

Poland Drops the Bomb?

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The new Polish government's disclosure of Warsaw Pact archival materials containing a scenario of a military conflict with NATO has heated debate in Poland, bewilderment in Western Europe and irritation in Moscow.

At a press conference Nov. 25, Defense Minister Radosław Sikorski presented an exercise map with scenarios tested by Warsaw Pact armies. The map and accompanying documents will now be forwarded to the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).

To the Polish public, particularly the younger generation, the contents of the "war games" prepared at the Warsaw Pact headquarters may appear shocking. Estimates suggested that the Polish population would have suffered grave losses if a conflict with NATO broke out. More than 2 million people could have been killed and injured within Polish territory. The nuclear impact would have been targeted at Poland's 43 largest cities. Part of Poland could have also been affected by nuclear fallout and chemical contamination.

Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz announced in his policy speech Nov. 10 that Warsaw Pact files would be transferred to the IPN, creating legal controversy because of an agreement signed in 1991—the year the Warsaw Pact was dissolved—which forbade former Warsaw Pact members to make the files public. Sikorski says the agreement is not binding on Poland and adds that, according to lawyers from the Ministry of Defense, the agreement was not ratified by Poland and consequently national law takes precedence over the agreement. Sikorski has also revealed that "nearly all" of the Warsaw Pact files will be declassified in the near future. The files will be selected by a special team appointed by the minister. The head of the team has until Jan. 2, 2006 to present Sikorski with a list of documents whose secrecy clause has been downgraded or annulled.

Sikorski said the Warsaw Pact files in Poland's possession contained around 1,700 documents. These include the pact's secret statutes, minutes from command meetings and documentation of the military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to suppress the Prague Spring.

Among the Warsaw Pact files, IPN historians expect to find materials on nuclear weapon stockpiles in Poland, the existence of which was rumored for years. The files may also contain documents belonging to the allied Warsaw Pact command and concerning the "Polish front." According to the pact's war doctrine, the potential targets were northern Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark.

Sikorski's decision stirred up heated debate among Polish politicians. Jerzy Szmajdziński of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) described the issue as a "media humbug." Szmajdziński, Sikorski's predecessor in the leftist governments of Leszek Miller and Marek Belka, said too much political risk had been taken, aggravating already tense relations with Russia. Szmajdziński emphasized that the states which dissolved the Warsaw Pact had signed a document in which they pledged not to publish their pact-related files or make them accessible to third countries. In Szmajdziński's opinion, even though Poland never ratified the agreement, by virtue of international law, the agreement is binding in relations between countries.

Szmajdziński also criticized Sikorski for encouraging impressions of the pact's "war games" as possible responses to attack from the Soviet Union or one of its satellite states, while in fact the exercises assumed a NATO attack and a possible U.S. nuclear strike.

Deputy Sejm Speaker Bronisław Komorowski of the Civic Platform (PO), formerly minister of defense, says the disclosed documents may be interpreted differently by Poland's NATO allies. "Minister Sikorski has showed American attacks on Polish cities," Komorowski said. "It feels a little awkward today." Komorowski added that Poland might now be perceived as a country that does not observe international commitments.

Adam Bielan, spokesman for Law and Justice (PiS), says that the documents disclosed by Sikorski expose the entire shocking truth about the Warsaw Pact and incriminate Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, former communist leader and the architect of martial law in 1981. The same goes for the generals and politicians who supported the system, Bielan said. "Many of them have made careers in the SLD," he said.

Quite naturally, the disclosure of the Warsaw Pact military maps and plans has also provoked a response from Moscow. Konstantin Kosachov, president of the foreign affairs committee in Russia's Duma, says the attitude of Poland's new minister of defense is an outright anti-Russian provocation. Kosachov emphasizes that the disclosure coincides with Poland's declared interest in the American missile defense program, which the Russians say is targeted against their country. Kosachov has also remarked that the Warsaw Pact files Poland may reveal could contain materials constituting a threat to Russian security.

"World War III Scenario Found in Poland," was the title of a report from Warsaw published by the Izvestya daily. The article explained a scenario formulated during a military game in 1979 that featured an exchange of nuclear strikes between the Soviet Union and NATO resulting in a "European desert with a moonlike landscape." The Russian paper remarks on the well-known fact that militaries regularly formulate "inconceivable" conflict scenarios from the point of view of civilians. "This is still happening today, although the United States and Russia are partners," Izvestya reads.

Another popular Russian paper, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, questions the authenticity of Sikorski's map. According to the scenario presented in Warsaw, the first nuclear strike would be initiated by three American B-52 bombers taking off from a base in Great Britain. The squadron's targets were Polish cities located along the Vistula River, from Gdańsk to Katowice. The nuclear attack on the main cities in Poland was meant to destroy their transportation hubs and therefore cut off the Western Group of Soviet Troops stationed in East Germany from the main Soviet Army. Then, a massive armored attack would have been launched from West Germany. Nezavisimaya Gazeta asks why American bombers should have flown over East German and Polish territory, running the risk of being shot down by the Soviet, East German and Polish air defense forces, if it would have been much easier to take off from West Germany and destroy the bases of the Western Group of Soviet Troops. This would have prevented NATO armies from a land engagement that could have resulted in enormous losses. According to the Russians, individual elements of the puzzle do not form a logical whole. "A closer look at the document that the Polish minister presented raises serious doubts concerning either the mental condition of the Soviet marshals or the authenticity of the document," Nezavisimaya Gazeta reads.

The Warsaw Pact was a military alliance that the communist states in Central and Eastern Europe (except for Yugoslavia) signed May 14, 1955 in the capital of Poland. Members of the pact were supposed to defend one another if attacked by a third state. The Warsaw Pact's chief enemy was NATO. After the transformations of 1989-90, the member militaries decided that Soviet troops stationed in countries of the pact should leave their respective territories. An agreement was signed in Budapest Feb. 25, 1991 on the discontinuation of military collaboration as part of the pact. July 1 that year, the pact's political structures were dissolved in Prague, which ultimately put an end to the alliance.

(The Warsaw Voice)
