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SILESIA AS A THEATRE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS THROUGHOUT THE AGES

ŚLĄSK JAKO TEREN WOJENNY NA PRZESTRZENI DZIEJÓW

ABSTRACT: The location of Silesia and Lusatia in Central Europe, their geographical conditions, the network of transport routes, as well as the geopolitical and military situation, determined the concepts for the use of the Silesian-Lusatian region for military operations as early as in the 14th century. Situated in the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor, it was used as a base for military activities both on the north-south axis, as well as in the north-east direction (against Wielkopolska and Poland) and in the west direction (towards Berlin and Dresden). It was not until the second half of the 20th century that Silesia became a rear area and hopefully it will not be used in that role.

KEYWORDS: military geography, military history, Silesian history

Introduction

The territory of Silesia and Lusatia as an area of military operations has been extensively studied in relation to the Middle Ages¹, the Thirty Years' War², the Silesian

¹ Benon Miśkiewicz, *Studia nad obroną polskiej granicy zachodniej w okresie wczesnofeudalnym*, Poznań 1961 (Dzieje polskiej granicy zachodniej, 1), pp. 21–50; Karol Olejnik, *Obrona polskiej granicy zachodniej 1138–1385*, Poznań 1970 (Dzieje polskiej granicy zachodniej, 5), pp. 23–39; Joseph Partsch, *Schlesien als Kriegsschauplatz*, [in:] *Schlesien. Eine Landeskunde für das deutsche Volk*, vol. 1, *Das ganze Land*, Breslau 1896, pp. 394–420.

² Jerzy Maroń, *Śląsk jako teatr działań wojennych w czasie wojny trzydziestoletniej*, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 47 (1992), pp. 313–321; *idem*, *Operacyjna rola bramy łużyckiej*, [in:] *350 rocznica Pokoju Westfalskiego na terenach Euroregionu NYSA 1648–1998*, Jelenia

Wars of the 18th century³ and the Prussian-Austrian War of 1866⁴. From a military point of view, the real Gordian knot is the incompatibility of geographical, historical and military approaches. For geographers, Silesia as a separate administrative unit does not exist, because its territory is located within the territorial range of the North European Plain, the Bohemian Massif, the Carpathian Mountains and Outer Subcarpathia, as well as the so-called Western Europe⁵. Some Polish geographers understand the term “Silesia” as one of the historical districts of Poland, quite clearly separated from Małopolska, Pomerania and Wielkopolska⁶. In turn, scholars of Silesia’s past recognize a significant duality and inconsistency in the use of the term, and this was particularly strongly accentuated by Kazimierz Orzechowski⁷, an outstanding expert on Silesian history.

However, for geographic-military analyses, the aforementioned considerations of geographers and historians are of secondary importance. For, adopting a physiographic criterion, three distinct components of Silesia can be distinguished: mountains (the Sudetes together with the Sudeten Foreland, the western part of the Carpathians together with the Outer Subcarpathia), lowlands (the pre-Sudeten area) and uplands (the Silesian Upland). The Sudetes and the western part of the Carpathians form a kind of wall, defending the borders of both Silesia and the Bohemian Citadel⁸. In Silesia, the key axis is the Oder River, dividing the whole area into two distinct parts with its large volume of water⁹. Among military writers the prevailing view questions the military significance of mountains as obstacles to

Góra 1999, pp. 29–38; *idem*, *Operacyjna rola Górnych Łużyc*, [in:] *Górne Łużyce na przestrzeni wieków*, ed. Jerzy Maroń, Łukasz Tekiel, Lubań, 2007 (Lubańskie Studia Historyczne, 1), pp. 80–92; Łukasz Tekiel, *Die operative Bedeutung der Stadt Zittau während des Dreissigjährigen Krieges*, “Neues Lausitzisches Magazin”, NF, 12 (2009), pp. 49–58; *idem*, *Wojna trzydziestoletnia na Górnych Łużycach. Aspekty militarne*, Racibórz 2010, pp. 56–66.

³ Robert Kisiel, *Strzegom–Dobromierz 1745*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 66–73.

⁴ Adam Pudelka, *Wehrgeographie der Innersudetischen Pässe. Eine wehrgeographische Betrachtung*, “Schlesische Monatshefte”, 1934/36, pp. 203–221.

⁵ Jerzy Kondracki, *Geografia fizyczna Polski*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 256–263.

⁶ Andrzej Piskozub, *Dziedzictwo polskiej przestrzeni. Geograficznohistoryczne podstawy struktur przestrzennych ziem polskich*, Wrocław 1987, pp. 44–45, 47, 50, 54–55, 56.

⁷ Kazimierz Orzechowski, *Terytorialne podziały na Śląsku*, “Kwartalnik Opolski”, 17 (1970), pp. 55 ff.

⁸ Jerzy Kondracki, *Geografia Polski. Mezoregiony fizyczno-geograficzne*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 157–182, Fig. 19, pp. 158–159.

⁹ Partsch, *Schlesien als Kriegsschauplatz*, p. 409; Kondracki, *Geografia fizyczna Polski*, pp. 258 ff.

warfare¹⁰, but it must nevertheless be pointed out that they determine the capabilities of operating armies.

In the case of Lower Silesia, there are several gates in the southern wall of the Sudetes providing convenient marching conditions and several passages much more difficult to cross for large groups of troops. Almost in the centre of the mountain chain the Lubawka Gate is located, lying between the east edge of the Karonosze Mountains and the western border of the Wałbrzyskie and Stone Mountains. The Lubawka Gate is also conveniently connected with the Mieroszów Depression and the Ścinawka Depression, stretching between Mieroszów and the Kłodzko Basin. From Kłodzko it is easy to get to Náchod through the Polskie Wrota Pass, which separates the Orlické Mountains from the Levinské Hills, and from there to the Upa River. Access to the Kłodzko Basin from the north is much more difficult. It is closed by the Owl and Bardzkie Mountains, although both ranges are not very high, yet due to the sharp northern tectonic edge, they are a serious obstacle to cross. There are three “wickets” crossing them: Srebrna Pass, Kłodzka Pass and, in the Bardo area, the Nysa Kłodzka Gorge. They are considered to be one of the easiest positions to defend in Silesia. Mountain ranges located to the east, reaching deeply to the south, prevent larger groups of troops from passing along the north-south axis. Communication only becomes possible in the Opawskie Mountains, on the line Głuchołazy – Cukmantl.

