

The Geopolitical Spotlight on Poland 1980-81: Pragmatic Efficiency of Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT: Declassified documents show that information regarding the emergence of Solidarity, the reaction of the Warsaw Pact leaders, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski's justification for his proclamation of martial law in Poland as it was presented to public opinion world-wide then and since, had little in common with reality in Warsaw and Moscow in 1980-1981. Not only was Soviet invasion and occupation of Poland never a seriously considered option throughout the 1980s, but the U.S. was fully aware of that. Records also show that Jaruzelski's successor as head of state, Solidarity leader and first democratically elected president Lech Wałęsa, received highly preferential treatment from the communist government, especially under martial law, and lived better than Poles outside the governing elite. This article examines the level of disinformation induced by East and West in equal measure for media consumption and justification of policy in a masterpiece of public diplomacy.

It is an axiomatic fact of realpolitik that public diplomacy carries neither a presumption of truth and accuracy nor of completeness and objectivity. It behooves us never to forget that it is first and foremost an instrument of advocacy, a means to an end. Its purpose lies in the state actor's preference for low-level engagement as opposed to the cost, on various levels, of having to employ means more expensive by multiple criteria.

Among the tools employed, use of information reported by ostensibly independent media to the extent of creating factual disinformation figures prominently. It happened over and over in modern history that the creation of a smokescreen, a distraction, permitted a power player to conduct or justify in its shadow policies that would have been far more difficult to rationalize for public acceptance by other means. It is a strategy the U.S. does – and is still well-advised to – employ in a multitude of confrontations that have not passed the threshold of direct international military engagement.

During the 1980s, a time of substantial economic fortunes in the U.S., it was in the interest of the Reagan administration to maintain at all times the highest justifiable level of pressure on the Soviet Union it had labeled the “Evil Empire.” This was accomplished by maintaining the arms race at a level assured to be unaffordable given the flagging Soviet economy, through aggressive postures labeled as “defensive” such as the forward stationing of Pershing II missiles in Europe, as well as by inciting internal opposition by exploiting the incontestable issue of human rights. The latter was considerably more cost effective to Western governments than training, stationing and equipment of considerable additional military presence would have been – aside from the fact that the expected survival time of any military asset on the ground in the event of the Cold War turning hot would have had to be measured in hours at best and the preparedness of the European allies to accept significant casualty figures was superficially rhetorical at best.

The Human Rights agenda, embodied in the Helsinki process, permitted a complete reversal of this cost structure by causing the Warsaw Pact nations significant risks and expenses from within that, whichever way they chose to respond to it, would not allow them to look good and aside from that

would undermine the level of political control their regimes were necessarily built on. The attractiveness of open societies and free markets provided the background for a chronic discontent¹ that allowed for the cost and sacrifices of opposing the regime to be shifted to domestic payers within the opponent societies—typically the young generation and intellectuals without a vested interest in the limited but not insignificant benefits of the communist system.

Because of the inherent attractiveness of capitalist societies—whose excesses remained considerably more tempered until the early nineties throughout the West by elements of a functioning welfare state despite the ideological opposition of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations—it was sufficient for the West to put pressure on relatively few and comparatively incontestable basic rights: the right to free flow of information and unimpeded access to it, the right to travel (which in many if not most cases implied the reality of defection of the most qualified travelers), and the right to peaceful association in order to participate in the process proclaimed by Marxism as its greatest achievement in the empowerment of the working class.

Poland presented itself as the most attractive proving ground for Western interests because of its strategic location between the Soviet Union to the East, the inherently unstable puppet state of the German Democratic Republic in the West, and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the South that had been the venue of an ugly Soviet crackdown just a little more than a decade earlier. Steeped in anti-Russian enmity following centuries of Russo-Prussian partition and occupation, the loyalty of the Polish armed forces in the event of military confrontation could never be relied on realistically by the Warsaw Pact, to the extent that Soviet garrisons had to be kept as far out of sight of the local population as possible. In Poland, even communists attended mass, and the election of a Polish pope in the second 1978 conclave, along with the failed 1981 assassination plot of the Bulgarian State Security Service acting on behalf of Soviet interests, had created an atmosphere ripe for overt public dissent that, in a population of almost 40 million, could not be suppressed militarily at justifiable expense by the communist regimes.

The non-violent trade union movement *Solidarność* (Solidarity) did basically nothing more than take Marxist dogma at its word with regard to workers' right to self-determination and unionizing. It did so with secure knowledge of the existence and political disposition of a large Polish diaspora in the United States, England, France and Germany including artists and intellectuals of international renown, and of the support of the global Catholic Church.²

This article will show how selective media presentation of facts and arguments concerning an allegedly imminent military crackdown by the Warsaw Pact was used by both the Polish military dictator General Wojciech Jaruzelski and the West, despite their factual knowledge that such an

¹ Therein lay, in significant part, the historical significance of Deng Xiao Ping who, by dismantling after 1978 in all but name the ideological and dogmatic fundamentalism of Mao Zedong and his inner circle, and by reforms essentially introducing capitalism to China under a level of authoritarian central control, succeeded in perpetuating the power of the communist party elite if not of communism itself, for which at that point and after the experiences of forty years of Maoism few in China cared aside from ritualistic lip service and the production of libraries full of apologetic literature and reporting. It is virtually certain that Deng and his advisers had closely examined the reasons for the decline and collapse of the Soviet empire.

² There were widespread rumors that the Vatican bank IOR (Istitute per le opere di religione) had served as a conduit for the covert financing of Solidarity. Lewis, Paul. "Italy's Mysterious Deepening Bank Scandal." *The New York Times* (July 28, 1982) <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/28/world/italy-s-mysterious-deepening-bank-scandal.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed July 26, 2012. See also Salinger, Lawrence M. *Encyclopedia of White-Collar & Corporate Crime*. Thousand Oaks, California and London: Sage Publications (2005).

intervention was not feasible and, if it had been undertaken, would not have been sustainable against world opinion and embargoes, especially that the Soviet Union, aside from its chronic economic failures, was engaged in an extremely costly engagement in Afghanistan at the time. But it behooved both the Jaruzelski regime and the Reagan administration to incite a maximum level of rumors and fearful anticipation of a Soviet intervention in Poland: Jaruzelski was interested in it as a justification for his plan to declare martial law, a measure that could be expected to inaugurate the unstoppable decline of communist power when, not if, it would fail.

This is the only persuasive explanation for the preferential treatment of Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa who was not only not officially detained, but also not deprived of any creature comfort as a “guest of the state” in affluent accommodations that included his large family. Wałęsa’s treatment with kid gloves was Jaruzelski’s hedge against likely future prosecution, as well as an astute act of ostensible avoidance of creating a martyr and incurring an unmanageable uproar in the international media. Records show that, if Jaruzelski committed treason, it was against the Warsaw Pact by taking a course of action he knew would in any scenario of possible outcomes irreparably damage Soviet interests while hedging against his own future historical and legal responsibility. The latter calculation succeeded as admirably as the first: despite multiple indictments, Jaruzelski, whose integrity with regard to personal benefits was uncontested, never was convicted of a crime and managed to retain a measure of respect as a former president of Poland at a critical juncture in the nation’s history. The interests of the Reagan administration do not require further elaboration. With Carter’s national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski still a widely known and highly regarded public figure, and with several U.S. Senators of Polish descent, advocacy for Polish democracy and liberty interests was a foregone conclusion in Washington as it could be counted upon to place an additional heavy burden on the Soviet Union in world public opinion. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, could not afford to publicly dismiss the option of a multilateral military intervention in Poland without in effect abdicating control not only of the country but also of most if not all of its European allies, as would become inevitable in 1989 as a further consequence of Jaruzelski’s two-faced strategy.

