

Document No. 53: Reports on the “Šumava”  
Exercise, July 1968

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*These three documents relate to the “Šumava” maneuvers, which became the military cover for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The first item is a memo by Gen. Tadeusz Tuczapski, one of Poland’s more outspoken military officers. Tuczapski does not try to hide the difficulties or problems that emerged during the exercise, which was intended to intimidate the Dubček leadership, although it did not entirely succeed. The maneuvers resulted in near chaos when Polish movements interfered with an ongoing Czechoslovak reconnaissance exercise. Soviet Marshal Ivan Iakubovskii’s intervention created a “very unpleasant atmosphere” and delays ensued. Other problems arose, partly because the Soviets shrouded their plan of action in secrecy. The exercise showed that the forces on which the Soviets intended to rely did not in fact function very well.*

*The second document is a report by two Hungarian generals and is also quite candid. It makes clear that the exercise was organized for political reasons, to impress the Czechoslovak with the combined strength of Warsaw Pact forces. However, the plan backfired, according to the Hungarians, creating a “tense, nervous, and antagonistic atmosphere.” Iakubovskii contributed to the difficulties by parading his mistrust of the Czechoslovak representatives, who in turn tried at length to convince the Soviets of their reliability. The Hungarians’ conclusion was that the maneuvers mainly highlighted the “shortcomings, irregularities, and inadequate provisions in the Warsaw Pact.” If not corrected, they warned, these problems would drain Soviet credibility and weaken the alliance.*

*Finally, the East German view presented here is by Gen. Fritz Streletz,<sup>25</sup> in the form of an information report on a conversation with Soviet Gen. M.I. Kazakov on July 5. Kazakov described the exercise to Streletz (who obviously had not attended) in order to be sure the East Germans were aware of their role in case of an invasion. One of Kazakov’s comments was that the combat readiness of the Czechoslovak army had so declined that its ability to operate with other Warsaw Pact armies was in doubt.*

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a) Memorandum by Gen. Tadeusz Tuczapski, July 4, 1968

[...]

I report that on June 18–July 2 a command post exercise (cryptonym “Šumava”) was carried on the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The exercise was led by the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces—Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Iakubovskii. [...]

<sup>25</sup> Gen. Streletz later became deputy defense minister and chief of the general (“main”) staff in 1979. After the collapse of the GDR, in the early 1990s, he was sentenced to prison for his role in the shoot-to-kill practice against citizens attempting to escape across the East German border.

Participating in the exercise were:

- the command and staff of the Northern Army Group of Poland—as the command and staff of the Front;
- the staffs of two armies together with staffs of two divisions from the Czechoslovak People’s Army;
- the staffs of two armies together with staffs of four divisions and four regiments from the Soviet Army Group from the GDR and the Carpathian military district;
- the staff of one army and one division from the Hungarian People’s Army;
- the staff of one army and one division from the GDR National People’s Army (deployed on the territory of the GDR);
- the command and staff of Silesian military district, the and 10th Sudeten Armored Division—as the army staff and one division [staff].

[...]

The Czechoslovak side, until the commencement of the exercise, was against deployment of the staff and units of the Polish Army on the territory of the ČSSR. Only after Marshal Iakubovskii’s intervention at the highest authorities of the ČSSR on June 19, that is, already after the commencement of the exercise, did they agree to allow the staff of our army and staff of one division without troops to enter the territory of the ČSSR. However, the practice range “Mimoň” in the northwestern part of the ČSSR was enforced as a location for the deployment of training staffs of the Polish People’s Army, which was not in accordance with the expected operational direction of our army. On June 24, a reconnaissance battalion of the Czechoslovak People’s Army had been operating near the location where our division and army staff were deployed, which [because they were] carrying out a tactical exercise and shooting from tanks in the immediate vicinity of our staffs clearly disrupted the work of both our army staff and division staff.

Discussion of this subject between Marshal Iakubovskii; Premier of the ČSSR government Cde. [Oldřich] Černík; and Minister of National Defense Cde. [Martin] Džúr took place in a very unpleasant atmosphere.

As a result of this discussion the reconnaissance battalion was removed from the area of the army’s deployment on July 2.

The plan for the duration of the exercise, which was delivered to operational groups of individual armies, projected concluding the exercise on June 29, and discussing it on July 7.

The plan of the exercise was implemented with much delay, particularly because of operationally unjustified delays in playing out specific situations. As a result of pressure from the Czechoslovak side, attempts by the Soviet comrades to prolong the exercise were torpedoed, and the exercise ended on June 30.

