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Memorandum of Conversation
1974-1-10, Sadat, Ghorbal, Kissinger

Date: January 10, 1974

Handwritten initials: MEA, 7/8

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SUBJECT: Middle East Developments

PARTICIPANTS: Ashraf Ghorbal, Egyptian Ambassador-Designate
Ahmad Khalil, Egyptian Minister
The Secretary
Joseph J. Sisco, Assistant Secretary
G. Norman Anderson, NEA/EGY

COPIES TO: S, D, S/S, NEA, GEN. SCOWCROFT

Ambassador Ghorbal called at his initiative on the Secretary's departure January 10 for a general discussion before the Secretary's departure for Aswan later that evening.

KISSINGER: I look forward to going to Egypt again, but hope my hosts will cut down on the number of courses served at meals. The main thing now is that the Israeli Government is so divided. One member says something and others jump on it and block it. Also, of course, a new cabinet is being formed. I felt I had to go to Israel to get the Israelis to put their position in writing, so I could then take it to President Sadat. I feel I have an obligation-- President Sadat has been wise in his policy--to produce something concrete that can be negotiated. I have in mind basic concepts, not working out every detail, but the aim is to get the Israelis off the Canal.

GHORBAL: Why will the first stop be Egypt, in light of this approach?

KISSINGER: There are two reasons. It is not that essential to go to Egypt first, as I already know President Sadat's thinking. However, I want brief talks with President Sadat. This will be useful as the Israelis are preparing their position. I will be able to give them a brief report. I also want to give President Sadat impressions of the Dayan visit to Washington. The alternative would have been to go to Israel first, then to Egypt.

GHORBAL: You sounded optimistic after the Dayan visit.

NEA/EGY: GNAAnderson:pm
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KISSINGER: ~~What happened in Geneva afterwards, with the Israelis failing to present concrete proposals. I am nevertheless optimistic I can prevail. As I said to President Sadat, the issue should not be the October 22 lines, but Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank of the Canal and into Sinai. When Mrs. Meir was here in November, she had not wanted to hear of a return to the October 22 lines. While I was in Jerusalem, the Israelis had not wanted to hear of withdrawal from the West Bank. This is now a matter they are willing to talk about. I think we are making progress in light of the evolution in Israeli thinking.~~

GHORBAL: It is good to hear this.

KISSINGER: Of course, much remains to be accomplished. When I talked to President Sadat in November, I took a gamble. I said I would use the coming months to organize to press the Israelis. I think we will succeed, perhaps not 100%, but enough to satisfy the Egyptians. I want to stop the current "games" in which plans are presented and then pulled back. Dayan comes here and says the plan would have to be presented to the Cabinet. Mrs. Meir was then sick for several days. I want to put an end to this. I want to give President Sadat my views on what maximum results can be achieved and to get President Sadat's reaction. We consider President Sadat to be the leading Arab statesman. It is in our selfish interest to make sure he succeeds in peace efforts. President Sadat took a risk in relying on the U.S., Israel's principal supporter.

GHORBAL: President Sadat has to succeed.

KISSINGER: Another reason for going to Egypt first is that the other possible approach--Israel, then Egypt--might make me look like Israel's lawyer.

GHORBAL: I understand. These words are comforting. There are, however, "rumors" that you are not getting what you hoped for from Israel and that therefore an attempt will be made to get more from Egypt.

KISSINGER: You will see. Of course, the end results have not yet been achieved. However, I intend to pursue the basic principles already discussed with President Sadat. Of course, not every word should be taken overly literally. The Egyptian object should not be the October 22 lines, but to get the Israelis off the West Bank and into Sinai. As I stressed at my press conference today, this is the first stage on the road to a just and lasting peace. This process must continue.

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GHORBAL: Egypt's experience in talks before the October War leads us to believe Israel wants only "partial" solutions.

KISSINGER: I told President Sadat that after disengagement is completed, I will discuss the next stage of strategy toward a final settlement.

