tasks have changed. Then, it was

assigned to be a part of a group of warships operating in the territorial waters of Iraq, patrolling the river Kaa, which is the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris. The interesting and at the same time bizarre fact is that the supply of spare parts to the ship was conducted by private American companies especially DHL and FEDEX.

Soldiers of the GROM special unit arrived in the Gulf region in March 2002. It was a group of the unit's officers who flew in for reconnaissance to familiarize themselves with the terrain and conditions in which they would be conducting their mission. The first GROM shift flew out of Poland to the Persian Gulf region on 19 April 2002, together with 6 soldiers of the FORMOZA special unit¹⁶. These were primarily waterborne troops who were tasked with operating as part of the Multinational Interception Force MIF (Multinational Interception Force). These units operated under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 of 8 November 2002. This was about compliance with the United Nations resolution, which aimed to impose sanctions on Iraq in the oil trade and the purchase of arms. In this phase of operations, the task of the Polish soldiers was to control ships sailing in the waters of the Persian Gulf. The Poles were stationed at a base in Doha, near the capital of Kuwait. As hostilities approached against Iraq, the activities of special units also intensified. "Despite considerable skills and major experience, as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, GROM operators waited for

15 H.M. Królikowski, Cz. Marcinkowski, *Irak 2003*, Warszawa 2003, p. 22.

16 W. Skrzypczak, M. Majewski, P. Reszka, *Moja Wojna*, Poznań 2010, p. 178.

a final decision from Poland as to their participation in the war operation almost until the final hours. It was a rather bizarre situation. Our soldiers stationed in Kuwait were already making their final preparations before their first combat mission. On the other hand, officially, they did not have approval for it. Ultimately, Colonel Roman Polko, then commander of GROM, was told of the agreement to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom by telephone from the General Operations Directorate. The actual documents were not delivered until after the first combat assignment, during the war with Iraq. It was an incomprehensible situation and, in the event of refusal to participate in combat operations, embarrassing for Poland, mainly because from the very beginning of the planning of special operations, the Poles were treated as equal partners by the coalition partners¹⁷.

The Polish Army's combat operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom were limited to special operations conducted by GROM group. These were met with the highest praise from our allies. Among others, Admiral Robert S. Harvard, the commander of Task Force 561 in which the Polish unit operated in Iraq, wrote in a letter to the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Poland that among the special units from all over the world with which he had worked for almost 25 years, the GROM soldiers turned out to be the best. Indeed, Prime Minister Leszek Miller, welcoming the commandos returning from Iraq, said: "We are proud

that Poland has such soldiers. Thank you for coming back without losses, accidents, or casualties. This is a further proof of your professionalism. There were few of you in Iraq, but the benefits for Poland are enormous"¹⁸.

Throughout their mission in Iraq, GROM soldiers officially conducted 200 direct actions, resulting in the detention of a number of suspected terrorists, including people from the so-called "Deck of cards", i.e., the most wanted members of the regime. According to a Ministry of Defence spokesperson, about 80% of GROM soldiers and about 60% of officers took part in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq between March 2002 and December 2004. The most famous actions of GROM were¹⁹.

The storming of KAAOT (Khawar Al-Amaya Offshore Terminal) standing at the entrance to the port of Umm Kasr, which took place on the night of 20-21 March 2003, capturing the Mukarian dam and hydroelectric power station, 100 km from Baghdad.

The legal basis on which the above-mentioned units operated, according to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, was possible based on three UNSC resolutions:

- no. 678 of 1990,
- no. 687 of 1991,
- no. 1441 of 2002 (except that the resolution was issued on 8 November and the units had been operating since spring 2002),
- pursuant to the Act of 17 December 1998 on the rules of use or stay of

17 M. Łukaszewicz, R. Polko, *Gromowładny. O GROM-ie, MON-ie, Rangersach i Nieustraszonych*. Kraków 2005, p. 45.

18 M. Lasoń, *Polska Misja w Iraku*, Kraków 2010, p. 157.

19 GROM ended the Iraqi mission, www.wiadomosci.wp.pl (access: 18.04.2023 r.).

the Polish Armed Forces outside the country,

- participation of the first Polish military units in military operations in Iraq was regulated by the order of the President of the Republic of Poland of 17 March 2003, which was the legal and political authorization for such operations a period of 7 months until 15 September 2003.

In connection with the war effort in Iraq, one should mention Operation Display Deterrence. Poland, on 24 March 2003, declared its readiness to send a contamination elimination platoon of up to 50 soldiers to Turkey. The operation was to take place on Turkish soil in connection, as the US side suggested, with Iraq's threat to use WMD²⁰. A contingent was prepared for deployment consisting of 36 soldiers from the 4th Chemical Regiment from Brodnica (contamination elimination platoon), soldiers from the Logistics Brigade from Opole and soldiers from the 1st PSK (Special Commando Regiment) from Lubliniec. The legal bases invoked were Art. 4 and 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the order of the President of the Republic of Poland. However, the operation did not materialize due to the rapid end of the armed conflict in Iraq.

