Filip Mazurczak
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1014-1723
Uniwersytet Ignatianum w Krakowie
filip.mazurczak@ignatianum.edu.pl
DOI: 10.35765/HP.2680

Horyzonty Polityki
2025, Vol. 16, N° 56

"Providential Smart Power": How John Paul II's Nyean Soft Power Helped Defeat Communism

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this article is to explain Pope John Paul II's role in the formation of Solidarity in Poland using the concept of soft power as formulated by the political scientist Joseph Nye.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND METHODS: Many historians consider Pope John Paul II's first pilgrimage to his native Poland, which took place on June 2–10, 1979, to have played a key role in the collapse of communism across East-Central Europe. However, their explanations of the pope's role are often vague. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power is helpful in framing the significance of the papal visit from a political science point of view. My qualitative research is interdisciplinary.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The article explains the impact of John Paul II's first visit to communist Poland using the three sources of soft power identified by Joseph Nye: culture, political values, and foreign policy. In all these categories, the pope increased the Church's soft power. The article concludes by noting that John Paul II's pilgrimage was not the only cause for the collapse of communist rule in East-Central Europe, which does not disprove Nye's non- reductionistic concept.

RESEARCH RESULTS: This analysis has demonstrated that Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to Poland contributed to an increase in the Catholic Church's three sources of soft power, as identified by Joseph Nye.

Suggested cittation: Mazurczak, F. (2025). "Providential Smart Power": How John Paul II's Nyean Soft Power Helped Defeat Communism. *Horizons of Politics*, *16*(56), 173–189. DOI: 10.35765/HP.2680.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: While John Paul II and the Catholic Church's soft power played an important role in forming Solidarity, they alone do not suffice to explain the peaceful collapse of communism. The independent but mutually reinforcing contributions of the pope, Reagan, and Gorbachev may be dubbed "providential smart power." This study should remind scholars to avoid the "Stalin trap" of negating the role of religious soft power in precipitating political change.

Keywords:
Pope John Paul II, soft power, Joseph Nye, communism, Vatican *Ostpolitik*

INTRODUCTION

On October 16, 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, Archbishop of Krakow, was elected pope, becoming the first non-Italian bishop of Rome since the Dutchman Adrian VI, who had died 455 years earlier. The world was shocked not only by the new pontiff's not being Italian and his relative youth (Wojtyła was just fifty-eight), but also by the fact that he came from behind the Iron Curtain. This was at the height of the Cold War, and there were no signs that Soviet power was waning; indeed, just a year after Wojtyła's election, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, while the communist Sandinistas, backed by Fidel Castro's Cuba, overthrew the corrupt pro-American dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza and gained power in Nicaragua.

Also in 1979, the new pope went on a nine-day pilgrimage to his native Poland. After long negotiations with the Vatican (the initial notion of John Paul II coming to coincide with the nine-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaus, martyred for rebuking an immoral medieval Polish king, was scrapped for fear of the potential political symbolism), Poland's communist regime agreed to a papal visit on June 2–10. Upon learning of the planned pilgrimage, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev told Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the communist Polish United Workers' Party: "Well, do what you want, so long as you and your party don't regret it later" (Caryl, 2013, p. 81).

The pope's itinerary included Krakow, Warsaw, his own hometown of Wadowice, the former German Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, Nowy Targ, and the religious shrines of Jasna

Góra and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. In total, eleven million Poles – nearly a third of the country's population – participated in the pilgrimage (Caryl, 2013, p. 208).

Many historians and witnesses have described the papal visit as a gamechanger that facilitated the formation of Solidarity, the ten-million strong, nonviolent labor union turned into a national liberation movement, a year later, and the collapse of Soviet hegemony in East-Central Europe more broadly. For example, Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis has written:

> When John Paul II kissed the ground at the Warsaw airport on June 2, 1979, he began the process by which communism in Poland – and ultimately elsewhere in Europe – would come to an end (Gaddis, 2006, p. 193).

