

Brief Report

The Territorial Defence Force in Disaster Response in Poland: Civil-Military Collaboration during a State of Emergency

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Abstract: The functioning of the “territorial army” of Poland is described in military history alongside that of the regular active combat troops. The main aim in creating “territorial troops” was to strengthen the state’s defence system. In countries with relatively long traditions concerning such troops, they now constitute an important link in the state’s defence system, counting close to the regular operational forces. Their purpose, and thus the goals and tasks set for them, depend on the specific needs related to the security of a given state, and are adequate in addressing the occurrence of possible threats. Given international guidelines for the proper use of the military in natural disasters and the rapidly changing landscape required for emergency assistance, Poland has recreated disaster-related operations of the existing Territorial Defence Force, now under the designated Territorial Defence Force, which will be limited to the territory of the country and largely focused on cooperation with the civilian sector. This article is written for two major reasons: One to both present the conditions and possibilities of cooperation between the Territorial Defence Force and public administration in the event of a natural disaster within Poland, and two to foster shared guidance and feedback from countries undergoing similar advancements. This is especially crucial in recognition that natural disasters are increasingly impacted by cross-border factors such as climate extremes, biodiversity losses, rapid and often unsustainable urban population growth, refugee migrations, growing scarcities of water, energy and food, and increasing risks of internal conflict all of which place increasing demands on Poland and its neighbors to begin a larger dialogue of cooperation.

Keywords: Territorial Defence Force; disaster management; disaster prevention and preparedness

1. Introduction

Natural disasters cause not only the death and disability of many people and enormous material losses, but also contribute to significant disruptions in the development of societies, nations and entire regions. Contemporary countries, fulfilling the function of ensuring security for its citizens, undertake activities aimed at eliminating or reducing these threats [1]. United Nations’ guidelines maintain that military assets should only be used as a “last resort” in responding to natural disasters, yet in many countries, especially in Asia, the military is the “first resort” in time of natural disasters [2]. Indeed, whereas in recognition of the fact that humanitarian relief is and should remain predominately a civilian function, humanitarian principles “dictate that all available resources, including military support, should be used to minimize the human cost of a natural disaster” [3]. In Poland, the public

administration is responsible for counteracting and combating the effects of natural disasters. They do this through coordinating the activities of forces and rescue measures, as well as providing support to the injured population [3].

Currently in Poland, the Territorial Defence Force (TDF) has recreated disaster-related operations within the TDF under the designated duties of the Territorial Defence Force, which will be limited to the territory of the country and largely focused on cooperation with the civilian sector. It will be referred to in this article as the TDF. As a flexible military structure of the state, it possesses the capacity to help in disasters and increase the security of citizens. Unfortunately, this is especially crucial in recognition that natural disasters are increasingly impacted by cross-border factors such as climate extremes, biodiversity losses, rapid and often unsustainable urban population growth, population migrations, growing scarcities of water, energy and food, and concomitant risks of internal conflict all of which place increasing demands on Poland and its neighbors to begin a larger dialogue of cooperation.

TDF represents an important element of support for public administration and society in combating natural disasters. As such, the TDF has a new structure, significantly different from other types of Polish Armed Forces and requires integration with currently functioning solutions in the field of military use, in situations of extraordinary threats and in defining the principles of cooperation with public administration. Establishing a territorial defence which functions well is a long-term process, one preceded by arduous analysis and planning.

The purpose of this work is to present the conditions, as well as the needs and possibilities of the TDF, for cooperation with public administration in the event of a natural disaster.

2. The Territorial Defence Force

The TDF is the fifth military branch of the Polish Armed Forces, following Land Forces, Air Force, Navy and Special Forces [4]. The force consists of professional soldiers and soldiers of the country's defence, the Territorial Military Service.

The Territorial Military Service (TSW) is a new kind of active military service, one which will be performed in the soldier's area of residence in two ways—rotational (during military exercises and training) and dispositional (in the remaining time). The TDF constitutes an independent type of the Polish Armed Forces and will significantly complement and increase the defence potential of Poland. The TDF commander is competent in commanding military units and organisational unions of these troops during peace, crisis and war [4].

The main tasks of TDF soldiers include:

- Conducting military operations in cooperation with operational forces (in the event of a conflict). These actions are aimed at terminating or stopping the forces of a potential enemy;
- Protection of people against the effects of natural disasters, reducing their consequences, protection of property, search and rescue, or protection of health and human life, as well as participation in the implementation of tasks in the field of crisis management;
- Protection of local communities against the effects of destabilisation and disinformation;
- Cooperation with elements of the state's defence system, in particular with voivodes (the area administered by a voivode "Governor" in several countries of central and eastern Europe) and local self-government bodies;
- Protection of local communities against the effects of attacks in cyberspace;
- Disperse the idea of patriotic education in society [4,5].

