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June 27, 1972

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Ashraf Ghorbal, Head of UAR Interest Section
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE AND PLACE: 12:15-12:45 p. m. Tuesday, June 27 in Dr. Kissinger's office

Dr. Ghorbal opened the conversation by congratulating Dr. Kissinger' on the "tremendous job" that he has been doing in recent months. Ghorbal smiling said he was especially proud of a "fellow Harvard alumnus."

Dr. Kissinger thanked Dr. Ghorbal and said that he hoped it would be possible to make "progress in other areas" as well.

Dr. Ghorbal replied, "I am counting on it."

Dr. Kissinger replied that realistically until after the US election no significant moves are likely on our side. This did not preclude moves initiated by others. But in spite of that, we recognize the need for a peaceful solution of the Middle East problem. It will certainly be a major item on the agenda of the new administration. How that solution will be arrived at, "I don't know." However, we do have to find a way.

Dr. Kissinger continued that his philosophy is to promise less but to deliver on everything we promise. He felt that the trouble with the US-Egyptian dialogue has been that it did not lead to any concrete results. We expected too much.

Dr. Ghorbal said he was glad to hear this. He always likes to look to the horizons. Dr. Kissinger's concern about the dialogue, he felt, was valid. There has been unhappiness over it in Cairo.

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Dr. Kissinger said that, very honestly, he had been afraid this would happen.

Dr. Ghorbal said that he would not report this conversation formally and that if there were anything Dr. Kissinger wanted to say it could be reported orally when Ghorbal returned to Cairo. Dr. Kissinger's conversation with the Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad in New York had never been reported.

Dr. Kissinger said that the reason negotiations conducted from the White House have been effective is that we have never promised anything we could not deliver. We have never really had a good dialogue with Egypt about what is "do-able" and in what time frame.

Dr. Ghorbal said that he felt that Cairo needs now more than a general promise that the US will try again "after elections." Cairo's patience has been "eaten up." In fact, Dr. Ghorbal felt that Cairo had shown more patience since May than he had expected. He said he would like to take to President Sadat and to Hafez Ismail some indication of what they can hope for.

Dr. Kissinger said he would like to start a dialogue with someone on the Egyptian side "who can keep a secret." He said he frankly had not believed that the road we were on would work. On the one hand, Egypt has asked for too much too soon. On the other hand, the US has "fudged up the differences" between Israel's position and Egypt's to make it seem as if they were smaller than they actually were. He said this had all worked to Israel's advantage -- not that anyone here tried to make it turn out that way, but it had been the object^{ive} consequence of what we have done that the status quo has been continued, and that is what Israel has hoped for.

Dr. Kissinger reiterated that in principle we are prepared to establish a high-level contact. Out of that we would hope to crystallize some position. This would, however, have to be kept secret -- even from our own people.

Dr. Ghorbal asked how he could contact Dr. Kissinger if Cairo wished to respond to this suggestion.

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Dr. Ghorbal asked what kind of meetings Dr. Kissinger envisioned. Would it just be Dr. Kissinger and one other to start and where might they be?

Dr. Kissinger said that the negotiations would be conducted "under my supervision." He might be in Europe sometime for Vietnam talks, although he usually makes those trips in secrecy. He might be in Europe for a few days in September for the Olympics. Or talks could take place in New York.

Dr. Ghorbal said he would like to come to the substance of the issue. He recognized that Dr. Kissinger could not promise anything at this point. "But what can you give me at this stage?" We had the Rogers proposal two years ago. Where are we in this regard? Where are we on such issues as demilitarized zones, Sharm al Sheikh, Gaza? He asked how Dr. Kissinger could help him to make his case in Cairo.

Dr. Kissinger said that he did not want now to make a concrete proposal. The US stands very "generally behind" the Rogers Plan. The problem is, in his view, that we have to start Israel moving. From some points of view making maximum demands plays into Israel's hands because Israel finds it easier to turn those aside.

Dr. Kissinger continued that he could see how the Israeli logic might work: The Israelis could argue that Egypt alone cannot defeat Israel and that the US and USSR will not fight over the Middle East. Therefore, they could justify going on with the status quo rejecting all demands that they could find any reason to reject. If, on the other hand, tensions get too bad, the Israelis can play on the anti-Communist line to get US support.

