

Chapter 15

Poland and the End of the Cold War

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Several processes were essential to bring the Cold War to an end.¹ Among them were the changes of the political situation in Poland, the unification of Germany, a final collapse of communism in Europe, and dismantling of all instruments of Soviet domination, particularly the Warsaw Pact. In this chapter I will concentrate on these three developments.

Polish *Solidarność* (“Solidarity”) and the Demise of the Communist System

It would be rather futile to assume that the totalitarian system would collapse by itself in a time of peace.... It is almost impossible to destroy the communist system from within during normal times by a dissident movement or even by the raise of masses of people.

—*Jean-Francois Revel, How the Democracies Perish*

By October 1953, the US Security Council had privately accepted that the eastern European satellite states could be freed only by general war or by the Russians themselves. Neither was possible.

—*C.ᄁ. Barlett, Global Conflict*

Soviet domination over Poland is vital to Moscow’s control over Eastern Europe. Indeed, controlling Poland has been a 250-year-long Russian objective, first attained late in the eighteenth century after a protracted struggle ... Since then, every Russian government has insisted on Russia’s preponderance in Polish affairs ... Control over Poland was presented as central to Russia’s security and internal Russian matter... Control over Poland would be the bridge to a decisive Russian role in German affairs.

—*Zbigniew Brzezinski, Game Plan*

Russia finally managed to subordinate Poland at the end of the 18th century. Since then Poles tried to regain their independence at every possible opportunity. The 1794 uprising, the Napoleonic Wars, and uprisings in 1830 and 1863 showed quite vividly that Russia could conquer Poland but it could not digest it.

After many attempts Poland finally regained its independence in November 1918 as an outcome of World War I. Its independence was almost immediately challenged, however, by the Soviet Red Army. As Soviet Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky put it, “over the dead body of White Poland there is a path to a worldwide revolutionary conflagration.” This time, Russia did not succeed because the Red Army was conclusively defeated by Poles on the outskirts of Warsaw in August 1920.

The situation changed once again as the result of World War II. Russia (as the Soviet Union), managed to regain full control over Poland, which was for Russia one of the most significant gains of the war. For decades, Poland became a part of the external Soviet empire.

During the post-war period the Soviets always considered Poland to be the most troublesome and worrying of all their communist satellites.

First, it was different because of the survival of individual farming, the strong role of the Catholic Church (which managed to successfully defend its independence) and very strong cultural and academic ties with the West, which were partly due to the existence of a strong Polish diaspora which historically had always contributed greatly to the development of Polish culture.

Second, every decade there was a major political crisis, whether the general strike and street fighting in Poznań in 1956, massive strikes and street demonstrations of students in 1968, and more strikes in 1970 in Gdansk, where the army killed several dozen protesters. On top of that, there was a growing movement of discontent among intellectuals demanding more academic and artistic freedoms and protesting against the excesses of censorship.

When in 1976 another wave of strikes was brutally suppressed by the police, leading Polish intellectuals formed a Workers Defence Committee (KOR), which began a process of open institutionalization of the Polish dissident movement. One of the most seminal was the foundation of a completely independent free trade union, albeit small and

not recognized by the authorities. (It is worth knowing that according to the Convention of the International Labor Organization, ratified by communist Poland, trade unions could be organized without prior consent of the authorities. Thus, an independent trade union set up after 1976 had a certain degree of legality.)

In 1980 another strike broke out in a shipyard in Gdansk under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa. Soon, many other factories and enterprises followed and the scale of the protest was so great that the communist authorities decided to negotiate.

The agreement signed between the strikers and the government was unprecedented in a number of ways. First, it granted the right to form new trade unions free from communist party control, as well as the right to strike. Second, all political prisoners were freed and censorship was to be seriously limited. Third, it reduced the role of the Polish communist party (Polish United Workers, Party—PUWP) from its “leading role” in all aspects of public and political life to only the “leading role in the State.” This freed the trade unions from communist party control.

Thus, for the first time in a communist country, a truly independent trade union—*Solidarność* or “Solidarity”—was born. Within a matter of months it had 10 million members. Under the *Solidarność* protective umbrella a whole range of civic society independent institutions began to function. What initially was only a trade union soon became a national movement aimed at the profound expansion of civil liberties. The powerful Catholic Church, led by Polish Pope John Paul II, openly sympathized with the movement (and often tried to mitigate more radical tendencies within *Solidarność*).

