

MEMORANDUM

INFORMATION

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*rec'd 11:30 am*  
Friday, August 23, 1968  
11:00 a. m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: U. S. Intelligence on Czech Crisis

There are attached two press stories which are the result of Dick Helms' effort to counter earlier reports of a U. S. intelligence failure in anticipating the Czech crisis:

1. An AP report of this morning which is a complete turn-around of its earlier story; \*
2. A Washington Post article which came out of the conversation between Mr. Helms and Russ Wiggins of the Post.

Also attached is a page 1 story in today's Wall Street Journal which says that U. S. intelligence on the Czech situation was excellent -- except for the timing. Mr. Helms does not know the source of this story.

*W. Rostow*

Attachments (3)

*\* This is the result of my call of last night to AP - Doug Cornell.*

COPY LBJ LIBRARY

## U.S. INTELLIGENCE-CZECH

WASHINGTON (AP)--PRESIDENT JOHNSON AND OTHER TOP U.S. OFFICIALS WERE ALERTED TO THE PROBABILITY OF A SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA ABOUT THREE WEEKS BEFORE RUSSIAN TROOPS CROSSED CZECH FRONTIERS, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID TODAY. 29a 1

A SECRET PAPER WAS GIVEN TO THE PRESIDENT AND CIRCULATED AMONG SOME 30 HIGH OFFICIALS EARLY IN AUGUST SAYING SUCH A SOVIET-LED MOVE WAS PROBABLE, THE ADMINISTRATION SOURCES SAID.

THEY ALSO DECLARED THAT AS LATE AS TUESDAY, THE DAY OF THE INVASION, JOHNSON AND OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS WERE NOTIFIED AT THEIR WEEKLY STRATEGY LUNCHEON BY INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS THAT SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION WAS PROBABLE.

THIS WAS BASED ON THE EXPERTS' KNOWLEDGE THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ITSELF ALSO WAS MEETING TUESDAY ON THE CZECH SITUATION.

THE CLAIMS OF FOREWARNING CLASHED WITH A PREVIOUS STATEMENT BY A HIGH STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL THAT "WE WERE SURPRISED" BY THE INVASION.

THEY ALSO RAN COUNTER TO INFORMATION FROM PENTAGON SOURCES THAT, WHILE AN INVASION WAS FORESEEN AS A POSSIBILITY, THERE WAS NO INTELLIGENCE FORECAST THAT IT WAS LIKELY TO HAPPEN.

THE PENTAGON SOURCES ALSO SAID THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS SURPRISED. OTHER ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID THAT CHARLES BOHLEN, A LEADING EXPERT ON RUSSIA, AND OTHER ADVISERS TOLD JOHNSON IT SHOULD BE ASSUMED THERE WOULD BE SOME SORT OF MILITARY MOVE AGAINST THE CZECHS.  
JA948AED AUG. 23

COPY LIBRARY

## WASHINGTON -- ADD U.S. INTELLIGENCE-CZECH (24)

THESE SOURCES SAID THAT AT THE TUESDAY LUNCH, ONLY HOURS BEFORE THE INVASION, THERE WAS A VIGOROUS DISCUSSION AMONG JOHNSON, SECRETARY OF STATE DEAN RUSK, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CLARK M. CLIFFORD AND OTHERS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A RUSSIAN MOVE.

"THEY DISCUSSED NOT ONLY THE POSSIBILITY BUT EVEN THE PROBABILITY, THERE MIGHT BE AN INVASION," AN OFFICIAL SAID. "THE CONCENSUS WAS THERE MIGHT BE A MOVE AGAINST THE CZECHS."

IT WAS FELT, THE OFFICIALS SAID, BY THOSE AT THE WHITE HOUSE LUNCHEON THAT RUSSIA PROBABLY WOULD HAVE TO THROTTLE THE LIBERAL CZECH REGIME.

