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THE POLITICAL-MILITARY VIEW OF THE PURPOSE OF THE CREATION OF TERRITORIAL DEFENSE SYSTEM IN POLAND

Summary:

Creation of the Territorial Defense System (TDS) in Poland is a very serious step in military, political and economic terms. Therefore, it is important to understand if this decision is an effective response to Russian threat or a politically motivated populist mistake. Article explains, why military conflict between NATO and Russia is not realistic. At the same time, some interest groups in American elite (mainly, the so called “hawks”) are interested in construction of the “geopolitical wall” between Russia and the EU, creating artificial “Russian threat” for Europe and twisting spiral of confrontation between two sides with the help of Baltic states and Poland (concept of “Intermarium”). Contemporary Polish ruling elite follows this strategy, because sees America as a main guarantor of Poland’s security and wants to be its main ally in Europe. Also exploits “Russian threat” to strengthen its popularity internally. Creation of TDS – one of the populist steps in this direction. But it can be paradoxically useful in case of possible disintegration of Ukraine.

Keywords:

Poland, Territorial Defense System (TDS), American elite, “hawks”, “traditionalists”, “isolationists”, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Russia, Baltic region, Baltic states, “Intermarium”, Ukraine

Introduction

Carl von Clausewitz once described a war as a continuation of politics by other means. Creation of Territorial Defense System (TDS) in Poland is a very important decision in political and military terms with serious consequences for Polish security planning and economy. But the problem is that sometimes such decisions can be wrong, because there is no adequate understanding of the strategic situation, or because they are reasoned by the interests of some elite groups, not the state. In order to understand the point of the creation of TDS in

Poland, it is necessary to “catch” the essence of the global and regional geopolitical confrontation between the West (NATO) and the East (Russia). Then it will be possible to say, if TDS has been created because of the real Russian threat or it is more internally motivated.

Three elites of the United States and Russia’s strategy

In the United States for the moment there are three camps of elite with different external strategies. First group (the so called “hawks”) prefers “ruled chaos” approach, described by Steven R. Mann¹. His main idea is that it is possible to create the points of tension in different regions and use them for promotion of national interest. Only a few examples. In Syrian conflict America used to support opposition groups in their war against Bashar Assad and use the continuation of this confrontation for strengthening of its influence in the Middle East. In Ukraine American “hawks” support Kiev regime fight against Donbas, which, in turn, is supported by Moscow. In this way, Russia has permanent military tension on its border, what is useful for the US, because Kremlin is seen as a geopolitical enemy by the “ruled chaos” proponents. Finally, in the East Asia aggressive part of Washington elite seeks to create problems for China, for example, using geopolitical competition between Beijing and Tokyo and China policy in the South China Sea.

Second influential group in the American governmental system (the so called “traditionalists”) consists of adherents of the “policy of spheres of influence”, seeing Moscow as a player at the table you should deal with. In practice this approach is very similar to the political process during the Cold War and means that America must be great, but creating balance and making deals (for example, on Ukraine, if Russia gives Washington something in return), not chaos.

It seems that the former president of the United States Barack Obama was closer to the second camp, but could not counter the influence of “hawks”. The foreign policy course of the elected president Donald Trump is unclear for the moment, but it can have strong isolationist element. D. Trump’s interview to “The Washington Post” is very indicatory in this context².

In it he stressed several crucial points: *And yet you know I watched as we built schools in Iraq and they’d be blown up. And we’d build another one and it*

¹ S. R. Mann, *Chaos Theory and Strategic Thought*, “Parameters” (US Army War College Quarterly), Vol. XXII, Autumn 1992, pp. 54-68.

<http://www.thelivingmoon.com/91_PDF_Database/DTIC_NWO_Docs/Chaos%20Theory%20and%20Strategic%20Thought.pdf> (10.12.2016).

