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**POLAND AS A PLAYER IN THE MIDDLE EAST
IN THE FIRST TWO DECADES
OF THE 20TH CENTURY. SELECTED MILITARY
AND NON-MILITARY DILEMMAS**

This article aims to show that Poland's foreign policy towards the Middle East is important, although not a priority in the pursuit of its interests. However, the significance of the Middle East in the Polish *raison d'État* has been increasing continuously and this trend will continue. Dilemmas related to the issue of military involvement in the region were among the most important for the Polish ruling class over the last three decades. Of equal importance were implications of the Arab Spring, the refugee crisis and the threats of lone wolf terrorist attacks. Also problematic was the position of Polish authorities regarding Iran, or rather the dilemmas connected with unthinking support for the United States in this matter, and the simultaneous cooling of relations with Tehran and the European Union's states. The policy towards the Middle East is a derivative of the Euro-Atlantic direction, which has been a matter of priority to Poland. Presenting Poland as a loyal ally as regards policy towards the Middle East is an outcome of Polish elites' endeavours to ensure security in Poland by strengthening the alliance with the USA and NATO, which are to constitute a security provider against the neo-imperial policy of Russia.

Keywords: the Middle East, Poland, foreign and security policy, Middle Eastern conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Taking into consideration the priorities proclaimed, but also consequently implemented in Polish foreign policy in the post-Cold War period, it can be assumed that the Middle East is an important direction, although not a priority, in the pursuit of Polish interests and Polish *raison d'État*. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Jacek Czaputowicz, in his speech delivered at the Sejm on 14 March 2019, mentioned the Middle East as the last but one, followed only by Latin America, in terms of strategic areas for Polish interests. He emphasised: "We continue to prioritize a stronger military presence of NATO on the eastern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance, especially a closer military cooperation between Poland and the United States"¹. Therefore, the bilateral relations with the United States, but also Poland's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, as well as its participation in the European Union undoubtedly determine the shape and nature of Polish foreign policy, while the Middle East remains one of the numerous directions which could be even called secondary or marginal directions, that fit into the main Euro-Atlantic, or rather pro-American axis of Poland's foreign policy, with which they remain fully consistent.

However, it should be stressed that Poland has been and remains present in the Middle East both in the military and non-military dimension. Over the past decades Poland has energised (both in the positive but, unfortunately, also in negative dimension) its relations with the Middle East and North Africa countries. Analysing Poland's involvement in the Middle East region over the past three decades, it should be stressed that the significance of this part of the world in Polish foreign policy has been permanently increasing and this trend will most probably be maintained also in the third decade of the twenty-first century. This state of affairs is definitely affected by the evolution and occurrence of new challenges and threats, whose causes lie not only in the very region of the Middle East, considered as the source of the activity of terrorist and jihadist² organisations and of uncontrolled Muslim migration to Europe, but also in the reaction

¹ *Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Polish Foreign Policy Tasks in 2019* <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-jacek-czaputowicz-on-polish-diplomacy-priorities-in-2019> [accessed: 25.10.2022].

² S.H. Alkaff, *Evolving Jihadist Landscape In The Middle East*, „Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses” 2019, no. 11, pp. 76–79.

of particular members of the international community, both in the European and global dimension, to these challenges and threats. In this context, therefore, quite relevant are the words uttered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz, who in his *speech of March 2019 argued*: “The region of the Middle East and North Africa has long been a hot spot on the global map, a source of threats of international terrorism and uncontrolled migrations. We should not, however, view this region only in the context of security challenges, but we should look at it also through the prism of its potential, in particular for economic cooperation”³.

The aim of this paper is thus to analyse the military and non-military challenges and threats to the security of Poland with particular focus on the second decade of the 21st century, which constitute a certain implication for the policy of the Republic of Poland towards the Middle East. The paper is aimed at the explication of the dilemmas connected with Polish policy towards the Middle East and the influence of these dilemmas on the security of Poland, as well as on the increase or decrease of Poland’s prestige among the members of the international community, taking into consideration the reaction of the Middle Eastern countries on the one hand, and the reaction of the countries with which Poland cooperates within NATO or the EU on the other. The main research thesis formed in this paper is as follows: Poland’s policy towards the Middle East does not have a positive impact on shaping its relations with the Middle Eastern countries, lowers the prestige of Poland in the Middle Eastern arena, and therefore may contribute to increased threats related to the Middle East region in the future, which at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, but also at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, are especially evident in Western Europe. This policy, both in the military and non-military aspect, remains to a great extent an outcome of Poland’s relations with the United States and fits into the broader context of Polish-American relations. The Author of this paper will attempt to find answers to the following research questions: what are the determinants and key objectives in Poland’s policy towards the Middle East in the second decade of the 21st century?; how does Poland’s involvement in the political and military conflicts in the Middle East affect the security of Poland?; how has Polish policy towards the

³ *Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Polish Foreign Policy Tasks in 2019*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-jacek-czaputowicz-on-polish-diplomacy-priorities-in-2019> [accessed: 29.10.2022].

Middle East evolved and what factors have affected the energising of this policy?; is the policy of the Polish ruling elites towards the Middle East effective and does it bring more or less tangible benefits to the Polish state and if so, to what extent?

THE DETERMINANTS OF POLAND'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST

As perceived by the Polish political establishment, the Middle East is an important region where Poland should be visible, especially from an economic perspective. Nevertheless, the political level (for example through participation in peace initiatives) and military level (security reasons) remain of equal importance. However, Poland's involvement in this part of the world is not easy due to the fact that the Middle East region itself has been one of the most conflict-generating and destabilised territories in the world for many decades. This conflict-generating tendency and destabilisation are on the one hand determined by the interregional divisions and the rivalry of state entities (Saudi Arabia versus the Islamic Republic of Iran⁴) and non-state entities (including, in particular, terrorist organisations), and on the other hand by an attempt to dominate the Middle East by the powers from outside the region (the United States, Russia, but also China or India), which strive to turn this part of the world into their own sphere of influence with the use of both soft power and hard power instruments.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the Middle East is an extremely complex region in terms of its geopolitical nature, ethnicity, nationality, identity, but also religion, which is the reason why effective pursuing broadly defined interests in this part of the world poses a challenge and requires rational policy which is devoid of emotions and extremes, and at the same time is of multi-vector nature and aims at avoiding evident involvement in disputes and conflicts in favour of any of the sides. From the perspective of Poland, this is all the more important since the Middle East is a region where the interests of the followers of three largest religions clash⁵. Persians, Arabs and Jews compete

⁴ S. Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran. Power and Rivalry in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London – New York 2018, pp. 206–210.

