

February 3, 1970

Memorandum for the President, "Reply to Kosygin"

Citation:

"Memorandum for the President, "Reply to Kosygin"", February 3, 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/240274>

Summary:

A draft reply to Kosygin's message, along with recommendations for the President on content, tone, and timing from Kissinger and Secretary Rogers.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED

Authority EO 12958
By SSA NARA Date 07/16/02NSCF, 340, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

MEMORANDUM

SECRET/NODIS

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

ACTION 7054

February 3, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

SUBJECT: Reply to Kosygin

Attached are a draft reply to Kosygin's message and Secretary Rogers' recommendation. The Secretary's memo makes essentially the points made in my earlier memo to you but adds these:

1. The Kosygin message may have been designed to delay our response to Israel's arms requests, since Nasser has probably asked the Soviets for more and the Soviets know the UAR problem is lack of trained manpower and not lack of equipment.
2. While it might be tempting to stand back and let pressure on the UAR and USSR mount further, this carries an element of risk. Soviet prestige is involved, and they might see themselves under increasing pressure to do something visible to reverse the present trend. It is, on balance, in the U. S. interest to restore the cease-fire.

I agree and the draft reply is written with this in mind.

The Secretary urges an early response. I understand your view to be that we should deliver our reply Wednesday, mainly not to reply in a time frame suggested by Dobrynin. I agree because the onus for delay cannot be placed on us; our response says we have already been in touch with both sides about restoring the cease-fire. Moreover, Nasser delivered a strongly anti-American speech Monday, and there is some advantage in ignoring him.

Recommendation: That you approve the attached text and delivery to Dobrynin by Sisco Wednesday morning.

Approve *PK*

Disapprove _____

SECRET/NODIS

FEB 3 1970

Authority EO 12958 NSCF, 340, SF
By SSA NARA Date 07/16/02 Dobrynin / Kissinger

7051

~~THE SECRETARY OF STATE~~

WASHINGTON

February 2, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Soviet Message of January 31 on the Middle East

Attached is a suggested reply to the Kosygin message of January 31 on the Middle East. We will discuss our proposed reply, after your approval, with the UK, France and with the Israelis, whose cooperation is essential in restoring cease fire conditions in the area. Your reply would then be handed to Dobrynin.

A prompt reply would have the advantage of informing Kosygin of the current efforts we started on our own several days ago to help bring about restoration of the UAR-Israeli cease fire. We agree with the argument that we should not appear to be excessively hurried and in fact we would not be ready to respond before Tuesday.

On the other hand, undue delay in informing the Soviets of our efforts would play into their strategy to place the onus for the current situation on the United States and to garner credit in the Arab world for applying pressure on the United States and Israel.

There are several observations regarding the Kosygin letter which are worth mentioning.

First, its principal thrust seems to be to get us to get the Israelis to lift the military pressure on Nasser. It could possibly signal that Nasser may be about ready to give up for the time being his war of attrition tactics and he may be looking for a way out. The Rabat Conference has helped free Nasser's hands in this regard, since he can always say his attempt to mobilize Arab resources fell far short of what

SECRET/NODIS

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
not automatically declassified

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Authority EO 12958
By SP/NARA Date 07/16/02NSCF, 342, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

SECRET/NODIS

2

he needs. He is also freer after Rabat to pursue a political solution if he so decides. This is why I feel it is so important to continue to stand firm on our two United States peace proposals and to maintain our efforts to convince Cairo and Moscow to adopt a positive stance toward them, as has Hussein.

Second, the inability of Cairo to respond effectively to the Israeli deep penetration raids is no doubt embarrassing to Moscow. We surmise, though we are not sure, that Kosygin's letter stems from Nasser's reported trip to Moscow which must also have involved further UAR arms requests. As a minimum, we are reasonably certain that Nasser encouraged Moscow to come forward with a concrete arms proposition to Jordan. The reference in the message that the Soviets would be "forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal" could signal that the Soviets have taken a decision to give more arms to Nasser, though there is nothing to indicate any change in their policy of providing measured amounts, or that they have decided provide more sophisticated weapons. It may also be intended to discourage us from providing Israel with additional arms. Moreover, short of nuclear weapons, the Soviets know as we do, that more materiel to the UAR cannot have an immediate effect on the arms balance or result in a sharp increase in UAR effectiveness, since the problem is not hardware but Egyptian lack of training and overall qualitative capacity. In short, the Soviets are in somewhat of a squeeze at the moment, and it should not be precluded that in time a more responsive reply to our two peace proposals will come forth.

