

POLAND: SOVIET INTENTIONS

P. A. Sub - Registry

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1. In Poland the Soviet Union faces a dilemma; either intervention or inaction will incur severe costs. In this note we examine how this situation has been reached and why the Soviet Union has not reacted with force up to now, and assess the likelihood of Soviet military intervention in the next few months.

Developments so far

2. Since 1956 there has been a greater willingness on the part of the Soviet Union to acknowledge the role of national differences in determining the policies of East European Parties so long as ultimate control by the Party over economic and political life is not jeopardised. The growing weakness of the Polish Party since the mid-1970s, and especially its inability to implement effective economic policies, has led since August 1980 to the spontaneous growth of organisations which are often strongly nationalistic in character and are outside its political and ideological control, and at the same time to the strengthening of existing social and political institutions vis-a-vis the Party. The Polish Party and government have been forced to take into account the opinions of movements exerting pressure from below.

3. These developments have progressively brought about a situation in Poland which is politically and ideologically far more serious for the Russians than they can have foreseen nine months ago; and one which they would no doubt then have judged to be intolerable. If they have nevertheless not so far intervened, this has been because they have at each stage judged that their interests had not been irretrievably jeopardised and that the costs of intervention remained higher than those of non-intervention. On two occasions in the past six months the Russians have sharply increased their military preparations - and the secrecy of certain of their military measures suggests that they were genuine contingency preparations and not merely part of an effort at intimidation. But the political decision to intervene was not taken. In November/December Solidarnosc had been registered but the extent of deterioration in the Party was not yet clear. Kania evidently persuaded the Russians that he could

effectively neutralise the union and in time restore the Party's authority in the country. In subsequent weeks he failed to produce any progress in this direction. The appointment of Jaruzelski as Prime Minister in February raised hopes in Poland that a genuine dialogue would be instituted with Solidarity and that the new premier would be able to rebuild public confidence in the government, which in turn would lead to social and economic stability. The Bydgoszcz incident and the subsequent threat of a general strike led to the increase of Soviet contingency preparations for intervention in March/April, possibly to back up Polish measures to deal with internal opposition. In the event agreement was reached between the Polish government and the unions, and Jaruzelski was either unable or unwilling to call for parliamentary endorsement for special measures. The Soviet military stance was subsequently relaxed, although the Soviet Union continues to maintain the command and control infrastructure, which would be required for a military intervention.

#### Soviet interests

4. The Soviet Union's fundamental interest in Poland is the protection of Soviet security and that of the Warsaw Pact. Its minimum requirements are the security of the personnel and facilities of its own forces in Poland and the lines of communications between the USSR and GDR; and continued Polish membership of the Warsaw Pact. So far, although the Soviet leaders must be apprehensive about the evolving situation, their minimum requirements have not been clearly breached. All strikes have been conducted so as to avoid any harm to communications or Soviet facilities. There have been isolated cases of harassment of Soviet personnel, but no major incidents. Nor is there any doubt about the loyalty of the present Polish leadership to the Soviet Union as far as essential matters of foreign and defence policy are concerned, even though they have insisted in the face of Soviet pressure on adopting their own unorthodox ways of dealing with the internal crisis.

5. The Soviet Union also has a strong political and ideological interest in Poland which is partly linked to its security interest but is also important in its own right. This means that there must be a Communist regime in power which is both loyal to Moscow and in control of the country. Where the current Polish leadership does not fully meet Soviet requirements is in its control over the country. The Polish regime has tried hard to preserve the impression that it

is at least formally in control. If the government is in practice more effective than the Party, there are no obvious differences between them and the facade of Party control is preserved. And while the regime has in practice made concession after concession to Solidarnosc, both this and the private farmers' union have formally recognised the leading role of the Party. And the Party claims that it retains key levers of Party control: Kania at the last plenum upheld the Party's right to maintain control over the appointments and the media.

6. We do not doubt that the Russians will intervene if they judge their fundamental security interests to be directly jeopardised. A general breakdown of law and order in Poland would directly threaten those interests. In such circumstances the Polish leaders would probably ask for Soviet assistance but the Russians would if necessary intervene and restore order without an invitation. But we have difficulty in judging how far short of this extreme their threshold of tolerance lies. A large measure of ideological heresy and political liberalisation has been shown to be tolerable as long as some hope of improvement remains, though in the longer term it might be decided that these trends had become intolerable. Nor need there be any dramatic development in Poland for this to happen: a shift of opinion in Moscow in favour of intervention could occur spontaneously. But whether or not they intervene the Russians cannot avoid damage to their interests. Either way Poland will remain for some considerable time a weak link in the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA.

