

# STRENGTHENING DETERRENCE IN THE EAST



## Poland-Provided Logistic Support

■ *By CPT James Bath*

Since the start of hostilities between Ukraine and Russia in 2014, including the Russian seizure of the Crimean Peninsula, the U.S. military has steadily increased its presence in NATO countries along Europe's eastern flank, sending regionally aligned forces (RAF) to these areas

to bolster commitments with NATO allies and deter aggression.

However, the financial burden on taxpayers and the impact on RAF unit operational readiness rates have been significant. In 2017, the U.S. Government faced a dilemma: how to reduce spending while maintaining a

strong military presence in Eastern Europe to support NATO allies and partner nations. The solution was to use taxpayer dollars more efficiently by investing in NATO partnerships, thereby enhancing deterrence with minimal U.S. financial involvement. This led to an innovative approach: training host nation militaries to

maintain U.S. equipment. Thus, the Poland-Provided Logistic Support (PPLS) initiative and the strategic placement of Army prepositioned stocks (APS) in Poland were born.

Since 2014, the Polish government has significantly increased its military spending from \$10.35 billion to \$16.57 billion annually, allocating 4% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to NATO. Poland has invested heavily in U.S. arms and equipment, including M1A1 and A2 Abrams main battle tanks, F-35 Lightning stealth multirole combat aircraft, and MIM-104 Patriot surface-to-air missile defense systems. With these upgrades, Poland has become a highly active NATO member, one of the few to recently increase its military GDP. Given its strategic central location on

Europe's eastern flank, the decision to establish a new APS site in Poland was a logical step. This move not only enhances NATO's readiness but also fortifies Poland's defense capabilities amid growing regional tensions.

In 2017, the U.S. Government initiated discussions with NATO and the Polish government about establishing an APS worksite in Poland, resulting in an agreement in 2018. Planning for the world's newest APS worksite began that year at an estimated cost of 82 million Euros (\$91 million). Construction started in 2019, with an initial completion target of 2021. However, due to COVID-19 delays, the project was completed in October 2023. The total cost, covered by NATO, amounted to 212 million Euros (\$232 million).

With the completion of the APS-2 worksite, the U.S. Army announced the activation of its newest Army field support battalion, AFSBn-Poland, which is responsible for providing mission command and oversight of all APS-2 equipment at the site. Almost simultaneously, the Polish Air Force activated the 33rd APS Battalion in October 2023. With much of the APS-2 equipment moved from the Coleman APS-2 worksite in Mannheim, Germany, to the Powidz APS-2 worksite in Poland, the training of PPLS began in July 2024.

The concept of PPLS is straightforward. The challenge is to reduce U.S. financial costs associated with funding a large, contracted workforce or establishing



*Poland-Provided Logistic Support personnel from the Polish military's 33rd Army Prepositioned Stocks Battalion receive training on the M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams main battle tank from training facilitators from U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command at the Powidz APS-2 worksite, Sept. 13, 2024. (Photo by CPT James Bath)*

a major U.S. Army organization at a new installation in Poland. This installation needs to be robust enough to maintain enough APS-2 vehicles and equipment for a modernized armored brigade combat team (ABCT) while also enhancing NATO's current deterrence posture in Eastern Europe.

The solution is to provide an Army advanced individual training-level program to the host nation's military, equivalent to the training U.S. Soldiers receive. Additionally, as the Polish military purchases modern equipment such as M1A1 and A2 Abrams tanks from the U.S. to replace its aging Soviet-era stocks, this U.S.-provided training to PPLS personnel at the Powidz APS-2 worksite adds significant value to Poland.

At the APS-2 site, the PPLS, once fully operational, will handle all maintenance and operational requirements for the APS-2 equipment with minimal involvement from U.S. Army Soldiers, Army civilians, or U.S. contractors. At that point, the relatively small AFSBn-Poland workforce will oversee operations to ensure quality assurance and maintain mission command of the site and APS-2 operations. By reducing the presence of U.S. military personnel or contractors at the APS-2 site and using a large Polish military workforce instead, U.S. taxpayer dollars are saved while resources are available to properly maintain and store the U.S. Army APS-2 equipment.

This concept, though great on paper, brings its own challenges. Neither the U.S. nor NATO has ever executed this concept. No military has ever trained another country's military workforce to maintain an ABCT's worth of equipment on a NATO-funded worksite.

For that reason, this program's success will forever stand as an example for others in the future, according to LTC Omar McKen, the commander of AFSBn-Poland.

"While the U.S. military has partnerships across the world, including many countries in Europe, U.S. and local national civilians make up the workforce at each APS-2 location," said McKen. "To my knowledge, this is the first time we will employ a foreign active-duty military force to maintain our equipment full time. This will stand as a proof of principle that will set the stage for the establishment of similar conditions across NATO, and as the AFSBn-Poland's motto states, 'This is the Way.'"

