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Poland in a time of geopolitical flux

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ABSTRACT



President Donald Trump has provoked U.S. allies into reevaluating their own national strategies and position within the international order that the United States purportedly fashioned and has sustained since 1945. This essay looks at Poland. Like other treaty allies such as Germany and Japan, Poland has maintained – even deepened – its security relationship with the United States in order to manage Trump. What distinguishes Poland, however, is that it more explicitly supports the military basis upon which U.S. global leadership rests. Because the United States is offshore, its preponderance helps Poland balance against Russia and head off potential security dilemmas within Europe. This essay contextualises the Polish-American relationship and explores how the United States has played in Poland's national security strategy. As Poland values the military primacy associated with the United States being a unipolar power, it is increasingly confronting geopolitical challenges for which U.S. support can only provide partial solutions.

KEYWORDS

Poland; alliances; U.S. foreign relations

Since being elected U.S. president in 2016, Donald J. Trump has provoked much soul-searching among U.S. allies and partners. He has claimed that NATO is 'obsolete' and accused allies in Europe and East Asia of not contributing their fair share to the collective defence burden (Riddervold & Newsome, 2018). Crucially, his embrace of America First rhetoric has caused widespread consternation that he will undo the liberal international order that many analysts believe that the United States has taken a lead in fashioning and sustaining since the end of the Second World War. One result of this potential sea change in international politics is that U.S. allies and partners have by necessity reevaluated their own national strategies and position within that international order. Still, the status quo appears to be holding. Many U.S. allies and partners have in fact maintained, if not deepened, their security cooperation with the United States in an effort to manage Trump.

Poland is an example of one such U.S. ally. Yet the basis of Poland's strategy for dealing with Trump differs from that of other U.S. allies. Germany, for example, has valued its partnership with the United States to the extent that both support a strong transatlantic community premised on rules and multilateralism, with an abiding interest in the flourishing of

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liberal policies and free markets (see Helwig, 2020, this volume). Similarly, Japan identifies itself as an advocate for the rules-based order that the United States allegedly underpins (see Tamaki, 2020, this volume). As much as Germany and Japan value the military commitments that U.S. security guarantees entail, their contributions to this international order have largely been economic and diplomatic because of their historical experiences early in the twentieth century. Poland has prospered under liberal hegemony, too, but it distinguishes itself from these other U.S. allies because it is much more explicit in its support of the military basis upon which U.S. global leadership rests.

I argue that Poland's national strategy and orientation in international politics largely rely on the military primacy of the United States. Specifically, Poland wants to see unipolarity continue with the United States retaining a position of military primacy. Because the United States is offshore, its preponderance is not threatening to Poland. To the contrary, it is to be welcomed because the alliance it underpins helps Poland balance against Russia and head off potential security dilemmas within Europe. Hence the current Polish government has courted the Trump administration so as to ensure its engagement in European affairs, just as previous U.S. administrations have more or less done. Critically, Poland still views Russia as the primary threat to its security, and, more broadly, the international order. To the extent that China matters for Poland, it is largely due to China's growing strategic partnership with Russia and, more importantly, the long-run tendency of the United States to shift its attention and resources away from Europe and towards East Asia in the post-Cold War environment. Notwithstanding the controversial domestic agenda of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, Law and Justice), its leadership is much more invested in the international status quo than not. However, as this essay makes clear, Poland must grapple with various challenges at the regional and international level that go beyond what the United States can resolve single-handedly.

Focusing mostly on Poland's security and defence policy rather than its foreign relations, more generally, this essay proceeds in three parts. The first part contextualises the Polish-American relationship and explores the role that the United States has played in Poland's national security strategy. The second part outlines the most prominent alliance management issues that have surfaced between Poland and the United States during the Obama and Trump presidencies. The third part describes the broader geopolitical challenges that Poland faces at the regional and international levels.

1. The role of the United States for Poland

Shortly after the Warsaw Pact dissolved in 1991, Poland began developing defense ties with its members in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Along with other post-communist countries, Poland participated in the Partnership of Peace programme and made various military reforms to improve its chances of joining NATO. It succeeded, joining the Alliance in 1999 alongside the Czech Republic and Hungary so as to receive an Article 5 commitment whereby an attack against one ally is construed as an attack against all. For U.S. policy-makers, NATO enlargement was justified on at least three grounds: that it would deter future Russian aggression; that it would help resolve disputes among European countries peacefully and enhance European security by heading off potential security dilemmas; and that it would enable further democratisation in the former Soviet bloc. NATO expansion was controversial. Many observers argued that these potential benefits

were overstated and worried that it would antagonise Russia, thereby jeopardising the burgeoning cooperation between Moscow and Washington (Brown, 1995; Reiter, 2001). Others claim that Soviet leaders received a promise that NATO would not expand eastwards by incorporating former members of the Soviet bloc (see, e.g., Shiffrinson, 2016).

