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NORTH ATLANTIC MILITARY COMMITTEE
COMITÉ MILITAIRE DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD

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The Chairman
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CMCM-11-81

30 June 1981

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY GENERAL, NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

SUBJECT: Military Appreciation on the Current Situation in Poland

1. Attached herewith please find a Military Appreciation on the situation in Poland.

2. This paper has been prepared in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Council last month and is designed to serve as a background document for the discussion scheduled to take place on 8 July.

3. I have attached sufficient copies to allow for distribution to Ambassadors and to your staff.

R.H. FALLS
Admiral, CF
Chairman, Military Committee

1 Enclosure

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ENCLOSURE TO CMCM-11-81

A MILITARY APPRECIATION

ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN POLAND

This paper seeks to assess Soviet military capabilities in and around Poland, especially with regard to reacting to a Soviet political decision to intervene militarily in that country. In particular it attempts to determine how quickly the Soviet military forces could react to such a decision, and in what strength they could intervene.

The main factors involved in a consideration of Soviet military preparedness for operations in Poland are:

- combat readiness;
- combat efficiency;
- logistic support posture;
- troop morale; and
- employment of other Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces.

In order to discuss the various possibilities, we should note first the disposition of Soviet and NSWP forces currently in and around Poland. The Soviets have 2 Divisions stationed in Poland as part of the Northern Group of Forces; 19 Divisions plus 2 Brigades in the GDR; 5 Divisions in the Central Group of Forces (Czechoslovakia); and 4 in the Southern Group of Forces (Hungary). All are Category A. There is 1 Category A Division in each of the 3 Western Military Districts of the USSR,

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including the Carpathian Military District which has a reduced Category A Division. In the Baltic Military District there are 3 Category B Divisions and 6 Category C Divisions. The Belorussian Military District has 1 Category B Division and 9 Category C Divisions, while the Carpathian Military District has 3 Category B Divisions and 8 Category C Divisions. Thus, there are 30 Category A Soviet Divisions in the Groups of Forces comprising the forward area and in the Western Military Districts there are 3 more Category A Divisions, 7 Category B Divisions and 23 Category C Divisions. Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces are as follows:

Poland, 10 Category A, 3 Category B and 2 Category C; GDR has 6 Divisions, all Category A; Czechoslovakia 7 Category A Divisions, 3 Category C; Hungary has 3 Divisions in Category A, 2 in Category B and 1 Category C Division.

There are a number of questions which must be addressed in order to analyse Soviet military capabilities, or, at least, the analyst must be prepared to make some assumptions at the outset since the speed and size of a Soviet reaction to a Polish contingency would depend upon what Soviet contingency forces would be required to accomplish, and which forces would be employed. To examine several examples, if the Soviets planned to augment the two Northern Group of Forces Divisions already in place in Poland in order to enhance Soviet Security only, it is estimated that this could be accomplished within 24-48 hours with 3-5 divisions.

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If the Soviets desired to introduce a mid-size contingency force of from 15-20 divisions to support a Polish national effort, for example, to impose martial law, approximately 10 days to 2 weeks would be required to prepare the forces. A full invasion force, comprised of 30 or more divisions, designed to impose a military solution on Poland would require 2-3 weeks of preparation time.

In all these cases NATO's warning time would be less than the preparation time stated. With regard to readiness, the Soviet combat forces which would most likely be employed in Poland, are in what is considered to be a normal state of readiness. That is to say they are engaged in training activities considered normal for this time of year. The only Soviet troops who can be considered to have been on continual "alert" status since last year are a limited number of Signal Troops. The signal formations have been operating and continue to operate a contingency command and control communications network. There are no recent reports of military formations in the Groups of Forces or the Western Military Districts currently at other than seasonal normal levels of readiness.

