

Document No. 52: Memorandum from Ronald I. Spiers to the Secretary of State, "Polish Resistance to Soviet Intervention"

June 15, 1981

Publication of the June 5 Soviet letter was yet another cause for alarm in Washington that Moscow might be close to an invasion of Poland. In this context, the question naturally arose how the Poles would respond. The State Department's intelligence unit, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), offered this fascinating take. Virtually all Poles would resist such a move, this memo states, except those who were loyal to the Soviets or wanted above all to prevent bloodshed. But the analysis then leaps to the conclusion that the leadership could therefore be expected to join the population in resisting with military force. Apparently, INR based its assessment in part on the outcome of the June 9–10 plenum in Warsaw, which demonstrated surprising unity and support for Kania and Jaruzelski within the party against strong Soviet pressure. But instead of seeing that the Polish leaders' rationale for imposing martial law could be to comply with Moscow's demands (and their own inclination) to crush the opposition and reassert party control, the memo's authors believe that the Warsaw leadership would use martial law "not to suppress the labor movement but to maximize deterrence" against intervention. INR was not alone in this judgment. The CIA produced a similar analysis at the end of June and again in July.²⁷

June 15, 1981
Secret/Noform

To: The Acting Secretary
From: INR Ronald I. Spiers
Subject: Polish Resistance to Soviet Intervention

Poland's first line of defense against Soviet intervention would be to try to deter it with a show of national unity, which would imply maximum resistance. The Poles might resort to a declaration of martial law and deploy Army units around key points, not to suppress the labor movement but to maximize deterrence by preparing defenses against attack. If the Soviets invaded, much would depend on the state of readiness, deployment and initial actions of Polish air and ground forces, but the Polish Army would not long be able to prevent occupation of Warsaw even if the authorities ordered a maximum resistance effort. Even if

²⁷ See "Polish Reaction to a Soviet Invasion," CIA Intelligence Memorandum, June 30, 1981, available in the collections of the National Security Archive. See also the discussion in MacEachin, *U.S. Intelligence and the Polish Crisis*, pp. 134–135.

Polish leaders decided at the last moment not to try to fight, they would probably not be able to turn off widespread resistance by Army units and the populace.

I. *Detering Intervention*

The basic tactic of Kania and Jaruzelski in the period immediately ahead is likely to be an increasing accent on national unity. This implicitly threatens the Soviets with widespread and costly resistance to any military intervention. This line is already coming through in some official Polish commentary on the June 9–10 plenum. Solidarity's Wałęsa also appears to be playing it.

Since national unity would be clearly challenged by a resurgence of labor tension, the regime will probably move quickly to remove some of the major outstanding bones of contention with Solidarity. Jaruzelski has already, for example, announced the firing of Justice Minister Bafia, whose removal was demanded by Solidarity in connection with the March 19 police beating of union activists in Bydgoszcz. Wałęsa and other Solidarity moderates are likely to lend their efforts to defusing potential flash-points. The Church can also be expected to work to this end.

II. *Martial Law as a Possible Deterrent*

As tensions mount, Jaruzelski might additionally invoke a state of emergency or some variant of martial law in order to gird the nation against a threatened Soviet intervention.

In late March, it appeared the Poles were thinking of imposing martial law had Solidarity carried out its threat of a nationwide general strike. The Soviets seemed poised to intervene in a supportive role had Polish forces proved unable or unwilling to control the situation on their own.

A declaration of martial law now, however, would be different; it would be intended to prevent civil disturbances from developing, thus depriving the Soviets of this pretext for intervention. It would also keep the Polish armed forces in a heightened state of alert, thus enabling them to react more quickly against a Soviet move.

In the present context, the Polish Army's reliability as a deterrent to the Soviets presumably would be much greater than as a suppressor of Polish workers. While a declaration of martial law nevertheless would risk creating some internal tension, to the extent the Church, Solidarity, and the populace understood it to be directed against the Soviets, they would probably support it.

III. *The Nature of Resistance*

The Polish armed forces are the second largest in the Warsaw Pact. They include 340,000 men in the services, 90,500 militarized security forces and 670 combat aircraft. The Army is deployed predominantly on Poland's western borders and is therefore not well positioned to meet Soviet troops coming in from the East.

There would be widespread resistance by the Polish Army to a Soviet or Warsaw Pact invasion. (The Poles have probably made some contingency plans.)

This would be particularly true if resistance were ordered by the Polish General Staff, but many units would probably resist on their own, although in a less organized fashion. The Soviets do not have officers serving with the Polish forces and they appear to have had little success in increasing their control over the Polish military.

The Polish regime might at the last moment prior to invasion attempt to turn the resistance off. Some leaders might be motivated either by pro-Soviet sympathies—especially on the part of some strategically placed members of the military and security forces—and others by a real concern for the Polish lives which would be lost. To the extent the Polish regime is able to maximize its deterrent posture prior to a Soviet intervention, however, it will also have mobilized the nation and armed forces to resist such a potential Soviet move. It therefore seems unlikely that it could turn off all resistance and at least some units would probably fight.

There is also evidence of contingency preparations by at least some branches of Solidarity. Plans include armed resistance, industrial sabotage, general strikes, occupation of factories, protection of union leaders, and appeals to the patriotism of members of the armed and security forces. The existence of such planning appears in some cases to have been deliberately leaked.

[Source: FOIA release from the State Department, on file at the National Security Archive, "Soviet Flashpoints" collection.]