Several motivations animated Poland's pursuit of NATO membership. The first was to deepen ties with the United States, which were already extensive notwithstanding Poland's time behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Polish national heroes Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski participated in the American Revolutionary War. Kościuszko even oversaw the construction of various fortifications in the United States, including one that would eventually provide the location of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Starting in the late eighteenth century, the United States became the destination of about 1.5 million Polish immigrants who would settle in the American Midwest, with a major wave of migration occurring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This mass Polish emigration had geopolitical roots: Poland had ceased to exist as a territorially sovereign state in 1795, having been divided between the Prussian, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires in three partitions. Nationalist movements failed to achieve independence throughout the nineteenth century. With imperial authorities leaving their Polish provinces under-developed, depressed wages characterised the labour markets in which many ordinary Poles had to participate on their native territory. Agrarian crises in Central Europe made local farming uncompetitive in global markets (Nelson, 2010, p. 442). Though not as large as Irish or Italian emigration, Polish emigration to the United States was significant in scale (Hillstrom & Hillstrom, 2005, p. 185). Indeed, after Warsaw, Chicago was the second largest home in the world for Polish inhabitants for much of the twentieth century.

Poland regained statehood in 1918. Although the First World War created the political space for Central and Eastern European nationalists to challenge imperial authorities, Polish leaders received critical diplomatic support from Washington. In his Fourteen Points speech, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson articulated that one war aim (or peace term) was that

an independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.¹

These words were not empty: partly because of pressure coming from Polish voters in the American Midwest, Wilson successfully negotiated for Poland's statehood and recognition at Versailles. The significance of this diplomatic support puts into perspective the so-called 'Western betrayal' at Yalta that Polish and other Central and Eastern European leaders experienced at the end of the Second World War (Plokhy, 2010). Instead of advocating for Polish national sovereignty as Wilson had, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appeared to surrender to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin control of those areas that the Red Army had 'liberated' from Nazi Germany. Poland subsequently spent the four decades of the Cold War firmly embedded in the Soviet camp.

The post-war international order – one marked by bipolarity – was thus unkind to Poland. Hence the second motivation for why Poland wanted to join NATO: to help ensure that it would not be the subject of foreign depredations again. Russia might have experienced serious decline over the course of the 1990s, but its wars in Chechnya

signalled its willingness to use brutal force towards political ends. Accentuating Poland's sense of vulnerability is geography since

[l]andlocked Poland stretches across the narrowest point of the Northern European Plain, connecting through Ukraine with the belt of lands between the Baltic and Black Seas that used to be for many centuries her buffer zone, separating the core of Poland from the heart of Russia. (Bartosia, 2018, p. 33)

Moreover, because the United States is effectively a major military power in Europe, as it is in East Asia, it is a stabilising influence, thereby suppressing any potential rivalries and security dilemmas that could develop (see Christensen, 1999). Unipolarity, and the military primacy it entails, has been good for Poland.

But what has been the role of the alliance with the United States in Poland's national security strategy? Both major political parties – PiS and *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO, Civic Platform) – agree that the United States is important to Polish national security. Shortly after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, the Polish government – then led by PO – asked Washington to position a large number of American forces on Polish territory (Financial Times, 2014). Prior to 2014, however, no military deployments accompanied the NATO commitment to its newer members because the security environment did not warrant it and because such deployments would have contradicted the NATO-Russia Founding Act. After all, this document stated that

the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces. (NATO, 2009)

Opinions vary as to how much Poland should align itself with the United States. PiS prefers cooperation with Washington, even at the expense of relationships with Western European partners like Berlin or Paris. This preference has generally been strongest when a Republican party controls the White House. PO values working with the United States but it also values Western European partnerships. For example, PO takes more seriously the Weimar Triangle, the loose grouping of France, Germany, and Poland that aims at foreign policy cooperation (Zięba, 2012, p. 166).

