

February 1, 1970

Memorandum for the President, "Message from Kosygin"

Citation:

"Memorandum for the President, "Message from Kosygin"", February 1, 1970, 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/240273>

Summary:

Kissinger analyzes the message that Kosygin gave to the US regarding Israel's military action against the Arab states. He believes the tone is moderate, but still a threat, and that the Soviets are not in the stronger position. He also lays out a proposed response.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

File here
INFORMATION

SECRET/NODIS

February 1, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

SUBJECT: Message from Kosygin

The key points in the message from Kosygin which Ambassador Dobrynin gave me last night (Tab A) are:

1. The Israelis have in effect resumed military action against the Arab states.
2. The USSR is studying to what extent Israeli action has been coordinated with [U. S.] diplomatic action.
3. If Israel continues, this will widen the conflict with highly risky consequences for the situation in the Mid-East and international relations as a whole. If Israel continues, "the USSR will be forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal" to rebuff Israel.
4. The Four Powers must compel Israel to stop and to see that a lasting peace is established. Withdrawal of Israeli forces is key; if this is solved, there would hardly be any difficulty on other questions.

My thoughts about this message are as follows:

1. The tone is relatively moderate, but nevertheless this is the first Soviet threat to your Administration, so the tone of your reply will be important. The Soviets avoid directly threatening action of their own. So far, it would seem that they are loath to make this a US-USSR confrontation.

SECRET/NODIS

SCI, 189, PTF, D/K 1970 [p. 27], V. 1

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sect. 3.6

Reproduced from the open files
of the Nixon Presidential
Materials Staff

By KW NARA, Date 11/20/01

SECRET/NODIS

- 2 -

2. There is evidence that the combination of our firmness and the Israeli raids are hurting Nasser.

- There is a strong likelihood that Nasser made a secret visit to Moscow January 22-27. That may be the background for this note.
- Nasser told the Jordanian Foreign Minister that he cannot accept our position
 - (a) because the USSR won't let him, and
 - (b) because he would appear to be capitulating if he negotiated while the Israeli bombing continues.

3. The Soviets seem to have become increasingly concerned about a peace plan with a U. S. label on it.

- This document suggests action by the Four Powers, and Kosygin has sent it to Wilson and Pompidou.
- It implies that we can compel the Israelis to settle.

4. The letter holds out the bait that if the cease-fire could be restored and withdrawal achieved, other issues would fall into place. It does not spell out a view on the other issues and therefore leaves the Soviet view vague. What is worse, the position that Israel must withdraw before other issues are settled is a return to the Soviet position of 1967, which seems to negate much of the progress made in the US-USSR talks last summer.

5. The overall conclusion from the message and the circumstances surrounding it is that they are not in the stronger position vis-a-vis us. Our policy of holding firm creates the following dilemma for them: If they do not agree to our proposals, they get nothing, the onus for escalation falls on them and their client will lose if the escalation leads to a major clash. If they do agree, they would have to deliver their client on our terms.

SECRET/NODIS

SECRET/NODIS

- 3 -

The strategy of our reply that I propose is:

- to come down very hard on the Soviet threat;
- to relate Israeli observance of the cease-fire to corresponding observance by the other side, including irregular forces;
- to press the Soviets to spell out their views on what the Arabs would commit themselves to if Israel withdrew.

Because this message is going to both Prime Minister Wilson and President Pompidou, I believe State must be brought in. I have talked to Secretary Rogers and given him the memorandum at Tab B suggesting the elements of a reply based on our conversation from New York. I have also talked to Joe Sisco who agrees with this general approach.

I have also told Ambassador Freeman that we have a message and will talk to him before replying. I will reach Ambassador Lucet tonight. These small gestures of consultation are worth the effort since they will have the letter anyway. After we have a draft reply, we should seriously consider telling the Israelis.

We will have a draft reply for your consideration on Monday. My recommendation is that we should hold it, however, until at least Wednesday and preferably Thursday.

