

ROMANIA'S POSITION TOWARDS THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Roxana Georgiana HOLCĂ-NISTOR

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava (Romania)

E-mail: roxananistor1@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The present study focuses on the way Romania decided to stand in regard to the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict. The government in Bucharest took a number of decisions during this period which at first did nothing but to increase the degree of political isolation of Romania among the Soviet states. Gradually however, the decisions taken by Nicolae Ceausescu both during the hostilities in the Middle East and after the ceasefire, showed that the position of the Romanian state was right, and in regard to the principles of an assumed foreign policy and worthy of a sovereign state. Moreover, the attitude of the Romanian president to this issue allowed him later to assume the role of mediator of a conflict in one of the most "hot" areas in the world. The 1967 conflict was a turning point for the Bucharest administration, and Romanian diplomats knew how to exploit in the benefit of the Romanian foreign policy.*

Keywords: *Romania, Arab-Israeli conflict, Nicolae Ceausescu, foreign policy, Middle East*

Rezumat: Poziția României față de conflictul arabo-israelian din 1967. *Tema abordată în cadrul acestei lucrări are în vedere modul în care România a ales să se poziționeze în timpul conflictului arabo-israelian din 1967. Guvernul de la București și-a asumat, în această perioadă, o serie de decizii care, la prima vedere, nu au făcut nimic altceva decât să crească gradul de izolare politică a României în rândul statelor sovietice. Treptat însă, deciziile luate de Nicolae Ceaușescu atât în timpul desfășurării ostilităților în Orientul Apropiat cât și după încetarea focului au demonstrat faptul că poziția statului român a fost una corectă, respectând principiile unei politici externe asumate și demne de un stat suveran. Mai mult decât atât, atitudinea avută de președintele român față de această problematică i-a permis ulterior acestuia să își asume rolul de mediator al unui conflict situat într-una dintre cele mai „fierbinți” zone de pe glob. Momentul 1967 a reprezentat un moment de cotitură pentru administrația de la București, moment pe care diplomații români au știut să-l exploateze foarte bine în folosul politicii externe a statului român.*

Résumé : La position de la Roumanie vis-à-vis le conflit arabo-israélien de 1967. *Le thème qu'on aborda dans l'ouvrage ci-joint fait référence à la manière dans laquelle la Roumanie choisit se positionner pendant le conflit arabo-israélien de 1967. Le gouvernement*

de Bucarest prit pendant cette période une série de décisions qui, à la première vue, firent augmenter le degré d'isolation politique de la Roumanie parmi les Etats soviétiques. Mais au fur et à mesure, les décisions prises par Nicolae Ceaușescu pendant le déroulement des hostilités du Proche Orient, mais aussi après leur fin, démontrèrent que la position de l'Etat roumain fut correcte, respectant les principes d'une politique externe assumée et digne d'un Etat souverain. De plus, l'attitude du président roumain envers cette question permit ultérieurement à celui-ci s'assumer le rôle de médiateur d'un conflit situé dans une des plus "chaudes" zones du globe. Le moment 1967 représenta un moment de tournure pour l'administration de Bucarest, moment que les diplomates roumains surent exploiter très bien au service de la politique externe de l'Etat roumain.

INTRODUCTION

In a time when the Cold War was in full progress, the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict – known in the literature as “the Six-Day War” – led to further deepening of the division between the two political blocs and the states gravitating around them. For Romania, this war became a very important moment for redefining the position adopted by its officials, both in relation to the states directly involved in the conflict, but especially in relation to the policy promoted by the Soviet Union. Applauded by Israel and the West and blamed equally by the Arabs and the Soviets, the attitude of Romania demonstrated that it was trying to make the first steps to develop an independent foreign policy. Given the major impact of this conflict on international relations, the Romanian diplomats in the Middle East embassies and all around the world had constantly tried to obtain accurate information, at a time when many of the sources were corrupted. Thus, with their help, the Bucharest officials followed closely the progress of the Arab-Israeli conflict, leading us to the fact that Romanian Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs might provide us a wide range of information on the evolution of the situation in the Middle East, but also of the issues encountered by the Romanian diplomats. We find highly important information to determine the course of Romania, Israel and the Arab states relations, in the archival funds of Issue 224 (1967-1972, 32, 33, 40, 43, 45, 61, 69, 2608). Romanian National Archives and Department of Foreign Relations documents (files 43/1967, 114/1967) prove very useful as well.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

