

July 9, 1967

**Memorandum of Conversation between Dr. Gerhard
Weiss and Gamal Abdel Nasser**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Dr. Gerhard Weiss and Gamal Abdel Nasser", July 9, 1967, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1337. Obtained by Yair Even. Translated for CWIHP by Richard Iserman.
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Summary:

Weiss and Nasser discuss the events of the 1967 Arab-Israeli or Six-Day War.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Appointee of the Government of the German Democratic Republic in the United Arab Republic

Memo about the conversation held by the Special Appointee of the Chair of the Council of State of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht, and the Representative of the Chair of the Council of State, Dr. Gerhard Weiss, with the President of the United Arab Republic, Gamal Abdel Nasser, on July 9, 1967 from 12:00 pm until 1:25 pm in his residence.

Other participants in the conversation were:

Comrade Paul Markowski, Director of the Dept. of International Relations of the SED's Central Committee

Comrade Dr. Wolfgang Kiesewetter, Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Comrade Dr. Ernst Scholz, Appointee of the Government of the GDR in the UAR

After a friendly greeting and introduction of those present Comrade Dr. Weiss expressed gratitude that President Nasser had given the opportunity for this conversation. He passed along personal greetings from Walter Ulbricht and his wife to President Nasser and his wife. He said that Comrade Ulbricht is following the events related to Israeli aggression with great interest. Even before his departure he--Comrade Dr. Weiss--had a lengthy conversation with Comrade Ulbricht in which he asked him to share his best personal wishes for the upcoming difficult fight, which he said is part of the great overall fight against imperialism. Comrade Dr. Weiss mentioned Comrade Walter Ulbricht's speech during the election campaign in Leipzig about the events in the Near East, and particularly in the UAR in response to numerous questions from the people. Comrade Dr. Weiss handed over the text of the speech in Arabic and English. He then handed over the personal message from Comrade Ulbricht to President Nasser, who read it with great attention and expressed warm thanks for it.

Comrade Dr. Weiss conveyed on behalf of Comrade Ulbricht his deep satisfaction that President Nasser remains at the head of the UAR through the will of the people. He said these feelings are shared in the same way by the government and the people of the GDR. Comrade Dr. Weiss said he had been sent expressly by Comrade Ulbricht to his "Friend Gamal Abdel Nasser." He said his mission consists of the following three tasks:

1. Comrade Ulbricht asked President Nasser to inform him precisely about the events and to give an assessment of the situation. He said he was interested to be briefed on the actions before, during, and after the aggression as well as about the inward and outward conclusions that can be drawn from it. He underscored here that the UAR and President Nasser enjoy a high regard among Comrade Ulbricht as well as the Party, Government, and People of the GDR.
2. Comrade Dr. Weiss said he was ordered to discuss with President Nasser how the GDR could better support the UAR, in order to quickly overcome the consequences of the Israeli aggression.
3. He said he has the task of advising the development of relations between both countries in light of the new situation.

He said he is gladly prepared to report about the consequences that may be made in the GDR from the Israeli aggression. He asked President Nasser to share with him what he should tell Walter Ulbricht about the situation.

President Nasser expressed thanks for sending Comrade Dr. Weiss to Cairo and for the attentiveness and support shown by Walter Ulbricht personally as well as the government and people of the GDR since the beginning of the aggression. He said the current situation is not stable, despite the UN Resolution on a ceasefire. Yesterday it was known that there was fighting and air attacks on Port Said and Port Fuad. The imperialists clearly want to prevent the rebuilding of the UAR's armed forces. Their plan is to cross the Canal and occupy a 10km deep zone on its Western bank. He said that behind this is the intention of re-opening the Canal. He said that during the night troops and armored vehicles, as well as tanks, were brought to the Canal. He said the goal of the aggression is clear: the imperialists had prepared for the aggression over two years with considerable weapons deliveries from West Germany. He said the USA

