

## Policy Brief

# How to “Bison” up the Alliance?

## A view from Poland

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**At the beginning of 2017 more than 4,500 troops from the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the United States, Canada, Belgium and Estonia took part in international exercise „Bison Drawsko 2017” conducted on Polish Armed Forces’ firing ranges and training grounds in the Western part of Poland. This endeavor provided a very good illustration how allies should operate to implement decisions of Newport (2014) and Warsaw (2016) NATO summits. Initiating the exercise brigadier-general Jan Swillens of the Dutch 43rd Mechanized Brigade, lead unit herein, commented: “After years of focusing on stability missions, the current security challenges demand us to be well prepared”. Accordingly, “Bison” demonstrated NATO solidarity and the need for effective defence and deterrence. In practical terms, it stressed the importance of modern, demanding high-end capabilities for the full range of NATO missions, including collective defence. It recalled that troops have to be regularly trained and operated on a large scale in demanding field environment. All these elements were adequately captured in the leitmotif of the exercise: “together we stand, together we shield”.**

This is a good introduction to positively note that just one year after the Warsaw summit, its decisions are being successfully implemented. Enhanced forward presence, namely four NATO multinational battalions led by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany, is fully operational today, both in Poland and the Baltic States. Many allies are contributing their forces on the ground, including the Netherlands in Lithuania. Multinational Division Northeast Headquarters in Elbląg, Poland, has already reached its initial operational capacity. The largest corps-level headquarters in the region — Multinational Corps North-East in Szczecin, with Poland, Germany and Denmark as framework nations — enhanced its readiness. The number of land, air and maritime exercises — bilateral, multilateral and within NATO framework — has increased and plays a crucial role in enhancing interoperability of the allies. Air policing of the Baltic states, but also of Romania and Bulgaria, continues. The significant US military presence in the region is in place. But of course this would not be enough to deliver “360-degree” NATO strategy adopted at Warsaw that aims at addressing security concerns of each and every ally. With this in mind NATO and its members are actively supporting the Global Coalition’s efforts against Daesh, stabilization efforts in Libya and Iraq as well as are continuing presence in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the context in which these decisions were endorsed by the NATO leaders is still very distant from any improvement. Russian aggression in Ukraine continues. Moscow is exerting political coercion and military presence along NATO borders (from the High North, throughout the Baltic and Black Seas, the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East). Russian ZAPAD-2017 — the biggest exercise close to NATO borders since 1991 — is yet another example. The deep, multifaceted crisis in the South and successive terrorist attacks (just to mention recent tragic events in Barcelona) are a sad but true reality.

Altogether this shows that the NATO adaptation to developing threats and challenges should continue. It is a must to ensure that NATO is still “the most powerful defence Alliance” in the house. These negative developments could not be longer treated as a “temporary bad weather” as some might think in 2014. It is more about security “climate change”.

Such a thinking stood behind the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) concluded in May 2017 by the Polish Ministry of National Defence and set in “The Concept of Defence of the Republic of Poland”. In a nutshell the SDR implementation will allow Poland to enhance its role within the NATO framework and to serve as the unifying force of all allied activities on the Eastern flank. The ambition within a 15 years time frame (till 2032) is to build up robust, flexible, and interoperable capabilities for successful deterrence and in the worst case scenario — effective defence. Simultaneously, it shall result in significant contribution to collective defence of the Alliance as well as participation in various operations abroad. With a fresh look on the Polish Armed Forces and pessimistic (but realistic) analysis of the security context, the SDR key recommendations were providing for in-depth transformation of structures and capabilities, underpinned by adequate resources. In line with the Warsaw summit decision the SDR illustrates our strong commitment to enhance resilience in the Alliance and to address appropriately some existing dependencies on Russian-sourced legacy military equipment.

### **Structures**

Firstly, in terms of structures, there will be five services within a 2032 perspective: Land Forces, Navy, Air Force, Special Operation Forces, and the newly established Territorial Defence Forces. The prerequisite for success will be their ability to interact with each other on joint operations, especially between the core — the operational forces — and — supportive — territorial units that are trained to neutralize hostile activities below the threshold of a classical armed conflict. For the first time in 30 years, the numbers of soldiers and civilian employees will grow significantly — the total number of the Polish Armed Forces will exceed 200,000 troops in the next decade. The whole command and control system will be simplified so that it is clear and ready for immediate reaction in the time of crisis and war. Along with our participation in the multinational command structures (Elblag, Szczecin), we plan to establish an additional command HQ in Kraków in order to facilitate the regional cooperation, including within the framework of the EU missions.

### **Capabilities**

Secondly, a broad set of modernized and new capabilities will be delivered. The Polish Armed Forces needs them to effectively and proactively perform duties across the whole spectrum of scenarios, in conventional and less traditional domains, including dynamic information and cyber environments. Enhancing Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) potential is defined as one of the priorities and it determines the shape of the SDR recommendations. Land and Air Forces will remain the key elements of the Polish defence system with adequate logistic and engineering capabilities.

