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"Solidarity" on the map of the world

We encourage you to read the text by Ryszard Terlecki. The text was originally presented during the celebration of the 25th anniversary of "Solidarity", with the participation of the Chaplains of the World of Work, Nowa Huta in September 2005.



In the spring of 1980, no-one had anticipated any breakthrough events yet. On the contrary, it seemed that the unfavourable economic conditions for the West would continue in the coming years. As the

strike summer began in Poland in July, the prospect of Soviet domination over the world seemed more real than ever before. The 74-year-old Leonid Brezhnev, admittedly ill and prematurely aged, was at the head of the empire that was just achieving its greatest success in international relations. Economic difficulties, never leaving the Soviet Union, had only a limited impact on public mood. Most of the empire's inhabitants lived on the brink of poverty, but most often they could not even imagine that it was possible to live otherwise. Television showed how people in American cities were dying of hunger in the streets, and in Western Europe millions of unemployed people were demonstrating under the red banners. Not even a fraction of Soviet citizens travelled abroad; and to travel to the Baltic republics or to Lviv, where the standard of living was slightly higher, one had to obtain a special permit. But the success in foreign politics was conducive to maintaining internal peace.

In Europe, peace and order reigned in the Soviet protectorates. After the invasion of 1968, Czechoslovakia returned to the group of the humblest subjects. After the bloodily suppressed rebellion of the Coast in 1970, Poland seemed - according to Moscow - to experience a period of the preponderance of positivist reason over romantic adventurism. Although the leadership in the Kremlin was concerned about the debts incurred by carefree Gierek, and the resistance of the Polish Church, which still did not accept the geopolitical realities, and also - as the Soviet press wrote about the intrigues of a handful of oppositionists who remained on the American wages, it was not yet expected that Poland would break out of obedient ranks.

In Europe, just a few years earlier, a document was signed in Helsinki, commonly known as the CSCE declaration (the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), in which the Soviets finally managed to obtain international acceptance for their territorial gains in 1944 and 1945 as well as the actual recognition of their sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe. In return, the Kremlin agreed - on paper - to respect human rights, but by no means did it intend to apply them in the area administered by KGB (the Committee for State Security) and its national counterparts in the bloc countries.

For several months, precisely since Christmas 1979, the victorious operation of the Red Army was taking place, which, traversing the wilderness of Afghanistan, waited only for an order to move further south, take Pakistan or Iran under the red wings and set up bases by the Indian Ocean. The Afghan expedition was an experiment as for the first time since the end of World War II Soviet tanks traversed the territory outside the Soviet sphere of influence. The test of the West's reaction had so far been successful: the American sanctions were not too bothersome, and German and French friends of the Kremlin did not give up their plans to jointly build a large gas pipeline. Although it turned out that it was necessary to send a much larger number of troops than it was initially anticipated, the losses concealed by the generals did not bother the Kremlin strategists so far.

And the world seemed to be waiting with open arms for the Soviet liberators. On all continents, Soviet weapons and Soviet advisers paved the way for power for obedient puppets, ready to hand over their

countries to terror, corruption and poverty. In Central America, the rebels armed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, after conquering Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, were just introducing a Marxist dictatorship, openly referring to Cuban models. In the neighbouring El Salvador, under conditions of political chaos, following the killing of Archbishop Romero in March 1980, the success of the guerillas supplied by Cuba and Nicaragua seemed dangerously close. In Guatemala and Honduras, fierce battles were fought against the communist rebels, in the tiny Caribbean Granada, the Marxist government, ruling for a dozen or so months, was gaining strength, and the Cuban battalion guarded the construction of one of the largest airports in this region. Left-wing governments maintaining friendly relations with Havana installed in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. Around Cuba, being the most important base of communism in America, there emerged a group of small states, ready to march the way of Fidel Castro. Much of Central America seemed to be on the verge of becoming a Soviet aircraft carrier, threatening closely the US borders.

In Africa, the friendship agreements with the USSR were signed by Angola (where 30,000 Cuban soldiers were stationed), Ethiopia, Congo and Guinea, and the pro-Soviet regime was created in Madagascar. Since May 1980, the Libyan military intervention in support of local communists continued in Chad. In turn, Ethiopia, supplied by the Soviets and Cuba, led a military offensive in Eritrea.

In North Africa, Libya worked closely with the Soviet Union, and in the

Middle East - Syria, Iraq, South Yemen and the Palestine Liberation Organization. There was a civil war in Lebanon, the participants of which were, among others, the Shiite communist party and the intervention army of Syria.

In Asia, the army of red Vietnam took over Cambodia, the communists also ruled North Korea and Laos, a left-wing dictatorship located in Burma, and communist guerillas threatened the governments of Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

The Soviet offensive on all continents heralded further successes, and KGB was everywhere the vanguard of communist coups d'état. Soviet shipments of weapons to the Third World rose from 400 million dollars in 1970 to nearly 1 billion dollars in 1980. To this there must be added weapons provided by satellite states worth over 300 million dollars, as well as Soviet aid to communist Third World states: 4 billion dollars a year to arm Cuba, a billion dollars for the communist Vietnam, nearly a billion dollars for North Korea and Mongolia.

