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HR70-14



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06-18-2012

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Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland

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RP 77-10141CX

June 1977

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Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland

Central Intelligence Agency
Directorate of Intelligence

June 1977

Key Judgments

Since the end of World War II, successive Soviet leaderships have imposed political, economic, and military requirements on the East European regimes. None of these demands is more important to Moscow than ensuring that each regime preserve the leading role of the party, directed and fully controlled by its leadership, along with its subservience to the USSR—and thereby the Soviet “empire.” Should a Soviet leadership perceive any regime’s failure or reticence to do this—as in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—armed Soviet intervention could and probably would take place. To the extent that an invasion ensures the primacy of a party ruled by a leadership subservient to the USSR, the Soviets can consider military action to be a political success.

Soviet leaderships, however, have showed a clear preference *not* to intervene—at least until a thorough search for a nonmilitary solution has been made. Secondary considerations in this Soviet determination include the physical and demographic size of the country, whether the nation has a common border with a NATO member, its political, economic, and strategic military importance to the Soviet Union, and the historical legacy of anti-Russianism and anti-Sovietism harbored by a target country’s people.

Since coming under Communist rule, Poland, the largest East European country, has been the focal point of three politicoeconomic crises—without Soviet armed intervention:

- The “Polish October” of 1956 followed Soviet party leader Khrushchev’s faith-shattering denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Soviet party congress in February 1956 and culminated in the restoration of Wladyslaw Gomulka as party first secretary.

- In December 1970, Gomulka's extremely ill-timed decision to hike food prices during the Christmas buying season led to bloody riots by workers, bitter repressive measures, and Gomulka's replacement by Edward Gierek.
- The Gierek regime's proposals for stiff increases in food prices in June 1976 again sparked worker riots that caused the government to retract its proposals almost immediately.

Each crisis also has been in fact a Soviet-Polish emergency, in part because of the potential for such unrest to spread into the Soviet Ukraine and East Germany. Moreover, each has been a Soviet-Polish crisis because of the gamble taken by any Soviet leadership which decided to intervene militarily in the largest East European country. In short, the Soviets know that an invasion of Poland, with its much larger population of intensely nationalistic and anti-Soviet people, would be much more difficult than was the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The Soviets, of course, have the military capability to invade and occupy Poland (see appendix A). The Kremlin evidently prefers, however, to have the Polish leadership make minor concessions to the people to reduce public frustration. Polish regimes have thus far successfully used such tactics. At the same time, they have preserved the leading role of the party, while initiating and executing the transfer of party authority. There is currently no evidence to conclude that either the Soviets or the Poles intend to alter this pattern. A crisis could come in the event that ameliorating tactics failed to pacify the public, or in the event that the economic situation became sufficiently untenable that austerity measures would have to be strictly enforced.

This paper discusses the highlights of past Soviet-Polish crises—details are provided at annex—but it concentrates on the Soviet Union's political and military reactions to each emergency. The paper also outlines several key considerations that would shape any Soviet decision to intervene militarily in a future Polish crisis.

Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland

Background

Poland is of considerable political and strategic military importance to the Soviet Union. Politically, Communist rule in Poland, the largest East European country, strengthens Soviet claims to political legitimacy and provides the Kremlin with tangible evidence of the gains of socialism. Militarily, Soviet access to Poland provides forward bases and control of the traditional invasion routes into and from Western Europe, particularly across Poland's northern plains. Along with East Germany and Czechoslovakia, Poland constitutes an important element of Soviet national security.

The Russian-Polish relationship, however, has been a long story of conflict, almost from the time a millennium ago when the King of Poland became a convert to Roman Catholicism and turned his country's back to its eastern neighbors, who had turned to Constantinople for Christianity. To make matters worse, in the early 17th century—Russia's "Time of Troubles"—the Poles invaded their tsarist neighbor with considerable success. Warsaw's forces repeated the invasion in 1920 during the transition era in the Soviet consolidation of power. For its part, tsarist Russia, along with Austria and Prussia, in 1772, 1793, and 1795 absorbed the Polish state by dividing its territory between them.

A sovereign Poland did not re-emerge for 123 years—until the end of World War I with the collapse of the three partitioning states. The partitions instilled an intense sense of nationalism in the Poles, particularly a deep, stubborn will to achieve and preserve their independence and nationhood.

Poles have thus come to regard civil disobedience and opposition to foreign occupiers and alien political systems as essential patriotic virtues. At the same time, this legacy has taught them to make the best of what they cannot avoid, to become masters of the grapevine in defiance of censorship, and to look to the Roman Catholic Church as the basis of national identity.

Communist rule, thus, is accepted as a fact of life, but the party has never enjoyed general acceptance. Most Poles believe that the party rules ultimately because of the power and proximity of the Soviet Union. When Warsaw and Moscow must decide how to keep Polish unrest within controllable limits, the Polish heritage is an ever-recurring problem.

The "Polish October," 1956

Khrushchev's faith-shattering denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Soviet party congress in February 1956 probably more immediately affected Poland than any other East European country. Indeed, Boleslaw Bierut, Stalin's faithful and long-time viceroy in Poland, died of a heart attack while still in Moscow.

In the interval between Beirut's death and the Poznan riots in late June, there was a period of anti-Stalinist outbursts and intense nationalist reaction, sparked mainly by Polish intellectuals. There appeared, however, to be little cause for concern by the Kremlin, which was preoccupied with the effects of the Khrushchev speech, because the Polish leadership seemed in full control of the situation. The absence of any visible top-level split in the Polish leadership and the slowly evolving and moderate character of Warsaw's reforms obscured growing contradictions within the regime. The situation thus failed to create—for Moscow—a clear-cut justification for direct Soviet intervention.

