**Memorandum of Conversation**

Glassboro, New Jersey, June 23, 1967, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

**PARTICIPANTS**

* ***US***
  + President Johnson
  + William D. Krimer, Interpreter, Department of State
* ***USSR***
  + ***Alexey Kosygin***, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR
  + Victor Sukhodrev, Interpreter, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

To Chairman Kosygin’s apologies for having caused the President some difficulty in selecting a place for the meeting, the President replied that he was not concerned with minor items; he was happy to welcome the Chairman to this country and particularly to this meeting, and he was hopeful that they would get to know each other and understand each other better.

Chairman Kosygin said that there was a great deal of clarification needed in order to understand each other’s actions, particularly during the recent period of time. The direction that US policy was taking was not clear to him and to his colleagues in the Government of the USSR. Therefore, he proposed to take advantage of this meeting in order to better understand us and to be better understood by us. He did not expect to reach all-encompassing global solutions here, but if the President and he could at least reach agreement on some problems, that would be of mutual advantage and would contribute to a better understanding.

The President replied that he quite agreed with Mr. Kosygin’s view of the purpose of the present meeting and remarked that perhaps we were poor communicators. He knew that sometimes this was the case between himself and our own people and that perhaps a better job of communicating was required between him and the Chairman. He knew very well that the major question with which he and the Chairman would have to deal was whether or not they agreed on the kind of world that we would like to live in, and also whether we could use the great strength and the vast resources of the two countries to contribute to the goal of creating such a world. The President believed that the American people want to live in peace and harmony with the Russian people, in agreement and as friends with them. He knew that he wanted to cooperate with the Chairman and the leaders of his country and with the people of the Soviet Union to help bring about peace in the world so as to prevent the holocaust that could come about otherwise. Inquiring of the Chairman as to the size of his family, and learning that there were just two children, i.e., Mr. Kosygin and his sister, the President remarked that he was one of five children in his family. It often happened that the oldest brother, himself, and the oldest sister had to take special pains in order to avoid disputes and differences between them so as to set a good example for the other children in the family. Frequently, the oldest brother has to provide guidance to the rest of the children. While he did not want to appear to be paternalistic towards the Chairman’s country, and its leaders, he thought that if we could work more closely together, the two countries could ultimately develop and multiply their resources so as to help their peoples to a better life. The President thought that Ambassador Thompson was an excellent communicator, particularly because of his great friendship with the Russian people. He wanted the Chairman to know that the Ambassador was fully authorized to speak for the President and on his behalf. The President said that he also had a great deal of respect for Ambassador Dobrynin whose representation of the USSR in this country was of a very high quality indeed. For all the above reasons, the President thought that if we could build upon the fact that while we have difficult problems, we did have the same goals, this would be a useful and constructive attitude to take for the leadership of both countries. In 3 or 4 instances, we had already made a good beginning. The President hoped that his grandson would not have to experience a Pearl Harbor or a Siege of Leningrad or any other kind of war-connected calamity. He was sure that Chairman Kosygin felt the same way and thought it necessary to move further in that direction.

Chairman Kosygin said that whenever we discussed any problem on a global scale, it seemed to him that there was complete agreement between the President’s view and his own. But he had to emphasize here that this was true of this overall global aspect only. We have the same goals, neither country wanted war, and everything else that the President had said he could endorse. However, it seemed to him that when we began to discuss specific problems and practical steps for their solution, then a great many difficulties and differences arose. As concerns Ambassador Thompson and Dobrynin, he quite agreed that they did an outstanding job in representing their countries and he also wanted the President to know that Ambassador Dobrynin kept in very close touch with the situation in the United States and transmitted very careful reports to his Government. He believed that Ambassador Dobrynin had a thorough understanding of the situation in the United States and that his reports were objective and correct. The Ambassador had not in any instance attempted to inform his Government in any way calculated to disturb relations between the two countries.