has made the decision to deliver weapons directly to Israel and to cease all assistance to the UAR. He said the imperialists had deployed their full capabilities when they used domestic reactionary forces, hatched the Islam Pact, propped up Feisal, and much more. After all these preparations, he said they have now crossed over to direct aggression. According to him, the USA had only recently guaranteed that there would be no aggression. Now the whole world knows the full truth. The Israelis led the first and hardest blow against the air force of the UAR. After they had attained full air superiority, the UAR troops in the Northern part of Sinai no longer had any chance of success, since the supply lines of water and fuel had been broken. Many mistakes were made, he said, that are now recognized. But the one just mentioned was the main cause. Then came the ceasefire. The army had been completely defeated. The UAR is now striving to rebuild it and create positions on the Canal. In this it must be remembered that part of the UAR army is stationed in Yemen, and cannot be removed from there.

He said that the UAR maintained a policy of non-alignment. In reality, this policy no longer exists. The USA and also Great Britain depend on the activity of the American military leadership. Israel cannot exist without the USA. All Western powers, except for France, support the Israelis. Now they want to clear the way for Israel to take the Canal. He said the non-alignment of progressive countries is actually directed against imperialism and supports liberation movements. Nasser said that UAR stands firm on the side of the USSR. Quoting directly, he said that "without officially declaring it, in reality we are Communists." The USA knows that the UAR faces a set of choices. Either they submit themselves to the USA, like Thailand did, or they depend firmly on the USSR and the other Socialist countries, receive help from them, and don't stand alone.

Nasser said that Israel has received from the Western powers weapons and volunteers, who are designated as "immigrants." The UAR has nothing of the sort. Despite the MiG 17s and MiG 21s that they have, Israel has the air advantage. Thus the Israelis can do anything, and cross the Suez Canal. It has been made clear to the USSR that the current UAR government will not and cannot side with the USA. He has asked the USSR to send airplanes with pilots and to take over the air command. The Soviet pilots would not need to flight to Israel. They could remain over Egyptian airspace. Sinai can be freed at a later point in time. The imperialists have determined that their goal hasn't been reached yet, since the Nasser regime still exists. There is now information that the Israelis want to cross the canal. Bridge parts have been gathered for this purpose. A very critical situation is looming. Nasser said the people stand behind him but within the UAR there are many pro-American elements, particularly among the intelligence services. Nasser declared that he does not trust the UN or the security Council. He said that yesterday (8.7.1967) he sent a message to the Soviet leadership asking what will happen if the Israelis cross the Canal. One cannot restore a defeated army so quickly. There is no time now for indecisiveness, he said. The main issue is air support. The UAR needs airplanes with Soviet pilots, no matter whether they are called volunteers or otherwise. He said the USA will send Israel airplanes with pilots no matter what.

Nasser continued to say that the Syria has sustained heavy blows. The prestige of Syria and the UAE have suffered greatly. The issue in both countries is not individuals, but the fall of the regime. He said he had thought it better if he stepped down, since he, Nasser, is seen as a leftist while Mohieddin qualifies as "moderate." The people were against it. After the difficult defeat and the full collapse of the army, the UAR can fight on politically, but not militarily. For this reason Israel is trying to provoke incidents to prevent the rebuilding of the UAR Army. It is not enough for the Soviet Union to send armored vehicles alone. Teams of men are needed, but they must first be trained. He said that UAR has lost 600 armored units. The only way is for the Soviet Union to take a decisive step to break the air superiority of Israel. The people must feel that the Soviet Union is prepared to defend the revolution in the UAR. He has suggested that the Soviet Union send airplanes with pilots and take over the UAR's air defense. This would create a new political situation. If the USA is certain that the Soviet Union will do nothing, then they will achieve their plans. Nasser suggested that Podgorny conclude a military treaty. In this context, he asked the rhetorical question of what non-alignment means in this day and age.

President Nasser expressed his concern over what would happen if the USA succeeds in bringing about the collapse of Syria, the UAR, and then Algeria, the only truly independent regimes. They already now control India, Indonesia, and practically all of Asia; Ghana and all of those countries are in no way non-aligned. Even Ethiopia voted against the Arab countries at the UN. In the Arab world itself, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya are not non-aligned.