⁵ *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010–2050*, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> [accessed: 12.07.2022].

for influence in the region⁶. An important role is played by the Kurds, whose constant goal is the proclamation of Greater Kurdistan and maintaining its independence, which in turn is in contradiction to the national interest of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Additionally, the regional and even global arena has been more and more seriously affected by the Muslim fundamentalists and jihadists, for whom deterritorialization is of essence, national identity is of secondary importance and what matters is the ideology whose core constitutes a return to the sources of Islam in their pure form and expansion of Islam by the sword⁷. Therefore, the landscape of the Middle East is indelibly linked with numerous terrorist groups of the “old type”⁸, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, Palestinian Islamic Jihad or the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, which, however, are not as active as the groups of the “new type”, such as Al-Qaeda or the so-called Islamic State, whose goal is the global jihad and whose instruments include: propaganda in cyberspace⁹, activity of the lone wolf suicide bombers¹⁰ and efforts to establish a caliphate with the use of both soft power (cultural or religious power) and hard power (military power)¹¹. Total elimination, annihilation or defeating of the above-mentioned terrorist and jihadist groups or only marginalisation of their significance, seem to remain impossible to achieve even in the long-term perspective. Ideology and activity of Muslim fundamentalists has been ripening and became one of the greatest challenges and threats to national security of particular countries (including Poland).

⁶ P. Holtman, *Terrorism and Jihad: Differences and Similarities*, „Perspectives on Terrorism” 2014, no. 8, pp. 140–143.

⁷ T. Osman, *A History of Political Islam from the Fall of the Ottoman Empire to the Rise of ISIS*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2017, pp. 11–22.

⁸ D.C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, in: *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds A.K.Cronin, J.M. Ludes, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC 2004, pp. 46–68.

⁹ M. Lakomy, *The Evolution Of Cyber Jihad: From Al-Qaeda to the Islamic State*, „Політичні науки” 2017, no. 13, pp. 3–15.

¹⁰ I. Black, *A Guide to Middle East Politics in 2014*, „The Guardian” [online], August 4, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/04/-sp-middle-east-politics-2014-egypt-syria-palestine-iraq-gaza> [accessed: 26.05.2022].

¹¹ The Middle East is a mosaic of terrorist groups which draw on secular ideologies and groups with strongly religious agendas. The first category includes Kurdish terrorism, whose most important emanation was the activity of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party and the associated militias, active predominantly in the territory of Syria as People’s Protection Units and the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks. The second category is the significance of the extremely active jihadist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State and Al-Qaeda and the related regional terrorist networks, e.g. Al-Nusra Front, which after breaking relations with the central leadership of Al-Qaeda at the beginning of 2017 changed its name to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

It should be emphasised that Polish authorities should permanently pay particular attention to the source of challenges and threats to the security of Polish citizens and the Polish state associated with the Islamic fundamentalism and jihadism which originated in the Middle East. It is worth remembering at this point that over 20 Polish citizens fought in the ranks of the so-called Islamic State and over 200 citizens of the Republic of Poland who were suspected of sympathising or having contacts with terrorists remained under observation of the Polish security services¹².

Analysing the determinants of pursuing Poland's interests in the Middle East, attention should be given to certain general features determining interest in this part of the world shown not only by Polish political decision makers. Firstly, consideration should be given to the determining factors of geopolitical nature, which result from the geographic location of the Middle East. The Middle East region includes the Suez Canal, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which are strategic for the supplies of raw materials and passage of ships. It connects the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Arabian Sea. Therefore, the Middle East plays the role of a significant and very convenient land, sea and air transport hub, and also provides the shortest route from North America and Europe, to Asia and Australia. Consequently, military presence in this part of the world gives the opportunity to control and strategically influence other areas of the world¹³. Poland's presence in such a strategically and military important territory, as perceived by the Polish ruling elites, enables Poland to increase its prestige in the international arena and reinforces its importance considerably, making Poland a significant player that through the multi-vector foreign and security policy also influences the events in the Middle East region, and at the same time marginalises the challenges and threats to the security of Poland.

Secondly, interest in the Middle East is determined by economic factors. The Middle East, despite its instability, is viewed through a prism of the rich deposits of natural and energy resources located in this region – especially oil (43.8% of world's oil reserves) and natural

¹² N. Płóciniak, *Polacy w Państwie Islamskim (ISIS) – studium przypadku*, https://securityinpractice.eu/polacy-w-panstwie-islamskim-isis-studium-przypadku/#_ftn1 [accessed: 11.07.2023].

¹³ O.N. Özalp, *Where is the Middle East? The Definition and Classification Problem of the Middle East as a Regional Subsystem in International Relations*, „*Turkish Journal of Politics*” 2011, no. 2, pp. 5–19.

gas (38.4% of world's natural gas reserves)¹⁴. In the case of Poland and searching for supplies of energy resources alternative to the Russian ones – including supplies from the Middle East – the perspective of at least correct relations, if not taking steps aimed at creating very close links with the Middle Eastern countries in this respect, in the second decade of the 21st century seemed to be an extremely attractive one. It is also worth mentioning that it was only in 2014 that the share of Russian oil in the import of this raw material to Poland dropped below 90%¹⁵. The Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq, have become Poland's main suppliers of oil beside Russia, and in 2018 the United Arab Emirates became a significant new direction of oil import.

Thirdly, the Middle East is perceived as a huge market for goods and services, as well as the place to export capital and make long-term investments, including investments in the most technologically advanced sectors such as: IT, cyber, military, aviation, and – from the perspective of Polish business – also the furniture, clothing, medical, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, petrochemical and the agri-food industries. Numerous Polish companies, usually sector leaders, have set up offices or shops or have made acquisitions in the Middle East countries, including *Comarch*, *CCC*, *Inglot*, *Freezco*, *Grupa Nowy Styl*, *Multidekor*, *Mokate*, *Techglass* or *Sunreef Yachts*. Polish political and economic establishment perceives the Middle East in the latter category – as a place for potential investments and opportunities for development of large and medium-sized industry and services sectors¹⁶.

