

Modern Army for Modern Times or Private Paramilitary?

Polish Territorial Defense Force as a Benchmark Case in Conflict Evolution

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Abstract: The new Polish military branch, the Territorial Defense Force (TDF), has been described both as a defensive tool against Russian hybrid warfare and as a private paramilitary force of the incumbent Law and Justice Party. This paper examines the strategic, political, and military purposes of the Territorial Defense Force using two theoretical models. One is designed for analyzing units intended to protect against external threats, the second for units targeting internal threats. Comparing these models with the officially declared objectives of the TDF, our results indicate a stronger correlation of the new branch with the second model and reveal distinct political motivations for its creation.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, territorial defense, hybrid warfare, Poland, paramilitary

Introduction

While the nature of the armed conflict has not changed, its character, i.e., the way it is exercised has evolved driven by technological progress¹ beyond the “new wars” paradigm.² Contemporary security scholars focus on modern dimensions of war,³ conflicts below its threshold,⁴ next-generation, fourth- and fifth-generation wars,⁵ cognitive,⁶ information,⁷ ideological,⁸ economic⁹ or hybrid warfare¹⁰ based on proxies¹¹ irregular and guerrilla tactic.¹²

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated how important citizens are for the country’s defense. Assumptions adopted years ago by the Baltic and Nordic states, and Poland as part of the total defense concept¹³ proved to be right. Even before Russia started a full-scale conflict with Ukraine, vigorous measures were taken to increase the involvement of Ukrainians in strengthening their country’s military security and sovereignty. Territorial Defense Forces (Сили Територіальної оборони Збройних Сил України) as a separate type of armed forces were established in Ukraine less than two months before the outbreak of the war and constitute one of the essential elements of the defense system. However, Territorial Defense Force (TDF or *Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*, WOT), the formation that has been operating in Poland

already for five years served as a model for the Ukrainians. It is unsurprising that the structure of the Ukrainian forces largely resembles the solutions adopted in Poland, since information on the Polish TDF was transferred to Ukraine from 2019. Polish WOT is also becoming a model for similar formations in other countries, including in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Georgia.¹⁴ Furthermore, in recent years, voluntary formations are expanding in many countries, including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland or Germany.

However, the creation of the Polish Territorial Defense Force, established in 2016 as a mostly-volunteer military support formation operating on home territory sparked a discussion as to what the TDF and its purpose actually is.¹⁵ Nebulous terms like “paramilitary” or “militia” have been used to describe its nature. Furthermore, its mission to combat hybrid warfare raised questions about the position of the TDF within the security system and its connection to the ruling party, stoking controversy over the unit’s political allegiance. Much of this debate comes down to one pivotal question – is this force truly a new line of defense against Poland’s potential enemies, or is it the governing party’s new “private” army, targeting perceived domestic rivals? Therefore, in order to benchmark this formation in a wider security architecture of the European continent and explore whether there is some substance to its undemocratic potentiality, the primary goal of this paper is to examine both the strategic-military and political why and wherefore of this alternative security force,¹⁶ and to establish whether the Territorials are intended to combat external or domestic threats. While the TDF is an interesting case study and analytical puzzle on its own, its creation (and the subsequent debates) took place in a charged political climate, just as opposition parties and the European Union accused the ruling Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) of imperiling Polish democracy. Moreover, Poland is not unique in Central and Eastern Europe. The new phenomenon of paramilitarism has been described as a potential risk to liberal and democratic values in the region.¹⁷ One could

argue that the TDF is a manifestation of both of these processes – rising illiberalism and European paramilitarism – and thus the results of this analysis are relevant beyond Poland’s borders especially in view of the Russian invasion on Ukraine.

Our research takes a model-based approach¹⁸ centered on the organization’s stated task – one around combating external threats, the second around combating internal threats. In the theoretical section, we create a coherent set of secondary features of the TDF’s purpose around the center points. These features are subsequently compared with the empirical data. Determining the points of correlation between the theoretical constructs and the empirical data enables us to assess how well the models conform to the reality of the TDF and how we can formulate the best possible hypotheses explaining the TDF’s mission. After separate analyses for each model, the results are tied together to provide the best possible answer to the research question. Though both models are analyzed separately, some of the same issues are touched upon in both tests, only from different perspectives, indicating an area of overlap between hybrid warfare and paramilitarism, and thus raising new interesting questions.

A somewhat different approach has been adopted for the construction of each model. For Model A, it was necessary to use an inductive approach, whose “primary purpose... is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data”.¹⁹ Following this logic, the most common themes were extracted from the state-of-the-art scholarly literature on hybrid warfare, as well as other sources, and used to construct a coherent, testable model.

Conversely, a more deductive approach was taken to construct Model B, based on an existing theory with its own causal mechanism.²⁰ Accordingly, we test whether it can be applied to the case of the TDF, and whether its causal mechanisms can help answer our research question. Through syllogistic reasoning we can conclude that a substantiated match between Böhmelt and Clayton’s²¹ theory and the empirical data indicates the presence of the same causal

mechanism in the TDF²² (Flach 1998). If the features of the Territorial Force correspond robustly with Böhmelt and Clayton's description of paramilitaries, we have reason to argue that just like paramilitaries in general, the TDF is aimed against internal opponents.

However, the overarching logic of the whole research is inductive. It is presupposed that neither model will fit reality perfectly. Still, they are invaluable in providing meaning to data, and thus in gleaning new insights. The analysis uses both secondary research and original data, particularly information from governmental and military websites and documents. The data are operationalized using the two models; that is, the key features included in each model are sought in the empirical data.

