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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
QUESTION OF PALESTINE

SECURITY COUNCIL
Forty-fourth year

Letter dated 28 February 1989 from the Permanent Representative
of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, E. A. Shevardnadze, in Cairo on 23 February 1989.

I request you to have the text circulated as a document of the General Assembly under items 37 and 39 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. BELONOGOV

* A/44/50.

ANNEX

Statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the
USSR in Cairo on 23 February 1989

The Middle East: A chance of an historic compromise

The Soviet leadership's perspective on the overall context of the
conflict in the Middle East and means of resolving it

I must qualify my remarks at the outset by saying that we have no magic formula, are not working on one, and suggest no panaceas.

We recognize that the conflict, which has dragged on for decades and sparked off five bitter wars, has exceedingly deep roots and presents a multitude of complicated aspects.

Where does that lead us, though? To the conclusion that this conflict does not lend itself to a solution at all? Or that it cannot be resolved by the means that have been used up to now?

Before giving a reply we must sort out what exactly needs to be resolved. If the problem is separated from the incrustations, distortions and overblown emotions, it amounts to how to arrange for two peoples to be able to live in one shared historical motherland, and how to enforce the fundamental provision of international law that the acquisition of territory through the use of force is inadmissible.

A solution in principle was found long ago - in 1947, in resolution 181 (II) of the United Nations General Assembly which endorsed the plan for the partition of Palestine. In today's terms, the task is to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination, return to the Arabs the land that has been taken from them, and guarantee the Israeli State the right to a secure existence within recognized boundaries.

Common sense rebels against the thought that this cannot be accomplished. And common sense, backed up by bitter historical experience, says that none of the parties to the conflict can achieve its ends by force. Reliance on force will inevitably lead to further, ever more bloody and destructive wars.

The Middle East is a museum of past civilizations. If no peaceful political and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict is found, events in the region may spiral in response to the logic of the military stand-off. The region faces the threat of an arms race which will sooner or later spill over into nuclear confrontation.

Ultimately, one cannot rule out the possibility that Israel and its neighbours will condemn themselves to a repetition of the course that the nuclear rivalry between the East and West followed: that they will mount the predictable steps of the ladder of nuclear escalation. If this happens, future archaeologists will find yet another stratum containing a buried Middle Eastern civilization.

In the best case, the parties will eventually come to realize the need for a compromise settlement and will begin to put one into effect, but in immeasurably more dangerous and complicated circumstances than today's.

Time in the Middle East is not on the side of peace but of war. The preservation of the status quo is not leading to greater calm, but towards an explosion ...

It would appear that much of what Mikhail Gorbachev said in his statement to the forty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly also applies to the situation and problems of the Middle East.

The pyramids may vanish sooner than the yearning of the Palestinians for their homeland. The intifadah which has grown so far-reaching and intensive is confirmation of this.

Can it be supposed, though, that another nation - the Israeli nation - will allow its existence to be endangered?

The world is changing. Today it is changing faster than ever, and politically it is changing in directions which only yesterday seemed scarcely likely.

Look how easily we get used to new circumstances. The destruction of Soviet and American nuclear missiles is accepted as something mundane, something supposed to happen. Reciprocal inspections of military activities are carried out routinely both under the Stockholm accords and under the Soviet-American Treaty on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Nuclear Missiles.

Many countries are reducing the size of their forces and arsenals, and cutting back on military spending ... Talks on disarmament and confidence-building in the military sphere in Europe will be held as radical cuts are being made in the Soviet armed forces.

But in the Middle East - as, of course, elsewhere - many people still think that you can accomplish anything with a gun.

Let's be frank: there are people who believe that the great Powers are not particularly dismayed at the failure to regulate the Middle East situation. After all, they say, they are earning goodly sums by supplying arms to the region, and beyond that they don't much care.

I should like to say, on behalf of my country at least, that that is not true. Upheavals in the Middle East always affect us very deeply. The Soviet people are especially sensitive to everything that goes on here, because tension in this region costs us dearly in all respects, including material ones.

There is now some hope of a radical improvement in the international climate, and important agreements on arms reductions have been concluded. More extensive agreements on reducing military confrontation both in Europe and in Asia lie ahead. This is becoming a general and formative trend in modern development. But the historic process of disarmament may grind to a halt for lack of movement in the Middle East.

