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## POLAND

Filip Musiał: The control exercised by Communist repression apparatus over the society - the case of the Polish People's Republic

Poland was conquered by the Soviet Army in 1944-1945. The consequence was annexation of half of the pre-war territory of the Republic of Poland by the Soviet Union (which was supposed to be compensated by territorial gains in the West and North at the expense of the German Reich) and the imposition of the not legitimised communist government. In the summer of 1945, the constitutional government of the Republic of Poland - acting in exile from 1939 and continuing as an ally of the Western Allies from then - lost its international recognition to the authorities imposed in Poland by the Soviet Union, dominated by communists.

First to be repressed by the Soviets were representatives of the Polish Underground State - thus the legal underground authorities subordinated to the constitutional Polish government-in-exile - and the underground Polish Army, i.e. the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK). The NKVD and Smersh broke down the Polish underground structures in order to enable, among other things, the imposition of the Kremlin's puppet government. The Soviet security authorities dominated the actions targeting Polish independence organisations and groups up until the summer of 1945. The last large-scale NKVD operation conducted on territory governed by the Polish Communist authorities was the so-called "[Augustów Manhunt \(Roundup\)](#)".

As time passed, the tasks of combatting the independence resistance and controlling society was transferred to the domestic security apparatus. Its origins dated back to wartime, and its 'backbone' of personnel was formed by Polish communists trained by Soviets in the NKVD school in Kuybyshev. The security department was formed in 1944, initially as the Department of Public Security (*Resort Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, RBP) under the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN, a communist body acting as the government), and after PKWN was renamed as the Provisional Government, it was renamed the Ministry of Public Security (*Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, MBP). The structures were set up from the top down, from the voivodeship departments to powiat departments and at the beginning, gmina units (that were later abandoned). Until 1956, NKVD/MVD functionaries were present in the security apparatus; they were named "instructors," and later "advisors," or - in security jargon - "*sovetniks*" [Russian - "advisor," derived from "*sovet*" - "advice"/ "council"].

The Communist security apparatus in Poland was vastly expanded; apart from the Department of Security (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, UB), it created the Internal Security Corps (*Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, KBW - counterinsurgency troops to pacify the region, used against independence underground and formed on the model of the NKVD internal troops), Border Security Troops (*Wojska Ochrony Pogranicza*, WOP - border guard units), Citizens' Militia (*Milicja Obywatelska*, MO, the state police force), Citizens' Militia Volunteer Reserves (*Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej*, ORMO - the 'popular' MO auxiliary force), Prison Guard, (*Straż Więzienna*, SW), Industrial Guard (*Straż Przemysłowa*, SP). This structure was only reduced after the thaw following Stalin's death: initially MBP was reformed as the Committee for Public Security (*Komitet do spraw Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, KdsBP), and after 1956 the security police became part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych*, MSW) and were renamed the Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, SB) (the counterinsurgency KBW troops, WOP border guard and MO police were also subordinated to MSW).

In the following years, the Security Service acted as political police protecting the ruling

communist Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR), and was one of the most important tools of communist power in the public life of the Polish People's Republic (PRL).

There were several general areas of deployment of the security apparatus from 1944-1990:

- 1944-1948 - the Department (*Resort*) of Public Security (RBP), and then the Ministry of Public Security (MBP) were the tools of the communist takeover of state structures. It was a period of mass repressions;
- 1949-1956 - MBP and then KdsBP took power in Poland, using widespread repressions;
- 1956-1981 - SB was the tool for controlling society and a pillar of power securing PZPR domination and exerting selective repressions;
- 1981-1983 - SB was one of the basic tools to quash the "*Solidarność*" revolution, returning to mass repressions;
- 1983-1990 - SB served to maintain PZPR domination, and at the end of the decade, it was a tool to control the "regulated revolution" [as the transformation period is called in Polish political science], employing selective repressions.

Until the summer of 1945 - and possibly up to the autumn of 1945 - the Polish security apparatus played a second-place role in the Soviet services theatre of activities. It was the Red Army and the Soviet secret services that crushed the backbone of the Polish Underground State. The domestic services had an important and sometimes key role in suppressing the independence underground organisations that emerged after the dissolution of the Home Army. The general aim of the security apparatus was the annihilation of the organisations and circles representing the legitimate and constitutional authorities. It then struck the independence organisations continuing the activities of the Polish Underground State, acting openly (such as political parties: Polish Peasant Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL), Polish Labour Party, (*Stronnictwo Pracy*, SP, a liberal party), as well as underground groups (such as post-AK organisations, the Freedom and Independence Association (*Zrzeszenie "Wolność i Niezawisłość"*, WiN), or national ones, such as the National Military Union (*Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe*, NZW). Political personalities - such as pre-war politicians and activists, representing the ethos of the pre-war Republic of Poland, were also repressed. All of those actions created an environment for the installation of the communist administration in Poland.

After the quashing of open and underground resistance and the rigging of the January 1947 elections by the communists, a period of widespread terror commenced, whose general aim was the subordination of society. The victims of the repressions were not only those people continuing the struggle for an independent country, but also potential enemies of the communist system, and even some communists deemed as enemies of the Sovietisation imposed by Bolesław Bierut's (the country's president) group.

