

U.S. Democracy and Polish Experience for Joint Export

By Arnold August, October 2011

Obama's May 2011 visit to Poland revealed some important features of the U.S.–Poland alliance. In order to stress the theme of historical alliances with the U.S. today, as Obama said in the Warsaw Joint Press Conference with Polish Prime Minister Tusk, “Poland is one of our strongest allies in the world” as a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). However, the importance of Poland also lies in that the U.S. (as Obama reported on a session he had held earlier that day with “democracy promotion experts” recently returned from Tunisia) is counting on Poland to influence the revolts in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. Poland, he said, “has gone through what many countries [in the Middle East and North Africa] want to now go through, and [Poland] has done so successfully.”¹ In other words, the U.S. would consider a success in the region (Middle East and North Africa) the channelling of the revolts, as was the case in Poland in the 1980s and early 1990s, into the establishment of pro-U.S. governments.

The role of the U.S. in Latin America in the 1980s did not draw Obama's sympathy for its victims, as he himself wrote in his second book. Nor did the U.S. responsibility move him during his trip to Latin America in March 2011. However, he made some revealing remarks during a discussion on democracy that day in Warsaw. His history came to the fore once again in Europe when he vowed that the Polish Solidarity (Solidarnosc) movement “inspired” him. In reference to his student years, he confirmed, “I remember at that time understanding history was being made ... [not only in Poland but against] a broader system of Soviet repression.”² The fact that he was never inspired in the 1980s by resistance to the U.S.-backed repression in Chile or in other Latin-American countries, as was the case with other progressive youth of his time, should come as no surprise given what he wrote in his second book and many other declarations since its publication. This stand and similar ones have long-range effects on the thinking and action guiding U.S. foreign policy. The role that the Obama administration (as the previous Bush ones) has mapped out for Poland as a continuation of Reagan's policy is clearly indicated in two White House Fact Sheets issued on May 28, 2011, during the Warsaw visit. One Fact Sheet clearly illustrates the close military ties that include U.S. Air Force bases in Poland and joint air and land coordination for Afghanistan.³

The other Fact Sheet, entitled “U.S.–Polish Efforts to Advance Democracy Worldwide,” “applauds Poland’s decision to establish an International Solidarity [named after Lech Walesa’s Solidarity movement] for democracy assistance, modelled on and *supported by* the U.S.A. National Endowment for Democracy [NED]”⁴ (emphasis added). NED is the CIA-backed and trained instrument for infiltrating and destabilizing countries unfavourable to the U.S., such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. In fact, while the NED – Polish collaboration is specifically interested (according to the Fact Sheet) in Tunisia and in North Africa and areas in Eastern Europe, it is, however, linked to a new July 2010 State Department International Lifeline Fund to “support embattled NGOs [non-governmental organizations] around the world.”⁵ This implies countries in Latin America, which Obama had visited in March 2011 and whose leaders he met at the April 2009 Trinidad and Tobago Summit of the Americas. On both occasions, he presented the image of a new era of cooperation and mutual understanding to replace the policy of previous U.S. administrations.

¹ Obama, Barack. 2011a. “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Tusk of Poland in Joint Press Conference in Warsaw, Poland.” White House (May 28). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-tusk-poland-joint-press-confe>>.

² ———. 2011b. “Remarks by President Obama and President Komorowski in Discussion on Democracy in Warsaw, Poland.” White House (May 28). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/28/remarks-president-obama-and-president-komorowski-discussion-democracy-wa>>.

³ White House. 2011a. “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Poland Bilateral Defense Cooperation.” (May 28). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/28/fact-sheet-us-poland-bilateral-defense-cooperation>>.

⁴ ———. 2011b. “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Polish Efforts to Advance Democracy Worldwide.” (May 28). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/28/fact-sheet-us-polish-efforts-advance-democracy-worldwide>>.

⁵ Ibid.