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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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Subject : Harriman Mission to Israel
Date : February 26, 1965
Place : Ministry of Defense, Tel Aviv
Participants: ISRAEL -

SANITIZED
Authority State Dept 12/30/77
By rmj, NARS, Date 1/20/78

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol
Foreign Minister Golda Meir
Deputy Defense Minister Shimon Peres
Chief of Staff General Yitzhak Rabin
Director-General of the Foreign
Ministry Arye Levavi
Director U.S. Department Moshe Bitan
Political Secretary to the Prime
Minister, Aviad Yaffe

UNITED STATES - S/AH - W. Averell Harriman
Robert W. Komer, White House
Walworth Barbour, U.S. Ambassador
Stephen E. Palmer, Jr., First Secretary

Reference : Tel Aviv's 1057, 1058, 1059 and 1060 to Department.

Copies To : S/S White House-Bundy
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(Note: Prior to the February 26 meeting, Bitan of the Foreign Ministry informed the Ambassador the Israel side would have a piece of paper for our consideration. The Ambassador said that, as the Israelis had been informed, we were preparing a piece of paper, and that Governor Harriman felt very strongly that we should focus on it.)

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The Prime Minister began by reading from and commenting on the Israeli paper. He said it was nothing formal, but contained some "bricks" which might be useful in working towards an agreement. (At the end of the meeting, Mr. Levavi gave Mr. Palmer, at the latter's request, a copy of the Israeli paper. See Attachment 1.) Addressing himself to the points in the Israeli paper, which he claimed was based on our talks the previous day, the Prime Minister said U.S. policy was to help maintain an arms balance in the Middle East. This was strongly reiterated when he met President Johnson in Washington. At that time, Israel required tanks, and the U.S. had agreed that tanks should be supplied. Since his visit to Washington, there had been a deterioration in the arms balance. The Soviets had concluded a new arms deal with the U.A.R., the UAC had gathered momentum,

In the light of these factors, Israel should be supplied by the U.S. with planes and tanks and other items to maintain the arms balance. As long as Jordan remained at war with Israel, Israel could not agree to Jordan's being armed. However, if in the global view of the United States arms to Jordan seemed the best course, the U.S. would go ahead. But this should not be done before agreement was reached on direct U.S. supply of arms to Israel. An Israeli mission would go to Washington soon for further consideration of arms requirements.

Continuing, Prime Minister Eshkol said it was Israel's understanding that Jordan would receive no arms which were not on Ambassador Earbour's "list" when the subject was first raised with the GOI. Further, that there would be no tanks on the West Bank. Shortly after the Jordan arms deal became known, President Johnson would make a public statement reaffirming U.S. support of Israel on the Unified Plan and on maintaining the arms balance. The GOI would agree to enter discussions with the U.S. on ways to prevent Arab diversion outside the Unified Plan. Israel was asking the U.S. to secure a binding undertaking from Jordan that the Mukheiba Dam would not serve Arab diversion plans involving Jordan River headwaters.

The Prime Minister said that during his visit to Washington it was agreed there would be high-level, bi-lateral meetings from time to time. It would be well to have such a meeting in Washington in March; then the U.S. commitment to the security of Israel could be clarified. The Prime Minister repeated his request for U.S. assistance in helping Israel establish full diplomatic relations with several countries.

General Rabin then made a brief presentation on Israel's security problems. On the basis of the current situation and a projection of the situation three years from now, he outlined 1) the balance of forces

and 2) the state of readiness and susceptibility to surprise attack. In addition to observations the Israelis had previously made to U.S. officials, and which already are on record, the Chief of Staff made the following points.

The IDF considered the air and armored forces its key elements, for what was important was not to contain an enemy attack but to destroy the enemy on its own ground.

General Rabin said the U.A.R. had more than heavy bombers and fighter bombers. Now the U.A.R. could deliver tons of bombs on Israel in one strike, or tons in one day. Three years from now it would be able to deliver tons and over tons, respectively. This was not counting the air forces of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. As of now the IDF Air Force's bombing capacity was little more than half that of the U.A.R.'s. The U.A.R. had developed a good air warning system, using Soviet P-30, P-20 and P-8 equipment. By the end of 1968 there would be about bases in the U.A.R. The Hawks would help, but in addition Israel needed planes with larger payloads and long range. If attacked, Israel must be able to strike the enemy bases. Of course, Israel would prefer the Phantom but this was a subject for further discussion.

