



Polish special forces stand in the port of Umm-Qasr in southern Iraq ([news - web sites](#)) after turning captured Iraqis to U.S. control on March 23, 2003. Poland admitted on March 24 that its elite GROM commando unit had taken part in the U.S.-led attack on Iraq after the soldiers posed for a Reuters news photographer

Poland Admits Iraq Combat Role After News Photos

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By Douglas BusvineWARSAW (Reuters) - Poland admitted on Monday that its elite GROM commando unit had taken part in the U.S.-led attack on Iraq after the soldiers posed for a Reuters news photographer. The Defense Ministry had denied that GROM (Thunder) special forces were involved in combat, but on Monday it confirmed their participation after dailies splashed photographs of the soldiers in the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr, where U.S.-led troops are battling pockets of Iraqi resistance. Defense Minister Jerzy Szmajdzinski refused, however, to divulge details of the troops' role in supporting the main U.S.-British force fighting to oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "We are determined not to comment on secret operations," Szmajdzinski told reporters, saying only that GROM troops were operating "in the coastal region" of Iraq and in Gulf waters. "You don't comment about the theater of operations because that would give away information about our capability...this is secret," he added. GROM is an SAS-style commando unit which has seen recent action in Afghanistan. It is one of the few highly trained units in Poland's armed forces, which are mostly underfunded and still rely on outdated Soviet-era equipment. Poland, a NATO member whose government has supported the tough U.S. line against Baghdad, sent 200 troops to the Gulf in what they originally said was a supporting, non-combat, role. The Reuters photographs showed masked GROM soldiers

taking prisoners, scrawling graffiti on a portrait of Saddam and posing with U.S. Navy Seals holding up a U.S. flag."These photos shouldn't have happened," said Szmajdzinski. "The next time it will definitely be with the Polish flag."Surveys show that most people in this east European country of 38 million do not want Polish troops to take active part in fighting in Iraq, although a majority backs an auxiliary role.Szmajdzinski denied the government had failed to tell the nation that Polish troops would take part in combat."We sent our contingent to take part in military operations, not to be observers -- that was obvious," he said. "Nobody misled anyone."