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The Soviet Position in Eastern Europe after Czechoslovakia

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THE SOVIET POSITION IN EASTERN EUROPE AFTER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czechoslovakia's dramatic and unexpected evolution toward a pluralistic society in 1968 revealed to Moscow the extent to which the existing order in Eastern Europe is vulnerable to popular pressures for liberalization. Although Moscow resorted to invasion and occupation to eliminate the threat, the results have not measured up to its expectations.

In Czechoslovakia, the minimum goals of the occupation have probably been met. The danger that Prague would gradually drift out of the Soviet orbit and into that of the West, with intolerable consequences for the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, has been eliminated.

Moscow has not, however, been able to replace the reformist Czechoslovak leadership with a puppet regime. It has adjusted to the situation by continually forcing the Czechoslovak leaders to make concessions that it hopes will in the long run obliterate the reforms of 1968. Moscow probably would like eventually to bring about the downfall of the present Prague regime with a minimum risk of popular upheaval, but the path of further developments is still unsure.

Beyond Czechoslovakia, the invasion served to add impetus to existing centrifugal tendencies. Albania and Yugoslavia have turned, respectively, to China and the West for support against Moscow. Rumania has also made quiet approaches to the West and has resisted Soviet pressures. Even among the loyal "allies," the present leaders have lost prestige internally because of their participation in the invasion.

Moscow is now using both bilateral and multilateral pressures to tighten its control of its "allies." The Soviets look to the Warsaw Pact and CEMA organizations as the means of strengthening their institutional ties with the East Europeans. To date, however, Moscow has made little progress, and differing national interests will probably add to the difficulties that must be overcome.

PRELUDE TO INVASION

Beginning in January 1968, events in Czechoslovakia slowly opened the Soviet leaders' eyes to the fact that all was not well in Eastern Europe. There is little evidence that Moscow before that time perceived any serious threat to its interests in the area. Rumania was, of course, an annoyance, but hardly more than that. Bucharest, for all its ostentatious demonstrations of independence and only marginal participation in the affairs of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance (CEMA), had been careful to avoid any suggestion that it would break completely with the "socialist camp." There could be no talk of a "threat to socialism" in Rumania, where moves toward liberalization were barely under way and were under the complete control of the party. As for the two Balkan heretics, nonaligned Yugoslavia and pro-Chinese Albania, Moscow gave every sign of having accepted their independence as an established fact, albeit with bad grace.

It was clearly appreciated in Eastern Europe that for geopolitical and ideological reasons there were limits to what Moscow would consider tolerable behavior. For those parties and individuals inclined to experiment, however, there was room to do so, particularly in the economic sphere. Certainly, Moscow was reluctant to revert to outright repression to ensure total conformity when this seemed unnecessary and would have jeopardized its efforts to establish a working relationship with the West.

Soviet tolerance, along with the growing self-confidence of the East European leaders—the latter a function of the apparent erosion of any serious domestic threat to Communist rule—resulted in a modest resurgence of national assertiveness among Moscow's European allies. This tendency was by no means limited to reformist or nationalistic regimes, such as the Hungarian or

Rumanian. Even East Germany's Ulbricht felt free to take stands that were not always strictly in accord with those of the Soviets. The Czechoslovak reformers were doubtless both inspired by the success of other reformers, particularly in Hungary, and encouraged by the conviction that the Soviets could be persuaded to accept liberalization—or at least to refrain from taking action to block it.

If the Czechoslovaks failed to judge the limits of Soviet tolerance, the Soviets also seriously misread the political climate within Czechoslovakia and the character of the new generation of leaders that came to power in January. This was illustrated by Soviet party leader Brezhnev's refusal to intervene on behalf of the beleaguered Novotny and his endorsement of Dubcek, when he went to Prague in December, 1967, as one of several acceptable successors.

Soviet confidence in the new leaders, however, diminished rapidly. The Dubcek leadership, largely to put pressure on its conservative opponents, loosened the restrictions under which the Czechoslovak information media had operated. The resultant tide of reformist and liberal sentiment, which found expression both in the press and through the activities of spontaneously organized—and often predominantly non-Communist—pressure groups, in turn swept the official leadership along in its wake. The result was a dramatic and apparently irrevocable shift toward a pluralistic society that threatened ultimately to carry Czechoslovakia away from its association with the other East Europeans and with the Soviet Union.

