

April 20, 1963

**Record of a Conversation between N. S. Khrushchev,
Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, and Ali
Sabri, Chairman of the United Arab Republic
Executive Council**

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Summary:

Khrushchev and Ali Sabri discussed political developments in the Middle East, including the revolutions in Yemen and Iraq, as well as efforts to reunify Egypt and Syria within the framework of Arab unity. They also addressed Soviet-Egyptian relations, including ongoing Soviet assistance with projects like the Aswan Dam, and the positive visit of Nasser's family to the USSR. Khrushchev expressed skepticism about the political direction of Iraq and Syria and cautioned against anti-communist tendencies, while affirming support for Arab independence and cooperation with Egypt.

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[handwritten: "to Cde. Shuysky"]

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Secret

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION

[between] N. S. Khrushchev, Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, and Ali Sabri, Chairman of the UAR Executive Council

20 April 1963

After mutual greetings N. S. Khrushchev was informed of Ali Sabri's health and how his flight had gone. Ali Sabri noted that he felt well and that the flight went well. Ali Sabri asked how N. S. Khrushchev spent his vacation, and expressed the supposition that N. S. Khrushchev's health is good after the vacation.

N. S. Khrushchev My health was also good before the vacation. It is especially good when the Minister of Foreign Affairs is ill. Then I have time left to rest.

A. A. Gromyko But the Minister of Foreign Affairs is rarely sick.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, this is so.

Turning to Ali Sabri, N. S. Khrushchev is informed about the health of President Nasser.

Ali Sabri The President feels well. He asked me to congratulate you on [your] birthday and pass you a personal message. (Ali Sabri passes N. S. Khrushchev Nasser's personal message, which is distributed separately).

N. S. Khrushchev Pass the President my gratitude. How is his daughter, Hoda? I think now we have a common daughter. We adopted her in Moscow.

Ali Sabri Hoda returned healthy and pleased. She was left with the very best impressions of Moscow.

N. S. Khrushchev She needs to be with us in the summer; she could have formed the impression that Moscow is always covered in snow.

Ali Sabri The President advised her to go in the spring or summer, but she preferred winter since she had never seen snow.

N. S. Khrushchev Now the visit can be repeated and be among us in spring or summer. And the wife of the President might come with Hoda.

Ali Sabri I will inform the President and his wife about this kind invitation.

N. S. Khrushchev We live well. Things are going very well with us. In any event we are pleased with our affairs, although enemies all write that we have crisis after crisis. But a year will pass, we have a seven or eight, or even 10% increase.

Ali Sabri If only there were more such "crises".

N. S. Khrushchev In any event we are very pleased with our "crisis situation". Things are also going well in the country with you.

Ali Sabri If we speak of the economy then right now we are in the third year of the five-year plan. It is the first year when our plans are being successfully accomplished. The goal of the first five-year plan is an increase of the national income by 42%. This goal will be achieved. As regards political events then, as [you] know, great changes

have occurred in the Near East, and the President has asked me to inform you. First of all I would like to begin with events in Yemen. A revolution has occurred there, the regime of the Imam, more backward than a feudal regime, was overthrown. The country was living as if in the 10th century. We supported the revolution in Yemen, although we didn't know who were its leaders. It was only clear that the revolution was pursuing progressive goals. After the revolution the situation in the country was initially calm. However, soon reactionary forces interfered headed by King Saud and the imperialist circles of Britain and the US helped him. Then the UAR decided to help Yemen and sent its troops there. We proceeded from the fact that this was not only a military and political act but first of all an act of humanism. We continued to send our troops until the total number reached 30,000. The President has charged me with passing [his] gratitude to the Government of the Soviet Union for offering the transportation resources to transport the troops.

