

**Tomasz Paszewski**

## THE CREDIBILITY OF NATO SECURITY GUARANTEES FROM THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of NATO for Poland. Since the end of the last century the membership in the Alliance has been by far the most important instrument to ensure the security of the country. However, the central role of NATO in Poland's security policy, and the large dependence of the state security and defence on NATO and US policy, much stronger than in the case of most other member states, has not been accompanied unfortunately by a wider reflection either about the nature of alliances and rules governing their functioning, or issues related to the credibility and effectiveness of collective defence in the rapidly changing international situation. Despite numerous statements of Polish decision makers that the presence of NATO does not fully guarantee the security of the country and does not relieve form national defence preparations, in practice, Poland has often acted as if this was the case.

Such an attitude, however, is completely contrary to the very nature of alliances, including defence alliances<sup>1</sup>. As K.J. Holsti wrote, 'in every international system composed of independent and sovereign states (...) there is no automatic guarantee that even the most solemn obligations will be fulfilled, if they are in conflict with the overriding interests of various governments. Many situations can cause tension in alliances, undermining their effectiveness as instruments of deterrence as well as military organisations'<sup>2</sup>. One of

<sup>1</sup> Friedman, J.R. 1970. Alliances in international politics. In: Friedman, J.R., Bladen, Ch., Rosen, St. eds. *Alliances in international politics*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., pp. 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> Holsti, K.J. 1970. Diplomatic coalitions and military alliances. In: Friedman, J.R., Bladen, Ch., Rosen, St. eds...., p. 99.

the characteristics of alliances is the fact that they are inherently unstable. Hans J. Morgenthau pointed out that a typical alliance is based on a small portion of interests of all constituting countries. Other interests of its members are either neutral from the point of view of the objectives of the alliance, or competitive or even contradictory. The duration of the effectiveness of the alliance depends on the relationship between the objectives and interests that the Alliance supports and all the others, and the relationship changes over time<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, as Morgenthau said, if the alliance is to be operative, the Member States must agree not only about the general political orientation, but also on specific policies and measures. However, as can be clearly seen on the example of Russia, for many years NATO has been able to meet only the first condition, while at the level of specific actions there have been already significant differences. The main creator of the classical realism also thought that the ideological similarity or proximity can strengthen the alliance if it is a factor put on a real community of interests, but it can also weaken it by obscuring the nature of common interests and their limited scope, as well as by the creation of expectations impossible to satisfy<sup>4</sup>. It is worthwhile to remember this thesis, for example, in the context of the Polish approach to the alliance with the US during the past quarter of the century.

These issues are always relevant although they might have seemed insignificant at the moment of Polish accession to NATO in 1999. At that time Russia, the only potential aggressor, was very weak while NATO had a devastating conventional military advantage over any potential adversary. This arrangement of forces in Europe gave little reason to worry about the effectiveness of NATO support. However, already the first decade of the membership revealed some disturbing symptoms. NATO, convinced of the lack of threat from Russia, did not realise its promise from the accession period pertaining to the capability of military aid for Poland and other new members in the event of aggression from outside<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, for many years the Alliance was also unable to adopt contingency plans for the new states, due to the opposition of some Western allies, who, firstly, did not see such a need, and secondly saw such a move as an unnecessary manifestation of distrust towards Russia. In practice, as noted by one analyst, each attempt to strengthen the capacity for collective defence was instantly critically eval-

<sup>3</sup> Morgenthau, H.J. 1970. Alliances. In: Friedman, J.R., Bladen, Ch., Rosen, St. eds..., p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Asmus, R.D. 2009. Shattered confidence in Europe. *Washington Post* 19 September 2009.

ated in terms of possible negative consequences for the expeditionary capability of the alliance, as well as from the point of view of what implications it may have for NATO's relations with Russia<sup>6</sup>. The Russian-Georgian war in 2008 contributed, although not immediately, to breaking the resistance on the contingency plans, but did not change significantly the Alliance's approach to the issue of deterrence, which is still often seen as marginal<sup>7</sup>

In parallel, starting from the second half of the past decade, NATO's military capabilities in Europe – as a result of involvement in costly stabilisation operations, significant reductions in defence budgets and the gradual withdrawal of US troops – underwent a deep erosion. According to SIPRI, in the years 2006–2015 defence spending of the US decreased in real terms by 3.9%, of the UK by 7.2%, France by 5.9%, and Italy by as much as 30%<sup>8</sup>. Only Germany recorded a minimal growth by symbolic 2.8%. For comparison, Russia's outlays on the armed forces increased in this period by 91%. The financial data themselves, however, do not reflect the full scale of the changes in the balance of power in Europe, and more precisely in the relation of military forces between Russia and NATO. While western countries focused their spending on expeditionary capacities, including counter-guerrilla and stabilisation, at the same time reducing or neglecting traditional conventional capabilities in terms of modernisation, repairs and training, Russia in its great programme of modernisation of the armed forces gave priority to the capacity for high intensity activities, including against technically advanced Western armies<sup>9</sup>. Due to all this, the current NATO's capability to deter aggression is at least very doubtful<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Jonson, P. 2010. The debate about article 5 and its credibility. What is all about? *Research Paper*, no. 58. Rome: NATO Defence College, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> The treatment of deterrence, especially of Russia, as a third rate issue was visible both at the level of NATO policy as well as in various scientific and expert publications. See, among others: Kamp, K-H., Yost, D.S. eds. 2009. *NATO and the 21<sup>st</sup> deterrence*. Rome: NATO Defence College.

