

June 17, 1967
Letter from Walther Peinsipp (Tel Aviv) to Lujo Tončić-Sorinj (Vienna), 'Final Confrontation of Soviet and American Opinions from Israel'

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Summary:

Summary of conversation with a departing Soviet Embassy official who describes the Soviet assessment of the Six-Day War.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

- English Translation

Tel Aviv, June 17, 1967

Final Confrontation of Soviet and American Opinions from Israel.

Hon. Foreign Minister,

BS [Counselor] Dr. Hoess had a final opportunity for a conversation with his source from the Soviet Embassy here about developments to be expected in the Middle East. Due to the breakup of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Israel, he [the Soviet diplomat] is about to depart soon. Following up on this conversation, we tried to figure out the opinions of the U.S. Embassy. Below we are providing the contents of those two conversations.

The Soviet colleague admitted the Soviet Union's miscalculation regarding the combat strength of the Egyptian Army in particular. Though one never had calculated with an Egyptian victory, a much longer duration of fighting was expected. In that case the Soviet Union would have had the opportunity to intervene, maybe jointly with the United States, as a stabilizing force and keep conflict partners apart from each other.

Asked why the Soviet Union initiated the breakup of relations given the current situation, the source replied there were several relevant reasons. First, the Soviet Union feels like it has to demonstrate solidarity with its Arab allies. Here the Soviet diplomat also hinted that Chinese activities are cause for some concern.

In addition, the Soviet Union was seriously upset about the ignoring of Soviet warnings not to attack Syria, especially when such military actions had occurred for the most part after the ceasefire. The source did not deny that this outrage had increased further after the capture of quite some Soviet officers who had served as instructors with the Syrian Army.

Thirdly, however, according to the source's statements, the Soviet Union has reassessed the current situation in the Middle East. It seemingly has reached the conclusion that its defeat can only be offset by a wide-ranging internationalization of the conflict and a mobilization of world opinion against the Israeli "aggressor." For that reason, the Eastern bloc should for now break up diplomatic relations with Israel and thus basically lay the foundation for further action in the aforementioned direction. The Soviet Union would pursue the objective to win at the next extraordinary United Nations General Assembly over a majority as large as possible to pass a resolution to demand from Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. This resolution might perhaps contain a provision to use force against Israel in case it refuses to give up those territories. We could figure the Soviet Union does not expect to achieve a two-thirds-majority in favor of its resolution, but it believes in winning a simple majority and in the ensuing moral consequences [for Israel].

The Soviet Union would reject any direct negotiations between Israel and neighboring Arab states. The newly appointed ambassador to Cairo, Vinogradov,¹¹ would guarantee that Cairo will receive the correct advice. The only weak link in the chain of

Arab states is Jordan. Its King^[2] might try to reach a bilateral agreement with Israel which would seriously interfere with the Soviet concept.

In a conversation with a member from the Political Division of the U.S. Embassy here we also discussed questions arising from the new situation.

According to that meeting, the United States is aware of the above mentioned position of the Soviet Union. However, this position is seen as a rearguard action after a severe defeat in the Middle East. The United States has not yet formulated a policy in light of the new situation. All statements by the President in this regard were made with the intention to first "let the dust settle." Already now it can be said that the United States is in favor of direct negotiations between Israel and the individual Arab states. According to American opinion, increasing economic problems in Egypt make it appear urgent to soon reopen the Suez Canal for its capacity as a source of revenue. It might induce Nasser,^[3] if he is actually still in power in foreseeable time, or his successor to make concessions. The United States thinks that first movement might most likely occur at the Jordan River. King Hussein is confronted with the following situation: If he continues with the course of no negotiations, he will run the danger that Palestinian notables living in the West Bank will initiate negotiations with Israel on their own. This might lead to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian republic and to a confederation or an Israeli protectorate. In that context the question of Palestinian refugees could be solved as well. Though in years past King Hussein hardly enjoyed dealing with the rebellious Palestine [West Bank] people—who are completely different from the population of the other side of the Jordan—, he now has to assess whether a loss of this territory is acceptable in economic, but also in civilizational terms. From the American perspective, a separation from the West Bank would inflict [on Jordan] the loss of agriculturally very fertile land and of a major source of tourism. The remaining Jordan with its Bedouin population would be deprived of its link to an Arab population superior in civilizational terms. This would not result for Jordan in cultural but in civilizational regression. For those reasons it could very well happen that, notwithstanding all the pressure, King Hussein will show up at the negotiation table.

The American as well as the Soviet conversation partner expressed the opinion that even with utmost international pressure a withdrawal of Israel from Jerusalem will be unachievable. Also, both sides were expecting some minor border corrections.

The American side would welcome if, in parallel to Israeli-Arab negotiations, talks would be held between both superpowers about an end to the arms race in Middle East. The recent crisis would have demonstrated that influence of the superpowers on their "protégés" is rather limited. Both conversation partners were hardly convinced of the effectiveness of French steps taken, while obviously the Soviet colleague was delighted about the French support for Soviet positions.

As far as developments in Israeli domestic policies are concerned, the Soviet Union as well as the United States are expecting a strengthening of Mapai's^[4] right wing and a prime ministership of Dayan.^[5] On the Soviet side it looks like that one is very much captured by dogmatic thinking: they expect a "backlash" in Israel's population after a

forced withdrawal from most occupied territories following international pressure and a subsequent turn towards the Left. (This is an opinion not shared by the Embassy in light of developments occurring already at the moment.)

However the situation will turn out on the international level: given what was said above, Amman's^[6] position might potentially hold the key for forthcoming developments.

Please allow me, Hon. Foreign Minister, to express my absolute loyalty.

Peinsipp m.p.^[7]

^[1] He actually did not arrive in Egypt until October 1970. Vladimir N. Vinogradov (1921-1997), Soviet Ambassador to Japan (1962- April 1967), Egypt (October 1970- April 1974), and Iran (1977-1982). Deputy Foreign Minister of the USSR April 1967 to October 1970.

^[2] Hussein bin Talal (1935-1999), King of Jordan 1952-1999.

^[3] Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), President of Egypt 1956-1970.

^[4] Mapai (1930-1968), Zionist and Israeli center-left party, in 1967 dominant force in Israeli politics.

^[5] Moshe Dayan (1915-1981), 1959-1964 Israeli Minister of Agriculture, 1967-1974 Minister of Defense, 1977-1979 Minister of Foreign Affairs.

^[6] Amman, capital city of the Kingdom of Jordan.

^[7] "manu propria": personal signature.