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On Soviet Policy following the Israeli Aggression in the Middle East

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Summary:

Polish document describing the speech given by Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) on the actions undertaken by the Soviet leadership before and during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Brezhnev tells the CC CPSU plenum that the Arab struggle in the Middle East has both a class struggle and a national liberation dimension. Brezhnev blames Israeli aggression for the start of the war and Arab blunders and low morale for the humiliating defeat of the UAR forces. Given the success of the Israeli Defense Forces, the Soviets were forced to consider diplomatic and political methods for saving the Arab leadership. When Israeli forces did not stop their aggression against Syria, threatening to overrun the Syrian capital of Damascus, Brezhnev claims tells the CC CPSU that Soviet leadership warned the Americans that the Soviet Army would have to intervene and, at the same time, threatened the Israeli that any further ...

Original Language:

Polish

Contents:

- English Translation

“ON SOVIET POLICY FOLLOWING THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION
IN THE MIDDLE EAST”

Report By Comrade L. I. Brezhnev To The Plenum Of The Central Committee Of The Soviet Communist Party,
Held On 20 June 1967

Comrades, the Politburo has found it necessary to report in detail to members of the CC CPSU on the dramatic events resulting from the Israeli acts of aggression against Arab countries, on the policy we pursued throughout these events, and on measures we undertook to avert aggression and to assist the United Arab Republic (UAR) [Egypt], Syria and other Arab countries. Undoubtedly, this current Middle East crisis could be viewed as a crucial moment in the development of international relations...Supported by the well-known imperialist circles of the West, and first and foremost by the US, this instance of Israeli aggression is yet another link in the chain of the bellicose policy of international imperialism. Headed by the US, the most reactionary and militant circles of imperialism have been unrelentingly striving to reset the global balance of power, to suppress peoples' struggle for national liberation, to block their march on the road to social progress and to systematically fan international tensions.... We have come across manifestations of this policy elsewhere: first of all in Vietnam, then in Europe (suffice it to recall the Fascist coup in Greece), Africa and Latin America... Held in December 1966, the plenary session of the CC CPSU approved the Politburo's proposed course of action. Its resolution stressed the need to support peoples who were struggling against colonial oppression...and to unswervingly pursue a policy course designed to strengthen the alliance between different forces of national liberation...

Only one conclusion can be drawn from any general appraisal of recent events in the Middle East. It was an attempt by American-led Western imperialism to suppress progressive Arab regimes which had taken the path to socio-political transformation. It was an attempt to reverse the general direction of political development in Middle Eastern countries. It was a protracted attempt to subjugate this region of the world... Now imperialist propaganda attempts to conceal the real causes of this conflict and confuse public opinion in the world at all costs...Single-mindedly, it has been argued that the Six Day War resulted from the protracted Arab-Jewish quarrel. Obviously, this version of events is a crude distortion of the real state of affairs. It aims to dismiss the existing element of class struggle in the Arab-Israeli conflict, to disguise the fact that the conflict is between the oppressive forces of imperialism and the forces of national liberation, democracy and social progress...Now it has become completely clear that the imperialist powers, and first and foremost the US, targeted their weapons against one of the most significant sectors of the national liberation movement, namely the Arab world...

Israeli ruling circles and the Western powers blamed the USSR for encouraging its Arab clients to threaten Israel with an act of aggression. Comrades, needless to say this is a complete falsification of the objectives of Soviet diplomacy. We have helped these progressive regimes in the Arab world and will continue to help them in the future. We have supported them not in the least because we share their view that Israel must be destroyed. These progressive regimes need our help to consolidate their independence and defend themselves against imperialist aggression...We help them because they have chosen the path to Socialist progress and could exert great influence upon other Arab countries, many Afro-Asian nations and the entire national liberation movement... Any suppression of these progressive regimes in the Arab world might have caused a serious blow to the anti-colonialist front in this region of the world. Therefore, the Politburo of CC CPSU decided immediately to render active and firm support to the Arabs. First and foremost, our task has been to put out the flame of war unleashed by the aggressors, to stave off any potential defeat of Arab nations and at the same time, to avoid any deterioration of the Middle Eastern conflict to all-out war between the superpowers...

