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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Deputy Prime Minister  
and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Syrian Arab  
Republic

Sameeh Tawfeek Abou Fares, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State  
and Assistant to the President for National  
Security Affairs

Isa K. Sabbagh, Special Assistant to Ambassador  
Akins, Jidda (Interpreter)

Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff *Plr*

DATE & TIME:

Saturday, March 15, 1975  
12:02 - 12:35 p.m.

PLACE:

In Secretary's Car from Airport to  
Guest House; Guest House  
Damascus

Khaddam: Welcome back.

Kissinger: Thank you. It is good to see you. Whatever our problems  
politically, it is always a good human thing to see our friends.

Khaddam: The sentiment is definitely reciprocated. We don't see  
only great difficulties, because from what we hear, the United States  
has decided to recognize the PLO.

Kissinger: I saw that in the newspaper.

Khaddam: President Sadat is saying that.

Kissinger: Where?

Khaddam: In a press interview with a Lebanese paper.



SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, SEC. 3.5

NSC MEMO, 11/24/90, STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES

BY *HR*, NASA, DATE 9/29/03

CLASSIFIED BY HENRY A. KISSINGER  
EXEMPT FROM AUTOMATIC DECLASSIFICATION  
EXEMPTION CODE: 25X(1)  
EXEMPTION AUTHORITY: 5 (B) (1, 3)  
APPROPRIATELY CLASSIFIED OR Imp. to Det.

Kissinger: Mr. Foreign Minister, with respect to the PLO, you will always know exactly what we are doing, and we would not do anything with another country that you wouldn't know about beforehand. We know of your special interest in the Palestinian problem and your historical connection with Palestine.

Khaddam: And our future relations also.

Kissinger: Exactly. So you can be sure we will make no understanding with President Sadat that we don't discuss with you. I told President Asad last week exactly what our position is, and there is no change, and it's exactly what I told President Asad. And I have always refused to establish contact with the PLO through Cairo, and when I do it, I'll do it through Morocco, so the various factions in this area are not affected.

Khaddam: Of course, it goes without saying that it would be a great pleasure to us to learn that there is such a contact.

Kissinger: But if there is such contact, first, it will not be made through Cairo. And second, we will let you know first. It will be through Morocco.

Khaddam: What is important is that that step be taken.

Kissinger: But frankly, they are making it harder by constantly attacking me and making it look like what we do is under pressure.

Khaddam: How is President Sadat's health?

Kissinger: He seems fine.

Khaddam: And Minister Fahmy?

Kissinger: He speaks of his Syrian colleague with great affection!

He expects to see you on the 24th in Cairo.

Khaddam: Yes, there is a possibility.

Kissinger: [pointing to the peak of Mt. Hermon] More snow in the last week?



Khaddam: No, that's the same.

When are you going to sign the agreement between Egypt and Israel?

Kissinger: There is no agreement. Believe me, there is no agreement. I told my colleagues on the way up that I'm qualified after this job only to be chief director of a lunatic asylum. [Laughter]

Khaddam: Actually, I believe this will be an excellent qualification. [Laughter] If only to judge the situation from what one hears. They don't jell.

Kissinger: Exactly. The Cairo press gives an impression of optimism for which there is no basis. The Israeli press gives the impression of pessimism, which is also exaggerated. The situation is not as good as Cairo says and not as bad as the Israelis say.

Khaddam: President Sadat's optimism is based on the fact that you've moved to certain definite things.

Kissinger: But the reason he said -- or I -- is frankly to bring pressure on the Israeli Cabinet, which is meeting Sunday, to come up with something definite. They are both doing a veil dance. And every once in a while they both peek out from behind the veil. And both act as if the Secretary of State of the United States has nothing to do except massage them and adjust to their domestic requirements.

Khaddam: You don't have to. My opinion is the best thing you could do for both is just freeze it and say goodbye to them.

Kissinger: That's not very hospitable! I'll give you a ride as far as Washington.

Khaddam: Perhaps if you want to conduct this kind of negotiation in Washington...

Kissinger: There is a definite chance -- there is a chance of an agreement; I don't want to mislead you -- but there is also a chance I'll go home.

Khaddam: I don't mean you should go home. We could arrange a beautiful touristic program. You could still be here and have a good time!



With Egypt, even if there is a signing of an agreement, things will not move smoothly.

Kissinger: I consider myself morally and politically obligated to move with Syria. Whether Syria wants it is something else, but I don't believe Syria should be left out for any length of time. And I am already working with Israel in that sense.

Khaddam: By suggesting that you sort of freeze up to them, I meant that that would make your job easier. It would make your attempt to make an overall settlement easier.

Kissinger: I cannot refuse if the parties want an agreement. I'm not in a position to refuse. But I'm not pushing. In the case of Syria last year, I felt it was an absolute necessity. I do not feel that now.

[Pointing to trees along the airport road:] Beautiful.

Khaddam: Apricots.

Kissinger: When I reach a certain point, where last year I would keep going, this year I will go home.

I was good to see the Foreign Minister at the airport, difficult as he is.

Khaddam: As far as we are concerned, it is no trouble.

Kissinger: But I would have missed him. If I had been in Syria without him, it would not have been the same.

Khaddam: I stayed for you.

Kissinger: I know. Is my friend Bouteflika still here?

Khaddam: He left.

Kissinger: Did he speak well of me?

Khaddam: With respect.



Kissinger: Because I like Bouteflika and the Algerians.

Khaddam: He came through Damascus to make clear that Algeria is placing at Syria's disposal all its potential, military and economic. Whatever Syria decides to do.

Kissinger: There was a press announcement.

Khaddam: Yes, he said on his arrival that our viewpoints are coinciding, Syria and Algeria.

Kissinger: That was my impression from my many talks with President Boumedienne.

Khaddam: The relations between us and Algeria have a special nature.

Who is going to guarantee for Israel the Egyptian signature? Or for the Egyptians the Israeli signature?

Kissinger: I don't understand. They guarantee each other.

