

**Minutes of a Policy Review Committee Meeting About the Middle East,
Anticipating Shimon Peres as Israeli Prime Minister
(19 April 1977)**

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume VIII, Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1977–August 1978, Document 28.



US President Jimmy Carter and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 19, 1977. Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/foreword>

When the Carter Administration entered office in 1977, an early foreign policy priority was to kick-start Middle East negotiations. Step-by step diplomacy had characterized American mediation during the Nixon and Ford administrations. Carter's team preferred a comprehensive Middle East peace process. A comprehensive solution was proposed in the 1975 Brookings's Report, [Toward Peace in the Middle East](#). A major author of that report was Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. At this Policy Review Committee meeting, Carter's staff proposed a negotiating outcome that would pass through a conference. It included withdrawal of Israel's forces to almost the 1967 borders, bringing the PLO into talks as Palestinian representatives, all the while seeking to uphold Israel's security requirements. Israeli officials did not like a conference approach because it meant negotiating with all the Arabs together and possibly imposed outcomes. And the Israelis did not trust Brzezinski. The Carter administration was sure that the Israeli Labor Party candidate, Shimon Peres would form the next government. Roy Atherton, a high ranking State Department official, remarked, "Peres will lose fewer seats than [his predecessor, Yitzhak] Rabin would have." No Carter administration official considered the possibility that Israel's opposition leader, Menachem Begin would form the next government, which he did. In addition, Carter's staff wanted to apply pressure on Israel. Under Secretary of State Philip Habib's question, "How far can Israel be pushed" would be revisited countless times over the course of the Carter administration.

3 July 2018, Ken Stein / Jacob Zack

Washington, 3:00–4:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS:

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance
 Under Secretary of State Philip Habib
 Assistant Secretary of State Alfred Atherton
 Secretary of Defense Harold Brown
 Deputy Secretary of Defense Charles Duncan
 Deputy Assistant of Defense Les Janka
 Admiral Stansfield Turner
 CIA Officer David Blee
 General George Brown
 General William Smith
 National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski
 Assistant to National Security William Quandt

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Geneva. It was agreed that the reconvening of the Geneva Conference this year remains a high-priority goal. At a minimum, this is needed to prevent a political deterioration on the Arab side. We should plan to go to Geneva with as much prior agreement on general principles as possible. This should be the focus of our diplomatic effort between June and September. It is unclear whether we can reach agreement on principles primarily by talking to the parties, or whether we should go public at some point with our own views.
2. Border and Palestinian Issues. It was generally agreed that the most difficult substantive issues would be borders and the Palestinians. CIA, working with INR, will prepare a study on how to make politically acceptable borders—e.g., close to the 1967 lines—as militarily secure as possible. The NSC staff will prepare a paper on the utility of the idea of a referendum to help settle the Palestinian question. It was agreed that during King Hussein's visit we should not specifically endorse a Jordanian formula for dealing with the Palestinian issue. Instead, we should keep our options open, including the possibility after June of direct contacts with the PLO. We still need to consider what we would say in such talks and what price we could extract in return.
3. Soviet Role. The Soviet role was discussed at length. We should ask the Soviets for three things: to restore diplomatic relations with Israel; to moderate the rejectionist stance of Iraq and Libya; and to get the PLO to endorse UN Resolution 242, perhaps with a reservation on the Palestinian question. We would not, however, want the PLO to conclude that we saw the Soviets as our channel to them.
4. Effect of Rabin Resignation. The Rabin resignation was not seen as significantly delaying the negotiations, but it was felt that the new Israeli Prime Minister should be invited to Washington as soon as possible after the formation of his government. This would presumably be mid or late June. Secretary Vance would plan to visit the area shortly

thereafter.

5. Arms Sales. On arms sales, it was felt that we should not make any new major commitments for the moment and that the exaggerated Egyptian request for arms for its “Africa Corps” should be treated with great restraint.

PRC MEETING ON THE MIDDLE EAST

Vance: The first question is whether or not a Geneva Conference can be held this year. My own view is that we should push hard for this, if it is at all possible. It will help to keep the pressure on all of the parties. We’ve told everyone that we want such a conference and the only way now to get progress is to push the parties toward that conference. If we take that position, there is still the question of what kind of conference. Should the conference ratify an agreement or should the conference be the place to negotiate an agreement? Let’s start with that question.

