

DEPARTMENT OF STATE



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EXCHANGE OF TOASTS BY
THE HONORABLE HENRY A. KISSINGER
SECRETARY OF STATE
AND THE HONORABLE HABIB CHATTI
FOREIGN MINISTER OF TUNISIA
AT A LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE SECRETARY
IN HONOR OF HEADS OF DELEGATIONS
AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES OF ARAB STATES
UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 29, 1976

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished colleagues, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

Despite this imposing podium, I am going to speak to you informally, preemptively, because I know that my distinguished friend the Foreign Minister of Tunisia is preparing an all-out assault on me. [Laughter]

This is the fourth time I have met with you since I've become Secretary of State. I have just returned from Africa, and I don't want to say anything insulting to my Arab friends; but I must tell you that compared to the passions that exist in Africa the Middle East has almost Anglo-Saxon restraint. [Laughter]

I have visited many of your countries, and I know we cannot compete in hospitality. With respect to hospitality, we are the underdeveloped region compared to our experiences in the Middle East. But as I look back over the four meetings we have had, the first time we assembled here everyone wanted to know with great suspicion what we were going to do. And I said all the conventional things about Security Council Resolution 242.

You saw to it that soon after, another Security Council Resolution became necessary. But as I look back, I feel that despite all the ups and downs very great progress has been made toward peace in the Middle East. First of all, the traditional friendship between the United States and the countries of the Arab world has been restored with respect to at least very many of them. And we have had an opportunity to make a contribution to three agreements that have begun the difficult and complicated process toward peace.

When I met with you last year, I pointed out four principles which I would like to repeat today.

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The first was that the only durable solution is a just and comprehensive peace and that the United States remains committed to that objective.

Second, we recognize that peace in the Middle East is not divisible. Each nation and people which is party to the Arab-Israeli problem must find a fair satisfaction of its legitimate interests.

Third, it is in the nature of movement toward peace that all the key problems must be dealt with in a balanced way. The questions of territory, borders, military deployments, cannot be dealt with unless at the same time political and economic settlement are given equal attention.

And fourth, any step taken must be judged in the light of the alternatives that are available.

Now, we had proceeded on a step-by-step basis, but we believe that now conditions exist that make comprehensive solutions the most useful approach. And we believe also that conditions are coming about in which the search for peace can be resumed with energy and with conviction. And I want to assure you that the United States remains committed to this objective and that we hope that significant progress can be made in the months ahead.

Since we last met also, there has been the tragedy of the civil war in Lebanon. As we stated on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Lebanese President, the United States is committed to an independent, sovereign and united Lebanon. We do not favor partition. We favor an opportunity for the people of Lebanon to live their own lives and to determine their own destinies. And we will be available to give any advice and assistance that the parties may request of us.

We can only express the hope now that this tragic conflict will soon come to an end because it is the unity of the Arab nations that is an essential precondition to an effective policy of peace in the Middle East. And if we are to achieve the objectives of a just and lasting peace about which we have spoken so long, which we must strive to implement, then unity among the Arab nations is of the greatest importance.

Our countries are also concerned with many economic problems and the relations between the developed and developing nations. The countries of the Middle East are playing an increasingly important role. The oil-producing countries, because of their wealth and because of their influence on the global economy, have an unparalleled responsibility which must be exercised for the benefit of all. We are discussing it with them and other countries of the Middle East in the United Nations, in the Conference for International Economic Cooperation; and we are doing so with the attitude that the dialogue between the industrial and the developing world is perhaps the deepest challenge of our time.

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We must solve it cooperatively. We cannot create a world community in which one party is condemned to permanent poverty. We cannot create a world community either through tactics of confrontation. So the United States is prepared to work cooperatively and constructively with the nations assembled in this room for the common benefit of all mankind.

Now, distinguished friends, let me conclude by saying that I know that we have not yet travelled except the beginning of the road toward peace. But I also believe that we have created conditions from which the rest of the distance can be travelled if we work on it with conviction and with confidence in each other.

I have personally valued the associations that we been formed with so many of you over the years. And I am grateful that you have done me the honor of joining me again for this meeting. So I would like to propose a toast to peace in the Middle East and to the lasting friendship between the peoples of the Middle East and the American people.

FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI: Mr. Secretary, I would like to thank you profusely in my name on behalf of my colleagues assembled here for the opportunity you have been affording us every year to meet with you and to discuss things of primary interest to the Arab world and also to our countries things of mutual interest between your country and the rest of the world.

You have mentioned, Mr. Secretary, that this is the fourth time that we meet here. We have the pleasure of meeting with you. And you also added that since that first meeting with you we have covered quite an appreciable distance on the way toward the common goal.

I would like to assure you that we agree completely with this viewpoint that you have expressed because we also believe that the Middle East problem — the Middle East cause — and the Palestinian cause have moved forward during these last two years.

It has become, as they say in French, *Cq va, sans dire* — that is, not open to any questioning — that the rights of the Palestinian people are no longer a subject for debate or questioning. And it goes without saying that it is not possible for peace to return to the Middle East without the solving of the Palestine question.

And it has become equally axiomatic that we cannot solve the problem of the Middle East. Peace would not go back to the Middle East unless we solve the Palestine question.

That is why we think that circumstances are still opportune for us to try to restore peace to the Middle East by following the path of the solution of the Palestine question.

At about this time last year, we had great hopes that we would be well on the way to peace — going back to the Middle East — as a result of what developments that obtained then were obtained with the agreement in the Sinai.

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We believed that after the Sinai Agreement steps would be taken immediately moving into the area of the Golan Heights and also the Western Bank.

We had also hoped that with those things in mind — the Sinai Agreement and what we thought would take place — we would be travelling a long way toward the ultimate goal of the Middle East — a comprehensible solution. But, unfortunately, came 1976, when nothing happened, to our knowledge; and we seem to have bogged down.

We, therefore, are witnessing something rather strange and contradictory. On the one hand, we find that circumstances are opportune — are available, are conducive to movement — and on the other hand, we see that we are not moving.

In actual fact, there has never come a time in the past which was better, more opportune — more conducive to actions and solutions — than what we are witnessing now. But I have to add that, unfortunately, we are not seeing any progress.

Mr. Secretary of State, we are very pleased to hear you express, personally, the fact that the United States is willing — determined to pursue its efforts to reach a comprehensive solution to the problem in the Middle East.

We hope that your preoccupation with Africa will not sway you away completely from the area of the Middle East [laughter] — that you would still at the same time perhaps find time to concentrate on this thorny problem and do something about it.

It is true, as you said, that the situation in Africa is serious. But might we add that the situation in the Middle East is, if anything, even more serious.

I would like to be very frank with you, Mr. Secretary, and say — or express my own conviction — that it is within the capabilities of the United States of America to bring about more pressure to contribute even more to the possible solution of the Middle East by bringing about more pressure on Israel.

As you know, Mr. Secretary, the Arabs have shown their willingness, their desire, for a peaceful solution — have given the reasonable guarantees that would make that solution possible. But, as you also know, the Israeli side has yet to come up with something comparable.

When it comes to the economic field and given the economic situations that the Arab countries find themselves in, it is also a fact that the Arab countries with the means and capabilities — the economic and financial — have shown that they also have the interests of the developing nations at heart and have done a lot towards that goal.

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And I am sure I am expressing the opinion of all representatives here — my colleagues representing the various countries — when I say that their countries are all ready to pursue their efforts towards the industrial nations in this regard.

As to the Lebanese tragedy to which you referred, we share with you the hope, the desire, the prayer, that things would be solved quickly. An also I would like to add that the Arab League has also striven very hard — has done its best toward that solution. But, unfortunately, so far we don't see it.

The Lebanese problem, in our opinion, is, so to speak, the result of the Palestinian question — the Palestinian problem — which seems to be the one factor dividing the ranks of the Arabs.

We would like, here and now, to record our appreciation for your expression of the fact that the unity of Lebanon, the integrity of Lebanon, should not be divided. It so happens that the Arab countries, the community of Arab nations, have for some time come to this conclusion also.

Mr. Secretary of State, let us put it this way: The horizons for Arab-American friendship are completely wide open. These vast horizons are based almost solely — but certainly in the greatest measure — on the cooperation between the United States of America and the Arab countries working toward that eventual goal, the pressing goal of peace in the Middle East.

So, if we work together and cooperate seriously, earnestly, toward attaining that goal and fast — namely, the goal of bringing peace to the Middle East — then the avenues for American-Lebanese friendship would be ever so much greater.

Permit me to propose a toast for the Arab-American friendship.

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