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DRAFT [] 22 Nov 68

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Post Mortem on Czech Crisis

REFERENCE: USIB-D-28.1/5, 11 October 1968 []

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1. In accordance with instructions contained in reference, the Strategic Warning Working Group (SWWG) received the post mortem reports on the Czech crisis prepared by CIA, DIA, NSA and INR, and reviewed them thoroughly. The CIA and DIA reports are studies in considerable detail of the intelligence coverage of the Czech crisis from January 1968 until after the invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20 August by Soviet and other Eastern European forces. The INR summary addresses some aspects of the crisis of particular concern to the State Department and the NSA report gives details of SIGINT coverage during this period. These four reports, taken together, present a thorough, comprehensive and very detailed review of all intelligence activities--collection, analysis and reporting--during the nine month period of developing crisis and final military intervention. The reports are so complete in themselves that no attempt was made to summarize them as a single document. A very brief summary of events and intelligence coverage thereof is attached as Annex A.

The INR, CIA, DIA and NSA reports are attached in subsequent annexes.

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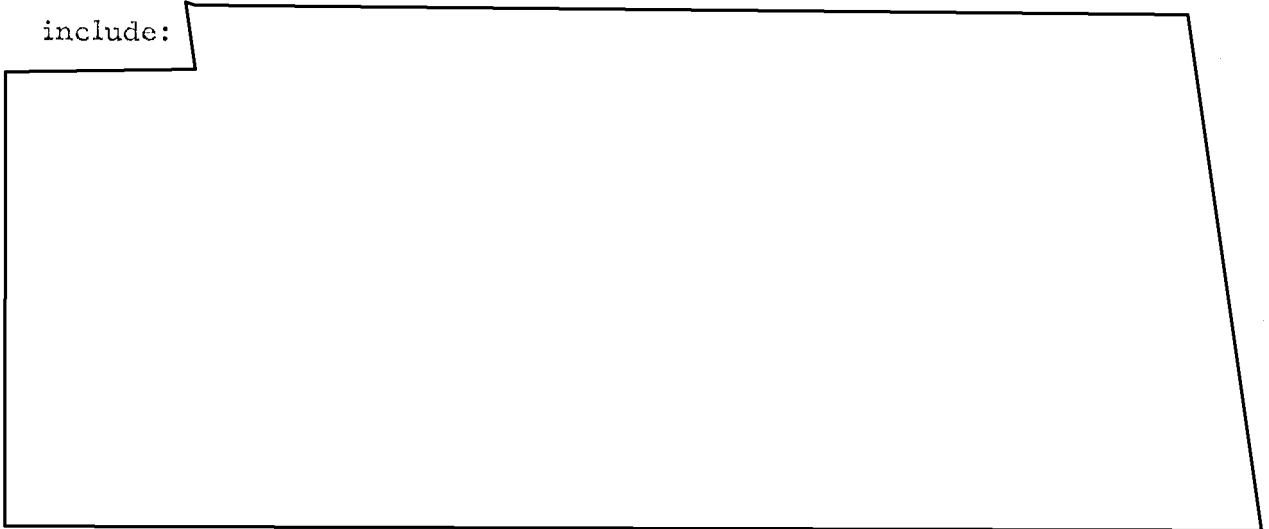
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2. In the final analysis intelligence coverage of this crisis was adequate up to the point of the decision to invade Czechoslovakia. The capabilities of the forces to carry out the invasion was clearly stated. The intention to invade was not known until after the fact. The lack of ability to assess more accurately the likelihood of this intention was the point of intelligence failure in the Czech crisis.

3. There are certain areas of possible improvement in intelligence performance which have been taken under consideration by the SWWG for possible referral to action agencies. These areas

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include:



4. The SWWG believes that the Soviet actions during the period of May-August 1968 offer an unique opportunity to study the procedures utilized by the USSR to conduct military operations. Seldom has a major military power made such a large-scale deployment of forces under non-wartime conditions which permit a study of the many facets revealed by these operations in something of an academic

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atmosphere. Much more can be done with the evidence accumulated over the past few months than has been possible in these post mortem studies which have been prepared by busy people also occupied by on-going responsibilities. Consequently, we recommend an intensive further study of the evidence be made by an objective group. This study possibly could be achieved by the establishment of an ad hoc group established solely for the purpose and staffed by representatives from CIA, DIA, State, NSA and the military services. Alternatively, such a study might be undertaken under contract by a suitable existing research organization. Specific guidance for such a study would have to be developed and preparations of this guidance would be a major undertaking. The SWWG, if directed, could monitor the development of this guidance which would require major contributions from member agencies.

