

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET/NODIS/CEDAR

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Implications of a Confrontation with Israel

As you consider the State Department game plan for the Middle East, it is worth thinking through the possible outcomes of the all-out approach to Israel that it recommends.

There are two different premises from which judgments can be made about possible outcomes:

--The State Department proposal rests on the premise that there may be a faction in Israel potentially strong enough to change Israeli policy if given sufficient inducement and justification. The assumption is that a substantial US assurance of Israel's future security--along with the implied threat of reduced support--would enable those just under the Israeli top leadership to argue that Israel should withdraw from the Sinai provided there are serious international guarantees. Put in another way: Israel could be persuaded to go back to the pre-war UAR-Israeli border provided there were ironclad assurances against the UAR's ever again closing the Straits or mobilizing in the Sinai. Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird and Assistant Secretary Sisco seem to be working from this premise.

--People in CIA and some others in Washington see no evidence that the Israelis are prepared to give up an Israeli position at Sharm al-Shaikh. They believe the Israelis are virtually united in wanting to change the Sinai border. They would concede that there are differences among Israelis as to just exactly how much withdrawal from the Sinai there should be. Some these people feel that Israel would not withdraw much behind the mountains 40 kilometers from the Canal, while others believe that they would be content with Sharm al-Shaikh and a land corridor down the west bank of the Gulf of Aqaba. They take Dayan at his word

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when he says he would "rather have Sharm al-Shaikh than a peace agreement." Put the other way: the US cannot now persuade Israel to go back. Mr. Helms at the Tuesday meeting seemed to hold this premise.

The basic question to be answered before we can formulate a strategy, therefore, is: Can the US persuade Israel to withdraw this year, or should the US aim at trying to construct a long drawn-out negotiating process that might have some chance of containing the situation and perhaps even give Israeli thinking a chance to evolve?

--If the judgment is that the US can persuade Israel to withdraw to essentially pre-war borders this year, then there could be reason for going ahead with something like the State Department approach. The consequences of this approach would be as they are laid out in the State Department game plan: "Such an overall approach on our part would hopefully set in motion the kind of reappraisal in Israel, perhaps leading to political re-alignments, which we have increasingly felt may be necessary before the Israeli government can be brought to risk the compromises that peace will entail." In short, success of the State Department game plan by its own definition requires a major Cabinet crisis in Israel and perhaps the resignation of Prime Minister Meir. The underlying assumption is that perhaps the present Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir would take over and, in collaboration with Dayan, might be able to accept the kind of proposal that is being made.

--If, however, one assumes that the Israelis are not prepared to withdraw totally at this point, then one would have to assume a confrontation in which the Israelis would stand firm and in which the US would make the choice between backing down or beginning to separate itself from Israel by applying the leverage of withholding major support from Israel. Because of the magnitude of these consequences, it is worthwhile examining them in more detail.

For the sake of analysis, therefore, let us assume for a moment that the Israeli government decides to reject our approach and to stand firm on its present position that Israel must change its Sinai border and must negotiate these changes directly with the Arabs. In that case, the following consequences would seem likely:

--If the US were unable to force a change in the Israeli stand, the Israeli position would have hardened and it is unlikely that the Israeli government could advance any position in the Jarring talks that would provide sufficient hope to justify Egypt's continued participation. The Jarring talks would presumably grind to an early halt.

--Given the position that Sadat has taken and the pressures on him, it seems likely that at some point his military would have to begin some sort of harrassment of Israeli forces across the Canal. This would not necessarily be an immediate outcome, but it is difficult to see how he could very long go on without resuming fire or at least heightening the tension with threats.

--The Egyptians might be emboldened if they knew of the US-Israeli confrontation and especially if the US appeared to have taken some distance from the Israeli position.

--The Israelis might make only a minimal response for some period, but if the harrassing fire reached any significant level, it is difficult to see how they could avoid responding in some way, either with air attacks across the Canal or even perhaps with ground raids.

--President Sadat must have received some assurance in Moscow that if the ceasefire did break down the Soviets would stand behind him. Presumably, the Soviets are not anxious to become involved in a renewal of hostilities. But if fighting returns to the intensity of last summer, it seems likely that Soviet pilots would become involved again. It may be that Egyptian missile crews are now trained and that the Soviets would be less involved than they were last summer in the air defense system.

--Alternatively, the Egyptians might not resume firing immediately but might, as in 1967, mobilize and make moves perhaps in concert with the Soviets that would be sufficiently threatening to make the Israelis feel that they had to mount some sort of preemptive strike.