The threat to Soviet interests was not limited to Czechoslovakia. Polish student demonstrations in April, although quickly suppressed by the government, proved that the Czechoslovaks had would-be emulators in other Eastern

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Meeting at Bratislava: Kosygin (USSR), Zhivkov (Bulgaria), Svoboda (Czechoslovakia), Brezhnev (USSR), Gomulka (Poland), Ulbricht (East Germany), Dubcek (Czechoslovakia).

**Main Points of the
BRATISLAVA AGREEMENT
3 August 1968**

European countries. Even the neo-Stalinist East German regime was not wholly immune to the Czechoslovak virus. East German officials reacted with typically exaggerated alarm to weak and scattered instances of dissent throughout the summer of 1968.

Once the Czechoslovak leaders had proven their unwillingness or, more probably, their inability to fulfill the terms of the Cierna and Bratislava agreements of 3 August, Moscow could see no palatable alternative to intervention. Bluster and threat clearly had proven to be ineffective, even when backed by Soviet troops massed on the Czechoslovak frontiers. With the risk of Western intervention and the possibility of Czechoslovak resistance judged to be minimal, the die was cast.

MIXED RESULTS OF THE INVASION

Moscow probably calculated that the mere presence of Soviet troops would be enough to sweep away the Czechoslovak reformers and their works, but these assumptions went awry. The

- Support, consolidations, and protection of (socialist) gains...is a common internationalist duty of all socialist countries.
- ...consolidate the leading role of the working class and its vanguard, the Communist parties.
- Unbending loyalty of Marxism-Leninism...and irreconcilable struggle against bourgeois ideology and all antisocialist forces.
- ... (not to) allow anyone to drive a wedge between socialist states or undermine the foundations of the socialist social system.
- ...deepen the all-around cooperation of their countries...



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Moscow's would-be collaborators, cowed by the unanimity and vehemence of the popular

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opposition to the invasion, came forward one by one to deny any complicity and retired—for the moment—from the political stage. The legitimate leaders, who had been spirited off to Moscow by Soviet officials within hours of the occupation of Prague, were buoyed by the demonstrations of popular support and adamantly turned down Soviet demands for changes within their ranks. Moreover, they refused to sanction the invasion by issuing a public statement that socialism in Czechoslovakia had been threatened by a counter-revolution.

Faced with the unexpected intransigence of the Czechoslovaks and an anticipated—but still unwelcome—wave of international condemnation, Moscow declined to impose an occupation government at bayonet point. Instead, it took the embarrassing step of dealing with the leaders whom its press had just denounced as “counter-revolutionaries” and “traitors.” This decision was doubtless influenced by the probability that a puppet government could not be installed without converting into a bloodbath what had been a remarkably bloodless occupation.



After signing the Status of Forces Agreement: (from left) Kuznetsov, Svoboda, Kosygin, and Gustav Husak.

The Soviets did, however, succeed in extorting concessions from the hard-pressed Czechoslovak leaders. These were formalized in the Moscow Agreement of 26 August, which the Czechoslovaks were forced to sign before being allowed to return home. This agreement committed the Czechoslovaks to enforce the provisions of the Cierna and Bratislava agreements and bound them to “coordinate” their policies with the Soviets. In effect, the agreement was aimed at the heart of the liberal Czechoslovak Action Program. In return, the Soviets promised to withdraw their troops once the “threat to socialism” had passed.

THE FORMS OF SOVIET PRESSURE

The “agreements” forced on Prague in August still serve as Moscow’s goals for Czechoslovakia, as the Czechoslovaks are regularly reminded. The Soviets have moved slowly, however, in their application of pressure to gain compliance. The Soviet troops, whose presence was belatedly legitimized in the “temporary” status of forces agreement of 16 October, have stayed on. Despite rumors of an early partial or complete

Main Points of the MOSCOW COMMUNIQUE 26 August 1969

...the main thing in the present situation is to carry out the mutual decisions adopted in Cierna nad Tisou and the provisions and principles formulated by the Bratislava conference...as well as to implement consistently the practical steps (agreed upon).

...improving the methods of guiding society...and strengthening the socialist system on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.