The current situation

7. The Polish leadership is at present trying to avoid a domestic crisis which might precipitate Soviet intervention and at the same time to evolve economic and social policies which might eventually lead to a recovery. But they are faced with serious economic problems and their room for manoeuvre is limited. Relatedly the leadership is trying to present a united front, to ride and channel the wave of popular feeling and to put the best face on developments in the Party. They have so far been able to ensure that no serious expressions of anti-Sovietism appear. Throughout the crisis they have insisted that a political solution should be found and that there should be no use of force. It is by no means clear for how long these tactics will work. Frequent references in Soviet comment to "creeping counter-revolution" indicate that the Russians are aware of the dangers of progressive liberalisation.

8. From the Soviet point of view the Polish situation has deteriorated sharply in the last few weeks. The outcome of the Party election process and Congress is impossible to foresee. One possibility is the emergence of a moderate regime pursuing policies acceptable to Moscow. On the other hand the Congress could result in the removal of most of the people trusted by Moscow and the endorsement of a package of liberalising reforms. In the Soviet perception there would be a risk of such a regime eventually proving less than fully loyal to the Soviet alliance. The Russians might see some advantage in a regime which, albeit reformist, could gain the trust of the people, restore stability and begin to reverse the economic decline. However, this would present the Russians with an equally serious danger: that of the eventual emergence of a stable and prosperous pluralist state in Eastern Europe enjoying popular support. Such a state could prove attractive to the population, if not the leadership, of other East European countries. In 1968 the Russians acted to prevent a Czechoslovak Party Congress which would have had similarly unpredictable consequences. Increased anxiety at this prospect among other East European countries might lead them to press the Soviet Union to take preventive action.

#### The outlook

9. A breakdown of law and order could occur in Poland in the next few weeks, and lead to Soviet intervention. But if this does not happen will the Soviet Union intervene to prevent the Polish Congress in July? If not, will it intervene if a reformist leadership is elected then and endorses widespread measures of liberalisation. Or will it tolerate even that and wait to see if such a new leadership acts in such a way as to jeopardise Soviet interests?

10. The costs of intervention in terms of the Soviet Union's external relationships would be heavy and long-lived. The problems they would face on the ground would be appalling: apart from widespread disorder and passive resistance they would have to assume in their planning that there would be opposition by elements of the Polish Army. They would have to plan for an indefinite military occupation of Poland. They would probably have great difficulty in building up a new Party even if people could be found to take over the leadership under Soviet occupation. They would have to keep the Polish economy afloat for many years. The purpose of acting now would be to forestall the Congress and prevent the emergence of a new and popular but unacceptable Party leadership. The Russians do not

appear however to have abandoned hope up to this point that by some means the electoral process can be managed so as to produce an acceptable Party leadership, that the Congress will adopt moderate policies, and that the Party will emerge with a measure of renewed authority which it can then use to get the country gradually back on to reasonably orthodox lines.

11. The Russians will be watching preparations for the Polish Party Congress closely and anxiously; they could between now and July conclude that the Congress was certain to result in completely unacceptable changes and intervene militarily to forestall this. However it seems doubtful whether they could make such a firm and pessimistic prognosis and that their reluctance to invade would be overcome, we therefore believe that military intervention before the Party Congress is unlikely. However the Russians might well undertake some military measures before then as a means of exerting maximum pressure on the Congress participants.

12. Intervention will be politically no less difficult in the period immediately following the Congress, when new Polish leaders and policies have been publicly endorsed. If they allow the Congress to go ahead, the Russians will do so in the hope that it will serve to draw a line under the events of the last decade, dispose of the problem of the errors of the Gierek regime, and allow the Polish leadership to look ahead and begin to tackle the problems of the economy. They will want to see how the situation develops before resorting to military measures. But their objective that in the longer term Poland must be brought back to something nearer to Soviet orthodoxy will undergo no change.

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