

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

February 18, 1981

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

Time and Place: 10:42 - 11:45 a.m., The Cabinet Room, White House

Subject: Caribbean Basin - Poland - F-15s (S)

Participants:

The President

The Vice President
Admiral Daniel Murphy

State
Secretary Alexander A. Haig, Jr.
Deputy Secretary William P. Clark

USUN
Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick

OSD
Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger
Deputy Secretary Frank Carlucci

DCI
John McMahon, Deputy Director for Operations

JCS
General David C. Jones

White House
Edwin Meese, III
James A. Baker, III
Richard V. Allen

NSC
Roger Fontaine (notetaker)
Charles P. Tyson, II

Summary of Conclusions

The meeting began with a detailed briefing for the National Security Council principals from the CIA on the situation in El Salvador. The focus was on the sources of outside support for the insurgents. (S)

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Review 2/18/1991

Extended by Richard Allen

Reason: NSC 1.13(g)

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Secretary Haig then detailed our responses so far and the results received from our Western European briefing tour. (S)

He also commented on Nicaragua's reaction to our private warning regarding Sandinista involvement in the Salvadorean insurgency. (S)

Secretary Haig also listed the IG consensus on short-term actions dealing with the Salvadorean situation. He also promised a study on long-term policy in approximately three weeks, and a White Paper for public release in about a week. (S)

The short-term measures involving a Naval MTT and an augmented MilGroup were agreed to by the President. (S)

The War Powers Act and its complications for US policy in El Salvador were also discussed but no final decision was reached. (S)

The meeting then turned to the F-15 question. (S)

Secretary Weinberger outlined the enhancement package for Saudi Arabia and expressed his willingness to accept most of the measures except one -- which remains under further consideration. (S)

The Israeli reaction was discussed and the means to dampen their concern was discussed; primarily, the supplying of another F-15 squadron to Israel on a grant or credit basis. But no decision on funding was made. The exact deal, however, has not yet been worked out. (S)

There was a general consensus that the Israelis would accept the Saudi deal as worked out provided they were compensated. The compensation involves F-15s for them and an understanding of the US's attitude toward the Israeli sale of Kfir fighters to third countries. The two packages should never be openly linked and should be separated by time.

Poland was not discussed at the meeting. (S)

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Summary of Conclusions

Mr. McMahon, representing DCI William Casey, presented a 10-minute briefing on the situation in El Salvador. He stated that there is good intelligence on external support for El Salvadorean revolutionaries. Human intelligence and captured documents reveal Soviet Union surrogates, including Ethiopia, supplying arms. The estimate is some 800 tons have been allocated for the war with

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200 tons now in El Salvador. The remaining 600 tons are in Nicaragua awaiting transshipment. In early November, 400 tons were funneled into Nicaragua from Cuba. Meanwhile, Nicaragua has been trying to introduce into El Salvador 100 tons per month. We know from a good source that last November 60 tons of US weapons were sent to Nicaragua from Vietnam. The air flights from Cuba to Nicaragua have recently been doubled, and the arms once they have arrived are widely dispersed for storage. In the recent past, the arms have been airlifted out of Papalonal to El Salvador, but since its location was discovered by us, they are dispersing to several different airstrips. The Nicaraguans are also changing air routes followed into El Salvador and shadowing normal Nicaraguan commercial flights into El Salvador in order to disguise their operations. They also are moving by sea -- the Gulf of Fonseca, but the quantity of arms shipped by water is not known. The Nicaraguans are also using land routes, and some of them are being interdicted. Recently the arms flow has altered in character -- perhaps has even slowed down. The El Salvadorean military capabilities, however, have been eroded. Guerrillas can watch and even outshoot GOES security forces. The insurgents have approximately 4,000 men divided into five groups. Approximately 1,000 have received training in Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Middle East. Their strategy was to establish a "liberated zone" but that failed in January. The shift now is to employ terrorist tactics to disrupt the economy. (S)

Meanwhile, the El Salvadorean army is on the decline. They have in all forces a total of 16,000 men which is half of what they need. It's mobility is limited, supplies are low, command and control is bad, and the NCO's are non-existent. The officer corps numbers only 500. It lacks basic equipment like radar and recruitment needed to maintain force levels. (S)

