
Transforming Poland's Military: A Focus on Western Concepts, Training, and Hardware

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Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, many former foes of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) sought to bring their militaries up to the standards of western nations. This was not an easy challenge. The strength of western military power does not rest solely on hardware but rather depends heavily on training methodologies and concepts of operations that differ greatly from those of the former Warsaw Pact nations.

Transforming Poland's military, a former Soviet bloc country, into a force capable of integrating with NATO and U.S.-led coalitions requires more than simple hardware commonality. While common hardware does indeed enable integration at the operational level and simplify logistical issues, considerable changes in training and operating concepts are also necessary. The Europe/NATO/Eurasia Division of the Air Force International Affairs Secretariat (SAF/IARE), by focusing on mutual goals, capabilities, and commonalities, is committed to supporting Poland's military transformation.

In this manner, SAF/IARE is involved in all aspects of Poland's efforts to transform its air force. The most visible evidence of this involvement is on the hardware side. In a program known as PEACE SKY, Poland agreed in 2002 to purchase thirty-six F-16C and 12 F-16D Block 52 aircraft. The first aircraft are to be delivered in late 2006 and deliveries are expected to continue through 2009. This purchase of 48 "latest off the production line" F-16s is a big step toward hardware commonality as a means toward enhanced interoperability between the air forces of Poland and the United States.

Training is an area of particular emphasis within the Polish Air Force. Poland is seeking enrollment for all future Polish F-16 pilots in the USAF-taught T-38 qualification course. After this T-38 course, Polish pilots will continue to fly the T-38 in the Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals (IFF) program and be taught how the USAF conducts air-to-air and air-to-surface missions. Finally, instructor pilots at the 162nd Fighter Wing of the Arizona Air National Guard will teach Polish pilots to fly and employ the F-16. Throughout these training programs, Polish pilots will learn more than simple "stick and rudder" skills. More importantly, they will come to understand the manner in which the USAF employs airpower.

The transformation of the Polish Air Force is further enhanced by its officers' attendance at the operational and strategic courses taught at the Air Command and Staff College and Air War College. These schools will help Polish officers alter their warfighting perspectives from the Cold War era Soviet dogma of sheer numerical superiority to the current U.S. approach toward conflict management and peacekeeping operations. The instruction of 600 field grade Polish officers in different concepts, theories, cultures, and values will significantly contribute to integrating their thinking and methodologies with those of Western forces.

The USAF will also offer extended Training Service Specialists (ETSS) and guest pilot programs. Under the ETSS program, the USAF will send two F-16 instructor pilots to Poland, who will spend two-year tours with the Polish Air Force developing continuation training, mission qualification training, and Polish basic pilot course training. The guest pilot program features a Polish pilot who, upon completing his F-16 certification, will remain at the 162nd Fighter Wing (162 FW) in Arizona, as an instructor pilot to teach follow-on Polish pilots. The guest pilot will eventually return to Poland to help the Polish Air Force establish its own F-16 basic course. By having the initial 37 F-16 pilots trained by the USAF and placing one of their own pilots in the 162 FW, the Polish Air Force will be well on its way to producing its own F-16 pilots whose training and capabilities mirror those of the

USAF. This is a key factor in ensuring the two nations' air forces can further integrate their operations and achieved hardware compatibility through foreign military sales.

To maintain the Polish Air Force's combat edge, the U.S. Air National Guard and Air Reserve have deployed, and will continue to deploy, annually to Poland to conduct F-16 training. In the past, these deployments have exposed the Polish Air Force to operational training and basic aircraft maintenance on the F-16. In the future, these visits will focus on continuing unit maintenance training. Members of the 183rd Fighter Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard and the 149th Fighter Wing of the Texas Air National Guard have already visited Poland to work with Polish maintainers using USAF procedures.

Logistics is also an important area of emphasis between SAF/IARE and Poland. The centerpiece of an effective logistical system is the ability to expeditiously move supplies to the right place when needed. To improve Poland's logistical capability, the Polish Air Force is acquiring five C-130 aircraft from the USAF. These tactical airlift aircraft will enhance Poland's ability to conduct day-to-day military supply operations within Poland as well as to lend Poland's support to international peacekeeping and disaster relief missions.

Poland's efforts to transform its military from Soviet-style doctrine, training, tactics, and operations to western standards and practices are consistent with our international security assistance policies and, ultimately, the United States' national security strategy. SAF/IARE is committed to supporting these efforts and will continue to provide a broad range of security cooperation activities.