



Ministerstwo
Obrony Narodowej

2 5 Y E A R S O F P O L A N D I N N A T O

POLSKA ZBROJNA

MARCH 12, 2024

SPECIAL ISSUE

**MARCH 12,
1999**

Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek signed **the documents of Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty** at the Harry Truman Presidential Library in Independence, the United States.



U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES EUROPE



**Władysław
Kosiniak-Kamysz**

POLISH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
POLISH MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

When on March 12, 1999 Poland became a full member of the North Atlantic Alliance, no one doubted that it was one of the most important moments in its modern history. It was also clear to everyone that joining the pact was possible, as we all agreed that Poland's place was among democratic states. Also today, nobody has any doubt about the choice we made at the time. Moreover, in the face of the war taking place so close to our homeland's borders, now we are even more convinced our choice was right.

Poland's NATO membership was the culmination of many years of efforts to strengthen our country's security. Raising the Polish flag in front of NATO headquarters in Brussels 25 years

ago was a sign for Polish people that their homeland, after decades of communist dictatorship and dependence on a neighboring superpower, regained full sovereignty and had the indisputable right to decide about its own future. Poland, next to Hungary and the Czech Republic, was the first former Eastern Bloc country to join the Alliance. Our example was followed by other countries in the region.

Over the past 25 years, Poland has been an active participant in the activities of the North Atlantic Alliance. Our soldiers have taken and continue to take part in peace, stabilization and training missions in many places in the world. Our country has also become an important

partner in building security in Central and Eastern Europe. With the Alliance, Poland feels safer and more secure, and with the engagement of Poland, the Alliance itself is stronger and more determined than ever to defend its values.

The year 2024 marks not only 25 years of Polish membership in NATO, it is also an important moment for the entire Alliance. On April 4 falls the 75th anniversary of its founding. The first words of the Washington Treaty, concluded at that time and constituting a fundament of NATO's functioning, are worth quoting here. They say that all the parties to the treaty "are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."

Poland's membership in NATO not only guarantees our military security, which is crucial in the face of an ongoing war near our borders, but it is also participation in a strong community of values. Along with thirty other

countries, we are building a world that is more transparent, safer and free.

On July 24, 1920, Wincenty Witos, taking office as Polish Prime Minister for the first time, said in his statement on the program for his government: "Our people are capable of effective defense and resistance against their enemies as long as there is a strong will and unity of all the forces." Those words were spoken in the face of the Soviet army invading from the East, several weeks before the Battle of Warsaw. Today, over a century later, they still seem relevant: with a strong will, allied support and collective defense, Poland can resist any threat, and can also feel more secure and safe.

We are witnessing an unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against sovereign Ukraine bravely fighting for the freedom and safety of its citizens. For this reason, our moral obligation is to support Ukraine, a country aspiring to join the Alliance and defending its independence. One should remember that the security of our allies is also the security of ourselves. ■

April 4. Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Iceland, Canada, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, the United States of America, Great Britain and Italy signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C.

August 24. The Treaty entered into force. It became the basis for the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance headquartered in Paris.

January 6. The North Atlantic Council (NAC) approved the Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area, the first strategic concept of the Alliance.

August 25. The forces of the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea entered the Republic of Korea, which was supported by the United States and the United Nations.

September 26. At a New York meeting NAC approved the formation of integrated armed forces under centralized command. At the same time, a strategic concept of the so-called forward defense was adopted. It assumed shifting combat operations onto the territory of the Eastern Bloc states in the event of war. The United States proposed to remilitarize Germany and make it a member of the Alliance.

December 19. NAC requested the nomination of General Dwight D. Eisenhower as the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).



April 2. General Dwight D. Eisenhower signed an order activating NATO Allied Command Europe (ACE) and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Rocquencourt near Paris.

1950

1951

DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY

In 2024, NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary, and Poland - 25 years of membership in the Alliance

1967

1968

1973

1974

1979

March 31. SHAPE began operating from its new headquarters in Casteau near Mons in Belgium.

October 16. NATO Headquarters was opened in Brussels.

December 12. NATO Defense Planning Committee adopted a flexible response military strategy, which remained in force until the 1990s.

August 20–21. The invasion by the forces of the five Warsaw Treaty members on Czechoslovakia started. Its goal was to abolish the country's reformist authorities.

July 8. During the NATO summit in Madrid, the member states decided to invite Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to NATO.

October 30. In Vienna, official talks started between NATO and the Warsaw Pact on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe.

June 26. The leaders of NATO governments and states signed a Declaration on Atlantic Relations, with a key postulate to restrict the dominance of the USA. The document was approved and published by the North Atlantic Council in Ministerial Session on June 19 in Ottawa, the capital of Canada. Hence, it is called the Ottawa Declaration.

December 12. The NATO states agreed to deploy in Europe US Pershing II intermediate-range ballistic missiles and BGM-109G Gryphon maneuvering missiles with nuclear warheads. The decision was a counter-reaction to the deployment of the RSD-10 Pioneer intermediate-range ballistic missiles by the Soviet Union. At the same time, NATO proposed to Moscow immediate negotiations for a complete ban on the deployment of such weapons in Europe.



