

WEST EUROPEAN SECURITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1968 SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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The invasion by Warsaw Pact forces on the night of August 20–21, 1968 deeply influenced life in Czechoslovakia and halted reforms in Czechoslovak society for more than twenty years. How were these events perceived in the West? Why did the West do nothing to stop it? What was the impact of the invasion on West European security? What were the consequences in mutual Euro-Atlantic relations?

US Bilateral Cooperation with the Soviet Union

During the Johnson Presidency, there had been a tendency to favor the pursuit of a policy of *détente* or bilateral cooperation with the Soviet Union at the expense of closer ties with NATO Allies. The Administration saw Soviet-American reconciliation as its ultimate goal. However, the political, military, and moral implications of Johnson's 'bridge building' at a time when the Soviet Union was the principal supplier of assistance to the American enemy in Vietnam was questionable.¹

¹ On Johnson's 'Bridge Building' Policy, see e.g. Andrzej MANIA, *Bridge Building: Polityka USA wobec Europy Wschodniej w latach 1961–1968* [Bridge Building: US Policy towards Eastern Europe in 1961–1968], Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1996.

The Johnson Administration appeared to have accepted the Soviet argument that American efforts to improve American relations with US Allies in Western Europe worked against attempts to achieve *détente* with the Soviets. A critical point was reached when the Administration chose to override objections of Western Europeans to the US-Soviet Union draft of the NPT in order to achieve rapprochement with the Soviet Union.² In order not to provoke the Soviet Union, Washington feared to show any marked support for the Czechoslovak reform movement.³

The United States's policy of bipolar cooperation was based on the assumption that the emergence of younger – and hopefully more pragmatic – leaders and the growing demand in the Soviet Union for more personal freedoms and consumer goods would lead to a reduction of mutual hostilities and suspicion, thus bringing forth a 'genuine *détente*.' Bipolar Soviet-American cooperation had, however, affected the security of Western Europe and, as a result, weakened the Alliance. This led to two ominous, although not necessarily contradictory, trends in Western Europe. One was the development of national nuclear defense outside the framework of the Alliance (e.g. France). The other was the bilateralization of relations on the part of America's other NATO Allies, including France and Italy, with the Soviet Union. Both these trends invited the risk of deflecting the Soviets from serious negotiations while playing one NATO ally against the other.

² Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) [Archive of West German Christian-Democratic Party], Bestand I-433187/3, Findley to Nixon, "Proposals to Strengthen Atlantic Community," September 9, 1968.

³ See e.g. Andrzej MANIA, *Bridge Building: Polityka USA wobec Europy Wschodniej w latach 1961–1968*, Chapter 5; and IBID, "Administracja L. B. Johnsona wobec agresji Układu Warszawskiego przeciw Czechosłowacji w 1968 roku [Johnson Administration and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of the Czechoslovakia, 1968]." In: *Z dziejów Europy Środkowej w XX. wieku*, Kraków 1997, pp. 227–246. According to some authors, the US 'hands-off' policy toward the Prague Spring only encouraged the Soviet Aggression towards the Czechoslovakia. See e.g. Jiří VALENTA, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia 1968. Anatomy of Decision*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. 132. See also Antonín BENČÍK, *Requiem za Pražské jaro* [Requiem for Prague Spring], Třebíč: Tempo, 1998, p. 96; Petr LUNÁK, *Západ. Spojené státy Západní Evropa ve studené válce* [West. United States and Western Europe in the Cold War], Praha: Libri, 1997, p. 224; and Karen DAWISHA, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 253–254.

The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia and *Détente*

For the United States, the most serious concerns at the time were the war in Vietnam and the situation in the Middle East. The most important issues were the long prepared negotiations on mutual strategic arms reductions with the Warsaw Pact and the associated Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁴

Johnson's policies towards Europe – both East and West – received a sharp setback following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia showed that the *détente* supposedly achieved in the years preceding the invasion was an illusion. It also exposed as unfounded the widespread notion that Soviet Communism had fundamentally changed and that its regime had become more liberal.

The negotiations on mutual strategic arms reductions and the associated NPT were priorities that prevailed also in the United States' 'hands-off' approach to Czechoslovak events. The Prague Spring and its violent suppression was, from the US perspective, diminutive in its international political importance. For this reason, the United States shared not only the Soviet interest in quick 'normalization', but also preferred the further continuity of the pre-invasion cooperation with the Soviets.

From a military point of view, the Soviet military performance was very efficient. From a political standpoint, of course, it could hardly have been worse. On the whole, however, the Soviet Union succeeded in keeping the total political cost of their action rather lower than might have been expected.

Only in relation to the Communist parties outside the Soviet block had the setback been severe. The reaction of the Communist Parties was dictated, in general, by national circumstances or the degree of fealty to Moscow or Peking. Only the strong Western Communist Parties reacted with overwhelming opposition to the invasion. The realization of the planned November conference of Communist Parties was questioned and

⁴ USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union signed Non-Proliferation Treaty on July 1, 1968. China and France stayed outside the treaty that time, but expressed their readiness to obey its statutes. On negotiations on mutual strategic arms reductions, see National Academy of Sciences, Committee on International Security and Arms Control, *Nuclear Arms Control. Background and Issues*, Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1985, pp. 24–58.

could not finally serve fully Soviet intentions in developing a new pro-Soviet, anti-Chinese front.⁵

However, there was a good reason to think that the Kremlin leaders had calculated this price in advance and had consciously decided that for a post – revolutionary empire, the loss of the remnants of its revolutionary halo in the outside world was a lesser evil than the progressive loss of the Soviet Union’s own cohesion and discipline.⁶

A free world reaction to the events in Czechoslovakia had been almost universally critical. The public in most West European countries reacted with shock and horror. There were demonstrations against the Soviet Embassies. Although the Soviets liked to regard the Czechoslovak affair as an essentially internal business and would like to see the rest of the world concur, even the great majority of the Third World governments made official statements voicing disapproval of the Soviet action. Events in Czechoslovakia tarnished the Soviet image as an enemy of imperialism and champion of democracy, which the Soviet Union sought to create for itself in Africa and Asia.⁷

According to the CIA, the invasion of Czechoslovakia was viewed as a result of Soviet fear concerning its hold over Eastern Europe. In this respect, the calculations of profit and loss were generally secondary in a Soviet international policy and it was the preservation of the *status quo* in Eastern Europe that had overridden any Soviet urge that Moscow might have had to seek advantage in limited accommodations with the non-Communist world.⁸

⁵ Thompson Gale Declassified Documents Reference System (<www.gale.com>) [online], URL<<http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb/...img+574804+++czechoslovakia:text>> [2001-11-05], CIA Intelligence Memorandum “World Communist Reaction to the Invasion,” September 9, 1968. On Soviet-Chinese Relations in 1968/1969, see Raymond L. GARTHOF, *Détente and Confrontation. American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985, pp. 200–213; and Richard WICH, *Sino-Soviet Crisis Politics: A study of Political Change and Communication*, Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: distributed by Harvard University Press 1980, pp. 123–124.

⁶ See e.g. Richard LOWENTHAL, *Sparrow in the Cage*, type-written copy available at Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [Archive of West German Social-Democratic Party], Willy-Brandt-Archiv, Nachlaß Egon Bahr, 1/EBAA000298, p. 48.

⁷ Thompson Gale Declassified Documents Reference System (<www.gale.com>) [online], URL<<http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb/...img+575289+++czechoslovakia:text>> [2001-11-05], CIA Intelligence Memorandum “The USSR’s International Position After Czechoslovakia,” September 19, 1968.