Brown: I don’t believe that if a conference is held this year it can be used to ratify an agreement. I agree with the idea that something has to be done this year or we will be headed again toward a confrontation. The Arabs, especially Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, cannot manage all of their internal problems, especially Sadat, if there is no Geneva. But we can’t expect much agreement on substance before Geneva, if it is to be held this year. We also don’t want a conference that will break up.

Vance: I agree. We’re thinking of a conference sometime this year, but not necessarily in the early fall.

Brown: But even if it is later in the year, it cannot simply ratify an agreement.

Vance: I agree. It would be disastrous to have the conference meet and then break up. I agree with you on that.

Brown: There are several kinds of questions that might be discussed at Geneva. If the first question were to be PLO representation, it might be played along for some time and would lead to others. We could get everyone talking at least. Alternatively, we might have to start with a plenary session, and then break up into working groups.

Vance: That’s what the UN Secretary General favors.

Brown: But that way might not work.

Vance: On the other side, it might be better to delay until we can get a better sense of the whole shape of a final deal, and then the PLO issue might disappear.

Brown: What kind of Palestinian entity do you have in mind? It’s not just a question of territory, but also a question of whether there would be a separate state or a federation. This may not be the hardest issue.

Vance: I don’t think it is. I think the hardest issue is borders.

Brown: Golan will be more difficult than Sinai.

Vance: Yes, Sinai is easiest.

Habib: And Golan is easier than the West Bank–Palestinian State. That will be the toughest.

Vance: I disagree.

Habib: That will be the hardest for Israel.

Vance: Roy, what do you think?

Atherton: For Israel, the hardest questions involve the borders. Even in Sinai, it will be difficult for Israel to withdraw completely. Golan is almost impossible. On the West Bank, regardless of its status, Israel would like to keep as much as one-third of the territory. It would be easier if there were no Palestinian State, but not much easier.

[Dr. Brzezinski enters.]

Vance: [To Brzezinski.] Let me bring you up to date. We talked about the possibility of Geneva this year and if so what type of Geneva. This led to a discussion of issues. I said the hardest question was borders, and that the Palestinian issue would be easier.

Habib: Having just spent a week in North Africa, I have been talking a lot about the Palestinian issue. Sadat and the others all say that it is the primary question.

Vance: Saudi Arabia also says that, but that's because all of the Arabs start from the assumption that the 1967 borders will be restored, and then they go on to talk about the Palestinian issue.

Brzezinski: The border question does seem to be the gut issue, especially for Israel. On the Geneva Conference, if we do not go this year it will be a setback. We have to at least get it started. But we probably will not have much substantive agreement first. We should aim for agreement on basic principles, fleshing out the President's statements before the Conference begins. That should be our agenda for the June to September period. This could be done by Secretary Vance's next trip to the area, and by Peres coming here.

Brown: What will the effect of the change in Israel be?

Vance: Not much. We may have lost a little time. If Peres is the next Prime Minister, how long would it take him to form a government? It may slip a little bit, but much depends on how close the election will be. That could affect his ability to negotiate. The election is on May 17th.

[Dr. Brzezinski leaves.]

Atherton: Peres may have an easier time putting a government together, but he cannot do it until

June. Once it is done, however, he may be in better shape to negotiate.

Vance: Will the NRP be in the coalition?

Atherton: Probably yes.

Vance: Does that make things more difficult?

Atherton: Yes, especially on the West Bank and on the Palestinians. Ideally, Peres would form a coalition with Yadin, without the NRP. But I think we have to assume that both Yadin and the NRP will be part of the coalition.

Vance: There seem to be some signs that Yadin is slipping.

Blee: We have some evidence of that.

Vance: That's too bad if it's true. That would leave Peres more dependent on the NRP.

Blee: We can't really judge the situation now.

Atherton: It seems as if Peres will lose fewer seats than Rabin would have.

Blee: Little has really changed because of Rabin's resignation. [Dr. Brzezinski enters.]

Brown: But we still need to get Peres on board.

Vance: He's already involved.

Habib: But he opposes an overall settlement, and seems to prefer a step-by-step approach.

Vance: We'll have to consult with him, but we don't want the negotiations to slip.

Brzezinski: When should he come here?

Vance: As soon as possible. I would then go to the Middle East after his trip to Washington. This might be about mid-June.

Atherton: That would be good if it were possible.

