MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

We have revised and edited the memorandum on Czechoslovakia which I spoke of in the meeting this morning, and here it is. It still does not seem to us good enough for much outside distribution, but it may be a useful summing up for your information.

Abbot Smith
Director
National Estimates

3 September 1968
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED. (47)

SECRET

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 September 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Consequences of Czechoslovakia

SUMMARY

It is still very early to assess all the likely consequences of the Soviet military move into Czechoslovakia. Quite obviously, arrangements between the USSR and Czechoslovakia are fragile, and the current relative calm within Czechoslovakia could be broken at any time by popular manifestations against the occupation forces. It now appears more likely, however, that the people will reluctantly accept the results of the Soviet-imposed Moscow compromise, which -- in exchange for the Soviets' conditional acceptance of the Dubcek leadership and for a vague Soviet promise someday to withdraw the occupying forces -- commits Prague to renewed fealty to the USSR abroad and to a return to more orthodox communist policies at home. Moscow thus seems to have accomplished its principal immediate aims, the reversal of Czechoslovakia's movement away from the Bloc, the collapse of the Czech experiment in a new form of liberal and independent socialism, and the erection of new barriers against the emergence of any Czech-like developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Among the costs of such accomplishment for the USSR, however, are the potentially explosive political strains endured by the Soviet leadership; the probable strengthening of anti-Soviet nationalism among the peoples of Eastern Europe; the reinforcement of polycentrist trends within the Communist Parties of the international movement, especially in Western Europe; and -- despite Soviet hopes to the contrary -- the possible disruption of a variety of Soviet policies across the world.

S-E-C-R-E-T

Approved For Release 2005/12/24 : CIA-RDP79R00904A001400020006-1

1. Contrary to indications last week that Moscow was preparing to crack down hard on the Czechs and on the Dubcek leadership, the Soviets now appear to be giving the Czechs some opportunity to put their own house in order. The most virulent Soviet accusations against the Czechs have lately been muted and have been accompanied by praise of both Dubcek and Svoboda. This turnabout -- the third time the Soviet press has changed its line on Dubcek -- and other anomalies (including, first and most conspicuously, the apparent lack of any clear-cut occupation policy once the invasion had been completed) has suggested Soviet indecision or even serious disagreements within the Soviet leadership. The following discussion offers some notions on how things might go now inside Czechoslovakia, how the Soviets might view this process, what the circumstances might be within the Soviet leadership, and, finally, a very brief consideration of the possible impact of the Czech affair on general Soviet policy.

The Scene in Czechoslovakia

2. The Czechoslovak leaders surely did their best in Moscow, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, to obtain an honorable settlement and the withdrawal of all Warsaw Pact troops from Czech soil. But Dubcek and his comrades -- with their

entire nation as hostage -- had few opportunities to bargain and little chance to succeed. And, indeed, the Czechs could not hide their personal anguish on their return to Prague, nor could they conceal from the people the costly essence of the Moscow compromise. In exchange for a vague pledge by the Soviet leaders to pull out the Warsaw Pact forces and for a conditional Soviet agreement to tolerate most of the existing Czech leadership, Prague has unconditionally promised renewed fealty to the USSR and a hasty return to orthodox, Soviet-approved ways of conducting the domestic affairs of party and state. Thus the Soviets have avoided the establishment of a military occupation regime, at least for the time being, and have prevented what they feared the most, the departure of Czechoslovakia from "socialism" and from the Soviet Bloc.

3. "It will be harder and more difficult than we imagined not too long ago," Dubcek warned, with understatement, on his return to Prague. Please bear with me and trust me, Dubcek said to his people, and all will not necessarily be lost. But popular faith and hope in Dubcek have now been severely tested, and the tremendous moral authority he once commanded, and depended on, has surely been weakened by his conceding -- even at gunpoint --

so much to the Soviets. Now, with this authority perhaps seeping away from him, he must somehow find a way between the demands of the Soviets and the appeals of aroused patriots, and persuade (or force) the Czech people to follow him. It is unlikely that anyone on either side is inclined to make his task easy for him, and indeed, he may not find it within himself to continue the effort.

4. The presence of massive numbers of Soviet and allied troops in Czechoslovakia -- perhaps 20 divisions or more -- adds substantially to Dubcek's problems. Most Czechs are probably anxious to avoid provoking the Soviet troops and to give the Dubcek regime a chance to get on its feet. Nevertheless, the Czechs have not been cowed by these troops and there is still surely some esteem attached to acts of defiance. Sporadic violence and brutal Soviet retaliations are simply constant hazards of the occupation. Moreover, should the Soviet troops remain in the country for a long period -- despite Dubcek's assurances that they are scheduled to go -- chances of open protest would grow. Public rage at the continued Soviet military presence would certainly be directed in part at Dubcek, and the feeling that he had failed and that there was no longer any particular point in supporting him in office would surely grow. In the public mind he might acquire an image something like the Kadar of 1956.

