



ARTYKUŁ

## **A ground-breaking visit, or a visit of ground-breaking times?**

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On the late evening of July 9th 1989, Air Force One with president George H. W. Bush and his wife Barbara on board landed at the Okęcie airport in Warsaw. An official visit of the fourth American president on Polish lands began, lasting two days.

Previously, Poland was visited by Richard Nixon (in 1972), Gerald Ford (in 1975) and Jimmy Carter (in 1977). Each of these visits gathered a lot of attention in the country over the Vistula river. Here were the leaders of one of the most powerful countries in the world, an oasis of freedom, for many years portrayed by the

communist propaganda as the “rotten west”, visiting from behind the iron curtain.

### **As Reagan’s vice president...**

Although George Bush visited Poland as the president of the USA, it was not his first visit in the country. Two years prior, in September 1987, he made a four-day trip to Poland as the deputy of Ronald Reagan.

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The places visited by the then vice president of the US, as well as people he was meeting with were closely watched by the Security Service as part of the securing of the visit codename “Tama-87”. More than a 1000 operational pictures, shot from hiding, showing Bush’s gestures, Solidarity banners and reactions of people who met with him.



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**A crowd in front of the church of St. Margaret the Virgin and Martyr in Łomianki. Vice president George Bush delivers a speech in the middle. Operational photo of the Security Service. September 27th 1987 (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)**



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**The grounds of the church of St. Stanisław Kostka in Warsaw. Vice president George H. W. Bush and Lech Wałęsa lay wreaths on the grave of priest Jerzy Popiełuszko. Operational photo of the Security Service. (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)**

**... and as the President of the USA**

Bush's visit in 1989 as the president was of entirely different character, a month after the free elections to

contract Sejm and Senate, just before the change of the government and the presidential elections. Under the circumstances of the galloping inflation and economic crisis at the time, Poles expected not only political support for the changes, but also the promise of real help. Unfortunately, in this regard, George Bush was reluctant already on board the plane.

The popularity of George Bush in Poland was best exemplified by the crowds of the citizens of Warsaw, which despite the late hour gathered along the route of the presidential column on the day of the arrival. The visit also gathered a lot of attention from the Polish and global press. It was covered by 700 journalists, including 400 American ones.

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On July 10<sup>th</sup> 1989, George Bush laid flowers in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and then met with the Jewish community by the *Umschlagplatz*. Then, he met at the Belweder palace with gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was then the President of the National Council. During the talks, he supposedly encouraged the general to take part in the elections for the President of Poland, fearing the democratic destabilisation in Poland and the eventual reaction of the Kremlin. At the same time, the first lady Barbara Bush visited the Centre for the Blind in Laski.

Next, the US ambassador in Poland organised an official breakfast for the two leaders, after which George Bush met with the Polish youth baseball team. In the afternoon, the president spoke in the Sejm in front of the National Assembly, where he expressed the support of the USA for the democratic changes in Poland, but also assured about the delay of the due date for Poland to pay off its debts and promised to appeal for new loans at the World Bank for the Polish agriculture.



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**Citizens of Gdańsk waiting for the arrival of the presidential couple by the Monument for the Fallen Shipyard Workers. Photo by Stanisław Składanowski. July 11th 1989 (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)**



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**Anti-communist demonstration of the "Fighting Solidarity" during the visit of president George Bush in Gdańsk. Protests near the Podwale Grodzkie Street, in the back part of the skyscraper called "Zieleniak". Photo by Stanisław Składanowski. July 11th 1989 (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)**

He then met with prime minister Mieczysław Rakowski and the representatives of the American press. He ended his first day of the visit with a solemn dinner at the Palace of the Council of Ministers with Mr and Mrs

Jaruzelski.

The one who got the most out of the visit was Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was in a way “anointed” as the next president of Poland by George Bush. However, it is worth stressing that in July 1989 no one was certain how far the changes in the eastern bloc would go, the USSR had to be taken into account before making any gestures.

Gdańsk became the arena for the third day of the visit, where the presidential couple went to the cathedral in Oliwa for an organ concert. George Bush was then invited for a breakfast at Lech Wałęsa’s home, from where they both went to the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers, where the American president laid a wreath. This point of the visit sparked the most emotions, the Solidarity movement printed several thousand leaflets inviting to the event. George Bush gave a speech to the gathered crowds, although the Polish authorities wanted to remove it from the program of the visit. The government finally cracked under pressure from the Americans. Bush’s speech, however, was very toned down as he stressed the importance of the Round Table talks and the engagement of both the Polish society and the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic.

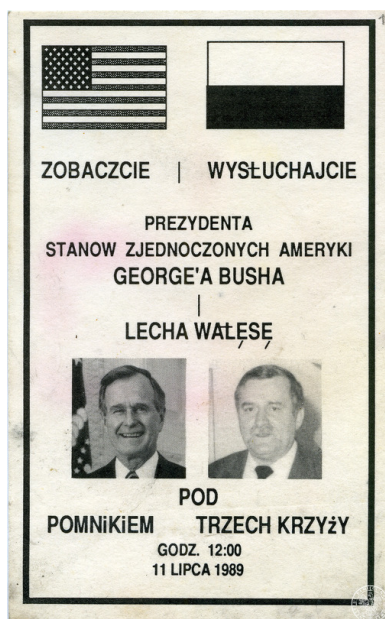
The last part of the program was the visit of both leaders at Westerplatte. After that, the US president flew to Budapest.



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**Ceremony of commemorative**

entry in the Golden Book of the City of Gdańsk by the president of the United States George H. W. Bush. In the first row, from the left: mayor of Gdańsk Rynkowski, President of the National Council Wojciech Jaruzelski, Barbara Bush and the president of the United States of America George H. W. Bush. Photo by Stanisław Składanowski. July 11th 1989 (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)



Leaflet/invitation to the meeting with the US president George Bush and the leader of the NSZZ "Solidarity" Lech Wałęsa, on July 11th 1989, in Gdańsk at the Monument for the Fallen Shipyard Workers. (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)

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George Bush's visit in Poland, in 1989, although taking place during ground-breaking times, was not ground-breaking on its own. The proposals of economic help were assessed as insufficient. The one who got the most out of the visit was Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was in a way "anointed" as the next president of Poland by George Bush. However, it is worth stressing that in July 1989 no one was certain how far the changes in the eastern bloc would go, the USSR had to be taken into account before making any gestures. Nonetheless, the fact that the president of the USA visited the country which was the first in this part of Europe to step on the road towards democratic changes, stressed the international importance of this process.



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**President of the USA George Bush raises his hands in the gesture of victory at the Monument for the Fallen Shipyard Workers. Photo by Bernard Skorowski. July 11th 1989 (Photo from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance)**