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COMMITTEE OF POLITICAL ADVISERS

THE STATUS OF PEOPLE'S MILITIA UNITS IN THE SOVIET BLOC

Note by United States Delegation

The following preliminary comment was prepared several weeks ago by the Department of State in response to the report by the Greek Representative to the Committee of Political Advisers on the establishment of a voluntary public militia in Bulgaria.

2. The Bulgarian voluntary public militia is the most recent such body to be organized in the European communist bloc. Similar groups have been formed in the USSR, and have been in existence for a number of years in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Although such formations customarily play a major role in communist seizures of power, e.g., in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, after passage of the specifically revolutionary situation their role becomes chiefly that of Party watchdog in plants and enterprises and, to a limited degree, in matters of civil defense.

3. Such units played but a small part in the USSR after 1920, and gradually died out. They were, however, resuscitated in November, 1958, and set up on a national scale in early 1959. Judging from the evidence, the Soviet "people's guard" was conceived of as a new synthetic institution which would maximize the regime's surveillance over the population during a period when activities of the Secret Police (KGB) were being restricted. The aim was to offset the decline in coercion by inducing conformity through social pressure. So far the experiment in the Soviet Union has been more or less a failure. The guards have proved capricious, unamenable to controls, and are held in contempt by the citizenry. An extensive national campaign to remedy these shortcomings has been underway since December 1959.

4. In some bloc countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary, on the other hand, they play a more important role and enjoy somewhat greater prestige and authority. Throughout the bloc, where they are usually called "workers' militia" or "people's militia", their establishment and maintenance are governed by the same rationale as prevails in the USSR. In other words, they are designed as a transitional expedient to accompany a shift in mode of application of internal police power.

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As such, they would appear to have little or no relevance to such issues as international detente or reduction of military armed forces.

5. It should be noted that militia of this type is completely distinct from a so-called military militia, which could have a direct relationship to such issues as international detente and demobilization. In his January 14th speech on demobilization, for example, Khrushchev said that the regime was "studying" the advisability of a territorial military system. Subsequent Soviet press comment suggests that such a system, if adopted, would probably be loosely referred to as a "militia". However, there is no apparent connection between proposals for a military "militia" and what now exist in the USSR and the satellites, largely for purposes of internal Party security, under the heading of "people's guard", "workers' militia", and "people's militia".

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