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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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SPECIAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE

October 23, 1980

Time and Place: 10:00 - 11:15 a.m.  
White House Situation Room

Subject: Polish Contingencies

Participants:

State

Secretary Edmund Muskie  
Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher

OSD

Secretary Harold Brown  
Deputy Secretary W. Graham Claytor, Jr.

JCS

General David Jones  
Lt. General John Pustay

DCI

Mr. Frank Carlucci, Deputy Director

White House

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski  
Mr. David Aaron

NSC

Mr. Marshall Brement

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Dr. Brzezinski: The President has asked us to hold this meeting to deal with the possibility of a Soviet invasion of Poland. We will therefore not bother discussing the likelihood of such an event, but will rather proceed on the assumption that the Soviets

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are about to invade or have invaded. The question is how we would react. Perhaps a useful way to hold the discussion would be to divide it into two parts. The first would be what we would do if we were able to get some advance warning. The second would be how we would react once such an invasion actually took place. The paper you have before you posits two scenarios for a Soviet intervention. The first would be one which is accompanied by a minimum level of violence. The second consists of a large scale invasion with considerable bloodshed. I think this is a useful distinction because the degree of violence would condition public response abroad.

Secretary Brown: And here too.

Dr. Brzezinski: That's right, and here as well, It therefore might be useful to keep this distinction in mind. Is it agreeable to proceed this way?

Brown: I would only note that the very first scenario, i.e., what we would do before an invasion occurs, would also entail a whole spectrum of possible reactions. We could have clear indications that an invasion is about to take place or they could be quite vague. Obviously, the nature of our reaction would be conditioned accordingly.

Brzezinski: In Czechoslovakia there was only limited warning that the Soviets were really about to invade.

Ambassador Carlucci: That's right. We think that in the event of a full invasion of 30 odd divisions or more that we would have eight to ten days warning. However, if the invasion were a comparatively limited one, we think they could mount a sixteen division force within four days. This would only give us three days warning.

Brzezinski: I'm rather inclined to think that the first of the invasion scenarios, i.e., support for an internal coup, is more likely. In fact, I think that if Reagan wins the Soviets might well decide to move in December, thereby taking advantage of the interregnum. The Polish General Staff would not be ready to stop the Soviets. Furthermore, it would be cold and this would impede popular reaction.

Carlucci: I think the Soviets are leery of the Polish army.

Brzezinski: There would probably only be disorganized resistance, and I doubt that the army would be that much of a factor, although individual units might fight. The General Staff probably does not even have plans to handle a Soviet invasion. The Polish army faces westward and it would be difficult, if not impossible for it to handle an invasion from the East. The Soviets could probably do the job in two days.

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Carlucci: One thing that seems to be missing from the paper is a statement of overall objectives. We have no criteria by which to measure the various actions proposed.

Brzezinski: That is a good point.

Secretary Muskie: I have no objection to the paper as it stands or to proceeding as outlined, but I would like to note that my people feel that the most likely course of events would be for the Soviets to engineer the overturn of Kania and then replace him with a more amenable leadership in the hope that this new leadership would accomplish Soviet aims. Only as a last resort would such a leadership call on the Soviets for armed assistance. Another point I would like to make is that this subject has been discussed generally by the Quadripartite group, which has drawn up its own list of contingency steps. We have also produced an analysis of events for the Quad.

Brzezinski: The Quad contingency list was considered in drawing up this paper.

Muskie: Steps which might be taken by the allies have also been discussed at the Quad, and it might be useful to distribute the Quad contingency paper to all of you here. In any case, I think we ought to take this into consideration. (The paper is circulated.)

Brzezinski: It might be best at this stage to go through the list of contingency actions item by item. We will start with the first scenario -- i.e., those steps which are intended to deter an imminent Soviet invasion. Are there any general comments?

Brown: Isn't the key to get the Allies to move? Our problem is, or will be, that if we get too far ahead of the Allies, it will look very bad for us. We cannot be too far ahead, but we cannot be behind either.

Muskie: The Quad agreed that reaction among the allies would be far stronger than it was to Afghanistan. An important factor will be whether Eastern European actions against Poland are coordinated with the Soviets, as they were in Czechoslovakia.

Brzezinski: As we go through this list, we might consider the items under four broad categories: 1. those which strike us as unacceptable; 2. those which have to be refined; 3. new measures which occur to us; and 4. measures which should be undertaken at this point.

David Aaron: The real question is what political objectives we can achieve. We will not be able to deter the Soviets once

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they have made up their mind to invade Poland. The three objectives which occur to me are: to punish the Soviets; to bolster the Europeans; and to enhance third world reaction.

