THE KREMLIN, THE PRAGUE SPRING, AND THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE

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Until the late 1980s, the Soviet Union's determination to preserve Communism in East-Central Europe was not in doubt. When Communist regimes in Eastern Europe came under violent threat in the 1950s — in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956 — Soviet troops intervened to subdue those challenges. A very different problem arose in 1968, when Czechoslovakia embarked on a dramatic, but entirely peaceful, attempt to change both the internal complexion of Communism and many of the basic structures of Soviet-East European relations. This eight-month-long experiment, widely known as the "Prague Spring," came to a decisive end in August 1968 when hundreds of thousands of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia.

Neither the Soviet Union nor Czechoslovakia exists any longer, but the legacy of the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion is still being felt. The reforms that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968 under the leadership of Alexander Dubček offered the first opportunity for an East European Communist regime to earn genuine popular support. Moscow's unwillingness to tolerate those reforms ensured that, from then on, stability in the Eastern bloc could be preserved only by the threat of another Soviet invasion.

That threat sufficed to hold the bloc together for more than twenty years, even when tested by severe crises like the one in Poland in 1980-1981. But soon after Mikhail Gorbachev came along and was no longer willing to use military force in Eastern Europe, the whole Soviet bloc collapsed. Because of the legacy of 1968, all the East European regimes still lacked the legitimacy they would have needed to sustain themselves without Soviet military backing. The invasion of Czechoslovakia saved Soviet-style Communism in Eastern Europe for more than two decades, but it could not forestall the eventual demise of the bloc.

This paper draws on recently declassified archival materials and memoirs to provide a reassessment of the 1968 crisis, showing how the confrontation with Czechoslovakia fit into Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe. The paper begins by discussing the context of the 1968 crisis, highlighting trends in Soviet policy in the late 1950s and 1960s. It then turns to the Prague Spring itself, explaining why the bold changes in Czechoslovakia provoked such a harsh reaction in Moscow. Finally, the chapter explores the international and domestic consequences of the Soviet-led invasion, focusing in particular on the promulgation of the "Brezhnev Doctrine," which set the tone for Soviet-East European relations for the next 21 years.

CONTEXT OF THE 1968 CRISIS

From November 1956, when Soviet troops crushed a popular uprising in Hungary, to January 1968, when the Prague Spring began, Soviet-East European relations underwent several notable changes. Some developments facilitated greater Soviet control over Eastern Europe and better cohesion among the Warsaw Pact states, but numerous other factors tended to weaken Soviet control and to create fissures within the Eastern bloc.

Sources of Cohesion

From the early 1960s on, the Soviet Union sought to invigorate the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), which had been largely dormant since it was created by Stalin in 1949. Both Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev hoped to use the CMEA as a means of formally integrating the Soviet and East European economies.[1] The "Basic Principles of Socialist Economic Integration," announced by Khrushchev with much fanfare in 1961, did not yield many results in the end; but the Soviet Union was able to exploit its economic preponderance to promote bilateral integration with each of the CMEA member-states, especially in trade relations. The unusually large proportion of foreign trade that the East European countries conducted with the Soviet Union and with other CMEA members rose to nearly 70 percent in the 1960s, except in the case of Romania.[2] This trend did not bring the supranational integration that Soviet leaders had envisaged, but it did ensure that the East European states remained crucially dependent on (and therefore beholden to) the Soviet Union for key economic goods, particularly energy supplies.

The Soviet Union also fostered greater intra-bloc cohesion in the military sphere, a policy reflected in the newly emerging concept of "coalition warfare." This approach, as described in a classified report by Soviet military planners in the mid-1960s, called for a rapid, massive offensive against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by a combination of Soviet and East European forces using both nuclear and conventional weaponry:

> The defense strategy of the socialist countries must focus on seizing the most important regions and lines, and on absolutely preventing an incursion by the adversary's forces into the territory of the socialist countries. The strategy will be based on nuclear strikes

[1] Jozef M. van Brabant, *Socialist Economic Integration: Contemporary Economic Problems in Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), esp. ch. 1; Alan H. Smith, *The Planned Economies of Eastern Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 174-202; and Michael Kaser, *COMECON: Integration Problems of the Planned Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[2] J. T. Crawford and John Haberstroh, "Survey of Economic Policy Issues in Eastern Europe: Technology, Trade, and the Consumer," in U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Reorientation and Commercial Relations of the Economies of Eastern Europe: A Compendium of Papers*, 93rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1974, p. 41.

> in conjunction with the use of conventional firepower and mobile operations by combined forces, and also on the wide-scale use of obstruction.[3]

To underscore the new emphasis on joint military operations, Soviet leaders took several steps to improve the capacity of East European troops to perform effectively alongside Soviet forces. With Moscow's backing, all the East European states significantly modernized and expanded their armies in the 1960s; and they made renewed efforts to promote the interoperability and standardization of Warsaw Pact armaments. From October 1962 on, the Soviet Union conducted joint military exercises with the East European armies.[4] As a result, the Warsaw Pact, which had been little more than a paper organization for several years after it was founded in 1955, finally started to acquire a few of the trappings of a real alliance.

These efforts to strengthen the Warsaw Pact were initiated by Khrushchev, but they were given even greater emphasis by Brezhnev. Unlike Khrushchev, who had sought to cut Soviet conventional forces and to rely predominantly on long-range nuclear missiles, Brezhnev committed the Soviet Union to a full-scale military buildup that expanded *both* conventional *and* nuclear weapons. The growth and modernization of Soviet conventional forces during the Brezhnev era facilitated major improvements in Soviet combat units in Eastern Europe, whose role was to serve as the "main strategic echelon" of the Warsaw Pact.[5]

The increased vigor of the Pact helped to shore up the Soviet Union's position in Eastern Europe by allowing more of the financial costs of "defending the socialist commonwealth" to be passed off onto the East European governments while avoiding any commensurate change in the way the alliance operated. All the Soviet-dominated structures of the Warsaw Pact were preserved. Wartime control of allied forces was retained by the Soviet High Command, and even in peacetime the Pact's joint military exercises were infrequently -- and then only symbolically -- under the command of East European

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[3] "Razvitie voennogo iskusstva v usloviyakh vedeniya raketno-yadernoi voiny po sovremennym predstavleniyam," Report No. 24762s (Top Secret) from Col.-General P. Ivashutin, chief of the Soviet General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate, to Marshal M. V. Zakharov, head of the General Staff Military Academy, 28 August 1964, in Tsentral'nyi arkhiv Ministerstva oborony, Moscow, D. 158, esp. L. 400. Preparations to carry out this type of strategy could be discerned in Pact exercises even in the late 1970s; see, for example, "Referat des Stellvertreters des Ministers und Chefs der Landstreitkräfte zur Auswertung der Kommandostabsübung JUG-78," 18 April 1978, in Militärisches Zwischenarchiv (MZA), Potsdam, VA-Strausberg/29371, pt. 1. For an early public enunciation of the new concept, see Marshal A. A. Grechko, "Patrioticheskii i internatsional'nyi dolg Vooruzhenykh sil SSSR," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 6 October 1961, p. 3.

[4] V. V. Semin *et al., Voenno-politicheskoe sotrudnichestvo sotsialisticheskikh stran* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), pp. 72-74, 185-201; and 231-243. Secret accounts of many of these exercises, prepared by officers in the East German National People's Army, can be found in the Militärisches Zwischenarchiv in Potsdam.

[5] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Foreign Assessment Center, *The Development of Soviet Military Power Trends Since 1965 and Prospects for the 1980s*, SR SI 100353 (Top Secret/Intelligence Sources and Methods Involved), April 1981 (declassified March 2001), esp. pp. 1-20.

generals. Moreover, all the top posts in the Pact's Joint Command were still reserved exclusively for Soviet officers.[6]

Soviet hegemony in the Warsaw Pact was further strengthened in the early to mid-1960s by a series of top-secret bilateral agreements providing for the deployment of Soviet tactical nuclear warheads and nuclear-capable delivery vehicles on the territory of East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.[7] The agreements were described as coming "within the framework of the Warsaw Pact," but all nuclear warheads were kept under strict Soviet control, and the dual-capable delivery vehicles that the East European countries possessed would have come under direct Soviet command if they had ever been equipped with nuclear warheads during a crisis. Moreover, the thousands of tactical nuclear weapons deployed by Soviet forces on East European territory were not subject to any sort of "dual-key" arrangement analogous to the procedures adopted by NATO in the mid-1960s to give the West European governments an effective veto over the use of American tactical nuclear weapons. Whenever Warsaw Pact exercises included combat techniques for nuclear warfare (as they routinely did from early 1962 on), all decisions on whether to "go nuclear" were reserved exclusively for Soviet political leaders and military commanders.[8] East European leaders were not even consulted. Despite efforts by Romania and one or two other East-bloc governments in the 1960s to establish some form of nuclear "sharing" within the Warsaw Pact, the East European states were never given any say in the use of the alliance's "joint" nuclear arsenal.[9]

The growth of Soviet *strategic* nuclear power in the 1960s also helped to strengthen Moscow's sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Even at the time of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, when the Soviet Union's only means of delivering a nuclear attack against the continental United States was a limited number of long-range bombers, U.S. intelligence officials warned President Dwight Eisenhower that any steps aimed at "preparing for military intervention" in Hungary "would materially increase the

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[6] Mark Kramer, "Civil-Military Relations in the Warsaw Pact: The East European Component," *International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 1985), pp. 55-56.

[7] "O przedsiewzieciu mającym na celu podwyższenie gotowości bojowej wojska," Treaty Text (Top Secret/Special Importance), 25 February 1967, in Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Warsaw, F. 6, Kor. 234; "Dohoda mezi vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik a vládou Československé socialistické republiky o opatřeních ke zvýšení bojové pohotovosti raketových vojsk," Treaty Text (Top Secret/Special Importance), 15 December 1965, in Vojenský Ústřední Archiv (VÚA), Prague, Fond (F.) Varšavská smlouva, operační správa, Archivná jednotka (A.j.) 33167; "Hungary: USSR Nuclear Weapons Formerly Stored in Country," trans. in U.S. Joint Publications Research Service, *Nuclear Proliferation*, JPRS-TND-91-007, 20 May 1991, pp. 14-16; and a series of agreements covering 16 sites in East Germany, in MZA, VA-Strausberg/29555/Box 155.

[8] Bundesministerium für Verteidigung, *Militärische Planungen des Warschauer Paktes in Zentraleuropa*, Bonn, January 1992, p. 3.

[9] The nuclear "sharing" debate within the Warsaw Pact is covered in Mark Kramer, "Warsaw Pact Nuclear Operations and the 'Lessons' of the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8-9 (Winter 1996-1997), pp. 334-343.

risk of general war," including the possibility of a nuclear exchange.[10] With the advent of *Sputnik* in October 1957 and the USSR's subsequent deployments of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), as well as the expansion of the Soviet heavy bomber force, the Soviet Union by the early to mid-1960s clearly had the capacity to wreak untold destruction upon the U.S. homeland.[11] Although Soviet strategic nuclear forces at the time still lagged well behind those of the United States, the important thing, as was shown by President John F. Kennedy's overwhelming desire to avoid a nuclear exchange during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, was that Soviet ICBMs could now inflict "unacceptable damage" on the United States.[12] This new capability reinforced the pattern that emerged as early as June 1953, when the threat of Soviet nuclear or conventional retaliation against Western Europe helped deter NATO from coming to the defense of East German workers who had risen up en masse against the Communist regime. The much more dire consequences from any potential nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union by the mid-1960s led U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk to acknowledge that "our capacity to influence events and trends within the Communist world is very limited. But it is our policy to do what we can . . ."[13] Notions of "rollback" and "liberation" had been fanciful even in the 1950s, but they were all the more irrelevant by the mid- to late 1960s.

In the political sphere, as with the drive for economic integration and closer military relations, the Soviet Union accorded high priority to the goal of increased Soviet-East European cohesion. That goal was strongly endorsed by East European leaders who had come to be key figures in the 1960s, notably Władysław Gomułka of Poland and Walter Ulbricht of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Soviet Union's firm backing for Ulbricht during the severe crises of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when deepening economic strains and a large-scale exodus of East German citizens to West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had raised doubts about the very existence of the GDR, was crucial in preserving East Germany's frontline role in the Warsaw Pact. In particular, Khrushchev's decision to permit the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 halted the mass efflux of refugees from the GDR, staved off a further deterioration of the East German economy, and allowed the East German Communist

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[10] "Probable Developments in East Europe and Implications for Soviet Policy," Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE 12-2-56 (Secret), 30 October 1956, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1955-1957/Volume XXV (Eastern Europe), esp. p. 335.

[11] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy," National Intelligence Estimate No. 11-4-65 (Secret – Controlled Dissem), 14 April 1965, esp. pp. 5-6 ("Changes in the Strategic Relationship"); reproduced in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Estimates on Soviet Military Power, 1954 to 1984: A Selection*, Washington, D.C., December 1994, pp. 191-214.

[12] Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1989), pp. 78-95.

[13] "Why We Treat Communist Countries Differently: Address by Secretary Rusk," *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. L, No. 1290 (16 March 1964), p. 393.

party (formally known as the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, or SED) to reassert tight control in the GDR.[14]

Soviet relations with Poland and East Germany remained a top priority in Moscow after Brezhnev took office. Brezhnev's chief foreign policy adviser in the 1960s, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, recalled that the Soviet leader "greatly admired and respected" Gomułka and Ulbricht, and that Brezhnev, in turn, "acquired vast authority among the leaders of the other socialist states."[15] As both Ulbricht and Gomułka encountered daunting political challenges at home in the latter half of the 1960s, they looked increasingly to Brezhnev for support against their domestic rivals, a trend that gave the USSR even greater influence in Poland and East Germany. (The unequal nature of these relationships became painfully evident when Brezhnev withdrew his backing for Gomułka and Ulbricht at the beginning of the 1970s, and both were quickly ousted.)

The USSR's hegemonic position in Eastern Europe was further enhanced by a highly publicized conference in Moscow in November 1960, which brought together high-level officials from 81 of the world's Communist parties and reaffirmed the "universally recognized vanguard role" of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the international Communist movement.[16] East European party leaders worked closely with Soviet officials at the conference to ensure that the participants would support Moscow's calls for increased "unity" and "solidarity" with the CPSU in the "stand against imperialism." Much the same was true of a subsequent all-European conference of Communist parties, held in Karlovy Vary in April 1967, a few years after Brezhnev had replaced Khrushchev. The conference was notable mainly for its continuity in emphasizing the USSR's preeminent role in European Communism.

Sources of Friction

Despite these signs of greater Soviet-East European cohesion, most developments during the early Brezhnev years pointed not toward an increase of Soviet control in Eastern Europe, but toward a loosening of that control. In part, this trend reflected the growing heterogeneity of the East European

[14] A valuable first-hand Soviet account of this whole episode can be found in the recent memoir by Yulii Kvitsinskii, a long-time Soviet diplomat and foreign ministry expert on Germany, *Vor der Sturm: Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 1993).

[15] A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniya diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Yu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko, i M. S. Gorbacheva* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), pp. 135-144.

[16] A CPSU plenum was convened in January 1961 to assess the results of the November 1960 conference; the transcript of the plenum and its associated documents were recently declassified. See "Plenum TsK KPSS 10-18 yanvarya 1961 g.," in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Moscow, Fond (F.) 2, Opis' (Op.) 1, Dela (Dd.) 486-536.

societies, but it also was due to the schism in world Communism that had been opened by the Sino-Soviet conflict. A bitter split between the two leading Communist powers, stemming from genuine policy and ideological differences as well as from a personal clash between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong, developed behind-the-scenes in the late 1950s.[17] The dispute intensified in June 1959 when the Soviet Union abruptly terminated its secret nuclear weapons cooperation agreement with China. Khrushchev's highly publicized visit to the United States in September 1959 further antagonized the Chinese, and a last-ditch meeting between Khrushchev and Mao in Beijing right after Khrushchev's tour of the United States failed to resolve any of the major issues dividing the two sides.[18] From then on, Sino-Soviet relations steadily deteriorated.

By the time Brezhnev took office in October 1964, the Sino-Soviet split had become a central feature of world politics, with important consequences for Soviet-East European relations. All the East European Communist leaders had learned of the rift in June 1960, when Soviet and Chinese officials attending the Romanian Communist Party's congress traded polemics and recriminations. Over the next several months, as news of the conflict spread throughout the world, Khrushchev and Mao made a few additional attempts to reconcile their differences; but the split, if anything, grew even wider. The ascendance of Brezhnev failed to ameliorate the situation. Initially, a few officials on both sides hoped that the change of leadership in Moscow would permit the two countries to achieve at least a partial rapprochement and to restore a semblance of unity in the international Communist movement, but those hopes proved illusory. Enmity between the two sides intensified and moved ever closer toward an armed clash.

The spill-over from the Sino-Soviet conflict into Eastern Europe was evident almost immediately, as the Soviet Union and China vied with one another for the backing of foreign Communist parties. In late 1960 and early 1961 the Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha, sparked a crisis with the Soviet Union by openly aligning his country with China, a precedent that caused alarm in Moscow.[19] Quite apart from the

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[17] On the sources of the Beijing-Moscow dispute, see Mark Kramer, "Sino-Soviet Relations on the Eve of the Split," *Cold War International History Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7 (Winter 1995-96), pp. 170-185.

[18] For a transcript of these talks, see "Zapis' besedy tovarishcha Khrushcheva N. S. s Predsedatelem TsK KPK Mao Tsze-Dunom, zamestitelyami Predsedatelya TsK KPS Lyu Shao-tsi, Chzou En'-Laem, Czhu De, Lin' Byao, chlenami Politbyuro TsK KPK Pyn Czhenem, Chen' I i chlenom Sekretariata Van Tszya-syanom 2 oktyabrya 1959 goda," Verbatim Transcript (Special Dossier/Strictly Secret), 2 October 1959, in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF), Moscow, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 331, Listy (Ll.) 1-33. Equally valuable is the detailed trip report by an influential Soviet Politburo member, Mikhail Suslov, shortly after he and the other members of the delegation returned to Moscow: "O poezdke Sovetskoi partiino-pravitel'stvennoi delegatsii v Kitaiskuyu Narodnůyu Respubliku," Plenum Report (Special Dossier/Eyes Only), 18 December 1959, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 1, D. 415, Ll. 56-91.

[19] Valuable documentation on the Soviet-Albanian rift is available in *Albania Challenges Khrushchev Revisionism* (New York: Gamma Publishing, 1976), a compilation put out by the Albanian government which includes full transcripts of meetings between senior Soviet and Albanian officials in 1960 as well as cables and other messages

symbolic implications of Hoxha's move, Soviet leaders had always regarded Albania as an important member of the Warsaw Pact because of "its superb strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea."[20] The rift with Yugoslavia in 1948 had eliminated the only other possible outlet for the Soviet Navy in the region. To ensure that Albania could serve as a full-fledged "military base on the Mediterranean Sea for all the socialist countries," the Soviet Union had been providing extensive weaponry, equipment, and training to the Albanian army and navy. In particular, the Albanian navy had received a fleet of twelve modern attack submarines, which initially were under Soviet control but were gradually being transferred to Albanian jurisdiction. Khrushchev believed that the submarines would allow Albania to pose a "serious threat to the operations of the NATO military bloc on the Mediterranean Sea," and thus he was dismayed to find that Soviet efforts to establish a naval bulwark on the Mediterranean might all have been for naught.[21]

As soon as the rift with Albania emerged, the Soviet Union imposed strict economic sanctions, withdrew all Soviet technicians and military advisers, took back eight of the twelve submarines, dismantled Soviet naval facilities at the Albanian port of Vlorë, and engaged in bitter polemical exchanges with Albanian leaders. Khrushchev also ordered Soviet warships to conduct maneuvers along the Albanian coast, and he secretly encouraged pro-Moscow rivals of Hoxha in the Albanian Labor Party to carry out a coup.[22] The coup attempt was rebuffed, and the other means of coercion proved insufficient to get rid of Hoxha or to bring about a change of policy. In December 1961, Khrushchev severed diplomatic relations with Albania and excluded it from both the Warsaw Pact and CMEA. However, he was not willing to undertake a full-scale invasion to bring Albania back within the Soviet orbit, not least because of logistical problems and the likelihood of confronting stiff armed resistance. The "loss" of Albania, though trivial compared to the earlier split with Yugoslavia and the deepening rift with China, marked the second time since 1945 that the Soviet sphere of influence in East-Central Europe had been breached.

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between Hoxha and the Albanian participants in the meetings. A somewhat expanded edition of the collection is available in French: *Le grande divergence 1960* (Paris: Nouveau Bureau d'Édition, 1976). For other crucial Albanian documents pertaining to the split with the USSR, see Ana Lalaj, Christian F. Ostermann, and Ryan Gage, eds., "'Albania is Not Cuba': Sino-Albanian Summits and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 16 (Spring 2008), pp. 183-340. Key insights also can be gained by reading the surprisingly compatible accounts in Hoxha's and Khrushchev's memoirs. See N. S. Khrushchev, *Vremya, lyudi, vlast': Vospominaniya N. S. Khrushcheva*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), Vol. 2, pp. 109-121; and Enver Hoxha, *The Artful Albanian: The Memoirs of Enver Hoxha*, ed. by Jon Holliday (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), pp. 141-247, esp. 224-247. For an early but still useful overview of the crisis, along with a handy collection of public statements and press articles, see William E. Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1963).

[20] Khrushchev, *Vremya, lyudi, vlast'*, Vol. 2, p. 116.

[21] Ibid., p. 117.

To make matters worse, Soviet leaders soon discovered that China was secretly attempting to induce other East European countries to follow Albania's lead. At a closed plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in December 1963, a high-ranking Soviet official responsible for intra-bloc relations, Yurii Andropov, who became head of the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) in 1967, noted that the Chinese had been focusing their efforts on Poland, Hungary, and East Germany:

> The Chinese leaders are carrying out a policy of crude sabotage in relation to Poland, Hungary, and the GDR. Characteristic of this is the fact that in September of this year, during conversations with a Hungarian official in China, Politburo member Chu De declared that China would welcome it if the Hungarian comrades diverged from the CPSU's line. But, Chu De threatened, if you remain on the side of the revisionists, we will have to take a stance against you.[23]

China's efforts to lure these three countries (and possibly others) away from Soviet control à la Albania bore little fruit in the end, but Soviet leaders obviously could not be sure of that at the time. The very fact that China was seeking to foment discord within the Soviet bloc was enough to spark consternation in Moscow.

