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THE CABINET MEETING  
OF  
AUGUST 22, 1968

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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ATTENDANCE

At the Special Cabinet Meeting of August 22, 1968

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Vice President Humphrey  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary Fowler  
Secretary Clifford  
Attorney General Clark  
Postmaster General Watson

Secretary Freeman  
Secretary Smith  
Secretary Wirtz  
Secretary Cohen  
Secretary Weaver  
Secretary Boyd

STAFF MEMBERS AND OTHERS

Governor Daniels  
Nat Davis  
Ernest Goldstein  
Ed Hamilton  
Bob Hardesty  
Jim Jones  
John Macy  
Leonard Marks  
Mike Manatos

Charlie Murphy  
Art Okun  
DeVier Pierson  
George Reedy  
Walt Rostow  
Larry Temple  
Charles Zwick  
Ed Fried

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## A G E N D A

Special Cabinet Meeting, August 22, 1968

### I. THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN SITUATION

Secretary Rusk (diplomatic and UN)	5 minutes
Secretary Clifford (military)	5 minutes
Leonard Marks (world press reaction)	5 minutes

### II. SITUATION REPORT ON VIETNAM

Secretary Clifford	5 minutes
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### III. REPORT ON AIRPORT CONGESTION AND AVIATION LEGISLATION

Secretary Boyd	5 minutes
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### IV. LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM: Review of Current Status of Legislation

Barefoot Sanders Joe Califano Mike Manatos	10 minutes
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TOTAL TIME: 35 minutes

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MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING

Thursday, August 22, 1968

The President convened the meeting at 12:15 p. m. by reading from a briefing paper prepared by the National Security Council on the situation in Czechoslovakia. (Attached at Tab A)

The President continued with his own interpretation:

"Yesterday morning, after going to other governments, we formalized a statement and issued it. We believe there is no basic disagreement in the U. S. Government on this policy. We do not believe that any intervention is in our interest.

"But the cold war is not over. We must be cautious of those in our own country who say that it is, that Communism isn't Communism anymore.

"Some of our people are extremely discouraged... But I do think that we need to remember several agreements of mutual interest that we have with the Soviet Union... in space, nuclear and consular treaties, our hopes on peaceful use of atomic energy and to limit offensive and defensive weapons, our hopes in the Middle East and in Vietnam.

"We have thought that we have been making progress. I came away from Glassboro really thinking that the Soviets would and could do something in Vietnam. I have been disappointed. Maybe the Soviets tried and failed and don't want to admit it. They thought that they could help if we stopped the bombing so we undertook a 30-day bombing pause. We did it even though our own people were anxious about the danger, but we did it.

"I don't trust them. But I do feel that we can talk and work with them. I put in the Manila Communique a promise that we would pull out when the violence ceased. I thought that would meet Mr. Gromyko's terms to me. Maybe yes, maybe no. Maybe he couldn't swing it.

"We've got to stay alert. President Truman was disillusioned too. We woke up and found mighty armies marching into nations with tanks, so we have to stay alert."

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The President called on Secretary Rusk to give his interpretation of developments in Eastern Europe.

SECRETARY RUSK 12:27-12:35

"One factor restraining the Soviets was the political cost in world terms, in their general propaganda position, in many bilateral relations, including U.S. relations.

"For reasons known only to themselves, they sent troops in on Monday, going in because the danger of letting Czechoslovakia go along was too great.

"Let us be very clear about one thing. Military intervention means nuclear war. There is no mistake about it. For us to intervene would mean World War III. So world public opinion is our resort. The USSR is particularly sensitive to this area of propaganda. It is a main instrument of their own policy.

"Leonard Marks will give you a briefing on the almost unanimous world opinion condemning the Soviet action. It is more unanimous than I would have guessed.

"For example, we had a 13-2 United Nations vote condemning the Soviets, with only Russia and Hungary objecting. It is very possible that we could get a Special Meeting, with maybe 80-90 votes in the General Assembly.

