
THE ANTI-TERRORIST FORMATIONS OF THE POLISH POLICE

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Abstract: In practice, sometimes there are situations in which ordinary police officers are not able to operate because of the complexity of the task. In such cases, police anti-terrorist subdivisions are involved in the action. Their tasks mainly involve neutralization of terrorist threats, but also the detention of particularly dangerous, armed criminals and liquidation of bomb threats. In Poland, there are seventeen local special police units at the provincial police headquarters and the biggest one centrally located, which is designed for operations in the whole country and abroad. The Anti-Terrorist Operations Bureau is a member of the ATLAS group, which collaborates with special units from all over Europe.

Keywords: Police, Poland, special operations, anti-terrorist subunit, ATLAS group.

INTRODUCTION

One of the forms of counteracting terrorism is its physical combating. In Poland, special police groups, called anti-terrorist units, deal with this. They are the subject of analysis in this study. The main purpose of the present article is to answer the question: how are the special units of the Polish Police organized and how do they function? The subject is as timely as the current terrorist threats in Europe, including Poland.

The police is a uniformed and armed formation, serving the society and designed to protect the people and the public order¹. According to the Police Act, its primary tasks include, among others, protection of human life, health, and property against unlawful attacks that violate these goods, public order, and security protection, as well as detection of crimes and prosecution of their perpetrators. In their practical actions, the Police often encounter particular situations in which normal actions are not sufficient enough to perform its basic functions. Wherever the average policeman is not able to intervene in an effective and safe way, the anti-terrorist units of the Police (AT) take over. Their use is determined by both the degree of the complexity of the task, as well as the risk associated with its implementation. The anti-terrorist police units have been created as a kind of counterweight to the increasingly spreading terrorism. The police organizational units for physical terrorism combat currently consist of:

- Polish Police BOA KGP Bureau of Counter Terrorist Operations;

¹Art. 1, para. 1 of the Act of 6 April 1990. on Police, Journal of Laws from 2015, item 355.

- seventeen independent anti-terrorist police units (SPAP) in Gdansk, Bialystok, Lodz, Katowice, Cracow, Poznan, Szczecin, Rzeszow, Wroclaw, Bydgoszcz, Gorzow Wlkp., Kielce, Lublin, Olsztyn, Opole, Radom and Warsaw.

In the framework of these counter-terrorism structures 13 sapper-pyrotechnic teams function, taking action in case of a bomb threat. The biggest, 14th sapper-pyrotechnic Police team is located in the structure of the Department of the Implementation of the Metropolitan Headquarters of the Police, as the Sapper-Pyrotechnic Section. Since 2005 in the Police Training Centre's structures in Legionowo, in the Special Training Institute, functions the permanent Sapper-Pyrotechnic Team, with its basic form of activity being training actions.

Perpetrators of crimes for which the AT subunit action is targeted at can represent all social groups and each of them can be in its own way dangerous both for the surroundings as well as the police officers on duty. For various reasons, they can be determined to resolve the situation in the worst way. They often have a criminal past and a clear anti-social attitude, the pathological values usually top the generally accepted moral norms. The criminals, whose escape path was cut off, depending on the seriousness of the offense, in the face of the impending punishment are capable of desperate attempts, even without any chance of success. Another category consists of political terrorists or fanatics with a different motive, often intelligent and educated. Deeply convinced of the rightness of their actions, they are ready to sacrifice the highest value, which is human life, for the so-called "Idea"². As police practice shows they can also be prisoners starting a riot in prisons, their aggression, usually directed at the officers, may take different forms. When a public nuisance breaks out during a demonstration, or even a sporting event, the anonymity of the participants raises aggression, while ensuring the impunity of the pathological behaviour directed at the law enforcing officials. Finally, they may act unpredictably or be mentally ill³.

