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Notes on Yasser Arafat's Visit to Moscow in March [1978]

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Summary:

Notes on a meeting in Moscow from March 6-10 between Yasser Arafat & the PLO Delegation and the Soviet government. Arafat was met by Brezhnev, Boris Ponomarev and Andrei Gromyko. Among the issues discussed were the situation in the Middle East, the Soviets desire for Palestine to counter Egypt's "capitulation" to Israel and the U.S. (which Arafat affirmed), tensions in Southern Lebanon and the PLO's increasing desire to further cooperation with Syria and non-Christian Lebanese groups.

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Confidential

INFORMATION

During the period of March 6-10, Moscow was visited by a delegation from the Palestine Liberation Organization headed by Y. Arafat, along with the top officials from leading Palestinian organizations. Y. Arafat was received by L.I. Brezhnev. Detailed discussions with the PLO delegation were also held by A.A. Gromyko and B.N. Ponomarev.

In addition to the published reports in the press regarding the PLO delegation's visit to Moscow, we would like to confidentially report the following:

During the course of the meetings with Y. Arafat, there was a discussion of a broad range of questions pertaining to the situation in the Middle East, the establishment of a lasting peace in the region and the fulfillment of the inalienable rights of the Arab people of Palestine.

On our part, it was noted that the goal of the policies pursued by the USA and Israel in the Middle East, which have now been joined by Egyptian president Sadat, is to destroy the Front of Resistance against Israeli aggression, while at the same time reinforcing Israeli occupation and leading other Arab countries to follow Egypt on the path of capitulation. That is the very reason why all the constructive gains made earlier in preparation to the Geneva conference have now been erased. The organizers of separate negotiations are sabotaging the collective efforts to resolve this conflict, especially when the latter involve the Soviet Union. They are attempting to dictate the conditions for capitulation to every Arab country individually, while the PLO is being completely shut out of the settlement process.

We openly warned Arafat that right now the Palestinian movement is facing a very serious threat. Imperialism, Israeli ruling circles and Arab reactionaries, are carrying out a coordinated effort to disrupt the Palestinian movement and undermine the liberation struggle of Palestinian Arabs. Without receiving from Israel even a hint of concessions, Sadat has now redirected fire at the Palestinians. The PLO must oppose these efforts with a full unification of its ranks, and increased political activism and initiative in the struggle for peace in the Middle East.

We put particular emphasis on the importance of facing Sadat's capitulationist course with increasing counter-measures within the Arab world. In this regard, we view the establishment of a "Front of Determination" at the conferences in Tripoli and Algiers, in which the PLO was an active participant, as an important accomplishment by Arab patriots. Arafat was told that, in our firm conviction, further deepening of the solidarity demonstrated during these conferences, must be the primary mission of the progressive Arab forces. On its part, the Soviet Union is doing everything it can to support the anti-imperialist struggle of the Arab peoples.

We also noted that the Arabs' and their friends' rebuff of American-Israeli intrigues and Sadat's capitulationist course is already yielding some fruit. The dialogue between Sadat and Begin, despite all the maneuvering by the Americans and all the Egyptian concessions, has been seriously slowed. Sadat is now forced to act with caution and can no longer discount the anti-imperialist forces that are supported by the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.

Of course, some elements in the Arab world have not yet rid themselves of the illusion that the Americans can induce Israel to make meaningful concessions to Arabs. However, those that think this way are making a clear political miscalculation.

Making concessions to the aggressor in the hopes of cajoling him into negotiations cannot bring about the assurance of your own national interests.

In this regard, we focused the Palestinians' attention on the current efforts to save the separate negotiations that have reached a dead-end, and with that aim draft the so-called "declaration of principles." The calculation is that this will help draw other Arab countries, such as Jordan, into making deals with Israel. However, the final goal remains the same - to maintain the lands annexed by Israel under Israeli control, to deny the self-determination rights of the Arab people of Palestine, and to prevent the establishment of their own state.

We also expressed a negative view toward the recent attempts to revive the idea of holding some kind of a preliminary conference of interested parties, in so-called preparation for the Geneva conference. We always believed that this is a farfetched idea, and under the present circumstances it is clearly intended as a way for Sadat and the Americans to get out of their unenviable situation. The Soviet Union is in favor of holding the Geneva conference. However, in order for this to happen, there needs to be a sharp turn in the policies of Egypt, Israel and the US; they must make a clear repudiation of separate deals, which deny the fundamental interests of Arabs and, most importantly, of the Palestinian people.

In this regard, we again repeated the steadfast line of the Soviet Union on Middle Eastern issues that we had repeatedly discussed with our friends.

It was emphasized that we will continue to insist on a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Arab lands occupied in 1967, on the recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, including the establishment of their own state, and on the recognition of the right of all Middle Eastern countries to maintain an independent and safe existence. The Palestinians were told that the Soviet policy was, is, and will continue to be a source of firm and consistent support for the legitimate struggle of the Arab peoples. This stems from the principled foundations of Soviet Union's foreign policy and from the resolutions of the XXVth Congress of our Party, which continue to be firmly and unswervingly implemented.

The views of the Soviet side were met with understanding by the Palestinians. Arafat, in the name of the PLO leadership, affirmed that the PLO intends to continue to steadfastly oppose the capitulationism of Sadat, the separate deals between Egypt and Israel, imperialist scheming, and Arab reactionaries in the Middle East. He stated that the PLO will assist in every way to consolidate the Front of progressive Arab forces on an anti-imperialist basis, continue the course of strengthening relations with the Soviet Union and other countries in the socialist community, and fight for an equitable Middle Eastern settlement that heeds Arab interests.

The Palestinians emphasized that practically the entire population of the West Bank and the Gaza sector has decisively condemned Sadat's trip to Israel and supports the PLO positions. The attempts by Egypt, Israel and the US to concoct their own political creature in the West Bank to counteract the PLO have been unsuccessful.

The PLO leadership intends to counteract the slide of other Arab states, particularly Jordan, toward capitulationist and anti-Arab positions. In Arafat's words, the participants of the Algiers conference have reached agreements to implement appropriate steps with Jordan as a way of "neutralizing" it. With that same goal in mind, the Palestinians believe it possible to establish contacts between the PLO and Jordan, though they continue to regard the policies of King Hussein with great caution.

Arafat devoted substantial attention to the tense situation that has arisen in Southern Lebanon. In his words, the continued armed provocations by Israel in that region are aimed at defeating the Palestinians militarily, helping right-wing Christian forces establish control in Southern Lebanon and pushing them to attack the positions of the national-progressive forces and the Palestinian resistance movement throughout the country, and at the same time complicating Syria's position, whose forces make up the backbone of Mozarab forces in Lebanon. In these conditions, the PLO leadership intends to further strengthen cooperation with Lebanese progressive forces and with Syria.

In all, we believe that Y. Arafat's visit was timely and useful. It helped strengthen the anti-imperialist positions of the PLO leadership, intensify the Palestinians' struggle against the capitulationist policies of Sadat and against separate deals, and support their fight for an equitable settlement of the Middle Eastern conflict.