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DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRP SENSITIVE MIDDLE EAST
S/S-7400659Authority 5012958By D NARA Date 4/10/88 of ConversationDATE: December 15, 1973
TIME: 4:00 - 10:30 p.m.
PLACE: President's Office
Damascus

SUBJECT:

PARTICIPANTS:

President Assad of Syria
Foreign Minister Khaddam of Syria
Secretary Kissinger
Assistant Secretary Sisco
Interpreter (Syrian)

1973-12-15, Assad, Kissinger, Meeting

KISSINGER: This visit is important to peace in the area and our bilateral relations. Thank you for the polite, cordial reception.

ASSAD: Thank you, I am pleased to meet you. This is the first high level contact between our two countries in years.

KISSINGER: I am the first Secretary of State to come in 23 years, since Mr. Dulles.

ASSAD: The U.S. responsible for all this.

KISSINGER: The Foreign Minister pointed this out. (With a smile) The Foreign Minister was courteous, but I do not imply he was not strong in his views. Weakness is not one of the attributes of Syrian character.

ASSAD: We are glad our guests are pleased. Want to make clear the facts we believe in. Our relations can be built soundly by making certain facts clear.

KISSINGER: We must be honest with each other; we must be frank with one another. I'll tell exactly what I think. I'm not a professional diplomat.

NEA:JJSISCO

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ASSAD: I am pleased to meet you. I have heard from other Arab brothers that you are frank. Most recently I have heard from our brother in Egypt.

KISSINGER: I had good talk with Boumedienne.

ASSAD: President Boumedienne recently sent envoy to brief me on your talk.

KISSINGER: I knew Sadat was doing this. I told both of them they were free to tell you what I told them.

ASSAD: That is exactly what Boumedienne's envoy told us.

KISSINGER: We have no desire to divide the Arab people.

ASSAD: We have no interest in division either.

KISSINGER: I have told every Arab leader the same thing, and the Israelis too.

ASSAD: Although this is difficult, it is easier in the long run.

KISSINGER: It is a difficult road to travel. We can do it only if we have confidence in each other.

KISSINGER: How would the President like to proceed? What order?

ASSAD: The main problem is Israeli aggression. If these things you want to know about, anything, I would welcome any questions. If not, let's discuss the aggression. I want to stress our concern over US opinions and its stance. I may have an image of the US, yet direct talk gives clearer picture.

KISSINGER: There may be some bilateral problems, to discuss, but first I will discuss the principle subject. The principle subject is bringing peace and justice to the ME. I gave a lunch for Arab foreign ministers in N. Y. Before the war, I said I recognized conditions under which Arabs were living were intolerable and we have to do something

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KISSINGER CONTINUED: to change them. We would make an effort. American intentions were clear before the war. Nevertheless, war has created objective conditions which make hope possible. President Nixon understands this very well.

ASSAD: Some he does not understand.

KISSINGER: As a former Harvard professor, I tend to confuse complexity with profundity. I never use one when ten words are possible. It is opposite with the President Assad.

ASSAD: I can talk as much if I have the material. Dr. Kissinger has a greater volume of material.

KISSINGER: The truth is that I sometime speak beyond my material. The truth is that without your sacrifices and courage, I would have tried and failed. There would be no chance of a peaceful solution without the Syrian and Egyptian effort on the battle field. As result, objective conditions to make progress toward peace are better than they have been. There is a good possibility to bring peace. I can't be certain, I don't want to mislead you. We will make a major effort. We have succeeded in a number of other fields. Many countries can write the exact conditions they favor. They don't have to implement them. We are the only country that can bring about political progress without war. You are right in pointing out we have supported Israel. That is true. Candidly, there are strong domestic pressures in US in favor of support of Israel. We have to manage our domestic situation if we are to be helpful. Don't put us in a position where we have to take final positions, when what is required are first steps. People say if you can't get Israel to go back to the October 22 positions, you cannot do anything. If I had been stupid, I could have achieved this. That's not a problem. For me to waste capitol, to waste ammunition on this would not make sense, what is a few kilometers? Pressure on Israel must be for a bigger withdrawal. Israeli strategy is to get me to get them to say exactly where Israel is going, then all media and groups will start agitating

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KISSINGER CONTINUED: against me, or they will start a fight on small issues. Next time when I ask for something bigger they could accuse me of being anti-Israeli. That's why there has been no fight over the October 22 positions. We need some time to organize ourselves domestically. We have made progress in organizing ourselves at home. I have spent much of my time, with Congress. The press has also begun to turn. I told Sadat that after January 1 we will begin to show our hand. That promise remains in force. I repeat the same to you, I make the same promise to you.

