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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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DOS Review Completed.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

Simcha Dinitz, Israeli Ambassador to
the United States
Hanan Bar-On, Minister, Embassy of Israel

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
Alfred L. Atherton, Jr., Assistant Secretary
of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff *PHZ*

DATE AND TIME:

Monday, June 14, 1976
11:58 a.m. - 1:10 p.m.

PLACE:

Secretary's Office
Department of State

Dinitz: We are happy to have you back. Washington isn't the same without you. We missed you at the Independence Ball. Diana Ross sends her regards.

Kissinger: I like her.

Dinitz: Elizabeth Taylor too.

Kissinger: Was she there?

Dinitz: No, but she wants to have lunch with you. [Laughter]

[There was further discussion about Elizabeth Taylor.]

Kissinger: I wanted to get your assessment of the situation.

Dinitz: I have the assessment we received this morning, through the Foreign Minister. Our intelligence. [He takes out Tab A.]

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SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

2

Kissinger: Is it in English?

Dinitz: Yes. [He hands Tab A to the Secretary, who reads it.]

Kissinger: What is it, in your judgment, the Syrians were trying to do? There is general judgment -- not in Israel -- that if you do something incompetently it takes the moral curse off.

Dinitz: That's right.

Kissinger: There is no excuse. If you take military action, you should do it and succeed.

Dinitz: To lose 20 tanks . . .

Kissinger: To lose 20 tanks and win is all right. To lose 20 tanks and come out inconclusively is not all right.

Do you think the inter-Arab force will come in?

Dinitz: We think this is one possibility.

Kissinger [finishes reading Tab A]: This is about our assessment.

Dinitz: I have this also from the Prime Minister, whom I spoke to on the phone.

Kissinger: Incidentally, I think you've behaved with great skill. I don't always praise you, but I think you handled this skillfully.

Dinitz: I will tell him that. [He read from notes:]

There are several possibilities: (a), continuous independent Syrian operation. We see this as more difficult now. Iraq has moved forces to the Syrian border, and there is internal opposition to Asad in Syria. (b), the Syrians will fold. Lebanon will then become a left-oriented country. (c), the Syrians will operate for some time and achieve a limited success and then yield to the inter-Arab force. We think it will end up the same as (b).

Kissinger: Do you think the Syrians won't make an all-out effort?

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

3

Dinitz: That's (a).

Kissinger: If I were in Syria now I'd throw everything against Lebanon and take my chances with Iraq.

Dinitz: That would be best.

Kissinger: That's the only course. Incidentally, we're not advising the Syrians, as you can see.

[Jane comes in with a message for Dinitz from his Embassy.]

Dinitz: I have a new assessment, which just arrived.

Kissinger: Your sense of the dramatic . . . [Laughter]

Dinitz [reads it]: The Prime Minister wants me to talk with you about this later.

So, none of these possibilities has our acquiescence, but we see the second as the worst. The Inter-Arab force. Our policy was based on the assumption that if Syria was operating within the framework of the Damascus Agreement and would then withdraw their forces while we strengthened the Christian element.

Kissinger: It was our policy.

Dinitz: But the Syrians didn't deliver.

Kissinger: You mean that unfortunately, the Syrians didn't get a quick victory.

Dinitz: Right.

Kissinger: If we had understood that was your policy . . . We had frankly operated in the context of your previous statements. Insofar as we communicated with them, we gave warning. This may have been responsible for the inconclusive result.

Dinitz: The reason they didn't deliver was mainly the Iraqis and opposition on the ground.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

4

To continue: Our policy is to continue to strengthen the Christian element and to avoid a slaughter.

Kissinger: Has the PLO suffered heavy losses?

Dinitz: We'll get an estimate.

So far we've given 60-70 million Israeli pounds in equipment, in addition to food and fuel.

Kissinger: The only think we'd ask is: If there is a possibility of forming a central government, if the Christians won't be too obstinate.

Dinitz: The Christians are now scared, because their main ally -- the Syrians -- are in retreat. But if they are forming a central government, we wouldn't oppose.

