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February 26, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: National Security Council Meeting on the Near East,
February 21, 1968

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara
Under Secretary of State, Nicholas Katzenbach
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler
Director, U. S. Information Agency, Leonard Marks
Director, Central Intelligence Agency, Richard Helms
Under Secretary of the Treasury, Joseph W. Barr
Director, Office of Emergency Planning, Price Daniel
Assistant Secretary of State, Lucius D. Battle
President's Special Assistant for National Security
Affairs, Mr. Walt Rostow
Executive Secretary, Mr. Bromley Smith
Nathaniel Davis
Harold H. Saunders

This meeting evolved in three installments. Because the President was involved with UN Secretary General U Thant at the appointed hour, the meeting began in the Situation Room under the chairmanship of the Vice President. Then word came that the President would soon be available, and the Council adjourned to the Cabinet Room where further informal discussion took place before the President's arrival. Then the President came in and the discussion continued in a more formal way.

I. Mr. Katzenbach summarized the US position in the Middle East by saying that there is no blinking the fact that US influence in the area has been deteriorating. Conversely, Soviet influence has been increasing. He suggested discussing this problem under two headings--our relations with the countries of the Near East and Soviet intentions toward the area.

Speaking of our relations with the Arab world, he noted that we would have suffered some loss of influence had there been no Arab-Israeli war. He cited as the reason for this the natural growth of Arab nationalism and "the general changing face of the world." This

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was complicated by the US-Israeli relationship and by the extent to which Congress had restricted the resources available for use in the area. In the face of these restrictions, we have "very little elbow room."

Turning to Soviet intentions, he noted that there is not total agreement on just what Moscow is up to. The Russians themselves may not have a clear picture of their strategy. Obviously, they want to see the US position deteriorate and theirs improve, yet without a US-USSR confrontation. Over the past year, they have played their hand in the Middle East in a more traditional diplomatic way. They have done certain things to capitalize on the upheaval last June, but they have also shown some hesitancy in involving themselves in inter-Arab quarrels. They have also sought to improve the military facilities available to them in the area. In short, they are not taking any losses, but they are not jumping in with both feet either.

What can we do? Mr. Katzenbach felt there would not be a great problem if the Jarring mission succeeds. If that happened, some of the Congressional restraints would be relaxed, and we would be able to keep some influence in the Arab world. He would not put chances of Jarring's success particularly high, but because of the serious consequences for us if Jarring fails, we should put everything we have into making it succeed. He recognized the risk of backing a failing effort but he felt that if Jarring fails we will be left with a situation that is "absolutely intolerable." He pointed out that this raises serious questions about what we should do if Jarring fails. These are not questions that need to be settled now, but they are serious.

He concluded by pointing out that there are natural limitations on Soviet ability to increase influence in the area. He felt the normal situation in the Middle East would be for us both to be operating there.

Mr. Battle added that we are, in addition to these problems, also faced with the British withdrawal from the area and the consequent decline of general Western influence in the Middle East.

Mr. Rostow reported that he had just had a talk with Ralph Bunche. Bunche, as a veteran of Rhodes, thinks that Jarring is now in a position to declare that all parties accept the UN resolution and to invite them to a meeting on Cyprus. Bunche recognized from his own experience that tactically and in substance Jerusalem is the most explosive issue. If it came to the Security Council now, it could destroy

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Jarring's effort. Operationally, aside from nudging the UAR and Israel toward talks, the big question for us is when and at what level we lean on Israel on Jerusalem.

Mr. Katzenbach opined that Jerusalem in the Security Council would be less likely to sabotage the Jarring mission if Jarring is conducting talks. Mr. Battle pointed out that the danger is that Jerusalem will come to the Security Council just at a point when the Jarring mission appears to be near a breakdown. He would like to see Israel stop all activities in Jerusalem which make it appear that Israel is steadily incorporating former Jordanian Jerusalem into the Israeli sector.

Mr. Marks asked how hard we had leaned on Israel. Mr. Battle indicated that we had leaned quite hard for accepting the UN resolution. At that point word came that the group should move to the Cabinet Room, and Mr. Battle did not have a chance to answer the question as it related to Jerusalem.

