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Memorandum of Conversation of the President of the Republic with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Republic Mahmoud Riad, 8 January 1969, in Brioni

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Summary:

Minutes of meeting between Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and UAR Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad. Riad updates Tito on the developments in the Middle East, including the UAR's relations with the United States and Soviet Union.

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MEMORANDUM**of conversation of the President of the Republic with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Republic Mahmoud Riad, 8 January 1969, in Brioni**

The conversation was attended by: The President of the Federal Executive Council, Mika Špiljak, General Secretary of President of the Republic, Vladimir Popović, acting State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mišo Pavićević, Ambassador of the SFRY in the UAR, Danilo Lekić, and Ambassador of the UAR in the SFRY, Abdel Kader.

Minister Riad first presented comrade President a personal message from President Nasser and conveyed his cordial greetings and best wishes. To comrade President's interest, he said that President Nasser is currently in Alexandria and that his health situation is good.

He then informed comrade President about the latest development of the situation in the Middle East. He said the UAR government still gravitates toward a political solution to the crisis and is ready to support any initiative in that direction, under condition that it is not required from it to give territorial concessions. A political solution, to be acceptable, should envision the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories, which is, anyway, envisioned in the Security Council resolution. It is known, however, that Israel has been deaf for a year to the provisions of this resolution, that its actions have practically denied its implementation and that there are no signs to imply any change in Israel's unrelenting policy in that regard.

In this regard, and to comrade President's interest, Minister Riad spoke about the USSR government's recent initiative to implement a resolution of the Security Council. He said that the Soviet plan envisions implementing a Security Council resolution in stages. In the first stage there would be withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories, while other contentious issues such as the issue of Palestinian refugees, navigation in the Suez Canal, and the status of Jerusalem would be gradually addressed in the coming stages. The important difference between the Soviet and American 7-point plan is that the American plan envisions a parallel resolution of all contentious issues (a package of measures), namely it does not condition the resolution of other problems with the prior withdrawal of Israeli troops.

During minister Gromyko's recent visit to Cairo, he asked President Nasser whether the UAR government would like the USSR to inform the US about its plan directly or to leave it to the UAR government to do it. It was replied to him that it would be better if the Soviet government do that, because as it had happened before that the Americans had deliberately presented in the distorted light suggestions proposals coming from the UAR. The UAR government, for example, has countless times confirmed to the Americans that it accepts the "package of measures" to implement the Security Council resolution and that it does not insist on a prior withdrawal of Israeli troops. That was clearly stated to the UN General Secretary's envoy, Gunnar Jarring. Nevertheless, the American administration still claims that the UAR is raising the issue of troop withdrawal as an irrevocable prerequisite for resolving all other issues. Because of that it was decided that the USSR should submit its plan directly to the US and simultaneously notify them of general consent of the UAR government. At the suggestion and at the insistence of the Soviet side, the initial Soviet proposal omitted the issue of Jerusalem, which is very contentious and for which the USSR believes to be within narrower Jordan's jurisdiction. The UAR government, who is not directly concerned with that issue, did not consider it necessary, under conditions, to insist on its inclusion in the Soviet proposal, which was then announced to all major powers.

The French government reacted positively to the proposal as a whole. Great Britain has given principled support, but the question is to what extent it is prepared to confirm that support in practice. As for the US, the definitive answer has not yet been received but the initial reactions have been quite positive. It was said to be a constructive proposal. The final answer will likely follow the entry into office of the new American government. Soviet representatives introduced both American presidents with their government's proposal. It is difficult so far to say what will be Nixon's official reaction after taking office, but the chargé d'affaires of the USSR who delivered the Soviet plan to the newly elected American president was told that

Rostow would no longer be in the State Department after January 20th. It is a positive sign, since Rostow is known to be Jewish and one of Israel's most active and biased supporters in the Israeli-Arab conflict. It is not ruled out that Nixon's position will also be influenced by France's position, given the expected rapprochement between Nixon and De Gaulle. However, even under the assumption that the US accept the Soviet proposal, a peaceful solution to the conflict will therefore not be secured. Israel has already rejected the Soviet proposal and it will not withdraw without US material pressure. The UAR government has recently made great efforts to mobilize global public opinion in favor of the Arab cause and has accomplished remarkable results, thanks in part to some Israel's own mistakes. It was proven, however, that moral pressure is not enough and that Israel will not give up on its current positions unless the US forces it to do so through material pressure. If that is missed, then France's position and the decision to cancel the delivery of the "Mirage" aircraft will lose importance as it is clear that the "mirages" can be easily substituted with "phantoms."

