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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF  
HENRY A. KISSINGER  
SECRETARY OF STATE

THE BRIEFING ROOM

12:23 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: This will be on-the-record for taping and filming, no live feeds back to your office, no filing until the briefing is over. The Secretary has a lunch that he is actually going to be late to even if he only takes 15 minutes, so let's hold this to 15 minutes.

We will have still pictures at the front and silent film for three minutes and then move to the back so the reporters have a chance to see and hear.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Of course, the problem is that, the shortest statement I can make is 50 minutes, based on my proposition.

Q Start at the end.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I really don't have a very long statement to make. As we pointed out, after the meeting between President Sadat and the President, the purpose of these meetings is not to reach any definitive conclusions or to engage in any detailed negotiations but, rather, to enable the President to establish a personal contact with the principal leaders in the area to review the alternatives and to clarify the positions.

The meeting between the Prime Minister and the President was conducted in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere. We evaluated the results as very constructive. I think, the alternatives have been brought into sharper focus; the implications of the various roads that can be pursued are seen more clearly. We will now continue consultations with other interested parties.

As you know, the Foreign Minister of Syria is coming here next week, and we will, of course, be in touch with other parties in the area. And we will stay in close touch with the government of Israel, and we hope that, within the next few weeks, we can reach a final clarification of the best course that could be pursued on the basis of consensus among all of the parties concerned.

Now, I will take some questions.

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Q Mr. Secretary, are you saying that the President does not yet know enough to go forward with his policy statement, as he said he would?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think the President is not likely to make a policy statement within the next week or two, but I do believe that the meetings that have just concluded mark a considerable step forward, and we evaluate them in a positive manner.

Q Mr. Secretary, how would you evaluate the chances for resumption of negotiations between Israel and Egypt on another partial settlement in the Sinai?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think there are chances but we cannot yet make a final decision.

Q The tendency seems to be becoming aware that an interim settlement is a preferred solution rather than a return to Geneva; is that correct?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No. As I pointed out at Salzburg, the United States is not pushing any one particular approach. The United States is committed to progress in the negotiations. The United States believes that a stalemate in the diplomatic process in the Middle East would not be in the interest of any of the parties or in the interest of world peace.

We have found in the talks that this conviction is shared by all of the principals and it is clearly, emphatically shared by the Prime Minister of Israel. So we are not pushing any particular approach, but we will support whichever approach seems most promising.

Q Mr. Secretary, have you found in your talks with the Egyptian and Israeli leaders any signs that either or both are willing to adjust their positions that existed at the end of March?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We have told both sides that if an interim agreement is to be reached both sides would have to modify their positions.

I call your attention to the decision of the Israeli Cabinet last Sunday in which the Israeli Cabinet pointed out the Israeli willingness to modify their position if Egypt were prepared to modify its own position. We have the impression that, therefore, there is a certain parallel approach on both sides. What remains to be seen now is when one goes into the details whether that permits a sufficient conclusion.

Q You really have not gone into the details yet?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: We have gone into the parameters, but not into the details.

Q Dr. Kissinger, when you speak of touching base with other representatives, other groups, do you include the Palestinians?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No.

Q Mr. Secretary, were you able to assure Mr. Rabin that the United States will continue its military and economic aid to Israel?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: There has never been any question about the United States continuing economic and military aid to Israel. The question has been within the framework of a very large request that we have before us, how to relate it to all the other considerations. So, about the principle of economic and military aid, there is no debate at all but there were some discussions on that issue, and I will continue them at lunch, if you let me get there. This will keep the Israeli journalists from asking questions.

Q Mr. Secretary, there has been a reported hold-up of deliveries of certain military equipment including the last missile, and I think it is the F-15. Has the decision been made to go forward?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The F-15 was a question of training of a technical evaluation team coming over here. It has not been a question of holding up any equipment. But the point is it has always been made clear that these particular items were related to the whole process of free assessment. And as this process is coming to a conclusion, the decisions will be made with respect to these items.

Q Will you make another trip to the area before the reassessment is completed, or how soon do you plan another trip to the area?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Whether I make another trip to the area depends on which of the approaches that are open to us is going to be pursued. But a trip is not excluded.

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Q Do you have a feeling, Dr. Kissinger, as to what they would prefer? Do you get a feeling from either one or both that they would prefer you to start shuttle diplomacy again?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think it is too soon to say this precisely, but I would say, nothing that has happened in the discussions between President Sadat and President Ford and between Prime Minister Rabin and President Ford has made the prospect less likely, and much that has happened has made it, perhaps, more possible.

Q So, you sort of expect to resume sometime?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: That would be premature to say, but, certainly, neither side has precluded a reexamination of the interim approach.

Q How will you get into details, through diplomatic channels, or do you have to go out there yourself?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think, through both. If we go beyond a certain -- we will start through diplomatic channels, and at that point, we will decide whether --

Q You just want to know whether there is enough for agreement before you go out, so you have to know the details?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: That is correct. As I pointed out, we will now stay in close consultation with the government of Israel, and we will also be in close touch with the other interested parties. And after we have all their views, we will then be in a position to make the decision whether they are close enough for me to take a trip --

Q Mr. Secretary, what are the other parties you have been talking about, that you are going to consult with, before you make a decision?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: As I have said before, the Foreign Minister of Syria is coming here next week. We are, obviously, going to be in touch with the government of Egypt, and we will be talking to other Arab countries.

