

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

OR 00-27, #63; re. Dept. Ltr 12/18/01

By dal, NARA, Date 2/13/02

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
The Cabinet

DATE AND TIME: Friday, June 18, 1976
11:00 a.m.

PLACE: The Cabinet Room

President: Ron just announced we are evacuating Americans from Lebanon. We will leave essential people in the Embassy to keep operations going. We began announcements on VOA and BBC because communications in Beirut are so poor. There are about 1400 people in Lebanon but we have no idea how many will want to leave, because it is voluntary. Henry, why don't you describe the situation in Lebanon?

Kissinger: First, the situation about the Meloy killing. He was on his way to meet with the new President Sarkis, to discuss the situation and possible U.S. evacuation.

[He describes the assassination.]

To the best of our information, the killing was done by a splinter group of the rejectionist front. To our best knowledge, it was done without PLO involvement. All the Arabs have condemned the act, unlike the Sudan killings.

We will evacuate tomorrow. We will not announce the route. We have been given adequate assurances and most of the route is through Syrian-held territory. We have made adequate contingency preparations but it is important not to comment on this.

We don't know how many will leave. Many have no other real home, but there is no security in Beirut. But none of the responsible groups has any real interest in killing Americans, because if there was, it could be done quite easily at any time. But there are, of course,

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totally irresponsible elements. But the overall situation in Lebanon is developing in a way that is not unhelpful to our interests. Lebanon is a tragedy. In U.S. equivalents, four million people have been killed.

In March, the Syrians said they were moving in in 48 hours. The Israelis said they would move in that case. If that happened, we would have united all the Arabs against it. If Israel didn't act and if Syria cleaned it up, we would be accused by Egypt of colluding with the Syrians. But if the Syrians didn't move, the radicals could dominate Lebanon and Syria would then be squeezed between a radical Lebanon and Iraq.

We maneuvered our way through this and governmental changes were made. [He describes the election, etc.] But there was no security so the political changes couldn't take place. So Syria decided to act. [Describes Syrian-held territory.]

It looks now like no one will gain an overwhelming victory. What is likely to emerge is an Arab solution with no one in predominance, with the PLO weakened, but with Egypt relatively content and Syria as well. The end result should be a strategic situation which is favorable to us, because Syria and Egypt probably will get back together. We must remember that we are the only ones who are really in touch with all the parties and the only useful force working with all of them. [Compares with the Soviets] It could blow up, of course, but if it goes on track, that is a likely outcome.

A spectacular Syrian defeat probably would overthrow Assad. With this probable moderate outcome, we are in a good position for peace. If we can keep all the radicals from uniting, or all the Arabs, it looks like a positive aspect to the tragedy of Lebanon.

Secretary Richardson: Why did the Syrians support the Christians and what kept them from a spectacular victory?

Kissinger: The Christians were about to be wiped out and that would have given Lebanon to the radicals who would have squeezed the Syrians. A spectacular Syrian victory in March could have given them a need to prove their Arab nature and turn on the Christians; this would have radicalized Jordan and put pressure on the Saudis and isolated Egypt. They didn't win spectacularly, first because it is an agony for them to be attacking the PLO, and second they underestimated the strength they faced.

[The next item was a campaign update.]

[The next item was our line on busing.]



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