

'This is combat power': US builds on Poland presence with new weapons stock site

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Svetlana Shkolnikova



The new Powidz Army Prepositioned Stocks-2 site in Powidz, Poland, includes 650,000 square feet of warehouse space for battle tanks, armored vehicles and other equipment. (Svetlana Shkolnikova/Stars and Stripes)

POWIDZ, Poland — A group of Polish soldiers recently huddled over a tank recovery vehicle, practicing how to install and remove its generator in preparation for eventually taking over maintenance at NATO's newest weapons stock site.

The five storage and maintenance facilities, collectively called the Powidz Army Prepositioned Stocks-2, are the military alliance's largest infrastructure project in 30 years and will allow the U.S. to outfit an armored brigade in as little as a week, instead of the typical 60 days.

Construction on the \$240 million worksite began before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but the war has added geopolitical heft to the site and heightened its deterrent effect against Russian President Vladimir Putin's territorial ambitions.

“This is combat power,” said John Glasgow, the deputy to the commander for Army Field Support Battalion-Poland. “The strategic importance of this location cannot be understated. It is so forward-located that we’re basically telling Mr. Putin: ‘Don’t come across that border.’ ”

Powidz, a sleepy resort village and home to a Polish air force base, is located about an hour’s drive east of Poznan, the U.S. Army’s first garrison in Poland. Some 8,000 American troops are in the country to bolster NATO’s eastern flank and provide support for the rapidly rearming Polish military.



M1 Abrams tanks lined up at Powidz Army Prepositioned Stocks-2 site in Powidz, Poland, on Oct. 1, 2024. (Svetlana Shkolnikova/Stars and Stripes)

About 400 Polish soldiers are in Powidz to learn how to operate, maintain and supply battle tanks, armored combat vehicles and other equipment. After about five years, the stock site will be turned over to the Poles to sustain and the U.S. to use.

Durell Johnson, an instructor on the site, said the Polish troops are quick studies. A group of 25 Polish service members completed nine weeks of intensive maintenance training on M1 Abrams tanks late last month with a pass rate of 96%.

Polish Lt. Col. Przemel Musiej, the officer in charge of the stock site’s Polish workforce, said last year that the upkeep and maintenance of the equipment was “one of the most important missions for the Polish military right now.”

“This is the first site of its kind in Poland, and for us this complex demonstrates the strong partnership we have with the U.S. and NATO,” he said.

The U.S. has six pre-positioned stock sites in Europe, including in Germany, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. The one in Poland is the most modern in the world, according to the Army.

The last tactical vehicle rolled into Powidz from southwestern Germany last month, and the site is expected to be fully stocked with weapons deliveries by next summer. Convoys carrying the more than 3,000 pieces of military equipment that now fill the site have sometimes drawn unwanted attention.

Glasgow said there were reports of Russians taking photos of the transport, and a drone hovered above the stock site last month, prompting the Polish air force to send up a jet to investigate. The drone was never found.

“Bad guys are always looking,” he said.

Powidz is the logistical hub for U.S. forces in Poland and its new stock site is a game-changer for deployments, said Maj. Andrew Cool, the support operations officer for the 405th Army Field Support Brigade’s Poland Battalion.

“I’ve seen equipment take two months to get from the States to here,” he said. “So this reduces it drastically. Basically, you just deal with personnel movements, which is easy.”



Polish troops learn how to maintain tank recovery vehicles at Powidz Army Prepositioned Stocks-2 in Powidz, Poland, on Oct. 1, 2024. (Svetlana Shkolnikova/Stars and Stripes)

About 1,500 service members live in Powidz on rotational deployments. Last month, the 405th Army Field Support Brigade's Poland Battalion unfurled its unit colors, marking its official assumption of command and solidifying the growing partnership between the U.S., NATO and Poland.

"Bringing this battalion here to this location says that America stands beside Poland, stands beside Europe to defend freedom, to defend liberty, to defend lives where we see that we are needed," Brig. Gen. John Hinson, commander of U.S. Army Sustainment Command, said during the uncasing ceremony.

The stock site, which includes 650,000 square feet of humidity-controlled warehouse space, is part of a growing U.S. military footprint in Poland. An air defense base designed to intercept ballistic missiles opened this summer in Redzikowo, a village in northern Poland, and construction work on other sites is set to stretch into the next decade.

Michal Baranowski, a Warsaw-based European security expert at the German Marshall Fund think tank, said the U.S. will keep investing in Poland and sending its troops there as long as Russia remains a threat.

"It's unimaginable for them to leave before the security situation on the eastern flank changes," he said. "Until Russia becomes a country that wants to live within its borders, Poland will be on the front."

The American presence in Poland is largely rotational, but signs of permanence — the headquarters for V Corps in Poznan and the new missile defense site — are emerging.

"The U.S. is not necessarily advertising this hugely. No one is talking about this very openly, that 'Oh, the U.S. and therefore NATO is permanently based in Poland,'" Baranowski said. "But the fact is Redzikowo is a permanent base. It's literally dug in, and the V Corps is permanent and the rest of the presence is persistent."

Back in Powidz, American service members are living in somewhat austere conditions, sheltering in old-school green military tents that are well past their life cycle, said Franklin Marquez, the deputy garrison manager for the Powidz military community.



Congressional and U.S. Embassy staff delegation members move through one of the storage warehouses at the Powidz Army Prepositioned Stocks-2 site in Powidz, Poland, Sept. 5, 2024. (U.S. Army)

The tents will be replaced by containerized housing units in the next six to 18 months, and efforts are underway to build up other Polish locations for U.S. troops. But it will be a long time before Poland becomes “the new Germany,” Marquez said.

“I think that would eventually be the end state,” he said. “But right now, we’re just not there yet.”

None of the hallmarks and support services of a permanent deployment, such as schools, child care centers and medical facilities for military families, are in place in Poland. And there is no bandwidth to provide them, at least for now, Marquez said.

The Poles have pushed for American boots on the ground over a wider expanse, particularly in the east of the country, which borders Ukraine, Lithuania, the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and Russian ally Belarus. But that is unlikely with war raging next door, Marquez said.

For now, the focus is on developing the existing installations and improving the quality of life for the service members on them, he said. A community is growing around the U.S. military presence in Powidz — a supermarket went up last year — and similar roots are being planted at other locations throughout Poland.

“What we’re seeing countrywide, especially in the four years I’ve been here, is a vast increase in all the services that the U.S. is providing to support the Polish and the Polish are providing for all U.S. forces here,” Marquez said. “It’s a hand-in-hand relationship where we all work together for a common cause.”