

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perception in the USA of the Polish authorities' efforts to strengthen the Polish-American alliance in the 21st century

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the USA has been perceived in Poland as the main external guarantor of security. For this reason, Poland's security policy is clearly pro-American, and the Polish authorities strive for the closest possible allied relations with the USA, both in the multilateral and bilateral dimension. These activities are in line with the concept of an offensive bandwagon, the more so that Poland rarely benefits from its strong support for the USA, going beyond traditional allied commitments within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The aim of the article is to present and analyze the activities of the Polish authorities to strengthen the alliance with the USA in the context of their perception by scientists and experts from the USA. Experts and scientists believe that Polish authorities are legitimately striving to tighten the alliance with the USA, given its role in Europe and the world. However, the Polish-American alliance is clearly asymmetric, and Poland should not count on special treatment from the USA. Nevertheless, the war in Ukraine offers a chance to raise Poland's importance in the European policy of the USA.

Keywords

Poland, the United States, military alliance, NATO, war in Ukraine

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Introduction

Close allied relations with the USA are a key element of Polish security policy. Considering the dominant position of the USA in the world, Poland is incomparably less important for the superpower. The proudly sounding “Polish-American Alliance” is therefore clearly asymmetric in nature, which is not always correctly interpreted in Poland. The Polish authorities emphasize symbolic and courteous gestures of the American authorities, giving them an exaggerated meaning and interpreting them to the public as an expression of “special relations” between states. Nevertheless, the Polish authorities are striving for the closeness of cooperation with the USA to translate into measurable benefits for Poland, mainly in the form of enhanced real security guarantees.

The aim of this article is to present and analyze the activities of the Polish authorities to strengthen the alliance with the United States in the context of their perception by scientists and experts from the USA. The main research problem consists in the question whether specialists from American research centers perceive the actions of the Polish authorities to strengthen the alliance with the USA as rational and effective. The considerations are conducted in the perspective of offensive bandwagoning. The main thesis assumes that the Polish authorities are legitimately striving to tighten the alliance with the USA, given its role in Europe and the world. However, given Poland’s limited potential and, consequently, its importance in global American politics, the Polish authorities should not count on special treatment. Although after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Poland’s role in American European policy is increasing, Poland will be important to the superpower, especially as part of a united Europe.

Theoretical background

According to Stephen M. Walt, “an alliance is a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”.¹ The most crucial element of an alliance agreement is the *casus foederis*, defining the circumstances under which the treaty obligates an ally to aid a fellow member.² Alliances are characterized primarily by attributes such as: summing up the military resources of alliance members; common interests, especially in the field of security; directing all alliances towards the future; directing most alliances against other participants of international relations with conflicting interests; military cooperation of members; and the formation of most alliances to maintain the *status quo*.³ The weave of

¹ S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 12.

² D.G. Haglund, “Alliance,” Britannica, accessed November 25, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/alliance-politics>.

³ A. Dybczyński, *Sojusze międzynarodowe* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2014), 67–84.

interdependencies, most often historical, cultural and ideological, is also important, which causes a certain “gravity” of states.⁴

The main motive for the formation of alliances is the existence of an external threat. States, noticing that their individual military potentials are insufficient to defend against this threat, decide to aggregate military resources. Therefore, alliances arise from states' attempts to maintain a balance of power.⁵ The main goal, however, is not to balance the military potential of another state or group of states, but to balance the potential or real threat which they create. The mechanism of balancing was characteristic for the establishment of the North Atlantic Alliance after the World War II, which was to be a counterweight to the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. According to Halford J. Mackinder's “Geographical Pivot of History” theory, the permanent seizure of Eastern Europe by the heartland power would give it the basis for world conquest.⁶ Therefore, the USA has provided military, including nuclear, guarantees to Western Europe to prevent this scenario.

Another alliance-forming mechanism is bandwagoning, the name of which was coined by Quincy Wright⁷ and popularized by Kenneth Waltz.⁸ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the two-block rivalry was over and there was a significant asymmetry in the distribution of power in the world with an unequivocal supremacy of the USA. As a result, the mechanism of concluding an alliance with a much stronger country, even in a situation where there was no clearly defined external threat, gained importance. Andrzej Dybczyński indicates defensive and offensive bandwagoning, which he distinguishes based on the motives of joining the weaker state to the stronger one. Defensive bandwagoning, called the “potential victim strategy”, is about making an alliance with a much stronger state out of fear of pressure from it. The aim is to moderate the aggressive policy of the dominant power towards a weaker state, but it entails costs in the form of the necessity to satisfy the dominant power's demands.⁹ An example of this strategy in recent decades was the accession of several countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Some post-Soviet states that refused to ally with Russia and strengthened cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), such as Georgia and Ukraine, fell victims to its aggression.

⁴ B. Balcerowicz, *Sojusz a obrona narodowa* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1999), 49–50.

⁵ S.M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

⁶ H.J. Mackinder, “The geographical pivot of history,” *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April, 1904): 421–437, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1775498>.

⁷ Q. Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

⁸ K.N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁹ A. Dybczyński, “Teoria sojuszy międzynarodowych,” in *Stosunki międzynarodowe. Wokół zagadnień teoretycznych*, ed. K. Kačka (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014), 81–82.

Offensive bandwagoning, called the “hyena strategy”, assumes the joining of a weaker state to a dominant superpower in the expectation of a share in the profits from actions taken in the international arena. John G. Ikenberry distinguishes this mechanism from both balance of power and bandwagoning, describing it as “institutional binding”, under which stronger and weaker entities benefit from asymmetric cooperation.¹⁰ For the dominant state, this mechanism is an additional guarantee that in the future the weaker states will not act against it.¹¹ The acceding country benefits in general from close allied cooperation with the superpower. An example is Poland, which, by tightening allied ties with the USA within NATO, emerged from the geopolitical vacuum and strengthened its position in the international arena.

Methods

As part of the research, the author interviewed scientists and experts from research centers from Washington D.C. and New York between April and May 2022. Interviewees include representatives from Columbia University, George Washington University, American University, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Brookings Institution. Ethical approval was retrospectively obtained by The Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Political Science and Administration of the Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland (No. 1.5.2023). As the interviews did not cover sensitive or confidential matters, the author of the study assumed that verbal consent was sufficient. The committee approved that the participants’ verbal consent to participate in the study was adequate. Informed verbal consent to be interviewed by each participant was recorded along with the interviews. Participants were also informed that the author of the research would refer to these interviews in his scientific articles and that he would publish fragments of these interviews in the articles. During the study, audio recording was used to collect data, and participants were informed about it. In addition, the scientists and experts agreed to their participation by positively responding via e-mail for invitations to interviews. The interviewed researchers study US foreign and security policy and international relations, and some participate in the formulation of the foreign and security policy of the USA. The selection of interview participants was influenced solely by their research interests and willingness to be interviewed. Factors such as political sympathies or ideological orientations had no influence on the choice of interlocutors. The selection of interview participants was carried out by browsing the lists of employees on the websites of research institutions from Washington D.C. and New York and analyzing their research

¹⁰ G.J. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 7.