--If hostilities resumed and especially if the Soviets became involved the US would then face a choice between standing back and supporting an Israel which took a position that the US had already denounced.

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--Even if hostilities did not resume, the Israeli reaction would have been such that it is difficult to imagine resumption of any peacemaking effort.

In short, the consequences of confrontation with Israel seem sufficiently grave to warrant discussion of an alternative course.

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March 10, 1971

Alternative Game Plan for Seeking to
Break the Arab-Israeli Impasse

The scenario proposed by the State Department rests on the assumption that it is possible to set loose political forces in Israel that would cause the Israeli government to accept withdrawal to the international UAR-Israeli border provided there were reliable US and international assurances that the Egyptians would not again be able to mobilize in the Sinai or close either the Suez Canal or the Straits of Tiran. The State scenario envisions a major approach to Israel asking Israel to accept essentially the US positions on the terms of a border settlement that were outlined at the end of 1969 in return for a US commitment to involve its own forces in reinforcing international guarantees and to provide bilateral assurances of a US security relationship with Israel.

This alternative game plan is based on the assumption that the Israeli body politic is not yet ready to accept total withdrawal from the Sinai--if indeed it ever will be--and that the US strategy should aim at trying to construct a long drawn-out negotiating process that might have some chance of containing this situation and of allowing both Arab and Israeli attitudes to evolve in relation to each other. The essence of this proposal is to try to buy time by concentrating efforts on a scheme for partial withdrawal from the Suez Canal and then to approach the Israelis quietly to work out with them a common position on the other elements of a settlement. The objective would be to avoid confrontation now while maintaining pressure on the Israelis to negotiate seriously. If this were to be our strategy, we would have to acknowledge frankly to Israel that we are prepared to work with them in stringing out the negotiating process provided they were prepared to put enough into it to give the Egyptians an excuse for keeping it alive.

The key issue in setting a strategy is how long the US will delay before pressing Israel to accept 1969 positions. The Israelis will want to know whether if they advance their own negotiating position the US will immediately press them to change it or whether the US will give Israel some latitude to negotiate. They know the US will be limited by Arab and Soviet insistence that Israel not be given complete freedom to negotiate borders.

The emerging choice of strategies seems to be shaping up as a choice between:

1. A modified State Department course in which we would hold to the objective of talking Israel into changing position in the immediate future but would change tactics to try doing this in a dialogue about our respective positions rather than by bluntly requesting an Israeli change of policy.
2. An alternative which would seek to divert major attention to partial withdrawal from the Canal and would give Israel genuine latitude to advance a negotiating position on borders without threat of US disapproval. In the dialogue, we would seek less to change Israeli positions by direct approach than to create situations in which Israel itself would have to weigh security alternatives to territory.

An important parallel element in this strategy is a plan for getting Soviet combat forces out of the UAR. It will be essential in any approach to Israel to make clear that the US recognizes the threat those forces pose to Israel and can be effective in reducing that threat. It is also important to the United States' own interests in this area to reduce the Soviet combat presence. The only inducement we have to offer the USSR is Israeli withdrawal from much--if not all--of the Sinai.

The State Department game plan includes a promise that the US would seek an understanding in Moscow that a final Arab-Israeli settlement would be paralleled by a US-Soviet agreement not to base operational combat forces on the territory of Israel or any neighboring Arab country. The State plan explicitly says this would not be a precondition to a settlement.

The alternative strategy would be to use the negotiations on guarantees to pin down this understanding and, by inclusion of US and Soviet forces in a peacekeeping force, to legitimize but limit the Soviet presence to that operation.

For the sake of concreteness, a draft telegram embodying this approach--minus repetition of the rationale stated above--is attached.

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March 10, 1971

DRAFT TELEGRAM

ACTION: Amembassy TEL AVIV
Amembassy MOSCOW
INFO: USUN New York
AM EMBASSY Amman
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AM EMBASSY Beirut

STATE

1. To set this scenario in motion, the Secretary would call in Ambassadors Rabin and Dobrynin to make presentations along lines described in paragraphs 4 and 5 below. Ambassador Barbour would follow-up with a parallel presentation to Prime Minister Meir (Paragraph 4) and Ambassador Beam with Gromyko (Paragraph 5).
2. A central purpose of this approach is to reduce Israeli suspicion that the US is setting Israel up for major pressure to accept the US 1969 positions. The strategy is to show US willingness to let Israel try its hand at negotiation provided it is willing to inject enough movement into the negotiating process via a reasonable proposal on partial withdrawal from the Suez Canal to keep the ceasefire alive.
3. The strategy toward the USSR is to re-engage the Soviet Union in the peacemaking process and to establish a framework for reducing the Soviet combat presence in the UAR.

