

March 13, 1970
**Memorandum for the President, "The New Soviet
tactic on Middle East Talks"**

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Summary:

An analysis of the Soviet's proposal for a resumption of bilateral talks on a Middle East settlement, specifically the reasoning behind the Soviet's desire to resume conversations.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION 8208SECRET/NODIS

March 13, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: The New Soviet Tactic on Middle East Talks

Secretary Rogers has sent you the attached account of his March 11 meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin on the Middle East.

The Meeting. Ambassador Dobrynin proposed resumption of bilateral talks on a Middle East settlement. He indicated Soviet willingness to consider a more precise formulation on the obligations each side would undertake in a peace settlement provided the U. S. would indicate a willingness to consider the Soviet position that Sharm al-Shaikh would return to Egyptian sovereignty, that an irrevocable UN presence would be stationed there to assure freedom of passage through the Gulf of Aqaba and that Israeli troops should withdraw from Gaza with the pre-war situation there re-established. He also said that the Soviets would expect us to express "concrete views" on a Syria-Israel settlement.

Secretary Rogers responded that we would study these proposals. He made it clear, however, that if we should agree to resume bilateral talks there would have to be an understanding that this did not mean we accepted the substantive Soviet proposals or that we would be willing to make concessions beyond our present position.

What Does It Mean? It is not yet clear exactly what the Soviets are up to with this apparent switch from a propagandistic and unconstructive approach to more flexible tactics. As you know, an earlier signal came in the March 5 Four Power session where the Soviets rather suddenly began to indicate their willingness to resume a constructive dialogue after weeks of attacking us in that forum. This bid to resume the bilateral exchange--which was broken off in December when the Soviets responded to our proposals on the UAR-Israel aspect in a strongly negative and retrogressive manner--apparently is a follow-on to that move. In neither case, however, have they indicated that they are prepared to yield substantially on the issue most important to us and

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the Israelis--a specific Arab obligation to control the fedayeen and on how the parties will actually negotiate a settlement. Instead, they continue to press for concessions that Nasser demands and that the Israelis would not accept.

*Since
Wien
at all*

It could be that the Soviets came to feel increasingly isolated in the Four Power talks as we persistently stuck to our proposals, the British backed us up and the French search for the middle ground floundered. They may

*Maybe
Walden*

talks and were prepared, if necessary, to end the talks and leave the onus for the deadlock with them. It may also have become increasingly apparent to them that we were not ready to make any more concessions, at least without substantial quid pro quo.

*Simon
about
being*

*William
SA-3*

It may be that the Soviets are concerned to defuse the growing appearance of confrontation, which they themselves launched with the Kosygin letter. This course left them with the ultimate option of having to escalate their involvement. An additional tactical motive may relate to the Soviet sense of timing on the decision of supplying Phantoms to Israel. The Soviets may have thought a show of flexibility at this time would tip the outcome against a new supply.

Adding

I note that Dobrynin's presentation seemed to pick up the thought in your foreign policy report that our approach to the Middle East will be guided by broad interests of international security and development of relations between our two states--another suggestion the Soviets may be backing away from the confrontation track.

*Legion
for
action
times*

Whatever the cause, there are indications that the Soviets and Egyptians want to keep the negotiating option open. These recent moves were immediately preceded by a visit of Deputy Foreign Minister Vinogradov to Cairo. Egyptian Foreign Minister Riad recently agreed to keep up "political activity" without making a concession on basic issues.

*1. war
out
spread*

Conclusion: There may be some merit in letting the Soviets sweat it out a bit longer in hopes that they may change in substance as well as approach. They have come to us with a bid to resume the bilateral talks, but have not yet indicated any real give in substance. If we intend to stick with our proposals in their present form, there would seem to be little point in reopening the bilateral dialogue and ease the apparent pressure on the Soviets without any promise of substantive progress.

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There is also the problem of what to do with the Four Power talks. The British and especially the French see this forum as being the most productive and might be dismayed to see us abandon it again for private talks with the Soviets. The French, of course, have been difficult and the British are showing signs of becoming somewhat of a problem, but both are still manageable. We may even be able to buy more time in the Four Power talks if our current gambit to shift them away from drawing up guidelines for Jarring to developing an interim progress report for U Thant works out. This could also serve to keep the heat on the Soviets.

~~These are just preliminary considerations for your thought.~~

*All this is tactical. Talks aren't in the
interests. Question is what to do with
out of 4 power or 2 power talks. Heat
is heat? If we make 2 power talks, we
about 4 power's*

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