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**IMAGE ASPECT OF THE PARTICIPATION OF THE POLISH
ARMED FORCES IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS
BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF UNIFIL**

**ASPEKT WIZERUNKOWY UDZIAŁU SIŁ ZBROJNYCH RP
W OPERACJACH POKOJOWYCH ONZ NA PRZYKŁADZIE
UNIFIL**

Abstract: The authors of the article present the results of research on the image aspect of the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in UN peacekeeping operations based on the example of UNIFIL. The aim of the article is to identify Poland's image in terms of participation in UNIFIL and the main determinants influencing the perception of Polish personnel in this peacekeeping operation. The research problem was expressed in the question: how does the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in a peacekeeping operation in Lebanon affect Poland's image in the international arena? The assumed research goal was achieved through interviews with soldiers serving in the peacekeeping operation, the authors' own observations, as well as the analysis of statistical data and the content of Polish and multinational strategic documents. The results of the conducted research indicate a positive attitude of the Lebanese citizens towards Polish staff.

A significant fact is the creation of a positive image of Poland in the international arena by fulfilling allied obligations, thus contributing to the stabilization of the security situation on a regional and global scale. Another equally important aspect is the actual contribution of the Polish Armed Forces to building peace in the area of the Israeli-Lebanese border and the entire Middle East region. Analysing issues related to the image aspect, the authors conclude that the further participation of Polish soldiers in the mission on the territory of the Republic of Lebanon is justified.

Zarys treści: Autorzy artykułu prezentują wyniki badań dotyczących aspektu wizerunkowego partycypacji Sił Zbrojnych RP w operacjach pokojowych ONZ na przykładzie UNIFIL. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja cech wizerunkowych Polski w aspekcie jej udziału w UNIFIL oraz głównych determinant wpływających na postrzeganie polskiego personelu w tej operacji pokojowej. Problem badawczy został wyrażony pytaniem: jak udział SZ RP w operacji pokojowej na terenie Libanu wpływa na wizerunek Polski na arenie międzynarodowej? Założony cel badawczy został osiągnięty za pomocą wywiadów z żołnierzami pełniącymi służbę w operacji pokojowej będącej przedmiotem analizy, własnych obserwacji autorów publikacji, jak również analizy danych statystycznych oraz treści polskich i wielonarodowych dokumentów strategicznych. Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań wskazują na pozytywny stosunek lokalnej społeczności wobec personelu RP. Wywiązywanie się Polski ze zobowiązań sojuszniczych to fakt znaczący, który kreuje pozytywny obraz RP na arenie międzynarodowej i przyczynia się do stabilizacji sytuacji w zakresie bezpieczeństwa w skali regionalnej oraz globalnej. Inny równie istotny element to rzeczywisty wkład SZ RP w kształtowanie pokoju w rejonie granicy izraelsko-libańskiej oraz w regionie Bliskiego Wschodu. Po przeanalizowaniu kwestii dotyczących aspektu wizerunkowego autorzy konstatują zasadność dalszej partycypacji polskich żołnierzy w misji na terytorium Republiki Libańskiej.

Key words: international security, United Nations, UNIFIL peacekeeping operation, Polish Armed Forces, image aspect.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe, Organizacja Narodów Zjednoczonych, operacja pokojowa UNIFIL, Siły Zbrojne RP, aspekt wizerunkowy.

Introduction

Poland's involvement in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL) began in 1992, with the replacement of Norwegian and Swedish medical personnel in charge of the field hospital in An-Nakura,¹ where the mission's Headquarters are still located today.

More than twenty years of participation of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (SZ RP) in the structures of UNIFIL, during which there have been a number of modifications to the scale of involvement, role, tasks and deployment of Polish personnel, allowed for the collection of relevant experience regarding the area of operations, as well as functioning in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations.

Undeniably, the participation of troops in missions abroad is one of the key factors shaping the perception of the Polish Armed Forces in the international environment. Although the image aspect should not play the role of the main criterion in relation to involvement in individual undertakings of a multinational character, this factor undoubtedly influences the manner and scale of implementation of the assumptions of strategic documents of the UN, or regional organisations and military allied structures. However, it should be noted that the contents of national or international concepts and agreements, emphasise the essence of participation in operations under the aegis of the Organisation, which create a positive attitude towards Poland, including the SZ.