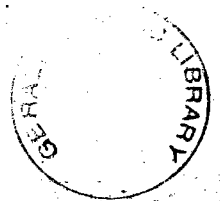
Khaddam: Suppose in an election Rabin falls and Begin comes in and rescinds it? One has to bear in mind possible changes.

Kissinger: [To Sabbagh:] He has an obsession with Begin. Maybe he should be the first Israeli Ambassador to Damascus. I told the Israelis that the only thing preventing a war is the absence of direct negotiations; if they met together they'd kill each other on the spot.

Khaddam: I state it as a matter of fact that the first real defeat Israel will suffer will be at the hands of Begin. Because of Begin. The Arabs would be very lucky if the Israeli leadership was in his hands, or Rabin.

Kissinger: I'm changing my mind about Rabin. I think there is the possibility of dealing with him. I had some long private talks with him. He is the first Israeli who talked with understanding about Syria. Most Israelis say something can't be done.

Khaddam: Apparently yesterday a number of Congressmen who came with a delegation to Israel said yesterday that Israel will not go down from the Golan Heights and is building fortifications in the rock so as not to leave.





Kissinger: There are two problems. American Congressmen say anything. There are even some who say things unfriendly about me. And then you know it's a crazy world. [Laughter] Seriously, Congressmen we can't be responsible for. They have their own purposes. Secondly, in Israel, there is always a fever chart. At the beginning of a negotiation they always say, "no, impossible," and you're a criminal for suggesting it. It takes weeks and even months of psychological preparation in Israel, and also in America. And so this is a process that is unavoidable. But I've started to begin the process now with Syria. It always starts low key.

Khaddam: The trouble is, by the time the process takes on momentum, no one can tell what other factors come in.

Kissinger: That is true -- that is the dilemma. Unfortunately, we lost four months last year when President Nixon resigned.

Is the President going to let some of our correspondents come in today? As he did last year? I think it's a good idea. I have no particular interest in it. They would inevitably write about it. And I have a suggestion. He will not be talking to an Arab audience, so the more moderate he can sound, the more it will be helpful in countering your enemies in America. So if he talked about understanding, etc. -- without giving up any principles.... I'm talking as a friend.

Khaddam: Of course, we don't see we are moving in the direction of peace enough to say so.

Kissinger: No, but there is a general indication of readiness. So the blame falls on others.

Khaddam: I'll talk to the President.

Kissinger: It is up to you.

Khaddam: What is your opinion? Should I let them in?

Kissinger: If he can talk in that sense, yes. Because it will give a good image in America. It makes it easier for us to do things in America. It is entirely up to you.



Khaddam: I'll talk to the Presidency.

[The Secretary's motorcade arrived at the Guest House at 12:29, and the party sat down in the sitting room.]

Kissinger: In which flower is the microphone? When President Nixon was in office, we killed ourselves to take notes in meetings. We didn't know he was recording everything.

Khaddam: But you're head of national security.

Kissinger: But this was done by the domestic staff. We didn't know about it.

Khaddam: You'd like some rest before lunch?

Kissinger: We're having a Syrian lunch? It's psychological warfare!

I have a colleague of whom it was said, "He has the best intelligence service in Washington, but unfortunately it's directed against you." He's a colleague of Sisco. Between the two of them, I'm helpless. I'm like the Queen of England; I just sign the documents they send me. [Laughter]

Khaddam: We'll take care of Sisco for you. [Laughter] We'll have an exchange and we'll take Sisco and give you an Arab in his place.

Kissinger: That's good. I like Arabs. I told the Foreign Minister that when I'm through with this job I can be director of a lunatic asylum.

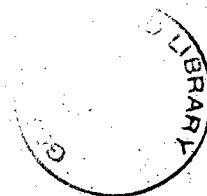
Khaddam: You'll be directing that kind of hospital before you retire. [Laughter]

Kissinger: We're ready for lunch, whenever you want.

Khaddam: You can rest half an hour and then we'll have lunch.

Kissinger: Good.

[The conversation ended.]



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PARTICIPANTS:

Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Deputy Prime Minister  
and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Syrian Arab  
Republic  
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Affairs  
Syrian Officials

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State and  
Assistant to the President for National Security  
Affairs

Amb. Richard Murphy, U. S. Ambassador to Syria  
Joseph J. Sisco, Under Secretary of State for  
Political Affairs

Alfred L. Atherton, Jr., Assistant Secretary of  
State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

Harold H. Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary of  
State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

Robert B. Oakley, NSC Staff

Amb. Robert Anderson, Special Assistant to the  
Secretary for Press Relations

Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff *JWR*

Robert H. Pelletreau, Jr., Deputy Chief of  
Mission, Damascus

Isa K. Sabbagh, Special Assistant to Amb. Akins,  
Jidda (Interpreter)

DATE & TIME:

Saturday, March 15, 1975  
2:00 - 2:35 p. m.

PLACE:

Guest House  
Damascus, Syria



[The conversation began in the dining room over lunch.]

Kissinger: When you go to Cuba, will you defend me?

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E.O. 12958, SEC. 3.5

NSC MEMO, 11/22/00, SYSTEMATIC GUIDELINES

BY *HR*, DATE *9/29/03*

CLASSIFIED BY *Henry Kissinger*  
EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION  
SCHEDULE AND EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652  
EXEMPTION CATEGORY *SB(3,1)*  
AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED ON *Imp. to cl. 4*

Khaddam: It is not necessary to defend you; it is easy to speak well of you.

Kissinger: What is this meeting?

Khaddam: A meeting of nonaligned nations to prepare for a Summit later.

Kissinger: I will be coming. We'll leave NATO and join the nonaligned. I want to join the largest alliance.

Khaddam: And Ismail Fahmy will join NATO.

Kissinger: How is Cuba nonaligned?

Khaddam: They're against imperialism.

Kissinger: But how is that nonaligned?

Khaddam: The nature of nonalignment is changing.