In the first section we present the conceptual basis for the research. The two models are defined, one assuming the strategic-military purpose of the Territorials is to defend against external threats, the second suggesting the TDF is a private paramilitary targeting internal threats. In the second section we present the analysis of both models and tie together all the results, discussing their wider implications for Poland and beyond.

Model A: External threat unit

The stated reason for the TDF's creation is consistent with the chief threats to Polish security listed in the 2017 Defense Concept,²³ specifically the threat of hybrid warfare from the Russian Federation. The government's officially declared purpose for the Territorials, therefore, corresponds to the strategic tasks in Model A. The model is based on the current state of the art on countering hybrid warfare (HW) by identifying the means and ends by which a military or semi-military unit can oppose these types of hostile activity.

Hybrid warfare is understood as a simultaneous and synchronized use of military, political, economic, civil and information instruments of power to target political, military, economic,

social, information and infrastructural vulnerabilities while blurring the lines between war and peace, civilian and military, front line and rear.²⁴ The aim is to exploit opponent's vulnerabilities in order to change his behavior according to political goals. This is accompanied by constant vertical and horizontal escalation and de-escalation,²⁵ while the implementation of non-military means does not preclude the use of a conventional army.²⁶

Hybrid warfare uses the “gray areas” between military and civilian, state and private, frontier and rear, to cause damage to the enemy without providing the opponent sufficient excuse to escalate the situation militarily. Therefore, a proper anti-HW unit must operate precisely in these gray zones and be equipped with capabilities beyond simple combat. These may include some tactics that are wholly non-kinetic in nature. Thus agitation, propaganda and information warfare are commonly employed, in such way as to target societal points of contest, like ideological, national and economic tensions, to weaken popular domestic support for the opposing government and cause division within the society. Therefore, it stands to reason that a counter-HW unit would be more effective if capable of countering such efforts, for example by fostering patriotic and pro-government values and combating disinformation efforts. Education plays a vital role in this process,²⁷ and a military or paramilitary unit could potentially play a role in this area by holding seminars, courses or workshops to educate the audience about the methods of disinformation and propaganda *and* to instill patriotic values (and even to employ “friendly” propaganda).

Secondly, the so-called *maskirovka*, the Kremlin's traditional method, means employing deception and camouflage to hide one's own movements and confuse the opponent. Intelligence operatives and cyber-activities can assist in combating this threat. The pivotal role of knowledge is tied to another aspect of countering hybrid warfare – the speed of the reaction. By acting in

a deceitful manner, the assailant seeks to complete his task before his opponent realizes what is happening and mobilizes forces to react; therefore, a counter-HW formation must be able to respond as quickly as possible. In the words of the former Estonian Chief of Defense General Terras, the defenders need to be ready for “shooting the first little green man that appears” as to avoid repetition of the Crimean scenario.²⁸

Hybrid attacks are aimed at interconnectivity and weak links in security structures, which means that a successful counter-HW formation must cooperate closely with other security branches, such as the police, to combat various types of threats and reinforce the connectivity of the security structures.²⁹ It follows logically that the counter-HW force should be incorporated into the crisis management system. In terms of armed kinetic action, the best-suited type of unit for HW is a small, highly trained and well-equipped force, like special forces. These troops can be deployed deep within enemy territory and are capable of multiple tasks including sabotage and disruption of infrastructure or guerrilla warfare.³⁰ The use of small, covert units for the purposes of sabotage or terrorism is well within their capabilities.³¹ Logically, the defending force must be ready to match the attacking special forces in equipment and training³² being more adept at irregular warfare than the regular military, but possess higher combat capabilities than other irregular security branches.

Accordingly, by definition HW often implies a combination of both regular and irregular features. While small special task forces may be deployed in the early-to-middle phases, the attacker may support them with more substantial and heavier troops in later phases. While unconstrained by the principles of conventional warfare, a counter-HW formation must still be capable of combating a large-scale, concentrated assault. Units should operate on the division or brigade level, equipped with armored vehicles and weaponry to combat heavy and armored

troops.³³ This leads us to the final part of Model A, which is defense against a conventional Russian attack, possibly as the final stage of hybrid warfare.

In summary, Model A hybrid warfare unit should be capable of countering military and non-military, as well as conventional and non-conventional threats, particularly when used in combination. Its chief duty is to respond to propaganda, intelligence, subversion and irregular and regular military activities. The unit should be capable of anti-propaganda, intelligence and counter-intelligence activities to oppose the enemy's use of deception and subversion. Cooperation is the key – a Model A formation must work closely with other security forces in activities such as crisis management. In terms of kinetic military threats, it must be capable of rapid and flexible deployment, deploying highly trained units that are capable of standing up to hostile special forces and armor, while operating mainly at the division or brigade scale. Individual sub-units should not be too thinly dispersed. Specifically, in response to a Russian threat, territorials' main task being support operations for the regular army, such as preparation of defenses or covering flanks, and potentially guerrilla warfare within the occupied territory. At the same time, however, they should be capable of rapid reaction to operations deep within the domestic territory.

Admittedly, in real life all these characteristics are unlikely to be found combined in a single unit. Nevertheless, Model A serves well as purely an ideal type in the Weberian sense for analyzing the counter-HW aspects of TDF and lays the groundwork for a critique of the unit – comparing the configuration of the TDF with the model reveals a certain schizophrenic quality to the unit's formal mission. While fighting hybrid warfare requires the defender to abandon the classical front-rear dichotomy and to deploy forces across the whole territory to prevent

deep operations, the defender against conventional assault should concentrate on the endangered (in this case eastern) border.

