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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: 17 October 1977

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SUBJECT: The Middle East
No. I of IV

PARTICIPANTS: US USSR
The Secretary Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin
Marshall D. Shulman

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Dobrynin came in Monday afternoon, October 17, 1977, at the Secretary's request. The meeting lasted from 4:00 to approximately 6:15.

I. Middle East - The Secretary asked Ambassador Dobrynin whether there was any Soviet reaction to the US/Israeli working paper. Dobrynin said that he had gone over the text. He asked if it was really necessary to have this paper and said it made matters more difficult with the PLO. He said the PLO had inquired whether the working draft superseded the joint Soviet/American declaration and had been told that it did not. The Secretary reported that the preliminary response from Egypt and Jordan had been positive and from Syria "reserved"--a word suggested by Dobrynin. The Secretary said there were two main questions: How the Palestinians were to be represented and how the working groups were to be organized. Dobrynin asked what role the Soviet Union would have in the six working groups listed in the working paper. The Secretary said that he had recommended that the two co-chairmen participate in each of the working groups and Dobrynin seemed reassured on this point. The Secretary recalled that in 1974 both the US and the Soviet Union had participated in the military working group and that we could build on this precedent. (The Secretary noted that in 1975 the Soviets had not participated in the military working group at their own choosing.)

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The chairmanship of the conference was discussed; it was agreed that it would be better to have the co-chairmen rotate in the chair than to have the Secretary General preside.

Returning to the Israeli statement, Dobrynin asked whether it implied that only West Bank Palestinians would be represented. The Secretary replied that the question of Palestinian representation should be solved in a practical way and should be developed with specific names. We should work together with the parties to find names that would be acceptable both to the Arabs and the Israelis.

The Secretary then raised the question of how to go about initiating a public call for the convening of the conference. Provisionally, it was agreed that it should be done the same way as last time, with identical letters from the co-chairmen to the Secretary General requesting that he convene the conference, and that one possibility would be one invitation to the Arab League for the Arab participants. The Secretary noted that Lebanon had asked to participate and that the other parties had expressed no objection to this.

The Secretary said that there could be no guarantees at this point on the outcome of the conference on specific substantive matters such as a Palestinian state. Dobrynin probed about the extent of the US determination, despite acute domestic pressure, to see that the legitimate interests of the Palestinians were met. The Secretary replied that this was the American determination and he had, in his nationwide television program the preceding day, repeated the US commitment to a Palestinian homeland, but he said the first step is to get the people to the table and other matters can follow. He thought that once the conference began, world pressure would help to bring about a resolution of the Palestinian problem. Dobrynin said the Soviet Union did not yet have a full indication of the Syrian attitude, but would keep the US advised. The Secretary expressed the hope that if the Syrians come along, the other two Arab states would also come along. Dobrynin expressed the opinion that the Syrians are feeling a little guilty about the events in Lebanon.

Dobrynin then inquired about the possibility of an Arab summit in November and the Secretary replied that there would be a meeting on November 12. It was not yet definite if this would include the heads of state, but the Secretary thought that there might be a mini-summit of the confrontation states within the next ten days.