

**THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS ON THE
PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND.
THE CASE OF THE POLISH PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS OF 1989¹**

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INTRODUCTION

In the first half of 2001 the US Department of State, following a request from the National Security Archive (a US non-governmental organisation), declassified documents relating to the Round Table negotiations, the presidential elections, the crisis over choice of a prime minister and the creation of government (coalition) in Poland in 1989.³

Those documents, highly confidential until their release, allow us to look at the most important events in the transformation in Poland from a different perspective, which has not yet been extensively analysed. In essence, they indicate the role of

¹ The subject has been further developed by the author in her Ma thesis submitted at the Institute of Sociology, Nicholas Copernicus University (academic year 2001/2002).

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³ Documents are available on the National Security Archive web side together with commentary made by Greg Domber: "*Solidarity's Coming Victory: Big or Too Big?. Poland's Revolution as Seen from the U.S. Embassy.*" Web side: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB?NSAEBB42/>

external factors⁴ which have influenced the political situation of Poland – the transformation and actual decomposition of communism. They include cables detailing the US embassy's participation in, and its analysis of the events during Poland's 'revolution'.

So far, the most commonly used approach to the analysis of the transformation in Poland involves describing the internal factors influencing the process. In my opinion however, in order to explain the complex process happening in 1989, one should also look at the external circumstances shaping the events. In the following pages I will analyse the specific case of the presidential elections of 1989, in the light of the declassified documents, and hence introduce the presence of external factors and attempt to elaborate their possible influence on the events in Poland. The aim of this paper is to critically analyse the events of 1989 in the light of new information. I therefore do not aim to replace the existing dominant discourse, but rather I will seek to complement it.

EXTERNAL FACTORS VERSUS INTERNAL FACTORS

The Polish transformation took place due to two types of factors: internal and external in relation to the communist system.

Within internal factors, which could have caused the *implosion*⁵ of the communism, one can include the self-destructive characteristics of the system such as discordance with human nature, bankruptcy of state ideology, ineffective reform of the economy in the form of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. In time, this metamorphosed into the "crisis of sources" (Schweizer 1999:9) and an inability for central planning and rigidity of bureaucratic state enterprises (Surdej 1999:81). It was due to internal factors that the communism decomposition occurred.

Next to the internal circumstances there were also external factors, which played a role in the events of 1989. These included: actions of secret services of western countries, diplomatic and economic activities.

In my paper I will concentrate on diplomatic activities of an unofficial character, which directly alluded to the 'revolutions of 1989'. To be more precise, I will present

⁴ By writing 'external factors' I mean those which did not originate in the communist system and which therefore came from outside of the communism block.

⁵ Implosion – as one of possible processes which are taking place in course of transformation – mean radical desinstitutionalisation, break down of structures. (Staniszki 2001:6; Tismaneanu 1999:1)

the role of United States in the presidential elections of 1989 in Poland. In my paper I conclude that the method by which the transformation took place, was *managed*⁶ by the external factors.

ROUND TABLE NEGOTIATIONS AND UNITED STATES

The year 1989 “had started with a Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) Plenum, that directly led to the Round Table negotiations from February 6 to April 5” (Domber 2001).

What was the meaning of Round Table negotiations?

– To some extent they were the turning point in the history of Europe and of Poland. They were non-violent and did not propose new utopia.⁷ In my opinion, the Round Table did not cause the fall of communism, instead it was a consequence of its decomposition. Participants in the Round Table negotiation, on the future status of Poland, included the state authority and social authority. By the time the Round Table negotiations took place, the informal presence of American diplomacy was already noticeable.

Throughout the 1980’s Solidarity, the Polish social movement opposing the state authorities, had been supported logistically, financially and technically by the USA.⁸ The events of 1989 proved that for the US such support was crucial in maintaining close ties with opposition actors, who in the course of the year played an important role in the process of transformation.⁹

“From the American perspective President George Bush has characterised American policy towards Eastern Europe during 1989 as that of ‘[a] responsible catalyst’ (Bush and Scowcroft 1998: 117). Presumably this meant, that the US worked to support Solidarity in its drive to become part of the Polish government, while

⁶ ‘To manage’ may be considered as a synonym of ‘to direct’. (Longmann 2000: 825; 360). Refer to page 4 of my paper under title ‘Presidential elections of 1989’.

⁷ Jacques Rupnik. Lecture given in College of Europe on October 23th, 2002.

