

April 1, 1969

**Record of Conversation, Czechoslovak Defense
Minister Martin Dzúr and Soviet Defense Minister
Andrei Grechko, Prague**

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Summary:

Top Czechoslovak and Soviet military officials discuss the recent anti-Soviet protests in Czechoslovakia following the following the defeat of the Soviets by the Czechoslovak national team at the hockey world championships in Stockholm. Defense Minister and Marshal of the Soviet Union andrei Grechko warned that Warsaw Pact troops would invade again if the Czechoslovak leadership could not contain the anti-Soviet protests.

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April 1, 1969 (10:00 AM-12.30 P.M.) in the building of the Ministry of National Defense

The CSSR Minister of National Defense Col. General M[artin] Dzúr received the USSR Defense Minister, Marshal of the USSR A[ndrei] A. Grechko at his own request. In addition to Minister Grechko, the Soviet side was represented by:

-- Col. Gen. [Alexandr] Maierov, commander of the Central group of forces in the CSSR,

-- Col. Gen. Povalin, head of the main operational administration and secretary of the State Defense Council,

-- Maj. Gen. [S. M.] Zolotov, head of the political administration and member of the Military Council of the Central group of forces in the CSSR.

In addition to the minister of national defense, the Czechoslovak side was represented by:

-- Lt. Gen. V[áclav] Dvořák, state secretary of the CSSR government at the Ministry of National Defense,

-- Lt. Gen. K[arel] Rusov, chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army,

-- Lt. Gen. F[rantišek] Bedřich, head of the main political administration of the Czechoslovak People's Army,

-- Lt. Gen. A[lexandr] Mucha, head of the main administration of land forces, deputy minister,

-- Maj. Gen. J[an] Lux, head of the main rear, deputy minister,

-- Col. Gen. M[iroslav] Šmoldas, inspector general of the Czechoslovak People's Army, deputy minister.

Minister [Dzúr]: stated at the outset of the talks that he had convened those members of the army command requested by Minister Grechko. The meeting is unexpected for us and it would have been more agreeable had it been possible to talk under different circumstances.

Grechko: stated that he, too, would have wished the situation had been better. He had come at the decision of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR government to investigate the causes and consequences of anti-socialist outrages on March 28-29, 1969, directed against the Soviet army and the Soviet people. He would carry out the investigations with his own people.

It was a shameful thing and that is why he felt obliged to inform the minister of national defense and the command of the Czechoslovak People's Army on his opinion of the affronts directed against the Soviet army. A note from the Soviet government and the CPSU Central Committee would be handed over today in which they address the ČSSR government and the CPCz Central Committee, informing them of the inadmissibility of a repetition of similar outrages.

According to the reports they were receiving they knew what was being prepared. Yesterday (March 31, 1969) there was a meeting of commanders and political officers of the Central group of the armies where they convinced themselves how far counterrevolutionary groups had gone, insulting the peoples of the USSR and jeopardizing the friendship of our peoples and armies. They found out that these were not spontaneous actions, to do with ice hockey, but were well planned and organized demonstrations.

These are official talks and that is why he must lay down the facts concerning insults and acts of violence against the Soviet army. He would not even take the trouble to speak about Prague.

In Bratislava slogans appeared such as "occupiers," "fascists," "Brezhnev is a hooligan" and so on. Even members of the Czechoslovak People's Army took part in the demonstrations. We are talking about political demonstrations, organized political demonstrations by thousands of people with counterrevolutionary tendencies. If similar slogans directed against the ČSSR appeared in the USSR they would know how to cope with it immediately. In Bratislava Interior Ministry bodies did not intervene until three to four hours after the outbreak of the demonstration. The commander of

the garrison had asked for help but nothing was done. However, Bratislava was the only city where the security bodies, General [Egyd] Pepich, finally intervened energetically.

At Ústí nad Labem the komandatura was surrounded, windows were shattered, a truck was burnt as were three motor-bikes, and soldiers took part as well.

At Turnov windows were also shattered and the barracks, housing Soviet troops, were besieged.

At Trutnov several thousand people wanted to force their way into the barracks.

In Olomouc several thousand demonstrators surrounded the staff of the corps and the military hospital. Columns of demonstrators were headed by soldiers, eight groups of soldiers, 50 persons each.

In Ostrava there were also thousands of people. Apart from slogans and insults there was even shooting. Machine-gun fire could be heard. After the end of the demonstration military vehicles were driving people around the town, praising other demonstrators. The commander of the security forces had given orders not to intervene.