1994

1997

1999

POLAND FORMALLY BECAME A MEMBER OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

January 10. During the NATO summit in Brussels it was decided that the Alliance would be open for the membership of Central and Eastern European countries. The launch of the Partnership for Peace was also declared. The goal of this program was to establish military and political cooperation with the states aspiring to join NATO. Partnership for Peace opened the possibility for partner countries to conduct joint military exercises with Allied states and to cooperate during humanitarian and peace missions.

September 12–16. Within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, the first joint military exercise, Cooperative Bridge, took place at the training ground in Biedrusko near Poznań. Military units from NATO member and partner states, including Poland, participated in the training.



February 17. The Polish parliament passed an act on the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty. Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski signed the act a day later. It entered into force on February 19, 1999.

March 12. Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek, on behalf of the Polish government, handed to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright the ratification documents regarding Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty. Poland formally became a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. Four days later, the flag of Poland, as well as those of Hungary and the Czech Republic, which joined the Alliance at the same time, were ceremoniously raised in front of NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

May 12 - September 1. NATO conducted Operation Allied Harbor in Albania, providing humanitarian help to Albanian refugees from Kosovo and organizing their return home. It was the first humanitarian mission of the Alliance, and the first one in which Poland participated as a full NATO member.



May 14. Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (GDR), Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Soviet Union signed in Warsaw a treaty establishing a military alliance – the Warsaw Pact.

May 23. NATO adapted for its needs the American strategy of massive retaliation, according to which nuclear weapons were of key significance to allied defense.



August 13. East Germany authorities initiated the building of a wall to separate the western side of Berlin, formed by the occupation sectors of France, Great Britain and the USA, from the eastern side.



July 1. France officially ceased to be a part of NATO's integrated military structure.



1953



1956



1962



October 29. France and Great Britain launched a military operation, the aim of which was to regain control over the Suez Canal nationalized by Egypt. It ended in a political failure of the interveners and caused divisions within NATO.

October 15. On that day, one of the most threatening Cold War conflicts between the USA and the Soviet Union began. The Americans launched the blockade of Cuba, where the Soviets secretly deployed medium-range ballistic missiles. Earlier, the United States had located similar weapons in Great Britain, Turkey and Italy. The crisis ended on October 28 with mutual concessions.

In Poland, the communist authorities imposed martial law.



November 9–10. The Berlin Wall fell. In Central Europe, the Revolutions (also: the Fall of Communism), during which the communist governments of Bulgaria, Romania, East Germany, and Hungary collapsed.

December 20. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), newly formed by NATO, held its first sitting. The NACC was to be a forum for discussion and cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries, as well as with new independent states formed on the territory of the former Soviet Union. 16 states of the North Atlantic Alliance and the representatives of Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, participated in the sitting.

December 26. The Soviet Union was formally dissolved.

November 2. The National Defense Committee (KOK; a body dealing with defense affairs subordinate to Polish President) adopted a document on the Polish Security Policy and Security Policy and Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland. The document stated that the membership in NATO and the Western European Union (WEU) as the European pillar of NATO was to be a strategic goal of Poland in the 1990s.

1982

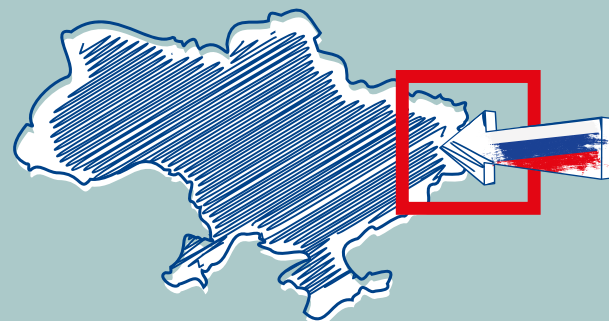
1991



December 8. The United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), in which both countries agreed to eliminate their ground-launched missiles with a 500 to 5,000-km range.

April 4. During the summit in Strasburg and Kehl, it was announced that France, after a several-year gap, was once again taking full participation in the military initiatives of the Alliance.

September 4–5. The NATO summit in Newport (Wales) was held. In connection to Russia's aggressive activity in Ukraine, it was decided that within the following ten years, NATO member states should increase their defense spending to 2% of GDP, and aim at maintaining the expenditure on essential armament at the level of 20% of their defense budget.



February 24. A full-scale Russian invasion on Ukraine started. NATO launched the plan of collective defense.

November 16. The first Polish Military Contingent started its service in Afghanistan within the frames of ISAF. The mission, initially established under the UN, was led by NATO from 2003.

April 2. Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia became full members of NATO

July 8-9. During the NATO summit in Warsaw the Alliance adopted a plan of strengthening its deterrence potential and approved a decision on establishing enhanced Forward Presence in the eastern flank states.

