

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 15, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM:

JAMES E. CONNOR

The attached was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

"Very excellent letter by Joe Alsop"

Please follow-up with appropriate action.

cc: Dick Cheney

Attachment:

Article in NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
of 12/14/75 re "Open Letter to an Israeli Friend"

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

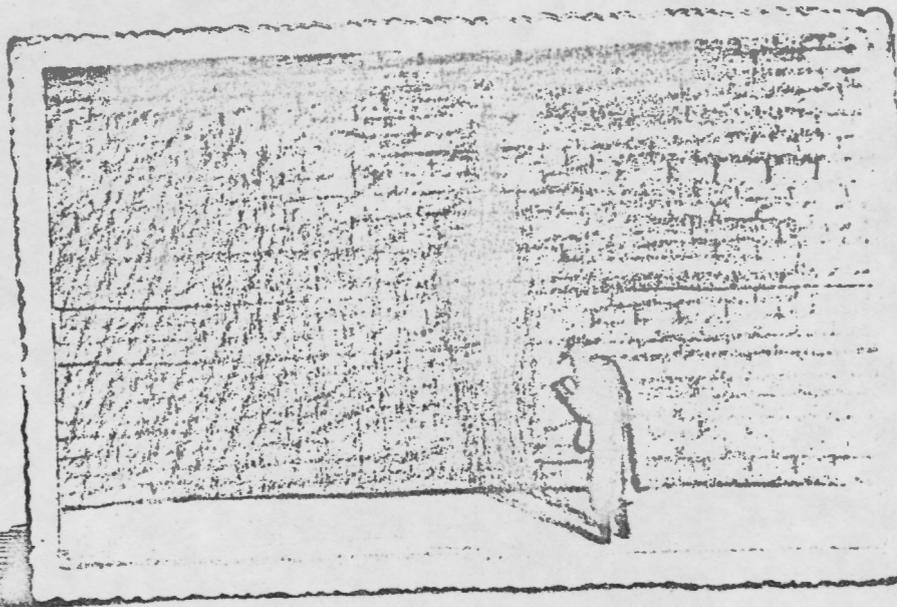
Gen. Scowcroft

Very excellent tho.

By Joe Abrop.

Open letter to an Israeli friend

'You Israelis must face the unpalatable fact...that...on an issue of war or peace of the utmost importance to your American partners, Israel's viciously competitive domestic politics had been allowed to take command....That was what really started the trouble between your country and mine.'



Eugene Mihalco

By Joseph Alsop

Dear Amos,

For a while at least, we no longer have to live with the constant danger of another Middle Eastern war. A badly needed breathing spell began last August, when Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger finally succeeded in working out the new arrangements in the Sinai between Israel and Egypt.

Meanwhile, however, another danger has arisen on a very different front. For the first time in your country's brief, inspiring history, bad trouble has begun between Israel and America. It was so unexpected that everyone is still trying to pretend it isn't really there, as people always do at first when wholly novel dangers suddenly confront them. But this trouble is there—very much there, I'm afraid. So I write you to suggest that you Israelis and we Americans urgently need to do some hard-headed stocktaking.

Since honest stocktaking between friends always tends

Joseph Alsop, a Washington-based political reporter and former columnist, visited Israel and Egypt last spring.

to be painful, I'd better start by explaining my own point of departure. To you, I don't have to elaborate on my attachment to your country, or my admiration for your people, or my unhesitating (though wholly insignificant!) support for Israel in all the many crises since Israel became a state. There's something else, however, which I've never told you.

Any American must always put American interests first, so I've thought a lot about the way Israel affects American interests. Some of the effects have been adverse, rather obviously, as in the area of American relations with the Arab world. Yet such considerations are heavily outweighed, in my opinion, as soon as you apply the 'acid test' to the Israeli-American relationship. It is a macabre test. Because of Israel's perilous national situation, we Americans always have to think about how America would be affected by Israel's actual destruction.

Against the cruel background of this cruellest of centuries, moreover, anyone can foresee at least one sure effect of the destruction of Israel—which Heaven forbid! This would be the automatic release, here in America, of such a flood of guilt and hatred and recrimination as might fatally corrode the whole fabric of our society. Hence I have long believed that we Americans must assure Israel's survival, if only to assure the survival of those American values that I





cherish most. There you have my personal bottom line where your country is concerned.

That being said, I can get down to cases. My concern about the Israeli-American relationship began last spring when I made another of my many visits to your country. Frankly, I was shocked by what I found, and more particularly by the drastically altered attitude toward Henry Kissinger. Only a few months earlier, he had been all Israel's hero—and deservedly!—because of the enduring memory of his courageous leadership of U.S. policy in the Yom Kippur war. For a long time after those hair-raising weeks of war in 1973, he was even treated as a super-numerary member of the Israeli Cabinet.

Yet, last spring, I ran into something almost resembling an anti-Kissinger campaign. The closest Kissinger friends in your Government complained that he had "turned against us." One high personage—not a Kissinger friend, to be sure—actually told me, "We'd be better off without a Jew at the State Department," thereby implying that our first Jewish Secretary of State was victimizing Israel in a cowardly attempt to be more gentile than the gentiles. Anything like that was of course too cheap and nasty for so great a woman as Golda Meir; yet Mrs. Meir, whom Henry Kissinger truly reveres, was only half jesting when she spoke of "my lost friend, Henry."