Its alliance with the United States via NATO membership is fundamental to Poland's national security strategy and arguably its post-communist identity, even if alliances in general have had a poor reputation in Poland given the country's historical experience (Kupiecki, 2018, p. 51). To some extent, perceptions of the bilateral U.S. alliance and NATO are deeply intertwined. Warsaw prefers NATO over other European initiatives because doing so could make itself a valuable partner to Washington (Osica, 2004; Zaborowski & Longhurst, 2003). Accordingly, Poland does not 'free ride' on the United States. Poland provided the fourth-largest contingent in the 2003 invasion of Iraq after the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. About 2,500 Polish troops stayed there until 2008 (see Lasoń, 2010). When the United States (and NATO) focused on out-of-area stability operations in the 2000s, Poland contributed its forces accordingly, participating even in NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Controversially, Poland hosted a secret detention site where Central Intelligence Agency officials interrogated and arguably tortured terror suspects (see Carey, 2013). A small number of Polish soldiers have been involved in U.S.-led operations near Raqqa in northern Syria (Radio Poland, 2017).

Poland is also one of the few European allies of the United States that spends about two percent of its gross domestic product on defense. These contributions arguably serve to Poland's reliability as an ally that would hopefully prove useful should a national security emergency arise. This strategy may already be working. Poland eagerly received rotational U.S. forces on its territory to bolster assurance and deterrence measures on NATO's so-called eastern flank. Poland hosts 3,000 US Army soldiers as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve. The United States is also the Framework Nation that leads a battalion-sized enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battlegroup that NATO has deployed in the Baltic region.

Poland thus views the alliance with the United States favourably, even in relation to the European order. Recall how both the post-Second World War European regional and international order was highly detrimental to Poland. Some Polish conservatives still bemoan Western European détente policies in the Cold War. To quote Member of the European Parliament Ryszard Legutko (2016, p. 140):

If one could imagine the political history of the last six decades without the United States on the political map of the world, and look at communism only through the prism of the relations between the USSR and Western Europe, it seems almost certain that communism would still be thriving, and Poland would continue to be called the Polish People's. From Europe's point of view, conducting the Cold War, much less winning it, was never a priority.

One can also invoke British and French reluctance to fight Nazi Germany as further evidence that Poland cannot count on Western Europe for its security needs. Accordingly, Legutko captures the ambivalence that PiS (of which he is a member) can have towards some Western European allies and, by extension, the EU.

Conventional wisdom holds that PiS opposes the EU for its perceived abridgements to national sovereignty. This view is overstated. Though some like party leader Jarosław Kaczyński are indeed Eurosceptic, the predominant view of the PiS government is softly Eurosceptic such that the EU serves best as an economic union that promotes development and prosperity on the continent. It should not cultivate an ideological hegemony that infiltrates certain spheres of domestic policy, much as what the Soviet Union had done in the Cold War. PiS has criticised multi-tracked approaches to EU governance and double standards, as what was the case when food brands sold lower quality goods to Central and Eastern European consumers that had been falsely advertised as equal to those higher quality goods sold in Western Europe (Livingston, 2019). PiS is also critical of any political overreach whereby unelected officials force member governments to adopt policies that are either ideologically undesirable or perceptibly harmful to the national interest. This controversy is especially salient over judicial reforms and migrant quotas in the EU – the latter of which speaks to widespread security concerns in Poland.

Polish leaders also worry slightly over Germany's growing influence on the continent. One reason why the 2016 Brexit vote dismayed Polish leaders is that they hoped to use Great Britain as a potential counterweight to Germany (Cienski, 2016). Poland's reluctance to join the Eurozone also reflects this worry (Cienski, 2018). Nevertheless, Euroscepticism in Poland should not be exaggerated. PiS Members of European Parliament voted for former German defense minister Ursula von der Leyen in 2019 to be the president of the European Commission. The EU enjoys much higher political support in Poland, not least because of the massive economic benefits that being in the Schengen Zone entails, than in many Western European countries (Stokes et al., 2017).

And so Poland sees its alliance with the United States – and not European institutions – as the primary vehicle through which it can realise its national security interests. The grievances expressed by Legutko reflect the belief that, in light of the historical record, much of Western Europe will not reliably provide security to Poland. Such views are not unique to Poland (The Economist, 2018). The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are wary of Western European efforts to be autonomous from U.S.-led arrangements. Like Poland, they are reluctant to support any multilateral security arrangements in Europe that could compete with NATO, much less take precedence over it (Šešelgytė, 2018). Even an initiative like the Permanent Structured Cooperation, which facilitates cross-border travel of European military forces within the EU, saw Poland participate with reservations (Gotkowska, 2018). Poland simply prefers working with the United States than some Western European allies (Waszczykowski, 2018). Of course, the EU is not a military organisation, but that is the point. Military power is seen as the bedrock for Polish security, rather than values and commerce per, important as they are.