This is what the world looked like in the summer of 1980. The West, deluded by the apparent relaxation and peaceful phraseology of the Kremlin, was slowly losing its breath in a tightening loop. In Asia, Africa, Central and South America, the area of Soviet interests, intelligence infiltration, military aid, and ideological hate offensive expanded. Those who did not succumb to the propaganda were bought with money, others were blackmailed and threatened with revenge. Left-wing associations and newspapers became the mouthpiece of the Soviet pressure, this process did not evade Western Europe and even

the United States. Democracy was clearly weakening in confrontation with the ruthless dictatorship.

Precisely then, at the height of the success of the Soviet expansion, in the very heart of the empire, in the colonized Eastern Europe, in the largest country of this region, i.e. Poland, there began a crisis, the scale of which was not foreseen by the Soviet political experts. According to the analyses prepared in Moscow, a strike broke out in the shipyard in Gdańsk, which had to be suppressed by force, but a convenient moment to do that was however missed, and the strike spread to hundreds of plants all over the country. Gierek, an inept governor, signed an agreement with the striking workers, and although he was sent into retirement shortly after, the consent granted to create an anti-communist organization pretending to be a trade union soon turned out to be a bigger mistake than the divisions sent to Afghanistan.

The twilight of all-powerful elders - Brezhnev, Kosygin, Suslov was approaching the Kremlin. Behind their backs, Andropov and Chernenko were getting ready to fight for power. Mikhail Gorbachev, until recently the secretary of the Committee in Stavropol, had just been promoted to a member of the Politburo, did not even imagine that he would have to dismantle the immortal work of Lenin and Stalin. Ambitious and stubborn Boris Yeltsin, the secretary of the regional committee in Sverdlovsk, had not yet dreamed of moving to Moscow. Vladimir Putin, a 28-year-old KGB officer residing in East Germany, probably believed that he was on the brink of a career that would lead him to officer, and

perhaps even general, epaulets. Neither of them, like none of the hundreds of thousands of them, had predicted that in just a decade their world would be turn into pitiful ruins.

At the end of August, the Kremlin had no sense of the impending catastrophe. For a dozen or more months, Poland was primarily associated with difficulties in international politics, the perpetrator of which was the Polish Pope, elected in Rome two years earlier and constantly appearing in the reports of intelligence residents, not only from Europe. The trip to Mexico and the Dominican Republic sowed anxiety in Havana, and the pilgrimage to Equatorial Africa met with the irritation of the puppet dictatorships. In 1980, John Paul II spent almost two weeks touring Brazil, and the fashion for "people's fronts" and the communist rebellion slowly faded throughout South America. There were also trips to the United States, France and Turkey, but the most complaints in Moscow were caused by his arrival in Poland in June 1979. Contrary to the interests of the Kremlin, the Pope attracted the attention of the world's media to Poland: TV stations all over the world showed not only crowds praying in exultation, but also economic paresis, arrogance of the authorities, and civilization delay. Reports from Poland became a media hit, and after this visit, the number of foreign correspondents constantly residing in Warsaw increased significantly.

In August 1980, when the shipyard stopped operation, the world was ready to shift the cameras to Poland. For several weeks, on all continents, in all free countries of the world, news from Poland made

its way to the main broadcasts and hit newspaper headlines. Suddenly it turned out that communism is not an irremovable bane, gradually poisoning new areas of the world. It turned out that it was stabbed in its own territory, and it was stabbed successfully. Walesa, Walesa - was inflected in all languages of the world, and the photo of a Polish worker with a moustache and tousled hair became more recognizable than the film idols of mass audiences.

The world watched in amazement as a trickle of air was escaping unstoppably from the red balloon. News from Poland influenced the development of events to a greater extent than we realize it today. When decisions were made in the Pentagon to deliver anti-aircraft missiles to the Afghan mujahideen, newspapers were lying on the generals' desks reporting the career of the word which was taking on a highly important meaning almost overnight. Solidarity - Gdańsk - Poland, this is how a new geopolitics was born, eluding previous arrangements. When Ronald Reagan was fighting for victory in the November presidential campaign, references to the symbols of Polish rebellion gave wings to his speeches devoted to international politics. The breakthrough in the Cold War seemed close at hand - so when the Republicans called for the offensive, was it possible to vote for the cold and sensible Democrats?

The seriousness of the situation was also noticed in the Kremlin. Stop this Polish brawl - Brezhnev ordered at the end of November 1980, but the pragmatic Andropov knocked out of his head the Hungarian rerun of 1956. Especially that the Afghan offensive had stalled, and even

some of the Kremlin's former friends declared their sympathies for the rebellious Poland. Reagan won the elections, and when he took office, he made speeches about the empire of evil and communism in the dustbin of history, which were enthusiastically received by opponents of the Soviet Union around the world.

When a gloomy figure in dark glasses in Poland announced, on a December morning, the use of violence to maintain Soviet captivity, the world was already rushing unstoppably towards changes inspired by the signals from Poland. In Gdańsk, on the hot days of August 1980, there blew in the wind that turned out to be a whirlwind of freedom. In ten years the impossible become real, the totalitarian leviathan collapsed like a house of cards, and in the place of the camp wires, the borders of independent states were opened. Although the history does not end yet, and new demons appear in place of the defeated ones, we were all lucky to witness how by an act of divine providence - in front of our eyes and with our participation - the fate of the world turned.

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