

January 4, 1968

Report by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister on the Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw on the Situation in the Middle East, 19-21 December 1967

Citation:

"Report by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister on the Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw on the Situation in the Middle East, 19-21 December 1967", January 4, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Record 23, File 3722a, Pages 69-79. Document obtained by Dr. Jordan Baev. Translated and edited by Dr. Momchil Metodiev and Kalin Kanchev. Obtained by the Bulgarian Cold War Research Group. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/113426>

Summary:

Ivan Bashev presents a report on the CPSU-organized meeting in Warsaw, where Eastern European government officials exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East. Among the discussed topics were the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Yemeni Civil War, and recent developments in Iraq.

Original Language:

Bulgarian

Contents:

Translation - English

Report by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister
on the Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw
regarding the situation in the Middle East, 19-21 December 1967

Strictly confidential #47088/

January 4, 1968

TO
THE CC BCP
POLITBURO

Comrades,

19-21 December 1967 the CC CPSU organized a meeting in Warsaw, where the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European socialist countries exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East. The Foreign Ministers of the PR Bulgaria, GDR, PR Poland, USSR, SFR Yugoslavia and the Deputy Foreign Ministers of the SR Romania and SR Czechoslovakia attended the meeting.

The participants exchanged views on the current situation in the Middle East and suggested further steps that should be taken in order to find a political solution to the crisis considering the November 22nd Security Council Resolution.

The first to speak was the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko [1]. He pointed out that the CC CPSU and the Soviet Government consider the current situation in the Middle East and the efforts to eliminate the consequences of the Israeli aggression as issues of extreme importance.

Comrade Gromyko pointed out that the latest events once again confirmed the conclusions drawn at the Moscow and Budapest meetings. The American imperialists have launched a major conspiracy against the progressive Arab states and the national liberation movement of the Arab people. The US attempted to use the Israeli aggression to further its own military, strategic, political and economic agenda. The American imperialists wanted to use the Middle East crisis as a part of their grand plan to deliver a blow to the national liberation movements and the international movement of communists and workers. These plans should be vigorously rejected, so that the problem with the future development of the Middle East, a region of great strategic and economic importance, can be resolved once and for all. What the imperialists couldn't accomplish through the Israeli aggression, they are now trying to achieve through the prolonged occupation of the Arab territories. The unwillingness of the Israeli troops to withdraw actually represents an attempt to depose the progressive regimes in the region. The US economic pressure on the Arab states is just another means to the same end.

Moreover, the imperialist forces together with the Chinese schismatics are encouraging the radical elements in the Arab states to use military force to drive out the Israelis, without considering their real capabilities and the current situation. These radical tendencies, popular mainly in Syria and to some extent Algeria, became even more dangerous with the adoption of the Security Council Resolution. They are distracting the Arab people from the possible political solutions to the Israeli occupation. This extremist line will lead to a renewal of the hostilities, which under the current circumstances will only serve the interests of the West and especially those of American Imperialism.

Further, comrade Gromyko talked about the enormous work done by the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries in support of the Arab states during and after the aggression. He stated that “even though the situation in the Middle East continues to be complicated and strained, time is working against the aggressor.”

The Arab states did not yield to the pressure of the West — the UAR and Syria continued and even broadened their progressive policies. Their relations with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries became broader, deeper and filled with mutual trust. The progressive Arab leadership believes that the friendship with the socialist camp has an “important role to play in ending the Israeli aggression”.

The Arab position became even more realistic after the Hartum Conference and the General Assembly's Extraordinary Session. Although it is still quite loose, an anti-imperialistic coalition of Arab states is emerging. No schism in the Arab World should be allowed because it will be a godsend for the US and Israel. With all this in mind, we should assist the Arab states to come up with a united policy for the forthcoming Summit Conference in Rabat.

Comrade Gromyko also pointed out the abundance of competing ideas for Arab development. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia for example, impede the process of establishing real Arab unity. However we should discuss with the Arab states mainly the issues that bring them together.

