

LITHUANIA AND ITS WAR POTENTIAL IN THE LITERARY ACTIVITIES OF LEON MITKIEWICZ, THE FIRST POLISH MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN KAUNAS

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ABSTRACT

On 17 March 1938, Warsaw delivered an ultimatum to Kaunas. After the 18 years of non-existent official diplomatic relations with Poland due to the occupation of Vilnius in 1920, Lithuania was forced to renew them. The acceptance of the ultimatum in Lithuania heavily influenced the prestige of the authoritarian regime, but opened a new stage in relations between Lithuania and Poland on the eve of the Second World War. In addition to the envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Lithuania Franciszek Charwat, Poland appointed Leon Mitkiewicz (1896–1972) as its military attaché to the diplomatic mission in Kaunas. Having scrupulously documented his life and service, Mitkiewicz observed Lithuania both before and after his appointment. He also conducted numerous political-military analyses, trying to assess the direction of international and geopolitical events. The article gives an overview of Mitkiewicz's notes on Polish-Lithuanian relations, and Lithuania and its war potential both before and after the 1938 ultimatum.

KEY WORDS: Lithuanian-Polish relations, war potential, Lithuanian armed forces.

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ANOTACIJA

1938 m. kovo 17 d. Varšuva paskelbė ultimatumą Kaunui. Dėl Vilniaus okupacijos nutraukusi su Lenkija oficialius diplomatinius santykius 1920 m., Lietuva buvo priversta juos atnaujinti. Ultimatumo priėmimas Lietuvoje smarkiai kirto per autoritarinio režimo prestižą, bet atvėrė naują Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykių Antrojo pasaulinio karo išvakarėse etapą. Be nepaprastojo pasiuntinio ir įgaliotojo ministro Lietuvai Franciszeko Charwato, į diplomatinę atstovybę Kaune Lenkija paskyrė karo atašė Leoną Mitkiewiczį (1896–1972). Skrupulingai dokumentavęs savo gyvenimo ir tarnybos įvykius, L. Mitkiewiczius stebėjo Lietuvą tiek iki jo paskyrimo, tiek ir po jo. Jis paliko daugybę politinių ir karinių analizių, kuriose bandė įvertinti tarptautinių ir geopolitinių įvykių tendencijas. Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiami L. Mitkiewicziaus užrašai apie Lenkijos ir Lietuvos santykius, Lietuvą ir jos potencialą kariauti tiek prieš ultimatumo paskelbimą 1938 m., tiek po jo.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai, valstybės potencialas kariauti, Lietuvos kariuomenė.

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In public speaking and in literature, even literature devoted to research, and in Internet discussions, people identify war potential (war capability) with military potential (military strength). They are not aware that they are making a fundamental mistake, because these terms mean different things. The term war potential has a much broader meaning than military potential. In the art of war, the term war potential means all the material and moral capabilities of a state (or coalition of states), which can be used to achieve the aims of war, whereas military potential is understood to be general capabilities in terms of conducting a military conflict of a state (or coalition of states), which have a direct impact on the outcome of the war. The dimension of military potential is determined by population factors, i.e. the number and skills of the armed forces in times of peace, and the level of reserves and material: supplies of military equipment and material-technical provisions, and elements of the military infrastructure.¹

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This article describes the views on interwar Lithuania and its war potential of the Polish officer Leon Mitkiewicz-Żółtek, an open-minded man with great intellectual qualities, a brilliant memory for people and situations, and a talent for unbiased, mostly favourable, descriptions of people he met officially or in private. His literary activity, although of great importance, is not very well known, even in Poland. He was the author of numerous scientific and popular-science articles,² as well as comprehensive works concerning the history of the armed forces of the Second Polish Republic and the Polish armed forces in the west between 1939 and 1945.³ His 'adventure' with writing began in the interwar period, when he published articles in *Bellona*, a leading scientific general military periodical established in 1918, and in 'Cavalry Review' (*Przegląd Kawaleryjski*), a monthly devoted to cavalry issues, published between 1924 and 1939. At the same time, he published a historic-military study entitled 'The Winter Battle of the Masurian Lakes, 6-12 February 1915',⁴ and a textbook for cavalry cadets entitled 'Tactics. Lectures at the Cavalry Training Centre'.⁵

¹ For more information see STANKIEWICZ, Waław. *Ekonomika wojenna*. Warszawa, 1981, passim; GOŁĄB, Zdzisław. *Wojna a system obronny państwa*. Warszawa, 1984, passim; PROEKTOR, Danił. *Siła militarna we współczesnym świecie*. Warszawa, 1987, passim.

² Among others, MITKIEWICZ, Leon. 2 Pułk Szwoleżerów. *Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1959, t. II, nr. 15; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Powstanie Warszawskie (z mojego notatnika w Waszyngtonie). *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1962, nr. 1, s. 95–156; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Przedwrześniowe wojsko polskie w krzywym zwierciadle. *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1965, nr. 8, s. 227–230; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Smutne post-factum. *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1968, nr. 13, s. 221–225; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Działania Grupy Operacyjnej Kawalerii gen. Romana Abrahama. *Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1969, t. VII, nr. 56; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Placówka „Star”. *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1970, nr. 17, s. 173–193; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Likwidacja Polskiej Misji Wojskowej w USA w 1945 roku. *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1972, nr. 21, s. 169–180; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. Szarża 18 P. Uł. pod Krojantami. *Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1973, t. IX, nr. 70.