How do we plan to proceed. First, we must get peace conference opened. Why? A peace conference provides legal front within which negotiating activity can go on. Real solutions will occur outside the conference. We must plan it as you make military campaigns. We must have agreement on a first phase, and then on second phase. We can use the conference to provide scenery and framework. What is first step? We are having difficulty getting the conference opened; but let's get back to substance.

On the Egyptian side, it is to get Israel to withdraw to something. This is significant psychologically; more important than any legal interpretation of 242. Israel should withdraw from the Canal region to the vicinity of the Mitla Pass. This would bring about a great psychological change everywhere in area. I have worked out some principles of a proposal which we hope to get approved after January. I will be glad to tell you, but Sadat may want to tell you.

I believe the same principles should be applied on Syrian side. There should be a first phase withdrawal from Syria. This will be harder since Israelis don't like you at all. That's my concern. I don't want the offensive. We can agree on some ideas on withdrawal. We are prepared to state this is first stage. It should be done during January. Then we should have discussions regarding the next stage. We are determined to make a major contribution to peace. We can discuss now withdrawal negotiations which should take place in January and which the US is prepared to support. Then there can be a discussion on the next phase.

We have a procedural problem with the Israelis, this is their willingness to agree to the US-USSR joint letter to

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KISSINGER CONTINUED: the SYG. Some say they should agree, some say not. It is in their interest to get into a fight with us because it would confuse American public opinion. Israel is not eager to get conference started because it will require sacrifices. For six years they have said they want direct negotiations because they knew you would say no.

We need to do two things; delay the conference until December 21, so I can talk to them, so they can be brought around. I talked to Sadat, and he agreed it makes no difference whether it is the 18th or 21st. What is your view?

ASSAD: Of course, the whole thing depends on general results of our talk today. This is not a new idea, we had it previously.

KISSINGER: Whether you come at all?

ASSAD: Our attitude as a whole our attendance at the conference depends on results of our talk.

KISSINGER: Your life won't be unfulfilled if it does not open on 18th. Is this impression correct? You don't dream about not going to Conference?

ASSAD: We are not dreaming about going to the conference. No measures have been taken as yet, even the delegation has not been formed. We have heard of conference, that's apparent; we do not know what the conference will be, what it will achieve.

When we accepted 338 we had an idea of what conference should be. We are only one of the parties. It is clear that there are many interpretations of the peace conference and 338. They give an ambiguous picture. In addition, it is not clear how US and USSR see the picture. What is the agreement between the US and the USSR?

KISSINGER: The USSR is a close ally of yours. They should help keep you informed. They always tell me what good friends you are. There is no agreement, except the conference. We'd rather make an agreement with you rather than the USSR make it with you.

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KISSINGER CONTINUED: They have made specific proposals and a plan for a peace settlement. I've avoided them. Because if it viable proposal, we can make it directly to the Arabs. Lots of people give us advice. We have to do some work with the Israelis and Soviet Union can't help us there. They have no influence with Israel. There is only one agreement: a conference, and we'll stay in touch with one another. There is no agreement on substance on any issue. If you are told anything else, then it isn't true. I told Boumediene that we do not recognize any sphere of influence in the Middle East. What will happen at the conference will depend on you and us. You can talk to the Soviets, we don't want influence Syrian-USSR relations. We will attempt to get separation of forces in the first phase, meaning some Israel withdrawal. This would be followed by another stage of withdrawal and discussions on security, borders, Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinians. Timing of when these items go on the agenda, we should do intelligently and agree among each other. This is my course. I recognize the Palestine movement has to be discussed, but not in first phase. Once the conference exists for a week, it would probably become impossible to end it. Whoever does so takes on a tremendous responsibility. At this point we should talk about complex issues. That is my idea of conference. The conference is a mechanism for moving from war to peace. Time has come to bring about peace. We've been told by the Soviets, you had agreed to go to conference. We'd assumed you'd be there. I didn't know the question was still open. They told us you told them you are coming.

ASSAD: This has never happened. This does not mean we are not attending. Last thing discussed were some observations; this is not important now.

KISSINGER: We must establish contact between us. If you want an interest section without diplomatic relations, then we can exchange messages directly. This would be useful at this stage.

ASSAD: It is true we have to seek doing things and urging direct contacts between us.

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KISSINGER: Otherwise we fly blind and might urge you to do things without knowing what you thought. Just a few people are enough. It is not satisfactory to tell the Italians what we want to tell you. On peace conference are you saying that since it no hardship for you not come on 18th, it is hardship for you not come on the 21st. Seriously, let us delay to the 21st if it does not make any difference to you.

ASSAD: Sadat has agreed?

KISSINGER: Yes.

