

October 17, 1963

**Report on the conversation between Koca Popovic
and Dean Rusk at the State Department**

Citation:

"Report on the conversation between Koca Popovic and Dean Rusk at the State Department", October 17, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, FMFA, PA, SAD 322, F-118, 444446 1963. Translated by Tanja Rajic
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/111943>

Summary:

Memorandum of conversation between Yugoslav Foreign Minister Koca Popovic and Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the State Department. The discussion concentrates on US foreign policy - US-Soviet Relations, US policy toward West Germany, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, force reduction in Europe, and the presence of Soviet forces in Cuba.

Original Language:

Serbo-Croatian

Contents:

Original Scan
Translation - English



Z A B E L E Š K A

o razgovoru druga Koče Popovića sa Dean Rusk-om u njegovoj sobi u SD - 17.X 1963.

Još u Beloj kući pitao me da li sam spreman da razmenimo mišljenja. Pošto sam odgovorio da jesam, odmah posle ručka u BK, otišli smo u SD, gde smo ostali u razgovoru do blizu 16 c., kad sam se vratio u BK za nastavak razgovora sa Kennedy-em (znači razgovarali smo oko sat i po).

Razgovor je bio za sve vreme prijatan, neusiljen, prijateljski. On mi je prvo izložio dokle su stigli u svojim razgovorima sa Rusima. Stvar je u tome, kaže, da se ne može ići tako brzo kao što bi se želelo. Njihovo javno mnjenje je još sumnjičavo, naročito posle sovjetskog dovlačenja misli na Kubu; a i oni sami, administracija, nisu još sigurni da neće doći opet do nagle promene sovjetskog kursa.

Iznosi svoje mišljenje da se još ne može govoriti o popuštanju zategnutosti, nego tek o stvaranju uslova za to. Došli smo do zaključka da se neke stvari lakše mogu rešiti jednim postupkom "de facto" nego preko potpisanih ugovora, sporazuma (gde se uvek moraju predvideti sve moguće garancije protiv kršenja sporazuma, što otežava postizanje ovog. Rekao sam da mi ovakav prilaz izgleda ispravan i realističan.

- 2 -

Govorio je pojedinačno o temama o kojima su razgovarali sa Rusima (Gromikom). Z. Berlin. Tu se boje da neće Rusi učiniti nešto što će ponovo zaostrići problem. Spominje zaustavljanje konvoja poslednjih dana. Kažem da je to verovatno lokalna stvar. Pitam, radi informacije, nije li možda komandant konvoja postupio drukčije nego obično, u pogledu procedure ili sadržine konvoja. Kaže da su to proverili, jer znaju da i pojedine njihove vojne starešine mogu biti nekorektni, bahati. Pokazalo se da se radilo o takvoj proceduri (postupku) koji je već ranije primenjivan. Kaže da se tu obe strane boje stvaranja nekih novih presedana, mimo uobičajene procedure. Pitam šta su Rusi naveli naknadno kao razlog zaustavljanja. Kaže: upravo to, nešto u vezi s tim kad i gde konvoji mogu da se zaustavljaju, kad posade imaju prava da sidju iz kamiona i sl. Ali do ovog puta nije bilo pokušaja kršenja uobičajenog postupka.

(Iz njegovih odgovora stekao sam utisak da se ipak možda radilo o pokušaju nekog "novog presedana". U svakom slučaju, objašnjenja mu nisu bila sasvim jasna.)

Zatim je spomenuo pitanje neširenja nukl. oružja. Kaže da je prirodna težnja sila koje raspolažu tim oružjem da se ono ne širi. Spor sa Rusima je oko nastojanja SAD da stvore multilateralnu zapadnu snagu. Oni u tom vide garanciju protiv samostalnog nuklearnog naoružanja Nemačke - što oni nikako ne žele. (Uostalom, kaže još neznaju da li će do toga, tj. multilateralne snage doći),

- 3 -

Rusima se ovo ne sviđa. I ja iznosim neke argumente protiv, tj. da i mi vidimo u tome neke razloge za zabrinutost. Rusk dodaje: a šta ćemo sa Kinom? Kažem da je tu slučaj ipak drukčiji: i SAD i SS su zainteresovane da Kina nema nukl. oružje; osim toga Kina nije na ist način član vojne grupe SS kao što je Nemačka u odnosu na Z., preko NATO. On tada kaže da su ipak Rusi ti koji su prvi odustali od principa neširenja time što su u svoje vreme pomogli Kinezima da razviju svoj nuklearni potencijal. Kažem da je to bilo u drugoj situaciji; osim toga SAD su delile svoje znanje na tom polju sa V. Britanijom. Kaže da je to različit slučaj, saveznik iz rata itd. Osim toga, kao ilustraciju da ne žele širenje, spominju njihovo držanje prema Francuskoj, gde je baš na tom pitanju došlo do glavnih teškoća.