Dr. Kissinger said that he knew Dr. Ghorbal was familiar with Israel's views on Sharm al Sheikh. "Just thinking out loud," Dr. Kissinger said he felt that it might be possible to work out some formula for a period of time which could meet Israel's security concerns. He said he personally could not be persuaded that Sharm al Sheikh is as essential to maintaining

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access to the Gulf of Aqaba as the Israelis feel. The strategic question is one problem, but the symbolic problem is another. If we talked informally, we could deal with problems of that kind and seek answers.

Dr. Kissinger said that we do not support the "Israeli possession of the Sinai." What we need is a formula to move Israel back. The US is willing to press Israel back but not to dissociate itself to the extent that it would encourage an attack on Israel.

Dr. Kissinger continued that we have "gone through the Bergus exercise" and "drawn lines on a map until we are sick of it." Two years ago he said he favored an interim settlement if it would be done quickly and with modest terms. He felt that if too much were tried, the withdrawal would be too much for Israel and too little for the Arabs. But if a very small withdrawal had been agreed then Israel would have begun moving and yet the Arabs would have been able to demonstrate that the small Israeli withdrawal was obviously not a final settlement.

Dr. Ghorbal said that it is, frankly, difficult to sell this point of view in Cairo.

Dr. Kissinger said that the important thing is that Israel should give the Sinai back. The US is accused of "balance of power politics" and that is a lot of nonsense. We realize that Egypt is a big country and an important country in the Middle East. We have no conceivable interest in being in a permanent state of estrangement from Egypt. If we can normalize relations with Peking, why can we not do so with Cairo? We have gone against the China lobby in the United States and we will go against "other lobbies" provided we can establish a framework where we both know what we are doing.

Dr. Ghorbal said he would convey this to Hafez Ismail. He jokingly said that he referred to him as Hafez Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger said with a smile that he had often been referred to as "the American Ismail."

Dr. Ghorbal said that he wanted to explain the apprehension that exists in Cairo that Israel will try to make permanent whatever line is drawn on a map short of a complete withdrawal.

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Dr. Kissinger said that he felt that the mistake that had been made was to get into the issue of drawing partial withdrawal lines on a map. What has to be done is for us to sit down and to talk about where we want to come out in the end. Otherwise, we will never get off dead center. [redacted] "you are strong minded too." This is a tough problem, and any solution is extremely difficult.

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Dr. Ghorbal said that Cairo is apprehensive about the "last mile." That is the most difficult.

Dr. Kissinger agreed. He said the reason he is reluctant to present a final proposal is that he felt we needed to talk about some sort of interim arrangements perhaps. Just speaking hypothetically, he wondered whether we could agree on a final line that would define sovereignty but find some way to provide for Israeli military control for some interim period -- "civil bases" or some other such arrangement. The US would be willing to bring some pressure on Israel -- but it would have to be pressure that is short of causing a war.

Dr. Kissinger continued that we cannot have an interest in having Egyptian leaders for the next fifty years blaming the US for a settlement that Egypt could not live with. He said he would rather live with the present situation than to have to live with that kind of solution.

Dr. Kissinger went on saying that we have not had an exchange at "our level" -- meaning at the level of the two presidencies. Maybe there is nothing at all that can be done. But on our side, we see Egypt as a permanent and important factor in the Middle East. We recognize that there have been many faults on our side. Dr. Ghorbal could convey this in Cairo.

Dr. Ghorbal replied that Cairo does not understand the notion that there have not been high-level exchanges. After all, Secretary Rogers was in Cairo and saw President Sadat.

Dr. Kissinger said that Dr. Ghorbal could tell Cairo -- he has been in Washington long enough to observe this -- that the question is not a question of whether the level is high or low but that one has to observe where the agreements that have been worked out in this Administration have been negotiated. The things that have been worked out in this Administration have not been negotiated in that channel.

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Dr. Kissinger concluded that we would have to wait until after the election for any significant developments, but a meeting could take place before. He again cautioned Dr. Ghorbal that it would be of the utmost importance to maintain the secrecy of any such exchanges.

They parted with an exchange of best wishes.

Harold H. Saunders

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