Otherwise, certain relations have been established between Nasser and Nixon. President Nasser congratulated Nixon on his election and received a reply that was considered as positive. Then came [William] Scranton's visit as Nixon's special envoy. Scranton raised the issue of bilateral relations, among other things. He was interested in how President Nasser viewed the perspective of their development. He was told that the UAR wants good relations with the US and that a less-biased US position on the Arab-Israeli conflict would open the door wide open to improving bilateral relations and establishing mutually beneficial cooperation. Scranton also insisted that Nasser sends Nixon a message in which he would explain his position on the Middle East crisis. The message was sent a few days ago. Its importance is not so much in its contents as it is in the fact that it maintains contacts. All of this, however, will not be of particular use unless the US decides to put material pressure on Israel, without which, in the UAR government's deep belief, any expectation of a political solution is illusory.

Comrade President then wondered whether the USSR was providing sufficient military assistance. Riad replied that the Soviet Union was completely fulfilling its obligations under previously concluded agreements but had not signed any new agreement on the delivery of more modern armament. The issue of the delivery of modern weapons was raised by the Russians themselves during President Nasser's talks in Moscow last year, but nothing concrete has followed so far. Besides, they lack motorized means of transportation to move faster in desert area. They would also need several light bridges that could be assembled in a short time and could be used to quickly cross the Suez Canal. Asked by comrade President if they had been delivered promised tanks for the two divisions, Riad replied that they had not.

Comrade President noted that in this sort of war, numerical strength can be a very important factor. Numerical supremacy even with weaker weapons often can often compensate for adversary's superiority in equipment and weaponry. If the front-line forces were to give in to a more modern equipment of the opponent, there should always be new fresh forces that can strike quickly just at the moment when the enemy, exhausted by the battle, is weakened.

Riad agreed. He said the UAR army is today incomparably stronger and better organized than it was last June, but it is still ready only for defense and not attack. It will take some time until it is fully operational for all tasks. Huge importance is attached to aviation, which has recently carried out several successful actions. The latest skirmishes on the Suez Canal showed that MIG21s are better than Mirages. However, they need more pilots. You could even say that there are more airplanes than pilots. The situation is expected to improve upon return of a larger number of Egyptian pilots who are currently training in the USSR

The current Soviet plan has, among other things, the additional advantage that buys time in anticipation of the armed forces of Arab countries being completely prepared for an eventual clash.

Noting the seriousness of the crisis in the Middle East, comrade President underlined that it is not of local importance. It is not only about the conflict between Israel and Arab countries, but about the confrontation between two superpowers for hegemony and prestige in the Mediterranean area and beyond. The US is determined to keep its

current positions in the Mediterranean, which is increasingly threatened by the growing Soviet presence and particularly its fleet. It threatens, hence, with a confrontation which both superpowers fear, because defeat in this confrontation would mean a decline in the international influence of the defeated party and not only in this region but also in Africa, Asia, and even Europe. The field of confrontation between the two superpowers is being transferred from the Far to Middle East. This explains the sensitivity and caution of the two superpowers in treating the Israeli-Arab conflict. It should be said that the US went further in this than the USSR, which did not, it appears, have looked at all the implications of this crisis, and therefore often lags behind and is late with its decisions.

Supporting this viewpoint of comrade President, minister Riad said it was, what he called it, the "polarization" of the conflict which Israel insists on and which was discussed during a recent Gromyko's visit to Cairo. Israel, namely, seeks to portray the conflict in the Middle East as a conflict between Arab countries and the USSR on one side and Israel and the US on other side, which is not correct and suits no one but Israel. The USSR is not against Israel as such, nor against the recognition of its existence and presence in that region. It should not be forgotten that the USSR, as a great power, not only recognized Israel, but also participated in its creation. Therefore, the USSR is not against the Israeli state, but against its aggression last year and its current policy. Even more absurd is the West's claim that there is a polarization of Arab countries around the USSR, when it is known that Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and even Lebanon and Libya are far more inclined to the US but because of the regimes that are rule them. The theory of polarization doesn't suit therefore neither the US, which though it can lose its friends in Arab countries, nor the USSR, which does not want to question its adherence to the decision in which itself participated. That does not suit the UAR either, which does not want to break all bridges with the US. It only suits Israel, which in every way is seeks to aggravate relations between the superpowers and thus make it impossible to reach a political solution and implement a Security Council resolution. What the UAR objects to the USSR in that situation is its lack of determination. It is considered that the USSR should not continuously and exclusively declare its support of a peaceful solution to the crisis, as this encourages Israel and thus indirectly reduces the prospects of actually achieving a solution peacefully. Occasional weapons-rattling would, in this situation, be a more effective contribution to peace.