U sovjetskom predlogu pakta o nenapadanju između istočnog i zapadnog bloka, Rusk kaže da bar za sada to za njih nije prihvatljivo. Oni se, naime, boje da bi u okviru takvog pakta i zajedničkih obaveza o neupotrebljavanju sile, Rusi mogli na miran način da rade na istiskivanju zapadnih trupa iz Zapadnog Berlina. Iznosim naše različito gledište o tom pitanju, tj. pozitivnu ocenu tog sovjetskog predloga; ukazujem pri tome na mnoge veštačke i uslovne elemente berlinskog predloga, koji otežavaju sada jedno potpuno razumno rešavanje.

Dalje govori o kontrolnim punktovima. Tu je teškoća u tome što Rusi to povezuju sa denuklearizacijom Srednje Evrope.

- 4 -

To je za njih, SAD, neprihvatljivo. Ne može se tražiti da ne bude nuklearnog oružja na prostorima koji ostaju meta nuklearnog oružja druge strane. Ne prihvatam ovu argumentaciju. Dodajem da je njena zabrinjavajuća strana i u tome što implicitno podrazumeva mogućnost nuklearnog naoružavanja tih "prostora", što mora izazvati sumnje. On kaže da je to bitno da to oružje ne bude u rukama, tj. na raspoloženju ovih zemalja. Ostajem pri tome da to nije dovoljno.

Spominje zatim razgovore sa Rusima o zajedničkom uništenju nekih srednjih bombardera (odredjenog tipa) obeju strana. Cilj ovoga je da se oni unište pre nego što zastare, i to pre svega zato, da se ne bi ovi bombarderi, dok zastarevaju, ustupali trećim zemljama. Pitam da li je dosad na neki način objavljeno o ovome, možda dok smo mi bili na putu za LA. Kaže da nije. On se doduše jednom prilikom bio skoro izlajao. Rusi nisu odbili ideju, ali zasad, predlažu neke druge tipove (opet srednjih bombardera) nego što su predložili Amerikanci.

Govori zatim o mogućnosti zamrzavanja, odn. reduiranja vojnih budžeta. To je upravo primer jedne "de facto" mogućnosti, o kojoj bi međjutim bilo sigurno vrlo teško postići jedan regularan, zvaničan sporazum, u formi ugovora. Kad je bio u Moskvi, da potpiše sporazum o testovima, Hruščov mu je rekao da SSSR namerava da sledeće godine ne povećava vojni budžet, čak da eventualno bude smanjen. Na osnovu toga bi, eto, mogle SAD slično da postupe.

- 5 -

Govorili smo ukratko o klauzuli. Rekao sam da ne zelim sada da pokrenemo. Nas stav je poznat i neizmenjen. Vracanje klauzule ostaje neka vrsta objektivnog preduzlova za sire popravljjanje odnosa. On usvaja. Na moje pitanje o izgledima odgovara da je skoro uveren da ce se stvar ispraviti sto se tice Jugoslavije. U pogledu Poljaka bice teze.

Zaboravio sam reci, odmah na pocetku, spomenuo je Kubu. Da ne moze doci do stvarnog smirenja dok budu tamo sovjetske trupe. Koliko oni znaju povlacenje se nastavlja, ali jos uvek ima oko 7.000 (ako sam dobro zapamtio) strucnjaka. Njih Rusi uveravaju da su to strucnjaci - instruktori, i oni, Amerikanci su skloni da u to poveruju; ali problem ostaje. Kazem da necu da ulazim u sve poznate momente koji su svemu ovome predhodili, ali da je pitanje mogu li sad odjednom Rusi povuci svoje osoblje. Zato me interesuje da li bi oni Amerikanci mogli da ucine nesto sto bi znacilo pozitivniji kurs prema Kubi, bar u smislu uzajamnog podnosenja. Kaze da su vec pokusali ali zbog Kastrovog stava bez uspeha. Navodi i kubansko odbijanje cisto humanitarne prirode, posle stete od "Flore": slicno kao sto su odbili i Kinezi pre par godina. Osim toga, nesto takvog, pozitivnog, ne mogu preduzeti upravo zbog prisustva sovjetskih strucnjaka, na sto je njihovo javno mnjenje vrlo osetljivo.