Like many other authors, Gaddis proceeds to quote Stalin's famous sardonic rhetorical question to Roosevelt at the Yalta conference ("How many divisions has the pope?"), claiming that Comrade Koba had an answer in June 1979, yet apart from vaguely identifying the papal visit as a contributing factor to the rise of Solidarity, the historian does not explain the causal relationship between June 2, 1979, in Warsaw and November 9, 1989, in Berlin (2006, p. 194).

Similarly vague was Mikhail Gorbachev himself. In a 1992 editorial initially published in the Turin daily *La Stampa* and later translated into English and syndicated in many American newspapers, the last Soviet leader wrote:

> Now it can be said that everything which took place in Eastern Europe in recent years would have been impossible without the pope's efforts and the enormous role, including the political role, which he played in the world arena (Gorbachev, 1992, para. 11).

Gorbachev's concise article details his respect for the Polish pope. He notes their kinship as fellow Slavs; the pope's admirable personal qualities; and John Paul II's desire for closer relations between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches (Gorbachev, 1992). Yet, like John Lewis Gaddis, the last general secretary of the CPSU does not explain exactly *how* John Paul II contributed to the tearing apart of the Iron Curtain.

The British historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash, who chronicled the rise of Solidarity and the fall of communist regimes across East-Central Europe, is somewhat more specific. In an obituary for John Paul II published in the *Guardian*, he wrote:

> I would argue the historical case in three steps: without the Polish Pope, no Solidarity revolution in Poland in 1980; without Solidarity, no dramatic change in Soviet policy towards eastern Europe under Gorbachev; without that change, no velvet revolutions in 1989 (Garton Ash, 2005, para. 5).

At least in this column, however, Timothy Garton Ash does not explain how exactly the pope led to the "Solidarity revolution in Poland."

METHODOLOGY

Having studied the Cold War and the pontificate of John Paul II for years, it has been my belief that the contribution of the pope to the fall of the Iron Curtain was primarily psychological and symbolic: the pontiff's first visit to his native country in 1979 helped many Poles to realize that they were not alone in their rejection of the communist regime; furthermore, the masses began to espouse emboldening Christian rhetoric and imagery. When I later read about Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, I began to see certain similarities between my intuitive notions regarding the significance of the papal visit and the political scientist's notions. In writing this article, I conducted an interdisciplinary review of works by historians, political scientists, sociologists, journalists, and theologians who have all dealt with the political impact of the pilgrimage, and I proceeded to find certain similarities in their observations and arguments despite their disparate backgrounds. Next, I attempted to analyze these similarities within the framework of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. During my qualitative literature review, I concluded that in mobilizing the Polish masses to protest, John Paul II's 1979 visit to Poland drew on the three sources of Nyean soft power: culture, domestic policies, and foreign policy.

WHAT IS SOFT POWER?

One political concept that can explain how John Paul II inspired a large segment of the Polish population to revolt against its communist oppressors is Joseph Nye's soft power. Nye is the former dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs during the Clinton administration. According to Nye, traditional theories of political science have focused on "sticks" and "carrots"; in other words, how one political actor can influence another's behavior through coercion or by offering tangible benefits. However, there is also what he calls "the second face of power": actors can obtain desired outcomes by being attractive to others, making the latter want to emulate or follow them (2004, p. 5).

For example, Nye notes how in the immediate post-World War II era the Soviet Union's soft power increased due to its major role in defeating Nazi Germany. Furthermore, as large swathes of Asia and Africa threw off the shackles of European colonialism, the Soviets' anti-imperialist rhetoric and standing up to the United States and other Western capitalist powers attracted many Asians and Africans to leftist ideologies and the Soviet leadership. Meanwhile, the Soviets' promotion of the arts and successes in sports positively contributed to its global image. By contrast, the Soviet Union's invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia twelve years later dented its popularity in the world, thus reducing its soft power (Nye, 2004, pp. 73–75).

