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Department of State
Washington, DC

182. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel/1/

Washington, March 8, 1965, 8:57 p.m.

/1/Source: National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1964-66, DEF 12-5 ISR. Secret; Immediate; Exdis. Text received from the White House, cleared by McGeorge Bundy, and approved by Jernegan. The substance of the telegram was apparently decided at a meeting of the President, McNamara, Rusk, Ball, and McGeorge Bundy between 6:01 and 7 p.m. (Johnson Library, President's Daily Diary) No record of the meeting has been found. Briefing memoranda and draft cables prepared for the meeting are *ibid.*, National Security File, Country File, Harriman Israeli Mission (II), and in Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 70 A 1266, Israel 470.

896. For Komer.

1. Since Israelis have delayed several days in making counter proposal, you should now approach Eshkol as soon as possible and seek his prompt agreement on carefully defined and limited agreement foreshadowed in Deptel 865./2/

/2/Document 175.

2. Terms and conditions of proposal are as follows:

(1) The US recognizes Israeli tank needs have increased because of prospective Jordan sale and possibility of non-delivery of 90 remaining German tanks. Accordingly, the US is now prepared to ensure sale on favorable credit terms of tanks to meet these changes as follows:

(a) 100 tanks for later delivery to match new Jordan sales, and

(b) 90 tanks for delivery in calendar year '66 if German agreement is not completed.

We can make these deliveries in form of **M-48A1 or M-48A3 tanks**, but you should point out that what we offer Israel we may have to offer Jordan.

(2) The USG is prepared to ensure opportunity for Israel to buy "a few" planes for later delivery, if not from Western sources, then from the United States. The USG does not believe it is in the interest of either government to decide now on exact model of airplane. FYI. "A few" means less than 20, which is the upper limit of possible sales under proposed Jordan agreement, and you should make this number privately known to Eshkol. End FYI.

(3) We wish to have a private agreement with Prime Minister Eshkol that Israel will not attack Jordan arms sale and that friends of Israel in the US will be given clear private guidance on this point. We ask this private agreement because we understand from Harriman/Komer mission that Government of Israel does plainly prefer US to USSR as Jordanian arms supplier. You should re-emphasize our understanding of this point and make it clear to Eshkol that if he takes a different view, now and not later is the time to say so.

(4) US undertakings on tanks and aircraft for Israel, as stated above, must be kept wholly secret for as long as possible in interest of both governments, and there must be agreement to consult fully on means of handling public statements when they become necessary.

3. You and Ambassador are authorized to develop argumentation for this straightforward agreement in the light of your own understanding of thinking of GOI. The following arguments seem important to us:

(1) Unless Israelis will tell us that they prefer Soviet arms to Jordan, we must move promptly with Hussein. But we greatly prefer not to make a deal with Hussein unless we have an understanding with Eshkol, and therefore such understanding is increasingly urgent unless Israelis wish to take responsibility for driving Hussein to the Soviets.

(2) The offer to find necessary tanks up to a total of 190 should more than meet immediate Israeli concerns deriving from Jordan sale and possible German shortfall.

(3) Similarly, offer to join in finding "a few" aircraft represents precisely what Eshkol asked for in his aside to you. First military analysis suggests that B-66 is not at all what Israelis really want, in either political or military terms. It would outrage Cairo but not offer best capabilities. There are a number of other planes, both US and European, which deserve careful study before a decision is made. In this situation it is much better not to decide on specific aircraft or means of ensuring sale. We have taken full note both of Eshkol's aside to you and of his statement that Israelis can find the funds they need. We believe him on both counts. He in turn should believe us when we say that we will help. This offer in fact goes beyond any commitment we will now make to Jordan.

(4) You should make it absolutely clear that broader agreement initially proposed by Harriman now seems to us wholly impracticable. Our offer to supply arms in the future was carefully hedged and made contingent upon Israeli acceptance of undertakings on Jordan waters and on nuclear development which are flatly unacceptable to the GOI. We recognize and accept that it is impossible for Eshkol to abandon final sovereign right of decision. But what is true for Prime Minister is just as true for the President. We therefore conclude that it is much better for both governments to reach a clear agreement now on the issues which need decision and to proceed as friends in the future, treating wider issues on their merits. We both will be free to press our view on these wide issues, always within the framework of recognition by both governments of their deep common interest in preserving the peace both by limiting the arms race and by avoiding a dangerous imbalance of power. FYI. If necessary to reach agreement, we could consider a reaffirmation of US policy in this sense, just as we are ready to reaffirm our policy on Jordan waters as stated in Shriver letter and our readiness to press Hussein for agreement to keep tanks east of the river. End FYI.

4. You should make it very clear to Eshkol that if this generous solution to the immediate problem is not acceptable, your mission will be at an end and it may become necessary for

USG to make its own decision on Jordan even without Israeli support. You should make it clear as your own personal judgment that, without agreement, Washington would have to reach and publicize its own judgment that Israelis themselves prefer US supply to Jordan, as against Moscow. The US and Israel have now spent a month exploring alternatives and we are not prepared to allow the Government of Israel to bargain indefinitely in search of advantage from a US decision which in and of itself already serves true Israeli interest.

5. Finally, you should make it very clear indeed that we are not ready to accept a shift in the arena of discussion either by a special Israeli emissary to Washington or by an attempted end-run through friends of Israel in the United States. Such tactics are certain to react adversely to the interests of Israel. We have now made this point clear on about five occasions to friends of Israel in Washington and we are not pleased by continuing efforts to use these side channels.

Rusk