⁸ Thompson Gale Declassified Documents Reference System (<www.gale.com>) [online], URL<<http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb/...img+575289+++czechoslovakia:text>> [2001-11-05], CIA Intelligence Memorandum “The USSR’s International Position After Czechoslovakia,” September 19, 1968.

In contrast to the American policy of preference for bipolar cooperation and *détente* with the Soviet Union over Allied cohesion, it was obvious that the Soviets preferred the cohesion and solidarity of their block and that they were willing to risk good relations with the United States in order to achieve it. The policy of bipolar cooperation at the expense of Western Europe had also not resulted in the modification of Soviet behavior or the lessening of hostility of Soviet ideology.

The invasion also revealed that the Warsaw Pact had to be viewed, as the Chairman of the House Republican Task Force on NATO and the Atlantic Community Representative, Paul Findley, put it, as “probably better organized and more effective than NATO in respect to military, political, and intelligence gathering operations.” The Warsaw Pact’s conventional forces and arms in important categories were “superior to those of NATO,” he further noted.⁹ The invasion of Czechoslovakia also demonstrated that Western Europe was still incapable of defending itself without massive US assistance, as the French *force de frappe* appeared to be too weak to be an effective continental deterrent.

An equally disturbing option for the United States was the Soviet belief that US-USSR relations would not be materially set back by the invasion.¹⁰ Instead of persuading the Soviets that a policy of exacerbating all instabilities in the Middle East and Europe was inconsistent with a relaxation of tensions of a *détente*, President Johnson preferred to believe that any temporary easing of Soviet harshness represented some fundamental change in Soviet attitudes. Johnson’s attitude might have been influenced to a great extent by his great wish to end the war in Vietnam, possibly also with the Soviet ‘help.’¹¹ Such a policy, however, was beneficial to the Soviets. As Paul Findley

⁹ Quoted from ACDP, Bestand I-433187/3, Findley to Nixon, “Proposals to Strengthen Atlantic Community,” September 5, 1968.

¹⁰ For US-Soviet relations during the summer of 1968, see e.g. Beneth KOVRIG, *Of Walls and Bridges. The United States and the Eastern Europe*, New York: New York University Press, 1991, pp. 112–113; and Rudolf G. PIKHOYA, “Chekhoslovakiya, 1968 god. Vzglyad iz Moskvy [Czechoslovakia, 1968. View from Moscow],” In: *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, 1/1995, pp. 34–48.

¹¹ See Karel DURMAN, *Útěk od praporů* [Runaway from Banners], Praha: Karolinum, 1998, p. 99. For the influence of the Vietnam War on the US-USSR relations, see also Vít FOJTEK, “NATO po invazi vojsk Varšavské smlouvy do Československa [NATO in the Aftermath of the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia],” In: *Mezinárodní politika*, 9/2001, pp. 9–13; and Walter LAFEBER, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945–1966*, New York–London: McGraw-Hill, 1991, pp. 218–219.

commented, “[t]his created the impression in Moscow that the risks of any course (aid to Vietnam, invasion of Czechoslovakia) [could] always be limited by some superficial gestures (such as agreeing to arms control talks, visiting the UN or inviting President Johnson to the Soviet Union) to recover its dwindling prestige.”¹²

The New Military Situation in Europe

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies and the continuing occupation of the country had significantly altered the balance of power in Central Europe. The continent was confronted with a new and serious military situation. The former *status quo* had been changed. There were several hundred thousand Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia and substantial additional Soviet forces along the NATO West German border in Bavaria. This represented a larger presence of military forces in Central Europe than at any time since World War II. There was no assurance that the Warsaw Pact forces would soon return to their previous deployment. The concern about eventual Soviet pressure against Romania and Yugoslavia also raised anew the issue of Mediterranean security, where a Soviet naval presence had increased since June 1968.

The stationing of over half a million Soviet soldiers in Czechoslovakia gravely menaced European peace and freedom and intensified the Soviet threat to West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany. Even during the Czechoslovak Crisis and after the invasion, the German question remained the most volatile issue. Washington maintained that the Warsaw Pact invasion might have been sparked by the demands of East German and Polish communist leaders Walter Ulbricht and Władysław Gomułka, respectively, who were afraid that Czechoslovakia might be moving too close to Bonn, which, consequently, might lead to the isolation of the German Democratic Republic.¹³

West Germany was the country most directly affected by the Soviet move in Czechoslovakia and the invasion deeply shocked all West Germans. For that reason, already on August 25, West German Chancellor, Kurt Kiesinger,

¹² Quoted from ACDP, Bestand I-433187/3, Findley to Nixon, “Proposals to Strengthen Atlantic Community,” September 5, 1968.

¹³ *Ibid.*

devised a NATO summit to deal with what could have been done after the invasion.¹⁴ Already before the invasion, Chancellor Kiesinger had desperately urged to avoid anything that Moscow could have seen as provocation. Again two days after the invasion, he stated before the weekly meeting of the governing coalition, the so called *Dienstagskreis*, that the “hitherto policy of *détente* and building of European Peace order should continue.”¹⁵

The forward position of many additional Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe had contributed to an increase in West Germany’s willingness to provide more money for defense and to press further on European integration, including British entry into the Common Market Agreement. Although West Germany’s move in this direction was hesitant and as yet inconclusive, it was more positive than ever before and clearly marked a waning of the influence of de Gaulle’s France. However, President Johnson’s willingness to start missile talks with the Soviets after the invasion was considered in Bonn as placing in doubt the judgment and good sense of West German leaders in pressing for increases in defense spending. Reports on strategic arms talks with the Soviets, at whatever level held, were a real worry in West Germany.¹⁶

The Soviet Propaganda Campaign against West Germany and West Berlin

In July, August, and mid-September 1968, there had been a series of menacing Soviet statements regarding West Germany and West Berlin. The

¹⁴ “Ministerialdirigend Heipertz, Prag, an das Auswärtige Amt,” August 28, 1968, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPBD) 1968, Band II: 1. Juli bis 31. Dezember* [Documents to Foreign Policy of the Federal Republic of Germany 1968, Volume II: July 1 to December 31], München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999, p. 1057.

¹⁵ According to Protokoll “Dienstagskreis (Koalitionsrunde) 1968–1969,” Meeting on August 23, 1968, as quoted by Klaus HILDEBRAND, *Von Erhard zur Großen Koalition 1963–1969 (Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bd. 4)* [From Erhard to the Great Coalition 1963–1969 (History of Federal Republic of Germany, Vol. 4)], Stuttgart/Wiesbaden/Mannheim: Brockhaus, 1984, p. 337.

¹⁶ “Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State,” from Ambassador to West Germany Lodge to President Johnson and the Secretary Rusk, September 28, 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 291 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/291.html> [2001-09-26]. On West German view towards Prague Spring, see, *i.a.*, Heinrich POTTHOFF, *Im Schatten der Mauer. Deutschlandpolitik 1961 bis 1990* [In the Shadow of the Wall. German Policy From 1961 to 1990], Berlin: Propyläen, 1999, pp. 55–72.

