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## **The United States Is Making Decisions Regarding Its Military Contingents in Europe: Six Implications for Poland**

**The decision to suspend the deployment of a rotational contingent of the United States Armed Forces to Poland has brought to light structural deficiencies in bilateral relations. The uncertainty generated by this decision merely exemplifies the broader challenges inherent in the asymmetrical Polish-American partnership. Improving the condition of these relations requires Polish decision-making centres not only to formulate an accurate diagnosis of the underlying causes of these problems, but also to undertake appropriate measures vis-à-vis their ally.**

On 14 May 2026, The New York Times reported that the United States Department of War (DoW) had suspended the deployment of 4,000 soldiers from the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, the "Black Jack Brigade", who had been scheduled for stationing in Poland as part of the rotational military presence<sup>1</sup>. In the days that followed, further details concerning the decision emerged through statements made by representatives of the administration of Donald Trump, information disclosed during congressional hearings involving senior military officials in the United States House of Representatives, as well as comments from Polish decision-makers. Among the most consequential revelations was the fact that the Polish side had not been informed in advance of the planned suspension.

The official position of the DoW was issued only on 19 May 2026; however, it still failed to provide clear answers regarding the nature of the decision. It remained uncertain whether the measure constituted a temporary suspension, a reduction, or a redeployment of the brigade, what factors had prompted the decision, and which actors were ultimately responsible for its adoption<sup>2</sup>. On 21 May 2026, President Donald Trump subsequently announced that an additional 5,000 troops would be deployed to Poland<sup>3</sup>. This statement likewise failed to resolve a number of key uncertainties. The final number of troops to be stationed in Poland remains unknown; neither the character of their presence (permanent, rotational, or temporary) nor the source of the contingent (whether deployed directly from the United States or reassigned from the existing American military presence in Europe) has been clarified. Nor were the ambiguities surrounding the earlier decision disclosed by The New York Times adequately addressed.

Although the situation remains dynamic and it is still premature to offer a comprehensive assessment of its implications for the security of Poland and, more broadly, NATO's eastern flank, the decision-making process itself already permits the formulation of several conclusions of fundamental importance for Polish security.

### **Commentary**

1. Poland's strong attachment to the United States in the sphere of alliance policy, together with its consistently supportive posture in this domain, is perceived in Washington—at least by parts of the current administration—as a permanent and stable component of bilateral relations that does not require particular efforts or special diplomatic engagement on the part of the United States. This perception may stem both from the manner in which segments of the Polish political elite conceptualise the strategic significance of relations with the United States – where asymmetry may translate into a syndrome of dependency,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/14/us/politics/us-army-poland-troops-hegseth-trump.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4496531/statement-attributable-to-assistant-to-the-secretary-of-war-for-public-affairs/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116614442694237946>

potentially culminating, in its extreme form, in the self-vassalisation of the state – and from the American assessment that the United States constitutes the only viable alternative available to Poland in the context of its security dilemma. This diagnosis is further reinforced by the relatively high level of public support in Poland for defence cooperation with the United States<sup>4</sup>. Within the context of the issue under discussion, Polish-American relations have evolved in such a manner that decision-making centres in the United States attached little importance to how the initial decision to suspend or withdraw the deployment of 4,000 troops would be perceived in Poland. Even if one assumes that the DoW decision resulted primarily from organisational disorder and deficiencies in process management, this would still indicate that no critical reflection was undertaken at any level regarding the possible reaction of the Polish authorities, who had not been informed of these measures in advance.

2. The critical reactions of American politicians – both Democrats and Republicans – as well as analysts and the press to the DoW decision indicate that Poland enjoys a favourable reputation in the United States. The earlier attribution to Poland of the role of a “model ally” by representatives of the administration of Donald Trump, together with Poland’s consistent alignment with this role, helped mobilise a bipartisan front critical of the actions undertaken by the DoW, which may in turn have influenced the subsequent statement issued by President Donald Trump. Although a positive image does not in itself constitute a direct guarantee of American alliance commitments towards Poland, it nevertheless remains an important element in the construction of bilateral relations and in strengthening Poland’s position and agency.
3. Although Poland not only aligned itself with the direction of alliance policy advocated by the administration of Donald Trump, but at times itself acted as an initiator of certain measures and lobbied in favour of particular solutions – including increased defence expenditure among NATO member states – it was nevertheless also expected to become subject, at least temporarily, to changes in the deployment of American armed forces resulting from the as yet unpublished DoW Global Posture Review, within the framework of which the suspension of troop rotations was reportedly envisaged. In this context, attention should be drawn to the challenges arising from Poland’s position as a *junior partner*. It is misguided to assume that security can be guaranteed solely through political proximity (of both political parties and individuals) to the state providing such guarantees or through arms procurement contracts. Ultimately, positive political relations and a high degree of cooperation are undoubtedly important; however, they may prove insufficient to ensure the durability of allied engagement. Of fundamental importance is the extent to which the interests of allies become structurally linked to the security of Poland itself. After all, alongside several other European states, Poland remains a key partner capable of supporting the United States in stabilising the western region of Eurasia. Awareness of this potential, combined with political will and the capabilities necessary to perform such tasks, constitutes one of Poland’s principal assets in its relations with the United States and may additionally help minimise the risk of self-vassalisation.
4. The DoW decision to suspend the deployment of the contingent also demonstrated the importance of possessing a well-prepared strategic communication framework within the state apparatus for crisis situations. Efforts should be undertaken to minimise circumstances in which Polish decision-making centres appear surprised by decisions taken by the DoW. Such situations may adversely affect perceptions of the effectiveness of the state apparatus, as well as Poland’s credibility and its capacity to deter Russia and Belarus.
5. The Polish reaction to the DoW decision also demonstrates the importance of cooperation between the principal centres of political authority, namely the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, as well as the extent to which the prioritisation of partisan interests derived from domestic political dynamics may prove detrimental to the interests of foreign and security policy. This becomes even more visible in the context of relations with the United States, whose

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/poll-poland-europe-us-military-bases/>

administrations have in recent years increasingly sought to maximise gains and create political leverage by exploiting internal political polarisation within Poland.

6. The decision to suspend the deployment of the United States military contingent in Poland also illustrates the importance of the character of the American military presence abroad. A permanent presence provides considerably stronger institutional and procedural safeguards, which may constitute an obstacle to the rapid or uncomplicated reduction of the American military footprint.

*This commentary reflects the state of affairs as of 22 May 2026, 22:18 CET.*