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WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

October 6, 1973

Time and Place: 9:01 a.m. - 10:06 a.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: Middle East

Participants:

Chairman: Major Gen. Brent Scowcroft

State: Kenneth Rush
Roy Atherton

DOD: James Schlesinger
James Noyes

JCS: Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Vice Adm. John P. Weinell

CIA: William Colby
William Parmenter

NSC Staff: William Quandt
Lt. Col. Donald Stukel
Jeanne W. Davis

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

- 1) Defense will survey the naval forces available in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic, their capabilities, where they are, and how long it would take to move them into the area;
- 2) CIA will prepare an estimate of how the fighting will go and on the possibility and impact of an oil embargo.
- 3) no U.S. military equipment should move to either side;
- 4) there should be no discussions with the press until an agreed press line has been developed, and all official press statements should come from one place.

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Gen. Scowcroft: The latest we have is from our Consul in Jerusalem reporting that the UN Truce Supervisor has said that air and ground fire is being exchanged around Suez, the Golan Heights and the Lebanese border.

Mr. Quandt: Of course it could be the fedayeen.

Gen. Scowcroft: They also report open hostilities have broken out and that Syrian and Israeli aircraft are dog-fighting over the Golan Heights.

Mr. Schlesinger: Does NSA have any messages that tell us who started it? 1

Mr. Colby: Damascus Radio says Israeli forces launched the attack.

Mr. Schlesinger: Their reputation for veracity is not very high, but if the Israelis didn't start it it's the first time in 20 years.

Mr. Rush: Mrs. Meir told Ambassador Keating that Israel would not launch a preemptive attack.

Gen. Scowcroft: (to Mr. Colby) May we have your briefing?

Mr. Colby briefed from the attached text. 3

Mr. Colby: Also, I would like to remind you that we have been unable to confirm the story about the SCUD missiles being delivered to the Middle East. Some of the ones we saw are still on the docks.

Adm. Moorer: Over the last two or three months, North Korean pilots have been coming into Egypt to fly the XS aircraft that the Soviets left behind there. Also the Soviets have been giving the Syrians an abnormally large number of surface-to-air missiles. It could be that Israel felt things were getting out of hand and followed their normal reaction and let fly. The missile build-up in Syria is denser than around Hanoi--and they are the new attack missiles, too. They're not operational yet, but the Israelis may have decided to try to knock them off before they became aoperational.

Mr. Atherton: I accept that Israel will preempt when they can. But all the evidence is that they were caught by surprise. This is the last day in the year (Yom Kippur) when they would have started something. And there were no signs of advance Israeli preparation.

Gen. Scowcroft: Yes, until yesterday they had assessed the situation as being defensive.

Mr. Schlesinger: This could be part of an elaborate cover story. On Yom Kippur,

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little Israel was set upon by Arab extremists.

Mr. Noyes: They have been intensely preoccupied with all that military equipment in Syria. They have wanted to knock it out, or at least to go in and get some of it.

Mr. Rush: The Soviets were very quick in getting their people out. They must have received some good intelligence.

Mr. Noyes: This could be a further break-down in Syrian-Soviet political relations.

Gen. Scowcroft: That's the way the Soviet pull-out was interpreted yesterday.

Mr. Schlesinger: The pressure that was being put on the U.S. by the Saudis and others may have led Israel to the conviction that the long-run trend was not favorable to Israeli interests. Experience has shown that it's easier to marshall U.S. support in time of crisis. That, at least, would be a plausible motive. I just don't see any motive on the Egyptian-Syrian side.

Mr. Colby: Egypt has been very soft in recent months. Sadat has obviously been trying to withdraw from the edge.

Mr. Rush: On that hypothesis, do you think Faisal has been deceiving Sadat?

Adm. Moorer: We had a report two weeks ago that Sadat was losing control of his military.

Gen. Scowcroft: And the buildup of Egyptian and Syrian forces has been unmistakable.

Mr. Schlesinger: That could argue either way. The Israelis may have seized the opportunity.

Gen. Scowcroft: What about the 6th Fleet?

Adm. Moorer: There are two carriers, one in Athens and one in Palma. One is one day and the other is two days away. We have double the number of Marines out there for that NATO exercise.

Mr. Schlesinger: Where should they go? This will have consequences throughout the area. Qaddafi in Libya is likely to take off after the Americans there. I think American forces in the Israeli area are redundant. We might need them elsewhere much more.

Adm. Moorer: We shouldn't make any move now. The 6th Fleet will go on alert and could move quickly. The Soviets apparently aren't making any move.

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Any U.S. moves could be counterproductive politically and they might pull us out of position.