³ The most well-known are: MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Kawaleria samodzielna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w wojnie 1939*. Toronto, 1964; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Z gen. Sikorskim na obczyźnie (fragmenty wspomnień)*. Paryż, 1968; MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *W Najwyższym Sztapie Zachodnich Aliantów 1943–1945*. Londyn, 1971.

⁴ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Bitwa zimowa na Mazurach (6-21.II.1915)* (Studia z Wojny Światowej 1914–1918, t. 7). Warszawa, 1936.

⁵ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Taktyka: wykłady w Centrum Wyszczolenia Kawalerii*. T. 1–3. Grudziądz, 1927–1929.

The works based on his memoirs are of particularly high value. First-person accounts, diaries, testimonies and memoirs, have always had their followers, even fierce devotees. Their popularity comes from the fact that they constitute very attractive, inspirational material for historians, politicians, screenwriters, authors of radio and television programmes and publicists. Not only do memoirs broaden our knowledge of past times, but they also introduce the reader to the atmosphere and the ambience of a past era. The value of such literature increases if the narrator is one of the main figures in the events being described, when he stands right at the centre of events. This kind of literary activity becomes a real pearl when the author of the story is a perspicacious observer, taking a factual and unbiased look at the world and the people around him, and possessing brilliant storytelling skills. Leon Mitkiewicz was certainly such a person.

In 1938, Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz was appointed Polish military attaché in Lithuania. The article will show how this appointment changed the Polish officer's views of the neighbouring country, and how he described Lithuania and its war potential both before and after March 1938.

Biographical sketch

Leon Mitkiewicz was an outstanding line and staff officer in the Polish army, a cavalryman, and a well-educated person who spoke five foreign languages (Russian, French, German, English and Lithuanian). He was born on 20 February 1896 in Zambrów, the Łomża governorate of Russia's Privislinsky Krai (formally non-existent Congress Poland). After leaving high school in Białystok (Hrodna governorate), he received a commission in the Russian army, and in May 1915 he went to the Cavalry School in Yelizavetgrad (Kherson governorate, now Kropyvnytskyi). After finishing his training, he was assigned to the 4th Regiment of Mariupol Hussars, stationed at the time in Võru (Werro), governorate of Liflandia. The regiment was part of the 4th Cavalry division fighting the German army in the Baltic governorates.

Influenced by news concerning the formation of Polish national units in Russia, he went to Minsk in mid-November 1917, where the staff of the 1st Polish Corps under General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki was stationed. Due to the surplus of officers, he was not appointed to the cavalry regiment. As a result, he decided to join a partisan unit under Lieutenant Ignacy Golec. After the disbanding of General Dowbor-Muśnicki's corps by the Germans in May 1918, he set off to visit his parents in Białystok. At the beginning of November 1918, he joined the Polish army. After briefly being trained in the Officer School by the Infantry Cadet School in Warsaw, he was assigned to the General

Staff. However, on 15 January 1919, he was sent to Rava-Ruska in Galicia (now western Ukraine) as a liaison officer for the general staff to the 'Bug' operational group under General Jan Romer fighting against the Ukrainians. In the next few months, he was operational officer and chief of staff of this operational group, later in a group under Colonel Leon Berbecki, and from April 1919 under Colonel Henryk Minkiewicz. In July 1919, Mitkiewicz became the first staff officer of the 2nd Legions Infantry Division, and in March 1920 he became interim chief of staff of this division.

He remained in the army after the war with Soviet Russia. In March 1921, he was made chief of staff of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, initially stationed in Kalisz, and after a few months he was relocated to Nyasvizh (Nieśwież) beside the Soviet border. From mid-December 1921, he was chief of staff of the 4th Cavalry Brigade in Suwałki, and between 1923 and 1924 he worked in the Bureau of the Close Council of War in Warsaw. In mid-1924, he started studying at the Military High School in Warsaw. After graduating in 1925, with the rank of certified major, he became a lecturer in tactics at the Central Cavalry School in Grudziądz. After operational internships as deputy commander of a regiment in the 2nd Grochów Uhlan Regiment named after General Dwernicki in Suwałki, and later in the 7th Lublin Uhlan Regiment named after General Kazimierz Sosnkowski in Mińsk Mazowiecki, already with the rank of certified lieutenant colonel, in the autumn of 1930 he was moved to the Military High School in the position of lecturer on general tactics. From April 1932 to November 1935, he commanded the 2nd Rokitna Cheveau-léger Regiment stationed in Starogard in Pomerania.⁶ In January 1935, he was promoted to certified colonel, and in autumn 1935 he took up the position of first staff officer with the inspector of the army, Major General Leon Berbecki.