The list of categories of persons whom the AT subdivisions carry out their activities against has not been completed here, however all of them pose a great danger to the lives and health of police officers. Thus, their interventions are associated with a lot of emotions and stress. The AT assault detachment, as a form of police intervention, is characterized by unprecedented dynamics and is a potential threat for almost all persons within the place of the action. During the operation a wide variety of methods, means and techniques is used which

² J. Pawlik, *Negotiations with people taking hostages*, KGMO, Warsaw 1988, p. 6.

³ Ibid., p.16.

often makes detailed planning not possible. There may be a number of different situations that influence the course of events, the behavior of their participants and their decisions, which precludes the use of the invariable patterns.

Methods and forms of activities performed by the units of the AT and sapper-pyrotechnic cells, as well as the procedure and manner of directing them is determined by the Chief of Police Decree No. 19 of 14th of July 2015 *on the methods and forms of action of the counter-terrorist and sapper-pyrotechnic units of the Police*⁴. It also indicates the principles of combat activities commands and the way to conduct them, as well as the support of the rescue operations, for which the AT subunit officers are also prepared.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR SERVICE IN ANTI-TERRORISM SUB-UNIT OF THE POLICE

Service in the anti-terrorist subdivision is extremely cumbersome and requires special predispositions from the officers who are on duty. To be qualified for it, you have to have the specific physical and personal characteristics, thanks to which the service is based on your preferred lifestyle rather than the official duty. The large physical workload, working under considerable stress and risking losing one's health and life are its characteristic factors, distinguishing it from other types of services⁴. A huge role is played by their psychophysical features, therefore strict⁵ criteria should be used in the process of selection of the candidates for service in the anti-terror subdivision⁶.

Recruitment for the anti-terrorist subunits of the Police is currently based on the Regulation of the Ministry of Interior of 20 March 2007 *on the procedure and the requirements of the determination of the physical and mental capability of the police officers who are to serve on certain positions or in specific organizational units of the Police*⁷. The Regulation establishes the procedures and conditions for establishing the physical and mental ability to serve in the subunits, including the departments performing combat missions. In accordance with provisions of the regulation, the process of recruitment of candidates to serve in the anti-terrorist subunits only applies to police officers and takes place in two stages. The first one involves a psychological examination, the second is a physical agility test, which determines

⁴Journal of KGP Laws from 15 July 2015, item 52.

⁵W. Zubrzycki, *The anti-terroristic police unit combating terrorism*, National Defence University Scientific Quarterly, addition from 2011, p. 93.

⁶Ibid., p. 78.

⁷Journal of Laws from (07.62.423) 10 April 2007.

the physical aptitude to serve in the subdivision of the person being tested.

An important element of the recruitment of the police officers to serve in the special unit is meticulous examinations, determining the state of health of the candidates. The policemen, who pass the abovementioned strict health tests are directed to the territorially relevant regional medical board, subordinate to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, in order to determine the candidates degree of ability for this type of service.

Completion of recruitment of a positive result does not confirm having the ability to perform the tasks assigned to anti-terrorist subdivisions. Quite the contrary, it starts a long lasting process, involving both varied training and participation in the actual operations, which improves the technical and tactical skills and above all shapes the rational acting under a lot of psychological burden.⁸

TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT OF POLICE ANTITERRORISTS

Preparing officers to perform the tasks assigned to the anti-terrorist subdivisions is based on the *Program of training the full-time police subunits*⁹ from 1995. The idea behind the program and the main task of training the anti-terrorist subunits is to obtain knowledge of carrying out activities on explosive devices, hijacking planes, aircrafts, other means of transport, unlocking objects, taking hostages and stopping dangerous criminals¹⁰. It takes place in police colleges, special training camps as well as locally, as part of independently organized classes, including the ones taking place in the course of daily service¹¹.

Preparing for combat operations is carried out through perfecting the skills in: the anti-terrorist tactics; special tactics; shooting training; use of coercive measures; sapper-pyrotechnics; working in an environment exposed to the influence of the biological or chemical agent, ionizing or nuclear radiation; work at heights; intervention techniques; emergency medicine; conduction and use of the means of transport necessary to perform the tasks; police negotiations; use of service dogs; observation; masking operations; scuba diving and underwater work; swimming and water rescue; physical fitness; skiing techniques; parachuting¹². A complete cycle of training a good anti-

⁸ W. Zubrzycki, *The anti-terrorist unit...*, op. cit., s. 80.

