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Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 02 April 1981
(excerpt)

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Summary:

Brezhnev and the Politburo grow frustrated with the Polish leadership. They express fear of the Polish crisis spreading to Belorussia and Georgia, and question the health of Polish leaders.

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SESSION OF THE CPSU CC POLITBURO

2 April 1981

Cde. L. I. BREZHNEV presiding.

Also taking part: Cdes. Yu. V. Andropov, M. S. Gorbachev, V. V. Grishin, A. A. Gromyko, A. P. Kirilenko, N. A. Tikhonov, D. F. Ustinov, P. N. Demichev, V. V. Kuznetsov, M. S. Solomentsev, I. V. Kapitonov, V. I. Dolgikh, K. V. Rusakov

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5. On the Matter of the Situation in Poland

BREZHNEV. All of us are deeply alarmed by the further course of events in Poland. What's worst of all is that the friends listen and agree with our recommendations, but in practice do nothing. In the meantime the counterrevolution is on the march all over.

The members of the Politburo are familiar with the content of all the previous discussions with the Polish leaders. I will speak briefly about my most recent telephone conversation with Kania, which was on the 30th of March.

Kania described the recent plenum of the PZPR CC and, in so doing, complained that they had been roundly criticized at the plenum. I then said to him: "They were right in doing so. They shouldn't have just criticized you; they should have raised a truncheon against you. Then, perhaps, you would understand." These were literally my words.

Cde. Kania acknowledged that they are acting too leniently and need to be more forceful.

At that point I said to him: "Well, how many times have we insisted to you that you need to take decisive measures, and that you can't keep making endless concessions to 'Solidarity.' You always speak about a peaceful path, but you don't understand (or at least don't wish to understand) that a 'peaceful path' of the sort you're after is likely to cost you blood. That's why it's important that you draw the right conclusions from the criticism at the plenum."

The friends succeeded in preventing a general strike. But at what price? The price of a subsequent capitulation to the opposition. Kania himself acknowledged in a conversation with the ambassador that this new compromise was a huge mistake.

At this point, much depends on the way events over the next several days turn out. In particular, will the friends manage to carry out the measures they arranged with us when they hold the Sejm, which, according to today's report, will be from the 2nd to the 6th of April? Will all these measures be adopted? Will the leadership be resolute and strong enough to implement the measures in practice?

We of course must continue working with the friends and searching for new ways of influencing the situation in Poland.

In particular, I think it would be worthwhile to act in accordance with the wishes of the friends by permitting Cdes. Andropov and Ustinov to go to Brest for a meeting with Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski.¹²⁷ This will allow for a more detailed assessment of the situation in the country, enabling us to gauge the intentions of our friends and again letting them know our position.

If that doesn't work we could still seek a meeting of the Seven at the highest level to discuss the Polish question.

We have a Commission on Poland. Perhaps the comrades from the Commission, who are following events in that country, wish to say something?

ANDROPOV. I believe the proposal offered by Leonid Il'ich regarding our next steps vis-a-vis Poland and his assessment of the situation there are absolutely correct. Indeed, what we're trying to find now is some way of exerting greater influence and greater pressure on the leadership of our friends. I believe the proposal for me to travel with Cde. Ustinov for a meeting with Kania and Jaruzelski is appropriate. Based on the exchange of views at the Politburo, and on the decisions adopted earlier by the Politburo and also the conversations that Leonid Il'ich had with Kania, we will perform the necessary function and tell Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski all our demands, proposals, advice, etc.

USTINOV. It seems to me that we indeed must meet with Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski, particularly because Cde. Kania and Cde. Jaruzelski themselves requested this meeting. We must convey to them all our demands and offer advice in accordance with the discussions that Leonid Il'ich had with Kania.

Leonid Il'ich is right in mentioning in his recommendations that we should keep as a fall-back option the possibility of convening the seven member-states of the Warsaw Pact. For now, all necessary measures must be adopted to ensure that the Polish friends act of their own accord.