The growing unease in Moscow about the effect of the Sino-Soviet split in Eastern Europe was piqued still further when Romania began to embrace foreign and domestic policies in the 1960s that were at times sharply at odds with the Soviet Union's own policies. Initially, the Romanian quest for autonomy was inspired by the USSR's attempts in 1961 to mandate a supranational economic integration program for CMEA, which would have relegated Romania to being little more than a supplier of agricultural goods and raw materials for the more industrialized Communist countries. In response, Romania began shifting much of its foreign trade away from CMEA toward the West and the Third World. In April 1964, the Romanian government issued a stinging rejection of the Soviet scheme.[24] From then on, the reorientation of Romanian foreign trade gathered pace. By the late 1960s, Romania's trade with other CMEA countries as a proportion of its total foreign trade had dropped from 70 to just 45 percent.[25]

Before long, Romania's defiance extended from economic matters into foreign policy and military activities as well. Romania staked out a conspicuously neutral position in the Sino-Soviet

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[22] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

[23] "Materialy k protokolu No. 6 zasedaniya Plenuma TsK KPSS: O deyatel'nosti Prezidiuma TsK KPSS po ukrepleniyu edinstva kommunisticheskogo dvizheniya, postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK KPSS ob izdanii tekstov vystuplenii na Plenume TsK Ponomareva B. N., Andropova Yu. V., i Il'icheva L. F., rechi sekretarei TsK KPSS Ponomareva, Andropova, Il'icheva, i Khrushcheva N.S.," Marked-up Transcript (Top Secret), 9-13 December 1963, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 1, D. 665, L. 30.

[24] Romanian Press Agency (Agerpres), *Statement on the Stand of the Romanian Workers' Party Concerning Problems of the World Communist and Working Class Movement* (Bucharest: Agerpres, 1964), pp. 5-50.

[25] Crawford and Haberstroh, "Survey of Economic Policy Issues in Eastern Europe," p. 41.

dispute, refusing to endorse Moscow's polemics or to join in other steps aimed at isolating Beijing from the rest of the Communist bloc. In 1967, Romania became the first East European country to establish diplomatic ties with West Germany, a step that infuriated East German leaders. That same year, the Romanians refused to attend the Karlovy Vary conference and maintained full diplomatic relations with Israel after the other Warsaw Pact countries had broken off all ties in the wake of the June 1967 Middle East War.

More important, Romania adopted an independent military doctrine of "Total People's War for the Defense of the Homeland," as well as a national military command structure entirely separate from that of the Warsaw Pact.[26] Several years earlier, in 1958, the Romanian government had requested and obtained the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Romania, but in the mid-1960s the new Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceauşescu, went much further by prohibiting joint Warsaw Pact maneuvers on Romanian territory and sending only token forces to participate in allied exercises elsewhere. Ceauşescu also stopped sending Romanian army officers to Soviet military academies for training and began openly challenging Soviet domination of the Warsaw Pact's military command structures. When the Soviet-Romanian treaty of friendship and cooperation came up for renewal in 1967-1968, Ceauşescu insisted that provisions be added to ensure that Romanian troops would be used only in Europe and only against "imperialist" countries, not against other Communist states. (Ceauşescu was thinking of China when he first proposed these amendments, but the provisions ended up being just as relevant to operations against Czechoslovakia.) Soviet leaders strongly resisted Ceauşescu's demands, but ultimately gave in.[27] Although Romania had never been a crucial member of the Warsaw Pact, Ceauşescu's growing recalcitrance on military affairs and foreign policy posed serious complications for the cohesion of the alliance.

Developments outside the Communist bloc also contributed to the loosening of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. The perceived threat of German aggression, which had long unified the Warsaw Pact governments, had gradually diminished. In the mid-1960s, West Germany had launched its *Ostpolitik* campaign to increase economic and political contacts in Eastern Europe, a campaign whose potentially disruptive impact on the Soviet bloc was well recognized in Moscow.[28] As far back as November 1956,

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[26] Alexander Alexiev, *Romania and the Warsaw Pact: The Defense Policy of a Reluctant Ally*, P-6270 (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, January 1979).

[27] The new treaty was finally concluded in July 1970, more than two-and-a-half years later than planned. See "Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoi pomoshchi," *Pravda* (Moscow), 8 July 1970, p. 2.

[28] Józef Fiszer and Jerzy Hołcer, eds., *Recepcja Ostpolitik w RFN i w krajach bloku komunistycznego : Polska, ZSRR, NRD, Czechosłowacja, Węgry* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 2004). The literature on the genesis and conduct of *Ostpolitik* is immense. Among many useful sources are Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer, eds., *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Responses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of

senior officials in the CPSU Central Committee apparatus had expressed strong misgivings about the effect that conciliatory overtures from the FRG might have on Poland and Czechoslovakia in the wake of the Hungarian revolution. They warned that if circumstances went too far, Poland "would no longer be interested in hosting Soviet troops" and that both Czechoslovakia and Poland might "pursue neutrality."[29] That notion seemed far-fetched at the time, no matter how much West German policy might change; but by the mid- to late 1960s, as the FRG's *Ostpolitik* gathered pace, those earlier warnings seemed all too plausible.

Soviet policy in Eastern Europe also was increasingly constrained by the improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations that occurred after leaders on both sides recognized how close they had come to war during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. The new relationship was symbolized by the signing of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in August 1963. The incipient superpower détente raised hopes in Moscow that strategic nuclear arms control agreements and increased economic ties would be forthcoming. Such prospects gave the Soviet leadership an incentive to proceed cautiously in Eastern Europe before taking actions that would undermine the détente and provoke Western retaliation (though the escalating U.S. military involvement in Vietnam presumably had the opposite effect). The advent of a more cooperative U.S.-Soviet relationship even spawned fears in Europe, both West and East, that the superpowers might eventually seek a formal condominium at the expense of the Europeans. Although this concern was especially acute in East Germany (where Ulbricht constantly worried that the Soviet Union might cut a deal over his head), similar anxieties were present in almost all of the East European countries.

North Carolina Press, 2001); Julia von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik: The Making of the Moscow Treaty between West Germany and the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); N. Piers Ludlow, ed., *European Integration and the Cold War: Ostpolitik-Westpolitik, 1965-1973* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Frank Fischer, *Im deutschen Interesse: Die Ostpolitik der SPD von 1969 bis 1989* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2001); William E. Griffith, *The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978); Thomas F. Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), esp. ch. 3; Klaus Hildebrand, *Von Erhard zur Grossen Koalition: 1963-1969* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1984); Arne Hofman, *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy, and the Formation of Ostpolitik* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wolfgang M. A. Schmidt, *Kalter Krieg, Koexistenz kleine Schritte: Willy Brandt und die Deutschlandpolitik, 1948-1963* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher, 2001); and Gottfried Niedhart, "Ostpolitik: The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Process of Détente," in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., 1968: The World Transformed (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 173-192.

[29] "Raschety i plany pravyashchikh krugov po germanskomu voprosu v svyazi s sobytiyami v Pol'she i Vengrii," Memorandum No. 23055 (Top Secret), from the CPSU Information Committee to the CPSU Presidium, 29 November 1956, in Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF), F. 595, Op. 77, D. 789, Ll. 437-442.

THE PRAGUE SPRING AND THE SOVIET RESPONSE

Amid these conflicting trends in Soviet-East European relations, the events of 1968 unfolded in Czechoslovakia. In early January 1968, Alexander Dubček was chosen to replace the increasingly unpopular First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), Antonín Novotný, who had held the post since 1953. Within weeks of taking office, the new KSČ leader embarked on a broad program of economic reform. Although Dubček remained a loyal Communist to the end, the program that he set in motion soon generated pressures for far-reaching political liberalization. The sweeping reforms that ensued during the Prague Spring brought a comprehensive revival of political, economic, and cultural life in Czechoslovakia.[30] When press censorship was effectively ended in early 1968, lively discussions of political and social affairs began appearing in Czechoslovak newspapers and journals. Unofficial political "clubs" sprang up all around Czechoslovakia, and numerous commentators advocated the reestablishment of non-Communist political parties from the pre-1948 era. The rehabilitation of victims of the show trials and repressions of the early 1950s, which had begun very tentatively in the early 1960s, was sharply accelerated in the spring of 1968, and lengthy articles appeared condemning the "crimes" of the early Communist period. A wide array of other political reforms, which only a year earlier would have been inconceivable, were swiftly implemented as the Prague Spring continued, giving rise to calls for even bolder steps.

Because Czechoslovakia only recently had seemed to be one of the most orthodox members of the socialist bloc, the measures adopted in 1968 quickly provoked anxiety in Moscow about the potential ramifications. As early as 18 January, less than two weeks after Dubček had taken office, the Soviet Politburo discussed events in Czechoslovakia and received a detailed briefing from the Soviet ambassador in Prague, Stepan Chervonenko. The ambassador described Dubček as "unquestionably an honorable and faithful man and a staunch friend of the Soviet Union," but Chervonenko warned that the KSČ leadership

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[30] Of the many works dealing with the events of 1968, see in particular H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), which remains an excellent, comprehensive overview. Other books worth consulting about internal events in Czechoslovakia include Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968-1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Vladimir Horsky, *Prag 1968: Systemveranderung und Systemverteidigung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975); Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Vladimir V. Kusin, *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Jiří Kosta, "The Czechoslovak Economic Reform of the 1960s," in Norman Stone and Eduard Strouhal, eds., *Czechoslovakia: Crossroads and Crises, 1918-88* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 231-252; and Eugen Lobl and Leopold Grunwald, *Die intellektuelle Revolution: Hintergrunde und Auswirkungen des "Prager Frühlings"* (Dusseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1969). See also the collection of essays by Czech scholars: Václav Kural, *et al.*, eds., *Československo roku 1968* (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 1993), Vol. 1 ("Obrodný proces") and Vol. 2 ("Počátky normalizace").

overall was still "weak and divided," and that Dubček was "vacillating."[31] The Soviet Politburo decided to increase bilateral and multilateral contacts with Dubček and to keep a close watch on future developments in Czechoslovakia. In line with this decision, the KSČ leader was invited to Moscow for consultations at the end of January, and a top-level Soviet delegation reciprocated the visit a few weeks later. Moreover, Brezhnev kept in frequent touch with Dubček by telephone and through a series of confidential letters.[32]

Initially, Brezhnev and his colleagues expressed their concerns to Dubček in a low-key manner, and Dubček did his best to accommodate those concerns. Although the new leaders of the KSČ moved ahead with wide-ranging political reforms, Dubček tried to preclude internal developments that would be perceived as hostile by his Warsaw Pact neighbors. He continued, albeit often unsuccessfully, to admonish journalists and political commentators not to question the legitimacy of Czechoslovakia's foreign alliances or the "leading role" of the KSČ, and he sought to dissuade intellectuals and political dissidents from taking steps that would be tantamount to the formation of a full-fledged political opposition. To this end, Dubček publicly affirmed that the KSČ would not tolerate a revival of "certain non-socialist modes . . . under the guise of democracy and rehabilitation," an obvious reference to the unofficial "clubs" and nascent political parties that had emerged.[33] The KSČ leader hewed to this basic line even as the Prague Spring took on a life of its own and moved gradually beyond the Communist party's control.

Dubček's desire to prevent any impetuous actions was soon complicated by the tortuous sequence of events that led to the removal of his predecessor, Antonín Novotný, from the Presidency (a post Novotný had retained after being ousted from the top party job). In late February 1968, General Jan Šejna, the chief of the Party committee in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense, defected to the United States shortly before he was to be arrested on charges of corruption.[34] Rumors spread that Šejna and General Miroslav Mamula, the head of the KSČ CC's Eighth Department overseeing the armed forces and internal security apparatus, had tried to use the Czechoslovak military in December 1967 and early

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[31] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 18 yanvarya 1968 g.," 18 January 1968 (Top Secret), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 37-39. For similar concerns, see "Zapis' besed s zam. zav. mezhdunarodnogo otdela TsK KPCh tov. M. Millerom v fevrale 1968 goda," Cable No. 211 (Top Secret), 5 March 1968, from I. I. Udal'tsov, minister-counselor at the Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, to M. A. Suslov, K. V. Rusakov, and A. A. Gromyko, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 27-33; and "Otdel TsK KPSS," 18 March 1968, Memorandum (Secret) from V. Moskovskii to M. A. Suslov, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 25, Ll. 12-14.

[32] The most important of these letters were declassified and published in Czech in 1991; see "Dokumenty: Dopisy L. Brežněva A. Dubčekovi v roce 1968," *Historie a vojenství* (Prague), No. 1 (January-February 1991), pp. 141-158.

[33] *K otázkam obrodzovacieho procesu KSČ: Vybrané projevy prvého tajomníka ÚV KSČ s. Alexandra Dubčeka* (Bratislava: VLP, 1968), pp. 31-58.

[34] The official KSČ report on the affair is in "Proč utekl Jan Šejna: Výsledky setřeni projednány vládou," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 12 June 1968, pp. 1-2.

January 1968 to keep Novotný in power, apparently at Novotný's request. Although details of the "Šejna affair" remained murky even after an official investigation was completed, what came out was damaging enough to inspire newspapers throughout Czechoslovakia to publish bitter criticism of Novotný and his supporters.

Confronted by these revelations and attacks, hard-line officials in key positions came under increasing pressure to resign. In the space of ten days from the 5th to the 14th of March, many of the hardliners were indeed forced out and replaced by prominent reform-minded officials. Jiří Hendrych was removed as the KSČ Secretary responsible for ideological affairs; Michal Chudík resigned as head of the Slovak National Council; Jan Kudrna was dismissed as Interior Minister; and Jan Bartuška was removed as Procurator General. The ouster of Kudrna and Bartuška on 14 March was particularly significant because the two of them together had controlled the country's internal security apparatus and had maintained intimate links with the Soviet KGB. The new Interior Minister, Josef Pavel, not only was a leading proponent of reform, but was also wary of the KGB's intentions in Czechoslovakia — a position that infuriated Moscow. Over the next several months, Soviet leaders repeatedly demanded that Pavel be removed.

The shakeup in Czechoslovakia's internal security network was especially worrisome for Moscow because it came on the heels of major changes in the Czechoslovak People's Army (ČLA), which, like the ČSSR Interior Ministry, had traditionally been a crucial vehicle for Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia, both directly and indirectly. In late February a reform-minded ČLA officer, Army-General Václav Prchlík, took over as head of the KSČ Central Committee's State-Administrative Department (the so-called Eighth Department) after Mamula was forced out; and another reform-minded officer of Slovak origin, General Egyd Pepich, was appointed head of the ČLA's Main Political Directorate, the post vacated by Prchlík. Soon thereafter, a number of other senior military officers were dismissed, and in early April the long-time Defense Minister under Novotný, Army-General Bohumir Lomský, was replaced by a ČLA officer from Slovakia with long-standing ties to Dubček, General Martin Dzúr.[35]

The turnover of high-ranking personnel in the KSČ, the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry, and the Czechoslovak armed forces sparked ever greater anxiety in Moscow that traditional channels of Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia were being eroded and undermined by the Prague Spring.[36] Although the process of political, economic, and cultural revitalization in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was entirely peaceful

[35] On Dzúr's earlier ties with Dubček, see Memorandum No. 8468 (Top Secret) from Army-General A. Epishev, chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Armed Forces, to K. F. Katushev, CPSU Secretary, 23 October 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 111-112.

[36] See Dubček's intriguing comments on this point in *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček*, trans. and ed. by Jiří Hochman (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), pp. 139, 146.

throughout, the lack of any violent turmoil did not prevent Soviet leaders from repeatedly drawing analogies to an event they had collectively experienced twelve years earlier — the violent rebellion in Hungary in October-November 1956, which was eventually crushed by a Soviet invasion. As early as 15 March 1968, at a meeting of the CPSU Politburo, the head of the KGB, Yurii Andropov, who had served as Soviet ambassador in Budapest during the 1956 revolution, claimed that events in Czechoslovakia "are very reminiscent of what happened in Hungary."[37] Brezhnev, who in 1956 had taken part in all the high-level discussions that led to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, concurred with Andropov's assessment, adding that "our earlier hopes for Dubček have not been borne out." Brezhnev phoned Dubček during a break in the CPSU Politburo's deliberations and emphasized his "grave concern" about the situation in Czechoslovakia, especially the "emergence of patently anti-socialist forces." The Soviet leader warned Dubček that "the Hungarian events of 1956 might soon be repeated in [Czechoslovakia]" unless the KSČ moved to reestablish order and crack down on the "anti-socialist elements." Dubček , in trying to allay these concerns, said that he would soon be meeting with the Hungarian Communist leader, János Kádár, to discuss the matter. Kádár had coordinated his actions with Brezhnev, who welcomed the Hungarian leader's proposal for a meeting, which he hoped would pave the way for a direct Soviet-Czechoslovak conclave.

As it turned out, however, neither the phone call nor the Kádár-Dubček meeting had as much of an impact as Brezhnev had hoped. Over the next week, events in Prague continued to gather pace, culminating in the downfall of Novotný himself. On 14 March, the same day that Kudrna and Bartuška were dismissed from the Interior Ministry, an announcement was made of the suicide of a deputy defense minister, General Vladimir Janko, following reports of his collaboration with Šejna in December and January on behalf of Novotný.[38] The outpouring of criticism that ensued in the Czechoslovak press led to further calls for Novotný's resignation and for a complete investigation of his efforts in January to stay in power. The volume of those demands increased after Czechoslovak journalists disclosed that Novotný's son had been a friend of Šejna and that Šejna's rapid advance in the Czechoslovak armed forces had been attributable solely to Novotný's largesse rather than to any professional qualifications or achievements. Under intense pressure, Novotný stepped down from the presidency on 21 March for "reasons of ill health."

If Novotný's forced departure had been an isolated event, it might not have stirred great unease in Moscow; but amid the flurry of other personnel changes in the KSČ in late February and March, as well

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[37] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 15 marta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 15 March 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, Delo D. 99, Ll. 123-124.

[38] The fullest official investigation of the reasons for Janko's suicide was not declassified until 1994. See "Informace o samovraždě gen. Vl. JANKA," 14 March 1968 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, Operační správa Generálního štábu (GS/OS) Čs. Armády, 154/277.

as a host of changes that followed Novotný's resignation, the ouster of the president seemed to confirm that orthodox Communists in Czechoslovakia were in danger of being removed from the scene altogether. On the day that Novotný resigned, the Soviet Politburo met to discuss the latest developments in Czechoslovakia.[39] Brezhnev expressed dismay that events were "moving in an anti-Communist direction," and that so many "good and sincere friends of the Soviet Union" had been forced to step down. He also noted that the situation in Czechoslovakia was beginning to spark ferment among Soviet "intellectuals and students as well as in certain regions" of the country, notably Ukraine. Brezhnev's misgivings were echoed by other Politburo members, including Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, who insisted that that the Czechoslovak authorities were "preparing to do what was done in Hungary." The Ukrainian Communist Party leader, Petro Shelest, confirmed that events in Czechoslovakia were having adverse repercussions in Ukraine— repercussions that, in his view, meant the crisis would determine "not only the fate of socialism in one of the socialist countries, but the fate of the whole socialist camp."[40] Aleksandr Shelepin and Mikhail Solomentsev spoke in similarly ominous tones about the effect of the Prague Spring on Soviet students and intellectuals, warning that "we can no longer have any confidence about [Dubček's] assurances." They joined Shelest in recommending that the Soviet Union be prepared, if necessary, to resort to "extreme measures," including "military action." Their recommendation was strongly endorsed by Andropov, who argued that "we must adopt concrete military measures" as soon as possible.

Soviet concerns were heightened still further by what happened in the wake of Novotný's removal. The process of selecting a replacement initially took the form of a "nomination campaign" in which the names of several outspoken advocates of reform and liberalization were put forward. Although the eventual successor, Ludvík Svoboda, was a moderate with close ties to Brezhnev dating back to World War II and was chosen in the usual way — first by a KSČ Central Committee plenum and then by the National Assembly in a pro forma vote — the abrupt removal of Novotný and the unorthodox nomination procedures before Svoboda's election seemed to betoken a new way of selecting the highest political elites that would loosen the KSČ's control over the selection process and almost wholly exclude Soviet influence.

Thus, even though the Soviet Union had never been deeply committed to Novotný (as was

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[39] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 21 marta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 21 March 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 147-158.

[40] For extensive evidence about the impact of the Prague Spring on Ukraine and the way this issue affected Soviet decision-making, see Mark Kramer, ""Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1): New Evidence from the Diaries of Petro Shelest," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (March 1998), pp. 234-248; and Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 2): New Evidence from the Ukrainian Archives," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 14/15 (Winter-Spring 2003-Spring 2004), pp. 273-369.

evidenced by Brezhnev's unwillingness to prevent Novotný's removal in December 1967), the unusual manner of replacing the president aroused concerns among Soviet officials that control of events in Czechoslovakia was slipping away from both the KSČ and Moscow.[41] Brezhnev was particularly upset about Dubček's failure even to consult with Moscow before Novotný was forced to resign. Although it may well be that Brezhnev would have approved the dismissal, it was the procedure rather than the result that provoked the Soviet leader's anger. After all, if Dubček would not consult with his Soviet counterparts about the fate of such a prominent figure as Novotný, that seemed to bode ill for dozens of other pro-Soviet officials in Czechoslovakia who were leery of reform and who were being ousted both from KSČ posts and from the military command and internal security network. Novotný's removal thus appeared, in Soviet eyes, to be a harbinger of a much wider purge that would eventually do away with all traces of Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia. A dangerous rift between Moscow and Prague was steadily emerging.

