

September 3, 1969

Minutes of Conversation between the Shah and Nicolae Ceaușescu, Teheran

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Summary:

The Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi spoke with Nicolae Ceaușescu regarding President Nixon's speech in which he talks about disengaging the US from issues that do not concern the US, but also not abandoning allies. The Shah recalled that he told President Nixon long ago to withdraw from Vietnam. The Arab-Israeli conflict was also discussed.

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Contents:

Translation - English

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The Shah: I heard that Ho Chi Minh is ill. He is actually quite old. Of course, this will not change too much, since the Vietnamese people are the ones to decide [their fate]. One person cannot do everything.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: But he enjoys great authority in Vietnam.

The Shah: Yes, he enjoys prestige, authority.

I noticed that in his latest speech, Nixon [adopted a position similar] to what I discussed with you, in the sense that [he wants] to disengage from those issues which do not directly concern America, on the one hand, and on the other hand, that the US will not abandon its allies.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: Indeed, he [adopted a position] in favor of disengagement, but the decision he recently adopted not to delay the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam is not conducive to this outcome.

The Shah: I think it is something temporary.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: In our conversations with him in Bucharest, he said he wanted to withdraw more troops than he had done until now. However, instead of withdrawing [these] troops, he made an announcement that for the time being he was not withdrawing them anymore.

The Shah: I think it is just a temporary measure. I believe that this is also a tactical thing, related to the changes which are currently in the making in the South Vietnamese government. The North Vietnamese delegation at the Paris talks declared that if the US agreed to withdraw their troops, the Paris peace talks could overcome their current stalemate.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: Of course, the only way [out] is for the US to withdraw its troops from Vietnam.

The Shah: I also told Nixon to do this a long time ago.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: In any case, I think the idea of creating a coalition government in South Vietnam is rather acceptable for the US. Now there are two governments in South Vietnam and the proposal of the National Liberation Front to form a coalition government is reasonable.

The Shah: The Americans are afraid of the world saying about them that they are abandoning their friends. In such a situation, the South Vietnamese government could ask for US support; if the US abandons the South Vietnamese, then they lose the trust of their other allies. It must also be seen if the citizens [of South Vietnam] want that regime. I think, however, that the US starts to understand [how things work].

Nicolae Ceaușescu: In any case, we believe that it is possible to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Vietnam.

The Shah: We always said the same thing. We insisted that the Geneva Accords on

Vietnam be respected.

In particular, in our discussions with the Americans, we told them [the situation in Vietnam] is not the same as in the past, that there are several changes in the East, and that it would be very [wise] to pull out of South Vietnam, as it would create a much healthier atmosphere in the world arena.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: A very serious problem [can] be found in the Middle East. It seems that things are getting worse lately, and there are trends pushing towards a resumption of hostilities. Of course, this would create a very serious situation.

The Shah: Two days ago, I gave an interview to a Pakistani journalist, showing that this situation is caused by the weakness of the United Nations, which does not have the necessary means to enforce the provisions of the Security Council resolution. If the November 1967 Security Council resolution had been enforced, these problems would not have existed. I added, however, that the provisions of this resolution are not as clear as they could be. Unfortunately, I told him, it is up to the US and the USSR to clarify this resolution. However, although I do not think the superpowers should decide the fate of others, I believe there is no other way in this situation, given that the superpowers supply the belligerents with weapons. It seems that there have been certain contacts: Sisco went to Moscow, Dobrynin came to Washington.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: But they did not achieve anything important. They told us too about these contacts.

The Shah: I think Mr. Novikov did not manage to persuade Mr. Nasser.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: There are certain pieces of news that Nasser has a more conciliatory position now, but there are other forces in there which ask for a military solution to this conflict.

The Shah: Yes, there are two opposing [camps] in Egypt, and Mr. Nasser is playing with fire, so to say.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: Maybe it would be a good idea to take action at the UN.

