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NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

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N A T O C O N F I D E N T I A L

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Summary Record of a meeting of the Council held
at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, on Wednesday, 6th April 1983
at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENT

Chairman: Mr. E. da Rin

BELGIUM

Mr. J.J.M.G. Cassiers

CANADA

Mr. J.H. Taylor

DENMARK

Mrs. B. Lindsay-Poulsen

FRANCE

Mr. J-M Merillon

GERMANY

Dr. A. Böcker

GREECE

Mr. S. Drakopoulos

ICELAND

Mr. H.Sv. Björnsson

ITALY

Mr. A. de Franchis

LUXEMBOURG

Mr. P. Wurth

NETHERLANDS

Mr. B.R. Bot

NORWAY

Mr. K. Vibe

PORTUGAL

Mr. J. de Lemos Godinho

SPAIN

Mr. J. de Ojeda

TURKEY

Mr. O. Olcay

UNITED KINGDOM

Sir John Graham

UNITED STATES

Mr. W. Tapley Bennett

INTERNATIONAL STAFF

Assistant Secretary General for
Political Affairs:

Mr. F. Dannenbring

Acting Executive Secretary:

Mr. A. Synadinos

MILITARY COMMITTEE

Deputy Chairman:

Lt.Gen. S.L. Melner

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N A T O U N C L A S S I F I E D

I. STATEMENTS ON POLITICAL SUBJECTS

(Restricted Attendance)

N A T O C O N F I D E N T I A L

II. THE SITUATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Document: C-M(83)9 dated 17th March 1983.

1. Introducing the report by the Expert Group on the Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, the CHAIRMAN noted that the region was still characterized mainly by serious economic problems, a generally poor human rights record, and, as far as Central America was concerned, by continuing instability. However, he urged the Allies not to overlook the hopeful signs for a return to democratic government in a number of countries, a trend which it was in all their interests to support.

2. The CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVE informed the Council that he would be circulating some additional remarks concerning Central America, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Chile and reporting the talks which had taken place on 16th March when the new Mexican Foreign Minister had visited Ottawa. In his discussions with the Canadian Government, the Mexican Foreign Minister had spoken of the international oil market and his country's position on that subject, as well as on the Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement and his Government's view on the situation in Central America.

3. The UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE said that his Authorities considered that the Experts' report was a sound and balanced representation of events in Latin America and the Caribbean during the period under review. The International Staff had again put together a report of high quality. Although there were many important developments elsewhere in the region, he wished to focus his remarks during the present discussion on recent developments in Central America.

4. He recalled that, as a first step in the new peace initiative which had emerged for Central America, a meeting would be convened of the Foreign Ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. This meeting would be witnessed by the Foreign Ministers of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and the Dominican Republic. The Foreign Ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras had already issued a joint statement endorsing such a meeting on 24th February.

5. For their part, the United States had indicated a positive attitude towards such a meeting on several occasions. President Reagan had done so in speeches on 22nd February and 10th March, and the Secretary of State had echoed this position

in public Congressional Hearings on 16th and 22nd March. Washington had been in touch with the meeting's sponsors, but had not been a party to diplomatic efforts to organize it.

6. However, it now appeared that plans for the meeting were faltering for lack of a positive response from Nicaragua and possibly Mexico too. Other governments had indicated a willingness to participate.

7. With regard to specific countries, he noted that the report singled out El Salvador and Guatemala for human rights abuses but said that it was unfortunate that it did not mention Nicaragua, where the Sandinista Government had become increasingly oppressive towards opposition groups, the private sector, and even the Church.

8. In Nicaragua, the recent fighting appeared to be confined largely to Boaco, Matagalpa, Jinoteja, Nueva Segovia, Madriz and Esteli, with little or no fighting in the other eight Nicaraguan provinces. There was also some fighting between Miskito Indians, large numbers of whom had been expelled from their homes by the Nicaraguan Government, and the Sandinistas in Zelaya province.

9. Although scant information was available, it was suspected that Sandinista and rebel claims alike were exaggerating casualties. Thus far, it appeared that the Sandinista militia, rather than its better trained army, had borne the brunt of the fighting.

10. The opposition to the Sandinista Government comprised Miskito Indians, former national guardsmen, former Sandinistas, such as the rebel leader Eden Pastora, former members of the governing junta such as Alfonso Robelo and other anti-Somocista groups. The opposition was diverse, nationalistic and independent.

11. He went on to say that the Sandinista government was also attempting to obscure its refusal to engage in any meaningful diplomatic attempts to defuse regional tensions. The San José Final Act explicitly addressed the very concerns raised by the Sandinistas, including the presence of foreign advisors or trainers, arms flows and external support for insurgency in neighbouring countries.

