

Chapter 2

The Long Shadow of History: Civilian Control and Military Effectiveness in Poland

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2.1 Introduction

The security sector reforms (SSR) enacted between 1990 and 2015 in Poland offer a particularly rich field of study. Being, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, one of the first former Warsaw Pact countries to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Poland exhibits features typical of former communist countries to join the Alliance. On the other hand, its geographical size, as well as the significant role played by its armed forces in its history, lends it traits comparable to those evident in Spain and, to a lesser degree, Portugal. The establishment of democratic civilian control over the Polish military was both a result and a part of systemic transformation from communism to parliamentary democracy and a free-market economy, developments that have been described by Linz and Stepan (1996) as applying to “third wave democracies”. The authors also advance the notion that democratic transition reaches the stage of consolidation when it is accepted *behaviorally* (when no significant group is engaged in regime change or secession), *attitudinally* (when a majority of the population accepts that democracy is the best form of government), and *constitutionally* (if there is a democratic and legitimate constitution).

Systemic reforms emulating established democratic “Western” institutions, as Jacoby (2004) points out, may take several forms. If they are voluntary, they may come about as *copies*, being the most faithful, or as more approximate *templates*. Being less voluntary, but appearing to be faithful, reforms end up as *patches* and as *thresholds* if they are only approximate. Examining civil-military relations (CMR) in Poland, we were seeking their best fitting description from the list that Jacoby provides. We were also asking whether the Polish armed forces (Siły Zbrojne

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Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej—SZRP) can be seen to accept democratic civilian control behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally.

After a brief period of being left in a “security void” following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, Poland’s political elite decided to apply for membership of the European Union (EU) and NATO. To qualify, state agencies, including the SZRP, were subject to a series of reforms, including the creation of a civilian-led ministry of defense (Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej—MON), the parliamentary defense committee, as well as a succession of documents and laws delineating new defense strategy. Joining the Alliance, as our research conclusively shows, was the single most important factor contributing to the establishment of democratic civilian control of the SZRP. It also shows that taking part in NATO and US-led military missions dramatically increased the effectiveness of the SZRP.

However, some institutional changes were mainly cosmetic. Though the MON is led by a civilian, the ministry’s staff is thought to consist of only some 40% civilians, most of them in low positions. The parliamentary committee overseeing the SZRP is bereft of specialists and the military still resists civilian researchers’ requests for information about its workings. Therefore, democratic civilian control of the SZRP remains superficial and prone to periodic reverses. Since 1990, the activities of the SZRP have been based on periodically revised doctrines, approved and acted upon by relevant state authorities. This fulfils two of the three criteria gauging effectiveness of the armed forces, as proposed by Florina Cristiana Matei (2015). The third criterion, that of sufficient resources committed to the armed forces by the authorities, can only be assessed arbitrarily.

The results presented here are part of a longitudinal study tracing the challenges that joining NATO created for the armed forces and the defense policies of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. It includes three series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted in 1996, 2006, and 2015–2016, using a proprietary questionnaire with a set of open questions. It was possible to interview 41 people, forming a sizeable part of Polish key decision makers and experts involved in the process of NATO enlargement, including ten generals, six ministers, and eleven secretaries and undersecretaries of state. Some of them were included in two or three series. It was possible to interview members of the team that negotiated Poland’s entry into NATO in 1996 and most of them again in 2016. Interviews consisted of our own original and as yet unpublished material. Findings were validated with the results of archival work on primary sources of Polish military doctrine, including the laws and the published statements of military concepts, practices, and procedure. A critical review of the existing, mainly English-language literature of the subject was used to broaden the perspective.

Section 2.2 explains the history of civil-military relations in Poland, and Sect. 2.3 describes the efforts to establish civilian control of the Polish armed forces since the country’s transition to democracy. The implications of civilian oversight for the effectiveness of the Polish armed forces are discussed in Sects. 2.4 and 2.5 summarizes the author’s findings.

2.2 Historical Background

Poland's changing fortunes over the past two centuries endowed it with features that have a direct bearing on contemporary CMR. Throughout the nineteenth century, at the time when most European nation-states were consolidating their final, contemporary shape, Poland existed in name only, being partitioned between its three neighbors Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Numerous uprisings against the occupying powers brought about a lore of selfless soldiers giving their young lives for the motherland, and a strong emotional attachment to people in Polish uniform. During most of the interwar period, which saw Poland's brief rebirth, former insurgents not only dominated its armed forces but also ruled, directly or indirectly, the state itself. The special role of the military in the Polish psyche was well understood by Stalin, who started his preparations for the imposition of communist rule in Poland by creating an army, Polish in name but staffed by Soviet officers. Its special feature was "political officers", often no more than party apparatchiks with party-gifted ranks, who could overrule the decisions of line officers, theoretically their superiors. Once Poland fell into the Soviet sphere of influence, the communist-led troops, renamed the People's Polish Army (*Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*—LWP), became the official armed forces of the newly-formed Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*—PRL). They also became one of the two pillars on which the imposed rule of the communist party rested, along with the security apparatus.

