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[ Czechoslovakia-USSR: Prague leaders are stalling on the timing and locale of a meeting with their Soviet counterparts pending the removal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia.

The withdrawal reportedly continued at a leisurely pace over the weekend, but some troops remained in the country beyond the Sunday deadline announced earlier by the Czechoslovaks. Prague radio reported that Soviet signal units were disassembling their equipment and beginning to leave on Saturday.

On 20 July Prague radio said that plans for a meeting of Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders at Kosice in eastern Slovakia had been "abandoned," and termed the Soviet proposal for a gathering in the USSR "unacceptable."

Czechoslovak agreement in principle to talks with Moscow is clear from the resolution adopted by the party central committee on 19 July. The document calls for "maximum effort" to bring about such "negotiations" as soon as possible, but it also instructs party leaders that the principles underlying Czechoslovakia's course are not negotiable. In a speech yesterday Czechoslovak President Svoboda also held out hopes for talks.

Some Czechoslovak leaders apparently believe reports of discord within the Soviet leadership and among its four allies in Eastern Europe over future tactics in the crisis.

[ there was no conciliatory proposal in the Soviet letter inviting the Czechoslovaks to a meeting, but Prague is ready to make limited concessions in order to keep the Soviets from hardening their position. These would include an end to criticism of the Warsaw Pact command structure, a moratorium on independent moves in foreign policy, and restraint on linking the Soviets with earlier repressions in Czechoslovakia.]

(continued)

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[On 21 July the Soviet army newspaper Red Star quoted an alleged Czechoslovak report that "several more" arms caches of US origin were discovered in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak Interior Minister quickly denied this report, and characterized a previously discovered arms cache in western Bohemia a "provocation."

Yesterday, Pravda again described the "counter-revolutionary" threat to Czechoslovakia, but took pains to deny that the joint letter from Warsaw last week constituted an ultimatum. Moscow has not yet commented in public on Czechoslovakia's refusal to meet in the USSR, suggesting that it may be keeping open some limited room for maneuver on the timing, locale, and composition of the delegations.

East German propagandists are now directly attacking Dubcek's leadership. Rumania and Yugoslavia continue to give Prague vocal support, but apparently Ceausescu and Tito have delayed going to Prague at Czechoslovak request.

The French party yesterday withdrew its proposal for a European Communist conference on Czechoslovakia, following the return of party leader Waldeck-Rochet from talks in Prague. The Czechoslovak leadership reportedly had been "negative" toward the proposal. The official announcement said that the proposal was being withdrawn because of the "possibility" of bilateral talks between the Czechoslovaks and "some" of the powers which met in Warsaw a week ago.

Yesterday the Czechoslovak party daily Rude Pravo rejected Soviet allegations of US involvement in the crisis, concluding that in the present spirit of US-Soviet detente there is no logic to the thesis that the US has an interest in provoking Moscow by fomenting "counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia. This editorial may have been designed in part to dampen fears raised by rumors of a Soviet deal with the US over the future of Czechoslovakia.

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