

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET (XGDS)~~

MINUTES

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Date: Wednesday, April 7, 1976  
Time: 2:35 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Place: Cabinet Room, the White House  
Subject: Lebanon

Principals

The Vice President  
Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger  
Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld  
Admiral James Holloway, Chief of Naval Operations (Acting Chairman in  
Gen. Brown's absence  
Director of Central Intelligence George Bush

Other Attendees

Defense: Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements  
WH: Richard Cheney  
Brent Scowcroft  
William G. Hyland  
NSC: Robert B. Oakley *RB*

President: I thought we ought to have a meeting so that everyone on the National Security Council would be up to date on the situation in the Middle East, especially the problems we face in Lebanon. Henry and I have been following the

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situation on almost a daily basis and analyzing events and taking actions to ensure that restraint is continued by all parties. Last week, in the middle of the visit by King Hussein, we sent Dean Brown to take charge of our Embassy and talk to all the parties in order to impress upon them the importance of maintaining the ceasefire and reaching a moderate solution. He arrived there Friday, I believe. He has seen everyone.

Kissinger: Actually, Mr. President, he arrived Wednesday night. He left right after you approved it, on a special aircraft. He has been running ever since and is doing a very good job.

President: Yes, he has been doing a fine job. The ceasefire is in effect although the situation is unsettled. It is so complex that it defies logic. We have been counselling restraint on both Israel and Syria.

Rumsfeld: The situation particularly defies logic as Henry tried to explain it to the Congressional leadership this morning.

President: They came in confused about the situation, as they usually do.

Scowcroft: And they left still confused but at a higher level.

Kissinger: They need to know just how complex it is and to understand that it is not a simple question of pushing troops into Lebanon. If the President can stand it, I will go over again the briefing I gave this morning.

Basically, there are three interrelated levels which are at work: the strictly domestic struggle to redistribute power, the moderate-radical struggle with the impact of outside powers, and the inter-Arab considerations. The division of internal power is still based on a 1932 census which gives the Christians not only the Presidency but a 6 to 5 ratio for the upper civil service positions and seats in Parliament. Yet the total population is not 10 to 15% Palestinian, and the rest is probably



60% Moslem. So this big strain has been building up for a reallocation of power and that is one level of the struggle.

The second level is the moderate-radical struggle within the Moslem camp--the Christians are almost all either moderate or conservative. On the Arab side there is a moderate faction which basically wants the status quo, the present system, preserved. The radical faction wants to secularize the state, thereby depriving the Christians of their position and safeguards. Like Rhodesia and South Africa, the minority sees the surrender of its position as a threat to its very existence. These factions are supported from outside. The Christians are getting arms from Israel, which we do not oppose since it helps maintain the balance. The radical group is strongly supported by Libya and Iraq and the Lebanese Communist Party with some encouragement from the Soviets. They are divided, themselves, into a more moderate group--the PLO if you can call Arafat a moderate. Then there is the Syrian group and then the Jumblatt radicals. Jumblatt is getting help from Libya and Iraq and a bit from the Soviets and to some extent from Egypt because it is so angry at Syria.

The inter-Arab lineup is stranger. Syria by tradition would be on the side of the radicals but the situation has evolved in such a way that Syria is with the Christians and the moderate Moslems, trying to preserve the existing system. If Lebanon goes radical, it could get a larger influx of arms from the USSR and Syria would find itself squeezed between Lebanon and Iran. Asad wants to avoid this threat. Syria also wants to control the PLO thru the Saiqa, to replace Arafat by its man, Mohsen, and increase its power in the Arab world. Jumblatt's natural inclination will be to destroy the Christians. In the short-term, therefore, Syria's role is very constructive and serves our interests. But over the long term the Israeli fear of Syrian intervention has merit because Syria could within a couple of years consolidate its power and achieve the dominant



position in an arc stretching from Lebanon through Jordan and pose a major radical threat, in line with its past tradition. Saudi Arabia has been playing a very complex role, by supporting the PLO in order to restrain its excesses but opposing the radicals. It wants to see a Syrian political victory but does not want to see Syria move in militarily. Jordan is apparently totally on the side of the Syrians, at least to judge from what Hussein had to say while he was here. Egypt has a complex role.

President: Hussein told us he supported Syrian intervention. He said Jordan had eliminated the radicals in 1970 and Syria has an excellent opportunity to finish the job now.

Kissinger: For a year or two, this would be a good thing. This would be true with respect to the rejectionists. It would stabilize the entire situation in the area. But later you would get too much Syrian influence and then we would have to contend with a massive problem.

