Ideology in American Cold War Foreign Policy

The Prague Spring Case Study

Abstract: This paper deconstructs the Johnson Administration's reaction to the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to explore whether realism or ideology drove American foreign policy in the Cold War. The article concludes that a distinction must be made between American decision-making in Europe and in the Third World due to the rigid bloc structure present in Europe, and absent elsewhere, constraining US options in responding to Eastern bloc crises. Due to the Warsaw Pact's limiting effect on US power projection across the Iron Curtain, the US viewed European events through a realist lens while waging ideologically-driven struggles in the Third World where spheres of influence were much more malleable.

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As World War II came to a close, the Soviet Union began the construction of an East European sphere of influence under its own domination. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, Albania, and Romania all became communist satellite states to the Soviet Union within a few short years after the guns of World War II fell silent.[1] By 1955, these countries entered into a collective defense agreement, called the Warsaw Pact, between themselves and the Soviet Union in response to West Germany's integration into the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Soviet Union dictated the foreign policies of all member states and to a large degree determined their economic future as well. However, member states often challenged the USSR's hegemony within the alliance, and such was the case in 1968 during the Czechoslovak Prague Spring.

In January 1968, Alexander Dubcek was elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.[2] Dubcek quickly began liberalizing Czechoslovak society by releasing political prisoners, enabling market reforms, reducing censorship regulations, and facilitating greater political participation among local communities.[3] Dubcek and his government did not envision how hard the Czechoslovak people would pressure the regime to push forward with further liberal reforms.[4] Soon, blatantly anti-Soviet articles began to appear regularly in the Czechoslovak press. Czechoslovak military commanders even expressed desires for an independent foreign policy within the framework of the Warsaw Pact alliance which was clearly antithetical to Soviet interests.[5] By July and August of 1968, the Soviet Politburo and its East European allies regarded Dubcek as either unwilling to control the population or unwilling to do so. On August 20th, twenty-three years after Soviet tanks entered Prague as liberators, Soviet tanks returned to the City of a Hundred Spires as conquerors.[6] The crushing of the Prague Spring will serve as an analytical tool to help clarify the nature of an old historical debate: "To what degree did realism or ideology influence US foreign policy during the Cold War?"

This paper makes use of *Foreign Relations of the United States* documents to analyze the US intelligence community's and President Lyndon B. Johnson's response to the crisis as it unfolded. This paper draws on presidential speeches, the minutes of national security council meetings, memorandums of conversations between key decision-makers, CIA intelligence bulletins, presidential daily briefs, communications between US embassies and Washington, *New York Times* articles, and any Warsaw Pact documents when deemed relevant. Although some Warsaw Pact documents are used, the author has generally avoided these documents in an effort to hone the discussion to the US response exclusively.[7] When used, eastern bloc documents serve to contextualize American reactions to the situation on the ground in Central and Eastern Europe during the crisis period.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, historians scrambled to determine the nature of the Cold War. Most of the debate occurred between 1993 and 2003 as former Soviet states continued declassifying mountains of new documents during this period. Three broad schools of thought emerged. One school proposed that realism, security, and superpower rivalry best explained the essence of Cold War conflict while a second suggested that ideology drove the hostilities. A third school rejected this binary assessment of the Cold War, opting for a more nuanced view of the conflict. While an argument spanning the entirety of the Cold War is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to discuss the nature of the Cold War by using carefully selected case studies to draw wider conclusions on the nature of the contest.

Analyzing the United States' response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 enables the deconstruction of the often-complex processes of US foreign policy decision-making during this period.

Realism is the first interpretation of the nature of the Cold War, serving as a very popular understanding of geopolitics during the Cold War itself. This analytical approach emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international state system (i.e. all states are responsible for their own security), the dominating role of the security dilemma, and the tendency of states to maximize their power whenever possible. US-USSR rivalry was most commonly explained by structural realists, notably John Mearsheimer and his concept of "offensive realism." Mearsheimer maintains that it "makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, to pursue hegemony."[8] Other scholars, such as Paul Kubricht, do not emphasize the influence of ideology on US policymakers' decision to tacitly allow the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia but stop short of explicitly adopting a realist perspective in their analyses.[9] Even though Kubricht does not overtly declare his presence in the realist camp, he cites US concerns over Vietnam and the presence of an understanding of "spheres of influence" in Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact as primary factors de-incentivizing an American response, both of which are very realist interpretations of US actions.[10]

