

July 14, 1969

**Record of a Conversation between L. I. Brezhnev
and Ali Sabri, member of the High Executive
Committee of the Arab Socialist Union**

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Summary:

Ali Sabri uses the increased pressure that the United States and Israel place on Arab nations to ask Brezhnev for increased military support to Egypt. Brezhnev responds by speaking about the importance that politics plays in negotiations with Israel. He also expresses gratitude for Egypt's diplomatic recognition of the GDR.

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Top SecretRECORD OF A CONVERSATION

between L. I. Brezhnev and Ali Sabri, member of the High Executive Committee of the Arab Socialist Union

14 July 1969

L. I. Brezhnev greeted A. Sabri, and inquired about his health.

A. Sabri expressed gratitude for the attention, and said that the treatment and rest in the Soviet Union were exceptionally useful.

President Nasser asked me to pass on best wishes to his friends, the Soviet leaders. He sent a written message to you personally, Cde. Brezhnev.

L. I. Brezhnev familiarizing himself with the message, expressed gratitude to the interlocutor.

Please express appreciation on my behalf to President Nasser for the warm message. It expresses the determination of the leaders and people of the UAR to continue the anti-imperialist struggle, confidence in the further strengthening of our friendship, and the final triumph of the just cause of the Arabs. I will try to respond to this friendly letter in the near future.

All the Soviet leaders highly appreciate the message of welcome of President Nasser to the International Conference of Communist and Worker's Parties. Attention was paid to it by its participants as a quite important document.

A. Sabri President Nasser asked me to also tell of our assessment of the situation in the Middle East and in the UAR. The situation has changed little recently. The US and Israel are increasing pressure on us and the other Arab countries. Although the Administration has changed in the US the policy remains as before. The American imperialists are striving as before to achieve their main goal - to overthrow the progressive Arab regimes and establish their dominance in this region. Israel publicly declares its expansionist plans. Together with the Americans it is raising a demand for direct negotiations with the goal of concluding peace treaties with the Arab countries. This is nothing else than a new means of achieving their main task, the overthrow of progressive Arab regimes.

[note at the bottom of the first page: The record of the conversation was not reviewed by Cde. L. I. Brezhnev].

We see some new aspects in the position of the US, for example, Nixon's assurances of a desire for a settlement in the Middle East, etc. However, this does not change the substance of the US position. They are using means of political and economic pressure with respect to the UAR, and rewarding Israel for aggressive acts.

We consider the domestic position of the UAR to be stable. Pressure from the US and Israel had led to a consolidation of the home front. Attempts by reactionary forces to become more active were cut short. The leadership of the country has devoted first-priority attention to increasing the combat ability of the armed forces, the mobilization of domestic resources, and the further development of the economy. The unity of the popular masses right now is higher than before June 1967.

The leadership of the UAR attaches great importance to the military measures being conducted in the zone of the Suez Canal. The actions of the armed forces are improving the morale of the troops and implanting a faith in our final victory in the people. These actions are also reflected in the positions of the other Arab countries, and promote the growth of the resistance in the occupied territories.

L. I. Brezhnev Questions of the solidarity and unity of actions of the Arab countries have great importance. We spoke of this to the Syrians in particular during recent talks in Moscow. Unfortunately, they still pay little attention to the voice of reason.

A. Sabri The increase of our endurance in the military sphere is the most important result of recent times. The might of the armed forces and faith in victory are growing. We think that all this has played a role of no little importance in the success of the revolutionary forces of Sudan. The victory won by them, it could be said, was a turning point in the development of the liberation movement in the Middle East and in all of Africa. Today Sudan is exerting a revolutionary influence on not only the Arabs, but also on the neighboring African countries. It is thereby inflicting a blow on

imperialism. The UAR immediately supported the revolutionary leadership of Sudan and displayed its readiness to give Sudan comprehensive aid, even at the expense of its efforts on the front with Israel. In strategic terms the victory of the anti-imperialist forces in Sudan is more important than the current regional tasks.

One could say that in the past year our leadership has acted in full accordance with the agreement which was achieved between you, Cde. Brezhnev, and President Nasser last year: we have strived to make maximum use of the political means of fighting and have increased our military potential at the same time as this. The combination of these two ways is the most promising tool of pressure on the enemy. We will henceforth not give him peace on the cease-fire line. This, of course, is connected with the material losses and the loss of personnel, which might grow in the future. However, we and our people are ready for this. The cease-fire line should not become a line of negotiations.

We express deep gratitude for the comprehensive aid and support which the Soviet Union has given and continues to give to our country. At the same time President Nasser has asked [me] to pass you a request to hasten the resolution of the question of military supplies, in particular, armored personnel carriers and helicopters, and to favorably decide the question of facilitating the creation of a military industry in Egypt [*u nas*] to produce small arms and ammunition. We could also organize the production of anti-tank weapons and some kinds of rockets, etc. We have the necessary industrial base, equipment, and personnel for this.

