

The Russian View(s) of the Prague Spring

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Galina P. Murashko, Tačyana V. Volokitina, and Aleksandr S. Stykalin, eds., *1968 god: "Pražskaya vesna"—Istoricheskaya retrospektiva* [1968: The "Prague Spring"—A historical retrospective]. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010. 808 pp.

Lyudmila A. Velichanskaya, T. A. Dzhililov, M. Kishkina-Ivanenko, and Mikhail Yu. Prozumenshchikov, eds, *Chekhoslovatskii krizis 1967–1969 gg. v dokumentakh TsK KPSS* [The Czechoslovak crisis of 1967–1969 in documents of the CPSU Central Committee]. Moscow: ROSSPEN and Fond pervogo prezidenta Rossii B. N. El'tsina, 2010. 1,152 pp.

Stefan Karner et al., eds., *Prager Frühling: Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968*, Bd. 1, *Beiträge* [The Prague Spring. The international crisis year of 1968, Vol. 1, Reports]. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008. 1,296 pp.

Natal'ya G. Tomilina, Stefan Karner, and Aleksandr Churbar'yan, eds., *"Pražskaya vesna" i mezhdunarodnyi krizis 1968 goda: Dokumenty* [The "Prague Spring" and the international crisis of 1968: Documents]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiya," 2010. 432 pp.

A. A. Zdanovich et al., eds., *Chekhoslovatskie sobytiya 1968 goda glazami KGB i MVD SSSR: Sbornik dokumentov* [The Czechoslovak events of 1968 through the eyes of the Committee for State Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union: A collection of documents]. Moscow: Ob'edinennaya redaktsiya MVD Rossii, 2010. 511 pp.

Although the norm is to latch onto decennial anniversaries as opportunities to revisit Cold War crises, each occasion acquires its own slant. A prime example is the evolving treatment of Czechoslovakia's brief but exhilarating experiment in reform socialism, commonly known as the Prague Spring of 1968. The 30th anniversary was the first after the end of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, so the emphasis fell on what Czechs and Slovaks had discovered in unsealed archives. Teams of historians assembled by the Czechoslovak and

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Slovak governments prior to the split of the country were the principal investigators, and their findings were communicated through collections of documents and analytical studies.¹ The more active team members also issued monographs.² Conferences, even when held outside the two successor republics, gave pride of place to Czech and Slovak speakers.³ Their work, carried on by the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague, enabled and was in turn supplemented by the concurrent scholarship of individuals in Western Europe and North America,⁴ and the most important declassified documents were translated into English and annotated superbly by Mark Kramer.⁵

Given the centrality of the Soviet Union to the events of 1968, above all the decision in August to intervene with overwhelming force, Russian scholars were conspicuously absent in 1998. Their marginalization was not deliberate but a function of the Russian academy's lack of readiness or willingness to deal with the matter. Only one monograph by a Russian scholar—a relatively junior scholar—had appeared by the 30th anniversary.⁶ In addition, Rudolf Pikhoya used his position as chief of the Russian federal archival service, with privileged access to the files of the Central Committee of the Communist

1. The primary collection of Czech documents is Institute of Contemporary History, *Prameny k dějinám československé krize v letech 1967–1970* (Brno: Doplněk, 1993–), a series issued by the Czech Academy of Sciences. Slovak materials are compiled in Komisia vlády SR pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967–1970, *Slovensko v rokoch 1967–1970: Vyber dokumentov* (Bratislava: n.pub., 1992). Collections of analytical essays include Václav Kural, Jan Moravec, František Janáček, Jaromír Navrátil and Antonín Benčík, *Československo roku 1968. 1—Obrodný proces* and Miloš Bárta, Ondřej Felcman, Josef Belda and Vojtěch Mencl, *Československo roku 1968. 2—Počátky normalizace* (Prague: Parta, 1993). The equivalent Slovak volumes are Komisia vlády SR pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967–1970 and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť v krízových rokoch 1967–1970: Zborník štúdií*, 3 vols. (Bratislava: RVO VVPS, 1992).

2. Antonín Benčík, *Operace “Dunaj”: Vojáci a Pražské jaro 1968* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994); Antonín Benčík, *Rekviem za Pražské jaro: Důvěrná informace o přípravě a provedení srpnové intervence varšavské pětky v Československu 1968* (Třebíč, Czech Republic: Tempo, 1998); Josef Madry, *Sovětská okupace Československa, jeho normalizace v letech 1969–1970 a role ozbrojených sil* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994); and Jan Paulík, *Po invazi: Podkladová studie o vojenskopolitickém vývoji Československa od konce srpna 1968 do přelomu let 1968–1969* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1996).