Muskie: I think another possibility would be to deter the Soviets. They may be in doubt about Allied coherence. Every evidence we can give them of Allied unity would be a deterrent factor. In that context, it would make good sense to coordinate our own planning with that of the Quad.

Brzezinski: Let's proceed with the list. In terms of political actions, demarches to the Soviets (1a) would have to be made, but certainly not at this stage. Whether we would publicize them or not (1b) would have to be decided at the time. As for CSCE (1c), perhaps we ought to be making our position clear right now as to how an invasion of Poland would affect our view of it. Maybe we ought to have a smaller group look at this question.

Muskie: This would be a good question to refer to the Quadripartite group.

Brzezinski: A hot line message (1d) would obviously be a last minute step.

Aaron: A decision has to be taken now as to what an invasion of Poland would really mean to us.

Brzezinski: Perhaps we need something like the Johnson speech after Czechoslovakia. We might have the Quad group look at this whole question. With regard to UN action (1e and 1f), this could only take place when we are sure they are about to make a move. How about consultation with Romania and Yugoslavia (1g)?

Brown: What would you say? Tell them that there is not much we can do in this case, but we will do much better the next time, when your turn comes?

Brzezinski: At least in terms of Yugoslavia we have the capability of reinforcing them. Convening a special ministerial session of the North Atlantic Council (1h) would be a good idea and a useful signal of serious concern prior to an invasion. Warnings to the Soviets that an invasion would mean a destruction of remaining economic relations with the USSR (2a) would be part of a message to be sent on the eve of such an invasion. Now what about military actions?

Brown: Dave and John Pustay are looking into it. An invasion of Poland would degrade the overall strength of the Warsaw Pact. This would eliminate the 15 Polish divisions and it would also require the Soviets to commit more forces in order to occupy Poland.

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The judgment of the Agency is that an invasion of Poland would be mostly from the East by Soviet divisions stationed in the Western USSR.

Brzezinski: This makes sense militarily, since the Polish divisions are pointed West.

Brown: The main question is what our actions would signify to the Soviets if dissatisfaction were spreading to other East European countries, especially East Germany. The Soviets in that case would probably fear a serious military move by us, ridiculous as it may seem. I would be very careful about doing anything militarily before an invasion, since the Soviets might well misread our intentions.

Muskie: We should not provoke them.

General Jones: A lot would depend on what specifically they did. If they took steps which threaten us, then we should definitely react. If not, we ought to be very cautious.

Muskie: The other danger would be to encourage Polish resistance forces to think that the West was going to come to their aid. They should be under no illusion on this score.

Jones: I don't think we will face a situation where they would wait poised on the border, except possibly as a threatening move which would be meant to gain their objective without actually invading.

Aaron: I really believe that now is the best time and that we are now in the best posture to deter them, and that once they make their decision there is little we could do about it.

Brown: But military actions are not a part of such deterrence, it seems to me. We should essentially react militarily to what they do. If, for example, their submarines went out to sea, then we would have to react. Otherwise, we ought to be cautious.

Brzezinski: The next category are psychological actions. Much of this you would only do if you saw that they were about to invade.

Aaron: I disagree. I would start talking to all those people about it right now. This would not have to be directly. In CSCE, for example, I would talk about the inviolability of frontiers and I would see if we could get the Allies moving on this as well.

Brzezinski: Your point is that it is better to start now. Would we be better off pursuing points e, f, and g (appeal to Castro, Ceausescu, Yugoslav leaders, Indira Gandhi and other third world leaders, and to the World Peace Council and similar groups) right now? It would be better if they were subtly pursued by the Allies.

Carlucci: I think we should make distinctions. People like Castro and Gandhi would suspect our motives. There is a question of whether the U.S. should be the one to act on these matters. Let's ask the Quad about some of these things.

Aaron: Castro feels that the more actions taken by the Soviets such as the invasion of Afghanistan or Poland, the worse his position will be in the Third World.

Brzezinski: So we are agreed that it is better to do it now.

Muskie: We ought to raise in the Quad format what we should be doing at this point.

Brzezinski: Particularly points d, e, f, and possibly g.

Aaron: I agree with the Department's assessment that economic actions on the part of the Allies will be difficult to achieve, even in the face of a Soviet invasion.

Brzezinski: There will be a tremendous outcry in France if the Soviets invade Poland. We will certainly want the Quad to focus on the economic actions which our Allies might take in the event of a Soviet invasion of Poland. This should definitely be raised in the Quad context.


