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S. Koziej: A new strategy for a changing world

Zachęcamy do przeczytania wywiadu Ewy Bonieckiej z szefem Biura Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego ministrem Stanisławem Koziejem, który ukazał się w 25 czerwca br. w tygodniku "Warsaw Business Journal". Rozmowa dotyczyła wyników szczytu NATO w Chicago, procesu wycofywania jednostek bojowych NATO z Afganistanu, inicjatywy smart defence oraz politycznych problemów związanych z budową natowskiego systemu obrony przeciwrakietowej w Europie.

What do you consider to be the most important and lasting outcomes of the recent NATO summit in Chicago?

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The most important is the view expressed by all NATO members that the priority of the Alliance should be the collective defense of its members and their territories according to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which was a fundamental founding principle of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This confirmation is of crucial importance to Poland and we consider the outcome of the Chicago summit to be a success.

It is a significant and lasting fact that the summit confirmed NATO's transition from its most recent model, which it adopted after the end of the Cold War, to a new model which will introduce important changes to the way NATO functions. The first post-Cold War model put an emphasis on engaging NATO in operations outside of its members' territories at a cost of limiting its ability to defend its members directly.

Lately, however, and especially since the 2010 Lisbon summit, there have been visible signs that NATO is changing strategy, and this was finalized in Chicago. Now we can talk about a new NATO strategy, which I would summarize thusly: "If we want to be effective outside, we must first ensure our security at home." This means realizing many practical steps for strengthening NATO's defense capabilities, such as conducting joint military exercises and training, preparing concrete contingency plans and developing a missile de-fense system.

Many experts describe NATO as being weak at present. How would you respond to these criticisms?

It is true that experts and even officials from NATO member countries have expressed very critical opinions about NATO. Thus, the road to recovery will take time and will be costly, but I believe that there is now a strong will to make changes. Yet the global security environment is changing so quickly that international structures and organizations find it difficult to respond.

So whatever can be said critically about NATO, I am convinced that it is an organization which adapts relatively well to change, better than other international structures like the UN or even the European Union. There is no danger that NATO will collapse or be dismantled.

One of the biggest challenges now is to end the NATO mission in Afghanistan and withdraw troops by 2014. What logistical, financial and political problems does this entail?

The approval for the decision made in Lisbon to withdraw NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014 represents the fulfillment of one of Poland's postulates, with which President [Bronisław] Komorowski went to the Chicago summit. The decision is much-needed, because the operation in Afghanistan turned out to be a strategic trap for NATO, so ending the operation in 2014 is a logical step for preventing the Alliance's defeat.

I do not want to evaluate all the political circumstances of our entering there, but in my opinion the longer NATO stays in Afghanistan, the longer it is postponing the fulfillment of its basic functions at home. Yet the withdrawal operation will be very complicated logistically and costly.

How was the decision by French President Francois Hollande to withdraw French troops from Afghanistan in 2013 received in Chicago and how could it influence the whole withdrawal operation?

The decision was met in Chicago with confusion among [France's] allies, but Mr Hollande is determined to do this and let's remember that the operation in Afghanistan is not being carried out on the basis of Article 5, so it is not obligatory and every member of NATO has the right to make its own decisions.

The French decided that they will end combat operations in 2013 and evacuate troops, but that they will leave some troops to help train the Afghan army. So their decision will not affect the whole architecture of the NATO withdrawal. And it could be said that due to France's decision, there was an even stronger determination in Chicago that after 2014 NATO will not conduct combat operations in Afghanistan. This was not so clear before.

What steps is NATO taking to prepare for the withdrawal of all combat troops?

Political talks have to be conducted with countries whose territories would be involved in the withdrawal, so this could involve Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan or Russia - depending on the chosen withdrawal routes.

There are many technical problems involved and the costs of the evacuation need to be shared, but generally each country has to pay for the evacuation of its own troops. There is also the basic problem of how to help stabilize the situation in Afghanistan after 2014 and provide it with a certain amount of security, so [NATO needs to] conduct the training of the Afghan army and offer some financial help. Yet an American proposal for its allies to pay a certain amount of money for that purpose did not meet with common acceptance in Chicago. Poland did not declare any money for this purpose, while at the same time agreeing with the Americans that without some external help it would not be possible to maintain security in Afghanistan. So we could be ready to get involved in some reconstruction, training, and advisory activities, but without spending extra money. We think that Poland has paid enough money for its participation in the NATO operation in Afghanistan.

How do you envisage the process of withdrawing Polish troops?

The General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense have already conducted conceptual work concerning the evacuation of our troops, but the details cannot be discussed publicly. I can say that we entered into that operation via a number of stages, and we want to do the same when withdrawing. ... There is also the matter of bringing home military equipment. Maybe part of it would not be worth evacuating because the cost would be greater than its value. The best thing would be to sell [these items] to the Afghans, but of course the most valuable military equipment, like for instance our Rosomak [armored personnel carrier] vehicles and helicopters, would be brought back.