3. The main such event was held in Paris on 16–17 June 1998; its proceedings appeared as François Fejtő and Jacques Rupnik, eds., *Le printemps tchécoslovaque 1968* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1999).

4. Mark Kramer, “New Sources on the 1968 Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 1, 4–13; Mark Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: New Interpretations,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 2–13, 54–55; Jan Pauer, *Prag 1968: Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes: Hintergründe, Planung, Durchführung* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995); and Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968–1970* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

5. Jaromír Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring '68* (Budapest: Central European Press, 1998).

6. Mikhail V. Latysh, *Pražskaya vesna 1968 g. i reaktsiya Kremlya* (Moscow: Obshchestvennyi nauchnyi fond, 1998).

Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), to produce two articles on the Soviet response to the Prague Spring.⁷

Come 2008, the 40th anniversary differed from the 30th in two respects: More conferences were held in more diverse locations, and there was a noticeable, organized contribution from the former Soviet Union. It is appropriate that most of the resulting publications originated in Russia or from collaboration between Russian and non-Russian institutions. I wish I were able to announce that these efforts represent a major advance in our knowledge and understanding of 1968, but they do not. They make slight additions in certain areas but serve mainly to reinforce conclusions that had already been reached by the 30th anniversary or earlier. They are more interesting instead as windows on how 1968 is being presented and remembered today in the countries that unleashed their military power on an allied state.

The five books under review here fall into three groups. The first two books—a collection of essays (which I cite here as *1968 god*) and an accompanying volume of documents from the archive of the CPSU Central Committee (cited here as *Chekhoslovatskii krizis*)—are part of an ongoing series on the history of “Stalinism” (a rubric that apparently extends well beyond 1953) and draw on personnel from some of the Russian federal archives, the Yeltsin Presidential Center, and the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the last of which convened a conference in October 2008. It is noteworthy that the 39 participants in that conference came from only Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Serbia.

The third and fourth books are another two-volume set, one that arose from a joint effort of the Ludwig Boltzmann-Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung (Institute for Study of the Consequences of War) in Austria, the Russian State Archive of Recent History, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the CenterAustria at the University of New Orleans, the Czech Institute of Contemporary History, and the German institute of the same name. That network drew in contributors from all over North America and Europe for conferences in Moscow, New Orleans, and Vienna, with the last of these falling precisely on the anniversary of the August invasion. In this review essay I cite the German edition of the conference papers (*Prager Frühling*), which is more complete than its Russian- and English-language spin-offs, but I review only the contributions from scholars in the former Soviet Union.⁸ I cite the

7. R. G. Pikhoya, “Chekhoslovakiya, 1968 god, vzglyad iz Moskvy. Po dokumentam TsK KPSS,” *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, No. 6 (November–December 1994), pp. 3–20, and No. 1 (January–February 1995), pp. 34–48.

8. Stefan Karner et al., eds., “*Prazhskaya vesna*” i mezhdunarodnyi krizis 1968 goda: Stati, issledovaniya, vospominaniya (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiya,” 2010); A. O. Chubar’yan et al., eds., “*Prazhskaya vesna*” 1968 goda i sovetskie respubliki: Reaktsiya vlasti i obschestva (Stavropol’: Izdatel’stvo

Russian-language companion collection of documents (*“Prazhskaya vesna”*) rather than the German because the collection consists primarily of materials originally written in Russian.⁹

The last of the five works (*Chekhoslovatskie sobytiya*) combines documents and what could only very generously be called analysis; it was put out by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

These books shed some light on three topics of enduring scholarly interest: Soviet interests and motives, Soviet handling of leaders and succession struggles in the satellite countries, and Soviet management of opinion and reaction within the USSR to developments in Czechoslovakia.

Soviet Interests and Motives

The process by which Soviet leaders arrived at decisions was a meaty bone of contention for Western Sovietologists, who tussled over the relative normalcy of Kremlin politics: Were there factions of identifiable coherence? Did the CPSU Politburo, like the U.S. Supreme Court, split when voting on matters of great controversy but seek unanimity on those of greatest controversy? Did the CPSU General Secretary set the agenda or heed the preferences of key sectors, such as the armed forces? These questions fueled the literature on Soviet behavior in 1968 written before the end of the USSR and resulted in books of tremendous sophistication that Russian scholars today would do well to consult but, judging by their footnotes, have not.¹⁰ The editors of *1968 god* (p. 7) announce the admirable aim of transcending the Marxist-Leninist constraints of Soviet historiography, but no distinctly Russian explanation of how Soviet high politics worked emerges to overcome our “lack [of] a consensual analytical framework for making sense of Brezhnevism as a regime type.”¹¹ The Politburo seems to be as alien a thing to scholars working today in the former Soviet Union as it was to Western Sovietologists in the past, perhaps even more so.