After the official announcement by the US President George Bush, on 1 May 2003, of the end of hostilities in Iraq, the situation had stabilized, and the Iraqi state was on the path to normalisation. The war campaign lasted

just forty-seven days, and, in that time, the Iraqi forces were completely crushed. Baghdad, the country's capital, was captured. Most of the Iraqi leaders were captured or, as was the case with Saddam Hussein, soon to be captured. At the end of July 2003, US Central Command commander Gen. John Abizaid officially confirmed that signs of guerrilla warfare have been spotted in areas captured by coalition forces. In these circumstances, it was difficult to consider that hostilities in Iraq had ended. In view of such facts, it was difficult then but also today to interpret the continued presence of Polish military units in Iraq as a 'peacekeeping and stabilization mission'. And it was for just such a mission that the Polish government teams and the President sent soldiers of the Polish Military Contingent to Iraq.

On 6 June 2003, the Polish Military Contingent was officially established for the purpose of supporting the stabilization mission in Iraq. This marked the implementation of President A. Kwaśniewski's decision of 3 June 2003, and an earlier motion submitted by the Council of Ministers. According to these legislative mandates, the Polish contingent was to number 2,500 soldiers²¹. The Polish command of the Multinational Division Central-South was in charge of the Central-South zone, covering the provinces of Al Qadisiyah, An Najaf, Karbala, Wasit and Babil. The area covered about 65,000 km, which comprised about 15% of Iraq's area²². The

20 W. Seth Carus, *Defining Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Waszyngton 2012.

21 Postanowieniu Prezydenta RP z dnia 6 czerwca 2003 r. o użyciu Polskiego Kontyngentu Wojskowego w składzie Międzynarodowych Sił Stabilizacyjnych w Republice Iraku.

22 M. Lasoń, *Polska Misja w Iraku*, Kraków 2010, p. 261.

deployment to the mission area took place in 3 phases: the initiative group on 5-12 June, the preparatory group on 2-8 July, the main force on 5-22 August. The period of operation of the Polish Military Contingent was set for the period from 9 June to 31 December 2003²³. The international stabilization force, within which the contingent was to operate, acted in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003.

The main tasks were to involve:

- overseeing the process of restoring security and public order,
- assisting emerging state and local authorities,
- protecting the governmental institutions of the Republic of Iraq and the border between the Republic of Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the control of border crossings,
- support in the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure,
- protection of significant places of worship, cultural goods, as well as personnel and infrastructure of oil fields,
- support for the detection and destruction of weapons of mass destruction,
- conducting military reconnaissance and information operations,
- support for the transition of the armed forces of the Republic of Iraq, including disarmament, demobilization, and restructuring processes,
- performing other tasks, including those of a humanitarian and rescue nature²⁴.

Summary

The wide-ranging work from Poland's political involvement through the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in the war and then in the stabilization mission, and the related economic implications for Poland years later, provide today a clearer picture of the decisions made at the time, the expected benefits and the difficult problems that arose.

It should be emphasized that in terms of military experience, it was a serious impulse for Poland to develop the army, especially the Special Forces.

From a military point of view, Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' was a considerable success. Within twenty days from the start of the attack, Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown. The main goals of the operation were:

- the end of Saddam Hussein's regime,
- identifying, isolating, and eliminating Iraqi weapons of mass destruction,
- search, capture, and removal of terrorists from Iraq,
- collecting all available data on terrorist organizations,
- collecting all data on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world,
- ending sanctions on Iraq and providing immediate humanitarian assistance to refugees and Iraqi citizens,
- securing Iraq's oil fields, an asset belonging to the Iraqi people,
- helping the Iraqi people create the conditions for the formation of their

23 R. Jakubczak, *Działania stabilizacyjne Polskiego Kontyngentu Wojskowego w Iraku*, Słupsk 2007.

24 M. Dziekan, *Conclusions from the course of the operation "Iraqi Freedom", Materials from a scientific conference organized on the initiative and under the patronage of the Minister of National Defense*, Warszawa 2003.

own government based on democratic principles.

In Iraq, the command of the Polish Armed Forces faced such a unique task as commanding a multinational division for the first time. This task required a multi-level work of preparation and implementation, not least logistical. Command skills were needed at the level of the execution of strategic tasks by the military units of the multiple countries comprising the multinational division in a hostile area of responsibility.

Deserts, palm forests, high-density housing development in the cities and an invisible enemy in the form of booby-trapped mines verified previous Polish military thought and command practice. Polish soldiers of all structures, especially individual soldiers, combat team crews gained real experience that no training ground exercise can give them. Iraq immediately changed the mentality of the commanders, also of the soldiers themselves. Diverse operations, in difficult and unfamiliar terrain, interaction with soldiers from other countries, in particular US soldiers, gave us invaluable multi-faceted military and life experience.

The experience of military operations in Iraq later developed a new naming nomenclature and division of operations for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland on 13 January 2009 adopted the Strategy for the participation of the country's Armed Forces in international operations. The document specified the objectives and rules for the use of the Polish Army in missions abroad. As a normative

document, the strategy fully reflected the qualitative changes in the approach to international security issues, with a particular focus on the redefinition of threats and challenges, as well as the increasing role of international operations as a tool for the implementation of state foreign policy.

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