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WINTRY DAYS IN
PRAGUE AND MOSCOW

NOVEMBER 1968

REPORT

OF

SENATOR ALBERT GORE

AND

SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

JANUARY 13, 1969.

Hon. J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Enclosed is a report on a brief study mission to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in late November.

We decided to take advantage of our presence in Brussels at the annual meeting of the North Atlantic Assembly to take leave of the delegation after most of the work of the Assembly had been completed in order to visit Prague and Moscow at this important—and delicate—time in East-West relations. Senator Pell, as you know, had visited Czechoslovakia in July before the invasion and occupation of that country, and a report to the committee on his mission, entitled "Czechoslovakia 1968," was published on July 22. Both of us had visited the Soviet Union before but not in more than a decade.

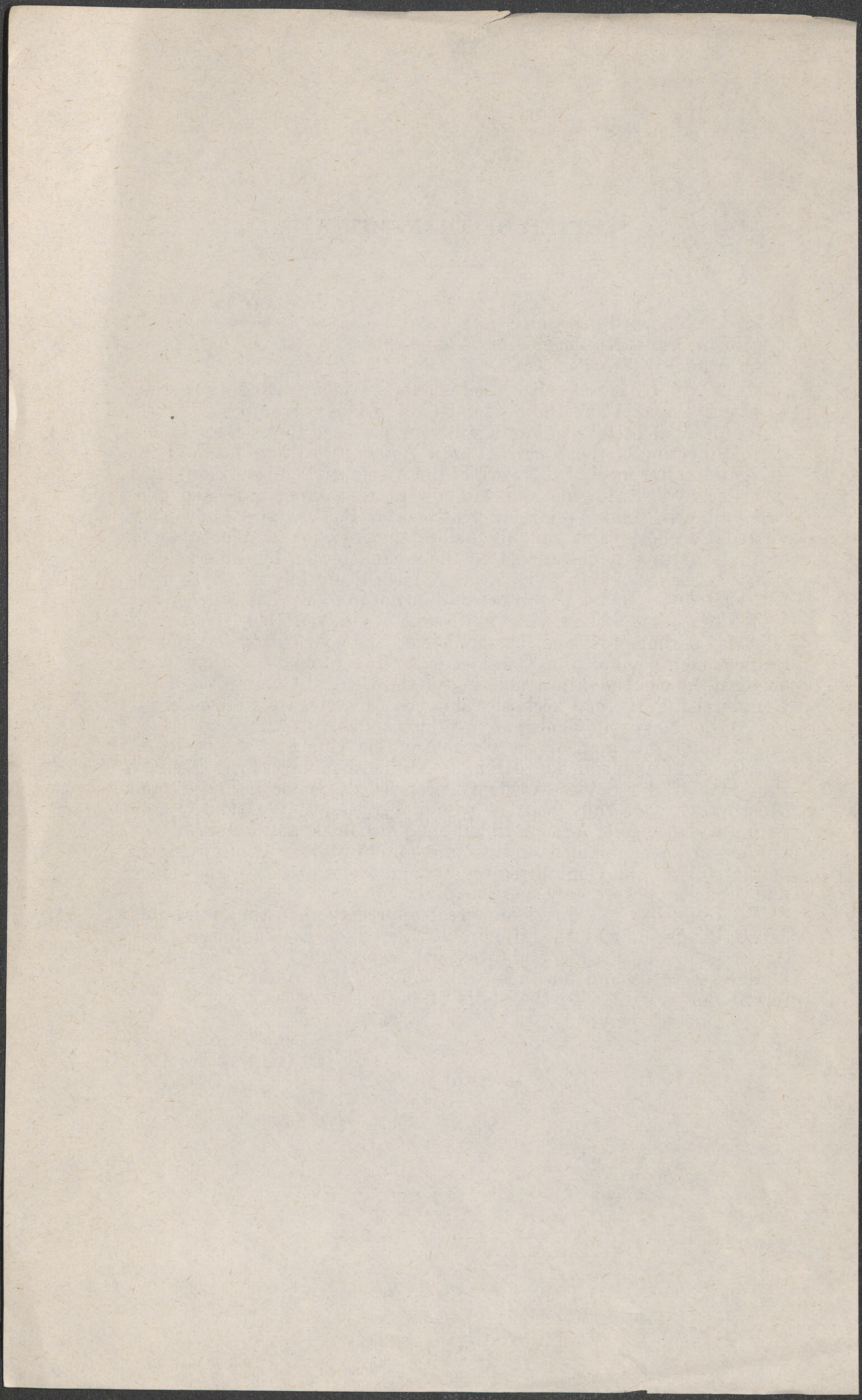
In the course of our visit to Prague we talked to a number of officials, parliamentarians, academicians, and journalists, but not to leading members of the Czechoslovak Government as they were engaged, at the time, in a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In Moscow, we were received by Alexei Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers; I. V. Spiridonov, Chairman of the Council of the Union of the Supreme Soviet; and Academician Mikhail Millionshchikov, First Deputy President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In both Prague and Moscow we were fully briefed by our Embassies. We talked, also, with a wide range of foreign diplomats, journalists, and others.

