

February 9, 1970

**Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) Meeting,
February 9, 1970, "Possible Soviet Moves in Egypt"**

Citation:

"Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) Meeting, February 9, 1970, "Possible Soviet Moves in Egypt"", February 9, 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).

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Summary:

Notes of a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group. They plan to draw up a US position for dealing with possible Soviet moves in Egypt within the next week, and review the military situation in the Middle East in subsequent meetings.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

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By KW Date 7-17-03

WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP (WSAG) MEETING

February 9, 1970

Time and Place: 10:21 A.M. - 11:02 A.M., White House Situation Room

Subject: Possible Soviet Moves in Egypt

Participation:

Chairman - Henry A. Kissinger

NSC Staff - Mr. Harold Saunders

Col. Robert Behr

State - Mr. Rodger Davies

Mr. Keith Guthrie

Defense - Mr. Richard Ware
Mr. Robert Pranger

JCS - Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

CIA - Mr. Thomas H. Karamessines

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. A US position for dealing with possible Soviet moves in Egypt must be ready within one week. The WSAG will meet on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 11 to draw up an initial position and will meet again Monday, February 16 to give the problem further consideration.

2. In connection with preparation of the US position the following papers should be prepared:

a. Assistant Secretary Sisco should submit on February 9 proposals for intensifying our diplomatic efforts to bring ^{about} a cease fire and, in this context, to warn the Soviets against further intervention in Egypt. These proposals should take into account the possible usefulness of a renewed cease-fire effort in dealing with public opinion pressures, staving off a further Israeli request for aid, and placing the onus on the Soviets for escalating the Arab-Israeli conflict.

b. For WSAG consideration at its February 11 and 16 meetings the military situation in the Middle East and the options open to the United States should be reviewed. This review should be related to the existing contingency plans, particularly Tab H (action by Soviet naval forces) and Tab D (responses to Soviet overt intervention in renewed Arab-Israeli hostilities) of the WSAG contingency plan of October 1969.

The analysis should take into account the overall power situation in the Middle East and not just the Arab-Israeli dispute. State and CIA should coordinate in preparing this aspect of the study.

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c. The ad hoc Under Secretaries group is to meet Monday, February 16 to consider the paper that has been prepared on aid to Israel. This paper must be coordinated with current contingency planning and should discuss what aid levels to Israel are appropriate in the light of foreseeable Soviet moves. It should also consider tacit US Government facilitation of Israeli military purchases in the US.

Mr. Kissinger summarized the circumstances requiring the WSAG to meet. There were hints that the Soviets might take some action, as yet unspecified, in the Middle East. It was essential we make sure our plans were in order and, that all possible contingencies had been examined. The study prepared by CIA suggested the following possible Soviet actions: (1) improvement of UAR ground-to-air defense, with some Soviet personnel made available for this purpose; (2) introduction of Soviet pilots, probably with associated ground-control installations; and (3) introduction of offensive weapons such as bombers and missiles. Mr. Kissinger asked if there were any new possibilities.

Mr. Karamessines said there was nothing further to add at this time. However, we might get some more information as a result of the Cairo meeting, since Nasser might tell his Arab colleagues what he expected or had requested from the Soviets.

Mr. Kissinger said he was concerned about one further possibility -- that the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean might take retaliatory action against Israel. Mr. Karamessines commented that while anything was possible, naval action did not seem consistent with the thrust of reported conversations by Soviet officials regarding the Near Eastern situation. Mr. Saunders pointed out that naval action was considered in the October 1969 WSAG contingency plan at Tab H, where it was suggested that we might respond by taking action against the Alexandria port facilities.

After noting that consideration should also be given to the more remote possibility of Nasser's loss of power, Mr. Kissinger suggested that the military situation in the Middle East and the options open to the US be reviewed and considered by the WSAG on Wednesday, February 11.

Mr. Kissinger asked about the timing of possible Soviet action. Mr. Davies suggested that the Soviets would move quickly for psychological purposes. Mr. Saunders observed that they might wait to see what decision we made on aid to Israel in the wake of Kosygin's letter to the President. Mr. Kissinger said he had noted the same theory in the press and asked who was putting out this idea. Mr. Saunders said that it appeared to be a complete fabrication, perhaps disseminated by the Soviet Embassy.

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Mr. Pranger noted that their freighter traffic through the Bosphorus in the next few weeks, Mr. Davies suggested that the Soviets might just announce that they were going to provide air cover to Cairo; and Mr. Saunders noted that, according to CIA, they could take the steps necessary to provide such an air defense within one week.

Mr. Kissinger said that the preceding discussion confirmed the need for a WSAG meeting as early as February 11 to give preliminary consideration to what the US should do. Discussion of the Middle East situation could be completed at a subsequent WSAG meeting on February 16. It was agreed that the February 11 meeting should be scheduled late in the afternoon to provide the maximum possible time for completing the necessary staff work.

Mr. Kissinger asked General Vogt to have a look at the existing military contingency plans. He noted that increased Soviet involvement would at the very least probably result in some attrition of the Israeli Air Force, and that this would generate pressure for US aid to Israel. General Vogt said the Israelis will probably move to take out any new defensive system installed in Egypt by the Soviets. He thought the Israelis had the capability to do so, even if the defenses were manned by the Soviets.

Mr. Kissinger observed that the implications of Soviet action would be different, depending on whether or not the Soviets acknowledged that they were assuming responsibility for the air defense of Cairo. If the Soviets maintained that an improved defense system was Egyptian, even though run by the Soviets, Brezhnev would probably be under less immediate internal pressures to retaliate in the event Soviet personnel were injured by Israeli attacks. In either case, however, we are likely to face a difficult situation. If Soviet help on air defense results in losses for the Israeli Air Force, we will probably get requests from Israel for aid. On the other hand, if the Israelis challenge the new defenses, the Soviets will eventually feel compelled to respond. They may act immediately if they have publicly acknowledged responsibility for Egyptian air defense; the time fuse may be a few months longer if the presence of their personnel is unacknowledged.

General Vogt pointed out that Soviet interest in defensive armaments for the UAR suggested that they were anticipating Israeli attacks. Thus, the Soviets might seek to keep their involvement covert. He observed that the Israelis had taken out all of the earlier Soviet SA-2 installations that threatened Israeli operations in the Cairo area. Mr. Karamessines noted that Brezhnev's reported remark about having taken a "bold decision" indicated that the Soviets were not planning merely routine action. General Vogt added that if the Soviets were to install the more sophisticated SA-3's in Egypt, they would be taking a major new step, since these weapons had never heretofore been deployed outside the USSR. One result might be an Israeli request to us for

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Mr. Kissinger then directed (intervention in renewed Arab-Israeli hostilities) and (Soviet naval forces) of the October 1969 WSAG contingency plan be reviewed in the context of the current possibilities for Soviet action in Egypt which might result in attrition to the Israeli Air Force and damage to Israeli territory. A judgement was needed on the circumstances under which we would prefer each of the options discussed in the October 1969 plan: military aid to Israel, interdiction of Soviet supplies, and US military intervention. Mr. Kissinger again emphasized the importance of considering the problem in the context not just of the Arab-Israeli dispute but of the overall power situation in the Middle East.

In answer to General Vogt's question, Mr. Kissinger said that JCS should submit its review of military plans directly to the NSC.

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