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THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Conversation of Meeting between Foreign Minister Shara of Syria and President Bush (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Richard N. Haass, Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs

Faruk Shara, Syrian Foreign Minister
Walid Mualem, Ambassador to the United States
Muwafaq Allaf, Former U.N. Deputy Secretary General

President Bush and Foreign Minister Shara met at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence at 9:00 a.m.

President: I'm very glad you are here. I hope you have seen the excitement around the world. But these killings taking place, the rocketing of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon--all this is totally counterproductive. We'd urge you to do whatever you can, especially with groups headquartered in Syria. Prime Minister Shamir raised it with me this morning. We cannot let the extremists go unopposed. We have our own positions on territory for peace, etc. We have built confidence with both sides. The issue is whether the talks can go forward. (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: I want to convey best wishes from President Assad. Your Geneva meeting was very important. It helped build confidence and helped Secretary Baker. Without Syria, there would be no conference. We did not wait for Israel to accept your offer. We came in good faith and hope for results. Unfortunately, Israel is opposing progress on substance. Regarding terrorism, and following my meeting last night with Secretary Baker, I phoned Damascus and asked them to do what they could. But this is different than the occupied territories, where Palestinians are seeking basic human rights. But peace will lead to an end of acts of violence. (S)

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President: But it is important now to stop these actions. They cannot help. Syria has a lot at stake. I recognize your contribution to the conference. I'd like to strongly urge you to rethink your position regarding multilateral talks. We are leaning on all sides to avoid preconditions. Regarding logistics and locus of talks, the Israelis came back to me. UN Resolutions 242 and 338 are quite clear on territory for peace. The fact that we won't hammer away on the U.S. position is because we want to be an honest broker. You can assure Assad of this; there is no change. We want to be a catalyst for peace. Our policy is underlined by principal. (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: Regarding multilaterals, we agree on the substance and the motive. Where we have a difference is on timing. If we rush to negotiate multilateral issues, the Israelis will gain more and more without giving. We want to see bilateral progress and then do the multilaterals. I remind you that when Sadat came to Jerusalem, Shamir tried to pocket concessions without giving away anything. It is not helpful for the cosponsor to push for the multilaterals before something tangible is received. Again, we share your objectives. (S)

President: But other Arabs disagree with you. Your position is not universal. (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: Only King Hussein disagrees. The other Arabs are not happy. (S)

President: What about linking settlements and the boycott? (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: Why don't we put this off for a few months. Let's test his intentions. (S)

President: But then we keep pushing off peace. I want to see Syria be constructive. It would be extraordinarily helpful for you and your relations with the world. We've told the others not to allow logistical issues to get in the way of peace. I'd make the same point to you. I know we never had an opportunity like this. I expect President Assad agrees or you wouldn't be here. (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: We know. That is why we are here. We disagree on the multilaterals, but we have never lied to you. Only King Hussein wants this. (S)

Secretary Baker: We have Egypt. (S)

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Foreign Minister Shara: Your friends don't tell you the truth. King Hussein only seeks personal gain. Your Gulf friends are nervous. Don't push them too hard. We don't want to shake these regimes. For us it is a matter of timing, but first we want to see where the Israelis come out. (S)

Secretary Baker: If we could get a suspension of settlements in exchange for a suspension of the boycott, could you give us the ammunition by agreeing? (S)

Foreign Minister Shara: We'll discuss it. (S)

President: My thanks for coming. My pledge to President Assad is that we will stay fully involved as an honest broker. (S)

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