Persons affiliated with the pre-war Polish state apparatus, peasants opposing forced collectivisation, former soldiers and activists of the Polish Underground State, members of post-war underground organisations - political and armed ones (as well as those who came out of hiding during amnesties), their associates and helpers, former activists and associates of the opposition parties, youth engaged in post-war underground independence organisations, clergy - generally Catholic, however also of other churches and communities (including Jehovah's Witnesses), persons accused of spreading the so-called "whispered" or "word-of-mouth" propaganda (for example, sharing political jokes or criticising the communist system in private), people who had contacts with political exiles or even simply persons on the other side of the Iron Curtain (accused of espionage), private businessmen and tradesmen (accused of profiteering), workers (accused of economic sabotage, among other things), and communist activists holding dissident views on the process of the communisation of the country (accused of "right-wing-nationalist deviation") were all registered and put under surveillance. One of the most characteristic operations led in this

period was [Operation "Lawina"](#) (Avalanche) (against the national underground) and [Operation "Cezary."](#) which was far broader in scope and had a key international component.

The 'thaw' that developed over nearly four years (1954-1957) resulted in a change in the tools of power used by the communist regime. A new chapter also opened in the activity of the security police. After reforming the Department of Security (UB) into the Security Service (SB) in 1956, the system of repression could be described, until 1981, as selective, i.e. targeting only persons, who actually defied the communist regime or the governing methods of the successive PZPR rulers - Władysław Gomułka and Edward Gierek.

In this period (until the second half of the '70s), only relevantly few circles and organisations that consistently aimed at overthrowing the communist system (among others, persons in contact with Polish exiles, the so-called *Taternicy* (Tatry mountaineers), the *Ruch* (Movement) organisation, signatories of various open letters, participants of mass protests, especially those happening in crises, part of the clergy, especially Catholic), as well as 'circles' aspiring to reform the system - as they were popularly called, demanding "Socialism with a human face" (e.g. the so-called 'Revisionist' circles in the '60s). After the mass protests of June 1976, the opposition circles emerged, acting openly, and they were instantly targeted by clandestine operations and repressions (among others, against activists and associates of the Workers' Defence Committee, (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR), Movement for the Defence of Human and Civic Rights (*Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela*, ROPCiO), Student Committees for Solidarity (*Studenckie Komitety Solidarności*, SKS), Confederation of Independent Poland (*Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej*, KPN), Free Trade Unions (*Wolne Związki Zawodowe*, WZZ), people engaged in the activity of the Society of Academic Courses (*Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*, TKN) and the "Flying University" (*Uniwersytet Latający*), signatories of open letters, and clergy).

The Catholic Church - seen up to the first half of the 1970s as the only serious enemy of the communists - was an object of systemic surveillance, as were other churches and religious communities (see subchapter [Operation "Gawron"](#)). Some basic operative measures were very broadly applied in order to counteractively control society. The aim was to neutralise real or potential threats. This was the essence of activity of the communist security police in the "post-thaw" period. The information gained was to be used to prevent planned anti-system activity or for the operative neutralisation of opposition activities, without the necessity of launching repressions. In this period - as it became the rule to the very end of Polish People's Republic - the SB's clandestine operations dominated - i.e. operational work. This '[disintegration](#)' activity appeared to be essential - i.e. crushing the cohesion of circles deemed hostile to the communist system, or compromising the representatives of those circles. Investigative activity appeared to be secondary in this regard. After the 'thaw,' the brutality of investigations also decreased. There were incidents of beatings or mistreatment of those arrested (for example - placing them in cells with criminal inmates instructed to 'break' them) - however, such situations were not common practice.

The events of August 1980 in Poland changed this situation completely: the "Solidarity" phenomenon pushed the organisation of the next communist dictator, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, to declare martial law on 13 December 1981 and to revert to the system of mass repression. The [introduction of] martial law in 1981 was the proof of the SB's defeat: the operational methods failed to contain the spontaneously developing objections to the regime, and widespread societal rebellion toward the communist system. Then repression fell on the Solidarity Trade Union activists as well as the "Solidarity" Union of Individual Farmers, the Confederation of Independent Poland and Fighting Solidarity (and other anti-system organisation) activists. The aim of declaring martial law and of mass repressions was to crush societal protest. However the clandestine manipulation and penetration of opposition circles remained the SB's main aim.