It did not take long to discover that this abrupt change in Israel could be traced to Secretary Kissinger's unsuccessful first round of Sinai bargaining in March. When I got home again, moreover, I quickly found that the March failure had also had alarming sequels in America.

The most dramatic sequel was, of course, the still unpublished but notoriously bitter letter that President Ford wrote, in hottest anger, to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. More generally, what our policy makers were saying about yours was the mirror-image of what your policy makers were saying about Henry Kissinger. This ugly feeling between the policy makers rapidly subsided when the Sinai bargain was finally hammered out last August, but it left a residue of increased hardness, as indicated by the recent U.S. decision not to veto the admission of the Palestinians to the Security Council debate on the Middle East. The main thing is, however, that no significant figure in the Ford Administration ever forgot the basic rule that, come what might, America must continue to assure Israel's survival. I have even heard the President himself analyzing the factors that impose this American rule about Israel in much the way I did at the opening of this letter.

As you well know, the President and his Secretary of State do not control the Congress; and neither the Congress nor the policy makers can ever manage to buck a strong tide in American public opinion. From Congress, moreover, we've already had grim warnings. With the deep knowledge of our affairs that you acquired from many years in your embassy here, you must have been much worried by the first warning. When the Sinai bargain was reached at long last, the Congress was carpingly critical—and the carping above all concerned the various commitments to Israel that were attached to the bargain! I was plain thunderstruck by this kind of hostile Congressional reaction to a major diplomatic success that may later be remembered as the first historic move toward real peace in the Middle East.

In the upshot, thank God, Congress grudgingly ratified the Sinai bargain; but I must also tell you that the aftermath left me thunderstruck all over again. Even our case-hardened Secretary of State was thunderstruck by the plea a leading Senator secretly made to him shortly after the ratification.

As you will recall, the bargain included an American commitment to provide \$2.3 billion of military and economic aid for Israel in 1976. Despite this formal published commitment by our country, the Senator in question begged Henry Kissinger to cut the promised sum severely before sending the necessary request for an appropriation up to Capitol Hill. By voting for the full amount, whined the Senator, he would also be voting for his own defeat at the next election. I wish I were free to give you the whining Senator's name, but you can probably guess it anyway, from the simple fact that he has always been known as one of Israel's two or three most ardent supporters in the entire Congress!

Furthermore, this former tower of strength has been sordidly transformed into a leaning tower of Jello, precisely because he has been terrorized by what he is hearing from the folks back home. He is not alone, either, for the same thing has been happening to great numbers of Senators and Representatives. In short, there are all too many signs of a new trend in Congress and in American opinion that can later prove really disastrous for Israel—unless ways are soon found to reverse the trend.

The central question, of course, is just where and how such totally unprecedented trouble started between your country and mine. The answer lies in the remarkable story of the pressures and the counterpressures that finally produced the Sinai bargain. But before I come to this hitherto untold story, I must set the stage for it.

Briefly, the Israeli-American relationship began to be significantly but indirectly transformed as long ago as 1971. Your archenemy, Gamal Abdel Nasser, had been dead for less than a year. With his extraordinary antennae, Henry Kissinger had already sensed that the U.S. could make a friend of Egypt's new leader, President Anwar el-Sadat. He then confided to me that he was "planning for a day when the Egyptians would look to the United States instead of the Soviet Union"—and I have to confess I feared he was giving way to megalomania. At that time, after all, the Egyptian armed forces had no less than 4,000 Soviet advisers and Egypt had seemingly become a permanent Soviet dependency. Yet Henry Kissinger, as so often, had seen the future correctly. In 1972, President Sadat threw out the Soviet advisers and took action against the numerous Soviet agents in his Government. By the time of the Yom Kippur war in October 1973, the U.S. and Egypt had a friendly, businesslike relationship—(Continued on Page 52)



Letter to an Israeli

Continued from Page 17

where we had not even been on speaking terms with Egypt in Nasser's later years. The new relationship, in turn, made it possible for Secretary Kissinger to negotiate the cease-fire that ended the war.

