



Research Report

KRYSZYNA MARCINEK AND SCOTT BOSTON

Polish Armed Forces Modernization

A New Cornerstone of European Security?



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About This Report

Poland's ambitious plans for a larger and more capable military will, if realized, enable it to assume a greater role in deterring overt Russian aggression toward the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastern member states. In this report, we provide a brief overview of those plans and suggest ways that the United States might help ensure the ultimate success of these plans.

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Summary

Issue

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine pushed Polish decisionmakers to launch military modernization and expansion at a pace, scale, and direction that was unprecedented in Poland's post-communist history. Given Russia's planned reconstitution, the extent of military aid that Warsaw provided to Ukraine, and previous problems with modernization, Poland's armed forces are at a crossroads. If Poland fails to realize its plans, it might come out of this moment relatively weakened and vulnerable. However, if Poland is successful, it will be able to take a much larger role in ensuring the security of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) eastern flank, thus providing the United States more flexibility to advance its interests in other parts of the world. In this report, we outline Poland's plans for modernization and expansion of the armed forces and provide a preliminary assessment of where U.S. support might be most useful to maximize the return on this joint U.S.-Polish investment in deterrence and defense.

Approach

For this exploratory research, we relied on official documents, statements, databases, analytic reports, and news reporting. We also conducted discussions with U.S. and Polish officials and experts on the condition of anonymity. We used these sources to analyze the planned force structure and how it will be populated with personnel and equipment. We also analyze the financial foundations of this process. We discuss the implications of this process for U.S. interests in Europe and conclude by outlining prospective areas of deepened cooperation between the United States and Poland.

Key Findings

The principal elements of Poland's overall plan, as of late 2024, include:

- creating two new heavy divisions—bringing the total to six—in the Land Forces and equipping the force with advanced armored vehicles, artillery, and air defense systems
- creating the *East Shield*, a large-scale improvement of Poland's border defenses that face Belarus and the Russian territory of Kaliningrad
- fielding at least 32 F-35A fifth-generation fighters, modernizing the current fleet of F-16 fighters, fielding a new Korean-built light fighter aircraft, and completely rearming its attack helicopter fleet with AH-64E Apaches
- acquiring three modern frigates and exploring options for a small submarine force
- increasing the total number of active-duty military personnel from 100,000 in 2015 to 300,000 by 2035, with 150,000 in active reserve by 2039.

If these goals are mostly met, Poland's military will dramatically increase in capability and capacity to defend its national territory and contribute to the defense of NATO's eastern flank more broadly. The Polish Land Forces, in particular, are programmed to grow over the next ten to fifteen years into a large modern combined-arms force. This plan is supported across Poland's political spectrum. In 2025, Poland will spend approximately 4.7 percent of its GDP on national defense, a considerable share of which goes to the United States in arms contracts. Many of these contracts are already being fulfilled. Consequently, Poland has made much progress since 2022. However, we note the following potential difficulties:

- Expanding and modernizing the Polish Armed Forces to such an extent will pose considerable challenges, particularly given the aggressive timelines for expanding the military while fielding whole families of new vehicles and weapon systems.
- At the end of 2024, the Polish Armed Forces numbered 205,000 troops; it remains to be seen whether Poland's accelerated recruitment efforts

can generate an almost 50 percent increase in personnel to reach 300,000 by 2035.

- The government vastly increased defense spending, but many purchases are financed through direct loans from countries supplying equipment; if securing such loans proves impossible, market financing might be too expensive to turn all framework agreements into binding contracts in the proposed timeframe.
- Even if it is successful in rearmament and recruitment, Poland will require additional time and resources to build out wartime attritional reserves and munition stocks and further create the enablers necessary for the expanded force. In case of war, Poland might give its allies more time to fulfill their commitments but will not be able to stand alone.

Recommendations

A successfully modernized and expanded Polish military would be a bulwark of security facing Russia and Belarus. Such a development would be manifestly in U.S. interests regionally and globally because it would reinforce deterrence and collective defense in Europe and provide greater freedom of action for U.S. military forces elsewhere. Large purchases of U.S. weapon systems have already benefited the U.S. defense industry. To ensure the success of these plans, Poland will need multifaceted support. We make the following recommendations:

- The U.S. Department of Defense should maintain and consider temporarily strengthening the U.S. military posture in Poland in the short- to middle-term to strengthen deterrence, thus ensuring that Poland has time to complete its modernization, and enhance interoperability and readiness. Doing so would maximize the return on already significant U.S. investment and signal to other European allies that taking a larger responsibility for regional security is highly appreciated by the United States.
- The United States should identify approaches to help accelerate Poland's purchase of U.S.-built weapon systems, increase funding of direct loans, support training of newly equipped units, and offset potential limitations in key enablers.

- U.S. European Command should continue to engage the Polish Ministry of National Defence to better understand the implications for deterrence and defense of the changing balance of power on NATO's eastern flank.
- U.S. European Command and the Department of Defense should enhance dialogue with Polish counterparts to explore how this emerging force can be best used to support Poland's and NATO's strategic objectives and operational plans.

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Introduction

[Poland will] be spending close to 4 percent of GDP. And I'll tell you more. If needs be, if Putin really threatens us, we will double it because we will not be a Russian colony again.¹

Radosław Sikorski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Poland's role in regional security shifted dramatically. The country not only provided vast military support to Kyiv and became a transit hub for equipment and supplies flowing to Ukraine but also launched extensive force modernization and expansion with the hope of becoming "the largest land force in Europe."² The scope and pace of this process are supported by the perception of Russia as a major threat that is shared almost unanimously across Polish society.³

Poland's expanded military will include improvements across all of its services, but, most of all, it will cement Poland as a key source of land combat power for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). A force of six heavy divisions that are fully rearmed with modern armored vehicles, artillery, and air defenses would be a much more solid platform for respond-

¹ Fareed Zakaria, "On GPS: Poland's FM: 'We Will Not Be a Russian Colony Again,'" CNN, February 25, 2024.

² Quoted in Loveday Morris, "Poland Is on a Quest to Have Europe's Strongest Military—with U.S. Arms," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2023.

³ Jacob Poushter, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy, "Spotlight on Poland: Negative Views of Russia Surge, but Ratings for U.S., NATO, EU Improve," Pew Research Center, June 22, 2022.

ing to an overt Russian military attack directed either against Poland or other NATO members that border Russia and Belarus.

Therefore, the realization of ambitious modernization plans would strengthen NATO's defense and deterrence posture while Washington juggles competing security needs throughout the world. However, meeting modernization targets might require multifaceted U.S. support. The sheer size of the acquisition plan is unprecedented in modern Polish history, and acquisition is only the first step on the long path of integrating new capabilities into force to make them credibly combat ready.

In this report, we aim to improve the U.S. policy community's understanding of Poland's plans for modernization and extension of its armed forces and provide a preliminary assessment of where U.S. support might be most useful. To that end, we present the planned force structure and how it will be populated with personnel and equipment in Chapter 2. We also discuss budget trends to highlight the financial foundations of this process. Then, we discuss the implications of this modernization and expansion process for U.S. interest in Europe. We conclude with a preliminary rundown of prospective areas of deepened cooperation between the United States and Poland.

In conducting this exploratory research, we relied on official documents, statements, and databases, analytic reports, and news reporting. We also conducted discussions with U.S. and Polish officials and experts on the condition of anonymity. The discussions took place in spring and summer 2024. Consequently, they reflect the attitudes of the Polish government that was elected in October 2023 toward the transformation launched by their predecessors.

Poland's Military Plans

In the view of Polish decisionmakers, the Russia-Ukraine war vindicated Poland's long-standing fears of Moscow's revisionism and revanchism. This threat perception, rooted in Poland's history, is the lens through which the determination for military expansion that is shared across the political spectrum in a politically deeply divided country can be understood.¹ Furthermore, it pushed the government to launch massive military modernization and expansion without updating formal strategic guidance: Poland's most recent National Security Strategy was published in 2020 and does not reflect the depth of change of the country's security environment after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, updating strategic documents takes time. Instead, Polish decisionmakers quickly began the modernization and expansion processes that are expected to take years to bear fruit.

The modernization plans have been relatively consistent despite a change of government in 2023, and, indeed, there is considerable agreement on the desired trajectory of modernization and expansion. Although many of plans of the previous government were criticized by the then-opposition, none were formally reverted after the opposition took over in the aftermath of the 2023 parliamentary elections. In a shared sense of urgency, the new government decided that suboptimal purchases are better than delayed ones.²

¹ Daniel Fried, "Dispatch from Warsaw: Poland's Military and Economic Rise Is Coming Just in Time, as the West Wobbles," Atlantic Council, July 5, 2024.

² Reportedly, many of the modernization and expansion plan were launched without proper analysis, and were therefore interpreted as motivated by politics, not security requirements. However, given the delays in previous modernization programs, the new government chose continuity. See Michał Piekarski, "Przed defiladą. Wojsko Polskie

Since joining NATO in 1999, Poland has been adapting to NATO standards in terms of command and control, equipping, and training.³ But none of those changes compare in scale to current efforts. In this chapter, we provide an overview of Poland's envisioned military expansion and modernization, including sections on future force structure, personnel requirements, technical modernization, and financing for these efforts. These plans are not fully set; they are likely to evolve over the next decade as Polish military leaders act to bring this new force into being. Poland has yet to define the strategy and doctrine that reflect the capabilities of this new force structure. Furthermore, as the host of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis Training and Education Centre, Poland is well-positioned to learn from Ukraine's combat experience, and change doctrinal documents accordingly. However, we lay out the major pieces of the modernization and expansion plans to demonstrate the scale of this effort.

Structure

The organization of the Polish Armed Forces has changed, reflecting shifts in perception of needs and available resources. As of October 2024, the Polish Armed Forces consists of five branches: Land Forces, Air Force, Navy, Special Forces, and Territorial Defence Forces (TDF). The Polish Armed Forces primarily focus on ground combat forces: Almost half of the personnel allocation for professional soldiers is assigned to the Land Forces, which is more than twice that of the Air Force and Navy combined.⁴ Furthermore, the

pod rządami nowej koalicji” [“Before the Parade. The Polish Army Under the Rule of the New Coalition”], OKO.Press, August 15, 2024.

³ Eugeniusz Cieślak, “Siły Zbrojne Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w NATO. Refleksje z Perspektywy Czwierćwiecza” [“Polish Armed Forces in NATO. Reflections from the Quarter of a Century Perspective”], *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe* [National Security], Vol. 44, 2024.

⁴ Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland (MND), “Decyzja Budżetowa na Rok 2024 Nr 6/MON Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 9 lutego 2024 r.” [“Budget Decision for 2024 No. 6/MON of the Minister of National Defence of February 9, 2024”], 2024a.

TDF consists mainly of light infantry formations and, in wartime, would support the land component.

Land Forces

In 2013, prior to the annexation of Crimea and when Poland was still focused on supporting allied out-of-area operations, maneuver units of the Land Forces consisted of the 11th Armored Cavalry, 12th Mechanized Division, 16th Mechanized Division, and three separate brigades—an airborne brigade, an air assault brigade, and the 21st Podhale (Mountain) Rifle Brigade. In 2018, in response to a changing security environment, the government decided to form a new 18th Mechanized Division, which absorbed an armored brigade from the 16th Division and the 21st Rifle Brigade; other division elements continued to form over the following five years.⁵

A much more substantial proposed expansion came only in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In June 2022, the Polish government announced that two new divisions would be created.⁶ The formation of the first—the 1st Legions Infantry Division—started in September 2022; it will consist of four maneuver brigades with four battalions each.⁷ The formation of the second—the 8th Home Army Infantry Division—was announced in November 2023; it is expected to consist of two mechanized brigades; an armored brigade; a motorized brigade; an artillery brigade; anti-tank, anti-aircraft, and logistics regiments; and other supporting elements.⁸

⁵ MND, “18. Brygada Zmotoryzowana z siedzibą w Poniatojew—rozpoczyna się formowanie czwartej brygady 18 Dywizji Zmechanizowanej” [“18th Motorized Brigade based in Poniatojew—Formation Begins of the Fourth Brigade of 18th Mechanized Division”], press release, October 2, 2023a.

⁶ MND, “Powstaną nowe dywizje Wojska Polskiego wyposażone w nowoczesne uzbrojenie” [“New Polish Army Divisions Equipped with Modern Weapons Will Be Created”], press release, June 13, 2022a.

