

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Prince Saud al-Faisal
Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
James A. Baker III, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Deputy Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Paul Hare, The Acting Assistant Secretary of State
for Near East and South Asian Affairs
Richard N. Haass, Senior Director, Near East and
South Asian Affairs, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

Saudi Arabia
Prince Saud al-Faisal, Foreign Minister
Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi Ambassador
Dr. Nazar Madani, Director of Western Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

DATE, TIME June 14, 1989, 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President began the meeting by welcoming his visitor, saying as well that he had great respect for the Arab League effort. The President ended his introductory remarks by stating that he looked forward to a full discussion of the situation in Lebanon.
(Ø)

The Foreign Minister, after thanking the President and handing over a written message from King Fahd, explained that he had come to describe the Arab League Committee's work. The Committee was established at the recent Casablanca Summit, and was headed by three leaders who enjoyed the confidence of all Lebanese.
(Ø)

Reading from prepared remarks, the Foreign Minister noted that Lebanon's crisis has persisted for fourteen years, causing great hardship to the people and instability in the region. The recently-established tripartite group intended to act as a "referee," not as a "mediator." It would put forth a suggested middle ground. The effort constituted a last chance for a peaceful solution to the crisis. What would emerge was a carefully prepared plan of action that ought to be acceptable. The Committee's authority was not legal, but was political and moral. (Ø)

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Any solution would require several dimensions, including national reconciliation, the re-establishment of governmental authority over the entire territory of Lebanon, the "liberation of Lebanon from Israeli occupation", and the "formalization" of Syrian-Lebanese relations. To bring this about, the Committee proposed a meeting of the Lebanese Parliament to discuss the political charter; a subsequent meeting of the Parliament to adopt the national reconciliation charter and to elect both a head of Parliament and a President; and a new President that would consult on the choice of Prime Minister and implement the charter. (C)

The Committee had enjoyed access to all parties in Lebanon and to the historical record. The Committee document was a strong one as a result. It drew on points already part of the existing consensus. In addition, it was important to move towards a cease-fire and a lifting of blockades. The initial meeting of the Parliament would be outside Beirut; subsequent meetings would be held in Beirut when it was safe to do so. The Committee was talking to Syria and Iraq in an effort to persuade to terminate their supply of arms and to avoid hindering the political process. Syria had stated its desire for guarantees that others would not continue shipping arms. The Committee would continue working for both a cease-fire and an end of blockades, but it would continue its political efforts even if it failed to end the fighting. (C)

The President asked whether the three leaders were prepared to mediate between Iraq and Syria. (C)

The Foreign Minister answered that they would not act as a mediator. Instead, each party would be asked to take certain steps regardless of the actions of others. By so doing, the Committee hoped to avoid linkage. (C)

Secretary Baker asked whether Syria was requiring assurances regarding a cessation of Iraqi arms supply to Aoun. (C)

Foreign Minister said that the diplomatic effort sought an unconditional cease-fire and end to the blockades. But he reiterated their determination to press ahead with their political process even if these efforts failed. (C)

Governor Sununu asked whether all parties had agreed to the Committee's role as a referee? (C)

The Foreign Minister responded that all those at the recent summit had accepted this approach. He went on to say that they were asking Iraq to curtail any supply of arms to Aoun. The Saudi Government believed that Iraq had sent one shipment of arms to Aoun through a Saudi port, despite the fact the Saudis had been told the shipment was going to Egypt. Although they did not know where the shipment ended up, they were suspicious and had warned Iraq that such behavior would not be tolerated. (C)

The Committee would be asking the five permanent members of the Security Council as well as the UN itself to help bring about implementation of UNSCR 425, which referred to Israeli occupation of Lebanon. The Committee sought to work closely with the US and other like-minded governments. They all faced a difficult challenge. In the past, efforts to make progress in Lebanon had run aground on the question of linkage and sequence. As a result, the Committee sought to separate obligations. They would work for Syrian withdrawal, hoping to bring it about by reassuring Damascus that its security needs in Lebanon could be met by Lebanese forces. (Ø)

Governor Sununu asked how it would be possible to get Lebanon's forces up to this task? (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that the first step was to disband the militias, and that some of these individuals could then be recruited for the Lebanese forces. (Ø)

The President asked whether the Saudis had any evidence that Iran's presence in Lebanon had recently increased. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that while there was a Revolutionary Guard presence in Lebanon, the exact numbers were uncertain. Rumors were as high as 6,000, although the usual number mentioned was about 2,000. The issue was discussed at the Casablanca summit, where it was agreed that it was up to Syria to do something about this, a responsibility that Syria accepted. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister then turned to question of other foreign countries present in Lebanon. He said it was necessary to sign an agreement between Lebanon and Syria that would define the relationship between the two countries so that Syrian military forces could leave and be replaced by Lebanese forces. Similarly, he sought Israeli withdrawal based upon UNSCR 425 and the 1948 truce agreement. UN forces and those in the military forces in Lebanon would replace the Israelis but the Committee sought to avoid any linkage between the Israeli and Syrian withdrawals. (Ø)

Governor Sununu asked whether such delinkage would be possible, and whether everything depended upon internal political reform. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister agreed that there were two tracks: internal political reform and the re-establishment of State authority with the removal of foreigners. He believed a consensus existed in Lebanon that favored power-sharing and non-discrimination. Christians wanted an assurance, however, that Lebanon's identity would not be lost. What was needed was a just constitution that did not remove confessionalism immediately. (Ø)

The President asked whether the Committee had been in touch with Aoun. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that the Committee had avoided direct contact with the various Lebanese parties, although it would discuss a cease-fire and preparations for parliamentary meetings. In general, there were lots of players with the capacity to help or hinder political progress. If the latter became a problem, Saudi Arabia was prepared to reconvene the Arab summit and point fingers. The Committee could not impose a solution but it did have moral weight. This was true for Syria as well as Aoun.

