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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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## Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: August 30, 1967

By jc NARA, Date 5/10/07

SUBJECT: Call of Yugoslav Foreign Minister Nikezic on the President

PARTICIPANTS: President of the United States  
 Foreign Minister Marko Nikezic of Yugoslavia  
 The Honorable Bogdan Crnobrnja, Ambassador of Yugoslavia  
 Walt W. Rostow, Special Assistant to the President  
 Ambassador C. Burke Elbrick, U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia  
 Lucius D. Battle, Assistant Secretary of NEA

~~COMES TO~~

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The President received the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia at approximately 7:15 p.m. for a conversation that lasted just under one hour.

The President greeted the Foreign Minister warmly, expressing gratitude for his visit to the United States. The President indicated his pleasure at President Tito's interest in the Middle East and at his willingness to involve himself with these problems of concern to both countries.

The Foreign Minister expressed satisfaction on the part of President Tito with the message from the President and joined with President Johnson in stressing the value of good relations between the United States and Yugoslavia.

The Foreign Minister then presented to the President the message from President Tito which President Johnson read and commented on as he studied the message.

With respect to the reference in the message referring to Israeli aggression, the President stated that it was difficult to be certain who really committed the aggression. There had been extreme provocation in the movement of troops and the manner in which Arab actions had inflamed the situation. The Russians had

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made a great mistake in stirring up the situation--an act that was difficult for us to understand. The United States considered that the problem had to be dealt with at its root, and the causes of the difficulties that had led to war must be removed. It was not adequate to take an aspirin to deal with a major illness. Causes must be faced. A call for withdrawal alone was no answer.

The President took exception to the statement in President Tito's message with respect to the possible "disassociation" of the United States from the occupation policy of Israel. The President noted that it was impossible to disassociate oneself from something one had not been associated with. He then reviewed the very serious efforts he had made to prevent hostilities, recalling his own conversations with Foreign Minister Eban in which he had urged that the Government of Israel exercise restraint in this situation. Similarly, the United States had urged restraint on the Egyptians in the hope that neither side would engage in hostilities.

The President referred to the reference in the communication from President Tito that indicated that the Arab countries consider the attitudes of the United States as "one sided". He agreed that some Arab countries did in fact feel this way. This attitude is unfortunate and does not reflect United States attitudes. The United States has great, in fact vital, interests in the Arab world. We seek a solution to the basic issues. In each talk the President has had with Arab leaders or Ambassadors, he has reaffirmed United States interest in the Arab world and a deep hope that a road to peace can be found.

The United States is in a difficult position with respect to arms races in various parts of the world. In the case of Jordan we had sold planes and arms with a guarantee that they would be used for defensive purposes only and not directed at Israel. It is difficult to explain to the American people a circumstance in which we have sold arms to both sides of a conflict.

The Foreign Minister then commented that the Yugoslavs had heard from the Egyptians that they considered that the United States had obtained promises that Israel would not engage in war and that the Egyptians had because of this refrained from opening hostilities.



The President replied that we had in fact urged restraint on both sides and had believed that each side would refrain from initiating hostilities. It is difficult, however, to place fault in view of the barrage of propaganda threatening the very existence of Israel in a very tense situation. At the critical moment the voice of Cairo was louder in Israel than the voice of Washington.

In commenting on the message from President Tito, the President noted with respect to the statement concerning passage through the Suez Canal that there must be an understanding that international waterways are open to all and noted that the Israelis would not accept opening the Canal and excluding themselves.

The President noted the statement in the letter that statesmen of the Arab countries cannot accept the Soviet-American resolution. He then indicated that the Israelis would not accept this resolution either.

The President also commented on the paragraph stating that the present situation in the Near East is untenable and extremely dangerous to peace in that region and in the world. The President expressed his strong agreement with this concern. Each day is more dangerous, particularly in view of the continued actions of the Russians in replacing military equipment including aircraft and tanks. Such action does not contribute to a solution to the problem. We understand the need for a solution that does not humiliate the Arabs, and we seek no such solution.

The President then completed reading the text of the message, commenting that the United Nations forces had disappeared pretty quickly when they were particularly needed in the period before the recent war.

The President then stated he would, with his advisers, study the message from President Tito, giving it careful consideration. Some aspects were, he thought, manageable and constructive. Others would not be acceptable. The exchange had been useful and the fact that President Tito prepared the letter and sent the Foreign Minister to see President Johnson was most encouraging.

The Foreign Minister then asked if he might add a few words. President Tito's trip had, the Foreign Minister thought, been constructive and useful and Arab leaders had



found it so. President Tito had not asked these leaders to endorse his proposals. They were, however, very close to the views expressed by the Arab leaders. The Foreign Minister acknowledged that his government connected withdrawal with the other issues in the area and expressed the opinion that progressive steps must be found which could lead to de facto (if not de jure) recognition.

President Nasser is probably closest of all the Arab leaders to a realistic approach to the situation. If he attempts to be moderate, he does so at great risk as he is under pressure from all quarters, particularly from the left. Everyone is trying to be a "better Arab than Nasser is".

President Tito believes we must not make the situation more difficult for President Nasser than it already is. He has problems that are real and difficult to overcome, particularly in light of what his people have been told in the past. President Nasser is, in President Tito's opinion, the only hope for peace and real and permanent guarantees with perhaps a de facto recognition of Israel that exists in the Arab world today.

President Johnson said that he had had some hope of improving relations before the war with President Nasser. President Johnson had hoped to approach the area in its entirety with a humanitarian plan based on need of food and water for all. He had considered sending the Vice President to the area. All of these plans had been set back by the war.

The President then referred again to President Tito's message saying that while we cannot accept the formula, there were some basic things that were acceptable. Everyone must deal with realities. The Israelis cannot be asked to put down guns and then have their throats cut. Withdrawal, therefore, alone was no answer. There must be answers for maritime rights, for Jerusalem, and for the refugees. There must be an answer to a permanent peaceful existence for Israel. It would take all the pressures, powers, and wisdom of all concerned to work out answers to these problems, but we must try to find them.

The Foreign Minister replied that three months had passed since the war and that the world must attempt to deal with the issues. He admitted the connection between these



problems and withdrawal. He reaffirmed, however, the need to work with those who could try for a solution. If those who existed today were removed from office (regardless of whether from the left or the right), those who came after would find the same dilemmas in the situation and the world would be no nearer a solution.

The President thanked the Foreign Minister for his visit and expressed again his pleasure that President Tito was taking an active part in finding solutions to the Middle East. He reaffirmed warmly a desire for friendship between Yugoslavia and the United States.