At Jaroměř - a demonstration around the hospital, 30 windows shattered. Stones were thrown and even landed in the wards. A monument to the Soviet army was destroyed and wreaths were set on fire there.

At Havlíčkův Brod gangs gathered outside the komandatura.

At Pardubice mobs gathered near a Soviet tank where they set fire to a Soviet flag with a painted swastika.

The conduct of Czechoslovak soldiers in the presence of a delegation of the Transcarpathian Military Area with the Western military area was undignified. Soldiers were hurling Molotov cocktails and shouting obscenities. The question arises whether commanders are commanding their troops. If this happened in their country they would know how to deal with this even without the courts.

The problem has gone beyond all limits, a danger is looming. The leadership of the Ministry of National Defense has taken no measures to liquidate actions against Soviet troops and to protect the allied army. It would surely not have been difficult to bring out a regiment to protect at Olomouc even if it had arrived on the scene later. Once it [the Soviet army—editors] begins to defend itself many people will suffer.

Their patience has been exhausted. How much longer are they to stand for insults and violence? Nobody protects them, no one apologizes to them. Although they turned to the security forces, no one, except in Bratislava, took part in suppressing the disorders. How do you regard this? None of the leading personages was on the spot, but [Josef] Smrkovský was. He said that now there was more at stake than just scores.

Minister [Dzúr]: he said that this is not quite the way things went and measures had been taken.

Grechko: continued that they had their officers in plain clothes. They knew that this had all been done in an organized manner and here, everyone acts as though no one had seen anything. He expressed the indignation of Soviet troops, commanders, the army command and the government. He conveyed a protest to the minister of national defense at the insults hurled at the Soviet army which had shed its blood for the liberation of the ČSSR. He quoted from the note saying that in the event of a repetition of similar events the Soviet side would be compelled to take its own measures and feel free to choose what kind of measures to take, depending on what kind of measures the ČSSR would take.

He once again asks Comrade Dzúr to take steps if he honors the memory of Soviet soldiers, and protect the Soviet army against counterrevolutionary elements. We, too, have our pride, honor and dignity. He had ordered Soviet commanders not to shoot, to ask for help, to keep a cool head and use restraint.

They hear nothing but verbal assurances but it looks to them as though counterrevolutionary elements are gradually expanding the range of their activity and are becoming increasingly daring. No one explains anything but merely shudders. No proper political work is being done and no measures are taken to strengthen friendship. Soviet troops are not allowed to go near Czechoslovak ones; they do not

need this kind of friendship.

He has given the commander of the Central group of forces orders which do not go beyond the provisions of the treaty:

- 1) to patrol from time to time with armored vehicles and tanks;
 - 2) in the event of a threat, demonstrators are not to be permitted to come nearer than 500 meters to the barracks, and if lives are in danger firearms are to be used;
 - 3) armored vehicles and tanks are to be sent to warehouses and bases where there are no troops and arms;
 - 4) commanders of Soviet garrisons are to be instructed to inform the local state administration about this order;
 - 5) if such events are repeated a curfew will be introduced, companies and tanks are to be deployed around existing komandaturas;
- 1) the possibility of increasing the number of Soviet troops by 10-15,000 to reach the number of 75,000 is being examined;
 - 2) the Warsaw Pact states are being informed of the participation of certain members of the Czechoslovak People's Army in anti-Soviet demonstrations;
 - 3) instructions have been issued for helicopters to patrol above areas where Soviet troops are deployed;
 - 4) he has ordered the group of Soviet troops in the GDR, Poland and in Ukraine to prepare a plan to enter ČSSR territory and, in the event of a threat, to enter ČSSR territory without even prior warning to the Czechoslovak authorities.

He demands a strict investigation of and sanctions against soldiers who are guilty and material damage to be compensated. We leave the moral damage up to your conscience. He is bitter that he has to talk in this way since this then also reflects on the Soviet people. He asks to be received by the president, Comrades [Alexander] Dubček and [Oldřich] Černík to express his protest and emphatically demands that measures be taken.

Dzúr: noted that the document he had prepared in many ways coincided with all that has been said. Several measures had been taken by the army. The only one who had asked for the assistance of troops was Pepich. We are specifying the situation in every respect. In Bratislava it had not been the soldiers but certain members of the Interior Ministry. Our inspection team left for Bratislava that same night. At Ústí nad Labem soldiers from the road battalion had been involved. A number had been summoned to the prosecutor.