The north-eastern border (with Wielkopolska) and the eastern border with Małopolska and the Łęczyca-Sieradz and Sandomierz lands are much less distinct, due to historical changes in political borders, both district and state ones¹¹. Therefore, an important question arises how to relate the geographical approach and the historical-geographical approach to the military one, and in the latter the problem arises as to which of the military-geographical levels should Silesia be classified.

¹⁰ Antoine H. Jomini, *Zarys sztuki wojennej*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 56 ff.; Partsch, *Schlesien als Kriegsschauplatz*, s. 395; Roman Umiastowski, *Granice polityczne, naturalne i obronne w czasach wojny i pokoju*, Kraków 1925, p. 75.

¹¹ Today, both Częstochowa and the Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin are part of the Upper Silesian Voivodship. In 1950, political reasons led to the creation of the Opole Voivodeship, an organism amongst several other administrative and self-governmental curiosities in contemporary Poland.

A military-historical approach

In this respect, the most relevant term used by military writers is a theatre of military operations (TMO). It has a long tradition in military writing, pioneered by Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine Henri Jomini. The Prussian theorist defined the theatre of military operations as “Eigentlich denkt man sich darunter einen solchen Teil des ganzen Kriegsraumes, der gedeckte Seiten und dadurch eine gewisse Selbständigkeit hat. Diese Deckung kann in Festungen liegen, in großen Hindernissen der Gegend, auch in einer beträchtlichen Entfernung von dem übrigen Kriegsraum. – Ein solcher Teil ist kein bloßes Stück des Ganzen, sondern selbst ein kleines Ganze, welcher dadurch mehr oder weniger in dem Fall ist, daß die Veränderungen, welche sich auf dem übrigen Kriegsraum zutragen, keinen unmittelbaren, sondern nur einen mittelbaren Einfluß auf ihn haben”¹². It was obvious that Silesia was not in itself a theatre of military operations, but the problem remained: what then was Silesia and what is it now? Here it comes with the help of a proposal by Jomini, a rival of Clausewitz, “On doit entendre, par zone d’opérations, une certaine fraction du théâtre de la guerre, qui serait parcourue par une armée dans un but déterminé, et principalement lorsque ce but serait combiné avec celui d’une armée secondaire. Par exemple, dans l’ensemble du plan campagne

¹² Claus von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, [in:] *Hinterlassene Werke über Krieg und Kriegführung*, vol. 1, 2nd edition, Berlin 1857, Buch V.2. Due to the multitude of editions of this work, including electronic ones, I quote it, in the same way as scholars of antiquity and medievalists quote sources. In the Polish military literature, this approach has been popularised by General Zygmunt Duszynski, who wrote about the TMO as a territory [for the maritime theatre: the coast and water space] on which the armed forces of the warring parties concentrate and conduct military operations in order to fulfill the strategic tasks set for them by the policy. [...] Each theatre of military operations constitutes a single whole, as a result of its geographical characteristics as well as its political significance. The natural borders of the theatre of military operations are geographical factors (sea, deserts, great rivers, mountains) and political ones (borders of states not taking part in the war): Zygmunt Duszynski, *Uwagi o powstaniu, rozwoju i ogólnych zasadach sztuki operacyjnej*, “Myśl Wojskowa”, 4 (1953), 1, pp. 47 ff. These terms were systematized by Zbigniew Parucki, *Teatry wojny i teatry działań wojennych*, “Biuletyn Wojskowej Akademii Politycznej”, 3–4 (1957), pp. 44–81. In the civilian circles, Clausewitz’s proposals were promoted by Karol Olejnik and Stanisław Alexandrowicz: “The theatre of war of a given state is the area which the army of that state must defend in order for it to retain its previous possessions and sometimes even its independence. Thus, it will be, on the one hand, an area of struggle against an attacking enemy, and on the other, areas decisive for maintaining the army in a state of combat readiness due to the fact that they will provide human and material reinforcements. The theatre of war of a given country may also be those areas which are the subject of intended political and military penetration”: Stanisław Aleksandrowicz, Karol Olejnik, *Charakterystyka polskiego teatru działań wojennych*, “Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości”, 26 (1983), p. 27.

de 1796, l'Italie était la zone d'opérations de la droite; la Bavière était celle de l'armée du centre (Rhin-et-Moselle); enfin la Franconie était la zone de l'armée gauche (Sombre-et-Meuse)"¹³. Even from this perspective, Silesia is not a separate "area of military operations", remaining a part of a larger whole¹⁴. However, a closer definition of the area of military operations to which Silesia can be assigned is possible by pointing to its location in Central Europe and the importance of this fact¹⁵.

The territory of Central Europe is merely a historical-geographical or political-geographical term. This term covers the part of Europe that is a bridge between the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic and Black Seas, bounded by the Saale and Elbe rivers in the west and the Dnieper and Dvina rivers in the east¹⁶. Considered on a global scale, in the Central European geostrategic region and part of the European strategic region, the western part of Lower Silesia is a fragment of the Baltic-Adriatic passage, or more precisely its northern part, located between the Baltic Sea and the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains. The western borderlands of Silesia already lie in the north-south passage, between Szczecin and Venice¹⁷.

