



## **Poland's Accession to NATO Considering "Partnership for Peace" and the U.S. Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The accession of Poland to the group of NATO member states was undoubtedly one of the milestones in the modern history of the country and in the direction of strengthening security in the international arena. The whole process was conditioned by various types of determinants: technological, organizational, political and ideological (Kupiecki, 2016). Many publications have been dedicated to Poland's accession to NATO and its later role among the allied members. Nevertheless, there is a lack of particular studies in the professional literature that presents a detailed chronology of Polish pre-accession activities and the diverse opinions of the US administration regarding the enlargement of NATO with new member states recruiting from the former Warsaw Pact. This gap in available literature was a trigger for writing this article with the purpose to present the undertakings of Poland aimed at accession to NATO in the aspect of "Partnership for Peace" and the US point of view. In the research process, two basic methods were employed: analysis and synthesis. The method of analysis was used in relation to the verification of collected literature, normative acts and documents on international security. The method of synthesis was applied for conclusions. The undertaken research on the topic proved that without consistent actions and initiatives conducted by Poland in the international area and without the support of the US, joining NATO would be highly difficult or even impossible. At the same time, a detailed analysis highlighted that the accession of Poland to NATO was and still is mutually and beneficial for Warsaw and Washington.

**Keywords:** safety, NATO, alliance, Partnership for Peace, foreign policy

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## 1. Introduction

Despite the fact that NATO is a multinational structure, from its beginning to present times, the US is the leader that engages the largest amount of assets and forces in the activities of the Alliance. The US is also a primary political decision maker on the international forum and many tasks dedicated to the NATO alliance are conducted according to the political interest of the US (Pacula, 2007). In terms of seeking security and geopolitical stability, the prevailing option among Polish politicians was that it would be most favorable for Poland would be to seek security and military balance within the cooperation with the US. The reason was the difficult situation of Poland after leaving the Eastern Bloc. Poland was isolated on the international ground, which in the long run could have threatened the maintenance of external security. In this situation, Poland put a great effort into reaching the status of a NATO member state. Moreover, the justification for these efforts was the historical experience resulting from the geopolitical location of Poland in Europe, which implied German and Russian aspirations to subordinate Poland. As a result of this reason, the breakup of the Warsaw Pact as well as the Mutual Economic Assistance Council resulted in the urgent need to create new political-military guarantees for Poland based on new alliances. Finally, the option of establishing the security of Poland on the basis of the North Atlantic Alliance and close cooperation with the US was been chosen. The adopted concept assumed that it is the best option to maintain balance of military force in Europe and to prevent Russian political-military expansion again to Poland (Mozol, 2016).

## 2. Poland in the “Partnership for Peace” program

The main effort of seeking the opportunity to join NATO structures was focused on a dialogue on the membership of Poland in the “Partnership for Peace” program. Politically, “Partnership for Peace” was a defense agreement for the US cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries. The idea of the program was announced on 20 October 1993 by the US Secretary of Defense Les Aspin during a conference NATO Defense Ministers in Travemünde, Germany. “Partnership” was also a response to the readiness of Central and Eastern European countries, former members of the Warsaw Pact, to join the new Alliance (Okoński, 1995). Taking into consideration the fact that Russia did not resign from its influence in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, it was beneficial to secure the interests of the US in Central and Eastern Europe liberated from the Soviet control. For this reason, countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic or Slovakia could have been supportive of the US in the struggle with Russia for military dominance. It seemed to be the best way to push the border of “western world” farther to the east.

Closer analysis of the “Partnership for Peace” program proved that it was a well-built cooperative bridge for the integration of NATO with other countries, especially from the perspective of international security. The program was attractive for these countries, because it offered an opportunity to:

- 1) support efforts for the transparency of national defense planning processes and development of defense budgets;
- 2) guarantee democratic control over the armed forces;
- 3) create ability and readiness to contribute to UN operations;
- 4) develop cooperation and military contacts with NATO in order to plan joint exercises that aimed at maintaining the capability of

“Partnership for Peace” members to conduct peace, search and rescue missions;

- 5) train and organize forces that in a long-term perspective will cooperate more efficiently with NATO forces.

From the legal perspective, assumptions of the “Partnership for Peace” were consistent with Article 10 of the Treaty,<sup>1</sup> which states: *“The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession”* (NATO, 2019).

The Treaty creates the possibility for the Alliance’s enlargement by including new European member states that would be able to comply with the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to NATO security.

It should be noted that for these reasons, on 10 January 1994 in Brussels at the NATO “summit”, there was an official proposal presented to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that emerged after the collapse of the USSR to cooperate with the Alliance in the framework of the “Partnership for Peace”. As a result, during a meeting with President Bill Clinton in Prague on 12 January 1994, the presidents of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary stated that they would make every effort to achieve the program requirements for the “Partnership”.