⁹ The Chief of Police Decree No. 86 Chief of Police of 7 July 1995 on the introduction of the official use of the program of training and professionally salaried anti-terrorist police subunits.

¹⁰ *The full-time training program of the anti-terrorist police subunits*, the Police Headquarters's Prevention Office, Warsaw 1995, p. 4.

¹¹ P. Gula, P. Tarnowski, W. Zubrzycki, *Terrorism – risks and prevention*, released by Health and Management, Cracow 2005, p. 55.

¹² Order No. 19, the Chief of Police of 14 July 2015 on the methods and forms of action of the anti-terrorist police

terrorist subdivision officer is estimated at 3 to 5 years, this period is dependent on many external factors and the psychophysical features of the policeman¹³.

The analysis of the anti-terrorist police subunits use cases shows that they fall into action wherever the vocational training and the equipment of the average police officer is not sufficient enough to carry out the task. Their actions are directed against terrorist and criminals of the highest caliber, therefore the measures, although extreme, are adequate to the potential threat. The use of such measures, often in the face of active resistance, carries the danger of loss of health and even the lives of those whom these activities are addressed to, the policemen and finally the public. For all of the above reasons, the measures which should be executed by the anti-terrorist subunits, should include a whole range of versatile equipment, from individual pieces of apparatus, through different means of fight supplies to the materials used to overcome natural, technical and construction obstacles¹⁴.

According to the Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs of 28 November 2014 *on the armed police*¹⁵, it is composed of primarily combat firearms: pistols, revolvers, shotguns, machine guns, rifles and grenade launchers¹⁶. Wherever the objective is not possible to achieve in close combat because of distance, position, short-term exposure or poor visibility, precision fire is used. The main task of the marksman in the anti-terrorist operations is to support the assault group by the elimination of the selected targets by firing precise shots from a distance. Therefore, sharpshooters must have certain psychophysical characteristics, undergo an appropriate training and have specialized equipment. In addition to the standard police department of combat equipment, they also have other, specific apparatus, including suitably adapted firearms, measuring instruments, several varieties of masking costumes¹⁷, night vision means, means of communication and other accessories needed to perform the assigned tasks.

Specific elements of the anti-terrorist tactics are based on special techniques, which require the appropriate equipment. Both altitude training of the anti-terrorist subunit police officers (in the form of rock climbing and urban mountaineering) and the use of altitude techniques in combat operations require to dispose specialized equipment of adequate strength and reliability. These

subunits and the sapper-pyrotechnic cells, §8.3.

¹³ J. Pawlik, M. Żywczyk, *The organization and purpose of the Militia special subunits*, The Department of Education and Vocational Training MSW, Warsaw 1989, p. 15.

¹⁴ W. Zubrzycki, *Subunits...*, op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁵ Journal of Laws from 8 December 2014, item 1738.

¹⁶ § 1.1.

¹⁷ W. Zubrzycki, *The crisis situation as a condition of appointment and special preparation of the police anti-terrorist subunits*, Police No. 1-2/2003, WSPol. Szczytno, p. 18.

techniques were borrowed from the mountain rescue services and enriched with regard to their own needs, the equipment used by both services is also similar. Equipment used in the anti-terrorist subunits to work under water can be broadly divided into floating devices and water operations technical security devices, diving equipment, as well as a complementary set of water rescue apparatus. It is worth paying attention to the possibility of its use for purposes other than combat, for example – rescue¹⁸.

Completely different, unique to only these units of the police, is the equipment of the sapper-pyrotechnic teams. They have the accouterment capable of locating, recognizing, neutralizing, removing, transporting and destructing the explosive materials and devices. Particularly noteworthy are the robotic devices capable of replacing man in life- or health-threatening situations¹⁹. Remote controlled robots, equipped in cameras and manipulators are able to perform precise tasks related to detecting and transferring or neutralizing dangerous goods²⁰.

