
NATO's Past, Present, and Future: A View from Europe

AN INTERVIEW WITH RADOSLAW SIKORSKI

Radoslaw Sikorski is currently Poland's Foreign Minister. From October 2005 until February 2007, he served as Poland's Minister of Defense. He was also appointed by the president of Poland to serve on the National Security Council. From 2002 to 2005, Mr. Sikorski was Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) and Executive Director of the New Atlantic Initiative (NAI).

*Mr. Sikorski served from 1998 to 2001 as Poland's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. In 1992, as the country's Deputy Minister for Defense in the first democratically elected government after the fall of communism, he spearheaded Poland's drive to join NATO. From 1986 to 1989, Mr. Sikorski was a war correspondent to Afghanistan and Angola. He is the author of *Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War* (1989) and *The Polish House: An Intimate History of Poland* (1997). His photograph from Afghanistan received the World Press Photo Award in 1988. From 1981 to 1989, Mr. Sikorski was a political refugee in the United Kingdom.*

On August 22, 2007, The Forum's senior editor Bjoern H. Seibert spoke with Mr. Sikorski about the NATO mission in Afghanistan, the EU-NATO relationship, and Poland's relationship with the United States, Germany, and Russia.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Among NATO's defense ministers, you were one of the few who knew Afghanistan prior to 9/11 very well. Given your expertise on Afghanistan, where do you think NATO's campaign stands at the moment? Is it winning?*

RADOSLAW SIKORSKI: That is a stark question, but it does not allow for an easy answer. NATO is a military alliance, while I believe that the correct definition of victory in Afghanistan is not a military one. In other words,

NATO is a necessary ingredient of what needs to be done in Afghanistan, but it is not sufficient. My definition of victory entails the Afghan govern-

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ment gaining control over all provinces and all districts of Afghanistan and establishing conditions in which normal development can take place. Given this definition, NATO alone cannot achieve victory. Cooperation between NATO and the EU in Afghanistan is crucial, because I believe the real long-term solution requires a different economic calculus that has to do with agriculture. It requires weaning Afghan farmers away from producing drugs to growing other crops. If the EU devoted a tiny fraction of what it spends on agricultural support to controlling drug

production, the kind of assistance that perhaps Turkey benefits from, there would be a synergy between the economic and the military operations. Only in conjunction can they succeed.

FORUM: *What are the lessons NATO can learn from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan?*

SIKORSKI: There are some technical and tactical lessons, but I think there are more differences than similarities. Remember that the Soviets were invaders, they never allowed a free election, they installed a puppet communist regime, they depopulated the country, and they killed about one million people. So the political context is completely different. I think if there is a lesson, then it is that if the Afghan people themselves start seeing us as similar to the Soviets, then we have lost. Afghans have proven that they want their country much more than any invader does, that they are resourceful, and that when angered, they are a formidable foe. But I don't think that this is the right paradigm. You can probably draw some practical lessons, but I think it is a political issue and the politics of it are completely different. So the lessons are limited, but let's state this lesson: that the long-term solution requires Pakistan establishing regular authority over its own territory on its side of the border, because that's where assistance for the resistance movement against the Soviets came from, and I am afraid it is today where the Taliban get their recuperation and infiltration opportunities. So part of the solution, we can say, lies in the hands of the Pakistani government.

FORUM: *So you think there is a structural problem with the way the Afghanistan campaign is currently being fought?*

SIKORSKI: Well, in the 1980s there was a huge flow of arms—paid for by the West and the Saudis—through Pakistan, through the refugee camps, through the training camps, that were then shipped over across the border. I don't think this flow is of the same scale today, but it is somewhat similar in that Arab money, I am sure, is reaching the Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan and it is from there that they go across the border. In fact there was a skirmish right on the border, with NATO troops actually firing across the border and into Pakistan where the Taliban were trying to cross into Afghanistan. So, there is a structural problem, yes.