The dilemma *Solidarność* had to face was very serious. It could be reduced to the question how far this process could go without prompting a strong reaction by the Polish communist party and without triggering a direct Soviet intervention like the one in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The prospect loomed constantly over *Solidarność* activities. After all, everyone in Poland knew how critical it was to Soviet interests to have Poland under full control. For *Solidarność* it was absolutely clear that in the case of Soviet military intervention the West would not respond in kind. Memories of the 1956 Hungarian revolution remained fresh.

These were not theoretical speculations. The Soviet Union was ready to intervene militarily in December 1980 to stop a “creeping counterrevolution.” That this did not happen was to a great extent due to very strong warnings from the United States and other Western countries. Polish communist authorities also claimed that they would be able to restore full control over the country. A similar danger came to Poland again in March of 1981. Poland’s communist leadership was under heavy pressure to restore full control, not only from Moscow but also from even more desperate communist parties such as those of Romania or East Germany who were worried that the “Polish disease” could be contagious and undermine their rule.

Despite these worries, the oppressive political system continued to erode under the pressure of emerging civic society institutions and of nearly-free media operating under the trade union umbrella. In this atmosphere of growing openness, the Communist Party began to crumble. At one stage more than one million members of the Party were members of *Solidarność*.

It became clear that the only structures the communist authorities could really count on were the police and the army. Therefore, the only way to stop *Solidarność* was to implement martial law, which was finally declared on December 13, 1981. Various strikes and demonstrations were crushed by the police and the army, very harsh penalties for every kind of unauthorized activities were introduced, and about 10,000 activists were arrested. *Solidarność* and all other independent institutions were declared illegal.

Despite these harsh measures, civic society survived. This could be seen in the variety of independent cultural or academic activities (often on Church premises), but primarily in the survival and development of an underground independent press (more than 600 regularly published periodicals) as well as an existence of a vast distribution network, linked to numerous underground printing houses publishing hundreds of book titles every year. Incidentally, when in 1980 Czesław Miłosz—a Polish poet living in exile—was awarded a Nobel Prize the only books published in Poland with his poems that were available at the Paris Book Fair were those printed illegally outside the reach of the communist censorship.

Despite all odds, *Solidarność* also survived and continued its activities. Lech Wałęsa, the *Solidarność* leader, was interned together with most of other leadership members. Those who managed to avoid arrest set up an underground Provisional Coordinating Committee to serve as the trade union national executive. Despite many efforts by the communist secret police to disrupt it, the Provisional Coordinating Committee managed to survive underground because of a highly decentralized structure and considerable experience accumulated from World War II, when Poles formed a whole range of underground institutions, such as the underground representation of the Polish government in exile, the underground Home Army with partisans units, a schooling system etc.

These activities could not have been developed to such a scale without support from abroad. This was especially important in two areas. First was the material support for the families of those arrested or fired from work. This help took various forms—transfer of cash, legal assistance etc. What was most spectacular was a spontaneous action in many countries like Germany, France, Sweden and others of sending parcels with food, clothing, sanitary materials and medicines, which were distributed by church institutions (not only Catholic) or groups of volunteers acting under the Church umbrella.

The second area of critical importance was the supply of printing machines and printing materials for our underground press. In this respect one should note the great financial support for underground *Solidarność* and various underground institutions of civic society that emanated first and foremost from the United States, through the American trade union the AFL-CIO, as well as from various European trade unions, primarily from France, the UK, Italy, Germany and Sweden, and from Japan.

On the international scene *Solidarność* retained its membership in major international trade union organizations like the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) or the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its affiliation to the UN International Labor Organization, which continued treating *Solidarność* as the genuine representative of working people in the Poland.

The dramatic consequences of martial law were augmented by the dire state of Polish economy. The economic crisis loomed over Poland even before martial law. The economic policy of the previous commu-

nist Polish leader, Edward Gierek, to embark on a huge investment program based on massive credits from the West had begun to show its weakness, especially at the very end of the 1970s. Gierek's plan to modernize industry and repay the debt through export of products of this industry to the West failed because of poor management and wrong economic assessments.

