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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

ROMANIA: Repercussions of the Polish Crisis

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The workers' challenge in Poland presents Romania's leaders with the most serious problems they have faced in recent years. President Ceausescu regards it as a threat to his control because it could stimulate more unrest among Romania's disgruntled workers. If the Polish crisis is not resolved soon, he may be forced to re-vamp his economic policies drastically. On the other hand, if Bucharest supports a Warsaw Pact move into Poland, it would damage Romania's independent foreign policy posture and weaken Ceausescu's domestic position. [REDACTED]

The situation in Poland coincides with growing restiveness in Romania over a deterioration in the country's already low living standard. Discontent has mounted steadily since last summer over food shortages, pay cuts, and bad working conditions, intermittently causing local disturbances. [REDACTED]

Ceausescu has worked hard to reduce tensions by granting selective but largely cosmetic economic concessions, by improving the standing of the official trade union, and by stimulating agricultural production. He also has warned against the establishment of "competing organizations" and has tightened internal controls--already among the most repressive in Eastern Europe. [REDACTED]

The President hopes that these moves will enable the regime to minimize the repercussions from Poland without diverting Romania's limited assets away from the drive for rapid industrialization. They may have in fact had an impact, as labor disturbances have remained small, uncoordinated, and focused on local grievances. At the same time, however, none of these measures seem likely to result in a significant improvement in living and working conditions. [REDACTED]

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Although officials privately voice confidence that Romanians will accept deprivation with little protest, there has been an erosion in the standing of the regime and of Ceausescu personally. [REDACTED]

If the turmoil in Poland persists, more significant unrest might develop and force Ceausescu to abandon rapid industrialization in favor of increased emphasis on consumer welfare. This could be seen, however, as an indictment of the economic policies he has pursued since assuming power. [REDACTED]

The Intervention Issue

Ceausescu wants the Polish Government to move decisively against Solidarity and other dissident forces. Bucharest's views regarding Poland have fluctuated, as much because of changes in Ceausescu's confidence in the security of his own position as because of developments in Poland. [REDACTED]

Last fall, following a summer of unrest in Romania, Ceausescu evidently became unnerved by Warsaw's capitulation to the Polish strikers and pressed for strong action, possibly including intervention. As civil unrest eased at home, however, he even more forcefully reiterated that the Poles should be allowed to resolve their problems themselves. Ceausescu still maintains this position. [REDACTED]

Ceausescu is aware that a Soviet-imposed solution would have far-reaching negative implications for his government, especially if he supported it. The impact on East-West relations probably would induce a siege mentality in Moscow, making it more difficult for Ceausescu to pursue his independent policies. Romanian support for a Warsaw Pact intervention would weaken Bucharest's defenses against Soviet meddling in Romanian internal affairs, endanger the ties Bucharest has developed with countries outside the Warsaw Pact as a buffer against such Soviet interference, and undermine Ceausescu's credibility and political standing. [REDACTED]

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On the other hand, a successful intervention--that did not involve Romania--could help Ceausescu domestically by demonstrating to his own people the futility of challenging party authority. It would also revive the fear of the Soviet threat. By publicly opposing a move against Poland, the President could win support at home for standing up to the Soviets. [REDACTED]

Outlook

Ceausescu will try to minimize the repercussions of the Polish crisis by temporarily placating workers and consumers and by intimidating dissenters. At the same time, he will privately urge Warsaw to crack down, while maintaining his public stance in support of allowing the Poles to solve their own problems. [REDACTED]

If limited measures are inadequate, Ceausescu may make the fundamental changes in economic policy that he has resisted. He already has admitted that overemphasis on industrial development to the detriment of agriculture has been a mistake. The failure to publish the 1981-85 Plan also suggests that a reassessment of economic policy may be under way. [REDACTED]

If party control appeared in danger of collapse in Poland, Ceausescu probably would privately favor intervention, if requested by Polish leaders. He would not want to go on record supporting such a move, however, and would resist any Romanian participation. [REDACTED]