



Weekly Briefing

Poland political briefing:

The dispute over the Russian missile that fell in western Poland

Konrad Rajca


China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

The dispute over the Russian missile that fell in western Poland

Summary

In December 2022, a Russian rocket fell near Bydgoszcz in western Poland. However, the incident caused widespread discussion at the end of April this year when its remains were found in a forest by random walkers. The rocket did not cause damage as it was not armed. News of the found rocket caused tension between the Polish Ministry of National Defence (MON) and the military. The head of the Ministry of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister Mariusz Blaszczak, accused the operational commander of the Polish Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Tomasz Piotrowski, of failing to inform him in December about the missile flying into Polish airspace. The military claims that they informed both Deputy Prime Minister Blaszczak and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki about the incident. The National Security Office (BBN), which reports to President Andrzej Duda, said it saw no grounds for resignation in the military. The case is being investigated by the Polish National Prosecutor's Office and sparked widespread criticism from the Polish opposition against Minister Blaszczak and Prime Minister Morawiecki. The opposition is demanding the resignation of the minister.

Introduction

At the end of April near Bydgoszcz, a passer-by found an unidentified military object. According to investigators, it was a Russian Ch-55 missile. It was probably launched from a Russian aircraft flying over Belarusian territory. It fell near Zamosc near Bydgoszcz on 16 December 2022. The rocket did not cause damage as it was not armed. As the Polish army admits, the Russians carried out a massive shelling of Ukrainian territory at the time. Among other things, they used aircraft stationed in Belarus for the attack. Due to the appearance of a Su-34 multi-role tactical bomber in the vicinity of NATO airspace, North Atlantic Alliance combat aircraft were picked up. In the course of these operations, an object appeared on the radars of Polish services, which flew into Poland from over Belarus.ⁱ

The defence minister accuses General

The finding of the rocket's remains alarmed the public. Both the Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the minister of national defence Mariusz Blaszczak claim that they only found out about the Russian missile at the end of April, when its remains were found. Minister Blaszczak publicly accused the operational commander of the Armed Forces Gen. Tomasz Piotrowski of negligence in informing the relevant authorities about the incident, demanding his resignation. He indicated that any personal or disciplinary decisions would be taken after consultation with the president, as required by Polish law. "The conclusions of the report submitted to the President and the Prime Minister clearly indicate the negligence of the Operational Commander of the Armed Forces and coincide with the results of the Supreme Chamber of Control audit recently submitted to the Ministry of Defence" - wrote the Ministry of Defence in a statement. However, the version presented by the Ministry of Defence and Minister Blaszczak is not believed by many generals, which they say publicly.ⁱⁱ

In response, Gen Piotrowski did not directly address the allegations, but made an 'appeal for reasonableness' and stated that he 'strives every day to live up to his responsibilities'.

- I wanted to make an appeal for reasonableness, for us to weigh our emotions very heavily in the coming days, for us to be reasonable in what we do, for us not to give food to a very ambitious and aggressive opponent, not to allow ourselves to be divided into groups. Because this opponent is just waiting for that," he said.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Presidential Palace also said. "The information currently in the possession of the President of the Republic of Poland does not justify making personnel decisions concerning the top command staff of the Polish Army, and, moreover, the President of the Republic of Poland has not been presented with any proposal in this regard," - the National Security Office said in statment. The topic of tension between the Ministry of Defence and the army was the subject of a meeting of the National Security Council with the participation of, among others, Minister Blaszczak and army commanders.^{iv}

The motion for a vote of no confidence in the minister

The issue of the defence minister's reaction to the Russian missile case was also the subject of a heated discussion in the Polish parliament. Cezary Tomczyk, a member of the

opposition Civic Coalition (KO), accused National Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak of hiding the case of the missile that fell near Bydgoszcz in December. - The minister cannot be a coward, he cannot be the footstool (of President Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of ruling party - KR)," he said to Minister Błaszczak. The MP claimed that the rocket "for five months no one was looking for it and that the president and prime minister did not know about it". The minister, in turn, accused Tomczyk of being "interested in making a political hookup" and criticised the previous government for its decisions on the military.^v

KO MP Czesław Mroczek, in turn, claimed that "a Russian missile hit the middle of our country", while "the Minister of National Defence comes out and cannot say anything about it". He also accused Błaszczak of being "personally responsible for the fact that there is no effective air defence system".

In response, the head of the Ministry of Defence took to the rostrum again. - In my previous speech, I posed the question: is this stupidity on your part or an action in favour of Putin. So I answer: after what I have heard, it is an action in favour of Putin. I will not be a part of these brawls that you are undertaking, that are working for Putin," Minister Błaszczak said.

The opposition parties the Civic Coalition and the Left have prepared a motion of censure against the head of the Ministry of Defence, Mariusz Błaszczak. - For four months he was looking for a missile. In no NATO country has there been such an experience of someone losing a missile, argued the chairman of the Left Party parliamentary club Krzysztof Gawkowski.^{vi} However, it has little chance of success, as the government camp has a majority to defend the minister.