Also, the review of the exercise, which was planned [to take place] after July 6, after another change resulting from talks on July 1 between CPCz CC First Secretary Cde. [Alexander] Dubček and Marshal Iakubovskii, was carried out on July 2, 1968—in accordance with the initial plan.

President of the ČSSR Cde. Gen. [Ludvík] Svoboda, [who was] present during the exercise when the first reports were heard, subsequently hosted a dinner for the direc-

tors of the exercise. During this dinner the president raised two very cordial toasts and emphasized in the first toast the role of the Soviet Union in our camp. He also stated that without the Soviet Union our nations and our states could not exist.

[...]

On July 1, the chief of the directing staff, Army Gen. Kazakov declared to representatives of individual armies participating in the exercise that after going over the exercise, the staffs and units would return to their garrisons. However, several hours later Marshal Iakubovskii voided this declaration, and decided that staffs would remain on ČSSR territory, without defining the date of departure of forces from the ČSSR.

[...]

The staff of our army and division, during their stay in the ČSSR, organized and held many meetings with civilians. These meetings—despite the fact that an official representative of the political department of the Czechoslovak Army district, who was supposed to facilitate contacts with local party and administrative authorities, was attached to the army staff—were in all cases inspired and organized by the political department of the Polish army that was taking part in the exercise. During every meeting (mostly organized in the form of a visit to work institutions) the Polish soldiers were greeted only by the representatives of the local administration.

[...]

During the meetings, the people of the ČSSR (mostly workers) generally showed sympathy to our troops and much interest in them. However, in a single case, when a larger number of our troops than initially planned went to the “Škoda” plant—that “surplus” was not allowed in the plant, and only a delegation of 18 persons was received. The atmosphere during the meeting at this plant was not the best.

Significantly, during every meeting, the Czechoslovak comrades scrupulously avoided discussion of current subjects with regard to the ČSSR.

[...]

Characteristic of the atmosphere of the “Šumava” exercise were the tense relations during the whole time between the comrades from the Czechoslovak People’s Army and the Soviet directors of the exercise. The state of tension was caused by both sides. During the initial stages, the Czechoslovak comrades took the view that the exercise should be shortened significantly, and toward the end of the exercise demanded that it be finished in accordance with the plan. They also desired guarantees that troops and staffs would leave the ČSSR immediately after the exercise.

The Soviet comrades hoped to extend the duration of the exercise to its maximum beyond what had been agreed with the Czechoslovak side, and they kept secret the real plan of action, without giving concrete answers to questions about the departure date of staffs and forces taking part in the exercise from the territory of the ČSSR.

Another reason for the Soviet leadership’s dissatisfaction was the information given by the press, television, and radio of the ČSSR about the conclusion of the exercise—because it was put out unilaterally and had not been discussed with the leadership of the exercise.

The state of tension has significantly intensified during July 1–3 as a result of Marshal Iakubovskii’s intervention with regard to the deployment of the Czecho-

slovak reconnaissance battalion near the staff of the Polish army that was taking part in the exercise.

The intensification of the tense situation was also caused by the fact that the Czechoslovak side did not agree to introduce additional Soviet detachments and repair shops onto ČSSR territory, as well as by a letter from ČSSR Deputy Minister of National Defense Gen. Lt. Mucha to the Chief of Staff of the exercise, Army Gen. Kazakov. [The letter] restricted the free movement of Soviet army units at Czechoslovak army training ranges on the alleged grounds that shooting was being practiced there.

We need to take into account the further intensification of the state of tension due to the prolonged stay of Soviet and Polish forces on the territory of the ČSSR. Already, one can notice increased uneasiness and discomfort on the Czechoslovak side, which has been pointing out the continued further presence of allied forces spurs the appearance and spread of anti-Soviet feelings, including in the Czechoslovak army.

[...]