Though formally independent, the LWP was totally subordinate to the Soviet military command, with Marshal Constantin Rokossovsky as its commander-in-chief (and Poland's defense minister) and Gen. Yuri Bordzilovski as the chief of the General Staff—both native Russians. Between 1955 and 1990, Polish military doctrine was, for all practical purposes, identical with that of the Warsaw Pact. LWP strategy and operations were determined in Moscow and handed over to the Polish General Staff as tasks to be fulfilled (Puchala [Undated](#)).

In the autumn of 1956, after a wave of mass protests, one set of hardline communist leaders was replaced by another, presumed to be more liberal, led by Wladyslaw Gomulka. Shortly after, Rokossovsky returned to Moscow. With him left 1427 Russian officers occupying commanding posts in the LWP. A second cleaning-up of the ranks of the armed forces took place in 1968, after more factional infighting within the communist party. As the losing "liberal" faction included several people of Jewish origin, it turned into a wholesale anti-Semitic purge. Though the winning faction was often described as "nationalist", Russian control over the LWP was actually strengthened.

The communist authorities repeatedly made efforts to legitimize the LWP and erase the stigma of its Soviet creation. They claimed that it defended Poland against the designs on its territory that NATO and the Federal Republic of Germany were supposedly harboring. Scaring Poles with the specter of "German revanchism" was also a justification of its subservience to the Soviet Union, portrayed by the official media as the main guarantor of Poland's territorial integrity. From 1945 up until

1991, Poland played host to the Army Group North of the Red Army, which counted some 400,000 troops in the early 1950s. Half a century later, after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, there were still 53,000 Russian soldiers and 7500 civilian personnel in addition to about 40,000 members of their families permanently stationed on Polish territory. They were located in 59 garrisons; had the use of 13 military airfields, a maritime base, and six exercise ranges; and owned 8000 pieces of real property.

The population, or at least a significant portion of it, saw the LWP as a deterrent to direct Soviet intervention in Polish affairs. This was the justification used (ex-post) by the generals, who in December 13, 1981 declared Martial Law in Poland. General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the head of the military junta, maintained until his death that the imposition of Martial Law saved the country from the fate that befell Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Outwardly, the taking of the reins of power by a group of generals, styling themselves the Military Council of National Salvation (Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego—WRON) and the suspension of not only the government, but also the ruling party itself, ran against the most basic tenets of communist rule. Yet a closer look at the Polish case reveals a more nuanced story. Between 1960 and 1965, Jaruzelski headed the Main Political Directorate of the LWP. Careful reading of his curriculum vitae suggests his meteoric rise through the army ranks had much to do with his political connections and close cooperation with Soviet military intelligence. The Directorate was in charge of all political officers, constituting an internal political structure within the armed forces. So, the rule of the WRON was a three-layer edifice where the civilian administration of the country was run by the military, which was itself ruled by the internal party network.

Being part of the communist power elite allowed its officers a significantly higher standard of living than was accorded most other professions. During Martial Law they had the added privilege of being allowed to order around not just their troops, but everybody else in the country. Ordinary Polish soldiers, mostly conscripts, had none of these perks, yet they had to share the opprobrium of a society deprived by the military of all civil rights. Contemporary underground cartoons and popular jokes suggest that society at large distinguished between the country's armed forces and its politicized commanding officers. This probably explains the highly ambivalent attitude Poles had towards the military at the onset of democratic transformation. "We regard Martial Law very negatively—points out former deputy Defence Minister—yet everybody will say 'but the Army has proved its organizational capacity'. So, high marks for professionalism and low for politics" (Karkoszka 2015). Ordinary Poles were even more affected: arbitrary arrests, mass detentions, and the suspension of all civil liberties negated in their eyes any vestiges of the legitimacy of communist rule.

Forty-four years of that rule left the Polish armed forces under the command and control of a foreign state, the Soviet Union, subordinate to its military requirements, and dependent on it for materiel as well as maintenance and upgrading. Polish officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel were required to attend a Soviet military academy. This instilled in the armed forces a culture of unquestioning

obedience to superiors and a total lack of individual initiative and responsibility. Their relationship with the world outside the military was based on giving orders and the expectation that these would be obeyed uncritically. While the communist party provided strict political guidance to the armed forces, all aspects of defense and military policy were in the hands of serving personnel and there were no civilian experts who could provide an assessment of the forces' effectiveness.

Separate civilian and military realms, including parallel educational systems and a culture of secrecy surrounding the activities of the armed forces, prevented the development of a civilian expert base. Any documents pertaining to the strategy of the LWP were strictly off-limits to civilians. The communist authorities did not reveal the details of military spending, and those figures that were made public, like the percentage of GDP spent on the armed forces, were suspect. In an economy ruled by central planning and not market forces, there were no tools available to evaluate them.

