



Poland: The Papal Visit

An Intelligence Assessment

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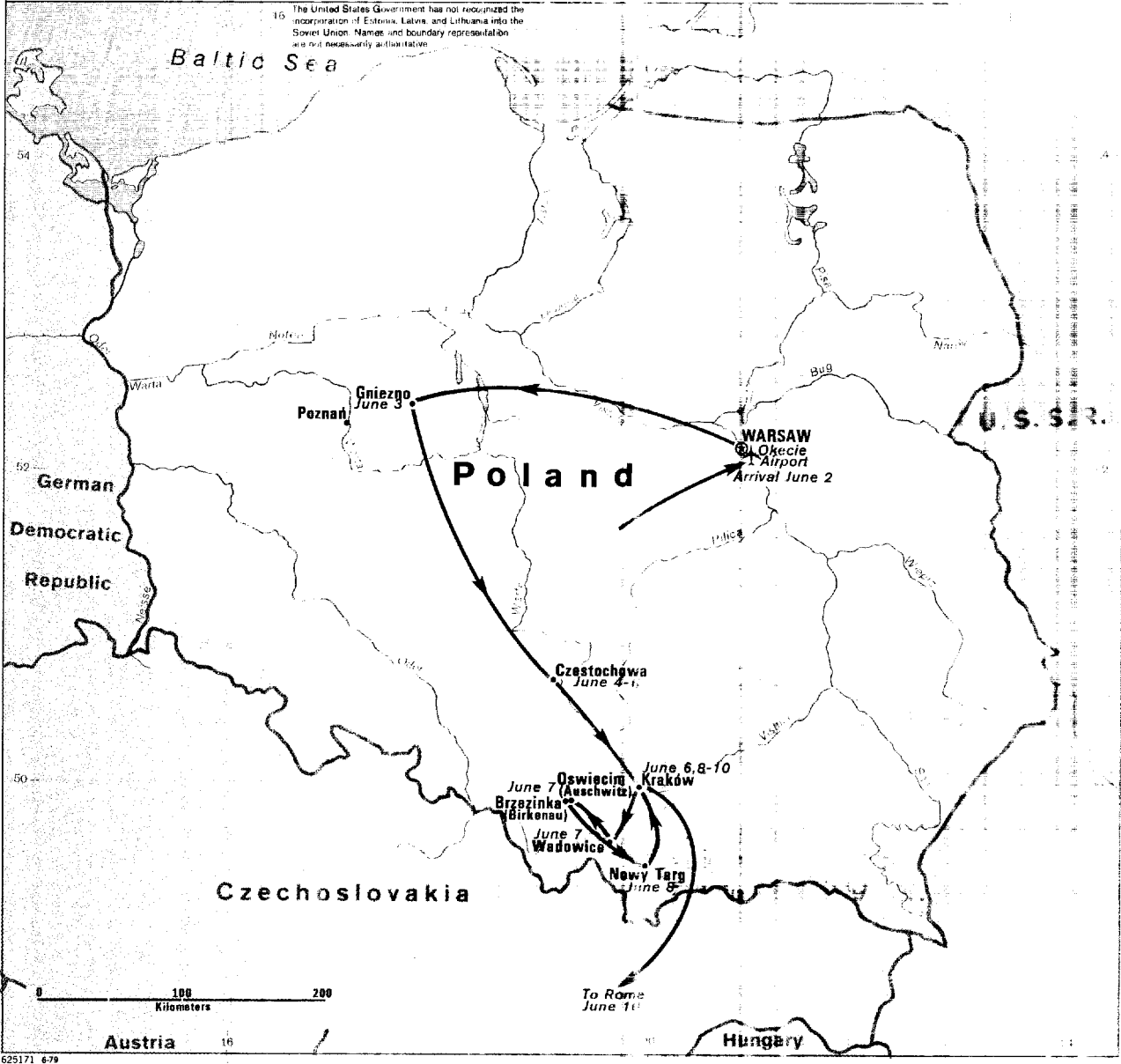
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Itinerary of Pope John Paul II



**Poland:
The Papal Visit (U)**

Key Judgments

The visit of Pope John Paul II to his Polish homeland from 2 to 10 June—the first papal visit to a Communist country—promises to be an occasion for a demonstration of Polish religious and national feeling, much of it with anti-Communist overtones. This has made Communist authorities—both Polish and Soviet—uneasy, but they presumably have concluded that permitting the visit is less risky than denying it. At this stage all sides involved in the event—church, state, and the Vatican—have a stake in an untroubled visit:

