WARSAW, POLAND (05/27/2011)(readMedia)-- President Barack Obama and twelve Illinois National Guard Soldiers laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw, Poland Friday. The Illinois troops and Polish Soldiers have been training together on responding to a chemical attack since May 19 as part of the crisis management exercise EPIFAKTOR 2011 in Warsaw, Poland.

Capt. Douglas Coop of Jacksonville, the State Partnership Program Director said the Illinois National Guard received the request to support the President's visit on Tuesday and the 12 troops were happy to assist.

"To meet the President and share with him the Illinois National Guard's cooperation with Poland was the icing on the cake of almost two years of hard work," said Coop.

Since 1993 Illinois Army National Guard and Polish force have trained together as part of the State Partnership Program.

Coop presented Obama with an Illinois National Guard State Partnership Program coin and said Obama expressed remorse about the Chicago Bulls playoff loss and thanked them for their service during their brief visit.

"The President took time to shake each of our hands and visit briefly with use, acknowledging that we're all from his home state," said Coop.

The Illinois Soldiers are part of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) and will return from Poland this weekend.

"Who gets to do this?," said Maj. Michael Eiter of Woodstock with the Joint Force Headquarters. "When I joined the guard I never imagined that I'd be part of something called the State Partnership Program and working with Polish counterparts and have a chance to

meet the President."

Illinois and Poland have conducted exercises both in Illinois and Poland for 18 years. Polish forces and Illinois National Guard troops have deployed together to both Iraq and Afghanistan during every Polish rotation into theater.The Soldiers participating in EPIFAKTOR 2011 are from Carol Stream, Chicago, Bismark, Rockford, Granite City, Cottage Hills, Glenarm, Alton, Jacksonville, Chatham and Woodstock.