"It is the strongest and most violent world reaction that I have seen in many a day. It may have some restraint on the Soviets. They may not shoot Dubcek. It is very important that the voice of Czechoslovakia is still heard through its Ministers, its President and on clandestine radio. The passive resistance is widespread. There are 20,000 students in a square in Czechoslovakia right now, sitting down in front of tanks. It could be a disaster."

The Secretary proceeded to discuss the implications of Czechoslovakian developments on Vietnam policy.

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"There is no organic relationship between the two. Czechoslovakia has its own dynamic. We need not ourselves slink around the corner of the house because of Vietnam. There is all the difference in the world between helping a little nation to which we are bound by treaty, to help it elect its own Government... and 200,000 troops marching in without warning to deny a people the right to have their own government.

"Remember the Dominican Republic. It was clear in two days after we had sent our troops in that the fight was about restoring Trujillo or setting up a Castro Regime. So the OAS condemned both and then authorized intervention, adding the troops of other nations to our own.

"People will try to muddy up this thing, to call black white, but they can't do it.

"I hope this Cabinet will use all its influence to stop it. Tomorrow, next week, next month, the decisions will still be there. They will be the hard questions of offensive and defensive weapons, nuclear treaties, and we just can't throw up our hands and say that it is all over now. We must continue on. We must live in the real world.

Secretary Wirtz

"I agree 100% that Czechoslovakia and Vietnam are utterly different. I watched Channel 26 last night and George Ball was having quite difficult a time in keeping Vietnam and Czechoslovakia apart, in making the difference clear. The Czechoslovakian minister gave a very genuine and moving speech, but he had trouble too. I believe our position must be to recognize that this is a very real problem."

Secretary Rusk

Thanked Secretary Wirtz for his thoughts.

"There are many nations in Asia and the world who do not support us on Vietnam, but who do condemn the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia. We are also prepared for United Nations action on Vietnam if Malik brings it up. We will ask that the Vietnam motion be inscribed. We're ready for it."

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The Vice President 12:35-12:36

The Vice President referred to an NBC television program where Kenneth Gailbraith had attacked U. S. policy in Vietnam, comparing it with Soviet action in Czechoslovakia.

"I called them up to protest. I think we need plenty of other spokesmen to speak up...not government men, not the Secretary of State, but other qualified men. The Vice President can't get involved, but we do need help...it would really hurt if people were allowed to grab this Czechoslovakian issue and turn it on us."

The President 12:36-12:40

"I am anxious that the Cabinet get all the views and speak out. I don't expect you all to be foreign policy experts... I want to take all the time needed to discuss and prepare Cabinet members for television and speeches.... So if we run a little over in this meeting today, I hope it will be worthwhile.... I want to hear your views and give you mine, so ask all the questions that you can."

"I must observe that we have started with more troops than we have ended up with.... I remember that Gailbraith lunched with me early on and approved all that I was doing, but he began looking for disengagement when things got worse. So many of the good soldiers that went in with us with the 1961 resolution have fallen by the wayside."

"We want peace now worse than anyone in the world -- but with honor, without retreat. There is a lot of talk about our bombing in Vietnam and now Saigon is under attack again. If we had rockets and bombs falling on our capital, I don't think we would say there is any lull."

SECRETARY CLIFFORD 12:40-12:48

The President asked Secretary Clifford to give his views on Czechoslovakian developments.

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"The Soviet Union is the one nation in the world that can offer a threat to the United States. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had a post mortem this morning on Czechoslovakia to see what we had learned.

"The Joint Chiefs had reached about the same decisions on Cierna as the State Department and the rest of us. It looked as if the Soviets had made all efforts to reach an accommodation with the Czechs. The Soviet military had also influenced the Cierna meeting. They brought along not only Kosygin and Breshnev, but ten or eleven Politburo members. The meeting seemed to go well and the later Bratislava meeting seemed to go just as well. The Joint Chiefs believe that the Soviets had indeed worked out an agreement. The fact that Kosygin and Breshnev did not go alone offers some proof that they could not be overruled at home.