Attachments

SECRET/NODIS

REF, 489, PTF, D/K 1970 [p. 27], v. 1

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sect. 3.3

Reproduced from the open files
of the Nixon Presidential
Materials Staff

By KW NARA, Date 11/20/01

Unofficial translation
from Russian

Dear Mr. President,

According to information now available the Israeli leaders, ignoring the decisions of the Security Council have in fact resumed anew military actions against the Arab states, including bombings of population centers of the UAR in the immediate vicinity of Cairo. Not only military installations of the UAR and Jordan are being attacked but also civil population, destruction is being brought to towns, villages, industrial and other installations. The aims of these adventurist actions are clear - to force the neighbouring Arab countries into accepting the demands which ^{are} put forward by Israel. All this takes place at a time when the UAR and other Arab countries, honoring decisions of the Security Council, are not so far striking back at Israel.

In this instance as in determining their position in Middle Eastern affairs in general the Israeli leaders are evidently proceeding from the assumption that the US will go on supporting Israel and that under these circumstances the four great powers will fail to come to a common view on the implementation of the decisions of the Security Council.

There is danger that in the immediate future the military actions may become widescale while the decisions of the Security Council and the UN General Assembly will be losing weight in the eyes of world public.

2.

We are now studying the question to what extent the Israeli counting on political and other support from outside has ground and has been coordinated with the diplomatic actions by certain powers. We consider it our duty however to draw your attention, Mr. President, to the highly risky consequences the course chosen by the Israeli leaders may have both from the point of view of the situation in the Middle East and international relations as a whole.

We proceed from the conviction that stable peace can and should be established in the Middle East. The Soviet Union has persistently strived for this and has influenced its friends accordingly. If on the other hand the US Government supported its pronouncements in favor of peace in the Middle East by practical steps, and in the first place - vis-a-vis the Israeli leaders, then there would not have been such a situation in which for two years and a half the occupier continues to hold the occupied lands, hundreds of thousands of Arabs are forced to abandon their homes and people continue to perish.

Adherence by Israel to its present course may only widen and deepen the conflict, perpetuate tension in one of the most important areas of the world since it is impossible to force the Arab countries to reconcile themselves to the aggression, to the seizure of their territory.

SCF, 489, PTF, D/K 1970 [p. 23], v. 1

Reproduced from the open files
of the Nixon Presidential
Materials Staff

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sect. 3.6

By KW NARA, Date 11/20/01

3.

It is in the interests of universal peace and international security to warn the Government of Israel against adventurism, to undertake urgent and firm actions, which will help in stopping the growth of military tension and will make Israel listen to the voice of reason. We believe that this would also correspond to the national interests of the United States.

We would like to tell you in all frankness that if Israel continues its adventurism, to bomb the territory of UAR and of other Arab states, the Soviet Union will be forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal, with the help of which a due rebuff to the arrogant aggressor could be made.

The situation in the Middle East urgently dictates the necessity of immediate cessation by Israel of its dangerous armed attacks and sorties against the UAR and other Arab states.

The four powers are capable and must compell Israel to abandon its policy of military provocations and to see to it that a lasting peace be established in the Middle East.

We believe that now it is necessary also to effectively use the mechanism of bilateral and four-power consultations in order: 1) to ensure speediest withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the occupied Arab territories, 2) to ensure establishment of peace in the Middle East.

4.

Withdrawal of forces is the key question for establishing peace. If it is solved then there would hardly be any particular difficulties on the way to agreement on other questions.

We would like you, Mr. President, to appraise the situation from the viewpoint of special responsibility for the maintenance of peace which lies on our countries. As for the Soviet Government, there is no lack of goodwill on our part as well as resolution to act in the interests of peace in the Middle East.

Appropriate communications have been sent by us to Prime Minister Wilson and President Pompidou.

Sincerely,

A. Kosygin

13CF, 489, PTF, D/K 1970 [p. 2], v. 1

Reproduced from the open files
of the Nixon Presidential
Materials Staff

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sect. 3.0

By KW NARA, Date 11/20/01