President Nasser repeated that the UAR has only one alternative: either proceed with the Soviet Union and the other Socialist countries, or make arrangements with the USA. If the Israelis cross the Suez Canal, it will happen with the agreement of the USA. If the Canal is crossed, neither the UN nor the Security Council can do anything to stop it. In this case he would have to step down from the government and appoint someone who will initiate a deal with the USA. But this would mean that the USA is the ruler of the world, and the UAR would have to accept its dictatorship.

Nasser said that the UAR has received tanks, artillery, and airplanes from the Soviet Union. But this is not enough. It is very difficult to rebuild an army within a month. Up till now the UAR has not been able to equip its troops. Three divisions have been armed again, while two remain without arms. President Nasser does not believe that the USA will give up its machinations against the UAR. They want to get rid of Nasser, and for this reason are pushing Israel to cross the Canal. The liberation of Sinai can wait.

President Nasser asked in light of this difficult situation where the borderline of coexistence lies. If Syria, Egypt, and Algeria are overcome, then the imperialists will turn to the GDR, the USSR, and other Socialist countries. The UAR sees itself as the first line of defense for the Socialist Camp. If there is success in winning this fight, the USA will hesitate to destroy the progressive order in other countries. This is the main issue. The ceasefire was not the end of the whole Affair. They will find pretenses to destroy the UAR while it is still weak. The President again emphasized that he possesses information that Israel is preparing to cross the Suez Canal. Even the Soviet Union has allowed information of this sort to come to him. The UAR is waiting now for the Canal to be crossed. This occurrence would serve to fulfill the plans of the imperialists from 1956, i.e., the "internationalization" of the Canal.

According to Nasser, the Soviet Union answered his most recent message by saying that they will send representatives from the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Valik, with a delegation. They will send more weapons. But this is an expression of a prolonging and indecisive position. The UAR is standing alone. The issue is not Israel, but a direct fight against the USA, which wants to implement its plans at the UN. The USA will absolutely not think about pulling the Israelis back before all of their conditions have been met.

Nasser said that the UAR cannot be compared with Vietnam for geographic reasons. There is no jungle here, and no mountains like there are in the GDR, for example. One can move freely with tanks here. For this reason the situation is particularly serious. The UAR has no strategic depth and could be occupied within 24 hours. Only 4% of the country is occupied by people. He said he does not feel justified in leaving the Egyptian people and the country defenseless against destruction.

President Nasser asked Comrade Dr. Weiss to convey to Walter Ulbricht a request to press and pull other Socialist countries to overcome their indecisiveness. He said that the USA wants to rule the entire world. On the third day of the aggression the people were against the Soviet Union. After the visit by Podgorny, and the use of propaganda he succeeded in reducing these misunderstandings. President Nasser repeated: the Socialist countries must make an immediate decision and provide effective support. If the Israelis cross the canal, he must write a letter to Johnson that he gives up. If the Socialist countries do not immediately help he must consider how to approach the USA. He said that he, Nasser himself, cannot speak with the USA. They want his head. Someone else must do this, a pro-American politician can talk to them. This means that the USA will take the entire Near East in hand. The UAR has been knocked down hard. As soon as the UAR attempts to retake its feet, they are knocked down again.

President Nasser indicated that the economic situation was very bad. This was particularly due to the closing of the Suez Canal, causing monthly losses of 9 million pounds. The closing of the Canal is in reality a weapon against the UAR. They have turned to Podgorny with a request to send grain and cooking oil in particular. The

other needed goods can be found elsewhere. The UAR needs urgent assistance or credit or both. The UAR is also suffering a loss of around 60 million pounds per year because of a fall in tourism. From an overall income of 400 million pounds they have lost already 160. The USA knows this and it is striving to strangle the UAR not through direct war but through economic pressure. Under the current state of affairs the UAR will have no financial means left in 4 months.