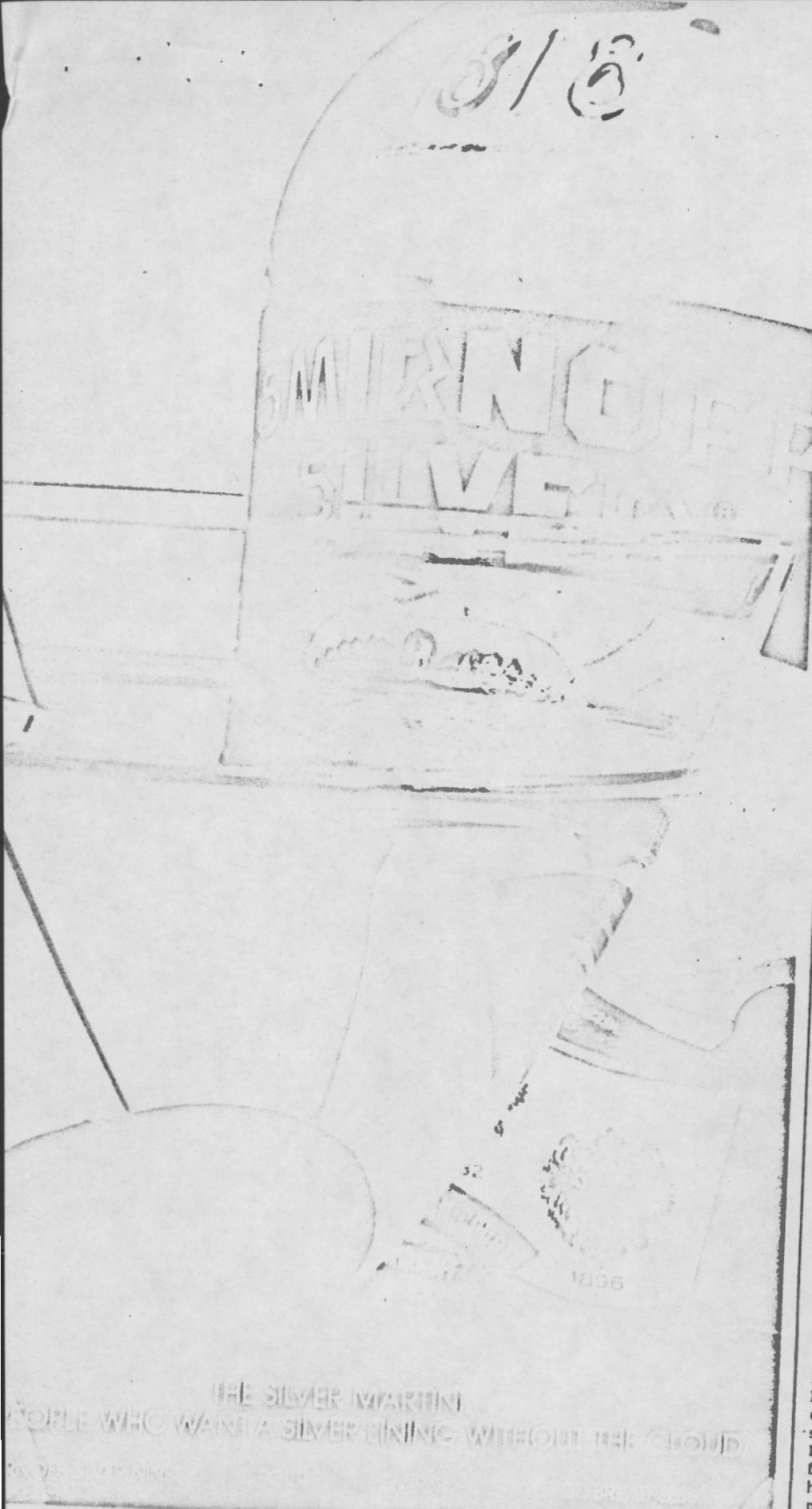
For Israel, meanwhile, this new relationship was a truly transforming development for the simplest possible reasons. While the U.S. was totally unable to do rational business with Egypt, or with Syria, either, it would have been pretty silly for any American to press you Israelis this way or that way concerning your dealings with your Arab neighbors. Hence we never really did so. This ceased to be the situation, however, as soon as the U.S. and Egypt became friends again, and Syria's President Hafez al-Assad began to take the same road as President Sadat had taken in Egypt. After the Yom Kippur war, moreover, Henry Kissinger was firmly convinced that fighting would start again before long, if the precarious cease-fire were not quickly followed by further moves toward a peaceful settlement. Hence it was his plain duty as Secretary of State to press hard for such moves, not only in Cairo and Damascus, but also in Jerusalem.

The only question was which moves to press for. Secretary Kissinger saw several grave objections—and your Government warmly concurred — to the "Geneva approach," which meant attempting to take the hardest road of all, straight from the cease-fire to an over-all Middle Eastern settlement at another Geneva conference. Therefore the U.S. adopted what Secretary Kissinger calls the "step-by-step approach"—again with your Government's concurrence.

The most practical first step was to seek an interim peace-keeping agreement between Israel and Egypt, and even this first step took a year to prepare. By the end of 1974, however, President Sadat had not only approved of such a first step, he had actually disclosed to Secretary Kissinger the minimum price that Egypt could accept for an interim agreement.

Here, please remember that in 1948, 1956 and 1967, Israel's wars with her neighbors only ended in cease-fires, betokening nothing more than temporary exhaustion. Never before, in fact, had you Israelis had a real chance to get any kind of genuine peace-keeping agreement, however brief and incomplete, with any of the Arabs. Thus President Sadat was making a bold move when he agreed to Secretary Kissinger's first step. He hesitated at first, as he told me when I went to Egypt after my visit to Israel. "I should never have done it," he said, "if I'd not had confidence in my friend, your Secretary of State."

With Egypt's minimum price in hand, Henry Kissinger was then able to ask whether you Israelis would pay this minimum price—and of course to urge your Government to do so, since he thought Sadat's price a bargain for Israel. By the end of last February, he was finally satisfied that his patient preparations had succeeded, and his interim-agreement package was ready to be tied up. He therefore decided to embark on another round of his



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Rabin and Kissinger last March. The Prime Minister personally favored meeting Egypt's terms in the Sinai but, in the end, he could not bring the rest of his Government along.

shuttle diplomacy last March. There are two points of utmost import to note about this decision. First, the Secretary had been invited to shuttle by both the Israeli and Egyptian Governments. And second, he would have refused to set foot on Air Force One last March if he had not believed that after suitable haggling the Israeli Government would finally meet President Sadat's rock bottom requirements for an interim agreement.