A new (fourth) division of armed forces is to be created. We will continue to introduce new armored vehicles and develop a new generation main battle tank. By 2032 we will possess

autonomous system enabling commanders to grasp the full operational picture and to take faster decisions. The flow of information across all echelons of command will be improved. The data-sharing system will be adjusted to the conditions of a battlefield that can be highly interfered with by jamming. Intelligence will be gathered by sophisticated reconnaissance assets operating right from the lowest organizational level in a friendlier legal environment and with advanced technological support such as unmanned platforms.

The range of operational fire will be increased e.g. through developed tube and rocket artillery and new attack helicopters. By 2032 we will introduce new air and missile defence systems procured in “Narew” and “Wisła” programmes. We will invest more in the development of electronic warfare technologies. The Air Force should be equipped with long-range precision weapons and appropriate modern combat aircrafts. The special operations forces will increase their potential, both with respect to conducting high-intensity operations and participation in lower-intensity missions abroad. The Territorial Defence Forces will achieve its full potential by providing them with increased firepower. Due to the reinforcement of the coastal missile units, manned and unmanned reconnaissance platforms, modern mine warfare and submarines, we will greatly increase our capabilities to protect our coastline.

### **Resources**

How to implement the SDR ambitious recommendations? The answer is simple: resources. Poland already invests in defence in accordance with the NATO guidelines of “2/20” emphasized in Newport and Warsaw, namely: 2% GDP for defence budget and more than 20% for major military equipment. We understand that we should spend more and — as described above — better on priority capabilities. Having full governmental support the SDR recommends further increase in the level of defence expenditure — it is expected to reach the level of 2.2% GDP in 2020 and 2.5% GDP in 2030 respectively. The proper legal framework for that is now being debated in parliament.

In broader context, the SDR reflects Poland’s full understanding and support for enhancement of NATO capabilities, fair burden sharing and solidarity within the Alliance. In the same spirit, Polish F-16s have been forward deployed this year both to Kuwait and — taking over from the Dutch air force — to Lithuania. Some of them secure the Allied airspace in the context of Baltic Air Policing, others conduct reconnaissance and targeting mission over Iraq. Polish land forces are being deployed to Latvia and Romania, while we host US and Romanian forces at home and, at the same time, training Iraqi and Jordanian special units and military service members and contributing to NATO Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

### **Consolidation: ‘Bison’ up**

These efforts would contribute to effective defence and deterrence of the Alliance if accompanied by joint efforts of all allies on the two sides of the Atlantic and of the Organization itself. For that reason we need to consolidate our new deterrence and defence posture and strengthen NATO capacity to project stability beyond our borders. In other words — we have to continue the long term adaptation of the Alliance. There are three key parameters in this regard.

Firstly, more commitment. As emphasized again at the NATO “special meeting” in May we need more resources and have to significantly increase allied defence budgets in the forthcoming years. We need to take NATO Defence Planning Process seriously by fulfilling obligations determined within its framework. Our forward presence and contribution to various operations and missions require a long-term substantive engagement. The NATO resilience pledge has to be fulfilled.

Secondly, more detailed work on plans, concept and structures. This is related to the issues of follow-on forces and logistics capabilities that determine if the Alliance is able to deliver required reinforcement and defence if needed. As indicated very often also by the Dutch minister of defence, we have to make a “military Schengen zone” reality. Military force requires transfer through the allied territories swiftly and accordingly, without unnecessary barriers. Already established forward presence needs clear understanding how it fits into the broader picture of NATO reinforcement and defence strategies. The NATO Command Structure should be properly adopted so that it delivers all functions as decided subsequently by NATO leaders since 2014. As unpopular as it might be, it will require some new resources, including personnel. “Doing more for less” approach of the past is hardly functional today.

Thirdly, more cooperation. Allies cannot deliver NATO adaptation alone. We need burden sharing, good investments and more interoperability. As far as Poland is concerned, we are looking forward to enhancing military cooperation with the United States but also directly in our region, especially in the Baltics, among the members of the Visegrad group, with Romania and all other countries on NATO’s Eastern flank. This should manifest itself in the international exercises, the creation of joint commands and units, more personnel exchanges through delegating officers to NATO command entities, such as Multinational Division HQ in Elblag, and if possible in the joint acquisition of military equipment. The German-Dutch defence cooperation, including integration of some units, is a very good illustration of how it could be done.

The Newport and Warsaw summits have begun the process of NATO’s adaptation to new threats. The implementation of these decisions is in progress without delays. Yet, the volatility of the security environment around NATO’s borders does not allow for complacency. Enduring efforts are needed from all NATO members and the Organization itself to truly beef (or ‘bison’) up NATO in the forthcoming years. Indeed, the Alliance of the future needs to be like a bison: strong, fast and resistant. A recipe for that, including clear objectives for years ahead, should be delivered by the next NATO summit in 2018.

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