One of the consequences of events in Yemen was the revolution in Iraq. Kassem's government strived to isolate Iraq from the other Arab countries. But such a policy did not meet the needs and goals of the Arab people, who are striving for unity. We supported the revolution in Iraq, although we did not know who headed it. Only on 21 February were we able to familiarize ourselves with the leaders of the revolution in Iraq. On this day talks began between us and the Iraqi side. The question of the unification [*yedinstvo*] or union [Translator's note: *soyuz*, which can also be translated as "alliance"] was not discussed during this meeting. Only the question of the development of cooperation between our two countries was considered. Several days later a revolution occurred in Syria. In its substance it was directed against the split between Syria and the UAR. The popular masses have again demanded the unification of Syria and Egypt.

In connection with the fact that a national government already existed in Iraq talks were begun between Syria, Iraq, and Egypt about the creation of a tripartite union. We know that there exist domestic difficulties in Iraq, including of an economic nature. These difficulties might grow, but all the same we have decided to enter into talks about unity based on the fact that no government can exist in our region which does not fulfill the demands of the masses concerning unity. This is demonstrated by the events in Syria. In spite of the split between Syria and Egypt, in spite of the support which was given to the separatists by the imperialist forces, the separatist regime in Syria could not resist the demand of the popular masses. Considering all this, we began talks with the new government, drawing conclusions from the lessons of the past and not wishing to repeat the mistakes. Four days ago the results of the talks were announced and the principles were presented of the creation of a state by the unification of the three countries. I think that the Government of the USSR is familiar with the text of the communiqué and knows that the new government will be federal and parliamentary.

N. S. Khrushchev We know of these reports.

Ali Sabri As regards the political aspect of the matter a single political system will be created in all countries, although we understand that this is very difficult. Our political activity will be based on socialist principles. They are already being implemented in our country, as we understand them, but not yet in other countries. This is what I wanted to report to you. I am ready to answer your questions.

N. S. Khrushchev Thank you for the information. We are of course familiar in broad terms with the events which have occurred in the Near East. Our position with respect to these events cannot cause you any doubt. I have had occasion to talk with President Nasser on the question of unification. We have never been opponents of the unification of Arab countries. We think that the unification of Arab forces does not threaten the socialist countries, but threatens the imperialist powers who are pursuing their economic goals in the Near East. We have no special economic interests in the Near East. Of course, we have a political interest in the Near East. It is expressed in that we would like for all the peoples of the Near East to enjoy the benefits of freedom and independence.

I repeat, we do not have any special economic interests in this region. Our country has everything that it needs. As they say, thanks to Allah, we have everything. You have more sun. But our people will not exchange their conditions for something else. Therefore we can completely coexist. During the events in Yemen we helped this

country with messages and collaborated well with you. We gave our aircraft and crews, and they participated with you in the defeat of the reactionary forces. We think that this was good cooperation. [We] agree with you that the events in Yemen had progressive significance.

As regards events in Iraq and Syria, we and you evidently have different points of view. As you know, we had a skeptical attitude toward Kassem. He did not show himself to be a positive leader. But we displayed patience. We cannot call the new government of Iraq revolutionary. The Devil knows what it is, but not a revolution. It is a reactionary movement of a national chauvinist nature. We assess the events in Syria the same way. This is not a progressive phenomenon, but reactionaries. And we are confident that it will not last long, the people will defend their rights.

Excuse me, but we have different assessments. Frankness is better than insincere smiles and false words. As regards unification then I repeat that we have no dissatisfaction or protest. In general we favor unification. The new governments which are created under the banner of a struggle against Communism are tribute to imperialism. Governments which declare that they are building socialism and at the same time pursue a policy of anticommunism cannot have credibility. This is a hybrid of a jackass and a sheep. Therefore we regard with suspicion such a movement which tries to combine socialism with anticommunism. Communism is the highest stage of socialism. How can one build socialism and fight Communism? Such a government uses socialism as a popular slogan, as a fig leaf to conceal goals with have nothing in common with socialism. History knows such examples. Hitler called his party National Socialist. How much socialism he had everyone knows; it is also known what this socialism cost people. Mussolini also ascribed socialist goals to his party. Harriman is looking for a new name which could replace the word capitalism, which has discredited itself. For the Afro-Asian countries the word capitalism sounds the same as the word colonialism. In a conversation with him I said that the leopard won't change his spots. However capitalism [one word missing], whatever new name it [gets] it will remain black.

