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TRENDS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE AND
THEIR POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Note by the Chairman, Working Group of Experts
on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Experts representing twelve member countries met on 17th March and completed the attached Report on 21st March, 1969. In the course of their work they paid particular attention to a list of specific questions circulated to them before the meeting, as well as to the assessments in "Political Implications of the Czechoslovakia Crisis" (C-M(68)43(Final)).

2. The Report is divided into two parts: Part I is concerned with general observations covering both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; Part II is concerned with Eastern Europe, and it includes studies of separate countries and a final section on workers, students and intellectuals.

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PART ONE

GENERAL ANALYSIS

I. SOVIET INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

Present Situation

1. The familiar stresses and strains in the USSR do not appear to have significantly intensified as a result of the intervention in Czechoslovakia.

2. There have been several reports that the leadership is deeply divided. But the evidence of a potentially serious split is still not conclusive; and there are no sure indications that any particular element in the present leadership has exerted a decisive influence. This applies also to the military, who are not represented in the Politbureau. Nevertheless, the military do seem to have enhanced their rôle. Collective leadership naturally results in some diffuseness of power and uncertainty in decision; this is exemplified in the present situation.

3. Controls over society are on the increase. This process has gained momentum since the April 1968 Plenum. It includes a greater emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy, more insulation against foreign influences and a moderate increase in political vigilance. Notable examples have been the restoration of the name of M.V.D. and the continuing rehabilitation of Stalin. A sharper awareness has been displayed in the press about the problem of nationalism in the Republics (which may owe something to the Czechoslovakia crisis). There has been continuing evidence of protest by youth and of dissidence among intellectuals, and there seems to be growing concern about the alienation of young people from the Komsomol, and of intellectuals and even workers from the Party.

Future Prospects

4. Argument about priorities and allocation of resources is likely to continue within the Party and Government. However, the over-riding interest of the higher echelons of the Party remains to preserve an appearance of stability and solidarity. This militates against early or sudden change, though it does not preclude it. It also probably raises the level of tolerance of strains and disagreements. In the longer-term, the conflict between the inflexibility of Soviet society and its need to modernise is making for change; but it is not possible to predict what form this change might take.

5. The Soviet leadership is likely to continue to pursue the twin objectives of further strengthening the country's military posture and improving the standard of living. The industrial economic reforms have been pursued, but with less speed than was planned. There have been few positive results, and the old problems seem likely to remain.

6. The influential levels of the bureaucracy will remain primarily conservative. The trend towards greater police powers and social discipline will be reversed only if the leadership wills or allows it. Dissent seems unlikely to constitute more than a marginal problem for the next few years at least, and will be easily contained even if occasional outbursts are not prevented or concealed.

II. SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS EASTERN EUROPE AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

7. There is no evidence that the Soviet Union has modified its general policy toward its Eastern European Allies over the past six months.

8. As far as the present situation in Czechoslovakia is concerned the word "normalisation" continues to mean to the Soviet leadership what it meant immediately following the invasion. The intervention has succeeded in controlling the movement for liberalisation but the Soviets have not yet achieved all their basic aims. The Soviet leadership may have also come to realise that there is a political limit to the use of military force. This, however, does not affect the Soviet concept of limited sovereignty.

9. The Soviets are continuing their efforts to consolidate their control of the "Socialist Community", through the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, and to promote cohesion in Eastern Europe. The Warsaw Pact summit meeting of 17th March, 1969 in Budapest may represent a step in this direction. There are no serious grounds to expect that in the foreseeable future the Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe will be jeopardised by centrifugal tendencies such as conflicting economic interests, local nationalism, and different ways to socialism. There do not appear for the time being to be any realistic alternative methods open to the Soviet leadership for exercising influence and control in Eastern Europe.