12. For their part, the United States would continue to search for a peaceful solution to regional disputes in this part of the world where right and wrong were so often confused and would hope that those Allies in a position to do so would support such efforts.

13. The NORWEGIAN REPRESENTATIVE expressed his appreciation to the International Staff and to the Expert Working Group for a most useful survey of developments in the region during the period under review.

14. Norway, too, believed that the report struck the correct balance on the relative importance of internal political and social factors on the one hand and external factors on the other. However, it was felt to be slightly too descriptive here and there on certain events, at the expense of assessments and evaluations.

15. He went on to say that the situation in Nicaragua was still somewhat unsettled, in spite of the ongoing consolidation efforts, and relations between Nicaragua and its neighbours remained tense, particularly in the case of Honduras from which anti-Sandinista forces were operating. Norway believed that armed conflict between Nicaragua and Honduras could not be entirely ruled out and therefore welcomed the peace initiative referred to by the United States Representative.

16. In paragraph 18, reference was made to the continuing Soviet assistance to Nicaragua, particularly in the military field. Norway was of the opinion that the Sandinistas, nevertheless, continued to attach great importance to improving their relations with the West European nations as a means of restoring and developing the Nicaraguan economy. An assessment of these relations might have been useful in the report since there could be room for positive Western influence, although the Sandinista takeover had brought many disappointments.

17. As far as Peru was concerned, Norway agreed with the assessment of the situation in that country but believed that, in judging the viability of the present government one should bear in mind that the opposition in Peru was divided and diverse. With regard to paragraph 44 of the report on the resurgent Sendero Luminoso group, he recalled that its support was limited to the South Eastern part of Peru, which was largely populated by non-Spanish speaking Indians. Consequently, he did not believe that one should attach too much importance to this group in spite of the latest incidents reported in that day's press.

18. Turning to Argentina, his Authorities agreed with the evaluation in the report that the political dynamics seemed to have shifted decisively in favour of the civilians and that the performance of the military régime was subject to mounting criticism. In the present situation, what appeared to be really lacking was a generally recognized and respected central political authority with the ability to take coherent and consistent decisions. Norway believed that Argentina might be facing a further period where authoritarian measures might alternate with democratic social measures in response to conflicting tensions. A real stabilization of Argentinian society might still be far away.

19. Finally, in light of the attention which had been devoted internationally to human rights problems in Chile over the last decade, his Authorities felt that somewhat more extensive coverage should have been given in the report to the human rights record of this country, which, on the whole, had shown no improvement in the period under review, even if some encouraging moves had been registered here and there.

20. The SPANISH REPRESENTATIVE said that his Authorities were grateful to the Group of Experts and its Chairman for the report which it had drafted on the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. The report was all the more valuable and important since it dealt with developments in a part of the world which, as he had pointed out on previous occasions, was the only so-called "Third World" region that was definitely a part of the West, and as such, was of great importance and interest to the Alliance. To this fact was added the increasing concern of the Spanish Authorities at the difficulties which the region was undergoing at present and its political instability in the future.

21. He recognized that the report was subject to shortcomings by the very fact of its joint elaboration by experts of various nations with different approaches to the same problems. As had been the case with previous reports on Latin America and other areas, the document engaged the sole responsibility of its drafters and he would therefore go no further in developing the extent to which the Spanish analysis was somewhat divergent from that contained in the report, both with regard to particular issues and on its overall approach contained in Part I "General Trends and Main Events". Developments in Central America, in particular, appeared to be influenced by a set of factors of a social, economic and political nature which were not sufficiently highlighted in the report. The same could apply to situations as complex as the aftermath of the Falklands Conflict.

22. He recalled that his Delegation had already expressed its views on these outstanding questions during the Council's examination of the previous report on developments in the region. He wished to inform the Council that the Spanish Authorities expected to contribute to the preparation of the next report in a more comprehensive and detailed way so that the general considerations which he had outlined might find their way into its text.

23. The UNITED KINGDOM REPRESENTATIVE wished to be associated with earlier speakers who had already congratulated the Expert Working Group and its Chairman on a fine report.

24. In supporting his United States colleagues' remarks in favour of the proposed peace conference on the situation in Central America, he would recall that the United Kingdom had already welcomed the efforts underway in this direction in the recent Security Council debate and had suggested that the United Nations Secretary General might play a useful rôle in overcoming any remaining obstacles to such a gathering.