Agreement...on measures aimed at the speediest normalization of the situation in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

...the withdrawal of (Soviet) troops from (Czechoslovak) territory as the situation in Czechoslovakia normalizes.

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withdrawal, Moscow is not satisfied that the conditions that led to the invasion have been removed.

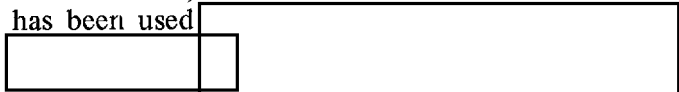
These troops number some 40,000 to 50,000 men, down from the original invading force—including “allied” contingents—of about 300,000.



role as occupation forces. Their garrison areas, near large Czechoslovak population centers, also have been chosen with an eye to permitting quick and decisive intervention should this be judged necessary, a fact that has not been lost on the Czechoslovak leaders.

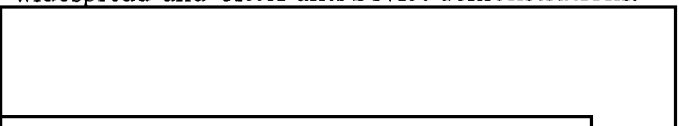
Although Moscow has made an effort to minimize frictions with the Czechoslovak popu-

lace by keeping most of its troops out of large urban centers, the threat of a “second invasion” has been used



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The most recent example occurred in late March, after the victory of the Czechoslovak national hockey team over the Soviets sparked widespread and bitter anti-Soviet demonstrations.



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The threat was sufficient to spur the Czechoslovak party presidium to announce the reimposition of censorship over the press—blamed by the Soviets for instigating the riots—and to promise a crack-down on the alleged “organizers” of the riots.

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It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the Czechoslovaks, even now, will carry out their pledges. Similar but less far-reaching promises were made under virtually identical

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circumstances [redacted]

rank and file party members whom they encountered, but there can be little doubt that their bluster and blandishments have had some influence on some career-minded Czechoslovak officials. On the Czechoslovak side, virtually every top-level, and many middle-level officials have made the pilgrimage to Moscow. Here again, it is probable that the exposure to Soviet pressure and inducements has been partly responsible for the visible trend toward fence-straddling among many Czechoslovak officials.

Moscow undoubtedly is aware that the quickest and most effective solution to the problem would be a forced purge of the party and state leadership at all levels. The same considerations that led it to forgo the installation of an out-and-out occupation regime in August, however, continue to militate against this step.

Instead, Moscow has adopted the slower and more indirect tactic of attempting to undermine the "liberals" by eroding their support at the local level. One of the major purposes of the official delegations that have shuttled constantly between Czechoslovakia and the USSR has been to establish contacts with lower level Czechoslovak officials in the party, state, and military hierarchies.

On the Soviet side, the delegation led by central committee secretary Konstantin Katushev, which was in Czechoslovakia from 27 December to 10 January, and the later one led by CPSU politburo member Arvid Pelshe are particularly notable. Katushev was accompanied by a coterie of local and regional Soviet party officials who made contact with their Czechoslovak counterparts in virtually every area of the country during their two-week stay. The delegation of the CPSU Control Commission led by Pelshe, which visited Czechoslovakia from 27 February to 12 March, had much the same composition and followed the same practice.

It is difficult to measure the degree of success these delegations have had in influencing the

The resurgence of pro-Soviet conservatives at higher levels in the Czechoslovak leadership since last November is in large part a result of these efforts. The retention of such old-line Novotnyites as Alois Indra and Milan Jakes in the leadership of the Czechoslovak party reportedly stems from Moscow's insistence. Moreover, by refusing to permit the convening of a Czechoslovak party congress, Moscow has ruled out the possibility of a liberal drive to oust the members of the pro-Soviet minority faction. Soviet military officers and diplomatic officials openly consult with the members of this faction at meetings of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Friendship Society, which serves as a principal organizational stronghold of

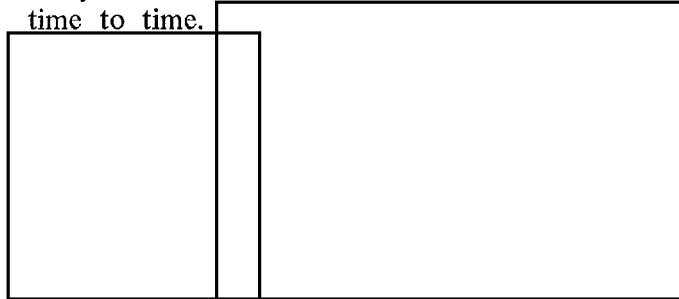


First Secretary Dubcek, Premier Cernik, and Slovak party leader Husak boarding plane for Moscow in October 1968.

the conservatives. Although Soviet support has not enabled these elements to seize power, it is certainly responsible for their continued existence as an organized faction, bereft as they are of popular support.