GROMYKO. Let me briefly inform you about something we received through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A huge amount of information about Poland is coming in. However, it is worth noting that in the USA, in the FRG, and in other countries they're closely following the situation in Poland and greatly distorting the true state of affairs. Of course both the American and the West European information regarding events in Poland is tendentious. They talk about the "just" demands of Solidarity and the antisocialist forces in Poland and the inability of the Polish leadership to resolve internal problems. In addition, they speak a great deal about the Soviet Union, as though warning us that the Soviet Union must not use its armed forces to interfere in Poland's affairs. But the whole matter is clear; bourgeois propaganda always comes forth with hostile positions about the Soviet Union and is now purveying this information, as I already mentioned, in a tendentious manner.

I want to say that things with Kania and Jaruzelski are not particularly good. There are even hints that Jaruzelski is completely worn out and does not know what to do next. This, of course, is deplorable. During the negotiations with Solidarity, the PPR leaders went back on their word in what they had promised us. That, too, is deplorable. Even the Polish leaders themselves say that the latest agreement with Solidarity was a mistake of the Polish leadership.

With regard to the agreement with Rural Solidarity, it essentially is already ratified. If the matter is turned over for review to the Sejm committee headed by Szczepanski, a deputy who is not a party member, we can certainly expect that the decisions will of course be to the advantage of Rural Solidarity. How are we to assess the situation in Poland in the aftermath of the CC plenum? I think we won't be mistaken if we say that

no improvements at all have occurred. On the contrary, things have gotten still worse because the leadership is moving steadily backward. But as Leonid Il'ich already said, Kania is raising the question about having our comrades Andropov and Ustinov go to Brest for an exchange of views with Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski. I believe we should go ahead with this meeting, particularly because it will allow us to convey everything to the Polish friends on a personal basis. This meeting, in my view, is an intermediate type of step, and we should use it to the full. If, as they say, they are going to resort to the partial introduction of emergency measures, one must ask whether they are sure that the army, internal affairs ministry, and state security organs will be on their side. I think it would be appropriate for our military personnel to conduct a far-reaching analysis of how things stand in the Polish armed forces and whether the army is the main force and can be relied upon.

The CPSU CC Politburo must be clear in its understanding of the current state of forces in the PPR. We must know what it is. The Polish High Command says that the army will fulfill its duty. But is that really so? In any case we must be sure to emphasize to the Polish comrades the necessity of adopting harsher — I would say extraordinary — measures to restore order, and to emphasize that further concessions are simply intolerable. It would be impossible to back down any further.

USTINOV. In the military sphere things stand as follows. Today at 8:00 p.m. the military leadership is meeting with Cdes. Kulikov and Kryuchkov and other of our comrades. As far as the Polish army is concerned, it is, as Cde. Jaruzelski declares, ready to perform its duty. But if we're candid about the matter, we have to recognize that Kania and Jaruzelski are scarcely inclined to pursue a confrontation, bearing in mind the conflict in Bydgoszcz. The results of this conflict showed that even if just two people from Solidarity are somehow injured, the whole country will literally be up in arms, and that Solidarity was able to mobilize its forces quickly. Of course there is now still some hope that the army, state security organs, and police will put up a united front, but the further things have gone in recent days, the worse they have become. I think that bloodshed can't be avoided; it will occur. And if they're afraid of that, they'll have to keep relinquishing one position after another. In the process, all the gains of socialism could be lost.

I'm thinking also about another question, whether we won't have to take certain economic measures. How do the Polish friends now view this matter? We're helping them, we're taking things from ourselves and from our other friends and giving them to Poland, yet the Polish people know nothing about this. None of the Poles has any idea that Poland is receiving from us full shipments of oil, cotton, and so forth. If in fact they were to take account of all this and see what help the Soviet Union is providing to the Poles, and if they described this help on television, on radio, and in the press, the Polish people, I believe, would understand from whom they are receiving the major portion of their economic assistance. But not a single Polish leader has gone out among the workers and discussed this assistance.

