MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT September 10, 1969

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: The Next Step in the Middle East--NSC Meeting Thursday, September 11

The following is an analysis of the major issues which may become obscured amidst all of the negotiating detail you will hear at the NSC meeting. In addition to giving you the basis for a decision, this meeting will also provide guidance for Secretary Rogers in his first talks with Eban, Gromyko and the Arab foreign ministers in New York. Joe Sisco will propose that we tell Gromyko we will take the position that Israel should return to the pre-war boundary with Egypt provided Gromyko can commit Nasser to direct negotiations with Israel and firm arrangements for securing that border and Israel's passage through the Tiran Straits and the Suez Canal. Although you approved the draft document which Joe has been negotiating from, you have never had an opportunity to consider the details of an overall settlement.

As I see it, there are four major and one minor considerations:

1. The US cannot proceed on an Israel-UAR settlement alone. If we are going to press for a settlement, it must include Jordan:

--We have a much greater interest in getting our friend Hussein's territory back than Nasser's because of Hussein's moderate and pro-Western position.

--The Soviets and Nasser would not agree to a UAR-Israel settlement alone.

2. If the US is going to take a stand on the elements of a general settlement, we must be prepared to press hard for their acceptance.

--If we just state our position without following up, we will have alienated Israel and won little favor with the Arabs. They believe we could move Israel if we wanted to, so they would regard any US position as hypocritical if we did not stop backing Israel with arms. In other words, proceeding along the line State proposes would involve

a commitment to Israel's pre-war borders (with only minor modifications except on the Syrian Heights) and the willingness to stop the sale of arms if necessary. If we are not prepared to impose a settlement, it will not happen.

--Israel will not be satisfied even if we win Nasser's commitment to direct negotiations (the State formula). Israel wants to bargain with Nasser for an Israeli position at Sharm al-Shaikh and with Hussein for a position on the West Bank. Only strong US pressure, if that, has a chance of moving Israel away from that position.

3. If the US believes continuation of the present situation is dangerous and erodes our position in the Mid-East but if we are not prepared to try to impose a settlement, then we must consider whether there is anything we can do in the absence of a settlement to make the situation less dangerous for us. There are several possibilities, none too bright:

--Try for some understanding with the USSR that would limit US-USSR engagement if there is another Arab-Israeli clash.

--Take a strong US stand for a refugee settlement.

--Concentrate on a Palestine settlement, leaving aside the UAR and encouraging an agreement between Israel and the West Bank Palestinians.

4. There is also the Israeli nuclear issue. You have authorized an approach to the Israelis which was designed as a first step toward getting their commitment not to deploy strategic missiles or nuclear warheads. State and Defense believe--though you have not approved this--that we should cut off their arms supply if they do not comply. Rabin stonewalled our first approach, saying in effect that he expected this issue to be on your agenda with Mrs. Meir and that the Israeli government would be unlikely to make any decision before its October 28 election. One of the consequences of pursuing an Arab-Israel settlement that would require Israel to give up the security provided by expanded borders is that we would probably have to relax on the nuclear issue.

The minor issue is that your talks with Mrs. Meir will take place September 25-26. I do not see how we could take the stop State proposes with Gromyko before you talk with her.

In short, I do not believe the State Department proposal--giving Gromyko our position on boundaries--should be approved until we have studied its consequences and are prepared to deal with them.

The argument in detail for and against stating a precise US position on where the boundaries should be goes as follows:

The argument for taking this step includes these points:

1. If we continue on the present diplomatic track, we have almost no chance of movement toward a negotiated settlement.

2. In the continued absence of a settlement, the moderates in the Middle East will be under increasing pressure from the radicals. This does not mean that moderate regimes such as those in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia might be upset solely because of the Arab-Israeli impasse. It does mean, however, that the continued impasse gives the radicals another issue on which to stand in their efforts to weaken those moderate regimes. If the impasse does not cause their downfall, it may speed it. Thus, the US would have to look forward to a gradual erosion of friendly regimes and a gradual broadening of the Soviet influence in the area.

3. The proposal being made perhaps does not even offer a 50-50 chance of success. What it offers is (a) a further test of Soviet willingness to press Nasser toward serious negotiation and (b) in the process an opportunity for the US to state its view on the terms of a fair Arab-Israeli settlement. As part of the diplomatic move being proposed, it would be planned that our suggestion be made known to the Arab regimes involved.

4. In addition to offering the only possible prospect in sight for a breakthrough toward negotiations, we would be in a better position to ride out the protracted absence of an Arab-Israeli settlement in the broader Middle East if we were standing on our own statement of what the terms of a fair settlement would be than we would be if we continued to hold essentially to the Israeli position. To state no precise US position and to maintain that the Middle Easterners themselves must work out the terms of a settlement is to state an essentially Israeli position. In fact, we are telling the Arabs and Israelis that we will not put US influence on the bargaining scales and that we will leave the Israelis free to put the full weight of their territorial conquest and their military power in the scales on the negotiating table.