ASSAD: Nodded affirmatively and with a big smile on his face.

KISSINGER: You have seen the letter to the SYG we intend to send to the participants. Our problem is Israelis don't want reference to the Palestinians in that letter, particularly because of their elections. Our view is that it would be a mistake to take up the Palestinian question now in the Conference. We recognize the problem cannot be solved without taking into account interests of the Palestinians. We are not opposed in principle to contact with the Palestinians. I already have an arrangement with the Moroccan King. There are so many Palestinian groups, we don't know who to deal with. You might advise us as to which might be an authentic group. We are willing to have contact with Palestinians at a level below me, say Sisco. I want to be in a position at present to say I've had no contact with them. As to any reference to the Palestinian question in the US-USSR letter, there are two ways to settle it. Every one said to me you would get angry if I raised the Palestine question with you. The Russians say they are afraid to raise it with you. I'll take my chances. I rely on Arab hospitality.

As to the sentence on Palestinian representation in the US-USSR letter, one way to avoid it is to say "the question of other participation will be decided at first stage of conference." I've told you our view of the Palestinian issue, and I will be glad to give you a note as to our view on that sentence. It is just a way to avoid a big fight for nothing so the conference can get started. You are free to tell them what I have said re Palestinians, but you must promise it will not be made public. Sadat is

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willing to have invitation go without any specific mention of the Palestinians. There was another idea which is bigger departure than this which Sadat accepted. This would be for the US-USSR to send out a simple invitation without any legalistic formulae. We have a text. This Sadat has agreed to, but the Russians didn't want to put it to you. You see everybody says that of all the Arabs, you Syrians are the most impossible to deal with. I will send you a letter of apology.

ASSAD: If US policy toward the Arabs and the Syrians is based on wrong intelligence reports, it backs up my view you are responsible for the break in relations.

KISSINGER: That's true. In September, intelligence reports described your military disposition as defensive. I called the Israeli Ambassador and asked if Syria was going to attack. He said impossible, not a chance. I didn't believe it. So I asked our own intelligence people. They said not a chance. Three times hard intelligence reports rejected the possibility. Since then, our intelligence predicts attacks every day. Does this happen in Syria too?

ASSAD: It is a mistake in estimating the situation. Perhaps someone sympathetic to Arabs.

KISSINGER: I don't hardly listen to the experts. If you can accept the first alternative, I don't have to bother you on the second alternative. Sadat has accepted the second alternative. I have not discussed the question of other participants with Sadat. Israelis would have to accept it.

ASSAD: During my meeting with Sadat I saw a text which said "question of the Palestinians" would be raised at first stage. There were two texts; the Conference would discuss the "question of Palestinians", the other text would decide matter at first phase.

KISSINGER: President Asad agreed to "question of"

ASSAD: Yes

KISSINGER: I appreciated it. This is new suggestion to avoid meaningless fight. Whether the Palestinians will be invited cannot be decided by a few words. If Israeli propaganda machine starts

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in US, Israelis will say terrorists are begging given recognition. I am willing for Sisco meet secretly with Palestinians. We are not trying to avoid problem, you could arrange a meeting if you wanted. Sentence would say "question of other participation," implies Palestinian representation.

ASSAD: Is it my turn to speak?

KISSINGER: Please express your views.

ASSAD: I welcome you Dr. Kissinger. I am pleased to be meeting with you. This will give each of us an opportunity to understand the other side correctly. It is important that this understanding be accurate. The meeting should be frank and clear and should help us with clear ideas. This is what we seek from this meeting.

As a professor you have spoken for fifty minutes. The President was an officer and officers are brief. As a military man, I take the place of politicians; professors take the place of politicians. (Kissinger interjected most professors cannot replace politicians.)

ASSAD: I recall a report of your talk with the Arabs in New York, you made the point that your country cannot seek miracles. Miracles require prophets. I do not have any illusions about miracles or facts being interpreted as illusions. Facts should be named as facts and stressed as facts, despite difficulties. Facts are one thing; miracles are another.

I want to make the following points:

First, we are not or never have been against the people of the United States. I have said this many times and in many places. There is much convincing evidence that we have to be against U.S. policy because it is against Syrian interests and Syrian just aspirations. Had it not been for U.S. assistance in support of Israel, Israel could not remain in occupation and force out the Palestinians from their lands since 1948 but we are not against the United States as a country or a people.

Secondly, our policy is decided in light of our national interests. We want to build our line in a completely independent way. Syria is non-aligned. It is an effective member of the non-aligned group and a member of the Bureau. It cannot be diverted, because it has deep convictions.