As a result, Poland's financial needs in August 1980 amounted to \$9 billion, which simply could not be met without financial assistance from the West. Default was avoided in 1981 due to the readiness of the West to restructure the debt. These decisions were made to a great extent because the *Solidarność* movement created hopes that U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig formulated quite explicitly in his analysis sent to President Reagan: "if what had happened in Poland could be consolidated this would be a historic event for the people of Eastern Europe and for Western values."²

The fact that Poland depended so heavily on Western financial assistance was an important factor mitigating the harshness of the martial law period. Despite Western reluctance or inability to use fully its economic tools, and because of martial law restrictions, the Polish communist authorities could not stabilize the situation. The country desperately needed far-reaching and painful economic reforms, which could not be carried out without public support and the creation of a measure of confidence and public trust in the authorities. Several attempts were made, but all of them failed, being blocked by strikes and protests organized by the *Solidarność* underground.

It became quite clear that neither the Church nor the West would recognize the artificially created *Solidarność's* poor substitutes, such as new trade unions or various councils, as a true representation of the Polish people. Attempts to reconstruct the government by offering ministerial posts to some prominent people from *Solidarność* failed as well. So at the beginning of 1989 the PUPW Central Committee gave final approval to begin official negotiations with *Solidarność* to break the political deadlock in the country. On Feb 6, 1989 the Round Table Talks began.

Despite the official format of the talks (the round table), in reality there was a clear division of sides: on the one side was *Solidarność* and on

the other the Communist Party with its satellites and communist-controlled organizations, such as the official trade unions.

Both sides came to the talks with a similar vision for the eventual outcome of the talks, but each had a completely different view of what would happen thereafter. The common vision was to liberalize the political system (which, thus far, was at least in intention, a totalitarian system) by changing it into a system in which the PUPW would still play a dominant role, but where some areas (like trade union activities) would be free from direct Party control. Roughly speaking, the totalitarian system would be replaced by a kind of a relatively mitigated autocracy. Both sides also knew that due to Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union there was much greater maneuvering room for political experimentation in Poland than had been the case a decade earlier.

The two sides differed, however, when it came to expectations regarding developments after liberalization of the system. The communist leadership hoped that after the legalization of *Solidarność* the whole movement would be somehow built into the system, and the communist party would be able to maintain overall control over the state. In other words, the system would acquire some legitimacy and self-correcting mechanisms, but would remain the same in its essence. *Solidarność*, in contrast, believed that once the trade union regained its legal status, the whole process of expanding freedoms would start all over again as in 1980-81.

The electoral law for the forthcoming parliamentary elections became one of the areas of major political controversy. The authorities were quite ready to accept a wide representation of the political democratic opposition centered around *Solidarność* to enter the parliament, but on the basis of a common single electoral list of candidates together with the communists. The idea was to have a "non-confrontational election." In the view of the communist party, this would blur the political differences and one common list would be presented under the name of a new version of the Front of National Unity that was so well-known from the past. The carrot was a guarantee that *Solidarność* would be guaranteed 35% of the seats.

Solidarność countered with a proposal to have a completely free and competitive election for the offered 35% of seats, leaving the remaining 65% seats to be filled by the communist party and its satellites.

These proposals were approved, but after a long struggle. The communist side proposed to reinstate the Senate with 100 seats and the position of President, which had been abolished by the communists when they came to power. The president, elected by a National Assembly (both chambers of the parliament), would have very considerable powers, such as the right to dissolve the parliament or to declare martial law. It was quite clear that the election of the president would be determined by a pro-communist parliamentary majority and his very strong prerogatives were intended as an additional safeguard against the situation getting out of control. As compensation *Solidarność* managed to win communist agreement to completely free elections to the Senate, which however had very limited powers.

The final agreement ending the Round Table Negotiations was signed on April 5, 1989. Elections were to take place in June 4. What was extremely important was the clear declaration that the electoral law negotiated during the talks would be applicable to the forthcoming election only. The next elections were to be fully democratic, without any quotas of seats.

The final result of the election was a total catastrophe for the communists. *Solidarność* won, with a crushing majority, every seat except one in the Senate (the only seat not taken by *Solidarność* was won by an independent businessman) and all of the seats in the freely contested part of the *Sejm*, the lower chamber of the parliament.

On top of that, the 65% majority guaranteed by the negotiated electoral law looked much less reliable, because among the members of parliament elected on the communist quota there were many tacit Solidarity sympathizers.

The electoral shock accelerated the process anticipated by the *Solidarność* leadership. There were many signs of dissent and a heightened readiness, especially among the satellite political parties, to desert a communist-led coalition and join the ranks of *Solidarność*.