We were accompanied on this mission by James G. Lowenstein of the staff of the Committee on Foreign Relations. His knowledge and proficiency were very, very helpful.

We would like to express our great appreciation to the Honorable Jacob D. Beam and the Honorable Llewellyn E. Thompson, our Ambassadors in Prague and Moscow, respectfully, for their many kindnesses to us and for their wise counsel. We would also like to record our gratitude to the staffs of both Embassies.

Sincerely yours,

ALBERT GORE
CLAIBORNE PELL.



WINTRY DAYS IN PRAGUE AND MOSCOW

I. INTRODUCTION

The "Czechoslovak spring" has passed into history and an ideological winter seems to be descending not only on that country but, indeed, on much of Eastern Europe. For since the invasion on August 20, Czechoslovakia has experienced relentless Soviet pressure designed to force that country to become, once again, a follower of Soviet policies in both internal and foreign affairs and to cease being an innovator. There are echoes of similar pressures for reversion to a more conservative era in other Eastern European countries—especially, it would seem, in Poland—and in the Soviet Union as well.

For several years, increasingly severe controls have been imposed on dissident intellectuals in the Soviet Union. This process has been accelerated since April, when a Central Committee meeting of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union settled on new guidelines in the cultural field. Thus, in the past 9 months there have been further trials and arrests of writers and of others who have protested against Soviet policy. And in the same period contacts between Soviet citizens and foreigners have been progressively more restricted—another traditional indication of the mood of the Soviet leadership.

Many foreign observers in Moscow describe the present atmosphere in the Soviet Union as "re-Stalinization" by which they mean reminiscent of the Stalin era but without, to date, any sign of the mass arrests, executions, and severe terror of that period. In foreign policy, the Soviet Union has proclaimed a doctrine justifying any measures, including armed intervention, to keep socialist regimes in power in those Warsaw pact countries which the Soviets consider must be kept within Moscow's orbit. But this doctrine, it would appear, is a license to intervene, as well, in cases where socialist regimes are not in danger but where they are merely governing in ways which do not suit the Soviet leadership and which the Soviets believe might cause them to withdraw from the Warsaw pact. The effect of this policy looms clear: It will slow—slow but not, we believe, stop—the inevitable erosion of Soviet-designed and Soviet-directed communism in Eastern Europe although perhaps at the cost of serious disaffection and disruption even within mother Russia. Thus, the "Czechoslovak spring" has been followed by a winter that promises to be of unusual severity and of abnormal duration.

II. PRAGUE

Prague is a city still in the process of accommodating itself to a situation it has not known since 1945: Capital of an occupied country, occupied by a strong though often invisible foreign power. By the time of our visit in mid-November, the occupation had indeed become a discreet one. There were no Soviet units in Prague, and the building that had housed Soviet military headquarters seemed deserted. With the exception of a few guards outside the communica-

tion centers and a few individual soldiers, we saw no Soviet troops, although units were then—and reportedly still are—billeted just outside the city less than an hour away.

Visible signs of the invasion did remain. Many buildings, including the national museum at the head of the main square, were pockmarked with bullet holes, and others had been gutted by fire.

But the invisible reminders of the invasion, occupation, and suppression were more widespread and will certainly have more lasting effects. Before August 20, the Czechoslovak people were perhaps the most pro-Russian in central Europe, with the exception of the Bulgarians. In our view, that sentiment no longer applies to Czechoslovakia, and we would venture to guess that the Czechoslovak people will hold anti-Russian feelings for a long time. This feeling seems to be particularly strong among students and intellectuals. But while they are the most obviously restless element in the country, we sensed a general apprehension among all elements of the public, for Czechoslovaks well remember the harsh days of the past.

Nevertheless, according to most reports, the more liberal leaders of Czechoslovakia remain cautiously confident that they will be able to retain at least some of the significant advances made during the spring. On the other hand, it is obviously the Soviet hope that the power of the liberal elements in the Czechoslovak Communist Party can be eroded and a leadership willing to govern according to Soviet wishes placed in power. This objective is summed up in the euphemistic term "normalization."

