

**"Poland, 1980-1982: Internal Crisis, International Dimensions"**  
**8-10 November 1997**

"Were the Soviets poised to invade in 1981, or not?"

"We did not wish to invade, but we could have."

"Did the Americans inadvertently signal their acquiescence for the imposition of martial law by General Jaruzelski?"

"Is Jaruzelski a hero or a traitor?"

These and other weighty questions were discussed at an international conference held sixteen years after the imposition of martial law in Poland. Organized in exceptional fashion by the Institute for Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, the National Security Archive at the George Washington University, and the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, the proceedings were held by invitation only outside Warsaw in a conference facility operated by the Central Statistical Office.<sup>1</sup> The decision to close the deliberations to the general public and broadly to the press was meant to facilitate discussion among four broad groups of participants, with a fifth group, the historians and political analysts, interacting as time permitted:

\* the Solidarity group:

Bogdan Borusewicz  
Ryszard Bugaj  
Zbigniew Bujak  
Wieslaw Chrzanowski  
Andrzej Celinski  
Tadeusz Mazowiecki  
Karol Modzelewski  
Janusz Onyszkiewicz  
Andrzej Stelmachowski

\* the Polish Communist group (and their functions on December 13, 1981):

Ambassador Stanislaw Ciosek, Minister for Trade Unions  
General Wojciech Jaruzelski, Prime Minister and First Secretary, Polish United Workers Party  
Stanislaw Kania, former First Secretary, Polish United Workers Party  
Mieczyslaw Rakowski, deputy Prime Minister  
General Florian Siwicki, Vice-Minister of National Defense

\* the Soviet group:

Marshal Viktor Kulikov, Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief  
General Anatoli Gribkov, Warsaw Pact Chief-of-Staff

General Viktor Anoshkin, Adjutant  
Georgi Shachnazarov, functionary of the Central Committee of the  
Communist Party of the Soviet Union

\* the American group:

Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor in the Carter Administration  
Richard Pipes, Senior Advisor for Russian and East European Affairs in the National  
Security Council of the Reagan Administration  
Stephen Larrabee, National Security Council  
General William Odom, Chief of the National Foreign Intelligence Board  
Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, retired Director of Radio Free Europe's Polish Section

\*the political analysts:

Some were asked to make presentations and did so. others came prepared with texts but were unable to present them. A much larger number of scholars came prepared to participate in the discussion. The entire group comprised the following: Csaba Bekes, Dieter Bingen, Thomas Blanton, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Matthew Boyse, Malcolm Byrne, Jane Curry, Karen Dawisha, Jerzy Diatlowicki, Derelina Dineva, Ludwik Dorn, Antoni Dudek, Eugeniusz Duraczynski, Jerzy Eisler, Andrzej Friszke, Timothy Garton Ash, Lech Gluchowski, James Hershberg, Jerzy Holzer, Jakub Karpinski, Anthony Kemp-Welch, Peter Kende, Krystyna Kersten, Mark Kramer, Marcin Kula, Pawel Machcewicz, Wojtech Mastny, Gabriel Meretik, Tomasz Mianowicz, John Micgiel, Georges Mink, Valeri Musatov, Christian Ostermann, Andrzej Paczkowski, Krzysztof Persak, Vilem Prečan, Tina Rosenberg, Aleksander Smolar, Eugeniusz Smolar, Nina Smolar, Tim Snyder, Grzegorz Soltysiak, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Dariusz Stola, Włodzimierz Suleja, Jean-Charles Szurek, Janos Tischler, Teresa Toranska, Oldrich Tuma, Andrzej Walicki, Jan de Weydenthal, Andrzej Werblan, Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski, Andrzej Zakrzewski, Marian Zgorniak, and Vladimir Zubok.

Nearly 14 pounds of materials were distributed to each participant, containing documents from American, Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Russian archives, and presentations by selected participants. The conference was divided into five panels, each of which began with a discussion of the so-called blank spots, questions of interpretation, and conflicting sources. After these introductory remarks, each session was opened first and foremost to the twenty-two key participants in the events, and then to scholars who provided additional questions and analysis. The eagerness with which the former approached their task meant that there was often too little time for the scholars to join in. The first two panels dealt with the internal dimensions of the Polish crisis, and were chaired by Andrzej Paczkowski with reports by Eugeniusz Duraczynski, Andrzej Friszke, Jerzy Holzer, and Andrzej Werblan. Brief comments were made by Jane Curry, Marian Zgorniak, and Krystyna Kersten; the latter also summed up the discussion with general remarks. The last three panels dealt with the international aspects of the Polish crisis. Panel three was chaired by Aleksander Smolar and covered the role of the United States' and the Western Allies. James Hershberg presented a report, and Dieter Bingen, Malcom

Byrne, Tony Kemp-Welch, and Georges Mink commented. The Soviet Union and the Communist countries were the subject of panel four, with opening reports by Valeri Musatov and Mark Kramer, and comments by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Detelina Dineva, Janos Tischler, and Oldrich Tuma. Panel five was devoted to the Polish crisis in East-West relations and was chaired by Vojtech Mastny, with comments by Vladimir Zubok and Valeri Musatov.