Our assistance to the Arab countries had a positive impact on the efforts to formulate a political solution to the crisis. The Soviet Union will back any endeavor of ours to further develop the bilateral relations with the Arabs, and most importantly, with the leading Arab state — the UAR. The Soviet leadership proposed numerous concrete steps that have already helped improve these relations. As a result, our bilateral contacts have intensified, despite UAR's reluctance to wholeheartedly support it.

After the Israeli aggression, the Soviet Union supplied the UAR with hundreds of fighter jets, tanks, armored vehicles, mortars, anti-aircraft machine guns, portable firearms, as well as various types of radio transmitters, ammunitions and other technical devices. The bulk of those shipments was provided free of charge. A big group of Soviet military advisers were also sent to the UAR. The purpose of all the military assistance was to strengthen the defense capabilities of the Egyptian army.

The Soviet Union also launched a broad range of initiatives for economic cooperation. Here the emphasis was on the timely completion of the Asuan Hydro Technical Complex, whose significance will be felt far beyond UAR's boundaries, as it will open the way for new economic development of the whole region. The Soviet supply of wheat and other foodstuffs also had important political and economic consequences.

The Soviet Union has also been developing its relations with Syria. Many Syrian leaders visited Moscow. Not only did the Soviet Union provide them with military equipment, but it also agreed on late payment. The two countries signed an agreement for the dispatch of Soviet military advisers, responsible for training the Syrian army. In the agreement the Soviet government emphasized the importance of the local “committees for defense” and “people's battalions” for training the population in case of renewal of Israeli hostilities. The economic cooperation has also been developing successfully. The Soviet Union sees the construction of the Euphrates Hydro Complex, the reorganization of the oil industry and the railroad construction as priority areas. Comrade Gromyko confirmed however that there is significant disagreement with the Syrian government over the efforts to eliminate the consequences of the Israeli aggression and to strengthen the inter-Arab unity.

The Soviet Union also broadened its relations with Iraq in support of that country's anti-imperialistic policy. Moscow is hoping to encourage the Iraqis to participate in the united Arab struggle for ending the Israeli occupation. Soviet experts assisted Iraq to develop Iraqi national oil industry.

Until recently the Soviet Union was actively engaged with Yemen, helping the republican regime there to consolidate its power. That was considered necessary because the Arab Republic of Yemen can be really influential for the national liberation movement in Aden as well as on the whole South Arabian Peninsula. The Republic of Yemen however was unprepared to face the recent downturn in the situation, despite its five-year-long existence. The internal disorders and power conflicts weakened the country. With the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops, the Republican regime remained basically defenseless. The Soviet Union supplied the Republican army with warplanes, weapons and ammunition necessary for the struggle against the royalists. The events in Yemen should be regarded as part of the expansionist policy of American and British imperialism in the Middle East. The Soviet Union will continue support to the people of Yemen in their struggle to preserve the Republic, despite the uncertainties of the situation. To that end, the socialist countries around the world politically recognized the new People's Republic of South Yemen and established diplomatic relations with it.

Trying to secure an anti-imperialist Arab unity based on the common struggle against the Israeli aggression, the Soviet government gives special attention to improving the relations with the other Arab states, such as Sudan, Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan. Therefore recently the king of Jordan was on official visit to Moscow.

Further, comrade Gromyko stated that despite its numerous weaknesses, the Security Council Resolution from 22 November 1967 has certain positive elements, which can be useful for finding a political solution of the crisis.

The socialist camp in cooperation with the Arab governments should exert pressure on the US administration, and personally on Lyndon Johnson [2], for the fast implementation of the resolution. For example, as a part of such pressure, on 20 November 1967 the Soviet Union introduced its own draft resolution, not expecting it to pass. The Soviet Union then voted for the resolution drafted by the fraternal countries mainly for two reasons. First, the Soviet draft was unlikely to pass and second, Nasser [3] had asked the Soviet government for support. The Soviet leadership believes that if the Security Council in coordination with the Arab states and the other peaceful nations approach the issue wisely enough, the conflict can be resolved in favor of the Arabs through peace negotiations. The adopted resolution can contribute to this goal. In the process however, the socialist countries should try to exercise some influence on the Arab governments.

