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Armed Forces Operational Command as a Crisis Management Centre in the crisis management system of the Ministry of Defence - summary, conclusions and experiences

Original article

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this article is to present conclusions and experiences that have resulted of functioning of the Armed Forces Operational Command as the Crisis Management Center of the Ministry of National Defense. The author also focuses on the evolution of the military crisis management system.

Methods: Analysis and synthesis of the literature on the subject and a critical approach to the source material, including a presentation of the experiences of the Ministry of Defense in responding to non-military emergencies.

Results: The result of the conducted research is the presentation of conclusions resulting from several years of experience of the Armed Forces Operational Command fulfilling the function of the Crisis Management Center in the years 2014-2022.

Conclusions: The main objective of the crisis management system developed in every country is to protect the population against natural disasters and technical failures. In order to prevent such situations, public authorities carry out planning activities in order to be prepared for unusual actions. However, if the situation takes an unfavorable turn, the authorities should have the capacity to take effective action to respond to the incident by the forces and resources of the combined and non-combined administrations. The potential, including the forces and means of the Armed Forces, their availability and also the legal regulations of the possibility of using the troops are the basic factors that indicate the significant role of the Ministry of National Defense in the internal security of the state, through effective support of the non-military subsystem in the crisis management system.

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Introduction

After the catastrophic flood of the millennium, which in July 1997 hit southern and western Poland, the Czech Republic, eastern Germany (Lusatia), northwestern Slovakia and eastern Austria, resulting in the deaths of 114 people in the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland (56 people died in Poland at the time) and material damage amounting to approx.

4.5 billion US dollars (in Poland the damage was estimated at approximately 3.5 billion dollars), several attempts were made to sanction a national crisis management system without success. In 2005, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, another governmental draft law on crisis management was prepared. Over the next two years, numerous inter-ministerial consultations took place, which finally led to the enactment of the Crisis Management Act on 26 April 2007. More than 10 years after the flood of the millennium, in August 2007 President of the Republic of Poland signed the Act, which provided the legal basis for the system in question.

A multi-level crisis management system has been adopted (Table 1), which consists of the following components: crisis management authorities, consultative and advisory bodies competent to initiate and coordinate actions taken in the field of crisis management, and crisis management centres maintaining 24-hour readiness to take action.

Table 1. Crisis management system

CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM			
Administrative level	The crisis management authority	Consultative and advisory body	Crisis Management Centre
National	Council of Ministers, Prime Minister	Government Crisis Management Team	Government Security Centre
Resort	Minister in charge of a government administration department, Head of a central authority	Crisis Management Team (Ministry, Central Office)	Crisis Management Centre (Ministry, Central Office)
Provincial	Governor	Provincial Crisis Management Team	Provincial Crisis Management Centre
District	District governor	County Crisis Management Team	District Crisis Management Centre
Municipal	Mayor, Town Mayor	Municipal Crisis Management Team	Municipal (town) crisis management centres may be established (there is no obligation to establish one)

For a crisis management system organised in this way, notification and response runs from the lowest level of commune, district, province and state.

In the terms of the law in question , "crisis management is the activity of public administration bodies that is an element of national security management, which consists in preventing crisis situations, preparing to take control over them by means of planned actions, responding in case of crisis situations, removing their effects and restoring critical resources and infrastructure".

The tasks of ministries and central government administration bodies whose spheres of action include matters related to ensuring national security, including protection of the population or the economic basis of state security included the establishment of crisis management centres that provide:

- to be on 24-hour standby to ensure the flow of information for crisis management;
- liaising with the crisis management centres of public administrations;
- overseeing the operation of the detection and alert system and the early warning system for the population;
- cooperation with entities carrying out environmental monitoring;
- documenting the activities undertaken by the centre;
- implementation of the tasks of the Standby Service for the purposes of increasing state defence readiness;
- cooperation at all levels of government in informing and passing on instructions to be carried out on a 24-hour basis for health units in cases of emergency, random events, as well as disorders, cooperation with entities carrying out rescue, search and humanitarian operations;
- operation of the system.

