



*The 13<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference*  
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT  
IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY”**  
**Braşov, November 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 2018**



**FUTURE CHALLENGES TO NATO AND THE IMPACT ON  
THE DEFENCE POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN ALLIES**

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**Abstract:**

The contemporary security environment can be characterised by multiple challenges – both in military and non-military sphere – that NATO must face. These challenges entail the necessity of the Alliance to adapt itself through increasing the military and civilian capability, that will allow an efficient deterrence, and response if necessary. That, in consequence, requires the member states to properly modernise their armed forces, increase their non-military defence capabilities, and – most of all – to build up the allied solidarity and the willingness to act.

*Key words: NATO, defence policy, security*

**Introduction**

Presently, the North Atlantic Alliance is considered as the world’s most powerful organisation in the domain of international security. Its power and geopolitical conditions have been shaped within decades through strong military, economic and political relations. As, Robert Kupiecki claims, thanks to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the West was capable of bloodlessly ending the Cold War, and before, through forty years ensured security and stable development for its member states [Kupiecki, p.5].

These achievements are not accidental, but the result of systematic and thoroughly thought political acts and policies of NATO, realised in diverse areas of the Alliance’s responsibility. Thus, NATO has a unique capability of adapting to the ever-changing world’s security environment. Thanks to this fact, a significant evolution of the Alliance was possible, that out of a typical military-political pact, created a global security organisation not restricting itself to the defence-related issues. Changes, that have occurred and occurs within its structures, enable the organisation to accordingly respond and cope with emerging challenges and threats.

It is worth noting, though, that the strength of NATO is built up by its member-states. Therefore, each member of the organisation has to realise its declared commitments, and certainly not limit them, counting on the United States to fill the gap. Unfortunately, in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, numerous European states, that are not only NATO members but also form the European Union, seemed to have had forgotten their commitments. These governments cut their military expenditures down, limited their armies’ manpower, and thus jeopardising their defence capabilities [Deni, p.25]<sup>1</sup>. Enjoying

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<sup>1</sup> Between 2005 and 2015 France reduced its armed forces from 169 000 to 115 000 soldiers. Similarly did the second European power, Germany. Its reduction was even greater, as it went from 221 000 to 63 000 soldiers.

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the sensation of freedom, well-being and peace, the European states forgotten the ancient truth of *si vis pacem, para bellum*. It can be assumed that the main reason behind this phenomenon, that visibly lowered NATO's vigilance, were relatively good relations with Russia [Kupiecki, Menkiszak, p.7].

Let us point out that even in the NATO Strategic Concept 2010 it was underlined that – despite differences in some minor issues – the Alliance members were convinced that NATO's and Russia's security are interconnected, and that a strong and constructive partnership, founded on a mutual trust, transparency and predictability of actions, can serve our common security in the best way [Koncepcja]. Presently, this partnership is put on hold, and relations with Russia reminds more of the Cold War than from the best time of cooperation between NATO Council and Russia in the 1990's.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Security environment**

In the present NATO Strategic Concept (2010) there is no mention of a potential armed conflict on the Alliance's Euro-Atlantic territory. Among biggest threats to the security of the member states are listed as: a) proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery, b) terrorism, c) lack of stability or a conflict outside NATO borders, d) cyberattacks, e) transit road attacks, f) new technological trends, e.g. development of the laser weapons, g) limitations in the natural environment and resources, like climate change [Marszałek, p. 15].

In the meantime, though, Russian Federation captured Crimea and invaded Eastern part of Ukraine. Paradoxically, both events motivated political leadership of the Alliance to a serious approach to the issue of its territorial defence, thus to restoring the meaningfulness of the article 5 of the Washington Treaty in the organisation's agenda. Unfortunately, not all NATO members initially considered as a threat the events in Eastern Ukraine, a country directly bordering Poland and thus NATO itself. Both the political decisionmakers in Poland and Polish citizens took the events were seriously, and it seems that were even preoccupied with a possibility of a possible spill-over effect. Such sentiments were fortified by Russian air force provocations, that increased both its sorties and violations of NATO states' airspace. Poles' fears were also common among citizens of other Baltic states, especially there where the Russian minority is significant (e.g. Estonia).