<sup>8</sup> SIPRI. 2016. *Trends in world military expenditures, 2015*. Stockholm: SIPRI Fact Sheet, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognised the Russian armed forces as the most serious threat for the interest of the USA. Burgess, R.R. 2016. Dunford: 'Russia presents greatest array of threats'. *Sea-power Magazine* 29 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.seapowermagazine.org/stories/20160329-dunford.html> [Accessed: 4 May 2016].

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, J., Romanovs, U. 2015. NATO's Eastern Flank: Rebuilding Deterrence?, *RUSI Newsbrief* 1 May 2015. London: Royal United Service Institute.

NATO began to seriously approach threats to its eastern members after the Russian attack on Ukraine, however, the process proceeded slowly and gradually, strengthened with new examples of Russian militarism, and the undertaken defensive measures can hardly be considered adequate to the needs<sup>11</sup>. The past divisions associated with the policy of the pact towards Russia did not disappear either. They were visible both in terms of NATO's reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine and strengthening of the capacity of deterrence and defence of the alliance itself<sup>12</sup>. The demands for the creation of permanent NATO bases in Central and Eastern Europe (that is bases of western members subordinated to NATO) turned out to be politically unacceptable<sup>13</sup>. In the coming years, a lot will depend on the attitude of Moscow, as well as the evolution of the political and economic situation in the West, but even now we can say that the attempts to return to the state of relations with Russia from the times before the Ukrainian crisis are getting stronger. What is more, the more the reaction of NATO to Russia's aggressive policy will be spread over time, the greater the risk that the next years, when the conflict in Ukraine is relegated to the background by other events, it will be so diluted that its significant portion will finally not come into force.

The aim of this text is to assess the credibility of NATO security guarantees in the short and medium term perspective through the prism of the risks that are already clearly outlined, and which pertain to two basic variables that determine the effectiveness of these guarantees: military capabilities and political will to use them. The term 'guarantee' cannot be taken literally, as an unconditional commitment to military aid, as in NATO this type of

<sup>11</sup> Larsen, J.A. 2014. *The Wales Summit and NATO's deterrence capabilities: an assessment*. Rome: NATO Defence College; Cooper, H., Erlanger, S. 2014. Military cuts render NATO less formidable as deterrent to Russia. *New York Times* 26 March 2014; Manea, O. 2015. After Crimea: NATO response still anchored in the logic of 1990s. *Romania Energy Center* 3 July 2015. Bucharest. Available at: <http://www.roec.biz/bsad/portfolio-item/raspunsul-nato-ramane-anchilozat-in-logica-anilor-90/> [Accessed: 20 July 2016].

<sup>12</sup> Patrick, S.M. 2014. NATO: suddenly relevant, deeply divided. *Council on Foreign Relations* 28 August 2014; Pifer, S. 2014. NATO looks divided and its eastern members look exposed. *Financial Times* 19 May 2014.

<sup>13</sup> They were criticised not only in Western countries but also in Visegrad countries. See, among others: Binnendijk, H. 2015. Deterring Putin's Russia. In: Kupiecki, R., Michta, A. eds. *Transatlantic relations in a changing European security environment*. Warsaw, Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, pp. 22–23; Šimečka, M. 2015. NATO's Eastern promises? *European Security Spotlight*, no. 14. Prague: Institute on International Relations.

'hard' guarantees does not exist, but rather as a very serious treaty-political commitment of states to mutual assistance in the case of aggression from outside. What is also important is the distinction made by Michael Fitzsimmons between uncertainty and a risk<sup>14</sup>. While in the case of uncertainty there is no basis for predicting the future, a risk refers to a situation in which the ultimate development of events is unknown, but it is possible to assess the probability of different scenarios on the basis of known facts, experience and testing of adopted assumptions. In the case of NATO security guarantees we can already, on the basis of the assessment of the current situation in the transatlantic community and the experience of several past years, distinguish a number of risks of this type, the likelihood of materialisation of which seems now not only real, but often even quite high. As J. Friedman rightly pointed out, 'probability' is 'the key to the calculation inside the alliance' pertaining to its behaviour in case of war<sup>15</sup>.

The analysis of individual risks will be preceded by a brief look at the theory of deterrence, because the main objective of NATO's policy, just like of most national defence policies, is not so much winning a defensive war, but rather preventing it. Moreover, the effectiveness of deterrence policy and of defence policy are extremely closely related.

## DETERRENCE AND SECURITY GUARANTEES OF NATO

Deterrence is indeed an integral part of states' defence or military policy existing for thousands of years. The theory of deterrence, which essentially developed only during the Cold War, is a different matter. This theory originally referred almost exclusively to nuclear deterrence, as one of key strategic relations between the two superpowers, later it has encompassed the conventional forces<sup>16</sup>. From its very beginnings until today, it has been based, in spite

<sup>14</sup> Fitzsimmons, M. 2006/2007. The problem of uncertainty in strategic planning. *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 4, Winter 2006/2007.