Q Mr. Secretary, you know very well what the particular issues were that held up the March agreement. Are you really --

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I read a lot about it. I didn't know anymore whether I knew.

Q Are you really telling us you are no further along on understanding whether either side has changed its position to make an agreement possible?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No. I am saying that, obviously, there has been an evolution in the thinking of both sides. I am saying that we are not yet at a sufficient degree of detail for me to be able to say whether an agreement is possible and that we have not been engaged in an actual detailed process of negotiation.

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Q Mr. Secretary --

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Neither side has been asked to put forward a specific position at this moment.

Q Mr. Secretary, the President has said he was going to make a definitive statement, or a statement, about this, when the reassessment is complete. Could you tell us how definitive that is likely to be -- how long? Does it include reexamination of the whole question?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think it depends, in part, on which of the options before him -- of those that he has described -- he is likely to pursue, and I think, obviously, when the President states the direction in which we are going, he will do it with sufficient concreteness to explain what we hope to achieve and where it is likely to take us.

Q Mr. Secretary, the President made the reference to the desirability of Israel being more flexible, and I have asked several times, here, in the White House -- and can get no definition of anything specific -- of how Israel could be more flexible. I was wondering if this request, that it be more flexible, means that Israel should give up Mitla and Giddi Passes in exchange for nothing but the Egyptians' word, not even guarantees of shipping in the Canal or diplomatic recognition?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: You are way ahead of me in the present situation of the negotiations. I don't believe that the President has said that Israel should be more flexible.

There was one reference to his evaluation of the March negotiations. I don't think that it would serve any purpose, now, to apply adjectives to the various positions of the parties. The issues that led to the breakdown, as Mr. Kalb said, are clearly understood.

I think the two sides know in which area the major concerns of the other are. We have done our best to explain the positions of each side to the other, as we understand it. We have found a general receptivity to looking at the prospects for making progress, and I can assure you, as someone who has negotiated with Israeli negotiation teams, the danger of their giving away something for nothing is extremely remote.

Q How about 1956? (Laughter.)

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Q I can understand why it was necessary for President Ford to establish some kind of personal contact with Mr. Sadat, whom he had never met before. I am a little harder pressed to understand why it is necessary with Mr. Rabin, whom he knows quite well. Is it in fact that this is the only need for that meeting, to establish personal contact?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No, the need for this meeting was the necessity of reviewing the positions and options of both sides, of all sides in the Middle East, and of the American relationship to it. Since this involves rather faithful decisions for Israel and very crucial decisions for the United States, it was imperative for the Prime Minister and the President to meet, not just to exchange ideas on technical details but to gain an understanding of their perception of the Middle East situation.

I think the meeting was extremely important from that point of view as well as from others, and I don't believe either of these two leaders would have been prepared to make the decisions that need to be made without having a full opportunity to understand not only the technical but also the tangible aspects of the other side.

Q Mr. Secretary, the President said the other night that if step-by-step does not work that he would have a comprehensive plan of his own to present possibly at Geneva. Did he reveal to Mr. Rabin what the outlines of that comprehensive plan would be?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The two leaders had an extremely frank and detailed review. The President's habit is always to put forward his thinking as fully as he can, and he did put before the Prime Minister his best judgment of the situation in some detail, yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, following the breakdown, there was a widespread impression -- and I can understand your unwillingness to engage in the use of adjectives -- there was a widespread impression that was left as a result of official statements on the record and background record, that the Israelis were stubborn and arch, and were the key to the -- were responsible for the breakdown.

As a result of today's meeting, is that impression not justified any more? Has that been wiped off?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: An Israeli friend of mine has once defined objectivity as 100 percent approval of the Israeli point of view. And maybe some of these difficulties, some of these impressions that you describe, arose from that particular definition of objectivity.

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Be that as it may, we are now looking to the future and we believe, as I have pointed out before, that all the parties whom we have talked to are interested in making progress towards peace.

As the Prime Minister pointed out in his toast last evening, no country can have a greater interest in peace than Israel, and therefore we will work with the parties concerned, with the attitude of seeing how we can help ease tensions and help them to achieve what is, above all, in their overwhelming interest.

Q Mr. Secretary, you have spoken of both sides now and it has been made public by the Israelis that they would like an agreement of long duration, defined as three to five years. Now that you have spoken of both sides, is this a likely prospect?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I don't want to go into any of the details of the various aspects. But, as I have pointed out, from what I have seen of the positions of the parties, the possibility of progress is by no means precluded.

Q Mr. Secretary, one last question. When will the aid program be presented to the Congress, on the Middle East?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We don't have a precise date yet, but I have stated our general view with respect to aid.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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(AT 12:40 P.M. EDT)