Reactions within the Warsaw Pact

The growing unease in Moscow about the Prague Spring was reinforced by the much harsher complaints expressed in other East-bloc capitals, especially Warsaw and East Berlin. From the outset, Gomułka, as the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), and Ulbricht, as leader of the SED, were determined to counter "inimical, anti-socialist influences" along their borders. The two men feared that events in Czechoslovakia would prove "contagious" and would induce political instability in their own countries, thereby threatening to undermine their own political control. As early as mid-January 1968, when a high-level Soviet delegation led by Brezhnev paid an unofficial visit to Poland and the GDR, both Gomułka and Ulbricht expressed disquiet to their Soviet counterparts about recent developments in Czechoslovakia.[42] Gomułka reiterated his concerns in a private conversation with Dubček a few weeks later in the Moravian city of Ostrava, warning that "if things go badly with you [in Czechoslovakia], we in Poland, too, will find hostile elements rising against us."[43] In subsequent weeks, Gomułka's and Ulbricht's views of the Czechoslovak reform program took on an increasingly alarmist edge; and before long both of them were calling, with ever greater urgency, for direct intervention by the Warsaw Pact to halt the Prague Spring. Their concerns were shared by the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party,

[41] See, for example, the letter from Brezhnev to Dubček, 16 March 1968, in Národní Archiv České Republiky (NAČR), Archiv Ústredního výboru Komunistické strany Československa (Arch. ÚV KSČ), F. 07/15, Zahr. kor. čislo (č.) 787.

[42] See the materials pertaining to these discussions in Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Warsaw, Archiwum Komitetu Centralnego Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Rabotniczej (Arch. KC PZPR), Paczka (P.) 32, Tom (T.) 114.

[43] "Protokół z rozmowy Pierwszego Sekretarza KC PZPR tow. Władysława Gomułki z Pierszym Sekretarzem KC KPCz tow. Aleksandrem Dubczekem," 7 February 1968 (Secret), in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, Dok. 3.

Todor Zhivkov, who spoke as early as 6-7 March about the desirability of allied military intervention in Czechoslovakia.[44]

Gomułka's fears that the "anti-socialist" tendencies in Czechoslovakia would spread into Poland were heightened during the first few weeks of March, when students in Warsaw and many other Polish cities held riots and street demonstrations, carrying signs in support of Dubček and proclaiming "*Polska czeka na swego Dubczeka*" (Poland is awaiting its own Dubček).[45] Although the Polish authorities violently quelled the student protests, the episode convinced Gomułka that events in Czechoslovakia, if allowed to proceed, would have an "increasingly detrimental effect on Poland."[46] The Polish leader became the first Soviet-bloc official to attack the Czechoslovak reforms publicly when, in a speech before PZPR employees on 19 March, he averred that "imperialist reaction and enemies of socialism" were active in Czechoslovakia.[47] By that point Gomułka's hostility to the Prague Spring had increased still further as a result of the political challenge he was encountering from a group of ultranationalist "Partisan" officials who supported the hard-line Polish Internal Affairs Minister, Mieczysław Moczar. Eventually, Gomułka was able to thwart their efforts and retain his position as PZPR First Secretary, but he was greatly weakened in the process.[48] To help shore up his position, the Polish leader soon resorted

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[44] Iskra Baeva, *Bulgariya i Istochna Evropa* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), p. 133. For a useful assessment of Zhivkov's hostility toward the Prague Spring, see Ivana Skálová, *Podíl Bulharska na Potlačcní Pražského Jara 1968* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2005).

[45] On the effect of the turmoil in Poland, see Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006), esp. pp. 224-395. Eisler's book includes an extensive bibliography along with his lengthy, detailed analysis. See also Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec '68: Geneza -- przebieg -- konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1993), as well as the comments by one of Gomułka's chief rivals and his eventual successor, Edward Gierek, in Janusz Rolicki, ed., *Edward Gierek: Przerwana dekada* (Warsaw: BGW, 1990), pp. 46-48. The unrest in Poland posed a dilemma for Soviet officials, who initially were unsure what, if anything, they should say about the riots. The director-general of the Soviet TASS news agency, Sergei Lapin, felt the need to contact the CPSU CC Politburo for permission just to publish in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* a brief dispatch from the official Polish Press Agency. Brezhnev personally approved the request. See Lapin's secret memorandum of 11 March 1968 in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 25, L. 3. A notation in Brezhnev's handwriting at the bottom says "*tov. Brezhnev L. I. soglasen*" ("Comrade L. I. Brezhnev agrees").

[46] "Dopeše sovětského velvyšlancě ve Varšave do Moskvy o názorech W. Gomulky na situací v Československu," from A. Aristov, Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, to the CPSU Secretariat, 16 April 1968 (Top Secret), in Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, Sbírka Komise vlády ČSFR pro analyzu událostí let 1967-1970 (ÚSD-SK), Z/S -- MID No. 2. See also "Wystąpenie Władysława Gomułki na naradzie Pierwszych Sekretarzy KW PZPR," 26 March 1968 (Top Secret), in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 298, T. 1, Dok. 3.

[47] "Umacniajmy jedność narodu w budownictwie socjalistycznej Ojczyzny: Przemówienie Władysława Gomułki na spotkaniu z aktywem warszawskim," *Zołnierz Wolności* (Warsaw), 20 March 1968, pp. 3-4. The full speech was republished in *Pravda* (Moscow) on 22 March 1968, pp. 3-4.

[48] On the way the Moczar affair affected Gomułka's response to the events in Czechoslovakia, see Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 516-632, 711-753. See also *Edward Gierek: Przerwana dekada*, pp. 42-43, 47-50, 60-63, 88-89, and 92-93. Another first-hand account of the Moczar Affair, from a very different perspective, is by Franciszek Szlachcic, "Ze wspomnien Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych," *Życie literackie* (Warsaw), No. 10, 6 March 1988, pp. 4-5. Szlachcic was a deputy Internal Affairs Minister in 1968 and a close friend of Moczar.

to even greater repression at home, including a sustained anti-Semitic campaign; and he became more dependent than ever on the Soviet Union, as he looked to Moscow for political backing against his rivals in the PZPR. Consequently, Gomułka's aversion to any possible "spill-over" from Czechoslovakia intensified.

Ulbricht's reaction to the events in Czechoslovakia was similar to Gomułka's in two respects: first, the SED leader was worried about a potential "spill-over" of the Prague Spring into East Germany; and second, Ulbricht's stance vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia was shaped in part by challenges and pressure he was facing at home — in this case from his erstwhile protégé, Erich Honecker.[49] To guard against any possible "contagion" from the Prague Spring, the East German authorities prohibited the sale of a wide range of Czechoslovak publications in the GDR, ceased issuing exit visas for East German tourists wishing to travel to Czechoslovakia, curtailed bilateral scientific and cultural exchanges, and imposed restrictions on broadcasts from Czechoslovakia. As time went on, the East German government largely sealed off its border with Czechoslovakia. All these measures were similar to the steps implemented in Poland.

In one key respect, however, Ulbricht's motives during the crisis differed from those of Gomułka. The prospect of a rapprochement between Czechoslovakia and West Germany was clearly at the forefront of the East German leader's concerns.[50] After Romania had broken with its East-bloc allies and unilaterally established diplomatic relations with the FRG in early 1967, the rest of the Warsaw Pact states had resolved, at a special meeting in Karlovy Vary, not to do the same until the West German government met a number of stringent conditions. Even so, Ulbricht was worried that some of the Pact leaders might eventually deviate from the Karlovy Vary agreement. He hoped that by opposing the reforms in Czechoslovakia, he could forestall any change in Prague's policy toward Bonn and exploit the events to head off a Soviet decision to seek diplomatic relations with the FRG.[51] Even the slightest hint that Czechoslovakia was considering an opening to West Germany provoked belligerent accusations from Ulbricht.

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[49] Lutz Priess, Václav Kural, and Manfred Wilke, *Die SED und der "Prager Fruhling" 1968: Politik gegen einen "Sozialismus mit menschlichem Antlitz"* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996); Heinz Lippmann, *Honecker: Porträt eines Nachfolgers* (Koln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1971), pp. 204-206; and Gerhard Naumann and Eckhard Trumpler, *Von Ulbricht zu Honecker: 1970 – ein Krisenjahr der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990).

[50] Among many studies on this theme, one of the best is Wolfgang Schwarz, *Brüderlich entzweit: Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der ČSSR 1961-1968* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2004). Also still very useful is Adolf Müller and Bedřich Utitz, *Deutschland und die Tschechoslowakei: Zwei Nachbarvolker auf dem Weg zur Verständigung* (Freudenstadt: Campus Forschung, 1972).

[51] See Ulbricht's handwritten notes to this effect in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPM0), Zentrales Parteiarchiv der SED (ZPA), Berlin, IV 2/201/778.

The Prague Spring and the Soviet Politburo

The concerns expressed by Polish and East German leaders, combined with the disquiet that senior officials in Moscow were beginning to feel, induced the CPSU Politburo to give high priority to the "Czechoslovak question."[52] From mid-March 1968 on, the issue was constantly at the top of the Politburo's agenda. Brezhnev consulted and worked closely with his colleagues on all aspects of the crisis, ensuring that responsibility for the outcome would be borne collectively. Unlike in December 1967, when Brezhnev had resorted to "personal diplomacy" during his sudden visit to Prague at Novotný's request, the growing "threat" in Czechoslovakia by the spring of 1968 gave him an incentive to share as much of the burden as possible with the rest of the Politburo and Secretariat. In particular, he ensured that his two top colleagues (and potential rivals), Aleksei Kosygin and Nikolai Podgornyi, were prominently involved in all key decisions and negotiations, linking them in an informal troika (with Brezhnev) that represented -- and often acted on behalf of -- the full Politburo. Much the same was true of Brezhnev's reliance on two other senior Politburo members: Mikhail Suslov, who oversaw ideological matters; and Petro Shelest, whose responsibilities in Ukraine did not prevent him from playing a key role during the crisis.

At the same time, Brezhnev was careful not to get bogged down by lower-level bureaucratic maneuvering. Throughout the crisis the CPSU Politburo, led by Brezhnev, exercised tight control over Soviet policy. The Politburo eventually set up a high-level "commission on the Czechoslovak question," consisting of Podgornyi, Suslov, Arvids Pel'she, Aleksandr Shelepin, Kirill Mazurov, Konstantin Rusakov, Yurii Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, and Aleksei Epishev. The commission kept a daily watch on events in Czechoslovakia, functioning as an organ of the Politburo that was directly accountable to Brezhnev. (Six of the nine members of the commission, including Podgornyi and Suslov, were full or candidate members of the Politburo, and the three other commission members had been taking an active part in the Politburo's deliberations on Czechoslovakia.)[53] The commission's findings and recommendations were regularly brought before the full Politburo for consideration. Brezhnev himself carefully guided the Politburo's proceedings and took direct responsibility for bilateral contacts with Dubček.

Contrary to assertions made by some Western analysts, the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat depended relatively little on lower-level Party and state agencies in their dealings with Czechoslovakia. Most of the time, the information flow during the crisis was from the top down (i.e., the Politburo ordered lower-level officials what to think and do), and all media outlets were kept rigidly under the Politburo's

[52]Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, pp. 147-149.

[53]"Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 maya 1968," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 23 May 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, L. 262.

control.[54] From at least early March on, all significant articles about Czechoslovakia had to be cleared directly with the highest officials, and often with Brezhnev himself.[55] A formal directive to this effect was issued in early June. Moreover, the Politburo transmitted frequent "informational reports" about the crisis to lower-level party and state organizations, which were required to disseminate the Politburo's findings to all employees and party members.[56] Brezhnev and his colleagues used the CPSU CC Organizational-Party Work Department as an oversight mechanism to ensure that dissemination of the reports throughout the Soviet Union (and in the other East-bloc countries) was carried out in strict accordance with the Politburo's wishes. Preparation of the reports was valuable both in forcing the Politburo to arrive at a common position and in preventing any divergences at lower levels from the Politburo's line.

New Reforms and New Responses

Despite the growing external pressure, senior Czechoslovak officials continued to advocate far-reaching political liberalization, particularly freedom of the press, on the grounds that uninhibited debate was the only way to ensure that the KSČ would retain its dominant position in Czechoslovak society. In keeping with this notion, Dubček encouraged a lively and wide-ranging exchange of views within the Communist Party about the future course of social, political, and economic liberalization. These discussions culminated in the adoption of a comprehensive "Action Program" at a plenary session of the KSČ Central

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[54] Evidence about the top-down flow of information, based on newly declassified materials, is provided in my forthcoming book, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia, 1968: The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion*. This new information undercuts much of the utility of the "bureaucratic politics" framework employed by Jiří Valenta in *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Further doubts about Valenta's approach are raised in Mark Kramer, "The CPSU International Department: Comments and Observations," in Sergei Grigoriev *et al.*, *The International Department of the CPSU Central Committee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, 1995), pp. 99-122, esp. 109-111.

[55] See, for example, the reference in footnote 45 *supra* to a brief official news release about the unrest in Poland, which had to be cleared with Brezhnev.

[56] See, for example, "Informatsiya TsK KPSS o sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii" (Top Secret), 23 March 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, Ll. 1-12; "Informatsiya TsK KPSS po vazhneishim voprosam vneshnei politiki i polozheniya v otdel'nykh sotsialisticheskikh stranakh" (Top Secret) and "Informatsiya TsK KPSS o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii i o nekotorykh vneshnepoliticheskikh shagakh rumynskogo rukovodstva" (Top Secret), 18 June 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 1, Ll. 92-99 and D. 10, Ll. 15-26; "O sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii" (Top Secret), 8 July 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, Ll. 27-50; "Informatsiya o vstreche v Chierne-nad-Tissoi i soveshchanii v Bratislave" (Top Secret), 4 August 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 24, Ll. 127-135; "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. P1513 (Secret), 30 September 1968, from I. Shvets, deputy head of sector in the CPSU CC Department for Party-Organizational Work, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, L. 97; "O polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii" (Top Secret), 7 February 1969, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 21, Ll. 79-111; and "O sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii" (Top Secret), 12 February 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 21, Ll. 161-185. See also "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. 14194 (Top Secret), 27 May 1968, from V. Stepakov, K. Rusakov, and V. Zagladin, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 109, 133-136.

Committee in early April 1968, a document that became the symbolic blueprint for the final months of the Prague Spring.[57]

The decision to adopt a sweeping reform program was accompanied by the removal or demotion of many prominent anti-reformist officials in the KSČ and the Czechoslovak government (almost all of whom had spent considerable time in the Soviet Union) and the replacement of numerous regional and local Party secretaries left over from the Novotný era. The combination of these developments greatly expedited the pace of reform in Czechoslovakia in April and May. Procedures for the rehabilitation of victims of past injustices were drafted and implemented, as were measures that effectively restored freedom of religion and freedom of travel. In accordance with the heterodox notion that the government should be primarily responsible to the National Assembly (i.e., the parliament) rather than to the Communist Party, the powers of the Assembly were enhanced. A new government was organized with Oldřich Černík at its head, and the National Assembly met on its own to begin considering legislation. These reforms were somewhat offset by the KSČ's attempts to prohibit the return of the Social Democratic party and the formation of any other independent political parties, but the pace of reform still greatly exceeded that of all earlier efforts. The Czechoslovak public responded enthusiastically to the KSČ's shift toward liberalization, and popular support for both the party and the Action Program grew rapidly.

Yet at the same time that the Action Program and personnel changes were generating excitement and anticipation in Czechoslovakia, they were causing even deeper misgivings in Moscow and other Warsaw Pact capitals. Initially, Soviet leaders' response to the Action Program was relatively muted (and excerpts from the Program were even published in the main Soviet daily, *Pravda*, on 12 April), but over the next few weeks the Soviet Politburo, as Brezhnev remarked to his colleagues, became "united in the view that [the Action Program] is a harmful program, which is paving the way for the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia."[58] Of particular concern to Soviet officials were the free-wheeling political discussions in the Czechoslovak media and the continued removal of hardline opponents of the Prague Spring, most of whom were replaced by ardent reformers. Earlier, at a hurriedly convened meeting in Dresden on 23 March, the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries other than Romania (which was not invited, for fear that Ceauşescu would disrupt attempts to rein in Czechoslovakia) had rebuked Dubček for allowing "the press, radio, and television to slip away from the Party's control" and for

[57] "Akční program Komunistické strany Československa," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 10 April 1968, pp. 1-6.

[58] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 6 May 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, L. 202.

dismissing many "loyal and seasoned cadres, who have proven their mettle in years of struggle."[59] Events over the next several weeks, especially after the publication of the KSČ Action Program, had greatly reinforced their concerns.

Even though all the changes in Czechoslovakia remained distinctly peaceful, analogies with the violent rebellion in Hungary in 1956 continued to be a salient feature of the Soviet Politburo's deliberations about the Prague Spring. When Dubček and other reform-minded Czechoslovak officials spoke with Soviet leaders, they tried to convince them that the situation was not at all like Hungary twelve years earlier:

> [T]he current events [in Czechoslovakia] are not a repetition of the events of 1956 in Hungary. In Hungary the popular masses rose up against the party and Central Committee, whereas in Czechoslovakia the masses are speaking out only against the conservatives and the group around [the hardliner Antonín] Novotný and are supporting the [KSČ], the Central Committee, and friendship with the Soviet Union.[60]

But these assurances, in the absence of concrete steps demanded by the Soviet Union, failed to mollify leaders in Moscow. Although Soviet officials acknowledged that no violent upheavals were occurring in Czechoslovakia ("at least not yet"), they argued that this was purely because "the American and West German imperialists" had "shifted tactics" and were "resorting to a new, step-by-step approach." The extensive evidence now available in Western and former East-bloc archives makes clear that, contrary to these allegations of "imperialist" involvement, Western governments were in fact not masterminding or even doing much to help out the Prague Spring. The reform program in Czechoslovak was devised from within.

For Soviet leaders, however, the allegations served a clear purpose. By repeatedly accusing the U.S. and West German governments of conspiring with "reactionary" forces in Czechoslovakia, they sought to discredit the Prague Spring and associate it with the "malevolent designs of imperialism." They argued that Western governments had been chastened by the experience in 1956 (when Soviet troops

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[59] "Protokol der Treffen der Ersten Sekretäre der kommunistischen Parteien Bulgariens, der ČSSR, der DDR, Polens, der Sowjetunion und Ungarns," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 23 March 1968, in SAPMO, ZPA, IV 2/201/778. This transcript was discovered in late 1993 by a German researcher, Lutz Priess. Until then, most experts assumed that no detailed records of the Dresden meeting existed. Brezhnev had explicitly requested at the outset of the conference that no minutes be taken and that the stenographers be ordered to leave the room. His request was duly observed. Hence, the closest thing to a stenographic report in the former Soviet archives and in most of the East European archives was the handwritten notes of the participants. Until 1993, these notes, as well as interviews with and memoirs by participants at Dresden, were the only first-hand source indicating what went on at the Dresden conference. But it turns out that a secret stenographic record – albeit a somewhat incomplete one – was kept by East German officials, thanks to a hidden recording system. The proceedings apparently were taped without the knowledge of the other participants, including the Soviet delegates. The recordings were subsequently transcribed for Ulbricht and other SED leaders.

[60] Cited in "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. 1/22 (Top Secret) from P. Shelest to the CPSU Politburo, 21 March 1968, in Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads'kykh Ob'ednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU), Kyiv, F. 1, Op. 25, Sprava (Spr.) 27, Ll. 18-23. See also Emil Šip, "Prvomájové referendum," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 3 May 1968, p. 2.

forcefully quelled the Hungarian revolution) and were therefore now adopting a subtler approach. At a closed party gathering in late April 1968 the Soviet Politburo member Petro Shelest explained this alleged shift in Western tactics:

> In Hungary in 1956 the imperialists urged the local reactionaries to embark on an armed attack to seize power, whereas in Czechoslovakia they are trying to establish a bourgeois order by "peaceful means." That is, they are trying gradually to change the situation so that the reactionaries can gradually seize one position after another. . . . [The anti-Soviet elements in Czechoslovakia] do not dare to speak out openly in support of anti-Communist and anti-Soviet demands. They understand [from the decisive Soviet response in 1956] that this game is over once and for all. The enemies provide cover for themselves with demagogic statements about "friendship" with the Soviet Union, while at the same time sowing doubts about some sort of "inequality" and about the pursuit of a special, "independent" foreign policy. They are also trying to undercut the leading role of the [Communist] Party.[61]

Shelest claimed that he was still hoping that "the healthy forces in the KSČ will be able to regain control of the situation and guide the country back onto the socialist path." But he added that "in the event of danger," the CPSU Politburo "will use all of our capabilities," including military forces, "to thwart the intrigues of our enemies who want to rip fraternal Czechoslovakia out of the commonwealth of socialist countries."[62]

Shelest's argument signaled a far-reaching change of course that was later reflected in the Brezhnev Doctrine. The implication of his comments was that even if violence did not ever break out in Czechoslovakia, the peaceful "seizure of power" by "hostile forces" (supposedly "in collusion with Western imperialists") could eventually pose the same sort of "mortal danger" that arose in Hungary in 1956, necessitating the same type of Soviet response. This line of reasoning was later publicly codified in an article in the main CPSU newspaper, *Pravda*, in July 1968, a few days before Soviet leaders met in Warsaw with the leaders of East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary to decide what to do about Czechoslovakia. The article, titled "Attack against the Foundations of Socialism in Czechoslovakia," asserted that "the tactics of those who would like to undermine the foundations of socialism in Czechoslovakia are even more cunning and insidious" than the "frenzied attacks launched by counterrevolutionary elements in Hungary in 1956."[63] Because the "champions of counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia and their Western backers were aware that open revolt would provoke a Soviet military response, they were "carrying out a stealthy counterrevolution" that would peacefully "subvert the gains of socialism."

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[61] "Doklad P. E. Shelesta 'Ob itogakh aprel'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS,'" Speech Text (Top Secret), 25 April 1968, in TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 97, Ll. 8-9.

[62] Ibid., L. 11.

[63] I. Aleksandrov, "Ataka protiv sotsialisticheskikh ustoev Chekhoslovakii," *Pravda* (Moscow), 11 July 1968, p. 4.