It is undisputable, namely, that Israel persists in its unyielding attitude. Minister of foreign affairs, [Abba] Eban, has publicly stated that Israel is not going to agree to a Soviet proposal for a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict even if the US accepts it. It should not be forgotten that Israel is ahead of the elections and that the language of "hawks" is the way to succeed in the election campaign. Prime Minister [Levi] Eshkol has already emphasized on two occasions that Israeli forces should stay in the area of Sinai and Sharm el-Sheikh. It is about Israel's right to all of Palestine. It should not be forgotten that the Israeli concept of Palestine is broader than geographical. Israel is counting on the annexation of Gaza and the West Bank of Jordan where about 1,500,000 Arabs now live. For now, there is no talk of political annexation because in that case Israelis could find themselves in the minority in their own state. However, economic annexation is being considered. This means that these areas would be under Israel's economic and military control, temporarily enjoying certain political autonomy, but their inhabitants would be denied voting rights, which would otherwise belong to them as Israeli citizens. It is calculated that the number of Arabs would decrease over time as a result of various forms of pressure, after which these areas would be politically officially annexed to Israel. It is, therefore, about a deliberate plan of a broader scale, which Israel will not easily renounce. Even the American administration itself is aware of that. [Dean] Rusk himself once told Riad, who asked him why the US, which in words supports the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories, was not pressuring Israel to do so, because they know that Israel would not listen to them. All this only confirms, in Riad's words, that a peaceful solution can only be achieved through strong economic and material pressure on Israel. If that is absent, a military solution will become inevitable.

As talks continued, comrade President said that Yugoslavia's position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict was clear from the very beginning and it had not changed. Our position had been, and it still is that Israel should withdraw its troops from the

occupied Arab territories and that the issue of border security should be discussed. The issue of the Suez Canal navigation was tied to solving the problem of Palestinian refugees. All these problems are still urgent. Whether they will be resolved in stages or in parallel as a "package of measures," it is a matter of procedure, which changes nothing in essence and it should be decided depending on concrete conditions and possibilities. Comrade President further said that the American 7-point proposal contains conditions (particularly vagueness in respect to the position on the occupied territories) that he believes are hardly acceptable for Arab countries. He added that he recently received a message from President Johnson in response to his message expressing the American president's opinion that Yugoslavia should engage more actively in searching a solution to the crisis in the Middle East. The American ambassador echoed that sentiment during a recent reception in Brioni. Comrade President, however, decided not to meddle so as not to prejudge the eventual success of a Soviet initiative with which he was not familiar enough. Comrade president categorically dismissed speculation from the foreign press about the alleged change in Yugoslav policy toward the Israeli-Arab conflict as a supposed consequence of the UAR's position toward the invasion of Czechoslovakia. He confirmed that the UAR and other Arab countries can always count on Yugoslavia's full support in their efforts to find a fair political solution to the crisis and return of the territories taken by force. He also agreed with the need to improve military readiness in response to Israel's unyielding attitude and aggressive policies. Referring to the insidious attack on the Beirut airport, he said that he regretfully noted that the World Jewish Congress with whose president [Nahum] Goldman he once spoke and who had really sober and rational views at the time, had now supported Israel in this unacceptable action. This certainly speaks to the gradual alignment of Jews and the extremely dangerous situation that can arise, if it is not prevented as soon as possible and as efficiently as possible. Imposing a solution through material pressure on Israel represents, it appears, to be the most effective, if not the only solution.

Referring to the issue of Czechoslovakia, comrade President said that our stance toward the events in that country is known. We condemned the military intervention in Czechoslovakia as a wrong and dangerous method of resolving contentious issues. If the great powers succeed in practicing to legitimize the right of the stronger, to forcefully accomplish their objectives and solve problems in the way that suits them, than the independence and sovereignty of all small and medium-sized countries are seriously in question. That realization matures in a growing number of small and medium-sized countries and represents a factor of bonding and connectivity in the joint struggle against the affirmation of force as a means of resolving international disputes. Along that line, we need to mobilize the world's public opinion as much as possible.

The use of force in international relations should, in comrade President's opinion, be subject to consideration at the upcoming conference at the top of nonaligned and other peaceful countries. A lot is said and written, comrade President continued, that the policy of nonalignment has failed and that holding the conference is an outlived thing. Such voices are spread with precisely specific intentions, with both superpowers playing an active role, for which this policy is not appropriate. However, such maneuvers are doomed to failure. Nonaligned and other peaceful countries are tied with a series of common interests and objectives. Those are the struggle for independence and sovereignty, against the hegemony of power and meddling in the internal affairs of others, for equal international cooperation and to reduce the gap in development between developed and underdeveloped countries. The nonaligned conference should discuss these issues, emphasizing what is common and avoiding anything that could cause rifts among its participants.

