

June 24, 1967

Record of Conversation between Polish Politburo member Zenon Kliszko and Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev, Moscow

Citation:

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Summary:

Brevhnev describes discussions he's had with North Vietnamese leaders, who only want the U.S. bombings to end in order to open negotiations. He also discusses the outcome of the Arab-Israeli war at the UN General Assembly; even though the assembly condemned Israel, the Arabs are shaken by defeat. The only hope for the Arabs is the support of the USSR. He has also warned Fidel Castro not to push things too far.

Original Language:

Polish

Contents:

Translation - English

Minutes from Conversation between Cde. Zenon Kliszko and Cde. Leonid Brezhnev

In the course of the conversation, which took place on 24 June in the headquarters of the CC CPSU, Cde. L. Brezhnev, among other things, stated:

There are signs which attest to the fact that there are hesitations [fluctuations] within the Vietnamese leadership as to whether to continue the war or whether to transfer the solution of the problem to the diplomatic level. But, of course, the pressure of China is very strong here.

I would like to inform you that a few days ago one of the members of the CC Political Bureau of the Workers' Party of Vietnam stated in a conversation with our ambassador: We are not so much afraid of the Americans as we are of the Chinese. This is very revealing.

As you know, Cde. Kosygin is currently in New York. We came to the conclusion that he should meet Johnson. We made it so that Johnson would come to a meeting in the state where New York City is. They proposed to have the meeting take place at some military facility, to which we naturally did not agree. In the end the meeting took place at a pedagogical college. In connection with this meeting we sent a letter to the Vietnamese in which we talked about the possibility of holding such a meeting and at the same time we asked about their opinion [as to] how one should treat the recent statement of the Political Bureau member Nguyen [Duy] Trinh. We posed the question that if the bombings are stopped, will there be conditions for entering into negotiations? The Vietnamese answered immediately - and this is very typical. They wrote that this statement continues to have authority and that one should take advantage of the possibility of entering into negotiations. They added at the same time that a further threat of escalation exists. We immediately informed Cde. Kosygin about this.

This means that in addition to maintaining a general position with regard to continuing the fight, anxiety exists within the Vietnamese leadership as to the consequences of further escalation of the American aggression. It was for the first time that the Vietnamese answered so quickly and this is a new thing in the relations with them.

A very complicated situation had arisen related to the events in the Near East. The Arab friends committed many mistakes, both political and military. Treason surely played some role as well. One must emphasize that the activity of the Soviet Union and brethren socialist countries exerted their influence after all. The fight was interrupted.

Eighty-five countries supported the extraordinary session of the UN General Assembly. The session began its deliberations. The fight continues at the session. Naturally, we do not maintain any illusions that this would solve any problems especially since the session of the General Assembly can only give definite recommendations to the Security Council. However, what we consider to be a big achievement is that the General Assembly is being used to denounce American imperialism, to denounce the aggression of Israel and the role of American imperialism in this aggression. The fight will still continue. There are, of course, different propositions...

The events shook up the Arabs, but at the same time they made them sober. This was a unique shock for the Arabs. We undertook all possible precautions [measures] so this defeat would not be considered a disaster. We undertook many different steps. I directed a personal letter to Nasser so he should not resign from his post. We

sent our comrades to the Arab nations. Cde. [Soviet President Nikolai V.] Podgorny went to Egypt [on 21-24 June 1967]. Cde. [Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Matvei V.] Zakharov went to Syria. We hosted [Algerian Prime Minister Houari] Boumedienne [in Moscow on 12-13 June 1967]. In the course of conversations with Cde. Podgorny, Nasser admitted that he committed many mistakes. The main conclusion that he came to is contained in his statement: the policy of not joining any blocs does not work for Egypt. The imperialists are beating us and you, on the other hand, are treating us as if we were not connected with you. We want to be with you forever. Only a friendship with the Soviet Union will rescue the Arabs.

This change in their mood, Cde. Brezhnev stated further, must be well thought through by us. We have to think over how to carry it out tactically. One cannot naturally announce it, but one must attend to it. Nasser is grateful to us for our help. We will act.

We posed a series of conditions before him, or rather principles, by which they should be guided. First, they must maintain Arab unity. Second, they must maintain friendly relations between progressive Arab leaders. The Arabs must unite because only in this way will they be able to resist the aggression of imperialism.

The Arabs understood us well. All their newspapers changed their course and they are placing emphasis on the friendship and assistance of the socialist countries. We must continue our work, continue to maintain our personal contacts and to give assistance. We have transferred many airplanes, tanks, and food to Egypt and other Arab nations. Among other things, we sent them 10 thousand tons of sugar, butter, pasta, medicine, etc.

