



## **November 20, 1989**

### **Cable from US Embassy in Prague on Czech Demonstrations**

#### **Citation:**

"Cable from US Embassy in Prague on Czech Demonstrations", November 20, 1989, Wilson Center Digital Archive, FOIA request release.  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/116242>

#### **Summary:**

Cable from the US embassy in Prague reporting on their protest regarding attacks on American journalists during the November 17-19 demonstrations in Prague.

#### **Credits:**

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#### **Original Language:**

English

#### **Contents:**

Original Scan

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USIA FOR EU (PENDERGRAST AND JORJA)  
STATE FOR EUR/EEY, PA AND HA  
DEPARTMENT PASS TO ERICA SCHLAGER - CSCE COMMISSION

E.O. 12356: N/A  
TAGS: CASC, PHUM, PREL, CZ  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY PROTEST OF ATTACK ON AMERICAN  
JOURNALISTS DURING NOVEMBER 17-19 DEMONSTRATIONS IN  
PRAGUE

REF: PRAGUE 8082

1. AS INDICATED IN REFTTEL, AND IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
A DEMARCHE BY THE AMBASSADOR CONCERNING THE BRUTAL  
RESPONSE BY CZECHOSLOVAK POLICE TO DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH  
OCCURRED IN PRAGUE ON NOVEMBER 17, AND THEREAFTER,  
EMBASSY IS SUBMITTING A NOTE OF PROTEST CONCERNING  
SEVEN AMERICAN CITIZEN JOURNALISTS WHO WERE ATTACKED  
BY SECURITY OFFICIALS DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS.  
THE TEXT OF THE NOTE FOLLOWS BELOW IN PARA 3.

2. THE MINISTRY HAS TWICE INFORMED THE EMBASSY THAT  
IT CANNOT ENSURE THE SECURITY OF FOREIGNERS, NEITHER  
DIPLOMATS, JOURNALISTS NOR CASUAL OBSERVERS WHO  
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ARE "PRESENT WITHIN THE RANGE OF UNPERMITTED  
DEMONSTRATIONS". AN ORAL WARNING WAS PRESENTED TO

US AT THE MINISTRY PRIOR TO AUGUST 21 DEMONSTRATIONS THIS YEAR. A DIPLOMATIC NOTE, SIMILARLY DISCLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY, WAS SENT IN REPLY TO OUR PROTEST OF THE DETENTION OF A CNN CAMERA CREW DURING DEMONSTRATIONS ON OCTOBER 28. (A COPY OF THAT NOTE IS BEING POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT, ATTN: EUR/EEY.) IN RAISING THE NOVEMBER 17 AND SUBSEQUENT INCIDENTS, THE EMBASSY WILL STRONGLY POINT OUT THAT THESE HAVE NOT BEEN ACCIDENTAL, BUT IN ALL CASES HAVE INVOLVED CLEAR IDENTIFICATION OF THE JOURNALISTS BEFORE THE DETENTION OR ATTACK. THEREFORE, THE GOC CANNOT DISCLAIM RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DELIBERATE ACTIONS OF ITS POLICE SECURITY PERSONNEL.

3. THE TEXT OF NOTE FOLLOWS:

THE EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA PRESENTS ITS COMPLIMENTS TO THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIALIST REPUBLIC AND HAS THE HONOR TO PROTEST THE TREATMENT OF THE FOLLOWING AMERICAN CITIZENS WHO, WHILE PERFORMING THEIR NORMAL DUTIES AS ACCREDITED JOURNALISTS ON THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING OF NOVEMBER 17 IN AND AROUND WENCESLAS SQUARE, WERE BEATEN BY OFFICIALS OF THE SECURITY ORGANS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

MS. PAULA BUTTURINI OF THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE WAS SEVERELY BEATEN BY UNIFORMED POLICE, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF A PLAINCLOTHES OFFICIAL. SHE REQUIRED EMERGENCY MEDICAL ATTENTION AT THE FRANCISCU CLINIC FOR HEAD WOUNDS, AND RECEIVED 16 STITCHES. WITH HER WAS MR. TYLER MARSHALL, OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, WHO WAS ALSO BEATEN AND UNCLASSIFIED

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TREATED AT THE FRANCISCU CLINIC.

MR. PAUL CONOVER OF CABLE NEWS NETWORK WAS ACCOSTED BY THREE PLAINCLOTHES OFFICIALS. HE WAS SHOVED AND STRUCK REPEATEDLY WITH NIGHTSTICKS. THE OFFICIALS DEMANDED THAT HE SURRENDER HIS VIDEO TAPE, WHICH HE DID. THEY THEN SEIZED HIS CAMERA WHICH WAS CARRIED OFF BY UNIFORMED PERSONNEL. THE EMBASSY STRONGLY URGES THE IMMEDIATE RETURN OF THE SONA BETA CAMCORDER, VALUED AT THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLARS (DOLS 30,000), TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CABLE NEWS NETWORK. IN ADDITION MR. CONOVER'S SOVIET PRESS CREDENTIALS WERE DESTROYED.

MR. JOHN KAUFMAN, OF THE BOSTON GLOBE, WAS SIMILARLY

ACCOSTED, BOTH BEATEN AND MACED BY SECURITY OFFICIALS.

MR. ANDREW ALEXANDER AND MR. MICHAEL SCHWARZ  
OF COX NEWSPAPERS WERE ALSO ATTACKED. MR. SCHWARZ'  
PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT WAS SMASHED.

MR. TIM ORTMAN OF THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY  
(NBC) WAS BEATEN WITH NIGHTSTICKS AND SUFFERED A  
CONCUSSION AND LEG INJURIES AND WAS TAKEN TO WEST  
GERMANY FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT. HIS CAMERA EQUIPMENT  
WAS DESTROYED.

THE ABOVE INCIDENTS ALL INVOLVED AMERICAN CITIZENS.  
THE EMBASSY IS AWARE OF NUMEROUS OTHER INCIDENTS  
INVOLVING ACCREDITED JOURNALISTS OF BOTH CZECHOSLOVAK  
AND FOREIGN NATIONALITIES WHO WERE BRUTALLY TREATED  
DURING THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTIES. WITH REFERENCE  
TO THE MINISTRY'S NOTE NO. 317.572/89 CONCERNING THE

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TAGS: CASC, PHUM, PREL, CZ  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY PROTEST OF ATTACK ON AMERICAN

MINISTRY'S INABILITY TO ENSURE THE SECURITY OF JOURNALISTS WITHIN THE RANGE OF UNPERMITTED DEMONSTRATIONS, THE EMBASSY MUST EMPHASIZE THAT ALL ATTACKS WERE MADE BY CZECHOSLOVAK POLICE OFFICIALS. IN ALL CASES THE JOURNALISTS IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES CLEARLY AND WERE SUBSEQUENTLY BEATEN. IN PARTICULAR CAMERAMEN AND THEIR EQUIPMENT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SINGLED OUT FOR ATTACK.

IN KEEPING WITH THE AGREEMENTS OF THE CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE, AS WELL AS INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED STANDARDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, THE EMBASSY WISHES TO CONVEY ITS STRONGEST PROTEST AGAINST SUCH DELIBERATE INTERFERENCE WITH THE LEGITIMATE CONDUCT OF INFORMATION MEDIA ACTIVITIES AND PHYSICAL ABUSE OF PERSONS ENGAGED IN NORMAL PRESS  
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BUSINESS.

THE EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING THE MINISTRY'S EARLIEST REPLY. COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE, END TEXT.  
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