Kissinger: In fact, I urged you to strengthen the Christians.

Dinitz: Yes. The question therefore isn't the Inter-Arab force or other instrument, but the new reality that emerges. It will be inevitably negative. Therefore the most desirable thing is to strengthen the Christians. I have been asked to get your judgment: (1) How does the Secretary see the direction of the Syrian operation, given the pressure? (2) What will happen with Syria and Asad, if they fold?

Kissinger: He will be overthrown.

Dinitz: (3) Isn't it an opportunity now to form a coalition of Iraq, Libya, and the PLO? We believe these countries are working with the Egyptians only to get the Syrians back on a radical stand. As soon as it works, they will switch and isolate Egypt again. And the Soviet Union is behind it.

Kissinger: This is exactly our assessment. We went through the same exercise this morning and came to almost exactly the same conclusion.

From this, one would draw the conclusion that the best outcome now is a decisive Syrian victory over the PLO.

Dinitz: Provided they don't stay there as an occupation force.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

5

Mr. Secretary, if you're back in the Middle East picture, can you see Syria, Egypt and the Saudis working in coalescence? Provided that Egypt realizes its [present] partnership is a very tactical alliance. I think the Saudis can play here a very central force.

Kissinger [to Atherton]: See if you can get some such thinking in that cable to the Saudis.

Dinitz: By the way, we don't buy these statements of the PLO that Syria is moving in the southern region to wipe out the camps. We see it as Syria moves to secure their lines to their forces. Sidon.

Kissinger: Yes. But your judgment is the Syrians have missed their opportunity.

Dinitz: Yitzhak sees it as very hard now for the Syrians to launch an all-out move now. Because of the Iraqi pressures.

Kissinger: That's senseless. They have lots of territory.

Dinitz: By the way, they've taken lots of their forces from the Golan.

Kissinger: You are their most reliable neighbor. [Laughter]

Dinitz: The Lebanese used to think we wanted to take southern Lebanon.

Atherton: They still do!

Kissinger: I'm unhappy we didn't get this analysis 10 days ago, because we have been discouraging them. They clearly underestimated the situation. That's clearly true.

Atherton: They're up against all those weapons they gave the PLO, including some very good anti-tank weapons.

Dinitz: And there are many Saiqa desertions.

Kissinger: But it's a pity we missed the opportunity to wipe out the PLO. Israel is better off with the Syrian forces in Lebanon, than with PLO forces in Lebanon. Because Syrian forces in Lebanon are no more a threat than Syrian forces in Syria.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

6

Dinitz: The best thing would have been Syrian intervention that was temporary and didn't lead to a left-wing Lebanon.

Kissinger: You'll get that [a left-wing Lebanon] now anyway.

Dinitz: Rabin thinks the Syrians are in difficulty because of a coalition against them.

Kissinger: The Egyptians think so too. I thought they were blowing smoke. You don't kid yourself; the Egyptians are romantics. The Golan book will say that!

Dinitz: The Golan book has sold only a few thousand copies here. It's a failure.

Kissinger: But the Egyptians have read it. Sadat and Fahmy complained.

I think they want Asad out.

Dinitz: But there will be a more radical element there.

Kissinger: They don't care. They're beyond reason about Syria.

Dinitz: Rabin says he's very disappointed about Asad.

Kissinger: I am too. His strategic conception was okay, but he didn't implement it.

Dinitz: He was afraid of confrontations and did it halfheartedly.

Kissinger: We've seen it. When you do something against your moral convictions and do it halfheartedly, you get in a morass. In the Dominican Republic, our intellectuals screamed, but we did it with 25,000 troops and succeeded and you never hear about it.

Rodman: It was all over in three months.

Dinitz: Who are the Syrians in communication with? We have information that the Syrians are relatively comfortable, because they know that you, because of your contacts with us, and could "control" us.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

7

Kissinger: That's what all the Arabs say. The Egyptians think we were colluding.