Vance: Let's talk about the set of principles that could serve as a framework for negotiations. How realistic is this?

Atherton: The Rogers plan tried to establish such a framework, but it failed. Both Israel and the Arabs were opposed.

Vance: But without a framework, the whole process becomes impossible. There are just too many loose parts. We need some kind of framework to fit the pieces into. It has to be very basic.

What are the views on this?

Brzezinski: I'm very much in favor of that approach. The parties will not reach agreement by themselves. We're the only ones who can do it. The question is how. What can we do beyond what the President has already said? He has probably already said enough about our position. Perhaps you [Secretary Vance] could give a speech, but that's not such a good idea if you're going to be in the role of broker.

Habib: It's too soon for that. Maybe after the Israeli elections.

Brzezinski: It will be useful to sit down with the Arabs and say, "Here are the basic ideas. Let's begin to flesh them out and try to get some detail." Their position will not go far enough, and we will have to press them. And we will do the same thing with Israel. We have to keep telling them that they haven't gone far enough. We should try to get them to commit themselves to new ideas, without being too precise in our own views. It's best if we can get them to do the job. We should say, for example, to Peres: "What do you think? What are your proposals?"

Vance: We should be very specific.

Brown: I assume that there will be no overlap in the positions of the parties, that there will still be a gap when this is done.

Brzezinski: That's right, especially on territory.

Brown: In the end, we will have to say what we think.

Brzezinski: But when we get their positions, we can start to push. For example, if they say in Israel that they have no intention to annex territory for its own sake, and that they are only interested in security, then we can begin to press on this latter point.

Brown: We need to consider what leverage we have in the form of guarantees, and maybe eventually even stationing troops.

Brzezinski: That's right. We need to do that between now and late May.

Brown: We need to be sure of what we want and whether we can sell it to the parties.

Brzezinski: We also need to build U.S. public opinion support for what we do. We will have to have a continuing series of meetings with American public leaders.

Vance: I talked to Henry Kissinger about this recently and he is convinced that we will have to get the Jewish leaders in this country on board.

Brown: The question of U.S. guarantees and troops will be a difficult one.

Vance: I have some questions about American troops. We're not there yet, and I'm not sure it's in our interests. It's not the same as a guarantee.

Brown: In some ways I prefer troops to guarantees, and in other ways I prefer guarantees to troops. You can become a hostage to any guarantee that you give.

Brown: We haven't gone beyond a vague commitment to Israel's security. We've shied away from defining what our commitment is. If we now want to move toward a sharper definition, we need to get people ready. What do we have in mind? We don't want to be hostage to their action. They are a sovereign nation, and they will have to act in their own national interest.

Vance: They're very clear on that.

Brown: And we have to know what we are guaranteeing.

Vance: Yes.

Brown: We're far from talking about stationing troops. There are other ways of providing a guarantee.

Habib: We might even think of non-American troops.

Brzezinski: The UN is not a very happy tradition. There's the 1967 precedent.

Vance: We might consider French or British forces. Let them get involved in some of this.

Habib: We don't need to think of the 1967 arrangements. It could be set up so that neither party can ask the forces to leave.

Vance: Let's talk about borders. We need to talk about where the borders will be, and what defense arrangements can be established. This gets into DMZs, troop stationing, early warning stations, and a whole set of related issues. We need to look at this in detail.

Brzezinski: On one level we need to do our own homework in detail. But we also need to think about a political strategy for engaging the parties seriously.

Habib: Israel has more of a reason to stall on negotiations.

Brzezinski: Peres may want to delay.

Vance: What do we have already on the question of borders? What can we draw on?

Atherton: We have some studies on what would be militarily desirable in areas like Golan, but we have dealt with this primarily as a military problem. We have lots of that kind of work, including studies of the West Bank and Sinai.

Vance: Could we get a group of Defense, State, and NSC together? They should look at borders and related issues. We need to know what the options are in this area.

Brown: Lots has already been done. But any work might become public knowledge.

Vance: We can't let that happen.

Turner: Hal Saunders has done some work with people from CIA. They have looked at various security arrangements. There is a small group working now.

Brown: Can that be broadened to define the territorial aspects?

Turner: That's been done.

Habib: This sounds closer to the Israeli view of defining borders as a way of achieving security. But it disregards the political issue. This is not just a military problem. We have to first think of politically viable borders, and then look at what arrangements can make the borders secure. There is more in that approach in the long run.