At the end of the conference, a public session chaired by Timothy Garton Ash was held in Warsaw at the headquarters of the Academy of Sciences, with extensive press coverage, and an elegant reception at the Royal Castle hosted by Warsaw President Marcin Swiecicki concluded the three-day event.

While the program covered a lot of ground, in fact, the conference participants concentrated on a few points, the major one being: "Were the Soviets poised to invade in 1981, or not?" This key issue permeated the proceedings and gave rise to many an anxious moment. At several points, General Jaruzelski, the author of the Polish crack down, repeated a well-rehearsed statement in which he averred that he was present not to be tried but to be heard, although it often seemed the other way around. The General, and his Politburo supporters at the conference table, claimed that he chose the lesser of two evils, avoiding a much greater tragedy that would have befallen Poland had the Soviets invaded as they had in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. His erstwhile Soviet colleagues denied that Soviet troops were poised to invade Poland in 1981 and that Jaruzelski therefore acted on his own initiative. Yet Czech, East German and American documents indicate that in December 1980, such a threat was narrowly avoided, thanks to the reaction of the US and other governments that warned the Kremlin of serious consequences should there be an invasion. The US learned of the planned invasion by 15 Soviet, two Czechoslovak, and one East German division from a Polish spy, Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski (document 14 in the compendium of declassified documents), from other intelligence sources and from satellite pictures.<sup>2</sup> The Russian group's response to various indications of an invasion in autumn 1980 was weak. For example, Karen Dawisha asked why 15 Soviet divisional commanders had been recalled from distant and strategically important commands to the Polish border; Kulikov responded that these were routine transfers as occur in every army. When General Gribkov claimed that these movements were merely staff exercises that might involve a few thousand soldiers and a few hundred vehicles, he was asked why Warsaw Pact scout units were in Poland examining invasion routes. Stanislaw Kania claimed that the Polish Communist leaders were given a now-lost detailed map indicating the invasion routes at the beginning of December 1980. And General Jaruzelski pointed out that the East German division was kept on alert status until April 1982, while the Czechoslovak divisions were not stepped down until July 1982. The establishment of a Polish Commission in August 1980, led by the ultraconservative Suslov was a further factor that indicated the Soviet Union was prepared to take whatever steps were necessary to keep strategically important Poland in the Bloc; a similar Afghan commission headed by Suslov had been established prior to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

The invasion of Poland on December 8, 1980, by several hundred thousand Soviet, East German, and Czechoslovak soldiers under cover of "Soyuz 80" maneuvers would have upset the strategic balance in Europe; that was why Washington warned the Kremlin via the hot line in early December of the gravest consequences that such troop movements would incur. In a particularly interesting exchange on the activities of Colonel Kuklinski, whom Kulikov termed a traitor, Zbigniew Brzezinski looked coldly at Marshal Kulikov and told him that the Americans

knew where the command bunkers were, and that that within three hours of a Soviet attack the Marshal would have been dead.

The documents presented at the conference, including notes taken by General Anoshkin, indicate that the Soviets gave up the notion of invading Poland in December 1980, and instead pressured their Polish comrades to make order with an increasingly radical and hostile Solidarity movement. They did so through a combination of economic, political, and military pressure. Marshal Kulikov was a frequent visitor in Poland in 1981, and during 22 visits that year, he urged (having seen Kulikov perform perhaps bullied is a more appropriate term) the Poles to speed up their preparations to deal with Solidarity and occasionally massed troops on the border to urge them on. At Jachranka, Jaruzelski's Soviet colleagues denied that they had pressured him, and both Kulikov and Gribkov claimed that Jaruzelski was told that there would be no "fraternal assistance" as in the case of Czechoslovakia some thirteen years earlier. And the documents presented bear this out. While most observers found Kulikov's denial of bringing pressure to bear laughable, Jaruzelski was visibly affected and quietly asked Marshal Kulikov after almost all participants had left the room "You know what you said to me back then. How could you do this to me in front of the Americans?"

