



Poland risks ire of Russia over cold war files

By George Parker and Jan Cieski in Warsaw, Financial Times

Published: November 25 2005 20:42 | Last updated: November 25 2005 20:42

Poland on Friday risked inflaming tensions with Russia when it released 1,700 highly sensitive Warsaw Pact files, including a war game exercise that envisaged massive nuclear destruction in western Europe and Poland.

The new conservative government in Warsaw wants Poland to deal more firmly with its communist past, and Friday's opening of military files shows it is prepared to incur Moscow's wrath and confront those Poles who worked closely with the Soviet Union.

Warsaw has already protested to Moscow over plans to build a new Russo-German gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea that bypasses Poland, and over Russian restrictions on Polish meat exports.

Radoslaw Sikorski, Poland's defence minister, claimed the country had been "an unwilling ally of the Soviet Union in the cold war" and that being in the Warsaw Pact had put the country in mortal danger.

Mr Sikorski published a map showing Soviet bloc forces planning a "counter-attack" against Nato forces, in which the Soviets would have dropped nuclear bombs along a line from the Dutch coast to Strasbourg, wiping out cities in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

But the 1979 exercise also showed that Warsaw Pact planners believed such a conflict would have seen Nato target its nuclear bombs along the line of the Vistula river in Poland, to prevent Russian reinforcements reaching the front.

Mr Sikorski said: "The Polish army was being asked to take part in an invasion which could have resulted in a nuclear violation of our country."

"Poland is a country which would have been bombed out of existence." He claimed 2m Poles would have died in any conflict.

The military files handed over to Poland's Institute of National Remembrance also included details of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia to crush the "Prague Spring".

The release of the documents will reopen questions about the involvement of Polish communist-era politicians and soldiers in the Soviet-bloc alliance, 15 years after the country left the Warsaw Pact.

Poland agreed at that time never to release the Pact's military files but Mr Sikorski claims it never ratified the agreement. He also said Moscow was not alerted to the fact he intended to make the files public.

"We need to know our own history," he told journalists in Warsaw. "It's important for a democracy to know who was the hero and who was the villain. A morality tale has to be told."

The new Law and Justice party government's determination to accelerate the disclosure of communist-era files marks a shift from the previous ex-communist government of the Democratic Left Alliance, and comes at a sensitive time in relations between Poland and Russia.

Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, the new prime minister, played down suggestions that his fledgling government was stoking tensions with Moscow.

"All countries want to build their present and future on the truth and I'm sure this won't spoil our relations with Russia," he said.