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FROM WALT ROSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
CITE CAP 82192

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AUGUST 27, 1968

THIS STATE DEPARTMENT (TOM HUGHES) ASSESSMENT IS
LESS GLOOMY THAN EMBASSY PRAGUE'S

QUOTE SUBJECT: THE SOVIET-CZECHOSLOVAKIA COMMUNIQUE --
PRELIMINARY APPRAISAL

1. ON THE FACE OF IT, THE CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERS PRESERVED CONSIDERABLY MORE OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND THEIR SKINS IN THE FOUR-DAY MOSCOW NEGOTIATIONS THAN THEY OR ANY ONE ELSE COULD HAVE EXPECTED AFTER THE SOVIET INVASION. MOST OF THE DETAILS OF THE UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED REMAIN UNKNOWN TO US AND MANY HAVE YET TO BE WORKED OUT; BUT THE CZECHS HAVE COME AWAY WITH SOME NEW LEASE ON LIFE FOR THEIR POST-NOVOTNY DOMESTIC REFORMS. UNDOUBTEDLY, HOWEVER, THEY WILL NOW HAVE TO FOREGO MUCH OF THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION THAT THEY HAD COME TO SAVOR, AT LEAST ON ISSUES OF GREAT SENSITIVITY TO THE SOVIETS AND THEIR HARD-LINE ALLIES, AND THERE MAY WELL BE VARIOUS OTHER LIMITATIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORMS. MOREOVER, IT IS CLEAR FROM THE COMMUNIQUE LANGUAGE AND THE SUBSEQUENT SPEECHES OF THE CZECH LEADERS THAT SOVIET FORCES WILL REMAIN ON CZECHOSLOVAK SOIL FOR SOME TIME TO COME, THUS PROVIDING THE SOVIETS WITH SOME ASSURANCE THAT PRAGUE'S POLICIES UNDER THE NEW ACCORDS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED MORE NEARLY ALONG SOVIET-PREFERRED LINES THAN WAS TRUE AFTER CIERNA-BRATISLAVA.

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2. FOR THE SOVIETS, THE TERMS OF THE COMMUNIQUE ARE LESS THAN THEY PRESUMABLY WANTED TO ACHIEVE BY THEIR INVASION; AND THE TERMS ARE CERTAINLY LESS THAN WHAT ULBRICHT WOULD HAVE WANTED. THE SOVIETS APPARENTLY HOPED TO AVOID MAKING OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA A MILITARY PROTECTORATE WITH QUISLING GOVERNMENT AND THEIR CALCULATION SEEMED TO BE THAT THE EXISTING PRAGUE LEADERSHIP WOULD BEND TO ALL THEIR WISHES (INCLUDING THE FIRING OF THE MOST LIBERAL LEADERS) ONCE THE SOVIET ARMY HAD MARCHED IN. THIS CALCULUS MISFIRED AS LEADERS AND PEOPLE UNITED TO DEFY THE INVASION. THIS DROVE THE SOVIETS TO BLACKLIST MOST OF THE LIBERAL LEADERSHIP; YET THEY COULD FIND NO CAST OF CHARACTERS FOR A LEADERSHIP THAT COULD COMMAND EVEN MINIMAL AUTHORITY IN THE COUNTRY. THE MOSCOW COMMUNIQUE MAKES CLEAR THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE HAD TO SWALLOW THE BITTER PILL OF ONCE AGAIN WORKING WITH LEADERS WHOSE CONDUCT THEY DISTRUSTED IN THE PAST, WHO ATTACKED THE SOVIET INVASION AS ILLEGAL, AND MANY OF WHOM WERE BRANDED AS "RIGHT-WINGERS" IN THE SOVIET PRESS.

3. LIKE ANY COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN CONTENDING PARTIES, THE MOSCOW COMMUNIQUE IS FULL OF POTENTIAL FOR NEW DISAGREEMENT AND FRICTION. THE CZECH LEADERS, TO REASSURE THEIR PEOPLE, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY SEEK TO MAXIMIZE THE FREEDOMS THEY HAVE RETAINED AND TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE MAIN LINES OF THEIR ACTION PROGRAM ARE INTACT. THE SOVIETS ON THE OTHER HAND WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THAT THE SAFEGUARDS FOR THEIR INTERESTS THAT WERE WRITTEN INTO THE COMMUNIQUE WILL BE EFFECTIVELY ENFORCED ACCORDING TO SOVIET INTERPRETATIONS. THUS THE POLITICAL IMPERATIVES AND LINES OF THE TWO SIDES WILL BE IN OPPOSITION ON MANY PARTICULARS AND EVEN A CONTINUED PRESENCE OF SOVIET FORCES -- ITSELF A CONSTANT SOURCE OF FRICTION AND INCIDENTS DESPITE THE COMMUNIQUE'S PROVISIO AGAINST INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS -- IS UNLIKELY TO ENSURE THAT SOVIET VIEWS ALWAYS PREVAIL. SOVIET-CZECH BARGAINING AND MANEUVERING WILL THUS CONTINUE.

4. WHILE THE SOVIET-CZECH CRISIS HAS THUS APPARENTLY MOVED AGAIN INTO AN ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL PHASE, THE COMPROMISE THAT HAS BEEN NEGOTIATED IS HIGHLY TENUOUS. THE SOVIET LEADERS, ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY BY NOW A GOOD DISTANCE AWAY FROM STALINIST VALUES AND HABITS, CONTINUE TO CARRY MUCH STALINIST BAGGAGE. IT IS FAR FROM CLEAR THAT A MOMENT WILL NOT AGAIN COME WHEN THE CZECH EXPERIMENT IN CIVILIZED COMMUNISM WILL SEEM SO INCOMPATIBLE WITH THEIR OWN INTERESTS AS THEY SEE THEM THAT THEY WILL CONSIDER RENEWED RECOURSE TO FORCE A LESSER EVIL OR EVEN THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE.
UNQUOTE

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