The January 22 settlement which the Syrians had worked out collapsed when the army disintegrated and the Moslems went over to the side of the radicals. So Syria sent us a formal note a couple of weeks ago requesting our advice about its intervening with regular army units to stop the fig. and restore order. We approached the Israelis who said they would move into South Lebanon if Syrian regular units came in. They said they could tolerate a smaller number-- up to the total of a brigade but this was ambiguous--if they stayed north of the Beirut-Damascus road. So if Syria moves into regular troop units, Israel will come in. This will upset the entire Arab balance and force Syria to attack Israel. The Syrians could not stand still and face the charge of partitioning the country to share it with Israel. They would have to attack. The Saudis and Jordanians would have to support the Syrians. With Egypt out of the picture militarily, this would be a calamity since Israel would quickly overrun and smash Syria. The Soviets would then come in and we would face an oil boycott.

That is why we have been supporting the Syrian political plan of January 22, but we are concerned over a Syrian



invasion. This gives us the opportunity to develop a relationship of confidence with Syria by helping it meet its minimal needs. Once again we find that we are the only country able to talk to all sides and we have the situation in pretty good shape for the moment, although it is uncertain as to how it will evolve. We have used the Saudis to urge restraint on the PLO and we have not discouraged Israel's resupply of the Christians. We support Syria's cutting off military supplies to the PLO by sea as well as land, and Israel has not objected to the activities of the Syrian patrol boats. We have used our fleet to worry the Soviets. They sent us a note protesting the fleet so we replied that a country which is responsible for supporting a faction involved in the struggle should make all efforts to stop the fighting. We now learn they are urging a ceasefire. We have the ceasefire but it is very fragile. We need to keep it together. Brown is doing a good job. But we can't get too far ahead of the Syrians.

The big need is to establish a central authority, and there are three ways of doing that:

one, that the factions will reach agreement among themselves. This is very doubtful.

second, that the factions agree to supply contingents to a central force and put it under the President. This would require us to talk to the PLO as one of the factions.

third is the seepage of additional Syrian forces into Lebanon, not the open entry of large numbers of regulars. We have had close cooperation thus far from the Syrians. A battalion moved into Tripoli quietly over the weekend. In Tripoli and elsewhere they have cut off the supply of arms by sea. They are thus blockading arms to the leftists by land and sea. We have not discouraged the Syrian actions, nor have the Israelis. Israel grumbles when additional Syrians enter Lebanon and we take note of it to sooth them. Actually, the Israelis are acquiescing but Syria can't go too far, can't send in regulars in large



numbers. Right now the Syrians--regulars, Saiqa and PLA--are one of four factions. The Lebanese left, the PLO and the Christians are the others. So far the situation is not out of control but if the balloon goes up as a result of Syria going in and Israel following with an intervention in the South, we will have an Arab war. Israel will not stop just inside the border but will go the Litani River. And once they go in we will never get them out. It will be like 1967. And if they go in and stay, there is a high probability of a major war. We need to plan for this.

My personal view is that if there is another war we need to overpower it quickly and use it as the point of departure to solve the whole Middle East problem. I believe that in another war, there is a high probability that the Soviets will come in in some form. They can't allow Syria to be smashed again. It would be total humiliation for the Soviets to allow Arab countries they arm and support to be totally defeated for the fourth time. It would probably be the end of Asad. Jordan would probably support Syria militarily and be smashed. Also, Saudi Arabia would support them and there would be an oil embargo. Egypt would be forced to come in. The only way to stop it is to demand a ceasefire in the name of an overall settlement.

Rockefeller: Not only an oil embargo. The Arabs own twenty billion in American assets they could dump. The disruption would be terrible.

Kissinger: Greenspan says the only way the Western Europeans can live within their means is thanks to Arab deposits. If the Saudis and Kuwaitis got out of the British pound, it would collapse. So if Syria goes in, we should make a major effort to keep Israel out. We will have to work out a proposal to keep Syria north of the Beirut-Damascus Road and a timetable for withdrawal. If Syria moves, our interest demands that we try to keep Israel out. But it would be better if we can get a solution and Syria does not move.



To get a solution we may have to ask for your authorization to deal with the PLO, Mr. President. There would be no change in our position toward the PLO on the Middle East question but we have no commitment to Israel not to talk to the PLO exclusively about the situation in Lebanon. This could also help us with the Middle East situation.

President: We have an evacuation group off the coast, don't we Don?

Rumsfeld: Yes, sir. [Hands the President a chart showing location.]

Kissinger: We don't need to face the PLO question now but we may need to later on. I will come back to you on this.

Bush: What about the French mediation effort?

Kissinger: They are a bunch of jackals. They came to us at the Syria's request to ask us to hold off the Israelis and they suggested the idea of international guarantees. We warned that we could not count on stopping Israel but told them we needed to have specific information about Syria's intentions if we were to have a chance. They told the Syrians we had turned them down and said something entirely different to the Israelis. The Quai is full of Gaullists who practice cheap Machiavellian politics. This is not true of Giscard, but it is of many around him. They have irresponsible Gaullist tendencies.