Brown: In terms of allied military actions (3a), the suggestion to put NATO forces on alert status is not a good idea.

Brzezinski: In terms of Allied psychological actions (4a and 4b), the Quad should pursue these questions. Now let us turn to scenario I, a limited Soviet intervention. Are there any general thoughts on the list?

Brown: We can't withdraw SALT from the Senate.

Brzezinski: We could announce that ratification would not be pursued, as we did after Afghanistan.

Aaron: We ought to think hard about what this would do to SALT I provisions which are still current.

Carlucci: 

Christopher: How do we reassure the Yugoslavs?

Aaron: This really means that we consult with them.

Brown: We do have a group that is engaged in Yugoslav contingency planning and which has come up with an action plan. The difference is that in an invasion of Poland we would not be able to help the Poles.

(Dr. Brzezinski is called out of the room.)

Aaron: We should add Romania to the list of those countries with which we consult. Those on the Yugoslav contingency group are not all the same players that are in the Quad, so we would have to think about the mechanism in dealing with the question.

Muskie: Point h (cut the size of the Soviet embassy and of the Soviet Consulate) also remains a question.

Carlucci: The other aspect is that they have access to the UN. If we close them down in Washington, they could simply operate their espionage network from New York.

Aaron: I am not in favor of cutting the Embassy and Consulate but I am in favor of point i (expel all officials of Soviet commercial enterprises operating in this country whom we have identified as suspected KGB operatives), which is a good idea.

Christopher: What do we do about SALT?

Graham Claytor: Announce that SALT ratification will not be pursued.

Aaron: There is also a question of whether we should cancel the CSCE Conference.

Brown: A lot depends on the nature of the Soviet intervention. If there was a low level of violence, then using the CSCE Review Conference to condemn Soviet interference is OK. But if the Soviets come across the border in a massive invasion, then cancellation of the conference and of the whole CSCE process would be called for.

(Dr. Brzezinski returns to the room.)

Christopher: It also depends to some extent on whether other East Europeans are cooperating.

Aaron: I wonder whether we shouldn't be conveying some of these things to the East. The more they understand the nature of our reaction, the more it would help in deterring a Soviet invasion.

Brzezinski: It would be better if the Allies pursue most of these points. So perhaps we ought to raise it in the Quad. What about the economic measures?

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Claytor: Couldn't we consult with other grain producers about these contingencies beforehand? That would be much preferable to the situation which existed after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Aaron: The Argentines are going to be strapped this year because of a bad harvest. The Canadians and Australians are in a different category.

Brzezinski: Why not talk to the Australians and Canadians now and ask them what their thoughts are about how to deal with Soviet aggression, relating it to grain sales. Are there any downsides to such action?

Christopher: It might impact against the actions we have taken toward Afghanistan.

Brzezinski: Shall we then ask State to do it? What about the military actions suggested in the paper?

Jones: We will have to think about such measures carefully. We can bring our forces up to such a level, but it would be difficult to maintain for any extended period. After a week or two our capacity to stay at such levels would be degraded.

Brown: A REFORGER division and Tac Air could be sent and that way we would be treating it like Berlin. But there is another question here, and that is whether you increase the risk of war. Furthermore, a lot depends on the Allies. If we take actions along these lines and they do nothing, it would be almost worse than doing nothing at all.

Brzezinski: Should we raise this at the Quad?

Aaron: I think perhaps raise it in the Quad, but also set up a side group to consider it.

Brzezinski: Then we should ask the Quad to consider a post-intervention scenario.

Christopher: The economic measures we will take also depend to a great extent on the Allies.

Brzezinski: I would suggest that the list of economic actions (B2) would be a good one for the Europeans to look at.

Brown: We skipped over the Chinese. We have already talked with them about some of these things. What they really want would be F-104 engines and radar. This would give them the capacity to improve their technology. It would be a major step.

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Brzezinski: It should probably be put under responses to Scenario II as action we would undertake in the event of an all-out Soviet invasion.

Aaron: On the economic side, we have to look carefully at the proposed economic measures and see where our interests lie. One of the things the Quad group might do is set up an economic side group to talk about these issues. Economists don't take part in the Quad and we need to have their thinking and technical judgment on these issues.

Brzezinski: Now let's talk about invasion Scenario II.

Christopher: How do these actions compare with Czechoslovakia?

Brown: This is much worse.

Brzezinski: But the situation would also be much worse than it was in Czechoslovakia, which was over in a couple of days. I wonder if this list should not be looked at by the Quad.

