

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

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WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

November 6, 1973

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Time and Place: 2:01 p.m. - 2:54 p.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: Middle East; Cambodia and Vietnam.

Participants:

Chairman	Gen. Brent Scowcroft	JCS	V/Adm. John P. Weinel
State	Kenneth Rush Roger Davies	CIA	William Colby Samuel Hoskinson
Defense	William Clements Robert C. Hill	NSC	William Quandt Jeanne W. Davis

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

... The US Navy ships scheduled to participate in MIDLINK should sail from the Pacific on November 9 as scheduled, with the final decision on U. S. participation in the exercise to be made when Secretary Kissinger returns.

... The U. S. cargo ship, without its escort, should continue through the Red Sea to Jidda despite the Egyptian "blockade".

... Further consideration will be given to the possibility of basing an SR-71 in Europe.

... The SR-71 mission over North Vietnam should be ordered immediately.

... General Scowcroft would inquire as to the reasons for the separate energy R&D agency.

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Gen. Scowcroft: May we have the briefing?

Mr. Colby briefed from the attached text.

Mr. Rush: (to Mr. Colby) What is your estimate of the number of Russian troops that might be in Syria?

Mr. Colby: Our clearest estimate is 1400 advisers. Other than that, we have no real evidence. We have some fuzzy reports that we can't rely on, but it's quite possible that they have some combat forces there. I think the most likely thing is that they have some kind of anti-aircraft or air defense people--possibly to protect themselves.

Mr. Clements: How hard is the 1400 count?

Mr. Colby: It's pretty hard. That was our count before the war started.

Gen. Scowcroft: (to Mr. Colby) But you come down negatively on Soviet combat troops in the sense ^{of} offensive troops?

Mr. Colby: Yes. To put in any size force, short of putting something in for political effect, would be a major effort. It would take 350 AN-12s for even a relatively lightly armored force.

Gen. Scowcroft: How about the cessation of the Soviet airlift? Is that because it has been picked up by the sealift, or is there any other significance?

Mr. Colby: No. The sealift is so much easier. There might be one or two more flights.

Mr. Rush: The air resupply has probably been completed.

Mr. Colby: Yes, with the sealift now bringing in the tonnage. It's still a little unclear as to what the airlift carried. We think primarily missiles and anti-aircraft. We're also pretty sure they carried some aircraft--we know they carried some MIG-25s, and possibly some MIG-17s and 21s.

Adm. Weinel: Maybe the airlift was used primarily as a political signal to their friends.

Gen. Scowcroft: I have precious little information from the party. I don't anticipate anything substantive coming out of Morocco or Tunisia, but we don't have a reporting cable yet. On the question of the resupply of the 3rd Army, the Israelis have agreed to let 50 more trucks through. According to their count, that brings

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the total to 188 trucks. At that rate this will take them past the Secretary's (Kissinger) stop in Cairo. (Prime Minister) Golda (Meir) has said that she rejected an American demand to keep the supply lines permanently open, but they won't cut them off while the Secretary is in Cairo. ~~We talked about the air-lift on Sunday and thought we might cut it off tonight, but the Secretary wants it kept open until probably Friday night. He doesn't think it would be good to terminate it while he is in Cairo.~~

Mr. Clements: When does he go to Riyadh?

Gen. Scowcroft: On Thursday, he will overnight there Thursday night. What about the Hancock?

Adm. Weinel: It's on station, with a destroyer escort.

Gen. Scowcroft: Where's that?

Adm. Weinel: It's on the high seas; it can't be seen from the beach. The only way anyone will know it is there is if we tell them. Its tanker and escort ships will join it tomorrow. We are initially deploying three P-3s to Diego Garcia; I'll get the message out today. They will operate out of there temporarily, now that we have all the necessary clearances. They will probably be there three days to a week. We can decide later whether or not they should go to Bandar Abbas.

Mr. Clements: Has the Shah given permission for the P-3s?

Adm. Weinel: Yes.

