



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Minutes of Meeting with Israeli Defense Minister
Moshe Arens on February 11, 1991, 11:37 a.m. -
12:05 p.m., Oval Office

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
James Baker, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President
and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Richard N. Haass, Special Assistant to the
President and Senior Director for Near East and
South Asian Affairs

Moshe Arens, Israeli Defense Minister
Zalman Shoval, Ambassador of Israel
David Ivri, Directory General of Ministry
of Defense
Ehud Barak, Deputy Chief of Staff

The President: I had a nice conversation with the Prime
Minister. I also understand you'll be meeting with Dick Cheney
later. (U)

Minister Arens: Thank you for setting aside time; I bring
greetings from the Prime Minister. He sends his admiration, as
do all the people of Israel. We're not part of the coalition,
and we understand that, but there's a feeling in Israel that we
are at war. Some 31 SCUDS have been launched at Israel; some
killed, hundreds injured, thousands of homes destroyed. SCUDs
have a large blast effect, resulting in scenes not seen in the
West since World War II. People in Israel feel the threat is not
gone. (S)

The President: Do you feel the threat is diminished? (S)

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Minister Arens: The last hit set people on edge, in part because it followed 6 days of no attacks. [REDACTED]

(S)

b1

General Scowcroft: [REDACTED]

b1

Minister Arens: [REDACTED]

b1

Secretary Cheney: That is fundamentally at odds with our experience [REDACTED]

(S)

b1

Minister Arens: We're working on it with the contractor. In any event, Israelis are on edge living with fear. We have other problems too; the PLO acting from Lebanon with Katushas; infiltrators from Jordan. King Hussein passed out arms to the "Popular Army". The result is a sense we're at war. We are very appreciative of what the U.S. has done versus the SCUDS, for Patriot batteries. Today, General Armstrong and others are in Israel providing information about the threat; we're in a much better position than before, although we still think cooperation can be improved upon. (S)

The President: What kind of thing are you talking about? (U)

Minister Arens: We have a contribution to make versus missiles; we need full-time contact with CENTCOM. I'll raise this with Secretary Cheney. This would give us a chance to contribute. Our Prime Minister is in a very difficult position. (S)

The President: What can you do better than what we're doing? (U)

Minister Arens: I don't want to be presumptuous. We might do it differently; we would add other dimensions: [REDACTED] We feel this could be an important addition to finding and destroying them. It would also give the Prime Minister a chance to contribute. (S)

b1

The President: But you'd also contribute to Saddam's war aims.

(U)

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Minister Arens: We understand the risks for the coalition, [REDACTED] But it is important to understand it is a very short time span from when there will be no alternative. If chemical weapons are used, we may have to retaliate. We'll want to consult with you; we hope you will not prevent us from doing so. And for the present, we hope to increase our cooperation, to contribute to what you're doing, to increase our ability to act effectively if it comes to that. Everyone underestimated the problem in eradicating the SCUDS. (S) b1

The President: I'd like to see a chart on SCUD firings. (C)

Secretary Cheney: I have one. (U)

Minister Arens: It is a dramatic change, but every one that hits does big damage. Plus the chemical threat still exists. (C)

The President: We're also concerned about his chemical threat. (S)

Minister Arens: It is a much more serious a threat to civil populations. You can imagine where our Prime Minister will be if we are hit with chemicals. (C)

The President: But how could you do it? Tell us how to do it and we'll do it. I need to know why you believe you can do something we can't. I have a lot of considerations to balance. You mentioned [REDACTED] We've tried to help, and we have. (S) b1

Minister Arens: First, if we can increase the level of cooperation, [REDACTED] we could make more contributions through suggestions to your analysts. I understand you've been hesitant to do this. Second, there are the dimensions of [REDACTED] (S) b1 b1

The President: [REDACTED] (S) b1

Minister Arens: [REDACTED] b1

The President: It will be important to talk further with the Secretary of Defense. Please understand that what Secretary Cheney has described as the U.S. position has my support. I am

concerned by innocent loss of life, but we have major problems over threats to our people. And I hope you understand the effect all this could have on our troops over there. We can talk more on this, but of these options, none is exciting to me. I am trying to get rid of one of your greatest enemies, Saddam Hussein. This is the big picture, the biggest picture. This should appeal to Israel. We need to keep that in mind. (S)

Minister Arens: We understand you're doing a job we'd otherwise have to do under very difficult circumstances. What you're doing is of existential importance to Israel. (S)

The President: I also have American lives at stake. I want you to know how strongly I view that. (S)

Minister Arens: I want you to know that what Israel is doing is in the the direction of participating given the civilian damage. (S)

The President: I can understand the anguish, but all I ask is we keep in mind the big picture, of how Israel's security would be better; also, you need to prove there is a dimension you can bring to it that we can't. (S)

Minister Arens: [REDACTED] b1

The President: There is recognition here that the restraint is helping. Maybe we need to get the message out in Israel about the extent of what we're doing. (S)

Minister Arens: I don't think that's a problem; Israelis know what you are doing. It gets to be personal; I left Israel and I worry about my wife. (S)

The President: There's no military value. Now he's trying to claim we are causing civilian injury. (S)

Minister Arens: I think it important you understand our position. Maybe you can help us resist these forces at home. (S)

The President: I'm glad you'll be seeing Secretary Cheney and General Powell. I'm not brushing off your concerns; please convey this. But I have to keep in mind the big picture. This brings me to the fragility of this diverse coalition. I have responsibility to see we win, and when we do, we will do an enormous favor for Israel and the region. (S)

-- End of Conversation --