¹¹ L. Levick and C.A. Schulz, “Soft Balancing, Binding or Bandwagoning? Understanding Institutional Responses to Power Disparities in the Americas,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3 (2020): 525, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423920000220>.

interests and specializations. Relations with the interviewees were established prior to the interviews via e-mail. Potential interview participants were informed via e-mail about the study, about author's place of employment and his scientific specialization. The research interest of the author in the issues of political and military relations between Poland and the USA was presented as the reason for the study. The author of the study informed about the period of stay in Washington D.C. and New York, respectively, asking about the availability and willingness to give interviews by potential study participants. The author presented his readiness to adapt to an interview location indicated by a participant. In practice, these were different places, usually a workplace, but also a cafe and a park. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a few interviews were conducted online via Zoom. During online interviews, both the interviewer and an interviewee had their cameras turned on throughout the interview. A total of 15 researchers were interviewed.

Grounded theory was stated as a methodological orientation to underpin the study. The questions for the interviews were previously prepared by the author of the research, but during the interviews, depending on the direction of a conversation, some threads were developed by asking additional questions. Therefore, the respondents had an indirect influence on the questions asked. The concepts discussed in the interviews became apparent to the author based on the review of the collected data. The interviews were individual, non-standardized and in-depth. Since the knowledge of the American researchers about Poland is diverse, the questions were adapted to them and the threads in which individual researchers specialize were developed. At the beginning of the interviews, the author of the research informed that it was not necessary to answer all the questions. In practice, however, interviewees did not avoid answering questions. The questions were open-ended, and the interviewees could express themselves freely, without any time limit imposed by the interviewer. In practice, the interviews lasted from 25 to 90 minutes, mainly depending on the length of the answers provided. The interviews were one-off and were not repeated.

Before the interview, it was also stipulated that the participants should not be guided by courtesy resulting from the fact that the interviews were conducted by a Pole. During the analysis of the interviews, the author tried to maintain full ideological neutrality towards the collected data, understand the context of the statements and the attitude of the interview participant to specific phenomena and events. The author referred in the article to fragments of interviews that most accurately reflected the attitude of the interviewees towards particular issues. Themes were both identified in advance and included in the questions, as well as derived from the data. The author also uses the data to write other articles on various aspects of Polish-American relations. These articles have different aims, research problems, hypotheses, *etc.* Usually, different excerpts from the interviews are used, depending on the issues discussed. The author has already published the

article *Changing the Importance of Poland in the Security Policy of the United States in the Context of the war in Ukraine*.¹²

During the literature review, monographs and scientific articles from private collections accumulated by the author over the years were used. The literature review was done between September and November 2022. However, some of these books and articles have been read by the author in recent years. While reading them, the author marked the most important passages. In the case of previously read publications, during the review of the literature, the author usually referred only to the marked fragments. The method of content analysis of text sources was also used, which made it possible to study the National Security Strategies (NSS) of Poland and the USA. In order to support several important claims, surveys of Polish and American opinion polls were used. Opinion polls were taken from public opinion research institutions such as the Center for Public Opinion Research (Poland), Pew Research Center (USA), and YouGovAmerica (USA).

The main motives and specifics of the Polish-American alliance

Poland's main motive for tightening its alliance with the USA is to ensure the security of the state. Poland has had very difficult historical experiences with its neighbors, which is why it perceives the USA as the guarantor of its security.¹³ The involvement of the USA in Europe and the presence of its military on the continent is crucial for Poland's security. This is rational because the USA is the most powerful country in the world and shows readiness to defend its European allies.¹⁴ These assumptions were confirmed in all National Security Strategies (NSS) of Poland issued in the 21st century. The 2003 NSS stressed the importance of the US and the trans-Atlantic bond: "NATO and our bilateral political-military cooperation with the USA and other major Member States constitute the most important guarantee of external security and stable development of our country. Our bilateral relations with the USA also represent an essential link of the transatlantic relationship (...) the American presence, including military, in Europe is to continue strengthening the sense of security within the transatlantic and European dimension."¹⁵ Although in the following years it was noticed in Poland that the global war on terror weakened the position of the USA, the 2007 NSS stated: "Globally, the United States which guarantees international security plays a

¹² Ł. Jureńczyk, "Changing the Importance of Poland in the Security Policy of the United States in the Context of the war in Ukraine," *Przegląd Politologiczny*, no. 1 (2023): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2022.28.1.4>.

¹³ R.J. Lieber, "The United States and Europe: Explaining the Transatlantic Bonds," in *American Foreign Policy in a Globalized World*, ed. D.P. Forsythe, P.C. McMahon and A. Wedeman (New York: Routledge, 2006), 275.

¹⁴ C. Reeves, "From Intervention to Retrenchment: Poland's Strategic Culture and the 2011 Libyan Campaign," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 7 (2019): 1150.

¹⁵ "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2003," Princeton.edu, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://dataspace.princeton.edu/bitstream/88435/dsp016m311r75x/1/Poland-2003.pdf>, 6, 7.

key role (...) and is a force that guarantees security and stabilizes political and military relations on the European continent.”¹⁶ The American turn towards Asia and the attempt to reset relations with Russia made Poland focus more on political and military cooperation with EU (European Union) countries. Nevertheless, according to the 2014 NSS, bilaterally the strategic partnership with the USA remained the most important, and Poland declared the need to maintain close allied ties between Europe and Poland with the USA: “Among strategic partnerships of Poland, the priority significance is attributed to the cooperation with the United States of America. Poland will strive for the possibly broadest military presence of the US in Europe, including Poland, and it will support activities for the preservation of the US security guarantee for Europe”.¹⁷ In the circumstances of deepening divisions within NATO, the focus of Poland’s security policy has once again shifted decisively towards the USA. In the 2020 NSS, Poland assumed to: “Develop strategic cooperation with the United States of America, particularly in the areas of security and defence (including in the form of enduring presence of the US Armed Forces in Poland), technology, trade and energy”.¹⁸ Other strategic and program documents, including those concerning Poland’s foreign and defense policy, confirmed and specified the above assumptions.