June 5. The Alliance, as part of its so-called policy of open doors, accepted the membership of Montenegro, another country in Southeast Europe.

March 27. After regulating the ideological conflict with Greece, North Macedonia became the 30th NATO member.

April 4.
Finland became
a full member of
the Alliance.

Sweden
in NATO.

May 1. Poland joined the European Union.

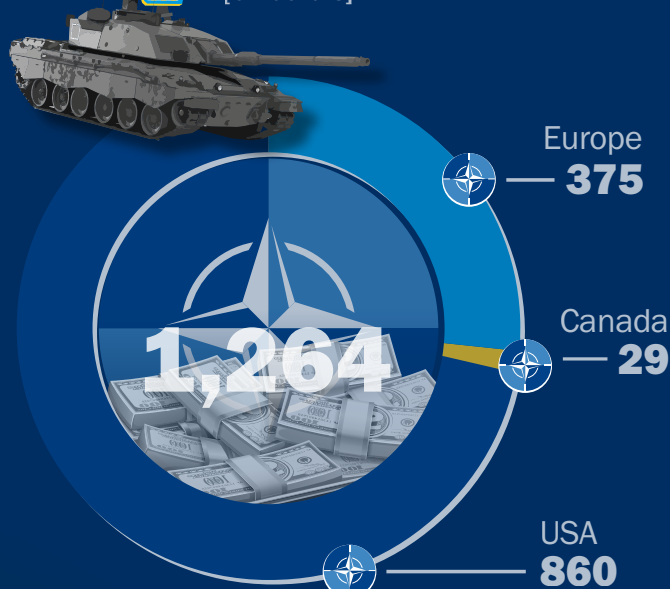


POWER OF NATO

MEANS PERFECTLY
TRAINED SOLDIERS
OF ALL MEMBER
STATES FITTED
WITH THE MOST
ADVANCED
EQUIPMENT

Defense budget in 2023

[bln dollars]



ASSAULT HELICOPTERS

1,306

SOLDIERS

about
**3.4
MLN**

MISSILE ARTILLERY

1,536

GUN ARTILLERY AND MORTARS

about
14,000

COMBAT SHIPS

416

ARMORED FIGHTING VEHICLES

about
86,080

COMBAT AIRCRAFT

5,492

TANKS

9,111

Security Under One Flag

Poland for 25 years has been an integral part of NATO

Several thousand allies stationed on the Polish territory, and assurances from the West that – if need arises – each centimeter of our land will be defended by joint forces.

Over 90,000 soldiers from all NATO member states, hundreds of tanks and IFVs, aircraft and helicopters, and almost 50 ships – such large NATO exercises have not been held in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024, which started at the end of January, is to test readiness to repel an attack on the so-called eastern flank. The scenario relates to the regional defense plans, which were approved at last year's summit of NATO leaders in Vilnius. In short: the plans assume that designated military units will defend designated parts of NATO territory, and they are now being implemented step by step, i.e. translated into practice. This is the result of NATO's significant strategy change in the recent years. As early as a decade ago, a full-scale conflict in Europe seemed a mere fantasy, but after the Russian annexation of Crimea, starting a war in Donbass and then an open invasion in Ukraine, it became very real. In the summer of 2022, at the summit in Madrid, NATO leaders clearly defined Russia as a threat, and returned to the concept of deterrence and collective defense. Western leaders started to loudly emphasize that if need arises, the forces of the Alliance are ready to collectively defend every part of NATO territory. Such declarations remind us how important this moment in the history of Poland is, as probably never before have the guarantees of security for Poland been so strong.

Some may say: in 1939 we had agreements with France and Great Britain, and yet they did not prevent us from the tragic war. The difference is that then we were surrounded by enemies, and our allies were far away. Today, Poland is still a frontline state, but behind its back there is the strongest political-military alliance in the world's history. Moreover, for 25 years, Poland has been an integral part of this alliance. On top of that, the allied forces, ready to support the Polish army, are not stationed somewhere on the far end of the continent, but right here, on Polish territory. Among them are: the US Army's Armored Brigade Combat Team, the aviation of the US Army, or the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland. In 2020, the US Army V Corps Headquarters (Forward) was located in Poznań. In total, there are several thousand foreign soldiers stationed on the territory of Poland.

Being a NATO member is also an obligation. Poland cannot only be counting on its allies, it also has to be an important piece in the transatlantic machine of collective security. For that reason, Polish army has for years been expanding and acquiring new armament. The list of purchases includes the most advanced equipment: from Abrams tanks and K9 howitzers, through F-35 and FA-50 aircraft, HIMARS and Patriot missile systems, to Miecznik missile frigates. The defense spending planned for 2024, with the financing from the Armed Forces Support Fund, will come close to 170 billion zlotys. This is over 4% of Polish GDP – an amount which places Poland on top among NATO members. It also gives hope that we will be able to safely get through any political and military turmoil. ■

ŁUKASZ ZALESIŃSKI



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