

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE/NODIS/XGDS

October 17, 1973

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
Omar SAQQAF, Minister of State for Foreign
Affairs from Saudi Arabia
Ahmed Taibi BENHIMA, Minister of Foreign
Affairs from Morocco
Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-SABAH, Minister
of Foreign Affairs from Kuwait
Abdelaziz BOUTEFLIKA, Minister of Foreign
Affairs from Algeria
Joseph J. Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State for
Near Eastern Affairs
William B. Quandt, NSC Staff
Alec TOUMAYAN, Department of State Interpreter

DATE AND PLACE: Wednesday, October 17, 1973, 11:10 a.m. in
the President's Oval Office

President: There is great interest in this visit. We haven't had
this many photographers since Brezhnev was here.

F. M. Saqqaf: Your Excellency, Mr. President, I am speaking for
all four of the Foreign Ministers here and we in turn
are speaking for eighteen Arab countries. Our views
are approved by all concerned. We are very thankful
to you for the chance to meet with Your Excellency to
exchange views on the conditions in the Middle East.
The main point that I would like to make clear is that
we are not asking for this meeting to engage in a long
discussion which will lead nowhere. Nor are we here
to challenge anyone. Nor are we here to ask for charity
from anyone. All we want is to open the door of
discussion to exchange views and to improve our
bilateral understanding by discussing the objective
situation. When we speak with you, we know that you

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BYAUTH - Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

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understand this question. The United States is a great country with a great history and it has fought too much for dignity and independence not to understand us. We are proud to mention when you were Vice President of the United States you contributed to the solution of the Israeli, British and French aggression of 1956. We have no doubt about your efforts to work for peace all over the world, to solve the Vietnam question, and to make the world safe for peace and progress. We look with admiration on what you have done. We hope that you will do with the Middle East question what you have done in Vietnam and in your relations with China. The Middle East is a very sensitive area.

The main issues I wish to raise are the following. We want only to stay within the principles of the UN Charter which allows for self-defense under Article 51. I can assure you that the Arabs have no ill feelings; they are not your enemy, but they do not accept the occupation of their land. Now they are defending their own land, to get back what was taken by force. All we want is for the United States to consider the UN Charter principles, as it has done in the past. Land cannot be taken by force. The continuation of the Israeli occupation would cause difficulty and would make the balance of power shaky and put us under the control of the arrogant enemy we are facing. Also the principle of adding territory by force should be seen in the light of the right of self-determination.

The Arabs are keen to have very good relations with the United States, with all the western countries, but especially the United States. We are keen and we believe that Your Excellency is also keen to continue these good relations. These could be strengthened by stopping Israel from holding the post-1967 lands by force. We believe the world has never seen a more reasonable offer than that offered by President Sadat yesterday. This provides a good chance for the United States to start taking steps to do what is right for the Arabs.

Israel is now being helped by the United States by force. Israel is not being threatened by the Arabs with annihilation. Your help to Israel is seen as hostile to the Arab world. We want no more than a return to the 1967 borders and respect for the rights of refugees to return to their lands or be compensated for what they have lost. This would be enough to guarantee the stability and integrity of Israel.

As we said to Secretary Kissinger, who is doing a great job, the United States has to guarantee the stability and integrity of the Middle Eastern countries. This should apply not just to Israel, but to the Arabs as well. The occupied areas should go back to the Arabs. If you stick to the principle of integrity, that is all we ask. We are very thankful to you, whatever your answer will be. We are trying to have the United States as a good friend in the Middle East and as a good friend with Islamic countries. We believe the United States is the leader in the world. We know there is a great burden on the United States and we need you for everything--for technology, etc. You could be of great help to us. Thank you, Mr. President.

President:

Mr. Foreign Minister, Your Excellencies, I appreciate first your moderation and your generous appraisal of our policy. I realize that there are many elements in the Middle East who view the US supply of Israel and current airlift as being pro-Israeli, and therefore they attack the United States. Since your statement aims at a solution, not a confrontation, I particularly appreciate it. I want to be candid with friends-- some of you know me personally--I talk straight. I don't promise what I can't deliver. Usually I deliver more than I promise. In any negotiations which may take place in the future, the important factor is one of trust. In this case, I don't ask for your trust on the basis of my past record, but rather on the basis of what I say today. We will provide all of you with a transcript of this conversation.

