

WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

October 24, 1973

Time and Place: 10:21 a.m. -11:11 a.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: Middle East

Participants:

Chairman:	Henry A. Kissinger	JCS:	Adm. Thomas Moorer V/Adm. John Weinel
State:	Kenneth Rush Joseph Sisco	CIA:	William Colby <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 15px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>
Defense:	William Clements Robert C. Hill	NSC:	Gen. Brent Scowcroft Harold Saunders Jeanne W. Davis

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

- 1) a team of U.S. military officers from our Defense Attache's office in Embassy Tel Aviv would be sent immediately to the East bank of the Canal as ground observers; be accelerated;
- 2) the resupply sealift to Israel should be accelerated; once the sealift is underway the airlift may be terminated;
- 3) each WSAG member should prepare a critique of the handling of the current crisis substantively and procedurally;
- 4) a U.S. team should proceed to Israel to confirm the extent of their equipment losses for purposes of replacement;
- 5)

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Secretary Kissinger: (to Mr. Colby) Go ahead with your briefing.

Mr. Colby briefed from the attached text.

Secretary Kissinger: (commenting on briefing) I'm a specialist on ceasefires that never happen. The Israelis are not only obnoxious, they're also boastful. If they had kept their mouths shut, no one would have known where the ceasefire line was (in the south). Why did they announce it? On the north, are the Israelis claiming they are up to the Lebanese border?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, they're on the mountain (Mount Hermon).

Secretary Kissinger: Didn't they have the mountain when the fighting started?

Mr. Colby: They had a slice of it; it's a long mountain.

Secretary Kissinger: And now they have the whole mountain?

Mr. Colby: Yes, they're on the summit.

Secretary Kissinger: Is that significant?

Mr. Colby: Yes, it gives them both electronic and artillery coverage.

Mr. Sisco: Will it have an effect on fedayeen infiltration into Lebanon?

Mr. Colby: It could have. We have this report from our DAO that the Israelis say an Egyptian force has attacked to the east, but I'm suspicious of that.

Secretary Kissinger: We've made an arrangement with the Israelis. They have agreed to stay in defensive positions on the east bank and we will send some US military personnel from the attache's office in our Embassy in Tel Aviv there as observers. Can Defense arrange that as soon as we get out of this meeting? Send about ten -- or as many as you can. The Egyptians also asked us to send some US ground people. They wanted US military units, but we said we would send US ground observers. We have told the Soviets, and everyone is delighted.

Adm. Moorer: Along the entire east bank?

Secretary Kissinger: No, on the 3rd Army front. Just for 48 hours to make sure the Israelis are in a defensive position.

Mr. Sisco: (to Adm. Moorer) Make sure Ambassador Keating is a recipient of any message you send. He's had some problems.

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Secretary Kissinger: He hasn't been on the losing side of a war yet and he's getting nasty.

Mr. Colby: We also have a report that three formations of Israeli aircraft attacked Port Tawfiq.

Secretary Kissinger: I'd like to arrange a meeting between Thieu and Golda and Duc and Dayan. They deserve each other.

(Commenting on a late report of an Israeli-Egyptian air engagement southwest of the Bitter Lakes in which Egyptian pilots jumped from their aircraft prior to being engaged) The Iliad was certainly not written about the Egyptian Air Force.

What about the UN observer teams on the Syrian front? Aren't they behind the lines now?

Mr. Colby: They're in place and can move ahead easily.

Secretary Kissinger: (commenting on the briefing report of criticism among Egyptian military and government officials of the ceasefire) Do those maniacs think they were winning?

Mr. Colby: Yes, probably; they weren't told very much.

Secretary Kissinger: They would have lost their whole army, wouldn't they? Couldn't the Israelis have repeated in the north what they did in the south?

Mr. Colby: Yes.

Secretary Kissinger: Where's Port Fuad? Mrs. Meir claims we kept them from taking that.

Mr. Colby: They didn't make a serious effort.

Adm. Moorer: If I may add to Bill's (Colby) briefing, the Israelis yesterday initiated high-tempo air activity in both the north and south. They claim they have now destroyed all of Syria's oil storage capacity. On the Soviet ship supply, 25 ships have either left or are scheduled to go. They have brought in 19,000 tons to the Egyptians and 14,000 tons to Syria, with 28,000 tons en route, destination unknown. That's a total of 61,000 tons, added to their airlift, for a grand total of 70-75,000 tons. [redacted]

[redacted] Brezhnev has expressed curiosity

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about the Egyptian use of the missiles they gave them -- both their utility and their survivability.

Mr. Colby: [redacted]

Adm. Moorer: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Adm. Moorer: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Mr. Colby: [redacted]
[redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: I have a feeling the Egyptian commanders don't report the truth to Cairo.