We are given, especially by Mikhail Prozumenshchikov, a narrative of the

Stravropol'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2009); and Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010).

9. The German-language collection was published as Stefan Karner et al., eds., *Prager Frühling: Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968, Vol. 2, Dokumente* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag Köln, 2008). The Russian edition contains 115 of the 232 documents found in the German edition.

10. In particular, Karen Dawisha's masterpiece *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) should still be read as an example of how to bring theoretical rigor to abundant primary and secondary material.

11. Stephen E. Hanson, “The Brezhnev Era,” in Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. 3, *The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 293.

Politburo's activity, with the eight months before the invasion divided into four periods.¹² From his and most of the other studies of Soviet decision-making in these books, we get two main impressions. First, in terms of willingness to use force, there was a spectrum of hawkishness in the Politburo, but all the Politburo members fell somewhere on that spectrum. No one sticks out as a voice for restraint in the way that Anastas Mikoyan did when Hungary erupted on 23 October 1956.¹³ The differences of outlook that sometimes emerged, which Prozumenshchikov vividly conveys when reconstructing the process by which Soviet leaders drafted official statements, serve only to remind us that the Politburo was a collection of individual human beings rather than clones. But we cannot go so far as to organize them into discrete factions to which labels or power bases might be assigned.¹⁴ The only structural gap seems to have been between the Central Committee apparatus (and the whole Politburo) and the more worldly, pragmatic, but easily sidelined advisers from the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations and the Institute of Concrete Social Research.¹⁵

Second, the decision to invade was a civilian, political decision driven by concern for the survival of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia and for that country's attachment to the Soviet bloc, lest it evolve into yet another maverick such as Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania. The invasion was not, as a few studies suggest, cover for an unrelated geostrategic objective; namely, to return Soviet armed forces to a frontline state from which they had withdrawn in 1945.¹⁶ Although it is easy to speculate that the Soviet military, and perhaps civilians in the Politburo, wanted a pretext to fill the gap between their garrisons in East Germany and Hungary, especially to facilitate missile support for the tactical nuclear warheads coming into Czechoslovakia under a 1965 agreement, nothing in these studies or accompanying documents takes

12. Michail Prozumenshchikov, "Die Entscheidung im Politbüro der KpdSU," in *Prager Frühling*, pp. 205–241. For an English translation, see Bischof, Karner, and Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, pp. 103–143.

13. Mark Kramer, "New Evidence on Soviet Decision-Making and the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crises," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8–9 (Winter 1996/1997), p. 366; and Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April 1998), p. 184.

14. See also Mark Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion in Historical Perspective," in Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010), pp. 41–46.

15. G. P. Murashko, "'Prazhskaya vesna' i sovetskaya intelligentsiya: K voprosu o formirovanii 'vnutrisistemnoi oppositsii' neostalinizmu," in *1968 god*, pp. 389–412.

16. This point is raised by N. V. Vasil'eva, "Rol' voennoi sily v 'razreshenii' krizisa: Sovetskíe voiska v Chekhoslovakii," in Murashko, Volokitina, and Stykalin, eds., *1968 god*, p. 136; and Ya. V. Shimov, "Avgust 68-go: Voennaya operatsiya s politicheskim ukonom," in *1968 god*, p. 158. For a Czech version of this argument, see Jaroslav Dvořák, "Vojenské důvody invaze do Československa v roce 1968," *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 1, Nos. 4–5 (1994), pp. 591–597.

us beyond that easy speculation.¹⁷ Even if it does seem that all the essential planning for the military side of intervention in Czechoslovakia had been worked out by March or April 1968,¹⁸ it also seems that civilian leaders, especially Leonid Brezhnev, were hoping at least until 10 August to avoid putting the plans into effect, as indicated by their going on vacation after a summit with Czechoslovak leaders and planning to receive presidential candidate Richard Nixon in the Crimea around 21 or 22 August.¹⁹ It was Brezhnev's disastrous telephone conversation with Dubček on 13 August, reinforced by intelligence from the Prague embassy, that pushed the Politburo to commit on 15 August to the use of force.²⁰

An undeniably disappointing feature of the document collections reviewed here is their omission of the transcripts of Politburo discussions that were referred to in the 1990s works by Pikhoya and Latysh (but not in Prozumenshchikov's chapter in *Prager Frühling*). Whereas the records of two dozen Politburo meetings during the 1980–1981 Polish crisis are available because of their use as evidence in post-Communist Russia's aborted quest to put the CPSU on trial, and the closest equivalent for the October–November 1956 crises in Poland and Hungary (the Malin notes) were released by Russian archives in 1996, the innermost 1968 files did not emerge for general use during the brief Yeltsin *glasnost*.²¹ (The Yakovlev Foundation in the late 1990s did intend to put out a volume of the transcripts co-edited by Pikhoya and Mark Kramer, but that project fell through because of unrelated squabbles.) The transcripts probably contain nothing that would disturb the de-