Finally, the newly elected (by a majority of only one vote) President, the former Secretary General of the PUWP and the de facto ruler of

Poland, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, had no other option but to turn the task of forming a government over to a prominent *Solidarność* activist: Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

The process of forming the government was not easy. To begin with, it seemed important to offer participation in the government to representatives of the communist party. By offering them such critical portfolios as Defense or the Interior Ministry, which was in charge of the police, Mazowiecki wanted to alleviate a possible strong reaction from Moscow. There was also a need to assure the communists a presence in ministries dealing with the economy to involve them in the process of economic transformation.

Finally, on September 12 a new government was finally, and almost unanimously, approved by the Polish Parliament. The communists received 3 of 24 portfolios. Among them were defense and interior, but soon *Solidarność* deputy ministers were nominated in these departments, while the critical Ministry of Foreign Affairs was taken by *Solidarność*. The communist system in Poland came to an end and the process of dismantling this system in Europe began. Something that had seemed quite impossible actually happened in a peaceful, organized manner, without any loss of life or even a single broken glass.

In retrospect, *Solidarność's* contribution to the fall of communism may be summarized in several points.

First, the movement positioning itself in opposition to the Communist Party was of immense scale. Because it encompassed almost the whole of society it showed with compelling clarity that the Party and the system it represented had no democratic legitimacy.

Second, martial law, although implemented with remarkable efficiency and military professionalism, was a political failure. It became clear that tanks on the streets could not save the system.

Third, the Soviet Union was no longer ready to defend the communist system in another country by military means. Clearly with *perestroika* in full swing in Soviet Union one could think that such a military intervention would be very unlikely. But someone somewhere had to put it to a final practical test. That is what *Solidarność* did by forming the first non-communist government in our part of the world.

Finally, *Solidarność* showed quite clearly that in the new, non-communist system even the former communists would not be ostracized or hanged. They would find a place and a role in a new democratic state.

After the historical breakthrough in Poland it became relatively simple for others to follow the Polish way, and they did just that.

Poland and the Reunification of Germany

The East and West Germans share a profound wish to be reunited under one roof sometime in future...though they know there is no chance of it in the presently foreseeable future. It may come sometime in the next century, perhaps late in next century.

—*Helmut Schmidt, A Grand Strategy for the West (1985)*

Poland's political opposition had a great difficulty with the problem of German unification. For the communist rulers the situation was relatively simple. Only a divided Germany and the existence of the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) with a powerful Red Army stationing on its territory was a guarantee of the inviolability of the Polish western border along the Oder-Neisse rivers. The communists' justification of this position was not easy to ignore. After all, the German Constitutional Tribunal in Karlsruhe declared that the recognition of Germany's border with Poland, as agreed in treaties between Poland and both German states, would not be binding for a unified Germany. The argument that only Soviet Union was a reliable guarantor of our western border was an important element legitimizing communist rule in Poland.

On the other hand, it was clear for the independent Polish political opposition that Poland would not be able to regain its independence as long as Germany was divided and its eastern part was under Soviet control.

The problem was that the Polish democratic opposition would have liked to see the problem of unification as being central to actual Eastern German policy, whereas for the Germans the issue of unification was absolutely not on the political horizon. Instead, Bonn conducted an Eastern policy known as *Ostpolitik*, which was based on the assumption that cooperation in a spirit of *détente* with East Germany and Mos-

cow might alleviate the situation of the Germans in the GDR and, in a process of “change through rapprochement,” eventually undermine the communist government and bring about unification in the long run.

For quite a long time the Polish democratic opposition considered this policy to be interesting and promising. What was very highly valued was not only a treaty between the Federal Republic and Poland that recognized Poland’s western border, but also very substantial financial assistance in the form of various cultural and social programs as well as new credits to alleviate Polish financial problems.

Nevertheless, beginning from the late 1970s the *Ostpolitik* began to show its weaknesses. Bonn considered contacts with dissident movements in Poland to be detrimental to the détente process and to perhaps even “set communist parties on a reverse course.” The destabilization of communist countries by grass-roots movements would eventually “terminate the peace and détente policy” (both quotes from Horst Ehmke’s article published in 1985 in *Frankfurter Hefte*). For the Polish opposition it was very painful to see German Chancellor Schmidt’s reaction to the implementation of martial law in Poland. At a press conference on December 13, 1991, held together with the East German leader, Schmidt said only “I am as much dismayed as Mr. Honecker that this was necessary.”