10. The Soviet Union is pressing ahead with preparations for a world Communist conference with the aim of regaining undisputed leadership of the world Communist movement. In view of the divergencies within this movement, however, it is to be expected that the Soviets, in order to bring in as many parties as possible, may have to avoid all controversial questions. The only theme on which agreement is likely to be reached is the "struggle against imperialism".

11. Sino-Soviet relations seem to have taken a new turn since the recent border clashes. It now looks as though the Soviet leaders will adopt a new and tougher approach. Although developments have not yet reached a stage where a forecast can be made, this new element in the Sino-Soviet dispute may have far-reaching implications for the world Communist movement, the relations within the entire Socialist camp, and Soviet policy towards the West. The unprecedented diplomatic démarche made by the Soviet Government in Western capitals and other parts of the world may be taken as an indication of this.

III. THE SITUATION IN EASTERN EUROPE(1)

12. To the extent that the Czech crisis has had repercussions on relations between Socialist States, its main effect has been to strengthen the feelings of sympathy and solidarity or, on the contrary, of distrust and hostility with which some of these countries already regarded one another. The reactions engendered by the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" have played an important part in this respect. As regards specific proposals in the fields of economic co-operation and trade, the attitude of each country is dictated by its national interest or aspirations. This affects cohesion within C.M.E.A.

13. Gathered together in Dresden in March 1968, the leaders of the five countries which were to invade Czechoslovakia had advocated a summit meeting of the Warsaw Pact. The conference which, for the first time since that date, brought together in Budapest on 17th March, 1969, the leaders of the seven Pact countries enabled them to take common decisions on the operation of its military bodies and to display unanimous agreement on the principles which should, in their view, govern a settlement of European security problems. There are no grounds, however, for concluding, particularly in the absence of information on the nature and scope of the military decisions taken, that there has been a deep and lasting change in the relations between member countries.

14. Within the limits of Soviet tolerance, Czechoslovakia and the countries which invaded her are making efforts to resume - or continue - contacts in all fields. Rumania has shown herself confident enough to continue along her own individual course toward developing political and commercial relations with the West and the Third World while balancing this carefully with public professions of general loyalty to the "Socialist system". The Rumanians remain critical of the

(1) Developments within the individual East European countries are considered in Part Two.

Soviet Union's domination of the Warsaw Pact, and they have shown unwillingness to accept Warsaw Pact manoeuvres in their country. On many issues, such as "limited sovereignty", Rumania has taken a line similar to Yugoslavia's.

15. The Soviet/Czechoslovak confrontation has led to marked deterioration in Yugoslav relations with the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria and East Germany. Their criticism of Yugoslav economic revisionism and lack of solidarity with the world Communist movement has been met by Yugoslav counter charges of aggression and of rigid dogmatism, which have been of varying intensity. The dispute is aggravated in the case of Bulgaria by a revival of the polemic over Macedonia.

16. Although the part played by the East German régime in the campaign against Czechoslovakia may have enhanced Ulbricht's personal standing with the Soviet leadership, it has caused some uneasiness in the rest of Eastern Europe. In spite of continued activity no real progress has been made towards formal recognition outside the Socialist camp.

17. Czechoslovakia's bilateral relations with the other Warsaw Pact countries are still suffering from the damaging effects of the invasion. Relations with East Berlin and Warsaw remain bad while those with Budapest have been least affected. However, Prague is making efforts to normalise relations with its Allies. The Czechoslovaks will continue to try to make a distinctive Czechoslovak voice heard in fields in which they can do this without provoking Soviet opposition. They continue to express interest in developing political, economic, technical and cultural exchanges with the West.

18. Hungary, while asserting her loyalty to Moscow, is making efforts to preserve some room for manoeuvre in foreign policy. Contacts with Rumania and Yugoslavia are being cautiously encouraged.

