

80. Summary of Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, August 20, 1968, 8:15-8:42 p.m.

*Summary of Meeting in Cabinet Room, Tuesday, August 20, 1968 With the President, Soviet Ambassador Anatoli F. Dobrynin and Walt Rostow, 8:15 p.m. to 8:42 p.m.*

The President started off the meeting by asking Ambassador Dobrynin how he had been and asked about Mr. Kosygin. He then told him that he had night before last seen a color movie at the ranch which was very good. The movie was one taken at Glassboro when the President met with Kosygin.

Mr. Dobrynin said that he would have liked to have seen it and the President told him that it was good of both Kosygin and of him. The President said it was particularly good when he was talking to the crowd which had assembled outside the house.

Mr. Dobrynin said it was probably the students.

The President said: "And you could have thought he was a . . ." Mr. Rostow spoke up and said "A campaigner."

The President said: "Well, you would have thought he could be a County Judge of New Jersey, or President of the United States or anybody." Mr. Dobrynin laughed at this statement by the President. The President said it was colorful because the children were in red, blue, and green—different colors. Mr. Dobrynin asked the President if he had ever seen a Youth Parade (he was not sure what the name was) and he said it was a pageant and very colorful and a huge gathering. He said it was an interesting thing to see.

The President told Walt Rostow that Dean Rusk was going to be on television at 9 o'clock and that he ought to watch it.

The President said he had just been down to have his hair cut because he did not have a barber at the ranch, to which Mr. Dobrynin said "Why not?" They both laughed. Mr. Dobrynin then asked the President if he would be at the ranch long. The President had told him he was leaving in the morning for the ranch. He said he would be there unless President Eisenhower died. He said he would have to be there the second day and possibly the third—it's a six day affair. He said on the fifth day, however, they would take him out to Kansas and the President said he did not know whether he would go out there or not. The President said that President Eisenhower had had another attack that day.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Johnson Library, Recordings and Transcripts, Transcripts of Cabinet Room Meetings. No classification marking. The text printed here contains revisions that were made after the editor listened to the recording of the conversation. The recording is *ibid.*, Recording of Meeting Between President Johnson, Ambassador Dobrynin, and Walt Rostow, August 20, 1968, 8:17-8:42 p.m. [Tape FC002, Side A].

Mr. Dobrynin said: "He still has a strong heart because so many heart attacks, and he still survives. It's unbelievable."

The President told Mr. Dobrynin that he (the President) had had one heart attack and he almost did not make it. He said his blood pressure went to zero at once and they counted him out. He said they just thought he was gone.

Mr. Dobrynin said: "This is very dangerous . . . in the old country they used to give some stimulant or something. Otherwise they couldn't do anything. There was no surgery, anything specific. They couldn't do it—especially not at his age. And today, even in my own country, now we have very nice surgeons—but . . . until now there wasn't a single operation."

The President said this was going to open up all new, different and complex problems.

Mr. Dobrynin said: "This is the point."

The President then offered Mr. Dobrynin a Fresca and asked him if he had ever drunk this drink. Mr. Dobrynin said: "No, is it a strong one?"

The President told him that it contained no alcohol and had no calories and Mr. Dobrynin wanted to know how he did it. The President said he had to lose some weight and that he had lost about seven or eight pounds.

Mr. Dobrynin said:

"Now, Mr. President, I have an urgent instruction from my government to tell you about serious business. I will read it."

The President asked him to read a little louder—that he was a little hard of hearing but was so vain he would not wear a hearing aid.

Mr. Dobrynin went on to say:

"Kosygin asked me personally to visit you and to say the following on behalf of my government. I will read this; what I am instructed to say:

The Government of the Soviet Union considers it necessary to inform, personally, President Johnson about the following. In connection with the further aggravation of the situation which was created by a conspiracy of the external and internal forces of aggression against the existing social order in Czechoslovakia and against the statehood established by the constitution of that government, the government of Czechoslovakia Socialist Republic approached the allied states, the Soviet Union among them, with a request of rendering direct assistance, including the assistance of military forces.

