

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 2, 1973

INFORMATION
(outside system)

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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER
SUBJECT: Meeting with Hafiz Ismail on May 20

In short, Ismail came to this meeting to probe White House intentions further--not to discuss concrete elements of a possible Egypt-Israel agreement. The result was that the formal talks were less useful than last time, but I felt that more progress was made than last time in bringing Ismail to understand the reasoning and the domestic political realities behind our proposal to move toward a settlement in a step-by-step approach. Last time he had listened well, but only in this second talk did I feel that he fully understood the implications of the step-by-step approach we are proposing.

I explained to him concretely in private talks that it is essential for us, if we are to be influential with the Israelis, to be dealing with proposals which represent politically manageable steps rather than tackling the issue of total withdrawal all at once. It remains very much an open question how Sadat will respond; he has rejected this approach before and may do so again. The issue on Sadat's mind is whether the White House will remain engaged beyond the first stage. It may be that he needed to hear this directly from us.

The issue I posed, which the Egyptians are now considering, is whether a general statement of principles like that in Resolution 242 could be used to get talks started on the first phase of an agreement provided the US and Israel stated publicly that this first step would not become the final settlement. Ismail promised to let me know before your meetings with Brezhnev. If the Egyptians are agreeable, some progress in working out a set of principles might be made during the summit meetings here.

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BYAUTH - Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

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Background

These talks took place against the background of an agenda of specific issues left from the February meeting which Ismail had promised to consider. These included:

--As full and concrete a statement as possible of the obligations Egypt and Israel would accept toward each other in a state of peace.

--The relationship of an Egypt-Israel agreement to other aspects of a Palestine settlement. For example: Could a state of peace become effective between Egypt and Israel before Syrian and Jordanian settlements with Israel or a refugee settlement are achieved?

--Concrete ways for assuring Israeli security in the Sinai while restoring Egyptian sovereignty there.

Ismail's Position This Time

It quickly became apparent that Ismail was not prepared this time to discuss those issues left from our first meeting. He wanted to discuss US intentions. These were the main points in his presentation:

--The Egyptian side had the impression from the last talks that Egypt was being asked to come up with a new position that would enable the US to try to move Israel.

--Even with a new Egyptian position, however, the US seemed uncertain whether Israel would withdraw. In the Egyptian view, Israel has shown no sign that it is interested in peace.

--Ismail had found continued hesitancy about the role, if any, to be played by the White House. It is not clear that the White House has decided to put its weight behind an effort to achieve a peace settlement.

--The events of March, April and early May had raised further questions in Egyptian minds about US intentions:

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--The decision to continue aircraft deliveries to Israel through 1974-75 was "very revealing."

--The decision to provide technological assistance to Israeli military industry was "dangerous" because it would free Israel of US influence.

--US financing (\$50 million) for the settlement in Israel of Jewish emigres from the USSR further supports Israel's growth.

--The US equating of the acts of the radical Palestinians with Israel's raid in Beirut was "most unfair."

--Egypt had observed how pressure from the US Congress had forced the Administration against its will to put pressure on the USSR for the emigration of Soviet Jews. This caused Egypt to wonder whether the US could freely play a role in the Middle East.

--It cannot even be excluded that there is US nuclear cooperation with Israel.

--Egypt feels that the most important factor encouraging Israel to stand fast is the fact that the US is committed to defend Israel's conquests until the Arabs concede to Israel's demands. Unless there is a more balanced US approach, it is difficult to see how there can be progress. If the US is prepared to shift its "balance of power" approach of assuring overwhelming Israeli predominance, there could be some positive results.

--Egypt is, therefore, faced with two choices:

--It can accept an "interim agreement" which will "almost certainly" become a final one.

--Or it can move toward a final agreement which would require "enormous concessions" by Egypt.

--If neither approach is acceptable, what is left to Egypt except military action? [Ismail in private conversation said he felt military action would be "too adventurous" now, so he was apparently thinking of the longer term future.]

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My Response

Given Ismail's unreadiness to talk about the concrete elements of a settlement, it seemed to me most useful to concentrate my discussion with him on the general theory of how we should proceed. I had a long private talk with him in which I made these points:

--The US is not trying to exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict to achieve some global objective. The US remains prepared to work with Egypt for a just solution.

--The most the US can now foresee persuading Israel to accept is restoration of nominal Egyptian sovereignty in the Sinai with a transitional Israeli security presence at key positions. This might not be the full exercise of sovereignty but it would establish the principle of legal sovereignty.

--It might be 1974 before real progress on an interim agreement could be made and a year after that before there could be progress on an overall agreement.

--On the other hand, it is not the US strategy to keep the Israelis in the Sinai. It is the US policy to try to get a process going in which the US could exercise its influence.

--The US has no interest in bringing about a change in Egypt-Israel frontiers. The longer the present situation continues, the greater the danger that it will become permanent. Any line through the Sinai would be less natural than the Suez Canal, so there is advantage simply in beginning Israeli movement back. If a negotiating process could be started, the US would stick with it beyond the first-stage agreement for withdrawal from the Suez Canal. We would make this clear publicly and elicit a comparable public commitment from Israel. It is not excluded that negotiations on a Canal agreement and on an overall agreement could be carried on simultaneously.

--The US view is that an effort should be made soon to work out general principles of agreement that could get talks started. The US needs to avoid the kind of concrete detail that would trigger sharp

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domestic and Israeli pressures on us at the outset and limit the usefulness of our involvement before we have even begun. The potential of these public pressures is great. It might be useful to work toward such principles with the USSR during the summit.

--Debate in the UN Security Council (beginning June 4) could complicate the process of arriving at some useful understanding with the USSR, if the Egyptians thought some such understanding would be helpful. Ismail said that, if the Security Council debate dragged on to the eve of the US-USSR summit, Egypt would be receptive to a proposal for adjournment.

Where the Matter Stands

The issue now is whether Sadat can accept the step-by-step approach with assurance of persistent White House involvement. Ismail frankly said he could not commit himself; he would have to talk with Sadat. There is a good chance that Sadat will not feel able to go along. Ismail said he would send word of Sadat's reaction in the next couple of weeks.

If Sadat were prepared to engage on the basis I outlined, then it might be possible to make some progress on a statement of principles during the US-Soviet summit. We would try to keep these general, and this would be one reason for Egyptian hesitancy. If we were to proceed, we would want to discuss this approach further with the Israelis.

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