The workers' uprising in Poznan, suppressed only through the use of the Polish army, heightened Moscow's concern and signaled that the ferment had spread from the intellectuals to the workers, who were smarting under oppressive working conditions. The authorities reacted quickly and were soon in command of the situation, but the leadership seemed genuinely surprised by what had occurred. The events in Poznan reflected a lack of alertness by security elements and, as with later Polish crises, the absence of genuine contact between the party and the working class. The regime had to decide whether to march toward further liberalization—that is de-Stalinization—or to resort to purely repressive measures. A party Central Committee plenum in July opted for further "democratization" combined with economic measures to alleviate slightly the plight of both workers and peasants.

This apparent show of unanimity among the party's leadership concealed a basic split in the hierarchy. Suspicion of a split quickly spread among the party's rank and file, causing rumors to flourish and the political situation to deteriorate. By early October, attitudes in the country at large and within the party indicated to the Polish party hierarchy that unless decisive steps were taken, a major explosion—perhaps civil war and Soviet military intervention—could not be avoided. In mid-October, the moderate faction, which by then included Bierut's successor as first secretary, Edward Ochab, concluded that a sharp break with the Stalinist past was imperative.

The moderates decided that the restoration of Wladyslaw Gomulka to the central party leadership was the only way to rein in nationalism. He had lost his party position in 1948, ostensibly because he sympathized with Yugoslavia's Tito and spoke strongly for a "Polish road to socialism." Charges were lodged against him, and he was imprisoned until September 1955. Gomulka was not officially rehabilitated until April 1956. It was against this background that the moderates also concluded that only Gomulka could effectively reshape Polish-Soviet relations without undermining Polish Communism.

As one who had "paid his dues," Gomulka insisted that he would not return to the central party organs without assuming the number one position. He also demanded the removal of all arch-Stalinists from the Politburo and the ouster of Marshal Rokossovsky, the Soviet general who since 1949 had been Poland's defense minister. These were stiff demands, and the last one particularly raised the possibility of Soviet military intervention.

When the Polish party's Central Committee met on October 19 to elect Gomulka as first secretary and to comply with his other demands, the Soviets were stirred to action. Khrushchev, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, and Molotov—a delegation representing the main factions of the Soviet leadership—flew to Warsaw. In response, the Poles temporarily adjourned their plenum. At the same time, Soviet military units in Poland began moving north from Silesia and those in East Germany toward the Polish border. The Polish army, still under Marshal Rokossovsky, also started maneuvers that brought some large units closer to Warsaw. The possibility of an outright clash could not be excluded, because Gomulka's supporters controlled the security forces, which were assuming defensive positions, and workers were calling for arms for what might have become a new battle of Warsaw.

The "Polish October" also prompted increased security precautions throughout Eastern Europe. In the wake of Khrushchev's speech, the regimes probably anticipated a strong ripple effect from Poland. [

[

This state of alert rippled southward with the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution and was not relaxed until late November.

[It would appear that the Soviet leadership did not go to Warsaw with either a clear understanding of the situation or a program to impose on the Poles. Rather, they arrived with a set of grievances. They were particularly disturbed by the implications of Rokossovsky's removal and apparently were relatively unconcerned about Gomulka's rise.] they neither endorsed nor rejected Gomulka's domestic program.

It is clear, however, that each side assumed a threatening attitude. On the Soviet side, this was buttressed by the overwhelming military strength that the Soviet leaders had at their disposal, and on the Polish side, by an aroused and partly armed anti-Soviet population led by Gomulka. The turning point in the one-day talks reportedly came when the Poles made an ominous double threat—Ochab threatened to distribute arms to the workers unless Soviet-ordered troop movements ceased, and Gomulka threatened to go on the radio and reveal the course of events to the population. In an effort to balance his warning, however, Gomulka reportedly presented himself as a loyal Communist who would not lead Poland out of the Soviet bloc. As a result, the Soviet leaders accepted the situation and agreed to the removal of the ultra-Stalinists from the Polish leadership and to the elevation of Gomulka. On October 20, the day the Khrushchev delegation returned to Moscow, Soviet troop movements in Poland all but stopped. On October 21, Gomulka was formally elected as first secretary, and the Stalinists were ousted at the resumed session of the party's Central Committee.

[Serious divisions in the Soviet leadership which culminated in Khrushchev's ouster of the "anti-party" group in late 1957 prevented agreement on a decision to use military force. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin made him less concerned with Gomulka's "Polish Communism" and the fate of the Polish Stalinists than with the implications of Rokossovsky's expected removal.]

The Soviet delegation may also have concluded that if Gomulka could restrain certain anti-Soviet tendencies, Moscow could tolerate at least a reduction of blatant Stalinist abuses of Poland's national interests. Furthermore, the situation in Hungary was heating up, and Moscow was not anxious to have that pot boil over at the same time—a development that would have been made much more likely by Soviet intervention.

On the plus side of the ledger, power in Poland was retained by the Communist Party which initiated and executed the transfer of authority to Gomulka. Gomulka's program stressed domestic reforms that did not threaten Poland's membership in the bloc or the leading role of the party. Military intervention was avoided that would have shattered the tenuous links that Khrushchev had worked so hard to develop with Tito.

Furthermore, armed Soviet intervention would have run counter to the "friendly advice" of the Chinese, who reportedly urged restraint. Direct action would have encouraged elements in the Soviet party opposing both de-Stalinization and Khrushchev. The gradual evolution of the Polish challenge also deprived the Soviets of any immediate provocation to justify the use of force, and the Soviets knew that the historically anti-Russian and anti-Soviet nature of Poland's 25 million people would have prompted massive public resistance to armed intervention.

As a result of these factors, the Soviet leaders evidently chose to guide Gomulka's course by applying indirect political pressure coupled with economic rewards.