West Germans were nervous. To counter this, the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, specifically warned the Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin, on August 31, that West Berlin was a 'state interest' of the United States.¹⁷ Rusk also warned him against possible Soviet intervention in Romania. In their propaganda attacks, the Soviets were coming down hard on the claim that they had the right to intervene in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the Kremlin, this claim should have been based on Articles 53 and 107 of the UN Charter, which related to actions against former enemy powers.¹⁸

There had then been an unusual series of attacks, charges, and the use of strong language by Moscow's *Izvestiya* and *Pravda* daily against West Germany and West Berlin at the end of September. An excerpt from *Pravda*, dated September 18, stated: "As a participant in the [1945] Potsdam agreement, the Soviet Union will continue to stand ready, together with other peace-loving states, to take necessary effective measures, if the need arises, to stop the dangerous activities of neo-Nazism and militarism."¹⁹

Although another article in *Pravda*, on September 25, which presented, according to Secretary Rusk, "singularly [a] naked doctrinal pretext for Soviet intervention in [the] socialist world," dealt primarily with Czechoslovakia, some element of threat to other socialist countries certainly might have been implied.²⁰

On September 17, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France publicly announced in separate statements that Articles 53 and 107 of the UN Charter did *not* give the Soviet Union the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Federal Republic. They also stated that such intervention

¹⁷ "Action Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson," Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

¹⁸ "Action Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson," Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26]; on Soviet 'accusations' against West Germany, see also Jan PAUER, *Prag 1968. Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes* [Prague 1968. The Warsaw Pact Invasion], Bremen: Edition Themen, 1995, pp. 62-67.

¹⁹ Quoted from *Pravda*, September 18, 1968, p. 1.

²⁰ Quoted from "Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Subject: Guidance for Private NAC Session October 16 on Eastern Europe," October 16, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 333 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/333.html> [2001-09-26].

would inevitably lead to a NATO response.²¹ On September 20, Rusk repeated this position privately to Dobrynin. Rusk qualified that “any rights under the UN Articles in question and the Potsdam Agreement [must have been] multilateral as amongst the four powers (US, UK, France and USSR) and [could] not be unilaterally applied by the Soviets or arrogated to the Warsaw Pact.”²²

On October 2, Rusk made the point again in his United Nations (UN) speech.²³ In conjunction with the opening of the 23rd session of the UN General Assembly in New York, Secretary Rusk met the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko. Rusk raised the subject of Berlin. He reminded Gromyko that he already had spoken directly to Ambassador Dobrynin about Berlin as a US ‘vital state interest’ on August 31, and that the Americans expected everyone to recognize this fact. He also said that he accepted Ambassador Dobrynin’s subsequent message as a categorical assurance that the Soviets would not move against West Berlin. Gromyko, for his part, stated that the Soviet Union did not intend to move against West Berlin and wondered whether Rusk really thought the Soviets were planning to do so. Although the Soviets had given a flat commitment about not moving militarily against West Berlin, Rusk replied that this sort of commitment was worth only what it was worth, and the Americans could take no comfort from the continued pressure on West German activities in Berlin. Rusk maintained that if the Soviets were contemplating further moves, these ‘assurances’ might have been designed only to mislead the Americans. Rusk also explained that it was important for West Berlin to have full contacts with the outside world, and it was thus only natural for West Berlin to have close relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. Gromyko then noted that the Soviet Union objected to any attempts by the West Germans to take over West Berlin and indicated that the Soviets would continue to press this point. Rusk concluded that what the Federal Republic of Germany was doing in Berlin was America’s

²¹ *Department of State Bulletin*, October 7, 1968, p. 365. See also “Action Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

²² Quoted from “Memorandum of Conversation,” September 20, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968 Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 290 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/290.html> [2001-09-26].

²³ For text, see *Department of State Bulletin*, October 21, 1968, pp. 405–410.

responsibility. Therefore, there were no grounds, according to Rusk, for Soviet objections, especially with respect to what the East Germans were doing in Berlin.²⁴

In his speech to the UN, Gromyko repeated the Soviet position that the Federal Republic had no rights in Berlin. Gromyko also issued a warning that any “aggravation of tensions” would be Bonn’s fault. He said: “The Federal Republic of Germany has ceaselessly laid claims on West Berlin, which has a special status of an independent political entity. Our answer is clear: West Berlin has never belonged, nor does it belong or will it ever belong to the Federal Republic of Germany. If sometimes an aggravation of tensions may occur here, the responsibility for this lies squarely with the West German Government.”²⁵ However, Gromyko did not assert Soviet intervention rights in the Federal Republic under the UN Charter.²⁶

In terms of the Soviet military threat to Berlin, the United States interpreted the situation as ‘without significant change’ in Soviet policy since the invasion, as there were, according to Johnson’s Special Assistant and National Security Advisor, Walt Rostow, “no military indications of it.” As Rostow mentioned, “[the Soviet] increased forces in Czechoslovakia [had] cut down what they [could] mount immediately against Berlin.”²⁷ However, the roads in Czechoslovakia were considered good enough for the Soviets to change force dispositions in a day or two, and their alert status was also improved. Thus, Rostow’s final conclusion was that the disposition of Soviet forces did not tell much about Soviet intentions regarding Berlin.²⁸

In October the West Germans discussed the problem of an Allied Declaration on Berlin with the Americans, e.g. the statement about Berlin

²⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation,” Rusk-Gromyko, October 6, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 295 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/295.html> [2001-09-26].

²⁵ Quoted from “Action Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

²⁶ For text of Gromyko’s address to the General Assembly on October 3, 1968, see *U.N. Doc. A/PV. 1679*, pp. 6–14.

²⁷ Quoted from “Action Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

²⁸ *Ibid.*

that “would make clear the legitimacy of what the Federal Republic of Germany had been doing in Berlin over the years.” According to West German Foreign Minister, Willy Brandt, there was some difficulty with the French over this. His French counterpart, Michel Debré, told Brandt, that the French would go along only with an internal paper from the three Occupying Powers to the Federal Republic of Germany that would not be passed on to the Soviets. Brandt agreed since, as he put it, “even such a paper would be better than nothing.”²⁹

The Americans were also not fully supportive of such an action. Secretary Rusk told Minister Brandt, that the Americans had said a lot to the Soviets in recent weeks about West Berlin and the US resolve to defend it. Rusk added that it could have been a sign of weakness in Soviet eyes if the Americans kept making one statement after another about Berlin.³⁰ President Johnson had previously set the question of an Allied Declaration on Berlin aside as openly provocative. Therefore, his National Security Advisor, Rostow, recommended a ‘fall-back position’ that all three Occupying Powers make a parallel *démarche* through diplomatic channels rather than a public declaration, which would not have been as effective, even though better than inaction.³¹

The question of a Berlin Declaration was then set aside. Americans used the anti-American posture of the right-wing extremist National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD, National-demokratische Partei Deutschlands) – a countrywide Congress of which was to be held in West Berlin at the beginning of November – as an excuse for their weak reaction. As Rusk put it: “We can do whatever is required to defend West Berlin, but we cannot do that in order to defend the NPD.”^{32 33}

Later in October, Rusk remarked, that the United States had already made its position clear to the Soviets in the strongest possible terms. He

²⁹ Quoted from “Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Embassy in Germany,” October 8, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 296 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/296.html> [2001-09-26].

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ “Action Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

³² Quoted from “Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Embassy in Germany,” October 8, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 296 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/296.html> [2001-09-26].

