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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

1974-1-20, Assad, Kissinger, Khaddam

PARTICIPANTS:

Abd Al-Halim Khaddam, Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister of Syria
Dr. Mohammed Zakaria Isma'il, Asst. Foreign Minister
Dr. Abd Alaghani Al-Rafi'i, Assistant Foreign Minister
Adnan Umran, Director of Private Officer, Foreign Ministry
Dr. Fayez Al-Nahlawi, Director of Protocol, Foreign Ministry
Dr. Sabah Kabbani, Director of the Dept. of Information, Foreign Ministry
Hammad Shufi, Director of the American Department
Daj' Allah Fattal, Director of Dept. of International Organizations and Conferences
Misbah Dalati, Assistant Director of Protocol

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
Ellsworth Bunker, Ambassador at Large
Joseph J. Sisco, Asst. Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Carlyle E. Maw, Legal Advisor, Dept. of State
Thomas Scotes, Head of US Interests Section, Damascus
Mr. Alfred L. Atherton, Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Mr. Harold H. Saunders, NSC Senior Staff
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff *PR*

DATE AND TIME:

Sunday, January 20, 1974
11:50 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.

PLACE:

Guest Palace, Ar-Rawdah
Damascus, Syria

Secretary Kissinger: We are ready to sign the agreement here!

Minister Khaddam: We are ready if you are.

Secretary Kissinger: We want to express appreciation for the way our Interests Section has been handled.

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Minister Khaddam: We have the common desire to improve our relations.

Secretary Kissinger: [To Sisco] The Foreign Minister told me that Syria would send a few diplomats to Washington, and I told him they would be treated with the same courtesy but with less efficiency. [Laughter]

Minister Khaddam: We will exert our efforts to help them be more efficient.

Secretary Kissinger: When I became Secretary of State, a friend of mine sent me a letter of congratulations. He received a reply thanking him for his helpful suggestions on the Middle East problem. [Laughter] So if you ever receive a note from us on Vietnam, send it back to us.

Minister Khaddam: It is essential to hear the point of view of others; it is of benefit even if it is not worthwhile.

Secretary Kissinger: If it comes from Hanoi, you can do what you want. If it comes from Washington, it is an accident.

Minister Khaddam: With Jordan, are/any steps toward Israeli withdrawal? there

Secretary Kissinger: We will take steps to encourage talks to get started between Israel and Jordan along the same lines as between Israel and Egypt. We will strongly encourage it, which is a nice way of saying we will exercise pressure to bring it about.

Minister Khaddam: What about the Palestinians?

Secretary Kissinger: I already told your President that we recognize there is a legitimate and important role for the Panestinians.

Minister Khaddam: Will the Jordanian talks start soon?

Secretary Kissinger: There is no date yet set. In fact, Israel has not yet agreed to it. Israel is giving preferential treatment to Syria [Laughter], based on the long history of affection that exists.

Minister Khaddam: The affection is reciprocal.

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Secretary Kissinger: Israel has agreed to discuss with Syria some framework.

What are your relations with Jordan, Mr. Foreign Minister? I am never fully clear.

Minister Khaddam: Our relations are normal with all countries. Notwithstanding any problems, our relations are good.

Secretary Kissinger: We will work on our relations in that spirit.

Minister Khaddam: This is good.

Secretary Kissinger: Next time your Vice Minister comes to America, he will even say a sentence or two, and not just listen. When I said "good afternoon," he said, "I'll report that to my President." [Laughter]

Minister Khaddam: Dr. Ismail was carrying out orders precisely.

Secretary Kissinger: He never replied, either [Laughter]. [To Dr. Ismail] You will give me the answer to last year's conversation.

Minister Khaddam: It is natural, when there is a lack of contacts, to have some caution even when exchanging greetings.

Secretary Kissinger: Seriously, we appreciate the gesture of Dr. Ismail coming to Washington. That is more important than anything that was said.

Minister Khaddam: That is clear,

Secretary Kissinger: That was an important step.

Minister Khaddam: In fact, when Dr. Ismail went to America, we had in mind a framework of establishing relations. In fact, your efforts and your visits to Syria were important factors in establishing relations. Especially the Geneva Conference will be the equivalent of Dr. Kissinger!

Secretary Kissinger: Whether you participate or not, we will always keep you fully informed and always will make an effort so that Syria can have equal participation and equal benefit.

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Minister Khaddam: We are not going to the Conference -- not because we want to go but as a matter of principle. [Sic] We agreed to Resolution 338 and we know the Conference was a means to implement it. Of course, there is a difference between rejection of Conference as a principle and refusing to attend.

Secretary Kissinger: You accept the Conference in principle but didn't want to attend it?

Minister Khaddam: Yes. But because of certain circumstances at hand that didn't leave us at ease.

Secretary Kissinger: We understood your position, and we think that as the negotiations develop, and as you see the negotiations more clearly, you can see at each stage and you should be given the opportunity at each stage to join.

Minister Khaddam: And when will the second stage be held?

Secretary Kissinger: Well, we have to discuss this. We think we should complete the disengagement stage and then have the second stage of the Conference. But we don't believe the process should stop at the disengagement stage; it must continue, and we will use our influence that it should continue.

Minister Khaddam: If this process stops with disengagement, this means it contradicts Resolution 338 and any trend towards peace.

Secretary Kissinger: It will not stop with disengagement. And that is our determination. And we even insisted in the disengagement agreement that it will not stop.

Minister Khaddam: The agreement itself mentions this.

Secretary Kissinger: Yes, and it mentions 338.

Minister Khaddam: This is in the agreement signed by the Chiefs of Staff of Egypt and Israel, not in the agreement signed by Golda Meir and President Sadat.

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Secretary Kissinger: Yes, in the agreement. But Golda Meir has acknowledged it publicly, and our President said it publicly when he announced the agreement. And I will have a press conference when I get back to Washington and I will say it again publicly. Because every month I have to spend three days in Washington before I come back here! I've spent more time in Cairo than in Washington since becoming Secretary of State.

Minister Khaddam: It seems the climate of Cairo suits you.

Secretary Kissinger: It is warmer in Cairo.

Minister Khaddam: There is no Congress in Cairo to disturb you.

Secretary Kissinger: And they have no energy problem [Laughter].

[At 12:07 p. m. the meeting broke up. Secretary Kissinger engaged the Foreign Minister in a few minutes of private conversation, as follows:]

Secretary Kissinger: There is no reason why Arab countries and U. S. should be in conflict. There are no conflicting interests between the U. S. and Arab countries.

Minister Khaddam: The volume of contacts between the U. S. and Arab countries is considerable. Presumably the relations between Arab states and the U. S. should be the same volume as the volume of contacts.

If the U. S. should study objectively the situation, it will see that the Arabs are not responsible. There are always strong and weak persons and differences. Always the right is on the side of the strong, because he is strong.

Secretary Kissinger: Not all the weak are necessarily innocent!

Minister Khaddam: If they are not innocent, they are not the aggressor for sure. Because they have no ambitions to attack. Anyway, what we do is to see what damage might come to our country. If you have time, you should go see the children who were killed or mutilated because of the bombing of civilian targets. If we take such a child, how do we remove the feelings from his head about the U. S. and its policy which is working against the Arabs? All we were asking for is justice.

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We are certain that your effort will yield positive results. The essential thing is that you have put yourself inside the problem. This is the essential thing.

Secretary Kissinger: It is just the beginning.

[The conversation ended, and Foreign Minister Khaddam escorted Secretary Kissinger to the Presidential Palace for the meeting with President Hafiz al-Asad.]

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