Gomulka's Ouster, December 1970

The crisis that toppled Gomulka from power on December 20, 1970, was triggered by the announcement one week earlier of a package calling for wage reforms and sharp price hikes on foods. The evidence suggests that the Soviets knew in advance of the contents of the decree but not of the regime's decision to announce it just prior to Christmas.

Warsaw claimed that this unpopular move was necessitated by its inability to satisfy consumer demands, especially for food items. The timing of the announcement could scarcely have been worse—the Christmas season in predominantly Catholic Poland is a major holiday, exceeded in importance only by Easter.

Public riots and work stoppages immediately swept the northern part of the country. Significantly, however, there was considerably less evidence than in 1956 of a strong anti-Soviet bias to the disorders. The port cities of Gdansk, Gdynia, and Szczecin—the latter near the East German border—were centers of particularly violent protest. In Gdansk, for example, workers rioted, shouted "Down with Gomulka," and set fire to party and police headquarters.

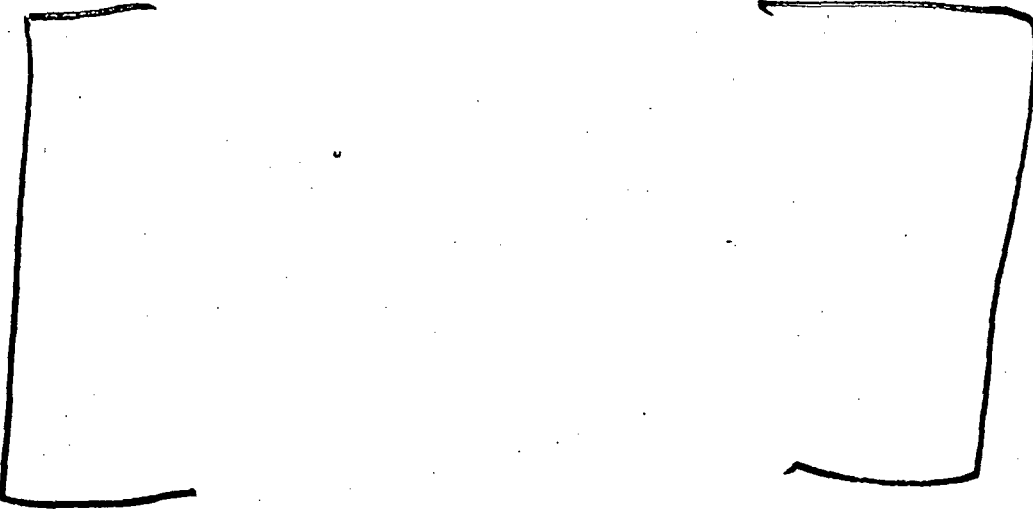
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The regime responded to these riots and strikes by sealing off the northern coastal area, imposing a strict curfew, and sending substantial reinforcements to the militia and internal security forces in the region. Repression was severe, physical damage was heavy, and strikes were nationwide. The regime stressed that it would not back down on the retail price hikes.

Predictably, all Polish military units and the two Soviet divisions in Poland were put on alert, but the evidence indicates that the Soviet military reaction to the 1970 crisis was at a considerably lower—or at least, less visible—level than in 1956. [7

[In the days leading up to Gomulka's resignation and his replacement by Edward Gierk on December 20. [acute political concern in Moscow over the Polish situation. There was never any evidence, however, of a Soviet intention to use its military forces to resolve the problem. [] the Soviet party Politburo held two meetings in [

[These meetings coincided at least in part with the Polish party Central Committee plenum which was debating the fate of Gomulka. The evidence does not make clear whether the Poles and Soviets were consulting during the two sessions, or whether the Soviets were merely discussing the implications of changes already decided in Warsaw. 7



Unlike the turmoil in 1956, the events surrounding the fall of Gomulka in 1970 unfolded so rapidly that the Soviets were basically cast in the role of bystanders. Several considerations probably persuaded the Soviets to adopt a hands-off attitude:

- The Gomulka regime had clearly outstayed its welcome by increasingly showing itself to be inept and out of touch with the people.
- The riots did not have the strong anti-Soviet cast of those in 1956, but the Soviets wisely recognized that Polish nationalism was near the surface.
- A secondary consideration for Moscow's inaction probably was a desire not to interrupt detente and the preparatory talks then under way for a Conference on European Security and Cooperation.
- Of crucial significance, however, was the fact that the leading role of the Polish party was never in jeopardy.
- As in 1956, the Polish party initiated and executed, albeit with Soviet approval, the transfer of authority, in this case from Gomulka to Gierk.

These political and military considerations almost certainly gave Moscow some anxious moments. But Brezhnev, unlike Khrushchev in 1956,

did not have to contend with a strong "anti-party" group challenging his leadership. This almost certainly facilitated a more measured and relaxed Soviet response.

The June Riots, 1976

From a Soviet as well as a Polish viewpoint, it is ironic that like Gomulka in 1970, Polish party chief Gierek had to cope late last June with public rioting sparked by his regime's proposals for sharp price hikes on food. This irony was undoubtedly heightened by the knowledge in Moscow and Warsaw that Gierek had chaired a special party commission that investigated the Poznan riots in 1956. He was also a member of the Polish team—led by Gomulka—that conducted the crucial negotiations with the angry Khrushchev delegation in Warsaw in October 1956.