The tensions at the Arab-Israeli border were present since the beginning of 1967, when the UN General Secretary proposed Syria and Israel to form a discussion

framework to assist with the signing a truce between the two states. Meetings that took place on January 25 and 29, and February 2 failed to bring the parties to a common ground, leading to the suspension of negotiations¹. During that period, the attention of the entire international community had focused mainly on the Vietnam War, which had overshadowed the Near East situation. However, for the Arab leaders the Israel issue was more vivid than ever. The Egyptian president, Nasser, who wanted to be the leader and unifier of the Arab world, went through a moment when his authority and position among the Arabs were questioned. This drove him to a series of rushed decisions that later would justify the Arab army's failure, during the confrontation with the Zionist enemy².

On the May 2, 1967, President Nasser launched a statement in which he accused imperialism, in general, and United States, in particular. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol warned Syria that there would be very serious consequences if the Damascus government will not take any measure to stop terrorist incursions on Israel's territory, at the Syrian border. Shortly after these declarations, a series of rumours insinuated that Israel sent troops to the Syrian border to prevent an armed attack. These rumours proved untrue as long as Israel mobilized troops at its borders with the Arab states only after the launch of the Egyptian offensive. The origin of these rumours remained unclear. The Central Intelligence Agency sources showed that neither Israel nor Egypt spread them, but the Soviets³. Even so, there was a possibility that Israelis to proliferate this information, taken over by the Soviet Union and forwarded to the Arab side, with the aim that the Soviets persuade the Syrians to abandon their actions against Israel. The Soviet Union did not seem interested in denying this information and establishing the truth about the course of events. In the Egyptian president's speeches of June 9 and July 23, 1967, there are indicated sources pointing to the Soviet Union to be responsible for these rumours' dissemination.⁴ Apparently, the information was sent to an Egyptian official during his visit to Moscow. The information provided by the Soviets was accompanied by a warning to not take

¹ Cristina Nedelcu, *Politica României față de problema palestiniană, 1948-1979* [Romania's policy towards the Palestinian issue, 1948-1979], Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2013, p.166.

² *Ibid.*, p.166.

³ Central Intelligence Agency, Electronic Reading Room, *Soviet Policy and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, Colecția CAESAR, POLO, and ESAU Papers, 16 Martie 1970, p. 4, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001408643.pdf (Accessed on 14.08.2017).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.5.

any action that would give Israel a reason to start an armed conflict. The Arabs seem to have taken into account the information they received, but have completely ignored the Soviet officials' warning⁵.

In the Israeli camp, the situation was equally tense. The information received from the neighbour countries created panic and hysteria among the population of Israel: "In the past two days there has been an increase in tension among the population, and military preparations have increased in intensity. Beginning on the evening of the May 22, the mobilization of reservists is intensely ... the population makes massive supplies of sugar, oil, flour..."⁶.

This explained the exemplary mobilization of Israeli troops and their capacity to defeat the Arab army in just a few days, despite their numerical superiority. The military leader and Israeli Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, motivated the Israeli army's success of capturing the Egyptian army: "I thought the Egyptians were anxious to give the first shot ... we were losing the advantage of surprise ... we have limited forces, and every passing moment was against us because the Arabs have been organized" ⁷. The Israelis also claimed some evidences, demonstrating that the radar equipment had recorded movements of the Egyptian army that started on the morning of June 5, from Gaza and Sinai to the Israeli territory⁸.

ROMANIA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

On June 5, 1967, the day when the war broke out, the Romanian government addressed an appeal to the states involved in the conflict, asking the two sides to cease military operations and solve the conflict peacefully.⁹ A few days later, on June 9, 1967¹⁰, Nicolae Ceausescu attended a meeting of the Chiefs of Communist

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶ Dumitru Preda, Victor Boștinăru (eds.), *Romania-Israel. Diplomatic Documents*, vol. I: 1948-1969, București, Bruxelele, 2013, p. 168.

⁷ Moshe Dayan, *Istoria vieții mele* [History of my life], București, Editura Hasefer, 2001, p. 297.

