

Poland's Territorial Defence Force – Its Role, Significance and Tasks

More and more European countries are currently seeking an opportunity to extend the capabilities of their armed forces with limited funds. Since the 1960s, Poland have been striving to solve this issue by founding the Territorial Defence Forces, which used to be a part of a regular army. Given the disbandment of the 1st Mechanised Division and the Territorial Defence Forces, the potential of the Polish Armed Forces has been significantly reduced due to Poland's military reform, which started in 2008 and lasted until 2011. In 2015, the new government brought back the concept of the Territorial Defence Force (Pol. WOT, Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej). Therefore, it seems necessary to consider and analyse the role, significance and tasks of these units in the structure of the Polish Armed Forces..

The role of the Territorial Defence Force

The Territorial Defence Force (TDF) is the fifth branch and the reserve component

of the Polish Armed Forces, which is aimed at operating in the regions in which the use of a regular army is not operationally justified. The number of the Polish regular troops is insufficient to achieve strategic goals of defensive operations and defend Poland's territory effectively. In fact, three divisions of the Polish Land Forces, including one armoured division, are capable to defend the area of roughly 40,000 square kilometres. Therefore, the Polish Armed Forces expect to receive military support from NATO member countries with at least two armoured divisions as well as other combat support and logistics units. There is no

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doubt that the deployment of these forces to Poland is perceived as a primary concern for the Alliance. The Territorial Defence Force can play a key role in this particular context. There are no significant issues related to the deployment of the NATO forces in peacetime (even though the deployment of the US troops to Europe would cause logistical difficulties); however, in wartime, this process may prove extremely complex and problematic. It is worth noting that the Alliance will have to face Russian airstrikes and counter various types of cruise missiles; combat enemy's airborne forces and face hostile special forces operations (e.g. subversion) conducted by units such as Spetznaz. Furthermore, the NATO forces are expected to operate in damaged areas and rebuild the water crossings, as well as possess CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) defence capabilities.

The Territorial Defence Force: mission and tasks

The Territorial Defence troops are divided into battalions, independent battalions and brigades which are supposed to conduct defensive and delaying operations in the regions (including urban areas) and directions suitable for the employment of mobile light infantry units. Poland is a geographically diverse country abounding with water obstacles, forests, uplands and foothills which are convenient to organize defensive lines or delay hostile operations. According to the plan, each voivodeship (province) is expected to field one brigade, except for Masovia Province in which two brigades will be formed. Given the fact that these units are under control of local military administration, this concept should allow to optimize the use of human resources and supplies during a crisis or war. The employment of the Territorial Defence Force units ought to be based on combat operation plans, also outside of their military districts. During war, however, it is not necessary to deploy the entire brigades in each province, especially if a heavy concentration of the Territorial Defence Force troops is required in other regions, e.g. in the coast in order to prevent hostile landing operation. Furthermore, in order to backfill losses of regulars in the depths of Polish territory it is necessary to use reserves and form new troops. Given the hostile operations in the rear, the units of the Territorial Defence Force are expected to combat enemy's forces in this area. The TDF's role in a strategic formation and its support for the regular troops should be considered in the context of strategic defensive operations. The TDF can cooperate with the regular troops or as independent units operating in distant areas.

As far as the operational formations are concerned, the TDF units ought to be deployed between the regular troops in less dangerous directions and able to cover their flanks. Furthermore, the Territorial Defence Force may play an important role in depth, e.g. to combat enemy's airborne troops and organize defensive lines on an ad hoc basis against the enemy's forces which would break through the front line. These force should also be capable to conduct other actions, such as life-saving interventions in case of CBRN incidents.

Brigades and, less often, battalions of the Territorial Defence Force can operate independently, without the employment of the regular troops. However, the number of brigades conducting an operation depends on the significance and size of the operational area. The TDF units are supposed to be capable to cooperate with the Navy, Air Force and Special Forces with limited support of the regulars, particularly if the employment of Land Forces is impossible due to their involvement in major defensive operations.