GHORBAL: Does the U.S. support linkage of intermediate steps to a final settlement?

KISSINGER: We will urge this. The Israelis can be expected to resist. Progress is reflected in the fact that the Israelis are now willing to discuss moving off the West Bank. You have to let me do it step by step. I do not believe in writing everything down. I do not want President Sadat's enemies to be able to say President Sadat is not having any success. I have been telling the Israelis that President Sadat is the best hope for peace, a strong, reasonable leader.

GHORBAL: There is "a feeling" that the Israelis are hardening their position, thanks to U.S. military supplies.

KISSINGER: The situation today with respect to U.S. policy is totally different from that in 1971. Then, there was no concerted U.S. Government support for Assistant Secretary Sisco's efforts. There is now a unified USG decision to pursue a settlement. We are using military aid to obtain concessions. Egyptian military actions have proved that Israel can never again fight a three-day war. The Israelis are aware that a quick victory is no longer possible.

GHORBAL: The Israelis are seeking U.S. support under any and all conditions.

KISSINGER: We have started a deliberate policy. While at the White House, I never made promises. I never committed myself that I or the President would do anything. Now there is a totally different situation. Peace efforts are on the schedule I mentioned to President Sadat. As I said, nothing could be expected before the beginning of January. I told President Sadat that I would use the time before January to press Israel.

Would the Egyptians prefer me to go to Israel first, and then to Egypt? I chose to go to Egypt first out of respect for President Sadat, but if you prefer otherwise, I will alter my travel plans.

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GHORBAL: I think it is best to keep it as it is.

There seems to be a general feeling developing that pressures are mounting here against a constructive U.S. role.

KISSINGER: There has also been some criticism against me.

GHORBAL: Time is of the essence.

KISSINGER: The pressures are manageable, and quick movement is needed. This will depend on Cairo and Tel Aviv. I look forward in the immediate future to either an agreement in principle like the Six Points, or at least to getting something formal that can be negotiated in Geneva. This would enable President Sadat to reopen the Suez Canal, along lines discussed with him.

GHORBAL: Would there not be another "freeze"?

KISSINGER: While withdrawal is going on, we will play matters in low key. Our policy is to continue the process until a final settlement is reached.

GHORBAL: Clarity is needed. We have had an unhappy experience with Security Council Resolution 242 and the Six-Point Agreement.

KISSINGER: The Six Points achieved their purpose.

GHORBAL: Except for disengagement.

KISSINGER: I told your President right off that nothing would happen until January. It is miraculous we are as far along as we are. The attack on U.S. policy is not fully mounted. It is still a series of isolated attacks. That I can handle.

GHORBAL: They are hardening. The situation is very precarious on the west side of the Canal, very risky.

KISSINGER: I told President Sadat that I would not permit things to bog down. I will keep that promise. My method is not to talk a lot. If I made public declarations, these would be attacked. Every week, as part of an educational campaign, I meet with leaders of the Jewish community. I will continue when I return from the Middle East.

GHORBAL: How do you find them?

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KISSINGER: Moderates are becoming worried. If there is a diplomatic success, it will be harder to criticize. I am not going to the Middle East to welsch, but to give previous statements a concrete, realistic context.

I understand we are to see some temples.

GHORBAL: And the Aswan Dam.

KISSINGER: I don't look at Russian projects.

GHORBAL: We are pleased that Ex-Im Bank today informed us it will participate in SUMED. This will balance off the Dam.

KISSINGER: We will discuss more substantial projects. Now that I have met most of the Arab leaders, I am basing our policy on President Sadat. He is the most respected leader in the area.

GHORBAL: What is your impression of Asad?

KISSINGER: Our meeting had unexpected moments. The Foreign Minister gave a lunch. I was the first Secretary of State to visit Syria in over 20 years, so what did the Syrians want to discuss? Hollywood movie stars. We all had a good time, and I got on a subject in which I have some expertise.