In fact, there is movement, but in the wrong direction - towards an expansion of the arms race. It is already on a scale that extends far beyond the boundaries of the region ... Today, in terms of direct military expenditure, the region ranks third in the world after NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Its expenditure in 1987 amounted to \$59 billion. But while an awareness of the danger of overarmament is taking root within the two military-political alliances, in the Middle East the old and now universally discredited idea that the more weapons one has, the greater one's security, continues to hold sway.

In the Middle East a military potential has been created which is considerably in excess of its real economic and demographic weight in the world.

Twenty-five thousand tanks and more than 4,000 aircraft in the military formations of the opposing sides, about 5 million - or including reserves, 7 million - men under arms and \$600 billion allocated over 10 years for military preparations in the region do not mean that a limit has been placed on the arms race. It is rather the contrary ...

The region receives 61 per cent of world exports of weapons. And what are the results? They are appalling. The Iran-Iraq war alone, which caused the irreparable loss of a million human lives, devoured \$500 billion, which amounts to about half the external debt of the developing countries. But that is by no means all. In the region weapons are appearing, such as intermediate- and short-range missiles, which we and the United States are completely eliminating. Meanwhile, deployed in the Middle East, they pose a threat to the Soviet Union, the European countries, and the interests of the United States.

It is precisely because the Middle East is becoming a very serious obstacle to the further progress of disarmament - in which most of the peoples of the world place their hopes for a better future - and is becoming a threat to them that it is necessary to internationalize efforts to arrive at a Middle East settlement.

In the absence of such an approach, complications may arise in the relations of the Middle East with most of the rest of the world.

I understand that this argument may not be accepted in the region. However, it must be recognized that this factor in politics has already arisen today and tomorrow it will begin to have repercussions. It will hardly be useful or convenient for the States of the Middle East to stand in the way of universal human interests.

Sometimes it is argued that in order to eliminate the arms race, it is necessary to remove the cause of conflict. Others say that as long as the arms race persists, conflict will also persist.

This argument is academic. In our view, the process must be dual and parallel, comprising the curtailment of the arms race and, simultaneously, the process of peaceful settlement, eliminating the causes of conflict.

For many years at all international forums a long list of regional conflicts was drawn up, and again and again the absence of any progress in resolving them was noted.

Yet now the Geneva accords on Afghanistan are being signed, and today in that country there is no longer a single Soviet soldier.

The Iran-Iraq war, which lasted eight years, is coming to an end. Although with difficulty, diplomatic negotiations are being initiated and are proceeding.

Agreements are being concluded on a settlement in southern Africa, and a start is being made on the implementation of the United Nations plan for the granting of independence to the people of Namibia.

The time is drawing near for the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea, and many States are beginning to co-operate actively to ensure peace and national reconciliation in that country.

In Central America, too, a productive dialogue is taking place.

There is encouraging news from Western Sahara, where again it appears that a political mechanism for the settlement of the conflict has begun to work.

There is positive movement on the Korean peninsula.

The same may be said about the affairs of Cyprus.

Yet what can be said about the Middle East? Despite the marked change in the situation it has to be noted; so far only one side - the Palestinians - is taking constructive steps. That, of course, is not enough. Reciprocal steps need to be taken by Israel.

Surely the Middle East will not lag behind the times and fall behind the overall trend in world politics?

Why do the sides in the Middle East conflict not look at the experience of others? There is surely much in it that is instructive and useful.

In settling every conflict, the question of the balance of interests is resolved in a specific manner. In these specifics, however, general principles may also be discerned.

First. The dialogue between the sides is being initiated through intermediaries. Negotiations too are being conducted with their help. In some cases the intermediary is the United Nations (a typical example here is Iran and Iraq, and also Afghanistan); in others, it is a group of countries (Contadora, the Support Group, the ASEAN countries) or individual States.

Second. The withdrawal of troops from a country participating in a conflict is balanced by contractual political obligations protecting its interests. This approach may be seen in the Afghan, southern African and Kampuchean situations.

Third. A system of guarantees is used. The guarantors for the fulfilment of agreements may be the great Powers, and also the United Nations, which monitors the observance by the sides of the terms of settlement agreements.

This is not a theory, but working elements of real agreements in real conflicts.

Far-reaching changes are also taking place over the Middle East conflict. Never before has there been such broad international agreement not only in favour of a political solution, but also in respect of the means of reaching such a solution.

