

## Martial Law Evaluated by Historians and Generals at Jachranka

Are They Going In? They Did Not.<sup>1</sup>

by Jerzy Holzer

[In red inset] A three-day conference on the crisis in Poland in 1980-81 took place November 8-10 in the Warsaw suburb of Jachranka, ending with a public panel in Warsaw's Staszic Palace, home of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The conference was organized by the Institute for Political Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Washington Cold War Project, initiated by the American National Security Archives. Historians and political scientists from Poland, the United States, and several European countries played a rather secondary role in the meeting. Some authored short papers that initiated discussions; rarely, some asked questions. Mostly, they listened carefully.

It was an unusual event. The main role was played by the participants in the events of 1980-81. As one of the politicians present described it, historians and political scientists were like ichthyologists attentively observing the behavior of the different kinds of fish in the aquarium-like conference room.

There were many different kinds of fish, indeed. Most of them used to be big fish in the past. From the United States came Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's former National Security Advisor; William Odom, his colleague handling military matters; Richard Pipes, once the person responsible for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the National Security Council during the Reagan presidency; and Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, the former head of Radio Free Europe. From Russia came Marshal Viktor Kulikov, the former Chief of the Warsaw Pact armies; his Chief of Staff, General Anatolii Gribkov; as well as Georgii Shachnazarov, a high-

ranking official of the section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that handled relations with fraternal parties in other socialist countries.

Poland was represented by more people from the former “party-government administration” than from the side led by Solidarity. Stanisław Kania, Wojciech Jaruzelski, Mieczysław F. Rakowski, Stanisław Ciosek and Florian Siwicki were there; as well as Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Karol Modzelewski, Andrzej Celiński, Zbigniew Bujak, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Bogdan Borusewicz, Wiesław Chrzanowski and Ryszard Bugaj.

I dare say that sixteen years ago none of the historians and political scientists present at the conference could have imagined that such a meeting would ever take place, that it would be possible for people to talk so calmly and objectively about the Polish crisis at the time of the first Solidarity -- though the meeting did not pass without certain controversies. This is the true end of the Cold War -- there is no fighting anymore over who would defeat who on the world scale. That question has been solved. If there is still a fight going on (and it would certainly be hard to literally describe the proceedings of the conference as such), the fight is about the shape of historical memory.

There were several questions in which the participants of the conference were most interested. Those included the potential military intervention of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries in Poland, the purpose and/or necessity of imposing martial law in Poland, the possibility of greater flexibility on the part of Solidarity and an agreement between it and the “party-government administration,” and the goals and methods of American policy towards Poland and the Soviet Union.

Concerning the first question, three different viewpoints became clear. The first view -- namely, that during the whole period of legal activity of Solidarity in 1980-81 the threat of Soviet intervention was real and could have been realized in an emergency -- was advanced by

all former Polish communist politicians save Stanisław Kania. Among the representatives of Solidarity present at the conference, this view was held by Karol Modzelewski, and among the historians, also by Andrzej Werblan (Werblan was a member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party during the most of the period in question), and -- with some hesitation -- by Krystyna Kersten. During the public panel, Modzelewski even put forward the proposition that "it is laughable that any decision of the Soviet Politburo about giving up armed intervention had any meaning at all."

Another view was represented by Stanisław Kania, Zbigniew Brzeziński and other Americans, as well as historians Andrzej Paczkowski and Jerzy Holzer. They considered the threat of Soviet intervention to have been very serious at the end of 1980 and during the first few months of 1981. However, they believed that by the second half of 1981, having analyzed the situation, the Soviet administration abandoned the idea of armed intervention because of its possible results: sanctions by Western countries, long-term resistance in Poland (which would mean opening up another war front apart from Afghanistan), and high economic costs that would have burdened the economies of the Soviet Union and the entire Eastern Bloc, which were already breaking down at the time.

The view of the Russian guests was different again. Russian military officials stressed even more strongly than Shachnazarov the lack of any plans for intervention. They questioned the map for disposition of Soviet troops in Poland, mentioned by Kania and Jaruzelski. The map was transmitted to Warsaw in the beginning of December 1980 but later disappeared from Polish archives under unexplained circumstances. The Russians termed the so-called plans for intervention meaningless "sketches of plans," and dismissed the planned entering of troops as simply scheduled military exercises that had been in place beforehand.

Concerning the purpose or necessity for imposing martial law, opinions were divided differently again. Representatives from Solidarity, the Americans, Stanisław Kania, and, among the historians, Paczkowski, Holzer and, to a degree, Krystyna Kersten, questioned the proposition that imposing martial law was necessary because of the threat of Russian intervention or because the collapse of domestic order threatened civil war. Kania stated explicitly that during his term as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party until October 1981 he never considered imposing martial law to be a rational decision, although he avoided clearly stating his opinion about the imposition of martial law in December 1981. The historians present called everybody's attention to the sequence of events, whereby the "party-government administration" was aiming to liquidate Solidarity, and to the planned measures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to force Solidarity to adopt extreme positions.