As far as the strategic defensive operation is concerned, the Territorial Defence Force ought to consider the following regions:

- A coastline with harbours, naval bases and energy infrastructure;
- Masurian Lakelands and other lakes located between the Bug and Vistula rivers;
- Mountain ranges in the southeast of Poland;
- The areas around convenient crossings of the Vistula and Oder (Odra) rivers; particularly bridges which allow NATO forces to cross Poland's longest rivers;
- Key industrial centres, factories and facilities including the defence sector;
- Regions crucial for the functioning of the state, including the capital of Poland;
- Regions in which the strategic materiel of the Polish Armed Forces is located;
- Part of critical national infrastructure which is crucial for the functioning of the state.

Based on the military operational analysis, five or six brigades of the Territorial Defence Force are expected to be permanently deployed and operate between the Bug and Vistula rivers, which is the area of their permanent disposition. However, it seems absolutely certain that the number of this units is not sufficient. The region of Masurian Lakes and the

Elbląg Upland requires three or four brigades of the Territorial Defence Force in the first echelon and at least one additional brigade in reserve. Further two or three brigades and the regular troops ought to be deployed along the eastern border. Moreover, it is necessary to deploy additional two brigades in Lublin Upland and Bieszczady Mountains. Approximately 8–10 brigades of the Territorial Defence Force are required to support the regulars in the area between the Bug and Vistula river in the first phase of a war, which means that three or four additional brigades from western Poland ought to be deployed in this area.

Given a potential strategic offensive against Poland, it is worth noting that the enemy's forces will certainly conduct airborne and landing operations in an attempt to take over Polish territory as quickly as possible. The enemy will certainly try to destroy Polish defensive lines along the Vistula river and block NATO forces on the Oder river. Much of Poland's coastline is easily accessible and vulnerable to amphibious assaults, therefore, this area ought to be defended not only by the Navy and Land Forces. The regulars should be supported by further five or six brigades of the Territorial Defence Force (the first echelon consists of three or four TDF brigades; additional two brigades remain in reserve) in order to repel an attack.

The Armed Forces will have to place great emphasis on regions and objects such as crossings on the Vistula and Oder as well as areas suitable to organize river crossings. There are four or five spots along the Vistula river which comply with these requirements. This is the reason why the Armed Forces ought to deploy from six to eight brigades of the Territorial Defence Force in order to secure these areas together with the capital of Poland. Furthermore, it is necessary to deploy further three or four brigades in the region of the Oder and Warta river. A Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces should possess additional two or three brigades in reserve.

In conclusion, it seems absolutely clear that the Armed Forces need to deploy approximately 30 brigades of the Territorial Defence Force, it is questionable, however, whether this goal can be achieved. It is also worth considering the organizational structure of the Territorial Defence Force. The structure of each brigade ought to reflect its combat capabilities as well as diverse conditions and environment, in which a brigade is supposed to operate, e.g. forests and lakelands; urban areas; mountain warfare. Above all, units of the Territorial Defence Force should be capable to conduct defensive and delaying operations.

Given the advantage of reconnaissance and preparations for a potential attack, units and sub-units of the TDF are supposed to carry out operations in their local area. Operations conducted by the TDF ought to utilize well-prepared terrain and obstacles, e.g. building defence lines based on natural terrain features, forests, urban areas, lakes and rivers. There is no doubt that the organizational structure of the Territorial Defence Force should be based on tasks and goals of a specific brigade. Furthermore, it seems worth pointing out that brigades' structure must not be homogenous.

The main goal of the defensive and delaying actions is to consistently delay hostile military operations by using defensive lines. Conventional infantry units, however, are not sufficient to perform these tasks. The employment of highly specialized sub-units, which are capable to delay enemy's offensive, seems to be indispensable. Units of the Territorial Defence Force should be also equipped in accordance with their specialized tasks, missions and the operational area. It seems clear that the units operating in the coast require different weapons than units which are supposed to conduct operations in forests and lake districts.