Joseph Nye identifies three sources of soft power. The first is culture. Nye notes, for example, how in 1960s Czechoslovakia the communist authorities saw the political dangers of rock music, afraid it would increase the capitalist, democratic West's soft power. Indeed, jailing young men for listening to American and British rock was counterproductive, as it made Western political values only more alluring. As Nye cleverly notes: "With the passage of time, Lennon trumped Lenin" (2004, p. 50).

A major part of the Soviets' culture-based soft power was disinformation. Propaganda was a crucial tool for the establishment of Soviet hegemony beginning with Lenin. The first communist state's propaganda above all appealed to the human instinct of aggression,

presenting every aspect of life, from the campaign against literacy to sport, as a struggle (Tchakhotine, 1991, pp. 46–49).

One successful example of Soviet propaganda that increased global affinity for the USSR and made Catholicism less attractive was its campaign against Pope Pius XII. Although the pontiff, who led the Catholic Church from 1939 to 1958, was initially praised by many Jews, including Albert Einstein and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, for his assistance to victims of the Holocaust, in 1963 the Soviet Secret Service financed the play *The Deputy* by German playwright Rolf Hochhuth, which depicted Pius XII as a sympathizer of Nazi Germany. The play received much attention and was translated into many languages. Historian Johan Ickx has called it "a most stubborn artifact of the Soviet Secret Service's production market," and since 1963, the caricature of Pius XII as "Hitler's pope" has become commonplace (Ickx, 2022, p. 3).

The next source of soft power is political values, which includes building credibility by living up to them, as expressed in domestic policies. In the 1950s, at the height of decolonization, the United States' policies of racial segregation decreased its soft power in Africa where, as mentioned above, the Soviet model at that time appeared attractive (Nye, 2004, p. 13).

The final source of power is reminiscent of the second; it is foreign policy. For example, the Carter administration's vocal defense of human rights in Latin America increased the United States' soft power in Argentina, then under the rule of an oppressive right-wing military dictatorship. After the restoration of Argentinean democracy, Washington's perception in Buenos Aires had improved, and consequently Argentina was more inclined to support the United States' policies in the Balkans and the United Nations in the 1990s (Nye, 2004, p. 13).

CHRIST TRUMPS LENIN

Vernon A. Walters, the United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany from 1989 to 1991, said that after seeing millions of Poles flocking to see the pope in 1979 "we knew that Poland had ceased to be a communist country" (Jauer, 2011, p. 30).

It would be more precise, however, to say that in June 1979 at least a large part of Polish *society* had ceased to be communist. The fact

that many Poles rejected communist symbols and ideas for Christian ones attests to John Paul II's increasing the first source of soft power, which is culture.

According to political scientist Jan Kubik, John Paul II's memorable sermon on Victory Square in Warsaw in 1979, during which he implored the Holy Spirit to descend and "renew the face of the earth, of this earth," was of profound symbolic significance. Victory Square had previously been the site of official communist state ceremonies, yet the pope had transformed it into a platform where he spoke about the Polish nation's Christian heritage. Kubik quotes the Polish writer Julian Stryjkowski as saying that the papal visit was the "second baptism of Poland." In Auschwitz-Birkenau, the pope interpreted the war crimes of the Third Reich from a Christian perspective, calling the concentration camp "the Golgotha of our times" (Kubik, 1994, pp. 138–144).

In Kubik's view, the pope had presented the Polish nation as an "imagined community" rooted in Catholic symbolism and belief. This was the first time that the Polish masses had such a comprehensive alternative to understanding history and society presented to them on such a wide scale. Kubik notes that Polish industrial workers realized how much the communist authorities had insulted them in 1976 by calling them "hooligans" for protesting the regime, while he argues that even the leftist opposition, traditionally wary of the Church, was enthusiastic about John Paul II's Christian view of the nation's history: for example, Kubik cites a laudatory article by Jan Lityński, a secular Jew, published in the clandestine social democratic journal *Robotnik* (1994, pp. 144–146).