³³ Rusk argued that Administration had to take into account the US public opinion and how it reacted to the program of the NPD and its Anti-American posture. See *Ibid.*

concluded that another specific *démarche* by the US “without any apparent reason” would seem to have fallen clearly in the category of over-reaction by the US.³⁴

In the autumn of 1968, there were two important meetings planned by the Federal Republic to take place in West Berlin. There were sessions of about twenty Committees of the West German *Bundestag* to be held in West Berlin, October 27 to November 2 and the ruling Christian Democratic Union countrywide Party Congress to be held from November 3 until November 7. Johnson’s Administration expected a political crisis associated with such ‘high visibility’ meetings. Washington feared what it called “could be another Berlin crisis” with a great impact on the entire city of Berlin and throughout the Federal Republic.³⁵

In mid-November, when speaking to Rusk, West German Foreign Minister, Brandt said that for the West Germans, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting in West Berlin – planned for the fall of 1968 – was a decisive question representing a West German effort to bring in new activities not related to the city’s status. A negative decision about the meeting, Brandt argued, would add to fears that West Berlin was not the place to have even non-political meetings. Brandt explained that he was worried about the internal situation in West Berlin. He was not worried about the economy of the city, which he viewed as ‘not bad’ but he was concerned about the outlook of the city and the worsening psychological situation that might have resulted, according to him, in real trouble. Therefore, the question of whether West German *Bundesversammlung* would meet in West Berlin should have been seen in the same light, he maintained.³⁶

Rusk considered the possibility of an IMF meeting in West Berlin a good idea. He maintained, since there had been three previous meetings of the *Bundesversammlung* in West Berlin, not to have the next one there

³⁴ Quoted from “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Germany,” October 22, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 298 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/298.html> [2001-09-26].

³⁵ “Action Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” Rostow to Johnson, October 4, 1968, *FRUS 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 293 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/293.html> [2001-09-26].

³⁶ “Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State,” November 14, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 300 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/300.html> [2001-09-26].

could create a problem. But simultaneously, he mentioned that apparently some NATO Allies were against the meeting.³⁷ The French were not enthusiastic about it and the British had even advised the West Germans against the meeting in West Berlin. Nevertheless, Brandt tried to persuade Rusk, arguing that, although perhaps none of these meetings were vital for West Berlin, the West had nothing to posit against these elements to counteract the negative trend.³⁸

French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis

In the months preceding the Soviet military intervention, France's President, Charles de Gaulle, believed that he witnessed significant progress towards the accomplishment of his long-term goals of *détente*, *entente*, and then *coopération* in Europe. In addition, de Gaulle might have been convinced that the United States – under the combined pressure of domestic strife and the Vietnam War – would be forced to adopt a more limited role in Europe. Encouraged by the increasingly independent line taken by the regimes in Eastern Europe and by the course of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia, de Gaulle saw signs that seemed to have confirmed his view that the tensions of the past were subsiding. The 'policy of blocs' was becoming increasingly obsolete to him, and therefore, he continued a number of policy initiatives that he believed might have led to a further relaxation of tensions. The multiplication of political contacts between France and the Soviet Union along with its East European satellites as well as continuing technical Franco-Soviet cooperation was obvious. However, when Czechoslovak diplomats looked into the possibility of the French President visiting Prague – as he had promised twice the previous year – *Quai d'Orsay* replied evasively, even though the General embarked upon a successful visit to Romania in May.³⁹

De Gaulle, seeing a solution to the German problem as the key to *détente* in Europe, concluded that he would maintain close ties with

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Antoine MARÈS, "Naším hlavním cílem zůstává uvolnění napětí. Francie – Československo 1961–1968 [Our main Goal is détente. France – Czechoslovakia 1961–1968]," *Soudobé dějiny*, 4/1998, pp. 479–481.

Bonn and encouraged the West Germans to adopt a liberal policy towards Eastern Europe.⁴⁰ In addition, it seemed that he had moved to improve French relations with the United States. Following President Johnson's announcement on March 30, 1968 limiting the bombing of Vietnam, French officials at every level of government adopted a much more cooperative attitude towards the United States although it could not yet be viewed as a policy shift. However, in order to ensure its primacy in Western Europe, France continued to oppose the entrance of Britain into the Common Market.⁴¹

An apparent change in de Gaulle's policy took place with regard to the Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia. Yet, in late July 1968, de Gaulle had characterized the Czechoslovak situation as "but an episode in the inevitable process of gradually relaxing Russian control over the socialist bloc countries." Although Debré's Foreign Ministry sounded a clear alarm, citing a security concern of possible Soviet empowerment of 'militarily empty space' in Central Europe, de Gaulle appeared to have believed to the end that the Soviets would *not* use military force in their dispute with Prague.⁴²

The invasion, thus, was a drastic setback for de Gaulle. Although his initial response to the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a 'business as usual' approach in cultural, scientific, and economic areas, it provided for curtailment on the political front pending a change in the posture of the Soviet Union. In the initial weeks following the invasion, de Gaulle seemed determined to continue his major policies despite his surprise and

⁴⁰ National Security Archive (NSA), Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 68109, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Memorandum "French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis," Directorate of Intelligence, October 10, 1968.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* For de Gaulle's vision of 'Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains,' see Petr LUŇÁK, *Západ*, pp. 221–225. See also Maurice VAISSE, *La Grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle 1958–1969* [The Greatness: Foreign Policy of General de Gaulle], Paris: Fayard, 1998, pp. 418–419; Antoine MARÈS, *Francie – Československo 1961–1968*, pp. 471–484; Jean LACOUTURE, *De Gaulle. 3. Le souverain 1959–1970* [De Gaulle. 3. The Sovereign 1959–1970], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, pp. 382–406; Alain PEYREFITTE, *C'était de Gaulle***. *La France reprend sa place dans le monde*. [That Was de Gaulle**. France Will Regain its Place in the World], Paris: Éditions de Fallois/Fayard, 1994, pp.31–41.

⁴² See Antoine MARÈS, *Francie – Československo 1961–1968*, pp. 480–481; NSA, Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 68109, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Memorandum "French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis," Directorate of Intelligence, October 10, 1968. For de Gaulle's attitude towards Czechoslovakia in 1968 see e.g. Jean LACOUTURE, *De Gaulle*, pp. 543–555.

disappointment over the turn of events. He acknowledged, however, that his goal of *détente* had been “momentarily thwarted.”⁴³

De Gaulle’s continuing emphasis on *détente* and his unwillingness to see NATO strengthened appeared to have confirmed his belief that a possible Soviet attack on Western Europe was remote. In early September, his ‘no’ to blocs, NATO, and reappraisals, and ‘yes’ to *détente* seemed to provide a general outline of French policy. However, by mid-September, a number of signs began to emerge, according to the CIA, raising the possibility that de Gaulle was, in fact, rethinking his position somewhat.⁴⁴

Although de Gaulle hardly could fear a Soviet military move, it was the reaction of France’s neighbors in Western Europe, particularly Bonn, who were fearful of future aggression, which prompted his actions. One reason was that he sought to prevent the West Germans from falling more closely into the arms of the United States in order to have substantial influence over certain aspects of Bonn’s foreign policy. Simultaneously, he tried to preserve France’s dominant role in Western Europe without committing France unilaterally to the position of defender.

Therefore, in mid-September 1968, de Gaulle offered two different approaches to European security. The first idea concerned the possible revival of the concept of a European Defense Community.⁴⁵ Secondly, de Gaulle was interested in reopening tripartite discussions on the nuclear defense of Europe.⁴⁶ De Gaulle possibly would have seen a tripartite agreement automatically to commit nuclear weapons to the defense of Europe as a desirable goal. But, for such an arrangement, the French President would have to be recognized by the other participants as ‘speaking for Europe.’ De Gaulle might also have expected to have a veto

⁴³ NSA, Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 68109, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Memorandum “French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis,” Directorate of Intelligence, October 10, 1968.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ European Defense Community (EDC). France proposed original EDC Treaty in 1950, however it was then rejected in 1954 since the Gaullists vehemently opposed the treaty, which they believed would have an extremely negative effect on France’s national army. The EDC treaty, *i.a.*, called for an integrated European army with national units from the participating countries, which included only the ‘little six,’ e.g. France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux states.