Regarding the wish to unify with the West and to join NATO, on 2 February 1994 during a visit to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Polish Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak signed the “Partnership for Peace Framework Document”. Next, on 5 July the

same year, Poland agreed with NATO the individual “Partnership for Peace Programme” ([www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium](http://www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium)).

The initial participation of Poland was limited to:

- 1) the participation of military experts in specialist courses organized by NATO;
- 2) engaging military units and observers in joint training and exercises with the use of troops (LIVEX);
- 3) participation in combat, humanitarian missions as well as search and rescue operations.

In the longer perspective, cooperation within the “Partnership for Peace” was significantly expanded to include:

- 1) increasing transparency in defense planning and in work on the military budget by exchanging information and sharing expenses with NATO Headquarters;
- 2) ensuring democratic control over the armed forces through structural transformation, legislative changes and democratic procedures for operating the budget, in line with NATO norms;
- 3) maintaining capabilities and readiness to join the UN or CSCE peacekeeping operations;
- 4) the development of military cooperation with NATO aimed at organizing peace, search and rescue, humanitarian missions through:
  - a) undertaking joint actions for the compatibility of command and control system – C2;
  - b) creating a modern Polish air defense system;
  - c) unified procedures in emergencies and high necessity levels;
  - d) defense and logistic planning, including purchasing and delivery

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1 The North Atlantic Treaty is an agreement concluded in Washington on 4 April 1949 based on

the United Nations Charter. On the provisions of the Treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO was established.

- system, military infrastructure and standardization;
- e) trainings and research as well as the development of military technology.
- 5) Long-term development of the armed forces and preparing them to cooperate with joint forces, adjusting the C2 system, communication, logistics, armament and education to NATO standards.

For the needs of the "Partnership for Peace" program, the Polish party declared its readiness to provide training centers and military training grounds, as well as the attachment of a battalion and several smaller specialist units for joint use in future operations.

Poland's implementation of the assumptions for the "Partnership for Peace" included three main forms of cooperation:

- 1) expert level consultations, exchange of experience and information;
- 2) participation of military units and observers in trainings and exercises in peacekeeping, search and rescue and humanitarian operations.
- 3) participation of security experts in courses, trainings and studies organized by specialist NATO centers (NATO, 1994).

One of the first examples of cooperation was the joint military exercise codenamed "Bridge of Cooperation", conducted from 12 to 16 September 1994 in Biedrusko near Poznań, in which military units from thirteen Allied member states and partner countries participated (Hansen, 1995).

In conclusion, it should be recognized that the "Partnership for Peace" was undoubtedly a fundamental premise for Poland's accession to NATO and played a significant role in the process of expanding NATO itself. At the same time, the first contacts of Polish soldiers with NATO soldiers revealed essential differences in the functioning of military structures, elements of C2, knowledge of NATO nomenclature, and most of all the technological distance in military equipment and assets.

Despite this disparity, Polish representatives assured the US that even though there are visible technical, logistic and training imperfections, Poland expresses the readiness to become an active member and equal NATO partner.

### **3. The American point of view on new NATO members**

At the NATO Summit of Heads of States and Governments on 8 July 1997 in Madrid, it was decided to invite Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to talk about NATO membership. The decision was included in the "Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic Security and Cooperation". The Declaration assumed that the goal of the Alliance was to sign the "Accession Protocol" during the next session of the North Atlantic Council on 16 December of the same year and to finalize the ratification process enabling the invited states to join NATO by April 1999 (Madrid Declaration, 1997).

After the summit, representatives of Poland held a meeting with US President Bill Clinton in Warsaw. During the meeting, participants proposed the idea of consolidating Europe, among others, by expanding the NATO Alliance. Former participants of the Warsaw Pact also expressed their request to the US for support in the process of accessing NATO. During the meeting, Polish representatives argued that this would consolidate Europe and create a united continent. They also declared that in return, Poland would support the US in European policy (Kupiecki, 2019).

Advocates of the expansion of NATO claimed that through partnership with Poland, the US would build a solid anti-Russian dam. What is more, they convinced that cooperation with Poland will counterbalance European hegemons such as Germany and France, opponents of the US in the fight for dominance and influences in Europe (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Nevertheless, it has to be recalled that the

American political scene was divided into two “new membership access” camps. Despite the favorable position of President Bill Clinton, not all representatives of his administration agreed on the enlargement of NATO with new member states. Opponents stated that the expansion of NATO would disturb US relations with Russia. According to the Deputy Secretary of State for European Affairs Ronald Asmus, the only right solution in this matter should have been to choose negotiations as the main cooperative tool in building up the relationship between US and Russia (Asmus, 2002). Furthermore, Ronald Asmus claimed that any actions aimed at expanding the scope of NATO that would not be agreed and settled with Russia, would result in a backstop in the relations between US and Russia that would be difficult to estimate and rebuild (Asmus, 2008b). A good example of a negative approach to NATO candidates may also be a petition written by Susan Eisenhower addressed to Bill Clinton, which called for blocking further accession processes. It was a part of a wide-scale campaign called “No to NATO Expansion Tour” organized by the lobby group, which was, among others, associated with Neo-Nazi group “Cato Institute” (Kupiecki, 2019a).