He had and has thousands of troops ready, as well as a special plan. In agreement with the Interior Ministry he had taken measures and will take even more than had been requested. Every garrison commander has orders to help the security forces. In addition, there are special units. However, he himself cannot issue orders to the troops.

He was in contact with Comrades Dubček, [Lubomír] Štrougal and [Gustáv] Husák, but had been unable to contact the president and Comrade Černík. He had called on the commander of military counter-espionage and certain garrisons. On Saturday at 10 P.M. he was informed that everything was in order. All that needed to be done was done. He admits that certain factors were underestimated. He will summon the command, make his own evaluation and submit it to the party leadership, the government and the president.

Rusov: said that we felt miserable having to hear all this. Our information concerning the garrisons is more or less the same. We have a plan, the troops were prepared, all that was needed was for the political leadership to issue instructions. If soldiers did take part in the demonstrations, they were not from armored car or motorized divisions but from various rear supply units where there are soldiers with criminal records. We are investigating everything and shall take steps so the army will fulfill its duty. He informs the two ministers of the measures adopted.

Grechko: says the deputy commander of the group of forces had asked for assistance which was not given. Had he known that riots were being prepared throughout northern Bohemia he would have made a proposal to the government.

Dzúr: says that the Ministry of Interior, under pressure from us, has taken measures

at Ústí. He explains that the deputy commander of the Central group of troops had telephoned between 12:30 A.M. and 1:00 A.M. when everything was essentially over. Everything had to be first clarified and specified through the Ministry of Interior. He himself is not authorized to bring the troops out without permission.

Grechko: This means that Dubček did not permit this.

Dzúr: argues that this was not the way he put it. Comrade Dubček ordered things to be clarified and specified. It was then that he called Comrades Štrougal, Husák, Pepich and others.

Maiovrov: repeated the incident with the delegation of the Transcarpathian Military Area at lunch. When they were proposing a toast, explosives and Molotov cocktails were thrown outside and obscenities shouted. The commander of the Western military area and the commander of the 19th division were there. Of 36 garrisons 21 were in a state of disorder. He showed them on a map. A wireless engineering company was to have been deployed around Plzeň and Comrade Černík had spoken about this, but nothing is settled.

Rusov: specified that it was not near Plzeň but near Český Krumlov. We asked the government three times but received no answer.

Grechko: asked what our assessment was. He claimed that we were just looking on while the counterrevolution is running events. He again began to speak about counterrevolutionary slogans and banners and remarked that none of us had ever used the word counterrevolution. The allied troops had entered ČSSR territory to block the road to counterrevolution.

Dzúr: pointed out that he had said all he wanted to say.

Dvořák: noted that all that had happened and that is taking place cannot continue. The principles of friendship are being violated. The events on Saturday had been organized, and even if they had not, it's the results that matter. We have to apologize and take steps. He proposes that the Military Council thoroughly assess the situation, suggest measures and submit our evaluation and proposals to the leadership.

Dzúr: points out that this has been done. Agrees with Comrade Grechko that joint groups be set up to confront and verify facts with reports.

The question of guarding the western border is clear but as regards internal matters he is unable to state a decisive position. Then there is the political issue, the law on the press, censorship, the work of the judiciary, which also has its share.

He repeated how many and in which locations soldiers have been detailed to help the security forces. But he cannot send out a combat unit, for this he must receive instructions, consent. The commanders of the areas have the relevant orders.

Zolotov: division commander Novotný said he vouched for the senior officers but was unable to vouch for the younger ones.

Grechko: understands that Dzúr cannot send armed troops against the demonstrators. It was necessary to bar the road without arms.

He again came back to the insult of the Transcarpathian Military Area delegation. The commander does not command the regiment, the regiment has escaped subordination. In your country 40% of the soldiers say the main enemy is the USSR. And hundreds have taken part in anti-Soviet demonstrations. Relations with the USSR are getting worse. Counterrevolutionary forces are consolidating their positions. What are you doing in your political work? You call yourselves allies? Do you belong to the Warsaw Pact at all? We are defending socialism.

Both my hands were injured in battles for Czechoslovakia. I personally liberated many of the places where there were disturbances. You see this without any feelings. You are afraid to go to the troops and tell them the truth.

We warn you that we shall not tolerate a repetition of such acts. You said (that is, Comrade Dzúr), that you prevented clashes between Czechoslovak and Soviet troops. There was no need to say this. We shall make short shrift even of 100,000 counterrevolutionaries. We shall not let the CSSR go. We shall withdraw neither this nor next year.