⁴⁶ In 1959 De Gaulle originally proposed a tripartite directorate (United States, Great Britain, France), which should coordinate policy in matters of mutual security, and, in particular, use of nuclear weapons. See Petr LUNÁK, *Západ*, p. 167.

on the use of nuclear weapons in Europe and a 'guarantee' that the weapons would be used "if France so requested."⁴⁷

De Gaulle might have been interested in such a 'triumvirate' (US, UK, France), however, he was politically astute enough to realize that Washington would not readily abandon the theory of flexible response, and that any tripartite directorate would be an *anathema* to Bonn. In this connection eventual British support for such a plan would also depend on whether London would have believed it to be another French maneuver to keep London permanently out of Europe or whether British participation would be seen as a step toward inclusion in future Western security arrangements.⁴⁸

De Gaulle had never accepted Washington's policy of responding in the first instance to a conventional attack with its own conventional forces. Rather, he saw the flexible response theory as an indication that the United States would not risk its own existence for Europe. In his talks with the US Ambassador to France, Robert Shriver, on September 23, de Gaulle's main question was whether the United States would respond immediately with nuclear weapons if West German borders were violated. De Gaulle maintained that "France would *not* regard an invasion of West Germany as an invasion of France," a stand which the US Ambassador believed could have explained de Gaulle's conviction that the United States would not deploy all its resources in such a situation either. Although the French President refused to give any indication that France would undertake any new commitments regarding the security of the West, he stated that if the United States responded with "all of its power to an attack on [Western] Europe, France would respond with all its power."⁴⁹

After the invasion, the West Germans made a number of efforts to reinvigorate Franco-West German cooperation in military affairs, including the Franco-German Study Group. It seemed that there was some change in the French attitude. Senior West German military officers reported that their French colleagues' views were quite similar to theirs on questions of European defense, although it was perceived, at the same time, to have

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* General de Gaulle vetoed twice British entry into European Economical Community, first in 1963, then again in 1967. See Petr LUŇÁK, *Západ*, pp. 180 and 239.

⁴⁹ Quoted from NSA, Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 68109, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Memorandum "French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis," Directorate of Intelligence, October 10, 1968.

little political fallout. However, the French officials seemed to be more cooperative in some small matters with the West Germans.⁵⁰

But France's inept tactics during the de Gaulle-Kiesinger talks of September 27, appeared to have exacerbated Franco-West German relations.⁵¹ De Gaulle not only failed to offer a clear pledge of military support desired by the West German Chancellor, but he also infuriated Kiesinger by suggesting that West German policy alone might have been a factor in provoking the Soviet invasion.⁵² Nevertheless, the West Germans decided to continue talks with the French. US Secretary of State Rusk commented on the situation during a luncheon with Brandt on October 8, stating that it was "important to leave the way open for France to return at some future time to Europe and NATO."⁵³ He said that American relations with the French were seen to have improved in style, but not in substance. The problem was the same as it had been ten years earlier "whether or not to have a love affair with France at the expense of the rest of Europe."⁵⁴ The Americans could have had 'a lovely relationship' with the French, if Eisenhower in 1958 or Kennedy in 1961 accepted de Gaulle's *Directoire* proposals. But what would happen with the rest of Europe still remained somewhat unclear. The Secretary also mentioned some reports that claimed US disagreement with the French over nuclear issues. He added that the Americans had never had any indication from the French Government of possible French interest in questions of nuclear cooperation between France and the United States.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ "Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State Brussels," November 14, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 300 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/300.html> [2001-09-26]. See also "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kiesinger mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle," *AAPBD 1968, Band II*: pp. 1248-1260.

⁵¹ "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kiesinger mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle," September 27, 1968, *AAPBD 1968, Band II.*, pp. 1200-1212.

⁵² NSA, Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 68109, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Memorandum "French Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis," Directorate of Intelligence, October 10, 1968. On West German reaction to de Gaulle's 'accusations', see the memoirs of then West Germany's Foreign Minister Willy BRANDT, *Erinnerungen* [Memoirs], Berlin: Propyläen, 1997, pp. 193-194.

⁵³ "Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Embassy in Germany," October 8, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 296 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/296.html> [2001-09-26].

⁵⁴ Quoted from "Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State Brussels," November 14, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 300 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/300.html> [2001-09-26].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

NATO in the Aftermath of the Czechoslovak Crisis

The year of 1969 marked the 20th anniversary of the NATO Alliance. The second half of the 1960s had been until then the 'high-water mark' of *détente* with the adoption of the so called Harmel Report in 1967 and the NATO Ministerial Declaration on mutual force reductions in 1968.⁵⁶ However, the 'slow erosion' of NATO that had been obvious over the previous few years continued.

After France had pulled its military forces out of the integrated command structure in 1966, severing land communications between NATO's northern and southern tiers, Belgium decided to recall two of its six brigades from West Germany. In the five years prior to the invasion, Britain's Army on the Rhine had also been reduced from 53,000 to 48,000. Even the West Germans had been unable to field their 12th division before 1965. The US force in Europe had been cut by 25 percent over the same period. In June 1968, strong pressure in the US Senate to cut the American contribution to NATO had culminated because some of the NATO countries were not doing their share. According to the CIA, NATO was in a 'state of disarray.'⁵⁷

The invasion of Czechoslovakia not only had the effect of what the CIA called "stalling the slow process of disintegration," but also for the first time in several years, all the Allies accepted the necessity of preserving an effective Alliance beyond its 20th anniversary. In order to make the Soviets negotiate differently and more responsibly, a stronger and more united NATO appeared to be necessary. The Czechoslovak events presented NATO with an opportunity to reverse past trends if positive action was taken - as US Ambassador to Bonn, Henry Cabot Lodge, put it "to energize NATO and resume progress toward European integration."⁵⁸

From the US perspective, the Soviet aggression offered a major opportunity to improve the Alliance's political cohesion as well as its

⁵⁶ For the text of the Harmel Report see NATO Basic Texts: The Future Task of the Alliance – "The Harmel Report", Brussels, December 13–14, 1967, [online], URL<<http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b671213a.htm>> [2003-07-27].

⁵⁷ CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 2049/68/1 "The Response of the NATO Countries to the invasion of Czechoslovakia," November 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 334 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/334.html> [2001-09-26].

⁵⁸ Quoted from "Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State," September 18, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 289, [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/289.html> [2001-09-26].

defense posture. The shock of the Czechoslovak tragedy and a fear of a possible future aggression had galvanized new interest and support for the Alliance although not to the extent that the Americans might have liked.⁵⁹ For some Alliance members, including France, Canada, and Denmark, the Soviet aggression had deflated exaggerated hopes for early change in the Soviet Union's European policy. The Czechoslovak crisis also muffled the attack on US troops in Europe within the US Senate.⁶⁰

But the discussions in NATO had also demonstrated that, in the long term, none of the Allies wished to forestall essential contacts and negotiations with the East. Most of them still favored the Non-Proliferation Treaty. After all, they wished to see a breakthrough in the arms control race, in which the two great powers would be committed to accept controls on their own nuclear armaments.