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KISSINGER: We will not always agree on policy. We believe Israel should survive. This is not the Syrian objective. Our interest is that we want Middle Eastern countries to be independent and with strong leadership which reflects the authentic will of the people. We prefer to deal with strong leaders. We are interested in national independence. We like to think you don't follow any other's line. What you have said is philosophically acceptable to us.

ASSAD: We find our policy reflects the hopes and aspirations of our own people. They support it. Otherwise we could not face a number of difficulties. What you say is important and useful. (He stressed this twice.)

Third, we in this area want to realize a just peace. We are serious. We want to build our own country. We need a just peace.

Fourth, there can be no peace with justice unless the Arab Palestinian question is settled. The Arab people of Palestine were driven out by force and are now living in camps. How can there be peace without settling their problem?

We believe the U.S. is the major factor to check the aggressive Israeli spirit. Simultaneously, the U.S. is also a major factor in encouraging the aggressive spirit. When we discuss the question of Israel or our fight against them, it is not out of hatred of Jews. I have said this often. This is an area of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. They have lived together for a very long time. We do not deny Israel by maltreating Jews. The Zionist movement by their attitudes has affected their lives in countries they live. Nevertheless, we view the citizens as citizens of Islam. Even when the Jews had their normal life in our country, Israel tried to force them to take action contrary to their interests. For example, the two and one-half year campaign regarding the Syrian Jews is untrue. The biggest store in Syria is owned by a Jew. The most famous pediatrician was a Jewish doctor and most of his patients were Moslems.

KISSINGER: There is no question that the Jews have lived together with the Moslems in peace for a long time. I agree.

ASSAD: We recently seized spies for Israel, one Jew, one Moslem. We have full evidence against them. About a year and one-half ago,

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there were certain questions regarding some Jews accused of taking money out of the country. Many citizens in our country were condemned under this law. But two Jewish women were given special amnesty because of their Jewish faith. We are against Zionism as an expansionist move but we are not against Jews or the Jewish religion.

The next point I want to make is that no leaders of a regime can give up any sovereignty. We cannot compromise one inch of territory. It should all be restored. Within the framework of these points, Israel does not want peace and cannot realize her dream without the U.S. Israel talks about secure borders. The invalidity of this theory is obvious. Are there secure borders in these important times? Modern weapons show there are no real secure borders. This theory is invalid.

If we are to suppose there are such secure borders, history shows we are in the need of secure borders if any one. Why should secure borders be at the expense of Syria. Let secure borders be at Galilee if any where. Under what logic should secure borders be at the expense of the population of Golan. Why should the line of danger be closer to Damascus than Tel Aviv? The distance from the '67 border to Damascus is 80 kilometers; the distance from the '67 border to Tel Aviv is 135 kilometers. So why should they want secure borders. If the idea behind it is to keep danger away from both capitals, why not?

KISSINGER: You will be in trouble if they move their capital to Haifa.

ASSAD: In that case we will move our capital to Koneitra. As to Egypt, we have to take into account its rate of population and that it will soon be 50 million.

KISSINGER: I am not condemning it. I made a joke.

ASSAD: Some people may answer that these are the realities that Israel occupies the territory and has force. Of course, in this context we can only take lessons from history. We are also guided by the objective analysis of the past and the future. We conclude that the future is not for the logic of Israel. Israel today is in the Golan Heights. Maybe some day we will be somewhere beyond Golan. Israel would be in another place if it had not been for the U.S. in this recent war. Israel has made penetrations and pockets, but they have not gained any military advantage.

KISSINGER. I agree.

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ASSAD: On the contrary, it is a grave point of weakness for Israel. The war is stopped. Both sides are tired. Had the war continued for two days more Syrian forces would have been in a different position. I am completely confident on this on the basis of fighting on the two fronts. Until when will the Israelis rely on their unlimited American support? This attitude is against the U.S. interests and principles of peace and justice. I do not have in mind the question of oil when I mention U.S. national interests. It goes beyond merely oil. If the U.S. interests were confined only to oil that would be a catastrophe. U.S. has many other vital interests. We do not believe this American backing will continue in the manner it has. This is our first meeting. I am speaking frankly and openly so it will lay the basis for a future common understanding between our two countries.

KISSINGER: The Russians don't want to discuss the conference with you. They want us to do it. They want me to take the blame. I mean no disrespect for what you have said and your philosophy. It raises the question of your concept of peace. Perhaps we could concentrate on some practical questions.

ASSAD: I understand from other Arabs that you believe things should move gradually. You believe that things require time. I believe when the US tells Israel to go back it will do so without hesitation. There is a precedent in 1956, and then it was even more complicated because the US and UK were allied with Israel. This is a fact not a miracle.

KISSINGER: I agree. The present situation is different and the internal situation is much more complex.