While increased readiness has been detected from time to time in various Soviet formations, such increased readiness has not been concurrent throughout the area surrounding Poland and it has not, in the aggregate, involved all of the forces simultaneously that would be expected to be committed to a military intervention. Since last September, the Soviets have exercised selected elements and command

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headquarters of an intervention force, and, as a consequence, their overall preparedness to conduct a military intervention has been increased. However, the state of overall readiness has remained normal, and, upon analysis, it is doubtful whether their potential "combat efficiency" is any different than it would be in normal times.

Although the Soviets have done little in the way of exercising the total logistic support structure which would be required for a full scale military intervention, there are sufficient logistic resources already available in the Groups of Forces, as well as in the Western Military Districts to support all options, including a full scale intervention. The latter option or a mid-contingency option, would require some mobilization activity of AVTOKOLLONA, or army and Front level logistics units. Todate, no such mobilization activity has been detected.

The readiness and efficiency of Soviet forces is a function of, and is directly dependent upon, not only the category of the individual formations, but also upon the amount of time which has passed since the most recent troop rotation. The Autumn 1980 and Spring 1981 troop rotations have been assessed as normal two-way movements with no anomalies reported in the conduct of the rotation in any of the areas around Poland. As mentioned, all Soviet units in the Groups of Forces are Category A and by now should largely have overcome many of the adverse effects of a semi-annual rotation of approximately 23 percent of the force. The

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7 Category B Soviet Motorized Rifle and Tank Divisions in the Western Military Districts would require 10 days to 2 weeks to achieve an appropriate level of readiness for intervention. The 24 Category C units, some of which would be needed for a full-scale invasion would require 2-3 weeks. Since there are no NATO objective standards by which we can measure efficiency, one must assume that peak efficiency is normally reached towards the end of the current training cycle. A Soviet intervention prior to that time would be likely to suffer some proportional loss in efficiency.

Turning to the question of morale in Soviet Forces, it must be kept in mind that troop morale in Category A units is not now, or expected to be in the future, a limiting factor. There have been some reports concerning leave and movement restrictions for Soviet (as well as national) personnel in Poland as well as GDR and Czechoslovakia. In general, these restrictions seem to fall more heavily on signal troops maintaining contingency communications and, of course, this could ultimately have an adverse effect on morale. It is also likely that Soviet forces stationed in Poland have felt the effects of the crisis more severely than other Soviet forces, because of movement restrictions and the more openly hostile attitude of the Polish people. However, in general, their morale is assessed to be normal. A large-scale mobilization of reservists required to bring Category B and C units up to strength could introduce some local loss of efficiency and lower morale, but these elements would be unlikely to degrade seriously the overall effectiveness of any intervention.

Since 1 January 1981, only two new Soviet formations have been identified in or near Poland. One is a new Soviet Assault helicopter regiment, now permanently installed in BRZEG, Poland and the other a Soviet Air Assault unit at OROMOV LAZNE in Czechoslovakia. Because of an ongoing restructuring of Soviet combat forces, it cannot be determined precisely, at this time, if these two formations are related to the internal situation in Poland or are part of the ongoing restructuring of the Soviet military establishment.

It is likely that some Soviet Airborne forces would be employed in any military intervention in Poland. In a full-scale intervention, for example, it is likely, as a minimum, that an Airborne Division, plus the airborne formations organic to other forces, would be employed in the classic role of airborne forces: to secure airfields, key communications and terrain features. In the mid-contingency, airborne elements would also add mobility and shock power to the conventional ground elements. In the security role, airborne elements could have the same mission as above plus a forward contingency mission in the event later reinforcements would be required. It is expected that airborne forces would be deployed by air transport.

In the event that Naval Infantry were to be employed, along Poland's Baltic coast, it is likely they would be moved by sea. While some Soviet (and NSWP) forces could also be deployed by air transport, it is more likely that the majority would move by rail and road transportation in

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order to provide a rapid "saturation" effect and to avoid problems incident to moving large numbers of inexperienced ground troops and equipment and concentrating them, for a time, on or near airfields.