1. Crisis management system of the Ministry of Defence

In order to fulfil the imposed tasks in the Ministry of National Defence with the entry into force of the act² , formal and legal works were carried out, the final effect of which was the reformation of the Operational Duty Service of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland into a full-time structure called the Crisis Management Centre of the Ministry of National Defence (MoD CMC), which took place in 2011. Unfortunately, the dynamic development of the security situation, including those resulting from successive changes in the Polish Armed Forces, leading to the reform of the Command and Management System of the Polish Armed Forces, resulted in the disassembling of the MoD CMC. At the beginning of 2014, following

the reformation of the Operational Command into the Armed Forces Operational Command in addition to many of the hitherto extremely complex tasks, further tasks were imposed, including responsibility in the area of ensuring the internal security of the state, i.e. performing the role of an executive body in crisis management of the Ministry of National Defence. Additional structures were assigned to the new tasks of crisis planning and response and within them the positions for officers and civilian employees. Already the initial period, spring 2014, in which the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation took place, did not allow for methodical education of the command staff within the new subject matter, but forced, dynamic entry, not only into the area of crisis management of Poland, but also into the crisis response aspects of the North Atlantic Alliance, responding to military threats.

It was under such circumstances that the Armed Forces Operational Command assumed the function of acting as the Crisis Management Centre of the Ministry of National Defence and in an accelerated manner began the consolidation of structures, familiarisation of

with representatives of crisis management structures of other ministries, provinces (Departments of Security and Crisis Management), districts and municipalities, as well as the Government Security Centre, responsible for the execution of crisis management at the national level.

Under the above legal framework, the Armed Forces Operational Command operated until the enactment of the Homeland Defence Act . Following the entry into force of this Act on 23 April 2022 The Operational Commander of the Armed Forces lost the tasks of crisis response and the Commander of the Territorial Defence Forces assumed them.

At the beginning of June 2022, based on the Decision of the Minister of National Defence , the function of the Crisis Management Centre of the Ministry of National Defence was also transferred to the Commander of the Territorial Defence Forces.

2. Use of the Polish Armed Forces in crisis management

The legal basis for the use of sub-units and units of the Polish Armed Forces in the execution of crisis management tasks is invariably Article 25 of the Act , which unambiguously indicates "if in a crisis situation the use of other forces and means is impossible or may prove to be insufficient, unless other provisions stipulate otherwise, the Minister of National Defence, at the request of a voivode, may place at his/her disposal subdivisions or units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, hereinafter referred to as 'units of the Armed Forces', together with directing them to perform crisis management tasks".

The Act directly indicates what tasks the Polish Armed Forces may be directed to and these are:

- participation in risk monitoring;
- carrying out tasks related to the assessment of the effects of phenomena occurring in the area of risk;
- carrying out search and rescue tasks;
- evacuation of affected population and property;
- carrying out tasks to prepare conditions for the temporary stay of the evacuated population in designated places;
- contribute to the protection of property left in the danger area;
- isolating the hazard area or rescue site;
- carrying out safety, rescue and evacuation work on buildings and monuments at risk;
- carrying out work requiring the use of specialised technical equipment or explosives held by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland;
- removal of hazardous materials and their disposal, using forces and means at the disposal of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland;
- the elimination of chemical contamination and biological contamination and infections;
- disposal of radioactive contamination;
- carrying out tasks related to the repair and reconstruction of technical infrastructure;
- contribute to ensuring that traffic routes are passable;
- providing medical assistance and performing sanitary, hygienic and anti-epidemic tasks.

More than eight years of crisis management carried out by the staff of the Armed Forces Operational Command, at the present stage, allows us to share experiences and conclusions, the implementation of which in everyday operations allowed the system to be improved, and new people currently dealing with the subject matter may significantly help to effectively avoid the mistakes that have already taken place.

Starting from the statistical data and, therefore, from the number of requests submitted to the Minister of National Defence by provincial governors (voivodeships) between 2014 and 2022 (Tab. 2), there is a trend of a significant increase in the need for support of the non-military system by subdivisions of the Polish Armed Forces after 2018. Out of a total of 589 referrals, as many as 500 fall into the period 2019-2022, a period where the national fight against the spread of the SARS-COV-19 pandemic played a key role.

Table 2. Quantities of applications submitted to the Ministry of Defence by governors between 2014 and 2022 - tabular summary.