Gen. Scowcroft: But they should be ready.

Adm. Moorer: They're ready.

Gen. Scowcroft: We should also know what kinds of units we have in the Atlantic that could be moved in.

Adm. Moorer: We know all that. But any movement is a political decision.

Gen. Scowcroft: Yes; we don't want to do anything at the moment.

Mr. Schlesinger: The problem is Qadhafi and what he does about the Americans. There will be secondary consequences.

Mr. Atherton: We will have to think about evacuating Americans from any Arab country if this turns into a debacle for the Arabs.

Adm. Moorer: We're already thinking about that. We have 43,000 Americans in Israel, 200 USG employees and 1000 tourists. We have 1127 in Jordan, 800 in Egypt, 7500 in Lebanon.

Mr. Schlesinger: We must anticipate that Qadhafi will announce today that all American oil firms have been nationalized.

Adm. Moorer: And they have a law that says the operators of the plants can't leave the country. That's when the trouble will start.

Mr. Schlesinger: [An occasion may develop in which Qadhafi could be removed.

Adm. Moorer: We had an intelligence report saying that he was unhappy over the failure of the link with Egypt and that he was relinquishing some of his power.

Mr. Schlesinger: If he is losing power, he will take to the hustings.

Gen. Scowcroft: It would be hard to remove him without a fairly direct act.]

Mr. Schlesinger: I wasn't talking about that. But if there is an attack on Americans there, our ships should steam to Tripoli.

Mr. Rush: Any such action would stimulate an oil embargo and arouse the whole Arab world.

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Gen. Scowcroft: In addition to the two carriers, we have the LTA. That would be valuable for evacuation if the critical spot is Libya.

Adm. Moorer: But you can't take the helos in unless they are covered with fighter aircraft. And the Libyans are sitting there on Wheelus Field.

Mr. Schlesinger: We shouldn't make any move toward Libya. This would be interpreted as a coordinated action.

Mr. Rush: It would be seen as a conspiracy that would galvanize the entire Arab world.

Gen. Scowcroft: But if we move toward the Eastern Mediterranean, we can do it without threatening Libya.

Mr. Rush: We should keep a low profile.

Gen. Scowcroft: No question.

Mr. Schlesinger: But we should anticipate all possible threats.

Mr. Colby: Action should basically be in New York.

Gen. Scowcroft: We're fortunate that there are a number of Foreign Ministers there.

Mr. Colby: I've just received some additional items. They've confirmed fighting at Little Bitter Lake near Suez, with aerial dog-fights. Reuters reports that Egypt and Syria attacked Golan and Sinai and that the Israelis replied. The Israeli Military Attache here says Egypt attacked across the southern part of the Canal and that Egypt was bombing Sharm-el Shaik. I'm not sure how much of that is real.

Mr. Atherton: The smartest thing the Israelis could do would be to call for a Security Council meeting in New York.

Mr. Schlesinger: What is the possibility of an oil embargo?

Mr. Atherton: Very high. I think they'll embargo first, then possibly go after our communities. In 1967 there was even trouble in Dhahran. The local governments can lose control. The Arab radio keeps pouring out the propaganda on an Israeli sneak attack.

Mr. Schlesinger: Lebanon and Libya are the most dangerous.

Mr. Atherton: I would add Kuwait and I wouldn't rule out Dhahran.

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Mr. Schlesinger: Egypt and Jordan can maintain order?

Mr. Atherton: Yes.

Mr. Schlesinger: I also think there's a high risk of some internal moves.

Mr. Colby: There could be fedayeen involvement.

Adm. Moorer: The most sophisticated fedayeen force is the one that jumps back and forth between Syria and Lebanon.

Mr. Rush: Maybe Roy (Atherton) could give us a run-down on our diplomatic moves.

Mr. Atherton: The Secretary called Dobrynin this morning who indicated he would call Moscow.

Gen. Scowcroft: We got him a line to Moscow and he has talked to them.

Mr. Atherton: The Secretary also talked to Zaid and sent messages to Faisal and Hussein. In both cases he said we were urging Israel to stand down. We've also sent an alert message to all posts instructing them to take internal precautions. We're awaiting guidance on a press line.

Mr. Schlesinger: How long can we hold out without saying something?

Mr. Atherton: The sooner the better.

Gen. Scowcroft: We should stay very quiet. Any press releases should come from New York or Key Biscayne.

Mr. Schlesinger: But we should say something.

Gen. Scowcroft: But we should say it in one place.

Mr. Atherton: I'd like to get the word to the Israelis in New York about the possibility of their calling a Security Council meeting---say "here's your chance".