He had good reasons for this belief, too. To illustrate, let me confine myself to the particular problem that finally caused the March negotiation to break down. Your Government had been plainly informed that President Sadat's cardinal requirement was a significant Israeli withdrawal in the Sinai desert. It had been further specified that the withdrawal must leave the Mitla and Gidi Passes entirely free of Israeli troops. The Israeli general staff had then been consulted, and had handed down the formal opinion that there was no overriding military need to retain control of the two passes, or any part of them. In addition, Secretary Kissinger had word from your Prime Minister that he personally favored withdrawal from the passes to get an interim agreement with Egypt, and the Prime Minister had said he was confident of carrying his Government with him.

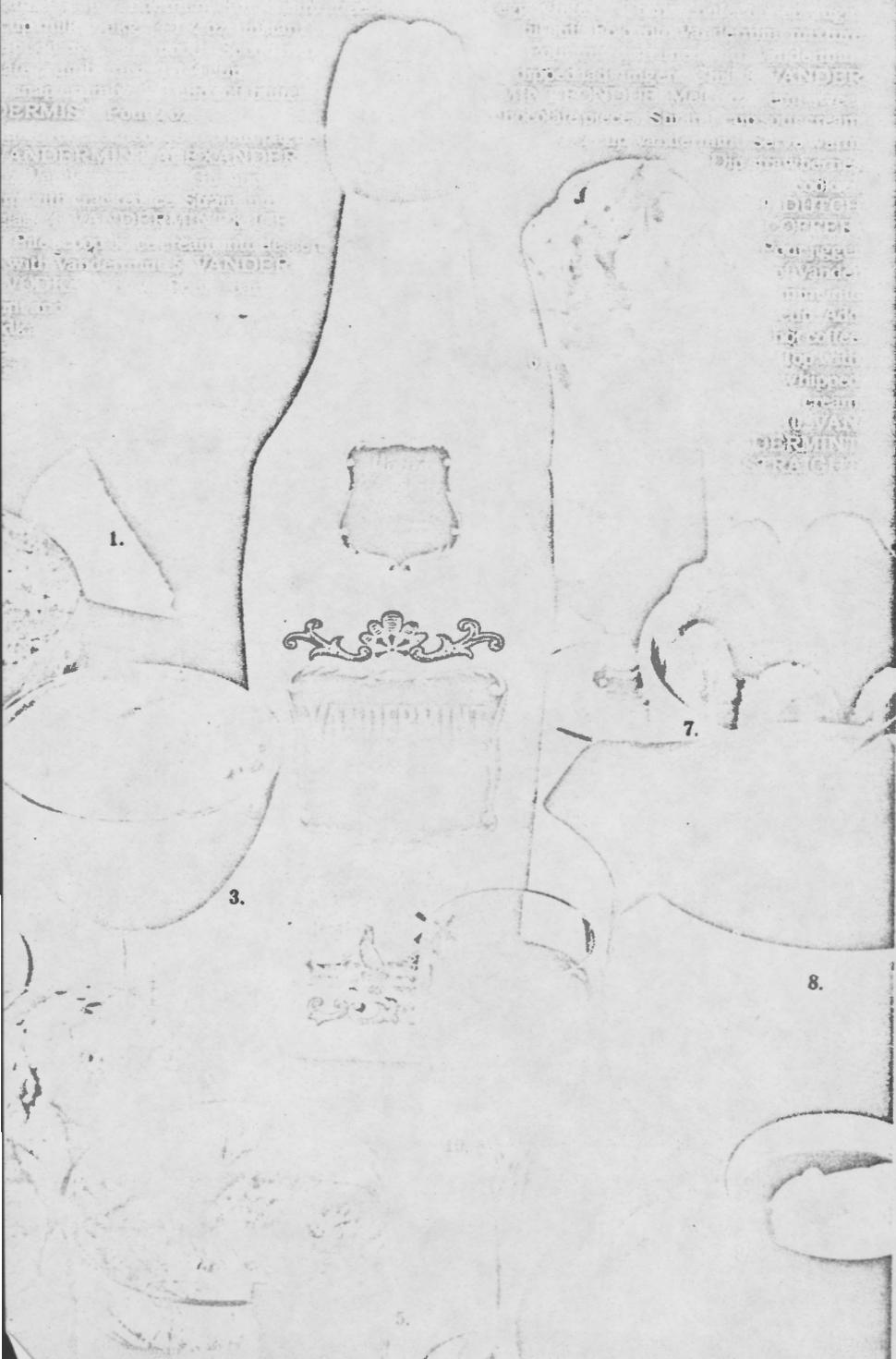
This is not merely the best information I can obtain

about Yitzhak Rabin's starting position. Even if I had no such information, I should refuse to believe anything else, for it would have been weak, stupid and dishonest for any Israeli Prime Minister to allow (let alone invite) Secretary Kissinger to begin shuttling, while knowing in advance that Israel would not meet the known rock-bottom requirements for the desired deal with Egypt. As a friend of some years—I am deeply proud to say—I can testify that Yitzhak Rabin is an exceptionally brave, intelligent and honorable man. Hence it is obvious to me that he had merely made an honest and quite normal political misjudgment when he indicated that he could carry his Government with him before the March shuttling began. The fact remains, however, that because of this misjudgment, the Israeli Government—or at any rate the Prime Minister—had unintentionally misled our Government. This was one of the reasons President Ford was later so angry.

The possibility that he had been misled first dawned on Secretary Kissinger when he arrived in Israel on his initial shuttle visit and promptly called on his heroine, Golda Meir. She flatly warned that whatever the Prime Minister might have said, Yitzhak Rabin would find that he was politically unable, in the end, to go through with complete withdrawal from the Mitla

(Continued on Page 58)

The Dutch invite you make the most of Vandermint, their great after-dinner liqueur.



