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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF  
HENRY A. KISSINGER  
SECRETARY OF STATE

KONGRESS HAUS PRESS CENTER

4:54 P.M. (Salzburg Time)

MR. NESSEN: Ladies and gentlemen, the two Presidents, of course, have given you their views of the meetings they held here. A number of you have asked for elaboration and further explanation of some of the points, so the Secretary of State has come down to do that.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I need hardly say how much I have been looking forward to having another press conference in Salzburg. (Laughter) I have been rehearsing for it for a year. (Laughter)

The two Presidents have really stated their positions, and there is nothing I can add to those, but I thought it might be helpful to answer some questions. So, within the limit --

Q Could you give us your reaction to the decision by the Israelis to thin out their forces east of the canal, please?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The question: to give my reaction to the position of the Israelis to thin out their forces east of the canal.

We think that that is a constructive move. It has clearly the intention of easing possible Egyptian concerns about Israeli artillery in range of the canal, and while not decisive -- and no unilateral step can be a decisive step -- at this point I think it is a helpful contribution to the process which the United States is strongly attempting to encourage in which both parties should make an effort to move toward peace.

Q Mr. Secretary, how long have you known about this Israeli decision?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: We have talked about this Israeli position -- about this concept, or about a concept like this previously. The actual decision we learned about this morning.

Q Mr. Secretary, did the Egyptians indicate there was any change in their negotiation position since last March and if there was enough to encourage a resumption of the negotiations with Israel on a partial agreement?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The purpose of these talks was not for the two heads of State to get into detailed negotiations on the issues of peace in the Middle East or on the issues of an interim agreement between Egypt and Israel.

As I pointed out to a number of you previously, the intention of this meeting was to permit the two leaders an opportunity to look over all the various roads to peace that had so far been identified in the Middle East and to see which of them might be more promising or how to pursue those that were available.

I think the discussion proceeded from the assumption that if progress towards peace is to be made, all parties must make a contribution and in that sense, I thought there was a positive spirit.

It is too early to tell whether it permits a resumption of any particular negotiation because we must now talk to the Israeli Prime Minister and see whether his ideas coincide with those we have heard from the Egyptian President or whether there should be perhaps some American suggestions.

But the atmosphere was constructive. The attitude was constructive, and together with the Israeli move that was made today, perhaps we are moving into a period where some momentum can be put behind peace efforts.

Barry?

Q Mr. Secretary, do you anticipate Egypt making some parallel confidence-building move, and also, did the shift of Syrian forces to the Iraqi front have any bearing or was it intended in any way to signal Syrian interest in a peace effort with Israel?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: Of course, whether Egypt will make some response, it is too early to say, but in general, the Israeli announcement, as I understood it, was intended as a response to the Egyptian opening of the Suez Canal despite the suspension of the negotiations in March, so that maybe that concludes this sequence of moves.

We have no confirmed reports about the shift of Syrian forces away from the Israeli frontier, but it is very possible that if it did take place, it is caused by reasons unrelated to the settlement issue, though it could have an effect on the settlement.

Q Mr. Secretary, could you be a little more precise on what form an American policy statement will now take after you have conferred with the Israeli Prime Minister? Will it be a general statement, or will you lay out a specific set of recommendations?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: As you know, we have always been reluctant to make specific recommendations unless we felt the parties were sufficiently close for these recommendations to bridge the gap. Certainly, the President will state his general views at some point after he has talked to the parties concerned.

Whether he will make any specific proposals will really depend on how close he judges the parties to be.

Q Mr. Secretary, that certainly was not a happy, exhilarated looking group in the courtyard today, the two Presidents and those of you who were standing with them. It did not, by any means, look like it had lived up in any way to President Sadat's talk of this meeting marking a historic moment.

Can you say whether, from your perception, the Egyptian leaders had much higher expectation which could not be fulfilled because of the American timetable? And secondly, can you tell us whether the deadline of the expiration of the mandate in the Sinai is pressing with any urgency on your considerations?

Q Question. (Laughter)

SECRETARY KISSINGER: As I understood Mr. Marder's conclusions (Laughter) I don't quite -- if he formed the impression that this was not a happy, exhilarated group that he saw standing in the courtyard at the Residenz -- and that is the name of the place -- and he wondered whether the expiration of the mandate in the Sinai might have been pressing on the consciousness of the unexhilarated group that was standing there.

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If I can be frank and not be offensive to you ladies and gentlemen, you didn't look like a pretty, exhilarated group to me either. (Laughter)

And it could be that the atmospheric conditions had something to do with it because I don't know how you show exhilaration when somebody holds an umbrella over you and rain is pouring down your back. But I am just beginning my lecture. (Laughter)

Basically, we thought it was a very constructive meeting. It was not intended to reach any specific conclusions. It achieved that purpose. (Laughter)

It was not intended to reach any precise conclusions that would lead to an immediate negotiation. It was, however, very positive, very constructive, and I think it provides the basis for useful talks with the Israelis. I really think, Murray, that your impression was just not right.

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Q You often do.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: That is true, but it never seems to affect what you write. (Laughter)

Q That is true.

The second part --

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Wait a minute.