Furthermore, the strategic character of the Middle East is determined by cultural, religious and ethnic factors¹⁷. Particular sides of such disputes and conflicts are supported for the sake of pursuing specific interests by global powers, which are deeply interested in the victory of their own client states in the region, which even in the short-term perspective is considered by them as strengthening their position and influence in the Middle East region¹⁸. Poland does not

¹⁴ *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019. 68th Edition*, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-oil.pdf> [accessed: 27.05.2022].

¹⁵ M. Bradshaw, T. Van de Graaf, R. Conolly, *Preparing for the New World Order? Saudi Arabia and Russia*, „Energy Strategy Reviews” 2019, vol. 26, pp. 4–7.

¹⁶ N. Buckland, *A Guide to Investing in the Middle East*, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2018/02/240060/investing-middle-east-risks-benefits/> [accessed: 10.07.2022].

¹⁷ O. Grojean, *The Kurdish Question in the Middle East: Regional Dynamics and Return to National Control*, „Mediterranean Yearbook” 2018, pp. 265–268.

¹⁸ R.A. Del Sarto, H. Malmvig, E. Soler, *Interregnum: The Regional Order In The Middle East And North Africa After 2011*, „MENARA Final Reports” 2019, no. 1, pp. 35–36.

remain passive as regards the above-mentioned conflicts. Over the past decades it has been either militarily involved in a conflict (e.g. Poland's participation in the Operation Iraqi Freedom) or politically involved by supporting a side of the conflict (in this case usually supporting the political line of the USA e.g. conference organised in Warsaw in February 2019).

Therefore, summing up the determinants of Poland's involvement in the Middle East, it should be emphasised that the importance of the Middle East in the foreign and security policy of the Republic of Poland from the Polish perspective is determined by two kinds of factors.

The first kind can be defined as intra-regional – directly connected with the Middle East region. These factors should be considered in two aspects. First of all, they should be viewed in the positive aspect – and consequently should be associated with the opportunities for Poland that emerge from the geostrategic location of the Middle East, with the deposits of energy resources (potential alternative of supplies) located in this region or the opportunities for the development of medium- and long-term investment and capital relationships with the countries of the region. The intra-regional determining factors viewed in the negative aspect are predominantly connected with the challenges and threats to security of Poland, including in particular the activity of terrorist and jihadist organizations, cyber jihadism, migrant and refugee crisis from the countries affected by armed conflicts initiated in 2015, appearance of “lone wolves” in Poland and permanent increase in the risk of terrorist attacks in the territory of Poland and the potential ideological radicalisation of Polish citizens.

The other kind of factors determining Poland's involvement in the Middle East region can be defined as extra-regional. The most important determinants of this kind include Poland's treaty and non-treaty obligations, on the one hand resulting from the will to maintain close or even strategic bilateral relations, especially with the United States, and on the other hand attributable to Poland's membership in international organisations i.e. NATO, the EU or the UN. Attention should be given to several aspects of the practical sphere of Polish involvement in the Middle East, of which the particularly important aspects in the first two decades of the 21st century include: participation of Poland in the war against terrorism, almost unconditional participation in the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, sharing the stance of the USA as regards the war in Syria (supporting

the opponents of president Bashar al-Assad), support for Middle East peace plans (Israeli-Palestinian) put forward by the American side, involvement in the attempts to resolve the migrant and refugee crisis, participation in the coalition against the so-called Islamic State or finally backing the USA as regards limiting the activity, or rather weakening the role and significance of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East in favour of support for Saudi Arabia.

MILITARY DILEMMAS OF POLAND'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Analysing both the military and non-military aspects of Poland's involvement in the Middle East, as well as attempting to show their implications for security, it seems necessary to refer to the origin of Poland's interest in this region, as it dates as far back as the interwar period. At that time this interest in the Middle East focused on establishing diplomatic relations with countries such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia or Egypt by the authorities of the Second Polish Republic. In the Cold War period the policy of the Polish People's Republic towards the Middle East was conditioned by being part of the Eastern Bloc. The policy was consistent with the correct relations with the Arab countries and relatively cool relations with Israel. This was evidenced by, among other things: Poland's approval of the UN concept for creating two states Israel and Palestine expressed in 1947; support for the declaration of independence of Arab states established in North Africa in the 1950s; supporting decolonisation processes taking place in the 1960s; or severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in June 1967 after it attacked Egypt and Syria. During the Cold War, active policy of Polish authorities in the Middle East was evident in the participation of Polish armed forces in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in the region, including UNEF II, UNDOF or UNIFIL¹⁹. Until 1989 the authorities of the Polish People's Republic kept close relations with the Middle Eastern countries maintaining good relations with the USSR or the countries which were members of the Non-Aligned Movement, but they remained distanced from countries which were within the sphere of influence of the United States²⁰.

¹⁹ *Missions*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/missions> [accessed: 27.10.2022].

²⁰ W. Lizak, J. Spyra, *Azja, Bliski Wschód, Afryka i Ameryka Łacińska w polityce zagranicznej RP*, w: *Polityka zagraniczna RP 1989–2002*, ed. R. Kuźniar, K. Szczepanik, Askon, Warszawa 2006, pp. 323–331.

After the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the general Euro-Atlantic reorientation in the Polish foreign and security policy implied also a reorientation in the actions taken in the Middle East. It was in a way an outcome of measures taken in relation with the prospect of membership, and then the membership itself in NATO and the EU, and also or rather first of all, measures aimed at building a strategic partnership with the United States, which at the beginning of the 21st century assumed the form of bandwagoning²¹.

In the 1990s Poland had a strong but predominantly positive military presence in the Middle East. Above all, of particular significance was its participation in the Second Persian Gulf War triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Poland took part in Operation Desert Storm – sent two vessels to the Gulf subregion: OPR *Wodnik* (hospital ship) and ORP *Piast* (rescue ship). In the Gulf subregion there were about 200 Polish soldiers, who, however, did not actively take part in combat actions. It should be added that after severance of diplomatic relations with Iraq by the USA, it was Poland, which during the Second Persian Gulf War assisted in the evacuation of the American intelligence officers to Saudi Arabia and deployed personnel to field hospitals at the request of Washington, that represented American interests in Iraq.

