

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
AUGUST 21, 1968

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Mr. Sharp: I left Cabinet in order to come here to make a statement that was agreed upon this morning, which I would now like to read to you.

(Mr. Sharp then read statement attached)

Mr. Western: What is your information with respect to this position of the Czechoslovak Government? Have the members been rounded up, are they still functioning, what is the situation?

Mr. Sharp: Well, we have various reports, none of which is very conclusive. It seems fairly clear that Czechoslovakia has been occupied. We have received from the Chargé of the Czech Embassy here statements made by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and a statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia which were issued on Wednesday, today, and both of these of course affirm the legality of the government of Czechoslovakia under Mr. Dubcek and President Svoboda. Now we know no more than that. We haven't had any reports from Czechoslovakia that would indicate whether those people are still in office. As you may have noticed the Soviet Government claims that they entered Czechoslovakia at the invitation of leading members of the Czechoslovak Government.

Mr. Collister: Ambassador Shpedko visited your office and Mr. Hellyer this morning. Can you tell us the purpose of this visit and how he explained this situation?

Mr. Sharp: He met Mr. Hellyer. As you may have noticed, the Soviet Ambassadors around the world have called on Heads of Governments. They called on the President of the United States,

they called on Mr. Wilson and they insisted upon calling on the Acting-Head of the Canadian Government. The Soviet Ambassador simply stated that their troops and those of their allies had entered Czechoslovakia at the invitation of the Czechoslovak authorities.

Q. Did he say how long troops would remain in Czechoslovakia?

Mr. Sharp: No.

Mr. Scott: Have you been in touch with the Prime Minister at all, or has he been in touch with you?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, I was in touch with the Prime Minister this morning and discussed with him the question of issuing a statement. I can tell you that the Prime Minister is on his way home as soon as transportation can be arranged and the quickest possible transportation.

Q. Why is he coming home?

Mr. Sharp: He is coming home because he feels that there will be important decisions to be taken with respect to our position in the Security Council and so on in which his presence is very desirable.

Q. Exactly where is he right now? Where is he?

Mr. Sharp: He's coming from his holiday resort. You seem to know all about it.

Mr. Van Dusen: Does this affect in any way, Mr. Sharp, the decisions that will be taken, do you think, in our reassessment of our role in NATO?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, I can't help but think that this is a very significant development. One of the main purposes of NATO for some time has been to bring about a détente between East and West and as I said in my opening statement, this is without any question

a serious setback. However, I for one hope that the dialogue can continue. I'm not one of those who despairs. I believe that these events will provide a lesson to peoples of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, of the significance of the events that are taking place and of the difficult task that lies ahead in order to bring about greater freedom for peoples in that part of the world and also to promote a peaceful world, in which the peoples in the Soviet Union have just as much interest as we have.

Mr. Beauregard: Mr. Minister, is it possible that such an invasion of Czechoslovakia by Russians, Polish, Bulgarian and East German troops could not have been foreseen? You have contact with Canadian Embassies in all these countries. It seems to have come all of a sudden, but the troops must have been there somewhere getting ready for the invasion.

Mr. Sharp: I think the best answer to that is to say that the Czechoslovak authorities were taken by surprise. However, we had known from intelligence sources that the Russian troops had not left the surrounding countries, and this had been a cause of concern to us and to our allies. We have been watching this situation very carefully. Indeed at the time of the discussions between the Czechoslovaks and the Russians and the other members of the Warsaw Pact we had had intelligence information which indicated that there was some movements of troops which it wasn't intended anyone should know about, and this had caused some concern. However, the fact that there was no invasion at that time seemed to us to be a hopeful sign. It now appears

of course that these troops had simply retired into the country surrounding Czechoslovakia, and then the order was given for them to invade.

Q. May I ask a supplementary question? This denunciation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia; was it only directed to the Russian Government or to all the Governments participating?
Mr. Sharp: It is directed to all the Governments participating, but, of course, it is quite clear that the Soviet Union is the leader of the Warsaw Pact and of this group of countries.

I have given instructions that this message is to be conveyed to the Ambassadors of the countries that have been involved and are here in Ottawa, including the Ambassador of the Soviet Union, and, of course, we will also let it be known to our friends.

