



“Reports of Heavy Fighting”

Date: 1967-06-05
Conversation: WH6706-01-11901
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson
Participant: Dean Rusk
Start Time: 05:09
Duration: 02:18
Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: Secretary of State Dean Rusk placed an early morning call to President Johnson to relay “reports of heavy fighting between Israeli and Egyptian forces.” Johnson then asked Rusk for his assessment of who was responsible for starting what came to be known as the Six-Day War, leading Rusk to characterize Israeli disavowals as “a little thin on the surface.”

Dean Rusk: —flash message at this point. I’d suggest it would read as follows: [*reading aloud*] “Dismayed by preliminary reports of heavy fighting between Israeli and Egyptian forces. As you know, we have been making the maximum effort to prevent this situation. We are expecting a very high-level Egyptian delegation on Wednesday, and we had assurances from the Israelis that they would not initiate hostilities, pending further diplomatic efforts. We feel it is very important that the United Nations Security Council succeed in bringing this fighting to an end as quickly as possible and are ready to cooperate with all members of the Council to that end.”

Now, we’ve been talking about it in these terms. It is probably better for us to get some sort of a message of this sort before the question of who really was responsible is completely clarified, to let them know that we were not a party to any of this business at this stage. But I wanted to check—get your own reaction—

President Johnson: Yes. Yes, I would.

Rusk: All right.

President Johnson: Yeah.

Rusk: All right.

President Johnson: Sure would. What do you—what does it appear to you? Did it appear to you reasonably sure that these tanks kicked it?

Rusk: Well, it—the fact that the fighting has been occurring, initially, over Egypt—it’s a little hard to sort out.

Ten seconds excised by the National Archives and Records Administration as national security information.

End of excerpt 1.

Rusk: It's possible that I would put more weight on the Israeli claim that they had a large number of Egyptian aircraft headed for Israel from the sea. But I think it's just a little too early yet. My instincts tell me that the Israelis probably kicked this off. But I just don't know yet, and I don't think we ought to make a preliminary judgment on that, because it's just hard to say.

President Johnson: Do they say to us that the Egyptians kicked it off?

Rusk: Well, they're both publicly—we have nothing, no message yet from the Israeli government, except that they've asked for a meeting of the Security Council. We've had no direct message from [Levi] Eshkol or [Abba] Eban or anybody. Both, publicly, are claiming that the other started it. But the Israeli claim that a big tank column was moving toward Israel and that they went out to meet it, again, looks just a little thin on the surface.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: Conversation WH6706-01-11901, 5 June 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

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Full information about this conversation: ["Reports of Heavy Fighting"](#)