Due to the significant difference in potential and position in the international security environment, in most US SNNs there are no direct references to Poland, only references to Europe or Central and Eastern Europe. In the 21st century, there were just two exceptions. In the 2006 NSS, Poland was listed in a group of seven countries from around the world as “successful examples of wise development” carried out with the support of the USA.¹⁹ In turn, the 2015 NSS recognized the contribution of Poland and the Baltic states to strengthening NATO and increasing its cohesion.²⁰ In each of the US NSSs, the importance of an alliance with Europe within NATO was emphasized. For example, the 2010 NSS stated: “Our relationship with our European allies remains the cornerstone for U.S. engagement with the world, and a catalyst for international action (...) NATO is the pre-eminent security alliance in the world today.”²¹ However, individual strategies showed that in the first two decades of the 21st century, in the bilateral dimension the alliance with

¹⁶ “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2007,” Princeton.edu, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://dataspace.princeton.edu/bitstream/88435/dsp01g445cg59q/1/Poland-2007-eng.pdf>, 6, 7.

¹⁷ “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2014,” BBN, accessed November 12, 2022, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/NSS_RP.pdf, 28.

¹⁸ “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020,” BBN, accessed November 12, 2022, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Republic_of_Poland_2020.pdf, 25.

¹⁹ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2006,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2006.pdf>, 34.

²⁰ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2015,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2015.pdf>, 7.

²¹ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2010,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2010.pdf>, 41.

Western European powers was much more important for the USA than with Poland. For example, the 2015 NSS stated: “we pursue close and regular collaboration with our close allies the United Kingdom, France, and Germany on issues of mutual and global concern.”²²

With each successive US NSS, Washington’s shift of focus from Europe to the Indo-Pacific was increasingly emphasized.²³ Despite this, the USA has always confirmed the permanence of its allied commitments towards the CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) countries. After the outbreak of the war in Donbass, the 2015 NSS stated: “We are reassuring our allies by backing our security commitments and increasing responsiveness through training and exercises, as well as a dynamic presence in Central and Eastern Europe to deter further Russian aggression.”²⁴ In turn, in the 2022 NSS, the USA announced the defense of “every inch of NATO territory” and the need to strengthen the Alliance to face the increasing threat from both Russia and China.²⁵

Europe is the main partner for the USA in defending Western values. For example, the 2002 NSS referred to values such as liberty, independence, democracy and the rule of law, human rights and peaceful development. The document emphasizes that the changes that took place after 1989 made it possible to achieve these values also in CEE.²⁶ According to subsequent US NSS, these values were jointly promoted by NATO countries also in other regions, including as part of the global war on terror,²⁷ in which Poland was actively involved. For several centuries, Poland and the United States have fought together for these values many times, which is cultivated especially in Polish, and to some extent also in American, political elites and society.²⁸ During bilateral meetings, American presidents refer to these events each time. In recent years, however, Poland has been struggling with problems with the principles of democracy and the rule of law, but in 2022 they were overshadowed by the war in Ukraine.

²² “United States of America 2010,” 11.

²³ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2017,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2017.pdf>, 21.

²⁴ “United States of America 2015,” 25.

²⁵ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2022,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>, 17, 26.

²⁶ “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2002,” NSS Archive, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2002.pdf>, 3.

²⁷ “United States of America 2006,” 12.

²⁸ J. Kiwerska, “Kwestie bezpieczeństwa w stosunkach polsko–amerykańskich. Trendy i perspektywy,” in *Bezpieczeństwo Polski. Współczesne wyzwania*, ed. S. Wojciechowski and A. Potyrała (Warszawa: Difin, 2014), 60.

The importance of Poland as an ally of the USA stems from the fact that it is the largest country in Central Europe, has a tradition of friendly relations with the USA and a large diaspora in the country. The United States can almost always count on Poland's support in undertakings carried out on the international arena, and the US political elites compete for the votes of citizens of Polish descent. It is in the interest of the USA to maintain security and democracy in allied countries, which strengthens its position in the world as the leader of the West. From the perspective of the USA, Poland plays an increasingly important role as a state taking responsibility for maintaining the security of NATO's eastern flank. Poland significantly exceeds the 2% of GDP required by NATO for defense spending, is quickly arming itself, mainly based on purchases of military equipment from the USA and plays a very important role in supporting Ukraine.

Researcher #2 from the interviews claims that Poland has become one of the most important US allies in NATO. Poland's strong support for US involvement in Europe made it a strategic American ally on the Old Continent. In the early 21st century, David H. Dunn described Poland as "America's New Model Ally",²⁹ in turn Marcin Zaborowski and Kerry Longhurst described Poland as the "American Protégé in the East".³⁰ In the following years, there was also strong criticism in the literature of the zeal of the Polish authorities in tightening the asymmetric alliance with the USA. According to David Sylvan and Stephen Majeski, after the Cold War, Poland became the only "client state" for the USA in Europe. This was supported by factors such as deepened military cooperation, the manner of inter-allied communication, and multi-billion dollar contracts for the purchase of arms from the USA, including for American loans.³¹ Ryszard Zięba defined the policy of the governments of both the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - SLD*) and the Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS*) as the practical implementation of the concept of bandwagoning towards the USA, with clear manifestations of clientelism and even self-vassalisation.³² In turn, Roman Kuźniar described the PiS government's policy towards the USA as actions from the position of a client, satellite, and even a semi-colony.³³ According to Claudia

²⁹ D.H. Dunn, "Poland: America's New Model Ally," *Defence Studies* 2, no. 2 (2002): 63–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702430208405026>.

³⁰ M. Zaborowski and K. Longhurst, "America's Protégé in the East? The Emergence of Poland as a Regional Leader," *International Affairs* 79, no. 5 (2003): 1009–1028, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1468-2346.2003.00351.x>.

³¹ D. Sylvan and S. Majeski, *U.S. Foreign Policy in Perspective. Clients, Enemies and Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57.

³² R. Zięba, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w strefie euroatlantyckiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013), 118.

³³ R. Kuźniar, "PiS robi z Polski "półkolonię" Stanów Zjednoczonych," *Onet.pl*, September 24, 2018, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/kuzniar-pis-robi-z-polski-polkolonie-usa/ed51172>.

Snochowska-Gonzalez, Polish sense of inferiority and lesser worth, related to related to the civilizational underdevelopment in relation to the countries of Western Europe and the USA, was supposed to speak for appearing in a subordinate position.³⁴ The PiS government sees the closest possible alliance with the USA as a way to advance Poland in the international political and economic hierarchy, which, in its opinion, Western European powers are trying to limit.

