

SECRET

Czechoslovakia-USSR: The upcoming Czechoslovak party congress apparently is viewed in both Prague and Moscow as the next critical test.

The Czechoslovaks are preparing for the congress scheduled to begin on 9 September. It is with an eye to keeping the reformist elements in Prague from totally dominating the congress, thereby excluding significant Soviet-conservative influence, that the Russians are maintaining military and propaganda pressure on the Dubcek regime.

The Czechoslovaks, meanwhile, are attempting to cope with their foreign and domestic problems. Party leaders will meet again with Czechoslovakia's leading editors on 21 August in a second attempt to persuade them not to engage in polemics with the Soviet press. If Dubcek is unable to get the editors to exercise restraint, he may attempt to impose some type of control over Czechoslovak mass media, a move that will imperil the "freedom of the press" guaranteed in the party's "Action Program."

Dubcek, in addition, may have new problems when the Slovak Communists open their party congress on 26 August. A growing rift between liberals and conservatives appears to have split the Slovak party. There is also evidence of dissatisfaction with the Prague regime's reform program among some elements of the Slovak hierarchy. In addition, the Slovak press has been critical of its own party leaders, including conservative Slovak party boss Bilak.

Almost 950 candidates--the majority of whom are unknown in national politics--have been proposed by the lower party bodies for membership in the party central committee. This unprecedented range of choice, however, will be reduced by an election committee to 150 candidates for the 110 positions.

20 Aug 68

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

3

SECRET

SECRET

Top-ranking Soviet military officials, including Defense Minister Grechko and Warsaw Pact Commander Yakubovsky, were visiting Soviet and Polish troops in southwest Poland on 16 August.

Prague radio announced yesterday that exercises of Czechoslovak divisions will be held in mountain terrain in western Czechoslovakia on 21 and 22 August under the direction of the commander of the western forces of the Czechoslovak Army. The exercises will be attended by Czechoslovak defense and security officials, and military observers from other Communist countries. Division-level exercises at this time of the year are not unusual, but this one may have special significance as an effort to demonstrate the Czechoslovak Army's capability to defend the country's western border without having Soviet or other Warsaw Pact forces stationed in Czechoslovakia.

25X1

20 Aug 68

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

4

SECRET