

## Extract from minutes of the 361st meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level in Luxembourg on 6 and 7 February 1969 (London, 12 February 1969)

**Caption:** At the 361st meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 6 and 7 February 1969 in Luxembourg, the delegations debate on the situation in the Middle East. As tensions worsen in the region, the French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Jean de Lipkowski, outlines the French Government's position on the crisis and notes that the Soviet plan for the settlement of the conflict contains several ambiguities. France wishes to promote a global solution for the region in cooperation with the UN Security Council. Robert Michael Maitland Stewart, British Foreign Secretary, shares France's views.

**Source:** Western European Union. Draft Minutes of the 361st meeting of the Council held at ministerial level on 6th and 7th February 1969 in Luxembourg. CR (69) 3. Part I. Copy No. 5. 12.02.1969. pp. [s.p]; 60-65. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes. Archives rapatriées de l'ambassade de France à Londres. Série «Union de l'Europe occidentale (UEO)». 1953-1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Numéro 18. Cote EU.40.1.3. Luxembourg (février 1969). 1960-1970.

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12th February 1969

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MINUTES OF THE 361ST MEETING  
OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL  
ON 6TH AND 7TH FEBRUARY 1969 IN LUXEMBOURG

Present:

CHAIRMAN

S.E. M. G. THORN

Ministre des affaires  
étrangères du Luxembourg

BELGIUM

S.E. M. P. SAUREL

Ministre des affaires  
étrangères

S.E. le baron J. van den  
BCSCF

Ambassadeur extraordinaire  
et plénipotentiaire, Londres

S.E. M. J. van der MEULEN

Ambassadeur extraordinaire  
et plénipotentiaire,  
Représentant permanent  
auprès de la C.E.E.

S.E. le baron F.K. van  
der STRATEN-WAILLET

Ambassadeur, Directeur  
général de la politique,  
Ministère des affaires  
étrangères

Le vicomte E. DAVIGNON

Chef de Cabinet du Ministre  
des affaires étrangères

M. J. DESCHAUMPS

Ministre plénipotentiaire,  
Chef du service des  
organisations occidentales,  
Ministère des affaires  
étrangères

M. J. van HAUTE

Ministre plénipotentiaire,  
Chef du service de  
l'intégration européenne,  
Ministère des affaires  
étrangères

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## Situation in the Middle East

M. de LIFKOWSKI said they were now witnessing an increase of tension in the Middle East and the consequent resumption of efforts to reach a settlement.

The tension arose from a renewal of activities on the part of the Palestine resistance organisations who were multiplying their terrorist attacks, which in turn, brought about Israeli reprisals, thus undermining stability in surrounding countries and jeopardising the chances of a peaceful settlement. The two organisations involved were El Fatah and what was known as the Palestine Popular Liberation Front. They operated for the most part from unoccupied territory and aimed to attack targets in occupied areas. They tried, of course, to give their activities a spectacular character in order to capture the imagination and rally Arab opinion. They modelled themselves on such movements as the former F.L.N. in Algeria and on the Vietcong, setting themselves up as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians, and they had obtained declarations of support and a recognition of their independence from Nasser. They were known to have been in existence for some time, but the Cairo Government had in practice retained some control over them until now. However, the Arab Governments had been progressively losing their hold, so that finally - at least as regards El Fatah - it would seem that nobody was controlling them at all. However, these organisations were to some extent in competition. El Fatah, which was undoubtedly the more formidable and the more aggressive of the two, claimed to be exclusively Palestinian. Militarily speaking it was not very strong, depending on funds from abroad and on the arms which such money could buy. The Palestine Popular Liberation Front went in, for propaganda purposes, for isolated acts such as the Athens attack. It had been obliged to transfer part of its activities from Jordan to the Lebanon where, as was well-known, it exerted a threatening influence, exemplified by the raid on Beirut airport. It was conscious of its weakness in relation to the U.S.S.R. and Egypt and seemed to be seeking an understanding with Nasser, who was anxious to acquire some degree of control over Palestine resistance elements and to use it to enhance his prestige. At all events, the situation was obviously precarious, and uncontrolled organisations such as El Fatah were likely not only to provoke local reactions on the Israeli borders, but also