The Polish military demonstrated their dedication to this concept by creating the 33rd APS Battalion, which recruits Polish soldiers and airmen trained to maintain APS. The 33rd APS Battalion consists of about 450 to 500 personnel recruited from all Polish military installations. To be assigned to the 33rd APS Battalion, Polish servicemembers must take and pass an advanced English language course. Language differences have proven to be a challenge

for both AFSBn-Poland and the 33rd APS Battalion. Additionally, PPLS military and local national personnel provide real property oversight, including site security, maintenance, cleaning, carpentry, welding, and painting.

"For our team, the main challenge lies in the language barrier, so the training must be thorough, technical, and comprehensive. Identifying any knowledge gaps while respecting the Polish forces' existing expertise will be difficult, at first," said SGM Olimpia Valdez, the AFSBn-Poland senior enlisted advisor. "Once the Polish servicemembers pass the English language course, they sort into their follow-on PPLS training. These sections are heavy and light wheeled equipment, heavy and light track equipment, armament, limited C5ISR, and supply and supply support activity (SSA) sections."

Polish servicemembers train according to their assigned section or shop. This training corresponds to U.S. Army military occupation specialty (MOS) training, such as 91B for the wheeled shop, and 91A for the heavy-track shop. They use the MOS equivalent to 91P/91M/91H for the light-track shop, 92Y for the supply section, and 92A for the SSA.

The training program includes eight to 12 weeks of classroom instruction followed by 16 weeks of supervised reinforcement training with contracted instructors from the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command

(TACOM) and the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM). The program also includes working with field service representatives onsite for up to a year for targeted troubleshooting. Program Manager Abrams, Program Executive Office Howitzer, TACOM, CECOM, and Tobyhanna Army Depot develop the training plans based on the shop or section. These organizations also hire and fund the training facilitators, instructors, and translators for the 14-month training program, which is estimated to cost \$42 million.

The 33rd APS Battalion servicemembers gain the knowledge, expertise, and experience to maintain a wide range of U.S. Army equipment through this integrated classroom and hands-on training. They work on the M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams main battle tank, the M109A7 Paladin 155 mm self-propelled artillery system, and all the Army's logistics and engineer support equipment. PPLS training involves diagnosing faults, conducting services, replacing engines and transmissions, ground hopping engines, road testing vehicles, ordering parts, inventorying government equipment, and performing all tasks associated with Level 10 and 20 maintenance.

"The training facilitators and I are impressed by how quickly the Polish soldiers and airmen learn as the training courses progress. Their enthusiasm in their day-to-day actions, despite the ever-present

language barrier, is remarkable," said George Palmer, the Powidz APS-2 worksite director.

The Polish government pays the salaries of their servicemembers and assigns the Powidz APS-2 worksite as their permanent duty stations for up to 10 years, ensuring continuity of force. By 2026, the U.S. Government is expected to reduce its financial costs by 90% when the temporary contracted workforce transfers the entire maintenance mission at the APS-2 site to the PPLS. The knowledge, experience, and expertise gained in training will ensure the PPLS is fully qualified to maintain the various systems at the site.

"This training will undoubtedly strengthen the bond between the U.S. and the Polish militaries and governments, as well as NATO," said Palmer. "By engaging in joint understanding of U.S. military equipment, some of which is already common to the Polish forces, we enhance interoperability and cohesion and ensure seamless operation of the APS-2 site. This collaboration fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose, reinforcing our collective defense commitments and enhancing our ability to respond to threats as a unified front."

John Glasgow, AFSBn-Poland deputy to the commander, adds, "The joint training initiative sends a clear message of solidarity and commitment. It demonstrates the U.S. and Polish governments' dedication to strengthening defense capabilities to ensure regional stability and security.

This initiative also underscores the importance of NATO's role in maintaining peace in Europe, highlighting the alliance's readiness to support its member nations."

"Providing this training to our NATO partners enhances their readiness and capability, which in turn contributes to the overall deterrence strategy," McKen said. "By improving their skills and integrating them into joint operations, we send a strong signal to potential adversaries that our forces are well prepared and united. This readiness acts as a powerful deterrent because it demonstrates our ability to respond effectively to any threat. Nothing says we are here to stay more than this. Our allies and enemies know that we are stronger together, and the concept we are employing will be the standard for the future."

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***Featured Photo***  
***Poland-Provided Logistic Support personnel from the Polish military's 33rd APS Battalion go through a training program that includes 8-12 weeks of classroom instruction followed by 16 weeks of supervised reinforcement training and up to a year with field service representatives onsite for targeted troubleshooting of APS-2 equipment. Taken Sept. 13, 2024. (Photo by CPT James Bath)***