17. For details of the 1965 agreement, see Mark Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," p. 9; Petr Blažek, "Jaderné hlavice, Československo a Varšavská smlouva po karibské krizi," *Prážský web pro studenou válku*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2002), at <http://www.praguecoldwar.cz/rakety.htm>; and Miroslav Púčik, "Slovensko v bezpečnostnom systéme medzi Východom a Západom v období rokov 1960–1968," in Miroslav Púčik and Mária Stanová, eds., *Armáda a spoločnosť na Slovensku v kontexte európskeho vývoja 1948–1968* (Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav, 1997), pp. 160–161. These authors do not attribute the 1968 invasion primarily to the warhead question.

18. Valerij Vartanov, "Die militärische Niederschlagung des 'Prager Frühlings,'" in *Prager Frühling*, p. 662. That the Soviet General Staff might quickly prepare an invasion plan that would never be put into effect can be seen from the Polish crisis of 1980–1981. See Mark Kramer, "New Evidence on the Polish Crisis, 1980–81," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 5 (Spring 1995), p. 120.

19. See Prozumenshchikov, "Die Entscheidung," p. 229.

20. The transcript is printed in *Chechoslovatskii krizis*, pp. 851–862. For a translation, see Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring '68*, pp. 345–356. On the 15 August decision, see Prozumenshchikov, "Die Entscheidung," p. 230.

21. See Kramer, "New Evidence on the Polish Crisis, 1980–81," p. 118; and Mark Kramer, *Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980–1981*, CWIHP Special Working Paper No. 1, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1999, http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/research_portal/TsKhSD_fond_89.html. Full transcripts of the CPSU leadership's deliberations on Hungary in the 1950s have not yet turned up (if they exist), so the next best records are handwritten notes by a CPSU Central Committee official, Vladimir Malin. See Kramer, "New Evidence on Soviet Decision-Making and the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crises," p. 359.

scription of Soviet decision-making sketched above, but withholding them from full view means that any reconstruction of the path to invasion will be less complete than that of, say, the imposition of martial law in Poland.²² *Chekhoslovatskii krizis* reprints around half of the 400 Politburo resolutions (*postanovleniya*) that concern the Prague Spring, but these are mostly very brief statements of what had been agreed or lists of duties to be performed, and they reveal little of the discussions that took place. Of the final decision to invade, for example, we are given only the terse, unanimously (*edinodushno*) approved statement of 17 August, much of which concerns propaganda plans (p. 184). No additional light is shed on Politburo-level documents declassified in the 1990s. Knowing more about these documents, such as who wrote the refreshingly candid, Machiavellian analysis (dated 16 November 1968) of the invasion's political fiasco, would be very helpful.²³

Even less has come to light about the input of the Committee for State Security (KGB). Ol'ga Pavlenko's study of the flow of information to Moscow gives reason to suspect that Soviet intelligence's deep hostility to developments in Czechoslovakia primed Soviet leaders to be pessimistic even before Dubček's election, and Nikita Petrov reconstructs the extensive use of journalistic cover to send additional KGB officers into Czechoslovakia (of the 57 Soviet troops later decorated for their part in suppressing the Prague Spring, 20 were from the KGB).²⁴ Apart from a few very general situation reports, however, little KGB primary material has been released. Almost no KGB materials from January to August 1968 are included in the fifth book under review here, *Chekhoslovatskie sobytiya*, despite its title's promise to present "the Czechoslovak events of 1968 through the eyes of the KGB and Ministry of Internal Affairs."²⁵ Ukraine may prove to be a more forthcoming source than Russia, at least for ground-level KGB reports on Soviet citizens' reactions to the Prague Spring.²⁶

22. For the latter, "highly sensitive items are more readily available . . . than for any of the earlier Soviet-East European confrontations." Kramer, "New Evidence on the Polish Crisis, 1980–81," p. 119.

23. The analysis is reprinted as doc. 107 in "Pražská vesna," p. 392–400. An English translation appeared in Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring '68*, pp. 547–554.

24. Ol'ga Pavlenko, "Der Informationsfluss an die Moskauer Machtzentrale," in *Prager Frühling*, pp. 243–278; "Sovetskoe posol'stvo v Prage o situatsii v ChSSR. 1967–1968 gg.," in *1968 god*, pp. 87–130; and Nikita Petrov, "Der 'Prager Frühling' im Visier des KGB," in *Prager Frühling*, pp. 761–777.

