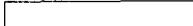
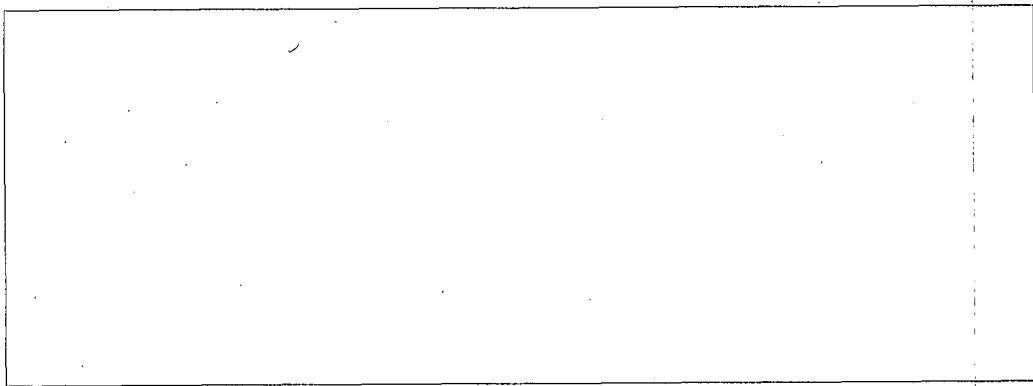


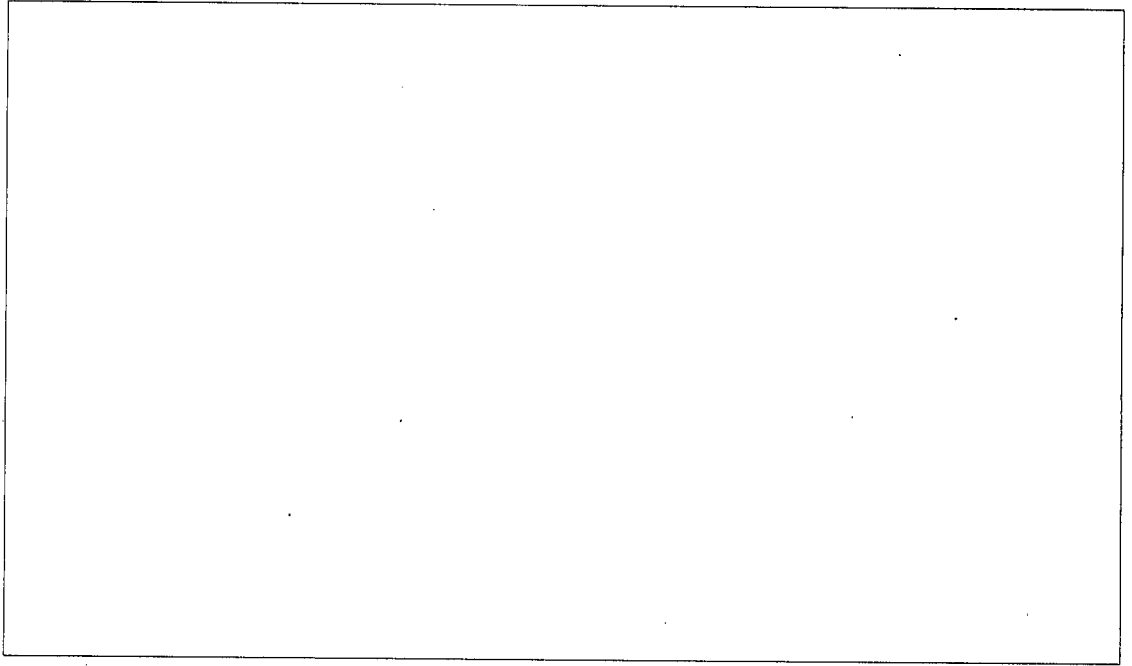
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28 October 1968



 FINISHED REPORTING  
ON THE CZECHOSLOVAK-SOVIET CRISIS





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Finished Reporting on the Czechoslovak-Soviet Crisis

Summary

1. The development of the rift between Moscow and Prague can be traced back over a period of ten months in the Agency's finished intelligence publications. This reconstruction of Agency reporting focuses on the period between early May and the invasion on 20 August.

[REDACTED]

2. How well did we report the issues? The answer is that we understood and reported them well. With a flood of open polemics [REDACTED] this was not difficult. Our reporting was voluminous; it identified the issues correctly; it conveyed the depth of Soviet concern and Czechoslovakia's determination to press ahead. We never reached a judgment that intervention was more likely than not. But our readers were continually kept aware from March on that the stakes were high enough to raise the possibility of military intervention.

3. How well did we report the build-up of Soviet capabilities? The job of strategic warning was well done. Our problems were eased by the fact that the USSR assembled far more forces than the minimum required to do the job, did so in a methodical manner, and publicized some of its preparations as part of its war of nerves against Czechoslovakia.