Kissinger: I told Gromyko there was a leadership crisis in the Soviet Union. He said, never. I said I read a lot of attacks in the Soviet press about someone travelling around the Middle East giving away sleeping pills; since attacks on the United States are prohibited by the principles of coexistence, the articles must have been against him. [Laughter] I had to have it translated twice before he understood.

Khaddam: That's a record.

Kissinger: He needs it translated three times to understand your jokes?

Khaddam: No. It's good he heard your statement twice.

Are you seeing him soon?

Kissinger: A date is not set. I told him to wait for me in Phnom Penh. [Laughter]

Khaddam: The trouble with Sihanouk is he's wavering between the Soviets and the Americans.



Kissinger: And the Chinese and Khmer Rouge. He's more afraid of the Khmer Rouge than Lon Nol is.

Khaddam: The Chinese have lots of influence with your Congress.

Kissinger: Are you sure you know which side the Chinese prefer to win? It's like the alliance between the Iraqis and Kurds. [Laughter]

Khaddam: The Chinese prefer that both sides stay together.

Kissinger: I think there will be a negotiated solution fairly soon.

Khaddam: The Security Council has taken some good theoretical resolutions on Cyprus.

Kissinger: I think there is a good possibility now of settling the problem. It depends on which government will be the caretaker government in Turkey until the election. If it's either Ecevit or Demirel, both are strong enough to settle this. If they have another interim government like the caretaker Prime Minister I talked to earlier this week, then we will have to wait for the election.

Khaddam: I think before the election it will be impossible, because the issue is the key to the election.

Kissinger: No, I think if Ecevit becomes Prime Minister before the election he'll settle it before the election. So he can run on the platform that he achieved a political as well as a military success. I could be wrong. That's my estimate. Is that right, Joe?

Sisco: Yes.

Kissinger: That's why he is Under Secretary!

Khaddam: I'm sure your opinion is based on studies by Mr. Sisco.

Kissinger: Yes, he and I were in all the meetings there. We work very closely together.

I think Ecevit will run on a platform claiming victory. He was a student of mine.

Khaddam: I met him. He is very intelligent.



Kissinger: When he was my student he was a poet and professor.

Khaddam: Poets, when they enter into politics, tend to harden a bit. Their psychological makeup makes it harder to adapt.

Kissinger: They're like women in politics. They're more blood-thirsty than men.

Khaddam: That's why the Conservatives chose a woman.

Kissinger: Mrs. Thatcher. Mrs. Gandhi, Mrs. Meir, Mrs. Bandaranaike. She was very tough on her opponents.

Khaddam: And Elizabeth of Argentina.

Kissinger: You'll stop there on the way?

Khaddam: In 1980 there will be the Summit Conference of the nonaligned in Cuba.

Kissinger: By that time we'll be there.

Khaddam: By that time your relations will have taken a different turn.

Kissinger: Did you see my speech a few weeks ago? About Latin America. I mentioned Cuba.

Khaddam: Did you see the book by Mr. Jobert?

Kissinger: I've heard of it. He mentions me. I'm an obsession with Mr. Jobert.

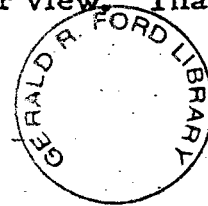
Khaddam: It would be beneficial to read it.

Kissinger: He's very intelligent.

Khaddam: And ambitious.

Kissinger: But I don't think he can go anywhere in French politics. He's a temporary phenomenon. I don't think he's strong enough to last for a long time in opposition.

Khaddam: He doesn't have any particular color or view. That is why he won't last.



Kissinger: Or the personality to sweep millions. I think he got carried away and overestimated his political power.

Nor does he have the nerves for a confrontation. He should try negotiating thirty days with Syria. [Laughter]

Khaddam: With us, actually you were just getting used to the airport road! The negotiations with Rabin and Sadat are those that predicted your future, unlike Jobert. Jobert does not know his future; Dr. Kissinger does. At least you establish a light at the end of the tunnel; if you stay long enough in the area you'll end up as the head of a lunatic asylum. [Laughter] This is the difference. Dr. Kissinger is discerning enough to see the future -- sometimes correctly, sometimes not. Mr. Jobert cannot. Perhaps you could employ him later in your retirement. [Laughter]

Kissinger: As an inmate or an assistant?

Khaddam: He wouldn't qualify as assistant. [Laughter]

How is President Nixon?

Kissinger: The last time I saw him he was better.

Khaddam: The campaign against him is less now.

Kissinger: His rehabilitation will begin soon.

Khaddam: There is no doubt he suffered an injustice.

Kissinger: I called on him a few weeks ago in San Clemente.

Khaddam: The problem of the newspapers is very big in the United States.

Kissinger: They insist on making the news, not reporting it.

Khaddam: Sometimes they help each other in creating news.

Kissinger: At the news conferences they ask you questions designed to get you to give answers you don't want to say, or what they know you can't say. And so they make it a sensation either way. For example, last week they asked your President, would he make peace with Israel? They know very well that if he says yes, he's in trouble with the Palestinians, and if he says no, it's a sensation in America.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS



Khaddam: But he answered.

Kissinger: He was very skillful.

Khaddam: The President said that of course we want peace. There is no sane person who doesn't.

Kissinger: He handled it very skillfully. How long will your conference last in Cuba?

Khaddam: It depends on the violence of the campaign against imperialism. [Laughter] It could be a week. There will be 17 Foreign Ministers. If each Minister gives a speech of 15 minutes or half an hour, we would need four days.

Kissinger: Ministers can't speak for 15 minutes.

Khaddam: Especially now since Cuba has a very good climate.

Kissinger: But what is the main subject -- imperialism?

Khaddam: There are several subjects.

Kissinger: Western or Eastern imperialism?

Khaddam: We'll start with Western.

Kissinger: Because it's safer.

Khaddam: Because we're starting there.

Kissinger: There is less risk involved. Never attack someone who might retaliate.

Khaddam: We're not worrying about retaliation. Even though we're small, we'll lock horns with the biggest. I meant because we find ourselves physically in the West, we should start there. For example, now we're in Damascus; is it conceivable we'd talk about Jamaica?