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to undermine the stability of neighbouring régimes, in particular that of Egypt. The powers outside the area were, of course, endeavouring to curb what might be called an escalation of violence, which was in danger of getting completely out of control. The U.S.S.R., as the Council would know, had submitted a plan for solving the crisis to the United States, Great Britain and France on 30th December last. On 16th January, France herself had proposed to the three other permanent members of the Security Council that they should make a four-power attempt to find a settlement. The Soviet scheme called upon Israel and her Arab neighbours to confirm their acceptance of the Resolution of 22nd November and to declare willingness to comply with all its provisions. It also summoned them to consent, in principle, through the good offices of Mr. Jarring, to seek concrete measures to implement the Resolution and to agree a timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces. The latter would take place in five stages: firstly, there would be a simultaneous declaration of intention to achieve a peaceful solution after withdrawal and to fix the date on which withdrawal would start. Secondly, the beginning of withdrawal would coincide with the deposit with the United Nations of the appropriate documents - the term used in the Soviet text - on the end of the state of belligerency and on reciprocal recognition; at the same time, discussions would begin with a view to reaching an understanding, through the offices of Mr. Jarring, on the delimitation of "safe and recognised" frontiers, on the guarantee of navigation through international waterways, on the settlement of refugee problems, on the safeguarding of the integrity and independence of all countries in the area and possibly on the creation of demilitarised zones - all this forming one package deal. Thirdly, within a time limit to be agreed (in principle one month), the Israeli forces would be withdrawn to intermediate lines and the Canal would be reopened. Fourthly, within a further agreed period (in principle during the second month), troops would be withdrawn to the lines of 5th June 1967, where the United Nations forces would take up their former positions. Fifthly, after the completion of withdrawal to the inter-state demarcation lines (previously referred to as the lines of 5th June 1967), the documents already deposited would come into force through the agency of the Security Council or through the signature of a multilateral document. This scheme was obviously very complicated and also somewhat ambiguous. It did not

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establish any clear connection between the general agreement, which was to be negotiated as from the second stage, and the beginning or the end of the withdrawals. Nor was it clear as to whether the Israeli forces should retire to the lines of 5th June 1967 or to the inter-state demarcation lines; the two expressions, although used in the same context, did not have the same meaning. However, it involved substantial concessions of principle for Israel. A striking feature of the Soviet plan was that it would only apply to those countries who were prepared to take part, and that withdrawal was divided into two distinct stages - the first ending with a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula, creating the right conditions for the re-opening of the Suez Canal. It would also be noted that there was no mention of Jerusalem nor of the Palestinians. The French Government had asked Moscow for clarification on these points and hoped that the ambiguities could be resolved. In any case, they would be interested to know the reactions of other U.E.U. member governments to the scheme.

M. de Lipkowski went on to explain what his Government had had in mind when they approached the three other permanent Security Council members with a proposal for Four-Power discussions with a view to hastening the solution of the crisis. Their prime concern had always been to prevent any worsening of tension in the Middle East and to encourage efforts to achieve a settlement which would not be a mere temporary arrangement, but a comprehensive solution providing fundamental answers to all the problems involved in the crisis. They had consistently called for the evacuation of territories occupied during the recent conflict and for an end to the state of war, mutual recognition by all neighbouring states, the fixation and guarantee of frontiers, freedom of navigation in international waters, and a settlement of the fate of the refugees. It was a regrettable fact that Israel had not clearly accepted the Security Council Resolution of 22nd November 1967 and the French Government had welcomed the growing tendency in one sector of the Arab world to favour a political solution to the crisis. They hoped that the