Continued from Page 54

and Gidi Passes. Most unhappily, events then proved Mrs. Meir's habitual astuteness.

As I hardly need to remind you, the Rabin Cabinet had a hairline majority in the Knesset, and contained more than one man eager to step into the Prime Minister's shoes. One of the Prime Ministerial aspirants, furthermore, decided to adopt the tactic of out-hawking Yitzhak Rabin. I judge it was a tactic for three reasons. The man in question had the fullest knowledge of the verdict of your general staff that complete withdrawal from the Mitla and Gidi Passes was militarily acceptable. Yet he took the stand that for specifically military reasons, he could never, never, never accept complete withdrawal. And later on, he also accepted what he had said he could never, never, never accept! I have a horror of the bad American practice of choosing up sides in other people's politics, so I shall identify this member of the Rabin Cabinet no further, except that it is necessary to add that he personally controlled eight votes in the Knesset.

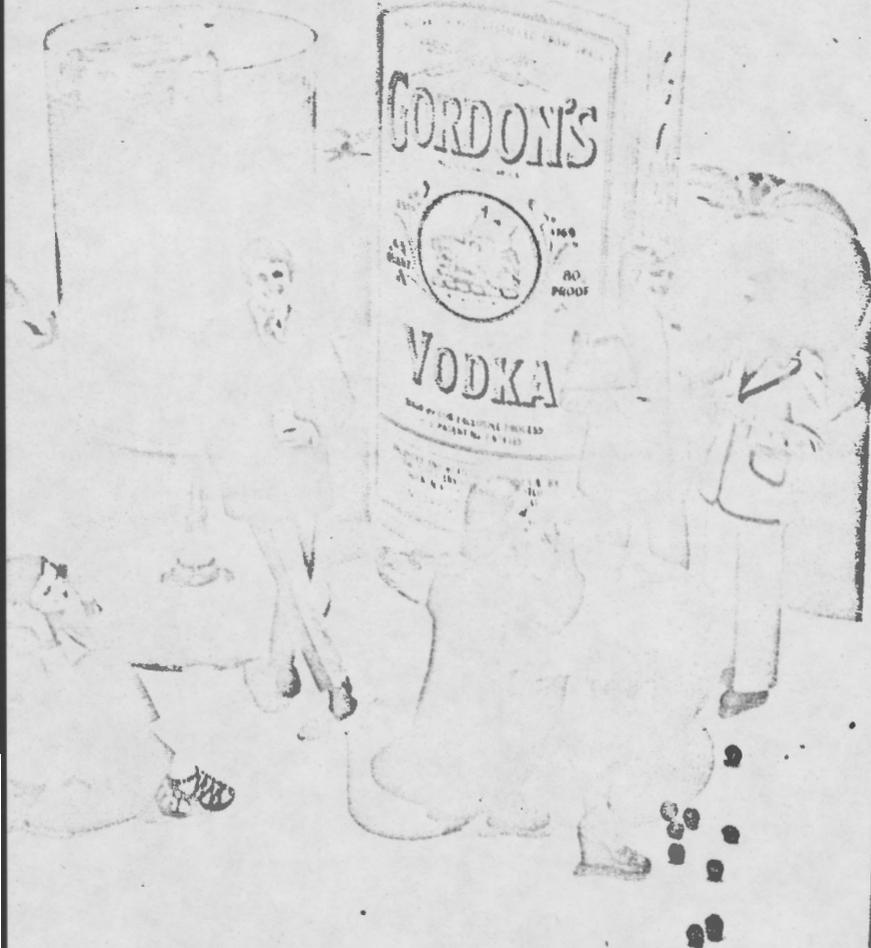
The loss of those eight votes meant no parliamentary majority for the interim peace-keeping agreement with Egypt that Secretary Kissinger was working for. As a second best, there were endless exchanges about different formulas for partial Israeli withdrawal from the two passes. But as your Government had always been told to expect, President Sadat would not budge from his first position that complete withdrawal was essential. So there was a total impasse in the end, and Yitzhak Rabin had to choose between bringing down his Cabinet by trying to force through the kind of interim agreement he had originally said he would support; or now explaining to Henry Kissinger that he could not support such an agreement after all. He chose the second alternative—Secretary Kissinger thinks rightly, for he has told me that bringing down the Cabinet would only have made matters worse.

You Israelis must face the unpalatable fact, however, that matters were already pretty bad because of the failure of the first round of Sinai bargaining in March. On an issue of war or peace of the utmost importance to your American partners, Israel's viciously competitive domestic politics had been allowed to take command. That, and only that, was the really basic reason our President was so angry when he wrote your Prime Minister. That, and only that, was what really started the trouble between your country and mine—at least on the American side, which is the side that endangers you. Unfairly enough, of course, trouble with America can be fatal to Israel, but trouble with Israel does not gravely endanger the U.S. So about what happened in Israel, I shall say only that you Israelis were plainly so angry with Henry Kissinger because you were still so unprepared for serious pressure from an American Secretary of State to come to any kind of terms with your Arab neighbors. And this, in turn, was because you had not made a realistic prior adjustment to the radically novel situation produced by America's changed relations with these neighbors of yours.

Such an adjustment is now more urgent than ever, unless you Israelis want still worse trouble between our two countries. Making the adjustment by no means requires you to bow invariably to American views. There will always be room for serious discussion. But the new situation most certainly requires you to keep Israeli domestic politics strictly out of all future Middle Eastern negotiations vitally involving American national policy. And I must regretfully add that it further requires

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you to avoid any future attempts to influence our national policy in the Middle East by interfering in American domestic politics. Unhappily, this was precisely what you did last spring after the negotiations broke down in March.