2.3 Civilian Control of the Armed Forces: A Work in Progress

The communist regime in Poland officially ended on June 4, 1989, when Poles were allowed for the first time in over half a century to vote in partially free elections. However, this was preceded by several months of negotiations between the representatives of the authorities and the "Solidarity". At the proverbial round table, the grand bargain for the peaceful transition to democracy was struck. The chief negotiator on the communist side and the initiator of the whole process was Gen. Kiszczak, head of military intelligence and Gen. Jaruzelski's right-hand man. During those negotiations the military secured substantial informal immunities and privileges. None of the architects of Martial Law, nor any perpetrators of serious human rights abuses among the higher echelons of the military, were ever imprisoned. The few who were successfully prosecuted, were customarily given very light sentences that were later suspended. The military also secured important material benefits, such as well-paid jobs in state-owned enterprises in the armaments sector or reserved areas of economic activity, for example in the energy industry. The round table agreements left in place extraconstitutional bodies that were holdovers from the Martial Law regime, such as the Committee for the Defense of the Country (Komitet Obrony Kraju—KOK) and the National Security Bureau (Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego—BBN). The latter is still in existence, persistently usurping the right to participate in the formulation of key strategic documents of the state.

Despite appearances, there was no clear break between the totalitarian, communist regime and the new democratic one. Gen. Jaruzelski, the last president of the Polish People's Republic, became the first president of the new Republic of Poland (Rzeczpospolita Polska—RP), soon dubbed the Third Republic. Gen. Siwicki, who

served as minister of defense throughout Martial Law, held on to his job under the new “Solidarity” Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, while Gen. Kiszczak, a retiree, like the other two generals, became Mazowiecki’s deputy and minister of internal affairs. His job included oversight of the police, secret services, and state administration.

Jaruzelski’s tenure lasted exactly a year, being supplanted in December 1990 by “Solidarity” leader Lech Walesa, who won the first free presidential elections. Walesa’s presidency ushered in a particularly tumultuous period for CMR in Poland: firstly, it coincided with a severe economic crisis, including hyperinflation and its intended cure, “shock therapy” reforms that involved the creation of a free market, the introduction of a transferable currency, as well as the closure of numerous unprofitable state-owned enterprises. The reforms resulted in massive unemployment and a drastic fall in living standards. Severely depleted state coffers necessitated a series of cuts in the number of troops and the equipment available to them. In 1997, the Armed Forces stood at 241,000 in service, having numbered 412,000 in 1989 (Garztecki 1997).

In parallel with economic reform, Poland underwent thorough political changes, such as the creation of all previously missing institutions of parliamentary democracy, including a civilian-led defense ministry and the construction of new legal foundations for the state, constitutional amendments, and a large number of new laws and documents concerning defense policy and strategic issues. In addition to those domestic shapers, there were several external drivers at work. Probably the most momentous was the final dissolution in July 1991 of the Warsaw Pact, of which Poland was a member. This was followed in quick succession by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, and the splitting of Czechoslovakia on January 1, 1993. Those historical shifts in Poland’s neighborhood, preceded by the reunification of Germany in October 1990, fundamentally altered its geopolitical and military-strategic position. “The wall, the iron curtain were gone, but we found ourselves in a grey zone”—recollects Poland’s first civilian deputy defense minister, Janusz Onyszkiewicz (2015) adding—“it was a rather uncomfortable situation”. It took Polish military planners a while to adjust to the new realities. The very first post-transition document outlining security policy, the “Defense Doctrine of the Republic of Poland”, published in February 1990, was still based on the assumption that were an armed conflict to develop in Europe, its armed forces would remain within the structure of the Warsaw Pact, but Poland would retain sovereignty over their use. It took almost 2 years to develop the first truly independent concept of national defense. This was outlined in two inter-linked documents published in November 1992: “Principles of Polish Security Policy” and “The Security Policy and the Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland”. Eight years were to pass before the next key defense policy documents appeared. In the meantime, Poland’s geostrategic position was irrevocably altered.

The informal agreements that led to the formation of the first post-transition government were a balancing act, encapsulated in the slogan “Your (that is, communist) president, Our (meaning “Solidarity”) prime minister”. They included a provision for three governmental departments—defense, foreign, and internal

affairs—to be designed as “presidential”, giving the head of state a say in appointing ministers as well as in the general direction of their policies. Those provisions, tailor-made for Jaruzelski, were appropriated by Walesa and were never completely relinquished by their successors. They also gave vast informal powers, mainly of patronage, to Walesa’s advisers, Mieczysław Wachowski and Lech Falandysz, and the head of the BBN—Jerzy Milewski. With Jaruzelski stepping down, generals Kiszczak and Siwicki also left the government, with Siwicki’s post taken over by rear admiral Piotr Kolodziejczyk. Kolodziejczyk not only appointed two civilian deputies, Janusz Onyszkiewicz and Bronisław Komorowski, but also took some tentative steps towards opening up the MON to civilian employees. The Main Political Directorate and communist party structures in the forces were disbanded and the LWP was renamed the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (*Sily Zbrojne Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*—SZRP). All this went against MON tradition, where by custom the only civilians were the secretaries and cleaning staff. The General Staff (*Sztab Generalny*—SG), the highest command of the forces and now part of the ministry, was particularly resistant, since as its chief and hitherto the minister’s first deputy, he found himself third in the ministerial pecking order, below two civilians.