Similarly, the Polish sociologist and historian Marcin Zaremba underlines the symbolic transformation of Polish society that occurred as a result of the papal visit. He claims that the pilgrimage had a psychological effect on Polish society, demonstrating to many Poles that they were not alone in their opposition to the regime. Additionally, he notes what he calls the "symbolic and ritual" transformation of Polish protests following 1979. According to Zaremba, previous protests (such as in 1956, 1968, 1970, and 1976) were devoid of religious imagery; he quotes Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa as saying that in the 1970s protesting Polish workers sang the "Internationale." By contrast, during the Solidarity period Mass was regularly celebrated

at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk, whose gate was adorned by a large portrait of John Paul II; Zaremba likens the shipyard's appearance to that of a Corpus Christi altar (Zaremba, 2023, pp. 576–579).

Meanwhile, according to the political scientist Krzysztof Mazur, who conducted an in-depth study of the political ideology of Solidarity, the two biggest "spiritual mentors" of the movement were Catholic priests: Pope John Paul II and Father Józef Tischner. The former's Christian personalist view that man should be treated a subject rather than an object by the state was an attractive alternative to Marxist-Leninist dogmas (Mazur, 2017, pp. 182–187).

Although, as Marcin Zaremba has emphasized, the papal visit increased the Church's cultural soft power among anti-regime dissidents, the leadership of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński as primate of Poland from 1948 to his death in 1981 had already boosted Catholic culture in society. During his imprisonment by the dictatorship from 1953 until 1956, Wyszyński conceived the Great Novena, a nine-year evangelization program coinciding with the millennial celebration of Poland's baptism. The Great Novena focused on the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, while each year had a different theme, including the Ten Commandments, the family, and social justice. Large crowds flocked to hear Wyszyński's sermons (Weigel, 1992, pp. 104–117). In addition to Wyszyński, grassroots Catholic projects, such as Father Franciszek Blachnicki's Life-Light youth ministry movement or the intellectual Catholic lay journal *Tygodnik Powszechny*, bolstered Catholic culture in officially communist Poland (Weigel, 1992, pp. 125–128).

The sociologist Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński has observed that the 1979 pilgrimage served as a kind of unofficial census that opened many Poles' eyes to the fact that "we" (i.e., those who rejected the regime and instead embraced Christian and democratic values) were more numerous than "they," or the supporters of the regime (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007, p. 14). In reference to Joseph Nye's witty observation that in communist Czechoslovakia, which had myopically tried to ban rock music, Lennon trumped Lenin, we can illustrate John Paul II's increasing the Church's soft power by referencing the young Father Karol Wojtyła's 1950 play *Our God's Brother*.

The drama deals with Albert Chmielowski (1845–1916), a successful Polish painter and amputee (he lost his leg in one of the many nineteenth-century Polish revolts against Poland's oppressors) who

shunned a life of celebrity and instead devoted himself to the poor, founding numerous homeless shelters across Poland and establishing the Albertines, male and female religious orders dedicated to the destitute.

In Wojtyła's play, Chmielowski debates a figure named "the Stranger," who the pope would later confirm was based on Lenin but was not explicitly named for fears of communist censors. Lenin did live in Chmielowski's Krakow in 1912–1914, and according to an uncorroborated legend the two met. In the play, "The Stranger" claims that Chmielowski's works of charity are harmful to the poor, whose anger must explode into a revolution that will create a new order. Brother Albert, meanwhile, maintains that the poor should be served through transforming culture; at the individual level, only the cross can make man truly free (Weigel, 1999, pp. 112–115).

Similarly, beginning in 1979 much of the Polish population rejected the materialist Leninist dogma promoted by the state and instead chose the Christian view of the human person promoted by Brother Albert.