Polish opposition criticism of Schmidt’s remarks was summarized quite well in a comment published in a leading underground weekly, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, in 1986:

It is true that every change in the communist bloc requires Moscow’s acceptance. But there is a difference between asking for approval for changes that are only planned and for convincing the Kremlin that it is a necessity to acquiesce to a situation that resulted from the action of some powerful socio-political forces(...)

The problem is that the unification of Germany cannot be achieved across the dinner table. One can negotiate with the communist rulers the reduction of visa fees, amnesty or passports for some people to travel to the West, but such successes almost exhaust the potential of the present day *Ostpolitik*.

More ambitious diplomatic initiatives in Moscow or Berlin could be seen by the communists as worth considering only if they were supported by the authentic, strong and vocal pressure of the GDR people. To come closer to the main political goal of unification one should work on developing certain civic habits and postures in the GDR. In short, a real chance for German unification is not in changing Poland into another GDR, but in changing the GDR into another Poland.

By 1989 the dramatic and revolutionary developments in Poland completely changed the political landscape. On top of that, partly because of spillover effects, Central and Eastern Europe began to be engulfed in a wave of social and political turmoil. Hungary opened its border with Austria and thousands of Germans from the GDR took the opportunity and escaped. Soon after, the German embassies in Czechoslovakia and Poland were flooded with refugees from East Germany seeking a transfer to the West. In the GDR street demonstrations gained strength and the Communist Party was clearly in disarray. On November 7 the government of the GDR resigned and the following day the Central Committee of the Communist Party changed the whole party leadership. Finally, in the wide spread confusion and commotion, partly as a result of a certain misunderstanding, the Berlin Wall fell. The unification of Germany was no longer a pipe dream.

The West German leadership was for a very long time completely unaware of the gravity of the new situation. The day the Hungarians opened the border with Austria, the CDU national conference in Bremen did not see any reason to respond to this event. On the day the Berlin Wall fell Chancellor Kohl was in Warsaw and had to break off his visit and fly to Berlin to find out what was going on. His reaction was swift. Two weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall Kohl presented a plan for German unification. Thus, the German government declared unification not to be a distant, historical goal but a priority of current German policy.

Kohl's plan, consisting of 10 points, did not answer many very basic questions. It was not clear what would be the place of united Germany in the newly emerging international order. There were only rather vague references to the European Communities, CSCE and disarmament. What was significant was the absence of any references to NATO. Moreover, there was no indication what would be the territo-

rial shape of the new, united Germany. This was noticed immediately in Poland and raised a certain concern.

It became quite obvious that the first task for Polish diplomacy would be to “extend” Chancellor Kohl’s plan by adding “another point,” specifying the question of Germany’s eastern borders.

This turned out to be no easy matter. On November 30 the SPD caucus in the *Bundestag* proposed an expansion of Kohl’s plan by two points regarding medium-range missiles and Germany’s borders. It failed to gain enough support, which understandably raised considerable concern in Poland.

A not very positive scenario of future developments began to be anticipated in Poland. It was a scenario of a united Germany released from entanglements with NATO and the European Communities while keeping open legal questions related to its eastern borders with Poland. It was a scenario of Poland being again sandwiched between the Soviet Union on one side and formally neutral and unconstrained Germany on the other. It was also a scenario in which neutralized Germany might be tempted again to cooperate with Russia to the detriment of Poland, a Germany that could be “a loose cannon.”

This is why Poland from the very beginning was against German neutrality and was very much against plans of neutralization of Germany such as those presented by Moscow and by GDR Prime Minister Hans Modrow. Opinions voiced by various SPD politicians that neutrality was a price worth paying for unification were received with equal concern in Poland. Poland’s firm support for German membership in NATO was officially confirmed in February 1990 by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs during his visit to Bonn.

The Polish position came as a shock to Moscow, which strongly believed that Poland would be particularly sensitive to all German issues and would always share Moscow’s views on these matters. The Polish position was soon shared by other former communist countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary. According to Chancellor Kohl’s national security advisor Horst Teltschik, this Polish support was a decisive factor in convincing Gorbachev that his opposition to Germany’s NATO membership was untenable.³ The road to German unification was opened.

The only issue to be decided that was of very special importance to Poland was the problem of Germany's eastern border.