Vance: I agree.

Brzezinski: So do I. You might have defensible borders, but they will not be politically viable, and you can have politically viable ones which by themselves won't be defensible. That's why we have to talk about borders and security arrangements separately.

Vance: Right.

Habib: The Israelis talk about the need to have borders that keep Arab weapons out of range of key targets. But everything is within range of some kind of weapon.

Atherton: We have to think of the 1967 lines in the main, but with some adjustments.

Brzezinski: The President has already committed us to that.

Habib: Sinai and Golan were internationally recognized borders, but not the West Bank.

Vance: Someone needs to look at the Jerusalem question again. It may be the hardest of all.

Brzezinski: And it won't be solved by drawing borders.

Atherton: We have lots of studies.

Brzezinski: It should probably be the last issue.

Vance: That's the conventional wisdom, but is it right?

Atherton: Probably so.

Brzezinski: We should think of two issues now: One, we should develop some idea of what

security arrangements would look like along the 1967 lines. Two, we need to consider what political tactics Secretary Vance and the President can use between May and October to get us to a Geneva Conference.

Vance: On another issue, what are the options on the Palestinian question? What are the pros and cons of various approaches? I'm hearing more and more about the idea of a referendum. We should look at the pluses and minuses of that approach.

Habib: Self-determination is an attractive principle, but it doesn't deal with the politics of the question. It doesn't address the type of Palestinian entity.

Vance: Wouldn't self-determination help to settle the question of the Palestinian entity?

Habib: It doesn't settle the nature of the entity.

Vance: Won't the Arabs agree to that?

Habib: They could.

Vance: If it could solve the question, it's hard to argue against it. It might be harder to set up the practical arrangements.

Blee: A referendum is very hard to imagine.

Vance: We should look at it. It will be floated by King Hussein on Monday. I want to know more before Monday about our thinking on this. King Hussein may favor it. What answers do we have?

Atherton: There's been little serious analysis.

Quandt: We could do a study of that. I've done some work on that in the past.

Brown: When we look at borders, we have to avoid thinking of the 1967 or 1973 type of war exclusively. We also have to think about how the borders and security arrangements would work against dissident guerilla groups. If a Palestinian entity is created on the West Bank, and even if the Arab states are no longer preparing for war against Israel, there may be some groups who will want to stage raids from that entity. We should look at that issue.

Brown: That's a hard question since technology has changed so much in recent years.

Vance: We're talking about very sensitive issues. Let's not have any notes taken or circulated on this.

Brzezinski: This is very explosive.

Habib: If there is a Palestinian entity, we have to try to assure that it will be moderate. That's

part of the overall structure. We need to try to freeze out the fringe groups.

Vance: That's what attracts me to a referendum. How do we know it wouldn't work?

Habib: Look at the possibilities. How are you going to include other Palestinians outside the West Bank and Gaza? They're all over. There are one million in the East Bank, and over a million in the West Bank and Gaza. Only a minority of Palestinians live in the West Bank itself. The alternative is to accept any organized structure that the other Arabs have blessed, assuming that it will cut out the radicals.

Vance: I want to look at the alternatives.

Habib: We should look at the question of the Palestinians, both in some kind of association with Jordan and as an independent state.

Blee: If there is a referendum in the next year, you would have the PLO.

Habib: What would a referendum be for? To set up a constituent assembly?

Vance: Yes, maybe.

Habib: Then you'll have all sorts of factions.

Vance: This would drive things toward the PLO.

Habib: The Arabs now seem to see the PLO plus Jordan. This is Sadat's answer. King Hussein even seems to agree.

Vance: But this is not the concept of the PLO or of Assad.

Habib: No, but its closer to the Israeli answer.

Atherton: There are serious problems with the geography of any Palestinian entity.

Quandt: There are a number of problems with the idea of a referendum. It sounds attractive in principle as a way of adding legitimacy to whatever is done on the Palestinian question. But, in fact, it would probably not solve any questions which had not already been dealt with in previous negotiations. For example, what would happen if a referendum were to produce results which were unacceptable to the Israelis? They would simply reject them. Nor would a referendum held under Israeli, Jordanian, or possibly UN auspices have legitimacy among Palestinians if it did not produce results which were acceptable to the mainstream nationalist opinion. So, I would think more of the Algerian model where a referendum was used to ratify and legitimize an agreement that had already been reached in negotiations. In that sense, a referendum could play a very useful role, but I do not think we should look to a referendum to solve the questions of who represents the Palestinians, who their leaders will be, or whether there should be a fully independent state or some link to Jordan. I would be glad to do a paper on this for you.