THE CHURCH AS THE DEFENDER OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Spanish-American sociologist Jose Casanova writes that post-World War II Poland did not experience "the French-Latin pattern of secularization" such as that of Revolutionary France or post-Franco Spain, where the Catholic Church was seen as an opponent of progress and an ally of repressive regimes. On the contrary, during the partitions of Poland from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, World War II, and communism, the Church's role was that of a defender of human rights and national sovereignty. In particular, under the leadership of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Church served as the main rallying point against the communist dictatorship (Casanova, 1994, pp. 92–101). Thus, the Church already had bolstered much of the second source of soft power (political values) in Polish society before June 2, 1979.

However, it was especially in the latter half of 1970s that the soft power of the communist regime was declining. Although Gierek had

contributed to many modernization projects, the foreign debt he had accrued led to economic stagnation. Meanwhile, workers' protests in 1976 had been violently suppressed by the regime, thus decreasing its popularity among the working class as well as a large part of the intelligentsia, which in response formed the Workers' Defense Committee. When in 1977 Stanisław Pyjas, a Krakow student with ties to the Workers' Defense Committee, had been found murdered in an alleyway and many Poles linked the communist regime to the killing, protests erupted. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła presided over the funeral Mass, thus symbolizing how many Poles' loyalties had shifted away from the communists and towards the Church (Caryl, 2013, pp. 13–18).

Edward Gierek himself unsuccessfully hoped that he could neutralize the Church's soft power by ridding it of the aura of martyrdom and attempting to shore up Catholic support for his regime by a policy of liberalization. Thus, the Gierek government legalized various Catholic organizations (Staniszkis, 1984, p. 172).

A further example of how the Church in Poland increased the second source of soft power at the expense of the communist regime was its response to the government's signaling that it would not provide significant security during John Paul II's 1979 pilgrimage. As a result, Cardinal Wyszyński created the Totus Tuus Church Security Service of the Archdiocese of Warsaw (*Kościelna Służba Porządkowa Archidiecezji Warszawskiej „Totus Tuus"*). Twenty thousand Polish men signed up to maintain order during the pope's appearances in Poland. After the pilgrimage had ended, they maintained order in their parishes and created the structures that facilitated the functioning of illegal opposition groups after martial law had been imposed two years later (Petrowa-Wasilewicz, 2000, p. 277). Wnuk-Lipiński has likewise noted that the mobilization of thousands of volunteers in organizing the pilgrimage served to democratize Polish society, to create alternative grassroots structures independent of state organization and cement the bonds between the Church and dissidents (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007, p. 14).

Meanwhile, dissidents from the traditionally anti-clerical Polish left recognized the Church's soft power and its potential in democratization. Thus, in the late 1970s secular dissident intellectuals such as Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, and Adam Michnik abandoned their deep-seated anti-Catholic prejudices and, in their writings, recognized the Church as the most important defender of human rights

(Garton Ash, 2002, p. 30). Whereas under communism more than ninety percent of Poles were baptized Catholics, the liberal intelligentsia was traditionally ambivalent, if not hostile, to the Church, the Catholic bishops' (particularly Cardinal Wojtyła's) consistent defense of those persecuted by the regime made secular, pro-democratic dissidents feel they had a powerful ally in the struggle for human rights (Burakowski et al, 2021, pp. 61–64).

In other words, the Church was already vested with a large amount of soft power in Polish society upon Wojtyła's 1979 pilgrimage. The turnout only consolidated the Polish opposition's conviction that the Holy See was the greatest defender of their human rights and that they, as Ludwig Ring-Eifel put it, were now the main actors in their national history, while the communist functionaries were mere "extras" (Ring-Eifel, 2006, p. 165).

REJECTING *OSTPOLITIK*, INCREASING SOFT POWER

The third source of Nyean soft power, John Paul II's foreign policy, also increased the Church's standing behind the Iron Curtain.