Analysing military aspects of Poland's involvement in the Middle East, it is also worth noting that from the end of the Cold War until 2009 the armed forces of the Republic of Poland were involved in numerous initiatives centred on the peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in the Middle East. The most significant ones included: the continued UNDOF or UNIFIL, but also UNIIMOG, or UNIKOM. The second decade of the 21st century, however, was characterised by non-participation of Polish forces in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in the Middle East. It was a mistake that Poland withdrew from UN missions in the Middle East. Polish presence in Afghanistan should have been reduced, yet it was strengthened to the detriment of the lack of presence in the Middle East, although Poland did not have any direct business in Afghanistan²². It should also be emphasised that the year 2019 was in a way a breakthrough for the change in the wrong strategy of withdrawal from peacekeeping missions in the

²¹ J. Zając, *Poland's Security Policy. The West, Russia, and the Changing International Order*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2016, pp. 74–79.

²² M. Lasoń, *Zaangażowanie Polski w operacje zarządzania kryzysowego NATO. Stan obecny i perspektywy*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2013, no. 4, p. 118.

Middle East. In November 2019, after a decade of absence, Polish soldiers went to Lebanon to carry out a peacekeeping mission. Soldiers of the 12th Mechanised Brigade from Szczecin constituted the first shift of the Polish contingent in the UNIFIL mission. As the then Minister of National Defence Mariusz Błaszczak stressed, after a decade-long break the Polish Army returned to the participation in UN peace missions, thus rectifying the mistake which had been made 10 years earlier by the then government. The Minister emphasised a very significant issue connected with the fact that participation of Polish soldiers in peacekeeping missions does not only constitute an opportunity for the Polish Army to raise their skills, but also is a chance to strengthen Poland's international position, as it is directly associated with the security of the Republic of Poland²³.

Thus the above-mentioned positive military involvement in the Middle Eastern countries did not cause the weakening of Poland's image among the countries of the region. On the contrary, the sensible policy towards the Middle East as regards military issues strengthened Poland's prestige in the region and confirmed the positive image of Poland and the Poles developed and achieved in the previous decades. This state of affairs in turn allowed for the gradual development of stronger and closer economic and political relations with particular countries in the region.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that not all the decisions made by the Polish political elites concerning military involvement in the Middle East in the post-Cold War period were right. One of the most serious failures of Polish policy towards the Middle East was Poland's military involvement in the Third Persian Gulf War. In March 2003 Poland became one of the countries participating in the US aggression against Iraq²⁴. The implications of both the involvement in the Operation Iraqi Freedom itself and the subsequent presence of the Polish Military Contingent in Iraq, included cooling of relations with the Arab countries and the discrediting of Poland's image in the Middle East which had been developed by particular authorities of the Republic of Poland for several decades, as well as perceiving Poland by European partners as a "Trojan horse" of the USA in

²³ *Poland Confirm Partnership with Ireland in UN Mission in Lebanon*, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d40896-poland-confirm-partnership-with-ireland-in-un-mission-in-lebanon/> [accessed: 30.08.2022].

²⁴ D.M. Malone, *The International Struggle over Iraq. Politics in the UN Security Council 1980–2005*, Oxford University Press, New York 2006, pp. 199–201.

Europe (European Union). Poland's policy towards the Middle East, subordinated to the policy of self-vassalisation and clientelism towards the USA ended up in a considerable fiasco, and the economic benefits expected by the Polish authorities in the form of contracts for Polish companies for the reconstruction of Iraq turned out to be nothing more than empty promises from the American ally.

CHALLENGES FOR THE POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE CONTEXT OF ASYMMETRIC THREATS – MILITARY AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

Of great importance in the context of Poland's military participation in the Middle East (or the conscious decision on the non-participation) in the second decade of the 21st century were the challenges and threats related to the Arab Spring processes²⁵, including in particular the civil war in Libya and Syria and the formation of the most dangerous jihadist organisation in the 21st century, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), in 2014.

During the Arab Spring, Poland attempted to play the role of a model state for countries affected by the wave of the Arab Spring revolutions²⁶. The then authorities presented an image of Poland as a country with vast experience as regards political system transformation, processes of transition to a market-oriented economy and democratisation²⁷. Emphasising this aspect, they declared readiness to assist in changes and modernisation processes in the Middle East and North Africa countries but without participation in military activities.

In the case of events in Libya (an uprising against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in February 2011²⁸) and the decision taken by the coalition informally led by France concerning intervention in this country, Poland thus took a distanced and very sensible position. It should be added that although Polish authorities were in favour

²⁵ S. Amin, *The Reawakening of the Arab World. Challenge and Change in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2016, pp. 45–62.

²⁶ I.A. El-Hussari, *Yet Another Version of the „Arab Spring”. Ramifications of the Syrian Armed Conflict for the Existing Arab Order and Beyond*, „Central European Journal of International and Security Studies” 2014, no. 3, pp. 136–145.

²⁷ M. Almond, *The Arab Spring – Contemporary Revolutions in Historical Comparison*, „All Azimuth” 2012, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 41–43.

²⁸ J. Brownlee, T. Masoud, A. Reynolds, *The Arab Spring. Pathways of Repression and Reform*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, pp. 81–85.

of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 of 19 March 2011, they clearly stated that Poland is not an advocate of an armed intervention, and thus it would not join it and would not deploy its fighters to patrol the no-fly zones over Libya. Consequently pursuing the policy of military non-participation in the Middle Eastern conflicts, Poland did not participate in the EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya, either, which was initiated pursuant to the Council Decision of May 2013, whose objectives were to support Libyan authorities in strengthening the border services through training and mentoring, to strengthen operational capabilities of Libyan institutions, as well as to advise the Libyan authorities on the development of an integrated border management strategy²⁹. Of great importance in this context is the fact that decisions of Polish authorities on the military non-participation in Libya on the one hand were given a favourable reception by the Polish society, and on the other hand the non-involvement in the NATO operation in Libya was criticised by the United States. It should be noted, however, that the then Polish ruling elites permanently argued that they would compensate for Poland's military non-participation in the NATO operation in Libya with humanitarian and political actions, as well as investment operations within the framework of economic support and Libya's economic recovery, but also with initiatives for the development of a better political system after the end of the armed conflict.

