



NORTH ATLANTIC MILITARY COMMITTEE  
COMITE MILITAIRE DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD

Record - MC-CBX-24-81 (Plenary Session)

37

22 June 1981

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SUMMARY RECORD

24TH MEETING OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE IN 1981

Held on Thursday, 11 June 1981 at 1000 hours  
in the Situation Centre, (Presentation Room),  
NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium

PRESENT

- Chairman: Admiral R.H. Falls (for Part I, Item 1)  
Lieutenant General J.C. Zoutenbier (for Part I,  
Item 2 et seq)
- Belgium: Lieutenant General Y. Dedeurwaerder  
Canada: Lieutenant General R. Gutknecht  
Denmark: Lieutenant General P.O.W. Thorsen  
Germany: Lieutenant General E.D. Bernhard  
Greece: Lieutenant General E. Papaefstathiou  
Italy: Vice Admiral G. Fantoni  
Luxembourg: Colonel P. Bergem  
Netherlands: Lieutenant General J.C. Zoutenbier (for Part I, Item 1)  
Captain O. den Boeft (for Part I, Item 2 et seq)  
Norway: Major General Ole Mißen  
Portugal: Lieutenant General J. Ferreira Valente  
Turkey: Vice Admiral S. Ergin  
United Kingdom: Admiral Sir Anthony Morton  
United States: Colonel H.M. Reed, II
- Director, IMS: Air Marshal Sir Alan Davies

ALSO PRESENT

French Military Mission: Général de Corps d'Armée P. Crousillac

H.J. OTTO  
Colonel, GEAR  
Acting Secretary, IMS

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PART I      PLENARY SESSION

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Item 1      SUPPLEMENTARY BRIEFING BY THE INTELLIGENCE  
DIVISION, IMS (NU)

After introducing Colonel Friedman, the Chairman asked Members to take particular note of the briefing as the Secretary General had asked for a special paper to be prepared on the military situation in and around Poland, to be distributed prior to a meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 8 July 1981. Provided Members agreed with the substance of the briefing this would form the basis of the paper and it would be updated later as required.

Colonel Friedman briefed the Military Committee(1).

The Canadian Member thanked the Intelligence Division, IMS, for the excellent briefing and agreed with the proposal that the briefing should be used as the basis for the paper to be distributed to Members of the North Atlantic Council.

The German Member commented that the briefing was interesting both in its content and scope. He said he had recently received a report that there were indications that within a week a command post exercise would take place in Czechoslovakia and that this might extend into Poland and continue until early July 1981. Should he receive any further information on the subject, he undertook to inform the Intelligence Division.

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(1) Amended version to be issued in the near future.

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The Chairman emphasised the importance of providing for the Intelligence Division any information which became available, so that all Members were informed and the paper was kept up to date.

The United Kingdom Member commented that the briefing, even if realistic, appeared to be somewhat cautious. Furthermore it contrasted sharply with the perception which he had held for some months that the Warsaw Pact was ready to move in strength at short notice. He suggested that the paper should indicate how the significant change in the state of readiness compared to December 1980 had come about as it was probable that Ambassadors were still under the impression that the Warsaw Pact was ready to invade at 48 hours' notice. He said he also saw merit in the IMS or the International Staff taking account of economic and political indicators; for example the rationale now being presented by the Soviet press for what was occurring in Poland differed considerably from earlier explanations of what was taking place and he considered that this merited a mention in the paper. Similarly the economic situation had become much worse since December 1980 and he believed that any assessment of military capabilities would be incomplete if such political and economic indicators were not taken into account; they should also be presented to the Ambassadors.

The Chairman said that while he was in complete agreement with the United Kingdom Member's thoughts on the need to explain the changes which had occurred in the Warsaw Pact's state of readiness, various events had already lead him to believe that a reduction in the Warsaw Pact's readiness had been taking place. He also agreed that Ambassadors would wish to take account of political and economic indicators; these he assumed would be produced for them by the International Staff.

The Danish Member said he considered it would be worthwhile to develop the briefing further. He proposed that, although it was not needed immediately, an assessment should be made of how long it would take to subjugate Poland and what the military consequences of this would be for the Warsaw Pact as a whole, as he considered that this might be the situation with which NATO could be faced in the long term.

The Belgian Member asked for information on the Warsaw Pact's capability to use airborne divisions in an intervention as this had not been mentioned in the briefing.

The Briefer replied that the Soviets had Airborne Divisions which could be capable of intervening at short notice in Poland. There were two Airborne Divisions based in the Western USSR adjacent to Poland; one was at Uitzbsk (Beyerloruss SSR). Although the Division from Uitzbsk was engaged in Afghanistan there was another Division in the Odessa Military District which could also be employed. The Soviets had a total of seven Airborne Divisions and it was expected

that at least one Airborne Division would be employed in any invasion and certainly in a medium or full scale one, with possible two being used in a full scale intervention; they would probably be used to secure airfields and key facilities. He then drew the attention of Members to the timings which had been given in the briefing which were, in this case, preparation times and not warning times. In December 1980 the Intelligence Division had commented on the readiness of airborne forces and, following the semi-annual troop rotation, there had been a degradation in readiness and thus the preparation time had also changed.