At the same time, it was offered to the Central and Eastern Europe to evolve broader cooperation under the “Partnership for Peace” program and to open the gates of the European Union to these countries, instead of expanding NATO. There was also a clear message for the US to improve relations with Russia instead of supporting former Eastern Bloc countries in their strivings for the membership. It was pointed out that the US should seek solutions that would encourage Russia to assume the role of America's partner, and even ally in the further perspective (Asmus, 2008a).

Despite opposition, President Bill Clinton did not remain alone in his opinion, and his course of action remained unchanged. There were voices highlighting the fact that NATO enlargement is the necessary condition for the further

functioning of the entire organization. The US conducted an analysis of Poland's readiness to join NATO structures. At the request of the US Congress Research Office the report determining the state of the Polish army was prepared. The report gave a positive opinion on Poland's preparation for the military operational capability, but undermined the ability to provide civilian control over the army (Zalewski, 2002).

Finally, the approval of Poland's aspirations to join NATO prevailed. Among other reasons, it was underlined that Poland played significant role in the overthrow of the communist system and it should be rewarded with a solid American support.

#### **4. The end of the Warsaw Pact and a new opening for Poland**

The year 1991 brought to Poland many changes in its political and military situation. It was stated at the forum that after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact on 31 March 1991, Poland in the field of military and political affairs was definitely oriented towards the West (Kaczmarek, and Skrzyp, 2003).

On 23 May 1991, the Minister of National Defense visited the NATO Headquarters to reveal the course of Polish foreign policy. On 3 July 1991, the President of Poland paid a visit to Brussels, where he made a statement on Poland's support for NATO policy. In 1992, Poland officially re-confirmed the aspirations for membership in NATO (MON, 2017). On 11-12 March 1992, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner announced that the road to NATO is open. A month later, the first meeting of the NATO Military Committee was held, attended by defense ministers and chiefs of staff of Central and Eastern European countries. On 1 September 1993, President Lech Wałęsa in a letter to the Secretary General of NATO made a statement that membership in the allied structures is the

highest priority of Polish foreign policy ([www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium](http://www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium)).

After official announcements, Poland started implementing particular changes regarding the area of armament and equipment, which had to be strictly adapted to high NATO standards and norms. It was necessary to shift to a new communication system and C2. It was also necessary to restructure the organizational scheme of the army following the NATO pattern, which means that there was a high demand to achieve compatibility and interoperability of the Polish armed forces with Western armies. It was also necessary to ensure civilian control over the army, which meant civilian leadership at the Ministry of National Defense, subordination of the General Staff to the civil defense minister, and parliamentary control over the armed forces.

All of these projects were difficult to meet because of the high costs and the "curtain", which Poland was separated for many years from the modern way of conducting military operations and access to high-tech military technologies. Despite the existing difficulties, accession procedures gradually were implemented. Worth mentioning is the fact that all the "NATO-matching" efforts were provided along with diplomatic persuasions aimed at obtaining the consent of the Alliance for Poland to finally join NATO (Kaczmarek, and Skrzyp, 2003).

On 16 February 1995, the House of Representatives of the US Congress adopted a resolution on the "Revival of National Security" providing the enlargement of NATO including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (Congress, 1995).

After the Alliance proposed to Poland an engagement into individual dialogue, on 4 April 1996 the Polish government submitted to NATO the "Individual Discussion Document" presenting Poland's positions for the enlargement of the Alliance, a vision of the European security architecture and the prospective role of NATO in the future.

The first meeting of the individual Poland-NATO dialogue was held in Brussels

on 7 May 1996. In addition to individual meetings, there were two joint sessions of a dialogue between NATO and countries participating in the "Partnership for Peace" program. In his speech on 22 October 1996 in Detroit, President Bill Clinton for the first time specified the date of NATO enlargement. He announced that the first new members from Central and Eastern Europe should be admitted to the Alliance in 1999 ([www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium](http://www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium)).

