

Document No. 93: Report on the Committee of Ministers
of Defense Meeting in Moscow, December 1–4, 1981

At this meeting of the Committee of Defense Ministers in Moscow, the main topic is not Poland but the Reagan administration's proposal for a zero option on medium-range missiles in Europe. Soviet Marshal Dmitrii Ustinov declares that the correlation of forces is not in the Warsaw Pact's favor—except in the area of nuclear weapons; therefore the U.S. proposal is unacceptable. On the third day of the session, Poland is discussed. Polish Defense Minister Florian Siwicki asks the group to approve a draft communiqué regarding a declaration of martial law he has brought with him, referring to the need for measures to ensure the security of the entire socialist community. The Polish argument adds that a strong statement is needed to help counter potential claims by the West that a crackdown was neither necessary nor supported by Poland's allies. But the underlying aim was to come up with a justification for instituting martial law amongst the Polish people. The discussion was contentious and the draft underwent several modifications. In the end, the desired communiqué was never issued.

[...]

Between December 1–4, 1981, the 14th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Pact member-states took place in Moscow under the chairmanship of Marshal D[mitri] Ustinov, minister of defense of the Soviet Union. The participants at the meetings included all the members of the defense ministers committee, except Army General W[ojciech] Jaruzelski, defense minister of the Polish People's Republic. The Polish People's Army (PPA) delegation was headed by Col. Gen. F[lorian] Siwicki, chief of General Staff and deputy national defense minister of the PPR. Each point of the agenda was discussed in the following order.

1. *Analysis of the state and developmental tendencies of the armed forces of the aggressive NATO bloc.*

The head of the Chief Directorate of Information and deputy chief of the USSR General Staff, Army General P.I. Ivashutin, in his introductory speech, thoroughly analyzed the current state of the international military and political situation. It was consistent with the appraisal made at the 26th CPSU Congress as well as the congress of fraternal socialist states.

PPA Chief of Staff Col. Gen. Siwicki said in his speech, among other things, that the complex socio-economic situation in the country might produce, in the near future, serious disturbances in arms and military procurement for the PPA as well as for the armies of the alliance. He then spoke about the significance of the state of the army's political morale. He noted that as a result of the situation in the country, fundamental changes were introduced in party and political work. More time had been spent on it. The quality of party and youth meetings had improved, including the intensity of

individual discussions. At this time, in party and political work, almost 60 percent of the [political training] is dedicated to explaining party and government policies. [He added] that these policies are aimed at bringing the country out of its complicated situation as well as to unmask the enemy activities of those opposed to socialism, especially "Solidarity's" extremist circles.

At the end of his speech, Gen. Siwicki said that "at least once a month, at the meetings of the Military Council, an assessment on the state of the military's political morale is conducted, which, at this moment, appears to be satisfactory. Thanks to this effort, the PPA successfully resists the attacks of the class enemy and plays an essential stabilizing role in the life of our country, despite the fact that the conscripts entering its ranks, who found themselves under the negative influence of Solidarity, preserved their own ideological and political character."

Gen. Siwicki said that the PPA activists support the party and state apparatus. He considers the defense of the socialist states, the snappy battle with manifestations of counterrevolution, to be his duty, to be his highest goal.

With regard to the situation in the PPR and its development, alarm was registered during the discussions concerning that point of the program in the speeches by the defense ministers of the USSR, Bulgaria, the GDR as well as the commander of the Unified Armed Forces.

2. On the state and development of the air forces.

A report will be given by a representative of the USSR Ministry of Defense.

3. On the progress of the resolution passed at the 3rd and 6th meetings of the Committee of Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Pact member-states on the subject of improving the command system of the allied armies.

Information to be delivered by representatives of the PPR and Romanian ministries of national defense.

4. On the program for the 16th Meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense.

Draft to be presented by the chief of staff of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact member-states.

The draft resolutions put forward on this point were unanimously accepted.

At the conference, the draft information text to the press, radio and television concerning the work of the 14th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense was prepared for approval.

Before discussing the matter of the draft text, a supplement concerning the reaction to the situation in the PPR was put forward, which was sent by Comrade Jaruzelski to the Committee of Ministers of Defense with a request that it be attached to the text for the mass media with the following content: "The Committee of Ministers of Defense has expressed its alarm at the development of the situation in the PPR, resulting from the subversive activities of the anti-socialist forces, who are making it more difficult to fulfill the allied obligations of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact member-states and result in the necessity of taking suitable steps aimed at ensuring the common security in socialist Europe."

Regarding this supplement, Minister of National Defense of the Romanian Socialist Republic Lieutenant-General C[onstantin] Olteănu did not express his consent. And he demanded that the text with the contents agreed upon before the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense be accepted. The remaining defense ministers supported accepting the supplement.

A closed session of the Committee of Ministers of Defense, including only members, took place next, at which it was proposed that the Romanian defense minister and, if necessary, others who need to do this, consult about the problem mentioned above with their own political leadership.

On the draft supplement, I reported to you, honorable comrade general secretary and president, on the telephone on December 2, 1981, and I asked for your agreement.

After the consultations had taken place, Minister of Defense of the Hungarian People's Republic Amy-General L[ajos] Czinege, reported that the Hungarian side had agreed to the supplement only in the event of full agreement by all the defense ministers.

