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Keeping Poland Secure.

By: Raphael Benaroya

U.S. President Donald Trump is visiting Poland, where in 2017 he delivered his first major foreign policy address. Now is the time to re-examine and reaffirm the special relationship between the United States and Poland -- and why it serves both countries' best interests.

A staunch proponent of transatlanticism, Poland is arguably the most pro-American state in the European Union. The two countries have a history of friendship, shared values, and mutual respect that goes back to the Revolutionary War. With America's NATO allies discussing creation of an all-European army and many -- unlike Poland -- falling short of their financial commitments to NATO, a strong U.S.-Polish relationship has become particularly important. A committed guardian of the Atlantic alliance and NATO's eastern flank, Poland now plays a crucial role in Western security.

President Trump's visit will coincide with the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. The atrocities of the Nazi German invasion of Poland in 1939, and the ensuing 50 years of oppressive Soviet occupation, are deeply and indelibly etched in Poland's national consciousness.

Little wonder that Poles view with alarm Russia's resurgence and open aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, just beyond Poland's eastern border. Similarly, it is not surprising that Germany should be a source of concern for Poland, for two reasons. One is Germany's plan to source Russian gas directly, so as to displace Ukraine as a hub for Russian energy exports to Western Europe. The other is Berlin's drive, sometimes through proxies in Brussels, to impose social and cultural norms on all EU member states. In particular, Poland and other Eastern European countries view Germany's liberal policy toward migrants as threats to their national identity and sovereignty -- and to freedom.

Following the Soviet Union's fall, the Poles re-emerged as a free people, joined NATO, and became part of a new post-Cold War geostrategic reality essential to American interests in Europe and beyond. But the world is changing. Supranational institutions are exerting power, new threats are on the rise, and new alliances are forming. China, Russia, and Germany each play their own disruptive roles. The Cold War-era East-West divide has shifted eastward, with Poland at the forefront.

President Trump and Polish President Andrzej Duda recently reaffirmed their commitment to NATO as the cornerstone of the Polish-American relationship. They also signed a Joint Declaration on Defense, an agreement championed by the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Georgette Mosbacher, further affirming strong bilateral relations between the two countries. That Poland remain free, secure, and prosperous clearly serves Poland well. Equally clear is that a strong Poland serves the strategic interests of the United States.

Here is why:

First, understanding that the presence of the U.S. military personnel in Poland strengthens NATO's deterrence and defense capabilities, the United States plans to enhance its military footprint in Poland, at no cost to the U.S. Treasury. The plan's public announcement is a welcome departure from the previous U.S. administration's policy of "strategic patience," which effectively emboldened Russia and left Poland and other U.S. allies on edge.

Second, deploying more U.S. troops along NATO's eastern flank should help alleviate a perceived security threat by strengthening Poland's defenses, economy, and deterrence posture -- along with that of the United States. Poland is a reliable U.S. partner, an essential pillar of European security, and a NATO member that has honored its commitment to spend 2 percent of its GDP on defense. A militarily robust Poland close to the line of potential conflict is in the direct interest of the United States.

Third, Poland has worked to make its defense capabilities compatible with U.S. systems, and Warsaw's military modernization program means buying important American air, sea, and land military platforms. Most recently, Poland completed a large purchase of F-35 combat aircraft. Supporting allies who strengthen transatlantic relations while striving for fairness and reciprocity is in the U.S. strategic interest.

Fourth, Poles recognize that enhancing the U.S. troop presence in Poland will require an investment in supporting infrastructure. They are prepared to facilitate such projects in a meaningful way, including with a most uncommon offer of billions of dollars in Polish financial contributions. Poland will also provide additional support to U.S. forces above the NATO host-nation standard, in the establishment of a U.S. Division Headquarters, Combat Training Center, U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance squadron, U.S. special operations forces capability, and more. Moving quickly from the Declaration on Defense agreement to action and implementation of the plan will greatly benefit America's security.

Fifth, recognizing Poland's earnestness about the bipartisan security partnership as well as the new European defense realities, the U.S. plans to add troops to the rotating NATO military units currently in Poland. Polish leaders make a strong case for a permanent U.S. base on Polish soil. Moving some American defense assets from Germany to Poland would lower the U.S. exposure to the costly regulations and complicated interest-group politics that they face in Germany. It is in the U.S. strategic interest to strengthen NATO's current eastern flank, rather than the alliance's former, Cold War-era boundary.

Sixth, given the realities of recent (and not-so-recent) history, no wonder the emerging energy alliance between Germany and Russia fills Poles with apprehension. Nord-Stream 2, a new Gazprom pipeline connecting Russia to Germany across the Baltic Sea, is particularly controversial, especially when pipelines are replacing tanks as instruments of coercion. Poland sees the marriage of German technology and Russian natural resources as a way to monopolize the European energy market and achieve energy dominance in the EU, thwarting all potential competitors and alternatives, including energy imports from the United States. President Trump has expressed security concerns about Europe's over-reliance on gas supplies from Russia on several occasions, and targeted sanctions are under consideration in Washington.

Seventh, just as the Poles are working to become NATO's forward military hub, they are intent on becoming Central Europe's regional energy hub. They are leaders in shedding dependency on Russian gas, rightly considering Russia as both an economic competitor and a security adversary. Poland has already built the Baltic's only land-based liquefied natural gas terminal to import gas from the U.S. and other non-European sources. Poland is also developing an undersea Baltic pipeline with Denmark to import gas from

Norway. In the process, Poles are diversifying the E.U.'s energy sources and helping support U.S. energy exports. Poland's three long-term contracts, worth billions of dollars, with U.S. energy companies demonstrate additional potential for growing strategic cooperation and advancing America's interest in the European energy market. Poland's focus on energy security and energy diversity in Europe is consistent with America's strategic interests.

Lastly, Poland's fast-growing, free-market economy has benefited from sensible regulation, a reliable banking system, incentives for foreign direct investment, a stable currency, investment in infrastructure, and serious anti-corruption measures. Additionally, Poland's investment in social programs, effective tax collection, and an educated workforce have produced one of the world's most vigorous economies. In 2018, under the leadership of Prime Minister Morawiecki, the country graduated to a "developed market" status. Poland's "open for business" attitude has helped deliver uninterrupted GDP growth for over 20 years: Poland was the only EU member to avoid the 2008 recession, and the nation continues to grow. Accordingly, Poland offers great opportunities for U.S. businesses.

The new reality and its implications are clear: The geopolitical security center of Europe has shifted eastward, to Poland. The U.S. should strengthen its special strategic relationship with Poland and secure the enduring presence of U.S. troops in the country. Smartly positioning strategic assets in Poland to establish an effective logistical network can make Poland an economic and security hub for the West's eastern flank, shoring up the region's security—and America's own. The U.S. should support Poland's drive towards energy independence and promote trade and investment in Poland's thriving economy. We must recognize that supporting Poland is not only in the interest of Poland and Europe, but clearly in the best strategic interest of the United States as well.

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