<sup>15</sup> Friedman, J.R. 1970. Alliances in international politics. In: Friedman, J.R., Bladen, Ch., Rosen, St. eds. ..., p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Authors of one of the most important works of the seventies differentiated three levels of deterrence: the strategic one pertaining to a nuclear war between superpowers, a limited war (e.g. in Korea) and a situation below the threshold of war (crises, secret operations, provocations, etc). While on the strategic level there is no doubt about the kind of response to an attack, on the other levels also political factors count due to which the response to an act of aggression is less certain. George, A.L., Smoke, R. 1974. *Deterrence in American foreign policy: theory and practice*. New York, London:

of many voices questioning this approach, on the rational choice theory, and related ones, including e.g. a model of expected benefits.

In the case of NATO security guarantees for Poland it can be assumed, following numerous authors, that we deal with a form of so-called extended deterrence. This term refers to a situation where one country (defender) deters another from the attack on its ally, that is a country it protects for one reason or another. Of course, the United States is a country most widely applying extended deterrence, protecting in this way more than 50 countries around the world. However, it can also refer to NATO, where aid commitments from all the members are a deterrent against a military attack on one of the allies. Unlike basic deterrence, which consists of deterring a potential aggressor (or attackers) from your own country, extended deterrence is much less credible, due to a significantly smaller motivation of the state which deters<sup>17</sup>. In the case of this country there is a risk that fulfilling the commitment related to deterrence it may incur costs exceeding the value of what it protects<sup>18</sup>. This problem always occurred during the Cold War – there were always doubts as to whether the US would decide to use nuclear weapons in defence of its European allies, risking a retaliatory nuclear attack<sup>19</sup>. In order to increase the credibility of extended deterrence, and thus its effectiveness, deterring states often undertake a number of actions increasing in a demonstrative way their commitment to the defence of allies. These are usually such measures as deploying their own troops in the territory or public declarations or other forms of political commitment, from which it would not be easy to withdraw during the crisis, because of external and internal expectations and pressures<sup>20</sup>. Engaging in protecting the ally of both its soldiers, who are exposed to danger in the event of aggression, as well as its own reputation, the state authenticates its policy of deterrence, for the price, however, of limiting itself room for manoeuvre in the event of an actual attack on the ally.

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Columbia University Press, p. 39 and 53; see also: Mearsheimer, J.J. 1983. *Conventional deterrence*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Schelling, T.C. 1966. *Arms and influence*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, pp. 35–36; Freedman, L. 2008. *Deterrence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Crawford, T.W. 2004. The endurance of extended deterrence: continuity, change, and the complexity in theory and policy. In: Paul, T.V., Morgan, P.M., Wirtz, J.J. eds. *Complex deterrence: strategy in the global age*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> Fedder, E.H. 1973. *NATO: the dynamics of alliance in the postwar world*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, p. 56–57.

<sup>20</sup> Crawford, T.W. ..., p. 283.

It is easiest to measure the credibility and effectiveness of deterrence by the analysis of its constituent elements. The literature often distinguishes three of them: 1) appropriate military capabilities, 2) the will to use these capabilities if necessary, 3) effective communication of the readiness to defend to the potential opponent. The last element, however, is largely a function of the previous two, it also has a very situational nature, due to which is not subject to any long-term predictions. Therefore, it is adopted in this text that deterrence is primarily a function of the assessment by the potential aggressor of NATO military capabilities and political will to use them<sup>21</sup>. Exactly the same criteria as already mentioned will be used to assess the credibility of NATO security guarantees.

In reality, however, the effectiveness of the policy of deterrence, understood as the absence of war, is equally, if not more determined by the type of countries that are deterred rather than by the actions taken by the deterring side. While the states which in general are satisfied with the status quo are relatively easy to deter with the use of even small forces, in the case of those seeking consistently to change it, and Russia, China and Iran can be now regarded as such, the policy of deterrence requires much more substantial measures because these actors are clearly ready to take greater risks. In such cases, the effectiveness of deterrence is primarily determined by the local balance of power, because the armed forces which are on site can repel a fast attack or succumb to it<sup>22</sup>. In the case of extended deterrence the aggressor that has a clear local advantage may assume that it will be able to achieve all its military objectives before the defender is able to help its ally<sup>23</sup>. If the goal was to capture some territory it can be assumed that the defender would choose not to win it over because of too high costs.

In the theory of deterrence there are two main ways of its implementation: deterrence through direct preventing of effective aggression (deterrence by denial), and by retaliation (deterrence by punishment)<sup>24</sup>. The first type is

<sup>21</sup> Gerson, M.S. 2009. Conventional deterrence in the second nuclear age. *Parameters* Autumn 2009, p. 42. Watman, K., Wilkening, D. 1995. *U.S. regional deterrence strategies*. Santa Monica: RAND, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Gerson, M.S. ...., p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Watman, K., Wilkening, D. ...., p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Another typology of deterrence divides it into general deterrence – working all the time, not necessarily against a specific state and immediate deterrence – appearing in crisis situations threatening with an outbreak of war. The latter kind of deterrence appears when the former one has turned out to be ineffective. Very High Readiness Joint Task Force created by NATO could be used exactly in the case of incidents of this type.