Gen. Scowcroft: As long as we stick to his cover story.

Adm. Weinel: I want to be sure we all understand that that cover story is not something we are going to run to the press with. If the Shah says the P-3s are there to train his pilots, we will agree.

Mr. Clements: We don't need to say anything.

Adm. Weinel: We've marked the whole thing Secret Sensitive and are not talking about it at all. (to Gen. Scowcroft) Your people asked for a report on the evaluation team (surveying Israeli losses), but it's not complete yet. We got a report today from their observances on the Sinai front. The Israelis told them that they lost all their armament there to infantry weapons, not tanks. They claimed that the head-to-head tank duels with the Egyptians were almost 100% in their favor. At Mitla Pass, there is only a single road, and the Israeli artillery is zeroed in on that. Also they said the Israelis are building a causeway across the Canal.

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Mr. Clements: A dirt-rock fill. It's no bridge.

Mr. Colby: That's across the Sweetwater Canal; it blocks the flow of fresh water to the 3rd Army. That's a separate canal system bringing water to the city. It's not across the Suez Canal.

Mr. Clements: But it's part of the Canal system, isn't it?

Mr. Colby: It could be two different things.

Mr. Davies: It would give the Israelis great flexibility with their armor if they could cross the Suez and Sweetwater Canals.

Adm. Weinel: In Suez City, they say the Israelis have the outskirts and all the industry and power, and the Egyptians have City Hall and all the people to worry about. The Israelis lost 109 aircraft, but only 3 to air-to-air combat. They lost 44 to SAMs; 31 to air defense; 6 to SAMs or AA; 3 to air-to-air combat; 9 to technical failure; 10 to unknown causes.

Mr. Clements: But it needs to be said that there were not too many enemy planes flying.

Gen. Scowcroft: There were in Syria but not in Egypt.

Adm. Weinel: It could just as easily have been 44 in air-to-air and 3 to SAMs. It's hard to operate both in the same environment.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Middle East]

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[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Middle East]

Adm. Weinel: Also, about this Egyptian blockade (at Bab Al-Mandab at the southern end of the Red Sea). My personal opinion is that it is an Israeli invention. It's not a blockade in the international sense. They haven't announced it and they have no ships strung out in a line and no blinker signals. They do have some ships mucking around. One of our cargo carriers left Djibouti this morning on the way to Jidda with an American destroyer along. We called CINCEUR to make sure everyone understood that we wanted no incident in the Red Sea while Secretary Kissinger was on his visit. They told the destroyer to break off and go to Masawa. The freighter is still on its way to Jidda.

Gen. Scowcroft: Let it go on.

Mr. Clements: There's no point in a quasi-confrontation that would make headlines in every Arab newspaper.

Mr. Rush: Right.

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Gen. Scowcroft: Yes. What about the blockade? What is a blockade?

Mr. Rush: This is not legally a blockade.

Mr. Clements: In any event, we don't want any confrontation.

Mr. Colby: The Israelis have 13 ships tied up in Eilat. They claim there is a blockade. Technically there isn't, but if you were a master of one of those ships, you wouldn't go out of there.

Adm. Weinell: It serves Israel's purpose to claim a blockade.

Mr. Colby: Sure.

Mr. Rush: But if there is no blockade, and they have to pay something to have it lifted, they will be paying something for nothing.

Adm. Weinell: Also, I'd just like to mention again the possibility of basing an SR-71 in Europe. It costs a half a million dollars to fly one from New York and it would cost \$175-200,000 to fly out of Europe.

Mr. Colby: Where in Europe?

Adm. Weinell: [redacted] would be great because the fuel is close.

Mr. Rush: [redacted] wouldn't let us.

Mr. Clements: They might now in the ceasefire environment.

Mr. Colby: [redacted]

Adm. Weinell: There's [redacted]. I suppose we'd have the same problem [redacted].

Mr. Colby: Can [redacted]?

Adm. Weinell: Yes.