19. Poland's relations with the other members of the Warsaw Pact have been closest with those whose policies have been most aligned with Soviet policies. Although continuing occasionally to speak of their traditional interests in disarmament and a European Security Conference, Polish foreign policy statements have for the most part been reduced to an arid defence of the status quo, together with a continuous propaganda campaign against the Federal Republic of Germany. This generally rigid foreign policy line has not interfered with Poland's trade with the West nor with continued expressions of a desire for improved bilateral relations with Western countries.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR EAST-WEST RELATIONS

20. The Soviet leaders have shown themselves sensitive to the sharp reaction which the invasion evoked in the West, and in the Third World. The solidarity of the West highlighted at the last Ministerial Meeting of the Alliance did not remain without effect on the Soviets. It also apparently exerted a positive influence on the political-psychological situation in Rumania and encouraged the Yugoslav leadership in the continuation of its own course. These are the kinds of reaction which the Soviets would have to take into account if they were considering the use of force again, though this would not be a decisive factor if vital Soviet interests were in question within the territory of the Warsaw Pact.

21. The Soviets have shown in a variety of ways that they wish to revert to the relationship with Western countries which they enjoyed before August last year. The reluctance of Western governments to follow this lead was meant to demonstrate to the Soviets that they cannot isolate certain aspects of their foreign policy from the rest; the Soviets will have to take into account that if they wish to negotiate constructive agreements with the West they cannot at the same time pursue a policy of aggression or open coercion, even in areas which they regard as within their own sphere of influence.

22. The increase of tension between East and West which was generated by the Czechoslovakia crisis has not altered and may have strengthened the Soviet desire to engage in a bilateral negotiation with the US over strategic missiles. It follows that the Soviets probably have no desire to see their actions in Eastern Europe lead to further escalation of tension between East and West, and in particular more strained relations with the US. The Soviet attitude in regard to Berlin in March 1969 tends to confirm this view.

23. At a Warsaw Pact summit meeting in Budapest on 17th March the Soviet Union and its Allies resurrected earlier proposals about European security and co-operation. These proposals do not contain any new elements of substance compared to similar statements which have been made before, although the language is much more restrained. Among possible Soviet motivations for this initiative are:

- to refurbish the Soviet "peaceloving" image, so badly tarnished by the invasion of Czechoslovakia;
- to provide a new platform subscribed to by the Eastern European countries which gives an appearance of unity among them at this time, thus creating a more favourable atmosphere for the scheduled world conference of Communist parties in Moscow (from the point of view of some Pact members the declaration may be seen as providing grounds for a freer development of their relations with the West);

- to stimulate in the West the hope for a genuine relaxation of tension, with the aim of weakening the solidarity of the Alliance (the timing of the Warsaw Pact declaration may in part have been dictated by the forthcoming ministerial meeting in Washington);
- to create a more relaxed climate in Europe which could enable the Soviets to deal more freely with the situation on their frontier with Communist China.

24. The Soviets probably do not expect their call for a European conference to be taken more seriously now than in the past, in view of the unacceptability to the West of the preconditions set forth in the declaration. They no doubt hope to derive valuable propaganda advantages from it and to exploit Western reactions.

PART TWO

EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRY STUDIES

Poland

25. The invasion of Czechoslovakia caused few visible repercussions within Poland. Following the November Congress, and its endorsement of the tough line which had already been adopted by the Party at the time of the student disturbances in March 1968, Mr. Gomulka, with the backing of the Soviets, emerged still in control of the supreme organs of the Party. The bitterness of the internal disputes which lasted into the summer would seem to indicate, however, that the crisis of leadership has been merely swept under the carpet.

26. The Government re-shuffle which followed the Congress has, as expected, put a rubber stamp on the departure of Mr. Rapacki. He has been replaced by Mr. Jedrychowski, hitherto Chairman of the Planning Committee. The appointment, to top posts in this body, of persons with more pronounced reformist tendencies may reflect the Party's concern to embark on the re-adaptation, up to a point, of the country's economic structures.

Bulgaria

27. In Bulgaria, the Party Central Committee, at its plenary meeting in November, "summed up the situation resulting from the events in Czechoslovakia". The upshot has been a general tightening up of Party ideology.

