



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

1974-6-8, Assad, Inkenian, S
"Al-Ahram"

July 8, 1974

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To: The Secretary

From: NEA - Alfred L. Atherton, Jr. *AL*President Asad's July 5 Interview in "Al Ahram"

Cairo's Al Ahram carried an interview with President Asad on July 5 which gives some useful insights into Asad's thinking. The following are the most noteworthy points:

1. Defending Disengagement:

Asad stressed Syrian achievements in disengagement with Israel, drawing particular attention to the fact that the Syrian flag again flies over Kuneitra and that Syria has recovered "650 square kilometers of occupied land." He described the disengagement agreement as the first step on the way to a total Israeli withdrawal and the guaranteeing of the Palestinian people's rights. He said the war of attrition waged by Syria was an important factor in bringing about Israeli withdrawal.

2. The Damascus-Cairo Axis:

Throughout the interview, Asad emphasized close Syrian-Egyptian coordination on policy and strategy -- "harmony between Damascus and Cairo is fundamental... No one can doubt this fact. Contact is constant between the two capitals..." While this may be partially attributable to the Egyptian audience for the interview, the recurring stress on Syrian-Egyptian coordination also suggests that Syria does indeed attach considerable importance to Egyptian views and that Asad realizes that there is little that he can accomplish without Egypt's support.

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3. Reconvening at Geneva:

Asad called for a unified Arab position for the reconvening of the Geneva Conference, which he said would take place in September. He added that Egypt and Syria must be prepared to return to the field of battle if Israel seeks to temporize at Geneva ("We have to be vigilant so as not to let the Israeli enemy transform Geneva into a means for gaining time and overcoming the accomplishments which Egypt and Syria realized in the October War.").

4. Syria and the U.S.:

Asad attributed the U.S. initiative in the Middle East to Arab achievements in the October War which compelled the United States to reassess its previous policy in the area. But, he said, the U.S. has not gone far enough. (The U.S. position "has not yet reached the extent that is required and called for by a serious endeavor to contribute to the realization of a just peace.") The Arabs, said Asad, must exert efforts to develop further the American position; the United States must strengthen its commitment to work for world peace. Asad concluded his observations on the American role by noting that "we have great bounds of hope in the U.S. position." Asad said that a high-level Syrian personality would soon visit the United States to continue the discussion on the area situation. Asked whether the discussions would focus mainly on economic cooperation, he replied that they might include economic cooperation but would center primarily on the basic issues -- occupation of Arab lands and the rights of the Palestinian people.

5. The USSR:

Asad said the Soviets should participate in the efforts for a just peace in the Middle East. Although Syrian-Soviet friendship is an established fact, this should not preclude Syria from winning new friends in the world. Noting that the United States had recently waived repayment of half a billion dollars worth of arms provided to Israel, Asad hinted that Soviet failure to do the same for Syria might create obstacles in the way of Syrian-Soviet friendship.

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