




National Defense Academy of Latvia
Centre for Security and Strategic Research

The Responses of Major Powers to Military Incidents: Russia's War against Ukraine and the 2022 Missile Incident in Poland



Dr. Sandis Sraders, researcher
Centre for Security and Strategic Research
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This paper examines how major powers have reacted to military incidents as Russia's war against Ukraine led to a missile attack on a NATO member state, Poland. The paper has depicted three cases for investigation and comparison for analysis: the downing of a Russian Sukhoi SU-24 by Turkey in 2015, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia by NATO forces in 1999 and the downing of a Korean Air Lines plane by the Soviet Union in 1983. All three incidents are discussed in relation to the responses of the major powers involved: Turkey, Russia, the Soviet Union, the PRC, and the United States. The paper concludes that major international military powers and alliances are reluctant to directly confront adversaries over military incidents, because the stakes and costs of a direct military response and eventual confrontation are very high. These military incidents can serve as cases to better understand the military incident which stemmed from Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Ukraine was forced to defend itself from Russian aggression in response to the Kremlin's artillery and drone assaults. Two missiles, shot from Ukraine as a part of its air defence against Russian missiles and kamikaze drones aimed at Ukrainian cities, hit Poland. This military incident questions a more concerted response from Poland and NATO member states.

Keywords: *Military incident, Poland, Ukraine's air defence, Russian missile attacks, Kyiv, NATO, United States, Turkey, Russia, the PRC, Yugoslavia, Korean Air Lines 007, Sukhoi Su-24.*

Introduction

Ukraine's defences and civilian population have been targeted by ruthless military activities, including the recent massive Russian missile attacks on Kyiv and other cities across the country since 2014, as a

result of Russia's war against Ukraine. On 15 November 2022, two missiles hit a village in a NATO member state, Poland. Immediately after these strikes, Poland indicated that they were Russian-made and blamed Russia, but the Kremlin denied any involvement. Poland's NATO allies pledged support with an investigation and response.

Immediately after the explosions in Poland, its political leadership called for an emergency meeting of the country's national security and defence council. Furthermore, Polish President Andrzej Duda said it was likely that Poland would invoke NATO's Article 4. As a result, the members of the transatlantic security organisation would convene to discuss the threats to the territorial integrity or security of a member state. The leaders of the G7 met to discuss the situation alongside the G20 meeting in Indonesia. The United States' Department of Defence reaffirmed its strong commitment to NATO security guarantees, and several NATO members (especially from Central and Eastern Europe) reaffirmed their readiness to act in support of Poland's security as a NATO member state. In response to these events, United States President Joe Biden mentioned that the likelihood of the missile hitting Poland's territory having been shot from Russia was very low (Times, 2022).

While Poland, the United States, and NATO allies were engaged in investigating the explosion, Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba stated on social media that the explosions in Poland were not caused by Ukrainian air-defence missiles. Conversely, Russia's foreign ministry called this incident a "deliberate provocation." In the meantime, international experts were contemplating possible responses while the West was indulging in self-deterrence to stop the humanitarian catastrophe caused by Russia's deliberate war against Ukraine, its military, and its civilians. Since the beginning of the war, Ukraine's Western allies, including the United States, have kept the fighting limited to Ukrainian territory. Moreover, the West

(especially such major European powers as Germany and France) has thus far failed to deliver any concerted, regular, and substantial military aid to Ukraine which would allow it to stop and deter Russia, and to shield itself from such missile attacks. This reluctance to provide military support has been in parallel with Russia's threats of possible nuclear or chemical attacks against Ukraine, escalating the brinkmanship by the Kremlin to levels unprecedented since the Cold War.

This paper will investigate how major powers have reacted to such cases in the past to better understand how they would react against such military incidents as above, where Ukrainian missiles defending against Russian attacks led to an explosion and civilian casualties in Poland, a NATO member state. The author of this paper has selected three cases to investigate and draw analogies between previous similar or comparable military incidents.

The first case is the military incident between Turkey (a NATO member) and the Russian Federation (one of the nuclear powers and a UN Security Council member) when the Turkish air force downed Russia's Sukhoi SU-24 in 2015. The second case is the United States' bombing of the Chinese embassy in the then Yugoslavia in 1999 due to a military accident, during a NATO military mission in the Balkans. Both countries are nuclear powers and members of the UN Security Council. The third military incident is the downing of the Korean Air Lines plane by Soviet military aircraft in 1983. This assault by a Soviet Sukhoi Su-15 interceptor during the Cold War on Flight 007 which departed from New York on 31 August, resulted not only in the deaths of all 246 passengers, but also included United States House of Representatives Congressman Larry McDonald from Georgia, as well as passengers of other nationalities.

