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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:30 P.M. BELGRADE TIME

AUGUST 4, 1975

MONDAY

(Belgrade, Yugoslavia)

MR. NESSEN: I don't have very much, but I want to clear up one or two small details. We have coming for you a joint statement by the American and Yugoslav Governments. It is for release at four o'clock.

We will be able to give it to you at about two o'clock.

Some of you have asked about Ambassador Eilts. As you know, he did come here and meet with Dr. Kissinger briefly last night for a preliminary discussion.

Ambassador Eilts will fly back to Washington on Air Force One, which will give him a further opportunity to talk to Secretary Kissinger, and also I would expect he would talk to the President on the plane.

Secretary Kissinger wanted you to know he is meeting Ambassador Dinitz in Washington tomorrow.

Q Did he talk on the phone to Rabin in Helsinki?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Have you asked him, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He has been keeping me informed of the situation, developments on this, and did not mention --

Q You did not ask him specifically?

MR. NESSEN: I did not.

Q Have you been able to rule out definitely that Rabin went to Stockholm, as was reported, to see officials?

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MR. NESSEN: I don't think there is any secret that Rabin went to Stockholm.

Q Ron, we can't hear the questions.

MR. NESSEN: There was a story a few days ago that Rabin went to Stockholm to have a secret meeting with Sadat or with Egyptian officials, depending on the version of the story. I don't think there is any secret that Rabin went to Stockholm, but my understanding is -- and as Henry told many of you the other day -- it was inconceivable to him that there would be such a meeting and that the United States had been notified of no such meeting and that the published story, which is that Rabin went there to meet with, I believe, European Socialist leaders, is the story that as far as we know is the accurate story.

Q Can you explain -- I know you are the spokesman for the White House, not the Government --

MR. NESSEN: I know what you are getting at, Ralph. Let me finish my routine matters here. Some of you have inquired as to the meaning of the comment that there were military matters discussed today. I think some of you know there has been a minor difficulty involving American military sales and assistance to Yugoslavia.

The President told President Tito that we do have a list of the Yugoslav needs and that this list is being carefully and sympathetically examined, and the President said he was taking a personal interest in it and he told President Tito that he expects to move ahead on this matter.

I am sorry to say I don't have the full background on it, but John Trattner either has or can get the background for you on what the difficulty is. My understanding is it is more of a bureaucratic foul-up at some level than any major problem, but this is what the President told President Tito when this matter was discussed.

Q Defense Secretary Schlesinger has opposed these sales.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the full background on it. I am merely reporting what went on at this meeting, but John Trattner and I will dig up whatever additional information you need.

Q Ron, do you know what kind of military material he is talking about for Yugoslavia.

MR. NESSEN: No, John will get that for you.

Q Ron, my question deals with the Middle East. Can I ask it now?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, go ahead, Ralph.

Q We are all interested in President Tito's remarks, that his views and Mr. Ford's views are identical, and he formed that judgment after the President told him what the United States intended to do in the future. Can you explain that?

MR. NESSEN: Rather than attempt to explain it, I think I would merely like to say that at this meeting today the United States explained its position on the Middle East, and I think that position is well-known. I was there, and there was no change in the American position.

It was explained at some length. As for how President Tito reacted or responded to that, I just don't think I can tackle that question from here.

Q Ron, do you remember what he said in his dinner speech?

MR. NESSEN: I clearly do, and he restated that today to the President.

Q Ron, do you consider President Tito's comment useful in the American efforts to promote a settlement?

MR. NESSEN: I think without direct reference to the Middle East, but really more generally speaking as to the tone of the entire talks on all the subjects discussed, it would be fair to say the United States is encouraged that President Tito, as a leader of the non-aligned world, does have an apparent positive approach to America's views.

Q Ron, we can't hear the question. The last question Ralph asked something or other and your answer was that Tito had restated that view to the President. What view was it?

MR. NESSEN: Ralph recalled the remarks of President Tito in the toast last night as to the Middle East and his views of the Middle East, and I said he restated those this morning.