In summary, the June riots followed the regime's announcement on June 24 of stiff price increases on most foods, particularly meat. Prices of basic food items had been frozen since Gomulka's ouster. Meantime, Gierek had undertaken a massive program, based on importing Western technology, to modernize the Polish economy. The Soviets were reportedly unhappy with the stress that the Poles put on expanding Western economic relations, but this policy was inherent in the Soviet prescription for bloc economic ills. The Soviets were also unhappy about Warsaw's heavy foreign debt and debt servicing and the consequences thereof. The population benefited through higher earnings—a 40-percent increase in real wages from 1971 to 1975—that were greater than those justified by increased productivity. Consumers also had more to spend and, in the absence of sufficient supplies of major consumer goods, the Poles increasingly spent their extra money on food. As a result, per capita meat consumption sharply increased, and budget subsidies to support stable food prices more than quadrupled between 1971 and 1975. Indeed, by 1975, the subsidies had reached 14 percent of total budget outlays.

Gierek's ruling style also probably was a key element in the decision to raise food prices. Unlike Gomulka, Gierek does not rule by diktat. In late June, he evidently yielded to the economists, who had strongly pushed for the increases. In contrast, the politicians had opposed the hikes because, mindful of 1970, they feared a violent popular reaction. Like Gomulka, Gierek and the economists badly misjudged the public's reaction, which became evident the day after the proposals were announced.

Faced with widespread disorders, the stunned leadership promptly withdrew its proposals and prohibited the militia from using firearms in

quelling the riots. Warsaw has since promised not to raise food prices until mid-1978, it has freed nearly all the workers imprisoned for allegedly participating in the riots, and it has promised to consult with the workers before decisions on pocketbook issues are made.

There is absolutely no evidence, however, that the Soviets played either a direct or indirect role in quelling the disturbances.

Soviet press treatment of the Polish riots was low key. The Gierk leadership's decision to retract the increases was reported without editorial comment in the press on June 27, by which time Polish tempers were visibly cooling. Moreover, as if to avoid fueling discontent at home, Soviet media conspicuously refrained from reporting that Polish workers had again taken to the streets.

Privately, however, the Soviets were and are deeply concerned over unrest in Poland. Moscow's ultimate concern is to ensure that political stability reigns in Poland. This concern did not prevent Gierk and Brezhnev from seriously disagreeing—reportedly over the price hike debacle—during a private meeting on June 29 in East Berlin at the European Communist Parties' Conference (ECPC). One month later in the Crimea, however, the two had a "friendly" meeting. In November, Brezhnev's ringing endorsement of the Polish leader, delivered when Gierk visited Moscow, and a concurrent Soviet economic package clearly signaled Soviet agreement with Gierk's placatory approach as the safest bet over the short run.

Poland's other neighbors, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, showed minor signs of concern over the possible turn of events, but their misgivings were dispelled by early July, when conditions in Poland had essentially returned to normal. East Berlin and Prague were mainly concerned that there might be a spillover from the Polish unrest that would find popular acceptance among disgruntled East German and Czechoslovak workers.

Moscow's apparent restrained reaction to the June riots was probably governed by the following considerations:

- Polish authorities and the party clearly had the means to control the situation.
- The June violence broke out less than a week before the long-delayed and Soviet-desired European Communist Parties' Conference opened in East Berlin. Any heavyhanded Soviet meddling in Polish affairs prior to the ECPC would have incurred the risk of scuttling the conference, bringing Moscow under intensive public attack from the Eurocommunists, and triggering an explosion of Polish nationalism.
- Strong nationalistic feelings with anti-Soviet overtones had been expressed in Warsaw earlier in the year by the church and Polish intellectuals. They successfully opposed amendments to the constitution that would have further institutionalized the country's links with the Soviet Union and strengthened the role of the party at the expense of the church



The Difficult Future

A Soviet economic aid package in November and Gierk's tactics have enabled Polish authorities to muddle through the country's two major religious holidays—Christmas and Easter. But the testing period is far from over. With the Soviet leadership and the Polish people both judging his performance, Gierk must successfully cope with a distrustful and volatile populace that is at once increasingly conscious of its own power and impatient for concrete results. At the same time, he must also cope with a Soviet leadership that is becoming impatient with subsidizing the relatively high level of Polish consumption.

Tensions will thus remain high and could again explode into public disorders and rioting as the Gierk regime tries to decide how to:

- Regain a healthy measure of public confidence.
- Manage the politically explosive and economically pressing problem of raising food prices.
- Overcome shortages of consumer goods, particularly meat.
- Proceed with economic development as the burden of hard-currency debt gets even heavier.

Gierek must show progress in achieving the above goals in the full knowledge that:

- The authority of his regime has been clearly weakened.
- There is now little room for political or economic maneuver.
- The Soviets have recorded in no uncertain terms their displeasure both with Poland's growing indebtedness to the West and with the June violence.
- The Kremlin would be even more displeased should there be a recurrence of rioting in 1977, when the 60th anniversary of the Soviet October Revolution is celebrated.
- Any major mistake could again send the Poles into the streets, thereby substantially raising the probability of a new Polish leadership and possibly inviting Soviet intervention.

Conjecture on Intervention

Successive Soviet governments have since World War II imposed political, military, and economic requirements on East European regimes. Political requisites have stressed a monopoly of power for the Communist Party. Military needs have—in the case of Poland—particularly emphasized control over the lines of communications to Soviet forces in East Germany. Economic requirements have stressed close cooperation with the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance. When, in Moscow's opinion, these fundamentals appear to be seriously threatened or compromised, the Soviets can be expected to show alarm.

Moscow would become particularly alarmed, *if* the Polish leadership edged toward the "main danger of revisionism" while trying to reduce

conflict between the party and the people. From the Kremlin's vantage point, this could undermine the Polish party's ability to continue leading the country. The Soviets might also consider that Warsaw's concessions to the demands of the workers and intellectuals could tilt the Gierk leadership toward the Eurocommunists. For the Soviet Union, Eurocommunism increasingly challenges the very legitimacy of the Soviet party model and offers the prospect of a Europeanization of Communism in Eastern as well as Western Europe.