Mr. Rush: They would have the initiative for peace.

Mr. Schlesinger: I urge that we say something---the U.S. looks with regret on the outbreak of hostilities which has taken place, possibly by accident, and we urge all sides, etc.

Gen. Scowcroft: We could express concern at the apparent outbreak of hostilities, urge all sides to stop the fighting.

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Mr. Atherton: Let's put it in terms of violation of the cease-fire. That puts it in a lower key.

Mr. Rush: And urge all parties to cease hostilities.

Mr. Noyes: Does the cease-fire line cut out Syria?

Mr. Atherton: No, there was a 1967 cease-fire involving Syria.

Mr. Rush: It should be an impartial statement urging cessation of hostilities.

Mr. Schlesinger: We have two alternatives: 1) a low-profile, bland statement, with no finger-pointing, and 2) a slightly more vigorous statement, that we view with regret the outbreak of hostilities and that neither side should attain any advantage from the fighting. I'm looking ahead five or six days from now. If Israel started it, is the U.S. prepared to call them aggressors?

Mr. Rush: I would add a call on the parties to return to their original positions. A cessation of hostilities, no advantage to either side, and restore the situation as it was.

Mr. Atherton: And that we will continue to attempt to pursue peace efforts once this is over.

Mr. Rush: Either the Israelis or we and the Russians together could call for a Security Council meeting to restore peace and get the other nations involved.

Gen. Scowcroft: There are problems with Israel calling for a Security Council meeting. The Arabs will accuse Israel and they automatically have a majority.

Mr. Rush: We should call for the meeting. If the Russians join in, it would appear more impartial. We should try to get them to join us.

Adm. Moorer: That would put us in a good position.

Gen. Scowcroft: That's a good thought.

Mr. Schlesinger: The American objective is to give every appearance of being uninvolved with either side. Our public posture should be built that way.

Mr. Rush: The call for a Security Council meeting should be in the press release.

Adm. Moorer: That would depend on when we get word from the Russians.

Gen. Scowcroft: It doesn't have to be in the first press release.

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Mr. Rush: We should 1) deplore the outbreak of fighting; 2) call for cessation of hostilities; 3) call on the parties to restore the previous situation with no advantage to either side; and 4) call the nations together to stop it.

Gen. Scowcroft: We could call on the parties to restore the situation and to give some time for diplomatic efforts.

Mr. Rush: Yes. Should we say anything about the protection of American lives?

Mr. Schlesinger: What would be the advantage?

Gen. Scowcroft: That might signal intervention to all the Arabs.

Mr. Rush: You're right.

Mr. Atherton: How can we keep people from speculating on who started it? The press will be calling every desk officer.

Gen. Scowcroft: For the moment they shouldn't talk to the press at all.

Mr. Rush: If we accept the Israeli view that they have been attacked, this could be deadly for us in the Arab world. We could say the situation is unclear.

Gen. Scowcroft: We just don't know.

Mr. Schlesinger: That has been no bar in the past.

Adm. Moorer: There should be one central point for official statements, but we can't stop people from speculating.

Gen. Scowcroft: We'll do our damndest. We have the advantage of a three-day weekend. The less we get into speculation, the better. Let's find out what forces we have in the area, what they can do, and when. Are there any other steps we should think about? What about an oil embargo? Is there anything we could do now?

Mr. Rush: We have to look at the oil picture in the light of the dangers.

Adm. Moorer: The real danger point is Saudi Arabia. We can do without oil from Libya.

Gen. Scowcroft: But the Europeans can't--we would have them to worry about.

Mr. Colby: We should also get to the Saudis to see if they could damp things down.

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Gen. Scowcroft: We have gone to Faisal.

Mr. Schlesinger: Maybe Hussein, Faisal and the U.S. could call for a Security Council meeting.

Mr. Atherton: The odds on Faisal's agreeing to that are very slim.

Mr. Rush: I think it would be best with the Russians who are outside the area. Hussein has been completely inactive--they haven't mobilized.

Adm. Moorer: If we could make a move toward Faisal---he's the key to the oil problem for us. If Western Europe is denied oil from Libya, that might be helpful. They have been less than sympathetic in the oil situation. The German Foreign Minister told me no matter what Qadhafi does they would have to let him do it.

Mr. Rush: I'm afraid that might work the other way.

Adm. Moorer: We have no real problem as long as we have access to Saudi Arabian oil.

Mr. Rush: ~~But there~~ is a problem for Europe. Libya is very important in the overall scheme.

Gen. Scowcroft: Are there any steps we should take now on oil?

Mr. Schlesinger: We're in fair shape.