The Soviet Government repeatedly stated that the events in Czechoslovakia and around it involve vital interests of the Soviet Union and of a number of other states tied by appropriate treaty obligations, and that the threat to the Socialist order in Czechoslovakia constitutes at the same time a threat to the foundations of European peace and world security. In

view of this, the Soviet Government and the Governments of the allied countries have taken a joint decision to satisfy the request of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic rendering necessary assistance to the Czechoslovak people. Accordingly, the Soviet military units received orders to enter the territory of Czechoslovakia. Of course, they will be withdrawn without delay from the territory of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic as soon as the present threat to the security is eliminated and they come to the conclusion that there is no need in further presence of the allied forces. We would like President Johnson to know that our steps, which are being taken upon the request of the Czechoslovak Government are dictated fully by the concern to strengthen peace and in no degree do they involve state interests of the United States or any other state. We proceed from the fact that the current events should not harm the Soviet-American relations to the development of which the Soviet Government as before attaches great importance.' This is what I was asked to tell you."

The President said:

"I would like to take it and read it and study it and I appreciate very much your bringing it to me and I will review it in the morning with Secretary Rusk and we will be back in touch with you."

Mr. Dobrynin thanked the President.

The President then asked if it were in English and Mr. Dobrynin said it was not, but that he could tell him afterwards if he would like it. The President said that frankly he had missed a word or two here and there. He asked Mr. Rostow how he would summarize it and Mr. Rostow said:

"As I understand it, the Soviet Government informs you, Mr. President, that they and other states have taken a collective decision at the request of the Government of Czechoslovakia to introduce military forces into Czechoslovakia because of a threat defined by the Czech Government; that those forces will remain until the threat to the Czech Government has passed, and be withdrawn. It is the hope of the Soviet Government that this will not interfere with US-Soviet relations and that there is no threat to the United States or to the interests of peace in Europe. In fact, it is stated that these moves should stabilize the peace in Europe."

The President replied:

"Our position with regard to the problem that exists in Czechoslovakia is as represented by Secretary Rusk and I trust that you understand that the position that he explained in detail to you is my view, and the views of this Government, and is the honest and absolutely correct attitude that we have taken. Although I have seen a good many other interpretations and predictions and evaluations, Secretary Rusk, at my instruction,

asked you to come in to see him and told you frankly and honestly, looking directly in your eyes, what our position was and you can rely on it.<sup>2</sup>

"I didn't hear the conversation between you and Secretary Rusk but I have such confidence in him that I know he related to you what I asked him to and I don't want there to be any doubt about our attitude."

Mr. Dobrynin said: "No. This message refers to you. I know what you told him to say and it is very clear."

The President asked Mr. Dobrynin what had been done about his announcement and he said they had had no word yet.<sup>3</sup>

The President went on to say:

"Well, I have all these problems about all these folks I have got to talk to beforehand. And I thought I would have them at breakfast at 8:00 o'clock and we'd stay from 8 to 10 at breakfast and I would do it so they wouldn't shout to high heaven that I gave them no information."

Mr. Rostow said that it had been our understanding that the joint announcement would be made at 10 o'clock tomorrow.

The President continued:

"There are four changes. I had to sit down with various people and assure them at 10:00—they would all be in the same room at 10:00 o'clock—but at 10:00, the Soviet Union will say this and we will say this. And I gathered from the announcement that I received that—I think your expression of it when I got off the airplane last night in Detroit—it said that it is acceptable, or there is no objection in Moscow if the American side desires it—if the American side desires it—and announce in the nearest time—I don't know what that means—in the nearest time about the coming visit. Now the language that they suggested, I understand that you and Secretary Rusk had a little adjustment, just a little leeway, about the same thing."

Mr. Dobrynin replied:

"Yes, but you see, Mr. President, sometimes when you make . . . in my impression, the text the Secretary gave me yesterday at midnight, there is no difference really. But the question is, when does the United States, or the President of the United States, Mr. Johnson, wish to continue . . ."

The President said "what we propose is to announce at 10:00 o'clock our time and whatever time it is there—6:00 o'clock their time. Look, while we're at it, I would like to touch a base or two, you see. And in order to touch a base, I have to get people to come in 35 miles to Washington. And I thought I'd do it at the breakfast table, and over breakfast I would say: This is what is going to be said when we finish the breakfast."

