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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

June 12, 1981

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Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: JUL 12 2019

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS

U.S.

Secretary Weinberger
Brig. Gen. Carl R. Smith,
Mil Asst to SecDef

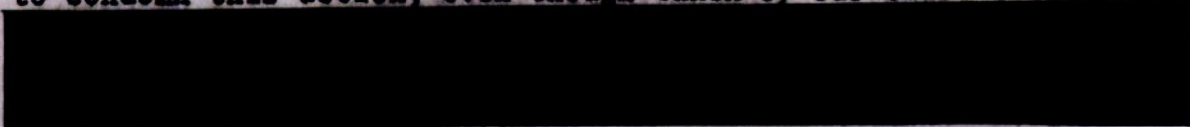
Israeli

Ambassador Evron, Israeli
Ambassador to the U.S.
MGen. Menachem Meron,
Israeli Defense Attache

TIME AND PLACE: 10:10 a.m. to 10:35 a.m., 11 June 1981, in
SecDef's Office

Ambassador Evron began by expressing his appreciation to SecDef for seeing him on such very short notice to deliver a personal letter for SecDef from the Prime Minister. After reading the letter, SecDef commented that the letter was very similar to one which the Prime Minister had written to President Reagan. The Secretary said he understood the Prime Minister's strength of feeling, but we could not condone the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor. This was an apparent breach of the contract under which U.S. manufactured aircraft were sold to Israel, a matter of "taking the law into your own hands."

The Secretary mentioned that it was our understanding that the Iraqis weren't anywhere near ready to begin production in their nuclear reactor, but he understood that the Israeli government had a different view and that this was obviously one of the factors which would need to be considered. We could not support the use of military force in lieu of other more peaceful actions to accomplish the same goal, and therefore we had no choice but to condemn this action, even though taken by our close friends.



The Ambassador said that the success of the strike was the result of three factors: the skill of the pilots, the quality of the U.S.-supplied equipment, and the motivation of the entire team. The success of this attack, said the Ambassador, was a matter of life or death for Israel.

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The Secretary repeated our strength of feeling that the conditions of the sale need to be observed. President Reagan believed that our suspending the shipment of the four F-16s scheduled for delivery on 12 June was the only proper course. The Secretary promised to discuss with the President the Prime Minister's letter, and he repeated his concern about the Israelis taking the law into their own hands.

Evron responded that a unique, extraordinary situation existed; the Israelis have had U.S. equipment for 10 to 15 years and they have always handled it responsibly. Iraq is not a good friend of the U.S.--it is a country whose President has said their objective was to destroy Israel. The Ambassador recalled that the Iranians had tried to destroy this reactor last October but, unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. He observed that there are moments in a country's life when it feels that it must take actions in its own defense and, in this regard, he cited the 1962 Cuban missile crisis as a somewhat similar case in which the U.S. was involved. He pointed out that this was done despite the fact that Cuba had never said that destruction of the United States was its goal. He noted that the Israelis had discussed the Iraqi reactor with the previous Administration, which then attempted to influence the French to cease its assistance of Iraq in this matter. When Israel learned that enriched uranium was to be supplied, it was necessary that they act immediately.

Secretary Weinberger responded that the kind of enriched uranium is questionable; we didn't believe that it was weapons-grade material. Evron said that they hadn't heard this. He continued that Israel didn't expect the United States to condone their action, but they did expect U.S. understanding. He was personally taken aback by the decision to suspend delivery of the F-16s.

Secretary Weinberger responded that if we didn't take this action, it would appear to others as though we had no concern about this apparent violation of the law. Our firm intentions that others abide by the law should be understood by other purchasers of U.S. equipment as well. Evron responded that he wished we would treat other U.S. customers similarly, to which the Secretary responded that we have no evidence of violations by others. Evron believed that there was an obvious difference of interpretation, and he wanted to go beyond the technicalities of the matter. The impact around the world, especially in Israel, will not further the goal both the Israelis and Americans desire. Moderates should be encouraged, and others may feel that this is an indication of things to come. Mr. Weinberger reminded the Ambassador that the Soviets have taken the position that the U.S. had full knowledge and had granted prior approval. Evron responded that of course the Soviets know better than that. The Secretary agreed but opined that others don't, and it is therefore necessary for us to emphasize that we didn't know anything about the raid in advance.

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Evron made the point that the Israelis and others must necessarily interpret the U.S. act as a hope for breaching the friendship between the United States and Israel; there could also be implications for the peace treaty. He observed that other Arab countries are not especially enamored with Iraq. Secretary Weinberger agreed to the latter point but noted that neither are the other Arab countries enamored with the Israeli bombing. Evron hoped that this whole situation would not affect the ongoing relations between our two countries, especially regarding matters on which the DoD deals with Israel, and he asked for our intentions on such matters. The Secretary responded that this is a matter with which the Congress also deals, and we therefore need time to consider fully the matter. There may well have been a violation of the law and the contract, but nevertheless we didn't now have plans to suspend other shipments (beyond the four F-16 deliveries scheduled for 12 June).

Evron said he understood and asked if there was a difference between the positions of Administration and the Congress on this matter. The Secretary responded that we did not yet know the Congressional position. He noted that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would likely hold hearings soon and that there may also be hearings in the House of Representatives.

Evron then asked if this is an open ended suspension. The Secretary responded that the suspension applied to the planes due to be delivered on Friday.

In closing, Evron repeated his statement of disappointment with the decision, and the Secretary informed him that he would pay careful attention to the Prime Minister's letter.

Office of the Secretary of Defense
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MDR: 18 -M- 1193

Carl R. Smith
Carl R. Smith
Brigadier General, USAF
Military Assistant to the
Secretary of Defense

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