With regard to the Polish leaders, I believe it's difficult to say which of them is best. Earlier we regarded Cde. Jaruzelski as a stalwart figure, but now he has proven to be weak.

BREZHNEV. That's why we must clarify everything for ourselves: to determine what the situation is within their Politburo and to determine who is capable of doing something.

ANDROPOV. I completely agree with you, Leonid Il'ich, in the analysis you provided of the situation in Poland. We find that Solidarity is seizing one position after another. If an extraordinary congress is convened, we can't rule out the possibility that it will be completely dominated by representatives of Solidarity, and that they will then be able to stage a bloodless coup. We need to meet again personally with the Polish leaders,

as Leonid Il'ich indicated here, so that we can urge them to adopt severe measures and not to be afraid of what might result, possibly even bloodshed. Instead of taking severe measures, they are proposing to us so-called "political management." We've told them to adopt military measures, administrative measures, and judicial measures, but they invariably limit themselves solely to political measures.

In addition, we must seriously ask the Polish friends whether they will hold Solidarity accountable for what's going on in Poland. How do things stand now? Economic chaos, confusion, and all manner of shortcomings in the supply of consumer goods and other things can be attributed to the strikes sponsored by Solidarity, but it's the government that's being held accountable for this. An absurd situation has emerged. Yet none of the members of the Politburo, and no one from the PPR leadership, is speaking out and telling the workers that the leaders of Solidarity are chiefly responsible for the shortcomings and economic devastation. With regard to the PZPR Politburo, we must advise Cde. Kania to unite the stalwart members of the Politburo and rely on them.

BREZHNEV. We must tell them this means the introduction of martial law and explain it all very plainly.

ANDROPOV. That's right, we must tell them precisely that the introduction of martial law means the establishment of a curfew, limitations on movement along city streets, and stepped-up protection for state and Party institutions, enterprises, etc. Under pressure from the leaders of Solidarity, Jaruzelski has gone soft, and Kania recently has begun to drink more and more excessively. This is a very pathetic situation. I think we have plenty of reasons to hold a meeting with Kania and Jaruzelski. Obviously we need to listen to what they have to say.

In addition, I want to say that the Polish events are influencing the situation in the western provinces of our country, particularly in Belorussia. Many villages there are listening in to Polish-language radio and television. I might add that in certain other regions, especially in Georgia, we have had wild demonstrations. As in Tbilisi not long ago, groups of loudmouths have been gathering on the streets, proclaiming anti-Soviet slogans, etc. Here we, too, must adopt severe measures internally.

USTINOV. With regard to the army, the situation in their country has substantially deteriorated. This is because they replaced a large segment of old recruits with new inductees, the majority of whom sympathize with Solidarity. Hence the army is being weakened. We believe the old recruits must be kept in the Polish army; it would be undesirable to discharge them. However, the Poles don't want to keep them. Obviously, we need to talk about this with them.

GRISHIN. I believe the proposals offered by Leonid Il'ich are absolutely correct and that we should adopt them, authorizing Cdes. Ustinov and Andropov to go to Brest.

USTINOV. The meeting can be on the border, either on our side or on the Polish side. Let's play it by ear. The most militant members of the PZPR Politburo, it seems to me, are Cdes. Olszowski, Grabski, and Barcikowski, but they're being kept at bay.

ANDROPOV. I think we should not yet expand the group taking part in the meeting and should instead limit it, as they said, to just Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski.

BREZHNEV. When should we inform them of this decision?

ANDROPOV. I think we should inform them about it today.

BREZHNEV. Fine. Then we'll consider that this proposal has been adopted.

EVERYONE. Correct.

A decision is adopted:

1. To endorse the recommendations offered at the Politburo session by Cde. L. I. Brezhnev regarding the situation in Poland.
2. To take into account the information provided by Cdes. Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov about the situation in Poland and the measures adopted by the Foreign Ministry, KGB, and Defense Ministry in connection with events in Poland.
3. To approve the request of the Polish comrades to hold a meeting between Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski and Cdes. Andropov and Ustinov in Brest.

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