Two dimensions of the Polish-American alliance

The Polish-American alliance has two dimensions, *i.e.* multilateral and bilateral. Its multilateral dimension has been implemented within the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance. NATO operates across different levels of analysis (system, state and the domestic) and cannot therefore be understood by drawing upon the resources of any one theoretical approach in international relations or comparative politics.³⁵ After seven decades of NATO's existence, the transatlantic order remains a "theoretical indeterminacy". This results from the lack of consensus about the prospect of the transatlantic alliance among different theoretical paradigms, and the ongoing transformation of the transatlantic order.³⁶ After the Cold War, neo-realists assume NATO's final collapse due to changing conditions in the international system. On the other hand, liberal and social constructivist scholars usually predict the continuity of the Alliance. This is due to the fact that the alliance continues to offer institutional assets that are invariably valued by the member states. Moreover, it forms the basis of the logic of liberal peace, given the creation of stable ties between democratic states. NATO still produce a geo-cultural space called "the West".³⁷

Poland's diplomatic activities had significantly contributed to the evolution of the American authorities' position on NATO's eastward enlargement. The territorial expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance to include Central and Eastern European states coincided with the expansion of its functions, including crisis management. It was the most radical change in NATO's agenda in its history.³⁸ The focus on activities carried out outside the territory of the member states was the result of the search for consensus among the allies, including the satisfaction of US global policy. The interests of NATO member states are not self-evident and evolve over time. Therefore, the way of interpreting the provisions of the treaty results from

³⁴ C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, "Post-colonial Poland—On an Unavoidable Misuse," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 26, no. 4 (2012): 717–718, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412448473>.

³⁵ A. Hyde-Price, "Theorising NATO," in *Theorising NATO. New perspectives on the Atlantic Alliance*, ed. M. Webber and A. Hyde-Price (New York: Routledge, 2016), 32.

³⁶ S.C. Wang, *Transatlantic Space Politics. Competition and cooperation above the clouds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1–2.

³⁷ A. Behnke, *NATO's Security Discourse after the Cold War. Representing the West* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 12.

³⁸ H. Dijkstra, *International Organizations and Military Affairs* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 96.

their perception of security issues, the boundaries of the alliances, and the scope of their responsibility to each other and to third parties.³⁹ Today, NATO plays many internal and external roles, performs political and military functions, and has a complex, multi-faceted structure. In addition, it draws its identity and legitimacy as an organization from the deeply embedded distinctive normative, cultural and ideational framework.⁴⁰ Seeking to join NATO, Poland first of all expected to be included in the system of common deterrence and defense. In practice, however, like other NATO countries, it had to take on some responsibility for stabilizing the international environment. To gain the trust of the USA as a NATO ally, Poland engaged in military missions in various parts of the world. In the 21st century, NATO has been perceived better in Poland than in the USA. For example, in 2022, as many as 89% of Poles and 67% of Americans had a positive opinion about NATO, and 6% of Poles and 31% of Americans had a negative opinion.⁴¹

In the bilateral dimension, Poland has been making efforts to strengthen allied ties with the USA, including obtaining additional security guarantees from the superpower. Despite the clear asymmetry of potentials between Poland and the USA, the Polish authorities of all pedigrees have been trying to build some kind of “special relationship”, which critics even referred to as “megalomania”.⁴² Close political and military relations began to be referred to in Poland as “Polish-American strategic partnership”.⁴³ In August 2008, its formal foundations were created in the form of *the Declaration on Strategic Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Poland*.⁴⁴ Willing to form the opinion of the USA's closest ally in Central and Eastern Europe, the Polish authorities first of all supported US military ventures. The “Hobbesian” and realistic approach of the Polish authorities, including the excessive tendency to participate in USA-led military missions, made Poland perceive itself—occasionally with overhasty and deluded eagerness—as an important military power in Europe. This significantly distinguished it from the actions of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which have epitomized the “Kantian” instincts of small Central European countries with no tradition of foreign intervention.⁴⁵ Moreover, while modernizing the army, Poland

³⁹ V.M. Kitchen, “NATO's Out of Area Norm from Suez to Afghanistan,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2010): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794011003760269>.

⁴⁰ Hyde-Price, “Theorising NATO,” 32.

⁴¹ Pew Research Center, “International Attitudes Toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a Time of Crisis,” June 22, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/positive-ratings-for-nato/>, 23.

⁴² Kiwerska, “Kwestie bezpieczeństwa,” 61.

⁴³ M. Raś, “Foreign and security policy in the party discourse in Poland: main future,” *Revista UNISCI/UNISCI Journal* 43 (2017): 124, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/RUNI.54783>.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Declaration on Strategic Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Poland,” August 20, 2008, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/aug/108661.htm>.

⁴⁵ E. Lagadec, *Transatlantic Relations in the 21st Century Europe, America and the rise of the rest* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 98.

primarily purchased weapons and military equipment from the United States. In return, the Polish authorities counted on the tightening of bilateral allied cooperation, including increasing the military presence of the US Armed Forces in Poland.

In the 21st century, Poles were one of the most pro-American nations in the world. In 2000, 86% of Poles had a favorable opinion of the USA, but in 2007 it fell to the lowest level of 61%, which was a consequence of the war in Iraq. In the following years, it had increased, reaching a peak of 91% in 2022, as a consequence of the decisive US response to the war in Ukraine.⁴⁶ In the last decade, there was also a systematic improvement in the Poles' assessment of relations with the USA. According to CBOS surveys, Polish-American relations were assessed the worst in November 2012, when only 32% of respondents described them as good, 51% neither good nor bad, 8% as bad, and 9% had no opinion on this matter. In the following years, the positive assessment had gradually increased and in April 2022 already 73% of Poles described them as good, 16% neither good nor bad, and only 2% as bad. Although this result is impressive, it is still a bit short of the March 1990 peak, when as many as 80% of Poles considered bilateral relations as good, 17% neither good nor bad, and only 1% as bad.⁴⁷ In the 21st century Poland has been among the countries quite liked by Americans. In the example year 2020, 46% of Americans had a positive view of Poland, and only 7% had a negative view.⁴⁸ In the 21st century, no surveys have been conducted in the USA to assess bilateral relations with Poland.