Mr. Loucks: This is quite a strong statement, Mr. Sharp, there are many in this world that apparently still remember 1938 and it hangs heavy on a lot of consciences. Are words going to be enough this time do you think?

Mr. Sharp: I'm sure that none of us would want to repeat the tragedy of Hungary, and in all of the Western countries there is great concern not to raise false hopes. It is very significant that the Western countries have all acted with great circumspection in this situation. To raise false hopes that we would be in a position to come to the help directly of those countries would I believe be a greater tragedy even than what has happened. We can only act now through the force of world opinion. This is not to be underestimated, and its effect upon the people of Eastern Europe is not to be underestimated. I'm sure that the invasion

of Czechoslovakia is a great blow to the prestige of the Soviet Union itself.

Mr. Blakely: Sir, back to the occupation of Hungary more than a decade ago; we gave asylum to a very great number of refugees. Is there any indication that there might be a similar if somewhat smaller flow of refugees this time, and that we would again offer asylum to any Czechoslovaks wishing to come to Canada?

Mr. Sharp: Well, Canada always has the welcome mat out for people of this kind. I can't answer the first question as to whether greater numbers would want to come or whether they would be permitted to come. Czechoslovakia has, as my information leads me to believe, been occupied, and the significance of that occupation of course relates to the question of the ability of Czechoslovaks to leave the country.

Mr. Walz: Mr. Sharp, has there been or do you contemplate any contact between your Government and the United States Government about this development?

Mr. Sharp: Oh, yes, I expect that there will be many contacts. The United States Government so far as I know, unless anything has happened in the last few hours, has not yet issued a statement. We are of course in touch with the United States Government in New York since they are members of the Security Council and in Brussels, as they are members of NATO, so there are many contacts. I haven't personally had any direct contacts as yet with the Secretary of State.

Mr. Scott: Sir, there seems to be a slight cooling off of relations here between Canada and the Soviet Union as a result of this, but is there any suspicion or do you contemplate any

suspension of activity at all in our relations with the Soviet Union as a result of this move?

Mr. Sharp: I would think not, indeed, as I have already said, it is, I think, of the utmost importance for the future that we should not despair of the possibilities of promoting peaceful relations between the Soviet Union and the NATO Alliance, for example. Notwithstanding this setback, we must try to maintain the dialogue, because the significance of these events seems to be that the Soviet Union is very reluctant to see freedom proceed more quickly in satellite countries than in the Soviet Union itself. But it must be the hope of the world that we will see greater freedom for all these peoples and that it should be our endeavour to try to promote good relations between the East and the West, notwithstanding the fact that we condemn this particular action as all free people must condemn it.

Mr. Sauvé: What would be the number of Canadian people in Czechoslovakia at the present time, and have you started the first phase of pulling out the families of these people, the Canadian Embassy personnel over there?

Mr. Sharp: I have no reason to think that Canadians are in any danger. We are in communication with our Embassy there - there is no difficulty - and the report we have is that all the Canadians whose presence is known in Czechoslovakia are safe and we will be, of course, facilitating their leaving Czechoslovakia if they wish to leave. Some of them may want to continue in the business that they're engaged in. I have spoken to a few people myself, and I've encouraged them to let us know the names of any of their friends or relations that they're concerned about

in Czechoslovakia, which we're passing on to our Embassy, so that we know where these people are in case of any danger but at the present time I don't see any reason to be concerned about their safety.

Mr. Nelson: The State Department at 10:30 this morning issued an advisory to all U.S. citizens asking them to defer travelling to Czechoslovakia until further notice. Presumably we'd give the same advice.

Mr. Sharp: We certainly would. While we are not concerned about the safety of those who are there, I wouldn't encourage anyone to visit Czechoslovakia under these circumstances.

Q. Si l'USSR, Moscou, le régime soviétique impose un gouvernement à la Tchécoslovaquie, est-ce que le Canada a l'intention de reconnaître ce Gouvernement?

Mr. Sharp: C'est une question à laquelle je n'ai pas l'intention de répondre parce que il y a un Gouvernement tchécoslovaque qui nous reconnaissons. C'est une question hypothétique.

