

December 8, 1969

Strategy in Four Power Talks on the Middle East

Citation:

"Strategy in Four Power Talks on the Middle East", December 8, 1969, Wilson Center Digital Archive, From the Six Day War to Yom Kipper: Selected US Documents on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973, a briefing book prepared for the international workshop, "New Evidence on the Arab-Israeli Conflict" (Wilson Center, June 11, 2007).
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/230159>

Summary:

An assessment of the US Government's strategy in the Four Power Talks, specifically focusing on the goal of a comprehensive and final Arab-Israeli settlement, but acknowledging the immense difficulties of this given the positions of other international players.

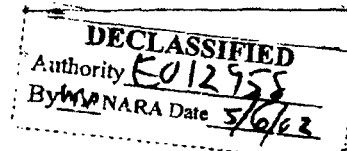
Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON



SECRET/NODIS

DEC 8 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Strategy in Four Power Talks on
the Middle East

We have made a fundamental assessment of our over-all strategy in the Four Power talks in light of four principal considerations:

(a) That our fundamental policy goal should remain a comprehensive and final Arab-Israeli settlement, based on the principles that the Arabs accept the sovereign existence of Israel and agree to live in peace with it, that Israel in return withdraws (with certain specified exceptions) from Arab territory occupied in 1967, and that the two sides negotiate the detailed security and other arrangements under Ambassador Jarring's auspices and sign peace agreements between them;

(b) That neither Nasser nor the Israelis are ready at this time to make the necessary compromises to achieve such a settlement;

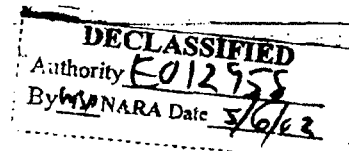
(c) That it is unlikely we will be able to achieve common ground between ourselves and the USSR, particularly in light of the stiff position the Soviets have taken at the outset in the Four Power talks and their apparent unwillingness to influence Cairo's position;

(d) That it is likely the French and to a lesser degree the British will take positions in the Four Power talks on which we are unlikely to be able to get Israeli concurrence, in particular by seeking to elaborate the detailed terms of a settlement.

These four considerations lead us to conclude that our strategy in the Four Power talks should have as its prime objective as much improvement as is possible in our

SECRET/NODIS
GROUP 1

Excluded from automatic downgrading
and declassification.



SECRET/NODIS

2

over-all position and image in the area against the contingency that the Four Power talks reach an impasse and we conclude it is desirable to disengage.

In the context of our bilateral talks with the USSR, we have already adopted a balanced position on which we should stand very firm. This position would require Israel to withdraw from UAR territory to the international border which existed before the June war in return for a specific UAR commitment to make peace with Israel and a further UAR commitment to negotiate on the basis of the so-called Rhodes formula the practical security arrangements for the Sharm al-Shaykh area, the demilitarized zones in the Sinai, and the final arrangements for Gaza.

As you know, we await the Soviet reply, and it is our judgment that we should categorically reject any attempt by the French, the British, or the Soviets to try to add details to this proposal which would throw it out of balance.

We have developed a parallel proposition as it relates to the Jordanian aspect of the settlement which is spelled out point by point for the purposes of illustration in the Enclosure. The position we are recommending in the attached is consistent with your conversation with King Hussein. In exchange for a Jordanian commitment to negotiate with Israel on the basis of the Rhodes formula, and a commitment to a binding peace with Israel, the latter would be expected to commit itself to a withdrawal from the West Bank, subject to satisfactory negotiations between Israel and Jordan of minor changes in arriving at the final border. In addition, our proposal would leave it to the parties to negotiate the questions of demilitarization arrangements, refugees and Jerusalem on the basis of open formulations which would not prejudice either side's position.

This proposal would be criticized by both Israel and Jordan. Israel would not like the provision for withdrawal

SECRET/NODIS

Priority CV 12758
By MM NARA Date 5/6/83

SECRET/NODIS

3

from the West Bank, even though the U.S. officially transmitted to King Hussein in July 1968 the Israeli position on Jordan that if Hussein was willing to make peace with Israel and to negotiate with it, "most, if not all, of the West Bank would be returned to Hussein." Our proposal would also leave open for negotiations, principally between Jordan and Israel, the final disposition of Gaza, our view being that it ought to go to Jordan in return for the border adjustments which Jordan seems prepared to give to Israel.