The second part of your question was whether the imminence of the UNEF expiration was weighing on the leaders. I don't think it played any role in the discussions. It was never invoked. It was never mentioned by either side.

But I really want to go back to the first point. It was not an occasion in which you could say a final conclusion was reached, but I think the possibility exists for constructive further discussion with other parties.

Marvin?

Q Mr. Secretary, did President Ford promise President Sadat an American aid program, at least as large as last year's, and was there talk or was there agreement reached on American participation in an international consortium that could help the economic development of Egypt?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: With respect to the first question, the final decisions on American aid figures to Middle East countries will be reached after the conclusion of the general reassessment, but it is clear that we will retain an interest, as the President made clear in his luncheon toast, in the economic development and progress of Egypt.

It is our intention to make a substantial contribution to that, but what the precise figure is, we will have to wait until the general decisions are made.

With respect to the idea on the long-term program, I think there the word "consortium" is probably exaggerated, but we have indicated to a number of other countries that we favor assistance to Egypt for its long-term economic problems.

Q Mr. Secretary, to what extent do you feel there was a similarity of views between the two Presidents on what should constitute a basis of an overall settlement?

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SECRETARY KISSINGER: We did not go into a discussion of the details of a final settlement. We discussed rather what approaches would be used if that were the road that all parties decided they preferred to take and how the discussions might be conducted.

Of course, we are familiar with the Egyptian point of view on these matters, which has been stated repeatedly and publicly, but we have not taken a formal American position or, for that matter, we have not taken an American position on an overall settlement.

Q Mr. Secretary, the Egyptian spokesman here yesterday seemed to give short shrift to your shuttle diplomacy and step-by-step seems to be landing in the ashcan. Did Ford have any consensus with Sadat on the one promising route -- the approach to this problem.

Q Question.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: The question is, the impression was created by the Egyptian spokesman yesterday that Egypt was not interested any longer in a step-by-step approach.

Q For a prolonged period.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Well, for a prolonged period, and that this seems to have given short shrift to one of the promising avenues.

Let me make clear the United States is not pushing any one approach. As for the President -- and I have stated repeatedly -- we are prepared to go to a Geneva Conference and we are prepared to discuss in that framework.

At the same time, our conviction is that whatever approach is most promising should be pursued and, therefore, if other avenues open up, we are prepared to pursue them. I did not have the impression from the talks that any avenue was excluded or that there was any strong preference for one approach rather than another.

There was a preference on which both parties agreed that some progress towards peace in the Middle East was essential. We do not want to commit ourselves to which of the approaches is the more likely to succeed until we have heard the Israeli views on that subject, but I did not have the impression that the Egyptian side precluded any of the approaches.

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Q Did you reach any consensus, though? I mean, do you have a meeting of minds?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: We cannot have a meeting of minds until we have heard from the Israelis.

Q But I mean a meeting of minds between the U.S. and Egypt.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: I think we clearly understand the Egyptian view of what are the elements of an interim agreement and also the Egyptian view of the procedures and content of an overall agreement.

Now we have to get the Israeli views on this subject and then we can see how closely they mesh and, of course, as we have stated with respect to the interim agreement, both sides will have to look at their positions as compared to what they were at the end of March, if one wants to get moving.

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Q Dr. Kissinger, one more question.

Before this meeting began, a senior American official said that there would probably be no announcement. He also said that would not mean an important decision was not reached. Are you now telling us that there was no important development here?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No, I am trying to tell you that on the whole, we are encouraged by these talks in the sense that we believe that serious discussions can be continued now on the issue of moves towards peace.

I have stated previously, and so did the senior spokesman, that no dramatic announcement could be expected here in the nature of things since the decisions involve many other parties, but we considered this meeting to have been helpful. We plan to have other meetings, and, of course, you know of the other meetings which will now be taking place.

Q Do you anticipate that any of these subsequent discussions will take place at Geneva either in an overall conference or a step-by-step basis in Geneva with other parties participating apart from the United States?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: There is no question that the Geneva Conference will have to be reassembled at some point. This is a view we have always had even during step-by-step diplomacy and that view has not changed.

All the parties are agreed to it. We are agreed to it. What the next step will be, we want to reserve our judgment until we have had our other conversations, but it is my impression that on the basis of the discussions that have been taking place, that there are possibilities for useful talks.

Q One more. You said on about half a dozen occasions just now at the podium that what happens now depends on talks with the Israelis.

Would it be unfair to say that in some way the Israelis are the hang-up to find the path?

SECRETARY KISSINGER: No. I think we have gone through this on many of the shuttles. There is always somebody you have talked to last and you are going to talk to next. It is therefore inevitable that when you get into the talks with the next person that in the nature of the sequence you have to get their views before you can determine what is going to happen.

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We are not saying that any country is the hang-up. We did not elaborate a specific proposal with Egypt that will now be put forward with Israel. Rather, after we have discussed with Israel, we will then be in a position to see whether both parties should be encouraged to come forward with specific proposals or whether the time isn't right to go towards a more comprehensive solution, but it is not of a nature where we can say, here is a proposal and now ask the Israelis to accept it.

It is, rather, to get the Israeli point of view and then we will be in a position to see whether both sides should be asked to be more concrete.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

END (AT 5:16 P.M. Salzburg Time)