ASSAD: I move to practical steps.

1. Is the US with us on our idea that we cannot give up one inch of territory or do you have other views?
2. Do you believe that there can't be a solution without the peoples of Palestine?
3. Are we to go to the Peace Conference for implementation of the above two points or only to think and take a long time without reaching a radical solution?

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KISSINGER: The purpose is to convene a conference for peace not for triviliaties. There is no question that those who want to delay matters want to concentrate on triviliaties. We will use our influence to move towards a sound peace. This is my response to the first question.

As to the second, we recognize that a final settlement must take into account the problems and the aspirations of the Palestinians.

Third, we are prepared to discuss with you now or later withdrawal of Israeli forces in a first stage. As to the ultimate destination (withdrawal), it is true that the Security Council resolution 242 opposes the acquisition of territory by force. We recognize that there have to be further withdrawals beyond the first stage. We have avoided taking a position on your question because everything in the Middle East becomes public sooner or later. That would be suicidal for us. But you are a man of facts and two facts are evident: there can be no settlement you don't agree to and we will not force you; in any event, if there is a start with some of your territory regained, my view is after the first stage of disengagement we must then address the specific problems of security guarantees, borders, and so on. After disengagement, that should be less difficult to resolve. I don't deny that there will be difficulties but our direction is clear. We must move now to disengagement. I discussed principles with Sadat, and there have to be modifications in negotiations. We did not discuss the details, we discussed concepts only. These included: The Egyptian Army staying east of the Canal; a thinning out; a withdrawal of three Egyptian divisions; restrictions on tanks and heavy artillery; Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank to about 35 kilometers east in the area of the Mitla Pass; a buffer area with UN forces in it; and an Israeli thinning out of their forces on their own side of the line and possible moving of their army back east of Mitla. We are prepared to support such concepts. Now as to the Syrian situation, is there an area where you could have a buffer, an area where the Israelis could stay in the first stage. We would be prepared to say publicly we consider it a first stage.

ASSAD: Golan is smaller than the Sinai. Weapons of one side should not affect weapons of the other side. Moreover, the villages in Golan are numerous, 163 more than in the Sinai. Of course, disengagement should involve all of the Golan Heights.

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KISSINGER: They will never accept it. Can I see any ideas you may have? I do not know the area. It is conceivable that the Israelis might be willing to go out of the area they occupied after October 6. I want to make clear I have never discussed this with the Israelis.

ASSAD: That is not worth anything. It is in our interest they stay where they are. It is only a pocket.

KISSINGER: I haven't studied it.

ASSAD: The weapons should become ineffective.

KISSINGER: How far should it be?

ASSAD: At least 20-25 kilometers.

KISSINGER: I cannot promise something I cannot deliver.

ASSAD: Disengagement is different from withdrawal.

KISSINGER: It is possible that the Syrian Army might be able to follow up and occupy up to a certain point certain of the areas evacuated.

ASSAD: No observers?

KISSINGER: I don't want to mislead you. Conceivably, your army could move up from part of the way and UN observers could be in place.

ASSAD: If withdrawal is only restricted to the pocket, it doesn't solve the problem.

KISSINGER: You are thinking of disengagement beyond the October 6 line.

ASSAD: Of course, after all our forces are on the October 6 line, the only exception is in the pocket.

KISSINGER: Their generals didn't know war has to be fought for political objectives. I don't understand why they did what they did.

ASSAD: I don't either.

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KISSINGER: Territory is meaningless unless it gives a political advantage. I want to talk to the Israelis about this matter. Everybody thinks you are irresponsible. I would like to communicate with you. How do I do this?

ASSAD: If you go to Geneva, I can contact you. I agreed with Sadat that disengagement first had to be settled with you.

KISSINGER: I did not know a prior disengagement agreement was a condition of your attendance at Geneva. I can send Sisco back to Damascus. Or you can always go to the conference. We ourselves don't need a conference. We are in the ridiculous position of talking with everybody to go to the conference. If the conference doesn't start, you are playing the Israeli game. It will be an open conference, two days of meetings. In the internal working groups studies of the problems will be made, then the conference will resume. If no progress is made, you don't have to go back to the conference. If by the time it resumes we will not have made real progress on disengagement you could refuse to go back.

ASSAD: I agreed with Sadat that the question of disengagement on the Syrian-Israeli front should be discussed with you, that the conference would be only a framework. This question of disengagement must be settled before hand.

KISSINGER: I have had many chances to have talks with the Israelis. If you are willing to have talks with the Israelis so that in the interval you can make proposals and they can make proposals, this would be fine.

ASSAD: The question of POWs should be closely linked to disengagement.

