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[USSR-Czechoslovakia: Moscow yesterday again stepped up the pressure on Prague, this time in preparation for the talks between the Soviet politburo and the Czechoslovak presidium.

Izvestia yesterday announced a massive rear services exercise to take place in most of the western USSR, including the Carpathian Military District adjacent to Czechoslovakia. The exercise, probably the largest of this type to take place since July 1961, is clearly designed to bolster the position of the politburo in its confrontation with the Czechoslovak leadership.

Izvestia carried the announcement of the exercise alongside a notice of the politburo members' decision to go to Czechoslovakia for talks with their Czechoslovak counterparts. Neither Moscow nor Prague has indicated that a time or site for the meeting has been set. The Yugoslav news agency TANYUG, however, reported yesterday that the politburo had already left Moscow. The report has not been confirmed or denied by any other source but TANYUG is usually accurate on such matters.

Along with its latest threatening military moves, Moscow stepped up its propaganda against Prague. The Soviet military organ Red Star attacked General Prchlik, the Czechoslovak party official in charge of military and security affairs, for his criticism of the Warsaw Pact command structure at a press conference a week ago. Izvestia weighed in with a veiled attack on the Czechoslovak minister of the interior, reprinting a letter charging him with complicity in the political trials of the 1950s. According to unconfirmed news reports, among the demands in the Soviet note reportedly handed to the Czechoslovaks on 22 July was one that certain officials be removed from power.]

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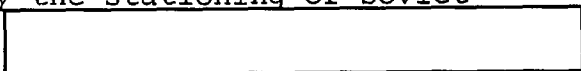
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[It is still unclear how many members of the Czechoslovak presidium will participate in the discussions with the Soviet politburo. Prague has yet to acknowledge officially that all 11 would join their Soviet counterparts, and a presidium member stated on 22 July that only six members from both sides would attend the meeting. A Western news service reported yesterday, however, that "knowledgeable" sources in Prague said the Czechoslovaks had "virtually" agreed that the entire presidium would be present.

The Soviets desire that the entire Czechoslovak presidium be included in the talks, presumably because they hope one or more of the Czechoslovaks will waver in the face of Soviet pressure. Various factions are represented in the presidium, and some members reportedly favored accepting the earlier Soviet proposal to attend the Warsaw summit meeting. They eventually acquiesced in the final decision not to go, however, and since then the nationwide support given to the leadership has strengthened the presidium's resolve and unity.

A Czechoslovak journalist told Western diplomats on 23 July that the Soviet note delivered on 22 July dealt with the arms cache found in Czechoslovakia. He asserted that in the note Moscow did not propose stationing Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. Yesterday, however, the commander of Czechoslovak border guards defended Prague's ability and willingness to protect its borders with West Germany. This suggests at least that Czechoslovak officials are alert to the possibility that the Soviets may present arguments concerning Czechoslovak defense capabilities to justify the stationing of Soviet forces in the country.



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