Chairman
Strategic Warning Working Group

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SUMMARY

The development of the Czech crisis was protracted, extending from January 5, 1968 when Dubcek replaced Novotny. The possibility of the impending crisis was recognized from its inception, with an initial report on January 11 of the beginning of far reaching changes in Czech life.

The intelligence community became increasingly concerned with and reported the growing ferment in Czech life and the impact this might have on other countries in Eastern Europe. On March 20 a recommendation was made to the Senior Interdepartmental Group that they take the implications of the situation under consideration. A State Department Task Force on Czechoslovakia was formed in April and NATO set up an intelligence watch with a special daily reporting procedure in May.

The confrontation at Dresden on March 23 between Dubcek and the leaders from the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Rumania was inconclusive and satisfied no one. A month later, on April 23, an intelligence memorandum reported that Dubcek's program had led to a bloodless but nevertheless very real revolution

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in Czechoslovakia and that Soviet and other leaders obviously feared the spread of these concepts to their own countries. It was recognized and reported by the intelligence analysts that this constituted a threat to vital Soviet interests and that if political pressures failed, the Soviets would face a choice between acceptance and military action.

Intelligence publications first began to suggest that a Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia was a real possibility in late March. This warning was repeated and on May 10 definite evidence of Soviet troop concentrations and maneuvers on the Czech border was reported for the first time.

Reporting on Soviet military preparations and maneuvers from May 10 on was thorough. Our reporting was able to make the important distinctions among the relatively small deployments for political purposes in May, the ^{extensive} deployments involved in the Warsaw Pact exercises in Czechoslovakia in June/July, and the very large deployments, complete with mobilization and reinforcement from the rear areas, which were undertaken from the second half of July and culminated in the actual invasion. Their capability to intervene in Czechoslovakia at any time should they elect to do so was clearly stated. However, it was not possible to report when the decision to invade was being taken, when the Soviet troops had received their orders and were preparing to move, or when the Soviet troops actually began to move.

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Political reporting, based in large part on open sources, was extensive and it was possible to keep well informed of the various political moves made by the Soviets and their allies on the one hand and Dubcek and the Czech government and party on the other. The import of the various meetings between the Czechs and the Warsaw Five was reported promptly and accurately. In spite of this, however, although intelligence publications had said that the possibility of intervention with military forces was not to be excluded, at no time was the intelligence community able to make a judgment that a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was more likely than not. Only ten hours before the invasion was the DCI able to inform the President and his senior advisors that an important development regarding Czechoslovakia was taking place in Moscow. He did not predict intervention but did note the hardening trend of Soviet policy.

Certain items of information, collected by highly sensitive technical means before the invasion but not available in Washington until afterward, would have made a difference in political and military reporting and could have permitted a better assessment of a Soviet intent to intervene as opposed to the continuation of a war of nerves. Also, many individual items of information fell into place after the fact, and later came to seem obvious indicators.

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Insofar as the possibility of an attack on NATO and/or the United States was concerned, the intelligence community examined all available information and reached the conclusion that such an attack was unlikely. There were no indications at the time of unusual strategic forces activities. Also, the identified movements of Soviet and other Warsaw Pact forces involved showed no pattern which posed any threat to NATO. The detected deployment of more Pact forces than were needed for the Czech situation reflected a cautious policy and a use of extra forces to guard against a miscalculation of Czech strength and to brace against possible NATO counteraction.

In summary, the strategic warning of a confrontation between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was adequate. An assessment that this confrontation did not represent a direct military threat to NATO was made by the intelligence community and constantly reviewed and affirmed as the crisis deepened. And finally, tactical warning that a Soviet decision to intervene in Czechoslovakia with military forces had been made, or even that such intervention was more likely than not, was not given and could not have been given under the circumstances and with the information available at the time.

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