Na njegovo pitanje o trajnosti sadasnjeg sovjetskog kursa, kazem da je nase uverenje da jeste trajan. (On je predhodno, pored Z. Berlina i Kube, naveo kao osetljive tacke Vijetnam i Laos i za Laos kaze da imaju jasan utisak da Rusi vise nisu u stanju mnogo da uticu, a i da ovo sto cine doprinosi da stvari ne budu gore).

Ta trajnost bi, kazem, mogla biti ugrozena jedino izbijanjem nekih kriza i zaostrevanja. On kaze da od spomenutih pitanja ne vidi koje bi

- 6 -

se moglo - sem eventualno Berlina - od strane Rusa - ponovo zaostriti. Ja kazem: Za Berlin ne vidim kakav bi Rusi imali interes da zaostravaju. Znaci, ostaje po mom misljenju, tri moguca povoda: Kuba, naoruzavanje Nemacke i eventualno pokusaj nekih da eksploatisu, potencirajuci ga, spor SS - Kina. Obrazlazem podesnim argumentima ovo moje misljenje.

Pitao me jos o kretanjima u IE zemljama, o mogucnosti pomirenja Kina - SS i drugo. Dajem mu poznate nase odgovore.

Kaze da zeze naimenovati novog ambasadora u Beogradu posto prodje stvar sa klauzulom kroz Kongres. Kazem da razumem, ali da bi bilo slabo ako bi se naimenovanje suvise odlagalo. Slaze se.

Kazem na kraju da se, koliko vidim, kvalitet njihovih odnosa sa Rusima znatno promenio, popravio, u poredjenju sa prosloscu. (Spominje da su u toku razgovori oko prosirenja konzularnih odnosa). Dajem pozitivnu ocenu Kennedy-jevog govora na Univerzitetu, koji potvrđuje gornje. On se potpuno slaze sa tim. Nece ici brzo, ali glavno je da se napreduje, oni su spremni. Vide da i Rusi razumeju njihove teskoce. Medjusobno sasvim druckije razgovaraju, konstruktivno. Cak se i on i Gromiko sada nazivaju po imenu. Zatim navodi koliko ih je na primer impresionirala izjava Hruscova koja se odnosi na Kineze, kad je rekao da bi posle nuklearnog rata zivi zavideli zrtvima. To je Kennedy naveo u jednom od svojih govora.

Naveo sam ovde sve cega sam se setio iz razgovora sa Ruskom. Mozda sam propustio neka sporednija pitanja, glavno sam obuhvatio. Ponavljam na kraju da je razgovor bio prijateljski, i jos vaznije, potpuno ravnopravan i sa punim uvazavanjem - kao sto nije bio slucaj ni sa kojim ranijim ministrom spoljnih poslova SAD.

Rusk me je takodje zamolio da ponovo razmotrimo mozemo li ostaviti nase osmatrace u Jemenu. Objasnio sam mu koliko je taj zadatak neugodan,

- 7 -

ali sam rekao da cu preneti nasem Predsedniku te da cemo mozda ponovo razmotriti. (Poslo je drug Tito, u razgovoru sa Kennedy-em, jasnije stavio u izgled mogucnost da nasi vojnici ostanu na sadasnjem zadatku u Jemenu.)

R. me je na kraju zamolio da ostanemo u kontaktu u vezi sa mnogim, iznesenim pitanjima. Slozio sam se, zahvalio na prijemu i dragocenim obavestenjima i otvorenom razgovoru.

Koca Popovic

N O T E

of the conversation between Comrade Koca Popovic with [US Secretary of State] Dean Rusk in his office at SD [the State Department] 17 October 1963.

While still at the White House, he [Rusk] asked me if I was ready to exchange thoughts. Since I answered that I was, immediately following lunch at the WH, we went to the (SD), where we remained in conversation to near 1600 hours, after which I returned to the WH to continue my discussions with Kennedy (that means we spoke for about an hour and a half).

The conversation during the entire time was comfortable, warm, and friendly. He first explained to me what they had accomplished in their conversations with the Russians. Situation is as such, he said, that they cannot move forward as quickly as they would like. Their [US] public opinion is very skeptical, especially after the Soviet stationing of rockets in Cuba; and they themselves, the Administration, are still not sure that once again it will not come to a sharp change in the Soviet course.