There are three topics: (1) the situation in the Middle East, (2) the question of energy and basic commodities.

Kissinger: May I make a suggestion? Don't come out for prices which are lower than what is necessary for alternative sources. I know you'll





come out for lower prices. Don't go below \$7.

Khaddam: No, \$12!

Kissinger: Below \$6 will be difficult for us.

Khaddam: It's for America's sake because there are American companies inspecting for oil here. We will have a very good petroleum future. And we need help from the Arabs.

Kissinger: What's the third problem?

Khaddam: To support national liberation movements against discrimination, things like that. We can be useful.

Kissinger: How long do you expect it to last? Seriously. Three or four days?

Khaddam: Three days. I'm careful to come back as quickly as possible.

Kissinger: I may come here again.

Khaddam: Yes, in case you come back.

Kissinger: I may do it. I'm thinking about it.

Khaddam: You realize, of course, we'll always welcome you warmly.

Kissinger: No, I know.

[The party moves to the sitting room and continues the conversation.]

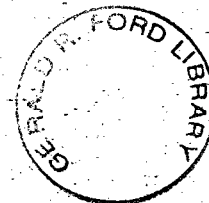
Khaddam: What do you have in the way of new thoughts about Jordan?

Kissinger: They can't negotiate about the West Bank?

Khaddam: No.

Kissinger: I'll just call on King Hussein to keep him informed. I have no new thoughts. I understand Zayd Rifai is taking out Syrian citizenship. He was so impressed by the military demonstration you showed him.

Khaddam: We are all one people. It was the Western world that split us up.



Kissinger: That you can't blame me for. It was the British and French. When they were great powers. The post-World War I settlement was a disaster for everybody -- for the Middle East, Europe. Never was a war fought for more stupid reasons and settled with more stupidity. In Europe -- forget about the Middle East -- the settlement guaranteed German predominance. They surrounded a powerful state with scores of little states; that's what powerful states like.

Khaddam: True. Wars always produce tragedies.

Kissinger: There are very few leaders who in the middle of conducting a war keep in mind that sooner or later they must make peace.

Khaddam: King Hussein has taken the final decision to carry out the resolutions of Rabat.

Kissinger: That is my impression, and we're making no effort to change it. I'm seeing him because he's an old friend, and it would be impolite not to see him when I am in the area.

Khaddam: Right.

Kissinger: I think you're a great Foreign Minister to have good relations with both Jordan and the PLO.

Khaddam: It's the direction of the President.

Kissinger: But it's skillfully done. Seriously -- I'm not saying it as criticism.

Khaddam: Because we have no vested interests, we treat both sides equally. We don't try to play one side against the other, and we're very frank with both sides. When one side does something we think is wrong, we tell them. And because we do this, both respond in kind to us. And of course, as you probably observed, it's not easy to follow this kind of path. But as long as there is sincerity, dedication, and warmth.... Take Lebanon, the situation between Lebanon and the resistance forces: we've been able to keep good relations with both and to improve relations between both sides. In the future, if you have a quarrel with another Arab country, we can perhaps bring about a balance.



Kissinger: You'll help us?

Khaddam: By letting things move in a positive direction. Because in fact we want American policy to develop in a better way -- for our interests and the interests of the American people. But the time is long.

Kissinger: If the time is long, you'll see our policy is also in the interest of Syria.

Khaddam: When it comes to time, there is nothing to cause us to burn our nerves. We will be patient. When there is the element of time with no hope, that will lead to desperation. When there is time allied to hope, there is patience.

Kissinger: Quite seriously, if you're willing to give time some hope, then I'm confident progress can be achieved. It is not in the American interest to have Syria in a state of desperation. And it is not American policy.

Khaddam: As you heard from the President, I would like to reiterate that irrespective of the results of Dr. Kissinger's efforts, we are very interested to have U. S. -Syrian relations strengthened and improving.

Kissinger: Even if we succeed!

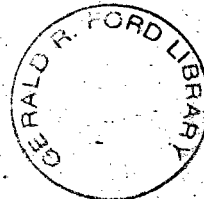
Khaddam: If you succeed, it will be a shot in the arm to U. S. -Syrian relations.

Kissinger: Whatever happens on the present trip, Mr. Foreign Minister, we want to bring positive results for Syria in the near future.

So even aside from that -- I appreciate what you said -- but if we work together with some confidence and some patience, I think we can bring Syria some progress.

Khaddam: As you're aware, the situation in the Middle East differs from the rest of the world. Surprises in this area are always big and likely to happen, and it is not easy to control things given the possibility of such surprises.

Kissinger: The question is whether you'll surprise us or whether we'll both be surprised together.



Khaddam: We might both be surprised.

Kissinger: If that is true, we should probably on one of my trips discuss what it is that might surprise us. So we can perhaps act jointly to prevent it.

Khaddam: The situation is not in the control of any one. Take Vietnam -- we know the parties who are controlling the situation -- but not here. That's why I asked you in the car how would you guarantee that what one side pledges won't be violated.

Kissinger: The Arabs never break their word, so we have only the Israelis to worry about.

Khaddam: True. There are human circumstances which seem to be dictating. There is no region in the world where events spring up like in the Middle East. Although the elements in Vietnam are known, although Dr. Kissinger signed with the Vietnamese, what happens there is known.

Kissinger: In Vietnam, we have a difficult domestic situation. With the right set of circumstances, peace could be preserved. It's quite predictable whatever happens in Vietnam, whatever the circumstances are. That's not the case in the Middle East.

Khaddam: That's why I said that.

Kissinger: Yes, I agree with the Foreign Minister.

Khaddam: There are many currents in the Arab world. President Sadat made a statement demanding the internationalization of Jerusalem. The result was that in Kuwait -- with the national assembly of 50 -- they passed a resolution condemning every Arab leader who backed that. And the Kuwaiti Government took a resolution supporting Syria, President Asad's call for a unified command. Because there is public opinion in Kuwait and 200,000 Palestinians in Kuwait.