From the Polish point of view, the most important is the latitudinal significance (east-west) of this narrowing, referred to as gates. In this view, the gates enabling

¹³ Antoine-Henri Jomini, *Précis de l'art de la guerre, ou Nouveau tableau analytique des principales combinaisons de la stratégie, de la grande tactique et de la politique militaire*, Paris 1837, p. 195. I use the second edition of the work, as the Polish translation is based on the first edition, which is much more scanty.

¹⁴ In reference to the Polish, Eastern, theatre of war, General Eduard Wilhelm Hans von Liebert divided it into 3 theatres of military operations: North-Eastern, Eastern and South-Eastern. See Sarmaticus, [E. W. H. von Liebert], *Der Polnische Kriegsschauplatz. Militärgeographische Studie*, vol.1 *Der nordpolnische Kriegsschauplatz*, Hannover 1880, p. 1, vol.2 *Der südpolnische Kriegsschauplatz. Operationstudien*, Hannover 1880, pp. 2, 4–5. In his next book he used a different terminological grid for the area of military operations (*Operationfelde*); *idem*, *Von der Weichsel zum Dnjepr. Geographische, kriegsgeschichtliche und operative Studie*, Hannover 1886, p. 323.

¹⁵ The nodal character of Silesia, including Wrocław, in Central Europe, was strongly emphasised by Grzegorz Myśliwski, who linked Silesia, together with Bohemia and Hungary (and thus together with Slovakia and Transylvania) and southern Poland (western Małopolska), to the Sudeten-Carpathian Zone. To the north, this zone was adjacent to the Baltic-Hanseatic Zone, to the west to the Lusatian-Saxon-Turanian Zone, to the southwest to the Upper German zone (Bavaria, Franconia, Swabia, Württemberg, Alsace, Switzerland and Austria) and to the east and southeast to the Black Sea Zone. More importantly, the border between the Baltic Zone and the Sudeten Carpathian-Zone ran through Silesia. See Grzegorz Myśliwski, *Wrocław w przestrzeni gospodarczej Europy (XIII–XV wiek). Centrum czy peryferie?*, Wrocław 2009, pp. 61–62, 63, 65, 67. He was inspired by the work: Marian Małowist, *Wschód a Zachód Europy w XIII–XVI wieku. Konfrontacja struktur społeczno-gospodarczych*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 25–26.

¹⁶ Stanisław Herbst, *Znaczenie strategiczne Europy Środkowej w II wojnie światowej*, [in:] *idem*, *Potrzeba historii, czyli o polskim stylu życia. Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1978, vol. 2, p. 412.

¹⁷ Zbigniew Lach, Andrzej Łaszczyk, *Geografia bezpieczeństwa*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 161, 168.

the passage from west to east and vice versa are of key importance. Three of the four gates, distinguished by historians, are located at the edge of Lower Silesia: Lubusz Gate, Krosno Gate and Lusatian Gate (actually the Upper Lusatian Gate in the area of Zgorzelec, Lubań and Żytawa)¹⁸. Nowadays, due to the development of motorization, the Krosno Gate has become a part of the Lubusz Gate¹⁹. In the past, the complex of the Lower Silesian and Lusatian Forests separating the Krosno Gate from the Lusatian Gate determined the east-west direction of military operations, but in military terms it did not constitute the western barrier-border of Lower Silesia, since the distance from Zgorzelec to Legnica meant a mere three days' march for infantry and two days' march for cavalry, while for motorised and armoured troops it took just about 11 hours²⁰.

Polish historical-military literature usually neglected discussions on the significance of Silesia in the south-north direction and vice versa, thus overlooking the key significance of the gates: the Lusatian one, opening the way into Bohemia, and the Lubusz one, allowing entry into Brandenburg and Western Pomerania²¹. This is perfectly understandable, as this role of Silesia was fully revealed in the struggles in which the Rzeczpospolita, for various reasons, did not participate, or in the post-Partition period, when the Polish state no longer existed. Hence, it makes sense to treat Silesia as an essential part of the Silesian-Lusatian theatre of military operations (*Operationfelde, zone d'opérations*), forming the eastern part of the Saxon-Silesian theatre of military operations. More importantly, two strategic directions, namely east-west

¹⁸ Benon Miśkiewicz, *Studia nad obroną polskiej granicy zachodnie w okresie wczesnofeudalnym*, Poznań 1961, pp. 30, 46 ff.; Stanisław Herbst, *Polski teatr wojny*, [in:] *idem, Potrzeba historii*, vol. 2, p. 438.

¹⁹ Bolesław Balcerowicz, *Czynniki geograficzne w strategii wojennej RP. Skrypt*, Warszawa 1991, p. 5. Three "routes" corresponded with this division: "the Margrave Road", the Lubusz Gate (the Toruń–Berlin Glacial Valley) and the Lusatian Gate. The first, the "coastal" one, led towards the Baltic republics; the second, the central one: through the Lubusz Gate towards Poznań, Warsaw and the central regions of Russia; and the third, the south one, from Saxony through the Lusatian Gate towards Ukraine. The result of a certain terminological inconsistency is the use of a different conceptual (operational) framework which does not correlate well with military-geographical terms. The three "routes" roughly correspond with the three operational directions: the Mecklenburg, the Lubusz and the Lusatian, Bolesław Balcerowicz, Jacek Pawłowski, Józef Marczak, *Problemy obrony Polski. Opracowanie studyjne*, Warszawa 1993, p. 231.

²⁰ The daily march standard is 30 km (infantry), 50 km (cavalry), 280 km (wheeled vehicles) and 200 km (tracked vehicles). A 2–3 day effort can be up to twice that.

²¹ The only exception was General Balcerowicz, who recognised the matter, but for political reasons limited it to the route leading from the „Sudeten Passes to Szczecin” and from the Moravian Gate to Gdańsk ("Amber Road"), see Balcerowicz, *Czynniki geograficzne*, p. 5. In his proposition, the Lusatian Gate did not exist, as it was on the territory of the western neighbour, namely West Germany.

and north-south, intersect in this area and each of them includes separate operational directions. The first includes 2 directions: the Lubusz and Lusatian, and the second includes 3 ones: the Lusatian, the “Sudeten” (from the Sudeten Passes, a controversial concept to say the least) and “Amber” (from the Moravian Gate to Gdańsk)²².