Lp.	Province	Year									TOTAL	
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*		
1	Dolnośląskie	1	3					11	4	2	21	
2	Kujawsko-pomorskie				3	1		7	9	2	22	
3	Lubelskie			1	3	6	8	12	2	4	36	
4	Lubuskie		2	3	1		5	20	17	2	50	
5	Łódzkie			1			2	8	2	1	14	
6	Małopolskie						3	18	16	4	41	
7	Mazowieckie		1	1	4	5	4	23	30	17	85	
8	Opolskie					1		33	28	2	64	
9	Podkarpackie	2		3	1	1	4	15	5	14	45	
10	Podlaskie			1	2	2	1	16	13	2	37	
11	Pomorskie				4		1	10	11	3	29	
12	Śląskie					1	3	5		2	11	
13	Świętokrzyskie	9				1	4	12	1	1	28	
14	Warmińsko-mazurskie	1		1	5	3	5	1	1	1	18	
15	Wielkopolskie				1		5	9	1	2	18	
16	Zachodniopomorskie		1		1			33	33	2	70	
		13	7	11	25	21	45	233	173	61		
											TOTAL	589

* - data only for the period STY-MAJ2022, pending the transfer of the MoD CMC from the Armed Forces Operational Command to the Territorial Defence Forces Command

Source: own elaboration based on AFOC/CMC data

The three provinces of Mazowieckie, Zachodniopomorskie and Opolskie (Fig. 1.) are the proverbial leaders in the ranking of the number of applications submitted. While the Mazowieckie voivodeship, as the largest in terms of area of 35558 square km and the most populous with over 5.423 million inhabitants (152 persons per square km), finds a logical justification for a much greater need for support, smaller voivodeships such

as Zachodniopomorskie (area 22892 square km, population 1.676 million, population density 73 persons per square km) and Opolskie Voivodeship (area 9411 square km, population 0.980 million, population density 104 persons per square km) should be subjected to a thorough further scientific analysis of the validity of the requests made.

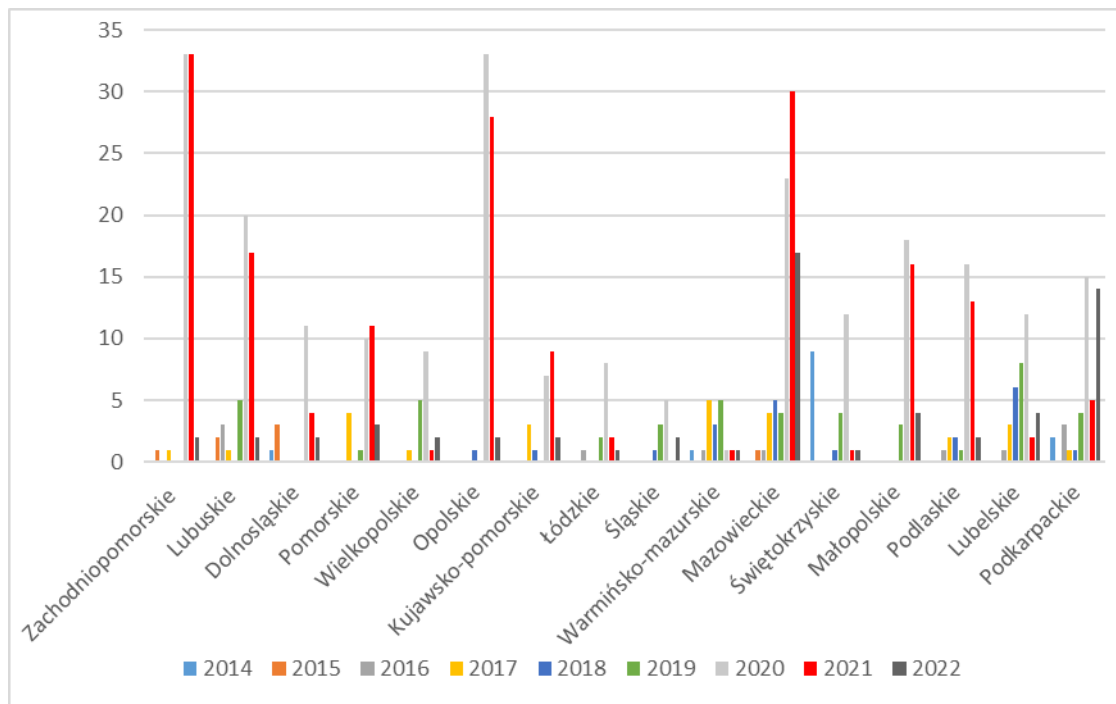


Chart. 1. Quantities of applications submitted to the Ministry of Defence by governors between 2014 and 2022 - graphic summary.

