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LITERALLY EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT

AUGUST 24, 1968

HEREWITH A CONVERSATION YESTERDAY OF AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN  
WITH SECRETARY RUSK AND AMBASSADOR THOMPSON.

"THE SECRETARY SAID HE HAD ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO COME IN FOR A VERY INFORMAL CHAT ABOUT CURRENT PROBLEMS. HE BEGAN BY REFERRING TO HIS TALK WITH THE AMBASSADOR EARLY IN THE WEEK ON DEVELOPMENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE SECRETARY SAID THAT HE CAME FROM GEORGIA AND WAS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS SOFT SPOKEN IN MANNER. HE WONDERED WHETHER THE AMBASSADOR HAD IN ANY WAY BEEN MISLEAD BY THE MANNER IN WHICH HE HAD DISCUSSED THE CZECHOSLOVAKIA PROBLEM, AND WHETHER THE AMBASSADOR HAD FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT THE SECRETARY HAD TOLD HIM ABOUT REACTION IN THIS COUNTRY AND THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA DEVELOPMENTS ON SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS.

THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE SECRETARY'S REMARKS. HE SAID THAT THE DECISION WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT HAD MADE WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT AN EASY ONE. THE REACTION IN THE UNITED STATES AND FOR THAT MATTER IN CERTAIN COMMUNIST PARTIES HAD BEEN CLEARLY PREDICTABLE. HE HAD PERSONALLY THOUGHT THAT A SOLUTION TO THE CZECH PROBLEM HAD BEEN FOUND, BUT SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED TO CHANGE THE SITUATION. IN SPECULATING ON WHAT THIS MIGHT BE THE SECRETARY REFERRED TO HERR ULBRICHT'S VISIT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA. DOBRYNIN SAID THAT SOVIET POLICY WAS NOT DETERMINED BY HERR ULBRICHT OR ANYONE ELSE. EAST GERMANY WAS OF COURSE AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE WARSAW PACT, BUT THE SOVIETS KNEW HOW TO SAY NO TO HERR ULBRICHT. LATER IN THE CONVERSATION AMBASSADOR THOMPSON SPECULATED ON THE ROLE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAKIA PRESS IN EFFECTING THE SOVIET REACTION, AND AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS WAS CERTAINLY A FACTOR. AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN SAID THAT HIS COUNSELOR HAD RETURNED FROM MOSCOW LAST WEEKEND, AND HAD TOLD HIM THAT MOST OF THE SOVIET LEADERS WERE ON VACATION. DOBRYNIN HAD BEEN ON THE VERGE OF ASKING PERMISSION TO ACCOMPANY HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER WHEN THEY RETURN TO THE SOVIET UNION NEXT TUESDAY. HE INDICATED HE HAD RECEIVED WORD OF THE CHANGE IN SOVIET POLICY ONLY A SHORT TIME BEFORE HE HAD INFORMED THE PRESIDENT ABOUT IT.

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WHEN THE SECRETARY INDICATED THAT HE HAD BEEN SURPRISED BY THE SOVIET ACTION, DOBRYNIN ATTEMPTED TO JUSTIFY IT LARGELY ON THE BASIS OF INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE SECRETARY SAID THAT HE HAD SEEN NO INDICATIONS THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA INTENDED TO LEAVE THE WARSAW PACT OR CONDUCT ITSELF IN ANY WAY OTHER THAN AS A MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST CAMP. DOBRYNIN SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW IT HAD BECOME CLEAR THAT DUBCEK WAS A WEAK LEADER WHO WAS ALLOWING THINGS TO DRIFT, AND THAT IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE RIGHT WAS STEADILY GAINING INFLUENCE, AND THE SOVIETS THOUGHT THAT DUBCEK WAS LOSING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. THESE DEVELOPMENTS WERE LEADING IN THE DIRECTION OF A SITUATION IN WHICH CZECHOSLOVAKIA WOULD NO LONGER BE A MEMBER OF THE WARSAW PACT. DOBRYNIN EMPHASIZED THAT THE CZECH ECONOMIC REFORMS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CASE AS THE SOVIETS CONSIDERED THAT THIS WAS A MATTER FOR THEM ALONE TO DECIDE.

