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To : Secretary General  
c.c.: Deputy Secretary General  
ASG, Political Affairs  
From : Executive Secretary

Summary Record of a Restricted meeting of the Council  
held on Friday, 3rd April, 1981 at 10.15 am

I. THE SITUATION IN POLAND

[Redacted]



T. ÖZCERI

NATO SECRET

N A T O       S E C R E T

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FR(81)26

ATTENDANCE

Restricted

AGENDA

Yes

MEETING PLACE

Presentation Room

N A T O       S E C R E T

-2-

I.     THE SITUATION IN POLAND

1.       The UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE said that his colleagues would certainly be aware that the concern felt in Washington with respect to developments in Poland had heightened during the last 24 hours. For the first time, an article in Pravda had criticised the Polish Communist Party, accusing it of handling badly the situation at Warsaw University. This was a worrying development. On the other hand, reports from the United States Embassy in Warsaw suggested that the situation in the city was now less tense and that activity in the streets was normal. However, there had been large scale military exercises in and around Poland and these had not yet come to an end.

2.       In Washington, it had been concluded that Soviet and other Warsaw pact forces were now ready to intervene in Poland within 48 hours and could move more quickly than that. The evidence took the form of preparations for movement, new Soviet deployments in the Western Military Districts of the USSR, a new high level of readiness assigned to Soviet, GDR and Czechoslovak combat units, preparations for a possible GDR amphibious landing in Poland and palletisation of stores for two airborne divisions. In addition, one tank division was preparing to deploy in the Byelorussian Military District. A sizeable force was available to move if required. It was not possible to say whether any movement order had been issued; in any case, it might not be possible to detect such an order.

3.       Elements of a number of forces had been placed in a general state of readiness. Of course, intentions could not be judged from capabilities but there was no doubt that the state of readiness had been heightened.

4.       The CHAIRMAN saw this as alarming information, coming as it did in addition to new and disquieting press reports.

5.       The CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVE informed his colleagues that he had heard from the Canadian Ambassador to Moscow on 1st April that the picture of Polish events presented to the Soviet public was one of a serious challenge to the authorities from the Solidarity movement and of a threat of anarchy. There were also allegations of United States interference in Polish affairs, a theme which TASS continued to press. This public picture perhaps represented the preparation of the background for an intervention.

6.       The factors militating against an intervention had not changed but to judge from the picture given to the Soviet public, the Kremlin must now regard the cohesion and grip on the situation of the Polish Communist Party as very tenuous.

7.       The DANISH REPRESENTATIVE said that he had received similar reports from the Danish Embassy in Moscow. It was true that recent criticisms in Pravda of the Polish Party were particularly disturbing although it might be noted that they concerned the local leadership of the party in Warsaw and not of the Polish Party as a whole. In his opinion, the key to the Soviet judgement of the situation would be the opinion formed by the Soviet leaders on the degree of control of the situation exercised by the Polish Party.

8.       The UNITED KINGDOM REPRESENTATIVE then summarised a report which he received from the British Ambassador to Warsaw. On 4th March, Mr. Kania and General Jaruselski had been told that it was their task to reverse trends in Poland and the Soviets must then have expected some results; they must have seen Bydgoszcz as a test case and clearly, they would regard Solidarity as embarking upon a challenge to the power of the state. In Soviet terms, such a challenge

implied a irreconcilable conflict.

9. The Ambassador had continued to speculate that the Soviets would conclude that the Polish Party had compromised too much. Worst of all, perhaps, they would have noted that the time-table for the Polish Party Congress had been laid down before the Party had restored its internal cohesion. The Kremlin must now fear that the Polish leadership had lost the initiative and that by July, Poland might be under the influence of a widely-based reform movement. The Soviet leaders now had three options available to them: firstly, they could make a further attempt to stiffen the present leadership; secondly, they could instal a new hard line leadership in Warsaw; and thirdly, they could undertake a military intervention.

10. In the view of the British Ambassador to Poland, it was most likely that the primary objective for Moscow would be to assert control over the Polish Party, but the Soviets might feel that it was too late to do this. The Kremlin might well regard the installation of a harder-line leadership as an attractive option, even if it meant engineering a coup in Warsaw. A new Soviet/Polish or Warsaw Pact Summit meeting might be needed to keep up the pressure on Warsaw.

11. It seemed probable that avoiding the use of force retained a high priority for Moscow, but the Soviet leaders could be expected to see the limits to political pressure. An intervention could come at any time; whether and if so, when, it would take place, would depend on the Poles. There remained a possibility that the Soviet leaders would gradually accept a greater degree of liberalisation if no general strike took place in Poland - but the stakes were high.

12. The probable western reactions to an intervention constituted a deterrent but were not decisive. They would be more effective if balanced by a positive alternative presented by the West. Such an alternative could take the form of economic assistance to Poland but could also be embodied in the responses to Mr. Brezhnev's recent letters. The point could be made that if there was no intervention, dialogue remained possible.

13. The NETHERLANDS REPRESENTATIVE, referring to military preparedness, asked about the situation with regard to communications. He also wondered whether fourteen divisions would be enough to initiate an intervention. Finally, he commented that a date for an intervention was to be set, it would probably be 17th April, this date being just before the western Easter holidays.

14. The UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE said that his information was that 16 to 20 Soviet and other Warsaw Pact divisions were prepared to intervene within 48 hours. As for communications, an extensive net had been set up in connection with recent exercises and no doubt it remained in place.

15. The CHAIRMAN of the MILITARY COMMITTEE agreed. The figure of 14 divisions was correct but referred only to Soviet divisions in the Western Military Districts. It excluded airborne formations as well as Czechoslovak and GDR units. He could also confirm that the command and control network established for Soyuz 81 was still in effect.

16. One unexpected factor in the situation was the presence of RO-RO troop carrying merchant ships with GDR units embarked. No doubt this deployment represented part of Soyuz 81 but it was unusual to use GDR troops in this area and certainly, it could be regarded as antagonistic to Poland. This deployment seemed unnecessarily tactless.

17.       The GERMAN REPRESENTATIVE said that the reports made available by the German Embassy in Warsaw were similar to the one mentioned earlier by his Canadian colleague. As for the Soviet Union, he would recall that Mr. Genscher was at present in Moscow. He had not yet heard detailed reports on this visit but public statements were already available. It was clear that the Soviet media were mounting a campaign against Solidarity, the KOR and so on - including accusations of being "counter revolutionary" - but this was nothing new. The German authorities were unlikely to reach any firm conclusions until Mr. Genscher had finished his talks in Moscow. When they did, he would ensure that his colleagues were informed immediately.

18.       The CHAIRMAN, concluding the discussion on this point, said that the information given was of an alarming nature. There were reports of ominous military movements around Poland together with a campaign mounted in the Soviet Union and designed to suggest that the stability of the Socialist order in Poland was threatened. No doubt members of the Council would wish to maintain close consultations.

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