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WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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 1974-3-8, Sadat, Nixon, Meeking About 2
 MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

President Nixon
 Secretary Kissinger
 GOP Congressional Leadership
 Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
 to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE & TIME:

March 8, 1974

SUBJECT:

Middle East

President: It is very important not to talk about linkage. I don't know how Henry has stood it. He has been out there talking to everyone. There is movement on an agreement between Syria and Israel. It is more difficult than the Egyptian one, and we don't know when it'll be done. Don't predict. The Egyptian disengagement was an enormous achievement. Henry?

Kissinger: It might be helpful to summarize your basic strategy, Mr. President.

In October and November of last year we found a united front of the Soviet Union, Europe, Japan -- most of the world -- supporting the Arabs and then following generally the Soviet line. All of the issues were lumped together in one big ball. We were the only supporter of Israel, and everything we advanced the Soviet Union would block.

Our objective was (1) to break up this coalition, (2) to change the situation where the Soviet Union was the supporter of the Arabs and we were the supporter of Israel, and (3) to break out the issues into separate items.

We demonstrated to the Arabs that the Soviet Union could give them arms, but only the U.S. could give them political progress. The Jordanian crisis of 1970 and all our other actions were parts of this policy, to demonstrate that the Arabs would have to come to us.

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-2-

President: At the time of the '67 war, the U.S. ended up on the Israeli side. This time, we saved Israel with an airlift; we stopped a possible Soviet intervention -- both of these looked pro-Israel. We saved Israel. But we did this in a way which enhanced our role with the Arabs and did not posture us as anti-Soviet.

Kissinger: The paradox of the situation is that it is in our interest to have Israel so strong the Arabs can't defeat it, so they must come to us for progress. We must keep the Soviet Union out but not frustrate them so that they actively oppose negotiations. Asad of Syria said he wanted U.S. equipment because I told him we wouldn't let Soviet equipment defeat U.S. equipment.

Sadat is a wise, moderate leader who permitted a reduction of tensions by agreeing to disengagement. He ran the risk of separating himself from the other Arabs; Asad immediately started a campaign against Egyptian disengagement. A Syrian disengagement is tougher. Egypt acts as an independent country and not as part of a pan-Arab movement; the Sinai is not close to Israel. But the Syrians are at the front of the movement of pan-Arabism; much of Israel used to belong to Syria, and the domestic situation in Syria is more complicated.

President: Tell us about Asad. Sadat turned out to be more able than Nasser.

Kissinger: Sadat is able. He is not mesmerized by exhortation or tactics. Asad is very intelligent, perhaps more intelligent than Sadat. Also there is a difference in background -- Egypt was British, Syria was French.

Syria doesn't want to be the first one to have made an agreement with Israel -- whatever the content. This is the reason we have adopted the procedure we did. We had planned to do it like Egypt and Israel at Kilometer 101. It became apparent to me, though, that this would just produce a situation where each side would constantly have to prove its manhood. The way we ended up was a way we could get things moving and lead into it gradually. The Syrians would reject anything I brought back, so I brought something very vague. Now they have said they have rejected it -- whatever that can mean -- and made a counter-proposal publicly -- thus getting that public element out of the way.

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~~SECRET~~Authority EO 12958
By JNARA Date 4/10/81

- 3 -

President:

The point is we won't get an instant settlement.

Kissinger: And they may attack -- to prove they can't win and must negotiate; to prod Israel back into the conflict; to force Soviet support; or even egged on by the Soviets.

President: There is no indication of the latter, and we don't want any anti-Soviet coloration to our policies.

Kissinger: The President is right. Soviet influence is down drastically. And they must be asking: what have they gotten from their aid?

President: You should know that we are prepared to help clear the Suez Canal. It is the right thing to do.

Burleson: What is the significance of the Iran-Iraq dispute?

Kissinger: We have no relationship to it. But if the Iranians the down Iraq, they can't go to Syria. Iraq is a radical element in Syria. Syria can't fight back by itself.

President: What can the leadership say on the embargo?

Kissinger: As little as possible.

President: Why not say we are making progress -- apart from the embargo -- and hope to avoid rationing? We are working on negotiations and that will have a favorable effect -- but the embargo is a matter for the Arabs to decide. We are seeking peace as an end in itself -- the fact of the embargo makes it more difficult. They should lift the embargo as an end in itself because a positive American role in their countries is in their interest.

On the other point! Israel is saying: Between '67 and '74 you were our friend; now you are renewing relations with the Arabs, etc. The answer is this is not at the expense of Israel. We always will stand by Israel, but we are seeking better relations with the Arabs in Israel's own interest, and also to keep the Soviets out and not have Israel surrounded by countries either radicalized or under Soviet influence.