However, more than thirty years after the events, the time has surely come to set the record straight with regard to the facts as they are amply evidenced by now declassified archives, and to distinguish historical reality from however useful fiction and half-truths. Its work done, this masterpiece of Western public diplomacy has more than served its purpose and deserves to be viewed in light of the sole appropriate criterion: creating the mosaic of an unvarnished picture.

The boiling social unrest experienced by Poland in the 1980s galvanized by and organized around the Solidarity movement culminated in the imposition of martial law by the government of General Wojciech Jaruzelski on December 13, 1981. While much Polish research has focused on the internal causes and circumstances of this enduringly controversial political move, this paper places the events of 1980-81 within their larger context of East-West relations. Specifically, it investigates the circumstances of the first successful application of the Mikoyan doctrine³ in Soviet foreign policy

³ The term “Mikoyan Doctrine” was introduced by Csaba Békés to describe a policy first promoted by Anastas Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier 1955-1964 under Nikita Khrushchev, around the events of the Hungarian Revolution that would allow future domestic crises of Eastern Bloc countries to be resolved by internal, political means, rather than through direct Soviet military intervention. Békés, Csaba. *Cold War, Détente, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*. Working Paper No. 7. The Cold War as Global Conflict. International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University. New York (2002). <http://www.coldwar.hu/html/en/publications/detente.pdf>. Accessed July 26, 2012. This “hands-off” policy stood in stark contrast with what was later known as the Brezhnev Doctrine,

during that era by seeking a substantiated answer to the question whether a Soviet or Warsaw Pact military intervention had, in fact, ever been a realistic actionable possibility, given not only the internal situation of Poland but also, and more importantly, the entirety of existing and evolving Soviet relations with the United States and Western Europe as exemplified by the Helsinki Process. Credible evidence supporting the specter of a Soviet military invasion of Poland, to the extent declassified today, does not exist and Jaruzelski's claim in numerous testimonies and interviews to that effect must be refuted as a self-serving myth calculated to secure his claim to power until 1989 as well as reasonably civil and lenient treatment by an anticipated non-communist government since 1990.

The Polish Crisis of 1980-81 was unusual in comparison with earlier cases of social unrest in Poland, most notably those of 1956 and 1970, in that it mobilized wide swaths of society: besides workers at numerous factories, it included intellectuals, students and farmers engaging in strikes, demonstrations and in the new and independent trade unions and supporting organizations. This broad appeal of the popular movement centered on Solidarity found reflection in its membership statistics: upon legalization of independent trade unions—which Solidarity initially purported to be—as many as 9 million people joined “S” in a country of then 36 million,⁴ while at the same time communist party membership dwindled rapidly.⁵ Especially worrying to the PZPR⁶ was the ideological support of KSS KOR⁷ for this popular movement, which was suspected of trying to subvert independent trade unions for the purpose of its political goals of reforming the socialist regime and of possibly dismantling it altogether.⁸ Thus, strikes and demonstrations coordinated by Solidarity leaders were clearly perceived by the communist government of Poland not simply as workers' demands for better living standards and working conditions but as a stepping stone for extracting fundamental political reforms.

In view of a crumbling economy, food shortages, raging inflation, and a country paralyzed by frequent general strikes, unrest was spilling onto the Polish streets in form of demonstrations.⁹ In

which asserted the explicit right of the Soviet Union to interfere in the internal affairs of socialist countries when their socialist regime was at risk. It is still being inconclusively debated whether the Brezhnev Doctrine was suspended already around the Polish Crisis, or only later, during Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

⁴ “S” was used as a cryptonym for Solidarity by both communist regime and Solidarity supporters.

⁵ According to Janos Kadar, Polish communist party membership shrunk to about 3.5 million by the end of 1980. See “Minutes of Warsaw Pact Leadership Meeting in Moscow, December 5, 1980.” In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.). *From Solidarity to Martial Law: The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981, A Documentary History*. Budapest, New York: Central European University Press (2007) 149.

⁶ Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Polish United Workers Party – the official communist organization ruling Poland in the Marxist-Leninist one-party political system prevalent among the members of the Eastern Bloc.

⁷ Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej KOR (Committee for Social Self-Defense KOR) was an organization of opposition intellectuals established in 1977. At the First Plenary Meeting of the Delegates of Solidarity on September 23, 1981, KSS KOR self-dissolved and its members joined the ranks of Solidarity.

⁸ See “Report on the domestic situation and proposals of actions by the Ministry of Interior, December 22, 1980.” In: Kropka, Bogusław and Grzegorz Majchrzak (eds.). *Stan wojenny w dokumentach władz PRL (1980-1983)*. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu. Warsaw (2001) 35-40.

⁹ “Arkhipov: [...] Right now the Poles need to pay off 1.5 billion dollars. This applies mainly to interest on previous debts. They are requesting 700 million dollars from us. Of course we can't possibly come up with such a sum.” “Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 26 March 1981.” In: Kramer, Mark (ed.). *Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980-1981. Special Working Paper No.1*. Cold War International History Project. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (April 1999) 90. Total economic aid in hard currency supplied by the Soviet Union, including payments for servicing the foreign debt, deferrals of payments to USSR banks, and food purchasing facilities amounted to nearly \$3 billion during 1980-1981. See Krawczyk, Andrzej (ed.).

this environment it cannot surprise that the communist government felt compelled to act in the face of a vital threat to its hold on power. The response of General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was simultaneously holding the offices of defense minister, Secretary General of PZPR, prime minister, and chairman of the Committee on National Salvation (KOK) in one person, to this threat was to impose martial law.

The imposition of martial law itself came hardly as a surprise to anyone involved at a political level: the leaders of Solidarity had learned early on about the planned “operation Wiosna,”¹⁰ and warned the communist elite already during the summer of 1981 against having the Sejm grant special emergency powers to the existing government. Plans for a military crackdown were drawn up an entire year in advance, and lists of opposition members to be interned quickly ballooned to exceed 10,000.¹¹ The military even conducted dry runs of its anticipated scheduled arrests.¹² The U.S. administration had been kept up to date about Polish and Warsaw Pact military planning for a good decade by their intelligence asset Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski, who was also a member of the military planning commission for martial law until he defected to the U.S. in early December 1981. Needless to say, the Kremlin continuously advised the Polish Politburo and was in turn kept up to date by its Polish counterpart with detailed reports on current developments.¹³ Therefore, publicly displayed shock and dismay at the event as it was professed by all interested parties must have been part of a political kabuki dance for the consumption of a global audience. Everybody who mattered knew well in advance and in some detail what was coming.

Foreign media sometimes have described the imposition of martial law by General Jaruzelski as a “military putsch.” 30 years later it is still inconclusively debated whether the act itself was constitutional and legal under Polish law in effect at the time.¹⁴ As Jaruzelski explained,¹⁵ there was no clause in the Polish constitution to declare a “state of emergency” that is the first step in Western European law before the declaration of a “state of war”. There was only a clause about a “state of

Information on Soviet aid for PPR in foreign currency in years 1980-1981. Documents: The Suslov File. Warsaw: Polska Agencja Informacyjna, Wydawnictwo Interpress (1993) 101.