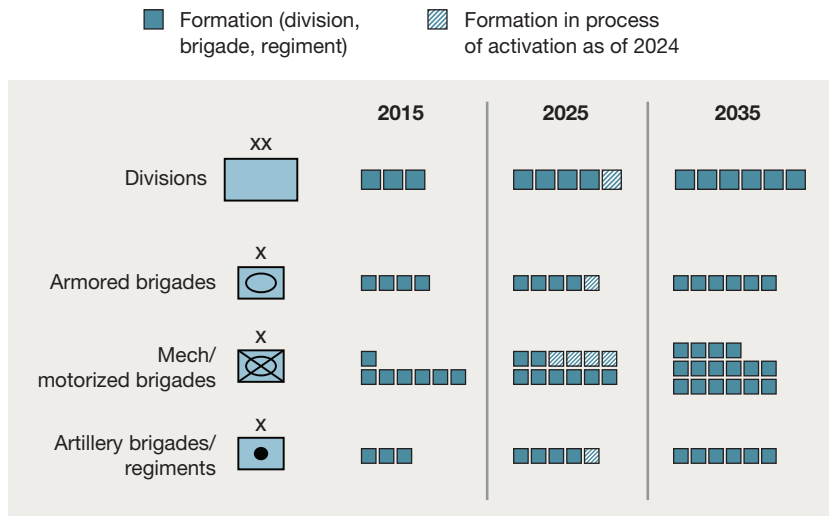
⁷ MND, “1 Dywizja Piechoty Legionów wzmocni bezpieczeństwo północno-wschodniej Polski” [“The 1st Legions Infantry Division Will Strengthen the Security of Northeastern Poland”], press release, November 12, 2023c.

⁸ MND, “Rusza budowa kolejnej dywizji—8. Dywizji Piechoty Armii Krajowej” [“Construction of Another Division Begins—the 8th Home Army Infantry Division”], press release, November 3, 2023b.

Importantly, unlike the 18th Mechanized Division, which was largely built on existing units, the new 1st and 8th divisions will mainly be built through the formation of new subordinate units. These new divisions, as well as the 16th and 18th Divisions, are to be postured for defense of Poland’s borders with Kaliningrad and Belarus. All four frontline divisions are to eventually take on the larger, four-maneuver-brigade design.

Figure 2.1 depicts the intended maneuver force design of the Land Forces as it is currently planned to evolve, with an anticipated date of completion sometime in the 2030s. Importantly, this figure depicts how many new formations are to be created in a relatively short time, a challenge that is compounded by the fact that all legacy Soviet-era main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery systems that made up the bulk of the 2015 force are slated for replacement with modern Western weapon systems.

FIGURE 2.1
Approximate Polish Land Forces Expansion (2015–2035)



SOURCES: Uses information from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 116, No. 1, 2016, p. 127; Jarosław Ciślak, “Big Changes in the Polish Army: What Will the Army Be Like in a Decade?” *Defence24*, August 15, 2023a; Tomasz Dmitruk, “Nowe jednostki w 16. Dywizji Zmechanizowanej oraz 18. Dywizji Zmechanizowanej” [“New Units in the 16th Mechanized Division and the 18th Mechanized Division”], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, July 21, 2023b; MND, 2023b; MND, 2023c.

The six-division future Land Forces design is one of several ongoing developments related to armed forces modernization plans that are focused on the land domain. Some of the others include the following:

- creation in 2023 of a corps headquarters—2nd Corps—that will provide command and control to multidivision formations and allow for improved tactical and operational coordination of deep fires⁹
- construction of border defenses along Poland's borders with Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad as part of the East Shield program, which will ultimately combine physical barriers and a variety of surveillance systems¹⁰
- expansion of the attack helicopter arm of the Land Forces with a major purchase of AH-64E Apache Guardian helicopters, the acquisition of which is based on a Letter of Offer and Acceptance signed in August 2024; this expansion will be covered further in the section on technical modernization, but the total number of attack helicopters in Polish service will grow from 16 to 96 helicopters¹¹
- proposed creation of a drone command within the armed forces to facilitate incorporation of new robotic platforms across all of the branches of the Polish military.¹²

Finally, Poland's creation, expansion, and continued development of a TDF as a fifth separate branch of service in the Polish Armed Forces has been ongoing since 2016. The aim of this force is to eventually exceed 50,000 personnel in at least twenty regionally-situated brigades.¹³ TDF units are

⁹ Jakub Borowski, "Generals: High Time to Polish Command System Reform. Artillery Assigned to Territorial Defence," *Defence24*, May 10, 2024b.

¹⁰ Bartosz Głowacki, "Poland's New East Shield Plan Mixes Modern ISR with Old-School Physical Barriers," *Breaking Defense*, May 28, 2024a.

¹¹ Bartosz Głowacki, "A 'Breakthrough' Moment for Polish Military Aviation as Apache Deal Is Signed," *Breaking Defense*, August 15, 2024b.

¹² Wojciech Koziół, "Defence Minister: We Are Ready to Establish 'Drone Branch' Command," *Defence24*, November 8, 2024.

¹³ Maciej Klisz, "The Polish Territorial Defense Forces (POL TDF): A Significant Component in National Resilience and Resistance," *Insights*, Vol. 2, No. 8, August 2, 2022.

largely composed of light infantry but have a variety of other enablers available. These units have roles in disaster response and countering hybrid threats, and, in the event of a major conflict with Russia, they could supplement the Land Forces in a variety of combat and security roles.

This new force structure will require not only personnel and equipment but also investment in facilities and training. It will also likely require new doctrine, given the incorporation of lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war, the creation of the drone branch, and the construction of the East Shield. All these changes have already started. MND announced that a transformation command will be established to oversee the formation of new units; it will likely be modeled on the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.¹⁴ Poland has been investing in training grounds modernization, including an extension of Nowa Dęba training grounds and the purchase of live tactical engagement simulation training systems for a reinforced mechanized battalion at the Drawsko Pomorskie combat training center (which is reportedly to be expanded to a brigade-sized system), and company-sized systems for Orzysz, Nowa Dęba, Żagań, and Wędrzyn training grounds.¹⁵ However, these investments were made before the announcement of two additional divisions, so further expansion of training capacity might be needed.

Air and Maritime Forces

The Polish Air Force and Navy expansion is less prominent in public debate than the expansion of the land-centric branches. However, the acquisition

¹⁴ Jakub Borowski, “Plany MON: ‘dronizacja,’ satelity, dowództwo transformacji” [“MND Plans: ‘Dronization,’ Satellites, Transformation Command”], *Defence24*, February 9, 2024a; Jędrzej Graf, “Transformacja to więcej niż modernizacja. Szef Sztabu Generalnego przedstawi plan zmian w armii” [“Transformation Is More Than Modernization. Chief of General Staff Presents Plan for Changes in the Army”], *Defence24*, February 20, 2024.

¹⁵ MND, “Nowa Dęba drugim największym poligonem w Polsce” [“Nowa Dęba Is the Second Largest Military Training Ground in Poland”], press release, September 25, 2019b; MND, “Important Contracts for the Modernization of the Polish Army Were Signed in Kielce,” press release, September 7, 2021; Łukasz Zalesiński, and Magdalena Miernicka, “Laserowa rewolucja” [“Laser Revolution”], *Polska Zbrojna*, December 7, 2023.

of new aircraft and vessels indicates that they are expanding, and major new platforms will result in important changes in their capabilities.

As shown in Table 2.1, Poland will decommission Soviet-era airframes (likely by transferring them to Ukraine) while increasing its combat aircraft fleet by one-third (from 94 aircraft to 128 aircraft). It will consist entirely of modern platforms, albeit with a mix of advanced F-35A fifth-generation fighters, as well as nonstealthy modernized F-16s and Korean-built light FA-50 fighters.¹⁶ In May 2023, the Inspector of the Polish Air Force said that Poland aims to operate ten squadrons (160 combat aircraft), which implies a purchase of an additional 32 aircraft.¹⁷ Reportedly, these could be either

TABLE 2.1
Trend in Polish Air Force Combat Aircraft

Aircraft Type	2022	2024	2035 and beyond
5th-generation fighter	N/A	N/A	• 32 F-35A
4th-generation (modern)	• 48 F-16 C/D Block 52+	• 48 F-16 C/D Block 52+ • 12 FA-50 Block 10	• 48 F-16C/D (upgraded) • 12 FA-50 Block 10 • 36 FA-50 Block 20 • Possibly additional 32 jets (5th or 4th generation).
Legacy (Soviet-era)	• 28 MiG-29 • 18 Su-22	• 14 MiG-29 • 11 Su-22	N/A

SOURCES: Uses information from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 122, No. 1, 2022, p. 136; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 124, No. 1, 2024, p. 126; Tomasz Dmitruk, "Plany modernizacji Sił Powietrznych" ["Air Force Modernization Plans"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, May 27, 2023a.

NOTE: The decrease in the number of legacy aircraft between 2022 and 2024 reflects military aid to Ukraine. N/A = not applicable.

¹⁶ Derek Bisaccio and Jon Hemler, "Poland's Military Pursues a New Era of Airpower," *Defense and Security Monitor*, November 8, 2024.

¹⁷ Dmitruk, 2023a.

4th- or 5th-generation aircraft, possibly air superiority fighters.¹⁸ Poland is reportedly studying increasing transport and air refueling options.¹⁹

Poland's Navy force structure is also programmed to expand over the coming decade. Two former U.S. Navy frigates in Polish service (originally launched in the late 1970s) are to be replaced by three new *Miecznik* (Swordfish)-class frigates, each with greater displacement and considerably greater capability.²⁰ Polish leaders have also been pursuing a new *Orka*-class submarine, which would include up to four boats that would replace Poland's single Project 636 (Kilo-class) submarine.²¹

Personnel

Staffing this larger force structure with trained military personnel will be another challenge. In 2009, Poland suspended conscription, as did many other Western militaries, and instead opted for a smaller, more professional, and better-equipped all-voluntary force that largely focused on out-of-area operations in support of NATO and coalition missions. The number of professional military personnel stabilized at approximately 100,000.²² However, the return of Russia as a potential overt adversary, signaled by the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, called into question the sufficiency of this force. The response to this new security environment was two-fold: First, Poland started to train more reserves, from practically none from

¹⁸ Jędrzej Graf, "Polska kupi 1000 czołgów. Błaszczak: planujemy pozyskanie dodatkowych F-35 lub F-15" ["Poland Will Buy 1,000 Tanks. Błaszczak: We Plan to Acquire Additional F-35 or F-15"], *Defence24*, July 26, 2022; MND, "Siły powietrzne—ważna część zintegrowanego systemu sił zbrojnych" ["Air Force—an Important Part of the Integrated Armed Forces System"], press release, March 20, 2025.

¹⁹ MND, 2025.

²⁰ PGZ Stocznia Wojenna, "Miecznik—Multipurpose Frigates for the Polish Navy," webpage, undated.

²¹ Richard Thomas, "Naval Primes Positioning for Poland's Orka Submarine Programme," *Naval Technology*, September 3, 2024.

²² NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2009–2016)," press release, March 13, 2017, p. 11.

2009 to 12 to 38,000 reservists in 2019.²³ Next, in 2017, the government set out to increase the military personnel to 200,000 members: 150,000 professional soldiers and 50,000 of the newly-formed TDF.²⁴

In July 2021, the government announced that it intended to increase the size of the armed forces to 300,000 members: 250,000 professional soldiers and 50,000 part-time members of the TDF. This goal was first met with skepticism given the slow rate of personnel growth in the preceding years.²⁵ Because of Poland's demographic limitations, some experts doubted that it could be achieved without reinstating conscription.²⁶ Before the 2023 elections, commanders were reportedly pressured to meet recruitment targets in any way possible, such as forcing civilians working in the military, including cooks, to switch to military service while staying in the same posts.²⁷

However, 2022 seems to have brought two changes that aided recruitment: the Russia-Ukraine war—and the subsequent rise in patriotic sentiment—and a new form of military service created by the Homeland Defense Act (HDA) of 2022, voluntary basic military service, that simplifies and shortens formalities for a person to join the military for short-term training (one to 12 months) and subsequently become a professional service member or a reservist. This new form of service makes the armed forces more accessible to people who otherwise might be wary of long-term commitment to professional active duty. It also allows for increasing the number

²³ Paulina Glińska, "Wojny wygrywa rezerwa" ["Wars Are Won by Reserves"], *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland], November 5, 2019.

²⁴ Paulina Glińska, "Więcej pieniędzy na obronność" ["More Money for Defense"], *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland], October 23, 2017.

²⁵ Marek Kozubal, "Wizja wielkiej armii [Vision of a Great Army]," *Rzeczpospolita*, July 26, 2021.

²⁶ See, for example, Krystian Winogrodzki, "Były szef MON komentuje pomysł Błaszczaka. 300 tys. żołnierzy—'księżycowa propozycja'" ["The Former Head of the Ministry of National Defence Comments on Błaszczak's Idea. 300 Thousand Soldiers—'Unrealistic Proposal'"], *Wprost*, August 6, 2021.

