

DECLASSIFIED
 Authority NND 009029
 By JB NARA Date 8-2

*Chapter 13
 #2
 (?)*

THE WHITE HOUSE

770086-0008

WASHINGTON

SECRET/SENSITIVE (XGDS)

SECRET

November 1, 1973

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel
 Simcha Dinitz, Israeli Ambassador in
 Washington
 Aharon Yariv, General in Prime Minister
 Meir's Office
 Mordechai Gazit, Head of the Prime Minister's
 Office

President Richard Nixon
 Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State and
 Assistant to the President
 Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE AND PLACE:

12:10 p.m. Thursday, November 1, 1973 in the
 President's Oval Office

The meeting began with photographers invited in and with small talk
 between the President and the Prime Minister during that session.
 When the photographers had left, the following conversation took place:

Prime Minister:

I want to say to you how much we appreciate what
 you have done and are doing. Last night at Lod
 Airport I said that a friend proves his friendship
 when the need is great. There were days and hours
 when we needed a friend and you came right in. You
 don't know what your airlift means to us. Our Cabinet
 Ministers have been out to see it. I have been out to
 see it.

President:

There is one plane every fifty minutes, isn't there?
 They are big planes, too.

SECRET

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 EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICA-
 TION SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER
 11652 EXEMPTION CATEGORY XGDS-1

XGDS-3
 DECLAS-Impossible to Determine Date.
 BYAUTH-Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

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Prime Minister: And your people who have come with the airlift!
They work with such enthusiasm!

You are standing up to our friends the Soviets so that they cannot bully a little nation like ours. They have done this before to others; I hope they will never be able to do it to us.

The war was pretty bad. I remember that morning--early Saturday morning--when the Chief of Staff told me that if he could make a first strike, everything would be fine. We said no. We had to be in a position so that Egypt and Syria could not make the excuse that we struck first.

The first few days were terrible days. The Syrians and Egyptians came on. You, Mr. President, were on the Golan Heights, and you know what it is to be up there and to look down on our settlements.

The heroism and self-sacrifice of our boys was something that nobody will be able to describe. I suppose that when you have everything to lose--not just territory but everything--only then can people fight like that.

Why the Arabs did it, I don't know. What they will have to do now is what we have wanted them to do right along--to sit down with us and to work out a peace agreement. Sometimes, we cannot understand their mentality.

What is important now is that they should not get a victory that they did not get on the battlefield. But this must be the last war.

No one has been as staunch as you, Mr. President, on prisoners of war.

President: How many are there?

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Prime Minister: There are 380 in Egypt and 120 in Syria, we think. We have 7,000 Arab prisoners. There are wounded, and we want them back. We are too small a people to bear tragedies of this kind. In terms of the US population, we suffered the equivalent of 100,000 casualties.

Yariv: 150,000.

Prime Minister: In a small nation like Israel, everybody knows everybody else.

Kissinger: Do those include the dead or all the casualties?

Yariv: The dead.

Prime Minister: In our country everybody grew up on a kibbutz, or went to school, or lived in a neighborhood with someone who was hurt in the war. There are 45 wounded in Egypt and the same in Syria.

Yariv: We don't know how many are in Syria, Madame.

Prime Minister: In Syria we don't know. We counted those dead or wounded whom we found. For the rest, we don't know whether they are missing, dead or captured. We have no lists from Syria.

President: You have Syrian prisoners?

Yariv: Three hundred.

Prime Minister: They don't care.

President: They probably consider them dead. At least that is their attitude.

Prime Minister: What we would like now that the ceasefire is in action is to prepare everyone involved for real peace negotiations. We know there is the problem of the Egyptian

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Third Army. We do not want to destroy it. The question is keeping the ceasefire and then achieving the release of prisoners and the lifting of the blockade in the Red Sea. We can't get any oil from the Persian Gulf. It is the same problem we had at Sharm al-Shaykh before the 1967 war.

The question is will the Russians or will the Egyptians and Syrians through the Russians be able to bully us into a position that is impossible for us to accept.