Comrade Dr. Weiss expressed thanks for the information and underscored that the GDR attributes great significance to the UAR within the framework of the so-called non-aligned world and in the Near East. The role of the UAR and Syria in this framework also determines the position of the GDR. The events will not be seen as local actions but as part of the global strategy of the USA. Dr. Weiss remembered his conversation with President Nasser in January 1967, in which they spoke about the events in Indonesia, India, and about the fall of Nkrumah. These events must be seen in connection with the military coup in Greece, and the machinations in Cyprus. For this reason the GDR from the very beginning has actively supported the UAR and the Arab people out of principle consideration, and in contrast to West Germany. In West Germany the press is full of attacks against President Nasser and the UAR, as well as against the GDR because of its position on the Israeli aggression. The attacks against the GDR have also taken place because they have fully supported the Soviet proposals at the UN. Comrade Dr. Weiss pointed to the fact that the GDR has limited capabilities but from the first days of the aggression it has striven to help quickly. This entailed for instance the delivery of non-civilian goods. 10,000 tons of wheat, 3,000 tons of flour, and 500 tons of cooking oil were made available from the national reserves of the GDR. Details were discussed with the Minister of Domestic Trade, Dr. Korra.

The leadership of the GDR has already drawn its own conclusions from the Israeli aggression: this relates particularly to the strengthening of military defensive preparedness, because the West German government considers the "blitzkrieg" as a means of resolving political problems. For the West German government, the GDR represents an "unresolved problem." A further conclusion can be drawn on the strengthening of the economic power of the GDR. A particularly important conclusion is the strengthening of cooperation of the Socialist countries with the progressive Arab countries. The coordination of activities of Socialist countries with the progressive Arab countries in this regard is of primary importance. The advice from Moscow can be attributed to the activities of the Chair of the Council of State of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht, and the party leadership of the GDR, among others. The GDR has suggested that relationships with the progressive Arab countries can be coordinated under the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. This can also take military measures in relation to the UAR.

Dr. Weiss continued that the population of the UAR showed great political awareness through the demonstrations on the 8th and 9th of June. The self-confidence of the people of the UAR is growing again. This circumstance must be used for the further mobilization and organization of the people. This goes for the rebuilding of the army as well. The UAR's cooperation with Socialist countries, including the GDR, on this question is certainly to an advantage. Comrade Dr. Weiss mentioned his discussion with the Secretary of the ASU, Kamal Eddin Rifaat, about cooperation between the two leading parties, i.e. the SED and the ASU. In response to a request for assistance, the GDR has provided information about structural and organizational principles for the fighting groups in the government services and administration. The GDR is constantly facing provocations from West Germany. The population of the GDR has been politically educated for years and is well-informed about the problems the Arabs face. This became clear during the election campaign. There was not a single campaign rally at which questions were not asked on the situation in the Near East. Questions about bilateral relations also played a great role during that time.

The discussions in January with Comrade Dr. Weiss and in May with Foreign Minister Otto Winzer resulted in general agreement on the necessity of establishing normal diplomatic relations. This question must be examined in light of the newly developed situation. Now it has become clear that the West German Federal Republic has taken a clear position against the UAR, progress, and the progressive Arab countries. On the other hand the GDR has clearly taken the side of the UAR against imperialism. The

party and state leadership of the GDR believe that the normalization of relations in the current situation will lead to a strengthening of progressive forces in the Arab countries, in the GDR, and also in Europe. This is in accordance with the will of the people. Dr. Weiss added that we know from an employee of the GDR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs who accompanied the sending of aid to Amman that the Jordanian people also sees itself as having to choose between the policy of the GDR and West Germany. He said that we attribute this as well to the activity of the UAR and their support for the GDR. It is understood that the Jordanian government officials, however, have a different opinion on these questions.

Comrade Dr. Weiss asked President Nasser what he can report to the Chair of the Council of State of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht, on the question of normalization of relations.

