

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~FBIS TRENDS
28 DECEMBER 1973

- 1 -

ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

USSR WELCOMES GENEVA CONFERENCE, BEGINNING OF "PRACTICAL WORK"

Moscow has welcomed with wary optimism the 21-22 December formal opening of the Middle East peace conference in Geneva, while underlining the need for practical measures to maintain the momentum toward a political settlement. In this connection, Soviet media noted with approval the conference decision to establish a military working group to resume the discussions on disengagement of Egyptian and Israeli forces. Moscow viewed this as a success achieved despite the wishes of "some people" to adjourn the conference indefinitely, and described disengagement as the most urgent task. Keying to a theme from Foreign Minister Gromyko's speech, the comment has stressed the importance of recognizing the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by force and of insuring full implementation of Resolution 242. At the same time Moscow has acknowledged the difficulties facing the conference, noting that while a useful dialog had begun, the participants' stands were "admittedly" still far apart "for the moment" and that no one expected all the complex issues to be solved quickly.

Not unexpectedly, Moscow did not report Gromyko's meeting in Geneva with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, and it treated Eban's statements to the press with a mixture of criticism and reserve. PRAVDA complained that Eban interpreted Resolution 242 to suit himself; it observed that Tel Aviv's attitude toward settlement of the Middle East problem was a "source of distress" to those hoping for a constructive outcome of the conference. Soviet media on the 26th, citing alleged Israeli cease-fire violations, military preparations and other "provocations," said such saber-rattling was "hardly the best accompaniment" for peace efforts; the media also professed to see evidence of Israeli foot-dragging in Eban's statement that he would be surprised if the troop disengagement problem was solved in the near future.

GROMYKO SPEECH Gromyko's moderate speech at the conference stressed the need for an Israeli commitment to withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. His remarks on elements of a settlement were in keeping with previous Soviet positions. He called Resolution 242 a "realistic, well-substantiated approach" to a settlement and defined the conference task to be the working out of a specific and realistic program for implementation of this resolution, with the sides' agreement recorded in appropriate

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CONFIDENTIAL

FBIS TRENDS

28 DECEMBER 1973

- 2 -

"binding" documents. If necessary, he said, the Soviet Union was prepared to make "appropriate commitments" with other powers to add weight to the agreements. He touched on possible measures such as reciprocal demilitarized zones and the temporary deployment of "international personnel" in some areas. While he did not specifically refer to opening the Suez Canal, he mentioned the negative consequences suffered by many states as a result of the conflict, and in this context mentioned that a settlement would favorably affect international economic cooperation, trade and shipping.

On the issue of Israel's right to exist, Gromyko contended that this was recognized through the UN decision on the formation of that state and was confirmed by the fact that many states, including the Soviet Union, had established diplomatic relations with Israel. He indicated, as Moscow commentators have done previously, that Israel's Arab neighbors had agreed in effect to the recognition of Israel when they expressed readiness to reach agreement on the basis of Security Council resolutions which recognized the right to existence of all states in the conflict. At another point Gromyko reiterated the Soviet position that the USSR is not hostile to the state of Israel as such, but objects to its policy of annexation and its ignoring of UN resolutions.

On the Palestinian issue, Gromyko said only that justice must be assured and the Palestinians' legitimate rights safeguarded. While he said this problem cannot be resolved without "participation of representatives of the Arab people of Palestine," he avoided spelling out the form of this representation.

U.S., SOVIET ROLES Moscow has on occasion mentioned its role as co-sponsor of the Geneva conference and has hailed the effects of U.S.-Soviet detente in helping pave the way for the talks. At the same time, some slight sniping at the United States has appeared in routine-level Moscow broadcasts in Arabic which again complained that Western media were trying to give American diplomacy credit for the Geneva conference. An Arabic-language broadcast on the 24th noted that Secretary Kissinger had not included any criticism of Israel's refusal to abide by Security Council resolutions in his conference speech. TASS, on the other hand, carried a straightforward summary of Kissinger's conference speech, as well as the speeches of other participants. It also briefly reported the Kissinger-Gromyko meetings in Geneva, Kissinger's departure remarks, and his "optimistic assessment" to newsmen in Washington in which he expressed hope that Egypt and Israel would reach agreement on military disengagement next month.

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FBIS TRENDS

28 DECEMBER 1973

- 3 -

A dispatch by TASS correspondents in Geneva on the 21st credited the convening of the talks to the "active stand and initiative of the two great powers," co-chairmen of the Geneva conference. The dispatch alluded indirectly to the diplomatic risks Moscow was taking in assuming a middleman role. It professed "perplexity" over the allegations of "some Western journalists" that the Soviet Union, to preserve good relations with the United States, intended to exert pressure on the Arabs to abandon their just demands. In the weekly observers roundtable broadcast by Moscow's domestic service on the 23d, IZVESTIYA's Matveyev also called attention to the "change for the better" in Soviet-American relations which made possible the joint approach on a cease-fire and the contacts between the two countries which were "instrumental in preparing the peace conference." Roundtable panelist Zamyatin took up U.S.-Soviet cooperation in another context: In a discussion of U.S. trade legislation "discriminating against the Soviet Union," he pointed out that the United States and the USSR were working together in Geneva for a Middle East settlement and asserted that those who worked against improvement of Soviet-U.S. relations were in effect opposing the settlement jointly pursued by the two countries.

