

Thurs., July 6, 1967
9:30 a.m.

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~~SECRET-SENSITIVE~~

MR. PRESIDENT:

This transcript of the De Gaulle-Nixon conversation may interest you, although it contains no surprises. De Gaulle's explanation of why the USSR wishes, in his view, to end the war in Viet Nam is mildly interesting, as is his assessment of moderate Soviet intentions in the Middle East.

W. W. R.

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I RECOGNIZE THAT, IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE UNITED STATES, AND FOR YOU PERSONALLY, TO ASSUME A NEW ATTITUDE REGARDING VIET-NAM. I THINK THAT IT IS VERY GREATLY IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM VIET-NAM, BUT PUBLIC OPINION IN YOUR COUNTRY FAVORS A FIGHT TO THE FINISH. THAT CREATES A GREAT DIFFICULTY AS REGARDS THE ELECTIONS.

MR. NIXON: WITH REGARD TO VIET-NAM, THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION IS THE QUESTION OF THE FUTURE, THE KIND OF SETTLEMENT, AND THE MEANS OF BRINGING THE WAR TO AN END THAT WILL NOT BE INTERPRETED AS ENCOURAGEMENT OF OTHER AGGRESSION BY COMMUNISM IN THE ORIENT. IT IS THEREFORE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO FIND A FORMULA. TWO BIG QUESTIONS ARISE: FIRST OF ALL, DOES CHINA WANT THE WAR TO END? PERSONALLY, I DON'T THINK SO. NEXT, DOES THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH IS FURNISHING MOST OF THE AID TO VIET-NAM, WANT THE FIGHTING TO CEASE? UNLESS THESE TWO BIG POWERS, OR ONE OF THEM, EXERTS DIRECT INFLUENCE, I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT HO CHI MINH WILL AGREE TO A SETTLEMENT THAT WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO US.

GENERAL DE GAULLE: IT DOES NOT, INDEED, APPEAR THAT CHINA WANTS AN END TO THE WAR. BUT THE SOVIET UNION DOES WANT IT, FOR THIS WAR IS COSTING IT A GREAT DEAL AND IS BRINGING IT NOTHING IN RETURN. HOWEVER, AS LONG AS YOU ARE IN VIET-NAM, THE SOVIET UNION WILL BE COMPELLED TO BE THERE ALSO WITH ITS AID AND ITS WEAPONS; OTHERWISE, IT WOULD LOSE FACE BEFORE THE WHOLE WORLD AND BEFORE ALL THE COMMUNISTS, TO THE BENEFIT OF CHINA. THAT IT DOES NOT WANT. THEREFORE, AS LONG AS YOU REMAIN IN VIET-NAM, THE RUSSIANS WILL SUPPORT VIET-NAM. HOWEVER, THEY WOULD LIKE TO WITHDRAW AND, CONSEQUENTLY, WOULD LIKE YOU TO WITHDRAW ALSO.

MR. NIXON: THE SOVIET UNION HAS CERTAIN ADVANTAGES IN CONTINUING THE WAR. THESE ARE THE INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES IN THE UNITED STATES, THE DIVISION THAT IS APPEARING THERE, AND ALSO THE FRICTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CERTAIN OF ITS FRIENDS IN EUROPE. MOREOVER, THE WAR IS COSTLY FOR THE UNITED STATES ALSO. IT IS SPENDING RESOURCES THAT IT COULD HAVE USED EITHER TO INCREASE ITS MILITARY MIGHT OR TO INCREASE ITS ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE..

GENERAL DE GAULLE: THIS WAR IS VERY COSTLY FOR THE SOVIETS. THEY ARE SPENDING A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY TO SEND THEIR AID. IT APPEARS TO ME THAT, AT PRESENT, THEY HAVE REASON TO SAVE THEIR RESOURCES IN ORDER TO DEVOTE THEM TO THEIR [OWN] DOMESTIC NEEDS. I SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT THEY DO NOT WANT THE WAR TO CONTINUE. CERTAINLY, AS LONG AS YOU ARE IN VIET-NAM, THE RUSSIANS WILL BE THERE ALSO, WITH THEIR WEAPONS, THEIR TECHNICAL EXPERTS, AND THEIR MISSILES; BUT THEY ARE NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT. THEY WOULD MUCH PREFER THE WAR TO END, IF YOU WOULD LEAVE. AND, WITHOUT A DOUBT, THEY WOULD NOT ASK ANYTHING MORE. LAST YEAR, WHEN I WAS IN THE SOVIET UNION, KOSYGIN, WHO WAS PREPARING HIS 1967 BUDGET, TOLD ME: "YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MILITARY EXPENDITURES HAVE INCREASED BECAUSE OF VIET-NAM."