In conjecturing about the possibility of armed Soviet intervention, it may also be useful to keep in mind the principles that lay behind the Soviet decision to invade Czechoslovakia.

- The so-called northern tier countries—Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland—are of crucial political, economic, and strategic military importance to the Soviet Union. The strong Western political, cultural, and economic heritage of these countries also makes them the Achilles heel of the Soviet empire.
- Soviet doctrine is rich in guidelines for dealing with non-Communist enemies, but it offers relatively little guidance for resolving major conflicts among Communist-ruled countries.
- The Soviets can procrastinate and appear to be patient with East European countries experimenting with reforms or coping with unrest. When party control is threatened, however, the Kremlin can and will take the measures necessary to preserve its empire.
- In Czechoslovakia, Soviet actions were as frequently based on the Kremlin's interpretation of the possible consequences of Dubcek's methods and intentions as on the measures which his regime had actually put into effect.

Up to a certain point, the disbelieving, often hostile Polish people, their wary leaders, and church authorities can count on each other to keep unrest contained. Most Poles assume, and correctly so, that the Soviet Union would be forced to invade *if*:

- the leading role of the party were seriously threatened, or
- untrammelled Soviet military access to East Germany were severely jeopardized, or

- the Polish people simply refused to yield to regime concessions coupled with promises for the future.

Some Constraints on a Decision To Invade

The cautious nature of Soviet reactions to past Polish crises clearly indicates that the Soviets would prefer *not* to intervene militarily in a Polish emergency. In support of this generalization, it is helpful to recall that in the months leading to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Kremlin also searched carefully for a nonmilitary solution. For instance, a Politburo-to-Politburo summit was used to persuade the Prague leadership to slow down, if not reverse, Dubcek's reformist course. The Kremlin also extensively consulted with all of its East European allies, except Yugoslavia and Romania. In the final analysis, it was not Brezhnev but East Germany's Ulbricht who most stubbornly advocated military action. Indeed, the Soviet leadership abandoned nonmilitary courses of action only after it became clear that the Dubcek team could neither modify nor control steadily increasing popular demands. Moscow was also concerned about the possible effects of the "Prague Spring" in the Soviet Union.

The conclusion that Moscow would use extreme caution with the Poles, however, does not preclude invasion as an ultimate Soviet action in a sufficiently threatening situation in Poland. Rather, it argues that because the Soviets showed considerable restraint with respect to Czechoslovakia, they would show an even greater reluctance to invade Poland. They encountered only token resistance in Czechoslovakia. It is a near certainty, however, that Soviet invasion of Poland would be met with widespread and bloody opposition, including some from elements of the Polish army. Furthermore, Soviet intervention could spark reactions in East Germany and in the restive Ukrainian and Lithuanian Soviet republics bordering on Poland, as well as stimulate intense political activity among the numerically and politically significant ethnic Polish minority living in the West, including the United States.

Other probable restraints against military intervention by the Soviets include possible differences of opinion in the Soviet leadership, the uncertain effects on decisionmaking of the aged and ailing nature of Soviet leaders, as well as the likelihood of differing opinions among Moscow's allies. The Soviet leadership was not genuinely united in its decision to invade Czechoslovakia, [] A consensus favoring intervention in the much more populous and anti-Soviet Poland—which would require the largest Soviet military operation since World War II—could

easily be more difficult to achieve. This would particularly be the case, *if* a decision had to be made during jockeying for position to succeed Brezhnev and Premier Kosygin. A consensus might be even more difficult to reach in the event that the question of invasion had to be decided *after* the departure of Brezhnev. The periods immediately following the Stalin and Khrushchev eras were marked by a lack of decisiveness in Eastern Europe and a consequent drift of control.

The Soviet leadership is presumably aware from the Czechoslovak experience that any invasion of Poland would repress but not eliminate the powerful political, economic, and social forces challenging the Kremlin's interests and authority. Since 1968, nationalism and the quest for socioeconomic modernization in East Europe have become stronger. Invasion would also tend to prove that force, fear, and intrigue are the ultimate and dominant principles of the Soviet international system, and would reveal to the world the fragility of Moscow's situation in Eastern Europe. To the extent that intervention would strengthen this impression, the ability of the Soviet party to pose convincingly as the superior model of Communist practice would be severely undermined; the Chinese party could reap a propaganda bonanza.

Divided opinion among Moscow's allies could reflect the regimes' individual perceptions of the Soviet leadership situation. Survival instincts of East European party hierarchies are keenly developed, in part by scrutinizing and assessing the political scene in Moscow for signs of leadership differences on key issues. In addition, some regimes might want to conceal their position on intervention, either to minimize problems with their own populations or to limit damage to ties with major West European countries and political parties, including the Eurocommunists. Even so, no member of the Warsaw Pact, with the possible exception of Romania, could refrain from going along with a Soviet decision to invade. The Hungarians, who also harbor a volatile brand of anti-Sovietism, might engage in foot-dragging, however, in order to reduce the risk of unleashing Hungarian nationalism.

Elsewhere, orchestrated activity by the West, especially by NATO members, would probably be the single most important constraint against a Soviet decision to intervene in Poland. A Soviet determination to invade would have to be preceded by considerable military preparation. Western monitoring could hardly fail to detect such activity in its early stages. The transformation of these findings into concerted diplomatic initiatives would not necessarily alter the Soviet decision. *If* the balance favoring invasion in

the Soviet leadership were a delicate one, however, the Western activity might at least forestall, if not change, the decision to intervene.

