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1974-4-11, Boumediene, Nixon, Meeting

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

Houari Boumediene, President of Revolutionary Council, Algiers
Abelaziz Bouteflika, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Idriss Djazani, Economic Counselor

President Nixon

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Maj/Gen Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Camille Nowfel, OPL/LS, interpreter

TIME AND DATE:

Thursday, April 11, 1974
11:00 a. m.

PLACE:

The Oval Office
The White House

President: I saw Giscard in Paris.

Boumediene: Why him?

President: He was at the reception. The only meeting I had was with Pöher.

Boumediene: All are here in this country.

President: I want to wish you a warm welcome. As you know, we don't have diplomatic relations, but as I look around the world, we have better relations with you than with some countries with whom we have official relations.

Boumediene: They have improved since 1967.

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President: I have tried since 1967 to improve relations with those countries who felt it necessary to sever relations in 1967, whether formal as in the case of Egypt or informal as Algeria. We welcome the chance to improve our relations because the destinies of our people are tied in many ways.

Boumediene: We agree that our relations are good although we don't have diplomatic relations. We distinguish between that which is permanent and that which is formal and subject to temporary circumstances. We didn't sever relations because of Algerian-US relations, but we found ourselves in different circumstances. I discussed this with Dr. Kissinger frankly and told him that many Arabs hold him responsible for what happened in that part of the world. But there is no Algerian-US problem, and there won't be in the future. This is as far as diplomatic relations are concerned. We trust there will come a time when this situation can be positively resolved. If Secretary Kissinger was capable of bringing contradictions together around the table, it may be that the initiation of negotiations between the sides could be the occasion for resumption of relations between us.

As far as my situation is concerned, so far as I am concerned and the Algerian people, I could do it tomorrow. But we want to stay with our Syrian brothers for the moment.

President: The timing is up to you; the important thing is that we can talk to each other.

Boumediene: We are in favor of a dialogue.

President: We think Algeria has a big role to play in a just peace, and a particular role in the Syrian-Israeli disengagement. You may possibly be able to do more there if you don't have relations.

Boumediene: As regards the problem of Israeli prisoners, I don't talk to Asad.

Kissinger: Without Boumediene, it would not have happened. I know that from Asad.

President: That makes my point. In your neutral role, you have a greater role with the Syrians than we or perhaps than you would have if you had relations with us. The important thing to realize is that in terms of a permanent peace we have a long way to go. We have to have talks with the Israelis and with Israelis neighbors. I don't ask

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you to take any position contrary to your principles. But we have only a just peace in mind, and where our actions are consistent with your principles, we would appreciate your help.

Boumediene: Our policy can be summed up in one sentence. We support whatever Egypt, Syria and Palestine can accept. We don't want to be more Egyptian than Egypt, more Syrian than Syria, or more Palestinian than the Palestinians. We have followed this course since 1967 since we thought that a solution was not possible. We thought the United States was aligned with Israel.

President: It was. Speaking in this vein, American policy was tied closely to Israel. Our failure was not in talking and working with Israel's neighbors. I told Israel that because we are a friend of Egypt, it doesn't mean we are not a friend of Israel. It is better that we be their friend than only the Soviets.

Boumediene: I want the President to be very frank--and I will be frank also. What is a just and fair solution in your view?

President: It has many parts and it must be one that both sides can accept. It is impossible to return to the status quo ante, because Israel's neighbors won't accept that. It is unrealistic for Israel's neighbors to insist on any settlement which would jeopardize Israel's continued security. As far as we are concerned, we are not here as lawyers for Israel; we want to mediate between Israel and its neighbors--not exclusively, but we have a major role, because we are the only ones who can influence Israel. Being honest and frank, I cannot draw the line as to how we solve border problems of Jerusalem, but we are totally committed, as I told Sadat, to a permanent peace. I am not dodging the question, but I don't want to commit myself to anything I cannot deliver. But with the Kissinger diplomacy, we are committed to a solution. As you know, in diplomatic language, we say we will work out a solution in accordance with Resolutions 242 and 338. They don't bite the bullet on the question of who will have what piece of sand, but we will work in the spirit of those resolutions.

The reason I am confident we can reach a settlement is that after 1967 both sides dug in and had no communication. The American position was that we cannot move Israel, so we would just provide arms and hope the war doesn't resume. That failed last October.

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I know it would please some if I said we would push Israel into the sea--as Nasser said when I saw him--or that we would force Israel to accede to any demand, but I couldn't deliver that. I think we must be honest with each other in the interest of peace.