President: Do we have contingency plans, Don?

Rumsfeld: There is a working group which is meeting to work on these plans.

Scowcroft: The working group has met and all the plans are being updated--military, political, intelligence and economic.

Kissinger: In the event of another war, we will need to pour forces into the Mediterranean to dissuade the Soviets. My estimate is that there is a greater probability of a Soviet move now than ever before.



President: When will the plans be prepared?

Hyland: By Tuesday, Mr. President. We will have the plans updated. Right now we are getting the intelligence inputs. We have contingency plans concerning the evacuation of the Sinai and Lebanon. State is working out political and diplomatic contingency plans but you can't be sure of what the circumstances will be so that cannot be too precise. We also have in being an extensive economic contingency plan covering full and partial oil embargoes and financial problems. CIA has just completed an update on free world oil stocks and non-OAPEC production. We are way ahead of 1973. We have forces in the area. We are alert. Our contingency planning is in pretty good shape.

Scowcroft: We will also have a single coordinated situation report to eliminate the confusion we have had in the past.

Kissinger: We have also learned a lot. We know that the Syrians are scared of the Israelis so the idea of a Syrian attack can be pretty much ruled out. We exaggerate Israel's eagerness to enter Lebanon but Syria is not about to start a war if it can be avoided. Only if they have to go into Lebanon and Israel also goes in. We have also learned that the Soviets are not eager for a war. They are supporting the Lebanese Communist Party and other local elements, including the PLO, but overall they are a factor of restraint. The Lebanese Communist Party is most helpful but the Soviets seem to be counselling the Syrians against moving. They want to have their cake and eat it, too. The Soviets are not looking for trouble but they will be forced to move rather than lose all their assets in the Middle East, should another war come.

Scowcroft: Egypt is in bad shape. It would probably take them a week to get ready and Syrian would be knocked out by then.

President: When does the ceasefire in Lebanon end?



Kissinger: Monday. But things are moving in a good direction so we have maybe two weeks. We must get some sort of a force in being, even a force composed of the major elements, to restore some sort of order. We have explored the idea of a neutral zone, but there are too many undisciplined, criminal elements and there is no one to police them. A buffer zone without a force is no good.

Bush: Do you believe what the Israelis tell us about the Christian military situation?

Kissinger: Brown has talked to the Christian leaders and our Defense Attache has talked to their military men. We believe that they could hold out for three weeks in case of another attack but there could be a lot of erosion in their position during that period.

Rumsfeld: The Lebanese Defense Attache has come to us and asked for arms and ammunition. We told him to present the request through diplomatic channels to the Department of State.

Kissinger: Let the Israelis do it. They are already supplying the Christians.

Rumsfeld: We have the carrier Saratoga which is between 24 and 36 hours away from Lebanon.

Admiral Holloway: They could provide air support within twelve hours.

Rumsfeld: We also have the Guadacanal which is less than 24 hours from Beirut. Beyond that we can use civilian or military airlift or possibly sealift.

I understand the interagency process is working. Plans are being updated and dusted off. We will see there is no carrier gap in the Mediterranean. After the interagency group has gone over the plans we will take other moves.



- Scowcroft: We can have the NSC meet again then.
- Rumsfeld: We will have our plans ready for review by next Tuesday. What about the military probabilities? What about the role of Jordan?
- Clements: The last time I was out there I felt a pulse bearing on the confederacy between Jordan and Syria. There are all sorts of likely indicators. Jordan and Syria are getting very, very close to each other, to the disadvantage of Saudi Arabia.
- President: My impression from Hussein was that Jordan and Syria are closer so long as Asad is in charge. If a more radical individual comes to power in Damascus, then Jordan will move away.
- Kissinger: Jordan is playing a very dangerous game. They are telling the Syrians everything so we can't tell them as much anymore.
- Clements: Henry, you are right. Jordan is playing an extremely dangerous game. They are walking on eggs. If they have a full understanding with Syria on Lebanon, it will be trouble.
- Kissinger: That is a minor question. The Soviets are the big question if we move into another conflict. Israel will have no trouble with Syria and Jordan.
- Scowcroft: Now Israel can go around the Golan through Lebanon, not having to go over the mountains.
- Rumsfeld: There is some question about whether or not our task force should anchor. It makes about 24 hours difference in the time needed to reach Lebanon, since they would have to start the boilers and other things.
- Admiral Holloway: There is no real problem now. We can have the helicopters in for evacuation within 24 hours. The task force will need to anchor some time to ease the strain on the personnel, including the Marines, but not right



away. It is also true that it costs more to steam than to anchor. There is an anchorage off Turkey, but our Ambassador has been reluctant to ask the Turks for permission and we do not need it now. But bear in mind that an extended period at sea causes some deterioration in readiness. We will put it to the Secretary, if there is a need to use the anchorage.