⁸ It is known that the financial and logistical support was supplied at least from 1983, the year that National Security Defence Directive (NSDD-32) had been signed in the USA. Its aim was to weaken the influence of the Soviet Union through the support of the opposition in the communist block. (Andrew 1995:468)

⁹ The meetings between the representatives of Solidarity and the American ambassador John Davis were not rare. As the ambassador stated: “Nearly every week we have eaten dinners together with representatives of ‘Solidarity.’” (Paczkowski 2002:45). As Helen Carey-Davis, wife of ambassador Davis, mentions in her book: “The long-lasting place on the guest list was reserved for: Onyszkiewicz, Geremek, Trzeciakowski, Szaniawski and Mazowiecki and many others” (Carey Davis 2001: 92)

pushing the Communists to give up their monopoly on power” (Domber 2001). In accordance with idea of using the “weak link in the Soviet bloc” (Andrew 1995:468) the Eastern European policy of the US aimed to strengthen the opposition in Poland. Such an approach was followed up until the parliamentary elections in June 1989.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN POLAND

Shortly before the first round of elections on June 4 the US, concerned with radical social and political change (which from an American perspective could cause nervousness in the Soviet Union), changed its approach from a ‘responsible catalyst’ to a ‘reluctant inhibitor’. In its politics towards Poland, the US tried to contain Solidarity from an unquestionable political victory. The containment, or restriction however had to be balanced: on the one hand the US desired change which could result in a decomposition of communist block; on the other hand it feared Soviet reaction to the rapidity of events in Poland. As the American ambassador in Warsaw underlined in his cable to the Secretary of State: “The elections in June are, for the regime, an unpredictable danger and for the opposition an enormous opportunity, the authorities having staked a great deal, are hoping for some modest success, but they are more likely to meet total defeat and great embarrassment. [...] The likelihood of a Solidarity sweep in the Senate elections will create the conditions for a legislative and constitutional crisis. This in turn will force a resolution of the profound issues of power sharing of Poland’s political future”.¹⁰ Thus, during the crisis months of mid-1989, as Solidarity bargained with the PZPR for control of the office of President and then Prime Minister, Washington tried to make sure that “Communists were not left behind” (Domber 2001). When Solidarity’s victory in the parliamentary elections “dealt a stunning blow to the regime”¹¹ it was clear that by that time “Solidarity took its destiny into its own hands” (Domber 2001).¹² The role of Washington was restricted to interpreting the events without causing their creation.

¹⁰ Analysis given by the American ambassador John Davis in the cable from Warsaw to Secretary of State Document 1. “Elections ’89 The year of Solidarity” April 19, 1989.

¹¹ Document 2 “Elections ’89: Solidarity ‘s Coming Victory: Big or Too Big?” June 2, 1989.

¹² In the parliamentary elections (first round took place on the 4th June, 1989 – second on the 18th of June) ‘Solidarity’ won 160 out of 161 Sejm seats (in the second round it gained the remaining one place to complete the sum of 161 seats) it was eligible for, and 92 seats in the Senate. In the second round of elections – ‘Solidarity’ received additional 7 out of 8 remaining seats in Senate summing to 99 seats out of 100. (Machcewicz 2002:199, 200).

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1989

The Polish presidential elections of 1989 were *directed* by the United States. By saying 'directed' I mean 'instructed' (Longman Dictionary 2000:360) and not 'led' (Collins Dictionary 1987: 67) which may be perceived as reserving the exclusiveness in the area of influencing the ongoing events. For a more accurate understanding the word 'instruct' signifies 'to give orders or directions, especially with the right or expectation of being obeyed' (Longman Dictionary 2000: 684).

On 22nd of June 1989, Ambassador Davis met over dinner "with some leading Solidarity legislators, who had better remain nameless".¹³ As Davis states: "I jotted down a few numbers for them on the back of an embassy matchbook. I also reviewed for them an arcane western political practice known as head counting. What the matchbook calculation revealed is that there are a total of 560 seats in the combined Sejm and Senate. The Government coalition has 299, Solidarity – 260 and there is one independent. The required quorum for a presidential elections two-thirds of the combined membership of the two houses. Of those present, a majority of votes is needed to elect. Ergo, if a large number (up to 185) of Solidarity senators and Sejm deputies are ill or otherwise unable to attend the election session, there will still be a quorum and one in which the government coalition majority is so great that only a truly major defection from a party discipline could prevent Jaruzelski's election. The Solidarity deputies and senators who were present could safely abstain."¹⁴

On 23rd of June, Solidarity deputies and senators created Citizens' Parliamentary Club (Obywatelski Klub Parlamentarny – OKP), with Bronisław Geremek as its chairman. During the meeting the decision was taken not to present any candidate for president of Poland.

