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December 5, 1983

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ambassador Richard Murphy
Assistant Secretary, NEA

FROM: Ambassador (ret.) Robert G. Neumann

SUBJ: Conversations in Moscow

Former Assistant Secretary State/NEA Harold Saunders and I went to Moscow November 27 - December 3, 1983 for one of the "Dartmouth Conversations" sponsored by the Kettering Foundation.

The American participants were former Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders and I, accompanied by two academic Soviet and "Crisis Management" specialists plus officers of the Kettering and Rockefeller Foundations and two (U.N.) interpreters.

Leader of the Soviet Delegation was Academician Evgenie Primakov, former Soviet ambassador to Cairo and high ranking advisor to the Soviet government whose authority was made very clear in several instances.

Saunders and I suggested that it might be useful for us to meet confidentially with ranking Soviet officials. Those appointments came through immediately (indicating Primakov's connections) and were with the Director (equivalent to Asst. Sec.) for Middle East Affairs, MFA Polinkov, Deputy Director International Department of the Central Committee CP-USSR, Zaglatin. These are officials whom Ambassador Hartman does not see. We debriefed Ambassador Hartman but only in general terms because we were meeting at a reception he gave in our honor in a non-secure location (Spasso House).

While we were treated personally with great courtesy, the atmosphere was extremely tense. We were given a clear and unmistakable message which, because of circumstances, form and direction are, in my and Saunders' opinion to be taken seriously. We were told the following at first at lunch, later we were called out individually and given the message in calm but very serious tone by Primakov obviously acting under instruction. This took place before the U.S. bombing attack on Syrian installations but in clear anticipation of such an event.

The message: Don't hit the Syrians. If you do we shall have to and will escalate. We shall not be driven out of our presence in the Middle East and we shall give the Syrians what ever they need.

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You are escalating and we shall escalate. With specific reference to the Cuban missile crisis we were reminded of what the Russians said thereafter (you will never again find us in such a situation) and told that Syria was the only Soviet window to the Middle East and the Soviets would maintain it by whatever means needed.

To this was added: Your and our forces are only a few miles apart. We both have difficult and at times difficult-to-control clients. In this situation an escalation can have uncontrollable consequences.

Neumann added that the Soviets would not clarify whether or not they were talking about Syrians in Syria or in Lebanon.

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