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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
TASHIN BASHIR
PRESS SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT AL-SADAT
AND
RON NESSEN
PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

1:03 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: We want to move along because some people want to get to the Press Club for President Sadat's speech and question session over there.

Let me tell you, first of all, that we are pleased to have with us Ambassador Tashin Bashir, who is the spokesman for President Sadat, and who will be available to give you his thoughts about the meeting and answer your questions about the meeting.

President Ford and Egyptian President Sadat met in the Oval Office, beginning at 11:52, for a total of one hour and eight minutes. Secretary Kissinger also attended on the American side, and Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Fahmy on the Egyptian side.

The President expressed his great personal pleasure at receiving President Sadat on this first State visit by an Egyptian head of State to the United States. Both leaders recalled their cordial and productive meeting in Salzburg in June, and expressed their mutual conviction that President Sadat's stay here will deepen and broaden the relationship between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

This first meeting of the visit provided the opportunity for a review of the Middle East situation, with particular emphasis on how to maintain the momentum toward an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

President Ford reiterated the determination of the United States not to tolerate stagnation or stalemate in the peace-making process.

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He reaffirmed the importance of future Egyptian-U.S. cooperation in bringing about peace in the Middle East for the benefit of all the people in the area. Both leaders noted with satisfaction that the recent interim Sinai agreement, which they consider a significant step toward a final, just and durable settlement, is being implemented on schedule.

The two Presidents also discussed ways in which the bilateral relationship between the United States and Egypt may be further strengthened. They noted the progress already made in developing close cooperation in the economic, scientific and cultural fields within the framework of the Joint Cooperation Commission, inaugurated by Foreign Minister Fahmy and Secretary Kissinger in August of 1974.

President Ford stressed that he intends to request of the Congress assistance for Egypt for the coming year to help strengthen the Egyptian economy and improve the well being of the Egyptian people.

The conversations were conducted in the spirit of openness and friendship, which has come to characterize American-Egyptian relations. Both sides look forward to continuing them in the days ahead.

I believe Mr. Bashir would like to give you his views of the talks.

MR. BASHIR: First of all, I am glad to be here, and thank Ron Nessen for it.

President Sadat was very happy to be in this country, and he and President Ford are determined, in our thinking, to continue the peace process. This is the most and overriding need that our area requires. We have to work fast in an effective way to follow the Sinai agreement with progress on all other fronts, particularly of the Syrian front.

We are very hopeful about the talks and, as they develop, more issues will be discussed, and we will be available for any comment on that.

Thank you.

Q What specifically does President Sadat have in mind on the Syrian front? Could you elaborate on that, please?

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MR. BASHIR: The aim of the effort that President Sadat wants to see developed is the overall settlement, but at this moment, the next more urgent step is to have a disengagement program on the Syrian front.

Q Ambassador Bashir, what will be the content of the talks with the President, or did they mention today the system of arms shipment or sales to Egypt by the United States?

MR. BASHIR: Today they discussed basically general principles, and this issue is among the general principles, but they did not go into any details of that.

Q They did discuss general principles of arms aid?

MR. BASHIR: No, they discussed general principles of how to progress in the Middle East, and the question of arms is one of the dimensions of this question.

Q Mr. Ambassador, did the President say -- maybe I should be asking Ron this. I am not sure. Did the President tell President Sadat the amount of the economic assistance request to Congress for Egypt?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is the discussions today on assistance were in more general terms and did not deal with specific amounts.

MR. BASHIR: That is my understanding, too.

Q May I address this to both spokesmen? Did President Ford and President Sadat have any hope that progress could be made, and were they able to exchange views on where they thought the talks could go on the Syrian front?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is in this area, too, the talks were more general in nature because they still do have other occasions to talk. I don't mean to speak for President Sadat, but I think Ambassador Bashir has said President Sadat did indicate his great interest in progress in this area. As for the specifics of it, I have nothing to give you today.

Q Mr. Ambassador, is it correct then to say that President Sadat does not know the size of the economic assistance request to Congress? He was not told today, but was he told prior to coming here today?

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MR. BASHIR: As I said, today they discussed the general principles. They did not go into the minute details of that. They discussed the Middle East and how to effect progress there. It was left at that. Later in the week they may go into more detail on this.

Q Prior to coming here, President Sadat had not been advised of the size of his economic assistance request?

MR. BASHIR: There are a lot of discussions in the joint American-Egyptian committee on different projects that need knowhow and aid, but we did not come to a certain figure or a certain sum.

Q When you say that the Sinai is on track, does that mean everything has moved forward now on the technicians and so forth?

MR. BASHIR: It is moving according to schedule.

MR. NESSEN: The timetable is being followed precisely.

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Q Ambassador, you said that general principles were discussed today, including general principles involving possible arms shipments to Egypt. You talked about principles. Was there an agreement in principle reached that at some time in the future there would be arms sales to Egypt?

MR. BASHIR: The general principle regarding the arms is how the supply of arms help the development of the peace process in the Middle East. They did not talk about shopping lists or certain categories, it is how to link the whole issue of arms to the development of the peace process.

Q My question, if I may again, is whether an agreement in principle was reached at some time in the future the United States would sell arms to Egypt?

MR. NESSEN: No, not today. If you are saying was a commitment to sell arms in the future --

Q Yes, in principle.

MR. NESSEN: No. The commitment that was followed was a commitment to discuss the issue and I wouldn't expect any specific arms agreements would grow out of the visit at all.

MR. BASHIR: We have not asked about that.

Q Was the trouble in Lebanon on the agenda of this meeting?

MR. NESSEN: They did talk about the trouble in Lebanon. There was a brief discussion of it.