Road network

From the point of view of the military exploitation concept, apart from the demographic potential, the road network played a key role for the Silesian-Lusatian zone of military operations. In Silesia two transport axes were clearly visible and the first one, latitudinal, was formed by two main routes, one of which led from Dresden to Wrocław, through Zgorzelec, Bolesławiec, Chojnów, Legnica, Prochowice and Środa Śląska²³. It was supplemented by the old Podsudecka Road from Budziszyn through Gryfów Śląski, Lwówek Śląski, Jelenia Góra, Świdnica, Dzierżoniów, Ząbkowice Śląskie, Ziębice and Nysa. It was possible to get from Lwówek to Zgorzelec via Leśna²⁴. From the Podsudecka Road southwards there were routes leading to the Bohemian area. In the west it was possible thanks to a route from Jelenia Góra to Mieroszów, and from there through Ścinawka Depression to Broumov and Kłodzko. Also from Jelenia Góra it was possible to get to Świebodzice and Kamienna Góra and from there through the Lubawa Gate to Bohemia²⁵.

The second transport axis ran diagonally from north-west to south-east, connecting the two opposite Silesian gates: the Frankfurt and the Jablunkov Gates. The Frankfurt route led through Krosno Odrzańskie, Nowe Miasteczko, Prochowice to Wrocław.

²² Duszyński, *Uwagi o powstaniu*, p. 48 wrote: “strategic direction – is a significant strip of land, with political and industrial objects located on it, allowing to conduct concerted combat operations of large army groups. Strategic direction is determined by political and war-geographical factors. [...] there may be 1 – 2 (more rarely several) strategic directions in a single theatre of military operations”, while an operational direction being part of a strategic direction “depends on the specific location in a given theatre of military operations, taking into account the enemy forces, objects situated therein and the topographical conditions of the terrain”.

²³ *Atlas Homanna*, Map 9, scale 1:200000 (scale acc. to Julian Janczak, *Zarys dziejów kartografii śląskiej do końca XVIII wieku*, Opole 1976, p. 76); Map 13, scale 1:100000 (scale acc. to Janczak, *Zarys dziejów kartografii*, p. 75); *Geografische Verzeilung des Goerlitzer Creises*, ed. J. B. Homann, 1753, BOss, Dział Kartograficzny, 2071/IV, scale 1:180000 (scale acc. to Roman Wytyczak, *Katalog zbiorów kartograficznych BOss*). The author of cartographic pictures of Silesia was Jan Wolfgang Wieland, see Janczak, *Zarys dziejów kartografii*, pp. 71 ff.

²⁴ *Atlas Homanna*, Map 7, scale 1:220000 (scale acc. to Janczak, *Zarys dziejów kartografii*, p. 75); Map 6, scale 1:93000 (scale acc. to Janczak, *Zarys dziejów kartografii*, p. 75).

²⁵ *Atlas Homanna*, Map 7.

It was possible to shorten this route in Krosno, through Zielona Góra, Głogów, Polkowice or through Chocianów to Legnica and then to Wrocław, or, bypassing Legnica, through Prochowice to reach Wrocław directly²⁶. This biggest Silesian city had an excellent connection to the south, thanks to two routes: one led through Niemcza to Ząbkowice Śląskie and the other through Oława, Brzeg and Grodków to Nysa²⁷.

The road network in the western and eastern borderlands of Silesia was much less developed. Two roads led from Zielona Góra south to Bolesławiec, almost parallel to the border, but they ran through a heavily forested area of the Lower Silesian Forest²⁸. In the East, on the right side of the Oder River, there was a convenient route from Głogów to Góra and Wińsko, and from there to Wołów and Wrocław or Chobienia²⁹. In the industrial era these roads were supplemented by railway lines. From the north-west the line Zielona Góra – Nowa Sól – Głogów – Ścinawa – Wrocław ran and still runs nowadays intersecting in Głogów with the important Żagań line. Żagań was an important railway node and connected with Ząbki (via Żary), Gubin, Zgorzelec (via Węgliniec). Another line ran from Głogów through Wschowa and Leszno to Poznań. Moreover, the Wrocław line from Rudna-Gwizdanów had a connection with Legnica³⁰.

The most important railway node was of course Wrocław. There, besides the Zielona Góra line mentioned above, the lines from Dresden (via Zgorzelec and Legnica), from Poznań (via Rawicz and via Milicz and Krotoszyn), from Ostrów Wielkopolski to Katowice (via Gliwice, Strzelce Opolskie or Kędzierzyn – Koźle, Opole and Brzeg), to Jelenia Góra, Międzylesie and Kudowa (via Kłodzko) and Kłodzko via Sobótka converged. Slightly smaller transport nodes were: Jelenia Góra (with lines to Karpacz, Szklarska Poręba, Lubań and Zgorzelec), Brzeg (with a line to Nysa and Głucholazy), Opole (with lines to Częstochowa, via Nysa to Kamieniec Ząbkowicki and Kłodzko and to Racibórz) and Gliwice had a connection to Częstochowa and Rybnik³¹. The railway lines thus supplemented the existing roads.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, Maps 9, 13.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, Maps 1, 6.

²⁸ The east road ran along the Bóbr River through Kozłów, the west one through Świętoszów, along the right bank of the Kwisia River, *Atlas Homanna*, Maps 8, 9.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, Map 9.

³⁰ For a thorough discussion of the origin and development of the railway network in Silesia, see Marian Jerczyński, Stanisław Koziański, *150 lat kolei na Śląsku*, Opole–Wrocław 1992, pp. 19–34, 65–80; Marek Potocki, *Sieć kolejowa w Województwie Dolnośląskim*, <http://www.bazakolejowa.pl/mapy/1/1090561049.png> (date of access: 01.06.2018).

