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THE BALTIC REGION IN POLAND'S SECURITY POLICY: STRATEGIC ASSESSMENTS AND RESPONSE

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For the first time in Russian academic discourse, the article examines strategic assessments of the Baltic region's role in Poland's contemporary security policy, drawing on institutional and situational analysis as well as elements of scenario modelling. These assessments serve as the basis for military and diplomatic initiatives and adjustments to strategic planning in the development and modernisation of the armed forces. Building on strategic foreign and security policy documents, a corpus of legislative acts, and statements by Poland's political and military leadership, the author reconstructs the hierarchy of priorities underpinning Poland's contemporary security policy. The findings reveal a marked increase in the significance of the Baltic region within Poland's security policy since the escalation of the international political crisis in 2022. This trend is reflected in the systematic adaptation of state institutions to the prospect of conducting autonomous operations in the Baltic region. Consistent efforts have been undertaken to strengthen national defence capabilities, with particular emphasis on the development of a regional Baltic security architecture. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of subregional security dynamics in the Baltic Sea region and has practical relevance for foreign and security policy planning institutions in the Russian Federation.

Keywords:

security policy, foreign policy, strategic assessments and scenarios

The current political conflict between Russia and the West, which is a direct consequence of the erosion of the global governance model, is accompanied by the systematic dismantling of 'political buffers', the institutions and mechanisms for discussing and reconciling the interests of states and military-political blocs, not only at the global level but also at the regional level. The accession to NATO of Sweden and Finland — countries that had until recently declared their

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neutrality — has radically altered the military-political situation in the Baltic Sea region, effectively transforming the Baltic, once a model region of cooperation and mutually beneficial interaction [1], into a politically unified line of contact (confrontation) between Russia and the West [2; 3].

Given the special role of the Baltic region in the security policies of both Russia and NATO / EU countries (including the expanding presence of non-regional actors such as France [4]), the study of the strategic culture and military-political ambitions, as well as the principles of formulation and mechanisms of implementation of the security policies of foreign countries in the region, is of paramount importance for understanding the overall security dynamics on the so-called “Eastern flank” of the North Atlantic Alliance, and for developing scenarios of military-political actions in the Baltic region in the interests of the Russian Federation’s foreign policy planning institutions. The logic of scenario modelling involves moving toward reducing future uncertainty and helps define Russia’s own response strategies to Poland’s potential actions in the military-diplomatic and foreign policy spheres. Based on an understanding of the country’s strategic culture, its stated and (as assessed by experts) unstated security intentions, available resources, and military capabilities, it is possible to proactively and rationally implement measures in Russia’s interests to respond to and mitigate emerging threats.

Scope of the study. Methodology

At present, the Republic of Poland is one of the most prominent players in the system of international relations in the Baltic Sea region and is pursuing extensive military modernisation, citing an “existential threat” from Russia as the premise underlying the formulation and implementation of its security policy. The starting point for this study was the crisis events of early 2022, following which Poland intensified the ‘Baltic’ dimension of its foreign policy, stepping up efforts toward military-political integration with key regional players (Germany and Sweden), advancing the logic of collective regional efforts to ensure the security of critical underwater infrastructure and control of the Baltic Sea, while simultaneously adhering to the framework of expanding EU and NATO sanctions regimes against Russia and its economic interests.

Since the very start of the special military operation (SVO), Warsaw, whose strategic culture is rooted in the understanding that Ukraine’s independence is essential for effectively deterring Russia [5; 6], has severed all ties with Moscow. Poland not only actively supported Kyiv through economic and diplomatic measures but also provided the criminal regime with direct military support, transferring heavy tracked and wheeled vehicles, aircraft, helicopters, and a wide range of military equipment from storage bases and directly from combat units.¹

¹ Arms deliveries monitor, URL: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/armssdeliveries> (accessed 24.04.2026).

At Polish Army training grounds, the formation, equipping, tactical training, and combat coordination of units of the Kyiv regime are provided, and the Polish Army's military medical service continues to provide ongoing rear-area medical care to wounded and injured Ukrainian soldiers and foreign mercenaries. In the context of the overall dynamics of regional security, we should also note that the Polish leadership raised the question of the advisability of certain 'autonomous' decisions regarding the nuclear option in the global political game¹. Furthermore, on April 20, 2026, during a visit by French President Emmanuel Macron, plans were announced for joint Polish-French military exercises over the Baltic Sea involving a simulated nuclear strike against targets in Russia.²

Leaving discourse analysis aside — the political rhetoric of the military and political leadership and discursive practices in general undoubtedly require separate investigation — the author employs a combination of methods: institutional analysis, focusing on the role of state institutions in policy formulation and implementation, including through the development and adoption of strategic planning documents; situational analysis; scenario modelling and expert assessment.

This methodological framework enables the study to achieve its objectives: to explain the logic and trajectory of strategic thinking on the Baltic region in the context of national security, to understand the rationale behind Warsaw's current actions, and to identify the likely contours of the emerging regional order.