also referred to sometimes as counter-military, and the other as counter-value, because its essence are attacks on the aggressor's high value targets, and these may be either purely military or civilian targets. It is generally believed, at least in the case of conventional deterrence, that deterrence by denial is more effective because it is based on the threat and possibilities of direct repellence of enemy forces engaged in aggression, and this is equivalent to its failure. In the case of deterrence by punishment the aggressor decides what level of loss it is ready to bear<sup>25</sup>, and whether to respond to retaliatory attacks with the escalation of the conflict. The latter situation could arise particularly in the case of Russia acting in the role of an aggressor. For various reasons this state is, on the one hand, less sensitive to suffered losses than Western democracies, on the other hand, it has a wide range of military means of conflict escalation, and its leader and the power elite cannot so easily afford a military defeat, for intra-political reasons.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NATO SECURITY GUARANTEES – THE MILITARY POTENTIAL

The aggressive Russian policy in the years 2015-2016 found NATO unprepared to counter conventional threats connected with the use of force or threats to use it. Despite some adjustments in defence policies of member states and priorities of NATO, there is a real risk that this condition will not improve significantly. A lot of old and new challenges may hinder the strengthening of the military capabilities of NATO in Europe. Those which are the most important and most probable in the foreseeable future can be classified into two groups: a) related to the economic and financial situation of the member states and b) resulting from the military involvement of the key members in other regions of the world or focusing on other threats.

- a) Geographical and financial threats for NATO capabilities for collective defence

One of the main causes of significant weakening of the defence capabilities of NATO, in particular those related to high intensity activities were cuts in defence budgets associated with the effects of the economic and financial crisis of 2008–2009, which are felt even today. The most important of these

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<sup>25</sup> Freedman, L. ...., p. 39.

effects is a very high level of debt, which, moreover, as shown in Table 1, in some countries will continue to grow for a few years. The burden of the debt will significantly affect the financial capabilities of key NATO countries for many years, including the possibility of increasing defence expenditures.

Table 1  
Public debt of Poland's Western allies

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
USA	104,78	104,78	105,85	105,79	105,28	105,52	106,17
France	95,56	97,08	98,40	98,01	97,21	95,48	93,08
Germany	74,62	70,74	68,22	65,85	63,36	60,44	57,88
Italy	132,09	133,10	132,28	130,47	128,33	125,76	122,95
The UK	89,39	88,89	88,02	86,69	84,55	81,28	77,79

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2016.

In the US, high levels of federal debt and the associated need to reduce the budget deficit were the main reasons for the real fall of the Pentagon budget in the period 2011–2015 by 21%<sup>26</sup>, probably it will be a very important brake limiting its growth in the coming years. According to one analysis, taking into account not only the level of debt and its servicing costs but also, among others, rising costs of federal programmes for pensions and health care, the long-term possible level of defence spending ranges between 1.6–2.6% of GDP, well below the US post-war average and less than today<sup>27</sup>. In the absence of a clear political consensus on raising taxes, or a significant reduction in spending, and such a scenario is very likely, the gap between the existing global tasks of the US armed forces and the level of their funding is likely to maintain or even increase. This can give rise to a strong pressure to cede a part of the defence burden to regional allies.

These cuts of the Pentagon budget have already strongly affected the state of the US armed forces, which in some respects is one of the worst in the post-war period<sup>28</sup>. According to the report of the Heritage Foundation,

<sup>26</sup> SIPRI. 2016. *Trends in world military expenditures, 2015*. Stockholm: SIPRI Fact Sheet, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, C. 2011. *The future affordability of U.S. national security*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology 28 October 2011; See also Congressional Budget Office. 2016. *The budget and economic outlook, 2016–2026*. Washington D.C.

<sup>28</sup> Statement by general Daniel Allyn, vice chief of the United States Army Staff before the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Readiness. 26 March 2015.

measuring the state of the US armed forces every year, the capabilities of ground troops in 2015 were assessed as weak, one degree lower than in the previous year, while those of the Navy, Marine Corps and nuclear forces were considered barely sufficient<sup>29</sup>. Given the budgetary constraints with which the American ground troops will struggle through almost the entire current decade, and possibly longer, their technological advantage over militarily strong opponents, such as Russia, may be further eroded<sup>30</sup>.

The high level of debt will also affect the defence capabilities of European countries, although their situation in this respect varies. In the case of France and Britain, their defence budgets will remain very tight at least until the end of the current decade<sup>31</sup>. Germany will have potentially the greatest financial possibilities to strengthen its forces, especially ground forces, due to definitely the most favourable budget situation. In its case, however, the announced gradually increasing military spending, if it really comes to that, will have to be spent to a large extent on the regeneration of the current military capabilities, including the recovery of the equipment already used in the service, much of which due to years of underfunding is not suitable in the current state to be used on the battlefield<sup>32</sup>.