Proponents of the second school of thought reject the realist interpretation as too constrained. For example, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein firmly reject the above interpretation of the international system, arguing that "the narrow constituents of realism – material power, changes in its distribution, and external threat – are radically incomplete and do not account for what nations actually do." [11] For Rosecrance and Stein, domestic groups, social ideas, the character of constitutions, economic constraints, historical social tendencies, and domestic political pressures play a more important role in grand strategy. John Mueller similarly concludes that liberal democratic values were intrinsic to US goals in the Cold War. In his view, the Cold War sprang from a contest of ideas and ideological conflict, not merely raw superpower rivalry.[12]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War, some scholars challenged the binary realism vs ideology debate on the nature of Cold War geopolitics. Prominent Cold War historian Melvyn Leffler calls for scholars to do away with the binary paradigm completely, maintaining that "Realists can be ideologues, and ideologues can be realists. Ideology alone does not dictate policy, nor does security."[13] Nigel Gould-Davies offers a compelling interpretation of the complex relationship between ideology and security in the Cold War by arguing that "the United States frequently measured security in terms not of power relations but of the global fortunes of regime types …

Demonstration in Helsinki against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. (1968)
Source: Self-photographed (Wikimedia Commons)

This ideologized view was founded on antipathy toward Communism not as an economic system, but as a political project."[14] This interpretation of the realism versus ideology question provides greater nuance and analytical flexibility than the former binary structure and better explains the decisions of both superpowers in the Cold War.

This paper should be considered an outcrop of the third school of thought, whereby neither superpower operated exclusively under the influence of realism or ideology. Instead, each side complied with a tacit understanding that Europe was not a place for *violent* ideological confrontation since East-West armed conflict in Europe could quickly escalate to World War III. Instead, the superpowers operated based on realist principles in Europe because there was no room for ideological maneuvering in the clearly demarcated European continent. Rather, the superpowers engaged in violent ideological conflict in the Third World where the threat of nuclear escalation was much smaller.[15] In this arena, communism and democracy would square off in one of the most destructive, prolonged conflicts in human history, eventually claiming the lives of nearly 14 million people in the post-colonial world.[16]

The US response to the Prague Spring is a useful case study for analyzing the degree to which the United States operated based on realism or ideology. The lack of a forceful US response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 demonstrates that the United States could not take an aggressive, ideologically-driven stance due to their lack of options and the possibility of igniting World War III. Furthermore, the Johnson Administration had clearly demonstrated its willingness to fight bloody Cold War battles in the Third World, having launched or escalated interventions

in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. US inaction to the Prague Spring is thus an intriguing historical surprise. The explanation? Simply put, Europe was a different political context for the superpowers which rendered violent ideological reactions to world events impossible.

On August 20th, 1968, at 8:15 pm in the White House Cabinet Room, Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin sat down to meet with President Lyndon Johnson and his special assistant Walt Rostow. The meeting started amidst a good atmosphere, with US President Lyndon Johnson telling Dobrynin about a new color film he had seen while at his ranch in Texas.[17] The laid-back mood seemed to foreshadow the upcoming era of détente which Johnson had so firmly worked for during his presidency.[18] Dobrynin soon switched to the topic at hand and delivered the message to President Johnson that the Soviet Union had invaded Czechoslovakia, stating that there had been "a conspiracy of internal and external reaction against the social system" in Czechoslovakia. He added that the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies had replied to a request by the Prague government for help.[19] Accordingly, Soviet military units had been ordered to cross into Czechoslovakia. "Needless to say," Dobrynin continued, "they will be immediately withdrawn from Czechoslovak territory once the existing threat to security is removed." The message concluded that Moscow assumed there would be no damage to Soviet-American relations, "to which the Soviet government attaches great importance."[20] However, in reality, the invasion tarnished Soviet reputation within the socialist camp, non-aligned movement, free world, and nearly all other states.[21] Unfortunately for Johnson, détente was now in serious jeopardy.

Johnson responded unpredictably. Instead of acting with strong condemnation to the news of the quashing of millions of people's political freedoms, Johnson responded by informing Dobrynin that the position outlined by Secretary of State Dean Rusk during Dobrynin and Rusk's July 22 meeting was the current position of the United States.[22] During that meeting, Rusk had told Dobrynin that "If this happened (an invasion of Czechoslovakia – C.R.) we would deeply regret it and it could not possibly have anything but a very negative effect on our relations, all the more so if the U.S. was to be presented as a scapegoat."[23] Johnson proceeded to thank Dobrynin for the notification, only to move on to discuss his visit to the Soviet Union and, curiously, one Mr. Rayburn's drinking habits and the history of Texas.[24] If Johnson understood the severe damage the invasion would do to the prospects of détente and his visit to the Soviet Union, he certainly did not show it during this meeting.

President Johnson called an emergency meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the Soviet invasion after Ambassador Dobrynin's visit. The meeting consisted of numerous key decision-makers, including President Johnson, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, CIA Director Richard Helms, General Earle Wheeler, US Ambassador to the United Nations George Ball, and Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt Rostow, among others. Secretary Rusk was disappointed by the timing of the invasion, especially in light of the USSR's "favorable messages" on strategic missile talks and the President's in-person meeting with General Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev.[25] To make the timing even more uncomfortable, the Americans and Soviets had previously decided to announce President Johnson's impending visit to Moscow on August 21st, the day after the invasion. There is no evidence to suggest that this move was an intentional ploy to scuttle the meeting. There were much easier ways to cancel a proposed meeting than by invading a country. However, the damage was done, and President Johnson's hopes for a bilateral summit were summarily dashed.