Efforts of the Polish authorities to strengthen the Polish-American alliance in the 21st century

The global war on terror, initiated in 2001 by President George W. Bush, became an opportunity for Poland to demonstrate allied loyalty to the USA and readiness to take responsibility for international security. Polish government, dominated by the Democratic Left Alliance decided on Poland's significant support for the United States in military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Strictly offensive bandwagoning was visible with Poland's participation in the USA-led war coalition against Iraq in 2003. Poland strongly supported the war, despite the opposition of Germany and France, which was used in the USA's political disputes with Western European powers. The decision on the participation of Polish soldiers in the war was made against the strong opposition of the Polish society, reaching 75% in

⁴⁶ Pew Research Center, "International Attitudes," 14.

⁴⁷ CBOS, "Komunikat z badań Nr 57/2022, Ocena wizyty Joe Bidena w Polsce, jego prezydentury oraz stosunków polsko-amerykańskich," accessed November 18, 2022, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_057_22.PDF, 6.

⁴⁸ YouGovAmerica, "What countries do Americans like most?," October 26, 2020, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/travel/articles-reports/2020/10/26/what-countries-do-americans-most>.

March 2003, with only 19% support.⁴⁹ By taking part in the war, and then taking over the administration of one of the four zones of occupation in Iraq, the Polish authorities had many expectations of the Americans. They counted on large contracts for Polish enterprises for the reconstruction of Iraq, on contracts for the supply of arms and military equipment for the Iraqi security forces, and on participation in the Iraqi oil market. Moreover, they hoped for closer investment and trade cooperation with the USA, transfer of modern technologies to Poland, development of joint research, increased support for the Polish Armed Forces, visa waiver for Polish citizens traveling to the USA and others.⁵⁰ Poland was often praised and set as an example by President Bush, but Warsaw's expectations were not satisfied. This shows that it is the dominant power that decides on the distribution of profits and possible rewards for countries supporting its activities in the international arena. The "Polish-American alliance" has often been reduced mainly to the symbolic sphere and did not translate into equal cooperation, bringing mutual benefits. The change in this unfavorable situation was not helped by large orders of armament and military equipment by the Polish army in the USA, including the purchase in 2003 of 48 F-16 aircraft, which in Poland was called the "contract of the century".

Despite the lack of clear benefits for Poland from supporting the controversial policy of the US "liberal interventionism", the coalition government, led by the very pro-American Law and Justice party, continued in 2005–2007 the policy of its predecessors. In addition, it enthusiastically accepted the US proposal to locate an element of the anti-missile defense system in Poland, even though it was not intended to protect Polish territory.⁵¹ The rationalization of this policy and the balancing of relations with the USA and the European Union took place with the coming to power of the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska* – PO) in 2007. According to R. Zięba, this was to constitute a gradual departure from the policy of clientelism and the concept of bandwagoning in relations with the USA.⁵² A new opening in Polish-American relations was supposed to enable President Barack Obama to take over power in the USA in 2009, who announced a revision of his predecessor's foreign policy. As a consequence, Poland and the USA withdrew their main military contingents from Iraq by 2011 and Afghanistan by 2014. In the first months of office, the Barack Obama administration initiated a "reset" in relations with Russia, which was supposed to restore them after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. The

⁴⁹ CBOS, "Komunikat z badań Nr BS/100/2003, Zmiany opinii o wojnie w Iraku i udziale w niej polskich żołnierzy," accessed November 18, 2022, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2003/K_100_03.PDF, 4.

⁵⁰ M. Lasoń, *Polska misja w Iraku: użycie sił zbrojnych jako środka polityki zagranicznej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na przykładzie interwencji w Iraku 2003–2008* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2010), 123–124.

⁵¹ R. Grodzki, *Polska polityka zagraniczna w XX i XXI wieku. Główne kierunki – Fakty – Ludzie – Wydarzenia* (Zakrzewo: Replika, 2009), 295.

⁵² Zięba, *Polityka zagraniczna*, 131–132.

consequence of this was to be the reduction of the US military presence in Central and Eastern Europe, including the abandonment of the anti-missile system in Poland.⁵³ Since China was considered a strategic rival of the US, in 2011 President Obama announced a policy of balancing this revisionist power within the framework of the “pivot to Asia” concept.⁵⁴ The Polish authorities feared that the consequence of the above policies would be the withdrawal of the USA from CEE, therefore they appealed to the USA to review its policy. Russia’s military actions in Syria and Ukraine, however, positioned it in opposition to the West and its values, which is why the reconstruction of American-Russian relations ended in a fiasco.⁵⁵ As a consequence, the anti-missile system was implemented, after being included in the broader NATO anti-missile defense formula and extending the protection also to the territory of Europe, including Poland.⁵⁶ However, this happened with the reluctance of the Polish society. While in December 2005 50% of respondents were in favor of locating an element of the anti-missile system in Poland, and 32% were against, in December 2007 only 24% were in favor and 57% were against, and in September 2009 38% were in favor, and 48% against.⁵⁷ In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the provocative attitude towards NATO, the administration of President Obama fulfilled its allied commitments, strengthening the deterrence and defense of the Alliance’s eastern flank. Among other things, it decided to send the main forces to the NATO battalion battle group to Poland, and as part of bilateral cooperation - the U.S. Army’s 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team.⁵⁸ These forces arrived in Poland in early 2017.

The political camp of the Law and Justice party, who returned to power in 2015, is particularly zealous in strengthening the bilateral alliance with the USA. It stands for an international order in which the two key elements are the global military domination of the USA and the existence of genuinely sovereign states.⁵⁹

⁵³ P. Madajczyk, “Polskie dylematy wyboru między Stanami Zjednoczonymi a Unią Europejską XXI wieku,” in *Współpraca transatlantycka. Aspekty polityczne, ekonomiczne i społeczne*, ed. J.M. Fiszer, P. Olszewski, B. Piskorska and A. Podraza (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2014), 159.

⁵⁴ C. Wang, *Obama’s Challenge to China. The Pivot to Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3–4.

⁵⁵ M. David, “US–Russia relations in Obama’s second term: a damage limitation exercise,” in *The Obama Doctrine. A legacy of continuity in US foreign policy?*, ed. M. Bentley and J. Holland (New York: Routledge, 2017), 175–177.

⁵⁶ R. Steff, *Strategic Thinking, Deterrence and the US Ballistic Missile Defense Project. From Truman to Obama* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 113.

⁵⁷ CBOS, “Komunikat z badań Nr BS/128/2009, Opinie Polaków o tarczy antyrakietowej,” accessed November 18, 2022, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_128_09.PDF, 3.