It is also worthwhile to discuss the position of Polish authorities as regards the civil war in Syria, which broke out in connection with actions aiming at removing president Bashar al-Assad from power³⁰. The unwillingness of the political ruling elite to engage in the civil war in Syria resulted from two factors. Firstly, from the rational and distanced approach of the then ruling elite to the issue of sending Polish army to the conflict regions. Polish authorities, with the experiences of Iraq in mind, were far from participation or even supporting another military intervention. Secondly, continuation of the policy of non-involvement in the Middle Eastern conflicts was caused by the growing Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Russia's aggression against Ukraine), and then the war in eastern Ukraine, which were interpreted and presented

²⁹ Due to the unstable and permanently deteriorating political and security situation in Libya in February 2015 the mission stopped its advisory activity; S. Stavridis, *EU Incoherence and Inconsistency over Libya: Evidence to the Contrary*, „Cahiers de la Méditerranée” 2014, no. 89, pp. 163–173.

³⁰ D.W. Lesch, *Syria. The Fall of the House of Assad*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2013, pp. 122–163.

to the Polish society as direct threats to security of Poland, much bigger than the processes and implications of the Arab Spring in the Middle East (e.g. the civil war in Syria). Events in the region close to the border constituted a priority to political decision makers of the Republic of Poland, who were also aware of the lack of support among the Polish society for sending Polish armed forces to the Middle East.

Poland's stance on the war in Syria was defined as early as 26 September 2012, in the speech delivered by President Bronisław Komorowski at the UN General Assembly session in New York. President of the Republic of Poland called for solving the conflict by means of compromise. At the same time he very rightly stressed the inability of international organisations and institutions to resolve problems and cope with the challenges of the contemporary world, which could be proved by the inability of the UN Security Council and the Arab League to stop the increasingly tense situation in Syria. He stated that Poland expected that the conflict in Syria would be settled soon based on the UN principles and using the instruments available to the UN³¹. On 8 October 2013 the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Artur Nowak-Far, replying to the Sejm interpellation No. 20814 submitted by Tadeusz Iwiński on the policy of the Republic of Poland towards the civil war in Syria and the consequent international crisis, very clearly identified the stance of the PO-PSL coalition on the nature of Polish involvement in the Syrian conflict. He stated that since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria the authorities of the Republic of Poland had been constantly presenting a stance according to which they advocated the use of diplomatic solutions, and reiterated readiness to actively participate in the process of political settlement of the conflict, which would ensure the respect for the territorial integrity of Syria and its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. Polish government supported any initiatives for the peaceful transformation in Syria. Having categorically rejected the possibility of involvement in potential military actions in Syria, the political decision makers of the Republic of Poland emphasized that the contribution of the Polish state to the international actions concerning Syria might cover expertise on the destruction of chemical weapons, as Poland had taken steps to participate in the political process connected with putting under international control

³¹ *Statement by H.E. President of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Bronisław Komorowski at the UN General Assembly Session September 26, 2012*, https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/PL_en.pdf [accessed: 20.10.2022].

and elimination of Syrian chemical weapons. To ensure fulfilment of the obligations of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Poland offered its expert support, including assistance of former inspectors and employees of the OPCW and UN. Poland also declared its readiness to make its experts available to support a potential international supervisory mission for the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria.

In the context of the war in Syria, the military aspect constituted just one of the numerous challenges for the Polish decision makers. As regards the political dilemmas of the then Polish elites, of particular interest was the issue of the migrant and refugee crisis initiated by the uncontrolled wave of illegal immigration from the Middle East and North Africa which flooded into the countries of the European Union in 2015.

On 22 September 2015 the EU member states took a decision on distribution of nearly 120 thousand refugees (and illegal immigrants) from the Middle East and North Africa. The ruling PO-PSL coalition undertook to admit 5,082 refugees. Together with 2 thousand people to whose reception the coalition had already agreed in July 2015, the total number of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa who were to be distributed in Poland amounted to about 7 thousand, and the first of them were to arrive in Poland in 2016. The PO-PSL coalition's stance was thus favourable to the EU decisions. It was particularly close to and compatible with the relocation policy promoted by the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Angela Merkel. Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz repeatedly acknowledged the need for unity with the EU, upholding the principle of European solidarity and distribution of responsibility as concerns the migrant and refugee crisis among all the member states. However, a totally different approach to the issue of receiving immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa in Poland was presented by the main opposition party. PiS expressly opposed the reception of the illegal refugees in Poland and at the same advocated an alternative solution – providing systematic financial aid for the maintenance of refugee camps located in the countries neighbouring the countries affected by armed conflicts, as well as providing economic and humanitarian aid in the conflict epicentres. What is important, the islamophobia which accompanied such a stance and which was increasing in the Polish society as a result of hyperbolising by some political parties the threat connected with accepting Muslim refugees stereotypically perceived as

potential terrorists, as well as emphasizing the threat of the expansion of Islam and even the possibility of islamisation of Europe³² regarded as the greatest and permanently increasing threat also to the security of the Polish state and stability of the life of its citizens, became the reasons why parties promoting lack of support and aversion to accepting immigrants from the Middle East received support in the parliamentary elections in 2015. Consequently, following the victory of PiS in the elections, the authorities made a decision to withdraw from the obligations undertaken by the PO-PSL coalition and not to receive refugees. However, at the same time they declared to increase Poland's involvement in the humanitarian aid in the countries affected by crises and military conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. It can therefore be concluded that the policy of avoiding terrorist threats in the Polish territory, connected with blocking of the decision on participation of Poland in the process of relocation of refugees promoted by Germany, was given a favourable reception by the majority of the Polish society.

Beside the political actions resulting from the challenges of the Arab Spring, Poland was quite strongly involved in humanitarian actions both for the Syrian society and the neighbouring countries. Polish humanitarian aid for Syrians was provided within the framework of bilateral cooperation through Polish non-governmental organisations and via the multilateral channels (through UNICEF and UNHCR). In 2013 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs directed funds in the amount of PLN 0.9 million to the UN OCHA office in Damascus and launched a grant competition for Polish non-governmental organisations to carry out projects for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. The winning projects were those prepared by Caritas and the Polish Centre for International Aid for the total amount of PLN 2.6 million (EUR 600 thousand). The total value of the Polish aid for Syrian refugees in 2012 amounted to PLN 4.3 million, while the total value of Polish humanitarian aid for the Syrians in 2013 amounted to approximately PLN 8 million. In accordance with the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2012-2015, Poland allocated the amount of about PLN 18 million to aid for people directly affected by the conflict in Syria. The aid was provided directly to Syria or indirectly to Lebanon and Jordan. It was organised through specialised humanitarian

³² D. Pratt, *Islamophobia as Reactive Co-Radicalization*, „Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations” 2015, no. 26, pp. 11–12.

agencies (mostly UN agencies) or via bilateral aid channels (usually in cooperation with the Polish non-governmental organisations)³³.