The next day, after Johnson had met with his cabinet, he released a public statement on the invasion, condemning the USSR's invasion justifications as "patently contrived." Johnson called on the Soviets and their allies to withdraw all forces from Czechoslovakia.[26] The statement's brevity indicates Johnson's nonchalant attitude towards the invasion as well as American policymakers' lack of options. President Johnson desired détente between the United States and the USSR; as a result, he wanted to leave the invasion behind and continue furthering bilateral ties. It is no coincidence that a period of US-Soviet détente emerged immediately after Johnson's presidency under the Nixon Administration once the backlash against the Soviet invasion had largely dissipated. As historian Mitchell Lerner demonstrates, Johnson deserved much more credit than he was given for détente and the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in 1972.[27] Furthermore, since President Johnson only had a couple more months left in office, the invasion rendered cooperative talks with the Soviets essentially impossible if the US issued a strong, public condemnation of the event. The United States was caught off-guard by the invasion. Even on the day of the invasion, the Administration was working to further arms control talks between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.[28] It is in this context that Johnson decided to de-emphasize the importance of the invasion and instead focus on bilateral relations. However, as the American and global public exploded in rage at the Soviet action, Johnson's somewhat conciliatory tone began to change.

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AS CONSTRAINT

The President's inaction did not sit well with many in the American public, which was quick to condemn not only the Soviet invasion but also its government's lack of a meaningful response. One *New York Times* article on August 22nd compared the invasion of Czechoslovakia to the "rape

of Hungary" in 1956, raged against the lackadaisical US response, and bemoaned the slow-moving efforts made by the UN to convene a Security Council meeting on the issue.[29] Furthermore, numerous US senators such as Senator Roman Hruska and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen informed Johnson of their constituent's displeasure with the lack of a concrete American response to the invasion, particularly exacerbated by Johnson's continued effort to build better relations with the USSR.[30]

There were also strong voices in the American public supporting some of the President's actions. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as a national security adviser to US Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter, praised President Johnson for his bridge building initiative with Eastern Europe which Brzezinski believed forced the Soviets to invade and show their true colors.[31] James Reston, executive editor of the *New York Times*, wrote an article praising Johnson for his pragmatism in ignoring the invasion while focusing on arms control, which he deemed to be "the predominate issue in the world today."[32] Journalist Max Frankel agreed with the President's decision not to cross the well-understood line of demarcation separating West from East. To Frankel, these lines existed so nuclear war could more easily be averted. Frankel stated eloquently that "Moscow has let down good communists in France and Guatemala as Washington has let down liberty-loving men in Budapest and Prague because survival is ultimately a higher value than ideology."[33] In short, many influential members of the public understood US inaction towards the invasion as a surefire sign of an "understanding" between Washington and Moscow that they would not interfere in each other's backyards– the interference was meant for the Third World.

While the Johnson Administration vehemently opposed this notion, Brezhnev believed that Johnson had confirmed to the Soviet Union that a sphere of influence in Europe did exist. According to Leonid Brezhnev, he asked President Johnson "if the American government still fully recognizes the results of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. And on August 18, I (Brezhnev – C.R.) received the reply: as far as Czechoslovakia and Romania are concerned, it recognizes them without reservation; in the case of Yugoslavia, it would have to be discussed."[34] As of yet, no document has surfaced which confirms that the Johnson Administration gave Brezhnev this greenlight. To the contrary, two well-respected scholars on the invasion, Jiri Valenta and Harold Gordon Skilling, did not find any convincing evidence to suggest that Brezhnev's statement was true. Furthermore, on September 4, in the 590th meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), Secretary Rusk explained that "It is important that everyone know we have never had any understanding with the Soviet Union about respective spheres of influence as De Gaulle alleges."[35] Ultimately, even foreign heads of state bought into the "spheres of influence" explanation of US inaction towards the invasion.

Memorial of victims of 21 August 1968 in Liberec (1968)
Source: Photograph by Jiří Sedláček (Wikimedia Commons)

Clarifying this debate over whether or not the Johnson Administration agreed to an explicit or implicit understanding between the US and USSR on their respective spheres of influence helps indicate to what degree ideology influenced US decision-making during this period. If the Administration agreed to an understanding, then this is strong evidence that practical security matters, in this instance, trumped ideological concerns; allowing your ideological rival to dominate half of the European continent, and millions to toil under the communist system, is a very hard pill to swallow for cold warrior ideologues. However, if Johnson did not agree, it would be easier to argue that ideology still played an important part in his foreign policy calculations vis-à-vis Europe and the Soviet Union.