In March 1938, the general inspector of the armed forces, Marshall Edward Rydz-Śmigły, appointed Colonel Mitkiewicz first Polish military attaché in Lithuania, with which diplomatic relations had just been established. As it turned out, he was also to be the last before the Second World War. In October 1939, after Polish-Lithuanian diplomatic relations were broken off, Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz arrived in Paris, where he became a close associate of the prime minister and commander-in-chief, General Władysław Sikorski. He later held the following positions: chief of the Military Mission in London, chief of the Second Department commander-in-chief's general staff, and deputy chief of the commander-in-chief's general staff. In June 1942, he was made deputy commander of the 1st Armoured Division, and in February 1943 General Sikorski nominated him as his representative in the combined chiefs of staff in Washington, and at the same time deputy chief of the commander-in-chief's general staff in the USA. He occupied this post until August 1945, until the Allies withdrew their recognition of the Polish government-in-exile. On 5 August 1945,

⁶ The time of commanding the regiment was described in his memories MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *W pułku szwoleżerów rokitniańskich 1932–1935*. Oprac. Waldemar REZMER. Toruń, 2014.

he started to liquidate the Polish Mission by the combined chiefs of staff. Having executed this task, he applied for permanent leave from active service. He did not return to his homeland: he remained in the USA with his wife Stefania. They received American citizenship in 1951. Then he started his cooperation with Radio Free Europe which lasted more than ten years.

From 1961, Leon Mitkiewicz wrote only 'for himself', because of the inner need to leave to his descendants testimonies of the events he had participated in and people he had met. He made use of handwritten notes from his diary from his service in the army, first in the Russian army, then from 1917 in the First Polish Corps under General Józef Dowbor-Musnicki in Russia, and then in the interwar Polish army. When he became Polish military attaché in Lithuania in the spring of 1938, he took his notes with him. He kept writing them in Kaunas, noting the most significant political-military events, mentioning people he had met, and recording his conversations with them. His notes were very meticulous and detailed. He also conducted numerous political-military analyses, trying to determine the direction of international and geopolitical events. In the first place, which is obvious, was Lithuania and its war potential.

An observer of Polish-Lithuanian relations

Some information about Lithuania's war potential can be found in Mitkiewicz's writings that cover his pre-1938 activities. However, they focus mainly on Lithuania in general, and Polish-Lithuanian relations. What I mean here is, first of all, his multi-volume memoirs under the common title 'In the Polish Armed Forces' (*W wojsku polskim*). This was supposed to be the most important memoir by Leon Mitkiewicz, in which he wanted to present his participation in the fight for independence and for the borders of the Second Polish Republic, and after hostilities ended in the autumn of 1920, his service in various posts in the Polish armed forces. The first volume, which covers the years 1917 to 1921, was published in London four years after his death.⁷ For unknown reasons, the text was significantly reduced from the typescript kept in the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London. In order to make up for this, the volume was printed again in 2015 in Toruń.⁸

There are few passages in this volume about Lithuania and its war potential. The author usually repeats already-known arguments concerning geopolitical issues, e.g., claims that Piłsudski's political concepts were not clearly thought out, especially concerning Belarus. It seems that Piłsudski imagined it together with Lithuania, as the

⁷ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *W wojsku polskim 1917–1921* (Biblioteka Polska. Seria Czerwona, t. 78). London, 1976.

⁸ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *W wojsku polskim 1917–1938*. T. 1: *W wojsku polskim 1917–1921*. Oprac. Waldemar REZMER. Toruń, 2015.

old Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In terms of Ukraine (Rus), Piłsudski's views were more crystallised, and the agreement with ataman Petlura is proof of that.⁹ He writes quite extensively about the events from October 1920 that led to the capture of Vilnius (Wilno) by forces under General Lucjan Żeligowski. He even devotes a separate subchapter to them entitled 'Armistice. General Żeligowski's "rebellion".' His opinions are very interesting, because at that time he was the chief of staff in the 2nd Legions Infantry Division fighting against Soviet forces in the area, on Belarusian soil. He writes:

during our stay in Maladzyechna, the news fell, like a bomb, that General Lucjan Żeligowski, and his operational group, two Lithuanian-Belarusian infantry divisions¹⁰ and a cavalry brigade, 'rebelled', and without orders from Marshal Piłsudski, marched towards Vilnius, which at the time was in Lithuanian hands. Żeligowski took control of it and created Central Lithuania [...] General Żeligowski was acting on clear orders from Marshal Piłsudski, of course. Broadly and loudly announced in newspapers for international and our own consumption, Żeligowski's 'rebellion' was clearly fiction. General Żeligowski, an old and obedient soldier, would never have executed a 'rebellion', especially political, causing serious international confusion. At the end of October 1920, Poland, or rather its government, is currently a hot subject in all foreign newspapers. Journalists and columnists in all countries in Europe and America are showing their indignation. They have recognised Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania. They are unable to understand why not federation with Lithuania with the capital in Vilnius, which is due to them in line with their historical rights.¹¹

His notes concerning Vilnius and its citizens, are also interesting:

I did not have time to see Vilnius, because the train to Minsk was to leave at 9 am. From my cab, I noticed that there are a lot of citizens of the Judaic faith, totally different to the Jews from Rava-Ruska. They do not wear ritual clothing at all. I also heard them talk. They speak mainly Russian. I learned that they are called Litvaks. There are much more Polish people in Vilnius than Lithuanians, but most Vilnius citizens are just Litvaks. Before the Great War, Vilnius used to be a huge Russian garrison, and the headquarters of the military district and the Russian administrative authorities. All this has disappeared, including most of the extraneous Russian population. Nevertheless, the nature of the city of Vilnius has remained Polish, pure Polish, despite more than a century of Russian occupation. It is true that Wilno-Vilnius is the capital of Lithuania, or rather of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and that the Lithuanians in Kaunas have a substantial historical claim to it as their capital. Gediminas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, founded Vilnius; there is even a hill with the ruins of his castle. From the 15th, and more exactly the 16th century, Polishness, the influence of Polish culture, Polish science, Polish customs, the Polish language, and nobleman's culture had an impact on previously purely Lithuanian Vilnius. People speaking Lithuanian can currently only be found in remote villages in the Vilnius area, primarily in Švenčionys. The rest of the Lithuanians, the urban intelligentsia, only speak the Polish language. The class of landowners, all noblemen without exception, feel Polish, or at least citizens of the Republic of Poland, who were born in Lithuania.¹²

⁹ Ibid., s. 180–181.