Whether the Soviets will succeed, and, if so, how long it will take them to achieve "normalization," or whether they will be willing to change the definition of "normalization" in a more permissive direction, are the questions the answers to which will determine the final fate of the Czechoslovak reforms. These reforms were described in Senator Pell's July report in the following way:

* * * its leaders are attempting to reform Czechoslovakia's Communist society to make it more democratic and more humanistic—more responsive to the will of the Czech and Slovak peoples, more tolerant of dissent, and more progressive socially, economically, and culturally—than it has been at any time during the 20 years of Communist rule.

They have, however, obviously no intention of replacing the present Communist regime with a non-Communist regime of any sort. For there is a central political fact of life governing Czechoslovakia's fate that is as permanent as the baroque architecture of Czechoslovakia's capital city. It is that Czechoslovakia is a small, central European state and that its fortunes—for better or for worse—must thus lie with the dominant force in central Europe. From 1938 until 1944 that dominant force was Nazi Germany. Since 1945, that dominant force has been the Soviet Union.

Czechoslovakia's new leaders obviously understand this fact of life. Nevertheless, the country's new liberal and reform-minded leadership, which assumed power in January by obtaining the support of a majority of the Communist Party's Central Committee, has succeeded in bringing about a greater degree of personal freedom in the country than at any time since 1948. * * *

These new personal freedoms were outlined in the new "action program" of the Communist Party adopted on April 5. The program pledged new guarantees of freedom of speech, press, assembly, travel, and religion; new electoral laws to provide a broader choice of candidates; the upgrading of Parliament; broad economic reforms to give enterprises greater independence; an independent judiciary; Federal status for Slovakia on an independent basis; and a new constitution to be drafted by the end of 1969.

It now seems quite clear that the Soviets found unacceptable a number of these reforms—principally the abolition of censorship, the

democratization within the party which had gone so far as to include secret balloting in Communist Party meetings, political activity by parties other than the Communist Party and the rehabilitation of party members—a policy which had certain anti-Russian overtones.

The question of the future of these reforms, and of the new liberal leadership of the Communist Party, would have reached a crucial point on September 9, when the party congress was scheduled to meet and, among other things, elect a new Central Committee. To forestall action by the congress which, it was feared, would have accelerated the reforms and removed all conservatives from the upper reaches of the party hierarchy, the Soviets began combined political and military pressures—military pressures which took the form of Warsaw Pact maneuvers on the borders of, and within, Czechoslovakia; and political pressures which were centered around the meetings in Warsaw, Cierna-nad-Tisou and Bratislava. The communique issued on August 4 at the conclusion of the Bratislava meeting appeared, on the surface, to resolve the matters in dispute. But between August 4 and August 20, the Soviets decided that the situation in Czechoslovakia was getting out of hand and that the consequences posed a danger to the future of Communist regimes not only in Czechoslovakia but in other Communist countries as well. Invasion by troops of five Warsaw Pact powers followed. At the same time, the Czechoslovak leaders were taken by force to Moscow and all but President Svoboda were physically abused in the process.

It is not within the scope of this report to catalog, in detail, the course of events in Czechoslovakia since August 20. Suffice it to say that a number of the more liberal leaders no longer remain in power and that large numbers of Soviet troops remain “temporarily” in Czechoslovakia under the provisions of a treaty signed on October 16. These concessions, and others relating to the reforms, were hammered out at meetings between the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders on August 23–27, October 3, October 16, November 15–16 and December 7–8.

The reform program envisaged by the new Czechoslovak leadership is being gradually whittled down. Thus, the creation of any new political organizations outside the National Front has been banned; censorship has been reestablished, on a so-called voluntary basis but with the clear understanding that there will be no criticism of the Soviet Union; permanent exit visas have been abolished and foreign currency for tourist visits is no longer generally available; there has been a gradual return to rule by decree; and meaningful economic reforms have been set aside for the moment. Several measures included in the new Czech regime's reform program remain untouched. A federal state has been created. The rehabilitation of those unjustly sentenced for political crimes in the past has continued. And, perhaps most importantly, the guaranteeing of the security of personal freedoms within the law has not been invalidated.

Just before leaving Prague for Moscow, we issued a statement to the American correspondents in that city. We are reproducing that statement here, since it reflected then—and still reflects—our feelings after our brief stay in Prague:

Over the years Czechoslovakia's ties with the United States have been particularly close. These ties have been of sentiment as well as of tradition and of family.

It is thus only natural—it could hardly be otherwise—that the events that have taken place in Czechoslovakia since August 20 have been of profound interest to the American people. This interest has, of course, been accompanied by shock and dismay. The efforts of the new leadership in Czechoslovakia to democratize and humanize political life in their country had seemed to Americans to point the way to greater freedom for the people of Czechoslovakia and to the possibility of a more fruitful and peaceful American relationship not only with Czechoslovakia but with all the countries of Eastern Europe.

The present situation in Czechoslovakia, and the question of what the future may bring, are matters of continuing concern to Americans. We share this concern. We are disturbed at the fear and foreboding we have sensed in Prague, a fear and foreboding that even those recent advances in Czechoslovak life that have not yet been lost will gradually—or perhaps even rapidly—disappear. It is obvious to us that such a development, taken together with other developments on the international scene, could cause a resumption of the cold war whose icy winds would surely reach across the Atlantic.

But all is not yet lost by any means. We are impressed by the deep desire of the Czechoslovak people to preserve those reforms that can be preserved. The personal contacts we have had have convinced us of the obvious wish of the Czech and Slovak people to be permitted to develop their own solutions to the problems that confront them—solutions based on the history of their country, the desires of a majority of the Czechoslovak people and the actual conditions which confront Czechoslovakia. We can only hope—and hope most earnestly—that, whatever Czechoslovakia's destiny, the path it eventually follows will be the path it chooses to follow, whatever the obstacles that now stand in the way.

III. Moscow

A visit to Moscow in November 1968, especially after first visiting Prague, is not a particularly cheering experience. We have already referred earlier in this report to the general crackdown in the Soviet Union on intellectual dissent and on contacts with foreigners.

As far as the question of contacts between Russians and foreigners is concerned, we could not help but be acutely aware of the isolation of the foreign community in Moscow—an isolation which can only be harmful in the long run to Soviet relations with other countries. The apartment buildings in which foreign correspondents live are ringed by wire fences, and entrances in the fences are controlled by guards who require every Soviet citizen seeking to enter the building to produce identity documents and a reason for the visit. Diplomatic contacts are also tightly restricted.

Not only is the foreign community in Moscow isolated from Russians; the other side of the coin is that Russians continue to be relatively isolated from contacts with the non-socialist world. Thus, there are few, if any, non-Communist newspapers and magazines sold in Moscow, and the Soviets began after the invasion of Czechoslovakia again to jam Voice of America broadcasts in Russian.

As for the suppression of intellectual dissent, the trials and arrests, imprisonments and incarcerations in mental institutions, of the past few years have been widely reported in the Western press. It would not serve any purpose to recapitulate them here, but it seems to us that they must, regretfully, be noted in any report on Moscow today.

We do not mean to imply in any way in this report that we were not received hospitably and openly by the high official with whom we met. On the contrary, our meetings took place in an atmosphere of friendliness and frankness.

Our general impressions from our talks in Moscow on the specific issues of negotiations on missile control and of Czechoslovakia were these:

A. It seemed clear to us that the Soviets are interested in beginning talks on limiting offensive and defensive missiles, though not necessarily at the level of chiefs of government. At the same time, the Soviets remain highly sensitive to any feeling of "pressure." They regard statements in the United States implying that they are more interested than the United States in such talks as examples of such pressure. Also, they seem to regard the contention that the United States will only negotiate from a position of superiority as pressure and as meaning, too, that the United States will continue the arms race or, at least, that a striving for superiority in armaments would make an armaments race inevitable. Though acknowledging the pressure of domestic needs, they deny that economic considerations are a principal motive for them in beginning talks on controlling missiles and emphasize instead the political importance of disarmament agreements for world peace.

We considered it necessary and important to point out, in our talks, the effects of the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia in the United States, and we noted that the presence of large numbers of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia made it difficult for any American President to initiate disarmament talks with the Soviet Union or, in fact, for any American Senator to urge that such talks begin. The argument made in reply was that public opinion could be changed in the United States if there were a desire in the Government for such a change. Little do they know our free American press!

B. In our discussions in Moscow of the situation in Czechoslovakia, there was virtually no common ground. The well-known Soviet rationale for the invasion—a word that was, of course, never used by them—was often repeated. The Soviet argument is based on the importance of preserving the situation in Europe as it has existed since the end of World War II, the need to prevent any change in borders in Central Europe, the charge that forces outside Czechoslovakia wanted to take control of the situation in that country, and the theory that the Communist Party was losing its leading role and that as a result there was a danger that the socialist system would be replaced by a non-socialist system contrary to the wishes of a majority of the Czechoslovak people. It was also emphasized that Soviet troops are now stationed in Czechoslovakia under treaty, just as American forces are stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and other countries under treaty. It was often stated that the situation in Czechoslovakia was quite unlike that in Vietnam and that, in fact, it was invidious to compare Vietnam, where a full-scale war was being waged in which hundreds of thousands had lost their lives, with Czechoslovakia. No high official with whom we talked claimed that Warsaw Pact forces had been invited or urged to enter Czechoslovakia, although lower level officials, and the Soviet press, do so claim.

It is, however, worth noting in this report, for the record, that among the pamphlets available at no charge to passengers passing through the Moscow International Airport is a reprint in many languages of an article which appeared in Pravda on August 22 entitled "Defence of Socialism: Supreme Internationalist Duty." The first two paragraphs of the article read as follows:

Party and government leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic have asked the U.S.S.R. and other allied states to give the fraternal Czechoslovak people urgent assistance, including assistance with armed forces.

This appeal stems from the threat to the socialist system and the constitutionally established statehood in Czechoslovakia from counter-revolutionary forces that have entered into collusion with external forces inimical to socialism.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present situation in the European Communist world is discouraging, to say the least, for those who have hoped and worked for improved East-West relations. Apart from the course of events within Czechoslovakia, and within other European Communist countries, including the Soviet Union, there is the question of what these developments and the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia mean for the future.

It appears to us, in the first place, that there will inevitably be further confrontations between the natural impulses in European Communist countries for more personal and national freedom, and the apparent unwillingness of the Soviet leadership to permit such impulses to be realized—except at a very tightly controlled pace which may, in fact, cause these pressures to increase rather than abate in the long run. In the second place, these developments within the various European Communist countries, and the intervention in Czechoslovakia, have caused uneasiness in Western Europe and the United States.

As a result, in the United States, in particular, there could well be a turn toward the attitudes of the past regarding relations with Communist countries—perhaps not a return to the cold war but to a cool war at the least. How these attitudes develop in the United States and Western Europe will depend, in large part, on the restraint shown by the Soviets in Czechoslovakia and on whether future Soviet actions in Eastern Europe will show that the Brezhnev doctrine was really an *ex post facto* theory to justify an isolated incident or a theory designed to explain future actions and thus a forecast of things to come.

Having said all this, we would like to emphasize that it is our strong view that a return to the cold war, or even to a cool war, serves the interests of neither the United States, nor the Soviet Union, nor any country interested in peace. It should not be necessary to say, but it may be wise to repeat, that it is essential in a nuclear age that the world's two leading nuclear superpowers have the best possible relations and the fewest possible disagreements.

Turning to specific actions that could be taken, both the United States and the Soviet Union seem ready to begin talks on antiballistic missile deployment, and we believe it to be to the advantage of the whole world that such talks begin as soon as possible. We believe, and expect, that we would consult with our allies before such negotiations begin and throughout such talks, for the nervousness of the smaller countries, caught between two superpowers, has been greatly increased by the intervention in Czechoslovakia. If it would seem inappropriate for these negotiations to begin "at the summit," as may well be the case, then let them begin at a lower level.

One other specific recommendation we wish to make is to emphasize the importance, in our view, of continuing to develop relations with

the countries of Eastern Europe. These countries want contacts with the West in general, and with the United States in particular, and they need closer economic relations with us. We should be responsive to their desires, for in being responsive we will serve our own interests as well as theirs. So should the countries of Western Europe who are in a position to do a great deal to increase communication between the Communist and non-Communist worlds.

Thus, we favor an increase in trade; cultural, scientific and technological exchange; and tourism and consular relations. Trade relations, in particular, should be put on a more normal, predictable, and acceptable basis.

We believe that relations with Eastern Europe should be developed on a bilateral basis if the collective NATO-Warsaw Pact context proves sterile. It follows from our previous comments that, in our view, it would be desirable for the countries of Western Europe to take a more active role in developing their bilateral relationships with Eastern European countries. Obviously some Western European states are in a better political position to develop such contacts than are others.

The winter of 1968—in Czechoslovakia, in the Soviet Union, and in other Eastern European countries—holds lessons for all of us to consider. In our view, the combination of events in the past few months in the socialist world is evidence of the essentially conservative nature of the Soviet leadership, of the power of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, of Soviet resolve not to yield this power, of the still vast differences between the Soviet philosophy of government and our own, of the potential areas of conflict that exist and—including all of these subsidiary points—of the precarious state of world peace. But it is also evidence, if any is needed, that the Communist world has serious problems, that absolutist regimes—by whatever name—are counter to the basic instincts of mankind and cannot be permanently maintained, and that in every developed country—including those in the socialist world—man's effect on society is, in the long run, greater than society's effect on man.