Cdes. Kosygin, Grechko, and Skachkov have a detailed list of our needs.

There is yet one more important question to which President Nasser wanted to direct your attention. As is well known, President Nixon came to power under the slogan of avoiding drawing the United States into new military conflicts outside the US. The experience of Vietnam has an effect in this. Therefore, in our view, the opportunity exists for us to use this interest of the US. When I say "us", I mean the UAR and the Soviet Union.

We think that the presence of the ships of the Soviet Navy fleet in the Mediterranean Sea strengthens the anti-imperialist forces in this region.

At one time Soviet comrades held talks with President Nasser about air cover of Soviet ships, in particular, about the possibility of basing Soviet aircraft in the area of Mersa Matruh. We completely agree that such cover is necessary and are ready to accept any quantity of Soviet aircraft for this purpose.

In our opinion, in the current situation the US will not undertake any serious actions in connection with this, but will limit itself to declarations and statements in the press. This has already happened previously in connection with visits of Soviet ships to Alexandria and Port Said. The Americans will not go further than this. The UAR is also ready to offer any necessary services which the Soviet armed forces need in this region.

We are not for war. However, we are convinced that peace can only be achieved through strengthening the defensive capacity of our country. We should not surrender. Our position should be firm in discussions with representatives of the US.

L. I. Brezhnev I thank you for the clear presentation of the UAR position. We understand the importance of the questions you posed. All this relates to the big politics connected with the defense of the legitimate interests of the Arab peoples.

We fully share the opinion of our Arab friends that the main goal which the American imperialists and Israeli aggressors set before themselves in June 1967 was the overthrow of the progressive Arab regimes. The imperialist and reactionary circles have strived by such a means to again enslave the Arab peoples and plunder their national wealth.

Then L. I. Brezhnev gave a brief survey of the events connected with the aggression of Israel and characterized the actions of the imperialist countries and the Israel ruling circles. He stressed the need for a critical examination of the past events by the Arab leaders in order for lessons to be drawn from the June [defeat], and talked in detail about the role of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in support of the UAR, Syria, and Jordan, including military and economic aid, and efforts in the international arena.

He said, it is quite important to understand that, in spite of the military defeat in June 1967, the Israeli aggression was all the same stopped. This occurred thanks to the vigorous position of the USSR and other peace-loving countries. This shows how great is the importance of the international influence and the policy of the socialist countries in the modern epoch. These very political methods played their role in a ceasefire in that the aggressor was stopped. Many other young peace-loving countries joined the efforts of the socialist countries. World public opinion was aroused to condemn the Israel aggression, and the Americans could not fail to reckon with this.

Understanding the importance of the political methods of struggle, we consider it necessary to strengthen the defensive ability of the UAR and are doing much in this direction. But it is not just a matter of the quantity of weapons which our Arab friends receive from the Soviet Union. They have enough weapons. Military personnel need to be trained and taught to use them well. It is hard to count on success without this.

For example, the Syrians, as recent talks with them in Moscow have shown, are striving to get as much modern weaponry as possible, but they devote insufficient attention to questions of their correct use. They have great shortfalls both with the military as well as political training of army personnel. For example, during the recent clash in the air between Syrian and Israeli aircraft the Syrian pilots parachuted, without joining battle. Thus several modern aircraft were ruined.

B. N. Ponomarev The Syrians are poorly mastering the available military equipment; however, they constantly make requests for new supplies, including the latest military aircraft.

L. I. Brezhnev During the talks with the Syrian delegation we stressed the need to coordinate the activities of Syria with the UAR and for them to act in a united front. What is needed are not declarations but joint actions. Otherwise, we pointed out, Israel will again gain the ability to launch strikes on Arab countries one at a time. We do not yet know what conclusions the Syrians drew as a result of our talks.

We agree that it is necessary to strengthen the combat might of the armed forces, improve military training, raise the morale of the soldiers and officers, and conduct daily political work. At the same time as this we completely agree with the opinion you expressed about the need to combine efforts in the field of increasing the defense capability with work in the political field.

Pass to our friend, President Nasser, that we have helped and will help the UAR in the future on this route, without ignoring your requests. In particular, we just came to agreement with Marshal Grechko about an assignment of 100 tracked armored personnel carriers for the UAR from stocks designated for the Soviet armed forces in accordance with a request of President Nasser. We are of the opinion that Cde. Skachkov will also be able to find some additional quantity of armored personnel carriers to satisfy the request of the UAR. We will look for an opportunity to assign additional helicopters and anti-aircraft equipment, in particular the Strela missile launchers. In the near future we will study our capabilities and make a decision on this question. It is possible that we will accelerate the delivery of some kinds of weapons, moving them from 1970 to the current year.