WHEN THE SECRETARY AGAIN REFERRED TO THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS, DOBRYNIN SAID THAT HE COULD TELL THE SECRETARY THAT HE HAD RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS TO SAY, IN CASE THE SUBJECT WERE RAISED, THAT THE SOVIET UNION DESIRED TO CONTINUE TO MAKE PROGRESS UPON THE BILATERAL QUESTIONS WITH WHICH THEY HAD BEEN DEALING BEFORE THE RECENT CZECH EVENTS. HE REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO THE PEACEFUL USES OF ATOMIC ENERGY AND THE STRATEGIC MISSILE PROBLEM. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE UNITED STATES TO PROCEED IMMEDIATELY IN THESE MATTERS WHILE THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION WAS STILL SO UNCLEAR. WITHOUT WISHING TO PRESS THE SECRETARY HE WONDERED WHETHER AS A MATTER OF POLICY, UNRELATED TO TIMING, THE UNITED STATES WOULD ALSO WISH TO PROCEED TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS.

THE SECRETARY SAID THAT HIS REPLY WOULD HAVE TO CONSIST OF TWO STATEMENTS. THE FIRST WAS THAT FROM THE BEGINNING OF HIS ADMINISTRATION THE PRESIDENT WAS PROFOUNDLY AND PASSIONATELY INTERESTED IN ADVANCING THE CAUSE OF PEACE AND IN PROMOTING BETTER RELATIONS AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. WE OF COURSE HAD DIFFERENCES, AND SOME OF THESE WOULD REMAIN BUT IN THIS ATOMIC AGE THE PRESIDENT CONSIDERED IT ESSENTIAL TO DO EVERYTHING HE COULD TO DIMINISH DANGERS OF CONFLICT. THE SECRETARY MENTIONED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD TODAY MET WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP. MANY OF THESE MEN HAD BEEN SCATTERED ABOUT THE COUNTRY, AND THEIR REACTIONS REFLECTED THE SERIOUS IMPRESSION WHICH THE CZECH DEVELOPMENTS HAD HAD ON THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. IT APPEARED THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE SUBJECT TO STRONG CRITICISM FOR HIS EFFORTS IN BUILDING BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. NEVERTHELESS, HE COULD ASSURE THE AMBASSADOR OF THE PRESIDENT'S DEEP COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF PEACE.

THE SECOND PART OF HIS ANSWER WAS THAT AT THE PRESENT STAGE HE SIMPLY COULD NOT SAY WHAT THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE UPON THE PROBLEMS UNDER DISCUSSION WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

THE SECRETARY EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT PRESIDENT SVOBODA'S VISIT TO MOSCOW WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL. DOBRYNIN SAID THAT SVOBODA WOULD STAY ON UNTIL THE NEXT DAY WHEN HE WOULD RETURN TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE SECRETARY RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE SAFETY OF THE CZECH LEADERS, AND DOBRYNIN SAID THAT WHILE OF COURSE HE HAD NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION, HE WAS CONVINCED THAT NO HARM WOULD COME TO DUBCEK OR THE OTHER CZECH PERSONALITIES. IN THIS CONNECTION THE SECRETARY REFERRED TO THE CZECH RADIO BROADCAST COMMENTING ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE CZECH DELEGATION THAT HAD GONE TO MOSCOW.

THE SECRETARY MENTIONED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD GONE TO THE RANCH. WE HAD RECEIVED IN THE LAST FEW HOURS A NUMBER OF ALARMING RUMORS ABOUT A POSSIBLE SOVIET INVASION OF ROMANIA. THE SECRETARY EMPHASIZED THAT THESE RUMORS HAD NOT COME TO US FROM THE ROMANIANS. THE AMBASSADOR WOULD SURELY BE AWARE OF WHAT THE EFFECT SUCH ACTION WOULD HAVE UPON THE UNITED STATES OPINION COMING ON TOP OF THE RECENT SOVIET ACTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE SECRETARY EXPECTED THE PRESIDENT TO TELEPHONE HIM AS SOON AS HE ARRIVED AT THE RANCH AND RECEIVED THESE REPORTS, AND THE SECRETARY DID NOT KNOW WHAT HE SHOULD REPLY. HE ASKED WHETHER DOBRYNIN HAD ANY INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT. DOBRYNIN SAID HE HAD NEITHER SEEN NOR HEARD ANY INDICATION WHATEVER OF ANY CONTEMPLATED SOVIET ACTION AGAINST ROMANIA, AND DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE WAS ANYTHING TO THESE RUMORS. ON THE CONTRARY, HE REFERRED TO THE WARM GREETINGS WHICH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP HAD SENT TO THE ROMANIAN LEADERS ON THE OCCASSION OF THEIR NATIONAL HOLIDAY.

THE SECRETARY CONCLUDED THE CONVERSATION BY STATING THAT HE DID NOT CONTEMPLATE INFORMING THE PRESS OF AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN'S VISIT."

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