

# WebMemo



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## The Polish Elections: Implications for the Washington–Warsaw Alliance

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On October 21, Polish voters will take to the polls to vote in a new parliament two years ahead of schedule. Although early indications demonstrate widespread apathy on the part of the Polish electorate, important foreign policy issues are at stake.

The most important foreign policy issue for Poland to address is the European Reform Treaty. EU elites desire to either undo or circumvent Poland's opt-out from the Charter of Fundamental Rights and diminish Warsaw's traditionally muscular negotiating stance in favor of national sovereignty.

The composition of Warsaw's next government will be just as important to Washington as it is to Europe. The negotiations over stationing 10 interceptors as part of America's ballistic missile defense shield is at a critical stage, and a new Polish administration must quickly grasp the issues at stake. Poland also remains an important European ally in Operation Iraqi Freedom and a valued member of the NATO alliance operating in Afghanistan; both issues will be debated in the election.

**The Political Map.** Current polls indicate that no one party can expect an outright working majority in the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament), with Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party (PiS) and Donald Tusk's Civic Platform Party (PO) polling within a few percentage points of one another over the past month. A center-right alliance between PiS and PO is certainly possible, and PiS has made overtures in recent weeks to put aside old PiS–PO rivalries. Equally possible is an alignment between PO and the Left and Democrats

coalition (LiD), which would completely change the current complexion of Polish politics.

**Poland and the European Union.** The next Polish administration will be forced to deal with major foreign policy questions, not the least of which is the possible ratification of the EU Reform Treaty. EU heads of state and foreign ministers—with Poland represented by the current Kaczyński government—will meet in Lisbon on October 18, just three days before the Polish elections, with the aim of agreeing on the final text of the European Reform Treaty. To avoid another EU summit failure, Poland is currently being put under immense pressure to negotiate away its interests, even though member states only received the final text of the Treaty on October 5.

Poland's reservations about voting weights and the legal status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights should be fully considered before any agreement is signed, and the Kaczyński government should not feel rushed into an agreement either disproportionate with its national interest or not fully analyzed by its legal experts. In fact, failure by the Kaczyński government to protect Poland's right to self-determination over controversial questions such as same-sex

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marriage are certain to be punished by the electorate and have wider ramifications for Poland's negotiating credibility at future EU summits.

Should the current Polish administration reach agreement in Lisbon next week—as looks increasingly likely—it is still the next Polish government that will be required to ratify the accord. With the possibility that PiS will once again head a governing coalition in Warsaw, the Kaczyński administration cannot afford to make concessions to Brussels that are not fully commensurate with its strong record of defending Poland's national interest in Brussels.

**Poland and Britain.** The British–Polish relationship is also an important element in this election. Donald Tusk has already been to London campaigning for Britain's one million Polish votes. With such a sizable Polish population and a valued ally fighting for similar interests inside the European Union, Prime Minister Gordon Brown must seek to maintain warm relations with whichever party comes to lead the Sejm.

**The Polish–American Alliance.** In spite of their controversial reputation in Brussels and Berlin, the White House and Congress have nurtured warm relationships with the Kaczyński administration and the PiS-led Sejm. Both President Lech Kaczyński and Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński have been personally welcomed to the White House by President Bush, and they have demonstrated a canny ability to navigate Washington politics. However, there are multiple high-level issues for Washington and Warsaw to deal with in the immediate future, which will prove testing to whoever occupies the premiership after October 21.

**Missile Defense.** The basing of a U.S. missile interceptor site in Poland will be decided after the Polish elections. The Bush Administration is currently protesting Congress's proposed \$85 million cut to the budget for European third-site installations, arguing that this cut could not only endanger

the security of America and its allies but also jeopardize the Polish–American bilateral alliance. The current Polish administration has already invested significant political capital into what has proven to be a controversial proposal.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever takes over the posts of prime minister and foreign minister after October 21 will have a difficult task completing the delicate negotiations with Washington. Latest polls show an increasingly hostile response to the missile defense project by the Polish public, and many high-level parliamentarians do not support it.

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, recently indicated that U.S. officials are speaking to both the current government and opposition parties about missile defense.<sup>2</sup> The most powerful opponent of the project is former Polish Defense Minister Radek Sikorski, a former Washington insider who recently defected to the PO and is widely expected to run for the Polish presidency in 2010.

“This will be the first pro-American decision that I believe the Polish public will simply not take,” Sikorski said during a recent visit to Washington, noting that Iran was not seen as a threat by most Poles. “If we get nothing at all...the public and the Parliament will not forgive us.”<sup>3</sup>

Many U.S. and European observers see Sikorski as the key to the outcome in Poland. Washington will be watching his comments carefully, regardless of the outcome on October 21. Sikorski's demands for a more generous package of U.S. military and financial support in exchange for a missile defense site in Poland will certainly gain traction during this election campaign.

**Iraq and Afghanistan.** The current Kaczyński administration has gone to great lengths to emphasize the overall geo-strategic benefits of closer ties with Washington. To strengthen its bilateral alliance with America and its standing inside NATO, War-

1. H.R. 1585, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, passed October 1, 2007, and Strategic Forces Subcommittee Markup of H.R. 1585, on May 2, 2007, at [www.house.gov/list/speech/armedsvc\\_dem/tauscher050207.shtml](http://www.house.gov/list/speech/armedsvc_dem/tauscher050207.shtml)
2. On-the-record briefing, U.S. Department of State, Daniel Fried (Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs) and Tom Casey (Deputy Spokesman), “Upcoming Moscow 2+2 Meeting,” October 5, 2007, at [www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/93323.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/93323.htm)
3. Peter Spiegel and Kim Murphy, “Europe Is Skeptical on Missile Shield,” the *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2007.

saw has invested considerable capital in maintaining troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan. At present, 900 Polish troops are based in Iraq, and 1,200 Polish troops contribute to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, importantly as “fighting” soldiers without national caveats.

Among the major parties, only the PiS remains steadfastly committed to maintaining troops in Afghanistan and ensuring the stability of Iraq before a withdrawal of troops. The PO is committed to a timetabled withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq, and PO deputy parliamentary speaker Bronisław Komorowski recently called for the mission in Afghanistan to become a civilian one. Whatever the outcome of the forthcoming election, the commitment of Polish troops to the American-led mission in Iraq and the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan are likely to undergo some change.

**Conclusion.** Despite warmer relations with Berlin and Paris, Poland remains an important strategic partner for the United States. Warsaw has been a steadfast ally, especially in the War on Terrorism, and that alliance should be both preserved and strengthened where possible.

The negotiations on missile defense have the distinct possibility of elevating the Polish–American security relationship as well as enhancing Poland’s standing within NATO. However, failure of the negotiations on either side’s part could prove extremely detrimental to what has been a rapidly evolving bilateral alliance.

Poland should also be wary of Brussels’ gravitational pull, because closer ties with the EU will come at the expense of its relationship with the United States. A significant loss of sovereignty is not something that makes for a strong coalition ally. Instead, Poland must pursue a relationship with the EU that is based on free trade and voluntary inter-governmental cooperation. The Polish–American relationship will therefore require hard-edged, decisive leadership on both sides of the Atlantic to take it forward in a positive manner; in that respect, the elections on October 21 are highly significant.

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