Kissinger: They'll all be in the streets greeting me when I come. It will be the biggest reception in the Middle East.

Khassam: The Kuwaiti Government respects the feelings of the Palestinians and the Palestinians respect the feelings of the Kuwaiti Government, so there is no worry.



Kissinger: I thought there would be a 21-gun salute, all aimed at me.  
[Laughter]

Khaddam: No. That was my way of supporting the contention that there are many factors that bear on this. Specifically, today there are 20 Arab governments, and every government feels that the measure of dedication and sincerity is whether they support the Palestinians. That is of very great importance.

Kissinger: I agree this is one of the problems....

Khaddam: Even in Turkey, even in Greece, they're each their own country, and certain things have been happening.

Kissinger: I agree there is no one more interested in Arab unity than me. I could deal with one Arab leader instead of traveling around.

Khaddam: That's true. Arab unity will be coming about.

If that is true, that you would like Arab unity, then you should cease separate settlements.

Kissinger: As I told you in the car, we're not promoting anything.

Khaddam: Granted; that's what we believe. But as you know, there are times when somebody does things not seeking the results that are brought forward. You possibly agree that when you're dealing with a certain people, you have to know the factor that makes them tick. For example, people in the Third World are different, in the character of the people.

[The protocol officer arrives to indicate that President Asad is ready to receive the Secretary.]



HAK / Asad  
Memcon

*Scowcroft  
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

COMPLETE DISTRIBUTION *Memorandum of Conversation*

MADE IN S/S-I.

Date 15Y 12 1975

Initial DS

DAMASCUS, SYRIA

DATE: March 15, 1975

SUBJECT: Meeting between President Asad and Secretary Kissinger

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.: Secretary Kissinger  
Ambassador Murphy  
Under Secretary Sisco  
Assistant Secretary Atherton  
Deputy Assistant Secretary Saunders  
Mr. Isa Sabbagh, Interpreter

Syria: President Asad  
Foreign Minister Khaddam  
Muhamad Haydar, Deputy Prime Minister  
for Economic Affairs  
Naji Jamil, Deputy Minister of Defense  
and Air Force Commander  
Adib Daoudi, Political Counsellor to  
President  
Elias, Press Counsellor

DISTRIBUTION: S; S/S; WH (General Scowcroft)

Asad: The Foreign Minister delayed his departure for Cuba to be here.

Kissinger: I was most appreciative.

Asad: He felt it was important for him to be here.

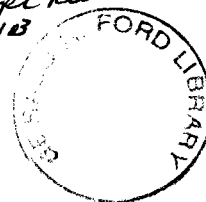
Kissinger: It's a very complicated situation. I almost formed a government myself. Of the 5 major parties, the leaders of 2 are former students.

Asad: The more students you have, the better the situation should be. You have no students in Egypt, in Syria? No students in Israel?

Kissinger: Only the Foreign Minister who is one of their best.

NEA:HHSaunders:he  
(Drafting Office and Officer)

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12958, ORA 0.5 *State Dept Review*  
STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES SF 9/17/03  
BY *hr* DATE 9/29/03



Kissinger: Did you ever see "The Gunfighter"? Everyone wants to prove he is better than "The Gunfighter." In the end he gets shot in the back. That's my fate. Every Foreign Minister wants to prove he's better than I. No problem here. Khaddam knows he's better than I.

Khaddam: Do you know? [Laughter]

Kissinger: Seriously. It's a problem for me.  
The President's English is improving.

Asad: I learn a few words each time.

Kissinger: You will be speaking with a German accent!  
In Turkey, we did make some progress. They have to get a government before they can act.

Asad: They can't form one?

Kissinger: Probably in the next two weeks--or agree on an election.

Asad: On Cyprus, they have a government, don't they?

Kissinger: An administration, but they won't form an independent state.

Asad: What is the population of Cyprus?

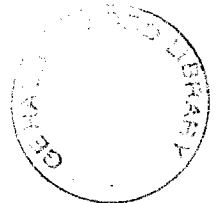
Kissinger: 800,000--200,000 Turks. But they will form a federation. Turkey will give back some of the territory they now hold.

Asad: The Turks fear the Greek Cypriots will join Greece. Have Greece and Turkey agreed to talk about the Aegean?

Kissinger: Yes, but a few weeks after the Cyprus talks begin.

Asad: Ecevit is a poet.

Kissinger: Yes. He is really good--and very understanding





Kissinger: of the Arab view. It is a serious government because every significant leader is outside the government.

Asad: The Cabinet will work on the technical aspects.

Kissinger: Yes. It's a good system of government if you don't want to make concessions. I'm sure Israel will adopt it if it ever catches on.

Asad: It has its negative aspects--for instance, if war erupts.

Kissinger: It's not a matter of government. It cannot last. The military may even take over. It's not probable--but possible.

Asad: The military still have great authority.

Kissinger: If Turkey can get a government, there could be a Cyprus agreement in 2-3 months.

Asad: I read that West Germany will be providing arms--instead of the U.S.

Kissinger: Spare parts--and some arms.

Asad: This is a maneuver around Congress?

Kissinger: The German Foreign Minister is a student of mine!  
No, the Congress knows about it.

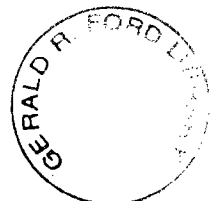
Asad: I hope Congress won't cut off relations with Germany.

Kissinger: With me.

\* \* \* \*

Kissinger: About the Middle East. Maybe we should talk alone later.

I told your Foreign Minister that when I leave office all I'll be qualified for is to run a lunatic asylum.



Kissinger: The Egyptian newspapers say an agreement is wrapped up. Israeli papers say, "Never." I don't know what either is talking about.

Frankly, it is a very weird situation. There's no agreement of any kind.

Both sides say what they want--not what they'll give.

I'll do one or two more shuttles and then break off if I decide it can't be done.