⁸ Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României [Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives; hereinafter – MFAA], Problema 224/1967, *Oriental Apropiat* [Issue 224/1967, the Near East], Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 33, *Informații de la oficiile diplomatice române* [Information from the Romanian diplomatic offices], f. 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Problema 224/1969, *Oriental Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 69, *Aprecieri asupra situației din Oriental Apropiat* [Assessments on the situation in the Near East], f. 119.

¹⁰ Arhivele Naționale ale României [National Archives of Romania; hereinafter – NAR], Fond C. C al P. C. R., Secția Relații Externe, Dosar 43/1967, f. 3.

and Workers' Party and the Socialist Governments, which took place in Moscow. The purpose of this meeting was to condemn the Israeli aggression against the Arab states and to find a solution to solve the conflict in the area, a solution that had to satisfy the interests of the Soviet Union in the region. During the meeting, the socialist states condemned – by a common document – the Israeli aggression, identifying Israel as the only one to blame for the conflict outbreak. We owe to specify that the statement was not pleasing Romania's delegation, who tried to propose another approach according to which Israel was not to be condemned as an aggressor state¹¹. At the same time, it was underlining the fact that the Israeli army had to withdraw from occupied territories and both sides must take responsibility for the conflict outbreak. In addition, Nicolae Ceausescu demanded that the name of Romania be cleared from the joint statement¹² of the socialist states following a disagreement over the condemnation of Israel, preferring to make a separate statement. Although the joint declaration of the socialist states condemned the Israeli aggression –which was “accomplished with the help of the American imperialism”¹³ – in his discussion with Nicolae Ceausescu, L. I. Brezhnev admitted his dialogue with the Soviet representative on the Security Council, with Johnson, Wilson, and de Gaulle. He also confirmed that the US Armed Forces have avoided intervening in the conflict, supporting the Israeli offensive. The Soviet leader even reported a story according to which Israelis accidentally bombarded an American ship, and Soviet ships panicked, believing that it was an Egyptian attack. Immediately after the incident, Brezhnev contacted the US president who explained that Americans sent those planes in order to help the ship's crew and not to intervene in the conflict.¹⁴ Brezhnev acknowledged that the only to blame for the Arab defeat was the president Nasser, who had taken a series of rushed decisions, such as the blockade of the Akaba Bay, the withdrawal of the UN troops, and an offensive against Israel without consulting its Soviet allies¹⁵. Although Brezhnev was worried about the announcement (made under the pressure of others Soviet leaders)¹⁶ on Israel as an aggressor state¹⁷, the final declaration was one in which Israel became accountable for the whole situation in the region, not recognizing the guilt of the Arab states. The Romanian declaration was seen as

¹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, f. 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 34.

“elusive”, many of the Soviet leaders present at the meeting considering that its adoption could provoke a very aggressive reaction from the Arab states¹⁸. The Romanian president thought that the adoption of a statement condemning exclusively the Israeli state could lead to isolation of the socialist states from the progressive movement in the West, as Communist parties in the Western countries made statements in which they avoided identifying Israel as being the only one responsible for triggering the war¹⁹.

A very sensitive point on which Nicolae Ceausescu tried to draw attention was that through the unique condemnation of Israel, the Arab states could understand that the policy they have pursued up to that point was the best possible. In the Romanian president’s opinion, this attitude would eventually turn against them due to Arab states’ lack of maturity in decisions making and to the uneven outcomes that could not lead to long-term benefits²⁰.

Despite the arguments presented by the Romania's delegation to Moscow, on June 11-14, all states that signed the Soviet Union's declaration broke relations with Israel. A few days later, on June 17, the Soviet Union called for an extraordinary session of the UN General Assembly. During this reunion, Romania was one of the states that tried to have a conciliatory position, appealing once again to the non-intervention of the great powers in issues that concern only the states directly involved in this conflict²¹. At the same time, Romania voted alongside the Arab states for the resolution of the non-committed countries for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories²². A few months later, in September 1967, the socialist countries held a meeting in Belgrade. Its purpose was to inform of the measures taken by each of them on the Near East conflict²³.

Throughout this period, Romania's position was steady, militating for the respect of the UN Security Council’s resolution from the November 22, 1967, a document that enjoyed the consensus of all Council’s members, and which was also agreed by the parties directly involved²⁴. Bucharest officials repeatedly stressed out that compliance with this resolution’s provisions is the only way to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 66.