Drawing on strategic planning documents in the fields of foreign and security policy, other policy documents³, and statements by Poland's military and political leadership, the study examines the place of the Baltic Sea region within the architecture of Poland's contemporary security policy priorities. Its objectives are to explain the logic of Warsaw's military and diplomatic actions at the global and regional levels and to model scenarios for the implementation of Polish security policy. The unstated intentions of Poland's military and political leadership, as well as the logic underlying classified strategic planning documents, are reconstructed through a combination of methods: analysis of politicians' public statements, examination of deliberate leaks to the media, expert assessment, and analysis of information regarding contracts for the supply of weapons and technology.

¹ Brytyjska prasa: Tusk chce nuklearnego parasola dla Polski. Zapowiedział też rozbudowę armii, 2025, *Wprost*, 08.03.2025, URL: <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/11953720/tusk-zapowiada-polska-chce-broni-nuklearnej-i-500-tysiecznej-armii.html> (accessed 24.04.2026).

² Parafianowicz, Z. 2026, Francuskie głowice w Polsce. Znamy szczegóły wspólnych ćwiczeń i parasola atomowego, *WP Wiadomości*, 23.04.2026, URL: <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/francuskie-glowice-w-polsce-znamy-szczegoly-wspolnych-cwiczen-i-parasola-atomowego-7278089990662528a> (accessed 24.04.2026).

³ Some executive-level documents relating to Poland's national security and military planning are classified, which inevitably limits the research base to publicly available, open-access documents only.

The body of strategic planning documents is hierarchically subordinate to Poland's National Security Strategy, which identifies territorial integrity, the security of citizens, sustainable development, and the establishment of a global security architecture favourable to Warsaw as national priorities. The author conceptualises security policy as a complex system comprising interrelated elements — objectives, instruments, institutions, threats, and resources — which, in the Polish case, are subject to only partial cross-party consensus among the relevant political actors.

This study focuses on Poland's security policy in its foreign policy and defence dimensions. The central hypothesis tested in the study is that the Baltic region occupies a priority position in contemporary Polish security policy, which seeks to maximise Poland's defence capabilities while placing particular emphasis on building a regional (Baltic) security architecture based on bilateral and multilateral agreements.

While publicly emphasising, both internationally and in domestic political discourse, its commitment to the principles and foundations of the transatlantic security architecture, Warsaw is, in practice, taking steps toward the autonomization and regionalisation of its security policy. This trend indicates growing, albeit unspoken, doubts about the effectiveness of NATO security guarantees, particularly in light of adjustments to U.S. strategy toward European affairs, as well as pessimism regarding the prospects for establishing unified European Union armed forces.

Based on the research field outlined above, the study's objective, and its expected scientific results, the following research objectives are formulated:

1. To characterise the institutional logic underlying the formulation and implementation of security policy and to identify and systematise assessments of contemporary threats reflected in strategic planning documents.
2. To analyse the body of current national strategic documents to determine the hierarchy of national security policy priorities.
3. To characterise Poland's military and diplomatic initiatives aimed at safeguarding its national interests in the Baltic region and to assess current practices in the implementation of Polish security policy in the region.

In Russian scholarship, prior to the escalation of the global political crisis and the onset of the acute phase of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022, Poland's foreign policy and its military and diplomatic efforts to shape its preferred regional security architecture were viewed primarily within the broader context of the policies pursued by major alliances — NATO and the EU. Within these alliances, Poland (a 'middle-sized country' in the established terminology), together with the Baltic States ('small states'), sought, to the greatest extent possible, to securitize interactions with Russia (the term is used here in the sense defined by Buzan [7]), thereby strengthening its role in military and political planning and resource allocation and positioning itself as a provider of expertise on the so-called "Eastern policy" within the EU and NATO (see, for example, [8—11]).

The Baltic dimension of Poland's foreign policy and, more broadly, its security policy has traditionally been regarded in relevant international scholarship as an important but not fundamentally significant component [12–15]. These studies were largely based on the assumption that the goals, instruments, and expected outcomes of security policy implementation were determined within the framework of major alliances (NATO and the EU).

The outbreak of active hostilities in Ukraine in 2022 and Poland's indirect intervention in the conflict prompted the country's military and political leadership to reassess the effectiveness of its previous defense policy and adjust its regional priorities, which resulted in the launch of a large-scale program to rearm the army through purchases on the international market (the U.S., South Korea, Sweden, and Germany) and a surge in diplomatic activity in the Baltic Sea region. Following the change in government resulting from the fall 2023 parliamentary elections, this trend evolved into an autonomist one, aimed at enhancing the country's own defense capabilities, a shift reflected in strategic planning documents on security policy and the responses to them: serious expert analyses and high-quality studies are beginning to emerge on the issues of the accelerated modernization of the Polish army and the assessment of military-diplomatic and defense initiatives, taking into account the unprecedented dynamics of the global political crisis, authored by Russian [16–21] and foreign researchers [22–24]. Nevertheless, given the exceptionally high intensity of the processes unfolding in the region and within the global political system as a whole, it is necessary to focus on the implications of current regional dynamics for Polish security policy, which is precisely what the author undertakes in this study.