Journalist George Urban interviewed Eugene Rostow the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs during the invasion, in 1979.[36] The text of this interview was subsequently published in the *Washington Quarterly* and contains passages which illuminate the Cold War paradigms senior Johnson Administration officials viewed their world through. Rostow freely admits that the United States never considered aiding anti-Soviet reform efforts in Eastern Europe, saying:

During the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovaks carry their national flag past a burning tank in Prague (1968)
Source: The Central Intelligence Agency (Wikimedia Commons)

> "We recognized, and it was a very painful and hateful thing to recognize, that under the standing rules of the Cold War there was nothing we could do about Czechoslovakia, but if the Soviet moves represented something wider than an "internal" response to the Prague reforms-that was going to be treated as a very different matter."[37]

From Rostow's perspective, US officials clearly understood that their influence in Eastern Europe was negligible, and further supporting the Prague Spring reformists may in fact endanger them. Rostow notes that there was a central rule which the administration always heeded: "Don't cross the East/West demarcation line."[38] This decision was not taken lightly. Rostow explained the United States' difficult position in formulating how to "meaningfully" respond to the invasion. After all, it is quite difficult to respond to an invasion reciprocally without declaring war. According to Rostow, decision-makers weighed multiple options, including stopping grain shipments to the USSR, halting technological transfers to the Soviets, and/or ceasing arms control talks. However, these options were limited in their viability, as Rostow admits, especially in the case of halting grain shipments. Rostow stated resolutely that "food simply is not a weapon, because we could not refuse help to starving people."[39] It was also not politically viable to halt arms control talks due to Johnson's determination to achieve a breakthrough on arms control between the US and USSR. US passivity to the invasion is thus well-grounded. The distinct lack of diplomatic and economic options available to Washington seriously constrained its ability to respond in a way which would placate the American public. Rostow's version of events suggests that during the Johnson Administration there was, at the very least, a *de facto* understanding between the US and USSR over European demarcation. Whether Johnson gave Brezhnev formal authorization is of little relevance since US actions reflected its silent consent of the invasion.

THE LIMITS OF IDEOLOGY ON DECISION-MAKING

Washington's decision-making on Czechoslovakia did not occur in a vacuum, and the international context under which the United States operated in 1968 was not at all conducive to exploiting the Soviet invasion for maximum damaging effect on the USSR and its allies. The Vietnam War constrained the Johnson Administration's ability to conduct further foreign policy ventures and produced an American public which was quite wary of increased entanglement abroad. In 1968, merely forty-two percent of American men and thirty-six percent of American women supported the war in Vietnam.[40] Furthermore, the number of US servicemen killed in action reached its apex in 1968, with 16,899 American soldiers losing their lives in Vietnam.[41] War in Europe, even if it could be assuredly contained to purely conventional, non-nuclear forces, was out of the question for the Johnson Administration in light of staggering losses in Vietnam.

Vietnam further constrained Washington due to the American media's quick realization of the parallels between the American involvement in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Reporters told Secretary Rusk in his press briefing on August 22nd that some Americans suggested that the US did not have a moral right to criticize the Russians because of the US role in both Vietnam and Santo Domingo (the 1965 US-led intervention in an anti-government coup in the Dominican Republic).[42] Rusk adamantly responded that the comparisons were unequal because the United States responded to a "common danger" shared with South Vietnam and acted on its treaty of mutual security, while the Warsaw Pact had deprived a member state of their ight to sovereign, internal policymaking.[43] Regardless of Rusk's reasoning, the message was clear: many Americans viewed each intervention as Cold War-fueled actions undertaken by two governments which were obsessed with imposing their will on the world.

Ideologues can still be constrained by concrete security concerns without compromising their ideological morals. President Johnson clearly championed democratic and capitalist governments in the world, as well as pro-Washington regimes which brazenly rejected democratic principles. Even though most Cold War presidents were ideologues in their own ways, they understood their boundaries in the international system. In Johnson's case, although he may have felt that helping Czechoslovakia achieve democracy would fit squarely within his personal ideological framework, that would result in the destruction of the world if the US responded militarily. Under such a moral calculation, realism and idealism would have resulted in the same exact response. Furthermore, realism does not intrinsically mean rationality just as ideology does not inherently imply irrationality. Adherents to both schools of thought, assuming they are rational actors, would have pursued the same general course of inaction chosen by Johnson. There simply was not another reciprocal option.

"The distinct lack of diplomatic and economic options available to Washington seriously constrained its ability to respond in a way which would placate the American public."

A military response was off the table for the Johnson Administration. However, as outlined previously, there were not many more palatable options of a reciprocal nature which could both punish the Soviets and placate the American public's outrage at the invasion. The Johnson Administration was thus left with little leeway in deciding the US response. There was no room for ideology to influence the administration's decision-making because concrete factors prevented any resolute reaction to the invasion. If more options were available to policymakers, ideology might have affected the decision-making process more meaningfully.