The Soviet role is one of low-profile support. It's surrogates are actively involved. Since 1979, the Soviets are encouraging the Central American Communist parties to cooperate in a common front with the revolutionary groups. There is a report that Arafat sent a PLO delegation to Managua in order to assess the Sandinista requirements. He then agreed to supply arms for the Nicaraguans and the Salvadorean insurgents. He also sent a secret message to Castro promising to work with the Cubans. Arafat is doing that to appease leftists in the PLO so they will cooperate with him on pushing his Palestinian policy. (S)

Recently, two small battles were fought near San Salvador. The army captured a guerrilla camp that had been used by 200 insurgents. Meanwhile, the guerrillas are destroying bridges, power plants, etc., to disrupt the economy. (S)

Secretary Haig added that this is in summary what we have been telling the Europeans, the OAS Ambassadors, our Latin American friends, and the Congress. The thrust is already a global Marxist

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grand strategy which includes such diverse elements at Vietnam, the PLO, and Libya. Moreover, this represents a shift in policy from sending arms after the revolution succeeds to one of shipping arms before the revolution succeeds. (S)

Mr. Meese asked for a breakdown of the security forces. (S)

Mr. McMahon said 16,000 was the figure for all forces. The army had 9,600 men, the rest included the treasury police, national guard, etc.

Secretary Haig stated that Ambassador Pezzullo had been instructed to be very firm with the Nicaraguan government and they were given the 30-day limit to cease the arms flow. The Sandinistas admitted to their involvement and guaranteed they will stop because the "revolution is more important to them than victory in El Salvador or friendship with Cuba." They want the money. (S)

There has been a change in tempo and style since Pezzullo's warning. We can't be sure -- there is some human intelligence on this -- but there seems to be a pause. At least the C-47s at Papalonal are still there. AWACs have revealed no suspicious tracks. Radio Liberscion -- a clandestine station in Nicaragua suspended broadcasts on February 6th. We don't know about sea infiltration, but we definitely have their attention. (S)

The Secretary then outlined the contents of the IG consensus on El Salvador. That consensus is the infiltration must be stopped; we need to help El Salvador; we must demonstrate US resolve; we must restore El Salvador's stability by broadening the GOES's popular support. The Secretary also reviewed our activities on the Hill, in Europe, and now in Latin America. The information we have provided has had a favorable impact in general. (S)

The Germans were hesitant and nervous. They show concern over the Socialist International's campaign of disinformation on US policy toward El Salvador. (S)

The French Foreign Minister was very supportive and is weighing a public endorsement of the Junta. (S)

The North Atlantic Council for once seemed impressed and surprised at the extent of Communist intervention in El Salvador. General Walters meanwhile is in Mexico and will go on to Brazil, Argentina and Chile. (S)

In general, there has been shock over the true nature of the situation, and sympathetic support. (S)

We hope to have a sanitized public report ready to go next week (S)

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Mr. Allen asked if this White Paper would be "illustrated" with photos to show the evidence. (S)

Secretary Haig replied that we are sorting this one out because we don't want to compromise sources, but we don't want a "thin gruel" either. The Secretary also said that strong Presidential support of the Duarte government would be useful. The previous Administration went up and down on the support. The Duarte government may not succeed, but it cannot succeed without our help. We also need to explain to the Roman Catholic Church in this country -- Bishop Kelley, for example -- our side of the issue. (S)

The Secretary then reviewed the GOES's military requirements. They included \$5 million in FMS, especially spare parts; four additional helicopters -- although there is a funding problem on this; six-man Naval MTT that would help on sea interdiction. (S)

The President asked if we were providing and manning the ships? (S)

Mr. McMahon said no. The boats were there but they needed new engines, radar would be added, and the crews would be trained by the MTT. Meanwhile, the Army lacks intelligence gathering capabilities and has poor command and control. (S)

Secretary Haig then listed other actions including eventually going to the OAS and looking at El Salvador's new economic needs. That must be costed out. (S)