Q Did he specifically restate his support for a separate Palestinian State?

MR. NESSEN: He did not.

Q The President in the past has indicated that at some point the talks over the problems of the Middle East might reach a stage where he would have to propose a settlement. President Tito used the term "actions the United States intends to take." Was it possibly that kind of action that he was referring to?

MR. NESSEN: The President did not go into quite that much detail this morning, although he did restate the public American position, which is that a stalemate or failure to find a solution or to take another step in the Middle East historically has increased the possibility of war, and he restated what he has stated before, which is that in the absence, ultimately, of another step in the Middle East, that there would then be the possibility of going to Geneva, but he did not, at this meeting today, restate what you mention, which, as he said before, the United States at this point would offer its own suggestion for a settlement. He did not say that.

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Q Was the suspension of Israel from the UN discussed?

MR. NESSEN: The issue was discussed but in no way was it resolved.

Q What was Tito's position? In that connection, does the United States make any request of President Tito?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think, as the President himself said, that the American officials there spoke in terms of moderation, the need for moderation on that issue.

Q Is he planning to use his influence in the Third World for moderation on this particular point?

MR. NESSEN: Henry, it was not put in those terms. There was talk of an existing moderation but not in terms of recruiting him to do that in the Third World.

Q Was there talk on Tito's part of moderation?

MR. NESSEN: Tito pointed out that the Organization of African Unity had taken a somewhat moderate stand on this and that Sadat himself had taken a somewhat moderate stand on this.

Helen?

Q When the President called for flexibility, was he referring to the latest answers he has been getting on Israel and the Egyptians, and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: I did not sense that anything the President said today was related to any report that Ambassador Eilts brought because, as I say, the Ambassador had only a brief preliminary meeting with Henry last night and he has not had an opportunity to talk directly to the President this morning.

Q Other than saying that he might have to go to Geneva, he did not outline any actions per se to Tito?

MR. NESSEN: The United States merely stated its already publicly known position.

Q Ron, why were we deliberately kept in the dark on the interception of the President's plane over Sweden when I specifically asked you for information on it and you never came up with anything and now we finally heard from the Swedish Government that it was in fact an interception?

MR. NESSEN: Henry, I, myself, don't know for a fact that there was what you refer to as an interception. We are trying to find out precisely what did happen but as far as we can find out at the moment, the Swedish Government is not inclined to make any issue of that flight, and how or whether the flight may have strayed from its agreed upon path is still being checked out, but there is no indication that the Swedish Government is at all exercised by it.

Q Have you talked to the pilot and found out what kind of radio conversation he had about it? That is what I asked you to do about it while we were still on the plane. I asked you to find out from Stockholm Air Control.

MR. NESSEN: I know virtually nothing more than I knew when I was on the plane, which is we have no indication that Sweden is exercised in any way about the flight path.

Q On the plane you said you knew nothing at all about it and gave me some story about how it was a friendly salute.

MR. NESSEN: I talked to others since then, Henry, and, as I say, there is no indication that Sweden is exercised and precisely what the flight path was and how it may or may not have strayed, is being checked.

Q Ron, is it now the case that you do not think it was a friendly salute; it was something other than a friendly salute?

MR. NESSEN: At this moment, I have no reason to believe it was anything other than what Major Barrett said it was.

Q But you don't know what kind of planes, or how much of each?

MR. NESSEN: I would say I am not familiar with the background of the military assistance discussed this morning but John Trattner will get it for you.

Walt?

Q Ron, have you heard anything by way of comment from the President on his assessment of this trip overall?

MR. NESSEN: No, but I would think by the end of the day we would be able to get something for you on that.

Q Before we take off from here?

MR. NESSEN: I hope so, but I would think that if you add together the things he said at each stop you would get the idea of how he feels about the CSCE, about the trip to Bonn and Warsaw. I don't know that I am going to be able to get him to put it concisely, in a sentence or two, but if you look back at what he said at each stop and the usefulness of each stop, I think you will get the idea.