In 1982, MSW created the Bureau for Studies and Analysis (*Biuro Studiów i Analiz*), a unit tasked with operations against the most important opposition activists and leaders, and against the leading cells of anti-system organisations. The formation of the voivodeship Inspectorate 2 (*Inspektorat 2*) branches of the Bureau followed. Bureau leadership stressed: "*liquidation of the underground group or structure is unadvisable [...] when the group or structure is operationally*

*controlled and its activities are controlled by a system of 'games' and sting operations."*

The lifting of martial law in 1983 marked a return to selective repressions. At the same time, the *perestroika* process commenced in the Soviet Union; its intended result would be the upholding of political power by the communists, though with economic liberalisation. Moscow's focus on the situation in the centre of the Soviet empire caused the Soviet Bloc to erode. From the second half of the 1980s, the Soviet Union's satellite states tried to imitate the Soviet processes on their own, to salvage sinking economies and to maintain the political power of the communist parties. The secret services were of course engaged in those processes. In Poland, the Security Service was engaged in a social-engineering operation connected to the "Round Table" talks with the opposition. Repressions were redirected to the circles that were seen by the security police as "unconstructive opposition," which resisted talks with the communists at the end of the 1980s. It should be noted that the leadership of the ministry of internal affairs was convinced that the opposition was under efficient operational control. The Ministry's head, Czesław Kiszczak, stressed at the end of 1980s that 10% of opposition groups were steered by the SB, 84% of opposition groups were to various extents operationally controlled, and only 6% were beyond the control of the security police.

The PZPR leaders preparing the "Round Table" talks after the summer of 1988 crisis were negotiating with opposition leaders surrounding Lech Wałęsa. The Security Service supported the negotiations with its operations. On the one hand, they were of a motivating nature - the persuasion of select individuals by agents of influence to come to concessions and a compromise with the communist authorities; on the other hand, they were of a 'disinformation' nature - spreading visions of the negative consequences of not entering into talks. The operation "Żądło" (Sting) aimed to break up opposition circles and deepen the conflicts between those who accepted the negotiations with the communists and those who saw that as an abandonment of ideals. Concurrently, the security police led operation "Hydra," which targeted those opposing the negotiations (and declaring the overthrow of the communist system instead of its reformation), to thwart the eventual integration of their circles.

The results of UB and SB activities are difficult to be expressed in numbers. The clandestine character of operational dealings makes it actually impossible to establish or estimate the number of the people affected - who lost their jobs, had their careers ruined and private lives destroyed, or were pushed to the margins of society. There is no precise data showing the number of people under surveillance, invigilated or affected by clandestine operations. Only the 'hard' repressions are traceable. In 1944-1956, the security police arrested at least 250,000 people, and in 1944-1946, in the territory of pre-war Poland, Soviet security services arrested about 50,000 people (the majority of whom were sent to remote areas of the Soviet Union - however, this figure encompassed not only Poles, but also Germans and Soviet Army deserters). It is estimated additionally that only in 1947, in the course of the campaign to prepare the rigged elections, about 100,000 people were apprehended without any prosecution or arrest warrants, and the total number of people apprehended without a warrant in 1944-1956 is estimated at not less than 400,000. In 1944-1956, Soviet and domestic security police in action killed about 9,000 people (not only Poles, but also Ukrainian nationalist partisans). The special military tribunals in 1944-1953 sentenced more than 70,000 people (the majority of them prior to sentencing were investigated by the UB). In 1944-1956, the military tribunals sentenced about 8,000 people to death, and about the half of those sentences were carried out. In the prisons, custody centres, and camps, more than 20,000 people died.

Data enabling assessment of the number of people arrested, apprehended, and sentenced after the 1956 'thaw' is unavailable - only the numbers of people apprehended and sentenced during the crises (the so-called "Polish months") in June 1956, March 1968, December 1970, and June 1976 can be precisely indicated. The data concerning the repressions launched after the local protest are also known - as, e.g. after the confrontation concerning the cross in Nowa Huta (the new industrial district in Cracow) in April 1960. During the above-mentioned crises and social protests, at least 8,500 people were apprehended and arrested, more than 200 were sentenced, at least 100 were killed, and many wounded - up to 12,000 (due to the deployment of firearms against the

protesters). To these figures should be also added the approximately 10,000 interned and 3,000 arrested during martial law 1981-1983. The opposition activists murdered by the so-called 'unknown perpetrators' (supposedly security police functionaries) should also be remembered: in the 1980s alone, there were dozens of unexplained deaths of opposition activists and their close family members. All of those figures appear to be only assessments, far from being accurate, although enabling the estimation of the scale of repressions applied by the communist security police.

The Security Service was abolished in the summer of 1990 by acts passed by parliament (the so-called "Contract Sejm" (lower house of Polish parliament), elected as a result of the "Round Table" negotiations) in April 1990. The Citizens' Militia MO was also abolished, with a police force formed in its place. The SB was replaced by the newly organised Office for State Protection (*Urząd Ochrony Państwa*, UOP). The process of qualification or -as it was called - verification of the former SB functionaries, that was to assess which of them were fit for service in the new security services, lasted until the end of July 1990. On the local level, the vast majority of SB functionaries undergoing the verification procedures were rejected - however, a great percentage of them were admitted on appeal or directly by the central verification committee. As a result, after 1990, many former SB functionaries, who were previously engaged in combatting the opposition or the Church, or enforcing communist party control over political, social, economic, and intellectual life in "People's Poland" joined the ranks of the UOP and the police.

[Poland Soviet Union](#)

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