¹⁰ In the 'rebelled' forces under Gen. Żeligowski there was only one Lithuanian-Belarusian Division.

¹¹ MITKIEWICZ, L. *W wojsku polskim 1917–1938*. T. 1, s. 303–304.

¹² Ibid., s. 185–186.

In 2017, the second volume of Mitkiewicz's memoirs, from the period between 1921 and 1930, was published.¹³ He does not write much in it about Lithuania and its war potential. Actually, he mentions Polish military exercises only once, in which the possibility of offensive Lithuanian action to recapture the Suwałki area are taken into account. In the event of such an offensive, units of the 4th Cavalry Brigade (1st Krechowce Uhlan Regiment, 2nd Grochow Uhlan Regiment, 3rd Mazovia Cheveau-Léger Regiment, 4th Horse Artillery Squadron), with their headquarters in Suwałki, were to resist. Captain Leon Mitkiewicz used to be the brigade's chief of staff.

The last practice in our exercise consisted of the operation of a cavalry brigade, red, and in this case Lithuanian, from Sejny for a strike-rally on Suwałki. The entire brigade was to participate in this practice. I managed to convince Colonel Ślaski¹⁴ that Lt Colonel W. Jasiewicz,¹⁵ instead of Lt Colonel Podhorski,¹⁶ should take command of the brigade. The Polish side, blue, was represented by the 41st Infantry Regiment, with a squadron of field artillery, stationed in Suwałki: its task was to defend Suwałki. The regiment brought two battalions with artillery forward on the hills a few kilometres from Suwałki, and kept one battalion in reserve. Colonel Jasiewicz had difficult terrain in front of him: an open space, with no forest, additionally crossed by hills that gave a brilliant view of Sejny.

The solution to the task to capture Suwałki by surprise was performed by Lt Colonel Jasiewicz: one squadron of the 3rd Cheveau-Léger Regiment and one battery from the squadron of horse artillery distracted the infantry in front of Suwałki, and he, with the remaining forces of the brigade, the 1st and 2nd Uhlan Regiments, the rest of the 3rd Cheveau-Léger Regiment, and the 4th Horse Artillery Squadron, marched quickly north, almost along the Lithuanian border, and unexpectedly approached Suwałki from the direction of Calvary.¹⁷

From April 1932 to November 1935, Mitkiewicz commanded the 2nd Rokitna Cheveau-Léger Regiment stationed in Starogard in Pomerania. He describes this period particularly thoroughly in his memoirs.¹⁸ In many extracts he presents his opinions concerning the course of political-military events in the world and in Europe, and Polish military endeavours, and describes military and civil personnel that he had met while commanding the regiment. He also mentions Lithuania.

On 2 January 1934, he wrote:

In foreign affairs, Poland has achieved great successes: a significant improvement in relations with the USSR,¹⁹ almost removing any concerns about the eastern borders, and a big ease in tension in relations with Germany. [...] There is only one cloud on the political horizon that has not dispersed: it is Lithuania. We are still in a state of non-combatant war with

¹³ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *W wojsku polskim 1917–1938. T. 2: W wojsku polskim 1921–1930*. Oprac. Waldemar REZMER. Toruń, 2017.

¹⁴ Colonel Eugeniusz Ślaski was the commander of the 4th Cavalry Brigade.

¹⁵ Lt Colonel Wincenty Jasiewicz commanded 2nd Grochow Uhlan Regiment.

¹⁶ Lt Colonel Zygmunt Podhorski commanded 1st Krechowce Uhlan Regiment.

¹⁷ MITKIEWICZ, L. *W wojsku polskim 1917–1938. T. 2, s. 72*.

¹⁸ MITKIEWICZ, L. *W pułku szwoleżerów...*

¹⁹ He means a non-aggression treaty signed in Moscow on 25 July 1932 between Poland and USSR. The treaty was signed for three years and on 5 May 1934 it was extended till 31 December 1945.

this nation. A paradox of History? What has happened to the Union? What has happened to all those centuries of cooperation between the crown and Lithuania? Unfortunately, these are the results of the past policy of Poland's noblemen. Lithuanian folk, primarily countrymen, do not trust Polish lords.²⁰

In his book, Mitkiewicz attempts to show his relations with Lithuania and Piłsudski. He writes: 'There is common blood between the houses of Piłsudski and Mitkiewicz. Marshal Piłsudski's mother was from the house of Billewicz, and a man from the house of Billewicz in the 17th century married a lady from the house of Mitkiewicz.'²¹

In 1969, Leon Mitkiewicz finished another work, 'Lithuania and Poland. Mutual Relations to 1939', which was supposed to be published in London by Veritas publishers. However, the book was not published, because the author did not agree with the suggestion to totally 'make over the book', and decided to withdraw it. However, the typescript has been preserved. Reading it enables us to learn Mitkiewicz's views on the centuries of Polish-Lithuanian relations. However, the author pays particular attention to the geopolitical and military location of Lithuania and Poland in the mid-war period. He claims that:

The most important and most difficult part for Poland in establishing relations with Lithuania was played by the following reasons: 1. Lithuania's proximity to Soviet Russia; 2. the majority of Vilnius residents being Polish people.