25. The collection does provide some KGB reports from the days and weeks after the invasion, mostly very raw enumerations of expressions of Czech and Slovak displeasure.

26. Digitized Ukrainian KGB files can be found on the website of the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/dokumenty-kgb>. For translations of documents from the Ukrainian Communist Party archives, see Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968: New Evidence from the Ukrainian Archives," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 14–15 (Winter 2003–Spring 2004), pp. 273–368.

Because the many other flashpoints of the Communist bloc have also been investigated, we should ask how Soviet decision-making in 1968 compares with that in other crises. A stark difference between the “Prague Spring” and the Polish and Hungarian unrest of 1956 is the far greater collegiality of the Brezhnev Politburo compared to the unresolved post-Stalin succession agony of the Khrushchev-era Presidium. The latter could achieve unanimity, such as when deciding on 31 October 1956 to intervene on a much larger scale in Hungary, but thanks to the Malin notes we know just how wild were the swings and vituperative the exchanges that preceded this decision (a decision that one Presidium member, Anastas Mikoyan, opposed).²⁷ Determined to avoid a return to that acrimony, the Brezhnev Politburo by 1968 was already gravitating to the ever-more-circumscribed groupthink that would culminate a decade later in the fateful decision to go into Afghanistan.²⁸

Managing Cadres in the Satellite States

It is striking how little the essays by Russian scholars and the document collections refer to the recruitment of collaborators in Czechoslovakia. Moscow had delegated to the collaborators much of the post-invasion political planning and apparently followed their lead in deciding the timing of the invasion. Admittedly, the decision to invade per se was reached by Soviet leaders on their own terms, less under the sway of pleas from anxious comrades than in Hungary in 1956 or Afghanistan in 1979, and it is positive that no effort is made in Russia today to exonerate the Brezhnev Politburo under the color of the “invitation” to which several Czechs and Slovaks were secretly willing to put their names.²⁹ More broadly, however, these studies and documents do contribute considerably to our appreciation of the difficulty the Soviet Polit-

27. Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland,” pp. 190, 198. To gain unanimity on 31 October, one Presidium member, Maksim Saburov, had to be goaded into dropping his reservations. Mikoyan was absent from the meeting and would almost certainly have continued to oppose intervention had he arrived in time.

28. Artemy Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan: From Intervention to Withdrawal,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2009), pp. 48–50. See also Odd Arne Westad, “Concerning the Situation in ‘A.’: New Russian Evidence on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8–9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 128–132, and the documents that follow on pp. 133–160.

29. On whether Ernő Gerő freely requested the help of the Soviet special corps on 23–24 October 1956, see Aleksandr Stykalin, “The Hungarian Crisis of 1956: The Soviet Role in the Light of New Archival Documents,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2001), p. 123–124; and Johanna Granville, “1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?” *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (2002), pp. 667–669. For the pressure on reluctant Soviet leaders to come to the rescue of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, see David N. Gibbs, “Reassessing Soviet Motives for Invading Afghanistan,” *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2006), pp. 251–252.

buero faced when identifying reliable persons for high office in other Warsaw Pact states, and they also indicate the sometimes surprising limits of Moscow's ability to control who reached the top.

The diplomatic cables reprinted in the second half of *Chekhoslovatskii krizis* (pp. 656–722) and Ol'ga Pavlenko's very helpful dissection of the activity of Soviet diplomats in Prague and Bratislava delve into the months before January 1968 and thus into the longer-running problem of Soviet management of the bloc after the ouster of Nikita Khrushchev, an event that had presented Czechoslovak leaders with yet another crisis of Soviet authority to explain and contain.³⁰ The slow-motion tumble of Antonín Novotný in 1967, after fourteen years at the head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, comes through graphically in cables to Moscow, yet Soviet leaders were unable either to forestall his removal or to determine who would replace him. Even Dubček, the eventual beneficiary, and his fellow Slovaks seemed baffled by his election after momentum had been building behind Oldřich Černík, the deputy premier responsible for planning. We gather from the Soviet dispatches that Černík was blocked in the last hour by other Czechs who regarded him as unduly influenced by the Yugoslav embassy.³¹ Presented with this fait accompli, the Soviet authorities put on a brave face (made easier by Dubček's childhood in the USSR), but their lack of confidence in a succession they had not supervised is apparent.