KISSINGER: I understand this. First, the conference should be opened then there would be set up working groups on disengagement. Before the conference, Syria should give its list of POWs to the Israelis, permit Red Cross visits, and release the wounded. The rest of the POWs could be released when there is actual agreement on disengagement. With that I could go to Israel. They would think I have real influence with you. You still have the basic weapon of withholding the final release of all the remainder of the POWs if there is not agreement on disengagement.

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ASSAD: In light of past experience with Israel, I believe no result will come. There must be prior agreement on Syrian-Israeli disengagement, otherwise our attendance at the Conference is without sense.

KISSINGER: The best we can do is our best effort. We have not given any one any promise we can't keep. I'm in no position to make an agreement. If the conference never meets, I have no objection. Let everyone talk alone and see what they can get, but I believe it is important to get the conference started. Then it is a means for continuing pressure for withdrawal, and we will help in that.

I came here under a misapprehension. I did not think your attendance was conditional on anything. When I said I would discuss disengagement, it was out of good will not to get you to go to the conference.

ASSAD: Let me say that we welcome you here, Dr. Kissinger, so that we can understand each other. I did not link this meeting, we may or may not agree on attending the Peace Conference but I have not told anybody that I would without saying additionally what I have said to you. I have never told any one that we are going without certain requirements being met, and Sadat agreed.

KISSINGER: We were misled.

ASSAD: I was told by Sadat that there had been agreement between you and he on disengagement, that there was agreement on the framework.

KISSINGER: That is correct. First we must have a conference. You understand that there have been no talks between you and the Israelis on disengagement as there have been between the Egyptians and the Israelis.

ASSAD: Today I received Sadat's envoy who said that the question of disengagement on the Syrian-Israeli front would be agreed between us.

KISSINGER: There have been six weeks of exchanges with Sadat on the question of disengagement. There have been no such exchange with Syria. There is also the background of the Israeli-Egyptian talks at Kilometer 101. I will work in the same spirit with you. It would be irresponsible for me to start drawing lines. I have not studied the matter. You wouldn't respect me if I did this. I am a serious man. Moreover, the Russians have told us you have accepted the US-USSR letter to the Secretary General.

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ASSAD: I would respect you because I suppose you will be following up on these things. You have made this clear.

KISSINGER: When I promise you something I want to keep it. For that there is need for a framework. There is need for a Geneva Conference.

ASSAD: The general impression is that Dr. Kissinger is a serious man and keeps his promises.

KISSINGER: There are two practical problems. One is procedural and the other is substantive. I cannot be the principal negotiator. I can be the mediator. Perhaps there can be military talks with the Israelis on disengagement outside the conference. The danger in this is that they may agree on disengagement, then there would be no Israeli incentive to go to the conference.

Let me summarize. You don't care about the date of the conference if you aren't coming.

ASSAD: It makes no difference to us.

KISSINGER: You agree to the 21st.

ASSAD: If I'm not going, our opinion is of no value.

KISSINGER: Your decision does not depend on that.

ASSAD: No, it does not.

KISSINGER: The Egyptians and the Soviets have agreed to go to the conference. I don't know how to proceed. If you are willing to start military talks with the Israelis, we are willing to help you bring about an acceptable disengagement agreement. If you don't give the list of POWs, Israel won't agree to go.

ASSAD: We have to agree on disengagement before we go to the Conference.

KISSINGER: You need to give the list, permit a Red Cross visit and exchange the wounded to get discussions on disengagement.

ASSAD: Our understanding of what you say is that agreement on disengagement must be accompanied by the POW list and a Red Cross visit.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

Authority SAL/2958
By D NARA Date 4/10/88

KISSINGER: I told Sadat Israel won't talk to you unless you give them the list and permit the Red Cross visit.

ASSAD: There are two Geneva Conventions including one on the repatriation of civilians. They have made an offer. 20,000 people are important. Why should we give anything without anything in return. We are taking back our own land.

KISSINGER: The Israelis will permit the return of your people to the lands when you return the POWs.

ASSAD: That is why disengagement is linked to the release of the POWs.

KISSINGER: I understand it. I need to give the list, the Red Cross visit and an exchange of the wounded. The POWs should be released before discussions on disengagement.

ASSAD: Why give up these cards, for what? The exchange of POWs is linked to land.

KISSINGER: How about the list?

ASSAD: There must be prior agreement on disengagement.

KISSINGER: Before the list?

ASSAD: What do we get?

KISSINGER: Give the list, begin negotiations on disengagement.

ASSAD: Beginning talks are a loss to us. Our people do not want talks.

KISSINGER: How shall we proceed? Israelis won't talk to you unless you give the list. I can't understand why you take the view that there can be no release of the POWs until disengagement agreement is achieved. When I was in Moscow, Brezhnev promised that you would release the POWs in a few days.

