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President opens Kuklinski exhibition at West Point

US-visiting President Andrzej Duda at the West Point Military Academy on Thursday opened an exhibition devoted to Ryszard Kuklinski, a communist-era Polish army officer who for years passed top-secret Warsaw Pact documents to the CIA.

Accompanying Duda at the opening was West Point head, General Robert L. Caslen. On display among others are over 200 photographs, maps and documents which Kuklinski passed to the CIA, including charts showing the location of Soviet forces in Poland and a detailed plan of a Warsaw Pact invasion of western Europe.

A senior officer of the communist Polish People's Army, Kuklinski secretly served as one of the CIA's key sources behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Over years he provided the Americans with information about strategic Soviet and Warsaw Pact plans, including plans for an attack on the NATO countries. He also passed to the CIA documents about the Polish government's secret plans to impose martial law in the country in 1981.



From 1972 to his escape to the US in 1981 Kuklinski provided the CIA with 35,000 pages of secret Soviet documents. The files among others contained the USSR's nuclear warfare plans, technical data on its military equipment and weaponry, the location of its air defence installations in Poland and East Germany, descriptions of spy satellite evasion methods, and plans for imposing martial law in Poland.

In 1981, denounced by a communist collaborator and facing discovery, Kuklinski was smuggled out of Poland by the CIA together with his wife and two sons. The family settled successfully in the US, but in later years both of Kuklinski's sons died. The elder Waldemar was hit by a truck without a licence plate on a college campus in August 1992, and the younger Bogdan drowned six months later when his yacht capsized on a calm sea. Kuklinski did not claim that their deaths were the work of the KGB, but did not reject the option.

According to journalist Jolanta Jablonska-Gruca, who met Kuklinski in Poland in 1998, Kuklinski's work for the CIA helped prevent a nuclear war and made the Soviets abandon their plans of invading Poland in 1980 and 1981 to pacify the then rising Solidarity Union.

Commenting on Kuklinski's role in preventing a Soviet invasion of Poland in 1980 and 81 to crush the then 10-million strong Solidarity Union, Jablonska-Gruca reminds that it was he who provided the invasion plans to the US administration, which promptly deterred the Soviets from invading Poland by threatening harder sanctions on Cuba.

"Experts have no doubt that Colonel Kuklinski twice saved Poland from a Soviet invasion. (...) At the time, with social unrest in Poland at a peak and half a million Warsaw Pact soldiers waiting ready for action on the Polish border, a brief order from Moscow could have easily led to a military operation. The invasion was scheduled for December 8, the Soviets aiming to crush "Solidarity" by means of mass arrests, quick trials and death sentences for the movement's leaders", Jablonska-Gruca wrote.

Kuklinski's exploits were the subject of the 2014 US-Polish film production Jack Strong, the title a reference to Kuklinski's real codename as a CIA operative.

Kuklinski died in 2004 in Tampa, Florida, in the United States.

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