²⁷ Edyta Żemła, *Armia w ruinie* [Army in Ruin], Czerwone i czarne, 2024.

of people with basic military training and rebuilding reserves without reinstating conscription.²⁸

So far, recruitment has exceeded expectations. For example, in 2023, MND planned to recruit 25,000 people to voluntary basic military service, but the limit was later increased to 33,000 people because of high demand.²⁹ Similarly, in 2024, the limit was raised from 30,000 people to 40,000 people (with an additional 4,550 entering service in military academies).³⁰ However, the retentions picture is somewhat less optimistic: In mid-2024, the Polish Armed Forces were expected to reach 216,000 troops, but at the end of year the total number was 205,000, including 143,300 active duty professional soldiers.³¹

One important factor is that there is apparent political consensus regarding growth of the armed forces despite the fact that the target size was a contentious issue during the parliamentary elections of 2023. In October 2022, the General Staff of the Armed Forces announced its more detailed plans: By 2035, there would be 196,500 professional soldiers (including 9,373 soldiers in military academies), 50,000 soldiers in territorial defense service, and 53,500 soldiers in voluntary basic military service (including 3,500 people in their freshman year of military academies).³² The then-main opposition

²⁸ This process is also aided by such initiatives as “Train with Military” and “Summer with Military,” which allow civilians to sign up for a basic short-term military training during weekends or summer. “Summer with Military” targets high school graduates who can sign up for month-long training and receive enlisted pay, which is a very attractive prospect for that age group. See MND, “Wakacje z wojskiem” [“Summer with Military”], press release, May 16, 2024c; and MND, “Szkolenia wojskowe dla każdego w projekcie ‘Trenuj z wojskiem 5’” [“Military Training for Everyone in the Project ‘Train with Military 5’”], press release, April 25, 2024b.

²⁹ Paulina Gliška, “Więcej miejsc dla dobrowolców” [“More Spots for Volunteers”], *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland], September 21, 2023.

³⁰ Gliška, “Więcej miejsc dla dobrowolców” [“More Spots for Volunteers”], *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland], June 11, 2024c.

³¹ NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024),” press release, June 17, 2024, p. 13; “Polska armia liczniejsza, ale czy doświadczona? Alarmujące odejścia ze służby” [“Polish Army Is Larger, but Is It Experienced? Alarming Departures from Service”], *Bankier.pl*, January 1, 2025.

³² Jarosław Ciślak, “Liczebność Wojska Polskiego. Mity i fakty” [“Size of Polish Military. Myths and Facts”] *Defence24*, October 26, 2023b.

Forms of Military Service in Poland

In March 2022, Poland enacted the Homeland Defense Act, which sets out the following forms of military service:

- **Professional active duty** is the backbone of the armed forces and is expected to grow from 100,000 service members in 2016 to 200,000 service members in 2035; as of March 2024, approximately 140,000 people served as professional active-duty military personnel.^a To become a professional service member, a prospective service member must complete voluntary basic military service.
- **Territorial active duty** is served in the TDF, which was established in 2017 as light infantry and modeled on the U.S. National Guard and other similar services. The service is mostly made up of part-time soldiers who complete 16 days of basic training followed by three years of 36 days of training each year (one weekend a month for eleven months and 14 days straight in the 12th month).^b The TDF is expected to grow to 50,000 members by 2035; as of March 2024, almost 40,000 people served in the TDF.^c
- **Basic active duty**, which has included the following:
 - Mandatory (i.e., conscription) service has been suspended since 2009.
 - Voluntary basic military service is a new form of military service introduced by the HDA. After a month of basic military training, a soldier decides whether to continue for another eleven months of specialized training or move to passive reserve. After the specialized training, soldiers can join professional military service, TDF, or active reserve; otherwise, they are transferred to passive reserve. It is expected to grow to 53,500 members by 2035; as of March 2024, more than 18,000 people served in voluntary basic military service.^d
- **Reserve duty** consists of the following:
 - The active reserve is another form of military service introduced by the HDA and is modeled on the U.S. military reserve structure. Members of the active reserve report for duty at least one

weekend per quarter and for a two-week-long training at least every three years.

- The passive reserve, broadly speaking, consists of all persons younger than 60 years old (63 for officers or noncommissioned officers) who underwent the military qualification process (i.e., military fitness assessment for all 18-year-old males) or military training in any form of active-duty service but who do not currently serve. The passive reserve can also be called into training.

SOURCE: Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny [Act of March 11, 2022, on the Defense of the Homeland], Dz.U. 2022 poz. 655 [Official Journal 2022, item 655], March 11, 2022.

^a Ciślak, 2023b; Piotr Celej, “Polska armia trzecia w NATO i największa w Unii Europejskiej” [“Polish Army Third in NATO and Largest in the European Union”], *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* [Daily Legal Newspaper], July 16, 2024.

^b TDF, “FAQ. Służba—system szkolenia” [“FAQ. Service—System of Training”], webpage, undated.

^c Ciślak, 2023b; Celej, 2024.

^d Ciślak, 2023b; Celej, 2024.

party deemed the 300,000 force demographically unrealistic.³³ However, there has been no declared policy change since the opposition took power in the 2023 parliamentary elections. Instead, it seems that the current government responds to the market signal: As long as there are candidates, the Polish Armed Forces will continue to recruit.

Consequently, the number of active-duty military personnel is expected to grow among professional, territorial defense, and voluntary basic military service members (see Figure 2.2). The recruitment targets for 2025 are 16,000 soldiers for professional military personnel and almost 40,000 sol-

³³ The then main opposition party proposed 150,000 of professional soldiers, 20–30,000 voluntary basic service members, and 30–40,000 territorial defense troops (i.e., 200–220,000 total). See Marta Rawicz and Piotr Salak, “Siemoniak: Polska nie ma potencjału demograficznego do budowy 300-tysięcznej armii” [“Siemoniak: Poland Does Not Have the Demographic Potential to Build an Army of 300,000 People”], RMF24, October 20, 2023.

FIGURE 2.2

Active-Duty Military Personnel of the Polish Armed Forces (2013–2024)



SOURCES: Professional active-duty military personnel limits are based on analysis of the appendixes to defense budgets from 2013 to 2024; see MND, “Budżet MON [Budget of the Ministry of National Defence],” webpage, undated-a. Total active duty military personnel was based on NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013–2020),” press release, March 16, 2021, p. 12; NATO, 2024, p. 13; and “Polska armia liczniejsza, ale czy doświadczona? Alarmujące odejścia ze służby,” 2025.

NOTE: The growing difference between total and professional active-duty military personnel reflects the increasing number of military personnel in new forms of service—territorial defense and voluntary basic military service.

diers for voluntary basic military service (including in military academies); 44,000 soldiers are expected to serve in the TDF.³⁴

Whether the Polish Armed Forces will be able to reach 300,000 troops remains to be seen. Given Poland’s population of less than 37 million

³⁴ Grażyna J. Leśniak, “Rząd wie, ile osób może zostać powołanych do czynnej służby wojskowej w 2025 r.” [“The Government Knows How Many People May Be Called Up for Active Military Duty in 2025”], *Prawo [Law]*, October 11, 2024.

people, 300,000 troops would amount to 0.82 percent of the total population.³⁵ In comparison, the U.S. armed forces amount to 0.38 percent of the U.S. population.³⁶ Furthermore, to grow the armed forces from 205,000 to 300,000 soldiers over the following ten years (Figure 2.2), the country will need to recruit 95,000 people, which amounts to almost 2.5 percent of Polish people ages 10 to 19 in 2023. To put this task in perspective, the U.S. armed forces face challenges in recruitment in a larger cohort (the 10 to 19 age group constitutes 12.8 percent of the U.S. population and 10.4 percent of Poland's population) and even considering that military service provides incentives that Poland cannot offer (for example, young Poles have access to free higher education and health care regardless of service). Meanwhile, the U.S. armed forces seek to maintain the current staffing level, whereas Poland seeks to vastly increase its number of troops. Furthermore, the U.S. military allows foreign nationals to serve, thus increasing its recruitment pool. Although this idea has been floated in the expert community, the majority of Poles oppose this solution.³⁷

To support recruitment and retention, the Polish government has increased military salaries and other benefits several times since 2019.³⁸ But the competition for labor will intensify as the economy improves. In 2022, Poland was still recovering from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; as of this writing, Poland has one of the fastest-growing econo-

³⁵ United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision*, 2022.

³⁶ United Nations Population Division, 2022; NATO, 2024, p. 13.

³⁷ Marek Kozubal, "Polski mundur nie tylko dla Polaka. Czy polskie wojsko przyjmie cudzoziemców?" ["Polish Uniform Not Only for Poles. Will the Polish Army Accept Foreigners?"], *Rzeczpospolita*, January 22, 2024a; Marek Kozubal, "Sondaż IBRiS dla 'Rz': Legia Cudzoziemska nie odpowiada Polakom" ["IBRiS Poll for 'Rz': The Foreign Legion Does Not Suit Poles"], *Rzeczpospolita*, April 29, 2024b.

³⁸ MND, "Najwyższe od lat podwyżki dla żołnierzy już od 1 lutego" ["The Highest Pay Rises for Soldiers in Years from February 1"], press release, January 23, 2019; Paulina Gliška, "Jakie podwyżki dla żołnierzy" ["What Pay Rises for Soldiers"], *Polska Zbrojna*, February 8, 2024a; Paulina Gliška, "Zmiany w dodatkach stażowych" ["Changes to Seniority Allowances"], *Polska Zbrojna [Armed Poland]*, March 6, 2024b; "Wojsko: Zmiany w odprawie mieszkaniowej i sposobie rozliczeń urlopu wypoczynkowego" ["Army: Changes to Housing Allowance and Vacation Leave Settlement Method"], *Defence24*, July 15, 2024.

mies in the European Union (EU).³⁹ This translates into the second-lowest unemployment rate in the EU, forecasted at 2.9 percent in 2024 and 2.8 percent in 2025.⁴⁰ Eastern and Central Poland, where new military units are created, are areas of higher unemployment.⁴¹ Enlisted soldiers initially apply to units—in contrast to enlisting into service branches as soldiers do in the United States—which could aid the recruitment.⁴² Furthermore, patriotic motivation for service seems to remain high.⁴³ However, the sense of threat that led many young Poles to sign up for military service might weaken if the Russia-Ukraine war comes to a halt.⁴⁴

It is too early to tell whether Poland will be able to meet its ambitious recruitment goals. This process will unfold over the coming decade, the goal being to recruit 300,000 soldiers by 2035. The first signposts of waning interest in military careers will be the level of interest in weekend and summer basic training programs for civilians, especially those targeting high school graduates (e.g., the “Summer with Military” program), as well as military

³⁹ In November 2024, the EU forecasted that Poland's gross domestic product (GDP) would grow by 3 percent in 2024 and 3.6 percent in 2025, ranking 4th and 3rd in the EU, respectively (European Commission, *European Economic Forecast: Autumn 2024*, European Economy Institutional Papers No. 296, November 2024, p. 1). A longer term growth might be threatened by excessive deficit and debt. However, historically, Poland has managed its economy well. In fact, over the past 25 years, Poland's economy contracted only during the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, “GDP Growth (Annual %),” database, updated December 16, 2024).

⁴⁰ European Commission, 2024, p. 1.

⁴¹ Robert Czystowski, “Te powiaty wyróżniają się pod względem bezrobocia. Oto najnowsze zestawienie” [“These Counties Stand Out in Terms of Unemployment. Here Is the Latest Ranking”], *300Gospodarka*, August 26, 2024.

⁴² John T. Warner, “The Effect of the Civilian Economy on Recruiting and Retention,” in *The Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation. Supporting Research Papers*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2012, pp. 75–79.

⁴³ Leonard Osiađło, “Kosiniak-Kamysz chwali patriotyczny zryw. Ale rekruci skarżą się, że w wojsku nie ma dla nich miejsc” [“Kosiniak-Kamysz Praises Patriotic Outburst. But Recruits Complain That There Are No Places For Them in the Army”], OKO.press, September 22, 2024.

⁴⁴ This seems to have been the case after the annexation of Crimea: Unfavorable views of Russia soared in 2014 and started to fall after (Pew Research Center, *Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey: Topline Questionnaire*, July 10, 2023, p. 48).

classes, which are secondary school programs that introduce military education.⁴⁵ The latter will be particularly useful for analytic purposes because they provide information in advance: High school students sign up for these classes three to four years before they are eligible to enlist.