On February 11, 1990 a conference of the Warsaw Pact and NATO countries began in Ottawa. On the agenda was a debate about the "Open Skies" program. Within the framework of the conference several bilateral and multilateral meetings and talks took place. One of them addressed the issue of the unification of Germany. In a communique issued at the end of the meeting, the four powers (United States, UK, France and the USSR) and the two German states announced that talks of the six countries on the "external aspects of the establishment of German unity, including the issues of security of the neighbouring states" would begin. Five month later, in Paris, all controversies on the political conditionalities were overcome, including (as the result of consultations and negotiations with Poland), the satisfactory wording of the final confirmation of German borders. A formal "peace settlement" ending the division of Germany was finally signed by six governments (United States, United Kingdom, USSR, France, GDR and FRG) on September 12 in Moscow. Germany was united again, but not "by blood and iron" as in the 19th century, but by a peace settlement with the full consent of all neighbors and other nations of the Euro-Atlantic area.

The Demise of the Warsaw Pact

There is considerable evidence that the Soviet government has decided in 1989 to allow more beginnings of self-rule in Poland and Hungary and their other satellite states than before. But it is still too early to tell whether this trend ... will be allowed to continue if these satellite states should decide they no longer want to be in the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, the Soviet government said that while they permit Poland to have a non-communist government, Poland "of course must remain a member of the Warsaw Pact."

—Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace* (1990)

In 1955 West Germany joined NATO. This was treated by Moscow as a good pretext to form the Warsaw Pact, a military alliance of all European communist countries that was supposed to be a formal counterweight to the North Atlantic Alliance. Until then Moscow could

control the satellites through a series of bilateral treaties with extended security clauses and military guarantees. On top of this, great numbers of Russian officers were delegated to the armed forces of other countries to occupy very high positions, which very effectively secured sufficient control by Moscow. However, NATO expansion and integration of West Germany into the Alliance required an additional and more spectacular response. Control exerted through the mass presence of Soviet officers appeared as an overtly crude solution and needed to be replaced by more sophisticated mechanisms.

The new Treaty signed in Warsaw in 1955, known as the Warsaw Pact, stipulated the setting up of a joint military command, which would allow the Soviets to gain direct control of the armed forces of other members of this new alliance. The Treaty also provided a legal framework for stationing of Soviet forces on the territory of other member states.

Although the Warsaw Pact was presented as a copy of NATO and very often treated in the West that way, in fact it was a completely different organization. First, all top Warsaw Pact commanders were Russians. The Supreme Commander of the Pact's United Armed Forces was at the same time the First Deputy of the Soviet Minister of Defense. Similarly, the Chief of the Combined Staff of the Pact Armed Forces was, at the same time, the first Deputy of the Chief of the Soviet General Staff. The Combined Command of Pact Forces was fully subordinated to the Soviet General Staff. On top of this, no one from the national Deputies of the Supreme Commander or the national Deputy Chiefs of the Pact's General Staff had access to an overall war plan, which was available only to Soviet generals. National representatives on the Pact General Staff could be familiarized only with those fragments of the overall operational plan which were necessary for the national planning and commanding. In every country there was a military mission of the Pact Command, but staffed only by the Soviet military. Needless to say, there was no Pact mission affiliated to the Soviet Army. In the Warsaw Pact there was no equivalent to the civilian NATO Headquarters and no regional multi-national commands. There was the Political Consultative Committee consisting of the first secretaries of the communist parties, ministers of foreign affairs and defense but, in reality, this Committee dealt basically with very general and rather ideological issues and had no relevance to real military planning, doc-

trine and strategy. These issues were worked out by the Soviet General Staff only.

The Polish Army had slightly greater autonomy than the other satellite armies. The Supreme Command Mission to Poland (with Russian staff only) had an office in Warsaw, but unlike in other states it had no permanent liaison officers allocated to local major army units. Soviet military intelligence GRU (unlike KGB) had no mission in Warsaw. Poland, in case of war, was supposed to deploy three land and one air army, but these forces were to form a separate group of armies (a "front"- in Soviet terminology) which under the Polish command was supposed to capture Denmark and the Danish Straights, northern Germany and the Netherlands.