Vance: That's a good idea. On the nature of peace, we also need to have a detailed paper.

Brzezinski: It should amplify the points that have already been made in our talks with the Arabs.

Atherton: We could lay out a series of steps that the Arabs might take over time. We need to introduce the time frame into this.

Habib: On the Palestinian question, we have to be careful not to sign on with King Hussein to any specific plan while he is here. We should draw him out on his thoughts, and tell him where we think he is being reasonable or unreasonable. We should be careful not to sign on to any Jordanian solution at this point.

Vance: We're not ready for that yet. It's too early.

Atherton: King Hussein himself will be reluctant to take on any major role unless we can assure him that he will get virtually all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. And we can't say that at this point.

Brzezinski: Would Jordan accept any substantial border adjustments?

Vance: Very little. King Hussein told me that he would accept minor changes if they were reciprocal.

Habib: He stressed that they could only be very minor.

Quandt: This would be very hard for him.

Brzezinski: What about the settlements?

Vance: He could only accept them as part of a transitional arrangement.

Atherton: The King's general attitude is that if there must be any major concessions, he would like to have the PLO take the blame for them.

Smith: That makes a great deal of sense.

Vance: What about the Soviets? They seem to be more aggressively staking out their positions. I'm going to see Gromyko in Geneva at the end of May. He will probably push me on a date for a Geneva Conference.

Habib: He will also want you to agree to PLO participation.

Vance: How should we play the Soviet angle?

Brzezinski: I would think that we would be in a good position to urge the Soviets to do two things. One, they should resume diplomatic relations with Israel. We should encourage this.

Vance: I did this in Moscow.

Brzezinski: This would help us to get some credit with the Israelis. We should push them on this now.

Habib: They say that restoration of diplomatic relations would result from the process of negotiations itself.

Brzezinski: The second point is that the Soviets can play a role in getting the PLO to change its positions.

Habib: We can use the Arabs for this more effectively.

Brzezinski: Why not use the Soviets also?

Habib: Saudi Arabia basically finances the PLO.

Brzezinski: But the Soviets should be asked to do certain things.

Vance: This was raised in Moscow. The Soviets took the line that if they were to produce Arafat, we should guarantee that Israel would recognize him. The two points are not unconnected. Arafat might actually make that concession.

Habib: Do we want the Soviets in on this? Why get them involved?

Brzezinski: It will keep them from making trouble. It gives them something at Geneva. They don't have any role otherwise.

Vance: If negotiations are ahead of us, we'll be better off to go this way.

Brown: But you won't get anything from the Soviets before the Conference begins. We could ask the Soviets to do something for us because they do seem to want a Geneva Conference. We should review their positions with them and, if they can sell their ideas to some of the Arabs, and especially if they can bring the PLO along, that would be fine.

Habib: There's no problem with selling the Soviet ideas to the Arabs.

Brown: But the PLO is still a problem.

Brzezinski: The utility of getting the Soviets in on the PLO recognition of Israel is that it might help influence Arafat and company. It also gets the Soviets on record concerning the recognition of Israel's right to exist. They should try to get the PLO to take the same position.

Brown: That's right. I have one question. What is the Soviet motivation in the Middle East in both the short and long run? This is a question we have talked about in DOD. If the Soviets

become importers of oil, will this change their role in the Middle East? In the past, we've assumed they had an interest in getting control of the oil valves of the Middle East. But they may now have a more direct interest in the oil itself.

Turner: I assume the Soviet motives are similar to ours. They want to preserve their positions in the Middle East. Recently they have become more supportive of the peace effort.

Blee: Their positions are weaker now, with the exception of Iraq, Libya, and South Yemen. But Syria and Egypt could easily change course.

Vance: And they have influence with the PLO.

Brzezinski: There are tactical reasons to try to commit the Soviets to a favorable outcome at Geneva. This is why we should press them to recognize Israel and to get the PLO to take the same step. We want to get the Soviets on record.

Blee: They've already done this in private.

Vance: We also want them to get the Iraqis and the Libyans to lay off.