The aim of the publication is to present Poland's image in respect of participation in UNIFIL and the main determinants influencing the view towards the presence of Polish personnel in this peacekeeping operation. The authors of the article conducted research on issues related to the influence of involvement in missions abroad on the perception of the SZ in the international environment, as well as in the place of temporary deployment of troops. The area towards which the above-mentioned activities were undertaken was the Republic of Lebanon, where Poland has been part of the UNIFIL force over the past decades.² The problem addressed in this publication was defined by the question:

¹ *Tymczasowe Siły Zbrojne Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych w Libanie*, Wojsko Polskie, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/weterani/articles/historia-misji-n/2020-05-11x-tymczasowe-siy-zbrojne-organizacji-narodow-zjednoczonych-w-libanie/>, (accessed 27.02.2024).

² In 2019, Poland reactivated its participation in UNIFIL, after a ten-year break.

how does the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in a peacekeeping operation in Lebanon affect the image of Poland? The authors, on the basis of their research, have thus determined the main factors that shape the image among the Lebanese public related to the Polish involvement in UNIFIL, thus assessing the legitimacy of continued participation in the mission in question. The considerations were based on interviews conducted with military personnel serving in the past within the framework of the undertaking in question, the authors' own observations, as well as a detailed analysis of statistical data and selected publications dealing with this subject. The aim of the article was to conduct a relevant analysis, presenting objective conclusions in a synthetic manner, thus providing a basis for further considerations regarding the legitimacy and impact of Poland's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, with particular emphasis on UNIFIL.

The significance of Poland's participation in UN peacekeeping operations

The United Nations, as the successor to the League of Nations, was established after the end of the Second World War. Its main objective is "to maintain world peace and security and to develop friendly relations among member states."³ One of the instruments used in the pursuit of these objectives are peacekeeping operations, the theoretical formulation of which in UN nomenclature and official documents was preceded by a practical formula.⁴ The reason for this was that it was not until 1965, i.e. when the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations⁵ was established, that this concept was officially introduced into the Organisation's terminology.

The first UN-mandated mission that is still in place today is the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation, established on 29 May 1948.⁶ The main

³ Ministerstwo Zdrowia, *Organizacja Narodów Zjednoczonych*, Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://www.gov.pl/web/zdrowie/organizacja-narodow-zjednoczonych>, (accessed 22.02.2024).

⁴ D. Kozerański, *Operacje pokojowe jako środek stabilizacji sytuacji w środowisku międzynarodowym. Międzynarodowe operacje pokojowe i stabilizacyjne w polskiej polityce bezpieczeństwa w XX i XXI wieku*, AON, Warszawa 2016, p. 11.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Based on UN Security Council Resolution of 29 May 1948, S/RES/50, https://www.unic.un.org.pl/misje_pokojowe/untoso.php, (accessed 25.02.2024).

purpose of its establishment was "...to monitor the ceasefire, prevent incidents, supervise truce agreements and cooperate with other peacekeeping missions operating in the region."⁷ Over the years, there has been a variable intensification of UN activities in terms of establishing peacekeeping operations. It is worth mentioning that by 1988 only 13⁸ such operations had been launched, while up to now there have been 74⁹ such operations under the aegis of the Organisation. The observed variability also concerned the fact that selected regional organisations more frequently established their own missions.¹⁰ For Poland, the first venture into participation in missions abroad was the entry into the Supervisory Commission of Neutral States, established after the end of the Korean War and the conclusion of the Armistice Agreement in 1953.¹¹ Over the past decades, the scale of Poland's involvement in missions abroad has undergone many transformations, including with regard to the allocation of a contingent to the UNIFIL mission.

Poland's participation in UN peacekeeping operations is currently an important element of Poland's security policy. Justification for this statement is provided by the fact that the issue in question has been taken up for years in the contents of national strategic documents. Referring to the provisions of the 2020 National Security Strategy, attention should be drawn to the emphasis on the importance of "...Poland's involvement in missions and operations of the North Atlantic Alliance, the European Union, the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as those of a coalition nature."¹² The conclusion to the above statement seems to be the growing importance of multinational security cooperation on both a regional and global scale. This should also be understood in the category of the development of partnerships, through multilateral peacebuilding efforts and thus the accumulation of common experiences in international cooperation. Undoubtedly, this

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ A. Cianciara, *Operacje pokojowe*, in: A. Florczak, A. Lisowska (eds.), *Organizacje międzynarodowe w działaniu*, OTO Agencja Reklamowa, Wrocław 2014, p. 14.

⁹ United Nations Peacekeeping, *Data*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data>, (accessed 27.02.2024).

¹⁰ P. Żarkowski, *Zasady użycia sił zbrojnych w operacjach pokojowych*, „Doctrina. Studia społeczno-polityczne” 2019, vol. 12, no. 12, pp. 183–204.

¹¹ UN Security Council Resolution of 29 May 1948, op. cit.