Despite his assertion that he was not on trial at Jachranka, Jaruzelski behaved as though he were, trembling (whether from illness or nerves), offering an abundance of commentary throughout the three days that nevertheless evaded many direct questions. The General doubtless feared that the Commission on Constitutional Oversight in a parliament now dominated by a Solidarity coalition might reopen the investigation into those very same issues that had been examined at length and ultimately dropped during the tenure of the previous Parliament, which had been dominated by post-Communists. In fact the current Chairman of the Commission, Solidarity MP Jerzy Gwizdz indicated that his parliamentary club would do exactly that.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, this observer was struck by the gentility of the exchange between the leaders of Solidarity and their old nemeses who were present at the conference. After all, martial law lasted 589 days, during which over 100 people were killed, thousands arrested and/or interned; more thousands were dismissed from their places of work and many emigrated. All of the Solidarity leaders present had been interned and/or arrested and their families faced repression; they now faced their former adversaries with dignity and kindness and without the recriminations that have so often been a hallmark of Polish politics after 1989. Marshal Kulikov's demeanor was no less memorable, although for different reasons. At one point, provoked by a remark or frustrated by the treatment that his now-dissolved super-power was receiving at the hands of the participants, he bellowed: "The USSR was, is, and will be." No comment was more reflective of the atmosphere in 1980-82, and no one followed up with a question or remark.

A clearer and more nuanced view of the decision-making process among the various elites emerged during the meeting, the proceedings of which are being transcribed and will eventually be published. Many articles have already appeared based on the documents and views presented at the conference, and books will surely follow. What impact did the conference have on the public at large?

A public opinion survey was undertaken by the Center for the Study of Public Opinion (CBOS) on a random sample of 1000 adults in Poland at the end of November-beginning of December 1997. Sixteen years after the imposition of martial law, nearly 60 percent agreed that a worse fate could have befallen their country. When asked whether General Jaruzelski had acted properly in imposing martial law on December 13, 1981, 54 percent agreed (as was the case

the year before), while 31 percent disagreed. 43 percent agreed with the assertion that martial law was forced upon Poland as a result of external pressures and threats, and when asked to be more precise 86 percent of those pointed to the East, indicating the USSR, Moscow, the Soviets, or the Bolsheviks. 30 percent of those believed that the decision was taken independently by the then-Polish authorities.<sup>4</sup>

More than half of those adults polled agree generally, it seems, with General Jaruzelski's assessment of martial law. It must be all the more difficult for the General to reconcile that view with the tremendous reception accorded Ryszard Kuklinski in May 1998 upon his first visit to Poland since he fled a few weeks before the General imposed martial law. And while no citizens' committee has yet raised a monument to the General, the citizens of Krakow are erecting a likeness of Kuklinski to honor his role during Poland's "times of trouble."<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the controversy surrounding Jaruzelski continues.

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<sup>1</sup> The photos that follow were taken by this author and depict in order: the organizers at the opening of the conference; Zbigniew Bujak addressing the Russian delegation; the closing panel; and Stanislaw Kania during a coffee break.

<sup>2</sup> The US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that Soviet military planners estimated that 30 divisions might need to be employed, and as many as 45 if Polish armed forces "reacted." Document 11, reproduced below.

<sup>3</sup> "Jaruzelski przed Trybunałem Stanu?" *Nowy Dziennik*, March 31, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> "Większość uważa, że Jaruzelski postąpił słusznie," *Rzeczpospolita*, December 13, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> "Pierwszy pomnik Kuklinskiego," *Nowy Dziennik*, May 22, 1998.





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2. (U) TITLE: SOVIET ESTIMATES ON POLISH INTERVENTION FORCES (U)
3. (U) DATE OF INFO: 001103

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7. SUMMARY:

SOVIET MILITARY PLANNERS CONSIDER IT WILL REQUIRE 30 SOVIET DIVISIONS TO ADEQUATELY CONTROL POLAND IF THE SITUATION DETERIORATES TO POINT SOVIET MILITARY FORCE IS EMPLOYED. SOME PLANNERS HAVE FORECAST AS HIGH AS 45 DIVISIONS MAY BE NEEDED IF THERE IS ANY REACTION FROM POLISH ARMED FORCES (OSTENSIBLY TO MAKE UP FOR THE 15 POLISH DIVISIONS). ON THE OTHER HAND, SOVIET PLANNERS FORESEE THE NEED FOR ONLY 15 SOVIET DIVISIONS IN POLAND IF SOVIETS ARE "INVITED".

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