To conclude, Poland accords major importance to its relationship with the United States. Indeed, the international order that has advanced Poland's interests the most has been one in which the United States is a unipolar power that seeks to retain military primacy. The United States may have been stronger than the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but Poland chafed under bipolarity because of its proximity to a hostile superpower that has long been its historic adversary. Yet, as discussed in the next section, unipolarity can be a mixed blessing. The United States may be superior to its adversaries, but it has incentives to loosen its alliance commitments since its security depends less on them (Walt, 2009).

2. Tensions within the Polish-American alliance in the Obama and Trump years

Every alliance has its management issues. For Warsaw, the key alliance problem is to keep Washington remain sufficiently engaged in European affairs and provide an effective security guarantee against Russia. After all, according to one cross-national Pew survey conducted in 2017, Poland had by far the most respondents who reported that Russia is a major threat to their country (65%). In second place, 47% of American respondents believed that Russia constituted a major threat (Vice, 2017). This survey result should not be surprising given Poland's experience with Russia. Traditionally a rival, Russia had exerted imperial authority over parts of Poland between the late eighteen and early twentieth century. Soviet domination during the Cold War also suppressed political freedoms and undermined territorial sovereignty. That Russia goaded Georgia into a war in 2008 and wrestled territory away from Ukraine in 2014 indicates its willingness to violate international rules at any good opportunity.

Keeping the United States engaged in Europe was a problem that Poland confronted during Barack Obama's presidency. Relatively unpopular in Poland, Obama's aborted effort at resetting relations with Russia in 2009 began when he scrapped the Central European missile defense programme that George W. Bush had initiated (Deyermund, 2013). Unfortunately, the Obama administration clumsily announced the cancellation of this programme on the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland (Wall Street Journal, 2009). The Obama administration's attempt to pivot to East Asia came at the

expense of the strategic attention it could afford to Europe (Parkes, 2012). Adding insult to injury was when Obama referred to 'Polish death camps' in 2012 (Landler, 2012). Obama did not win praise for his administration's lackluster response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Eliciting a more positive reception, however, Obama declared in a 2014 speech in Warsaw that 'Poland will never stand alone' (White House, 2014).

Obama's presidency embodied unwelcome trends that had come to characterise U.S. foreign policy in the twenty-first century. Its 'reluctant leadership' or preference for 'leading from behind' during the Obama years suggested that the United States was much less interested in European security (Kupiecki, 2016, p. 37). Poland had now become such a success story for NATO expansion and democratic consolidation that it receded in importance for U.S. foreign policy (Kupiecki, 2016, p. 39). Polish society was thus exceptional among those in Europe for its negative perceptions of Obama. Whereas the Democrat president was popular elsewhere on the continent, surveys found Polish respondents to hold disapproving views of him. That said, Poles remained the most positive about the United States than other Europeans (Wike et al., 2016, p. 3, 6). Moreover, it would be wrong to take the view that the Obama administration did nothing for Poland following Russia's activities in Ukraine in 2014. It initially sought to reassure Poland and the Baltic countries by prepositioning military hardware in the region and imposing sanctions on Russian political and economic interests (Woyke, 2016). Months after the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, Poland came to host a rotational force of 3,000 U.S. Army soldiers and one U.S.-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup. The Battlegroup is part of a larger NATO effort aimed at assuring regional partners and deterring Russian aggression.

These gestures aside, for the United States, the main alliance problem with Poland has indeed been how Poland can come across as a 'single-issue' voter within NATO. Its seeming preoccupation with Russia can cause frustration because, for better or for worse, the road towards resetting relations with the Kremlin passes through Warsaw. Poland cannot veto U.S. policy towards Russia, but its views cannot be ignored either. To conciliate Poland after cancelling the ballistic missile defence project, Obama agreed to provide it with the ground-based Aegis ballistic missile defence system – a move that has rankled Moscow despite the system not yet being operational as of writing (Judson, 2018). Poland is, of course, not alone in its concerns about U.S. engagement and the Russian threat. The Baltic countries have them, too. Yet Poland is 'too big to be small' but 'too small to be big'. Poland might wish to go alone and so may not invest in its politico-military ties as much as it should with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the last of which has had difficult relations with Poland due to historical grievances and inter-ethnic discord (see Jermalavičius et al., 2018). One challenge for Washington is to ensure that Warsaw can deepen cooperation with like-minded allies.