Although the Holy See is the world's smallest state and occupies an area roughly one-seventh the terrain of Central Park, it exercises, as Stalin failed to understand, major moral authority, which can be the source of soft power in international relations. Thus, during World War II Pope Pius XII's perceived vagueness in condemning the atrocities of Nazi Germany against Roman Catholic Poles led to a major decline of the Vatican's moral standing and soft power in occupied Poland. Consequently, some Polish underground leaders called for a severing of diplomatic ties with the Holy See and the underground press accused Pius of "walking hand in hand with the Hitlerite… Fascists" (Lukas, 1986, pp. 16–17).

Similarly, from the late 1950s through the 1970s, during the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI, the Vatican pursued a new eastern policy based on compromise and accommodation, dubbed *Ostpolitik*. Under this foreign policy, the Holy See established diplomatic relations with communist states such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The policy rested on the assumption that Soviet domination of East-Central Europe would last for many years, and so it would

be more prudent to seek dialogue with communist regimes instead of confrontation, as for instance, during the pontificate of Pius XII. In order to negotiate better conditions for Catholics living behind the Iron Curtain, John XXIII and Paul VI muted criticism of human rights abuses in communist states and appointed bishops willing to accommodate with Marxist-Leninist regimes instead of hardliners like Cardinals Stefan Wyszyński in Poland, Josef Beran in Czechoslovakia, or Jozsef Mindszenty in Hungary (Weigel, 1992, pp. 74–76).

The Vatican's *Ostpolitik* led to a decline in its soft power among populations in the Soviet Bloc. In Hungary, for instance, Pope Paul VI's dismissal of Cardinal József Mindszenty, a courageous and outspoken critic of the Hungarian Stalinist regime who was jailed and tortured for years for defending the Hungarian nation, from his offices of Primate of Hungary and Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest led to outrage among Hungarian dissidents and emigres, decreasing the Vatican's soft power and distancing the nation's opposition from Catholicism (Balogh, 2021, pp. 646–647).

John Paul II, however, decisively broke with his predecessors' *Ostpolitik*. Less than three weeks after his election as pope, he said in Assisi, referring to Catholics persecuted by communist regimes: "There is no longer a Church of silence because it now the pope is its spokesman" (Skibiński, 2023, p. 31).

This was evident in 1984, for instance, when the pro-Solidarity priest Father Jerzy Popiełuszko was murdered by functionaries of the regime; John Paul II explicitly mentioned the priest's death, calling it a resurrection, and visited the former's tomb during a 1987 pilgrimage to Poland (Jones, 2018, p. 227).

Already in June 1979 the pope's rejection of his predecessors' *Ostpolitik* was praised by Adam Michnik, a secular, left-leaning Jewish dissident, in the underground press of the Workers' Defense Committee (Skibiński, 2020, p. 459).

Meanwhile, already before 1945 the Soviet Union's soft power was relatively weak in Poland, compared to Czechoslovakia or Germany, because of the Soviet Union's (and, more generally, Russia's) centuries-long aggressive, anti-Polish foreign policy. In the late eighteenth century, Muscovy took the largest share of Polish territory in the nation's partitions, while in 1920 Lenin unsuccessfully attempted to conquer the country. During World War II, not only Hitler but

also his then-ally Stalin invaded Poland; consequently, hundreds of thousands of Poles were deported to the Soviet interior, while the NKVD shot more than 21,000 Poles in the Katyn massacre alone (Burakowski et al, 2021, pp. 57–58).

The pope's rejection of an accommodating attitude towards communism was appreciated by anti-communist dissidents outside Poland as well. On June 3, 1979, John Paul II gave a sermon in Gniezno during which he explicitly defended the European and Christian identities of such captive nations as the Lithuanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians (Skibiński, 2020, p. 269). At other times, he invoked the Christian heritage and unique national identities of two national groups living behind the Soviet Union, the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians. Declassified KGB documents demonstrate that the Soviet secret services regarded such gestures as a threat. The KGB was disturbed, for instance, by the fact that shortly after the inauguration of his pontificate John Paul II invited Cardinal Josef Slipyj, head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, the largest underground Church in the world, for a private audience. The KGB thus considered the Polish pope's election to be an anti-Soviet provocation engineered by the CIA (Grajewski, 2023, pp. 34–41).