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Now, let's talk politics. First, you've been too polite. Most of you believe that US administrations are politically influenced too much on the side of Israel. That is what you think. As far as I'm concerned, I am not now, nor have I ever been, nor will I ever be affected by domestic politics in my search for peace in the world. I'll give you an example. When Pakistan was being raped by India, I ordered support for Pakistan at a time when opinion in this country was ten to one against us, especially in Congress. Why did I do it, especially in an election year? I did it because it was right. It was not right for India to destroy Pakistan. Today Pakistan still survives. When I make a decision, such as today, it will never be influenced by US domestic political concerns.

When Dr. Kissinger became Secretary of State, I said to him that we had had major successes in China and in our relations with the Soviet Union. I told him that in the next four years it was of greatest importance that we obtain a just and fair peace in the Middle East. I told him to start the machinery going.

Secretary
Kissinger:

I told some of the Foreign Ministers in New York of our intentions.

President:

I have also informed Arab leaders of this. My goal is a just, equitable settlement in the Middle East. I have a more personal point to make. I have said that I will not be affected by domestic considerations. I also want to say that I know the Middle East and the Arab world. I have seen the promise and the problems of Egypt, the little children, how much they need, and it pains me to think that we do not have relations with Egypt, or with Algeria, let alone with Syria and Iraq. I have visited Morocco twice; I have visited Tunisia, Sudan and Libya. Also when I was out of office I visited Egypt and I visited Israel once. I haven't been to Saudi Arabia, but I hope to visit it some day. I would also like to visit Algeria

in my second term, as I told Dr. Kissinger yesterday. I also hope to visit Kuwait. Jordan has asked me to pay a visit. Of course, visits alone do not mean much. They would only make sense if a peace were concluded in the Middle East. One of my fervent hopes is that in my last four years as President I can have an active program with the governments of the Middle East working for technological progress and economic development. We can't do this until there is peace. Peace is our goal.

You haven't mentioned the airlift. Let me explain that to you. We tried to avoid war before it started. Also we tried once it began to avoid fueling the war, especially in our contacts with the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders, and I'm not condemning them, felt they should mount a massive airlift. Only after one week had passed, and over 300 planes had gone in, I decided that we must maintain a balance. This is all we're doing. As soon as we can reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, we will cut off the arms. Sending arms to the Middle East does not contribute to economic progress.

Now, where do we go from here. I know you and the nations that you represent sometimes speak in terms of a take-it-or-leave-it settlement. You say a settlement must include Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 borders. I could say sure, we accept that, but there is no use making commitments we can't deliver on. We don't want any more broken hopes. What has happened in this tragic war, and some good usually comes out of tragedy, is that the military-security situation in the Middle East has been changed. This means that now conditions have been created where we can use our influence to get negotiations off dead center in moving toward a permanent, just and equitable peace such as you want.

Rather than being specific about the terms of a settlement, I want to describe the principles to which we are dedicated. We can then work on implementing them.

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And when I say implementing them I mean implementing Resolution 242. With regard to how we do this, as Foreign Ministers you know that it will require talk and negotiations. I totally support Resolution 242. It won't be easy for us to persuade Israel.

Both sides seem to want all or nothing. But as the result of the military situation, things have changed. Things seem dark now because of the war, but chances for real peace and real movement are better than at any time since 1967. I would like you to convey to your colleagues and to your Chiefs of State that, first, we will work for a ceasefire, but second, our position is not that of getting a ceasefire and then leaving things as they are. Four wars in the Middle East are too many. One was too many. This has hurt progress. A ceasefire is our first goal. I pledge to you that after the ceasefire we will work for negotiations in which we will use our influence-- and we will work to get others to use their influence also-- for a settlement within the parameters of Resolution 242. Not only will Secretary Kissinger work for this, I'll do so also, particularly in my contacts with the Soviet leadership, and with your governments, and with President Sadat, despite the absence of diplomatic relations. Even with Syria, which is hard for us to communicate with, we can try. We, of course, have a primary responsibility in working with Israel. I have told Prime Minister Meir-- and she is a very able, very strong leader--I have told her that my goal is a negotiation leading to a permanent settlement, which would be just and which would require a settlement of the territorial issue. This has fallen on deaf ears. But it will not now. I can't say this for sure since I have not heard from her. But the realities of the situation require movement.