² *A transcript of Donald Trump’s meeting with The Washington Post editorial board*, Washingtonpost.com, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/21/a-transcript-of-donald-trumps-meeting-with-the-washington-post-editorial-board/?utm_term=.73887f222d7a> (10.12.2016).

would get blown up. And we would rebuild it three times. And yet we can't build a school in Brooklyn. We have no money for education, because we can't build in our own country. And at what point do you say hey, we have to take care of ourselves. (...) I look at the Ukraine situation and I say, so Ukraine is a country that affects us far less than it affects other countries in NATO, and yet we are doing all of the lifting, they're not doing anything. And I say why is it that Germany is not dealing with NATO on Ukraine? Why is it that other countries that are in the vicinity of the Ukraine not dealing with – why are we always the one that's leading, potentially the third world war, okay, with Russia? Why are we always the ones that are doing it? (...) Well if you look at Germany, if you look at Saudi Arabia, if you look at Japan, if you look at South Korea – I mean we spend billions of dollars on Saudi Arabia, and they have nothing but money. And I say, why? Now I would go in and I would structure a much different deal with them, and it would be a much better deal. When you look at the kind of money that our country is losing, we can't afford to do this. Certainly we can't afford to do it anymore.

This means that D. Trump (people behind him) actually declares neo-Monroe doctrine ideas and thinks that the problems of different regions should be solved primarily by the main countries of these regions themselves. *We will stop looking to topple regimes and overthrow governments. Our goal is stability, not chaos because we wanna rebuild our country. It's time, – D. Trump resumed clearly*³. But at the same time he speaks to such “traditionalists” as Henry Kissinger, who, in turn, had many meetings with the president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and explains that America cannot ignore the global role of Russia any more. To make a long story short, D. Trump wants to limit the role of the United States in the world and make America's policy more compromise oriented.

When V. Putin came to power in 2000, he wanted to make Russia an equal partner of the West in the framework of Western geopolitical system. But the West was not ready to grant Moscow such status, because America justly saw itself as a winner of the Cold War, and Russia's economy was in a very poor condition at that time (not to speak about its military weakness and political instability). Moreover, the West began to spread its influence in the post-soviet states, what Russia called a *crossing of red line*. And V. Putin decided to prove “Western partners” that his country is worth of equal treatment.

He succeeded in doing that in Georgia, Ukraine (Crimea and Donbass) and Syria. Besides, Russia's economy managed to survive despite of Western sanctions. The newest Russian *Foreign Policy Concept*⁴ states that Russia is

³ *'New era of peace': Trump vows to stop US toppling of regimes during 1st stop of 'Thank You' tour*, RT.com, 02.12.2016, <<https://www.rt.com/usa/368951-trump-us-toppling-regimes-isis/>>, (10.12.2016).

⁴ *Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации (утверждена Президентом Российской Федерации В.В.Путиным 30 ноября 2016 г.)*, Mid.ru,

responsible for global security. V. Putin's country does not want to be a part of the Western geopolitical system any more, but fights for CIS (*Commonwealth of Independent States*) area and is ready to stop America's chaos policy in different parts of the world. As famous Russian expert Sergey Karaganov noted: *We can be the providers of security, especially in Central Eurasia, supporting regimes there and crushing radicals*⁵.

To sum up, there is almost no chance for geopolitical deal between Russia and American "hawks", but Kremlin (as written in the *Foreign Policy Concept* mentioned) is ready for constructive dialogue and common actions with the US, what can be acceptable for American "traditionalists-isolationists", who stay behind D. Trump.

"Intermarium" concept for Baltic region

Today information discourse both in the West and in Russia is full of fear that big war may happen between two sides. But thinking realistically it can be said that neither NATO, nor Moscow want and are ready for direct, large-scale and long-term military confrontation.

First of all, many Western experts, politicians and military officials repeat again and again, that V. Putin can attack NATO. But nobody clearly explains why he should do this. Russian president himself repeats again and again, that it would be a madness for his state to start war with such opponent as NATO. For example, in his interview to "Bloomberg" V. Putin said: *I think all sober-minded people who really are involved in politics understand that the idea of a Russian threat to, for example, the Baltic states is complete madness. Are we really about to fight NATO? How many people live in NATO countries? About 600 million, correct? There are 146 million in Russia. Yes, we're the biggest nuclear power. But do you really think that we're about to conquer the Baltics using nuclear weapons? What is this madness?*⁶.