¹⁰ The Kremlin was well aware that Solidarity knew about the plans to impose martial law: “But even if the government does intend to impose martial law, Solidarity knows this very well and, for its part, has been preparing all necessary measures to cope with that.” *See Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, December 10, 1981.* In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 162. In late 1980 the Kremlin started to suspect that a high-ranking Polish official was leaking military information to the West, and in spring of 1981 Solidarity began to reveal details about martial law to the public. *See “Translator’s Note to Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, October 31, 1980.”* In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 56-57.

¹¹ The first known list of persons to be interned as part of the case “W” („state of war”) dates back to October 28, 1980. The documentation preparing for case “W” was issued by the Ministry of the Interior and the General Staff of the Polish Army in October of the same year. *See: Kopka, Boguslaw and Grzegorz Majchrzak (eds.).* (2001) 13.

¹² For examples of “war game” exercises, *see inter alia* “Inter-ministerial decision games” that took place on February 16, 1981 under the leadership of the secretary of KOK, general Tuczapski. *See Paczkowski, Andrzej. Droga do “mniejszego zla”: Strategia i taktyka obozu władzy, lipiec 1980-styczen 1982.* Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie (2002) 137.

¹³ *See for example “CPSU CC Politburo Report on Topics for Discussion with the Polish Leadership, September 3, 1980.”* In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.). (2007) 83-86.

¹⁴ For more details, *see Dudek, Antoni and Krzysztof Madej (eds.) O stanie wojennym w Sejmowej Komisji Odpowiedzialności Konstytucyjnej. Sprawozdanie komisji i wniosek mniejszosci wraz z ekspertami i opiniami historykow.* Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu (1997).

¹⁵ “Meeting of CK PUWP Politburo on August 29, 1980.” In: Kropka, Boguslaw and Grzegorz Majchrzak (eds.). (2001) 13.

war,” without, however, stating any particulars as to its implementation, much less provisions governing it. The declaration of a “state of war” required a vote of the Sejm (Parliament), which Jaruzelski knew he could not possibly hope to obtain.¹⁶ The alternative was to sidestep the required Sejm approval by issuing a decree of the State Council declaring a state of war and endowing the government with extensive emergency powers. This was the course of action opted for by Jaruzelski. However, the legal definition of a “state of war” required the existence of a threat to the sovereignty of the country: even a threat of civil war was not sufficient. It is therefore understandable that the State Council, while declaring a “state of war” (imposing martial law) in the night of December 12-13, 1981, invoked a need for “protection of the sovereignty and independence of the People’s Republic of Poland,”¹⁷ aside from securing public order. General Jaruzelski himself alluded to the objective of the measure of protecting Poland’s sovereignty, thus implicitly suggesting a threat of Soviet military intervention. Based on historic precedent, this argument appeared so convincing at the time that even several decades later a large part of the Polish population still believes that Jaruzelski’s imposition of martial law was indeed a necessary step to prevent a Soviet invasion.¹⁸

It is therefore no surprise that Wojciech Jaruzelski and Stanislaw Kania, past Secretary General of the PZPR, kept insisting *ex post facto* that there had existed a very real danger of Soviet military intervention that they had been able to avert only by their drastic measure of imposing martial law, which also had the consequence of sealing-off Polish borders. One needs to understand that the version of events as described in their memoirs and later interviews was necessarily skewed towards self-defense against the unfavorable judgment of posterity that they anticipated. Their self-serving testimonies before a Polish parliamentary commission were a readily transparent play to assure their survival—Jaruzelski was, in fact, on trial at the time for crimes committed by his government under martial law (including the unlawful detention of some 9,000 opposition activists and the deaths of workers during crack-downs on strikes by army and police¹⁹), and he could very well expect to face a court martial under a charge of high treason. What is surprising, though, is that the threat of Soviet intervention was also exaggerated by an insider of the Polish armed forces, U.S. spy Colonel Kuklinski. And yet, looking at the precarious position of a military spy who had been sentenced to death in absentia by a Polish court martial in 1984,²⁰ it is again understandable that a man who knew he would be executed upon discovery was trying to make his contribution to U.S. intelligence as valuable as possible, not only by passing on actual military and technical plans to the tune of some 40,000 pages, but also by sounding a heightened alarm whenever there was a chance of dramatic

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See “Decree on the Martial Law from 12 December 1981.” In: Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.). *Stan wojenny w Polsce: Dokumenty i materiały archiwalne, 1981-1983*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Comandor (2001) 24.

¹⁸ According to a poll conducted by the Polish Center for the Study of Public Opinion (TNS OBOP) on December 13, 2006, a majority of Poles deemed the imposition of the martial law justified, with 60% believing that it had prevented a Soviet military intervention, and 50% believing that it had prevented a civil war. “TNS OBOP: Stan wojenny dzieli Polaków.” In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 13, 2006. <http://wyborcza.pl/1,77062,3788063.html>. Accessed July 26, 2012. These poll results did not change significantly during subsequent years, including 2011.

¹⁹ On December 16, 1980, police supported by the army opened fire on striking workers in the Wujek mine, killing 7 and wounding 300. See Paczkowski, Andrzej. *Droga do “mniejszego zła”: Strategia i taktyka obozu władzy, lipiec 1980-styczeń 1982*. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie (2002) 282.

²⁰ Kuklinski’s sentence was commuted subsequently to 25 years imprisonment, and later reversed, although he was not exonerated till 1996; according to a Polish ex-prime minister, Adam Michnik, this rehabilitation was one of the unofficial conditions set by the Clinton administration for its agreement not to oppose Poland’s accession to NATO (see Adam Michnik’s blog and his article in *Transitions*, dated September 15, 1998, retrieved from <http://www.foia.cia.gov/MartialLawKuklinski/1998-09-05a.pdf>). Accessed July 26, 2012.

events actually taking place. His urgent letter of December 4, 1980²¹ is just one such example: based on mere hearsay of other officers, he presented contingency plans for a Warsaw Pact intervention as actual developments to be forthcoming within a matter of a few days. The CIA's analysis²² showed that Kuklinski's reports were not taken quite at face value: comparing his account with other intelligence sources, including spy satellite photographic reconnaissance, the CIA's reaction was rather lukewarm. The facts including limited accumulation of Soviet troops near the Eastern border and of East German build-up by Poland's Western border could be interpreted as part of Warsaw Pact exercises²³ then in progress, or as attempts to seal off the Polish borders in the event unrest were to spin out of control, but they were certainly not consistent with a major movement of troops comparable to those preceding the invasion of Afghanistan. Only following President Carter's decision to issue statements warning both U.S. allies and the USSR against Soviet invasion²⁴ did the CIA issue a report that an invasion was to be expected, although it said it was not clear when the invasion would occur.²⁵ Significantly, NATO did not corroborate any such threats by evidence even on December 13 and 14, 1981.²⁶ Just like Jaruzelski, Kuklinski had his own head to protect as he needed the CIA to facilitate his safe extrication to the U.S. For all these purposes, the advertised Soviet military scare was as powerful an argument with the American public as it was with Polish audiences.

