

Armored Fist

With respect to the number of the latest-generation tanks owned by the members of the North Atlantic Alliance, Poland ranks right after the United States and Turkey.

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Although their appearance on the battlefield over a century ago did not change the course of World War I, it certainly triggered a technological arms race, the result of which was that two decades later, instead of low-functioning clumsy armored giants, soldiers had at their disposal vehicles capable of changing the course of battles at the operational and tactical level.

World War II tanks were not only fitted with powerful armament, which could be used to fight manpower and vehicles, or even destroy enemy fortifications; they were also considerably maneuverable,

which enabled them to cover very long distances in a short time. For armies, which until relatively recently had based their strength on cavalry and infantry, it was a colossal change.

THE HEART OF THE LAND FORCES

The development of tanks over the past eight decades can be simply summarized as rivalry between the sword and the shield. As soon as designers developed a new anti-tank weapon (the absolute technical revolution here were guided missiles), inventors from all over the world tried to create an antidote to protect the tanks from destruction and the crew from death or injury.

► K2 Black Panther

Photo: Michał Wajnoch

K2 Black Panther

Weight – 55 t
Length – 7.5 m (hull), 10.8 m (with barrel)
Width – 3.6 m
Height – 2.4 m
Powerplant – Hyundai Doosan DV27K 1,500-hp diesel engine
Main Gun – 120-mm Hyundai WIA CN08 smoothbore gun, up to 10 RPM
Armament – 12.7-mm machine gun and 7.62-mm machine gun
Maximum speed – 70 km/h (paved road) and 50 km/h (cross-country)
Crew – 3 (commander, driver and gunner)



M1A2SEPV3 Abrams

Length – 9.8 m
 Width – 3.7 m
 Height – 2.4 m
 Weight – depending on the variant and the amount of fuel and ammunition: from 66 t to 72 t
 Powerplant – 1,500-hp (1103-kW) Avco Lycoming AGT-1500C
 Main Gun – M256, i.e. licensed RH-M-120/L44
 Armament – 1 12.7-mm M2HB machine gun, 2 7.62-mm M240 machine guns
 Crew – 4



The Polish army is no exception when compared to the leading world armies. In the Polish Armed Forces, tanks are a key weapon in the land forces. At the beginning of the previous decade, the Polish armored troops owned about a thousand machines of three types: T-72, PT-91 Twardy and Leopard 2A4, distributed among 12 battalions and stored in military depot stocks.

The Leopard 2 tanks, the only third-generation tanks in Polish arsenal, were owned by two battalions of the 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade. Two battalions of the 34th Armored Cavalry Brigade, two battalions of the 1st Warsaw Armored Brigade and a battalion of the 2nd Mechanized Brigade were equipped with a tank somewhat technologically inferior to Leopard, but produced in Poland: PT-91 Twardy, the design of which was based on the Soviet T-72. The third, outdated type of tanks, the T-72, was in the arsenal of five battalions: two battalions of the 9th Armored Cavalry Brigade, one of the 15th Mechanized Brigade, one of the 2nd Mechanized Brigade and one battalion of the 21st Podhale Rifles Brigade.

TRUE REVOLUTION

Although this is a great simplification, if we consider as the starting point the beginning of the previous ten-year technical modernization plan, i.e. the year 2012 (the document covered the years

2012–2022), our armored troops have undergone a true revolution.

The plan assumed a gradual withdrawal of the outdated T-72s, which were to be replaced by more advanced third-generation designs. Importantly, not necessarily new designs! For that reason, in 2013 Poland signed an agreement with Germany, under which we obtained from the German army's resources 119 used Leopard 2 tanks, 105 Leopard 2A5 tanks, and 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks for a total price of about 180 million euros.

Two years later, the then Armament Inspectorate commissioned the Polish Armaments Group (PGZ) to modernize 128 Leopard 2A4s owned by the Polish Armed Forces to the Leopard 2PL standard and left the door open in the contract for a potential future modernization the Leopards 2A5 as well. The plan was to deliver the modernized tanks in the Polish variant to the army by the end of 2020.