[Source: KC PZPR 2663, pp. 419–24, *Archiwum Akt Nowych*. Translated by Magdalena Klotzbach for the National Security Archive.]

b) Report by Generals István Oláh and Ferenc Szűcs  
to the Hungarian Politburo, July 5, 1968

The Supreme Chief of the Warsaw Pact's Joint Armed Forces organized strategic–operational military command-staff exercises under the codename “Šumava,” which started on 18 June 1968. Most of the exercises were held on the territory of the ČSSR, with some on the territory of the GDR, Poland, and the Soviet Union. Soviet, Czechoslovak, Polish, German, and Hungarian army and division staffs took part in the exercise: in total, these included the staff of one front, the staffs of seven combined-arms armies, one air force army staff, one air defense army staff, and the staffs of nine divisions, as well as subordinate intelligence and rear services units together with lower-level formations. Originally, it was not planned to include the Germans but in the last phase of preparations they joined on the basis of decisions of which we were totally unaware. The Hungarian People's Army was represented by the staffs of the 5th army and the 11th tank division (altogether approximately 800 persons and 260 vehicles).

Romania and Bulgaria, under the command of their deputy chiefs of the General Staff, took part with three persons each, at the invitation of the Commander-in-Chief.

The exercise was organized essentially for political reasons and with political objectives, on the basis of an analysis of the situation worked out at the Dresden and Moscow conferences. The exercise and the preparation of the highest-ranking staffs were to serve as a kind of camouflage.

The objective of the exercise, its content and procedure, and above all the methods used in carrying it out revealed the extent and implications of the conflicting assessments of underlying facts. As a result, a tense, nervous, and antagonistic atmos-

phere arose in which views held by Czechoslovakia clashed with those of the exercise commanders, the Soviet comrades.

On the basis of statements by the exercise commanders, the information they provided, and their activities, as well as on the basis of our own experience, the objectives of the exercise can be summed up as follows:

- a) With regard to foreign policy, this was decidedly a demonstration of the strength and unity of the Warsaw Pact and a warning to the imperialists that speculation about the events in Czechoslovakia or about similar internal political developments elsewhere, as well as all provocative attempts, would be doomed from the very start.
- b) With regard to domestic policy, the exercises were intended to influence the Czechoslovak events in the sense that a show of the strength and determination of the Warsaw Pact states would paralyze and frighten enemies at home; the exercises would also intimidate wavering elements (especially intellectuals) and bolster and safeguard true Communists dedicated to the revolution and to socialism.
- c) Extensive meetings between senior military commanders and the staff participating in the exercise as well as members of units with the Czechoslovak people are to strengthen friendship and shore up the authority of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.
- d) The exceptionally important strategic–operational exercises are designed to enable multinational army staffs to acquire greater experience in planning, organizing, supervising, and cooperating in military operations.

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These planned objectives guided the exercise command in determining the scope of the exercises (the number of those involved), the timetable (making the exercises as long as possible), their content (deploying huge enemy and domestic forces against the ČSSR or for its defense), as well as the means to carry all this out.

The objectives of the exercise were determined by the position of the Soviet comrades in assessing internal political events in Czechoslovakia. They proceeded from the conviction that there is a counterrevolutionary situation in Czechoslovakia or, to be more accurate, a situation on the verge of counterrevolution [...]

The assessment of the Czechoslovak comrades of their internal situation as well as their vision of the exercise and its requirements differed from everything that has been said above. They essentially agreed to the exercise after being convinced that all activities would take place on the basis of a mutual agreement, with Czechoslovakia's active participation and within the framework of specified military objectives.

But this did not happen, and that is why there was a tense atmosphere at the exercise from the very beginning. They were taken aback when they learned that although the exercise was not supposed to be held until the second half of June, some of the Soviet intelligence units and General Kazakov's preparatory staff had arrived on Czechoslovak territory as early as the end of May and beginning of June.

Moreover, during his stay of more than two weeks, Cde. Kazakov was unable or

unwilling to inform the Party, government, and military leadership of the objectives of the exercise, the dates of its commencement and termination, the forms it was to take, the planned progression and time schedule of the individual phases, and the size of the armies and staffs arriving on Czechoslovak territory. According to the Czechoslovak comrades, he merely informed them of requirements, especially with regard to intelligence activities. Referring to adequate information, he pointed out that this was the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, who was due to arrive on 10–11 June. This disconcerted the Czechoslovak political and military leadership, and they increasingly pressed for sufficient information, but to no avail. As a result, each demand of the Soviet comrades to increase the number of units and formations triggered conflicts and heated discussions. This gradually increased the mistrust that was already present at the outset.

[...]

The tension increased still further when the Commander-in-Chief delayed his arrival from the 10th or 11th to the 14th, and then finally arrived on the 18th, the day before the start of the exercises.

The arrival of the Commander-in-Chief further increased the tense atmosphere surrounding the exercises. The leadership of the Czechoslovak Party again got no answers when it raised questions about the exercises.