Our only hope is that you--who appreciate our deep desire to live in peace--is that we can work together.

President:

We have been in pretty close contact. [At this point, the Prime Minister picked up a cigarette. The President asked whether he could light it for her, but General Yariv did so. He said that he had told his people to put cigarettes out, because the Prime Minister used them.] We are aware of the enormous suffering that you have undergone. Even if there were only 50 dead, that would still be too many. I remember the note you gave me at dinner the last time we were here when you had only fourteen or fifteen prisoners that you were trying to get back. We know how we felt about our prisoners. Your families feel like ours did.

The problem is now to move on toward the goal that you have outlined--it is a goal the whole world wants. The goal is not to have another war; you have already had four. For a small country, even victories can be disastrous.

My studies indicate that when great attrition is involved, even winners can lose.

The problem you have to consider is whether the policy you have followed--being prepared with the Phantoms and the Skyhawks--can succeed, lacking

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a settlement. The question is whether a policy of only being prepared for war--although even with a peace settlement you will have to be prepared--is sufficient.

This last war proves the overwhelming conclusion that a policy of digging in telling us to give you the arms and you will do the fighting, can't be the end. Your policy has to be to move as you are moving toward talks. You've had direct talks, haven't you? But they are only on the ceasefire?

Yariv:

There was more. The Egyptian General presented a plan for a first phase on a general disengagement. It did not look like much to us, but it was something.

President:

But you probably gave them one they could not accept, too, didn't you?

Yariv:

Yes.

Prime Minister:

When General Yariv had his meeting with the Egyptians, the Egyptian General drew him aside and said that the highest authority in Egypt wants peace if Mrs. Meir wants peace.

President:

I think Egypt wants it. We can't speak for Syria. You each want peace at a cost that the other is not prepared to pay. What we need to do is to develop a chain of events, to break the whole matter up and to move step-by-step.

Prime Minister:

Absolutely.

President:

Neither of you is in a position now to agree on the terms of an ultimate settlement. The problem is to keep the negotiations from getting bogged down. Lacking agreement on final terms, the danger is that you will agree on nothing else.

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They have the Third Army problem. You have the problem of the prisoners and the blockade in the Gulf. We need to break those issues off and to deal with them. We need to decide where the October 22 line is--I won't get into that. That is for the experts. The important thing is that communication has begun. You must not miss this opportunity.

As a friend, let me tell you what I have done to date and how I see the future. I want to tell you frankly so you will understand what our situation is. Here it is.

When this war started, there were some here who charged that we kept you from a pre-emptive strike. As you know, you volunteered that. The reason was that you did not want to be seen as the provocateur.

When the war came the overwhelming sentiment among our leaders was let's not let it spread so that we will not get involved. I reminded them that Prime Minister Meir had always said that Israel does not ask for our men, only for the tools to do the fighting themselves.

We showed restraint. Your people said you did not want a UN resolution in the early stages. We took a lot of heat even from the friends of Israel here--not the sophisticated ones--for not supporting a ceasefire resolution. We did not press for a ceasefire because your ambassador--he is a fine fellow, always tells us the truth--

Kissinger: Eight times a day.

President: We did not press for an early ceasefire because your ambassador at that time said you were at a disadvantage. This was not a popular decision here.

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Then came the next decision. The Soviet airlift began. At that point, I had to decide what our reaction would be. When that came up, you told us you were running out of ammunition.

Dinitz:

At that time the Soviets had the upper hand.

President:

The second decision was to send some consumables. Our bureaucracy favored only modest help to Israel. They recommended three C-5As with equipment. I called Henry. I told him that if we call the Soviets on their resupply and supply Israel, we will be blamed as much for three airplanes full of equipment as for thirty. This airlift was bigger than the Berlin airlift because the planes were larger. I never believe in little plays where big issues are at stake. That gave you the tools to fight. Right?

Prime Minister:

Right.