Polish consent to the borders demanded by Lithuania, and Polish recognition of the agreement signed on 12 July 1920 by Lithuania with Soviet Russia, would place Lithuania in the direct neighbourhood of Soviet Russia, and, what is more, would prevent direct contact between Poland and Latvia and Estonia, two Baltic States that Poland strives to maintain proper relations with. Lithuania's direct neighbourhood with Soviet Russia on one hand, and its indirect neighbourhood with the German Reich on the other, would certainly mean that at the first opportunity there could be conditions that Lithuania, either voluntarily or under pressure, would follow the path of full collaboration, and would submit to one of its mighty neighbours: in this case, it is more likely that this would come from the Soviet Russian side.

Over the course of half a century, and at least between 1917 and 1923, there was no sound from the new Lithuania about collaborating with one of its neighbours, Poland. That is the main reason why Marshal Piłsudski decided to create Central Lithuania, in the hope that the Lithuanians would agree to federation, would agree to the Polish forces under General Żeligowski taking control of Vilnius, and that is why the new Lithuania was hermetically separated from Soviet Russia by the Vilnius corridor.

In the strategic consideration of the Polish staff of that time, this situation would protect Poland more effectively from an attack by Soviet Russia than if Vilnius were only in the hands of the new Lithuania.²²

²⁰ MITKIEWICZ, L. *W pułku szwoleżerów...*, s. 146.

²¹ *Ibid.*, s. 218.

²² MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Litwa i Polska. Wzajemne stosunki do roku 1939. Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. Gen. W. Sikorskiego w Londynie* (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London), sygn. Kol. 50/13, s. 158.

Leon Mitkiewicz argues with Józef Beck, the Polish minister of foreign affairs, about the need to take radical steps towards Lithuania for the normalisation of relations. In a book written in 1940 in Romania, Józef Beck claims that he was realising what Marshal Piłsudski outlined.²³ Mitkiewicz negates these claims, and writes:

I have grounds to argue that it was a justification of the Polish government's policy, and as a matter of fact his own, towards Lithuania, and particularly his note of ultimatum to the Lithuanian government. The situation in Polish-Lithuanian relations had to be calmly tolerated for as long as Marshal Piłsudski lived. He never agreed in principle to any other, radical, solution to the Lithuanian issue, leaving those things to the passage of time. [...] Immediately after Marshal Piłsudski's death, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs started a new political course towards Lithuania, contrary to Piłsudski's instructions.²⁴

An observer of Lithuania's war potential in Kaunas

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'Memories from Kaunas' (*Wspomnienia kowieńskie*) was printed in 1968. The publication can be regarded as the final part of a multi-volume autobiographical work under the general title 'In the Polish Armed Forces'. There is no doubt that 'Memories from Kaunas' contains the largest amount of data on Lithuania's war potential. That is because, as an official holding the position of Polish military attaché, the author was obliged to observe carefully the situation in Lithuania, especially in its armed forces, and in the areas that had the strongest impact on its war potential. General Stasys Raštikis, the commander of the Lithuanian army in 1934–1940, recognised the great informative value of Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz's notes, and wrote:

Colonel Mitkiewicz's book is very interesting. A lot of material about Lithuania and the Lithuanian armed forces can be found in it. The author is a great Polish patriot, but he also has a very positive attitude and feeling towards Lithuania. Possessing very great intelligence, he often writes very cautiously about very delicate political issues, and always attempts to avoid offending anyone or saying anything negative about anyone. Wherever possible, he does not spare beautiful words and compliments. His statements about the Lithuanian army and its commanders are very beautiful.²⁵

Before leaving for Kaunas, Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz received an instruction from the head of Unit II of the general staff, Certified Colonel Tadeusz Pełczyński, according to which his task was 'to establish good relations with senior members of the Lithuanian armed forces'.²⁶ The aim was to convince the Lithuanians, senior commanders and officers, that Poland would not 'gladly watch any Lithuanian trouble concerning its

²³ See BECK, Józef. *Ostatni raport*. Warszawa, 1987.

²⁴ MITKIEWICZ, L. *Litwa i Polska...*, s. 165–166.

²⁵ RAŠTIKIS, Stasys. [Atsiminimai]. T. 3: *Ivykiai ir žmonės. Iš mano užrašų*. Chicago, 1972, p. 493.