Soviet leaders stressed this theme at a bilateral Soviet-Czechoslovak meeting in Moscow in early May, where they repeated all their earlier complaints and raised a host of new allegations, leaving the Czechoslovak delegation almost speechless.[64] Dubček, Černík, and Smrkovský were interrogated at length by their Soviet counterparts about the Action Program, the personnel changes, and other recent developments. Brezhnev and his colleagues not only presented a litany of complaints about the incipient "counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia, but also expressed dismay that the Czechoslovak "army is being weakened" and that Czechoslovakia's "inexcusably lax" border security was facilitating "imperialist espionage and subversive activities" against the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet officials at the meeting repeatedly chastised Dubček for underestimating the strength of "anti-socialist and counterrevolutionary forces" in Czechoslovakia who were seeking to "restore a bourgeois order" and "abandon the socialist commonwealth." Brezhnev insisted that developments in Czechoslovakia had gone so far that they were "no longer just an internal matter," and he closed the session with a thinly-veiled warning that if the KSČ authorities did not soon "rectify things on [their] own," the USSR itself would have to take much stronger action.

The growing impatience in Moscow was just as evident two days later, when the Soviet Politburo convened to discuss how events in Czechoslovakia might develop in the wake of the bilateral meeting.[65] Brezhnev claimed that the Czechoslovak media were "endangering socialist gains and the role of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia," and he accused Dubček of having "decapitated the Party" by forcing so many "honest and committed Communists" to retire. All participants in the session expressed their determination to "preserve socialism in Czechoslovakia" by any means necessary. They approved a number of steps designed to bring greater pressure to bear on KSČ leaders and the Czechoslovak public. The Soviet Politburo also designated Petro Shelest to serve as a clandestine liaison with the hardline forces in the KSČ led by Vasil Bil'ak, Alois Indra, and Drahomir Kolder. Brezhnev acknowledged that the buildup of military and political pressure on Czechoslovakia would "evoke protests in the bourgeois and Czechoslovak media," but he added: "Well, so what? This will not be the first time such a thing has happened. . . . And besides, after this is done, everyone will know that it's not worth fooling around with us."[66]

As the rift with Czechoslovakia widened in the spring of 1968, the CPSU Politburo authorized the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko, to begin preparing Soviet forces in Eastern Europe for

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[64] "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR, 4 maya 1968 goda," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 4 May 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 100, Ll. 1-148. All quoted passages are from this transcript.

[65] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedanii Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968," Ll. 200-220.

[66] Ibid., L. 218.

a large-scale military contingency in the region.[67] This marked the initial step in planning for Operation "Danube" (the eventual code-name of the invasion of Czechoslovakia). Further "concrete plans about our practical measures" for Czechoslovakia were considered on 6 May by the Soviet Defense Council, a political-military body headed by Brezhnev. The Defense Council's recommendations, including the dispatch of a high-level Soviet military delegation to Czechoslovakia in mid-May and the use of large-scale military exercises on Czechoslovak territory in late May and June to exert political pressure and carry out logistical preparations for future military action, were then considered and approved by the CPSU Poliburo.[68] Brezhnev and his colleagues also took a number of important political steps to ensure that members of the CPSU Central Committee and other lower-ranking party officials would be ready for a vigorous stance against Czechoslovakia.[69] These steps were useful both in reaffirming the general thrust of Soviet policy and in giving Central Committee members a sense of involvement in high-level policymaking.

Within the Soviet Politburo itself, however, a firm consensus about the best course to pursue had not yet emerged. For the time being, Brezhnev was unwilling to embrace a clear-cut position, and he permitted and indeed encouraged other members of the Politburo to express their own opinions about particular matters.[70] The diary of one of the senior Politburo members at the time, Petro Shelest, reveals that as late as the summer of 1968 the differing approaches of Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyi, Suslov, and others "kept the Politburo from being firmly united about how to deal with the question of Czechoslovakia."[71] The formerly secret transcripts of the Politburo's sessions in 1968 amply corroborate Shelest's observation. The transcripts indicate that some members of the Politburo, such as Andropov, Podgornyi, and Shelest, were vehemently supportive of military intervention from an early stage, whereas others, particularly Suslov, were far more circumspect. The transcripts also show that a substantial number, including Kosygin, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Pyotr Demichev, fluctuated markedly during the crisis, at times favoring "extreme measures" (i.e., military action) and at other times seeking a political solution.

Nevertheless, even when the members of the Soviet Politburo disagreed with one another, their disagreements were mainly over tactics rather than strategic considerations or fundamental goals. All the

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[67] Directive No. MO/GOU/1/87567 (Top Secret – Eyes Only), 5 April 1968, to Colonel-General K. I. Provalov, in Magyar Honvédség Központi Irattára (MHKI), Budapest, 5/12/16.

[68] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968," Ll. 208, 216-219.

[69] For an extended discussion of these steps, see Kramer, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia, 1968*.

[70] Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, pp. 147-149. See also the declassified diaries of Petro Shelest, "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), F. 666, Tetrad' (Te.) 6, Ll. 6-7.

[71] "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 7.

members of the Politburo agreed that the reform process in Czechoslovakia was endangering the "gains of socialism" and the "common interests of world socialism," and they feared that the ongoing changes in Czechoslovakia would set an alarming precedent for the entire Communist bloc. Analogies with the Hungarian revolution, no matter how dubious, persisted in high-level discussions. By the late spring of 1968, most of the Soviet Politburo members sensed that drastic action would be necessary to curtail the Prague Spring. Although some still hoped that Czechoslovak leaders themselves would be willing to crack down, many had begun to suspect that it was no longer possible to count on a purely "internal" solution.

The time constraints that Soviet leaders believed they were facing increased precipitously in June and July, as it became evident that reformist delegates were going to dominate the KSČ's Fourteenth Congress in September. From Moscow's perspective, this trend posed the danger that orthodox, pro-Moscow officials (i.e., "healthy forces") who were still in place would be removed en masse by the Congress, setting Czechoslovakia on a "non-socialist" course. To forestall that prospect, Soviet leaders sharply stepped up their pressure on Dubček, urging him to move expeditiously in combatting "anti-socialist" and "counterrevolutionary" elements. In particular, they urged the KSČ First Secretary to reimpose tight restraints on the press, to disband the unofficial "clubs" that had sprouted up, and to remove the outspoken reformers who had increasingly moved into influential positions in key party and state organizations. These demands, however, left Dubček in an unenviable position. Freedom of the press was the bedrock of the Prague Spring, symbolizing all the recent changes in Czechoslovakia. A crackdown would signal at least a temporary end to liberalization and would be politically disastrous.[72] Furthermore, the greater the pressure the Soviet Union exerted on Dubček, the more he believed that his best defense was to show that widespread popular support existed for both the KSČ and the reform program. Maintaining a free press, in his view, was the only viable way to achieve this objective, but it also created a problem: The freedom necessary to assure press support for the regime was frequently used by journalists and public commentators to attack the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact member-states.

Hence, Dubček's leeway for maneuver became more and more attenuated. Throughout the spring and summer of 1968 he sought to persuade the press to halt its criticism of the Soviet Union and the party's leading role in Czechoslovak life, but his efforts met with little success.[73] The task of restraining the media was made all the more difficult by the growing number and severity of public attacks from the other Warsaw Pact countries, which spurred the Czechoslovak press to respond in kind and exacerbated

[72] On this point, see Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 161-163.

[73]"Soudruh Alexander Dubček: Hodnoceni současné situace, zpráva o činnosti orgánů ÚV, další taktický postup strany, příprava sjezdu KSČ," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 2 June 1968, p. 2.

the already tense atmosphere. Angered by the attempts of Soviet, East German, and Polish leaders to intimidate the reformers in Prague, many Czechoslovak journalists and intellectuals called for bold measures to guarantee the permanence of the latest reforms. These demands heightened the concerns in Moscow and other East-bloc capitals and led to further obloquy in the Soviet, East German, and Polish media against the Prague Spring, which in turn caused the Czechoslovak media to become even bolder in their commentary.[74] The situation, to say the least, was an uncomfortable one for Dubček, but there were few steps he could take to rectify the situation short of reimposing censorship, which he was unwilling to do.

Soviet Concerns about Czechoslovakia's Foreign Alignment

In part because Dubček was unable to mollify Soviet displeasure over the press and other internal changes, he strove to reassure Moscow about the firmness of Czechoslovakia's commitment to the Warsaw Pact and the "socialist commonwealth."[75] Looking back to the events of 1956 in Hungary, Dubček and other senior KSČ officials concluded that by upholding Czechoslovakia's membership in the Warsaw Pact and maintaining broad control over the reform process, they could carry out sweeping domestic changes without provoking Soviet military intervention.[76] This conclusion, as we now know, was erroneous even about the earlier case of Hungary. The Soviet Presidium's decision at the end of October 1956 to quell the revolution in Hungary through a full-scale invasion on 4 November predated Hungary's announced intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact.[77] Whether valid or not, however, the "lesson" that Czechoslovak officials drew from the 1956 crisis — that internal reform would be tolerated so long as membership in the Warsaw Pact was not questioned — induced them to make frequent references to Czechoslovakia's "unbreakable friendship and alliance" with the USSR.[78] As domestic liberalization gathered pace, Dubček was particularly careful to issue repeated expressions of solidarity with Moscow and to pledge that Soviet interests in Czechoslovakia would be safeguarded under all circumstances. He also emphasized that Czechoslovakia would uphold all its "external" obligations to the Warsaw Pact, including its role as a leading military supplier to key Third World countries such as North

[74] See, for example, "Po návšteve delegacie ČSSR v Moskvě," Dispatch by ČTK correspondent Jan Risko, 12 May 1968, in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, A.j. 22.

[75] See the comments of the Czechoslovak foreign minister in 1968, Jiří Hájek, in *Dix ans apres: Prague 1968-1978* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), pp. 110-115, 163-164, 172-179.

[76] See Dubček's comments on this matter in *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 178-179.

[77] Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 163-214.

[78] See, for example, "Projev soudruha Alexandra Dubčeka," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 25 April 1968, pp. 1-2.

Vietnam.[79]

Although Dubček was undoubtedly sincere in his professions of loyalty to the Soviet Union, his assurances failed to defuse the crisis. The rapid sequence of events since January 1968 had stirred doubts in Moscow about the integrity of Czechoslovakia's long-term commitment to the Warsaw Pact. Soviet leaders were alarmed by the "hostile" and "anti-Soviet" forces in Prague, and they suspected that the leaders of the KSČ would be increasingly amenable to calls, from both within and outside the Party, for policies favoring national over "internationalist" interests. Before long, some in Moscow came to fear that a major shift in Czechoslovak foreign policy — perhaps even a shift toward neutrality (à la Yugoslavia) or alignment with the West — could no longer be ruled out. In early May 1968 Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, who was a member of the CPSU Politburo commission on the Czechoslovak crisis, warned the Politburo that "in the best scenario," the "burgeoning counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia would soon "mean a second Romania, and this will be enough for the complete collapse of the Warsaw Pact."[80] Even those in Moscow who did not believe that a radical change would take place immediately were concerned that the Prague Spring would induce a steady reorientation of Czechoslovakia's loyalties in Europe, especially if pro-reform elements in the KSČ gained ever greater sway.

Soviet perceptions of this matter were not entirely fanciful. Although Dubček himself never contemplated any far-reaching innovations in foreign policy, the press and non-Communist organizations in Czechoslovakia by mid-1968 had begun alluding to the need for "independence" from Moscow and the pursuit of Czechoslovakia's "own national interests."[81] That theme also was being propounded by a growing number of researchers at the KSČ's specialized institutes on international affairs, as well as by a few more senior party and Foreign Ministry officials. At the KSČ Central Committee plenum in late May, Drahomir Kolder found it necessary to excoriate those who "allege that [Czechoslovakia's] orientation toward the Soviet Union has degraded our international position and forced us to uphold and defend interests alien to us."[82] In retrospect, it may seem extremely unlikely that Czechoslovakia would have attempted a full-scale shift away from the Warsaw Pact in 1968, but Soviet leaders at the time could

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[79] "Zapis' besedy s ministrom inostrannykh del NR Bolgarii tov. I. Bashevym," 11 July 1968 (Secret), from A. M. Puzanov, Soviet ambassador in Bulgaria, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 278, Ll. 78-82. Because of the Johnson administration's preoccupation with the Vietnam War, Czechoslovakia's continued role as a supplier of military equipment to North Vietnam inhibited U.S.support for the Prague Spring. See, for example, "Notes on Emergency Meeting of the National Security Council," 20 August 1968 (Secret), in National Security Council Box No. 3, Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, 20 August 1968, Lyndon Baines Johnson National Library.

[80] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Polityuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968 g.," L. 211.

[81] Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 617-658. See also Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968-1969* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 200-211.

[82] "Z diskuse na plenu ÚV KSČ ve dnech 29. května - 1. června 1968," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 7 June 1968, p. 3.

not afford to dismiss any scenario that, if realized, would prove ominous for the Warsaw Pact. The Prague Spring had already brought so many dramatic changes in Czechoslovakia's internal politics that there was no telling what might eventually become of the country's "socialist internationalist" stance on foreign policy.

The seeming plausibility and urgency of these concerns were magnified by signs of turmoil within the Czechoslovak People's Army. The ouster of many hardline Communist (and pro-Soviet) military officers and National Defense Ministry personnel in the spring of 1968 allowed the reform movement to extend far into the ČLA. A lively debate arose in Czechoslovakia, both publicly and privately, about the possibility of sharply reducing military spending and transferring resources to the civilian economy. Implicit in any such move would be a diminution of the country's military obligations to the Warsaw Pact. Further controversy about Czechoslovakia's role in the Warsaw Pact arose in early June when thirty officers from the Klement Gottwald Military-Political Academy, including the rector, Colonel Vojtěch Mencl, sent Dubček a "Memorandum" which, though not advocating withdrawal from the Pact, strongly criticized existing alliance structures and proposed numerous reforms both in the alliance and in Czechoslovak policy.[83] The implementation of these measures would have resulted in a markedly different Soviet-East European military relationship. When the Gottwald Memorandum was published in early July in the military newspaper *Lidová armáda*, it received overwhelming support within the Czechoslovak armed forces. Nearly all of the document's main proposals were included in drafts prepared by the National Defense Ministry for consideration at the KSČ's upcoming Fourteenth Congress.

Combined with the ongoing personnel changes and the debates over military spending, the Gottwald Memorandum sparked fresh apprehension in Moscow about the future of Czechoslovakia's contribution to the Warsaw Pact. Detailed reports from the Soviet defense ministry and KGB, which were sent regularly to the CPSU leadership, offered a gloomy view of the "military-political standing and combat readiness of the Czechoslovak armed forces."[84] In a briefing to the Politburo on 23 May, Marshal Grechko claimed that the Czechoslovak army was "rapidly deteriorating" and was "no longer capable of defending the border with the FRG."[85] A few weeks later, Soviet military officials warned Brezhnev that if the number of "ČLA officers who favor 'democratic reforms in the army'" continued to grow, it would

[83] "Memorandum: Formulovat a konstituovat Československé státní zájmy v oblasti vojevenství," 4 June 1968, in ÚSD-SK, D II/73.

[84] See, for example, the voluminous reports and memoranda in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, Dd. 232, 243, and 309.

[85] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 maya 1968 g.," 23 May 1968 (Top Secret), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 260-262.

accelerate the "grave decline in the Czechoslovak army's combat capability."[86] Brezhnev, in turn, urged the leaders of the KSČ to realize that "when your army is being weakened, this is not and cannot be a purely internal matter. We count on your [army's] strength, just as you rely on the might of the Soviet Union."[87]

Far from abating, however, Soviet concerns intensified in mid-July when the views expressed in the Gottwald Memorandum were openly endorsed and substantially amplified at a press conference by General Václav Prchlík, the head of the powerful State-Administrative Department of the KSČ Central Committee.[88] Prchlík chided the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries for having "arbitrarily stationed their units on [Czechoslovak] territory" (a reference to joint military exercises that had been extended without Czechoslovakia's consent after the scheduled completion date in June), and he called for the "formulation of a Czechoslovak military doctrine" that would be distinct from Warsaw Pact doctrine. Prchlík also averred that "qualitative changes" were needed in the alliance to bring about "genuine equality among the individual members." Under existing arrangements, he argued, the Pact's military organs were dominated "by marshals, generals, and lower-ranking officers of the Soviet Army," while representatives of the East European armed forces "hold no responsibilities at all nor have a hand in making decisions."

Prchlík's assessment of the need for major reforms in the Warsaw Pact was largely in accord with what many East European officials had been saying in private for some time, and most of his recommendations had already been proposed by Romanian leaders. Indeed, proposals along these lines had been discussed at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee in early March 1968, and some version of them was slated to be approved later in the year.[89] Even so, Prchlík's willingness to raise the issue in such a blunt manner at a time of heightened tension between Moscow and Prague was extraordinary. The news conference deeply antagonized Soviet leaders and army officers, who charged that Prchlík had "distorted the essence" of the Warsaw Pact, "defamed the Soviet military command," and "improperly divulged vital secrets about the deployment of the Joint Armed Forces."[90] Soviet responses to the news conference were particularly strident because of longstanding concerns

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[86] Comments recorded in entry for 14 June 1968, "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 3, L. 24.

[87] "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," L. 144.

[88] "Vystoupení generála V. Prchlíka na tiskové konferencí," *Obrana lidu* (Prague), 16 July 1968, pp. 1-2. For a typical Soviet response, see "Komu ugozhdaet general V. Prkhlik," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 23 July 1968, p. 2.

[89] "Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung des Politischen Beratenden Ausschussee der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages in Sofia im März 1968," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 6-7 March 1968, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt, MfAA, G-A 553, Blatt. 1-43, 88-100.

[90] "Pervomu sekretaryu KPCh, t. Aleksandru Dubcheku" (Top Secret) from Marshal I. Yakubovskii, commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact, 18 July 1968; in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15.

about Prchlík. Since early May, reports had been filtering into Moscow that Prchlík was intent on drafting contingency plans to resist a Soviet invasion. His proposals had been rejected immediately both by Dubček and by Defense Minister Martin Dzúr, and no such preparations had actually been carried out; but the disclosures of Prchlík's involvement — as the KSČ official directly responsible for military and security affairs — had generated alarm in Moscow. Soviet leaders assumed that as time went on, there was a greater likelihood that Czechoslovak army commanders would prepare an active resistance against outside intervention.[91] Coupled with the changes that had already taken place in the Czechoslovak military establishment, such a prospect aroused deep anxiety in Moscow about the impact of the Prague Spring on Czechoslovakia's military alignment and more broadly on the Warsaw Pact. Memories of the heavy losses that the Soviet Army experienced when confronted by armed resistance in Hungary in October-November 1956 were still vivid for many of the Soviet officers who were preparing the 1968 invasion.[92]

Soviet leaders demanded that Prchlík be removed from his post in the KSČ Central Committee apparatus, but their demands were only partly fulfilled. The State-Administrative Department that Prchlík had directed, which had been a notorious organ of repression under Novotný, was simply abolished on 25 July, as had been promised all along in the KSČ's Action Program. Prchlík was then reassigned to other military duties (as commander of one of Czechoslovakia's military districts) rather than being fired ignominiously. Soviet leaders were dismayed to learn that the general would still be in an influential position. Indeed, in his new capacity, Prchlík was even able to continue working on an expanded version of a draft report on the "external and internal security of the Czechoslovak state," which had been prepared under his auspices in late June.[93] The report was to serve as the basis for the military and national security policies adopted by the KSČ Congress in September. The draft was never published, but a copy was leaked by "confidential sources" to the Soviet embassy in Prague and was then promptly

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[91] "Interview with Jiří Pelikán: The Struggle for Socialism in Czechoslovakia," *New Left Review*, no. 71, January-February 1972, p. 27. Pelikán was a member of the KSČ Central Committee, head of the state television service, and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the National Assembly as of August 1968. On Prchlík's role, see also John Erickson, "International and Strategic Implications of the Czechoslovak Reform Movement," in Vladimir V. Kusin, ed., *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1968* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Press, 1973), p. 26.

[92] See, for example, the memoir by one of the top Soviet officers involved in the invasion, Lieutenant-General S. M. Zolotov, "Shli na pomoshch' druz'yam," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, No. 4 (April 1994), pp. 15-24.

[93] The secret Czech document, titled "Otázky politiky vnitřní a vnější bezpečnosti státu, současný stav a základní směry jejího řešení" (Questions of Policies for the Internal and External Security of the State, Their Current Status, and the Basic Ways of Resolving Them), was sent by Prchlík to Dubček on 24 June 1968. The marked-up copy is stored in NAČR, F. 07/15, Svazek (Sv.) 18, A.j. 176, Ll. 36-65. The copy that was leaked to the Soviet embassy and subsequently sent to the CPSU Politburo can be found in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 310, Ll. 121-153, along with a cover memorandum (marked "Top Secret") from the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, Stepan Chervonenko, to Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and the two most senior CPSU officials who were handling the crisis on a day-to-day basis, Konstantin Katushev and Konstantin Rusakov. Chervonenko noted that the author of the draft was the "infamous General Prchlík."

transmitted to high-ranking officials in Moscow, who could see for themselves that the positions espoused by Prchlík during his news conference were in line with those being put forth for adoption by the KSČ. Indeed, the draft report went even further than Prchlík did at his news conference in calling for sweeping changes in Czechoslovakia's approach to defense and national security. The report claimed that the country's military policy was still based on "erroneous and obsolete ideological-political premises of the Stalinist era," and it insisted that Czechoslovakia must formulate "its own national military doctrine" and seek "an equal role in the common decisions of the alliance," rather than "just passively accepting those decisions." The report also urged Czechoslovak leaders to reject "unrealistic and dangerous scenarios," especially scenarios involving nuclear warfare, which had always dominated the Warsaw Pact's military planning.

This last point brought to the fore the most sensitive military issue of all during the 1968 crisis, namely, the role of Soviet nuclear weapons in Czechoslovakia. No Soviet troops had been permanently stationed on Czechoslovak territory after 1945, but materials declassified in the early 1990s reveal that the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia secretly concluded two bilateral agreements in the early 1960s entitling the Soviet Army to deploy nuclear-armed weapons on Czechoslovak territory during an emergency.[94] In 1965 the two countries signed a more far-reaching agreement authorizing the Soviet Union to store nuclear warheads permanently at three sites in western Czechoslovakia under strict Soviet control.[95] No hint of these plans was ever disclosed in public. Construction of the sites and deployment of the warheads were due to be completed by the end of 1967, but last-minute delays meant that the facilities had not yet entered service when the Prague Spring began. It is clear, therefore, that Soviet anxiety in 1968 about the security of Czechoslovakia's borders and about the spread of reformist influences within the Czechoslovak army was tied, in no small part, to concerns about the construction and planned operation of Soviet nuclear weapons sites in Czechoslovakia.[96] Those concerns were exacerbated still further when Soviet officials came across the report drafted by Prchlík and his colleagues, who insisted that any war in Europe involving nuclear weapons would be "purely senseless" and would "bring about the total physical destruction of the ČSSR." The document stressed that Czechoslovak military policy must be aimed first and foremost at ensuring the "continued existence and sovereignty" of the country. This line of argument implied that a military doctrine appropriate for Czechoslovakia would have to be

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[94] "Dohoda ČSSR-ZSSR o vzajemných dodavkach výzbroje a voj. techniky v rr. 1963-1965," March 1963 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, A.j. 26, 2.

[95] "Dogovor mezhdu pravitel'stvami SSSR i ChSSR o merakh povysheniya boegotovnosti raketnykh voisk" (cited in note 7 *supra*). See also Petr Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: Československé válečné plány 1950-1990* (Prague: Dokořán, 2007), pp. 112-118.

[96] On this point, see Mark Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion: New Interpretations," *Cold War International History Bulletin*, Issue No. 3 (Fall 1993), esp. pp. 9-12.

based on the eschewal of nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare. Not only would such a doctrine have been incompatible with basic tenets of the Warsaw Pact's own military doctrine and war plans at the time; it also would have cast doubt on the status of the proposed sites in Czechoslovakia for Soviet nuclear warheads.

Soviet Concerns about a "Spillover"

Even if no questions had emerged about Czechoslovakia's *foreign* orientation, Soviet leaders believed that the country's *internal* changes were themselves a grave threat to the cohesion of the Communist bloc. If the Prague Spring, with its tolerance of dissent, elimination of censorship, democratization of the Communist Party, and wide-ranging economic reforms, were to "infect" other Warsaw Pact countries, including the Soviet Union, it might well precipitate the collapse of the socialist camp. The threat of a spill-over into Poland and East Germany had been of concern for some time, particularly after the outbreaks of unrest in Warsaw in early March. Gomułka repeatedly warned Soviet leaders that "reactionary centers operated and inspired by foreign intelligence services" were seeking to extend their "subversive activities" beyond Czechoslovakia.[97] His complaints took on a more urgent tone after Czechoslovak students held large rallies in May to condemn political repression and anti-Semitism in Poland.[98] Brezhnev followed up on the Polish leader's complaints by admonishing Dubček to prevent Czechoslovak citizens from "interfering in [Poland's] internal affairs."[99] Like Gomułka, Ulbricht wanted to forestall any "contagion" from Czechoslovakia by swiftly and decisively bringing an end to the Prague Spring. Following a multilateral conference in Moscow on 8 May, he stayed "on vacation" in the Soviet Union for nearly three weeks as an official guest of the CPSU Central Committee.[100] During that time he had ample opportunity to convey further warnings to the Soviet authorities about the latest events in Czechoslovakia. (Ulbricht also did his best to derail the tentative progress in Soviet-West German relations.) The repeated East German and Polish denunciations of the Prague Spring could not help but take their toll.

Even more worrisome from Moscow's standpoint was the prospect of a spill-over into the Soviet Union itself. Soviet leaders had been on edge about this matter because of the resurgence of Soviet

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[97] "Zapis wystapien na spotkaniu pierwszych sekretarszy KC: Bulgarii, NRD, Węgier, Polski i ZSRR w Moskwie, 8 maja 1968 r.," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 8 May 1968, in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, D. 4.

[98] "Zapis' besedy v TsK KPSS s rukovoditelyami bratskikh partii Bolgarii, Vengrii, Germanii, Pol'shi," 8 May 1968 (Top Secret), in NAČR, Arch. Komise, Z/S 3, Ll. 151-171; and "Depeše sovětského velvyšlance ve Varšave předsedovi Rady ministrů SSSR A. N. Kosyginovi," Memorandum (Top Secret) from A. Aristov, Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, to Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, 22 May 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S -- MID No. 5, Ll. 179-180. See also Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 732-733.

[99] "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," L. 136.

[100] "Tovarishch Val'ter Ul'brikht na otdykhe v SSSR," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 11 May 1968, p. 1.

dissident groups and intellectuals in 1966-1967 and early 1968. The authorities responded with vigorous repression and show trials, but events in Czechoslovakia seemed to give new impetus to the Soviet dissident movement. Leading proponents of democratic change such as Andrei Sakharov publicly hailed the Prague Spring and called on the Soviet leadership to halt its pressure against Czechoslovakia.[101] The elimination of censorship in Czechoslovakia enabled dissident Soviet writers to get their work published in Czechoslovak periodicals, in much the same way that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had sent a letter to the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress in June 1967 denouncing official censorship in the Soviet Union.[102] By the same token, activists involved in the underground press (*samizdat*) in the USSR began translating and disseminating a wide range of materials from Czechoslovakia. Soviet leaders tried to suppress these activities by adopting further harsh measures and banning the circulation of some Czech periodicals, but they sensed that a crackdown would be futile so long as publications and broadcasts from Czechoslovakia continued to enter the Soviet Union. Brezhnev emphasized this point to the KSČ leadership during bilateral talks in early May: "Your newspapers are read also by Soviet citizens and your radio broadcasts attract listeners in our country as well, which means that all this propaganda affects us just as much as it does you."[103]

Soviet concerns about a spill-over from Czechoslovakia intensified as reports streamed into Moscow about disaffection among Soviet youth and growing ferment in several of the union republics, notably Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, and the Baltic states. Brezhnev and his colleagues learned from KGB sources that a surprising number of Soviet college students were sympathetic to the Prague Spring, including "some [who] are contemplating the possibility of replicating the Czechoslovak experience in our own country."[104] With the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Komsomol (Communist Youth League) due to be celebrated in 1968, Soviet officials were dismayed to find that a growing number of young people were being enticed by "false slogans about the 'liberalization' of socialism, which are being promoted by counterrevolutionaries."[105] The "false slogan" in question was, of course, the notion of "socialism with a

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[101] Andrei Sakharov, *Vospominaniya* (New York: Izdatel'stvo Chekhova, 1990), pp. 371-389.

[102] *IV. Sjezd Svazu Československých spisovatelů (Protokol): Praha, 27.-29. června 1967* (Prague: SCSS, 1968), pp. 131-162.

[103] "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," L. 138.

[104] "Studenchestva i sobytiya v Chekhoslovakii," Report transmitted by KGB Chairman Yu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Secretariat (Top Secret), 5 November 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 48, Ll. 120-153. See also the comments by Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Mikhail Solomentsev in "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 21 marta 1968 goda," Ll. 147-158.

[105] "Zamechaniya k dokumentu 'Pod rukovodstvom Kommunisticheskoi partii po leninskomu puti: K 50-letiyu Vsesoyuznogo Leninskogo Kommunisticheskogo Soyuza Molodezhi 1918-1968 g.g.," Directive (Top Secret) from the CPSU Politburo to the CPSU CC Propaganda Department, September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 23, Ll. 77-79.

human face" that had gained sway in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and had sparked consternation in Moscow. The spate of revelations about the effects of the Prague Spring on Soviet youth spurred the Soviet Politburo to order the CPSU Propaganda Department to adopt special measures that would prevent "right-wing opportunism from overtaking the youth movement, as happened earlier in both Czechoslovakia and Poland."[106]

Equally disconcerting from Moscow's perspective were the growing signs that events in Czechoslovakia had emboldened Ukrainian intellectuals and nationalist elements. Newly declassified materials, including Soviet Politburo transcripts and the diaries of the Ukrainian leader Petro Shelest, not only confirm Grey Hodnett's and Peter Potichnyj's earlier conclusion that "there was an important linkage between the situation in the Ukraine and the developments in Czechoslovkia," but also demonstrate that Soviet leaders themselves clearly believed the two situations were linked.[107] On numerous occasions, Shelest complained to Brezhnev that events in Czechoslovakia were "causing unsavory phenomena here in Ukraine as well."[108] The situation, he noted, was especially bad in Ukraine's "western provinces, where the inhabitants receive information directly from their neighbors across the border" and "watch both Czechoslovak and Western radio and television." Shelest reported that vigorous steps had to be taken to curb the "distribution of political and nationalist leaflets" and to prevent the circulation within Ukraine of newspapers published by the Ukrainian community in Czechoslovakia. During bilateral negotiations with KSČ leaders in late July, Shelest accused them of approving "the publication of counterrevolutionary tracts which are then sent through special channels into Ukraine."[109] Because Shelest was a full Politburo member and the leader of a key republic bordering on Czechoslovakia, his views during the crisis were bound to have a major effect on Soviet decision-making.

The reports from Ukraine seemed even more worrisome after the Soviet Politburo learned that "support for the KSČ's course toward so-called liberalization" was also evident in Moldavia, Georgia,

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[106] Ibid., L. 79.

[107] See, for example, "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. 15782, 1/51 (Secret), 11 June 1968, from P. Shelest, First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, Op. 60, D. 1, Ll. 86-90. See also "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," Ll. 141. The quoted passage is from Grey Hodnett and Peter J. Potichnyj, *The Ukraine and the Czechoslovak Crisis*, Occasional Paper No. 6 (Canberra: Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences, 1970), p. 2.

[108] See entries for 12 April, 24 April, 15 May, 11 June, and 22 June 1968 in "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 303, 309, 319, 354, 376, 378. Quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are from Shelest's diaries.

[109] See also "Záznam jednání přesednictva ÚV KSČ a ÚV KSSS v Čierna n. T., 29.7-1.8.1968," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 1 August 1968, in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, Sv. 12, A.j. 274, Ll. 311, 313.

and the Baltic states.[110] Brezhnev and his colleagues were especially dismayed that periodicals, newspapers, letters, and other materials casting a positive light on the Prague Spring were "pouring in" from Czechoslovakia and Romania. At the Politburo's behest, party officials in the outlying Soviet republics undertook "comprehensive measures aimed at further increasing political work among the population."[111] Five Politburo members — Andrei Kirilenko, Aleksandr Shelepin, Arvīds Pelše, Pyotr Demichev, and Yurii Andropov — were designated to oversee these measures and to recommend other ways of "eliminating pernicious ideological and bourgeois nationalist phenomena."[112] Although the burgeoning unrest in the USSR's western republics would probably not have eluded the authorities' control, the threat of a spill-over from Czechoslovakia into the Soviet Union was fast becoming a reality by mid-1968.

All these concerns — political, ideological, and military — gradually fused into a widely-shared perception in Moscow that events in Czechoslovakia were spinning out of control. The sense of impending danger, or of "spontaneity" and "unlimited decentralization" as a Soviet Politburo member, Viktor Grishin, put it in a speech in April 1968, eventually colored Soviet views of the whole Prague Spring. It was this cumulative impact of events, rather than any single development, that seems to have convinced Brezhnev and his colleagues that internal changes in Czechoslovakia were threatening vital Soviet interests. The necessity of countering that threat was no longer in doubt by mid-1968; the only question remaining for Soviet leaders was whether — and when — an external military solution would be required.

Soviet/Warsaw Pact Coercive Diplomacy

By July and early August, the Soviet Union was applying relentless pressure on the Czechoslovak authorities to reverse the liberalization program. The Soviet campaign was supported throughout by Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, and anti-reformist members of the KSČ Presidium. Brezhnev used a variety of bilateral channels to urge Czechoslovak officials to combat "anti-socialist" and "counterrevolutionary" elements; and he even approached a few of Dubček's reformist colleagues surreptitiously in the hope of finding a suitable replacement who would be willing to implement a

[110] See, for example, "TsK KPSS: Informatsiya," Cable No. 22132 (Secret), 1 August 1968, from Yurii Mel'kov, 2nd Secretary of the Moldavian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 2, L. 30; and "TsK KPSS," Cable No. 13995 (Top Secret), 23 May 1968, from V. Mzhavanadze, First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 22, Ll. 5-9.

[111] Ibid.

[112] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 marta 1968 g.," Ll. 93-95.

crackdown.[113] In addition, a series of conclaves of Warsaw Pact leaders — in Dresden in March, Moscow in May, Warsaw in mid-July, and Bratislava in early August — generated increasingly harsh criticism and threats of joint action to "defend the gains of socialism" in Czechoslovakia.[114] An additional meeting was held secretly in Moscow on 18 August, two days before the invasion. Brezhnev seemed to prefer the leverage that these multilateral conferences afforded him, particularly because East German and Polish leaders had staked out such vehement positions against the Prague Spring from the outset.

Dubček was present at the Dresden conference, but he was not invited to (or even notified of) the Moscow conference in May and he chose not to attend the meeting in Warsaw. The Warsaw meeting, on 14-15 July, proved to be a turning point in many respects. It marked the first time that Hungarian officials, including János Kádár, joined with their East German, Polish, and Bulgarian counterparts in expressing profound doubts about the ability of the Czechoslovak authorities to regain control of events. Kádár even pledged, in a conversation with Brezhnev, that "if a military occupation of Czechoslovakia becomes necessary, [Hungary] will take part without reservation."[115] The Warsaw meeting also marked the first time that Soviet officials who had earlier adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude began roundly condemning the Prague Spring and calling for "extreme measures." Far more than at previous gatherings of Warsaw Pact leaders in 1968, the option of military intervention loomed prominently throughout the deliberations in Warsaw.

The tone for the Warsaw meeting was set at a preliminary Soviet-Polish discussion on the eve of the formal talks.[116] Gomułka argued that Brezhnev was being "deceived" and "hoodwinked" by Dubček,

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[113] See the interview with Josef Smrkovský in "Nedokončený rozhovor: Mluví Josef Smrkovský," *Listy: Časopis československé socialistické opozice* (Rome), Vol. 4, No. 2 (March 1975), p. 17; and the interview with Oldřich Černík in "Bumerang 'Prazhskoi vesnoi'," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 21 August 1990, p. 5. Both Smrkovský and Černík were members of the KSČ Presidium in 1968. Smrkovský was also president of the National Assembly and a leading architect of the Prague Spring; Černík was the Czechoslovak prime minister. Shelest records an incident in his diary ("Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, L. 80) that suggests the overtures may have found a receptive audience in Smrkovský, but no further corroboration of this incident has emerged.

[114] Transcripts of the first three meetings are now available from the East German, Czechoslovak/Polish, and Polish archives, respectively. See "Protokol der Treffen der Ersten Sekretäre der kommunistischen Parteien Bulgariens, der ČSSR, der DDR, Polens, der Sowjetunion und Ungarns"; "Stenografický záznam schůzky 'pětky' k Československé situací 8. května 1968," 8 May 1968, in ČNA, Archiv ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15; and "Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych -- Bulgarii, NRD, Polski, Węgier i ZSRR – w Warszawie, 14-15 lipca 1968 r.," Copy No. 5 (Top Secret), 14-15 July 1968, in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, Dok. 4. Many other newly released documents and first-hand accounts shed further light on these meetings; see in particular the lengthy interview with János Kádár in "Yanosh Kádár o 'prazhskoi vesne'," *Kommunist* (Moscow), No. 7 (May 1990), pp. 96-103, which covers all three meetings, especially those in Dresden and Warsaw.

[115] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 iyulya 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 3 July 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, L. 367.

[116] This preliminary meeting was not included in the Polish transcript of the talks, but it was recorded in detail in Shelest's diary. See "Dnevniki P. E. Shelests," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 30-31. Later on, when Brezhnev

and he urged the Soviet leader to be "guided by principles, resoluteness, and honor," rather than by "emotions." Gomułka expressed concern that "up to now [the Soviet Union] has not raised the question of sending troops to Czechoslovakia." He insisted that a military solution had become unavoidable because of Moscow's earlier cunctations. Anything less than an invasion, Gomułka warned, would be an "empty gesture."

At the formal five-power meeting the next day, Gomułka was more restrained, but he argued in his lengthy opening speech that the KSČ was "abandoning Marxism-Leninism," and that developments in Czechoslovakia were "endangering the whole socialist commonwealth."[117] Moreover, during a break in the talks, which was not recorded in the formal Polish transcript, Gomułka again charged that Soviet leaders were being "hoodwinked" by Dubček, and he repeated his demand that "troops be sent to Czechoslovakia."[118] Ulbricht and the Bulgarian leader, Todor Zhivkov, joined Gomułka in his hardline stance. Zhivkov, in particular, openly called for joint military intervention to "restore the dictatorship of the proletariat" in Czechoslovakia:

> There is only one appropriate way out — through resolute assistance to Czechoslovakia from our parties and the states of the Warsaw Pact. At present, we cannot rely on internal forces in Czechoslovakia. . . . Only by relying on the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact can we change the situation.[119]

This appeal, for the time being, was not endorsed by the Soviet delegates, but Brezhnev's keynote speech confirmed that non-military options were indeed nearly gone and that preparations for armed intervention would have to move ahead. Although the Soviet leader still wanted to pursue a political solution, he emphasized that the "Five" would have to look to the KSČ's "healthy forces" rather than to Dubček.[120] Brezhnev had not yet given up all hope of working with Dubček, but he clearly sensed that the KSČ leader would be unwilling to comply with key Soviet demands, especially about personnel changes and the press.

At Brezhnev's suggestion, the participants in the meeting agreed to send Dubček a joint letter denouncing the Prague Spring and calling for urgent remedial steps. A draft letter that the Soviet

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informed the CPSU Central Committee about the proceedings of the Warsaw meeting, he chose not to mention the preliminary talks. See his lengthy speech in "Plenum TsK KPSS 17 iyulya 1968 g.," 17 July 1968 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 323, Ll. 2-38.

[117] "Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych," Ll. 4, 7.

[118] This break was recorded in "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 40-41.

[119] "Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych," L. 29. Shelest notes that in informal conversations with Zhivkov right before and after the Bulgarian leader's speech, Zhivkov had urged Brezhnev to be "more decisive," adding that "the sooner troops are sent, the better." See "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 38-39.

[120] "Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych," Ll. 30-42.

delegation brought to the meeting was submitted to a joint editing committee to be put into final form. The Warsaw Letter, as it quickly became known, was little more than an ultimatum, specifying a long series of measures that were "necessary to block the path of counterrevolution."[121] The Warsaw Letter, as it quickly became known, offered an ultimatum to the KSČ leaders. Using hostile and belligerent rhetoric, the letter accused the Czechoslovak authorities of repeatedly succumbing to "anti-socialist and counterrevolutionary forces" and of forsaking the KSČ's "leading role" by tolerating press criticism and countenancing the formation of non-Communist groups. The letter also alleged that Czechoslovakia's role in the socialist commonwealth was being undermined by "hostile, anti-Soviet elements" who were seeking to distance Czechoslovakia from the GDR and USSR in order to curry favor with West German "revanchists."

Further on, in what was to become a central part of the "Brezhnev Doctrine," the signatories of the Warsaw Letter contended that "a situation has arisen in which the threat to the foundations of socialism in Czechoslovakia jeopardizes the common vital interests of the other socialist countries." The only way to prevent "the loss of socialist gains" and to thwart the counterrevolution, according to the letter, was for the KSČ to restore "democratic centralism" within its ranks, ban all unofficial political organisations, reimpose stringent press censorship, and carry out "a resolute and bold offensive against rightist and anti-socialist forces" who were seeking to "tear Czechoslovakia out of the socialist camp." The document concluded on an ominous note, promising the "solidarity and comprehensive assistance of the fraternal socialist countries" as the KSČ undertook "necessary steps to block the path of reaction." By proclaiming both a right and a duty for the Soviet Union and its allies to offer such assistance, and by describing the situation in Czechoslovakia as "completely unacceptable for a socialist country," the Warsaw Letter was more explicit than previous joint statements had been in raising the prospect of armed intervention.

The Warsaw Letter provoked official and public consternation in Czechoslovakia, but Dubček and his supporters did not yet realize how dire the situation had become. They were unaware, for example, that on 19 July, four days after the Warsaw meeting, the CPSU Politburo began considering "extreme measures" to turn the political situation around in Czechoslovakia. At this session and a follow-up meeting on 22 July, the Politburo adopted a dual-track policy of (1) proceeding with all the steps needed to send troops into Czechoslovakia, while (2) making one final attempt at negotiations.[122] These two tracks were reaffirmed at an expanded meeting of the Politburo on 26-27 July, with a few key

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[121] "Tsentral'nomu Komitetu Kommunisticheskoi Partii Chekhoslovakii," *Pravda* (Moscow), 18 July 1968, p. 1.

[122] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 19 iyulya 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 19 July 1968, and "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 22 iyulya 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 22 July 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 417-426 and 427-434, respectively.

military officers present. On the one hand, the members of the Politburo unanimously "approved the [military] plans laid out by [Defense Minister] A. A. Grechko" and "authorized Cde. Grechko to take measures to carry out those plans in an expeditious manner."[123] On the other hand, they devised a negotiating strategy for bilateral talks that were due to begin on 29 July in the small border town of Čierna nad Tisou. Those talks were seen as the only remaining opportunity to resolve the crisis through peaceful means.

To ensure that the first track (i.e., the military option) could be implemented successfully, the Politburo sought greater assurance that the "healthy forces" (i.e., pro-Soviet hardliners) in Czechoslovakia would be able to establish a viable regime. Earlier on, many Soviet officials had expressed deep skepticism about the prospects of relying on the "healthy forces" to assume power in the wake of an invasion.[124] A consensus emerged at the Politburo's 19 July meeting that the Soviet Union must obtain a formal document from the "healthy forces" that would credibly commit them to act once Soviet troops moved in. To this end, Brezhnev phoned Shelest on 20 July and instructed him to leave immediately for a clandestine meeting with Vasil Bil'ak, one of the leaders of the KSČ's anti-reformist group.[125] With assistance from Kádár and other Hungarian officials, Shelest traveled to a remote island in Hungary's Lake Balaton and met with Bil'ak late that night. He explained to Bil'ak the importance of receiving a formal "letter of invitation" from the KSČ hardliners, which would provide a "guarantee of a bolder and more organized struggle against the rightists." Bil'ak promised that he would transmit such a letter to Shelest in the near future. Having secured that pledge, Shelest flew to Moscow and met with Brezhnev on the evening of 21 July to inform him of the auspicious results. The next day, Shelest briefed the full Politburo.

With hopes buoyed by Shelest's secret liaison with Bil'ak, Soviet leaders traveled on 28 July to Čierna nad Tisou to meet with the leaders of the KSČ. They were ready, if necessary, to break off the talks after the first day and return to Moscow for an emergency meeting on 30 July with Polish, East German, Bulgarian, and Hungarian officials.[126] But when the preliminary sessions ended on the 29th,

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[123] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 26/27 iyulya 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 27 July 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 437-438.

[124] See, for example, the comments of Podgornyi, Demichev, and Kosygin in "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 16 maya 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 16 May 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 237-241.

[125] This entire episode was unknown until Shelest's diaries became available in 1996. See "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 45-52.

[126] "Pamyatka dlya konfidentsial'nykh besed," July 1968 (Top Secret), memorandum for the CPSU Politburo, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 99, Ll. 12-13. See also the intriguing passages in Shelest's memoirs, "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 67-69, which make clear that Shelest and Andropov were hoping that the talks would break down.

the Soviet participants decided it was worth staying to try to forge some sort of agreement. Although the talks produced mainly acrimony and recriminations, a fragile compromise emerged on the third and fourth days. The two sides did not sign a formal document at the end of the talks, but they did reach (or at least thought they had reached) an informal agreement that imposed ill-defined obligations on the Czechoslovak leaders and called for a follow-up meeting in Bratislava among all the Warsaw Pact countries other than Romania. Some press reports claimed that the Čierna talks had produced a full-fledged "breakthrough," but subsequent events made clear just how ephemeral this breakthrough was. As Brezhnev boarded the train on 1 August to return to Moscow, he bade farewell to the KSČ delegation with the following words:

> You gave us a promise, and we are confident you will fight to carry it out. For our part, we want to affirm that we are prepared to give you unlimited help in this effort. . . . If our plan is thwarted, it will be very difficult to convene another meeting. I say this with full responsibility. We will then have to come to your assistance instead.[127]

Although Brezhnev undoubtedly assumed that the Czechoslovak leaders shared his understanding of the "obligations" and "promises" they had taken on at Čierna, no such common understanding actually existed. In the absence of a written set of specific pledges, the two sides left the meeting with very different conceptions of what they had agreed to.[128] Despite the hopes that both parties attached to the upcoming Bratislava conference, the gulf between the KSČ and CPSU was rapidly becoming irreconcilable, and Brezhnev's vow to "give unlimited help" to the "healthy forces" in Czechoslovakia loomed ever larger.

The multilateral meeting in Bratislava was held on 3 August, just two days after the Čierna negotiations ended. At the close of the daylong meeting, Dubček agreed to sign a joint Declaration that included ominous references to "the common international *duty* of all socialist countries to support, strengthen, and defend the gains of socialism."[129] This phrase was cited repeatedly after August 1968 as a justification for the invasion. More important than the Declaration, however, was the opportunity that the Bratislava conference gave to the anti-reformist members of the KSČ Presidium, led by Bil'ak. Aided by the KGB station chief in Bratislava, Bil'ak was finally able to transmit to Shelest the promised letter "requesting" Soviet military intervention.[130] Shelest promptly conveyed the document to Brezhnev, who

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[127] "Záznam jednání přesednictva ÚV KSČ a ÚV KSSS v Čierna n. T., 29.7.-1.8.1968," L. 349.

[128] See, for example, "Informace z jednání v Č. n. Tisou," 1 August 1968 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, 1968-1969, 161/282 and 162/283.

[129] "Zayavlenie kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii sotsialisticheskikh stran," *Pravda* (Moscow), 4 August 1968, p. 1 (emphasis added).

[130] It seems likely that more than one "letter of invitation" was handed over. The version released by the Russian government in 1992 and published in "Kdo pozval okupační vojska: Dokumenty s razitkem nikdy neotvirat vydaly svědectví," *Hospodařské noviny* (Prague), 17 July 1992, pp. 1-2, contains five signatures: Bil'ak, Alois Indra,

expressed deep gratitude. Contrary to what has often been thought, the "letter of invitation" was not intended to provide a legal basis for Soviet military action in 1968. Shelest had assured Bil'ak from the very start that the letter would be kept secret and that the names of the signatories would not be released. Those assurances would have made no sense if the letter had been sought as a legal pretext. Instead, Soviet leaders viewed the document as a way of credibly committing the signatories to seize power when allied military units entered Czechoslovakia. With the letter in hand, the Soviet Union had much greater "freedom of action" (to use Shelest's phrase) during the crucial two-and-a-half weeks after the Bratislava conference.[131]

The pressure generated by the bilateral and multilateral meetings in July and early August was reinforced by large-scale exercises and maneuvers that Soviet military forces were conducting with other Warsaw Pact armies. The joint exercises had begun in late March, and from then on the Soviet Union and its allies had engaged in almost daily troop movements in or around Czechoslovakia.[132] By late July and August, the joint maneuvers were designed not only to intimidate the KSČ leaders, but also to lay the groundwork for an invasion. Reconnaissance units scoured the best entry routes into Czechoslovakia and prepared the logistics. The Soviet press devoted unusually prominent coverage to all these maneuvers in tones reminiscent of war reports, thus accentuating the psychological pressure on the Czechoslovak government.[133] Even then, however, Soviet power proved of little efficacy, as all manner of troop movements, thinly-veiled threats, and political and economic coercion failed to deflect the KSČ from its course. Dubček in fact seemed to benefit domestically the stronger the pressure from his Warsaw Pact allies became.

Oldřich Švestka, Antonín Kapek, and Drahomír Kolder. However, Shelest's detailed account of this episode ("Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, Ll. 83-85) refers to a letter with eleven, not five, signatures. The six additional signatories mentioned by Shelest are Emil Rigo, Jan Piller, František Barbirek, Lubomír Štrougal, Jan Lenart, and Karel Hoffmann. In his memoirs, Bil'ak acknowledged that he had passed on a letter urging the Soviet Army to lend "fraternal assistance," but he does not mention the number of signatories. See *Paměti Vasila Bil'aka: Unikatní svědectví ze zakulisi KSČ*, 2 vols. (Prague: Agentura Cesty, 1991), Vol. 2, p. 88.

[131] "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, L. 85.

[132] For a brief summary of the ten exercises conducted in 1968, see Jeffrey Simon, *Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 44-50.

[133] See, for example, "Ucheniya organov tyla," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 24 July 1968, p. 1; the daily reports in *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow) entitled "Iz raiona uchenii organov tyla"; "Ucheniya 'Nebesnyi shchit'," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 25 July 1968, p. 1; "Chasovye neba Rodiny," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 26 July 1968, p. 1; "Na ucheniyakh 'Nebesnyi shchit': Ispytanie boem," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 30 July 1968, p. 1; "Nadezhnyi shchit Rodiny: K itogam uchenii Voisk PVO strany," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 1 August 1968, p. 1; "Ukreplenie boegotovnosti -- nasha glavnaya zadacha," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), 13 August 1968, p. 1; and the daily reports in *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow) entitled "Iz raiona sovmestnykh uchenii voisk svyazi."

The Invasion

As the crisis intensified in late July and August, the high-level debate in Moscow gradually produced a consensus. After the Warsaw meeting, a few key members of the Soviet Politburo had still hoped to avoid military action; but after the Čierna and Bratislava conferences, sentiment in favor of military intervention steadily grew. The Politburo had tentatively decided at its meetings on 22 and 26-27 July to proceed with a full-scale invasion sometime in mid- to late August if the situation in Czechoslovakia did not fundamentally change for the better. The receipt of the long-awaited "letter of invitation" from Bil'ak and his fellow hardliners, coupled with Dubček's failure to carry out the "obligations" he had supposedly undertaken at Čierna and Bratislava, reinforced the decision to intervene. By the time the Soviet Politburo met in an expanded session on 6 August to review the Čierna and Bratislava negotiations, there was essentially no hope left that military action could be averted. Although a few participants in the session voiced reservations about the potential costs of an invasion — especially if, as Marshal Grechko warned, the incoming troops were to encounter armed resistance — the Politburo reached a consensus on 6 August to proceed with full-scale military intervention unless the Czechoslovak authorities took immediate, drastic steps to comply with Soviet demands. No specific timetable was set, but Soviet leaders realized that an invasion would have to occur sometime before the KSČ's Extraordinary Fourteenth Congress in September and, preferably, before the Slovak Party Congress that was scheduled to start on 26 August. If the Slovak Party Congress convened and removed Bil'ak as the party's leader, this would complicate his efforts to establish a hard-line regime in Czechoslovakia after Soviet troops moved in. The CPSU Politburo's consensus did not yet signify an irrevocable decision to invade, but it did mean that Soviet leaders were on the verge of giving up hope that "anything more can be expected" of Dubček.[134]

In the meantime, the Soviet High Command was completing the extensive logistical and technical preparations needed for a full-scale invasion.[135] The largest of the Warsaw Pact maneuvers in early August were accompanied by a mass call-up of Soviet and East European reservists, the requisitioning of civilian vehicles and equipment, and the stockpiling of fuel, ammunition, communications gear, spare parts, and medical supplies. In Ukraine alone, more than 7,000 civilian vehicles and huge stocks of food

[134] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 6 August 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, L. 462.

[135] On these preparations, see "Záznam z jednání sovětských generálů Tutarinova, Provalova a Maruščaka s náčelníkem generálního štábu MLA generálem Csémi o přípravě operace 'Dunaj'," Memorandum of Conversation (Top Secret), 27 July 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Materials of J. Pataki, NHKI, 5/12/11; "Depeše čs. titularů z Berlina, Varšavy a Budapeští z 29. 7. - 1. 8. 1968 o pohybu vojsk kolem hranic Československa," Cables (Secret), July-August 1968, in Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí, Prague, Depeše Nos. 7103, 7187, 7259, and 7269/1968; "Setkání ministrů obrany," *Mladá fronta* (Prague), 17 August 1968, p. 2; "Grečko v Polsku," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 18 August 1968, p. 2; and "Cvičeni v Mad'arsku," *Mladá fronta* (Prague), 17 August 1968, p. 2.

and fuel were reassigned to the army.[136] Soviet commanders also diverted Czechoslovak supplies of fuel and ammunition to East Germany — ostensibly for new Warsaw Pact "exercises," but actually to obviate any possibility of Czechoslovak armed resistance. Much the same was done with Czechoslovak troops and equipment, which were unexpectedly transported for "maneuvers" to bases in southwestern Bohemia, far away from any planned invasion routes. Even if ČLA commanders had been determined to put up large-scale armed resistance against Soviet troops — General Prchlík's proposals for such measures had been categorically turned down, and none of the necessary preparations were ever carried out — the Soviet deception campaign and the size of the invading force effectively eliminated any options of this sort.

Even as the tentative date for an invasion approached, Brezhnev seemed to hold out a very faint hope that Dubček might yet reverse course. The strain of the crisis was beginning to take a serious toll on Brezhnev's health, but he was still determined to avoid resorting to military action unless all other options had been exhausted.[137] Although he confided to his aides that he was deeply worried about "losing Czechoslovakia" and about "being removed from [his] post as General Secretary," he also was concerned that a military invasion would exact high political costs of its own.[138] He and other Soviet leaders were on vacation in the Crimea during the second week of August, as was customary at that time of year. But the Soviet ambassador in Prague, Stepan Chervonenko, met with Dubček on several occasions in mid-August on Brezhnev's behalf. Moreover, Brezhnev himself kept in close touch with Dubček by phone throughout that time. In a phone conversation with Dubček on 9 August, Brezhnev emphasized how "very serious" the situation had become, and he urged Dubček to act immediately in accordance with "the conditions we jointly approved and agreed on at Čierna nad Tisou."[139] But in a follow-up conversation four days later, Brezhnev was far more aggressive and belligerent, accusing Dubček of "outright deceit" and of "blatantly sabotaging the agreements reached at Čierna and Bratislava."[140] The Soviet leader pointedly warned him that "an entirely new situation had emerged," which was "forcing [the Soviet Union] to consider new independent measures that would defend both the KSČ and the cause of socialism in Czechoslovakia."

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[136] "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 53.

[137] A first-hand account of Brezhnev's medical problems during the crisis can be found in the memoir by Brezhnev's physician, Evgenii Chazov, *Zdorov'e i vlast': Vospominaniya "kremlevskogo vracha"* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), pp. 74-76.

[138] Quoted in an interview with Brezhnev's closest aides in Leonid Shinkarev, "Avgustovskoe bezumie: K 25-letiyu vvoda voisk v Chekhoslovakiyu," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 21 August 1993, p. 10.

[139] "Telefonický rozhovor L. Brežněva s A. Dubčekem, 9.8.1968," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 9 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S 8.

[140] "Rozgovor tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva s tovarishchom A. S. Dubchekom," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 13 August 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 120, Ll. 1-18.

To make matters worse, some of Dubček's remarks during the second conversation, especially his insistence that Soviet leaders should "adopt whatever measures you believe are necessary," may have been construed by Brezhnev as a tacit green light for military intervention.[141] Brezhnev warned Dubček that the Soviet Politburo would "indeed be adopting the measures we believe are appropriate," and he noted that "such measures would be easier for us to adopt if you and your comrades would more openly say that these are the measures you are expecting of us." Dubček's response to this warning — to wit, that "we [in Prague] are able to resolve all these matters on our own, but if you believe it is necessary for you to adopt certain measures, then by all means go ahead" — must have seemed to Brezhnev like a further hint that Dubček would acquiesce, if only grudgingly, in Soviet military action. This was certainly *not* the impression that Dubček wanted to convey, but a miscommunication in such tense and stressful circumstances would hardly be unusual. Thus, the phone call on the 13th may have ended up worsening the situation not only by reinforcing Brezhnev's belief that Dubček would not "fulfill his obligations" if left to his own devices, but also by prompting Brezhnev to conclude that Dubček and perhaps other high-ranking KSČ officials had now resigned themselves to the prospect of Soviet military intervention.

Soon after the phone conversation on the 13th, Brezhnev sent an urgent cable to Chervonenko ordering him to meet with Dubček as soon as possible to reemphasize Moscow's concerns.[142] Chervonenko did so that same evening, but his efforts, too, were of no avail. The failure of these different contacts seems to have been what finally led Brezhnev to conclude that "nothing more can be expected from the current KSČ CC Presidium" and that a military solution could no longer be avoided.[143] From then on, the dynamic of the whole situation changed. Although Brezhnev remained in the Crimea for a few days after the 13th, he was busy conferring directly with other senior members of the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat, most of whom were vacationing nearby.[144] Ad-hoc sessions of the Politburo were convened on 13, 14, and 15 August to discuss appropriate responses. The participants acknowledged that a military solution "would be fraught with complications," but they all agreed that a

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[141] Ibid.

[142] "Vypiska iz protokola No. 94 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS 13 avgusta 1968 g.," No. P94/101 (Top Secret), in APRF, Prot. No. 38.

[143] Cited in Tibor Huszár, *1968: Prága, Budapest, Moszkva. Kádár János és a csehszlovákiai intervenció* (Budapest: Szabad Tér, 1998), p. 180. For a translation into Czech, see "Vystoupení J. Kádára na zasedání ÚV MSDS a rady ministrů 23.8.1968 k mad'arsko-sovětskému jednání v Jaltě, 12.-15.8.1968," in ÚSD-SK, Z/M 19.

[144] Declassified documents reveal that Brezhnev met several times in the Crimea with Aleksei Kosygin, Nikolai Podgornyi, Petro Shelest, Mikhail Suslov, Aleksandr Shelepin, Arvids Pel'she, Kirill Mazurov, Gennadii Voronov, Viktor Grishin, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, Pyotr Masherov, Sharaf Rashidov, Vladimir Shcherbitskii, and Konstantin Katushev.

failure to act "would lead to civil war in Czechoslovakia and the loss of it as a socialist country."[145] On 14 August, Brezhnev authorized a resumption of harsh press attacks on the Prague Spring, putting an end to the lull that had followed the Čierna and Bratislava conferences.[146] The Soviet leader also sent a stern letter to Dubček dated 13 August on behalf of the full CPSU Politburo, and he followed it up three days later with a personal letter (which itself was approved by the Politburo).[147] Both letters emphasized the urgency of the situation and warned of dire consequences unless immediate changes were made. It is questionable, however, whether anything Dubček could have done at this point would have been enough to forestall the invasion.

On 16 August, a formal session of the CPSU Politburo was convened in Moscow at Brezhnev's behest, even though he and several of his colleagues had not yet returned from the Crimea. The session was chaired by Andrei Kirilenko, one of Brezhnev's closest aides, who presented the latest assessments from the CPSU General Secretary and from the Politburo's commission on Czechoslovakia.[148] By this point, the debate about what to do in Czechoslovakia had come to an end. On 17 August, with all the top leaders back in Moscow, the Soviet Politburo reconvened and voted unanimously to "provide assistance and support to the Communist Party and people of Czechoslovakia through the use of [the Soviet] armed forces."[149]

The following day, Brezhnev informed his East German, Polish, Bulgarian, and Hungarian counterparts of the decision at a hastily convened meeting in Moscow.[150] Similar briefings were held in Moscow on 19 August for the members of the CPSU Central Committee and the heads of union-republic, oblast, and city party organizations, all of whom were ordered to prepare their members for what was to come. When the briefings on the 19th were over, the CPSU Politburo convened for several hours to review the military-political aspects of the upcoming operation.[151] Detailed presentations by Grechko and

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[145] For a valuable, first-hand account, see "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 190. Evidently, no full transcript of the ad-hoc sessions was compiled.

[146] See, for example, Yurii Zhukov, "Podstrekateli," *Pravda* (Moscow), 16 August 1968, p. 4.

[147] The letters are stored in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 02/1 (13 August) and NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, Zahr. kor. No. 822, respectively. The text of the second letter is also available in "Co psal Brežněv Dubčekovi: Hovori dosud neveřejnené dokumenty," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 14 May 1990, pp. 1-2.

[148] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 16 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 16 August 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 469-471.

[149] "K voprosu o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii: Vypiska iz protokola No. 95 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK ot 17 avgusta 1968 g.," No. P95/1 (Top Secret), 17 August 1968, in APRF, Prot. No. 38.

[150] "Stenogramma Soveshchaniya predstavitelei kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii i pravitel'stv NRB, VNR, GDR, PNR i SSSR po voprosu o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 18 August 1968, in Arch. Kom., Z/S 22.

[151] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 19 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 19 August 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 474-482.

the chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Matvei Zakharov, provided grounds for optimism about the military side of Operation "Danube," but questions about the political side received less scrutiny. Even though Brezhnev expressed confidence that the KSČ hardliners led by Bil'ak would carry out their plan, at least a few members of the Soviet Politburo were doubtful about what would happen "after our troops enter Czechoslovakia."[152]

With the zero-hour set for midnight on the night of 20-21 August, Soviet leaders remained in close contact with their East European counterparts. Unlike in 1956, when Soviet troops intervened in Hungary unilaterally after Khrushchev turned down offers of assistance from Romania and Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev was determined to give the invasion in 1968 a multilateral appearance. Some 70,000 to 80,000 combat soldiers from Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary, as well as a token liaison unit from the GDR, ended up taking part. The initial plan had been for East German combat troops to participate as well, but that idea was abandoned after both Gomułka and the KSČ hardliners warned Soviet leaders that the entry of German troops onto Czechoslovak soil would produce highly undesirable connotations.[153]

Despite the participation of East European troops in Operation "Danube" (the codename of the invasion), the intervention was only nominally a "joint" undertaking. Soviet paratroopers and KGB special operations forces spearheaded the invasion, and a total of some 350,000 to 400,000 Soviet troops eventually moved into Czechoslovakia, roughly five times the number of East European forces. Moreover, the invasion was under the direct control of the Soviet High Command at all times, rather than being left under the command of Warsaw Pact officers as originally planned.[154] Until 17 August the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact's Joint Forces, Marshal Ivan Yakubovskii, had been designated to oversee Operation "Danube," but the Soviet Politburo accepted Defense Minister Grechko's recommendation that command of all forces be transferred to Army-General Ivan Pavlovskii, the

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[152] Comments recorded in "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 93.

[153] On this point, see Gomulka's secret speech on 29 August 1968 to the PZPR Central Committee, reproduced in "Gomułka o inwazji na Czechosłowacje w sierpniu '68: Mysmy ich zaskoczyli akcja wojskowa," *Polityka* (Warsaw), No. 35 (29 August 1992), p. 13. The most authoritative analyses of the role of the GDR's *Nationale Volksarmee* (NVA) during the invasion have been produced by Rüdiger Wenzke, including his *Prager Frühling -- Prager Herbst: Zur Intervention der Warschauer-Pakt-Streitkräfte in der ČSSR 1968, Fakten und Zusammenhange* (Berlin: Dunckere Humblot, 1990); and *Die NVA und der Prager Frühling 1968: Die Rolle Ulbrichts under der DDR-Streitkräfte bei der Niederschlagung der tschechoslowakischen Reformbewegung* (Berlin: Links Verlag, 1995). See also the lively exchange prompted by the earlier of these publications: Walter Rehm, "Neue Erkenntnisse über die Rolle der NVA bei der Besetzung der ČSSR im August 1968," *Deutschland Archiv*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (February 1991), pp. 173-185; and Rüdiger Wenzke, "Zur Beteiligung der NVA an der militärischen Operation von Warschauer-Pakt-Streitkräften gegen die ČSSR 1968: Einige Ergänzungen zu einem Beitrag von Walter Rehm," *Deutschland Archiv*, Vol. 24, No. 11 (November 1991), pp. 1179-1186. Wenzke returned to these points plus many others in his 1995 study.

[154] See the interview with the supreme commander of the invasion, Army-General Ivan Pavlovskii, in "Eto bylo v Prage," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 19 August 1968, p. 5.

commander-in-chief of the Soviet Ground Forces. Some CPSU officials were concerned that this last-minute change might prove disruptive, but it ended up having almost no discernible effect on the conduct of the operation.

When the first Soviet troops crossed the border, Marshal Grechko phoned the Czechoslovak national defense minister, General Martin Dzúr, and warned him that if ČLA units fired "even a single shot" in resistance, the Soviet Army would "crush the resistance mercilessly" and Dzúr himself would "be strung up from a telephone pole and shot."[155] Dzúr heeded the warning by ordering all Czechoslovak troops to remain in their barracks indefinitely, to avoid the use of weapons for any purpose, and to offer "all necessary assistance to the Soviet forces."[156] A similar directive was issued by the Czechoslovak president and commander-in-chief, Ludvik Svoboda, after he was informed of the invasion — in more cordial terms — by the Soviet ambassador, Chervonenko, shortly before midnight.[157] Neither Dzúr nor Svoboda welcomed the invasion, but they had no inclination at all to try to rebuff it. Both men believed that armed resistance, even if it were desirable, would merely lead to widespread, futile bloodshed. The KSČ Presidium and the Czechoslovak government also promptly instructed the ČLA and People's Militia not to put up active opposition; and the Soviet commander of the invasion, General Pavlovskii, issued a prepared statement in the name of the Soviet High Command urging the ČLA to remain inactive.[158] As a result of these multiple appeals, the incoming Soviet and allied troops encountered no armed resistance at all.

Within hours, the Soviet-led units had seized control of Czechoslovakia's transportation and communications networks and had surrounded all the main KSČ and government buildings in Prague, Bratislava, and other cities. Soviet troops then began methodically occupying key sites and setting up new communications and broadcasting facilities. Soviet transport aircraft flew dozens of sorties every hour to bring in tens of thousands of additional soldiers and large quantities of weaponry. In the early morning hours of the 21st, Soviet commandos from the elite Taman division, accompanied by KGB troops and Czechoslovak State Security forces, entered the KSČ Central Committee headquarters and arrested Dubček and the other reformist members of the KSČ Presidium (except for Prime Minister

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[155] Cited in "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, 93-94. See also the interview with Shelest in Leonid Shinkarev, "Avgustovskoe bezumie: K 25-letiyu vvoda voisk v Chekhoslovakiyu," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 21 August 1993, p. 10 and the recollections of Pavlovskii in "Eto bylo v Prage," p. 5.

[156] "Obdobie od 21.srpna do konca roku 1968," Report to the ČSSR National Assembly (Secret), by National Defense Minister General Martin Dzúr, 9 June 1970, in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, File for G. Husák.

[157] See the "extremely urgent" (*vne ocheredi*) cable from Chervonenko to the CPSU Politburo, 21 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, Z/S – MID, Nos. 37 and 39.

[158] "Prohlašení předsednictva ÚV KSČ z 21.8.1968," *Prace* (Prague), 21 August 1968 (2nd ed.), p. 1. For Pavlovskii's statement, see "Obrashchenie Chekhoslovatskoi narodnoi armii," in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, Papka (P.) 127, D. 586, Ll. 33-35.

Černík, who had been arrested earlier at his office in the Government Ministers' building). The Soviet troops then sealed off the building and spirited the captured officials to a detention center in the Soviet Union.[159]

By the time the KSČ leaders were carted off, the whole of Czechoslovakia was under Soviet military control. The Prague Spring, and its promise of "socialism with a human face," had come to an end.

Soviet Political Miscalculations

Decisive as the military results of Operation "Danube" may have been, they seemed rather hollow when the invasion failed to achieve its immediate political aims.[160] The Soviet Union's chief political objective on 20/21 August was to facilitate a rapid transition to a pro-Moscow "revolutionary peasants' and workers' government." That objective failed to materialize when the "healthy forces" in Czechoslovakia were unable to gain majority support on the KSČ Presidium.[161] The resulting confusion was well described in an emergency cable to Moscow from Kirill Mazurov, a Soviet Politburo member who had been sent to Czechoslovakia on 20 August to monitor and help direct Operation "Danube." Mazurov reported that the KSČ hardliners had "gone a bit haywire" and "lost their nerve when Soviet military units were slightly late in arriving" at the KSČ Central Committee headquarters.[162] Over the next several hours, the KSČ Presidium's statement condemning the invasion, which passed by a 7 to 4 vote shortly after news of the military action came in, was broadcast repeatedly over radio and television and was published on the front page of *Rudé právo* on 21 August. These developments, according to Mazurov, caused even greater disarray and panic among the "healthy forces," who were "unable to recover from the shock."[163]

Despite this setback, Soviet leaders were reluctant to abandon their initial plan, apparently

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[159] For first-hand accounts, see "Nedokončený rozhovor," pp. 16-18; Zdeněk Mlynář, *Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus* (Köln: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), pp. 181-187; František August and David Rees, *Red Star Over Prague* (London: Sherwood Press, 1984), pp. 134-142; Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 182-184; and Historický ústav ČSAV, *Sedm pražských dnů, 21.-27. srpen 1968: Dokumentace* (Prague: ČSAV, September 1968), pp. 53-58. On Černík's arrest, see the first-hand account by Otomar Boček, Chairman of the Supreme Court, delivered to the 14th Congress in Vysočaný, in Jiří Pelikán, ed., *Tanky proti sjezdu: Protokol a dokumenty XIV. sjezdu KSČ* (Vienna: Europa-Verlag, 1970), pp. 66-68.

[160] The military operation itself was not wholly flawless, as Leo Heiman points out in his "Soviet Invasion Weaknesses," *Military Review*, Vol. XLIX, No. 8 (August 1969), pp. 38-45. However, the same is true of almost any large-scale use of military force against a foreign country. Unexpected glitches are bound to arise.

[161] "Prohlašení předsednictva ÚV KSČ z 21.8.1968," p. 1.

[162] "Shifrtelegramma," Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret), from K. Mazurov to the CPSU Politburo, 21 August 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 574, Ll. 184-186. For Mazurov's retrospective account of his role in the invasion, see "Eto bylo v Prage," p. 5.

[163] Ibid.

because they had neglected to devise any fall-back options. It is surprising, even in retrospect, that they would have committed themselves so heavily to such a dubious strategy without having devised a viable alternative. Part of the problem was that the information flowing into the Soviet Politburo from Shelest, from embassy officials in Prague, from KGB sources, and from Czechoslovak hardliners was unduly optimistic about this issue. In August, Shelest and other officials had assured the CPSU Politburo that the "healthy forces in the KSČ Presidium have finally consolidated themselves and closed their ranks so that they are now a majority."[164] Soviet leaders genuinely expected that the invasion would earn widespread official and popular support (or at least acquiescence) once the "right-wing opportunists" in the KSČ had been removed and the initial shock of the invasion had worn off. Although the plans called for martial law to be imposed in certain parts of Czechoslovakia on 21 August, that was regarded as a temporary and selective measure that could be lifted as soon as a "revolutionary government" was in place and the "anti-socialist" and "counterrevolutionary" forces had been neutralized.[165] The lack of any attempt by the invading troops to take over the functions of the Czechoslovak government or parliament, the very limited scale of the initial Soviet propaganda effort inside Czechoslovakia, and the meager quantity of provisions and fuel brought in by Soviet troops (because they assumed they would soon be resupplied by a friendly Czechoslovak government) all confirm that the Soviet Politburo was expecting a swift transition to a pro-Moscow regime.[166]

Only after repeated efforts to set up a post-invasion government had decisively collapsed and the invasion had met with universal opposition in Czechoslovakia — both publicly and officially — did Soviet leaders get an inkling of what the real situation in Czechoslovakia was.[167] An internal Soviet Politburo report on the invasion, prepared by the commission on Czechoslovakia, conceded that "75 to 90

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[164] "Shifrtelegramma," Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret) from S. V. Chervonenko, Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, to the CPSU Politburo, 7 August 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 573, Ll. 183-185. For further relevant citations from the ex-Soviet archives, see Mark Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia (Part 2): New Interpretations," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 6-8, 13, 54. See also Zdeněk Mlýnář, *Československý pokus o reformu, 1968: Analyza jeho teorie a praxe* (Köln: Index, 1975), pp. 232-233.

[165] "Rozkaz správcu posádky čislo 1, Trenčín, 21. augusta 1968: Správca posádky Sovietskej armády podplukovník ŠMATKO," Military Directive, 21 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, A, from I. Šimovček. See also Historický ústav, *Sedm pražských dnů*, pp. 123, 278-281, and 324-325.

[166] See "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. 24996 (Top Secret) from Aleksandr Yakovlev, deputy head of the CPSU CC Propaganda Department, and Enver Mamedov, deputy head of Soviet television and radio, to the CPSU Politburo, 6 September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 200-206; and "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," Report to the CPSU Politburo (Special Dossier/Strictly Secret) from the Politburo commission on Czechoslovakia, 16 November 1968, in RGANI, F. 5 "OP," Op. 6, D. 776, Ll. 128-144.

[167] "Shifrtelegramma," Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret) from Kirill Mazurov to the CPSU Politburo, 21 August 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 574, Ll. 184-186.

percent of the [Czechoslovak] population . . . regard the entry of Soviet troops as an act of occupation."[168] Although Brezhnev and his colleagues acknowledged this point, they were loath to admit that they had fundamentally misread the political situation in Czechoslovakia. Instead, they ascribed the fiasco solely to the "cowardly behavior" of the "healthy forces" and the "lack of active propaganda work" by Soviet units.[169]

Faced with massive popular and official resistance in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Politburo decided to open negotiations on 23 August with Dubček and the other KSČ officials who had been arrested on the morning of the 21st. During four days of talks, the Czechoslovak leaders were in a very weak position, but the very fact that bargaining was taking place at all was indicative of the extent of Moscow's political miscalculations. On 26 August the two sides agreed to sign the Moscow Protocol, which forced the reversal of several elements of the Prague Spring, but also ensured the reinstatement of most of the leading reformers, including Dubček. Brezhnev's willingness to accept the return of key Czechoslovak officials did not go over well with some of his colleagues on the Politburo and with the hardline leaders in Eastern Europe. At a Warsaw Pact conclave on 24 August, Gomułka insisted that Soviet and East European troops should be "ordered to combat the counterrevolution" and take "whatever steps are necessary" to "prevent rightists and counterrevolutionaries from regaining power."[170] In his view, "the situation in Hungary [in 1956] was better than in Czechoslovakia today." Gomułka's complaints were echoed by Ulbricht, who declared that "if Dubček and Černík are going to be back in the leadership, what was the point of sending in troops in the first place?"[171] The KSČ reformers, according to Ulbricht, "deceived us at Čierna and Bratislava" and "will deceive us again." Both he and Gomułka joined Todor Zhivkov in demanding the imposition of a "military dictatorship" in Czechoslovakia and the removal of all those who had championed reforms. Their views were endorsed by Andropov, Shelest, Podgornyi, and a few other Soviet officials during a meeting of the CPSU Politburo the following day.[172] Andropov proposed that a "revolutionary workers' and peasants' government" be installed in Prague, which would carry out mass arrests and repression. His suggestion was backed by another candidate

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[168] "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," L. 137.

[169] The first quotation is from the Soviet participants in a high-level "Warsaw Five" meeting shortly after the invasion, "Záznam ze schůzek Varšavské pětky v Moskvě ve dnech 24.-27.8.1968," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 24-27 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/M 21; and the second quotation is from "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," L. 129. This was also the view put forth by the four East European leaders of the "Warsaw Five." See, for example, "Gomułka o inwazji na Czechosłowacje w sierpniu '68," p. 13.

[170] "Záznam ze schůzek Varšavské pětky v Moskvě ve dnech 24.-27.8.1968," L. 3.

[171] Ibid., L. 5.

[172] "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 25 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 25 August 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 484-491.

Politburo member and CPSU Secretary, Dmitrii Ustinov, who emphasized that "we must give a free hand to our troops."

These calls for a much more vigorous (and presumably bloodier) military crackdown were rejected by Brezhnev, Kosygin, and other officials. Although Brezhnev was prepared, *in extremis*, to impose direct military rule in Czechoslovakia for as long as necessary, he and most of his colleagues clearly were hoping to come up with a more palatable solution first. The task of finding such a solution was seriously complicated, however, by the collapse of Moscow's initial political aims. The reinstatement of Dubček's government after the KSČ hardliners failed to set up a collaborationist regime enabled the reform program in Czechoslovakia to survive for some time. During the last few months of 1968, substantial leeway for economic and political reform continued, and the long-promised federalization of the Czechoslovak state was implemented on schedule (even though plans to federalize the Communist Party were cancelled under Soviet pressure). For a while, moreover, many of the top reformers held onto their posts, despite constant pressure from the Soviet Union. These developments underscored the limits of what Soviet military power could accomplish in the absence of a viable political strategy.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE INVASION

Soon after the invasion, the Soviet Politburo concluded that the only way to prevent a resurgence of "counterrevolutionary and anti-socialist forces" in Czechoslovakia was by securing a formal bilateral treaty providing for a "temporary" Soviet troop presence on Czechoslovak soil. Soviet leaders publicly justified their decision to pursue a status-of-forces treaty in purely military terms (as being necessary to counter "West German militarism and revanchism"), but the transcripts from CPSU Politburo sessions and from a secret Warsaw Pact conference in September 1968 leave no doubt that Moscow's dominant motivation for seeking the agreement was to obtain greater leverage over Czechoslovakia's internal politics.[173] On 16 October 1968 a bilateral "Treaty on the Temporary Presence of Soviet Forces in Czechoslovakia" was signed with much fanfare, thus codifying what amounted to a permanent Soviet troop presence.[174] Czechoslovak leaders privately acknowledged that the document would "impose definite limits on the exercise of Czechoslovak state sovereignty" and that Soviet "troops will have a

[173] "Stenografický záznam schůzky varšavské pětky v Moskvě z 27.9.1968 k situaci v Československu," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 27 September 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, Z/S 13.

[174] "Dogovor mezhdu pravitel'stvom Soyuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i pravitel'stvom Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki ob usloviyakh vremennogo prebyvaniya Sovetskikh voisk na territorii Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki," *Pravda* (Moscow), 19 October 1968, p. 1.

certain influence [on Czechoslovakia's internal affairs] by the very fact of their presence."[175] The extent of Soviet influence, however, turned out to be far greater and more lasting than most KSČ officials had anticipated.

Although the main purpose of the status-of-forces treaty was political — that is, it was intended to facilitate Soviet control over current and future political developments in Czechoslovakia — the military implications of the document were by no means insignificant. The establishment of a Central Group of Soviet Forces on Czechoslovak territory, numbering some five divisions (or roughly 70,000-80,000 troops), strengthened the Soviet Union's ability to launch a rapid offensive against Western Europe. A top-secret report compiled by a senior CPSU official in December 1968 noted that the deployments had created "an entirely new situation in Europe because Soviet forces will now be able to confront NATO all along the East-West divide, from the Baltic Sea to Bohemia."[176] The creation of the Central Group of Forces thus provided a crucial link between the Soviet Union's Northern Group of Forces in Poland, its Southern Group of Forces in Hungary, and the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (which was later renamed the Western Group of Forces). The deployment of a Central Group of Forces also ensured that three long-planned storage sites for Soviet tactical nuclear warheads in Czechoslovakia could be safely completed and brought on line, thereby filling a key gap in Soviet nuclear preparations.[177] For the Soviet Army, the achievement of its long-standing goal of obtaining a permanent military presence in Czechoslovakia was at least as important as the political leverage that the status-of-forces treaty afforded.

In that sense, the treaty helped offset other military results of the invasion that were not so favorable. The growth of reformist sentiment in the Czechoslovak People's Army during the 1968 crisis had undermined Soviet confidence in the reliability of the ČLA, which is why no troops from the Czechoslovak army were given any role in Operation "Danube" (in contrast to selected units of the Czechoslovak State Security forces, who helped arrest KSČ leaders[178]). The invasion itself was devastating to the morale of Czechoslovak soldiers, who were confined to their barracks for several days

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[175] "K otázke Dohody mezi vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik a vládou Československé socialistické republiky o podminkách dočasného pobytu sovětských vojsk na území Československé socialistické republiky," Memorandum No. V-42 (Top Secret), from the KSČ CC Ideological Department, to the KSČ Presidium, October 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 259-282.

[176] Memorandum No. 23923 (Top Secret) from L. Tolokonnikov to K. V. Rusakov, 18 December 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 155-170.

[177] For further discussion of this matter, see Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia (Part 2)," pp. 9-12.

[178] It is worth noting, however, that neither the Czechoslovak State Security nor the KSČ People's Militia was wholly immune to the "winds of reform." See, for example, "O deyatel'nosti kontrrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii," Memorandum No. 47/A/22 (Special Dossier/Top Secret) from KGB Chairman Yu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Secretariat, 13 October 1968, in RGANI, F. 4, Op. 21, D. 32, Ll. 99-157.

beginning on the night of 20-21 August.[179] The morale of the ČLA was dealt a further blow when the incoming Soviet and East European troops began systematically disarming Czechoslovak soldiers, a process that continued long after it was clear that the ČLA would put up no resistance.[180] Moreover, the combat capability of the ČLA was severely eroded by the massive transfer of bases and facilities to Soviet units in October 1968 and by the subsequent purges of the Czechoslovak officer corps. The trauma of the invasion and post-invasion period was so great that Czechoslovakia's role in Warsaw Pact strategy ultimately collapsed for many years.[181] The once impressive Czechoslovak ground and air forces, numbering some 230,000 troops, 2,700 main battle tanks, 3,000 armored personnel carriers, and 600 combat aircraft in 1968, became a glaring weak point in the Warsaw Pact's Northern Tier, and Czechoslovak divisions no longer were expected to fill the main axis of advance running from Plzeň to Coblenz.

A further casualty of the invasion was the hope that Soviet leaders once had of giving much greater emphasis to "coalition warfare." The events of 1968 made clear that in the end the Soviet Union would have to rely predominantly on its own forces in Europe. Soviet confidence in the East European militaries was shaken not only by the turmoil in the KSČ, but also by the performance of the Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and East German soldiers who took part in the invasion. The total number of East European troops involved was small (only about one-fifth the number of Soviet troops), and they engaged in no fighting. Their contribution was almost entirely symbolic. Thus, the invasion provided no test of the combat prowess of the four East European armies. The most it could show was whether soldiers from those armies were able to offer limited support when they encountered no armed resistance. Judged even by that very modest standard, the results were less than satisfactory. Signs of demoralization and disaffection cropped up among Polish soldiers stationed in northern Moravia and among Hungarian

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[179] "Rozkaz generála Provalova, velitele jižní skupiny intervenčních vojsk v odzbrojení jednotek ČSLA," Directive (Secret), 26 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, N – VHA; and "Zpráva náčelníka generálního štábu ČSLA generála Rusova a náčelníka Hlavní politické zprávy generála Bedřicha na schůzé předsednictva Narodního shromaždění," Vertatim Transcript (Secret), 26 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, O – Arch. Národního Shromaždění.

[180] See the items adduced in the previous footnote as well as "Zápis ze zasedání Vojenské rady MNO ČSSR," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 26 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, N – VHA, Sv. MNO-Vojenská Rada.

[181] J. Paulik, *Československá armáda po srpnu 1968* (Prague: Komise vlády ČSFR pro analyzu událostí 1967-1970 lat, 1992), pp. 40-72. Soviet officials were aware of this possibility at the time; see, for example, Memorandum No. 23923 (Top Secret) from L. Tolokonnikov to K. V. Rusakov, head of the CPSU CC Department for intra-bloc relations, 18 December 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 164-170; "O deyatel'nosti kontrrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii," Ll. 132-137; and "O politiko-moral'nom sostoyanii i boesposobnosti Chekhoslovatskoi Narodnoi Armii," Memorandum No. 85 (Top Secret) to the CPSU Politburo, February 1969 in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 367, Ll. 37-45. See also the Soviet Defense Ministry's follow-on reports in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 289.

troops deployed in southern Slovakia, a region inhabited predominantly by ethnic Hungarians.[182] Similarly, the morale of East German communications personnel (the only East German troops that actually took part in the invasion) declined when Czech protesters repeatedly accused them of serving as a "new Gestapo."[183]

Even if no such problems had arisen, confusion was bound to prevail among many of the East European units, who had been told they would be defending against American "imperialists" and West German "militarists" and "revanchists." Under those circumstances, it was not surprising that most of the East European units were quickly pulled out. Nor was it surprising that Soviet leaders made no attempt to have any of the East European forces included under the bilateral status-of-forces treaty.[184] Although the invasion did not impose stringent demands on the East European armies, their performance still fell short of the mark.

For the Soviet Union itself, the crisis also revealed notable shortcomings. Soviet leaders were unable to prevent the reforms in Czechoslovakia from spilling over into the USSR, especially into Ukraine and other western republics.[185] Even after Soviet troops had crushed the Prague Spring, officials in Moscow were dismayed that "events in Czechoslovakia are still giving rise to illegal nationalist activities" in Ukraine.[186] Soviet leaders claimed that Ukrainian nationalists were "hoping to exploit the latest events in Czechoslovakia to disseminate vile sentiments and malicious fabrications" and to sow "bourgeois nationalist ideas about an 'independent Ukraine.'"[187] Shelest reported that "anti-Soviet" graffiti and thousands of leaflets condemning the invasion had turned up in Kyiv and other Ukrainian

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[182] On the general question of East European troop morale during and after the invasion, see Memorandum No. 2613-Ts (Top Secret) from S. Tsvigun, deputy chairman of the KGB, to the CPSU Secretariat, 19 November 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 139-142. On the problems with Polish troops, see Lech Kowalski, *Kryptonim "Dunaj": Udział wojsk polskich w interwencji zbrojnej w Czechołowacji w 1968 roku* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1992), pp. 180-191; and George Gomori, "Hungarian and Polish Attitudes on Czechoslovakia, 1968," in E. J. Czerwinski and Jaroslaw Piekalkiewicz, eds., *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Its Effects on Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1972), esp. p. 109. The problems among Hungarian troops are discussed at length in "Uznesenie Mad'arskej revolučnej robotnicko-rolnickej vlády: 'O stiahnuti mad'arskych vojsk rozmiestnených v Československu,'" Resolution (Secret), 16 September 1968, in Archiv Komisia vlády Slovenskej Republiky pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967-1970, F. Generálny konzulát MĽR, A.j. 2, 224-225.