Since there were few viable options for decision-makers in Washington, it is difficult to properly assess the role ideology played in the US decision to stand aside. This dilemma calls into question the reliability of using Czechoslovakia as a barometer for ideology's prevalence in US foreign policy. However, the solution lies in proposing a more nuanced understanding of the term "ideologue" in Cold War history. Common assumptions of ideologues suggest that they cannot compromise with their ideological rivals, or that they are inherently aggressive towards them. Importantly, however, deeming someone an ideologue does not mean that they are inherently irrational. The history of the Johnson Administration's stance is useful because it highlights the ideological flexibility with which the United States operated during the Cold War.

Johnson's ability to look past the Soviet invasion and immediately focus on arms control talks is commendable. This serves as an example of ideological compromise making sense for world peace. If a state's number one goal is security, a nuclear exchange with a country with second-strike capability would be completely irrational. This view prevailed on the US side, as former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara explained to the United Press International in San Francisco in September of 1968: "the blunt fact is, then, that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States can attack the other without being destroyed in retaliation; nor can either of us attain a first-strike capability in the foreseeable future."[44] This statement accurately reflects US nuclear defense policy at the time since McNamara left his post as Secretary of Defense in February of 1968, only a couple of months before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August that year.

THE THREAT OF THE SOVIET STEAM-ROLLER

The US foreign policy apparatus was much more concerned about the invasion than President Johnson was. The President was focused solely on achieving a positive legacy through arms control talks, and this is exemplified in the initial meeting between Dobrynin and Johnson on August 20th, when Dobrynin first informed the President of the Soviet invasion. According to Dobrynin himself, Walt Rostow was the only other person in the room when he told Johnson of the invasion, and while the President seemed to miss the significance of the invasion, Rostow "sat with

lowering face, trying not to interrupt the president," as he continued to arms control talks.[45] According to Dobrynin's account of events, Johnson still wanted a summit in Moscow between himself and Brezhnev in spite of the invasion.[46]

Secretary of State Rusk was much more resolute in making the President aware of his disapproval of the invasion. Dobrynin explained that Rusk's attitude toward the invasion "represented anything but approval" and that he would "spare no effort to make President Johnson disapprove of it just as strongly as he did."[47] Furthermore, the Central Intelligence Agency prioritized the Soviet invasion and accorded it a high degree of importance. From August 21st to September 7th, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was the first entry in each worldwide agency bulletin; this demonstrated that the invasion was the primary focus of the intelligence community immediately following the event, with other regions such as Vietnam taking a temporary backseat.[48] During this period, US analysts began to fear further Soviet invasions in Eastern Europe targeting both Romania and Yugoslavia.[49] Both of these countries were in open opposition to Moscow before the invasion, and certainly after it.

On August 21st, the day after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party published a scathing indictment of Soviet actions that day.[50] The committee railed against the "flagrant violation of the national sovereignty of a fraternal socialist, free and independent state," and mobilized the Romania population in case of invasion, stating that the "The armed patriotic guards, formed of workers, peasants and intellectuals," would be immediately reorganized.[51] This action only fueled Soviet fear of Romania's rebellion more, with Petro Shelest, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine and a full member of the CPSU Politburo, specifically criticizing the actions of the armed patriotic guards in protesting the invasion.[52] Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito blasted the Soviet invasion as well, stating that it was a "great blow to socialist and progressive forces in the world" and could "intensify the Cold War."[53]

Senior US foreign policy officials scrambled to assess the possibility of further Soviet invasions. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John Leddy provided Secretary of State Rusk with possible US responses in the event of a Soviet-led invasion of Romania. In the note, Leddy suggests an increase in NATO vigilance measures andthe return to Europe of United States air and ground forces currently being rotated back to the States. He further recommends potentially extending military assistance to Yugoslavia if Tito requested it.[54] The drafting of these proposals illustrates the high degree of concern in the US foreign policy community about further invasions which would seriously destabilize world peace.

Just after the invasion, Tito called in Charles Burke Elbrick, the American ambassador to Yugoslavia, to ask about US policy towards Yugoslavia in light of Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia. Elbrick informed Tito that US policy vis-à-vis Yugoslavia was "the same as always," meaning that the United States would continue to "support Yugoslav independence and integrity."[55] Elbrick then paused and asked Tito, "Do you need any help?" Tito thanked Elbrick for enquiring but declined assistance. However, Tito remained firm, making it clear that he supported the Dubcek government and rejected the Soviet invasion. Elbrick later commented that "He (Tito) volunteered to receive me at any time if my government should require any information or clarification of Yugoslav position and implied hope that I would be available if Yugoslav Gov't had any suggestions to make."[56]

Even President Johnson worried about further invasions. After all, if any occurred, arms control talks would be completely out of the question, even more so than they already were.[57] President Johnson valued arms control talks highly, illustrated by his letter to Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin in 1967 in which he declared that arms control talks were of the "greatest importance" and "considerable urgency."[58] Therefore, he feared that further Soviet invasions would derail bilateral progress on arms control between the US and USSR. At his speech to the Democratic National Convention, Johnson observed that "In a tragic move they (the Soviets) have applied the full measure of military power in Czechoslovakia where tonight hundreds of tanks surround that capital. There are even rumors late this evening that this action might be repeated elsewhere in the days ahead in Eastern Europe."[59] Fears of subsequent Soviet aggression had thus reached the top of the United States government.[60]