⁵⁸ J.A. Larsen, “NATO’s responses to Russian belligerence: an overview,” in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century. An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. K. Friis (New York: Routledge, 2017), 12.

⁵⁹ A. Lanoszka, “Poland in a time of geopolitical flux,” *Contemporary Politics* 26, no. 4 (2020): 466–467, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1777042>.

The PiS government aims to deepen the alliance with the USA in order to ensure Poland's survival in a difficult geopolitical location. In addition to the ongoing threat from Moscow, the right-wing government has considerable distrust of Berlin, Paris and Brussels.⁶⁰ Under the rule of the PiS, Poland is the initiator of integration projects in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, including the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) and the Bucharest Nine (B9). The PiS has been trying to strengthen Poland's position of a leader in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and to increase the ability to geopolitically balance two centers of power in Europe, *i.e.*, Russia and Western Europe. However, it is difficult due to the limited potential of the countries in the region and their diversified interests.⁶¹ For this reason, Poland has been seeking the decisive support and involvement of the USA in these initiatives.

The opportunity to tighten the alliance with the USA appeared with the takeover of power in the USA by Donald Trump in January 2017. The Polish government and the American administration were brought closer by the conservative-nationalist-populist agenda and the resulting aversion to the left-liberal elites of the European Union.⁶² As Roman Kuźniar stated, the Polish authorities, as the only ones in Europe, ideologically and unconditionally bet on Trump.⁶³ While the illiberal trend in Poland, undermining the principles of democracy and the rule of law, was criticized in Western Europe, the American administration itself was skeptical about liberal international institutions.⁶⁴ The PiS government is distrustful of the intentions of Western European partners, including their security guarantees, which is why it focuses on the closest possible allied cooperation with the USA.⁶⁵ Poland's efforts to tighten the bilateral alliance with the USA were viewed with reluctance in Western Europe, whose leaders distanced themselves from President Trump. Due to the lack of proper consultation with Western European countries, Poland was accused of undermining the importance of NATO and weakening allied unity.

⁶⁰ E. Goh and R. Sahashi, "Worldviews on the United States, alliances, and the changing international order: an introduction," *Contemporary Politics* 26, no. 4 (2020): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1777044>.

⁶¹ R. Zięba, "Polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski," in *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe w XXI wieku*, ed. R. Zięba (Warszawa: Poltext, 2018), 469.

⁶² Goh and Sahashi, "Worldviews on the United States," 379.

⁶³ R. Kuźniar, *Zmierzch liberalnego porządku międzynarodowego 2011–2021* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2022), 180.

⁶⁴ H. Appel, "Can the EU Stop Eastern Europe's Illiberal Turn?," *Critical Review. A Journal of Politics and Society* 31, no. 3–4 (2019): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2019.1647956>.

⁶⁵ W. Paruch, "Polska w Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckim. Koncepcja Prawa i Sprawiedliwości bezpieczeństwa państwa (2015–2019)," in *Sojusz Północnoatlantycki w środowisku niepewności i zmiany. Dwadzieścia lat członkostwa Polski*, ed. W. Paruch, M. Pietraś and B. Surmacz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2020), 372.

Under encouragement from Poland, President Trump supported integration projects in CEE, with the flagship Three Seas Initiative, which is a cooperation of 12 countries between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas in the field of energy, transport infrastructure and digital communication.⁶⁶ For Poland and its neighbors, this gives an opportunity to increase energy security, and for the USA to increase liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and investments in the region.⁶⁷ The US administration understood the concerns of the countries of the region related to the Nord Stream II gas pipeline being built by Germany and Russia and imposed sanctions on the companies implementing the project. The Bucharest Nine initiative, *i.e.* regular meetings of defense ministers of NATO's eastern flank countries, also received US support. President Trump, conflicted with Western leaders, was received with the highest honors in CEE, including Poland. He could also count on the support of initiatives criticized by traditional allies, including the US-led Middle East conference in Warsaw in February 2019.

The most important goal of the Polish government in strengthening the Polish-American alliance was the stationing of soldiers of the US Armed Forces in Poland. In 2018, the Polish government came up with a proposal to permanently locate an American armored division in the country. The Polish government has proposed up to USD 2 billion to build infrastructure for American soldiers.⁶⁸ The financial proposal was geared towards President Trump's transactional approach to international relations. In turn, he was flattered by naming the project "Fort Trump".⁶⁹ The proposal aroused controversy within NATO, as it was not consulted with European allies on an ongoing basis. President Trump, in turn, used it to pressure the countries where American soldiers are stationed to increase defense spending and share in the costs of such stationing.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the proposal to build "Fort Trump" was not implemented, and the main reasons included: fear of Russia's response; lack of availability of an armored division; recognition that rotational stationing will be more effective than permanent. However, in the Polish-American bilateral agreements of 2019–2020, it was decided to increase the US military contingent in Poland to 6.5 thousand personnel on the basis

⁶⁶ P. Kowal and A. Orzelska-Stączek, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza: geneza, cele i funkcjonowanie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2019), 84.

⁶⁷ V. Jančoškova, "Regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe and its implications for the EU," *European View* 16 (2017): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-017-0460-8>.

⁶⁸ Ministry of National Defence, "Proposal for a U.S. Permanent Presence in Poland," accessed November 5, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Proposal-for-a-U.S.-Permanent-Presence-in-Poland-2018.pdf>.

⁶⁹ B. Szklarski and P. Ilowski, "Searching for Solid Ground in Polish-American Relations in the Second Year of the Trump Administration," *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 23, no. 1 (2019), 70, 73, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1641-4233.23.05>.

⁷⁰ N. Wadhams and J. Jacobs, "President Trump Reportedly Wants Allies to Pay Full Cost of Hosting U.S. Troops Abroad 'Plus 50%'," *Time*, March 8, 2019, <https://time.com/5548013/trump-allies-pay-cost-plus-50-troops/>.

of the so-called permanent rotation.⁷¹ The increase in the military presence of the US Armed Forces in Poland went hand in hand with the increase in Poles' support for the military presence of NATO forces. While in December 2005 only 33% of Poles supported this concept and 49% were against it, in June 2016 65% were in favor and 23% were against, which was mainly influenced by the war in Donbass. Support jumped again after Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine and stood at 85% in March 2022, with only 9% opposed.⁷² In recent years, support for long-term US military bases in Poland has also increased significantly among Americans, from 37% in 2014 to 62% in 2022.⁷³

In recent years, both bilateral and multilateral military exercises on Polish territory were intensified, with the "Defender-Europe 2020" strategic maneuvers involving the largest number of US troops in Europe in the 21st century. Their goal was to test the ability to regroup the American armored division to Europe, the ability of host nations to receive the American division, and the ability to defeat the enemy's Anti Access/Area Denial systems.⁷⁴ These exercises were a test of NATO's preparation for a possible Russian or Chinese aggression in Europe. Also, during the Trump presidency, Poland signed further multi-billion dollar contracts with the US, including the purchase of 32 F-35 aircraft, two batteries of the Patriot PAC-3 and many others.