In a word, I confirm that we will remain in our Communist positions and are not thinking of changing them. These positions bring us good dividends. We sympathized with those forces which stand on positions of fighting imperialism, colonialism, and on positions of building genuine socialism not covered with empty phrases, but on positions of such a socialism which wins the hearts of the people. We maintain diplomatic relations and will maintain them with all countries. This does not contradict our policy. But our sympathies are on the side of those who are fighting for real freedom. That is our frank point of view, and please understand it correctly. I don't want to express any dissatisfaction in connection with the unification of the three countries. We are not against a federation. But what can come of such a hybrid where socialism is mixed with anticommunism, we don't know. It's your business.

A. A. Gromyko. It's more apparent to you.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, it's more apparent to you. We will look closely, and depending on this we will form an idea of the processes in the Arab countries. As regards the relations between the Soviet Union and the UAR, then I think that they will develop normally. We have become aware that in Iraq some officers are recruiting our officers and inclining them to remain in Iraq. Of course, these recruiters are not having success. They suggested that two pilots remain.

A. A. Gromyko. They rebuffed them.

N. S. Khrushchev The Iraqi authorities are acting unwisely. Of course, we declared a protest, but are treating these cases calmly. This is how we assess events, with mixed feelings. We welcomed events in Yemen. We eagerly collaborated with you in giving aid to Yemen, and it turned out well. We helped a progressive cause in Yemen and collaborated further with you in the same spirit. I think that if Abboud had not prevented us at one time we could have helped the Congo together and the situation there would have been different. Lumumba would be alive. But Abboud prevented the two of us. Recalling this, I would like to stress that we were not then nor are we now pursuing selfish goals. No, we had in mind and have in mind only humanitarian goals. When we helped Yemen they told me that all this aid would be credited to Nasser's account. We replied that this is nothing, just not to the credit of the British and the Americans. Some day the Arab people will assess this. Some day Allah will help the

Arabs achieve a correct understanding of the laws of social development.

Ali Sabri I would like to stress that the unification of the Arab countries presents no threat to the Soviet Union. On the contrary, it meets the interests of our countries and the interests of the Soviet Union both in its political as well as the economic and cultural aspects. In fact the unification of the Arab countries threatens only the interests of the imperialists and cannot threaten the Soviet Union. Even a general survey of what the unification of the three countries leads to indicates what difficulties this creates for the imperialist powers. Mr. Khrushchev remembers this well from his discussions with Eden.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, I remember these discussions.

Ali Sabri The events of recent years in Egypt and the policy which our country is pursuing alarm the imperialists. In the 10 years since the revolution we have not only waged a battle with imperialism in political terms, but have also tried to free ourselves from its shackles in the economy and in other areas. The interests of imperialism have been completely destroyed in our country not only with respect to the Suez Canal, but also in other areas.

There is no foreign capital in Egypt right now. Consequently imperialism is developing its plans for the future, and we expect that it will resist our unification. Possibly that this resistance will not be open for the time being. But in general it is good for us to know the attitude of the imperialist powers toward Arab unity. We recognize this. But I will speak only about Egypt. I want to stress that we are pursuing socialist measures. It was hard to even imagine that such measures could be carried out in such a region as ours. Differences of an ideological nature can exist between us. But nevertheless these measures should be considered socialist. We recognize the socialist achievements of other countries. In our Charter For National Action it is written down that we are not opponents of Marxism and are ready to draw lessons from the experience of building socialism in other countries. During the discussion of the Charter For National Action President Nasser explained that we are not against Marxism, but we will employ it considering our conditions and our experience. He said that we should take socialism with an open heart and mind and draw lessons from it.

As regards Syria and Iraq, then it is evident even from the slogans we have been advanced in these countries that there are differences among us. These countries are advocating freedom, socialism, and unity. We held these positions even before the start of the talks. Iraq and Syria are striving to carry out unification, and then employ the socialist principle. The problem is that the peoples of the Arab countries are putting pressure on their governments. They are dictating the need for unification. Therefore we entered into talks in the course of which the question was discussed of the employment of the principles of socialism right after unification. Of course, it is impossible to expect that socialist measures will be carried out in Syria and Iraq in the very first months. We ourselves began building socialism only in 1961; however, these were only the first preparatory steps. We recognize that socialist measures cannot be carried out in Syria and in Iraq with the same speed as in our country.

