

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: Addressing the Prague Spring

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Introduction

A city long enveloped in the grayness of political repression suddenly burst into colorful idealism in the spring of 1968. The streets and institutions briefly came alive with the thrilling prospect of freedom and reform, breaking through years of authoritarian stagnation. Scholars and intellectuals sing songs of democracy and liberation following this newfound opportunity. This event was known as the Prague Spring.

The Prague Spring was an economic and political liberalization campaign initiated by Alexander Dubček that began in January 1968. The main objective of the reforms was to reduce the limits on press and speech to establish a more humanitarian form of communism. Despite Dubček's guarantees, the Soviet Union viewed the situation as a challenge to their control over Eastern Europe. Subsequently, they and other Warsaw Pact allies invaded Czechoslovakia on August 20, 1968, hence putting an end to the Prague Spring.

Despite its brief duration, the Prague Spring had significant impacts on the continent of Europe. For instance, writers, artists, and activists in Czechoslovakia and beyond employed the principles and ideals of the Prague Spring to oppose oppressive regimes and advance democratic reforms. In addition to its cultural influences, the Prague Spring also played a role in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, helping push the subsequent wave of democratization in succeeding decades. As such, even if the Prague Spring is only a brief period in the Cold War's overall context, it is still important to reflect on.

Definition of Key Terms

Democratization

The process through which a political regime becomes democratic.

Liberalization

The practice of making laws, systems, or opinions less severe, typically in the sense of eliminating certain government regulations or restrictions.

Socialism

A political and economic theory of social organization, which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community.

Sovereignty

The authority of a state to govern itself or another state.

Satellite States

A nation that's not fully independent and must share control of its external relations with a foreign power.

Warsaw Pact

A mutual defense agreement between the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe, including Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

History & Developments

Background and causes

In the early 1960s, Czechoslovakia was facing numerous problems under its communist leader Antonín Novotný, including poor living standards, a receding economy, declining industrial production, decreased agricultural output and political discontent. In the year 1964, a group of reformists, including economic professor Ota Sik, forced Novotný to adopt new economic principles, arguing to replace the nation's command economy with a mixed economy. The group of reformists outlined numerous changes, though ultimately few of them were implemented, which caused Czechoslovakia's economic issues to persist.

In addition to the economists, Novotný also faced pressure from new Slovak leaders who demand Slovakia autonomy. As he could not fulfill those requests, the Slovak leaders turned against him, further decreasing his support. Despite that, the greatest cause of Novotný's downfall was the dissatisfaction in Czechoslovakia's cultural spheres, especially among the younger generation. Students were tired of the traditional Soviet model and the restrictions on freedom that followed. The low standards of living brought on by the communist regime only worsened their frustration. Throughout the 1960s, students were rioting and protesting in the streets against Novotný's regime, though it was responded with nothing but police brutality.

On the other hand, many writers also rejected the standards of the Communist party and published works that went against Socialist Realism. In response, Novotný put up sanctions against the numerous writers who did so. Due to his oppression, Novotný faced great public opposition. Eventually, in early 1968, Novotný was ousted as the head of the Czechoslovakia Communist Party and was replaced by Alexander Dubček, his Slovak opponent, who was elected unanimously by the public.

Outbreak of the Prague Spring

Despite being a devoted Communist, Dubček believed that communism shouldn't be as restricted as it currently is. Hence, he decided to implement the Action Program, which encompasses economic policies, political democratization, industrial and agricultural reforms, an amended constitution protecting civil rights and freedoms, as well as the promotion of Slovakia to full parity within the new Czechoslovakia federation. However, the program's most important points were its efforts towards granting freedom of speech through ways such as decreasing censorship, legalizing political opposition groups, and reducing secret police activities.

These liberalization efforts became known as "socialism with a human face," and it quickly became popular amongst the citizens. As censorship was lifted, the media published news alleging corruption, murder, and other official crimes. Alternative political organizations also emerged because of the reforms, such as K-231, KAN, and the re-establishment of the Social Democratic Party. The effects of the Action Program were soon being felt by the public and has successfully won over their favor.

Despite these efforts, citizens were soon unsatisfied by the limited change, and desired to overthrow the Marxist-Leninist framework. As conflicts arose between those wanting further reforms and conservatives concerned by the progress of the liberalization, Dubček struggled to keep control.

The reforms in Czechoslovakia alarmed members of the Warsaw Pact, despite Dubček's numerous assurances to them, fearing the risk of democratic contagion, especially after recalling the 1956 uprising in Hungary. To resolve their issues, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev invited Dubček to a conference, where he and the Soviet Politburo discuss compromises. On August 3, representatives from members of the Warsaw Pact met again in Bratislava. However, the conference did little to ease their worries.

Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

On August 20, 1968, 500,000 troops from the Soviet Union and its satellite states stormed Czechoslovakia, catching the entire world by surprise. The forces swiftly occupied Prague and other major cities as well as communication and transportation lines. Within hours of the invasion, Dubček had been seized from his office and was discreetly flown to Moscow for interrogation.

Although the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was successful, the people still passively protested against the troops, through ways such as erecting barricades, swapping street signs, and misleading troops. The Warsaw troops in retaliation, shot to death more than 100 protesters. The Soviet Union, which claimed they had come at the Czechoslovak government's request, ended the reform experiment. In April 1969, the Soviets removed Dubček from power and reinstated the pro-Soviet Gustav Husák.

Husák immediately reversed all Dubček's reforms upon gaining authority. On August 23, Husák and Svoboda left for Moscow to negotiate an end to the occupation. By August 27, Czechoslovakia was forced to yield to the Soviet Union's commands with an agreement known as the Moscow Protocol. The agreement demands that Czechoslovakia would be proclaimed a federal republic with two autonomous regions, having the Czech lands

forming the Czech Republic and having Slovakia form the Slovak Socialist republic, respectively. Each region has its own governments and national parliaments.