It is planned for TDF subunits to be equipped with individual and team equipment similar to that of the Polish Army, and above all not departing from the parameters and technical standards of such equipment as used in the Polish Armed Forces. Both professional soldiers and Territorial Military Service soldiers will be equipped with the same type of equipment regardless of the length or type of military service they perform. This mainly applies to individual equipment and utilities. At the same

time, due to the specificity of conducting operations in a diverse geographical environment (e.g. highly urbanised, mountainous, forest, watery areas), the equipment of individual TDF subunits will vary, i.e., adapted to both the place of service and unique civilian need. The equipment is determined by the competent Minister in consultation with the appropriate commander [4–6].

3. Opportunities for Cooperation between Civil-Military Sector in the Event of a Disaster

Currently, in accordance with the legal provisions in force in Poland, mobilising military forces and resources of the Polish Armed Forces takes place when the use of other forces and means is impossible or may be insufficient. This results in limitations concerning employing troops because of the ‘exhaustion’ of the possibility of other services. This is a fairly immeasurable factor and, in relation to natural disasters, difficult to determine due to the unpredictability of events [7–9]. However, any delay in making appropriate decisions may negatively impact upon the sensible use of available forces and resources of the Polish Armed Forces, resulting in reaching the aimed destination too late with the required resources. Another determinant which may make it difficult to reach an impacted area of a disaster with help is the dislocation of the Polish Armed Forces and the subunits planned to support public administration activities. This has the potential to have a negative impact upon the availability of military units, their preparation for rescue and preventive activities, as well as the possibility of using the specialised equipment which is provided by these units [10,11].

The establishment of the TDF as a significant element of support for public administration and society in combating natural disasters, could significantly improve the cooperation between the Polish Armed Forces and public administration. The TDF are supposed to have the capacity to implement support for protection subsystems in the field of internal security and assistance to the public. In relation to these tasks, the TDF has been set the mission of maintaining readiness to separate their subunits to support society and the non-military system. To implement this mission, TDF-specific features will be of fundamental importance, distinguishing them from operational forces, i.e., territoriality, via the use of the TDF in the permanent area of responsibility (pol. SRO); and mass character—the formation of the TDF subunits/branches are mainly based on local resources [4–6].

Thanks to the previously mentioned features, the TDF subunits will be able to immediately mobilise and begin performing tasks when needed. TDF are recruited by an ongoing process.

In addition, the TDF units are recruited to a large extent from citizens living in the SRO, which contributes to their determination in the implementation of tasks related to the protection of local communities. Additionally, operation in a familiar area significantly increases effectiveness of such formations. This allows the creation of a rapidly developed, flexible military structure of the state for disaster relief and raising the level of security for citizens [12].

Another important factor, beneficial from the point of view of implementing the mission of supporting a local community in the combating of natural disasters, is the decentralisation of the TDF command. The TDF structures are created in accordance with the administrative division of the country, i.e., the national command concerning the entire territory of the country, the TDF Brigade in voivodships, battalions and light infantry companies in counties [4]. This allows rapid assistance to the inhabitants of a county or voivodship and predisposes the TDF primarily to non-combat humanitarian activities for citizens [13]. Linking organisational structures of the TDF with the administrative division of the country is a factor which increases the effectiveness of cooperation with the local public administration bodies (government administration and local government), which are responsible for the implementation of tasks related to combating natural disasters.

In the TDF structure, the basic subunit which carries out rescue operations is the military “company”. The TDF light infantry companies will ultimately be located in all counties across the country. The TDF are to possess and maintain, in SROs allocated throughout the country, the necessary capabilities to perform crisis management tasks, including dealing with natural disasters. The main tasks provided for the TDF in this area include complicity in rescue and evacuation operations in the areas of natural disasters, technical disasters and technical failures. The enumerated TDF’s tasks

should be included in legal acts and documents in the field of crisis management, both nationally and locally (voivodship and county crisis management plans), in documents defining the principles, as well as the possibility of the Armed Forces in the Ministry of National Defence [4]. In accordance with the Crisis Management Plan of the National Defence Ministry in force, the Armed Forces may be used to combat natural disasters, primarily in such areas as:

- Monitoring hazards and assessing their ramifications;
- Search and rescue campaigns;
- Isolating the area of occurrence of hazards or the location of the rescue operations;
- Evacuating the injured population and property;
- Performing security, rescue and evacuation works of endangered construction objects and monuments;
- Support public order assurance in the areas of natural disasters;
- Protection of property remaining in the area of natural disasters;
- Ensuring accessibility of communication routes [4,14].