¹² *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP z 2020 roku*, rozdz. *Środowisko bezpieczeństwa*, p. 10, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020.pdf, (accessed 21.02.2024).

type of activity directly fits into the assumptions of meeting alliance obligations and implies the credibility of the country in the category of partner.¹³

The content of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland also includes the statement that Poland “will pursue [– author’s note] national interests and with a sense of solidarity participate with allies and partners in missions and operations conducted by international organisations (including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Alliance, the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and in a coalition format, taking into account commitments under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security.”¹⁴ The indication of the above theses in a document of a strategic nature warrants the recognition of these objectives in the key and priority categories with regard to Poland’s involvement in the international security system. Poland’s continuous participation in peacekeeping operations unequivocally indicates its approval of the main mission of the UN, i.e., among other things, efforts to promote world peace.¹⁵

The image aspect of the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in UNIFIL

The creation of the UNIFIL force was based on UN Security Council resolutions S/RES/425 and S/RES/426 of 19 March 1978.¹⁶ The main determinant was the entry of the Israel Defence Forces into Lebanon as part of Operation Litany.¹⁷ The purpose of the establishment of this mission was “...to monitor the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, to restore peace and security in the area and to assist the Lebanese Government in exercising effective authority.”¹⁸

The Polish Armed Forces did not begin their participation in UNIFIL until 1992 with primary responsibility for the operation of the Mission Headquarters Field Hospital. Over the years, tasking issues have undergone many modifications.

¹³ Ł. Jureńczyk, *Wysyłanie polskich żołnierzy na misje poza granicami kraju w świetle krajowego ustawodawstwa i doktryny obronnej*, „Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego” 2012, no. 5, pp. 133–152.

¹⁴ *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP z 2020 roku*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁵ Ł. Jureńczyk, op. cit.

¹⁶ UN Security Council Resolution of 29 May 1948, op. cit.

¹⁷ Z. Groszek, *Siły Zbrojne RP w procesie utrzymania bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego w Korei, na Półwyspie Indochińskim, na Bliskim Wschodzie i na Bałkanach*, „Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie” 2017, vol. 18, iss. 5, part 2, pp. 163–176.

¹⁸ *Tymczasowe Siły Zbrojne Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych w Libanie*, op. cit.

This included the deployment and the structures created. The withdrawal of Polish troops from participation in the peacekeeping operation in Lebanon in 2009¹⁹ was justified by the priority of other multinational undertakings under the aegis of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, with particular emphasis on participation in the mission in Afghanistan.²⁰ The reactivation of the Polish involvement in UNIFIL, which has continued to the present day, took place in 2019, by creation of a Polish-Irish battalion.²¹ The current legal act, which is the basis for directing dedicated forces and resources from the Polish Armed Forces, is the Decision of the President of the Republic of Poland of 31 August 2023 on the extension of the use of the Polish Military Contingent in the Lebanese Republic.

As stated in § 2 para. 2 of this document, the general tasks of Polish personnel include:

- “monitoring the ceasefire and cessation of hostile activities in the area of responsibility, with particular reference to the so-called ‘Blue Line’;
- supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces in carrying out their tasks and building their operational capacity;
- supporting and protecting the local population.”²²

The image issue in the case of the UNIFIL mission is the result of many factors significantly influencing the perception of Poland, including the Polish Armed Forces in the international arena. Undoubtedly, the basic component, contributing to building a relevant opinion, is the fulfilment of the obligations of the provisions of multinational documents. In this way, the country gains the name of a reliable ally, towards which trust seems to be somehow justified. It also provides a basis for partial influence in the settlement of decisions in the area of bilateral or multilateral partnerships with other countries, not only limited to security issues, but also economic, cultural and social issues.

The above factor is also related to the field of international cooperation in the area of deployment of a peacekeeping operation. An adequate example of this

¹⁹ G. Ciechanowski, *Misje pokojowe ONZ na Bliskim Wschodzie w okresie zimnej wojny*, „Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka” 2013, no. 2, pp. 85–102.

²⁰ P. Hudyma, *Udział wojsk polskich w misjach zagranicznych o charakterze pokojowym i stabilizacyjnym w latach 1953–2008*, 1953–2008, Ph.D. diss., Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu 2011, p. 236.

²¹ *Powrót Wojska Polskiego na misję pokojową ONZ w Libanie*, Wojsko Polskie, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/dorsz/pkw-unifil/>, (accessed 27.02.2024).

²² Order of the President of the Republic of Poland of 31 August 2023 to extend the period of use of the Polish Military Contingent in the Lebanese Republic, M.P. 2023, item 901, paragraph 2.

thesis, is the formation of the Polish-Irish battalion in the structures of the Western Sector of the UNIFIL mission. Close cooperation on substantive issues, division of competences, combined with the possibility of sharing experience significantly influences image issues, thus contributing to the creation of capabilities in the potential occurrence of the need to perform analogous tasks in future multinational undertakings.