5. The Soviet leadership believes that it has successfully ended the Czech "revisionist" experiment. Dubcek and others apparently hope that with Czech patience and persistence -- without, in his words, "passions" and "psychoses" -- the Soviets will finally tire of their overlordship or will actually swing around to a more liberal and sympathetic point of view. In the long interim, Dubcek will count at home on popular common sense and self-discipline, on the general awareness that the Soviets would invade again if the regime in Prague lost control or again embarked on a "counter-revolutionary" road. And it is almost certainly true that the vast majority of Czechs of all persuasions would prefer a home-grown, and relatively benign, communist dictatorship to a Soviet military government. With Moscow, of course, Dubcek will hope to be able to exercise some influence, relying on Moscow's reluctance to impose a military regime and, perhaps, on the possibility that disagreements within the Kremlin will work to Czech advantage.

6. The Dubcek-Cernik regime will go back on as few of their earlier promises of reform as possible. But the Soviets have asked for and apparently gained, a Czech promise to reintroduce press controls, restore "democratic centralism" within the Party, and reimpose Party control over all aspects of national life. Men

who resist these programs are more likely to be fired than arrested; journals which persist in opposition are more likely to be deprived of paper and presses than formally closed; but in the end, when and where necessary, the police will probably be used. There are probably limits, however, beyond which these leaders would not go; pushed too hard and too far by the Soviets, they would probably resign from office and allow a more frankly Moscow-dominated regime to live with the onus of doing the Soviets' dirty work.

7. Eventually, the pattern which might emerge in Czechoslovakia -- assuming public order and continued Soviet toleration -- could be akin to that already well established in Hungary. There the party retains firm control and is quick to respond to Soviet guidance. But it is also willing to live with some diversity, actively seeks to court popular favor, and tries to avoid total subservience to Soviet whims. If not a model for independent and "humanitarian" socialism on the order of the earlier Czech hopes, it is nonetheless a form of communist dictatorship which is far removed from Stalinism but completely acceptable to Moscow. And Kadar, while certainly not loved, is apparently granted at least grudging popular respect.

The View from Moscow

8. If the tensions and mistrust between the Soviets and the present Czech leadership cannot be contained, Dubcek will be dispensable. The Soviets did not wish to put him and his colleagues back in office; they did not trust the instincts or the motives or even the abilities of this increasingly "revisionist" group. They were willing to accept Dubcek's return, however, because of President Svoboda's insistence, the attitudes of other Communist Parties, and, most important, the lack of any strong alternative other than Soviet military government. The Soviets almost certainly believe that Dubcek can function only with their sufferance and that eventually, if necessary, an effective and reliable and probably tougher replacement for him can be found.

9. In any event, it is clear that the Soviets, in accordance with all past preferences, hope to deal with the Czech problem as much as possible by political means, and to minimize reliance on military force. There probably is a substantial number of Czech party functionaries who were anxious about Dubcek's reforms and opposed to democratic experiments, or who are simply opportunists and see a promising future in working again with the Soviets. A corps of such men, in contact with Moscow, could be built up over

time, aided now and again by Soviet pressures on the leadership and by the ability of the Soviets once more to wheel and deal within the Czech Party. If Dubcek should fall, or be pushed, it is from such a corps that the Soviets would hope to find a suitable replacement.

The Soviet Leadership

10. The Soviet leadership has wrestled with the problem of Czechoslovakia for some nine months, sometimes clumsily so. The initial Soviet political intervention in the crisis -- a move to support Novotny in his hour of need -- was ineffective. The USSR's efforts -- as at Dresden in March and in subsequent meetings in Moscow -- to curb the new Czech leadership's enthusiasm for reform and its desire to act more independently of the Bloc were equally so. Finally, the Soviets' resort to extreme military pressures -- menacing troop moves on the Czech borders and a prolonged Warsaw Pact exercise within Czechoslovakia -- also failed of its purpose, though it did advertise to the world at large that the USSR was behaving in a heavy handed and reprehensible way. Throughout this period, the Soviet leadership acted in public as a unified collective. But Brezhnev, as the most powerful figure on the Politburo and as the one leader most closely identified with both

Novotny and Czechoslovakia, was generally thought to be the major architect of the USSR's policies and the man most responsible for its repeated setbacks.

11. Reports of serious disagreements within the leadership during this same period were never confirmed. The most consistent report, and speculation, was that Brezhnev and Kosygin were at odds over the Czech issue, the former favoring extreme action, the latter opposed. It seems likely that the leadership as a whole was essentially united on the principal proposition: the course followed by the new leadership of Czechoslovakia threatened, or potentially threatened, the vital interests of the USSR. It seems plausible, however, that there were different currents of opinion within the leadership over the degree of danger Czechoslovakia represented at any given moment and what should be done by the USSR to contain that danger. Contributing to any such disagreement, of course, would have been the normal process of Soviet politics, especially the tendency of the discontented and the ambitious to try to capitalize on the opportunities offered by a crisis situation to weaken the position of rivals and opponents in the leadership.

