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By CUP NARA Date 5/8/98

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PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
September 6, 2007

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4/15/69

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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DATE: April 3, 1969
TIME: 11:30 a.m.
PLACE: The Secretary's Office

SUBJECT: US-Tunisian Relations

PARTICIPANTS: Foreign
Habib Bourguiba, Jr., Tunisian Secretary of State
for Foreign Affairs
Rachid Driss, Tunisian Ambassador to the United
States
Noureddine Mejdoub, Counselor, Tunisian Embassy

United States
The Secretary
Joseph Palmer 2nd, Assistant Secretary of State
for African Affairs
John F. Root, Country Director for Northern Afri-
can Affairs

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After a preliminary exchange of comments between the two Sec-
retaries on their pleasure at establishing a personal acquaintance,
the Tunisian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs first outlined
Tunisia's views on the importance of its close relations with the
United States and its sincere appreciation for the benefits, poli-
tical and economic, it has received from them. He then dwelt on
Tunisia's preoccupation with the threats to its security building
up in its part of the Mediterranean.

Bourguiba, Jr., recalled that it was President Eisenhower who
wisely tried to stem the Communist advance in the Middle East and
Mediterranean by offering the protection of the Eisenhower Doctrine
in 1957. Tunisia was the first country to accept and welcome the
Doctrine, but unfortunately President Eisenhower's objectives had
not been achieved, and today the danger in the mid-Mediterranean
is greater than ever.

The Tunisian Minister referred to the analysis of the situa-
tion in the Mediterranean which his father had given to President

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Nixon two days before and which he himself had also discussed with Secretary Laird yesterday. Radical countries like Algeria and the UAR, for shortsighted and demagogic reasons, had opened themselves to Soviet ambitions. These countries, he was sure, had not intended at the outset to mortgage their national independence to the Soviet Union, but gradually this was what had happened. It was as if first their fingers, then their hand and now their arm had been caught in the gears of the Soviet machinery. For example, the Rumanian Foreign Minister had told him the Algerians requested deletion from the joint Algerian-Rumanian communique of a sentence condemning "foreign intervention" on the grounds that this might be embarrassing to Algeria's "friends."

Bourguiba, Jr., warned that while the Soviet Union might at one level pursue a policy of coexistence with the United States, on another level it was constantly nibbling away at the peace and security of other countries, seeking to expand its sway, its power and its influence. This was particularly true in the Mediterranean, for Russia's dream of "warm waters" went back to Peter the Great. The Soviet Mediterranean fleet had to be warned away by Tunisia, something the Soviet Union did not at all appreciate.

In answer to a question, the Tunisian Secretary estimated that there are now six to eight thousand Soviet civilian and military technicians in Algeria. When skepticism was expressed that the number was anywhere near so high, he insisted, and claimed that the estimate had come originally from Messmer, the French Minister of the Armed Forces.

Bourguiba, Jr., then expanded on the problems Tunisia faced in its relations with Algeria. As a consequence of the protracted quarreling among Algerian politicians at a much earlier period, Algeria had lost most of its elite, who were swept aside and discredited when the Algerian Revolution finally erupted. Algeria was led today by men of little or no education, many of them (like Boumediene) with an outlook on the world that was five hundred years behind the times. The ingratitude, impetuosity and demagoguery which characterize Algerian leadership were due less to stupidity than to immaturity. The men now in control of Algeria's destiny were simply neither intellectually nor emotionally equipped to provide the kind of rational and forward-looking leadership Algeria so badly needed. They started first by providing the country arms and then grandiose industries for which the country was not yet prepared. Tunisia started by giving its people food and work, and in contrast

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with the Algerians, the Tunisians were a happy people. Tunisia was attacked for its "moderation" but had too much respect for the real values of revolution to prostitute its meaning in the way others did. Tunisia did its best to have satisfactory relations with Algeria but this was not easy, and the task was made no easier by Tunisia's friendship for the West.

The Secretary asked whether the threat Tunisia feared was from the Soviet penetration in the Mediterranean or from Algeria. Bourguiba, Jr., replied, both. Tunisia today more than ever needed the sense of security that had been offered and accepted under the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957. Tunisia has of course in recent years been given to understand in various ways that we would not stand idle if it were ever attacked; but even suppose, for example, the Sixth Fleet came to its rescue in event of overt aggression, the damage--the political damage--would already have become irreparable. What Tunisia needed, rather, was a deterrent. Tunisia had no intention of wasting its resources on a large army and was keeping its military budget within 10 percent of the total, but it should have, first of all, sufficient military strength of its own to make a would-be aggressor think twice. In addition, the Tunisian Government had given considerable thought over the past several years to how to supplement self-defense measures with an assurance of protection from its friends. Tunisia was at one time ready to enter an alliance. However, it is well aware that today the mood of the US Congress is not favorable to new security commitments of a formal nature. There were other ways, nevertheless, in which the interest of the United States in Tunisia's security could be made clear to potential adversaries.

In light of the foregoing, he had two proposals to present for our serious consideration. First of all, there should be a complete review by our two governments of the conclusions of the Clowes Report /a US military team study in late 1965 of Tunisian army needs/ to take into account the formidable new dangers that have arisen in the mid-Mediterranean in the intervening years. Secondly, it would be helpful if an American firm could undertake to develop the ship-repair facilities at Menzel-Bourguiba near Bizerte for the use of commercial shipping plying the Mediterranean. Bizerte was very favorably placed to provide such service, and there could be a real economic benefit to Tunisia; but over and beyond the commercial interest the presence of an American firm would also signify to others US political interest in Tunisia's general welfare and security. If

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an American firm could not be found, it might be possible to encourage a firm from Denmark or Norway, both NATO allies, to undertake the same kind of commercial development. The presence of either one would have much the same political advantage that Tunisia seeks in trying to enlist our interest.

The Secretary said he would discuss the questions raised by Bourguiba, Jr., with Secretary Laird, and we would be in touch with the Tunisians in due course.

In acknowledging the Tunisian Foreign Minister's expression of appreciation for US economic help, the Secretary of State noted the difficulties we are having with Congress on aid appropriations generally, but said that Tunisia was of course among the favored candidates for aid in Africa, and we would continue to do our best within the limitations of Congressional appropriations. Bourguiba, Jr., indicated complete understanding as regards current attitudes in the US affecting foreign aid.

The meeting closed on the cordial note which had prevailed throughout. The Secretary emphasized the extremely favorable and well deserved reputation which Tunisia had earned for itself in this country and said that President Nixon valued very highly our close friendship with Tunisia. The new US administration wished to preserve these good relations and to improve them--if indeed that were possible. He knew that President Nixon already considered them excellent. The two Foreign Secretaries looked forward to their next opportunity to meet, perhaps later this year.

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