Even if Poland succeeds in recruitment, retention remains a problem. For example, almost 17,000 people left the military in 2022 (8,988 professional service members and 7,962 territorial defense troops) and another 19,000 in 2023 (including 9,168 professional service members and 9,759 territorial defense troops).⁴⁶ These departures have been partially attributed to the politicization of the Polish Armed Forces under the previous administration.⁴⁷ However, retention is a problem across NATO and will unlikely be stopped by political change. In fact, some of the reasons for leaving the service have more to do with legacy leadership culture within the Polish Armed Forces: Those who leave the service in the first three years (up to 30 per cent of those leaving professional service)⁴⁸ mention poor interpersonal relations, lack of respect from superiors, cronyism, unfair punishment, and other issues.⁴⁹ For those who stay in the service longer, the frustration stem-

⁴⁵ Central Military Recruiting Center, “Klasy wojskowe” [“Military Classes”], webpage, undated.

⁴⁶ Glińska, 2024a; Piotr Jaszczuk, “Chętnych do wojska więcej niż odejść. Wielu doświadczonych żołnierzy zdejmuję mundur” [“There Are More People Willing to Join the Army Than to Leave. Many Experienced Soldiers Take Off Their Uniforms”], *Defence24*, January 17, 2022; Piotr Miedziński, “Zakup uzbrojenia nie wystarczy. Narasta problem odejść żołnierzy z wojska” [“Purchasing Weapons Is Not Enough. The Problem of Soldiers Leaving The Army Is Growing”], *Portal Obrony*, March 20, 2024.

⁴⁷ Politicization led to fast promotions of inexperienced officers and dismissal of experienced ones because of their suspected political leanings, as well as the use of the military for political campaigning purposes. Morale was further undermined by special privileges of the TDF, which were initially created as a political project of a highly controversial Minister of National Defence and directly subordinated to him (Żemła, 2024).

⁴⁸ Marek Kozubal, “Gen. Wiesław Kukuła: Czerwona lampka już się pali” [“Gen. Wiesław Kukuła: The Red Light Is Already On”], *Rzeczpospolita*, November 12, 2024.

⁴⁹ “Fala odejść z wojska. Dlaczego coraz więcej żołnierzy zdejmuję mundur” [“A Wave of Departures from the Army: Why More and More Soldiers Are Taking Off Their Uniforms”], *Onet*, December 29, 2023; Aleksandra Cieślak, “Ma dość i odchodzi z wojska. ‘Rozmowa z pułkownikiem trwała dwie minuty’” [“He’s Had Enough and Is Leaving

ming from these cultural problems is compounded by the burden on families (especially since 2021, when the military was sent to support the Border Guard on the Poland-Belarus border), housing issues, problems with equipping, and work overload because of staffing shortages.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, losing experienced personnel—many of whom had combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan—when so many new recruits arrive will be a challenge for education, training, and readiness. The last item remains especially hard to assess given the lack of reporting standards for the Polish Armed Forces' readiness.

Finally, it is worth noting that reserves still remain the least-discussed piece of the personnel puzzle. In 2024, 20,000 people served in active reserve, and the limit for 2025 was set at 30,000 people.⁵¹ Additionally, the armed forces continue to train passive reserves (up to 200,000 people in 2024).⁵² However, in the long term, the General Staff wants to shift focus from passive to active reserve, which is supposed to reach 150,000 people by 2039.⁵³ In March 2025, the Polish Prime Minister announced that the government is exploring options to introduce basic military training for all adult men and women who choose to participate without reinstating conscription.⁵⁴

the Army. 'The Conversation with the Colonel Lasted Two Minutes'"], *Interia*, November 13, 2023.

⁵⁰ "To wyznanie nie spodoba się Błaszczakowi. 'Takie rzeczy dzieją się w naszej armii'" ["Błaszczak Won't Like This Confession. 'Such Things Happen in Our Army'"], *NaTemat.pl* [OnTopic], October 15, 2022; Edyta Żemła, "Fala odejść z wojska. 'Dowódca ze swoimi zaufanymi ludźmi robi zakrapiane "odprawy"' ["A Wave of Departures from the Army. 'The Commander and His Trusted Men Hold Boozy "Briefings""]], *Onet*, February 3, 2023.

⁵¹ Robert Horbaczewski, "Armia chce podwoić rezerwistów w aktywnej rezerwie i wzmocnić WOT" ["The Army Wants to Double the Number of Reservists in the Active Reserve and Strengthen TDF"], *Prawo [Law]*, February 5, 2024; Leśniak, 2024.

⁵² Leśniak, 2024.

⁵³ "Gen. Kukula zapowiada potężne zmiany w Wojsku Polskim: musimy zbudować strategię służby powszechnej" ["Gen. Kukula Announces Major Changes in the Polish Army: We Must Build a Universal Service Strategy"], *PolskieRadio24*, April 27, 2024.

⁵⁴ "Obowiązkowe szkolenia wojskowe na horyzoncie. Tusk: Muszą stać się obyczajem, oczywistą tradycją" ["Mandatory Military Training on the Horizon. Tusk: They must Become a Custom, an Obvious Tradition"], *Bankie.pl*, March 7, 2025.

It is important to understand that the proposed 300,000 soldiers represents neither the full strength of the Polish military (the number does not include reserves) nor the number of trained full-time soldiers (which are programmed to reach 187,127 by 2035). Therefore, the failure to reach 300,000 soldiers would mean different things depending on the form of service falling short of its target. Soldiers in voluntary basic military service are important as a recruitment pool for professional service and reserves, but the exact number of people in this service has little importance for combat capability. Reserve and TDF would be particularly important in a protracted war. However, the first response to any major contingency will fall on the professional active-duty military personnel. Reaching 187,127 soldiers by 2035 would require a yearly increase of 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers, which is not an impossible task. However, if Poland does not improve retention, substantial support will be required to train these troops. If the armed forces fail to reach the target number of professional soldiers, it will ultimately pose challenges for their ability to reach the desired future force structure.

Technical Modernization

Even though Poland has never lost sight of the Russian threat, efforts to modernize the armed forces prior to 2022 were often slow to take form or achieve full-rate production, especially when attempts were made to involve the domestic defense industry (which has also been a priority for successive governments). Consequently, despite some notable exceptions, such as the acquisition of F-16 aircraft, the fielding of the Rosomak 8x8 Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), and the AHS Krab self-propelled howitzer, the country has largely relied on Soviet-era systems.⁵⁵ Air defense, rocket artillery, and infantry fighting vehicles are all examples of areas in which major emphasis in previous plans failed to translate into large contracts—until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁶ The war has pushed Polish decisionmak-

⁵⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 120, No. 1, 2020, pp. 79–80.

⁵⁶ One of the primary examples of delays was the modernization of the layered air defense system. Poland understood the need for these capabilities ahead of other allies

ers to launch acquisition programs at a pace, scale, and direction unprecedented in Poland's post-communist history.⁵⁷ In the words of the Polish Minister of Defence Minister, "We don't have time to waste, we can't wait, we have to arm the Polish army."⁵⁸ This surge has only been exacerbated by the vast amount of legacy equipment that Poland sent to Ukraine to aid its war effort.⁵⁹

In this section, we briefly consider five capability areas: land maneuver forces, cannon and rocket artillery forces, air and missile defense forces, combat aircraft, and naval vessels, addressing the main programmatic initiatives underway for modernizing Poland's military as of November 2024.

and included these needs in its Technical Modernization Program 2013–2022. A very-short-range air defense system was contracted domestically, while contracts for short and medium range systems were expected to be signed with foreign suppliers in 2014. Instead, the contract for a medium-range air defense system was signed in 2018 (first two batteries of Raytheon Patriot system), while the contracts for a short-range system were signed in 2022 and 2023. See "Najważniejsze decyzje zapadną w 2015. 'Rok próby' Planu Modernizacji Technicznej" ["The Most Important Decisions Will Be Made in 2015. The 'Test Year' of the Technical Modernization Plan"], *Defence24*, December 30, 2014; Przemysław Gurgurewicz, "Struktura polskiej obrony powietrznej" ["The Structure of Polish Air Defense"], *MILMAG*, June 3, 2023; Lidia Kelly, "Poland Signs \$4.75 Billion Deal for U.S. Patriot Missile System Facing Russia," Reuters, March 28, 2018; and "MSPO 2023: Dwie umowy wykonawcze za 54 mld PLN w programie Narew" ["MSPO 2023: Two Implementation Contracts for PLN 54 Billion in the Narew Program"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, September 5, 2023.

⁵⁷ To put in context the purchases discussed in this section, from 2015 to 2021, new big-ticket items ordered by Poland were 32 F-35A Lightning-2 aircraft, 20 M-142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) rocket launchers, two batteries of Patriot Configuration-3 air defense systems, and a dozen helicopters. See Jen Judson, "Poland Officially Signs Deal to Buy Patriot from US," *Defense News*, March 28, 2018; Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland Acquires Black Hawks After Canceled Helo Deal," *Defense News*, January 25, 2019a; Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland to Sign \$414 Million Deal for Rocket Launchers," *Defense News*, February 11, 2019b; Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland Acquires AW101 Helos for Navy Under \$430M Deal," *Defense News*, April 29, 2019c; and Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland Inks \$4.6 Billion Contract for F-35 Fighter Jets," *Defense News*, January 31, 2020.

⁵⁸ Maciej Szopa, "Polska kupiła czołgi, samoloty i haubice z Korei" ["Poland Bought Tanks, Planes and Howitzers from Korea"], *Defence24*, July 27, 2022a.

⁵⁹ President of the Republic of Poland, "Poland's Aid for Ukraine," press release, November 11, 2024.

This overview is not exhaustive and focuses on the largest programs in each capability area to demonstrate the enormous scale of rearmament.

Armored Vehicles

Before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while Poland was still standing up its fourth division, Poland’s fleet of armored vehicles was dominated by Soviet-designed equipment.⁶⁰ More-modern equipment consisted of 105 Leopard 2A5 tanks, with the first 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks modernized to Leopard 2PL standard (their number is expected to increase to 128 by 2027), and 659 Rosomak wheeled infantry fighting vehicles.⁶¹

TABLE 2.2
Major Armored Vehicle Acquisition Programs

Main Battle Tanks					
System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
M1A1 Abrams	116	\$1.4 billion	2023–2024	Deliveries completed	Approved with related equipment for up to \$3.75 billion
M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams	250	\$4.75 billion	2025–2026	Deliveries started	Approved with related equipment for up to \$6 billion
K2 Black Panther	180	\$3.4 billion	2022–2025	Deliveries started	
	820		Starting in 2026	Framework agreement	Contract for next 180 under negotiations

⁶⁰ 318 T-72 tanks of different modifications, 232 PT-91 Twardy tanks (Polish modification of T-72 delivered between 1995 and 2002), and 1,252 BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, p. 135.

⁶¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, p. 135. The Polish Land Forces operated 142 tanks that were bought secondhand from Germany in the early 2000s (produced in the late 1980s). All will be upgraded to the Leopard 2PL standard—roughly equivalent to an improved Leopard 2A5—by 2027 (likely with the exception of 14 sent to Ukraine). See Jakub Palowski, “‘Nowe’ Leopardy dla Wojska Polskiego na półmetku” [“‘New’ Leopards for the Polish Army at the Halfway Point”], *Defence24*, November 17, 2023.

Table 2.2—Continued

Infantry Vehicles					
System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
Rosomak 8x8 IFV	138	\$1.7 billion	2026–2028	Contract signed	More than 600 Rosomak variants are already in service, 344 of which are infantry fighting vehicles. Two contracts signed in 2024 for 58 Rosomak and 80 Rosomak-L vehicles.
Borsuk Tracked IFV	111 1,289	\$1.7 billion	2025–2029	Contract signed <i>Framework agreement</i>	In 2023, framework agreement signed for 1,400 vehicles (1,000 IFVs and 400 special vehicles on Borsuk chassis). Contract for first 111 IFVs signed in 2025.

SOURCES: Uses information from MND, "Modernizacja techniczna SZRP" ["Technical Modernization of the Polish Armed Forces"], webpage, undated-b; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Poland," webpage, undated; Radosław Ditrich, "Pierwsze M1A2SEPV3 dla Polski już gotowe. To najnowsze amerykańskie czołgi" ["The First M1A2SEPV3 for Poland Is Ready. These Are the Newest American Tanks"], *Forsal*, September 13, 2024; Maciej Miłoś, "Czołgi K2 wciąż niepewne. Problemem jest ich spolszczenie" ["K2 Tanks Still Uncertain. The Problem Is Their Polonization"], *Rzeczpospolita*, November 20, 2024; Maciej Szopa, "Borsuk po testach. Umowa w tym roku" ["Borsuk After Tests. Contract This Year"], *Defence24*, August 5, 2024a; Jakub Palowski, "MON zapowiada miliardowe zakupy w polskim przemyśle" ["Ministry of National Defence Announces Billion-Dollar Purchases in Polish Industry"], *Defence24*, November 15, 2024a; Lukasz Prus, "United States Delivers First Batch of M1A2 SEPV3 Abrams Tanks to Poland," *Defence Industry Europe*, January 19, 2025; Tadeusz Wróbel, "Trzecia umowa na ZSSW-30" ["Third Contract for ZSSW-30"], *Polska Zbrojna [Armed Poland]*, December 17, 2024; Antoni Walkowski, "80 New Rosomaks: Agreement Signed with an Option for More," *Defence24*, December 18, 2024b; Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland Signs \$1.7 Billion Deal for Infantry Fighting Vehicles," *Defense News*, March 27, 2025b; Antoni Walkowski, "Finally! The Borsuk IFV Execution Contract Signed," *Defence24*, March 28, 2025.