Security policy: institutions, mechanisms, and documents

The institutional design of the system for safeguarding national interests in the military-political and defence spheres is defined by the country's constitution and supplementary laws governing the powers of the head of state as a key player in the formulation and implementation of security policy. Pursuant to Article 126 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland,¹ the President combines the functions of strategic coordinator of all branches of government, non-partisan leader, and guarantor of the continuity of the state tradition. As the supreme representative of the Republic of Poland in the system of international relations (Article 133 of the Constitution), the President upholds the sovereignty and ensures the security of the state, the inviolability of its borders, and its territorial integrity. The head of state has primary authority in the development and implementation of the country's foreign policy in the field of international security, coordinating the monitoring, identification, and assessment of all potential threats (including

¹ Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r., *Dziennik Ustaw* № 78, poz. 483, sprostowanie: *Dziennik Ustaw* z 2001 r. № 28, poz. 319, zmiana: *Dziennik Ustaw* z 2006 r. № 200, poz. 1471, *Dziennik Ustaw* z 2009 r. № 114, poz. 946.

military, political, economic, and hybrid threats) and countering them to ensure the normal functioning of the Polish state and the preservation of the well-being of its citizens.

The institutional design of Poland's system of government as a parliamentary republic creates conditions for a so-called "competence dispute" between the President and the government (formed by the parliamentary majority) regarding foreign and security policy [25]: depending on the current domestic political configuration and the personal ambitions of the head of state and the head of government, leadership practices in this sphere differed during the presidencies of Andrzej Duda (2015–2025) and Karol Nawrocki (from 2025).

During the tenure of the Law and Justice governments led by Beata Szydło (2015–2017) and her successor, Mateusz Morawiecki (2017–2023), President Andrzej Duda effectively played a secondary role, making no attempt to monopolise the formulation and implementation of security policy and instead coordinating his foreign policy activities with the relevant government agencies under the prime minister's authority.

Following the formation in 2023 of the coalition government led by Donald Tusk, leader of the Civic Platform party, which came to power on a platform of categorical opposition to the policies pursued by Law and Justice, the dispute over the division of powers between the two state institutions intensified. President Duda sought to expand his sphere of responsibility and autonomy in foreign and security policy, frequently bringing him into conflict with the government over its initiatives on the international stage.

To a large extent, the president's activity in this area was driven both by political competition between the two opposing camps — the need to demonstrate the government's ineffectiveness and create favourable conditions for the Law and Justice candidate in the upcoming presidential election — and by subjective considerations. Andrzej Duda actively pursued opportunities for an international career, including within NATO, after the end of his second presidential term, although these efforts proved unsuccessful.

Upon assuming the presidency in 2025, Karol Nawrocki, formally an independent candidate but effectively a protégé of Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the Law and Justice party, moved decisively to shift the centre of gravity of Poland's security policy toward the presidential office, viewing himself as the leader and strategic coordinator of the country's security agenda. The domestic political agenda increasingly centred on the development and implementation of military, diplomatic and foreign policy initiatives, both bilateral and within the frameworks of the EU, NATO, and the UN.

Under the new president, the National Security Council (NSC) was strengthened both structurally and in terms of its members. The NSC serves as an advisory body to the head of state, gathering information, setting priorities, and issuing recommendations, including on appointments falling within the president's authority.

Karol Nawrocki and his administration interpreted both the Constitution and the 2022 Law “On the Defence of the Fatherland”,¹ broadly in their favour. Under Article 26 of the law, security and defence policy is formulated and implemented through the National Security Bureau (hereinafter, the NSB), which is part of the Office of the President. Since the law authorises the President’s representative to participate in meetings of the government and its committees at which security and defence issues are discussed, including closed meetings, the NSB became actively involved in the work of the government and security agencies directly subordinate to the Prime Minister.

The same law establishes the President’s key role in the preparation of strategic planning documents in the field of security policy. Accordingly, before starting to work on the National Security Strategy, the government receives recommendations from the National Security Bureau (NSB). Before strategic planning documents are submitted to the head of state for signature, they are subject to preliminary review by the Bureau, which issues an opinion and recommendations for further revision.

In matters requiring close coordination between the President and the government, the Constitution provides for the convening of a special consultative body known as the Cabinet Council, which is essentially a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by the head of state. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cabinet Council met twice, in 2020 and 2021, to discuss measures to address the consequences of the pandemic.

President Karol Nawrocki convened his first Cabinet Council almost immediately after taking office in August 2025. The meeting addressed, among other issues, prospects for the construction of a nuclear power plant, as the President views the national nuclear energy program as a cornerstone of Poland’s long-term relations with the United States.

As a result of the consolidation in recent years, both in law and in political practice, of the President’s predominant powers in the field of security policy, a broader shift in Poland’s institutional structure toward a semi-presidential system can be observed. This trend is being actively promoted by President Karol Nawrocki, who seeks to ‘seize’ powers and authority in the fields of foreign and security policy from the government. To this end, he employs the instruments of administrative influence and personnel policy at his disposal — including delaying the conferral of new officer ranks and withholding approval of appointments of ambassadors and representatives to international organisations — to secure concessions from Prime Minister Donald Tusk on issues prioritised by Nawrocki.

Should the Law and Justice party, with which Nawrocki is politically aligned, win the upcoming parliamentary elections, a further consolidation of presidential power can be expected, potentially extending to constitutional amendments that would institutionalise Nawrocki’s ambitions to establish a presidential system of government.

¹ Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny, *Dziennik Ustaw* z 2025 r., poz. 825.