Due to the increase in Soviet forces in Central Europe, the United States had to take measures in the defense field, including higher Western European financial contributions. However, at first, the European NATO Allies had responded to the Czechoslovak events with far more promise than performance. Among the four or five that had pledged concrete contributions, only Greece had offered anything approximating a clear net gain for the Alliance. Greek Foreign Minister, Panoyotis Pipinelis, emphasized that, to deter aggression, one must let the aggressor know that if he tried to invade, things would be difficult for him. He stressed that rearmament must be pursued, and Greece had neglected other items of its budget in order to be able to raise the level of its military forces.⁶¹ Belgium, for its part, offered only to 'postpone' impending troop cutbacks in West Germany. Britain had promised further commitments, which, however, represented almost nothing new as far as the common defense was concerned. West Germany, which most feared the Soviets, had refrained from making any substantial gesture that might have reinforced Soviet charges of West German 'revanchism.'⁶²

⁵⁹ CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 2049/68/1 "The Response of the NATO Countries to the invasion of Czechoslovakia," November 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 334 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/334.html> [2001-09-26].

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 2049/68/1 "The Response of the NATO Countries to the invasion of Czechoslovakia," November 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 334 [online] URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/334.html> [2001-09-26].

On October 1, 1968, the Special North Atlantic Council meeting provided the Americans with nothing other than grave disappointment and deep concern. The meeting presented an occasion to take stock of the situation in light of NATO's activities in the six weeks following the invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, what the Americans perceived as a clear and urgent need, e.g. to establish a 'NATO umbrella' for national contributions to improve NATO capabilities, seemed to have become lost in discussion over texts and procedural processing of various assessments. West Germany and the Netherlands were an exception. Only the Netherlands Representative, Hendrik Boon, had grasped the central issue of need for decisions, i.e., an agreed NATO Minute, approved on an *ad interim* basis by Permanent Representatives, which would have provided the needed 'umbrella.'⁶³

Whatever the original Western reaction to the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia had been, none of the European NATO Allies initially seemed willing to provide more money for defense spending. The reason was that none of them was supportive of the flexible response strategy on which the argument for increased conventional forces had been based. America's European Allies continued to regard flexible response, although it had been officially adopted by NATO (in 1967), rather suspiciously, and viewed it as a prelude to US nuclear disengagement on the continent. After the invasion, this strategy appeared even less attractive.

What the invasion demonstrated was that the concept of 'political warning time,' a basic tenet of flexible response, appeared to be questionable. Judging from the rapid airlift of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia, it was no longer certain that NATO would have sufficient lead-time, after the first signs of a Soviet build-up, to rotate the US and British reserves forces for Allied defense back into Europe. Hence, there was no stimulus for the West Europeans to add further resources to NATO's conventional arsenal since, in the event of a Soviet attack, it might have to be quickly superseded by a resort to nuclear force.

The Americans expected West Germany – as a key country for European security within NATO – to demonstrate that the situation was sufficiently serious for Europe to take concrete steps. This was meant mainly in relation

⁶³ "Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Special NAC Meeting October 1," October 2, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 330 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/330.html> [2001-09-26].

to decisions on the military budget, both in the amount of money spent on West Germany's own forces and for balance of payments purposes arising from the presence of US forces. A statesmanlike West German decision on this latter subject was expected to have been politically important in determining the position of the new American government, as the US Ambassador to Bonn pointed out to the West German Chancellor, mentioning, *i.a.*, the decline in American public interest in Europe in recent years.⁶⁴

The West Germans, on their part, demonstrated their willingness to consider later increases in the West German defense budget if based on a careful NATO appraisal of the new security situation. They also displayed a willingness to consider at least the possibility of defense budget increases in order to assist the Americans in their military balance of payments problem. Nevertheless, the West Germans expressed skepticism regarding the prospects of receiving increased collaboration from de Gaulle. As Chancellor Kiesinger mentioned to US Ambassador in Bonn, Cabot Lodge, the only positive thing that could have been expected from de Gaulle was a commitment that he would not withdraw from NATO at that time. The Chancellor expressed in that context West German interest in possible more collaboration between NATO forces and French forces, although even here he was not at all certain that something could be worked out.⁶⁵

Rusk's dinner for NATO Foreign Ministers, on October 7, proved more important. It enabled the Americans to prepare for reaching their goals later at the November Ministerial Meeting in Brussels. All NATO Ministers agreed that there were dangerous implications of the Soviet intervention as a high degree of uncertainty existed in Eastern and Western Europe. Soviet troops were present near the West German border, and it was not clear whether or not the Soviets were ready to use force eventually. The impact of the new military situation thus went beyond Central Europe. It was felt in all of Europe, including the Mediterranean.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ "Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State: Ambassador's talk with Chancellor on implications of Czechoslovakia." Walt Rostow transmitted the telegram to President Johnson at the LBJ Ranch, September 18, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 289, [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/289.html> [2001-09-26].

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation: Secretary's Dinner for NATO Foreign Ministers," October 7, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 332 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/332.html> [2001-09-26].

A need to make plans and to clarify the consequences of any aggression against NATO countries had also been discussed at the meeting. It was agreed that relations with the Soviet Union as well as other Eastern European countries would continue, but with discretion and moderation so as not to appear in any way to condone Soviet aggression. Continued military efforts were called for in order to strengthen Western security as a long-term objective. From the military point of view, all NATO members agreed on the need to carry on the effort to bring manning levels and training up to proper standards. It was seen as necessary to improve and to correct force levels, the reserve units' equipment as well as to increase the frequency of exercises and to improve the conventional role of the air force (as opposed to its nuclear role). General recommendations were to be made to the countries to dedicate sufficient resources to fulfill their goals and bring their forces up to the proposed 1969 levels.⁶⁷

French Foreign Minister, Debré, stated, on this occasion, that the real question was whether or not we have "entered or [we are] entering into a period of preparation for conflict." In this case, the only thing 'worth talking about' was to have discussions with the US regarding its nuclear intentions for the defense of Europe. On the other hand, if this was not the case, and instead, there was a beginning of a process essentially based on a Soviet defensive reaction, the problem could not be considered immediate and was a question of "three, four or five years" for the French. Although the Soviet Government had committed an act which was morally and politically inadmissible, by invading, for Debré, it was questionable whether a reaction with token military measures was warranted since it could have appeared that a position was adopted, which may not be maintained, made effective, or be pertinent in the months to come. If the problem was, however, "essentially political," he argued, then relations between the Soviet Union and the other Eastern countries must be studied, and the attitude with respect to possible attacks on the Federal Republic of Germany examined. Reinforcing the Alliance represented "only drawbacks and no advantages" for France.⁶⁸

Despite the shock the real question for Debré was "what do we do tomorrow if Yugoslavia is invaded or if there is other military action? [...]"

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The best service we can render the Czechoslovaks,” he continued, was “to focus on the problems of Germany and continue to show the Soviet government that it has committed an error.” The French Foreign Minister concluded that the US – Soviet talks and other *détente* projects could be resumed and pursued once more only if the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁹

NATO Summit in Brussels

To underscore ‘by word and deed’ their reaction to the Soviet aggression, the NATO partners met in Brussels from November 14–16, 1968. The main focus of the meeting was on what the US and its Allies were supposed to do to strengthen NATO in light of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Americans believed that the Soviets would continue to avoid moves that risked serious confrontation with the West as long as NATO would keep its essential military strength and political cohesion. It was agreed that *détente* remained a long-term goal of NATO policy, but the atmosphere had changed drastically in comparison with the meetings of a few years before. The emphasis was now on strengthening the Alliance’s defense and its deterrent posture against possible future contingencies in spite of differences in emphasis among individual NATO Governments.

