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## Martial Law in Poland at the behest of the Kremlin

One of the meetings, crucial for the development of the events of 1981, took place just outside the eastern Polish border. On 3 April in Brest on the Bug River, Stanisław Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski met with Soviet leaders to discuss the situation.



"We are all very concerned about further developments in Poland," said Leonid Brezhnev in early April. The Kremlin dignitaries made it clear to the Polish Party leaders that they expected them to act quickly and decisively against the opposition and "Solidarity".

**The Kremlin is not glad**

The spring of 1981 was a period of turbulence for the Polish communists. From 16 March, Poland held military exercises of the Warsaw Pact forces, codenamed "Soyuz 81", and the threat of strikes triggered by "Solidarity" in the wake of the Bydgoszcz provocation had not yet subsided.

On 30 March 1981, the authorities concluded a compromise with the "Solidarity" leadership. The trade union dismissed the idea of general strike, and in return was authorised i.a. to legalise the founding committees of rural "Solidarity" and given promises - never kept - that the state would investigate the events that took place on 19 March in Bydgoszcz and draft a law on trade unions.

The leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was not satisfied with such an agreement. The "Polish" topic was raised on 2 April 1981 during the meeting of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party. The Soviet Party leader, Leonid Brezhnev, reported his telephone conversation with the first secretary of the Polish Communist Party, Kania. In response to Kania's complaints about the difficult situation in Poland and criticism from "Solidarity", Brezhnev was to scold him with the words: "They did the right thing. You did not need to be criticised, but get a whipping. Then you might understand. [...] How many times did we convince you that you must act decisively, that you still cannot give way to 'Solidarity'."

At the meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, the Polish Party leaders were criticised for their "soft" stance. "Our [Polish] friends managed to prevent general strike. But at what

price? For the price of another surrender to the opposition," complained Brezhnev.

The Kremlin decided to call up Kania and Jaruzelski (the Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence at that time) to take part in a direct meeting with the head of the KGB Yuri Andropov and the Defence Minister of the Soviet Union Dmitry Ustinov. Both were also members of the Committee for the Polish Issues, formed in the Kremlin after the workers' strikes on the Polish coast in August 1980. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the legitimacy of introducing Martial Law in Poland to the Polish communists, as well as instruct them not to be afraid of bloodshed. A list of recommendations, which Andropov and Ustinov were to pass on to Kania and Jaruzelski, was drafted.

### **Ustinov bangs his fist on the table**

The meeting was arranged in Brest on the Bug River. Jaruzelski's personal aide-de-camp, Marian Stepnowski, recalled: "Jaruzelski and Stanisław Kania sat alone in the compartment. [...] I did not know where the aircraft headed when it took off, but I was sure that we would be landing in Moscow. After about 40 minutes of flying, the plane sharply began to land. [...] I realised that the flight time was much shorter than the flight to Moscow would take."

They landed in Brest on 3 April at around 8 p.m. The black Volga limousines took them to the old railway siding, where the wagons already waited. There, the communist dignitaries started the meeting, which lasted until the morning of 4 April.

"A few minutes after the talks began, I heard Marshal Ustinov's raised voice and the beating of his fist on the table. It lasted several minutes. [...] At about 3 a.m. of Warsaw time (I did not change my watch) General Jaruzelski and Stanisław Kania left the compartment feeling extremely tired," reported Stepnowski. They landed back in Warsaw at 4 a.m. As Andropov remarked, the point was "that nobody would know that the Polish comrades were going anywhere."

### **Moscow mobilizes Jaruzelski**

The Polish communists were concerned whether they would be able to use military force without the Soviet assistance. According to Ustinov, Kania and Jaruzelski were afraid of the consequences of introducing Martial Law in Poland when they saw the effects of the Bydgosz crisis. "It was enough to barely touch two members of Solidarity and immediately the whole country would stand up, that is, Solidarity was able to quickly mobilise its forces."

Meanwhile, the Soviets urged Jaruzelski and Kania to boldly take the initiative and impose Martial Law on their own. "The overall impression of our meeting with the Polish comrades was that they were very tense and nervous. It was obvious that they were affected by the situation," they said at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on 9 April. According to Andropov's further account, as the Soviets did not have "expertise in the fight against such negative phenomena" (strikes in workplaces), ready plans and instructions for introducing Martial Law were passed on to the Polish communists, which Kania and Jaruzelski were obliged to sign the week

after the meeting in Brest. The recommendations concerned, among others, a state of emergency, curfew, and the use of military and administrative forces.

However, Andropov stated during the meeting that all actions against "counter-revolutionary elements" should be carried out only by the Polish communists. Ustinov saw the case from the perspective of an experienced Soviet apparatchik: "To dispel their fears related to introducing a state of emergency or Martial Law, we gave the example that in many countries, as soon as an uprising breaks out, or if any riots begin, a state of emergency or Martial Law is introduced. [...] Why the Poles are afraid of introducing a state of emergency - we do not understand."

The Soviet leaders, including Brezhnev, agreed that Jaruzelski and Kania had to be ready as soon as possible to deal with "Solidarity" with their own means available to the Polish communists, without thinking that "it could possibly lead to bloodshed." Ustinov expressed the view that in the event of a clash in Poland, a common front of the army, Security Service and Citizen's Militia could be maintained there, adding, however: "bloodshed cannot be avoided; it will happen".

Moscow hoped for Jaruzelski's independent actions. "Soyuz 81" maneuvers ended. The Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact, Soviet marshal Viktor Kulikov, in an interview with Eastern German officers, stated while saying goodbye that "the common goal should be to solve the [Polish] problem without the intervention of allied armies."

## Jaruzelski asks Kulikow for "help"

After the meeting in Brest, Jaruzelski's team took very firm action. They began to more often evoke provocations, defined by members of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party as "segmental confrontations". Preparations for introducing Martial Law were accelerated. Kania and Jaruzelski began to understand that they could do all this only using their own strength. Despite this, Jaruzelski sought for guarantees for the next months that if the operation failed, the Soviets and Warsaw Pact countries would be ready to pacify Poland. Moscow refused to accept it.

At the end of October 1981, at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Andropov reported: "The Polish leaders are asking for military assistance from fellow countries. However, we should definitely stick to our line - not to bring our troops to Poland."

Just a few days before the introduction of Martial Law, Jaruzelski personally asked Kulikov: "You will have to help us. We can't do it alone." However, he did not convince the Soviet comrades, Andropov replied: "We cannot take any risks."

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