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SOVIETS AND CZECHS AGREE ON MULTILATERAL TALKS

There was a brief respite in the Soviet-Czechoslovak crisis on 1 August as a result of the agreement to move from the bilateral talks at Cierna to a multilateral gathering in Bratislava, scheduled to open on 3 August.

The communique at Cierna, besides announcing the upcoming meeting of Soviets, Czechoslovaks, Poles, East Germans, Hungarians, and Bulgarians, said that the four-day session had been conducted in an atmosphere of "complete frankness, sincerity, and mutual understanding." The formula is one generally used to describe disagreement but not a total impasse. Four out of the six participants in the upcoming meeting at Bratislava have been openly hostile to the Czechoslovaks, with only Hungary's Kadar expressing a limited sympathy. Thus, it appears that the Czechoslovaks will be subject to the same kinds of demands that they faced at Cierna.

The crucial meeting between the leaders of Czechoslovakia and of the Soviet Union began on 29 July at the small Czechoslovak border town of Cierna nad Tisou. The Czechoslovak delegation included the full membership of the presidium and President Svoboda, one of the few leaders of the Dubcek regime who had remained

in the good graces of the Soviets. The Soviets were represented by the full politburo, less Kirilenko and Polyansky, who stayed in Moscow to run the affairs of the party and government.

Both sides had moved to bolster their negotiating positions during the preceding weekend. The Czechoslovak leaders publicly reaffirmed their determination to continue their reform program, at the same time making a few conciliatory moves aimed at the Soviets. On the second day of the meeting, Prague announced that a 35-page list of official secrets had been distributed to news media, a move clearly aimed at countering Soviet criticism of the free-wheeling Czechoslovak press. The Soviets, for their part, intensified still more their military and political pressure against Prague, massing more forces near the Czechoslovak borders and continuing their propaganda barrage.

The Soviets were expected to insist on tight press controls, the reinstatement of orthodox Communist political structures, a voice in the composition of the presidium, and some form of Soviet military presence in

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Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovaks may have been willing to agree to a token number of Soviet military observers and to provide foreign policy guarantees but reportedly were determined to avoid compromise on the crucial issues of the domestic reform program.

Despite frequent though cryptic assurances by Dubcek

and other Czechoslovak leaders that they were "optimistic" about the outcome of the meeting, there was some suggestion that they had privately been more pessimistic. The departure of Dubcek's wife and two of their three children to Yugoslavia on 31 July has been explained by some Czechoslovaks as only a token of Dubcek's "confidence," but this is hardly convincing.



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Czechoslovak press reports claimed that Brezhnev fell ill on 31 July and missed at least part of that day's meetings. [redacted]

[redacted] despite his record of apparently minor heart trouble there is nothing to indicate that Brezhnev's illness was serious.

The presence of almost the entire Soviet leadership in Cierna was probably intended to facilitate on-the-spot decision-making and to commit all of the leaders to any agreement with the Czechoslovaks. [redacted]

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[redacted] there seems little doubt that the Soviet handling of the Czechoslovak crisis has been a controversial issue for the leadership. Whatever direction Soviet policy takes now, there is every likeli-

hood that the controversy will grow.

During the past week, the Soviets apparently continued to build up their military forces near the Czechoslovak borders. [redacted]

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Military attaché reporting indicated that sizable Soviet forces remain in Czechoslovakia.

Moscow further increased its pressure on the Dubcek government by announcing that the rear services exercise that began last week in the western USSR was being extended into Poland and East Germany. Military reservists in these two countries were being called up for the exercise, according to the announcement. There is no evidence that Czechoslovak units have redeployed or been put on a full-scale alert. [redacted]

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