You may have certain requirements to criticize U.S. policy. You haven't done it yet.

We're not conducting this like last May's negotiation. Then, I was an extremely active force. Then I felt war was likely if Syria was left out. And I didn't take "no" for an answer--even while dealing with President Asad who will not take "yes" for an answer.

If this negotiation doesn't succeed, we'll have to see what will happen. I can't play God in the Middle East.

But it can succeed.

The basic problem can be determined from the newspapers.

The Israeli's want it to have more of a political character--Egypt, military.

Egypt wants the passes and oil fields. Some Israeli ministers may agree, but the Cabinet has not yet. The Cabinet meets tomorrow.

In Aswan, I said we had received some concrete ideas--but they're not so concrete. But I'll have to force the Israelis to make some decision. I can't spend all my time here.

This is where it stands. No decisions yet.



Kissinger: Since I saw you, I've only been in Egypt one more time--only 24 hours.

It is not moving with enormous speed.

I want to state my basic position again.

I have no interest in coming this often to Syria if I were not interested in the peace process. If I wanted to divide Syria from the others, I could just do it and take the consequences.

If an agreement is reached, I cannot refuse it. But I am prepared to exert the same effort for a Syrian agreement.

Asad: Egypt--Israel?

Kissinger: If they want it. I have no particular incentive.

From our viewpoint, Mr. President, how can the U.S. refuse to help if the others want it.

Whether or not there is an agreement, we will do our utmost to see that there is an agreement.

And there has been a fever chart in all of these negotiations. The first time I talked to Golda Meir about withdrawal on the Egyptian front, she wouldn't discuss one kilometer. With each issue, they refuse.

What they did in Quneitra was wrong. Friday the Israelis admitted that.

After the initial stage there comes a period when I am attacked in the U.S.

Then we move into a negotiation.

We have started the first phase on Syria in that I have made clear that something will have to be done for Syria. My press are asking when--not whether--the Syrian negotiation will begin.

Kissinger: I haven't put it before the Israeli Cabinet because I don't want a negative decision.

I told Rabin I agreed with Dayan that there could be no peace until something is done on the Golan.

This is my basic approach.

There are two basic things that can happen in the next 10 days:

- What I'm doing now will fail.
- Or it will succeed.

If it fails, that will diminish a role for the U.S. because our people will be turned off.

What we should avoid either way is a crisis atmosphere and to try to develop as much of a common strategy as you are willing to develop.

So this is the general situation. Since I just saw you Sunday, there hasn't been much change.

Asad: The Egyptian-Israeli differences are still basic?

Kissinger: Quite basic. I don't want to mislead you. It is important that we trust each other. As of now, they're quite basic--Egypt wants more in the military field than Israel has given. Israel wants more in the political field than Egypt has given. On the other hand, it is possible on any one or two trips that the basic gaps could be closed.

I have no proof.

This afternoon, the Israeli inner group is meeting. Tomorrow, the whole Cabinet meets. Tomorrow evening I'll meet the inner group again.

I don't know what they will tell me. I don't think Rabin knows. This Cabinet hasn't made this kind of decision.



Kissinger: I've told them not to make this decision thinking this is the end of the process.

I did not bring an Egyptian proposal that they could accept or reject.

I know Khaddam's mind. We won't sign anything while he is in Cuba.

Tomorrow, the best the Israelis could do is make some general decision. After that there would be all of the details. We went through it! I've never been the same since!

I know the location of every hill and Druze village on the Golan. That's hard to work into a Washington cocktail party conversation.

On the Syrian problem, the difference is still very great.

But I know I am making an impression on the top leadership--that they must think about this with a seriousness never before.

Rabin told me last night--this is in strict confidence--he has been in touch with Dayan to see whether they can work out some common position.

The Israelis earlier said they didn't want me to see Dayan.

Asad: Why?

Kissinger: He had seen me before he made his last statement on Syria.

Rabin seems to be changing his mind.

I want you to know this.

We can't negotiate now.

Intellectually the problem is what we discussed a few weeks ago.



Kissinger: For Israel, if all they are asked to do is withdraw, they don't know when the agony will be. But if they could see some progress towards peace, their attitude might be different. I believe the mood in Israel today is less arrogant and more willing in that direction.

I really think there has been an important change. When I saw Rabin at dinner last night-- Peres, Zadok and some professors were there-- I said there has to be a Palestinian state at some point. The government people were negative. The professors and the mayor of Tel Aviv said this is inevitable. I repeat--the government absolutely rejects it. But the others-- I asked them individually--reacted very differently.

This was interesting.

The problem of statesmanship in the Arab world is how to move Israel from war to peace. I have the impression that the Israeli public would force a momentum towards peace if they saw hope of some progress.

The less this is done in an atmosphere of crisis.

If you and I could see what progress toward peace is possible, this could create an irreversible process--especially since they don't expect it of them.

I will come here again before I go home no matter what happens.

For instance, if Israel could reduce compulsory service from 3 to 2 years, it would affect the mood and the military complexion.

Forget a moment the immediate crisis and look at the future. In the context of moving towards peace--if we go at it as a military problem every hill will block us.

Let me say one other word about the Palestinians. I have not made an agreement with Sadat to recognize the Palestinians.

Asad: It was in Al Ahram.

Kissinger: First, I recognize the paramount interest of Syria, and I would make no such move without consulting Syria.

I've told Sadat what I've told you. If I could trust them more, I might have moved sooner.

Once I establish contact, they have a weapon to use against me with Israel and in the U.S. In the U.S. they are considered terrorists and murderers.

I would be open to messages through you. We could do that fairly soon.

If we establish physical contact we will do it in Morocco not in Cairo.

The trouble is the Moroccan king--fond as I am of him--is no specialist in keeping secrets either.

He is coming to Washington.

Asad: In my recent interviews--we have the memcons-- I said when it comes to the person of Dr. Kissinger....

Kissinger: I have no complaint. But after the Foreign Minister's speech in Havana, we will have cause to complain.

