

DOCUMENT No. 93: Cable from Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko to the Kremlin on His Meeting with Alexander Dubček and Oldřich Černík, August 19, 1968

Source: AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 574, LI. 124-127.

Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia Stepan Chervonenko transmitted this cable to Moscow on August 19, shortly after meeting Alexander Dubček for the last time before the invasion. Chervonenko requested the meeting primarily in order to hand over the CPSU Politburo's final "letter of warning." The letter originally was supposed to have been delivered to the CPCz leadership on the morning of the 18th but Chervonenko obtained the Politburo's approval to wait until the evening of the 19th so that Dubček would pay less attention to its significance and there would be less risk of "sparking off premature actions by the rightist forces." The ambassador's account of the meeting suggests that both Dubček and Černík regarded the letter as nothing more than the latest in a long series of Soviet protests and complaints.

(See also Documents Nos. 88, 90.)

... Dubček said that no obligations of any sort had been undertaken at Čierna, and that there was an exchange of views there, during which certain plans and intentions had been laid out, including personnel matters, which should have remained known only to those who had spoken in private with one another. Now the CPSU CC Politburo is asking him to inform the members of the CPCz CC Presidium about the letter that Cde. Brezhnev sent confidentially to him, Dubček, on 16 August. This means that it will be regarded by party activists and by the people as interference in internal affairs.

... I responded that he, as a political leader, should not present the matter as "interference," since what is at issue is whether there will or will not be a struggle against the rightist danger as the main danger, that is, whether they will or will not fulfill the decisions of the May plenum of the CPCz CC, the agreement at Čierna, and the declaration signed at Bratislava. A struggle against the rightist danger requires concrete measures to be adopted against the purveyors and inspirers of the rightist course in the CPCz, and above all the rightist course in the CPCz leadership. ... I reminded him that he and others had several times linked Kriegerl, Císar, and others with a second center and with the rightists. Consequently, the personal side of things is an important part of the political line, since a political struggle against the rightists must be clear-cut and take a concrete form.

Dubček did not specify what sort of concrete steps and measures would be implemented in the struggle against rightist and anti-socialist forces. He said that they [in Moscow] do not trust him, and that no specific timeframe was set in Čierna for resolving any particular questions. At times he flared up and sputtered comments to the effect that "you want to restore Novotný or Novotný's methods."

Dubček said that in Moscow they do not understand that it is impossible to resolve problems that have been accumulating over a long period in just a week's time, and so forth.

I did not bother to argue any further because Dubček obviously had not made a realistic and concrete analysis of the situation in the ČSSR and did not reveal his plans and intentions. Černík was present, but he barely took part in the conversation. He was gloomy and only occasionally interjected remarks in a cold tone. Dubček said that on 20 August the letter would be considered by the CPCz CC Presidium and that an answer would be given later on.

DOCUMENT No. 94: Message from the CPSU CC Politburo to Members of the CPSU CC and Other Top Party Officials Regarding the Decision to Intervene in Czechoslovakia, August 19, 1968

Source: ÚSD, Sb. KV, ZIS 9; Vondrová & Navrátil, vol. 2, pp. 210-211.

The Soviet Politburo transmitted this communiqué to all leading officials in the CPSU's Central Committee apparatus and to the heads of republic, regional, and provincial party branches two days before the invasion. The document contains a vehement justification of the decision to "provide fraternal military assistance to the healthy forces in the CPCz," including a pledge that "the troops from our five countries will not interfere in the domestic affairs of fraternal Czechoslovakia." Senior party workers are instructed to use the same sorts of arguments when conducting "explanatory and mass political work among all segments of the public" after August 21. The need for a stepped-up campaign of "mass political work" is indicative of the unease that many Soviet leaders felt about the corrosive impact the invasion might have on the "cohesion of the party and the people" and on the "moral and political unity of Soviet society."

The number of officials who received the announcement was unusually large—a total of 663, including 350 from the CPSU Central Committee, 64 from the Central Auditing Commission, 75 from the union republic CC Secretariats, and 154 from the provincial and territorial party committees. No evidence has emerged that any of the recipients objected to the message, publicly or privately.

The message underscores the top-down character of Soviet decision-making. Although the Politburo was nominally accountable to the Central Committee, it was the Politburo that made all key decisions during the crisis and then informed other party organs.

TO: MEMBERS AND CANDIDATE MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CPSU

TO: MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL AUDITING COMMISSION OF THE CPSU

TO: SECRETARIES OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEES OF COMMUNIST PARTIES OF THE UNION REPUBLICS

TO: FIRST SECRETARIES OF PROVINCIAL (AND TERRITORIAL) PARTY COMMITTEES¹⁰⁹

The CPSU CC Politburo has systematically informed party activists about the situation in Czechoslovakia and about the emergence there of counterrevolutionary events that have endangered the socialist achievements of the Czechoslovak working people and the fate of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The CPSU CC Politburo, basing itself on the decisions of the April and July plenary sessions of the Central Committee, has used all possible political measures to influence the development of events in the ČSSR and to assist the healthy forces of the CPCz to sustain socialism and to prevent Czechoslovakia from moving into the imperialist camp.