[183] Thomas M. Forster, *Die NVA -- Kernstück der Landesverteidigung der DDR*, 5th ed. (Köln: Markus-Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1979), p. 93.

[184] "Stenografický záznam schůzky varšavské pětky v Moskvě z 27.9.1968 k situaci v Československu"; and "Stenografický záznam Československo-sovětského jednání v Moskvě ve dnech 3.-4. rijna 1968," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 3-4 October 1968, in Arch. Komise, Z/S 14.

[185] See the sources adduced in Notes 100 and 101 *supra*.

[186] "TsK KPSS: O nastroeniyakh dukhovenstva v svyazi s chekhoslovatskimi sobytiyami," Report No. 25583 (Secret) from V. Kuroedov, chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers, 11 September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 24, Ll. 150, 153-156.

[187] Ibid., L. 154.

cities.[188] The spillover ultimately was contained, but at the price of a stifling political clampdown. Whatever room there may have been before 1968 for discussion of political and economic reform in the Soviet Union, the invasion helped put an end to it. Brezhnev and his colleagues became increasingly unwilling to undertake reforms of any sort. Their aversion to change merely exacerbated the political and economic weaknesses of the Soviet Union that had been conducive to a spillover from the Prague Spring in the first place.

The invasion entailed further costs for the Soviet Union in terms of relations with certain Communist countries, not least Czechoslovakia. Shortly after the invasion, Soviet leaders privately acknowledged that "90 percent of the Czechoslovak population believe that the entry of Soviet troops was an act of occupation."[189] Reports from Soviet diplomats in Czechoslovakia in late 1968 confirmed that even most members of the KSČ viewed the invasion in "highly negative" terms.[190] The anger and widespread resentment toward the Soviet Union had to be countered by sustained repression and "normalization," and even then, popular sentiments were only submerged, not eliminated. Moscow's goal of restoring cohesion to the Eastern bloc in 1968 permanently alienated the vast majority of Czechs and Slovaks. This price may have seemed worth paying at the time, but it guaranteed that the Czechoslovak regime would be unable to regain a semblance of popular legitimacy, and would be forced instead to depend on Soviet military backing. If Soviet leaders had once hoped that "stability" in the Eastern bloc could be maintained by something other than coercion, the 1968 invasion put an end to those hopes.

Quite apart from this longer-term cost, the invasion had the immediate effect of deepening fissures elsewhere in the Warsaw Pact. Albania, which had been only a nominal member of the alliance since 1961, protested the intervention by severing its last remaining ties with the Pact and aligning itself ever more firmly with China. The invasion also led to acute tensions between Romania and the Soviet Union. Ceauşescu refused to let Bulgarian troops pass through Romania on their way to Czechoslovakia (they were airlifted to Ukraine instead), and he promptly condemned the invasion. Some observers at the time even thought that a complete rupture would ensue, but the actual effect was more mixed. On the one hand, Ceauşescu soon toned down his rhetoric and sought to mend relations with the other Warsaw Pact countries.[191] Over time, Romanian foreign policy came further back into line with the rest of the bloc,

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[188] "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 7, L. 4.

[189] "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," L. 129.

[190] "Informatsiya o druzheskikh svyazyakh oblastei i gorodov Ukrainskoi SSR s oblastyami, voevodstvami, okrugami, uezdami i gorodami sotsialisticheskikh stran v 1968 godu," Memorandum No. 337 (Secret) to the CPSU Central Committee, 20 December 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 2, Ll. 46, 64-65.

[191] "Zapis' besedy s General'nym sekretarem TsK RKP Nikolae Chaushesku, 23 avgusta 1968 goda," Cable No. 847 (Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Secretariat, 25 August 1968, in RGANI, F.

and Soviet leaders were no longer so fearful that Ceauşescu would try to pull out of the Warsaw Pact.[192] On the other hand, the invasion dissipated any lingering chance that Romania would return to a meaningful role in the Pact. Ceauşescu was more determined than ever to pursue an independent military course. Romania not only continued eschewing joint military exercises, but also refused to submit to the unified wartime command structure that Soviet officials devised for the alliance in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[193]

Significant as these rifts *within* the Pact may have been, they were modest compared with the effects in other parts of the Communist world. The invasion lent further impetus to the bitter Sino-Soviet confrontation, prompting the Chinese authorities not only to denounce the Soviet action, but also to reinforce their own military units along the Sino-Soviet border. The events of August 1968, and the outbreak of two serious rounds of armed clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces on the Ussuri and Amur Rivers in 1969, were cited by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in the latter half of 1969 when he declared the Soviet Union to be China's "main enemy." On that basis, Zhou and other Chinese leaders were soon willing to seek a rapprochement with the United States to present a common front against Soviet expansionism.[194] The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was not the only factor that spurred this reorientation of Chinese policy, but it clearly had a far-reaching impact both in heightening diplomatic tensions and in stirring new fears among the Chinese leadership about Soviet military capabilities and intentions.

Even more striking was the schism that the 1968 crisis helped produce in the international

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5, Op. 6, D. 339, Ll. 47-53; "Zapis' besedy s poslom SFRYu v Bukhareste Ya. Petrichem, 2 sentyabrya 1968 goda," Cable No. 917 (Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador to Romania, to the CPSU Secretariat, 5 September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 69-72; "Zapis' besedy s general'nym sekretarem TsK RKP N. Chaushesku, 3 sentyabrya 1968 goda," Cable No. 915 (Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat, 5 September 1968, in RGANI, F. Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 73-80; "O nekotorykh problemakh sovetsko-rumynskikh otnoshenii v svete pozitsii, zanyatoi rukovodstvom RKP v svyazi s sobytiyami v Chekhoslovakii," Report No. 686 (Top Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Politburo, 23 September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 106-121; and "O pozitsii Rumynii v svyazi s sobytiyami v Chekhoslovakii," Report No. MB-4809/GS (Top Secret) from B. Makashev, deputy secretary-general of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, to the CPSU Secretariat, 16 October 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 188-194.

[192] For earlier Soviet concerns about Romania's willingness to stay in the Pact, see "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 marta 1968," L. 92.

[193] Romania's defiance on this score was first revealed by Colonel Ryszard Kukliński in "Wojna z narodem widziana od środka," *Kultura* (Paris), 4/475 (April 1987), pp. 52-55, esp. 53. Kuklinski was a senior officer on the Polish General Staff who also was a spy for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. He had to escape to the West in November 1981.

[194] Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "China under Siege: Escaping the Dangers of 1968," in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 193-217. See also Kenneth Lieberthal, "The Background in Chinese Politics," in Herbert J. Ellison, ed., *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), pp. 10-11.

Communist movement. The Communist parties in Western Europe, especially in Italy and Spain, had watched Dubček's reform program with great sympathy and hope. The violent suppression of the Prague Spring aroused open and vehement opposition to the Soviet Union within these parties and stimulated the rise of what later became known as "Eurocommunism."[195] The defection of most of the major West European Communist parties from the Soviet orbit was nearly as important in its long-term consequences as the earlier splits with Yugoslavia and China, and far more important than the break with Albania. The emergence of Eurocommunism mitigated potential Soviet influence in Western Europe and significantly altered the complexion of European politics. Moreover, the Eurocommunist alternative — an alternative that, unlike the Prague Spring, could not be subdued by Soviet tanks — became a potentially attractive, and thereby disruptive, element in Eastern Europe. The long-term costs of the invasion, in that respect, were considerable.

By contrast, the costs of the invasion vis-à-vis Western *governments* were only modest and transitory.[196] Although the political and economic benefits of détente with the United States had to be sacrificed for several months, Soviet officials accurately judged that almost all of those benefits could be salvaged without undue delay.[197] Indeed, U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear arms control talks resumed after only the slightest interruption. Another way the invasion redounded to the Soviet Union's advantage was by reinforcing the West's implicit acceptance of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Much as the 1956 invasion of Hungary had essentially ended talk of a Western-aided "rollback" of Communism and "liberation" of the East European countries, so the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia forced the United States and its allies to abandon even their far more cautious policies of "bridge-building."[198] In effect, U.S. officials concluded that any future "bridges" to Eastern Europe would have to go first through Moscow.

Similarly, the Czechoslovak invasion compelled West Germany to reorient its *Ostpolitik* in a way more palatable to the Soviet Union. Until 1968, the West German authorities had been reluctant to conclude any agreements that would imply formal recognition of the existing political configuration in

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[195] See Jiří Valenta, "Eurocommunism and Czechoslovakia," in Vernon V. Aspaturian *et al.*, eds., *Eurocommunism Between East and West* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980), pp. 157-180. The disillusionment was equally important among non-Communist intellectuals, as discussed in Konrad Jarausch, "1968 and 1989: Caesuras, Comparisons, and Connections," in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., *1968*, pp. 461-477.

[196] "Depeše No. 378 čs titulare z Washingtonu do Prahy z 21.8.1968," Cable (Secret) from Karel Duda, Czechoslovak ambassador in Washington, 21 August 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, K – Archiv MZV, Dispatches Received, No. 7765/1968.

[197] Memorandum No. 2588-Ts (Top Secret) from S. Tsvigun, deputy chairman of the KGB, to the CPSU Politburo, 15 November 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 107-110.

[198] For an overview of U.S. policy in the 1950s and 1960s, see Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp. 193-287.

Europe. Because the intervention in Czechoslovakia underscored Moscow's determination to prevent any change in the political and territorial status quo of Eastern Europe, the West German government recognized the necessity of acceding to this demand in its own policy toward the region.[199] From then on, leaders in Bonn emphasized East-West diplomatic "normalization," rather than territorial adjustments.[200] The new brand of *Ostpolitik* was in gear even before the formation of Willy Brandt's Social Democratic government in 1969, but it gained momentum thereafter and rapidly achieved concrete results. The status quo in Europe was explicitly codified not only in the series of interstate agreements on Germany in the early 1970s, but also in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords) in 1975.

Thus, in two respects, the Soviet Union's "rules of the game" in Eastern Europe, with a newly bolstered sphere of influence, gained further tacit acceptance from the West as a consequence of the 1968 invasion.

THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE

The new framework for Soviet-East European relations became even more explicit in the weeks following the invasion, when the Soviet Union proclaimed what became known in the West (though not in the USSR until 1989) as the "Brezhnev Doctrine." One of the clearest Soviet statements of the rationale behind the Doctrine actually came two months before the invasion, in a speech given by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to the Supreme Soviet. For the Soviet Union, Gromyko declared,

> there is nothing more sacred in the field of foreign policy than the consolidation of the commonwealth of socialist countries. The defense of the gains and the cohesion of states belonging to the socialist commonwealth is our sacred duty, to which our country will be loyal despite all trials. . . . Those who hope to break even a single link in the socialist commonwealth are planning in vain. The socialist commonwealth will never permit this.[201]

Gromyko's sentiments were echoed by lengthy *Pravda* editorials on 22 August and 26 September, which linked the fate of each socialist country with the fate of all others, stipulated that every socialist country must abide by the norms of Marxism-Leninism as interpreted in Moscow, and rejected "abstract

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[199] For further discussion of this point, see Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*; von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik*; James H. Wolfe, "West Germany and Czechoslovakia: The Struggle for Reconciliation," *Orbis*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 1970), pp. 154-179, esp. 170-172; and Arnulf Baring, *Machtwechsel: Die Ara Brandt-Scheel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), esp. pp. 178-360.

[200] See Brandt's notes for the FRG Cabinet meeting on 7 June 1970, in Willy-Brandt-Archiv im Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn, Bundeskanzler und Bundesregierung 91, WBA, A 3/513.

[201] "O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii i vneshnei politike Sovetskogo Soyuza: Doklad Ministra inostrannykh del SSSR deputata A. A. Gromyko," *Pravda* (Moscow), 28 June 1968, p. 4.

sovereignty" in favor of the "laws of class struggle."[202] The Brezhnev Doctrine thus laid out even stricter "rules of the game" than in the past for the socialist commonwealth:

> Without question, the peoples of the socialist countries and the Communist parties have and must have freedom to determine their country's path of development. Any decision they make, however, must not be inimical either to socialism in their own country or to the fundamental interests of the other socialist countries . . . A socialist state that is in a system of other states composing the socialist commonwealth cannot be free of the common interests of that commonwealth. The sovereignty of individual socialist countries cannot be set against the interests of world socialism and the world revolutionary movement. . . . Each Communist party is free to apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialism in its own country, but it is not free to deviate from these principles if it is to remain a Communist party. . . . The weakening of any of the links in the world system of socialism directly affects all the socialist countries, and they cannot look indifferently upon this.[203]

Brezhnev himself reaffirmed the Doctrine three months after the invasion in a speech before the Fifth Congress of the PZPR. While acknowledging that the intervention had been "an extraordinary step, dictated by necessity," he warned that "when internal and external forces hostile to socialism are threatening to turn a socialist country back to capitalism, this becomes a common problem and a concern of all socialist countries."[204] In such circumstances, he declared, the USSR and its allies would have a duty to act. Subsequently, this theme was enshrined as a "basic principle" of relations among socialist states.

The enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine codified Soviet attitudes toward Eastern Europe as they had developed over the previous two decades. The Doctrine owed as much to Josif Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev as to Brezhnev, inasmuch as the policies of these earlier leaders were merely reaffirmed in the Brezhnev era. Moreover, all the theoretical groundwork for the Doctrine had already been laid prior to the invasion by Gromyko's speech, the Warsaw Letter, the Bratislava Declaration, and numerous other Soviet statements.[205] To that extent, the Brezhnev Doctrine added nothing genuinely new. Nevertheless, the promulgation of the Doctrine was significant both in restoring a firmer tone to Soviet-East European relations and in defining the limits of permissible deviations from the Soviet model of Communism.

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[202] "Zashchita sotsializma -- vysshii internatsional'nyi dolg," *Pravda* (Moscow), 22 August 1968, pp. 2-3; and S. Kovalev, "Suverenitet i internatsional'nye obyazannosti sotsialisticheskikh stran," *Pravda* (Moscow), 26 September 1968, p. 4.

[203] Kovalev, "Suverenitet i internatsional'nye obyazannosti," p. 4.

[204] "Rech' tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva," *Pravda* (Moscow), 13 November 1968, p. 2. According to bracketed comments in the text, the delegates at the Congress greeted this and several other passages of the speech with enthusiastic applause.

[205] For a cogent review of the genesis of the Brezhnev Doctrine, see Karen Dawisha, "The 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Causes, Consequences, and Lessons for the Future," in Karen Dawisha and Philip Hanson, eds., *Soviet-East European Dilemmas: Coercion, Competition and Consent* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 9-25.

Among other things, the Doctrine suggested that, in the future, Soviet military intervention would not necessarily be in response to a specific development — as it had been to the revolution in Hungary in 1956 — but might also be *preemptive*, heading off undesired changes. Although a preemptive military option in Eastern Europe had always existed for the Soviet Union, the Brezhnev Doctrine made it explicit by suggesting that the Soviet government would never again risk "waiting until Communists are being shot and hanged," as in the autumn of 1956, before Soviet troops would be sent to "aid the champions of socialism."[206]

The Doctrine also confirmed that *internal* deviations from Communism, even if unaccompanied by external realignments, might be sufficient to provoke a Soviet invasion. Dubček and other Czechoslovak officials had concluded from the experience with Hungary in 1956 that the most important thing was to ensure that sweeping internal changes were not perceived as endangering Czechoslovakia's foreign orientation or its membership in the Warsaw Pact. The events of 1968 and the enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine made clear that East European *domestic* as well as foreign policies would have to conform with the "common natural laws of socialist development, deviation from which could lead to a deviation from socialism as such."[207] If the internal policies of a given Communist party might "damage either socialism in its own country or the fundamental interests of the other socialist countries," the Soviet Union would have not only a right but a "sacred duty" to intervene on behalf of the "socialist commonwealth."[208]

In justifying such actions, the Brezhnev Doctrine imparted an explicitly ideological character to the Warsaw Pact. By its charter, the Warsaw alliance was originally "open to all states . . . irrespective of their social and political systems," and the charter pledged its signatories to "refrain from violence or the threat of violence in their international relations" and to "abide by the principles of mutual respect for their independence and sovereignty, and of non-interference in their internal affairs."[209] The intervention of allied forces in Czechoslovakia raised obvious questions about these principles. In a secret report a few months after the invasion, the CPSU Politburo commission on Czechoslovakia acknowledged that "maintaining a line of non-interference" would be difficult because Soviet troops had committed "the most extreme act of interference there can possibly be in [Czechoslovakia's] internal affairs."[210] Far from expressing any regret about this development, the report emphasized that the Soviet Union must continue

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[206] S. Kovalev, "O 'mirnoi' i nemirnoi kontrrevolyutsii," *Pravda* (Moscow), 11 September 1968, p. 4.

[207] "Rech' tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva," p. 2.

[208] Ibid.

[209] "Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoi pomoshchi," *Pravda* (Moscow), 15 May 1955, p. 2, Articles 9, 1, and 8, respectively.

[210] "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," Ll. 131-132.

to "exert decisive interference in Czechoslovakia's affairs and to apply pressure through every available channel."[211]

For public consumption, however, Soviet officials had to come up with some way of claiming that the invasion was consistent with the principles laid out in the Warsaw Pact's charter and in other binding international agreements. To that end, Soviet theorists began distinguishing between "bourgeois" and "class-based" versions of state sovereignty and independence. They argued that the intervention, far from overriding the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference, had actually buttressed them by "defending Czechoslovakia's independence and sovereignty *as a socialist state*" against "the counterrevolutionary forces that would like to deprive it of this sovereignty."[212] The "bourgeois" concepts of independence and sovereignty, according to this argument, were invalid because they lacked "class content."

By redefining the basic norms of international law within "the general context of class struggle," and by elevating the collective interests of the "socialist commonwealth" over those of individual socialist states, the Brezhnev Doctrine in effect transformed the Warsaw Pact into a more formally ideological alliance than it had been in the past. This development further narrowed the prospects for individual alliance members to deviate from Soviet policy, a point emphasized by Ceauşescu in his protests over the invasion.[213]

EPILOGUE: THE INCEPTION OF "NORMALIZATION

By the end of 1968 the Soviet Union had gone far toward consolidating the military and political gains of the invasion and toward overcoming most of the problems that had arisen. The conformity of the Warsaw Pact had been largely restored. Even so, the process of "normalization" in Czechoslovakia was far from over. Dubček was continuing to maneuver in a broadly reformist direction, despite the enormous pressure he was coming under from Moscow. It would take another four months before a new regime was formed in Prague under Gustáv Husák and nearly a year more of intensive "normalization" before the last remnants of the Prague Spring could be eradicated.[214] In the meantime, Soviet leaders again had to undertake various forms of intimidation and persuasion to try to ensure that Dubček would heed their

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[211] Ibid.

[212] A. Sovetov, "Sovremennyi etap bor'by mezhdu sotsializmom i imperializmom," *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'* (Moscow), No. 11 (November 1968), p. 7 (emphasis added).

[213] "O pozitsii Rumynii v svyazi s sobytiyami v Chekhoslovakii," Ll. 188-194.

[214] See Vladimir V. Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of "Normalization" in Czechoslovakia 1968-1978* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), esp. pp. 5-142.

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At a meeting with Dubček and other KSČ officials in Kyiv in early December, Soviet leaders emphasized their displeasure at the continued presence of reform-minded officials in the top Party organs, the ČSSR security forces, and, above all, the Czechoslovak army.[215] Dubček acknowledged that "right-wing and even anti-socialist forces" were still active in Czechoslovakia, but he defended his latest policies, arguing that the KSČ had largely isolated the unsavory elements. Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi were far harsher in their assessments, and they demanded that Dubček move expeditiously to get rid of the "patently anti-Soviet . . . and irresponsible right-wingers" who were still acting in the name of the KSČ. Brezhnev and his colleagues also expressed dismay that the KSČ had still not reclaimed its "leading role" in Czechoslovak society, and they urged Dubček to "rebuff all these attacks" against the Party.[216]

Although Dubček remained in power until April 1969, the tone of the Kyiv meeting suggested that Soviet leaders had already concluded in early December that the situation would not fundamentally change unless they forced Dubček himself to leave the political scene. The KSČ First Secretary had moved a considerable distance away from his earlier policies in a bid to accommodate Soviet demands, but it was increasingly evident that Dubček, unlike some of his colleagues such as Gustáv Husák, was not willing to renounce the whole thrust of the Prague Spring. Earlier, when the basic problem was to gain credibility for the post-invasion regime in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union benefited by restoring Dubček to his post; but by late 1968 and early 1969 this function had outlived its purpose. To the extent that Brezhnev and his colleagues were seeking a definitive return to orthodox Communism and a full-scale purge of the KSČ, the Czechoslovak government, and the Czechoslovak army and security forces, they sensed that their objectives could be met only by getting rid of the man who had long symbolized the Prague Spring.

It would be left to Husák and Lubomír Štrougal — both of whom accompanied Dubček, Černík, and Svoboda to the Kyiv meeting — to extend "normalization" into its next, much harsher, phase. Joined by Bil'ak, Indra, and other members of the KSČ's revived "healthy forces" (who had suddenly become the dominant forces), they plunged Czechoslovakia into a "Prague Winter" that lasted more than twenty years.

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[215] "Záznam z Československo-sovetského jednání v Kyjeve," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), 7-8 December 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S 17.

[216] Ibid., Ll. 518-530.