President Nasser answered: "We are fully in agreement with you that diplomatic relations between our two countries should be established." At the present time though, he said, we must consider two factors:

1. We do not want any division between the progressive Arab countries. We must talk together with them about this question. If we make this decision alone at the present time, it will mean that a new division within the progressive Arab countries could arise. We are convinced that we must recognize the GDR. President Nasser emphasized that this is the clear standpoint of the UAR.

2. It is not yet time to give the USA new pretexts for action. At the present time the UAR is weak in terms of military capacity and morale. The situation is different from before the aggression. If the UAR now gives the USA a pretext, then that would mean that the UAR is challenging them further. President Nasser emphasized that had received counsel on this question the day before within the government, since he expected that Dr. Weiss would ask this question. If the military situation develops well and the Canal is not crossed by Israeli troops, this will create a favorable situation. But if the Israeli troops cross the Canal, then he will step down and another government will begin dealing with the USA. If he recognizes the GDR now, this other government will reverse the decision later on. The timing is not good now. The USA would feel challenged and give the Israelis a pretext for crossing the Canal. The reactionary forces within the country would declare that Nasser is a complete hothead and would ask the question of why at this precise moment he is challenging the USA. For all of these reasons he thinks that now is not the moment for this step. When the UAR army is rebuilt again and morale in the UAR is better again, he promises--and asked to convey to Walter Ulbricht--that the UAR will recognize the GDR. He said that the GDR has stepped in for the UAR when "the others" were against it.

President Nasser declared that he can try to convince Boumedienne on the establishment of diplomatic relations with the GDR. But he does not think that the timing for this is favorable. When morale is again strong enough then the UAR will take this step without having to fear immediate countermeasures from the USA. He said that he must consider that 60% of the intelligence workers in the UAR are pro-American. This class does not think of the people but only about refrigerators and personal comfort.

President Nasser declared that he would like to say quite openly that his position does not mean that he underestimates the support from the side of the GDR. In no way does he want to offend the GDR. He would like to firmly assure and promise that no relations will be established with West Germany, as long as he is in his position. If Algeria and the other progressive Arab countries do not recognize the GDR in a new situation, then the UAR will do it alone. President Nasser asked again to convey this standpoint to the Chair of the Council of State of the GDR.

Comrade Dr. Weiss declared that these questions must also still be discussed in Damascus. He asked President Nasser to discuss this problem with the leading personalities of the progressive Arab countries. He expressed a request to meet together with President Boumedienne during his stay in Cairo. Dr. Weiss referred to his discussion with President Boumedienne in February of this year which he conducted in private--in accordance with a recommendation from President Nasser. President Nasser agreed to assist in brokering this discussion. He characterized

Boumedienne as a moral, straightforward, honest, dedicated, good-hearted, and pure person. In this respect he stands in contrast to Bouteflika, who is "playing a diplomatic game." President Nasser added that it is "his tragedy" but he is personal friends with Ben Bella, as well as with Boumedienne.

Comrade Dr. Weiss expressed his thanks again and declared that one must consider the voice of the people. The intelligence services are not all there is, he said. One should not look so much at the 60% in the intelligence services as at the masses of the people, at the workers and farmers who support him, and will also support him in this step, the normalization of relations between both countries.

Comrade Dr. Weiss explained that the Chair of the Council of State, Walter Ulbricht, had given a Party Order to do everything to support the UAR with expert, especially where West German experts have abandoned their posts, or where they must still be removed from their positions. He said that what took place in the first days of the Israeli aggression is also connected with Western experts, including West German ones. Therefore, he said, the GDR is prepared to send experts in accordance with its ability. For this purpose, he said, the government has prepared the necessary lists of experts. A government resolution has also been made that the UAR should not bear any of the costs for these experts.

President Nasser expressed his thanks for this.