It should be emphasised that in the following years Polish authorities continued the implementation of the position they took at the beginning of the conflict in Syria. Refraining from the military involvement in the armed conflict, they concentrated primarily on the humanitarian aid for the local people. Such policy of the Polish ruling elites seems to be completely understandable, rational and therefore the right one. Sources of conflicts are rooted inside the region, and their most significant reasons are almost always connected with economic factors. The impoverishment of Arab societies should thus be associated with the possibility of increased terrorist threats, whose marginalisation may be achieved through assistance to local population. Such a stance became particularly close to the PiS government, under the leadership of both Prime Ministers Beata Szydło and Mateusz Morawiecki. The government spokeswoman Jolanta Kopcińska emphasised that PiS government took the position that it is necessary to help, but in a wise way that brings real help and at the same time takes into account the security of its own nation. Also Beata Kempa, the Minister for Humanitarian Aid³⁴, at the end of April 2018 stressed that the following year Poland would allocate PLN 48 million for humanitarian aid in Syria and additionally EUR 12.5 million for refugees in Turkey. The Minister, after a visit to the largest Syrian refugee camp in Jordan – Zaatari in January 2018 emphasised that in 2017 alone Poland allocated PLN 200 million to humanitarian aid for the Middle Eastern countries, which was used, among other things, to carry out the Polish-German project for the reconstruction of public schools in Lebanon, to finance the second tranche of aid projects for refugees and local population implemented by Polish non-governmental organisations, and to finance additional aid projects for displaced persons and the local population. PLN 106 million was allocated to the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. These

³³ *Polish Aid for Syria*, <https://poland.pl/politics/foreign-affairs/polish-aid-for-syria/> [accessed: 15.09.2022].

³⁴ The Ministry for Humanitarian Aid was established in December 2017, with Beata Kempa as its head. Such a political undertaking proved how significant the problem of the migrant and refugee crisis was and how consequent and consistent Polish authorities were as regards this issue – they did not agree to the distribution of refugees (immigrants) from the Middle East in the EU states but declared aid in the war-ridden regions – Syria, Jordan and Lebanon; *Warsaw: Only Poland Decides Whether To Accept Refugees or Not*, <http://www.uawire.org/warsaw-only-poland-decides-whether-to-accept-refugees-or-not> [accessed: 17.10.2022].

funds were also directed to the Polish training centre for medical staff working in Zaatari. It is worth noting that during his visit to Lebanon in February 2018 Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki declared that Poland would offer additional funds in the amount of USD 10 million for the construction of houses for about 10 thousand refugees, and the Polish delegation presented Syrian children with computers and toys.

To sum up the issue of military non-participation of Polish armed forces in the settlement of the Syrian conflict and of the simultaneous considerable contribution to humanitarian aid for local population in the crisis-affected countries such as Syria, Lebanon or Jordan, it should be stressed that one of the priority objectives in Poland's policy towards the Middle East in the second decade of the 21st century was the issue of providing development aid. For this purpose the Council of Ministers adopted the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme for 2016–2020 on 6 October 2015, which stressed the necessity of aid for Lebanon and Palestine³⁵.

Analysing Poland's policy towards the Middle East in the second decade of the 21st century, attention should also be given to one of the biggest challenges and threats not only to the security of Poland, but also to the global security, which is connected with the formation and operations of the Salafi jihadist organisation, ISIS³⁶. The caliphate not only constituted a real threat of terrorist attacks in Europe, but also recruited numerous Europeans, including Poles, to join the ranks of ISIS³⁷. Taking the decision on participation of Polish armed forces in the coalition of countries against ISIS constituted thus another significant dilemma and challenge for the authorities. What is important in this context is the fact that on 17 June 2016 President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda signed a decision on sending two Polish Military Contingents to support the Global Coalition to Defeat the so-called Islamic State. The Polish Military Contingents were to participate in the Inherent Resolve military operation conducted within the scope of the Global Coalition formed on the basis of article 51 of the UN

³⁵ *Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme for 2016–2020*, <https://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/Multiannual,Development,Cooperation,Programme,for,2016-2020,2085.html> [accessed: 15.07.2022].

³⁶ D. Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement. What Everyone needs to know*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2015, pp. 213–216.

³⁷ In August 2014 there were 80 thousand ISIS fighters, including 50 thousand in Syria and 30 thousand in Iraq; F.A. Gerges, *A History ISIS*, Princeton University Press, Princeton–Oxford 2016, pp. 50–97.

Charter, as well as at the request of the Government of the Republic of Iraq, to fight the so-called Islamic State³⁸. The presidential order was issued at the request of the Prime Minister Beata Szydło on the basis of the Act of 17 December 1998 on the rules of use or stay of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland outside the state. In accordance with the provisions, a Polish Military Contingent composed of 150 soldiers and military personnel was to be used in Kuwait. The other contingent of 60 soldiers and military personnel was to be used in Iraq to train Iraqi special forces. Both the contingents were to receive elements of support in other countries of the region. The main contingent force in Kuwait was to consist of four F-16 military aircraft to support the Inherent Resolve operations. The contingent in the Republic of Iraq was to comprise Special Forces, with their main tasks including advisory activities and training of officers and special units of Iraq's Military Forces³⁹.

Analysing involvement of the Polish armed forces in the war against ISIS, it should be emphasised that Poland's military participation was of symbolic nature and did not involve combat activities but rather focused on the logistical tasks. Polish ruling elites, however, considered the decision to deploy the Polish Military Contingent to Iraq and Kuwait as extremely significant and valuable to Poland, primarily in the context of proving that Poland is a loyal ally (especially as regards the USA and NATO) that can be always relied on. In order to gain acceptance of the Polish society for the deployment of the Polish Military Contingent to the Middle East, the political decision makers stressed two dominant factors. On the one hand, they emphasised the necessity to fulfil the alliance commitments and to demonstrate Poland's solidarity with the allies, including, in particular, with the USA. On the other hand, they expected from the NATO allies, in exchange for the participation in the war against ISIS, a solidary support on NATO's Eastern flank, which in turn resulted in hyperbolisation of the military threats to Poland from the Russian Federation. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Polish political scene was not unanimous as regards the deployment of the Polish Military Contingent to the conflict region. The opponents of involvement of Polish soldiers in the war against ISIS

³⁸ *The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS: Partners*, <https://www.state.gov/s/sect/c72810.htm> [accessed: 15.09.2022].