Mr. Rush: We have no plans in the event of an oil embargo. If there is an embargo, we're all in a helluva fix. We only have 30 days supply and the Europeans have about 60 days. And that is to catastrophe. Within 15 days there would be panic.

Mr. Colby: The Middle East doesn't provide that much of our oil.

Mr. Rush: Our total oil imports are about 25% and that includes oil from Canada, Venezuela, etc. Only about 7% of our oil comes from the Middle East.

Adm. Moorer: But there's a lot of back-scratching on transportation. For instance, we get sweet oil from Nigeria, but it is owned in Libya. Nigeria is just closer to the U.S.

Mr. Rush: Yes, they do a lot of swapping around to get the closest transportation route.

Mr. Noyes: The Japanese have about a 10-minute supply.

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Mr. Atherton: A selective embargo would be the most effective.

Adm. Moorer: The Japanese get 90% of their oil from the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Rush: A Middle East embargo of the U.S. wouldn't be catastrophic.

Adm. Moorer: But Europe would go into a frenzy. They might do something political.

Mr. Schlesinger: If Egypt and Syria started this deliberately and calculatingly, the only reason would be that they think they can trigger an embargo. That is the only rational reason for proceeding in this manner, particularly with the growing relations between Faisal and Sadat.

Mr. Rush: You mean Faisal was deceived by Sadat?

Adm. Moorer: There's the remote possibility that Sadat has lost control.

Mr. Colby: All the indications are not there.

Mr. Rush: Coordination with the Syrians would have to have been without Sadat's knowledge.

Gen. Scowcroft: It would be hard t for him not to know.

Adm. Moorer: He may not have been able to stop it.

Mr. Atherton: This is one of the two tracks Sadat was talking about six months ago. Then he did his flip-flop. You could make the case that his change of heart was a master deceit.

Gen. Scowcroft: If so, he was awfully clever---better than his track record would indicate.

Mr. Atherton: But we did have a report of this scenario in May.

Gen. Scowcroft: No question.

Mr. Schlesinger: Should we move forces from the Atlantic?

Gen. Scowcroft: It's too early to know. But we should know what we have, where it is, and how long it would take to get there.

Mr. Rush: Any military movements should be as quiet as possible.

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Mr. Schlesinger: That's clear in the Mediterranean. But in the Atlantic, we could start moving toward Gibraltar.

Mr. Colby: Movement of a rowboat in Norfolk harbor would be news.

Gen. Scowcroft: I agree.

Adm. Moorer: We should let our commanders know what we are thinking about. We will look at all the ships in the Atlantic. During the Jordan crisis we were lucky that the Kennedy was at sea, and we just let it go on to Gibraltar rather than bringing it back to port.

Adm. Weinelt: We have a carrier force in the North Sea.

(Gen. Scowcroft left the room to take a call from Secretary Kissinger)

Adm. Moorer: The Kennedy is in the North Sea.

Mr. Schlesinger: What about our troops in Germany? Should we get them back in their barracks?

Adm. Moorer: We have one ready unit on short notice. We could add to that and do the same on the airlift. We will set up an alert schedule for all units, but we shouldn't have them make a mad rush for their barracks.

Mr. Schlesinger: Can we reach the Middle East from Fort Bragg with C-5As?

Adm. Moorer: We would have to stage through the Azores or Torrejon if they were carrying any load.

Mr. Schlesinger: Could we use the Azores?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, we did it before.

Mr. Schlesinger: The Spaniards would be concerned about their relations with the Arab world.

Adm. Moorer: In the Lebanon crisis, ^{and} when we set up the hospital in Amman, we staged through the Athens. The Greeks were very helpful. We can also go through Cyprus, but we prefer Torrejon.

Mr. Schlesinger: Even if we don't have clarification before Tuesday as to what is going on, events may force our hand. Qadhafi may start to move.

Mr. Rush: He may complete the nationalization but I don't believe he will declare an embargo.

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Mr. Schlesinger: He could start attacking Americans.

Mr. Rush: He could do that, but it is illegal for Americans to leave unless we take them out by force. This would galvanize the Middle East and end the oil supply.

Adm. Moorer: What if they start killing Americans?

Mr. Rush: Then we would have to do something.

Mr. Atherton: Are there any moves we could make now? I am concerned about our appearing to have a guilty conscience.

(General Scowcroft returned)

Mr. Rush: In the press release we could call on all parties to protect the lives of all foreign nationals across the board, both in the country and from bombing from outside the country.

Mr. Noyes: The Israelis move quickly---they've just sent us a list of equipment they need urgently.