As I see them, the consequences of taking this step would be as follows:

1. Stating a precise US position on the UAR alone and not on Jordan would put us in a position of spending our influence to help Nasser while leaving our friend Hussein with a divided country. We must decide what we are going to do on the Jordan front before we can decide whether to make this move. The Jordan settlement is even more difficult territorially than the Sinai. It would be very difficult to allow the Arabs back within 12 miles of Tel Aviv and all but impossible for them to give the Arabs a significant role in Jerusalem.

2. The Israelis would probably reject our proposition, even if we won Nasser's commitment to negotiate face to face. The Israelis would argue that by depriving them of their main bargaining counter--that is, by committing them in advance of negotiation to withdraw to the pre-war UAR-Israel boundary--we have made negotiations meaningless. They will ask: What is left for them to negotiate?

3. Even if the Israelis were inclined to accept, the Arabs would probably undercut the significance of their agreement to negotiate directly (a) by claiming that they are just meeting to sign an already negotiated document and (b) by taking positions that would deny Israel the security arrangements that would make such a border tenable. We would then have isolated Israel without contributing anything of our own toward a settlement. We would thus have given the Arabs and Soviets what they want--an isolated Israel--and all we would have gained in return is the major political reaction in the US that the Israelis would have stirred up.

4. Even if the Israelis and Arabs were inclined to accept, the Soviets would still be in the driver's seat. A lot would depend on what we assess their motives to be. At the very least, they could take credit for having extracted concessions from us. If they want to, they can outbid us by pressing for total return of all conquered territory, including the Syrian heights.

5. If our move failed to produce negotiation, we would gain little in Arab goodwill. The Israelis want to bargain for the expansion of their territory, and the Arabs refuse to accept peace on those conditions. The problem for Israel is whether to withdraw and gamble on a settlement with Arab governments that may not survive to fulfill their obligations (which at best will be less than perfect even if fulfilled) or whether to hold onto territory as the only means of guaranteeing their own security. The only

way, therefore, that we could make a negotiation succeed is to press Israel hard to make its choice in favor of the gamble on withdrawal with security arrangements. If we failed to exert serious pressure on the Israelis--such as threatening to cut its supply of arms or flow of financial support--the Arabs would immediately question the credibility of the position we had stated on the terms of a settlement.

In short, the principal risk of proceeding as State proposes is that we would provoke a major domestic political storm--including increased opposition on Vietnam and on defense--with only a very limited hope of producing movement toward serious Arab-Israeli negotiations in return. Any Arab goodwill we hoped for would be lost if we continued military supply to Israel.

Therefore, I conclude that our real choice is between staying on our present course or making an all-out effort now to press Israel to accept what we regard as reasonable terms of a settlement. To make that decision, I believe you should ask State for:

1. the precise terms of an Israel-UAR settlement, including those which would provide reasonable security for Israel;

2. the terms of a Jordan-Israel settlement;

3. a position on Syria.

If you do not have those before authorizing a move, you will not have a chance to see where the move might take us and you will have little chance of keeping our negotiators within the limits of your policy.

The other dimension of this problem is how the Mid-East negotiations fit into our broader relationship with the USSR. I believe the bargaining advantage lies slightly on our side in that Nasser would lose in another war, although we must face the general judgment that our position in the Mid-East gradually becomes more difficult as the present impasse continues.

There are several possible ways to relate this with other issues on the US-USSR agenda:

1. If we were going to press Israel to accept unpalatable measures, we might expect the Soviets to press Nasser to accept some equally unpalatable terms.

2. - If the terms are going to be harder for Israel than for the UAR to accept, then we might look to other areas for compensating Soviet pressure on their clients such as the North Vietnamese. Another possibility would be some sort of understanding about the limits of Soviet imperialistic ambitions in the Mid-East, Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean.

Whether the Soviets will respond depends heavily on how they view their situation in the area. It is common for us to assume that time helps them and hurts us, but there are enough disadvantages in this situation and advantages in a settlement to give us some leverage. With a settlement, they could pursue their interests without risk of war, get their fleet into the Indian Ocean and still have enough tension points like the Persian Gulf to exploit. The balance is fine enough however that they might cooperate with us in pressing a reasonable proposal on the Arabs. They apparently judge that pressing our present proposals would cost them too much in Cairo. Given this delicate a balance and our inability to press the Israelis beyond certain limits, it may be that on this issue we are negotiating in a relatively narrow field.

I would recommend that you issue the following instructions in connection with the meeting:

1. Nothing should be done until after Mrs. Meir's visit. Secretary Rogers should be instructed privately to divide his talks in New York into two phases--first, purely exploratory talks before the Meir visit and then perhaps a series of more specific talks afterwards when you have decided what our course should be. (I know Joe Sisco agrees with this.)

2. Well before the Meir visit, the following should be submitted to you: detailed US positions on the terms of Jordan-Israel and UAR-Israel, including adequate security provisions for Israel, and a position on Syria.

3. CIA should provide an assessment of the Soviet's true attitude toward a settlement with Israel.