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State Dept. review completed.

GROMYKO'S APPROACH TO THE
MIDDLE EAST AT VIENNA

Gromyko's general posture at Vienna will be that in the wake of the breakdown of the step-by-step approach, the Soviet Union has acted responsibly and positively to get meaningful Geneva negotiations underway.

In fact, the Soviets have been very active over the past six weeks. They have:

- talked in Moscow with senior Iraqi, Syrian and Egyptian leaders,
- received a Palestinian delegation headed by Yasir Arafat,
- dispatched emissaries to meet with top level Israeli officials in Tel Aviv, and
- sent Premier Kosygin to Libya and Tunisia.

Following his meeting with you and before Sadat's meeting with the President, Gromyko will probably visit Cairo.

The Soviets' underlying purpose is to demonstrate that:

- they are genuinely interested in a Middle East settlement and have a constructive role to play,
- the USSR must be granted a permanent role in the Middle East if peace is to come, and

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--responsibility for another war cannot
be laid at Moscow's doorstep.

Gromyko is likely to assert that the Soviet Union is doing its part to pave the way to Geneva and now it is up to the US to move Israel. Gromyko can point to the explicit reference he made to guaranteeing Israel's existence -- clearly words that would not ingratiate Moscow with the Syrians or the Palestinians -- and to the contacts in Tel Aviv.

The evidence suggests that none of the Soviet contacts with the Arabs went smoothly, in part because the Soviets were not telling their interlocutors only what they wanted to hear about Geneva.

--Gromyko may argue that Moscow put in jeopardy its standing with its Arab friends for the sake of real progress on a settlement.

--In his speech on the Warsaw Pact anniversary Wednesday, Gromyko did seem to pull back a bit to a harder line in order to soothe Arab sensitivities.

How much of a contribution the Soviets actually made is a different question.

--Gromyko can claim that he got a commitment from Arafat to go to Geneva,

--but there is no evidence that Arafat compromised on more troublesome points such as folding his delegation into somebody else's,

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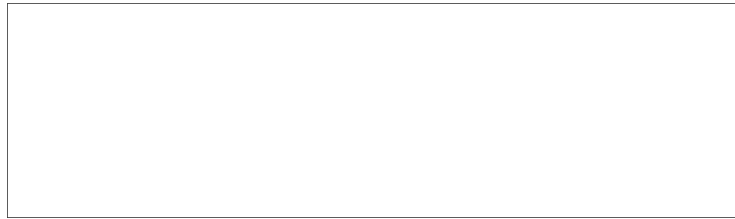


--or agreeing to delay the time when the PLO would formally show up at the Conference.

--Moreover, he apparently rejected Moscow's suggestion that the PLO make some gesture toward recognizing Israel.

It seems clear that even if the Soviets did twist Arafat's arm a bit, they did not get the PLO to do their bidding, and Arafat himself does not feel that he has sufficient political security within the Palestinian movement to make significant concessions.

The Soviets also made no breakthrough on the Palestinian representation issue in their talks with the Syrians and Egyptians.



--We do not know the Soviet reaction, but we think Gromyko recognizes the problems that such a proposal would cause Washington and Tel Aviv.

He may seek to finesse the issue by suggesting that Moscow and Washington publicly pledge that the Palestinian issue will be dealt with at some point in the conference. We doubt, however, that Gromyko has reason to be confident that the Syrians, much less the PLO, will go along with this.



The Soviets clearly foresee the possibility of another round of step-by-step negotiations, and they have even suggested that such negotiations may be necessary if Geneva is not to fail. They would prefer to call them "careful preparations" and they have, of course, sought to get the Arabs, and particularly the Egyptians, to forego dealing with the US alone and to operate under the auspices of the Geneva Conference.

--The Soviet message seems to be that while it may be possible to make progress on part of the problem, this time the Soviet Union should be fully cut in and get due credit for any achievements.

--President Ford's upcoming meetings with Sadat and Rabin and the US "reassessment" of its Middle East policy have aroused new fears in Moscow that the US intends to embark on another round of bilateral talks, using Geneva merely as a figleaf. One senior Soviet official, for example, recently told Ambassador Stoessel that Moscow thought Washington's commitment to Geneva had become "more ambiguous" and Gromyko in his Warsaw Pact speech accused "certain capitals" of wanting to renew step-by-step diplomacy.

While Gromyko is likely to assert that the US must bring Israel around to a "more realistic" attitude on the Palestinians and other issues, it seems likely that he will be concerned that that is precisely what the US intends to do.

--The Soviets clearly do not know what exactly the US policy reassessment portends, but they fear that it means a more Arab-leaning policy.

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--Inevitably this would be at Moscow's expense.

--Gromyko is likely to probe vigorously for "new ideas" coming out of this reassessment, proffering in return some details of the recent Soviet-Arab conversations.

There is no evidence of a change in the Soviet position on other issues.

--They continue to argue for a return to the 1967 borders, although in private they do not foreclose the possibility of minor changes.

--A Palestinian state that included the West Bank and Gaza remains a key element of the Soviet position.

Gromyko will probably be relatively flexible on the timing and agenda for Geneva. At this point, it is more important to Moscow that Geneva be held than that it achieve immediate progress.

--Several Soviets have spoken unofficially in terms of a short Geneva session in early summer, with more serious discussions put off till fall.

--They may suggest that working groups be formed at such an opening session to explore possible agenda items such as a Palestinian state, boundaries, and guarantees.

--Gromyko may suggest that Syrian renewal of UNDOF later this month will depend on a firm US and Soviet pronouncement on Geneva.

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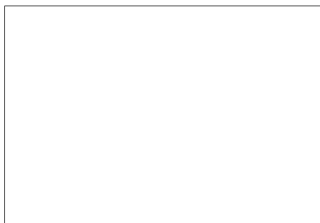
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