He revealed his thinking that one could still not speak about an easing of tensions, but only about creating conditions for this to happen. We came to the conclusion that some things are more easily solved through one step "de facto," rather than through signed agreements, agreements in which one always had to foresee every possible guarantee against violations of the agreement. This makes it difficult to sign this type of agreement. I told him that this approach seemed to me to be correct and realistic.

He spoke individually about the themes that they had spoken with the Russians ([Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei] Gromyko). West Berlin. Here he fears that the Russians will do something that would again escalate the problem. He mentions the recent halting of convoys over the last few days. I told him I believed that was a local issue. I asked him, for my information sake if the commander of the convoy had behaved differently than normal, with respect to the procedure, or perhaps the content of the convoy. He said that they had verified this, because they know that some of their individual military commanders can at times be arrogant and make mistakes. [The review] showed that, in fact, the [convoy] followed the same type of procedure and approach as in previous times. He said that both sides are concerned about creating any new precedents, outside of the normal procedures. I asked him what the Russians had stated was the reason for the stopping [of the convoy] after the fact. He said: exactly that, it had something to do with when and where the convoy can be stopped, when the crews have the right to disembark from their trucks and similar things. But that at this time there was no attempt to violate the normal procedures.

(From his answers I gained the impression that in fact maybe this was an attempt to create some type of a "new precedent." In any event, his explanations were not totally clear).

Following this he mentioned the question of the spread of nuclear weapons. He said that it was a natural desire on the part of the powers that had these weapons that they not be spread. The conflict with the Russians revolves around the insistence of the USA to create a multilateral attack force [Multilateral Nuclear Forces (MNF)]. They see in this a guarantee against the individual nuclear arming of Germany - which they [the US] do not desire at all. (Among other things, he said that they still do not know if it will come to this, that is if multilateral forces will be created). This does not appeal to the Russians. I brought forth some arguments against this, that we, as well, see in this some reason for concern. Rusk added: and what will we do with China? I said that this situation is in fact different: both the USA and the SU [Soviet Union] are interested that China remain without nuclear weapons; in addition China is not in the same way a member of the military group of the SU as is Germany in relationship to

the West, through NATO. He then said that in fact the Russians are the ones who first stepped away from the principle of non-proliferation [of nuclear weapons] since they were the ones helping the Chinese to develop their own nuclear potential. I said that this happened under different circumstances; the USA had also shared their knowledge in this field with Great Britain. He said that this was a different situation, it concerned an ally from the war and so forth. In addition, as an illustration that they did not want to spread [nuclear weapons], he mentioned their position toward France, where they came to have major problems especially because of this question.

Regarding the Soviet suggestion concerning a pact of nonaggression between the Eastern and the Western blocks, Rusk said that, at least for now, this is not acceptable for them. They, in fact, fear that in the framework of this type of pact, under mutual obligations concerning the non-use of force, the Russians could, in a non-military way, work to pressure Western troops from West Berlin. I brought forth our different point of view concerning this question, that is, the positive assessment of this Soviet proposal. I also pointed to many artificial and conditional elements in the Berlin proposal, which makes it more difficult to achieve a completely rational solution.

He continued to talk about the checkpoints. The problem in this [situation, Rusk stated] is that the Russians have tied this to the denuclearization of Middle [Central] Europe. For them, the USA, this is unacceptable. They [the Soviets] cannot ask that there be no nuclear weapons in the area that remains a target of nuclear weapons from the other side. I did not accept this argumentation. I added that this is worrisome in that it implies the possibility that nuclear weapons can be put in "this area," which raises suspicions. He says that it is important that these weapons not be in the hands of, that is, at the disposal, of these [Central European] countries. I remained firmly on the position that this is not enough.

Following this I mentioned the discussions with the Russians concerning the mutual destruction of some mid-range bombers (srednjih bombardera) (of a specific type) of both sides. The goal is to destroy them before they become outdated. That is above all else because, as they age, these bombers should not be transferred to third countries. I asked if there had been some announcement about this, maybe when we were on our way to LA [Latin America]. He said that there was no announcement, [a]lthough on one occasion he almost slipped and blurted out the information. Russians have not rejected (odbili) this idea, but now they are suggesting some other types (again mid-range bombers) than those suggested by the Americans.