Khaddam: We will attack imperialism--not the U.S. I will have to greet you.

Kissinger: At the UNGA, he was very restrained--more restrained than the president of the Assembly (Bouteflika).

Asad: Bouteflika was here last night. We discussed the area. He had a message from Boumediene. We talked of our own situation, the Iraqi-Iranian situation. Our relations are very good.

Kissinger: I like Boumediene very much. He's a very good man.

Asad: We couldn't give them much. I told him I didn't know what you would bring.

Kissinger: If he had waited for me I'd have told him.

Asad: He said you had sent him a letter. He told us the contents.

Kissinger: Was it the same as I told you?

Asad: What I understood from you seemed more optimistic.

Kissinger: I wrote Boumediene mainly about his speech to OPEC. He had received our Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. I thanked him.

Bouteflika's speech was more in the Khaddam tradition.

Haydar: Khaddam speaks with heat--with no oil to ignite it. We are having U.S. companies to look for oil to ignite Khaddam. Even with oil they are dealing with us on a step-by-step basis.

Kissinger: Then I added one paragraph on my mission. I could not state the nuances. You're right. It was less positive. It's so hard to put it in writing.

Asad: He was pressed to get to Tehran. Or he could have stayed. Today is the session between the Iraqis and Iranians.

Kissinger: My problem is: If I write all the Arabs the same thing, they think I'm a liar. If I write them too differently, they think I'm a hypocrite.

We regard Boumediene highly. I may send someone to brief him. And what we are prepared to do for Syria.



Asad: Useful..

It's been some time since you had any contacts with the Palestinians?

Kissinger: I was going to send Roy Atherton to Rabat in November, but after the conference and Arafat's speech at the UN, it became very difficult.

But if you have suggestions, let me know. It's not a question of principle.

If the Palestinians could stop attacking the U.S. and me, it would help. It's not vanity. It makes it harder. It helps me politically. But for contacts .....

Let them attack Sisco.

Asad: Please appreciate the special situation the Palestinians are in. We can't ask as much of them.

Kissinger: For me, it's not a major problem.

Asad: Generally, they have complexes. That's why when Geyelin asked me whether the PLO would recognize Israel, I asked whether Israel would recognize the PLO.

Kissinger: If I may suggest--I told Sisco after our times with Rabin--for the first time I beginto see how peace could come.

I hoped a point could be reached in the step-by-step approach where people would be tired of it and say, let's make peace. I just saw a glimmer. We're not at that point yet.

Some time, it would be good for the PLO to recognize Israel.

Asad: When we had followed that step-by-step path, if each step had been on all fronts, we could have discussed many points and have moved closer to peace.



Asad:

Egypt and the Palestinians could have moved faster. But as I said before, we are for peace. War cannot be a hobby for any sane person. I have emphasized this. Peace is that situation which preserves justice for human beings. Otherwise it would be surrender rather than peace. Open declarations before our people could never be a maneuver. We don't like maneuvering and our people wouldn't stand for it.

We want peace. I say it all the time. It is my conviction that it is in Syria's interest. My talk of peace is for our people--not for Israel.

Peace would be our gain. This is a matter of our conviction.

But Israeli behavior doesn't give us evidence the Israelis want peace.

Kissinger:

No. The Israelis are confused--whether to go to war or peace. Once the peace process has started, the process will be irreversible. If peace rests on a few kilometers, no one will believe in peace. Peace is the atmosphere in which people feel no injustice is being done to them. Let's say we get a few kilometers in Sinai and Golan--as time passes the Arabs will still feel injustice--and as long as Palestinians are in camps.

[Asad asked colleagues whether they object.]

Kissinger:

Problem is how we are going to achieve this peace. If we had tried last year it would have led to an inconclusive war. War would have followed war.

As I explained last May, the reason we had to start with even unsatisfactory steps was to get people used to the process of peace.

Intellectually, I agree that simultaneity would have been better. What makes these meetings so painful to me is that intellectually you are right.



Kissinger: You are also right that it would be easier because there would be no suspicions because the Arab partners could help each other do things they couldn't otherwise do.

But from the U.S. view, it cannot be in our interest to divide the Arab world.

If you and Boumediene and Iraq are all dissatisfied, where are we?

We will proceed on the path I have indicated to you.

In terms of my political necessities, a move with one country makes it easier for me to get a move for another.

You must all have been up all night talking to Bouteflika. It can't be short.

Asad: This was my first long talk with him.

Kissinger: In my book on Arab Foreign Ministers, he will have an honored place.

Asad: This is a threat to Khaddam.

Kissinger: Sadat had to cancel a dinner he had for me.

Asad: Bouteflika arranged it.

Kissinger: I gave him my apartment in New York for the UNGA.

[The Secretary and the President moved into a private talk with only Mr. Sabbagh present.]



HAK/Khaddam  
Memcon

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

**PARTICIPANTS:** Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Deputy Prime Minister  
and Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Samech Tawfeek Abou Fares,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State  
and Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs  
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff  
Isa K. Sabbagh, Special Assistant to  
Amb. Akins, Jidda (Interpreter)

**DATE AND TIME:** Saturday, March 15, 1975  
6:45 - 7:15 p.m.

**PLACE:** In the Secretary's Car from the  
Presidential Palace to Airport, Damascus

Kissinger: You know what we agreed to, Mr. Foreign Minister?  
The President and I?

Khaddam: No.

Kissinger: He asked me if I would replace you when I leave my present  
job. But you can stay until then.

Khaddam: I would have no objection now.

Kissinger: But I have a job now. It would be fun to be an Arab Foreign  
Minister. All Arab Foreign Ministers are men of remarkable personality.

SECRET/NODIS/XGDS

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, SEC. 3.5

NSC MEMO, 11/24/93, STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES

BY HR, NARA, DATE 9/21/03

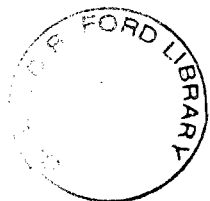
CLASSIFIED BY: HENRY A. KISSINGER

EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION

SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652

EXEMPTION CATEGORY 5 (B) (1, 3)

AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED ON Imp. to Det.