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4. The following are the elements of the approach to the Israelis we envisage stated in the form of tentative talking points:

A. After almost four years, the US and Israel have succeeded in establishing a negotiating framework which we both have agreed is essential in moving toward a settlement. The US has also succeeded in re-establishing the ceasefire. In this process, the US has persistently resisted pressures from other powers to move toward an imposed settlement. This continues and will continue to be the US position.

B. Our purpose in approaching the Israelis now is to devise a common strategy for prolonging the ceasefire and preserving the negotiating framework which has been established at such cost. While we share Israeli reservations about Arab intent, the fact is that we have succeeded in eliciting from the principal Arab leader a public commitment to make a peace agreement with Israel. We feel that US interests require that this opportunity not be allowed to pass. We even presume to say that Israeli interests are parallel to ours in this respect.

C. We fully understand the Israeli fear that if Israel advanced a specific negotiating position on a subject other than borders or if it advanced a position on borders with which the US did not agree, the US would publicly confront Israel and press it to change that position to conform to the US position papers of 1969.

D. The US, for its part, frankly continues to believe that pre-war borders with minor changes are all the Arabs can accept. Despite that continuing conviction, however, the US will not now press this position on Israel. It is willing to see Israel test the Arab position itself.

E. In particular, the US is prepared to join with Israel in an effort to keep the present negotiations alive by concentrating on a limited proposal for partial withdrawal from the Suez Canal and re-opening of the Canal. The purpose of this move would be to enable the Israelis in contact with the Egyptians to work out over a period a practical common arrangement which would give the Israelis not only a chance to test Egyptian intentions but also a chance to decrease the likelihood of renewed hostilities.

F. The US is prepared to take this position only if the Israeli government will advance a proposal on the Canal and put forward positions in the Jarring talks that will have a reasonable chance of keeping the negotiating process alive for the next few months. This would require not only a scheme for partial withdrawal from the Suez ceasefire line but also a position on borders which could provide a basis for discussing next steps toward an overall settlement. The US would be prepared, if desired, to participate in the injection of an international force at Sharm al-Shaikh alongside Israeli troops.

G. The US is prepared to make a major approach to the Soviet Union in which the US would propose limited Soviet involvement in that international force in the context of the elimination of the Soviet combat presence in the UAR. Another way of putting this would be to say that the US is prepared to negotiate with the Soviet Union an agreement on the limitation of stationing US and Soviet forces--apart from peacekeeping units--on the soil of Israel or its neighbors.

H. This suggestion to Israel is made in the full knowledge that it will be very difficult for Egyptian leadership to accept. Therefore, to repeat, the one condition for US cooperation with Israel in this endeavor is that Israel agree to put forward sufficiently imaginative proposals to enable Egyptian leadership to continue the ceasefire.

I. Just so Israel can understand what the US has in mind in the long term, US support for an eventual UAR-Israel agreement could include long-term arrangements to satisfy Israeli arms requirements (the aircraft Israel wants) under generous financial terms, US executive and congressional declarations of support for Israel's security, formalization of bilateral defense consultations, financial contribution to refugee settlement and \$500 million in credits each in FY 1972 and FY 1973.

5. The following are the main talking points for an approach to the Soviet government after the Israelis have indicated readiness to advance what the US regards as a Suez Canal proposal the UAR could reasonably accept:

A. In view of the importance of maintaining movement toward a settlement, the US is conveying simultaneously to the UAR and USSR an Israeli proposal in response to President Sadat's suggestion for Israeli pullback from the Suez Canal as an important first step toward a peace agreement.

B. If the UAR is prepared to discuss this proposal, the US is prepared to discuss with the USSR appropriate means of guaranteeing scrupulous adherence on both sides to the agreed terms of a pullback. The US proposes that an international team including US and Soviet nationals be established in a UN headquarters to verify observance. The US would propose bilateral discussions to be followed by discussion by the Four Powers in New York.

C. In introducing its own nationals into this situation, the US is prepared to discuss with the USSR an agreement that both the US and USSR refrain from stationing any combat forces in Israel or in any neighboring Arab country except as part of agreed peacekeeping forces. These discussions would, of course, remain in the bilateral channel.

FYI. The objective behind the proposal on peacekeeping forces is to try to trade withdrawal of all Soviet combat forces from the UAR for a legitimized but limited Soviet presence in the context of a peacekeeping force. END FYI.