²⁶ MITKIEWICZ, Leon. *Wspomnienia kowieńskie* (Biblioteka Polska. Seria Czerwona, t. 71). London, 1968 [subsequent issues: Warszawa-Wrocław, 1989; Warszawa, 1990], s. 28.

independence, or threaten its sovereignty; on the contrary, we fully respect the independence and sovereignty of Lithuania, we wish to have the best relations, and that only depending on Poland guarantees independence for Lithuania.²⁷ Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz was to accomplish this task, avoiding excessive impositions and haste. First, he was tasked with attempting to minimise the negative impression among Lithuanians, and in the Lithuanian armed forces especially, caused by the Polish ultimatum. He also learned that 'issues of military intelligence are totally beyond [his] duties, he will have nothing to do with it; on the contrary, he is to give no suspicion that, as a member of the Polish staff, he is interested in the Lithuanian armed forces.'²⁸

Brigadier General Waław Stachiewicz, the head of the Polish general staff, ordered him to pay attention to real relations between Lithuania, the Soviet Union and Germany. He emphasised the strategic importance of Lithuanian territory and Lithuania's position in the event of a military conflict between Poland and the Soviet Union or Germany. In both cases, Lithuania would be on the northern flank of Polish defence.²⁹

In preparing for his mission, Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz familiarised himself with the material about the Lithuanian armed forces that was gathered in the general staff:

I read this with great interest. The opinion was very severe, perhaps a little unfair to the Lithuanians, and, as I personally found out later on, totally unjust. [...] I didn't find the characteristics of senior Lithuanian officers in 'Dossier Litwa'. There were only brief, deficient personal notes about a few Lithuanian generals. So, a general, until recently a colonel, Stasys Raštikis, is 42 years old (born in 1896), comes from the Russian army, graduated from the Officer Academy of Infantry in Tyflis in 1917, and in 1932 the High Military Academy in Berlin, currently (since 1934) is commander-in-chief in Lithuania. The opinion of him: reserved, works a lot on his own, wants an accord with Poland, practical sense. General Černius, 40 years old (born in 1898), graduated from L'École Supérieure de la Guerre in 1932 in Paris, and is currently head of the commander-in-chief's staff; opinion: intelligent, a theorist. As for other generals and colonels, only a few, I found mostly empty pages in the files, e.g. the commander of the cavalry in Lithuania is General Tallat-Kelpša, certainly a Tartar from Lithuania. Numerous surnames in the Lithuanian army sound Polish, but distorted under the influence of the Lithuanian language. The personnel of the Lithuanian armed forces in (March) 1938 was: 2,000 officers and 22,000 NCOs and lower-ranking soldiers, and, including the Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga (Lithuanian Riflemen's Union), approximately 50,000.³⁰

Colonel Mitkiewicz was able to confirm the information about Lithuania and its armed forces obtained in the general staff only after his arrival in Kaunas, which was on 22 April 1938. For the first time, he saw 'the Lithuanian armed forces en masse on a parade on 8 September 1938 in Kaunas'.³¹ The parade was held at an airfield

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, s. 29.

²⁹ Ibid., s. 33.

³⁰ Ibid., s. 52–53.

³¹ Ibid., s. 120.

near Kaunas. According to Mitkiewicz's estimates, around 5,000 soldiers took part in it. The marching Lithuanian infantry resembled:

Russian infantry from 1914–1917. A Lithuanian infantryman has none of the elegance and grave looks of a British or German infantryman. Our Polish infantry look better in this regard. The weapons seemed similar to Polish ones: just as with us, too few anti-tank weapons, only two Oerlikon cannons for a battalion of infantry.³²

There were a few motorised units in the parade: anti-aircraft artillery, anti-aircraft machine-guns, pontoons, a few companies of tanks and armoured cars, and around 100 aircraft in the air. In Certified Colonel Mitkiewicz's opinion, General Raštikis did this deliberately: 'He wanted to show the military attachés of foreign countries, as well as his own press and the audience, that the Lithuanian armed forces are familiar with modern military technology, and strive to keep up with technological developments.'³³ According to Mitkiewicz, the Lithuanian artillery was well presented: 'Three horse-drawn squadrons: two squadrons equipped with French 75mm cannons, and one squadron equipped with light 100mm howitzers. The appearance and presentation of Lithuanian artillerymen were better than the infantry, although the harness was not fitted.'³⁴ The Lithuanian cavalry was rated the highest by Colonel Mitkiewicz. It filed past in full force: the 1st Hussar Regiment named after a great hetman of Lithuania Duke Jonas Radvila, the 2nd Uhlan Regiment named after Grand Duchess Birutė of Lithuania, and the 3rd 'Iron Wolf' Dragoon Regiment, two squadrons of the Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga (Lithuanian Riflemen's Union), and a squadron of horse-drawn artillery.

Regiments of Lithuanian cavalry had at least 500 to 600 horses each: four squadrons and a squadron of machine-guns on carts per regiment. The uniforms of the Lithuanian cavalry are very colourful [...]. The horses are good, maybe a bit too heavy, but well cared for, selected according to the colours of coats in regiments and squadrons [...]. The Lithuanian cavalry are not only well trained, but undoubtedly maintain the traditional spirit of cavalry, have great vigour, and the hearts of true cavalrymen.³⁵

From 13 to 15 September 1938, Certified Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz, together with 12 other military attachés accredited in Lithuania, participated in the autumn exercises of the Lithuanian army. The exercises were held in the Panevėžys district, on both banks of the River Nevėžis, south of Panevėžys. 'Around two infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade, and mainly motorised support units participated in them.'³⁶ The Polish attaché concluded that these exercises were not interesting. There were political reasons for this fact, because in Kaunas the intention was not to give 'the autumn

³² Ibid., s. 122.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., s. 123.