<sup>2</sup> Apparently a reference to the Rusk-Dobrynin meeting of July 22; see Document 70.

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to a joint announcement of a visit by President Johnson to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Rostow pointed out that there were two issues that the Presidium would have to set. "The President's suggestion was, raised the question—would things move quicker if we accepted your language. But my guess is you have two issues that have to go to higher authority: One, the exact time of the announcement, and two, the exact language. So that any check-back, there had to be a check-back with Moscow on the time, Mr. President."

Mr. Dobrynin said: "So I will try, Mr. President, to get back tomorrow morning."

The President told him there was no rush, for him to go on and do the best he could.

The President then directed his remarks to Mr. Rostow and said they ought to get their drinks down—that he didn't mind, but he just did not want them to think they all were in there drunk. The President went on to say that Mr. Rayburn used to say that he would never take a drink before the House adjourned in the afternoon because if they had a big fight or something and they had a roll call and he had to get up in the chair, he said just as sure as he did, he would trip his toe and someone would say he is drunk again. They all laughed and the President asked Mr. Dobrynin if he knew Mr. Rayburn and he said, yes, for a long time.

The President said that Mr. Rayburn and his father were deskmates in the Legislature before the President was born.

Mr. Dobrynin said: "That would be in Texas? Now I see."

The President continued:

"The old Capitol that was built was the original Capitol that was destroyed when we were a Republic. You see we were a Republic, an Independent State, before we came in to the Union in 1845. We won our independence in 1856 from Mexico, and from 1836 until 1845, a nine year period, we were an independent Republic."

Mr. Dobrynin asked why it called Lone Star.

The President pointed out that that's the flag—that we had a lone star flag and that we were known as the Lone Star State.

Mr. Dobrynin said: "Did you know the song the Yellow Rose of Texas?"

The President said:

"Yes, that was during the Civil War. One of the better Commanders, the Hood Brigade. My grandfather was a member of it, and they went into battle with the flag flying and the boys singing the Yellow Rose of Texas. It's a good marching hymn. It gets you excited, and so on and so forth."

Mr. Dobrynin asked if we had an official state song or flower. The President replied that we have the bluebonnet as our state flower but he did not know what our state song was. Mr. Rostow laughingly said that if the President didn't know, he certainly didn't.

The President asked Mr. Dobrynin if it was his impression that this meeting be around the first of the month and he replied that was his understanding—the first of the month—the first three days—between the first and the tenth of October.

The President said he had a grandson or a granddaughter that was expected during that period.

Mr. Dobrynin said:

“Ah, you will bring her along . . . But you see, in your case, in America when somebody is born here, he automatically becomes an American citizen. In our case it is not so.”

[Here follow comments by the President on his family.]

The President then switched to a more serious note and said there were many subjects that needed to be discussed and that he thought they were very free to do that now and that he thought their meeting in Glassboro was good. He said he enjoyed it very much. He thought it was good for our people and for their people also.

He went on to say:

“I thought the reception they gave Mr. Kosygin was really unusual. Ten years ago you wouldn’t have thought that could happen.” “I was here ten years ago” Dobrynin said, “so I know how the situation was.”

Mr. Dobrynin went on to say:

“For him it was a caution he had no chance to see more than New York and New Jersey. He is very connected with the university. He would like to see for himself, because he is the head of the whole economy of the Soviet Union . . . All the responsibility of dealing with those buildings, dams, those huge dams, factories . . . He said—in New York I would like to see both bad and good sides.”

The President said—“We have many misfortunes and lots have problems, but one of the fortunate things that’s happened to both countries is that we have been blessed with good men like Thompson in Moscow who tells us what it is without prejudice or without any hatred or without any ambition or personal attempt to satisfy me or our Government. I want you to do the same thing with your people. It would be good for this country and for your country too, if we had men of quality like you and Thompson.”

Mr. Dobrynin thanked the President very much.

The President went on to say: “Yes, one Ambassador sometimes can change the fate of the world. And a lot of times Tommy Thompson says to me—well, just a minute.”

The President asked Mr. Dobrynin to let us know about the other thing because he wanted to have the breakfast date.

Mr. Dobrynin said: “Thank you very much, and good luck.”