Model B – Internal threat unit

The foundation stone for Model B lies within Böhmelt and Clayton's theory on auxiliary forces, particularly in the hypothesis that paramilitaries are established in response to "a domestic threat to the incumbent,"³⁴ i.e., to combat internal threats of a political and military nature to the ruling establishment. Though applying a theory of paramilitarism to the Polish Territorials might seem provocative, it is justified due to the similarity of the TDF mission to the traditional functions of paramilitary groups, the close ties between the Territorials and Polish self-defense paramilitaries proper, and the TDF's parallel and separate position in regard to the other military branches. The other defining attributes of paramilitaries further strengthen our reasons for applying this theory to the TDF – these forces are organized under the central government, and therefore rely on the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, which is accountable for their actions due to the clear link between them. Unlike that other class of auxiliary forces, pro-government militias are likely to appear even in stable and developed countries absent of internal violent conflict.

Böhmelt and Clayton present several types of intentional internal threats a paramilitary may be deployed to combat. We examine two types of threats that do not require narrow specialization, have the greatest political implications, and which are tied to military and political threats to the ruling regime – counterinsurgency (CI) warfare and coup-proofing.

Paramilitaries have several inherent qualities that make them more suitable for counterinsurgency warfare than regular soldiers. While the latter are equipped to combat conventional external forces, paramilitaries tend to be recruited locally and therefore have a better knowledge of the populace and territory, and are faster and cheaper to deploy in the critical area.³⁵ This requires a firm hierarchy and well-organized structure, unlike insurgents, which can be made up of loose semi-independent cells.

Any insurgency/counterinsurgency struggle aims not only to defeat the opponent's military capabilities but also to win over the support of the population. This is done through close contact with locals, as the CI unit needs to be present in the minds of the civilians, not merely a distant force housed in military bases.³⁶ In other words, a CI force needs to win "hearts and minds." While the "minds" factor focuses on the rational sensibilities of the population, characterized by improving local lives through infrastructure building, civil defense, etc., the "hearts" aspect is aimed at winning emotional support. This is where the role of ideology – which we understand as a systematic set of values and ideas identifying a social group (class, religion, ethnicity), the dangers it faces, the values it strives for, and the course of action it should take – takes center stage.³⁷ Either side in an internal conflict can promote a specific ideology to generate popular support, and to set a structure of values and goals for the various socio-economic groups from which it seeks support. Naturally, weaponizing social values can be used to demonize the opponent by presenting him as an enemy. Through this, the incumbent not only ensures civilian support but also the inflow of new recruits.

The importance of propaganda in CI warfare should not be overstated even if it is limited to keeping the silent majority neutral.³⁸ The need for positive contact with population touches on another subject vital for a successful CI, and that is local presence and territorial character of the unit. Establishing contact with the local population, and uprooting the enemy politically,

helps to establish a friendly administration and organize and cooperate with local self-defense units. The task of the counterinsurgents is to maintain security, project the military and political presence, and build the relationship between the local population and the incumbent government. Intelligence gathering is also vital, by creating a web of informants mainly through the use of the friendly minority. This provides CI units with better knowledge of the area, population and opposing forces.³⁹

These static troops should operate in smaller units, initially in battalion or company sizes and eventually in squads. They should also maintain multilevel cooperation with local civilian structures. Individual units should not be rigid in their deployment nor of the same numbers in every region; instead, reinforcements should be sent to other regions as necessary. Their allocation should be determined by the characteristics of the population, not by the military-strategic value of the location.

An effective CI unit does not necessarily need the most modern and powerful conventional arsenal as its political goals take precedence. Light arms and transport would be sufficient, as the non-combat tools of the static units, such as propaganda and ideological warfare, support of the local population and projecting political control, are their greatest strengths in CI operations.

Böhmelt and Clayton⁴⁰ imply that paramilitaries should be equipped to defend the regime from rogue institutions or small but powerful groups, including members of the political elite and the military. In this situation, the chief role of a paramilitary is to balance out the capabilities of the regular army. This brings us to the theory on coup-proofing. Correlation between the TDF with this part of the model has deep political implications since, based on empirical data, authoritarian regimes are much more likely to engage in coup-proofing than democracies, which tend to have more benevolent military-civilian relations⁴¹ and because opposition groups have many different and non-violent ways of removing rulers from power.

Based on the theory, we can construct a theoretical “ideal type” unit representing Model B. Such a unit is recruited primarily on political, ethnic or religious affiliation, in both the lower and upper echelons, to ensure loyalty to the incumbent regime. To further strengthen this loyalty, unit B should be organized outside the regular chain of command and under the complete jurisdiction of the political leadership. To ensure this, political supervisors can be assigned to oversee its functioning. There should be meaningful separation between unit B and other military structures, for example through limited or no joint training or bases. The regime should provide preferential treatment to the unit in terms of finances, equipment and personnel, and through this and other methods, rivalry is created between it and the regular military.

Instead of being housed in military bases with the regulars, unit B should be deployed near population centers in close contact with the civilian population, and particular emphasis should be given to the country’s political centers. However, deployment should not be rigid and the unit should be capable of a flexible reassignment throughout the country. The unit should possess a specific toolset. In terms of military capabilities, this would mean mobile infantry equipped with light arms capable of swift action against a similar foe. Thanks to the close contact with the populace and its intelligence-gathering capabilities, the unit should possess broad knowledge of the local area and population. This contact is enhanced by engaging in various civilian and social activities and by fostering cooperation with local groups, including self-defense forces. The political/religious affiliation of the unit implies an active role in ideological mobilization among the population.

An interesting discovery concerning both of our ideal type models is that while in some respects they stand in opposition to each other (e.g., whether to be integrated with other military and security institutions), in other respects they overlap (particularly in the use of non-military means), albeit in different contexts or for different purposes.