Jordan would also be critical of this proposal since it leaves the key question of ultimate sovereignty over Jerusalem untouched and for the parties to negotiate.

The advantage of making such a proposal at an early date in the Four Power context is two-fold:

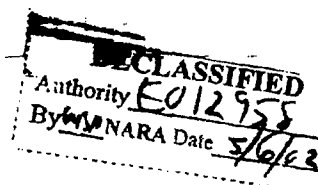
(a) Taken together with the proposal we have made on the UAR-Israeli aspect of the settlement, this proposal is balanced and is justifiable at home and abroad, and we can stand on it for an indefinite period; and

(b) If Ambassador Yost takes the lead on it, it will help preempt the situation and deny to the Soviets a good deal of the initiative which they seem to want to exploit from a propagandistic point of view by pegging out the most extreme position by calling for total withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territory, including Jerusalem and Syria.

Insofar as Syria is concerned, we should continue to avoid taking any position and to let sleeping dogs lie. If and when Syria should decide to accept the Security Council Resolution we should face up to that problem at that time. We certainly should not agree at this juncture to any Soviet proposal which calls for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Hussein's private assistant, Zaid Rifai, is meeting with Joe Sisco in London on December 11 and Foreign Minister Eban will be meeting with me here in Washington on December 16. This will afford us an opportunity to discuss these proposals with them, more in the nature of

SECRET/NODIS



SECRET/NODIS

4

informing them what we have in mind, rather than giving a veto or with the intention that we can achieve common ground between them. We can expect from Eban a firm reiteration of Israel's opposition to major power peace efforts and to substantive positions we have taken, particularly on the territorial question.

Our assumption is that after we have played out this string, it may prove desirable for us to disengage from the major power talks but to do so on the basis of reasonable and comprehensive proposals which would stand and be available for the parties to pick up if they come to that point. If, as we consider likely, this round of Four Power talks does not succeed in achieving sufficient consensus to put Jarring back in operation, we shall want to search for another device to carry forward the settlement effort. The most likely result of a breakdown in the talks without any successor activity, is the return of the problem to the Security Council where we will face a very difficult situation. We will want to consider at that time such possibilities as: a high-level singular U.S. mediating role; the possibility of three past UN General Assembly Presidents undertaking a peace mission; a UN-sponsored conference of major powers and the countries in the area; and other possibilities.

The course I am recommending is unlikely to produce a Four Power consensus or a settlement in the near future, and it therefore has certain risks of which you should be aware:

(a) It will not reverse the trend toward our being isolated with Israel and under fire in the Arab world. In the final analysis, that trend probably cannot be reversed no matter what position we take so long as Israel remains in occupation of Arab territory and we are seen to be supplying Israel militarily.

(b) It will not end the present war of attrition on the ceasefire lines or Palestinian guerrilla attacks on Israel, which will continue to be mounted to the full capacity of the UAR and could escalate toward more general hostilities between the Arabs and Israelis.

SECRET/NODIS

SECRET/NODIS

5

On the other hand, this course will give us a more balanced position in the eyes of the world, and one which might eventually provide a starting point for a negotiated settlement when and if the pressures of the existing situation on both sides and on the Soviets render them more willing to make concessions. So long as Israel preserves its considerable military lead, it will also leave us relatively free of direct involvement in the area. And, because we will have made clear our opposition to the kind of Israeli territorial acquisitions many Israelis have in mind, our position will give our moderate Arab friends something to work with and might help slow somewhat the rate of polarization in the area. Israel will, of course, strongly resist accepting even our present balanced position on a settlement. Should they persist in stand-patism, it raises a question as to how feasible it will be for the U.S. to continue to be in effect the sole economic and military support of Israel.

If we do in fact conclude that we should disengage from the Four Power talks, we will need to consider what steps to take to minimize the adverse effects on our position in the area. This indicates proceeding on two tracks: (a) a major effort to get Israel to modify its approach to a settlement by accepting the substantive positions we have adopted; and (b) moves in the bilateral and other international contexts to maintain the appearance and momentum of continuing settlement efforts.

William P. Rogers

Enclosure:

Fundamental Principles for
a Jordanian-Israeli Settlement

SECRET/NODIS