Since the contract with PGZ was not executed on time (by May 2025 the army received about 80 Leopards 2PL), the Polish Ministry of National Defense (MoND) decided in 2019 to launch the reserve option, and ordered the modernization of 318 T-72M/M1 tanks to the M1R standard. Since in 2017 decisions were made to create a new tactical unit with considerable armored potential, i.e.,

the 18th Mechanized Division, the MoND also started efforts to acquire the Abrams tanks from the United States.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly complicated diplomatic efforts for acquiring tanks recognized by experts as the best in the world. Despite that, in mid-2021 the US government received an official offer request from Polish authorities. Poland requested approval for the sale of 250 Abrams tanks in their latest variant (i.e. Abrams M1A2SEPV3) along with 26 M88A2 Hercules recovery vehicles and 17 M1110 joint assault bridges.

The SEP (System Enhancement Package) designation in the name of the Abrams tanks means that the machines are equipped with the Tank Urban Survival Kit (TUSK) designed for operations in urbanized terrain. The names of subsequent system enhancement packages are marked with Arabic numerals. Poland wanted to buy their third variant, i.e. SEPV3. The American government approved the export of Abrams to Poland on February 18, 2022.

POWER IN NATO

Someone may say: it is no coincidence that the American approval appeared a week before the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. Those who support conspiracy theories should



Leopard 2PL

Weight – 59.2 t
 Length – 9.67 m
 Width – 3.75 m
 Height – 3.05 m
 Powerplant – 1,500-hp MTU-MB 873 Ka 501 diesel engine
 Main Gun – 120-mm Rheinmetall L/44
 Armament – two 7.62-mm MG3 machine guns
 Maximum speed – 68 km/h (paved road)
 Crew – 4

due to the deteriorating geopolitical situation in Europe and the need for further military assistance to Ukraine, Poland decided to accept the support of the United States, which offered 114 tanks, i.e. two battalions, of used M1A1FEP Abrams tanks.

These were the machines that ended up in military warehouses due to the fact that the US Marine Corps decided to cease using armored vehicles, switching entirely to wheeled systems. Poland took advantage of the American proposal. The contract was signed in January 2023, and already in June 2024, all M1A1 Abrams were delivered to the Polish Armed Forces.

With the modernization of the Leopard 2 tanks, the acquisition of the M1A1FEP Abrams and the delivery of the M1A2SEPV3 Abrams and K2 Black Panthers, Poland owns the third largest fleet of advanced main battle tanks – right after the United States and Turkey.

Once the already signed contracts are executed, particularly the framework agreement with the Koreans for the delivery and production of over 800 K2 Black Panthers in Poland, and when we decide to modernize all our Leopards 2, then with 350 Abrams, 250 Leopards 2PL and a thousand K2s (and 232 Twardy tanks in military warehouses) at our disposal, Poland will become an armored power in NATO.

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only be reminded that negotiations with Washington on this matter had been going on for two years. Although, of course, it cannot be ruled out that the decision made a few days before the invasion, which American intelligence must have known about, was not a coincidence.

In any case, Poland was one of the countries that provided the most extensive military support to its warring neighbor, especially in terms of armored and mechanized weapons. We have delivered hundreds of T-72 tanks to the Ukrainian army, both newly modernized and older, dozens of PT-91 tanks and a company of Leopard 2A4 tanks.

Since the loss of armored potential, counted in hundreds of machines, had to be replenished as soon as possible, the Polish government began intensive multidirectional diplomatic activities. As a result, a contract for the supply of 250 Abrams M1A2SEPV3s was concluded in April

2022, and a framework agreement with the Korean Hyundai Rotem company for the delivery of a thousand K2 Black Panther tanks was signed in July 2022. The latter agreement assumed that we would buy 180 machines in the then produced variant, and 820 machines would be manufactured in Poland as the K2PL variant.

The indisputable advantages of the K2 tanks, apart from their American pedigree (the predecessor of the K2, i.e. the K1 tank, was designed in cooperation with the creators of Abrams), were short delivery times as well as the experience of the Koreans in launching licensed production. The K2 project was bought by, for example, Turkey, which created their Altay on its basis. The first Polish K2s arrived in Poland in 2022, and all vehicles contracted three years ago are to be delivered by the end of 2025.

When the first K2s arrived in our country, the Polish government announced that