The vehicle fleet and other means of transport are very important to the anti-terrorist subunits, as they determine the mobility of the anti-terrorist subunits. They consist of passenger, general-purpose, combat and special cars. Among the means of transport are also helicopters, as well as the police aviation units which are a particular element of the increasing reliability and effectiveness of the anti-terrorist formations²¹.

TASKS OF POLICE ANTI-TERRORISTS SUBUNITS

The primary objective of maintaining subunits is their preparation for physical combat of the terrorist acts, physical reaction to the commission of a terrorist act caused by a political or other motive²². These subdivisions carry out tasks in situations such as: holding hostages captive in a building and ground, air or water transportation means. They block buildings and protect them from attacks. Their competence is also stopping especially dangerous criminals²³.

The anti-terrorist police subunits and the sapper-pyrotechnic cells conduct combat actions or support rescue operations. The militant activities are implemented as: counter-terrorism, salvage,

¹⁸ W. Zubrzycki, *Subunits...*, op. cit., p. 71-72.

¹⁹ <http://www.antyterroryzm.com>, 15 November 2017.

²⁰ W. Zubrzycki, *Subunits...*, op. cit., p. 78.

²¹ Ibid, p. 79.

²² J. Szafrński, *Security and defense of the state in terms of terrorist threats* [in:] J. Szafrński (edit.), *Todays threat of terrorism and the methods of anti-terrorist measures*, Szczytno 2007, p. 29.

²³ K. Jałoszyński, *National anti-terrorist units - history and present*, „Police” 2000, No. 1-2/00, p. 98.

executive tasks and sapper-pyrotechnic actions²⁴. The sapper-pyrotechnic activities consist particularly of locating, recognizing, neutralizing, removing, transporting and destroying explosive materials or devices made at a factory or in an improvised manner, constituting a threat to life, health and property, as well as security and public order, overcoming construction locks and other obstacles using explosive materials²⁵.

The Anti-terrorist Operations Bureau KGP was called to counteract terrorism, physically fight with it, but also to organize, coordinate and supervise the actions of the police in that area, in particular:

- 1) conducting combat operations and reconnaissance, aimed at eliminating the terrorist attacks, as well as the prevention of incidents of this nature, including those of particular complexity and those in an environment exposed to a chemical or biological agent, ionizing or nuclear radiation and explosive materials;
- 2) carrying out activities that require the use of special forces and means, or the use of special tactics;
- 3) conducting negotiations;
- 4) performing tasks in support of the protective measures taken against protected persons;
- 5) supporting the activities of the police and KGP organizational units in the conditions of a specific threat or the requirement of certain qualifications and skills;
- 6) coordinating the preparations for the police to conduct combat and sapper-pyrotechnic operations as well as police negotiations;
- 7) analysing various aspects of the fight against terrorism and taking initiatives affecting the proper implementation of the tasks of the police in that area;
- 8) cooperating with domestic and foreign formations competent in matters of preventing and combating terrorism²⁶.

The scope of the independent anti-terrorist police subdivision contains, in particular, the physical fight against terrorism by carrying out reconnaissance and combat tactics using anti-terrorism measures to suppress terrorist attacks and prevent incidents of this nature, carrying out sapper-pyrotechnic activities and performing other activities that require the use of special forces and means, which the sub-divisions are supplied with or the need to use the special tactics,

²⁴Order No. 19, the Chief of Police of 14 July 2015 *on the methods and forms of action of the anti-terrorist police subunits and the sapper-pyrotechnic cells*, §5.

²⁵Ibid, §6.1.

²⁶ <http://www.policja.pl/pol/kgp/biuro-operacji-antyter>, 15 November 2017.

especially detaining particularly dangerous persons.

