



Col. Ryszard Kuklinski during his visit at the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York in 2003  
(photo: Barbara Aleksandrowicz)

## **COL. RYSZARD KUKLINSKI, A SUPERB SPY, A HERO AND A PATRIOT**

**Ryszard Jerzy Kuklinski (June 13, 1930 – February 11, 2004) was a Polish colonel, Cold War spy and whistleblower. He passed top secret Warsaw Pact documents to the CIA between 1971 and 1981. Former United States National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński has described him as "the first Polish officer in NATO."**

Kuklinski was born in Warsaw into a working class family with socialist traditions. His father was a member of the Polish resistance movement during World War II. He was captured by the Gestapo and died in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. After the war, Kuklinski began a successful career in

the Polish People's Army. He took part in the preparations for the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Disturbed by the invasion of Czechoslovakia and by the brutal crushing of the 1970 Polish protests, in 1972 Kuklinski sent a letter to the US embassy in Bonn. He described himself as "a foregen MAF from Communistische Kantry"(sic!) and requested a secret meeting. Many years later Kuklinski said that his awareness of the "unambiguously offensive" nature of Soviet military plans was an important factor in his decision to discuss the details with the United States, adding that "Our front could only be a sacrifice of Polish blood at the altar of the Red Empire". Kuklinski was also concerned that his homeland would be turned into a nuclear wasteland as the Warsaw Pact's superiority in conventional forces could mean NATO would respond to a military action with tactical nuclear weapons.



Col. Ryszard Kuklinski and Pope John Paul II

Between 1971 and 1981 he passed 35,000 pages of Soviet secret documents to the CIA. The documents described Moscow's strategic plans regarding the use of nuclear weapons, technical data about the T-72 tank and Strela-1 missiles, the whereabouts of Soviet anti-aircraft bases in Poland and East Germany, the methods used by the Soviets to avoid spy satellite detection of their military hardware, plans for the imposition of martial law in Poland, and much more.

Facing imminent danger of discovery, Kuklinski was spirited out of Poland by the CIA, along with his wife and two sons, shortly before the imposition of martial law in December 1981. Though Kuklinski and his family managed to successfully defect, his controversial past may have followed him to the United States. In the subsequent years, both of his sons died under mysterious circumstances.

His son Bogdan died in a mysterious boating accident and his son Waldemar's death in a car accident was considered suspicious. There is widespread belief that the KGB's hand was behind the death of Kuklinski's sons, though this has never been substantiated.

On May 23, 1984 Kuklinski was sentenced to death, in absentia, by a secret military court in Warsaw. After the fall of communism, the sentence was changed to 25 years. In 1995 the court cancelled the sentence and stated that Kuklinski was acting under special circumstances that warranted a higher need. Kuklinski visited Poland again in April 1998.



Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski

In June 1986, a spokesman for the Soviet-backed Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski regime, Jerzy Urban, revealed Kuklinski's existence to the world in order to make the argument that the Reagan administration had been informed by Kuklinski of the plans to install martial law but had betrayed the Solidarity movement by not passing that information on to its "friends" in Solidarity. When the journal *Kultura* interviewed Kuklinski, Kuklinski said that planning for martial law had begun in late 1980 and that the Jaruzelski group planned to crush Solidarity regardless of the outcome of negotiations with the trade union and the Polish church.

He also rejected the regime's claim that declaring martial law was an internal decision by describing how the Soviets had applied pressure on Polish authorities to impose martial law. When asked whether Jaruzelski was a hero or a traitor, Kuklinski replied: I believe that Poland had a real chance to avoid both Soviet intervention and martial law. If Jaruzelski and Stanislaw Kania had have shown some dignity and strengt, and honestly adhered to the existing social agreements, instead of knuckling under to Moscow, todays Poland would undoubtedly look completely different.



Leonid Brezhnev

Kuklinski, the chief of a military strategic command planning division of the Polish Army was the liaison between the Polish Army and the command of the Soviet military. He was very familiar with the layout of the Polish forces within the Warsaw Pact. While details of the general plans for the Warsaw Pact forces were known only in Moscow, Kuklinski could infer much from his contacts at the Moscow high command headquarters.

According to President Carter's NSA, Zbigniew Brzeziński, "Kuklinski's information permitted us to make counterplans to disrupt command-and-control facilities rather than only relying on a massive counterattack on forward positions, which would have hit Poland."

During his term as Poland's first freely elected president, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa refused to pardon Kuklinski. The administration of US President Clinton nonetheless took the stance that it would oppose Polish membership in NATO unless Kuklinski were exonerated.

When all charges were dropped against Kuklinski in 1997, the left leaning newspaper Trybuna lamented that "Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski — a spy, deserter, and traitor — has been turned into a model of virtue and a national hero of the rightists."



Zbigniew Brzezinski

Today, many people believe that by revealing military plans to the Americans, he foiled a planned Soviet invasion of Poland in 1981 (resulting in the lesser evil of the martial law), and in this way may have helped prevent the start of a World War III that would have resulted in the nuclear destruction of Poland (or revealing those plans made Poland target for NATO nuclear counterstrike).

Col. Kuklinski died from a stroke at the age of 73 in Tampa, Florida in 2004. He was buried in the Powazki military cemetery in Warsaw, Poland, along with his son Waldemar. He has been given honorary citizenship of several Polish cities, among which the most notable are Krakow and Gdansk.

The Polish political group Centrum (at that time headed by Zbigniew Religa) requested in 2004 that the President of Poland posthumously promotes Kuklinski to the rank of general.