With Asad, we were in the midst of discussing the letter to the Secretary General on opening the Geneva Conference. Asad was very reasonable in agreeing to changes in the date and in language on the Palestinians. I then made the mistake of asking whether anything in the letter bothered him. He said, "yes, the part about the parties agreeing to attend the conference. We do not agree." We had been talking for two hours before he said so. Nevertheless, I found him intelligent and rather likable. Unlike President Sadat in Egypt, however, Asad did not give the impression of being completely in charge. He seemed preoccupied with his domestic problems. President Sadat, by contrast, had always spoken on the merits of the case.

GHORBAL: I think in the final analysis they will go along with a solution.

KISSINGER: I would just as soon get Egyptian-Israeli disengagement out of the way first, and then worry about Syria. If we can agree on disengagement, then we can get the Syrians involved and do the same for them. Then we could go on to the next phase.

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GHORBAL: What about the Palestinians?

KISSINGER: This will come up in the next phase after disengagement.

GHORBAL: Have you met with any Palestinians?

KISSINGER: No. I told President Sadat I do not want to see any now. I don't want to jeopardize the prospects for disengagement. Withdrawal, while important from the military point of view, would be of immense importance psychologically. It would be the first withdrawal since 1956. It could change the whole attitude in Israel. 1956 is not a good example, because they did not stay long. I told Dayan that it was dangerous to stay on the West Bank. He said, "Never mind, we will win. We will put down a million mines if necessary."

GHORBAL: What would that achieve?

KISSINGER: I am not supporting the idea, just telling you what he said. No Egyptian government can permit Israeli forces to stay on the West Bank.

GHORBAL: Dragging of feet can be dangerous.

KISSINGER: That's why I am going to the area. There is a risk for me, too. We could have done the negotiating in Geneva.

GHORBAL: What Dayan told you reflects the pre-October mentality.

KISSINGER: We are not going to withdraw from the basic approach we have discussed.

GHORBAL: I have seen Dobrynin once. I would like to coordinate regarding to what extent the Soviets are informed.

KISSINGER: Dobrynin gave me his version of the discussions in Geneva, which I did not recognize. I informed Dobrynin of my decision to go to the area to seek crystallization of the Israeli position. Dobrynin doesn't know of my conversations with President Sadat. He knows from Fahmi about the Yariiv plan put forward in the Kilometer 101 talks.

GHORBAL: I have been seeing some senators and congressmen recently.

KISSINGER: There are also several senators going to the area. Perhaps President Sadat will receive them. Congressional visitors

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have returned extremely impressed from meeting your President, for example, the Stratton group.

GHORBAL: Despite visits, many of them nevertheless vote for arms for Israel.

KISSINGER: Regardless of such votes, they can be influential.

GHORBAL: We have been supporting meetings with Sadat in any case. What impact will Watergate have on the U.S. role?

KISSINGER: I think we will be able to carry it out. As for oil, however, if the Arabs are going to lift the embargo, it would be stupid not to do it soon. This would do us some good.

GHORBAL: What came of your talks with the Saudis?

KISSINGER: I think they are getting ready to move. From the oil point of view, we are not in bad shape. The effect is mainly psychological. Continuation of the embargo and the price rises could well have a bad impact on the Arab image.

GHORBAL: There is a rumor that there is a scenario in which Israel stands pat and there is pressure on the Arabs, the purpose being to get the Arabs to lift the embargo and that's that.

KISSINGER: I wouldn't go to the Middle East in that case. If we wanted no progress, we could play the game of models and theories. I am going because I want concrete results quickly.

GHORBAL: I would like to see you more often. This would be helpful to the performance of my functions here.

KISSINGER: Any time you feel the need, come and see me. If there is no urgent business, let's meet every two weeks anyway. Let's also announce that we met today for one hour to talk about my trip to Egypt and the current diplomatic situation.

GHORBAL: That would be helpful.

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