

CIACO NID 81 [REDACTED]

May 28, 1981

[REDACTED]

CIA LATE ITEM

POLAND: Death of Cardinal Wyszynski

The death today of Cardinal Wyszynski will usher in a period of mourning in which political controversies will be temporarily shelved and will open up discussion within the Church leadership about its future role. [REDACTED]

During his 30-plus years as head of Poland's powerful and embattled Catholic Church, Wyszynski exercised great moral authority over the population as well as strict control over the sometimes cantankerous bishops. He used his personal prestige as a moderating force both on the regime as well as on the disgruntled Polish population. His influence was particularly critical during the tumultuous past 10 months. [REDACTED]

The selection of a successor will involve behind-the-scenes discussions between the Polish Episcopate, the Vatican, and the regime. Archbishop Macharski from Krakow is a leading candidate, and there are several prominent bishops and many dark horses who could be compromise choices. [REDACTED]

The regime, technically, has a veto power over Church appointments. In light of its current weakened condition and need for Church support, it will probably go along with the Church's candidate. It would only exercise its veto power if one of the more radical bishops were nominated. [REDACTED]

No matter who succeeds Wyszynski, the Church will continue to act as a moderating force. Maintaining unity within the Church leadership will be more difficult, however, without the authoritarian rule of Wyszynski. Some Polish bishops are known to favor more active support of Solidarity and have privately criticized Wyszynski's cautious and conciliatory policies. In the past, such differences were submerged by the need to maintain Church unity against the regime. In a more pluralistic, democratic Poland, however, some bishops might begin to act more independently. [REDACTED]

Approved for Release
Date AUG 1999