Moscow can have little hope of swinging popular opinion to the side of its conservative allies, but it does have a good prospect of eroding the popularity of the Dubcek leadership. Czechoslovak liberals unanimously fear that the concessions which the liberal leaders have been compelled to make over the past months will convert the support of the public—their main prop—to apathy, thus opening the way for a conservative drive for power within the narrow confines of the party. The growing disillusionment with the leadership that is evident among students and workers indicates that this hope may bear fruit in the long run.

Semyenov—who have been on the scene from time to time.



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HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS MOSCOW BEEN?

At this stage, Moscow probably believes that the minimum objectives of the invasion have been achieved. The Czechoslovak press, although still the most outspoken in Eastern Europe, has toned down since the days before the invasion. If the new censorship regulations are enforced, it will be even more circumspect in the future.

On the other hand, Moscow cannot count the invasion as an unqualified success, even in Czechoslovakia itself. The Dubcek faction in the leadership still refuses to concede defeat and until now has managed to maintain a measure of unity and to evade full compliance with Soviet demands. Although the “realists” in the leadership are more promising from the Soviet point of view, there is no indication that Moscow has any great faith in their reliability.

The post-invasion career of Gustav Husak, the Slovak party chief, is illustrative of Moscow’s difficulties in finding suitable collaborators. On the one hand, Husak has reimposed party controls on his Slovakian fief and is usually considered to be among the opponents of liberalization. On the other, there are reports that Husak recently aligned himself with the moderates in opposition to Soviet demands for changes in the Czechoslovak leadership.

Pending an anticipated turnover in the Czechoslovak leadership, Moscow exercises a close and careful scrutiny of its activities through the Soviet Embassy and various special representatives—notably First Deputy Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov and, most recently, Defense Minister Grechko and Deputy Foreign Minister

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Moreover, Moscow is dissatisfied with the lack of progress in re-establishing party control over the students and the workers, two groups still agitating in favor of further liberalization measures. Last week, under Soviet pressure, the police were granted new powers, which may have some effect, and Moscow undoubtedly believes that with time the strength of these pressure groups will dissipate. It cannot, however, consider the situation in Czechoslovakia stabilized until they have been eliminated as independent factors on the political scene.

THE EFFECT ON EASTERN EUROPE

Beyond Czechoslovakia, the results of the invasion have been even more mixed, and in many ways have furthered the trend toward disunity. The Soviets probably expected that the blow against Czechoslovakia would support their efforts to reimpose discipline on their other allies.

Certainly, the tenor of Soviet propaganda in the weeks after the invasion seemed in part designed to create a psychological atmosphere of threat. This was particularly true of the doctrine of "limited sovereignty," which was elaborated at great length in a landmark Pravda article on 26 September and has since been justified in various leadership speeches. The "doctrine" tacitly grants socialist states, e.g., the Soviet Union, the right to intervene in defense of socialism. It was probably originated as a rationale for the Czechoslovak invasion, but it has been exploited to create fears of Soviet intervention in other Eastern European countries.

Despite the threatening posture adopted by Moscow after August, however, the most immediate effect of the invasion was to heighten the tendency toward fragmentation in Eastern Europe. Albania and Yugoslavia denounced both the invasion and the doctrine of limited sovereignty in bitter terms, and have turned to Mos-

cow's enemies for help in defending their independence against a possible Soviet threat.

Albania, after renouncing its formal membership in the Warsaw Pact in September, has made an ostentatious display of its alliance ties with China and has asked for—and received, to a limited extent—military assistance from that quarter. Yugoslavia, although not dropping its posture of nonalignment, has made known its determination to resist attack and has quietly stepped up diplomatic and low-level military consultations and cooperation with the Western powers. In March, Belgrade even made approaches to China, still its most bitter ideological enemy, dispatching a trade mission to Peking and signing a trade agreement.