If Yugoslavia were invaded, the Soviet Union would place its troops there permanently as was done in Czechoslovakia.[61] Western powers considered the presence of Soviet troops adjacent to Italy and Greece, the inevitable result of a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia, intolerable.[62] The United States was even prepared to supply Yugoslavia in any military conflict with the Soviet Union if Tito so requested; US ambassador Elbrick specifically informed Tito of this US position. President Johnson had also made a point of improving bilateral relations between the United States and Yugoslavia as part of a larger "bridge building" campaign in the socialist bloc. Johnson believed that "bridge building could make the Cold War less dangerous and bolster the United States' influence in both Western and Eastern Europe."[63] Supporting Yugoslavia made sense to US policymakers due to Yugoslavia's independent foreign policy. Unlike countries in the Warsaw Pact where Moscow dictated each member state's foreign policies, Yugoslavia was free from Moscow's control. Yugoslavia's independent foreign policy ensured that Yugoslavia could preserve the regional geostrategic balance in south-eastern Europe and enabled Belgrade to be a frequent thorn in Moscow's side within the socialist camp, something America welcomed. Clearly, the United States viewed Yugoslavia's independence as crucial to its foreign policy in Eastern Europe.

Romania, however, was a different story. While the United States certainly wanted to avoid any unnecessary bloodshed, there was a powerful argument within the State Department to allow the Soviets to invade Romania if it were inevitable. Proponents of this course of action rationalized that an invasion of Romania might weaken the Warsaw Pact's war potential since additional Soviet forces would be required to neutralize the Romanian divisions.[64] This is a realist position by the United States; the US recognized the limits of its military capacity behind the Iron Curtain but would simultaneously do nothing to prevent Romanian revolt within the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, the position of the communist party in Romania was never under threat, and political liberalization akin to the Czechoslovak Prague Spring was not underway in Romania in August 1968. Instead, Bucharest's opposition to the Soviet invasion was purely based on their belief in national sovereignty and their fear of Moscow asserting further control over countries in the Warsaw Pact. US officials would thus be more reluctant to directly aid Romania since there was no democratization process underway, unlike in Czechoslovakia. However, US influence was still negligible compared to Soviet influence across the divide of the Iron Curtain.

CONCLUSION

American impotence in Eastern Europe, and Soviet impotence in Western Europe, contributed greatly to the static nature of the post-war European order. US inaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is thus indicative of a broader trend which spanned nearly the entire Cold War. President Truman espoused one of the most important conceptual frameworks for American foreign policy during the Cold War on March 12, 1947. In his speech to Congress, Truman exclaimed that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." He continued by declaring that a free and just world could not be achieved "unless we are willing to help free people to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes."[65] However, analysis of the US non-response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia demonstrates clearly that the United States did not always follow this "central" tenet of its foreign policy. This was especially the case in Europe, where, as discussed previously, American influence was not enough to help East European nations toiling under communism.

This practice transcended partisan politics, with Democratic and Republican presidents choosing European non-intervention. President Eisenhower refused to intervene in the East German Uprising in 1953, the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, or the 1956 Polish crisis but approved the CIA-directed topplings of the Iranian government in 1953 and the Guatemalan government in 1954. President Johnson refused to intervene in Czechoslovakia in 1968 but waged anti-communist wars in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. President Reagan declined intervention in the Polish Crisis of 1980-81 but funded right-wing death squads in Central and South America which targeted leftists and communists with impunity. Reagan verbally supported the Poles but did not offer concrete aid, just like President Johnson in 1968 with the Czechoslovak crisis.[66] Czechoslovakia 1968 is thus one link in a long chain of a sustained US policy of non-intervention in Eastern Europe.

Brian McCauley correctly notes that *mutual* non-interference existed in Cold War Europe, arguing that "both the Soviet Union and the United States felt that in times of crisis, the status quo was preferable to a complete breakdown in the existing power balance. Neither was prepared to risk a major war over an area it had little prospect of controlling."[67] After the initial scramble for influence in Europe immediately after WWII, both superpowers operated under the assumption for the remainder of the Cold War that NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were firmly entrenched in their respective camps and successfully "flipping" a country from the rival bloc would be nearly impossible. Furthermore, both sides understood that the force required to successfully flip a rival state in Europe would likely require military action, and thus threaten the world with nuclear annihilation.

The United States did adhere to a de facto understanding of spheres of influence in Europe with the Soviet Union; this produced one of the most peaceful periods of *European* history. The agreed system offered very clear and distinct lines which each superpower understood they could not cross. There was no question where one ideological system ended and the other began. In Europe, this produced a stable and peaceful post-war status quo which endured until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Keeping this in mind, a purely ideological interpretation of the Cold War fails to fully explain the de facto US-Soviet understanding over the demarcation of Europe. Allowing the Soviet Union to dominate Eastern Europe for decades and refusing to aid East European revolts against communism seems antithetical to democracy promotion as espoused in the Truman Doctrine.

