

Interview With Polish Journalists

June 30, 1989

The President. Well, let me say at the outset of this interview that this visit is in no way intended to complicate the situation there -- rather to show American interest in Poland, to support the general desire that we feel for Poland to have improved relations with the United States and with the West in general. It is, obviously, as I will in every country -- give me a chance to give our views freely and openly about freedom and things of that nature, but it is not a visit that is trying to complicate matters between the Soviet Union and Poland, or anything else. It is in keeping with my view that Europe should be whole and free, and in saluting the changes that have taken place, and hopefully in contributing to Poland's quest for more democracy and economic reform. So, we're going in a constructive vein, not in some critical vein or not in some mode of trying to complicate things for somebody else.

President's Visit to Poland

Q. Mr. President, this group here -- the composition of this group is actually a testimony to the progress of pluralism, because we have Solidarity here on the Government's side. Yes, and isn't it, Mr. President, very interesting that you were in Poland about 1 year and 9 months ago, and now you are going to Poland again? Is there any particular reason that you make the second trip in such a short time?

The President. Well, in the first visit, we had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Walesa [Solidarity leader], and certainly I was accorded wonderful hospitality by General Jaruzelski [Chairman of Poland's Council of State]. At that time, as you point out, Ziggy, there was no real communication between Solidarnosc and the leadership. And again, I, in that visit, did not try to involve myself in the internal affairs of Poland. But by being there, and by being permitted to speak on the television and say what was in my heart, and able to meet with Jaruzelski -- I mean, with Walesa, even though Solidarnosc was then outlawed, it opened up for us a strong feeling for Poland, and you could sense the indications of change.

And now there has been change; there has been an evolution in these relationships. And so, it is appropriate that we go back and talk respectfully to the leaders about their aspirations for economic reform, my aspirations for an era of what we call in our East-West relations ``beyond containment," and in terms of the evolution of -- the moving of countries toward the West as much as they feel comfortable with.

So, it's a visit that makes sense because things are evolving, things are moving in the direction that we salute. And also, going there as Vice President, I am sure, is quite different than being President. There's only one President, and true, there's only one Vice President. But that isn't seen the same as the President going there to say how much an evolving relationship means to the United States.

Q. So, let me ask maybe more precisely, Mr. President, what would you tell the Polish Nation about the American attitude toward our efforts to achieve self-determination, about all those free elections which took place recently in Poland, about our achievements in gaining free speech and the restoration of our free will in Poland?

The President. Yes, I'd simply say the visit is a symbol of our support for Poland as it moves toward greater democracy. And I had a chance to make that point a couple of years ago and will make it again. So, it's symbolic. I will state that we are encouraged by changes. I'll try not to look like I'm fine-tuning the internal affairs of Poland. I'm not going to do that, but I think I have every right to say I am encouraged by the changes we've seen.

Obviously, we followed the roundtable discussions and agreement, and salute that agreement. As you know, we are committed to representation by the people, of the people. And so, we see changes in the way elected representatives are chosen and go forward to represent their people -- we salute that.

So, it will be in this vein, this thematic vein, that I will be talking. And in Poland, you know, there's an historic opportunity now to help end the postwar division of Europe. I mean, Europe has been divided. And if we handle ourselves correctly with the Soviet Union and if the changes continue that we're seeing, we could see a Europe that is freer and more whole.

Q. That's what you said in 1983 in Vienna in your -- --

The President. Yes, and I talked about differentiation there. And, indeed, that Vienna trip led to my feeling very comfortable going with a similar message to Poland. So, it's evolutionary here.

Foreign Troops Deployed in Europe

Q. Mr. President, already during the first few minutes of this interview, you used, several times, the word "change," because everybody now sees the changes taking place in Poland. For some, the changes are too slow; for some, are too quick.

The President. Yes.

Q. But as a very experienced politician, you certainly know that good policy requires not only change but also some elements of stability that prevent the change from erupting, from being blown up and leading to some kind of a deep crisis. Would you like to comment about what elements of continuity in central and Eastern Europe would you like to see?

The President. Well, I'd like to see respect for the will of the people. And I think as we -- I don't want to -- well, let me start over. I will stand by that, obviously, but I would like to see -- very candidly -- I'd like to see Soviet troops -- we're talking about Poland now --

out. I don't think anyone, anymore, thinks that there's a danger of invasion from the West into Poland, for example. And I would like to see a continuation of the change that would result in the Soviets feeling comfortable in taking their troops out of there.

Having said that, I will not be trying to inflame change so that it does what you're talking about. The people seem to be handling it very nicely now, with elections and with discussions around a table. And I don't want to do something that would inadvertently do what you're talking about, or that you asked about; and that is, to have some crisis that will compel other answers. And I don't want that, and I'm not going to deliberately do anything that is going to cause a crisis.