NOTE: The data in this table are up to date as of May 1, 2025.

Meeting the acquisition requirements for a six-division force will require a large number of additional main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and other armored vehicle variants for important combat roles. Table 2.2 outlines the major acquisition programs in the Land Forces' armored vehicle portfolio.

Although a substantial initial investment in new vehicles has already been made, it is clear that there is also much more needed in order to fully equip the future force, which Polish experts estimate to consist of 29 armored and 53 mechanized or motorized battalions.⁶² Equipping the future force would require the following:

- Fully equipping 29 armored battalions would require 1,682 main battle tanks (assuming each battalion continues to have 58 tanks), including 366 M1A1/A2 Abrams, 233 Leopard 2A5/2PLs, and a purchase of 1,000 K2s. Poland would have 1,599 modern tanks, which would be 95 percent of the estimated total requirement.
- Fully equipping 53 mechanized or motorized battalions would require 3,074 infantry fighting vehicles (either wheeled or tracked, and again assuming 58 infantry vehicles in each battalion); with 482 Rosomaks and 1,000 Borsuks acquired, Poland would have 1,482 modern infantry vehicles, which is about 48 percent of the estimated total requirement. Additional Borsuks, as well as proposed heavy infantry fighting vehicles and future wheeled armored vehicles, might make up the difference.⁶³

In practice, there will likely be variation in unit organizations, at least at the brigade and division levels, for some time. Not all Polish brigades have the same number of battalions; some brigades lack a tank battalion altogether. Regardless, the big picture holds: Without enormous rearmament, Poland will not be able to stand up the six-division force. There was not enough equipment to begin with, and now much of that equipment is in Ukraine.⁶⁴ Furthermore, even at the announced level of effort, some units will still need to rely on legacy vehicles.

⁶² Ciślak, 2023a.

⁶³ Jakub Palowski, "A Year of Difficult Continuation. 2024 in the Modernization of the Polish Armed Forces," *Defence24*, December 31, 2024b.

⁶⁴ Poland provided to Ukraine 60 PT-91 tanks, 280 T-72 tanks, 250 BWP-1 infantry fighting vehicles and 100 Rosomak armored personnel carriers. See President of the Republic of Poland, 2024.

Artillery

Modernization of the Land Forces Artillery was a major element of the 2013–2022 Technical Modernization Program, which planned for purchases of self-propelled gun-howitzer Krab (155 mm), self-propelled gun-mortar Rak (120 mm), and rocket artillery systems Homar from domestic suppliers.⁶⁵ Although the first two programs were reasonably successful (deliveries started in 2016 and 2017, respectively), Poland ultimately opted for foreign solutions in the Homar program.⁶⁶

The future Land Forces artillery requirement includes both cannon and rocket systems within maneuver brigades and in divisional artillery formations. Table 2.3 outlines the major artillery programs that are being executed or under consideration by MND, at the time of this writing.

To rapidly acquire the large number of cannon and rocket artillery systems required for its future force, Poland's leaders have signed multiple contracts for Korean-built artillery vehicles. The framework agreement for approximately 27 battalions of HIMARS was created before the contract for K239 Chunmoo was signed; although some additional HIMARS will be acquired, it is not clear whether the full 468 launcher modules will still be required.⁶⁷

Current Polish unit designs have a solid complement of artillery systems, including battalions of both rocket and cannon artillery in each armored, mechanized, or motorized brigade and a divisional artillery formation with additional battalions of both. It is probable that the total number of howitzer battalions will be 34,⁶⁸ including brigade- and division-level guns,

⁶⁵ Krzysztof Wilewski, "MSPO: Przyszłość polskiej artylerii" ["MSPO: The Future of Polish Artillery"], *Polska Zbrojna* [*Armed Poland*], September 2, 2015.

⁶⁶ Jerzy Reszczyński, "Polska artyleria w 2021 roku: 'plusy dodatnie, plusy ujemne'" ["Polish Artillery in 2021: 'Positive Pros, Negative Pros'"], *Defence24*, December 31, 2021.

⁶⁷ Having 288 K239s would be sufficient to equip 12 battalions, each with 24 launchers, which would amount to two battalions for each of Poland's planned six divisions. For subsequent HIMARS orders, see Barbara Erling and Karl Badohal, "Poland Prepares for Talks on Buying Over 100 HIMARS Rocket Launchers," Reuters, October 31, 2024.

⁶⁸ The breakdown would be one battalion for each of 22 brigades, and two battalions for each of six divisions.

TABLE 2.3
Major Artillery Acquisition Programs

Rocket Artillery					
System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
M142 HIMARS (Homar-A)	18	\$400 million	2023	Deliveries completed	Framework agreement called for 18 HIMARS and 468 loader-launcher modules for integration with a Polish truck
	486	Up to \$10 billion		Framework agreement	
K239 Chunmoo (Homar-K)	290	\$5.1 billion	2023–2029	Deliveries started	Contracts for 218 in 2022 and an additional 72 in 2024
Self-Propelled Howitzers					
AHS Krab 155-mm SPH	266	\$4.3 billion	2017–2029	Deliveries started	Contracts signed in 2016 and 2022 for an initial 170; 2023 framework agreement for 152; contract for 96 of them signed in 2024
	56			Framework agreement	
K9 Thunder 155-mm SPH	364	\$5 billion	2022–2027	Deliveries started	The 2022 framework agreement covered 672 howitzers; contracts were signed for 212 in 2022 and 152 in 2023.
	308			Framework agreement	

SOURCES: Uses information from MND, undated-b; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, undated; Adam Świerkowski, "Wielka modernizacja kontra opóźnienia. Wojska Lądowe różnych prędkości" ["Great Modernization Versus Delays: Land Forces of Different Speeds"], *Defence24*, October 10, 2024; "486 wyrzutni za 40 mld zł. Polska zrezygnuje z części HIMARS-ów?" ["486 Launchers for PLN 40 Billion. Will Poland Give Up Some HIMARS?"], *Money.pl*, September 9, 2024; Radosław Ditrich, "Dostawa Homar-K, K2 oraz K9. Sprzęt trafia głównie na granicę z Rosją" ["Delivery of Homar-K, K2 and K9. The Equipment Is Mainly Sent to the Border with Russia"], *Forsal*, October 8, 2024; Tomasz Dmitruk, "Kolejne armatohaubice samobieżne K9 zamówione" ["More K9 Self-Propelled Gun-Howitzers Ordered"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, December 2, 2023c; "Umowa ramowa na dostawy kolejnych AHS Krab" ["Framework Agreement for the Supply of Further AHS Krab"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, December 8, 2023; Antoni Walkowski, "Krab Howitzers and Beyond. Record-Breaking Contracts for Stalowa Wola," *Defence24*, December 24, 2024b; "Uruchomienie umów na Bostawy armatohaubic K9 i wyrzutni rakiet Homar-K" ["Launch of Contracts for the Supply of K9 Gun-Howitzers and Homar-K Rocket Launchers"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, December 2, 2024.

NOTE: The data in this table are up to date as of May 1, 2025.

which, with 24 howitzers per battalion, implies a requirement for 816 total Krab and Thunder self-propelled howitzers, which roughly aligns with the number of systems on contract and in framework agreements. Additional rocket artillery units may also be created as corps-level formations, so it is uncertain what the ultimate requirement for these systems will be, but the total number of modern multiple-launch rocket systems in the Polish Land Forces is certain to be the largest of any European NATO member.

Air and Missile Defense

Poland understood the need for a layered air and missile defense system sooner than other allies and included these systems prominently in the Technical Modernization Program 2013–2022. Initially, contracts for short- and medium-range systems were expected to be signed with foreign suppliers in 2014.⁶⁹ The programs were delayed (only one contract for two Patriot batteries was signed) and incomplete by the time Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁰ Poland's air defense capabilities reside in both the Air Force and Land Forces. This section does not cover Aegis Ashore.

Poland is developing what will be, when operational, a very capable layered air defense system. The contracts outlined in Table 2.4 are for Wisła, a version of the Patriot missile system that would defend critical targets from air and missile attack, and Narew, which would provide area air defense to Polish divisions and likely supplement national air defenses. Poland has also been investing in short-range air defense systems, such as anti-aircraft guns, man-portable air defense missile systems, and shorter-range variants of the Common Anti-Air Modular Missile (CAMM).⁷¹

Notably, Poland has also been the first country after the United States to receive the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS), which is an any sensor, any shooter networked system that would enable all of the new air defense weapon systems to operate with a common picture provided by the full network of compatible radars and other sys-

⁶⁹ "Najważniejsze decyzje zapadną w 2015," 2014.

⁷⁰ Kelly, 2018.

⁷¹ Jarosław Adamowski, "Poland Spends \$3.1 Billion on Short-Range Air Defense Upgrades," *Defense News*, April 28, 2023.

TABLE 2.4
Major Air and Missile Defense Acquisition Programs

System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
PATRIOT (Wisła)	6 batteries	Up to \$15 billion	2026–2029	Contract signed	IBCS-enabled PATRIOT-3+ with modernized sensors and components, up to 644 PAC 3 MSE missiles.
iLauncher/CAMM (Narew)	2 batteries	\$387 million	2022–2023	Deliveries completed	Contract for 2 batteries with CAMM missiles signed in April 2022; additional
	23 batteries	\$5 billion	2027–2035	Contract signed	contract for 138 launchers and more than 1000 missiles signed November 2023

SOURCE: Uses information from MND, undated-b; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, undated; “MSPO 2023,” 2023.

NOTE: The data in this table are up to date as of May 1, 2025.

tems. Because IBCS is also a key element of the U.S. Army’s modernization strategy, Poland’s adoption of this system should also allow a high degree of interoperability with U.S. forces.⁷²

Combat Aircraft

Modernization of the Polish Air Force—specifically, the purchase of 48 F-16s that were approved for a midlife upgrade—was Poland’s first large acquisition program after joining NATO.⁷³ However, the remaining fleet consisted of increasingly obsolete Soviet-era aircraft that were plagued by a

⁷² Olivia Savage and Meredith Roaten, “Poland to Acquire IBCS for Wisla and Narew Air-Defence Systems,” *Janes Defence Weekly*, March 1, 2024.

⁷³ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Poland—F-16 Viper Midlife Upgrade,” press release, October 23, 2024.

series of accidents.⁷⁴ The modernization process started with a contract for 32 F-35s signed in 2020 and accelerated after 2022 when Poland decided to send its Soviet-era aircraft to Ukraine.

This section covers fixed-wing fighters operated by the Polish Air Force and rotary-wing attack aircraft operated by the Land Forces. Table 2.5 shows planned aircraft acquisitions.

Polish Air Force modernization plans center around the acquisition of the F-35A, which would constitute about a quarter of the future Polish fighter fleet. Acquiring a fifth-generation fighter—with stealth charac-

TABLE 2.5

Major Combat Aircraft Acquisition Programs

System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
F-35A combat aircraft	32	\$4.6 billion	2024–2030	Deliveries started	First two aircraft were delivered to Ebbing Air National Guard Base in 2024 for Polish pilots to train. First aircraft are expected in Poland in 2025.
FA-50 light aircraft	48	\$3 billion	2023–2028	Deliveries started	The first 12 aircraft are gap fillers in the Korean standard (ongoing deliveries); the remaining 36 aircraft would be in the Polish standard.
AH-64E Apache attack helicopter	96	Up to \$12 billion	2028–2032	Contract signed	In 2025, an additional eight aircraft were leased to train pilots and ground crew.

SOURCES: Uses information from MND, undated-b; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, undated; Tomasz Dmitruk, “Dlaczego kupiono samoloty FA-50?” [“Why Were FA-50 Aircraft Purchased?”], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, October 10, 2024; Bartosz Glowacki, “Poland Adds Long-Range Strike to Its F-35 Fleet with AARGM-ER Missiles,” *Breaking Defense*, January 29, 2025; Jarosław Adamowski, “Poland Leases Eight Apache Gunships as Warmup Ahead of Major Delivery,” *Defense News*, February 28, 2025.

NOTE: The data in this table are up to date as of May 1, 2025.