Third, while it might be tempting to make only pro-forma efforts to achieve restoration of the cease fire and let pressure mount on the Soviet Union and Nasser, this carries with it elements of risk. Since Soviet prestige is involved,

SECRET/NODIS

DECLASSIFIED

Authority EO 12958
By SP/NARA Date 07/16/02NSCF, 340, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

SECRET/NODIS

3

they might see themselves under increasing pressure to do something visible and concrete to reverse the present trend. The Israeli attacks have made their point psychologically and have achieved the military objective of reducing their casualties on the Suez front. Much of the UAR military capacity in the Suez area has been destroyed. If Nasser as a quid pro quo is ready to abide by the UN cease fire resolutions and let up for the time being on his declared war of attrition, it is in the Israeli and United States interests to restore observance of the cease fire. Moreover, as long as the deep penetration raids go on, it is unlikely that Nasser can take any positive moves toward a peace settlement. This is not to say that the converse is true; even if Israel relaxed its military pressure, there is no assurance Nasser would move toward a settlement.

Fourth, there are some important tactical considerations on how to handle the Kosygin letter.

The letter has propagandistic overtones seeking to pin responsibility exclusively on Israel and the United States. Our reply must be framed on the assumption we may find it necessary and desirable to make it public if the Soviets play their message that way.

The Soviet letter is firm, one sided, and is confined exclusively to the Middle East; but it has an element of threat to us in that it first implies we are in collusion with Israel and then warns of giving the Arabs more means to rebuff the Israelis. Our response on this point in particular should be firm.

It is important to note that Kosygin does not propose that the United States and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics bring joint influence to bear on both sides to restore the cease fire; his focus is primarily on Israeli responsibility for the situation, American collusion, and

SECRET/NODIS

DECLASSIFIED
Authority EO 12958
By SSA NARA Date 07/16/02

NSCF, 340, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

SECRET/NODIS

4

the need for total Israeli withdrawal. For this reason, I suggest that your reply inform Kosygin of the steps we have taken and are taking through diplomatic channels to ensure compliance with the UN cease fire resolutions. We believe that joint action by the Four Powers is undesirable since it would offer more opportunity for the Soviets to exploit this as responsive to their pressure. We therefore should tell the UK and France that we agree that the UN cease fire should be restored, that our own efforts have been in train for some time, and that each should do what he can through diplomatic channels to help bring about a mutually respected cease fire.

Finally, we believe your reply should place considerable emphasis on the need for a positive reaction by the Soviets to the two United States peace proposals.



William P. Rogers

Attachment

Suggested reply to Soviet Premier Kosygin

SECRET/NODIS

DECLASSIFIED
Authority EO 12958
By SP/NARA Date 07/16/02

NSCF, 340, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

SECRET/NODIS

Suggested Reply

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Your message of January 31 has been studied carefully. For its part, the United States intends to continue its efforts to promote a stable peace between the parties in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution of November 22, 1967 and to encourage the scrupulous adherence by all concerned, not just one side, to the cease fire resolutions of the United Nations. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, this is the steadfast policy of the United States.

We do not accept the views expressed by the Soviet Government in explanation of the current situation in the Middle East. We have been using our influence with both sides urging strict observance of the cease fire. Thus any implication that the United States has been a party to or has encouraged violations of the cease fire is without foundation. Moreover, your attempt to place

SECRET/NODIS

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
not automatically declassified.

Authority EO 12958
By SSA NARA Date 07/16/02

NSCF, 340, SF
Dobrynin / Kissinger

SECRET/NODIS

2

responsibility on one side is not supported by the facts; there have been repeated violations of the UN cease fire resolutions by both sides. Full compliance with these resolutions on all fronts, including the prevention of fedayeen attacks against Israel, would help establish a more favorable atmosphere for progress towards a settlement.

As I have pointed out, the United States, just shortly before the receipt of your letter, discussed this matter with both Israel and the UAR and urged both sides to adhere strictly to the UN cease fire resolutions. We intend to continue these discussions in order to bring about early restoration of the cease fire between Israel and the UAR. It will be recalled that in early 1969 the UAR announced and initiated a policy of non-observance of the cease fire. An early indication by the UAR that it will abide by the UN cease fire resolutions if Israel will do the same would contribute to a reduction of tension and violence and facilitate a political solution.

SECRET/NODIS