The Soviet leaders' general view of the Slovaks as more dependable than the Czechs is drawn out by S. A. Korneev in *1968 god*, but here, too, Moscow was forced in August 1968 to accept a downfall (Vasil Bil'ak's, as leader of the Slovak Communist Party) and a triumph (Gustáv Husák's) that they had not cleared in advance.³² Brezhnev and his colleagues pragmatically accepted Husák as the more authoritative figure in Slovakia, much as they had accepted Władysław Gomułka in Poland in 1956. Like Gomułka and Hungary's János

30. Ol'ga Pavlenko, "Der Informationsfluss an die Moskauer Machtzentrale," in *Prager Frühling*, pp. 243–261; and "Sovetskoe posol'stvo v Prage o situatsii v ChSSR. 1967–1968 gg.," in Murashko, Volokitina, and Stykalin, eds., *1968 god*, pp. 87–108. Lubomír Štrougal, in 1964 the Czechoslovak interior minister (and, later, prime minister from 1970 to 1988), did not conceal his exasperation from the local KGB resident when word of Khrushchev's impending removal reached Prague. See Petrov, "Der 'Prager Frühling' im Visier des KGB," p. 762.

31. The complaint that Černík was too in league with the Yugoslav ambassador surfaces in remarks by an embittered Novotnýite, František Havlíček, in early 1968, then reappears in July when Bil'ak conversed with Ukrainian leader Petro Shelest, and reappears again as late as May 1969 in a postmortem memorandum from Drahomír Kolder to the Soviets. See *Chekhoslovatskii krizis*, p. 710; Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1): Revelations from the Diaries of Petro Shelest," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 10 (1998), p. 242; and *Chekhoslovatskie sobytiya*, pp. 354–358.

32. S. A. Korneev, "Slovatskii faktor v khode sovetsko-chekhoslovatskikh peregovorov v Moskve v avguste 1968 goda," in *1968 god*, pp. 167–180.

Kádár, and unlike Dubček, Husák then knew what to do to earn and retain Soviet affection.

Managing the Home Front

Soviet leaders might have been marginally more tolerant of the Prague Spring had it not occurred in the midst of a campaign to combat ideological problems (dissent, nationalism, religiosity) within the USSR. Petrov reminds us that Brezhnev had been talking in the Politburo since November 1966 about the need to tighten the slack allowed by Khrushchev, a move wholeheartedly seconded by Yuri Andropov, the former ambassador in Budapest in 1956 and future KGB chairman, who at the time was the CPSU Secretary overseeing relations with other Communist parties.³³

By August 1968, the spillover from Czechoslovakia into the Soviet Union and other states was not yet great, especially when compared to the unrest sparked by the Hungarian events of 1956 in Romania, Slovakia, and Soviet universities, or the effect the Solidarity movement had in the Baltic republics, Ukraine, and Russian labor circles in 1980–1981.³⁴ The overall picture from the archives is of successful Soviet containment of interest in the Czechoslovak reforms before the invasion and then of reaction to the invasion. Soviet leaders were probably helped by the fact that the 1968 crisis peaked while university students were out of session, unlike in 1956. It was difficult for the average Soviet citizen to get information about the Prague Spring, and the kinds of questions with which they peppered local officials—Why had Novotný been toppled? Why were Czechs unhappy with a standard of living higher than in the Soviet Union? Why was the Czechoslovak working class not doing more to protect socialism?—arose from natural but neutral curiosity. Most Soviet citizens did not know enough about Dubček's reforms to decide whether they liked them and would want something similar in their country.³⁵ Konstantin Nikiforov estimates that 160 people courageously protested

33. Petrov, "Der 'Prager Frühling' im Visier des KGB," pp. 763–764.

34. On the impact of the Hungarian events, see Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," pp. 195–198; Johanna Granville, "Hungary, 101: Seven Ways to Avoid a Revolution and Soviet Invasion of Romania," *Cold War History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2010), pp. 81–106; Muriel Blaive, *Une déstalinisation manquée: Tchécoslovaquie 1956* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2005); and Jan Štaigl, "Vojenské opatrenia na Slovensku v súvislosti s vývojom v Maďarsku na jeseň 1956," in Miroslav Půček and Mária Stanová, eds., *Armáda a spoločnosť na Slovensku v kontexte európskeho vývoja 1948–1968* (Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav, 1997), pp. 184–203. On the impact of the Solidarity movement, see Kramer, *Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis*, pp. 172–173.

35. See the chapters in *1968 god* by G. P. Murashko, L. I. Shinkarev, I. V. Kryuchkov, and N. D.

the invasion, of whom half were in Moscow and seven in Kyiv.³⁶ By contrast, within the first 48 hours, the Moscow party committee organized 18,275 meetings (attended by more than two million people and addressed by 65,360) to endorse the occupation of Czechoslovakia.³⁷ At the trial on 9–11 October 1968 of a small group that had gathered on Red Square to denounce the invasion, the authorities had no trouble filling the gallery with spectators who expressed “great approval” of the severe prison sentences given to the defendants.³⁸

In such moments, Soviet leaders were not well served by the nature of the domestic intelligence being supplied to them (if we go by the relatively few examples that are available). The typical KGB or local party update reported strong backing from the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens for the Politburo’s handling of Czechoslovakia and then proceeded to enumerate a few exceptional cases in which named individuals were overheard expressing a more critical view—and sometimes that criticism was of the Politburo for being too slow to crack down on “counterrevolution.” This combination of broad generalization and minute anecdote, with no attempt to contextualize the instances of complaint or quantify their actual prevalence, would have left leading officials with a nagging fear that a potential for trouble might lurk behind the outward displays of support, but that there was no way to be sure.