ASSAD: I never talked on this subject with them.

KISSINGER: I will be glad to show you the minutes of the meeting. I never deceive you. When the conference opens there would be two working groups established. Before the beginning of the work of the two groups, you would give the Israelis the POW list. This would make it easier to deal with them later.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

ASSAD: This would be possible providing first there is agreement on disengagement on the Syrian-Israeli front.

KISSINGER: The Israelis would agree that there should be some disengagement, but the details would have to be negotiated.

ASSAD: This is difficult. We will never agree with the Israelis.

KISSINGER: You can have the UN there in a subgroup, and we will help you on the side, I promise you.

ASSAD: I prefer to reach prior agreement with you on where the line of disengagement. This is just the way it was in the case of Egypt.

KISSINGER: Egypt is different. There have been a number of discussions with the Israelis, then military talks at kilometer 101. I gave them some ideas.

ASSAD: Egyptian-Israeli talks on disengagement and other disengagement talks were not fruitful.

KISSINGER: Yes and no. They were fruitful enough for me to have a full exchange with both sides.

ASSAD: There is no agreement on distance.

KISSINGER: Put forward some proposals, so I can understand what can be done.

ASSAD: I understand with Sadat he has worked out an agreement with you.

KISSINGER: It is more complicated than that. On the Syrian-Israeli front I could not draw a line. It would be stupid for me to do so. You have to get the Israelis used to the idea. The Cabinet would have to decide. If I bring a proposal now to them, there would be an explosion.

ASSAD: If within a period of time our people see the results, it would have a big effect on our people.

KISSINGER: We have to get started.

ASSAD: If we go to the Conference without deciding things our losses would be very great.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

Authority 50/2958
By D NARA Date 4/10/87

KISSINGER: I could not tell him what would happen. I would use my influence. I could not

ASSAD: Israel cannot say no when the US wants them to say yes.

KISSINGER: The problem is much more complex than that. It is essential to get a process started. If this is impossible, there is no natural law that we have to be the mediator. If we can do it, I will use my best efforts to produce a disengagement agreement. I can't tell you at this point what it is. I want to hear from Israel, then you should talk to the Israelis, then I can help. Everything I promised Sadat I have done.

ASSAD: I will await a reply from you. I suggest we look more at the map. (There was a period in which Assad showed Secretary Kissinger the enclave and the October 6 line; he mentioned no specific lines of withdrawal; he stressed how small an area the Golan is.) It is not difficult to see the short distances and within a short period of time.

KISSINGER: It took me four years to settle the Vietnam war. You are asking for something absolutely impossible if I were to attempt it. I cannot draw a line. It is too important a mission to start it. It would disappoint you. We can help once negotiations start, like the Egyptian case. Sadat knows and appreciates timing, and how to make things develop. This is important. We haven't got a line agreed to. Maybe Israel won't come to the Conference. "Participation of other Participants" will solve the problem.

ASSAD: This could mean Europe, China, etc.

KISSINGER: It could say "Other participants from the Middle East".

ASSAD: Isn't this too much support by the US for Israel?

KISSINGER: Why fight it now? This is totally irrelevant now. For me to make such promises are not worth it.

ASSAD: Anything you agree with Egypt on a text of a letter is all right with us.

KISSINGER: The points I made regarding the Palestinians is our position. What will your answer be to the letter? Will you put your weight behind it? In time I will help you, before the end of January, before the end of six weeks. The only two people who can pull off a settlement are President Nixon and myself.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

Authority EW/2958
By J NARA Date 4/10/88

If at the beginning you say "no conference", I will be totally discredited. If there is no conference after two trips to the Middle East I will be discredited. Perhaps the best thing for me is for there not to be a conference. I have no personal ambition in this. In ten years they will thank me in Israel. They don't understand that now. When you make your decision, I hope you keep in mind the fact that it is a chance for the first time in 25 years. We must trust each other at least for a month or two. We want the conference to open and the working groups to meet in the first week of January. You should give the list and allow the Red Cross to visit at the opening of the working group meeting and work out an agreement by the end of January. You can have a UN man there. We will be glad to work behind the scenes with you. I can send Sisco to you in January, and we'll shape it up. You can release all the remainder of the POWs after the agreement has been achieved.

ASSAD: Difficulties are being created by Israel. We cannot go to the conference without things being clear. Disengagement should be agreed on before the conference.

KISSINGER: Principles, possibly, but details impossible.

ASSAD: In this case Egypt and Jordan will go, and we will see what happens.

KISSINGER: It is a mistake for you.

ASSAD: I don't agree with you.