I have talked much with the Iraqi leaders. They informed me that the Iraqi Communist Party offered armed resistance to the revolution on the very first day of the revolution, as a result of which several leaders of the uprising were killed. The Communists offered armed resistance for five days. They called for support of Kassem, although it was obvious that he was not capable of leading the country. The Iraqi leaders informed me that the measures which they were forced to adopt against the Communists were prompted by their resistance to the revolution, that these measures were not part of their plan, and that they do not express their convictions. I am confident that these events would not have occurred if the Communist Party had not acted against the revolution or at least remained neutral.

It is natural that the situation in Iraq has affected Syria. The government of Syria has taken approximately the same position with respect to the Communist Party as the Iraqi [government]. Western propaganda is trying to cause differences between the Soviet Union and the Arab countries on this basis. We should not allow this.

Arab unity is a historical inevitability. I cannot say if our policy of unity will achieve all our goals. Possibly our plans will be accomplished only halfway. However, if not us,

then the next generation will achieve the accomplishment of the goals of Arab unity. We know that this is a difficult matter, but we do not want to flee from difficulties. If we do not strive for unification we will be traitors to the Arab cause. We want to construct our unity on the principles of democracy and progress.

N. S. Khrushchev We regard the ideas of the unity of the Arab people with understanding. But we think that this movement ought not cut off such a part of the people as the Communists, who are fighting for the interests of the working class and the interests of the Arab people. The truth is, you are denying class struggle, but the Communists recognize it. They are fighting, they will fight, and they will manifest themselves. The deeper the economy develops the stronger consciousness will be strengthened, and the wider Communist ideas will spread. This is without doubt. I am not declaring that this is an objective process. I understand when the capitalist Kennedy, Eden, or McMillan resists this process. This is understandable, as they are capitalists. But when my friend Nasser, who is not a wealthy person and who had devoted his whole life to the interests of the Arab people, resists the progress of historical events then it is hard for me to understand this. He weakens his own positions. Ben Bella acts more correctly when he strives to forge the democratic, anti-imperialist forces of the country together. What could be bad if the Communists took part in the building of socialism in Egypt?

In the economic field you have adopted radical and serious measures, but you have much that is reactionary in the field of ideology. We cannot agree with your political philosophy. Of course relations between our countries should not worsen from this; they did not worsen after my conversations with Nasser. I have talked with President Nasser more than once and consider him our partner and friend. When storm clouds gathered over Lebanon, fearing for the life of Nasser I convinced him not to fly across the Mediterranean Sea. We deceived the British and sent him home by aircraft through Iran. We treat Nasser in a friendly manner, but in those cases when anticommunism is exhibited we cannot support him.

I am a Communist. It turns out so that Nasser, my friend, wants my death. He has imprisoned people who aren't even Communists, but who simply sympathized with them. What the hell kind of socialism is this[?] You should not be angry with me for frankness. I don't want to offend you. I want the same for you as for myself. Don't call yourselves Communists but don't weaken your own positions. At one time the British and French promised us a great deal, inducing us to not support Egypt. But we did not acquiesce to them. We are not opportunists. Egypt has waged a battle against colonialism. This was a progressive struggle and we support it.

Ali Sabri I would like to make some comments. We recognize class struggle. This is evident from the Charter For National Action and from the discussion of it in the National Congress of Popular Forces. We believe in an alliance between workers. The Arab Socialist Union unites workers, peasants, intellectuals, soldiers, and national capital. Speaking of national capital, we mean small capitalists. As regards the unification of feudal lords and capital, we think that this union should be destroyed. The workers should have the complete freedom and their enemies none.

N. S. Khrushchev Lenin said, "Peace to the huts, war to the palaces".

Ali Sabri We want peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union. We learned much here during Nasser's visit to your country. We would like to adopt much from you. There are not great differences between us. They are only in points of view about some practical questions. I would like to briefly talk about the social situation in our country.

