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1975/03/18
SECRET NODIS CHEROKEE

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

EGYPT SIDE:

PRESIDENT SADAT
FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY
GENERAL GAMASY

US SIDE:

SECRETARY KISSINGER
UNDER SECRETARY SISCO
AMBASSADOR DUNES

PLACE:

ASWAN, EGYPT

DATE:

MARCH 18, 1975

Secretary Kissinger said that he had talked with the President and with Gamasy the previous evening. He could add very little to the meeting of the previous day. The Egyptian reaction was totally expected. He could not refuse to present the Israeli paper lest he be accused of transgressing his role and compromising his impartiality. If there is a break-up of negotiations, there will be a complicated battle at home. If President Sadat is prepared to give us a final Egyptian position, we will make a massive effort with the Israelis. Should this fail, we should consult on a common strategy on how to handle the situation with particular regard to two aspects:

a) the problem of Egyptian-Israeli relations, and
b) the problem of US-Egyptian relations.

The Secretary continued that we believe the strategy the President began earlier, as expressed in the October War, is correct. It must, if we stick by it, produce the desired results. The US will not tolerate being treated this way (if negotiations abort). Unless the President makes some radical move, we will continue on the same strategy.

The Israeli attitude can be either through incompentence or ill-will. The Secretary opined it is the former. The
rationals for those who believe it is ill-will is threefold:

a) A US Presidential election is due next year and the Israelis may have decided to take their chances;

b) the Israelis hope that the Congress will over-ride the Administration, and

c) the Israelis desire to get rid of the Secretary on the theory that only he is able to move them back.

In the Secretary's judgment, however, propositions b and c will not turn out to be true. We can discuss the matter further on Thursday, following the Secretary's return from Israel. There is still an opportunity to come to a conclusion.

President Sadat said that after the previous evening's talk, he was about to react that there was nothing new to warrant carrying on. The President felt, however, that such a position would be letting the Secretary down. He could appreciate the Israeli political judgment in opposing any step toward peace -- either it was a conceptual unwillingness or ill-will. If this is the Israeli attitude now, what will it be for every 50 kilometers? What will it be later? Nevertheless, in order not to let the Secretary down, the President had put down his last word.

The President then gave the Secretary the statement drafted by Fahmy. He noted it contained everything, including his statement in Paris. Although Fahmy had opposed this, he had no objection to stating it again, but it could not be in a substantive article.

After reading the Egyptian paper, the Secretary asked about para 3, i.e. to refrain from the use of force. If that article could stop after the phrase, "duration of this agreement," or some shorter version, this would be helpful.

The Secretary continued that if we were to put forward an American plan, it would be close to the President's proposals, except for para 3. The Secretary acknowledged that the Egyptian paper represented a massive Egyptian effort for which he expressed appreciation.
The President recalled that when they had first talked, he had told the Secretary about the German problem: "Give them a finger and they will take the whole hand." The President expressed the fear that because of the incompetence of the Israeli leaders, we may involve ourselves in a very complicated negotiation. If he had given the Secretary the paper earlier, they would have raised trouble on the military side. The Secretary said that everything Egypt is doing must be done in the context of a satisfactory military solution. The US will not participate in anything that would provide ammunition for the President's opponents. If the President would allow the Secretary to put forward the Egyptian ideas, the Secretary would say he would bring it to the President if the "conditionality" (duration of the agreement) is removed.

Fahmy intervened to say that the Egyptian proposals must be presented as an American proposal. The Secretary agreed. On para 4, the Secretary noted his understanding that this would be done in a letter from the United States to the Egyptians. Nevertheless the President should know that this might be leaked. The President said he was prepared for this.

On para 2, the Secretary said that if a war of attrition breaks out on the Syrian front, the Israelis will clearly retaliate. While the US can prevent a preemptive war, it cannot do so if Assad begins a war of attrition. The President thought the Syrians will not start a war of attrition. The Secretary indicated that, in his view, Israel will not do so either. However, they must have the right to retaliate. Fahmy intervened to say this was very normal. He thought if the US could promise these two points, this would be agreeable.

On Article 6, regarding Syria, the Secretary said he would like to phrase this to be consistent with his talks with Assad. The Secretary recalled he had told Assad that disengagement is not a viable solution for the Golan, but that there might be an interim agreement. Moreover, it will be difficult to do anything by the middle of 1975. Something along the lines that a maximum effort will be made to move along as rapidly as possible might be used, and for this the Secretary could get President Ford's approval.