Dinitz: I have a request from Yigal to ask about the nuclear agreement. Where does it stand with Egypt? We want to go ahead with the "roof" . . .

Kissinger: Umbrella.

Dinitz: . . . agreement. Is it still active?

Kissinger: It's still active. We're waiting for you.

Dinitz: What if they purchase new reactors then from the Soviets?

Kissinger: I understand they'll give us all their reprocessing.

Dinitz: Can we have an agreement that neither the Israelis or the Egyptians will buy no reactors from anyone else for, say, 20 years?

Kissinger: That I don't think we can get. But all the reprocessing will come to us.

Atherton: Yes.

[From 12:27 to 1:10 p.m. the Secretary and Ambassador Dinitz conferred alone.]

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1. The Syrian attack has not achieved its aims - namely the control of Beirut, Sidon and Tripoli. The Syrian forces did not receive the order to attack and stop the resistance of the PLO, the left and the PLA. The Syrians were unable to effect a link up of their forces with the Saika and their own "special forces" in those places, which have in fact been surrounded and suffered casualties. Moreover, some desertion, in particular of units of the PLA, took place.

2. The Syrian action and the appeals by the ^{Palestinian} ~~terrorists~~ terrorists (and the left) for inter-Arab action have brought an increase in inter-Arab activities like: the Libyan-Algerian mediation attempts, (including the dispatch of a Libyan unit and possibly an Algerian) and the League's decision to dispatch an inter-Arab force.

3. The Iraqis exploited the situation by concentration of forces on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier. As a result, Syria was forced to deal with two fronts at the same time, whilst maintaining a minimum watchfulness on the Golan front.

4. In the face of this, Syria is trying to gain time in order to neutralize as far as possible the pressures exercised on her, and to stabilize the situation. Syria has taken the following steps:
 - (a) Responding formally to the Libyan-Algerian cease-fire proposal. Syria apparently tries through this to neutralize the League's involvement and the PLO.

- (b) Moderation of the League's proposals, for example Syria succeeded in negating the demand for the withdrawal of its troops, and dragging out the implementation of the League's decision for the "Inter-Arab" force.
- (c) Syria is trying to evacuate from Lebanon part of the PLA units being apprehensive that they too might desert.
- (d) Stationed considerable forces on the Iraqi border.
- (e) Agreed to the Riad meeting on the 23 June with Egypt.

The stopping of the Syrian offensive has considerable implications as follows:

Lebanon

1. The position of the left and PLO has improved considerably - both military and political. They consider the intervention of the League as a success ^{since} they have been able to manoeuvre Arab govts. As a result they will apparently make more extreme demands on the Syrians. This has already been demonstrated by their demands for a total Syrian withdrawal and for an inter-Arab presence on their terms. The PLO will try to use other Arab governments against Syria. It should be noted that in spite of this the PLO is trying not to cut all its ties with Syria.

2. The Christians will be put into a very difficult position. An inter-Arab force or a Libyan-Algerian presence will further tilt the scales against them. The Christian anxiety has been increased also by the fact that the negotiations are without them.
3. The inter-Arab intervention weakens Syria's predominance in Lebanon. The presence of radical Arab forces and their anti-Israel drive could bring to a deterioration along the Lebanese-Israel border.
4. As long as Syria is busy on the Iraqi border and does not act in Lebanon the present complications in Lebanon will continue.

B. Syria

Within Syria itself the opposition could rise. It is possible that Assad might change some of the officers responsible for the force in Lebanon.

C. Inter Arab

The lack of success of Syria in Lebanon have brought about a situation in which there are certain options for Syria:

- a. To forego, even if only temporarily, the possibility to bring about a military decision in Lebanon, by agreeing to an inter-Arab force, etc.
- b. The opposite, in other words, the Syrians will press for

that the Iraqi pressure is not too real, It is possible that Syria, if it does choose option)a) will look for a different Arab alignment either, (1) with radical forces, Algeria-Libya, Iraq-PLO, (2) with lesser likelihood a compromise with Egypt.