For faster implementation of the Security Council Resolution, the Soviet government considers important that all socialist countries try to apply some pressure on the Swedish government, and particularly on Jarring [3]. Pressure should also be put on W. Tan.

To prevent surprises, we should not rule out the possibility that the Arab countries might use force as a last option to drive out the occupying forces. However, our most important task will be to work systematically with the Arab leaders and the other influential circles in support for a peaceful solution.

Another important goal is to uncover West Germany's neo-colonial policy in Africa and the Arab world. Our countries should contribute to raising the awareness toward FR Germany's aggressive expansionism. In the same time we should praise the

position of GDR, emphasizing the beneficial cooperation between East Germany and the Arab states.

The existing disagreements between the US and France should also be part of our strategy.

Comrade Gromyko's assessments and conclusions were fully supported by the delegations of the GDR, SR of Czechoslovakia, PR of Poland, PR of Hungary, PR of Bulgaria and the SFR of Yugoslavia. All of us pointed out the critical role of the USSR in realization of our policy. In addition, the leaders of the delegations presented their own views on the Middle East.

Emphasizing the importance his government assigns to the situation in the Middle East, comrade Otto Winzer [5] presented GDR's foreign policy objectives with regard to the region. Despite its consistent anti-imperialism, so far no progressive Arab regime has established diplomatic relations with GDR. Syria and Iraq agreed on principle to do that in May 1967, but they keep postponing. Nasser declined addressing the issue directly in his conversation with comrade Matern [6]. Boumedienne [7], on his part, agreed that the GDR - Algerian relations are not normal but he also made a reference to his country's close contacts with the Common Market and the existing diplomatic relations with the US, Western Europe, Portugal, and Great Britain.

The German comrades pointed out that Bonn's main foreign policy objective is to prevent the political recognition of the GDR by the Arab states. The Federal Republic considers this as a test of their policy to be seen as exclusive representatives of entire Germany. Ruining their plans and establishing normal relations between the GDR and the progressive Arab regimes should be set as common goal for all the socialist countries.

Comrade Jan Pudlah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the SR of Czechoslovakia stated that Great Britain's active involvement within the Security Council can be explained by the British political and economic interests in the Middle East and particularly their desire to see the Suez Canal opened as fast as possible. At the consultations that the Czechoslovak comrades held with Finland and Sweden both countries presented a very realistic assessment of the situation and showed willingness to contribute to the process of finding a political solution to the crisis. Comrade Pudlah suggested that the socialist countries should insist on improving the UN mission of observers in the region of the Suez Canal, so that pro-Western and pro-Israeli experts are not overrepresented.

Comrade Rapatski stated that the growth of patriotic and anti-imperialistic feelings across all classes and social groups in the Arab world contributes to strengthening of the Arab unity. Many governments have been forced to accommodate these feelings. In fact, it was often government policies that caused these sentiments on the first place. As a result, there are good prospects for the class struggle to intensify.

In some Western countries, including France and Britain, concern is growing toward the US expansionism. This concern is likely to affect decision making. However, the West is also worried by the growing influence of socialism in the Middle East region.

The Israeli aggression inspired those circles in the FR Germany who are looking at imposing their will on Europe through a conventional war.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of PR Hungary, comrade Janos Peter [8], pointed out that the socialist countries should formulate a solution to the crisis that will stimulate unity of action of all Arabs. According to him, our approach to some issues has been

too general, as for example the refugee problem. He suggested that these issues be put on the agenda of a new meeting that should take place after the Arab Summit Conference in Rabat.

The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the SFR Yugoslavia Marko Nikesich outlined the major driving forces for the situation in the Middle East and emphasized the key role played by the Soviet Union in breaking down the aggressor's intentions. He again pointed out the importance of the assistance provided by the socialist countries.