In addition, there were two more issues. Mr. Chapin, our interim Charge in El Salvador, believes we need more MTTs -- 20 men -- to help train the army. The question is how to do it. How do we deploy them? Do we keep them in San Salvador or disperse them to the regions? We must be straight with Congress on this issue. (S)

The President expressed a concern that we do not do it in a heavy handed way. He feared a negative Latin reaction. (S)

Secretary Weinberger also brought up the War Powers Act problem connected to the training mission. The Vice President asked if other nationals could be involved. (S)

Mr. McMahon said no. (U)

Secretary Haig further emphasized the need for being open and straight on this matter. He then outlined the basic options in regard to the War Powers Act. First, we could avoid invoking it but consult with the Congress, or we could consult under the Act itself. The latter he felt was a mistake. The important thing, he stated, was to be consistent. (S)

The Secretary also discussed the funding problem -- whether to go with Section 506 or ask the Congress for a supplemental that remains to be decided. (S)

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Meanwhile, according to Secretary Haig, the Cubans are nervous. They have just pulled out 1,000 men from Ethiopia back to the home island. And the Europeans and Latin Americans know we mean business and they are generally reassured about our policy. (S)

Mr. McMahon mentioned the Soviets have mounted a massive propaganda campaign since January, criticizing the US in Central America. They are worried too. (S)

Secretary Haig added the Mexican government was leaning toward the revolution but General Walters will talk to them. (S)

Mr. Meese asked about the President calling Lopez Portillo on this subject. (S)

Secretary Haig recommended sending a letter rather than making a phone call. (S)

Mr. Meese asked if a decision on the MTTs needed to be made today. (S)

Secretary Haig said no. (U)

The President asked if the MTTs were at the request of the El Salvadoran government? (S)

Secretary Haig said yes. "There has been," he noted, "a considerable change in the dialogue after the previous Ambassador's recall." (S)

Mr. Allen then asked where will we be in a couple of months? Are we making the mistake of a step-by-step escalation a la Vietnam? (S)

Secretary Haig admitted to the danger but argued there was a four-part program. First, we are consulting with our friends and allies; we are being firm with Nicaragua; we are preparing short-term measures; and we are working on a long-term strategy, but we are two to three weeks away from finishing it. This will involve some difficult decisions for the President regarding Cuba, for example. How far will we go? (S)

Ambassador Kirkpatrick asked if we were going to use the Guatemalan and Honduran navies to interdict? Are we going to use some 1,500-2,000 mercenaries in Guatemala? On the question of training, can we use the Argentines? The Argentine military has a very good training capability and are active in Bolivia. The Argentines, he observed, might help if given the right signal. (S)

Secretary Haig said the DCI was considering it. The Argentine possibility is being looked at. General Walters will ask in Buenos Aires. (S)

As far as the Guatemalans are concerned, they are nervous about getting over committed. (S)

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The President reiterated his concern about high profile US involvement, but stressed we do have to win in Central America, but we don't want to get bogged down in that old Yankee interventionist question. (S)

Mr. Meese asked about support from the OAS. (S)

Secretary Haig said it was a mixed bag. They don't like US interventionism, but they do want US leadership. They like it when we talk about going to the source of the problem: Cuba. (S)

Mr. Meese asked when the public paper would come out -- would it coincide with the next NSC meeting. (S)

Secretary Haig thought it should be piggybacked. (S)

General Jones stated there was a consensus on the MilGroup and the Navy MTT. Could we move on this now -- rather than wait another week? (S)

Secretary Weinberger said there was no problem on this. (S)

The President said: "Fix the boats." (S)

Secretary Haig said we should move now on these two items. (S)

The NSC meeting then turned to the F-15 question involving Israel and Saudi Arabia. (S)

Mr. Allen pointed out that the joint memo deals with the F-15 sale to Saudi Arabia and there are two issues. One is accelerated delivery and the other is F-15 enhancement, but that enhancement is the real issue. (S)

Secretary Weinberger said that enhancement meant equipping the F-15s to increase their range, to prepare them for aerial combat. The Carter Administration formally said yes to these enhancements. They held off on the bomb racks. Naturally, the Israelis oppose all of this. (S)