Now, I would like to review the course of events in the Middle East and measures taken by us in order to help the UAR, Syria and other Arab nations to foil Israel's plans for aggression. During recent months we monitored developments in the Middle East with special attention...There were

many signs which led us to the conclusion that a serious international crisis was in the making, and that Israel had prepared an act of aggression together with Western powers. In mid-May – I am stressing this fact – we received reports that Israel was preparing a military attack against Syria and other Arab countries...Subsequently, the Politburo decided to warn both the UAR and the Syrian government. In turn, these two governments informed us that they were taking necessary steps and that their armed forces had been put on full alert...I must tell you that the UAR government took a number of ill-advised steps. Surprisingly, on 19 May 1967 the UAR leadership demanded that UN peacekeepers be withdrawn from the cease-fire line...As explained to us by UAR Vice-President Marshall Amr, the mobilization of Egyptian armed forces on Israel's southern border was designed to deter Israel from concentrating troops on the Syrian border and conducting military operations against Syria...On 22 May 1967 President [Gamal Abd el-] Nasser informed the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, Sergei A. Vinogradov that the situation in the Middle East was rapidly improving thanks to decisive steps taken by the UAR. Nasser expressed his determination to assist Syria if attacked by Israel. He informed our ambassador that the UAR Government had blocked the Gulf of Aqaba to the passage of Israeli ships and other vessels carrying strategic goods to Israel. Unfortunately, our Government had not been informed beforehand of this action which had serious repercussions...

The situation had become rather complicated...Under these circumstances, the only correct course of action left was to take some measures to foil Israel's aggressive plans. Therefore, it was necessary to urge both the Egyptians and the Syrians to act cautiously and avoid further provocation which might spur Israel to wage war...

The Soviet Union spared no effort in helping Arab nations to formulate a correct policy course with regard to the ensuing Middle East crisis. We warned the Arabs that their belligerent rhetoric and calls for a war of annihilation against Israel might set fire across the Middle East...During a CC CPSU meeting, we asked the Syrian President Atassi, then on a visit to Moscow, to be more alert to imperialist plots and at the same time, to avoid steps that might be used as a pretext for a war by the militarist and pro-imperialist circles in Israel. We told President [Nur-ad-Din] Atassi that any armed conflict might harm Arab countries in the long run.... In a letter conveyed to President Nasser on 26 May 1967, the Soviet Government stressed the need to do whatever was necessary to prevent armed conflict with Israel. After reading this note, Nasser asserted to our ambassador to Cairo that he completely shared the Soviet government's view. Nasser then assured the Ambassador that the UAR would not be the first to start war...During his visit to Moscow, the [Egyptian Minister of War Shams A-Din Badran assured us that the UAR was not contemplating war against Israel, and stated that his country would not be the first to resort to arms. He then indicated that his Government was willing to accommodate Israel on the issue of free navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba...

On 5 June 1967 events in the Middle East took a dramatic turn, when Israel launched a surprise attack against the UAR, Syria and Jordan. To a grater extent, developments in the military sphere turned out to be highly unfavorable for these Arab countries. This was due to the fact that the UAR, Syria and Jordan lost most of their air power during the initial phase of the war. In one strike, 270 aircraft were destroyed or damaged on the ground...Due to these losses in aviation, Arab ground forces were left without an air umbrella. Subsequently, tank units, other mechanized forces and the infantry were all exposed to the danger of an attack by the Israeli air force...

Within six days, Israel managed to curtail severely the UAR's fighting capacity and to destroy the Jordanian army completely. The Syrian armed forces, too, suffered heavy losses and were forced to retreat. Subsequently, Israel occupied a large part of Arab territories: the entire Sinai Peninsula, the Western part of Jordan and some Syrian territories bordering on Israel...As demonstrated by the course of wartime events, the military leadership of both the UAR and Syria failed to take appropriate measures to repel the Israeli attack...