²² *Ibid.*, f. 67.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 101.

bring peace and understanding in the Near East²⁵.

The Romanian government position over this conflict was quite peculiar given that Romania stood among the communist states as one of the most anti-Semitic. Even so, we should notice that during the 1960s and especially after Nicolae Ceausescu came to power, the attitude towards the Jews and the state of Israel began to change. On one hand, this change of perception over Israel might come as well from Israelis isolation in the Near East, as Romanians were among the Soviet states. On the other hand, Nicolae Ceausescu had the intuition on the opportunities that could result from the agreements' conclusion with Israel²⁶.

The non-signing of the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict Joint Statement led to the tension between Romania and the Soviet states and the isolation of Romania among the East European countries²⁷. Romania's position also drew United States' attention, in particular, of CIA, which developed a series of documents about the Romanian government strategy and the consequences that might follow from it. According to the officials of Bucharest, the adoption of the Communist states' statement condemning exclusively Israel and, at the same time, assuring the Arab side of economic and military support could have engage the Soviet Union and the signatory states in an armed conflict that Romania could never manage²⁸. Moreover, in 1963, one year after the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Romanian representative at the UN, Corneliu Mănescu had a discussion with US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, assuring him that "in the case a conflict triggered by the USSR, similar to that of Cuba, Romania will stay neutral"²⁹. Thus, the continuation of relations with Israel was meant to assure Washington officials that Romania wanted to remain neutral during the Near East conflict, moving further away from the USSR's decisions.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Central Intelligence Agency - Electronic Reading Room, *Weekly Summary Special Report, Impact of Arab-Israeli Conflict on Eastern Europe*, Colecția General CIA Records, 21 Iulie 1967, p. 6, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79-00927A005900050003-2.pdf> (Accessed on 20.08.2017).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁸ Isabella Ginor, Gideon Remez, *Foxbats Over Dimona, The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six Day War*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 199.

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, *150 Years of Modern Romanian Diplomacy (1862 - 2012)*, <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/16926> (Accessed on 16. 08. 2017).

THE ATTITUDE OF THE MIDDLE EAST STATES REGARDING THE POSITION OF ROMANIA

Romania's position has been quite heavily criticized by some Arab countries that perceived Romanian intervention as an announcing statement for its Israeli actions support. Charara Mohamed, the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, said: "Romania has left the Arab countries! ... This factor is a surprise for the Arab countries and they cannot understand the position of Romania"³⁰. On the other hand, Romania's Declaration on the situation in the Near East received appreciations among UN diplomats. Samuel Prager, an international official in the UN Secretariat, thought that Bucharest government's declaration demonstrated political maturity and it was very balanced: "its impartial tone and the balanced position expressed are directed precisely to bring at the negotiations table the opposing parties. Words are carefully chosen so that they do not damage the parties and at the same time express an unequivocal position"³¹. The UN representative made a detailed analysis of the statement, believing that the document was drafted with great care not to harm any of the involved parties. Thus, the Declaration did not mention "the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops", but only "their withdrawal".

Furthermore, in order not to create an unnecessary dispute with the Arab side, the text of the statement did not talk about the "peaceful coexistence" of the two parties, but about the Arab-Israeli "peaceful cohabitation"³². With its balanced and equidistant tone, Romania's statement presented a constructive position that sought to support the parties involved by formulating concrete solutions and respecting the principle of non-involvement in a state internal affairs³³. On the same time, Samuel Prager believed that Tel Aviv leaders were eager to sit down and negotiate a series of issues addressing the Israel position in the Near East, but they wanted the discussions to be held directly with the states involved, without the UN that could try to delay the negotiations. Israelis were motivated to discuss the Israel's access to the Tirana Strait and the Suez

³⁰ MFAA, Problema 224/1967, *Orientul Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 40, *Informări în legătură cu evoluția conflictului din Orientul Apropiat și poziția altor țări* [Information on the evolution of the Near East conflict and the position of other countries], f. 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 45.

³² MFAA, Problema 224/1967, *Orientul Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 32, *Informări trimise de la oficiile diplomatice române privind conflictul arabo-israelian* [Information sent from the Romanian diplomatic offices on the Arab-Israeli conflict], f. 45-46.

³³ *Ibid.*, f. 45-46.

Canal, as well as the Jerusalem area in Jordan³⁴.