Rumsfeld: Our plans will be ready by next Tuesday. Shall we meet again next week?

President: What is my schedule? Will I be in town?

Cheney: You will be in Texas this weekend but in town all next week.

President: Let us have another meeting the end of next week.

Rumsfeld: In the October War we had a problem with our NATO allies, who did not want to give us permission to use their territory in the worst-case scenario we need to be able to use some NATO forces yet when..... came they were nervous. We might not be able to count on Italy or Germany next time so in the contingency plan, we may want to assign units not in NATO countries, especially those two.

President: Let us meet no later than Thursday.

Kissinger: I think we have an improved situation and we have done reasonably well in keeping it under control. If Syria does go in, despite our efforts, we should do our best to keep the Israelis out.

President: When Hussein was here, he estimated the Christians could only last for 48 hours. That did not happen.

Kissinger: I do not believe an all-out attack will be made on the Christians. We should keep our same posture--not explaining what E and E means so people will be scared by the presence of the fleet and not talking about the Marines going in or not going in. We sent others a threat as well as giving them an excuse to do or not to do things. The fleet movements have been helpful.





dangerous for us. In time, there will be a real problem if the Cuban presence remains in Africa. It has an inhibiting effect on others. In the period 1970-73, we successfully frustrated the Soviets in the Middle East so the Arabs finally had to turn toward us. We will try to identify with the aspiration of the black nations in Africa, but not in response to Cuban pressure. There has not been a single criticism by an African leader of my statement about Cuba. Nyerere, who is a radical, told our Ambassador he approved of it and wants to talk about it when I visit there.

President: When do you go?

Kissinger: April 23. Bhutto also told me we could not allow the Soviet to succeed in using the Cubans that way. Our African policy needs to be discussed in the NSC but we can't be panicked into it by the Soviets and the Cubans. And we can't say Rhodesia is not a danger because it is a bad case. If the Cubans are involved there, Namibia is next and after that South Africa, itself. We must make the Soviets pay a heavy price. If the Cubans move, I recommend we act vigorously. We can't permit another move without suffering a great loss. We must separate the African issue from Cuba. Otherwise, it will be seen as Soviet strength and US weakness. We need to impress others with our will so we need serious military plans. On my African trip, I will identify with African aspirations.

Clements: Are you going to Nigeria? It is the key to West Africa.

Kissinger: They will not receive me. There is a total lack of security there, ever since the coup. The regime is too insecure. They will not allow Robinson to come either, and he has been there frequently.

Vice President: Do you believe what the French say about Cubans in Algeria

Kissinger: I think we ought to separate the issue of Cuban advisers from actual Cuban units. It is a much more complicated but less dangerous problem.



President: The French are leaving Djibouti. What about the Cubans?

Bush: We have an up-to-date study on that and there are no Cubans yet. There are a few in Algeria but none confirmed in the Sahara, either.

Vice President: The French told me they would set up an independent government in FTAI and support them at their request. The French will be responsible for security and foreign affairs.

Bush: Zambia and Mozambique are exercising restraint where the Cubans are concerned.

Kissinger: I may go to Mozambique.

Rumsfeld: Were there to be Soviet-supported Cuban activity in Rhodesia, the President of the United States should not warn the world and then be blocked by Congress--the worst thing for the United States would be to appear to be making hollow threats. We have talked about this before. The US people and the Congress can be brought to support the political facts of life about Cuba's shock troops but they cannot accept them if it seems to be an African problem. So we must pre-decide to discuss the issue publicly in the context of the Soviet Union rather than Cuba and Rhodesia. If it is in the latter context, the US people cannot accept. In the former, the people and Congress can decide the right way.

Kissinger: Yes, in behalf of a positive program and not on behalf of Rhodesia. It is better to confront Cuba militarily and let the Soviets decide whether or not to go in. We can confront Cuba and force the Soviets to back down. We must prevent it by displaying firmness.

Rumsfeld: We can't get Congressional and public opinion support if it is a Rhodesia-Cuba issue.

President: This is also my feeling. The tactical situation pertains to Cuba but in the strategic sense we must tie in the Soviets and Cubans.



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Vice President: What are our capabilities against Cuba?

President: We should include both Cuba and the Middle East.

Scowcroft: We can meet again next Friday.

Hyland: We are surveying what we can do about Cuba.

President: Tactically we should deal with Cuba but strategically it will be necessary to deal with the USSR. It must be tied strategically to the USSR.

Rumsfeld: We should study what military, economic and political means can be used against Cuba and the USSR, including such things as wheat.

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