Analysis

Comparison of the TDF with Model A

Cooperation with other security structures

The cooperation of the TDF with other actors in the Polish security structures is highly developed when it comes to the institutions under the Ministry of Interior. The Territorials cooperate particularly closely with the Polish Border Guard. In September 2018, both formations signed a document formalizing the collaboration mechanism, agreeing on information exchange, logistical assistance, experience sharing, joint training and cooperation in crisis situations.⁴² This was followed by a number of other documents detailing cooperation between the Border Guard and individual TDF units, like the 6th Masovian Brigade,⁴³ the 2nd Lublin Brigade⁴⁴ and the 3rd Subcarpathian Brigade.⁴⁵ The documents focus mainly on information and experience exchange and logistical collaboration, including sharing training facilities. These processes are observable mostly in the eastern regions.

The law establishing the Territorial Defense Force also specifies the possibility for cooperation between the TDF and the Fire Department and the Forest Guard in terms of exchanging information and joint activities.⁴⁶ The mode of collaboration between the firefighters and the Territorials was expanded further in 2020 when both groups agreed on mutual support in the following spheres: protection of lives and health of citizens, property and the environment; protection against natural disasters, including fires and other local threats; search and rescue operations; and specialized equipment sharing and education. The chief stated goal was the expansion of the TDF's capabilities in the protection of local communities from natural disasters.⁴⁷

A legal precedent for cooperation between the Territorials and the Polish Police was set by an agreement from November 2014 between the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Interior, which enabled their subordinate bodies to share information affecting the

security of the state, citizens, public order and safety and to conduct joint exercises and training.⁴⁸ As the TDF is a branch of the Armed Forces, this agreement extends to the Territorials as well. Nevertheless, the relationship with the police has been further expanded through similar agreements as those with the BG and Fire Department.⁴⁹

The lack of similar agreements with other military branches could possibly hint that there is no comparable will to increase cooperation with the Land Forces, Special Forces, Navy, and the Air Force. However, a more likely explanation is that the real reason is their inter-departmental nature – since the non-military security formations like police and the Border Guard are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. It is, therefore, more likely that the basis for cooperation between the TDF and the other Armed Forces is being established through intra-departmental channels. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Territorials and the Armed Forces is explored below, since this relationship is more crucial in Model B there than in Model A. From the evidence thus far, we can safely conclude there is a strong correlation between the TDF and theoretical Model A, since the TDF works closely with other security actors.

Non-military and non-kinetic capabilities

The TDF possesses a wide range of responsibilities and capabilities outside of combat. The unit is integrated into the crisis response system through close cooperation with local administrative and security bodies. Its tasks include natural disaster prevention and mitigation, property and infrastructure protection, search and rescue, explosives removal, protection of local communities from destabilization and disinformation, carrying out information activities and, theoretically, propagating patriotic education.⁵⁰ Their unique position as a link between the Armed Forces and civil administration provides the Territorials with the potential to unify crisis response, improve coordination, and increase trust in the military. Due to the wide dispersion of units across *powiats*⁵¹ they can react quickly to crisis situations.⁵²

It is indeed in the area of crisis response where the TDF seems to be most useful, as demonstrated by their successful participation in the disaster response after tornados hit Lubusz *voivodeship* and their role in the Covid-19 response. Operation “Resilient Spring” put the Territorials on the front line of the fight against the pandemic. In cooperation with local medical services, law enforcement, and the military’s chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear units and Medical Corps, they have distributed food and medical equipment, evacuated personnel, collected samples, assisted patrols and border control, and fulfilled other tasks for the mitigation of Covid-19’s effects and in building community resilience.⁵³

The TDF is also developing its own cyber-component. Once it is complete, *Zespół Działań Cyberprzestrzennych* (ZDC) is planned to be composed of 100 servicemen, one-tenth of whom will be professional soldiers. Its designated tasks will be reconnaissance and defense in cyberspace, forensic analysis, and strengthening the country’s cybernetic defense systems⁵⁴ This is also part of the TDF’s task to combat disinformation and hostile propaganda activities found online.⁵⁵ The unique contribution of ZDC to national cyber-defense will be the protection of local communities. The unit’s combination of close cooperation with local communities, knowledge of the surroundings and cyber-capabilities has a significant potential for intelligence gathering. Another hitherto untapped potential lies in educational activities – the TDF appears to be focused on expanding practical survival knowledge among the public rather than on media and information literacy, or on propagating pro-state values for that matter. Yet, due to their close connection with the civilian population, the TDF would be an ideal agent for this task.

These non-kinetic and non-military capabilities, as well as close cooperation with other security branches, correlate with the features defining Model A. By serving as “the middleman” between the Armed Forces, local communities and other security actors, the Territorials have the potential to improve the connectivity and coherence of the defense system, which is likely to be attack attacked in hybrid warfare. Furthermore, by developing skills in cyberspace and

assisting in disaster response, the TDF is well-equipped to combat non-military types of aggression, which might very well be employed in an HW offensive campaign.

Combat deployment and capabilities

The character of the Territorials is highly local in terms of both recruitment and deployment. This is because unlike the other branches, the TDF should be deployed in such a way as to help local communities and administrations and be always ready to support the public and non-military systems and protect critical infrastructure, indicating that non-military tasks are prioritized over military operations.⁵⁶ The command structure is composed of three main levels – firstly the national command overseeing the entire TDF; secondly, 17 brigade commands on the *voivodeship* level, one for each *voivodeship* and two for Masovia; and thirdly, battalions and companies on the *powiat* level,⁵⁷ meaning that the sub-units are quite widely dispersed.