Among experts, there is no doubt, that proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (and means of their delivery) is an important threat to the security of the Alliance. Each state outside of the Alliance that possesses both WMD and ballistic missiles of various range, capable of its delivery, becomes a potential threat to NATO. Speaking about a military threat, it can be assumed that, presently, only a rocket attack can surprise a potential foe. Therefore, we observe a rise of importance of the anti-rocket defence system, which up-to-date is not a strong point of the Alliance as much as its decisionmakers and military would like it to be. A susceptibility to such attacks put the Alliance, and especially

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<sup>2</sup> Even a project of the Strategic Concept from 2010 itself caused a reaction from the Russian part, that felt threatened by a stronger consolidation of NATO forces and their modernisation. In order to prevent, or at least slow down, these steps, president of Russia, Dmitrij Miedwiediew send to the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen a project of an agreement between the Alliance and Russian Federation. Despite the fact that the document at the beginning formulates proposals of activities that are aimed at fostering stable relations between both entities in the security sector, in its farther part a certain fear of strengthening NATO's position is visible. It can be seen in an attempt at creating distinctions between new member states and old members of the Alliance. In the project, the old members were asked not to deploy their armed forces on the territories of the new member states. On the other hand, it is a Kremlin's response to the Alliance's policy of 'open doors' towards strengthening cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine in common councils, which Russia opposes.

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its European members, in uncomfortable situation where they can be blackmailed by a hostile state with significant ballistic-missile potential.

The threat of terrorism is rated highly on the NATO's threat list. Not surprising is then a fact that NATO undertook numerous initiatives aimed at combating the phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. As a regional security organisation, NATO joined the global effort just after 9/11 attacks in the United States. We must remember, though, that the threat of terrorism in different member states varies, since some states are more vulnerable to extremist while other less. However, it cannot be assumed that in states of lower level of threat, the phenomenon can be disregarded. We may assume that the well-functioning NATO's crisis management system will deal with such issues, though, it will not be an easy task, however certainly a feasible one.

### **2. Initiatives on the level of the North Atlantic Alliance**

Contemporary, NATO as its main goals considers the collective defence of the member states, participation in conflict-solving undertakings on the global scale and cooperative security, based on cooperation with other organisation and international partners. These missions find its reflection in present, however criticised, though still in force, NATO Strategic Concept. However, efficient realisation of these goals requires strengthening of military potential, which in consequence entails a need to create and then implement new programmes, that will increase the defence potential, and as well to conduct operations of crisis management character outside the NATO borders. Since it is far better to react to threats farther from one own's borders.

An important initiative that should significantly neutralise the main threat (proliferation of WMD) is a concept of extending the NATO anti-ballistic missile defence system. During the Lisbon Summit, a decision was taken to consider anti-missile defence as an Alliance's common mission, and to create an allied anti-ballistic missile defence system. NATO decisionmakers accepted an important conception based on extending of already existing Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) with a territorial defence. The Alliance's system shall be constructed upon the future US anti-missile defence installations based in Europe and national resources designated for the ALTBMD programme. Finally, a common anti-missile defence command system will be created.

One of the most important decision, which the NATO political leaders undertook during the NATO Summit in Newport in 2014 was related with creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Being based in their countries of origin, VJTF are required to be ready to deploy within 48h to a crisis' area. Despite the fact that this force is conceived to be capable of dealing with the full spectre of the Alliance missions, with a high dose of probability we can accept that their real purpose is to reinforce collective defence, when needed. It is worth noting that the forces of such a high-level of readiness are not a different entity, yet they are derived from doubled NATO Response Force.

Another initiative that can be considered as aimed at reducing potential Russian threat is the new programme of NATO readiness, "4 x 30", means 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 naval vessels ready to react within 30 days. This

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<sup>3</sup> The aim of this initiative is to coordinate the fight against terrorism, building the means of mutual trust, helping the states that require assistance, intelligence exchange, and creation of an area free from terrorism through establishing a narrower cooperation among partner states, consulting and realisation of accepted programmes and providing mutual support in situation of potential terrorist attacks. In 2002 EAPC accepted a Partnership Action Plan Against Terrorism, that was a political declaration of 46 member-states. See: *Antyterroryzm.gov.pl* [03.10. 2018 r.]

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initiative should be materialised until 2020. However, we should underline that the programme aim is to increase readiness of forces existing in each member-state, and not creating or sending new units. This initiative should therefore be considered as a logical consequence of decision taken at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 and in Poland in 2016. First, the Alliance decided to create VJTFs, and then decided on sending small multinational military formations to the NATO Eastern flank and deploy them in Poland and the Baltic States.

