THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Wednesday, August 21, 1968
5:25 p.m.

MR. PRESIDENT:

This cable from Prague is the first official comment on the dilemma the Soviets face. They have the troops in the country, but they still have the problem of dealing with the Czech government and the Czech people. And whatever their plan was, it did not immediately throttle all Czech communications and capacity for political expression.

The critical issue in the days ahead will be how they move from military tourism to the political result they want.

[Signature]

Rostow

CONFIDENTIAL attachment
1. SOVIET TACTICS IN PRESENT SITUATION DIFFICULT TO FATHOM. SOVIETS HAVE SUFFICIENT MILITARY POWER HERE TO DO AS THEY WISH, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THEIR POLICY OF NONRESISTANCE. HOWEVER THEY HAVE INEXPICIBLY FAILED AS YET TO KNOCK RADIO OFF AIR AND PERMITTED TELEVISION TO CONTINUE transmitting FOR SUPRISINGLY LONG PERIODS. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, SOVIETS DID NOT SIMPLY INSTALL READYNADE QUISLING GOVERNMENT AND HAVE LET MATTER OF WHO IS IN CHARGE DRAG ON.

2. MIGHT BE SPECULATED THAT SOVIETS IN ATTEMPT TO PUT BEST POSSIBLE FACE ON THEIR INTERVENTION ARE PRESSURING CAPTIVE CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIP TO ACCEPT SOVIET DEMANDS AND REMAIN MORE-OR-LESS INTACT, MINUS THOSE INDIVIDUALS MOST DISTASTEFUL.
TO SOVIETS AND WITH POSSIBLE PROMISE TO WITHDRAW BULK OF OCCUPYING FORCE. IF SOVIETS DO NOT QUICKLY PRODUCE "THEIR" REGIME, HOWEVER, THEY MAY FACE STICKY SITUATION AS LEGALLY CONSTITUTED ORGANS MEET AND TAKE STANDS AGAINST SOVIET ACTION. THIRTEEN CABINET MINISTERS WHO ISSUED DECLARATION SUPPORTING DUBCEK REGIME AND WHO COULD SERVE AS STAND-IN GOVERNMENT ILLUSTRATE DIFFICULTIES ENGENDERED BY DELAY WHICH LETS CZECHS GET THEMSELVES ORGANIZED. CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLenum, WHICH SUMMONED TO MEET YET TODAY OR TOMORROW, COULD POSE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS FOR SOVIETS EVEN IF CC IS STRIPPED OF ITS TOP LEADERSHIP. SOVIETS MAY BE FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO COPE WITH NONPROVOCATIVE YET APPARENTLY FIRM ATTITUDE OF LEADERSHIP AND WITH CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED REJECTION BY POPULATION, WHICH AT SAME TIME IS HOLDING ITS INDIGNATION WITHIN BOUNDS (EXCEPT FOR SOME GROUPS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE STRETCHING THEIR LUCK). BEAM

COPY TO CCO.