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NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

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SUMMARY RECORD
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Summary Record of a meeting of the Council
held at the Headquarters, Brussels,
on Wednesday, 25th September, 1968 at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENT

Chairman: Mr. Manlio Brosio

BELGIUM

Mr. A. de Staercke

CANADA

Mr. M. Dupuy

DENMARK

Mr. H. Hjorth-Nielsen

FRANCE

Mr. R. Seydoux

GERMANY

Mr. W.G. Grewe

GREECE

Mr. P.A. Cavalierato

ICELAND

Mr. N.P. Sigurdsson

ITALY

Mr. C. de Ferrariis
Salzano

LUXEMBOURG

Mr. P. Reuter

NETHERLANDS

Mr. H.N. Boon

NORWAY

Mr. G. Kristiansen

PORTUGAL

Mr. V. da Cunha

TURKEY

Mr. Nuri Birgi

UNITED KINGDOM

Sir Bernard Burrows

UNITED STATES

Mr. Harlan Cleveland

INTERNATIONAL STAFF

Assistant Secretary for Political
Affairs:

Mr. J. Jaenicke

Executive Secretary:

The Lord Coleridge

ALSO PRESENT

Military Committee Representative:

Vice-Adm. J.M. Lee

SHAPE:

Maj.Gen. R.E. Coaker

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I. BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN EASTERN EUROPE

1. Col. MICHAUX (International Military Staff) gave a briefing on the military situation in Eastern Europe, followed by a few comments on the appearance in the Mediterranean of the Soviet helicopter carrier "Moskva"(1).

2. The BELGIAN REPRESENTATIVE asked whether it was true that, as had been reported in the Press, the three major powers intended to protest to Moscow against the presence of East German troops in Czechoslovakia.

3. The GERMAN REPRESENTATIVE added that reports were appearing in the East German Press of the presence of East German troops in Czechoslovakia.

4. Gen. COAKER (SHAPE) said that there had been two East German divisions in the invasion forces but these had been withdrawn after about ten days. They were at present stationed on East German territory near the frontier. Only a few units had remained on Czechoslovak territory - also near the frontier. He added that although the presence of only four Soviet divisions in Hungary had been confirmed, a total of eight divisions was reported to be in this country. It was believed that their presence was intended to exert pressure on Yugoslavia rather than Rumania.

5. Replying to the Belgian Representative, the UNITED KINGDOM REPRESENTATIVE said that the possibility of making remonstrations to the Soviet Government had been considered, but no decision had been taken by the United Kingdom, the United States and France.

6. The GERMAN REPRESENTATIVE pointed out that, according to the information which had just been given, the state of military vigilance had not been declared until 23rd August; he felt that this was somewhat late in view of the emotion and nervous tension which the Soviet intervention had aroused in member countries close to Czechoslovakia. Referring to the SHAPE analysis of recent Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia from a military point of view (MCM-70-68) he drew attention to the statement in paragraph 5 of this document(2): "The entire air movement picture was evaluated by Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF) and since it was not considered a threat to the Centre Region because of location, direction and pattern of movement, it was not reported to higher headquarters including SHAPE". It was clear from this statement that

(1) Issued as BN(68)19.

(2) This document has been reproduced as Annex I to DPC/D(68)30.

intelligence reporting to the various levels was unsatisfactory and that under the current arrangements it would not be possible to react should military activities inside a Warsaw Pact country "spill over" towards the NATO area. In view of the extremely adverse psychological impact of this situation in the Federal Republic, where NATO's reaction had been felt to be inadequate or non-existent, he recommended that existing procedures and regulations should be modified in three essential respects:

- how appropriate was the level of command responsible for deciding not to refer a given item of information to higher levels?
- should military decision-making procedures be altered?
- what political guidance should be given to the military authorities?

7. The NETHERLANDS REPRESENTATIVE expressed support for these comments. He stressed that the information on the intense Soviet air activity in the area under consideration was generally inadequate.

8. The BELGIAN REPRESENTATIVE felt that it was necessary to conduct an overall review of crisis management arrangements at the political and military levels.

9. The CHAIRMAN agreed that the function of reporting to the various military levels and to the Council required further consideration. He also enquired how the military authorities arrived at certain assumptions, e.g. that the ten Soviet divisions on the German-Czechoslovak frontier had been deployed there solely for defensive purposes. He agreed with the Netherlands Representative on the need for more information on the deployment of air forces.

10. Adm. LEE recalled that the operational procedures of the Allied Command Europe defence system were geared to the detection of an attack directed against NATO. He stressed that, in view of the very considerable volume of information continually being received, it was essential to decide on specific levels so that reports would be promptly delivered. He considered that a separate briefing should be held on the relatively recent problem of immediate response. In his view, it would be impossible for the Council to deal with the mass of information received from radar sources.

11. The CHAIRMAN expressed the view that in certain political situations the military authorities should be given guidance so that arrangements for the circulation of intelligence could promptly be modified by them in the light of developments.

