

**June 9, 1970**  
**Memorandum for the President, "Next Steps in the  
Middle East"**

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<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/240280>

**Summary:**

A memorandum that outlines several proposed courses of action the United States could take in order to stop the fighting in the region, restart negotiations, provide Israel reassurance, and does not reflect weakness towards Moscow.

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English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

June 9, 1970

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## MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Next Steps in the Middle East

We have conflicting objectives in the Middle East, the achievement of which poses dilemmas for the US at this present juncture. Our purpose is to find a course of action which: (a) stops the fighting on the principal fronts, or at least reduces the likelihood of confrontation between Israel and the USSR which would increase the possibility of a more direct US-Soviet confrontation; (b) offers a fresh and new approach to get negotiations started between the parties; (c) provides Israel with sufficient assurance regarding military assistance as an inducement towards military prudence and political flexibility, without causing a major break with the non-radical Arab regimes and jeopardizing the chances for success on the political front; and (d) neither reflects weakness to nor provokes undue escalation from Moscow.

To this end, the following courses of action are recommended as a "stop shooting, start talking" American initiative.

1. Ceasefire. We would propose to Israel and the UAR, and subsequently to as many other Arab frontline states as possible, agreement on a publicly declared ceasefire for a limited period from July 1 to September 15, the opening day of the UNGA, during which time major efforts will be made to get the parties to start talks on a political solution. Under such a ceasefire, Israel would continue to refrain from deep penetration raids. The UAR (USSR) would have to refrain from changing the military status quo (by emplacing SAM's or any other new installations) in a 25-mile zone on either side of the Suez Canal ceasefire line, and Israel would be required to observe a standstill on new installations on the East Bank of the Canal. While concentrating in the first instance on a UAR-Israeli aspect, we would also seek to broaden the limited ceasefire to include other

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and the Soviets keeping out of the Canal combat zone), the result will be to restrict Israel's freedom of action in the air without, however, losing its air superiority over the Suez sector. If the Soviets decide to challenge the Israelis in the Suez sector, Israel's air power would be quickly worn down. Our intelligence prediction is that Israel, faced with prolonged attrition, would be forced either to abandon the Canal line or attempt major pre-emptive strikes.

In short, the intelligence evaluations indicate that the weight of the Soviet presence has already reduced the material and psychological advantages previously enjoyed by the Israelis. Fundamentally, the Arab-Israeli military balance now depends on Soviet actions and decisions which have already created a situation in which Israel's air superiority could be rapidly neutralized.

In the light of the foregoing and your public and private statements regarding possible additional assistance to Israel if a change in the balance required, we recommend Israel be informed quietly and discreetly of the following.

(a) By the end of June, 44 Phantoms of the 50 will have been delivered. The other six, which are to be special reconnaissance models, have not been promised for delivery until early 1971. We, therefore, will (1) sell and deliver three additional Phantoms to Israel in July and three in August bringing the total to 50 (which Soviet and UAR intelligence will interpret as completion of the 1968 Phantom deal; only 88 Skyhawks have been delivered of the 100 committed in past contracts. The 12 remaining will be delivered over the next few months); (2) as replacements for past and future projected losses, earmark four Phantoms per month and four additional Skyhawks per month out of future production for delivery starting in September through the end of the year. This would be subject to review, only if negotiations between parties under Jarring's auspices had started and showed signs of success; and (3) make contingency plans for immediate delivery of F-4's and A-4's to Israel out of USAF inventories if there should be a dramatic shift in the balance.

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By KW NARA, Date 11/09/01

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(b) As part of your decision which I announced on March 23, we would also inform Israel of our intention to continue to respond affirmatively to other Israeli military requests in order to maintain the logistic pipeline. We would respond affirmatively to most items in their latest request--i.e., Hawk ground-to-air missiles, bombs, tanks, radar, acceleration of spare parts deliveries for F-4's and A-4's.

(c) A low key announcement would be made which made clear: (1) that for the next two months, during which we would make new efforts to launch a "stop fighting, start talking" proposal, the deliveries of aircraft by the U.S. to Israel would not bring them beyond levels committed on the basis of past contracts (not over 50 Phantoms and 100 Skyhawks); and (2) that we have made contingent provision for immediate delivery of additional or replacement aircraft to Israel if the need arises. As a condition, Israel must agree to affirm publicly that it is satisfied with the contingent arrangements made by the U.S., otherwise there is apt to be a strong reaction in the Congress. The announcement would be made shortly after we have launched our political initiative through diplomatic channels (see Scenario attached). We would insist on full cooperation from Israel with respect to our political proposal.

(d) We would inform Nasser that we are limiting ourselves for the time being not to go beyond the 50 Phantom and 100 Skyhawk level committed in the 1968 and 1966 contracts, but that further deferral of sale of additional aircraft is only feasible in circumstances of a ceasefire and his agreement to enter discussions under Jarring on the basis of the new American proposal.

4. U.S. Resolve Vis-a-Vis the USSR. One of our most serious problems is to reflect resolve and firmness to the USSR. The diplomatic efforts we have made with them, to underscore how seriously and how potentially dangerous their decision is to commit operational personnel in Egypt, have elicited no visible reaction or clarifications from the Soviets. There are increasing signs that the Soviets are prepared to live with and derive the political benefits from turmoil in the Middle East, and that they are operating on the assumption that they can press for unilateral political advantage while we are heavily involved in Southeast Asia. We believe more must be done privately in the area, and publicly over the coming weeks to reflect our resolve to the USSR. I recommend that you direct

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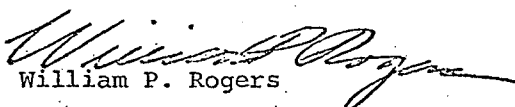
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Secretary Laird and me to make a high priority study of this aspect immediately covering the whole range of our relations with the USSR. Both political and contingent military steps should be studied. What do we do if the Soviets challenge the Israelis in the Suez area? All of us are agreed this means a "new ballgame", but precisely what are the options open to us? If Cairo and Moscow refuse to accept our proposals for a ceasefire or for the start of negotiations between the parties, what political and military steps should we take? Should we break off the Two and Four Power talks rather than continue giving the present impression that the door to a political solution is still open? Should we slow down our efforts to achieve understandings on certain bilateral matters? In addition to giving Israel more military help, which in itself is unlikely to deter the Soviets, can we dramatize efforts to make the Sixth Fleet more modern and effective, or can we fly routine patrols between Sixth Fleet carriers and Israel? Are such steps possible given the atmosphere on the Hill? How do we begin to educate the American people that the Middle East is a principal test between the US and USSR over the next few years?

In the meantime, we are limited largely to diplomatic efforts which are not apt to make much impact on the USSR.

Enclosed is a brief scenario and detailed instructions required to carry out the recommendations contained in this paper.



William P. Rogers

Enclosure:

Scenario

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