The American view, presented by Secretary Rusk, was that strengthening NATO would depend largely on the Europeans. The United States had a 650,000 strong force in Southeast Asia and continued to maintain its troops in Europe. There was already considerable pressure in the US Congress to withdraw these forces. Any US Administration would have pressed its European NATO Allies to take the issues seriously and work together in a common effort, Rusk mentioned.⁷⁰

The balance of payments problem received more high level attention than at other Ministerial meetings. Ministers showed understanding but were reluctant to make specific commitments. The final *communiqué*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation: 42nd Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, General Tour d’ Horizon,” November 14, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 336 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/336.html> [2001-09-26].

paragraph dealing with this matter had proved to be one of the more difficult to draft in acceptable language.⁷¹ But it was politically significant that the constant trend towards the reduction of military expenditures by the European Allies had been stemmed, and, as stated, “hopefully reversed”.⁷² The specific contributions of the members revealed a growing awareness by European leaders of the need to expand their contributions to share the burden of collective defense and then spend more money to improve their military forces.

The unique November Ministerial Meeting crowned American efforts. All fifteen Allies, including France, whose manner of performance, the US viewed as being markedly changed, showed unexpected cohesion on key political issues. The Ministers approved that any further adventures in intervention by the Soviets would “create an international crisis with grave consequences”.⁷³ The French had been reasonably constructive and exhibited a clear appreciation of the significance of Soviet actions as they affected the security situation in Europe. This Ministerial Meeting had not yet by any means solved NATO’s problems, but the general reaction was that there was a basis for seeking more serious consideration of this subject than had existed previously.

On November 14, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Greece, FRG, Turkey, and Great Britain created within NATO a special integrative institution called EUROGROUP. It coordinated e.g. through informal meetings of defense ministers the problem of financing US forces in Europe (in November 1970). Defense ministers of EUROGROUP later in October 1971 also agreed on a Program for Enlargement of Conventional European Forces and a six percent rise in arms expenditure (so called Euro-Package from October 1971).⁷⁴

⁷¹ For text of the final *communiqué*, see Department of State *Bulletin*, December 9, 1968, pp. 595–597.

⁷² “Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State: Subject: Wrap-up of NATO Ministerial Meeting, November 14–16,” November 16, 1968, *FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 337 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/337.html> [2001-09-26].

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ On NATO’s EUROGROUP, see Jiří FIDLER, Petr MAREŠ, *Dějiny NATO* [History of NATO], Praha/Litomyšl: Paseka 1997, pp. 144–145.

An Extension of the Area of NATO Interests

At the end of the 1960s, the Soviet Union concentrated its military efforts on catching up with American military power. The Soviets approached parity with the United States in strategic weapons of mass destruction and increased in highly mobile, sea and airborne forces for conventional military action. This improvement in military capabilities broadened the Soviet Union's political options. This trend was already apparent in the expanded Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean.

The Soviet presence in the Mediterranean became much more significant in light of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. While the Czechoslovak crisis had attracted attention on the NATO Central Front, concern about eventual Soviet pressure against Romania and Yugoslavia also raised anew the issue of Mediterranean security. Prior to the invasion, the United States believed that the increasing presence of the Soviet navy was mainly a consequence of the Middle East conflict and was dictated more by political reasons of prestige and influence within the bordering countries than by military reasons.⁷⁵

In November 1968, the NATO Ministerial Council at Brussels agreed on new defense measures and noted the creation of a NATO air surveillance command for operation in the Mediterranean.

The possibility of extending the area of NATO's interests beyond the strict territorial limits of the NATO countries, particularly the Mediterranean was already being considered at the beginning of October. It became obvious that NATO would have been faced with a major problem, if Soviet forces were to move toward the Adriatic. But these questions were not taken as seriously by all NATO partners as they "deserved to be."⁷⁶

In his talk with British Foreign Secretary Stewart about the reactions of various guests at his dinner for NATO Foreign Ministers on October 7, 1968, Rusk noted that the Italian and Greek Foreign Ministers, and even the Foreign Minister Debré to some extent, seemed to think that NATO should

⁷⁵ "Paper Prepared in the Department of State," undated, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 323 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/323.html> [2001-09-26].

⁷⁶ "Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Embassy in Germany," October 8, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 296 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/296.html> [2001-09-26].

have become more interested in strategic areas outside the territory of NATO countries. Rusk expressed amusement at this new-found support for a policy the United States had been advocating unsuccessfully for years. He said he knew that the change was attributable to the Czechoslovak crisis and to Soviet threats to the rest of the Balkans.⁷⁷

Whatever Moscow's intentions in August 1968 might have been, the move against Czechoslovakia produced a war scare elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. It was shown by various degrees of military mobilizations and alerts; Romania, Yugoslavia, Albania, and even Austria feared of the Soviet Union.

In the fall of 1968, danger still existed that the Soviets might seek to "regularize" situation in the Balkans by military means. NATO had to consider what the attitude of the Alliance would be if Romania, Yugoslavia or another country became involved in a crisis. According to Rusk, in the event of so-called "solid threat" phase, NATO should have differentiated sharply between a threat to Romania and to Yugoslavia or Austria. A military invasion of Austria would have been of totally different dimension with strong possibility of developing a global conflict. Although the likelihood of invasion appeared less likely, it would have had the gravest immediate consequences. Any move into that country would have meant serious risks of involvement of the forces of principal NATO Treaty signatories.⁷⁸

In the case of Romania, the United States suggested, for example, to call an urgent, top-level meeting with the Soviet Ambassador in order to gain assurances that no invasion had been planned. Another presidential statements with maximum publicity or possible NATO response were also considered. Further envisaged was an emergency National Security Council session, or consultation with Congressional leaders.

In the Yugoslav case, a range of possibilities included a public announcement of readiness to consider Yugoslav requests for economic and/or military material assistance. Legal steps to facilitate assistance to Yugoslavia and a restriction on all civilian travel to Eastern Europe and

⁷⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation: Secretary's Dinner for NATO Foreign Ministers," October 7, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 323 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/323.html> [2001-09-26].

⁷⁸ "Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," October 16, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 333 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/333.html> [2001-09-26].

USSR were also taken into consideration. And, at last, it embodied the improvement of military alert status of NATO and US forces in Europe and the Mediterranean.⁷⁹

Another question arising from the new military situation on the Continent following the Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia was a discussion over the possibility of Spain joining the Alliance. The US facilities in Spain served NATO as well as US interests. Spain provided the home base for the United States strike wing assigned to the southern flank. Communications links important to NATO were located in Spain and the use of the naval base at Rota helped the United States maintain the nuclear deterrent in the Eastern Atlantic. In addition, US bases in Spain played an important role in the US's ability to react swiftly to Mediterranean area contingencies. The Spanish Government had indicated varying degrees of interest in some form of association with, if not membership in, NATO since 1953.

Rusk and Brandt discussed the matter at the beginning of October 1968. However, the German Foreign Minister responded negatively mentioning that the Dutch, Norwegians, Danes, and the British would be opposed to it, too.⁸⁰ During Secretary Rusk's visit to Madrid, in mid-November 1968, the Spanish Government reminded him of its desire to participate in the defense planning for the Spanish Atlantic area and the Mediterranean with the United States and other Western European countries. Furthermore, Spain wished to participate in the decision making process in defense matters pertinent to its area of concern.⁸¹

The problem was that a number of NATO members were ideologically hostile to the Spanish regime of that period. Nevertheless, there were other NATO Allies who believed that Spain, by virtue of its geography alone, would be a valuable potential contributor to an enhanced NATO defense posture in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. In light of the growing Soviet military presence, the mutual benefits of such a contribution were

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ "Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk to the Embassy in Germany," October 8, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XV Germany and Berlin*, Doc. 296 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/296.html> [2001-09-26].