Inasmuch as the President had inquired about the Chairman’s family, Mr. Kosygin wanted to enlarge on this question and said that his mother had died when he was only 2 years old and that his father, who had never remarried, had brought him up with the help of his grandfather and other relatives. Mr. Kosygin came from Leningrad as did his ancestors and they had all been workers, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before him. He himself had also been a factory worker and since the President had mentioned Leningrad, he wanted him to know that he had spent the entire siege during World War II in Leningrad as a representative of the Soviet Union’s defense, later as the chairman of the Leningrad Soviet. He had a very clear understanding therefore as to the true meaning of war; he had experienced two world wars personally. He also knew that the President had fought in World War II and had a good understanding of what war was really like. Personally, he believed it was not just the two of them but all the nations and all peoples who had a good knowledge of the horrors of war and everything they implied. For this reason, everyone would say that he and the President had to do all in their power to maintain and strengthen peace in the world. He regarded this not only as their greatest duty but also as a deep personal moral obligation. Taking the Middle East situation for example, just as soon as the fighting had begun, he and the President had communicated with each other on the Hot Line and while, of course, they had not accomplished everything to settle the issue, perhaps in some way this direct communication had been useful. He wanted to tell the President very frankly and clearly that he and his Government were dismayed by the fact that the President had taken a certain position with which they had agreed, but then a few hours later had changed it radically. This had caused a great deal of worry and concern for him and his colleagues in the Soviet Government and had indeed alarmed them. He was speaking very frankly and sincerely; he did not know whether he would have another chance to meet with the President and therefore wanted to take advantage of this meeting for a frank and outspoken exchange. If the President wanted him to be specific, he would be glad to explain what he meant subsequently. But first, he wanted to say that just before leaving Moscow, his Party and his Government had asked him to assure the President that they all very much wanted this period of their lives to be devoted to peaceful purposes and the future to better relations with the United States.

He, his Party and his Government, were totally opposed to war. But if a war should be forced upon them, then the Communist Party and the Government and people of the Soviet Union would know how to fight and would know how to defend their people; this was not, however, what they wanted. They wanted to do everything in their power to develop peaceful and amicable relations with all the countries of the world. History had entrusted him and the President with great responsibility in this respect. Not everything in this world could be measured in rubles or dollars; there were many other overriding humane considerations which had to guide their work in the direction of developing peace in the world and providing their peoples with a better standard of living. To this they devoted all their activities and efforts and he was sure that on this basis fruitful cooperation between the two countries could be established. As he saw it, the path to this goal consisted above all in trust for each other. If the situation could be attained where Americans could trust the Soviet people and the Soviet people could trust Americans, then he felt many questions facing us would lend themselves to a comparatively easy solution. He would like to attain such a situation, but to do so a great many steps in that direction were required.

The President said that he shared the Chairman’s views; he knew they had been stated sincerely and believed that the Soviet people and the American people could easily agree on that kind of a platform. He recognized the wisdom and desirability of the exchange of views initiated by the Chairman on the Hot Line, he welcomed this initiative, and wanted to state emphatically that he was unaware of any change in the American position mentioned by the Chairman. We had brought our influence to bear in the interests of preserving the peace; we had asked for restraint and had urged Israel to agree not to abandon it. We had not known of any plans for military actions until they had begun and he was certain that the Chairman had not known and had not been consulted on the act of closing the Straits before it had been taken. This illustrated the great responsibilities of the two powers; the other countries were a part of the family but it was up to the older brothers to provide proper guidance. As a result of the Chairman’s communications, we had gotten busy and it was perhaps a result of the initiative displayed by the Chairman that we had managed to alleviate the situation, even if only temporarily. The big question was really this: if we could achieve some measure of success after the fighting had already started, why could we not have done so before the start of hostilities? We appreciated what the Chairman had done in this respect.

Mr. Kosygin fully concurred with the President’s view. Once we had acted together, we had achieved some measure of success in bringing about a cease-fire between Israel and the Arab countries; this was good and he was very grateful. However, when he had seen before the fighting had started that a military conflict was about to break out, he and his Government had contacted the Arab countries with a view to discourage them from starting a war and evidently they had been successful in accomplishing this. It appeared to him that the United States had not been successful in influencing Israel in the same direction.

The President remarked that he did not think either of the two big powers had been successful in this respect since it was the Arabs who had taken the first act of closing the Straits.