At the same time, the United States waged incredibly costly wars in the Third World which realism fails to fully explain. For example, US involvement in the Vietnam War is difficult to rationalize without taking into account America's deep antipathy towards communism as a political and cultural system. Furthermore, the US and USSR both supported murderous regimes across the Third World in the name of their respective ideologies. It is useful to return to Nigel Gould-Davies' argument that "the United States frequently measured security in terms not of power relations but of the global fortunes of regime types … This ideologized

view was founded on antipathy toward Communism not as an economic system, but as a political project."[68] This view explains superpower interaction in the Third World quite well. However, as American restraint after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia demonstrates, Gould-Davies' argument must be qualified to note that the superpowers were reluctant to influence the "global fortunes" of regime types in Europe across the East-West line of demarcation. With this caveat in mind, the third school of thought on the old realism versus ideology debate is most accurate in explaining superpower antagonisms during the Cold War.

Endnotes

[1] For many excellent accounts of these transformational years in East European history, see *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain*: *The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1989*, ed. Mark Kramer & Vit Smetana (Lanham, Maryland; Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2014), 3-171.
[2] "Resolution of the CPCz CC Plenum, January 5th, 1968, Electing Alexander Dubcek as First Secretary," 5 January 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 34-36.
[3] Three crucial primary documents outline the intellectual basis for the Prague Spring reforms: Josef Smrkovsky, "What Lies Ahead," 9 February 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 45-50; "The Action Program of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia," in *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis*, ed. Robin Alison Remington (Cambridge & London: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), 88-137; "The 'Two Thousand Words' Manifesto," 27 June 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 177-181.
[4] "Open Letter from 134 Czechoslovak Writers and Cultural Figures to the CPCz Central Committee," 25 March 1968, *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 76-77.
[5] "Informal remarks by Czechoslovak Chief of General Staff, Gen. Otakar Rytir, at a Confidential Meeting of General Staff Officials, Prague," 13 March 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117166; "Action Program of the Czechoslovak Army," 11 June 1968, in *A Cardboard Castle?* ed. Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (Central European University Press, 2005), 279-282; "Interview with Czechoslovak General Vitanovský," *Parallel History Project*, http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_czechgen/fraternal_invasion.html.
[6] "Statement by the CPCz CC Presidium Condemning the Warsaw Pact Invasion," 21 August, 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 414-415.
[7] While Moscow's view of the crisis is equally as, if not more, important than Washington's view of Czechoslovakia in 1968, this paper seeks to utilize the United States' point of view since the goal of the paper is to establish the degree to which the US operated based on realism or ideology. The paper does not attempt to explain Soviet motivations, Prague's understanding of the crisis period, or the US position on the crisis before the invasion on August 20th, 1968. While all of these questions are important to answer, they are beyond the scope of this paper and deserve full length studies of their own.
[8] John Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 72.
[9] Paul Kubricht, "Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 40, H. 2 (1992), 197-212. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41048782.
[10] Paul Kubricht, "Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer," 211.
[11] Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, "Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy," In *Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.
[12] John Mueller, "The Impact of Ideas on Grand Strategy," In *Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 48-62.
[13] Melvyn Leffler, "What Do 'We Now Know'?" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (1999), 523.
[14] Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), 109.