I am going to feel free to speak out about -- as I did right now at the Iwo Jima Monument -- about what we hold dear and what Polish-Americans think and what we want to see about a freer, a more whole Europe. And so, I think we can do this, Daniel, without exacerbating tensions that I know exist in Poland. We're realistic; we know there are tensions still.

Q. But this shall mean that -- are you in favor of withdrawing foreign troops from all Europe, from all countries?

The President. I would like to see the start be withdrawing of the troops from Poland, because I think there is no danger at all of an invasion of Poland from the West. And I don't think anybody in Poland thinks there's a danger of invasion of Poland from the West.

But what I will do, in answer to your question, is to press forward with a very bold plan that we've laid on the table at NATO which substantially reduces U.S. and Soviet troops deployed outside their borders, and that sends a good signal. And then we go for whatever the next step might be; but as long as we have this tremendous disparity in Soviet-deployed troops or bloc troops versus NATO troops, it's pretty hard to visualize eliminating all troops. But I think we're on the right track, and we're on the right step here. And so, we'll go down that road.

U.S. Assistance for Poland

Q. Mr. President, let me go back to your coming back to Poland, if I may. In September you had a chance to talk to General Jaruzelski, who is both the man who introduced martial law, but also the roundtable talks and the first honest elections since the Second World War. What are you expecting of your conversation, of your forthcoming conversation now, with the General?

The President. Well, obviously, we've got a baseline. We have a point of departure, because with respect, he gave me probably a disproportionate amount of time. I was the Vice President; he was the head of the whole country. And thus, I remember with sincerity what I thought was great courtesy to me. And through that courtesy, we had more than a passing conversation; we had a conversation about a lot of things that now

have changed. We even had a chance to talk about Solidarnosc with Jaruzelski, his knowing my view and his making very clear to me his view at the time.

Now there's been an evolution of views. And what I think we ought to do is pick up from where we started and then say: All right, we've come along here. We want to help you in an economic sense. Some of that won't be easy, because the concept of reform -- economic reform -- to get full cooperation from these international institutions, monetary institutions, is essential. And I expect he'll be saying, I've tried to make reforms, and don't push me too far on all this.

And I'll understand that, but I'll say: Please understand my position. We want to help you with OPIC; we want to help you with privatization; we want to help you in the international institutions and with special trade benefits. But we need to know that you're going to be able to not only continue existing reforms but expand on reforms so that the economic system that works will be given a chance to work unfettered. And that's a big key, and that isn't easy for a lot of regimes all around the world. It's not just Poland and Hungary and Eastern Europe; it's many countries.

And so, I know that what I'll be talking about will not be easy for the regime to accommodate or, indeed, even for those who have been in opposition. And I'm talking now about newly elected people, too. But I think I owe the people with whom I meet our honest assessment, and I owe them my frank view of what we can do, and what it's going to take for us to be able to do it in terms of economic support.

Q. Just pressing this a bit, Mr. President, will you intend to set any specific conditions for the U.S. aid to Poland, and would you like to have control over implementing such conditions, if any?

The President. Not control -- we cannot try to control the internal affairs of another country -- but we've got to be clear that to get the kind of financial support from the outside world and the kind of private investment that I think can be enormously helpful, that certain reforms must go forward.

But I'm not going there in an arrogant mode, trying to say we've got all the answers. I mean, he might turn around and ask me about our debt -- [laughter] -- and then I'd be embarrassed.

Q. I have, Mr. President -- --

The President. In fact, he might; and if he did, that would be fine. I'll tell him what we're trying to do about it. And one of the things we're trying to do about it is to live within our means, and that gives us less money available to do many of the things I'd like to be doing around the world, you know. So, then we're kind of on a catch-22 on that one. [Laughter]

Q. I sometimes get the impression that both sides, Poland and the Western alliance countries, are expecting too much from each other. The West is expecting from us to change the system, to change the economic system, to introduce pluralistic democracy and, at the same time, to preserve the necessary level of stability and prevent the country from collapse. On the other hand, our country expects from the West such a significant assistance that would make all these changes possible to happen in a country which is so heavily indebted and its economy is in such a mess.

The President. Well, I think you raise a very interesting point -- and very carefully phrased, I noticed. But that's why I keep saying I don't want to exacerbate tensions. I don't want to make competing forces move apart inadvertently. I don't want to say something that would complicate the move that is taking place towards democratization and economic reform. I feel confident enough that both of those things are necessary for Poland -- for Poles to enjoy the freedoms that I think most Poles aspire to. But I'm not going to say hey, you've got to have a Senate with 100 people and a Congress with 435 and a President and a Vice President and 50 States. I mean, that's our system.