If Obama appeared to be sometimes suspect in his engagement to Europe, then how does Poland see Trump? In his presidential campaign, Trump criticised NATO for his obsolescence, suggested that some allies like South Korea and Japan acquire their own nuclear arsenals, spoke approvingly of Vladimir Putin, and voiced a strong desire for resetting relations with Russia. Indeed, his closeness to Russia has been controversial. Campaign advisor Paul Manafort was convicted for defrauding the United States in conspiracy with members of the pre-Maidan Ukrainian government; Michael Flynn had attended an RT-sponsored dinner event; and many observers believed that WikiLeaks and the

Kremlin were colluding in order to help Trump's campaign. Poland is the only country alongside Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary in which more respondents than not believe that Russia influenced the 2016 Presidential elections (GLOBSEC, 2018, p. 26). Naturally, East Central European governments generally preferred Hillary Clinton's candidacy even if some governments like Poland are – all things equal – generally prefer Republican governments.

Unsurprisingly, ambivalence has marked Polish attitudes towards Trump. How much public opinion affects foreign policy is unclear, but a Polish Newsweek poll conducted on the eve of the 2016 US presidential election found that only 20% of respondents expressed support for Trump's candidacy. By contrast, 55% said they would vote for Hillary Clinton if given the opportunity. The rest were undecided (Szaniawski, 2016). Following Trump's surprise win, 13% of one poll's respondents expressed the view that the President-elect would be good for Poland. A third of respondents of that same poll indicated that Trump's presidency would bring more ill than good (Onet, 2016). Still, his major foreign policy address in Warsaw on 6 July 2017 received a warm reception. 59% of one poll conducted by a major Polish newspaper agreed with Trump's assertions that Western Christian values were at stake. A slim majority believed his visit would yield benefits for Poland, including a stronger position within the EU (Do Rzeczy, 2017).

Under PiS, the Polish government has actively courted Trump, likely to ensure his engagement in European security affairs. It may privately believe that he is unreliable, but its strategy seems to be that openly criticising the United States would be counterproductive. One success was having Trump attend the second Three Seas Initiative (3SI) summit in Warsaw in July 2017. He touted the construction of liquefied natural gas terminals in Poland (and Lithuania) as well as plans to build a regional pipeline (DiChristopher, 2017). In September 2018, President Andrzej Duda visited Washington to meet with Trump at the White House. At that meeting Trump affirmed that 'the security of Poland is almost as important as it is to [Duda]', and said that Russia has been acting aggressively (CBS News, 2018). Poland even hosted a controversial conference on the Middle East in February 2019 that was seen as anti-Iranian (Sieradzka, 2019). Some argue that PiS has aligned too much with Trump in a way that is harmful to Polish national interests (Taylor, 2018).

In spring 2019, Warsaw and Washington signed a new bilateral defense cooperation agreement that sought to bolster ties. This agreement falls short of what the Polish government has been seeking from the United States – a permanent military presence on Polish soil – but it nevertheless represented one of the biggest commitments made by the Trump White House to European security. To be sure, this agreement must be seen in context with the other defence and deterrence measures against Russian aggression that the United States has supported in Europe since 2014. Poland has long coveted a permanent U.S. military presence on its territory. Even the previous Polish government sought to host large numbers of U.S. and NATO forces after the Russian annexation of Crimea.

After all, Poland regards Russia as a revisionist actor that not only operates outside international norms and rules, but also poses a major territorial threat. Polish fears also concern the balance of power that prevails in the Baltic region, more generally. Not only does Russia have a large nuclear weapons arsenal, but it also has extensive conventional military power that it can bring to bear in the Baltic region. Russia has also militarised the enclave Kaliningrad to create something akin to an anti-access/area denial bubble in the region (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2016). That is, in wartime, Russia can complicate NATO efforts

to move around the theatre-of-operations or to enter it in order to resupply and to reinforce local forces. One 2016 study concludes that Russia could take Estonia and Latvia within several days (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016). This analysis exaggerates the ease in which Russia could undertake such large-scale aggression (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2019). Nevertheless, its findings indicate the sheer military disparity that exists between Russia, and countries located on NATO's so-called northeastern flank. And so, like its Baltic allies, Poland has shifted its military focus away from out-of-area stability operations to territorial defense. Such is the so-called Komorowski Doctrine, named after the former Polish President Bronisław Komorowski (of PO). As discussed below, PiS also prioritises territorial defense even if it eschews the doctrinal label associated with the opposition party.