President:

I had to ram the airlift down the throats of our leaders. There was no sense sending three planes only. I told the Soviets frankly what we were doing.

Then came the crisis of the following week. It was pretty hairy. The Soviets threatened to put forces into Egypt.

Kissinger:

Before that, Mr. President, was the Soviet pressure to get the war wrapped up when the Israelis broke out. My trip to Moscow was to gain Israel another 48 hours.

President:

The Soviets then feared they would be on the losing side. I sent Henry to Moscow to gain a couple of more days. As a result of that talk, we got a ceasefire agreement. We thought this would be better for you at that point.

Then came the crisis. The Soviets think we overplayed it. I don't think so. We had our intelligence, and we thought the possibility of Soviet military forces going

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into the Middle East was real. I ordered a precautionary alert of our own forces. That caused consternation here. Many people in the Congress asked whether we were going to risk a nuclear war. Despite their great respect for Israel, they could not see risking that kind of confrontation over the ceasefire.

When we ordered the airlift and when we ordered the alert, we did not have a major friend in the world. The Europeans and the Japanese were all closer to the Soviet Union.

Kissinger: We did not even have a minor friend.

President: That's right. There was Mubuto and the Ivory Coast. But they don't count. We were getting pressures from the British, French, Italians, Germans and even the Spanish after all they owe us. The Japanese mounted terrible pressure.

Yariv: Oil.

President: Oil. If this ceasefire breaks down and Europe and Japan freeze this winter, Israel will be in a hell of a spot. That may be wrong. But they all support the Russian position--not for anti-Israeli reasons but for pro-oil reasons. I want you to understand this.

I have always said that we would hold the ring against the Soviets--we risked detente, the nuclear arms limitation talks and a showdown with them over this issue. God knows, I knew about the dangers of Communism before Senator Jackson knew what a Communist was. On detente, what we risked was the resumption of the cold war. In Vietnam, we did not think the Chinese and the Soviets would intervene. But the Middle East is next only to Europe as the most important area in the world.

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Where are we now? The point is that now it is imperative to realize that if hostilities break out over an unreasonable Israeli position, we are not going to lose our respect for Israel, but it will be difficult for us--not because of the Russians but because of the Europeans, Japanese and some Americans.

Now we have face-to-face talks. But if the cease-fire breaks down and we have another hairy episode with the Russians--and in addition if the oil embargo gets notched up tighter--everything will break loose.

I am just telling you the problems I have in wanting to support Israel. We will give you the hardware and we will hold the ring.

I know your concerns. But I have read some of the statements in your press--not yours, they have been very responsible--suggesting that Nixon hasn't stood by Israel because he is more interested in getting on with the Soviets. But we have to face the facts that Europe and Japan and many in the United States have attitudes that mean now we have to keep the ceasefire on a reasonable basis. You will be talking to Henry about the details of this. I told the Egyptian Foreign Minister Egypt must be reasonable and that Egypt will have to compartmentalize the negotiations.

I have had frank talks with the Russians--Dobrynin and Brezhnev. I have talked to them about arms. I have said that if they send weapons, we will send weapons. That is something we'll have to talk to them about. It takes two to make peace. We will stand firm.

But I have digressed. I know the talk in Israel--not from you--that we would risk Israel's future because of our desire to get on with the Russians and to get

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oil to Europe and Japan. That is not what this is all about. I stand for the survival of Israel. I stand for secure borders. I have always used that word "secure."

We must understand that at this juncture, if the ceasefire breaks down, we will have a terrible time building public support.

Others charge that Nixon and Brezhnev are seeking a condominium. We are not going to dictate the terms of a settlement. All we agreed is that we will use our influence to bring the parties together and to influence a settlement. That is fair enough.

Our Soviet friends are always trying to get the edge. They moved in 70 observers. But Henry pointed out that they were just trying to establish a base for getting in more.

Prime Minister: Their 70 wouldn't be 70 anymore.

President: We have stood firm. We provided you with equipment. It is better equipment than the Soviet equipment. Wasn't it, General?

