

Reg. PA  
Mr. Cella  
Mr. DeVeque  
Mr. Serbinoff  
Mr. Cabot

U. S. Delegation  
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SUBJECT: Eastern Europe After Poland:  
Creeping Disorder

REG. P. A.
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Summary

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(Poland)

(C) Eastern Europe--one year after the emergence of Poland's new political environment--has yet to be swept by the "Polish contagion." The Polish crisis, however, has added to the burden of the region's communist regimes and has set the stage for more tension between them and parts of their populations. The example of a reformed communist Poland, acting in opposition to Soviet demands, is likely to encourage restive East Europeans to agitate for their own national course, however it may be defined. Greater domestic disequilibrium thus seems likely for all of the regimes.

(C) One of the more important impacts of Poland on Eastern Europe is the demonstration of successful resistance to an indecisive Moscow. This has contributed to the weakening of the Soviet-East European alliance system, in terms of the further erosion of its ability to coordinate policy.

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Soviet-East European Alliance Weakened

(C) During the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968, the Warsaw Pact (minus Romania) was able to chart a relatively cohesive political course. In contrast, events in Poland find the alliance floundering. The Soviets and their close allies have been unable to generate a consensus on the nature of and proper response to a mass Polish reform movement which has coopted part of the ruling communist party--in defiance of Moscow.

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(C) Not being able to contain the phenomenon, short of using force, the Soviet Union and its East European supporters find themselves forced into a begrudging acquiescence to the situation. This acquiescence has further hindered their ability to come to terms with the Polish challenge. As a result, and given all the usual problems besetting the alliance system:

--a follow-up Warsaw Pact summit to the one on Poland in December 1980 has not taken place, although it has been much rumored;

--an expected Warsaw Pact foreign ministers' meeting in Bucharest has been held up;

--a Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA) summit of party chiefs, apparently agreed to in principle, cannot be scheduled; and

--the 1981 round of Crimean consultations between Brezhnev and the East European party heads (the Polish rulers aside) eschewed any public mention of Poland.

In short, formal and informal processes of Soviet-East European political coordination appear to be in greater than usual disarray. At the same time, the economic chaos in Poland has further set back plan coordination and trade within CEMA.

(C) Moscow's uncertainties about how to handle Poland, given the need to balance Soviet primacy in Eastern Europe with wider USSR foreign policy interests, have heightened the deterioration. This has fed East European differences on the issue--above and beyond Romania's traditional reluctance to cooperate where infringements on independence could be involved. Hungary, for example, also has been reluctant to press the Polish issue, preferring that Warsaw be allowed to work out its problems: Budapest wants to avoid anything that might undo its own post-1956 political consensus.

(C) With Moscow sending mixed signals, and Bucharest and Budapest seeking to limit Warsaw Pact involvement, the traditional hardliners in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria have found themselves in something of a lonely vanguard. And even within this grouping, Bulgaria until recently has been surprisingly detached from the Polish question, apparently believing that those closer to the problem should deal with it more actively.

East European Image of Soviet Power Tarnished

(C) All of the East Europeans were surprised at the apparent impotence of Soviet power in dealing with events in Poland. None, however, are as dismayed as the "front-line" hardliners, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. The fact that they share borders with Poland of course plays a part. But the Kremlin's failure to act decisively to contain the Poles' heterodoxy must be particularly disconcerting to regimes whose own orthodoxy and power rest on Soviet backing. East Berlin and Prague, after the experiences of 1956 and 1968, have taken it as axiomatic that Moscow would never permit the emergence of a substantially liberalized model of communism in the heart of the Warsaw Pact, let alone one that in many of its features goes beyond what Yugoslavia has done.

(C) The fact that this "renewed" Polish communism raises serious questions about the role and reliability of the Polish Government and Armed Forces in Pact operations adds to the gravity of the situation as seen by Prague and East Berlin. The Kremlin's unwillingness to move decisively after Gdansk and its failure to dump Kania after the June 5 CPSU "warning" letter certainly have tarnished the East Europeans' view of Soviet political power.

(C) Indeed, one of the more important impacts of Poland on Eastern Europe is the demonstration of successful resistance to an indecisive Moscow. Although this resistance has not yet spread into foreign policy, some East European observers believe that this is only a matter of time. Romania, for all of its own reservations about the Polish experiment, is beginning to see virtues in the potential anti-Soviet aspect of that development and is looking forward to seeing an eventual assertion of Polish foreign policy independence, once party unity had been restored. The same hope has no doubt arisen among the Yugoslav leaders, who see in Poland not only a confirmation of the correctness of their own policies but a blow to the cohesion of the Soviet-East European alliance system and a severe setback for Moscow.