As far as military tactics are concerned, sub-units of the TDF should also consist of highly specialised sub-sub-units, such as reconnaissance (including sub-sub-units equipped with UAVs); anti-tank; light artillery (with self-propelled mortars in particular), air defence; search and rescue; and engineering sub-sub-units (capable of destroying and building barriers, maintaining and repairing roads, rebuilding infrastructure).

The infantry ought to be organized into fully autonomous companies which are capable to operate in various directions, away from army's main defence forces. These units need to be equipped with light pickup trucks to transport an entire squad with weapons and ammunition. Generally speaking, a support squad is necessary in each platoon and each company should possess one support platoon, which is capable to combat both tanks and infantry. Therefore, the platoon should be equipped with anti-tank missile launchers and mortars. Furthermore, it seems necessary to emphasize the significance of the engineering sub-units capable of conducting minelaying operations (including those equipped with self-propelled minelaying systems). These units, together with units equipped with anti-tank missiles, can also participate in conducting area interdiction operations and support the regular troops in depth. Moreover, the Territorial Defence Force needs light engineering equipment to increase army's flexibility and security, as well as provide camouflage capabilities in accordance with needs, tasks and features of an operational area. It seems

indispensable to establish camouflage engineering units responsible for handling visual deception to misinform the enemy and hide the real location of combat formations. It is also worth considering search and rescue training for the Territorial Defence Force and cooperation with firefighters, particularly in damaged urban areas.

TDF's artillery ought to be based on 120 mm self-propelled mortar systems; portable 60/81 mm mortars; light man-portable anti-tank missile launchers; and 40 mm automatic grenade launchers. Furthermore, it worth analyzing to equip the artillery sub-units with 70 mm short-range missiles mounted on mobile multiple rocket launchers and 105 mm gun-howitzers (including self-propelled variants), especially for the units that are supposed to operate in the coast and uplands. TDF's sub-units should also be capable to operate in areas of CBRN surface contamination in operational depth and conduct counter-CBRN operations with non-military services.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Capabilities of the Polish regular Land Forces do not fulfil the needs and ambitions of Poland, even though these forces are decisive to stop the advance of enemy forces between the Bug and Vistula rivers and allow NATO troops to join the battle.
2. In the East of Warsaw, it is necessary to deploy additional units of the Land Forces in order to secure the shortest way to Warsaw from Brest in Belarus. The Territorial Defence Force will not be capable to stand against enemy's heavy divisions and their main offensive. Weapons and equipment (e.g. anti-tank missiles etc.) of the TDF is in this particular case of secondary importance due to limited combat capabilities and firepower of these units.
3. The military doctrine of the Russian Federation points out the significance of 'heavy' formations in strategic directions, which can determine the outcome of a battle. Given a theoretical military conflict, Russia's Armed Forces will probably attempt to reach Polish defensive lines along Vistula river and establish bridgeheads in order to deploy its strategic reserve forces. Therefore, a primary goal of the Russian Armed Forces is to defeat the Polish Army as quickly as possible and descend upon the Oder to block the deployment of NATO forces in Poland.
4. An operational planning process for the Territorial Defence Force should take into consideration the strength of enemy's armed forces, particularly in the first phase of

combat. It is also crucial to scrutinize hostile doctrine and operational plans for the rearguard. Given Russia's military doctrine and a lack of tolerance towards partisans, the enemy will certainly pacify occupied areas. Furthermore, the operations conducted by the Territorial Defence Force in the occupied areas can lead to mass deportations in order to deprive Polish forces of logistical support.

5. The deployment of the regular troops is currently the most important issue, regardless of government's decision to form the Territorial Defence Force. The regulars ought to be perceived as a decisive force in a theoretical battle in the east of Warsaw. There is no doubt that it is necessary to put greater emphasis on preparation of the Armed Forces and the reserve components for a war.

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