25. With regard to relations between Belize and Guatemala, the United Kingdom deeply regretted the breakdown of negotiations and the lack of any immediate prospect for their revival. At the same time, the United Kingdom Government would like to encourage broader economic support for Belize in order to demonstrate the isolation of Guatemala's claims. In the meantime, the small British garrison would remain in Belize, although it was recognized that it could not do so indefinitely. The need was to ensure Belize's security, and the United Kingdom was considering ways of developing the country's small national defence force to this end.

26. Turning to the Falklands, he said that the position of the United Kingdom Government was well known. The United Kingdom could see no possibility of negotiating the sovereignty of the Islands with Argentina as if nothing had happened. As the report itself pointed out, there had still been no formal declaration by Argentina of the cessation of hostilities and, indeed, warlike statements continued to emanate from Buenos Aires. Consequently, the United Kingdom Government remained concerned that Argentina should not obtain military supplies which were likely to increase the threat to the Falkland Islands. It therefore hoped that potential arms suppliers would exercise restraint, or would at least co-operate with the United Kingdom in providing in confidence information on sales of sensitive weapons.

27. On this subject, the United Kingdom Government had been somewhat disappointed with the resolution resulting from the recent summit of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement. This had been adopted in preference to the original Indian draft which had, at least, suggested a genuine attempt at pursuing a moderate line between the parties concerned. The United Kingdom found it hard to understand that, despite the events of 1982, the Non-Aligned Movement should still feel able to support Argentina's extreme position virtually without qualification. Moreover, the United Kingdom found it offensive to suggest that its military presence in the South Atlantic affected stability in the region. The garrison in the Falkland Islands was essential while the threat remained, as was pointed out by the report, and would stay there.

28. The GERMAN REPRESENTATIVE said that he, too, wished to express his appreciation to the Expert Working Group and to its Chairman for a valuable report. His Authorities could agree in general with its contents and his remarks would therefore concentrate on the events since its completion.

29. As far as the situation in Argentina was concerned, his Authorities believed that President Bignone was serious in his intention to hold elections on 30th October. The announcement of these elections had relaxed considerably the tensions between the Government and the political parties on the one hand and the trade unions on the other. However, there were visible rifts between the two major parties in Argentina and he feared that this might lead to their disintegration before elections could take place.

30. He went on to suggest that the growing political pressures on Bignone, as demonstrated by the call for an illegal strike on 28th March, seemed to explain Buenos Aires' more neutral line and might have enabled Argentina to secure stronger support for her claim to sovereignty over the Falklands at the Non-Aligned summit, even though Bignone's meeting with Castro and Arafat had been sharply criticised on his return.

31. Turning to Brazil, he said that in spite of the success of the Brazilian Government in obtaining IMF credits, it was doubtful whether this would solve the country's balance of payments problem for the current year. Certainly, the objective of a \$ fixed billion budget surplus in 1983 was unlikely to be achieved, and debt re-scheduling negotiations might well prove necessary before the end of the year. On the other hand, it was premature to assess the effect on Brazil's balance of payments of falling interest rates and falling oil prices. The overall economic situation remained very bad and could well account for the most recent eruptions of violence.

32. As far as the situation in Bolivia was concerned, there appeared to be increasing concern in some neighbouring countries that Cubans and Nicaraguans who recently entered Bolivia might establish training camps for terrorists and subversive activities in the region. The situation should therefore be carefully monitored.

33. The German Authorities also believed that some attention should have been paid in the report to the situation in Ecuador, where the Government and Ecuador's democratic system as a whole appeared to have been weakened by recent events. The strike which had been called by both the unions and the employers' organizations on 23rd and 24th March had paralyzed the economic life of the country almost completely. Although, by skilful tactics, the Government had been able to avoid clashes between the military and the police on the one hand and the strikers on the other, the large following which the strike had received demonstrated the grave discontent within the country, which the German Authorities expected to worsen rather than improve.

34. In Central America, Nicaragua was and would no doubt remain an element of instability for the foreseeable future. The German Government welcomed the proposed meeting of Foreign Ministers of the region referred to by the United States Representative and hoped that it would be the beginning of a regional settlement. Overall, the situation continued to be tense and unsatisfactory. It was for this reason that Germany had instructed its Ambassador to the United Nations Security Council to express its disappointment at the evolution of Nicaragua since 1979.

35. The NETHERLANDS REPRESENTATIVE said that since the comprehensive and useful report by the Expert Working Group had not given rise to specific comments by his Authorities, he wished to use this occasion to say a few words on Surinam.