Analysts such as Wojtech Mastny,²⁷ besides relying heavily on memoirs of actors personally involved in the events of 1980-81, most notably Kuklinski, Jaruzelski, and Kania, to support an often emotionally charged interpretation of the events of 1980-81 in Poland, also tend to mention Warsaw Pact meetings and Politburo minutes discussing a Warsaw Pact or Soviet military response to the increasing Polish threat to socialism. In retrospective analysis, it does make sense that the traditionally conservative communist regimes of East Germany and Czechoslovakia would call for a Soviet crackdown: they very likely believed that there was no other realistic way to prevent contagion by a "counterrevolutionary," "anti-socialist" movement from spreading to other countries of the communist bloc including their highly vulnerable selves. Both the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia had experienced Soviet intervention in the past.²⁸ Therefore it is also

²¹ See "Message from Ryszard Kuklinski on Impending Warsaw Pact Invasion, December 4, 1980." In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2007) 139-140.

²² "CIA Alert Memorandum, "Poland", December 3, 1980." *Ibid.*, 138.

²³ See "Report of the Czechoslovak Army Chief of Staff to the Minister of National Defense, December 3, 1980." *Ibid.*, 136-137.

²⁴ See "Minutes of the U.S. Special Coordination Committee Meeting, December 7, 1980." *Ibid.*, 162-164. In fact, Jimmy Carter issued such warnings already earlier, for example in September of 1980: See "President Carter's Letter to the Allies on Poland, September 1, 1980." *Ibid.*, 81-82.

²⁵ See "CIA Situation Report, "Poland", December 8, 1980." *Ibid.*, 165-166.

²⁶ Understandably, in December of 1980 NATO was drawing up contingency plans for a potential Soviet military intervention, but it stressed that there were no indications that the Soviet Union was actually preparing one. Movements of Soviet troops that were placed on alert were largely interpreted as a pressure tactic aimed at Jaruzelski. http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_archives/20111130_19801201_3530.12.02-SHINBM-S-267-80_1_DEC_80.pdf Accessed July 26, 2012. On December 13 and 14, 1981, NATO Situation Center assessments do not corroborate a threat of Soviet invasion or movements of Soviet troops, but predict that Jaruzelski might use this argument to justify the imposition of martial law. See http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_archives/20111130_19811214_AS_81_96.pdf and http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_archives/20111130_19811213_AS_81_95.pdf

²⁷ See especially Mastny, Wojtech. *The Soviet non-Invasion of Poland in 1980/81 and the End of the Cold War*. Working Paper No. 23. Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, (September 1998).

²⁸ German Democratic Republic in 1953, Czechoslovakia in 1968.

not entirely inconceivable that they could wish for Poland to experience her own medicine this time around.²⁹ Unfortunately, there is not much if any confirmable evidence that other Warsaw Pact countries ever demanded a Soviet intervention in Poland, or that Brezhnev insisted on it but somehow did not receive approval from his own Politburo.³⁰ It is also worth noting that, while known hardliners Erich Honecker and Todor Zhivkov did, in fact, call for decisive “administrative measures” (read: a military crackdown) at the much-cited Warsaw Pact meeting of December 5, 1980, every participant at that meeting stressed that any measures involving the use of force needed to be carried out by Polish units acting alone.³¹ On the other hand, the Soviet Union as the sole power believed to pose a real threat to Polish sovereignty, demanded a political solution. To be sure, the Polish leadership was roundly criticized for its perceived lack of decisiveness and for too many compromises accommodating the “counterrevolutionary” opposition forces represented by Solidarity—but there no real evidence that the Soviet Union threatened Poland with a military intervention.

Of course, one might assume that threats were understood to be implicit, and this argument does carry a certain weight. Brezhnev’s policy was at all times to keep ambiguity about how far liberalization—or destabilization—could go before the Soviet Union would lose patience. However, if the Kremlin had, in fact, been seriously considering military intervention, it is wholly inconceivable that the Politburo would not have discussed it, or at the very least have mentioned it during one of its meetings. And, yet, the entire evidence of hitherto declassified documents, especially the Suslov Commission file,³² does not reveal any tangible indications that the Politburo was actually envisioning and preparing for an invasion.³³ However, what the Politburo documents do show was that the Soviet Union was busy giving notably detailed orders to the Polish leadership on how to handle the crisis, including urging Jaruzelski to staff key positions in the government with trusted

²⁹ Polish troops directly intervened in Czechoslovakia, but not in the German Democratic Republic.

³⁰ The sources pointed to by Mastny include the minutes of CPSU Politburo sessions of October 29 and 31, 1980 (in his Working Paper No. 23, “The Soviet non-Invasion of Poland in 1980/81 and the End of the Cold War”, 10), and an “emergency meeting of party secretaries in Moscow on December 4-5, 1980” (in his chapter “The Warsaw Pact as History.” In: Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2005) 51). For a comparison *see* “Minutes of the Warsaw Pact Leadership Meeting in Moscow, December 5, 1980.” In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2007) 141-161, as well as the pertinent sessions of the Soviet Politburo in Kramer, Mark (ed.). (1999) 44-59.

³¹ “Minutes of the Warsaw Pact Leadership Meeting in Moscow, December 5, 1980.” In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2007) 141-161.

³² The Suslov Commission was established on August 25, 1980 by the CC CPSU as a special commission on the Polish crisis. Mikhail Suslov, a Politburo veteran and an ideological hardliner, was appointed its head. The Suslov File was donated to the Polish government on the occasion of the state visit of President Boris Yeltsin in August 1993. *See* Krawczyk, Andrzej (ed.) (1993).

³³ Although Brezhnev suggested in October of 1980: “Perhaps it will indeed be necessary to impose martial law,” Ustinov put the matter quite bluntly: “If they don’t impose martial law, the matter will be very complicated and will become still more serious. In the army there is a good deal of vacillation. But we’ve prepared the Northern Group of Forces, which is in full combat readiness.” Yet the topic of a military intervention was not taken up by the rest of the Politburo at all. In fact, shortly thereafter Gromyko stated, “As concerns the imposition of a state of emergency in Poland, this must be kept in reserve as a measure to protect socialist gains.” Yet despite the fact that, at that time, Gromyko’s view was that “We simply cannot lose Poland,” Brezhnev, supported by Andropov, Suslov, and Ustinov stressed the importance of creating Polish “self-defense detachments.” Suslov also complained about Gomulka’s disregard of Soviet advice against using firearms against the workers (in December of 1970). *See* “Minutes of the Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 29 October 1980.” In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 46-49. Preparing troops for an event of emergency was proper military procedure, but neither at that time nor thereafter was military intervention seriously considered. Even a Polish domestic crackdown was not a desirable solution in the eyes of the great majority of the Politburo.

and disciplined military officers³⁴ and to implement martial law before the Solidarity movement would gain too much momentum. Soviet documents do not show Jaruzelski fighting to prevent the sovereignty of his country—in fact, they show Jaruzelski himself requesting a Soviet military backup,³⁵ which the Politburo repeatedly outright denied³⁶ while it prodded him impatiently to take decisive action at long last to crack down on the civil unrest and disobedience caused by Solidarity.³⁷ After the Kremlin’s initial enthusiasm for Jaruzelski, who was expected to restore order in Poland,³⁸ Brezhnev and his entourage grew increasingly restive and disappointed with the time it took him to implement the Soviet plan of quenching growing unrest through exclusive reliance on Polish forces. Especially irritating to Kremlin was the fact that Jaruzelski tried to use the situation to extract concessions in the realm of economic aid in exchange for obeying Soviet directives with regard to imposition of martial law.³⁹ The implementation of martial law had been long prepared, both in terms of legal paperwork and administrative structures, not to mention military and secret police plans that included previously rehearsed drills. In summary, the overwhelming weight of the evidence shows that it had actually been Jaruzelski himself who, however “indirectly,” had clearly requested—but equally clearly failed to receive—Soviet “military assistance.” It turned out that the Mikoyan Doctrine, originally formulated to protect Soviet interests, found woefully few sympathizers among the endangered communist leaders of other Eastern Bloc nations.