Seriously, we had a very good talk in which we tried to define a possible direction, and how to find a path between your necessities and our possibilities.

Seriously, will you say to the Cubans that from your impression here there are no objections to an improvement of relations? Not as a message, but as our impression.

Khaddam: Yes, that's quite possible. I seem to have read that shortly there will be serious contacts between the U.S. and Cuba.

Kissinger: If you've read it, it's not true. But it's possible. There has to be some reciprocity on the Cuban side. They can't make unilateral demands on us. But I think it can be worked out.

Khaddam: We know it requires time but we see the appearance of a softening of the attitude of the OAS.

Kissinger: This is correct. And we're engineering that.

Khaddam: That's very good.

When will you come back here?

Kissinger: When you're out of town. And I'll really fix you.

No. You will be back when?

Khaddam: On the 21st.

Kissinger: I won't be back before then. Not before. It would take a surprising change in the situation if I came before.

Khaddam: You are having dinner with King Hussein tonight.

Kissinger: Yes. If I get there in time. Once when I came here, I was supposed to be there for dinner and I arrived at 11:30.

Sabbagh: It was your second time here.



Kissinger: Yes. And they made me eat the dinner there, after I'd had a Syrian dinner. So I had two dinners in one night.

Khaddam: Bouteika didn't let us sleep last night.

Kissinger: What time did he arrive?

Khaddam: 11:30.

Kissinger: And he spent the whole night with you?

Khaddam: His plane left at 6:00 a.m. I got home just when my kids went to school.

Kissinger: The kids go to school on Saturday?

Khaddam: Yes. I got only one hour of sleep.

Kissinger: One hour is worse than none at all.

Khaddam: I can go to sleep now.

Kissinger: Did the President get any sleep?

Khaddam: I think so. I couldn't sleep because I had the rendezvous to come to the airport.

Kissinger: I must say this, Mr. Foreign Minister, I was very, very pleased to find you at the airport. Really.

Khaddam: And for sure I was extremely pleased. And I spent a great effort trying to find an airline that would leave on Sunday.

Kissinger: How are you going?

Khaddam: Tomorrow I go to Munich, then to Frankfort, and from Frankfort to Havana.

Kissinger: What airline?



Khaddam: A Russian airline. So tomorrow I'll be flying for 15-16 hours.

Kissinger: It's a long flight. Why didn't Bouteflika come here at a more reasonable hour?

Khaddam: He first told us he was arriving at 3:00 in the afternoon. At 2:30 the Algerian Embassy told us he would be arriving at 8:00. Then we were told 9:00. I got to the airport, and he didn't arrive until 11:00.

Kissinger: He is worse than I am!

Khaddam: We realize one can't always control one's schedule.

Kissinger: No.

Khaddam: He had the President of Mauritania there.

Kissinger: The President of Mauritania in New York gave a toast in water. He said he was first because he's a Moslem and second because he's from a drought area and water is more precious than champagne.

Khaddam: The flight to Amman is about a half hour.

Kissinger: Not with our pilot. We have a new pilot who looks for clouds to see how bumpy he can make it.

Khaddam: You're supposed to have the best pilots.

Kissinger: Yes, but this is a new crew that's never flown with me before.

Give my best regards to Mrs. Khaddam.

Would it embarrass you at the airport if I thanked you for staying to receive me?

Khaddam: On the contrary.

Will Mrs. Kissinger come the next time?

Kissinger: She stayed in Aswan because she has a stomach problem, so if she flies too much, she gets sick. So I didn't bring her to Israel.



Khaddam: It must be warm in Aswan.

Kissinger: Yes, but at night it's very cool.

The Foreign Minister thinks it would still be too dangerous to go to Kuwait, even with a unified command?

Khaddam: A serious danger, no.

Kissinger: They would just shoot me, and not use a bomb. [Laughter].

Khaddam: They have a good security outfit in Kuwait.

Kissinger: Unfortunately it's all manned by Palestinians.

Khaddam: True.

Kissinger: But since what my security people are worried about is Palestinians, it doesn't do much good to be guarded by Palestinians.

Khaddam: That's exaggerating. There are a great many Palestinians up and down the Gulf. Besides, we have to remember there is not that deep tendency to assassinate and so forth, and the Palestinians are part and parcel of the Arab world. And assassins are few and far between.

Kissinger: Of course that doesn't help you in any individual case. [Laughter].

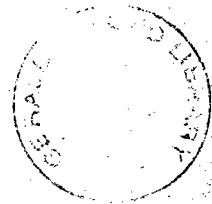
Khaddam: When one's time comes, there is no escape. God is the great protector.

Sabbagh: It's like the story of the bullet which said "To whom it may concern."

You haven't visited the casino here?

Kissinger: No, I haven't.

[The motorcade arrived at the airport. The Secretary's departure remarks to the press are attached].



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Chatham 3/5*

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STATE PASS NSCE FOR SCOWCROFT, NESSEN

EO 11652: N/A  
 TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A)  
 SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S DEPARTURE STATEMENT, DAMASCUS AIRPORT, MARCH  
 15, 1975

FC /ING IS TRANSCRIPT SECRETARY'S DEPARTURE  
 STATEMENT DAMASCUS AIRPORT, MARCH 15, 1975: QUOTE.  
 FIRST OF ALL I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOREIGN MINISTER  
 FOR HAVING DELAYED HIS DEPARTURE SO THAT HE COULD RECEIVE ME AND  
 PARTICIPATE IN THE TALKS. PRESIDENT ASAD AND  
 I HAD A VERY FULL AND DETAILED REVIEW OF THE PROSPECTS  
 OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND WE AGREED THAT BEFORE  
 I COMPLETE MY STAY IN THIS AREA I WOULD RETURN TO DAMASCUS  
 TO CONTINUE THOSE DISCUSSIONS. THANK YOU. UNQUOTE.

MURPHY

BT



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