

Pres. file

19

Thurs., June 27, 1963
2:15 p. m.

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MR. PRESIDENT:

My Soviet TV sparring partner turned up this morning, at his suggestion.

He was sure wired for sound. It was a thoroughly instructed professional performance. I have checked with our intelligence people. He is KGB and used for political contacts.

The most interesting item was his raising the question of whether you wished to meet with the Soviet leaders (marked in red).

As you can see, I was friendly but cautious.

If you wish me to go back to him and say I have the impression such a meeting would be welcomed, I can easily do so.

W. W. Rostow

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NEJ 94-472
By 40, NARA, Date 9-5-96

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Thursday, June 27, 1968

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Mr. Victor Kopytin of Tass called on me today. He had suggested this when we squared off in a television show last week.

He first made clear that he intended to write nothing about what I said but was simply talking to me for his "personal background."

After pleasantries about what I planned to do when I left government, he turned to Viet Nam. He said it was his "impression" that Hanoi would take de-escalatory action if we stopped the bombing. He asked why we could not accept this "impression" as a basis for action. I took him through:

- our experience with other "impressions," including the 37-day bombing pause;
- the problem of resuming bombing once the hopes of the peoples of the world were elevated by a cessation;
- the high level of infiltration and the responsibilities of the President for the position of his men and his allies, notably in I Corps.

He said: What would you expect Hanoi to do if you stopped bombing? I told him that I was not in a position to give him an exact formula, but mentioned by way of example the level of infiltration; shelling across the DMZ; troop movements across the DMZ; the shelling of Saigon.

He then said: Perhaps you could stop bombing if they returned some of your fliers and stopped the shelling of Saigon. I again said that I was in no position to give him precise terms, but the bombing in the North Vietnamese panhandle was imposing a significant military tax on Hanoi and we must see serious military de-escalation if the bombing were to be stopped. He tried once more: Then you are asking for the whole list of things that you mentioned?

I reminded him once again that I was not in a position to tell him precisely what de-escalatory action on the other side was required.

He then asked: If Moscow were to tell you precisely what the other side would do if you stopped bombing, would that be sufficient?

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(LDR'ed to SW)

I said that what we needed were explicit arrangements that we could trust. It would be "interesting" for us if Moscow felt confident enough of how Hanoi would behave to give us a clear picture of the military consequences from the other side of our bombing cessation.

I observed that it would be extremely important after a total bombing cessation that there be very rapid progress toward a settlement. I recalled "prompt" and "productive" from the San Antonio formula. He asked: What about the NLF? I said that our position was based on the President's concept of one-man-one-vote, indicating that the Vietnamese have a good record with respect to free elections.

He then asked promptly: Would the government in Saigon let the NLF operate as a political party? I said that I could not speak for the government in Saigon, but it was my personal impression that they would be "reasonable" in any serious negotiation based on their constitution and the one-man-one-vote principle. I pointed out that one could not expect them to be making forthcoming political statements when Saigon was being bombed and the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops were at their threat.

He then asked: Would the President like to meet with Soviet leaders before his term is over? I said that it was clear from the President's statements that he felt there were many important matters which the U. S. and USSR should try to move forward. The question of a meeting had simply not arisen. If it were of interest to the Soviet leadership, such interest might be indicated through regular diplomatic channels.

Kopytin then turned to the ABM-ICBM. He said there were two views in the United States: one, for example, the Stennis Committee's, was that the U. S. required "supremacy" over the Soviet Union; the other was that an even balance was all that was required. Which did I think was the policy of the U. S. Government? I said that the President had explained that an ABM-ICBM race could go on to much higher levels, at great cost to both countries, with no increase in security to either. The details of a precise agreement were complex and would have to be worked out, but, clearly, it was the President's objective to see the security interests of both countries satisfied without a further escalation in strategic missiles.

Kopytin then brought up a somewhat unexpected subject. He asked: If President Johnson should meet with Soviet leaders, could they agree to a doctrine of non-intervention in developing nations? I said that this was interesting but difficult. I explained at some length why American interests were satisfied if each nation was permitted to develop in its own way

without external interference. Our problems arose because of the interference of others. I pointed out that Che Guevara was not a Bolivian; that those who tried to obstruct the Venezuelan elections of 1963 did not get their money and arms from Venezuela; that the war in Viet Nam was caused by infiltration via Laos from North Viet Nam. In short, there was interference to which we have had to respond; and that interference did not always come from the Soviet Union. He said: Yes, there is a problem of third parties. I said the matter was worth some thought because he had raised it; there was no question that U. S. policy was to let nations find their own destiny without external interference; but there were clearly operational problems which would have to be faced.

He then put to me the following proposition: "I am often asked in the United States why the Soviet Union does not do more to bring peace in Southeast Asia. You know our problems in the Socialist camp and especially our troubles with China. Knowing all these troubles and limitations, how do you think we should use our influence on Hanoi?" I said that I doubted very much that anyone outside could give Moscow advice on this matter. The Soviet leaders knew better than we what their limitations were and what they could and could not do to bring peace to Southeast Asia. Right now the question was: how could we make the Paris talks succeed and bring an early peace? More generally, I would hope Moscow would advise Hanoi along the following lines:

- they should cease to pursue their objectives in Laos and South Viet Nam by military means;
- they should take their chances on a one-man-one-vote proposition in South Viet Nam;
- they should look to unification of Viet Nam by peaceful means over the long pull;
- more fundamentally, they should turn to developing North Viet Nam which had suffered greatly in its economic and social development because of their expansionist ambitions;
- they should build their foreign policy on what will be historically their central problem; that is, their independence of China. they should try to achieve this independence by working constructively with their neighbors in Southeast Asia while maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union and, even, the United States.

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-4-

At the latter point, Kopytin grabbed firmly. He said: I agree absolutely. Their problem is independence of China. After a few more pleasantries, he departed.

W. W. Rostow