Adm. Moorer: Of course, the Russians are putting them under the same kind of pressure, [redacted]
[redacted]

Mr. Clements: [redacted]

Adm. Moorer: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Adm. Moorer: [redacted]

Mr. Clements: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Mr. Colby: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Adm. Moorer: [redacted]

Mr. Clements: [redacted]

Secretary Kissinger: [redacted]

Mr. Clements: [redacted]

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Secretary Kissinger: [REDACTED]

Adm. Moorer: [REDACTED]

Secretary Kissinger: The Israeli Air Force Chief told us that in the first two days they needed the close ground support, regardless of the consequences, which gave the SAMs a free ride. (Referring to a telegram handed into the meeting) Here's an Israeli sitrep which swears that the Egyptians have tried to break out both north and west across the Canal. There have been a few attacks to the east, and now they have moved some miles toward the east. This should be determinable by our people as soon as they get there. We were very tough with the Israelis this morning. We told them this had to stop.

Let me explain where we stand diplomatically. I think we have come out in the catbird seat. Everyone has to come to us since we are the only ones who can deliver. I think this will be true in the diplomacy, too. This is for the information of the people in this room, not for debriefing. We have made some real gains in the last few weeks, since everyone has learned that the US is the essential ingredient. Israel has learned that they can't fight a war without an open American supply line -- they can't stockpile enough to do it. That is the lesson they have learned. Their casualties are enormous. Mrs. Meir told us they have 1500-2000 dead and 5-7000 wounded. That's comparable to 500,000 for us. She said there is not a family in Israel that has not been hit directly or indirectly, and that must be true in such a small country.

The Arabs may despise us, or hate us, or loathe us, but they have learned that if they want a settlement, they have to come to us. No one else can deliver. Three times they have relied on Russian equipment, and three times they have lost it. So, strategically, we have a very good hand if we know how to play it. All the Arabs have approached us, from the most radical to the most conservative.

Our strategy is to hold these cards and to get a settlement. We cannot tolerate continuation of the status quo. On the other hand, we want to keep the supplies going in until we have a concrete proposal to put before the Israelis. It would be premature to start nit-picking them now. Although we were brutal today with the Israelis in stopping the military activity.

The next phase will be direct negotiation between the Israelis and the Arabs under joint US-Soviet auspices. We and the Soviets will participate, at least in the early stages, but the US is the key element. The Egyptians have been more than circumspect in their dealings with us.

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You will begin to see the pattern of our dealings with the Arabs in the next few days. We will be as hard as nails on oil. We will tell them that if they want our auspices they have to stop their oil threats -- that we will do nothing under pressure. We won't do it in a provocative way, but we will be firm. I think we will even get Egyptian support if the ceasefire is not broken. That's our strategy.

Mr. Clements: You want to keep the resupply going as is?

Secretary Kissinger: Right.

Mr. Clements: We'll do it.

Secretary Kissinger: We will offer the Soviets a mutual agreement on resupply. If they cut theirs, we will cut ours. But I don't want to give that away in advance. I want the Arabs to see that there is no hope in relying on the Soviets.

Mr. Clements: We are in a transitional period of moving from an airlift to a sealift.

Secretary Kissinger: Once the sealift is organized we can start cutting back on the airlift. The airlift is not an end in itself.

Mr. Clements: We will proceed as we are going unless we are told otherwise.

Secretary Kissinger: (referring to a message handed into the meeting) The Egyptians are nuts! They say there are "some enemy splinter units scattered in some areas west of the Canal." But "our forces control the east bank except for a seven kilometer gap." Is that true?

Mr. Colby: It's 30 kilometers.

Adm. Moorer: And they didn't mention that the roads from Cairo to Suez and to Israel have been cut by the Israelis.

Mr. Colby: The situation is the exact reverse. The Israeli presence here is thin, but it is the Egyptians who have splinter units scattered along here.

Mr. Sisco: And the Israelis put fresh troops in last night.

Adm. Moorer: The Israelis are astride the two main roads and the Egyptians' water and supplies have been interdicted. I don't think they have more than three days' supplies.

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Secretary Kissinger: As soon as the sealift gets going, we can drop the airlift. When will that be? Where is the first ship?

Mr. Clements: The first ship will arrive on November 12.

Adm. Moorer: (referring to charts) There are 13 ships involved.

Mr. Rush: What is our total tonnage as compared to the 61,000 tons of Soviet supplies going by ship?

Adm. Weinel: So far it's very small in comparison.

Mr. Clements: It doesn't really compare at this point.

Secretary Kissinger: What happened to the 50,000 tons you promised us?

Mr. Clements: Remember that we are continuing our airlift tonnage -- that's cumulative. Also, we have a new shopping list from the Israelis and we have to talk about what you want to send them.

Secretary Kissinger: The President promised the Israelis two weeks ago that we would replace their losses. He also promised that at least 40% of their tank losses would be replaced with M-60 tanks.

Adm. Moorer: How fast should this be done? Does he want to take them out of new production or out of operating units.

Secretary Kissinger: He didn't say.

Mr. Clements: We need to think about this in terms of the urgency. That will determine where they come from.

Secretary Kissinger: From the diplomatic point of view, anything that is already under way is easier to handle than something that is done in the middle of the diplomatic maneuvering.

Mr. Clements: That means soonest.

Mr. Rush: There are two considerations: (1) the quicker they get in, the less chance that they will be stopped by a diplomatic agreement with the Russians; but (2) the slower they arrive, the more leverage that gives us on Israel.