"Militarily, it has been a very clever and sophisticated strategy. This is the time of year when they usually hold their maneuvers on the Czech border. The fact that the Red Army had divisions there did not disturb the Joint Chiefs. The Soviets apparently made an agreement in Cierna, but they were not absolutely sure that it would float. When the Politburo met on Monday and decided to move on Czechoslovakia, it was all set up -- the troops were there and ready to go. They had rehearsed it and rehearsed it and rehearsed it. We think they must have had 300 planes and elements of 26 divisions, some of them Bloc troops for appearance sake. It went exceedingly well. We had no warning. Their radio silence was good and it caused no alarm because they had done that on maneuvers before. We knew about it when Dobrynin told the President.

"I have asked for a study to see if we should have known about it earlier, even though the Joint Chiefs think not.

"What does it mean to us? First, we have no obligations to the Czechs, no treaties. But the presence of well-armed armies in Czechoslovakia and on the borders of West Germany, a nation we do have treaties with, means that the Joint Chiefs are very concerned.

"The Soviet army is just over the border now from a NATO nation. I don't think that the Soviets have any designs on West Germany now.

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They have always seen Czechoslovakia as a buffer state and always wanted to hold it. They feared that other buffers might also break away.

"The Joint Chiefs think that this development has very great consequences for NATO. They feel that it might help to avert some of the Congressional cuts that threaten. They feel the cuts would be a calamity.

"It would be best, generally, to do as the President says and stay alert."

Secretary Clifford then gave a brief report on the current situation in Vietnam.

"There has been a good deal of talk lately about a lull, mainly in the Press. I find a certain sheep-like quality among these writers. One says it and all say it. But the facts do not support it.

"We have just made a comparison of seven weeks in 1967 with corresponding weeks now. During that time last year, we were losing 170 men a week; this year it is 180 a week. So there is very real doubt that there is a lull. The South Vietnamese casualties show the same. In seven weeks in 1967 the South Vietnamese and friendly forces lost 2400 men. It is 2800 for the corresponding seven weeks of this year.

"There is really no lull. The enemy has had to regroup and refight and maybe prepare for a new offensive. He just can't conduct an offensive and launch a new one. He has to hit and wait, fight and regroup. The level of fighting has gone up quite a lot in the last three or four days. Saigon has been shelled again. All the indications are for a so-called third offensive. We got it from prisoners and other sources. The pattern that is emerging now looks like that just prior to Tet. There is a very close similarity:

- In the May offensive leading up to Tet, 124 enemy attacks were launched. We have had 73 up to now.
- In the May offensive, 64 towns were attacked. We have had 12 attacked now.

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## THE INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces has produced an outpouring of press condemnation in major capitals. Voluminous editorial comment and grim headlines expressed shock and disbelief at the Soviet-directed move against a small and helpless ally.

The act itself -- which a British paper called "a blend of brutality and trickery" -- was widely judged to reveal "moral and political bankruptcy" of the Soviet system, failure to develop humane institutions, and the retention of "imperialistic tactics."

Major consequences for the Soviet Union appeared to many commentators to be a drastic loss of prestige, especially in the developing world, and a setback for the Communist cause everywhere.

Many observers feared that efforts toward East-West detente had suffered a severe blow. However, some urged that the West should not despair. A leading West German paper, for example, argued that "detente policy -- including the nuclear nonproliferation treaty -- must be reconsidered but not cancelled."

Editors saw other losses to the U.S. in the event, including the possible end of President Johnson's hopes of completing his term of office with a peacemaking trip to Moscow. A hardening of U.S. Viet-Nam policy was widely predicted.

A normally neutralist paper in Pakistan wrote this morning:

"Russia bewails U.S. aggression in Viet-Nam.... It is our guess that those who are screaming and yelling over American actions in Viet-Nam will turn away from the naked aggression and shocking atrocities of the Russians."

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### Oslo: "Detente Set Back Many Years"

In Oslo, liberal Dagbladet, Norway's second largest paper, commented:

"This is a bleak day in European history. The tough conservative wing within the Soviet leadership has gotten the upper hand, and turned to the same methods the Russians applied to Hungary in 1956.

