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A ground-breaking visit, or a visit of ground-breaking times?

On the late evening of July 9th 1989, Air Force One with president George H. W. Bush and his wife Barbara on board landed at the Okęcie airport in Warsaw. An official visit of the fourth American president on Polish lands began, lasting two days.



Previously, Poland was visited by Richard Nixon (in 1972), Gerald Ford

(in 1975) and Jimmy Carter (in 1977). Each of these visits gathered a lot of attention in the country over the Vistula river. Here were the leaders of one of the most powerful countries in the world, an oasis of freedom, for many years portrayed by the communist propaganda as the “rotten west”, visiting from behind the iron curtain.

As Reagan’s vice president...

Although George Bush visited Poland as the president of the USA, it was not his first visit in the country. Two years prior, in September 1987, he made a four-day trip to Poland as the deputy of Ronald Reagan.

The visit in 1987 was quite peculiar for those times, since, apart from the scheduled, official meetings with the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic, Bush had a lot of private meetings with opposition activists (Lech Wałęsa, Bronisław Geremek, Zbigniew Bujak, Leszek Moczulski). Vice president Bush laid wreaths at the grave of priest Jerzy Popiełuszko and made a speech in the Polish television, where he mentioned his meeting with Wałęsa. He also visited to farms near Łomianki. The meetings with the then vice president were accompanied by banners of the delegalized Solidarity and fingers pointing to the sky in the shape of V for victory – a gesture of support for the opposition. Bush’s speeches were full of references to the Polish values of freedom and non-direct appeals for democratic changes.

The places visited by the then vice president of the US, as well as people he was meeting with were closely watched by the Security

Service as part of the securing of the visit codename “Tama-87”. More than a 1000 operational pictures, shot from hiding, showing Bush’s gestures, Solidarity banners and reactions of people who met with him.

... and as the President of the USA

Bush’s visit in 1989 as the president was of entirely different character, a month after the free elections to contract Sejm and Senate, just before the change of the government and the presidential elections. Under the circumstances of the galloping inflation and economic crisis at the time, Poles expected not only political support for the changes, but also the promise of real help. Unfortunately, in this regard, George Bush was reluctant already on board the plane.

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