Though transitional constitutional arrangements vested most executive powers with the prime minister, President Walesa (aided by his legal adviser Falandysz) started a campaign to substantially increase various presidential prerogatives, especially in defense and military matters. To do so, he used his titular position of the head of the armed forces to develop personal relations with a number of generals. Following the first fully-free general elections in October 1991, a new government was formed with Jan Olszewski as Prime Minister. For the first time in modern Poland, a civilian, Jan Parys, was assigned the defense portfolio. It was apparently agreed with Walesa that after passing his position to Parys, Admiral Kolodziejczyk would be nominated as Inspector General of the armed forces. Instead, he was retired from active service, becoming ineligible for the post. The concept of the Inspector General, patterned after a similar post in the Bundeswehr, but never properly developed, was dropped altogether. Walesa was furious. To undermine Parys he relied on the young, ambitious head of the southern military district, Gen. Tadeusz Wilecki. His actions prompted Parys to claim publicly that Walesa was trying to subvert the constitutional order by offering to make Wilecki the chief of the general staff in exchange for his support for a direct subordination of the armed forces to the president. An extraordinary parliamentary committee of enquiry summoned Wilecki, Wachowski, and Milewski, in which all denied that a meeting where such arrangements were supposed to have been discussed ever took place. Parliament recommended the removal of Parys, and on May 23, 1992, he duly resigned. Three months later, Walesa named Wilecki as the new chief of the general staff.

In the meantime, the publication of a list of alleged communist secret police agents (naming prominent “Solidarity” figures, Walesa among them), triggered a parliamentary vote of no confidence, ending in the fall of Olszewski’s cabinet on June 5.

The constant tension between the office of the President and that of the Prime Minister was skillfully exploited by the generals. Their redoubt was the SG, so the main front of the battle was over the degree of its integration within the civilian structure of the MON (Michta 1997; Latawski 2006). As Simon (2004) noted: “[t]he manner in which the General Staff had played off the president and prime minister/defense minister effectively brought the military independence not found anywhere else in Central Europe”.

On October 17, the Polish parliament adopted a law substantially amending the Constitution of 1952. The act, dubbed “The Small Constitution”, regulated anew the relationship between the state executive and legislative powers and abrogated all the provisions that were meant to perpetuate communist rule. The parliamentarians, mindful of Walesa’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies, also enshrined in law the provision stipulating that every presidential act has to be countersigned by the Prime Minister or a minister responsible for its implementation. A succession of unstable coalition governments, formed by a plethora of parties spawned by the “Solidarity” electoral committee, finally led to early parliamentary elections in September 1993. They returned to power two re-branded, formerly communist parties that benefitted from splits and quarrels in the “Solidarity” camp. It also marked the return of now-cashiered Kolodziejczyk as “civilian” defense minister. The post-communists’ co-habitation with Walesa turned out to be as fractious as it was the case with previous “Solidarity” governments. Kolodziejczyk intended to fully integrate the SG into the MON as one of its main departments. This would have made the armed forces command accountable principally to him and the Prime Minister. To scupper his plans, Walesa again used Gen. Wilecki. During military exercises at Drawsko shooting range, Kolodziejczyk was invited to the canteen for a meal attended by Walesa and a group of selected generals. In the course of the event, the attendees were asked by Wachowski and Wilecki to express their views on the minister’s competence. All but two answers were negative. Shortly afterwards, Kolodziejczyk was sacked by Walesa, replaced by Milewski as acting minister.

The unfolding events were also monitored by the parliamentary committee on national defense, which since 1992 had held regular hearings. Out of such discussions grew the Euro-Atlantic Association (Stowarzyszenie Euro-Atlantyckie—SEA), established formally in March 1994 by a group of 33 “Solidarity” intellectuals. In its Founding Declaration, the Association put forward proposals for “a wide citizens’ forum to reflect on security matters of the state” for Poland to consider joining European and Euro-Atlantic institutions (Wikipedia [Undated](#)).

The November 1995 presidential elections were won by former communist minister Aleksander Kwasniewski. Rebranded as the “Social-democracy of the Republic of Poland” (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej—SdRP), communists again held all the levers of power. This arrangement not only eliminated, albeit temporarily, the rivalry between the government and the presidency over primacy in matters of national security, but also greatly reduced the tensions between the military and civilian elites. Kwaśniewski and his closest associates, such as Marek Siwiec, the new head of the BBN, and Ryszard Kalisz, the head of the presidential

chancellery, shared with the generals a common political background and *Weltanschauung*, all being former communist activists and members of the pre-transition power elite. After initial misgivings, the post-communists also embraced the idea of NATO and EU membership, realizing it would gain them credibility in the West. For Kwasniewski and his SdRP colleagues, the most important thing by far was the adoption of a new constitution, enshrining in law parliamentary democracy and the free market. While the quarrelsome coalitions of “Solidarity” parties had been unable to accomplish its drafting in 6 years, SdRP politicians completed it in less than a year. The new Constitution, however, left in place the hybrid semi-presidential system that had evolved during the early post-transition years. While the splitting of executive responsibilities in foreign affairs and national security between the presidency and the government is acceptable if the same party holds both positions, in the area of CMR it is a recipe for conflict when, as often happens in Poland, different parties must co-habit.