The extent of the Soviet Union's reliance on the West for the transfer of technology and overall economic, cultural, and political East-West exchanges could constitute additional leverage to be brought to bear on Moscow. Moreover, with the advent of the triangular relationship—Moscow, Washington, and Peking—the Soviet Union has developed a particularly strong interest in maintaining a dialogue with the US on a wide variety of issues. It is worth noting that Foreign Minister Gromyko publicly announced, about three weeks before the Czechoslovak invasion, a Soviet willingness to discuss arms control issues, including limitations on the deployment of offensive and defensive missiles, for which Washington had long pressed Moscow.

Advantages of an Invasion

The Soviet Union would presumably predicate any decision to invade Poland on an exhaustive but unsuccessful search for a nonmilitary solution to a perceived crisis. Such a situation would almost certainly contain any or all of the following elements or would be seen by the Soviets as pointing in that direction.

- Polish authorities would no longer adhere to the basic tenets of Communist practice as interpreted by the Soviet party leadership.
- The regime in Warsaw would either be unable or unwilling to meet the full range of Soviet military and economic requirements.
- The Polish people would not settle for "amelioration" or the transfer of power from one perceived group of pro-Soviets to another.

An invasion could in theory generate a number of advantages—from the Kremlin's point of view.

- The most immediate effect would be to "stabilize" the situation by freeing the Soviet empire from possible contagion posed by a presumably "reformist" and probably "weak" Polish regime. Intervention would also remove all doubts that the Soviet Union was and will be prepared to use its military forces to preserve its political and military requirements in the area encompassed by the Warsaw Pact.

- A "successful" invasion might strengthen the Soviet grip over the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance and the Warsaw Pact.
- Successful intervention would also have the effect of strengthening those East European countries and leaders most loyal to Moscow.

From Moscow's vantage point, benefits beyond Eastern Europe could include:

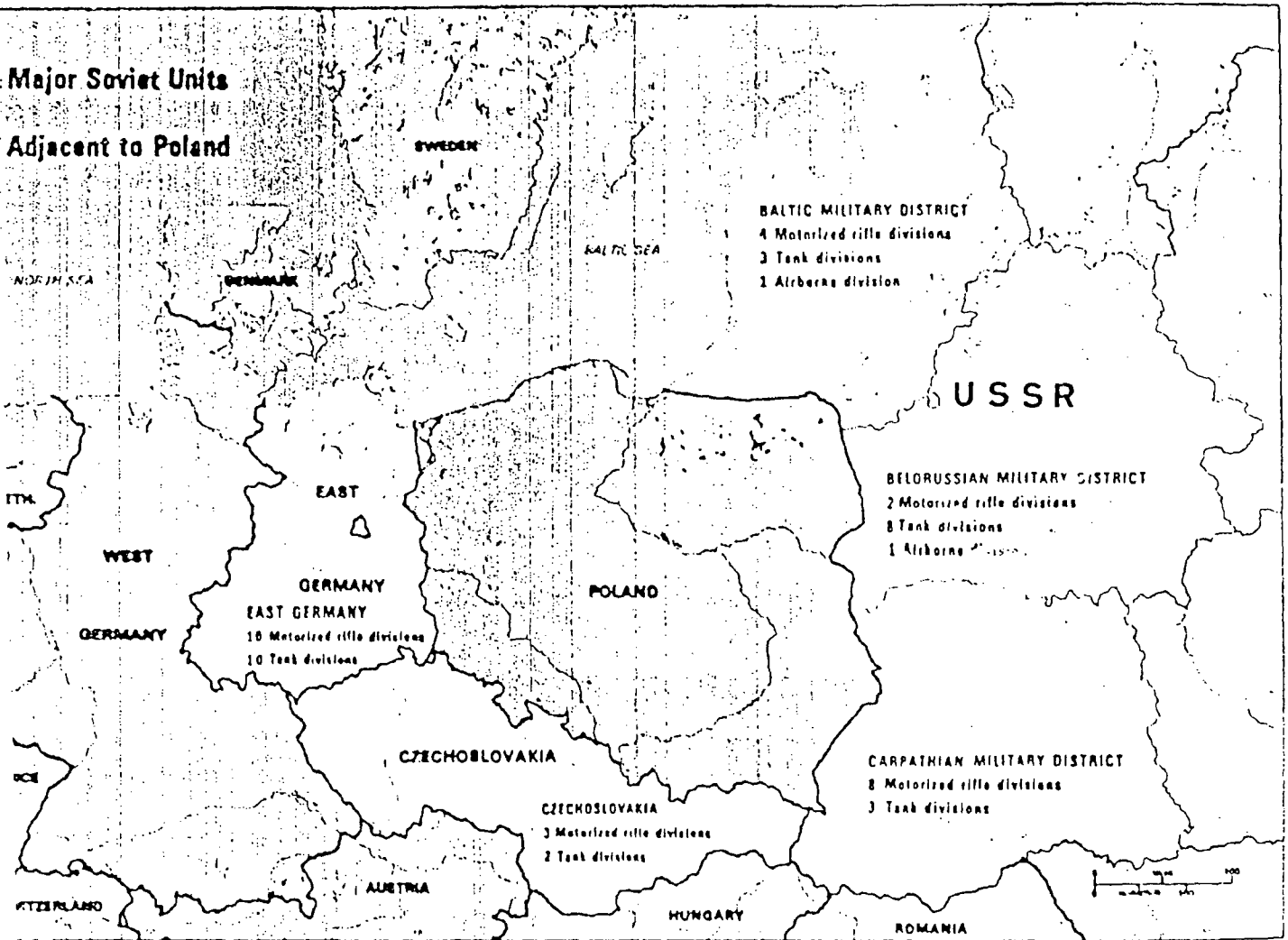
- An increase in the credibility of Soviet power. In this context, the Kremlin would probably be only slightly concerned by negative reactions to an invasion in the West. On the basis of the post-invasion situation in 1968, the Soviets clearly consider such responses to be short-lived.
- A demonstration to Eurocommunists and a Western-inclined Polish leadership that the Soviets were resolved to defend against Western political penetration of the East.
- Proof that the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe is so important to Moscow that it is unrealistic for either East or West Europeans to anticipate major shifts in the region, except in the context of very significant changes in Soviet attitudes or leaders or both.