All three of these military incidents have been discussed broadly internationally and especially in relation to the responses of these major powers, Russia, China, and the United States, all of which are nuclear powers and members of the UN Security Council. All three incidents had a strong international background and led to domestic political pressure for bold responses. The actual response to the particular incident by each of the major powers is discussed in this paper.

Furthermore, these incidents involved at least one NATO power and took place in the framework of broader conflicts; first, when the tensions were high during the Cold War, second, during the Syrian civilian war where Russia and Turkey were in opposition in

terms of their foreign and security policy interests, and, third, during the NATO led Kosovo defence and stabilization campaign where the PRC was very critical of the US led NATO military campaign due to the former's fear of its own domestic liberation movements.

These cases will allow for a better understanding of the Polish-NATO response to the Russian-caused military incident and the resulting exposure of Poland due to the Ukrainian air defence against Moscow's missile campaign on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, and on other cities. The author will now investigate these three incidents and compare each to explain the reactions of the major powers below. This will provide a better understanding of the actions of NATO and Poland.

The Downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007

Even major powers are reluctant to rush in and declare wars. The United States has fought more than 11 wars against its adversaries. Any attempt by any major power such as the United States to launch a war in the name of international interests is very unlikely, even at times of salient military preponderance. Every military campaign reveals a correlation between domestic and international interests. These declarations of war encompassed five separate wars: the war with Great Britain declared in 1812, the war with Mexico declared in 1846 and the war with Spain declared in 1898. Then, during the First World War, the United States declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917. Finally, during World War II, the United States declared war on Japan, Germany, and Italy in 1941, and on Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania in 1942.

This last declaration of war was significant because the United States was initially allied with the Soviet Union, until the end of the three post-war conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. Only after a surge in differences did the United States and the Soviet Union find themselves on opposite sides during the Cold War, which lasted for years. During this time, the United States was engaged in undeclared wars: the Korean War of 1950-1953, the Vietnam War of 1964-1973 and the Gulf War of 1991. The Soviet Union also engaged in proxy conflicts in its battle for communism against the liberal capitalist world. For the United States, except for the Korean War, all of these conflicts received Congressional authorisation on an

official level in some form short of a formal declaration of war (Grimmett, 2010).

During the Cold War, one military incident between the United States and the Soviet Union provided a reason for bolder confrontation. At this time of brinkmanship, both sides were awfully close to military conflict (for example, during the Cuban Missile crisis). While any incident had the potential to lead to a confrontation between the two nuclear military powers, Flight 007 was different. Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was a scheduled passenger flight from New York City to Seoul, South Korea. *En route*, it was shot down on 1 September 1983 by the Soviet air force. All 246 people on board were killed, including the pilot, co-pilot, and crew. Since a United States Congressman was among the passengers, this incident represented an unintentional assault against a United States institution. The plane was shot down after it strayed into Soviet airspace near the Kamchatka Peninsula. It was the deadliest aviation incident involving a Boeing 747 aircraft and the biggest incident of the Cold War. The incident caused an international outcry and sparked an investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The United States responded to the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 by condemning the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the United States government also imposed economic sanctions on the Soviet Union, including a halt to grain shipments, and a recall of its ambassador. The United States Senate passed a resolution condemning the downing and demanded a full account of the incident. The Reagan administration ultimately sought to use the incident to encourage other nations to join the United States in pressuring the Soviets to change their behaviour (Ball, 1993). Moreover, the incident had a major impact on US-Soviet relations as it was seen as a provocation by the Soviet Union and an egregious violation of international law. The United States strongly condemned the act; President Ronald Reagan called the downing "a massacre of innocent people" and Secretary of State George Shultz said it was "a crime against humanity" (Reagan, 1983). The US imposed economic sanctions on the Soviet Union, suspended civil aviation agreements, and withdrew from a nuclear arms treaty.

Moreover, the response from the international community was harsh. Sanctions against the Soviet Union in response to the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 included the freezing of \$1.5 billion of Soviet assets by the United States, the European Economic Community suspending trade and technology agreements, and the United Nations Security

Council condemning the action (Jackson, 2015). The United States also imposed an embargo on all exports to the Soviet Union, and the ICAO moved to suspend Soviet civil aviation rights. In addition, the United States and its allies encouraged other countries to impose bilateral economic sanctions against the Soviet Union.