The internal structure of units is not always uniform, but a general template exists: on a brigade level, with full numbers counting 3,000 Territorials, the formation consists of the command and staff, a command company, three to five light infantry battalions and a few smaller units. A battalion counts 765 soldiers and is composed of roughly 4 companies and once again a few smaller units. Every company of 150 soldiers is then further divided into roughly 4 platoons by 30-40 soldiers. The squad is the smallest unit of the TDF, with composition varying according to specific tasks. The equipment of the TDF matches that of light infantry – mostly small arms such as rifles, grenade launchers, machine guns, light mortars, reconnaissance drones and transport vehicles.⁵⁸

The basic operational level of organization is a company. Each is assigned a so-called Permanent Area of Responsibility (SRO), usually corresponding either with a *powiat* or, for larger cities, the municipality. Any crisis that comes to pass in the SRO is the primary responsibility of the company assigned there. Depending on the topography of the *powiat*,

companies are equipped to operate in urban, woodland, coastal, mountainous, or other types of terrain. It is expected that after the build-up is complete, there should be a total of 364 companies.⁵⁹

This mode of deployment is not an ideal set-up to counter an invasion. Firstly, equal deployment across all voivodeships instead of concentration at the Russian border is questionable.⁶⁰ Secondly, the basic organization at the company level is not effective. It makes operational command more difficult and the units are too widely dispersed. The TDF needs to concentrate higher firepower to have any real effect. Preferably, the main operational unit would be an independent brigade, or the troops should be assigned under a divisional command of the local Land Forces. Admittedly, the build-up of the Territorials in the eastern regions has been prioritized, and those brigades that are already fully manned are usually positioned there.⁶¹ According to Skrzypczak,⁶² for the TDF to fulfill its task of supporting defensive operations – while reminding us that the other branches play the primary role – the total number of brigades would have to rise to 30, thus further straining the defense budget.

However, the current broad deployment should make the TDF theoretically effective in combating deep operations and would put them in a good position to respond to attacks on critical infrastructure and population centers. Similarly, the greater concentration in Masovia strengthens the defense of the capital city. Nevertheless, under Model A the anti-HW unit needs to operate on the large-to-mid formation level to be effective, meaning that the companies in *powiats* would be at a disadvantage, as they would have to respond either on their own and in weaker numbers, or they would have to take time to organize for a combined assault, undermining the quick-response aspect, while the SRO system hampers their maneuverability.

The amount of training reflects the vision to establish the Territorials as a supporting force made up of part-time volunteers. The basic training for a fresh TDF recruit takes 16 days, while those who already passed reservist training need only eight days. This phase is intended

for Territorials to master basic principles of combat, the use of small arms, basic logistical and medical skills, improvement of physical fitness, and adoption of soldierly manners. However, there are plans to lengthen the period of basic training and unify it for both new recruits and reservists. This initial phase is followed by three one-year periods. In each year, 22 days of training are dedicated to improving theoretical knowledge, while 14 are focused on developing skills in the field. In addition, all members have to undertake a SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) course, meant to prepare them for all conditions on and off the battlefield.⁶³

However, in terms of equipment, the TDF more resembles a front-line infantry unit, as they are equipped with the most modern MSBS Grot rifle and other state-of-the-art small arms, as well as grenade launchers, machine guns and light mortars. The formation's anti-aircraft weaponry includes ZUR-23-2 rocket artillery, and Grom/GromM, Piroun and Strała-2M missile systems, while its anti-armor weapons are mainly single-use anti-tank missile launchers. Though it has been announced that the TDF will be equipped with the anti-tank Spike-LR37 guided missile weapons, Tomaszewski⁶⁴ considers this to be unrealistic, as the TDF lack sufficient training to operate them. This also prevents them from fielding medium and heavy mortars.

Advanced equipment and local knowledge could potentially make the TDF into an effective guerrilla force. Being familiar with the territory, possessing equipment specific to the local environment, and operating in smaller units, while not remaining too long in direct combat, means that the Territorials might indeed be particularly useful in this role. Going back to Skrzypczak,⁶⁵ however, the question remains whether the numbers would be sufficient.

Save for guerrilla warfare, the TDF's other combat capabilities appear doubtful. The Territorials' wide dispersion across the entire country weakens their ability to launch a concentrated counter-offensive. From the tactical perspective, it is difficult to imagine

volunteers with only weeks of training per year facing *Spetsnaz* forces, as Macierewicz apparently believes.⁶⁶ While the government obviously wishes to provide advanced equipment which would, in theory, make the Territorials capable of in the mission defined in Model A, the part-time nature of the TDF prevents it from fulfilling this role effectively. While the localization of TDF troops makes them capable of responding quickly to deep operations, this is futile if they lack sufficient skills to actually fight the incursions successfully. Its numbers would have to be increased to cover all the designated tasks. Still, there are several other points of correlation between Model A and the current configuration of TDF: its units are indeed well-equipped, possessing both anti-aircraft and anti-tank capabilities, and by adapting to specific areas of operation they have potential as a guerrilla force.

Comparison of the TDF with Model B

The TDF's position within the command structure

Model B postulates that an ideal “B type” paramilitary serves under the direct control and oversight of the incumbent faction, either by inserting its own agents into the upper echelons of the security hierarchy and the unit itself, or by separating the paramilitary from the command structure entirely. Interestingly, the data reveals evidence of both approaches in the TDF's case.