³¹ Jerczyński, Koziański, *150 lat kolei*, pp. 30–31, 33–34.

Silesia as a base for military operations. Geopolitics

The geographical location, together with the network of transport routes, is a permanent factor determining the importance of the area of operations. The second factor for Silesia, determining its use was the configuration of the political borders of states – Poland, Germany (Brandenburg, Prussia), Bohemia, and even Russia, as well as their military potential and mutual relations, including active military-political alliances undergoing significant changes over the last millennium. Several periods can be distinguished in this respect:

1. the years 1348–1742, from the Peace of Namysłów and the Peace of Wrocław, that is, from the period when Silesia formally belonged to the Kingdom of Bohemia.
2. the years 1742–1918, from the Peace of Wrocław with Austria and the incorporation of Silesia into Prussia until the end of the First World War. With interludes in 1793 (Second Partition of Poland) and in 1807 (Treaty of Tilsit) and 1813 (Saxon-Silesian campaign).
3. the years 1918–1939, the period of Independent Poland, with an interlude in 1919 (Wielkopolska Uprising).
4. 1945 (Battle of Berlin).
5. the years 1945–1991 (Eastern Bloc until the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact)
6. the years 1991 to 1999, from the Warsaw Pact to Poland's accession to the NATO.

Taking into account political-military and geographical-military factors, there are several examples of the use of the Silesian-Lusatian area of operations:

- a) as a base for operations to the north (Pomerania) and south (Bohemia) directions.
- b) as the base of operations to the north and north-east: Greater Poland and Warsaw (1919, 1939).
- c) as a base for operations against Brandenburg/Berlin (1945).
- d) a rear area (1945–1991, and from 1999 until today).

The use of the Silesian-Lusatian area of military operations: the north-south passage.

The only case of making use of a part of Silesia as a base for operations in the north direction was the expedition of the “Sirołci” to the sea. At that time, on 27th May 1433, a strong Hussite corps was concentrated near Głogów, under the

command of Jan Čapek of San, (700 cavalry, 7 thousand infantry and 350 combat vehicles)³². Without any major problems, Władysław Jagiełło's Czech allies moved through Wielkopolska and then reached the New March and Pomerania, raiding the Teutonic Order's dominions with fire and sword. It was, of course, a classic operational raid, part of the Hussite art of warfare. Its essence was to destroy, not to conquer certain objects and territories³³.

A kind of mirror image of the "Sirotni" expedition, i.e. the treatment of the Silesian area as a buffer zone protecting Pomerania from the threat from the south, was the Swedish system for the control of operational directions and the exploitation of the necessary areas (1642–1648). It controlled the "Silesian operational core" and was based on the active defence of a system of fortresses. The nucleus of this system, a kind of defensive citadel, was Głogów. In its distant foreground, Swedish garrisons were located in Jawor, Oława (from 1644), Świdnica, Lwówek Śląski, Żmigród, Namysłów and Syców. Oława and Jawor were counter-fortresses against the Imperial troops garrisoned in Legnica and Brzeg. Świdnica and Lwówek Śląski, in turn, were outposts controlling the far foreground of Głogów and paralyzing the possibility of using the Silesian area as a logistical rear area and base for operations against Pomerania. The Emperor was therefore unable to field a strong, independent Silesian army to break up the Swedish corps and advance on Szczecin. This allowed the Swedish corps to roam freely in Silesia, moving into Moravia and Bohemia³⁴.

This role of Silesia, as an important element in the development of the army against the Bohemian Citadel, was fully revealed during the campaigns of 1744, 1757 and 1866.

³² Bronisław Dziaduch, *Wojny husyckie na Śląsku 1420–1435*, [in:] *Wybrane problemy historii militarnej Śląsk X-XX wieku*, Wrocław 1992, pp. 56–57. „Sierotki” (sirotčí svaz, sirotci, východočeský husitský svaz, sirotčí bratrstvo), radical wing of Hussitism – the Taborites, so called (the “Orphans”) after the death of Jan Žižka (1424).

³³ The specificity and significance of the Hussite raids (*spanilé jízdy*) was discussed by Konrad Ziółkowski, *Z Królestwa Czeskiego nad Bałtyk. Wyprawa wojsk polnych “sierotek” na Nową Marchię i Pomorze Gdańskie na tle pozostałych rejsz*, [in:] *Mare Integrans. Studia nad dziejami wybrzeży Morza Bałtyckiego*, vol. VII “Migracje. Podróże w dziejach”. *Starożytność i średniowiecze, Monografia oparta na Materiałach z VII Międzynarodowej Sesji Naukowej Dziejów Ludów Morza Bałtyckiego, Wolin, 26–28 lipca 2014*, ed. Maciej Franz, Karol Kościelniak, Zbigniew Pilarczyk, Toruń 2015, pp. 334–339.

³⁴ Jerzy Maroń, *Szwedzi w Głogowie. Operacyjna rola Głogowa w czasie wojny trzydziestoletniej*, [in:] *Wielokulturowe dziedzictwo Głogowa – wczoraj i dziś – materiały z konferencji naukowej – Głogów 6.12.2010*, eds. Leszek Lenarczyk *et al.*, Głogów 2010, pp. 219–221.

In the first of them (1744), King Frederick II of Prussia divided his forces into three corps: the royal corps (40 thousand soldiers), the corps of Field Marshal Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Dessau the Younger (16 thousand) and the corps of Field Marshal Curt von Schwerin (16 thousand). The royal corps was to march through Saxony, Prince Leopold with his army was to advance through the Lusatian Gate, and Schwerin from Silesia through the Lubawka Pass. The corps was to be concentrated deep in Bohemia. Frederick II hoped that the surprised Austrians would withdraw their main forces from the West German theatre of operations and allow the French (Frederick II's allies) who were pursuing them to first occupy Bavaria and then enter Bohemia from the west. The Prussian army crossed the border into Saxony on 12th August 1744. The Saxons, surprised, put up no resistance and as fast as on 23rd August the royal corps crossed the border into Bohemia. At the beginning of September, the Prussian corps united at Prague. After a short siege (10–16 September 1744), the Bohemian capital fell into Prussian hands³⁵.