Another threat is a spectre of another deep economic crisis in Europe, which could turn out to be much more difficult to bring under control than that of the end of the past decade. Its potential source could become a financial or economic slump in one of the European economies. Especially Italy is facing extremely serious challenges encompassing a deep demographic

<sup>29</sup> Wood, D.L. ed. 2016. *2016 Index of U.S. military strength: assessing America's ability to provide for the common defense*. Washington D.C.: Heritage Foundation, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Weisgerber, M. 2015. Russia could block access to Baltic Sea, US General Say. *Defense One* 9 December 2015. Available at: <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/12/russia-could-block-access-baltic-sea-us-general-says/124361> [Accessed: 3 January 2016]; Sen, A.K. 2015. *A three-pronged strategy to deal with Putin*. Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council, 8 October 2015. On the topic of modernization of US ground troops (US Army) see US Army, US. Department of Defense. 2016. *Army equipment program in support of President's budget 2016*. Washington D.C.; US Army. 2015. *The US Army combat vehicle modernization strategy*, 15 September 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Chalmers, M. 2015. Mind the gap: the MoD's emerging budgetary challenge. *RUSI Briefing Paper* 13 March 2015. Royal United Service Institute.

<sup>32</sup> Mizokami, K. 2015. Is Germany's military dying? *National Interest* 1 September 2015. Available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/germanys-military-dying-13748?page=show>; Vestring, B. 2014. Unfit for fight – or flight: Germany's army admits to massive equipment failure. *IP-Journal* 30 September 2014. DGAP. Available at: <https://ip-journal.dgap.org/en/blog/berlin-observer/unfit-fight-or-flight> [Accessed: 12 October 2014].

crisis, huge public debt and weak, uncompetitive economy<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the uncertain economic and financial situation still persisting in some Western European countries may lead them to a more cautious course in foreign and security policy because they have to try to avoid a new recession and a further significant debt increase at any price, and both these phenomena could occur, for example, in the case of a serious political and military conflict in Europe.

### b) Other threats and challenges

NATO is facing a whole range of challenges, and the threat from Russia is just one of them. Problems in North Africa and the Middle East are much more important, more urgent and real for a large part of the members, including of course all from southern Europe<sup>34</sup>. Undoubtedly, in the coming years the threat from this direction will concentrate a large part of the attention and resources of the Alliance. From the point of view, however, of the credibility of NATO's deterrence potential, especially against threats such as those posed by Russia, the US military geographical and functional priorities will be of key importance. But for the United States for years China, not Russia, has been the main geopolitical rival, which is firmly committed to a gradual revision of the existing status quo in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. Beijing supports its regional aspirations with quickly modernised armed forces, constituting an increasingly serious threat to US allies as well as America's own troops in the region<sup>35</sup>. If the US does not start to a greater extent than ever before to balance through its own armaments the growing Chinese military power, it may lose the military dominance over the region of

<sup>33</sup> Ezrati, M. 2014. Will Italy wreak economic havoc on Europe? *The National Interest* 25 August 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Parker, G., Pickard, J. 2015. David Cameron announces £2bn extra military spending to fight Isis. *Financial Times* 16 November 2015.

<sup>35</sup> On the topic of the change of the military balance of power in Asia between the US and China see Heginbotham, E. et al. 2015. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: forces, geography, and the evolving balance of power, 1996–2017*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation; Blackwill, R.D., Tellis, A.J. eds. 2015. *Revising U.S. grand strategy toward China*. Council Special Report, no. 72. Washington D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, March 2015; Center for Security and International Studies. 2016. *Asia-Pacific 2025: capabilities, presence, and partnerships*. Washington D.C.; Kamphausen, R., Lai, D. 2015. *The Chinese People's Liberation Army in 2025*. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College; Montgomery, E.B. 2014. Contested primacy in the Western Pacific: China's rise and the future of U.S. power projection. *International Security*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 115–149.

the western Pacific to China, and this would mean a fundamental degradation of its leadership role, not only in this region constituting today the economic and geopolitical centre of the world, but also on a global scale. Taking into account such potentially momentous consequences, a growing and long-term development of the American military potential in this part of the world, perhaps at the expense of lesser involvement in other regions, seems to be a likely scenario.

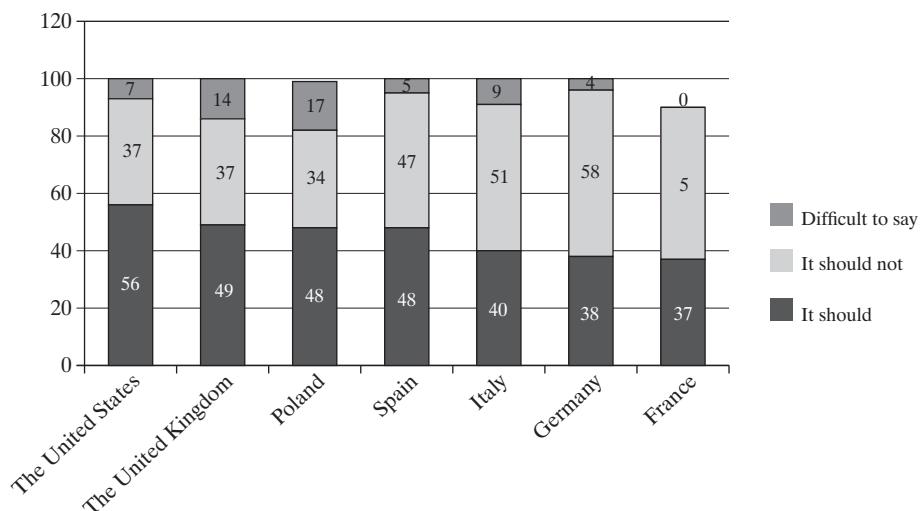
### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NATO GUARANTEES – POLITICAL FACTORS