³⁴ As of December 13, 1981, 88 military officers were among the highest ranks of the Polish government, including 11 ministers or vice-ministers. The military also dominated the party leadership, and after December 13, 7400 military officers were appointed to mid-level administrative and industrial managerial positions. See Paczkowski, Andrzej (2006) 125-127.

³⁵ See for example the conversation between Jaruzelski’s aide, General Florian Siwicki, and the Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact, Soviet Marshal Victor Kulikov, on December 11, 1981, as recorded by Kulikov’s personal adjutant, Lieutenant-General Victor Ivanovich Anoshkin. On that occasion, Jaruzelski’s message seems to threaten Polish secession from the Warsaw Pact if Soviet political, economic, and military support was not forthcoming. “Document 17.9: Jaruzelski and Martial Law in Poland, 1981.” In: Hanhimaki, Jussi and Odd Arne Westad (eds.). *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*. New York: Oxford University Press (2004) 571-573. Also, “Andropov: The Polish leaders talk about military aid from the fraternal countries. However, we must firmly stick to your [Brezhnev] line – not to insert our troops into Poland. Ustinov: In general, one must say it is impossible to insert our troops into Poland. They, the Poles, are not ready to receive our troops. [...]”. “Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Meeting on Rusakov’s Trip to Eastern Europe, October 29, 1981.” In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2007) 397.

³⁶ Even on December 10, 1981, Andropov insisted “If Cde. Kulikov actually spoke about the insertion of troops then I consider that he did so incorrectly. We cannot risk that. We do not intend to insert troops to Poland. That is the correct position, and we must observe it to the end.” “Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981.” In: Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.). *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991*. Budapest, New York: Central European University Press (2005) 459. Andropov was immediately corrected by Ustinov that Kulikov had not, in fact, said such a thing. In reality, Kulikov did discuss the crossing of Warsaw Pact troops onto Polish territory as late as in June 1981 – but it was strictly in the context of the Warsaw Pact’s long-planned Shield-81 joint exercises. See “Report on Conversation between Marshal Kulikov and Senior East German Military Officials, June 13, 1981.” *Ibid.*, 446.

³⁷ For example, on two occasions (April 9 and 13, 1981) the Soviet leadership presented Jaruzelski and Kania with undated documents declaring martial law for their signature, which both declined to render. See “Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, April 9, 1981.” In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 106.

³⁸ See in particular the records of the congratulatory telephone call of Brezhnev to Jaruzelski upon the election of the latter as the General Secretary of CK PUWP on October 19, 1981. In: Krawczyk, Andrzej (ed.) (1993) 53-59.

³⁹ “Andropov: [...] Now I would like to note that Jaruzelski is rather persistently placing economic demands before us and conditioning the implementation of Operation “X” on our economic aid; and I would even say more than that, he is raising the question, albeit indirectly, of military assistance.” “Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981.” In: Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2005) 459.

Heated discussions within the Soviet Politburo regarding Jaruzelski's requests of economic aid for Poland are especially revealing. Well aware that unrest in Poland had been provoked by her dramatic economic situation, especially by chronic food shortages and price hikes of up to 100% for already heavily rationed meat,⁴⁰ the Soviet Union was unable to fulfill even its previous obligations of economic aid to Poland, so Jaruzelski's increased demands tied to the imposition of martial law were met by the Kremlin with irritation that may be explained only by the economic despair of the Soviet Union itself: "*Brezhnev*: And are we able to give this much now? *Baibakov*: Leonid Illich, it can be given only by drawing on state reserves or at the expense of deliveries to the internal market."⁴¹

The issue of economic aid points to another factor shaping Soviet Union policy regarding Poland at the time: the impending economic disaster brewing in the Soviet Union itself. Its centrally-planned economy, riddled with systemic inefficiencies, additionally burdened with defense expenditures reaching 30-40% of GDP in the midst of the Cold War⁴² and a perceived ideological obligation to support both the equally inefficient economies of Eastern Bloc countries and a wide array of revolutionary "liberation movements" throughout the Third World, could barely feed its own notoriously undersupplied population. Imposing martial law in Poland was a dramatic step to preserve the socialist regime there and to stabilize it against social unrest, but it was also fully expected to cause dramatic economic sanctions by the West, sanctions that had to be compensated by an increase of "fraternal assistance" from both the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern Bloc.⁴³ That was already a sufficiently bitter pill to swallow. But the alternative was even worse: a direct military intervention to restore the status quo undertaken either by the Soviet Union alone or by the Warsaw Pact structures would cause Western economic and political sanctions to be imposed against the Soviet Union itself—and on the Eastern Bloc as a whole.⁴⁴ This was an outcome neither the Soviet Union nor other Warsaw Pact allies could afford or likely sustain for any significant amount of time.

At the time, the Soviet Union was already suffering heavy international censure for its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan that would continue to drain its resources until 1989. The Reagan administration, true to its hardline policy, used the incident to highlight Soviet expansionism in the Third World and its blatant disrespect for the sovereignty of an unaffiliated non-aligned country. That position conveniently disregarded the fact that Soviet troops had moved in only after as many as 14 requests by the Kabul government for help to restore order in a country that had long been marred by tribal and regional infighting and periodically re-emerging civil war. It also conveniently forgot the U.S.'s own and not any less extensive history of highly unsavory armed interventions in the Third World in

⁴⁰ Such price increases were not unusual in that period: for example, on February 1, 1982 the announced price increase for food was 241%. See: Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.) (2001) 471.

⁴¹ See "Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, December 10, 1981." In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 161. See also fn 7 above.

⁴² See Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: The Penguin Press (2005) 592.

⁴³ See "Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981." In: Krawczyk, Andrzej (ed.) (1993) 87.