On armor, General Rabin said in 1968 the U.A.R. would have tanks and Jordan Israeli intelligence estimated that the U.A.R. could now bring 900 tanks to the borders. The IDF had to be able to put 562 tanks against these. Syria could bring tanks to its border with Israel; the IDF would need there. Jordan could bring up and the IDF needed to match this number because of the terrain factors. Iraq could furnish and the IDF needed to oppose these. In summary, the IDF needed tanks to oppose the tanks the Arabs have. In 1968 the U.A.R. would have tanks. At that time Israel would need at least

General Rabin said another crucial question concerned the quality of the hardware. The Soviet tanks were as good or better than Western models. Generally, the tanks already held by the U.A.R. could outshoot Israeli tanks.

There followed a short exchange between General Rabin and Mr. Komer on some technical aspects of the tank question. General Rabin said the British Centurion was okay

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The General concluded his review by saying he would mention "just for the record" that navies were also involved in Israel's security picture. He said the missile-carrying destroyers being furnished the U.A.R. and Syria by the Soviets had created quite a crucial problem.

Governor Harriman expressed appreciation for this personal briefing, but observed that this was a subject for military experts. The experts had discussed the situation last summer and had reached certain conclusions. Mr. Komer noted that Israeli military personnel were qualitatively better than the Arabs. Governor Harriman said he had not come to Israel to discuss military requirements. These already had been discussed, and he presumed they would continue to be discussed. He came for a discussion of basic political issues, not military details. He again stressed that the President was contemplating a fundamental change of U.S. policy; a willingness to reconsider the question of direct supply of arms to Israel. This would change a policy which had continued for seventeen years. Governor Harriman then closely paraphrased the pertinent paragraph from his Presidential instructions. He read out the U.S. draft Memorandum of Understanding, then handed a copy to Mr. Eshkol. (See Attachment 2.)

The Prime Minister said that the formulation and content of these words confronted him with difficulties. After General Rabin's presentation, did the Governor really think the GOI would be happy about U.S. arms to Jordan? Did the U.S. really think Israel had deterrent superiority? Mr. Komer replied yes. The Prime Minister said, "Then we are lost." Mr. Komer said the Joint Chiefs of Staff had concluded that Israel had deterrent superiority. The Prime Minister suggested that a working group be formed of some of those present to see if something could be worked out on arms.

Governor Harriman insisted that focus be put on certain principles. It was necessary for us to respond to Jordan very promptly. We had cut down their requests considerably. Now we were asking Israel to accept this as the best alternative. It would permit only a limited buildup of Jordanian strength. This would change Israel's situation from that which was agreed on last summer.

So, we were willing to consider this new situation and if Israel met certain conditions, a basic change of U.S. policy would take place. We were not asking the GOI to applaud the Jordan arms deal. We were asking it to carefully consider the realities of the situation. On Jordan waters, we believed that together we could develop world opinion against Arab spite diversion plans.

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The Prime Minister said he was afraid that in this shape the proposition was "almost unacceptable." If the U.S. felt it had to go through with Jordan arms, it would be possible for him to explain it only if the U.S. helped Israel solve its security problems. But the U.S. was sending Israel back to European arms markets; "You leave me with nothing." The Prime Minister said he was afraid to have a "one-sided" secrecy clause in any agreement reached. Too often Israel was accused of leaks which were made by third parties. On the basis of what the Governor had proposed, "I have nothing to tell the Government or the press. We will have to say something to the press."

Prime Minister Eshkol asked if there would be absolute secrecy about any Israeli pledge to desist from preventing action on Jordan waters for a while. It would not be good for Israel, and maybe not for the U.S., if such a commitment became known. Again he asked the U.S. to approach the Arab governments directly on the water question. Governor Harriman said we had some quiet talks with the Lebanese. He reminded the Prime Minister that both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson had made a basic commitment to Israel. The Prime Minister asked if the U.S. would oppose the Arab plans if all peaceful means failed. Governor Harriman said we had given notice that we could not accept military action.

Mr. Komer observed that when the points which the Governor had discussed were reduced to cold, hard paper they might appear different, but such was not the case. Previously, the GOI had raised with him (Mr. Komer) the question of how Israel was going to meet its needs. Now we had come back with the answer, which was that we could agree to meet Israel's residual needs.