KISSINGER: How can we discuss disengagement on the Syrian-Israeli front if there is no military working group at the Geneva Conference.

ASSAD: In any event, agreement will be outside the conference.

KISSINGER: Well then, the US-USSR letter will be sent you, and you can either accept it or not as the case may be.

ASSAD: In any case, I think your contact can be maintained. We shall not attend any conference before agreement on disengagement.

KISSINGER: I was never told this, to the contrary. What will you tell the Secretary General in response to his invitation to go to the conference.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

SECRET, By J. Sale/2958
NARA Date 4/10/87

ELY EYES ONLY

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ASSAD: The text of the letter is not accurate.

KISSINGER: But you said you agreed to the text of the letter. The letter won't be accurate if you do not agree to go to the conference, the letter cannot be sent. My Middle East mission would be a failure. It would be difficult for me to do any more work on this problem.

ASSAD: If you continue, there could be progress. Are we to give up territory?

KISSINGER: That is not what I want to do. There is no sense talking to you if my purpose was to bring about what the Israelis want. I cannot agree to a disengagement plan. I didn't do that with Sadat, and I can't do that with you. I can have full influence once the talks have begun between you and Israel.

ASSAD: You will get acquainted with the Israeli view.

KISSINGER: I cannot get a disengagement agreement by Friday, perhaps by the end of January.

ASSAD: Maybe you should postpone the conference.

KISSINGER: I can't travel around the world. If there is no conference I will not be able to do anything more. We will look ridiculous. Somebody else can see what can be done. If I go to Israel and tell them you are not going to the conference, there will be a celebration in Israel. If you do not go this would set things back. It would be difficult to explain it failed. This would be a set back for months. I will not do it. This is not necessarily your problem. I don't see where diplomacy goes from here.

ASSAD: We were very clear with all of the people we contacted.

KISSINGER: I would not be here if I had been told this. I would not have taken on a trip under such conditions. If I were to send the text of the letter, you would be saying no objection to the text, but you have objection to the conference.

ASSAD: This is not quite accurate. All things we are discussing are clearly connected. For example, the letter, the conference, the working group, are connected. The text is a framework but it is irrelevant unless we agree on substance.

KISSINGER: How can I agree on a plan on disengagement, when you don't even have a plan. There is no point in going forward.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

Authority EW/2958By D NARA Date 4/10/88

I have tried to be helpful to the Arab people. If this is not possible, it is fine with me. I can't promise what I can't deliver. Perhaps we should drop the whole process of a letter or accept either form. I must caution you that all of these discussions are very confidential. We will contact Egypt and the USSR to see what they think.

ASSAD: Anything you don't want made public will not be made public, except only our attitude.

KISSINGER: If the talks fail and there is no conference, speculation will be so rampant, it will be hopeless to recreate the circumstances. In America this will be impossible.

ASSAD: I'm sorry if you have failed. I have no cards to help facilitate your discussion. I have nothing at all to offer. I want to help you. We will not attend. It is important that there be disengagement on both fronts.

KISSINGER: I agree that there should be disengagement on both fronts, but I cannot agree on a line at this time. I have not studied the matter.

ASSAD: Before leaving for Algiers I talked to Sadat. Egypt wants Israel to withdraw east of the passes. This occurred at the Kilometer 101 talks.

KISSINGER: Israel withdrew the Yariv offer immediately. I'll do my best in the framework of the conference. I am sure I will succeed. I can't tell you the exact line today.

ASSAD: We still have a few days. Maybe that will be enough.

KISSINGER: You will be sent the US-USSR letter. Let's see what happens. If there is a conference I will work with you seriously. By the end of January, disengagement of both frontiers should be possible.

ASSAD: If we go to the conference how will we know where the line will be? On the Egyptian-Israeli front they know.

KISSINGER: They don't know exactly. Where should the line of disengagement go?

ASSAD: Can you suggest anything?

KISSINGER: I cannot. I have not studied the problem.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

KISSINGER: Can we agree to establish an American Interests Section? We must maintain contact.

ASSAD: Yes, we must maintain contact. What do you have in mind?

KISSINGER: An Interests Section of a few people just as we have in Baghdad and Algeris.

ASSAD: That should be possible.

KISSINGER: As to further immediate contact maybe we could send Ambassador Buffum to see President Assad.

ASSAD: Yes, that would be fine.

KISSINGER: I will have him come in a few days to report to you on my talks in Israel.

ASSAD: I agree that you can send a few people to Damascus.

KISSINGER: You are free to do the same - to send them to Washington.

KISSINGER: What should we say publicly?

ASSAD: That we have had a frank and useful talk, and that we have agreed to maintain contact.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY