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## CZECHOSLOVAK-SOVIET RELATIONS REMAIN UNEASY

The fragile "understanding" between Moscow and Prague was jarred this week when the Soviet Foreign Ministry for the first time formally protested an article that had appeared in a Czechoslovak newspaper.

Moscow's note objected to the reprinting of a New York Times article which alleged that Soviet military officials were involved in General Sejna's escape from Czechoslovakia. The note accused the newspaper of reprinting the article with the "one aim" of disturbing friendly relations between the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Virtually demanding the reimposition of censorship controls, the note expressed the "conviction" that the "appropriate Czechoslovak organs will take the necessary measures" to prevent the appearance of similar reports.

The Soviet decision to revive the issue of press freedom at the intergovernmental level indicates Moscow's continuing dissatisfaction with the Dubcek regime's determination to use only informal controls on the press. The Soviet note was delivered almost simultaneously with the arrival in Moscow of a Czechoslovak economic delegation led by Deputy

Premier Strougal to continue negotiations on a large Soviet loan. The fact that the delegation left two days later without a Soviet commitment for immediate aid tends to confirm reports that Moscow is using the prospect of economic assistance to force a retreat on the issue of press freedom as well as to exert influence on the course of other reforms.

As yet, the Soviet press has made no move to resume the war of words that ended during Kosygin's stay in Czechoslovakia. Soviet reporting of developments in Czechoslovakia continues to be biased, but without direct criticism.

The Soviets continue to exert other psychological pressures, however. Preparations may now be complete for a Warsaw Pact command-staff exercise in Czechoslovakia. The exercise was announced three weeks ago. The Czechoslovak Defense Ministry has issued numerous press statements intended to allay domestic fears that the USSR will use the exercise to cover military intervention. These statements stress that only a "minimum" number of Soviet troops will take part and that they will leave Czechoslovakia on conclusion of the exercise, which is to last several days.

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