Rumania, which is most clearly threatened by the new Soviet mood, decided that the best defense was a good offense. It has played up its independence in an effort to convince Moscow that the price for stern measures would be higher than in the Czechoslovak case. In addition to consulting quietly with the Western powers, the Rumanians have established an even closer relationship with the Yugoslavs, most recently dramatized by the February meeting between Tito and Ceausescu in Timisoara.

The Soviets have hardly strengthened their position, even with the four collaborators in the

... "It is known, comrades, that there are common laws governing socialist construction, a deviation from which might lead to a deviation from socialism as such. When the internal and external forces hostile to socialism seek to revert the development of any socialist country toward the restoration of the capitalist order, when a threat to the cause of socialism in that country, a threat to the security of the socialist Communist as a whole, emerges, this is no longer only a problem of the people of that country but also a common problem, concern for all socialist states."

General Secretary Brezhnev at the
Polish Communist Party Congress—12 November 1968



Hungarian leader Kadar is met in Kiev by Brezhnev and Kosygin.

invasion of Czechoslovakia. The pro-Soviet leaderships in these countries lost prestige because of their complicity in the invasion. In Hungary, which participated only reluctantly, the liberal leadership's reassertion of its intention to proceed with reforms has drawn the attention of the Soviets. Moscow reportedly warned Budapest

against carrying its liberal "New Economic Mechanism" too far.

In Poland, where the Gomulka government reportedly was one of the most ardent proponents of intervention, the Soviets have cause for concern. The threat to the leadership at the October congress of the Polish party was real enough to draw a ringing endorsement of Gomulka from Brezhnev, who led the Soviet delegation to Warsaw. Although the serious threat to Gomulka's position collapsed—and in any event, did not have liberal origins—the urge to put a humanistic face on socialism and the possibility that the latent anti-Russian sentiment of the Polish people might find expression in a leadership change is enough to give Moscow the jitters.

The Soviet position remains relatively solid only in East Germany and Bulgaria, where the regimes are dependent on Soviet political or economic support. In Bulgaria, there are reports of growing dissatisfaction with the Zhivkov government's excessive subservience to Moscow. There



Yugoslav President Tito is welcomed to Bucharest by Rumanian leader Ceausescu.

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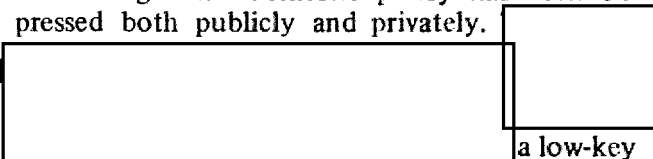
have even been some reports of coolness in the Moscow-Pankow relationship, with Ulbricht suspicious of Moscow's apparent willingness to deal with Bonn over his head. Their dependency ensures the loyalty of the present pro-Soviet leaderships in these two countries, but disruptions in these relations brought about by the differing national interests of each country are likely to increase.

MOSCOW SEEKS TO HOLD THE BLOC TOGETHER

The Soviet leaders are undoubtedly aware of the limited achievements of the Czechoslovak intervention and the potential for future crisis in Eastern Europe. A well-defined effort to do something about it, however, is not yet apparent.

Relations with Yugoslavia now are cooler than at any time since the Khrushchev-engineered reconciliation in 1955. Soviet criticism of Yugoslav foreign and domestic policy has been expressed both publicly and privately.

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 a low-key but constant stream of polemical articles has poured from the press of both countries.

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No open economic sanctions have been directed against Belgrade. The Yugoslavs blame Moscow, however, probably with reason, for instigating or sanctioning Bulgarian irredentist propaganda aimed at Yugoslavia's Macedonian republic. Belgrade's charges that Moscow is trying to isolate Yugoslavia were given credibility by Moscow's forbidding its allies to attend the March congress of the Yugoslav party.

Since last fall, the Soviets have been pressing the Rumanians to host Warsaw Pact maneuvers on their soil. Bucharest has agreed "in principle," but

no firm agreement has yet been reached concerning the date, location, and types and numbers of forces to take part in an exercise. Recently, Bucharest has even seemed more confident of its ability to stall off the exercises, perhaps indefinitely.