(Ø)

The President asked about whether Aoun would be likely to support a compromise. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister stated that handling Aoun posed a very delicate problem. He needed to be encouraged to accept reform. But he would want to be President, something that would be unacceptable to Syria. (Ø)

Secretary Baker pointed out that Aoun might oppose any political solution that would not guarantee his being President. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister agreed that this was a problem. It was important to avoid drawing up lists of potential presidents until all else was done. (Ø)

Governor Sununu asked whether Aoun expected to be part of the Parliament's deliberations. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said this would only be open to members of Parliament. He went on to say that he was aware how complicated this all was, and that he would give us the necessary documents. At the same time, he emphasized the need to avoid publicity.

(Ø)

The President said that we would endeavor to honor his request for secrecy. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that the Committee counted heavily on U.S. help. It was important to urge all Lebanese parties and Syria accept the cease-fire. It would also be important to provide Syria with the sense that it was a part of a Middle East peace process that included the Golan Heights. Last, the Committee wanted the U.S. to get from Israel a pledge that it would withdraw. (Ø)

Governor Sununu asked whether the Committee expected to have any contacts with Israel. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that Saudi Arabia did not recognize Israel, and that the Saudis were requesting US and UN assistance. In particular, they hoped the U.S. would work to convince Israel to separate the question of its presence in Lebanon from that of Syria's. The issue for Israel ought to be the absence of a threat from the Lebanese side. (Ø)

The President said there might be some disagreement over priorities. The Israeli force in southern Lebanon has had less to do with recent disorder than the Syrians. Moreover, Israel had only a few people in Lebanon; Syria's presence was many times larger. We would support the withdrawal of all foreign forces, but we were worried over the Arab League's emphasis on Israel rather than Syria. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister responded by saying there had been a change in the Arab League's policy. In the past, they had sought to distinguish between the Israeli and Syrian presence. Now, however, they were not asking who was more responsible for Lebanon's problems. It was important that linkage between the presences be avoided. (Ø)

The President asked whether Assad was under any pressure at home because of Lebanon. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that the situation in Lebanon did influence public opinion in Syria. Lebanon was an historic part of Syria and was only created by France to promote Christian interests. Now, however, he believed that Syrian troop withdrawal and a formal Syrian-Lebanon relationship would be acceptable to Syria. But they did not seek to try to impose a settlement on Assad; it would be necessary instead to convince Syria to support a peace process. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister continued to outline other assistance desired from the U.S. From Israel, they wanted a statement that Israel was prepared to withdraw if government institutions and stability could be established in Lebanon. It was also important to encourage the Christians to accept national reconciliation and power sharing. Syria and Iraq needed to be pressed to keep their dispute out of Lebanon. All of this would reinforce regional peace efforts. The Arab League wanted to coordinate all this with the U.S. and to take us into their confidence. (Ø)

The President said that he would ask Secretary Baker to look carefully at all of this. We looked upon the Committee as highly significant and as the "only game in town". We would look closely at what we could do. We were glad that it was the Saudi Foreign Minister who had come to present all this to us. (Ø)

Prince Bandar reiterated that the Committee was not asking Israel to withdraw right away but only to declare its readiness to withdraw if the security situation allowed. (Ø)

Secretary Baker said that we could probably make such a request but that raising the issue of the Golan Heights would be a bigger problem. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that it was important to assuage Syrian suspicions concerning UNSCR 242 and its applicability to the Golan Heights. (Ø)

The President asked if it were possible to turn to the Afghan situation. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia were cooperating, and he looked forward to discussing the issue during the Fahd visit. We had been wrong in predicting a rapid fall of the Najibullah regime. What was Saudi Arabian thinking about the situation?
(Ø)

The Foreign Minister attributed the disappointing performance of the Resistance to its internal divisions and poor coordination. In particular, it had done little to reach out to people and to emphasize its political program. The Saudis favored negotiations between the Soviets and the Resistance. (Ø)

The President said that it was hard to see how there could be any agreement involving Najibullah. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that the Soviets seemed to be changing their view of Najibullah. (Ø)

Secretary Baker agreed, saying the Soviets had hardened their position. (Ø)

Prince Bandar said he was worried about the erosion in U.S. public support for the Resistance. (Ø)

The President said he was right to sense this erosion. There had been lots of support so long as Soviets troops were present. But there was no identifiable figurehead within the opposition that inspired confidence. We wanted to avoid the emergence of a Khomeini-like figure. (Ø)

The Foreign Minister said that Islam in Afghanistan was not the same as it was in Iran. In Iran, Islam was like a church with temporal power. In Afghanistan, which was not Shia, there was no religious hierarchy with political authority. As a result, there would be no Khomeini. (Ø)

Secretary Baker said it was important that the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia consulted and stayed close on Afghanistan. We would be weakened vis-a-vis the Soviets if we appeared irresolute.
(Ø)

The Foreign Minister agreed, saying the Soviets must not get a sense that we are divided. He went on to say that the Soviets should be warned to avoid trying to exploit its relations with Iran and Afghanistan's Shiites for the purpose of affecting the course of events in Afghanistan. (Ø)