The United Nations General Assembly and all the permanent members of the Security Council - the USSR, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and China - are in favour of convening an international conference on the Middle East. The European Community is actively promoting this course. All the Arab parties to the conflict regard such a forum as necessary and see no other alternative for initiating the settlement process.

Basically only Israel is opposed to this idea, and this is bound to give rise to doubts about its own statements that it wishes to live in peace with its neighbours.

Yet experience shows that in the process of dialogue and negotiations it is possible to find formulas for solving the most acute and complex questions ... I should like to stress: in the Middle East the problems of security are of concern not only to Israel, but also and to no lesser extent to all its neighbours. It is understandable therefore that all the sides in a Middle East settlement, including the Palestinians, would like to have firm guarantees that they will not be attacked.

Of course each side is entitled to have its own views about the reliability of such guarantees. But we feel that on the basis of the international practice already approved, including the practice of regional settlements, it is possible to assemble a package of obligations and verification measures which can satisfy the most stringent demands and will inspire the necessary confidence that security will be maintained.

Undoubtedly, future guarantors could give commitments regarding specific measures which they would take in the event of a threat of violation of future agreements.

It is perhaps premature to talk of that now, but in principle, if one looks ahead, such objectives could successfully be met by a regional centre for the reduction of military danger.

We see no reason why the sides in a future Arab-Israeli settlement could not use mutual inspections and on-site verification, including inspections at short notice on grounds of suspicion.

They would also make it possible to remove the suspicions which are now the main factor in inflaming the situation, and particularly suspicions about activities involving the possible development of nuclear or chemical weapons.

This would also be helped by a decision to declare the Middle East a nuclear- and chemical-weapon-free zone. There is a proposal on this subject, and it must be moved forward.

In the Middle East the principle of establishing completely demilitarized zones, as well as zones with a sparse military presence along lines of temporary demarcation and recognized borders, has already been used. Such zones in future, too, can fulfil an important function in preventing sudden attacks and facilitating the system of reciprocal and international monitoring.

Here, too, there is considerable experience in using international verification machinery.

Moreover, it is of course difficult to expect a fruitful dialogue without clear undertakings by the parties that they will neither directly nor indirectly foment terrorism or any other subversive activity against each other in any shape or form. These undertakings must incorporate measures for verification and co-operation sufficient to inspire the necessary confidence that they will be honestly complied with.

I am speaking about these elements of a possible settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to demonstrate that it is possible to find a balance of interests between the parties to the conflict and to satisfy their legitimate demands.

If we look at the possible versions of a solution to any specific problem connected with finding a settlement, we shall see that there are a great many of them. In other words, there are already numerous individual bricks or elements out of which, given the desire, it is possible to build a durable peace in the Middle East.

This means that it's a matter of choice between preserving the status quo and searching for a compromise acceptable to all.

But preserving the status quo is not possible for anyone, be it the Palestinians, the Arabs or Israel itself. An alternative to reconciliation and settlement, in essence, does not exist. There is no alternative, and this is not only for military and economic reasons.

In the present world, the concept of humanism in international relations, universality, the indivisibility of human rights and the primacy of law are being reaffirmed.

The retention by Israel of the Arab territories which it occupied in 1967, the régime established in them, and the actions of the Israeli authorities in suppressing the political and civil freedoms of the Palestinians will inevitably lead to the isolation of Israel in the community of nations and to the loss of support even from its staunchest of friends. And it is quite legitimate to raise the question of imposing sanctions against Israel as a country which, on a massive scale, tramples underfoot the rights of the civilian population.

Now that the Palestine Liberation Organization has proclaimed its own State, accepted United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and condemned terrorism, Israel has not even the semblance of a pretext for refusing to enter into a dialogue with the PLO, which is recognized by the international community as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Israel can, of course, continue its defiant refusal to speak with the Palestinians. But then it must also reckon with the possibility that a great many States around the world will refuse to talk to it.

The peculiarity of the Middle East conflict lies in the fact that it is extremely complex, owing to its origins, the number of parties involved and its multifaceted political character and psychological rigidity. The nature of the conflict suggests that its solution must be comprehensive, based on a multilateral dialogue and negotiations that are carried on at several levels simultaneously.

That is the reason for the firm conviction that the way to achieve a Middle East settlement may be found only through collective international efforts.

The discussions raise the question as to the nature of an international conference on the Middle East, its agenda, its manner of functioning and its participants.