### **3. National engagement**

As we have already established, the strength of the Alliance is determined by an effort of each member-state. European members must, therefore, change their attitudes towards realisation of their commitments and duties related with ensuring security and defence, what should be expressed in increased defence expenditures and real, and not simulated, modernisation of their armed forces. Certainly, though, the military spending should be adequate to economic capabilities of a given state. In the NATO Summit in Newport, it was reaffirmed that 2% of GDP is a desirable level of defence budget of each member-state. We should note that presently only several states (Poland included) meet this requirement. It may seem, that the lasting threat in the East should encourage the Alliance members to stop decrease of their military expenditures, and in long term, to gradually increase their defence budgets up to the required level.

Thus, reinforced defence budgets are necessary to develop national defence capabilities (including the armed forces), that in a natural way would increase overall military potential of the North Atlantic Alliance. NATO anti-missile defence plays an increasingly significant role for the defence of member-states of the organisation. This project, similarly as integrated air defence system many years ago, requires engagement of all states that build up the Alliance. Worth noting is the fact, that it is a continuation of the programme of the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence – ALTBMMD), started in March 2005.<sup>4</sup> Not only Poland, but also Romania, were seriously engaged in the project, investing in the Patriot rocket system, that have a capability of destroying ballistic missiles on the last stage of their trajectory. Surely, implementation of these rocket systems, will significantly increase territorial defence of aforementioned states, but also strengthen whole Alliance's deterring potential.

### **4. Alliance's will to act and its potential as a guarantee of achieving success in collective defence and crisis management**

A will to act is as much important as the military potential of the North Atlantic Alliance. In order to achieve success in a typical military operation on a grand scale (i.e. during the war), or in the operation of crisis management, the Alliance must show both a will to act (i.e. a political will) and an indispensable military potential. If the Alliance had a will, but lacked a potential, because the member-states does not stand up to their commitments and spend less on defence than 2% of their GDPs, then no operation could be successfully realised. Interesting may seem a case when the Alliance had a huge military potential, but a lack of will to use it due to lack of consensus among the member-states in a certain crisis situation. We should therefore consider whether systematic expansion of the Alliance is indeed a good solution, that brings only advantages to the organisation as a

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<sup>4</sup> ALTBMMD's aim was to integrate diverse anti-missile defence systems (TMD) into a single, coherent network of protection, and was planned to be operational in 2010.

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whole. It seems that the more entities forming the organisation, the harder it takes to build a consensus in serious issues related with crisis management in the international dimension and defence. Surely, it is only one perspective, while the second related with promotion of development and democratic values in weaker states should not be overseen either.

### **Summary**

The North Atlantic Alliance is considered as a guarantor of security by numerous member-states, Poland included. On their own, most of the member-states would not be capable of dealing with already identified threats, not to mention these potential and unknown challenges that are yet to appear. Since from some time, the security environment seems increasingly turbulent and thus unforeseeable.

It seems that in the NATO Strategic Concept existing threats have been adequately identified. The military threat come mostly from the East. However, we cannot disregard a complexity of threats emerging in the South. In the latter case, challenges arise from extremism and other negative outcomes of armed conflicts on the southern NATO neighbourhood. Eastern threats can be nonetheless considered a priority and of strategic importance.

Briefly characterised chosen projects and initiatives of the North Atlantic Alliance should allow an efficient response to the aforementioned challenges. Each of them has a very significant importance to the security and defences of member-states of this presently the most powerful organisation in the world. Having in mind, the increasing threat from states possessing weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, it seems that the NATO missile defence system should be treated as the priority. Properly constructed system should not only efficiently defend territories of the states and their citizens, yet at the same time realise the highly demanded role of a successful military deterrent.

We should also positively assess an attempt at increasing the numbers of units of high operational readiness, i.e. doubled numbers of NATO Response Force and creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. These initiatives are a visible and, so far, effective reaction to the increasing threat emerging in the East. We should not expect an important improvement in this matter without a proper national engagement, since it is the states that provide the financial and material input into the common effort. We can, however, accept that any doubts of member-states political leaders regarding the need of increasing military spending and defence capabilities, have been dispelled by Russia's aggressive international policy.

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