Mr. Clements: Why couldn't we fly them in the ceasefire environment?

Mr. Rush: There would be the question of whether we accede [redacted]
[redacted]

Mr. Clements: [redacted]
[redacted]

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Mr. Colby: [redacted]

Gen. Scowcroft: What would be the frequency of the flights?

Adm. Weinel: That could be decided. If they were infrequent, we shouldn't have too much difficulty.

Mr. Colby: [redacted] makes sense in the political context.

Mr. Rush: Weren't [redacted] sticky before?

Mr. Colby: No. They were in their public statements, but not in fact.

Mr. Davies: They said that if it were a question of a US-Soviet confrontation, there would be no question where they stood.

Mr. Clements: They were cooperative in every way with the 6th Fleet. We have no complaints; indeed we have nothing but good things to say about them as far as the Fleet was concerned.

Adm. Weinel: If I could quote Secretary Kissinger, he said the people of whom we asked the least were the most forthcoming. I'm not poor-mouthing the Greeks, but we didn't ask them if we could fly any tough missions off Greek territory.

Mr. Clements: So we'll never know what they would have said, will we?

Adm. Weinel: No. I'm not suggesting any action now on the basing of the SR-71. I'm just suggesting that State think about it.

Gen. Scowcroft: Yes, we'll see what is reasonable and look at the question of frequency.

Mr. Davies: If there is a stabilized ceasefire, it would be different ballgame.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Middle East]

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Gen. Scowcroft: [redacted] (to Mr. Rush and Mr. Clements) How did your hearings go?

Mr. Rush: Very well.

Gen. Scowcroft: (to Mr. Clements) Except for your remarks about \$6 billion for Israel. I heard that on the 11:00 news last night.

Mr. Clements: That was a misprint on the ticker. On one line, they had me saying \$1 billion worth had already been done for Israel, and three lines later it was \$6 billion.

Mr. Hill: There was no confrontation at the hearing. The Senators were quite cooperative.

Mr. Rush: (Senator) Inouye leaned over backward. If he saw a question give us trouble, he said "just let me have that for the record." It was nothing like the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. Hill: Even Senator Humphrey supported the \$2.2 billion for Israel and \$300 million for Cambodia in the cross-examination.

Mr. Rush: That was very helpful. I think Senator Javits supported everything too. I tried to put Israel and Cambodia in the same category as countries whose freedom was being threatened by outside forces. It's a little difficult for them to swallow, but it's true.

Mr. Clements: There were no unfavorable comments while we were there.

Mr. Rush: I think there's a real question of urgency, though. We need to push them hard. Senator Fulbright has threatened to hold no hearings until January. We stressed the 30-day limitation on credits, and State and Defense Congressional people are getting together to give this a hard push.

Mr. Clements: We have another Hill appearance in the next few days--before the House Appropriations Committee. That will be helpful.

Mr. Rush: The problem is with (Senator) Fulbright--maybe a little with (Congressman) Morgan--in getting hearings scheduled.

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Adm. Weinel: May I go back a little to the problem of verifying Israeli losses. They claim they lost 495 tanks, but our team can only count 68. They think 250 is the best guess, but they won't have a really firm figure even when they get back.

Gen. Scowcroft: When will that be?

Adm. Weinel: They're just about finished. They're putting their final report together.

Mr. Clements: They need to do some consolidating, some sorting and sifting among the various groups that have been scattered at various points; they need to put their data together.

Adm. Weinel: (reading from a message) They said they were well received, but they had some difficulty in getting an independent count of tank losses. The Israelis were making strong representations for more tanks. They had long intelligence briefings on the Soviet support efforts with the Arabs and on Israel's need for an SR-71 capability.

Mr. Colby: They want one of their own? How about a satellite system?

Adm. Weinel: Yes. (referring to [redacted])

Mr. Clements: (Prime Minister) Golda (Meir) talked to Jim (Schlesinger) and me about [redacted]

Adm. Weinel: The team's estimate of tank losses is about 120 M-60s and 138 M-48s. They actually saw 15 on the Golan Heights and 53 in the Sinai for a total of 68.