We are not going to sit down with the Soviets and cut up the world or determine the future of the Middle East. But the fact is that the Soviets are in the Middle East. Israel cannot survive without US support. Egypt and Syria cannot survive without the USSR.

The question is: Do we let the Soviets come in and let them unilaterally have that kind of influence, or do we try to work with them and maintain our own role? I have always said that you are a strong leader. I am pretty tough, too. I think it is better for us to influence Egypt and Syria than to have the Soviets do it.

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Kissinger:

The Syrians have put out feelers through Morocco.

President:

The first problem is getting the ceasefire. The second problem is getting it held. On further negotiations, we will use our influence to get peace talks moving along.

We are going to talk to the Soviets. Our strategy is to try to isolate them by working with them. Otherwise the whole world will be ganged up against us and Israel. They will have the Europeans and the Japanese on their side. We will talk to the Soviets, but we are going to have lines to Egypt. Our influence in Egypt is not anti-Israeli influence. It is in your interest that we have influence there.

I have tried to give you a frank evaluation of where we are. If the ceasefire breaks down and we have another deadly round, how much we could do is very much open to question. I did not have majority support. I did not have majority support when I made my decision on the airlift. I did not have majority support when I made my decision on the alert. We will still do what is right. But the negotiating track is the best track. You have to have some confidence in me and in Henry that we will do our best not only on the hardware, but on the software side when it comes to negotiations.

Of course, I could leave you to the UN.

Prime Minister:

That court of high injustice!

President:

All this nonsense that we are going to stab Israel in the back, to negotiate behind Israel's back! But we are going to try very hard to get a reasonable peace settlement. Your interests require it. Our interests require it. The world's interest requires it. These US-Soviet confrontations are not pleasant.

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Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr. President. All these comments in the press. I was reading a piece in the London Times on the plane saying that since the Egyptians started the war on Yom Kippur, that was proof that the Israelis didn't start it.

President: It was awful to start a war on that day. That proves that the Israelis didn't start it. That's your holiest day, isn't it?

Prime Minister: I was reading a piece on the airplane saying what an idiotic thing it was for the Arabs to choose the one day when there is no traffic on the roads in Israel. If they had chosen Rosh Hashanah--the New Year holiday--people would have been travelling everywhere. I just didn't have the patience to read the newspapers during the war, only the headlines.

President: This fellow Kraft is giving us a hard time. These people are supposed to be friends of Israel's but they kick us around.

Prime Minister: During the Libyan plane business when I was here before, he was the most horrible of all. As far as the Israeli press is concerned, in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Knesset and among high officials, the only thing that is true as far as your stand is concerned is that you helped us. I went to see the troops on the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal the other day-- I told my grandchildren when I returned that I was coming back from Africa--I told the troops of your help.

President: I could understand why the troops would object to the ceasefire and ask why they were not being allowed to kick the Egyptians out.

Prime Minister: I told them what you did with the alert. I told them that I thanked God that there was not a world confrontation over Israel. That would be terrible.

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President: You've got the judgment. You are a supreme politician.

Prime Minister: These troops were frank and informal. They asked lots of questions. It hurts to see how good their attitudes are. They believe in me. Everybody in the Cabinet knows what you have done. Where else could I go? Should I go talk to Brezhnev?

President: You would hit it off with with him. I mean "hit."

Prime Minister: I only realized recently that Sir Alec was with Chamberlain at Munich. There was a question and answer in the Parliament recently, and this came out.

President: Can we agree that we are on the right course? We will continue to talk with the Russians.

Prime Minister: Absolutely.

President: We will try to work to consolidate the ceasefire.

Kissinger: What we discussed this morning we haven't discussed with the Egyptians. It will be very difficult to sell to them. What we are trying to do is this. Your policy, Mr. President, is to move the Soviets to a secondary position. The President told the Egyptians that they should talk to us alone. We are trying to decouple the Soviets from this issue. But you have to give us the opportunity to do this. We have to prevent the others from ganging up against us on every issue.