The Chairman asked if it would be possible to comment on what form an intervention might take as this would assist in the efficient use of intelligence gathering resources.

The United Kingdom Member asked whether it was known when the significant airborne activity which had been reported in the Odessa area had ceased, or what had happened at the end of the Command Post Exercise which had been reported on frequently. He considered that it was important for the paper to make clear the differences between warning and preparation time and for past events to be extrapolated so that a clear picture of the issues was presented to Ambassadors.

The Chairman added that nothing more had been briefed concerning the regiments of helicopters which had been moved into Poland and asked if they had been withdrawn.

The German Member, returning to his Belgian colleague's questions about airborne forces, stressed the importance of addressing the airborne capability and identifying the whereabouts of the helicopters. History showed that the Soviet Union was likely to make use of such forces in the initial stages of an intervention and as they were readily identifiable by intelligence resources, he considered that they should be included in the Warsaw Pact's Category A capability and an assessment of their probable tasks should be provided.

The Briefer replied that two new formations had been identified since 1 January 1981 in the area around Poland. The Committee had already been briefed about the Soviet Assault Helicopter Regiment which was based at Brzeg in Poland. The other was the Soviet Air Assault formation which was at Oromou Lazne in Czechoslovakia. There was general agreement among national intelligence analysts that the move of the Helicopter Regiment was a permanent deployment which might or might not have been related to a future intention to mount an intervention. These two formations could be part of the restructuring of Soviet forces now underway.

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As regards the Soviet Air Assault formation, there was a continuing reorganisation of the Soviet Forces which the Committee had been briefed about previously, and it was not clear if this formation had been affected by the general reorganisation or whether it had been deployed as a result of the Polish situation.

Since early January 1981 these airborne units had, on occasions, been observed going through procedures which would be normal prior to a move and this had been reported to the Committee. It was generally agreed by intelligence observers that airborne units would be employed in all the scenarios envisaged for an intervention and he suggested that, as a preliminary measure, they might be used for security purposes to augment the existing Soviet forces in Poland. Alternatively they might be used in the normal airborne role to secure airfields, centres of communication and vital points needed to facilitate the movement of large forces into Poland.

The Netherlands Member endorsed his Belgian Colleague's proposal for more information to be included on the airlift capacity and asked for this to be extended to cover the available sea lift assets. Commenting that the three possible scenarios which had been developed were reasonable, he drew attention to the apparent requirement for all Soviet divisions based in East Germany to be used if the second or third scenarios became realities and he asked if any assessment had been made to determine which troops might be allocated to a particular scenario.

The Briefer replied that there was no information available to indicate which divisions would be employed in any particular type of intervention. Turning to the air lift and sea lift capabilities, he said that these had remained unchanged however it must be assumed that if naval infantry forces were used they would be deployed by sea. Pointing out the desirability of having a separate briefing dedicated principally to identifying the transport assets available, he concluded by saying that it was generally assumed that the majority of forces likely to be used would be ground forces augmented by airborne forces in an air assault role, with the majority of movement being by surface transport including rail.

The Danish Member announced that he had received a study made by the Danish Intelligence Authorities which was being passed to the IMS. The study included addressing under a variety of scenarios such subjects as the possible use of air and naval forces, likely timings and the reaction anticipated along the Polish coast.

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The Chairman proposed that the Intelligence Division should be tasked to take account of the various additions which had been proposed by Members and should reproduce the briefing for the Committee, either in oral or written form, before it was transmitted to the Council. Pointing out that it would not be necessary to distribute copies of the current briefing as was normal, he asked Members for their agreement to this course of action.

The Belgian Member said that although he was generally in agreement that the paper with the additions mentioned would be satisfactory, the subject was sufficiently important for the Committee to spend more time on it. He suggested that a display of indicators and warnings had not been provided for some time and the Committee should be briefed on this subject. Referring to the apparent failure of the Soviet Union to influence the political course of events at the session of the Polish Communist Party's Central Committee on the preceding day, he warned that this failure to solve the problem politically could mean that the Soviet Union might resort to other means. He therefore cautioned against making too many elaborate preparations for a briefing to be given in about four weeks time since otherwise it might be overtaken by events.

The Chairman, while agreeing with the Belgian Member's views, pointed out the desirability of starting work on the briefing as it might be required earlier than was currently anticipated. He recorded a consensus that the Intelligence Division should present a revised briefing at the Committee's next weekly meeting.

THE COMMITTEE TOOK NOTE.

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