The Soviet Union did, in fact, issue a call for economic aid to Sofia, Budapest, Berlin, Ulan Bator, Prague, Havana, Hanoi, and Vientiane on December 14, 1981. See "Minutes of the Meeting of CK CPSU, December 13, 1981." *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁴ "*Andropov*: [...] But if the capitalist countries fall upon the Soviet Union, and they already have a suitable agreement, with various kinds of economic and political sanctions, then that will be very difficult for us. We must show concern for our country, for the strengthening of the Soviet Union. That is our main line." "Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981." In: Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2005) 459.

support of dictators or rebels trying to overthrow legitimate democratic governments.⁴⁵ But publicizing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, misguided and damaging for the Soviet Union as it was in and of itself,⁴⁶ also helped the U.S. to divert attention of public opinion away from the embarrassingly clumsy handling of the Iran crisis by the Carter administration, including the Iran hostage crisis lasting 444 days that had ended only once Reagan had already taken office. The censure of the Soviet Union for its involvement in Afghanistan did not end with the disapproval by international public opinion and the deterioration of its political relations with the West, especially with the U.S., dealing a heavy blow to years of Soviet efforts at disarmament talks. Even more painful were the economic sanctions forced on the Soviet Union by the U.S., including halting the supply of grains. As part of its plan for bringing the Soviet Union to its knees through economic pressures, the U.S. brought considerable influence to bear on its NATO allies to use the invasion of Afghanistan as grounds for alliance-wide sanctions against the Soviet Union. Although President Reagan lifted the grain embargo imposed by Carter (not least because it was also hurting the U.S. economy by affecting Midwest farmers), its repercussions were still felt throughout the Soviet Union. So any further worsening of relations with the West as a result of yet another invasion, this time not in a Third World country obscurely removed from any heretofore known U.S. sphere of interest (though the U.S. administration had been traditionally worried about gradually losing control over the oil fields of the Persian Gulf⁴⁷), but right in the heart of Central Europe, and in a country with extensive economic and political ties to Western Europe, most notably the Federal Republic of Germany, was simply not a realistic option any Soviet leader would likely consider entertaining.

The wisdom of not invading Poland was felt by the Soviet Union shortly thereafter: first, the long prepared Soviet project of the Helsinki process leading to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was halted upon the news of imposition of martial law in Poland during the Madrid Review Conference, where Basket III covering human rights issues in the Eastern Bloc had already become a seriously contentious matter.⁴⁸ Moreover the U.S. imposed sanctions not only on Poland, as had been expected, but also on the USSR itself, even though it had previously threatened the Soviet Union with sanctions only if they *did*, in fact, invade Poland. The measure was justified under the rather flimsy pretext of the Soviet Union's "undue intervention" in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country. At this point, the Western allies of the U.S. broke rank by declining to accept this rationale and refused to impose sanctions on the USSR in accordance with U.S. demands. When the U.S. attempted to block the construction of an East-West oil pipeline that would benefit both the Soviet Union and Western Europe, there was an outcry among the European allies about infringement on their own economic sovereignty and a violation of international law. It is worth noting that the blocking of this pipeline had been planned by the U.S. administration already several months earlier, showing that the U.S. had fully expected a military intervention in

⁴⁵ See U.S. involvement in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

⁴⁶ Rather than proving to be the anticipated quick and cheap intervention, the war lasted for over 9 years, 1979-1989, and ended in Soviet withdrawal in disgrace under Gorbachev, after which the communist government in Kabul survived for all of 3 more years.

⁴⁷ Concerns over access to the world's oil reserves in the Middle East were a recurring theme of Carter and Reagan administrations' public announcements. See for example a response to the imposition of martial law in Poland published in the New York Times by Admiral Stanfield Turner, USN, formerly Director of Central Intelligence: Turner, Stansfield. "A New Strategy for NATO," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1981.

⁴⁸ Unable to reach consensus about adjourning the meeting (while the Eastern European delegations pressured for following the agenda), the delegations spent a "night of long silences" before a "coffee break" was announced that lasted 54.5 hours before the representatives could agree on adjourning the meeting until November 1982. See Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2005) 337.

Poland. However, it did not plan to go to great lengths to prevent this course of events, only to prepare harsh consequences. When the situation was eventually resolved domestically without involving Soviet troops, the U.S. decided for its own reasons to proceed with the prepared sanctions anyway.⁴⁹ The obvious conclusion that the U.S. focus was not so much on restoration of human rights in Poland but on strategic advantage in the polarity of U.S.-Soviet relations finds its reflection also in the fact that, despite imposing some sanctions on Poland, the U.S. did not declare a default on the country's significant debt even after Jaruzelski announced that Poland would be unable to service its international financial obligations. Instead, the U.S. government not only deferred Polish payments, but also actually paid Polish sovereign debt to U.S. private banks and thus prevented other foreign banks from declaring Poland in default.⁵⁰ The Reagan administration's confrontational rhetoric jarred its Western European allies when their own economic interests were exposed to risk, as was the case in the matter of the contentious U.S. sanctions against the Soviet Union in 1981. Thus some measure of rapprochement between Western Europe and the Soviet Union was preserved, even though this resulted in the appearance of a rift between U.S. policies and those of its European allies. Had the Soviet Union actually sent troops to Poland, the attitude of Western Europe would in all likelihood have been quite different.

Other good reasons for not invading Poland were the internal consequences of such a move, both for the Soviet Union and for Poland. A large-scale military operation would have come at a very high cost for the Soviet Union at a most inopportune time; feeding the uncooperative population of an occupied country would have proved even more expensive. The principal problem was, however, that quashing social unrest by Soviet troops would inevitably have been exceedingly costly in terms of human lives. Historical anti-Russian sentiments of Poles were shaped by more than three centuries of neighborly tensions, wars and occupations. Poland had been partitioned between its neighbors Russia, Prussia and Austria at least three times during that period, with the last partition ending as late as 1918, and lasting 123 years. And only considerably more recently, Poland had suffered significant territorial losses to the USSR under the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. Anti-Russian sentiments had been kept in check somewhat effectively by communist propaganda and repression, but notions of Polish-Soviet brotherly love never really caught on like they did in Bulgaria where Tsar Alexander II had in 1878 liberated a Christian Slavic population from five centuries of Ottoman rule. Anti-Russian sentiments in Poland were especially common given a profoundly Catholic society not educated in the Soviet Union the way its imposed communist leaders had been. There was certainly a reason why Soviet troops stationed in Poland pursuant to the Warsaw Pact and purportedly as a security backstop against anticipated Western, most notably West German, hostility were kept as far out of sight of the general population as possible, stationed in remote closed garrisons. Any open hostility of the Soviet army (or, even worse, Soviet and East German armies within the structures of the Warsaw Pact, since the population of Poland still well remembered the egregious atrocities committed on its population by occupying Nazi Germany) would have been but a welcome pretext for all-out nationalist rebellion understood as a war of independence that would have drenched the entire country in blood.⁵¹ The fact that up to 75 million

⁴⁹See Wyatt-Walter, Holly. *The European Community and the Security Dilemma 1979-1992*. London: St Anthony's College, Oxford (1997) 78. Also Young, John W. "Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979-1989." In: Leffler, Melvyn P. and Odd Arne Westad (eds.). *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Vol. III: *Endings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2010) 294.

⁵⁰ Villaume, Poul and Odd Arne Westad (eds.). *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Detente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965-1985*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press (2010) 200.

⁵¹ This was understood by NATO early on. See NATO Working Paper *The Scope of NATO Action in the Event of Soviet or WP Military Intervention in Poland*. Bruxelles: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (October 27, 1980).

Americans claim Polish descent of some form, including President Carter's national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, cannot be denied some place in the analysis of possible reactions of international public opinion, especially in the U.S., where a newly elected president had bet his administration on a hardened U.S. foreign policy against what he later proceeded to call the "Evil Empire." In the wake of the Soviet public relations disaster in Afghanistan, and in an era of enduring necessity of detente efforts, an invasion of Poland was the last thing the Soviet Union needed or could afford.