Selected issues should also be discussed from a principled point of view, avoiding any specific mention of somebody or condemnation. The success of the conference depends on that. But success will not be complete unless it goes from words to deeds after the conference, that is, if the declaratively accepted positions are not applied in practice. Yugoslavia, for its part, will try to hold on to this principle and to strengthen its international activity in the framework of nonalignment and beyond in the coming year, for the more consistent application of the principles of equality and peaceful coexistence.

Comrade President was also interested in how the UAR government viewed initiatives related to the involvement of great powers in resolving the crisis in the Middle East. He emphasized that he personally believes such action could be positive if, through pressure on Israel, it would ensure implementation of the Security Council resolution. It is understood, however, that any pressure on Arab countries to impose a solution that would presume territorial concessions would be unacceptable and harmful.

Minister Riad said that he shares comrade President's views regarding the possible involvement of great powers in resolving the crisis in the Middle East. In this regard, he added, one more question is posed: Whether great powers should act within or outside the UN. The UAR government firmly stands on the position that any action by great powers should go through the Security Council. Any attempt to find a solution outside of the UN would mean a heavy blow to the world organization and would question even the purpose of its existence.

Minister Riad categorically rejected allegations by one part of the foreign press about the alleged pre-orientation of Yugoslav policy toward the Middle East crisis, something comrade President was talking about. He said such voices did not resonate in the UAR where it is well known the role Yugoslavia and particularly President Tito played in efforts to resolve the conflict fairly since the first day of its outbreak. The people and the government of the UAR are grateful to the Yugoslav President for his involvement so far in their just cause and are assured that they can continue to count on his full support and understanding.

The UAR government, Minister Riad continued, is aware that the core reasons for the deterioration of relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR. Its representatives discussed this with representatives of the Soviet government, both immediately after the Czechoslovak events as well as during Gromyko's recent visit to Cairo. On the Soviet side, assurances were given that the USSR wants good relations with Yugoslavia and, for its part, will seek normalization and not aggravation. They were also informed that economic cooperation continues to develop successfully, and that trade continues at an undiminished pace.

Comrade President confirmed it. He said Yugoslavia also wants good relations with the USSR as well as with other socialist countries that participated in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, from the very beginning, it sought not to respond to their attacks with the same intensity and to avoid anything that could cause further deterioration of relations. It remains, however, consistent in defending its principles, which it has represented for years and whose it is not ready to compromise on.

Minister Riad acknowledged that. Referring to the issue of nonalignment, he said the UAR government was accused of insufficient activity in preparation to convene a new nonaligned conference. The objection is somewhat justified. It is true that the UAR government has not engaged in preparations for this conference to the same extent as it engaged in preparations for earlier conferences in Belgrade and Cairo. The reason lies not in the UAR's weakened interest in the policy of nonalignment or its departure from the nonaligned group for any reason, but because of the difficult situation the country is in because of the continuing crisis in the Middle East and the preoccupation of all members of the government, and particularly the minister of foreign affairs, in seeking a way out from the dead end. It is understood, however, that the UAR is going to participate in the conference and that its representatives will try to be as active as possible in discussing all issues on the agenda. He completely shares comrade President's opinion of the need to emphasize what is common at the conference and to discuss certain issues in principle, without getting into the appraisals or condemnations of one country or another. The UAR government is counting on the conference to discuss, in one form or another, the issue of the conflict in the Middle East. It is confident that the correct cause for Arab countries will find full support and understanding of all participants, as was the case at the conference of Afro-Asian countries in Algeria. Reiterating that the UAR is for the conference, he emphasized that, at Malaysia's initiative, a conference of Islamic countries in Kuala Lumpur will soon be held on the issue of Jerusalem and that the UAR government has already confirmed its participation even at such a conference.

As for holding a nonaligned conference will be held, Minister Riad thinks preparations for its convening should be accelerated. It is important to hold a preparatory meeting in Addis Ababa as soon as possible so to see what the problems are and what the

positions of individual participants is in relation to them. He believes one of the most contentious issues will be the issue of the conference makeup, namely its expansion. That was the main problem during preparations for the Afro-Asian conference in Algeria.

Comrade President agreed. He expressed Yugoslavia's full readiness to engage even more actively in conference preparations in the coming period and to cooperate more closely with Ethiopia and other interested countries to convene a preparatory meeting as soon as possible.

In the end, comrade President thanked Minister Riad for extensive information on the latest developments of the situation in the Middle East, expressed satisfaction with the useful exchange of opinions and asked the minister to convey his greetings and best wishes to President Nasser for good health and success in carrying out his difficult and responsible duties.

Minster Riad, for his part, thanked him for cordial reception and conversation, which he will brief in detail on President Nasser and the government.

Delivered to comrades:

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