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Special Analysis

POLAND: Easing Martial Law

An end to martial law in the near future will not erode the regime's control or the military's involvement in political affairs. Premier Jaruzelski--with the support of party moderates--may try to carry out some reforms he has advocated but could continue to be thwarted by the bureaucracy and political hardliners. Solidarity is unlikely to mount any immediate, serious challenge, in part because of internal debates over strategy. The Church will continue to counsel moderation and may become more active in representing the people's interests.

Jaruzelski appears intent on removing some of the trappings of martial law before the end of the year to show movement toward normalization. The government's confidence has grown since it faced down underground Solidarity on 10 November, released Lech Walesa, and eased many martial law restrictions.

The regime also has taken some steps to ensure its control after martial law is ended. Recent legislation provides many legal means to thwart protests.

The new trade union law, for example, severely restricts strikes and protests; other laws on "parasitism," alcohol abuse, and juvenile delinquency allow the government considerable latitude in punishing dissenters. Parliament will meet soon to adopt more special measures.

The government apparently has not yet decided on modalities for ending martial law. According to one report, it might move in stages, with final action to come possibly in March. In any event parliament may grant the state presidency "emergency" powers to run the country, with Jaruzelski becoming head of state while remaining party leader.

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As martial law is lifted, some military bodies will be dissolved, including the Military Council of National Salvation and most military special operational groups. Military courts may no longer have jurisdiction over civilian cases.

Remaining restrictions on public assembly and domestic and foreign communications will be removed or eased. Most of the remaining 1,000 internees will be released, although some intellectuals may face legal charges for previous dissident activity. The estimated 8,000 activists charged or convicted of violating martial law will not be released.

For security reasons, the military will remain heavily involved in administering the country. Equally important, Jaruzelski looks to the military to assure his personal power and administrative control. Officers in government and party positions may simply don civilian garb, and many overseeing "militarized" factories probably will remain in place.

The nationwide hierarchy of defense committees--a mainstay of martial law--is likely to retain its key role in ensuring calm and will continue to rely on the secret police and the uniformed civilian police. The military will remain available on short notice to back up civilian forces.

Policy Stalemate

Jaruzelski also may try to make good on some of the economic and administrative reforms he and party moderates have advocated. He will continue, however, to face strong bureaucratic and political resistance. The political impasse might deepen as the armed forces continue to wield considerable power in the face of the expectations of many party officials that they will play a greater role.

The Premier could gain some credibility by showing he is willing to allow the unions more than a nominal role in representing the workers' interests. He might welcome a call by Walesa to have workers join the unions, because this would give them the appearance of legitimacy.

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Such an attitude, however, would run into opposition from party hardliners. They would argue that such a lenient policy risks a revival of Solidarity. Party stalwarts in many factories who were opposed to Solidarity have taken the lead in setting up the new unions, even though Warsaw apparently does not want local party organizations to be so blatant.

Solidarity's Prospects

Despite the fears of some underground activists, Walesa seems unlikely to strike a deal with the regime. He has been cautious in his public statements but still gives the impression of wanting to push for fulfillment of the "spirit" of the agreements of August 1980 that gave rise to Solidarity.

Walesa seems inclined to wait for the lifting of martial law before seriously considering future actions. After the beginning of the year, he is likely to try to reestablish contact with the men who formed the core of Solidarity in order to discuss future strategy.

Some will argue that any form of resistance is futile in the near term. Others, probably including Walesa, might argue that the only way to keep pressure on the regime to carry out Solidarity's ideas is to try to subvert the new government-sponsored unions. Walesa would require broad agreement from other activists, however, before he would openly support such a controversial policy.

The Church's Role

Senior officials of the Church will urge Walesa to work within the new unions, believing this to be the only way to make them represent the workers' interests. Although the Church reportedly may assume financial responsibility for Walesa and his family, it probably will be cautious in associating itself in any formal way with other former union leaders.

The Church also may move to fill some of the void left by Solidarity's dissolution. Archbishop Glemp, for example, plans to have the Church advocate more openly the interests of Polish society and to establish closer ties with the workers. The Church also will push the regime to make good on its promised political and economic reforms but--as in the past--will not be able to force the government to take action.

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