In the second campaign, the king applied this tactic almost unchanged. The army was divided into 4 corps. The corps of Prince Maurice von Anhalt (14,900 infantry, 5,200 cavalry) was spread between Zwickau and Chemnitz. The main royal corps (30,500 infantry and 9,100 cavalry) was concentrated in Saxony, in the area of Dippoldiswalde, Pirna and Dresden. In the Silesian-Lusatian border area the corps of Prince August Wilhelm von Braunschweig – Bevern (16,000 infantry, 4,300 cavalry) was located. Whereas in Silesia, the corps of Field Marshal Kurt Ch. von Schwerin was positioned (25,000 infantry and 9,300 cavalry)³⁶. The essence of this strategy was to make a kind of “concentration on the enemy” and destroy the main imperial forces. The Austrians had 7,700 infantry and 7,300 cavalry in Těšín Silesia and Moravia, 26,000 infantry and 6,600 cavalry in the Karlovy Vary region, 30,400 infantry and 8,700 cavalry between Prague and Budějovice, and 20,400 more infantry and 3,800 cavalry around Plan. The combat power ratio was therefore rather even (118,000 men and 72 guns against 118,000 and 120 heavy guns), but in heavy artillery the Prussians had a considerable advantage.

The corps of Prince August Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Bevern set off through the Lusatian Gate in the direction to Liberec and near this town, on 21st April, it

³⁵ Kisiel, *Strzegom–Dobromierz*, p. 75 ff.

³⁶ *Die Kriege Friedrichs des Grossen*, ed. Grossen Generalstabe, Abteilung für Kriegsgeschichte, vol. 3. *Der Siebenjährige Krieg 1756–1763*, vol. 2, Berlin 1901, p. 58 and Beilagen No. 1–4.

clashed with a part of the Austrian forces. The Prussians prevailed and pushed the Imperial troops back, suffering lower losses (650 against 1,000 killed)³⁷. The further march of the “Lusatian” corps was encouraged by Schwerin’s corps coming from the east. Divided into four columns, it crossed the Lubawka Pass in one day, and on 21st April it was concentrated in Dvůr Králové³⁸, threatening the rear of the Austrian troops facing Prince August Wilhelm’s troops. The further combat route of the Lusatian corps led through Turnovo, to Mnichovo Hradiště, where its encounter with Schwerin’s “Silesian” corps took place on 27th April³⁹. The concentration of all Prussian corps took place on 5th May 1757, during the Prague battle. The forces of the opponents were almost equal: 48,500 Austrian infantry and 12,600 Austrian cavalry against 47,000 Prussian infantry and 17,000 Prussian cavalry⁴⁰. The Prussian army was victorious, despite the loss of 14,000 men (including 401 officers) against 13,000 Austrians killed or taken captive. King Frederick II, however, did not achieve his strategic goal, as the Emperor had strong reserves at his disposal, and consequently his troops defeated the Prussians at Kolin (18 June 1757).

It should be noted that on a different scale, due to the number of troops (230,000–250,000), this combat strategy of incursion into Bohemia was repeated by Helmuth von Moltke in 1866. General Herwarth von Bittenfeld’s Elbe Army was then deployed on the Prussian-Saxon border, and 1st Army troops were concentrated between the Elbe and the Lusatian Neisse, making extensive use of rail transport. In the second wave, the I Guards Corps was deployed in the Cottbus area, which was moved from Zgorzelec to Jelenia Góra, while the V and VI Corps went to Kamienna Góra. These 3rd Prussian armies, spread over the semi-circle of the Sudetes and Ore Mountains, were to enter Bohemia, including: from the north-west the Elbe Army, going along the left bank of the Elbe, in the centre: the 1st Army from Budziszyn and Zgorzelec, and the 2nd Army from Cieplice, Kamienna Góra and Kudowa⁴¹. Under pressure from the Prussian king, who feared for the fate of Upper Silesia, the corps of the 2nd Army was moved further east to the Neisse and Brzeg. On the eve of the start of hostilities, the concentration of the Prussian army was completed,

³⁷ Robert Kisiel, *Praga 1757*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 118 ff.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

³⁹ Rudolf Koser, *Geschichte Friedrichs des Grossen*, Stuttgart–Berlin 1913, vol. 2, p. 473; *Die Kriege Friedrichs des Grossen*, p. 85. The latest monograph, Kisiel, *Praga 1757*.

⁴⁰ *Die Kriege Friedrichs des Grossen*, pp. 122, 127.

⁴¹ *Moltke Militärische Werke*, vol. 2 *Moltkes TaktischStrategische Aufsätze aus dem Jahren 1857 bis 1871*, Berlin 1900, Beilagen 1–13, Gordon B. Craig, *The Battle of Königgratz*, London 1965, p. 50; Alfred Schlieffen, *Cannae*, Fort Leavenworth, 1931, pp. 63 ff.

and the bulk of the forces were developed between the Elbe (including) and the Lusatian Neisse (including). In Lusatia the 1st Army of Prince Frederick Charles of Prussia was grouped. The strongest 2nd Army, of the heir to the throne Prince Friedrich Wilhelm (96 infantry battalions, 5.5 rifle battalions, 94 squadrons and 352 guns), was spread very widely, as far as Nysa and Kłodzko⁴². Helmuth von Moltke assigned the decisive role to the strike of the 1st Army and the Elbe Army. The 1st Army was to strike through the Lusatian Gate, from Budziszyn, Zgorzelec and Lubań. The Elbe Army, after pushing back the Saxon allies of Austria, was to enter Bohemia and unite with divisions of the 1st Army⁴³.