The TDF is constituted as a fully separate military branch, on par with the Land Force, Air Force, Navy and Special Forces. The post of commander, which has been occupied since its conception by now-Major General Wiesław Kukuła,⁶⁷ is therefore in no way subordinate to the commanders of the other branches. Instead, the immediate superior is the General Staff of the Armed Forces, followed in the hierarchy by the Ministry of National Defense, putting only a single intermediary between the ruling PiS Party and the Territorials.⁶⁸ Critics point out that Macierewicz, in particular, exercised great personal authority over the formation in terms of its development and activities, loosening the ties between the General Staff and the Territorials.⁶⁹

The impartiality of both the Ministry and the General Staff is called into question by purges conducted by Macierewicz after his appointment to the ministerial seat. In March 2016, several of the most senior officers, including the Joint Staff Chief, as well as the commanders of the Land Forces, Navy, and of the armored and airborne forces, unexpectedly resigned from their posts, apparently under pressure from the minister. This coincided with Macierewicz's announcement to "stamp out all traces of the communist era" from the Defense Ministry.⁷⁰ A notable event was a raid on a NATO counter-terrorism unit to "dismiss" its commander, Colonel Piotr Gastał.⁷¹ This approach is well in line with Macierewicz's controversial struggle against suspected internal enemies, in a list including PO supporters and alleged communist sympathizers. Some claim that the purge targeted those officers who had too strong ties to NATO,⁷² suggesting that the ex-minister's isolationism was directed towards Poland's Western allies as well.

Under PiS, the Polish military command was transformed. Other than Kukula, virtually all senior generals have been appointed during Law and Justice's tenure.⁷³ However, there is no evidence suggesting that these officers would actually serve as "agents" of PiS, or that they owe their loyalty primarily to the party. Nevertheless, the reasons for the purge presented by Macierewicz himself, in particular elimination of those that might harbor loyalties to Law and Justice's political opposition, is a clear indicator that the change-up in the military brass was politically motivated, thus proving correlation of the empirical data with the model. Similarly, the independent structure of the TDF makes another point supporting the accuracy of Model B. We can summarize that PiS exhibits the tendency to exert its own influence over the Polish Armed Forces and the Territorials.

The isolation of the TDF and rivalry with other branches

According to the model, the ideal type B formation should function as independently as possible. Common bases and joint exercises with other security actors, and the regular army in

particular, should be avoided, and rivalry between them should be fostered, ideally through disproportionate support for the paramilitary.

Although the TDF is separated from the other branches in terms of jurisdiction, it cannot be said that the Territorials are isolated from the regulars and other security branches in terms of activities and tasks. Quite the opposite; cooperation with other branches is stressed as one of the chief means of achieving their full effectiveness. According to the national Defense Concept, the TDF should cooperate closely with the Special Forces, providing them with additional firepower.⁷⁴ In terms of their defensive responsibilities, the Territorials are meant to work in tandem with the Land Forces and fill those gaps that cannot be covered by the regulars, cover their flanks and prepare defensive lines. The TDF brigades are also called to be under the command of the local military administration, meaning that there is certain oversight from other military bodies over the TDF on the mid-to-upper level,⁷⁵ and the Territorials share bases with other branches.⁷⁶ (RPO, 2018). Additionally, there is a connection between the Territorials and patriotic self-defense groups. Numerous exercises are conducted by Territorials in cooperation with paramilitaries, and the graduates of the PiS-sponsored Academic Legion are given preference as TDF recruits and make up the bulk of the corps' NCOs.⁷⁷

Most of the training is under the instruction of professional soldiers who have been reassigned from other branches,⁷⁸ while other parts of training and exercises are conducted in cooperation with local military administrative bodies, military academies, and self-defense groups, though interestingly, activities with units from other branches are not as common.⁷⁹ Many of the exercises in which the TDF takes part are conducted in cooperation with various military or security bodies and institutions (as demonstrated above in comparing with Model A). However, training together with domestic Armed Forces does not seem to be the focal point.

While the TDF is not isolated from other security and military actors in terms of exercises, training and deployment, when it comes to fostering rivalry between the Territorials and

regulars, we find strong evidence supporting a correlation in this aspect. Macierewicz himself claimed the TDF is “the most important of the armed forces,”⁸⁰ which was repeatedly manifested in his policy (e.g., the Territorials have the most modern transport vehicles, weapons, uniforms, and other equipment, even though they are used much less frequently than that of the Land Forces due to the smaller amount of TDF training). Siphoning modern equipment from the Land Forces (badly in need of modernization) to the – often not fully manned – TDF brigades, in combination with a preference by the media for the latter, has reportedly strained the relationship between the branches, even among the common rank-and-file.

In 2016, it was estimated that the creation of the TDF will cost PLN 3.6 billion (Tomaszewski 2019, 74), but these costs turned out to be underestimated. The high expenditure on the TDF is all the more surprising given that, according to official statements, the cost of a Territorial volunteer is one-sixth of that of a professional soldier.⁸¹ This casts doubt on one aspect of the theoretical model – despite receiving greater material and moral support than the Land Forces, their part-time training suggests their inferiority in comparison with professional army soldiers, and therefore it is not certain that the TDF could balance out the Land Forces as a military tool. Still, Model B postulates that a parity of strength is not required, only the capacity to quickly react to local flashpoints. We can therefore determine only a partial correlation on this point. While the planned whole-country deployment and high-quality standard would enable the TDF to counter-balance the Land Forces, the comparatively low level of training might prevent them from reacting effectively.