This soon came to light when the general elections of September 1997 returned the “Solidarity” bloc to power. Although it had to co-habit with a post-communist president, its solid majority ensured that the new government headed by Jerzy Buzek lasted, for the first time since transition, its full four-year term. This allowed it to continue the reform of the SZRP, a process that had proceeded in fits and starts since 1990. The forces were already shrinking rapidly, initially as a result of ceilings imposed by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

A sizeable proportion of the armed forces was in fact assigned purely administrative duties. All large military bases were located in western Poland, near the German border, a holdover from the days when the LWP was primed for an attack against NATO forces. With Russia now becoming the main threat to Poland’s security, there was a need to relocate those bases towards the eastern border of the country. It was also necessary to re-balance the ratio of lower to higher ranks in the officer corps, which initially formed an inverted pyramid with NCOs at 23%, junior officers at 31%, and 46% colonels and generals. In the process, those generals who had challenged the former defense minister during the “Drawsko dinner” (including Wilecki) were quietly, one by one, retired. Interviews revealed that it was the process of preparation for NATO membership that allowed, for the first time, the extension of meaningful democratic civilian control over the SZRP. Janusz Onyszkiewicz (2015) points out:

It was about the introduction of the real civilian control over the armed forces as well as about their modernization. There was a general understanding, also in the military, that joining NATO was absolutely our primary strategic goal, so we had to take various actions and introduce changes, which were resisted. The argument ‘our membership of NATO requires it’ would eliminate all the resistance.

Representatives of the Polish military, such as Gen. Henryk Tacik (2015), support the civilian view:

Membership of NATO first and foremost forced Poland into a fundamental reform of the armed forces, starting with the acceptance of civilian authority as the essential Alliance requirement, ending up with their internal restructuring and the abandoning of the Warsaw Pact doctrine.

The influence of Alliance membership was noticeable in the new general “Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland”, adopted by the cabinet in January 2000 and the more technical “Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland” that arose from it. They were the first Polish policy documents based on the assumption that were the country to be attacked, it could count on the armed support of its Western allies. These developments did not stop the old guard generals from trying to reassert their decision-making autonomy, as the so-called “Szeremietiew affair” attests to. Szeremietiew, a deputy defense minister, was suspended in July 2001 along with his assistant Zbigniew Farmus, following allegations of Szeremietiew’s complicity in Farmus’ supposed taking of bribes from defense contractors. It did not matter that by November 8, 2010, Szeremietiew was cleared of all charges and the most serious accusation against Farmus which stuck was that of “being in possession of classified documents”. After a nine-and-a-half-year military tribunal, both men’s careers seemed to be over.

Kolodziejczyk and his successors intended to reduce the SG role to that of a military planning body, while successive presidents wanted to retain its pre-transformation role as a supreme command of the forces, directly answerable to them. To that end they expanded the role of the BBN, hitherto a monitoring and advisory bureau situated within the President’s chancellery, to become an alternative policymaking body. All this had one highly undesirable effect: the politicization of the Polish officer corps. Ambitious officers would signal political sympathies to further their promotion prospects. As this was obviously in breach of the constitution that stipulates strict political neutrality of the armed forces, they did it surreptitiously, particularly if they were expecting a political change in the coming elections. The presidential term of Lech Kaczynski was noticeable for it. Lech Kaczynski and his twin brother, Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, were hoping to “cleanse” the SZRP of what they saw as its illegitimate origins. As late as 2005, the year of Kaczynski’s presidential ascendancy, the vast majority of Polish generals were alumni of Soviet military schools. This led to new fissures in Polish CMR, not necessarily between the military and civilians, but rather between certain politicians and the officers aligned with them on the one hand, and competing civil-military groupings on the other. A split developed even within Jaroslaw Kaczynski’s government, pitting Defense Minister Radoslaw Sikorski against his deputy Antoni Maciarewicz. The latter, known for his role in the anti-communist resistance, prevailed and instigated a wholesale purge of the military intelligence (*Wojskowe Sluzby Informacyjne*—WSI) of Soviet-trained officers.

The generals were also unhappy with the level of technical and financial support they were receiving from politicians, just as Poland’s international military commitments were growing rapidly. The last well-publicized incident of this kind happened in the summer of 2009, when the commander of the Polish contingent in Afghanistan, Gen. Waldemar Skrzypczak, publicly upbraided then-Minister of Defense Bogdan Klich for neglecting the needs of the armed forces. Interviewed 6 years later, Skrzypczak (2015) explained his view of CMR quite clearly.

In my view, at the very beginning of those changes somebody gave it a wrong name: control. This word, control, is probably from the soviet era. The Army needs a political backing, supervision as well, no doubt. Military commanders have to be loyal to those politicians that rule this country, no two words about it. Control is not an appropriate word. I would call it political direction of the army, not control. As far as I am concerned it is a misunderstanding. What is this control, what should it entail of? Snooping on what the military does? [...] I cannot imagine that the military has to be controlled, because soldiers are completely loyal and they have no need to be controlled.