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MR. NIXON: THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION CONTINUES TO BE: ARE THE SOVIETS TRULY SEEKING A DETENTE? I AM NOT A DOCTRINAIRE WHO WOULD OPPOSE THE COMMUNISTS AS SUCH. ONE MUST CONSIDER THE COMMUNIST LEADERS AND JUDGE THEM AS THEY ARE. HOWEVER, THE PARTICIPATION BY THE U.S.S.R. IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS CAUSES ONE TO DOUBT THAT THESE LEADERS REALLY WANT A DETENTE. WHY DO YOU THINK THEY BLOCKED OUR PROPOSAL FOR A FOUR-POWER CONFERENCE, AND ALSO THE UNITED NATIONS ACTION, AND WHAT ROLE ARE THEY PLAYING NOW?

S.M. CLEVELAND
BT

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GENERAL DE GAULLE: I THINK THAT THEY ARE VERY EMBARRASSED. THEY HAVE, OF COURSE, ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE ARABS; THEY BUILT THE ASWAN DAM; THEY ARE FURNISHING THEM WEAPONS AND ECONOMIC AID. THEY HAVE A CERTAIN POSITION THERE, ESPECIALLY IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES THAT CALL THEMSELVES SOCIALIST. THEY HAVE NEVER OCCUPIED A SIMILAR SITUATION TO THIS EXTENT. THEY DON'T WANT TO LOSE IT AND THAT IS WHY THEY ARE SUPPORTING THE ARABS. BUT THEY ARE NOT GOING VERY FAR AND THEY ARE NOT DOING A GREAT DEAL. FROM THE MOMENT OF THE ISRAELI VICTORY, THE RUSSIANS AGREED TO THE CEASE-FIRE. THEY SAID SO IN THEIR OWN WAY, TO BE SURE, BUT THEY ARE NOT PRESSING FOR TOO MANY COMPLICATIONS. THEY WANT TO KEEP THEIR POSITION AND THEIR REPUTATION OF BEING FRIENDS OF THE ARAB WORLD; BUT THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF GOING VERY FAR. AS TO THE PROPOSAL FOR A FOUR-POWER CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS MADE IN ORDER TO FORESTALL THE ISRAELI ATTACK--AND IT WAS CERTAINLY THE ISRAELIS WHO ATTACKED--RUSSIA WASN'T IN FAVOR OF SUCH A CONFERENCE. SHE DID NOT SAY "NO" EMPHATICALLY, BUT NEITHER DID SHE SAY "YES". I SHOULD BE SURPRISED IF SHE DID NOT FEEL SOME REGRET ABOUT THAT NOW. HOWEVER, WITH YOU, IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL, THE RUSSIANS DECIDED IN FAVOR OF THE CEASE-FIRE. THAT CLEARLY SHOWS THAT THEY DO NOT WANT TO GO VERY FAR. BESIDES, NEITHER DO YOU. YOU, OF COURSE, SUPPORTED ISRAEL, BUT, IN THE GULF OF AQABA AFFAIR, BASICALLY YOU DID NOTHING. AND I THINK THAT YOU WERE RIGHT.

NIXON: DIDN'T THE SOVIETS PERHAPS WAIT TOO LONG TO DECLARE THEMSELVES IN FAVOR OF THE CEASE-FIRE? INDEED, EITHER THEY SUPPORT IT 100% OR ELSE THEY ARE OBLIGED TO GIVE NASSER OR THE ARABS COMPLETE MILITARY ASSISTANCE. NOW, I DON'T THINK THEY WANT TO BECOME DEEPLY INVOLVED AGAINST THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM. THE QUESTION THAT ARISES NOW IS WHAT KIND OF SETTLEMENT THEY COULD ACCEPT AND SUPPORT. THAT POSES A VERY DIFFICULT PROBLEM FOR THE UNITED STATES, FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND FOR THE OTHER POWERS CONCERNED: IT IS CLEAR THAT THE VICTOR WILL BE TEMPTED TO DEMAND THE FRUITS OF HIS VICTORY. HOWEVER, I THINK IT ESSENTIAL THAT THE PEACE BE A PEACE OF RECONCILIATION RATHER THAN OF VENGEANCE. FURTHERMORE, THIS IS IN ACCORD WITH THE VERY INTERESTS OF ISRAEL, WHICH WOULD BE UNABLE TO SURVIVE IN THE MIDST OF A SEA OF ARABS AND, IN THE LONG RUN, WOULD LOSE THE WAR. CONSEQUENTLY, THE TIME HAS COME TO WORK OUT A GENERAL SETTLEMENT. TO DO THAT WILL REQUIRE A GREAT DEAL OF DIPLOMATIC SKILL, PARTICULARLY ON THE PART OF A MAN LIKE YOU. TO HUMILIATE NASSER IS ONE THING, BUT TO HUMILIATE THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD CAN BE VERY DANGEROUS TO A PEACE CONFERENCE.