Of course, sometimes it is hard to believe V. Putin's words (like in case of Crimea events, when in the beginning he said that there is no Russian troops there), but several reasons support them. First, the reasons of the reason. Georgia and Ukraine belong to CIS area and strategically are very important for Russia. Besides, they are not members of NATO. That is why, Moscow was ready to use military force to keep them in the Russian sphere of influence.

<http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248>, (01.12.2016).

⁵ *Остановив НАТО, мы выступили поставщиком безопасности (интервью с Сергеем Карагановым, беседовал Артём А. Кобзев)*, Lenta.ru, <<https://m.lenta.ru/articles/2016/05/30/strategy/>> (30.05.2016).

⁶ *Putin Discusses Trump, OPEC, Rosneft, Brexit, Japan*, Bloomberg.com, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-05/putin-discusses-trump-opec-rosneft-brexit-japan-transcript>> (05.09.2016).

Baltic states are members of NATO. We can imagine, that V. Putin dreams about restoration of the Soviet Union and therefore possibly could attack them, but it is hard even to imagine, why he should attack Poland? What would be his final goal in this case – create conflict like in Donbas, take part of Polish territory, change political regime in Warsaw, go further to Germany and France? All Western “experts”, who speak about Russian threat, do not answer these kind of questions, just say – HE CAN. Second, Russia is already involved in military conflicts in Syria and Ukraine (officially it denies military support of Donbas, but it is more than evident). So, opening of the third (actually global) front, fighting such enemy as NATO, would become an unbearable challenge even for modernized Russian army, also keeping in mind systemic problems of Russian economy.

On the other side, America (NATO) is also not prepared for big war with Russia. First, Western society (German, French, Italian, etc.) got used to peace and prosperous life, and psychologically is not ready to lose everything in one night. Besides, after very limited success in Afghanistan and Iraq it would be rather difficult to explain ordinary Americans, why their military forces must fight for some Baltic states and Poland against Russia with a possibility of nuclear strikes. Second, experts, who are deeply interested in the military capabilities of the US and NATO, know that American and Alliance military strength is doubtful for the moment. US Army⁷ and Air Force⁸ are in a serious trouble, and RAND specialists admit that NATO will not be able to protect Baltic states from Russian occupation⁹ (not to speak about an offensive operation).

In this context it is clear, that we should speak about some kind of political strategy from both sides. As it was mentioned, before D. Trump election, the “hawks” dominated foreign policy of the United States. But situation in the Baltic region differs from that of Syria or Ukraine. In other words, “ruled chaos” strategy cannot be applied there, because it is the territory of allies. Thus, for Baltics both American “hawks” and “traditionalists” found more or less single strategy of “Intermarium” (see picture below) with the goal to create the “geopolitical wall” between Russia and the EU (first of all Germany).

To be more precise, artificial “Russian threat” for Europe (especially for its Eastern flank) is being created. Then it must be responded (NATO deploys its battalions in Baltic states and Poland, not to speak about American AMD base

⁷ 2016 *Index of U.S. Military Strength*, Heritage.org, 2016, <<http://index.heritage.org/military/2016/assessments/us-military-power/us-army/>> (20.20.2016).

⁸ J. Johnson, *5 Reasons the US Military Is in Trouble*, <<http://dailysignal.com/2016/07/12/5-reasons-the-u-s-military-is-in-trouble/>> (13.09.2016).

⁹ D. A. Shlapak, M. W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, Rand.org, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf> (10.12.2016).

near Redzikowo). Russia reacts (deployment of nuclear-capable “Iskander” missiles in Kaliningrad and new divisions on NATO border). Spiral of confrontation (sanctions, etc.) twists, and strategic cooperation between Russia and the EU becomes hardly possible. D. Trump may change the situation, just paying less attention to the cooperation between Russia and the EU, but it will be difficult for him to do that at once – inertia will stay strong for indefinite time. At the same time, the role of “cordon” is acceptable for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland, because they see the US – not the EU – as the main guarantor of their security and want to become the main allies of America in Europe.