Mr. Kosygin was quite emphatic in feeling that the Arabs had heeded his advice.

The President repeated his statement concerning the Straits and asserted that both great powers had succeeded in helping to bring about the cease-fire and to allow tempers to cool. He was concerned, however, over the fact that this had not been accomplished before the outbreak of shooting. He did not believe that the Soviet Union had wanted the UAR to close the Straits of Tiran or that it had wanted to see the Arab countries undertake military movements on Israel’s border and publicly make many statements of their intention to liquidate Israel. He had said to the Foreign Ministers that he would like to see this discussed in the United Nations in the hope that neither side would undertake steps which later both might regret. Perhaps the very fact that all of these countries had at their disposal weapons, some provided by the Soviet Union and some by the U.S., had permitted them to become that reckless. The President hoped that his proposal for full disclosure of arms shipments to the Mid-Eastern countries in addition to an agreement not to furnish arms to them would in the future result in restraint being exercised by both sides. He hoped that we could agree on such steps with Chairman Kosygin. At this point, the President told Mr. Kosygin an anecdote about the English writer Charles Lamb. Once, when he had laid aside a book he had been reading, in obvious displeasure and had said to his sister that he did not like the author, his sister asked him if he knew the author. To this Lamb replied that he did not, that if he had known him he would have liked him. The President expressed his view that he thought a similar principle applied to Mr. Kosygin and himself, that in getting to know each other better, they were also getting to like each other.

Mr. Kosygin replied with respect to disclosure of arms shipments and refusal to ship arms to the Middle East that quite frankly he did not think this approach to be realistic at the current stage. However, he wanted to return to the previous question concerning the Hot Line communications. As he and his Government had understood the first exchange, the positions of the two countries calling for a cease-fire and a return to the original armistice lines had been as one. But then, four hours later, as the military situation had changed, the President had also changed his view.

The President replied that we had not changed our view; that we still adhere to the same principle of preserving the territorial integrity of all countries. This was the policy of our Government and we have stated it to Israel and to other countries just as we are stating it right now with respect to Viet-Nam. We believe in the territorial integrity of all countries and we want everybody to abide by it. He was not aware of any change in the position of the United States not only on this occasion but also on all past and present matters. Certainly, there was no such change of view involved in the exchanges on the Hot Line. He said that he knew that if we could accomplish what he believed we had helped to accomplish before hostilities started, this would have been useful, Nasser would not have closed the Gulf of Aqaba and there would have been no destruction as a result of Israeli Air Force action. If no nation had supplied arms to the Middle Eastern countries, none of these war-like acts would have been taken. The President hoped that if we could reach agreement between ourselves with respect to the great problems facing us, we would be responding to what was expected of us by our people. This is why we wanted to explore the questions of restraint in developing anti-ballistic missiles systems and inter-continental ballistic systems with the government of the Soviet Union, so as to be able to devote the 40 or 50 billion dollars an ABM system would cost to the peaceful development of our country. The President was sure that neither people wanted to use these weapons against the other and therefore believed that if we could manage to reach that kind of agreement it would be very helpful to both countries. We did want to live in peace-the question was how? He thought that an understanding not to furnish arms to either side in the Middle East, an agreement concerning the ABM systems, a solution of the problems in South Viet-Nam and a cessation of hostilities with North Viet-Nam, that all of these constitute a reply to the above question of how to live in peace.

In 1948 both the Soviet Union and the United States had agreed that Israel was entitled to a national life of its own and this had a bearing on a solution to the Mid-East problem. The President did not think either side had worked hard enough to reach agreement on these questions. He wanted to suggest these measures to the Chairman, measures for arms control, ABM control, Viet-Nam, Middle East, and some steps for a solution to certain problems of mutual interest in Europe. He would be glad to hear the Chairman’s view concerning them. Our peoples were asking us to find solutions and he thought that if Mr. Kosygin and he could understand each other and like each other on the principle illustrated by the Lamb anecdote, progress could be made. Neither of our peoples wanted to cause harm to the other. Therefore, perhaps extended discussions of all these problems could accomplish some progress in the direction of finding solutions. Our people want us to have confidence and trust in each other and perhaps the action decided upon here in this little farm house could represent first steps in this direction. The President would rather leave that kind of a monument of his work than any other and he was sure that this was also true of the Chairman.