SYRIAN POSITION Moscow has refrained from outright criticism of Syria's refusal to attend the Geneva conference but has shown little inclination to sympathize with it. A Moscow Arabic broadcast on the 20th implied that Syria's absence from the conference represents leaving the ranks of world public opinion ranged against Israel. While noting Syria's "justifiable distrust," the commentary reminded that "it must not be forgotten" that Israel's "aggressive actions" have earned it wide condemnation and isolation, and that in such a position Israel cannot easily overlook world public opinion and has been unable to thwart the conference. The broadcast cited an Egyptian spokesman as saying that Cairo understood Damascus' motives and misgivings and predicting that progress in the talks would open the door to Syrian participation.

Soviet commentator Matveyev, in the domestic service observers roundtable on the 23d, blandly noted Syria's position without defending it: Syria, he said, insists on linking its participation with Israeli withdrawal, and Israel insists that its prisoners of war should be returned first. Seeming to suggest that the issue would eventually be resolved, Matveyev added that Syria's chairs at the conference table remained unoccupied but that Secretary General Waldheim had expressed hope for Syrian participation, depending on progress in the conference. Earlier, Matveyev had commented that "the task of further strengthening the ranks of the Arab countries is still very pressing and topical."

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FBIS TRENDS

28 DECEMBER 1973

- 4 -

An Arabic-language commentary on the 25th implied that Syria was undermining Arab unity by its intransigence. The broadcast asserted that while Syria was not in principle opposed to holding the conference, it had made its participation conditional on an Israeli pledge to withdraw from the occupied territories and recognize Palestinian rights. This, the commentary argued, was essentially the same position held by Egypt and Jordan and thus--by implication--was no reason for Syria to refuse to attend the conference.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FBIS TRENDS

28 DECEMBER 1973

- 5 -

MOSCOW HAILS OIL PRICE HIKE, URGES FURTHER ARAB ACTIONS

Moscow, apparently seeking to maintain credibility with the Arabs while collaborating with the United States in probing for a Middle Eastern peace formula, has adopted an increasingly partisan, anti-Western position in reporting and commenting on the oil issue for Middle Eastern audiences. Thus, in broadcasts beamed to the Middle East Moscow has hailed the oil price hike decided by the OPEC Gulf states at their meeting in Teheran on 23 December and has urged the oil-producing countries to take further actions against the Western oil monopolies. In this connection it has drawn favorable attention to the idea of withdrawing Arab funds from Western banks and to nationalization measures aimed at increasing Arab control over their own oil resources.

The tendentiousness of Moscow's reporting is further illustrated by its failure to acknowledge the decision by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in Kuwait on 25 December to ease their production cuts. A broadcast in Arabic on the 26th pegged to the OPEC meeting merely said the participants had decided to continue the use of the oil weapon.

In a commentary beamed to Iran on 20 December Moscow accurately reported that the Persian Gulf states were preparing to double the posted prices of oil; it went on to suggest that the price hike should be followed by measures aimed at abrogating the various "enslaving commitments" undertaken by the oil-producing countries to the advantage of foreign companies. Other commentaries during the same period drew favorable attention to Iraq's nationalization measures and to the idea of withdrawing Arab funds from Western banks as measures to be considered by the Arab countries in carrying on the struggle for independence. A commentary in Arabic on the 19th, for example, pointed out that "many Arab public figures are calling for the withdrawal of Arab holdings from Western banks," a measure which, the commentary pointed out, "could aggravate the financial crisis in the capitalist world in the same way as the energy crisis." Another commentary in Arabic on the 20th praised the Iraqi example as a model for other Arab states to emulate, and asserted that "nationalization remains the most effective means" in the struggle against Zionism.

Moscow comment following the Teheran decisions similarly suggested that the price hike should be followed by further measures. In a commentary in Persian on 24 December, Moscow suggested that the price hike itself might be too modest and not truly reflective of

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FEIS TRENDS
28 DECEMBER 1973

- 6 -

market demand. It pointed out that in its recent oil auction Iran had sold oil at prices one-third higher than the price fixed by the OPEC Gulf states. It went on to say that the "struggle against oil imperialism" was far from over and predicted "new victories" for the OPEC states in eliminating a "system based on the principles of exploitation."

In the meantime, Moscow has shown sensitivity over reports it has profited from the oil boycott to increase its sales to the West. Referring to such reports in its own comment, Moscow has denounced them as "provocations." Typical was a commentary in Arabic on 27 December which denounced a Kuwaiti newspaper for allegedly repeating Israeli propaganda to the effect that the USSR was selling oil to the Western countries "behind the backs of the Arabs." In a highly defensive tone, the commentary protested that Soviet oil shipments to Europe amounted to no more than four percent of European consumption, and that Soviet oil was exported to the United States only "rarely."

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~