Cde. Podgorny is coming back today and he will most likely fly to Syria again in the near future. The Syrians are jealous; they think that they were most entitled to the visit since they fought the best. One must balance this. We must help them in getting rid of the chauvinistic fumes [czad - lit. smell of burning]. We will do all this and it would be necessary that you also attend to this.

As you know, the CC CPSU plenary session was held. The main point of the agenda at the plenary session was my report [on 20 June 1967] about the USSR policy with regard to the aggression in the Near East. We will send you the full text of the report through our ambassador. It may have already been sent out today. Criticize me or not, but the report was as it was. The general character of our assessment is in accordance with the statement of Cde. Gomulka at the Labor Unions Congress. We published the summary of Cde. Gomulka's statement in our press. The atmosphere was good at the plenary session. The members of the CC supported in full the position of the Political Bureau. In order not to create the impression that the situation is alarming, the plenum also approved the plan [thesis] for the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution which will be published tomorrow. In addition, we removed Cde. [Yurii] Andropov from the position of secretary, we made him the deputy, but it seems to me that he is not too worried about it. Cde. Andropov is now working in a different place, but he still spends much time with us here and in connection with [the current] situation he is dealing a lot with international affairs. He said that in the future he will also be conducting talks with Cde. Kliszko. The plenary session is over, but there is much work. In connection with the plenum many secretaries of district committees want to talk and I am always busy; internal matters, international matters.

We have not yet received any detailed information from Cde. Kosygin regarding the meeting with Johnson. I talked to him over the phone, but the conversation was rather loose. Cde. Kosygin was in a good mood in the course of this conversation. He passed on the greetings from the representatives of socialist countries. The Americans are, of course, carrying out a definite game, they want to lead the matters

to the point where we are these two great empires, along with them, and that we can decide on different matters together. Putting the matter in this way would be beneficial to them. After having received a detailed report from Cde. Kosygin, we will define more closely our line of action, so we are not caught off guard [lit. caught on the fishing pole].

Yesterday at the meeting of the Political Bureau we approved my letter to Fidel Castro. We told him openly that much of what they are doing is dangerous [and] that we do not concur with many things. We decided to tell him honestly our remarks so that they would not say later that we, as a big party, did not bring to their attention certain matters. An idea came up that Cde. Kosygin would fly to Cuba on his way back from New York. In order to bring him up to date we sent this letter to Cde. Kosygin. He will know how to talk. We received approval from Cuba to receive Cde. Kosygin. We emphasized that it would not be an official, a party, or a governmental visit, but simply a direct and friendly conversation. Cde. Kosygin's stay in Cuba will no doubt be beneficial. Everyone will understand that he went to a socialist country.

We informed 51 parties about the events in the Near East. We informed brethren socialist countries about our talks. The Arab nations currently assumed the correct position. The only position that is not clear is that of the Lebanese party. There is something fishy [lit. rickety] about it.

As far as the situation in our country is concerned, Cde. Brezhnev continued, then one should say that we did not have any panic. Rallies are being held in many plants and institutions. There were only isolated Zionist statements. We found a formulation by which we are guiding our activities externally. We acknowledged the nation of Israel and we are not going against it, but we are opposed to the aggressive course of the leaders of Israel. One must say that the tendency of the Arabs to eliminate Israel was not correct. This was a harsh lesson, but things could have been worse if the Arabs managed to occupy Israel. Then, the United States and England would have surely joined in the action and we would then be much closer to a third world war, since we would have to react as well. Then not a single stone would remain standing in Egypt, especially in Cairo.

At this point Cde. Suslov added: As far as the internal matter is concerned, it is developing well. The fact which testifies to this is that in the current year the rate of industrial production growth was set to be at 7.3%, but in reality it amounts to 10.5%. The increase of work productivity was defined at 4.7%, but in reality it amounts to 7.6%.

The capricious spring worries us, continued Cde. Brezhnev. There are too few rainfalls in many places. The situation, however, is becoming normalized gradually. One should assume that we will not harvest as much grain as we did last year. The crops will be rather average. But this will be sufficient to us, all the more since we have certain reserves. In any case, we will not be making any Krasnodarskii [?] statements.

This is all I would like to say today. I will phone Cde. Gomulka today to inform him about various matters. In addition, we will send the information which I had already mentioned.

The conversation ended at this.

From the Soviet side the following took part in the conversation: Cdes. Brezhnev, Suslov, Andropov, Kapitanov and Rusakov. From our side, members of the PUWP delegation on their way back from Hanoi were present.