[...]

The date of the termination of the exercise was a constant problem not only for the Czechoslovak comrades, but for us as well. On this point the Commander-in-Chief kept everyone in a state of maximum uncertainty.

The repeated insistence by the Czechoslovak side that the exercise be terminated and that the armies be withdrawn made certain Soviet comrades ask the following question: If these commanders are truly friends of the Soviet Union, why do they object to a Soviet presence that, after all, is there for their benefit as well? Insinuations were made that the presence of Soviet units and military organs had been a problem in the past for Imre Nagy, though not for Cde. [János] Kádár. (The Czechoslovak events were in general terms compared to the Hungarian counterrevolution.)

[...]

As we have pointed out, the Czechoslovak military leaders assessed their domestic situation as well as the objectives of the exercise and the need for it differently from the Soviet comrades. That is why they tried their utmost to ensure that the exercise would not go in the direction it did.

In our opinion, there is no counterrevolutionary situation in the country.

[...]

The experience of the entire exercise unfortunately confirmed that there are unacceptable shortcomings, irregularities, and inadequate provisions in the Warsaw Pact. All this clearly demonstrates that sooner or later these deficiencies will erode the dignity of the Soviet Union and undermine the Pact.

If such results are to be averted, the following steps are necessary:

- the text of the Treaty must be made more specific on the basis of the Politburo resolution, as we had planned;

- in connection with the organization and conduct of the so-called joint exercises, matters of substantial and fundamental importance and their observance must be specified in advance.

On the basis of our experience during the past 20 days and prompted by a feeling of responsibility for the common cause, I take the liberty of proposing to use acceptable methods in explaining to the leaders of the Soviet Party and Government that the unprofessional, crude, and insulting behavior of certain Soviet military commanders is objectively detrimental to the authority and reputation of the Soviet Union and to the unity of the Warsaw Pact.

*[Source: Archives of the Hungarian Defense Ministry, 5/12/11. Translated by Mark Kramer.]*

c) Information Report by Gen. Fritz Streletz to the  
GDR National Defense Council, July 5, 1968

On July 5, 1968 I was received by Army General Kazakov for a conversation in which he told me the following:

The relocation of Soviet and Polish headquarters and troops is taking place at a time currently not specified.

1. The leading Soviet comrades are pleased and satisfied to recognize the politically clear and principle-based position of the Army leadership of the National People's Army.

The National People's Army is maintaining its discipline with regard to the instructions given by their superiors.

In contrast, the Czechoslovak and Polish armies have begun their troop relocations without orders from the leaders of the exercise after the evaluation of the exercise on July 2.

The Polish comrades are also now pushing for their troops and headquarters to relocate as quickly as possible to accommodations on Polish territory.

[...]

2. In the course of the day on July 4, Marshal Iakubovskii was given a document signed by Defense Minister Dzúr. Speaking for the Czechoslovak Party and national leadership, the document called for a plan for troop relocation from the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by 20:00 hours of the same day.

This was the occasion for a discussion between Marshal Iakubovskii and Minister Dzúr, which began at 19:00 hours and ended toward 20:00 hours.

Marshal Iakubovskii clearly laid out the Soviet opinion and described how he personally evaluated developments in the ČSSR.

Minister Dzúr responded that the Soviet comrades had not correctly evaluated the process of democratization and that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the working class of the ČSSR had power firmly in hand.

The exercise as such had helped the party and national leadership of the ČSSR a lot. What would now play itself out after the exercise does not help the advanced forces, but rather hindered them in their work.

Marshal Iakubovskii did not agree with this opinion. He pointed to the fact that the USSR had helped and is helping the ČSSR in general.

The genuine danger of the counterrevolution must be recognized and the suggested measures must be taken.

Minister Džúr would not turn over the relocation plan. He was informed that the Czechoslovak document had been sent onward to Moscow.

In closing, Army General Kazakov expressed the basic idea that the Czechoslovak comrades had gotten stuck in their democratization process, that they themselves no longer knew what they really wanted.

After that, Army General Kazakov informed me that implementation of the most varied field excursions was planned for 6–7 July for staff officers as well as for enlisted officers and soldiers.

[...]

There were no instructions from Moscow about how and whether things would go forward in the next weeks.

[...]

[Source: *DY/30/3618*, pp. 81–85, *SAPMO-BA*. Translated by Paul Spitzer for the *National Security Archive*.]