Of course, even though the plane was downed by the Soviet air force, a Soviet aircraft Su-15, and a Soviet pilot, the Kremlin denied any involvement in the incident until 1991, when it admitted that the plane had been shot down by mistake. The initial investigation concluded that the plane had been shot down by a Soviet fighter jet after entering Soviet airspace and that the pilot of the fighter jet had acted in self-defence. Nevertheless, the evidence showed and experts also concluded that it was easy for any pilot serving in any armed forces to recognise the markings and the silhouette of an aircraft. In fact, Reagan's Cold War rhetoric, various military operations and exercises by the Soviets and the United States, and the deployment of United States missiles to Europe led the Soviet government to perceive the incident as a potential cause for war (Pry, 1999).

Apart from strong sympathy for the victims and their families within the United States, there was widespread outrage at the Soviet Union for shooting down the plane. Many in the United States were also critical of the Reagan administration's response to the incident. In particular, some Americans called for more stringent sanctions against the Soviet Union, while others criticised the administration for not taking stronger action in the wake of the incident. On the domestic level, there was a belief that the United States had not retaliated boldly enough to such an attack, the killing of a US Congressman and other American citizens.

The effect of this incident on domestic opinion allowed for the Reagan administration to enhance the surge in the missile race against the Soviet Union during the last days of the Cold War. From a long-term perspective, this incident even had an effect on nuclear arms treaties, which had been the cornerstone of Cold War relations between the United States and the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 1990). Furthermore, the economic sanctions also made the already dismal economic conditions inside the Soviet Union even worse. As a result, this incident imposed international pressure leading to the Soviet Union disintegrating even sooner. Discontent and protests also gained traction within the Warsaw Pact, as well as the entire Soviet Union.

Turkey's Downing of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24

On 24 November 2015, an incident occurred between Russia and Turkey due to a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 attack aircraft being shot down by Turkish forces near the Syrian-Turkish border. The military incident was viewed as a consequence of Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war, where Russia had been supporting the government of President Bashar al Assad with airstrikes against rebel groups since September 2015. This was a way for President Vladimir Putin to support his "the rest against the West" doctrine, especially since his return as President in 2012, and against the United States in the Middle East and elsewhere. Conversely, the Turkish government had sided with Assad's opponents in the civil war (Korten, 2018).

The incident was seen as a sign of the increased involvement of outside powers in the conflict, and a reminder of the potential for direct confrontation between two major powers in the region, with one being a NATO member state. This military incident was also the result of dangerous brinkmanship and Russia's foreign and security policy, testing the resolve and resilience of the West against military harassment, especially since the beginning of 2014 (Frear, Kulesa and Kerns, 2014).

This form of Russian military brinkmanship and pressure (often without any substantial response from the West, encouraging further such actions) included harassment of reconnaissance planes, close overflights over warships, and Russian 'mock bombing raid' missions. These high-risk incidents could possibly have caused casualties or a direct military confrontation, with a collision narrowly avoided between a civilian airliner and Russian surveillance plane, the abduction of an Estonian intelligence officer, and a large-scale Swedish 'submarine hunt' being just a few examples. There were also regular crossings and violations of the airspace of other countries, such as the Baltic states, which have been NATO members since 2004.

The downing incident occurred after the aircraft violated Turkish airspace (even for just a few seconds), which Russia denied. The incident caused a major rift between the two countries, with the Turkish government accusing Russia of a deliberate provocation and the Russian government denying any wrongdoing and accusing Turkey of aggressive behaviour. It resulted in the death of the pilot, who ejected from the

plane shortly before it was shot down. According to international law, the facts which were established warrant the conclusion that the attack and the downing of the Russian jet could be seen as a disproportionate reaction on the part of the Turkish Government and, therefore, as a violation of the prohibition of the use of military force under Art. 2(4) of the United Nations Charter and under the corresponding customary rule of international law (Henry 2016). Conversely, the Turkish side perceived this act as a violation of its borders, sovereignty, and security.

Russia imposed economic sanctions on Turkey, suspended military cooperation, and banned some Turkish imports in response to the incident (News 2016). The sanctions included restrictions on imports of certain Turkish goods, a ban on charter flights from Russia to Turkey, and the suspension of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens. The Russian government also warned its citizens against travelling to Turkey and recommended that Russian tour operators halt the sale of trips to Turkey. These measures were intended to hurt the Turkish economy, which relies heavily on tourism from Russia.