The decision to enter Bohemia was made on 19th June 1866. Special units of 2nd Army were to come from the direction of Lower Silesia, from Jelenia Góra through Cieplice and Szklarska Poręba. However, the original plans of the Field Marshal were not realised and the concentration of the Prussian army did not take place until near Jičín (82 km north-east of Prague). The divisions of the “Silesian” 2nd Army were coming from the Lubawka Pass and from the gorges in the area of Nowa Ruda and Náchod⁴⁴, fighting very hard battles with Austrian forces. The full concentration of the troops of the heir to the throne, Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, took place only at Dvůr Králové, and therefore the decisive battle of Jičín – intended by Moltke – did not take place. The great battle did not take place until 3rd July 1866 at Sadová – Hradec Kralove⁴⁵.

All these campaigns demonstrate the decisive importance of, above all, the “Lusatian Gate” and the much lesser role of the Sudeten Passes, easy to defend and very difficult to cross, which of course questions the suggestion of Gen. B. Balcerowicz about the existence in Lower Silesia of a central operational corridor, as one of the two key ones in the Polish part of Central Europe.

A base for operations in the north, north-east direction

Only once in its history did Silesia play the role of a base of operations in the north (Poznań) and north-east direction, and only once was it planned in that role. The first was John of Luxemburg’s expedition against Wielkopolska in 1331, when the

⁴² *Moltke Militärische Werke*, Beilagen 1–13; Craig, *The Battle of Königgratz*, p. 50.

⁴³ Schlieffen, *Cannae*, p. 86.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 89 ff.

⁴⁵ Werner Rüstow, *Der Krieg von 1866*, Zurich 1866, p. 197 ff.

Bohemian king, having concentrated his forces near Wrocław, moved towards Poznań along the route through Głogów and Kościan⁴⁶. He did not try to conquer Głogów, as he was leading a destructive raid, not an expedition aimed at political change.

Different assumptions underpinned German planning in 1919, as Silesia and Pomerania were to become the base for the operation to conquer Wielkopolska. From 17th January 1919 onwards, the German Government was determined to settle the question of Wielkopolska's affiliation in its favour "by force of arms". In mid-February 1919, the General Headquarters moved from Wilhelmshöhe near Kassel to Kołobrzeg, and Marshal Paul von Hindenburg Benckendorff appealed "to the sons of Germany" to fight to "defend the eastern border". General Wilhelm von Groener, Quartermaster General, after his inspection, assessed that things were not so good in East Prussia, better in West Prussia and "relatively good in Silesia"⁴⁷. However, the negotiations with Marshal Ferdinand Foch, taking place in Trier on 14–16 February 1919, made these plans impossible to achieve. Foch's firm stand forced the German side to accept the demarcation line and extend the armistice⁴⁸. However, it did not inhibit their preparations to launch an offensive, and on 20th March 1919. Armee Oberkommando (AOK) "Nord" gave the order to undertake the operation, codenamed Stellungskrieg. The Northern Group, commanded by Gen. Otto von Below of the XVII. Corps in Gdańsk, was to attack from the Bydgoszcz-Toruń area, in the direction of Gniezno and further to the south. Whereas the Southern Group (AOK "Süd"), under the command of General Kurt von dem Borne, was to advance from Lower Silesia towards Kalisz, Ostrów Wielkopolski and Krotoszyn in the direction of Gniezno, where it was planned to close the ring of encirclement. However, the post-war negotiations with the Entente and the social "unrest" in Germany at the time made this impossible⁴⁹. This did not mean that the German officer corps had completely given up on military resolve. In May 1919, serious forces were concentrated in the "German East", including: 72,000 in Pomerania and 96,000 in Silesia⁵⁰. In mid-June 1919, the army command

⁴⁶ Olejnik, *Obrona polskiej granicy zachodniej*, pp. 194–195.

⁴⁷ Przemysław Hauser, *Niemcy wobec sprawy polskiej. Październik 1918–czerwiec 1919*, Poznań 1984 (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Seria historia, 121), pp. 123, 126, 127.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 136–138.

⁴⁹ Piotr Łossowski, *Miedzy wojną a pokojem. Niemieckie zamysły wojenne na wschodzie w obliczu traktatu wersalskiego marzec-czerwiec 1919 roku*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 54 ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 121. The German concentration was closely watched by Polish intelligence, *ibidem*, pp. 122–123 (sketches). More on the development of Polish units, Tadeusz Grygier, *Polski front przeciwniemiecki w maju 1919 roku*, "Przegląd Zachodni", 4 (1948), 1, pp. 142–157.

positively assessed the chances of recapturing Wielkopolska⁵¹. With the peace of Versailles signed, the confrontation did not take place⁵².

The period of the Weimar Republic seemingly undermined the importance of the German part of Silesia as a base for operations against Poland, but in Lower Silesia a line of fortifications was being developed, the so-called Oder Position, between the mouth of the Kaczawa River and the Oder River⁵³. It should be remembered, however, that fortifications can also play an offensive role, and this was the case here⁵⁴. A different role was played by Silesia in the Polish campaign of 1939, as it became the starting area of the Wehrmacht's key strike force, the 10th Field Army (an armoured corps, two motorized corps and two army corps)⁵⁵. There was no attempt to conquer Wielkopolska and the German attack at the meeting point of the Polish armies "Łódź" and "Kraków" led to the breaking of the Polish defence line already on 2nd September and, as a result, to the collapse of the Polish war plan⁵⁶.