## 5. Access dialogue with success

In 1997, four sessions of accession dialogue were held. The first one was carried out on 16 September 1997 and the second on 29 September being mainly dedicated to defense aspects. The third session of the dialogue was held on 9 October and was entirely devoted to financial matters, particularly to Poland's participation in the financing of Allied activities. On 23 October 1997, the last fourth meeting of accession talks was held at NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

On 10 November 1997, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek sent a letter to the Secretary General of NATO in which Poland officially accepted the amount of contributions to the civil and military budget of the Alliance and the "NATO Security Investment Program" (act.nato.int-NSIP in nutshell). Four days later, Bronisław Geremek officially presented a letter to the Secretary General of NATO, confirming Poland's readiness to accept the obligations related to NATO membership and expressing the Poland's will to join the North Atlantic Treaty.

On 25 November 1997, Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek paid an official visit to Brussels and held a meeting with the Secretary General of NATO Javier Solana and the Secretary General of the Western European Union Jose Cutileiro. On 16 December 1997 in Brussels, NATO foreign ministers signed the "Accession Protocols"

for Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Finally, the transfer of ratification instruments to the US government - the depositary of the Washington Treaty, was considered as the completion of the ratification procedure. The Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana issued formal invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary for accession to the North Atlantic Treaty. On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1999 the Polish Parliament adopted the act on the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty, and the day after, the President of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski signed the act ([www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium](http://www.bbn.gov.pl-kalendarium), [www.sejm.gov.pl](http://www.sejm.gov.pl)).<sup>2</sup>

On 12 March 1999, in the city of Independence, in the Missouri state, the Polish Minister of foreign affairs Bronisław Geremek handed over to the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, the act of Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty.

From that moment, Poland formally became a party to the Treaty - a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. The same day, at Piłsudski Square in Warsaw, the President of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski and other leading representatives of the state authorities participated in the ceremony of raising the NATO flag (Pawlikowska, 2006).

## 6. Conclusions

The described analysis carried out in the field of the Polish-American relations in light of the involvement leading up to Poland's achievement of the status of a State Party in the NATO Alliance, proved rationality and effectiveness. For this reason, the pre-accession path may be of interest to representatives of various disciplines: political science, security, law and history. Particularly in the area of security science, it is possible to reflect on

the process of political transformation that was supposed to lead to strengthening the position of Poland on the international arena and by this means, to guarantee the security of its borders. In the scope of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the government and politicians perceived the necessity to improve the security of Poland through the accession process that at the final stage would enable Poland to join NATO. Furthermore, as a strategic partner for national security, it was decided to rely on the power of the United States of America. Undoubtedly, the United States had the worldwide potential that gave the legitimacy to support and defend countries that were seeking security as well as political and social stability in the new European order.

Nevertheless, the matter of NATO enlargement by new member states, including the accession of Poland, occurred to be more complicated than expected. For the political reasons, it is highly important to underline the fact that there was a bipolar attitude among US politicians in the field of Poland's accession. For many key players on the American scene, opening the possibility for former satellite states to become a NATO member state would increase the tense American relations with Russia. Due to that factor, some political environments in the US strived to undermine the accession process with the prime aim to sustain dialogue with Russia. What is more, it is important to highlight that the accession process, apart from its political dimension, mostly required overcoming difficulties resulting from the lack of compatibility between the Polish armed forces and NATO forces in a very vast military context. The Soviet curtain caused the backstop of Poland in the international military area; thus, it was a great challenge to acquire operational capability and inter-state interoperability. Nonetheless, despite all the difficulties, the efforts regarding the accession were finally crowned with success. From the perspective

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<sup>2</sup> The Act of 17 February 1999 r. on the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty, issued in Washington

on 4 April 1949 r. (Journal of Laws 1999 no. 13, item 111).

of the past, the aspiration of Poland to NATO should be considered as justified. Looking back over the pages of history and analyzing the geopolitical situation in Europe nowadays, one would state that Polish relations with Russia have not changed a lot for decades. The political and military activities of Russia, especially taking into consideration the conflict on the Ukraine, proves that Russian political-military course still poses a threat to the countries of the region. From the Russian perspective, the vision of the Central Europe seems to stay unchanged with the supremacy of "Russian Bear" over the former satellite states and without the US engagement manifested in this part of the world. That supposedly would be the hierarchy and the order acceptable for the Russian head of state.

Fortunately, the accession process was successfully finished and Poland acquired one of the most important elements in the security puzzle, the strong Alliance. For the time being, the Polish armed forces are not fully prepared to face external military threats on their own, which is why NATO is perceived as the "security umbrella" expanded over Poland. The close cooperation with the US Army, joint exercises, American soldiers' presence on the Polish land, is an important deterrence factor in the international politics. However, the process of army transformation is still ongoing and although the pace of changes is visible, there is still a lot of space for improvement to achieve full interoperability with the armies of other NATO members.

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