⁷⁴ “Polish MiG-29 Crashed. Pilot Successfully Ejected,” *Defence24*, March 4, 2019.

teristics and modern sensor fusion—will provide Poland with a more-capable air arm and, more broadly, should help improve interoperability with other NATO members by improving familiarity with the F-35's capabilities. To fill out the rest of Poland's combat aircraft fleet, it will also be upgrading its existing F-16C/D fighters and acquiring FA-50 light fighters from South Korea.

As noted previously, the Polish Land Forces will also be acquiring 96 AH-64E Apache Guardian helicopters. The \$12 billion cost of this effort, as outlined in the initial framework agreement, would include a large number of munitions, including Hellfire and Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles, Stinger air-to-air missiles, and guided rockets, as well as training and sustainment packages.⁷⁵ Both the capability and capacity of Poland's attack helicopter fleet will majorly increase because the Apaches replace a much smaller number of older Soviet-designed Mi-24 HIND gunships.

Naval Vessels

Finally, we provide an overview of the major programs of the Polish Navy, outlined in Table 2.6.

The acquisition of three *Miecznik*-class frigates will provide Poland with a much more capable anti-aircraft and anti-submarine surface combatant that can operate in the Baltic Sea or potentially participate in NATO missions in the North Atlantic or North Sea. These vessels have modern sensors and a much more capable armament than the two obsolescent U.S.-built *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class frigates that they will replace.⁷⁶ Although the *Orka* submarine program is known to involve the purchase of up to four new diesel-electric subs, this effort is still in development and will likely not enter service before the mid-2030s.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Poland—AH-64E Apache Helicopters," press release, August 21, 2023.

⁷⁶ Jan Starosta, "The Polish Navy's Role in Baltic Sea Warfare," Institute of New Europe, July 31, 2024.

⁷⁷ Thomas, 2024.

TABLE 2.6

Major Naval Acquisition Programs

System	Quantity	Value (in U.S. dollars)	Delivery	Stage	Notes
Komoran II-class minehunter	3	\$560 million	2026–2027	Contract signed	Previous three delivered 2017–2022
Miecznik-class frigate	3	\$3.8 billion	2029–2031	Contract signed	
Orka submarine	3–4			<i>No decision has been made regarding the technology and quantity.</i>	

SOURCES: Uses information from MND, undated-b; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, undated; "Nowa broń dla Polski. MON odpowiada: są rozmowy" ["New Weapon for Poland. Ministry of National Defence Responds: There Are Talks"], Money.pl, February 11, 2024; "Szósty niszczyciel min typu Kormoran II w budowie" ["The Sixth Kormoran II Class Minehunter Is Under Construction"], *Dziennik Zbrojny* [Armed Journal], October 15, 2024; "Położenie stępki pod pierwszą fregatę Miecznik" ["Laying the Keel of the First Frigate Miecznik"], *Dziennik Zbrojny* [Armed Journal], January 31, 2024.

NOTE: The data in this table are up to date as of May 1, 2021.

Modernization Challenges

The acquisition of such a large number of new systems and subsequent absorption into Poland's armed forces poses several important challenges. Poland is acquiring new U.S., European, and Korean weapons and has accepted more variety of acquisitions in order to receive new capabilities more quickly. The speed with which Poland's allies have been able to supply new systems has been a major consideration that has driven acquisition decisions; although the sense of urgency is understandable, it might also cause additional difficulties in the future once the new force begins to come together. For example, we note the following challenges:

- **Sustainment challenges.** Poland will, for the foreseeable future, rely heavily on weapons purchased abroad, particularly from South Korea and the United States. Multiple variants of vehicles with the same role (for example, main battle tanks from Korea, the United States, and Germany) mean that requirements for spare parts and maintenance expertise will vary across different formations in the Land Forces.

- **War reserves and reconstitution.** Poland's rapid expansion and acquisition of new systems combined with the donation of many of its legacy platforms to Ukraine will mean that, even once the new units are fully formed, more time and resources will be needed to make them durable for sustained combat operations. War reserve stocks of critical munitions are crucial for ensuring that the full effect of modernization is achieved: New combat aircraft or rocket/missile launchers will consume massive quantities of ammunition once a conflict begins. Typically, when countries modernize, old equipment can be placed in long-term storage as a reserve for quickly creating new units or replacing combat losses. Poland's substantial donations to Ukraine might mean that its attrition reserve is more limited than it would otherwise be.
- **Training considerations.** New platforms providing much-needed new capabilities will also require, in some cases, substantial retraining. The difference between a legacy BWP-1 and the proposed Borsuk infantry fighting vehicle—which has a different crew size and layout, has different weapons, and carries a different number of soldiers—will have second-order effects on training and potentially how those forces are used.
- **Military aid to Ukraine.** Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Poland was at the forefront of providing military aid to its neighbor. Polish decisionmakers believe that Ukraine's fall would be detrimental to the country's security. As long as the war continues, Poland will likely be compelled to provide additional aid from the existing stock of weapons, which would further affect the equipping needs.
- **Lessons learned in Ukraine.** Many have argued that the Russia-Ukraine war changes warfare for good.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Poland launched extensive technical modernization without a review of strategic documents or time to properly analyze lessons from the war. Some of the purchases are vindicated by the experience in Ukraine (e.g., the importance of air defense and artillery), while others seem controversial. For example, Poland is heavily investing in tanks in the midst of

⁷⁸ For example, Mark T. Kimmitt, "'One Shot, One Kill': How Ukraine-Russia War Is Changing Warfare," *Politico*, February 13, 2024.

a debate on whether those still have a place on a battlefield saturated with drones.⁷⁹ There is a risk that, by committing so heavily to modernized platforms without fully assessing the lessons from Ukraine, Poland might find it more difficult or costly to adapt later. Waiting for a perfect solution would likely have taken much too long, so some of these risks might be unavoidable.

Poland's growing defense relationship with South Korea is worth highlighting. South Korea has been willing to move quickly to make weapons available, even diverting weapons from production lines that had been purchased for use by the Republic of Korea Army.⁸⁰ Korean combat platforms are modern but priced competitively, which, combined with a willingness to explore technology transfer and construction in Poland, has led to a large number of major purchases by Warsaw with more likely to follow in the future. South Korea is also exploring the possibility of Poland being a hub for sustainment and support of Korean platforms that are sold to other European countries.⁸¹ However, the issue of financing and coproduction looms over these purchases. Reportedly, the contracts are contingent on direct loans from South Korea, but the two sides have not yet agreed on loan conditions.⁸² Furthermore, the framework agreements stated that the PL versions of Korean tanks would be produced in Poland. Meanwhile, Poland's defense industry does not have the capability to do that, and setting up a new production line will increase the final cost.⁸³

⁷⁹ Lara Jakes, "Do Tanks Have a Place in 21st-Century Warfare?," *New York Times*, April 20, 2024.

⁸⁰ Oskar Pietrewicz, "Poland-South Korea Strategic Partnership Rises to the Next Level," *PISM Bulletin*, Vol. 2217, No. 98, July 21, 2023; Gordon Arthur, "How South Korea's Defense Industry Transformed Itself into a Global Player," *Breaking Defense*, November 6, 2023.

⁸¹ Michał Górski, "Poland as a Maintenance Hub for South Korea?" *Defence24*, May 9, 2024.

⁸² Miłosz, 2024.

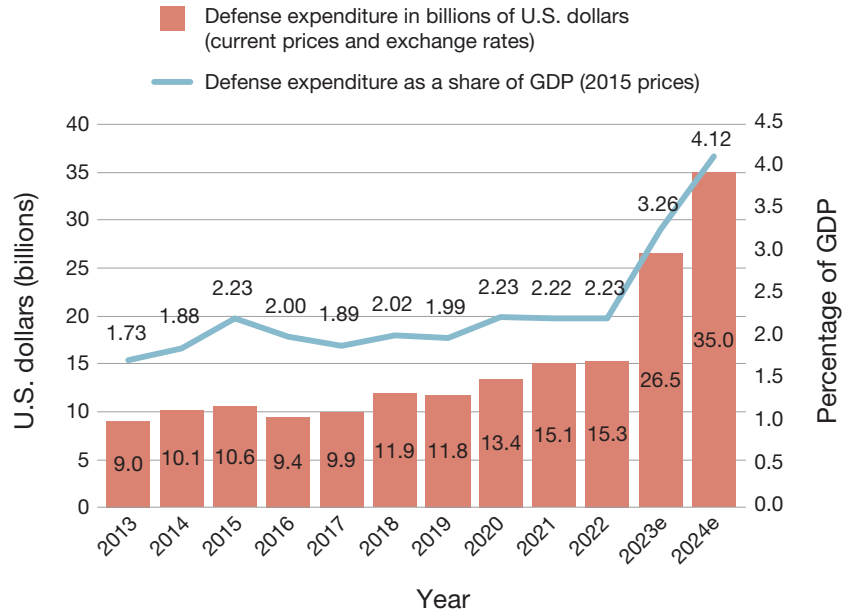
⁸³ "Co dalej z czołgami K2 dla Polski. Perspektywa umowy coraz dalej" ["What's Next for K2 Tanks for Poland. The Prospect of a Contract Is Getting Further Away"], *Business Insider*, November 20, 2024.

Budget Trends

As we have demonstrated through this report, Poland’s military modernization and expansion plans are unprecedented in scale in Poland’s post-communist history. Aside from the already discussed challenges of managing a large acquisition portfolio and recruiting, retaining, and training such a large force, another overarching question looming over this process is whether Poland can actually afford it.

As a NATO member, Poland is expected to spend at least two percent of its GDP on defense. Historically, that has not always been the case, but defense spending started to increase after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Figure 2.3), reaching a record high in 2024 of an estimated

FIGURE 2.3
Poland’s Defense Expenditures (2013–2024)



SOURCES: NATO, 2021; NATO, 2024.

NOTE: Years 2023 and 2024 are estimates, as denoted by the “e” in the figure.

4.12 percent of GDP. In comparison, the United States' defense expenditure in 2024 was expected to amount to 3.38 percent of its GDP.⁸⁴

The defense spending obligation is codified in Polish law, which requires the government to allocate at least 3 percent of GDP in the state budget to national defense.⁸⁵ Additionally, the HDA created the Armed Forces Support Fund (AFSF), which provides extrabudgetary means for technical modernization. Among other sources, it is financed by government-secured bonds issued by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (Bank of National Economy), credits, loans, treasury bonds, the state budget, and profits from the central bank.⁸⁶ According to projections from the Polish Ministry of Finance, by 2028, the debt of the AFSF will increase to 282.4 billion złoty (U.S. \$74 billion), which will amount to 6 percent of the expected total public debt in that year.⁸⁷ This figure can be used as an approximation of what Poland plans to spend on technical modernization on top of the defense budget funds.

Consequently, as indicated in Figure 2.3, the actual defense spending in 2023 and 2024 was even higher than 3 percent. NATO estimates that in 2023, Poland's defense spending amounted to \$26.5 billion, and it is expected to

⁸⁴ NATO, 2024.

⁸⁵ From 2002 to 2015, the required defense allocation was 1.95 percent of GDP. In 2015, the threshold was raised to 2 percent, and then, in 2017, Poland amended the law to gradually increase that share to 2.5 percent by 2030. The amendment also changed the basis for calculation from the passing to the upcoming year's GDP projections, see *Ustawa z dnia 25 maja 2001 r. o przebudowie i modernizacji technicznej oraz finansowaniu Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [The Reconstruction and Technical Modernization and Financing of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland Act of May 25, 2001], *Dz.U.* 2001 nr 76 poz. 804, [Official Journal 2001, No. 76, item 804], May 25, 2001. The current requirement was adopted in the Homeland Defense Act of 2022; see *Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny* [Act of March 11, 2022, on the Defense of the Homeland], 2022.

⁸⁶ *Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny* [Act of March 11, 2022, on the Defense of the Homeland], 2022, Article 41.

⁸⁷ The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Poland, *Strategia Zarządzania Długiem Sektora Finansów Publicznych w latach 2025–2028* [Debt Management Strategy of the Public Finance Sector in 2025–2028], September 2024. Historical exchange rates are the average exchange rates from the last day of the year published by the National Bank of Poland; current year exchange rates are the average exchange rates from the publication date: National Bank of Poland, "Exchange Rates Archive—Table A," webpage, undated.

reach \$35 billion in 2024 (compared with \$15 billion in 2021).⁸⁸ The budget bill for 2025 foresees spending on national defense to reach almost 187 billion złoty (U.S. \$49 billion estimated, which is 4.7 percent of GDP) from the state budget and the AFSE, out of which almost 60 percent (\$29 billion) is earmarked for technical modernization and construction investment (\$4.3 billion more than the previous year).⁸⁹

This continuation of defense spending, despite the change of government following the 2023 elections, highlights the existence of a consensus on defense needs among the main political forces in Poland. Nevertheless, the country is in an objectively difficult situation. The increase in the defense budget was a major contributor to the 2023 general government deficit of 5.1 percent of GDP.⁹⁰ This deficit, in turn, led to the launching of the EU's Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) against Poland.⁹¹ Warsaw argues that its defense investment fosters international solidarity and fulfills one of the common priorities of the EU, which should be taken into account in subsequent steps of the EDP, as required by the EDP regulation.⁹² The government highlights that the "gradual deficit reduction in Poland, in line with EU rules, will not jeopardise public investment."⁹³ Nevertheless, being under EDP limits the government's room to introduce new social programs, so political and social pressure in other areas might lead to stretching defense investment over a longer period.

