

January 29, 1968 Record of a Conversation with J. Rowland, Australian Ambassador to the USSR

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Summary:

S.P. Kozyrev and J. Rowland debate the reasons behind the tense situation on the Korean Peninsula. Though Rowland is emphatic that the Soviet Union ought to pressure the DPRK to cease provocations, Kozyrev insists that the "DPRK is an independent country."

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S. P. Kozyrev N° 127/GS-ns

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION WITH J. [Rowland], AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE
USSR

29 January 1968

I received Rowland at his request.

Referring to the instructions of his government Rowland touched on the issue of the development of events around Korea. In the opinion of the Australian government, he said, a dangerous situation has arisen and continues to develop in this region, especially in connection with the latest incident, the seizure of an American ship by the North Koreans. Serious military clashes have been occurring here for a considerable period of time as a result of actions of the North Koreans. For example, last week a subunit of North Korean troops landed on an island not far from South Korea. More than 20 South Korean officers and soldiers died during battles. Troop subunits regularly infiltrate the South from North Korea. On 21 January of this year 30 servicemen of the North Korean army infiltrated Seoul with the objective of killing the President of South Korea. In the opinion of the government of Australia, all the actions of the North Korean side create the impression of a premeditated campaign accompanied by attacks of sabotage and terrorism, acts of violence, attacks on South Korea in the press and radio calling for the overthrow of the South Korean government, etc. The object of this entire campaign is to create a trouble spot in this region. The following information is evidence of the desire of North Korea to create tension in this region: Whereas in 1966 North Korean troops entered the territory of South Korea 150 times, in the last 10 months of 1967 it was 543 times and the total for the year was 566 incursions in the course of which 153 people were killed. It is characteristic that the North Korean side refused to investigate these incidents in the Armistice Commission inasmuch as there is no doubt of the reasons why they arise.

Thus, the Ambassador noted, the current dangerous situation in the region of Korea has been developing for quite a long time. Finally, last week the North Koreans seized an American ship in international waters and several crew members were killed in the process and [the rest of] the crew were taken prisoner. Whereas before now, Rowland continued, the North Korean side would not have pursued matters to the point of inflaming the situation, one might have expected that their warships would have simply escorted the American warships out of their territorial waters. But in this case the actions of the North Koreans were clearly premeditated for they knew of the movements of the American ship in advance. This is also confirmed by the conversations and commands between the North Korean ships and North Korean authorities on shore which participated in the operation to seize the American ship which were intercepted by the Americans. Thus the actions of the North Koreans are difficult to regard other than conscious attempts to increase tension. These actions violate the Armistice Agreement and can have the most dangerous consequences for the cause of peace in this region. These actions, in the opinion of the Australian side, are in complete accordance with the "doctrines and practices of Asian communism" and are an expression of a policy of "revolutionary violence". In connection with the above and in accordance with the instructions of his government he, Rowland, would like to ask the Soviet government to use its influence on North Korea in order to avert future incursions into South Korea, halt violence (in the instructions for the conversation, noted the Ambassador, it spoke of the fantastic violence) in the area of the DMZ, observe the Armistice Agreement, and release the American ship and its crew. The North Korean side should understand how dangerous are these actions and the possible consequences associated with them.

I told Rowland that I can of course report to the Minister about the views the Ambassador expressed. However, both the form and content of what the Ambassador said provoke surprise. The Americans say all this in those very same expressions. However the whole world knows that

the Armistice Agreement is being violated by the Americans and the South Koreans, that the incidents in the DMZ, like the other provocations against the DPRK, occur for one reason, namely because of the presence of the American troops occupying South Korea. Nevertheless, in spite of the obvious facts the Ambassador is not hesitant about ascribing the "actions" of the DPRK to the struggle which the people of South Korea are waging against the occupiers and the puppet regime. We Soviet people, and not only ours, understand this struggle of the South Korean people. No people has ever agreed to live under foreign occupation. As regards the increase in tension in the region of Korea of which the Ambassador also spoke then this is really occurring. But this tension has been created by the Americans, and their aggressive policy in this as in other regions of the world, in particular in Southeast Asia. As regards the latest incident, the American ship was detained in the territorial waters of the DPRK and not in international waters as the Ambassador says, repeating the statements of the Americans. At any rate, one cannot help call strange the statement of the Ambassador about the so-called "doctrines and practices of Asian communism". It is not the DPRK which is waging a policy of aggression and violence in Southeast Asia but the US and their allies, including Australia; the DPRK did not violate the territorial waters of the US but the Americans who sent their ship into North Korean waters for special intelligence purposes. The DPRK has acted in accordance with the norms of international law which require respect for the sovereign rights of independent countries.

In connection with the Ambassador's comment that if the DPRK does not release the American ship and its crew then this would cause serious consequences, I said that this is the language of aggression. It is known that the Americans are specially fomenting a war hysteria around this incident to achieve certain goals of theirs. Sending US warships to the shores of the DPRK, the mobilization of reservists, threats by American leaders against the DPRK, all these actions have the purpose of exerting pressure on the DPRK and are calculated not on settling the issue but on aggravating the situation.

In these conditions it would be appropriate for the Australian government as an ally of the US to exert a certain influence on the Americans and advise the American government not to give in to emotion but to soberly assess the situation and search for the correct and customary ways of settling the incident with the ship. Pressure, intimidation, and threats cannot facilitate the achievement of this goal. In response, Rowland justified the American action. He that according to all indications North Korea is trying to create a new breeding ground of war in order to pull American forces from Vietnam. All this is fraught with the danger of a renewal of the Korean War and the Americans are taking "precautionary measures" against North Korea in connection with this. The Ambassador again stated that the American ship was allegedly seized in international waters and that in fact a premeditated armed attack on this ship by the North Koreans had occurred. Rowland stressed the "genuine desire" of President Johnson to quickly settle the incident through diplomatic channels if, of course, this is possible. It is necessary to use this in order not to allow the creation of a new breeding ground of tension. In the words of the Ambassador, the Americans do not want to create a new breeding ground of tension and are trying to find a way to settle this issue through the Soviet Union, Poland, and other countries.

I replied that the Soviet Union, like other countries, cannot act as any intermediary. The DPRK is an independent country. If the US really wants to settle this incident while observing generally accepted norms of international law they can find a way to do this. I agreed with the Ambassador that there is no need to create yet one more breeding ground of tension in our already anxious world. I stressed that to do this it is first of all necessary to influence the US so that they abandon the method of pressure on the DPRK and engage in a settlement of the incident with the ship in the customary manner on the basis of respect for the sovereignty of the DPRK. It is necessary to create a suitably favorable atmosphere to settle this on this basis but threats and pressure will not help the matter. In connection with the Ambassador's argument about international law I pointed out that the Americans ought to strictly observe these norms and respect the sovereign right of all independent countries to the inviolability of their territory and territorial waters.

At the conclusion of the conversation I again stressed that the US government should not yield to

emotion and not inflame the situation, that it cease threats and pressure on North Korea, and adopt a policy of a peaceful settlement of the incident on the basis of respect for the sovereign rights of the DPRK.

Ye. N. Makeyev, Deputy Chief of the 2nd European Department and V. I. Dolgov, 3rd Secretary of the 2nd European Department were present at the conversation. Third Secretary of the Embassy [Bowen] [was present] on the Australian side.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (S. Kozyrev)