These are all legitimate questions for each future participant in that forum. And, naturally, they need responses acceptable to all.

These responses will not appear out of the blue. They must be discussed and compromise versions must be found. Today, that is the primary task ...

There is now no more important task than beginning practical preparations to convene the international conference. In our view, this work should be carried out through flexible and comprehensive mechanisms which would also wield sufficient authority.

That is why we propose that it should be conducted through informal discussions in the Security Council, through informal consultations among its five permanent members and through a multilateral and bilateral dialogue of the parties concerned with reaching settlement and carried on either directly or through

intermediaries. In this way it will be possible to arrive at a definite understanding acceptable to all parties concerning the basic parameters of an international conference on the Middle East. This work, obviously, must have a time-limit and be spread over a period of six to nine months.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that, at this stage, it is a question of fashioning an instrument for a Middle East settlement and not of elaborating its parameters. But already at this stage, some questions of principle must be settled. These, we feel, constitute the political and legal basis of the conference, and involve the participation of the Palestinians in the conference.

As regards all other aspects of this international forum, it would be better to leave them over for consideration by the conference itself. What is most important now is to start the process of peaceful negotiations without predetermining the forms which it may take in the course of the actual conference, depending on the wish and agreement of its participants. The experience of resolving regional conflicts affords convincing evidence that each case calls for its own particular kind of intermediary, concerned that the threads of negotiation and dialogue should not be broken and that the negotiating process should continue smoothly without stops and starts.

The international conference is precisely that kind of collective intermediary. But it is not only an intermediary. By providing some kind of safety net, guaranteeing the negotiations against failure, the conference will assist in resolving many regional issues.

To begin the dialogue and to keep it going is not easy. This needs assistance, from outside.

It would appear to be desirable and timely to establish, under the United Nations Secretary-General, the post of special representative for the Middle East, and to appoint a person with considerable international authority. He could be involved in the preparations for the international conference at the very earliest stage.

If his mission is supported by the European Community, the United States and the other great Powers, we may expect success.

Conditions are ripening in the region for a breakthrough in setting up a full-scale dialogue on a Middle East settlement in the context of the international conference.

We have had a preliminary exchange of views with the other permanent members of the Security Council. It is our understanding that they would all be prepared in principle to support the convening of the international conference, to participate in its preparation and to establish the prerequisites for its success.

In this regard I should like to recall that, despite the divergence of approaches, the Security Council has played a major role in bringing to an end the war between Iran and Iraq. The Council has shown its readiness to act in a

balanced manner, preserving its unanimity. In looking back, we see that the members of the Security Council have acted wisely by concentrating on achieving the implementation of its first resolution on the Iran-Iraq conflict.

There is no doubt that everyone has noticed the changes that have occurred recently in the work of the Security Council. There is now, unquestionably, a greater sense of collegial unity and desire to reach agreement in its work.

I think that we have sufficient grounds to believe that the Security Council will be able to formulate balanced recommendations for organizing the international conference on the Middle East.

I should also like to remind you that the United Nations has, from the very outset, played a fundamental role in Middle East affairs. In essence, everything that has been achieved here has been done in this Organization and with its assistance. It is no coincidence that no one nowadays conceives of the Arab-Israeli settlement other than on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Under its Charter, the United Nations has the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and preventing situations which may threaten peace.

The United Nations effectively assisted the conclusion of the Geneva accords on Afghanistan.

Security Council resolution 435 (1978) was adopted many years ago and today we see that without that resolution it is unlikely that a settlement in southern Africa could have been achieved and the path to independence opened up to the people of Namibia.

The parties involved in the Middle East conflict can, in our view, rely on the United Nations and entrust it with the role of intermediary. Today there is no reason not to trust the Security Council and see what recommendations it will put forward.

No one will be the worse off for this. Everyone will be worse off if we once again miss the chance to find the path leading to a settlement and to peace in the Middle East.

Israel should have no fear of a conference. Its security will not only not suffer - on the contrary, it will increase, as the security of the other States of the region will increase.

In general, as I understood from the conversation with Mr. Arens, the Israelis for the time being do not hold the idea of an international conference in high esteem.

We consider that the conference presents the very opportunity needed for reaching an historic compromise between the Arabs and the Israelis.