In the years that ensued, the new regime reestablished government censorship and freedom of movement and speech was restricted once again. However, economic conditions improved under the new leader, effectively eliminating the key incentive for revolution. After the invasion, Czechoslovakia reverted to being a cooperative and pro-communist member of the Warsaw Pact until the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

Aftermath

The invasion of the Soviet Union has brought upon many long-term consequences. For instance, the Soviet Union drafted the Brezhnev Doctrine, which justifies the use of force in Prague. This document stated that the Soviet Union had the right to intervene in any nation where a communist government is being threatened. This document was also used to justify the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and helped finalize the Sino-Soviet split. As the United States found Soviet interventions and the Brezhnev Doctrine to be defending established territory as opposed to expanding authority, the results of the Czech dilemma also helped support the United States Congress to reduce military presence in Europe.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was also a setback for the improvement of international relations, particularly between the Soviet Union and the United States as they continue to stock on weapons. The Soviet Union's actions also demonstrated that their control over their satellite states were weakening, shown by the strikes in Poland in 1970 and Romania's independent foreign policy.

Major Parties Involved

Czechoslovakia

Initially, under Dubček's leadership, the Czechoslovak government supported liberalizing the communist regime and making it more humane for citizens, as demonstrated with their "socialism with a human face" goal, and the numerous economic and political reforms implemented. This period of liberalization resonated with many Czechoslovakia citizens at the time. However, after Husak was instated as Party Leader by the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak government soon capitulated, leading to a period of normalization where the reforms were reversed.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union aimed to preserve communist and hence strived to prevent any shifts towards a more capitalistic or democratic system within their own Bloc. During the Prague Spring, the Soviet Union was concerned with the growing influence of the political reforms and feared that it could inspire similar uprisings in other Eastern Europe nations, which would've threatened their control.

Western Powers

As NATO allies preferred the idea of decreasing tensions between the Eastern Bloc, they decided not to intervene in the invasion, particularly the United States who was already fully occupied with the conflict in Vietnam. It was also due to the fear of provoking a nuclear war, that the United States backed down from intervention, especially since the invasion took place only 6 years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was still fresh in the memory of the United States officials. The most action taken on behalf of the United States was the cancellation of the summit meeting with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event Name and Description
January 5, 1968	Dubček's replaces Novotny as party leader and expresses his intent for new reforms
March 22, 1968	Novotny resigns after facing pressure from liberals
April 5, 1968	Action Program is published in effort to create "socialism with a human face"
June 27, 1968	Two Thousand Word Manifesto is signed which called for democratization
August 3, 1968	A Warsaw Pact meeting was held in Bratislava, leading to some agreement between Czechoslovakia and the Warsaw Pact. The Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty was also announced for the first time.
August 20, 1968	Czechoslovakia is invaded by approximately 500,000 Warsaw Pact troops.
August 21, 1968	Dubček and other party leaders were arrested and sent to Moscow. During their time in Moscow, they were forced to comply with Soviet terms.
April 17, 1969	Dubček got removed as first party secretary general and replaced by Husak.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There were multiple attempts to ease the Soviet Union's worries prior to the invasion in 1968. The first were the Moscow Meetings in April 1968 where Dubček flew to Moscow to discuss reform plans with Soviet leaders. In the meeting, he assured the Soviet Union that the reforms in Czechoslovakia wouldn't undermine the socialist bloc's authority. This meeting was essential in attempting to build trust with the Soviet Union.

The second attempt was Dubček's "Socialism with a Human Face" statement in June 1968, where Dubček publicly described the concept of "socialism with a human face". The announcement clarified that the reforms' objectives were to make socialism more humane as opposed to abandoning socialist principles. In addition to the statement, Dubček also issued numerous formal communiques to assert the benefits of the changes to socialism.

The third attempt was Brezhnev's visit to Czechoslovakia in July 1968, where he expressed concerns regarding the reforms. Dubček utilized this opportunity to clarify the intentions of the Czechoslovak government, while reiterating their commitment to socialism.

However, all these efforts were fruitless as the Soviet Union still chose military intervention. During the invasion, the United Nations Security Council attempted numerous times to pass a resolution condemning the attacks, though all efforts were met with opposition from the Soviet Union. Eventually, the effort died away.

Possible Solutions

The first solution could be to phase out reforms while maintaining high levels of Soviet engagement. This could be achieved through establishing bilateral advisory committees between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. The advisory committees would present reforms to the Soviet Union and would integrate their feedback into it. This would ensure the policies won't threaten the Soviet Union as they have some degree of control over it. Another way to increase engagement could be to issue public statements and formal agreements that align with the Soviet Union's agenda to assure loyalty to the Eastern Bloc. When a consensus is reached between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, then reforms can gradually be introduced, starting with non-controversial ones, and then steadily implementing more significant changes.

The second solution could be to focus on garnering international support. This could look like forming an international coalition with other nations for support or launching a global media campaign targeted at condemning the actions of the Soviet Union to apply international pressure. Engagement with western powers could be attempted though it's worth noting that western nations have no intention of provoking the Soviet Union. Delegates could turn to look for alliances with neutral states instead.

The third solution could be to increase diplomatic negotiation and neutral mediation. Some ways to execute this could be to propose a detailed negotiation framework with the Soviet Union or host a summit conference at a neutral site. This negotiation could involve neutral mediators and monitoring mechanisms for transparency.

The above three solutions are just some ideas from the chair and delegates are more than welcome to produce their own creative and unique solutions.

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