Muskie: I think it should be presented very carefully or it might make the wrong impression.

Brzezinski: We could handle it by saying that it is a checklist of possible responses.

Muskie: This would be the best way to gauge NATO reaction. It is the next thing to going to war.

Christopher: Could this be used by the Soviets as an excuse to act?

Brzezinski: More probably as a legitimizing factor. I have a real concern that talking about the inevitability of a Soviet invasion might make it more likely. Some of the things suggested on this list could only be done very quietly.

Christopher: I also fear a self-fulfilling prophecy. How would you like to read a New York Times story that the United States is orchestrating a campaign to deter a Soviet invasion of Poland?

Brzezinski: I would not like to read it. This is why we are holding this meeting this way and restricting it to principals only.

Muskie: It is also why I think we ought to work off the Quad list. We'll go over this with George Vest and see if we cannot put it together.

Brown: As Dave Jones pointed out, DEFCON III could not be maintained for long. If the Germans call up their reserves, we might want to do so as well. But there is a real question as to why we would want to do so, which is certainly not clear to me, since we are not expecting to fight a war.

Aaron: All the fictional accounts of World War III start the same way. If we were to think forward about this, what readiness steps would make the most sense? I can well see the Soviets being much more sanguine about our sending a REFORGER division to Europe than they would be about calling up the German reserves.

Muskie: What is being said here really give me pause. What would be the purpose of these military actions? If the purpose is not clear, would we be wise in undertaking them?

Brzezinski: One purpose would be to reassure the Yugoslavs.

Jones: We should first get the Allies to move and then take commensurate action. We have to work the Allied problem first. They have to be in agreement with our general approach.

Brown: Or at least work up joint contingency plans beforehand.

Brzezinski: Sensitizing them to the issues in this context would be useful.

Aaron: The other way to look at the problem would be to have the Berlin Group consider the question. In any case, I agree there ought to be military contingency planning.

Muskie: The point made earlier is correct. We looked at these things unrelated to an objective. The first question which would arise in such a situation is whether the West is going to try to defeat the invasion militarily. What is the objective? Is there an assumption that this would be a precursor to a wider invasion? If not, then I have doubts about taking some of these military steps.

Brown: The Soviets believe the West will do nothing because of the current unfavorable military balance. The point of the build-up of forces would be to change the balance.

Brzezinski: Another factor would be public emotion. We may be compelled to do something. If there is real fighting and the West is perceived as doing nothing, this could have a very negative political effect.

Aaron: There are two factors involved. The first is that the problems in the East could spread to the West. The second is that people in Western Europe are going to be damned scared.

Brzezinski: There is going to be fear and outrage and we are going to have to deal with it. So some action will be necessary.

Aaron: I think we will need an adequate force posture to deal with the problem.

Brzezinski: Could we ask DOD for a paper on what military measures might be taken to deal with these various scenarios? They would have to achieve the various objectives we have talked about, i.e., allay the fear and outrage in Western Europe; help ensure that any Soviet military action does not slop over the Polish border; increase Soviet restraint; and reassure the Yugoslavs and Romanians. Obviously, any actions we take should not be such as to provoke the Soviets to do things which they had not previously planned.

Aaron: I would think that we ought to wait until we have this paper before discussing the military contingencies with any of the Allies.

Carlucci: In terms of objectives, I think we have been talking about four of them: 1) to strengthen the Western Alliance; 2) to discredit the Soviets; 3) to reassure the Romanians and Yugoslavs; and 4) to allay negative public reaction.

Brzezinski: I think that is good and that the minutes should reflect those objectives. One further aim would be to keep up public pressure on the Soviets to disengage. That is obviously very important.

Now if I might sum up the decisions taken by this meeting, they would be:

1. To ask the Quad participants to raise many of the items which we have discussed with the French, British and Germans, but in the context of discussing the previous Quad contingency paper.
2. To raise with the Allies whether this might not be a good time to undertake points 4 d, e, f, and g on page 3.
3. To look into the question of whether we should use the Berlin Group or some other mechanism to deal with military contingencies on the part of the Alliance.
4. The State Department should raise the impact of a Soviet invasion of Poland on the grain trade with the USSR with both Australia and Canada.
5. Defense should give us a paper as previously outlined.

Is there anything else?

Aaron: I think it is important to focus on the economic question as well. We should ask Cooper to give us a list of questions for the Europeans which we could raise in the Quad group.

Brzezinski: OK. I think this has been a useful meeting.

(The meeting adjourns.)