FORUM: *Most recently, the United Nations agreed to step up its efforts in Iraq. NATO's role, however, continues to be insignificant. Do you think NATO should also step up its efforts to support U.S. efforts in Iraq? If so, what should NATO do?*

SIKORSKI: I don't think it's worth trying, because, as we know, the war in Iraq was so politically controversial in some important NATO countries that I do not think it is doable to get NATO involved. And we also now know that some of those objections were vindicated by reality. So, however pro-NATO the new French president and the new German chancellor may be, I don't think they could politically push through with it. So, I don't think it is worth trying.

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FORUM: *In the United States calls have been growing for an involvement in Sudan's western province Darfur. Can you foresee a larger NATO mission in Darfur?*

SIKORSKI: Well, as far as I know, an EU mission is being put together and Poland has tentatively pledged some troops for it. I personally think it is a good system whereby NATO gets the first right over a future mission, and if NATO doesn't want to take on a mission, the EU may. The EU conducted a peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo last year, it has a mission in the Balkans, and this I believe would be the third. I think this is good, because NATO has taken on a really tough mission in Afghanistan, and that should be our first priority.

FORUM: *The European Union is steadily moving forward to include mat-*

ters of security and defense within its organization. Most recently, the EU declared its own rapid reaction force—the European Union Battlegroups—to be fully operational. At the same time, NATO has, over the years, developed the NATO Response Force (NRF). Against this background, do you think that the European Union and NATO are competing or complementary organizations?

SIKORSKI: There has always been an institutional competition between the EU and NATO. For example, I think NATO enlargement was a kind of battering ram that helped central Europeans get into the EU, and I think that it has been good. In the security sphere, I think NATO should remain the bedrock, because in security terms the United States and Europe should be one strategic area. But having said that, there may be occasions when the United States is not interested in acting and when it makes sense for Europe to get involved. For example, I wish we had had European forces 10 years ago or earlier to deal with the Balkans, and so I think in some circumstances it may be useful to have European forces. You know the European continent has a population of 400 million, with the largest economy in the world, so it is hardly surprising that Europeans would want some security structure to defend their joint interests.

FORUM: *So you advocate even closer security cooperation within the EU?*

SIKORSKI: Well, we have closer and closer cooperation in the internal security sphere, and I think external security is probably going to be the last area where we will integrate. But it is happening. Poland is part of one Battlegroup already, and we are in talks to start another one. I don't see why not, as long as it does not compromise our commitment to NATO. As long as it strengthens it, I think it is good.

FORUM: *There is a lot of disagreement within NATO concerning its political role. Some believe NATO should concentrate on purely military issues, leaving political issues to other organizations. Do you believe NATO should be the place for a transatlantic strategic dialogue or should such dialogue rather take place in another forum, such as the EU-U.S. summits?*

SIKORSKI: NATO is a good place to discuss strategy, because where else do our defense ministers or ambassadors or prime ministers talk with the United States as equals? On Afghanistan, we decided unanimously to take on the mission. And I think NATO—where you have joint staff, joint institutional assessment, development of infrastructure, and important spending programs such as Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS)—is the perfect place for a strategic dialogue. Also, military people tend to be practical people, and

we talk to one another at NATO as allies, whereas the EU's trade commissioner and the U.S. counterpart, for example, talk more as competitors and counterparts rather than allies. NATO would be my preferred venue for dialogue.

FORUM: *But as you mentioned, some of the issues that need to be addressed in Afghanistan, such as agriculture, should fall within the organizational structure of the EU. Would that not make the dialogue very difficult?*

SIKORSKI: Well, no. Because if we would spend a few billion euros on agriculture and thereby save ourselves tens of billions for the military, that would be a good deal, both for us and
 for the Afghans. I just think it's common sense, and it's actually a trend in
 military affairs that is an integrative
 approach—that not only the various
 branches of the military should col-
 laborate, but also that the military
 as a whole should collaborate with

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the civilian sector. Afghanistan is providing examples called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which are basically forts protected by the military where representatives of other ministries from various countries have brought their expertise to help the Afghans develop their country. That kind of integrated approach should also be tried at the highest institutional level. Afghanistan is a really tough mission, where we should bring to bear all our institutional resources.

