

Transcript of A.A. Gromyko's Negotiations With C. Vance
March 28-30, 1977

Excerpt on the Middle East

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March 29 (16:30 - 19:45)

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C. VANCE: Completing our exchange of opinions on the Middle East, one more issue should be discussed. That is the character of the peace which should be achieved as a result of the agreement. Here there is a disagreement between the sides. The Arab side says that peace should mean only the cessation of the state of war with Israel. Israel wants more, in particular: movement toward normal relations between the sides. This issue should be settled between the sides in Geneva, and it is not an easy issue. I want to say that we should think in what way we can bring the sides together on this question.

A.A. GROMYKO: For us this is not a difficult issue. We have our own understanding of peace in the Middle East, and it is broader than simply a cessation of the state of war. Without any doubt the state of war must end, and peace should be guaranteed into the future. The guarantees should be strong, and we are ready to participate in the guarantees, so that we can jointly and decisively say "no" to any country which wants to violate the peace in the Middle East. But Israel here must not dissemble. A simple normalization of relations is not sufficient. Normal relations are not synonymous with a stable peace, because Israel today can normalize relations and in three days time without a declaration start a war. This eventuality, in particular, should be anticipated by the guarantees. The main thing, in our view, is that we be convinced of the possibility of carrying this out together with you. You also know this.

C. VANCE: Clarify, please, how you regard the normalization of relations as a fundamental element of an agreement between the sides.

A.A. GROMYKO: You hardly can find such a wise man who could answer the question, what are normal relations. If countries live in peace, does that mean this is normal relations? In our opinion, yes. But if between countries there exist diplomatic relations, but simultaneously there are skirmishes, feuds, what is that? Normal relations or not? In our opinion, no. We do not identify the normalization of relations with the establishment of diplomatic relations. Diplomatic relations in the Middle East can be established not from the first day -- between the Arabs and Israel and, with regard to certain Arabs, with each other. Maybe they will be established within several months. This is not a critical issue. The main thing is that no one should raise his hand to another side after the agreement is concluded. It's clear that the ideal situation in the Middle East would be a stable peace, calmness, diplomatic and trade relations between countries.

C. VANCE: I agree that cessation of the state of war is the most important issue. But normalization of relations can facilitate the preservation of peace.

A.A. GROMYKO: That does not contradict what I said. May we consider that we have here with you a common understanding?

C. VANCE: We have an understanding.

A.A. GROMYKO: Can't we say that our positions coincide?

C. VANCE: We put a somewhat greater accent than you on normalization of relations as a means of maintaining peace.

A.A. GROMYKO: We stress the significance of achieving peace, not belittling either the significance of normal relations between states. For example, in a state of normal relations with Israel, we would with satisfaction eat Israeli oranges. I have heard that they have good oranges.

C. VANCE: So, why don't you do that?

A.A. GROMYKO: Because we don't have normal relations with Israel, diplomatic, trade, and such.

C. VANCE: Don't you believe that it would be constructive to establish such relations?

A.A. GROMYKO: For that, a movement forward in Israeli policy is necessary. In New York I said to the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Allon, that our people will not understand why it is necessary for us under current conditions to normalize relations with Israel. How could we explain such a step, when in the Middle East a state of war continues, when Israel occupies Arab territories and there are no signs of an agreement? I do not want to say that absolutely all issues must be resolved before the normalization of diplomatic relations, but there must be significant movement forward in Israel's position. We hope that it will be so. But time is needed here. I am cautious in my prognoses, since, it seems to me that Israel lives according to some sort of its own calendar.

C. VANCE: It will be necessary for us to resolve issues of procedure and organization of the work of the Geneva Conference. In what way should the delegations organize work on the agenda? That is not a simple question, taking into account the gap between the Arab countries, and the sooner we start work on resolving that problem, the better it will be for us, including at the conference.

A.A. GROMYKO: Let's arrange it this way. You consult with the Arab leaders. We also have in mind to do this. Then at our meeting on the Middle East in May it will be possible to return to that question. But we must clearly see the path and not drown the issues of war and peace in procedural questions, not do it in such a way that while the debates go on about procedural issues, people are dying in the Middle East.

C. VANCE: I agree with you, but, on the other hand, in Geneva it falls to us to take the leading role upon ourselves.

A.A. GROMYKO: That is so. But it is not necessary for us to let ourselves drown in procedural issues. We don't intend to drown and will endure the procedural questions. I know, though, that in America you are used to viewing great matters through a prism of petty issues. By doing this, big issues are understated, while the petty ones appear many times bigger. We are convinced that it is possible to overcome the procedural issues.

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