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Telcon NYC
The President/HAK
October 6, 1973; 9:25 a.m.

P: Hello, Henry. I wanted you to know I am keeping on top of reports here. The Russians claim to be surprised.

K: The Russians claim to be surprised and my impression is that they were supposed to be surprised because apparently there has been an airlift of dependents out of the area going on for the last 2 or 3 days.

P: I agree.

K: And so our impression is that they knew about it or knew it was possible. They did not warn us.

P: What is happening now? What is the status?

K: Fighting has broken out on the Golan Heights and along the Sinai. The Egyptians claim that the Israelis had launched a naval attack in the Gulf of Suez which triggered the whole thing. That I just can't believe. Why a naval attack? The Israelis claim that so far the fighting is still mostly in Israeli territory and that they have confined themselves to defensive action. My own impression is that this one almost certainly was started by the Arabs. It is almost inconceivable that the Israelis would start on the holiest holiday for the Jews when there is no need to and there is no evidence that the Israelis launched air attacks, and they gave us an assurance which we passed on this morning that they would not launch a preemptive attack and we told the Arabs that if the Israelis launch a preemptive attack that we would oppose them and they should exercise restraint. My view is that the primary problem is to get the fighting stopped and then use the opportunity to see whether a settlement could be enforced.

P: You mean a diplomatic settlement of the bigger problem?

K: That is right. There is going to be a Security Council meeting almost certainly today and we are still debating whether we should call it or the Israelis should. Somebody has to call it in the next hour.

P: I think we should. We ought to take the initiative. Can't we get the Russians to? I think we ought to take the initiative and you ought to indicate you talked to me.

K: Let me call Dobrynin right away on that. In the debate there are going to be a lot of wild charges all over the place.

P: Don't take sides. Nobody ever knows who starts the wars out there.

K: There are two problems on the immediate thing. The long term I think it is impossible now to keep maintaining the status quo ante. On the immediate thing we have to get the Soviets drawn in on the side of the Arab group - then it would be involved. If they join us in a neutral approach in which both of us say we don't know who started it but that we want to stop it, that would be best. If they make a defense on the part of the Arabs. But first we ought to see if they will join us in a neutral approach - that will be the best.

P: Let me know what develops.

K: We have sent you a report an hour ago, but that is already overtaken. I may return to Washington today.

P: OK, thank you.