Collectively, these advantages strongly suggest that the Soviets will do whatever is necessary to preserve their sphere of influence and security. There is reason to believe that the Soviets consider their past armed interventions to have been "successful" in terms of "stabilizing" threatening political situations. This suggests that although a future Soviet decision to invade may be difficult and distasteful for the Kremlin, neither the cries of East Europeans and their Eurocommunist supporters nor Western public opinion will change the Soviet perception of the need to protect the USSR's national interests.

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*The author of this paper is
, Office of Political and
Regional Analysis. Comments and queries are
welcome and should be directed*

Major Soviet Units
Adjacent to Poland



APPENDIX A

The Soviet Capability for a Military Solution

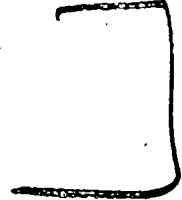
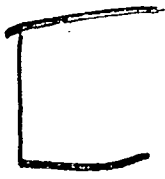
Should the Soviets decide to use military force to intervene in Poland, they would have several options open to them. The following options assume that no resistance would be encountered from the Polish army.

- The two Soviet tank divisions in Poland could be used anywhere in the country within a few hours for riot suppression or a limited show of strength.
- Airborne troops from the USSR probably could be airlifted to major Polish cities within 24 hours.
- The Soviet divisions nearest the Polish border in the western USSR and East Germany could be moved into Poland within 24 hours. There are currently 30 Soviet divisions in the western military districts of the Soviet Union and 20 Soviet divisions in East Germany.
- The Soviet divisions in the western military districts in the USSR could be mobilized for a full-scale invasion; however this would require at least three days.

APPENDIX B

Chronology: Highlights of the "Polish October," 1956

- February 14-25 The 20th Soviet party congress. Major ideological changes and denunciation of the cult of personality culminate in secret session on last day when Khrushchev fiercely attacks Stalin.
- March 12 Polish party first secretary Boleslaw Beirut dies from a heart attack in Moscow. Edward Ochab succeeds him.
- April 6 Ochab announces several rehabilitations, including the partial one of Wladyslaw Gomulka.
- June 28-29 Poznan workers riot, call for a general strike, and more than 50 deaths ensue.
- July 18-27 At the 7th Central Committee plenum, Ochab rejects theory that "provocateurs and imperialist agents" were responsible for the Poznan riots. Plenum makes modest moves toward reforms, Gomulka's party membership is restored, and Edward Gierk joins the party's Politburo.
- [] [] [] []
- September 27 Poznan trials start. Trials are open to the public, all accused are properly defended, and relatively mild sentences are handed down.
- [] [] [] []
- [] [] [] []

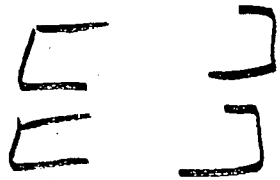
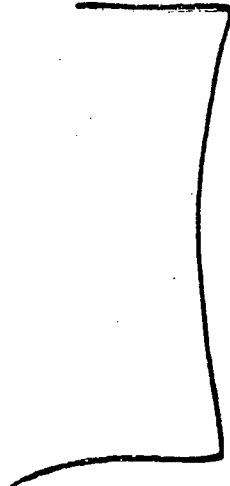
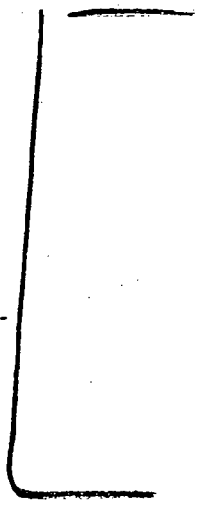
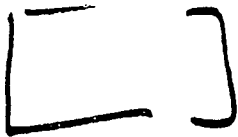


October 19

Polish Central Committee convenes 8th plenum amid reports it will call for the dismissal of Soviet officers and the departure of Soviet troops.

October 19

Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Molotov, and Kaganovich arrive in Warsaw.



October 20

At 0600 hours, the Khrushchev delegation, finding the Polish party firmly in control and the anti-Gomulka faction weak, departs Warsaw for Moscow.

October 21

Party Central Committee plenum resumes, Gomulka is elected first secretary, and his "national Communist" reform faction gains majority in Politburo.

October 23

All Poznan sentences are reviewed.

October 24

Gomulka publicly reaffirms ties with the USSR and asserts that the Soviets have promised to return units in Poland and the GSFG to their barracks area within two days.

- October 25 Transport aircraft for the airborne forces in the Kaunas area return to their home bases.
- October 28 Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski is released.
- Late October Poles begin release or reassignment of Soviet officers assigned to their armed forces.
- November 19 Soviet Marshal Rokossovsky "resigns" as Polish defense minister and becomes a Soviet deputy defense minister.

APPENDIX C

Chronology: The Downfall of Gomulka, December 1970

- December 9 Probable date of Politburo meeting in Warsaw to decide on regime's package of wage reforms and food price increases.
- December 13 The official decree is published in the press and broadcast on Polish radio and television. Price hikes on food range from 11 to 25 percent.
- December 14 Polish police and military units are alerted.
- December 14 Disorders break out in Gdansk with workers shouting "Down with Gomulka!"
- December 14-15 Party and police headquarters as well as radio station in Gdansk are set afire by rioting workers.
- December 15 Riots spread to Gdynia; eyewitness reports from Gdansk say police and military are engaged in quelling the riots.
- December 16 900 people have been arrested in Gdansk since December 1. Polish press reports northern part of country is sealed off.
- December 17 Strikes and riots break out in Szczecin, near Polish - East German border.
- December 17 The Council of Ministers declares a state of emergency and formally authorizes the use of all necessary means to quell disorder.
- Mid-December] Poles working there are urged not to go home for the holidays.

