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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Tunisian Foreign Minister Mohammed Masmoudi
Ambassador Slaheddine El-Goulli
Ambassador Abdelaziz Lasram, Director of
International Cooperation in the Tunisian
Foreign Ministry
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Mr. Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff
Mr. Alec G. Toumayan, Interpreter, State Department

DATE AND PLACE: October 29, 1970, in Dr. Kissinger's Office

After exchanging greetings with his visitor, Dr. Kissinger indicated that he was aware of his conversation with the Secretary of State and with his views in general. The Foreign Minister then proceeded to cover the following points:

He explained the role Tunisia had been called upon to play and how important it was for the US to support it in its present role. First called "traitors" by Nasser because they had advocated calm and reason, the Tunisians had recently seen their position vindicated by Nasser himself, who, a few days before he died, had stated categorically that he did not want war and that the Tunisians had been right in the stand they had taken.

The growing Soviet presence in the Mediterranean was a cause of deep preoccupation. The Soviets now openly declare themselves "a Mediterranean power" by virtue of the Mediterranean Sea being an extension of the Black Sea. He recalled that a few years ago the French would dismiss any remark about Soviet penetration into the Mediterranean and would refer to that presence as short-term and temporary.

He emphasized the need for the United States to focus on the central idea of a settlement and not become obsessed with details. He cautioned us against engaging in a step-by-step escalation supplying weapons to the Israelis because the Egyptians had moved missiles. This escalation could only lead to ultimate folly.



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He was proud that Tunisia had been able to introduce a new approach, a new method of work, and that other Arabs listened to Tunisia and responded to this calm approach.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had followed every point the Minister had made so far except one. Why was it incomprehensible that we would like to maintain an agreement that we had proposed in the first place and that we had every reason to believe had been accepted by the UAR? When he had first heard of the violations of the standstill agreement he had not believed them because he could not believe that any country would engage so soon in violations of those agreements. He had studied the evidence. The Secretary of State had spent five hours reviewing the evidence and there was absolutely no doubt that there had been massive violations. Thus, why was it difficult to understand that we wanted to maintain this agreement that we had initiated?

The Foreign Minister responded by restating his argument on the perils of escalation and on the importance for the United States to view the overall idea of a settlement rather than focusing on details such as getting the Israelis to accept indirect negotiations, to use or not to use the term "withdrawal"; all these were details.

Turning to the Palestinian aspects, he stressed that no settlement can be arrived at without a settlement of the Palestinian question. This included secure and guaranteed borders for a Palestinian entity.

Dr. Kissinger asked what would happen to Jordan in this process of redefining borders. The Foreign Minister replied that Jordan would become what it had been in the past--"Trans-Jordan." He urged the US to be more understanding toward the Palestinians and stressed that in his view El Fatah was the responsible party with whom to open an eventual dialogue.

Dr. Kissinger expressed regret at having to go to another meeting but stressed how valuable it was for him to have had the benefit of the Minister's advice and counsel. The Minister should be assured that we share the basic principles he had outlined. We also want peace in the Middle East to be established for several generations. We want to encourage moderates like Tunisia in their development without the pressures and the tensions under which they labor at present. We want to work usefully for peace and our ideas and objectives are very very close to the Minister's own.

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The Minister expressed the hope that on his future visits to Washington he would have the opportunity to meet with Dr. Kissinger and compare thoughts and ideas with him. He considered this as extremely important and valuable. Dr. Kissinger responded that, indeed, his feelings would be hurt if the Minister did not call on him when he came to Washington again.

H. S.

Harold H. Saunders