Israel, of course, has the leverage to interfere in our politics because of the strong support for Israel in the American Jewish community; and this is an aspect of the Israeli-American relationship that now calls for particularly careful thought. I myself begin with the conviction that no other community in America, either racial or religious, has made a greater proportional contribution to our national life. If most American Jews did not support Israel, moreover, I should not think highly of them; and I see nothing in any way improper in this support.

After all, the Jewish American support for Israel today is exactly comparable to the passionate Irish American support for "the old country's" independence in the long years before Eire became a state, and no one has ever been silly enough to suggest that the Irish Americans did wrong. But whereas the instinctive Jewish American support for Israel is not at all wrong, you Israelis can exploit this Jewish American support for Israel in ways that are very wrong indeed. Or perhaps "wrong" is not the best word here. I'm reminded, in fact, of old Talleyrand's bitingly cynical remark about Napoleon's murder of the Duke of Enghien: "It's worse than a crime; it's a blunder."

It was a serious blunder, to begin with, for you Israelis to let yourselves be angered by the unaccustomed American diplomatic pressure you first began to feel last winter, and then to allow your anger to spill over into the kind of quasi-campaign against Henry Kissinger that started after the March failure. It did not take me more than a day in the hotel in Tel Aviv to discover that all the more important Jewish American visitors to Israel last spring were getting briefings on the alleged crimes of their own Secretary of State—and sometimes pretty high level briefings, too.

As a natural result, Secretary Kissinger soon found himself having trouble in Congress with the many Senators and Representatives who were then far more automatically responsive to Jewish American opinion than they

are today. Men in this group, in fact, provided the margin for victory of the anti-Turkish forces in the House of Representatives' shocking vote in August to deny all military aid to Turkey. After the vote, Representative Benjamin Rosenthal of New York blithely explained to the leading English newspaperman Henry Brandon that "he just wanted to show Henry Kissinger that he couldn't push Israel around." Yet if the House vote of last August had not been reversed a little later, the United States would have experienced an appalling strategic setback in the eastern Mediterranean — which would also have been most harmful to Israel!

In short, this worst single by-product of the quasi-campaign against Henry Kissinger was certainly neither planned nor desired by your Government; yet I think the cause—the quasi-campaign itself—was an activity at least subconsciously aimed at limiting Secretary Kissinger's power to "push Israel around," just as the foolish Rosenthal had said. There was nothing subconscious, moreover, about last spring's open letter of 76 Senators to President Ford, warning in menacing terms against any reduction in American aid to Israel. This was a direct, planned intervention by your Government in American politics, again aimed to prevent Israel from being "pushed around." The Senators' letter was of course presented at the time as spontaneous. But we needn't argue about the Israeli Government's active role in preparation of the letter, since you told me yourself in Tel Aviv that you had been quietly sent back to Washington for a while with the special mission of getting your many friends in the Senate to sign the letter.

The letter made a momentary impression, but soon turned out to be a costly boomerang. To begin with, it made the President angry all over again—for understandable reasons—and it did not affect his policy in any way. As a flagrant foreign interference, it further shocked a good many of Israel's staunchest American friends, myself included; and it left a bad taste on Capitol Hill, because of the arm-twisting certain colleagues of yours foolishly employed to get the maximum number of senatorial signatures. As to the letter's real value, finally, you have only to recall the whin-

Senator who begged Henry Kissinger to make severe cuts in the 1976 request for aid to Israel. I need hardly say that only five months after he had been one of the most eager public sponsors of this famous letter intended to forestall aid cuts of any sort.

But although your Government therefore gave way to the U.S. pressure, what had happened in March still bore bitter fruit in August. This was because you were now going to do in August exactly what had been categorically refused a few months earlier—and this presented natural political difficulties. Most conspicuously, the man who had sworn he would never, never accept complete withdrawal from the Mitla and Gidi Passes, now insisted on something striking to boast about which would explain his change of mind. This was the real origin of the key demand for 200 American technicians to man the warning station in the passes. But there were also demands for other extras—a considerable list of them, in fact, including the U.S. aid commitment of \$2.3 billion.

Secretary Kissinger fruitlessly warned against the whole list, on the ground that Israel would get surer and more ample U.S. support without insisting on dangerously controversial formal commitments. From the sidelines, with her unfailing wisdom, Golda Meir also kept pointing out the basic worthlessness to Israel of the 200 American technicians—until further argument was in vain. On this point, too, I am pretty sure your Prime Minister would have followed Mrs. Meir if he had not needed so badly to keep his Cabinet together. But once again—let's face it!—Israel's domestic politics had taken effective command. For that sole reason, in order to get the vital interim agreement with Egypt, the Sinai bargain had to be dressed up like a Christmas tree for Israel with the U.S. playing Santa Claus.

The political consequences in the United States were precisely what Henry Kissinger had warned they would be. The worst thing on the Christmas tree, of course, was the project for the 200 American technicians. This necessitated Congressional action, and thereby positively insured that the whole bargain would become a political football. Yet even in the case of the \$2.3 billion aid commitment, merely think first of my story of the whining Senator who begged Henry Kissinger for aid cuts in 1976. And then recall that in the 20 months after the Yom Kippur war, Israel got no less than \$2.5 billion of U.S. aid, every dollar of which was all but voted by acclamation, with only the most perfunctory notice in

the March im-

as going to be indefinitely prolonged, he would be instantly compelled to accept the "Geneva approach" in the Middle East.