We think it necessary to inform the participants in the CC CPSU plenary session on the Middle East balance of forces on the eve of the war...The armed forces of the UAR, Syria, Algeria and

Iraq were almost one hundred percent equipped with modern weapons, produced and supplied by us and by other Socialist countries. The USSR had supplied, on favorable terms and reduced prices, its Arab allies with considerable amounts of aircraft, tanks, firearms, mine-throwers, AA guns, ground-to-air missiles, military vessels and other modern weapon systems. A large number of Arab experts received military training in the USSR...The data at our disposal shows clearly that due to this generous aid rendered by the USSR and other countries, Arab countries were indisputably superior to Israel in weapons and military personnel prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The armed forces of the UAR, Syria and Iraq had at least one and a half times more tanks and airplanes than the IDF. If one also takes into consideration the numerical advantage of Arab armies, it becomes clear that they were indeed capable of mounting stiff resistance to the IDF, if not inflicting a severe defeat on Israel...However, the first two days of the war offered proof that the fighting capacity and even the morale of Arab armies were very low...

At 8 a.m. on 6 June 1967, the second day of the war, the Soviet ambassador called on Nasser who was rather optimistic in his assessment of the course of military operations..."The situation on the front doesn't seem as bad for the UAR, as Western propaganda has tried to portray...". Nasser asserted that Cairo was determined to fight to the last Israeli soldier on Arab soil...The Egyptian president then asked the ambassador to inform his government that the Arabs were holding out and that the UAR and he personally would spare no effort to mobilize the entire Arab world against the Americans, if they decided to actively intervene in the war...However, at 6 p.m. the same day, Marshal Amr conveyed to the Soviet government an urgent message from President Nasser, stating that "...the situation is very dangerous and critical and that it would further deteriorate tonight". At Nasser's initiative, Marshal Amr met again with the soviet ambassador to Cairo six hours later. Amr informed the ambassador that the situation in the front was grave and requested that Egypt be helped by the Soviet government to accomplish a cease-fire agreement with Israel within the next five hours...

On receipt of this alarming report from Cairo on the dramatic situation on the Israeli-Egyptian front, members of the CPSU Politburo gathered at 1 a.m. During this emergency session, several ways to assist the UAR were contemplated by the Politburo. Members of the Politburo thought it would be impossible on short notice to send significant numbers of tanks and airplanes to strengthen Egypt's disintegrating armed forces and enable them to stop the advance of the IDF into the Suez Canal zone and to improve the AA defense of Cairo and other Egyptian cities. Also, it was unwise to ignore the fact that the Egyptian leadership no longer controlled its army which was in a state of chaos and confusion. Moreover, many airfields, on which our airplanes were supposed to land, had been destroyed by the Israelis...Under these circumstances, the only way out of the situation was to save the UAR army from total destruction through political and diplomatic means...

The urgent request by the UAR leadership...aimed at stopping the further advance of Israeli troops into the Suez Canal zone and reaching a cease-fire by 5 a.m. At 2 a.m., the UN Security Council adopted a draft resolution which called for an early cease-fire as a first step on the way towards a settlement of this armed conflict...Given the critical situation, our goals aimed at stopping the aggressor... Furthermore, we were determined to forestall the occupation of Damascus and Cairo by the IDF and to avert the potential collapse of Nasser's progressive regime, which would likely have launched a chain reaction in the Arab world. We were indeed willing to accommodate them on the main demand, namely the call for an early cease-fire, and then to launch a campaign for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from occupied territories...

Israel's armed forces carried out their offensive ignoring this UN resolution. We then proposed that a second draft resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire be approved by the UN Security Council. As already known, on 7 June 1967 the members of the Security Council unanimously adopted a Soviet draft resolution, calling for an immediate cease-fire. Simultaneously, the Soviet government issued a stern warning to Israel in which it demanded that the Israeli offensive be stopped without delay. Otherwise, Moscow would reconsider its diplomatic relations with Israel and even contemplate the use of other necessary measures against the latter...

The obvious complexity of the military and domestic situation served as a reason for the vacillation by the UAR leadership following [Soviet] actions at the UN. On one hand, the UAR leadership pressed upon us the need to mediate an immediate cease-fire and to ensure that all Security Council resolutions be implemented without delay. On the other hand, the Egyptians did not rush to officially announce their willingness to accomplish a cease-fire. It was only at 1 a.m. on 9 June 1967 that the UAR envoy to the UN announced his government's willingness to end hostilities, provided that the opposite side would do the same. That same night, Syria, too, announced its willingness to stop fighting...