"The invasion order is a fatal decision which will set back a European detente many years. The invasion also will immediately bring about an alarming international situation."

The paper declared that if the Cierna and Bratislava meetings were now shown to be "no more than window dressing... the USSR has committed a most outrageous betrayal of Czechoslovakia.... Brutal military superiority has once again revealed its cruel face."

The TASS announcement regarding the invasion, the paper said, "is nothing but a cynical lie which ushers in sinister times. The entire world, therefore, will follow the events in tragic Czechoslovakia during the coming hours with fear and suspense."

### "LBJ Has Done His Best to Influence Soviets"

Independent-conservative Verdens Gang of Oslo asserted that "just as Hitler crushed the Czechoslovak nation with brutal power thirty years ago, the Soviet leaders now have used their troops to crush the aspirations for a more liberal society which the entire free world was pleased to see developing.

"But written in fire over East European skies today is the message that none may try to take paths which the power-holders in Moscow do not approve. They drowned Hungary in blood 12 years ago.... What happened last night is possibly even more grotesque than the events in Hungary."

The paper maintained that "the takeover of Czechoslovakia will not result in an open conflict between East and West. It has been clear from the beginning that the U.S. did not dream of entering the Czech crisis. But President Johnson has undoubtedly done his best behind the scenes to influence Soviet leaders to show moderation.



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"But what has happened will cause tremors throughout the free world and brand today's tyrants in the Kremlin as Stalin's worthy heirs. A winter chill is settling over a Europe which until now seemed to see clear signs of spring."

### Austria: "A Turning Point in History"

The chief of Austria's radio and television news service described the event as the "third Prague tragedy in this century... after the German invasion in 1939 and the Prague putsch in 1948." It was possible, he said, "because Europe has been divided into spheres of influence for 20 years so that one power cannot contest the other power's right to take such action."

"We can assume with almost 100 per cent certainty that the events of this night will not entail any further dangerous developments...."

The paper pointed out that "the Soviet Union disregarded the attitude of the biggest Communist parties of Western Europe.... These parties cannot retract what they said about Czechoslovakia, and they will have to censure the Soviet action."

"This past night perhaps signals a turning point in the history of both the Soviet Union and the Communist world movement. ... A myth has collapsed and a faith has been destroyed..."

### Tokyo: "Second Hungary Unlikely"

Tokyo Shimbun said that since Prague radio called on Czech citizens to remain calm and not resist, "a second Hungarian incident" was not likely. Seoul papers published extras, and news agencies pasted up hand-written items on street bulletin boards. But the story broke too late for comment. Front pages in Ceylon carried the invasion news from wire services without comment.



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### Communist Broadcasts

Moscow radio broadcast this announcement:

"TASS is authorized to state that party and state officials of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic appealed to the Soviet Union and other socialist states to give the fraternal Czechoslovak people urgent aid, including the assistance of armed forces."

A Pravda commentator today blamed "calculations and miscalculations by the enemies of the Czechoslovak people" for the trouble in Czechoslovakia.

Bucharest radio today carried a speech by President Nicolae Ceausescu to a mass meeting. He said the Rumanian leaders "unanimously decided to express complete solidarity with the Czechoslovak people and with the Czechoslovak Communist party."

Prague radio and television managed to keep broadcasting through the night by changing frequencies and transmitters frequently. Broadcasters told the Czechs not to resist "the occupying forces."

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STATUS REPORT ON VOA BROADCAST LEVELS

The only expansion of VOA broadcast time in European vernacular languages is in the Russian language.

The normal eight-hour broadcast to Europe in Russian now runs 21-hours and will run longer if the Security Council proceedings require.

The other languages are the normal one-hour Georgian, one-hour Ukrainian, one-hour Latvian, one-hour Lithuanian, one-hour Estonian, two-hours Hungarian, two-hours Polish, two-hours Czech, one-half hour Albanian, one-half hour Slovene, one and one-half hours Serbo-Croatian and one and one-half hours Bulgarian.

English to Europe is on 24 hours a day instead of the normal 14 hours.

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