28. A Government reshuffle in December 1968 was designed, inter alia, to increase Party control over the economic machine, a step which was tied to the economic reforms of a relatively limited nature on which the régime has been engaged for some time.

Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany

29. In the Soviet Zone, the signs of protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia were on a scale unknown for the past fifteen years. There is no indication of a major force for change, either in the population at large or within the Party apparatus. The high rate of economic growth in the Zone continues.

Hungary

30. Achieved, despite some differences of opinion within the Party, the Hungarian leadership's loyalty to Soviet policy in the invasion of Czechoslovakia was the condition for continuation of the moderate policy which is a feature of the régime and the economic reforms (the results of which are not impressive). After a period of silence which had lasted since 21st August, the Hungarian leaders in October confirmed their attachment to a line midway between dogmatism and revisionism.

Rumania

31. In Rumania, where the leadership is engaged in rallying the support of the nation for its resistance to the Soviets, the régime remains as orthodox as ever. Where progress is apparent in the economic, social and cultural fields it is organised and closely controlled by the party. Mr. Ceausescu is steadily strengthening his grip over the political establishment. The recent creation of Councils of Minorities, under the control of the new United Socialist Front, is indicative of a slight departure from the policy of assimilation of non-Rumanian nationalities and is in keeping with the régime's desire to win their loyalty, particularly that of the Transylvanian Magyars.

Yugoslavia

32. The official condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia undoubtedly reflected the views of the Yugoslav population. One result of the crisis has been to rally public opinion behind the leadership and President Tito in particular.

33. The Congress of the Communist League which took place from 11th to 15th March confirmed the determination of the leadership to continue its policy of cautious liberalisation while retaining a firm hold on the reins and preserving the cohesion of the Federation.

34. The demonstrations which took place in Kosmet and Macedonia in the autumn of 1968 provided further evidence of deep dissatisfaction among the Albanians of Yugoslavia. Occurring at a time when the authorities had just completed their campaign to win over public opinion, these two incidents emphasized the gravity of the problem of nationalities and the danger that it could provide ammunition for foreign powers.

Czechoslovakia

35. Despite the obvious progress towards the re-establishment of a "normal" situation, Czechoslovakia has not become once again a people's democracy quite like the others. Political activity has retained some measure of freedom from total subjugation to a monolithic machine. While press censorship has been reintroduced, there is a certain undercurrent of liberty in the newspapers. The unions have just restated their determination to constitute an autonomous force.

36. In the atmosphere of relative stability which emerged after the controversy over the position of Smrkovsky and the tension which followed the public suicide of Jan Palach, the party leadership continues to steer a middle course between the demands of the extreme progressives and the attempts of the hard line conservatives to strengthen their position. Now in different stages of preparation is extensive new legislation connected with the economic reforms, some parts of which have been opposed by the Soviets in the past.

37. As for the future, it is difficult to foresee the level of liberalisation at which the régime will rest. The attitude of the Soviets in this context will be extremely important. Although it is fair to assume that they will exploit opportunities to undermine the position of the present moderate leadership and to strengthen that of the conservative old guard, the Russians appear, for the time being, to be content to work with the existing leaders.

38. A great deal will depend, too, on the determination shown by these leaders to defend certain of the post-January 1968 achievements and on the fund of confidence which they can preserve both among the people and even more in the Party.

39. Of equal importance for the future of the régime will be the outcome of the economic reforms and, in particular, the results of the controversy over the organization of enterprises.

Workers, Students and Intellectuals

40. The solidarity of the intellectuals, students and workers, for which the foreign invasion provided the mortar, has made a major contribution in Czechoslovakia to the defence of the reformist school of thought, but there has so far been no such development in the remainder of Eastern Europe.

41. While there is evidence within the camp of a certain identity of feelings between the intellectuals and groups of young people professing liberal ideas, it has been impossible so far to translate these common feelings into definite, concerted action.