Q. On a entendu dire ce matin que M. Dubcek a démissionné.

Mr. Sharp: Je n'ai pas entendu ce rapport.

Mr. Collister: I presume we have a certain military planning reaction to events of this kind. Is Canada as a Nation or NATO as an Alliance taking any new measures as a result of what has happened in Czechoslovakia to increase their military preparedness.

Mr. Sharp: Needless to say the NATO Commander is watching developments very closely, if only because Russian troops are now in Czechoslovakia and on the borders of members of the Alliance. Other than that I know of no other developments, but that as I've said is a matter of very grave concern because Russian troops have not been there until the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Mr. O'Neil: You spoke earlier of the Security Council. What's the news from there, when do they plan to sit?

Mr. Sharp: Discussions are now under way amongst members of the Security Council, as to when the Security Council will meet. We've been engaged in those discussions. I think its premature to give you a report.

Mr. Wilson: It seems obvious, I suppose, that there must have been some shift in Moscow since the Bratislava Conference. Have you any information on that at all or any information on the role that Ulbricht may have played?

Mr. Sharp: No, I have no information that I could pass on at any rate.

Mr. Conrolley: Mr. Sharp, in view of the strength of the statement of the Canadian Government, is Canada taking an initiative at the United Nations in condemning the Soviet action?

Mr. Sharp: Well, we shall certainly support one. The question of which country would be most effective to take the lead is now under consideration. As I say I don't want to make any premature reports about this because our main problem is to try to get the most effective possible action in the Security Council and that must over-ride any considerations of national prestige. Obviously, there are some candidates for this role that we would like to have assume it.

Q. Would you like to name them?

Mr. Sharp: No, not at this stage.

Thank you very much Mr. Sharp.

August 21, 1968

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Canadian Government views the invasion of Czechoslovakia with shock and dismay. We condemn this use of force. All Canadians feel the deepest concern for the courageous people of Czechoslovakia in this hour of trial.

The invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia constitute a flagrant breach of the principle of non-intervention to which the Soviet Union itself professes to subscribe. It is also a tragedy for all peoples who prize human freedom and national independence and I am confident that its significance will not be lost on the people of Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Union.

We are engaged in consultations on the developing situation with other interested governments in the respective capitals, at the United Nations, and in the North Atlantic Council. As far as the Atlantic Alliance is concerned I am sure that all of us will be anxious to keep in mind our ultimate goal of seeking a durable East-West accommodation, but no one can doubt that the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia constitutes a serious setback to a rational dialogue.

We are in continuing touch with our Embassy in Prague and are taking such measures as are available to us to ensure the safety of all Canadian citizens there.

DECLARATION DU SECRETAIRE D'ETAT AUX AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES

Le Gouvernement canadien est atterré et consterné d'apprendre que la Tchécoslovaquie a fait l'objet d'une invasion. Nous ne pouvons que condamner cet usage de la force. Tous les Canadiens ressentent la plus profonde inquiétude pour le peuple courageux de Tchécoslovaquie dans cette heure d'épreuve.

L'invasion et l'occupation de la Tchécoslovaquie constituent une violation flagrante du principe de non-intervention, auquel l'Union Soviétique elle-même prétend souscrire. C'est également une tragédie pour tous les peuples épris de liberté et d'indépendance nationale. Je suis convaincu que la portée de cet événement n'échappera pas aux populations de l'Europe orientale et même de l'Union Soviétique.

Nous étudions l'évolution de la situation en consultation avec les autres gouvernements intéressés, dans les diverses capitales, aux Nations Unies, et au Conseil de l'OTAN.

Pour ce qui est de l'Alliance atlantique, je suis certain que tous garderont à l'esprit l'objectif ultime d'un règlement durable entre l'Est et l'Ouest; cependant nul ne peut douter que, en raison de l'occupation soviétique de la Tchécoslovaquie, les chances d'un dialogue raisonnable n'aient subi un revers sérieux.

Nous nous maintenons en rapport constant avec notre Ambassade à Prague et prenons toutes les mesures possibles pour garantir la sécurité de tous les Canadiens en Tchécoslovaquie.

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