

Summary Notes
590th NSC Meeting
September 4, 1968, 5:00-7:25 P. M.

U. S., Europe and the Czechoslovakian Crisis

The President: The purpose of the meeting is to assess the impact of the Czechoslovakian crisis, to discuss how we can use the crisis to strengthen Western European defense and NATO, and to talk about our relations with the Russians and Eastern Europeans.

Secretary Rusk will summarize the issues and possible ways of dealing with them. Secretary Clifford will talk about the defense of Western Europe and the new disposition of Soviet troops in Central Europe.

Director Helms and Secretary Rusk will give us their views on the German reaction to the crisis. The press has already printed that the State Department was recommending additional reassurances to the Germans even before Secretary Rusk had made any recommendation to the President.

Secretary Fowler will speak on the financial problems.

If we speak out about a threatening situation and the situation does not develop, we are accused of over-reacting. If we don't speak out and a serious situation does develop, then we are accused of not having done what we should have done. This is what happened following an indirect mention of the Romanian situation in the speech of last Friday.

More meetings of the NSC should be held in the next few weeks so that all of the members may be fully informed on current foreign problems.

All requests of political candidates for briefings are to be granted. Mr. Temple and Mr. Rostow are to clear Administration responses to requests for positions on foreign problems coming from candidates, advisors, task forces, etc.

Secretary Rusk: The gravity of the current situation cannot be overstated in view of the very high costs the Soviet government was willing to pay for intervening in Czechoslovakia.

The situation in Czechoslovakia has been developing since 1967. Dubcek gained power over conservative Communist Party members in January, 1968. Press censorship was lifted and other reforms were initiated. Dissention between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union rose rapidly. The summer maneuvers

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of the Warsaw Pact were used to build up military pressure against the Dubcek government in the hope that the liberals would slow down the reform campaign.

The day of the Soviet invasion, the President met with Ambassador Dobrynin at 8:15 P. M. and then with the NSC later that evening. Decisions were reached at the NSC meeting to take the Czech case to the United Nations immediately and on a response to the oral message Dobrynin delivered earlier.

The response to Dobrynin's message emphasized two points:

- a. Jefferson's quotation about governments based on the consent of the governed, and
- b. Denial that there was any U. S. or NATO attempt to intervene in Czechoslovakia as alleged by Moscow.

Dobrynin had said that U. S. state interests were not affected by the Soviet action. In response he was told that U. S. interests are involved in Berlin where we are committed to prevent the city being overrun by the Russians.

Although the Soviet military effort went smoothly, the Russians badly miscalculated the political reaction in Czechoslovakia. All Czechs opposed the movement of Soviet troops into their country. Their performance and discipline were superb. The Russians were unable to organize a puppet government to take over and legitimize their invasion. Opposition outside Czechoslovakia to the Soviet move was world-wide and very strong.

The President: Asked to interrupt the meeting to deal with a proposed press release on the admission of Czech refugees to the United States. The statement was read. (Copy Attached as TAB A)

Secretary Rusk: The United States must grant refuge to those Czechs who want to leave their country or who are now outside and do not wish to return. The number is not large. We have to open our doors because if we do not, the refugees might return to Czechoslovakia and oppose the existing government. This would not be in our interest.

Ambassador Thompson: We should not encourage Czechoslovakian refugees to come to the United States but only welcome them. If we appear to be urging them to come to the United States, the Soviet Union could use this policy to argue that we are, in fact, intervening in Czechoslovakian affairs.