- The Polish regime has opted, after some initial hesitation, to associate itself with the visit, hoping to dilute the visit's inherent anti-Communist content and to garner some popular good will.
- The Polish episcopate hopes the visit will bolster its efforts to secure further concessions from the state.
- For the Vatican, the trip is a bold gambit in what is developing into an active papal foreign policy, particularly toward Communist countries. (C)

The visit will draw the largest crowds in the history of Communist Poland. This raises the possibility that, despite the best efforts of all involved, an untoward incident could turn pervasive popular discontent into anti-regime disturbances. Moscow will be watching for signs of any significant shift in popular Polish attitudes toward the USSR and the Gierek regime, and for any ripple effects elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the USSR. (C)

Poland: The Papal Visit (U)

Emotional Homecoming

The visit is an outgrowth of the Pope's personal interest in celebrations of the 900th anniversary this year of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaw, Poland's patron saint. As Archbishop of Krakow, the Pope (then Cardinal Wojtyla) took a strong hand in propagating the commemoration of Stanislaw, an 11th century bishop of Krakow whose death at the hands of an unpopular king has become identified with Polish patriotism, national unity, and the primacy of religious over secular values. The visit, moreover, will be an emotional one for the 59-year-old pontiff, the first Polish cleric ever to head the Roman Catholic Church, and will include a stop at his birthplace in southern Poland near the Czechoslovak border. (U)

A joint state-church committee has been hammering out the details of the visit for several months, and these negotiations have continued to the eve of the Pope's arrival. The state authorities, who reportedly anticipate that upwards of 2 million people may gather at any one time, have been trying to limit the crowds for both political and security reasons. The church shares the latter concern, and the two sides have agreed that to maintain order:

- The visit, at least major portions of it, apparently will be carried live on Polish television, even though this will further erode the state's restrictions on church access to the broadcast media.
- The Pope will appear in four regions of the country, reportedly traveling between cities by helicopter.
- Teams of clergy and uniformed police reportedly will share responsibility for crowd control in order to reduce the danger of an incident precipitated by overzealous police restraints.
- Admissions to some outdoor masses will be limited and sales of alcoholic beverages will be banned from 1 to 3 June.

Some local officials are also trying to keep workers at work and students at school during the visit. These efforts probably have done little more than annoy the populace, and are not likely to reduce significantly the size of the crowds. (C)

The Church's Objectives

The visit should give new strength to a church that, despite the hostile official environment in which it functions, is among the most vibrant in the world. The extraordinary strength of Polish Catholicism is attributable in large part to its strong identification with the culture and history of Poland's highly nationalistic population. (U)

Church leaders in Poland undoubtedly hope that the visit, and indeed the whole reign, of a Polish pope will give new momentum to its efforts to roll back numerous and longstanding restrictions on church activity. Among the episcopate's goals are:

- More permits for building and renovating churches.
- Greater access to the media, including some new church publications, less censorship of existing publications, and permission to broadcast masses on radio and television.
- Increased opportunities for the religious education of young people.
- An easing of state restrictions on the church's social and charitable work. (C)

The Pope may use the visit to tell party leader Gierek and the Polish episcopate about his preferred choice of a successor to the ailing Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, who has headed the Polish church for more than 30 years. With the departure of Wojtyla from the Polish hierarchy, the 78-year-old Cardinal has no obvious successor. (C)

Regime Tactics

The regime's initial obstructionism appears to have reflected differences within the party leadership over the acceptability of the visit, sensitivity to the antiregime symbolism of the St. Stanislaw celebrations, and an unwillingness to let the Vatican alone decide the timing of the visit. Several reports claim that party leader Gierek personally gave the go-ahead



Pope John Paul II, left, greeting Cardinal Wyszyński shortly after the pontiff's investiture in October 1978.