Wojciech Jaruzelski and his collaborators at the time defended their decision to impose martial law as an alternative against Soviet intervention and a measure absolutely necessary in the light of the deepening economic disaster and threat of civil war. This standpoint was supported by the Russian guests. Both Jaruzelski and the former Soviet commanders stressed that it was a decision made independently in Poland, and that Soviet pressure was either not crucial (Jaruzelski's view) or that it did not exist at all (the view of Soviet military officials).

An additional aspect of this question was the controversy about possible aspirations of the group imposing martial law to assure Soviet military aid in case their own attempts were to fail. General Jaruzelski very emphatically denied this kind of information coming from Soviet and, indirectly, Polish sources (the so-called "Variant III" in the plans of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), or Czechoslovak or East German sources (the interpretation of the proposal of General Siwicki during the meeting of Warsaw Pact defense ministers in Sofia).

New material was provided in the form of photocopies of pages from the diary written at the time by Marshal Kulikov, which were distributed to some participants. Reading those pages, it seems that on December 11, Kulikov passed on Jaruzelski's request to the Kremlin. However, General Jaruzelski was not given a copy [of the diary pages] in Jachranka and the diary pages did not become a topic of public discussion. Some participants of the conference even suggested that the pages were faked and distributed purposely.

Discussion of greater flexibility on the part of Solidarity, particularly on the question of avoiding street demonstrations, was much less passionate. Representatives of Solidarity emphasized that the "party-government administration" underestimated the consequences of the collapse of food supplies to stores. They also stressed the role played by provocations of the Communist apparatus and by the limitations imposed on Solidarity itself, an organization of several million people which lacked any developed structures of control.

Greater controversy emerged in relation to American policy, which arose when the Russian participants questioned the scope of American inspiration and the goals of US policy. Zbigniew Brzeziński did not hide the fact that great importance was attached to the Solidarity movement in the United States. He pointed out that the main goals of American policy toward Poland were to support Solidarity, to protect Poland from Soviet intervention, and to prevent internal unrest. These goals explain why the US issued sharp warnings to the Polish government on the one hand, while on the other hand it exercised a mitigating influence over Solidarity. However, he emphatically denied allegations that Washington wished to treat the situation in Poland as an instrument to compromise the Soviet Union and create insoluble problems.

Although the questions posed by the Russians could be understood as suggesting a far-flung inspiration for Solidarity, Zbigniew Bujak switched that discussion to a different track. He pointed to the inspiring role of the American model of human rights, propagated particularly

during Carter's presidency. He did not hide either that Solidarity took advantage of the help from American foundations to purchase printing equipment after the imposition of martial law, in which connection he mentioned the sum of two million dollars. His comment, that the two million dollars it took to win the war with Marshal Kulikov proved either Solidarity's strength or the Warsaw Pact's weakness, was not without irony.

American policy of the Carter (and Brzezinski) era was portrayed as coherent and consistent, although Richard Pipes finally agreed with Mieczysław Rakowski's statement that clear warning signals from Washington were lacking before the imposition of martial law. This mainly had to do with the visit of Polish vice-premier Madej to the US, when economic aid for Poland was promised without any mention being made of possible American reactions to the imposition of martial law. Therefore the scale of the later sanctions came as a surprise and the decision to impose martial law was made without taking such consequences into consideration.

There was no shortage of anecdote-generating situations in Jachranka. One example is a hallway conversation during which a Polish political leader of the early 1980s asked one of the highest ranking Russian military officials in attendance, "Why are you lying?" Another memorable scene was the loud greeting issued by the retired Soviet general Gribkov to Zbigniew Bujak: "Greetings, Comrade Bujak!" He then called on General Jaruzelski, Sergeant Bujak, and Corporal Wałęsa to create a common Slavic front. Zbigniew Brzezinski also spoke about the importance of the information provided to the US by Colonel Kukliński, who, he said, acted out of patriotic motives. He finished by saying that if there had in fact been a war, Marshal Kulikov would have been gone in three days.

As concerns personal relations, the conference was very cordial, filled with mutual understanding and largely free of aggression. So it happens when wars end and veterans meet to

reminisce about the fighting. The atmosphere during the last reception, at 7 o'clock in the evening, after the war,<sup>2</sup> was also pleasant.

Photo captions:

1. Marshal Kulikov taking to General Wojciech Jaruzelski.
2. Gdańsk- a city particularly “difficult” for those who imposed martial law.
3. From left: G. Shachnazarov, M. Rakowski, W. Odom, S. Kania, W. Jaruzelski, T. Ash, R. Pipes, Z. Bujak, W. Chrzanowski, K. Modzelewski
4. Zbigniew Brzeziński and Stanisław Ciosek
5. “Greetings, Comrade Bujak!”

Translator’s Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lit. “Will they enter? They did not” – an allusion to a contemporary popular song titled “Wejdą? Nie wejdą?” (“Are they going in? Are they not?”), referring to the threat of a Russian invasion.

<sup>2</sup> An allusion to the title of a Russian war movie, “At Six O’clock After the War.”