

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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September 11, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT'S FILES

FROM: MAJOR GENERAL ALEXANDER M. HAIG, JR. 

SUBJECT: President's Meeting with Secretary of State
Rogers, Dr. Kissinger and M/Gen. Haig

TIME AND DATE: 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, September 6, 1972

PLACE: The Oval Office

PARTICIPANTS: President Nixon
Secretary of State William Rogers
Henry A. Kissinger
M/Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

The meeting was held for the purpose of discussing the situation in Munich which resulted in the death of 11 Israeli athletes together with Arab terrorists.

The President stated that he had had spoken to Ambassador Rabin the previous evening and found him to be completely rational. The President continued that the US must pursue a delicate line which demonstrated justified sympathy for Israel but which did not serve to encourage Israeli retaliation which could only further escalate tensions and dangers in the Middle East. The President noted that he had called Mrs. Meir from San Clemente the day before and assured her that the United States was working diligently on the terrorist problem. It now remains to outline a number of measures, practical and public, with which to deal with the problem.

Secretary Rogers noted that it was tragic that the German Government had handled the public notification of the situation so poorly with initial reports that the athletes were safe followed by a complete reversal of this news. The Department of State had formed a task force that had been working all the previous day and throughout the night on the situation. There was some indication that the Israeli Government might ask

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the United States Government to cancel its further participation in the Olympics. This developed earlier that morning and General Haig, Dr. Kissinger and Secretary Rogers coordinated on a position which precluded our becoming involved in this knotty issue. Nevertheless, it could come up again in the hours ahead. The Secretary noted that one of the measures which we might consider would be to direct the US flags in Washington be placed at half mast and declare a day of mourning.

The President stated that the United States should not agree to drop out of the Olympics and that Israel should remain consistent with the position it announced earlier to see the games through.

Secretary Rogers stated that all had agreed on this stand the day before since it would be a terrible slap at the Germans to precipitously withdraw. It appeared that the Germans were in deep difficulty already for their handling of the situation at the NATO airbase. Secretary Rogers stated that most nations were in deep sympathy with Israel but were they to withdraw from the games that sympathy could be reversed. An additional problem was the fact that even if the United States were to accept Israel's logic it could not control either its athletes or the head of the Olympic Committee.

The President directed that Israel be informed that we wished to continue.

Dr. Kissinger commented that it was important that the United States not permit Israel to "put the heat" on us to withdraw. The President noted that withdrawal would be the New York Times/McGovern approach.

Secretary Rogers again asked about the propriety of lowering our flags and a day of mourning. The President stated that we had not done similar things when deaths occurred in Ireland or during the earthquake in Peru and we must be careful not to demonstrate a double standard. Secretary Rogers suggested that we could call for a period of silence during the funeral of the Israeli athletes. He added that the Israelis apparently do not want high-level delegations in order to avoid politization and perhaps we should send some of our athletes such as the US swimmer who is of Jewish descent. In any event, we should abide carefully by Israel's own wishes.

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Secretary Rogers stated that the Department of State is not favorably inclined towards the suggestion that we convene the Security Council on the terrorist issue. The President stated that this kind of action would butt us up against China and the Soviet Union but if the US were to go to the Security Council condemning countries which harbor guerrillas, this would in effect support Israel while at the same time not encouraging it to take escalatory retaliatory action.

Secretary Rogers stated that a cable had been prepared to the Prime Minister outlining our disgust and sympathy. He noted that he would make a strong statement at the International Hijacking Conference being conducted at the Department of State that day. The President agreed that the message should go and that the Secretary should make the statement. He inquired what kind of a resolution we would seek should we decide to go to the United Nations.

Dr. Kissinger stated that no resolution would be likely to pass. The question is how to posture ourselves. The resolution should talk about rules of conduct of those who sponsor radicals who operate across international borders. It is probable that the Peoples' Republic of China would veto. On the other hand, this would be a statesmanlike US position. It would likely engender extensive debate and would tend to defuse Israeli emotions during the critical hours ahead. Then when the General Assembly meets the debate could continue. All this tends to control Israeli retaliatory action.

The President stated that we should now turn to the public relations aspects of the problem and following that bring Mr. Ziegler to the meeting.

Secretary Rogers again expressed opposition to the United Nations initiative. Dr. Kissinger stated that the government lawyers could develop a formulation which included something on border crossing, something on countries who harbor organizations which operate beyond their borders and in this way the US would go to the Security Council in a statesmanlike posture and solicit the views of other nations. Secretary Rogers stated that it would be impossible to get any kind of action. Dr. Kissinger stated that this was true but it would serve as a deterrant to Israeli action. Secretary Rogers stated that the Israelis would not be impressed by Security Council action and that for the moment it is important that we keep in close contact with them.

