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POLICY

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23 MAR 1981

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

I-20387/81  
March 23, 1981

ISRAEL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Strategic Dialogue with the Israelis

In a separate memo, I have suggested that you send a memo to Al Haig so as to firm up the ground rules for these talks and to delimit the involvement of the State Department. (A copy of that memo is attached at Tab B.)

Tab A offers you some more background about these talks.

Israeli Deputy MOD Zipori is coming here Wednesday for a couple of days for meetings with DoD people. The idea is that he would meet some of the new people in DoD and express Israeli views about Defense issues. A one to two-hour meeting is scheduled with him to discuss the possible agenda for a follow-up meeting later on, that would restart the "strategic dialogue."

Fred C. Ikle  
USD/Policy-Designate

cc: DepSecDef  
Mr. West  
Mr. Marshall

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~~UPON RECEIPT OF THIS DOCUMENT~~

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A

The Strategic Dialogue with the Israelis  
Background

This dialogue began in the spring of 1976 at the initiative of the Israeli Minister of Defense, who wished to establish a separate MOD/DoD channel for discussion of strategic issues.

The State Department never participated in the talks until last December when ASD(ISA) McGiffert chaired a meeting here in Washington. Indeed, initially we were directed not even to inform the Embassy on our first visit to Israel in 1976 as to the true purpose of our discussions. No members of the Embassy staff, including the Attache's office, ever participated in the talks.

The State Department did not participate in any way, nor were they informed of the agendas, nor did they receive reports on the results of the discussions. Harold Brown occasionally discussed the advisability of including particular agenda items and may have discussed some of the issues that the Israelis commented on with Brzezinski and Vance. The Israelis occasionally raised a topic to be conveyed to the SecDef, using the talks as a channel to communicate directly with him.

During most of the period very few people knew of the true nature of the discussions. Initially only Rumsfeld, Ellsworth, Scowcroft and Habib (representing Kissinger) knew of the talks. Participation in the talks was confined to Andrew Marshall and his Net Assessment office and a few other people who were chosen for their particular military/technical background. The cover for the discussion was that we were exchanging views for purposes of developing a US assessment of the military balance in the region.

The disruption of the talks last summer and the evident value the Israelis placed on them have given them such a cachet that everyone wants to get in on anything that is apparently so important. Expanding the talks may not be as welcome to the Israeli MOD as some assume, given that they initiated them to get a MOD/DoD channel to SecDef.

Haig requested some weeks ago that Andrew Marshall brief him on the previous conduct of the talks. Haig has not yet been able to receive the briefing because of scheduling pressures.

Andrew Marshall feels the talks will be most valuable if they are conducted as they have been in the past. Haig would be briefed on the agendas prior to the meetings and provided with a report on the meetings. Protection against leaks has been excellent in the past, because few people were directly involved or received reports on the discussions.

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