[15] The use of the term "Third World" here, while not understood to be fully politically correct in modern discourse, is used in its proper context here to use the vocabulary of the Cold War as a means of explaining the international system at the time. The author does not intend to use derogatory language in relation to the Global South, developing world, or whichever titles are deemed most appropriate to use. The use of the term is carefully considered and the author deems its use appropriate in describing the Cold War world of the late 20th century.
[16] For an excellent overview of the international Cold War, see Paul Chamberlain, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2018).
[17] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 80.
[18] On Johnson's work towards Détente, see John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2004); Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[19] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, Random House, 1995), 185.
[20] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 185.
[21] For relevant newspaper articles on world backlash to the invasion between merely August 20th and 22nd, see "West Europe Reds Denounce Soviet; In Unusual Step, They Voice Public Condemnation," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "New Rift in Red Bloc; Invasion Tears Open Gap in Europe Comparable to Peking-Moscow Split," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "De Gaulle Condemns Invasion; General Accuses the Kremlin of 'Attack on the Destiny of a Friendly Nation'," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "Tito Decries the Invasion; Yugoslav Meets Aides," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "Rumania Warns Soviet; Ceausescu Adamant," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "Wave of Anger Sweeps World, Some Soviet Embassies Raided," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; "Wilson Calls it a World Tragedy; Briton Terms Occupation of Czechoslovakia a Blow to East-West Relations," *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 21, 1968.
[22] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 80.
[23] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 70.
[24] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, Document 80.
[25] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 81.
[26] "The Situation in Czechoslovakia: Statement by the President," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United State: Lyndon B. Johnson, Book II July 1, 1968 – January 20, 1969* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1970), 905.
[27] Mitchell Lerner, "Four Years and a World of Difference: The Evolution of Lyndon Johnson and American Foreign Policy," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 107, No. 1 (2003): 93.
[28] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, eds. David C. Humphrey & Charles S. Sampson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 288.
[29] "Russians, Go Home!" *The New York Times* (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.
[30] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, eds. David C. Humphrey & Charles S. Sampson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 292.
[31] Meyer Srednick Handler, "U.S. Specialist on Soviet Affairs Urges NATO Parley on Invasion," (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.
[32] James Reston, "Washington: Czechoslovakia and Disarmament," (New York City: New York), Aug. 24, 1968.
[33] Max Frankel, "Spheres of Influence: Inaction of the US in Crisis Illustrates Its Impotence in Eastern Europe," (New York City: New York), Aug. 23, 1968.
[34] Paul Kubricht, "Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer," 209.
[35] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 93.
[36] Under Secretary Eugene Rostow should not be confused with Special Assistant to the President Walt Rostow.
[37] George Urban, "The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (1979), 108.
[38] George Urban, "The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow,"108-109. The line he refers to is the line dividing Western and Eastern Europe, and roughly corresponds to membership in either the Warsaw Pact or NATO.
[39] George Urban, "The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow," 113.
[40] William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly* 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), 35.
[41] "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," The National Archives, January 2018, https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.
[42] "Cabinet Report on Czechoslovakia and Vietnam," in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 4, No. 34 (Aug. 26, 1968): 1265.

[43] "Cabinet Report on Czechoslovakia and Vietnam," 1265.
[44] "Text of McNamara Speech on Anti-China Missile Defense and U.S. Nuclear Strategy," *The New York Times (*New York City: New York), Sept. 18, 1968.
[45] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.
[46] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.
[47] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.
[48] For brevity, these documents will not all be cited, but they can be found at the CIA FOIA site by searching "CIA Intelligence Bulletin" and narrowing your search to the dates 08-21-1968 to 09-07-1968. The September 1st and 2nd Bulletins are not available on the website, but in light of this trend it seems acceptable to assume that Czechoslovakia maintained the same level of importance on those reports seeing as it continued to do so until September 7th.
[49] For instance, the CIA emphasized the Romanian government's belief that they too were about to be invaded in the President's Daily Brief on August 23rd and 24th. See "The President's Daily Brief, 23 August 1968," *Central Intelligence Agency*, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005976319.pdf & "The President's Daily Brief, 24 August 1968," *Central Intelligence Agency*, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005976321.pdf.
[50] "Protocol No. 5 of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on the Situation in Czechoslovakia," August 21st, 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110454.
[51] "Protocol No. 5 of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on the Situation in Czechoslovakia."
[52] "P. Shelest on Romanian Reactions to the Unrest in Czechoslovakia," September 3, 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112461.
[53] Paul Hoffman, "Yugoslavia Meets Aides," *New York Times* (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.
[54] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 164.
[55] David Binder, "C. Burke Elbrick, Ex-Envoy, is Dead," *New York Times* (New York City: New York), April 15, 1983. Note that they got his name wrong here. It should be Charles BURKE Elbrick
[56] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 191.
[57] Arms control talks were crucial to the Johnson Administration. This can be seen by his focus on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which was eventually signed in 1968. However, work began on the treaty as early as 1964. See documents 36, 37, 46, 47, 50, 52, and 55 in "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XI, Arms Control and Disarmament," edited by David S. Patterson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997).
[58] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XI, Arms Control and Disarmament," edited by David S. Patterson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), Document 178.
[59] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Message to the Democratic National Convention Prior to the Nomination of a Presidential Candidate, August 28, 1968," in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon Johnson, 1968, Book II-July I, 1968 to January 2.0, 1969, 920 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968).
[60] It is important to remember the President's Daily Brief of August 23rd here. The CIA expressly emphasized the danger of a Soviet invasion of Romania in this report which Johnson saw five days before his speech at the DNC.
[61] "Bilateral Treaty on the 'Temporary Presence of Soviet Forces on Czechoslovak Territory,' October 16, 1968," in *The Prague Spring '68* ed. Jaromir Navratil (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 533-536.
[62] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 193.
[63] Frank Costigliola, "Lyndon B. Johnson, Germany, and 'the End of the Cold War,'" in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds. *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 196.
[64] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 23.
[65] "Truman Doctrine, 'Recommendations for Assistance to Greece and Turkey', 12 March 1947," *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116182.
[66] Günter Bischof, ""No Action": The Johnson Administration and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968," in *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, edited by Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Peter Ruggenthaler, 215. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2009.
[67] Brian McCauley, "Hungary and Suez, 1956: The Limits of Soviet and American Power," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1981), 795.
[68] Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War," 109.