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Editorial Observer/TINA ROSENBERG

When Old Cold Warriors Replay Poland's Crisis

JACHRANKA, Poland

Viktor Kulikov is a blunt man, and he sent a blunt message last weekend when he arrived in a small town outside Warsaw. The Russian general was a participant in a conference to reconstruct a significant event of the cold war — the Polish crisis of 1980 and 1981, which saw the rise of Solidarity and Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski's attempt to crush it by imposing martial law. Mr. Kulikov came to the meeting with a retinue of aides, in full uniform and with Soviet insignia on the shoulderboards.

The conference was sponsored by two Washington groups, the National Security Archive and the Woodrow Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project. It was one in a series bringing together newly released documents and old — sometimes very old — participants in cold war flashpoints. At this conference, held with the Polish Academy of Sciences, officials from Moscow, Polish Communists, Solidarity leaders and members of the Carter and Reagan Administrations gathered to probe the historical mysteries remaining from the Polish crisis.

Was the general in dark glasses a hero or a traitor?

Many of them concerned the relationship between Mr. Kulikov and Mr. Jaruzelski. Mr. Kulikov came to Poland 22 times in 1981 bearing threats that plans for martial law were moving too slowly and that drastic consequences would ensue. Several times, Soviet troops massed on the Polish border.

Were the threats of invasion real or a bluff? And if they were a bluff, did General Jaruzelski know it? The question of whether General Jaruzelski is a hero or a traitor is a living one for many Poles, who hold sovereignty all the more precious after centuries of foreign occupation.

When asked about Moscow's intentions and actions, Marshal Kulikov and retired Gen. Anatoly Gribkov, who had been his chief of staff, mainly offered lectures on the "traitors" who brought down the Warsaw Pact,

denunciations of NATO and statements that provoked outright laughter, such as the news that Communist Poland was a fully sovereign nation and that Moscow never pressured the Poles to call martial law.

The Russians' crudeness was shocking, but General Jaruzelski was hardly more forthcoming. Since he handed over Poland's presidency to Lech Walesa in 1990, he has spent his time seeking historical vindication as a Polish patriot who deterred a Soviet invasion. At the conference, he repeated his now familiar story of Soviet pressures. He evaded most other questions, no doubt worried that a new right-wing parliament might revive a long legal case against him that a previous left-wing parliament dropped.

History, however, is likely to decide that although he did so reluctantly, in the end he carried out his Soviet masters' bidding. In minutes of Soviet Politburo meetings just before martial law, Soviet leaders underscore that the Soviets had too much to lose to invade Poland, and that they had told General Jaruzelski they would not invade. Officials even

report that he asked Moscow for backup in case martial law failed.

Nevertheless, the impression he gives now is one of pathos. His trademark dark glasses and stiff posture are no longer menacing now that the end of Communism allowed him to reveal that they are the results of injuries from his own experience of Soviet ruthlessness — forced labor in Siberia, where Stalin interned his family in World War II. He must know that even if a court never convicts him, future generations will.

At the conference he was even betrayed by the men he had served. He sat, silent and virtually expressionless, as the Russians denied they had pressured him. After the close of the session, he approached Marshal Kulikov in the nearly empty room. "You know what you said to me back then," witnesses reported that General Jaruzelski whispered, in Russian. "How could you do this to me in front of the Americans?" Mr. Kulikov bowed his head. General Jaruzelski seemed to be near tears, a rare display of emotion from a man broken by both the history he suffered and the history he made.