Local deployment

While the local character of the TDF impedes its capabilities when countering external forces as assumed in Model A, it is much better suited for the purposes listed in Model B. Localization allows the TDF to more effectively support communities and build positive relationships with

them. The TDF works closely with local Border Guard units, police, and fire departments. They are also deployed as smaller units to work together with their counterparts from other security institutions for specific tasks. We can safely assume that by working in tandem with local administrative and security bodies they develop close working relationships and build trust with the population. The links between TDF units and communities are further strengthened by the fact that enlistment is always local – new recruits are drawn from the very same communities they are meant to protect, which provides the troops with inherent knowledge and contacts in the area. In general, many of the aspects of the Territorials fit the type of static units described in the CI and coup-proofing literature. They are close to the local population, equipped as a light infantry ready to react to local crises, and capable of performing numerous activities in the civilian sphere.

Special affiliation and ideology

The often-cited point regarding the dissemination of patriotic⁸² and Christian⁸³ values as one of the TDF's goals provides another point of congruence with Model B. Patriotism and Christianity can be considered ideological in nature, and dissemination of ideology is one aspect of the model. However, the practicalities of this aspect are never expanded upon. The TDF's educational activities with the public, which would probably be the ideal means of disseminating these ideas, are always of a practical nature, such as their safety courses. Therefore, while in theory the TDF matches the model even in this aspect, there seems to be little empirical evidence of the Territorials being actually employed in this role, save for some symbolical activities like maintaining the memorials of war heroes. It is more likely that this feature puts them at the centre of the struggle between two perspectives on Polish security, divided along political lines.

The patriotism embodied in military service and proclamation of the Christian foundations of Polish society are most likely means to attract supporters of PiS and other conservative or

nationalist-leaning groups to enlist. The TDF presents itself as an institution that shares their values and provides a way of promoting and applying them. At the same time, the declared ideals and associated activities are not radical by any means – for example, Christian values are mainstream for the majority of the population in Catholic Poland. Similarly, it is hard to argue that the defense of one’s homeland is a radical idea. This seems to indicate that the TDF’s ideology targets the moderate (though mainly conservative) and “silent” majority, as was presented in Model B, rather than on the right-wing fringe of the spectrum.

Discussion

We have compared the declared tasks of the TDF as a force against Russian hybrid warfare and potentially conventional assault with Model A, which characterizes the ideal HW unit as highly-trained, well-equipped modern infantry, operating on a mid-to-large formation level, capable of countering special forces, armor and air force, while also being capable of participating in non-military and non-kinetic aspects of defense, such as intelligence gathering, counter-propaganda activities, cyber-warfare and crisis response, all the while cooperating closely with other security actors. This analysis revealed incongruence between the ideal type and the designated tasks of the TDF. For example, while an effective anti-HW force should not focus on the front-rear dichotomy in deployment, a force designed to fight against a conventional Russian assault should be focused on the country’s eastern borders.

We also compared the TDF with Model B, which posits that a paramilitary aimed against internal threats should be characterized as a light infantry, though not in need of high levels of training and equipment, which should be deployed across the whole territory and operate in small formations. These should be in close contact with the local population and administration. The unit should be able to counter-balance the capabilities of the regular army, and it should receive unequal support to foster rivalry between the branches, while its command and rank-

and-file should be manned primarily by those from sections of the population that are most loyal to the ruling faction.

The Model A analysis casts doubt on the actual usefulness of the TDF for combat purposes, save perhaps for guerrilla warfare. From the tactical perspective, it is difficult to imagine volunteers with only days of training per year facing *Spetsnaz* forces, which Macierewicz apparently believes they could. While there is an obvious will by the government to provide advanced equipment, which would theoretically make the Territorials capable of fulfilling the tasks set out in Model A, the part-time nature of the unit prevents them from performing them effectively. Also, while localization makes TDF troops capable of responding quickly to deep operations, it serves no real purpose if they lack the skills to actually fight incursions successfully. Still, there are several other points of correlation between Model A and the data: the TDF is indeed a well-equipped armed force, possessing both anti-aircraft and anti-tank capabilities, and their equipment is adapted to the specific areas in which they operate.

This analysis brings us back to the contradicting nature of the formation. The Polish leadership seems to be undecided on what kind of force the TDF should be – on one hand, it is supplied with the latest equipment; on the other hand, recruits have only part-time training, preventing them from utilizing the equipment properly. The TDF is meant to support crisis response, community defense formation, but it is also expected to stop *Spetsnaz* deep operations.

The real potential of the Territorials seems to lie in their cooperation with local communities and security forces detachments, as well as in their non-military capabilities. In this way they can strengthen the connectivity of the Polish defense system, and in this area we find the most correlation with Model A. There is also the apparent intention to adapt the force to other aspects of the model, such as deployment to combat deep operations and provide advanced small arms, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. For the Territorials to be effective in this regard, however,

the government would have to employ more resources to expand the numbers and the training. Alternatively, the force should be limited to support and non-military tasks.

In contrast, the analysis confirms the correlation between the TDF and the Model B ideal type of formation against internal threats in numerous crucial respects. The purges and the consequent appointment of new senior generals in the upper-most echelons of the military display the ruling party's effort to clear the Armed Forces of potential opposition and thus strengthen control over it. Even so, the Territorial Defense Force exercises a high degree of independence from other branches and is subordinate only to the – PiS-appointed – General Staff. Furthermore, the Ministry, especially under Macierewicz, exhibited a high degree of control and attention to the TDF.

This uneven support from the Ministry began to foster tensions between the Territorials and the Land Forces, mainly due to the fact that a large amount of materiel and personal resources have been rerouted from the latter to the former. This diversion of equipment and professionals is taking place despite warnings from experts about draining the other branches of much needed resources for modernization.