After the takeover of power in the United States by the administration of President Joe Biden, there was a risk in Poland that it would be partially isolated on the international arena. The new administration viewed the populist-nationalist PiS government with reluctance and intensified criticism of Poland's betrayal of the principles of democracy and the rule of law. This changed dramatically with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Poland has become a key player in US-led Western aid to Ukraine. Millions of refugees from Ukraine found their way to Poland, to whom the Polish authorities and society opened up with enthusiasm and compassion. Weapons and military equipment from the West are delivered via Poland to the Ukrainian army. In addition, for the first six months of the war, Poland was the second largest arms supplier to this country, after the United States and ahead of the United Kingdom.⁷⁵ If the war in Ukraine turns into an open armed conflict

⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, "Defense Cooperation Agreement Between the United States of America and Poland," August 15, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20-1113-Poland-EDCA.pdf>.

⁷² CBOS, "Komunikat z badań Nr 40/2022, Stosunek do NATO i obecności wojsk sojuszniczych w Polsce," accessed November 18, 2022, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_040_22.PDF, 8.

⁷³ The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "Pivot to Europe: US Public Opinion in a Time of War," accessed November 18, 2022, https://globalaffairs.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/2022%20Chicago%20Council%20Survey%20Report%20PDF_0.pdf, 10.

⁷⁴ A. Feickert, K.J. McInnis and D.E. Mix, "U.S. Military Presence in Poland," last modified August 4, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF11280.pdf>.

⁷⁵ PAP, "Poland second largest donor of military aid to Ukraine - German think tank," *The First News*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/poland-second-largest-donor-of-military-aid-to-ukraine---german-think-tank-32424>.

between Russia and NATO, or Russia defeats Ukraine, the threats to the countries of the Alliance's eastern flank, including Poland, will increase the most.⁷⁶ In such circumstances, the alliance with the United States, including the credibility of its defense guarantees, will be of cardinal importance for Poland. Moreover, by responding to the war in Ukraine, Poland is trying to show itself to the United States as a credible and competent ally, counting on taking the role of the main US ally in the region. Among other things, it is trying to take over the competences of Germany, which presents an ambivalent attitude towards this conflict.

American scientific and expert discussion on the efforts of the Polish authorities to tighten the alliance with the USA

As noted earlier, the main activity of the Polish authorities to strengthen the alliance with the USA was participation in military operations under American leadership. When Poland decided to support the US militarily in overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime, Ted G. Carpenter said: "Poland will not receive significant compensation for supporting America in the military intervention in Iraq. This is the harsh reality. America does not reward client states, no matter how much they cooperate with us."⁷⁷ As noted by Researcher #3 from the interviews, American authorities are aware that when allied countries, such as Poland, send soldiers on US-led military missions, such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, they do so because they count on the USA to reciprocate with credible security guarantees. Researcher #2 believes that the American authorities appreciate Poland's allied credibility in counteracting security threats in distant countries together with the US and NATO, including its involvement in the controversial military operation in Iraq.

As argued, Poland has been trying to strengthen its alliance with the USA not only within NATO, but also, and in the case of the PiS government especially, in the bilateral dimension. Researcher #4 from the interviews believes that for the USA it is less important to build a bilateral alliance with countries like Poland, because they cannot offer the USA something that would be of exceptional value. For example, Poland's military support for US-led military operations in the world is important, but as an element of broader allied support within NATO. Even more important is Poland's role as a NATO flank state integrated into the Alliance's defense system. For this reason, the US is less interested in giving separate guarantees to Poland, going beyond those provided under the broader security community like NATO. The increasing importance of Poland's geographical location due to the war in Ukraine and its growing contribution to strengthening NATO's eastern flank may, however, lead to closer allied relations with the USA.

⁷⁶ A. Polyakova *et al.*, "What Does Europe Look Like 3–7 Years After Russia's War in Ukraine?," *CEPA*, May 24, 2022, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/what-does-europe-look-like-3-7-years-after-russias-war-in-ukraine/>.

⁷⁷ R. Zięba, "Polska polityka zagraniczna: do Brukseli przez Waszyngton i co dalej?," *Rocznik Strategiczny 2003/2004*, 338.

Researcher #5 even believes that some of the forces that the Americans sent after the outbreak of war to Poland, could remain there under the formula of permanent stationing, which is a key goal for Polish authorities.

Particularly criticized are attempts to create divisions in Europe and Poland's search for a way to tighten its alliance with the USA in opposition to its Western European allies. According to Researcher #6 from the interviews, the tightening of the bilateral alliance by Poland and the USA during the Trump presidency led to a weakening of NATO's cohesion. He believes it was part of President Trump's strategy: "to divide allies to have a pure transactional approach to its defense relationship with the members of NATO. There was a concern at the time that the US would only favor its bilateral relationship with some allies, who would pay for US presence and security guarantees." This was to lead to weaken NATO as a collective organization. Researcher #1 believes that it happened because NATO and Europe were not important to President Trump. Researcher #4 thinks that Trump does not have adequate knowledge about the importance of NATO in US security policy. Even the secretary of defense in Trump's administration, Mark Esper, challenged President Trump's knowledge in this regard. Researcher #2 criticizes the policy of creating divisions or rival blocs in Europe, regardless of which country initiates it. He also warns the Polish authorities not to try to tighten the alliance with the USA in opposition to the Western European powers, because, firstly, they are of great importance to the USA, and secondly, the unity of the West is fundamental to America. Researcher #7 referred to the actions of the Polish authorities with greater understanding, given the weakness of NATO and the split in it, symbolized by President Macron's statement about the "brain dead" of NATO. According to her: "the Poles wisely understood their best option was to solidify the bilateral relationship with the USA". She shows understanding for this, even though she realizes that focusing on bilateral relations could lead to further weakening of NATO as a collective organization. She points out, however, that that due to its geographical location and economic ties, Poland should also strive for good cooperation with Western European partners. Another issue is Poland's prioritizing purchases of armament from the USA. As noted by Researcher #6, this makes Poland more reliant on US military assistance. It is contradictory with overall goal of more European strategic autonomy and sovereignty. Poland could diversify the sources of armaments acquisition more, including by bigger involvement in projects implemented under the European Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). However, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Poland became in a way a binder for the Western alliance. According to Researcher #8, this is due to the leadership role of the USA and Poland in helping war-torn Ukraine and its inhabitants. The development of a common position within NATO regarding the condemnation of Russia's military policy and the defense of Ukraine's independence breathed a new spirit into the organization and reversed the previous negative trend of hopelessness. Now there's a kind of renewed commitment to making NATO of a vibrant organization. This statement is somewhat true, but the

Polish authorities continue to maintain a clearly anti-EU, and even more anti-German, narrative, which is not conducive to the cohesion of the West.

