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Russian sacrifice: Poland

By Graham Bowley International Herald Tribune

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WARSAW In a early test of its relations with Russia, Poland's new government opened up on Friday previously sealed Warsaw Pact military archives, including a 1979 map showing Soviet plans to sacrifice Poland in the event of nuclear war with the West.

Just four weeks into power, the rightist government of President Lech Kaczynski is putting a priority on rebuilding relations with its big European neighbors, Germany and Russia, which were frayed during the time of the previous government, according to senior ministers interviewed here.

But the opening up of the archives now - a decade and a half after independence and 19 months after joining the European Union - reflects the new government's attempt to play to its more conservative, anti-Russian supporters and to underline Poland's break with its Communist past.

"This government wants to end the post-Communist period," said Radoslaw Sikorski, the defense minister. "It is crucial to educating the public in the way that Poland was kept as an unwilling ally in the Cold War. It is important for people to know who was the hero and who was the villain."

The 1,700 files, which have been kept in Warsaw's central military archives, include details of Operation Danube - the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by Warsaw Pact troops. The plans dating from 1979 were made at the height of Cold War tensions, coming at time when a new pope, John Paul II, was publicly pressing the Communist nations of Eastern Europe to grant greater freedoms.

At a press conference Friday, Sikorski unveiled a map showing hypothetical plans in the event of a NATO attack on Warsaw Pact nations which called for a Soviet counterattack that would have included the nuclear bombing of Munich, Brussels, Dutch ports and other targets. This in turn, according to Soviet military thinking, would precipitate NATO nuclear attacks on forces concentrated on the Vistula River, attacks that the Polish government now estimates would have killed two million Poles.

The map showed the widespread destruction of Western Europe, including mushroom clouds over key areas of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark. Cities such as Brussels would have been destroyed as Soviet troops advanced to the Western shores of the Continent, although Britain and France would have been left unscathed.

"Poland was being asked to participate in an operation that may have resulted in the destruction of Poland," said Sikorski, who came into the government from the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative research group in Washington.

Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz said that he supported the publication of the files and added that he doubted it would worsen relations with Russia.

"I think that opening all the files is an important element in discovering our history and also our international relations," he said in an interview with journalists here. "I am sure that all countries want to build their presents and futures on the truth."

After its sometimes radical pre-election rhetoric, the new government in Warsaw is trying to define itself in the eyes of the world, as well as prove its domestic stability since the governing Law and Justice Party has been forced to forge an alliance with two extreme radical groups.

Ministers interviewed here stressed that they would continue the policies of the previous government, including a strong commitment to European integration, economic reform and

balanced relations with Russia.

"The pre-election period in every country is a special period, not only in Poland," said Stefan Meller, the foreign minister. "I would like to assure you that this is without doubt a pro-European government and a government that wants to be perceived as pro-European."

But ministers also stressed that they would put renewed pressure on both Russia and Germany to reconsider the path of a multibillion-dollar gas pipeline to bring gas to Western Europe, an issue of sharp controversy between the three countries.

The decision by Russia and Germany to route the pipeline under the Baltic Sea rather than through Poland has exacerbated tensions between the countries, amid anxiety in Poland about its reliance on Russia for much of its energy needs and worries that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, could use Russia's energy resources to exert influence.

"The pipeline on the bottom of the Baltic might create environmental problems, since there are chemical weapons from the Second World War on the sea bottom," said Marcinkiewicz.

Poland's stance comes at a time of increasing tensions between Russia and the former Soviet vassal states on the Baltic, including some bitter border disputes. The new government wants to make forging stronger alliances between Poland and the Baltic countries a priority.

The Polish government, which is perceived as strongly pro-American, confirmed Friday that it would proceed with the withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq next year, a move that the previous government agreed to in talks with the United States and Britain.

Poland currently has about 1,400 troops in three southern provinces of Iraq. Sikorski and Meller are due to visit Washington next month, and they said a decision on the troop withdrawal would be made in December after the Iraqi elections set for Dec. 15. The withdrawal could come as early as January or February, they said. But Sikorski held out the possibility of a delay until next summer.

Sikorski also said that Poland would be eager to act as host to American military operations that might be moved from Germany. "If the U.S. is rethinking its global posture and global network of military bases, and there are facilities in Germany where I am told there is concern, then perhaps some of them could be more cheaply run in Poland," he said.

"I have a long list of mayors who would love to have U.S. bases, but it would be the U.S. that would have to take the initiative."

The government, which has promised higher social spending, has also faced questions from business about its openness to foreign investors and commitment to economic reform.

Earlier this month, the finance minister triggered a drop in the stock market after suggesting the government would resist further investment by foreign supermarkets in Poland.

She has since been shifted out of the public spotlight, but Marcinkiewicz added to the uncertainty on Friday when he suggested that the government might begin to favor domestic Polish investors more over foreign investors in Poland.

"We have concentrated on facilitating investment possibilities, mostly for creating good conditions for foreign investors," he said. "We want all investors to have equally good opportunities. I have never seen a foreign investor lose in Poland."

Sikorski said Warsaw Pact records held by the former nation of Czechoslovakia and Hungary had also been released, but Waldemar Wojcik, head of the central military archives in Warsaw, said Poland was the first Warsaw Pact country to release full records.

He said they were technically declassified a couple of years ago but had remained unseen.

Jan Rokita, a leader of the opposition party Civic Platform, said instability in the minority government, and particularly its reliance on extreme radical parties, could lead to a collapse of the government next year.

"It is very possible that we have a political crisis next year," said Rokita. "It could lead to a general election or a coalition between Civic Platform and Law and Justice."



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