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*Last Updated: 09/30/2024*

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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BACKGROUND BRIEFING  
BY  
SENIOR ADMINISTRATON OFFICIAL  
ON  
VISIT OF FOREIGN MINISTER PERES OF ISRAEL

October 5, 1984

The Briefing Room

10:05 A.M. EDT

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'll begin by going over the schedule and the expected major participants on both sides. Then, I'll say a few words about the issues we expect to come up and, then, be happy to take your questions.

He'll be arriving on Monday morning. And Ambassador Lewis and Ambassador Murphy will be meeting him out at Andrews. Then, Secretary of State will meet them at the Washington Monument grounds. We'll go directly into an initial meeting to review the schedule and see that we're going to be able to --

Q What are all these times?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just run through it on the basis -- I think the times will be -- well, the important times will be published, won't they, Bob --

MR. SIMS: I -- not unless you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think that we can say the exact time of the meeting. I'd be happy to indicate early morning or late morning. Arrive early morning. First meeting will begin after arrival. And I don't know how long it'll go on. The rest of the day will be free until that evening when the Secretary will host dinner for the Israeli delegation at his home.

Tuesday will begin with the Secretary hosting a small breakfast for the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister Shamir. That will be followed by a morning meeting with the Secretary of Defense, and, then, in late morning the delegation on Tuesday will come over to the White House to meet with the President. There will be a small meeting with the President, then a traditional few minutes of one-on-one with the President, then a larger meeting in the Cabinet Room, followed by a working luncheon.

We expect the official departure statements will take place after that. That would be about 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday. And, then, the Israeli delegation would adjourn over to the State Department for further talks. That evening there will be a call on the Vice President, and the Vice President will host dinner. The dinner will be at the Department of Agriculture because the 8th floor of the State Department is undergoing renovation.

Then, on Wednesday, there will be a pre-departure breakfast with the Secretary of State. And they will depart early Wednesday morning.

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As for the major participants on both sides: On the Israeli delegation, of course, it will be led by Prime Minister Peres; Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shamir; Ambassador Rosenne; Menachem Meron, who's the Director General of the Minister of Defense; Abraham Tamir is the Director General of the Prime Minister's office and his National Security Advisor; Yossi Beilin is the government's Secretary; Hanon Bar-On, the Deputy Director General with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and other advisors to the Prime Minister.

On our side, the principal participants in various talks will be, of course, the President and Vice President, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Treasury, Ambassador Kirkpatrick, Undersecretary Armacost from the State Department, Bud McFarlane, Dick Murphy, our Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, and Herb Stein, former

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Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, who was serving as a consultant to the Secretary of State.

As far as issues, one can say, in general, that the U.S.-Israeli relationship has been very close and cooperative over the past year and we expect that to continue and see a reaffirmation of that type of relationship. Obviously, the Israeli economy will be a principal issue. And in that regard, I'd say that our posture is, we're ready to work closely with Israel's leaders in their efforts to find effective, creative, and enduring solutions to Israel's current economic problems.

On the political side, certainly, the question of South Lebanon and Israel's plans for -- or hopes -- for an early withdrawal of its forces will be on the agenda. These will be following on discussions that the Secretary and Foreign Minister Shamir have had recently in New York on Ambassador Murphy's recent visit to the area. It's worth noting that the discussions so far have been exploratory, that we're not engaged in any formal negotiations or mediation, but the United States is willing to play a helpful role if the parties want our involvement and if there seems to be a reasonable prospect that something can be achieved, meaning that if there is a prospect that the current wide gaps and differences between the parties can be narrowed.

We're not now in that kind of a situation, but it is a moving situation with the government of Israel having announced its intention to withdraw if satisfactory security arrangements for its northern border can be achieved. We have the Unifil renewal coming up at the UN on October 19th. And they've had a lot of discussions among the various concerned delegations on that subject in New York.

We expect the questions of broader peace will also be discussed and what might be possible in the future on reaching a broader peace between Israel and its neighbors. Certainly, the relationship between Israel and Egypt, which is a key relationship in the area, will be discussed. And, normally, in such sessions, we have a review of Israel's security posture.

I mentioned that the Secretary of Defense is on the schedule and these discussions would take place within the framework of our traditional commitment to helping Israel preserve its qualitative edge and to maintain the capability to defend itself against any combination of potential adversaries.

I just close my remarks by saying we're looking forward to the visit, we welcome it, and we expect to see a reaffirmation of the very close U.S.-Israeli relationship that is currently the case.

I'd be happy to take your questions.