Mr. Kosygin assured the President that he took the same view but as the President probably knew this was not such a simple matter. He wanted to return to the first question concerning the situation in the Middle East. What was it that could be undertaken now with respect to the Middle East on which the two countries could agree? First of all, he wanted to emphasize the Soviet Union had no commercial interest in the Middle East, that it was not deriving any economic benefits from the resources of the Middle East such as oil (the Soviet Union had ample oil resources of its own); all that the Soviet Union was doing was investing in development projects in Mid-Eastern countries, exemplified best of all by the Aswan Dam. Presently an agreement was being worked out to build a similar dam on the Euphrates River. None of these were military projects. He did not know whether the President had ever visited the Middle East; if he had, he surely would be appalled at the great poverty of its people-and all this while there were enormous sources of energy available. The Soviet Union could not be accused, as perhaps Great Britain could be, of self-serving commercial interests in that area. The Soviet Union was only investing there to raise the standard of living of other countries and would wish to see the United States do the same; the USSR was not as rich a country as the United States and yet it was doing all in its power to help the impoverished people of the Middle East. Now, to turn to the question of what could be done to solve the problems of the Middle East, Mr. Kosygin drew a sketch of the Suez Canal indicating Israeli forces occupying the eastern bank and Egyptian forces, regrouping after the initial shock, on the western bank. He said that renewed hostilities along the Suez, which was now the front line, would be inevitable unless the two warring military forces could be separated. It was not reasonable to expect the Arabs to withdraw any further; therefore, it was clear that Israel would have to withdraw its forces back to the original armistice line. If this were not done, hostilities were certain to break out again; the Arabs were an explosive people and no other solution to this problem was possible.

The President asked Mr. Kosygin to consider the record of the past three years of his Presidency. During that period of time, we have not concluded any new military alliances with other countries. We have concluded a cultural exchange agreement with the Soviet Union, although its implementation had been hampered to some extent by the rejection of Mary Martin’s show “Hello Dolly” on the part of the USSR following initial acceptance. We had concluded a civil air agreement, we had concluded and ratified a consular agreement and we had concluded an agreement on the peaceful exploration of outer space. The President hoped that today we could agree that a non-proliferation agreement be actually tabled before the other countries concerned become disgusted with the endless delays which have occurred. Further, the President hoped that Mr. Kosygin could assure him that Ambassador Thompson would get to talk to his representatives concerning control of the ABM race. He hoped we could announce that such talks would take place. Three months ago the Chairman had informed him that he was prepared to undertake such discussions, yet nothing further had happened. Thus we could point to four finished and completed measures undertaken by the two countries during the past three years, none of which were war-like or had any military connotations. We should agree now to table a non-proliferation agreement and we should be able to tell our people today that we would undertake discussions concerning the ABM systems; even if we disagreed on many aspects of this problem, the discussions in themselves would prove to be a step in the right direction. Regarding arrangements to control the Middle East situation, the President would like to have Mr. Kosygin’s views regarding the five points he had proposed, national life, territorial integrity, etc. Perhaps agreement could be reached on some of these and perhaps Mr. Kosygin might have some proposals which the President could agree to. The President emphasized that he did not doubt that Mr. Kosygin wanted the same thing as he, and he knew what he wanted. The President did not like to see one-half of our budget devoted to military expenditures. Soon after he had become President, he had addressed a letter to the then-Chairman Khrushchev in which he had proposed that the military budgets of both countries be reduced. This was before the Viet-Nam conflict, before the aggression of North Viet-Nam against South Viet-Nam. This, however, was another subject to be explored; right now the President felt we had the opportunity to take effective steps in the interests of world peace as outlined above.