THERE IS NO DISAGREEMENT THAT THE FIRST WORD THE U.S. GOVERNMENT RECEIVED ABOUT THE INVASION CAME FROM RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR ANATOLY DOBRYNIN IN A FACE-TO-FACE MEETING WITH JOHNSON TUESDAY NIGHT ABOUT THREE HOURS AFTER THE INCURSIONS STARTED.

THERE ALSO IS NO DISPUTE THAT THE FIRST INFORMATION RECEIVED THROUGH OFFICIAL U.S. INFORMATION GATHERING CHANNELS CAME ABOUT AN HOUR AFTER THE START OF THE JOHNSON-DOBRYNIN MEETING WHEN MONITORING STATIONS INTERCEPTED A RADIO PRAGUE BROADCAST.

ACCORDING TO ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, OBVIOUSLY ANXIOUS TO SHIELD U.S. INTELLIGENCE FROM CHARGES OF FAILURE, THE INTELLIGENCE MEN WERE "PRETTY SHARP IN CALLING THE SHOTS."

JA953AED AUG. 23



Close Surveillance Maintained

# U.S. Kept Track of Invaders

Troops of the Soviet Union and its communist satellites were under the closest surveillance by the American intelligence community prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and reports on the invasion reached the President within the hour of Soviet

Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin's visit, it was learned yesterday.

Following the Cierna meeting, deployment of the troops on Czechoslovakia's border were continuously noted. The shifting of command posts and units were

under constant study and battle information was continuously in hand.

These observations continued during the critical period that Alexander Dubcek, Communist Party chairman, met with Czechoslovakia's editors.

During this time, anxiety mounted.

At the regular Tuesday White House luncheon, where the President surveys the world situation with his top foreign policy advisers, the outlook was reported to him in detail. The facts of the troop deployments on the border, which they could be crossed at almost a moment's notice, were summarized.

CIA Director Richard Helms, and Walt W. Rostow, the President's special assistant for national security affairs, both regarded with foreboding the meeting of the Soviet high-ranking officials in Moscow, to which many of them had been summoned from vacations.

Both officials felt the meeting had to do with the Czech crisis. They did not make any prediction that orders for intervention would be given, but they told the President that the outlook was extremely ominous.

The luncheon meeting lasted from 1 until 3 p.m., and broke up with a clear understanding that very

serious events might be in the offing.

During the evening, the CIA began to gather reports of what looked like alarming though isolated troop movements.

They had a report from reliable sources of troops entering Prague within the hour of Dobrynin's White House visit shortly after 6 p.m.

The lapse between the time of the actual movements and reports to authorities here were attributed to the ordinary delays of transmission and collation.

The first reports were given high credibility because of the nature of the weather, which was cloudy with intermittent mist—a condition in which movements of aircraft and personnel probably would not have occurred if maneuvers only were involved.

In retrospect this was also viewed by Washington intelligence sources as an indication that the operation had been decided upon only a short time before the invasion took place.

2.  
296

COPY LIBRARY

29c

COPY 1 BJ LIBRARY

## Washington Wire

A Special Weekly Report From  
The Wall Street Journal's  
Capital Bureau

U.S. INTELLIGENCE on Czech crunch was excellent—except for the timing.

Well in advance, LBJ had CIA's flat prediction that Moscow would succeed in crushing Czech liberalism, and wouldn't shy from military occupation. Top diplomats also forecast a tough squeeze on Dubcek, though they thought he might ride it out. But most expected no Russian move before autumn.

Officials here still insist the Russian Politburo really didn't intend to invade so soon, suggesting a sudden change of mind or an as-yet undisclosed shift in the Kremlin power structure. One reason the Moscow men were willing to look like butchers: They figured they would soon have this image anyway, because the Czech free press was digging into past purges and would have implicated Brezhnev in murder.

*The dramatic White House huddles this week entertained no thought of strong U.S. action. The decision against that had come at least a month before.*

PRESERVATION COPY

FROM QUICK COPY