II. In the informal discussion which continued around the Cabinet table while the Council waited for the President, Mr. Battle and the Vice President discussed our relations with Nasser. The Vice President said that we had tried to get along with Nasser but he had finally concluded that "Nasser just did not like us." Mr. Battle felt that the reason for the failure of our policy 1962-1965 was that we had mounted a policy that we could not sustain without Nasser's cooperation. As long as Nasser made speeches lambasting the US, we could not hope to win Congressional support for a policy of supporting him. The Vice President questioned whether we should resume relations and thereby tend to support Nasser's continuation in office. He felt there were people in the area who would know how to "bring Nasser down." Mr. Battle suggested that we were not sure that leaders who followed would not be worse, although there were still pro-Western people around Nasser to whom we would still like to hold out a hand.

The Vice President then noted the difficulty of explaining to the American Jewish community how much we had done over the past year in support of Israel. He felt that stories of our plane sales had not reached the average member of the Jewish community and that many members felt that we were pursuing a half-hearted policy toward Israel.

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III. At this point the President entered and Mr. Rostow summarized the discussion to this point.

The President noted that Eugene Black had reported to him that our position in the Near East was deteriorating. Mr. Black had recommended more contact with Nasser. He had recommended, in reference to the false charges levied against us last June, that we accept the idea that Nasser had been misinformed. Unless we do, resumption of relations is hopeless.

Mr. Katzenbach said that we were prepared to resume relations if we had an opportunity. We did not expect too much to follow from resumption of relations. He felt that perhaps the problem of the "big lie" would be taken care of by Mr. Attwood's interview with Nasser in LOOK magazine. Mr. Battle pointed out that we still want Nasser to take the initiative in resuming relations, and the President did not disagree.

The President asked whether we were any nearer to working out some arrangements with the USSR on arms limitation, or is that in limbo?

Mr. Katzenbach said it was pretty much in limbo. Ambassador Thompson had talked with Kosygin, and Secretary Rusk had raised the matter with Ambassador Dobrynin the previous Thursday.

The President said that he had "played for time" with the Israelis. He had hoped before Secretary McNamara left to have discussions on the ABM with the Soviet Union. He felt that Kosygin had agreed at Glassboro to have such discussions.

A brief exchange followed on exactly what Kosygin had agreed to at Glassboro. The President felt that he had pressed over and over for a date to begin these discussions. He said that he had just talked to U Thant about achieving some sort of arms limitation and about registering with the UN arms shipments to the Middle East. He said all he had done at the Ranch with Prime Minister Eshkol was to postpone our decision in hopes that some of this could take place. Did anybody have any suggestions?

Mr. Katzenbach felt that a good deal depends on Ambassador Jarring. If he succeeds, then arms limitation can be discussed.

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The President asked whether there was any chance that Jarring would succeed. Mr. Katzenbach felt that the chances were "less than even." Secretary McNamara said he was "very pessimistic" and rated chances for his success as perhaps "one in four."

Mr. McNamara further noted the shortage of US resources for this area. He felt that the Middle East should be given very high priority for our resources. When the President asked whether this would be from existing funds or from a supplemental appropriation, Mr. McNamara said both, but felt that, as far as Defense was concerned, needs could be met largely from existing appropriations.

Mr. McNamara and Mr. Barr noted that the Export-Import Bank had come out very well and that some arms could be sold on Ex-Im credits with support in both the Senate and the House.

When Mr. McNamara said that we should not let a few dollars stand in our way, the President said he would "not object to a little more money."

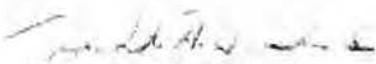
The President concluded the meeting by suggesting that we do three things:

1. He asked that the Vice President and the Secretary of State be fully briefed on Eugene Black's report. Then State should pursue the resumption of relations with Nasser.

2. State and Defense should get together an estimate of resources we should need if the worst happened--appropriations that we would need if Jarring's mission failed.

3. We should go back to Ambassador Thompson and instruct him to talk further with the Soviets about arms limitation and ABMs. We should also urge reporting arms shipments to the UN. We should make it clear to the USSR that if they act unilaterally, we would have no choice but to do the same.

The meeting adjourned.


Harold H. Saunders

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LIST OF ATTENDEES, NSC MEETING

February 21, 1968; Wednesday, 12:00 noon

Vice President Humphrey

Under Secretary Katzenbach

Assistant Secretary Battle

Secretary of Defense McNamara

Under Secretary of Treasury Barr

CIA Director Helms

JCS Chairman Wheeler

USIA Director Marks

OEP Director Daniel

Walt Rostow

Bromley Smith

Hal Saunders

Nat Davis

Mr. Clark Clifford will not be able to attend because of a prior commitment to meet a group of Republican Congressmen