Q How much money do they want?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We expect that --

Q And how much will they get?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: These are questions that it's premature to answer right now. Obviously, the economy is high on the list of items to be discussed. We expect that the Prime Minister will be laying out for us his plans and his program in that regard, and in the context of that program, we will see how we can best be helpful.

There's been no discussion up to this point of actual figures. I expect that --

Q At what level has there not been a discussion?

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There's been a discussion at some level of figures, has there not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In terms of government to government, there has not because we have not yet been formally presented with the full Israeli program. We -- obviously, you have seen and we have seen some measures that Israel has taken. And we certainly note with -- that the Paris government is addressing this question with great seriousness and with great priority. But actual figures have not yet come out.

Q But you're not meaning to imply that this administration is going to hold off funds to the Israeli government pending its approval of the Peres plan for getting the economy back on its feet?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm saying that this is something we're going to discuss and work out together. That is one of the reasons -- that's the reason why included in our participants are the Secretary of the Treasury and Herb Stein. I think the general characterization of our posture now is, we're going to be in a listening mode, but a sympathetic listening mode, and we want to see how we can be most helpful in helping the Israeli government put into effect its plan, its program.

Q Peres said a few days ago he is not going to be asking for any specific supplemental aid on this trip and this is its stop-gap aid. But are you looking for a longer-range plan and just -- what type of economic talks are you looking for? Some long-term aid program or military aid program so you can get some hearing on this?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think the wrong focus is "aid program", Bernie. I think the right focus is a long-term and comprehensive Israeli economic program that will lead to the restoration of health to the Israeli economy. That's what we're -- I think both we and the Israeli government are looking for. And stopgaps and sort of quick-fix bridging arrangements may, indeed, turn out to be part of that, but the focus is going to be on a long-term, a comprehensive, and an effective program.

Q Are you going to have a ceremony on the signing of the free trade legislation?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think that's one we haven't quite answered yet because, as you know, we're just in the process of getting the enabling legislation now and the negotiations on the free trade area are not quite complete yet. There are some further negotiations that have to take place. I think we're over the watershed and it's not going to take a long time to wrap them up, but there is a little more that has to be done.

Whether there is some kind of a signing of principals or heads of agreement, something like that, that's something that may or may not come about at this point.

Q Is there any particular reason why this was not set up as a State visit? It's his first visit here as Foreign Minister.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think I know the answer to that. It's --

Q Isn't it more customary for that to be the format?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, the -- I think it's customary that you have periodic visits to Washington by Israel's leaders. It happens generally more than once in an administration and in a term, and I wouldn't put any particular emphasis or value on whether we call it a State visit or a working visit.

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Certainly, as I've indicated by the schedule, the amount of interchange that we're going to have is really very comprehensive. We're going to have the opportunity to get into the issues that concern us very deeply.

Q On the troop withdrawal question, could you summarize for us

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what the U.S. understands to be the positions of the Lebanese and the Israelis at this point, and talk a little bit about what might be done to narrow what you call "wide differences" between the two.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think I'm prepared to do that at this point, Barry. A certain amount has been said in the press, but our understandings are still in the category of diplomatic communications between governments, and I think I'll pass that one.

Q Yesterday Prime Minister Karami said at a press conference that he had asked to see the President this week. Are there any plans to receive him in Washington?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think the President is going to have the time in his schedule.

Q Do you see any effort to get anything moving on the President's September 1st, 1982 program?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: At this point, I wouldn't see too much that is realistic. We have just had, you know, the Israeli elections and the extraordinary effort that went into forming this coalition government. It's well known that the area of Middle East peace negotiations is the one that has been probably the most difficult for this unity government to resolve within itself. And it's going to take some time to sort that out.

For our part, the President reaffirmed in his U.N. General Assembly address that our policies are based on his September 1st initiative. We will certainly be discussing this subject with the government of Israel, and we're in a mode that we want to take advantage of any opportunities that exist to make progress toward broader peace. We don't want to miss any opportunities and we want to work to create an atmosphere that makes those opportunities possible. But --

Q Well, why don't you see Karami then if you want all these opportunities?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The Secretary of State has just seen Mr. Karami up in New York, and they've had very comprehensive discussions, so I don't think it's correct to say we haven't -- we haven't been talking with Mr. Karami -- we have.

Q Does that mean that the Secretary of State sees no profit for the President in seeing him -- no progress that can be made?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think that we've explored and addressed the issues pretty thoroughly with Mr. Karami and we understand each other's positions. It may be that Assistant Secretary Murphy will be seeing him again before he leaves.