12. The UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE said that it would have to be established whether the military services responsible for intelligence reporting had realised that, in the situation with which the Alliance would be faced for an unforeseeable period, inadequate information was available concerning developments on and beyond the boundaries of the NATO defence area. He pointed out that the Czechoslovak crisis had brought to light a new type of threat, namely, the danger of a "spill-over effect" - i.e. the danger that, during a period of turbulence and repression in a country under Soviet domination, Warsaw Pact forces might "spill over" the border of the NATO defence area. In order to decide on the imminence of such a threat, every indication of the turn of events was of vital importance. The question of military vigilance should be considered in a wider context. In so far as past action was concerned, he stressed that, before condemning the inadequacy of NATO's response, it should be borne in mind that no additional measures of vigilance had been called for by any government. For the future, it should be established whether routine intelligence should be transmitted to a higher level than at present.

13. Turning to the situation in Czechoslovakia, he expressed the view that, during the consultations which were to take place on the repercussions of the crisis, further consideration would have to be given to the reasons for the Soviet initiative. He felt that, should the Soviet Government be asked why Soviet forces were in Czechoslovakia, it would doubtless argue that Eastern Europe had to be defended against NATO: consequently, some means would have to be found of convincing the Soviet Union that the NATO defence system was intended solely for defence purposes. In his view, the fact that the political scenario for the successive stages of the Soviet action had been extremely ill-conceived suggested that the Soviet Union's contingency planning provided for a possible NATO offensive and that this assumption should be shown to be false. As regards the present situation, he called for more extensive intelligence on air force movements which, in his view, were inadequately covered in the military briefings. On the question of the true strength of the invasion forces in Czechoslovakia, he said that while these were thought by the public to total 500,000 men, other assessments placed them at 200,000 or 250,000 men. He suggested that this estimate should be published lest the Soviet Union was the first to make an announcement to this effect, thus giving the impression that its forces had been reduced by half.

14. The DANISH REPRESENTATIVE felt that it was logical for ten divisions to be deployed on the German-Czechoslovak frontier since, now that the Czechoslovak divisions had been neutralised, this frontier was undefended. Consequently, it would be unwise to draw hasty conclusions regarding the

offensive intentions of the Soviet Union. He pointed out that, on the other hand, there had been a marked reduction in Soviet strength on the Northern boundary of the NATO area, which had so far been considered to be one of the most threatened areas.

15. The TURKISH REPRESENTATIVE expressed the view that the Soviet Union's intentions were still far from clear and would become more apparent only as a result of the overall assessment now in progress. It should also be considered whether the steps taken by the Council had been effective and a procedure should be agreed so that the military authorities would be given the necessary guidance with a view to the timely transmission of intelligence at all levels. In his view, the crisis was not yet over and might have repercussions in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. In this connection, he felt that the build-up of the Soviet Fleet in the Mediterranean was particularly disquieting.

16. The ITALIAN REPRESENTATIVE expressed support for the points made by the German and Turkish Representatives. While acknowledging the difficulty of assessing the situation, he felt that the available intelligence provided sufficient indications that the threat was not directed against NATO. However, it was not out of the question that the Soviet Union might also occupy Rumania and Yugoslavia; he therefore recommended that the military authorities should prepare to respond to the various forms of threat which might arise on frontiers where Soviet forces were deployed in strength and in the Mediterranean, on which very detailed information was available. He stressed that the build-up of the Soviet Fleet was a matter of special anxiety for his country. Generally speaking, he expressed the hope that the Alliance would rapidly be able to rectify the shortcomings which had been noted during the latest crisis.

17. The UNITED KINGDOM REPRESENTATIVE said that the consideration of certain problems would have to be deferred pending the reports by the Defence Review Committee and the Council Operations and Exercise Co-ordination Working Group. However, he believed that neither of these bodies was concerned with the problems raised by the German and Netherlands Representatives in connection with reporting procedures. He had been very interested in the points which had been made on the deployment of Soviet units and their probable tasks. He understood that the Defence Review Committee had considered the problem of the Warsaw Pact's intentions. Referring to the SHAPE assumptions, he questioned the statement that, in the event of an attack from Czechoslovakia, six Warsaw Pact divisions would be required for internal security. In his view, twelve to fifteen divisions would be needed for this task. This was an example of the different assessments which could be made on the basis of the same total strength. Turning to the

situation in South-Eastern Europe, he said that, in the United Kingdom Government's view, the reserve attitude taken at present by Yugoslavia and Rumania was the result of the war of nerves being waged against these two countries. He did not believe that a solution was about to be found to the Czechoslovak situation or that the Soviet Union had decided what line to take with the Czechoslovak leaders.

18. The LUXEMBOURG REPRESENTATIVE expressed the view that the present situation was potentially threatening for NATO since it could not be foreseen at what point the Soviet Union would stop. He asked what criterion was used by the military authorities for deciding whether a threat was direct or indirect.

19. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the International Military Staff had recently circulated a revised list of the "indicators" on the basis of which the military authorities could decide on the existence of a threat.