Following this he [Rusk] spoke about the possibility of freezing, actually reducing the military budget. This is in fact an example of one "de facto" possibility about which in the meantime it would be certainly very difficult to achieve a regular public agreement in the form of a treaty. When he went to Moscow to sign the treaty about testing [Limited Test Ban Treaty], [Soviet leader Nikita S.] Khrushchev said to him that the USSR intends not to raise its military budget next year, and that, eventually, the budget would be reduced. On the basis of this, the USA would, therefore, be able to behave similarly.

We briefly discussed clauses [Most Favored Nation clause (MFN)]. I told him that I did not want to initiate this. Our position is known and unchanged. The return of clauses [MFN] remains some kind of an objective precondition for increasingly improving relations. He accepted this. As to my question concerning the prospects [of MFN] he said that he was almost certain that concerning Yugoslavia this issue would be resolved, but in the case of the Poles it would be more difficult.

I forgot to say, that right at the beginning, he mentioned Cuba. He said that a real peace cannot be reached as long as Soviet troops are there. As far as they know the withdrawal is continuing, but there still remain about seven thousand (if I remember

correctly) experts. The Russians are trying to convince them [the US] that these are experts –instructors– and they, the Americans, are inclined to believe this; but the problem remains. I said that I did not want to enter into all of the known elements that had contributed to all of this earlier, but the question remains: can the Russians now immediately withdraw all of their personnel? That is why I am interested whether they, the Americans, could do something that would mean a more positive course of action towards Cuba, at least with the idea of reducing their debt. They say that they had already tried, but without success because of Castro's position. He also noted the Cuban refusal to accept clear humanitarian assistance following the damage by [Hurricane] "Flora," in the same way that the Chinese had refused [aid] a few years earlier. In addition, they [the US] cannot undertake something along these lines, [i.e.] positive, because of the continued presence of the Soviet experts [in Cuba], because [US] public opinion is very sensitive to this.

To their question concerning the duration of the current Soviet course, I said that it is our belief that it is long term. (Prior to this, along with West Berlin and Cuba, he noted as sensitive points Vietnam and Laos, and for Laos he said that they had a clear impression that the Russians are no longer in a position to influence things, and what they are doing is contributing to not making it worse).

The long term, I said, would possibly be endangered only if some type of crisis develops and escalates. He said that of the issues mentioned, he did not see any that could again escalate matters – except for eventually Berlin – on the part of the Russians. –I said: as for Berlin, I do not see any interest the Russians would have in escalating. That means, there remain, in my view, three possible causes (for escalation): Cuba, the arming of Germany and the eventual attempt that some would exploit, manipulate, the conflict of the SU [Soviet Union] with China. I supported this with arguments concerning my thinking.

He asked me about the movements in the Eastern European countries, about the possibility of China and the SU making peace and [about] other things. I gave him our well known positions.

He said that they would like to name a new ambassador to Belgrade after the matter with the most-favored-nation clause goes through Congress. I said that I understand, but that it would be bad if this issue would be delayed too long. He agreed.

At the end, I said that, as far as I can see, the quality of their relationship with the Russians has significantly changed, improved, with respect to the past. (I mention that discussions are underway about widening consular relations). I gave a positive evaluation of [President John F.] Kennedy's speech at [American] University which supported the above [statement]. He completely agreed with this. It will not go quickly [Rusk said], but in the meantime it is important that it is moving forward and that they are prepared (for this). They see that even the Russians understand their difficulties. In private they speak differently, more constructively. Even he and Gromyko call each other now by their first names. He adds how much they were impressed by Khrushchev's statement that pertains to the Chinese, when he said that after nuclear war the living would envy the dead. Kennedy used this in one of his speeches.

I have added here everything that I could remember from my conversations with Rusk. Maybe I have left out some peripheral questions, but I covered the main points. In the end I repeat that the conversation was friendly and more important it was totally between equals and with full respect – as was not the case with any prior minister of foreign affairs of the USA.

Rusk also requested that we again consider leaving our observers in Yemen. I explained to him how uncomfortable this mission is, but I said that I would convey

this to our President and that maybe we would reconsider this. (Later, [Yugoslav President] Comrade [Joseph Borz] Tito, in discussions with Kennedy, clearly put the possibility forward that our soldiers would remain in the current mission in Yemen).

In the end Rusk requested that we stay in contact concerning many of the questions discussed. I agreed, thanked him for his hospitality and for the valuable information and open conversation.

[Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs] Koca Popovic