Immediately after the conflict, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Corneliu Mănescu had a series of discussions with officials from the states directly involved in the conflict and with representatives of the great powers. On June 12, 1967, UAR Ambassador in Bucharest, M. F. Hamad, in a meeting with Corneliu Mănescu, accused a group of young people aged between 18 and 20 years, who left Romania by plane with destination Israel, on June 8, to join as volunteers. He also described this gesture as an unfriendly one, expressing his concern about Romania's attitude³⁵. Corneliu Mănescu denied the allegations and assured that such an action did not take place with the support of the Romanian authorities. More than that, he was of the opinion that this information was false, spread by malicious persons³⁶. According to him, Romania was militating for the definitive cessation of hostilities, as it was revealed in the discussions with the Israeli Minister³⁷.

Another complaint of UAR Ambassador regarded Romania's documents and statements, which do not identify Israel as an aggressor state and no mention the rights of the Arab population in Palestine³⁸. To these remarks, the Romanian Foreign Minister stated that Romania was supporting the struggle for independence of the Palestinian people, which could be noticed in the statements of Romanian officials from different Arab states, while moreover Romania voted UN resolutions, which were also approved by the Arab states and aimed a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict³⁹. From the Romanian state's policy perspective, Arab states had the right and obligation to reach an agreement with Israel without the interference of foreign powers, while taking into account the right to independence and sovereignty of all states in the region⁴⁰. Although the UAR Ambassador admitted that Romania's position was as balanced as possible, he considered that a settlement with Israel would be the equivalent to the recognition of this state by the Egyptians, which the other Arab states would never accept⁴¹.

In the same spirit, the Romanian officials had discussions with the Israelis, through Minister Eliezer Doron. The Romanian side was concerned about Israel's intentions to annex the occupied territories by force. This was seen by the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 47.

³⁵ NAR, Fond C. C al P.C.R, Secția Relații Externe, Dosar 114/1967, f. 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, f. 13.

Romanian authorities as an obstacle to find a peaceful solution for both sides⁴². The Israeli Minister was very pleased with the position adopted by the Romanian government and tried to convince Romanian diplomats that Israel had no intention to keep the annexed territories, though the constant threat issued by the Arabic side determined Israelis to do all their best not to return to the situation of 1948⁴³. Eliezer Doron also shared Romania's position concerning the belligerent parties that had to sit at the negotiations table and find solutions as soon as possible. Because of this, and given the position of the Arab side, the Israeli Minister considered that Romania could play the role of mediator between the two parties, as one of the few states that had a balanced attitude towards the conflict in the Near East⁴⁴.

The President of the Council of Ministers, Corneliu Mănescu presented the Romanian S.R.'s position on the Arab-Israeli conflict to the UN General Assembly, stressing out that "the force does not create the right", thus showing that the Israeli troops had the obligation to withdraw from the occupied territories as soon as possible⁴⁵. While criticizing Romania's position on the situation in the Near East⁴⁶, the Arab states had supported the election of Minister Corneliu Mănescu as president of the 22nd session of the UN General Assembly⁴⁷.

In December 1967, another meeting of foreign ministers from 8 East European countries, including Romania, took place in Warsaw. During this meeting, a series of issues related to the events in the Near East were discussed. The real purpose of the reunion was to remove the disagreements between the socialist states since the last meeting from June, in Moscow. The final release of the Conference on December 22 adopted a more balanced position of the socialist states in relation to the Arab-Israeli war. In order for this statement to be accepted by Romania, no mention was made of Israel's status as an aggressor state, the final text referring only to the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli troops and to the compliance of the UN resolution by all the states involved⁴⁸.

⁴² *Ibid.*, f. 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 24.

⁴⁵ MFAA, Problema 224/1967, *Orientul Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 40, *Informări în legătură cu evoluția conflictului din Orientul Apropiat și poziția altor țări* [Information on the evolution of the Near East conflict and the position of other countries], f. 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Dosar 43, *Conflictul din Orientul Apropiat din 5 iunie 1967* [Near East conflict from June 5, 1967], f. 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Dosar 45, *Informări de la misiunile diplomatice privind conflictul din Orientul Apropiat* [Information sent from the Romanian diplomatic offices on the Arab-Israeli conflict], f. 90.