The aforementioned 2022 “Law on National Defense” established a framework for cooperation between the Ministry of Defense and the head of state regarding the determination of strategic priorities for the development of the armed forces, under which the president, upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Defense, signs strategic planning documents in this area, including plans for the use of the army, as well as the principles and organization of the armed forces’ operations during peacetime and wartime.¹ Following a similar procedure, upon the recommendation of the Minister of Defense, the President also makes the formal decision regarding the deployment of foreign troops on the country’s territory, which allows him to actively participate in the drafting of such documents and directly influence their content.

Thus, the institutional framework, which provides for a division of powers and responsibilities between the head of state and the head of government in the formulation and implementation of security policy, has been undergoing significant changes since 2022. These changes have been driven by the specific dynamics of domestic politics and compounded by the personal ambitions of the new President, Karol Nawrocki.

The Presidential Office is increasingly taking control of the process of setting national security priorities through active involvement in the preparation of strategic planning documents. It is also asserting a leading role in military-diplomatic activities and effectively determining the direction of the development and modernisation of the Polish armed forces, both by identifying sources of funding for military modernisation and by defining the role of the armed forces in times of war and peace. This new phenomenon is accompanied by rapid changes in Poland’s strategic culture (on the evolution of Poland’s strategic culture, see [26]).

The key document in the strategic planning system of Poland’s security policy is the National Security Strategy (hereinafter the NSS), which publicly articulates the country’s national interests and sets forth the objectives of security policy. Based on the NSS, executive acts are formulated, financial mechanisms for their implementation are determined, legislative amendments are prepared, and the principles and directions for the implementation of the country’s foreign policy are defined.

The document succinctly reflects the logic of the country’s strategic culture, providing insight into the principles guiding its thinking about the present (“the world around us”) and outlining a vision of the desired future. On July 25, 2025, the government of Donal Tusk adopted a new version of the National Security Strategy, which must be signed by the president to take effect.² Despite the fact

¹ The President’s extensive powers in the area of internal security remain outside the scope of this study.

² As of March 30, 2026, the NS Strategy was not signed by K. Nawrocki.

that as of the end of April 2026, the 2020 National Security Strategy¹ — which emphasised global threats and hybrid operations as priorities — remains formally in effect, the government has based its current policies on the logic of the new document since it was submitted to the President for signature.

In addition to the goals set out in the country's Constitution — preserving the state's territorial integrity and inviolability, as well as its independence and sovereignty — the 2025 National Security Strategy places particular emphasis on establishing a world order based on the principles of cooperation and respect for international law as a means of guaranteeing Poland's security.

To this end, as envisaged by the drafters of the Strategy, Poland must actively participate in shaping NATO and EU policies in ways that advance its national interests, while maintaining its strategic partnership with the United States and expanding regional and bilateral military-diplomatic and defence cooperation. Within the stated logic of the Polish government's policy, these two directions are not considered contradictory.

However, developments in 2026 indicate that the expansion of regional cooperation in the Baltic region and bilateral security relations with Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Baltic States is a process that directly contradicts the objective of maintaining a strategic partnership with the United States.

The same document explicitly states that Russia's efforts to establish a global security system based on spheres of influence run counter to Poland's national interests. Ukraine, meanwhile, is viewed as a key player, whose independence and pro-Western orientation must be supported, including in the military-political sphere. The principles guiding the formulation of defence policy are based on strengthening the Polish Army's ability to defend itself effectively and inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy in the context of an intense and protracted conflict. To this end, measures are being taken to modernize the armed forces' equipment and revise plans for the operational deployment of forces and capabilities accordingly. Advanced technological solutions are expected to safeguard the country's interests in multi-domain conflicts, including in the space domain.² Measures are being implemented to develop civil defence capabilities, enhance the resilience of critical infrastructure, and establish an integrated national security management system that accounts for both military and civilian infrastructure. A significant aspect of security policy (which we leave outside the scope of this study but plan to address in the near future) is the National Security Strategy's emphasis on developing citizens' readiness for active resistance and the armed defence of the state.

¹ Postanowienie prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 12 maja 2020 r. w sprawie zatwierdzenia "Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", 2020, *Monitor Polski*, poz. 413.

² Poland already has its own satellites to establish an independent of NATO channel for intelligence information in the Baltic Sea region, Russia and Belarus.

The classified Political and Strategic Defence Directive of the Republic of Poland (hereinafter, the PSOD) occupies a special place within the system of strategic planning documents in the security sector and serves as an implementing document for the National Security Strategy. The PSOD is prepared by the Ministry of Defence and issued by the head of state with the prior approval (the so-called “countersignature”) of the Prime Minister.

The document identifies military and political threats, outlines scenarios for developments in both peacetime and wartime, and specifies measures to address these threats. These measures take the form of operational plans for the Armed Forces, central and local government authorities, as well as research and production tasks assigned to the defence industry.

The Programme for the Development of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (hereinafter, the PDFAF) is a strategic document that defines the key directions for the development and modernisation of the country’s armed forces. The document was approved by the relevant parliamentary committee and subsequently signed by Minister of National Defence Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz on December 22, 2025.¹

On the basis of the PDFAF, the Armed Forces Technical Modernisation Plan is developed, providing for the procurement of advanced weapons systems and technologies from domestic and foreign suppliers. The Program contains classified information on detailed plans for developing the operational capabilities of the armed forces, the parameters of arms procurement programs, international defence cooperation, and mobilisation scenarios.

