Interview with Lt. Gen. Wiesław Kukuła, Commanding General of the Polish Territorial Defence Forces, and Col. Konrad Korpowski, Director of the Government Centre for Security

Marcin Lasoń, Maciej Klisz, Leszek Elak: What, in your opinion, is the most productive approach to developing an effective resilience of the state and society in the current security environment?

Wiesław Kukuła: Developing a state’s resilience is a highly positivist task that cannot be completed overnight. From my point of view, the most effective approach to developing effective state’s and society’s resilience should focus on the processes related to shaping individual and collective perception of resilience. Today, the most significant threats to shaping the state’s resilience properly come from the minimal knowledge about the development of an individual, local communities, and state resilience. Thus, the most critical current challenges are awareness and education. These activities must identify citizens with the system and allow them to determine their roles in the state’s resilience system consciously.

Konrad Korpowski: The claims that the whole of society determines the national defence potential remain valid. The recipe for creating effective resistance of the state and its society to various types of threats, including hostile hybrid activities and those carried out below the threshold of war, is full implementation of the provisions of the National Security Strategy. However, such implementation requires numerous recommendations resulting from the strategy and the development of standardising documents, which should specify the powers and responsibilities of individual state bodies. Effective resilience of the state and society should be built on the competencies and responsibilities of state entities, both military and civilian. What is extremely important, it should be done in well-designed cooperation, among others,
with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the scientific and academic communities, and broadly understood volunteering. Currently, particular elements of government administration and other institutions within their competencies are responsible for the state immunity divisions assigned to them. On the other hand, there is noticeably insufficient coordination of these dispersed ministerial responsibilities at the state level. The current situation imposes the need to integrate the security system components’ tasks to strengthen Poland’s resilience and society.

M.L., M.K., L.E.: What are the opportunities and threats in preparing the state and society for comprehensive defence in the digital world where even essential information is often limited to a single image or tweet?

W.K.: In the digital world, communication remains an essential leadership attribute. Appropriate communication, including developing resilient and trusted communication channels, is an excellent opportunity that enables the state’s information to be cohesive and create a coherent picture of the current situation. Proper communication enables building interagency (inter-institutional) trust which influences the speed of action critical in contemporary times. Obviously, the “digital world”, democratic systems of governance, and the freedom of speech inseparable from them make us susceptible to “external control” which is supposed to weaken the processes that binding and strengthening the state. Nevertheless, I see more opportunities than threats. Again, threats awareness and risk management are critical.

K.K.: Information management, strategic communication, and fake news are, in my opinion, the most critical areas for building the entire common defence system. The key to success is to develop and maintain an efficient system for analysing threats resulting from hostile activities in cyberspace, including in the media space, and preparation of counter-campaigns, as well as supervision and control of a “coordinated state response” to such attacks. An essential element of this system must be conducting “modern” education of society about potential threats and ways to recognise and counter them. “Modernity” should be understood as “attractive,” informative, educational, and practical activities aimed at the target groups of society.

M.L., M.K., L.E.: What are the armed forces’ responsibilities in the development of operational capabilities for comprehensive defence? How should the armed forces be integrated with the civilian component?

W.K.: The armed forces play a critical role in building the capacity for comprehensive defence. Directly, their capabilities are an essential part of the national defence system, and in turn, they indirectly shape and support the operation of many civilian systems that make up the overall resilience of the state, which enables long-term defence of the state and helps survive economic crises or natural disasters. Thus, the armed forces are a source of fundamental capabilities and competencies for civilian communities and
institutions that use and develop them according to their role in the system. In Finland, I have often heard that the armed forces are a catalyst for these processes and that through widespread military training of reservists, they are building dual-use social awareness and competence. It is interesting because “the way to a warrior can lead through a rescuer.”

K.K.: I believe the armed forces are essential in common defence, but not the most important. Therefore, cooperation between the military and the civilian area will determine the state’s ability and effectiveness of common defence (comprehensive defence).

M.L., M.K., L.E.: What are the civilian institutions’ responsibilities in the development of capabilities for comprehensive defence? How should the civilian component be integrated with the armed forces?