Mr. Kosygin repeated that on the whole, on a global scale, he agreed with the President but that he was disturbed when it came to discussion of specific points and proposed measures. Mr. Kosygin repeated his view of the Suez Canal situation. He continued that mankind would not forgive him nor the President for wasting one-half of the resources of the two countries on military expenditures. Weapons were built, became obsolete and were discarded. Yet, in his view, it was the United States that was being carried away by the military situation, as if driven to it by some force. The military budget was being increased constantly and this forced the Soviet Union to keep up and increase its own military budget. Once we had told you two years ago that we proposed reduction of military expenditures by mutual example. The Soviet Union had followed through; yet because of the Viet-Nam situation, or Korea, or some other reason, the United States had increased its budget and forced a reversal of Soviet policy. This has become a race. The United States increased its military budget and then the Soviet Union had to follow suit although it was the United States which was always ahead, with the Soviet Union merely following its lead. As concerns the President’s view on the ABM system, it was not anti-ballistic missiles that were the root and the cause of trouble and tension in the world. To a much greater extent this was due to the development beyond reason of offensive weapons systems.

The President told Mr. Kosygin that he was under pressure on the part of many people in this country to adopt the decision of spending some $40 billion for the development of an anti-ballistic missile system. He had not taken a decision as yet and did not want to take it without at least first having had a chance to explore all possibilities of avoiding such a race with the Soviet Union. He had brought Secretary McNamara to this meeting and Secretary McNamara was anxious to sit down with Soviet military representatives to discuss and explore possibilities of preventing an ABM race between the two countries. Secretary McNamara could say everything here in five minutes that the President had expounded in his letter. He knew better than anyone else how quickly weapons became obsolete and turned to junk and therefore was more aware than others of the need to hold down the arms race. Thus, if the experts could examine the problems and present drafts to deal with them this could be announced today as one of the results of the present meeting. The President would also hope today to be able to state that the two countries were prepared to table a non-proliferation treaty. As for Secretary McNamara, he was willing to meet with Soviet representatives at any time in Geneva or elsewhere in order to reduce the $73 billion military budget we were now faced with. Perhaps Mr. Kosygin could suggest how such discussions could be started. If these points could be announced today, i.e., non-proliferation, arms disclosure, ABM discussions, the world would salute the two leaders for what they had accomplished. People in our country and indeed throughout the world were already recognizing the initiative which had brought about this meeting.

As for Viet-Nam (the President drew a sketch of North and South Viet-Nam separated by the DMZ), he wanted Mr. Kosygin to understand the following: North Vietnamese soldiers were being sent through the DMZ to attack South Viet-Nam. Some of our military people advocated our replying in kind. We did not however want to conquer North Viet-Nam, we merely wanted to prevent the North Vietnamese from completing their aggression against South Viet-Nam. It was for this reason that we sent planes to North Viet-Nam to bomb instead of men to fight. If we could get the North Vietnamese to stay north of the DMZ, our people would remain south of it, and the bombing cease. In that case, the co-chairmen of the Geneva Accords would have a chance to supervise free elections in South Viet-Nam and the people of South Viet-Nam would be given a chance to express their view as to what government they wanted to have. All we were being told, however, was for you to stop the bombing. Our reply to this is if we did stop what could we expect in return? We know that ultimately we can do no better than to let self-determination in South Viet-Nam prevail and we think you know this also. Perhaps today there was not enough time to discuss all of these problems, perhaps the Chairman could suggest some additional steps to be discussed at a later date, but the President did want him to be quite sure that the United States had no desire to conquer North Viet-Nam. If the three billion people of this world could be informed today that Chairman Kosygin and President Johnson had made some progress in the direction of resolving some of the problems between them, this would represent a great step forward and would be universally acclaimed.

Chairman Kosygin, returning to the question of the Middle-East asked the President if he was informed of the conversation which took place last night between Secretary Rusk and Dr. Fawzi, Deputy Prime Minister of the UAR.

