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Cable from US Embassy in Prague on Czech Demonstrations

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Summary:

Cable from the US embassy in Prague reporting that demonstrations continued over the weekend in Prague.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 08097

BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMBASSADOR NILES
DEPARTMENT PASS TO ERIKA SCHLAGER CSCE COMMISSION

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM, CSCE, CZ
SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE OVER WEEKEND IN PRAGUE

REF: PRAGUE 8082

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. SUMMARY. DEMONSTRATIONS IN PRAGUE CONTINUED ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, BUT UNLIKE FRIDAY'S STUDENT DEMONSTRATION WERE NOT MARRED BY VIOLENCE. BESIDES DEMONSTRATIONS, THE CZECHOSLOVAK PUBLIC HAS REACTED TO THE BRUTAL SUPPRESSION OF FRIDAY'S DEMONSTRATION AND THE REPORT (PERHAPS INACCURATE) OF THE DEATH OF A STUDENT AT THE HANDS OF RIOT POLICE WITH CALLS FOR STUDENT AND GENERAL STRIKES. CZECHOSLOVAK AUTHORITIES HAVE DENIED THE REPORT OF A STUDENT DEATH, HAVE ACCUSED THE VOA OF TRANSMITTING A FALSE REPORT, AND ARRESTED PETR UHL, WHO FIRST MADE THE REPORT. THE CONFIDENTIAL

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REGIME HAS CLEARLY BEEN SHAKEN BY THE WEEKEND'S EVENTS, AND HAS ASKED FOR THE NATION TO BE CALM. THE LIKELY REACTION BY THE PUBLIC WILL BE

CONTINUING DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH WILL ADD TO THE PRESSURES ALREADY FACED BY THE JAKES LEADERSHIP.
END SUMMARY.

3. THE VIOLENT SUPPRESSION OF FRIDAY'S DEMONSTRATION IN PRAGUE AND THE REPORT (PERHAPS INACCURATE) THAT A STUDENT WAS KILLED BY POLICE DURING THE DEMONSTRATION SPURRED CZECHOSLOVAKS TO RETURN TO THE STREETS OF PRAGUE FOR DEMONSTRATIONS ON THE EVENINGS OF BOTH SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18 AND SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19. SATURDAY'S DEMONSTRATION AT ITS HEIGHT NUMBERED ONLY 1,000 PERSONS BUT SOME 25,000 PERSONS MARCHED THROUGH PRAGUE ON SUNDAY.

4. RIOT-EQUIPPED POLICE CONFRONTED DEMONSTRATORS ON BOTH DAYS, BUT WE ARE AWARE OF NO SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE AGAINST DEMONSTRATORS. ON SUNDAY RIOT POLICE WERE ONLY DEPLOYED TO PREVENT DEMONSTRATORS FROM CROSSING THE VLTAVA RIVER AND MARCHING TO PRAGUE CASTLE, SITE OF THE OFFICE AND RESIDENCE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK PRESIDENT. OTHERWISE, DEMONSTRATORS WERE FREE TO MARCH WITHOUT POLICE HARASSMENT OR INTERFERENCE SO LONG AS THEY STAYED IN THE AREA OF PRAGUE'S SO-CALLED GOLDEN CROSS (WENCESLAS SQUARE AND NATIONAL AVENUE). IN MARKED CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS PRACTICE, AUTHORITIES ALSO ALLOWED PERSONS TO PLACE CANDLES AROUND THE STATUE OF SAINT WENCESLAS AND AT THE NATIONAL AVENUE SITE OF THE FRIDAY NIGHT "MASSACRE."

5. SATURDAY'S AND SUNDAY'S DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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LARGELY SPONTANEOUS AND LEADERLESS. UNLIKE FRIDAY'S, WHEN DEMONSTRATORS WERE MOSTLY STUDENTS, DEMONSTRATORS ON SUNDAY APPEARED TO BE FROM ALL SECTORS OF CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIETY. SUNDAY'S DEMONSTRATION BROKE UP PEACEFULLY WITH DEMONSTRATORS PROMISING TO RETURN TO THE STREETS MONDAY EVENING.

6. VARIOUS OTHER REACTIONS TO FRIDAY'S VIOLENCE HAVE INCLUDED CALLS FOR A STRIKE BY UNIVERSITY (AND POSSIBLY HIGH SCHOOL) STUDENTS DURING THE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 20-24, SUSPENSION OF THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES IN PRAGUE, BRATISLAVA AND OTHER CITIES, AND CALLS FOR A TWO-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE ON NOVEMBER 27. VACLAV HAVEL IN AN RFE INTERVIEW STATED HE RECEIVED CALLS FROM NUMEROUS FACTORIES PLEDGING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GENERAL STRIKE.