We understand that it is necessary to increase the defensive might in order to force the Americans to change their position. We agree that Nixon is mainly pursuing the same policy as Johnson. He holds to more anti-Soviet sentiments, and uses more subtle and flexible methods. We have the means to pressure the US in the area of bilateral relations, in connection with Vietnam, and the situation in the Middle East. We intend to work these levers of pressure together with you. Therefore one cannot abandon political means of struggle. In Israel itself the opposition to the current [course] of the ruling circles is brewing. The progressive circles of Israel increasingly [one or two words illegible] adventurism and the danger of the current policy of the government.

One can understand the feelings of the Arabs who are striving as quickly as possible to eliminate the consequences of the damage caused them. However, it is necessary to decide these questions without any haste. Rashness and extremism might cause irreparable harm. We should not provide grounds for an accusation of aggressiveness against us. [We] ought to comprehensively use the favorable sentiments of world

public opinion, which condemns the refusal of Israel to carry out the Security Council resolution.

Stepping up our efforts in the political sphere, concerning which agreement was reached during the recent visit by Cde. Gromyko to Cairo, increasing the combat training of soldiers and officers, matters can successfully be pursued to the successful solution to the question which we need. Israel understands that it would be difficult for it to remain in its current aggressive, expansionist positions when unity and coordination of actions between Arab countries is increased and with the presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Arab Socialist Union can play a great role in pursuing such a policy. It is still young. Its development continues. However, it should increasingly act as an organizing political force.

Then L. I. Brezhnev talked about the role of the CPSU CC in the lives of the Soviet people.

The need for a progressive political party is increasing during the difficult period of the development of the UAR. We sincerely wish you success in party development and are ready to support your efforts in this field and to exchange experiences.

B. N. Ponomarev By agreement with the ASU leadership draft of a plan for the development of party ties for the next year has already been drafted.

L. I. Brezhnev This is a very good thing. We agree to exchange [party] delegations at various levels, to offer you [one word illegible] [to use] from our experience that which suits you.

A. Sabri We also favor the development of our relations in the party area.

L. I. Brezhnev We were pleased to hear your assessment of the presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. We do not plan to withdraw it from there. As concerns air cover of our ships, I am aware of this matter. We promise you to study this question in detail. You may assure our friend, President Nasser, that we will consistently defend the interests of the UAR and the other Arab countries in contacts with the US and will take a firm position, displaying the necessary tactical flexibility when doing so.

We intend to develop friendly relations with Syria and Iraq and exert the necessary influence on them in order to increase the coordination of their activities with you. With all [their] outward intransigence the Syrian and Iraqi leaders are nevertheless letting us know that coordination of their activities with you is necessary.

As concerns giving assistance to the military industry of the UAR, we promise to study this question and, if there is a possibility, to give you aid, especially in the production of ammunition.

In conclusion I would like to express our deep satisfaction at the UAR's recognition of the German Democratic Republic. It is a demonstration of the strength and independence of your country in the current difficult conditions. We think that more favorable opportunities are opening up right now for cooperation between your country and the GDR.

And lastly: the minor military operations which are conducted by you in the Suez Canal zone possibly also worry the occupiers. However, it is necessary to increase vigilance when this is done, without giving Israel a pretext to turn these actions into a large military clash as long as all other possibilities to influence the aggressor are not yet exhausted. We want to frankly say that the instances of unhindered penetration of UAR territory by Israeli aviation, in particular by helicopters, acts of sabotage by Israelis deep into UAR territory, and the impunity of these acts concern us.

A. Sabri explained that Israeli helicopters penetrate remote regions of the UAR from the direction of the Red Sea, where they are practically [impossible] to detect.

B. N. Ponomarev However, flights of Israeli helicopters over Cairo have also been recently noted.

L. I. Brezhnev We would like to again stress the need for vigilance and improvement of [your] air defenses.

We are satisfied with the current cooperation between the Soviet military specialists and the UAR command. In order to make our cooperation more effective we might

send a group of highly-authoritative military leaders such as, for example, General Shtemenko and others, to the UAR for familiarization on site with the condition of the armed forces and the work of our advisers and to conduct exercises. I will ask Marshal Grechko to think about this question. But, for your part, report about this to President Nasser. We would like to know his opinion on this question. We think that this would be useful to increase the defensive ability of your country.

A. Sabri This is a very valuable suggestion. We can say in advance that it is acceptable to the UAR and will bring great benefit.

At the end of the conversation A. Sabri reported the intention of President Nasser to come to vacation in the Soviet Union in the first half of this September.

The participants of the conversation agreed regarding the text of a press report about the conversation which was held.

CPSU CC Secretary B. N. Ponomarev and UAR Ambassador in the USSR M. Ghaleb took part in the conversation.

The conversation was recorded by [signature] (V. Rumyantsev)