12. The present Soviet leadership is by nature cautious and conservative, reluctant to make hard decisions. The Czech experiment caught these men off guard and placed them into an especially difficult and unpleasant circumstance. There was no easy and graceful way out; anything they did, or even failed to do, would be attended by disadvantage and opprobrium. Temporizing, however, offered no solution. Ultimately, the Czechs in effect forced the Soviet Politburo to make a choice. Either it tolerated the collapse of reliable Communist authority in Prague and faced the risk of growing Western influence over the Czechs and the danger of similar developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe, or it took a hard stand and moved incautiously and radically to prevent such developments. It could not have been an easy decision to make, and it would not be at all surprising if, [redacted] 25X1

25X1 [redacted] some of the Soviet leaders openly argued against it. It is certainly not too difficult, for example, to imagine a concerned Kosygin rather more anxious than, say, a Soviet marshal about the impact of a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on the USSR's policies in Western Europe and even on some of the USSR's economic problems at home. It is also easy to see an alarmed Brezhnev, sensitive to his past miscalculations and open to pressures from the party apparat and from the military, moving toward an extreme position.

13. The collective has endured for almost four years, and its ability so far to govern with few signs of inner turmoil has surpassed most expectations. To date, however, it has had to endure few major crises, either at home or abroad. The Czech problem probably presented it with its most difficult hours and may have placed some of the top leaders in a vulnerable position. Brezhnev in particular may suffer as a consequence of the strain and may in the end be picked as the obvious and most convincing scapegoat for an especially unsavory and unsatisfactory episode in the conduct of Soviet affairs abroad. It seems unlikely, however, that any moves against Brezhnev, or any of the other top leaders, would come too close on the heels of the events themselves. This is not a good time for open displays of disunity.

The Impact in Eastern Europe and on Other Parties

14. In a way, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia served quite unintentionally to dramatize for all the East Europeans the power and the appeal of the Czech movement and the poverty of Soviet efforts to contain it. Once Moscow had decided to move, it chose to issue a series of pronouncements which were intended for all Eastern European ears; it decided to use the armed forces of four other Warsaw Pact countries, including even East Germany, in

the invasion campaign; and it was forced to engage in open and direct argument with both Belgrade and Bucharest and a number of Parties not in power over the need and the legitimacy and the probable consequences of the military intervention. All of these developments served to internationalize a question which the Soviets had devoutly hoped could be confined to Czechoslovakia.

15. In any case, while certainly aware that it would be foolhardy to seek to go beyond the boundaries now firmly set by Moscow, the East Europeans have been reminded once again of their unhappy relationship with a doctrinaire, reactionary, and oppressive neighbor. Most East Europeans were dismayed by the invasion of Czechoslovakia, were chagrined by the use of East European forces in that invasion, and were strengthened in their convictions that the Soviet presence must somehow and someday be removed from their own territory. All in all, if the Soviet move has served to erect new barriers against the advance of national independence in Eastern Europe, it has also surely failed to halt the growth of a strong anti-Soviet nationalism behind those barriers.

16. Elsewhere within the Communist movement, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia apparently brought the greatest glee to Peking, which, however, is probably in the least advantageous

position to exploit the development. Some distress was probably occasioned in North Vietnam and North Korea, but their remoteness and preoccupation with other concerns will probably limit the response. The greatest effects were, of course, felt in Western Europe, where the Communist Parties were gravely embarrassed by the act and believed it necessary to disassociate themselves from it in order to safeguard their own political futures. Over the long term, the Soviet move has confirmed and almost certainly reinforced the tendency of parties in Western Europe to strike out in their own national directions. It is becoming increasingly obvious to many of these parties, most notably the French and Italian, that close association with the CPSU can only serve to limit the roles they are likely to play in the future in their own societies.

Effects on Soviet Foreign Policies

17. The USSR's problems with Czechoslovakia came about in part as a result of Prague's efforts to overcome a Cold War legacy, and the USSR's response was certainly reminiscent of the Cold War at its worst. But Soviet considerations were not directly the outgrowth of Cold War concerns, nor did the West react as if they were. In fact, the Soviet leadership has almost certainly

conceived all along of the Czechoslovak problem as no one's business except its own and Eastern Europe's, a matter quite apart from questions of understandable interest to both East and West. The Soviet effort to solve this problem was conceived and executed in this context, and, Soviet propaganda notwithstanding, the Soviets have not sought to entangle their policies elsewhere in the world with their actions against Prague. That is to say, Moscow has made no deliberate moves to change course toward the Third World, Western Europe, or the United States. If relations between the USSR and other states are damaged, Moscow probably believes it will be the result of the actions of others, using the events in Czechoslovakia simply as a pretext.

18. Specifically concerning the US, a number of proposed programs already appear to be casualties of the Soviet move and prospects for a number of others have been placed in doubt. The idea of a mutual reduction of forces in Europe is almost certainly dead for the foreseeable future; and the various schemes for arms control and disarmament, all of them already inherently difficult of accomplishment, face formidable new obstacles. But the economic and military factors which seemed to be moving the Soviet leaders closer to the idea of some arms control arrangement have not in

and of themselves been affected by the new Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, and much will now depend on the impact of recent events on the attitudes and policies of the United States.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

[redacted] 25X1

ABBOT SMITH
Chairman