President: We have to take Soviet sensitivities into the act because we have other fish to fry with them.

Kissinger: But de facto we are trying to reduce their influence.

President: The Egyptians will talk with us.

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Dinitz: You are the only factor that makes any difference.

President: To have some influence, though, we have to deliver something. We don't want the radicals to become a greater factor in the Middle East. I am told Sadat is not as radical as others. It is better for Israel if the Arabs turn to us for a moderate solution--and we want them to see it is better for them--than if they turn to the Soviets for a radical solution.

Prime Minister: There is no clash of interest between you and us.

President: Good.

Prime Minister: It would be a calamity for the world if the Soviets were to rule in the Middle East, not only for us. When the Europeans talked about detente, they were bleary-eyed. But you know exactly what you are doing and who your partners are. We have no desires against Egypt. King Hussein sent in two groups of tanks. We got the information at one point that all the Syrian generals were meeting at a particular place, and our boys were eager to go after them. But then we learned that King Hussein might be there and we didn't want to hurt him. The bridges with Jordan were left open during the war. This is a crazy kind of double life. Hussein did the least he could do.

President: Historically it is correct. It does not make sense to kill people who are responsible.

Prime Minister: Life went on as usual on the West Bank. We want peace. I hope there will be a treaty with the Arabs that will really guarantee peace.

Peace will depend on the elements of the treaty, especially borders. Israel is duty bound to be very concerned about that. We do not know whether Sadat will keep the treaty. A bullet could remove him from the scene at any time.

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President:

I have talked to the Egyptians about a settlement. The Egyptians want Israel to return to the 1967 borders. Israel wants to change those borders. Neither side will get what it wants. I have always said that the borders must be "secure."

Prime Minister:

You also once used the word "defendable."

President:

Yes, that is the same as "secure." Everybody has to give a little. You can be remembered--I know this doesn't mean anything to you or to me--but I want to see you be the one at last who works this out, who creates an Israel not burdened with a huge arms budget or with war every five years.

Prime Minister:

That is what I want.

President:

You need your prisoners back. It will not be easy.

Prime Minister:

We want you to talk to the Russians and to the Egyptians. We want to talk to each other.

On the ceasefire, we are prepared to keep the ceasefire.

President:

And let non-military supplies through?

Prime Minister:

Yes. And to exchange prisoners and to have the blockade lifted in the Gulf. If they have claimed about this line or another, now that the generals are meeting and meeting cordially, let's let them decide.

Yariv:

Yes the meetings have been very dignified.

President:

Kissinger and Le Duc Tho talked cordially, but it was four years before they got a settlement and then it took our military action to get it. I hope that doesn't happen here.

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Prime Minister: Let's leave the line to the generals.

Yariv: They know the difficulty of their military position.

Prime Minister: We can't live with this situation on the prisoners. What can be done with the Syrians?

President: Very little.

Prime Minister: You could approach the Russians.

President: We'll do our best.

Kissinger: The Egyptian proposal is far from yours. If one assumes that Sadat wants to get something out of my visit, he could announce that the lines to the Third Army are open and that the principle of the October 22 lines has been accepted. Then we could leave the details to the commanders. We don't want to get into that, because we don't know where the lines are.

President: Supply to the Third Army is indispensable.

Prime Minister: I would urge you not to press the idea of accepting the October 22 lines in principle.

President: But that is my point.

Kissinger: The advantage of the formulation of accepting "in principle" is that it gets us off the hook. It is the best we can do since we do not know where the line is.

Dinitz: If we know the line doesn't mean breaking our hold on the road, that would be all right.

Kissinger: We have already agreed that there would be no military supply.

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Prime Minister: They want military supply?

President: No.

Kissinger: That we can insist on.

Prime Minister: You know what the first truck across the line contained? Filter-tip cigarettes.

[At this point, the Prime Minister and the President spent five minutes alone before the President took the Prime Minister to the Rose Garden steps for photographs and then to her car.]

Harold H. Saunders

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