The Shah: We voted, alongside with you, for all the resolutions. We are ready to be as constructive as possible, we do not hesitate to say that the weakness of the United Nations can lead to [a] catastrophe, and we will ask everybody, both the Security Council and the General Assembly, to think of a solution. However, I believe that ultimately we will end up in a situation where the Soviets and the Americans will have to find a solution, because if we support a certain side, and others support another side, then the Arab and Israeli extremists will be supplied with weapons, and a UN resolution will be just a piece of paper.

As for Jerusalem, the Americans would have voted alongside us, if it was not for a country which had not voted, a country which later on accepted the resolution, albeit belatedly. But the Americans never accepted the current status-quo in Jerusalem.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: In any case, if the situation is prolonged, then it will greatly worsen.

The Shah: Without a doubt [it will worsen] because both belligerents receive new weapons every day, and they cannot have a correct assessment of the situation while they are holding up weapons, when they think they can do anything they want;

people start to lose it, they think they can do anything they want, and because of this, they can end up in a certain situation.

Military training has a great impact. We saw what happened in June 1967. Of course, this will not happen again, they will not be taken aback and undoubtedly the entire Arab air forces will not be destroyed in a couple of hours. But I think the Arabs have not reached a point where they can destroy Israel's armed forces. In any case, we told Israel: you can wage another war, but eventually where will you end up? There are 100 million Arabs and as time passes by, they will learn how to fight.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: We should [allow] countries like Iran [and] Romania to contribute to finding a solution.

The Shah: We must ask [our] ministers of foreign affairs to undertake something.

We openly told the Americans our opinion even during Johnson's [time in office] and from 1967 onwards we have kept telling them the same thing. It is true that the Arabs committed a big mistake. But it is nonetheless true that we cannot accept Israel's forceful occupation of certain territories. Maybe it would be possible to make some border adjustments so as to guarantee Israel's security, because if they achieve peace, it must be a durable peace; why reach a peace deal today, if in five years' time a new conflict erupts? It is nonetheless true that Israel became arrogant following its military victories, but time passes by in the Arabs' favor. Of course, Israel exists as a state and a people cannot be exterminated; the desire manifested by some to exterminate the Jewish race cannot be fulfilled. The Americans wanted to agree with what I was telling them, and I was hoping that Israel would understand this, given the influence they have on the Democratic Party in the US.

Still, we should try to see if there is anything we could do at the UN.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: I think we could undertake something.

I told the Israelis very clearly that they must withdraw their troops.

The Shah: We also talked to the Israelis on numerous occasions and I can tell you, Mr. President, that they had a much more moderate position beforehand. Maybe in the aftermath of the upcoming elections things will improve. The advice we gave to the Israelis was always as follows: do not think only about today, or tomorrow, think about what will happen in 5, 10, 20 years' time.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: If one exerts moderating influence on both sides, it will be good.

The Shah: We will not hesitate to do the same thing in the future as well.

We think we can reach not an Arab agreement, but an Islamic agreement. You know, there are people interested in this matter, there are countries which share a border with Israel. There are 80 million, 100 million Arabs, but there are 600 million Muslims. I think Muslims in Turkey, Indonesia, a large part of African countries, like Tunisia, and even Saudi Arabia, could exert a very health influence.

As you know, I met the Moroccan minister of foreign affairs yesterday, who brought me a message from the King of Morocco. Previously, I met King Faisal whom I consulted on holding an Islamic conference, whose principles had been adopted at the Cairo Conference. There we will only talk about the setting on fire of a mosque in Jerusalem, because if we tackled other problems, especially the matter of the

Arab-Israeli conflict, there will be fiery speeches again and things will get even more complicated. We can only undertake things through the United Nations.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: We share the same view, and the Iranian and Romanian ministers of foreign affairs could study how we could look into what kind of actions we should take.

From our discussions with Nixon, we gathered that the US also wants to solve the issue through negotiations. The Americans are in favor of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories. Of course, they are also interested in border adjustments, along the lines mentioned by Your Majesty, but they believe that the withdrawal of troops is indispensable to reaching a solution. And that is a positive thing.

We must take advantage of the opening of the UN General Assembly session and undertake some efforts in this respect.

The Shah: We fully agree with your idea to continue undertaking efforts in this respect and to see what we can achieve.

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