Gen. Scowcroft: Secretary Kissinger is coming down from New York--he should leave about 11:00 a.m. Bill (Colby), he would like you to prepare an estimate of how the fighting will go. And he also wants to know what units are in the Atlantic.

Mr. Colby: We'll also give you an estimate on an oil embargo. Is 2:00 p.m. okay?

Gen. Scowcroft: Okay.

Mr. Atherton: The Israelis may try to take Damascus this time.

Mr. Noyes: Yes, Israeli Embassy people here have said informally that in the next round they would move considerably forward, then negotiate back to their present lines which would give them a secure border.

Adm. Moorer: Also they want to destroy all that equipment, both to get rid of the equipment and also to give the Soviets a clear signal that equipping the Arab countries is a loser. They lost all that equipment in 1967, too.

Mr. Atherton: And they want to bring down some governments.

Mr. Schlesinger: If the Israelis move toward Damascus, we can't afford not to choose sides. If we don't, we will have de facto chosen sides. We either have to come out strongly against aggression and wind up opposed to Israel,

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or, if we do not, be identified as being with Israel.

Adm. Moorer: If we give them a single item of equipment, we will have taken sides.

Mr. Rush: Any movement of equipment by us would involve a very serious situation.

Mr. Noyes: This Israeli request for equipment is just an effort to get us in motion. They don't really need the equipment.

Mr. Rush: If they really need anything on that list, they have been woefully inept in equipping themselves.

Gen. Scowcroft: And they don't have that reputation.

Mr. Rush: For now, we should call on all parties to stop the fighting.

Mr. Schlesinger: We have neither the desire or the information to go beyond that. But if Israel moves toward Damascus, we will have to.

Mr. Atherton: We could call for everyone to get back behind their cease-fire lines. Whoever crosses them, we could go after them.

Mr. Schlesinger: If Israel moves and we fail to come down on them, we've had it!

Mr. Atherton: A lot of sympathy is with Egypt and Syria over what is seen as their patience over the last six years.

Mr. Rush: But a lot of people in this country think that the first strike in 1967 was by the Arabs and the Israelis were defending themselves. It will be the same now.

Gen. Scowcroft: We have to think not only of our public posture, but what kind of position the U.S. should be in to give us the best chance to bring about a peace. If the Israelis move toward Damascus, it would be good publicity to stand up, but what would this do to our leverage with Israel to try to stop them, for example.

Mr. Schlesinger: It would be a damage-limiting move.

Mr. Rush: The basic problem is how to limit the damage in the Arab world.

Gen. Scowcroft: I understand that, but the question goes further than the immediate impression in the public mind.

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Mr. Rush: It could be a catalyst for action by Faisal and others. Or they could lose control.

Mr. Schlesinger: If we want Faisal to help we have to give him something to hang his hat on.

Mr. Rush: We will have to help him resist the pressure in his own country.

Adm. Moorer: It would be good to give him some feeling that we are taking him into our confidence.

Mr. Colby: Maybe Hussein can do something with Sadat.

Gen. Scowcroft: We have sent messages to both Faisal and Hussein.

Mr. Rush: We should maintain continuing communication with them.

Mr. Schlesinger: There will be attempts to overthrow some regimes that are not directly involved--Morocco, for example. Everyone will look on this opportunistically.

Adm. Moorer: There are Moroccan soldiers in Syria. They may be inspired to go do something.

Mr. Schlesinger: Are there Americans in Algeria and Morocco?

Mr. Quandt: About 1000 in Algeria and a few more in Morocco.

Mr. Rush: We should also maintain communication with Arab leaders with whom we are still friendly--Hassan, the Shah, the Emirates.

Adm. Moorer: Have we had any communication with the Shah?

Mr. Atherton: Not that I know of.

Mr. Schlesinger: We should treat the Shah with some distance.

Gen. Scowcroft: But we should keep him informed.

Mr. Rush: That's all we should do with Hassan is keep him informed.

Mr. Schlesinger: Bourguiba has always been helpful.

Gen. Scowcroft: Is there anything more that would be useful for us to do at the moment? If not, we'll wait for that appraisal from Colby.

Adm. Moorer: They have two more hours of daylight there. The Syrians

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and Egyptians may try to do something at night when they are not so vulnerable to Israeli air. The attack began at 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Atherton: But it was apparently moved up. The original plan was to attack at nightfall.

Adm. Moorer: That argues for the Egyptians and Syrians having started it. It would be to Israel's military advantage to start at daylight and in the Arab's favor to start in the late afternoon.

Gen. Scowcroft: I expect we'll have another WSAG meeting this afternoon, and I would appreciate your all staying available.

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