Source: own elaboration based on AFOC/CMC data

Despite the above-mentioned turn of events, it is stated that, in any case, each submitted application was subjected to a thorough analysis in the Armed Forces Operational Command in aspects such as the fulfilment of the prerequisites of a crisis situation, the capabilities possessed by the military, the availability of forces and resources, the deadline for the execution of tasks, the logistic security guaranteed by the non-military system, etc. Many applications, as a result of the proposed recommendation, were considered negatively by the Minister of National Defence, but in the end more than 80% of them were carried out by subdivisions or branches of the Polish Armed Forces, assigning a total of 22562 soldiers and military personnel and 6011 equipment units (Table 3).

Tab. 3. Allocated capacity of forces and resources for emergency tasks from 2014 to 2022.

Lp.	Total regions	Year									TOTAL
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*	
1.	Dedicated forces/soldiers	365	113	820	2010	1489	2218	8897	5455	1195	22562
2.	Dedicated equipment/resources	57	54	42	457	85	260	4029	422	605	6011

* - data only for the period JAN-MAJ 2022, pending the transfer of the MoD CMC from the Armed Forces Operational Command to the Territorial Defence Forces Command

Source: own elaboration based on AFOC/CMC data

Among the tasks that were carried out by the Polish Armed Forces were:

1. Multidimensional complicity in countering the spread of the SARS-COV 19 (coronavirus disease) pandemic across the country.
2. Taking action against the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) initially in the provinces on the eastern wall of Poland, then in the central part, ending also in some provinces on the western wall of Poland.
3. Eliminating the risks of the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) - Lubuskie and Mazowieckie Voivodeships.
4. Activities in search and rescue operations for missing people.
5. Preventive security for events such as the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw and World Youth Days in Krakow.
6. Hurricanes and storms - dealing with the aftermath of the elements.
7. Eliminating the effects of fires and helping to rebuild damaged buildings.
8. Flood risks and floods - preventive measures leading to minimise the effects of such hazards and, in the event of their occurrence, to take measures to help people and rebuild.
9. Addressing ice blockages that pose a threat to the public, including critical infrastructure.
10. Picking up and disposing of chemical residue finds from World War II - example Fort IV (Chrzanów) in Warsaw.
11. After a sewer failure in Warsaw - construction and maintenance of a crossing for a temporary sewer as well as support for nearby villages with drinking water tankers.
12. Preparation of temporary accommodation for refugees on the basis of military infrastructure as a possible response to the threats of displacement of significant

numbers of refugees from Ukraine caused by the situation in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

13. Counteracting the illegal movement of foreigners across the border between the Republic of Belarus and Poland through the engineering development of a 3-row concertina and later a vertical barrier - a total section of approximately 180 km.
14. Transporting aggregate to vulnerable areas and extinguishing dump fires using specialised military equipment.
15. Preparation and handover of a Temporary Guarded Refugee Centre (TGRC) on the basis of the Land Forces Field Training Centre in Wędrzyn to support the resources of the Border Guard.
16. Providing technical support to TGRC in Kętrzyn, Wędrzyn and Lesznowola under the management of the Border Guard.
17. Serving on Medical Rescue Teams to maintain the provision of medical cover in Warsaw.
18. Helping to develop reception points at the border and transporting large numbers of people in connection with the war in Ukraine.

On the basis of the analyses carried out, it can be concluded that the largest commitment on a national scale was the referral of sub-units and units of the Polish Armed Forces to assist in countering the SARS Covid-19 pandemic, where more than 4100 soldiers and almost 3500 equipment units were used in the course of just two years. The support was provided on the basis of separate decisions of the Minister of National Defence, on the basis of which 103 Military Task Groups were established.

In terms of the number of troops deployed, countering African Swine Fever (ASF) comes to the fore, where more than 8,600 soldiers and more than 600 equipment units have been deployed for tasks over six years (2016-2021), with as many as 108 Military Task Groups organised.