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The President noted that we had been doing precisely this. He also noted that the public statements made thus far by Israel were also statesmanlike. Dr. Kissinger stated that all of this is true. Nevertheless if we do nothing it is probable that we will see strong Israeli action. Secretary Rogers urged that the President think about this before proceeding with the UN initiative.

The President stated that in his discussions last night with Ambassador Rabin he underlined the fact that despite the disadvantages of the tragedy it would bring the terrorist activity to the attention of the world. Secretary Rogers stated that another advantage of the tragedy was that it will again underline the need for an overall settlement. He noted that Dayan had made some overtures and that Egypt would probably launch some initiatives in conjunction with the General Assembly meeting this fall. This is the basic problem and only a settlement will solve it. If Dayan was actually speaking for Israel then it is important that we get the process started for another round of negotiations.

The President stated that the situation in Munich will not soften up the Israeli attitudes but will strengthen their hawks. Secretary Rogers agreed but said that this only underlined the need for seeking a solution to the Middle East situation and certainly there will be efforts in the fall to get negotiations started.

The President stated that Secretary Rogers should make a strong statement at the hijacking conference. Secretary Rogers stated that with respect to the UN initiative we should leave it open until he has an opportunity to check the Israeli view.

The President instructed the Secretary to see what kind of a game plan we could come up with for the United Nations. Secretary Rogers stated that his people were tired and he hoped that Dr. Kissinger's people would also work on this. Dr. Kissinger stated that if the decision is made to proceed in the UN it must be done quickly.

The President stated that we might also have some legislation for the Congress to get the Conventions for Hijacking, etc. moved. Also we should give some thought to what the Congress could do on terrorism.

The President told Secretary Rogers to consider the UN initiative seriously, since it might just serve to buy time. It serves as a visible

reaction to the Israeli outcries. Secretary Rogers said that he would discuss it with Rabin although he does not think the Israelis will support it because of their anti-UN feelings. Secretary Rogers continued to the effect that feelings in Israel are very high against the Germans for three reasons: (1) because they afforded poor protection to the Israeli athletes, (2) because of the reporting of the incident, and (3) because of the trigger-happy performance of the German police.

The President commented that it was ironic that the German Government found itself in the position of protecting Israeli athletes. He stated that in summary the following actions should be undertaken:

1. The cable sent to Mrs. Meir.
2. Secretary Rogers would make a strong statement at the Hijacking Conference.
3. We would look into the feasibility of a UN initiative.
4. We would do whatever remained to be done with our own Congress with respect to pending legislation and the possibility of new legislation.
5. Secretary Rogers should ask Ambassador Rabin about the UN initiative, tell him that we have no illusions but that it would serve to spotlight the issue.

Secretary Rogers asked that Dr. Kissinger keep him informed if he should have any contact with the Israelis. The President told General Haig to do this should Ambassador Rabin contact the White House.

Secretary Rogers then noted as an aside that the President should give a brief speech at the IMF Conference since it was a good platform for an expression of the President's monetary policies. The President stated that Treasury Secretary Shultz was opposed on the convertibility issue but that Mr. Burns favored it. Secretary Rogers agreed that this was a problem.

Secretary Rogers recapitulated noting that he would call Ambassador Rabin, that we should continue to consider lowering our flags and that he would give the speech at the Hijacking Conference.

The President stated that he did not think the flag at half mast was a good idea. Dr. Kissinger agreed. Secretary Rogers said that we would

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just do this in public buildings. The President stated maybe just the White House. Dr. Kissinger again stated that he disagreed. Secretary Rogers stated that an alternative would be a moment of silence during the funeral. The President stated that it might be worth considering. Dr. Kissinger stated that it was less troublesome than lowering the flags. The President asked why not do something on a personal basis. He could go to church at the time of the funeral. This looked more spontaneous and more of an individual reaction rather than a government reaction.

Press Secretary Ziegler was then called into the Oval Office and was given the following press guidance. He should discuss the fact of the meeting, the message to the Prime Minister, and the fact that we are considering measures to include consultations with other governments on an urgent basis to see what can be done to prevent terrorist activity. The point should be made that the President, Secretary Rogers and Dr. Kissinger consulted throughout the night and that close consultation was maintained with Israel and Bonn. It should be noted that the President talked to Ambassador Rabin and that Secretary Rogers will see the Ambassador later today. The point should be made that precautionary measures have been ordered by the President to ensure the security of Israeli and other foreign personnel and facilities in the rising tensions.

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