(C) The Eurocommunist parties also see Poland as a vindication of their advocacy of a more flexible and pluralistic, non-Soviet communist course. The entry of the French communists into coalition with the socialist government, which one Yugoslav leader has termed the first application of Eurocommunism, would seem to constitute further erosion of the Kremlin's ability to shape European communist developments. There is even some

speculation that Poland, in the distant future, might function as a partner of the Eurocommunists, Romania, and Yugoslavia in thwarting Soviet hegemonic designs.

(C) Poland: How Contagious?

Nevertheless, Eastern Europe has thus far not proved very susceptible to the so-called "Polish contagion," although several of the regimes have acted as if it were:

- East Germany froze relations with the FRG and made cross-border travel with Poland extremely difficult.
- Czechoslovakia also clamped down on cross-border visits and apparently now intends to eradicate its Charter 77 dissident movement.
- Hungary's Kadar made it clear that there are distinct limits to the regime's political tolerance and moved to contain those few individuals and groups who sought to test it.
- Romania's Ceausescu, having suppressed a Romanian free trade union movement in 1979 and confronting a restive citizenry, initially took a critical line on Polish developments but soon reverted to supporting Polish party autonomy.
- Nearly all the regimes have publicly emphasized, but not convincingly, their renewed concern for public opinion, trade union operations, worker-management relations, consumer supplies, party dialogues, etc.

In general, the ruling elites have moved reactively and preemptively--thus giving the edge to more hardline elements in their respective parties.

In one sense, such effort has probably been overdone, because there are few signs that East European populations--though they may share in varying degrees some of the problems that galvanized the Poles--have been inclined to follow the Polish example. The particular set of factors that facilitated the Polish revolt are not present to the same degree in the other East European states. No other East European state has had such a powerful competitor with the party as the Polish Catholic Church or such a militant and sophisticated working class and intelligentsia to give force and direction to popular alienation. Moreover, Poland's democratic disorder and economic deprivation are not enticing to most East Europeans--developments the regimes have been able to highlight to their own advantage. East Europeans also feel considerable resentment over aid to Poland. A Poland with its house in order might prove alluring in

the long term, but the prospects for a Polish contagion, i.e., direct emulation of the emerging Polish political model, appear remote in the near term.

The ruling parties nonetheless realize that what has happened in Poland has begun to erode old certainties about the limits to change in Eastern Europe posed by Soviet ideological preferences and military power. The very existence of a reformed Poland, in the heart of the Warsaw Pact, demonstrates that a new political era is beginning, one in which East European perceptions about the feasibility of political change will be increasingly altered. This can only work, over time, to encourage restive elements--not necessarily to emulate Poland but to try to chart their own more nationalistic courses.

In any event, it seems probable that growing numbers of East Europeans will eventually seek to redefine elements in their respective political systems:

- Party members may be less inclined to accept the heretofore prevailing interpretation of "democratic centralism."
- Intellectuals will be more taken with the possibilities for pluralism within a communist system and will agitate accordingly.
- Workers will be less inclined to go along with whatever the party and management decide and more apt to consider pressure tactics.
- Consumers will be less likely to endure prolonged periods of material deprivation without making their discontent known.

These changes will not happen overnight, and they will not emerge uniformly in Eastern Europe. Hungary, for example, is likely to experience more unrest with its intellectuals than is Romania, which will have to deal with sporadically irate workers and consumers. East Germany and Czechoslovakia are more likely to experience intra-party debate on the sensitive matters of economic reform and a greater role for technocrats in a period of economic recession. In nearly all cases, there is likely to be quiet, behind-the-scenes rethinking of the economic and political relationship with the USSR, particularly as, and if, the Soviets become more constrained, not just by Poland but by their own growing political and economic problems.

The outlook for Eastern Europe over the next several years, thus, is for greater domestic disequilibrium than would have been the case without the Polish crisis. The regimes will tend to

become more inward looking and relations with Moscow more contentious and strained. Although the current leaderships seem secure for the moment, the intersection of economic problems with increasingly discontented populations might very well set off intra-party debates that could bring new figures to the fore-- especially if leadership change is occurring in the Kremlin. Eastern Europe may not be swept by the Polish contagion per se, but creeping disorder there seems to be a strong prospect.

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