Nobody from the 21 garrisons came to apologize. This speaks for itself. You talk about this quite calmly. You should hear what our soldiers and commanders said. I am sorry

but we shall not ask, we shall not ask your leadership, we shall not be afraid to adopt measures. You are afraid of a confrontation with counterrevolution.

There were signals of anti-Soviet slogans as far back as on March 21, yet this was no warning for you. You know the situation when ice hockey could turn into a political demonstration. You have no political vigilance.

Throughout the command of the Czechoslovak People's Army there is no good relationship with the Soviet army, otherwise measures would have been taken. What of it that the Military Council will meet, talk a while and then disband. Our people are waiting for someone to come and apologize.

At Mladá Boleslav, the commander asked three times until someone came and hit him with a stone. Things are verging on the terrible. Go to the soldiers and tell them the truth. Our soldiers are not permitted to mix with yours. I do not understand this and we cannot tolerate this. Measures must be taken, otherwise things will be really bad. One has to educate them, if not for friendship, then at least to show respect. Demonstrations are being prepared in your country and you are sitting still. I once again express the indignation of the Soviet command on the question of relations with the Soviet army. He not only asks but proposes that measures be taken.

Bedřich: agrees with the evaluation and understands the indignation. We have taken several measures but our results are not commensurate with our efforts.

Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship is not being defended consistently. It is not easy to paralyze various influences on people's thinking. We must apologize for the events that have taken place and take steps towards strengthening lasting friendship.

Zolotov: is astonished how calmly the head of the main political administration is speaking. You often said that many political workers were an obstruction but you do nothing, you have them all at the main political administration. Those who want to work are angry that things are being dragged along and nothing is being done.

Maiorov: states that the treaty of October 16, 1968, is not being implemented, namely the passage which states that measures will be taken to strengthen relations. The Czechoslovak People's Army is not carrying out the president's decision on contacts. We are trying to fulfill it. The political leadership has laid down the line—the letter from the CPCz Central Committee to local branches speaking of the reinforcement of mutual relations. This applies to the army as well. An all-army assembly also underlined the demands to strengthen relations, but in practice nothing has changed. No political work is being done in carrying out the demand of the political leadership. If the army command did this the Soviet army would not be so isolated. There is still the Warsaw Pact. We made some good decisions there but what is needed is political education, friendship, love.

Grechko: none of this is felt, counterrevolution has gone onto an open offensive.

Dzúr: remarked that comrade Maiorov would be right if things were that simple in the state and among the people. There are many orders as well as speeches by leading representatives. We do not have the means to introduce love and friendship.

Maiorov: says he would dismiss a person if he were to find out that his men had harassed the allied army.

Dzúr: says he, too, will do this but only if the information is accurate.

Grechko: orders are given but how are they being fulfilled? We do not tell our people the kind of insults we hear. Or don't you think it necessary to summon your men, tell them, to come and see our men and talk to them?

Dzúr: is not too soft to do this. We, too, shall go there and explain.

Grechko: says it is essential to wage a real battle. He believes the situation in our country is worse than on August 21, 1968. If you don't take measures things will be in a bad way.

Dvořák: not only for us but for you as well.

Grechko: Smrkovský is always there when something against the USSR is taking place. He is surprised that we are so soft.

Dzúr: has spoken to the president and wants to brief him tomorrow at 10 A.M. The Bureau, the presidium is meeting and he is asking to be invited. He will inform them and state his opinion.

Grechko: asks Dzúr to inform them in the same way he informed the army command.

Dzúr: promises he will do this.

Grechko: asks Dzúr for an appointment for the whole delegation with the president, Comrades Dubček and Černík.

Dzúr: says he cannot promise that the president will see all of them. He stressed that we must make a profound analysis of all questions. It is not that simple. Your work is easier.

Grechko: we do not have people of the Smrkovský type. He (Grechko) would make use of this outrage by the counterrevolution and take a number of steps. He said he was glad that shortcomings, the consequences of incorrect processes and so forth, were being eliminated.

Dzúr: does not want to say a great deal. As regards the enemy from outside, the Czechoslovak People's Army will always be by the side of the Soviet army. The internal situation is something else. There are various linkages from which we shall learn lessons.

Grechko: again returns to the note, and remarks what it contains in this respect. Rejects the view that it was all unexpected. Go and explain and I, too, would like to go to our troops and explain certain matters.