3. Crisis management plan of the Ministry of Defence

In order for the implementation of crisis response tasks to take place, it was extremely important to have a proper planning document, which was the foundation for the planning and implementation of crisis tasks by the Polish Armed Forces. The Crisis Management Plan of the Ministry of National Defence (MoD CMP), as it was referred to, was created on the basis of the Crisis Management Act , in its part concerning crisis management plans and constituted a

classified annex of the National Crisis Management Plan (NCMP). Armed Forces Operational Command, as the Crisis Management Centre, revised and updated the plan in question five times, each time adapting it to new legal regulations, the use of the Territorial Defence Forces after their successive units reached operational capability, changes in the command and control system of the Polish Armed Forces, demands submitted by voivodes, withdrawal of equipment from the Polish Armed Forces and introduction into service of new equipment, furnishings, vehicles and devices, as well as achievement of new capabilities. The above required intellectual effort as well as agreements between all elements of the crisis management system, not only of the Ministry of National Defence, but also of the Government Centre for Security, and finally resulted in a two-year cyclical issuance of subsequent documents:

- MoD CMP 2014 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 6 November 2014, with a strength of 9447 soldiers and military personnel and 2424 equipment units;
- MoD CMP 2016 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 19 September 2016, with a strength of 9460 soldiers and military personnel and 2407 equipment units;
- MoD CMP 2018 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 3 July 2018, with a strength of 9552 soldiers and military personnel and 2444 equipment units;
- List of changes to MoD CMP 2018 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 20 February 2019, with comparable numbers of soldiers and military personnel and equipment units;
- MoD CMP 2020 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 24 April 2020, with
- a strength of 9743 plus 3,000 soldiers and military personnel (30 WOT light infantry companies) and 2773 equipment units;
- MoD CMP 2022 - approved by the Minister of Defence on 16 August 2022, with more than 13,000 soldiers and military personnel and more than 4,500 equipment units.

The last MoD CMP 2022 was still agreed by the Armed Forces Operational Command, but finally, after it was handed over to the Territorial Defence Forces Command, it was thoroughly rebuilt and took into account the additionally greater potential of forces and means.

Conclusion and experiences

The analysis of the entirety of the undertakings carried out so far by the Armed Forces Operational Command as the Crisis Management Centre of the Ministry of National Defence during crisis management tasks allows us to formulate a number of conclusions and recommendations that should be helpful in the further functioning of the Ministry in the crisis management system.

Starting from formal documents, which are formalised applications of territorially competent voivodes to the Minister of National Defence for the use of sub-units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in a specific crisis situation in terms of their content, required forces and means and times of use, very often they were not agreed with representatives of Territorial Military Administration Bodies, i.e. with the Chiefs of Voivodship Military Staffs (currently Commanders of Territorial Defence Brigades) or their representatives. Such an approach has repeatedly resulted in misunderstandings, the need to collect additional information, to undertake explanations, ultimately prolonging the entire decision-making process, which should be unacceptable in the time deficit of crisis response.

The recalled situations, events and their consequences referred to by the representatives of the government administration in the field (provincial governors) requiring the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland repeatedly did not fulfil the prerequisites of crisis situations, and if this was fulfilled, it was impossible to get the impression that the forces and resources on the side of the non-military system were not exhausted.

The very high turnover of crisis management personnel in the Security and Crisis Management Departments resulted in the need for increased improvement and training, with the aim of avoiding errors in the proper creation of at least formal requests. Training within the framework of annual conferences organised by the Armed Forces Operational Command was very popular, but the frequency of such meetings could be increased according to the needs and for proper understanding of both sides.

In those provinces where the cooperation of the Chiefs of Provincial Military Staffs currently with the Commanders of Territorial Defence Brigades with the Directors and staff of the Security and Crisis Management Departments was based on direct contacts, at which constructive discussions were held and final positions were worked out, a proper process leading to the collision-free provision of support by the Polish Armed Forces was observed.

The times of use of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (up to 24 hours during the week and up to 72 hours on non-working days and holidays), as enshrined in the MoD CMP, were significantly shortened each time. This was, and still is, a result of the understanding by the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces of the seriousness of emergency situations and also of the above-average commitment of decision-makers, unit commanders and the soldiers themselves.

In conclusion, the Polish Armed Forces, in performing their constitutional duty, are preparing to protect the sovereignty of the state and the independence of the nation, but are nevertheless a very important and significant element in ensuring internal security, as they

repeatedly prove by carrying out emergency response tasks, whether to natural disasters or technical failures.

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