³⁵ Ibid., s. 123–124.

³⁶ Ibid., s. 130.

exercises any operational character that could indicate that the Lithuanian armed forces are working out practical warfare against any neighbouring countries: Germany, Poland and Russia'.³⁷

What I have witnessed during the exercises allows me to state that, in terms of tactics, the Lithuanian infantry can march fast and persevere for long distances, it knows its work in the field, and understands defence issues, and that this infantry is good, persistent and tough, albeit maybe a bit slow in offensive actions. The infantryman is very tough, physically strong and disciplined. However, just as in Poland, the senior commanders do not know how to command on a divisional level, not to mention higher operational levels. All the counter-attacks during these exercises were unsuccessful: they were simply badly managed. In attacking, the Lithuanian infantry has no offensive spirit: it is slow and sluggish. The Lithuanian artillery is very weak in terms of equipment (old French 75mm cannons), but it seems to be well trained. The air defence was good, due to motorised units of artillery and machine-guns. I saw almost no Lithuanian cavalry at all during these exercises. It seemed to me the soldiers did not show an interest in the exercises. They fulfilled their duties quite pathetically and indifferently, not being interested in the course of the battle. [...] In general, it seemed to me that the Lithuanian armed forces, somehow well trained, and undoubtedly with their own esprit de corps, were not ready, either operationally or tactically, to undertake defensive operations, not to mention offensive actions, against neighbouring countries. It is simply a single, adequately trained corps, but without sources of supplies, which could only play a role as part of an allied army.³⁸

Mitkiewicz noticed with great satisfaction the improvement in Polish-Lithuanian political and military relations. The first clear symbol of this was the visit by Brigadier General Stasys Raštikis, the Lithuanian commander-in-chief, to Poland in May 1939, and later the exchange of officers-trainees that occurred in July 1939. Certified colonels, Eugeniusz Chrzanowski and Albin Habina, arrived in Lithuania. The first did an internship in the 2nd Uhlan Regiment named after Grand Duchess Birutė of Lithuania, stationed in Alytus, the second in the 9th Infantry Regiment named after Duke Vytenis of Lithuania, in Marijampolė. In Poland, four Lithuanian officers did internships in regiments stationed in Pomerania and Greater Poland: two in infantry units, one in the cavalry, and one in the artillery. The positive results of the initial series of internships encouraged both parties to proceed to an exchange of officers. Subsequent groups were due to arrive in the autumn of 1939. According to Leon Mitkiewicz's notes, General Raštikis was especially interested in sending Lithuanian officers to Polish training centres, to the Centre for Infantry Training in Rembertów, and the Centre for Cavalry Training in Grudziądz.

At the end of August, after numerous discussions with the military leaders of Lithuania (e.g. with the minister for national defence Brigadier General Kazys Musteikis, the commander-in-chief Brigadier General Stasys Raštikis, and the chief of

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., s. 131.

Unit II of the general staff Colonel General Kostantinas Dulksnys), Certified Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz informed the chief of the Polish general staff that in the event of a war between Poland and the Third Reich, Lithuania would remain neutral, and that 'Lithuania does not intend to take advantage of Poland's difficult situation and occupy Vilnius.'³⁹

After leaving Kaunas on 10 October 1939, Certified Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz had no opportunity to contact the Lithuanian armed forces directly, and it was also more difficult for him to assess the overall Lithuanian war potential. After a few months, there was not even any need to do so, because in mid-1940 the independent Republic of Lithuania and its army ceased to exist.

Conclusions

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An analysis of Leon Mitkiewicz's writing brings us to the conclusion that until the spring of 1938, he was not interested in the Lithuanian war potential and the Lithuanian armed forces. At that time, he was focused on military issues concerning the Soviet Union and Germany. This related to his duties as a senior officer in the Polish armed forces. The situation changed on 26 March 1938, when he was appointed Polish military attaché in Kaunas. Then he established both personal and official relationships with the commanders of the Lithuanian army, and had an opportunity to observe personally the Lithuanian armed forces during manoeuvres, exercises and parades. He was often at the centre of political-military events. As he was a perspicacious and intelligent observer, watching people and the world around him, and writing brilliantly, his evaluations of Lithuania and its military capabilities are unbiased and usually accurate.

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³⁹ Ibid., s. 278.

LIETUVA IR JOS POTENCIALAS KARIAUTI PIRMOJO LENKIJOS KARO ATAŠĖ KAUNE
LEONO MITKIEWICZIAUS RAŠTUOSE

Waldemar Rezmer

Santrauka

Valstybės potencialas kariauti nėra tas pat, kas ginkluotųjų pajėgų potencialas, nors šiedu dalykai dažnai painiojami. Pirmasis terminas gerokai platesnis, karybos mene reiškiantis visą valstybės (ar valstybių koalicijos) materialinį ir dvasinį pajėgumą, kuris gali būti panaudotas siekiant karinių tikslų. Antrasis terminas savo ruožtu reiškia karinę galią, kurią lemia karinių pajėgų skaičius ir taikos metu įgyti įgūdžiai, rezervo ir materialinio aprūpinimo lygis. Šiame straipsnyje referuojama, kaip į Lietuvą ir jos potencialą kariauti tarpukariu žiūrėjo Lenkijos karininkas Leonas Mitkiewiczus-Żółtekas, plačių pažiūrų žmogus, turėjęs didelį intelektualinį pajėgumą, puikią atmintį ir talentą nešališkai (dažniausiai palankiai) apibūdinti žmones, su kuriais jam teko susitikti per gyvenimą.