³⁹ At the beginning of 2017 in a prestigious magazine "Intelligence Online" there was speculation that GROM military unit is also stationed in Jordan together with the American special forces, from whom they received modern military equipment and that their operations in Syria and Iraq were coordinated by SOCOM.

put forward a substantial question whether declarations of Poland's participation in the war against ISIS in exchange for vague promises to build NATO bases in the territory of the Republic of Poland which were to potentially ensure security of the Polish state on its eastern border and protect (deter) from the potential Russian attack, are worth exposing Polish soldiers and citizens to potential terrorist attacks, including the "lone wolf" attacks, which at the end of the second decade of the 21st century were particularly intense in the Western Europe.

It is noteworthy in this context that at the beginning of 2020 Polish soldiers participating in the training and stabilisation mission launched by NATO and Global Coalition against ISIS, were stationed in four Middle Eastern countries: Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan, and the total number of soldiers and other military personnel in the Polish Military Contingent in these countries amounted to 350 people⁴⁰, as at the end of December 2019 President Andrzej Duda issued another decision to extend the use of the Polish Military Contingent in the region for the period from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020. In the case of Kuwait, Polish soldiers were stationed at the Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base, and they were given the task of securing air transport from Iraq to Poland with the CASA and sporadically Hercules aircraft. Previously there were also four F-16 fighters used for reconnaissance flights. As far as Qatar is concerned, the liaison officers were stationed at the regional air operations headquarters at the enormous Al Udeid Air Base. According to the available information, in the territory of Jordan there are special forces soldiers training Jordanian and Iraqi soldiers. The largest military contingent, though, is present in Iraq. The Polish Military Contingent operates within the Global Coalition to defeat the Islamic State. Moreover, to support the development of defence capabilities of the Republic of Iraq, Poland declared at the Brussels Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on 22 May 2017 to take the initiative as the Lead Nation to train Iraqi soldiers. It is worth mentioning that the main goal of the mission is to support the Iraqi Security Forces in restoring the capacity to ensure security. The aims pursued within the contingent include improved capacity of special forces and security of Iraq, as well as improvement of the military capabilities. At the beginning of 2019 the participation of Polish forces in the mission was increased: Mobile Training Teams,

⁴⁰ Polish Military Contingent reports to the commander of the U.S. Central Command as regards the Inherent Resolve operation and to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe in the case of the NATO Mission Iraq.

an additional engineering brigade (up to 30 soldiers) and 35 people for the NATO Mission in Iraq (security brigade and advisory team).

Analysing presence of the Polish Military Contingent in the Middle East at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it should be noted that it is much better thought-out, organized and more professional than it had been in the period from 2003, that is from the combat participation in the Operation Iraqi Freedom and subsequent stabilisation presence of Polish armed forces in the territory of Iraq, until its withdrawal in 2008.

As Polish political decision makers emphasise, there are no plans to withdraw the Polish Military Contingent stationed in the four countries in the Middle East in the nearest future. Such declarations are all the more important as at the beginning of 2020 another extremely serious crisis emerged in the Middle East, which resulted in questions about the security of Polish soldiers present in these countries, especially in Iraq, where the personnel of the Polish Military Contingent amounted to 268 people. The crisis was caused by the targeted killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani – commander of special forces within the structure of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the key figure creating the Iranian strategy of building Iran’s position as the superpower in the Persian Gulf subregion and in the entire Middle East through reconnaissance and military operations – on 3 January 2020 in Baghdad by a US air strike⁴¹. Five days later Iran responded by launching missile attacks on two American military bases in the territory of Iraq – Al Asad and the military airport in Irbil⁴². It should be noted that although the attack was of symbolic dimension, it brings forward the question of stability of the region and another potential armed conflict, perhaps even with the participation of external forces – the USA, and maybe even international forces (with the participation of Poland as an ally of the USA?). Of great importance in this context was thus a very reasonable voice of the Polish political establishment, which was also politically and militarily well-balanced and focused on securing the broadly defined Polish interests in the Middle East. Particularly valuable was the distanced position regarding support for any military intervention in Iran and the opinions acknowledging that

⁴¹ C.W. Freeman, Jr, *Suleimani’s Extrajudicial Killing Legitimizes Assassination as a Foreign Policy Tool*, Middle East Policy Council, <https://mepc.org/speeches/suleimanis-extrajudicial-killing-legitimizes-assassination-foreign-policy-tool> [accessed: 27.08.2022].

⁴² A. Vatanka, *The Killing of Qassem Soleimani: Analysis from MEI Experts*, <https://www.mei.edu/blog/killing-qassem-soleimani-analysis-mei-experts> [accessed: 15.09.2022].

non-participation in the open American-Iranian dispute, as well as avoidance of taking sides, constitute the basis for pursuing effective Polish policy towards the Middle East, securing Polish interests in the region and ensuring security of Poland. Chairman of the Senate's Foreign and European Union Affairs Committee Bogdan Klich, in the meeting on 14 January 2020, emphasised that due to the significance of Iraq for the stability of the Middle East it is necessary to engage political and military resources in order to maintain territorial integrity of Iraq and to prevent its territorial division between Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, as such a state of affairs might cause proliferation of the international conflict, which would be dangerous for Poland. Furthermore, Bogdan Klich stressed it is important to maintain relations with Iran, including a political dialogue, also because of security of the soldiers of the Polish Military Contingent stationed in this area. Importantly, in the course of the discussion involving senators and invited experts, the participants pointed to the need for Iran to return to the nuclear deal of 2015 called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and to undertake cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, but without exposing Poland's role in these actions. Such a position was presented, among others, by the Director of the Department of Strategic Analyses Marcin Kaźmierski, who expressed his doubts whether Poland must take a clear position on the American-Iranian dispute. Importantly, Director of the Department of Africa and the Middle East in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Przemysław Bobak emphasised that Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to assist the mediation activities and that Polish military presence in the Middle East has neither military nor offensive character, supporting the training of Iraqi forces and assisting activities aimed against ISIS and intended to maintain stability in the region. The activities of the Polish forces are consistent with the decisions of the North Atlantic Council of 6 January 2020, when all the countries opted for the continuation of the NATO training mission.