An important component towards the image aspect is the perception of the personnel of the Polish Military Contingent in UNIFIL among the Lebanese community. It should be noted that a significant role is played by soldiers in charge of civil-military cooperation, whose activities contribute significantly to the stabilisation of many processes in the Republic of Lebanon. Development projects,²³ the implementation of which is based on the improvement of the quality of life of citizens in the southern part of Lebanon implies a positive attitude towards Poland. In addition, the involvement in undertakings aimed at promoting Polish cultural heritage and history, contribute to increasing the awareness of the Lebanese society towards Poland. This factor should be addressed bilaterally, through appropriate awareness-raising of Polish personnel on selected cultural issues of the host country. Adequate factual preparation allows for a better understanding of individual situations, while at the same time enabling the anticipation of possible consequences through the proper recognition of selected symptoms. Situational awareness associated with possessing basic knowledge of prevailing customs, religions and social habits can significantly influence the positive image of the country forming a military contingent in the mission area through noticeable tolerance, as well as respect towards the local community. In addition, it contributes to reducing the risk of unintentional incidents that could trigger situations perceived as scandalous or cause an escalation of tensions that would result in situations threatening the safety of soldiers. The relatively small number of unfriendly incidents towards Polish personnel indicates a positive attitude towards the RP, despite the PKW's deployment, which is often treated in the category of a challenge, i.e. in an area mainly inhabited by supporters of Hezbollah (Lebanese radical Shiite party) and the Amal Movement. The progressive economic crisis in Lebanon undeniably increases the importance of UN assistance from the point of view of the people. The deployment

²³ E.g. the Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM) project *Support for equal opportunities – improving the quality of life of the population*, which was initiated by the personnel of the Polish Military Contingent in UNIFIL. See CIMIC PKW UNIFIL, *Kolejny projekt zrealizowany*, Wojsko Polskie, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/dorsz/articles/aktualnosci-w/kolejny-projekt-zrealizowany/pdf/>, (accessed 24.02.2024).

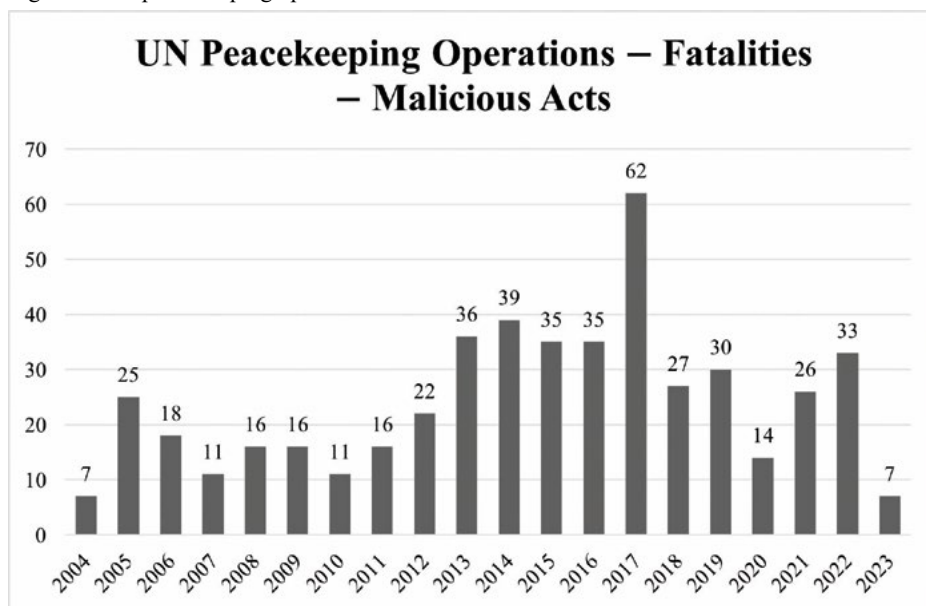
of peacekeepers implies an increased demand for particular goods and services, as well as the possibility of employing Lebanese in the structures of the Organisation or in logistical services.

The image aspect should also be considered from the point of view of the overall UN activity, including the chosen peacekeeping operation. The overall purpose of the mission promotes the internal stability of the country by influencing the de-escalation of tensions and thus the citizens' sense of security.