In the late 1980s, with *perestroika* gaining speed, some attempts to make the Warsaw Pact look more like NATO could be seen. First, Moscow made a vague suggestion that a parliamentary body similar to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly could be introduced, together with some form of more direct political control. Then in 1987, on Moscow's initiative, a Warsaw Pact Reform Group was formed. Discussions at this forum showed significant differences: Poland and Hungary were in favor of democratization of the Pact whereas Moscow, Prague, East Berlin and Bucharest were in favor of increasing its political functions. According to these proposals, the Warsaw Pact was supposed to play a coordinating role not only in military and security matters but also in the area of cooperation in research and development, in the economy and even in cultural affairs. The Group met only a couple of times and turned out to be a forum of general debates only. It soon became irrelevant in view of fundamental political changes underway in Poland and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The unification of Germany raised fundamental questions regarding the new security system in Europe. The suggestion to dissolve both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, made by Gorbachev in Strasbourg in July 1989, were unacceptable. It was important for NATO was to stay, if only to stabilize the newly united Germany. The GDR ceased to exist, so the Warsaw Pact lost one important member. Although the main strategic documents were to be returned to Moscow, all documentation, data and material assets became available to a NATO country:

united Germany. The Warsaw Pact was no longer covered by the veil of complete secrecy.

Several concepts were presented, such as the “Finlandization” of the area between NATO and the Soviet Union, the creation of a loose federation of the states of the region operating within a democratized Warsaw Pact, or a moratorium on structural changes both in NATO and the Warsaw Pact in order to stabilize the situation. The spectre of chaos in the region emerging from a permafrost of Soviet control and the collapse of Gorbachev loomed very largely on the debates. In May 1989 Zbigniew Brzezinski in Lublin said that “Polish membership in the Warsaw Pact could be seen as something positive providing the Pact will not be an instrument of an enforcement of some orthodox ideology but will be an agent of geopolitical and territorial stability in Europe.”⁴

For Poland none of these options was attractive. Regaining full independence and establishing very close ties with the West were the order of the day. Therefore, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact became an obvious policy. Nevertheless, Poland had to handle the situation with caution. The need to solve the problem of the Polish western border required a very balanced policy towards Moscow. After all, to retain a measure of uncertainty about the final nature of these borders could be seen in Moscow as an element increasing future Soviet leverage on Poland.

Under these circumstances, it was Hungary that took the lead. On July 7, during the meeting of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee in Moscow, the Hungarian delegation proposed setting up an intergovernmental commission to review the nature, and functioning of the Warsaw Pact, including the option of dismantling all the Pact’s military structures. The direction of change was clearly indicated. Soon after that, Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall announced that regardless of the outcome of the debates, Hungary would quit the Warsaw Pact at the end of 1991.

Warsaw took these statements with understanding and sympathy, but decided to take a slightly different course. The idea was not to go for a clash, but to convince Moscow that under political circumstances developing in Europe, even a reformed Warsaw Pact could not serve any positive and constructive purpose and should be dissolved

on a consensual basis. For example, in May 1990 Poland declared that Polish troops could be used to defend Polish territory only; any other use of Polish troops outside Poland was completely excluded also in the future.

This imaginative policy, developed and very skilfully carried out by Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was soon strongly supported by the President of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel and by Hungary. Bucharest and Sofia, which had been rather passive for quite a long time, finally decided to follow suit.

Poland and other countries began to withdraw personnel from Warsaw Pact command structures. Soon it became clear that the Pact was in a state of atrophy. In Budapest on February 25, 1991 a decision to dismantle all military structures was unanimously adopted. Three months later, in Prague, the Warsaw Pact was finally dissolved.

Poland's remaining task was to secure a swift and speedy withdrawal of Russian troops from Poland. The negotiations were difficult, but an agreement was finally reached and the last Russian detachment left Poland on September 17, 1993. If one disregards a short period between the two world wars, for the first time since the beginning of the eighteenth century there were no foreign troops on Polish soil.

The date of departure of the last Russian soldiers from Poland had also a symbolic significance: on September 17, 1939 Poland was invaded by Russia, at that time an ally of Adolph Hitler.

Notes

1. The term “Cold War” was used for the first time by George Orwell in 1945, but entered the common political discourse after well-known newspaper columnist Walter Lippman published an article analyzing the nature of East-West relations. However, the temperature of these relations began to change over time from a deep frost period, marked by the Korean War and the Stalinist concept of the inevitability of a major war between the “Socialist Camp” and the capitalist West, to Khrushchev’s concept of peaceful coexistence, which was presented at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

2. Alexander M. Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan, 1984) p. 246.

3. Artur Hajnicz, *Polens Wende und Deutschlands Vereinigung* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995).

4. Cited in Jerzy M. Nowak, *Od hegemonii do agonii* (Warsaw: Bellona, 2011), p. 163.

