

NLJ-001-201-1-22

CIA HAS NO OBJECTION TO
DECLASSIFICATION AND/OR
RELEASE OF THIS DOCUMENT
DATE: NOV 2001
BY: 0664393

B. Smith

~~Secret~~

26 work det 3/25

27 - Davis

28 - Fil. Rev.

29 - Berl'd 3/21



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

POLAND TODAY AND IN 1956

~~Secret~~

25

21 March 1968
No. 0644/68

~~WARNING~~

~~This document contains information affecting the national defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, sections 793 and 794, of the US Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.~~

~~GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND
DECLASSIFICATION~~

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
21 March 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Poland Today and in 1956

Summary

There is so far little analogy between the events of the past few weeks in Poland and those of 1955 and 1956 which led to the election of Gomułka in October 1956 as party first secretary. The events in Poland in recent days have fallen into their own unique pattern suggestive of one or another aspect of 1955 or 1956 but not indicative of a similar chain of development. Moreover, the political and economic pressures at work today, and the psychological atmosphere, are different than they were 12 years ago. A new generation is pushing onto the political stage and the goals of the dissatisfied are different.

Nevertheless, the political situation in Poland is unstable and popular aspirations have been unfulfilled for too long. Thus a revolutionary situation could come into being. If it does, it will evolve in ways different from the developments of 1955 and 1956.

The one parallel--and it is significant--between the scene today and that of over a decade ago is an implicit challenge to the USSR. Moscow cannot tolerate political unrest on its immediate borders or along its main communications line to

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research, the Office of National Estimates, and the Clandestine Services.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Germany. In 1956 it reacted by moving troops toward Warsaw. Should the Soviets again lose confidence in the Polish leadership, they might react in somewhat the same way, but conditions in Poland have not so far reached the point of drawing Moscow's direct involvement.

-2-

~~SECRET~~

Spontaneity of Demonstrations

1. The recent demonstrations in Poland have so far been largely spontaneous expressions of student dissatisfaction over genuine issues of individual liberties and freedom. They are in response to ever more repressive policy affecting the arts, literature, the theater and personal rights. The students were clearly turned on by the almost simultaneous events in Prague and the resistance by the Warsaw Writers Union to regime dictates. These expressions of feeling differ in one very significant way from what happened in 1955 and 1956. At that time similar demonstrations and calls for freedom of expression were largely carried out by party intellectuals who were the spearhead for change. Their party membership made them threatening, in a much stronger sense than today's students, to the party and thus guaranteed there would be some degree of favorable response. So far no such need to respond to the students has been evident in Poland. Rather the regime confidently, though probably ill-advisedly, has reacted by cracking skulls and jailing students.

Worker Support

2. The students have gained popular sympathy today in Warsaw for their defiance. But this is not enough to cause the regime much concern yet. A key turning point in 1955-1956 was, and probably would be again today, the joining in the demonstrations by the industrial workers. So far there are only minor expressions of sympathy for the students among some industrial workers; the large majority of the workers have sullenly submitted to party blandishments to avoid involvement with the students. This, of course, could change if the students can keep up the pressure and cause it to spread throughout Poland, a development which may be in train.

Role of the Church

3. Another difference rests in the aloofness so far of the powerful Roman Catholic Church, which can unequivocally speak for the bulk of the workers and the peasantry. In 1956 the tacit and later explicit support of the church for Gomulka was crucial in rallying the people. Today, Poland's Primate,

Cardinal Wyszynski, has taken no strong stand, although he has shown clear sympathy with the student cause in two low-key sermons.

Anti-Russian Sentiment

4. In 1955 and 1956 the average Pole was well aware that for all practical purposes his country was run by the Russians. All government decisions, it was known, had to be first approved by the Russians. They were the hated occupiers. Today, even though the cornerstone of Gomulka's policies is friendship with the Russians and nationalism is an important factor in the crisis, the bitter hatred of 1956 is not there as a strong motivating factor.

Popular Attitudes

5. In 1956 a sense of hopelessness was prevalent--the average worker or student believed he had nothing to lose no matter what he did. He lived in a grey world of nothing, empty of all but the most minor amenities. Today, the average Pole is better off materially, if not spiritually, and though his wants are by no means satisfied, he does realize he has something to lose. He probably would be less inclined, or certainly more hesitant, about going out on the streets in revolt.

Party Factions and Leadership

6. One of the key factors in the Polish upheaval of 1956 was the existence in the Polish party of a powerful and daring faction--the Pulawian group. Influential, well-placed and under Gomulka's leadership, the members of this faction were able to bring their man to power despite opposition from Stalinist elements. The Pulawian faction had the support of the party intellectuals, at that time a matter of key importance because the intellectuals were able to promote and gain support from the industrial workers. The Pulawians also were able to count on support by the Polish military.

7. No such elaborate coalition exists today. The factionalism appears more fragmented. The regime, moreover, has adroitly forestalled any coalition between the workers and the students, and the army has shown no inclination to withdraw its support to Gomulka.

8. During 1955 and until October 1956 the Polish party was in the hands of a caretaker leadership. Party First Secretary Beirut had died in March 1955 and was replaced in May by Edward Ochab who never really put his heart into the job. His leadership was weak and uncertain, providing ideal grounds for the development of plans to bring in Gomulka. In the present circumstances Poland has a leader who has been in office nearly 12 years and has maintained his predominant position through skillful manipulation of the different factions and cliques in his party.

The Threat Today

9. The crisis is clearly being exploited by Interior Minister Moczar's hardline, anti-Semitic, and nationalistic faction, not to unseat Gomulka but to gain decisive influence within the party. Quoting Gomulka's own anti-Semitic statement of last June, this faction has now seized the opportunity to blame the unrest on Zionists, liberals, and intellectuals. These are elements which Moczar has long sought to oust from the party and government to his benefit. Certainly the provocative manner in which the unrest has been handled by Moczar's police suggests that he is more interested in having it run its course than nipping it in the bud.

10. With Moczar's group now apparently riding high, there is no guarantee that he will not seek to go beyond what initially may have been limited goals. If the factional struggles become too great or Gomulka loses his ability to manipulate and control them, then his position in the party could deteriorate rapidly with unfortunate consequences for his leadership and for Poland.

11. Despite the lack of direct parallels with 1955 and 1956, the political situation in Poland today is unstable, as it has been for several years. Even if Gomulka successfully weathers the present storm, this does not rule out a new and more dangerous outburst. Events in Poland may be moving toward, or into, that state of political volatility where rationality suddenly disappears and the paranoia born out of fear, hate and desperation, takes over.

Russian Concern

12. The only similarity, but a most significant one, between the events of today in Poland and those of 1956 is that both cases posed an implicit challenge to the USSR. Extreme political unrest on its immediate borders and athwart its main lines of communication to Germany are intolerable conditions for Moscow. In 1956 Russian reaction upon learning of the pending change in leadership in the Polish party was to begin moving troops toward the Polish capital--a measure of how sensitive an issue Polish leadership and stability is to the Russian leaders. A like loss of confidence again could spark a similar reaction. So far, of course, conditions have not degenerated in Poland to any such threatening degree for the USSR.