One might argue that the Soviet Union had a third alternative: rather than crack down on the opposition in Poland with either domestic or external military force, it could stabilize the situation by political means. However, such a normalization of internal situation in Poland proved quite elusive due to broad popular support for the Solidarity movement in spite of increased propaganda and administrative efforts at containing the spread of ideas of self-determination. Polish communist cadres were badly trained and notoriously apathetic, but they had still somehow managed to impart on the working masses certain classical Marxist-Leninist ideas of self-government. Of course, the dictatorial Polish party leadership never seriously intended to grant the proletariat any actual powers of self-determination, and even if it had, it would have been impossible to obtain Soviet blessing. Ideas of the Polish leadership about inducting three blue-collar workers into their party's supreme governing body, the Polish Politburo, were resoundingly criticized by their Soviet counterparts who would approve at most one such labor representative.⁵² Thus, by using nothing more than free speech and a sense of empowerment of the working masses as introduced by the communists themselves, Polish opposition leaders did not have to go farther than to adopt ideologically unassailable Marxist-Leninist forms of meetings, resolutions and union structures to channel worker's dissatisfaction into properly organized forms of protest culminating in regional and general strikes determined to make their voices heard. The Kremlin certainly recognized the danger of intellectuals concentrated around KSS KOR for extending the dissatisfaction of the labor force with economic and working conditions into the area of politics and government, and it advised Jaruzelski early on to infiltrate the Solidarity leadership with trusted communists to emasculate and control the power of the new popular movement by means of sabotage and targeted disruption.⁵³

Yet another realistic alternative was to simply let Poland go, and the minutes of the Politburo show that the Kremlin was, in fact, not entirely averse to considering that option,⁵⁴ in spite of concerns about the Polish unrest spilling over into other hitherto well-controlled countries of the Eastern Bloc⁵⁵ and even into the non-Russian socialist republics of the USSR itself, threatening domestic

http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_archives/20111130_19801027_3050-SHPPPOP-S45-80_-_27_OCT_60.pdf Accessed July 26, 2012.

⁵² See "Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, April 9, 1981." In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 107.

⁵³ See "Extract from Protocol No 213 of the Session of the CPSU CC Politburo on 3 September 1980: On Theses for the Discussion with Representatives of the Polish Leadership." In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 39.

⁵⁴ "Andropov: [...] I do not know how matters will develop in Poland, but even if Poland comes under the authority of Solidarity that will be one thing. But if the capitalist countries fall upon the Soviet Union, and they already have a suitable agreement, with various kinds of economic and political sanctions, then that will be very difficult for us. We must show concern for our country, for the strengthening of the Soviet Union. That is our main line." "Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981." In: Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2005) 459.

⁵⁵ Erich Honecker, Gustav Husak and Todor Zhivkov repeatedly warned Brezhnev about the danger of spilling Polish unrest and ideas to their countries. See Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 25.

stability there.⁵⁶ In any case, the Soviet leadership would clearly rather see Poland Finlandized than embark on high-risk adventures by suppressing social unrest with Soviet tanks the way this had still been possible in 1956⁵⁷ and 1968,⁵⁸ but was no longer possible in 1980.⁵⁹ Had Jaruzelski been aware of the viability of this option, the developments of 1989 could have materialized some years earlier—but in 1981, the Politburo did anything but publicly disavow the Brezhnev Doctrine, even if its actions were a lot more consistent with the Mikoyan Doctrine. Consequently, the Eastern European governments' appetite for risk taking was naturally thwarted by their memories of global reactions to earlier repressions of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak uprisings. Yet the situation there had been entirely different: the Brezhnev Doctrine reserved the right to interfere in the internal affairs of a socialist country in the event that socialist order and principles were endangered. The reaction in Hungary and Czechoslovakia had been triggered by a departure from Marxist-Leninist doctrine by the communist party leadership itself. In the case of Poland, however, the PZPR did not stray from the line set out by Kremlin—it had only lost practical relevance to the country's political scene. Weakened and impotent, the Polish United Workers Party threatened to become just a shadow of a government, vaguely reminiscent of prior Polish governments-in-exile, unable to either lift the country out of its chronic economic crisis or to at least placate its clamoring population with some temporary fixes. Once the heavily politicized free trade union Solidarity was legalized, it became clear that the democratic process would eventually push the communists aside and install an independent government, replacing the empty communist rhetoric of a “dictatorship of the proletariat” with a genuine rule of representatives of the working masses. It begs the question whether the extent of special treatment extended to Solidarity's leader Lech Walesa was not Jaruzelski's and Kania's insurance policy to secure lenient treatment of communist leaders in the event the Solidarity movement would succeed in taking power (which, in fact, happened in 1989, and communists promptly did not suffer all too many repercussions and indignities in the subsequent review process called *lustracja*). Not only did the Jaruzelski regime allow Lech Walesa to travel to the West with his entire entourage in January 1981, causing great upset on the part of the Soviets at a time when strict travel restrictions remained the general rule throughout the Eastern Bloc.⁶⁰ Walesa's highly publicized four-hour meeting with the decidedly political Polish Pope John Paul II was also supplemented by meetings with Italian labor organizations, increasing the Solidarity leader's visibility and prestige both internationally and domestically. That trip took place at a time when operational plans for the imposition of martial law and arrest lists of opposition leaders had long been readily prepared and finalized. But even after the imposition of martial law in Poland, when not only Solidarity activists but also previous communist elites, including the past First Secretary of PZPR, Edward Gierek, and his ex-prime minister Piotr Jaroszewicz were arrested, the treatment afforded to Walesa was far different than the treatment of others: while Gierek and Jaroszewicz were held in strict detention together with other party functionaries accused of common felony offences such as corruption, and complained about unjustifiably harsh conditions,⁶¹ Walesa

⁵⁶ “*Andropov*: In addition, I want to say that the Polish events are influencing the situation in the western provinces of our country, particularly in Belorussia. Many villages there are listening in to Polish-language radio and television. I might add that in certain other regions, especially in Georgia, we have had wild demonstrations. And in Tbilisi [...]” etc. See “Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, April 2, 1980.” In: Kramer, Mark (ed.) (April 1999) 100.

⁵⁷ Hungarian Revolution.

⁵⁸ Prague Spring.

⁵⁹ See fn 52 above.

⁶⁰ See “CPSU CC Instruction to the Soviet Ambassador Concerning Lech Walesa Visit to Italy, January 14, 1981.” In: Paczkowski, Andrzej and Malcolm Byrne (eds.) (2007) 177-179.

⁶¹ They complained of cramped small rooms, very bad sanitary conditions, difficulties with receiving letters and visits from their families, and insufficient medical care, which was especially an issue with Edward Gierek who

was kept in comfortable seclusion at a government facility under comparatively luxurious circumstances⁶² at a time when the rest of the population continued to suffer serious shortages of food and basic necessities.⁶³ By comparison, other opposition activists were treated far less generously,⁶⁴ and some of them were not released from detention until a general amnesty postulated by many accomplished that at long last in 1986.⁶⁵ Thus, Jaruzelski's ambivalent position vis-à-vis the Kremlin's demands could be interpreted as his attempt to save face in the eyes of Polish public opinion and secure some support from Solidarity in case their "anti-socialist counterrevolution" did, in fact, succeed.