The Prime Minister asked if we did not agree Israel needed more arms now. Instead, the U.S. was asking Israel to take the "Via Dolorosa" to the UN. Nobody in Israel will agree." Mrs. Meir said the gulf between us was so big that changes of wording would not help. The Prime Minister again said before Israel decided to take preemptive action, it could discuss peaceful means. What the Governor was proposing was not acceptable. Perhaps we should take just one item. He could not say it would be worse for Jordan to have U.S. rather than Russian tanks, but what was there for Israel? Israel needed more tanks now. Then there was the question of financing. The U.S. should reconsider, and give Israel an answer. Governor Harriman said the better alternative was for us to supply some arms to Jordan. The Prime Minister stated, "Then don't ask us. You are a world power." (At this point the Prime Minister, in an aside, asked Peres what he thought of the U.S. paper. Peres responded, in Hebrew, "No good.")

Mr. Komer

Mr. Komer said the GOI had asked us to hold up on the Jordan arms. We thought our plan was by far the lesser of two evils, that it was even more important for Israel than the U.S. It was a matter of mutual interest.

Continuing, Mr. Komer said the third major item was U.S. policy against preemption. Whatever we were able to work out in these discussions, we would not change our minds on this.

Mrs. Meir said the Israeli side apparently misunderstood what had been said the previous day. Last night they had an entirely different impression of the U.S. position. The Prime Minister interjected that he was very glad that he had not told anybody anything about the previous day's discussions. The Foreign Minister asked what would happen if a peaceful solution to the water question were not found. According to her understanding of the U.S. position, if the Arabs took Israel's water, Israel still could not use any other than peaceful means.

Mr. Levavi noted that the U.S. commitment to Israel was traditional and included help in maintaining an arms balance. Since the deal involving tanks was made, a deficiency had arisen, and now Jordan was going to get them. Thus, "restoration" of the arms balance by the U.S. would simply be traditional policy. Governor Harriman said he was not here to discuss the military balance. The U.S. would be willing to consider it at a future time. He had come to obtain Israel's agreement to the Jordan arms deal. We planned to supply tanks and if this did not go through Jordan might well receive more than double that number of better Soviet tanks.

On Jordan waters, we were as concerned as anyone could be if their own water was not affected. The Arabs tended to talk big and produce small actions. If we worked together we could build up world opinion in support of Israel's rights to its share of the waters. The U.S. was willing to review changes in the arms buildup since last summer, but this was a job for the soldiers. The Prime Minister should study the U.S. draft paper carefully. We must have an answer. Should we abandon Jordan to a Moscow-U.A.R. axis?

The Prime Minister said that as long as the U.S. was not responding to Israel's request for security, the U.S. would have no answer from Israel on the Jordan arms. Governor Harriman again said the U.S. was prepared to change a 17-year old policy. This was very important. The Prime Minister iterated that he would not want to say arms assistance to Jordan by the U.S. was worse than the alternative, but then help Israel, too.

said he had some remarks to make after a first reading of the U.S. paper. The idea of the U.S. furnishing arms to Jordan was shocking to the Israeli public. If Jordan got more tanks, then Israel needed more tanks. Meanwhile, the Soviets would be doing more for Egypt. And now Israel was facing a "new Jordan and a new Lebanon." It would not be wise to make any of the U.S. points conditional on other points. There could be no strings on arms. We had to separate these elements out. We might agree on some parts, but not on all. A major part of the value of arms was the right to use them. It was okay for the Prime Minister to declare Israel's peaceful intentions, but there could be no prohibition on Israel's right to use its arms. The U.S. maintained Israel's present deterrent was okay, but it was not. The military experts should discuss this.

Mr. Komer asked if Israel considered that its highest priority need was for planes or tanks. asked if Jordan were going to get planes. Governor Harriman said not from us, perhaps from the French. (At this point the Prime Minister vigorously shook his head.) Ambassador Barbour asked the Israeli side to think over the elements in our paper; the U.S. was willing to go a long way. remarked that this would be the most secret piece of paper in Israel. It was so terrible that he did not want anyone else to see it. He asked that the U.S. side think over the Israeli paper. He had to be able to tell his people something.

Governor Harriman wondered how we would proceed to work out a mutually acceptable draft. suggested that get together with from the U.S. side in the evening. Governor Harriman asked Mr. Komer and Ambassador Barbour to participate in the sub-group. Mr. Komer requested, as a personal suggestion, that Israel consider the implications of the alternative that the U.S. supply no arms to Jordan.