December 17

Broadcasts from Gdansk and Szczecin admit a very serious situation exists. []
East German Politburo member Honecker describes the Polish situation as a "counterrevolutionary matter" against the state.

December 17

[] the Warsaw Pact members
[] placed their police and internal security organs on
[]

December 18

Gomulka is reportedly asked to summon a Politburo meeting by a group of colleagues opposed to pure repression. His replacement is discussed.

[]
[]
[]

[]

December 19

After a seven-hour meeting of the Polish party Politburo, a majority agrees to ask Gomulka to resign.

December 20

A plenum of the Polish party's Central Committee formally elects Edward Gierk as first secretary and approves other changes in the composition of the Politburo and Secretariat.

December 20

Gierk appears on Polish television, acknowledges the leadership's mistakes, and promises a revision of economic and other policies. Strikes and disturbances start to die down.

December 20

East German Politburo member Honecker, [] []
[] [] implies that Moscow had a hand in the
decision to replace Gomulka.

December 20



December 21

The crisis appears to be abating. Brezhnev sends warm personal messages to Gierek.

December 22

Polish Council of Ministers revokes the December 17 emergency measures, stating that life had returned to "normal" in the coastal cities.

January

Renewed worker unrest surfaces, albeit in much less violent form. Gierek successfully appeals for "reason" among the people. The Soviets show some signs of anxiety but on January 31, when Warsaw announces price adjustments favoring the consumer, unrest quickly dissipates.

APPENDIX D

Chronology: Reaction to Price Proposals, June 1976

March 27 Prime Minister Jaroszewicz echoes Gierek's remarks to the party congress in December by stressing to parliament the need to end the existing freeze on food prices. He makes no formal proposals, however.

[] [] [] []

[] [] [] []

[] []

June 23 The party's newspaper prepares its readers for price hikes by condemning the policy of subsidies.



June 24 Jaroszewicz announces proposals for price hikes on food in a lengthy speech to parliament. The proposals call for an average price increase of 69 percent on meat, 100 percent on sugar, and over 50 percent on butter and higher quality cheese. Bread, flour, and some milk products will remain at their current prices.

June 25 Riots and demonstrations break out at several key industrial facilities, workers stop trains on nearby rail lines, and [] reports growing rumors of unrest throughout Poland.

June 25 In a one-minute "speech" on Polish television, Prime Minister Jaroszewicz retracts the regime's proposals for food price hikes.

June 29 A group of Polish intellectuals addresses a letter to the Polish parliament, calling for an "expansion of democratic freedoms, including freedom of the press and assembly, in order to prevent further popular excesses."

- June 30 At the European Communist Parties' Conference in East Berlin, Gierk and Brezhnev reportedly disagree in private over the food price debacle in Poland.
- Late June [] authorities in East Berlin are closely watching Poland's food price riots for any possible spillover effects.
- July 2 In his first public speech since the riots, Gierk appeals to workers to show "patriotism and national unity."
- July 4 [] Gierk reiterates his strong commitment to raise food prices.
- July 13 The government announces it will increase prices on meat by an average of 35 percent later this year but will maintain a price freeze on other basic foods at least through 1976.
- July 21 Polish courts sentence 13 convicted rioters to prison terms ranging from 3 to 10 years.
- July 21 A member of the Polish party Central Committee tells [] that the mishandling of the proposed price increases has produced "depression, defensiveness, and a loss of self-confidence" within the leadership. He does not imply, however, that a change in leadership might be in order.
- July 28 A top Polish party official informs [] that Warsaw will not raise meat prices this year.
- Late July A major French non-Communist labor union joins with the Italian labor movement in protesting the trials and prison sentences for Polish workers.
- September 3 Gierk announces that existing economic problems will be examined by five commissions--each headed by a Politburo member; the commissions are told to complete their work within a year or by the next party conference in early 1978.
- September 9 Poland's Catholic bishops call for an amnesty of workers punished for their roles in the riots. The bishops also appeal for calm and unity.

- Mid-September Reports indicate that the Poles will not raise food prices for at least another year.
- Late September Dissident Polish intellectuals are the main force in creating the Workers' Defense Committee. The committee seeks to defend the rights of arrested or dismissed workers and to provide financial aid to families of such workers.
- September 27 The Polish Supreme Court reduces the sentences of seven workers to one year's imprisonment, suspended.
- October 25 Jaroszewicz pays a one-day visit to Moscow, probably to discuss economic issues, including Soviet aid, prior to Gierek's visit in November.
- Late October   Polish authorities are worried about a possible outbreak of violence at Warsaw University.
- November 8-15 Gierek and Jaroszewicz lead a party and state delegation to the USSR. Brezhnev gives Gierek his full personal endorsement, and the Soviets grant an apparently sizable economic aid package to Poland.
- December 2 Following the Gierek visit to Moscow, important personnel shifts are announced in the Polish party and in the Council of Ministers. Changes focus on getting a better hold on the country's economic problems.
- Early December Reports claim that some party and government officials in Warsaw have become increasingly concerned during the last several months about the morale and reliability of the Polish armed forces.
- December 13 An article in the major party daily for the first time brands the Workers' Defense Committee as the chief antigovernment group at home and abroad. The article also tries to undercut the committee's claim to speak as a legitimate representative of the workers.

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