Q Ron, were you aware a number of commercial arms sales had already been approved and export licenses had already been granted?

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry, I don't know the background on the military assistance problems in Yugoslavia. One of the reasons we brought John with us was so he could provide the kind of detail you are asking, and he will.

Q Can he follow you on to the podium to do that?

MR. NESSEN: He will either follow me or he will get the information, and then follow me.

Helen?

Q Did the pilot obtain clearance from Sweden to fly over Sweden?

MR. NESSEN: The flight path that the President's plane followed was filed with the Swedish Government.

Q Did he follow what he filed?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he did. That I just confirmed a few moments ago. The path that was filed was followed.

Q Did the aircraft fly over Swedish air space?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know it did, and it followed the flight plan which had been filed.

Q Ron, did President Tito have any reason to believe that the President and Dr. Kissinger embraced his remarks in the toast last night that Israel should get out of that territory and should recognize the Palestinian --

MR. NESSEN: Aldo, I just don't think I can report to you what the views of President Tito are. I am telling you what the United States did and said at the meeting today.

Q Did the United States say that in the future perhaps they believe that Israel should get out of that Arab territory and would have to recognize the Palestinians?

MR. NESSEN: The United States restated what it has stated publicly before as its Middle East policy.

Q Do you feel President Tito supports the American step-by-step approach to the settlement?

MR. NESSEN: Again, I would just prefer not to speak for President Tito.

Q Ron, these actions that the U.S. will take in the future to which Tito referred, this is a publicly stated U.S. policy?

MR. NESSEN: Correct.

Q Ron, just to clear up one point, the United States has never had an agreement for a separate, independent state with the Palestinian people, have they?

MR. NESSEN: I think the position that has been taken publicly before is that the Palestinian issue is a matter for the discussions and not something that ought to be determined ahead of the discussions.

Q Since President Tito has called for the creation of a separate Palestinian state, how can we reconcile that with his statement today that he and President Ford have identical views on the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: I understand, Ralph, but the United States did not say anything in the meeting different from or beyond its publicly stated position.

Q Why, then, Ron, do you say the U.S. is encouraged by Tito's position?

MR. NESSEN: On the whole range of issues discussed at yesterday's and today's meeting.

Q Are they encouraged about their views on the Middle East?

MR. NESSEN: I say they are encouraged that he is taking such an apparently positive approach to our views.

Q Ron, would it be incorrect to say the U.S. does not agree with Tito on the point of an independent Palestinian state?

MR. NESSEN: The publicly stated position which has not changed, Russ, is that that is a matter of negotiation and not something to be decided ahead of time.



Q Then we don't agree with it?

Q Ron, we have supported the legitimate right of the Palestinians.

MR. NESSEN: That is part of the public statement of policy.

Q We have not supported a separate state?

MR. NESSEN: That is quite right. The public statement is that any final settlement must take into consideration the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. That has been long since publicly stated.

Q Now that these talks have concluded, would it be fair to say that we can expect the President's Middle East reassessment soon?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a timetable on any conclusion of the reassessment.

Q At this meeting tomorrow, we deliver the reply, right?

MR. NESSEN: To relay the Egyptian reply, is that what you said? I would say generally to continue the discussions of the positions of the various parties, that is right.

Q Did they discuss Portugal or Cyprus?

MR. NESSEN: No.

You have the list of topics which were discussed. That was the Middle East, international economic issues, including the upcoming Special United Nations Session on the world economy, and these few bilateral matters left over, including the military assistance question.

Q Will you find out if there was a Rabin-Kissinger telephone conversation?

MR. NESSEN: I will.

Q Will there be remarks at the airport?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President will have brief departure remarks. I don't know what he intends to say. I think they will, perhaps, be off the cuff, but I would be surprised if they went beyond what he said publicly here.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:50 P.M. BELGRADE TIME)