NYEAN SOFT POWER IS NOT REDUCTIONISTIC

One could reasonably argue that even if John Paul II played an important role in making the rise of the nonviolent Solidarity revolution in Poland, it would not suffice in bringing about tangible political change. After all, a Soviet invasion of the country could have just as easily crushed Solidarity as Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's respective "interventions" in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. By contrast, as communist control was slipping in Poland and, later, other East-Central European nations, Gorbachev decided to pursue the "Sinatra doctrine" and let his satellites undergo a political transition "their own way."

Meanwhile, the strongly anti-communist leadership of Ronald Reagan in the United States was another indispensable contributing factor to the liberation of East-Central Europe. Vladimir Lukhim, the former Soviet ambassador to the United States, has acknowledged that Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), President Reagan's ambitious

missile defense system, accelerated the Soviet collapse "by at least five years." Likewise, Genrikh Trofimenko, head of the Institute for U.S.A. and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has argued that SDI "was the most effective single act to bring [Gorbachev] to his senses" and realize that he could not win the Cold War (Kengor, 2006, pp. 300–301). The Reagan administration also pursued traditional hard power against the Soviet Bloc by, for example, imposing potentially crippling sanctions against Jaruzelski's regime in Poland, which were ultimately lifted after the protests of Solidarity and the Polish bishops (Domber, 2014, pp. 177–178).

Acknowledging the role of other factors than John Paul II's soft power in enabling peaceful political transition in East-Central Europe does not contradict the importance of soft power because Joseph Nye's concept is not reductionistic.

In reference to Niccolo Machiavelli's famous advice that it is better to be feared than to be loved, Nye writes that "in today's world, it is best to be both" (2004, p. 1). Nye notes that all the sources of power have their limits, observing that tanks are not an effective military resource in swamps or jungles, for instance, while coal and steel do not hold much economic power in a poorly industrialized nation. Similarly, the United States' soft power has its limits:

> Serbs eating at McDonald's supported Milosevic, and Rwandans committed atrocities while wearing T-shirts with American logos. American films that make the United States attractive in China or Latin America may have the opposite effect and actually reduce American soft power in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan (Nye, 2004, p. 12).

In other words, the effectiveness of soft power – as that of any kind of political power – all depends on context.

In response to his critics, over the years Nye repeated that soft power is "rarely sufficient by itself." The political scientist eventually coined the term "smart power," which he describes as the maximally efficient combination of hard and soft power. Nye cites the example of the People's Republic of China, which has increased its hard military and economic power, thus increasing its overall international political standing, but its failure to increase its soft power by improving its human rights record and promoting its culture causes its popularity in Asia to lag behind that of the United States, for instance. In Nye's

view, a key missing factor in China's aspiration to be a global power on par with the United States is soft power (2021, p. 10).

I propose naming the confluence of Pope John Paul II's soft power in Poland, Ronald Reagan's military and political hard power employed against the Soviet Union, and Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of non-intervention in East-Central Europe "providential smart power."

Whereas Nye defines smart power as the coordinated policy of a state, the abovementioned three actors did not coordinate their policies or enter into a formal alliance. Rather, it was the opportune confluence of these three leaders acting on the global stage between 1979 and 1991 that made the peaceful collapse of communist hegemony in East-Central Europe possible. The adjective "providential" also serves as a reference to the religious soft power exerted by John Paul II's Catholic Church in Poland.

CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, Joseph Stalin was correct in noting that the pope has no divisions, in the sense that the Vatican lacks economic and military resources, the traditional sources of hard power. Nevertheless, the rise of Solidarity in Poland and its ultimate triumph that led to the end of communist rule in the country and paved the way for similar political transformations across East-Central Europe demonstrates that the symbolic and cultural soft power exercised by the Holy See did have momentous political consequences.