In recent days events have assumed a most ominous character. The country was on the threshold of a counterrevolutionary coup.¹¹⁰ By relying on the overt and covert support of reactionary imperialist forces and by exploiting the levers they had seized to run society and the mass media, right-wing forces have attempted to force the party and government of Czechoslovakia to follow a pro-Western policy and return Czechoslovakia to a bourgeois republic. They did not receive the support of a majority in the CPCz CC Presidium, the National Assembly, or the government. Instead, a majority who wish to defend the cause of socialism and the cause of the working class, the peasantry, and the working intelligentsia, have appealed to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Polish People's Republic, the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the

¹⁰⁹ Provinces (*oblasti*) and territories (*kraja*) were administrative divisions in the USSR. Smaller divisions of this sort included autonomous regions (*avtonomnye okrugi*), cities (*goroda*), and urban districts (*raiony*).

¹¹⁰ An apparent reference to the forthcoming 14th Party Congress.

Hungarian People's Republic, and the German Democratic Republic with a request to give them military assistance in the struggle against counterrevolution.

The CPSU CC Politburo, having considered this appeal, has concluded that the moment has arrived to undertake active measures in defense of socialism in the USSR.

Our assessment and conclusions are shared unanimously and supported by the leadership of the fraternal parties and socialist countries: the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the Hungarian People's Republic, the German Democratic Republic, and the Polish People's Republic.

Guided by feelings of internationalist duty and fraternal solidarity, the governments of the five countries have ordered their military units to take all necessary measures on 21 August to help the Czechoslovak working people in their struggle against reactionary forces and to protect Czechoslovakia's security against the intrigues of imperialism.

We have undertaken this decisive step on the basis of a deep and unwavering conviction that it will fully meet the desires and interests of the working people, the peasants, the people's intelligentsia, and all our Czechoslovak brothers.

The troops of our countries will not interfere in the internal affairs of fraternal Czechoslovakia. They will be withdrawn from its territory as soon as the danger to the independence and security of Czechoslovakia and to the socialist future of the Czechoslovak people is eliminated.

Our enemies should be fully aware that no one can or will ever be allowed to disrupt the inviolability of the borders of the allied socialist countries, and that no one will ever be permitted to break a single link in the community of socialist states.

Give serious attention to explanatory and mass political work among all segments of the public in order to promote the further cohesion of the party and people and to strengthen the moral and political unity of Soviet society.

The CPSU CC Politburo

DOCUMENT No. 95: Ciphared Telegram from Andrei Gromyko to Soviet Embassies in Eastern Europe Transmitting the Joint Text of an Appeal to the Czechoslovak People's Army, August 19, 1968

Source: AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 127, D. 586, Ll. 33-35.

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko sent this telegram and its brief cover memorandum to the Soviet embassies in the four loyal East European countries on the day before troops were due to begin moving into Czechoslovakia. The cover memorandum directs the Soviet ambassadors in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Bulgaria to present the leader of the respective country with the text of an "Appeal to the Czechoslovak People's Army," issued in the name of the commander of the joint interventionary forces, Army-General Ivan Pavlovskii. The text of the "joint" appeal claims that the intervention is being conducted at the invitation of "the leaders of the Communist Party and Government of Czechoslovakia;" it calls on Czechoslovak soldiers to support "the joint efforts to defend the cause of socialism in Czechoslovakia," and exhorts them "not to give in to provocateurs, who would try to sow confusion and discord in the ranks of the defenders of socialism." First Secretaries Todor Zhivkov, Janos Kádár, Walter Ulbricht and Wladyslaw Gomulka all approved the brief appeal. It was released as planned two days later.

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OUTGOING CIPHERED TELEGRAM

Destination: Sofia, Budapest, Berlin, Warsaw

Addressee: The Soviet Ambassador

Pay a call on Cde. Zhivkov (Kádár, Ulbricht, Gomulka) and, as agreed at the meeting in Moscow on 18 August, transmit to him personally the text of an Appeal to the Czechoslovak People's Army issued in the name of the Commander of Forces of the Bulgarian People's Republic, Hungarian People's Republic, GDR, Polish People's Republic, and USSR. (The text of the Appeal is being transmitted to you in a separate telegram.)
Send a return telegram when you have carried out this task.

A. G.

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19.08.68.

OUTGOING CIPHERED TELEGRAM

Destination: Sofia, Budapest, Berlin, Warsaw

Addressee: The Soviet Ambassador