However, Israel continued the war, with Syria becoming the prime target of its military thrust. These military operations exposed in an especially revealing manner the Israeli government's perfidy, and unmasked Israel's real face as an aggressor. It became clear to us that the main objective of Israel and the imperialist circles which supported it, was the liquidation of all the revolutionary governments in the Arab world...Therefore, our main goal was to force upon the aggressor compliance with the UN Security Council resolutions and avert the total defeat of Arab countries...

On the morning of 8 June 1967 we instructed our representative to the UN to propose that another draft resolution be adopted by the Security Council, calling for an immediate cessation of military operations and the withdrawal of Israeli troops to the 1949 armistice line. In the afternoon, Nasser conveyed a similar request to us. He demanded that another draft resolution calling for an immediate withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from all occupied territories be proposed by the Soviet envoy to the UN, [Nikolae Federenko]. We received Nasser's message shortly after sending similar instructions to Comrade Federenko, our ambassador to the UN...

As is already known, a special gathering of East European heads of government and leaders of Communist Parties was held on 9 June 1967. At the end of this meeting, a statement was issued in support of Arab nations and against the Israeli aggression. The communiqué included the demand that Israel's military operations immediately come to an end and that its armed forces withdraw to the 1949 armistice line...This urgent gathering...had a significant impact upon the course of successive events, offering proof that a concerted action of Socialist countries was indeed a powerful factor in containing the aggressive circles of international imperialism...One should regret the fact that Romanian leaders, who took part in this gathering, declined to sign the communiqué... However, it should be pointed out with considerable satisfaction that all the other delegations did not hesitate to take a common action, as well as to pledge decisive support for the Arab cause and back all steps taken by Socialist countries...

Acting in the spirit of this communiqué, we adopted some measures aimed at containing the Israeli aggression. At 8 p.m. 9 June 1967, the Soviet ambassador to the UN was instructed to demand that more efficient measures aimed at ensuring Israel's compliance with the resolution which called for the cessation of military operations against Syria be taken by the Security Council. As is already known, the Security Council adopted this new resolution. However, Israel ignored it and further continued the offensive against Syria. A third resolution was issued but to no avail. By noon on 10 June 1967, Israeli troops had captured the city of El-Quneitra, the Syrian army's main stronghold on the road to Damascus. At 11:30 a.m., the Syrian minister of foreign affairs informed us that Israeli tanks, heavily defended by aircraft, were advancing in the direction of the Syrian capital. He then urged us to take all possible measures to stop the Israeli offensive...This was indeed another critical moment in the Middle East conflict...

Immediately, we took new measures. One missile cruiser and a number of submarines, which were part of the Soviet squadron in the Mediterranean Sea, were ordered to sail to the Syrian coast. On the afternoon of 10 June 1967, an official note was conveyed to the Israeli government in which the Soviet government announced its decision to break off diplomatic relations with Israel. Moscow warned the Israeli government that it would be held responsible for its violation of Security Council resolutions. It also threatened that sanctions would be jointly imposed upon Israel by the USSR and other peace-loving countries, if hostilities were not stopped immediately...

Simultaneously, our government conveyed a message to the US President, Lyndon [B.] Johnson... It stated that '...now is a crucial moment, in which we are forced to take our own decisions, if hostilities do not stop within the next few hours. We are absolutely ready to do so...These measures are likely to provoke a conflict between ourselves, and this could possibly lead to a terrible catastrophe...We request that you urge Israel to end the offensive within the next few hours...We too intend to warn Israel that if it continues the fighting, necessary actions will be taken against it, including military ones...'. One hour and fifteen minutes later, President Johnson informed us that his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, had sent an urgent message to the Israeli government, in which he stated that the US administration considered it extremely important that Israel should demonstrate by deeds that orders to end hostilities were indeed put into effect. According to President Johnson's own words, Israel expressed willingness to ensure a real cease-fire.... Therefore, comrades, one is right to conclude that our warnings to the US and Israel brought about the desired results. Evidently, the Israeli offensive against Syria ended on the evening of 10 June 1967...".