An important issue related to the perception of UNIFIL peacekeepers is the number of incidents directed at mission personnel. As determinants of such incidents, one can primarily point to provocative actions, often aimed at portraying a given situation in a pejorative light, including by creating a political or propaganda media message. From the opinions obtained from the interviews conducted by the authors of the publication, it should be concluded that other causes are also a kind of coercion of given decisions, procedural changes with regard to the functioning of the mission, or presentation of force.

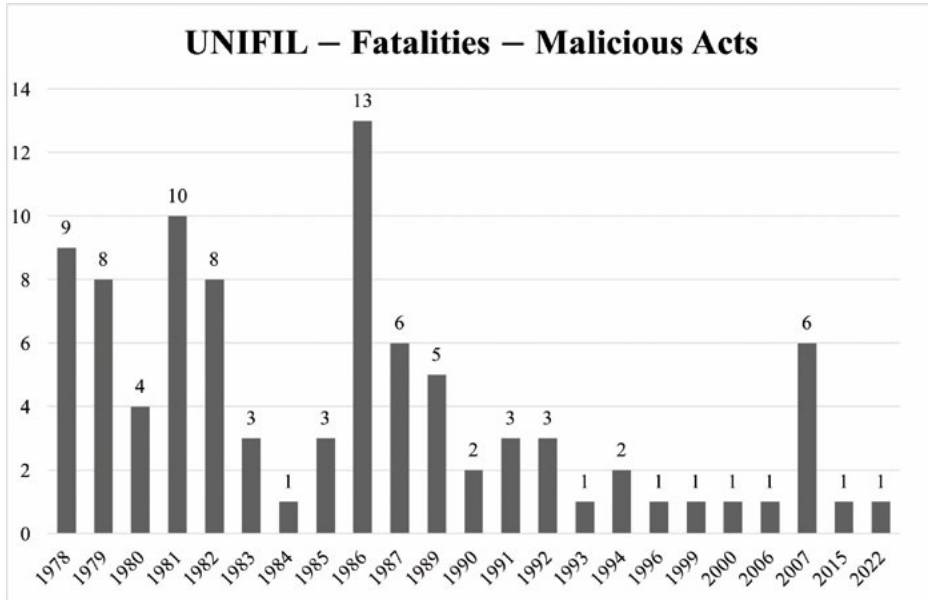
Based on the data periodically made available by the UN, there is a wide variation in the number of fallen peacekeepers from both UNIFIL (Figure 2) and other peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the Organisation (Figure 1), where intentional acts of aggression were the cause.

Figure 1. UN peacekeeping operations – Fatalities – Malicious acts



Source: own compilation based on United Nations Peacekeeping, *Fatalities*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>, (accessed 24.02.2024).

Figure 2. UNIFIL – Fatalities – Malicious Acts



Source: own compilation based on United Nations Peacekeeping, *Fatalities*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>, (accessed 24.02.2024).

Although the above figures indicate some kind of trend in the image of peacekeepers in the eyes of the Lebanese public, they do not reflect the full spectrum of perceptions of UNIFIL. Also significant in this case are minor incidents illustrating attitudes towards current activities or ad hoc implemented modifications.

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Tymczasowe Siły Zbrojne Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych w Libanie, Wojsko Polskie, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/weterani/articles/historia-misji-n/2020-05-11x-tymczasowe-siy-zbrojne-organizacji-narodow-zjednoczonych-w-libanie/>, (accessed 27.02.2024).

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Summary

The aim of the article has been achieved by showing the image features of the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in the UNIFIL mission, as well as the key determinants influencing the perception of this phenomenon among the Lebanese public and in the international environment. The assessment of the legitimacy of participation in a given

peacekeeping operation is the result of many factors shaping the final image, both in the group of citizens from the contingent's region of deployment and on a global scale. A favourable image in the eyes of the local population is not always matched by a favourable perception on a regional scale or vice versa. However, in the case of UNIFIL, the opinions of mission participants, statistical data and literature mostly indicate a positive perception of the personnel and activities of this peacekeeping operation. The relatively low number of dangerous intentional incidents against Polish soldiers, allows one to conclude that Lebanese society appreciates Poland's involvement in the mission.

Answering the research question defined in the introduction of the article, it is necessary to emphasise first and foremost the real impact on shaping security in the area of the Israel-Lebanon border, improving the quality of life of citizens in the southern part of Lebanon through initiatives and undertakings carried out by personnel dedicated to civil-military cooperation, fulfilling obligations of an allied nature, as well as implementing security policy in line with the UN strategic assumptions and contributing to building peace on a global scale. Other factors contributing equally significantly to building the correct perception of Poland through participation in UNIFIL are the sharing of experience and cooperation in a multinational formula, providing a basis for free adaptation of the Polish Armed Forces in the event of potential participation in other peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the UN.