However, while the success of Polish Solidarity demonstrates that we should not fall for the "Stalin trap" of reducing the factors political change to hard power, Joseph Nye himself notes that soft power rarely works alone in having transformative effects (2021, p. 10). While analyses of soft power usually focus on the actions of one political actor, the example of the collapse of communist hegemony in East-Central Europe demonstrates that sometimes the hard power of one or more actors combined with the soft power of others can coalesce to create an informal and unwitting, but nevertheless potent, smart power coalition.

Pope John Paul II's influence in Poland in 1979 is by no means the only religion-inspired political change in living memory; it suffices

to recall the Islamic revolution that took place in Iran that same year. A new model inspired by Joseph Nye's concept with the working name of providential smart power, detailed in this article using the example of Poland following the 1979 papal pilgrimage, can help scholars to grasp the role of religious soft power in political change while at the same time acknowledging the complementary influence of other factors.

References

Balogh, M. (2021). *"A Victim of History": Cardinal Mindszenty – A Biography*. A.T. Gane (Trans.). Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.

Burakowski, A., Gubrynowicz, A., & Ukielski, P. (2021). *1989. Jesień narodów*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

Caryl, C. (2013). *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century*. New York: Basic Books.

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Domber, G. (2014). *Empowering Revolution America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Gaddis, J.L. (2006). *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin Books.

Garton Ash, T. (2005, 4 April). *The First World Leader*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/04/catholicism.religion13 (accessed on 2nd June 2024).

Garton Ash, T. (2002). *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gorbachev, M. (1992, 9th March). *Pope Had a Key Role in Freeing Eastern Europe*. https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1992/03/09/pope-had-a-key-role-in-freeing-eastern-europe/ (accessed on 2nd June 2024).

Grajewski, A. (2023). Oczami wroga. *Biuletyn IPN, 10*(215), 34–41.

Ickx, J. (2022). *The Pope's Cabinet: Pius XII's Secret War for Saving Jews*. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press.

Jauer, J. (2011). *Urbi et Gorbi. Jak chrześcijanie wpłynęli na obalenie reżimu komunistycznego w Europie Wschodniej*. B. Moryl (Trans.). Warszawa: Akcent.

Jones, S.G. (2018). *A Covert Action: Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Kengor, P. (2006). *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Kubik, J. (1994). *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Lukas, R.C. (1986). *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939–1944*. New York: Hippocrene Books.

Mazur, K. (2017). Kraków: *Przekroczyć nowoczesność. Projekt polityczny ruchu społecznego Solidarność*. Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej.

Nye, J. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

Nye, J. (2021). Soft power: The evolution of a concept. *Journal of Political Power, 14*(1), 196–208. DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572

Petrowa-Wasilewicz, A. (2000). Kościelna Służba Porządkowa Archidiecezji Warszawskiej „Totus Tuus". In A. Petrowa-Wasilewicz (Ed.), *Leksykon ruchów i stowarzyszeń w Kościele* (pp. 277–279). Warszawa: Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna.

Ring-Eifel, L. (2006). *Światowa potęga Watykanu. Polityka współczesnych papieży*. T. Sotowska (Trans.). Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax.

Skibiński, P. (2023). Jan Paweł II i wielka polityka. *Biuletyn IPN*, *10*(215), 18–33.

Skibiński, P. (2020). *Odnowa tej ziemi. I pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Polski, czerwiec 1979*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

Tchakhotine, S. (1991). Tak zwana biała propaganda: mówi praktyka. In V. Volkoff (Ed.), *Dezinformacja. Oręż wojny*. A. Archiuch (Trans.) (pp. 26–49). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Delikon.

Staniszkis, J. (1984). *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Weigel, G. (1992). *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weigel, G. (1999). *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Wnuk-Lipiński, E. (2007). Meandry formowania się społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. *Chrześcijaństwo-Świat-Polityka*, *1*(2), 7–24.

Zaremba, M. (2023). *Wielkie rozczarowanie. Geneza rewolucji Solidarności*. Kraków: Znak Horyzont.