Comrade Dr. Weiss continued to say that we also have other possibilities for supporting the UAR. In a discussion with the Minister for the Economy and Foreign Trade, Hassan Abbas Zaky, for example, he said he had discussed the fact that 25 million pounds from the agreed-upon line of credit have not yet been contracted, and are still to be made use of. In answer to a question on this point from President Nasser, Comrade Dr. Weiss explained that this could be used for industrial equipment as well as consumer goods. President Nasser responded that in this year the UAR cannot concentrate on industry, but must first and foremost focus on bread. Dr. Weiss explained that he still must discuss these questions with the Minister of Domestic Trade, Dr. Korra. He expressed thanks again for the open expression and made assurances that he will report everything precisely to the Chair of the GDR's Council of State.

President Nasser asked if he had convinced Dr. Weiss with his arguments. Dr. Weiss responded that he had come to an attentive awareness and will convey it exactly and faithfully to Walter Ulbricht.

President Nasser assured him again that the UAR will be the first country to establish diplomatic relations with the GDR.

Comrade Dr. Weiss expressed his conviction that other Arab countries will do the same, so that the UAR will not be left alone. He said the UAR will take this step at the right time.

President Nasser asked whether the GDR has its own airplane industry. In the UAR there were and still are many West German experts who are active in this area. He explained that against his will--but by Amer's demand--60 million pounds had already been invested since 1960 in the airplane industry and the development of a new airplane. He, Nasser, represented the opinion that the UAR should license the construction of airplanes from the USSR. But the foreign experts had consistently assured him that they would design an airplane that would be better than Soviet and American ones. Now he said he was of a mind to make a connection with the Soviet Union in order to end this old project and request Soviet licenses. He said this will be cheaper for the UAR, especially since they have the necessary machines.

Comrade Dr. Weiss declared that airplanes will be delivered under the framework of non-civilian deliveries from the reserves of the GDR. But the GDR does not have its own airplane construction capabilities. In response to a related question from President Nasser Dr. Weiss responded that the UAR's two existing airplane factories can be converted for the production of other goods. He said the GDR has experts who were active in the airplane industry, but are now working in other branches. They converted the GDR's former airplane construction facilities. He said the GDR can possibly offer help in this area. He said that if this is the special wish of President Nasser, then he will forward it to Walter Ulbricht.

President Nasser responded that no conclusion has been made on this, but one will

be. Since 1960 the UAR has conducted research in the area of the airplane industry, without producing any concrete results. Ironically, he added, the research was done for West Germany. These factories, incidentally, are equipped with modern machines from West Germany, including automatically operated ones.

Dr. Weiss responded that the GDR can potentially give the UAR advisory recommendations in the making of necessary decisions. He said the GDR adapted its the airplane industry at the right time, before it cost too much. In the GDR the conversion of the facilities--for instance, for measure devices and light industry--happened quickly.

Comrade Dr. Weiss expressed his conviction that the discussion will have a fruitful effect on the deepening of our friendship. He said he hopes very much that the UAR's difficulties will be overcome. In this he said President Nasser has the support of his people, whose confidence he is regaining. The international situation is also not well suited to the imperialists for new adventures. He said that the United Nations has not yet produced results that satisfy us. But, he said, the UN can only reflect the fighting that occurs between nations. The imperialists will think very carefully about whether they can undertake new adventures.

Comrade Dr. Weiss wished President Nasser success in the difficult fight. He said it will be long-lasting, persistent, and difficult. But at the end of it will come success for the anti-imperialist forces. He said that the imperialist powers did not attain their goal in the first attempt, and will not do so in the second one either. Time is on the side of progress.

In saying goodbye President Nasser asked to convey his heartfelt greetings to the Chair of the Council of State of the GDR, and his best wishes also to his wife.

The conversation took place in a very friendly and open atmosphere, with a seriousness appropriate to the situation.

President Nasser made a striking impression. It was clear that he sets his entire hope on a direct military engagement by the Soviet Union. There was no sense that he and the UAR's leadership have the intention of mobilizing the people for a decisive stand against a possible broadening of the aggression.

(This text was approved by Comrade Dr. Weiss).

Dr. Scholz

Ambassador

Cairo, 10.7.1967

Dr. Scho/Dr. Kie/S.

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