20. The GREEK REPRESENTATIVE said that he fully agreed that the NATO Military Authorities should be invited to increase their alert capability so as to keep a better watch on Warsaw Pact troop movements on the boundaries of the NATO area. Questioning whether a distinction could be made between offensive and defensive forces in the case of the Soviet Union, he drew attention to the lively anxiety which still existed in Yugoslavia. He suggested that the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops to the interior might indicate that, being trained primarily for guerrilla operations, they had made for the mountains which provided a better setting for such operations. In conclusion, he drew attention to his country's considerable anxiety at the presence of a large Soviet Fleet in the Mediterranean and stated that the "Moskva" had not revictualled in Greek territorial waters.

21. The GERMAN REPRESENTATIVE said that his initial remarks had been meant partly as a self-criticism and that he had been prepared to accept that a degree of responsibility was borne by his Government. Referring to the comments by the Danish Representative, he said that, although he did not disagree with his conclusions, three Czechoslovak divisions had been replaced by six or seven Soviet first category divisions on the frontier between Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. In view of the errors of judgement committed by the Soviet Union in assessing the situation and the possibility of a spill-over of invasion troops, it was clearly impossible to prepare in advance an outline plan covering the whole picture.

22. The UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE said that three basic policy questions emerged from the discussion:

- the need to change existing regulations for reporting from the lowest to the highest military levels and to the Council. He recommended that the NATO Military Authorities be invited to review the operational arrangements in this respect so that they would cater for all contingencies including the danger of a "spill-over";
- the NATO Military Authorities should be requested to state whether, in their view, the present vigilance measures were adequate, taking into account all the factors in the present situation. In the conclusion to MCM-70-68, SHAPE acknowledged that "recent events have reinforced the military view that we must plan on capabilities rather than intentions";
- in view of the fact that military planning would be responsive to all actions by the Warsaw Pact forces which might be prejudicial to NATO, what preparatory measures could they consider taking at the political level? In other words, was political contingency planning feasible?

23. The NETHERLANDS REPRESENTATIVE said that the major problem was that the intelligence from radar sources had not reached the highest military levels in time. He strongly urged that, even if no specific instructions were received to this effect, the military authorities should ensure that reporting procedures were in future adjusted to the situation.

24. Adm. LEE said that the Military Committee had examined the problem of intelligence reporting. In reply to the requests which had been made for a modification of reporting procedures, he pointed out that those currently used had been designed to ensure that the data reported were received at the proper level. He added that even if Council guidance was given calling for a broader definition of what constituted an important intelligence item to be reported, the problem of the reporting machinery would remain and consideration would then have to be given to the additional equipment and personnel needed to handle a larger volume of information. As regards the problem of how the military authorities could draw up their plans in the light of political guidance, he recalled that in the middle of August, SHAPE had described the plans made in the light of a situation which did not constitute a direct threat to NATO and had been given the approval of the political authorities. When the crisis had broken, it had been agreed, mainly for psychological reasons, that the vigilance measures must remain secret and that, if the invasion was stepped up, the threat to NATO would be increased, but there

would be no risk of a direct attack. He had no doubt that the military authorities would be better placed to prepare their action in future if they were given political guidance in advance. It would be extremely valuable for them to know what political interpretation should be put on the invasion of Rumania, Yugoslavia or Austria and to what extent such developments would constitute a threat to NATO.

25. Summing up, the CHAIRMAN recalled that the Belgian Representative had drawn attention to a possible protest by the three major powers to the Soviet Union against the presence of East German troops in Czechoslovakia. He asked that the Council be kept informed of developments and thought that it should be able to discuss this aspect of the Soviet action.

- Referring to the situation in the Mediterranean, he recalled the special responsibilities conferred on the Secretary General and the Council by the Ministers at Reykjavik. In his opinion, there should be an early discussion of the overall situation in that area.
- Several Permanent Representatives had stressed the inadequacy of the intelligence available on Soviet Air Force movements. The military authorities had no doubt taken note of these views.
- There had also been a comment on the real figures for the Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia. He hoped that the military authorities could provide a precise evaluation to enable the Council to consider how information could be released to the public.
- It seemed to have been generally agreed that the intelligence reporting procedures at the different levels should be reviewed, and this would call for a decision by the Council and by the military authorities. He would ask the Chairman of the Defence Review Committee to study the matter in conjunction with the military authorities and to submit a report on suitable improvements.
- The question of the assessment of Warsaw Pact capabilities and intentions had also been raised. In his view, the problem was how to process information and select what was significant. He felt, however, that there was only limited scope for improvement in the procedures since the evaluation required decisions at all levels.

- A review of the state of military vigilance should be undertaken at the time of the political and military re-evaluation. Although new vigilance measures did not seem necessary at present, the military authorities should indicate whether they were satisfied with the present system and what improvements, if any, they would propose.
- The Council should also examine the possibility of contingency planning in case the war of nerves waged against certain countries developed into military action.
- The Council should consider how NATO action should be presented in order to ensure that it was not misinterpreted.

26. The COUNCIL:

noted the above statements and endorsed the Chairman's summing up.

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II. STATEMENT ON POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Private Session

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III. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

27. Tuesday, 1st October at 3.30 p.m.

OTAN/NATO,
Brussels, 39.

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