But I am going to say we've got common thoughts here. I think of the Polish people as treasuring freedom. I think of them fighting -- having a tough go there in World War II and standing up to the hordes that finally just were too much. I think of the patriotism of Poland. I think of the affection that Americans of Polish heritage have for Poland.

And I'd like to try to have the interlocutors, the people I talk to -- whether they're labor or whether they're in the regime -- understand that we want to help and that we do admire the changes that have taken place, and not put it into a great East-West mode all the time. We have problems. I'm keeping my eyes open, but we're going to try to improve relations with the Soviet Union.

But I can't look at these outrageous differences in conventional forces, for example, and then say to everybody in the United States, hey, we don't need to be concerned about Soviet intentions. They're modernizing their intercontinental stuff, their nuclear weapons. They've got disproportionate advantage in conventional forces. And so, I'm not going to be naive in suggesting that we have no differences between us, as it relates to the Soviet Union. And when Gorbachev talks about a European house, we say, yes, but let all the doors be open; let it be done so people can move from room to room in that house -- and that shouldn't antagonize anybody.

Q. Mr. President, you have been known as a conciliator, as a consensus-builder, as an adversary of extreme solutions. Can we write that George Bush, the President of the United States, is unequivocally in favor of an evolutionary change in Poland without outbursts, without breaking down of the dialog among the different social forces? Can we write that?

The President. Yes, you can write it. I don't want you to write it in such a way that I seem to discourage those who may have differences. In other words, I don't want to discourage those that have felt out and are trying to get in, those who didn't participate over the past

many years in elections and are now able to participate. I don't want to endorse the status quo -- I mean, that's not my role. Nor do I want to do what you're talking about, that your question asked about, which is exacerbate tensions.

What I want to do is say, ``Here's what we stand for." Here's what the United States stands for; and here are our aspirations for a relationship with the Soviet Union, which obviously is the superpower there. And here are my aspirations for Poland that come from my heart, because I can feel it strongly -- how those who came to our country from this country feel about their homeland. And I'd leave it there, Ziggy, rather than try to endorse the status quo. But I have to exhort and encourage as much economic reform as possible, as much political freedom as possible. And if I don't do that, I will not be leveling with the Polish people, and I will not be being a good President for my own -- for the United States.

So, I don't think it's as delicate as perhaps before, but I -- and it's important. You see, I have no hangups when Gorbachev goes to Germany or France -- fine, let him go. The better hand he gets and the better he is received there -- they're saying, ``Atta boy! Keep it up!" Keep what up? Keep reforming up; keep changing up. Who would have thought you'd hear lively debates in their own political process 2 years ago? So, it doesn't bother me as President of the United States that he gets a good standing on the applause meters over there in Western Europe. Nor should it bother him when I take this message of freedom and democracy to Eastern Europe. In my view, that doesn't come under the heading of his business, just as it doesn't come under the heading of mine if he goes to France or Germany.

And so, it's in that vein I go to -- not competitively. Saying you want one house? Fine. Let's get all the rooms open so we can all move around in there. And let's find out what works in the economy, what works in terms of free unions, what works in terms of free politics. And we think we can speak to that because we've had some success. We're not saying we have no problems in the United States, but in these things -- moving around, freedom to say what you think, freedom to form a union, freedom to have a voice in the politics by the people -- we think we know what we're talking about there. We want to share it with you. So, it's in that spirit that we'll be going.

Q. Mr. President, I think that Daniel has one personal question for you. Just one.

Q. Mr. President, last question of a little personal character. If you were a young Pole, would you now queue in front of an American consulate to emigrate to the United States, or would you rather stay in Poland and fight the difficult fight there?

The President. Well, I don't know what a young Pole would be thinking, but what I think -- what I'd like to think he'd be thinking -- is, look, I'm living in a time of dynamic change. This is the time of most hope for my country in a long, long time. And I want to be a part of it, and I want to participate. I want to run for election; I want to join a free association; I want to be a part of a government to bring economic relief to my people. And I want to see Poland appreciated around the world -- its art, its culture, its heroism. And I want -- I,

young guy Stanislaw, whatever my name is, at 21 years old -- I want to be a part of this. And that's the way I'd like to do it -- that's the way I would hope that some young kid could look at it.

Now, maybe that's a little much, because in economically difficult times, people kind of think, hey, the grass looks a little greener over there; the ocean doesn't look quite so wide. If I could just make it to Chicago, maybe I could do something. But even if he makes it to Chicago, he's got to have, beating in his heart, the love of his homeland. And so, I would hope that most would say, look, I want to be a part of the change that I feel in the air, you see.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you all.

Note: The interview began at 10:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Daniel Passent of Polityka, Zygmunt Broniarek of Trybuna Ludu, and Andrew Krajewski of Nowy Dziennik interviewed the President. The interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 3. A tape was not available for verification of the contents of the interview.