Another group of factors affecting the credibility of NATO guarantees, far less tangible than military capabilities, covers issues related to the political will of countries forming the alliance. This problem cannot be limited to a possible future decision on the defence of a threatened or attacked ally. What is equally important are issues related to the strategic culture of individual countries in general, as well as their attitudes toward issues such as collective defence and deterrence policy of NATO, the degree and nature of transatlantic solidarity and cooperation, as well as the policy towards Russia and the changes which may occur in this respect in the foreseeable future. These issues create the context, *inter alia*, through their impact on the physical, organisational and geographic capabilities of NATO in the sphere of collective defence, in which the member states would take a decision on possible allied aid under Article 5. They also have influence on public opinion in the individual alliance members, which, especially in the light of the public opinion survey presented in Figure 1, may also have important implications in the event of a *casus foederis*.

Below there are briefly outlined two factors that create, within the next 5–10 years, a political risk for NATO's ability to fulfil its original mission, though of course there are more of them, for instance a potential political and institutional crisis in the EU or the severity of disintegration tendencies. The first is the future US policy towards NATO, which could weigh on the fate of the pact, the other are possible changes of power in the member states, threatening with the departure of those countries from the principles that have guided the Euro-Atlantic community so far and on which in fact the post-Cold War European order has been based.

Figure 1

If Russia was in a serious military conflict with one of its neighbours belonging to NATO, should your country, or should not, use its armed forces in the defence of this country?



Source: PEW Research Centre, September 2015.

a) US policy towards NATO – no more tolerance for ‘fare dodging’?

According to Edward Lucas, well-known for the extremely Atlanticist views, NATO in such a state as it is now is not sustainable. Europe, with 500 million inhabitants and having combined GDP of 20 billion USD, cannot indefinitely rely on military aid from the US, with 320 million inhabitants and GDP of 17 billion USD<sup>36</sup>. As Robert D. Kaplan, a well-known commentator, asked in the context of Ukraine and policy towards Putin’s Russia: ‘Why should America defend the continent which does not want to defend itself?’<sup>37</sup> A similar view is shared by more and more politicians and experts<sup>38</sup>. The United States is fed up with tolerating European ‘fare dodging’.

<sup>36</sup> Lucas, E. 2016. Make NATO great again. *Center for European Policy Analyses* 11 April 2016. Available at: <http://cepa.org/Europe's-Edge/make-nato-great-again> [Accessed: 16 April 2016].

<sup>37</sup> Kaplan, R.D. 2015. America will lose patience with European appeasement. *Financial Times* 7 April 2015.

<sup>38</sup> See, among others, Joyner, J. 2014. Europe’s free ride on the American-defense gravy train. *National Interest* 13 July 2014; Dempsey, J. 2014. *Europe is losing America*. Brus-

In Kaplan's opinion the sluggish response of Obama's administration to Putin's aggressive policy is not necessarily an expression of its weakness or imminent indecision and more a reflection of the gradual but visible change that takes place in the USA in relation to the problems of security in Europe. In fact, this change has become apparent already within a few previous years, including in the form of a significant reduction of the American military presence in Europe, the conduction from the 'back seat' in the course of the intervention in Libya in 2011, or just in a limited and very stretched in time strengthening of defence of the eastern flank of NATO<sup>39</sup>. In 2012 the House of Representatives adopted a resolution, which ultimately never entered into force, calling on the administration to withdraw all remaining combat units from Europe. Washington gradually goes from purely verbal calls for more equal sharing of costs in the alliance to the gradual reduction of its involvement in Europe. If European countries are not more involved in the defence of peace and stability on the continent, the United States will probably be more cautious in taking on its shoulders both existing and new tasks, even if the risks are serious. There is a risk that in Europe, due to the reduced presence of the US and the inability of European countries to take over part of its duties, a security vacuum will appear at some point<sup>40</sup>.

Meanwhile, the prospects for a change in the European approach to security seem faint. Shortly after the adoption of commitments at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014 it turned out that some members had already broken them, and the prospect of implementing the target objectives set for 2020 is at least questionable. Not only because of the financial situation of many

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sels: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Daalder, I. 2013. Europe must be prepared to spend on defence. *Financial Times* 23 December 2013; Cordesman, A.H. 2014. *NATO and Ukraine: the need for real world strategies and for European partners rather than parasites*. Washington D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies. Available at: <http://csis.org/publication/nato-and-ukraine-need-real-world-strategies-and-european-partners-rather-parasites> [Accessed: 14 July 2014]; Schwarz, J. 2014. Europe's paralysis problem. *National Interest* 22 September 2014; Cohen, E. 2014. The 'kind of things' crisis. *The American Conservative* 10 December 2014; Michta, A. 2015. A stasis in Europe. *The American Interest* 18 August 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Sullivan, G. 2015. Europe requires more than symbolic defense. *Defence One* 7 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/05/europe-requires-more-symbolic-defense/112210/> [Accessed: 11 May 2015]. Available at: <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/05/europe-requires-more-symbolic-defense/112210/>; Gould, J. 2015. US removing 24 Apaches from Europe. *Defense News* 19 April 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Techau, J. 2015. *The politics of 2 percent: NATO and the security vacuum in Europe*. Brussels: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 7.

