

April 25, 1969
National Security Council Meeting, Friday April 25,
1969, 10:00-11:15 A.M.

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Summary:

The National Security Council discusses US considerations of Middle East negotiations, including the Soviet role in the Middle East and their positions on negotiations, repatriation and settlement, and the possibility of negotiating small pieces of an agreement as opposed to direct negotiations.

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English

Contents:

Original Scan

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National Security Council Meeting
Friday, April 25, 1969 - 10:00 - 11:15 A.M.

PARTICIPANTS: ✓The President
✓The Vice President
✓The Secretary of State, William P. Rogers
✓The Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird
✓Chief of Staff, Army, General Westmoreland
✓Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness,
General George A. Lincoln
✓US Ambassador to the UN, Charles Yost
✓The Director of Central Intelligence, Richard M. Helms
✓Under Secretary of State, Elliot L. Richardson
✓Assistant Secretary of State, Joseph J. Sisco
✓Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
✓Colonel Alexander Haig
✓Harold H. Saunders
Alfred L. Atherton

President: Do we take a position.

Do we peddle it with Israel first? Israel sort of like South Vietnam. Difficult make peace with Israel. Impossible to make peace without.

Do we go to UAR or Jordan first?

Rogers: I promised Eban we'd go to Israel first.

President: I understand. It's a lot better to try to bring the Israelis along with us.

Rogers: Meetings with Jewish leaders show they more rigid than Eban.

President: Eban reasonable but has to represent his hawks.

Rogers: We're discussing problem in several ways:

-- Four power talks. Yost will talk.

-- Soviet talks. Sisco will report.

-- Problem is how to mesh these.

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President: What concerned me is Soviet requirement for equal-sized DMZ's. Of course that could be bargaining position.

Sisco: Soviets are talking about peace and not patchwork, though we recognize "peace" means different things. Soviets agree that whatever framework we evolve will be presented to Jarring so won't be "imposed." Soviets agree all terms must be agreed in advance. This different from French and step forward in Soviet position.

Agree on some kind of international document. Soviets, if Eban objects to Soviet guarantee, say they have no interest in being guarantor.

Dobrynin says he just deferring to US. Soviets have no problem on free navigation.

President: Israeli position quite interesting. Back through the years, Israeli attitude toward USSR ambivalent. Eshkol and others tried to see USSR in best possible light. Is there still division on this point?

Sisco: I have feeling still some division but official position is much more categorical.

President: "Is this bargaining or belief?"

Sisco: Some bargaining.

Helms: Israelis want to in-gather exiles so that is the one soft-spot in Israel's position. Otherwise, they take anti-Communist line for US benefit and see mainly the threat of Soviet help for the Arabs.

Kissinger: Not so much anti-Soviet as against Soviet support of Arabs. I don't take Israeli anti-Communism too seriously.

Sisco: Soviets push Israeli withdrawal to June 4 lines. We have stuck to our general position. Dobrynin has been trying to divide us from Israelis. Soviets do allow for minor border rectifications. Soviets want DMZ's of equal width. Soviets

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will object to Israeli requirement for positions at Sharm al-Shaikh.

President: Asked for positions on map.

Lincoln: Would Israelis insist on position at Sharm al-Shaikh if Sinai were demilitarized?

Rogers: Israeli doesn't trust UN forces.

Sisco: UAR doesn't like demilitarize whole Sinai. But maybe Aqaba Gulf side of it. Refugees: repatriation and compensation.

President: 50,000 go back?

Sisco: At most 100,000.

Rogers: Fawzi claims that if refugees had choice only few would want to go back.

President: Hussein says same.

Why not combine the principle with that fact? People wouldn't want to go back to an unfriendly land.

Sisco: Arab governments could push decision of refugees either way.

Yost: If offered opportunity for resettlement.

President: US effort here if part of peace package, we should go very far - not limited by budget. Poisonous element. We have to go further than we have.

Yost: Agree. Main source of Arab resentment for twenty years.

Sisco: We have told USSR there will have to be face-to-face negotiations at some point:

-- Israelis feel it sine qua non of recognition.

-- Practically necessary to hammer out details.

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Russians say Arabs won't buy it.

Generally, USSR wants limited accommodation but whether they will pay price we don't know.

President: Hussein wants peace. Does Nasser?

Sisco: Probably not or yes on his own terms.

Yost: Yes, because of his precarious position. We don't know whether he will pay price.

President: Why does USSR want settlement?

Sisco: Limited settlement they want would leave Soviets a free hand to support Arabs, but give them a string to maintain control. Settlement does not preclude their pursuing political objective. They want good relations with us.

Rogers: Strong feeling they are very worried. Their prestige on the line. Hussein says Arabs will be clobbered, if war breaks out again. They would lose all over Arab world.

Helms: Agree with both Rogers and Sisco.

President: Are Soviets using this for negotiating purposes?

Helms: Soviets have not done well on communications of Mid-East. They could work better in less confused situation. Even they do not profit from a situation where fellows are throwing bombs around.

President: June war a help to USSR - influence in Mediterranean. There is their desire to cool things with us - e.g., Korean crisis. If there is a chance of a break through, we should go ahead. But it all boils down to who goes first, who sticks neck out.

Yost: Big areas of Arab soil occupied but "big brother can't do anything." If Arabs start something, Soviets will be called on to make good on their promises.

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President: Could they be concerned about Israeli nuclear capability?

No disagreement.