During the evening of December 3–4, 1981, the draft supplement was changed several times and its final text contained: "The Committee of Ministers of Defense expressed its alarm at the worsening situation in the PPR. The subversive activities of the anti-socialist forces, behind whom stand the aggressive imperialist circles, has a direct impact on the fulfillment of the allied obligations of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact member-sates. Solidarity was expressed with the PUWP's battle, with all Polish patriots against counterrevolution, with the battle to bring the country out of its crisis. As a result, it was underlined that the Polish nation can rely completely on the support of the socialist sates."

During the early morning hours, on the last day of the conference, another closed session of the Defense Ministers Committee, including only members, took place, at which it was agreed that the prepared text for the mass media will not be supplemented; but that, apart from this, information will be published in the press by the defense ministers of all the countries, with the exception of the Romanian Socialist Republic. This course of action was agreed upon by all the defense ministers except the Romanian. Further details were to be talked over after the protocol was signed.

After the session ended, another session of the defense ministers committee, including only members, took place, where Comrade Ustinov familiarized them with the substance of Comrade Jaruzelski's request. He asked that in the current, very complicated, practically climactic period the Committee of Ministers of Defense express its displeasure with regard to the situation in the PPR and express its support for the present Polish leadership.

The chief of the PPA General Staff spoke next. He said that the situation in their country had deteriorated greatly, that the Front of National Unity could be organized and that the party was disintegrating. All this was utilized by enemy forces supported by the "West."

In this battle the Polish leadership needs support. Dissolving the firefighting schools was a minor success, to which the counterrevolution responded with very sharp demands to isolate further the party and to weaken the state authorities. It wanted

to show its strength and to demonstrate that the entire Polish nation was following it. The “Solidarity” leadership turned to the Sejm so that it would overturn the decision of the government on dissolving the firefighting schools and show a vote of no-confidence in the government. Otherwise, they threatened to introduce strikes, including a general strike. It was also counting on an increase in the wave of discontent with the state of provisions, especially before Christmas.

For the above-mentioned reasons, Comrade Jaruzelski asked that the diversionary claims of the “West,” according to which the PPR did not have the support of its allies, be denied. Comrade Siwicki expressed his conviction that supplementing the text for the press would be a cold shower for the counterrevolution and, at the same time, support the battle by the Polish leadership against reaction. He then asserted that the PPR still had enough power to resolve the situation. This was not about any concrete military steps but about moral and political support for the PPR’s party and state leadership.

Comrade Ustinov asserted that the complex situation in the PPR was known and understood by us. That was why such moral support could be helpful and would not indicate the threat to use force. His outlook received the consent of the remaining members of the Committee of Ministers of Defense, with the exception of the Romanian minister of national defense.

The Hungarian defense minister asserted that he would give his consent to supplement the text for the mass media, but only if all the defense ministers agreed. The Hungarian side did not quite understand who was supposed to be helped, because after closing the firefighting school 20 counterrevolutionaries were arrested and then let go. Comrade Czinege turned to Comrade Siwicki with the following questions: Why does Comrade Jaruzelski not turn to the first and general secretaries of the fraternal parties with the request, since it was a political problem? Why did they not resolve the situation themselves? And who ought to be supported if they [Polish Party] are always on the retreat? He also added that if they [Polish party] resisted, even the counterrevolution would behave differently.

Comrade Siwicki said that they had a few scenarios planned against the counterrevolution. There is a scenario to ban strikes, to limit the freedom of citizens, to introduce military courts, and a plan to establish order in the country.

Further in the discussion, Comrade Czinege again asserted that the Hungarian side will give its consent only in the event that all the defense ministers agree. Given that two defense ministers would not give their consent, the discussion to accept the supplement ended.

After the discussion, a sharp exchange of views followed between the defense minister of the Hungarian People’s Republic and the chief of the General Staff of the USSR armed forces, Comrade [Nikolai] Ogarkov, who asserted that the Hungarian comrades possibly forgot about 1956 and the bloodshed that occurred at that time. Drawing attention to this was seen by Comrade Czinege as an insult to Comrade Kádár and himself, and he voiced his astonishment as to how a marshal of the Soviet Union could come up with such a declaration. Comrade Ogarkov added that the Soviet comrades did not want the kind of bloodshed in the PPR that had happened

in Hungary, and that was why they supported every effort to resolve the crisis in Poland.

In the talks with Comrades Ustinov and [Viktor] Kulikov, a suggestion emerged about the suitability of raising matters in connection with resolving the situation in the PPR at the meeting of the highest representatives of the communist and workers' parties of the Warsaw Pact member-states.

The 14th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense ended with the signing of the protocol.

In his final speech, the chairman of the conference, USSR Minister of National Defense Marshal of the Soviet Union Ustinov underlined the significance of the concluded meeting for the strengthening of the defense capabilities of the Warsaw Pact member-states. He thanked the members of the Committee of Ministers of Defense for their participation in the conference and gave the last word to the minister of national defense of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, who will chair the 15th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense in 1982 in Prague.

In my speech, I voiced my conviction that the 14th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense added to the strengthening of unity and friendship, and to a deepening of cooperation between the fraternal armies. I thanked the chairman, Comrade Ustinov, for organizing and leading the conference. I underlined the strong feelings of the Soviet people with our nations and the decisive role of the Soviet Union in our common struggle, measured to ensure the defense of socialism and peace. I ensured all the members of the Committee of Ministers of Defense that during the preparations and execution of the 15th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense in 1982 in Prague, we will take advantage of all experiences, most of all from our Soviet friends, for a prosperous conference proceeding.

[Source: Andrzej Paczkowski and Andrzej Werblan, "On the Decision to Introduce Martial Law in Poland in 1981," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 21, November 1997, pp. 37–43. Translated by Leo Gluchowski.*]