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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: September 30, 1966

Place: Vienna, Austria

SUBJECT: Conversation with A. Snejdarek, Director, Czech Institute
of International Affairs

PARTICIPANTS: A. Snejdarek, Director, Czech Institute of International Affairs,
Prague
Henry A. Kissinger, Professor of Government, Harvard University

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I sought out Snejdarek after the opening session of the annual conference of the Institute of Strategic Studies and invited him for a drink. Pursuant to my instructions I told him the following:

I had reported our conversation in Prague to a very small group of highly placed officials in Washington including Governor Harriman. (I mentioned no other names.) These officials had been favorably impressed by the Czech attitude and would cooperate in any attempt to achieve an honorable settlement. In particular, there was considerable understanding for the Czech concern with the physical safety and political role of members of the NLF. The United States was ready to explore frankly and sympathetically any ideas on the subject and was in its turn undertaking a study of the problem. The United States was deeply concerned with promoting a national reconciliation of all Vietnamese prepared to forego violence in pursuit of their objectives and to work out adequate international guarantees for their safety. I was planning a trip to Saigon in the near future and might be able to be more specific on my return. (As agreed with Governor Harriman, I said this to provide an incentive for a future meeting.) We hoped to continue these informal contacts with the Czech side in particular to get their view about the situation in Hanoi as they saw it.

Snejdarek replied that he appreciated the spirit of my comments very much. He had not yet seen any reports about the Czech mission's impressions of Hanoi; he was aware of their conversations in Moscow. He said that Czechoslovakia found itself in a very complicated situation. It was most eager for the war in Vietnam to end. The war inhibited the possibility of a relaxation of tensions

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in Europe which Czechoslovakia required to gain a greater freedom of maneuver. At the same time, Czechoslovakia could not move openly against Soviet wishes because it needed Soviet support against Germany and its economy was geared to Soviet raw materials. He reminded me that even Benes had insisted that after the experience of Munich Czech policy had to rely on the support of Russia.

Russian policy at the moment was extremely complex. For one thing, the Soviets seemed to be extremely confused. He knew that six months ago the Soviet Foreign Ministry had started a study about the main lines of Soviet foreign policy in the present situation. The report was already three months overdue.

Then he was beginning to have doubts about the real motives of the Soviet Union with respect to Vietnam. Until the early part of the summer he had believed that the war in Vietnam was an obstacle to a detente which was desired by the Soviet Union. Now he and many of his colleagues were beginning to wonder whether the Soviet Union really wanted a relaxation of tensions -- indeed whether they were really very interested in ending the war in Vietnam. The crisis in Southeast Asia might be a convenient pretext to tighten control over Eastern Europe. If this interpretation was correct, one might expect a gradual increase of Soviet pressure on Eastern Europe perhaps by Soviet support of the more intransigent factions which exist in every Communist country including Czechoslovakia.

I asked whether the stop-over of the Czech delegation in Moscow had given any clue about Soviet intentions. Snejdarek replied that it was difficult to judge Soviet intentions by private conversations. The Soviet tactic with East European states was to make a bow to their sovereign right to conduct an independent policy but then to apply pressure indirectly through the party apparatus or other measures -- sometimes even economic ones. With respect to the Czech mission to Hanoi, the Soviet reaction was ambiguous. The Soviet leaders had said that they welcomed the Czech efforts to urge Hanoi towards a peaceful solution. At the same time, they had made an analysis of the situation which could be interpreted as implying that the Czech overture was premature. According to the Soviet view, the United States was getting stuck deeper and deeper in the muck of Vietnam. Sooner or later, the United States would get tired of it and then accept terms going far beyond anything now being conceived. I interjected that the war was no strain on us either economically or militarily and that we could continue it indefinitely. Snejdarek replied that this was the view also of Czech military experts. However, the Soviet response was that the United States had never fought a long war even when the issues were clearer. They counted on American psychological exhaustion. A North Vietnamese victory would then enable the Soviet Union to strengthen its influence in Hanoi as a counterweight to China. Snejdarek wondered whether the relatively cool reception the Czech delegation had received in Hanoi was not due to a Soviet attempt to ingratiate themselves with Hanoi by informing them of Czech intentions in advance.

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I said that Washington had noted with interest the passage in the speech of the Czech Prime Minister when he said, "But it is necessary to grasp all possibilities that lead to a realization of these goals." Snejdarek said this statement had been well considered; indeed it had been drafted in Prague before the departure of the Czech delegation.

I asked whether I had understood correctly in Prague that Czechoslovakia might stop its aid if Hanoi refused to make reasonable peace efforts. Snejdarek said that I had understood correctly but that he had been imprecise. Czechoslovakia could not stop its aid completely as long as the Soviet Union continued to help. However, it could drag its feet in its implementation and resist new demands. He could tell me that studies to this effect had already been made. However, the difficulty was that North Vietnam made it very difficult to find a suitable technical pretext. For example, North Vietnam was meticulous, almost pedantic, in fulfilling its commercial engagements to Czechoslovakia -- much more reliable than the African states and even than some East European countries. Nevertheless Czechoslovakia would certainly try to use its aid program to move Hanoi in a more peaceful direction. It had already evaded requests for some advanced weapons. A great deal would depend on the impressions the Czech delegation brought back from Hanoi.

Snejdarek asked me whether the United States was sincere in trying to change the government in Saigon to a civilian government or whether it was a facade. I assured him that the United States was using all its influence to bring about the most broadly based government possible. Of course, it was a difficult process in a country at war and it would not be accomplished overnight. The trend was clear, however.

I asked Snejdarek what Prague knew about the NLF. Snejdarek replied that Prague's impression was that a major internal struggle was taking place in the NLF between a pro-Hanoi and a pro-Peking faction. I inquired whether there existed a South Vietnamese nationalist faction as well. Snejdarek said that he was not aware of one. I asked which faction was likely to be more peaceful. Snejdarek said that it was hard to tell; Peking in his view need not always remain intransigent.

Snejdarek then returned to Soviet intentions. He said that clearly the USSR wanted to use North Vietnam as a barrier to Chinese expansion and did not want to see it too badly weakened. I said we certainly had made clear that we had no intention of threatening the Hanoi regime; indeed in this respect U.S. and Soviet interests seemed parallel. Snejdarek pointed out that this was the other horn of the Soviet dilemma: they could not admit an identity of interests with the United States all the less so as they were under constant attack by China on this score.

Snejdarek then asked me whether the Rusk-Gromyko talks had shed any light on Soviet intentions. I replied that we had been impressed by the

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the restrained tone on Vietnam even though there had been no change in the formal position. Snejdarek said that he would not give too much weight to a change of tone. He thought that the only area in which the Soviet Union might be interested in real progress was non-proliferation.

We then turned to the question of how to continue our conversations. Snejdarek said that it was a difficult problem. The Central Committees of the Communist parties of Eastern Europe had agreed that there would be no additional contacts with Americans while the Vietnamese was going on. Thus official contacts were out of the question. Whether the members of the Czech delegation were prepared to continue our informal conversations would only be known after their return from Hanoi and Moscow on October 2nd. If so, he would send me a telegram to the effect that he wished to continue exploring Central European problems.

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