And we hope that within the framework of an eventual Polish-American bilateral agreement some of the transport costs are covered by the Americans, yet it is too early to evaluate and we could only tell you what the results of the talks are a year from now.

How do you assess the arrangements at the Chicago summit concerning the construction of NATO's missile defense shield in Europe, and how could Russian opposition influence NATO policy in this matter?

It is very optimistic that during the Chicago summit – in spite of the strong and many-months-long Russian opposition – all NATO members decided on the necessity of building a missile defense system in Europe. A report was accepted concerning the readiness of the first stage of construction, which allows for the defense of a part of European territory against a short-range missile attack by placing ships in the Mediterranean Sea with AEGIS anti-missile systems. An early-warning radar would also be located in Turkey.

[The second stage] would end in 2015 and it would include the first ground-based missiles – SM3s – located in Romania. The third part of the system is expected to be finished in 2018 and until that time a base would be prepared in Poland to house the modernized SM3 rockets. The last stage of the NATO missile defense system will be completed after 2020, and located in Poland, the new version of the SM3 rocket would be able to destroy intercontinental missiles.

This is how the situation looks now, but how it looks once the whole system is in place – despite doubts raised by France about details, costs and the principle of using European firms in construction – only time will tell.

On a political level future developments in relations between the US and Russia should be taken into consideration, as should the US stance after the presidential election in that country, because the American [contribution] is the most important in the NATO anti-missile system.

Washington and Berlin have declared their wish to involve Russia in some kind of cooperation with the Western missile defense system. How do you see this situation?

The whole of NATO is talking about cooperation with Russia, but while we support the best possible type of cooperation, there exist two totally contradictory approaches to missile defense. Moscow has declared its wish for the construction of one common European security system and is dead set against the NATO missile defense system. The Russian position is totally unrealistic and members of NATO answer that Russia can build its own anti-missile system and that the two systems – of NATO and Russia – could cooperate, share some information and even establish a joint center for exchanging information.

Maybe at some point Russia would see the need to cooperate on missile defense, because the missile defense system is needed strategically by all of us. This is because it secures us against unpredictable nuclear threats, not only from some countries, like Iran, but also from attacks delivered by non-state actors, including groups of terrorists or international criminals. And experts say that it is only a matter of time before terrorist organizations get hold of nuclear weapons.

Why is Poland so keen on having a missile defense shield on its territory?

We are a border country of NATO and we need a system of missile defense. Nowadays the territory of each state is threatened first of all from the air, and Poland is no exception. And today we do not have a missile defense system and our air defense is very weak.

So whether we want to or not, whether the Americans place these rockets in Poland or whether NATO builds the missile defense shield, we have to build a national system of air defense, including a missile defense system. And President Bronisław Komorowski has stated that in the next 10 years the building of such a national system of missile defense should be a priority. We care deeply about linking our system with the systems of our allies, because this will strengthen our defense capacity, and we are vitally interested in NATO building its missile

defense system and locating some parts of it on our territory.

And I want to point out that the NATO missile system is based on national components. The biggest and most advanced part is American, while there are also various European parts - including from France and Poland. It is our common venture in the field of missile defense which will protect Europe and, in its final stage, also the American continent. So nobody is doing us any favors in building the part of the system that will be located in Poland - it is in our common interest to do it.

Yet securing financing for NATO's defense systems is becoming increasingly difficult because European members are reducing their military budgets and America is demanding that its European allies do more. How might this dilemma be resolved?

Poland sets aside a steady 1.95 percent of its budget expenditures for defense, while other countries are reducing their military expenditures. And now, during the financial crisis I do not see a possibility for changing this. So the minimum task now is to ensure that these expenditures are not reduced any further.


Yet in a situation when the US is giving public signals that it will focus its strategic attentions, and therefore military expenditures, towards Asia and the Pacific region, European members have to think more about their own security. One recipe to help this process is to spend money better - here NATO's Smart Defense concept can help.

Poland is still catching up with older and richer members of the Alliance. Do you think that Poland is secure?

The answer depends on what we mean by secure. Are we talking about our safety right now or about strategic security in a longer-term perspective? I think that right now as we speak, drinking a cup of coffee, we feel very secure, but we do not know what could happen in the years ahead. I think that viewed from a short-term perspective Poland is a secure country and that there are no threats on the horizon to our direct strategic environment. However, there is no assurance that in 10 or 20 years Poland's political situation would not have changed radically. Because security is not given once and does not last forever, it is a process about which we need to think all the time and prepare ourselves for the future. And we are doing this.

S. Koziej: A new strategy for a changing world, rozmowę przeprowadziła E. Boniecka, "Warsaw Business Journal", volume 18, number 25-26, 25 czerwca 2012 r., s. 8-9, <http://www.wbj.pl/article-59646-a-new-strategy-for-a-changing-world.html>

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