The above-mentioned, positively regarded position of the Polish ruling class seems to be particularly valuable in the context of the image fiasco as far as Polish policy towards the Middle East is concerned, connected with the organisation of the Middle East conference in the territory of the Republic of Poland on 13–14 February 2019 upon the initiative of the USA. The conference was attended by representatives of as many as 62 countries, including the Vice President of the USA Mike Pence, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Prime Minister

of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, and the heads of diplomacy of Great Britain, Italy and several Arab countries, however, France and Germany were represented by low-ranking officials and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs Federika Mogherini did not attend the event. This state of affairs was widely commented on and viewed as a divergence in the policy of the transatlantic allies and as a lack of consent of those absent to Donald Trump's unilateral policy towards Iran, and Poland as the conference organiser was inevitably identified with this policy. Poland was associated with support for continuing the policy of sanctions against Iran following the unilateral withdrawal of the USA from the JCPOA and for the request that the other countries should also isolate Iran in the international arena. What is more, Iran-related issues were discussed at the Middle East conference without representatives of this country but the role and presence of Iran's greatest antagonist – Israel – was strongly stressed. This state of affairs only resulted in the temporary cooling of good and politically correct Polish-Iranian relations. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz considered the conference as a great success of Polish policy towards the Middle East, which also showed that Poland is an important ally and a strategic partner for the USA. It might seem, however, that his opinion is strongly overstated. The fact is that the conference created a platform for Poland to present itself in the role of an active player in the international arena, whose interests go beyond the European continent. It also contributed to the strengthening of Poland's relations with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and initiated the so-called Warsaw Process, but at the same time it weakened the image of Poland as an objective country which is committed to building positive relations with all the countries in the region⁴³. After the conference the question remained unanswered how Polish elites wanted – as Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz stressed in his speech of March 2019 – to build relations with Iran “on the basis of the existing relations based on friendship and mutual respect”⁴⁴, if they blindly and unquestioningly followed the policy towards the Middle East outlined by the US President Donald Trump?

⁴³ *Co-chairs' Statement on the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/co-chairs-statement-on-the-ministerial-to-promote-a-future-of-peace-and-security-in-the-middle-east> [accessed: 11.12.2022].

⁴⁴ *Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Polish Foreign Policy Tasks in 2019*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-jacek-czaputowicz-on-polish-diplomacy-priorities-in-2019> [accessed: 29.10.2022].

CONCLUSION

To sum up, drawing conclusions from the above analysis regarding the question of security of Poland in the context of selected military and non-military dilemmas in Polish policy towards the Middle East in the second decade of the 21st century, it should be noted that the above thesis has been verified positively. The Middle East is an important direction, although not a priority or a strategic direction in the pursuit of Polish interests, and the foreign and security policy followed by the Polish ruling class (regardless of political affiliations) was set in the broader context of bi- and multilateral relations established by the authorities of the Republic of Poland. The policy towards the Middle East was thus to a great extent a product and a derivative of building alliance ties with the United States and of the membership in NATO, which constituted a matter of priority to Poland.

In the post-Cold War period Poland was present in the Middle East in the military dimension, however, two wrong decisions influenced the frame of this presence. The first of them was the military participation in the Third Persian Gulf War and involvement in the occupation zone, and then the stabilisation zone as an ally of the USA (aggressor state). The other decision concerned withdrawal of Polish forces from the UN peacekeeping missions. As for the non-military sphere, Polish political elites predominantly pursued economic interests in the Middle East, viewing this region as strategic for investments by Polish entrepreneurs into a broad range of sectors – from the furniture, to pharmaceutical, to agri-food industry. Of great importance was also the size of oil and natural gas deposits in the Middle Eastern countries. Polish authorities began to perceive countries such as Qatar, Iran or Saudi Arabia as potential sources for the diversification of energy resources supplies from Russia, which could enable the implementation of the policy to end Poland's reliance on Russian energy.

It is also worth stressing the fact that Polish authorities responded very rationally to the events of the Arab Spring and followed the policy to be a model state as regards the political system transformation, while remaining distanced and not engaged militarily in wars and interventions in Libya and Syria. Poland's quite strong involvement in humanitarian aid provided to the conflict-ridden societies and the Middle Eastern countries which became the destinations for receiving refugees should also be viewed in a positive light. The PiS government consequently pursued the right policy focused on the assumption that one of the

most significant sources of terrorist radicalisation and participation in jihadist organisations is the impoverishment of societies. This fact, as well as security reasons and avoidance of terrorist threats directly in the territory of the Republic of Poland, constituted the arguments used by PiS authorities to justify their decision not to accept immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa, thus exposing themselves to criticism from the EU partners – especially from Germany.

The fact remains that Poland participated militarily in the fight against ISIS carried out by a global coalition of countries led by the USA. Although the role of the Polish Military Contingent was symbolic and focused primarily on logistical activities, in this way Poland marked its positive presence in the Middle East. The fundamental objective of the ruling elites making the decision to deploy the Polish Military Contingent to Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan was to maintain alliance with the USA and to prove that Poland is a reliable, loyal partner which does not avoid military engagement on the side of the USA and NATO. Taking such a decision, Polish authorities also hoped that in return for their loyalty the NATO eastern flank would be reinforced, and the USA and NATO would without hesitation take Poland's side (even militarily) in the event of a potential conflict with Russia.

Importantly, the consistency of Polish political elites with the US policy towards the Middle East was demonstrated by the fact that in February 2019 Poland organised the Middle East conference. This decision, however, cannot be considered as a right one since it did not enhance the creation of the positive image of Poland among the European allies, and yet it is in the interest of the Republic of Poland to maintain the transatlantic unity. Poland presented itself as a country which unquestioningly implements Donald Trump's political decisions, even putting at risk its own interests in the Middle East, especially the positive relations with the Shiite countries in the region. It should be emphasised, however, that Polish ruling class, although it viewed the conference in the positive light, at the beginning of 2020, facing a serious crisis in the Iranian-American relations, responded in a sensible and distanced way, without taking sides, but stressing that stabilisation in the Middle East region, building peaceful relations and resolving disputes by means of diplomatic instruments are priority issues. Such an attitude in Polish policy towards the Middle East must be considered as valuable and should be promoted while hoping that Polish political elites will draw constructive conclusions from the wrong decisions taken by themselves and their predecessors.

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