I will close by saying first that my decision will not be affected by US political considerations--ever! My decisions will be affected by my knowledge of the area

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and my commitment to the independence and integrity of all the states there, as we have demonstrated in Lebanon and in Jordan. I will work for a ceasefire, not in order to trick you into stopping at the ceasefire lines, but to use it as a basis to go on from there for a settlement on the basis of Resolution 242. I make this commitment to you. It is very important to use restraint now. I know how people feel, I understand. We will use restraint, and we hope you will. This has been a tragedy. Since 1956, with the exception of countries like Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, our relations with the Arab world have not been as close as we would have wanted. What we want are good relations with countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and others represented here, but we can't do this unless there is a settlement in the Middle East. You have my pledge. I can't say that we can categorically move Israel back to the 1967 borders, but we will work within the framework for Resolution 242. Dr. Kissinger, do you have anything to add?

Secretary
Kissinger:

I have talked to the Foreign Ministers of Morocco and Saudi Arabia previously and we have all had a talk before coming here. I have made two points, Mr. President. We must end the hostilities now so that we don't submerge the chances for peace by continuation of the conflict or by greater involvement by the United States and the Soviet Union. After the ceasefire we will make a major effort.

President:

We will make a major and successful effort.

Secretary
Kissinger:

I can't add to what the President has said. This is the basis of our policy. It is important in such matters that the relations of trust remain. We want to move with a parallel strategy toward the objective of peace.

F. M. Sabah:

There is this problem of the arms resupply of Israel. We have seen pictures of the planes, of the ships. Is it so essential that you do this?

President: The problem is that, with the Soviets airlifting in so much before we began to act, we had to take these measures in order to set the stage for a settlement and in order to have influence with Israel in future negotiations. We have no intention of having the airlift do anything more than keep the balance. We are not going to give Israel an offensive capability.

F.M. Sabah: The Arabs pay for the arms that they get.

Secretary
Kissinger: That does not seem to me to be the key point. The problem is that if the balance tilts to one side or the other, this raises the chances of great power involvement. This is why we are in urgent need of a ceasefire, against great domestic opposition.

President: You have seen our press and what they are saying in the Senate. I have done less than what the majority of the Senate wants me to do. I will continue on the course we are on, however.

F.M. Saqqaf: Our goal is the implementation of UN resolutions. Israel is opposed to this. The British draft resolution is ambiguous and allows the victors to explain its meaning. We want to hear from the Israelis that they are willing to go back.

President: The key words are secure and guaranteed boundaries.

Secretary
Kissinger: These are practical matters to be dealt with. What is important is that a negotiating process begin in order to crystallize views. Neither side can force the other against the wall. We can't get a flat commitment from Israel before negotiations begin. That would risk the indefinite prolongation of the war. Once a negotiating process has begun, our influence can operate. The situation is totally different now from what it was between 1967 and 1973. Then it was assumed that Israel had total superiority. We had no argument to use with Israel

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for pulling back from the occupied areas. If the war ends soon, they will not be able to use the same arguments. We can use more influence now with them. We see the need for a resolution of the conflict, but we can't ask for everything all at once.

President:

The direction is what's important. When I spoke to King Faisal--and I know he feels strongly about this, and I admire him for he is a strong man--the point to be made is that we must face the reality of our being able to influence the Israelis. We haven't had many arguments to use. Now the military balance has changed. Under these circumstances, there can be constructive negotiations. This is my opinion and I have told you what we will do. You may ask, "Can you guarantee that they will go back?" What we hope for is a ceasefire now. Diplomacy requires movement and agreement on principles of direction. Details can then be negotiated. I have made a commitment to see that things move. You can hold me responsible. I don't break my word. I didn't break my word to Pakistan or to South Vietnam, nor will I break my word to you. You have a commitment from us. A commitment not just to obtain a ceasefire; what we are saying is that the ceasefire will be linked with a diplomatic initiative in which we will use our full weight.

F.M. Saqqaf:

Thank you, Mr. President.

President:

I want to say candidly to you that my friend, Dr. Kissinger, is a refugee from the Nazis and he is Jewish. But I assure you that he will not be moved by domestic pressures in this country. He has the same goal as I have--a fair and just settlement to all. He hasn't visited the area as I have, but he is committed to a fair settlement. Some of my Arab friends, I know, have asked how they can trust Dr. Kissinger. But I can say that above all he wants a fair and just peace.

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F.M. Sabah: We are happy to have Secretary Kissinger as a colleague. I want you to know that we are not anti-Jewish. We are all Semites together.

President: Your attitudes are very reasonable in the Arab world. I admired President Nasser--not when he stirred up trouble among his neighbors--but he was a strong and patriotic man, and I admired him. He went too far when he said that Israel had to be thrown into the sea, because Israel is there, it is fact of life. You gentlemen appear to accept that. All states in the area have a right to exist. Jordan has that right, as do the others.

W.B.2.
William B. Quandt