During his stay in Poland (10 –11th of July) President Bush was very positive towards General Jaruzelski.¹⁵ Bush's motivation for pushing a senior Communist

¹³ Document 4 "How to Elect Jaruzelski Without Voting for Him, and Will He Run?" June 23 1989.

¹⁴ Document 4 "How to Elect Jaruzelski Without Voting for Him, and Will He Run?" June 23 1989.

¹⁵ President's approach was well legitimated: in fact, General Jaruzelski began to show signs that he was not willing to run for election, further endangering the precarious balance (Domber 2001). As President Bush recalls in his book: "Jaruzelski [...] asked me what role I thought he should now play. He told me of his reluctance to run for president and his desire to avoid a political tug-of-war that Poland did not need. I told him his refusal to run might inadvertently lead to serious instability and I urged him to reconsider. It was ironic: Here was an American president trying to persuade a senior Communist leader to run for office" (Bush and Scowcroft 1998:117).

leader to run for office became clear already at that time (Domber 2001). Support was well justified: "Jaruzelski was a necessary part of any new government if Poland were to remain stable" (Domber 2001). According to the US, the balance between participation of opposition and the State authority in the new division of powers had to be preserved.

On the 19th of July, a week after George Bush's visit to Poland, a National Assembly was convened in order to elect the President. General Jaruzelski was the only candidate running for the position.

There were 544 deputies and senators taking part in the poll; out of which 270 voted for the candidature, 233 were against, 34 sustained and 7 votes were invalid. General Jaruzelski won by one vote only. "By deliberately spoiling or boycotting the vote, the victory of Jaruzelski was manufactured by the OKP group of parliamentarians" (Machcewicz 2002: 202).

Looking at the conduct and results of the elections it can be presumed, that the above mentioned 'matchbook' tactics were used in the presidential elections. When the result was announced, the next crisis that had to be faced was in relation to the designation of a Prime Minister and creation of the government.

CONCLUSION

For the West, it is important to interpret the events and where possible influence their perception. "The main way, in which I tried to influence the opposition was the attempt of persuasion in the period before the Round Table negotiations. I was saying that the dialogue with the government is in their own interest. If they continue on talking [with state authority] they [Solidarity] would achieve remarkable allowances; sufficient allowances since the ultimate attempt of economic reform, undertaken by Prime Minister Rakowski in 1988 did not succeed due to the strikes. I was saying that the government is weak, and Solidarity has a strong backup and therefore they are deemed to win any kind of negotiations. Hence... we were pushing them."¹⁶

On one side in 1999 Davis admitted that he did not have any indications on style of conduct: "I did not have any indications from Washington on what exactly I was to do. As it usually is I have been doing whatever I have thought could serve the best

¹⁶ Words of ambassador Davis during International Conference: Communism's Negotiated Collapse: the Polish Round Table Talks of 1989, Ten Years Later. University of Michigan, April 7-10, 1999. p. 54.

for the Polish nation.”¹⁷ On the other hand, in his report sent to Lawrence Eagleburger, the US Secretary of State on 24th of August 1989 (therefore after the designation of new Polish Prime Minister), Davis writes: “I have the honour to report that Mr. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a leading member of Solidarity was today confirmed by a vote of the Polish Sejm in the position of Prime Minister of Poland and commissioned to form a government. I believe that this development constitutes essential fulfilment of the political tasks assigned to me in my current letter of instruction and await further orders [underlining-ES].”¹⁸ The Secretary of State replied: “Department notes with satisfaction the essential fulfilment of the political tasks assigned in your letter of instructions.”¹⁹

From the above words stated in the declassified documents, it is possible to conclude that the influence on the events in Poland was not merely narrowed to “the attempts of persuasion” but rather had a form of ‘instructions’.

The decomposition of communism and the process of transformation in Poland occurred because of internal factors. The events of 1989 happened due to the work of Polish society, the opposition, the Communist Party and Catholic Church. At the same time one may agree, on the basis of declassified documents, that external circumstances played an unquestionably important role in the whole process. The external factors were the *conditio sine qua non* of the shape of ongoing changes. The external factors interpreted events in a form of *ad hoc* management, without any pre-prepared scenario. They then have directed events towards the outcome whereby there is no more Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc of countries. Instead, on the 1st of May 2004 Poland and a few other ‘satellite countries’, after years of transformation into Western model of politics, have entered the European Union.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Document 10a. Cable from Warsaw to Secstate, “Request for Instructions,” August 24, 1989.

¹⁹ Document 10b. Cable from Secstate to Warsaw, “Ambassador’s Instructions,” August 24, 1989.

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