At the same time, key military-strategic decisions and priorities were publicly discussed both at the political level and within the expert community, while certain information was deliberately leaked to specialised media outlets. The General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces published a brief statement outlining the Program’s priorities without disclosing specific parameters.²

Nevertheless, this information, when considered together with known details of the PRVS, open-source data on arms procurement, information on foreign policy consultations concerning the acquisition of weapons and technologies, and the publicly available National Security Strategy, makes it possible to identify and systematise assessments of contemporary threats to Poland’s security and the proposed responses to them. These assessments and responses were subsequently reflected in foreign policy documents and practical policy measures.

¹ 22 grudnia 2025 roku minister obrony narodowej Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz podpisał Program Rozwoju Sił Zbrojnych RP na lata 2025 – 2039, 2025, *Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej*, 22.12.2025, URL: <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/program-rozwoju-sil-zbrojnych-rp-na-lata-20252039-podpisany> (accessed 20.03.2026).

² Plan Modernizacji Sił Zbrojnych RP, URL: <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/sgwp/articles/aktualnosci-w-nowy-program-rozwoju-sil-zbrojnych-rp-wyznacza-kierunki-transformacji-wojska-polskiego> (accessed 23.03.2026).

In official foreign policy documents and public statements by Poland's political leadership,¹ the Russian Federation is explicitly described as a state that poses a threat to national security and freedom, not only to Poland, but to the international community as a whole. This threat is interpreted in two dimensions: as 'sub-threshold' operations — activities that do not formally meet the definition of aggression but have a destabilising effect — and as direct acts of sabotage and subversion preceding potential military aggression that poses an existential threat.

The PRSV is based on the principle of 'quality multiplied by quantity', which is intended to offset the potential numerical superiority of the adversary, meaning, of course, Russia and Belarus, by improving the efficiency of command and control processes within the armed forces, enhancing the training of military personnel (whose total number is expected to reach approximately 100,000 by 2026), and modernising equipment and logistics.

Based on an analysis of combat operations in Ukraine, the Polish Ministry of Defence plans to implement a set of measures aimed at radically expanding air and missile defence capabilities (including at critical infrastructure sites) and improving the survivability of units on the battlefield by equipping them with UAVs and electronic warfare systems (ECM). Particular attention is being paid to the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into analytical processes and combat control systems, accelerating the adoption of digital technologies to ensure situational awareness at the tactical level (use of digital theatre-of-operations models, real-time intelligence and target acquisition) and the integration of combat control systems for crew-operated vehicles and automated combat systems. According to the General Staff's assessment, conflict with Russia would take the form of a defensive operation, the success of which must be ensured by the threat of inflicting unacceptable damage on critical infrastructure not only in border areas but also in regions distant from the zone of potential direct conflict. The armed forces development programme reflects the state's desire to adapt to the changing architecture of international security by combining defensive and offensive components, as well as expanding the range of operational environments through the adoption of modern technologies.

An analysis of the data provided and publicly available information on past and planned arms procurements (modern tanks² and self-propelled artillery,

¹ Rutkowski, P. 2026, *Spięcie Nawrockiego z dziennikarzem TVN24*. "Pan redaktor się ogarnie i słucha", *Gazeta.pl*, 23.03.2026, URL: <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/polityka/7,198012,32680085,spiecie-nawrockiego-z-dziennikarzem-tvn24-pan-redaktor-sie.html> (accessed 23.03.2026).

² The modernisation programme of Polish armoured forces aims to reach by the end of 2026 the number of modern main battle tanks is 779, including "Abrams" version M1A1 FEP (116 tanks), "Abrams" version M1A2 SEPv3 (250 tanks), K2 "Black Panther" (180 tanks) and Leopard 2PL/2A5 (233 tanks). By 2030, the total number of modern tanks and engineering vehicles is expected to increase to more than 1,100.

multiple launch rocket systems, multi-role aircrafts,¹ and the program to procure submarines and coastal patrol vessels with advanced air defence capabilities) suggests that the Polish armed forces are preparing for a scenario of independent action in the event if allies fail to fulfil their obligations. The aforementioned documents, developed with the direct involvement of the Presidential Office, constitute the basis for strategic planning in the field of security policy. They are supplemented by foreign policy planning documents adopted at the government level, whose form and content, despite being grounded in shared strategic guidelines, are nevertheless strongly influenced by Radosław Sikorski, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The key document of this type to be analysed in the context of the present study is the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy for 2026–2030, published on 3 March 2026. It should be noted that the previous strategic document in the field of foreign policy was adopted in 2017. The annual policy addresses delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to parliament, the exposé, play a supplementary role, providing information on the country's international situation as well as on the key directions and principles of foreign policy implementation.

The Polish Foreign Policy Strategy reaffirms the view that Russia represents a long-term threat and declares a commitment to a 'two-pillar' approach: continuing military cooperation with the United States while developing the European Union's defence capabilities to ensure economic and military stability within the EU. In Radosław Sikorski's logic, such stability should demonstrate the effectiveness of the democratic system and serve as a model for states outside the EU that are embarking on a path of reform. The concept embedded in the document may be characterised as that of 'an influential Poland within a strong European Union', with Poland assuming an active role. This reflects the growing aspirations of Donald Tusk's government for greater autonomy in strengthening the macro-regional, EU-level context of its security policy, against the backdrop of increasing doubts about the effectiveness of EU-wide mechanisms for ensuring military security. The foreign policy logic presented as optimal for Poland is therefore aimed at strengthening its own defence capabilities, reinforcing the treaty framework for military and political cooperation, and maintaining NATO's and the EU's priority attention along the entire line of contact with Russia, above all in the Baltic region.