In Ukraine, the Czechoslovak developments reinforced existing anxieties, especially about the western districts that were poorly served by Soviet media but could receive Czechoslovak radio and television.³⁹ Even in Kyiv, however, the concerns of bosses such as Petro Shelest were not so much about present disturbances as about what might occur if events in Czechoslovakia were not curbed. Even after reading the two (rather thin) chapters on Ukraine in *Prager Frühling* (by Volodymyr Dmitruk and Julija Gogol’, pp. 941–964) and Mark Kramer’s (thorough) research elsewhere, I still do not know how to sum up Shelest in 1968: Was his hostility to the “Prague Spring” fueled mostly by a determination to prevent remnants of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army from teaming up with nationalist intellectuals and students addled by Czechoslovak revisionism, or by his role as go-between with jittery Slovak functionaries such as Bil’ak and Ján Koscelanský, or by fear that Moscow would use any

Kryuchkova, pp. 389–456. In *Prager Frühling*, see the chapters in the section “Der ‘Prager Frühling’ und sein Echo in den Sowjetrepubliken,” pp. 897–990. See also A. A. Gordin, “Czechoslovakia in 1968: Soviet Propaganda and the Mood of Russia’s Provinces,” *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2011), pp. 18–33.

36. K. V. Nikiforov, “1968 god—rubezh v istorii evropeiskogo sotsializma,” in *1968 god*, p. 11.

37. *Chechoslovatskii krizis*, p. 873.

38. *Chechoslovatskie sobytiya*, pp. 203–204.

39. Kramer, “Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1),” p. 236.

sign of weakness on his part as an excuse to impose more centralized control and Russification of Ukraine (as Gogol' suggests)? Or by all three, in roughly equal measure?

A Wish List for 2018

Even if collections such as *1968 god* and the Russian edition of *Prager Frühling* do not add a great deal to what was already known, they have an unquestionable value in acquainting Russian readers with the interpretation of 1968 that has long prevailed in the West and more recently in the Czech and Slovak Republics—that is, both what it was (the search for a form of government still socialist yet better suited to local conditions and traditions, interrupted by the Soviet Union in violation of international law) and what it was not (the conspiratorial handiwork of international imperialism). The need for such publications is supported by Levada Center opinion polling, cited in *1968 god*, which shows that a huge majority of Russians today know little about the Prague Spring and feel no sympathy for its objectives or moral responsibility for its suppression.⁴⁰ Just as anniversaries will continue to serve as educative moments in the Czech and Slovak Republics, where an ever-growing share of the population is too young to have any memory of 1948, 1968, or even 1989, so in Russia is there all the greater need to sensitize the population to the iniquity of invading smaller neighbors.

Because the 40th anniversary was something of a curate's egg, what would I hope for the 50th? First, less reliance on massive volumes of raw stuff. Although it is helpful to have the most important Soviet files easily available in their original wording (and the publication in any form of verbatim Politburo minutes from 1968 would be very welcome), most of the rest are litanies of trivia. Just because a document was once secret does not automatically make it interesting.

Second, there should be less reliance on collected conference papers. The Russian lay reader and the academic community alike would be better served by an interpretive monograph—even just a revised, expanded reissue of Latysh's 1998 book—that would assemble all the new material into a manageable narrative, ideally driven by a thesis about Soviet politics in the time of Brezhnev and offering a rounded portrait of the CPSU General Secretary. Brezhnev remains, even after all these years, a fuzzy figure in the 1968 events, equally susceptible to being depicted as an intolerant, robust campaigner for military intervention or as a passive, conflict-averse, and already ailing leader.

40. Nikiforov, "1968 god," pp. 12–13.

Like KGB Chairman Andropov, Brezhnev was in Budapest during the 1956 invasion (sent there on 3 November to supervise the second intervention), but whether such an experience would tilt one toward or away from the use of force in future crises is an open question.⁴¹ Like Shelest, with whom Brezhnev was—or was not?—on close terms, Brezhnev might not be reducible to a single dimension, but the role of the CPSU leader should be its own subject of analysis.