36. Since the execution of the fifteen leading critics of the military régime in December 1982 and the murder of former deputy Army Commander Horb in February 1983, no blatant violations of human rights in Surinam had been reported. However, there was still no

question whatsoever of a return to democracy, or of the restoration of press freedom and of the independence of the judiciary. Moreover, there were clear signs that prisoners were still treated very harshly.

37. With respect to the composition of the new Surinam Government formed at the end of February, it could be said that the new cabinet carried clearly the personal signature of Army Commander Bouterse. The leftist-radical Progressive Workers and Farmers Union (PALU) was strongly represented, although it lacked any significant popular support. Furthermore, Bouterse remained Chairman of the so-called "policy centre" where the important decisions were taken and one might therefore expect that the future direction of Surinam and its relations with the Netherlands would be determined largely by him. At the same time, it could be expected that the Progressive Workers and Farmers Union, which often took a strongly nationalistic and anti-Netherlands line, would endeavour for economic reasons to obtain the re-activation of the Netherlands development assistance programme, which had been suspended following the events of December 1982. To judge from statements by high-ranking Surinamese, they hoped and expected that the Netherlands could soon resume its aid relations with Surinam. However, this hope was completely without foundation as long as the present situation continued. Moreover, the Netherlands Authorities had informed the Surinam Prime Minister of their views on this subject.

38. In the ideological field, recent developments had shown a growing anti-Netherlands attitude on the part of Surinam. In this context he recalled the position taken by the Surinamese Government at the preparatory meeting of the non-aligned countries at Managua, as well as the attempts by Bouterse and his Delegation to include in the final communiqué of the non-aligned summit a paragraph condemning the position taken by the Netherlands Authorities towards Surinam. In the end, the paragraph adopted was very moderate in nature and failed to refer explicitly to the Netherlands.

39. As for Surinam's policy vis-à-vis Cuba and Libya, he suggested that the rapprochement towards these countries still fell short of what would be called extensive military or economic operations. There were no large numbers of advisers from these countries in Surinam.

40. With respect to military co-operation, an informal agreement had been rumoured to exist for military assistance between Cuba, Granada and Surinam. Under this agreement, the Cuban air force would be allowed to use the airport of Point Salinas.

41. Finally with regard to Surinam's economic relations, it was likely that Bouterse would be forced by the rapidly deteriorating economic situation of his country to seek new resources abroad at short notice. It was too early to tell where and on which conditions such economic assistance could be obtained.

42. The ITALIAN REPRESENTATIVE said that his Authorities were grateful to the Expert Working Group for an excellent report and wished to be associated with the expressions of congratulation to its members and Chairman.

43. Italy followed closely events in this part of the globe because of her ties of culture, language and civilization. It was for this reason that the Italian Government had been somewhat concerned at the deterioration in relations between Latin America and the West at the time of the conflict in the South Atlantic and had decided to try and contribute to a solution by the visit of the Italian Foreign Minister to a number of countries in the region.

44. However, the affinities which tied Italy to these countries did not prevent her from criticizing certain régimes when human rights and fundamental freedoms were abused. At the same time, the Italian Government believed that it was in Western interests to encourage greater economic co-operation and development, since it was only by meeting the most fundamental material needs of the region and in widening popular participation in the government of these countries that a truly democratic evolution could take place to an extent which would allow them to stand up directly or indirectly to attempts at de-stabilization by the East.

45. Summing up, the CHAIRMAN noted that the Council was unanimous in its appreciation for the report by the Group of Experts.

46. Permanent Representatives had expressed their concern at the situation in specific countries such as Brazil and Surinam, as well as their interest in current developments in the region such as the on-going peace efforts. At the same time, they had underlined certain weaknesses in the report, which tended to be rather too descriptive for some nations at the expense of in-depth assessments of the complex, economic, political and sociological problems involved. Such shortcomings would be amended in the next report by the Group of Experts.

47. The COUNCIL:

took note of the report by the Expert Working Group on the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

N A T O U N C L A S S I F I E D

III. FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE WITH EXPERTS

48. The TURKISH REPRESENTATIVE enquired whether it would be possible to re-schedule the meetings of the Political Committee with Disarmament Experts and with Legal Experts, which were to be respectively held on 3rd/4th May and 6th May 1983, so as to avoid national representation problems arising from their coincidence with the meeting in Geneva on 2nd/6th May 1983, of the Seabed Treaty Preparatory Committee.

N A T O C O N F I D E N T I A L

IV. FORTHCOMING DEPARTURE OF AMBASSADOR BENNETT

49. The CHAIRMAN said that it was with regret that he had learned of the imminent departure of Ambassador Bennett, Permanent Representative of the United States. The Council would have the opportunity to bid him an official farewell in due course.

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