Brzezinski: Yes, that's a third thing.

Atherton: The Soviets will find it easier to move the PLO than it will be for us to move the Israelis. The PLO is not too far now from the Soviet position. We will have the harder job.

Brown: Then there is not much to be gained.

Habib: Let's do the three things mentioned by Dr. Brzezinski, but without getting them deeply involved. The Soviets can't solve this problem. They can't touch the root issues.

Brzezinski: But we should keep them engaged and get them to pay a little for their involvement. We can try to commit them. These three things would help.

Habib: Let's hold off on getting too close to them as a channel to the PLO.

Vance: But we can ask them to use their influence.

Habib: Implicitly so, yes.

Brown: We shouldn't push the Soviets to do anything that would lead the PLO to conclude that they should look to the Soviets instead of to us. We will have to press the Israelis, but we also want to be able to influence the PLO. We can offer them more than the Soviets can.

Vance: When should we consider talking to the PLO?

Habib: And how? Should we do it in secret or in the open?

Brzezinski: Can we do it in secret?

Habib: Yes.

Vance: There were a series of talks in the past, or at least a few talks, which were kept out of public.

Quandt: We did, however, inform the Israelis and the Jordanians.

Brzezinski: It might be useful to resume these.

Habib: There may be other ways too. We might not need to inform anyone this time. But what would we talk about? If we just want to explore their positions, there may be other ways.

Vance: By June we should have a position on this.

Brzezinski: Yes.

Atherton: All of the Arabs want us to.

Vance: Arafat does too. We're getting lots of signals.

Brown: Will we get some price for this from him?

Vance: It's not clear yet.

Habib: We ought to consider Palestinian representation at Geneva, including the idea of phased representation.

Turner: This is the price that the Soviets asked for. They pushed for conditional recognition of Israel.

Vance: The PLO could do that now.

Brzezinski: It's not enough for them to do it just in private. Israel is right on this point.

Atherton: They need to accept Resolution 242.

Vance: Resolution 242, plus something on the Palestinian question.

Brzezinski: Yes, they should endorse Resolution 242 publicly, and if they want to add a reservation they could do so. That's normal international practice. The Arabs and even the Soviets could say they all accept Resolution 242, with a reservation on the Palestinian question. We would abstain, and Israel could oppose the reservation.

Habib: The real issue comes down to how we will deal with Israel. How far can they be pushed?

Brzezinski: That's an essential question.

Vance: We can't force them to face this question before May 17th.

Atherton: Or before they have formed a government.

Janka: Peres says it may take two months to form a government.

Habib: We ought to talk to Peres about this.

Brzezinski: Once the elections are held, and he becomes Prime Minister, what authority does he have before the completion of the coalition?

Habib: We could invite him before he has formed his government, but he won't have a coalition put together right away.

Brzezinski: But we don't want to lose two months waiting. What would happen if Peres tried to delay? He could use the argument that while he is forming his coalition we should not press him. What would he do if we were to invite him to come to Washington on June 1st to talk about broad principles of an agreement?

Habib: Secretary Vance will be seeing Allon in May in any case.

Brzezinski: But we need to get Peres engaged. Even if we can't push him hard at this point. Why not invite him for early June? We can stress again the points we made to Rabin.

Atherton: He wouldn't be able to come until he has his government formed.

Vance: Let's ask Dinitz about this.

Habib: We will be seeing Allon in May.

Brzezinski: Why not ask Allon if we think that we want to do this? Time is of the essence.

Habib: But he won't be able to speak with much authority.

Brzezinski: He can delay things though.

Atherton: We need more precision on this.

Brzezinski: Peres is very bright, and he has a sense for tactics. We should try to get to him soon.

Habib: When he becomes Prime Minister, we should lay our position on the line. We're beyond the point where we need exploratory talks. But before he becomes Prime Minister, he won't be very precise.

Brzezinski: Maybe he would be better off if he didn't have his cabinet formed yet.

Habib: If we're going to push him hard, he needs to have his cabinet with him.

Brown: He has to be strong.

Brzezinski: That's his weakness.

Brown: No, then he can act. He has ideas.

Brzezinski: We need to convince him that we are serious and that stalling won't work.

Habib: We can get that message to him. We have lots of channels.

Brzezinski: We also want him to have personal contact with the President and an understanding of the President's deep commitment to Israel's security.