FORUM: *More recently, the debate about future enlargement of NATO has gained prominence in the United States. Presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani called for opening NATO's membership to any state that meets basic standards of good governance, military readiness, and global responsibility, regardless of its location. Others have called for the enlargement of NATO to include other democracies such as South Korea, Japan, Australia, and Israel. Do you agree?*

SIKORSKI: I would be wary of extending NATO too far beyond its European transatlantic core, because credibility is everything in military affairs, and if we start extending it to places that we cannot defend, then our credibility suffers. With the exception of the United States, no other NATO country has any capability whatsoever that could be brought to bear in North Korea in the short run. So I don't believe in making unrealistic security guarantees. And, you know, we already have the traditional mission of protecting NATO

there will no longer be border control between Poland and Germany. I would say that is a sign of a very close and very friendly relationship.

Russia is a different case. Russia has difficult relations with most of its neighbors, particularly its European neighbors, who tend to be former captive nations of the Soviet empire. We tend to think of colonies as existing in Asia and in Africa, but actually we were a colony of Russia for two hundred years, and the relations are bound to be testy. Russia uses energy as a political tool, uses boycotts of various goods as a political tool, and threatens to target missiles at European cities, including Polish cities. That's not a friendly posture, which is regrettable, because we would like to have normal European neighbors on both sides of our borders.

FORUM: *In April 2006, you caused an uproar in Germany by comparing the proposed Baltic Sea gas pipeline as a throwback to the "Molotov-Ribbentrop tradition." Do you still see the pipeline deal as such?*

SIKORSKI: Well, I was correctly quoted in the original Reuters story, which said that Poland is particularly sensitive to deals done above its head, such as some of the historical deals between Germany and Russia. One could go further back in history to the partitions of Poland, to Locarno, and certainly the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which was a pact of nonaggression and simply had secret protocols, which were quite to the contrary. Poland regards the pipeline agreement as an unfriendly act on the part of these two countries because, first of all, as a Russian diplomat has said, its purpose is to be able to cut off supplies to Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland if need be, while continuing to supply gas to customers in Western Europe. And even more than that, it would definitely end up being much more expensive than building along an already existing pipeline in Poland. And, most importantly, we were not consulted. Germany aspires to be the leader of a united Europe, but on this, which we do regard as a vital national security issue, it did not consult us in advance. Chancellor Schröder was economical with the truth when he said that it was purely a business deal, because we now know that he arranged state financial guarantees for the project, and we also know that he has now taken a Russian seat on the board of the project. So, he didn't just have German national interest in the project but also a personal one. This is a project that circumvents Poland and that increases Germany's energy security at our expense. And I have not changed my view that this is a deal done above our heads, not something we would expect from a democratic Germany.

FORUM: *The Polish relationship with Russia has been deteriorating, especially over Poland's willingness to install a U.S. missile defense system on Polish soil. Will Poland push forward with this?*

SIKORSKI: The decision has not been made. And, actually, it is the United States that should discuss this with Russia because it is a U.S. project, not a Polish one. So, it is up to the United States to persuade Russia that the missile defense system does not threaten the country, which I believe is the case, and I think Russia knows it as well. Or, if the United States fails in doing that, it should give Poland the kind of assistance that will counter-balance any Russian military moves against Poland. So, really, this issue is up to the United States. We are a passive side in this equation.

FORUM: *Let me ask you one last question. You have mentioned on several occasions that Poland is haunted by the memory of fighting Hitler alone in 1939 while its allies stood by. You nonetheless consistently emphasize the importance of NATO for Poland and thereby rely on yet another alliance to protect Poland. Is this the right lesson that Polish history offers?*

SIKORSKI: Well, that's right. We are very wary of this kind of declara-

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tory guarantee. In Western Europe, our friends like to say that they went to war for Poland in 1939. What actually happened was that Britain and France *declared* war, but then didn't lift a finger to help us. And that is why it is so important for us to feel that this time it is different. That is why I'm delighted that NATO has a contingency plan to defend Poland and that NATO has invested real money in developing a defense infrastructure in Poland so that Poland could play the role of a host na-

tion. And that is why we would like to see more NATO infrastructure in Poland—such as the operating base of the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system or other elements of infrastructure, such as a center of excellence in the training of special forces—because we need support from our allies so that the nightmare of fighting alone may fade.

FORUM: *Thank you very much for speaking with The Forum. ■*