In the United States, involving the National Guard in community disaster planning provides a valuable medical support asset that can be critical in responding to multiple casualty events. One example is the use of the military National Guard resources in supporting civilian hospitals to sustain an adequate response in exercises of simulated terrorist events. In one study, it was emphasised that the value of regular joint disaster planning and training between military and civilian medical resources is to emphasise that an area of concern is to ensure compatibility between military communication and medical equipment compatibility with the civilian infrastructure. This has been identified as one of the major areas for the improvement of joint exercises. Studies support that the National Guard response is inherently faster than its federal counterpart. Based on the findings from joint exercises, states are encouraged to incorporate their corresponding National Guard as an integral part of the disaster response efforts in real multiple casualty events [15]. Other studies emphasise the value of aeromedical assets, especially helicopters in evacuating casualties from sudden onset natural disasters, and in crowd control to avert stampedes during mass gatherings [16,17]. Whereas the National Guard assets are often crucial, it is incumbent on the State public health professionals at the community and state planning level to have a knowledge of the types and capabilities of all response assets at their disposal. All of which must be joint planned and exercised on a regular basis [18].

Increasingly, all countries have experimented with the use of military assets in civilian calamities. What has been emphasized in the United States is that the role of the military is in support of the civilian, Federal and local governments, and does not supplant them or their authority. The military's capabilities and experience in search and rescue, logistics and transportation, medical aid, engineering and related services are those usually sought and employed by civilian agencies. In the United States, at least, the military has no "appetite" for law enforcement or anything suggestive of "martial law" and will only be involved if "disaster or calamities seriously endanger life and property and disrupt normal governmental functions to such an extent that duly constituted local authorities are unable to control the situation." Time must be spent by all countries in determining with legal clarification the exact role of the military [19]. It is noted that one UN senior official in 2012 asserted: "You can't hold the military back. The battle to keep the military out of disaster response was lost long ago. And the fact is that in natural disasters you need the military. Rather than trying to keep the military out of disaster response—which is a non-starter—you need to figure out ways to work with the military thus that their assets are used effectively and they don't complicate matters for civilian responders" [3].

4. Limitations

Assessment concerning the level of training and the level of combat readiness of individual elements of the TDF system will be carried out according to standardised procedures. These will be developed by the Headquarters of the TDF and approved by the Minister of National Defence.

Ultimately, after completing combat readiness by all TDF brigades, they will account for around 53,000 soldiers. According to the Ministry of National Defence, by the end of 2018 the TDF would have reached 20,000 soldiers, of which 17,000 will be soldiers in the Territorial Service [4,14]. In order to ensure efficiency and flexibility in terms of recruitment, financing, equipment and training, the achievement of full TDF combat readiness will be spread out over the coming years. Eventually, 17 TDF Brigades will be created in Poland. By 2020, the TDF formations would have been completed [4,20].

Due to the above, the TDF are not yet able to fully respond to all threats in the country, especially as their numbers are limited, and training soldiers in the field of disaster relief does not yet meet certain requirements.

5. Conclusions

The creation of the TDF in Poland is a response to the increasing threat from the forces of nature, as well as human activity. At the same time, it is also a way to connect society with armed forces by creating a military formation of local origin. The TDF soldiers are to be primarily residents of the same region of the country, who will thus be further determined in the implementation of tasks related to the protection of the local community.

Undertakings including the participation of TDF units lead us to conclude that they will become an important support for public administration in the event of natural disasters. The TDF light infantry companies will have a specific profile adapted to the geographical and demographic environment of the SRO, which will be reflected in their equipment (including individual soldiers), as well as the training process. It is planned to form the TDF sub-branches with profiles of, among others, urban, mountain, water and general. It should be emphasised that this new type of Polish Armed Forces will not replace the emergency services, but support and complement their action.

Despite the considerable variety of natural disasters, a large part of the potential ramifications of these events on the population, property and infrastructure occurring in the area covered by the threat, are the same or similar. This means that in a rescue operation, certain sets of tasks required will be the same in the case of various threats [21–24]. These tasks must be included in the standardised procedures which will be developed by the TDF headquarters. These procedures cannot uncritically assign the objectives, tasks and functions of the existing types of the Polish Armed Forces to the TDF subunits. It is necessary to conduct an analysis of the needs resulting from the deficiencies and limitations of the current functioning of the Polish Armed Forces in the occurrence of natural disasters.

The relatively even distribution of the TDF branches and subunits throughout the country creates a new reactionary tool for emerging disasters or other threats, which will be in the hands of the state. Due to the TDF, the real possibilities of supporting internal security and helping the public could be significantly improved, and the same territorial defence dimension in Poland could become more meaningful.

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