Strategic assessments of regional security: dynamics, potential, and responses

The regional system of international relations in the Baltic Sea region has changed fundamentally since the escalation of the global political crisis over Ukraine. The concept of a "region of cooperation", previously promoted by all

¹ Modern aircraft in the Polish Air Force: F-16 Block 52+ (48), FA-50 GF/PL (18), contracted (35) and expected delivery of the first F-35 in 2026. Su-22 and Mi-29 are being decommissioned as of April 2026.

countries in the region, has effectively been replaced by the logic of relations characteristic of a “region of conflict” [1, p. 155]. This understanding has become common both to the Russian system of foreign-policy thinking, in which the recognition of the Baltic Sea region’s transformation into a “region of cooperation without Russia” has acquired decisive significance, and to the other countries of the region, together with the EU and NATO as supranational regional actors. The latter have advanced the concept of the “Baltic Sea as NATO’s internal sea”, a notion that was consolidated after Finland and Sweden joined the North Atlantic Alliance [2; 27]. It should be noted that the logic of excluding Russia from the regional cooperation system had already been developed within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, adopted in 2009. This strategy symbolically, financially, and politically promoted the idea of the Baltic Sea as an internal sea of the EU, on whose periphery relations with Russia, Iceland, Belarus, and Norway were to be shaped.

The initiators of the Strategy viewed the European Commission as the authoritative moderator of the regional agenda and a source of resources for transforming the region, to diminish the significance of the ‘Russian’ component of the broader regional agenda [1]. Poland took steps to shift the programmatic priorities of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region toward regional security issues, leveraging Latvia’s presidency in 2023 and its own presidency in 2024 (the agenda included support for Ukraine and issues of energy, transport, and military security in the region). The overall trend toward securitisation in the content of the “EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region” was aligned with the “Strategic Agenda for 2024–2029” agreed upon at the European Council summit.¹

The Baltic region is of key importance to Polish security policy not only as a transport hub facilitating global trade and integration into global supply chains, but also as a region hosting critical energy infrastructure (the “Gazoport” terminal in Świnoujście, the “Naftoport” terminal in Gdańsk), through which Poland will import 48 % of its energy resources (oil, gas, motor fuel, and electricity)² by the end of 2025, and where a nuclear power plant is under construction and wind power generation is undergoing intensive development. Poland, in cooperation with Scandinavian investment funds, continues to actively develop onshore and offshore wind farms (18 facilities will be in operation by 2026), including testing technologies for the construction of more efficient mobile offshore wind platforms and developing scenarios for ensuring their physical and digital

¹ *European Council Strategic Agenda 2024–2029*, URL: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/4aldqfl2/2024_557_new-strategic-agenda.pdf (accessed 24.04.2026).

² Ciszak, P. 2025, *Oczy na Bałtyk. Wiele może się tu wydarzyć. “Strategiczny akwen”*, *Money.pl*, 16.11.2025, URL: <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/oczy-na-baltyk-wiele-moze-sie-tu-wydarzyc-strategiczny-akwen-7221723941030784a.html> (accessed 04.03.2026).

security as part of military deployment plans.¹ Several dozen power cables and 15 fibre-optic lines have been laid along the bottom of the Baltic Sea, which the EU classifies as “critical underwater infrastructure.” For Poland, the SwePolLink (a Polish-Swedish high-voltage direct current line) and BalticPipe (an undersea gas pipeline between Poland and Norwegian fields) are of key importance in this network.

The strategy adopted to transform Poland into a gas hub for Central and Eastern Europe (see the “Polish Energy Policy until 2040”) is based on existing long-term contracts with the United States and Qatar for gas supplies via Poland’s gas transmission infrastructure, including with a view to supplying Slovakia and Hungary. The Polish diplomatic service’s activities in this area are focused on formalising agreements with potential consumers under the banner of rejecting Russian supplies while emphasising economic factors. Analysing Poland’s actions in the region, as well as statements by representatives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs² and Polish experts on regional issues,³ we note that the research hypothesis regarding the growing importance of broadly understood security in the region (including safe maritime trade, open airspace, ensuring free passage through the Danish straits, and the preservation of critical underwater infrastructure) in the context of the developing military-political conflict between Russia and the collective West for Poland’s contemporary security policy. Viewing the U.S. policy of reducing its involvement in “European affairs” as a threat to its own security, the country’s military and political leadership seeks to create a regional security system based on the involvement of all countries in the region in active measures to counter so-called ‘Russian aggression’.

Citing numerous incidents involving critical underwater infrastructure as justification, Poland, with the support of the Baltic states and Sweden, is promoting within NATO and the EU the logic outlined in strategic planning documents regarding the need for military and political readiness to respond to inevitable (in their interpretation, of Russia’s origin) incidents that will threaten every element of regional security. In 2024, at the initiative of Poland, Sweden, and Germany, a NATO regional headquarters in the Baltic region (Command Task Force Baltic) was established in Rostock, Germany,⁴ with a combat control group consisting of

¹ The emphasis on developing wind power in parallel with the forced construction of the NPP is made to be able to compensate for the inevitable price jump as one gradually decreases its own coal generation in the energy balance of the country.