The TDF has a strong local character – the build-up plan counts on placing brigades in each voivodeship, and companies to each *powiat* assigned with a Permanent Responsibility Area. Members are drawn locally, providing them with greater knowledge of the region they are responsible for. Contacts between the Territorials and local communities are further strengthened through cooperation with local administration, police, fire departments, and others. The Territorials are responsible for the protection of population centers, the civilian population, and critical infrastructure.

There is little evidence that the Territorials disseminate ideology of any sort, despite the fact that “spreading patriotic ideals” is part of its mission. Similarly, there are no legal obstacles that

would prevent affiliates of various political or religious groups from joining the Force. However, PiS's discourse presents the TDF as the continuation of the World War II-era Home Army and as the embodiment of the "Pole-soldier", with patriotic and militaristic ideals the highest values to strive for. This suggests Law and Justice is trying to put the Territorials on their side of the political-cultural struggle. Promoting "patriotic and Christian" ideals is either part of a political effort to restructure Polish society in line with the interwar period praetorian system, or a branding move, meant to attract political co-affiliates into its ranks. The correlation between support for PiS and the TDF indicates that these efforts have been largely successful.

One significant point on which the empirical data do not match the theoretical model is the Territorials' lack of separation from other military and security actors. The TDF cooperates closely and even shares bases with other bodies of the security apparatus, including the Land Forces, and conducts exercises together with them. Otherwise, the Territorial Defense Force fits quite well into the theoretical Model B.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the Polish Territorial Defense Force found more matches with Model B than Model A, though not surprisingly the TDF displays features that are consistent and inconsistent with both models. The stronger correlation with Model B indicates the ruling party has a political purpose for the TDF, which suggests a worrying trend: in many practical respects, the TDF indeed resembles the kinds of units favored by less-than-democratic regimes. While the current political situation most likely prevents the Territorials from being employed in a partial manner by those currently in power, the fact that PiS appears to be borrowing from the repertoire of authoritarians elsewhere should be kept in mind.

We found correlations between the TDF and Models A and B in several important points, likely due to the fact that just as a paramilitary is a unit operating in the "gray area" between the

military and civilian spheres, so does hybrid warfare require targeting the same “gray area.” Therefore, a paramilitary or a paramilitary-like force should indeed be capable of successfully combating hybrid warfare precisely because it can use tools from both the military and non-military spheres, and by unifying both these aspects of the country’s defense system. We conclude that this proves the potential for the TDF to be a successful anti-HW force.

However, the underlying contradictions in the development of the Territorials undermine these efforts. The idea of creating the TDF as a part-time volunteer force and at the same time attempting to make it capable of combating Russian special forces leads to the diversion of valuable resources from the rest of the Armed Forces to the Territorials. The insufficient capability of the TDF to use them properly for defense leads us to the conclusion that thus far, the TDF is a hindrance rather than a help in Poland’s defense against Russia.

The TDF’s greatest potential lies, no doubt, in crisis management and community protection, as here the Territorials have already displayed success. Therefore, the best possible course would be to limit siphoning expensive military resources from other branches, since they are not necessary for the civilian protection mission, and focus on further building positive relationships with the local population and serving as a tool of mobilizing civilians against disinformation, sabotage, and other subversive means of HW.

The correlations between the Territorials and Model B, the counter-insurgency type, are certainly worrying. Admittedly, the existing political structure and security apparatus in Poland are far from prepared for an internal violent struggle, meaning that the actual use of the TDF for CI or coup-proofing purposes is unlikely under current circumstances. Still, the fact that a democratic country is taking a page from the playbook of authoritarian regimes is a disturbing indicator for the state of Polish liberal democracy. The findings of this research might become more important should Poland maintain its course in democratic backsliding. However, the

main political task of the TDF is less violent and radical than Model B would suggest, but still pathological in terms of its consequences.

The contradictions between the TDF and Model A would be explained easily if we looked at the TDF primarily as a political project. It appears that the TDF is intended, most of all, to be a political symbol, both externally and internally. As an institution it represents the willingness of Poland's population to defend its own borders, without the need for allies, and the TDF is a vehicle for the Law and Justice Party to demonstrate its willingness to defend the country from external threats. The need for only part-time training makes it an accessible option for patriotic-minded citizens who wish to participate in defense but are not willing to devote their whole lives to a professional military career. The branding of the TDF is modeled in such a way as to attract mainly conservatively and patriotically-minded volunteers, often correlating with the electoral base of PiS. At the same time, avoiding any overt politically-oriented or radical moves by the TDF keeps the government from being subjected to political sanctions from the population or allied democratic countries. To increase the branding potential of the TDF, the unit is equipped with the best equipment and endowed with substantial media and financial support. The reason this approach is still pathological to democracy is that through this political project, PiS is disrupting the capabilities of the Armed Forces, and exhibiting an "unhealthy" approach through interference in the neutrality of the military, which should be, in a democratic state, wholly apolitical.

Interpreting the TDF as first and foremost a political project explains the weaker correlation with Model A. The uneven development of the TDF's capabilities and mission undermines Polish defense capabilities more than it strengthens them. As we demonstrated, a narrower focus in the Territorials' development towards crisis management would have more positive impact. Until PiS stops approaching the TDF primarily as a political project, or until a new party is elected, this is unlikely to happen, however.

Finally, the apparent political dimension of the TDF is interesting since this features in both Model A (with HW being employed to induce political changes and anti-HW tactics of instilling pro-state values) and Model B (as a unit aimed against internal political enemies, as well as the CI strategy of winning “hearts and minds”). We might indeed speculate that an irregular, semi-military unit like the TDF is therefore inevitably political. This has profound implications not only for the Territorials, but also for other similar forces, and therefore warrants further research.

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