The anti-terrorist subunits have been covered by the *Emergency response procedure*, which relate to the following events:

1. the threat of a terrorist attack on facilities important to the national safety and defense as well as the public buildings;
2. terrorist acts:
 - a) planting an explosive charge;
 - b) abducting an air transportation mean;
 - c) abducting a water transportation mean;
 - d) abducting a land transportation mean;
 - e) seizure of a facility including taking hostages;
 - f) abduction of a person or persons²⁷.

COOPERATION OF POLICE SPECIAL UNITS IN THE AREA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Antiterrorist Operations Bureau also participates in the international cooperation of the interventional police units in special activities and rescue operations in the European Union. The first initiative in the field of the cross-border co-operation of specialized anti-terrorist formations in Europe dates back to the mid-90s. Several international projects in which from a few to a dozen anti-terrorist units of European countries co-operated with each other were conducted. After the events of September 11, 2001, which caused a worldwide re-evaluation of the perception of the threat of terrorism and the fight against it, a lot of decisive steps were taken to unify the multi-faceted activities in the area of almost the whole continent. This led to the first meeting of representatives of the anti-terrorist police formations of the European Union countries, which took place on 15 October 2001 in Brussels. This created a group, whose members were the commanders of all central units of the member states, and it was named ATLAS²⁸. The polish special central unit – BOA KGP – was invited to participate in the meetings of the group, even before the official Polish accession to the European Union, as an observer, in order to introduce its commander to the work of the group and therefore help with the process of the EU enlargement. BOA was accepted to the ATLAS in June 2005.

²⁷ The Chief of Police Decree No. 1429 of 31 December 2004. *on the introduction of the Police response procedures in crisis situations*, Journal of KGP Laws from (No. 3) 28 January 2005.

²⁸ W. Zubrzycki, *ATLAS, Europe united against terrorist attacks*, Jografika 2009, p. 41-42.

At present, the ATLAS includes 35 special police units, called for the physical terrorism combat, from 27 European Union countries but also Norway and Switzerland. The basic aim set by the group is to achieve a comparable level of the highest possible level of quality by all European Union countries special force units. Active co-operation of individual members, exchanging information and conducting joint projects within the Group is supposed to help achieve that goal. In circumstances that demand it, mutual force and resource support is also possible as well as joint operation conduction in crisis terroristic situations on a large scale.

The intervention taken together by different police forces in one of the member states requires an appropriate legal framework, regulating the individual task implementation areas in a foreign country. The Council of the European Union Decisions *provides with border cooperation intensification, particularly with combating terrorism and cross-border crime*²⁹ and on its implementation³⁰, as well as the *Council of the European Union Decision on the improvement of cooperation between the special intervention units of the European Union member states in crisis situations*³¹, referring to, for example, issues related to the conduct of joint operations, the use of weapons, ammunition and equipment, civil and criminal penalties, and costs of such actions³². The legal basis for the participation of special units of the Polish Police outside of Poland can be found in the Article 145a of the Police Act. In the light of its provisions a police officer may be assigned to duty outside of the country in order to carry out the tasks specified in a police contingent separated to participate in:

- 1) peacekeeping missions,
- 2) actions to prevent acts of terrorism or their effects,
- 3) rescue, exploration or humanitarian operations,
- 4) police training and exercises,
- 5) representative ventures.

These provisions of legal acts allow for technical, logistic and manual support during conducting activities. This means that - in case of a terrorist attack in Poland or another EU country – special police forces will not be alone in dealing with a crisis situation, but can expect help from their foreign counterparts, taking advantage of their expertise, experience, as well

²⁹Journal of the UE Laws from (No. 210) 6 August 2008 r., decision No. 2008/615/WSiSW.

³⁰Journal of the UE Laws from (No. 210) 6 August 2008 r., decision No. 2008/616/WSiSW.

³¹Journal of the UE Laws from (No. 210) 6 August 2008 r., decision No. 2008/617/WSiSW.

³²W. Zubrzycki, *Physical terror and terrorism combat in Poland*, [w:] W. Zubrzycki (edit.), *Countering the terrorist threaten Poland*, Jografika, Warsaw 2011, p. 324.

as specialist equipment and physical support³³.

CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of the operations depends not only on external factors. The uniqueness of the situations, events, behaviors, circumstances and prevailing conditions puts very high demands on the officers, who are responsible for the resolution of these difficult occurrences. The psychophysical features of the policemen play a big part in that process. High physical efficiency, sensory perception, reaction speed, courage and decisive action, intelligence, common sense and maturity, mental discipline and consistency in the proceedings, mental strength, composure as well as control over their aggression, honesty, and finally a highly developed sense of camaraderie - which is very important in teamwork; those are the traits required from the special unit officers. They, however, do not determine the final success of the action. Each steps performed under high tension, require specific habits, or even automation, which can only be obtained by long practice. In the conducted actions, there is little to no room for improvisation and randomness; the efficient and effective attack - especially in the case of many unknowns - is preceded by hours of painstaking exercise, a huge number of hypothetical tasks and their practical solutions. They allow, even in unique situations, a controlled and as secure as possible course of action. Therefore, the basic and almost only, apart from the executing tasks of the battle, subdivision officers duty is a continuous professional development and training³⁴.

Very important is also the experience acquired during active terrorism combat, daily fight against organized crime and other forms of common banditry. It complements the training process, verifies the skills level and eliminates these cells, which failed during the operation. Such experience also makes it easier to operate in conditions of mental tension, caused by the threat of loss of life.

By carrying out their daily tasks, the AT units counteract the threats, such as terrorism and organized crime. But the scope of their activities, beyond the need to intervene with a high degree of danger, also includes other tasks, requiring special skills or special equipment³⁵. They are not mass units and their equipment, comprehensive training and special skills predispose them to perform specific tasks, differing greatly from those appropriate for the

³³ Ibid., p. 323.

³⁴ J. Pawlik, M. Żywczyk, *The organization and purpose...*, op. cit., p.13.

³⁵ W. Zubrzycki, *Subunits...*, op. cit., p. 97.

conventional police forces. Their combat activity is mainly based on the violent attacks, which involve a direct threat to life and health, therefore the taken steps have to be bold and decisive. The skills disposed by the anti-terrorist formations officers allow for mastering all of the objects that could be used by the enemy and to conduct combat under various conditions, using a variety of measures³⁶.

Poland is not free from the threat of international terrorism in the strict sense of the term. The arrangement of political forces is changing at a fast pace in the world, the constant complication of the international relations is taking place, the persisting separatist and national liberation trends in many regions as well as the religiously motivated actions – all the above mentioned factors are a favorable climate for the international terrorist activities. The efficiency and effectiveness of the special police units in situations of serious threats related to terrorism may not only decide on the level of internal security of Poland, but also about the perception of it in the international arena.

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³⁶ W. Zubrzycki, *Anti-terrorist unit...*, op. cit., p. 311.

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INFORMACIJA APIE LENKIJOS POLICIJOS ANTITERORISTINĘ VEIKLĄ

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Santrauka

Praktikoje, kartais pasitaiko situacijų, kai įprasti policijos pareigūnai negali veikti, nes jiems kylanti užduotis yra pernelyg sudėtinga. Tokiais atvejais policijos antiteroristiniai padaliniai įtraukiami į tokios situacijos sprendimą. Jų užduotys dažniausiai apima teroristinių grėsmių neutralizavimą, taip pat ypač pavojingų ginkluotų nusikaltėlių sulaikymą, sprogmenų neutralizavimą. Lenkijoje yra septyniolika vietinių specialiųjų policijos pajėgų skyrių, kurie yra provincijos policijos štabų sudėtyje ir vienas centrinis skyrius, kurio įgaliojimai apima teisę veikti visos šalies viduje ir užsienyje. Antiteroristinių operacijų biuras yra ATLAS grupės narys, joje bendradarbiauja su specialios paskirties skyriais visoje Europoje.

Keywords: Policija, Lenkija, specialiosios operacijos, antiteroristiniai daliniai, ATLAS grupė

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