² Oczy na Bałtyk. Wiele może się tu wydarzyć. “Strategiczny akwen”, *Money.pl*, 16.11.2025, URL: <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/oczy-na-baltyk-wiele-moze-sie-tu-wydarzyc-strategiczny-akwen-7221723941030784a.html> (accessed 04.03.2026).

³ Romanów, M. 2025, Bezpieczeństwo Morza Bałtyckiego, *Instytut Sobieskiego*, 20.06.2025, URL: <https://sobieski.org.pl/bezpieczenstwo-morza-baltyckiego> (accessed 04.03.2026).

⁴ Reporting to the NATO Maritime Command (MARCOM) based in Northwood, United Kingdom.

officers from the German, Polish, and Swedish navies. Following the completion of the necessary certification procedures and personnel training, the command centre for international forces in the Baltic region will be relocated to Gdańsk in 2028 and to Sweden in 2032. Poland's military-diplomatic efforts are focused on creating the conditions for effective data sharing (work is underway to develop a unified regional system for tracking the movements of merchant ships flying the flags of third countries and Russian warships), developing joint capabilities to counter Russian electronic warfare systems and the Russian Army's electronic intelligence capabilities (with a focus on the capabilities of the Baltic Fleet group stationed in the Kaliningrad region). This activity was launched as part of the "Baltic Sentry" initiative, proposed in 2024 by Poland and launched in January 2025 as a set of analytical, intelligence, and operational activities by NATO forces and assets in the Baltic Sea region to analyse and counter military threats in the region, allegedly emanating from Russia. At the high-level NATO meeting (Baltic Sea NATO Allies Summit) in Helsinki, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk reaffirmed his commitment to the values of transatlantic security cooperation and the role of the United States as a key guarantor of stability in the region, although an analysis of the initiative's participants and the leading role of Poland and the Baltic states in mobilizing the Scandinavian countries and Germany to join the "Baltic Sentry" reveals the regional, "Baltic" nature of this NATO-led initiative.

An analysis of the logic and practice underlying the implementation of the Baltic Sentry initiative suggests that, alongside the development of scenarios for the combat deployment of forces and assets, scenarios for the military and diplomatic isolation of the Baltic Sea region in the interests of NATO member states were also, in effect, being refined. It is worth noting that Russian researchers Gudev and Ofitserov-Belsky conclude that response scenarios are being developed for critical underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea which could subsequently be replicated on a global scale [28].

This observation is further supported by an analysis of the decision taken in September 2025 to launch, under another timely pretext — the alleged violation of Polish airspace by Russian drones — a new NATO initiative, Eastern Sentry, which is unprecedentedly threatening in nature towards Russia. In addition to practising control over the Baltic Sea and its airspace, this initiative involved elements of projecting France's nuclear deterrence system onto the region through the redeployment of three Rafale fighter aircraft from Escadron de Chasse 2/4 Lafayette to the Polish Air Force base in Mińsk Mazowiecki. This squadron maintains permanent readiness to deploy nuclear-capable ASMP-A cruise missiles.

There is no doubt that Russia views such actions as openly hostile and escalatory in nature, a fact that is duly reflected in the military planning framework of the Russian Federation's armed forces.

A similar logic — that of acting as the initiator and driver of maximum military and political integration in the region amid growing doubts about the long-term role of the United States as a guarantor of regional security, doubts that have intensified as U.S. involvement in the Middle East conflict has expanded — has been pursued by Poland as part of its presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which began on 1 July 2025.

Having declared security and the development of regional identity as priorities of its programme, Warsaw has made significant efforts to reorient the CBSS agenda towards issues of pan-regional security and to transform the organisation into a political platform for formulating and promoting regional interests within NATO and the EU. This includes the joint use of resources from specialised EU funds and programmes. This process has taken place in parallel with the final decline of the Three Seas Initiative, previously regarded as one of Poland’s flagship political and economic projects in the region.

It is important to note that similar recommendations concerning the strengthening of the regional component of security policy, the development of cooperation protocols, and responses to the full spectrum of potential threats have been put forward by the Polish Institute of International Affairs, a think tank affiliated with the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs [29]. The Opportunity Institute for Foreign Affairs, a leading research centre in the field of international relations, explicitly identifies one of the key challenges for Poland’s security policy as the use of diplomatic and military instruments to create conditions that ensure the safety of shipping and the functioning of critical underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. In the event of a crisis scenario, this also includes ensuring the continuity of energy supplies via alternative routes [30].

The evolution of strategic assessments by key actors in the Baltic Sea region is presented in the table below.