Kissinger: There will be enough tensions between Arabs and Israelis after a settlement for USSR to exploit. They are asking us to restore their client's (Nasser's) losses so he can go on with his pro-Soviet policy.

Plan we are offering asks intangibles of the Arabs.

Our question is, whether it might not be in our interest as well as theirs to have a settlement. One interest is not having them drawn into a fight on Arab side.

Settlement which is painful to both sides and Soviets sell to UAR would be in our interest. From point of view of our overall relationship, we want a settlement that is unpalatable to UAR and Soviets have paid the price of selling it. We don't want Soviet client to come out ahead of Hussein.

Richardson: This most concrete subject we dealing with USSR on. It is the best way of testing their intent.

President: USSR may need this more than we do. While their position hard, our bargaining position may be better than we think. They may be willing to go further than we think.

Rogers: Maybe we psychoanalyze Soviets too much. They don't have a clear policy. Let's assume they negotiating in the same spirit we are. They're assuming, as we are, that the other fellow is trying to get the most he can. Thing we have to do is to get down to specifics.

On direct negotiations, Israel wants; US Jewish community wants; Arabs don't. Not necessary. In a divorce case, a lawyer would get nowhere if he forced both parties to sit down and work things out at the beginning. But if he works out a settlement that both sides can discuss concretely, he can negotiate a solution.

Eventually necessary, but thought the odds are probably against us, maybe we can work something out.

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YOST: Set of pressures on us - deterioration in area and what is likely to happen to Hussein. If no settlement, fedayeen get stronger, e.g., what happening in Lebanon now. Israelis making false analysis of their security interests.

President: An overall settlement may take years. Is it possible to "slice off any part of it?" I know Arabs and Israelis both demand whole package. I feel some progress would help.

Sisco: (1) Agreement between Arabs and Israelis on package idea. (2) The guts of this proposal are: Israeli commitment to full withdrawal. Alternative: Israel withdraw to "secure and recognized boundaries." The dilemma is that if the commitment is general, Arabs won't buy. Why do we include everything in this document? Finely balanced to leave Israelis leeway to negotiate. To my mind, direct negotiations are important to Israel.

Laird: It seems to me it is important to generalize that point. Israel is the strong military power. USSR wants us to deliver Israel and not deliver Arabs. Delivering Israel difficult.

Rogers: We conscious of delivering Israel. But our idea is to discuss paper first with Israel.

President: Use specific, hard paragraph with Israel?

Rogers: Yes.

Sisco: We have not decided to go ahead with Soviets before talking with Israel.

President: Where do we do this?

Sisco: In Israel, Barbour - Eban.

Rusk outlined eight-point position with Riad. We have never reaffirmed that position. We have kept that option open.

President: If you take it to Eban -- not Rabin --

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Rogers: What I'd like to find out whether UAR or Jordan paper first?

President: Barbour must not leave Israelis under impression they can do anything they want. While we're for Israel, what they hear from their friends in the US is not true. American people oppose intervention. Barbour must not give Eban a veto -- he must give Eban some sense of our determination to go ahead and do what we can for a settlement. Israel cannot count on us to be with it no matter what it does.

Richardson: A paper might emerge which four powers think is pretty reasonable but both sides object to.

President: Many believe we should have laid back and let parties get together -- simply because problem too difficult to survive. But maybe this is one area for concrete US-USSR agreement. I think we must assume the leadership here -- subtly. Any settlement will have to be imposed -- without calling it that. Overhanging this is US-USSR relations.

Yost: Absolutely right. Damaging events in area. Will improve our position in whole Arab world.

President: Is there anything we can do for Israel?

Yost: This paper gives Israel much of what it wants.

President: On refugees, American commitment -- "whatever it costs."
On Israeli side?

Sisco: A number of small arms requests.

Vice President: How about desalinization?

President: Too far away.

On both sides, just putting something on the plate. Refugees may be a phony issue. But we must feel we think it's worth a great deal to us to bring parties along.

Yost: Israelis may not be able to hold their own in fedayeen situation.

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Lindola: Wouldn't controlling fedayeen be one.

Laird: Soviets will take over fedayeen and use them against pro-US Arab countries.

Sisco: Present conditions working to advantage of USSR. Moderate governments will be toppling.

Rogers: He have to assume our interest is to have a settlement.

Westmoreland: We have some leverage with Israelis. F-4's begin delivery in September. A-4's, 40 of 100 delivered. Tank engines. Have asked for more A-4's and now A-6's.

President: If a settlement, our interest to see that Israel continues to maintain its edge.

Sisco: Jordanian side first? My own feeling is to proceed with what we have here. Recommend against doing both at once with Israel. Address after UAR - leave Israel-Jordan to secret contacts.

President: Jordan before UAR?

Sisco: Go ahead with UAR. Then over 3-4 weeks talk about Jordan.

Rogers: UAR plan is place to start.

Richardson: Jordan asking for more weapons.

Rogers: Leave aside.

Yost: Follow with Jordan paper soon. Interrelated.

President: OK.

Helms: US position eroded since June war. Soviets want tension beneath surface. But unless they make USSR run with us, we will give USSR a second victory.

Rogers: We conscious of that.

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President: June war netted out as great help to USSR.

Rogers: Greatest USSR victory would be radical takeover in Jordan.
UAR even Lebanon.

President: Got to go forward to build our strength back with moderates.

Yost: As long as Israel in occupation.

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