The crash of the presidential plane in Smolensk on April 10, 2010, in addition to killing the Polish Head of State, his wife, and a number of officials and parliamentarians, also wiped out the whole command of the armed forces, including the chief of the SG and heads of all service branches—some nine generals and an admiral in total. It was a graphic illustration of Kaczynski's close relationship to the military top brass. His successor, Bronisław Komorowski, also had links with the military, but of a different kind. Of all Polish politicians, he had probably the most experience in military matters: serving as a civilian deputy defense minister in three early "Solidarity" administrations, chairing for 3 years the parliamentary defense committee, and holding the defense portfolio between 2000 and 2001. He was also the most successful among presidents of the Third Republic in courting the support of the military, as an unstinting promoter of substantial increases in the defense budget. In November 2010, President Komorowski appointed a Committee for Strategic Review of National Security. It was a huge effort, involving over 160 civilian and military experts debating for almost 2 years. Gen. Stanisław Koziej, then head of the BBN and a close friend of the president, was responsible for coordinating the effort. His colleagues, often of higher rank, such as Gen. Prof. Bolesław Balcerowicz, would complain (2015) that he had a habit of substituting parts agreed by the committee with his own musings. The events unfolding in Ukraine forced a substantial update of the National Security Strategy, this time under the guidance of the MON, which should have been tasked with doing the "Review" in the first place.

On May 24, 2015, a young, untested politician representing the opposition Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS) unexpectedly won the presidential elections in what was widely seen as a protest vote against the corruption and mismanagement by the party in power. Five months later this result was repeated in the general elections. This time PiS managed to win an absolute parliamentary majority, becoming the first party in the history of the Third Republic to govern alone. Even before the names of the new ministers were announced, members of the "old guard" entrenched in the MON were making preparations to "make life hell" for the new boss were PiS to nominate Antoni Maciářewicz for the post. A few weeks later Maciářewicz became the new Polish Defense Minister.

In the period discussed above, the promise of NATO membership was key to establishing some form of democratic civilian control over the SZRP. Bilateral military contacts between the Polish and American armed forces reinforced this. Interestingly, there is no evidence that the long-term cooperation between the

Danish, German, and Polish troops in the Multinational Corps Northeast has exerted a similar influence.

The results of our study also suggest that treating civilian and military elites as two aggregated agents, who in their interaction and behavior in relation to each other define civil-military relations in Poland, is clearly inadequate. Both groups display several cleavages, but in both cases, there is one that dominates the others. The civilian elites cluster around the presidency on the one hand, and the prime minister and the defense minister on the other. Regarding the military, the distinction is more subtle, because it is primarily one of spiritual heritage and the behavioral norms stemming from it. One distinctive group is associated with The Generals' Club, an association of retired, some of them quite recently, Polish generals. They all are alumni of Soviet military academies, harbor nostalgia about the PRL, and treat civilians with barely disguised contempt (Puchala [Undated](#)). The second group, consisting mainly of generals who either served in NATO structures or/and studied in Western military schools, is more diffuse, mainly because most of them, after returning to active service in Poland, were denied promotion and have left the service or were cashiered. To have a true picture of CMR in Poland, all those four groups have to be considered in their various interactions.

There is no disagreement between these groups regarding the importance of Poland's NATO membership. Every person interviewed agreed that it was the single most important factor that set in motion the reform of the SZRP, though the military men saw membership benefits in terms of military-strategic gains while the civilians invariably stressed the establishment of civilian control over the forces and their professionalization. So if we consider all the successful and failed security sector reforms undertaken in quarter of a century in Poland, the internal politics emerge as their primary domestic shaper, and NATO membership as the primary external driver.

Despite numerous political upheavals in the period under discussion, the institutional framework of civil-military relations in Poland was remarkably constant. It was defined by the dual subordination of the armed forces to the office of the president and the cabinet through the minister of defense very early in the transition process and was maintained throughout the period. It allowed the military to play those two centers of power against each other, leaving it largely free of civilian scrutiny.

2.4 Civilian Oversight and the Effectiveness of the Armed Forces

Poland's geostrategic location—bordering nuclear as well as conventional military power Russia—makes assessment of its armed forces' effectiveness a matter of interpretation. There is little doubt that the SZRP would not be able to defend the

nation against Russian invasion on their own, so, a fundamental aspect of defense strategy must be the ability to form or belong to a military alliance that offers credible deterrence.

As Florina Cristiana Matei points out, in the security sector, “[g]enerally [...] effectiveness is very difficult to measure” (2015). She suggests that for security forces to be deemed effective, they must fulfil three basic requirements: (1) their activities must have a doctrinal base in form of a strategic document; (2) such documents should be formulated or approved and acted upon by the state authorities; (3) those authorities have to commit sufficient resources for their implementation.

In Poland, as we have already established, the first two requirements appear to have been met. Starting with the “Defense Doctrine of the Republic of Poland” of February 1990, up to the “White Book” and the “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland” of 2014, there have been four more such strategic documents, published in November 1992, January 2000, September 2003, and November 2007. They were produced by the Foreign Ministry, the MON, or BBN, all definitely civilian institutions. As the geopolitical environment evolved, so did the assumptions on which those documents were based. While the “Doctrine” of 1990 took into consideration Poland’s former membership of the Warsaw Pact and “The Security Policy and the Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland” of November 1992 assumed the country’s neutrality, all subsequent documents were based on its membership of NATO. Those documents were often accompanied by executive and implementing acts. The first comprehensive plan of modernization of the SZPR, the so-called “Fifteen-year plan”, was produced in 1996. Two years later it was superseded by another plan and yet another in 2001. These, as well as their two successor plans, were prepared by the SG, and all were totally divorced from the realities of a country in deep economic recession. There also appeared to be a significant disjunction between strategies and modernization plans. Needless to say, procurement requests, made by the armed forces, were based on the latter. So while the main strategic documents bore the imprint of civilian institutions, those that were acted upon came from the military. There were also deeper problems. “As far as I remember”, recalls Prof. Antoni Kaminski (2015), one of Poland’s foremost strategic thinkers, “even in the ‘civilian’ departments of the MON the military constituted an absolute majority of personnel, some of them were retirees but the rest just swapped uniforms for suits temporarily”. Agnieszka Gogolewska (2015), one of two Polish female analysts ever to work in the MON, puts at least part of the blame on civilians themselves:

All those politicians, ministers, their deputies, didn’t believe in their own ability to assess the situation. They didn’t trust their civilian advisers [...] This was a complete negation of the idea of civilian control. So the military exerted an enormous influence, but this was accepted as long as it was hidden from outsiders.

Professor Kaminski (2016), who briefly headed the MON Department of Strategic Studies as well as chairing the Polish branch of Transparency International, believes little has changed since:

The civilian component [in the MON] is still residual, the ministry is dominated by officers in suits. This is a serious problem in the inter-institutional areas: between politics and the administration, between politics and the armed forces, between administration and the armed forces as well as between politics and administration and the procurement industry. Because all those areas are poorly institutionalized it creates transparency problems for the authorities.

All procurement plans and all other budgetary items concerning the military as well as “matters regarding the defense of the country and the activities of the armed forces in particular” (Sejm 2015), should have been discussed and approved by the National Defense Committee of Sejm (Poland’s parliament). “In recent years the importance of the Committee was completely degraded”, complains Ludwik Dorn (2015), committee member and the former deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs, “at the time it was considered one of the most important bodies in the Polish parliament and dubbed ‘the committee of three secretaries’ because in its presidium sat general secretaries of the three largest parties. Those that are in it now represent the third echelon and the chairmanship of Niesiolowski is a nail in the coffin”.

This is the view that Stefan Niesiolowski (2015), understandably, disagrees with: “Sejm votes with the government and all important decisions are consulted with our committee. Except for the details of procurement, because they contain classified elements, such as prices, all decisions are consulted with our committee. You can’t have more control. There is no danger, I don’t even know against what it could be. This civilian control, what is it? Presumably this is in order to control the armed forces, but what for? So it wouldn’t be able to execute a coup, take the reins of power? I believe the whole concept of civilian control of the army is somewhat insulting, most of all to the army”.

The main problem plaguing both MON and the parliamentary committee is a lack of civilian specialists in military affairs. Familiarization courses organized for parliamentarians by the Academy of National Defense have been criticized as offering a level of knowledge so low as to be considered a waste of time, a charge also levelled at the military by Gogolewska. She remembers her time at MON as a constant struggle to gain access to documents necessary for her work. The military regularly obstructs civilian researchers from gaining knowledge of its workings. For example, our request to see the 2007 “National Security Review” was refused, despite possessing both national and NATO security clearances.

Probably the most important change the SZRP underwent during Komorowski’s presidency was the indefinite suspension of call-ups and the adoption of all-professional armed forces in 2009. While it followed similar reforms in several countries of the “old” NATO, it was also forced by the experience of taking part in military expeditions. Participation in UNPROFOR and UNCRO missions in former Yugoslavia (1992–1995), alongside NATO forces, exposed how far behind the SZRP was in Western standards of equipment, logistics, training, and morale. There were accusations of incompetence, inability to perform tasks without being given detailed orders by the commanding officers—a clear legacy of the soviet-type

military training—and outright corruption (Was 2015). The knowledge of English, even among higher ranks, was very rare.

Apparently there was a noticeable improvement in the performance of Polish expeditionary forces in Iraq 8 years later, when the largely conscript troops that served in former Yugoslavia were replaced by professional soldiers. But even there, the lack of proper training adequate to the tasks assigned, and shortages of appropriate equipment, were glaring. The inability of the SG to assess local conditions before sending troops to action were nothing short of scandalous. As a result, troops were sent to Iraq wearing uniforms made for North-European fall conditions (Praczyk 2006).

At the same time, at home, the military personnel shrank further, from 130,231 servicemen registered on January 1, 2008 to 97,414 by April 30, 2011, amounting to a cut of 25%. By the end of this period, there were 20,943 officers, 38,619 NCOs, and 38,161 privates (including 2312 registered candidates), that is 21%, 40%, and 39% respectively (NIK 2012). The MON and its head, Minister Klich, were of the opinion that in the coming years, the SZRP would mainly be used for expeditionary engagements, therefore their downsizing and professionalization had to be urgently enacted. The majority of the top brass we interviewed believes that this was done for political rather than purely military reasons, without any provisions made for training of the reserves. What's more, according to the figures quoted above, these include a large number of "soldiers in suits": "Some 20% of the Armed Forces were stationed in Warsaw, this is revolting", says Gen. Marek Ojrzanowski (2015), adding that the "soldiers' job is to fight, so what do we need all those bureaucratic structures and staffs for?". Gen. Skrzypczak (2015) concurs: "The army was shrinking while the staffs were growing. We had 18 thousand office workers in uniform and in suits in Warsaw alone for a 100 thousand strong army. That's a lot, isn't it?". In any case, rapid deterioration of the country's strategic environment following the Russian incursion into Ukraine has forced Polish politicians to appreciate the need for more robust territorial defense. President Komorowski and Gen. Koziej suddenly started to insist very publicly that the 2% of GDP mandated by the Constitution for the armed forces should be treated as the minimum and not the upper ceiling, as was the case in previous years. Some cynics suggested that this was to aid Komorowski's re-election campaign.