In addition to bilateral pressures, Moscow has looked to the Warsaw Pact and CEMA for ways of tightening and multiplying institutional controls over the Eastern Europeans. Reports that Moscow would use "summit" meetings of the Warsaw Pact and CEMA to promote institutional changes that would further strengthen its control of its allies have been frequent since last year.

A summit meeting of the Warsaw Pact was finally held on 17 March, but it turned out to be the shortest such meeting on record. It produced only an appeal for a European security conference—largely a rehash of similar proposals issued in 1966 and 1967—and a communiqué referring to unspecified organizational changes in the Warsaw Pact. These amount to formal recognition of existing practices by the establishment of a Council of Defense Ministers and measures allowing for greater East European participation at the staff and command levels of the pact. Although it is possible that these changes will make dissent more difficult, they are unlikely to rule it out altogether, and it remains to be seen what the practical effect will be.

Developments in CEMA have been even more meager. An economic summit meeting of the CEMA states was first proposed at the Dresden Conference last March, but has yet to materialize. There is little doubt that the USSR would like to further some measure of economic integration for political purposes. The plethora of varying, and to some extent, contradictory proposals which are being publicly promoted by the East Europeans suggests, however, that Moscow has



yet to come to a decision. It is likely that Moscow, as well as the Eastern Europeans, is reluctant to give up the degree of economic sovereignty which meaningful integration would require, and a CEMA summit still seems relegated to the indefinite future.

and "progressive" regimes throughout the world which are currently inclined to cooperate with the Soviet Union. China is a more immediate concern than ever, and Moscow's interests world wide are affected by its conduct in Eastern Europe.

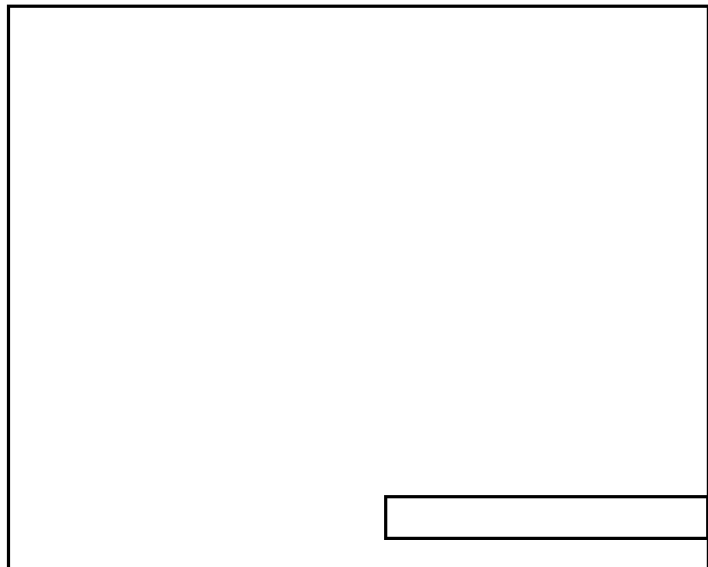
THE BALANCE SHEET

Despite its actions over the last year, Moscow has little to show for its efforts and little prospect at the present time of finding a long-range solution to its Eastern European problems. In the short run, the Soviet position is still strong enough, particularly while the Czechoslovak lesson is fresh, to slow down the disintegrative trends at work in Eastern Europe.

Although Moscow's international interests militate against the adoption of a policy of thoroughgoing repression, other factors hamper the adoption of any clearcut and consistent policy in Eastern Europe. Not least among these is the collegial nature of the Soviet leadership. In the absence of a paramount leader, policy is likely to fluctuate in response to shifting and transitory realignments within the Soviet leadership.

If its strength were ruthlessly applied, there can be no doubt that Moscow could suppress all dissension in Eastern Europe. This would, however, mean the installation of purely puppet regimes that would have to be perpetually backed by Soviet military force, a course Moscow is clearly unwilling to pursue.

Further, the considerations that have until now prevented Moscow from bringing its full weight to bear on the Eastern European dissidents will persist. For reasons of self-interest, Moscow is committed to maintaining at least a minimal working relationship with the West, particularly with its nuclear rival, the United States. Its credit with the West, however, would be virtually eliminated by a harsh policy of repression in Eastern Europe, as would the trust of the leftist



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