

Document No. 136: Summary of Discussion among
Defense Ministers at the Political Consultative Committee
Meeting in Warsaw, July 15, 1988

As part of this discussion among Warsaw Pact defense ministers, the issue of sharing military data with NATO receives further attention. By this time, the internal debate has changed significantly (see Document No. 130, for example). Soviet Defense Minister Iazov specifically declares that the East must be truthful in its reporting because the enemy knows the real figures, down to the order of tens of thousands of men and thousands of tanks. If less or more were published, he argues, the Warsaw Pact would be open to accusations of lying before all humankind. One cannot keep anything secret anymore, he opines. He also admits that the Soviet Union maintained 2 percent of its population under arms, whereas other countries had only 1 percent. On the subject of existing international military structures, he reminds his colleagues that they date back to the 1950s on the Warsaw Pact side. This prompts a debate between various allied representatives present over the proper pace of changing those structures.

[...]

The first speaker, Comrade Minister [Dmitrii] Iazov, explained that the forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact are more or less evenly balanced. The number of persons is approximately equal. The Warsaw Pact has about 30,000 more tanks, but the NATO tanks are of better quality. The Warsaw Pact has more launch pads for non-nuclear tactical missiles. Also, as regards artillery, the relation is about 1.2:1. But the USA has more aircraft. Their superiority in helicopters and anti-tank weapons balances out our superiority in tanks and artillery. However, the Americans put quantity first.

Neither side is in a position to begin an attack without major regrouping.

The USA claims, however, that our formations are attack formations. They point to the equipment of our pioneer troops with bridges and our superiority in tanks and artillery as proof.

They demand a unilateral correction of the asymmetries in land forces.

They are unwilling to negotiate the inequalities in attack aircraft, helicopters and naval fleets.

[...]

An inadequately prepared publication of the figures would be considered by the West Germans and Americans as a victory for their side. For this reason, it must be thoroughly prepared politically, so that we do not suffer a loss in prestige.

[...]

The publicized data must be objective, since the opponent knows our figures down to the level of c. 10,000 men and 1,000 tanks.

If we publicize less, their intelligence will notice it and accuse us of lying before the entire world.

Similarly, if we publicize more than we have, in order to minimize what we are lacking, the figures will be checked on the spot and our deception will be exposed before the eyes of the world. We can no longer hide anything.

[...]

Again: the figures must be exact. If you agree, then we can decide what to put into storage.

We should prepare the data in the months of August and September and come to an agreement about publication of the total figures in October.

The following speaker was Comrade Minister [Heinz] Kessler. He expressed his agreement in principle with the explanation of Comrade Minister Iazov. He pointed out that, once the figures submitted by the Warsaw Pact had been gone over once again, it was up to the Committee of the Ministers of Defense to decide about their publication. At the same time, he emphasized that the assignment of groups to theaters of war must not be changed and that this is not the time to discuss the withdrawal of the Soviet army groups.

Comrade Minister [Milan] Václavík voiced his agreement and called for charging the Army generals with the task of going over the data. Structural changes should not be undertaken hastily, but rather be realized gradually, taking into account the direction of the operations of the individual armies as well as of the opposing army. Divisions are needed that are in a position to act independently, without the assignment of different units for cover.

A reduction of the armed forces must not harm the Warsaw Pact in any way. In estimating the individual types of weapon the principle of sufficiency must be applied, in cooperation with the staff of the Unified Armed Forces.

[...]

Comrade Minister [Ferenc] Kárpáti pointed out that in view of a new rethinking of the division of the European theaters of war, thorough preparation of the data was very important. Comrade [Károly] Grósz, he said, had already raised this question before the Political Consultative Committee.

In working out the structures, the strength of the opposing groups must be taken into consideration. The Hungarian People's Army has begun reorganizing its units and has changed to the brigade system, which, however, is not yet regarded as the final solution.

[...]

Comrade Minister [Vasile] Milea observed that the solution of these questions is very important for all countries. He suggested that commissions on the question of publicizing the data should be formed in the armies. For the development and equipment of individual armies and decisions about structures, the geographic conditions of each country must be taken into account.

[...]

Army General [Anatolii] Gribkov pointed out once again that the data to be publicized are total figures and not information according to theaters of war and countries.

The operational plans must be reworked on the basis of the commitments made in connection with the Military Doctrine of the member-states of the Warsaw Pact,

on the agreed-upon dates. A change in organizational structures should only be undertaken gradually.

In conclusion, Comrade Minister [Florian] Siwicki summarized the meeting by saying that all participants were of the opinion that the data on the Warsaw Pact should only be publicized after the Committee of the Ministers of Defense has checked the figures and confirmed them.

The leading role should be played by the USSR, since it assesses these questions on a global scale. But each country must make its contribution.

The propaganda machine must be prepared for the publication, to prevent the opponent from exploiting our figures for a new round of the arms race.

The question of the technical equipment of the allied armies is a problem of quality. Therefore, parity must be reached in the area of the quality of military technology.

One should take account of the fact that NATO can translate research and development into production more quickly than the Warsaw Pact.

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