Author at home in Washington. "I pray for you, and I pray for this country, too."

is not a nice word, but please note the U.S. Government's formal diplomatic expectation quite different from the precedent you Israelis of interfering in our politics. In my opinion, the U.S. Government's actions were also justified, with the President and Secretary of State had evidence to prove prolongation of the impasse would inevitably result in renewed fighting in the Middle East.

expedients worked, because your Government has an understandable need for the kind of Geneva conference that would lead the U.S. to take an informed, detailed and public position on the right perspective for Israel.

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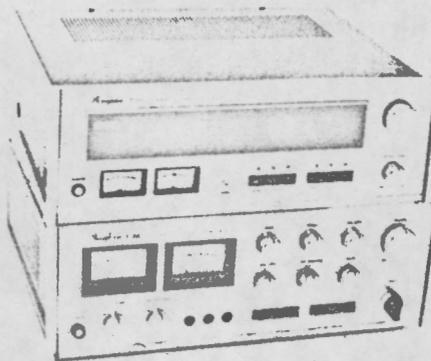
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domestic political reasons, in fact, you had broken the ancient rule against waking sleeping dogs. You had not realized the dogs even existed, of course, because too many of your people supposed that men in our Congress like the whining Senator, who had never argued with you, were more dependable supporters of Israel than the President and his Secretary of State, who had been putting unwelcome pressure on you. It was a cardinal error.

This error was compounded, too, by the additional error of further interferences in our domestic politics. In this instance the main actors were a couple of perfervidly pro-Israeli senatorial staff assistants, who could have been silenced by the merest murmur from your embassy. No one murmured, so they stirred up their easily influenced Senators to insist on total publicity for all the commitments Secretary Kissinger had made to Israel during the August bargaining. The slightly lunatic hope was seemingly to clothe every Kissinger commitment, however carefully hedged about, with something like the status of a hard and fast treaty obligation. Instead, Secretary Kissinger was forced to stress the personal, informal and strictly conditional character of all his commitments to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His testimony was public, of necessity; and the resulting fusses—about the promise to think about Pershing missiles for Israel for example—also accelerated the dangerous new trend of opinion in both the Congress and the country.

So there you have the story to date of the unprecedented trouble between your country and mine, as it appears from this end. I must add, alas, that I should not be bothering you with this letter if I thought the trouble at all likely to end where it is today. In that event, I should not be greatly worried. I now foresee, however, that the trouble between Israel and America may go much, much further and may even become truly fatal.

One specific reason for this apprehension is the true story behind Israel's long reluctance to embark on the next step in Secretary Kissinger's step-by-step approach to Middle Eastern peace. The next step, obviously, must be an interim peace-keeping agreement with Syria, to parallel the Sinai bargain with Egypt. Henry Kissinger is convinced—whether rightly or wrongly, I cannot judge—that he can get Israel an interim agreement with Syria if the Israeli forces on the Golan Heights are pulled back only four kilometers. There is no decisive military objection to such a pull-back, since it would leave your troops in control of more than enough of the Golan Heights to protect the vulnerable Israeli lowlands.

Instead, the decisive objection is that a four kilometer pullback would require the removal of three little farming settlements from the extreme forward area on the heights. This would mean a "transfer of population" (as it is magniloquently called) to the number of fewer than 1,500 persons. Last spring in Israel, I found almost no one who did not now regret that the three settlements had been allowed so far forward in the first instance. I also found almost no one who argued that compensated movement of the settlements would be "militarily unacceptable"—although that misleading argument will be heard later, no doubt. Instead, I was reminded on all sides that the three little settlements happened to represent Israel's three most powerful kibbutz movements, each with a vast capacity for making trouble in the Knesset. This—and only this!—was the reason that such a "transfer of population" was held to be "intolerable."

God save us all, I can only say, if this continues to be your Government's position, when and if the next step is actually attempted in the step-by-step approach to Middle Eastern peace. American opinion, you must realize, knows nothing of the influence of kibbutz movements on the Knesset. Instead, American opinion has a lively awareness of all the U.S. support for Israel in the past. American opinion has also been made almost too vividly aware of Israel's continuing, even growing need for massive American aid. And American opinion is well aware, above all, of the heavy risks to the United States of still another Middle Eastern war. Against this background, then, imagine how the American majority is likely to respond, when and if it turns out that the crucial next step toward Middle Eastern peace is quite impossible—and impossible solely because of Israel's domestic political inability to move fewer than 1,500 people from very recent new homes they should never have

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occupied in the first place! This will be letting Israeli domestic politics run wild, and I shudder to contemplate the possible consequences in the United States. In these circumstances, indeed, I would even predict Israel's desertion by much of your Jewish American support.

More generally, I'm afraid the time has come for you Israelis to tackle the hardest problem that has ever faced you—the problem of genuine Middle Eastern peacemaking, with Israel participating in a positive way. You cannot, after all, contemplate a state of permanent belligerency between you and your Arab neighbors. By now, you have won three wars hands down, and you have fought a fourth, with great skill and courage, to something considerably better than a stand-off. Yet you are no nearer peace today than you were in 1948—except for your interim agreement with Egypt, which was all but forced upon you by President Ford and Secretary Kissinger!