This embrace of territorial defence speaks to the abandonment concerns that linger in Warsaw. Note that the rotational U.S. forces that Poland has hosted since early 2017 are not permanent. Time favours Russia because it is a perpetual regional presence. When Duda met with Trump in September 2018, the issue of permanent U.S. military bases in Poland came up, with Duda offering to contribute up to two billion dollars for their construction. Critics denounced the idea of 'Fort Trump' – as Duda offered to call the bases – because of concerns about Polish domestic politics or local security dilemmas (Fitzsimmons, 2018; Kofman, 2018). Yet a U.S. military presence could benefit local deterrence of Russia while addressing concerns about security dilemmas and entrapment risks if designed appropriately (Hunzeker & Lanoszka, 2018). Some opponents of this initiative like retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges argue that Warsaw should multilateralize the base rather than negotiate with Washington on a bilateral basis lest the initiative would damage NATO cohesion (Schultz, 2018). Nevertheless, all permanent U.S. and British forces have been in Europe thanks to bilateral agreements made with host countries.

Such criticisms place Poland in a bind. Not getting a base would make some allies and Russia happy but leave Poland insecure. Getting one might make some allies and Russia unhappy but leave Poland feeling more secure. The new bilateral defense cooperation agreement signed in spring 2019 does not give Poland a permanent U.S. military presence, but it did refer to 'enduring presence' while providing a thousand more additional U.S. forces, improving military infrastructure, and establishing an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance squadron (Terlikowski, 2019).

3. Polish security in a changing international order

If Polish attitudes towards the United States are changing, then structural trends that go beyond whoever sits in the White House are partly to blame. Washington's strategic attention has steadily been shifting away from Europe and onto the Asia Pacific since the end of the Cold War (Simón, 2017). This trend intensified following the financial crisis and growing domestic weariness with fighting protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Compounding these matters is the rapid growth of China, which has become a central preoccupation for American decision-makers (Simón, 2015). Even the 2018 National Defense Strategy published by the U.S. Department of Defense prioritises China over Russia despite the stated importance to great power competition (Mattis, 2018, p. 2). In brief, under PiS at least, Poland desires an international order of the sort that has existed

since 1989: one made up of nationally sovereign states in which territorial integrity is upheld and the United States remains militarily dominant.

As indicated by its desire for a permanent U.S. military presence on its territory, Poland is attuned to the risk of being abandoned by the United States, however unlikely that a contingency with Russia may be. Beyond trying to maintain U.S. engagement in Europe, Poland's strategy for managing these risks is twofold. The first is to develop anti-access/area denial capabilities that would raise the costs of attack to Russia, thereby complicating efforts by the Russian armed forces to move its forces within a Polish theatre of operations. The May 2017 Polish Defense Concept makes this goal plain by declaring the need for Poland to expand the size of its armed forces to have about 200,000 soldiers (Polish Ministry of National Defence, 2017). It has created a new branch of the Polish Armed Forces called *Wojsko Obrony Terytorialnej* (Territorial Defense Army, WOT) that would serve as the last line of defense in the event of a large-scale Russian attack on Poland. This plan envisions 35,000 volunteers who would train for about a month each year (Polish Ministry of National Defence, 2016; Polish Ministry of National Defence undated). Whether such ambitious goals can be fulfilled remains to be seen. This effort has been important for reorienting the Polish armed forces to defending against threats closer to home. The focus on out-of-area stability operations in the early 2000s left defensive operations largely neglected (Paszewski, 2016). In its renewed emphasis on traditional defence, Poland has already created a fourth division (Adamowski, 2018).

The second is to rebuild Poland's defense industrial base and become as self-sufficient as possible in manufacturing weapons systems necessary for its own defense. To be sure, Poland still covets U.S. weapons, but it has negotiated with U.S. defense firms with a view to ensure the viability and participation of its indigenous weapons producers. The desire for high-end U.S. systems while stimulating growth in Poland's defense industry can complicate negotiations. For example, Warsaw initially balked at the price tag announced by Raytheon for the Patriot system – a price that went up because of its declared intention to manufacture its own systems rather than buy them off the shelf. Eventually, it signed a deal for the much-coveted system (Kelly, 2018).