With respect to the question of employment of other Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces which might be designated or "earmarked" for a contingency in Poland, we have not received any information that specific Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact units have been so identified, although it is expected that some Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces would be employed to give any intervention the appearance of Warsaw Pact solidarity. Most National Intelligence analysts doubt that any major intervention role is envisaged for Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces.

It should be clear that the Soviets have a number of options for military intervention in Poland, as well as adequate resources to support any option they may select. The Soviet military leaders have rehearsed their staffs, communications and selected elements which they believe would be required to initiate any of the possible scenarios. It is not possible to determine which of the options would be the most likely one to be employed; indeed, it is probable that at this juncture the Soviet military leaders themselves have not decided. In all probability, such a decision will be dictated largely by events at the time of decision. In accordance with long-standing doctrine and practice, Soviet leadership has reserved for itself the maximum flexibility in the number of options available, confident that a suitable choice can be made when necessary.

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CONCLUSION

The last nine months have borne witness to an unusual series of events in Poland. Major political changes, unprecedented in Eastern Europe in recent years have been accomplished with a minimum of violence, yet the underlying factors which brought about the changes remain themselves essentially unchanged. The Polish authorities who have been pursuing various policies of expedience, (while the Soviets have, to a degree, temporized), seem unable to address fundamental popular grievances. This suggests to many observers that the Poles may be running out of time while the Soviets may be running out of patience.

The Soviets have put the time elapsed since last Autumn to some good use. The necessary military plans and initial preparations for military intervention have been accomplished. In the accomplishment and rehearsal for possible military intervention, Soviet activities must be considered as not only directed toward increasing preparedness for possible military intervention, but also as a form of "posturing" designed to put pressure on the Poles, hopefully sufficient to discourage them from continuing a course of action making intervention necessary.

The military situation in Poland proceeded from October 1980 through January 1981 from a condition that has, in recent years, been considered to be normal, up to a high level of activity and readiness and then, back again to seasonal norms. We have observed normal and routine activity continuing through the Soviet Troop Rotation period

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of April-May 1981. During the end of June and through July and August, 1981 it is likewise normal to expect an increase in the level and intensity of out-of-garrison training, field training exercises and movement of troops in and around Poland. Since some of this activity will occur contemporaneously with the forthcoming Polish Party Congress, and other related political activity, it is natural that such military activity may again increase speculation concerning possible intervention. Since it is difficult to distinguish between normal seasonal training at the higher levels and what could be the initial stages of intervention, and also, as the proficiency of potential intervention forces increases with the effects of time and training, the military situation will have to be watched with great care, and analysed together with political and other indicators, in order to arrive at a timely and accurate forecast of events.

As set forth in the foregoing intelligence assessment, in order for the Soviets to initiate a military intervention into Poland, the necessary preparation time could range anywhere from 24 hours to 3 weeks, depending upon:

- the specific mission of the intervention force;
- the size and composition of the selected forces;
- the precise time at which an intervention would be initiated; and
- the posture of the selected forces, at the time of an intervention.

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Thus, should a decision to intervene be implemented soon, say in early July, with Soviet forces as they now stand, the longer preparation period might apply. As Soviet forces progress further into their training cycle, or, should a more intensive training mode be adopted, the time required in preparation of the forces would decrease proportionally. Should a decision to intervene be implemented while large numbers of the forces are in field-training or manoeuvre posture, the preparation time could be reduced dramatically, as much of the preparation would have been accomplished through activities associated with the manoeuvres. In any case, NATO's warning time would always be less than any preparation time which might be postulated.

MILITARY COMMITTEE JUDGEMENT

It is the judgement of the Military Committee, as experience has demonstrated, that Soviet military intervention is characterized by speed, secrecy and great force, immediately following a political decision that Soviet interests require such action. This, in turn, poses a dilemma for the Soviets as in order to prepare and dispatch any sizeable force, and despite imposition of rigorous security measures, some preparation actions would be expected to provide an advance warning of such an intervention and would provide, as it has in the past, time for NATO political reaction to take place.