⁸¹ "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom: Subject: Possible Spanish Relationship with NATO," December 20, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 339 [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/339.html> [2001-09-26].

increasingly apparent. Spanish naval forces in the Mediterranean and Atlantic could cooperate with NATO forces through surveillance and intelligence exchanges, coordinated planning, and combined exercises, thereby enhancing Western capabilities in the area. In the longer term, NATO could benefit from Spain's air defense capabilities in the same fashion. For these reasons, the Americans were considering finding means by which a suitable Spanish relationship with NATO could be established.⁸²

In light of particular British interests in this question – troubled by potential Spanish claims to Gibraltar – the Americans wished to discuss the matter with the United Kingdom and seek its views and possible support before developing a final position. The United States hoped that if the United Kingdom were ready to agree to a suitable Spanish-NATO tie, political objections on the part of other NATO Allies could be overcome.⁸³

Another means was the establishment of a 'Spanish Group' within NATO. The United States reckoned that those countries with interests in the Mediterranean could meet on a regular basis, or as needed, with a Spanish representative, and Spain could contribute "to the achievement of NATO defense objectives in the Mediterranean and IBERLANT [Iberian Atlantic Area] areas," without necessarily implying endorsement of the present Spanish regime.⁸⁴

Soviet Response to NATO's New Defense Measures

Moscow could hardly welcome the new defense measures and developments agreed upon at the NATO meeting at Brussels in November. The participants of the meeting came to the conclusion i.a. that increased national contributions to the Alliance's defense forces were needed. The member states also welcomed the new NATO air surveillance command for Mediterranean operation, and the extension of NATO's security concerns to a certain extent beyond its membership to states on the USSR's periphery.⁸⁵

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ "Research Memorandum No. RSE-175: Subject: Soviet Response to the Brussels Meeting of the NATO Ministers," Thomas L. Hughes to Secretary Rusk, December 13, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII Western Europe Region*, Doc. 338 [online] URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/338.html> [2001-09-26].

The Soviet reaction to the Brussels discussions was relatively limited, at least in the propaganda realm. On November 23, 1968, the official Soviet TASS news agency issued an 'authorized' statement on the Brussels session. It was the first such TASS statement about a NATO Ministerial Council meeting since December 1958 when NATO extended its guarantee to West Berlin. The Soviet diplomats also delivered a series of oral *démarches* about the air surveillance command in a variety of NATO capitals. On the whole, however, the Kremlin generally remained reticent.⁸⁶

The United States' Officials believed it was perhaps partly to avoid giving the NATO members more cause for concern about Soviet intentions, and the Soviets themselves might have been undecided as to the actual significance of the NATO Brussels decisions. Nevertheless, in mid-December, 1968, according to the Americans, the Soviets considered the new attitude on defense issues in Western Europe to be a 'manageable problem' for the time being. For the United States, a more serious potential problem might have been the 'gray area' of NATO security interest as Moscow had carefully given no hint as to how it expected to cope with this issue.⁸⁷

The NATO Mediterranean Air Command, in contrast, posed an immediate challenge to the Soviet interests. Thus, only in the case of the Mediterranean Air Surveillance Unit, had the USSR resorted to a formal action. On November 18–19, 1968, the Soviet ambassadors to Athens, Ankara, Rome, London, and Washington delivered oral *démarches*, castigating the new unit as "premeditated and flagrant violation of international standards governing the freedom of navigation in the open seas."⁸⁸ Moscow had also utilized – decrying the new NATO creation – the *démarche* to register in diplomatic channels for the first time its own claims to be – and to be acknowledged as – a Mediterranean power.

The thesis that the Soviet Union as a Black Sea power is, therefore, a Mediterranean power was first enunciated by Soviet Foreign Minister, Gromyko, already in May 1968; but the Soviet media began stressing the point only in November. In delivering their various *démarches*, some of the Soviet ambassadors also reportedly raised the idea of a possible conference of Mediterranean powers to deal with the problems of that area. Still, it was not clear whether these hints were merely interpolations by the diplomats

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

themselves or whether they were intended to presage a serious initiative. Moscow had to be aware that the prospects for reaching agreement with the interested powers for such a conference hardly seemed promising. At the beginning of October, the Americans reacted by strengthening their Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Thus, Moscow's major concern at this time seemed to be to put on record, if accepted internationally, that the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean was a vital element of the USSR's global defense posture, and that the Soviet navy would remain there regardless of what NATO did. Nevertheless, the number of Soviet ships and vessels operating in the Mediterranean had declined in the autumn of 1968 and the USSR seemed to intend on avoiding any undue exacerbation of tensions in the area.⁸⁹

The Impact of the Invasion on the Policy of *Détente*

The invasion demonstrated the unpredictability of Soviet behavior and essentially affected, if not radically changed, the military and security balance in Europe. It also exposed a new strategic threat posed by the Soviet buildup in the Mediterranean.

The Czechoslovak crisis led to renewed emphasis on the idea of NATO solidarity. In view of the growing threat to European security and the continuing inability of the United Nations to function as an effective protector of peace and freedom, the strengthening of NATO appeared to be extremely important and most urgent.

For the first time since the 1956 Soviet invasion to Hungary, all fifteen NATO member states seemed equally sensitive to the threat to their security. The Soviet action catalyzed the entire process of inter-Allied consultation. The West European Allies seemed to have been more aware of what they had to do to preserve the US guarantee on their behalf. Even the French were able to bring themselves to take part in discussions leading to the political and military papers on the situation. Moreover, the British and West Germans took a leading role in debates on strategy in the seven-nation nuclear planning group and agreed to work together on future strategic guidelines for the North Atlantic Alliance. In particular, the British began to talk about creating a European defense grouping in NATO as

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

a means of heading off any further cutbacks in the American presence on the European continent. Although this was in part an effort to enhance Britain's position as a European power, it also reflected a growing awareness that the West European Allies had to work together to relieve the United States of some of its defense burdens. All this led to greater involvement by the West Europeans in the area of Allied concern traditionally monopolized by the United States and made the West Europeans more responsive to the demands of NATO defense.⁹⁰

The Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia shifted emphasis from 'peaceful engagement' with the East and mutual troop reduction *vis-à-vis* the Soviet bloc back toward the more basic problem of defense. At the very least, the Alliance was "more cohesive than before," and the European Allies were "more aware of their responsibilities under the collective defense concept."⁹¹

The Czechoslovak affair should have served as a reminder that Bolshevism was not on the wane. US efforts to induce *détente* by reducing its forces to a so-called 'stabilizing relationship of parity' had served the purpose of provoking the Soviets into redoubling their efforts to capture world military supremacy. In reality, the USSR was provoked not by threats, but by weakness.

The Soviet Union filled the 'strategic vacuum,' which the United States had deliberately created in the mistaken belief that it could "convert the Soviet Union to Christianity by turning the other cheek", as General George J. Keegan, US Congress Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, wrote on November 8, 1968.⁹² In his words, the Soviets were achieving a staggering nuclear superiority, and this American stand could only have supported their further aggressiveness. "There will be more Czechoslovakias and more Middle Easts," warned General Keegan, "[and] as each new step unfolds, the United States will find itself dealing from paralyzing military weakness and fear of nuclear holocaust."⁹³

⁹⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 2049/68/1 "The Response of the NATO Countries to the invasion of Czechoslovakia," November 4, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XIII. Western Europe Region*, Doc. 334, [online], URL<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xiii/334.html> [2001-09-26].

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Quoted from NSA, Washington, DC, Soviet Flashpoints, Record No. 62358, "Letter from George J. Keegan, Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence to U.S. Senate, to Sen. George F. Murphy about the Vietnam Situation and the 'Czech Affair,'" November 8, 1968.

⁹³ *Ibid.*