Polish concerns about the current international environment go beyond Russia and prospective abandonment by the United States. Indeed, Polish-American ties are entangled in larger questions over regional and international order – questions to which the United States cannot alone provide answers on Poland's behalf. Both major parties agree Russia is the main threat to Polish security, but, as indicated, PiS is more troubled than PO by what it sees as the expanding influence of Germany in European affairs. Of course, Polish leaders do not see Germany in the same way as they see Russia and much room for cooperation exists in light of the scale of their trade as well as their shared interests in regional security. Germany might take advantage of its privileged status in EU structures, but it is not undermining the territorial order. Indeed, Poland may be a fast-growing economy, but its size and international stature remain small relative to those of France and Germany. With Great Britain intending to withdraw from the EU, Poland will lose a regional partner that could offer a counterweight to the integrative drives of those two continental states.

Anxieties about Germany are at least three-fold. First, Poland has been apprehensive of Germany's Janus-faced approach to Russia and its behaviour towards Ukraine since 2014. Although Germany has led the European sanctioning effort against Russian interests

following the annexation of Crimea and shooting down of MH70 in 2014, major German political leaders like current President Walter Steinmeier have spoken critically of NATO while arguing for greater cooperation with Russia (Austrian Institute of Economic Research, 2017; Reuters, 2016). German business interests have supported closer ties with Russia (Forsberg, 2016; Siddi, 2016). With Chancellor Angela Merkel due to exit the political scene, worry abounds that Germany will soon soften its approach to Russia. Indeed, Poland and the Baltic countries dislike Germany's participation in the controversial Nord Stream natural gas pipeline that connects Germany directly with Russia in the Baltic Sea, thus bypassing the traditional transit countries located between them (Cohen, 2016; Dempsey, 2016). The Nord Stream pipelines are objectionable because countries like Poland fear that Russia could cut off its supplies to them while continuing to ship to Germany. By undertaking this initiative, Berlin has appeared willing to cooperate with Moscow at the expense of its neighbours. That former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder joined the board of Gazprom after leaving political office has given such concerns credence.

Second, a perception exists that Germany dominates EU decision-making. Consider how Merkel has handled the migration crisis, particularly in the late summer of 2015 when she declared an open-door policy to migrants fleeing political or economic turmoil in parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Though she later backed away from this policy, she did it unilaterally with little consultation made with other EU members. Rightly or wrongly, security concerns genuinely motivate Polish resistance to EU migrant quotas, but Poland does not wish to reward or to condone German unilateralism in its immigration policy either (Reuters, 2017). Third, despite its economic pull within the EU, many argue that Germany could be doing much more militarily to support European security, especially in the Baltic littoral region (Gotkowska, 2016). As early as 2011, former Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski famously declared that he feared 'Germany's power less than her inactivity'.

These concerns have encouraged Poland to look both overseas and within its own region. U.S. imports of liquefied natural gas allow Poland to achieve more energy security. More importantly, Poland has sought to galvanise regional cooperation within Central and Eastern Europe. PiS's foreign policy programme has involved the so-called Intermarium (*Międzymorze*). Intermarium is a rebooting of an identically named project conceived by Polish leader Józef Piłsudski shortly after the First World War. Piłsudski had envisioned a federation of independent states spanning the region between the Baltic and Black Seas. This grouping would not only bolster Poland's leadership credentials, but it would also create a bulwark against possible Russian aggression. Piłsudski's initiative failed, not least because its multilateral aspirations could not survive in a climate where nationalism was pervasive (Cieplucha, 2014). The Polish government resuscitated the basic principles that undergirded Piłsudski's original plan when President Duda outlined his plans to strengthen partnerships in Central Eastern Europe at his presidential inauguration. Clearly embodying this vision is 3SI – a project led by Poland and Croatia to promote economic and energy policy in the twelve countries situated between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas (Tomaszewska & Starzyk, 2017).

Additionally, under PiS, Poland has sought a greater leadership role in Central Europe by promoting the V4. This political and cultural alliance came into existence in 1991 and brings together Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. One key initiative began even before PiS took power: the formation of the Visegrád EU Battlegroup. Another

such Battlegroup is planned for 2019. Both will exercise under the purview of the NATO Response Force (Slovakian Ministry of Defence, 2015). Of course, Poland also contributes to other NATO and EU Battlegroups (i.e. Battlegroup I-2000 and the Weimar Battlegroup). However, under PiS, Poland has tried deepening cooperation within the V4 partly because of ideological affinity with the ruling political party in Hungary, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz. These efforts have had mixed results. Poland is the only V4 member to spend about 2% of its gross domestic product on defence. The other three countries are laggards.