We would like the Government of Israel to know that its choice in favour of a conference and its agreement to enter into dialogue with the PLO would enable our two countries to take another step towards the resumption of full diplomatic relations. The beginning of the conference would mark the starting point for resuming such relations.

Exhorting others to dialogue, we ourselves intend to promote the broadest possible and most constructive dialogue with all countries.

The Soviet Union intends to encourage and support in every way all positive steps aimed at eliminating disagreements among the Arabs, uniting the Arab countries, and the establishment by them of constructive dialogue on a Middle East settlement. We favour, in particular, the idea of holding meetings between high-level representatives of Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the PLO and Lebanon in order to hasten the convening of the international conference.

We welcome the development of the contacts of Middle Eastern States with the European Community and the United States. In these matters, the Soviet Union advocates the elimination of all competition among the great Powers. The policy aimed at forcing one another out of the region must be rejected, and constructive co-operation in the interest of peace and tranquillity in the Middle East must be adopted.

According to the new political thinking which guides us in our foreign policy, the idea of co-operation among States in order to affirm universal values is of paramount importance. The scale of such values focuses on the concept of equality of people, nations, and States and freedom of choice for individuals and all peoples.

The infringement of human rights, particularly the rights of entire peoples, and all discrimination, regardless of the guise in which it is carried out, directly detract from universal values. Such values cannot be different for different peoples and countries.

It is only on the basis of this concept and in this context that we speak of the primacy of the values common to all mankind and the superiority of the universal idea.

We call for a rejection of the "enemy" stereotype in international relations. Psychologically this, of course, is not an easy task. In the context of Middle Eastern history and realities, such a statement may seem even naive. But rejecting this stereotype does not mean forgiving specific deeds and crimes. It only implies a legal approach, not an emotional one. In society we do not consider a person who has broken the law to be an "enemy". Accordingly, we ought to adopt legal terminology in international intercourse as well.

This is not a formalistic change. The category of enemy is a simple one. Either he must be conquered or destroyed, or, at best, he must be completely avoided.

The concept of "enemy" is incompatible with the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts and the principle of the inadmissibility of the use of force. It is always mutual and always subjective.

The new political thinking is based on the need to set aside ideology in relations between States. There is no attempt here to exhort anyone to abandon his beliefs, his world view or his values. What is meant here is that no one should impose his ideas on others.

Those in the Middle East are well aware of the dangers of all forms of intolerance and fetishistic attachment to ideological dogma.

In today's world such phenomena threaten to destroy civilization. Mankind can survive if it is united on the basis of common interests and upholds the principle of freedom of choice.

The new thinking also relates to the ability of the State and society to look at themselves critically, recognize errors or mistaken policy goals and undertake to review them.

The Soviet Union has examined its foreign policy from a critical standpoint and is prepared to listen to and accept the criticism of others. It is certain that our concrete actions in the international arena provide sufficiently convincing proof of this aspect of the new thinking.

I think that it would be good if the self-critical approach and realistic views became established in world politics.

The history of the Middle East has seen many plans and projects for a settlement. Not one of them has yet achieved it. Now one can read and hear that we have brought with us a new Soviet plan for a Middle East settlement.

Let us put it somewhat differently: we came here with the desire to draw up such a plan. The main issue for us is to work out, with the participation of all the countries of the region and all States concerned, a Middle East settlement.

At this point, with regard to the plan, I can definitely say that it is based on the priority policy objective of the Soviet leadership put forward by Mikhail Gorbachev in his statement at the forty-third session of the General Assembly - that of promoting the co-operation of countries and Governments in solving international and regional problems.

In pursuing this objective, we are also taking action now, transcending not only geographical boundaries but also the boundaries of the outmoded prejudices which today dangerously limit dialogue and restrict contacts. In particular, we reject ideology as a component of relations between States.

This is neither a rejection of one's own values nor a call for others to give up their values. On the contrary. Every time we establish contact in one form or another, contact which yesterday still seemed inaccessible or impossible, we ask ourselves: for what purpose?

In this case - for peace in the Middle East. This is the answer in the most general terms. More specifically we would reply: in order to prepare for the international conference on the Middle East.

At this time it is precisely the questions of preparing for the conference that are foremost. With very few and rare exceptions the idea of the conference predominates.

We hope that our current and future contacts in the region will be instrumental in implementing the idea.

Likewise, we are counting on the establishment of improved mutual understanding and co-operation between the Soviet Union and the States of the Middle East.