The Secretary said also the basic considerations are that most of the requests are legitimate -- e.g., the fuel tanks, the air-to-air missiles and these requests are linked to the broader question of cooperation with the Saudis. We need to consider further the bomb rack question. The Israelis are concerned about this because it would give the F-15s an offensive capability. The Saudis meanwhile have accepted our deferral of the bomb rack matter. (S)

The Secretary continued that we figure out how to announce the enhancement package. We must figure out how to tell the Israelis. They are resigned to losing this one, they won't press us on the Hill. There is a feeling that the Saudis need something from us, and that this will improve the US's position in the Middle East.

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Meanwhile, the Israelis want more F-15s -- and fully enhanced F-15s at that. In general we can go with three or four enhancements including air-to-ground missiles. (S)

The President asked about the F-15s for Israel -- are they to be given or paid for? (S)

Secretary Weinberger stated the Israelis don't want to pay for them -- their economy is in bad shape. The 15 new F-15s would be a gift or credit extended. (S)

The President would like that checked with OMB. He observed that we don't want a domestic battle on this issue. We don't want pro-Israeli groups to start a campaign. Can Israel be encouraged to head off their supporters? (S)

Secretary Haig said we were moving on this. He believed the Israelis won't press us provided we improve their air defenses by furnishing another squadron. We can also help on their exporting of their Kfir fighter. We have approved the Mexican sale and we will consider Guatemala's request. Our O.K. is necessary because the Kfir is equipped with a US engine. (S)

The Israeli Foreign Minister will be meeting with Secretary Haig on Friday and wants to know the arrangement. Are we prepared to make a deal and on what basis. (S)

The President reiterated that we want Israeli support in return to discourage their supporters in this country. (S)

Secretary Weinberger said in regard to AWACs, we can go with that too. AWACs will be ultimately manned by the Saudis, but there is a three year delivery time. (S)

The Secretary also pointed out that because this is an election year, the Israelis -- government and opposition -- cannot be "happy" about the Saudi deal. (S)

Mr. McMahon pointed out that there must be no public link between the Saudi and Israeli deals. (S)

Secretary Weinberger agreed. (U)

Mr. McMahon went on and said the two cannot be announced together. (S)

Secretary Weinberger stated the announcements should be widely separated. (S)

The President recalled that Mr. Carter in a personal briefing said that we will offer the gas tanks but not the bomb racks. (S)

Secretary Haig said we should do more in order not to appear to be merely rubberstamping a Carter policy. (S)

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Secretary Weinberger stated we should study the air-to-ground missiles for the Saudis and they have agreed to that. (S)

General Jones offered some background on the F-15 question and pointed out that with the Saudis the important thing is to never say no in definitive fashion. (S)

Secretary Haig added that if we don't go through with a deal, we will have a serious break with the Saudis. (S)

He also said he needed to know what our funding procedure will be with the Israelis. He added the memo asks for approval of the game plan in dealing with the Israleis and Saudis. Public announcement can wait until after Easter. (S)

Mr. Allen then asked how do we get the Israelis aboard on Friday. We need a report for the President to study over the weekend. (S)

Secretary Haig said we need a decision on Israeli financing. He also pointed out that Egyptians won't ask for more. (S)

The President said let's move on the game plan outlined in the memo. (S)

Secretary Haig added that Kfir sales will be decided on a case-by-case basis. But that we will be helpful with the Israelis. He reiterated we cannot publicly link these deals. The Saudis won't accept any such tie. (S)

Mr. Allen said it is important for the Israelis to be quiet about it, even though in an election year, the Prime Minister wants a "win." (S)

Mr. Meese said that Sadat will be here in June and Begin in July. (S)

Mr. Allen added that Prince Fahd is also coming but after Begin's visit. (S)

The President closed with a question on the El Salvadorean decisions. (S)

Mr. Allen said we will strengthen the MilGroup and add the Naval MTT. Meantime, we will get reports from Eagleberger and Walters in their missions. (S)

Poland was not discussed at the meeting. (S)

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