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for the visit, but even then the regime stubbornly insisted that the visit not coincide with the annual St. Stanislaw celebrations in early May. The church conceded, but then simply extended the celebrations to encompass the period of the Pope's trip. (C)

The regime's objectives seem mostly of a damage-limiting nature. Gierek's decision to meet with the Pope seems to reflect his hope of turning the visit into a testimonial of church-state cooperation, projecting a general sense of self-confidence and political strength that the regime in fact lacks. (C)

Potential Polish Troublemakers

The regime and probably the church hierarchy remain concerned that dissident groups in Poland might try to use the Pope's visit to advance their own causes. At the

other end of the spectrum, conservative party, police, and veterans groups, considering the visit an unacceptable boost to the church's position, might attempt to provoke incidents to embarrass both the Pope and regime leaders. Few Poles, however, would wish to spark widespread civil disorder that raised the possibility of Soviet intervention. (C)

Long-Term Implications

The new Pope undoubtedly sees his visit as a convenient way to emphasize his keen interest in the condition of the Catholic Church in the USSR and Eastern Europe and his intention to press this interest forward in a vigorous manner. He has already taken steps to review the status of the church in each East European country and to develop strategies for normalizing relations between the Vatican and the individual regimes. (C)

The direct impact of the visit elsewhere in Eastern Europe and in the USSR itself, depending largely on the availability of Western or Polish media coverage, will probably be felt in regions bordering Poland, especially in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Poland's visa-free travel agreements with both countries raise the possibility of a large influx of religious pilgrims, especially from strongly Catholic Slovakia. Political considerations and the enormous problems of assuring facilities for so many visitors may prompt the Polish or other East European authorities to restrict travel to Poland. (C)

The Soviet authorities undoubtedly take a much more ideological view of the papal visit than do the Poles. For the Soviets and some other East European regimes, the visit will be an unpalatable demonstration of faith in a radically different set of beliefs by people nominally under Communist rule. The possible travel of high-ranking clergy from elsewhere in the region, moreover, presents additional delicate political problems. The Czechoslovak regime apparently is pressuring Cardinal Tomasek, head of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, to stay home; Hungarian church leader Lekai, on the other hand, intends to go to Poland, probably with regime approval. The Soviet, and presumably the Polish, leaderships are evidently not eager for John Paul II to be host to a summit



Polish primate Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski and Polish Communist leader Edward Gierek have met twice in the last six months, largely in connection with the papal visit. Unclassified ©

meeting of East European churchmen in the heart of the region. (C)

Outlook

The visit is not likely to produce any dramatic rollback of restrictions on church activity in Poland. Indeed, initially there may even be a period of cooler church-state relations. After the visit, Gierek may feel the need to make a show of tougher policies at a time when the episcopate—still basking in an outpouring of religious fervor—might be expecting some immediate gains from the visit. (C)

Both sides will probably exercise their customary caution and in the longer term the visit may encourage a continuation of the piecemeal concessions that have characterized Gierek's conciliatory policy toward the

church. For a party that officially disdains religion as the "opiate of the masses," the Polish party is singularly dependent on the good will of the church. The episcopate, for its part, undoubtedly values the influence it has on a weakened regime, but shares the state's fear of civil unrest that could provoke Soviet intervention. (C)

Another consequence of the visit might be further steps toward diplomatic relations between Warsaw and the Vatican. The two sides agreed to establish "permanent working contacts" in 1974. Warsaw quickly stationed a representative in Rome, but the Vatican did not reciprocate. The Vatican may now be interested in going as far as full diplomatic relations, because of a desire to aid the church during a post-Wyszynski succession period in Poland and a general concern with church-state relations in Eastern Europe. The Polish regime, which had long favored the presence of a papal nuncio in Warsaw to help undercut Wyszynski's position as Polish primate, presumably is less interested now that the possibilities for thus sowing discord between the church in Poland and the Vatican are substantially reduced. Wyszynski's fears about his role being diluted by the presence of a Vatican representative in Warsaw may lessen now that his former loyal subordinate is the Roman pontiff, and he too may see value to Vatican representation in Warsaw for the long-term strength of the church. (C)

Relations with Moscow will be the Pope's major concern, however, both because as an East European he realizes the importance of the Soviet attitude to developments in the region and because of the Catholic Church's very poor situation in the USSR. The Pope does hold some cards. The Soviets presumably would like to obtain formal Vatican recognition of the union in 1946 of the Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) Churches, the regularization of the diocesan boundaries that presently overlap the Soviet-Polish border, and the general appearance of a cooperative relationship with the Vatican. Moscow will be reluctant, however, to allow the church more leeway in the heavily Catholic areas of Latvia, Lithuania, and Belorussia, because religious faith is closely intertwined with nationalist aspirations and dissident activity. (C)

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