Governor Harriman stated that in the discussions thus far, the power of the Sixth Fleet had been disregarded. We recognized that Israel needed deterrent strength, but the Sixth Fleet factor was a very important deterrent to aggression in this part of the world. We could, at an appropriate time, have the soldiers discuss further the question of an arms imbalance, but now we needed to concentrate on matters of vital principle.

SEPalmer, Jr.; rvc:3/19/65

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A. Points of agreement:

1. U.S. has over the years espoused a policy of arms balance in the Middle East. This doctrine was strongly reaffirmed during the Johnson-Eshkol meeting in Washington. Prior to Eshkol's visit to Washington, Israel had requested tanks to rectify imbalance. U.S. then agreed that tanks should be made available to Israel.

2. Since Eshkol's visit to Washington, the balance of arms has deteriorated in view of new Egypt-Russian arms deal, development of Unified Command, | This deterioration will become more acute if U.S. goes through with its proposed arms agreement with Jordan.

3. In the light of this situation, Ambassador Harriman has stated that henceforth U.S. undertakes to supply planes, tanks and other vital military/equipment to Israel with a view to maintaining arms balance in the area. Israel welcomes this very important development in U.S. policy. Israel also notes with satisfaction Ambassador Harriman's statement that U.S. considers an Israel effective deterrent capacity to be the major factor in preventing Arab aggression against Israel.

4. U.S. reaffirms its support for integrity and independence of Israel.

5. U.S. reaffirms its support for Israel's water project within the quantities of the Unified Plan, and its opposition to Arab diversions contrary to this Plan.

B. Israel's position and requests:

1. So long as Jordan remains in a state of war with Israel, the Israel Government cannot agree to arms deliveries from external sources to Jordan, as to any other country.

2. If for considerations of global policy, U.S. finds itself obliged to go through with the proposed arms deal to Jordan, Israel requests that nothing be finally concluded with Amman before a conclusion of a detailed agreement on direct U.S. arms supply to Israel of a scope and on economic terms which will enable Israel to maintain effective deterrent strength. For this purpose, an Israel military mission should proceed very shortly to Washington.

3. Israel

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3. Israel asks that the U.S. arms arrangement with Jordan should not go beyond the conditions specified in the information conveyed by Ambassador Barbour some weeks ago.

4. An undertaking should be received from Jordan that no American tanks be maintained on the Western Bank.

5. It should be agreed that whenever the arms deal with Jordan becomes known, simultaneously U.S.-Israel agreement arms supplies also become known.

6. In view of the great importance and wide scope of Ambassador Harriman's talks Israel asks that very shortly a public statement be issued in Washington by the President, reaffirming U.S. support for integrity and independence of Israel, U.S. policy on maintenance of arms balance in the area, U.S. support for Israel's water project and opposition to Arab diversions contrary to Unified Plan.

7. Israel will enter into a basic discussion with U.S. on ways to prevent Arab illegal diversions. In this connection, Israel asks that U.S. continue to use its influence in Arab countries against any implementation of such diversions or preparations in this direction. Israel asks that US. use all means of influence available to it in Amman, in order to receive from Jordan a binding undertaking that Jordan will not participate in any manner in Arab diversion plans, and that the Nukheiba Dam will not serve these plans.

C. Discussions on the Middle East:

During Eshkol's visit to Washington, it was agreed that periodic discussions take place on a high level between U.S. and Israel with regard to the developing situation in the Middle East. The first meeting of this kind is proposed for March in Washington. Israel suggests that the agenda include a discussion on ways for implementing U.S. opposition to Arab belligerency and also of coordinating efforts with other Western powers in this direction; clarification of U.S. commitment to the security, integrity and independence of Israel, particularly in the light of the growing threat of Arab aggression, direct and indirect; formulation of an active American policy for the normalization of Israel's international status; a study of the conclusions to be drawn from the deepening of Soviet-Egyptian ties.

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Enclosure 2

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UNITED STATES DRAFT MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

1. The U.S.G. has described fully to Israel why, in the interests of peace and stability in the Middle East, it is essential to make promptly certain limited and carefully controlled arms sales to Jordan providing Jordan does not accept Soviet arms. In the U.S.G. view such sales will enable King Hussein to withstand Soviet pressures, while still minimizing the threat to Israel. The U.S.G. and Jordan regard this as the only alternative to Jordanian acceptance of Soviet arms, which would be a major destabilizing factor in the area.