⁴⁸ Jerry Goodman, *Communist Bloc – Rumania*, in *American Jewish Year Book*, 1968, p. 196-197.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict also represented an opportunity for the Romanian government to clarify its position on the international stage, both in relation to the Soviet states and in relation to the Western powers and the states of the Middle East. Besides the determination shown during the Moscow Conference – which left the impression that Romania was protecting Israeli interests – Nicolae Ceausescu started an entire campaign among the Arab states in order to ensure their leaders of Romania's willingness to mediate the conflict and to help Palestinian population fulfil their dream of national sovereignty and independence. Thanks to the Romanian diplomats accredited in the Near East, Ceausescu tried to convince the Arab leaders that the most appropriate solution to resolve the conflict is to convene a UN General Assembly. At that moment, an aggressive policy could only bring disadvantages for the Palestinian population and for the states involved in the confrontation. Beyond the diplomatic approaches, the Romanian government also decided to support UAR government in a solid way, by sending 50,000 tons of wheat⁴⁹ and 15,000 tons of corn⁵⁰. On this occasion, a Romanian delegation led by Minister of Commerce, Gogu Rădulescu, travelled to Egypt for several meetings with officials in Cairo, expressing the interest in opening an informal line of communication between Egypt and Israel and trying to prevent drawing the disapproval of the other Arab states. According to Egypt's UN representative, Mohammed Hassan El-Zayyat, this action's purpose was to know and understand the position of Israel, and eventually to start some negotiations⁵¹.

This meeting offered Romania the occasion to organize the first Arab-Israeli mediation materialized as a dialogue between Abba Eban, Mircea Malița and Mahmoud Riad. As Mircea Malița remembered, the first meetings between the two parties were extremely clumsy, their representatives trying to avoid formulating any kind of concrete ideas and sending clear messages⁵².

ROMANIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN SOLVING THE CONFLICT

After the shameful defeat of the Arab troops, a number of accusations appeared about the poor preparation of the Arab armies and more than that, a sabotage of the military operations within the Arab coalition. In a statement sent

⁴⁹ Cristina Nedelcu, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁵⁰ MFAA, Problema 224/1967, *Oriental Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 32, *Informări trimise de la oficiile diplomatice române privind conflictul arabo-izraelian* [Information sent from the Romanian diplomatic offices on the Arab-Israeli conflict], f. 24.

⁵¹ Cristina Nedelcu, *op. cit.*, p. 187-188.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

to the Foreign Ministry by the Pekin Business Charge, I. Istrate, was described a discussion with the Yemeni ambassador, in which he talks about how it was possible for UAR armies to be removed from the field by the Israeli forces so quickly. According to the confidential information reported by him, Egyptian vice president Zakaria Mohieddin was accused of betraying the interests of UAR by its approach to the United States and FRG. He was also known in Egypt as a fierce opponent of communism⁵³. Subsequently, the diplomats sent to Cairo confirmed the betrayal of the Egyptian Vice President Zakaria Mohieddin⁵⁴. I. Istrate also informed about the sabotage of military operations during the conflict⁵⁵. Along with Zakaria Mohieddin there were other generals who betrayed Arab cause; one of them was married to an Englishwoman and his daughter was part of the English espionage service. Many of these militaries have chosen to end their lives following the Arab defeat and the discovery of their betrayal⁵⁶. This information strengthens Nicolae Ceausescu's position at the Moscow meeting, where he was wondering how was possible such a quick defeat of the Egyptian army, which was preparing for months to attack Israel⁵⁷.

After the end of the conflict, Romanian diplomats made considerable efforts to be well informed on the evolution of events in the region. According to the information provided by the Iraq Foreign Ministry to all the embassies, there were serious doubts about Israel's actions to disclose the Palestinian population in the occupied territories of Gaza and move them to the East Bank region of Jordan. The 50,000 Palestinians removed from Israeli actions were to be replaced by the Jews, thus violating the terms of the Security Council resolution of July 4, 1967⁵⁸. Therefore, the Iraqi government called on all governments, including Romania, to intervene to stop Israeli actions. Because of this request, the Romanian government assured that it would continue to militate for the implementation of the UN resolution that bound Israel to ensure the well-being and security of the population in the occupied areas. In fact, all states involved in the conflict were compelled to respect the humanitarian principles regarding the treatment of prisoners of war

⁵³ MFAA, Problema 224/1967, *Oriental Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 32, *Informări trimise de la oficiile diplomatice române privind conflictul arabo-izraelian* [Information sent from the Romanian Diplomatic Offices on the Arab-Israeli conflict], f. 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 20.