Member States, but also due to the clear lack of political will<sup>41</sup>. We can even have some doubts whether this problem can be solved at all. Already in 1966 Mançur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser published a famous article in which on the basis of empirical data and a model created by them they argued that in NATO and other similar organisations large countries bear a disproportionate burden, while small countries contribute very little or almost nothing at all and due to the layout of national interests in both of these groups, this situation cannot be changed<sup>42</sup>. So far, their argument is largely supported by expenditures of NATO members, however, we need to add yet another variable, namely the level of a military threat.

The border states of the alliance, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, would experience the negative effects of such a situation to a largest extent. This applies also to countries such as Estonia or Poland, which spend 2% of GDP on defence as required by NATO. Contrary to the opinion fairly common in our country, the credibility of US military aid in the event of crisis or war depends not mainly on the Polish-American relations, but on the fulfilment by Poland of its commitments. The USA looks at the issue of European security more comprehensibly, demanding far more equal distribution of tasks and costs. In this respect Poland is necessarily dependent on the rest of the European members of NATO, especially the largest ones. Their decisions can influence the scale of further American presence in Europe.

#### b) The change of power in the member states

The last of the analysed threats to the credibility of NATO as a military alliance is a matter of further promotion of transatlantic and European solidarity in security issues by successive governments in America and Europe. This issue concerns many member states of NATO and the EU, however from the point of view of the alliance response to the threat generated by Russia, of key importance are the United States and several European powers, including Germany, an informal leader of Europe.

<sup>41</sup> Raynova, D., Kearns, I. 2015. The Wales pledge revisited: a preliminary analysis of 2015 budget decisions in NATO Member States. *Policy-Brief*. Brussels: European Leadership Network; Jones, S. 2015. NATO spending promises largely ignored. *Financial Times* 26 February 2015; Techau, J. 2015. *The politics of 2 percent: NATO and the security Vacuum in Europe*. Brussels: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Olson, M. Jr., Zeckhauser, R. 1996. An economic theory of alliances. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 266–279.

In Poland, just like in many other European countries, the involvement of the United States in the security of the old continent, dating back to the Second World War, has been considered for decades to be constant, and in the light of the consensus on this matter prevailing until recently among American elites, this belief has had strong bases. Today, however, it is much more questionable. In the spring of 2016 out of three major presidential candidates, only Hillary Clinton represented the traditional American approach to European security. Her Democratic rival Bernie Sanders, an opponent of NATO expansion to the east, would offer rather 'soft' policy towards Russia rather than strengthening of the eastern flank of NATO, or help for still militarily threatened Ukraine<sup>43</sup>. From the point of view of NATO and transatlantic relations Donald Trump is by far the worst candidate. Trump's statements in the campaign have been so vague that it is difficult to predict his future policy on their basis, but he is certainly not a supporter of the transatlantic relations in their present form<sup>44</sup>. In his first speech devoted to foreign policy, he reproached the NATO allies that only four of them spend the recommended 2 percent on defence and then said: 'the countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defence – and, if not, the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves'. Whatever this rather strange statement means, this is not good news for European allies<sup>45</sup>. In the case of his victory in the election the most probable position towards NATO will be a firm demand for a fundamental change in the distribution of costs of the defence of Europe, other steps cannot be excluded either. His possible policy towards Putin's Russia is also unknown.

Germany is the second key country whose inside-political decisions can significantly affect the credibility of NATO's deterrence of threats from the east. It results from both its political, economic and military potential, as well as geographic location. Its role in NATO is, however, limited by two factors – the reluctance of a significant part of society and political elites to their country's participation in strictly military activities and the specific attitude to Russia.

German-Russian relations gradually, but noticeably cooled in the last decade. This process can be quite conventionally divided into three stages.

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<sup>43</sup> Parakilas, J. 2016. *US election note: Russia policy after 2016*. London: Chatham House, pp. 5–6.

<sup>44</sup> Brooks, R. 2016. Donald Trump has a coherent, realist foreign policy. *Foreign Policy* 12 April 2016. Available at: [http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/12/donald-trump-has-a-coherent-realistic-foreign-policy/?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/12/donald-trump-has-a-coherent-realistic-foreign-policy/?wp_login_redirect=0) [Accessed: 20 April 2016].

<sup>45</sup> Trump, D.J. 2016. Trump on foreign policy. *National Interest* 27 April 2016.

The first came with the seizure of power in Berlin by Angela Merkel, the second after the return of Vladimir Putin to the post of the president of Russia in 2012, the third after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Still, in Germany there are numerous supporters of cooperation with Russia (*Ruslandversteher*), in practice regardless of the behaviour of Russia itself<sup>46</sup>. They are visible in all segments of the political spectrum and among business elites. It is impossible not to note that among the more or less strong opponents of tough policy of Chancellor Merkel towards Russia in connection with the conflict in Ukraine there are such figures as Horst Teltschik, a former closest advisor to Helmut Kohl, former President Roman Herzog, former Social Democratic chancellors Helmut Schmidt and Gerhard Schröder and former, long-time foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, as well as a number of active politicians of the CSU, the SPD and smaller parties<sup>47</sup>. Even if supporters of the Russian option are not able to pursue their own political intentions toward Russia, they can still have the possibility, e.g. as part of the government coalition, to effectively block efforts to help allies threatened by Russia. Even more so as the majority of German society would probably support it<sup>48</sup>.