2. The GOI in turn recognizes that the above action poses less of a threat to Israeli security than the alternative. The GOI agrees that, if Jordan feels compelled to accept large quantities of Soviet arms, the ultimate result could be U.A.R. domination of Jordan, with Israel then hemmed in by a solid ring of Soviet-equipped hostile Arab forces.

3. At the same time, the GOI must point out that any new arms in Jordanian hands do create an additional threat to Israel. Moreover, whatever the degree of Israeli understanding on security grounds, the GOI is still presented with an acute political difficulty in explaining to its own electorate why U.S. arms sales to an ostensibly hostile Arab state for the overtly anti-Israeli purpose of countering Israel's diversion of its share of the water allocated to it under the Johnston Plan actually seems the lesser of two evils. Moreover, Israel recognizes the U.S. contention that to go too far in explaining these matters would be to defeat the very purpose the U.S.G. seeks to advance.

4. In its turn, the U.S.G. recognizes that Israel's chief security concern is less U.S. arms sales to Jordan; than the growing threat to Israel from the continuing buildup of Soviet arms in hostile Arab hands. The U.S.G. has considered that Israel could maintain adequate deterrent capability by looking to its traditional European sources of arms. In these circumstances U.S.G. policy, which the U.S.G. believes to have been in Israel's interest too, has been that the U.S.G. should avoid becoming a supplier of "offensive" weapons either to Israel or the key Arab states.

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5. The U.S.G. still believes that Israel should seek to meet its arms needs as much as possible from Western European sources. Moreover, the U.S.G. believes that Israel still maintains substantial deterrent superiority over any likely Arab military combination. However, provided there is agreement on all other matters herein discussed and provided the U.S.G. and GOI agree that a disproportionate arms buildup on the Arab side is developing which cannot be otherwise met, the U.S.G. will make selective direct arms sales to Israel on favorable credit terms.

6. The U.S.G. would expect to meet any Israeli needs on a quiet case-by-case basis, with minimum attendant publicity. The U.S.G. is acutely concerned over the impact of such a major change in U.S. policy on U.S. relations with the Arab states, and thus on the U.S. position in the Middle East. Therefore, the U.S.G. itself must have full control over how this change is to be carried out and over any attendant public disclosure. On the other hand, the U.S.G. recognizes that, in view of the GOI's political and security concerns, the GOI must be able to make appropriate private and public expressions to alleviate these concerns. In particular the GOI needs to make certain statements to the Knesset and to the electorate. The U.S. is prepared at an appropriate time to agree that the GOI can say that Israel's security needs can be adequately met and that Israel can face the future in confidence in the strong support of its friends. However, the nature, manner, and timing of any such expression which involve the U.S. must be fully agreed upon beforehand between the U.S.G. and GOI.

8. The U.S.G. recognizes that Israel's concern over any re-equipping or expansion of Jordan's forces, especially armor, depends partly on their location. Therefore, the U.S.G. will seek a firm, private undertaking that Jordanian armor not be deployed to the West Bank of the Jordan River, provided that Israel will under no circumstances divulge its knowledge of any such undertaking of U.S.G. efforts to achieve it.

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9. The U.S.C. recognizes the potential threat to Israel's water resources posed by the Arab counter-diversion scheme, though the U.S.C. regards it as much less likely than the GOI that a major threat will in fact develop. Nonetheless, the U.S.C. is prepared to discuss this matter fully with the GOI and to reiterate at an appropriate time both its policy of opposition to aggression in the Near East (as announced by President Kennedy on May 8, 1963) and its support of the Unified Plan as an appropriate standard by which to judge water usage by riparian states.

10. The GOI recognizes the far-reaching nature of the U.S.C. actions proposed as further demonstrating the firm support which the U.S.C. has given Israel. It is prepared in return to make certain firm undertakings to the U.S.C.

11. While the GOI cannot and should not publicly applaud U.S. arms sales to Jordan, the GOI privately recognizes that they are preferable to the only other likely alternative, and is prepared to help quietly in abating opposition to this and other U.S. efforts to maintain an influential presence in the Arab world. The GOI itself will be prepared quietly to back up these assurances.

12. The GOI pledges full secrecy on all matters covered in this memorandum, and on all subsequent actions carried out under it, until such time as the U.S.C. decides, in consultation with the GOI, on how and when to divulge them.

13. The GOI understands the U.S. cannot accept any military action against the Arab diversion works and the GOI agrees to have recourse to all peaceful means, including taking the problem to the United Nations where the U.S. would be prepared to support the principles of the Johnston Plan.