We are committed to a just peace which both sides can accept, and to rectify the injustices built into it that are unacceptable to that part of the world.

Boumediene Nasser didn't really believe in that. Of course we can't hope to have a total solution, but what one refers to in Arabic political language as "a minimum solution." According to my information, that includes Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territory and recognition of the rights of the Palestinians, and a third very sensitive issue--the question of the city of Jerusalem. If this minimum can't be implemented, perhaps there might be a truce--long or short--but not a true peace, because the question of Palestine would not be resolved.

As I told Dr. Kissinger, why don't you get directly in touch with the Palestinians? It would close the door on demagogic trickiness and be helpful.

Kissinger: We have been in touch, two times.

Boumediene: At a modest level.

Kissinger: As you instructed the President, we thought we should get Syrian disengagement done first. With all the Palestinian groups, we are not confident that secrecy could be ensured. If this became known, Israel would be upset, which would only delay disengagement. Following that, however, we are prepared to move to a higher level.

President: We will have Dr. Kissinger move step by step. I realize this does not give an instant solution. Our people want instant solutions--the differences are so great that they must be removed slowly. Each step creates momentum which makes the next step more attainable. But such a step is more difficult--the Palestinians--with Jerusalem the hardest of all. But we would like your views on this problem.

Boumediene: There is a question, Mr. President, and this may relate precisely to Syria. In my conversation with President Asad, what was in his mind was not so much a line of demarcation but the commit-

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ment of the US that the Golan Heights would be returned to Syria.

President: I have been there--I don't know why anyone wants it. Now if it were Algerian territory . . . that would be worth having.

I value this talk very much. It is important not only with respect to the world views, but from the perspective of raw materials, consumers and producers. My point is the goal and process. The goal is a peace which both sides wish to keep, so it must be fair to both. Having studied that, I note, in relation to the PRC, Soviet Union, and our friends--whenever there are differences, they can be papered over. We will push where we could be helpful. I am encouraged by developments on the Egyptian front, on the Syrian front, and with your help when you feel you can give it, we think we can succeed.

Kissinger: And we publicly dissociated ourselves from the positions stated by Israeli leaders on the Golan.

Bourmediene: Now that I am in Washington to meet you, I have a question, and you raised it before I could--whether it is possible to consider whether there is a serious US policy as to the fundamentals of the problem. We have followed your China, Soviet and Middle East initiatives. I would like some more light on these, and I would like your ideas on a question having to do with my country, a non-aligned state endeavoring to consolidate its independence. I refer to the European initiative towards the Arabs. What is your guideline on this question?

President: Our concern at the European initiative was that we thought all the consumers should consult with each other about a problem which had come up over oil. Our European allies had a different approach, and we disagreed. But our policy on the nonaligned nations is this: whether rich (like Algeria) or poor (like Egypt), we think each should go its way. We don't object to nonalignment, and we will try to be as cooperative as possible, not only in providing a market but also in reciprocation by providing our abundant technical assistance and other assistance when appropriate to do so.

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I know the President has frankly expressed his views about nationalization of resources. I respect that view. All we expect is fair treatment for American companies. While the eyes of the world have been on our relations with superpowers, I have enormous interest in the situation of the two billion people in the Third World. I know that each must seek its own destiny. The United States seeks no special privilege, only fairness and reciprocity. We want you to do well.

I know as you look down the path of history 50 to 100 years, peace will be seriously jeopardized if two-thirds of the world lives below the poverty line. It can't be changed overnight, but the United States has been generous in the past and will be so in the future. Unlike others, we have no designs on you. I know we make a popular whipping boy, and we don't object to rhetoric. What is important is to know that we stand by our allies, we seek negotiations with our adversaries, and we cooperate with those nations which are on their way up. We are not interested only in China and the Soviet Union because they are big, or Latin America because it is close. I have been to Africa and Asia. Those people are destined to play a big role in the world. We need to establish close and cooperative relations with these people.

Boumediene: We don't have any problems outstanding with American companies. People are afraid of the power of the United States, I, of course, am not talking about the Algerian people.

President: We will meet you again informally this evening and we will have a chance to talk even more.

Boumediene: We should always be rational.

President: Speaking of being afraid of the United States, when I have been in small Communist countries, none of them had fear of us.

Boumediene: They also fear the Soviet Union. They fear you are about to divide up the world. This is not Chinese influence on my speech.

Kissinger: Yes, he has just been in China.

President: We can talk about China tonight.

Boumediene: I would welcome that.

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