⁵⁷ NAR, Fond C.C al P.C.R, Secția Relații Externe, Dosar 43/1967, f.16.

⁵⁸ MFAA, Problema 224/1968, *Oriental Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 61, *Situația din zonă* [Situation in the area], f. 20.

and the civilian population⁵⁹. On the same time, the Romanian government avoided having a public position on this situation, in order not to give rise to undesirable interpretations regarding the state's position⁶⁰. This attitude stemmed from the fact that the information received from Iraqi and Syrian officials could not be ascertained by UN representatives. Israel had conditioned the approval of a UN investigation into the occupied territories to the extension of this investigation to the Jewish communities in Syria, UAR, Iraq, and Lebanon⁶¹. Therefore, Romania's position was a reserved one, not wanting to give rise to situations that could subsequently endanger the relations with Israel, but also with the Arab states.

On September 11, 1969, at a session of the UN Security Council on the conduct of actions that resulted in the arson of the Al-Aqsa mosque, the Saudi Arabian representative made a series of remarks on the policies adopted by the Romanian state. He said that during a visit through European countries, he came into possession of information that some East European states are buying modern military aircraft in order to send them to Israel. He did not want to give the names of the states, but it was clear from his remarks that he was referring to Romania⁶². Although such comments from Arab officials were quite common, the Bucharest officials maintained their position on the need to solve the conflict in the Near East by peaceful means and not by arms.

During the period between the two major Arab-Israeli conflicts, 1967-1973, Romania participated in many conferences and discussion forums initiated by the UN Security Council or other entities with attributions in the field, always calling for peaceful negotiations and respect for the security and sovereignty of all the states involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The resolution adopted by the UN Security Council and voted by the Romanian delegation, on November 5, 1970 reiterated some essential principles for solving the conflict: the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the occupied territories, following the 1967 conflict; 2) the recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the states in the Near East; 3) the recognition of the right of states to live in peace, within secured and acknowledged borders⁶³.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² MFAA, Problema 224/1969, *Orientalul Apropiat*, Direcția a V-a Relații, Dosar 69, *Aprecieri asupra situației din Orientalul Apropiat* [Assessments on the situation in the Near East], f. 60.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Dosar 2608, *Criza arabo-israeliană din Orientalul Apropiat* [The Arab-Israeli crisis in the Near East], f. 40.

These ideas were presented by the Romanian delegation at the 26th session of the UN General Assembly, in 1971. The Minister Corneliu Mănescu had an intervention in which he drew attention to Israeli troops' obligation to withdraw from the occupied territories, considering that a peace agreement should have been signed in accordance with Resolution no. 242 of 1967⁶⁴. The speech of Mănescu revealed another very important aspect for the Arab states, namely the problem of the Palestinian population, which, in the view of the Romanian minister, had to be resolved in "conformity with its national interests"⁶⁵.

CONCLUSIONS

During the 1960s, the world witnessed an almost desperate attempt of Israel to impose its supremacy among its neighbours. One of the greatest aspirations of Israeli leaders was to secure borders and obtain political support from the international community in order to counter Arab military aggression. This register also included the "Six-Day War" of 1967, a confrontation that not only redefined the borders of the Near East, but also gave foreign leaders the opportunity to make their own plans for solving the conflict. For the Romanian Government, it represented an opportunity to strengthen its foreign policy. The retention of diplomatic ties with Israel – at a time when the main allies of Romania suggested to Nicolae Ceausescu to revise his attitude – was a moment of political force and a real test for him who, in just a few years, would assume the role of negotiator in one of the hottest conflicts on the globe. Although the role played by the Romanian President in this matter was quite controversial, we must acknowledge that Ceausescu had, at least, the credit of trying to solve an extremely complicated problem through diplomacy rather than conflicts.

⁶⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, *Twenty Sixth Session, Official Records, Plenary Meeting*, October 6, 1971, New York, p. 8, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/NL7/404/74/PDF/NL740474.pdf?OpenElement> (Accessed on 18.08.2017).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.