The President replied that Secretary Rusk had only briefly informed him of the conversation since they had not as yet had a chance to talk to each other. Mr. Kosygin continued to the effect that Dr. Fawzi had first called on him and then on Secretary Rusk. Mr. Kosygin had asked Dr. Fawzi to explain the position of the UAR concerning the Gulf of Aqaba. In Mr. Kosygin’s opinion the situation along the Suez Canal was most acute, the Canal was blocked and paralyzed and would remain this way as long as Israeli forces remain on the East Bank. He was sure that the President would agree that the Arabs could not withdraw any further. Therefore the Jews had to leave. There was no other way than for them to withdraw. In his view then, if the Middle East problem was to be solved by the United States and the Soviet Union, the very first decision had to be the withdrawal of troops to the original armistice line. He did not want to repeat the conversation between Secretary Rusk and Dr. Fawzi except to say that Dr. Fawzi had informed Secretary Rusk that if the International Court of Justice would reach a decision that the Gulf of Aqaba was to remain open, the UAR would abide by that decision. This was said to Secretary Rusk and to Mr. Kosygin by Dr. Fawzi on direct instructions from Nasser. The President must realize the difficult situation in which Nasser found himself today. There are many positions that he could not publicly advocate but which he was willing to agree to in private and in confidence. Mr. Kosygin asked the President to treat this communication in a most confidential manner because he felt that it provided hope for a solution of the Middle East problem. If the problem were not solved, another war would be sure to break out sooner or later, completely destroying the Suez Canal in addition to other quite unforeseeable consequences. Whatever the Soviet Union or the United States had to do about this, whether we furnish them weapons or not, they would be sure to resume the fight sooner or later. If they had weapons, they would use them. If they did not have them, they would fight with their bare hands or buy weapons and surely someone would be found to sell them these weapons. If nothing else they would fight with hunting rifles. Mr. Kosygin was sure that the more than 120 nations represented in the United Nations desired a peaceful settlement and he was sure that an overwhelming majority of these nations would vote to support the withdrawal of troops proposal. He was concerned, however, since he saw the United States do everything possible not to permit a vote leading to troop withdrawal. Was this a humane or realistic position for the United States to adopt? In summing up, Mr. Kosygin wanted to propose that (1) Secretary Rusk inform the President about his conversation with Dr. Fawzi, (2) that all troops be returned to original armistice lines, and (3) that after this had been accomplished, all other problems could be discussed. This might take a few months, but it would be done. Otherwise, whether we wanted this or not, another war was sure to break out. Mr. Kosygin recited his proposal once again, this time placing greater emphasis on further attempts to be made to discuss all other outstanding problems in the Middle East area after the withdrawal of troops. He asked the President to understand Nasser. Everything was in a state of uproar in the Middle East. If the President had been there, he would know that Arabs were an explosive group of people. At present, it was necessary to support Nasser because otherwise the situation would be worse. Soviet President Podgorny was in the UAR at present and in greatest confidence Mr. Kosygin informed the President that just two days ago he had asked President Podgorny to talk to Nasser and to ask Nasser to have his position explained directly to the United States. The Rusk-Fawzi discussion was a result of this action. The Soviet Union had no desire to injure Israel. It is for this reason that he was careful in his speech before the UN to make this point clear. But was it likely, indeed was it realistic to assume that since the Arabs had not talked to Israel before the start of hostilities that they would do so now, before the troops were withdrawn? It was extremely difficult, if not impossible, now for the Arab leaders to undertake anything in this direction. Mr. Kosygin emphasized that he was telling this to President Johnson in great confidence, that this was certainly not intended for any press statements.

The President said he hoped that we could prevail on both sides there to first agree that they would talk to each other. Mr. Kosygin surely knew that when he asked for troop withdrawal, questions of security in the area were automatically being raised. The Israelis felt that they had been asked to do this very same thing in the past without gaining any security. Therefore, along with the troop withdrawal someone had to provide that security for them. The President would be glad to explore this question either in the UN or directly with the countries concerned, i.e., specifically how to preserve the territorial integrity of all states involved and how to provide for their security at one and the same time. The President hoped that we could avoid another war involving the use of arms, for we have seen in the last few days what vast destruction and human misery such wars lead to. If we refrain from furnishing arms to Middle Eastern countries, at most they could fight with their hands, which certainly would not be as bad as an armed conflict.

Mr. Kosygin replied that the Middle Eastern countries would find someone to sell them weapons no matter what the great powers would do.

Meeting adjourned for lunch.