

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 11, 1968

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. W. W. ROYSTON

SUBJECT: The Situation in Czechoslovakia

The situation in Czechoslovakia continues to heat up. Moscow is repeatedly broadcasting excerpts from yesterday's Pravda article denouncing "2,000 Words" (the Czech artists and intellectuals' recent manifesto). Pravda talks darkly of "anti-socialist forces," which have "embarked on the course of overthrowing the existing system and the restoration of capitalists ways." It compares Czechoslovakia with Hungary in 1956, and warns of "the activization of right wing and, indeed, counter revolutionary forces ... associated with Imperialistic reaction."

The German DPA press agency (not very reliable) is carrying a story about travellers observing Soviet troops crossing into Czechoslovakia from Hungary. This is unconfirmed and probably inaccurate. There are reports that the People's Militia are being called out, and are drawing live ammunition. (The People's Militia -- largely composed of factory workers -- is said to be pro-Soviet and pro-Stalinist.)

The Czech Government press spokesman has announced, on behalf of the Warsaw Pact Command, that remaining Soviet troops will begin withdrawing this Saturday. The Czech Minister of Defense says the Warsaw Pact Command will issue a communique tomorrow, and the departure will then "only be a question of a short time." The Soviets are silent.

Apparently the Dubcek government continues to resist pressure for another Dresden-type communist summit -- saying they will talk bilaterally with anybody, but not be brought before another such conclave. The Czech Reform Program continues. As for the Party Congress, the reformers are more than holding their own in preliminary selection of delegates.

Our Intelligence people are increasingly convinced the Soviets have as many as 18,000 troops in Czechoslovakia -- no match for the Czech army, but more than the Czechs had originally bargained on.

It looks like an intensified war of nerves -- like the episodes we have seen in past months, and at least as serious as the worst of them. The polemics in public tend to engage Soviet prestige, and increase the volatility of the situation. The best guess in the Intelligence community is that the Soviets are, as in the past, trying to exert pressure short of open intervention. However, nobody is wholly in control of the variables.

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By SJ, NARA, Date 25-02

Nathaniel Davis

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