K.K.: A comprehensive defence system requires the involvement of all citizens, civilian institutions, and the armed forces. Comprehensive defence is much more than just the armed forces. If the armed forces are to carry out their basic tasks for which they are maintained, they must be supported by the entire state apparatus, together with enterprises (not only subordinate to the state treasury but also commercial ones) and, what is important, the support of the society. It is purposeful to draw attention to the critical role played by Polish society and entrepreneurs in the matters of personal and equipment protection of units performing tasks for the security of the Republic of Poland. What I mean is the imposition of defence benefits, more specifically personal, material, or unique benefits. Currently, the organization of a common (comprehensive) defence is a complex responsibility, covering all spheres of state life. It also includes the economic and human potentials which affect the possibilities in the area of state defence preparations, including, among other things, increasing the mobilisation base of the Polish Armed Forces.

M.L., M.K., L.E.: Many countries have adopted the comprehensive defence approach to enhance national defence capabilities. Which of them, in your opinion, are the most effective and recommended to be implemented in Poland?

W.K.: Comprehensive defence as a model of state security strategies is common in states with a mature strategic culture that enhances the state’s operational capabilities pragmatically and rationally. It is primarily developed in countries facing the asymmetry of threats (e.g., a potential adversary significantly exceeds them in terms of demographic or military potential). I like several models implemented and functioning well all over the world. I consider Israel and Norway to be the most mature and comprehensive systems. But it is also worth getting acquainted with the universal defence system implemented in Singapore, which numerous experts consider a reference model for many countries that choose this type of strategy. In my
opinion, we are not far from the implementation of the Norwegian model of universal defence. One of the most significant differences is the compulsory military service for men and women in Norway. However, there is no need to copy the selected model. The system must be adjusted to a number of legal, cultural, and demographic conditions. Thus, drawing on solutions from other countries may be selective. That is how the Polish Territorial Defence Forces (POL TDF) were designed, deriving from the solutions implemented in other countries that best suited the Polish conditions.

K.K.: I am against direct implementation (copying) of comprehensive defence regulations from other countries. Each country has different conditions which must be carefully analysed before making a decision. Observation of the international security environment shows that indiscriminate imitation of the adopted solutions may even be harmful and ineffective. Nevertheless, the solutions applied in the United States, the Nordic countries, or Israel are worth considering. From each of the aforementioned “systems,” we should select those elements which may be best suited to Polish realities and requirements or expectations. Based on such a set, it is necessary to “define the optimal” functional model of the comprehensive defence of Poland. However, while developing the essential elements of comprehensive defence model, it is crucial to conduct series of tests and simulations before its final implementation. And then, after some time (e.g., achieving the Initial Operational Capability), carry out verification exercise and implement necessary amendments based on their conclusions.

M.L., M.K., L.E.: How can we enhance efficient cooperation of the Territorial Defence formations with Special Operations Forces in planning and conducting state defence?

W.K.: Special Operations Forces are a relatively small resource intended to execute strategic tasks for the state. The POL TDF possess extensive resources designed for tactical operations throughout the country’s territory. Both formations operate in the land domain, where the population and its critical resources are common characteristics. Due to the POL TDF development, defence and support from the Polish Armed Forces are available everywhere in a short notice. In such an environment, the SOF are designed to execute the most challenging missions with the highest priorities. They are highly specialised and require unique competencies. High-quality leadership and awareness of Special Operations Forces personnel are factors that integrate effort in joint operations. It is also not without significance that former POL SOF officers are at the head of many territorial defence formations. Both formations (POL SOF and POL TDF) share some similarities: joint missions, “sensitivity to the population,” and the highly aware personnel constitute an excellent foundation for joint operations. An excellent historical example of this
type of cooperation came from World War II: The Silent Unseen (*Cichociemni*) – elite special-operations paratroopers parachuted to Poland, and the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) soldiers active in their local area of operations.

**K.K.:** Both formations have common methods of conducting operations, operational goals, and tasks in certain areas. In these areas, we should strive to bring these two formations closer – obviously not forgetting the differences resulting from the degree of professionalisation of soldiers serving in these formations. At this point, it is worth carrying out a series of training experiments, e.g., delegating the command over the Polish Territorial Defence Forces elements to the Polish Special Operations Forces (POL SOF) operators during operations, e.g., unconventional warfare on a temporarily lost territory. The key to the future remains the implementation of joint exercises so that the soldiers of both formations could get to know their own “skills.” The Territorial Defence Forces soldiers know their area of territorial responsibility, their “little homeland,” like no others. And POL SOF operators know the best methods of “unconventional warfare” in the Polish Armed Forces. It would be advisable to combine these two “highly specialised” skills to implement the common task of defending our homeland.