President Sadat asked about the UNDOF mandate. The Secretary said his impression is if we can get something started by May, Assad will go along with it. If he, the Secretary, returned to Damascus one more time and goes back in late April or early May, he thought Assad would accept. This was also the impression that Deputy Prime Min. Saydar had conveyed. The President said he had already suggested earlier that the Secretary go to Syria in late April or early May.
Apart from the above, the Secretary said he had no further points on the Egyptian paper. Fahmy said the items mentioned in para 12 would be the subject of a letter from the US. The Secretary agreed, but said the letter would contain the language of the Vladivostok statement with the USSR.

The Secretary added that paras 4, 6, 12 and 13 will not be presented to the Israelis at this time. Fahmy agreed, noting that these points dealt with the US. The Secretary opined that these should take place only after the general signature of an agreement.

President Sadat acknowledged that, despite what had earlier been discussed, he was deeply disappointed. The President said he would almost prefer if the Israeli reaction were ill-will, which would mean that Egypt has an opponent whose purpose is unquestionable. The Secretary reiterated, however, that both Rabin and Amin are acting from incompetence. If we remain on our present course, he thought the present Israeli group wants peace.

They want non-belligerency for two reasons:

a) domestic and b) moving towards a genuine peace.

The Secretary recalled that he understood and predicted the Egyptian reaction. He indicated his deep disappointment with the Israeli reaction. However, he believed it might be in connection with a crisis situation. In this kind of a situation, there is a point after which things move. He thought this might be the situation in Israel.

The Secretary then outlined his plan as follows:

He would present the Egyptian ideas orally rather than as a paper. This, in his judgment, is wiser, since it will reduce possibilities of a leak. He would state it is his impression that is President Sadat's final position. Second, he would add an extremely strong American statement to the presentation. He had first considered sending a letter from President Ford, but decided this would be wrong. The Israelis would think he wrote it and view it as a sign of weakness on the part of the Secretary. Instead, therefore, he had sent word to President Ford asking his approval about what he might say.
His remarks will be very strong. Regardless of the results of the dispute, he would not be here if he did not believe there was a chance of succeeding. We would not have proposed the two-stage approach if he had not thought it could succeed. We had been led to believe (by the Israelis) that the negotiations might be difficult, but satisfactory in the end.

The Secretary again noted that should the negotiations abort, we have to think about Egyptian-Israeli relations and Egyptian-US relations. For us it is a problem of the position of the US in general. At the same time, the Secretary believed that US-Arab relations should not atrophy. Therefore, it is important these be given another chance.

The President agreed. He indicated he would answer in detail, but would not let the Secretary down. The Secretary said it is a question of evolution of the area and why.

The President noted that this begins with his personal relations with the Secretary. Thereafter, it is a matter of the impact on peace and the future of the area. The Secretary agreed. He recalled he had always visualized that sooner or later more forces would be mobilized against him. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this is the case. Unfortunately, we were faced with the resignations of a President and a Vice President in 1974. Nevertheless, we will see later that evening (in Israel) what the Israelis would do. If they reject the ideas, the Secretary proposed that we then discuss a common strategy which we will implement. The Secretary’s idea is to come on Thursday. He did not know what kind of Israeli reaction there would be after he takes them the President’s strong views. If the negotiations remain in progress, he would go back Thursday night (now Friday). Otherwise, he would go back late that night or early on Friday. There are no Israeli papers on Saturday to carry the news. He could get back to the US before Israelis started their public news media going. If the Secretary agreed, the President would announce the abortion of the negotiations for a few hours. The Secretary said he would agree. We should come out as we began the exercise.

The Secretary thought there was a 60-40 chance that the Israelis will reconsider. The President opined this is overly optimistic.
The Secretary suggested the President consider carefully concretely what can be done between the US and Egypt in the event of an abortion. It might be very important to have a meeting with President Ford. It might not be elaborate (as official) a meeting, but a business meeting. Perhaps, as an alternate possibility, such a meeting could take place in Europe. The President said this will have to be considered.

The President indicated there should not be a concrete announcement until there have been further discussions on how talks go in Israel. We would not have to decide until Thursday.

Thereafter, the President and the Secretary met privately for another half-hour prior to a lunch at the Presidency for the participants in the talks.