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11 February 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: How "Permanent" is the Soviet Central Group of Forces in Czechoslovakia?

1. The Central Group of Soviet Forces, Czechoslovakia (CGF) is disposed politically rather than militarily and shows signs of impermanence. This situation is contrary to estimates made immediately after the invasion which forecast the permanent stationing of strong Soviet forces disposed in a militarily logical posture; i.e., two Soviet field armies (about 8 divisions) protecting the Czech-West German border.

2. The validity of early estimates was quickly thrown into doubt when the best candidate for a permanently forward-deployed army in Czechoslovakia, the 11th Guards Army from the Baltic, returned to the USSR. The forces that remained in Czechoslovakia were disposed well away from the Czech-West German border, primarily in Slovakia, strung out in an east-west line near the Polish border. Of some 550 combat aircraft deployed for the intervention, all but five or six squadrons of interceptors (80-odd aircraft) returned to home bases. The commander of CGF turned out to be the

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two-star general who also commands the 38th Guards Army of the Carpathian Military District -- a low-ranker for a Group of Forces commander.

3. The current strength and disposition of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia is a matter of some dispute among order of battle analysts, but the anomalies in themselves are revealing. Apparently headquarters elements from the 38th Guards Army constitute the headquarters of the Central Group of Forces (COF). Order of battle evidence is murky, but it indicates that some divisions of the 38th Guards Army are located in Czechoslovakia, while at least one division remains in the USSR. Unless some undetected reshuffling has taken place, we are faced with the unprecedented deployment of a Soviet army over 350 miles of territory both inside and outside the USSR.

4. The three divisions of the 38th Guards Army are the only divisions claimed to be firmly identified as remaining inside Czechoslovakia. These are strung out on an east-west line in Moravia and Slovakia. They appear to be further spread out in regimental and battalion-sized groups in broad areas of divisional responsibility -- i.e., in political rather than military dispositions.

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5. The intelligence community has accepted the probable existence of two more divisions in the extreme northern area of Bohemia. These "divisions" are not identified as to designation or even origin. There are some indications that these elements are not real divisions, but ad hoc groupings of troops, tailored for population control. []

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[] they may be made up of stay-behind regiments detached from various Soviet divisions from East Germany, Poland, or the USSR. At any rate the evidence supporting designation of these additional units as divisions (which we allowed for in NIE 11-14) is not very convincing and becomes less so as time goes by without a clue as to identification.

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6. [] analysts generally agree that the disposition of the ground troops of the Central Group of Forces (CGF) is political and their organization makeshift. They further agree that the lack of proper tactical air army is a mystery if CGF is in fact a permanent Soviet deployment. They note that the Southern Group of Forces, Hungary, which also has more political than military significance, nevertheless was quickly provided with a de facto tactical air army. The 80-odd

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aircraft of the Carpathian MD tactical air army (first TAA) now in Czechoslovakia do not constitute an air army or even an air division; they are apparently operating as separate regiments and squadrons.

7. All these anomalies in the composition and disposition of CGF point to an essentially non-military and non-permanent posture; they suggest, though they do not prove, a Soviet intent eventually to withdraw troops from Czechoslovakia. At a minimum they indicate that there has been no Soviet decision to repair the weakened Warsaw Pact southern flank in Central Europe by redeploying Soviet troops.

8. If the Soviets withdraw from Czechoslovakia, the ramifications for estimates of the Soviet strategic stance vis-a-vis NATO would be far-reaching. The case for the Warsaw Pact attack against NATO (never very strong, but nonetheless the backbone of NATO planning) would be greatly weakened. The "increased threat" notion which has been used as a stiffener within NATO would go up in smoke. Further, withdrawal from Czechoslovakia would probably be tantamount to the junking of standing Soviet military plans to meet contingencies in Central Europe. In view of the

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events of the past year, it seems incredible that the Soviets would believe on the basis of renewed confidence in the reliability of Czech forces that they had reestablished the politico-military status quo ante.

9. Of course, the case can be made that the problems of reliability are not really resolved by retaining Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia. In fact, the political reaction to the continued presence of Soviet troops probably adds to the reliability problem. If the Soviets see it this way, they have a military-strategic incentive to withdraw. Their basic military options were (as we originally estimated) to establish a Soviet front to replace the Czechs, or to junk a large part of their strategic plans. The only basis for concluding otherwise is an assumption that Czech reliability and the Soviet view of it has remained unchanged despite the events of the past year.

10. In sum, from a military point of view Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia do not look permanent. Deployments are patently political, making little military sense, and constituting no increased threat to NATO; the Soviet occupation may actually be reducing Warsaw Pact capabilities against NATO because of adverse political impact within Czech forces.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

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