Q And were those positions at odds with each others?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right now there are considerable gaps between the positions of the parties.

Q What kind of gaps?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Large gaps.

Q Large --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, but I just -- I'm not really prepared to go into that beyond what different parties have said in the press already.

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Q Does Karami have the kind of authority that would be necessary to negotiate any change in those gaps?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He is certainly one of the principal figures of the Lebanese government, and has a considerable influence. His views will be influential in the way the Israeli government comes out. He is Prime Minister and Foreign Minister both.

Q But does the Lebanese government have the authority to narrow these gaps -- or shouldn't you be talking to people in Damascus?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Obviously, people in Damascus are not unrelated to that problem, and the Secretary of State is meeting with the Syrian Foreign Minister today -- up in New York.

Q As I understand it --

Q In that regard, is the U.S. ready to offer itself as a mediator in any troop withdrawal?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That is not a decision that has been taken yet. We are not engaged in any formal negotiations or mediation. We have been engaged in exploring the positions of the parties to see whether there is a helpful role that we can play. But we're not sure there is.

Q Do they really want to listen to --

Q Excuse me -- you said -- we're not sure there is?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm not sure there is at this point.

Q Well, what do you base that on?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: On the exploratory



contacts we've had so far.

Q I think you've just answered my question.

Q Is this what you're going to tell Peres because it seems to me that Shamir did ask for U.S. mediation?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think his latest statement that he said in New York was that he had not formally asked for U.S. mediation.

Q No, he asked in an interview, didn't he?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he said he was thinking of asking for it. We looked closely at that interview.

Q Getting back to --

Q So, he backed away from it, huh?

Q Getting back to the aid package, is the U.S. government willing to forgive the loans that it has provided Israel over the last 20 years? And, also, is the government willing to grant permission to Israel -- excuse me, to other countries which receive FMS credits, to use those credits to buy goods from Israel?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There are a lot of possibilities, and a lot of them have been explored and discussed and speculated about in the press, and it's premature to talk about what kinds of things might be done. Those decisions are only going to be taken in the context of Israel's own program, which we don't really have fully spelled out to us yet.

I think the one thing that is quite sure is that Congress is going to approve the FY '85 assistance program for Israel, and those funds will be available. And what beyond that is -- remains to be seen.

Q Well, what kinds of recommendations have the -- did the Stein Committee make to the President about economic austerity measures that Israel should implement and what kinds of things the U.S. government should consider in providing the Israelis --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think the primary feeling has been, as I've said, that we've got to work with Israel and Israel has to develop its program. And we will work with it in a helpful mode to try to make that program work.

Q Isn't -- we keep talking about -- you keep talking about the Israelis' program -- won't the Israelis' overall program be a U.S.-Israeli program in the end? I mean, we're talking about a lot of input by the U.S. and a lot of our economic advisers and a lot of our dollars going into Israel. So, therefore, we're going to have quite a lot of input. Is this not an Israeli-U.S. plan in the end? Is that not what we're getting --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I think it's an Israeli plan. If you're talking about the way the U.S. assists, you've got an overall Israeli annual budget of something on the order of \$20 billion. You have an economic assistance program from the United States that in this amount about to be voted is going to be \$1.2 billion. So, that is not anywhere near a controlling or really influential portion. It's obviously important, but to say -- to put it in terms of joint -- our role is not that great. It's first and foremost Israel.

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Q But that's predicated -- that aid is predicated on certain conditions by the Israelis as well to -- in their austerity plan or whatever -- I mean --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That particular aid is not predicated on any Israeli plan. If it hasn't been voted, I expect it will be by the end of the day. And those funds will be available.

Q Do you expect any discussion of settlements?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Within the context of what might be possible toward a broader peace, I expect there will be a discussion of settlements. We'll want to understand each other's positions.

Q How about other West Bank issues?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think they will come up. Sure.

Yes?

Q Is it the U.S. view that Israel would benefit in its economic performance if it dropped wage indexing?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't know as we can be that affirmative on any one single measure. What's you're looking at is a comprehensive approach. And indexing, obviously, fits into that. But I don't think we want to point to any specific measure or action as being indispensable or the absolute condition. No, I wouldn't put it that way.

Q As I understand it, as part of this unity government, Ariel Sharon was again given a post in that government. Am I correct?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, that's correct.

Q Is he going to come to the United States as a part of the Israeli entourage?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he will not be part of this delegation. No. He's the Minister of Transportation.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Commerce.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Commerce, yes.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

10:32 A.M. EDT

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