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positions recently taken up by certain Arab leaders, who were unfortunately opposed to this trend, would not hold up progress indefinitely. They deplored anything which might imperil such tendencies, such as an increase in terrorism and a recourse to reprisals by the occupying power. On 16th January, in accordance with their consistent views on the matter and with the views expressed by U Thant himself, the Government had proposed that the powers on whom the United Nations Charter conferred special responsibilities for the maintenance of peace should come together to study means of achieving a solution. They had suggested that their representatives on the Security Council should meet in order to work out, in liaison with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, ways by which the four governments could contribute to the institution of a just and lasting peace, in particular by devising procedures for implementing the Resolution of 22nd November 1967 and facilitating the work of the Security Council and the fulfilment of the Jarring mission. They were in no way concerned to impose a settlement but, in close consultation with the parties involved, to encourage them to work for peace. The French Government considered that this procedure might lead to the acceptance of views and solutions which, if propounded by the Americans or the Russians, might not be so well received. This applied particularly to the human problem of the refugees, and to the political problem now arising from the desire of the Palestinians to take their own affairs in hand. If due attention were not paid to these aspects of the crisis, and if endeavours were confined to devising partial solutions or solutions only applicable to one of the countries concerned, they would only be exchanging one form of instability for another. The abcess would remain, and might well erupt again. The French Government believed that, with the United Kingdom, they could go forward on these lines. They would be most interested to hear any comments and suggestions from other governments, all of whom - especially Italy - were anxious for a settlement of the political problems affecting the Mediterranean area.

Mr. STEWART agreed ...

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Mr. STANLEY agreed with M. de Liphowski that the situation in the Middle East was indeed dangerous due to continued incidents, reprisals and counter-reprisals; it was dangerous also because at the moment one platform on which a settlement might be built, namely, the Security Council resolution, might be rejected by a movement either in the Arab countries, or possibly in Israel, if these incidents and reprisals went on. They should therefore try to build something effective on that foundation before the foundation itself was swept away in a flood of violence. It was dangerous also because this was an area in which the great powers were keenly interested, but in which their commitments were imprecise. Along with the growth of the danger, however, there had been a growing realisation of it and attempts to contain the situation.

Like other governments, the United Kingdom had recently received two communications from the Soviet Union. The first, an oral communication, gave the Russian view of events in the Middle East and was very strongly anti-Israel in tone; indeed, it tended to put almost the whole blame on Israel. The United Kingdom had made it clear, that they could not accept this analysis. It was however sterile in the present situation to waste too much time looking back over the past and trying to apportion blame here or there.

The second, more helpful, communication was the Russian plan for a settlement. M. de Liphowski had given a clear and accurate summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the plan. For their part, the British Government had felt, as did their French colleagues, that it needed clarification on certain points, and they had asked the

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Russians for this. Despite its weaknesses and obscurities the Russian proposal did contain some constructive elements and it was thought the Russians took the same view of the British reply to their proposals. In this situation therefore the French proposal for a Four-Power Meeting in the United Nations framework was welcomed in principle. And, no doubt, the United Nations Secretary-General or Dr. Jarring would be available if they could help the progress of such a meeting.

If progress was to be made with the Security Council resolution, the Russian plan and with other ideas, the deep suspicion the one side had of the other, and which had so far blocked a settlement, had to be removed. On the Arab side, for example, it was believed that Israel had no intention of withdrawing from the occupied territories; and on the Israeli side it was held that whatever she did or whatever was nominally agreed, her Arab neighbours would not abandon their ambition of one day destroying Israel. It was hoped that the French proposal for a Four-Power meeting would help towards a settlement. Clearly much would turn on the contribution to be made by the new administration in the United States and it was important therefore that progress should be made with these consultations.

On the situation in the Mediterranean, the increased Soviet activity there had on the whole been correctly assessed by the last NATO ministerial meeting. The actual size of the Soviet presence compared with the forces of the West in the Mediterranean should not be exaggerated. NATO had made a correct assessment when it regarded it as something which required vigilance; it had therefore agreed last November to the establishment of the Maritime Airforce Command.

/s/ HENNI welcomed ...

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