Extract from a telegram from the UK delegation to the United Nations, New York, to the Foreign Office, London, on Soviet influence in the Czechoslovakian coup, dated 18 March 1948

IMMEDIATE

FROM NEW YORK TO FOREIGN OFFICE

 The latest coup in Czechoslovakia was handled according to typical Communist technique. It is a matter of public knowledge that Communist Parties take their order from Moscow and according to the Cominform Declaration of October last their activities in certain European countries of which Czechoslovakia is one are coordinated by the Cominform of which the Soviet Union is the originator and the moving spirit. The Conference of the Communist Parties of various countries which met in Poland in September last decided on the creation of an information bureau, the tasks of the bureau being defined as “organising the exchange of experience among the parties and if the necessity arises coordinating their activity on the basis of mutual agreement.

 One of the difficulties with which we are confronted is that with the progressive employment of this technique, country after country fades into darkness and silence. A rigid censorship is imposed, all communications are controlled, and the frontiers become impassable barriers. We get no news of happenings beyond what the censorship allows and what controlled propaganda services put out.

 We have been told that even if it could be established that there had been a violation of the Charter, there are some violations of the Charter which do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Security Council unless they involve a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security. I beg leave to doubt this.

 Article 24 confers on the Security Council “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security” and it goes on to say that “in discharging these duties the Security Council shall act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations”. I find it difficult to believe therefore that if a member of the United Nations were found to have violated one of the most important of these principles the Security Council could find that that was a matter of no concern to it. But even if I were proved wrong in this point, I should still maintain that in the present case, if violation of the Charter were proved, that might constitute a threat to international peace and security. It would be superfluous for me, and perhaps presumptuous on my part, to attempt to enlarge on this after what was said by the President of the United States in his address to Congress on March 17th. There are limits beyond which this tide must not advance, and it must be dammed back. Almost everyone in the world must hope fervently that that can be done by peaceful means, but there is an undeniable risk that that hope may not be fulfilled.

 In judging this case we must be careful, scrupulous and objective, but above all we must be very careful that we be not too easily fooled.

[TNA, CAB 121/359]

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, post-war USSR, post-war Eastern Europe, United Nations, Cominform