

## The New York Times

### Ryszard Kuklinski, 73, Spy in Poland in Cold War, Dies

By James Risen  
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Ryszard Kuklinski, a former Polish Army officer who secretly served as one of the C.I.A.'s most important spies behind the Iron Curtain during the cold war, died Tuesday in his adopted American homeland, United States government officials said Wednesday. He was 73. His death came at a military hospital in Tampa, Fla., following a stroke on Feb. 5, said Jozef Szaniawski, a long-time friend, The Associated Press reported.

During some of the darkest days of the cold war, when Moscow was trying to defend its Eastern European empire against growing grass-roots demands for freedom and democracy, Colonel Kuklinski covertly provided the United States with critical information that may have staved off a Soviet invasion of Poland. He also gave the Central Intelligence Agency advance warning of Poland's plans to impose martial law in order to crack down on Solidarity, the dissident movement in 1981.

On Wednesday, George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, issued a public statement calling Colonel Kuklinski "a true hero of the cold war to whom we all owe an everlasting debt of gratitude."

An army colonel on the Polish general staff who also acted as a liaison with Moscow, Colonel Kuklinski spied for the C.I.A. from Warsaw for nine years in the 1970's and early 1980's. Under the code name Gull, he became one of the C.I.A.'s most productive agents, handing over thousands of secret documents as well as insights into the plans and intentions of the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet-dominated military alliance then confronting NATO.

Fearing that he had been compromised, Colonel Kuklinski eventually asked the C.I.A. to help him escape from Poland, and he defected in 1981, just as the martial law that he had predicted was imposed. The C.I.A. secretly resettled Colonel Kuklinski and his family in the United States, where he was still living under cover in 1989, when Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and Solidarity came to power in Poland.

Yet he was not welcomed home as a hero in the newly democratic Poland and instead found that many Poles, particularly in military and intelligence circles, remained deeply ambivalent about his actions. Late in his life, he was finally able to return to Poland, but some Poles still felt he had betrayed Poland, not just a ruthless Communist regime.

Lech Walesa, as president of Poland from 1990 to '95, never pardoned Colonel Kuklinski but said he had "achieved great things."

Born in Warsaw on June 13, 1930, Colonel Kuklinski began his second life as a spy in August 1972, when he sent an anonymous letter to the United States Embassy in Bonn while he was on a boating trip through northern Germany. As a military officer, he said he wanted to speak to another military officer in order to propose a grandiose conspiracy between the Polish and American militaries, in which they would work together to sabotage the Soviets.

Instead the Americans sent two C.I.A. case officers posing as Army officers. He was finally convinced to stay in place and spy for the United States, but it was not until the next year that he was told that he was dealing with the C.I.A.

Despite surveillance from Polish security services, the C.I.A.'s clandestine methods enabled him to communicate effectively with American case officers for years without detection, and over time he provided more than 35,000 pages of "highly classified Soviet documentary intelligence," the C.I.A. later said.

While many spies on both sides of the Iron Curtain were motivated by greed, Colonel Kuklinski seemed to be one of those rare men who spied in order to help liberate his country from Communism. He was sickened by the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and by the use of Soviet troops to shoot at striking workers in 1970. And he felt that Poland was vulnerable in a Soviet attack on Europe because any American nuclear response would hit Poland, not Soviet territory.

In September 1981, nine years after he began secretly providing information to the C.I.A., he wrote in a letter to a C.I.A. case officer code-named "Daniel" that he had "boundless faith in the rightness of what I am doing." He added: "Nobody and nothing could possibly change my mind or lead me off the chosen path. . . . I was additionally convinced that I am not alone traveling the road, that the nation desires freedom from the shackles of Communism imposed from the outside." The letter to the C.I.A. is published in a new biography of Colonel Kuklinski, entitled "A Secret Life" by Benjamin Weiser, a reporter for The New York Times.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to the United States came in December 1980, a time when Solidarity was becoming an increasing political problem for both the Polish leadership and the Kremlin. Colonel Kuklinski warned the C.I.A. that Moscow was on the verge of invading Poland in order to crush Solidarity.

The information came in time to allow the outgoing Carter administration to warn Moscow, both publicly and privately, against taking military moves against Poland. In the end, the Soviets stayed out.

In a statement on Colonel Kuklinski's death, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national security adviser to President Carter, praised Colonel Kuklinski and said that he "decided to help America better understand Soviet planning, thereby increasing America's ability to deter Soviet aggression."

In 1981, he provided the C.I.A. with the Polish government's secret plans to impose martial law. Other information he supplied included Soviet contingency plans for war in Europe, details about advanced Soviet weapons systems and about the construction of three hidden bunkers in Russia, Poland and Bulgaria, where the Soviet command and control was to be based in wartime.

But in late 1981, Colonel Kuklinski became convinced that he had been betrayed when a senior Polish military officer told him that a source in Rome had revealed that the C.I.A. had obtained Poland's plans for martial law. Colonel Kuklinski quickly contacted the C.I.A. and escaped to the West.

Colonel Kuklinski was sentenced to death by Poland's Communist government in 1984. He visited his homeland in the spring of 1998, for the first time since fleeing, months after a court cleared him of the treason charges.

Colonel Kuklinski is survived by his wife, Joanna, and a grandson.

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