On a base of operations in the direction of Berlin and Dresden (1945)

In this role, Silesia as well as Lower and Upper Lusatia were used in 1945, during the Berlin and Lusatian operations of the 1st Ukrainian Front. The Russians concentrated gigantic forces on the border of Silesia and Lusatia, and their main strike towards Berlin was to be carried out by four field armies (3rd and 5th Guards, 13th and 28th Guards) and two armoured armies (3rd and 4th Guards). From the Dresden side, the 2nd Polish Army (reinforced by the Polish 1st Armoured Corps)

⁵¹ *Statement of the General Headquarters, 17 June 1919, Waldemar Erfurth, Niemiecki Sztab Generalny 1918–1945*, transl. Kazimierz Szarski, Warszawa 2007, p. 47.

⁵² The final decision to abandon operations in the east was taken at a meeting of the military leadership on 19th June 1919, in Weimar. The resistance in the west has been declared impossible, Jarosław Centek, *Hans von Seeckt. Twórca Reichsheer 1866–1936*, Kraków 2006, pp. 209–210.

⁵³ Work on this line was completed in 1938, with an average of 3 cannons per km, Tadeusz Rawski, *Niemieckie umocnienia na ziemiach polskich, w latach 1919–1939*, "Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości", 13 (1966), 1, p. 291; Robert Citino, *Niemcy bronią się przed Polską. Ewolucja taktyki blitzkriegu 1918–1933*, transl. J. Tomczak, Warszawa 2010, p. 290.

⁵⁴ Citino, *Niemcy*, pp. 126–127.

⁵⁵ Damian Tomczyk, *Rejencja opolska jako baza wypadowa Wehrmachtu przeciw Polsce*, [in:] *Śląsk wobec wojny polsko-niemieckiej 1939 r.*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński, Wrocław–Warszawa 1990, pp. 139–150.

⁵⁶ Marian Porwit, *Komentarze do polskich działań obronnych 1939 roku*, vol. 1, *Plany i bitwy graniczne*, Warszawa 1983, p. 281.

as well as the 52nd Field Army and the 1st Corps of the Guards Cavalry were advancing⁵⁷. The line of demarcation with the 1st Belorussian Front passed through Lubij, the smallest town in Upper Lusatia, while the back-up facilities and hospitals were located in the Lower Silesian Forest. Despite the exclusion of the Głogów, Wrocław and Opole railway nodes, thanks to the dense network of railway lines, military supplies flowed without problems to Zielona Góra and Ruszów. Once again, the German rail and road infrastructure worked positively. However, the disregard by the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front the operational significance of the Lusatian Gate, which was completely controlled by the Germans, led to the disaster of the 2nd Polish Army⁵⁸. This gate played a certain role in the last days of the war, as the advance of the 2nd Polish Army and the 52nd Army towards Prague, took on the character of a battle march⁵⁹.

A deep rear area

The new geopolitical configuration after World War II brought about a fundamental change in the perception of the Silesian-Lusatian area of military operations. It ceased to be the base of operations on the east-west axis or in the north-south passage. Instead, it became a rear area for the armies established in Czechoslovakia (south strategic direction) and the GDR (central strategic direction)⁶⁰. In this configuration, Lower Silesia and partly Upper Silesia were treated as an area for the development of a network of hospitals for the troops operating in the west. After Poland's accession to the NATO, this concept has not changed, except that it applies to troops fighting in the east.

In the course of 1000 years of history, geopolitical and military factors have conditioned and determined the concepts for the use of the Silesian-Lusatian area

⁵⁷ Iwan Koniew, *Zapiski dowódcy frontu 1943–1945*, transl. Piotr Marciszyn, Czesław Waluk, Warszawa 1986, pp. 469–470 (General Headquarters Directive of 16th April 1945).

⁵⁸ A horrifying picture of the operations of the 2nd Polish Army was given by Kazimierz Kaczmarek, *W bojach przez Łużyce. Na drezdeńskim kierunku operacyjnym*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 279–393. The Army's losses (killed, missing and wounded) amounted to 20% of the total (just over 20,000). 57% of combat vehicles and 20% of guns were destroyed, *idem*, *Druga Armia Wojska Polskiego*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 569, 580.

⁵⁹ Losses amounted to 70 killed and 17 missing, Kaczmarek, *Druga Armia*, p. 581.

⁶⁰ Franciszek Puchała, *Sekrety Sztabu Generalnego pojaltańskiej Polski*, Warszawa 2011, p. 154 Appendix I.

of military operations. Situated in the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, Silesia was used as a base for north-south, north-east (against Wielkopolska and Poland) and west (in the direction of Berlin and Dresden) operations. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that Silesia became a rear area and hopefully will not be used in this strategic role.

STRESZCZENIE

Terytorium Śląska jako obszar działań wojennych było przedmiotem szczegółowych badań w odniesieniu do średniowiecza, wojny trzydziestoletniej, wojen śląskich XVIII wieku, wojny prusko-austriackiej z 1866 roku i lat 1919–1945. Z wojskowego punktu widzenia problemem jest odrębność i niezgodność podejścia geograficznego, historycznego i militarnego. Dla geografów Śląsk jako odrębny byt nie istnieje, natomiast pod względem militarnego wykorzystania Śląska z powodu warunków geograficznych i sieci drogowej należy wspólnie traktować Śląsk i Łużyce. Ich zalety zostały w pełni ujawnione jako bazy dla operacji na północy (Pomorze Zachodnie i Gdańsk) lub na południu (przeciwko Czechom). W tej formie Śląsk był używany w końcowym okresie wojny trzydziestoletniej i kampanii prusko-austriackiej w latach 1741 i 1744, 1757 i 1866. Kilkakrotnie Śląsk był wykorzystywany jako baza dla działań przeciwko Wielkopolsce (1331 – w rzeczywistości i w 1919 r. – potencjalnie) oraz podczas kampanii polskiej w 1939 r. W 1945 r. teren śląsko-łużycki został wykorzystany w ataku w kierunku Berlina i Drezna (działania 1 Frontu Białoruskiego). Po zmianie konfiguracji geopolitycznej w Europie od 1989 roku i przystąpieniu Polski do NATO, Śląsk stał się jego zapleczem.

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