



Seal at the headquarters of the CIA

ARTYKUŁ

The beginning of a beautiful friendship

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In 1989, when the transformation began in Poland, the CIA initiated its cooperation with Polish intelligence. The resolutions made there and then defined the shape of Polish special services and their geopolitical alliances for years.

In 1989, the Cold War was coming to an end. Officers of the Polish intelligence and of the Central Intelligence Agency observed the slow fall of the Soviet Empire. Even though, until then they had been on opposite sides of the barricade, it turned out they were faithful to the same principle:

„There are no eternal allies nor eternal enemies, only the interests of the state and the duty to protect it are forever.”

A new order was to come to Europe and the Americans wanted to have as much say in it as possible. The CIA was particularly interested in establishing cooperation with the special services of the former USSR satellite states: Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

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Officers of the CIA always followed the same way of operating. Upon making contact with their communist counterparts, they offered to jointly fight against illegal drugs and weapons trade as well as to exchange information on terrorist threats. When they were met with positive reactions, they upped the stakes - the price for Americans' trust was suspending all intelligence operations in the U.S. and exchanging precious intelligence information. However, it was not only the CIA which was engaged in the operation - the White House played the political game and encouraged eastern European politicians to enter into such cooperation.

The fates of special services of the three aforementioned countries were very different from one another. Czechoslovakia practically did not enter the game, since its intelligence was immediately dismantled. Next on the list were the Hungarians, who established cooperation after some perturbations.



Czesław Kiszczak

The best ally

In the beginning of March, 1990, it was Polish intelligence's turn. John Palevich was put forward by the CIA to make contact. This grandson of a Polish immigrant had worked for the Agency since the beginning of the 1960s, among others, under a diplomat's cover in Poland. The operation began in Lisbon - the capital on the sidelines of spy games of the great world powers. There, Palevich met with the resident of the Polish intelligence and showed his CIA badge. He explained that the agency wanted to make contact in order to:

„Cooperate in keeping stability in Europe in the context of transformations happening in the countries of the Warsaw Pact and the impending unification of Germany.”

The resident spy rejected the offer, however, he informed his supervisors about it.

The contact was made in the critical moment for the Security Service. Czesław Kiszczak was still its leader, although it was clear that it would not be for long.

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the establishing of close ties with the U.S. was crucial from the economic standpoint - he had hoped for financial support and help in restructuring foreign debts.

Kiszczyk personally gave his permission for conducting dialogue with the CIA, most probably after consultations with deputy minister Kozłowski. Prime minister Mazowiecki was also informed about the matter. It was at this moment that the case took on a political dimension. On the American side, the people most likely included in the subject were president George Bush; secretary of state James Baker; national security advisor Brent Scowcroft; U.S. ambassador to Warsaw John Davies and of course, the participating CIA personnel.

Mazowiecki, during his visit to Washington in March, met with William H. Webster, the CIA director. He mentioned the events in Lisbon. He stated he „had certain signals” that the CIA and the Polish intelligence were interested in:

„Joint cooperation on certain aspects, such as fighting terrorism.”

The background for this talk was the fact that Mazowiecki had just announced that Poland would help in the transit of Soviet Jews from the USSR territory to Israel. This decision was in line with the interests of the American administration, however, it endangered Polish airlines and facilities with terrorist attacks from Middle Eastern terrorist organisations. Tackling terrorism became one of the most essential grounds of Polish-American intelligence cooperation in the following several weeks.



Krzysztof Kozłowski

Between June and July, 1990, a meeting between the delegations of the Polish ministry of interior and the CIA was set up in the facility of the ministry in Magdalenka. The talks were held in two groups: one for the matters of fighting terrorism and the other for political matters and intelligence work. One of the conditions of this

new opening was, similarly to Hungary, the suspension of all intelligence operations of the Polish secret services in the United States. This case was brought up by the American administration on several occasions - in July, 1990, the delegation of the U.S. state department warned that for the relations to improve, it was crucial to:

„Provide satisfactory proof of the cessation of intelligence activities against western states.”

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During the meeting in Magdalenka, various aspects of the widely-understood cooperation were under discussion. The CIA was to, among other things, provide information on terrorist threats and help Poles in building their own facility to combat terrorism, similar to CIA's own Counterterrorism Center. The Agency offered training support and to provide materials on KGB and GRU operations. In turn, the Americans cared for the help of Polish intelligence in gathering information in the territories non-accessible for the CIA: Syria, Libya, Iraq and Iran. Soon, it turned out that the Polish services had much more to offer.

Bridge and Samum

Operation Bridge was the practical realisation of the promise made by Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Washington to open the air corridor for Jews to emigrate from the USSR to Israel.

Earlier, this task was taken on by Budapest, however, it began to give in under the pressure of a terrorist threat. Poland took over this commitment. This decision was met with positive reception of the American administration.

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Ambassador John Davies expressed his respect to prime minister Mazowiecki and extended the offer to help in anti-terrorist operations and training.

The operation, commonly referred to as codename Samum, showed on a film under the same title, was based on evacuating six American officers of the special services from Iraq. However, it was not the only favour for the CIA. Earlier, the Agency had asked the Polish services for aid in acquiring plans for particular buildings. Firms such as Motostal, Budimex, Dromex, Naftobudowa, Bumar of the State Nuclear Agency employed various contractors in Iraq. They often realised special projects for the Iraqi authorities. Their documentations went to Langley.



William H. Webster and president of the USA George Bush senior

In recognition of these feats, William Webster, the head of the CIA, brought the letter of gratitude from president George Bush with the information of annulling half of Poland's debts.

As Gromisław Czempiński recalled, operation Samum broke the ice between the Polish People's Republic's officers of the intelligence and the Solidarity's leadership of the Office of State Protection. The operation's success and its spectacular consequences gave credibility

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It was not only the achievement of the intelligence, the Americans were getting ready for the annulment of Poland's debt anyway, although it was an important symbol. As Gromisław Czempiński recalled, operation Samum broke the ice between the Polish People's Republic's officers of the intelligence and the Solidarity's leadership of the Office of State Protection. The operation's success and its spectacular consequences gave credibility to many former officers of the communist Security Service.

In 1990, Polish intelligence was spared after verification. The transition from the Security Service to the Office of State Protection was one of the foundations of the transformation of the special services, This was the shared stance of i.e. Krzysztof Kozłowski and Jerzy Zimowski who worked under the Civic Parliamentary Club on the new bill on the Office of State Protection. Undoubtedly, these structures went under the protective umbrella of western services. Vincent Viktor Severski, author of spy novels and former intelligence officer, explained that:

„The Americans and the British [...] did not allow to destroy our intelligence.”

The patronage of Washington and Langley was visible for many years, although it came with a price. Marian Zacharski, in his memoirs, described how affiliation with the American contacts was used in the 1990s for internal fights for power over the Office of State Protection. He also quoted his conversation with a CIA resident, to whom he said:

„It must be cooperation, not dictatorship. We are helping you a lot already, but we have little gain from that. Mostly a headache.”

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