Worse, from Poland's perspective, are concerns about the ties that its V4 partners have with Russia. Official Hungarian policy documents might adopt pro-NATO and pro-EU stances in articulating defence policy, but concerns surround Orbán's diplomacy towards Russia (Kříž et al., 2018, pp. 359–360). Indeed, these countries have also disagreed on Russia in light of its activities in Ukraine. Poland has supported Ukraine despite the historical grievances that have troubled their relationship. Czechia and Slovakia are wary of angering Russia, whereas Hungary was initially reluctant to support anti-Russian sanctions (Kaca & Galewicz, 2018). Certainly, Hungary can help PiS avoid stiff EU sanctions over its controversial judicial reforms, but these advantages may be more short-term tactical than long-term strategic for Poland.

All these challenges stem from a systemic change underway in international politics: the rise of China. As indicated, Washington has been gradually shifting its attention away from Europe to Asia since the end of the Cold War and so increasingly can offer only partial solutions for Polish security. Renewed U.S. interest in bolstering defense and deterrence measures against Russia offers some respite from these anxieties, but the fact remains that long-term power trends are shifting against the United States and its presence in Europe. The rise of China is not entirely negative for Poland, to be sure. It presents economic opportunities, as Beijing has sought to enhance cooperation with Poland and other Central Eastern European countries in trade and investment via the 17+1 Format. China even sees the region as a focal point for its Belt and Road Initiative, despite how Chinese foreign direct investment in Poland is relatively limited (Hanemann et al., 2019, pp. 11–12; Vangeli, 2017).

Nevertheless, if Poland prefers living in a unipolar world dominated by a militarily powerful United States, the rise of China is ultimately great cause for concern. Washington could perceive greater trade-offs between its commitments to Europe and those to East Asia. It will have less wherewithal in managing threats from both China and Russia, especially if they increasingly coordinate with one another (Korolev, 2019). A Sino-Russian bloc could relieve economic pressure on the Kremlin and help it reduce Washington's freedom of maneuver in Eurasia (Rolland, 2019, pp. 16–17). The United States may even be tempted to attempt a grand bargain with Russia at the expense of certain European allies like Poland in an effort to prevent the formation of such a bloc. Accordingly, the United States may have been good for Poland, but structural trends could compel some sort of recalibration in Polish foreign policy.

4. Poland: hanging onto US military primacy?

Although Trump has caused much anxiety in foreign capitals with his America First rhetoric, partners and allies have sought to maintain their security relationships with Washington. Poland is no exception to this pattern, but what distinguishes it from other close allies

– like Germany and Japan – is the value it accords to the military basis of the international order that the United States has fashioned and sustained since the end of the Second World War. Of course, these differences are partly rooted in these countries' historical experiences. Germany and Japan were aggressors in the Second World War and so hosted a large U.S. military presence since as part of their rehabilitation in international politics. By contrast, Poland was a victim of aggression in the Second World War and experienced Soviet occupation until the end of the superpower rivalry that characterised the Cold War ended. Unipolarity allowed Poland to flourish. However, for Poland, unipolarity was important not only for its commercial benefits and liberal values, but also for its military basis. The United States extended an alliance via NATO membership to Poland, thus giving the latter insurance against its historical adversary, Russia. Amid Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, the alliance with the United States has renewed significance for Polish security.

The problem facing Polish decision-makers is that deep structural trends in international politics suggest the need to begin planning seriously for a world that does not feature U.S. military primacy. Notwithstanding NATO engagement, the United States has been turning increasingly away from Europe to East Asia. Europe faces an imbalance of power, especially in light of Great Britain withdrawing from Europe, Russia behaving roguishly, and Germany adopting unpopular policies. Poland's outreach to Trump is rooted in a desire to retain U.S. engagement in Europe so as to mitigate these problems. However, because it cannot fully rely on the United States to provide support in times of crisis, especially in light of its growing isolationist tendencies, Poland has endeavoured to prioritise territorial defence, its own defence industrial base, and regional organisations. These challenges have little to do with Trump and so would persist after his presidency.

Note

1. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, 8 January 1918.

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