N. S. Khrushchev Go ahead.

Ali Sabri In our country the state has 85% of the industry. Importation is 100% nationalized, exports - 75%. It is possible that these social reforms are not perceived so strongly outside our country as among us. We have taken all the lands belonging to foreigners into our hands. We think that the land should belong to those who work it. But there should also be cooperatives. We still have not attempted switching to a system of state farms. All services and transportation in the country have been completely nationalized, and free education introduced up to university [level]. And all this was done in four years.

N. S. Khrushchev This is good. Allah has a good effect on you. I will ask Him to help

you act correctly in the future. We think that you have done much of interest, useful, and progressive in domestic policy and in economics. It is particularly irrational, I repeat, to persecute forces which might be your support in carrying out a progressive policy. But this already such a question on which we should not sign onto together. Not right away, patience needs to be exhibited. In general we are satisfied with relations between our countries and think that they will develop in the same direction in the future. How is the health of my friend Amer?

Ali Sabri Marshal Amer feels well and sends you greeting. He disposed of his military concerns in Yemen.

N. S. Khrushchev Amer intended to come to us. Consider that we are inviting him. He established a "secret correspondence" with my deputy, Mikoyan, but we intercepted it.

Ali Sabri I will of course pass him the invitation about this and am confident that he will come to the Soviet Union at the first opportunity.

N. S. Khrushchev Possibly the President will find a chance to come to us to rest. He vacationed in Yugoslavia. There are good places there for a vacation. But ours are no worse.

Ali Sabri Thank you, and I am confident that the President will be very glad to hear of this invitation. For our part we would very much like to see N. S. Khrushchev in Cairo and familiarize him with those changes which are taking place in our country.

N. S. Khrushchev But how are things to be with anticommunism? For I'll be in a prison at your place. It's not dangerous to come to us. We have no anticommunist laws.

Ali Sabri There are also no such laws in the UAR. There are Marxists in the Arab Socialist Union.

N. S. Khrushchev I would like to come to Egypt, the ancient cradle of the culture of humanity. Adzhubey, Satyukov, and my daughter told me very much of interest about your country. They were very satisfied with the reception. Thank you for this. Possibly sometime during an autumn vacation I will get in an airplane and instead of visiting our South I will fly to you. It's warmer there.

Ali Sabri I hope that you will come. Will you visit the Aswan Dam[?]

N. S. Khrushchev How many hours [does it take] to fly to Cairo?

Ali Sabri Five and a half hours via Turkey.

N. S. Khrushchev Previously we flew to Sochi in five and a half hours, but now we fly in two and a half hours. In general the technical capabilities exist to fly to Cairo. The whole question is of security. You fly somewhere, but how [do you get] back?

Ali Sabri You spoke of Adzhubey's rip. He returned safely.

N. S. Khrushchev You are tempting. You Arabs are clever. I am joking, of course. I am grateful for the kind invitation of Nasser. I have the desire. Pass to the President that such a threat hung over him and it is not being removed.

Ali Sabri It is not a threat for us. The President and the entire people will be happy for your arrival and will greet you like a dear guest.

N. S. Khrushchev I think that the construction of the Aswan Dam is going well. Of course, there are difficulties, but the collaboration between our specialists with your specialists is going normally. They've not reported anything bad to me.

Ali Sabri The construction is actually going well. There are difficulties, but they are being overcome. I visited Aswan in January and I saw myself that the construction is going well, that the fruits of collaboration are evident. The Soviet specialists are working well in spite of the difficult climatic conditions.

N. S. Khrushchev The Aswan Dam will be built. There is no doubt of this.

Ali Sabri I thank you for the reception and the conversation.

N. S. Khrushchev Please pass President Nasser my best wishes.

A. A. Gromyko, USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs; S. G. Lapin, Deputy USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Mohammed Murad Ghaleb, UAR Ambassador in Moscow, were present at the conversation.

The conversation was recorded by : O. Krokhalev

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