Gimęs 1896 m. tuo metu formaliai jau nebeegzistavusioje kongresinėje Lenkijoje (Pavyslio krašte), tarnybą jis pradėjo Rusijos kariuomenėje per Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą, o 1918 m. lapkričio pradžioje įsiliejo į Lenkijos kariuomenę, kurioje liko ir po karo su Tarybų Rusija. Dar tarnybos Rusijos kariuomenėje metu jis pradėjo rašyti dienoraštį, o tarpukariu publikavo tekstų karine tematika Lenkijos kariniuose žurnaluose, tebetarnaudamas aukšto rango karininku įvairiuose Lenkijos pulkuose. Rašė ir po to, kai 1938 m. kovo 26 d. Lenkijos kariuomenės generalinis inspektorius maršalas Edwardas Rydz-Śmigły paskyrė jį – anuomet pulkininką – pirmuoju ir, kaip vėliau paaiškėjo, paskutiniu Lenkijos karo atašė Lietuvoje. Kilus Antrajam pasauliniam karui, nuo 1939 m. spalio mėn. L. Mitkiewiczus tęsė veiklą Paryžiuje, vėliau JAV, kurios pilietybę gavo 1951 m.

Daugiausia informacijos apie Lietuvą ir jos potencialą kariauti yra pateikiama L. Mitkiewicziaus daugiatomyje „Lenkijos kariuomenėje“ (*W wojsku polskim*), kurį pradėta publikuoti Londone, praėjus ketveriems metams po autoriaus mirties. Tiesa, pirmasis tomas, apėmęs laikotarpį nuo 1917 iki 1921 m., dėl nežinomų priežasčių buvo sutrumpintas ir visos apimties pirmąkart paskelbtas tik 2015 m. Torunėje. Šiame tome L. Mitkiewiczus apie Lietuvą pasisako daugiausia vertindamas jos ir Lenkijos santykius, gen. Lucjano Żeligowskio „maištą“, pasakodamas apie Vilnių ir jo gyventojus. Antrajame tome (paskelbtas 2017 m. Torunėje), kuris apima 1921–1930 m., apie Lietuvą ir jos potencialą kariauti duomenų beveik nėra. Čia jis tik retsykiais užsimena apie Lenkijos karines pratybas, kuriose buvo vertinama galimybė, kad Lietuva imsis puolamųjų veiksmų, siekdama atgauti Suvalkų apylinkes. Raštuose, kuriuos L. Mitkiewiczus paliko apie vėlesnį laikotarpį, įskaitant jo atsiminimus „Rokytinės kavalerijos pulke (1932–1935 m.)“ (publikuota Torunėje 2014 m.) ir 1969 m. baigtą rankraštį „Lietuva ir Lenkija. Abipusiai santykiai iki 1939 m.“, autorius daug dėmesio skyrė geopolitinei padėčiai Europoje, Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiams, jų vietai Europoje tarpukariu besiklosčiusioje geopolitinėje ir karinėje sanklodoje.

1968 m. Londone pirmąkart paskelbtuose „Kauno prisiminimuose“ (*Wspomnienia kowieńskie*), paskutinėje jo sumanyto daugiatomyje „Lenkijos kariuomenėje“ dalyje, informacijos apie Lietuvos potencialą kariauti daugiausia. Tai nestebina, mat autorius čia aprašo

savo darbą einant Lenkijos karo atašė Lietuvoje pareigas, o jos įpareigojo jį stebėti padėtį, ypač Lietuvos karines pajėgas ir tas sritis, kurios turėjo didžiausią įtaką Lietuvos potencialui kariauti. Šiuose prisiminimuose L. Mitkiewiczzius vertina Lietuvos kariuomenę po gen. Stasio Raštikio įgyvendintų reformų, aprašo savo akimis paraduose, manevruose ir pratybose matytą jos pasirengimą, t. y. pateikia informaciją, kurią jis galėjo priešpriešinti anksčiau Lenkijos turėtai informacijai apie Lietuvos kariuomenę. Šiame L. Mitkiewiczziaus prisiminimų tome taip pat esama žinių apie Lietuvos ir Lenkijos politinius bei karinius kontaktus.

Iš viso to darytina išvada, kad iki paskyrimo Lenkijos karo atašė į Kauną L. Mitkiewiczzius Lietuva, jos potencialu kariauti ir kariuomene nesidomėjo. Tuo metu jam labiau rūpėjo kariniai dalykai, susiję su Tarybų Sąjunga ir Vokietija. Padėtis pasikeitė 1938 m. jį paskyrus eiti minėtas pareigas. Iki pat Antrojo pasaulinio karo pradžios būdamas politinių ir karinių įvykių centre, jis įžvalgiai, supratingai ir tiksliai stebėjo Lietuvą ir vertino jos potencialą kariauti.