(HAVEL, INCIDENTALLY, HAS RECEIVED A PASSPORT AND PERMISSION TO TRAVEL TO SWEDEN TO RECEIVE THE OLAF PALME PRIZE, BUT WILL NOT DO SO IN LIGHT OF EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA.)

7. THE REACTION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK PUBLIC TO FRIDAY'S BRUTALITY HAS BEEN MAGNIFIED BY A REPORT THAT A STUDENT NAMED MARTIN SMID WAS KILLED BY POLICE ON FRIDAY. SUCH REPORT WAS FIRST MADE BY PETR UHL OF THE INDEPENDENT NEWS AGENCY VIA (EAST EUROPEAN INFORMATION AGENCY) AND WAS REPEATED BY THE VOA, BBC AND REUTERS. IT NOW APPEARS THAT, IF A STUDENT WAS KILLED, HE WAS NOT NAMED MARTIN SMID. EMBOFFS TALKED WITH THE MOTHER OF MARTIN SMID AND SHE TOLD US THAT HER SON HAD NOT BEEN KILLED OR EVEN INJURED. CZECHOSLOVAK TELEVISION ON SUNDAY DENIED REPORTS OF SMID'S DEATH, AND LOUDSPEAKERS ON WENCESLAS SQUARE ON SUNDAY PRESENTED A TAPE THAT DENIED SMID'S DEATH AND SPECIFICALLY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PRAGUE 08097

BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMBASSADOR NILES
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BLAMED VOA (BUT NOT BBC OR REUTERS) FOR HAVING
MALICIOUSLY PRESENTED THE REPORT.

8. FOR HIS ACTION OF PASSING ALONG INFORMATION TO
WESTERN JOURNALISTS ON THE REPORTS OF SMID'S DEATH,
PETR UHL, A MEMBER OF VONS (COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE
OF THE UNJUSTLY PERSECUTED) AND OF THE INDEPENDENT
EAST EUROPEAN INFORMATION AGENCY, HAS BEEN ARRESTED
BY AUTHORITIES AND CHARGED WITH "DAMAGING THE INTERESTS
OF THE REPUBLIC ABROAD." HIS WIFE ANNA SABATOVA WAS
ALSO DETAINED AS SHE ATTEMPTED TO GO TO AN INDEPENDENT
PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE HOME OF CHARTER 77 SPOKESPERSON
DANA NEMCOVA ON SUNDAY. SUCH A PRESS CONFERENCE WAS
REPORTEDLY CALLED TO PRESENT WITNESSES WHO COULD
TESTIFY ABOUT THE ALLEGED DEATH OF A STUDENT, BUT
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POLICE PREVENTED VISITORS TO NEMCOVA'S HOUSE AND THE
PRESS CONFERENCE DID NOT OCCUR. IT THUS REMAINS A
MYSTERY AT THIS TIME WHETHER A STUDENT WAS IN FACT
KILLED.

9. OFFICIAL CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS SOURCES INDICATE ABOUT
100 PERSONS WERE DETAINED ON FRIDAY, BUT EMBOFFS SAW
TWO BUSLOADS OF DETAINEES DRIVEN AWAY AFTER FRIDAY'S
DEMONSTRATION AND BELIEVE THE OFFICIAL FIGURE IS LOW.
IN ADDITION TO THE DETENTION OF PETR UHL AND ANNA
SABATOVA, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT JOHN BOK OF THE RADICAL
PARTY, EMMANUEL MANDLER OF THE DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVE,
AND DAVID DUSEK, A CZECHOSLOVAK WORKING WITH A CNN
CREW, WERE DETAINED OVER THE WEEKEND. MANDLER'S
DETENTION WAS APPARENTLY PROVOKED BY A DEMOCRATIC
INITIATIVE CALL FOR AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT HEADED
BY DUBCEK, HAVEL, AND OTHER INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVES.
WE UNDERSTAND MANDLER HAS BEEN RELEASED FROM POLICE
CUSTODY, BUT HAVE NO FURTHER INFORMATION CONCERNING
BOK AND DUSEK.

COMMENT

10. THE WEEKEND'S EVENTS HAVE CLEARLY SHAKEN AUTHORITIES. FRANTISEK PITRA, PREMIER OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, APPEARED ON TELEVISION ON SUNDAY AND ASKED THAT THE NATION REMAIN CALM. THE RESPONSE WILL MOST LIKELY BE MORE AND PERHAPS EVEN LARGER DEMONSTRATIONS. SOME OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT A DEMONSTRATION SCHEDULED FOR 4:00 P.M. TODAY ON WENCESLAS SQUARE WILL BE EVEN LARGER THAN THAT OF LAST FRIDAY. CONTINUING DEMONSTRATIONS WILL ONLY CONFIDENTIAL

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ADD TO THE PRESSURES ALREADY FACED BY THE JAKES' LEADERSHIP, AND MAY ACCELERATE HIS PASSING FROM THE CZECHOSLOVAK POLITICAL SCENE.
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