⁸⁸ NATO, 2024.

⁸⁹ Tomasz Dmitruk, "Projekt budżetu na obronność Polski w 2025 roku" ["2025 Defense Budget Bill"], *Dziennik Zbrojny* [Armed Journal], October 12, 2024.

⁹⁰ Government of the Republic of Poland, *Średniookresowy plan budżetowo-strukturalny na lata 2025–2028* [Medium-Term Budgetary and Structural Plan for 2025–2028], October 8, 2024.

⁹¹ Council of the European Union, Council Decision (EU) 2024/2133 of 26 July 2024 on the Existence of an Excessive Deficit in Poland, OJ L, 2024/2133, August 1, 2024.

⁹² Government of the Republic of Poland, 2024, p. 22. For the EDP regulation, see Council of the European Union, Council Regulation (EC) No 1467/97 of 7 July 1997 on Speeding Up and Clarifying the Implementation of the Excessive Deficit Procedure, OJ L 209, August 2, 1997.

⁹³ Government of the Republic of Poland, 2024, p. 18.

Allegedly, the Polish Ministry of Finance was already probing the possibility of some cuts in defense spending for 2025 to 2028, although the official position of the government is that no cuts were or are planned.⁹⁴ On the contrary, the 2025 defense budget reached a record high. Some of the budgetary pressures might be alleviated by the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030 launched by the European Commission in March 2025. It allows for taking up to 1.5 percent of GDP for defense spending out of the EU budget deficit limitations.⁹⁵ However, even if the government remains committed to the modernization and expansion plans, it is not guaranteed that the AFSF can raise the funds.

The government wants the majority of financing of the AFSF to come from countries supplying weapons, for example, because loans from states' development banks are expected to be cheaper than issuing bonds.⁹⁶ In that respect, the government has been successful: In June 2024, the overall ASFS debt amounted to 28.7 billion złoty (U.S. \$7.1 billion), while the bonds were issued only twice—for U.S. \$1 billion and 3 billion złoty (U.S. \$752 million).⁹⁷ However, negotiating these loans is a challenge in and of itself. For example, South Korea had to amend national law to increase the Export-Import Bank of Korea capital limit and effectively raise the lending cap to provide loans to Poland.⁹⁸ Despite clearing that hurdle, the two sides reportedly have had problems reaching an agreement on loan conditions.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Bartek Godusławski, "MON chce setek miliardów na armię. 'Potrzeby rosną lawinowo'" ["MND Wants Hundreds of Billions for the Army. 'Needs Are Growing Exponentially'"], *Business Insider*, July 9, 2024.

⁹⁵ European Commission, "Commission Unveils the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030," press release, March 18, 2025

⁹⁶ Jakub Palowski, "Poland Seeking Defence Funding 'Outside the Market,'" *Defence24*, December 29, 2022.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Poland, September 2024, p. 9; Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego [Bank of National Economy], "Obligacje na rzecz Funduszu Wsparcia Sił Zbrojnych" ["Bonds for the Armed Forces Support Fund"], webpage, undated.

⁹⁸ Yi Whan-woo, "Expanded Lending Limit to Boost Eximbank's Arms Deal Support," *Korea Times*, March 1, 2024.

⁹⁹ Maciek Kucharczyk, "Nie ma pieniędzy na broń z Korei. Pierwsza zadyszka FWSZ" ["There Is No Money for Weapons from Korea. The First Out of Breath of the FWSZ"], *Gazeta*, July 25, 2024.

If Poland fails to raise the funds, some of the framework agreements will not translate into contracts and deliveries or will result in smaller orders. This outcome could occur with some artillery systems and armored vehicles (specifically, Korean tanks and Borsuk IFV) that still have large requirements for which contracts have not yet been signed. Poland might also lose submarine capabilities and be unable to further extend its combat aircraft fleet. Curtailing modernization programs in the Air Force and the Navy would be unfortunate but not critical: Other allies have substantial air and naval capabilities that can be used across the theater (in fact, in a major contingency, Poland would likely need to secure its air assets by moving them to airfields located outside of Poland).

In contrast, curtailing modernization for the Land Forces might undermine the planned force structure changes or even cripple the combat capability of the existing units. This is because some of the vehicles in service are not suitable for modern warfare and there are not enough of these vehicles to fill out all of the new units. Each new brigade will require hundreds of new vehicles—such as tanks, infantry vehicles, artillery, logistics vehicles—as well as command posts, engineers, and other enablers. Formations need to be designed in a coherent manner or they will face increased risk in combat. The lack of a modern, survivable infantry fighting vehicle could particularly reduce the effectiveness of Poland's new tanks, and the armed forces might have to reduce the tempo of operations to accommodate them.

There is also the question of Poland's long-term ability to sustain this larger force. Although canceling contracts would be politically risky, other ways to save money could undermine combat credibility. For example, if military salaries and other benefits cannot keep up with inflation, Poland will face larger recruitment and retention problems. Potential cuts would also be consequential to supplies, such as ammunition, fuel, and spare parts, which determine the amount of training that troops can receive. All these areas could suffer if budgetary problems come to bear.

Implications

As shown throughout this report, there are many obstacles to the realization of Poland's military modernization and expansion plan, such as recruiting, training, and retaining personnel; executing multibillion-dollar contracts across multiple foreign and domestic suppliers; setting up sustainment and logistics systems for these new capabilities; redefining the strategy and doctrine for this force on NATO's eastern flank and, potentially, beyond; and financing this new force in the long-term. Consequently, given Russia's aggressive foreign policy and planned reconstitution, as well as the amount of support that Poland provided to Ukraine, the Polish Armed Forces are at a crossroads. If the modernization and expansion plans fail to translate these investments into meaningful, ready, combat-credible forces, Poland might come out of this moment weakened and vulnerable. However, if the plan comes to fruition—even if over longer timelines than were initially announced—Poland will become a cornerstone of NATO deterrence and defense on the eastern flank.

NATO estimates indicate that, in 2023, Poland surpassed the United States in defense expenditures relative to GDP, and, by all appearances, this trend will continue in years to come.¹ A large share of this expenditure goes to the United States through arms sales and would likely be even larger if the U.S. government and defense industry could respond to the surge in demand more quickly.² Poland is the first foreign country to buy IBCS, and

¹ NATO, 2024, p. 9.

² For example, in 2019, Poland planned to buy additional F-16s. However, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Poland bought the Korean FA-50, which was previously not considered for acquisition. Although the government highlighted that the purchase does not mean abandoning the plan for more F-16s, it was widely interpreted by the expert

it will be the largest foreign user of Apache helicopters and—if the contract goes through—HIMARS launcher modules. Existing contracts mean that Poland will become an important customer of the U.S. defense industry, which will contribute to its future condition.

If modernization and expansion are successful, the Polish Armed Forces will be a top contributor to NATO's land capabilities while still being able to provide meaningful contributions in the air and maritime domains. In turn, there would be an important shift in the military balance on NATO's eastern flank, both within NATO and toward Russia. Significant strengthening of Poland's Land Forces decreases the risk that Russia would attempt an opportunistic attack on a NATO member in the Baltic Sea region to repeat the *fait accompli* tactics from Crimea. Any attack in Poland's neighborhood would require a longer buildup, thus providing NATO with more warnings to prepare and respond. Finally, a larger force could enhance Poland's ability to host allied forces and rotate them through the theater should the need arise.

It is important to note that, despite this enormous investment, Poland's plans are not oriented toward building a force for protracted war: It would rearm existing units and form new ones, but much more time and resources would be required to build attrition reserves in major weapon systems, critical munitions, or bulk sustainment. To do so, Poland will still need the support of its NATO allies. Therefore, in a major contingency, this modernized force might buy the Allies more time but would not allow Poland to stand alone.

How exactly this force would be used in peacetime, crisis, and war—beyond what is prescribed by the new regional plans—remains to be determined. Poland has yet to define a new strategy and doctrine that would reflect the new security environment and capabilities. Does Poland want to become more active in its neighborhood (e.g., strengthen its presence in the Baltic states), or will it remain focused on territorial defense? How

community as a response to the backlog in production and lengthy foreign military sales process preventing a quick purchase of F-16s. See “524 mld na modernizację i więcej F-16. Błaszczak podpisał PMT” [“524 Billion for Modernization and More F-16. Błaszczak Signed PMT”], *Defence24*, October 10, 2019; and Maciej Szopa, “Dodatkowe F-16 dla Polski, ale kiedy?” [“Additional F-16s for Poland, but When?”], *Defence24*, October 31, 2022b.

exactly does Poland envision using its armed forces to support deterrence? The larger the force, the more possibilities for action it has and, therefore, the more options for how Poland can use it to best support national interests. Fortifying the border and investing in land forces also creates incentives and disincentives for an adversary, which will need to be an area of continuous analysis.

It is certain that realization of the modernization and expansion plans would be well-aligned with U.S. national security interests: As long as the United States continues to provide key enablers and is ready to fulfill its obligations in major contingency, Warsaw could take a larger responsibility for regional security, leaving Washington more flexibility in responding to emerging crises in key areas of interest. However, if Poland fails to fulfill its military modernization, Washington's resourcing dilemmas will only become more acute as the eastern flank will be more vulnerable than it was before 2022. Therefore, the United States has a stake in ensuring the success of the Polish military modernization and expansion, which should be seen as a long-term investment in securing U.S. interests in Europe.

The Role of the United States: Recommendations

Strong relationship and security cooperation with the United States has been one of Poland's key foreign policy priorities since the country overthrew the communist government in 1989.³ The cooperation has been mutually beneficial even before Poland joined NATO in 1999.⁴ Now, the country is one of the most steadfast U.S. allies. Poland agreed to host elements of the U.S. missile defense system and maintained that support despite disappointment

³ Thomas S. Szayna, *The Military in a Postcommunist Poland*, RAND Corporation, N-3309-USDP, 1991; Marcin Zaborowski and Kerry Longhurst, "America's Protégé in the East? The Emergence of Poland as a Regional Leader," *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 5, 2003; Ryszard Zięba, "The 20th Anniversary of Poland's Accession to NATO," in Daniel S. Hamilton and Kristina Spohr, eds., *Open Door: NATO and Euro-Atlantic Security After the Cold War*, Foreign Policy Institute, 2019.

⁴ For example, in 1990, Polish intelligence smuggled six Central Intelligence Agency officers out of Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War. See John Pomfret, "Polish Agents Rescued 6 U.S. Spies from Iraq," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1995.

over changes in the program.⁵ Poland was among the very few countries that joined the initial U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March of 2003. For nearly 20 years, Polish troops were also deployed in Afghanistan. From the start, these expeditionary missions were seen as an insurance policy of sorts. As one expert noted, “Poland hoped that if it was ever in need, it would be able to count on reciprocity and military support from Washington.”⁶

After Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the United States responded to that need by deploying an enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group and a rotational armored brigade combat team under Operation Atlantic Resolve. Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the U.S. Army forces in Europe have expanded further to include a second armored brigade combat team and an additional infantry brigade combat team. The number of U.S. troops on rotation in Poland has increased to 10,000. Additionally, the deployment of the U.S. Army V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post, an Army garrison headquarters, and a field support battalion established the first permanent U.S. presence in Poland.⁷ These units—along with a sizable number of additional elements, such as division headquarters, division artillery, and sustainment forces—have carried out a variety of training missions with allies and supported the flow of military support to Ukraine through Rzeszów-Jasionka airbase.⁸

Poland is growing toward being a security provider, but it still needs support to reach that level. Given that Poland now spends more on national defense in relation to GDP than does the United States, providing multifaceted support would be a strong signal that Washington appreciates its allies’ readiness to meet obligations. The ideas presented in this report assume that, as the United States adjusts its national security focus toward the Indo-

⁵ Benjamin Weinthal, “How Obama Lost Poland,” *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2012.

⁶ Katarzyna Hołdak and Anna Konarzewska, “Afganistan, Irak, Czad—Co Mamy z Misji? Bilans Zysków i Strat” [“Afghanistan, Iraq, Chad—What Do We Get from the Missions? The Balance of Gains and Losses”], *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe* [National Security], Vol. 7–8, 2008, p. 96.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Poland,” fact sheet, January 20, 2025.