The imposition of martial law in Poland represented the optimal solution for the Soviet Union: although it did nothing to resolve the underlying causes of social unrest provoked by the country's economic difficulties and lack of civil liberties, it did preserve the dictatorial rule of the communist party for several more years, until the final dissolution of the Eastern Bloc itself started again in Poland in 1989. Military intervention would have been an option far too costly for the Soviet Union both in terms of its political and economic consequences at a time when the focus of Soviet foreign relations was necessarily on detente, when the U.S. had turned increasingly uncooperative with respect to arms control, when Western Europe persisted with rubbing in the face of the Soviet leadership a wide range of human rights issues they had agreed to resolve under the Helsinki Final Act, and, most importantly, when the Soviet economy itself was at the brink of disaster and default as a result of chronic shortages due to the failures of its central planning and due to the mounting and alarming cost of its seemingly interminable Afghan war. More importantly, however, there is very little evidence of any significance that a military option was ever seriously considered by Kremlin, the same Kremlin that endowed Wojciech Jaruzelski with unusual decisional autonomy

purportedly suffered from tuberculosis. See "Note from January 27, 1982, from the meeting of the leadership of CK PUWP with Edward Gierek and Piotr Jaroszewicz." In: Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.) (2001) 216-223.

⁶² The entertainment at Walesa's disposal included outdoor sports, pool, ping pong, walks, and out-of-town fishing trips. During the first seven months of detention he received 58 visits, mostly from clergy. After several long-term visits from his family (transportation was provided at no charge by the Ministry of Interior), his wife moved with five children into his place of detention. The family's choice is not very surprising considering the fact that at that time of notorious food shortages Walesa had access to unlimited food supplies from special government sources. For example, within seven months, Walesa and his guests consumed 114 bottles of hard liquor, 77 bottles of wine and champagne, 512 bottles of beer, and 628 packets of cigarettes. See "Note of the Office of Government Security and the Investigative Office of the Ministry of Interior regarding the letter of the Bishop of Gdansk Lech Kaczmarek (of July 9, 1982) to the president of the Military Council of National Salvation gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, regarding the release of Lech Walesa from internment." In: Kropka, Boguslaw and Grzegorz Majchrzak (eds.) (2001) 277-280.

⁶³ The extent of rationing of basic necessities was wider at that time than during the German occupation of Poland during WWII and covered such staples as meat, sugar, butter, flour, rice, grits, cigarettes, detergent, sanitary products, and powdered milk.

⁶⁴ The vast majority of arrested opposition activists were held in prisons and jails around the country, not in government vacation resorts, and were not granted official status of political prisoners. See "Declaration of TKK NSZZ Solidarnosc from June 26, 1982, regarding persons detained for social activism." In: Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.) (2001) 285-286. See also "Decision No. 50/81/CZZK of the Ministry of Justice, December 13, 1981, regarding the creation of centers of detention." In: Kropka, Boguslaw and Grzegorz Majchrzak (eds.) (2001) 65. Cases of prison guard brutality exhibited towards groups of political detainees were not unheard of. See Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.) (2001) 475.

⁶⁵ Walesa was released already on November 12, 1982, which allowed him to resume the leading role in Solidarity's organizational structures, by then gone underground, as of November 22, 1982. See Walichnowski, Tadeusz (ed.) (2001) 477. Walesa was also technically not "arrested," but visited at his home by two dignitaries who invited him to board a plane to Warsaw, from where he was transported to a government villa. See Paczkowski, Andrzej. *Wojna Polsko-Jaruzelska: Stan wojenny w Polsce, 13 XII 1981- 22 VII 1983*. Warsaw: Proszynski i S-ka (2006) 48.

once it became clear that the Polish crisis was rapidly spinning out of control.⁶⁶ Jaruzelski could have gambled and flat-out refused to impose martial law, knowing that, by every bit of political logic and information then available to him, the Soviets would not opt to use actual force,⁶⁷ and instead would let history run its course—or, in the alternative, he could have vacillated long enough for the same result to occur without antagonizing his Kremlin masters. But cracking down on Solidarity, even if late, kept Jaruzelski in power until the collapse of the communist regime, and his approach, even if deemed entirely too soft by Brezhnev, secured him the sympathy of the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev after the brief and stagnant interlude of Yuri Andropov, without antagonizing Solidarity leaders enough to exert vengeance against him in due time. Jaruzelski is still at liberty today, and in the eyes of the Polish public he retains the reputation of a deeply unpopular and ambiguous, albeit not quite criminal, historic personality. Jaruzelski's scare of a Soviet invasion can be characterized as yet another propaganda move of many that were so popular throughout the Cold War period: its exaggerated threat ended in an anticlimactic domestic disciplinarian move that convinced both the American and the Polish public with a sentiment of shivers that, luckily, the worst had been averted yet again. In reality, and by the standards of historic consequences, the imposition of martial law in Poland had turned out to be little more than a self-serving public relations gambit⁶⁸ of this only lifelong professional soldier that ever became the leader of a ruling European Communist Party and subsequently rose to head of state.⁶⁹

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⁶⁶ “*Andropov*: In this context, I wanted to say that our position, which has been earlier formulated at the previous meeting of the Politburo and expressed many times by Leonid Ilicz [Brezhnev], is completely correct and we should not abandon it. In other words, we are standing by the internationalist help, we are alarmed by the current situation in Poland, but when it comes to the operation “X,” it should be exclusively decision of the Polish comrades, it is going to be the way they will decide it to be. We will not insist and will not dissuade them.” (translation by the author) This passage is missing from “Transcript of the Soviet Politburo Meeting on the Crisis in Poland, December 10, 1981.” In: Krawczyk, Andrzej (ed.) (1993) 83.

⁶⁷ Jaruzelski's claim that martial law was inescapable in order to avoid a Soviet invasion cannot be corroborated by any sources outside Jaruzelski and his circle, but they nonetheless carried surprising attention and credence even after the fall of communism. See Kogelfranz, Siegfried; Lorenz Andreas; Rybak Andrzej. “Das war psychische Folter. Ex-Präsident Wojciech Jaruzelski über Kriegsrecht und Interventionsgefahr in Polen 1981.” In: *Der Spiegel*, May 11, 1992. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13680621.html>. Accessed July 26, 2012.

⁶⁸ Jaruzelski's downright preposterous claim that he had also sought and received “green light” from the U.S. for his imposition of martial law in Poland in a meeting of his envoy Eugeniusz Molczyk with Vice President George H.W. Bush, unsupported by other evidence, appears to support this assessment Cf. Perlez, Jane. “Warsaw Journal: Old Cold War Enemies Exhume One Battlefield”, *The New York Times*, 11 November 1997, 14. It is also not likely that a decision of such weight would have been left by the Reagan administration to the Vice President. Aside from statements of continuity and of the obvious assessment of the hopelessness of armed resistance against the Soviet Army, the Reagan administration sought to discourage Soviet strategems aimed at resolving the crisis by military means but did not identify an actual military threat. See Haig, Alexander. *Caveat, Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*. London: 1984, 240.

⁶⁹ Although Tito favored portraiture in his marshal's uniform, his actual military service had been limited to WWI as the youngest sergeant in the Austro-Hungarian army and his later rank had always been incidental to his function of commander-in-chief. By comparison, Jaruzelski had been a career officer throughout his adult life and had risen through the ranks to become a general officer.

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