

Poland Will Do it for Us? Poland Acquires First Strike Capability to Pose Threat to Russia

By [Peter Korzun](#)

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It should be noted that quite often the most interesting arms contracts [escape](#) media attention. That's how it was in 2016. Signing a multi-billion-dollar military aid package between the United States and Israel and the subsequent White House approval for long-awaited fighter sales to the Middle East hit the radar screen.

In late September, the US approved the sales of Boeing fighters worth a total of around \$7 billion to Kuwait and Qatar. First mooted around two years ago, the deals had been held up by the US government due to Israeli concerns and in order to smooth the way for nuclear talks with Iran.

The same month, a \$38-billion Israeli [arms package](#) over the next 10 years - the largest of its kind ever - was finalized and signed.

The news about those contacts was a real scoop hitting the headlines of all mainstream media outlets. In late November, the State Department [approved](#) another transaction- the acquisition of 70 [AGM-158B JASSM-ER](#) (extended range) missiles for Poland. The deal undeservedly failed to attract much attention. In fact, it matters much and changes a lot.

The prospects for the acquisition of the extended range version [were discussed](#) as far back as 2014. The US obviously procrastinated due to political considerations. The decision to make the deal go through makes Poland the first state outside the United States to acquire the JASSM-ER.

In 2014, Poland [signed a contract](#) to procure the JASSM AGM-158A version for its F-16C/D jets. The stealth missile is designed to destroy ground targets at distances 370+km (230 mi). As of 2014, the JASSM had also entered service in Australia and Finland.

The 370 km is a great range for the purpose of self-defense. But Poland badly wanted strategic conventional first strike capability. With the JASSM-ER deal reached, its dream has come true. Using a more efficient engine and larger fuel volume in an airframe with the same external dimensions as the JASSM, the JASSM-ER has an operational range of 1000+km (620 mi) - an [effective stealth weapon](#) to knock out key stationary infrastructure sites located deep in Russia's territory. The weapon boasts a penetrating warhead.

With the AGM-158A expected to become fully operational this year, Poland has the aircraft and crews ready to receive the extended range version. The JASSM-ER [has](#) 70% hardware commonality and 95% software commonality with the original AGM-158 JASSM.

Poland has made a significant contribution into NATO's long-range conventional superiority to further complicate the prospects for further progress in the field of [arms control](#). The first strike capability presupposes that Russia would introduce corresponding changes into its military planning. The home bases of Polish F-16 fighters carrying the JASSM-ER will inevitably become potential first strike targets in case of conflict with Russia.

The study of defense contracts signed recently by the United States with other countries shows that potential threats to Russia are growing. For instance, an A/N FPS-132 Block 5 Early Warning Radar (EWR) with an operational range of 5,000 km is [to be installed](#) in Qatar. Described as ordinary arms sales, the deals are kept out of arms control discourse and public spotlight but putting together bits of information allows to compose the whole picture and identify the creeping menaces.

It's not air-to surface first strike capability only. Poland has been implementing the plans to form a 50,000 strong paramilitary territorial defense force, a planned military reserve component of the regular military, since 2015. Roughly, 20,000 guards will join the ranks of the new force in 2017.

Warsaw [plans](#) to increase the size of the army by at least 50 percent in the coming years (from about 95,000 to 150,000), including the creation of three brigades for the territorial defense of the country on the eastern flank.

The military is going through long-term [modernization program](#) with significant equipment acquisitions planned for 2017 through 2022 to involve new air defense systems, ballistic missiles, a new fighter trainer aircraft, combat and transport helicopters, submarines, self-propelled howitzers and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Around 1200 UAVs are to be procured, including at least 1000 with combat capabilities.

According to NATO plans, Poland will host rapid response troops starting this year. Warsaw has demanded a full-scale permanent base of the alliance on its territory.

A NATO Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense site to be positioned in Poland in 2018 and the AGM-158B are two destabilizing factors that undermine security in Europe and obstruct prospects for arms control. Both threats to peace come from Poland.

There are [reasons](#) to believe that 2017 will be the year when tensions in the Old Continent are reduced. The Russian Foreign Ministry [has just confirmed](#) this view in a statement. The BMD and the AGM-158B are the issues to be raised if Russia and NATO launch arms control talks as some leading European nations [have suggested](#) recently. But Poland seems to be marching out of step. The JASSM-ER deal is a highly provocative step towards Russia undermining the security of Europe and positioning Poland at the frontline of the arms race.

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Articles by: **Peter Korzun**

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