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We were not continuously abreast of all the details. But the major elements of the build-up were abundantly covered [redacted]

[redacted] from late July onward. The CIB of 1 August reported the build-up of at least 16 divisions along the Czechoslovak borders, and an Intelligence Memorandum of 2 August concluded that the Soviets had completed military preparations sufficient for intervention if the political leadership so ordered. Daily reporting in the first three weeks of August reinforced this message.

4. How well did we provide more specific warning? We did not suggest to our readers, just before the invasion, that the Soviets had decided to intervene with force. About ten hours before the invasion, however, we became aware that something major was stirring in Moscow, and the DCI was able to warn the President and his senior advisers of his belief that an important development regarding Czechoslovakia was taking place.

5. This, however, was as far as we felt we could go. We did not receive direct, reliable information of the Soviet decision to intervene, which almost certainly was made sometime between 3 August (the Bratislava meeting) and 17 August (the hurried, secret Politburo meeting in Moscow). Lacking such information, we had to rely on the total pattern of evidence, overt and classified, military and political.

6. The most prominent feature of the military evidence during this period was stability. Changes in the disposition of the Soviet forces were noted, but they were relatively minor, pointed in conflicting directions, and did not substantially alter the picture, which remained consistent with a policy of exerting pressure. On the political side, we reported numerous instances in which the compromises worked out at Cierna/Bratislava were wearing thin. But Soviet polemics did not regain the intensity of earlier periods. Most of the evidence on the

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behavior of the leadership in Prague did not suggest that it had suddenly become seriously alarmed about intervention. Our reporting tended to identify 9 September, when the Czechoslovak Party Congress was due to open, as the next stage in what had by now become a protracted crisis. Thus while we reported almost daily that massive Soviet forces were in place and ready to move if ordered, the total pattern of the evidence did not lead us to give increasing emphasis to this fact in our analysis in the final week.

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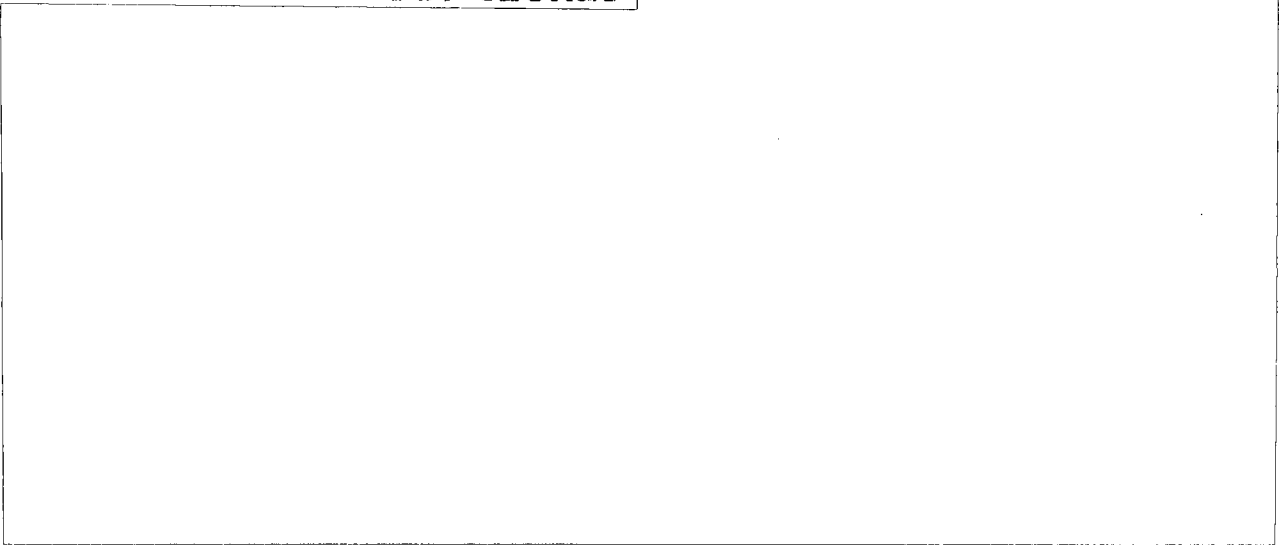
9. In sum, the Soviets, who were under no particular time pressure, were able to perfect their military preparations and then remain in readiness until, at an arbitrarily chosen time, they moved. They did not have to take urgent, hasty measures which might have generated specific warning indicators. On the political side, they refrained from a final crescendo of demands and propaganda which would have sharpened our sense of the likelihood of invasion. Thus they were able to achieve tactical surprise against both the Czechs and us.

10. How quickly did we report the fact of invasion, once it began? The first word we received was a Czech government statement which was broadcast at 2050 (all times EDT). This was translated and filed by FBIS in Vienna at 2114 and received in Washington (White House, State, Defense, NSA, and CIA) at 2115.

11. How useful were our various sources of information? Because so much of the Soviet-Czechoslovak maneuvering took place in the open, FBIS reporting of government statements and press articles was our primary source of information.

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