An important issue in Polish-American relations are shared values. Researcher #9 from the interviews believes that values like the commitment to democracy, opposition to authoritarianism, or defense of victims of aggression matters. Values, however, are in the background, as the most important thing is the ability to counter threats together. Before the war in Ukraine, Poland was portrayed by the American media and perceived by the American authorities as a country departing from democracy towards authoritarianism. Researcher #2 says that both Poland and the USA and many other countries have trouble maintaining democracy. According to him, NATO countries should recommit to democracy and help each other to push back against anti-democratic forces. Researcher #4 claims that the period of President Trump's rule was a departure from the attachment to the values of liberal democracy. His transactional approach and mercantilist philosophy, and his ability to mold facts and invent facts to suit his worldview, made him much more respected by autocratic than democratic leaders of states. President Trump tried to undermine democratic procedures and democratic institutions in the country, most notably by undermining the results of the January 2021 presidential election and inspiring the US Capitol attack. Researcher #10 believes that regardless of who rules in Washington, the USA wants to maintain allied relations with Poland, due to NATO membership and close ties in the security and economic spheres. He says that: "turning Poland into an enemy over something like democracy would be an enormous cost to the United States". Poland gives the USA what it expects, especially in the area of security, and this is the most important thing for the American authorities. Therefore, even if Washington criticizes the direction of legal changes in Poland, it will not decide on any sanctions.

In certain periods Polish authorities tried to deepen the alliance with the USA by tightening interpersonal relations at the highest political levels. They assumed that loyalty to an American president could be crucial in bilateral relations. For some American presidents, like Donald Trump in particular, that kind of loyalty meant a lot. Unfortunately, as Researcher #9 from the interviews notes: "he doesn't reward it much when you are loyal, but when you aren't, and you criticize him, he takes notes." The political camp of Law and Justice and President Duda sought to establish as close relations as possible, including personal ones, with President Trump and his administration. According to Researcher #9, President Joe Biden, given his dislike of his predecessor, resented this intimacy. He believes, however, that this is of little importance, since the key to American security policy is the objective perception of threat and capability. Russian aggression against Ukraine has further bonded Polish-American security interests. Both countries' fulfillment of their allied commitments and close military cooperation create an opportunity to maintain strong relations.

Poland's reaction to the war in Ukraine is definitely noticed by the American authorities and society. Researcher #11 from the interviews believes that Poland's leadership role in CEE in responding to Russian aggression and supporting Ukrainian refugees strengthens its overall leadership in the region. Researcher #9 claims that if the Democrats stay in power, the US political line towards CEE will be maintained, and Poland will still be an important American ally in NATO. Trump's re-presidency would, in turn, mean transactionality and little professionalism in relations with Poland, and a much softer attitude towards Russia. In reality, the situation will not be so zero-one, but it can be expected that the Trump administration would not be so eager to support Ukraine, which would have a negative impact on Poland's security. The same may be true if the election is won by the second leading Republican presidential candidate, Ron DeSantis, who said that defending Ukraine from Russia was not a vital interest for the United States.⁷⁸ However, Republicans are divided on this issue.

Conclusions

The United States plays a key role in Poland's post-Cold War security policy. Poland, in turn, plays a limited role in the global security policy of the USA, but in the European security policy this role is of increasing importance. The convergence of security interests and the clearly pro-American attitude of the Polish authorities make the USA willingly cooperate with Poland. The Polish authorities, regardless of their origins, treat the USA as the main external guarantor of security. Therefore, they undertake a number of actions to strengthen the alliance with the USA, both in the multilateral dimension within NATO and in the bilateral dimension. Due to the zealous efforts to tighten this alliance, Poland is perceived as an Americanophile state, and its policy towards the USA fits into the concept of bandwagoning. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, the USA has not sufficiently met the expectations of the Polish authorities resulting from their unequivocal support for the USA. On more than one occasion, Washington's gratitude to Warsaw boiled down mainly to the symbolic sphere. Moreover, the American authorities have repeatedly used Poland's pro-American attitude to put pressure on its Western European allies. However, the United States is fulfilling its basic allied obligations towards Poland in the context of the war in Ukraine, and the ambivalent attitude of Western European states further increases the importance of American security guarantees. Nevertheless, in the opinion of the author, Poland cannot position itself as a client state, but must strive to balance its relations with the USA. This can most likely be achieved by tightening cooperation with European allies, within both NATO and the EU.

⁷⁸ J. Swan and M. Haberman, "DeSantis, Backing Away From Ukraine, Angers G.O.P. Hawks," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/14/us/politics/ron-desantis-ukraine-republicans.html>.

Scientists and experts from American research centers believe that Poland's pro-American policy, including support for US-led military operations, is appreciated in the USA. However, it is important in the broader context of support from the entire NATO, as Poland does not have sufficient potential to constitute a qualitative change on its own. They warn against an attempt to build a Polish-American alliance in opposition to Western Europe, as this will work to the detriment of the West, including Poland. They also show that the problems of democracy and the rule of law in Poland are important to the USA, but they are in the background of security and economic interests. The Americans note that Poland plays one of the key roles in supporting Ukraine attacked by Russia, which significantly increases its importance as a US ally in the region. If Poland confirms its credibility and competence in responding to this crisis, it may play a greater role in US European policy. This, however, will depend to a large extent on the final outcome of the war in Ukraine and the balance of power in Europe.

Data availability

Access to the data will be granted upon individual request addressed to: lukaszjurenczyk@ukw.edu.pl. The data cannot be sufficiently de-identified and the author did not ask the interviewees for permission to publish the data in its entirety. Therefore, access to the data will be granted individually, provided that a person who gains access to the interviews does not publish them in their entirety. Researchers using the interviews in their scientific work may quote their excerpts without providing the personal data of the interviewees. The Institutional Review Board did not comment on data sharing.