There was also a dispute during the joint meeting of the combined parliamentary defence and special services committees, where the Minister of National Defence Mariusz Błaszczak was due to give an explanation about the remains of the missile that fell near Bydgoszcz, but this did not happen. 'NO to making happenings in the Sejm. KO MPs announced they would file a motion for my resignation before hearing the explanations." - argued in a Twitter post his decision not to submit an explanation to the Defence Minister. The Civic Coalition MP Adam Szłapka reported after the end of the meeting that the minister stated that "there was no time to talk and just got up and left".^{vii}

Media: The Prime Minister and Minister knew about the rocket in December

The discussion was heated up by a June publication of the Rzeczpospolita daily, according to which, on the basis of available materials and information, both Minister Błaszczak and Prime Minister Morawiecki received information about the rocket as early as December 2022.^{viii} The newspaper reported that the head of government and the defence minister's duty service received information about an 'unidentified object' in Polish airspace on 16 December. Prime Minister Morawiecki strongly denied the newspaper's information. Following the publication, opposition parties filed a motion to the prosecutor's office on the possibility that Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki had committed a crime in connection with a failure to fulfil his duties, Civic Coalition MP Cezary Tomczyk reported.^{ix}

The case of the fall of the rocket near Bydgoszcz is currently being investigated by the Polish National Prosecutor's Office.

Conclusion

The case of the Russian missile that crossed Polish airspace and landed near Bydgoszcz has caused tensions in relations between the Polish Ministry of Defence, which exercises civilian control over the military along with the President, and Polish military commanders. The controversy concerns the appropriate response of military and civilian authorities to the incident, as well as communication between them. The incident has been heavily criticised by the Polish opposition, according to whom the Polish authorities tried to conceal knowledge of the missile, which they may have had as early as December, and are now trying (Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak) to shift responsibility for the matter onto military commanders. The government camp, on the other hand, points out that the opposition's actions are the creation of a 'political row' and work in favour of Russian policy. However, the case has weakened the credibility of the minister, who has strong position in government, in the eyes of the public, and may have exposed the inadequacy of Polish communication procedures in a crisis situation. The case is being investigated by the Polish National Prosecutor's Office.

-
- i [RMF Radio https://www.rmf24.pl/raporty/raport-wojna-z-rosja/news-news-rmf-fm-biegli-wstepnie-potwierdzili-ze-pod-bydgoszcza-s,nld,6767139#crp_state=1](https://www.rmf24.pl/raporty/raport-wojna-z-rosja/news-news-rmf-fm-biegli-wstepnie-potwierdzili-ze-pod-bydgoszcza-s,nld,6767139#crp_state=1)
- ii [RMF Radio https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/polska/news-rosyjska-rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-blaszczak-punktuje-zaniedban,nld,6774073#crp_state=1](https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/polska/news-rosyjska-rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-blaszczak-punktuje-zaniedban,nld,6774073#crp_state=1)
- iii [Ibidem](#)
- iv [Onet.pl news Portal https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-bialy-dom-zabiera-glos/4s1texh](https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-bialy-dom-zabiera-glos/4s1texh)
- v [TVN24 TV Portal https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-cezary-tomczyk-i-mariusz-blaszczak-komentuja-w-sejmie-7143648](https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-cezary-tomczyk-i-mariusz-blaszczak-komentuja-w-sejmie-7143648)
- vi [Wprost Weekly Portal https://www.wprost.pl/polityka/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/11237959/wniosek-o-dymisje-blaszczaka-posmiewisko-spoleczno-panstwowe.html](https://www.wprost.pl/polityka/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/11237959/wniosek-o-dymisje-blaszczaka-posmiewisko-spoleczno-panstwowe.html)
- vii [TVN24 TV Portal https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-mariusz-blaszczak-nie-przedstawil-wyjasnien-na-komisji-sejmowej-marek-biernacki-zdezerterowal-nie-wyszedl-7145816](https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-mariusz-blaszczak-nie-przedstawil-wyjasnien-na-komisji-sejmowej-marek-biernacki-zdezerterowal-nie-wyszedl-7145816)
- viii [Rzeczpospolita Daily https://www.rp.pl/wojsko/art38553701-rosyjska-rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-odtworzamy-co-stalo-sie-16-grudnia](https://www.rp.pl/wojsko/art38553701-rosyjska-rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-odtworzamy-co-stalo-sie-16-grudnia)
- ix [TVN24 TV Portal https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-poslowie-ko-zapowiadaja-zawiadomienie-prokuratury-w-sprawie-premiera-7155637](https://tvn24.pl/polska/rakieta-pod-bydgoszcza-poslowie-ko-zapowiadaja-zawiadomienie-prokuratury-w-sprawie-premiera-7155637)