⁸ Sharon Weinberger, “In Poland’s ‘J-Town,’ Soldiers Move Arms to Ukraine as Russian Spies Try to Stop Them,” *Wall Street Journal*, last updated September 30, 2023.

Pacific to a growing extent, it will remain committed to European security and will continue to prioritize cost-effective measures to ensure its interests in Europe.

Aid Poland's Strategy and Doctrine Development

U.S. European Command and the Department of Defense should also enhance dialogue with Polish counterparts to explore how Poland's emerging new force can be best used to support its and NATO's strategic objectives and operational plans. Notably, in 2024, Poland launched a review of strategic documents, including drafting of a new national security strategy and a political and strategic defense directive, a classified document that specifies tasks for all state structures in times of crisis and war.⁹ Although the Polish government defines the role of the Polish Armed Forces in ensuring national security, the strategy development process is opened to external advice.¹⁰ The Department of Defense could leverage the Institute for Security Governance and the Ministry of Defense Advisor Program to support this process.¹¹ Another option is to leverage already existing U.S. presence in Poland, including the ongoing cooperation between the Polish 2nd Corps and the U.S. V Corps, to share lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war, provide strategic advisory, and launch joint analytic efforts to help the Polish Armed Forces better understand the opportunities and challenges created by modernization. Launching targeted analytic efforts, such as wargames, could be more effective in incorporating these insights into

⁹ Ministry of the National Defense of the Republic of Poland, "Informacja Ministra Obrony Narodowej w sprawie stanu bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej" ["Information from the Minister of National Defence on the Security Situation in the Republic of Poland"], Sejm of the Republic of Poland, May 22, 2024d.

¹⁰ Kamil Nowak, "Będzie nowa strategia bezpieczeństwa narodowego. Powstaje specjalny zespół" ["There Will Be a New National Security Strategy. A Special Team Is Being Created"], *Forsal*, December 10, 2024.

¹¹ In the past, these organizations have been used to support Poland's F-16 pilot training (Defense Security Cooperation University, "DSCU and Polish Partners Spearhead First Regional F-16 ICB Workshop," press release, February 26, 2024), but they can also facilitate strategic advisory.

strategy and doctrine than the ongoing exchange of views between U.S. and Polish senior leaders and staff.¹²

Look for Ways to Speed Up Polish Purchases of U.S. Equipment

Although most of the big-ticket items that Poland wants to buy from the United States are already on contract, there are still some opportunities to increase the share of U.S. equipment in Poland's armed forces (e.g., HIMARS). However, Poland needs as much help as possible with direct loans for new equipment. The country is already one of the biggest beneficiaries of direct loans through the U.S. Foreign Military Financing program, but more will be needed to move from framework agreements to contracts.¹³ Providing direct loans to Poland is a win-win solution: Enabling Warsaw to purchase U.S. equipment will boost both Poland's capabilities and the U.S. defense industrial base. Meanwhile, Poland has had remarkably strong growth since transitioning to a free market economy in the 1990s, with only a single year of contraction in 2020.¹⁴ As an EU country, Poland's debt and deficit management is scrutinized by Brussels, but as a country outside the Eurozone, Poland has more flexibility in responding to the economic environment. Therefore, the risk of Poland's default remains low.¹⁵

The sense of urgency that underpins Poland's military modernization and expansion is a challenge for the Foreign Military Sales program and the U.S. industrial base, which have not recently had to respond to such a

¹² Devin Klecan, "V Corps host first Warfighting Symposium in Warsaw," U.S. Army V Corps, December 21, 2023; Jacek Marcin Raubo, "Fundamental Cooperation Between the 2nd Polish Corps and the U.S. Army V Corps," *Defence24*, October 28, 2024.

¹³ "Blisko 12 mld PLN amerykańskiej pożyczki na zakup śmigłowców Apache" ["Nearly PLN 12 Billion of American Loan for the Purchase of Apache Helicopters"], *Dziennik Zbrojny [Armed Journal]*, October 12, 2024.

¹⁴ Most notably, Poland avoided economic contraction during the 2008 Great Recession. See World Bank, 2024.

¹⁵ In 2024, major rating agencies affirmed Poland's investment grade ratings. See Fitch Ratings, "Fitch Affirms Poland at 'A-'; Outlook Stable," November 8, 2024. For a history of Poland's ratings, see Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Poland, "Rating," webpage, undated.

surge in demand. This limitation contributed to Poland's decisions to enter into massive arms deals with South Korea.¹⁶ In this situation, the United States has two options to aid modernization and maximize interoperability: (1) Poland can be given high-level attention to ensure that the country's requests are able to move more quickly beyond bureaucratic hurdles, and (2) the United States can provide technical support to upgrade the Korean equipment to NATO standards (as appropriate and necessary).¹⁷ How exactly these steps can be taken would require additional analysis.

Help Integrate New Capabilities and Sustain Them in Protracted Conflict

The incoming mix of equipment from the United States, South Korea, Poland, and, to a lesser degree, other European countries, combined with a new large cohort of recruits, will require intense training to achieve combat readiness and interoperability with U.S. and other NATO allies' armed forces. This is the area in which Poland and the United States have a strong foundation of cooperation: One of the key tasks of U.S. troops deployed in Poland is to increase interoperability with Polish counterparts through exercise and training.¹⁸ New deployments after 2022 only strengthened this area of cooperation, including the Abrams Tank Training Academy, the Polish Apache Initiative, 4th Security Force Assistance Brigade activities, and many other bilateral and multilateral exercises and training activities.¹⁹

¹⁶ MND, "Samoloty FA-50 wzmocnią zdolności Sił Powietrznych" ["FA-50 Aircraft Will Strengthen the Capabilities of the Air Force"], press release, September 16, 2022b.

¹⁷ The Korean weapons are largely compatible with U.S. equipment, but Poland requires upgrades to integrate some munitions or targeting systems, for example. See Maciej Szopa, "Truth about the Armament for the Polish FA-50s," *Defence24*, September 18, 2024b.

¹⁸ U.S. Mission Poland, "American Armored Brigade Combat Team in Poland," press release, U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Poland, August 31, 2017; Matthew Foster, "eFP Battle Group Poland, Combined Arms, Combined Strength," U.S. Army V Corps, November 25, 2022.

¹⁹ Dean Johnson, "Abrams Tank Training Academy Opens in Poland," U.S. Army V Corps, August 10, 2022; James Liker, "Forward Deployed: 4th SFAB Trains to Advise, Assist and Lead," U.S. Army, April 20, 2023; U.S. Army Europe and Africa, "US and

Continued combined training that focuses on interoperability and integration will not only provide the Polish Armed Forces the opportunity to improve, it will also increase the U.S. armed forces' awareness of the progress in Poland's transformation into a modern Western military. Increasing the frequency of joint training and exercises and the pool of Polish military officers who are educated in U.S. military academies could also help change the hierarchical legacy culture of the Polish military, which, in turn, could help with retention. The United States, which has much more capacity at this level than other NATO members, can uniquely support training for new corps and division headquarters.

Poland will also face sustainment challenges with its technologically diverse force, especially in wartime. Therefore, Poland and the United States need to work together to understand the best ways to expand stockpiles of war materiel reserve munitions, spare parts, vehicles, and other supplies. It is no secret that Poland would like to host production of U.S. equipment and munitions.²⁰ However, doing so would require more analysis. Such a location would shorten delivery times, which could be critical given the attrition rates indicated by the Russia-Ukraine war; at the same time, it would be an obvious target for Russian attack and therefore, would increase air defense requirements. Consideration should be given to technology sharing—similar to technological cooperation within the alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—to accelerate initiatives that enhance European security and, therefore, ultimately contribute to U.S. freedom of action.

NATO Troops Execute Combined Exercise to Expand Battle Group in Poland,” May 19, 2023; James M. Lanza, “29th Infantry Division Leads Multinational Wet Gap Crossing in Poland,” Virginia National Guard, June 20, 2024; Nolan Brewer, “Polish Apache Initiative Takes Flight: V Corps Boosts NATO Unity,” U.S. Army, August 8, 2024; Tyler Brock, “Avenger Triad 24: V Corps’ Key Role in Strengthening NATO Interoperability,” U.S. Army V Corps, September 19, 2024; Jacob Murray, “U.S., Polish Air Forces Partner for Bilateral Training During Agile Bison 2024,” U.S. Army, November 13, 2024; Jacob Nunnenkamp, “Historic US, Poland Cavalry Divisions Train Together at Exercise Combined Resolve,” U.S. Army, February 12, 2025.

²⁰ Jaroslaw Adamowski, “Lockheed Offers Polish Industry a Seat at Its Rocket Launcher Table,” *Defense News*, June 11, 2024; Damian Ratka, “Poland Wants the Latest Munitions for Its Abrams MBTs. Offset Is Key,” *Defence24*, February 7, 2024.

Maintain Presence in Poland to Maximize U.S. Return on Defense Investment

To recruit soldiers, integrate new equipment, and train new and re-equipped units, Poland needs time it might not have if deterrence fails. The Polish General Staff is cognizant of the need to balance readiness with modernization and long-term continuous transformation.²¹ However, such a large expansion of the armed forces will almost inevitably lead to some degree of destabilization, particularly within the Land Forces. This destabilization and the military aid that Poland has provided to Ukraine mean that Poland will remain in a vulnerable position until the major pieces of modernization and expansion are in place. Therefore, to support Poland's ability to take a larger responsibility for regional security in the long term, the U.S. armed forces will need to maintain—and possibly even strengthen—its presence in the country in the short- to middle-term both to deter Russia and help Poland integrate new equipment and train the troops.

How this should be achieved is a separate matter; however, research shows that turning rotational presence into permanent basing in Poland would have benefits in terms of deterrence, readiness, and costs.²² The 2020 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between Poland and the United States provides a legal basis and mechanism for sharing logistical and infrastructure costs for U.S. forces' presence in Poland.²³ Continued presence in Poland would help maximize the return on U.S. defense investment in Poland by strengthening deterrence and ensuring that the Polish Armed Forces are combat ready and truly interoperable with the U.S. troops.

²¹ Graf, 2024; Maciej Chilczuk and Magdalena Kowalska-Sendek, "Uwaga, transformacja!" ["Attention, Transformation!"], *Polska Zbrojna [Armed Poland]*, May 9, 2024.

²² Seth G. Jones, Seamus P. Daniels, Catrina Doxsee, Daniel Fata, and Kathleen McInnis, *Forward Defense. Strengthening U.S. Force Posture in Europe*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2024; John R. Deni, *Rotational Deployments vs. Forward Stationing: How Can the Army Achieve Assurance and Deterrence Efficiently and Effectively?*, U.S. Army War College Press, 2017; John R. Deni and Lisa A. Aronsson, *The Role of America's European Allies in the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–24*, U.S. Army War College Press, 2024.

²³ U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," fact sheet, August 15, 2020.

In the long term, Poland needs to know that, even if its new capabilities will enable a strong first response to any Russian attack, allied forces will follow. In other words, Poland will still need a strong U.S. commitment to European security, including enabler forces that the United States is uniquely able to contribute in support of NATO operations. For example, although Poland is investing in air and missile defense capabilities that will considerably improve its defenses against some of the more common cruise and short-range ballistic missile threats, it lacks the high-end missile defenses that could help protect critical targets from the most dangerous Russian threats, such as the Oreshnik ballistic missile or Tsirkon hypersonic missile. Providing these capabilities will come at a price that should be seen as an investment in deterrence and European stability to gain more flexibility in responding to crises elsewhere and, therefore, advance U.S. interests across the world. It will also signal to other European allies that large-scale modernization is not only possible but tangibly appreciated by the United States.

Monitor Modernization Progress and Study Poland's Military Culture to Better Understand the Combat Potential of the Modernized Force

Understanding the ramifications of Poland's military plans for deterrence and defense on NATO's eastern flank will require continuous monitoring and analysis of their progress. Although monitoring of acquisition is a relatively straightforward task, understanding how it translates into combat credibility is more difficult. The Russia-Ukraine war has once again demonstrated that leadership and the will to fight greatly matter in combat. Meanwhile, some personnel retention issues seem to point to deeper cultural problems with leadership style. This hierarchical legacy culture might prove particularly problematic for the retention of large cohorts of young recruits. It might also affect the compatibility of decisionmaking styles and discipline types between Polish and U.S. military personnel. Therefore, a better understanding of Poland's military culture is an important area for future research.

Abbreviations

AFSF	Armed Forces Support Fund
CAMM	Common Anti-Air Modular Missile
EDP	Excessive Debt Procedure
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
HDA	Homeland Defense Act
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
IBCS	Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System
IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle
MND	Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
TDF	Territorial Defence Forces

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