

**April 25, 1970**

**Memorandum of Conversation between Yitzak Rabin  
and Henry Kissinger**

**Citation:**

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<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/240294>

**Summary:**

Rabin and Kissinger discuss the Soviet's participation in the Egyptian Air Force, an increase in Egyptian air attacks on Israel, and potential American responses.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

MEMORANDUMSECRET

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

April 25, 1970

## MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Yitzak Rabin, Ambassador of Israel  
Shlomo Argov, Minister, Israeli Embassy  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President  
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE and PLACE: Friday, April 24, 1970 at 6 p. m. in Dr. Kissinger's Office

Ambassador Rabin began by saying that, since April 18, there is a new phenomenon in the Middle East. Soviet pilots have taken an active role by participating in the air defense of Egypt.

In response to Dr. Kissinger's question, the Ambassador said that Israel estimates there are fifty Soviet pilots involved; Israel does not know how many aircraft are involved. They fly from three bases, two southwest of Cairo and one (Djankialis) near Alexandria. The last has been involved in only two incidents where planes were scrambled. Most of the activity has been from the two southern bases.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether Soviet pilots have engaged Israeli aircraft. The Ambassador replied, "Almost," on April 18 over the Nile. The Ambassador described the new pattern of Soviet activity as follows: Soviet-piloted aircraft operate south of an east-west line from Cairo to Suez. For the time being, they are not interfering with Israeli attacks in the Suez Canal Sector. Israel does not yet know whether they will expand their operations into that area.

Over the past week, the number of Soviet responses has grown rapidly. Whenever Israeli planes approach, Soviet planes are scrambled. As a normal thing, they have not tried to interfere directly with attacking Israeli planes, even in one instance when Israeli planes were attacking a target on the west shore of the Gulf of Suez south of the Cairo-Suez line.

The corollary to this move in Egyptian actions has been greater aggressiveness in Egyptian air attacks on Israeli positions in the Sinai. Since the Egyptians feel that their hinterland is defended by SA-3 missiles. (there are now ten operational sites -- four around Alexandria, six around Cairo), they have mounted more sorties themselves.

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The Ambassador concluded his presentation by stating emphatically and with some emotion that this is no longer a question of a UAR - Israeli military balance. Now there is a new element. Israel wants more planes.

Dr. Kissinger asked how many. Rabin initially replied, "at least as many as when the Prime Minister was here," but Argov later called Saunders to ask that a correction in the record be made to show the Ambassador's reply as reading, "The number submitted when General Yariv made his intelligence presentation here."

In the conversation that followed, there was a series of brief exchanges between Dr. Kissinger and the Ambassador with the following points made:

--The Ambassador asked how the U.S. would respond to this Soviet move. Dr. Kissinger indicated that we would have to look at this new intelligence and consider the new elements in the situation, but "we will not tolerate their using military force against you."

--Rabin implied that the Soviet decision was brought about by the U.S. decision not to provide Israel with aircraft now. He also felt that perhaps the Israeli decision not to attack Soviet-manned SA-3 positions in the Nile Valley had contributed to the Soviet decision. The Soviets will fill a vacuum whenever they feel one exists.

--Making clear that he was asking the question only to improve his own understanding of Israeli thinking, Dr. Kissinger asked whether Israel would attack the bases from which Soviet pilots are operating. Ambassador Rabin replied, "What would that do?" The U.S. would come to Israel and urge it not to further involve the Soviets. Assistant Secretary Sisco had made clear in Jerusalem that the U.S. believes that SA-3 missiles are now in the UAR because of the Israeli deep penetration raids. Dr. Kissinger asked, "Is that wrong?" Rabin said, "No. That is why there is no good reason for Israel to attack the Soviet-manned air bases."

--Rabin said that the Israelis did not think the Soviets would feel "so much freedom to involve themselves to back the Egyptian war of attrition." Israel was on the verge of forcing Nasser to accept a cease-fire. Israel had not backed the Soviets against

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the wall; Israel had given them a "political out" in the proposal to accept a cease-fire.

The conversation concluded with Dr. Kissinger saying simply that he would of course report the Ambassador's approach to the President and we would review our position.

*H.H.S.*

Harold H. Saunders

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