The SFR Yugoslavia maintains some relations with the World Zionist Movement. Representatives of the Movement visited Belgrade and appealed for a more moderate policy toward Israel, denouncing at the same time Dayan's [9]imperialistic ambitions.

Comrade Nikesich highlighted comrade Gromyko's observation that recently the American imperialism incited conflicts in the Mediterranean region for saving some of its positions there. As evidence Nikesich pointed to the fact that France has already left the NATO military alliance. Despite being a NATO member, Turkey has been pursuing lately more and more an independent foreign policy, as displayed during Cyprus crisis. Greece has been completely demoralized. The Arab countries have been vigorously expressing disagreement with the US policy. As a consequence, the once strong imperialistic influence in the Mediterranean region has been diminishing.

As for the Press release from the meeting, the Yugoslav State Secretary suggested that a short statement for the public should be enough. According to him, it should mention the continuation of our principled position and our determination to support the Arab people in their struggle for implementation of the Security Council resolution for complete withdrawal of the Israeli troops.

The Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs of the SR Romania, Marin Mihai, stated that his country's official position on the Middle East has been expressed in numerous Party and Government statements.

The interference of American Imperialism in the internal affairs of other countries is threatening the peace in the entire world. The aggressive war against the Vietnamese people has been the most persuasive example in this regard. Therefore, the American policy should be considered the main source of tension in the world.

The Romanian government's position on finding a solution to the many contentions issues between Israel and the Arabs has been carefully formulated based on the current situation. In its economic and political contacts with the Arab states and Israel, the Romanian government has insisted on peaceful resolution through UN-sponsored peace negotiations. The Romanian government supports full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and rejects any annexations and territorial claims.

The Romanian government believes that in the current situation the main responsibility for finding solutions to the problems in the Middle East rests with the people from the region. In the same time all peaceful nations in the world should support to the Arab efforts for coming up with durable solutions. As for the Press Release, the Romanian delegation proposed that the text reflect the views of all participants.

The meeting was held in a calm working environment. All seven countries were united in stating the main problems in the Middle East and formulating the future steps that should be taken. However, Romania expressed different position on the role of Israel. Although they shared our view about the aggressive American Imperialism, the Romanian delegates abstained from referring to Israel as US proxy

that has started an aggression.

Despite the initial Romanian and Yugoslav objections, the Soviet-proposed Press Release was adopted. The word "aggression" however was removed from the text.

MINISTER :

Ivan Bashev [10]

Printed in 4 copies

[1]Gromyko, Andrey Andreyevich (1909—1989) - Soviet Foreign Minister (1957-1985), Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR (1985-1988).

[2]Johnson, Lyndon B. (1908-1973) - The 36th President of the United States of America (1963-1969).

[3]Nasser, Gammal Abdel (1918 1970) - Prime Minister (1954 1956), and President (1956 1958) of Egypt and President of the United Arab Republic (1958—1970).

[4]Jarring, Gunnar (1907-2002) - Swedish diplomat, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations (1956-1958); Ambassador to the USA, Ambassador to the USSR, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on the Middle East (1967-1990).

[5]Winzer, Otto (1902-1975) - Minister of Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic (1965-1975).

[6]Matern, Hermann (1893-1971) - Member of the German Socialist Unity Party Central Committee (1950-1971).

[7]Boumedienne, Houari [Mohammed Ben Brahim Boukharouba] (1927 - 1978) - Leader of the National Liberation Front in Algeria, Defense Minister (1962—1965), President of Algeria (1965—1978).

[8]Peter, Janos (1910-1999) - Minister of Foreign Affairs of PR of Hungary (1961-1973).

[9]Dayan, Moshe (1915 1981) - Defense Minister (1967 - 1974), and foreign minister (1977— 1979) of Israel.

[10]Bashev, Ivan (1916-1971) - BCP functionary since early 1940s, Member of the People's Youth Union Central Committee, Secretary of the World Federation of Democratic Youth; Deputy Minister of Education and Culture and of Foreign Affairs; Minister of Foreign Affairs (1962-1971); Member of the BCP Central Committee from 1962 until his death in 1971.