The evolution of strategic assessments of Polish security policy

Poland’s Strategic Planning Document	Strategic Assessments			
	USA	EU	NATO	RUSSIA
2014 National Security Strategy	A key ally providing security guarantees through an expanded military presence	Unwavering confidence in the unity of the EU in the face of the challenges of the “post-Crimea” era, and the development of “soft security” instruments	Unwavering commitment to the principle of collective defence, increased defence spending	A significant potential threat, a source of hybrid threats, political revisionism, and political-economic expansion

The end of Table

Poland's Strategic Planning Document	Strategic Assessments			
	USA	EU	NATO	RUSSIA
2020 National Security Strategy	Relying on the United States as the primary source of security, expanding the military presence	The need to maintain unity in the face of threats, the task of mobilising resources to modernise the defence-industrial complex, and countering hybrid threats	The need to maintain unity in the face of threats, rising defence spending, and a strengthened presence in the Baltic region	The main threat, the driving force behind neo-imperialist policies, global revisionism
2026 National Security Strategy (Forecast)	A strategic partnership, maintaining a military presence, but developing autonomous self-defence capabilities in light of the risks associated with a decline in U.S. engagement in "European affairs"	Strengthening Poland's role within EU institutions and in shaping the political agenda; mobilising EU resources for the development of the defence industry; and developing bilateral mechanisms with EU member states	Poland's ability to act independently of NATO while maintaining its stated unconditional commitment to its alliance obligations	An existential threat, a factor in the domestic political mobilization of society

Compiled based on Poland's strategic planning documents.

On January 9, 2026, a landmark event took place for Polish security policy in the region: President Karol Nawrocki signed the "Safe Baltic" Act,¹ which consolidates the state's military and political efforts to safeguard national interests in the Baltic region. First and foremost, the authority of the Ministry of Defence has been significantly expanded with regard to decisions on the conduct of military missions, including patrolling, suppressing illegal activities, countering hybrid threats, and determining the intentions and nature of the cargo carried by suspicious vessels. At the same time, the navy has been granted simplified procedures for the use of weapons in international waters, as well as the right

¹ Ustawa o zmianie niektórych ustaw w celu usprawnienia działań Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na wypadek zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa państwa na polskich obszarach morskich oraz zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa na Morzu Bałtyckim, URL: https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc10.nsf/ustawy/1862_u.htm (accessed 04.03.2026).

to control shipping in Polish territorial waters — powers that were previously held exclusively by the Border Guard. The law was adopted in response to the growing importance of the Baltic Sea in Poland's security policy and confirms a broader trend towards greater autonomy in matters related to the protection of the country's national interests.

Conclusions. Regional scenarios in the context of increasing autonomy

Even given the exceptionally high intensity of the processes unfolding both in the region and in the global political system as a whole, an analysis of the actors' current actions makes it possible to identify likely future response scenarios and the potential contours of the emerging regional order. Having examined the logic and trajectories of Warsaw's strategic thinking with regard to the Baltic Sea region, we may conclude that the research hypothesis concerning the growing significance of this region in Polish security policy since 2022 has been confirmed.

This is reflected in the ongoing systemic adaptation of state institutions to the possibility of action in the Baltic Sea region, including autonomous action in a situation where allies refuse to fulfil their obligations. In the sphere of security policy, a single centre for decision-making and oversight of implementation has been established, namely the Presidential Administration. New strategic planning documents have been adopted; on their basis, the rapid rearmament of the armed forces is under way, while a military and diplomatic framework for a regional security model is being formed, albeit formally within NATO. Relevant legislation is also being modernised, and the powers of the Navy are being expanded.

The threat to Polish interests in the Baltic Sea has become the central narrative used in domestic political discourse to justify the massive expenditures required to rearm the Polish Navy, a process accompanied not only by purchases from allies but also by the modernisation of Poland's own defence industries, which are making a genuine technological leap forward. Strategic planning documents in the field of security policy are based on the idea of preparing the state to respond to various scenarios in the Baltic Sea region, where Russia, of course, is the sole source of threats. Threats are classified into categories such as "sub-threshold" actions (which do not formally fall under the definition of aggression but have a destabilising effect) and direct acts of sabotage and subversion that precede potential military aggression of an existential nature. In the event of "sub-threshold" events, Poland counts on a demonstration of solidarity from regional actors, and in the event of a military conflict, it is preparing to conduct autonomous defensive combat operations and strike deep into the enemy's (Russia's) territory, inflicting unacceptable damage.

The most likely course of action for Russia in such a situation would be a phased strengthening of the military and doctrinal components of its security policy and the protection of its national interests in the Baltic Sea region, which

would entail the implementation of the measures set forth in Russian Presidential Decree No. 991 of November 19, 2024 “On the Approval of the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence”.¹

It should be emphasised that, despite public assurances regarding a “two-track” approach to security policy, namely direct U.S. guarantees alongside institutional guarantees provided through NATO and the EU, Warsaw is in practice taking steps to develop its own defence capabilities, with an emphasis on constructing a regional, Baltic security architecture. This suggests a growing, though largely unspoken, doubt about the effectiveness of NATO guarantees, particularly in light of adjustments to U.S. strategy on European affairs, as well as pessimism regarding the prospects for establishing unified European Union armed forces.

The development of Poland’s own military potential does not resolve regional tensions and does not in itself guarantee respect for national interests in the region. Rather, it strengthens the country’s international position within NATO and the EU. The optimal scenario of regional dynamics towards which Poland’s efforts appear to be directed is the maintenance of a protracted but contained conflict situation in the Baltic Sea region, one that does not escalate into full-scale confrontation. Such a scenario makes it possible to convert perceived threats into a resource for industrial rearmament, thereby justifying the modernisation of the armed forces and increasing Poland’s role both in the region and, more broadly, in the global political system.

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