These policies of sanctions and restrictions on tourism and social cooperation were facilitated by public opinion inside the Russian Federation. Thousands of Russians took to the streets across the country to support the Russian government and voice their outrage at Turkey's actions. Demonstrations were held in Moscow, St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and other cities, with protesters burning Turkish flags and denouncing the Turkish government. Some protesters also called for a boycott of Turkish products and services (Shuster 2015). The incident also led to a rise in anti-Turkish sentiment among the Russian public. Polls conducted shortly after the incident showed that support for the Turkish government had decreased significantly, while the majority of Russians viewed Turkey as an unfriendly nation (Sraders, 2021).

In terms of respect for international law, one could also wonder whether the Russian authorities complied with their obligations under diplomatic law with respect to the treatment of demonstrations in front of the Turkish Embassy in Moscow (Smith 2018). With domestic pressure for action in addition to economic sanctions, the Russian government also took military action, increasing its presence in Syria and launching airstrikes against rebel groups backed by Turkey. Russia also accused Turkey of supporting terrorism and of colluding with the Islamic State (IS), which was strongly denied by the Turkish government.

Despite these tensions, the two countries main-

tained diplomatic relations. In June 2016, when Russian public opinion labelled Turkey as an adversary, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met in St. Petersburg, with the two leaders agreeing to normalise bilateral ties. Sanctions were gradually lifted in the following months, paving the way for improved relations between Russia and Turkey with some experts later labelling this as strategic (Tol, 2018).

The Bombing of China's Embassy in Yugoslavia by the United States

On 7 May 1999, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was bombed by the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The bombing killed three Chinese nationals and injured twenty more. The incident sparked international outrage, with China accusing NATO of deliberately targeting their embassy. The bombing was conducted as part of NATO's Operation Allied Force, a campaign to end the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. This NATO campaign was planned and executed by the United States military.

In the days following the bombing, Chinese state-run newspapers declared the bombing was a deliberate act of aggression, meant to punish China for its opposition to NATO's intervention in Kosovo (Liu, 2015). Indeed, the movement towards the separation of Kosovo, undertaken in pursuit of freedom, was compared by many in the Chinese Politburo and expert community to the freedom-seeking movements inside the PRC itself. In terms of the conflict, the United States accepted responsibility for the bombing from the outset, claiming it was the result of faulty intelligence and outdated maps.

A day later, on 8 May, an official Department of State statement called the bombing a "tragic mistake," and continued, "We wish to express our sincere condolences and remorse to the Chinese people and Government." In a news briefing three days after the accident, Secretary of Defence William Cohen mentioned that the target of the mission was the Yugoslav Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement (Dumbaugh, 2000). An official investigation concluded that the bombing was caused by incorrect GPS coordinates due to outdated maps that had been given to the bomber (Graham and Pearlstein, 1999). Nevertheless, the bombing of the Chinese

Embassy in Belgrade had major international repercussions. The United States and NATO were already facing scrutiny over mounting civilian casualties in a bombing campaign conducted without UN authorization, which was fiercely opposed by China and Russia (Ponniah and Marinkovic, 2019). They had now attacked a symbol of Chinese sovereignty in the heart of the Balkans.

China withdrew its ambassador to the United Nations for a period in protest. It also suspended diplomatic ties with NATO and condemned the bombing as an act of aggression, as did the Russian Federation (NATO n.d.). The Chinese government also demanded a formal apology from the United States and compensation for the victims. The incident caused a significant strain on US-China relations, with the two countries engaging in a series of tit-for-tat measures in the following months. This incident generated a crisis in an already brittle relationship that had been continuing since the new Bush administration came into office, and imposed additional strain on the long-term Sino-American relations, haunted by allegations of US imperialism.

The PRC strongly condemned the NATO bombing of its embassy in Yugoslavia in May 1999, calling it a "barbaric act" and a "gross violation of international law." The Chinese government demanded an immediate apology from NATO, compensation for the damage, and a full investigation into the incident. It also called on the UN Security Council to act to ensure the safety of diplomatic personnel and embassies around the world. In response to the bombing, the PRC recalled its ambassador to Yugoslavia and closed its embassy there. By doing so, the PRC distanced itself from any responsibility over any peace and security settlement in the former Yugoslavia, in favour of the fractious and unpredictable settlement that is in existence today.

