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THE WHITE HOUSE

INFORMATION

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~ CODEWORD

September 18, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

State Dept. review completed

SUBJECT: Fighting on the Suez Canal

Yesterday Egyptian surface-to-air missiles shot down an Israeli reconnaissance plane flying on the Israeli side of the Suez Canal. This morning Israeli aircraft fired air-to-ground SHRIKE missiles against Egyptian missile sites from Israeli airspace.

This activity comes against a background of the Israeli shootdown of an Egyptian SU-7 which crossed the Canal last Saturday and a general pattern of intelligence overflights by both sides through the summer.

the action has subsided as of mid-day Middle Eastern time, and Ambassador Rabin phoned to say that Israel as of now plans no further action. The Israelis have, however, moved troop-carrying helicopters to a mid-Sinai staging point, but this could be a combination of contingency preparation for a commando raid and a signal of warning to the Egyptians. The Egyptian air force has increased its state of readiness.

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There will be a temptation here to make immediate approaches to all sides to calm the situation. A normal amount of this in the natural course of contacts is all right, and I told Rabin this was important.

However, I would resist the temptation to mount any major diplomatic effort. There is the danger that irrational Egyptian acts could lead to further incidents, but our reproaching Sadat is not likely to have much influence. He knows we want the ceasefire to continue and will act in terms of his own interests. The Soviets cooperated in the Egyptian shoot-down according to Rabin, and it could be argued that the Soviets are prepared to see some risks taken to worry the US. But at some point they will have to calculate the disadvantages of resumed hostilities. If they have some influence, one would assume an interest in maintaining the ceasefire, although it cannot be ruled out that some Soviet hardliners would take risks to see the US embarrassed.

State Department for the moment, on the basis of Rabin's statement that they consider the incident over, is inclined to lie low.

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