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U.S. Commander Travels to Poland to Discuss Increasing Military Presence

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WARSAW — The commander of U.S. ground forces in Europe arrived in Poland on Thursday for talks on increasing the U.S.' military presence in a country where the Ukraine crisis has increased concerns about former Soviet master Russia.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said in an interview Wednesday that NATO member states were close to agreeing steps to beef up the alliance's military presence in eastern Europe.

The U.S. ambassador to Poland, Stephen Mull, said in Polish on his Twitter account: "Today we are hosting the commander of all U.S. ground forces in Europe, Gen. Campbell, for talks on increasing the U.S. military presence in Poland."

It was not clear whether the visit of commanding general of U.S. Army Europe, Donald M. Campbell, was focused on Poland's military cooperation with NATO or potential bilateral agreements with the U.S.

Poland, the biggest of the former Communist states to join NATO after the end of the Cold War, has been a leading voice in calling for sanctions on Russia and for NATO to shift troops and equipment eastwards to reassure members close to Russia.

At the beginning of the year, there were about 10 U.S. military personnel in Poland helping to train Polish pilots.

This has now risen to about 350 U.S. soldiers, seven helicopters and two Hercules transport aircraft, which are on exercises in Poland, a spokesman for the command of Polish armed forces said. About twelve F-16 fighter jets are due to arrive in the coming days.

NATO's leadership has proposed pre-positioning supplies and equipment at bases in the east, and said one option was to enhance an existing NATO regional headquarters in north-western Poland.

The U.S.-led alliance is expected to decide at a Sept. 4 summit what measures to take.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said this week that he foresaw the summit agreeing on building a stronger regional headquarters in Szczecin in Poland.

"I also foresee pre-positioning of equipment and supplies in order to be able to receive rapid reinforcements if needed," Rasmussen said.

Poland already hosts the command of the third NATO Communications Battalion, stationed in the western city of Bydgoszcz.

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