There is, however, enough circumstantial evidence to assess the level of resources available for the assigned roles and missions to the Polish armed forces. Though the SZRP went through drastic financial and materiel cuts, like all the armies of former Warsaw Pact members, they were never in the same order of magnitude. Admittedly, for years, the military budget did not reach the constitutionally mandated 2% of GDP, but it was not that far off. As the perception of a Russian threat substantially increased after the annexation of the Crimea, the funds allocated for the SZPR in the 2017 budget rose above 2%, a rare occurrence in NATO countries. It is expected that the trend will continue in the following year with an ambitious program of materiel acquisition. Moreover, it is expected that those decisions will substantially help the Polish military to fulfil its defense mission (Miziolek and Staniszewski 2015).

2.5 Summary

In over a quarter of a century since the beginning of systemic transformation to a parliamentary democracy, Poland has established all institutions considered as a foundation of civilian control of the armed forces. Though the transformation started with a general as Poland's president, the country has had only civilian heads of state since 1990. The sole attempt to reverse the trend, Gen. Wilecki's candidacy in the 2000 presidential elections, ended in embarrassing failure. Supported by the right-wing national-democratic party, Wilecki came in tenth of the 11 listed candidates, receiving 0.16% of the votes. Since November 1994, all Polish ministers of defense have been civilians. All strategic documents pertaining to national defense and security have to be, by law, prepared by a trio of civilian-led ministries: defense, foreign affairs, and internal affairs. Also by law, all military expenditure and procurement plans are to be scrutinized and accepted by two parliamentary committees, that of the Sejm (the lower house) and of the Senate. In fact, as early as 2004, a foremost Western expert stated that "[d]efense reforms since 1996–1997 have demonstrated that Polish leaders have understood what needed to be done in order to acquire democratic control of the military and they have met with great success" (Simon 2004).

Yet, 12 years later, several people interviewed by us voice strong doubts about the effectiveness of this control. The question of why there is such a divergence of views speaks to the very nature of the transformation that Poland, and indeed all other post-communist countries, went through. As this volume proposes, civilian control requires that pertinent decisions taken by civilians are unconstrained not only by *formal prerogatives* accorded to the military but also its *informal contestation*. We have seen that such a vigorous contestation by the Polish military goes indeed beyond the façade of democratic civilian institutions. It mainly takes the form of obstructing possibilities for civilians to acquire specialist knowledge about military matters, making civilian politicians totally dependent on military expertise. So although the MON has had a civilian minister for over 20 years, the minister has always had one or two generals as deputies. The "National Strategic Security Review" of December 2012 was coordinated by the BBN under Gen. Koziej who, as previously mentioned, even rewrote parts of it himself, despite such reviews being the prerogative of the MON, which is in any case still overwhelmingly staffed by military men.

Military culture remains the most neglected aspect of CMR studies in Poland, for it clearly differentiates interest groups in the military. Resource constraints turn out to be more elastic than generally thought, because when the perception of threats substantially increases, the state is able to mobilize vast additional financial resources with the agreement of all stakeholders.

The primary lesson that can be drawn from the experience of Polish defense and military policy reform is the need to secure an adequate pool of highly qualified civilian experts in all military matters. Without them reform is meaningless, since civilian politicians will otherwise always be dependent on the military to provide

necessary information. The second important lesson is that the most contentious aspects of such a reform should be enacted at its very start, while the internal pressure for change is strongest and outside scrutiny at its most intense. Once the foreign gaze is off and the civilian politicians get on with pressing economic problems, the military is strongly tempted to create informal areas of influence, under the radar of public scrutiny, such as the Generals' Club in Poland. Paraphrasing Linz and Stepan (1996), we may say that the Polish military has accepted civilian control constitutionally and behaviorally, but its attitudinal acceptance is still incomplete.

There are many aspects of Polish CMR that merit further study. Our research shows that cultural factors alone can explain important dynamics in civil-military relations. Those dynamics are not unidirectional, and in certain conditions they may be prone to reversals. It seems to depend on what model of emulation of established "Western" institutions and practices of CMR the democratizing country adopts. This is underscored by Agnieszka Gogolewska's (2015) observation:

When we were joining NATO we were sold, to make things simpler and faster, an idea of civilian democratic control over the military. It was sold to us as a certain simplified catalogue of rules that have to be introduced and obeyed sufficiently to have civilian control.

To use terms suggested by Jacoby (2004), Poland has accepted "templates" of CMR, which indicates that, although their adoption was voluntary, it was only approximate. So for the time being, the Polish armed forces have only manqué institutions of civilian oversight, an institutional skeleton still waiting to be filled with the concrete of internalized behavioral norms.

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