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SECRET
Authority EO 12958
By D/NARA Date 7/1/01

-4-

Kissinger: In fact, after the Syrian disengagement we plan to go back to the Egyptian part and seek a territorial settlement. Also with Jordan. Jordan is difficult because of Israeli domestic politics. Israel hasn't realized their choice is between dealing with Jordan and dealing with Arafat. They can't deal with neither.

We must deal with the situation one item at a time. This process has been very painful for the Soviet Union. Before, even we dealt with the Soviet Union as the spokesman for the Arabs. Now everyone is coming to us. We are not trying to force them out -- but their negotiating style is too legalistic for this situation -- and they also tend to push more extreme views.

But the Soviet Union has the capability of going public, stirring up trouble, etc.

President: The Arabs are very emotional.

Kissinger: A moderate Soviet policy is important -- therefore the President's relationship with Brezhnev is important -- and MFN. We can't put it to them in every area and expect them to continue to take it.

President: Remember, if the Soviet Union and China had wanted the Vietnam War to go on, it would have, and the POW's would still be there. Our interests are opposed to those of the Soviet Union in most areas of the world -- but we discuss with them our differences and we seek to avoid any of these issues from provoking nuclear war.

Rhodes: Do we have a promise of the embargo lifting?

Kissinger: The President's language in the State of the Union was Arab language. The problem is Arab unity. They have to have unity to lift the embargo. We have to decouple the embargo or we will be blackmailed at every step if they think we need it.

President: We can't link the two.

Kissinger: Take Faisal. He wants to lift the embargo, but by having it, he is at the head of the radicals -- for free.

Rhodes: We'll be playing the same game until Jerusalem?

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SECRETAuthority EW/2935
By D/NARA Date 7/10/85

-5-

Kissinger: No, he is not blackmailing now.

Bob : This tells me we ought to get off our duff and get going so the embargo doesn't matter.

President: Right.

Kissinger: One point on the MFN and credits.

President: Yes, this is very important to the world.

Kissinger: This is a case where an action produces the opposite reaction to what was intended. Cutting off MFN will push emigration back to what it was in the Johnson times, not increase it. It will radicalize their Middle East policy. We can't frustrate them in every area. The result of an MFN cutoff would be that after three years of detente they would be worse off than when detente started.

The story is we have been taken to the cleaners in detente. We got our way in Vietnam, solved Berlin, prevented war in Cuba, and got the Soviets moderated in the Middle East.

Until 1972 we were attacked for not making increased trade an end in itself.

President: I will veto if the credits are not passed. Our relations with the Soviet Union were cool during the '50s and '60s. We didn't trade; there was little communication. The new policy doesn't mean a change in attitudes -- I despise what they did about Solzhenitsyn, but he is in Paris, not in Siberia, or dead.

The question is how do you get the Communists to change? Not through the Glassboro technique -- a little of that is helpful. But great nations consult their interests, not their emotions. The primary US-Soviet interest is that we are both nuclear powers, and I can push a button to kill 20 million Soviets and he can kill 20 million Americans, and we are in consultation to find common points of interest, and the basic point is we are not interested in destroying each other. There is a gradual change which we can anticipate in a very long term. But in getting there we must avoid a holocaust. If detente breaks down, we will have an arms race, no trade -- that's not very important --

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By JNARA Date 7/19/87

-6-

confrontation in the Middle East and elsewhere, and they will go right on repressing their people and even more so. The only alternative is a \$100 billion increase in the defense budget and that might not do it. I don't think that is viable, because they can keep up an arms race.

Kissinger: One other point: Our careful detente policy prevents a wild European detente policy toward the Soviet Union. They can't do it now, because they fear we could outbid them.

President: We are trying to build a new world--not to change human nature, but to break the ice which prevented peaceful settlements of disputes. That is where we are now, and we must build now on this. People like Jackson think I have gone soft -- I know them and they know me.

Our options are very clear. We can follow our present track, build up our defenses, or bug out of the world.

Beall: Can we get this to the Jewish community?

President: Henry and I are trying to. They are worse than Jackson. Isn't it better for the U.S. to have influence with its enemies than the Soviet Union? Israel says all it needs is weapons. But even if they can hold off the Arabs, there is the Soviet Union. Who can keep the Soviet Union at bay? It is in Israel's interest to have us on good terms with the Soviet Union.

Kissinger: We are making progress. The leaders are receptive now and I think they are working on Jackson. But labor and others are running with this ball.

President: There is also a partisan interest that this diplomatic effort would fail.

Scott: The worse case may be a vetoed bill, and we would have to try then for a bill with MFN.

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