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NOTES ON EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

AUGUST 20, 1968 10 p.m.

THOSE ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

The President
Secretary Rusk
General Wheeler
CIA Director Helms
The Vice President
Ambassador Ball
Walt Rostow
Leonard Marks
George Christian
Tom Johnson

SANITIZED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
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Secretary Rusk: This surprises me.

Secretary Clifford: It does me too.

General Wheeler: Ambassador Bohlen was uneasy about this.

CIA Director Helms: This was what their big meeting was about today.

Walt Rostow: The evidence is: (1) Withdrew Soviet's planes to Poland.
(2) Brought them back. (3) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (4) Maneuvers.

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

CIA Director Helms: On 14 August exercise started.

General Wheeler: Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and USSR Troops have moved in:

23 aircraft into Poland
50 aircraft into border area
50 aircraft entered Czechoslovakia

Walt Rostow: Aircraft: 50 in Czechoslovakia
18 in S. W. Poland
44 in central Poland

Prague domestic radio tells people not to resist.

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~~SECRET~~

The President: I asked you to come here because of the alarm of the last few hours. Ambassador Dobrynin called me late today with a very "urgent" message. He read from a long-hand note. (INSERT A)

I told him we would give it our attention. He said they were invading Czechoslovakia because the Czechs had asked them to come in.

I notified the Secretary of State and called this NSC meeting to analyze these actions and try to determine what our national interest is.

It is one country invading another Communist country. It is aggression. There is danger in aggression anywhere.

We need to give immediate thought to timing of meeting with Soviets. The agenda is more full now than before. We must discuss all problems before us. Is October agreeable or should we meet earlier.

There are serious questions: (1) Can we talk now after this. (2) Does our presence look as though we condone this movement.

It demonstrates the difficulty the platform committee has in working out strategy at the Hilton Hotel. What do we do?

Secretary Rusk: First, I am surprised by the timing of this action. I am disappointed, particularly in light of their favorable messages on (1) nuclear explosion (2) strategic missile talks (3) your meeting. This shows they hold the USA in contempt.

Walt Rostow: Read FBIS 07 Bulletin (INSERT B)

Secretary Rusk: We do not know yet if the Czechs will raise a voice. There is not a great deal we can do if they don't. We could support the Czechs in the United Nations and through USIA. If we do they can put pressure on the West, particularly Berlin. Krushchev called Berlin the testicles of the West and when he wanted to create pressure he squeezed there.

Secretary Rusk: Draft reply to Dobrynin read.

We have a public problem as well. We must decide what moral force and political force we should bring to bear. The big question is what the Czech reaction will be. I would not move ahead in next day or so.

The President: We should talk to Dobrynin tonight.

Secretary Rusk: For the press to know I call him in to give him our views it will be good to position ourselves publicly.

~~SECRET~~

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~~SECRET~~

Walt Rostow: There are two points in Rusk's statement.

The President: I am amazed that Dobrynin told me it was at the request of the Czech government and the Czech government was never told.

We must talk to him about the other announcement.

The President: We reviewed information and information given by Ambassador Dobrynin.

The President instructed Rusk to ask Dobrynin in to discuss this matter. The Secretary could say:

- (a) Astonished at this news.
- (b) Not opportune time to make announcement tomorrow.

Tell allies we are dismayed and outline what should be anticipated.

Secretary Clifford: They had first meeting. It seemed to go well. They had a meeting of the Warsaw Pact countries.

I am not clear as to the reason the Soviets took this action.

The President: We have been fearful that they lost so much face they had to return. They could not stand to move in until the other ducks were in a row.

CIA Director Helms: It is not what has happened but what has not happened. They wanted to see if the Czechs would clamp down on the press. They did not.

The President: Wasn't this hard to swallow?

CIA Director Helms: Yes. Military exercises were designed to see how the troops could move in.

The President: Should the Secretary talk to Dobrynin tonight?

CIA Director Helms: Yes.

Secretary Clifford: Czechoslovakia is just one piece on the chessboard. This march will have effects on Poland, Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary. We must visualize what effect this will have on other countries.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Secretary Clifford: I agree we have to speak to Dobrynin. We have to delay this announcement.

The President: This seems strange in light of (a) peaceful uses of atomic energy and (b) the scheduled Geneva meeting. (c) The scheduled Geneva announcement. Then this bombshell.

Secretary Clifford: It may be that Supreme Soviet rumblings caused this.

Ambassador Ball: They have been concerned about the internal structure of the Warsaw Pact and about not destroying the relationship with the United States.

This occurred just before the Democratic convention, just as Hungarian invasion occurred before election.

We can't be idle in the United Nations about this.

General Wheeler: There is no military action we can take. We do not have the forces to do it.

This approach is cynical to the Nth degree. They have had CPX exercise and troops on the border. I think this message is an insult to the United States.

They say keep your hands off.

Dean (Secretary Rusk) should say the future course of US-USSR relations depends on how this is handled.

The President: A. Do we send for him? B. Do we say no announcement? C. Do we say we are utterly dismayed by it. D. Cannot reconcile his statement with other statements we've received.

Secretary Rusk: Czechoslovakia is 3rd arms supplier to Vietnam.

General Wheeler: That is because they were told to.

Secretary Clifford: Bug gets to the heart of this matter. They may be sincerely conciliatory. Suppose there is no combat. Suppose there is a pullout. They had a lot of troops in there two weeks ago.

The President: I sympathize with General Wheeler's views. We do not have to say what we feel. 1. Call in Dobrynin. 2. Tell him we won't make announcement. 3. Tell him we asked Council to meet.

The Vice President: We need to show caution. The Czechs touched the heart of the Communist revolution. All you can do is snort and talk.

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Your plan is right. We are in a more delicate situation than at the time of Hungary because of the developing relations with the USSR.

Ambassador Ball: What do we do effectively. What do we do publicly. We have a bad family problem. We may look like a paper tiger.

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11:10 a.m.
President's Office

THOSE PRESENT:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

Draft statement read.

Secretary Rusk: I told the Soviet Ambassador last night we could not reconcile statements.

George Christian: I prefer the tougher statement.

Secretary Rusk: The Czech mission at the U.N.

The President: Ambassador Ball has been instructed to join with other nations in the United Nations and vigorously express our protest of this unwarranted action. And to insist upon the Charter rights.

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LISTING OF ATTENDEES AT 589th NSC MEETING

The President

The Vice President

Secretary Rusk
Ambassador Ball

General Wheeler

CIA Director Helms

USIA Director Marks

Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

SERVICE SET