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GENERAL DE GAULLE: I AGREE WITH YOU. THERE MUST A SETTLEMENT AND IT MUST BE MODERATE. I DO NOT THINK THAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IMMEDIATELY. ISRAEL WON THE INITIAL SUCCESS--WHICH WAS EXPECTED--BECAUSE OF THE GOOD QUALITIES OF ITS ARMAMENT, ITS OFFICER CORPS, AND THE FACT THAT ITS FORCES ARE WELL ORGANIZED. BUT ISRAEL HAS REACHED ITS LIMITS NOW: IT IS NOT GOING TO OCCUPY CAIRO, OR THE NILE VALLEY. IN THE SINAI PENINSULA THERE ARE NO ARABS; THERE IS NOTHING BUT DESERT. BUT IN THE NILE VALLEY THERE ARE ALL THE EGYPTIANS AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THE JEWS LIVING AMONG THEM. NEITHER IS ISRAEL GOING TO CAPTURE DAMASCUS, OR BAGHDAD, OR EVEN BEIRUT. CONSEQUENTLY, IT IS GOING TO STOP AND THERE WILL BE A DE FACTO STABILIZATION THAT WILL LAST FOR A WHILE. THE ARABS ARE GOING TO REORGANIZE, RECOVER, PULL THEMSELVES TOGETHER. THEN IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO HAVE NEGOTIATIONS. LIKE YOU, I THINK IT NECESSARY TO ARRIVE AT A MODERATE SETTLEMENT. THE ISRAELIS ARE THE ONES THAT WILL WANT TO GO TOO FAR; AND, AS YOU SAY, THEY MUST NOT, FOR THEY WILL BE UNABLE TO HOLD OUT AGAINST ALL THE ARABS IN THE LONG RUN. BUT THE ISRAELIS ARE PEOPLE WHO [TEND TO] GO TOO FAR; THAT IS SOMETHING THEY HAVE ALWAYS DONE. ONE HAS ONLY TO REREAD THE PSALMS TO REALIZE THAT. THE ARABS, TOO, FOR THAT MATTER. SO, [IN THIS DISPUTE] BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO GO TOO FAR, IT WILL CERTAINLY BE NECESSARY FOR THE BIG POWERS TO MAKE THE VOICE OF REASON HEARD AND OBLIGE THEM TO SUBMIT TO REASON. THE RUSSIANS WILL SURELY HAVE TO BE PRESENT, OTHERWISE NOTHING WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED.

MR. NIXON: DO YOU THINK THAT THE SOVIETS DESIRE A MODERATE SETTLEMENT OR THAT THEY WISH TO GO TO THE LIMIT SUPPORTING THE ARABS IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD THEIR POSITION?

GENERAL DE GAULLE: THEY WILL WANT TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITION, AND THEY WILL SUPPORT THE ARABS UP TO A CERTAIN POINT. THEY WILL NOT GO TO THE LIMIT, FOR I BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE NO DESIRE FOR TOO BIG OR TOO WIDESPREAD A CONFLICT.

MR. NIXON: YOUR PROPOSAL FOR A FOUR-POWER CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS CONSTRUCTIVE IN THE BEGINNING, PERHAPS STILL CONSTITUTES A SOLUTION TODAY. DO YOU THINK THAT THE SOVIET UNION CAN ACCEPT IT NOW?

GENERAL DE GAULLE: NOT TOMORROW, BUT PERHAPS TWO WEEKS FROM NOW. I HAVE BEEN VERY HAPPY TO SEE YOU AGAIN. YOU ARE NOT GOING TO THE ORIENT?

MR. NIXON: THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE NOW: I AM GOING TO AFRICA IN ORDER TO VISIT THE COUNTRIES OF ETHIOPIA, KENYA, THE CONGO, AND LIBERIA. ON THE BASIS OF THE EXPERIENCE GAINED FROM MY TRIP, I CAN SAY THAT IT IS VITAL FOR THE UNITED STATES NOT TO PLAY AN EXCLUSIVELY BILATERAL ROLE WITH RESPECT TO THE SOVIET UNION. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT OTHER WORLD LEADERS PARTICIPATE. IF

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THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION, AS WAS THE CASE WITH REGARD TO NONPROLIFERATION, TAKE, BETWEEN THEMSELVES ONLY, DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THE WHOLE OF EUROPE, THAT WILL NOT PRODUCE GOOD RESULTS. I HOPE THAT, IN THE FUTURE, WE CAN DEVELOP CLOSER CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE OTHER GREAT POWERS, SUCH AS FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN.

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S. M. CLEVELAND
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