Map 1. The New Containment



Source: *From Estonia to Azerbaijan: American Strategy After Ukraine*, Stratfor.com, Geopolitical weekly, 25.03.2014, <<https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/estonia-azerbaijan-american-strategy-after-ukraine>> (10.12.2016).

Territorial Defense System as a product of political populism

Polish minister of defense characterized Russia as a threat many times. *Until the Kremlin authorities change their policy, we have to treat Russia as the biggest threat to peace in Europe and in the world,* – Antoni Macierewicz ac-

centuated¹⁰. Accordingly, speaking about the creation of TDS in Poland, he said: *These units are the cheapest way¹¹ to increase the strength of the armed forces and the defense capabilities of the country. It is also the best response to the dangers of a hybrid war like the one (...) following Russia's aggression in Ukraine¹².*

As it was explained above, there is no Russian military threat for Europe in general and for Poland in particular. Then, what is the main reason of TDS creation? Logical chain is very simple: Poland plays the role of “Russian threat” escalator – this threat must be responded both externally and internally – internally Poland got NATO battalion and American troops, but it is not enough for contemporary Polish ruling elite, which is very populist and take very controversial steps to strengthen its popularity – TDS is one of them.

Even if Russia decides to attack Poland (excluding Belorussian direction), it will either hit AMD base by “Iskander” missiles or try to go through the so called “Suwalki corridor”¹³ after capturing the Baltic states. In the former case, TDS would be absolutely useless, in the latter – it would be much better to attract additional NATO forces to Poland and/or develop regular professional army (equipment, exercise, possibly making it bigger).

So, understanding potential military ineffectiveness of the territorial defense forces and the fact that the project is rather expansive with no clear implementation vision for the moment (problematic aspects include creation of infrastructure, equipment, training, cooperation with regular Polish army and NATO forces, etc.), collateral reasons of TDS creation were proposed by the authors of the initiative – civil-patriotic effect and help in case of the extraordinary situations among them. But again – these goals can be reached more effectively without TDS by other means, using the same money (although, some interest groups in military and local government are supposed to support the idea, because they will get the bigger budget for its realization).

To conclude, concept of TDS is more a political, than military based initiative. But even its military goals (as well as collateral ones) can be better achieved by other means. So, creation of TDS in Poland is a politically motivated populist mistake – not because there is no threat from Russia, but because

¹⁰ *Polish Defence Minister Macierewicz: Russia the biggest threat to world peace*, The-news.pl,

<<http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/260472,Polish-Defence-Minister-Macierewicz-Russia-the-biggest-threat-to-world-peace>>. (06.07.2016).

¹¹ Territorial Defense Forces will have 53,000 men and will cost 3,5 billion zlotys (800 million euro). So, it is not a very cheap initiative.

¹² *Poland to build territorial defense force by 2019*, DW.com,

<<http://www.dw.com/en/poland-to-build-territorial-defense-force-by-2019/a-36386036>>. (14.11.2016).

¹³ A. Grigas, *NATO's Vulnerable Link in Europe: Poland's Suwalki Gap*, Atlantic Council, <<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/nato-s-vulnerable-link-in-europe-poland-s-suwalki-gap>> (02.09.2016).

the character of this threat for the EU and NATO (including Poland) requires other response than territorial defense forces.

Instead of conclusions

Polish TDS is supposed to address direct or hybrid Russian threat. But at the same time, Poland has another problematic neighbor – Ukraine. For the moment Warsaw supports Kiev, but economic and political situation in this country is deteriorating rapidly. To say more, European support of the corruptive Petro Poroshenko regime weakens, and D. Trump can review American strategy towards it (even reach some geopolitical deal with Moscow in this case).

Possible result of the mentioned tendencies – renewal of the military conflict in Donbas and disintegration of Ukraine. Accordingly, Poland can face two big problems it will have somehow to solve. First, if Russia restores its influence in Kiev, Ukrainian nationalistic radicals may be pushed out from Ukraine to Poland. Second, if Russia refuses to control the western part of Ukraine, where nationalistic climate *inter alia* is very strong, Poland will have to take some care of its compatriots there. In this – a bit provocative and hardly imaginable – respect, TDS can get another sense...

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