Q Ron, you are not ruling out the possibility that the final communique out of these meetings will indicate the United States may look favorably on an arms request at some future date?

MR. NESSEN: They are discussing the arms matter.

Q Ambassador Bashir, you said you discussed how to link the whole issue of arms to peace in the Middle East. Would that include a discussion by President Sadat to urge the United States to limit deliveries to Israel?

MR. BASHIR: They discussed how a structure of peace could be best enhanced by a policy of arms that will make it more effective to move toward peace. They did not go into either a shopping list specifics or any other issue. But it is no secret that we are against the escalation of the type of arms that the Middle East, whether they are nuclear or of an ordinary type that might lead or be used for nuclear. We are against the level of escalation of any arms in the Middle East.

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Q Does that mean that President Sadat asked Ford not to sell Hercules' missiles -- I mean Pershing missiles?

MR. BASHIR: They did not go into such details today but we are, as a general principle, against introducing Pershing missiles in the Middle East.

Q Have they agreed on further talks at Camp David or Jacksonville, Florida?

MR. BASHIR: They have agreed on more talks. The place and time will evolve as we go.

Q Do you object, Mr. Ambassador, to the Lance missile as well as the Pershing? Do you object to the introduction of any new type of weapons in the Middle East?

MR. BASHIR: We are interested in having any arms supplies in the Middle East to be linked to the development of the progress of the peace momentum and the arms will be of a nature of defensive arms and not to create an unruly situation by offensive arms.

Q This indicates, sir, that if arms shipments were sent to Egypt from the United States, this would only be if there were progress on the Syrian front?

MR. BASHIR: There is no such linkage. They talked about general principles and they did not go into that.

Q Did they discuss any indication of a willingness by Syria to negotiate?

MR. BASHIR: They discussed the Syrian-Israeli front and how to move toward that but they have not come yet to a specific demarche that they prefer.

Q Was there any discussion of an independent Palestinian state?

MR. BASHIR: They discussed the Palestinian issue but that will take a lot of discussion at later meetings.

Q When will they get down to a specific shopping list? Will that come in the talks tomorrow?

MR. BASHIR: I don't think necessarily so. What is needed more is to deepen understanding on how to move to peace. Once this is set and understood, then we get into the specifics of how best to do it, including such requirements for defense, if need be. That is not the urgent problem, however. The urgent problem is to agree on a policy of peace-making.

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Q Are you saying there will not be a shopping list any time during the talks or just tomorrow?

MR. BASHIR: I am saying that the shopping list concept is not an urgent concept. It will come only when general principles are agreed upon.

Q Could you say what the division of times was in the meeting? How much was devoted to bilateral relations and how much to the peace-making process?

MR. BASHIR: I think they mixed all the issues.

Q About half and half, because all our questions are on one part?

MR. BASHIR: You could say that.

Q That the urgent problem is agreeing on a policy to work toward peace?

MR. BASHIR: Yes.

Q What are the two sides? What are the dimensions of the problem? What does Egypt want to be the policy?

MR. BASHIR: The specific policy of how to move to peace is understood. It is within the frame of reference of the U.N. Resolution 338. But how to move from the recent accord into the Lebanon and Syrian front and how to prepare for the overall settlement.

Q There is disagreement on that now?

MR. BASHIR: Yes, they are investigating the possibilities of how best to move effectively on these issues.

MR. NESSEN: Your question, Dick, suggests there are two sides that need to be resolved somehow. I don't think that is necessarily true.

Q Is Egypt speaking for Syria? Ambassador Fahmi announced a possible meeting between President Ford and the President of Syria.

MR. BASHIR: Egypt speaks for Egypt, but while it speaks for Egypt, it speaks also for a lot of Arab opinion.

Q What is the Egypt attitude toward a renewed Geneva Conference? Does it feel a Syrian disengagement must come first?

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MR. BASHIR: We feel that Geneva has to be prepared for, that the Palestinians have to participate in that, the PLO. But the most specific immediate issue at hand would be some disengagement on the Syrian front.

Q Was there any discussion at all on Egypt's role in the UN Resolution denouncing Zionism as racist?

MR. NESSEN: They did not talk about that.

Q There was no mention at all?

MR. BASHIR: No.

Q There has been speculation Egypt may hold off on asking specifically for arms or getting any arms until after the American election in November, 1976. Is that true?

MR. BASHIR: I wouldn't put that as a condition. What is needed is even to involve American elections on how America can best help the peace process of the Middle East. We would like American public participation in how to bring peace in our area. I don't think the election is an impediment. The election is a chance for the American people to express their opinion on how to help stabilize and move the peace process in the Middle East.

Q What is your attitude on Dr. Kissinger's proposal at the UN for an informal conference of the participants who are already in Geneva?

MR. BASHIR: This has not been discussed today but we will discuss what he means by it as discussions develop.

Q You have made no decision on that at this point?

MR. BASHIR: No, we have to investigate the matter yet.

Q You say the elections will provide an opportunity for the American public to express an opinion on this and so on. Does this mean you think one side or the other, Democrats or Republicans, would be more prone towards a policy acceptable to Egypt?

MR. BASHIR: No, I am saying in the new relationship between Egypt and America there must be participation of the American people, not just the two Governments, or the two Parliaments, the Congress, but an overall American participation, for we need an American full commitment to the purposes of peace in the Middle East to help us develop enough determination to be able to overcome the difficult problems and reach peace.

MR. NESSEN: And the United States believes along the same line that the improvements of relations with the Arab world will contribute to further progress toward peace in the Middle East.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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(AT 1:20 P.M. EDT)