That interim agreement should, in turn, demonstrate two points to you. First, you now face, in President Sadat, the kind of flexible, long-headed and clever Arab leader, who puts country first and emotional oratory second, that you have never had to deal with before. In practical terms, this may seem a minus to you. But the second point is that for the first time you have a real opportunity to progress toward something like peace. You had no such opportunity before, because both Egypt and Syria were wholly dominated by the Soviet Union in the former era—and the Soviets do not want peace in the Middle East, except on terms that will fasten their control on the whole strategically vital region.

All that is over now, however, at least for the time being. In Syria, President Hafez al-Assad is visibly longing to be independent of the Soviets; and in Egypt, President Sadat has broken with the Kremlin quite openly and very angrily. While I was in Israel last spring, Yitzhak Rabin asked me, "But are you really suggesting that I should trust Anwar el-Sadat?" He was justifiably recalling the Egyptian President's role in the beginning of the Yom Kippur war. But after talking at length with President Sadat and his chief policy makers during my subsequent visit to Egypt, I think I have a kind of

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In brief, no nation should ever put personal trust in any foreign leader where there is the slightest conflict of interest. But I think you can trust President Sadat to serve his own interests, and this means trusting him not to let the Soviets back into Egypt. The truth is that the Egyptian President has been firmly persuaded, by sad experience, that letting the Soviets in again will end Egypt's independence, and probably his own life as well. Yet Egypt, because of her arms needs, can no longer venture on an actively warlike policy without first seeking massive Soviet support. These are good built-in guarantees for the future, if President Sadat's policy succeeds.

To ensure Egypt's independence, and to have the chance to tackle the fearful problems of giving his people a more decent life, President Sadat

'Too many of you Israelis hanker for the earlier era when your sole serious alternatives were to fight or die.'

has in fact turned to the U.S. to help him end the permanent state of war with Israel. That has been his policy since the Yom Kippur war. His final break with Moscow at the end of 1974 and his move toward an interim agreement early in 1975 are the proofs that President Sadat means business. Of course, Israeli stonewalling can defeat his purpose. In that case, however, the failure of the Sadat policy will bring back the war party that still exists in Egypt. If President Sadat then refuses to humble himself once more before the Kremlin, the war party will simply push him out, and will again make Egypt a Soviet dependency in order to get huge new flows of Soviet arms.

I am not sure that such a tragic outcome would cause sorrow in Israel, for too many of you Israelis visibly hanker for the simpler choices of the earlier era, when your sole serious alternatives were

to fight or die. But in your dealings with President Sadat and also with Syria's President Assad and Jordan's King Hussein, you must always remember the great change in your own situation. You must remember, in fact, that nowadays the U.S. also has strong opinions about these matters. These American opinions are life-and-death to you, for no degree of bravery will insure Israel's survival in total isolation, after finally alienating the American majority. Of this American majority, President Ford said to me long ago, and I think with unchallengeable good sense, "Most Americans are willing to take great risks to preserve the state of Israel, but they are not willing to take great risks to preserve Israel's conquests."

Therein lies the basic Israeli dilemma, and I needn't underline it any further for you. I must add, however, that I grow more worried than ever when I hear serious persons talking knowingly about Israel's "secret plan" for eluding this dilemma. Israel's alleged secret plan is to stall the Middle Eastern peace-making process in every way possible throughout 1976, and meanwhile to interfere in our domestic politics more openly than ever, in order to elect the kind of "Democratic President who will leave Israel alone." If this is what you really are thinking of, for God's sake ponder the whining Senator who begged Henry Kissinger for aid cuts but was positively eager to do Israel's bidding until the going got rough; and then ponder Henry Kissinger, who has put unwelcome pressure on you, but has been with you all the way whenever the going got rough.

Without regard to the Democratic or Republican parties, I submit that the important thing for Israel is to have the kind of American President who will be with you if the going gets rough. The other kind will walk softly with you, like Agag in the Bible. He will flaccidly let you defeat President Sadat's policy, if that is what you want. But when the next Middle Eastern war therefore breaks out, you will find this other kind of American President declaiming platitudes, and loudly blaming Israel, too, from under the nearest White House bed. As to the right kind of American President, he will surely press you to move toward Middle Eastern peace in ways that many of

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you will find difficult or even dangerous. Yet if his judgment of the Arabs proves to be incorrect, and another Middle Eastern war comes because he has been mistaken, this right kind of American President will be with Israel all the way—and the devil take the whining Senator and the others of his ilk. I leave you to judge which of these two kinds of American Presidents will be best for Israel in the long pull.

The cruel fact remains that you Israelis now find yourselves in a peacetime situation that can well be more dangerous than any of Israel's four wars. In your wars, a splendid unity of national purpose has always replaced the unappetizing infighting of your aspirants for high office, the relentless competition of your many political parties and the loud self-assertions of the special interest groups like the three kibbutz movements I've already referred to. Something like this wartime unity must now be achieved in Israel, at least by a solid majority of your much divided people; and worse still, it must be achieved in peacetime, and concerning such hideously divisive matters as Israel's permanent borders. It will be appallingly difficult, of course, to bring to serious peace-making anything like the kind of national unity you have always brought to war-making. Yet I'm afraid any other course can take you to the very brink of ruin, and maybe beyond, because of America's continuing importance to you.

So I pray for you; and as I pray for you, I pray for this country, too. For nothing that I've said alters my belief, already noted, that Israel's ruin may well bring our own ruin in its train.

Yours ever,
JOE ALSOP ■

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