On the domestic level, state-run media outlets such as Xinhua News Agency and the People's Daily denounced the attack, calling it an "outrageous act of aggression" and an "unforgivable crime" against the Chinese people. Humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross also expressed their condemnation of the attack, calling for an immediate investigation into the incident (Carr, 2021). The Chinese government demanded a full investigation and an apology from the Yugoslavian government. The incident also resulted in a wave of anti-Western sentiment among Chinese citizens, many of whom felt that the international community was not doing enough to prevent such attacks.

Tens of thousands of protestors demonstrated outside US and other NATO countries' government facilities in Beijing and in five other Chinese cities, throwing rocks, splattering paint, and inflicting other damage. The residence of the United States consul-general in Chengdu was seriously damaged by fire and smoke, and protestors attempted to burn the US consulate in Guangzhou. US diplomatic personnel, including Ambassador James Sasser, were trapped in the United States Embassy for several days. The Chinese government and some Western observers insisted the public sentiment was real (Dumbaugh, 2000).

Conversely, the PRC's refusal to receive US officials or answer their phone calls suggested that the protests against the United States and Western institutions inside the PRC were staged. Psychologically, the Chinese honeymoon with the United States that had been in existence since the start of the post-Mao reform had finally ended. Strategically, China lost any remaining illusion about the United States being a friendly ally and partner for the coming century for the long term, but the Chinese public, for the short term (Mobo, 2000).

In response, the PRC government imposed sanctions against the United States. Firstly, Beijing demanded an official apology and explanation of US and NATO actions, secondly, a "complete and thorough" investigation of the bombing, thirdly, prompt publication of the results of the investigation, and finally, to "severely punish" those found to be responsible (Laris, 1999).

Moreover, the PRC officially called for sanctions and actions to compensate for the incident, as they viewed that neither a proper investigation nor harsh punishment of those responsible had been sufficiently carried out by the US side (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 1999). These calls for international sanctions included restrictions on military and technological exchanges, suspension of high-level contacts, suspension of bilateral military cooperation, and a ban on weapons imports from the United States.

In addition, China also recalled its ambassador to the United States and placed visa restrictions on US citizens visiting China. There were also calls on the international community to condemn the US action, with the Chinese government calling for international sanctions against the United States, such as the suspension of arms sales and diplomatic ties. The Chinese government also called for an apology, an explanation of the incident, and compensation for the families of the victims. In addition, the Chinese

government demanded that the United States refrain from similar acts of aggression in the future and take steps to prevent similar incidents from occurring.

There were agreements reached by the United States and PRC to settle this incident and to offset the practical damage in the short term. The US Government paid \$28 million to the Chinese Government for the property loss and damage (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 1999). Both sides reached an agreement on the question of compensation for Chinese casualties resulting from the US bombing (Laris, 1999). On August 25, 1999, the United States made "a voluntary humanitarian payment" of \$4.5 million to the families of the three killed and to the 27 injured as a result of the bombing (Laris, 1999).

Conclusion

This paper has investigated three military incidents, the downing of a Russian Sukhoi SU-24 by Turkey in 2015, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia by NATO forces in 1999, and the downing of a Korean Air Lines plane by the Soviet Union in 1983. All three are comparable as they involve major international powers, and at least one NATO member state. All three incidents took place during regional wars, but can be viewed as part of the broader confrontation between Western democracies-institutions and their opponents. Furthermore, these incidents serve well for suggesting possible future responses and explain the recent response towards the 2022 military incident in Poland when two rockets caused casualties when they struck a village in a NATO country.

With respect to the US-led mission and incident against the PRC embassy in Belgrade, the case was an example of how the United States' foreign policy and military operations could have a major impact on international relations and that it did cause a great deal of tension between the United States and PRC. The incident showed not only how quickly the actions of one nation can affect the diplomatic relations between two countries, but on a broader scale, how the international community and institutions affected the opposition to NATO's peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia.

There were demands on the domestic level inside the PRC for bolder action, and this was also the case within the Chinese Communist Party. Most of the

demands were satisfied, some with voluntary compensation from the United States following the tragic events. This event took place after the end of the Cold War and bipolar confrontation, but it created even deeper fault lines in the ostensible Sino-American rapprochement. However, some of the demands by the PRC and the Chinese public were not met, such as the punishment of the personnel involved in public and to a harsher degree or a more detailed investigation of the incident to identify the personnel involved. In the end, the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was a tragedy that could have been avoided, and had lasting repercussions on US-China relations.

The downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 by the Soviet Union in 1983 was a major international incident that significantly impacted the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It resulted in economic sanctions and condemnation from the international community, and it ultimately contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, this incident took place during Reagan's term when Cold War tensions were already high. Both countries organised military exercises and installed missile systems at strategic sites, which made the incident a potential trigger for further escalation. The Soviet Union initially denied any fault for this incident, but the international community responded with a series of sanctions against Moscow. The United States public criticised the government for insufficiently retaliating for the killing of the civilians, including a US Congressman, and for violating international norms. Nevertheless, no military response from the United States ever followed to satisfy hawkish domestic public opinion.

The incident between Russia and Turkey in November 2015 was an example of the potential for direct confrontation between two major powers in the region, and a reminder of the consequences of involvement of outside powers in the conflict. It was a result of the dangerous brinkmanship between both Russia and Turkey, which tested the resolve and resilience of the West against military brinkmanship, as well as Russia's willingness to satisfy public calls for harsh retaliation. In the end, both countries managed to restore bilateral ties for strategic cooperation in the long term quite quickly, although the incident left some mistrust between the two countries in the short-term term. Apart from brief public outrage within the Russian Federation and a few short-term

sanctions which affected the Turkish tourism industry, no further escalation took place.

In conclusion, each of these incidents has had a significant impact on the relationship between major powers. For the United States and the Soviet Union (1983), the incident was already the result of ongoing tensions between the two countries, and it created further damage to their relationship. The response of the United States, along with the international community, contributed to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. For the United States and the PRC (1999), the incident affected their relationship and caused distrust in the long-term, even though the short-term demands were mostly met. For Turkey and the Russian Federation (2015), the incident resulted in short-term economic sanctions due to domestic pressures. Nevertheless, both countries eventually resumed normal and even strategic relations. Despite all these incidents leading to hawkish public responses domestically and therefore good grounds for retaliation politically, none of these cases ever led to a military response between these major international powers.

In comparison, the Russian-caused military incident against Poland led to similarly harsh public condemnation on a domestic level, but also regionally, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Even though the incident affected the security of a NATO territory, the responsibility for the investigation and its results were in the hands of Polish security structures. The national security structures acted quickly, but allies such as the United States and the Baltic states strongly supported a response that would not only compensate for the military incident against Poland, but would also address Russia's deliberate and ruthless actions against Ukraine. This was not just because the incident in Poland resulted from Ukraine defending itself against Russia's missile strikes against Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities, but also the historical memory shared especially by Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, Ukraine and Georgia and other former Soviet territories of political and military oppression and their common experience of communist occupation.

Notwithstanding the well rooted regional experience of Russian aggression in Central and Eastern Europe, the possibility of further escalation after military incidents like the recent one in Poland, are very low. All these incidents share two important traits. First, it is easier to dismiss and forget such

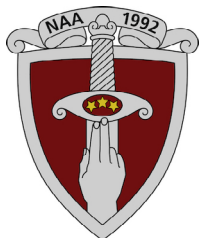
incidents internationally, but harder due to short-term hawkish public opinion on the domestic level. In most cases past or future incidents like these will be portrayed as errors or misperceptions and will consequently be disregarded internationally or forgotten domestically. Of course, the responses to such cases will be defined by broader interests and reasons to escalate or deescalate, especially in the short-term, for example, to test the resolve of an adversary to respond. Nevertheless, even major military powers like the United States seldom rush to declarations of war or bold military responses. Importantly, even though these incidents quickly lose their salience in the short-term, such cases will play a role in the long-term and can define the trajectory of partnerships, especially between major powers.

The lesson Russia must learn is about the resolve

of the West to enhance the defence of Ukraine and to stand against such aggression in the long term. The cause of the military incident in Poland can be seen as part of the West's broader reluctance to provide timely significant, regular, and sufficient military support to Ukraine to defend itself against Russia's aggression. Thus, NATO and the EU, and its member states have left themselves vulnerable to such unintentional missile attacks resulting from the Ukrainian efforts to shield itself against unprovoked Russian aggression. To pre-empt such incidents in the future, there is a need for a mandatory bolder and more concerted response from NATO and/or EU member states to supply Ukraine with military supplies. Otherwise, we cannot exclude similar cases against other transatlantic allies, especially those bordering the Russian Federation.

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Bibliography

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**Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmijas
Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs
Ezermalas iela 8B, Rīga, Latvija, LV-1014
Tālrunis: +371 67076881 Fax: +371 67076888
naa.mil.lv/lv**

**National Defense Academy of Latvia
Centre for Security and Strategic Research
Ezermalas street 8B, Riga, Latvia LV-1014
Phone: +37167076881 Fax: +371 67076888
www.naa.mil.lv/en**