Secretary Kissinger: (referring to a message handed into the meeting) We've got the firing stopped. (General) Haig called (Israeli Ambassador) Dinitz. Israel knows they cannot survive without us. They know they

would have lost this war except for us. They were on their knees on October 13 and they couldn't have recovered. If we cut our diplomatic support, they're dead. They can't survive a joint US-Soviet position in the Security Council. So we have basically all the leverage we need. I'm worried about the impact on the Arabs. In looking back over the last two weeks, the major mistake we made was in asking for that supplemental. We didn't need it. Incidentally, I want every WSAG member to write a critique of our handling of this situation by the end of the week: what was done well, what badly, both substantively and procedurally. And I don't want you to give it to the press!

Mr. Colby: (to Secretary Kissinger) (Congressman) Hebert was most complimentary about you yesterday. He said he had had a session with you and that everything had happened just as you said it would.

Secretary Kissinger: I think this is the best-run crisis we have ever had. I want to compliment everyone here.

Mr. Sisco: Let's assume for the moment that we had not asked for the \$2.2 billion. Would we have been better off in the context of our diplomacy?

Secretary Kissinger: If we needed to do it, it was better to do it now. The question is whether we needed to do it.

Mr. Clements: In the session with the House Armed Services Committee, with about 26 members, they made it clear they would have preferred not to have to pass on the supplemental. They didn't think we needed it. They took the attitude that if we had gone ahead and handled it as FMS sales, then the Israeli's credit went sour, okay, so their credit went sour. It has happened before.

Secretary Kissinger: (to Mr. Clements) That wasn't your feeling last week.

Mr. Clements: No, and it's not my feeling now. I'm just reporting the sentiment of the members of the Committee.

Secretary Kissinger: Having paid the price, the worst thing we could do is pull away from it now. There's no sense worrying about it. It's done. And I think we can bring the Saudis back.

Mr. Clements: We need to know how soon you want us to move out on the resupply. Should we push out or string along? Also, we should get a team in there to confirm these losses. We shouldn't just accept what their attache here is telling us about their losses.

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Adm. Moorer: They're asking for 1000 tanks and 1000 trucks.

Mr. Clements: The President said we would replace their losses, but we have a right to determine what they were.

Secretary Kissinger: I agree, we should do that. But can we agree on a minimum figure and start shipping something, even before our team can get a judgement?

Mr. Clements: Yes, we can do that.

Secretary Kissinger: It would be best from the diplomatic point of view to bulge now, then we can taper off. The tapering off can be a concession in the diplomatic process.

Mr. Sisco: I think that's what the Russians will do.

Secretary Kissinger: The way it is now designed, we won't be in high gear until November 15. I want more to go in quickly so that our contribution will be the tapering off, even though we were planning to taper off anyway.

Mr. Clements: We can do it.

Mr. Colby: Do you want to use non-Israeli ships?

Secretary Kissinger: Absolutely.

Mr. Clements: That's no problem.

Secretary Kissinger: Let's get more ships, then taper off in the second half of November. This will make some money with the Arabs as our diplomacy requires it.

Mr. Rush: (to Mr. Clements) How are you handling these shipments legally?

Mr. Clements: We're okay until the end of the year. It's being done under existing authority and the Israelis can say they need time to work out the payment. We can delay payment for three months.

Mr. Colby: (to Secretary Kissinger)

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Secretary Kissinger:

(Secretary Kissinger left the room to take a phone call.)

Mr. Hill: On the supplemental, I think it was a good thing we asked for it. It gave the Russians a signal. And if we hadn't done something dramatic, the Jewish leaders would have come right down the gun barrel at us. And we showed the Congress. There are 85 Senators in the Jewish pocket, and they would have taken the lead on it. Only about 15 Senators are critical. We shouldn't apologize for asking for the supplemental.

Mr. Sisco: The Administration preempted the Senators.

Mr. Rush: He (Secretary Kissinger) was talking about the price we paid with the Arabs. But I'm not sure there wasn't some good effect on them. It showed the Arabs we mean business.

Mr. Clements: I was just reporting the mood of the House Arms Services Committee.

(Sec. Kissinger returned)

Secretary Kissinger: I will meet with Jim (Schlesinger), Tom (Moorer) and Bill (Colby) at lunch, and we will talk more about this. I'll see Bill (Clements) and Tom (Moorer) now. Let's have another WSAG meeting on Friday, assuming there isn't some emergency. I want to thank everyone here--this has been very well done.

Mr. Colby: (to Secretary Kissinger) Had you heard Brezhnev is going to Cuba?

Secretary Kissinger: Yes, in December.

Mr. Colby: No, tomorrow--day after tomorrow.

Secretary Kissinger: Tomorrow? I hadn't heard of it.

Mr. Colby: The Soviet Embassy has requested overflight clearance from Halifax. October 26-28.

Secretary Kissinger: He told us he was going in December. Why do you suppose he's going now?

Mr. Sisco: I would have thought he would have told you about it.

Secretary Kissinger: I didn't know it.