Bloodletting in Polish army leadership

Clara Weiss
30 March 2017

The current wave of bloodletting in the senior ranks of the Polish army is unprecedented in the history of NATO.

Some 92 percent of the cadre in the general staff and 82 percent of colonels have been replaced in recent months, according to the Polish defence ministry. Information from the right-wing online website Wprost.pl indicates that between November 17, 2015 and January 31, 2017, 504 high-ranking officers resigned from military service, including 34 generals and 47 colonels. Numerous senior officers have also resigned in the subsequent period.

The most fundamental reason for the resignations are sharp differences between senior officers, many of whom are closely integrated into NATO, who served in Afghanistan and Iraq and in some cases were trained in the United States, and the ultra-nationalist Law and Justice Party (PiS) government.

The officers accuse Minister of National Defence Antoni Macierewicz, a close ally of PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, of bypassing them on important strategic decisions, awarding leading positions according to political loyalty, purging officers with even a remote connection to Poland's "Communist" (Stalinist) past and, as a result, weakening the professionalism and fighting ability of the Polish army.

Strong opposition also exists in the army to the plans to establish a Territorial Defence Force (WOT), a paramilitary force made up of volunteers, whose creation was agreed to by the Sejm (Polish parliament) last November.

Retired General Waldemar Skrzypczak stated that the army had been gripped by "an atmosphere of persecution for anyone with a different opinion from the government. They are treating the generals dismissively. They throw anyone out of the army who stands up for their own opinion and replace them with those with no backbone."

Skrzypczak accused Macierewicz of purges comparable to the actions of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and warned, "The question now is whether we are still credible for NATO."

General Stanislaw Koziej, a brigadier general and a professor of military science, attacked the government for "overt political interference into the competencies of the army command." In addition, he said, other problems included "civil servants taking the role of political superiors and the politicisation of the army along party lines." He added, "The scale and speed of the changes generate a risk to the effective functioning of the army."

The US magazine *Foreign Policy* wrote in January, "The chief of defence was not consulted when the ministry replaced his deputies. People are appointed to positions without the necessary ranking required. The NATO-Corps deputy commander is supposed to be a two-star general, but a colonel was given the post instead. The Washington military attaché—also at least a one-star position—has been empty since April."

Among the officers who have resigned are all three generals who led NATO's Anaconda exercise last year: Marek Tomaszycki, Mieczys?aw Gocu? and Miros?aw Ró?a?ski.

Ró?a?ski, former general commander of the Polish armed forces, tendered his resignation in December, the same day as protests by the liberal opposition escalated to a blockade and occupation of parliament. He had held his post, which nominally made him the most influential general in the Polish army, since 2015 and was to have served until 2018. At 52, he was one of the youngest officers in the Polish army and served in the military interventions in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

According to a report in the liberal newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Ró?a?ski opposed all of the important policy goals of Defence Minister Macierewicz. Like many other generals and officers, he

© World Socialist Web Site

rejected the construction of the WOT.

This militia is directly under the command of the Defence Ministry and not the army's supreme command. It is to be composed of at least 30,000 men and is being recruited mainly from far-right paramilitary units. Many professional officers view it as a competitor to the army and as PiS' armed wing.

Jerzy Gut, the supreme commander of the Polish army's special forces, resigned on March 13 due to "personal reasons." The relatively young Gut, born in 1960, is one of the Polish army's most experienced officers and has close ties to NATO and Washington. Media reports indicated that Gut had been bypassed by Macierewicz for months prior to his resignation on decisions relating to rearming the military and filling empty posts.

In "liberal" opposition circles, hopes are now being expressed about an intervention by the US government or the military. The magazine *Polityka*, which is aligned with the bourgeois opposition, in a comment headlined "How will the Americans respond?," wrote that Gut's resignation would "surely encourage the US to concern itself with the changes in our army."

The special forces under Gut's command were built up over the past decade under the direct supervision of the American army. Almost the entire leadership of the unit, which cooperated closely with the US, has been replaced over the past few months.

After deployments in Bosnia and Iraq, Gut studied at the National Defense University in Washington and in 2014 received the US Special Operations Command medal from the United States army. In 2015, he was commander of the "special forces" unit of NATO's Response Force (NRF).

Polityka wrote that while the US military has other priorities at present with a new president, there have been indications for some time that "some of Minister Macierewicz's nominations have produced astonishment among the Americans…Poland has got rid of many military leaders in recent times who had excellent relationships with their NATO colleagues."

Janusz Bronowicz, who was one of the first generals to resign in early 2016, has been sharply critical of the Defence Minister. He described Macierewicz in *Polityka* as the "first civilian leader of the armed forces," and declared that his military reforms would be catastrophic for the country. He wrote further, "The situation is totally unacceptable. And in case of a possible conflict, it is paving the way for a repetition of the defeat of September 1939." That was when the Nazis overran Poland, beginning World War II.

The "liberal" opposition's hope for the US to step in or even for the intervention of the military says a great deal about its democratic character. Although the opposition Citizens Platform (PO) has sharp disagreements with PiS over Poland's attitude towards the European Union and Germany, it fully agrees with PiS on the military build-up against Russia, which threatens to transform Europe into a nuclear battlefield. PO accuses PiS of endangering the fighting ability of the Polish army and its position in NATO with its clique politics.

Despite the bloodletting in the army leadership and the construction of the territorial army, Poland is rearming rapidly. According to official figures, the number of soldiers in the army rose from 96,000 in 2015 to 106,000 in 2017. Over the same period, the number of students at officer schools increased from 490 to 906. Wages for the lower ranks in the army have been increased substantially.

In addition, there are the 30,000 WOT members, a further 30,000 employees of the Defence Ministry and various institutions which supply the military, as well as numerous paramilitary units whose members are neither under the control of the government nor the military.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site