Mr. Rush: Has there been any study of how long the Israel economy, fully mobilized, can stand up?

Gen. Scowcroft: That's a good question.

Mr. Colby: They have plans to drop their mobilization down to 50,000 above their regular strength. Under these circumstances they can get 85% of their normal GNP. Since they probably devote more than 15% to investments every year, they can get along.

Gen. Scowcroft: You mean they can go on indefinitely?

Mr. Colby: They just won't be building for the future.

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Adm. Weinel: They could partially demobilize now. The Syrians can't get off the roads, and the passes on the Sinai they have zeroed in with artillery.

Mr. Rush: Are they having any trouble supporting their troops across the Suez?

Mr. Colby: No, they have four or five bridges across.

Mr. Clements: And they're well protected; that bridgehead is 25 miles across.

Gen. Scowcroft: (to Messrs Rush and Clements) Have you gentlemen had a chance to look at the latest draft of the President's energy message? We have no great problems with it, although I don't think it's a barn burner.

Mr. Rush: It doesn't set one on fire.

Gen. Scowcroft: Hopefully, they are going to punch it up a little.

Mr. Clements: I think they need more of the patriotic approach--that everyone needs to cooperate--than is in there now.

Gen. Scowcroft: We are making that point to them to try to get some dynamism in it, but it solves our problem about references to the Arabs.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Middle East]

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[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Middle East]

Mr. Clements: I'd like to make two or three quick points about this oil situation. If we don't solve this oil embargo situation by January/February 1, I can't emphasize too strongly the degree of trouble we'll be in. We need to talk about some things in this group that we can't talk about in the Energy Policy Group or the larger group. I tell you, from my experience, Watergate will be a tea-party compared to this thing by February 1.

Mr. Clements:

Mr. Rush: I agree, and the Israelis will think it's a tea-party, too. What happens in Europe and Japan has a very heavy impact here. As our allies start shedding us off, the impact here will be very serious.

Mr. Clements: There has been nothing in my adult lifetime as serious as the next 90-day period in our energy situation.

Mr. Rush: Our recent problems with NATO are just the beginning. Wait until they start closing plants, schools, jobs.

Gen. Scowcroft: In the middle of winter.

Mr. Clements: Our economy will turn itself ^{inside} out. And the alternatives are as serious as the ones we are talking about. I have carefully avoided such a discussion up to now, but I want to get this on the record. To use a favorite word in this room, my perception is that the President doesn't have any understanding of how serious the problem is. He has been preoccupied with other things, and understandably so, but compared to this, the naming of a new Attorney General and a new prosecutor are side issues. Ken (Rush), do you agree?

Mr. Rush: I do you agree?

Mr. Rush: We have the reverse of the normal economic situation. The Arabs can increase their prices and cut back their production, and still have more money than they did before. There are no economic pressures on them.

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Gen. Scowcroft: None.

Adm. Weinell: And the problem is exacerbated because people can't identify the sacrifices they are being asked to make with any principle. If we could put it in the context of a maximum contribution to the millenium someone could make a speech in the UN about it.

Mr. Clements: Henry (Kissinger) is really on a pilgrimage to Mecca. There's something ironic about that. I know what the problem is and I know what the solution must be, but how to get from one to the other, I don't know. Henry (Kissinger) now understands the problem and the solution--the solution is Saudi Arabia. But how to get there, I'm not smart enough to know. That's the Secretary's (Kissinger) problem. But we can't have any misunderstanding about this. There is no question of how strongly I feel about this, and I know I'm right. We'd better get our eye on the ball. Ken (Rush), do you agree?

Mr. Rush: Absolutely.

Gen. Scowcroft: (to Mr. Clements) I have relayed your views to the Secretary. I think this group should meet fairly frequently in the next week or ten days.