Habib: It would be better if he came after his government was formed.

Brzezinski: But I'm concerned about delays. He will plead for delays, arguing that he is too weak to make commitments.

Janka: If we invite him too soon, he could refuse to come on the grounds that his government is not yet formed.

Brzezinski: Why don't we find out from Allon how long this will take? I'm still afraid of slippage and what the consequences might be on the Arab side.

Vance: Roy and Phil can try to get a feel from Dinitz. I'll pick up on this with Allon.

Habib: I'll see Dinitz soon on my North Africa trip. I can let it slip out then.

Vance: CIA should get a group working on the borders question.

Turner: We can do that.

Vance: OK. You have that task. When could it be done?

Blee: Are we just talking about military borders?

Vance: Assume something like the 1967 lines, plus security arrangements. And let's talk about the end result of a final agreement, not all the stages in between.

Turner: We'll include guarantees and political acceptability, and military considerations. We'll need some inputs from State.

Vance: Keep the group small. Bill Quandt will work on a paper for us on the Palestinian

question and the idea of a referendum. We should have that before Hussein's visit. I want something on the nature of peace from Roy. Let's try to get that paper by May 5th. We also need some more thought on the Soviet question. We'd like a consideration of the pros and cons of the various ways of dealing with the Soviets. I'd also like that for May 5th.

Brzezinski: We also need a high-level strategy paper prepared for Secretary Vance and the President to work out the basic steps that we will have to take after this series of visits is completed.

Vance: Phil, Roy and Bill should work on that. We need to consider how to use leverage without provoking the Rogers plan type of reaction. I want to reemphasize that we have to be very careful about the minutes of this meeting. There should be no circulation.

Brown: Someone needs to think through this question of points of leverage. We do have some. Israel comes to mind. We provide lots of military equipment. We also have some leverage with Egypt. Maybe everyone has already thought this through, but if not, they should.

Habib: We ought to include this in the overall strategic study. We also need to consider how to prepare American public opinion.

Turner: This will involve the question of arms sales and boycott legislation too.

Habib: That's part of it. The problem is how to apply the leverage that we theoretically have.

Brown: We don't have to think entirely in terms of using the stick. There are also carrots. The F-16 is an example. We should think of how far we are ready to go with Israel on co-production of the F-16.

Habib: Maybe it would be best to hold back for now, and play this card later. We said to the Egyptians that if we were to give them arms, it would be primarily in the post- settlement period.

Brzezinski: Did you see his request for an African Corps?

Brown: There is an historical precedent that comes to mind. On the F-16 question and other military sales, we are getting pressed by Israel. Should we stall?

Vance: On what?

Brown: On the F-16, and on the co-production of tanks.

Vance: We should stall for a while.

Brzezinski: We have approved the Improved Hawk system for Israel, and also a small list of items for Egypt.

Vance: We should sit on the rest for now.

Habib: And we should pour cold water on the Africa Corps idea.

Vance: I agree.

Brzezinski: I hope it doesn't surface in public now.

Atherton: On the question of Geneva, we have assumed that we need some agreement before going to a conference, and if we don't get it, the conference might fail. But I think we should consider going to Geneva even if we do not get advance agreement on principles. Israel opposes the whole process of trying to get advance agreement on principles. They believe that it prejudices the outcome of negotiations. They are wary of the entire idea. But once negotiations begin, then they are more likely to take flexible positions. Also, once Geneva begins, it will be hard for the parties to break it off. Even if there has been little agreement on principles in advance, at least we can get them engaged.

Habib: You're trying to make the best of a bad situation.

Vance: It could be a disaster.

Atherton: It would be worse not to do anything.

Janka: If a conference is delayed, what other steps might be taken to keep the process going?

Atherton: The worst that could happen is not to go to Geneva. Then the political deterioration would set in.

Brzezinski: What's the formal situation on Geneva?

Vance: All the parties agree on Geneva without preconditions.

Brzezinski: Is there any talk of setting up preparatory groups?

Habib: It's a euphemism to say that they all agree.

Brzezinski: But has there been any preparatory work? Have we and the Soviets talked about how the Conference would run?

Habib: After the second round of talks, then we ought to work on this.

Brzezinski: Is it too early now? We should at least think about it now.

Habib: We have to at least wait until the Israeli Government is formed.

Vance: We have all agreed to get the papers in by May 5th.