## SUMMARY

When Poland joined NATO in the nineties of the last century, the West was at the peak of its global power. It might have seemed, therefore, that membership in NATO would almost guarantee the security of Poland for decades, and any possible internal problems of the pact would be compensated by the overwhelming military power of the United States and strong political leadership. This kind of thinking, however, was a mistake.

Military alliances are inherently unstable. Mainly because national goals and interests of all member states are only partially identical or convergent, in the case of other interests there are often substantial discrepancies. While for Poland and a few other members of the alliance deterrence of Russia is the most important priority in the field of security, for the vast majority of

<sup>46</sup> Scally, D. 2014. Coddling the Russian bear. *IP-Global* 21 March 2014. DGAP.

<sup>47</sup> See Forsberg, T. 2016. From Ostpolitik to ‘frostpolitik’? Merkel, Putin and German foreign policy towards Russia. *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Sondaż: większość Niemców przeciwko pomocy dla Polski w razie agresji Rosji. [Survey: the majority of Germans against aid for Poland in the case of Russian aggression.] TVN24, 27 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.tvn24.pl/sondaz-wiekszosc-niemcow-przeciw-pomocy-polsce-w-razie-agresji-rosji,638981,s.html>

other members it is a secondary or tertiary goal. It is not surprising, then, that for 15 years of Polish membership the task has been neglected, and even today, in the face of the aggressive attitude of better-armed Russia, most of the allies do not see the need to take more serious actions by NATO. In this context, taking into account the balance of power between Russia and the alliance, which is considerably less favourable in comparison with the end of the twentieth century, and many risks presented in the text, the credibility of NATO security guarantees is strongly weakened.

The above statements should not, however, lead to the conclusion that NATO and alliances as such are useless. Alliances, as wise scholars pointed, are eternal. In every contending environment, and the international environment is one of them, the actor has only a few options, which usually include: joining a rival, strengthening own potential and entering into an alliance. If nation-states disappear, other entities will come into alliance relationships. The problem lies not in the alliance institution and its inherent weaknesses and limitations, but in the ability of states to properly use alliances. Unfortunately, despite the existence of certain consciousness that NATO is not a complete protection against threats, Poland over the years has failed to develop adequate security policy that would try to compensate those negative characteristics of the alliance.

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## THE CREDIBILITY OF NATO SECURITY GUARANTEES FROM THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE

### Summary

The article distinguishes such risks for the credibility and effectiveness of NATO as a collective defence organisation in the short and medium term perspective, as tight defence budgets in key NATO countries, concentration of a large part of the members of NATO on other risks than those associated with Art. 5, the reduction of US involvement in European security connected with permanently unequal distribution of costs in NATO and changes in power in alliance countries that may undermine the transatlantic solidarity in the field of security. Referring to the theory of alliances and theories of deterrence the text argues that the credibility of alliance guarantee is always limited and is subject to significant fluctuations over time.

## WIARYGODNOŚĆ NATOWSKICH GWARANCJI BEZPIECZEŃSTWA Z PERSPEKTYWY POLSKI

### Streszczenie

Artykuł wyróżnia ryzyka dla wiarygodności i skuteczności NATO jako organizacji kolektywnej obrony w perspektywie krótko- i średnio-terminowej,

zaliczając do nich napięte budżety obronne w kluczowych państwach NATO, koncentracji dużej części członków NATO na innych zagrożeniach niż tych związanych z art. 5, ograniczenie amerykańskiego zaangażowania w europejskie bezpieczeństwo związane z permanentnie nierównym podziałem kosztów w NATO oraz zmiany na szczytach władzy w państwach sojuszu, które mogą podważyć transatlantycką solidarność w sferze bezpieczeństwa. Odwołując się do teorii sojuszów i teorii odstraszania tekst stawia tezę, że wiarygodność sojuszniczych gwarancji jest zawsze ograniczona, a także podlega istotnym fluktuacjom w czasie.

## НАДЁЖНОСТЬ ГАРАНТИЙ СО СТОРОНЫ НАТО С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ ИНТЕРЕСОВ ПОЛЬШИ

### Резюме

В статье дан сравнительный анализ риска для надёжности и эффективности НАТО как организации коллективной обороны в краткосрочной и долгосрочной перспективе, включая в них ограниченные оборонные бюджеты в ключевых государствах НАТО, сосредоточение большинства членов НАТО на угрозах, которых не касается пятая статья, ограничение американского участия в обеспечении европейской безопасности, связанное с непрекращающимся неравномерным распределением расходов в НАТО, а также изменения в верхах власти в государствах-членах блока, которые могли бы подорвать трансатлантическую солидарность в сфере безопасности. Обращаясь к теории альянса и теории отпугивания, автор текста выдвигает тезис, что надёжность гарантий со стороны альянса всегда ограничена; кроме того, она подвержена значительным флуктуациям на протяжении времени.