Third, it would be good if a narrative aimed at Russians included more detail about the non-violent resistance of Czechs and Slovaks to the invasion. Contributors to *1968 god* who were in Czechoslovakia at the time of the invasion (as journalists, academics, contractors, or soldiers) stress either how decently they were treated by Czechs and Slovaks or how there was more gunfire than is generally recalled today.⁴² Military bulletins in *Chekhoslovatskie sobyitiya* also create the impression of a very hostile theater awash in arms. What should be given greater emphasis is the success of the Czechs and Slovaks in devising peaceful ways to thwart the invasion's goals and force the Soviet Politburo into negotiations with the Dubček team (described in *Prager Frühling* by the Boltzmann-Institut researchers Peter Ruggenthaler and Harald Knoll).⁴³

Fourth, all residue should be shed of the Soviet line that the Prague Spring was a foreign-sponsored plot that had to be smashed to keep the balance of power (and thus the peace) in Europe. Although most of the contributors to *1968 god* and *Prager Frühling* are scrupulous in their use of sources and equitable in their judgments, readers will nonetheless detect the pride that military historians such as Vladimir Korotaev feel in the ability of the invading armies to take the world by surprise, as well as their tendency to blame Czechoslovak reformers and journalists for gratuitous provocation.⁴⁴ By far the worst offenders are the editors of *Chekhoslovatskie sobyitiya*, who immediately (on p. 2) assail the view of 1968 advanced by Czech and Western scholars and revive the old Soviet canard that the Prague Spring was a carefully planned and coordinated operation by Western intelligence to effect a coup in Prague. The disjointed essay "Heart of Europe," which precedes the collec-

41. The idea that Andropov's time at the embassy turned him into a hawk is challenged, albeit inconclusively, in Timothy Andrews Sayle, "Andropov's Hungarian Complex," *Cold War History*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), 427–439.

42. See the recollections of historian Yu. M. Kuz'min of his experience as a conscript with a unit sent into Bratislava, in *1968 god*, pp. 584–588; and the testimonies of V. P. Lukin, L. I. Shinkarev, V. M. Krivosheev, and L. N. Budagova in the same volume.

43. For a review of the methods of resistance and the relevant literature, see Kieran Williams, "Civil Resistance in Czechoslovakia: From Soviet Invasion to 'Velvet Revolution,' 1968–89," in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 110–126.

44. Vladimir Korotaev, "Der Einsatz sowjetischer Sondertruppen," in *Prager Frühling*, pp. 694–695. See even Prozumenščikov, "Die Entscheidung," pp. 240–241.

tion's 63 documents, seems to be the work of several hands, themselves in need of some careful planning and coordination (voice, style, and format shift abruptly) but united by the premise that any discontent within a Soviet satellite state was artificially generated from outside. It would take a small book to offer a systematic refutation of the essay's conspiracy theory, resting as it does on the tendentious use of otherwise legitimate sources, such as declassified U.S. foreign policy and intelligence documents. What distinguishes the circular reasoning of the essay from that of Soviet-vintage propaganda such as the "White Book" of 1968 and later the *Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the XIII Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (the "Poučení" adopted by Gustáv Husák's regime in 1970, on Soviet insistence, to legitimate the invasion), is the essay's marked indifference to the fate of socialism. The compilers of *Chekhoslovatskie sobytiya* write as geopolitical Eurasianists who are concerned about the continental span of Russian power and take delight in the failure of rival intelligence services either to achieve their aims or to detect the invasion before it happened. "Heart of Europe" says nothing about Prague in 1968 but a great deal about Moscow in 2008.

Lest I be misunderstood: It is desirable that there be a range of competing views of an event so momentous as the Prague Spring, but one wants it to resemble the sort of range found in discussions of, say, the Cuban missile crisis, not the Kennedy assassination.

Fifth, and finally, and for everyone in the field (not just Russians), the 50th anniversary would be a good opportunity to roam well beyond 1968 itself. If we take that year as now exhaustively studied, there remains much to find out about the five years before—including what Soviet officials knew about Dubček based on the Bratislava consulate's reports and perhaps records of his Soviet childhood and studies in Moscow in the 1950s—and the five years after, especially the origins of the 1970 purge and the simmering factional tensions between Husák and Bil'ak.⁴⁵ What, more broadly, can we deduce about Soviet management of a satellite in calmer as well as crazier times, especially a country like Czechoslovakia that was transitioning culturally from an industrial to a consumer society?

45. The deceptively complex Husák would, like Brezhnev, be a fit subject for a balanced study. So far only impressionistic, patchwork portraits have appeared, such as Marie Formáčková, *V hlavní roli Gustáv Husák* (Čechovice, Czech Republic: BVD, 2009).